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# Marginalia Reviews

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*Feeling Persecuted:  
Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages*  
Anthony Bale  
(London: Reaktion Books, 2010)  
ISBN: 978-1-86189-761-9 (Hardcover); 254 pages.  
RRP £29 (\$45).

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In his introduction to *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350–1500* (CUP, 2006) Anthony Bale aptly cited Frederic Raphael's dictum that the Jews are 'the margin which runs down the middle of the page of European history'. Synthesising recent approaches from a number of disciplines, Bale argued persuasively in that book that the deployment of anti-Judaic topoi in the production of late medieval English literary culture was no merely marginal matter. *Feeling Persecuted* consolidates some of the arguments of that first study, and expands their scope; it is, however, more a recapitulation than an advance into new territory.

Bale's subject is what has been described as the 'rhetorical construction' of the Jew in late medieval England. His focus is not the well-attested persecution of Jews by medieval Christians, but rather the persecution of medieval Christians by Jews – a phenomenon that is equally well documented, despite its being wholly invented. Imaginatively translating Jewish violence from the remote biblical past into the immediate medieval present, late medieval Christian culture found utility in depicting itself as currently victimized by the same murderous Jewish agency that it invariably over-emphasised in its representations of the Passion. (Hence the circulation of many tales of Jewish Eucharistic sacrilege, well-poisoning and child-murder, among which last Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* is the most well-known.) This was true even – and perhaps especially – when Jews themselves were unlikely to be encountered, as was the case in England following Edward I's expulsion of the Jewish community in 1290. (Bale states that the Jews were 'comprehensively expelled', although this idea has been contested by James Shapiro and David Lawton, among others. However, it is safe to say that their existence in late medieval England was at best peripheral.)

Bale seeks to understand medieval Christian attitudes towards Jews and Judaism holistically, inviting consideration of the 'aesthetic, intellectual and devotional reasons' for imaginary slanders. His emphasis, as might be expected, is on the 'authorizing' nature of perceived persecution: victimhood as a peculiarly empowering form of subjectivity. Beyond this broad point, however, the chief strengths of his book lie in its often deft analyses of an array of texts and artefacts. Bale hones in on the most characteristically tangible and piercing qualities of medieval material culture – its appeals to 'somatic engagement'. 'Medieval people did not see books and pictures as separate from themselves ... but as recreational objects which could touch, impress, hurt or wound the reader or viewer.' And so the import of Bale's title is clarified in his first and perhaps most interesting chapter: 'feeling persecuted' – 'feeling' having both a tactile

and an emotional register – was one of the fundamental affects in the material expression of ‘affective’ devotion.

The second chapter comprises seven brief discussions of purportedly Jewish biblical and post-biblical violence, with an emphasis on the imagined vulnerability of Christian children. A fourteenth-century Paris ivory statue of the Virgin and Child, with a depiction of Herod’s Massacre of Innocents on the reverse, nicely illustrates the inherent proximity of graphic murderousness and devotional comfort in the medieval Christian psyche (though one might argue that any crucifixion scene would have done the same). Imagined Jewish violence is further explored, with help from Freud’s essay “A Child Is Being Beaten”, in the apocryphal scenes of Christ’s childhood depicted in the Tring tiles, as well as in several ‘mock lullaby’ lyrics. Bale also returns to the subject of ritual murder (the so-called ‘blood libel’) already addressed in his earlier book; here he focuses on the cult of William of Norwich, allegedly crucified by Jews in 1144 (aged 12) as described in Thomas of Monmouth’s *vita*. Bale suggests we view such cases ‘as personalized and emotional reconstructions of Christ’s passion’, cognate with devotional practices that also sought to relocate its distant horrors “within the everyday, local and familiar”.

Two central chapters focus on what Bale calls the ‘interruptive’ function of the Jew. The first addresses the art-historical issue of ‘profile-positioning’ in medieval Christian visual representations, and uses the examples of Judas, the two thieves crucified with Christ, as well as Longinus and Stephaton (honorary Jews both). In an insightful discussion of the ‘lavish and beautiful’ Salvin Hours (c. 1270), Bale contends that ‘Jews prevent a fully focused, uninterrupted gaze on Christ’; they become objects of the viewer’s antipathy ‘not simply because they are ‘ugly’ and ‘Jewish’ but because they create a tension in modes of looking’; they are, in more than one way, at odds with Christian perspective. Next Bale turns to the apocryphal Jephonius – the Jew who attacks the Virgin’s funeral and whose hand sticks to the bier – as depicted in the Taymouth Hours, the murals of St Mary’s parish church in Chalgrove (Oxfordshire), and the N-Town ‘Assumption of the Virgin’. Jephonius’s role, Bale claims, is to provide narrative and iconographic resistance to Christian faith: ‘a kind of inversion of the Assumption’, he drags Mary’s body down, stalling her ascension. Bale discusses his relationship with the apostle Thomas and with other more ‘Jewish’ doubters, including Jonathas in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, who so memorably mishandles the Eucharistic ‘cake’. The Jew’s interruptive hand – often punitively severed, and rejoined only upon conversion – is thus ‘an eloquent and shocking metonym of incorrect engagement with Christian symbols’.

Medieval Christian representations of Jerusalem and the Holy Land are the subject of two rather different chapters towards the end of the book. One looks at the ways Jerusalem was depicted (or invented) as a potential destination for European pilgrims. The other describes its ‘transportability’ – its potential for imaginative recreation in late medieval England where it might prove even more potent than the reality: ‘one could ... feel oneself to be at Calvary ... without the inconvenience and inauthenticity of [going to] the real Jerusalem’. These chapters discuss fifteenth-century pilgrim accounts, Saint Helena and the Invention of the True Cross, the layout of English ‘Calvary chapels’ (including Red Mount Chapel in King’s Lynn), and the travels of Margery Kempe, whose whole life was ‘a performance of feeling persecuted’.

A final chapter deals rather more cursorily with Jewish sources: commemorative accounts of the mass suicide of persecuted Jews at Clifford's Tower, York, in 1190 and marginal illustrations from the Prato Haggadah (Spain, c.1300). While offering a salutary reminder that 'Jews too engaged in somatic, emotional and physical devotional practices, often based around feeling persecuted,' Bale also points out that the cultural celebration of persecution – Christian or Jewish – is often 'the prerogative of a relatively secure and empowered group'. Accordingly, he concludes with a sharp critique of recent Zionist historiography and a call to avoid labelling the kinds of 'cultural antipathy' described in his book with the modern, racially inflected term 'anti-Semitism'. (Bale in fact made circumspect use of precisely that word in his first book; here he explicitly disavows it as 'an anti-critical, ahistorical and totalizing term which obscures more than it illuminates'.)

This is a usefully illustrated volume. Quotations from Latin texts are given only in translation, and only a select bibliography is included.

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*Shakespeare and the Medieval World*

Helen Cooper

Arden Critical Companions

(London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2010)

ISBN: 978-1-904271-78-9 (Hardcover); 272 pages.

RRP £55.

Helen Cooper's aim in *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* is a simple one, expressed in its opening sentence: to establish that 'the world in which Shakespeare lived was a medieval one' (p. 1). Her book begins with the real world that formed Shakespeare's early life and experience, the medieval street-plan of Stratford, and it ends with the next world: the 'city full of straying streets', and death, 'the market-place where each one meets', as the widows in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* describe it (1.5.15-16, p. 233). And in between it encompasses Shakespeare's 'the little world of man', the *theatrum orbis* of his wooden O.

This book is the culmination of Helen Cooper's long-lasting efforts to deconstruct the periodisation that has emphasised the break, and not the continuity, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The tendency is nowhere more visible than in the connotative accretions of the terminology: we claim the sixteenth century as our own when we label it 'early modern' and hail it as a moment of new life after sterility when we say 'renaissance'; we relegate to the realm of the 'positively medieval' anything that smells of backwardness or barbarity. The division runs deeper than just words: as Cooper comments, 'we often label everything we like in the Middle Ages as proto-Renaissance, and everything we don't like in the Renaissance as medieval' (p. 2). In fact, of course, habits of thought die hard, and for as much as the sixteenth century saw some

tectonic shifts over the course of its turbulent religious, political, technological and intellectual development, it also held fast to where it had come from, its medieval origins becoming more precious and more clear as they became more distant. But the sheer ubiquity of the influence of the medieval has meant that the wood has tended to be missed for the trees: as Cooper observes, 'Chaucer [has] almost disappear[ed] from sight in much criticism of Shakespeare', but 'many times as much ink has been poured out over his relation to Plutarch' (p. 209).

Cooper's book is therefore a timely one, and deserves to be a significant one, in reorienting perspectives to the important place of the medieval, visible and invisible, direct and intangible, in Shakespeare's mind. But it is testimony to the suppleness of her writing, and the lightness with which she wears her learning, that this book remains beautifully simple. It covers a vast array of material with a swiftness of pace and ease of style that are sufficient to inform the undergraduate or interested layperson, without being laborious for the scholar. One of the delightful things about it is the incidental detail one encounters along the way – that, for instance, among the unnoticed bequests of the Middle Ages to the modern world are the alphabetical index, double-entry book-keeping, the mechanical clock, and the humble button. The book is full of such moments of intriguing detail and enticing speculation: one of the best is a subsection of chapter seven, 'A Note on Bottom and the Ass' (pp. 219-220), whose theory about the origin of the donkey-head as a hand-me-down from the talking ass of the Chester play, I leave to others to take or leave.

The book is made up of seven chapters, whose arguments are largely distinct and self-contained. The first, 'Shakespeare's Medieval World', starts with the things that we take for granted that were in fact medieval inheritances: the street-plan of Stratford, the skyline of London; ideas about the cosmos and the shape of human life and death that were staples of a medieval worldview, and barely dented by the Reformation; and the English language, with all the complex medieval history that made it, in Cooper's words, 'a palimpsest of successive conquests', and which shaped its peculiar boasts and anxieties about identity, vernacularity and nationalism. The second chapter 'Total Theatre' claims as particularly medieval (as opposed to classical) Shakespeare's belief in the stageability of everything. It argues that the cycle plays, which were still being acted in the provinces well into the sixteenth century, and which Shakespeare almost certainly witnessed in Coventry as a teenager, bequeathed to him an understanding of theatre that encompassed all things – 'damnation and bliss; God, and a man caught with his pants down' (p. 48). And, unlike Senecan drama, it 'acted its action' with an 'incarnational aesthetic' that included 'battles and dumbshows... embraces and kisses, on-stage deaths and blood' with total confidence in the audience's willingness to believe in spite of their unbelief (p. 48). This chapter shows that this all-encompassing ethic lay behind the concept of the *theatrum*, not originally connoting a dramatic space but an encyclopaedia or *summa*. When Burbage opened the Theatre in 1576, he was doing more than capitalising the T, Cooper argues: 'the playhouse... present[ed] itself as an encyclopaedia of the world, *theatrum mundi*. The Globe was named by analogy with the world' (p. 52).

The third chapter, 'Staging the Unstageable', considers the impossibilities that medieval and Shakespearean drama alike place on stagecraft and specta-

tion: 'Enter Ariel, invisible'; 'I am Deus Pater'; 'Exit pursued by a bear'. It contends that whenever there is a significant rupture between classical and Renaissance practice, it is because of what happened in between, and Shakespeare's deliberate neglect of the Aristotelian dramatic principles so cherished in other European traditions is no exception. The fourth chapter, 'The Little World of Man', continues its discussion of the medieval influence on sixteenth-century thought with regard to the human psyche and the moral cosmos: the influence of allegorical modes of drama (the Vice and Richard III), indicative nomenclature (Parolles), and the three types of the King, the Shepherd and the Fool. Chapter Five, 'The World of Fortune' turns to tragedy, explaining the evolution of the term from its ethical Boethian origins to its categorising function in the First Folio, and the ironies it entails along the way. The sixth chapter, 'Romance, Women and the Providential World' considers the enduring influence of popular medieval romance tradition: the self-determining agency of its feisty heroines, the benign supernatural forces governing the symmetry of its plot, the truly satisfying happy endings that come about only after deep and genuine suffering. This chapter gives special place to *Pericles*, the play that foregrounds its medievalism by having 'ancient Gower' give the Prologue. The final chapter, 'Shakespeare's Chaucer', discusses Shakespeare's three most pronounced engagements with his notable predecessor. One of the most pleasing suggestions of this chapter is the analogy between the *Dream* and *The Canterbury Tales*: 'Shakespeare's turning of Chaucer's April day's holiday into a midsummer night's dream, and showing in the process how he can compete with his master' (p. 219). The argument in this section insists that 'Shakespeare's responses to Chaucer... are a long way from being acts of allegiance' (p. 210), and the darker analyses of *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Knight's Tale* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, show Shakespeare persistently turning Chaucerian ambivalence into something more 'deeply disorienting' (p. 234).

This book expands Helen Cooper's 2005 inaugural lecture as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Cambridge on *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, and continues the efforts of her last book, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*, to show the enduring habits of thought in English literature from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. It will give Shakespeareans of all shades a fuller understanding of the world in which he lived and thought, and the ones he created.

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*The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*

Nicholas Evans

(Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010)

ISBN: 978-1-84383-549-3 (Hardcover); 308 pages.

£60.00 (\$99.00).

*The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society  
in the Early Seventeenth Century*

Bernadette Cunningham

(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010)

ISBN 978-1-84682-203-2 (Hardcover); 348 pages.

£45.00 (€50.00).

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As the blurb of the first of these books makes clear, 'Ireland has the most substantial corpus of annalistic chronicles for the early period in western Europe'. The Irish annals represent a major repository of information about the development of early-medieval Irish society and there are few aspects of early Ireland that can be researched without some understanding of this corpus of material. Yet, despite this distinction and their continuing usefulness to historians, full-length studies of these records themselves have been few and far between. These two books, as well as Daniel McCarthy's *The Irish Annals* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), go some way towards addressing this neglect.

A stated aim of Nicholas Evans' *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* is to 'build on previous research and provide some of the basic groundwork to improve our understanding of the Irish annals' (p. 7). Any book that seeks to conduct an in-depth analysis of the annals is bound to be highly technical. *The Present and the Past* certainly does not constitute 'light reading' and would probably be rather challenging to a reader who does not have some familiarity with medieval Irish history and its sources. However, the root of this problem lies in the nature of the sources themselves, rather than in Evans' approach to them. Indeed, Evans deserves praise for presenting this tangled mass of evidence in as lucid a fashion as possible. Throughout this book, his train of thought is clear and the various strands of argument ably expressed in precise unfussy prose.

Evans concentrates his attention on two textual groups of sources. The first is formed by the *Annals of Ulster* (AU) and the *Annals of Loch Cé* (ALC), both of which share a common source for the section from the year 1014 (when ALC begins) to the 1220s. The second group consists of the *Annals of Tigernach* (AT) and the *Chronicum Scotorum* (CS), both of which contain sufficient material from the monastery at Clonmacnoise to suggest that they were maintained there at some stage of their transmission. Evans' main focus is on the tenth and eleventh century sections of these annals, which he observes have been relatively neglected by scholars but which are highly significant. However, he does not ignore the earlier periods and reconstructs the chronology for the Irish annals for the period 664 to 730 by comparative analysis with other independent sources, most notably Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and Pictish king-lists. Annalistic entries treating events before 664 prove the most problematic, and

Evans concludes that in this period 'there are more difficulties and contradictions in the sources which hamper any analysis' (p. 188). Evans adopts a number of approaches in his study of annalistic texts: analysis of the content of individual entries, the ordering of these entries, and linguistic analysis of the form in which they were written. One of the most significant (and disputed) issues that Evans tackles is the question of the terminal date for the *Chronicle of Ireland* – the putative common source of AU, AT and CS. Some years ago, scholars such as Kathleen Hughes and John Kelleher argued that this chronicle terminated around the year 911 when AU and the Clonmacnoise group of annals parted company. Evans' researches tend to support this position. In doing so, they refute McCarthy's more recent view that the shared source of the annals was transferred to Clonmacnoise in the mid-eighth century where it remained until as late as c. 1019, as the common source for AU, AT and CS.

Evans appears to have taken pains to make this complex work as easy as possible to use and to digest. Most chapters contain clear and useful concluding sections and the book is teeming with illustrative footnotes. At the outset, two maps give the locations of the various peoples and places mentioned in the text. Evans supplies three appendices that collect and present some of the more complex evidence in the form of tables and diagrams. There is also a detailed index with English translations of vocabulary and phrases in Latin and Irish used in the annals.

*The Present and the Past* is a very significant work of scholarship; it is well researched, intelligently argued and never attempts to elide the fact that the evidence can be open to more than one interpretation. This book deserves to be an indispensable reference work for any scholar using the Irish annals for research purposes. Indeed, in many ways it functions as a manual, or a handbook, to the annals and is certainly a work that scholars will find themselves returning to again and again. Of course, notwithstanding Evans' important contribution to scholarship, the number of different sets of surviving annals, questions surrounding their interrelationship, the tendency evident in the annals to recast and translate earlier material, the large number of scribes involved in annalistic transmission at a variety of centres, the fact that the annals are generally preserved in later (in some instances considerably later) manuscripts, all conspire to ensure that the Irish annals will remain a rich source of speculation and contention among scholars and that only the most foolhardy will claim to have said the last word on the subject. Evans, in a further instance of the good judgement that characterises this book, makes no such claim.

Among the annalistic sources that fall outside the stated scope of Evans' book are the most celebrated of all the Irish annals, the so-called *Annals of the Four Masters* (AFM). A distinct aura of romance has always hung around this seventeenth-century work, originally styled *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* (The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland) and considered by many to be the final and greatest monument to the medieval Gaelic world. Indeed, the most prominent of the annalists, the Franciscan Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, has enjoyed a considerable reputation in modern Ireland. In 1944, the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death was marked by the issue of two commemorative postage stamps featuring a modern impression of Ó Cléirigh at his desk and emblazoned with the annalists' dedication of their work, *Do chum glóire Dé agus onóra na hÉireann* (For the glory of God and the honour of Ireland), expressing both the nationalism and Catholicism of

the Irish Free State. The design endured on Irish postage stamps until 1969.

As if in homage to the modern reputation of the Four Masters, Bernadette Cunningham's new book, *The Annals of the Four Masters: Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century*, uses the image of Ó Cléirigh from the 1944 stamps as its cover illustration. The publication of Cunningham's book follows on from a new flurry of interest in AFM occasioned by the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Irish College at Louvain which was marked in 2007. Unsurprisingly, the facets of AFM and its context that pique the interest of 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers are rather different to those of previous eras. From the outset, Cunningham's focus is on the text of the annals as a work of history noting, quite rightly, that the work itself has been rather overshadowed by the circumstances of its composition. She is also keen to stress the European context of the annals composition noting, as a starting point, that the 'much lauded [dedicatory] phrase. . . was in fact an adaptation of a phrase used also in other countries' (p. 22). Situating AFM in its wider European context might seem like an obvious approach to a work compiled at Louvain, but it is a refreshing and productive innovation in an area that has traditionally been insular in every sense of the word. Cunningham also explores the evidence for the Four Masters' methodology. Her analysis of the manuscript evidence, particularly the neglected autograph manuscripts of AFM, is deft and is supplemented by a generous selection of black and white photographs. This sort of detailed work is complemented by broader accounts of the socio-historical context. The tracing of such cultural context is the sort of research for which Cunningham has already displayed considerable affinity in her 2000 study of Ó Cléirigh's contemporary, Geoffrey Keating, and the chapters that adopt this focus are the most engaging in this study.

On one level, it is somewhat surprising that a full length study of AFM has been so long in arriving. The importance of AFM to scholars in almost every field of medieval and early modern Irish historiography and the continued celebrity of the annalists and their work beyond the scholarly sphere, effectively guarantees a particularly broad audience for a book of this sort. Of course such a mixed audience also provides challenges and, in this regard, the book sometimes betrays its origins as a doctoral thesis. At times, too few concessions are made to the needs of readers whose immediate area of specialisation is not Cunningham's own. A specialist in early medieval Irish history, for instance, is likely to find the array of late medieval O'Donnells (who, like most dynasties, had a fondness for repeating first names and sobriquets from generation to generation) rather bewildering. A genealogical table or two would have been particularly helpful in this regard. Furthermore, the depth of Cunningham's analysis of the text, particularly with regard to the details of AFM's use of known sources, will not always be sufficiently thorough to satisfy those who come to this book with a particular interest in such questions. Points are generally made by referencing one or two representative examples (usually from the fourteenth and fifteenth century material) rather than providing a more comprehensive account. The sort of extensive tables and charts Evans uses to present such material may have been avoided in order to encourage the non-specialist readership a book on this subject is capable of attracting (Cunningham's volume is certainly less visually daunting than Evans' in this respect), but the study's failures of elucidation at other points means such an audience will also encounter prob-



lems. The book could also have benefited from more thorough proof-reading. A range of small inconsistencies might have been easily avoided. For instance, Aodh de Blácam's *Gaelic Literature Surveyed* is dated to 1899 in the main text (p. 13), while the footnote and bibliography give the correct date of 1929; one page later, Brendan Jennings' book on Mícheál Ó Cléirigh is assigned to 1935 in the main text and to 1936 in the corresponding footnote.

Nonetheless, Cunningham deserves credit for undertaking this large scale evaluation, and re-evaluation, of AFM and its context. As the paucity of previous such attempts demonstrates, the scale of such a project cannot be anything other than truly daunting. It is to be hoped that this book will provide a stimulus for further work on these annals, work that should, ideally, culminate in a sorely-needed new edition of AFM itself.

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*The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe:  
Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the 'Vita Adae et Evae'*

Brian Murdoch

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

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RRP £58.00 (\$100.00).

Brian Murdoch opens his monumental study by challenging a basic critical assumption that we can talk about 'the text' usefully and meaningfully. The Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* (VAE), from which vernacular versions across medieval Europe derive, is 'not really a single text, but rather a more or less flexible accumulation of episodes grouped around a core' (p.vii). Murdoch doubts the fruitfulness of chronological and 'linear' discussion of the vernacular re-writings of the *Vita Adae et Evae*, instead favouring an approach that considers the reception history of the texts across a geographical spread. It is tempting to draw an analogy between the critical methodology informing Murdoch's *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe* and the plight of its subjects. Expelled from paradise, the wandering exiles, Adam and Eve, face a world of possibilities and uncertainties, the comfort and security of paradise denied to them. Murdoch likewise faces a terrain of *variance* and *mouvance*, the changing form of the *Vita Adae et Evae* as it is found in 49 European vernacular texts. Yet, unlike the penitential couple who long for the refuge of absolutes, Murdoch relishes the challenge of exploring the shifting, slippery ground.

Despite the presence of textual variations, the basic story of Adam and Eve after they are exiled from the Garden of Eden remains fairly stable. To summarise, the couple suffer the discomforts of cold and hunger and undertake penance by fasting and immersing themselves in river water for a set number of days. Satan, outraged by their atonement, successfully tempts Eve to leave the water. Adam prays and drives away the devil, completing his penance. Eve soon becomes pregnant and gives birth to Cain. The story of Cain and Abel follows, and later, Adam is transported into heaven, receiving a prophetic vision.

The apocryphal material culminates in the legend of the Holy Rood – Adam dies and is buried with twigs or seeds that eventually grow into the tree used to make Christ's crucifix. Seth, Adam's son, records his parents' history on tablets of clay and stone.

After an introductory chapter explaining his critical approach, Murdoch charts how this tale varies on account of its source, form and context over four chapters, beginning his study in Ireland with the text *Saltair na Rann*, one of the oldest vernacular versions of the *VAE*, which contains some unusual elements partly due to having a distinctive variant version of the *VAE* as its source, and partly due to scribal misreadings, such as the intriguing name given to the third heaven, 'Ficciona,' a possible misreading of 'faci(t) omnia.'

Chapter 3, 'England, Wales and Cornwall,' contains a particularly fascinating discussion of textual variations within the so-called 'Arundel' class of English manuscripts. Whereas in most European versions of the *VAE*, Adam sees a chariot ('currum') with fiery wheels, most manuscripts of the Arundel class contain the misreading 'choros,' some also containing a mistranslation of 'fiery' to 'fair,' thus perpetuating the myth that Adam saw a choir or circle of fair angels. However, although the Bodley and Wheatley manuscripts probably have the same source, they differ in that Wheatley contains the correct reading as well as the misreading, whilst the Bodley only contains the erroneous idea. This leads Murdoch to speculate briefly about whether the writer of the Wheatley manuscript had access to multiple sources, though he quickly reins in his discussion, wary of speculation, since 'questions like this can rarely have definite answers, and require too many assumptions' (p.108). Yet, he argues, this example leads us to consider further the fluidity of the apocrypha and raises more questions about traditional methods of textual analysis. While Murdoch's eagerness to divert from the conventional hunt for a source text is admirable, and his evidence appears all the stronger for his refusal to enter the realms of speculation, one cannot help feeling that his bolder critical assumptions are curtailed as soon as they enter interesting territory.

It is no coincidence that the most engaging part of the work, chapter 4, 'The Holy Roman Empire and Beyond,' is also that which shows European writers taking greater liberties with the *VAE*. The German works of Heinrich von Munchen and Lutwin add to *VAE* material in two significant ways: by exploring character psychology (especially that of Eve) in greater detail, and by contributing to theological discussions of penance and the fall. In this chapter, we see most clearly the twin agonies of love and guilt that the exiled couple endured, and engage most closely with the vexed issue of how Lucifer fell through envy of Adam before Adam was even created.

Chapter 5 considers versions of the vernacular texts in France, Brittany and Italy. Most interesting here is the discussion of how the source material was adapted for dramatic performance. Although in a majority of vernacular texts, Eve desires death and asks Adam to kill her, the Breton mystery play addresses the issue that Eve, ignorant of the implications of her own mortality, could not yet have known about death. The Breton play therefore introduces the concept of mortality in the form of a dramatic persona, *Maro* (Death), created by God. Not only does this bring an abstract idea to the stage with terrifying immediacy, in a way that reflects the allegorical mortality plays, but it also raises the problem of evil – how the God of classical theism can remain omnibenevolent with

the presence of death and suffering in the world.

The visual culture of the apocryphal story of Adam and Eve is briefly discussed in chapter 6, 'Iconography.' The iconographic tradition is somewhat limited, especially in comparison to the wealth of artistic material depicting the legend of the Holy Rood. Nevertheless, some of the artwork is compelling, such as the illustration found in a twelfth-century Psalter that provides a typological link between Adam's penance in river Jordan and Christ's baptism. Plates of the images could have been included to enrich Murdoch's discussion.

The concluding chapter once again emphasises the need to consider the texts from a pan-European perspective, which is 'just as valuable as the backward search for an elusive original' (p.252-3). While Murdoch's approach is thorough, diligent and original in this field of study, it has the unfortunate effect of making the structure of each chapter very similar, with the four chapters of textual analysis being rather repetitive in form. However, this is an undeniably important work, wide in scope yet painstakingly detailed, which furthers our understanding of textual criticism and theology. It would also be of interest to anyone whose imagination was triggered by what may have happened to the first man and woman after they, with 'wand'ring steps and slow / Through Eden took thir solitarie way' (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 12:648-9).

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