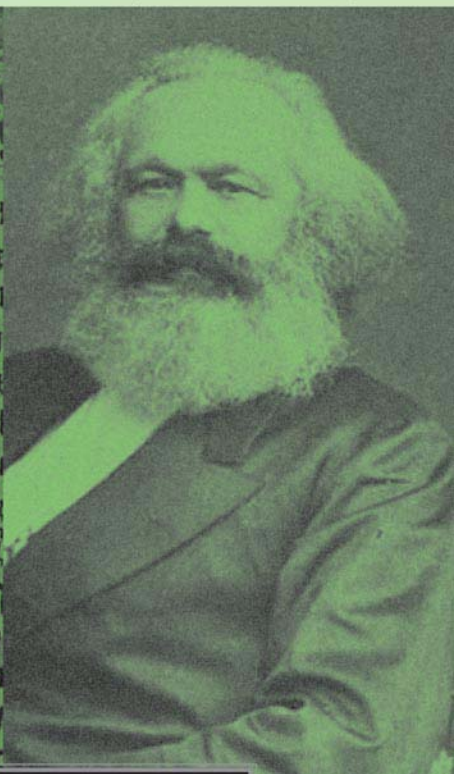
THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



THE POST-HISTORICAL MIDDLE AGES

Edited by Elizabeth Scala *and* Sylvia Federico

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

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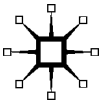

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INTRODUCTION

GETTING POST-HISTORICAL

Sylvia Federico and Elizabeth Scala

Petrarch's skull and Ovid's shells, giants' teeth and book reviews, the Hereford map and the Helgeland film: these are but some of the artifacts collected here as touchstones for reflection upon the place of historicism in the field of medieval literary studies today. We begin with the acknowledgment that historicism has become the Jamesonian "cultural dominant" of our field, one whose posture "allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features."[1] Our volume further assumes that historicism's dominant status ought to mark it, for all medievalists, as an object (or perhaps an artifact) primed for reexamination and redefinition. Through such a "historicizing of historicism," this collection aims more broadly to encourage a profession-wide interrogation of contemporary critical practices—where they came from, what they mean for their practitioners, and what future orientations they might assume.

Rather than begin at "the" beginning and work our way to the present (retailing a history that can only be fraught with our own desire), let us turn to an immediate point of departure: the powerful historicist discourse that has emerged in medievalist literary scholarship over the past twenty years. Offering a critique of merely formalist analysis, the pioneering work of scholars such as David Aers, Sheila Delany, Lee Patterson, Paul Strohm, and David Wallace politicized the field of medieval literary studies by engaging with the intensely social issues grounding the works of Chaucer and his contemporaries. Patterson's historicist manifesto *Negotiating the Past* (1987) set out the fundamental binarism

with which all such study of the past must struggle:

> While wanting to do justice to the otherness of a distant past, the historian is unavoidably conditioned by his own historical situation; while concerned to incorporate and understand as much of the material relevant to his chosen problem as he can, he is also aware that that material is never raw data but rather produced by elaborate processes of interpretation—many of which are so much second nature as to be unrecognizable as interpretations at all; and while attentive to the particularity and detail in which the significance of the past resides, he also knows that for detail to be significant at all it must be located within a larger, totalizing context.[2]

These are difficulties, Patterson laments, that cannot be supervened but "must be continually negotiated and renegotiated" (x). And when Patterson goes on to negotiate these oppositions, he does so with "values and commitments that are in the last analysis political" (x). So begins his larger theoretical investigation of the historicizing activity of and for medieval literature, and it is one that has been sweepingly effective.

Recuperating historicism from its earlier incarnations, Patterson aligns medieval studies with the historicism of other fields—most notably with Renaissance New Historicism, with its "politically engaged readings of a progressive if not explicitly Marxist kind" (3). One of the most important results of work such as this has been to end the stranglehold exegetics had on medieval studies as the only self-consciously historicized model of reading. That is, after Patterson's influential work, and especially after his explicit reading of the sibling nature of the rivalry between exegetics and New Criticism, historical study of medieval literature has been able to move away from the narrow and often naïve Augustinian applications of moralization to secular works. This freedom has opened medieval literature to a historical world outside the Church's interpretive control, thus showing—in the very act of its resistance—why the Church attempted to control interpretive acts so insistently in the first place.

Patterson himself recognized early on the limits of the historicist project, particularly as conceived within—and reinforcing—the narrow confines of disciplinarity. Only three years after *Negotiating*, he noted in the introduction to *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530*, a volume in Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism series at Berkeley, that historicism "has now . . . been inscribed on the banner under which literary studies as a whole seems to be marching."[3] Withdrawing (only somewhat given the publication venue) from the New Historicism, Patterson called instead for the adoption of Howard Horwitz's "critical historicism," which he characterized as a methodology with reach over "a wide

range of historicist initiatives" and yet one that "still assert[s] the crucial fact of initiation itself, of work that conceives of itself as something other than business as usual" (2). And yet, in the generational movement of scholarly studies it is precisely this critical edge to historicism that has been softened. Its success has been part of its undoing insofar as the critical historicism Patterson once envisaged as wide-ranging now appears precisely as "business as usual," with the effects of its ossification registering both in our scholarship and in our classrooms. Historicist practice has not, as Patterson called for, resisted the claims to power of its literary and critical texts; rather, over the course of its long tenure it inevitably has claimed, and now often wields, that power for itself.

A recent essay by David Schalkwyk diagnoses similar problems for medieval studies' most intimate neighbor, the one who always seems to work in advance of our shifts and changes, Early Modern studies. Writing in 2005, he characterizes Shakespeare studies as "in the doldrums":

> The excitement offered by the initial (and belated) injection of theory some twenty years ago has waned, as Renaissance studies in general, and scholarship devoted to Shakespeare in particular, settled into a "new" historicism that has entrenched itself as the predominant way of reading early modern texts. There is, I believe, a pragmatic, institutional explanation for the hegemony of historicism, which also accounts for the difficulty scholars and critics have found in breaking into a new paradigm.[4]

Schalkwyk attributes the "hegemony of historicism" to the academic job market and the new pressures for publication that that market dictates, an idea that medievalists may want to consider. More immediately germane, however, is his observation that the Shakespeare Association of America has had every year at its annual convention at least one seminar or lecture "devoted to the question of the limits of historicism and the possibilities of moving beyond it" (1). Medieval studies has only just begun to catch up with such questions.

In bringing to the Middle Ages the same theoretically informed historicism that Renaissance, Americanist, and Romanticist studies deploy, Patterson looked to a future medieval studies that would "recapture general scholarly attention" (2). Yet while successfully bringing the Middle Ages into the discussion of "modern" discourses, like subjectivity, nationalism, and capitalism, we have done little to capture a proximate (Early Modernist) reader, let alone a general one. Similarly, studies that have sought to show the medieval past as one connected to such emerging modern discourses as sexuality, psychology, or colonialism (just to name a few) have not managed to resituate the study of the Middle Ages as a

central part of the curriculum. After almost two decades, from the path-breaking work of scholars at Indiana and Minnesota, Harvard and Duke, to the theoretically sophisticated pages of the newly renamed *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, historicist practice has shifted neither the generalist scholarly audience nor the undergraduate curriculum. Despite their continued importance to popular culture, including film and fiction and new technological media, the Middle Ages are as academically marginal as ever.

It is of course the necessity of the Middle Ages, of the idea of the medieval, that makes a very discourse of modernity possible. In this sense, then, the concept of an outmoded "other" Middle Ages is one that other literary periods and the idea of periodicity and modernity themselves cannot do without. Such logic dictates that the Early Modernists can never learn anything new about the Middle Ages (because newness is what is *not* medieval) that does not ultimately threaten their own identity and existence.

And yet this familiar narrative of the necessary obsolescence of the medieval for the sake of the modern masks other tangible truths about the differences in language in which these fields trade. Speaking the modern and postmodern has not been a problem for medievalists. The languages and concepts of contemporary theory have permeated medieval studies, and medievalists have also shown that the medieval permeates theory.[5] The language barrier works in an entirely different way; the Middle Ages fade from view as the medieval forms of language recede from the present, helped along as foreign languages disappear from general university requirements.[6] Part of the reason Middle English appears so much more remote to today's students than to those who studied English literature even thirty years ago is the unfamiliarity of the language most important to the rise of Chaucer's London dialect, French (not to mention the remoteness of Latin). If gone are the days in which an Oxford English undergraduate was expected to have courses in both Old English and Middle English, so too increasingly are gone Latin requirements for graduate study. These are not problems affecting medieval literary study that begin merely at the masters or doctoral level. They begin startlingly earlier, at the middle- and high-school level, from which they wield the strongest effects. Many schools can no longer offer a choice in foreign languages, opting instead to teach Spanish alone (for purely practical purposes in the United States). In other cases, a rise in interest in Asian languages has displaced the Western European past that makes the earlier forms of English more intelligible. Turning from the issue with romance languages, we might also note that where the study of German could make Old English a

more familiar, and familiar sounding, language, it too disappears in the face of budgetary constraints. When students have little or no familiarity with these other languages, and thus no access to the roots of the tri-lingual culture shaping Middle English, what becomes of Chaucer in the undergraduate curriculum? He becomes an increasingly foreign and difficult writer within his own discipline. The situation is only exacerbated for Langland, the *Pearl* poet, or anything written outside or before the ascendancy of Chaucer's London dialect.

Of course, historicism did not cause these institutional problems, each of which has a variety of sources and appears to varying degrees on different types of campuses. But nevertheless the coincidence offered by historicism's centrality and the decreasing presence of the Middle Ages in the curriculum is something we ought to explore. One possibility is to consider the extent to which, in our acceptance of historicism's claims to knowledge and power, we have contributed to an idea of the medieval as excessively rarified and difficult. Our own subject positions as those presiding over (or perhaps guarding) the Middle Ages contribute to the contraction of our specialization at the institutional level. One of the aims of this volume is to think about ways that we, as a profession, might bring the medieval into more pleasurable and productive contact with the present. It's not so much a matter of making medieval texts more "relevant" to our students, but rather a matter of offering points of engagement between the past and the present that open the field, that resist its ideological and institutional tendencies toward self-marginalization. The contributors here offer several reflections on the necessity of the present for a vital Middle Ages; they seek not an end to historicism but a renewal of its focus on "history conceived . . . as a stratified, differentiated, contradictory practical series."[7]

Writing the introduction to an earlier collection, *Culture and History, 1350–1600*, David Aers focuses on the communities in which English identity emerges and the divisions in the institutions and social world against which those communities form.[8] As with his own monograph, *Community, Gender and Individual Identity*, Aers finds his critical edge against a facile reading of deconstruction: "The words, symbols and deeds with which this book is concerned did not take place only in the endless and indefinite referral of signifier to signifier, in a world of gamesome and self-referential textuality" (*Culture*, 2).[9] In sharply rejecting the solipsism apparent in some bad theoretical readings, Aers wants us to make sure we understand the real-world stakes of self-articulation, agency, and representation in medieval texts. These literary works reveal the struggles of real people important to our understanding of a real world that existed once and still has its effects now.

Presenting our collection as one that shares, rather than simply conflicts with, the concerns raised by Aers may come as a surprise since the essays' topics, authorities, notes, and critical dialects often seem so different from his own. However, like Patterson's, Aers' animus is clearly aimed at "business as usual"—in this case, the mythology of a unitary medieval society in which the discourses of the aristocratic elite stand for culture as a whole. In opening up the medieval world to the voices and interests of those from below—the rural, peasant, and artisan classes simply ignored by older historical accounts—Aers paves our way to seeing history awry. Moreover, by offering such a clear articulation of his present political investments, Aers encourages our investigation, as critics, of our own allegiances to and desires for the past.

Whereas Aers' critical project underscored his focus on the real, glossed as the lived existence of medieval people, we would distinguish the emphasis of the current volume as one concerned with the nature of the Real. For Marxist historicists and materialists, the real is, of course, the demystified social reality of economic and class structures. By contrast, for psychoanalytic readers, the Real is the realm of psychic existence that escapes representation in the symbolic order. In both conceptions, there is a secret—an aspect of life hidden from our experience of the world and from our conscious articulation of it—that the critic has a duty to uncover and expose. Paul Hamilton characterizes these distinctly modern forms of historical understanding, both Freudian and Marxian, as material: "the bodily conditions of our existence determine our consciousness of it."[10] In both formations, the r/Real provides the very groundwork of human existence upon which consciousness is erected. But while the Marxist works toward a dis-covery of the real in order to change it (through revolution in the class structure of society), the Lacanian Real is inaccessibly necessary and can never be exposed in the same way. The Real is that which, by definition, resists symbolization. Thus where the existence of the Real can be posited, it cannot be accessed, changed, or "known" in the way that Marx's real can be revealed. The essays in the *Post-Historical Middle Ages* look beyond the absolute horizon of Marxian historicism in ways that display concern with *how* we know, with the limits of our knowledge, and with ourselves as presumably knowing subjects.

While we have acknowledged here a distinction between Marxism and psychoanalysis, resistance to such oppositional formulations forms the basis of these introductory remarks and the essays themselves. In this sense we find exemplary the claims of Paul Strohm, whose "persistent attraction to Freud" has in no way endangered his historicist *bona fides*.[11] Strohm's articulation, in the introduction to *Theory and the Premodern Text,* of "the textual condition . . . [a]s more normally one of

non-transparency, of inherent and obdurate recalcitrance" (xii) guides our own adumbration of a post-historical Middle Ages. And like Strohm, we also work under the belief that "texts [are] not only . . . unwilling but unable to tell us all they know—everything about their antecedence, their suppressions and evasions, the uses and appropriations to which they are, or will be, exposed" (xii). Thus we note that these essays bring to medieval texts and the history of their reception a body of theoretical concerns unavailable to their "original" readers and beyond the intent of their writers.

One of the key points Strohm advances for medieval literary studies concerns the strategic disregard of the literary/nonliterary divide. So many medieval texts are anonymous productions or operate outside of fixed generic structures that "writing" operates as a more helpful category than literature per se. We see two possible avenues of direction following this formulation. One direction is to now query the textual/critical divide. The contributors here are often as keenly interested in the continued effects of medieval texts as much as the texts themselves—in fact some trouble this distinction itself—and read the critical field as an increasingly important part of the historical and textual register. Alternatively, another possibility is to reexamine the usefulness of the idea of "text" as it has been deployed for the last twenty years, and to question its appropriateness for medieval literary study at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Whichever way they lean, all the essays here display a commitment to rethinking accepted critical categories.

Like the discussion of "The Marxist Premodern" in recent pages of *JMEMS*, the *Post-Historical Middle Ages* aims to revisit the claims to historicism, materialist and otherwise, in medieval literary study.[12] But unlike the essays collected there, all of which show deference to a particular tradition of materialist historicism, the essays here are not united in any specific theoretical allegiance. If anything, they play with such allegiances and work to unsettle normativities of all kinds: akin to Carolyn Dinshaw's recent formulation of a "queer historicism," the essays here notice the multiple histories that inform a text in contradictory ways, and also show how we might remain open to the stakes of our present engagement with the past.[13] The contributors work toward a self-conscious historicism; they reflect and comment on the theoretical interventions of the last few scholarly generations, the identities we inhabit as practitioners of medieval literary study, and the nature of our fascination with historical objects and artifacts (including, most particularly, the artifact of language).

The volume begins with Patricia Clare Ingham's "Amorous Dispossessions: Knowledge, Desire, and the Poet's Dead Body," which locates our critical practices as implicated by and invested in controversy.

Ingham argues that politicized territories—of period, of discipline, of nation—have in our field been defined through the "non-convergence of truth and knowledge," and speaks particularly to the points of intersection and divergence between different methodologies as sites at which such territories might be reimagined. Jeffrey J. Cohen's "Time Out of Memory" challenges us to consider ourselves fully as agents when we approach the distant past. In exploring "the stories medieval and modern people create in order to give meaning to th[e] remnants of lost worlds," Cohen asks the crucial question that concerns us all: "can a long history of material objects escape the freezing of its subject into discrete and noncommunicating moments?" Maura Nolan, in "Historicism after Historicism," suggests on this point that "*both* sameness and difference are essential to genuinely grasping the past." Through a discussion of Gower's use of Ovid, whose narrator aptly remarks "*haec aetas moribus apta meis*" ("this age is suited to my character"), Nolan exemplifies her caution that medievalists in their critical practices not flatten the differences between past and present. Together these three essays constitute the core of a conversation about methodology, around which the rest of the volume situates itself.

Underscoring her two-decades' long "critique of discontinuist historicism—of the idea that different periods of time are radically other to one another," Aranye Fradenburg argues in "(Dis)Continuity: The History of Dreaming" that our need to engage with the archaic signifiers of the present is urgent. Our contemporary "ambivalent, indeed melancholic, relation to modernity" demonstrates how "fanaticism and rationality are more intimate with one another than we like to think." Fradenburg thus launches the second section of the volume, in which the essays variously are concerned with (and concerned *about*) the way the present informs our reading of medieval texts. Thomas Prendergast and Stephanie Trigg in their coauthored essay "The Negative Erotics of Medievalism" look at this present in the form of recent medievalist texts, including Brian's Helgeland's film *A Knight's Tale*. More broadly, they argue that medievalism can itself be a productive way of talking about historicism, insofar as the "ism" in both cases demarks an uncomfortable acknowledgment of distance from the thing itself (being a historicist, after all, is not quite the same thing as being a historian). Commenting on the "long-cherished opposition between medieval studies and medievalism studies," Prendergast and Trigg suggest that the difference may be less epistemological and "more about different kinds of desiring subjects." The desiring subject, and the medieval past as its lost object, is the topic of George Edmondson's contribution "Naked Chaucer." Taking as its central text the image of "Geoff Chaucer" as he appears as a character in Helgeland's film, Edmondson's essay asks us to think about history as "a

discontinuous sequence of synchronic periods, each one haunted by the moment of its diachronic foundation," and further to question our work as medievalists in relation to such a formulation. Urging us to let go of the "portly and dignified" Chaucer of monumental history, Edmondson foregrounds instead "the simultaneously strange and proximate Chaucer, the Chaucer that is our neighbor."

The notion of the familiar, elaborated on the abstract plane by Edmondson, takes on more immediately tangible forms in the third section of the volume: the essays here (respectively) explore historicism's relative familiarity with personality, contempt, and poetry. Daniel Birkholz's "Biography After Historicism: The Harley Lyrics, the Hereford Map, and the Life of Roger de Breynton," finds a form of "renewable energy" for historicist scholarship in critical biography. Arguing that we would do well to "free ourselves from the desultory academic need to be 'right' at all costs, or else demurely silent," Birkholz shows how a "New Biography" might extend the reach of our scholarship "beyond the usual handful of royal or sainted suspects." In "The Gender of Historicism," Elizabeth Scala takes a somewhat similar view insofar as she insists on presencing the personal in our critical practices, but the reach and the implications of her argument are quite different. Scala's essay asserts that our profession is "underwritten by a patriarchal politics easily critiqued in the world at large or condemned as part of a past we have superseded." Historicism, according to Scala, is a masculinist enterprise, and her examples illustrating the operations of this enterprise are pointed. She begins with the assumption that our relationships with each other as scholars tend toward disturbingly eroticized familiar patterns and, following her own "doctor–father" in predicting the perpetual antagonism between historicism and psychoanalysis, Scala leaves us for the moment with our grievances intact. R. Allen Shoaf, in the volume's final essay, "From Clio to *JHMuse*©: Literacy and the Muse of Digitalia," begins with a point of grievance: humanities scholarship, he observes, is threatened in 2009 "not only with the loss of resources and reduction of options but also with [a] demoralization possibly wider than that of any period heretofore." Shoaf measures this demoralization from his vantage as the founder (and until the end of this year, the editor) of the journal *Exemplaria,* a forum for the discussion of new methodologies in our field since 1987, as well as from his perspective as a teacher for over twenty years at a public university. Ranging across issues of careerism, collegiality, and professional responsibility, Shoaf ultimately confronts the growing disparity between our elite institutions and all others, and asks us to place ourselves in relation to the real, lived existence of our students within the American class structure.

Each of these essays tells its own version of history, sometimes primarily a critical history, and each works to explore the field's attraction to history as a self-defining gesture. Some do so by way of an alternate mode of historicizing medieval works, others by an investigation of the disciplinary field itself. Ultimately, *The Post-Historical Middle Ages* signifies as a significant misnomer: think of it as a wish, an impossibility, a threat—but most of all as a provocation. The richness of the past with which we are engaged deserves our most self-conscious critical attention; we encourage the readers of this volume to reflect further on methods and practices that might prod historicism out of its contemporary political inertia, take some risks, and connect with what's radical about the study of the Middle Ages.

Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism—or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), 4.
2. Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: On the Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987), ix–x.
3. Lee Patterson, ed., *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992), 1.
4. David Schalkwyk, "Between Historicism and Presentism: Love and Service in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 17 (2005): 1–17, at 1.
5. See Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005); and Erin Felicia Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006).
6. The MLA's "Digest of Educational Statistics, 2007" indicates a strong surge in Spanish foreign language study as French diminishes in relation to increasing enrollment.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), 56.
8. David Aers, ed., *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992).
9. David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360–1430* (NY: Routledge, 1988). Aers wrote separately against deconstruction in "Medievalists and Deconstruction: An Exemplum" in *From Medieval to Medievalism*, ed. John Simons (New York: St. Martins, 1992), 24–40. Lee Patterson recuperates deconstruction for political historicism in "Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate," in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 69–107.

10. Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*, 2nd edn, New Critical Idiom Series (NY: Routledge, 2003), 86.
11. Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), xiii.
12. "The Marxist Premodern," ed. Bruce Holsinger and Ethan Knapp, special issue of *JMEMS* 34 (2004): 463–672.
13. Carolyn Dinshaw, "Temporalities," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature (Oxford UP, 2008), 107–123. See also Christopher Lane, "The Poverty of Context: Historicism and Nonmimetic Fiction," *PMLA* 118 (2003): 450–469 and Mary Poovey, "Ambiguity and Historicism: Interpreting *Confessions of a Thug*," *Narrative* 12 (2004): 3–21.

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CHAPTER 1

AMOROUS DISPOSSESSIONS: KNOWLEDGE, DESIRE, AND THE POET'S DEAD BODY

Patricia Clare Ingham

If the bodies of dead poets are "national possessions," they are such regardless of their reliability as material artifacts, a fact that was suggested recently by the case of Petrarch's "missing" skull. Or rather, the skull that isn't Petrarch's, a skull perhaps once belonging to a woman, recently discovered cohabiting with the poet's remains. In preparation for a national celebration of the Italian poet's birthday on July 20, 2004, scientists exhumed Petrarch's body in the hopes of using his skull as a model for a lifelike portrait. The skull, however, was in fragments; even worse, it didn't seem to have belonged to Petrarch in the first place. London's *Daily Telegraph* reported that "DNA tests carried out on a tooth and one of the ribs exhumed from the tomb near Padua showed that they belonged to two different people." Doubts about the skull's authenticity surfaced well before the DNA result verified them; observers of the exhumation insisted that while "the poet was said to have been a strapping man . . . the head was too small" for such a skeleton. Mark Duff, reporting for the BBC, summed up the case: "The finding has put a damper on plans to mark the 700th anniversary of his birth." "Instead," Duff continues, "[scholars] will be indulging in feelings of 'what if' just as keenly as Petrarch did over his unrequited love for Laura."[1]

Duff's evocation of tropes of courtly love—of scholars "indulging in feelings of 'what if' "—are apposite, and not only on account of Petrarch's historic contribution to that tradition. Similarly, Valeria Finucci notes that the female presence in Petrarch's grave appropriately encodes Laura's power for the poet: "Brought up to see the specter of Laura everywhere

Petrarchist poetry took hold, and mindful, as Petrarch wrote, that Laura's shadow 'turns my heart into ice and tinges my face with white fear, but her eyes have the power to turn it to marble,' should we be surprised at such an extraordinary finding?"[2] The answer is, of course, no. Taken together, Finucci and Duff mark the doubled relevance of this grave to the desiring structure of courtly love: not only does courtly love figure the poet's relation to Laura, it figures, as the problem of the poet's dead body makes clear, the relation of devoted admirers to the poets they love. The yearning for possession that is always deferred, the dispossession of the beloved that structures the state of amorousness itself, the desire that is impossible of satisfaction—this is the amorous dispossession to which we, like Petrarch, are consigned.[3]

The case of Petrarch's missing skull literalizes what Thomas Prendergast in his study of *Chaucer's Dead Body* has called "the central paradox which has engaged scholars for the last two centuries—the incompatibility between a humanism which says that the authentic poet is ultimately recoverable, and a historicism that tells us that bodies and texts will always be profoundly fragmentary and irrecoverable."[4] Prendergast rightly places historicism on the side of the materiality of missing texts. But if, as he implies, historicism teaches us that some things cannot be recovered, that all we have are fragments, historicism also regularly insists that it is our duty to compensate as adequately as we can for those losses. As Prendergast himself notes, returns to the body of the poet frequently endeavor to serve historicist accuracy, correcting misrepresentations, asking us not only to assess truth claims but to accede to their reality. Despite a sophisticated awareness of history's "regimes of truth," and of the fictions that haunt the archives, historicists continue to aim at the objective "truth" about history, even when historicism figures truth as a series of psychoanalytic insights—as could be argued for some of the work of Paul Strohm. We may, in other words, understand a text's historical work in terms with which the text does not identify or even acknowledge, but our knowledge of those texts should converge on the best, most truthful, historical recovery we can manage. As Aranye Fradenburg puts it: "For many historicists today, giving truthful accounts of the past is an ethical imperative…" "Increasingly," she continues, "historians agree that producing an objectively truthful account of the past is impossible, though even these routinely write *as if* the objectivity they relinquish were possible."[5] Insofar as such projects aim at historical truth as their goal, insofar as they retain the assumption that we must discriminate "true" fragments from "false" ones, both reading the *right* signifier and reading the signifier *rightly*, they also and nonetheless are pointed at truth as an aim and an end.[6]

I am interested in what it means to write, to think, to study, indeed to love the past, "after history," and in how the psychoanalytic distinction between truth and knowledge (and, not coincidentally, between possession and dispossession) might help us in this endeavor. I am interested in what it means to face up to Fradenburg's *as if*. In the midst of the regular insistence these days on the compatibility of historicist and psychoanalytic modes—a point with which, as this essay itself will demonstrate, I am in basic agreement—I also wish here to face up to the epistemological assumptions that the two approaches do *not* share. The anecdote of Petrarch's missing skull is a good place to start not the least because of the existence of that false skull that was pressed into service to replace it. Not only have Petrarch's remains been fragmented by the ravages of time, they lie beside the fragment of another body, one placed in the tomb *as if* it were Petrarch's. Petrarch's skull was not just missing but misrecognized, entombed under false pretenses. The poet's remains are, thus, doubly haunted: by the fragmentation and irrecoverability that Prendergast identifies with historicist modes, but also by fraudulence, an artifact quite literally misconstrued. I begin with the anecdote of this skull because it emblematizes a key psychoanalytic insight, what Sarah Kay has termed the "non-convergence" of knowledge with truth. Psychoanalytic theory has a markedly different relation to truth claims than do historicist methods: in psychoanalysis, truth or the "event" may operate as the *cause* of knowledge and prompt libidinal transactions and transferential exchanges that constitute the primary object of analysis; but truth does not converge on the content of what is known.[7] Lacan's notion of the "Real" cannot be easily coordinated with events.[8] The case of Petrarch's skull offers a glimpse at a similarly complex epistemological structure: the truth of the falsity of Petrarch's dead body grounds the search for who is buried in Petrarch's tomb. Scientific technologies such as DNA analysis open up knowledge about Petrarch's tomb precisely because of the untruth of that fraudulent artifact. Rather than help us produce a true account of Petrarch's resting place, the fraudulent skull raises questions about the stakes in memorializing the poet's dead body and the circuits of possession and dispossession that surround them. This is precisely *because* the truth of that counterfeit skull does not coincide with our knowledge about it. This non-convergence of truth and knowledge, I will argue here, might help us to analyze the amorous dispossession of our love for the poet's dead body.

Dispossession is not, of course, our aim when we commit favorite poetic verses to memory, or lovingly read lines penned by poets long admired and long dead. Yet this essay will argue that far from being a state that prohibits or constrains knowledge about literature—about Petrarch or Chaucer—dispossession constitutes the occasion for the production of

such knowledge. This essay depends of course upon the already extensive understanding that the problems that longing, lack, absence pose for the heretofore confident project of historicist recovery.[9] To that important methodological tradition, I will add a consideration of Lacan's much-discussed essay "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis," assessing how it might help us to think not only about the state of desire and its vicissitudes, but the "elsewheres" (temporal and spatial) and triangulations embedded in our amorous dispossessions. My first section, "Knowing the Lost Object" reviews Lacan's essay, pushing upon the "anamorphotic" character of knowledge—of recognition and misrecognition, and of what we can see from different locales. The second part, "Misrecognizing Petrarch," reviews the work of a number of scholars who suggest the ways that Chaucer's relation to Petrarch troubles the easy possession of Petrarch by and for "Renaissance" Humanism. In that case Chaucer's exclusion from Petrarch's legacy haunts as a temporal elsewhere. Yet despite all the important work accomplished on this topic, the question of temporality, of literary history, of "medieval" and "early modern" remains strangely intractable. Something other than truth is at stake in it. Furthermore, while medievalists regularly make clear the stakes in the medieval elsewhere that haunts Renaissance periodization, we have generally (though not in every instance) had less to say about similar fantasmatics that inhabit the geographies of possession and dispossession in Chaucer studies. My final section, "National Dispossessions," turns to the claims of possession made in the name of nation and geography, thus moving my concern with "elsewhere" from a temporal register to a geographic one. In each case, I am interested in how we might reconsider the knowledge that emerges from our dispossessions.

Knowing the Lost Object

At least since the twelfth century, poetic production has been understood as unleashed by the lost object. Petrarch's Laura, Dante's Beatrice mobilize creative force precisely because they are gone, lost, absent; the beloved thus assists her respective poet to the extent that the desire unleashed by her remains unrequited. In Lacanian terms, of course, this structure marks the state of the modern subject-in-language, a subject that Lacan also first locates in the twelfth century: having relinquished claim to the body of the mother, the subject gains language—the symbolic order—as a kind of consolation; language, as a result, remains always already shot-through with this sacrifice, this act of relinquishment, rendered in the status of the Real. The Real—the prompt of truth that can never be known—does not converge on the content of language even as it remains in interlocking

relation with it, bound up with the circulation of the signifier. Gayle Margherita has long since reminded us of the power of this structure for the romance of origins: once the body of the woman is imagined as lost, "origins can be relocated within language itself: the father's 'old stories' supplant the mother's body and a literary tradition is born."[10]

From this vantage, the facts surrounding Petrarch's grave take on greater significance. Finucci, we recall, remarked that we should not be surprised to find Petrarch's body lying beside a woman's head, and this is at least in part because evidence from the grave unravels the relation of the poet's "old stories" to the lost woman. But it unravels as well, I am arguing, our relation to the lost poet. The female skull, fragment of a woman's body, functions as a double metonymy here: operating, on the one hand, as part for the whole, the female skull alludes to the lost body of the woman at the heart of the courtly love tradition; yet positioned as adjacent to the body of the poet—thus displaying metonymy as a relation of contiguity—the woman's skull also displaces (in this case, literally) the absence of the poet himself.[11] Woman-as-lost-object thus constitutes not only, as Margherita points out, the ground upon which a ("male") literary tradition is born; she also, in this case, stands in for the poet-as-lost-object, a dispossession out of which our own work as critics—critical tradition more generally—erupts. The evidence of Petrarch's tomb thus suggests the ways that amorous dispossession might motivate creative production not against but *around* the emptiness in the place of our beloveds.

All of this involves much ado about nothing, quite literally. In his much-discussed lecture "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis," Lacan emphasizes the discourse of courtly love as a phenomenon itself produced *ex nihilo,* and he considers sublimation in relation to this nothing. "Nothing" here is not, of course, simply nothing, recalling the *nihil* that medieval theologies of creation identified with God's creative extravagance.[12] Nothing is also, however, simply nothing, gesturing toward the material impossibility at the heart of this belief (that matter, in other words, can neither be created nor destroyed), and thus signaling Lacan's divergence from Aquinas and Bonaventure on questions of belief.[13] And yet this nothing has a *positive* valence as the structural emptiness important to Lacan's understanding of the Thing (Freud's *Das Ding*) and to his retheorization of sublimation. And it is the relation of creative production—of sublimation—to the Thing that Lacan situates by way of the traditions of so-called courtly love.

Lacan argues for an understanding of the notion of sublimation as something more than the libidinal satisfactions that artists derive from their creative activity. While these satisfactions are of interest, he wishes to stress that, as satisfactions, they depend first and foremost on the possibility that language might be able to form, as he puts it, "a structure

within a social consensus": "What needs to be justified is not simply the *secondary* benefits that *individuals* might derive from their works, but the *originary* possibility of a function like the poetic function in the form of *a structure within a social consensus*" (my emphasis).[14] Sublimation, a "universal" structure, thus and nonetheless comes to depend upon the particular ways that language functions at a given time, a shift in emphasis from the benefits sublimation grants to particular artists, to sublimation as a function of signification itself. "It is," he continues, "precisely that kind of consensus we see born at a certain historical moment around the ideal of courtly love" (145). Courtly love occupies a doubled and contradictory history in this account of creativity: it is an *innovative* social consensus (as Fradenburg puts it, "a breakaway moment in the history of the signifier") that emblematizes a *recurring*, universal structure of modern subjectivity. On the one hand, this combination grounds one of the main arguments for the deployment of psychoanalysis *for* historicism. On the other, as I am also arguing, the epistemological structure implied by Lacan's work diverges quite significantly from an epistemological investment in an "accurate" recovery of the true story about the absent past, a fact signaled symptomatically by his use of Gaston Paris' "courtly love," a term now judged inaccurate by historicist experts.

Yet Lacan's "inaccurate" term, in this case, signals that very impossibility of accuracy that is his concern; courtly love serves, like Petrarch's skull, as an impossible signifier for the impossible structures of desire he will here analyze. According to Lacan, the poetry of courtly love elaborates a cultural value that signifies desire beyond its own limits or productions; desire, always pursuing the impossibility of its own permanent satisfaction (the desiring subject prostrate before the Thing as "cruel and inhuman partner" who coldly refuses to be "won"), and thus always alluding to something more, something beyond, something impossible of representation or achievement. There is, at the heart of this transaction, a little bit of nothing; the impossible (and/or prohibited) love object occupies the space of the Thing, a void, a vacuole, an absence (mis)recognized as cold, inhuman refusal. The signifier comes then to the rescue, headed for the Thing but detouring around the void, preserving the space of the Thing sublimed. Creative production comes out of, even as it circles, this nothing at the heart of the Thing. Traditions of courtly love, moreover, make clear that the Thing cannot be approached directly; "fundamentally veiled," we can only draw near by way of detour, encircling, or bypass. In this way, courtly love makes "the domain of the vacuole stand out," (152) "at the center of the signifiers" (150)[15] that constitute its discourse. Signifiers place us ineluctably in the presence of the Thing as that empty space from which the Real beckons.

It is here that the anamorphotic features of art converge on Courtly Love. "Anamorphosis," Sarah Kay writes, "is the visual equivalent of the *après-coup*: it is the backward glance that assigns meaning to what had previously seemed troublesome, inconsistent, or resistant to analysis."[16] Courtly love emerges as similar to the appearance of the image in anamorphotic art, an appearance that seems to come from out of nothing. Nancy Frelick puts it this way:

> [Lacan] makes use of this analogy in order to evoke, in a dramatic way, the almost magical appearance of an image, as if from nowhere, as if from the Real. He also stresses the self-conscious play of illusion in anamorphotic art which highlights the primacy of the signifier in a manner analogous to the play on conventions and artifice in Courtly love.[17]

Like anamorphotic art, Courtly Love makes the image and the signifier seem to appear out of nothing, *as if* out of the Real. Yet if the Real cannot be accessed, its truth directly known, it nonetheless is everywhere at stake in creative production of art and, I would argue, of the knowledge produced about art.

In choosing anamorphosis as his central metaphor, Lacan points to a crucial *as if* at the heart of sublimation: in anamorphosis what we see cannot be termed a true image, so much as a conditional one, dependent upon whether we view in a conventional or an unconventional way. In "oblique" anamorphosis, for example, the type represented in Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, the anamophotic image changes its look depending upon whether or not the painting is viewed from the usual, in-front or straight-on position, or whether (to borrow Žižek's famous formulation) one looks at it awry. Visual illusion here is a kind of play with fun-house mirrors, a deformation, revealing the image *as if* in a monstrous projection. Courtly Love retains this anamorphotic structure because we can only see the monstrous projections—the Thing as cruel and inhuman partner—by circling, detouring, approaching from a certain angle. The something of nothing at the heart of these transactions remains "veiled" and sublimation constitutes our detour around it.

If Kay and Frelick's works remind us of the temporal dimension of anamorphosis ("it is, Kay writes, "the *après-coup*" "the backward glance"), Lacan points also to its spatial dimension, to illusion as involved with the angle of the sight-line. As is the case with many of Lacan's central ideas (the Mirror Stage, e.g.) spatial orientation helps elucidate the transaction he wants to describe. Anamorphosis provides "by means of an optical transposition a certain form that wasn't visible at first sight transforms itself into a readable image," now legible "if you place yourself at a

certain angle" (135). While Lacan wants to insist on "the primacy [of] the domain of language above all" (136), he here considers space (architectural interiors, the interiors of the caves as Lascaux, but also the illusory interior rendered in the mirror) because a spatial orientation makes clear the emptiness at the heart of the structure: "primitive architecture can be defined as something organized around emptiness" (135).[18]

Of course, in each case, the possibility of possessing the beloved itself is "something organized around emptiness": it is a fantasmatic misrecognition, what I am calling an *as if.* This is because, if the history of the literature of Courtly Love is anything to go by, actually having the beloved may not be the whole truth about desire in the first place. Moreover, insofar as the body of the beloved—the "cruel and inhuman partner"—occupies the place of the Thing, beckoning from the Real, possession is impossible anyway (this is, from one view, precisely the point). Fantasies of possession and dispossession do not, thus, converge on the truth of the case. This means that the dispossessions of Courtly Love are bound up with a powerful misrecognition precisely about possession and its vicissitudes.

My comments thus far emphasize the fantasmatic structures of possession and dispossession; they do not, however, make as clear as they might the competitive ways in which the two are mutually defined and defining. Courtly Love is, of course, shot through with rivalry as well as with dispossession: my dispossession of the body of the beloved may well seem real precisely through my *rival's* possession of my beloved. Or, to take this from another angle, my possession of the body of the beloved is made to feel real to me because of my rival's more obvious dispossession. The place of aggressivity in structures of identity and desire are legible elsewhere in Lacan's corpus, particularly in his account of "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," a sort of companion piece to "The Mirror Stage," and in the next two sections of this essay, I will develop this aspect of things more directly. At the moment, however, we should pause to note that the structure of sublimation in art emerges as a species of amorous dispossession; and from the vantage of the poet's dead body, so too does our work as critics and scholars. In the next two sections, I will argue that this structure offers us a way understand—to know—the recurrence of certain intractable fantasies of possession, both between "Renaissance" and Medieval Humanisms, and among the various localities of Chaucer studies.

Misrecognizing Petrarch

Medievalists may find the story of Petrarch's fraudulent tomb particularly satisfying in part because we have long understood the fraudulent claims

made for Petrarch by way of literary history. It is not news that Early Modern scholars misrecognize Petrarch as "the first Renaissance man," whose relation to Renaissance poets in England is regularly thought to skip Chaucer's generation. Following Petrarch's own self-fashioning, such scholars write *as if* Petrarch work constitutes a new beginning, absent in the work of the medieval predecessors of England's Renaissance poets, even if those "predecessors" (as in Chaucer's case) came after Petrarch. The clarity of dates (Petrarch, 1304–1374; Chaucer, *ca.* 1343–1400) has not particularly helped us here: the bald power of the factoid—usually so important to the use of the anecdote in Early Modern studies—seems never quite to hit its mark. Nor does the clarity of literary influence wield the power that it should: we all know that Petrarch's sonnet 132 of the *Canzoniere* is Chaucer's source for Troilus's lyric (I.400–420) in *Troilus and Criseyde*. We also know, thanks to the groundbreaking work of David Wallace, that Chaucer's deep interest in the literary relations between Petrarch and Boccaccio was a crucial inspiration for "The Clerk's Tale." Readings abound that nonetheless stake Wyatt's adaptation of the Petrarchan sonnet as original and originating. Truth in this case does not easily converge on what we "know" of Petrarch, Chaucer, or so-called Renaissance Humanism.

If scholarship does not regularly acknowledge these facts, it is certainly not for lack of effort, knowledge, or persuasive prose on the part of a number of scholars, many of them medievalists. As late as 2005, in a special issue of *JMEMS* also marking the occasion of the seventh centenary of Petrarch's birth, James Simpson disputed the "tenacious account" of Petrarch as Renaissance man, marshalling one more argument about the ways that Petrarch's originality in "initiating a new mode" of perception has been "seriously overemphasized."[19] As Simpson himself points out, the need to do this continues to hold, despite the influential work of scholars such as Stephanie Jed, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, and Wallace.[20] The problem is strangely intransigent: any one of the important revisionary accounts of humanism penned by these scholars should have done the trick; taken together, the compelling rethinking of Petrarch's relation to humanism would have seemed more than sufficient to make the case.

Scholars have, moreover, noted this problem of intransigence before. In *Theory and the Premodern Text*, Paul Strohm deploys Chaucer's use of Petrarch in *Troilus* to advance an important argument about temporality and the literary archive. "Petrarch," he writes,

> is…found on both sides of Chaucer: chronologically "pre," and with respect to certain kinds of adoption and exploitation, stylistically "post." His sonnet within the bounds of Chaucer's narrative constitutes a fold or

> wrinkle in time, a doubling back or superimposition, a non-synchronous intimation of past and future at the heart of the present. (91)

On one hand, this means for Strohm that "the problem of Petrarch within Chaucer can be stated but cannot be resolved within the terms of the Renaissance/Medieval dichotomy"; on the other, "period terminologies like medieval and Renaissance also serve as a vital reminder to view textual problems as historical problems" (93), and to recall "the contradictory nature of time as actually experienced" (94). A problem "stated" but never "resolved," Petrarch-within-Chaucer points to the non-convergence of knowledge with truth.

Yet the reason that Petrarch constitutes a temporal "problem" within Chaucer—he certainly didn't constitute a temporal problem *for* Chaucer—has to do with precisely those fantasies of possession and dispossession I examined earlier, fantasies that circulate by way of history and the period divide. The fact that neither simple chronology, old-fashioned source study, impressive and persuasive accounts of Humanism and of Chaucer, nor sophisticated attention to the methods of historicism—not even, *pace* Strohm, the way time is "actually experienced"—can suffice. If we are in the realm of history, this is the kind of history emblematized by Petrarch's fraudulent tomb: a haunted history that can never deliver on the truth it claims to possess.

Something other than truth structures period dichotomies.[21] And this suggests that something other than a desire for truth or accuracy can be seen to structure historicism, whatever the sincere ambitions, or claims, of its practitioners. The problem that Chaucer poses to Petrarchan accounts of Renaissance Literature involves—as we saw with Courtly Love—the circulation of misrecognitions about possession and dispossession. There are many kinds of claims staked in these complex relations. On the one hand, Chaucer's "possession" of Petrarch is at stake: placing a Petrachan sonnet in the mouth of his character Troilus, Chaucer presumably didn't recognize or "possess" Petrarch as well as Wyatt did, Petrarch's putatively more faithful translator. On the other hand, as the embodiment of a Humanism definitively associated the Renaissance, Petrarch stands metonymically for the "possession" of selfhood as such; this is, quite literally, a figure for that self-possessed consciousness that the Renaissance, and not the Middle Ages, simply "had," yet another "tenacious account" of period difference. Temporality notwithstanding, the English Renaissance grounds its possession of Petrarch in part by assigning "dispossession" to the adjacent period and to Chaucer—thus, and paradoxically, dispossession accrues to England at the very time in which Petrarch lived. While Petrarch's "Italian Renaissance" constitutes an elsewhere to the English

Renaissance in temporal as well as geographic terms, England's possession of Petrarch is understood precisely as a temporal *après-coup*; it is an anamorphotic recasting, a misrecognition organized around this doubled emptiness. Thus, and despite the fact that Wyatt, like Chaucer, had access to the poet by way of his manuscript tradition and not Petrarch's bodily presence, Renaissance possession circumvents this profound dispossession by assigning a more profound, if less temporal, dispossession of the poet's dead body to another time. That other time—Chaucer's time—is certainly not "earlier" from the point of view of Petrarch; it is earlier only with reference to Wyatt's backward glance.[22]

The use of Petrarch, predating his near contemporary Chaucer, to ground the claims of period difference offers, thus, another example of the non-convergence of truth and knowledge, recasting the importance of Petrarch's fraudulent tomb. For this is a view of literary history not simply cognizant of the limitations and fragmentations of the archive, but regularly misrecognizing possession and dispossession: it is *as if* Chaucer never knew him. Like the partial corpse of the unknown woman, parts of Petrarch's corpus rest in inappropriate places: metonymic in both senses, Petrarch haunts in partial form from the adjacent period. The poet, beloved and dead, constitutes that "cruel and inhuman partner" around which poetry and period detour. In looking back at Petrarch, Renaissance Humanists misrecognize their own dispossession in part by misrecognizing the dispossession of their ancestors; contemporary literary history takes up this misrecognition again, transforming the Real into knowledge about the problems of the period divide.

National Dispossessions

Fantasies of possession and dispossession, as we have seen, drive the discourse of courtly love and the historical discourse about Petrarch, the poet of that tradition. They have also, as Steve Ellis and others point out, structured the national history of Chaucer's reception. In this final section, I wish to consider dispossession in our own national and geographic modes. I am inspired here in part by Stephen Knight's characteristically provocative idea, offered as part of a round table at the New Chaucer Society Meeting in 2000, that British medievalists, having a national tie to the dead poet's body, enact a "somatized" relation to Chaucer, while Americans, absent that body, occupy a more abstract and associative relation to the poet and to his time. This is an account of cultural difference through the materiality of the corpus: as somatized, British scholars are in metonymic relation to Chaucer's dead body; American scholars, in contrast, relate to the body of the poet in more abstract, metaphorical terms.

Knight's heuristic registers important material differences between educational systems in the United States and the United Kingdom. It reminds us for one of the very different material histories of the two places: Saxon churches can be encountered in various English and Welsh locales, standing markers of times long past; architectural edifices, gravestones and guild halls, colleges at Oxford, and castles stand still, dating from the era of Chaucer and before. The United States, in contrast, has no such edifices, nothing standing from the ninth or fourteenth centuries. Medieval America is not a time or place that we know very much about. Knight's account, that is, offers an advance upon strictly material notions of possession and dispossession, as his remarks suggest the psychodynamics constituted by the responsibility that accrues under the guise of national assumptions of possession. Yet, of course, there is also a fundamental misrecognition here: England no longer possesses Chaucer exactly, certainly not in materiality of his body. Yet it is, Knight's comments suggest, *as if* they did. The knowledge made available by Professor Knight's comments, from the psychoanalytic point of view I have been pursuing, remains no less powerful because they are founded on *as if*. It can, moreover, be elucidated through the rivalries of amorous dispossession discussed in the previous two sections.

In the last few pages of this essay, I trace some of what we might know about the national rivalries within Chaucer studies, with an eye for the surprising detours and swerves legible in that record. If rhetorics of the possession and dispossession of poets frequently converge on national categories—as they did in Knight's comments—these still and nonetheless depend upon fantasies of dispossession elsewhere. The history of Chaucer's dead body resonates with the history of Chaucer's poetic reception, its national character most strikingly clear, Steve Ellis argues, from later Victorian times to World War II.[23] Recent work has nuanced the nationalist question in Chaucer studies considerably, but with a few important exceptions (Ellis's, Stephanie Trigg's *Congenial Souls*, and Richard Utz's *Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology*) most studies remain delimited by national boundaries. Of course we also know that from its very early days Chaucer studies was an international venture.[24] And Trigg's *Congenial Souls* reminds us throughout that the "international community of Chaucerians is not always as homogeneous as some members of that community like to imagine it" (xxiv). Such heterogeneity is not limited to international societies; postcolonial cultural studies has taught us that so-called national traditions claim the fiction of self-possession as an organic and unified whole, a fiction on which they can never deliver. This means that whatever characteristics might be identified with national scholarly traditions, those traditions—like

Petrarch's tomb—include trace evidence of other people, other places, and other traditions.

Since the early 1990s, and in response to the increasing corporate culture of the university, scholars interrogating the cultural history of post-secondary humanities education have shown us two things: first, that humanities curricula were founded in part as a means to coordinate national identities; and second that national rationales for humanities education are no longer either rhetorically successful or intellectually sufficient.[25] These are useful and compelling accounts, not the least because we still largely labor in departments structured by that founding moment, more so, perhaps, in the fields of language and literatures than in many others. Yet nearly all such accounts assume "national identification" a straightforward matter, national identity usually crafted in stark opposition to other identities, uncompromised by international affections, dependencies, or histories.

A countertrend, directed at the nineteenth-century institutionalization of the study of English literature and language, argues that English literature emerged most forcefully as an object of study outside England, or at least, in locales that were not wholly English. In *Masks of Conquest*, for example, Gauri Viswanathan challenges conventional understandings of literary possession—specifically an ownership of literary history demarcated by national borders—by reminding us of the geographic complexities of pedagogical developments marked by colonialism.[26] Where Strohm's work on Petrarch-in-Chaucer emphasizes a "fold in time," Viswanathan's account of curricular developments in the nineteenth-century colony raises for us an analogical "fold-in-space": the history of English literary pedagogy may well rest not simply in the placid English countryside, the Saxon Churches, or the esteemed universities of Oxbridge, but in classrooms in Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai.

With regard to literary history and pedagogy, such incongruence of space and nation surfaces earlier as well—in the energetic emergence of belletristic study of English literature in the United States, particularly as to the place of texts of medieval romance within that study. The influence of the German scientific model on the development of the study of philology and language in the United States in the early twentieth century is well-known. Allen Frantzen and Gerald Graff have each traced the influence of the philological approach to literary study in the United States through the work of Professor Francis A. March (1825–1911), longstanding professor at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania—the first college in the United States to establish an undergraduate degree program in English literature and language. Identified by Frantzen as "the pre-eminent figure of the . . . strictly scholarly line of Anglo-Saxonism"

in the United States, March's textbook *Methods of Philological Study of the English Language* influenced language study throughout the country, contributing to the establishment of the teaching of philology in doctoral programs from Harvard to Virginia and California.[27]

Yet it was also at Lafayette College that the belletristic study of *literature*—philology's less well-known rival and partner—was first established and taught. Franklin E. Court documents the process by which vernacular literary study was established, "largely through the influence of eighteenth-century Scottish moral philosophy and . . . Scots-Irish Presbyterianism." This was true, Court argues, of "all phases of colonial higher education in the United States."[28] A college established by Scots Presbyterians, Lafayette placed belletristic study alongside philology, and here the curriculum in medieval literature, unlike that of language, registered more than a passing interest in Scottish medieval writers. The textbook used at Lafayette (and similar institutions during the time) for *literary* not language study was Samuel L. Knapp's *Advice in the Pursuit of Literature* (1832).[29] Knapp's textbook locates a section entitled "Sir Walter Scott and Novels founded on Fact" immediately before its chapter on Chaucer and as part of its defense of medieval texts of romance. *A Manual of English Literature*: A Textbook for Schools and Colleges (1872),[30] by John Seely Hart, another textbook used in U.S. colleges during the last quarter of the nineteenth century devotes a lengthy early chapter to "The Scottish Chaucerians," writing that "from the time of Chaucer . . . the succession of minstrels and poets seems to have been limited to the northern part of the Island, nearly all the poetical writers of this period being Scotchmen [*sic*]." Hart emphasizes the "intrinsically Scottish character" of writers such as Robert Henryson, and includes critical commentary on the writings of Barbour, Dunbar, Gavin Douglas, and others. This is all the more striking given that March emphasized a philological approach to the early *English* language, placing Anglo-Saxon on a par with classical language study. Nor was Hart alone in this emphasis. The American edition of Thomas B. Shaw's *Outlines of English Literature* (1866)[31] also turns to Celtic Britain for history and inspiration, beginning with a chapter that emphasizes "the influence of the Celtic peoples on the development of English." These competing developments suggest an altogether more contentious view of the study of literature in the United States than even Graff proposes. With this history in mind, it is not surprising that the centenary of Robert Burns in 1896 would prove so popular (as Steve Ellis puts it, with no little note of surprise) "in the colonies and even in America."[32] This is in contrast to the Chaucer quincentenary in 1900, which according to reports analyzed by Ellis was "very much London based." Literary tastes for British authors in the United States

are instantiated in U.S. undergraduate college curricula triangulated by way not only of Germany, but of Scotland. As Court puts it, "to conclude that colonial America went to school on the Scots is hardly an exaggeration."[33]

If Court's work suggests that an interest in "Celtic Britain"—particularly Scotland—haunts U.S. study of English literature from its earliest days, his work also corroborates Robert Crawford's important reconsideration of the development of "English" literature in Britain, including Scotland. In *Devolving English Literature*, Crawford argues that "Scotland itself…was crucially instrumental in the development of university teaching of English Literature," and thus "British literature" emerges as "the Scots solution" to the problem of cultural identity that faced Scots writers at the time. Even here, this process triangulates beyond the shores of Britain. Crawford shows that crucial elements from Scottish tradition and literature inspired not only American readers, but American writers "anxious to compare a wide variety of other cultures, including that of the native Americans, with English culture, so as not to be subject to the sole model offered by Old England." Crawford argues that American literature would borrow an interest in dialect, a concern with the lostness of past colonized cultures, an anthropological method of association, even the insistence upon literary tension with England (American literary "exceptionalism") from the experience of Scots writers and thinkers.[34]

In American classrooms, then, Chaucer's textual body cohabited with the likes of Bobby Burns. Such accounts of literary history reassert not only the mixed, unstable temporalities of literary history as such, but the ways in which literary placement is regularly shot through with unexpected interlopers: such fraudulence is not the opposite of literary history, or an erroneous set of "inaccurate" fantasies that history proper must understand and correct, but precisely the way that the circulation of texts and artifacts work. Of course, the circulation of the corpus, as Prendergast reminds us, remains always implicitly linked to the problem of the corpse. With all of this in mind it is not at all surprising that throughout the mid-twentieth century—and in the context of rivalries between philological and belletristic approaches to the study of literature within U.S. education—American medieval studies programs (a number of them in the resolutely "American" "heartland" of the Midwest) would be concerned to display their reverence for the text: many would develop extensive, widely respected curricula in paleography, philology, and codicology (based on German models). This is to say nothing of the massive relocation of resources accomplished by Henry Huntington, J.P. Morgan, and others, philanthropists and antiquarians who acquired manuscripts,

relocating entire medieval libraries home to a place they had never been before. And while we're on the subject of massive resources and work, I should mention that of John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, who in 1927 attempted to collate all known Chaucer manuscripts in their "laboratory" at the University of Chicago, a project that we might view as a way of reviving and claiming a single Chaucerian corpus in an American locale.[35] One might, furthermore, read the obsessive footnoting of the American exegetical school of Chaucer Studies as a disavowal of a fantasmatic dispossession of U.S. scholarship, an obsessional insistence that faithful American scholars can get the medieval text or medieval *caritas* exactly *right*. We should note as well the important work currently being done by Japanese and Taiwanese scholars, many of whom have pursued doctoral studies in the United States or the United Kingdom, in the fields of manuscript studies and linguistic philology. Scholars from Japan, moreover, are currently acquiring manuscripts and buying medieval books in much the way Huntington and Morgan did in their day.

Where, in all these triangulating relations, are we to locate the poet, or the poet's dead body? Which groups may be rightly said to "own" the poet, and by what circuits do they do so? And if it feels *as if* Chaucer more properly *belongs* to England today, to what extent does this *as if* continue to exercise its power precisely though a contrast with other locales (and scholars) presumably suffering an even greater "lack"? Places that have never "had" Chaucer to begin with can be used implicitly to construct an academic Englishness imbued with the continued fantastical presence of Chaucer. Thus, England's possession of Middle English literature and culture gains its sense of reality in part by the "emptiness" of other locales. In the case of former British colonies, those other locales involve cultural sites linked to England yet emphatically not medieval.

The complexity of these geographic and cultural relations, like the relations of love and history examined earlier, problematize the truth of any possession of the poet's dead body. We would all probably agree that England can no longer exactly claim to "have" Chaucer (least of all in the physicality of his body). Fantasies of possession function anamorphotically here, approaching but veiling the nothing at the heart of such networks of association and of desire: English, Scots, American, Japanese; philologists, belletrists, historicists, psychoanalytic critics, we are equally dispossessed of the poet's corpse. Yet this does not mean that the work we produce as a result is immaterial or compromised by inaccuracy: powerful precisely as rivalries, passions, and misrecognitions, our scholarly productions detour around the poet's dead body. Our state of dispossession thereby offers plenty of power for rigorous editing, teaching, thinking, reading, and writing.

We have long known that amorous dispossession proves powerful enough to create whole eras of poetry; that it also enables accounts of literary history, edited texts and textbooks, libraries and anthologies, curricula and degree programs should be no less surprising. All of these relations, in other words and to return to Lacan's formulation about anamorphosis, can be defined as "something oriented around emptiness." From the view of this history, the poet's dead body may be spread in even more pieces, his tomb even more crowded than Petrarch's example suggests. Throughout this essay, I have endeavored to argue that insofar as accounts of creative production are misrecognized as the truth about accuracy or possession, they hide, rather than elucidate, what we might know about of the circulation of desire in our work, a circulation legible in the *as if* of the historical scene.

From the vantage of a rigorous historicism, we are all dispossessed of Chaucer's dead body. From the place "After History," we are also dispossessed of the truth about it. Yet if truth cannot constitute the content of our knowledge, it can still, and importantly, figure its cause. I began this essay with the anecdote of Petrarch's missing skull in the hopes that it might direct our attention to a certain kind of knowledge—emphatically not a (single) truth—about our desire for the poet and for poetry. Petrarch's missing skull gestures to the crossing of dispossession with fraud; yet it also gestures toward the impossibility of truth as not the frustrated end, but the promising beginning, the energy and cause of our labors. Refiguring creative activity and academic work as a species of amorous dispossession can not only keep us honest about what we really "have," but trigger a consideration of the other bodies that lie alongside the poet. Such a rivalrous, if also amorous, history reminds us that Chaucer's English presence, like Petrarch's Renaissance humanism, has long since cohabited with fraudulent remains.

Notes

1. Bruce Johnston, *Daily Telegraph,* April 6, 2004; From the BBC News, Wednesday, April 7, 2004. While fraudulent tombs are not all that unusual, the case of a fraudulent skull is remarkable. Wiel Marin, curator for the Petrarch exhibition, is quoted in the report from the BBC: "The theft of the skull of a person is not so unusual, but as far as I know this is the first time that thieves bothered to replace the original one with a damaged substitute . . . We really have no clue about the thief. I can only say that the skull was stolen before 1946, as a picture of the head taken at that time matches the same damaged skull we have today." The story circulated widely and internationally: in addition to reports from the BBC and *The Guardian*, India's National Newspaper, *The Hindu*, also covered

the event. The BBC report was picked up by United Press International and the Associated Press, with a diverse circulation in a range of websites including comic Dave Barry's weblog. Barry writes, "Losing his skull is a rather like misplacing Westminster Abbey, or someone half-inching the Lindesfarne Gospel. It's just so inappropriate."

2. "In the footprints of Petrarch," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35.3 (2005): 461.
3. Lacanian accounts of history and of Medieval Studies have long suggested the striking relevance of the structure of Courtly Love to the lost objects of history itself. Aranye Fradenburg's groundbreaking essay "Voice Memorial: Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 169–202, as Louise O., deploys psychoanalytic theories (particularly that of Freud, Lacan, and Julia Kristeva) in an analysis not only of the losses Chaucer's poetry commemorates and negotiates, but also of the implications of this material for what she terms a "compassionate historicism" of the Middle Ages. Fradenburg's influential Lacanian account of historicism as a "history of the signifier" is further developed in *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). My essay is also indebted to Gayle Margherita's important Lacanian account of the sexual politics of fantasies of origins for Middle English literature and Medieval Studies as such. See *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). Sarah Kay's analysis of the libidinal and logical structures of Troubadour poetry—alongside her account of the logics shared by Jacques Lacan and medieval scholasticism—has also been crucial to my thinking. Her work argues that, in its central treatment of the contradictory object, courtly literature mediates a transfer from medieval to modern structures of thought and enjoyment. See *Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Other relevant studies include Alexandre Leupin, *Barbolexis: Medieval Writing and Sexuality*, trans. Kate M. Cooper (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), and on the medievalism of psychoanalytic theory, Erin Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
4. Thomas Prendergast, *Chaucer's Dead Body: From Corpse to Corpus* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 4. In addition to Prendergast's study, a number of Chaucerians have displayed considerable interest in the cultural history of Chaucer's dead body and its various resting places. Seth Lerer, Joseph A. Dane, and Derek Pearsall have each examined the poet's tomb, pointing to its problematic uses for particular ideological ends: Pearsall argues that despite protestant claims on Chaucer, the poet's second 1556 tomb was likely constructed as part of Catholic claims to the poet; Dane visits Chaucer's tomb to correct mistranscriptions of its epitaph; and Lerer uses the tomb to leverage a larger critique of a Chaucerianism possessed by the "voice and vehicle for fantasy." See, Joseph A. Dane, *Who is Buried in Chaucer's Tomb?: Studies in the Reception of Chaucer's Book* (East Lansing:

Michigan State University Press, 1998); Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Derek Pearsall, "Chaucer's Tomb: The Politics of Reburial," *Medium Aevum* 64 (1995): 51–73.

5. *Sacrifice Your Love*, (44–45, emphasis in original).
6. As Elizabeth Clark points out, despite acknowledging the critiques of historicist method in the wake of the "linguistic turn," historians have not taken on the epistemological implications of this issue for historicist knowledge. Clark, *History-Theory-Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). In addition to those psychoanalytic medievalists mentioned earlier, important analysis of the state of historicism in and for medieval studies and medieval literary texts include Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) and *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Patterson has, of course, famously repudiated his earlier interest in psychoanalytic analyses. In the cases of these scholars' work, compelling historical knowledge continues to be understood, at least in part, as converging on truth—in aim, if not in every instance. This convergence is what grounds the authority and influence of historicist approaches in the first place. To point this out is not to suggest that historicist work is any more fraught with misrecognition, or "error" than any other method of analysis, but that the status of error or accuracy operates in ways that conceal as well as reveal. For an example of important historicist analyses of temporality deploying a distinctly psychoanalytic epistemology, see Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) and *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).
7. Freud's thoughts on the knowledge produced by fantasy can be found in "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," *Standard Edition* (1933) 22: 1–182. In his analysis of Freud's Schreiber case, Lacan develops the notion of the subject's knowledge as fundamentally paranoiac and, while distinct from psychosis, not entirely unrelated to it. See "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis," *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 179–225. Psychoanalytic epistemologies press upon the gaps, contradictions, and distortions of our mechanisms of observation, language, and reason, and are thus engaged in revealing what the constructions of positivism and empiricism owe to the mechanisms of repression. For an analysis of the paradox of Freud's relation to science, "sabotaging the language of science while claiming it as one's own," see Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Introduction à l'épistémologie freudienne* (Paris: Payot 1981). On Lacanian epistemology, see Alexandre Leupin, "Lacan: une nouvelle théorie de la connaissance," *Squiggle* (http://www.squiggle.be), 2006. The epistemological implications of psychoanalytic accounts of the "event," specifically

the traumatic event, have been particularly controversial, as evinced in the charge made most famously by Jeffrey Masson that in moving from a "seduction" theory to a theory of infantile sexuality, Freud "suppressed" the truth about the childhood sexual abuse suffered by his analysands. On this point, see Masson's *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1984). Both analysts and theorists have taken on Masson's critique, though many believe his analysis of Freud's motivation to be fundamentally wrong. For them the central controversy concerns the status of fantasy in psychoanalytic theory and the relation of fantasy to questions of truth: for Freud, Lacan, and others fantasy remains an important source of information and knowledge regardless of its relation to historical fact. Recently, the problem of fantasy and the "historical event" has been revisited within trauma theory. For an important, if not entirely satisfying, account of this problem and the relevant debates, see Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). At the largest, these debates pertain to what Sarah Kay has called the "non-convergence" of truth and knowledge in psychoanalytic theory. This point is made forcefully by Kay's *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

8. Fredric Jameson's famous statement "it is not terribly difficult to say what is meant by the Real in Lacan. It is simply History itself" is at best an oversimplification. Much depends, of course, upon what Jameson means here by History (with a capital H), but Lacan's category of the Real cannot be easily coordinated with events in the way that this implies. See his "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982), 338–395. For a more patient explication of this point, see my *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), particularly chapter one.
9. In "Voice Memorial," Fradenburg argues that the insistence that we remember Chaucer rightly arises from a refusal to mourn his loss, compensating for the lost object by an introjected identification with it.
10. Margherita, *Romance of Origins*, 87.
11. On metonymy as contiguity see, of course, Roman Jakobson, *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), especially pp. 115–133. Lacan's theorization on this aspect of metonymy as displacement, and thus the marker of desire, is influentially articulated in his essay "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud," *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).
12. Lacan's lecture "On creation ex nihilo" (also from Seminar VII) alludes to medieval accounts of creation even as it redirects them toward a different point, turning forcefully to a metaphor long important to accounts of creation, the metaphor of the potter: "According to a fable handed down

through the chain of generations, and that nothing prevents us from using, we are going to refer to what is the most primitive of artistic activities, that of the potter." Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 119. Lacan's reference to potter and vase ["so familiar in the imagery of the act of creation" (121)] recalls the biblical metaphor of creator and creature: "Can I not do to you, house of Israel, as this potter has done? says the Lord. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter so are you in my hand" (Jeremiah 18:6). Reference to the potter simultaneously raises human creative acts and the orthodox view of human creatureliness just rehearsed, that is, God's preeminent position as creator *ex nihilo*. For Lacan, the metaphor equally helps us see the fantasmatic structure at the heart of this tradition. As he punningly points out "[n]othing is made from nothing" (115–127).

13. Erin Labbie reads Lacan's work precisely as tracking the complex dynamic of the "universal" with "particular" by way of the structuring principle of the Real, a universal mode capable of crossing and accommodating various particular changes and shifts in signification over time. Lacan's complex account of an apparently "universal" subject takes considerable inspiration from the "quarrel of the universals" of the scholastics, and is indebted to Thomistic, Augustinian, and Boethian neo-Platonic philosophical traditions, traditions, Labbie argues, that Lacan turns on their head. Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism*.
14. Lacan, "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis," 145.
15. Lacan, "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis."
16. Sarah Kay, *Zizek: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003), 50.
17. Nancy Frelick, "Lacan, Courtly Love and Anamorphosis," in *The Court Reconvenes: Courtly Literature Across the Disciplines*, ed. Barbara K. Altmann and Carleton W. Carroll (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 107–114 (extract from p. 111).
18. All in Lacan, "Courtly Love as Anamorphosis."
19. James Simpson, "Subjects of Triumph and Literary History: Dido and Petrarch in Petrarch's *Africa* and *Trionfi*," *JMEMS*, 35.3 (2005): 489–508.
20. For instance, Stephanie Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986); David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolute Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
21. Robert Stein has demonstrated this point profoundly in his online essay written for the 1995 Conference *Cultural Fictions*, "Medieval, Modern, Post-Modern: The Middle Ages in a Postmodern Perspective," http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95/papers/stein.html. As he points out: "It is true that certain fourteenth- and fifteenth-century intellectuals begin using the terminology and concepts of rebirth—renasci,

rinascimento, renaissance—outside of the religious sphere where it had long been an essential part of the discourse, applying it now to secular processes. In virtually all cases, the word is used with a characterizing genitive, a genitive that names just what has been reborn—sometimes arts or letters, sometimes education, and in certain rare instances political liberty. Yet although periodization is surely occurring here, in none of these uses is the term for rebirth a totalizing period designator, and its typical antithesis is similarly not necessarily a period designator."

22. Chaucer's incorporation of Petrarch's sonnet within his narrative is, as Strohm points out, a non-synchronous "wrinkle in time"; but so too is Wyatt's with respect to Chaucer. Chaucer is, in fact, the earliest adapter of Petrarch in English; his adaptation is a "non-synchronous" fold in Wyatt's use of the form.
23. See Steve Ellis, *Chaucer at Large: The Poet in the Modern Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
24. Stephanie Trigg's work is crucial here. See *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Richard Utz documents the "increasing marginalization of most non-Anglophone Chaucer criticism" (xvii) since World War II. See *Chaucer and the Discourse of German Philology* (Belgium: Brepols, 2002).
25. As established definitively by Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
26. See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Viswanathan argues that the establishment of English literary studies depended upon its beginnings "elsewhere," in India, and as a strategy for colonial management. English literature, Viswanathan argues, "was called upon to perform the function of those social institutions (such as the church), that, in England, served as the chief disseminators of value, tradition, and authority." This explains "the more paid institutionalization of the discipline in the Indian colony than in the country where it originated" (7). Viswanathan argues that curriculum thus needs to be viewed less "a receptacle of texts"—that is, simple objects of study—and more an "activity, that is to say, as a vehicle of acquiring and exercising power" (167). She thus suggests that we jettison "descriptions of curricular content in terms of their expression of universal values on the one hand, or pluralistic, secular identities on the other" as "insufficient signifiers of [the] historical reality" that produced them (167).
27. See, e.g., Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), especially chapter 7, "Nationalism, Internationalism, and Teaching Anglo-Saxon in the United States." Frantzen gives rather short shrift to the belletristic tradition that I raise here, and he would likely dispute my account of this history.

28. Franklin E. Court, *The Scottish Connection: The Rise of English Literary Study in Early America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001). See also *Institutionalizing English Literature: The Culture and Politics of Literary Study, 1750–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).
29. Knapp, Samuel Lorenzo, *Advice in the Pursuit of Literature* (New York: J.K. Porter, 1832)
30. Hart, John Seeley, *A Manual of English Literature: A Textbook for Schools and Colleges* (Philadelphia: Eldridge and Brother, 1872).
31. T.B. Shaw, *Outlines of English Literature* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1866)
32. Ellis, *Chaucer at Large,* 19.
33. Court, *The Scottish Connection*, 2.
34. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; reprinted New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); see also Crawford, ed., *The Scottish Invention of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
35. Elizabeth Scala's work has been helpful to me here. See "'Miss Rickert of Vassar' and Edith Rickert at the University of Chicago (1871–1938)," in *Women Medievalists and The Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2005), 127–144; and "Scandalous Assumptions: Edith Rickert and the Chicago Chaucer Project," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 30 (Fall 2000): 27–37. Also pertinent is Sylvia Tomasch, "Editing as Palinode: The Invention of Love and the Text of the *Canterbury Tales,*" *Exemplaria* 16.2 (2004): 457–476; and, recently, Sealy Gilles and Sylvia Tomasch, "Professionalizing Chaucer: John Matthews Manly, Edith Rickert, and the *Canterbury Tales* as Cultural Capital," in *Reading Medieval Culture*, ed. R.M. Stein and S.P. Prior (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 364–368.

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CHAPTER 2

TIME OUT OF MEMORY

Jeffrey J. Cohen

> *One cannot love a monument, a work of architecture, an institution as such except in an experience itself precarious in its fragility: it has not always been there, it will not always be there, it is finite. And for this very reason one loves it as mortal, through its birth and its death, through one's own birth and death, through the ghost or the silhouette of its ruin, one's own ruin.*[1]
>
> *Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.*[2]

At Avebury

We stand beneath the megalith. Brisk winds roam the grass. The sheep are complaining. "Can you feel anything?" I ask. His palm presses against the rock as eagerly as mine. "Yes," he whispers, fingers searching clefts and lichen. "I think I do." He presses his ear against the stone and closes his eyes, as if through an intimate touch he might discern hoary secrets. He seems as certain and as joyful as when, many years ago, he used to press his head to my chest to know the life of an invisible heart. In a solemn voice, as if he has absorbed from deep in the rock its enduring history, he announces: "It knows it killed someone." I realize immediately that my son must have pilfered my copy of Aubrey Burl's *Prehistoric Avebury: Second Edition* (2002). He must have been reading the volume late into the night of our London flat. "Me, too," I respond. "I definitely feel something."

I am lying. Like this ten-year-old with ear against stone, I want to feel power in the towering monument. Not the energy of astral planes or the pull of a vortex or proximity to pagan divinity. Not whatever it is New

Age druids come to Avebury seeking. Yet as in their dreams, my desire is that the rock not be inert. My son is right: this megalith did, after all, take someone's life. After standing for millennia, the thirteen-ton boulder crushed a man and preserved him for six centuries beneath its bulk. The weight of the past, indeed. Alexander Keiller discovered the body in 1938 when he disinterred the toppled stone from its medieval grave. Archeologists hypothesize that the skeletal remains found beneath were in life an itinerant barber–surgeon.[3] His leather purse contained scissors, a lancet, and some coins from the early fourteenth century. He was likely witnessing or even assisting in the contemporary effort to obliterate Avebury, "mightiest in size and grandeur of all megalithic rings" before its piecemeal destruction commenced in the Middle Ages.[4] Pits were dug beneath the standing stones so that they tipped and were buried, acts of "pious vandalism" directed at what was probably understood to be an unchristian structure.[5] Perhaps the effort was abandoned when the accidental entombment of the barber convinced its witnesses that these stones could still exert some force. Since its modern reerection, the megalith has been known as Barber Rock, its new name bearing witness to the life it took.

Touching Barber Rock (photo by author).

As destructive as the fourteenth-century project of toppling Avebury may have been, this attempted annihilation of an architecture already four thousand years old assisted in its preservation. Buried where they fell by medieval hands, those rocks were shielded from fragmentation in later periods. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were especially brutal to the Avebury circle. The swift annihilation of megaliths was accomplished through fire, cold water, and sledgehammers. We will never know how many of the stones became, once smashed to pieces, the foundations of local farmhouses and the stuff of quotidian roadways.

My son felt power abiding in a megalith that, having endured millennia as a component of a vast Neolithic architecture, fell upon and crushed a medieval man. The rock had patiently awaited resurrection for five hundred years so that it could again tower over a verdant field, could again render the humans standing at its side small and ephemeral. With my child I wanted to believe that histories long separated from us can endure in objects such as Barber Rock—and Avebury, and Stonehenge, and the prehistoric past, and the Middle Ages. I wanted to believe that human meaning can survive across inhuman temporal gaps, that material objects can be active historical agents rather than inanimate traces of lost stories, potent subjects rather than passive objects. Yet I knew that the body of the crushed barber–surgeon, the man who had dared to undermine the stone and had paid for the act with his life, had been recently rediscovered in London. A new theory holds that the barber was dead before the stone toppled over him.[6] So much for the agency of the rock, its dangerous and enduring force. Those are powers we humans yearn to observe because we suspect that they do not exist, that time brings history to an oblivion as mute as stone.

Intimations of mortality. Whatever its initial architects called it, in whatever language they spoke but could not bequeath to us, Barber Rock has perhaps always been inert. The dolmens and stone circles that tourists wander Brittany, Ireland, and Britain to glimpse—architectures we think endure from time out of memory—are typically modern reconstructions using nearby materials, designed to look Neolithic. Avebury is no different, a product of massive restoration in the 1930s as much as a time capsule mailed five millennia ago. My son and I touched a megalith's cold side and felt our own desires.

Is history literally *immemorial*, out of memory, impossible to hold for long? Or do texts and objects have an agency that endures beyond human circumscriptions, outside of reduction into the small moments that receive them? Does the past possess a weight? Or is it—like its interpreters—the prisoner of a diminished historicism?

Post History

The landscape of medieval Britain included, just as it does today, intrusions of the ancient past: the fossilized remains of prehistoric animals, Neolithic structures such as Avebury and Stonehenge, barrows and graves, the ruins of forgotten habitations. This essay explores the stories medieval and modern people create in order to give meaning to these remnants of lost worlds, raising a series of related questions about the confluence of the timebound and the transhistorical, of the prehistoric and the post-historic, the coldly abstract and the sensuously human.[7] How can inhuman temporal gaps be grasped and expressed? Can a long history of material objects escape the freezing of its subject into discrete and noncommunicating moments? Do human creations that endure across vast historical spans resist historicist frames? Can the distant past communicate in a language of its own? Or can it be heard only as translated into a contemporary language, an impoverished kind of listening? How do we treat time capsules like stone circles, burial mounds, or bodies recovered in bogs? As numinous objects? As quarries for ordinary uses? As museum exhibits? As active agents in a living world? What is sacred about the past, or does reverence impede understanding? Is a body buried with artifacts a message to the future, a letter to an uncertain receiver, or a gift sent to lost gods never to be opened by human hands? What of a text describing a vanished life? An imagined life? Can the past speak to us directly, or does it require a mediator, a necromancer, a Merlin? Must the past end as Merlin does: entombed forever in silent stone, the victim of his own inability to comprehend the workings of the world he changed, of the future he himself set into motion? How might the past be kept alive, possessed of something other than a revenant's graveyard existence?

Utica Beach

Though time is so vast as to be utterly inhuman, we ordinarily measure its passing in anthropocentric terms. We can, without hindrance, parcel years into small segments such as generations, the life-units of organisms, but we have immense difficulty rendering the millennium a human unit of measure, let alone wrapping our minds around the eons of what geologists call deep time.[8] The Cambrian period is known for its proliferation of multicellular creatures, but its watery lifefields did not contain anything like *homo sapiens*, so it is difficult for most of us to think of it as distinguishable from the Permian, Jurassic, or Cretaceous. To paint a caveman into our portraits of dinosaurs is nearly irresistible, even though we know such creatures never coexisted. Though temporal spans

are better measured through the lives of rocks than of animals, we yearn to insert a human observer and humanized content in order to make the deep past less alien, a space of persisting impingement rather than an extinct and dissociated realm.

Material survivals from distant epochs are not so rare as to be solely the discoveries of modern paleontologists. The entrance to a Neolithic chambered tomb at Stoney Littleton in Somerset incorporates a fossilized ammonite of great size into its portal. The interior of the long barrow is constructed of rocks abounding in mineralized organisms. What the builders of this structure thought of the writing on its stones we cannot know, but we can guess that they found these objects to be beautiful, perhaps sacred, certainly a kind of art similar to what they were attempting to accomplish in erecting such an unnecessary architecture.[9] We know from classical texts and paintings on vases that petrified remains of prehistoric animals were familiar to the Greeks and Romans. Even if they were not understood to be the remnants of time out of memory, such objects were nonetheless known to be of great age. Seutonius writes that Augustus Caesar transformed his villa at Capri into a kind of natural history museum, displaying there "a collection of the huge limb bones of immense monsters of land and sea popularly known as giants' bones, along with the weapons of ancient heroes."[10] Musing upon a passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* that repeats Homer's claim that humans had once been larger in size, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, speaks of graves unearthed by inhuman forces, disclosing messages sent from a monumental past. While walking the sea edge with his companions, Augustine discovered one such missive. The bishop narrates the encounter as a fifth-century version of "Dover Beach," one in which the sea of faith is brimming while the pagan past ebbs . . . or ossifies:

> tombs [are] uncovered by the action of time, or by the violence of storms or various other accidents. Bones of incredible size have come to light in them, or have fallen out of them. On the shore at Utica I myself saw—and I was not alone but in the company of several others—a human molar so immense that if it had been cut up into pieces the size of our teeth it would, it seemed to us, have made a hundred. But that tooth I should imagine, belonged to some giant. For not only were the bodies of men in general much larger at that time than ours are now, but the giants far exceeded all the rest.[11]

The gifts of graves or tides, large bones intrude into Augustine's world. Like his classical predecessors, he understood such objects to be human remains. Whether brought forth from nameless tombs or washed ashore by storms, these giants' leavings were hard evidence that men had dwindled

as the earth aged. Whereas we will likely discern fossils from prehistory in these bones from lost sepulchers, or in that molar from Utica beach the remains of a mammoth or marine dinosaur, Augustine used the history available to him to interpret such objects as having originated before Noah's flood. Such antediluvian postcards declared contemporary humans to be weakened things, dwellers at the world's twilight rather than its Edenic morning. Augustine at the border of the sea examines a fossil tooth and memorializes the passing of time: the age of the patriarchs has ended, the era of the Greeks and Romans is fading, the ocean that once (as Matthew Arnold will put it for a later age) "Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd" now gives off a "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, / Retreating." Augustine stands at the close of an epoch and mourns its passing, while retaining faith in a better day's arrival.[12] The molar stands in for a vanishing Greek and Roman world, its power to trigger wistful memory likewise the fate of classical antiquity in a Christian era. Latin learning, that is, remains preserved within Christian doctrine like *The City of God*, a remnant of *temps perdu*, a past truly passed.[13] However superseded, that history is not wholly inert: as a reduced and fractured object, it intrudes into Augustine's present and urges him to dream the connections among Homer, Virgil, Pliny, and the Genesis narrative of a world-obliterating deluge.

Could Augustine have interpreted the giant's tooth in any other way? Could the tooth—like the Bible itself, with its sedimentation of multiple authors and discordant stories and alternative realities—could the tooth have somehow broken through a monolithic conception of the world as it was, as it ever had to be, and offered some other narrative, some other possibility? Or was it impossible for the giant's remnant to offer anything to Augustine other than the confirmation of his own system of thought, a system at once historicizing (context is all) and transcendent (ultimate meaning arrives from the system's encasing eternity)? The most likely and direct answer is that Augustine's philosophical ambit is both capacious and fairly impermeable. The tooth could no more be realized as a message from deep time as could a knowledge arrive that the divinities YHWH and El might have fused to form a single god in the course of the composition of the Jewish scriptures, or that the Bible offered three distinct versions of the creation story, or that it might have had multiple authors with varying agendas. Augustine conceptualized time as something we humans live within and are entrapped by.[14] God, on the other hand, is wholly outside the temporal. Only humans perceive the progress of the ages, illusory as that movement is: it is our fate as fallen and mortal creatures to order into sequences that which for God is not a historical chain. Thus for Augustine any notion of prehistory must stop at Eden.

The antediluvian world is as close as he can get to geology's deep time. No object can contain a story that is not collapsible into that shallow past, a history that can be measured in generations. The same must therefore hold true for ancient architectures such as stone circles, barrows, or dolmens: they cannot tell a story other than the temporally brief one Augustine expounds.

Within the Big Temporality that Augustine posits, there is little room for heterogeneity, for times, places, or narratives out of sync with the dominating story of decline and fall and redemption. Yet temporality need not be so static. In his phenomenology of stones, archeologist Christopher Tilley stresses the dynamic interrelation of body and space:

> Past experiences become selectively conjoined with present perceptions and serve to colour them. Temporality is carried by the movements of the body into, out of, around and between places. We carry times to places through our movements and prior experiences, and direct contact with these places acts as a mnemonic trigger for stories and the construction of personal biographies.[15]

The experience of such a mobile past can displace us, can make us consider the present in more flexible, more open terms. Augustine of Hippo lived in a world where the veneration of Isis coexisted with the worship of the Christian triune God, where the immortality of the soul described by Plato offered a different version of time from the Book of Genesis and its *In principio*. He could not have dreamt dinosaurs, but Augustine did not have to fold the giant's tooth back so quickly into a story of the diminished state of post-Edenic humans.

Letters to the Future

Augustine was not a necromancer. He did not conjure the dead to give them a second life, to converse with them about their times and learn lost stories. He meditates upon bones disgorged from an ancient tomb and a molar stranded on a beach, encasing them in a story alien to their living days. Can the past speak in a voice of its own? Can meaning travel across a millennium, an epoch, or must meaning always be bestowed by an interpreter? According to linguists, a language becomes "unintelligible to the descendants of the speakers after the passage of between 500 and 1000 years."[16] Suppose you know that you inhabit a present that will someday, inevitably, become someone else's distant past. How do you communicate with a future to which you will have become remote history? This problem of communication received intriguing consideration when

the Department of Energy proposed storing radioactive material inside Nevada's Yucca Mountain in 2002. Because this waste will remain lethal for at least ten thousand years, the Environmental Protection Agency enjoined the construction of a warning sign that can remain efficacious across a ten-millennium span.[17] What admonition can survive the likely vanishing of the United States, of English, of everything we who inter such waste now know? The University of Nevada sponsored an exhibit entitled "Universal Warning Sign: Yucca Mountain" in which artists created installations that might offer enduring, transparent commands to avoid the contaminated site. The winning entry proposed seeding the desert with genetically engineered cacti, altered to become cobalt-blue, transforming the desert into an unnatural wasteland, a swathe of sky on earth.[18] Yet this solution could as easily prove an attractant to the area as a bar to entry. The same problem was considered at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, New Mexico. Since 1999 the Department of Energy has stored the lethal detritus of nuclear weapons manufacture at this facility. Its vast subterranean chambers are expected to be filled by 2030, at which time the complex will be permanently sealed. Architectural theorist Michael Brill

> led one of two teams of linguists, artists, engineers, archaeologists, and other experts, who were charged by Sandia National Laboratories to design a method of keeping future Indiana Joneses out of this real temple of doom. "Passive Institutional Controls," meaning monuments impervious to harsh climate and sandblasting winds are mandated, because even the federal government has to acknowledge it might not be around in a few hundred years, never mind millennia hence.[19]

The team's first, practical thought was to allow the materials to lie exposed, creating in the desert an ocean of corpses, an instantly readable sign that no one should draw near. They then moved on to reflect upon the possibility of transhistorical, transcultural forms that announce *Danger*, such as fifty-foot-high concrete whorls laden with spikes (dubbed "Landscape of Thorns") or hulking black cubes arranged to provide neither shelter nor aesthetic appeal ("Forbidding Blocks"), jagged and irregular megaliths that pierce the desert at disconcerting angles ("Spike Field"). Inspired in part by the panel's study of architectures such as Stonehenge, the pyramids of Egypt, and the Great Wall of China, these menacing works of art would dominate the landscape, a speech act wrought in stone. They would be supplemented by admonitory texts composed in all known languages, with room to carve more deterrents as new tongues arise. Cheaper, less philosophical and far-looking solutions were eventually

adopted, however: monoliths with pictograms. Even these will not be put into place for another eight decades, when the radioactive cache is abandoned, a lethal message to a future that may not comprehend the lasting power of its contents.[20]

Though the necessity of disposing of nuclear toxins is new, the desire to send messages across inhuman spans of time seems an enduring human obsession. Whatever groups instigated the construction of vast, perdurable architectures such as Avebury knew that they could not possibly live to see their project to completion. To erect a structure as massive as Stonehenge, lofty stones rising upon reconfigured earth, is to face mortality. Such an architecture cannot be initiated unless a time long beyond one's own demise can be imagined. Otherwise, why not build something out of wood—a choice many peoples living in Britain at this time made, as surviving postmarks make clear? A builder in timber can live to behold the results of such labor. With projects that require generations to complete, projects that may in fact be designed to never come to completion, how can one *not* be sending a message into a future that does not include one's own presence, and perhaps the presence of one's people as well?

Such writing in rock and soil requires a leap beyond the horizon of death, a movement from human spans into a deeper temporality. Megaliths, menhirs, and stone rings are letters sent to someone who comes after, and very often to an unknown someone who comes *long* after. Architects of old surely possessed a decent set of wits, and knew from experience that the present is not eternal, that the horizon of the future is uncertain, that even powerful communities never long endure . . . and can we not therefore imagine, without too much of a leap of faith, that a project such as Stonehenge is sent into that future in part to stabilize it, but also to keep an ever-receding present alive, even beyond the demise of those who inhabited it? A building project that mandates the passing of multiple lives before its realization cannot be a day-to-day endeavor. This inbuilt temporal horizon tells us nothing about specific intent. It will not allow us to discern whether Stonehenge was a fertility shrine or ceremonial ground or a tomb or a monument—but it will remind us that such architectures have from the start lived within a future as much as a present.

The weighty exuberance of Stonehenge, the majestic chambered cairn at Maeshowe in the Orkneys, the gothic spectacle of York Minster: these structures are time capsules as well as messages to a known-in-advance receiver. What Avebury and the cathedral the Normans built in Norwich have in common is surfeit. Their colonization of space and time are far in excess of anything a historicist argument based upon cultural context or use value can explain. Both are ritual spaces; both are pedagogical machines that shape a certain kind of subjectivity; both are

materializations in stone of cosmologies; both anchor an earthly point to a celestial one. But both also in their exorbitance place their makers (and by their makers I mean everyone who at every point conceptualizes the architecture and its space as alive and open to enlargement and adaptation) into a relationship with time that moves them beyond the predictable or the determinate—so many generations into futurity that sameness and apocalypse and profound reorderings are all possibilities. The builders of the cathedral in Norwich realized that they were a conglomerate of parvenu Normans and "indigenous" English.[21] Both groups knew very well that the land had not always been theirs. Did that knowledge suggest that, as the stone rose and they saw that this monument would endure beyond their great-great-grandchildren, they didn't necessarily have full confidence they were sending a message only to future versions of themselves?

Of Giants

I'd like to return now to Augustine's giants, the monsters whose primordial existence is confirmed by his beachcombing, and suggest that sometimes the past does not reconfirm the present, but disrupts the moment into which it arrives, opening that present to the new.[22] A famously obscure passage from Genesis declares of the intermezzo between the expulsion from Eden and the unleashing of the Flood:

> Gigantes autem erant super terram in diebus illis. Postquam enim ingressi sunt filii Dei ad filias hominum illaeque genuerunt. Isti sunt potentes a saeculo viri famosi.
>
> [Now giants were upon the earth in those days. For after the sons of God went in to the daughters of men, and they brought forth children, these are the mighty men of old, men of renown.] (Genesis 6:4)

This passage is one of the Bible's many alternate histories, dissonant little pieces of conflicting or outlying stories sedimented into but not fully incorporated by the larger narrative. Genesis, like much of the Jewish scriptures, hardened into an authoritative form long before it could be made homogenous or monolithic.[23] These unassimilated fragments were often ignored, but sometimes because of their patent alterity became points of obsessive worry—and even catalysts to creativity and active engagement with a past come suddenly to life. *Gigantes* (Hebrew *nephilim*), born of the congress between the sons of God and the daughters of men, engendered supplementary and ultimately unorthodox visions of biblical history at least from the time of the *Book of Enoch* (second century BC) onward.[24]

"Now giants were upon the earth in those days." From this oblique glimpse of archaic monsters a tradition arose in which the "sons of God" who came to the "daughters of men" were fallen angels. They copulated with Adam's children, a miscegenation that impregnated the women with horrible giants. Building upon the fragmentary narrative of inhuman sexual mingling and category violation that the obscure passage offered, medieval romance traced its own primal monster, the giant, to the rape of human women by demons or incubi. With its lascivious angels, perfidious giants, and mighty men, Genesis 6:4 is the textual analogue to Augustine's discovery of an ancient and alien bone on Utica's shore. Yet just as that tooth belongs for Augustine to a large human, the giants of Genesis are likewise for him mere mortals:

> Some people, however, are worried by the statement in the Bible that the mating of those who are called "sons of God" with the women they loved resulted in offspring who were not like men of our own kind; they were giants. These critics seem to ignore the fact even in our own time men have been born whose bodies far exceed the normal stature of men today; a fact that I have already mentioned . . . Thus it is possible that giants were born even before the sons of God (also called the "angels of God") mated with the daughters of men, which means daughters of those who live by man's standards—that is to say, before the sons of Seth married the daughters of Cain . . . Now these sons of God were not angels of God in such a way that they were not also human beings as some people presuppose. Scripture itself declares without any ambiguity that they were human. (*City of God* 15.23)

In Augustine's account the offspring of Seth are the sons of God (*filii Dei*) who intermarry with the daughters of Cain (*filias hominum*), engendering prodigious but fully human children.[25] In his exegesis all that is perturbing or disorienting in the Genesis story is neutralized through reduction. Augustine's euhemerized account of the episode dominated thereafter.

This allegorical interpretation was not, however, the only possible version of the narrative. The story's intimation of sex between fallen angels and women and the giants such intercourse might spawn remained a "particle of alterity" never wholly absorbed into the prevailing exegesis, lying dormant for centuries and then reigniting to trigger unanticipated narratives, even perhaps a new genre. Thus the author of the Middle English poem *Cleanness* offers this riff on the Genesis passage:

> So ferly fowled her flesch þat þe fende loked
> How þe deȝter of þe douþe wern derelych fayre,
> & fallen in felaȝschyp with hem on folken wyse,
> & engendered on hem jeauntez with her japez ille.

Þose wern men meþelez & maȝty on vrþe,
Þat for her lodlych laykez alosed þay were.
(269–274)[26]

[With such foulness they defiled their flesh that the devils saw that the daughters of men were extremely fair. They rushed into congress with them in the guise of men and engendered upon them giants through their evil tricks. Those were mighty and immoderate men on the earth, that for their loathly enjoyments were renowned.]

What choice does God have in the face of such unauthorized cominglings of the human and inhuman than to send a deluge that will "fleme out of þe folde al þat flesch werez!" ("banish from the earth all fleshly things!" 287). Yet somehow, despite the cleansing power of this rush of waters from heaven's vault, the giants manage to survive: either by climbing mountains and keeping their nostrils above the rising tide, or by sitting upon the roof of Noah's ark, or by simply being created on earth once again by fallen angels who simply cannot resist the pleasures of union with bodies made of something more substantial than themselves.

The fragmentary narrative from Genesis even gave by the fourteenth century a new origin myth for Britain, one in which a Greek princess named Albina comes to the island's shores in search of sovereignty and becomes the source of its aboriginal monsters.[27] Having rejected marriage to men they consider beneath themselves, Albina and her royal sisters are exiled by their father to long wandering. They discover at the world's edge an empty island, christening its vastness *Albion* after their leader. The Amazons of Albion realize the insufficiency of their attempted matriarchy when they begin to long for the company of men. The devil appears, satisfies their lust, and renders them the mothers of monsters. According to the *Anonymous Riming Chronicle*:

Þe fende of helle þat foule wiȝt
Amonges hem al þer aliȝt
& engenderd þo on hem
Geauntes þat wer strong men
& of hem come þe geauntes strong
Þat were byȝeten in þis lond
For soþe to say on þis maner
Were þe geauntes biȝeten here.
(341–348)[28]

[The fiend of hell, that foul creature, alit amongst them and engendered upon them giants. These were strong men, and from them came the strong

giants who were begotten in this land. For, to tell the truth, this is how the giants were begotten here.]

That Britain had before its human occupation supported an indigenous population of giants derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.[29] Of the prehistory of the island Geoffrey states laconically: "At this time the island of Britain was called Albion. It was uninhabited except for a few giants" (72). Geoffrey never suggests from where the giants arrived, nor how the island received its first name. The various versions of the Albina myth were composed after Geoffrey's text but offer a reverent prequel to his British prehistory. Grafting Geoffrey of Monmouth's story to a narrative of demon–human sexual intercourse derived from Genesis 6:4, the Albina narrative accounts for how primal giants came to inhabit British shores, and who bestowed upon the land its eldest title.

The "geauntes biȝeten here" are the progenitors of a race of monsters central to Geoffrey of Monmouth's vision of earliest Britain. These giants attack the exiled Trojan Brutus at his arrival. They represent those forces inimical to his civilizing imprint. In a foundational act of genocide he and his men will exterminate them. Brutus will become the man who bestows to the island its enduring name. Though eradicated from the island, however, these giants—like the giants of Genesis—return. Medieval romance received much of its material from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*, and is replete with giants who menace chivalric heroes and must be destroyed. In the excess of their bodies, their violence, their history, the giants offer a vision of the past in disharmony with that which Augustine beheld while meditating upon a fossil as the waves broke. The bishop of Hippo preferred that the past incarnated by the object in his hand remain circumscribed and inert, a story about merely human monsters rather than the point at which an active and powerful alternative history erupts into the present. Augustine could not see the giants for the Flood. The authors of the Albina story, their biographical details lost to memory but their voices not yet become mute, beheld in those same exorbitant forms the history that could have been, and made that past alive.

Giant's Ring/Giant's Dance

The authors of the Albina myth jolt to life a past concocted of other pasts: the elliptical passage from Genesis melded to Geoffrey of Monmouth's relentlessly secular history. Albina and her sisters therefore inhabit a landscape formed by conjoining the two dominating texts of the late Middle Ages. In its popularity the *History of the Kings of Britain* was second only to the Bible, at least as measured by the number of surviving manuscripts.

The fascination that Geoffrey's work exerted can be accounted for in two ways. Geoffrey gave to Britain a far deeper past than it had ever previously possessed, and he promulgated as part of that history the charismatic figure of King Arthur. Like the Albina authors, Geoffrey filled a void in Britain's prehistory with durable content. He did so not by obliterating what little he found in that past, but by giving fragments gleaned from other texts a fullness, a vivaciousness, an agency. The Trojan Brutus he takes from a scant narrative found in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* and transforms the episode into a miniature *Aeneid*. Geoffrey's Arthur emerges from suturing vague references to a Welsh war leader into a coherent and compelling monarch whose conquests resemble nothing so much as those of contemporary Norman kings. Without Geoffrey's vision of earliest Britain as a strangely modern place, the genre of romance would never have assumed the contours it came to possess, so attractive was the alternative (and worldly, and marvelous) vision of history Geoffrey offered. Arthurian literature could not have burgeoned without Geoffrey's creation of its primal scene in the *History*. The consensual world that the *History of the Kings of Britain* established invited medieval artists to add their own narratives, their own images, enlivening Arthur and Merlin and Guenevere through continuous dilation and frequent change.[30]

Geoffrey of Monmouth's giants are an aboriginal population against whom the first settlers to Britain must wage genocidal war. Gogmagog, their leader, is executed by being hurled from a clifftop, plummeting to "a sharp reef of rocks, where he was dashed to a thousand fragments and stained the waters with his blood" (73). The place of his spectacular death is known thereafter as "Gogmagog's Leap." Yet despite the *action* inherent in the designation, the toponym captures not a life in motion but an enduring arrest, an eternal fall from which Gogmagog—ever about to be smashed to blood and fragments by looming rocks—will not escape: "Gogmagog's Leap," not "Gogmagog's Death." Yet that is not where their story ends; they are never consigned to a dead or fully superceded history. After the giants are cleansed from the land by the flood of newly arriving Trojan immigrants, moreover, we encounter more of the monsters. Just as in the Bible David fights the Philistine Goliath, so in Geoffrey's *History* King Arthur will battle the giant of Mont Saint Michel.

Old English poetry is full of dark meditations on unnamed ruins. These crumbling remnants of human habitations may be Roman cities, such as Bath; they could as easily be generic devastated architectures, since no specific history anchors them in the stream of time. In elegies such as "The Wanderer" such windswept piles of stones are simply but ambiguously "the old work of giants, standing abandoned" (*eald enta geweorc idlu stodon*). Geoffrey of Monmouth is the first medieval author to attach primal architects to the Neolithic structures that impinged upon

his present. The *History of the Kings of Britain* speaks of Stonehenge and possibly Avebury.[31] Aurelius Ambrosius, a glorious king of the Britons and the uncle of Arthur, defeats at great cost the Saxons who have invaded his lands. Desiring to construct for the fallen British dead a monument capable of their eternal memorialization, he "collected carpenters and stonemasons together from every region and ordered them to use their skill to contrive some novel building which would stand for ever in memory of such distinguished men. The whole band racked their brains and then confessed themselves beaten" (195). To conceive this "novel building" that can do justice to the story it incarnates, Aurelius must commission the mysterious Merlin. No one, we are told, possesses greater skill "either in foretelling the future or in mechanical contrivances." A prophet and an engineer (rather than the magician he will become in later literature), Merlin was introduced in the narrative as the son of a cloistered nun and an "incubus demon"—the product, that is, of the kind of trans-species sex that usually engenders giants.[32] In Old English literature, giants are builders of structures from time out of memory; a giant, Nimrod, was also supposed to have been the architect of the Tower of Babel. These monsters indeed form an integral part of Merlin's solution to Aurelius's architectural quandary, for he declares:

> If you want to grace the burial place of these men with some lasting monument . . . send for the Giants' Ring which is on Mount Killarus in Ireland. In that place there is a stone construction which no man of this period could ever erect, unless he combined great skill and artistry. The stones are enormous and there is no one strong enough to move them. If they are placed in position round this site, in the way in which they are erected there, they will stand forever . . . These stones are connected to certain secret religious rites . . . Many years ago the Giants transported them from the remotest confines of Africa and set them up in Ireland at a time when they inhabited that country . . . There isn't a single stone among them which hasn't some medicinal virtue. (196)

Entranced by this vision of an eternally potent, eternally persisting construction, Aurelius commands that Merlin, Uther Pendragon, and fifteen thousand men depart immediately for Ireland. There they meet Gillomanius, an Irish king incredulous that anyone would sail to his island to swipe big rocks. Gillomanius declares nonetheless that only over his dead body will the "minutest fragment of the Ring" be stolen. The Britons are happy to oblige, obliterating the Irish forces. Merlin then urges the Britons to attempt to move the rocks from the Irish mountain. Though they employ "every conceivable kind of mechanism . . . They rigged up hawsers and ropes and they propped up scaling ladders," no contrivance budges the unyielding stone (197).

Laughing at these attempts, Merlin easily dismantles the Ring with unnamed gear and places the megaliths aboard waiting ships. He transports the disassembled ring to Britain and with precision rebuilds it upon the burial mound: "Merlin obeyed the King's orders and put the stones up in a circle round the sepulchre, in exactly the same way they had been arranged on Mount Kilaraus in Ireland, thus proving that his artistry was worth more than any brute strength" (198). Whereas the Irish king can discern in the Giants' Ring only dead rock, Merlin—like the Ring's first architects—realizes that in their clefts and beneath their coldness the megaliths harbor ancient power: the ability to cure ailing bodies, the ability to do justice to the dead, the ability to memorialize that which would otherwise be forgotten. True, he steals the stones from their native place and erects them where they will be forever out of place: like an archeologist transporting Mayan artifacts from Mexico or marble sculpture from Greece, he has no confidence that contemporary people living with these ancient artworks are adequately connected to their beauty or their history. Geoffrey apparently approves of the decision to relocate the Giant's Ring, for its founders seem no longer to be present in Ireland (the dwindled age of men has long been in progress there), its ultimate origin is distant and impossible Africa. Once transported to Britain, the Ring flourishes as the gravesite not only of Aurelius and his soldiers, but of King Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon, and Arthur's cousin and successor to the throne, Constantine ("They buried him by the side of Utherpendragon, within the circle of stones called Stonehenge in the English language, which had been built with such wonderful skill not far from Salisbury" [262]). Arthur himself will find no resting place in Stonehenge or elsewhere, assumed as he is to the mysterious Isle of Avalon.

From Africa to Ireland to Britain, from giants to barbarians to civilized men, a ring of stones that should be so massive as to be immobile floats through time and across geographies. Geoffrey of Monmouth's gift was his ability to recognize that the ancient histories of a dispossessed people retained life, that they might engender unexpected futures through the exertion of enduring agency. Merlin, Geoffrey's authorial doppelganger, is therefore able to recognize the ancient history of the stone circle and add to that story another one, a living story oriented as much toward present and future as commemoration of the past. Merlin discerns in the stones the life they harbor: they are not dead remnants of a lost race, but the perduring incarnation of that race's history, and mediators of new relations to the past and to remembering. Though full of giants and battles that never were, Geoffrey's narrative of Stonehenge also conveys something of the truth of the structure. Medieval people knew very well that the stone ring was not the product of arcane magic

but of sophisticated technology. A manuscript illustration from the 1440 version of the *Scala Mundi* [*Chronicle of the World*] contains a fairly accurate, bird's-eye depiction of four trilithons (two immense pillars capped by a lintel); tenon joints are shown graven the lintels.[33] The rocks of Stonehenge were not transported from Ireland, but they did arrive from a distance: perhaps 20 miles across Salisbury Plain for the sarsen stones, and a vast span for the outer rings, fashioned from bluestone native to the Preseli mountains, 135 miles from Salisbury. The stones are alien intrusions into their setting. The architecture was not constructed of materials close at hand. Geoffrey added Hiberno-African origins to Stonehenge, a narrative that at least acknowledged the alien provenance of some of the structure's substance, and then granted the whole of the architecture an origin in a time and in a culture different from Geoffrey's own. Geoffrey of Monmouth was no Augustine, and his Stonehenge has no story to tell about the Great Flood or anything else found in the Bible. His Latin phrase for the transported monument is *chorea gigantum*, a "Giants' Circle" but also a "Giant's Dance." The kinetic phrase seems especially appropriate considering the life Geoffrey glimpses in the stones, the vitality he insists resides in their depths, their potential to touch bodies, effect cures, materialize and honor the past.

Given Merlin's ability to feel power in the megaliths, to perceive that they are not inert, it seems especially cruel that his eventual fate will be entombment within cold and immobile stone. Geoffrey of Monmouth says nothing of Merlin's death. The prophet vanishes unremarked from the narrative as soon as he enables the conception of Arthur (a copulation that uncannily replays the scene of Merlin's own conception, including misrecognition and exchange of bodily forms). Later authors were not content to allow such a spectacular figure so quiet a vanishing. Like Geoffrey adding giants and Utherpendragon to the story of Stonehenge, medieval writers developed a much fuller mythology for Merlin, energetically expanding the contours of the world that Geoffrey bequeathed them. According to the *Suite du Merlin*, the magician took as his protégé the young huntress Niviane, destined in time to become the Lady of the Lake.[34] Through the magic Merlin taught, Niviane discovered that her teacher had fallen in love with her. Loathing him as the son of a devil, she convinces Merlin to remove the stone slab of an ancient grave. She numbs his body so that he falls into a deep torpor, then has him placed inside, between the corpses of the dead lovers who give the tomb its name:

> She told the men to pick him up by the head and feet and throw him in the tomb where the two lovers lay. Then she had them replace the stone slab. When, with great effort, that was done, she began her incantations, and

> with her spells and magic words she so tightly bound and sealed the slab in place that there was no one afterward who was able to move it or open it or look at Merlin, dead or alive. (362–363)

Four days later a wandering knight hears the entombed magician weeping. Merlin tells the man that it is beyond anyone's power to liberate him. When he finally perishes shortly thereafter, Merlin utters a cry of despair so resonant that it echoes "the length and breadth of the kingdom of Logres, and gave rise to many extraordinary events." Merlin, who could peer into dead stone and behold persisting history, finds himself immured forever beneath rock that will carry him to oblivion. Since the tomb can never be opened, since the message it hides inside can never be released, the last we hear from Merlin is a wordless cry of pain that travels the world, diminishing into utter silence.

Yet what if we could discover the grave of Merlin? What if, despite the enchantments of Niviane, we could lift the stone that has so long held him and exhume his corpse? Would he be another version of the barber–surgeon of Avebury? Would he be just another body disinterred from a peat bog at harvest time, from an ancient cemetery as a new road is cut? How should we decode such complicated messages sent to a future so distant their originators could not possibly have imagined it? Are bodies preserved in ground or in stone yet another version of the impulse that leads human beings to construct a Stonehenge or a Parthenon or a Norwich Cathedral? Are they manifestations of the enduring human desire to send beyond the horizon of our own mortality messages to be received and interpreted by future peoples whom we want to know that we lived, we were here, we did something in this land and at this time?

Who Mourns for Lindow Man?

> *The pleasure we take in such recovered voices is inverse to the pain of contemplating voices that have been lost, obliterated, or heavily overlaid . . . acceptance of final loss, however, is to be resisted with every ounce of disciplinary skill at our disposal.*[35]

I'd gone to the British Museum early to get a look at the prehistoric section before the general public thronged the place. I filled my notebook with observations about objects as temporal archives and the semiotics of the placement of the dead. I was hunched over the darkened glass case housing Lindow Man when my family arrived. "Cool!" declared my son of the preserved corpse—fragmented by a peat harvesting machine, but otherwise uncannily lifelike for a two-thousand-year-old. Lindow Man is the gift to an unthought future of the anaerobic environment into

which the corpse was hurled at a time when Rome held much of Britain. My three-year-old daughter gazed into the gravelike case that houses his remains and her eyes grew large. "Is he going to be OK?" she whispered. "No," replied her brother confidently. "He's dead." "I don't want him to be dead!" she said. "I want him to be OK." He replied, "We all die. He's dead. He isn't going to get any better." This announcement of the body's unchanging deadness wounded her. "I want Lindow Man to be OK. I don't want him to be dead." These last repetitions were accompanied by tears, shaking, a loss of words. The inertness of Lindow Man's corpse was too blunt. In life this person had been savagely beaten. He'd been given mistletoe to drink. His throat had been slit.[36] Now Lindow Man is encased in glass, the resident of a museum display where hundreds stare at his head, torso, and arm every day, remarking how uncannily well preserved he appears but not feeling much for him. Lindow Man is the third most popular item in the British Museum, after the Rosetta Stone and Elgin Marbles. He would appear to be just as much an object as these stone artifacts, just as lifeless.

Looking into the case, holding my daughter close, and running my hand through her hair, I suddenly wondered if anyone had ever grieved Lindow Man's passing. I wondered if my child, with her mind that cannot yet comprehend mortality but is beginning to see that all human lives end, I wondered if she was the first to mourn for Lindow Man.

The Life of the Past

Lindow Man is exhibited in a way that mimics an artfully arranged grave. Low lighting and a bed of earth-colored material beneath the corpse suggest that we have intruded into sacred space. The presentation elicits melancholy. It also transforms the mummified cadaver through sensory cues and through informative plaques into a story, a narrative, the powerfully enduring trace of a mortal being. As *memento mori*, Lindow Man tells a story about death, and about the inevitable end of each of his observers. He also incarnates a narrative with life: the life of the past, of a history worth both memorializing and envitalizing. Perhaps the best we can do, then, is to refuse to petrify bodies into objects, and objects into inert incarnations of some lost and unchanging historical moment.

The rock of the Real, history as bedrock, the blunt materiality of that which is past: I have used stones and corpses throughout this essay to capture an immobility that is often attached to the past, a stillness that at its worst can render historicist reading an exercise in transfixion. Without a phenomenological awareness of the constant interaction of that which is timebound and that which is transhistorical, even across

inhuman temporal gaps, historicism as a critical practice can become an impoverished method of reading the past, reducing into stillness worlds that are animated and ever-changing. In a penetrating meditation upon "The Ends of Historicism," Elizabeth Scala has written that

> historicism . . . emerges as an unassailable reading strategy, one that would seem to lack any unacknowledged desires or ideologies of its own. Even more invidiously, historicism has become so dominant, even hegemonic, in medieval studies that at times it seems stifling, even repressive, to other methodological practices and theoretical perspectives. Historicism itself teaches us to be skeptical of any such illusion of self-sufficiency or disinterestedness in one's analytic work. And so historicism may itself suggest the necessity of other modes by which to assess its analytic function and critical performance in our field.[37]

My reading strategies throughout this essay have been loose, amalgamative, collaborative, dispersive. I have foregrounded my own desires, my own placement in time, my own particular embodiment—but in active encounter with dynamic textual and material world. Such a phenomenologically grounded approach perhaps risks solipsism, but like the postprocessualist archeologist Christopher Tilley, I believe that we

> interact with the materiality of place and the place interacts with us and affects the manner in which we perceive. Our vision of place, or sense of place, may change as the dynamic world is always changing. An objective bodily experience of place does not understand a place as a fixed and definite thing but rather as something fluid and flowing. Our approach thus transcends the "subjective" and the "objective" as these terms are normally understood.[38]

Even more than Tilley, though, I am interested in how history exists only in a plural state: an ebullient *then* crashing against a vivacious *now* and shaping times to be. I have therefore intermixed in this essay what is personal (my children, who change every time I look at them; my history of scholarship, a record of tentative and inadequate probings of pasts I am incapable of understanding in their fullness) with what is medieval (stories about stones, bodies, and the human desires discernable in the ceaseless movements of both). My aim has been to keep my analysis unsettled, lively, gregarious, hoping to open the prehistoric to the post-historic by mapping their common trajectories, by discovering the points at which they both take flight . . . whether from Africa to Wiltshire by way of Ireland, or to the present by means of books, rocks, kids, and corpses.

To intertwine meditation upon past and future while retaining some confidence that we are doing justice to history, we must encounter the materiality of the past in a way that grants life to what might otherwise seem inert. We must keep the distant past, the present moment, and the future—near and distant—alive, capable of plenitude, heterogeneity, change. We must never cease to grieve for Lindow Man, no matter who in life he was. We must never think of Stonehenge or of Avebury as anything but a ring of stones that does not cease to dance.[39] We must never forget that the past has a weight, but that weight is seen only in the past's movement, in its desire ever to remain alive.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law," *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 278. My thanks to Karl Steel for bringing this quotation to my attention. My argument here owes everything to conversations that unfolded on the blog "In the Middle" www.inthemedievalmiddle.com. I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Blake, Ken Cartwright, Theresa Coletti, Rita Copeland, Rebecca Davis, Hannah Johnson, Eileen Joy, Sylvia Huot, Mary Kate Hurley, Sarah Rees Jones, Jehangir Malegam, Nicola Masciandaro, Steve Muhlberger, Kellie Robertson, Michael O'Rourke, Karl Steel, David Wallace, and to audiences at McDaniel College, the University of Maryland, the University of Pennsylvania, and New York University.
2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 235.
3. Aubrey Burl, *Prehistoric Avebury: Second Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 34–35.
4. Aubrey Burl, *The Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 317.
5. Ibid., 318.
6. Donated upon its discovery to the Royal College of Surgeons, the barber–surgeon's skeleton was presumed destroyed when the institution was bombed in 1941. The remains were rediscovered in 1999 in a cardboard box stored in the basement of the Natural History Museum, and reexamined by Jackie McKinley. Though the "barber" may have been pinned by the falling rock, his bones were not crushed, making it impossible to know if he had fallen into the rock's pit while alive or been placed there when dead. See *British Archaeology* 48 (1999): http://www.britarch.ac.uk/ba/ba48/ba48news.html.
7. The last disjunction is well expressed by Christopher Tilley in his book *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), when he argues that "a phenomenological perspective, in which the past is understood and interpreted from a sensuous human scale, as opposed to an abstracted analytical gaze, can provide a radically different way of thinking through the past in the present, and shed new light on old monuments" (xiii).

8. In his examination of how an aeonic prehistory reconfigured modern notions of temporality, Martin J.S. Rudwick employs the phrase "deep time," coined by the geologist John McPhee in his book *Basin and Range*. Rudwick observes that "by analogy with the 'deep space' of the astronomer, ["deep time"] expresses the unimaginable magnitudes of the prehuman or prehistoric time scale." Rudwick, *Scenes from Deep Time: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 255.
9. An 1858 reconstruction of what had been an ancient but plundered architecture, the tomb is magnificent to see today because it has been frequently updated and renovated by English Heritage. The interior walls are formed of stone with numerous embedded fossils. Some striking images of the long barrow can be found at http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=421.
10. Suetonius *Augustus* 72.3. Cited in Adrienne Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Mayor calls the villa "the world's first paleontological museum," 143.
11. Augustine of Hippo, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 15.9.
12. Mayor writes, "We might end with Augustine's powerful experience on the beach at Utica, holding in his hands the unassailable evidence of the ancient races of giants. His essays, composed as belief in the old Greek myths was fading, have been called 'landmarks in the abandonment of Classical ideas.' But as his respect for Greek and Roman learning and history shows, the old traditions of giants, heroes and monsters were not yet extinguished." Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters,* 155.
13. On the intricacies of such supercession, see the recent work on the Christian–Jewish interrelation by Kathleen Biddick (*The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003]) and Steven Kruger (*The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006]).
14. For a good overview of Augustine on time and human history, see R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). This conception is given a vivid realization in the *Suite du Merlin*, where the prophet's entombment is horrific because for a while he seems to live outside of time, but time passes around him all the same.
15. Tilley, *Materiality of Stone,* 26.
16. Frederick Newmayer, as quoted in R.C. Baker "Deep Time, Short Sight: Bracing for Yucca Mountain's Nuclear Forever," *Village Voice,* May 25, 2002, http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0222,baker,35183,1.html.
17. Baker "Deep Time, Short Sight." See the similar circumstances surrounding New Mexico's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) examined by Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Building a Marker of Nuclear Warning," in *Monuments*

and Memory, Made and Unmade, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 183–204.

18. The exhibition is archived online at http://www.desertspace.org/warning_sign/uwsExhibition.html.
19. Baker, "Deep Time, Short Sight." See also Bryan-Wilson, "Building a Marker of Nuclear Warning," 201n6, on the two teams and the artistic bent of Brill's.
20. Julia Bryan-Wilson emphasizes the inadequacy of most of the designs put forward to their actual task, since "there will be no upkeep of these grounds after 2030, once the dump closes . . . The EPA stipulates that the . . . marker must signify on its own, passively, with no guards or maintenance staff" ("Building a Marker of Nuclear Warning," 187). Also perceptive is her analysis of how each of the proposed monuments for the future invoke archaism and "muddle its temporal context: for the benefit of the future it is made to look as if it is from the past" (195).
21. I have examined the historical conditions for the erection of Norwich Cathedral in *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 129–134.
22. Earlier in my career I approached much of the material in this section through a psychoanalytic reading: *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
23. On these points, see the work of James Kugel, especially *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) and *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
24. See *The Book of Enoch, or I Enoch*, trans. R.H. Charles (Oxford 1912). The book was well known to Josephus, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and others. For a consideration of Enoch's survival into Anglo-Saxon England, see R.E. Kaske, "*Beowulf* and the Book of Enoch," *Speculum* 46 (1971): 421–431.
25. Augustine treats the episode at length in *City of God* 15.23 ("Are we to believe that angels mated with women, and that the giants resulted from these unions?"), where he admits that incubi exist and do have intercourse with women. Augustine's commentary on the Genesis passage and its medieval reception is considered in James Dean, "The World Grown Old and Genesis in Middle English Historical Writings," *Speculum* 57 (1982): 548–568, at 560; and Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 79–85.
26. *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson; trans. Casey Finch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
27. See Cohen, *Of Giants*, 45–59, for a fuller account of the genesis and popularity of this text.
28. "Two Manuscripts of the Middle English *Anonymous Riming Chronicle*," ed. Marion Crane and Rosemond Tuve, *PMLA* 46 (1931): 115–154.

29. *The* Historia Regum Britannie *I: Bern, Bürgerbibliothek MS 568 (the "Vulgate" Version)*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984); *The History of the Kings of Britain,* trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966).
30. Geoffrey, in short, is the father of Arthur and it is perhaps for that reason that as a scholar resident in Oxford he signed charters with the signature *Galfridus Arturus*, Geoffrey Arthur. See Michael J. Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 2. Curley argues that Arthur was likely Geoffrey's father name, but William of Newburgh insisted that Arthur was a nickname (*agnomen*) bestowed upon him for Arthurian dreams (*The History of English Affairs*, Book 1, ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh and M.J. Kennedy [Wilthsire: Aris and Phillips, 1988] 1.Prologue).
31. On Geoffrey's confusion of these places, see the note in Thorpe's translation, p. 195.
32. The wizard Merlin becomes connected to this story from at his first appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, since he is said to be the progeny of an unearthly being and a nun. Merlin's father is described as one of the "incubus demons," creatures who "have partly the nature of men and partly that of angels, and when they wish they assume mortal shapes and have intercourse with women" (168).
33. Interestingly, the illustration shows four trilithons still standing; today only three remain upright. See Maev Kennedy, "Early Sketch of Stonehenge Found," *The Guardian,* November 27, 2006: http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1957926,00.html.
34. The *Suite du Merlin* survives in three incomplete manuscripts. I worked with the Huth *Merlin* (British Museum Add. 38117) in the edition of Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, *Merlin, roman en prose du XIIIe siècle* (Société des Anciens Textes Français: Paris, 1886). A good translation by Samuel N. Rosenberg of the section of the work I will be discussing may be found in *The Romance of Arthur: An Anthology of Medieval Texts in Translation*, ed. James J. Wilhelm (New York: Garland, 1994), 348–363. Much background on the influence of the *Suite du Merlin* upon later Arthurian literature is contained in Thomas L. Wright, "'The Tale of King Arthur': Beginnings and Foreshadowings," in *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of* Le Morte Darthur, ed. R.M. Lumiansky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), 9–66.
35. David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 4. In her review of this book Jenna Mead labels Wallace's introductory mode as *ficto-criticism*, "a genre that inserts autobiographical self-realization into theoretically-conscious critical scholarship . . . rethinking the generic and thus intellectual boundaries of canonical criticism" (*Paregon* 23.1 [2006]: 230). Wallace thereby offered me a powerful model for composing my own essay.
36. The British Museum website description of the body, officially known as "Lindow II," like a crime report: "The man met a horrific death. He

was struck on the top of his head twice with a heavy object, perhaps a narrow bladed axe. He also received a vicious blow in the back—perhaps from someone's knee—which broke one of his ribs. He had a thin cord tied around his neck which was used to strangle him and break his neck. By now he was probably dead, but then his throat was cut. Finally, he was placed face down in a pond in the bog." http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_prb/l/lindow_man.aspx. Like all the objects I have been examining in this essay, "Lindow II" is not an unmediated or "pure" intrusion of the ancient past into an alien present. Not only has the display of the corpse been carefully structured, but the body itself was freeze-dried after its discovery to prevent further deterioration.

37. *The Ends of Historicism: Medieval English Literary Study in the New Century*, ed. Elizabeth Scala, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44.1 (2002): iv. This extraordinary special issue of *TSLL* has in its entirety been fundamental to my framing this essay, as have the essays collected in this volume. I want to emphasize that historicism has served the medievalist well for so long because it is both rigorous and flexible. It does not denote a monolithic practice—and there is no "other" to it: meaning that historicism has to be part of any critical encounter with the past. It is the *sine qua non* that enables other, potentially unhistorical modes.
38. Tilley, *Materiality of Stone,* 220.
39. Compare Eileen Joy on artifacts and display: "The museum is a big box that *holds things in* and *keeps things in their places*. Alfred North Whitehead once wrote that 'The elucidation of the meaning of the sentence "everything flows" is one of metaphysics' main tasks.' And such might also be the task of the scholar of the artifact." Joy, "'What Counts is Not to Say, but to Say Again': A Response to Thomas A. Bredehoft," *Old English Newsletter* 37.3 (Spring 2004), 29. Substitute "traditional historicism" for "museum" and the stakes of my own essay become evident.

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CHAPTER 3

HISTORICISM AFTER HISTORICISM

Maura Nolan

Whatever kind of critical practice "post-historicism" turns out to be, one thing about it is certain: it too will be supplanted in its time, just as historicism seems now to be ebbing slowly away. Such moments of supplantation and loss often provide the best perspective on what is valuable about a mode of thought or a theoretical perspective; once the most basic assumptions of a mode or theory have been called into question, it is easier to see what it offered in the first place. Historicism is no exception. My essay focuses on the relationship of historical thought to literary form as a way of assessing what aspects of historicist discourse and practice remain critically energetic and analytically central to medieval literary study. It is not a critique. Instead, I seek to explore the kinds of challenges that confront any kind of historical thought, particularly in relation to literary art. It should not be forgotten that early historicist work took chances by insisting on the heterogeneity, variability, and sheer diversity of the Middle Ages—an insistence that is central to every revisionary account of medieval texts and practices, even those explicitly opposed to historicism.[1] Whatever the faults of the latter, history—in all of its shapes, discourses, forms, and styles—remains a central critical category for literary medievalists. History cannot be ignored, suppressed, or avoided. Indeed, history exerts a constant pressure on the literary work, just as form (literary form, cultural form, discursive or artistic form) shapes and molds history. This essay examines some instances of that interplay between form and history as a way of thinking about what criticism after historicism might look like, as well as how certain historical pitfalls might be avoided this time around.

In his remarkable essay for the present volume, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen recalls an image from St. Augustine's *City of God* (*De civitate Dei*) in which the saint narrates his discovery of a "giant's tooth"—probably, as Cohen points out, a dinosaur fossil. Cohen's description of Augustine's tooth forms part of his meditation on human and geological temporalities, a meditation that takes readers back to the prehistorical and forward to post-historicism. St. Augustine describes the tooth after discussing Homer's claim (cited by Virgil) that human beings were larger in the past. The account of the tooth thus responds to the implicit historical narrative contained in these classical pagan texts by situating their "larger humans" within Christian history, as the giants mentioned in *Genesis* 6:4, "gigantes autem erant super terram in diebus illis" [now giants were upon the earth in those days]. My encounter with Cohen's thoughtful exploration of prehuman time, Christian time, and modern "historical" time helped me to think through my own perspective on the relationship of post-historicism to medieval literary criticism by prodding me to consider the "historicism" of St. Augustine. Cohen remarks in relation to the giant's tooth that "sometimes the past does not reconfirm the present, but disrupts the moment into which it arrives, opening that present to the new."[2] Augustine attempts to mitigate against this disruption by absorbing his discovery into Scripture. But, as Cohen's discussion of temporalities shows, the intrusion of prehistoric, "deep time" into Augustinian time still has the power to "open the present to the new" by catalyzing reflections on history and the nature of the historical. In particular, I was struck by the power of the image of the giant's tooth as a symbol of the vexed relations among aesthetic discourse, historiographical modes, and the quotidian character of unmediated history—its status as a raw collection of events, objects, words, social forms, and personalities. Further, I noticed the resemblance between Augustine's account of the giant's tooth and a much later medieval description of Roman "collecting" as a metaphor for textual and historical production. This later description comes from a little-read section of Gower's *Vox Clamantis*. Like Augustine, Gower is obsessively concerned with the relationship between past and present; like the saint, he symbolizes this relationship using jetsam randomly cast by the sea onto the shore, shells then gathered by the Romans—"Lectaque diuerso litore concha venit" [and the gathered shells come from diverse shores]—here used as a simile for the act of creating the *Vox*.[3]

Gower's image of jetsam, like Augustine's giant, has been copied from an authoritative text (from Ovid instead of the Bible) and redeployed for a new purpose. In Augustine's story, the piece of jetsam is understood to be "real," suffused with the charisma of a past very different

from the present, a time when giants roamed the earth and left their teeth as evidence of their lives in the world. In Gower's account, the "realness" of jetsam—for him, sea shells—is mediated in two ways, first by the structure of simile ("a gathered shell" [lecta concha] is *like* "hoc opus" [this work—the *Vox* itself]). Second, the shell simile itself has been "gathered": Gower has taken the line from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, where it signifies Roman modernity—Ovid describes the up-to-date activities of the Romans, which include the wholesale harvesting of shells for their purple dye, much valued by the Roman elite.[4] These uses of jetsam—the tooth and the shells—are united only by chance. St. Augustine and Gower, unlike Ovid and Gower, are not linked as source-text and allusion. Instead, they stand together as similar attempts by widely separated authors to think through the relationship of the past to their own presents. Both deploy jetsam in part because they wish to exploit its chancy character, the fact that it lands contingently on the seashore, washed in by the ceaseless movement of the ocean. Each object—tooth and shell—arrives imbued with meaning. Augustine claims that the tooth he picks up is *already* that of a giant, and thus already affirms his vision of the past and of Scripture: it is a piece of evidence retroactively fitted into a completed narrative of past events. Gower similarly inserts the sea shell into his story but refuses to acknowledge in any overt way that he has copied a line of poetry from Ovid, and thus has imported a whole set of Ovidian meanings and concerns into the *Vox*. In both cases, the signifying power of the image supersedes the authority of the author and his ability to constrain its meaning. This power—this capacity to exceed the boundaries of texts and to break down the walls of time—links Augustine, Ovid, and Gower while creating a series of questions about temporality, history, and the historicism with which modern scholars have sought to pin down such images and their contexts. In what follows, I explore the parallelism of these three otherwise unrelated works—the *City of God*, the *Art of Love (Ars Amatoria)*, and the *Vox Clamantis* (the "voice crying")—by examining the image of jetsam that appears in each, with the aim of thinking through the "historicisms" defining these texts, contemporary historicism, and the relationship of history to art in the present and in the past.

I begin with St. Augustine's giant tooth, which he describes in some detail:

"molarem hominis dentem tam ingentem ut, si in nostrorum dentium modulos minutatim concideretur, centum nobis videretur facere potuisse" [a human molar, a tooth so immense that, if it should be cut into little bits, small measures (the size of) our teeth, it would seem to us to be able to make a hundred].[5] The anecdote reveals a deep concern for the credibility of sacred texts, and St. Augustine makes a great effort

to authenticate his discovery of such an extraordinary artifact. He tells us earnestly that he was with witnesses: "Vidi ipse, non solus sed aliquot mecum in Uticensi litore molarem hominis dentem tam ingentem" [I myself sawónot alone, but with several persons on the shore in Uticaóthe molar of a human, a tooth so immense] (XV, 9). He cites Pliny the Elder, "doctissimus homo" [a most learned man], who in turn had cited Homer's poems, not as "poetica figmenta" [poetic fictions] but "in historicam fidem"—"in credibility," literally, "in historical trust, faith, belief." Such "fides" is made possible by the sheer durability of bones, "quoniam diuturna sunt" [since they are long-lasting] (XV, 9). That durability is what makes the giant's tooth a guarantor of Biblical veracity; just as citations of Homer and Pliny helped to authenticate Augustine's experience, so too the tooth verifies the claims of the Old Testament:

> Si ergo humanarum vitarum diuturnitates, quas experti non sumus, hodie habere creduntur incognita nobis loca, cur non habuisse credantur et tempora? An vero credibile est alicubi esse quod hic non est, et incredibile est aliquando fuisse quod nunc non est? (XV, 9)
>
> [If, therefore, in these times, places unknown to us are believed to have long human life-spans, which we have not known in our experience, why should [other] ages not be believed to have had [such longevity]? Or is it truly believable for what does not exist here to exist somewhere [else]? And is it unbelievable for what does not now exist to have existed at some other time?]

At issue here is the longevity of men in the Old Testament. A kind of commonsense logic would challenge biblical descriptions of the great ages of figures such as Adam, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah—but, as St. Augustine points out, if giants could have existed (something proven by the discovery of the tooth) so too could men have lived hundreds of years.

The question that Augustine poses here—is it so "unbelievable for what does not now exist to have existed at some other time"?—is designed to contribute to readers' belief in the Old Testament. But it also crosses the chasm of time between the Augustinian era and the present day, bringing with it the giant's tooth, a vision of the signifier from the past as a kind of fossil cast on the shores of the present. In this vision, history itself is a live and changing thing, something that writhes in the hands of the historian and morphs from being a human to a mammoth to a dinosaur and back again. Augustine attempts to arrest that metamorphosis; he tries to bring order to the chaotic history embodied in the outsized and freakish bone he once held in his hands. He invokes authorities and texts: Homer, Pliny

the Elder, *Genesis*. But Augustine's solution simply multiplies the possible meanings contained in the tooth—adding signifiers to an already complex nexus of meanings. It is a problem that Augustine himself seems to think about briefly, as he imagines the enormous tooth fractured and divided into a hundred human-sized teeth. When alien signifiers are translated into familiar ones, in other words, they multiply, becoming both more intractable and more meaningful.

But it is important to note the difference between a modern vision of plenitude and the early Christian insistence on the fossil as a guarantor of *fixity*, not a window onto another world teeming with life and difference. Augustine metaphorically borrows the property of durability from bones, which "diuturna sunt" [are long-lasting] (XV.9), in order to lend its stability to Scripture. Further, he recognizes that he cannot show readers the giant tooth, cannot recreate the sensory experience of carrying the tooth in his hands and feeling its weight. All that remains are the signifiers, "dentem" [tooth] and "molarem hominis" [human molar] and "gigant[es]" [giants]. Augustine hedges against this difficulty by asserting that he was not alone in making his discovery; he had "aliquot mecum" [several persons with me]. Their discovery of the tooth created a group of believers, a set of witnesses that serves as an example to readers of the nature of Christian belief—an acceptance of the tooth's Christian history as well as an acceptance of the truth of Scripture. The fact that, for Augustine, these witnesses mitigate against the extraordinary juxtaposition of signifiers in this passage ("gigant[em]" with "molarem hominis") is a crucial detail, for it inserts the idea of the "group" into his discourse of proof, evidence, and analogy. Scripture's truth is in the end guaranteed less by the tooth itself than by the "others with me" (aliquot mecum) and their belief in the giant whose tooth they have found. For such witnesses, past and present are unified by belief; no matter how strange the fossil might seem, and no matter how incredible are the claims of Scripture to the longevity of its characters, both oddities can be seamlessly absorbed into a Christian understanding of history. And while modern thinkers provoked by Augustine's fossil might recognize this commitment to sameness—the tooth's resemblance to human teeth, the testimony of pagan and Christian texts to the existence of giants—they would also find its differences and oddities, strangenesses and exoticism, powerfully attractive. Many contemporary critics have embraced the Marxist notion that relationships between and among epochs must be understood as multiple, with many temporalities at work in a single age—a notion that contributes the critical insight that *both* sameness and difference are essential to genuinely grasping the past and its complexity.[6] St. Augustine's tooth may have been grotesque, exotic, Other, and strange, but it was familiarly

shaped: it looked like a human tooth. Its form persisted even as, detached from a body, it came to seem outrageously large. So too the Middle Ages persists, recognizably human but ineradicably different; an age familiarly wrought by human beings wearing human-shaped clothes, sitting in human-shaped seats, and producing artifacts made for and by human capacities, but also an age whose inhabitants were sometimes strangely encased in metal, strangely preoccupied with the lactation of holy women and the wounds of holy men, or oddly likely to wear animal masks and dance buoyantly after dinner.

A difficulty immediately arises, of course. St. Augustine was mistaken about the tooth. It was *not* a human fossil. This difficulty points to a danger: past reconstructions depend upon interpreters, who bring with them an intense desire to find a particular past amidst the incoherent shards of evidence that they find. This desire is visible in the Augustinian assumption that the strange object (the tooth) *must* be read as human, and thus as affirmation of *Genesis*. That instance shows us a present at work interpreting the past according to a powerful ideological paradigm, Christian exegetics. By modern scientific standards, Augustine's account of the tooth produces a failed narrative about the past, because the saint misrecognizes the found object in his zeal to affirm the truth of Scripture. According to this logic, his investment in continuity was so profound that his identification of the mute and insensible tooth, which depends on a physical homology between human and giant, fails to sustain the tension between sameness and difference, legibility and strangeness, that is essential to a notion of history as a living and changeable entity. But for Augustine and his readers, narratives of giants function in precisely this way, linking a "modern" present to a very different past in which suprahuman creatures ruled the earth, part human and part angel. The giants are not part of modern history; they are disqualified not only because the science of paleontology has produced a more convincing account of enormous teeth, but because the temporal distance between St. Augustine's text and the present makes the ideological commitments of the giant narrative stand out in relief. It is impossible not to evaluate the saint's account as a willful act of interpretation designed to bolster a Christian audience's belief in the literal truth of the Bible. Scholars too are never free of the "presentism" that led St. Augustine to see in his fossil the tooth of a giant, or the ideological tendencies that brought D.W. Robertson to see St. Augustine everywhere. At the same time, it is possible to be influenced by a kind of "pastism"—a refusal to see those moments at which the Middle Ages seem shockingly modern, out of step with the "medieval" and surprisingly or painfully resonant with contemporary preoccupations. Even in the face of an intransigent temporality, I

would suggest, there is a need for a point of stillness, a "neutral-enough" point (because no one is ever fully neutral) from which giants and dinosaurs can be seen at one and the same moment, creating between them an energy that revivifies the past and illuminates the present.

Were I a historian, perhaps my analysis would end here, with a plea for a new way of doing history, one free from the ideological rhetoric of point and counterpoint, one that regards the Middle Ages with both awe and strategic disrespect. But I am a literary critic, as are most of the scholars in this volume, and such critics have given themselves over to the *writtenness* of the past, to its production of textual forms of representation. As such, it becomes rather crucial to think again about St. Augustine's tooth. A fossil from prehistory is not the same as a text from *recorded* history. Nor is it the same as a work of art, whether it be cave-painting, Chaucerian verse, or embroidered cloth. That tooth came into being as the result of forces beyond its owner's control (be he giant or dinosaur), driven at the cellular level to add layers of bone and enamel, to become enormous. The fossil did not grow especially smooth on one side, or particularly jagged at one end, as a way of communicating with humans. But historical persons—including St. Augustine—*did* create artifacts they hoped would speak to the future. The meaning of such artifacts is bounded, hemmed in by the interpretive capacities of past readers and writers. What a dinosaur or even a giant thought about his bones and teeth is unrecoverable and unknowable. But in the present, medieval attempts to process, represent, and understand the world can be reimagined from the perspective of a medieval person, though such attempts will always be tentative and speculative. Such attempts to understand the past, medieval and modern, have limits—historical, ideological, and aesthetic boundaries that give shape and form to these modes of past- and self-understanding. It is not possible to write timeless scholarship, or to avoid making Augustinian "mistakes" about giant teeth, but it is possible to treat the past with respect for its past-ness. In the case of past poetry, for example, critics can identify and explore the interpretive boundaries that structured readers' encounters with poetic texts, while acknowledging that there are limits to the meanings that such texts can produce, limits created by the distance between the present and the past.

It might fairly be objected that medieval poets subjected the authority of the past to parody, revision, adaptation, and anachronism all the time, and that these practices are thereby authorized for modern readers. But poets such as Chaucer and Gower labored in a world of discourse constrained on every side by the sheer weight of the past. As a result, they tended to stage the primal tension between "sameness and difference" I described earlier with some frequency. These poets thus operated

with a concept of the literary work as a privileged aesthetic zone for the encounter of past and present, sameness and difference. It is a zone in which the potential for words to signify in multiple ways is indulged, a space in which the genuinely historical nature of literary form is exposed alongside the necessarily formal nature of human apprehensions of history. To demonstrate how this "aesthetic zone" functions, then I have chosen a literary text in which appears a parallel to Augustine's use of jetsam, Gower's *Vox Clamantis*. At the beginning of Book 2, Gower uses the image of shell-gathering as a simile for the practice of literary art:

> Lectus ut est variis florum de germine fauus,
> *Lectaque diuerso litore concha venit*,
> Sic michi diuersa tribuerunt hoc opus ora,
> Et visus varii sunt michi causa libri:
> Doctorum veterum mea carmina fortificando
> Pluribus exemplis scripta fuisse reor.

[As the honey is gathered from the bud of various flowers, and [each] gathered shell comes from a diverse shore, so diverse mouths imparted this work to me, and various visions are the cause of my book. I think that my poems were written with the support of many examples from learned men of old].[7]

Gower is introducing Book 2 by acknowledging his debts to authorities, "doctores veteres," much as Augustine gestured to Pliny and to Homer. He does so with a flourish, introducing a flashy construction of two similes of honey and shells. The first, which creates an analogy between "authorities" and "flowers," is a familiar medieval idea, found in countless places and giving rise to the "florilegium," a collection of the flowers of various texts. But the simile of the shells is a bit more interesting. Gower is quoting Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*:

> Prisca iuvent alios: ego me nunc denique natum
> Gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis.
> Non quia nunc terrae lentum subducitur aurum,
> *Lectaque diverso litore concha venit:*
> Nec quia descrescunt effosso marmore montes,
> Nec quiua caeruleae mole fugantur aquae:
> Sec quia cultus adest, nec nostros mansit in annos
> Rusticitas, priscis illa superstes avis.

[Let ancient times delight others; thereupon, I congratulate myself for being born now. This age is suited to my character, not because the sluggish gold is now removed from the earth, and [each] gathered shell comes from a diverse shores, nor because the mountains decrease with the

> digging out of marble, nor because the dark-blue waters are driven away by a sea-wall. But because civilization is at hand, and rusticity, which survived until our grandfathers of many years ago, has not endured until our years].[8]

In Ovid's text, "lectaque diverso litore concha venit" is part of a broader description of the ways in which modern Roman civilization outstrips the rude and rustic past. Women, as symbols of the style of an age, are central to making this "modernist" claim. As Ovid tells us, despite the glory of the Trojan past, the women of Troy were not adorned like modern Roman beauties: "si fuit Andromache tunicas induta valentes/Quid mirum? duri militis uxor erat" [If Andromache was clad in sturdy tunics, what wonder? She was the wife of a hardy soldier] (III.109–110). This gap between Trojan past and Roman present, a gap articulated by Ovid as a way of praising the practices and mores of contemporary Roman culture, is thus embedded in the poet's image of "lectae conchae" or "gathered shells." Collecting such shells, like mining "lentum aurum" and "marmor" [stubborn gold and marble], or building a sea-wall ["moles"], renders the Romans *modern*, up-to-date, civilized. Ovid claims that these symbols of modernity are not what makes him so well suited to his era ("haec aetas moribus apta meis" [this age is suited to my character]); it is the arrival of "culture" ("cultus") and the departure of "rusticitas" that makes him so self-congratulatory ("ego me gratulor"). But of course gathering, mining, and building are integral parts of the modernity Ovid defines here, and it is precisely the idea that gathering shells functions as a form of culture, a sign of civilization, that makes the verse resonate so profoundly with the new context given it by Gower centuries later.

Like Roman shell-gatherers, Gower has collected the words of many authorities in the making of the *Vox Clamantis*. Indeed, he has collected Ovid's very comment on collecting, redeploying the Ovidian line much as the shell-gatherers extracted the color from shells and used it to signify the empire in ceremonial clothes. Just so, Gower's appropriation of the Latin text forces readers to reinterpret Ovid's line; alternate meanings for words come to the surface when they are embedded in a new context, just as the shells are transformed into dye and later into clothes. For example, the verb in the line from Ovid, "lectaque" ("*Lectaque* diverso litore concha venit") (II.Prol.77), is a form of "lego," which not only means "to gather," but can also mean, "to read out, read aloud, recite" and "to find in an author or a writing."[9] The line can thus be read in several ways: "the *recited* shell comes from diverse shores," "the *read* shell comes from diverse shores," "the shell *found in a text* (that) comes from diverse shores." This cluster of alternative readings, all variations on the ideas of reading and writing, further cements the link that Gower has

forged between shell-gathering and word-gathering; after all, it is indeed a shell "found in a text" that he has appropriated. Indulging these alternative meanings—something readers are forced to do by the structure of the simile, which proposes a comparison and thus requires a mental leap—pushes to the surface a question implicit in Ovid's line: who is gathering? Who is reading, reciting, finding? Ovid leaves no doubt: Romans are shell-gatherers, voyagers who harvest the goods wherever they go as symbols of their own imperial glory—much as St. Augustine would later lift the Utican tooth and see it as a symbol of Christian history and the glory of God. But Ovid goes no further. He reveals only that the Romans gathered shells, mined gold and marble, and constructed sea walls as part of the civilizing process. When Gower appropriates the line, however, he effects a critical shift, transforming Ovid's flatly indicative statement into a formalized and elaborate poetic construction: "Lectus *ut* est variis florum de germine fauus, / Lectaque diuerso litore concha venit" [*As* the honey is gathered from the bud of various flowers, and the gathered shells come from diverse shores] (II.Prol.77–78). The line functions differently as a Gowerian simile than as an Ovidian description; shells here are doubled, not only twinned with honey taken from flowers, but also transformed into metaphors. They stand in for Gower's own work ("hoc opus"), which has been imparted to him by "diverse mouths" [diuersa ora], represented in the simile by the "diverse shore(s)" [diuerso litore]. "Diuersa ora," of course, is also a synecdoche, standing in for those authoritative *auctores* whose words have been gathered by Gower and relocated in his own work, in his own contexts. This combination of simile with synecdoche creates a fundamentally dense and intricate nexus of meaning, a slippery and troublesome cluster of lines that demands a special kind of reading. It is clear that the "gatherer" in Gower's text is the poet himself, though as I will show, he goes to some lengths to obscure his role in the simile. But a further question arises as the simile unfolds: what does Gower actually "gather"? Simple parallelism links the words on the page: "vari[orum] florum" [various flowers] with "diuerso litore" [diverse shores] with "diuersa ora" [diverse mouths]. From those flowers comes honey; from the shores, shells—and from the mouths of *auctores*, "hoc opus" [this work], presumably, "words."

The difficulty arises when Gower moves from simile to synecdoche, from a rhetorical device dependent on *both* similarity and difference to one deeply structured by contiguity. In a simile, x is like, similar to, y, but x is not y. Flowers and shores, and honey and shells, are all distinct entities whose poetic usefulness depends on that distinctiveness as well as on their capacity to be read as similitudes for one another. But the movement to synecdoche—from flowers and shores to the mouths of men—means

that a different logic, a logic of contiguity, comes to the fore: x (mouths) is similar to y (flowers, shores), to be sure, but x is also *part of* another entity, z, the *auctores* themselves. They lurk, hidden behind the synecdoche, ready to emerge when needed. The structure of contiguity provided by the "diuersa ora" here enables Gower to articulate a connection between authoritative texts and his own work; as he goes on to explain, "doctores veteres" [ancient teachers] have strengthened ("fortificando") his poems ("mea carmina").

Like any rhetorical excess, this flourish raises basic questions. Why, if "doctores veteres" can be referenced overtly, does Gower go to such trouble to create his simile–synecdoche structure in the first place? The answer lies in the relationship those forms establish between similitude and difference. The web of similitude linking honey, shells, and words is particularly fragile, weakened by the synecdochal status of "diuersa ora"—and this fragility is exploited by Gower as he sutures the main terms of the simile together with verbs. Honey "lectus est" [is gathered]; the shell "lecta venit" [comes gathered]. The double simile is thus structured around the image of gathering, a predicate that carries over to the final term of the construction, and suggests that "diuersa ora" are being gathered and collected by an assiduous poet. But the synecdoche defeats the nascent logic of the honey/shells simile; as the "diverse mouths" necessarily conjure up the concealed *auctores*, the voice of the verb shifts from passive to active. While shells "are gathered," "diuersa ora" have forcefully *imparted* ("tribuerunt") the work to Gower ("michi" [to me]). Because this active predicate is embedded in an imaginary scenario in which honey and shells passively are collected or gathered, it breaks the symmetry of the simile. Even though the sequence of "honey . . . shells . . . mouths" [favus . . . concha(e) . . . ora] seems on the surface to be a set of similar terms—"*as* honey and shells, *so* diverse mouths"—it is not. The first terms function as *objects* of the verb "to gather," while the third term ("mouths") is the *subject* of "to impart." What has in fact been gathered and imparted is Gower's book: "hoc opus" [this work], found in the syntactical position of the direct object, making it grammatically analogous to the objects of "to gather," honey and shells.

What lies behind this disjuncture between active and passive is a much more troubled relationship: that between a poet (here, Gower) and his *auctores* (the owners of "diuersa ora"). Gower uses the device of synecdoche to conceal and diminish those authorities, reducing them to "mouths." He also uses the implicit expectations created by the grammar of the double simile to conceal his own agency. Not only does the passive use of the verb [lectus est . . . lectaque] inevitably pose the question, "who gathers?"—but its repetition also carries its meaning forward into the final term of the simile, "diuersa ora." In a grammatical sense, the

arrival of the main verb "impart" [tribuerunt] quickly clarifies the final segment of the simile. But the question remains, "who gathers the honey, the shells, this work"? The answer is buried within the final two lines of the simile, in Gower's repetition of "michi."

> Sic michi diuersa tribuerunt hoc opus ora,
> Et visus varii sunt michi causa libri:
>
> [So diverse mouths imparted this work to me, and various visions are the cause of my book.] (Book II, Prologue, lines 79–80)

Hiding in plain sight in the dative "michi" [to me] is Gower himself, his poetic agency subordinated to the "diverse mouths" and "various visions" that are structurally aligned with the first portion of the simile, the honey and the shell. Not only do "mouths" and "visions" function as the subjects of the verbs "tribuerunt" and "sunt" but their two modifiers ("diuersa" and "varii"—"diverse" and "various") are synonyms. As a result, the Latin authorities implied by "mouths" are linked to Gower's visions, which come directly from God. The line of transmission defined by the simile thus becomes clear: God sends visions to Gower; Latin authorities impart wisdom to Gower.

This top–down, past to present hierarchy would seem to be business-as-usual for a humble medieval poet. But the simile as a whole displays cracks in this hierarchical edifice. The moment at which the grammatical voice in the passage shifts from passive to active reveals the uneasy fit between the signifiers—honey from flowers and shells from seashores—and the signified, Gower's work, the *Vox* itself. It is syntactically clear that diverse mouths "imparted" the *Vox* to Gower; each possible grammatical function is fulfilled by the verse: subject ("mouths"), verb ("imparted"), direct object ("this work"), indirect object ("to Gower"). But this fullness points to the absence in the first lines of the passage: honey and the shell are gathered from flowers and the shore—but by whom or what? The simple answer, of course, is "bees and Romans"—but the context of the images in the simile suggests a more complicated response. *Gower* is the author of these lines, the poet of the *Vox*, the logical figure to "gather" the words of classical poets. Though he overtly argues that he is a passive recipient of ancient wisdom and divine visions, Gower metaphorically asserts his own agency as the gatherer and collector, refusing to let his readers forget that he has appropriated and revised the words of others in order to make his own work of literary art.

All of this analysis certainly reveals the subtlety of which Gower was capable, in Latin and in all of the languages he wrote, but it also has a very particular resonance for this volume and for the question of

historicism more generally. That is because these lines are constructed around a quotation from Ovid used as a simile for the words of "ancient teachers" [doctores veteres] and the visions of God. But Ovid's own use of the line is very different. His "concha" (shell) is not a symbol of past authority or divine inspiration. It is one cog in a much larger imperial wheel, a piece of the imperial puzzle; each shell's inhabitant yields its purple color in the service of imperial self-representation, becoming a small part of a majestic garment signifying power. In temporal terms, these shells are messengers from the future, bringing to Romans small pieces of lands they will conquer or colonize. They symbolize the modernity of Augustan Rome, its civilizing practices, its rejection of the rustic and the old. Even though Ovid anaphorically claims (repeating some form of "quia" at the start of each line) he is *not* citing gold- and marble-mining, shell-gathering, and sea-wall-building as examples of his own suitability for modernity, these lines are clearly recognizable as a kind of false denial, a way of making the point without seeming to make it. All of Ovid's examples are indeed illustrations of the Roman civilizing project, all governed by the temporal marker at the start of the passage, "nunc": "Non quia *nunc* terrae lentum subducitur aurum" [Not because the sluggish gold is *now* removed from the earth] (III.123; my emphasis). Shell-gathering, far from being a respectful and humble act of homage to ancient teachers, appears in Ovid as an imperial practice, akin to tearing resistant gold from the earth, or to destroying mountains ("descrescunt montes"), or to driving away the waters of the earth ("caeruleae fugantur aquae").

When Gower appropriates Ovid's shells, then, he turns them upside down, transforming them from symbols of modernity to metaphors for the past—from carriers of imperial dye, the color of the modern, to pilgrim badges acquired at the shrines of past *auctores*. Gower's act of transformation, his aggressive appropriation of Ovid's words, contrasts sharply with the ideal of medieval poetic practice embodied in the second part of his simile: the poet humbly accepts "imparted" ("tributa") words and divine visions; he refers to himself only indirectly, in the dative "michi." The wickedness of Gower's use of Ovid lies, of course, in the fact that he constructs this passive poetic self in thrall to Latin authority and to God by means of an *imperial* and aggressive act, stealing a line from Ovid, a Latin authority. This willful and forceful act belies the passive poetic self produced by the literal, surface meaning of the text, at the same time as its wickedness is enhanced by the irony that the line Gower steals is itself a depiction of imperialism.

On closer examination, Gower seems even trickier; even as he subordinates a past *auctor*, Ovid, to his own project by appropriating his verse,

he also undermines the very enterprise of the *Vox* by allowing the *content* of Ovid's text to resonate within it. The opening of the second book of a serious Latin treatise (the *Vox*) seems to call for orthodox social commentary coupled with humble gestures to past authority. Instead, Gower copies Ovid's symbol of the modern, the shell, which leads the reader straight to the *Ars Amatoria* and away from the difficult estates satire that follows in the *Vox*. Ovid's poem reveals a narrator enraptured by the notion of civilization itself, "cultus":

> Prisca iuvent alios: ego me nunc denique natum
> Gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis.
> (III.121–122)

[Let ancient times delight others; thereupon, I congratulate myself for being born now. This age is suited to my character.]

> Sed quia cultus adest, nec nostros mansit in annos
> Rusticitas, priscis illa superstes avis.
> (III.127–128)

[But because civilization is at hand, and rusticity, which survived until our grandfathers of many years ago, has not endured until our years.]

"Cultus," derived from the verb "colo," to "cultivate, till," has a variety of associations—not only "ornamented, adorned, polished, elegant, cultivated" but also "civilization, style, manner of life." In its verbal form, it also implies "to honor, respect, revere, reverence, worship."[10] Ovid evokes all of these shades of meaning as a way of linking the modern to women, the subject of Book III of the *Ars Amatoria,* who function as emblems of the times—whether they be Andromaches in "rough tunics" or Ovidian beauties elegantly adorned and lovingly groomed. Ornamentation and polishing characterize Ovid's modernity, as well as his poetry, an observation borne out by his elaborate descriptions in the *Art of Love* of women's forms of adornment. Ovid addresses modern women in order to cultivate them, to adorn and civilize them; he teaches them how to match their hairstyles to the shapes of their faces, what colors will flatter their complexions, and how artfully to apply makeup, as well as insisting on the need for excess hair removal, tooth brushing, and hand washing. This emphasis on "cultum" and its superiority to "rusticity" [rusticitas] follows the Ovidian shells into the *Vox Clamantis* when they are "gathered" by Gower. Ovid's arts of seduction and self-care become in Gower's text the subtle poetic craft through which authorities are diminished and the Gowerian "I" quietly inserted into the hierarchy of poetic transmission.

This notion of craft is deeply sedimented in the Latin of Gower's work, and it provides a critical counterpoint to the ideal of past and present continuity that otherwise structures the self-understanding of the medieval poet. Taken at his word, Gower would appear as little more than a mouthpiece for "doctores veteres" and "visus varii," a means for the transmission of ancient values and divine prophecies. But of course, a Christian poet appropriating classical verses is confronted from moment to moment by discontinuity, difference, the pagan otherness of the classical past. What Gower creates by reusing the image of shells gathered from diverse shores is a poetic line strung taut between the twin poles of past and present, between Ovid and the *Vox*. It is a line that vibrates with the tension of sameness and difference: the word for word echo of Ovid, the radical reworking of its context (from signifying literally to functioning as a simile); the gesture to Ovid's authority, the elision of the agent, the intrusion of the I-as-object ("michi"), and so on.

It is not the fact that both objects are picked up on the seashore that makes Ovid's shells recall Augustine's tooth. Both demand to be written into history, and both function as symbols of the simultaneous continuity and alienation between past and present. Both resonate for me with the thinking about historicism that this volume demands, as both metaphorically stand for the exhilaration and danger of reading history, the ways in which such reading produces new thought by displaying strange, outsized, foreign and alien objects, and the ways in which "gathering" or collecting can give rise to mistakes, misapprehensions, overinvestments, and—in the case of the Roman shells—near-extinction. Each object—tooth and shell—was understood by its historians (Augustine, Ovid, Gower) to be a linking device, a suturing cord between then and now. Each was also ruthlessly imported from its peaceful rest on the seashore to the troubled pages of those historians' texts, put to work creating meaning for audiences in need of instruction: early Christians, lovelorn ladies, late medieval Englishmen suffused by doubt about the stability of their world. But each object also resists its transportation, much as the gold in Roman hills is "lentum," "slow, sluggish, immovable"—and this resistance is made manifest by the tendency of such objects to carry prior meanings with them to their new textual homes. Roman imperialism becomes part of the meaning of the *Vox*, just as St. Augustine's giants carry their story of angelic parentage into the *City of God*.[11] But there is a difference between the Ovidian and Augustinian models, though it is a difference that ultimately leads to the same place. When Ovid and Gower invoke shells from diverse shores, they are seeking a very different kind of artifact than Augustine. The saint urgently wants to affirm the truth of Scripture—"defendenda . . . historia, ne sit scriptura

incredibilis" [defending the historical truth, so that scripture might not seem incredible] (XV.8)—and he introduces his tooth as a way of claiming that biblical history can be verified. Giants did once exist; therefore, men once lived to a great age. Even the interpretive force of fourfold allegory cannot equal the authority of physical evidence and eyewitness attestation: Augustine held the giant's tooth in his hands before a group of believers. His narration of this experience thus serves a dual purpose. It confirms the truth of the scriptural account of giants, and it creates a secondary group of witnesses, persons who read or hear the story and whose Christian faith is enhanced by it.

In contrast, neither Ovid nor Gower cares about witnesses or literal truth. Both seek in the shell artifacts a metaphor, a way of writing about history at once removed from the sandiness and saltiness of those "diverse shores." Ovid's invocation of "cultus"—civilization, ornamentation, adornment, culture—echoes more loudly than perhaps Gower could have known, moving the *Vox* out of the realm of reporting and into that literary zone I described earlier as "aesthetic." That zone provides a safe haven for the exploration of sameness and difference, tension, contradiction, resolution. Play happens in that zone. It is there that the raw materials of history—the strange teeth, the sandy shells—are given form, lent the shapes that make them legible, made into genres, narratives, metaphors, words. In the end, the giant's tooth exists in that zone as well; written description, however cunningly contrived, simply cannot free an object from textuality by making it convincingly real. It must be described in words; it must be wrapped up in the clothing of art. To use Ovid's terms, Andromache's tunic may have been "sturdy" or "rough," but it was, in the end, a tunic—a garment that covered her and signified her status as a "hardy soldier's wife." She was not naked. So too the giant tooth cannot exist without the garments of Augustine's narrative; outside the circle of the saint and the witnesses, no unmediated experience of the tooth can be possible.

In the end, it would seem that the difference between the literalism of Augustine's story and the metaphorical and artful character of Ovid and Gower's sea shells disappears under the pressure of close reading. All three accounts become "texts" characterized by multiple meanings, rhetorical misdirections, inconsistencies, gaps, and failures of communication—and as texts all three solicit historicist readings, analyses that can explain how the tooth and the shells might have signified for early Christians, Romans, and late medieval English people. Some version of historicism is necessary to reading texts as ancient as these; without knowing that the Romans gathered shells for imperial dye, or that a giant tooth at Utica might well have been a dinosaur's tooth, neither Augustine's narrative

nor Ovid's description of Roman modernity would be fully comprehensible. Similarly, identifying and defining the particular medieval literary practices of gathering and allusion that lie behind Gower's appropriation of Ovid and other classical and Christian textual authorities is a kind of historicism in and of itself; modes of literary production have histories just as kingships and governments do. Historicism, in these simple instances, is nothing more than responsible literary criticism that seeks to understand the meaning of a writer's work as fully as possible. Should these historical contexts become ends in themselves, hermeneutic guides that foreclose the play of meanings in texts by insisting on their own superior truth, then historicism will have taken a wrong turn. Only the most impoverished notion of reading historically would exclude the play of meaning integral to literary and poetic texts—and at the same time, only the most limited concept of the aesthetic would deny the essentially historical character of literary form, the crucial way in which form shapes and is shaped by the stuff of history.

It is important to recognize, however, that the capacity of close reading to level the differences among texts—to make reading prose akin to reading verse, for example—should be tempered with an understanding of the types of discursive forms that characterize various works. St. Augustine's tooth functions differently in *De civitate Dei* than do Ovid and Gower's shells in the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Vox Clamantis*. Augustine insists on its literalism: the concrete reality of both the fossil that he handled at Utica and the biblical giant whose tooth it once was. Neither Ovid nor Gower emphasizes the quotidian real-ness of the "shells from diverse shores"; for both poets, the "concha" is a signifier, standing in for something more important—Roman modernity for Ovid, and for Gower, classical *auctoritas*. The difference between the real tooth and the metaphorical shells points to the complexity of the relationship between history and the forms of its representation. It is a relationship that literary texts repeatedly dramatize. The formal play created by literary art demonstrates to readers the devices, modes, shapes, structures, and frameworks that mediate the raw experience of living in history and transmit it in a comprehensible way. Such forms are not by any means restricted to literature or poetry; all writing is mediated by some kind of form, some more artful than others. Some of that writing foregrounds the matter of form, displaying, demonstrating, testing, and sometimes breaking forms in a purposive and meaningful way. Other kinds of writing burnish forms, polishing them to a high gloss and seemingly presenting those beautiful forms for readers with no purpose other than pleasure.

Presented with this diversity of forms and uses of form, critics have responded in equally various modes over the course of the last half-century,

though in medieval literary study, three such modes have tended to dominate. The first is the kind of theological reading propounded by D.W. Robertson, which functions according to an historical premise—that medieval texts must be read according to the hermeneutics available to medieval readers.[12] The second mode identifies "literature" as a separate kind of discourse, resistant to the pressure of history and events, and linked primarily to other literary texts across time. The primary mode of critique produced by this construction is evaluation: judgments of quality, beauty, technique, and skill are brought to bear on these texts as a mode of analysis that can establish a border between the literary and the nonliterary. In the third mode, the literary is construed as a form of writing akin to other forms of writing. Techniques and skills linked to literary representation are identified at work in a wide variety of written texts, from medieval chronicles to legal statutes and beyond. Value judgments become useless once the tasks of the critic become the explanation of how texts make meaning, the summary of possible meanings, the assessment of the cultural impact of a given written work, and the elucidation of how a social or historical environment influences that work. Readers will recognize these rather crudely defined approaches to literature as common assumptions about Robertsonianism, New Criticism, and New Historicism, all of which construe the objects of their analysis in different ways, as "allegory," "poetry," or a "text." Historicism seems to offer the broadest, most inclusive model—the one most sensitive to variation and difference, the one most flexible and useful. But something is lost when every piece of writing becomes a text like other texts; paradoxically, historicism's very inclusiveness, its openness to discursive variation, makes it possible to ignore differences in form. Nor does a return to New Criticism provide a solution to this problem; while it did recognize formal differences, its insistence upon judgments of literary value often obscured the real function of form in poetic and social milieux. Of course, every generation produces critics who transcend these crude definitions of "schools" or "trends," whose work moves far beyond failings such as these to produce, for example, New Critical essays sensitive to social contexts, or historicist projects heavily invested in form. But the weaknesses I have identified earlier function largely as critical impasses within these approaches to literature that allow certain kinds of questions to be ignored or papered over by hasty or careless critics.

Moving beyond these impasses requires a renewed understanding of form and its historical significance. For literary critics, the subject of investigation is usually traditionally "literary" texts—for example, the works of Gower and Ovid and their historical or formal aspects. More historical works are often mined for thematic or narrative elements, as

St. Augustine's *City of God* is read for its Christian apologetics or for its revelations about early Christian thinking. However, it would not be right to neglect the formal aspects of such narratives and the social uses of form that they display. Wherever such forms are found—in the works of poets or of saints—they enable crucial insights about the ways in which history is rendered through form, and about the essential role that the mediation of form plays in transmitting and constructing past and present historical understandings. In the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid plays with his own modernity; he trifles with the seriousness of Roman imperialism by linking it to matters of personal style, suggesting an equivalence between the dyed purple robes of emperors and the grooming of modern ladies, down to the minutest details of bodily care. Understanding Gower's appropriation of the dye-yielding shell requires grasping the state of play in Ovid's text, both its amusement with the trappings of empire and of love, and its moments of pointed critique. In the shell-gathering passage, Ovid proposes a relation between the creation of Roman civilization and its dependence on acts of imperial destruction, like the leveling of mountains and the extraction of purple from shells. He shows readers how imperial civilization is transmitted, made legible to Romans and their subjects through craft: dyeing robes and grooming women. In so doing, he shines a brutal light on both imperial history and on art, whose forms are appropriated for the glorification of modern Rome. When Gower then appropriates Ovid's art, he does so as a way of reflecting on his *own* poetic practice. Like the Romans who gather shells, extract what is beautiful in them, and transform that extraction into a symbol of power, Gower gathers words from his predecessors, detaches them from their contexts, and forces them to make meaning in a new way.

This account of Gower's poetics, as a form of imperialism wrought under the sign of deference to the very classical *auctores* whose words he has gathered and reused, fundamentally rewrites the standard narrative of Gower's history-writing in the *Vox Clamantis*. It has long been thought that the version of the fourteenth century found in the *Vox* is so ideologically driven, so wedded to a conservative vision of medieval society (the hierarchy of the three estates), that it utterly lacks nuance, self-reflection, and the capacity to accept social change. I do not have the space here to demonstrate just how subtle Gower's history-writing can be, even at moments of great aggression and hostility, but let me point out briefly that this subtlety is derived from his obsessive appropriation of line after line of Ovid's oeuvre. The example of the gathered shells thus illustrates the way in which Gower determinedly sustains a tension between deference to Latin authority (here, Ovid) and the display of poetic skill embodied in the fearless abandon with which he redeploys classical words

and images while ruthlessly exploiting both their past and present meanings. The brilliance of this particular display lies in the fact that Gower has chosen a passage from the *Ars Amatoria* whose Ovidian meaning constitutes a critique of its Gowerian use: Ovid deploys the gathering of shells to illustrate the triviality of modern forms of imperial expression, from the color purple to well-groomed ladies. If Gower aligns himself and his own gathering of words with these Roman practices, he must also accept the critique sedimented in the line he has adopted.

By so doing, Gower forges a poetic "middle way"—a practice of engaging the past that treats it with care, but without kid gloves. This middle way is a mode of using the past while allowing it to speak freely; Gower may manipulate Ovid's poetry for his own ends, but he retains the exact wording of Ovid's verse about shells. The line then sits amidst its new companions in the *Vox*, making meaning in a new context, while retaining the capacity to speak in Ovid's voice about Ovidian matters. This middle way would seem to contrast sharply with St. Augustine's vision of a history verified by the earth itself, made manifest in a touchable, weighty form as an object from the distant past. After all, what Gower encounters from the past are words—manipulable, changeable, ephemeral marks on a page, strokes of a pen with no tangible existence in the external world. But of course, for modern readers, St. Augustine's tooth is equally ephemeral, equally dependent on the workings of the imagination. Indeed, the passage of time has transformed the saint's material evidence for the truth of Scripture—evidence explicitly nonliterary—into proof of another kind: a record of an early encounter with a prehistorical fossil, the tooth of a woolly mammoth or dinosaur. At the same time, Augustine's giant has morphed from being a historical reality attested by the words of God and by its own tooth, into a fictional story, an attempt by the human imagination to make sense of an oddity, a freakishly large tooth. The giant becomes a kind of artwork; it exists in that aesthetic zone I described earlier, in which oddities are indulged, variability and instability are allowed to run free, and past and present engage in ahistorical and unattestable dialogue. For St. Augustine, the passage of time has effected a profound change, turning him from a somber theologian focused on proof and evidence, into a kind of scriptural storyteller, who verifies a strange reference in *Genesis* by linking it to a strange object cast up by the sea—and does so by using the tools of literary art to describe an extraordinary creature and to tell a tale.

In light of Augustine's transformation from theologian and historian to artist, at least in this single example, I wonder if it is the fate of all historicisms to be revealed over time as works of poetic or narrative art—as fully engaged with literary form even as they push aside the notion of art

in favor of the broader concepts of textuality and history. Many critics have commented on New Historicists' love for the anecdote, both as a formal device in their own writing and as a metonym for History itself, a part in which the whole is revealed. In other words, these historicists have been exposed as artful critics, hiding their imaginative and literary tendencies from the very beginning behind the mask of the historian and scholar. But the passage of time always transforms the giants of one age into the dinosaurs of another. Who knows what dinosaurs will look like or what they will be named in another five hundred years? A meaningful historicism, however, will not be threatened by accusations of artfulness; a genuine historicism is also a kind of formalism, a craft of reading and writing about texts, and like any such craft, it has conventions and tropes. A medievalism that does not embrace form as the precondition of historical apprehension cannot ever understand the workings of poetic art. To embrace form is necessarily to engage history at its deepest level. To think through what a culture's aesthetic production actually *does*, from the inside and at close range, should be a primary objective. Modes of thought that begin analysis with generalizations or abstractions—that start with an idea and look for a text to fit—cannot substitute for a good long look at those shells or that giant tooth, for a patient submission to the text until it yields its secrets and reveals its forms.

For some, that kind of gaze does lead beyond the text to such abstractions, modes of analysis that suture past to present in ways Gower or Ovid couldn't imagine. I think this turn to theory—cultural studies, psychoanalysis, queer theory, postcolonialism, feminist, for instance—when it emerges from an intense engagement with texts or artifacts, is primarily a good thing. It keeps the discourse of medieval studies alive; it keeps critics hunting for elusive giants' teeth and quarrying for stubborn gold. Indeed, I suspect that in fifty years, when the dust from all of the skirmishes over "historicism and theory," or "historicism and psychoanalysis" has settled, it will become obvious to scholars of the future that these factions are part of a greater intellectual attempt to think historically—that theory is one tool among many deployed by scholars in an effort to grasp the truth of the Middle Ages, and that historicism is only the most overt and direct such tool. In other words, the antagonism between "theory" and historicism is ultimately illusory; both are part of a broader historical phenomenon produced by their mutual origins in the late twentieth century in the West. For now, the best that scholars can do, mired in linear history as they are, is to recognize that critical difference is the lifeblood of scholarship while acknowledging that bending to the yoke of the past is a necessary precondition for grasping its particularity, its precious difference from the present. Such submission protects against the dangers of

a reading practice focused solely on matching text to context—on controlling literary meaning by building an edifice of historical causation or theoretical analysis designed to erase difference. Such edifices substitute the application of generalizations for engagement with particularity; they are easily built but less easily deconstructed. Whatever kind of literary analysis follows historicism, it is my hope that it can resist the lure of such generalizing habits of mind and maintain a sense of the differences between present and past—and indeed, between past and past, and present and present. Historicism invented ways of reading culture that are sensitive to alterity and difference, aware of multiplicity and variation; these modes of reading represent historicism at its very best, its most responsible and careful. If the age of post-historicism has arrived, these are the tools that must travel into the new age of medieval cultural criticism. Should they be left behind, as formalist reading practices were left behind by a previous generation, then whatever replaces historicism will find itself unable to cope with the giant's teeth and the literary shells that cross its path. Perhaps the lesson of St. Augustine, Ovid, and Gower's encounters with jetsam is that any kind of reading that hurries to fit its evidence to its hypothesis—to force difference into preexisting analytic categories—will fail to understand either a historical moment or a literary text. In the simplest terms, then, what will work after historicism is a reading practice that allows for the strange, the exceptional, the weird, and the outsized, and accepts the notion that such oddities are endemic to art.

Notes

1. For examples of the kind of adventurous early historicist work I am describing, see David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity, 1360–1430* (London: Routledge, 1988) (among others); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Medieval English Writing* (London: Routledge, 1993); Aranye (Louise) Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism, and the *Prioress's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 1 (1989): 69–115, as well as her first book, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) and *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press); and Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). These references only include the earlier historicist work of Aers, Beckwith, Fradenburg, Patterson, and Strohm; all five critics have gone on to write much more, including various metacritical reflections on historicism itself.

2. See chapter two in this volume. It will be clear to readers of both essays that mine responds to and was greatly enriched by Cohen's work. I owe him thanks for graciously allowing me to use his example of the giant's tooth in my own meditation on historicism.
3. G.C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower, volume 4: The Latin Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), *Vox Clamantis*, Book II, Prologue, line 78. All translations are my own. Subsequent references will be in the text by book, chapter, and line number.
4. For accounts of the Roman practice of gathering murex shells to extract purple dye, see Wolfgang Born, "Purple in Classical Antiquity," *Ciba Review* 4 (1937): 111–118, esp. 112, and Annette Kok, "A Short History of the Orchil Dyes," *The Lichenologist* 3 (1967): 248–272, esp. 248–250.
5. St. Augustine, *City of God against the pagans*, 7 vols, ed. and trans. George E. McCracken (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1957), 458–461, Book XV, chapter 9; though the translations are my own, I have consulted *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, introd. John O'Meara (London: Pelican Books, 1972; repr. Penguin Books, 1984), 610. Subsequent references are in the text by book and chapter number.
6. For a discussion of "multiple temporalities" in relation to Adorno, see my "Making the Aesthetic Turn: Adorno, the Medieval, and the Future of the Past," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 549–575. See also Fradenburg's essay in this volume, in which she describes how people live in "many times" not a single "age."
7. Book 2, Prologue, lines 77–82. One construction in this passage is clearly problematic, "variis florum," in which a dative or ablative is paired with a genitive, when the meaning is clearly "of various flowers," which should be "variorum florum." The construction is an instance of "antiptosis," the substitution of one case for another. Many thanks to Jill Mann for help with this passage.
8. Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, ed. and trans. J.H. Mozley, revised by G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), *Ars Amatoria*, III, 121–128, my emphasis. Though I have consulted Mozley's translations, the translation given here is my own. Subsequent references to the *Ars Amatoria* will be given in the text by book and line number.
9. Charlton Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary: Lewis and Short* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s. v. "lego," 2, B, 2; and 2, II, 2, b.
10. In order, the definitions from Lewis and Short refer to cultus, a, um, B (#II, B, 2, 2 s. v. colo); cultus, us, m, II.B.2; colo, colui, cultum, II.B.1.
11. Lewis and Short, s. v. "lentus, a, um," I.B.
12. For a discussion of this method, see the opening of D.W. Robertson's *Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

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CHAPTER 4

(DIS)CONTINUITY: A HISTORY OF DREAMING

Aranye Fradenburg

This spread of medievalist (ir-)responses to historicist imperatives, *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, has a rich history—of which, thankfully, it is unusually aware. Its thought is affiliated with the Foucauldian notion of "genealogy"[1]; Deleuze and Guattari's remarks on the political functions of archaism in modernity[2]; Karl Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*[3]; Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*[4]; the Freudian notion of the heritability of unconscious impressions[5]; Lacan's emphasis on the historicity of the drives[6]; de Certeau's *The Writing of History*[7]; in our own field, the work of Paul Strohm, Karma Lochrie, Patricia Ingham, Nicolette Zeeman, Erin Labbie, Michael Uebel, Bruce Holsinger.[8] The editors of this volume, Sylvia Federico and Elizabeth Scala, are themselves authors, respectively, of an impressive genealogical analysis of the recursiveness of the past in subsequent fantasy and enactment (*New Troy*, 2003) and an exemplary practice of reading the presence of absence in episodic and critical signification (*Absent Narratives,* 2002).[9] Their concerns are prominent in the present essay. I hope this essay will display historicism's possibilities. As Scala notes, "getting beyond historicism does not meant getting rid of history so much as it means transcending 'historicism as usual.' "[10]

My critique of discontinuist historicism—of the idea that different periods of time are simply and radically other to one another—is now two decades long.[11] In *Premodern Sexualities* (1996), Carla Freccero and I queeried the alteritism of approaches to the history of sexuality that followed the Foucauldian critique of John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (1980) and reconstituted traditional periodicities by means

of, for example, the opposition between acts and identities.[12] We included in that collection of essays Jon Goldberg's "The History That Will Be," a brilliant argument for the unfinished, and unfinish-able, nature of history; more recently, in *PMLA*, Goldberg and Madhavi Menon assert their championship of "the multiplicity of the past" and "the possibilities of different futures," proposing once again "the difficult task of thinking the *relations* between a past and present, neither of which is self-identical or identical to the other" (my emphasis).[13] The intersubjectivity of subjectivity is in part a temporal matter; we all live in many different times; different times live on in us and in our practices.[14]

Discontuinuist historicism, in the hands of Foucault, but in train also in Marxian, Saussurian, and Levi-Straussian analyses of how different times bear down on a given present, has played a revolutionary role in the history of knowledge, and continues to have revolutionary potential. Foucault was particularly and justly annoyed by histories of "la France," which, for example, began with the Gauls, as though those Celtic tribes belonged and contributed to the development of the French nation rather to pan-European bronze and iron age cultures. This historiography in effect purged la France of multiplicity—the always-already networked worlds of prehistoric Europe, Asia, and Africa—and of the consequent ironies of its future. Periods were mapped onto the narrative of national development so as to permit the supersession of various uncivilized features of the ancient world but also to preserve, like heraldic supporters, the hypermasculine fighting spirits of the Celts and the Franks, whose hatred of overlords signified an early manifestation of the French desire for *liberté*. Small wonder that Foucault was inspired to blow up the tracks linking the stations of the chosen *peuple's* cross.

The nonetheless endless nuance of Foucault's handling of periodicity made little headway across the Atlantic. The New Historicist reception of the Foucauldian notion of *epistème* did nothing to disturb the conventional periodization of English history; in fact it dug the deepest trench between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance since humanism's own fantasmatic futurism,[15] while riotously—so it seemed—rejecting the snoozy amalgams of medieval and Renaissance culture produced by the scholars of a previous generation (Farnham, Tillyard, C.S. Lewis) and putting the signifying screws to archival historians.[16] Founding itself on a constructed difference (as de Certeau would point out), Renaissance New Historicism discarded the Middle Ages, saving itself from the rubbish heap of history by heading straight for the "Early Modern." Goldberg and Menon call instead for a return to an earlier signifier: "If we persist in using the term *Renaissance*... it is to refuse the ideologically inflected *early modern* with its certainty that what matters in the past is its relation

to a predetermined modernity. With Bruno Latour we would say instead that we have never been modern."[17] With Goldberg, Menon, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, all epistemologists for mortal creatures, I would say that insofar as we are committed to the production of knowledge and to the impossibility of finalizing it, our moment demands that we "learn to think the present, the now that we inhabit . . . as irreducibly not-one."[18]

This call is urgent because our moment is characterized by a veritable explosion of archaic signifiers. The United States is in the grip of a simultaneous overvaluation of modernity in the form of technology's promise of emancipation, and disavowal of our hatred of modernity, projected onto Islam. One significant manifestation of this ambivalent, indeed melancholic, relation to modernity is the intense cathexis of the Old Testament by Christian sectarians, audible everywhere on talk radio and in the Holy Land itself, and familiar to medievalists for having accompanied nearly every militant, persecuting turn of events in the European Middle Ages. John Brown, of Dallas, Texas, founded Zion Oil because he was persuaded by God, by certain verses in Genesis and Deuteronomy, and by the evangelist Jim Spillman's "treasure map" of the Jews' ancient tribal territories, to begin drilling on Maanit, an inland plain northeast of Tel Aviv. His geologist, Stephen Pierce, also a born-again Christian, said "there is science to support their faith in this project"; according to *USA Today,* an article of his in the "leading industry publication *Oil and Gas Journal*" notes Maanit's three geological reefs, formations "whose cavities and pockets can be full of oil."[19] At about the same time that Brown gained notoriety, thousands of evangelical Christians marched on the West Bank in celebration of Israel's capture of east Jerusalem in the 1967 war; they were described by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as "fervent Zionists who believe [that the] return [of the Jews] to the biblical land of Israel will speed the Second Coming of Christ."[20] A reasonable humility might have suggested the dangers of trying to speed up God's providence, but never mind; militant theology has for centuries told us otherwise. The past is revivified to force God's hand in the name of a future that will *really* propel the "purified remnant" toward the New Jerusalem.[21] These folks can't wait to bypass death; they want to get it over with, they want the "living beyond" death that delivers the biggest all-time rush of aliveness.[22] Despite accumulating evidence that God does not seem to be assisting in any rapid fashion their efforts to squelch "Islamic radicalism," they're still dying to dig up the past in order to fuel the future. Their solution to the energy crisis? Keep drilling. We are speaking of forwardness, of reserves and archives, of propulsion and drilling technology (historicist and otherwise) as among our most significant defenses against the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

We learn the hard way to be careful what we wish for, yet the dangers of wishing have always been known to us; anxiety marks the approach of *jouissance* as much as its delay. *Angsting* keeps us aware of our non-coincidence with ourselves, our others, our *milieux*. It is related to anxiety in some of the same ways mourning is to melancholia; that is to say, futurism constructs the future along the same lines melancholic historicism constructs the past. Anxiety and the topics of motion and secretion are explored by Freud in his work on dreams and the death drive; they are also explored by ancient and medieval dream treatises and divination. I hope to sketch out a reading process that explores connections as well as disconnections between these different ways of signifying dreaming. When does *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*ID*) forget to value or even mention the terms of premodern dream theory, and when does it remember? When does premodern dream theory speak of desire, when of prophecy? Psychoanalysis breaks with the past by analyzing dream as (secret) wish and wish as the subject's truth; for early dream theory, dreams based on wishes unfortunately do not tell us the truth about whether our wishes will or should come true. An Other messenger altogether is required for that. But this is a bald and indeed inaccurate account both of early dream knowledge and psychoanalysis. As drivers of the dream, "destiny" and "wish" do not so much distinguish early from latter-day dream theory as range semantically around within and between them. Where to, and why, and what do we gain by asking? Dream theory, moreover, is not simply an example of the errant history of the signifier. It is because we dream, imagine, speak and hear, read and write that we never know what time it is. Signifiers are remarkably mutable, but they can also be very persistent—and persistent does not mean timeless. Signifiers enable repetitions, revivals, and resurgences; they mark the spot where things have gone missing, hence where we begin to look for them (again).

After 9/11, controversy broke out as to whether the song *Dust in the Wind* should have been taken off the airways or not; it seemed to call our attention too starkly to—or, despite its scriptural source, to be insufficiently evangelical about—the materiality of that dispersal.[23] The song was subsequently used in a melancholic television commercial urging the purchase of a new Subaru SUV, christened in neighborly fashion the Tribeca, in which the old cars of prospective buyers disintegrate on the street. These transformations of value make sense only insofar as we are creatures who die, who disappear from the world, who lose objects, who lose interest in objects, whose objects uncannily survive us.[24] The heirloom acquires its patina and reserve because it is handed on to the living by the dead. Similarly the cave-painting, Lacan argues, is "an exercise" in "fixing the invisible inhabitant of the cavern."[25] After the onset of

Derrida we felt entitled to scorn the notion that the signifier confers immortality, failing to appreciate Derrida's continuing appreciation of the signifier as nonetheless *not nothing*, but rather an undead something with the function of marking the place of another something, in fact another signifier, that isn't there, but once was, and may be again.[26]

That the signifier is just a mark that, in combination with other signifiers, can mean just about anything, helps to account for our occasional antagonism not only to it but to ages that we believe it ruled. Edgar Zilsel's "The Sociological Roots of Science," originally published in 1942 and republished in 2000 as its "Historic Paper" by *Social Studies of Science*, complains bitterly about the "occult qualities and substantial forms of the scholastics [and] the verbosity of the humanists," which were "of no use" to the "plebeian" "surgeons, . . . surveyors and navigators, . . . artist–engineers and instrument-makers" whose "quantitative rules of thumb" were "the forerunners of the physical laws of modern science."[27] And yet Newton wrote an enormous tome on signs of the Apocalypse, and Tycho Brahe also regarded his stellar discovery as evidence of the Second Coming.[28] Criticizing the use of terms such as "Pre-Reformation," "archaism," and "survival" to describe already-there or "still vital" polychronic elements, de Certeau laments that "theological or exegetical writings have been virtually erased from the works of the great 'savants' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as vestiges of epochs long since over, esteemed as unworthy of interest to a progressive society."[29] Not only blindness and insight but also fanaticism and rationality are more intimate with one another than we might like to think. (This is, of course, Freud's point when he lays out his theory of the relations between primary and secondary process in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.) When Emilie du Châtelet rejected certain aspects of Newtonian physics and calculus in favor of Leibniz, Voltaire in turn criticized her for returning to the age of superstition and magical thinking about mysterious forces at work in nature; and yet exponential power was mathematically demonstrable, for example, the squaring of the speed of light, which of course played a powerful role in the visions of that undoubted lunatic Albert Einstein.[30]

A few years before Einstein, Freud founded the "modern science of psycho-analysis" by publishing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, another vast tome about the reading and production of signs, which argued that every dream attempted to fulfill a wish, usually by disguising it, and that these wishes were derivatives of unconscious forces.[31] His new science, he thought, was proving to be more in sympathy with ancient and popular convictions about the importance of dreams than with the dismissiveness of scientists. The historical (dis)continuities of dream theory were known to him; he noted that for Aristotle "Dreams . . . do *not*

arise from supernatural manifestations but follow the laws of the human spirit . . . Dreams are defined as the mental activity of the sleeper insofar as he is asleep" (my emphasis); further, "it would be a mistake to suppose that the theory of the supernatural origin of dreams is without its supporters in our own days."[32] Neuroscience now links dreaming to parts of the brain connected with the "higher functions" of affect and symbolism, for example, to a network responsible for visuospatial perception and a "system which instigates goal-seeking and an organism's appetitive interactions with the world"—that is to say, the "instinct" of *seeking*.[33]

The drive to seek is, I suggest, one of the drives of history, and it rides the rails of the signifier. Merlin Donald contends that acquiring the cognitive ability to imagine fictions and dramatic scenarios was decisive for our development, specifically for the invention of tools and fire.[34] If desire misses what it (by definition, because it is desire and not satisfaction) cannot have or be, this missing is what brings into being the objects, identities, and ecologies that lend it substantiation. Though substantiations of desire are always off the mark, this inevitable displacement is what keeps desire on the move and indeed gives its vanguard a certain appearance of absurdity: Mickey Mouse, Pucci prints, baseball-playing robots. Going through the endless defiles of lack is what makes desire productive and economic. And the centrality of desire to our activity may be the reason why aesthetic factors have played such a prominent role in the history of technology. In her influential discussion of "drift," the cultural geographer Jane Jacobs argues for the primacy of contingency, creativity, and ornamentation in our economic history:

> Metallurgy . . . began with hammering copper into . . . ornaments "long before 'useful' knives and weapons" were made . . . . Pigments (. . . the first known uses of iron ore), porcelain . . . ceramics, glass and . . . welding all started with luxury or decorative goods. Possibly even wheels were at first frivolities; the most ancient known to us are parts of toys.[35]

Maybe toys and ornaments dominated our early economic life because societal structures privileged elite demands for luxury goods and entertainments, for techniques of living that signified the gap between the slave and the master. Post-industrial capitalism, on the other hand, does not appear *prima facie* to be driven by the wish to embody leisure in ornamental and ludic objects. But plastic was used for children's toys, and computers for games, long before their more "practical" purposes became widespread.[36] Innovation always takes the form of manifest enjoyment of the signifier's powers. And this is one of the best reasons we have to address the current "demoralization" of the humanities discussed by

R.A. Shoaf in this volume.[37] We should honor the role of wackiness and unpredictability in the history of human production, rather than adhering thoughtlessly to utilitarian articles of faith about how we invented wheels simply to haul cereals or bronze just to improve weaponry, or camera-enabled cell phones only to clarify our whereabouts for emergency services. The wisdom of myth has long told us that we acquired fire in the context of intrigue and political rivalry, presumption and punishment. The history of human production does not indicate the priority of planning over contingency, efficiency over waste, the bottom line over human misbehavior. If there is a gap between the wish and its fulfillment—and there is—it's this gap that turns the old into the new, the familiar into the strange. It is the ability to move, to wish for something new, that gives "man" (as Lacan puts it) the astonishing possibility of making "his desires tradeable or salable in the form of products."[38] Still, research on creativity and innovation indicates that paradigm-breaking is *enabled* by a rich context of prior forms of knowledge-production.[39] Somehow, the unpredictable depends on what it supersedes. We cannot bypass having a past.

Unless we discount dreaming as a meaningless function of "primitive" brain activity—a view no longer much in favor among neuroscientists—it always poses for us historical questions. What does my dream tell me about my past, what does it tell me about my place in my time or the role I will play in the future of my people? We address these questions to dreams because we know we do not know ourselves or how time defines and opens us. The many different ways history is indicated as a topic in *The Interpretation of Dreams* converge on the dependence of the living as much on the frustration of satisfaction as on its achievement (the absence marked by the signifier is an elaborate form thereof). When Freud discusses the dream-process, he imagines wish-fulfillment by means of a "fiction" about the life story of primitive organisms: wish fulfillment was originally a "path leading direct from the excitation produced by the need to a complete cathexis of the perception," that is, hallucination. But there is then the history of a diversion, to a "secondary" activity. By means of "voluntary movement"—that is to say, making "use of movement for purposes remembered in advance"—this "second system" takes a "roundabout path . . . made necessary by experience," altering (its grasp of) the external world so as to arrive at a real perception of the object of satisfaction (*ID* 5:565–566).

This little story is full of the physics and metaphysics of motion: the swerve, or *clinamen*; the path as a particular kind of place that invites movement, indicates direction, and materializes choice, including the bad or erring choice. To exercise is always to exercise the will; on a path,

one can always go backward or forward, even without a crossroads. In Freud's ethics of motion, movement is caused by the excitation of a need, becomes voluntary when moved by memory, seeks "real perception" on its roundabout path to satisfaction, but is always capable of regression to "perceptual identity," "a repetition of the perception which was linked with the satisfaction of the need." The organism explores external reality—at least, its resemblance to hallucinated objects of satisfaction—in search of a more reliably satisfying future, by projecting itself forward, thinking "in advance." The acquisition of the power of movement is bound up with the acquisition of a will and the possibility of its exercise; by contrast dreaming is something we can't stop ourselves from doing, we are famously paralyzed while doing it, and often, even repeatedly, we dream *about* being incapable of motion. Yet for the unconscious, dreams are the royal road to motility, hence also the royal road to altering (our perceptions of) the external world.

Now for the topic of enclosure—the pocket, recess, archive. The second system, says Freud, "makes use of movement for purposes remembered in advance": "for the sake of efficiency [it] succeeds in retaining the major part of its cathexes of energy in a state of quiescence and in employing only a small part on displacement" (*ID* 5:599). Freud's much-criticized attachment to economic and energic terminology here means something like this: we like to hoard just as much as we like to dig up buried treasure. Both activities depend on the experience of time. Recall that the classical virtue of Prudence had three aspects, one looking toward the past, one focused on the present, one looking ahead into the future.[40] Efficiency means nothing to a creature with no eye to the future and no intention of preserving the past. The concern of the second system with conservation shows its power of projection, literally and figuratively. Only divagation makes futurity, and pathway, possible; but in a later development, the organism reconstructs itself so as to *protect* the future or *prepare* for it, by pooling its resources. The problem of anxiety will emerge in the course and as a consequence of this history of a reservation, a setting-aside or hiding from view, for example, repression. The history of the organism's acquisition of the ability to live thus depends on its willingness to hold something in reserve even from its own will. Something inside it has to be made absent. This could be thought of as the organic impulse toward greater formal articulation.

For Freud, dreaming is archaizing insofar as it involves primary process. We return to an earlier state of ourselves in dreaming; we return to an earlier stage of life altogether. The body becomes a sac; dreaming is a psychic activity confined to the nursery of the sleeping body; it "guarantees the security of the citadel that must be guarded" (*ID* 5:568).

"What once dominated" is reserved there; "*Dreaming is a piece of infantile mental life that has been superseded*" (emphasis in the original; *ID* 5:567). But for this to happen, the mind must change some places. Dreaming is seeking, which is why it's only safe for us to dream while we can't move. But perhaps when we awaken, we will act on our dreams. Whereas elsewhere his discussions of the pleasure and reality principles tend toward rhetorics of equilibration and regulation, Freud imagines the secondary mechanism in *The Interpretation of Dreams* more as the means by which we acquire a history, arriving at the exercise of *a will to live* in tandem with the *willingness to secrete*—for example, to find ways of organizing the body, like the unconscious, that *don't* require knowledge, at least in the form of conscious deliberation.

In his essay "*Mes Chances*," Derrida suggested that psychoanalysis obtained from metaphysics the concepts it would interrogate in its own "project and operation—notably, the oppositional limits between the psychic and the physical, the inside and the outside, not to mention all those that depend on them."[41] By reworking these oppositional limits, Freud conceives of the lapse, the symptom, the error, as offering "the chance for the truth to reveal itself": "A *lapsus*... gives another truth its chance. The limit between... the unconscious 'I' and the other of consciousness, is perhaps this possibility for my fortune (*mes chances*) to be misfortune (*mal chance*) [or] for my misfortune to be in truth fortunate (*une chance*)" (21). Absent-mindedness distracts consciousness from the organism's rich, secret reserves and leaves marks that can be followed in more than one way. Absenting oneself opens up pathways and therefore the possibility of some kind of return, accidental or purposive, to what has been secreted away; Freud insists we are always trying to find "it" *again*. One displacement leads to another, and could, with a difference, end up near where it began, in or through the holy land. The "chance" thus given to an other truth is both opportunity and accident, "hap" or "happenstance" (e.g., parapraxis) and the possibility of good or bad fortune. Fortune is luck and therefore also accident, but some of us get what we deserve—for example, when we are kind to the god who has come to our door for bread and water, or fail to ask the *seigneur* of the castle what on earth is going on with this procession. "Meeting" is decisive encounter but also chance; opportunity knocks, but we don't always answer the door, because we don't know what's on the other side of it. The secondary mechanism necessitates an open future and the action of the will, while nonetheless secretly working to protect the hidden pool's quiescence from exhaustion and/or unbearable anxiety (panic). In doing so the secondary mechanism marks off places with signs that permit a re-finding, and hence risks discovery or exposure. Whoever is capable of answering the riddle is always

in danger of exposing that which enables living only if held in reserve, for example, by a taboo; hence, Oedipus.

Derrida writes:

> One can fall well or badly, have a lucky or unlucky break—but always by dint of not having foreseen—of not having seen in advance and ahead of oneself. In such a case, when man or the subject falls, the fall affects his upright stance and vertical position by engraving in him the detour of a *clinamen* [deviation], whose effects are sometimes inescapable. (5)

Tragic discourse focuses relentlessly on rising, falling, and missing, that is, on the relations between physical, metaphysical, and ethical motion.[42] What "happens" to us is that which we cannot see in advance and ahead of ourselves, even if what's coming at us comes from behind. As Oedipus shows, a failure of vision is at stake in falling, as also in meeting, which in tragedy is to miss or swerve away from the import of what one has encountered, by treating it as strange rather than as familiar, or vice-versa. For Lacan this locates tragedy in the field of anxiety via the uncanny approach of the *objet a*: falling involves an idea of exteriority, of encountering that which by definition cannot be anticipated (in Freud's discourse, "reality"), because we have allowed it to stand in the place of what is already known; but this exteriority really is "extimate," an intimate otherness, in that the exteriority of the other for whom we exist as pure object is the bearer of the same *jouissance* that also lies secreted within us.[43]

In order for futurity to take place, downward movement is inevitable. To be able to anticipate, plan, project a future or into a future, we have to *not* know for sure, because we have to suspend judgment even while exercising it, knowing that we don't know (everything). Ethics—and ultimately psychoanalysis—emerges from a *willing* of this suspension, a paradoxical knowing of non-knowing. Unfortunately we are too prone to dress up the nodal spot of unintelligibility as an insurmountable obstacle, so we won't notice what's hiding behind it. If, like Oedipus, we answer the riddle, we're doomed; that is, we know ourselves to be "man," that is to say mortal, meaning also that we know our fathers to be mortal and shameful, with everything that entails about our origins and life stories. But we can use our non-knowledge to distract us from the reserves we've put away and tried to forget, as if we had created a something other *inside* us out of the exteriority of protective coloring, camouflage, mimicry. Not only the question of adequating an image, then, but more specifically the principle of deception-as-protection, a repetition of paralysis as purposive captation, and hence figures of impasse and immobility, emerge from the life story that is the story of organic living.

Despite his appreciation of premodern emphasis on the importance of dreams, hitting the wall is more or less the way Freud describes the history of dream-interpretation. He says, "It is difficult to write a history of the scientific study of the problems of dreams because, however valuable that study may have been at a few points, no line of advance in any particular direction can be traced. . . . each new writer examines the same problems afresh and begins again . . . from the beginning" (*ID* 4:5). Is it possible that in the centuries previous to Freud, dream-study was under a compulsion to dead-end? Or to keep restarting? Did one of these timings serve the other, or both together? Later scholars have certainly thought that dream science had a history before Freud: the application of patristic exegetical principles to dream-interpretation in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages; the high-medieval revival of Aristotelian science, which animated medical, ethical, and psychological study of dreaming from twelfth-century scholasticism onward; the vast proliferation of dream-vision literature in the later Middle Ages, possibly the only moment in European literary history when representations of dreams dominated poetic production.[44] Freud's own awareness of the importance of Aristotle and the survival of pre-Aristotelian dream beliefs into modernity makes his figure of impasse seem particularly marked. "According to Aristotle's accurate but bald definition, a dream is thinking that persists (in so far as we are asleep) in the state of sleep" (*ID* 5:550). The extent to which dreaming is thinking is fundamental to the achievement of *The Interpretation of Dreams*—to its history of mentation, its theory of primary and secondary process (the account in chapter VII of the relations between perceptions and memory-traces, still held in high regard by neuroscientists and psychiatrists today), and the very distinction it makes between ancient and modern dream theory on the score of how we think *about* the kind of thinking that is a dream. But poor bald Aristotle.

Freud's non-knowledge of the prominence (and variety) of dream-vision in the later Middle Ages is also culturally (and otherwise) overdetermined. Chaucer's best dream-vision, *The Parliament of Fowls* (*PF*), was written in troubled time. It begins with a reading of the *Somnium Scipionis,* Cicero's "The Dream of Scipio." The narrator interrupts his account of "Affrican's" arrival by his bedside with this enchanting stanza:

> The wery huntere, slepynge in his bed,
> To wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon;
> The juge dremeth how his ples been sped;
> The cartere dremeth how his cart is gon;
> The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;
> The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;
> The lovere met he hath his lady wonne.[45]

The idea that dreams express the desire of the dreamer, says Benson in his note, was so well attested as to be commonplace, citing Claudian, Macrobius, Boccaccio, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Trevisa, and the *Liber Catonianus,* a "widely used medieval schoolbook" (996, n. 99–105). The narrator thus "puts his dream into the medieval medical category of the *somnium animale,* a dream brought on by mental activity or disturbance." Not just mental disturbance is at stake here; the rising prominence of the dream vision in later fourteenth-century England accompanies the rising prominence of parliamentary politics and discourse, and its imbrication in the troubles of Richard II's reign.[46] So let's also remember here Chauntecleer's nightmare, its tragic contextualization, and its reference to the Rising of 1381.[47] Parliamentary divagation, hesitation, betrayal of the hope of reform, rebellion found their way into the poetic dreams of the day. Yet Chaucer's and Langland's dream-visions are also famous for *angsting*—for endlessly signifying, for the failure to act, enact, or act out associated by the Elizabethans with Richard's reign, but that, from another perspective, can look a lot like thinking, analyzing, *working through*.

How might we read the absence of *this* history of dreaming in Freud? At the time of the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud's fascination with classical antiquity and archaeology had reached a certain height. When, after the publication of *ID*, he visited Rome, he reported that medieval Rome, and the Vatican ongoingly, disgusted him, as the fount of the massive "lie of salvation."[48] That lie of salvation, and the age of superstition during which it reigned—what place have they in the history of the interpretation of dreams? Do they have the place of a secretion? I believe so. Freud saw civilization as a progressive renunciation of instinctual satisfactions, a progressive dominance of secondary over primary process.[49] A strange progress, however, that leads to so many "discontents," and remains so vulnerable to the ongoing power of the repressed to return. That Freud gave us the means to read the meaning of "return" need not exempt him from the non-knowing of trauma.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Vienna got very medieval. Long before Freud was forced to flee to London, Christianity was not kind to his career; as a Jew, he was unable to obtain a university appointment. Some fascinating pages in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, on the topic of his "ambitiousness," recall a dream about the political mistreatment of colleagues and his own frustrations, as well as "prophecies of greatness" from his childhood—and then "a series of dreams which are based upon a longing to visit Rome," his early hero-worship of Hannibal ("[t]o my youthful mind Hannibal and Rome symbolized the conflict between the tenacity of Jewry and the organization of the Catholic church," at a time

when "I began to understand for the first time what it meant to belong to an alien race"), and the famous humiliation of his father's assault by "'A Christian who came up to me and with a single blow knocked off my cap into the mud and shouted: "Jew! Get off the pavement!"'" (*ID* 4:192–197).[50] It need not surprise us that Freud was unable to find a clue linking him to the failed struggles of medieval Christians against oppression. It is disturbing for an enlightened Jew to find anything *heimlich* whatsoever in the midst of the Christian "regression." As symptom, however, *ID* nonetheless inscribes the history of commonality between dreaming and disturbance.

A corollary symptom: so many things contemporary medievalists don't want to know much about. On the whole we seal ourselves off from Freud's premodernity, as we still seal ourselves off from the modernity of the Middle Ages. Despite the difference Charles Muscatine made, it remained surprisingly hard for us to sustain focus on the prominence of political disturbance during the Middle Ages, at least until Steven Justice took up the baton.[51] This focus is confusing; we fear Whiggish overidentification with our forebears' struggles for freedom. If, however, the Magna Carta people were just a bunch of brutal warlords who didn't want the monarchy messing with them, freedoms were what they wanted, and their *signifiers* lived on to be taken up again (and again) in later (and different) times. There is also little to console us in a *long* history of the struggle for social justice. What makes such a history most difficult to enjoy is that we don't want to know how fragile our own achievements in democracy might be. But we can't ignore this fragility, this vulnerability to return, in an age that has launched assault after assault on civil liberties in the pursuit of our new "crusade." A genealogical understanding of our attempts to explore the unknown—our history of seeking, which includes seeking better lives—requires that we renegotiate these splits.

What does Freud know, however unknowingly, about the silent history of broken dreams of freedom from oppression, even dreams dreamt by the ancestors of his own oppressors? On the face of it, medieval dream interpretation figures in Freud's imagination as dead-end or endless return because he is looking for a history of the (post)Enlightenment *scientific* study of dreams—for a way of reading dreams that will not be just another layer of protective coloration. Certainly many medieval exegetes re-routed the Horatian *dulce et utile* into the figure of the kernel and the shell—the kernel of spiritual meaning, or truth, hidden from blind eyes inside the shell of the literal meaning, or fiction. An exegetical discourse that privileges secrets, occultation, is a specially intense *divertissement*, a kind of dream outside the dream. Medieval dream-interpretation, by proliferating different types of dreams at the

same time as it acknowledges the extreme difficulty of figuring out to which category a dream belongs, shares in the delectation of occult meaning characteristic of medieval textual exegesis. In a certain way, Freud's readings privilege occultation also, on the level of living as well as dreaming; do they also risk an exposure, by linking the dream exclusively to wishing and willing, and analyzing dream signification as itself a form of seeking? Freud hopes so.

Chaucer wrote in the *milieu* of court culture, under the aegis of a sovereign who acquired books on geomancy and astrology. He was, according to Richard Kieckhefer, the first medieval English poet to attempt circumlocutory astrological timetellings, and the best acquainted with science, technology, and natural magic; one need only recall his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, or *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*.[52] The *Canterbury Tales* does not make it to the Apocalypse; its end refuses to hurry death. Life is something we mortals just have to put up with; we cannot short-circuit the endless work (and discomfort) of learning, of trying and failing, rising and falling, under the *sign* of death and judgment. The illegibility of Chaucerian dreams, like the impossibility of coming full stop, alerts us to the uncanniness of living. Pertelote is wrong; Chauntecleer is important enough to dream a prophetic dream about his potentially tragic demise. He is not just a barnyard animal, if that means that animals only dream about their bodily disturbances. But in another way she is right: he is also just a rooster who has to learn lessons about flattery and the desire to out-sing his father. What is the "position," as Foucault would put it, of this "social subject," whose human keepers shout like rebels when trying to save his life and the lives sustained by his inseminations? It is the position of the creature, common to us all: fragile, endangered, born with an appetite for satisfactions impossible to secure; important to himself and to some others, but also prey—nothing but an object in the eyes of the hungry. In *The Parliament of Fowls*, judges dream of pleas and lovers of lovers; the rest of *PF* gives the virtual tautology of this formulation time to think again and again, in a process analogous to the reformulations of formula that mark the structure of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Which lovers? What if my wishes come into conflict with each other? Do my dreams (mean that I) matter, or not, or (somehow) both? Why am I so frightened, if a dream (in Middle English) is a joy?

Chaucer's narrators are famously perplexed and dissatisfied by their dreams; they are always after "tidings"—but what, precisely, do they learn? They are like the medieval dream interpreters of Freud's description: "no line of advance in any particular direction can be traced . . . [with each new poem he] examines the problems afresh and begins again . . . from the beginning" (vol. 4, 5). But in Chaucer ambiguity is the sign of the

unfinishedness of desire, and therefore of history; "Affrycan" returns to help us with "common profit," but the problem posed by our desire with respect to common profit, the reason this most reasonable of notions is forever in the making yet unachieved, that is, our *antipathy* to satisfaction, is repeated on the level of our (non)knowledge.[53] In Chaucer as in Freud, the occult nature or incomplete legibility of the dream is the sign of the limits of (human) knowledge, its unfinished temporality, our inability to gain certainty about the future. But Chaucer foregrounds the very resistance to satisfaction Freud had so much trouble with in *The Interpretation of* Dreams—what about nightmares, what about anxiety dreams? Dreams that are, as one scholastic philosopher put it, "as though the mind has been gravely struck and beaten by the deeply imprinted vestiges of pain, revive in sleep images of a past consternation"?[54] Freud returned to this topic over and over again in *ID*, despite his breezy assertion that "there is no great difficulty in meeting . . . apparently conclusive objections" that "pain and unpleasure are more common in dreams than pleasure." He must turn to a secretion, to the "contrast between the *manifest* and the *latent* content of dreams," to the kernel in the shell, to justify himself (*ID* 4:134–135). But the traumatic repetition of unpleasure was not to remain a mere handmaiden to the fulfillment of wishes. Freud later found his means to address it through the topics of mourning, the superego, and the death drive. He was assisted by the grisly spectacle of trench warfare: advances in projectile technology (gas, artillery) leading only to a near-complete inhibition of motion.

Most antique and medieval dream-interpretation occupied itself with problems of divination. The dream is the tele-path across which the other scene, the undead zone that lies beyond the realm of the senses, sends us messages, usually but not always in response to our appeals. For the most part it is Freud's mission to re-place this other scene within the psyche by the things we already know, but would rather not know, and hence *un*-know, about ourselves, our others, and external reality. But in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, the discourses that taught the "techniques of living," like Artemidorus's *Oneirocriticon*, use dreams to promote an inner vigilance with eyes and ears still open to—still projected toward—external reality, as another means of averting tragedy and misfortune. The arts of living link the interpretation of an interior form of "life," the awakening of the interior that is a dream, to the question of one's fortune and one's position in the (after)world. Psychic interiority is cultivated as prosthesis and miniaturization of exteriority; the kind of reality a dream has is the same as the kind of reality we're in when we're awake. This is why dreams have relevance to ethics. So, not fully a projection in Freud's sense. Freud will have to redo this circuitry.

In late Antiquity, when the early Church was waging war against paganism, there abounded polemics against divination of all kinds and dream-interpretation in particular. Origen nonetheless understood that divination was consolatory in function and sprang from man's insatiable desire to know the future, also instrumental in our original Fall.[55] The arts of divination sought to supplement the dependence of human foresight on the internal activities of memory and judgment. Those great communicators, the farsighted angels, could inspire images "of things which it is useful to know, for this is a gift of God."[56] The gift of angelic foresight promises an intended magnification of life, a chosen cast into the future. Demonic dreams, on the other hand, are often lies; they make us fall again by making us not ourselves, persuading men "in marvelous and unseen ways, . . . mingling themselves with men's thoughts."[57] Demonic dreams intrude something other into our minds. The demonic attempt to frustrate divine and human purposes is the scary reverse of angelic messengering, foresight, and the gift of divine knowledge, knowledge taking the form of "images of unknown places and likenesses of men both living and dead."[58]

Before "science," Freud writes in his first chapter ("On the Scientific Literature Dealing with the Problem of Dreams"), people dreamed about dreams: "The pre-scientific view of dreams adopted by the peoples of antiquity was certainly in complete harmony with their view of the universe in general, which led them to project into the external world as though they were realities things which in fact enjoyed reality only within their own minds" (*ID* 4:4). Freud does not here refer to the many forms of "fate neurosis"—our tendency to (re)create the fate that will later seem to surprise us. Doesn't such an unconsciously (self-)generated fate pose serious problems for the confidence with which he here deploys the categories of "external world" and "reality . . . within one's own mind"? The tendency to try to substantiate hallucination is regarded as a primitive stage of mental activity. But note that it nonetheless either constitutes or follows the secreting of the organism's reserves, thus indicating that its role in history might be creative or productive rather than simply lacking in reality. Because substantiation involves the attempt to re-find the desired object in the external world, it must, as part of the "secondary mechanism," indicate the topic of motion. Freud obliges us, once again, with the concept of projection as displacement, specifically as forward cast or throw, which is also, in his little history of the seeking organism, the *beginning* of the search for reality. I am reminded again of Winnicott's contention that the child's magical feeling of omnipotence during play—whereby, with the connivance of the caregiver, a dishtowel turns into a wimple, a spatula into a sword—is the basis for a creative relation *to* reality, not its opposite or adversary.[59]

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, to throw is to will is to remember with an eye to the future. It is, though it is also not, to ask the gods about how the world works; throwing is one of the most important physical analogues to questioning the oracle and interpreting dreams—casting lots, throwing dice, little children who throw objects into forbidden zones and find themselves, usually to their detriment, in another scene, peopled by murderous projections. Following trails of signifiers wherever they go—"clues"—is also in this register of forward motion, as in *The Book of the Duchess*, when Chaucer's dreaming alter ego gets lost following the enchanting puppy into the secret place in the forest where he meets the mysterious Man in Black, whose words he seems to fail to understand until the very end of the poem.

Freud adds that that the premoderns who dreamed of dreaming "took into account the principal impression produced upon the waking mind in the morning by what is left of a dream in the memory: an impression of something alien, arising from another world and contrasting with the remaining contents of the mind" (*ID* 4:4). This "*impression* of something alien" is a *sign*; "dreams had an important purpose, which was as a rule to foretell the future" (*ID* 4:2). The impression of something alien is therefore a sign indicating the place where something is withdrawn, held secret—an inverted territorial marker. This is not news; I am merely trying to emphasize that "the impression of something alien" is a diversion, the kind of uncanny sign that sends Wile E. Coyote in the direction of the abyss rather than the Road Runner. Wile E.'s legendary resurrectability appears from this perspective to be the acknowledgment that wrong turns and unforeseen falling unfortunately constitute the errant path of life. The promise that the *lapsus* reveals another truth functions on the level of mental activity *about* dreams as analogue to the dependence of the organism's survival on taking its chances. That is to say, the *lapsus* becomes the shifting ground of truth because it makes us *think* about the nature and origins of the alien impressions in our minds; it instantiates effort, e-motion, judgment, just as the primitive organism's survival depends upon its moving and finding in reality an object it can refer to and compare with its hallucinatory objects of satisfaction. This leaves Freud making history by thinking about Aristotle's point that dreaming is how we think while we are sleeping.

The impression of important "purpose," of "this means you," so equivocally treated in *The Nun's Priest's Tale,* also marks the relations between projection, forecasting, chance-taking, and *not*-knowing. Finding that what one has projected outward derives from within oneself produces the feeling of a short-circuit, a cutting-short of the thread of life. Gurney, Myers, and Podmore note that most dreams with claims to telepathic status

concern the death of a loved one, the kind of dream that Freud associates with *Oedipus* and finds inside Sophocles' play in the inverted form of the kind of dreams Jocasta dismisses, prophylactically, that feature sleeping with one's mother.[60] The discussion of *Oedipus* emerges in the course of Freud's discussion of "typical dreams" of "the death of some loved relative" (*ID* 4:248ff.). Freud also associates this kind of dream with telepathy: his own dream vision of his son, apparently wounded, climbing onto a basket standing beside a cupboard in what looks like a storeroom, is interpreted as impelled by "the envy which is felt for the young by those who have grown old" (*ID* 5:560). The craving of the dead for the life of the living, the child destined to be the end of the father—these are projected forms of the punishment–anxieties of those who wish death upon their loved ones. If we wish death upon our loved ones, it is not least because we know they will abandon us, for example, when we want what they want, or refuse to wait our turn, when they refuse to share, owing to the humiliating limitations of their own creatureliness, which means also our own. What was hidden from us in the past is what we need to know about our future: our limits. So we dream: the trajectory created by answering projections is the tele-path across which messages (inscrutable ones) will be delivered, fortunes will be divined, and the dead and the living will speak to one another about the reality that will be.[61] The signifiers of the past do speak to us, but with a different kind of inscrutability.

The destruction of Oedipus's "envied fortune" is, Freud says, "a legend whose profound and universal power to move can only be understood if the hypothesis I have put forward in regard to the psychology of children has an equally universal validity" (*ID* 4:261). We can channel the import of this "legend that has come down to us from classical antiquity" because we already know all about it, though in secret; Oedipus's "destiny moves us only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (*ID* 4:262). This will mean that the first time we succeed in substantiating an object of desire in reality, it will necessarily have the quality of estranged intimacy characteristic of the projective mental activity that can be imagined as preceding it. The effect of fate emerges under the same conditions as chance. The notion that Oedipus's fortunes fall because of envy likewise invokes the tele-path of projection and life's need to protect its reserves and secrets from the exposure that would put too much of it at once on that path.

It's therefore perhaps *not* a chance occurrence that at the point of Oedipus and the destruction of his "envied fortune" Freud seeks and

finds a significant *continuity* between ancient and modern dreaming, in a form that closely resembles the trajectory of all organic life, of everything inserted into the chain of generation or reproduction. But, on the level of reading Freud, the larger import of the methods and insights developed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is not the tragedy but rather the survival or even the archeology of interpretation, of unwrapping the dream from the protective coating of the dream-interpretations of the dead. Perhaps it's the displacement to the level of historical method, of *tekhné*, that protects Freudian interpretation from the revenge of the superseded authorities diminished and demystified by his opening discussion of "The Scientific Literature Dealing with the Problems of Dreams." It will be in this subsequent discussion of Oedipus that the ancients are restored to full power, by means of the analysis that uncovers the fact of their continued life despite the differences that separate the "prescientific" from the "scientific": "*it is the fate of all of us*." The very psychoanalytic concept of the archaic past forever preserved by memory–inscription can thus be imagined as apotropaic with respect to the presumptions of scientific method, that is, its disrespect of the bald old gods who appeared in the dreams of our ancestors mumbling unsatisfying answers to the questions we were foolhardy enough to ask.

Freud notes that Oedipus is "what is known as a tragedy of destiny," but says there are lots of tragedies of destiny that leave us cold. He insists that the "effect" of *Oedipus* "does not lie in the contrast between destiny and human will, but is to be looked for in the particular nature of the material on which that contrast is exemplified" (*ID* 4:262). The bonds between the topic of the vicissitudes of the will and Oedipal material seem even tighter to me than this. The brilliance of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which is both dream-handbook and poetics of tragedy, emerges for me most clearly in the biologistic mythmaking also so powerful in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and so nervous-making in the subsequent history of Freudian transmission and reception. It is in the struggle of organic life to *have* a history that Freud locates the dangerous crisscrossing of the topic of destiny (hence inscrutability, helplessness, chance, and inescapability) and desire for what Lacan would call the extimate object.

Genealogy tracks the capture of life by the signifier. Foucault's critiques of psychoanalysis are well known—better known than his brilliant uses of the concepts of repression and the unconscious—but dreaming matters to him too in the *History of Sexuality*. The beginning of Volume III, *The Care of the Self*, is a reading of Artemidorus's dream treatise, also noted by Freud as a highly influential but superseded authority.[62] Foucault takes the risk of bypassing Freudian theory by means of explicit imitation of the ancients; the old authorities return in the techniques of self-care and

self-shattering we might now want to experiment with for the sake of bodies, pleasures and pains, not as a reserve of archaic power both continuous and discontinuous with our own. Depersonification of ancient authorities into "techniques of living," re-scattering regimes of sexuality into bodies and pleasures, function apotropaically for Foucault in relation to the reserved Freudian subject. But the dependence of practices of living on taking risks with identity, repose, and quiescence, turns out to be an active tele-path between Freud and Foucault. What interests Foucault in Artemidorus could be summed up by the term "Fortune": Artemidorus's treatise concerns what dreams can tell individuals about their fortunes. Foucault calls this a concern for the "principle of 'economic adequation' " (32), which I link to the Freudian concept of the organism's secretion of life in order to live. Foucault writes that

> The guiding thread of Artemidorus's interpretation, insofar as it is concerned with the predictive values of sexual dreams, implies the breaking down and ordering of such dreams into elements (personages or acts) that are, by nature, social elements; and that it indicates a certain way of qualifying sexual acts in terms of the manner in which the dreaming subject maintains, as the subject of the dreamed-of act, his position as a social subject. (33)

A certain inversion is suggested here: sexual acts in dreams symbolize social matters, not vice versa as in Freud. But then it's not really so much that sexual acts in dreams *symbolize* the individual's relation to his fortunes as that they are significant elements in the individual's manner of living out that relation. Foucault turns out to be good at dreaming Freud, insofar as he senses the tight bond in Freudian theory between the explanatory power of sexual desire and Freud's wish to be able to explain, without having to die first, the way life works.

This includes a wish for his survival. I have already noted the themes of "ambitiousness" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the obstacles posed to Freud's locomotion by anti-Semitism. To be clear: *The Interpretation of Dreams* does *not* focus exclusively on the sexual content, latent or manifest, of dreams. As noted earlier, *ID* also focuses on the Freudian position as social subject—that is to say, on aggression. *The Interpretation of Dreams* was Freud's big chance, the cast or throw on which his professional reputation would depend, and it has embedded within it a clue or trail of dreams concerned with his uncertain fortune, perhaps most famously the dream of Irma's injection. Both the death-wish and the death-drive, aspects of Freudian theory circumvented by Foucault in his revival of the ancients, indicate precisely the position of the dreamer as social subject, embedded in families and

hierarchies of rank, power, and access to resources, in Freud's case his position as a Jew, his belonging to a "denomination" threatened professionally and otherwise by the disordered climate of the disintegrating Hapsburg Empire, a denomination also central to the shame he felt about his father's passivity in the face of anti-Semitic attack, to the resolution of that shame, and to his attempt to relocate our understanding of politics, or "common profit," in the psyche. Freud is still commonly misunderstood to confine desire to the individual subject, despite his lifelong study of the interdependence of organism and environment. But he was himself confined, for example, to a career in medicine rather than neuroscience. On techniques for the aversion of suffering, he writes: "one can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated . . . But whoever, in desperate defiance, sets out upon this path to happiness will as a rule attain nothing. Reality is too strong for him."[63] Sublimation works better: "an artist's joy in creating, in giving his phantasies body, or a scientist's in solving problems or discovering truths"; but even "this method cannot give complete protection from suffering. It creates no impenetrable armour against the arrows of fortune."[64] Listening to the other, in the signifying forms of parliamentary and psychological discourse, is reality-testing for the sake of life and death, in *fin de siêcle* Vienna as in Ricardian London.

From *The Interpretation of Dreams:*

> Dream 2 . . . (I lost my father in the year 1896): —
>
> *After his death my father has played a part in the political life of the Magyars, and has united them into a political whole*; and here I see, indistinctly, a little picture: *a number of men, as though in the Reichstag; a man is standing on one or two chairs; there are others round about him. I remember that on his death-bed he looked so like Garibaldi, and I am glad that this promise has really come true.*
>
> [This] . . . was dreamed at the time when the Hungarians were in a state of anarchy, owing to Parliamentary *obstruction* . . . (Emphasis in the original.)

Freud goes on to say:

> my dream-picture . . . is the reproduction of a wood-cut representing Maria Theresa in the Reichstag of Pressburg— the famous scene of *Moriamur pro rege nostro.* Like Maria Theresa, my father, in my dream, is surrounded by the multitude; but he is standing on one or two chairs (*Stühlen*), and is thus, like a *Stuhlrichter* (presiding judge). (He has *united* them; here the intermediary is the phrase: "We shall need no *judge*.") Those of us who stood about my father's death-bed did actually notice that he looked very

> like Garibaldi. . . . "And behind him, in unsubstantial (radiance), lay that which subdues us all — the common fate."
>
> The most agonising of [my father's] afflictions had been a complete paralysis of the intestines (*obstruction*) during the last few weeks of his life. All sorts of disrespectful thoughts associate themselves with this. One of my contemporaries . . . once told me, derisively, of the distress of a relative whose father had died in the street, and had been brought home, when it appeared, upon undressing the corpse, that at the moment of death, or *post-mortem*, an evacuation of the bowels (*Stuhlentleerung*) had taken place. The daughter was deeply distressed by this circumstance . . . We have now penetrated to the wish that is embodied in this dream. To stand after one's death before one's children great and undefiled: who would not wish that? (*ID* 5:427–429)

When life lets go, it lets go of whatever it has accumulated. Freud uses this dream to illustrate purposive absurdity in the dream-work; but how "absurd" really is this dream that we will contravene the common fate? The deathlessness of repose will figure again in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, when the tragic principle of *fugienda vita*, refusal of life, lives and moves on in the figure of the undead and undying death *drive*, where the drive requires reserves of energy solely in order to main its paradoxical movement toward inanimacy.[65]

At its best, the mode of parliamentary discourse is to *work through*. As the end of *The Parliament of Fowls* suggests, working through takes time. One has to listen to a lot of shit. I am, in part, referencing the work of mourning; as Kristeva puts it, only the Freudian insight invites us to return to our "origins" *in order to* move beyond them.[66] In the argument that breaks out among the birds in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the plebeian duck responds to the turtledove's paean to undying love with the following:

> "Wel bourded," quod the doke, "by myn hat!"
> That men shulde loven alwey causeles!
> Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?

This earns the duck the utter contempt of the aristocratic birds:

> "Now fy, cherl!" quod the gentil tercelet,
> Out of the donghil cam that word ful right!

It's the filthy signifier—the "obstruction"—that points out to us the pretensions of our own unrecognized fixations and grandiose memorials and monuments.[67] Not everyone sees things the same way; people get in each

other's way all the time. Social tensions cannot be resolved absolutely, because of our limitations as creatures; this is one reason why we dream of apocalypse, of living beyond, of living beyond judgment. How is it that our "social position," our good or bad fortune, signifies in relation to the law of death? Is it not the very mode of that relation? Are we not fortunate to die in bed surrounded by our loved ones, taught by the most expensive wisdom available how to let go of our shit? When I buried my father in Omaha in 2005, my companions at the end were, in fact, the gravediggers.

But I am not speaking only of mourning here; I am again also speaking of anxiety, whose importance to dreaming Chaucer knew perhaps better than Freud, as Geoffrey's paralysis in *PF* before the ambiguously signed portal to the future of democracy suggests. When anxiety overwhelms us, panic is the result: paralysis, at one extreme, or at the other, acting out. We keep ourselves from panic by thinking, which Freud calls "trial action," that is to say, by imagining alternative futures, and then by trying to create them, in part but necessarily through the endlessly frustrating process of listening and speaking to each other. *Angsting* is the refusal of paralysis and acting-out; it is also the time of counsel, of *The Tale of Melibee.* The hypervaluation of procedure, of process, in parliamentary discourse is a sign that its most important function *is* to take time; it is frustrating because frustration, and its tolerance, is what it *does*; it delays, puts off, is happy to give a lady eagle a year to think it over, *good idea* Nature!—meaning that waiting to see is part of the lives of creatures, and if we can't do it, we start smashing things up. Not that things never need to be smashed up; in the paralytic form that is the analogue to melancholy, political *angsting* deserves no idealization. As Chaucer knew, and as psychoanalysis knows, the work is to keep moving, but also to keep living, which entails a certain humility, meaning endlessly undoing the fantasy that if we go *really* fast we will be able (or even want) to bypass obstruction forever. Geoffrey Hartman knew this about poetry too: its work is to push back the poles of human life, to create middles and muddles.[68] So, project all you want, but if you misrecognize your projections, you will never be able to tolerate living—the living that gives us knowledge about the past as real as that found in the archives. I would therefore affirm Birkholz's call for premodern biography, and emphatically answer in the negative George Edmondson's fine question as to whether "removing Chaucer from the position of (literal) bare life . . . [is] really the best way to honor the claim his humanity lays upon us."[69] Just as oil is the secretion that lies beneath our nation's current militant projections, the archive of premodernity continues to underlie our propulsion out of the putatively uncritical historiographies of the past. Polychronicity is

as sensible a proposal as is alternative energy, but as yet we are still struggling to de-territorialize the place of the past in our bio-history. We will not be able to work through the past until we understand that, and why, we still dream it.

Notes

1. In *The Order of Things* (Random House/Vintage, 1970/1973) Foucault writes that "By unveiling the unconscious as their most fundamental object, the human sciences showed that there was always something still to be thought in what had already been thought on a manifest level; by revealing the law of time as the external boundary of the human sciences, History shows that everything that has been thought will be thought again by a thought that does not yet exist" (372). Foucault's genealogical analysis of our thinking and thinking again about sexuality is his best-known work: *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990); *Volume II: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon, 1990); and *III: The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1988), all trans. Robert Hurley. *The Care of the Self* is hereinafter cited in the text.
2. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking, 1977).
3. On the recurrence of "great historic facts and personages . . . 'once as tragedy, and again as farce,'" see Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2006), 3.
4. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Routledge, 1983).
5. See Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudilliere, *History Beyond Trauma*, trans. Susan Fairfield (New York: Other Press, 2004), for an exceptionally fine treatment of this subject; also Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
6. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter; ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 209.
7. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
8. Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncracies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Patricia Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press,

2006); Erin Felicia Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

9. Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002).
10. See chapter eight in this volume.
11. Two essays, "The Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy" [*Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 8 (1986): 31–58] and "Criticism, Anti-Semitism and the Prioress's Tale" [*Exemplaria* 1 (1989): 69–115], best represent my early work on this topic; the former's emphasis on the future as an important historicist topic, and its treatment of modernity as an imaginative construction, are especially relevant to the present essay. For an extended treatment of various historicist impasses, see "Psychoanalysis and Historicism," in *Sacrifice Your Love: Chaucer, Historicism, Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), chapter two, 43–78.
12. See the Preface and "Introduction: Caxton, 6, and the Pleasures of History" to *Premodern Sexualities* [ed. Louise O. Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996)], vii ff.; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
13. Jonathan Goldberg, "The History that Will Be," in *Premodern Sexualities,* 1–22; Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, "Queering History," *PMLA* 120 (2005): 1608–1617, at 1609–1610].
14. Foucault writes: "since [the human being]...speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him...can his history ever be anything but the inextricable nexus of different times, which are foreign to him and heterogeneous in respect of one another?" *The Order of Things*, 368–369.
15. Futurism, Lee Edelman argues, is one of our most lethal ideological fantasies; see *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
16. Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956); E.M. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943); C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1963).
17. Goldberg and Menon, "Queering History," 1610.
18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Postcolonial theory and medieval studies are now engaged in a rich dialogue about "modernity"; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), is probably the most authoritative collection of essays on this topic.
19. *USA Today*, May 18, 2005.

20. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* October 24, 2005.
21. Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millenial Beliefs through the Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 52–53, 77.
22. Laurence Rickels, *The Case of California* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 73.
23. See www.tribe.net for a list of songs banned after 9/11.
24. See Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
25. Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 140.
26. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, on the spectral presence of significant absences (trans. Peggy Kamuf; New York: Routledge, 1994).
27. *Sociological Studies of Science* 30 (2000): 935–949, at 941–942.
28. Weber, *Apocalypses*, 89, 96–98.
29. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 31.
30. See *Nova*, "Einstein's Big Idea," October 11, 2005, Season 32, Episode 13.
31. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, (*ID*) trans. James Strachey, vols 4 and 5 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953/1958).
32. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 2, citing Aristotle, *De divinatione per somnum,* II [trans. W.S. Hett, *On the Soul* (London/New York: Loeb Classical Library, 1935), 377] and *De somnis*, III, in Hett, *On the Soul,* 365; on contemporary belief in supernatural origins, vol. 4, p. 4. Hereinafter cited in the text.
33. Mark Solms is probably the best-known neuropsychoanalyst working today on affiliations between Freudian dream theory and contemporary neuroscience; on seeking and dreaming, see Mark Solms and J. Allan Hobson, "Freud Returns," *Scientific American Mind* 290 (2004): 82–88; more generally Mark Solms, *The Neuro-psychology of Dreams: A Clinico-Anatomical Study* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Eribaum, 1997).
34. Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
35. Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 221–222.
36. Ibid.
37. See chapter nine in this volume.
38. Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 293.
39. See Nancy Andreasen, *The Creative Brain: The Science of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 109–114, on the social roots of creativity.
40. Erwin Panofsky, "Titian's Allegory of Prudence: A Postscript," in *Meaning and the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (New York: Doubleday, 1955).
41. Jacques Derrida, "My Chances/Mes Chances: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies," in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, H., ed. Joseph Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 4–31, at 27. Hereinafter cited in the

text. A fine discussion of falling in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* is John M. Fyler, "Irony and the Age of Gold in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Speculum* 52 (1977), 314–328.

42. On history and tragedy, see also L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, "Group Time: Catastrophe, Survival, Periodicity," in *Time and the Literary*, ed. Karen Newman, Jay Clayton, and Marianne Hirsch for the English Institute (New York: Routledge, 2002), 211–238.
43. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book X: Anxiety*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (Eastbourne: Antony Rowe, 2002–), chapter one, 3, on the "relation between essential anxiety and the desire of the Other"; his formulation of movement, stopping, inhibition in relation to anxiety is "what is going to allow us to come down to earth," chapter one, 7. On anxiety and the *unheimlichkeit*, see chapter four, 4–6. Lacan links anxiety to the "relationship with the libidinal reserve, with the something which is not projected," at chapter four, 2–3.
44. Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chapter five, 83–122, on "Aristotle and the Late-Medieval Dream." Important arguments for the prominence of the dream-vision genre in the high and later Middle Ages are A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy and Literary* Form (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); and *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2000); Susan Shibanoff, *Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Re-reading the Dream Trio* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).
45. Ll. 99–105. All citations to Chaucer's poetry are from Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), third edn; cited in the text.
46. Gwilym Dodd, "Changing Perspectives: Parliament, Poetry, and the 'Civil Service' under Richard II and Henry IV," *Parliamentary History* 25 (2006): 299–322, provides admirable historical context for *The Parliament of Fowls*, though his reading of the poem, in my view, falls prey to a disgust that I do not think is Chaucer's.
47. See Lacan, *Anxiety*, chapter one, 9, on the etymology of e-motion and/or "riot."
48. Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-analysis, Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887–1902*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey; ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 335–336.
49. Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 49. See also pp. 91–92 on "the sense of guilt" as "the most important problem in the development of civilization," guilt being "at bottom nothing else but a topographical variety of anxiety."
50. See Carl E. Schorske, *Politics and Patricide in Freud's* Interpretation of Dreams, *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 2 (1974): 40–60; Ronald R. Thomas,

Dreams of Authority: Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

51. Charles Muscatine, *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972); Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
52. Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100.
53. See chapter one in this volume for a discussion of (discontinuist) historicism's own version of the impossibility of satisfaction.
54. Calcidius, *Timaeus a Clacidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, ed. J.H. Waszink, Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi: Plato Latinus (London: Warburg Institute, and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), chapter 256; cited by Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* 30.
55. Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1900), 30, citing Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1953), 35.
56. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 48, citing St. Augustine, *De Genesi at litteram libri duodecim*, ed. Iosephus Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, XXVIII, section 3, part 1 (Prague and Vienna: F. Temsky, and Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1894), XII.13.18, 196. See also Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 161–162.
57. St. Augustine, *The Divination of Demons* 3, 5, trans. R.W. Brown, in R.J. Deferrari, ed., *St. Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects* (Washington, 1955), 426, 430; cited by Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 148. See also Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 49.
58. Calcidius, *Timaeus*, chapter 251; "imagines ignotorum locorum simulacraque hominum tam uiuentium quam mortuorum"; cited by Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* 25.
59. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 47.
60. Edmund Gurney, Frederic W.H. Myers, and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Trubner, for Rooms for the Society of Psychical Research, 1886), 600.
61. See Rickels, *The Case of California*, on the "processes of representation in the work of mourning which have ever extended living to the dead" (14).
62. Artemidorus is noted in Freud's *ID* 4:4; Foucault devotes Part I of *The Care of the Self*, "Dreaming of One's Pleasures," to Artemidorus's treatise (4–36).
63. Freud, *Civilization*, 30.
64. Ibid., 28–29.
65. On *fugienda vita*, see H. Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14.
66. Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 4.

67. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen discusses our love of monuments in his essay for this volume, "Time Out of Memory."
68. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature," in Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 337–355.
69. See chapters six and seven in this volume.

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CHAPTER 5

THE NEGATIVE EROTICS OF MEDIEVALISM

Thomas Prendergast and Stephanie Trigg

What is the difference between medieval studies and medievalism studies?[1] One of the easiest answers to this question makes a distinction between the Middle Ages as a finite historical period, and those cultural, political, and social forms that, coming after that period, seem to allude to it in some way. According to this model, the medieval period functions as the primary text, where all expressions of medievalism constitute a kind of secondary commentary on that period, necessarily belated, derivative, and attenuated by historical distance. Our scholarly training teaches us how to tell these things apart; and how to privilege the former, so that when the discipline of medievalism studies emerged, in the 1970s, it was seen by many as hopelessly tertiary: a weak discipline that studied the weak reflections of the Middle Ages.

This separation between medieval studies and its specular other should make it easy to tell the difference between the medieval and the medievalistic: one is the original, and one is copy, imitation, revival, dream, or parody. But even leaving aside, for the moment, the epistemological complexity of the relationship between primary and secondary text, and the breadth of discursive and ideological possibilities at work in the latter, we know that "medieval" is little more than a convenient, though hardly neutral, short-hand designation for a diverse range of cultural, social, and economic conditions that span over a thousand years. We also know that the conceptual relationship between the medieval and modern is a differential one that can shift and change according to the will of those who invoke it. To compound the difficulties, we are also increasingly aware that the medieval can usefully describe historical periods and movements on non-European continents. And finally, once we move into the realm

of contemporary culture, we know that the medieval can be deployed to carry all kinds of ideological freight that have little to do with European history, and much more with binary oppositions, and "misrecognitions," in Bruce Holsinger's phrase, between religious and political systems.[2]

Other questions come thick and fast. Does medievalism refer to a cultural practice, or a method of scholarly analysis? And if it refers to both, as we may easily argue, how can we tell the difference? And does it matter? Umberto Eco didn't seem to think so. His famous taxonomy of the ten ways we "dream" the Middle Ages moves easily between philology, nationalism, film, fiction, and other forms of popular culture, taking its examples from a range of genres and forms.[3] Now it is certainly possible to argue—and we take this to be one of Eco's points—that scholarship of the medieval, scholarship of medievalism, and the practice of medievalism all contribute to the conceptual "making" of the Middle Ages. But there are still important distinctions to be made. In this essay, we are concerned with some of the different institutional, social, and discursive contexts in which these different acts of medievalism take place, the different kinds of desires they express, and the undoubted tensions between various groups of practitioners. The long-cherished opposition between medieval and medievalism studies, for example, may turn out to be less about epistemology, as the historical purists would maintain, and more about different kinds of desiring subjects.

We suggest, then, that medievalism has the capacity to function as a challenge to many of our most complex debates about historicism. While its subject matter often seems embarrassingly lightweight, the sheer range and variety of medievalism discloses a correspondingly wide range of responses to the past. If the history of medievalism is the history of response to the medieval past, this is the broad canvas of historicism writ large. The purists may object that these popular, creative, and nonacademic responses have little to do with historical understanding: they are often fanciful, driven by nostalgia, utopianism, dystopianism, critique, or fantasy. But it is precisely because they make little attempt to conform to the constraints of conventional historical method that the manifestations of medievalism allow us to get closer to the expression of human desire about the past, expressions that are often disarmingly unselfconscious.

We examine a number of such instances, from the realms of popular and scholarly medieval studies, and from popular culture. We are particularly interested in the kinds of discursive positions and attitudes of those who claim knowledge about the medieval past, whether from within or beyond the academy. In one sense, of course, it is easy to demarcate and define the difference between, say, a William Morris and a Walter Skeat; between a medieval historian and a member of the Society for Creative

Anachronism; between a medieval literary critic and a writer of medieval fiction. But for much of the most influential period of medievalism, in the Renaissance, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, the dividing line between practitioner or exponent of medievalism and the professional scholar of either medieval studies or medievalism studies was not so clear cut. Where would we place Spenser, Walpole, or Ruskin in this division? Individuals such as Tolkien, Lewis, and Eco also render such distinctions hard to draw with precision.

This is not to say that the discipline has not been interested in insisting on such distinctions. Indeed, even as the study of medievalism has been growing, the divide between the medieval and medievalism has seemed to crystallize. There is surprisingly little commerce between the two disciplines. There are still many who feel that the latter is something of a joke, something that is secondary, derivative, tainted with amateurism and enthusiasm: the Middle Ages for the college or school student who cannot attain the pure heights of medieval studies; or the Middle Ages for the foolish aficionado or amateur who wants somehow to reclaim or relive them. It is not hard to identify a cultural hierarchy, a snobbery even, that excludes the medievalist impulse from what Nicholas Watson calls "the magic garden" of medieval studies.[4] Yet the relationship between medieval and medievalism studies is increasingly labile. Many of us teach greater numbers of students about the history of Arthurianism, or the cinematic representation of the Middle Ages, than teach Middle English strong verbs. Increasingly we are forced into positions that require us to make pragmatic arguments about the relevance of the Middle Ages by insisting on its modernity. In one way this is beneficial. For it would indicate that medievalists have opened the gates to the *hortus conclusus*, entered the world and allowed the world to enter their garden. At a moment when medieval studies is struggling for its survival, engagement with the world outside would seem crucial. It is, after all, resources from the outside that allow the garden to be maintained. As might be apparent, we believe that such engagement is not only necessary but beneficial both to the study of the medieval and the medievalistic. But it is also clear that such engagement will alter our relationships to our students, our institutions, and each other.

We cannot pretend to predict all of the ways that our fields and we will change. Early responses to work we have already presented suggest that while there is considerable support for our findings, there is also considerable resistance to our argument that medieval and medievalism studies can and should enter into productive dialogue, yet few scholars want to be identified as maintaining a rear-guard action while the emergent field gathers strength. Our interest in medievalism has regularly been greeted

with polite disdain, though a number of papers at the recent congress of the New Chaucer Society in Swansea added both dignity and urgency to some of the issues raised by medievalism. To make the situation even more confusing, we find the response varies widely according to context, whether this be American, English, European, or Australasian.

For the context of this collection, we think it might be helpful to understand the ground of these changes in the Academy by speaking to what motivates them: desire.[5] We say "desire," but we are also conscious that such alterations seek to fulfill (or frustrate) many desires. Among these desires are the desire to recover, the desire to revive, the desire to play or recreate, or to reform, the desire to know, and, most problematically, erotic desire. These desires, of course, interpenetrate one another and might be seen to enable a rapprochement between High and Popular culture, between the medieval and its -ism. In epistemological terms these desires thus might give shape to the object of inquiry and thus stabilize the relationship between those who wish to recover and those who wish to revive, between those who wish to know and those who wish to recreate. Yet each of these individual desires is often predicated on the rejection of some other purportedly antithetical desire. Hence it seems that when any of these groups speak of the Middle Ages, it is a Middle Ages that is more often defined by *what it is not* than by what it is.

In this essay we examine how the workings of popular and academic desire have led to a kind of negative erotics of the Middle Ages. While this apophatic way of speaking of desire might have its drawbacks as a method of inquiry, it draws our attention to the ways that pleasure and its denial have structured our approaches to the medieval. More importantly it reveals a subterranean discourse of eros that corporealizes the Middle Ages. In this discourse academics, enthusiasts, writers, and filmmakers figure themselves not as subjects who are invested in a particular view but as objective observers who have divested the Middle Ages of those things that hide her/him from view. To uncover the Middle Ages is thus to fulfill desire even as desire is abjured—a vacillation between discovery and reinvestment that is expressed in that vexed word "recovery."

Filthy Chaucer and the Sublimation of Popular Desire

At the 2001 Hay-on-Wye books festival, Sir Paul McCartney, meditating on love and loss, explained how death had led him to write verse. He said that, "after his boyhood friend, Ivor Vaughan, born on the same day as him, passed away . . . [it] set him thinking. 'He was there with me when our old teacher Alan "Dusty" Durban turned me on to poetry

by telling me about the dirty bits in Chaucer's the *Miller's Tale*.'"[6] The juxtaposition here of death and desire is, of course, nothing new. Indeed, it is one of the central tropes of Western literature. What is interesting here, however, is the way that the popular treatment of desire—the "dirty bits"—and death leads a popular icon to connect the production of poetry with what might be called Sir Paul's primal poetic scene. It is, presumably, the bodies of Alisoun and Nicholas, and Absolon's misdirected kiss that "turned on" McCartney and led him to compose his own poetry. It is the enlivening power of poetic coitus and the filthiness of the fabliau that McCartney juxtaposes against the death not only of his congenital friend, but also of Linda McCartney and John Lennon.[7] McCartney's own poetry, however, is curiously devoid of human bodies. In his poem about his wife, entitled "Her Spirit" (which he read just after this story), the songwriter predictably portrays his wife coming back to him in the form of a bird—a classic trope for the human soul. His, then, is a poetry of transcendence that has oddly enough been "inspired" by Father Chaucer's corporeal poetics.

This split between the popular generation of interest in poetry and the proper purpose of poetry itself has, of course, existed for a long time. What some have called the "Tee hee quod she" school of teaching has it that students will only be interested in something as old as Chaucer if it can offer something of fundamental material significance to youth—Durban's dirty bits. Others feel that the "relevance" (and genius) of Chaucer's poetry lies in the poet's ability to transcend the merely corporeal. This idea, and its logical offspring (that to descend to the level of the "bawdy" is to cheapen Chaucer) predictably has its popular defenders. Not long ago, John Sutherland, a columnist for *The Guardian*, attacked the English examination boards for promoting "filthy Chaucer." He claimed that "thanks to the Thatcherite deregulation of the exam boards, sex is used to sell English literature as cynically as it is for Japanese cars, or Channel 5 . . . the current preference among examination boards (which compete energetically for pupil-customers) is for 'bawdy' and 'socially relevant' Chaucer—notably the Miller's, Reeve's and Wife of Bath's tales and prologues."[8] This supposed commodification of Chaucer reduces the academy to a kind of business that bids for "pupil-customers." Worse yet, the academy's search for social relevance (something that will appeal to the twenty-first-century student) is made possible by the very Thatcherite policies that the academy deplored. Hence, in Sutherland's view, academics are complicit in the conservative policies that so damaged the education system in the first place.

Sutherland's critique at least partially recapitulates earlier attacks on the commodification of Chaucer that had their origins in the actual period of

Thatcher's England. As early as the mid-1980s critics such as David Aers were already attacking not only "the more conservative forces within medieval studies, but also the right-wing climate of his own country and its interpellation of the student as 'client' or product."[9] Aers's point of attack was primarily the conservative national forces (and the readings of Chaucer fostered by those forces) that ultimately erased or repressed the history of class conflict. In terms that strikingly oppose earlier assertions about the harmonious nature of the medieval body politic, Aers asserts that ideas about this "harmonious order" testify "more to modern critics' longings for a lost psychic unity than to any recognisable historical past."[10] Chaucer's poetry should not be seen to reinforce a transcendent, nostalgic projection of the past into the present, but to highlight the extent to which the implication of social and economic (i.e., material) forces in spiritual ideas disrupts metaphorical abstractions (such as Christ's body), which seem to order society.[11]

Yet, as one of us has noted elsewhere, the rise of the global economy and global culture renders the situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century subtly different.[12] And it is important, we think, to see any discussion of the place of Chaucer specifically or medieval studies in general in the larger context of recent academic critiques of the increasingly "corporate" nature of the university. One of the more notable of these, Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*, reads conservative ideas of capitalism (specifically the Thatcherism to which both Sutherland and Aers were responding) as embodying a political system that values global capital at the expense of all else including traditional notions of the state. This is important because, in Readings' analysis, the job of the university has traditionally been to "work out the relation between the subject and the state."[13] With the passing of the nation-state, Readings increasingly sees (as does Sutherland though in a slightly different way) that "students are consumers rather than national subjects" (53). In other words, the inculcation of citizens into the state is no longer necessary as the state itself has been subordinated to global capital. Thus the university (now apparently also subordinate to capital) has to sell itself, and its leading commodity is its own excellence—which Readings identifies as an empty ideal. Nowhere does the emptiness of this ideal become more manifest for Readings than in the study of popular culture. As Dominick LaCapra puts it, "cultural studies itself is, for Readings, not a way to save the university of culture but a symptom of its demise and, in its indiscriminate attention to all forms of 'culture' from pornography or Pop-Tarts to papal encyclicals and *The Pirates of Penzance*, it is an approach easily co-opted by the university of excellence."[14] The reason that the approach is easily "co-opted" by the university is that it fulfills what Readings elsewhere calls

the desire of the student–consumer because it renders important those objects that themselves already hold pleasurable (commercial) appeal (Readings 226n).

Predictably enough, Readings sees in this "consumerist" model the "extinction" of medieval studies in the university presumably because the study of the Middle Ages does not have the same appeal as other courses of study (*pace* Sutherland). As Readings puts it, "it is remarkable how few departments of English, for example, actually turned out to 'need' so many medievalists" (178). Readings hastens to add that this lack of "need" is solely the product of the new corporate model of the university. Indeed, he avers "that the twilight of modernity makes the premodern a crucial site for understanding what a non-Enlightenment structure of thought might look like"—a structure that he thinks might offer some hope for the re-formation of the university (226). While this assertion of the importance of medieval studies might be pleasing to medievalists, we might do well to interrogate the historical assumptions of Readings's comment. After all, to disentangle the history of the premodern so completely from what follows bespeaks a belief in the reception of a historical alterity that is somehow unaffected by the ages separating it from the present. Most notably it locates in the Middle Ages a utopian pre-capitalist moment which is unsullied by the fetishism of the commodity. Readings, of course, cannot escape the historical fact that the medieval university was corporate in structure but he asserts, "the medieval University as a society for the study of knowledge was a corporate community, in the medieval sense like a guild" (181). Readings's analysis of the Middle Ages is a kind of nostalgic Marxism in which "personal dependence form[ed] the groundwork of society" and "there [was] no necessity for labor and its products to assume a fantastic form [the fetishized commodity] different from their reality."[15] The abrupt change came when "the guild-masters were pushed on one side" by the rise of capital. Unlike Marx, however, who has no illusions about going backward (or desire to do so), Readings seems to engage in mourning not for the university of the nation-state, but for an earlier premodern community-based university that might provide a model for the late modern university.

Readings's privileging of the premodern is based on the idea that it is *not* desired and that it can provide a model for us because desire did *not* work in the ways that desire works in the late modern university. This is, of course, a nostalgic projection of what Readings believes or hopes the premodern university is like. But perhaps more importantly it reduces the operative range of desire to its function in a capitalist system. In this reading there is nothing to desire except the part it plays in the exchange of commodities. We do not believe that Readings actually wishes to insist

on this reductive reading. Instead it seems deployed in order to create the Middle Ages as Other—profoundly set off from modernity precisely so that it conjures "up mystical and enticing promise, as in the half-light moments just preceding dawn."[16] Catherine Brown has remarked about this tendency to Other the Middle Ages, suggesting that "a reader even noddingly familiar with Edward Said's *Orientalism* will recognize in the 'Middle Ages' the Orient of colonialist discourse, the Other figured as veiled woman, mystical and enticing."[17] It is, in other words, at once the lack of desire in and for the Middle Ages that makes it other and its otherness that makes it the object of desire.

This oscillation between the rejection of and desire for the Middle Ages is hardly confined to Readings. Indeed its operation recalls a central truth about the medieval, that the fluctuation between desire and abjection seems somehow necessary to keep the Middle Ages in place. Yet what happens to desire for the Middle Ages when the desire to know the Other threatens to unveil it? Can we discover the Middle Ages and desire her at the same time?

Revealing and Recovering the Middle Ages

> *He could still recall with horror that moment when his thin leather yard case, or prick sheath, had split and his seed had tumbled into the queynte of the young nun.*
>
> —Peter Ackroyd, *The Clerkenwell Tales.*

In the process of cataloguing over forty *bandhas* (coital postures), the medieval Indian erotic text *Ratirahasya* (the secrets of Rati) pauses for a moment to describe what it calls the "signs of satisfaction in woman": "Limpness, eye-closing and swooning are signs of enjoyment. She will move her queynt repeatedly, give the sound *sit*, lose all shyness and be beside herself with love—this is the point at which her feeling is most intense."[18] As there is no accompanying section detailing the "signs of satisfaction in a man," the implication is that these signs are more difficult to read in a woman. Hence the text helpfully offers a series of visual and auditory cues by which the attentive lover may give his beloved satisfaction. Most of the list will be familiar to the Western reader, but perhaps a bit peculiar is what the text describes as the palpable movement of the female organ of pleasure at the moment of satisfaction. Alex Comfort, the translator of the text (and author of *The Joy of Sex*) is quick to respond to this seeming oddness, claiming that this is a response rooted in cultural bias:

> Great stress has sometimes been laid on the unfamiliarity, oddity and unpracticability of the content. This is pure Englishmanship. Some of it is

> indeed unique to the Indian cast of mind, but leaving aside the mannerisms of the tradition . . . our sense of the oddity . . . is very largely the result of living in a society which restricts our observation of sexual behaviour.[19]

Comfort's invocation of "observation" as a way to reduce cultural difference is laudable, but, if his goal is to demonstrate a kind of universal sexual humanism, one might well question his use of a fourteenth-century English word to translate the Sanskrit word for "vagina" or "vulva" (*yoni*).[20] The use of the form "queynt" undoubtedly reflects a desire to give a "medievalistic" quality to the erotic passage, and one might see his adaptation of the medieval English word as a linguistic tour de force that attests to his learning and adeptness as a translator of a medieval Indian text. But we would also have to acknowledge that the word has the effect of distancing the reader from the overtly sexual and strange idea of the "moving vagina." His rendering of the *yoni*, then, contains within it not just the old fashioned sense of quaintness, but (to use another medieval meaning of the word) a queyntness or "strangeness" that might best be linked with the fact that the text is from a culture that is seen as geographically and temporally Other to the twentieth-century anglophone world in which Comfort finds his audience. There is, in other words, a colonizing aspect to Comfort's translation, a way in which he engages in his own "Englishmanship." He cloaks the Indian vagina in medieval English diction and thus makes the text at once strange and yet familiar, something that is geographically and temporally other, yet something that is defined by its very "Englishness," precisely because that Englishness can now be seen as colonial and medieval.

What is so telling about this use of the word *queynt*, is that in its medieval sense, it has long been understood that the word works not to cloak but to reveal that which is hidden, or gives meaning by divesting that which would normally be covered. When, in the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's Miller tells us that Nicholas "prively caught" Alisoun "by the queynte" this action at once makes Nicholas's "deerne love" public, and also reveals the extent to which Alisoun's "queynte" is supposedly no longer hidden.[21] This lack of hiddenness, for late modern academics, has been linked with the shock value of the word. For unlike Comfort's more general audience who might perceive queynte as somewhat fusty, medievalists have understood queynte (in its medieval sense) to be a taboo word. Hence, Thomas Ross identifies "queynte as the forerunner of the modern cunt," and, in the Oxford translation of the *Canterbury Tales*, David Wright renders queynte as the modern obscenity.[22] Yet the neat division here between the uncovering of the medieval and what might be termed the recovery of "medievalism" is perhaps less straightforward

than might originally appear. For the history of the word's reception suggests that the unvarnished meaning recuperated by medievalists might well be a product of a kind of medievalism that in its own sense "recovers" the queynte.

In what is probably the first recorded use of queynte, the author of the alliterative Romance *Sir Tristrem* used it to characterize what others may have seen when Tristrem, in the guise of a beggar, famously carries, drops, and then lies beside Isode in order to give her the ability to say that only King Mark and the disguised beggar had lain by her naked side:

> Tristrem hir bar flat tide,
> And on fle queen fel he,
> Next her naked side,
> flat mani man miȝt yse,
> Sans schewe;
> Hir queynt aboven hir kne
> Naked fle kniȝtes knewe.[23]

The first editor of the poem, Sir Walter Scott, omits "queynt" from his glossary and says only that when Tristrem dropped Isode, he did it "in such a manner as to expose some part of her person."[24] Eugen Kölbing translates the word as "*ihre Scham*," and G.P. McNeill characterizes the part exposed as Isode's *pudenda muliebra* (*sic*). In his 1984 lecture on the problem of queynte, Larry Benson characterizes the reaction to the word by all three editors as one of shock. He asserts that their euphemisms demonstrate both that they attempted to avoid using a taboo word *and* that they mistook queynte as a taboo word. With Scott, Benson certainly makes a good case. The periphrasis Scott uses indicates a discomfort with the word and it may well be (as Benson asserts) that Scott consulted Francis Junius's *Etymologicum Anglicanum* where he would have found queynt glossed as *cunnus*.[25] But the case is more difficult to make with the late-nineteenth-century editors. In the case of Kölbing, *ihre Scham* might seem a euphemism when rendered into English ("her shame") but in German the phrase is a good deal less circumspect than it appears in translation.[26] So too, McNeill's use of the Latin phrase "pudenda mulierbra" might indicate a kind of delicacy about the privy parts of women, but there is no evidence that he reads the word itself as taboo. In other words, the evidence that Benson educes only demonstrates that the work was thought obscene or vulgar in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This creates a problem for Benson, for his real purpose in discussing the uses and translations of the word queynte is not to condemn the

prudery of nineteenth-century editors but to reveal the origins of the lubricous tendencies of twentieth-century Chaucerians. Specifically, he is intent on demonstrating how nineteenth-century beliefs have led critics to an ahistorical understanding of the word's meaning.[27] As he says "every Chaucerian knows, or thinks he [*sic*] knows, exactly what 'queynte' means" (24). He blames this misunderstanding both on a lack of historical work and on the rage for finding wordplay in Chaucer, lamenting that "in the critical climate of our time a vial of pun is worth a bucket of philology" (24). He laments the loss of common sense when critics such as Thomas R. Lounsbury, J.S.P. Tatlock, and F.N. Robinson all agreed that there was very little punning in Chaucer (supposedly because punning was understood to be the lowest form of humor). What resulted from "newer" critics (whose taste was formed by Eliot and Joyce rather than Tennyson and Dickens) was a rush to find verbal complexity where there was none. Part of Benson's hostility to those who would read Chaucer in a salacious manner was born out of his hostility to a method that in his view had run roughshod over what he characterizes as the beauty of Chaucer's writing.[28] Worse yet, they had done this in complete contravention to the historical duties of the medievalist who (in his view) might be well advised to "stop by the library."[29] But Benson's hostility to what he called the "'queynte' punnings of Chaucer's critics" moves beyond a simplistic animus of the historical critic toward the formalist critic that characterized so much of Chaucer criticism in the twentieth century.[30] In many ways he critiques medievalists both for failing to understand the medieval meaning of the word, and for failing to understand the post-medieval history of the word. It is the post-medieval misunderstanding of the medieval word that has led to what Benson sees as the excesses of contemporary critics of Chaucer.

Though Benson does not pursue the theoretical implications of these various polarities, his views on indecency and euphemism rely on the notion that euphemism covers that which "should" be hidden, while obscenity, as Melissa Mohr has suggested, derives its power from its "more intimate connection" to the thing it represents, revealing "body parts and actions that should remain concealed, according to the dictates of civility."[31] We need not go as far as Mohr in claiming that these words give us "a direct link to reality," but it is true that in the period she is speaking about, there was a belief that obscene words could "peel back layers of polite disguise" (272). In other words, like Benson, she suggests that what constitutes obscenity is determined by gender and class distinctions. As Sheila Delany remarks in her discussion of Benson, "Wordplay, especially erotic wordplay, is excluded as incompatible with seriousness, deep emotion, or aesthetic quality. It is assumed that Chaucer shared the

critic's notions of good and bad taste, and that neither the poet nor his character could possibly display anything we might consider bad taste."[32] In this system of "civility," a man cannot say the same things to a woman that he can to his male comrades. Nor can he use the same kind of language with his social superiors as he would with those of equal status. Mohr's argument might be seen to make explicit what remains implicit within Benson's essay. And indeed, Mohr cites Benson in her analysis of queynte, agreeing that the word must have been a euphemism and speculating that critics have seen it as a taboo word because of what she calls the mistaken view that "a poet of the earthier Middle Ages, when people (supposedly) spat where they liked and farted with abandon at the dinner table, must be bawdier than early modern writers who are coming under increased pressure to ensure that their bodies and texts conform to certain standards of civility" (Mohr 263). Mohr's critique of what she calls the "teleology of the civilizing process" is probably a bit unfair to those critics who would understand queynte as an obscenity. Indeed, even as she distances herself from a modern medievalism that crudely views the Middle Ages as an "earthier" time, one could argue that she creates a kind of Early Modern medievalism that insists on the co-extensiveness of fourteenth-century and sixteenth-century thought.

It becomes clear from these various discoveries of queynte that the obscene is compelling because it seems to reveal the thing itself and elides the problem of attempting to recuperate the medieval. But, in fact, the medieval obscenity is a good deal like Isode's queynte in *Sir Tristrem*. Her queynte is revealed "sans schewe" when she falls (dropped by the disguised Tristrem). And, given the etymological roots of the word (through Old French from the Latin past participle *cognitum*), it is possible here that the author is suggesting that the knights only knew what had already been "known" by Tristrem.[33] The joke, of course, is that Tristrem knew her "queynt" in a different kind of way—the kind of way that Mark alone knew. The knights, then, do not know half of what they have just witnessed because they do not know that Tristrem is the beggar. The word, then, seems to reveal what it actually hides—the history of Isode's queynte.

So too, the history of the word itself has a hide-and-seek aspect to it. It seems to be explicit, yet like the terms *bele chose* or *quoniam*, it may also cover that which it purportedly reveals. To a non-specialist like Peter Ackroyd, it is a word that conveys the strangeness of the fourteenth century when condoms were called "yard cases" and made of leather. To claim to understand the full meaning of the word is a fantasy (to quote Alisoun of Bath, that is itself queynte). For, as she characterizes this "fantasye," "what thing we may nat lightly have, / Therafter wol we crie al

day and crave."[34] The desire is for that which we have lost—whether it is medieval Indian eroticism, the meaning of a Middle English word, or the character of the Wife itself. Thus though the word queynte seems reflexively to be about revelation in fact its recuperation makes clear the extent to which recovery (in both senses of the word) is not quite the same as unveiling or discovery. The most intimate part of woman is seemingly on view here, but the actual revelation involves not the body of woman or the extent to which critics and writers can unveil the Middle Ages, but the investments of those who view the body. In other words it is not the object of study that has determined desire but the history and position of those who observe and recover the Middle Ages.

Invention and the other *Knight's Tale*

Heretofore we have been dealing primarily with the complicated question of a historicism that is quite familiar to academics. Though McCartney's, Ackroyd's, Comfort's, and even Benson's musings about uncovered bodies are certainly determined by post-medieval sensibilities, there is a fidelity to a medieval history that is not invented but recovered even if in a medievalistic manner. But there is another form of medievalism, best characterized as a form of play, that seems fundamentally different than these more or less serious attempts to render or call up the medieval. This is an ahistorical medievalism that would seem to fall outside the range of our discourse of desire. After all, a purely invented form of the medieval would seem to have relinquished the historical anchor that occasions the kinds of desire that we have discussed. Questions of desire for the other, for instance, would seem moot given that there is no medieval culture or history to Other—merely contemporary material that is admittedly, even brazenly, invented.

The truth is, of course, that this simplistic bifurcation of invention versus recovery never really quite holds. Even in medievalistic material that manifestly reveals its non-medieval nature there is always the claim that this material is actually medieval (sometimes even more medieval than that which is recovered). One of the more popular recent examples of this phenomenon is Brian Helgeland's film *A Knight's Tale*. When it premiered in 2001, one of the most obvious things about the film was the stark opposition it drew between the medieval and the non-medieval. Much of the film's humor depends on deliberate and funny anachronism: the viewer is immediately and consistently interpellated by the film as an expert on medieval history. The humor or the "shock" of medievalism in the opening scenes depends on our recognizing the opening tournament scene as anachronistic: the audience knows medieval courtiers

didn't rock to the music of Queen or, as they do in the later scene, dance to the music of David Bowie. The film thus establishes a binary opposition between medieval and modern, or more precisely, between medieval truth and modern fiction. This dichotomy is affirmed by most reviewers and commentators, who painstakingly point out Helgeland's deliberate or accidental anachronisms. The vast majority of the discussion around this film takes for granted that the medieval is stable and knowable; the fixed point from which Helgeland does or does not, should or should not, diverge. However, the film's music also sets up a different kind of desire: by naturalizing the rhythms of stadium rock or 1980s' dance music as the suitable soundtrack for medieval joust competitions or courtly dances, Helgeland's film seems to show the medieval desire for the modern. If only they had had our music, he implies, they would have had an even better time. Thus the irony of Bowie's "Golden Years": the title and the chorus conventionally point us back to the Middle Ages as the object of modernity's romantic nostalgia; but they also imply a proleptic longing among his medieval characters for modernity. Further to compound the ironies, Helgeland's many commentaries on and interviews about the film suggest that he saw 1980s' music as sufficiently dated to provide a layer of musical history and nostalgia for its early twenty-first-century audience. It would be a taste of what it was like to look back to a past era.

But as he also made clear in a number of interviews, Helgeland did draw on some research into the medieval as he made the film, or at least draw on his own familiarity with the era from his university studies. It seems likely that he had read Maurice Keen's *Chivalry*, with its account of the thirteenth-century knight Ulrich von Lichtenstein, who traveled from Italy to Bohemia, offering "a general challenge to all comers to joust with him in honour of his lady."[35] But it is clear from his interview with Rob Blackwelder that "historical exactness wasn't a high priority." In a telling moment Blackwelder asks, "what kind of research did you have your cast do? Did you have them geek out at the Ren Faire or anything?" Helgeland responds:

> *A*: I don't think I had them do anything. Just what they wanted to do on their own. I had Shannyn (Sossamon, who plays the love interest) read this little book called "The Book of Courtly Love," which was kind of a 14th Century treatise on love and the rules of courtship, which we tried to actually follow quite closely in their relationship.
>
> *Q*: Although I noticed that her father was conspicuously absent and she's pretty much running around on her own.
>
> *A*: Yeah, she's kind of footloose. But that was their only research. (For) everything else they just relied on the script. I did a ton of research, then basically took what I wanted and threw the rest away, trying not

> to be a slave to it. At the end of the day, it's kind of a fantasy world. It's Medieval, but that's the beauty of movies—you can create your own world.[36]

This is a fascinating dialogue, revealing a curious power play of expertise between interviewer and director. Clearly Blackwelder has some sense of the medieval world; he challenges Helgeland on his unlikely scenario of a marriageable woman being so "footloose." Helgeland's response, that he was responsible enough to undertake "tons" of research but disposed of most of it, positions him as a scholar manqué even as it is clear that his research comes with no imperatives or conditions: it is simply up to him, as a good and desiring post-modernist consumer, to take what he wants and throw the rest away. At the same time he refuses to allow Blackwelder to define him as one of those geeky "Ren Faire" types. He acknowledges that "it's a kind of fantasy world," but then in a jarring moment corrects the interviewer saying, "It's Medieval." His phrase "you can create your own world" implies an equation between the "medieval" and "fantasy"; while at the same time it echoes the oft-repeated theme of entrepreneurship and class mobility in the movie: "you can change your stars."

In these comments, from both interviewer and director, the idea of doing research for a medieval movie is normalized as something that would easily be in the capacity of both director and actors: but the notion of "research" here means something very different from scholarly expertise, more like "getting into character." In fact, both Blackwelder and Helgeland shy away from the idea of academic research and are careful to affirm that neither would be bound by its scholarly decorums or its findings. This is not to say that research in and of itself is a bad thing, but carrying out what might be called medievalistic research will almost certainly make you a "geek," while hewing close to medieval sources will make you a "slave."

Yet if Helgeland abjures either being medievalistic or a medievalist this does not mean that he is trying to distance himself from imagining the "real" Chaucer. *A Knight's Tale* is famous for Paul Bettany's scene-stealing performance as a naked, gambling Chaucer. George Edmondson has read this scene as a meditation on the inescapable "creatureliness" that we share with Chaucer.[37] But we might also read it as a reference to Chaucer's earthiness, something Helgeland seems particularly preoccupied with:

> *Q*: Why choose Geoffrey Chaucer, a famous author?
> *BH*: Partly because he was around then. I was an English major and we studied Chaucer and he always felt like this dusty old librarian or professor in this venerated character from English literature. Then, when you

> read "The Canterbury Tales," they are so kind of raucous and wild that you thought, "That guy isn't the guy that wrote these stories." The idea was to breathe life into that character. I have no idea if he was any of those things that I have, but I think he was a much livelier person with a lust for life than what you end up with as some 600-year-old character in history.[38]

Chaucer's nakedness here does double duty. Not only does it suggest "Chaucer's bawdy" (as one critic puts it), but it also fulfils a promise to represent the true, naked character of the poet.[39] Chaucer thus becomes a figure for truth and figures that truth as desire. Yet Helgeland seemingly understands that he is taking a radical step in the representation of what he might call truth. Even as he says that he has no idea if Chaucer was as he represented him he says in another interview,

> One of the dangers of a period movie is that everything gets kind of put up on a pedestal and covered in varnish . . . I was an English major, and when we studied Chaucer he seemed like a guy who stepped out of a museum with dust all over him. But he had to be a more kind of out-there guy to write all that stuff. So having no idea, I'm hoping Paul's version of Chaucer is closer to who Chaucer probably was than . . .

At this point the interviewer interrupts him and finishes Helgeland's sentence ". . . than that guy in the etching hanging on the classroom wall?" To which Helgeland responds (a bit like Paul McCartney) "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."

Chaucer appears, contradictorily, as venerated but unknown; as dusty and covered in varnish, but also "a more kind of out-there guy" and "a livelier person with a lust for life." The implication is clear: Helgeland's experience in an English department introduced him to a musty figure in contradiction to the poetry that he (alone among his fellow students?) found more lively, "raucous and wild." As a filmmaker, he saw his mission as recovering this more lively personality, rescuing him from the museum of the classroom. In fact, in comparing the fun he had in making the film with the fun he thinks Chaucer had in writing the *Canterbury Tales*, Helgeland rehearses a very common tradition of Chaucer's readers identifying strongly with the poet, in order to license their own work, and to prove they are capable of resuscitating him into the present once more.[40] In an almost mystical way the desire to know Chaucer here is carefully equated with the ability to fulfil the desire to know Chaucer.

Ultimately, of course, the film is not really about Chaucer. Its plot encompasses the adventures of young William, born of a poor thatcher, who rises through the ranks of jousting by disguising himself as a knight

and eventually proving himself worthy of the name both through his sporting prowess and his gradual mastery of the courtly love paradigm. Helgeland chooses not to access Chaucer through any of his own works but through another piece of history that he has picked up from his reading—one perhaps more in keeping with contemporary fantasies about class. Like earlier doubts about the likelihood of young women being footloose in the Middle Ages questions are inevitably raised about the possibilities of a thatcher's son entering the ranks and being successful. But another interviewer is savvy enough to enlist the aid of a medievalist to verify this unlikely possibility:

> Far-fetched? "Not as far-fetched as you might think," says Hugh Thomas, a medievalist and associate professor of history at the University of Miami. "It's unlikely that people from the lowest ranks could even get into competitions like this, because of the expense of horses, armor and everything. But young men from lower nobility could easily use tournaments to rise through the ranks."
>
> Second and third sons of nobles, who would find themselves cut off from inheritance, turned to the jousting "circuit" to make their names and fortunes. "William Marshall, a man from poor nobility who, through jousting and marrying well, wound up as Regent of England, is the classic example of that," Professor Thomas says.
>
> "He was the Michael Jordan of jousting," Helgeland says. "Hey, I did my research on this. Eventually I threw it all out, but I read about Marshall."[41]

Here the scholarly expert, in the form of a medieval historian, affirms the "truth" of Helgeland's narrative. But in fact, Helgeland has it both ways. In the film's dramatic conclusion, the Black Prince, who has been impressed with William's courage and the loyalty of his supporters, claims that his own "personal historians" have discovered that William is indeed noble. Whose desires are being fulfilled here? With this one magical stroke, Helgeland turns his tale from a rags-to-nobility story into a fairy tale, or more precisely, a medieval romance. William has not so much "changed his stars" as fallen into a story reminiscent of Malory's kitchen knight, Gareth, whose true nobility eventually shines forth through the opprobrium heaped upon him when Kay sends him to work in the Camelot kitchens as a lowly peasant.

This twenty-first-century invocation of the romance convention of the "fair unknown" might seem a long way from the work of Chaucer, but in the logic of *A Knight's Tale* it makes perfect sense. William is able to joust only because Chaucer forged patents of nobility for him. Once these patents are revealed as fakes, Chaucer's ability to authorize William

might seem false, but in fact William's nobility is revealed to be true. In some sense, then, Chaucer's fakes both manufacture *and* uncover truth even though the genealogical history he created was a fiction. It is not difficult to see what Helgeland might imply here: he too created Chaucer and the story of the film as a fiction yet perhaps in some sense he too has a hold on some kind of historical truth. This truth is not the truth of academics who slavishly adhere to their sources, or the patently false truth of the geeky participants in the "Ren Fair" but what Helgeland sees as a more important truth—the truth that ought, from his point of view, to be true.

Helgeland's sense of truth here might be seen to be a late modern embodiment of the antique convention that truth ought to be exemplary, that, as Sir Philip Sidney put it, "if the question be . . . whether it be better to have it set down as it should be, or as it was, then certainly is more doctrinable the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon than the true Cyrus in Justin."[42] Yet there is also the troublesome implication that Helgeland has not only represented what should be, but that this "ought" somehow represents what actually was. Helgeland channels the Middle Ages here and gives us what he desires and what he believes we desire—a version of the medieval poet par excellence stripped of varnish and dust—like Helgeland's story, the naked truth.

This recurring link of nakedness and truth is not, of course, a modern invention. In the Middle Ages the abstract notion of truth was often seen as that which existed beneath the surface. In allegorical terms the outer husk might appear beautiful, but what was important was the nut inside. Truth was seen as unadorned, undisguised, or naked. John of Garland says, "I put forth the naked truth, by nakedness" (*nudam veritatem proponere, nuditate*).[43] This nakedness was equated with the prelapsarian condition and thus seen as an innocent and ethical way to establish what really was. But to think such "naked truth" outside the realm of desire is, in the case of the Middle Ages, complicated precisely because the Middle Ages do not reveal her/himself. Instead each constituency, (academics, popular writers, journalists, filmmakers) discovers the Middle Ages only to "recover" it for someone else.

Notes

1. Grateful acknowledgment is made to Anne McKendry who provided invaluable research assistance.
2. Bruce Holsinger, *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007), 30. As an example of the complexities here, Holsinger demonstrates how for Donald Rumsfeld and others of the Bush administration, "The enemy's medievalism is inseparable from

its character as an agile, adaptable, transnational, multimedia organization" (52). But Holsinger also distinguishes between this contradictory, "othering" kind of medievalist jargon and the "particular intellectual mechanism of neomedievalism within neoconservative discourse after September 11" (80–81), and outlines some disturbing affinities between this neomedievalism and the "postmodern-postcolonial patois those of us in literary studies have been speaking to one another over the last twenty years" (82).

3. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 59–85.
4. For a more developed treatment of this phenomenon, see our "What is Happening to the Middle Ages?" *New Medieval Literatures* 7 (2007): 215–229.
5. For an extended treatment of desire and the academy that has informed our own, see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), passim.
6. *The Guardian,* May 31, 2001.
7. McCartney's explanation for the "birth" of his poetry is, in fact, only a prelude to the reading of "Here Today" and "Her Spirit," poems commemorating Lennon and also McCartney's wife.
8. "Filthy Chaucer: A Tayle of Two Chaucers; or, How Examynation Boardes Are Using Sexe to Sell Theyr Syllabuses," *The Guardian,* July 30, 2001.
9. Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 211.
10. David Aers, *Chaucer* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1986), 4.
11. See, for instance, ibid., 45.
12. Trigg, *Congenial Souls*, 234–238.
13. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 51.
14. Dominick LaCapra, "The University in Ruins?" *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Autumn 1998): 32–55; here 26.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital,* ed. Frederick Engels; trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1887), 89.
16. Doris Banks, *Medieval Manuscript Bookmaking: A Bibliographic Guide* (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 4.
17. Catherine Brown, "In the Middle," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 547–574; here 549.
18. *The Koka Shastra,* trans. Alex Comfort (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), 142–143.
19. Ibid., 53–54.
20. Sir M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), s.v. Comfort's source is Richard Schmidt's *Beiträge zur Indischen Erotik: Das Liebesleben des Sanskritvolkes* (Berlin: Hermann Barsdorf Verlag, 1922), 410. Schmidt renders the word as "vulva" (414).

21. At the same time, as will become painfully obvious later in the tale (at least to Nicholas), Alisoun's queynt is sometimes not where one expects it to be.
22. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. David Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 83.
23. Eugen Kölbing, ed., *Die nordische und die englische Version der Tristan Saga* (Heilbronn, 1878), 2: ll. 2249–2255.
24. Sir Walter Scott, ed., *Sir Tristrem* (Edinburgh, 1811), 75. Though we take issue with much of Larry Benson's discussion of the problem of "queynt," we are, of course, dependent on his full treatment of the subject in "The 'Queynte' Punnings of Chaucer's Critics," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings, No. 1, 1984: Reconstructing Chaucer* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee, New Chaucer Society, 1985), 23–47; here 38.
25. Franciscus Junius, *Francisci Junii Francisci filii Etymologicum anglicanum* (Oxford: 1743).
26. For instance, the phrase "*webliche Scham*" would be translated as "vulva." In its adjectival form it means "pubic."
27. Benson, "The 'Queynte' Punnings," 23.
28. His particular example is Troilus's apostrophe to Criseyde's empty house in book five. See ibid.
29. Ibid., 25.
30. The best discussion of how this hostility characterized medieval studies in the twentieth century remains "Historicism and Its Discontents" in Lee Patterson's *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1987), 3–74.
31. Melissa Mohr, "Defining Dirt," *Textual Practice* 17 (2003): 253–275; here 272.
32. Sheila Delany, "Anatomy of the Resisting Reader: Some Implications of Resistance to Sexual Wordplay in Medieval Literature," *Exemplaria* 4 (1992): 7–34, at 21.
33. John Florio, *A worlde of wordes, or most copious and exact dictionarie in Italian and English* (1598), glosses "*Becchina*," as "a womans quaint or priuities."
34. All quotations from Chaucer unless otherwise noted are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). III. 517–518.
35. Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 92.
36. Rob Blackwelder, "Helgeland the Happy Heretic," Review and Interview, contactmusic.com, http://www.contactmusic.com/new/interviews.nsf/reviews/bhelgeland.
37. See chapter six in this volume.
38. J. Sperling Reich, "Director Brian Helgeland Tells *A Knight's Tale*," www.reel.com (2001).
39. Frank Grady, "Comstock's Chaucer" at http://www.umsl.edu/~gradyf/chaucer/mla05.doc.
40. See Trigg, *Congenial Souls*, passim.

41. Roger Moore, "Heath Will, Heath Will Rock You," *Adelaide Advertiser*, August 16, 2001.
42. Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. J.A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966; rpt. 1986), 33.
43. Traugott Lawler, ed., *The Parisiana Poetria of John of Garland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 93.

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CHAPTER 6

NAKED CHAUCER

George Edmondson

My title refers to the indelible first appearance—stark naked, shambling, emaciated, muttering to himself—of the character "Geoff Chaucer" in Brian Helgeland's film *A Knight's Tale*.[1] Allow me to set the scene: Three companions, William, Roland, and Wat, are traveling the road to Rouen when they are overtaken by a man walking briskly in the same direction. The man is naked. Who is he, they want to know. "*Lilium inter spinas*," he tells them, lifting his dirty foot to his mouth in order to suck out the sharp object he has just stepped on: "the lily among the thorns." No, really, who is he? "Geoffrey Chaucer's the name," says the man, trying to catch his breath, "writing's the game." They stare at him blankly. "Chaucer?" he repeats himself, a note of disbelief creeping into his voice. "Geoffrey Chaucer, the writer?... You've probably read my book, the *Book of the Duchess*?" They have never heard of him, nor have they read his "book." It turns out, however, that his talents as a writer can be of some use to them. And so a deal is struck, with "Geoff," as his new companions derisively call him, promising to forge the "patents of nobility" needed to enter the lowborn William in an upcoming tournament in exchange for food and clothing and the chance to ride the friends' horse for a bit. Their alliance thus sealed, it isn't long before they are once again on their way.

There is something about this scene, as there is about *A Knight's Tale* generally, that doesn't sit well with those intent on viewing it through a certain type of historicist lens. "The Chaucer of *A Knight's Tale*... is clearly a modern reimagining of things medieval," writes Kevin Harty. "Helgeland seeks to reinvent the medieval (and Chaucer in the bargain) in order to make the medieval less distant from the modern and

more acceptable to what we would like history to have been."[2] More pointedly, Kathleen Forni argues that Geoff's nakedness stands as an apt metaphor for the way in which Helgeland's film strips Chaucer of his historical contextualization: for the way it aggressively turns him into the not-really-Chaucer.[3] "While Geoff Chaucer does gain some degree of acceptance and respect for his knowledge of aristocratic mores," writes Forni, "throughout the film he is nonetheless abused, beaten, naked, and humiliated"—a state of affairs, Forni goes on to suggest, that might serve "as a metaphor for his modern, popular reception" (262). Although she never actually uses the term, it seems clear that Forni regards the film's treatment of Geoff as a sort of "extraordinary rendition": the removal of Chaucer from his rightful home to a black site, unlocatable on any map, where he can be tortured without end, forced to confess his secret modernity. Viewed from such a perspective, the only proper response to Geoff's disturbing nakedness would be to recontextualize him, to give him back the figural clothing, the coat and hood and hose and pointy shoes, of the historical specificity that is his due. On the face of it, this seems like a profoundly ethical gesture, consistent with what Lee Patterson describes as the "moral imperative" underlying historicist practice: namely, "to try to understand those who have preceded us as fully and accurately as we can," ever mindful that "their absence does not diminish the claim their humanity lays upon us."[4] But I wonder: Is removing Chaucer from the position of (literal) bare life—that is, from a position with the power to disrupt the temporalized pattern of brutal succession that Walter Benjamin terms "juridical violence"[5]—really the best way to honor the claim his humanity lays upon us? After all, why should we assume that Chaucer's nakedness, taken as a metaphor for his vulnerability, his impoverishment, or his (alleged) abuse at the hands of his latter-day readers, is necessarily a plea for help? Why, in other words, should we rush to the conclusion that a naked Chaucer needs us, his modern-day benefactors, to dress him at all?

My primary ambition in this essay is to take up the opposition (already well defined by L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, Carla Freccero, Christopher Lane, and others) against the limited notion of historicism advanced by Lee Patterson: historicism as the moral obligation to understand those who preceded us, and their worlds, exclusively in terms with which they themselves would have been familiar.[6] This does not mean, however, that I wish to mount a defense of "presentism," understood as the imposition of present-day understanding upon the past. On the contrary, one of the points I want to make about the naked Chaucer is that his untimely appearance challenges the logic of the present—of *a* present—assumed by presentism. But even while I reject the very notion of presentism, I

also want to make a case for periodization, understood as the succession of one historical epoch upon another. This too is something that the image of a naked Chaucer invites us to consider: the fact that historical time is not continuous, that there are breaks and ruptures, upheavals and overturnings. It is just that, as the naked Chaucer also reminds us, every instance of what Benjamin calls "lawmaking violence" invariably leaves behind stranded objects that then preclude the totality of the period to follow.[7] History, by this reckoning, amounts to a discontinuous sequence of synchronic periods, each one haunted by the moment of its diachronic foundation.

As a first step toward advancing these interconnected arguments, I want to suggest a different way of reading Geoff's nakedness, one derived from another naked figure seemingly in need of assistance: the wretched, naked beggar in Lacan's radical take on the legend of Saint Martin and the beggar. "Saint Martin shares his cloak, and a great deal is made of it," says Lacan.

> Yet it is after all a simple question of training; material is by its vary nature made to be disposed of—it belongs to the other as much as it belongs to me. We are no doubt touching a primitive requirement in the need to be satisfied there, for the beggar is naked. But perhaps over and above that need to be clothed, he was begging for something else, namely, that Saint Martin either kill him or fuck him. In any encounter there's a big difference in meaning between the response of philanthropy and that of love.[8]

The philanthropic impulse that Lacan critiques in this passage assumes two, mutually reinforcing forms. In the first instance, the subject interprets the other's nakedness as a plea for outward similarity, an excuse to dress the other in the same cloak as oneself. In the second instance, the subject moves to enforce a difference meant to affirm his own narcissism, imagining an other in need of the salvation that only the subject can provide. Either way, the other is handed the figurative garment—similarity, dependency—that best serves the subject's self-interest.

Admittedly, Lacan's language here may strike some as needlessly profane, if not a little puerile. Yet Lacan's provocative style is no reason to dismiss what really matters in this passage, and that is its evocation of a radically new ethics. Philanthropy, the sharing of what is, after all, meant to be shared, is neither difficult nor ethical, Lacan implies. As the excessively strong language of the passage suggests, in fact, an encounter with the other does not mean answering a perceived need at all. It means confronting a desire in the other that goes so far "over and above" the need to be satisfied that it becomes not just unanswerable but also threatening: a

confused eruption of aggression and libido. The critical impulse to interpret the other's nakedness as simple need is, in the first place, a defense against that desire, an attempt to turn something strange and excessive into something legible and manageable, something comfortingly familiar because it is recognizably different. It is also a way of maintaining the fantasy that the other—and, beyond that, the Other—knows his own desire enough to communicate it, even surreptitiously. The upshot of Lacan's parable, however, is that the beggar's nakedness may reveal far more—an enigmatic question or obscure request—than either he realizes or we are willing to face. Forni is right: Geoff's nakedness is a metaphor. But it is a metaphor for the way in which the subject, far from being self-identical, is always "at odds with itself, split by thoughts, desires, fantasies, and pleasures it can never fully claim as its own and that in some sense both do and do not belong to it."[9] The naked Geoff Chaucer is Chaucer precisely to the extent that Chaucer himself wouldn't recognize him.

How can this be? How is it that *A Knight's Tale*, of all things, manages to present us with a Chaucer that is more real than the empirical Chaucer, the one who lived and worked and wrote in the late fourteenth century? The answer, as I mean to argue here, is tied to the film's intuitive understanding that Chaucer coincides not with the timely life he once led but with the untimely afterlife that he continues to lead. One of the complaints about the film is that it tries to "make the medieval less distant from the modern." But what the film in fact does is acknowledge how the medieval is already uncannily present on the modern scene, and nowhere more so than in the figure of Chaucer. What *A Knight's Tale* ends up revealing, in other words, is a Chaucer that is real in the full, Lacanian sense of the term: a stranded object that confronts us, in its untimely appearance, with the scandal of an insistence over and above mere existence. This is not the historical Chaucer, the one we catch an occasional glimpse of in the *Life-Records*. This instead is the "natural historical" Chaucer, the one subject to the repetitive cycles of upheaval and dislocation, the continuous "emergence and decay of human orders of meaning" that constitute what Benjamin terms *Naturgeschichte* (17).[10] "In Benjamin's parlance," writes Eric Santner, natural history refers "not to the fact that nature also has a history but to the fact that the artifacts of human history tend to acquire an aspect of mute, natural being at the point where they begin to lose their place in a viable form of life." But this process, argues Santner,

> can be thought of in exactly the opposite way as well. Because human beings have not only natures but also *second natures*, when an artifact loses its place in a historical form of life—when that form of life decays,

> becomes exhausted, or dies—we experience it as something that has been *denaturalized*, transformed into a mere relic of historical being. To put it yet another way, natural history is born out of the dual possibilities that life can persist beyond the death of the symbolic forms that gave it meaning and that symbolic forms can persist beyond the death of the form of life that gave then human vitality. (16–17)

What I am suggesting here, by way of Santner, is that the figure we refer to as "Chaucer" has never been anything other than Chaucer's "second nature": the mere relic of a historical being, at once a "life"—or, better, an afterlife—persisting well beyond the death of the symbolic forms (the institutions of the late Middle Ages) that lent it coherence, and a symbolic form (a text, an image, a canonical figure) persisting apart from and beyond the historical form of life that vitalized it. One may be tempted to dismiss the Chaucer found in Helgeland's film as silly, anachronistic, or glibly "postmodern." Yet to do so is to overlook how the image of a naked Chaucer might serve as a focal point for thinking not only about his unusual presence, at once spectral and material, on the modern scene, but also about what it means to say that we have a moral obligation, as medievalists, to the dead. Because I am no longer convinced that the best way to fulfill that obligation is to consign the dead to a dead time, any more than it is to reanimate the dead in the interests of the living. Our purpose should be to bear witness to the "petrified unrest" of the dead, to the uncanny way their life persists even beyond the death of the symbolic forms that gave it meaning, and by which we might decipher it. And the first step toward bearing such witness is to acknowledge that what we share with the dead is a peculiarly human "undeadness," an "internal alienness" brought on, as Santner puts it, by a common exposure to the violence of natural history.[11]

I want to be clear that this expression of doubt and concern should not be taken as a call simply to do away with the practice of recontextualization. Locating Chaucer "in the politics, poetics, and personae of the late Middle Ages,"[12] piecing together the *habitus* that defined his everyday existence—such practices are indispensable if we wish to understand the form of life that made the Chaucerian text possible. I am suggesting, rather, that recontextualization alone always risks succumbing to the fantasy that an exhausted form of life might be made whole again—that it might *not* lack those symbolic forms that have since gone missing from it. However much locating Chaucer in the institutional frameworks, aesthetic traditions, political structures, and material realties of the fourteenth century might teach us about a particular form of life, it also threatens to occlude the one incontrovertible fact about

that form of life: namely that it has crumbled, fallen into ruin, and dispersed its objects. And in that, the practice of recontextualization avoids taking up the scandalous question of a denaturalized Chaucer, a Chaucer stranded—or, better, persisting—in the here and now.

A Knight's Tale, by contrast, takes up that question with a vengeance. Indeed, one thing I admire about this otherwise terrible film is that it doesn't misrepresent Chaucer by trying to restore him to a context that can be depicted accurately only by acknowledging that Chaucer is no longer to be found there. Instead, the film makes room for the Chaucer that we continue to find among us: the simultaneously strange and proximate Chaucer, the Chaucer that is our neighbor. The idea that the relation between medieval and modern might be one of neighboring is not new. It was introduced more than twenty years ago by Paul Zumthor, who noted that "our Middle Ages include a past that is both close and distant, foreign but familiar: isn't that a traditional definition of the 'neighbor,' the person whom, by turns, we exploit and love?"[13] Generally speaking, I agree with Zumthor's characterization of the Middle Ages as "both close and distant"—that is, both near to us in the form of physical artifacts while distant from us in time. Indeed, if one needed a way to conceptualize "natural history," one could do far worse than the dual existence, at once material and spectral, of the medieval past. All the same, I have two objections to Zumthor's implicit definition of the neighbor. The first is that it treats the Middle Ages as a formal abstraction, a past that, while split between distance and proximity, nonetheless holds together, as a coherent whole, through our imaginative engagement with it. But that is not how we experience the Middle Ages, which comes to us (or at us) not only as an abstract temporality but also, as Zumthor himself suggests, and as the contributions to this collection by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Maura Nolan so powerfully reiterate, in the form of physical remainders: books and objects and artifacts. As a tactile matter, if nothing else, "our Middle Ages" are always fragmented and dispersed. Second, and more urgently, the notion that the neighbor is someone whom we love and exploit by turns, while accurate enough, accords us a phantasmatic power that only ends up obscuring our ethical relation to the other. The neighbor, it assumes, will never surprise us or confront us, but will instead sit passively awaiting whatever treatment we care to dispense. Her desire becomes predictable, manageable. Yet this is to reduce the neighbor, once again, to a vulnerable figure whose fate lies in our hands alone, who can be made to resemble us even as his wretchedness maintains the difference between us. In short, it is to insist so strenuously on our power to "reinvent" Chaucer that we end up disavowing the fact that it is really we who are "de-invented" (if I may be allowed an ugly term) by our encounters with Chaucer.

It was in an effort to anatomize this very power of the neighbor to "de-invent"—or, better, undo—the subject that Lacan devoted part of his seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* to the question of neighbor-love. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud had dismissed the injunction to love one's neighbor on the basis of nothing more than proximity as an ethical ruse, an affront to an economic model of ethics grounded on the assumption that love is a finite commodity that ought to be apportioned only to those with the most legitimate claims upon it.[14] Lacan, while being quick to insist that "the whole Aristotelian conception of the good is alive in this man who is a true man," nonetheless wants us to see how Freud's classically derived notion of ethics blinds him to the fact that the injunction to neighbor-love is not simply an ethical aberration: a failure to judge the good, those friends and family members legitimately deserving of our love, from the bad, those strangers who not only do not deserve our love, but who would, if given the opportunity, exploit us or do us harm (*Ethics*, 186). Instead, Lacan argues, drawing out the radical implications of Freud's position, to follow the injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself is to experience "the opening on to *jouissance*" typically denied the speaking subject (186). This is why to return to Lacan's reworking of the Saint Martin legend, the fundamental ethical injunction to love thy neighbor is so radical, such an affront to the utilitarian logic of philanthropy. After all, if one is compelled to love even the "bad" neighbor *as oneself*, then one is also compelled to acknowledge, as Kenneth Reinhard puts it, that "this neighbor also dwells within me; the ill will exhibited by the neighbor defines my own most intimate and disturbing *jouissance*."[15] For Lacan, our encounter with the neighbor is an ethical moment not simply because it forces us to recognize the proximate other as the site of *oneself*, but because it presses us to acknowledge that the unfathomable desire in the other—the libido and aggression that we impute to the other—is in fact our own repressed desire coming back to us in ciphered form. Alenka Zupančič states the problem this way: "It is not simply the mode of enjoyment of the neighbor, of the other, that is strange to me. The heart of the problem is that I experience my own enjoyment . . . as strange and hostile."[16] If I have anything in common with my neighbor, it is that she too has a neighbor: unconscious enjoyment. Like me, the neighbor is estranged from her own most intimate desire: a pleasure of her own of which she herself is unaware,[17] and from which I, having recognized it as belonging to me as well, would just as soon flee. And yet to flee from the enjoyment that is our neighbor is not only to sacrifice *jouissance* once again; it is to reinforce the logic of the symbolic order by tethering *jouissance* to the transgression of the law, instead of encountering a *jouissance* within the law by following an injunction "to

the letter"—that is, until the injunction itself becomes its own form of enjoyment.

This notion of the subject as in some way estranged, whether from himself or others, is of course a quintessentially Chaucerian one; it informs both the "unliklynesse" (which can mean not only "dissimilarity" but also "dissatisfaction") of the *Troilus* narrator and the Host's description of the pilgrim Chaucer as "elvyssh" (which the *Riverside Chaucer* glosses as "mysterious," "uncanny," "not of this world"). The stroke of unwitting genius on the part of *A Knight's Tale* is to translate that estrangement into not only the subjective, but also the spatial and temporal, registers. Its ludicrousness aside, what immediately strikes one about the scene in question is that it presents Geoff as not just naked but radically dislocated: far removed from both his "proper" time and place. The action supposedly is set in 1372, a year when Chaucer, far from being down and out eighty miles northwest of Paris, was conducting the king's business in Genoa and Florence. The film thus transports Chaucer, broke and naked, to someplace other than where the *Life-Records* locate him in historical time. That dislocatedness, while it may seem historically irresponsible to some, serves as an especially vivid metaphor for what I earlier termed Chaucer's second nature: for the fact that Chaucer is really only ever encountered in his "denaturalized" state, deracinated from the form of life that would have lent him a seemingly "natural" coherence. One thing the film gets essentially right, in fact, is that Geoffrey Chaucer was not yet Chaucer—not yet the figure burdened with a particular symbolic meaning, saddled with the dead weight of his afterlife—in his own time and place.[18] John Bowers notes, for example, that by comparison with Langland, whose "work was actually read, quoted, copied, and imitated throughout the last decades of the fourteenth century . . . there is no hard evidence that Chaucer's works had any wide readership even at court during his lifetime." "If manuscripts provided the sole evidence for dating his literary career," suggests Bowers, "Chaucer might today be classified as a fifteenth-century poet."[19] One might go so far as to say, then, that Chaucer only becomes recognizable later, once he has become equated with the text—the ambiguous object, the vehicle of desire—that outlives him. In other words, Chaucer only achieves self-identity once his work begins to appear somewhere other than where he would normally be located, only when his second nature is found wandering far from its source.

The image of a naked, dislocated Chaucer thus registers on two, seemingly incompatible, but ultimately complementary, levels. On the one hand, it figures a Chaucer who is captive to natural history, to the ongoing processes of transitoriness and decay. This is a Chaucer who, as

Forni suggests, has been reduced, over time, to a mere ruin or remainder, denuded of any original significations: an object about which we make up stories to suit our present needs, but that we can never truly decipher. This is a Chaucer who wanders far from where he ought to be only because, having been subjected to a continuous process of revision and reinvention, he has never been allowed to return home. On the other hand, the image of a naked, dislocated Chaucer also figures a Chaucer who precedes the imposition of symbolic meaning, who may yet follow a different road than the one laid out for him by later regimes of historicization.[20] It figures, in other words, a Chaucer that is a neighbor even to his own contemporaries. This may sound, on the face of it, like a way of depriving Chaucer of his historically situated identity. But it might also be understood as a particular instance of neighbor-love, insofar as it constitutes what Santner terms an "intervention" into the "space of possibilities," or what might simply be described as the effort to imagine a Chaucer whose history, rather than needing to be resurrected, is still ongoing (206). If the naked Geoff acknowledges that the figure of Chaucer always belongs partly to another time and place than his own, that he is always at least partly dispersed—at any time more Geoff than Geoffrey—he also represents a Chaucer who might yet elude the trappings of monumental history. To contemplate the naked Chaucer is thus to contemplate both his subjection to natural history and the act of neighbor-love by which we might intervene in that history.

Now if I happen to be in no great hurry to "dress" Chaucer by restoring him to his proper setting, it is not only because I wish to emancipate him from a dead time, but also because the temporal dislocations to which he is subjected cut in two directions. Helgeland, in a bit of forced identification, wants us to accept the premise that, as he puts it, "people back then were probably a whole lot like we are today."[21] By this he means, presumably, that people back then, including Chaucer, possessed the same hopes and desires, the same virtues and foibles that we moderns do. Yet it would be more accurate to say that one of "those people," Chaucer, is like us insofar as we too are subject to the process of natural history. This is what the fully dressed Geoffrey Chaucer's reduction to the naked Geoff Chaucer forces us to contemplate: that we live in a world of second natures, symbolic forms that may continue to exist, in undead states, long after the life forms that animated them have fallen away. It is not only that, were we to go looking for a mirror reflection of our modern selves in the historical Chaucer, we would instead encounter a naked Chaucer, a Chaucer who confronts us only in the here and now, far from his temporal home. In other words, it is not just the case that Chaucer, having been subjected to the displacements of natural history, is missing

from his allotted place in the Other. It is not just that the distant mirror is cracked. It is that the naked Chaucer points up the transitory nature of our own historical moment, reminding us that we live in a world full of symbolic forms, objects and artifacts, old texts and curios, whose separation from their erstwhile signifieds merely adds to the incoherence of the symbolic order as presently configured. Appearing in a here and now where, strictly speaking, he ought not to be, Chaucer unsettles the present not only by decompleting the very past in whose image the present might identify itself but by confronting the present with the scandal of the signifier in its raw materiality: the signifier transmuted from a vehicle of comprehension to a mere object of contemplation. The naked Chaucer, we might say, stands in the same relation to us as Benjamin proposes the remainders of the Classical period stood in relation to the European Middle Ages: "The attire of the Olympians is left behind, and in the course of time the emblems collect around it."[22]

This is an idea already hinted at in Patricia Ingham's claim that "Chaucer's texts continue to be [*extimate*] to contemporary life,"[23] *extimate* being the wonderful Lacanian coinage used to describe that which is at once intimate and exterior to the human subject—a situation nicely summed up by Lacan's characterization of *das Ding* as "something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me" (*Ethics*, 71, 139). Ingham's point, in a nutshell, is that the Chaucerian text, while not "modern" in any straightforward sense, is nonetheless deeply embedded in modernity, constituting one of the means by and against which we (mis)recognize ourselves as modern subjects. As Ingham notes, however, *extimacy* is never unidirectional. Rather, it underscores the fact that we experience the most intimate part of ourselves as something exterior, located in the neighbor. Rather than distancing ourselves from that neighbor, then, our challenge is to recognize ourselves otherwise, in the place of the neighbor's self-estrangement. But what would it mean for us to recognize ourselves "in" the neighbor—that is, as a kind of *extimate* neighbor to the neighbor—when the neighbor in question is the Chaucerian text? At the very least, it would mean acknowledging that, in temporal terms, we are what precludes that text from achieving the coherence promised by historical contextualization. We should not be too quick, in other words, to dismiss as anachronistic those moments when we seem to detect an uncanny version of ourselves in such figures as the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, the Franklin, and the Canon's Yeoman—the way, that is, in which certain aspects of the Chaucerian text seem to anticipate the modern subject. Yet we should not do so in the hopes of perhaps locating ourselves in that text, or of trying to forge transhistorical community ties with fictional characters. We should do so in order to realize how we,

like the naked Chaucer, are dislocated at the moment of being anticipated by the neighboring text, and that our dislocation makes the inclusion of that text within its own historical moment impossible. At once *extimate* to modernity and the site of our own *extimacy* to our modern selves, the Chaucerian text precludes the cohesion of both its own time and the present.

Dislocation, incomprehension, untimeliness, *extimacy*: These are the same matters foregrounded by the scene in *A Knight's Tale* that gives this essay its title, the scene in which William, Wat, and Roland encounter the naked Chaucer. To begin with, there is the awkwardly comic business of Geoff's nakedness itself. Outwardly, that nakedness is legible as a sign of Geoff's pathetic vulnerability, of the fact that he seems desperately in need of assistance. Geoff, it turns out, has lost everything he owned, including the shirt off his back, to gambling debts. One gets what Helgeland is up to here: Chaucer was an artist, you see, and an artist, by definition, is a risk-taker, a gambler who lives on the edge. Yet the idea of Chaucer being perennially in debt might also be taken as a metaphor, in this case at least, for his indebtedness to us, his modern-day advocates: the scholars who continue to study his work; the self-appointed kindred spirits, like Helgeland, who take it upon themselves to make him hip and relevant. There may be something to this, of course. After all, "*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins."[24] So perhaps it is really is our vigilance alone that ensures the redemption of the past. Perhaps the dead really do owe us. But what if, over and above his need to be satisfied, the naked Geoff Chaucer was begging the three strangers either to kill him or fuck him? Geoff may be able to articulate his needs ("Clothe me, shoe me, for God's sake feed me, let me ride that horse for a bit"). But does that mean that either he or we know his desire? Why does he persist in wandering naked hours or even days after he lost his clothes? Is he sending a message of some sort? My point here is that, in the rush to interpret Chaucer's nakedness as need—a need that is then, in turn, too easily translated into the need for historical recontextualization—we overlook the potential of the other's inscrutable desire to trouble us, to haunt us, to call us into question. Put another way, we disavow the problem of the neighbor's subjection to natural history, the scandalous way in which the desire in the other manifests an excess of life persisting apart from the symbolic forms that might make it comprehensible, and that therefore retains the power to unhinge our own order of meaning.

Another intriguing detail of the scene is how it keeps redirecting our identification. At first our sympathies are squarely with William and his ragtag crew, the film's scrappy heroes, as they translate the master plot of romance into that of late capitalism, faking their way into the ranks

of the gentry where they naturally belong. This initial identification is then reinforced when Geoff, responding to the question "Who are you?" quotes the Song of Songs in Latin: "*Lilium inter spinas*," the lily among the thorns. The blank looks exchanged by the three friends register a bemusement shared even by the most bookish of modern viewers. For like us, they seem hopelessly out of place in the Latinate culture represented by the erudite (if still naked) Geoff, spouting his biblical verses and writing his books about duchesses. But then a remarkable thing happens: Wat, sputtering, barely able to articulate his raw emotions, threatens the naked Geoff with "pain . . . loads of . . . *pain*" if he doesn't make good on his promise to help them in their quest. The moment, though clearly meant to be humorous, is an oddly uncomfortable one: Wat, we fear, is about to get medieval on Chaucer's ass.[25] But that, of course, is precisely the point. Suddenly, Geoff seems startlingly modern, threatened by a cretinous emissary from the violent Middle Ages. Only a few minutes earlier, Chaucer's quotation in Latin had marked him as the quintessential medieval figure; now he seems as out of place as would any of us were we suddenly to find ourselves trudging, circa 1372, down the road to Rouen. Taking all four characters together, then, we could say that the medieval and the modern come together in this scene only through their mutual estrangement, their unrecognizability both to themselves and to one another. Aggression, libido, the enjoyment of each character, each temporal representative, returns to them as strange and hostile, located in their neighbor.

It is these two issues, unconscious desire and temporal dislocation, that make Geoff's invocation of the Song of Songs, in particular, worth dwelling upon at length. Presumably, Geoff's self-comparison to the lily among the thorns is meant to imply his (and, by extension, the poet Chaucer's) transcendence of his crude surroundings. In other words, it is meant to imply his exceptional status. Yet it might also be read as signaling the exact opposite: namely, Geoff's *creatureliness*. Santner, developing a strain of thought found in Benjamin, Heidegger, and Agamben, argues that the notion of creatureliness, as distinct from animality, signifies "less a dimension that traverses the boundaries of human and nonhuman forms of life"—that is, less a quality we share in common with the nonhuman world—"than a specifically human way of finding oneself caught in the midst of antagonisms in and of the political field" (xix). "The 'essential disruption' [of being] that renders man creaturely," he writes, "has . . . a distinctly political—or better, *biopolitical*—aspect; it names the threshold where life becomes a matter of politics and politics comes to inform the very matter and materiality of life" (12). Our creaturely state, to put the matter somewhat differently, is a response to the traumatic imposition of

a biopolitical order, understood as a politics directed toward the management of bodies. In our creatureliness, we betray a dim awareness that we inhabit bodies that are themselves inhabited, overcoded, expropriated—which is why, as Santner goes on to argue, "the so-called formations of the unconscious can be understood . . . as the specific modes of expressivity of creaturely life" (30). If animals have instincts, humans have drives: erstwhile instincts that have been redirected toward more socially acceptable, or just politically expedient, ends. That, in fact, is what finally separates the nonhuman animal from the human creature: Only the latter has "awoken *from* its own captivation," its complete absorption in the instinctual world of nature, "*to* its own captivation"—its complete subjection to the biopolitical order of natural history.[26]

With this in mind, consider the weird look on Geoff's face when he compares himself, by way of reference to the lily among the thorns, to the beloved of the Song of Songs. It is at that moment, I would suggest, when Geoff is at his most creaturely—most aware, however unconsciously, of his captivation by the cycles of natural history. For what we detect in that look is the degree to which Geoff's sexuality, the thing that most separates him, like all humans, from the animal world, is "fundamentally perverse . . . [swerving] from any teleological orientation provided by instinctual endowment" into the realm of metaphor.[27] At stake here is not only the fact that Chaucer equates himself, while standing naked in front of three (heavily armed) strangers, with the passive partner in a sexual relationship. Also at stake is the fact that the erotic charge of the scene is immediately sublimated, not simply into something it is not—language—but into language borrowed from the poem that taught medieval readers how to sublimate their sexual desires. It is not that Geoff is without desire. Quite the opposite. It is that he cannot express that desire without falling into the double bind of natural history, producing at once a symbolic form, the signifier, that outlives the life that animates it, and a life—a desire—that persists in excess of the symbolic forms needed to lend it meaning. Simply put, Geoff cannot express his desire without it becoming a mystery even to himself. What we sense in Geoff's odd expression, then, is the degree to which his human sexuality puts him on the side not of animal immediacy but on that of creaturely perversion.[28] Reaching for an erotic metaphor meant to signal his transcendence, his exceptional status, Geoff instead tells us that he has awoken to his captivation.

The scene's reliance on what might be called an allegorized sexuality—its channeling of desire through a love poem subjected to allegorization, its signifiers divided from their signifieds—is thus one of the ways in which we might understand Chaucer himself as having been

allegorized, in the Benjaminian sense: transient, disseminated, bereft of any meaning that might transcend the workings of time. Another way is in what might be called *A Knight's Tale*'s fundamental fantasy, which is to transform Chaucer, and indeed all of the film's central characters, into proto-capitalist individuals. It is in that fantasy above all, I would argue, where Helgeland's efforts to fulfill his own, contemporary desire run afoul of what Tom Prendergast and Stephanie Trigg describe as the film's enabling strategy, which is to "immediately and consistently . . . interpellate . . . the viewer as an expert on medieval history" (156). For in this particular instance, the film is so shamelessly (and, it must be said, humorously) anachronistic that it only ends up underscoring the impossibility of aligning the historical form of life that structured the late Middle Ages with that which structures our own time and place. By this I don't mean only that the importation of modern fantasies—the confident futurism of David Bowie's "Golden Years" ("Don't let me hear you say life's taking you nowhere!"), the adolescent ecstasies of Queen's "We Will Rock You," the firm conviction that anyone can "change his stars"—into a "medieval" setting is jarring enough to reveal just how far from timeless those fantasies really are. I also mean that the substitution of those fantasies for historical fact reminds us how thoroughly the late-medieval form of life has decayed, and how completely its ruins have become overgrown with our own desires. The Chaucer of *A Knight's Tale*, I have argued, is the *extimate* Chaucer: the personification of a medieval past that is strange to modernity even though it is at the heart of modernity. Without necessarily meaning to, then, the film confronts us with a choice that is ultimately a choice about our practice as medievalists. Do we work to resurrect the form of life that Chaucer would have understood to be that of his own time and place? Historicism, at least the type that seeks to "[replicate] medieval culture's self-understanding" while ignoring "the ways in which medieval culture might have misunderstood itself" or, more radically, how modernity might locate an eccentric version of itself in those misunderstandings, would tell us yes.[29] But if we simply resurrect a dead form of life and leave it at that, what have we really done? Or rather, what have we failed to do? From a psychoanalytic perspective—and perhaps this is one reason why the relation between psychoanalysis and historicism remains an uneasy one—we have acted unethically by failing to love our *extimate* neighbor as ourselves.

Far from being a cause for concern, then, the metaphorical denuding of Chaucer is about the best that could happen, either to him or to us. The naked Chaucer, I have been arguing, embodies the overproximity of a creatureliness stripped, quite literally, of the comforting distance of historical contextualization. What is the right way for us to respond to

that overproximity? As often as not, it seems, our impulse as medievalists has been to flee from the challenge of that overproximity, either by pushing it away, insisting on its alterity, or by bringing it too close, transforming it into a spurious affinity. Yet if one is truly to love the neighbor as oneself, one has no choice but to recognize how Geoff's creatureliness—his nakedness, his anguish, his dislocatedness, his unconscious desire—points to the creaturely in oneself. Helgeland's film may indeed get a lot of things wrong. But for all of its many failings, *A Knight's Tale* still somehow manages, probably in spite of itself, to do one thing right: It forces us to acknowledge that the thing we share with our medieval neighbor is a creatureliness, a captivation in the cycles of natural history, to which we awaken only in our untimely encounters with that neighbor's *jouissance*.

To acknowledge the creaturely in Chaucer may represent more than just a new way of understanding our field's moral imperative; however, it may also constitute a new way of engaging with the Chaucerian text. Consider, for example, the Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas, in which the Host famously turns to the pilgrim Chaucer and asks

> "What man artow?"
> . . .
> "Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare,
> For evere upon the ground I se thee stare."
> . . .
>
> "This were a popet in an arm t'embrace
> For any woman, smal and fair of face.
> He semeth elvyssh by his countenaunce,
> For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce."[30]

As a number of critics, including Patterson, have noted, the Host's comparison of Chaucer to a "popet" that a woman might hold in her arms aligns the poet with Sir Thopas, the "childe" of his tale. For Patterson, this "adoption of the child as an alter ego" is meant to locate Chaucer's writings in what Patterson calls "the space of history." "The child," writes Patterson, "is at once outside history—a figure of the beginning and end of life peculiarly close to the transcendent source, a natural being unaffected by the anxieties of fallen life—and, given the inevitability of experience, profoundly within it." But in this way, argues Patterson, the child becomes a fitting image of Man; for "Man is a creature in the middle, a historical being who dreams of a moment before and after history that he can never fully attain." "Whatever else the child is," concludes Patterson, "it is always a figure of futurity, a wager on the possibilities

of history" (127–128). Yet in the case of the Thopas, a tale notorious for being violently cut short by the Host, that future seems distinctly grim, those possibilities severely curtailed. Might it be, then, that in addition to registering his situation in the space of history, Chaucer's adoption of the child as an alter ego might signal his resistance to the future—specifically, a resistance, before the fact, to his posthumous elevation to the position of Father of English Poetry? Might it be, to put the matter another way, that Chaucer dreads the natural historical dimension of his historical being? This is one reason why the Host's description of Chaucer as "elvyssh" is so suggestive. According to Patterson, some medieval commentators believed that elves were not just "beings who have existed for generations" but "may even be the dead themselves" (104). By having one of his own characters detect something elvyssh about him, then, Chaucer aligns himself with the world of the undead, the shadow world of those displaced by, and yet strangely immune to, the cycles of natural history.

The same dread of natural history may also be what lies behind Chaucer's decision to assign the Tale of Sir Thopas, his only foray into English tail-rhyme romance, to his own alter ego. The Host, you will recall, chides the pilgrim Chaucer for looking at the ground as intently and continually as if he were hoping to find a hare. One possible reason for Chaucer's melancholic absorption, I want to suggest, is that he is distracted, haunted even, by what might be described as a premonition of the afterlife of the native literary forms he will later be used, in a manner underscoring the cycles of natural history, to supplant. The soon-to-be Father Chaucer is already haunted, in other words, by the prehistory of the English literary history of which he will shortly be made the progenitor. Consider, for example, that in the Thopas, as the *Riverside* describes it, "Chaucer adopts the genre of the popular romance . . . and pointedly departs from his normal poetic usages ('as though he himself were not the author but only the reporter of the rest')" (917). Such an adoption may be nothing more than an exercise in parody, of course. But one might also read it as Chaucer's attempt at preserving a native literary form by mortifying it: subjecting it to one form of violence, parody, in order to protect it from another, the juridical violence at the heart of natural history. One might read it, in other words, as Chaucer's acknowledgment that he is haunted, in an uncannily predictive way, by the thing he will have helped kill, and for whose death he knows, guiltily, that he must be held accountable. Toconcern oneself with the Chaucerian afterlife means more, then, than concerning oneself with the afterlife of Chaucer alone. It means concerning oneself as well with the prehistory that Chaucer brings with him into our present moment—the ghostly reminder, as it were, of all that may have been lost upon his captivation, at the moment of his involuntary

designation as Father Chaucer, to and by the processes of natural history. Chaucer's distractedness, his literal preoccupation with the afterlife of all that will be shunted aside, retroactively, upon his elevation to the position of Father of English Poetry, is yet another mark of the creatureliness that we both share and lament.

It is this same question of recognizing one's own creatureliness in and as one's neighbor that also makes me reluctant to dismiss Helgeland's film as merely a travesty of Chaucer's Knight's Tale. It is true, of course, that *A Knight's Tale* demonstrates little grasp of the complicated philosophical issues addressed in such subtle fashion by Chaucer's poem. But that doesn't mean that there are no points of contact between them, and in this one scene, at least, that point is the creaturely as a sign of political subjection—specifically, subjection to a biopolitical order overseen by a sovereign. One thinks, for example, of the control that Theseus assumes over the bodies of Palamon and Arcite (to say nothing of Emelye) after they have escaped from prison. Fighting alone in the grove, the two cousins are merely animal-like, comparable to a "wood leon," a "crueel tigre," or to two "wilde bores" (I.1655–1657). But once Theseus intervenes, their desires become a matter of politics, exposed to a series of sovereign decisions made at both the terrestrial and cosmic levels. Likewise, one recalls Theseus' Prime Mover speech—a veritable paean (albeit in a minor key) to the order of transitoriness and decay to which the creature is subject:

> And therfore, of his wise purveiaunce
> He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce
> That speces of thynges and progressiouns
> Shullen enduren by successiouns,
> And nat eterne, withouten any lye.
> This maystow understonde and seen at ye.
> (I.3011–3016)

The Knight's intervention into this natural historical scheme is a complicated one. In a move that may be intended either to counteract or extend the control that Theseus assumes over the bodies of the two cousins, the Knight violates Theseus' own stated belief—"And certeinly a man hath moost honour / To dyen in excellence and flour, / Whan he is siker of his goode name; / Than hath he doon his freend, ne hym, no shame . . . Thanne is it best, as for a worthy fame / To dyen whan that he is best of name" (I.3047–3050; 3055–3056)—and revives the names of Palamon and Arcite after their deaths. Initially, this seems like it might constitute the Knight's attempt to blast those names out of "the continuum of history,"[31] to redeem them from oblivion by forcibly extracting

them from their historical moment—a moment, as the Knight knows only too well, that has already been subjected to the violent cyclicality of natural history. Soon, though, one begins to question whether the Knight seeks to redeem the names of Palamon and Arcite or enlist them in the service of a big Other that is seamless, whole, continuous. It is notable, for example, that, like Helgeland, Chaucer's Knight promotes the fantasy that "people back then," in the mytho-historical past, were "probably a lot like" people in the late Middle Ages—that Theseus was a duke, that Palamon and Arcite were knights living by the chivalric code, and so on. Like the characters in *A Knight's Tale*, the characters of the Knight's Tale are called upon to reflect an eternal present—in this case, the medieval present. The irony, however, is that the Knight, by reviving the names of Palamon and Arcite, has already decompleted the very past in whose image he seeks a reflection of himself. The Knight doesn't seem to realize it, but by "denaturalizing" Palamon and Arcite, reanimating their symbolic forms, their names, after the demise of the pre-Christian form of life that once vitalized them, he only strengthens the grip of natural history upon his own present moment.[32] In short, the Knight makes a mistake that we too should be careful to avoid: Not content to "faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones"—that is, to gaze in horror upon the ongoing catastrophe of natural history—he instead "faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection," asserting the robustness of his own moment by reanimating the dead.[33] Like Saint Martin, the Knight dresses his pagan characters in half of his own cloak while at the same time insisting that there is a difference between them, that their desires can be kept at arm's length, that their temporal dislocation is not a harbinger of his own. Not only, then, does the Knight miss the fact that he too is subject to natural history: that even the order he defends will fall into ruin. He misses an opportunity to love the neighbor as himself. And in missing that, the Knight misses an opportunity not only to redeem Palamon and Arcite from the cycle of natural history, but also to awaken to his own creatureliness.

I began this essay by quoting Forni's argument that Geoff's nakedness might serve as a metaphor for his having been stripped of historical fact. I want to end by considering how Geoff's nakedness may be the most profoundly medieval thing about him, and about what that might mean for the place of Chaucer on the modern scene. Here is Erich Auerbach writing on what he terms the "creatural" aspect of late-medieval art:

> Certain it is that during the last centuries of the Middle Ages there are to be observed symptoms of fatigue and barrenness in constructive-theoretical thinking . . . with the result that the "creatural" aspect of Christian

> anthropology—life's subjection to suffering and transitoriness—comes out in crass and unmitigated relief. The peculiar feature of this radically creatural picture of man, which is in particularly sharp contrast to the classico-humanistic picture, lies in the fact that it combines the highest respect for man's class insignia with no respect whatever for man himself as soon as he is divested of them. Beneath them there is nothing but the flesh, which age and illness will ravage until death and putrefaction destroy it. It is, if you like, a radical theory of the equality of all men, not in an active and political sense but as a direct devaluation of life which affects every man individually.[34]

Geoff Chaucer's is a form of suffering, an anguish, that would have been immediately recognizable to a late-medieval audience. But what is it, exactly, that he suffers from? If Santner is to be believed, he suffers from a specific form of political subjection, a captivation to a biopolitical order that leaves him exposed to the depredations of natural history. Geoff, in other words, "soldiers on" (as he puts it in the film) under an internal pressure, a regime of self-estrangement. A part of my argument here has been that our encounters with that suffering, that creatureliness, awaken us to our own creaturely captivation. Adapting Auerbach, we might say that modernity's investment in biopolitics has put us back in touch with a late-medieval theory of universalism: the creatural as a sign of "the equality of all men." In other words, we find ourselves aligned with the medieval other at the point where we catch, in the other's creaturely state, an anamorphic glimpse of our own self-estrangement, our own dislocation.[35] To love Chaucer as our neighbor is thus not to restore him, portly and dignified, to the halls of monumental history. It is to join him, naked, on the road to redemptive ruin.

Notes

1. *A Knight's Tale*, dir. Brian Helgeland (Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 2001).
2. Kevin J. Harty, "Chaucer in Performance," in *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 568–570.
3. Kathleen Forni, "Reinventing Chaucer: Helgeland's *A Knight's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 37.3 (2003): 259.
4. Lee Patterson, *Temporal Circumstances: Form and History in* The Canterbury Tales (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 10.
5. I take the term "bare life" or "mere life" from Giorgio Agamben's analysis and elaboration of Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Benjamin's "analysis of this figure [i.e., the figure of bare life]," writes Agamben, "establishes a link between bare life and judicial violence. Not

only does the rule of law over the living exist and cease to exist alongside bare life"; bare life also hastens "the dissolution of juridical violence," insofar as the punishment "purifies," according to Benjamin, "the guilty, not of guilt, however, but of law," thereby calling the justice and efficacy, even the legality, of the law into question. Agamben, *Bare Life*, 65.

6. "My own situation leads me to understand Chaucer's poetry largely in terms of the historical conditions within which it was produced," writes Patterson. "I am always trying to think my way back into Chaucer's situation, into the way in which he made sense of his world as I can best understand that world." To be fair, Patterson elsewhere complains that "too often, historicist criticism continues to reduce text to context, to regard historical situating as an end in itself." *Temporal Circumstances*, 16; 6. For critiques of this version of historicism, see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 43–78; Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–6; and Christopher Lane, "The Poverty of Context: Historicism and Nonmimetic Fiction," *PMLA* 118.3 (2003): 450–469.
7. On the concept of lawmaking violence, see Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz; trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 277–300.
8. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1997), 186.
9. Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), xii. Subsequent references will appear in the text.
10. It is crucial to note that, as Santner puts it, Benjamin always connects these cycles to violence—specifically, "the violence of history, the rise and fall of empires and orders of meaning, the endless cycle of struggles for hegemony" (ibid., 17–20).
11. Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 36.
12. Seth Lerer, ed., *The Yale Companion to Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.
13. Paul Zumthor, *Speaking of the Middle Ages*, trans. Sarah White (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 28–29.
14. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), 62–63.
15. Kenneth Reinhard, "Freud, My Neighbor," *American Imago* 54 (1997): 183.
16. Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000), 225.
17. As Freud famously says of the Rat Man: "At all the more important moments while he was telling his story his face took on a very strange, composite expression. I could only interpret it as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*." Sigmund Freud, *Three Case Histories* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1993), 13. Emphasis in the original.

18. In his own lifetime, Chaucer was known as a translator, a composer of courtly love lyrics, and a philosophical poet—a far cry from the multidimensional figure of, say, the new *Yale Companion*, to pick but one recent example. The truth of Chaucer is that he remains, in Steve Ellis' phrase, "at large." Steve Ellis, *Chaucer at Large: The Poet in the Modern Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
19. John M. Bowers, *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonist Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 4.
20. "The vast majority of the discussion around [*A Knight's Tale*]," as Tom Prendergast and Stephanie Trigg note in chapter five of this volume, "takes for granted that the medieval is stable and knowable, the fixed point from which Helgeland does or does not, should or should not, diverge." But of course the medieval is no more stable and knowable than is the present. Accordingly, a part of my argument here is that Helgeland, in all of his breathtaking ignorance about Chaucer and the Middle Ages, somehow manages to achieve a genuine critical insight: namely, that our disrespectful re-imaginings of the unstable past hold the power to generate alternative versions of the equally unstable present, and thus alternative ways of imagining the future.
21. Brian Helgeland, "A White Knight Takes on Hollywood—and Lives to Tell the Tale," *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 2001, cited by Forni in "Reinventing Chaucer," 257.
22. On this point, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*," trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985), 220–226.
23. Patricia Clare Ingham, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," in Ellis, *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, 471.
24. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.
25. In all the ways that Carolyn Dinshaw has defined the phrase, making it a shorthand for a particular anxiety produced by the medieval: "the impossibility of absolute straightness, whiteness, modernity, of the purely dominant, of essentially *being* anything." See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 189.
26. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 70, cited by Santner in *On Creaturely Life*, 12.
27. Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, 31.
28. "One of Freud's great insights," writes Santner, "was that human sexuality, precisely that dimension of human life where we seem to be utterly reduced to animality, is actually the point at which our difference from animals is in some ways most radical" (ibid., 30–31). Whereas animal instincts express themselves in commensurate acts, human drives express our repeated—and often failed—attempts to interpret the enigma of the other's desire.

29. Louise O. Fradenburg, "'Be Not Far From Me': Psychoanalysis, Medieval Studies and the Subject of Religion," *Exemplaria* 7.1 (1995): 41 and 45.
30. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, VII.695–704. All references to Chaucer's works are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, third edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).
31. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 262.
32. In this respect, Palamon and Arcite emerge as inverted reflections of the Knight, who can be understood, if I read Patterson correctly, as a life that survives, unwittingly, beyond the death of the symbolic forms (of chivalry) that lent it meaning. Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 165–230.
33. Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 233.
34. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 249–250.
35. For an extended treatment of anamorphosis and its possible relation to historicism, see chapter one by Patricia Ingham in this volume.

CHAPTER 7

BIOGRAPHY AFTER HISTORICISM: THE HARLEY LYRICS, THE HEREFORD MAP, AND THE LIFE OF ROGER DE BREYNTON

Daniel Birkholz

In the Harley Lyric known as *Dum Ludis Floribus*, a love-struck narrator demonstrates the sophisticated poetics of his desire by describing both the aristocratic credentials of his beloved ("Ele est si bele e gente dame egregia" [she is such a beautiful, refined, and excellent lady], 9) and the bittersweet ambivalence of his own position:

> Dum ludis floribus velud lacinia
> Le dieu d'amour moi tient en tiel angustia.
> [. . .]
> Eius amor tantum me facit feruere
> Qe ie ne soi quid possum inde facere;
> Pur ly couent hoc seculum relinquere
> Si ie ne pus l'amour de li perquirere.[1]
>
> While you play with flowers, like Lacinian Hera,
> The God of Love binds me in such anguish.
> [. . .]
> Her love makes me burn so much
> That I do not know what I can do about it;
> Therefore I shall have to give up this world
> If I am not able to acquire her love.
>
> (1–2, 5–8)

Poor sod; and too bad about the whole sorry period. Already by the early fourteenth century and even in deepest Herefordshire,[2] such sentiments

are tragically widespread. But if *Dum Ludis Floribus* pursues familiar themes and employs standard rhetoric in doing so, this slight lyric yet succeeds in particularizing—in making historically unique—the generic, frequently abstracted experience of that most universal of masculine literary subject positions, the abject poet-lover. Whether *Dum Ludis* may be said thereby to preserve trace of a particular historical individual is another matter. Better that we ask whether this literary artifact may be persuaded to bear witness to—not itself house, but help us to recognize—some verifiable inhabitant of the medieval past.

In a past not quite so distant, when it was still possible to speak of "the despised historical anecdote," Frank Barlow described as "fashionable nowadays" the scholarly assumption "that it is impossible to get an idea of the character of a medieval person." "It is difficult even today," Barlow conceded in 1970—and here the old-school historian nods to present-day biographical theorists, who would be quick to agree concerning the impossibility of objective biography, that is, life-writing not profoundly influenced by the relationship between biographer and subject. The methodological justification to search after historical "character and personality" may lag behind; "All the same," Barlow shrugs, "I think it cowardly not to try."[3]

Biography has been deemed impracticable, even outright impossible for the medieval era,[4] but the pages to follow will demonstrate how plausible contours of one fourteenth-century person's individuated experience can be drawn, and will suggest what may be gained, for medievalism and for biography, in doing so. The premises upon which this endeavor builds may appear radical, in being as speculative as they are textual and documentary, but they derive from theoretical principles and interpretive techniques that are common scholarly fare. Prevailing wisdoms hold that the data available to medievalists is not enough to allow for legitimate biography; that the archival materials, literary artifacts, and traces of material culture we have are connected by historical strands too tenuous; or that, anyway, medieval interior lives must remain beyond us until we find better stock in which to trade—that is, material more reminiscent of the modern, such as diaries, photographs, or medical records. The challenge shall be to transform our period's supposed documentary insufficiencies into an interpretive virtue. For data, however plentiful and evocative, is *never* enough—not in contemporary biography, even for subjects known intimately, and certainly not in medieval studies, where evidence is not just scarce but always of the "wrong" sort.

Judging by the presumptions (e.g., as to interiority) upon which modern biography depends, the prospects do not look good. Nevertheless, this essay will look to generate grounded insight into one medieval

personality. Moth to flame, it shall do so by using, first, a love poem that is something of a poor relation in a book famous for its lyrics, British Library MS Harley 2253. It shall do so by using, second, some slices of material evidence that may indicate how audiences viewed a monumental *mappamundi* [map of the world] displayed at Hereford Cathedral during the years of Harley 2253's compilation nearby.[5] It shall do so by using, third, a brief lost period in the life of a Hereford Canon named Roger de Breynton, who likely knew and may have helped procure texts for the Harley Manuscript and who had an intimate relationship with the Hereford Map (e.g., as custodian of the chapel housing it). And it shall do so by using, fourth, methodological propositions gathered at the crossroads of four disciplines: literary studies, the history of cartography, documentary medieval studies, and contemporary biographical theory.

My mode shall be synecdochic: one poem to stand in for an anthology of breathtaking range; a single icon to suggest the possibilities for travel upon a geo-historical encyclopedia; a period of blankness in an ecclesiastical career otherwise accounted for. Here, where three kinds of historical archive and three orders of disciplinary truth intersect, there are means enough for producing a rich and particular, if provisional, *pre*modern life. The discursive realms of the medieval and the biographical are widely regarded as incommensurate, yet in certain of its tenets biography offers newly humanizing opportunities for literary medievalism. And benefits flow back in turn. A medieval case study requires that biographical theory respond to challenges it would not otherwise encounter, were the field's implicitly modernist orientation to remain undisturbed.

Playing with Flowers

To the extent that the lyric *Dum Ludis Floribus* has received notice, commentators have seized upon its unusual multi-linguality as a means by which to locate it in social-historical terms. The special "character and personality" of this poem, however, lies less in *that* it moves between languages, than in *how* it moves: with reckless abandon, as of youth or disenfranchisement. But to thus personify this slice of Harley verse as rakish and "transgressive,"[6] as if it were not a "carmina" [song] (17) but the swaggering body of a literary young swell, is both debatable as to characterization and getting ahead of ourselves, theoretically. One must not take undue liberties, or so caution various contributors to *Writing Medieval Biography*, Barlow's 2006 *festschrift* and, to date, the only edited collection on this topic. Marjorie Chibnall, for example, rules that "speculation, even when legitimate, is unlikely to be productive."[7] Barlow

himself is less foreclosed: "[despite] the need for caution," he emphasizes "the biographer's responsibility to stretch the evidence as far as legitimately can be done."[8]

The linguistic moves made by *Dum Ludis Floribus* are idiosyncratic, by the standards of medieval macaronic verse. Contemporary readers tend to regard this mode as elitist; artificial; literary ostentation of the worst sort. Still, professional medievalists have been enthralled by the poem's "irregular" macaronic practice, a "much less orderly" alternation than in other Harley poems.[9] The first four and a half of *Dum Ludis*'s five stanzas deploy French and Latin in similar proportion. In Mary Dove's judgment, French is "the primary language" (333). But while this may be true on word count (about 3:2), such an assessment disguises alternate truths concerning the poem's formal qualities and social possibilities. It progresses regularly enough: fourteen of twenty lines begin in French but end in Latin. What agitates academic readers is that the moment of transition varies: usually it comes around the half-line, but sometimes at the final word: "Ele est si bele e gente dame *egregia* / Cum ele fust *imperatoris filia*" (9–10; emphasis added).[10] Three quatrains begin with lines entirely in Latin (1, 5, 17), making this our default language, used first to establish stanzaic structure and then to satisfy metrical and rhyming needs. That each assay into courtly French sentiment returns to the cool embrace of Latin polysyllables suggests that the discursive practices of the ecclesiastical schoolroom continue to direct, and here work at a microlevel to contain, the wildcard energies of vernacular poetic expression. The iconoclasm of our amorous clerk begins to look establishment: the familiar progress of the literary rake. To thus pit Latin and vernacular against one another, however, ignores the pleasure the poem takes in commingling two worlds' metrics and mores.

The poem's final quatrain has allowed for broad conclusions about a poorly lit era in English literary history.[11] Bizarre even by *Dum Ludis* standards, it begins with a line of Latin, turns for a line to French, and then leaps the Channel to conclude in Middle English:

> Scrips[i] hec carmina in [meis] tabulis;
> Mon ostel est en mi la vile de Paris.
> May y sugge namore, so wel me is;
> ȝef hi deȝe for loue of hire, duel hit ys.[12]
>
> I wrote this song down in my notebooks;
> My hostel is in the middle of the city of Paris.
> I can say no more, I'm in such a condition;
> If I die for love of her, it would be a pity.
> (17–20)

For G.L. Brook, this stanza reflects the period's "unsettled state": "The three languages were competing with each other in literary use, and English had not yet gained the mastery" (26). Considering the macaronic cooperation prevailing in most lines and the capstone effect of the final couplet, however, the competition Brook describes seems a preoccupation more modern than medieval. His desire for English "mastery" fits well with the teleological concerns of university literature departments and state-sponsored publishing programs.

Lang-lit politics aside, most interesting here is our discipline's long-standing habit of lightning-quick social extrapolation: from the state of the poetic line to the state of the realm. Typically commentators use this lyric to shed cultural-linguistics light on other, better poems. Brook reasons that "such a poem would only be appreciated by readers familiar with all three languages" (26), but for Dove, "The trilingualism of *Dum Ludis Floribus* must suggest either that the perceived context for its performance/circulation was a male and educated one, or that the perceived context was one in which the male and educated element would enjoy understanding what the female and non-Latin literate element could not understand" (332–334). *Dum Ludis*'s courtly-into-academic habit signals its dual immersion; our "student-poet" (333) has both wax *tabulae* and a *bele dame*, whatever facility we may grant him with either. But the poem's happy high-cultural balance receives a guttural jolt with the final shift into English. This startling gesture, linguistic but also narrative, has occasioned some academic claims that are themselves startling, for how eagerly they dispense with principles of modern literary analysis, in order to pursue desires that are—and here we return to point—essentially biographical in nature.

Brook finds "every reason to believe that the final stanza is genuinely autobiographical," making *Dum Ludis* "probably written by an English clerk living in Paris who reverted to his native language in the last couplet" (26). Half a century onward one expects less confidence in the reliability of narrators—even in lyric, and even in benighted pre-Chaucerian days. But this bio-dramatization remains current. Dove reveals her own investments when she foregrounds, for subsequent demolition, David Jeffrey and Brian Levy's 1990 suggestion "that the composer is an English wandering scholar…learning the French of Paris and its gallant verses and showing off his Latin into the bargain" (332). Albeit brief, this portrait is full-fledged, complete with personal circumstances; professional standing; class background; even romantic personality. Dove challenges her predecessors' desire to read *Dum Ludis Floribus* according to an antiquated *clerici vagantes* paradigm, in which love-lyrics, dramatic fabliaux, and other impious poems (Latin, vernacular, and especially macaronic) are attributed to a marginal class of mobile students and unbeneficed

clerks—institutional Christianity being thus inoculated from erotic disorder.[13] Dove unmasks Jeffrey and Levy's "wandering scholar" using ingenious materialist arguments: on grounds that "the presumptive *tabula* on which he writes can only be encountered by way of the page of a codex," an artifact whose production requires professional stability, social capital, and a milieu "permitting texts to be exchanged" (334).

What interests me here is how, in correcting the picture painted by previous scholarship, Dove produces a biographical portrait herself. Where her forbears' dissolute clerk has highbrow pretensions, the qualities Dove chooses are assiduously institutional. In place of mobile hustling, we have regular employment; rather than a "Babylonian confusion of tongues" spilling out the tavern door,[14] we have "interest in the conservation of texts" and confidence in their "continuing value." Writing down—*scripsit* not *in tabulis* but in a codex we might lay hands on today—is the single aspect of production regarded as verifiable. Archivable vellum triumphs over "short-term" wax.[15] Except that the bespoken "codex" Dove presumes, along with its stable "context" in a literary Paris of steady scribal work, rolodex lunches, and university/courtly interchange, has no better claim to external reality than those wax tablets and oral verses she was rightly suspicious about. Having revealed the documentary uncertainties at the heart of this text's system of signification, we persist, oddly, in crediting similarly untenable assumptions about its authorial milieu.

We may wonder just what in *Dum Ludis* indicates to all concerned that its composer is an English student in Paris. The impoverished state of the lyric's English poetics may be seen in its final set of rhymes—the Latin of "in tabulis" spawns a lilting French "vile de Paris," but the audacity of the next linguistic turn disguises a lame conclusion. However anguished in content, in syntax the Middle English lines end weakly: "is" rhymed with "ys." Critics uniformly speak of the poet's reversion into his "native language" (Brook 26; cf. Fein, later). Yet the decline from fluent courtly-academic discourse to a labored repetition of that most passive of verbs (no other Harley Lyric rhymes "is" solely with itself) might argue this poet's slender experience with the exercise of composing in the English vernacular.

Such clerks as are implied by manuscripts such as Harley 2253 have as many as three "native" languages—Latin for intellectual, bureaucratic, and ecclesiastical life; French for courtly or devotional interaction; and English. By period standards, the most foreign of literary experiences would be to force English—province of an unlettered agrarian class—into a learned and courtly context to which it is unsuited. If Latin is the tongue into which academic minds and metrical lines retreat, while courtly French, when it comes to the pain of love, is where it all begins,

then what does monosyllabic English signify? Is English where to go when confounded and alienated, when a state of authentic wordlessness or emotive impotence is required? The couplet that concludes *Dum Ludis* is simple in diction ("so wel me is") but difficult in idiom.[16] The roughness and imprecision of his Middle English, however, has not led scholars to crisis concerning their poet's national origin—surely a biographical crux. Rather than presume an English clerk in France, why not imagine a French clerk, experimenting with the robust verses of Herefordshire?

There is no reason, textually, to keep insisting that the medieval personality behind *Dum Ludis Floribus* must be an *Anglais* "student-poet," resident in Paris. Yet this is the biographical principle and authenticating historicist detail upon which a century of response to *Dum Ludis* has been grounded—the external biographical "truth," as Virginia Woolf might enthuse, "out of which all vapour of falsehood has been pressed by the weight of research."[17] What makes us so attached to the notion that it is he himself, and not his narrator, who has a modest *hostel* in Paris, a student's *tabulae* to compose on, and *bele dame*-problems? Don't we all want to be young writers in love, in Paris before the war? As with the poet's expatriate identity, it remains unclear why production at "the University of Paris around 1300"[18] need be presumed. Must the Miller's Tale have been written at Oxford?

Dove does not object to Jeffrey and Levy taking a narrator at his word—just to the outdated profile they peddle. She does not dispense with previous scholarship's appeal to the biographical; she provides more compelling characterization. A new sketch displaces the old but remains itself susceptible to challenge, especially as new paradigms emerge down the scholarly road. Dove is persuasive in suggesting that "If *Dum Ludis Floribus* offers itself as a transgressive *jeu d'esprit*, the context in which it is preserved invites us to ponder that self-assessment." But rather than conclude that here, in a milieu so ordered "that the idea of disorder can be safely enjoyed" (334), is reflected the true face of our lyricist, we must consider the context in which *this* performance is produced, and ponder, in turn, *its* assessment of a textual artifact's historical personality. What Dove provides—what we all provide—is one more "assessment" of the presumptive "self" that lies latent within *Dum Ludis Floribus*.

It may appear that the sum of my efforts has been to make Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes necessary, by demonstrating the persistence of what *PMLA*'s Frank Ellis, writing on Gray's *Elegy* in 1951, decried as "the biographical problem in literary criticism." For Ellis, "biographical experiences can no more be reconstructed from a poem than [vice-versa] Formal biography based on this fallacy is easily recognized as a variety of historical fiction. But formal criticism based on the biographical fallacy

(as it may be called) can be positively misleading."[19] For Woolf, essential to biography is an engagement with "truth in its hardest, most obdurate form" (149)[20]; but I concur regarding biography's status as a "variety of historical fiction." Where Ellis and I part ways is at his dismissal of biographical criticism as an interpretive fallacy somehow uniquely "misleading." Ellis' *PMLA* predecessor E.E. Stoll had, already in 1932, fulminated against "[treating] literature as the mirror of the age or of the author": "is it not, as scholars, our chief business and privilege to distinguish fact from illusion?"[21] Writing on the far side of New Criticism, and now after the energies of Post-structuralism and New Historicism have ebbed, it seems neither possible nor desirable that we legislate between fact and illusion, any more than do our self-fashioning poems, fictional archives, and revelatory professional essays. What Ellis and Stoll find deplorable, I see as ineluctable; not biographical *fallacy*, as if such a thing were avoidable, so much as *biographical inevitability*. Interpretive characterizations exist in perennial competition, each version of "Gray" or "the Harley scribe" or "the *Dum Ludis* poet" telling us as much about the people doing the telling as those being described. Recognition of such—our active participation in the construction of the critical subject—is an operative tenet of "the New Biography" in both its early- and late-century incarnations (sharing this title are Woolf's 1927 essay and a 2000 collection edited by Jo Burr Margadant) as well as of postmodern biographical practice.[22] Another basic principle is that each rendition of a life, no matter how privileged in access or masterful in craft, remains subject to revision.

And what are *my* biographical desires, thus to implicate my fellow Harley scholars in high crimes against literary criticism? One wish is to make space for a more freewheeling approach to medieval texts—their truths and their fictions, their obdurate illusions and recombinant facts—than has heretofore been sanctioned. As an undergraduate, the redoubtable Barlow "considered becoming a novelist"[23]; why not let him? If confronted with wax tablets and erotic trilingualism along the Seine, why not play this song for all the jumbled payoff it is worth—not just in the "historical fiction" of formal biography, but in the historical fiction that is "formal criticism"? My point here is that biographical desire is never absent from the system of literary interpretation. Literary-historical personae, from patrons to authors to scribes to readers, are constructed in response to unsatisfactory prevailing wisdoms. They become newly characterized, as time goes by, according to the needs, tastes, and cherished blind spots of new reading communities.

Scholars have jettisoned the concept of character when treating *Dum Ludis Floribus*. Why? It is not that we connect with its hackneyed amorous sentiments; what seems authentic is this man's complicated social

positioning. We relate to his desire for home but see ourselves, too, in his ambitions to worldly fashion, and in his inability to refrain from virtuoso display of learning. These cosmopolitan credentials are balanced by the outland authenticity that only vernacular English can bring. Somehow, we believe—are invited to feel—that we know something inalienable, that we have been given access to personality-transmitting "truths" about the quotidian circumstances and exiled experience of a unique, no longer *just* representative, medieval human being. "Who the scribe was and why he was collecting these pieces remains a mystery": thus remarks one Harley reader about methodological rooms not her own, and she is afterward off—blithe as only a neo-New Critic with a bagful of semiotics can be—to examine "the poems themselves."[24] Do only poems, then, but not readers or compilers of them, have selves? Are only medieval texts, and not medieval lives, recoverable? These questions are not academic. The fallacy is to believe that we ever could dispense with the category of the human, with the fiction of the life, however naïve to the pieties of radical linguistics and radical materialism such a notion may sound.

Playing with Knives

Like the first, our second biographical scene concerns an impassioned act attributed to a clerk from western England—although now the act is not poetic in nature, but cartographic. This textual drama, like our previous, presupposes actors habituated to learned discourse in French and Latin, but the subjects involved are less preservation-oriented, less amorous, and less cosmopolitan than those mentioned earlier. Where in the lyric world of *Dum Ludis Floribus* there are flowers and a "charming manner" [beal semblant] (11), here we are to imagine a protagonist playing with knives, or at least a sharp stick, as he stands before the cathedral *mappamundi* displayed at Hereford from *ca.* 1290 onward. As before, the "vile de Paris" (18) provides our dramatic backdrop and starring is a *scriptor* whose visceral feelings come out English; now, though, our focal character is not just West Midlands in dialect (cf. Lerer, Dove) but a figure so intimate with Hereford Cathedral as to lay hands on one of its treasures. Latin commingles with French, here again, until challenged by a late eruption of "bluntly native" emotion, one more authentic, seemingly, than is the "moan of love-anguish in the vernacular" with which *Dum Ludis* closes.[25] Either way, this second inscription of English personality—carved now, where earlier sung—is more dangerous and difficult to render.

Our cases share features beyond an overlapped institutional context, but the differences are striking too—especially in scope. Its twenty verse lines written as ten of prose, *Dum Ludis Floribus* covers one-third

of a 19 × 29 centimeter manuscript page; the Hereford Map runs 1.3 × 1.6 meters (the splayed hide of a massive bull) and crowds in some 1,091 legends and 500+ icons. If *Dum Ludis* articulates one clerk's arrested ardor, the Hereford Map, like an encyclopedic *summa*, encompasses all realms and eras of human experience: classical, biblical, and natural history; politics and economics; architecture and cosmography. *Mappaemundi* have been analyzed in relationship to their host communities, such that cartographic historians now agree on the genre's basic meaning.[26] But documentation of medieval *encounters* with maps has rarely proven possible. Embedded ideologies are one thing; the discrete impact of maps upon individuals for whom period standards, institutional investments, and structural motivations may or may not apply is quite another. Audience prompts appear clear enough: one Hereford Map inscription "seems to call for an act of [devotional] attention," "admonishing people who [see it] to pray" for its maker.[27] But absent from the cartographical record are material traces of such acts, along with documentary "people" to commit them. Much as with our featured Harley Lyric, though, modern scholarship invites us to imagine biographical responses to the Hereford Map.

Emphasis typically goes to macro-level geographical design and theological framing, yet critics sometimes *have* pursued the micro-dynamics of medieval relationships with the Hereford Map. Chiefly this has meant close reading of its sometimes arbitrary representational choices. For example, the map shows architectural interest in some towns, where most are generic. The icon denoting "Lincoln" [Lincolnia], home to "Richard of Haldingham," "who made and laid out the map" [ki fet e compasse cest estoire], is perched on a river-cliff, with "a house-lined street leading up to [the cathedral]."[28] As only a fraction of the map's content corresponds to "home" territory, personally suggestive features are far outweighed by material derived from geographical authorities. Fortunately we have plenty of modern voices eager to see a laconic medieval text placed in an explanatory biographical context. The map-site most subject to critical-biographical desire has been "H-ford" [Hereford] itself, especially as this area "has been somewhat re-drawn," its town–icon a "'meagre and unfinished outline.'"[29] P.D.A. Harvey maintains that Hereford was absent from the map originally, but "added not long after by a different hand" (6). Scott Westrem questions whether, instead, local details were merely "rewritten (at a place on the map that might be touched repeatedly in the course of orienting its viewing audience to 'home')" (314). I have no wish to intervene between paleographers; fascinating either way is the expectation that a map will become indelibly marked by relocation to a new home—its very substance altered, as people are, by the experience of living in a different place. Indeed, the

map continues to generate parochial emotion. As a recent Cathedral guide laments, "sadly and mystifyingly, Hereford looks like a dilapidated barn about the collapse into the River Wye."[30]

If Hereford's icon suggests a backward agrarian identity, at the opposite extreme there looms "Parisius civitas" [the city of Paris], "the great metropolis of medieval times" to which the map assigns "pride of place." Lincoln may be most "realistic," but enthroned upon Île de la Cité, Paris is most elaborate, "a magnificent castle towering over the gothic spire of Sainte Chapelle."[31] That a variegated urban landscape is here subsumed within the courtly and the ecclesiastical matches the Hereford Map's usual practice. A majority of towns in Europe are cathedral seats. Typically these have spires, while garrison–towns have battlements. By contrast, there is no shorthand denoting university–towns: Cambridge fails to appear and Oxford is so modest that some presume animus against it, while Bologna and Padua, renowned for the study of canon law, share no distinguishing feature.

Paris' relationship to the land around it is unclear. There is no central legend to give substance to France, as for "Anglia" and others, just a spidery "terminus Francie et Burgundie" [the frontier of France and Burgundy] wending south from Paris across the diagonal Rhône and Saône. France's floating regional names ("Normannia," "Acquitania," "Gasconia") signify decentralization but also their ripeness for feudal plucking, as in the Plantagenet-Capetian conflict over Gascony in 1324–1325. *Mappaemundi* provide cultural more than logistical orientation, but the Hereford Map incorporates itineraries drawn from biblical and classical sources or compiled from medieval wayfaring. Examples in France include the pilgrim's way to Compostella; the "Voie Regordane" of Provençal poetry; and routes marking the passage of English wool—later soldiers—through Gascony.[32] Paris is thus characterized not only as urban destination and royal showpiece, but as way station. For English clerks, it stood along the route to the Papal Court. These details place Hereford's "Parisius civitas" in context, but they hide the passionate act of map-reading advertised earlier. For "at sometime unknown"—most presume the Hundred Years' War—"an attempt seems to have been made to deface Paris."[33] There are many deep cuts across the vellum.

What scholars find most noteworthy about Paris on the Hereford Map is how contemporary English viewers—apparently—responded to it. *Mappaemundi* often link to geographical descriptions or encyclopedic histories; the term can denote either image or text. However, there is no tradition of readerly annotation upon cartographic documents as there is for medieval written texts; nor is there, apart from the negative evidence of destroyed artifacts, any sign of map-defacement, whether ideological vandalism or pedantic correction. Some quality of early maps, surely

related to their association with elites, has kept them immune from the attentions of those, wielding pen or knife or brush, who in other settings leave physical trace of their engagement. This deference occurs even when maps present information their viewers know to be mistaken. The Hereford Map offers a quintessential example in the gold-leaf with which, in splayed capitals, it names the continents. Stunningly, the specialist contracted for this job has painted the characters "A-F-F-R-I-C-A" across Europe and "E-U-R-O-P-A" across Africa. Audiences feel the map's pain. But restraint wins out; none have dared scrape away the golden ignorance. In so fastidious a context, Paris' possible defacement constitutes an interpretive crux. Such textual wantonness—like irresponsible tongue-switching in a love-lyric—needs human explanation.

The first-generation commentary of Hereford parsons W.L. Bevan and H.W. Phillott (1873) has provided subsequent scholars with a common base.[34] Regarding the "heavy scoring" or "long scratches" marring the map, both Harvey and Westrem recount Bevan and Phillott's suggestion "that the marks are an expression of [nationalist] feeling," "perpetrated by some over-patriotic Briton at a time when feeling ran high against France."[35] More sober than our forbears, we moderns realize the cuts "may well be more mundane accidental damage," as Harvey reasons. "Probably," agrees Westrem, "it was inadvertent." The no-longer jingoistic cutting "might have been caused," Harvey proposes, "by the 'quantity of glass lanthorns' that had been found 'piled against the map' in 1812" (11). There is conspiracy-deflating pleasure here but such rational chastening does not account for the statistically unlikely fact that the scoring on the map "seems to be particularly bad around Paris" (12). In emphasizing Bevan and Phillott's failure to notice some fainter cutting in North Africa and Sinai, Westrem also underplays this point (xix). But there is no "seems" about it; whether by storage-shed chance or human design, the map's cuts do concentrate strangely upon Paris. The long horizontals that extend from the Channel south across France, some into or beyond the Mediterranean, are—*only* at Paris—crosshatched by shorter vertical cuts. Three begin just above Paris and the rest within inches; none cut into any other icon.

More precise attention to the vellum map-face—closer reading of the cuts—has quelled worries about virulent nationalism. But rogue lanthorns alone cannot fill the human breach these trenches have opened. As it happens, the explanation that recent examiners favor matches current beliefs concerning the pedagogical function of large-scale *mappaemundi*. Harvey connects the map with Hereford's "highly developed" Cathedral School[36]; Marcia Kupfer imagines it used for less formal instruction, in sermons or devotions[37]; and Dan Terkla argues for edifying reference to it

by attentive shrine custodians.[38] "Perhaps," Westrem concludes, the cuts are "the result of an overzealous instructor wielding a pointer."[39] These propositions are plausible. But since "we have no direct evidence,"[40] such readings remain slenderly related to the material "scoring" itself. In fact, recent scholarly claims are somewhat *less* grounded than Bevan and Phillott's. The cuts' indiscriminate border-crossing disqualified a nationalist explanation, but this same extension beyond France proves no impediment to theories involving pedagogues' pointers. Why should a cathedral *magister* gesticulate so wildly? And as for accidents, are even spare lanthorns drawn, with uncanny metropolitan desire, to congregate precisely upon the City of Light?

My point is not that any of these interpretations are right or wrong. Rather, it is to suggest that all are biographically speculative in imagining human responses to the map, even when they try most to read at a materialist level. The emotional overflow that once was nationalist has become pedagogical, but has not dissipated. It lingers even in the narrative of the lanthorns: such rough handling of our treasure implies an epistemological rupture of massive proportions. Faced with the jackals of Reformation and Enlightenment, we can no longer be confident, as the scribe of *Dum Ludis* could, of the continuing value of medieval texts; whoever allowed those lantern cuts does not share our concern for preservation. Even supposing no sin of commission, the omission of respect for so lavish an image communicates the distance between there and here.

The premodern lives imagined in each reading of Hereford's Paris—the map-viewers invented to explain its marring—differ increasingly down the years. First our perpetrator is a lecturer too cavalier with his stick; later he is an ugly Englishman, venting sharp ethnocentric rage; and finally he is unsentimental, too preoccupied with logistics of storage to care about damage to the medieval past. Yet flickering behind these visions of a ruined Paris is another projection, in which local eyes feast upon a *Parisius civitas* more majestic than anything in Britain. *Mappaemundi* are not travel brochures, but this does not mean that a young clerk who gazes upon one, in a cathedral whose soon-to-be sainted former bishop had studied canon law and theology at Paris,[41] will not have conceived a desire to see those ornate spires, not to mention *beles dames*, for himself. Considering its outsized splendor, one might argue that a desire for Paris is created by the map itself. Biographical work in cartography has mostly involved searches for mapmakers and patrons, although no treatment of Richard of Haldingham's career has yet traveled to Paris. Increasingly, scholars stress the *mappamundi* genre's French university origins; one archetype may lie in a descriptive treatise by Hugh of St. Victor (*ca.* 1200), "perhaps written down by a pupil."[42] Paris doesn't come up in discussing

our map*maker*'s background but does when talk turns to the *map*'s background. Sophisticated critics avoid the trap of looking for Richard in the tower-windows of Paris, or along the Seine's bridges where university clerks resorted,[43] or in the *Rue les Parcheminiers*, dense with booksellers and English student hostels.[44] Yet the Hereford Map's interest in its own genealogy, we might say, brings us back to university; sends us off to France.

Playing with Fire, Playing with Lives

My previous sections have sought to show how biographical personae underlie and give sanction to scholarly readings of medieval lyric and medieval cartography—whether we acknowledge them or not. Unavoidably it seems, we construct some version of a medieval person—however anonymous, however much an institutional type or historical composite—to stand behind and serve as human guarantor for the interpretive propositions in our foregrounds. At this point my argument shall negotiate a heavy turn. I do not wish to protest too much, but I do intend, for theoretical and narrative reasons that shall emerge, to be critically self-conscious concerning my essay's central methodological crux. I shall not seek to deny the biographical desire that, although forbidden, resides near the heart of many academic engagements with the past; nor will I strain toward a level of hermeneutic abstraction whose dealing in social-ideological collectives creates as many problems as it solves. Instead, this essay shall offer a singular, documentary human base-point from which to conduct its literary and cartographic research. If the critical construction of historical "characters" tends to happen anyway, as any reading's price of admission—*someone* needs to populate our implied textual communities, our presumptive "audiences at the time"—then why not make the implicit explicit? Instead of allowing the medieval reader we envision to remain generic, the function of a given text's time, place, institutional coordinates, and terms of dissemination, we may as well ask this historicized proxy for our own intellectual and emotional engagements to stand forward. If nothing else, doing so—putting documentary faces on our inevitably imagined readers—will give the critical readings we generate a heightened human purchase. Historical "accuracy" (as it is fondly called) is not the issue here. Rather, since virtually no medievalist reading can avoid being speculative, the issue is imaginative precision. Reading biographically can increase the degree of detail we bring to the task of suggesting how medieval human beings, wondrous in their documentary particularity, might have responded to the unique cultural artifacts they knew.

The register of Adam Orleton, Bishop of Hereford 1317–1327, records that on March 17, 1322, the clerk "Roger de Breynton" was granted "dispensation to be absent" from his diocese "for study." Most leaves—like one granted to Breynton in 1313 by Richard Swinfield (bp. 1283–1317)—covered three years at Oxford. Unusually, Breynton's 1322 leave came mid-career and provided for five. And in a provision unique in the Hereford registers, this grant came "with permission to go into parts beyond the sea."[45] After assigning proctors (*HRO* 242), Breynton disappears from the English documentary record until summer 1325. When he reappears, he does so in a royal letter of protection listing those accompanying the future Edward III to the court of his uncle Charles IV of France, where on September 24, at a royal residence outside Paris, he will perform homage for the territories of Aquitaine, Ponthieu, and Gascony.[46] Edward II's decision to send his heir to France, where he will join a disaffected Queen Isabella and the Marcher Lord Roger Mortimer, is the turning point that leads to rebel invasion a year later, followed by the king's November 1326 capture, January deposition, and September 1327 death.

I began following the career of Roger Breynton, idly at first, because in September 1326 he becomes Prebend of Norton, a Hereford canonry "vacated by the death of Richard de Bello" (*HRO* 389). Many believe this Richard Bello to be identical or related to the "Richard de Haldingham e de Lafford" whom the Hereford Map names as its patron or compiler. Collective wisdom now posits two clerks named Richard Bello: one (d. 1278) who was Cathedral Treasurer at Lincoln, Prebend of Holdingham and Sleaford, and an accomplished cartographer; and another, a kinsman and inheritor of the other's work, who by 1290 was friendly with Richard Swinfield. In 1305 this second Richard Bello was made a Hereford Canon, the thinking goes, as payment for the map, which Bishop Swinfield wanted as ornament for the shrine of his predecessor, Thomas Cantilupe, bp. 1275–1282.[47] From 1287, when miracles began at Cantilupe's tomb in Hereford Cathedral's North Transept, full energies were devoted to promoting his canonization, finally achieved in 1320.[48]

Roger Breynton's connection to Saint Cantilupe, and thereby to the map at his shrine, was lifelong and intense. Born about when the miracles commenced and raised near both a cathedral manor ("Mora Canticorum" [Canon's Moor]) and one of the bishop's own (Tupsley, from which his birth family took its name),[49] he was a Cathedral School student and Vicar Choral in the heady years surrounding a papal inquest (1307) into Thomas Cantilupe's sanctity.[50] As the protégé of Nicholas Reigate, who was Bishop's Registrar (by 1289) and Cathedral Treasurer (1302–1308), young Roger Breynton received accounts training and helped maintain altar vestments, sanctuary hangings, and other ornaments and relics, "all

comprising"—as the Hereford *mappamundi* did—"the 'treasures' of the cathedral."[51] Following ordination and his first study-leave, Breynton joined Bishop Swinfield's *familia* or administrative "household" (*HRS* 512). He plays a supporting role during final canonization lobbying, but takes a leading role in subsequent planning for translation of St. Cantilupe's relics to "a more sumptuous shrine" in the cathedral's Lady Chapel.[52] In 1321 Breynton rates special mention in a letter from king to pope requesting permission for this translation. Later records describe him as the Lady Chapel's special "custodian."[53]

Roger Breynton's intimacy with the Hereford Cathedral Map is incontrovertible, but his connections to British Library MS Harley 2253 are indirect. Much remains unknowable about this trilingual literary anthology, including the provenance and transmission-lines of most texts, but its main scribe was a legal scrivener active 1314–1349 in Ludlow (23 miles north of Hereford) who probably also served as chaplain for some local aristocratic family.[54] Despite its lay-household orientation, Harley 2253 also connects to an episcopal milieu. Among its ecclesiastical items are a Latin life of St. Ethelbert, patron saint of Hereford Cathedral; a Latin prayer lately promulgated at Avignon by Pope John XXII; and, copied onto the book's vellum "wrapper," extracts from a Hereford Breviary. In another of his manuscripts the Harley scribe transcribes seal-mottoes of Hereford Bishops Swinfield and Orleton; and so on.[55] Such codicological hybridity is common. Vernacular audiences were lay/ecclesiastical mixtures, and mobile, networked clerks like those in a bishop's *familia* are strong candidates to have transmitted texts of various kinds, from scattered national and international sources, to Ludlow for local copying.[56] Roger Breynton shares a structural fitness for such a transmitting role with others, but his particular institutional positions and geographical placements; his record of international, domestic, and regional travel; and his extensive professional networks—including documented ties to Ludlow-area clerks and aristocratic patrons, and to literary figures across England and in France—argue a heightened plausibility for his involvement in Harley 2253's compilation. At the very least, these social- and material-historical details suggest Breynton's probable acquaintance with the book's textual contents, its lay owners, and its specific production/reception milieu. Questions of transmission aside, Breynton makes an ideal reader, in that his life-record provides us with a sequence of documentary positions—proximate and far-flung, institutional and idiosyncratic—from which to interpret Harley literary material.

To the extent that a bureaucratic personality or relationship to textuality may be determined, Roger Breynton's profile is both highly unusual and highly suggestive. He did not normally write out documents himself,

but he did exert regular and direct oversight of episcopal scribes throughout his career, as "the Bishop's Agent," longtime treasurer, and frequent proxy (*ca.* 1317–1330); as Archdeacon of Gloucester (1331–1348), vicar-general at Worcester (early 1330s), and residential Canon at Hereford (1333–1351); and as legal Executor for Reigate (d. 1308), Swinfield (d. 1317), and Orleton (d. 1345) in turn.[57] He conducts examinations of new notaries at Hereford; they are perennially in his company, often in his lodgings.[58] Indeed whole clutches of Hereford documents (e.g., HCM #1001–1049) survive due to Breynton's personal archiving.[59] This is a man in whom careful accounting practices are engrained. His habit of retaining loose receipts produces bafflement during a *ca.* 1346 audit: "[seeing as] he produced the two documents"—from nearly three decades before—his disputants "confessed they could not gainsay the written bonds."[60] Such details describe a conscientious manager of scribal production and fluent trafficker in texts. Breynton is just the sort to have gathered and retained, whether in bespoken fair copy or still in their heterogeneous "single sheets and rolls," the many short items that together comprise the landmark Harley anthology.[61]

A tempting move at this point would be to sketch a factional historical landscape, tying episcopal Hereford to English power-politics at large. Roger Breynton's documentary reappearance in summer 1325, after all, comes rife with intrigue: another of Prince Edward's chaperones to the French Court, Treasurer of the Exchequer Walter Stapledon, will flee Paris in October, citing plots against his life by clerks in Isabella's retinue.[62] Though it foreshortens his study-leave (from five years to three-and-a-half), Breynton's subsequent involvement with the Queen and Mortimer suggests that during these months of cross-Channel revolutionary ground-laying he led "an exciting life, to say the least."[63] Back in England, Bishop Orleton's relations with Edward II had become increasingly fraught. Regime-change being afoot, some may feel the need for stage-setting here—a disquistion on, say, the failed baronial rebellion of 1321–1322, led by the King's cousin Thomas of Lancaster. There would be narrative appeal in describing the rebels' punishments: many executed, others imprisoned, dispossessed, or compelled into military service in Gascony. However, I shall frustrate these expectations, for they depend upon disciplinary paradigms that prioritize "history," especially its political varieties, above biography, to which subtle pejoratives such as "micro-history" attach. To mention, for context and trivia's sake, that among those imprisoned in 1322 was the Lord of Ludlow Castle, Roger Mortimer, who with Queen Isabella shall engineer the king's downfall in 1326, would be to genuflect before the notion that an individual biographical case has importance only insofar as it throws light

upon history's "course of events."[64] Or rather, mentioning Mortimer would do this, unless we add that in managing his famous escape from the Tower of London in August 1323, the future royal consort had the clandestine help, rumor went, of clerks in the *familia* of Adam Orleton.[65] Although unsubstantiated, as are chronicle accusations of their involvement in the murders of Walter Stapledon, Chancellor Robert Baldock, and the king himself,[66] these rumors make possible the fashioning of another historical persona for Roger Breynton, in this case a cloak-and-dagger identity to complement the sober bureaucrat's personality that diocesan records suggest.

Roger Breynton is not suddenly worth our attention because he enlightens dark times. Rather, the rebellion fomenting within English expatriate circles in mid-1320s Paris deserves our attention—so too the Hereford Map's ravaged metropolitan icon and a certain Harley Lyric's Left Bank nostalgia—because it casts uniquely angled light on the historical individual that is "Roger de Breynton": episcopal operative, map-chapel custodian, and plausible consumer, perhaps transmitter, of Harley literary texts. Where history privileges general conditions and consequential events, biography—in the authoritative words of David Novarr—"celebrates what is different, unusual, unrepresentative, idiosyncratic."[67] New Biography admits that it constructs both individual subject and historical context in the first place.

"To retain the Bishop of Hereford in England," exclaims King Edward II in 1325, "is as dangerous as to carry fire in one's bosom."[68] My earlier narrative has us playing with fire, but we are also playing with lives. Any account of a distant and fractious period such as 1322–1325 must acknowledge its inherent provisionality. Virginia Woolf considers that "the true life of your subject shows itself in action which is evident rather than in that inner life of thought and emotion which meanders darkly and obscurely."[69] But even when factual parameters can be agreed, interpretations of biographical "action" are rarely self-"evident." It was not until a decade into my fascination with the life of Roger Breynton that I noticed an extraordinary convergence of dates. His (surprising) dispensation to be absent from his home diocese and patron bishop is recorded on March 17, 1322. Following his return, some sources name him "*M.* Roger de Breynton"—that is, *magister*—but he takes no advanced degree. The concept of finishing was not always significant for medieval university attendees; still, *magistri* precede *domini* in Hereford documentation, indicating status to be gained. We may wish to allow him time to procure Harley texts from literary clerks at the French court or expatriates in the *Rue les Parcheminiers*, but Breynton seems unlikely to have squandered his sabbatical in taverns among *clerici vagantes* or gaping

at the city's soaring turrets and *gentes dames*. Another explanation for why Breynton comes home without the "*M*." most canons possess may lie in what transpired on the eve of his departure. After Mortimer surrenders at Shrewsbury, the king upbraids Orleton at Hereford (January/February 1322); then comes the decisive Battle of Boroughbridge—on March 16. At this point the baronial cause in England lies shattered. Lives and careers are in jeopardy. In 1324 royal inquests will determine that Orleton held strategy meetings with Mortimer; offered his manors as staging sites; even sent members of his entourage to join the rebels.[70] Roger Breynton is this embattled, highly political bishop's ranking executive officer and "numbers among his friends,"[71] but on March 17 he receives (a hasty?) license "for study," and on March 19 he is off, gone abroad into his lost years.

We Have to Invent Him

We cannot know exactly how Roger Breynton spent the three-and-a-half years between the Battle of Boroughbridge and the future Edward III's fateful journey to France—definitive "historical" moments that bookend his one real stretch of documentary obscurity. Nonetheless, his study-leave "beyond the sea" brings career transformation. As a result of Orleton's patronage, he is collated to the Cathedral Prebend of Norton in September 1326, before rebel forces land, and then receives another in November (*HRO* 391) during trials and expedient hangings at Hereford, now "insurgent headquarters."[72] Breynton remains in Orleton's wake until 1333, but his status as an ecclesiastical *dominus* in his own right grows steadily. As surely as for English politics, something changes for Roger Breynton, perhaps in him, during his "lost years."

This term is not innocent. If some find it illogical to attempt biography for any medieval subject "save perhaps a handful,"[73] how much more perverse to focus, in writing a premodern life, not upon those moments for which we have documentation, but upon those for which we do not? William St. Clair has little patience for "some" biographers' "deliberately speculative approach":

> Are biographical practitioners now free not only to pick and choose and reinterpret among the recorded evidence, but to offer interpretations and to deliver judgments for which the surviving evidence, taken as a whole, offers scant support? . . . [Gaps] in the archival record both invite, and provide opportunities for, speculation if they are biographically reconceptualized as "lost years."[74]

To highlight my subject's most obscure period brings us, paradoxically, near to the essence of the undertaking, because it makes us confront the distinctive methodological challenges that arise in doing medievalist biography. George T. Beech attributes medieval historians' "failure . . . to take a biographical approach" to "the lack of contemporary sources."[75] Beech advocates a collective or "prosopographical" approach as corrective to the medieval era's quantitative lack, while for St. Clair, the ideal biographical subject—his own, William Godwin (d. 1836)—is one for whom the greatest bulk of information exists. But if difference lies in amount of information (Godwin's archive is "astonishing" [228]) and not essentially in kind, then no matter how much or little documentation exists and no matter how conducive or resistant to interiority it may be supposed, for *any* subject the biographer plays a role that is part "archaeologist" (227), yes, but also part inventor. Rather than being somehow less appropriate than St. Clair's beloved nineteenth century or (the *locus classicus*) Boswell's eighteenth, the medieval period—theoretically—should be as available to biographical inquiry as any other.

What the Middle Ages have to offer is precisely their perceived lack of resources for biography. In the absence of the usual data, the diaristic and epistolary bonanza St. Clair has and Beech laments, we must be resourceful. Archives are finite, so we must develop new methods for extracting biographical meaning from the textual artifacts and material culture we do have. In being thus driven by necessity to challenge mainline biography's assumptions concerning documentation, it becomes necessary to question current practice. The biographies most amenable to present-day academic orthodoxies are unlikely to produce the innovation that is required to challenge the field's implicit bias against early subjects. One way to put it—with apologies to Barlow et al.—is that biography is too important to be left to historians alone. Another is that, as readers of the past who are the privileged coauthors of medieval culture and de-facto curators of its quotidian traces and creative achievements, we would do well to free ourselves from the desultory academic need to be "right" at all costs, or else demurely silent. Literary–historical and visual-arts methodologies can provide the renewable energy that, if nothing else, may embolden medievalist biographers to reach beyond the usual handful of royal or sainted suspects.[76]

The "demise of biography on the front line of academic history" has been attributed to interest across the disciplines in "shared identities" and "interpretations of collective experience," while biography's proponents advocate the signal importance to cultural insight of *particular* lives, of the historical singular. What distinguishes recent "New Biography" is not that it dispenses with the individual life but rather its skepticism for

concepts of a unified persona. Traditionally, the biographer's role was to "identify in a person's life an underlying pattern or motif that would serve as an organizing theme," but recent practitioners emphasize the "constructed nature [of] the historical self." The subject of biography is "no longer the coherent self." Instead it is "a self that is performed."[77]

New Biography considers itself able to "alter the content of [historical] master narratives," but standard rules of periodization apply: individual subjects appear only after the Middle Ages (25, 2). No public sphere, no performance of self: a "literature of personality"[78] must be impossible under such conditions. Many will recognize, here as in the emphasis on selves that are fashioned, the influence of Renaissance New Historicism upon the new "New Biography." Medievalists have been busy of late, demolishing the theoretical walls that prohibit the existence of medieval public spheres and ambivalent subjectivities; but there is still no life that can be known, apparently, without biography as various modernisms presume to know it, and without individuality as sanctioned by the Renaissance.

The challenge biography presents to medievalists is that we ourselves must presume to furnish the past mind we would interpenetrate, in order next to assess. Positions vary on the biographer's proper relationship to interiority—some advocate, others prohibit "imaginative reconstruction of the inner life." But always there is the "problem of filling gaps in the available material" (79, 141). In a medieval context it can seem all gap, but this is also true for subjects otherwise subaltern, those not so privileged as William Godwin or Roger Breynton. We construct interiors as we dare, all of us, but medievalist biographers first must struggle to assemble basic factual exteriors.

For most medieval people we have little documentation. Roger Breynton convened with kings and popes in his prime but also helped bring in the harvest, as a young reeve assigned to the cathedral manor beside his home village.[79] For subjects like him there may be no insurmountable lack of documents, yet from a modern standpoint, an implicit lack *in* the documents—even if we have handwriting samples and epistolary prose; clues about long-term friendships and personal habits; a few ripe anecdotes and traumatic period events (revolution, famine, plague); plus legal transactions and financial records aplenty. As Julia Boffey summarizes, "explicitly personal reflections on individual experience" are "hard to find in material from this period."[80] The conventions that structure medieval documentary genres such as letters, deeds, and devotional bequests, even artistic forms such as love-lyric or world map, allow "little space for individuals to present themselves." Eruptions of the personal do occur, as when, in 1336, Roger Breynton endows a mass on behalf of his

brother William (d. 1331) and his mentor Nicholas Reigate (d. 1308)[81]; or perhaps when the *Dum Ludis* "student-poet" mentions his Paris "dame" and "ostel"; or when a cathedral map's added icon for "H-ford" is drawn to resemble a tithe-barn. Still, traces such as these are "essentially partial glimpses into the lives to which they attach" and "can only be fitted into the chronology of a 'life'" with the help "of information from outside sources." "Biographical details," Boffey insists, serve exemplary or testimonial ends. They "do not command independent interest."[82]

We approach the premodern biographical bind: poems such as the Harley Lyrics are not just anonymous but evacuated, most convention-bound when seeming least so; monumental *mappaemundi* prohibit viewers from leaving unique trace of their response; and those few documents we do have, even for textually rich subjects, tend to be dry, formalized, partial at best: fatally absent of what Woolf would recognize as authentic personality. Medieval lives lack life. As a recent study of Hereford clerks in the fourteenth century laments, extant sources communicate "no sense of the historical individual": "we lack . . . depth of character in the historical pastors of the time. They appear, when they appear at all, in the colorless language of court records and Episcopal memoranda."[83] If such a paltry inheritance is to be revitalized, a new medievalist biography must animate documentary husks while yet paying respect to the scholarly traditions charged with ensuring their data's ongoing integrity.

Apprehending both what is powerful in cartography, and what is fanciful, John Rigby Hale has called maps "diagrams of the possible."[84] The interpretive historical project outlined in this essay uses literary, cartographic, and documentary evidence to access a possible medieval past. I do not say "*the*" medieval past, and I do not call this history: however fractured and mediated, I desire engagement with the experience of a *singular* medieval person. One model for such an undertaking comes courtesy of Norman Mailer, who in *Marilyn* (1973) sets out to produce "a species of novel ready to play by the rules of biography": "no items could be made up and evidence would be provided when facts were moot. Speculation *had* to be underlined." As an "experiment in biography," Mailer offered "a literary hypothesis of one possible Marilyn Monroe, who might actually have lived and fit most of the facts available."[85] A *Life of Roger de Breynton* produced according to Mailer's rules would be an experiment indeed—more passages underlined than not. What would a species of biography ready to play by the rules of medieval studies, literary criticism, and the history of cartography look like? To counterbalance its period-bending, such a project would historicize (and de-historicize) furiously. It would confront epochal differences in documentary subjectivity. It would delight in literary recital; manuscript trivia; cartographic

detail. Crucially, it would listen to texts and gaze upon images from discrete institutional and historical vantage points, at specific biographical moments. Historical understandings as idiosyncratic as anyone's lived life would be the necessary, perhaps not unenlightening result.

By academic standards, Mailer fails, in his "Olympian self-intrusiveness," "unforgivable" aversion to primary sources, and vulgar factual sloppiness, to keep his pledge to "play by biography's rules." But David Novarr judges his enterprise successful, insofar as the accepted "aim of biography" remains "the truthful transmission of personality." Novarr thinks Mailer succeeds because "he finds a kindred soul" (161–162). And so we circle back: data is not enough. Reconstruction of personality, whether from the early 1320s or the late 1950s, requires "manipulation" of biographical fact.[86] Such manipulation is performed, according to William H. Epstein, by one who "recognizes" in that historical Other some elusive quality of self. "Biographical recognition"—life-writing's definitive feature, for Epstein—constitutes the ambivalent means by which the wound of individual subjectivity may be sutured, the gap of consciousness between past and present, between them and us, bridged.[87] If we squint, we might imagine we see a familiar figure walking through Paris on the Hereford Map, dodging deep cuts on his way to the Sorbonne, or to court at the Palais Royal, or perhaps to some courtly tryst.

Positions will vary on what constitutes legitimate stretching of evidence, yet contemporary biography's increasing attention to the biographer's relationship to his or her subject would seem to resonate with contemporary medievalists' increasing recognition that "the scholarly gaze [itself] constitutes or reconstitutes its object." More and more medievalist work, David Lawton notes, is "prepared to instantiate in its writing the subject it seeks to articulate."[88] Critical biography, in which life and artistic output are read together, does not lie far afield from most literary historicisms, in which a documentary anecdote or institutional moment is used to give renewed life to a cultural object that has lost its traction. New Historicism tends to disavow its biographical orientation, yet it operates as a species of life-writing all the same.

The Harley Lyrics may be "first-rate," even "stunning" poems, but when it is sniffed of their medieval compiler that "scholars have often tried to invent him,"[89] the message is that we are daft to do so—mistaken even to try. As much now as in the era of Mailer and Monroe, critics remain torn between "biographical desires" and equally strong taboos: still, as René Girard urged in 1964, "fear of the 'biographical fallacy' must not be an excuse to evade the truly significant problems raised by literary creation."[90] As I have tried to show, interpretation always emanates from some historical and biographical location—indeed more

than one. Although displaced across time, reading minds are interpenetrated by histories of reception and legacies of disciplinary expectation. "Roger de Breynton" did in fact exist. Nonetheless, we cannot help but invent him, just as we reinvent vernacular love-lyrics and an ecclesiastical world map by placing "him" beside them; or if not him, then some other imaginary biographical construct, whether wandering scholar or workaday scribe, anti-French hooligan or fervent cathedral pedagogue. Incorporating elements of New Biographical method into the reading of Harley poems, into the viewing of the Hereford *mappamundi*, and into the piecing together of Roger Breynton's life-record enables us to see how each of several medieval bodies—literary, cartographic, bio-documentary—animates the other. To do so responsibly requires that we examine medieval textual selves and modern disciplinary selfhoods with equal rigor.

"Post-historicism" does not mean without the historical. "On the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality": thus does Woolf partition biography, demanding for it an order of truth qualitatively different from that with which fiction is made. She terms this "truth as truth is to be found in the British Museum."[91] Yet however many historical documents we enlist, medieval biographical truth as found at Hereford Cathedral is not so "granite" as Woolf imagines (149), nor is the British Museum's truth any less equivocal, within the manuscript vaults, display cases, and foam readers' cradles that have been Harley 2253's modern habitat. If there is to be any transmitted personality for Roger Breynton, cathedral clerk of medieval Hereford, it shall be found not in administrative documents alone, nor in recited poems or monumental maps themselves, but in the spaces between discursive realms that by habit and force of disciplinary pressure we allow to remain apart.

Notes

1. Transcription from G.L. Brook, ed., *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of Ms. Harley 2253* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1948), 55 (#19). See Bella Millet, ed., *Wessex Parallel WebTexts* (http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/), for textual difficulties; my translation builds on Millet's but departs in places (1, 6–8, 17, 19). Line 1 is difficult, as later the beloved appears in third person—"eius" [her] (5); "ele" [she] (9)—but "ludis" [you play] is second person. "Velud lacinia" also remains elusive: in classical Latin *lacinia* denotes a garment's fringe, but as Dove suggests (citation later), the line may instead allude to Hera, surnamed "Lacinia" (333).
2. Carter Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Sc*ribes, Conten*ts, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253,* ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Inst., 2000), 21–109.

3. David Bates, Julia Crick, and Sarah Hamilton, eds., *Writing Medieval Biography: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2006), vii–ix.
4. Attributed to K.B. McFarlane (1973), this position is disputed in Bates et al., *Writing Medieval Biography,* vii, 8. Cf. George T. Beech, "Biography and the Study of 11th-Century Society: Bishop Peter II of Poitiers 1087–1115," *Francia* 7 (1979–1980): 101–121; also R.M. Haines, *The Church and Politics in Fourteenth-Century England: The Career of Adam Orleton c.1275–1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), vii.
5. Dan Terkla, "The Original Placement of the Hereford *Mappa Mundi*," *Imago Mundi* 56:2 (2004): 131–151.
6. Mary Dove, "Evading Textual Intimacy: The French Secular Verse," in Fein, *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, 329–349, at 334.
7. Marjorie Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda as a Subject for Biography," 185–194, at 192. The conference behind the volume was entitled "The *Limits* of Medieval Biography" (Bates et al., *Writing Medieval Biography,* 12; emphasis added).
8. Bates et al., *Writing Medieval Biography,* viii–ix.
9. Brook, *The Harley Lyrics,* 26, 84.
10. "She is such a beautiful, refined, and excellent lady, / As if she were an emperor's daughter."
11. See later, but also Seth Lerer, "Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology," *PMLA* 118:5 (2003): 1251–1267. Lerer reads the folio page on which *Dum Ludis* appears (along with poems in ME and AN) as a microcosm, first, of the trilingual Harley compilation; and second, of "medieval anthology culture" writ large (1258–1260).
12. For transcription uncertainties (e.g., "scripsi" for MS "scripsit"; "uvel" [evil] for "wel"), see Dove, "Evading Textual Intimacy," and Millett, *Wessex Parallel WebTexts*.
13. This reading of *Dum Ludis* goes back at least a century; see Konrad Aegidius ten Brink, *History of English Literature*, trans. H.M. Kennedy (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904), 302–304.
14. Ibid., 302.
15. Ibid., 334. Conversely, see Lerer, who uses *Dum Ludis* to tease out the implications for literary history of a medieval "wax-tablet subculture": "No line can be drawn between the literary artifacts that we imagine circulating in particular past periods and the media that circulated them" ("Medieval English Literature," 1255–1261).
16. "I'd be well-off enough"? "I am in such a sorry [uvel] state"? See Millett, *Wessex Parallel WebTexts,* Dove, "Evading Textual Intimacy," and Lerer, "Idea of the Anthology," for renderings.
17. In "The New Biography" (1927), Woolf indulges in some famous provocation concerning factual data and its relationship to biographical truth. Above all a biographer must "choose those truths which transmit personality," but "in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded"

(149). Repr. in *Granite and Rainbow* (London: Hogarth, 1958), 149–155; for discussion, see David Novarr, *The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880–1970* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1986), 51–56, 88–94.

18. Dove, "Evading Textual Intimacy," 333; cf. Millett, Brook, Brink, Fein, and Lerer.
19. Frank H. Ellis, "Gray's Elegy: The Biographical Problem in Literary Criticism," *PMLA* 66:6 (1951): 971–1008.
20. For Woolf's "sleight of hand" on truth and fact, and the argument that her "influence on contemporary theorizing about biography is on the whole a misfortune," see Ray Monk, "This Fictitious Life: Virginia Woolf on Biography, Reality, and Character," *Philosophy and Literature* 31:1 (2007): 1–40.
21. Elmer Edgar Stoll, "Literature and Life Again," *PMLA* 47:1 (1932): 283–302.
22. Jo Burr Margadant, "Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective," in *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France,* ed. Margadant (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000), 3–8.
23. Bates et al., *Writing Medieval Biography,* viii.
24. Bonnie Israel Duncan, "Middle English Poems in Harley Ms. 2253: Semiosis and Reading Scribes," PhD dissertation, U of Iowa, 1988, 2, 13.
25. Susanna Fein, "The Lyrics of MS Harley 2253," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500 Vol. 12,* ed. Peter G. Beidler (New Haven: CT Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2005), 4168–4206, at 4192.
26. See David Woodward, "Medieval *Mappaemundi*," in *The History of Cartography, Volume I: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J.B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), 286–370. Woodward's account remains authoritative.
27. Scott D. Westrem, *The Hereford Map: A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), xxii.
28. P.D.A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map* (London: British Library, 1996), 7.
29. Westrem, *The Hereford Map,* 314, xxiii.
30. Gabriel Alington, *The Hereford Mappa Mundi: A Medieval View of the World* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), 26.
31. Ibid., 28; Harvey, *Mappa Mundi,* 6.
32. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi,* 50–51; Westrem, *The Hereford Map,* xl.
33. Meryl Jancey, *Mappa Mundi: The Map of the World at Hereford Cathedral* (Hereford: The Dean and Chapter, 1995), 23.
34. W.L. Bevan and H.W. Phillott, *Mediaeval Geography: An Essay in Illustration of the Hereford Mappa Mundi* (London: E. Stanford, 1873).
35. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi,* 11–12; Westrem, *The Hereford Map,* xix.
36. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi,* 14.
37. Ibid.
38. Terkla, "The Original Placement of the Hereford *Mappa Mundi*," 146.
39. Westrem, *The Hereford Map,* xix.
40. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi,* 14.

41. Jeremy Catto, "The Academic Career of Thomas Cantilupe," in *St. Thomas Cantilupe Bishop of Hereford: Essays in his Honour,* ed. Meryl Jancey (Hereford: Friends of Hereford Cathedral, 1982), 45–56.
42. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi,* 27; cf. Westrem, *The Hereford Map,* xxxiv–xxxvii.
43. Virginia E. Wylie, *On the Bridges of Mediaeval Paris: A Record of Early Fourteenth-Century Life* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), 22.
44. William J. Courtenay, *Parisian Scholars in the Fourteenth Century: A Social Portrait* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 88–90.
45. A.T. Bannister, ed., *Registrum Ade de Orleton, Episcopi Herefordensis 1317–1327* (London: Canterbury & York Society, 1908), 391; W.W. Capes, ed., *Registrum Ricardi de Swinfield, Episcopi Herefordensis 1283–1317* (Hereford: Wilson & Phillips, 1909), 546.
46. *CPR 1324–27*, 173–75 (September 5, 1325); cf. T. Rymer, ed., *Foedera*, third edn (London, 1745), 2.ii, 605.
47. Summarized in Westrem, *The Hereford Map,* xxii–xxv.
48. R.C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 173–188.
49. See Hereford Cathedral Muniments #117 (December 26, 1314) for a property transaction between "Hugh de Topesleye, son of Roger de Topesleye" and "Domino Rogo. dicto de Breynton, frat. meo" [Sir Roger called de Breynton, my brother]; abstracted in B.G. Charles and H.D. Emanuel, *A Calendar of the Earlier Hereford Cathedral Muniments* (National Library of Wales typescript, 1954).
50. For a dramatic account of these proceedings, see Robert Bartlett, *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005).
51. Meryl Jancey, *Handlist of Documents* (Hereford Cathedral Library typescript, n.d.), III.3. The earliest document in which Breynton appears—HCM #R352 (September 29, 1306)—lists him as reeve for Canon's Moor, the single manor allocated to the Cathedral Treasurer's expenses.
52. P.C. Morgan, "The Effect of the Pilgrim Cult of St. Thomas Cantilupe on Hereford Cathedral," in Jancey, *St. Thomas Cantilupe Bishop of Hereford,* 145–152.
53. *Foedera*, 2.ii, 44 (February 23, 1321); W.W. Capes, ed., *The Register of Thomas de Charlton, Bishop of Hereford 1327–44* (Hereford: Wilson & Phillips, 1912), 34–40 (April 10, 1330).
54. Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," 22–23.
55. N.R. Ker, *Facsimile of British Museum MS Harley 2253* (London: EETS, 1965), xiv, xxii–xxiii.
56. Daniel Birkholz, "Harley Lyrics and Hereford Clerics: The Implications of Mobility, c.1300–1351," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009), forthcoming.
57. Haines, *The Church and Politics in Fourteenth-Century England*, 81–101.
58. H.D. Emanuel, "Notaries Public and their Marks Recorded in the Archives of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford," *National Library of Wales Journal* 8:2 (1953): 147–163, at 150, 156, 158.

59. H.D. Emanuel, "The Will of Richard de Swinfield, Bishop of Hereford," *National Library of Wales Journal* 5:4 (1948): no pagination; Breynton, still dispensing legacies and collecting receipts, was "lone surviving executor" in 1342.
60. HCM #1378 (after July 18, 1345); cf. Haines, *The Church and Politics in Fourteenth-Century England*, 52.
61. Cf. Susanna Fein, "Compilation and Purpose in MS Harley 2253," in *Essays in Manuscript Geography: Vernacular Manuscripts of the English West Midlands from the Conquest to the Sixteenth Century,* ed. Wendy Scase (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 67–94, who notes, "We still have little sense of how [the Harley scribe] came across" his materials: "Whether he did it by traveling about or whether the manuscripts and single sheets were transported to him seems impossible to determine" (74–77). Either way, "we need to understand that many short items—religious, secular, and even political—were probably collected on single-sheets or rolls" (70–71).
62. N. Denholm-Young, ed., *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second by the so-called Monk of Malmesbury* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1957), 141.
63. I borrow this phrase from Revard, who uses it in dismissal of the "romantic speculation" ("Scribe and Provenance," 24) placing the Harley scribe himself (as some had proposed) in the retinue of Mortimer or Orleton.
64. Beech, "Biography and the Study of 11th-Century Society," 103–104.
65. Bannister, *Registrum Ade de Orleton,* xxix.
66. Haines, *The Church and Politics in Fourteenth-Century England*, 102.
67. Novarr, *The Lines of Life,* xv.
68. Bannister, *Registrum Ade de Orleton,* xxx.
69. Woolf, "The New Biography," 150.
70. G.A. Usher, "The Career of a Political Bishop: Adam de Orleton (c.1279–1345)," *TRHS* (fifth ser.) 22 (1972): 33–47.
71. Haines, *The Church and Politics in Fourteenth-Century England*, 100.
72. Usher, "The Career of a Political Bishop," 42.
73. Beech, "Biography and the Study of 11th-Century Society," 101.
74. William St. Clair, "The Biographer as Archaeologist," in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography,* ed. Peter France and William St. Clair (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 219–234.
75. Beech, "Biography and the Study of 11th-Century Society," 101–102.
76. Witness the extraordinarily narrow roster—even the bones chosen for epidemiological analysis are royal—in Bates et al., *Writing Medieval Biography.*
77. Margadant, "Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective," 3–8.
78. Novarr, *The Lines of Life,* 38–39.
79. HCM #R352 (September 29, 1306).
80. Julia Boffey, "Middle English Lives," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature,* ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 610–634, at 614–615.

81. *CPR 1334–38*, 247 (April 15, 1336); cf. HCM # 2873 (April 25, 1311).
82. Boffey, "Middle English Lives," 612–616.
83. William J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995), 119.
84. John Rigby Hale, *Renaissance Europe: Individual and Society, 1480–1520* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 51.
85. Quoted in Novarr, *The Lines of Life,* 161–162.
86. Woolf, "The New Biography," 149–150.
87. William H. Epstein, "(Post) Modern Lives: Abducting the Biographical Subject," in *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography,* ed. Epstein (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1991), 217–236, esp. 218–221.
88. David Lawton, "Mapping Performance," *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003): 1–10, at 1, 4.
89. Duncan, "Middle English Poems," 2, 10–13.
90. René Girard, "Camus's Stranger Retried," *PMLA* 79:5 (1964): 519–533.
91. Woolf, "The New Biography," 149–150.

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CHAPTER 8

THE GENDER OF HISTORICISM

Elizabeth Scala

Recent work in medieval literary studies emerging after and in response to the dominant historicism of the last two decades offers various historical approaches to medieval texts, a variety of historicisms where formerly there was one. Insofar as "post-historicism" can be defined in terms of such response, getting beyond historicism does not mean getting rid of history so much as it means transcending "historicism as usual."[1] In this effort scholars have brought feminist, postcolonialist, queer, and psychoanalytic concerns to the very center of historicist claims on the past. Yet as with much else, recognizing multiple forms of historicism is not the same thing as creating all historicisms equally. Thus where a recent contribution to Blackwell's *Literature Compass* calls for an end to the "Theory Wars" in medieval literary studies by castigating its polemics as unnecessary, I believe that simple rapprochements are neither desirable nor practical. To take an Olympian position "above" the fray is to imply that all disputes have been resolved, where clearly they have not. Calling for a truce is easy when the status quo works to one's benefit. But there is still much in need of *dis*-covery about our historical engagements with the past as well as the past's claims upon us.

To linger over the particulars of this recent contribution for a moment, we can see a fundamental difference between psychoanalysis and the hegemonic historicism it would challenge, a difference that appears clearly in their treatments of each other that we are here urged to ignore. Where psychoanalytic medievalism struggles to think through its claims to and upon history, historicism seems not very interested in considering the kind of misrecognitions psychoanalytic reading unveils. Working at two distinct levels of the text, historicism attends almost exclusively

to questions of production while psychoanalysis also holds (even much belated) textual reception in equal importance. That is, psychoanalytic criticism attends very closely to the behavior produced by texts often embedded in critical response, which historicism excludes as not being available to an original audience or recoverable as part of the author's intent. But their differences also appear in much more material forms in the places where such polemics get published and in the power such publications generate. This form of textual behavior, a response to *critical* as well as primary texts, will be analyzed in the following pages.

The most recent assault on psychoanalysis was published in *Speculum*, the oldest and most prestigious medieval studies journal in the United States. Its head note indicates it received no less than six reader's reports (instead of the usual two or three) before appearing in print. Such determination, either on the part of the essay's author (Lee Patterson) or the journal's editorial board, sits in stark contrast to the complete absence of psychoanalytic discourse in *Speculum*'s strongly historical and historicist pages. This essay participated in no debate within *Speculum*'s pages, making its appearance there all the more striking. In fact, the irrelevance of psychoanalysis, and the literary theory that would interrogate and problematize historicism, to *Speculum*'s readers may explain the necessity of the six reports. Its appearance in *Speculum* is nonetheless telling because it articulates so clearly a specific (and rather aggressive) kind of desire, a speaking down at such "theory" from on high. This is but a small example of how medieval studies replicates the status quo, how its circuits of power keep a positivist history and traditional historicism firmly in place, even as it pretends to engage in open discussion. As I will suggest in the pages that follow, despite the monitory example of Renaissance "New Historicism" against which it is often calibrated, medieval historicism has failed to read its own circulation of power. Investigating this circulation returns us to a central misrecognition of medieval historicism, a misrecognition that betrays historicism's power as markedly gendered. Any end to critical polemic between history and "theory" depends upon an equitable situation. Attention to the circulation of power and prestige in medieval studies shows how far we stand from that goal.

While the recent *Literature Compass* essay by John Sebastian sees polemics about historicism as a dead-end to literary critical business, the essays in the present collection assume a very different value to renegotiating the terms of historicism in medieval studies. His self-styled "review of the terms of this current phase of the so-called theory wars" seeks to cool their "intensity" by defusing the enmity of its two most pointedly meta-critical efforts, oppositional efforts that appeared nearly simultaneously.[2] More importantly for my concerns with the current state of

historicism are Sebastian's remarks at the close of his introduction. He claims "to elucidate the ways in which the theories in question enable critics to speak and write about Chaucer while occasionally and simultaneously condemning them to speak and write at one another" (768). His politic language might escape our notice for its censure of critics who have forgotten Chaucer in all this "posturing" (772). Sebastian means for us to return to our senses and thus to Chaucer. What seems so wrong about these polemics, to him, is their sometimes intense focus on the polemicist rather than on the topic of debate. There is much to recommend in this endeavor, to keep squarely in our sights the central interest in and deep affection we share for Chaucer's works and to let the work about Chaucer itself do the talking. Won't the better critical argument win? That somewhat naive assumption takes all contributions equally, when most of us experience the profession in less equitable forms. To use Sebastian's own words, this "does not tell the whole story" (772)—and indeed, what single narrative could? To bring the highly self-interrogating discourse of psychoanalysis into real conversation with the probing desires of newer forms of historicism (forms increasingly aware of their role in shaping the past they seek to know) means taking certain risks. And if we don't risk focusing too much attention on ourselves and the work of others around us, we risk remaking Chaucer the isolated object of our historical study once more.

Sebastian's essay compels our attention less for his desire to silence the polemic than for the telling circuit of critical reading his review traces. The author's preoccupation with male medievalists and their pronouncements on the field is compelling, not least because it seems entirely unaware of itself in these terms. Beginning with the august and unassailable Derek Pearsall, whose "prophecy" about the field's future opens Sebastian's study, he moves to the more worldly Lee Patterson and Paul Strohm (implicated by their use of psychoanalysis), before ending with kudos for a more trendy set of men, Glenn Burger and Bruce Holsinger. Beyond its attempts to resolve any debate, then, Sebastian's essay is remarkable for its unacknowledged deployment of male authority figures in its efforts to quell, even embarrass, warring factions.[3] Paragraphs and pages are devoted to male medievalists, both powerful figures and more "random" examples (this is Sebastian's term), where clauses and sentences here and there account for women in the field. Aranye Fradenburg and I receive longer treatment, but the essay as a whole celebrates the men who dominate the field and who have the authority to speak for it. My point concerns both the power of the players and the terrain of the field for this game. The gendering of power and its discourses goes well beyond the confines of Sebastian's effort to foreclose the issue of historicist polemic.

Related to the gender of the medievalists who write in differing theoretical modes is the gendering of particular kinds of intellectual work. Indeed, the prioritizing and hierarchizing of certain kinds of work emerges from associations with the gendered bodies of individuals long buried in academic history. In medieval studies psychoanalysis is explicitly gendered, and Sebastian's opening rhetoric is telling on this count. It shows two strong male medievalists overcome by the seductions of an alluring and implicitly feminine theory. As Sebastian's recounts, Patterson castigates himself for being "susceptible to the temptations of psychoanalysis as a younger man" while Paul Strohm remembers "his own dalliances with Freudianism" more fondly (767). In this opening Sebastian posits the allure of a psychoanalytic theory that is either repudiated or "impishly" (767) laughed at by these prominent male scholars. These seductive, explicitly erotic figures of speech are central rather than merely stylistic. They echo, in fact, Patterson's own analytic and confessional language in the essay at the center of Sebastian's critique. This playful quotation, which is really a double quotation (as it is Patterson quoting himself from yet a previous polemic), reveals the larger implications and subtle gendering of various ways of working in medieval studies.

These playful metaphors also show that psychoanalysis and historicism do not play on a level field; the gamesomeness in Sebastian's rhetoric, further, denies the competitiveness that otherwise sustains academic discourse. Whatever "return volley" psychoanalysis can make has to be judged against the institutional hegemony of historicism in medieval studies, its steady control over publication and promotion in a discipline that, in the disappointed words of Seth Lerer, has been "transformed . . . into a[n] overwhelmingly historicist enterprise."[4] Similarly, Sebastian correctly recognizes my polemic's intent "to break the stranglehold . . . historicists [have] . . . on the critical marketplace."[5] Indeed, to see historicists as operating in a marketplace in which prestige is bought and traded is perhaps the greater gain from the metaphor, and it is one that many quasi-Marxist historicists would probably disavow. While such readers easily critique the market and its productions in their scholarly work, they tend not to consider their work operating within a professional market upon which they have been all too happy to capitalize. Debates between historicism and psychoanalysis may *become* things of the past. But unless we can see clearly how those debates, and their attendant identifications and disavowals, were formerly pursued we cannot really hope to have gotten beyond them so much as willfully brushed them to the side (from whence they may strike back or find more invidious ways to return). Where historicism attends to a variety of histories (intellectual, social, political) and supposedly gestures self-consciously to its own historical

situatedness, it neglects almost entirely the field's history, what we might situate as our institutional "family" history.[6] It is this too familiar, even familial, history to which I intend to turn for the way our profession is underwritten by a patriarchal politics easily critiqued in the world at large or condemned as part of a past we have superseded. In that sense my efforts will return psychoanalysis (as family history) to historicism in order to give the fuller account of the past (and present) that historicism putatively seeks to know.

Feminists have long been aware of the "masculine nature of traditional political history," its interests in men's actions, causes, and ideas.[7] These gendered terms also characterize the medieval historicism that lately dominates our critical field, for politics has historically been men's business. Like certain kinds of work in medieval studies, such as textual editing, historicism has long been gendered. But the critical field as a whole may be more subtly gendered too. As Stephanie Trigg has shown in *Congenial Souls* (2002), the Chaucerian reading community has long been an implicitly masculine one: "the best reader of Chaucer is someone much like him, or his friends, as possible."[8] In constructing a "congenial" and sympathetic reader in imitation of Chaucer's original circle of friends and fellow civil-servants, one who is universal, that reader has been constructed along implicitly racial, nationalist, and gendered lines. Historicism has not only been interested in a certain kind of topic that mostly concerns the activities of men but is also associated with masculine authority and rigor. It has been given a particular power over the discipline, and, despite the women who labor in the field, it has been largely attributed to male scholars.

To see how such gender alignments work, we might consider the example of textual editing. Textual studies is a dense and abstract kind of labor, but one often considered, particularly in traditional circles, "real" scholarship. There would be no speculative theorizing or "mere" criticism without the foundational work editors perform on the often unwieldy manuscript tradition. In her study *Chaste Thinking* (1989), Stephanie Jed has written on the gendered language of textual editing, showing how it all too clearly articulates the masculinizing effects of this kind of textual mastery and the "humanism" that gave rise to them.[9] Manuscript productions and their subsequent relations are framed as corruptions of a family line in which the feminine body of the text has been ravaged by its male handlers, including the scribes responsible for the text's reproduction and transmission. This means, among other things, that the language used to talk about texts and textual relations figures the text as a feminine object and the editor as a man who masters its bodily corruption and preserves (or restores) its purity. Such language outside the book offers

a version of the heteronormative rescue fantasy that medieval romance narratives often inscribed inside a manuscript's pages. No matter the gender of the scholar working on the manuscripts, then, we are still in danger of "thinking" texts and textual relations as masculine editors and in terms of feminine texts.[10]

But even further, the filial logic of the way editions were (and often continue to be) historically produced confirms this gendering process, for the kinds of texts edited by men and those produced by (or relegated to) women reproduce this structure in dramatic (and thematic) form. If we look to an earlier point in the history of medieval studies, for instance, we will see a profession far more clearly modeled on an apprentice system in which preferment and advancement were enmeshed with such "chaste thinking." Women entered into this apprenticeship system gingerly and at considerable cost.[11] Where gender politics are sometimes harder to see in the present, they are highly visible in the editorial and professional past. In the early twentieth century, the American professoriat was considerably smaller, and far fewer women enjoyed the same professional privileges as men. A sharply wielded patronage system governed publication, appointment, and tenure.

As female scholars entered graduate institutions in greater numbers and sought university positions increasingly beyond the women's colleges, the workings of gender became visible in the assignment of thesis research and in the texts produced in this era of the magisterial critical edition.[12] Up through the first half of the twentieth century, men worked on the manuscripts of Chaucer and other major Middle English poets, while women students were given alternate topics deemed more appropriate to them. They edited romances (Edith Rickert's thesis, for instance, was an edition of the Middle English romance *Emaré*) as well as mystical and religious writings. When women did edit Chaucer, and they eventually did, they produced "school texts."[13] No woman has edited a major scholarly edition of Chaucer to this day, except Rickert herself, and she is far overshadowed, then and now, by her eminent male colleague and collaborator at Chicago, John Matthews Manly.[14]

Such conditions and restraints are presumably unthinkable in our advanced age of feminism and critical pluralism. We choose our own thesis subjects and are guided by our own interests and pleasures. But the persistence of these divisions is absolutely striking. One could look at the recent medieval titles produced or reedited for the Norton Critical Editions series as a test case. They tell yet another version of the same story. On one hand Chaucer's major poetry, the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, are edited by V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, and Stephen Barney, respectively. His lesser poems, the *Dream Visions* are edited by Kathryn Lynch.

Similarly Lynn Staley has edited *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Denise Baker, *Julian of Norwich*. A partial exception might be the NCE *Piers Plowman*, jointly edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen Shepherd (though for an exception one laments what we might call the perceived necessity of the male appendage here).[15] If Norton's Critical Editions seem like an arbitrary example, we can look at the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* itself, the pillar of canonicity in our discipline. No female scholar has ever been its general editor (now the eminent Stephen Greenblatt). Of late, some women's texts have infiltrated its medieval canon: Marie de France, Margery, and Julian are included in this once all-male bastion of literary authority. But no female editor has stood behind the medieval texts offered by Norton in the way that women have been authorized to speak for the nineteenth century, which is full of women novelists, or lately for the Renaissance, a period ruled by the strongest female monarch on record. Instead, the handling of *Beowulf* by Norton provides a synecdoche for the Middle Ages itself. As a masculine epic at the head of the medieval English literary tradition, *Beowulf* has been handled by a trio of men with elite institutional affiliations.[16]

Like the Norton Critical Editions and *Anthology*, which are driven by market forces attuned to larger public perceptions and assumptions we would often like to minimize as mere social constructions, various kinds of professional work are still meted out in powerfully gendered form that index social capital. If the age of the magisterial edition is over, we might call ours the age of the magisterial literary history and textual companion. These are the kinds of books capable of making material profit—unlike the scholarly monographs that can support various fantasies of equality—and are thus designed to appeal to a wide, collegiate book-buying audience. And when money is on the line, the truth of power and perception comes out, despite the way we think things ought to or could be. David Wallace's *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (2000) and James Simpson's *Oxford Literary History, Reform and Cultural Revolution* (2002), for instance, provide strong exemplars of the gendering of authority in today's academic medievalist marketplace.[17] To these we might add the more plentiful guides and companions to the major medieval writers authorized by prestigious university presses: Seth Lerer's *Yale Companion to Chaucer* (2006), Steve Ellis's *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide* (2005), and, most recently, Paul Strohm's *Middle English Literature* for Oxford's *Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature Series* (2007). None of these editors and literary historians is undeserving, and I do not mean to disparage their work or their sense of fairness and equity in professional life. I merely point out the overwhelmingly male positions of authority and prestige in our field.[18]

Most of these volumes, in fact, are composed of pieces written by various authors and include many female scholars. Indeed, I would go even further and say that the inclusion of the work of women is specifically and consciously *promoted* by these men. As just one example from personal experience (and one that I am sure is in no way unique), my own essay on "Editing Chaucer"—what looks to be a masculine topic according to my own evaluative rubric—was commissioned by editor Steve Ellis at the suggestion of my former dissertation director Derek Pearsall.[19] Men *are*, everywhere, promoting the work and careers of women medievalists, and the field is increasingly full of bright young women graduate students and newly minted female PhDs. Yet the publishing industry threatens to tell a different story about the larger perception and material effects of power and prestige. It tells us what sells—how a corporately imagined book-buying public itself imagines the idea(l) of a medievalist scholar. Unaffected by pressures to diversify their lists of authors in the same way as university curricula, presses are motivated by sales and the names that promote them. Further, such projects are overwhelmingly driven by professional stature, written under the aegis of senior male scholars and the venerable private institutions that appoint them.

Having apologized in advance to these prominent men, I should also say that this snapshot of our field is not meant as a slight against the increasing number of women trained, hired, and tenured in it, nor the high profile medievalist women found in any number of places. But it is undeniable that the vast majority of the most prestigious academic positions in our field are occupied by men, when there seems less reason than ever that they should be. If I cannot but wonder what Harvard or Princeton would look like with an august female Chaucerian occupying one of its chairs, then perhaps I should wonder instead what a female-edited medieval literary history might look like, and how is it possible at this late date and age that we don't have one? Might such institutions fear that such a literary history, an "Oxford English Literary History" written by a female scholar, will *necessarily* turn out to be a women's literary history, a reading of neglected writers and alternate literary traditions, rather than the History these authoritative men offer?[20] In this context we thus see the gender of these prominent male scholars, buttressed by institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, and Penn, guaranteeing these Histories and positioning women, and one version of the feminism they represent, as a threat to Chaucer himself. Because it defines women's interests against Chaucer's own, such logic explains why women scholars are not allowed to speak for him.

This gender inequity pervades more than textual studies and prominent forms of scholarly editing. Such gendering also continues more broadly

along nationalist lines to separate the "men" from the (still feminized) "boys," and the English from the French. A comparison of the relatively open reception of post-structuralist theory in medieval French studies to the resistance posed by scholars of English medieval works suggests other important divisions between an authoritarian Germanic model that appears as a forceful, abstract, masculine tradition and a "softer," French, social-science model of intellectual accommodation that registers as an all-too-playful feminine strain.[21] Where the Germanic trades on its philological rigor, the French is accused of a less serious wordplay that fails to obey a strict order of linguistic descent. Lee Patterson has written in this gendered and sexualized register to recuperate deconstruction (ironically, the byword of French "Theory" itself) by subordinating it to his own version of "critical historicism." In the essay at the deep source of the gendered metaphor with which I opened, Patterson describes medieval studies as an "extended courtship" between literature and history that "has recently been made more difficult by the arrival of a mysterious suitor, also from France, who has whispered a seductive message to literary critics."[22] Repeated in his more recent repudiation of psychoanalysis in *Speculum* and echoed in the rhetoric of Sebastian's attempt to calm the waters, Patterson playfully invokes the language of amorous seduction. The feminizing of literature (and, by extension, some of its literary critics) susceptible to the seductions of French theory, which might equally refer to a Lacanian psychoanalysis no less threatening than Derridean deconstruction, is playfully elaborated in the language of medieval romance. But the romance is clearly marked as dangerous. One might also hear the potential "feminizing" of all that is French in Patterson's metaphor—not simply French theory, that is, but French medieval studies, a field plagued by historical and theoretical permissiveness more generally. The "mysterious suitor" Patterson describes stands in opposition to a properly masculine history—and by extension to a properly historicist reader, who proffers a legitimate offer of "contractual relations with the world outside" (69). This playful metaphoricity speaks not only to the gendered ideologies attached to particular kinds of critical work but also to the coercive realignment of intellectual capital at stake in the invocation.

To be strong, Patterson's ideal critics have to resist (feminine and feminizing) seduction, to resist French theoretical allure and remain faithful to a legitimate union with history. Indeed, Patterson shows how with an appropriate set of hierarchical assumptions (theory at the service of historicism) all of this flirtation comes out right. Yet his later essay repudiates rather than subordinates discourses. Unlike deconstruction, psychoanalysis cannot be pressed into the same service because it dangerously blinds him to Truth. Where amorous seduction by Derrida turns

out well in the end, the seductions of psychoanalysis can only be confessed and renounced. What do these critical romances suggest? For one, they show how little we may be capable of understanding "fully" how our language works, the ways it hides something from us even as we subject it to the harsh light of critical scrutiny. But they also suggest how incomplete such repudiations ultimately are. In the waning of his career, such an influential scholar can hardly transform or erase the work that gave him his power, nor can he change the ways it has been used, understood, and read.

The amorous rivalry with theory and the gendered subjects it produces should be considered seriously, for it inflects our understanding of the critical past in a number of important ways. On one hand, it highlights the division between English- and romance-language medieval studies, the latter of which has been far more open to theory despite the same historical distance. But the rivalry also comments on a political/personal dialectic that operates as an opposition, the stakes of which have never been made clear. Where feminism insists that the personal is political, medieval historicism has prioritized the political over the personal, a category to which psychoanalysis has been relegated. For medievalists, Marxist structure has far outstripped libidinal circuits in their explanatory force. Dense, abstract, and serious, the German Marxist aesthetic tradition registers as archetypally masculine. In distinction, the French philosophic traditions are deceptively feminine, perhaps feminine *because* deceptive, marked by a punning playfulness and double reading that undoes teleology, making points performatively in a spectacle of the materiality of the signifier.

As I have set up the opposition, German and French intellectual models appear so different as to have us reconsider our theoretical alignments. But such distinction is only a cover. Many of the claims against Lacan, for example, including his abstractions, difficult syntax, and jargon are also descriptions of Marxist theory and the Germanic philosophic tradition out of Kant and Hegel, of which Lacan is one.[23] At a formal level, then, these traditions are much like each other, and it is mainly their reception that marks them otherwise. Why might this be so? As a provisional answer, there are the playful pleasures of French theory, its indulgence in the pun and the homophonic. There is little play in German aesthetics and Marxist history—these are sober and serious discourses dedicated to unveiling the true nature of Being. Such difference has nothing to do with difficulty, then, and everything to do with commitment.[24] The Germans are just as difficult, just as jargon-ridden and abstruse as the French, and their difficulty is deployed precisely to signify the seriousness of Marxist thought. One must endure and persevere in order to show one's

dedication, to deserve the hard-won understanding of social demystification. By contrast, the same kind of difficulty, abstraction, and specialized vocabulary wins French theorists no such acclaim within medieval studies. It instead registers as a perverse mystification of self-possession or social and historical construction that could, and should, be developed in other terms. Moreover, the apparent pleasure of French theory—its slips, its puns, its recourse to popular culture—renders it decidedly less serious, its devotions more cautiously guarded and problematically registered.[25] The difficulties of German theory guarantee the significance and central importance of what it has to say; the complexity of French theorizing, by contrast, reveals there may be no center and no stable signified at all. French theory thus threatens to leave medievalists, invested in a more secure possession of their relics, empty-handed.[26]

The caution with which the feminized French tradition has been treated also appears inside English medieval studies in ways all too familiar to many of its practitioners. Indeed the problem of the familiar (and the familial) makes the gendered history of the profession so very compelling. It is for no ironic effect that I turn to an essayist in one of the male-directed literary histories mentioned earlier in order to trace these issues. Indeed, it seems further proof that scholars in the field are not consciously doing anything to gender historicist work, and yet such work remains broadly gendered in spite of their efforts. Writing on Chaucerian "New Historicism" in Ellis's *Oxford Guide*, Sylvia Federico argues for the pervasive textuality of historicism in medieval studies, and she pursues a similar goal in her monograph, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (2003) a book that seeks to integrate the structures of fantasy into historiographic narratives then and now.[27] Both works decidedly reshape our understanding of historicism in medieval studies and move away from the masculine politics of an earlier era. But Federico also speaks of the larger disciplinary implications of her historical work in professionally self-conscious ways. Tracing the "translation" or transformation of Trojan deviance into an empire of English letters, she also traces a critical crisis of authenticity in medieval studies that asks anxiously, "what constitutes a 'real' medievalist?" (*New Troy*, xviii). Similar to the Trojan historiographical project that provides its subject, Federico shows how medieval studies is also deeply invested in fantasies of authenticity and legitimation.

Such coordination of the fantasies of "history" and "literature" is not always welcome. Out of the shifts and modifications in the nature of history and the variety of historicisms we practice—what sounds well and good as the healthy variety of pluralism and tolerance we imagine for ourselves in medieval studies—there is also repudiation.[28] Working

precisely at the intersection of psychoanalysis and historicism similar to the male medievalists Sebastian valorizes, Federico tracks the fantasies attendant on ideas of nation and empire in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English obsession with Troy. By her account, history and fantasy are written simultaneously in literary narrative and political tract alike.

Federico's book has been reviewed in some especially compelling language that resists this kind of historicist turn, indeed, refuses to see it *as* historicism. Further, it neglects the gendered readings of history and its narratives that Federico's book offers, all the while resisting the transformation of what it means to historicize at the heart of her psychoanalytic work. The critique claims that the book "does not break any new textual ground." Too many of Federico's texts "are familiar ones" and "have had their Trojan elements analyzed at length elsewhere."[29] While reviewer Matthew Giancarlo implies that he has heard similar accounts before, that assertion remains puzzling since Federico's is the first full-length psychoanalytically inflected account of the Trojan obsession in late medieval England. Begging for some substantiation on this point, Giancarlo's review also overlooks ways the book is *not* familiar. Instead, he privileges the power of the archive when he criticizes the book's lack of "new material." Implying that historical work gets done only when new materials are "uncovered," his priorities place the "facts" and documents of history before interpretive analysis in a way that recalls the *old* historicism its newer re-formulation was meant to displace. Giancarlo may be tired of historical returns to Troy in the much-discussed and deeply loved late medieval texts Federico treats, but that charge of wearisomeness has also completely neglected the feminist reading she offers of historiographic practice. And such neglect typifies an unwittingly masculinist structure of response.

The problem I have identified in this review is largely one of self-recognition. Federico's offence resides with her choice of texts and extends to the method of historicism that she dares present, for together they scandalize a traditional way of doing "historical" scholarship. The texts analyzed here are canonical, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Troilus and Criseyde*—the usual suspects. Giancarlo's charge of familiarity is worth returning to precisely because his review does so itself, at least three times. The authors and events made crucial subjects of her main chapters are "familiar," as are those "presented at the interstices of the main points," including Gavin Douglas, a brief account of Malory, and the Scrope–Grosvenor case. These "are familiar and are dealt with in familiar ways" (220). This repeated term leads us to ask why this familiarity should breed such contempt. What territorialism might we detect in this claim?

Giancarlo's response could be considered idiosyncratic, except for the fact that we have seen it before in reviews of books of a much more threateningly psychoanalytic and feminist nature. A similar response haunts David Lawton's otherwise appreciative comments on Gayle Margherita's *Romance of Origins* (1994), the first medieval English monograph to engage centrally with Lacan and one that sought to revise what historicist work could look like.[30] In the first analytic survey for *New Medieval Literatures*, Lawton calls Margherita's book "thoughtful and well-written" but also laments that it shows "an unduly respectful attitude to canonicity even when arguing against it."[31] He complains more generally of a textual "unadventurous[ness]" that "elid[es] the entire history of canonicity and its cultural formation" (246). Margherita, too, appears overly attracted to the familiar—*Troilus*, *Gawain*, the very same texts Federico gets criticized for treating—what appears in Lawton's more politically charged words, as "canonicity." Of course, Lawton wants to license Margherita to go even further in her study, to move beyond the center of the field in her bold rewriting of literary history and its "romance of origins." But Lawton's encouragement and enthusiasm reads otherwise in hindsight and in the specifically gendered institutional context I have developed here. His urge to move more radically away from the center and toward noncanonical texts is one that unintentionally resembles the acts of early-twentieth-century fathers of medieval studies who assigned women such extra-canonical topics. Encouraging her to move beyond the center may be intended as an expansion of the canon by means of her argument, but (particularly in light of the fate of Margherita's psychoanalytic work) it also protects the Middle English canon from such theorizing (and such women).

Such reviews, especially Giancarlo's reservations about psychoanalytic historicism, recall David Aers's review of *Romance of Origins*, among the most infamous reviews to be published in *Speculum* in the last generation. Margherita's book's appearance resulted in a flurry of interest and a spectacle of aggression that has proven monitory to many feminist scholars working in the field. Since the late 1990s to the turn of the new century, few could afford to ignore the outcome of the debacle over the *Romance of Origins*, or its reviews, in which its author was pilloried for an overfamiliarity with Lacan. While one can hardly call it a healthy dose of bloodletting, Margherita's case stands as our field's sacrificial exemplar of the so-called dead polemic between historicism and psychoanalysis. The very mention of her work recalls a past that we hardly want to remember let alone revisit in an analysis of the nexus of gender, historicism, and psychoanalysis in medieval studies. And far from such a sacrifice allowing for a kind of openness in working on this topic after the fact, the situation

has made everyone so cautious as to have closed down any discussion. The fate of Margherita's work functions as a kind of open secret. With a critical reception and set of responses played out in the public world of print (and the private realm of tenure decisions), the Margherita case is one about which almost nothing can be said openly.[32]

Discussing Margherita's example is quite difficult, and that point is made movingly by the last medieval essay Margherita wrote, in which she deals with the lingering effects of the judgment against another infamous woman. In "Criseyde's Remains" she reads the critical reception of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* to expose the ethico-juridical problematic of representation and judgment against her in Troy's male-dominated political world. But the terms work equally well to describe Margherita's position in the male-dominated scholarly world. The autobiographical strain is everywhere evident in her reading of the case against a woman marked as errant. Like Henryson's heroine, Margherita can be seen as writing from beyond the grave, a point outside the field from which she has been cast, an "abject odious."[33] In analogy to Chaucer's infamous female character, the literary judgment against Margherita is "at once distant and prurient, universalizing and infused with the particularity of desire."[34] If the desires for Criseyde appear at the surface of these poems and are enacted by the criticism written about her, what desire is satisfied (and transformed) in the judgment against literary and critical women, two overly familiar women who are too promiscuous in their associations with foreign men?

Where Margherita's book was charged with too much theoretical engagement and of the wrong kind for medieval studies, Federico's book, according to its *Speculum* reviewer, would seem to sustain too little. She would appear to want to deal with the historiographic fantasies of the canon too decidedly. *Speculum*'s standard for crankiness notwithstanding, these reviews betray a kind of territorialism over not only canonical poets but also the terms by which one engages history and historical thinking, or how a writer shapes her work as historically engaged. So that if Sebastian happily finds examples of the productive union of psychoanalysis and historicism in certain male scholars' work, we can continue to find, at the same moment, a more difficult reception of feminists who attempt to do the very same thing.[35] Beyond the gender of the particular individuals in these examples chosen to purpose, however, we might also look at the charge of excessive familiarity, one that itself suggests a critically familial and compellingly gendered register.

What all these instances reflect is that historicism has become part of the structure of fealty that holds together the field of medieval studies today. Struggling within the still monastic structure of the university,

our field displays a reverence for a monarchical authority that arranges itself in a quasi-feudal, semi-baronial structure of patrilineal inheritance and preferment.[36] We often seem invested in the investiture of kings, looking for a decidedly male figure to speak for the historical field—or in Chaucer's words, a "man of gret auctoritee." Despite how far we think we have come, such remains the desire in the professional *House of Fame*. There seems little room for the claims of women or their (versions of) history, their interest in the private and domestic, the libidinal, and the psychoanalytic. Recognizing our unwitting complicity in reproducing these structures, I would politely suggest, licenses a polemic now and again.

Our interest in the "kingmaking" function of scholarly studies is one that is actively cultivated by our professional practices. Duke University's *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, a premier venue for medievalists, recently sponsored an issue devoted to one of the important literary histories mentioned earlier, James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, the second volume of the new *Oxford Literary History*. The winter 2005 issue carried six essays on Simpson's book, and its editors were careful to invite a range of scholars at varying levels of seniority. One was Derek Pearsall, whose position at Harvard Simpson had only recently assumed; another was Bruce Holsinger, one of the youngest scholars to be included. Mindful of other categories than professional seniority, the editors carefully tendered invitations across the conventional medieval and early modern divide, a line that Simpson's work had consciously traversed and rewritten. Yet while these invitations were so carefully considered and managed—the editors, in fact, quote the invitation in their six-page introduction—not a single female or explicitly feminist historicist appeared in the issue. So far as *JMEMS* packaged the moment, literary history was presented, yet again, as men's work.

On this count, David Wallace's essay on Simpson's volume is telling in ways it can hardly recognize. Most of his essay summarizes in laudatory terms the choices Simpson makes, duly respectful of the limitations set by the series' editor. Much of Wallace's foregrounding compares Simpson's book with earlier versions of the Oxford History and thus positions him in a lineage of venerable male scholars, "earlier incumbents of the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge," a post Simpson held before his move across the pond to another Cambridge.[37] Wallace conjures J.A.W. Bennett and C.S. Lewis at the lectern, situating Simpson as their proper inheritor: "on the podium and in this book, extend[ing Lewis'] legacy" (14). In fact, Simpson's move to Harvard coincides with the paperback issue of the Oxford Literary History itself; they were simultaneous, and editors David Aers and Sarah Beckwith take the

time to mark the Harvard appointment for its means of both conferring and registering Simpson's authority (10 n.3). All this patriarchal "posturing" stands in stark contrast to Wallace's brief account of Simpson's neglect of women in his largely politically committed History. "[N]ot concerned with how the text might come to be read, but rather with its designed intent," Simpson's work has "little discussion of female and non-aristocratic readers in these chapters: they do not figure as authors, so what they might make of texts (should they fall into their hands) is less amenable to interpretation. Women do figure in discussions of the elegiac, but chiefly as victims of…inexorable, tragic unfoldings" (17). The logic by which gender does not matter to the argument this Oxford English History pursues is repeated in the logic by which contributors were chosen for *JMEMS*, which Aers and Beckwith are so careful to detail. Wallace, Pearsall, and Richard Emmerson were chosen for their own critical purchase on Simpson's new and revisionary argument, that is, because of the literary histories they have formerly produced.[38] In this proliferation of male authoritative discourse, we see clearly the patrilineal logic by which the gender of historicism is perpetuated and reproduced. So goes reform and revolution.

These historical narratives of desire and professional identity also reveal an aggressivity at work in these processes that few have acknowledged. One need not call immediately upon Lacan to articulate this aggressivity per se; it is writ large in the structure of professional self-articulation and advancement. Where aggression is not always easy to see—because it appears in somewhat disguised forms—it persists beyond express polemics dismissed as empty or unproductive. One of the most serious forms of aggression in the academy is silence. In an intellectual world in which one prides oneself on extensive footnotes, in which having the proper references in one's writing is deemed absolutely essential, leaving someone out can only be read as an aggressively meaningful gesture.[39] Arguing with someone thus seems far more respectful than ignoring her entirely.

Such aggressions are not only the provenance of the intellectual self-fashioning of modern academics whose professional identities originate in relation to an other, an imaginary interlocutor and a community of other readers, they are also produced in the subject's origin. Writing about the formation of the "*I* Function" at the end of his essay on the "Mirror Stage," Lacan "lay[s] bare the aggressiveness that underlies the activities of the philanthropist, the idealist, the pedagogue, and even the reformer."[40] More so than the analogy between psychic and professional work might have led us to expect, we can recognize in this array of activities defining everyday human life the characteristics of the professional medievalist who emerges out of the nineteenth century's colonialist–nationalist

project precisely as a philanthropist, idealist, pedagogue, and reformer. Articulating the aggressiveness inherent in the formation of the ego and its objects, Lacan himself turns medievalist, citing Saint Augustine's act of "foreshadow[ing] psychoanalysis" in his exemplary image of human behavior: the preverbal infant who casts jealous looks at his foster-brother displacing him at the breast.[41] Aggression also surfaces through the ways medieval studies disciplines itself, banishing its pleasures under a historicist asceticism and politics, with little recognition that asceticism and politics can comprise the forms in which such pleasure is pursued.[42] Indeed, some of the conflict in medieval English studies (conflict that predates Sebastian's critique of polemic) shows the gendering of alternate forms of reading, like psychoanalysis, in relation to the more properly masculine subjects of medieval historicism—associations that still operate over the field and account for its distribution of institutional power.

As an oppositional structure, this political (public)/personal (private) organization has been too long allowed to stand unchallenged as it pervades the "objective" reading of our medieval texts. Where national divisions no longer appear in philological races for the proper origin and "truth" of Chaucer's language, for instance, they do persist in the reading of medieval romance, in which the English redactors supposedly resisted or excised the psychologizing and internalizing forces of their French originals. Instead, the English romances are resituated as more "moral" and outwardly directed rather than inwardly focused. What could be read as representational strategy—internalization or projection—is instead understood as determining psychological limitation. But this critical narrative of difference itself seems so political (rather than the romances that are its subject). Much like medieval studies itself, which has resisted the mysterious French suitor, the English redactors have also resisted the seductions of French romance. These differences are used to maintain a division between the English and the French, but the division, as we can see from Richard Utz's work, goes beyond these thematic readings. Where these differences in the English romances have been used to argue about subjectivity, they also implicitly inoculate the English text from theoretical French contagion in the name of historicism, whether linguistic, political, or intellectual. In a defamiliarizing gesture, such distinctions preserve English romance from the familial structures governing the all-too-modern French texts. But these structures and the familiarities they cultivate and disavow operate in larger terms over medieval studies than mere romance suggests.

I have already suggested that the familiar and the family are operative concepts in the structure of the discipline, whose patriarchal politics have too often gone unread in our historical accounts of its formation. But the

patriarchal model looms larger over us than the particularly social narrative of professional discourse and communication might suggest and to which psychoanalysis offers one privileged point of access. Reading the developmental history of medieval studies within the discipline of English could be seen to correspond to a reading of the social nature of psychoanalysis much emphasized of late by the medievalists most interested in bringing Lacan's insights into productive alignment with historicist agendas.[43] Such readers insist on the intersubjective nature of Lacanian accounts of subjectivity, its foundation in the alienated self-recognition that "I is an other." Far from being a solipsistic dead end, psychoanalysis puts the subject's engagement with others and with the social world to which it submits, via the assumption of lack and its reparative language, front and center. The entry into the medievalist academy amounts to no less a submission to a paternal law and an assumption of desire as a condition of being. Beyond the playful analogy though, psychoanalysis's account of sociality, desire, and aggression in the assumption of the "I" and entry into the symbolic order helps track the subjections of professional medievalism and helps articulate the desires, sacrifices, and aggressions within professional discourse that have otherwise remain obfuscated.

Excepting our acknowledgment pages and citational notes, we too rarely speak of the interpersonal and social relationships buttressing our work, as if scholars were produced *ex nihilo* rather than out of institutions, in relation to strong mentors, and from within social networks of filiation and association, envy and eroticism. At least since Plato, the pedagogical relation has been seen as an erotic one, inspiring both emulation and envy, a desiring rivalrousness also witnessed in the Oedipal relations we typically locate elsewhere. Where a necessary physical relation between teacher and pupil is long since gone, psychic eroticism lingers over the lengthy apprentice–master relation governing postgraduate education. Similarly, our peers within educational institutions also suture us into social relations sibling in their rivalrous nature. If Freud appears more relevant to these symbolic, quasi-Oedipal erotics than Plato, it should be no less apparent that gender figures centrally into the nature of our modern pedagogical structure as well.

In many ways our profession follows familial structures we too comfortably relegate outside the academy in which we work. The fantasy of complete individuality and intellectual autonomy may be the last hidden refuge of the humanist or romantic "self" that we have more easily demystified *in* our work. That is, if we no longer believe poets and writers to be individual geniuses undetermined by larger social forces, we write as if our own critical work were not subject to the very same influences, determinations, and controls. Yet this essay has provided various

examples to the contrary. The patriarchal family infects the operations of these institutions as well as affects the aristocratic court structure our scholarship analyzes and imitates. This psychoanalytic insight offers not the personal narrative some might expect and by which it might be dismissed. Instead, it unveils the persistent, gendered logic by which our profession operates and by which it reproduces itself, a logic that we could call academic ideology.

Notes

I want to thank Douglas Bruster, Patricia Clare Ingham, Brooke Hunter, Jonathan Lamb, Kathryn L. Lynch, and Beth Robertson for their perceptive and helpful readings of this essay.

1. This phrase is adapted from Judith Newton's essay "History as Usual?: Feminism and the 'New Historicism,'" *Cultural Critique* 9 (Spring 1988): 87–121.
2. John Sebastian, "Chaucer and the Theory Wars: Attack of the Historicists? The Psychoanalysts Strike Back? Or a New Hope?" *Literature Compass* 3/4 (2006): 767–777, at 767. The two essays are Lee Patterson's "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clio in Medieval Literary Studies," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 638–680; and my own "Historicists and Their Discontents: Reading Psychoanalytically in Medieval Studies" *TSLL* 41 (2002): 108–131.
3. Of course, a handful of women appear in Sebastian's essay: Peggy Knapp, Jenny Adams, and Lynn Staley provide exceptions that prove the rule, both for one of his points and for my own. Fradenburg is compulsory quoting for anyone writing about psychoanalysis and medieval studies one way or the other (though interestingly Patterson ignores Fradenburg in his *Speculum* essay, instead using Carolyn Dinshaw as his whipping girl). One might similarly assess Sebastian's analogous substitution by which Elaine Tuttle Hansen stands in for Dinshaw ("Chaucer and the Theory Wars," 771). Finally, my own so-called withering condemnation of Patterson appears as a futile "return volley" in the polemical game, above which better men have now thoughtfully risen (772).
4. Seth Lerer, "The Endurance of Formalism in Middle English Studies," *Literature Compass* 1 (2003): 1–15, at 2.
5. Sebastian, "Chaucer and the Theory Wars," 772.
6. Lynda Boose ("The Family in Shakespeare Studies; or—Studies in the Family of Shakespeareans; or—The Politics of Politics," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 [1987]: 707–742) has written an important essay showing that the interests of deconstructing and demystifying Renaissance scholarship tacitly reconstructs and remystifies the politics of the patriarchal nuclear family. Medieval studies is similarly burdened by a lineage of strong fathers, patriarchs who write the commentaries on Truth that we study and gloss over. Boose also notes the strong alignment in Shakespeare

studies between feminism and psychoanalysis, against which historicism bristles (714 ff.).

7. Newton, "History as Usual?" 108.
8. Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 35.
9. Stephanie Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
10. For a feminist textual studies, see David Greetham, "Phylum-Tree-Rhizome" in *Reading from the Margins*, ed. Seth Lerer (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1996), 99–126. The classic articulation of the gendered nature of medieval/ist editing practices remains Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).
11. On the self-masculinization of women medievalists, see my "'Miss Rickert of Vassar' and Edith Rickert at the University of Chicago," *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 127–145.
12. At that time young scholars had limited choices as to the subjects of doctoral work. As students and as apprentices to their supervisors they were largely assigned topics, told what work needed doing. In the archives of the University of Chicago, for example, Edith Rickert has left a number of small address books in which she listed a number of PhD and MA thesis topics (often with names penciled in) suitable for students to pursue. Edith Rickert Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, box 3, folder 9.
13. See, e.g., the Cambridge University Press editions by Lilian Winstanley, *The Nonne prestes tale* (1914); *The prioress's tale, the tale of Sir Thopas* (1922); and *The clerkes tale and the Squires tale* (1931); and Phyllis Hodgson, *The franklin's tale* (London: Athlone, 1960).
14. Manly's shadow looms large over Rickert throughout the history of the Chicago Chaucer Project. See my "Scandalous Assumptions: Edith Rickert and the Chicago Chaucer Project," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 30 (2000): 27–37 and "'Miss Rickert of Vassar.'"
15. See the following Norton Critical Edition Series texts: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, second edn, ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 2005); Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Stephen Barney (New York: Norton, 2005); Geoffrey Chaucer, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, ed. Kathryn L. Lynch (New York: Norton, 2006); *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (New York: Norton, 2001); *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Denise Baker (New York: Norton, 2004); and William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen Shepherd (New York: Norton, 2006).
16. *Beowulf* has been the provenance of these translators and editors: E.T. Donaldson (*Beowulf*, Norton Critical Edition [New York: Norton, 1975]), Daniel Donoghue (*Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, Norton Critical Edition [New York: Norton, 2002]), and, lately, Seamus Heaney (*Beowulf:*

A New Verse Translation [New York: Norton, 2001]). I owe this point to the perceptive reading of Kathryn Lynch.

17. See *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge University Press, 1999); James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History: Volume 2: 1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2002); *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Seth Lerer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford University Press, 2005); and *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2007). Also telling in this instance is the special issue of *JMEMS* 35 (2005) devoted to Simpson's text (to be discussed further), particularly David Wallace's laudatory "Oxford English Literary History," 13–23.
18. Two partial exceptions to this rule show an uncanny need for a male coeditor. See *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer,* ed. Jill Mann and Piero Boitani [1986], second edn (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge University Press, 2003).
19. Sebastian's surprise at Pearsall's prognostications on future conflict between psychoanalysis and historicism might be read as a failure to know the history, and family history particularly, of the very figures engaged in the debate. Cast as a Tiresias looking into the future, Pearsall may also be accurately characterized as a Laius who knows too much approaching the crossroads. Since the prophet turns out to be one of the fathers of the conflict, a more careful reading of notes is warranted.
20. Where women do not seem to occupy a prominent position in Simpson's history, at one point they were enlisted in the new Oxford project. The volume on earlier medieval literary history in the new Oxford series was once scheduled to be edited by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Linda Georgianna. Neither is now involved with the project.
21. The easy acceptance of theory in French medieval studies is a relative claim. For discussion, see Sarah Kay, "Desire and Subjectivity," in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge University P, 2001), 212–227. The works of Jean-Charles Huchet, Alexandre Leupin, Roger Dragonetti, and Kay herself exemplify the extensive engagement with psychoanalysis in medieval French studies. On the masculinist nature of dialectical (and, thus, much theoretical) thinking, see Marie Fleming, "The Gender of Critical Theory," *Cultural Critique* 16 (1990): 119–141.
22. Lee Patterson, "Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate," in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 69–107, at 69. Patterson's metaphor plays on Brian Stock's language in *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 78.
23. For a discussion of the tradition of Hegel, see Andrew Cole, "What Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic Really Means," *JMEMS* 34 (2004): 577–610.

24. Another such argument could be developed around homology and differentiation, roughly Platonic and Aristotelian models that return to archetypally feminine (looking for relationships) and masculine (seeking distinction and individuation) gestures.
25. For fuller discussion of such popular responses see chapters five and six in this volume.
26. One need think only of the long history of romance itself and its critical fantasies. Despite their origins in French and Anglo-Norman models, English romances were long seen as politically and morally ordered, "public" narratives where French romances are psychological, internalized, "private" stories. Even further, in the history of German Anglistics, such French developments were cast as a fall from more properly moral, ethical Germanic origins. Richard Utz's compelling narrative of the fabrication of a Germanic Chaucer, whose native Aryan roots had to be discovered by a rigorous philological study of his language use, tells the story of a nationally divided reading of the medieval past, Germanic versus Romantic, in terms that are also implicitly gendered. Where the Germanic Chaucer is authentic and "manly," the French Chaucer is too concerned (like an unsubstantial woman) with outward appearance and fashion. See Richard Utz, "Inventing German(ic) Chaucer," *Studies in Medievalism* 8 (1996): 5–26.
27. Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Later Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Some words here are necessary, I think, since Federico is a coeditor of this collection. The present essay distills a number of papers given at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in 2003 and 2005 and at the University of Michigan, also in 2003. Much of this material, and this section on Federico's work particularly, was first read at Kalamazoo for panels organized by Maura Nolan, dealing with "Chaucer After Historicism." Risking the accusation of cronyism in preserving this material, I would offer these ideas as central to the project of the current volume. A different, yet compelling, history of women's scholarly engagement with the masculine field, a history of feminist struggle over the past thirty years (to which these personal yet political details point) is more fully addressed by Elizabeth Robertson, "Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 26 (2007): 67–79, esp. 67–68.
28. Elizabeth Bellamy explores the disavowal in Greenblatt's influential essay "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture." Freud's keen and repeated interest in Renaissance culture is disavowed by Greenblatt's description of Freud's "deeply inadequate attempts to explicate" it. In that respect, Greenblatt's territorialist disavowal of psychoanalysis has been one certain medievalists (most recently David Aers and Lee Patterson) have repeated, even though Aers has pointedly critiqued the assumption of the absolute historical rupture in the sixteenth century upon which Greenblatt relies in "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or Reflections on Literary

Critics Writing the History of the Subject" (*Culture and History*, 177–202). See Bellamy, "Desires and Disavowals: Speculations on the Aftermath of Stephen Greenblatt's 'Psychoanalysis and Literary Culture,'" *Clio* 34 (2005): 297–315. Ironically, Aers and Patterson represent the possibility of a premodern psychoanalytic medievalism for Bellamy because of their polemic against Greenblatt's early modernist neglect. But few Renaissance scholars have aligned themselves with the medievalists whose theoretical interests they share. Similarly, Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor defensively note only Aers and Patterson in the introduction, "Dreams of History," to *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–18. Like Bellamy, they ignore the medievalists who have worked on the very same psychoanalytic/historicist division they seek to negotiate. None of these Renaissance specialists seems remotely aware of the medievalists who have written relevant scholarship to their own, thus revealing yet another set of historicist desires and disavowals.

29. Matthew Giancarlo, *Speculum* 80 (2005): 219–222, at 220.
30. Gayle Margherita, *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).
31. David Lawton, "Literary History and Cultural Study," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997): 237–269, at 246.
32. The closest one comes is the essay by Charlotte Allen, "Dark Ages?" in *Lingua Franca* (March 1999): 11–12, but even that hardly speaks of the kind of masculinist closing of ranks that ended Margherita's career at Indiana University. It is not a situation that will ever be fully known, and I do not pretend to have answers. But as a spectator to the events, my inability to understand that history fully (even as an "eyewitness" or "contemporary") stages the problematic of historicism better than anything could in theory. All stories told about it will be partial recoveries. Interestingly, what remains clear is the trauma of the historical event rather than its "truth." Robertson, "Medieval Feminism," also attempts to trod gingerly over these particulars.
33. Robert Henryson, "The Testament of Cresseid," in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), l.133.
34. Gayle Margherita, "Criseyde's Remains: Romance and the Question of Justice," *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 257–292, at 277.
35. The one exception proving the rule would be the work of Fradenburg. Rather than licensing other such studies, hers is the only one that resists these prohibitions. Formerly castigated by David Aers, Fradenburg is set up as the pillar of responsible historicist psychoanalysis in his Preface to *JMEMS* 26 (1996): 199–208, at 200, an issue devoted to "the relation between historical inquiry, psychoanalytic criticism, and theories of gender in the study of medieval and early modern cultures" (199). For a fuller discussion of Aers' critique of Fradenburg, see my "Historicists and Their Discontents," 114–115.

36. Both monastic and monarchical structures of medieval studies provide particularly masculine forms of social interaction, power relations, and professional organization. While few have considered the still monastic features of the academic world in more than metaphorical terms, Boose offers a compelling account of the way Shakespeare studies reproduces the court politics that supposedly forms its subject. Like the historical agents subject to the reproduction of power *in* the past, so goes the reproduction of power *over* the past. And so works the masculine medieval historicists' system of primogeniture borrowed from the past it writes. Where Boose shows her field's uncanny repetition of the court politics in its own behaviors, "reproducing an academic microcosm of the absolutist court and its strategies of male power," she provides a suggestive analogue for medieval studies ("The Family in Shakespeare," 731).
37. Wallace, "Oxford Literary History," 13.
38. Rick Emmerson notes, without explicitly saying so, the gendered writing of Simpson's history as well. In his review essay, Emmerson criticizes Simpson's research on the drama, which relies on out-of-date and self-serving scholarship rather than on more recent work. Leaning on the august shoulders of O.B. Hardison (*Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965]) and V.A. Kolve (*The Play Called Corpus Christi* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966]), Simpson neglects a series of scholars, all of which happen to be women. See Richard Emmerson, "Dramatic History: On the Diachronic and Synchronic in the Study of Early English Drama," *JMEMS* 35 (2005): 39–66, at 42.
39. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Apparently the Italians (vendetta!) are infamous for this habit of aggressive omission (9–10).
40. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), 3–9, at 9.
41. Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits*, 10–30, at 21. On Lacan as medievalist, see Erin Felicia Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
42. Louise [Aranye] Fradenburg, "So That We May Speak of Them: Enjoying the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 205–230, as well as Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, Preface and Introduction: "Caxton and the Pleasures of History," *Premodern Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1996), xii–xxiv.
43. In this volume see particularly chapters one, four, and five.

CHAPTER 9

FROM CLIO TO *JHMuse*©: LITERACY AND THE MUSE OF DIGITALIA

R. Allen Shoaf

Of the many conditions that constrain this essay, three are especially relevant for helping the reader to see its perspective. One, in February 1987, I cofounded the journal *EXEMPLARIA*.[1] Two, between 1991 and 1997, I served as an officer of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals (CELJ)—vice president (1991–1993), president (1993–1995), and chair of the Mediation Board (1995–1997). CELJ has for several decades served the editors of learned journals, primarily in America and Canada, as an organization for sharing information, best practices, policy processes, and the like; it is also the organization to which journals in danger of failing will likely turn soon if not indeed first, as happened when I was president. Three, I have, for above twenty years now, taught in a state university where I have used a state university library both for research and for teaching undergraduate and graduate students.

The perspective resulting from these constraints may be expressed as follows, in a sort of shorthand: humanities scholarship, which, with very few exceptions, has never been lavishly endowed, is increasingly impoverished in American institutions of higher education, again with a few notable exceptions, to a point now, in 2009, that, as far as I can see, threatens the humanities not only with loss of resources and reduction of options but also with demoralization possibly wider than that of any period heretofore, exclusive perhaps of periods of open warfare or total social collapse.

There are many ways to measure this demoralization. I would like to begin this brief essay by calling attention to two in particular, which

I know to extend beyond my own personal horizon. One, college and university libraries are desperate to provide even minimum resources for humanities research because of their condition of chronic underfunding.[2] Two, more and more humanities positions are defined—precisely in reduction of humanities scholarship—as teaching positions, carrying heavy loads of student contact hours, which, over the life of a career, may not snuff out the spirit of research and academic writing but certainly will curtail and limit opportunities for such work.

Within the perspective just delimited, I propose now to look at the predicament defined in my title. It is not only that Clio is no longer mistress of an entire age, as she was, for example, in the nineteenth century throughout Europe,[3] nor is it only that Clio and her sisters find themselves of reduced importance generally speaking, it is also, far more radically, indeed perhaps revolutionarily, that a new kind of muse has emerged to seem to drive them from the scene altogether. My choice of *JHMuse*© of the Johns Hopkins University Press is largely arbitrary, of course, since I could have chosen many other recent neologisms and their radical references—"blogging," for example—but this particular neologism (almost certainly deliberately) calls attention to the transition if not also transformation currently underway. Even as the muse of history seems to be celebrated by such trumpeters as Fredric Jameson with his "always historicize,"[4] the sheer amount of information being generated across the planet in any one second threatens to defeat any narrative, let alone the frequently despaired-of "grand récit," with a quantity of stuff, just stuff, hitherto unimaginable by any historian—including, I suspect, Leopold von Ranke himself—such that the intellectual process of reducing information to knowledge is under a threat perhaps no other age or era has ever had to face. One year in the administration of a major Western government today produces not only more thousands of pages of information than one person can read (*if* s/he could gain access to it), at the same time blogs and Internet sites probably too numerous to count compete to offer explanations and narratives of data and events that in their sheer number fragment, disperse, randomize, and often trivialize any notion of disciplinarity as such. Interdisciplinarity is well on the way to being inter(red)disciplinarity even as state legislative appropriations and college endowments dry up.[5] To this also, as everyone knows, must be added the outcry and the agony of families that can no longer afford to educate their children, in some cases even at the level of the parents' own education, some of which parents may be academics themselves.

Throughout most of the past two centuries, but especially in the second half of the twentieth century, vocationalism has continually reduced academic disciplinarity and contributed to its ongoing marginalization.

From this perspective, the famous (or infamous) 1990 issue of *Speculum* was already two or three generations late for any real or lasting effect. To be sure, there will always be a certain number of wealthy individuals who can afford a $200,000 undergraduate education (four years) followed by a $300,000 graduate education (five–six years) by means of which they become medievalists. But it seems reasonably fair to predict at this particular moment that there will not be a very great many of them. At the same time, the number of interested and competent and potentially dedicated laborers in the field who might have kept the ranks of medievalists reasonably well populated must turn their backs on the aspiration simply because they cannot afford to amass student education debts of $100,000 or more on the prospect of a job paying $50,000 annually. This math is painfully simple and brutally easy.

It may be that it is already outdated to speak of the post-historical Middle Ages. We may need to begin using a coinage such as post-digital or, even more cumbersome, post-microcomputer (for, I think, we should pause to reflect on just what the microcomputer has done to our culture in *not even* thirty years). Whatever terminology or catchword that we use, we need with it also to see the fundamental transformation that the digital muse is at least contributing to, if not fomenting—fewer than one in four Americans reads any more, and recent reports have alarmed administrators, directors, corporate leaders, and, of course, educators, at the precipitous drop in the percentage of those who respond that they read anything at all.[6] There are many reactions to this basic phenomenon, far too many to summarize and address here. Nor do I have any desire to turn this essay into an occasional paper in sociology, sifting data and counter-data. I am, to the contrary, interested in the fate of literate education. I offer this essay as a lettrist concerned to preserve and promote the values of reading and writing. As I have dedicated my academic career to the proposition that literary theory and Medieval Studies are not mutually exclusive, so also am I dedicated (and not just in my career) to the proposition that literacy and the digital are not mutually exclusive but rather, indeed, necessary to each other.

In what sense, then, is this a paper about the post-historical Middle Ages? One way I can answer this question is to cite a recent brief paper by Jane Gallop to the effect that historicism may have prompted, as an unexpected consequence of its hegemony, a reduction in the capacity of students to practice close reading:

> This model [the banking model, where the professor deposits and the student withdraws] remains dominant in most academic disciplines where there is a huge gap between scholars producing knowledge and classrooms

> where students receive, repeat, and apply that knowledge. The literature classroom has represented a real alternative to the banking model: students had to encounter the text directly and produce their own knowledge; close reading meant they could not just apply knowledge produced elsewhere, not just parrot back what the teacher or textbook had told them. I fear that *the demise of close reading as a classroom method will leave us with students who learn cultural history by rote and then apply it to texts*... However elitist the New Critical canon might have been, in our rejection of the New Critical method we might end up throwing out our most effective antiauthoritarian pedagogy.
>
> That loss may not be the only irony of the current trend. Let us recall that literary studies embraced historicism as part of a rejection of timeless universals, a rejection that at the time I applauded and that I continue to applaud... I would argue that close reading poses an ongoing threat to easy, reductive generalization, that it is a method for resisting and calling into question our inevitable tendency to bring things together in smug, overarching conclusions... close reading may in fact be the best antidote we have to the timeless and the universal.[7]

In the same collection, N. Katherine Hayles discusses the dilemma of paying attention and the different kinds of attention required by literature and video games, observing that deep attention, which she deems specific to literature, is hardly compatible with the multitasking world of the digital.[8] Both of these analyses call attention, although no doubt unintentionally, to the case that I am interested in making, which is a case not just of information overload, although certainly there is evidence practically everywhere of that, but the case that historicism—old, new, or any other flavor—whether deliberately or not, conspires with the digital to undo the concentration of reading.

I do not imagine that any serious historian/historicist of whatever persuasion would remain still for a moment for the implication that s/he does not read; at the same time, I do not imagine that any serious historian of whatever persuasion would remain still for a moment for the implication that s/he is not interested in data. And this is just the fault line that I seek to emphasize. There is a curious hybridity to any historiography. It claims necessarily to promote and privilege data, and yet at the same time it proposes to write narrative that will be read. And, to be sure, there are very great writers of historical narrative, from Edward Gibbon to J.G.A. Pocock to Shelby Foote. But no matter how great the writer–historian, historiography itself is a hybrid, and one must never forget this fact. And within that hybridity all historiography is subjective.

So it is that most of the canons of reading rejected by the so-called "New Historicism," including but not restricted to "New Criticism,"

were themselves efforts to distinguish and liberate poetry from the mire of nineteenth-century historicisms and their horrendous political investments, which practically always promoted subjectivism's masquerade as *the facts* or as *historical validity* or as a "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*." Under such disguises, historicism contributed to some of the most heinous acts recorded in history.[9] Given the scientism, indeed pseudoscience, of so much historicism, one does not have to read very far in Kenneth Burke or T.S. Eliot or I.A. Richards or even, for that matter, F.R. Leavis to see that many felt poetry was being marginalized if not ostracized by Big Brother science and its little brother history, which aspired to be (like) science, copying its Big Brother, above all, with data from the archive to match science's data from biology or physics or chemistry. This collusion, for the most part unintentional, I am willing to believe, led by the 1970s to what we thought of, in that moment especially, as the revolution in the "human sciences," where the very phrase human sciences betrays the crisis I am trying to address. Poetry is not science, and poetry is not history, and history is only "poetry" if we treat the word *history* poetically—that is to say, metaphorically—and turn or trope its meaning from what many (by no means all) historians would claim that they are practicing. For every one Natalie Zemon Davis, I have met scores of, shall we say, differently (in)vested historians, and one can hardly forget, whether one agrees or not, Alistair Fowler's recent, withering dismissal of Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World* as a book revealing "a mind quite innocent of British history."[10]

Just so, our culture regularly and usually maliciously demeans poetry as either private and subjective or merely pieces of data in an otherwise dominant cultural machine of empowerment and enslavement—whether by governments or corporations or religions is irrelevant to present purposes, they amount to the same thing—which proper history should study. As a result, to state the case that Gallop makes more forcibly (and with ultimately a different agenda), students take my courses in Medieval and Early Modern poetry at the University of Florida first and foremost because they are hungry to hear poetry, to think about poetry, to listen to poetry, and to understand why and how poetry has meant so much to so many in the Western tradition for twenty-five centuries now, despite the efforts to marginalize and trivialize it.

In writing this essay, I take these students also to be part of my audience. I would like to speak to their desires, which are not only desires to learn how to read closely (as Gallop says, this is a very useful skill for them to learn—if indeed that should need repeating at this particular time, of all times), but also their desires to bring the authors of the collective past into their own immediate lives. Note that this is a different thing from

Greenblatt's famous "I began with a desire to speak with the dead."[11] My students want the dead to speak *to them*. The difference may seem trivial, but it is not. My students assume, or at least they desire to assume, that the dead are somehow there for them and have something to say that is different, unique, and yet somehow still humanly viable for them. It is just here that literacy, however discredited by Marxists, or Christian dictators, or digital gurus, can still be of immense value in teaching and understanding the past—disillusionment is necessary, yes, but disenchantment is a poultice of arrogance.

I will take as my test case one of the favorite whipping posts of historicists "old" and "new" alike, or Sigmund Freud.[12] I wish to make clear that I am not going to speak about Freud as a Freudian psychoanalyst or as an expert in the history of Freud but solely as a reader who has also found that reading Freud is immensely helpful for reading literature—I also find Lacan similarly helpful, and I should go ahead to make that clear since the withering attacks as a rule include him as well as Freud.

I am vividly aware of all the accounts of the many alleged atrocities, mistakes, stupidities, self-indulgences that these men were guilty of. That, of course, is to historicize. I am also vividly aware that these data are used to discredit the work of both men. But the fallacy here is one that St. Augustine reasoned through a long time ago in his rebuttal of the Donatist heresy: if you condemn an idea because of the man who had the idea—or condemn a sacrament because the priest who administered it is drunk, say, and living in fornication—then you seriously run the risk of destroying the idea or the sacrament in spite of the good that may really adhere in the idea or the sacrament, no matter what detractors say.[13] Saint Augustine repudiated Donatus and his doctrine of excessive purity precisely in order to *save* the church, all of whose sacraments were and are necessarily administered by corrupt men who may be living in all sorts of states of sin at any given moment they administer a sacrament (as we today know only too well in our era of Roman Catholic priests' pederasty scandals).

Thus, to take a particularly virulent *secular* example for the point I am making, I am well aware that Heidegger was an anti-Semite, but I do not think that this fact destroys the validity of *Being and Time*. I am enough of an old-fashioned historicist to want to judge the wickedness of anti-Semitism and, at the same time, credit the immense contributions to humanity of *Being and Time*. Or, again, I am aware, as I have heard any number of academics say over the course of my career, that Derrida was "making hay while the sun shines," but this does not alter the fact that a great deal of what Derrida has to say is profoundly important for understanding the course of Western philosophy.[14]

Similarly, with Sigmund Freud. When I first visited the Freud house in Vienna, I was less a skeptic than I am now, when much reading in Lacan has helped me to see the shortcomings of Freud's theories, especially his theories of women and female sexuality. I am much more skeptical now. I had not read the complete works of Freud, then, nor have I read the complete works of Freud yet. My reading was and remains selective, and my skepticism would likely continue high now no matter how much I might read. But I had read then and continue to read now extensively in certain of the key works of Freud, and I was a man at that time keenly interested in the evidence that he actually helped a number of people, provided them therapy, even as, there are no end of detractors to tell me, he hurt other people. I found myself surprised and strangely moved to read in the various glass cases in the rooms of his apartments, especially his office, some of the letters from late in his life in which he talks about human love from a totally disillusioned but clearly therapeutic point of view.[15] Later, after I had returned to America, I continued to mull these comments over and to test them against my early readings in the famous essay "On Narcissism" and the hardly less famous essays on obsession. These meditations led me to think more generously than I had done about Freud's essays on the psychology of love. In one of these essays, "On the most common degradation in love life,"[16] Freud writes the following sentences: "The whole sphere of love in such people remains divided into two directions personified in art as sacred and profane (or animal) love. *Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love*" (*SE* 11.183; my emphasis). My concern here is not to apply contemporary tests to Freud's claims; I am not competent to do that. My concern here is to marvel at how many people can be moved by the insight expressed in this analysis and especially in the second sentence. This is the statement of a physician, a healer, who made mistakes, as all men do, but who was, this evidence strongly suggests, also interested in understanding individual pathologies and helping persons to overcome them. This therapy may be conditioned by its historical moment—I am sure that it is; that does not for a moment detract from the fact that it *is* therapy and thus the efforts of one man to help another.

We, of course, live in a very different world from that of Freud. In our world we fuck whenever we feel like it, and we fuck anyone we care to. Permissiveness is the very blazon of our culture (and of the hatred of our culture by radical Islam, among others). And yet this blazon, if you actually talk to students in your classes, is not quite so bright as Hollywood or Victoria's Secret® would have us believe. A great many young people feel deeply conflicted about their sexuality, and you can talk to them about their sexuality with ideas and sentences of Freud, such as the one quoted

earlier, or the even more moving, "Wo es war soll ich werden" ("Where the It was shall the I come to be"),[17] and observe their minds absorb the ideas with an unusual appetite, an appetite I might, following Aristotle, go ahead to call human ("All men by nature desire to know").

If to historicize finally means only to circumscribe and belittle, degrade, alienate, distance, exile—you get the point—then historicism is pernicious. Obviously, it does *not* mean that for most of those who call themselves historicists, of whatever stripe. And yet we must never forget that careerism and its building blocks are as obvious in our profession as in any other profession. We should also remember that students are often the detritus of careerism. Not only does reckless historicism depress agendas and practices of close reading, it also denies the young, in particular, the opportunity to feel moved by that which can move them even as they learn, of course, that what moves them are the words and deeds of wicked men and women.

Nor will the Muse of Digitalia ameliorate this condition for our students. For most of the information they will find with the help of the Muse of Digitalia must still be *read*, even the "eye candy," and if it is not read, it threatens to produce, what the tyrant lusts for, mindlessness. Not only must it be read (and the computer *does* make it easier to access it *so as* to read it) it should also be heard, for if it is heard, my entire experience as a teacher indicates to me, it will lift and temper students' hearts and minds alike.

I contend that there is no substitute for reading poetry, including even the wonderfully helpful and often inspiring mechanical recording of someone else reading poetry. Actually reading poetry oneself makes a difference. Dido's line to Aeneas can be translated: "not ignorant of the sufferings of others do I learn how to give aid to the unfortunate." The student will need, however, at least to hear someone else pronounce this in Latin, "Non ignara mali miseris succerrere disco"—and I recommend you go find someone, if you cannot do so for yourself, to read it aloud to you.[18] Dante's famous Trinitarian *terzina* in *Paradiso*, canto 30, is also translatable. Indeed, it is relatively easy Italian for a beginning student.

> Light intellectual, full of love,
> Love of the true good, full of joy,
> Joy that transcends all sweetness.
>
> Luce intelletũal, piena d'amore,
> Amor di vero ben, pien di letizia,
> Letizia che trascende ogne dolzore.
> (30.40–42)[19]

But again, this needs to be heard aloud. I can attest that even in a class of undergraduates where no student has any Italian (as in my course, "Dante for English Majors"), hearing this *terzina* aloud moves students, some even close to tears—it is that beautiful. Again, read the following sentence from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* aloud: "This fierce abridgment hath to it circumstantial branches which distinction should be rich in."[20] And when you have read it aloud, revel in it. Finally, consider the following few lines:

> She as a vail down to the slender waste
> Her unadorned golden tresses wore
> Disheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
> As the Vine curles her tendrils, which impli'd
> Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
> And by her yielded, by him best receivd,
> Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
> And sweet reluctant amorous delay.[21]

I know that historicism is supposed to slam these lines for Eurocentrism, patriarchalism, misogyny, colonialism, dead-white-male-ism, rampant laissez-faire capitalism, and other faults I am forgetting. They are also some of the most erotic lines in Western poetry, and to observe students learn to hear them, not just read them or have them read to them, but actually to hear them in the sweetness they convey, is to be persuaded not only that a computer cannot replace a teacher but also that no amount of explanation, historical or otherwise, can preempt experience. This is, in fact, why *there is* poetry.[22]

I am a post-historical medievalist and early modernist, and at least partly a psychoanalytic humanist, and a skeptical student of Augustine, and a nervous reader of Heidegger, and one of the very first medievalists to put an entire medieval text online[23]—I am, in other words, an eclecticist in all that I do—so as not to make the mistake, to me a terrible and almost inexcusable mistake, of presuming that I myself know how to justify the ways of Virgil or Dante or Shakespeare or Milton to man. Only they and their muses can do that.

Postscript

The reviewer of this collection of essays called my essay a "sore thumb," adverting to his or her perception that it does not fit into the collection, either in content or in tenor. I would like, as one of the editors recommended, to "nurse my sore thumb," as I respond to several of my colleagues' essays (the phrasing, nurse my sore thumb, it will become clear, is significant).

As I see it, my essay is a sore thumb first and foremost because it does not repudiate the source, the mother or material or matrix (all words deriving from Latin *mater*), that is the original text that has endured through time and the vicissitudes of history precisely because of its material power, which I'm perfectly willing to call also its maternal power.

Thus I agree with Elizabeth Scala in her critique of historicism, most particularly, in its flight from the mother represented in its repudiation of psychoanalysis, that discipline above all that insists on the body of the mother and the ines/capability (my deliberate spelling) of that body. As Fradenburg observes, this ines/capability also includes death and the decay leading to death, which is full of shit, that no amount of masculinist posturing can ever ultimately deny: "It's the filthy signifier that moves us beyond the pretensions of our fixations and grandiose memorials."

Because the text, as I read it, is the mother of us all, to practice criticism and scholarship, I privilege the text, not as a work of anguished genius nor as an effusion of pus from capital's poisoning of the world, but as a creation that both lives and dies but, unlike mortals, lives to die again and dies to live again.

Thus, also, I find myself in strong concurrence with Patricia Ingham in her understanding of the "non-convergence of truth and knowledge" involved in the "amorous dispossession of our love for the poet's dead body": "this dispossession constitutes the occasion for the production" of knowledge about literature. It is, I would want to argue had I more time and space, dispossession from the mother's body that conditions and constrains all knowledge.

Returning to the mother's body, a matter of scorn for the macho masculinist rulers of "girlie men," who live off the repression of the return, is another way, a very precise way, of understanding Cohen's question, "[h]ow might the past be kept alive, possessed of something other than a revenant's graveyard existence?" Until and unless we can be honest and simple before the maternal body—of the mother, as of the text—we cannot answer this question, if only because all we will otherwise be doing is participating in what Fradenburg calls "oppositional energy" (a euphemism for such competition as that which destroyed the career of Gayle Margherita, analyzed so pointedly by Scala in her essay), we will just keep feeding on that "energy" that "turns the screws it wants to put" to other methods, other passions, and other beliefs, bequeathing as it proceeds "a revenant's graveyard existence."

Fradenburg goes on to remark that "[u]nfortunately we are too prone to dress up the nodal spot of unintelligibility as an insurmountable obstacle, so we won't notice what's hiding behind it. If, like Oedipus, we answer the riddle, we're doomed; that is, we know ourselves to be

mortal." Her alignment of history, ethics, and knowledge with Oedipus, and *the* Oedipus, is exact and instructive: most historicism most of the time is running away from knowledge of mortality precisely by flaunting the "dress" of "the nodal spots of unintelligibility as an insurmountable obstacle." So the system perpetuates itself. But, note, perpetuation is not reproduction.

In this fleeing from mortality, ultimately fleeing from the mother, recent historicisms, in particular, have repeatedly exemplified and certified the exact problem of neighborliness that Edmondson articulates: flight from the recognition of our own desire, the obverse of our fear, that we are, after all, every one of us, some mother's son or some mother's daughter, and each of us therefore is going to die—this is what reproduction *means*.

The disdain for derivativeness, for the almost absolute pre-maturity we suffer at birth and through so many early years of our maturation,[24] can be seen everywhere in advanced technological society, as if decoding the genome would somehow mysteriously liberate us from having genes and being genes, but when we see it in literary criticism and scholarship, we most easily and readily recognize it as the abandonment of the text—everything, after all, is literature, don't you know?, there's nothing very special about a poem and or a novel or a play (or a mother)—that has led inexorably to the degradation of the humanities in the past half-century, degradation the consequences of which our students now suffer when they go looking for jobs.

Nor will the Muse of Digitalia, any more than the demon(izing) of literary theory, provide any correction and certainly no rectitude. A return to the mother, a passionate and conscious acknowledgment of the matter, such as I hear Milton avow in his invocation of Urania (*Paradise Lost* 7.1ff.) or Chaucer in his evocation of Mary (*Troilus and Criseyde* 5.1869), is required of us all, not by the tyranny of -isms but by the humility incumbent upon a creature of derivation, a *creature*—that is, someone proceeding *from* another who *preceded* him or her.

My sore thumb will eventually heal, whether or not my essay is ever deemed (to) fit, and that is precisely significant, for me, and perhaps for the others: it is what *matters* in my contribution—and in my *nurturing* of my profession for nearly forty years now.

★ ★ ★

This essay is written with minimal customary apparatus of traditional scholarship. It is, one might say, lightly pointed. This should not be misconstrued, however. It may be lightly pointed, but I am prepared to

defend that it is not lightweight. To that end, my notes suggest a considerable bibliography of works that I have read over a very long period of time now, which have contributed directly and indirectly alike to the positions I outline and advocate in this essay. My premise in offering them is explicit: I think it could lead another reader at least to see how my conclusions can be drawn as I have drawn them, whether or not that reader would then subscribe to them. I am hardly so naïve as to doubt even for a moment that my essay will be ignored by those who have better things to do; but for those who find, as do I, that my concerns in this essay *are* the better things to do, perhaps these notes will be helpful.

Notes

1. My cofounder and partner Julian N. Wasserman died on June 5, 2003; our publisher, Mario A. Di Cesare is now Professor *emeritus*. As the remaining active member of the original founding group, I currently plan to step down from the editorship in 2008–2009.
2. The situation is much worse than it was in the 1990s, when, as president of CELJ, I saw that it was bad enough—a major annual undertaking of libraries around America today is the "night-of-the-long-knives" hacking-off of journal subscriptions.
3. Anthony Grafton claims, "The nineteenth century really was the age of Clio"; see "Roman monument…" *History Today*, September 1, 2006: http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/summary_0199–5853464_ITM. (Last accessed January 14, 2008.)
4. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 9.
5. In this matter, it is instructive to reflect for a moment on the recent decisions of Harvard and Yale, the two richest universities in America, to begin spending more of their endowments, especially on aid to deserving students who otherwise could not afford to attend. To be sure, as the cynic reminds us, Congress has been breathing down their Ivy necks about this for a good while. Still, however little and however late, it is something and better than nothing. See *The New York Times*: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/education/08yale.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=yale+spending+endowment&oref=slogin. (Last accessed January 13, 2008).
6. See, especially, the report of the NEA (http://www.nea.gov/chairman/index.html):

   > The story the data tell is simple, consistent, and alarming. Although there has been measurable progress in recent years in reading ability at the elementary school level, all progress appears to halt as children enter their teenage years. There is a general decline in reading among teenage and adult Americans. Most alarming, both reading ability and the habit of regular reading have greatly declined among college graduates. These negative trends have more than literary importance. As this

report makes clear, the declines have demonstrable social, economic, cultural, and civic implications. (Last accessed January 13, 2008)

7. Jane Gallop, "The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading," *Profession 2007* (New York: MLA, 2007), 181–186, at 185; emphasis added.
8. N. Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," *Profession 2007* (New York: MLA, 2007), 187–199, at 188.
9. See, among others, Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992); and George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), who, discredited by so many as he has been, still must receive some credit, I believe, for the courage of his questioning.
10. Alistair Fowler, "Review of *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004) by Stephen Greenblatt." *TLS* Sunday, February 20, 2005.
11. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1.
12. Quotations from Freud are taken from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–1974).
13. See Peter R.L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo, a Biography*, second edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 211ff.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans., with an introduction and additional notes, Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
15. In a letter to Romain Rolland, dated 1926, Freud writes:

    > Long years before I saw you, I had honoured you as an artist and as an apostle of the love of mankind. I was myself a disciple of the love of mankind, not from sentimental motives or in pursuit of an ideal, but for sober, economic reasons, because, our inborn instincts and the world around us being what they are, I could not but regard that love as no less essential for the survival of the human race than such things as technology. (*SE* 20: 279)

16. See Peter Gay's comment on the "standard" mistranslation of this title: Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 394ff. I would pause here to observe, in the wake of Fink's new translation of *Écrits*, that with Lacan as well, future work will likely show that much misunderstanding (and perhaps a good deal of maligning) will be found to trace back to poor or simply erroneous translations. See *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), xii-xiii, for a discussion of the precipitous difficulty of translating Lacan.
17. "New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis," xxxi, "Dissection of the Personality": "the therapeutic efforts of psycho-analysis…[are] to

strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. Where id was, there ego shall be" (*SE* 22.80).

18. Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough; ed. G.P. Goold, second edn, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1.630.
19. Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, "Paradiso," ed. and trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
20. *Cymbeline* is cited from *The Oxford Shakespeare*, second edn, ed. Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.5.386–388.
21. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1674, in "The Milton Reading Room": http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_1/index.shtml, 4.304–311.
22. In recapitulation, I might here say that the current essay, in one sense, is a review of my twenty plus years as editor of *EXEMPLARIA*. The very best theoretical approaches to Medieval and Early Modern literature invariably are expressed in essays that show the greatest strengths in close reading, often startlingly meticulous close reading.
23. Thomas Usk, *The Testament of Love*, ed. R. Allen Shoaf, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998). http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/shoaf.htm. *The Testament of Love* (modernized), accessible at www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rashoaf/modusk/musk/intro.htm.
24. This suffering is for Lacan the gouge as it is also the gauge of most psychopathology, if not all. Throughout his career, however posterity ultimately judges it, he called attention to the illusions of wholeness we affect so as to compensate for the elusion of wholeness in our lives: we never overcome infancy (lit., "not speaking" [< *in fans*]) no matter how much we talk of adulthood and its achievements. I admire Lacan's work for just this fidelity to the human condition.

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