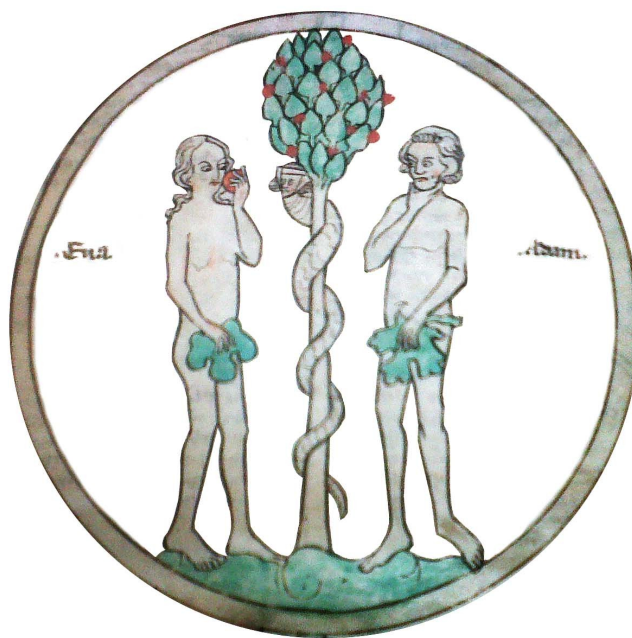
Marginalia

The Journal of the Medieval Reading Group



Taste

Thematic Issue, October 2011

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Cover Image: Adam and Eve taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 4081, c. 1300, fol.1r. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Acknowledgements:

The editorial team of Marginalia wish to thank the members of the journal's advisory board, the editors, the website experts, and the members of the English Faculty who kindly advise and support the Medieval Reading Group and this journal.

Marginalia Volume 13, October 2011

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Editor's Foreword

Sara Harris, *Magdalene College, Cambridge*

The 2012 issue of *Marginalia* addresses the theme of 'Taste'. Although then, as now, the term had implications of aesthetic discernment, the fleshly aspects of taste as one of the five senses and its connection to the Fall ensured that it remained predominantly associated with sin for medieval writers in the Christian West. However, such sin also afforded the possibility of redemption: the author of the Old English *Dream of the Rood* exploits the dual meaning of 'byrigde' as 'tasted' or 'buried' to great effect, creating a half-line that is simultaneously suggestive of both Adam's death and Christ's resurrection. The mouth remained a site of sin more generally, not only as a conduit for gluttony, but also as the origin of the *peccata linguae* which increasingly concerned the later Middle Ages.

Both items in this summer's *Marginalia* address the issues raised by our theme, directly and indirectly. Emily Selove's article, 'Crashing the Text: Speaking of Eating in *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim'* concerns the Arabic text of the *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim,* likely to have been written in the eleventh century by the otherwise unknown al-Azdī. Selove explores the writer's constructions of obscenity through overabundance, particularly the juxtaposition of a superfluity of verbal description with the paucity of food available for consumption. The morality of appetite and its appeasement are considered through the parasitical figure of the uninvited guest, whose insatiable epicurean desires, Selove suggests, are analogous to the author's omnivorous appropriation of other texts in the construction of this poem.

Ben Parson's essay, 'An Early Flyting in Hary's *Wallace*', draws critical attention to a previously unnoticed example of a flyting, found in the fifteenth-century Makar 'Blind' Hary's *The Actes and Deidis of the Illustre and Vallyeant Campioun Schir William Wallace*. Composed in the 1470s, the brief altercation between Wallace and an English soldier enjoys extensive stylistic and thematic parallels with the other three flytings extant, the earliest of which, that of Dunbar and Kennedie, dates from c.1503. Hary's *Wallace* is therefore able to provide evidence that the main features of the flyting tradition were in place significantly earlier than previously attested.

This issue of *Marginalia* also features reviews by members of the Medieval Reading Group of various recent books connected to the Middle Ages, discussing topics that range from the homiletic writings of Wulfstan to early Irish and Welsh astrology.

Crashing the Text: Speaking of Eating in *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*

Emily Selove
University of California, Los Angeles

Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim, probably written in the eleventh century by the otherwise unknown al-Azdī,[1] tells the story of a Baghdadi party-crasher crashing a party in Isfahan. In his introduction, the author explains that the events represented occupy a day and a night, and can be read in that same amount of time. He also tells us that the Baghdadi guest, who dominates the conversation with his alternately obscene and elegant tirades, represents the entirety of Baghdad, and indeed a kind of microcosm of creation. The *Ḥikāya*, a real-time representation of a feast, is in fact an all-inclusive banquet of words, incorporating elements of a wide variety of contemporary and ancient Arabic poetry.

Many scholars of the *Ḥikāya* have looked to the text as an example of realism, hoping to find within its pages a true-to-life microcosm of medieval Baghdad.[2] Although the *Ḥikāya* brims with words for household furniture and food, these scholars are inevitably disappointed in their quest for a realistic depiction of the everyday, which they complain is marred by the overabundance and obscenity of Abū al-Qāsim's speech.[3] For what they in fact receive is a parodic and grotesque portrait, more about language itself than about reality. Abū al-Qāsim tells us things about Baghdad we may find nowhere else in literature: the sounds of the water-wheels in the river, a story about excrement in the streets, and Baghdadi swimming strokes with names like "the scorpion" and "the peacock," named but not described. For right at the moment it seems that Abū al-Qāsim's discourse bring the physical presence of the city closer than ever before, at the next moment his speech seems, like Baghdad itself, a mere literary figment, elaborately imagined.

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[1] On questions of authorship, see my forthcoming dissertation, '*Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim* and the World of Satire,' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012).
[2] The first editor of the *Ḥikāya*, Adam Mez, introduced it as such in 1902, and many have followed his lead. See Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī, , *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī / Abūlkāsim: ein bagdāder Sittenbild,* ed. by Adam Mez (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1902), p. xii, and G.E. Von Grunebaum, 'Aspects of Arabic Urban Literature,' *Al-Andalus,* 20 (1955), 259-281 (p. 275), and Francesco Gabrieli, 'Abu'l-Muṭahhar al-Azdī,' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam 2,* 12 volumes (London:Brill, 1960-2006) 12 (2005), 31.
[3] See especially Josef Horovitz, "Abū 'l-Kāsim," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 4 volumes (Leiden: Brill, 1913-1936), I (1913), 133, and M.J. De Goeje, 'Abulkasim von Muhammad ibn Ahmad, hrsg. von Mez,' *Gottingische gelehrte Anzeigen,* 164 (1902), 723-736 (p. 723).

Like many seeming works of realism from medieval and ancient literatures, the *Ḥikāya* is a reaction to traditional literary notions of depiction and mimesis. Thus it represents less a comment about reality itself than about the failure of literature to depict reality. The title alone, difficult to translate, seems to hover between a promise of a realistic portrait and a grotesque parody.[4] However, even if Azdī is providing, as he seems to promise, an imitation or mimicry of contemporary Baghdad or Baghdadi speech, mimicry itself can imply not necessarily a faithful reproduction of the thing imitated, but a grotesque exaggeration.

To create this imitation, the author gathered from a wide range of sources, old and new, and "passed them off as his own."[5] Indeed Abū al-Qāsim touches on many genres of high-flying Arabic *adab* (*belles-lettres*), often quoting well-known sources from the classical literary tradition. These poetic recitations set off his rhymed prose lists of Baghdadi goods and foodstuffs, which go on for pages listing item after obscure item in a sometimes baffling effusion. Abū al-Qāsim's bombastic or grotesque poetry and prose both stand in contrast to his conversational exchanges with his half-stunned audience, as well as to the narrator's voice, which speaks rarely and simply. Thus the *Ḥikāya* weaves contrasting registers of Arabic literature into a continuous dinner conversation. To take an example, Abū al-Qāsim, having hinted (not so subtly) that he is hungry, is asked what he would like to eat. He replies with an acrobatic recitation of literary requests not only for food, but for gifts fit for the guest of a king: a swift charger, a choice singing girl, fine clothing, and so on.[6] When the other guests complain that they are intimidated by these extravagant requests, Abū al-Qāsim makes a more realistic request in prose: "A soft loaf, cheese that weeps, strips of local meat, tender and smiling, something from the ready foods of the market, and whatever lingering little bites you have around, like pickled snacks."[7] Then the narrator describes food brought to the table even more simply, mentioning

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[4] The word *ḥikāya*, as in the title *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim* could mean an imitation or mimicry, or a story. In his *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article, "Ḥikāya," Charles Pellat characterizes *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim* as the "link in the chain" between the original use of the word *ḥikāya* to mean "imitation or mimesis," and its modern meaning of "story or relation" because it was written during a time the word seems to have changed in meaning (*Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2, III (1966), 367-72.

[5] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. All citations of the *Ḥikāya* are from 'Abbūd al-Shāljī's edition, which credits Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, instead of Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī, with authorship: (Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Risālah al-Baghdādiyyah* (Koln: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1980), p. 42).

[6] This poem (minus an obscene line or two) also appears in al-Hamadhānī's "Al-Maqāmah al-sāsāniyya," in which the chameleon Abū al-Fatḥ recites it while disguised as one of the Banū Sāsān beggar clan (Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt* (Beirut: Dar el-Mashriq, 1968), pp. 93-4). Thus we can read this poem as typical of a rascally Bānū Sāsān character. But Abū al-Qāsim, like Abū Zayd, never adheres to one genre for long.

[7] Translation mine. Al-Tawḥīdī, p. 277.

"a platter of the cheese he had asked for, and some pickled things." Though Abū al-Qāsim is not exactly cheerful at the spread, so simply described, he brightens up when a lamb dish follows, apparently forgetting his outrageous requests in verse, as well as his lists of elaborately superior items to which he implied the Baghdadis were accustomed. Thus the substance and intricacy of Abū al-Qāsim's requests for food are adversely proportional to the material sustenance given him to eat—only when he makes his request in simple terms is he fed. However, he greets each dish with another literary outburst.

Works of Arabic *adab* often include many contrasting discourses, old and new, edifying and frivolous, and some also use the setting of a dinner party to present a literary feast. Though unique in many ways, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim* falls within a pan-Mediterranean tradition of sympotic literature, or texts depicting literary banquets. In one Arabic example, Ibn Buṭlān's *Da'wat al-Aṭibbā'* (The Physician's Dinner-Party),[8] a stingy doctor invites a young aspiring physician to his house for dinner, but allows him to eat very little, saying it is bad for his health. The doctor's friends arrive at the dinner, and each discusses his medical field of specialty. Thus the banquet consists of a multi-course meal of conversation, but very little actual food. Ibn Buṭlān, himself a physician, was certainly influenced by the Greek tradition of medical and philosophical literature. Dimitri Gutas has shown that even Plato's *Symposium* was not unknown to Arabic writers.[9] However, although we cannot say for certain that Azdī himself was familiar with the writings of the "ancients" he makes reference to in his introduction (indeed we cannot say for certain that his name was Azdī), the connections between the two traditions are palpable enough for us to discuss them side by side.

Classical sympotic texts (Plato's *Symposium*, and Trimalchio's dinner-party (the *Cena*) in the *Satyricon* being two of the most famous examples), explore the relationship of description and reality by setting various literary depictions of pleasure in a context of the real physical pleasure of a party. Furthermore, in these classical texts, unusual patterns of consumption often play against unusual literary productions, or replace the consumption of food with the consumption of conversation and literature. The guests at the *Symposium* famously forego the typical pleasures of a banquet for the pleasures of an intellectual debate. In the *Cena*, the superstitious, shocking, colloquial speech of the social-climbing freedmen garnishes the indigestibly showy, hybrid foodstuffs provided by Trimalchio.

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[8] Al-Mukhtār ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Buṭlān, *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2002).
[9] Dimitri Gutas, 'Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition,' in *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), pp. 36-60.

Encolpius, the (anti-)hero of the *Satyricon*, is an outsider to Trimalchio's party, if not himself a crasher, and he asks his neighbor to explain the events and people that he sees there. His freedman interlocutor not only describes and explains the feast, but helps color its seedy atmosphere with his low, colloquial dialect. Because of this layered portrayal of the proceedings, Erich Auerbach credits Petronius with producing a representation of a social milieu by means of mimetic speech, which representation is "closer to our modern conception of a realistic presentation than anything else that has come down to us from antiquity."[10] However, in all of these texts, the replacement of food with talk raises the question of the insubstantiality of speech, which cannot fill your belly, thus complicating any claims to realism these texts might otherwise have.[11]

Similarly hailed as an early attempt at realism, the *Ḥikāya* also replaces consumption itself with depictions of consumption, and conversation about absent food as well as sex, music, and material goods dominate the feast. This conversation does not match the food or events at the party in nature, as does the speech of the freedmen in the *Cena.* For although the dinner served at the Isfahani party seems modest enough, Abū al-Qāsim's elaborate foodstuff–laden speech leaves audience and reader alike with a feeling of dazzled overfullness. This dinner conversation is not a realistic representation of the food served, but a false display of a sumptuous feast, whose grand, luxurious offerings of gourmet meals, sex, cushions and song, like Abū al-Qāsim's incredible ravings, are ultimately just indigestible words. Azdī promises us a written mimesis of Baghdad, but throughout his text, there is a tension between words and reality, emphasized by this replacement of banquet with text. Abū al-Qāsim exchanges his wordy descriptions that may not describe something real in Baghdad, for real food at a party in Isfahan that is hardly described at all.

The frustration of being served a meal of words instead of real food is a common theme in contemporaneous Arabic literature.[12] In Hamadhānī's "Al-

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[10] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 30.

[11] The *Satyricon* of Petronius contains many fruitful points of comparison with the *Ḥikāya*. Like the *Ḥikāya*, it draws extensively from traditional literatures, and yet defies categorization or definition with its unique structure that confirms to no one prior genre. Like the *Ḥikāya*, its dating and authorship have been the subject of considerable debate, and the history of its preservation and transmission is something of a mystery, especially given its obscene content. Von Grunebaum likens the *Ḥikāya* to the *Satyricon*, calling it a "realistic caricature," thus capturing the tension between realism and representation in these works ('Aspects of Arabic Urban Literature,' p. 281). In the introduction to his translation, René Khawam also compares the two works, saying of al-Azdī, "On est en droit de le considerer comme le Pétrone arabe" (*Vingt-Quartre Heures de la vie d'une canaille* (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 1998), p. 10). Khawam here refers chiefly to both works' delightful uses of obscenity and humor.

[12] This topic is addressed throughout Geert Jan van Gelder's *Of Dishes and Discourse* (Richmond; Surrey: Curzon, 2000), as well as in Emily Gower's *The Loaded Table*, which explores similar tropes in Latin literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

maqāmah al-maḍīriyyah" a host, reminiscent of Trimalchio in his tastelessness, and almost as long-winded as Abū al-Qāsim, boasts so much to his guest about his food and household accoutrements that the guest becomes disgusted and unable to eat.[13] "In [this story]," comments Daniel Beaumont, "language does not disclose reality, it is rather a deafening roar which obscures it."[14] In al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl* (another 11th-century Baghdadi party-crashing book), a man describes a pastry so deliciously that his friend grows angry. "What do you think," says the man, "O Abū al-'Abbās, about jawzīnaj's light and flaky crust, and the power of its sweetness, drowning in sugar and oiled nuts?" To which Abū al-'Abbās replies, "If the pastry were only here right now, I would savor its presence so much more than your description. But as it is not, please let us do without more description as we must do without the pastry itself."[15] In a similar anecdote, someone asks the famous gourmand and party-crasher Bunān what he thinks about the pastry fālūdhaj. "Should anyone," he replies, "asking about fālūdhaj in this earthly life refer to intellect or reason? You simpleton! Eat it!"[16] Other party-crashers in the same text advise avoiding conversation altogether during a feast, as it interferes with the chewing process, further highlighting the tension between talking and eating.[17]

On the other hand, almost all of these party-crashers get fed by means of their silver tongues; indeed in a society that values eloquence above all else, one may make a living eating one's words, so to speak, by exchanging praise and poetry for daily bread. *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl,* the *Cena,* and many other tales of Mediterranean banquet texts share in common this interest in party-crashers or parasites, who exchange words for food.[18]

The parasite is a pervasive figure in banquet literature, and he often seems to serve the role of intratextual narrator of the text as banquet. For example, in many banquet texts, the narration occurs through the perspective of an outsider to the feast: in Plato's *Symposium*, the narrator Apollodorus hears his tale from Aristodemus, who tagged along to the party with Socrates, uninvited by the host (Socrates makes witty literary excuses, saying "To the feasts of the good the

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[13] For a translation, see Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt*, translated by W. J. Pendergast (London: Curzon Press, 1973), pp. 88-98.

[14] 'A Mighty and Never Ending Affair', *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 24 (1999), 139-159 (p. 159).

[15] Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Taṭfīl wa ḥikāyāt al-ṭufaylīyyīn wa akhbāruhum wa nawādir kalāmihim wa ash'āruhum*, ed. by Bassām 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jābī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazim, 1999), p. 105.

[16] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, p. 155.

[17] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, pp. 111, 131.

[18] The parasite is not a party-crasher because he is invited. Both parasite and party-crasher, however, earn their bread in essentially the same fashion. Thus the party-crasher is basically an uninvited parasite. For the Roman tradition of social parasitism in literature, see Philip Corbett, *The Scurra* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986).

good unbidden go.")[19] In the *Satyricon*, Encolpius, a stranger and a buffoon wherever he goes, attends Trimalchio's banquet for a free meal, and continuously asks his neighboring diner for explanations of the scene. These explanations allow both Encolpius and the readers a glimpse into the world of Trimalchio.

In the *Ḥikāya*, the dominant perspective is also that of a party-crasher, Abū al-Qāsim. However, Abū al-Qāsim does not narrate the banquet that he sees, but rather drowns out its description and the comments of its Isfahani guests with his ravings. The *Ḥikāya* therefore resembles the tradition of narrating through the lens of an outsider to the feast, but with a twist, because at this party, the uninvited guest takes over the banquet, commanding as if he, the guest, is now the host. Likewise his speech dominates the text, shoving the scenery, the other characters, and reality itself to the margins. Thus Abū al-Qāsim represents a twist on the typical role of the party-crasher as guide to the reader, because he makes the party his own,[20] and he replaces the real Isfahani feast that might have been described, with a force-feeding of his words. The other guests at the party in the *Ḥikāya* at once represent the reality which is occluded by Abū al-Qāsim's grotesque speech—the simple Isfahani party about which we hear so little—and also the experience of the reader when confronted with the *Ḥikāya* and the representation of Baghdad as a literary bully, impossible to resist, difficult to question, eminently entertaining but nauseatingly overabundant. The reader is united with the audience in their reaction to Abū al-Qāsim, who has hijacked the party and the text, making the original members of the banquet and the readers alike outsiders in their shocked response.

In the few studies of *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*, a few key passages receive the most attention: the introduction of the author, as well as the opening pages of the story in which Abū al-Qāsim himself is described, and various of the more outrageous and notable outbursts of the protagonist. But few notice the comments of the largely silent Isfahani party-goers, and the modest comforts offered at the banquet Abū al-Qāsim crashes. Indeed with uninterrupted quotations from the protagonist, some as long as ninety-three pages (in Shāljī's edition), it can be easy to forget that there is anyone else at the party. For the most part,

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[19] Plato, *Symposium*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 1996), p. 14. This is a sentiment the prophet Muhammad himself would have approved, as demonstrated by early chapters of al-Khaṭīb's *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl*, in which the prophet brings uninvited guests along to parties, or lets strangers follow him on his way to a feast.

[20] This in itself is not unusual behavior for Arabic party-crashers, who seem to question the very premise of ownership by their behavior. In one story in *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl*, for example, a very pushy crasher wonders silently to himself, "Whose house is this?" and then answers his own question saying, "It's yours, man, until someone says otherwise" (Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, p. 112).

Abū al-Qāsim only grudgingly entertains questions and grows furious and abusive if the guests laugh at his monologues. But by focusing on the few moments when Abū al-Qāsim converses with the other guests, one learns something about his character, and a little about the hypothetical but realistic party of people in awe of his shocking and literary speech, which is so overabundant that they hardly have time to digest what he is saying or the food they are eating. Indeed Abū al-Qāsim's conversation is almost indigestible, and though the other guests attempt to engage him in conversation and laugh at his jokes, he never really allows them to respond, as he drowns out their meal with his words.

The first to try to talk besides the protagonist is a "tough guy" (*jald*) from the crowd, who puts an end to Abū al-Qāsim's initial display of piety. At first the crowd, moved by his passion, respond as the audience of a pious exhortation should—with pious tears. But after all, they are at a party, and soon the crasher is cut short with an abrupt "Never mind!" from the tough guy, "There's no one in this crowd but drinks and fucks!"[21] This exclamation follows the tough guy's suddenly "understanding" Abū al-Qāsim (*yafṭan lahu*), though what precisely he understands could be a subject for debate. Monica Balda might argue that he "understands" that Abū al-Qāsim is not really pious, as his tearful recitations suggest, but is only a rogue putting on an act.[22] The tough guy may understand, at least, that Abū al-Qāsim is not *merely* pious, or that he has more to offer in the way of un-asked-for party entertainment than pious recitations. Either way, he suggests that Abū al-Qāsim's religious display is inappropriate for the party in question, composed of a group of people in a private convivial setting, who could handle sterner stuff in the way of entertainment. Despite the tough guy's braggadocio, the crowd will soon realize that Abū al-Qāsim's conversation is in fact much more than they can handle.

The party-crasher smiles at the guest's remark, and changes his manner entirely until the end of the tale. He takes off his sombre hood, relaxes his demeanour, and begins to insult each member of the feast, asking the other guests first to identify one another, saying "who is such-and-such?" We can compile a guest-list from their brief responses: first there is the "tough guy," then an eru-

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[21] Tawḥīdī, p. 55.

[22] In her character study of Abū al-Qāsim, 'Marginalité et eloquence contestatoire,' Balda argues that Abū al-Qāsim, as he exposes the hypocrisy of the other guests, is himself a hypocrite—a rogue who only wears the mask of piety (in *Identidades Marginales* ed. by Cristina de la Puente (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003), 371-93 (pp. 378-9). It seems, however, he is a genuine embodiment of opposites, and is described as such in several locations in the text, and particularly in the opening pages of the story, which includes a long list of often contrasting adjectives. In the final lines of the text, the narrator writes again that he is a "gathering of the beautiful and the hideous" (Tawḥīdī, p. 391).

dite man named ("for example")[23] Abū Bishr, then a secretary or writer (*kātib*), and an "important" (*khaṭīr*) man connected to the chief of a government bureau, his black servant, a visitor and friend of the leaders of the community, a ṭunbūrī player, a joker, a butler, a beardless youth, and the host. Later in the party we learn there is also a man sitting silently, plus two friends, an *'ūd* player, a singer, a slave-girl, and a slave boy. With the exception of the young and attractive members of the party, who are instead made the victims of Abū al-Qāsim's sexual aggression, each of these party-goers is lambasted by the crasher as being the worst of a stereotype: for example, the writer is an illiterate idiot, and the "important" man is in charge of guarding the duck guano on the river bank, and only brings a servant to puff himself up. The guest introduced as a "joker" receives the most scathing and lengthy round of insults, and indeed almost leaves the party in humiliation. This aggression of the protagonist is particularly telling, as Abū al-Qāsim, despite his entertainingly outrageous behavior, does not want to be identified as a joker himself. He may be funny, but he will not stand to be laughed at, and thus leaves the audience unable to interact with him at all. He denies that every other guest properly suits his category or profession, and himself refuses to be classified in a category.

Any audience in a Mediterranean sympotic text would recognize a fool as a familiar dinner guest, his function including humorous insults for each guest. However Abū al-Qāsim refuses to inhabit this paradigm, and during his insults the crowd seems uncertain whether they should try to defend the other guests or to play along, trying both strategies alternately. At first, they seem hopeful that he is there to entertain them, and is himself another joker: for example, they join him in a hearty chorus of "his beard in your bum!"[24] (Abū al-Qāsim's favorite insult, directed in this case toward the house steward). Thus they encourage his verbal barbs.[25] Indeed the crasher soon demands to be fed, reinforcing the

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[23] The entire text is in fact narrated in a hypothetical, past-continuous tense, as in "Abū al-Qāsim would walk into a party, and say something like…" Thus the party is presented merely as an example of something that might regularly occur.

[24] Tawḥīdī, p. 80.

[25] The host even complains "There's no one left in the party for you to mention but me!" inviting a rain of insults on his own head (though these are relatively restrained; Abū al-Qāsim does seem reluctant to bite the hand that might feed him). The host's complaint about being left out of the fun suggests that Abū al-Qāsim's insults could still serve the socially recognized function of entertaining the guests, and exchanging, in semi-professional manner, words for food; this kind of insult could be amusing and even flattering. The emperor Vespasian is said to have similarly solicited a joker's ridicule, and Carlin Barton explains in her *Sorrow of the Ancient Romans* how insulting dinner guests may ward off envy and evil eye (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 108 f. In her *Garden of Priapus*, Amy Richlin likens the satirist to the garden god Priapus, whose phallus threatens and wards off the "chthonic forces" (p. 113). She nevertheless reads satire as an often socially conservative act of ritual reversal and even violence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). An overly positive Bakhtinian reading of Abū al-Qāsim's violent speech would indeed seem idealistic.

impression that he is engaged in an exchange. So the crowd continues to play along when he exclaims, "There's not a living man among you, Arab or otherwise!" "What do we say?" they ask, encouraging him to go on, "What do we do?" Abū al-Qāsim responds with sexual and financial advice so immoral that one guest makes the terrible mistake of laughing out loud; the protagonist, who hates above all to be laughed at, erupts into a blasphemous and scatological tirade whose fury he hardly matches again during an entire day of scatological outbursts. "What are you laughing at?" he asks the laughing guests, adding that the sound alone hurts his ears. As Balda puts it, Abū al-Qāsim is "*hors la loi*" of discourse, impossible to respond to or even laugh at.[26]

"You've gone too far!" the guests exclaim for the first time during Abū al-Qāsim's vicious tirade against the "joker." And during his excoriation of their hometown, Isfahan, the guests again complain that he is "going too far," exceeding the bounds of proper conversation even for a jester. Later Abū al-Qāsim bridles violently when they ask him for some entertaining "*ḥikāyāt*,"[27] exclaiming, "Do you think I'm a buffoon?" For though he resembles nothing so much as a entertainer who sings for his supper,[28] only by addressing him in a tone of meticulous respect do the guests manage to guide his conversation to several topics that interest them.

Abū al-Qāsim not only refuses to allow the guests to respond to him in an ordinary way, he also refuses to let them remain silent. For the last man he attacks is a guest sitting silently through his verbal rampage, whom he calls a "statuesque vegetable."[29] This attack seems finally too much for the other party-goers, for before the crasher can really get started on his new round of insults, one guest remarks, "That's enough of Abū al-Qāsim, let's talk about something nice, like the beautiful weather that we're having in Isfahan!" Ever the enemy of anything resembling normal human conversation, Abū al-Qāsim bridles at the suggestion that the guests talk about the weather. In fact, this offending reference to Isfahani weather sets off the theme for the majority of his conversation: the comparison of Isfahan with Baghdad, in which, at first, Baghdad is depicted as a paradise of luxury, and Isfahan a hell of backwardness and filth. The Isfahani crowd listens uncomfortably, occasionally encouraging him with a polite but curt "speak, Abū al-Qāsim," occasionally complaining again that he has

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[26] Balda, p. 392.
[27] As described above, the word *ḥikāya* could mean either a story or an imitation.
[28] Mary St. Germain sees him as exactly that in *Al-Azdī's* Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī*: Placing an Anomalous Text within the Literary Developments of its Time* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 2006), p. 117.
[29] Tawḥīdī, p. 89.

gone too far. But after a very long rant, the crasher again demands to be fed. When his appetite is finally satisfied, he calls for water, and having quenched his thirst, he abruptly changes his tune about Isfahan, which he insulted up to this point. "By god," he declares, "I've been unjust to the people of Isfahan in all that I've said about them."[30] He then launches into a panegyric on the city's sweet water, ample flowing air, and temperate seasons, using some of the same phrases he previously used to describe Baghdad.

The crowd is baffled by his fickle use of words, and though he embarked on his comparison in angry response to what he considered a trivial, meaningless use of language (the comment about Isfahani weather, which trivial conversation he characterizes as "completely meaningless, like splashing water about"),[31] his own words seem equally substanceless in their way, full of tropes and clichés he is willing to use for either city. Towards the end of the party Abū al-Qāsim grows increasingly drunk and obnoxious, and when another guest again makes the mistake of laughing at him, and this sparks another obscene tirade, the crowd agrees to get rid of him by getting him drunk to the point of unconsciousness. They have generously tried and failed to verbally and socially interact with their monstrous fellow diner.

One may well ask why they put up with him at all. More than one answer is possible, but like much that is obscene or frivolous in contemporaneous Arabic literature, both al-Azdī and his character Abū al-Qāsim win themselves the partial indulgence of their audience by promising to teach them something. Al-Nafzawi, for example, author of the famous fourteenth-century sex manual *The Perfumed Garden,* promises in his introduction to teach his patron and his readers about sex.[32] Nor is his work without educational content, though what really hooks us, it seems, is its page-turning obscenity. Azdī and Abū al-Qāsim also promise to teach us something, but, although they are not as uniformly obscene as a sex manual, they are shocking enough that the modern reader, and

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[30] Tawḥīdī, p. 301.
[31] Tawḥīdī, p. 90.
[32] He introduces his work as fulfilling a patron's request for a guide to things stimulating intercourse and things that hinder it, as well as methods to enlarge the penis, and other similarly useful information (al-Shaykh al-Nafzāwī, *Al-Rawḍ al-ʻāṭir fī nuzhat al-khāṭir* (Londan: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 1993), p. 25.

probably the Isfahani audience, may endure some annoyances just to hear what they will say next.[33]

Azdī promises a portrait of Baghdad that has proved enticing to modern scholars of the city, some of whom seem to endure the obscene content only to benefit from these educational insights into Baghdad. Likewise, in the story, Abū al-Qāsim renews the attention of an offended audience by offering to teach them how to be "gentlemen" (*nās*), and thus tempts them to hear his further rants. Both enticements of educational content are immediately undercut, however: Azdī, in the same introduction in which he promises a portrait of Baghdad, characterizes his work as a mere "evening chat" (*samar*), designating a kind of story with very low truth value. And because Abū al-Qāsim provides such bad advice, a kind of "modest proposal" to plunge into debt and "fuck [anything that moves]," it would be difficult to consider his speech anything but a mockery of the didactic.[34]

Many scholars have noted the "encyclopedic" quality of the *Ḥikāya*--like the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, it could be considered a reference work of unusual words and phrases, if not actually of material goods found in Baghdad and Isfahan.[35] And it is true that we can turn to different sections of the *Ḥikāya* for poems about horses, fruits, beautiful and ugly people, and many other topics. It can serve, therefore, as a kind of encyclopedia of *adab*, a word that means both literature and good breeding, as indeed a familiarity with literature was required of a participant in polite society. But not only are these poems not provided with *isnāds* (citations), their immediate source, Abū al-Qāsim, cannot exactly be considered a guru of high culture—although he knows his literature, his manners are appalling, and he smells bad and drinks excessively.

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[33] Medieval authors often hid obscene sections at the tail end of their encyclopedic works, but at least one such author fretted that his readers turned to these spicy chapters first, sometimes forsaking the bulk of his book altogether. Therefore he dispersed his obscenity throughout the text, explaining, "If I had devoted a separate section to [jest] and had not mixed jest and earnest in this book, most present-day readers would have gone for that one section and they would have considered the serious parts as something heavy and dull, even something to be avoided and left alone, in spite of its being valuable like gold and pearls," Al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr* (translated by Geert Jan van Gelder in his article, 'Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature,' *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 23 (1992), 169-90 (p. 170).

[34] Philip Kennedy makes a similar observation concerning Ibn Buṭlān's *Physician's Dinner Party* in his article 'The Maqāmāt as a nexus of interests: Reflections on Abdelfattah Kilito's *Les Séances*,' in *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam,* ed. by Julia Bray (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 153-214 (173).

[35] Some, like Muhammad Ahsan, have looked to the work, and especially Abū al-Qāsim's long lists of foods and goods, as an encyclopedia of material culture (*Social Life Under the Abbasids* (London: Longman Group, 1979). Also see Dhū al-Nūn Ṭāhā, 'Abd al-Wāḥid, "Mujtama' Baghdād min khilāl Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī' (Baghdad Society through *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*), *al-Mawrid*, vol. 3 (1974), 14-25. Others have seen it as an encyclopedia of strange words and sayings (see Kennedy, 'Maqāmāt as a nexus of interests,' pp. 161-167).

As in the *Ḥikāya,* it is difficult in many contemporaneous Arabic works of *adab* to distinguish between the sincerely didactic and the parodic and parasitical.[36] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl*, (*Book of Party-Crashing*), for example, presents prophetic *hadith* on hospitality and table manners side by side with party-crashing advice on how to avoid table conversation in order to facilitate rapid chewing. It presents musings from the first successor to the prophet Muhammad side by side with misuses of Qur'an quotes by party-crashers angling to be fed. We can hardly suspect the piety of the author, who, famous primarily as a collector of prophetic *hadith*, begins his text with quotations and actions of the prophet of Islam. If his work has a morally didactic purpose, it must be to justify the party-crasher's actions, as any host who would deny them entry is a miser, at odds with the famously generous prophet Muhammad himself.[37] As for the crashers, however, is their advice to "not fraternize," nor "pity the weakness" of an aged guest when elbowing in for meat meant to be taken seriously?[38] Rather we should laugh at their single-minded greed. But the compiler makes little effort to distinguish these anecdotes from the *hadith* cited, or the simple advice on table manners and etiquette apparently issued in all sincerity.[39] Some pieces of advice lie between earnest and jest: one anecdote warns that reticence and abstemiousness in a guest may hurt the host's feelings;[40] no doubt it may, but quoted, as it is, by a party-crasher, can we see through to his intentions to use this sound advice as a thin excuse for eating as much as possible at someone else's expense?

Abū al-Qāsim's speech resembles some of these anecdotes by hovering between the genuinely informative and the laughably outrageous. Sometimes his conversation even resembles the deliberately nonsensical speech mocked in *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl* and elsewhere in contemporaneous Arabic texts. In *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl*, Bunān, the famous party-crasher warns against going to dinner with members of certain professions (tailors, for example), and goes on to mock their gossipy, babbling speech ("I'll cut a robe for a third and a dirham of a third, and two dirhams of a third, then three for a half and two dirhams with a half and three dirhams!").[41] Abū al-Qāsim sometimes resembles Bunān in this anecdote, mocking

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[36] In her work *Petronius the Poet*, Catherine Connors shows how the *Satyricon* also regularly uses morally didactic poetry in contexts that undercuts its meaning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[37] His generosity is attested in many *hadith* about him, al-Khaṭīb's special area of study.
[38] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, p. 131.
[39] See, for example, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, p. 144.
[40] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, p. 144.
[41] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, p. 147.

professions with his stereotyping insults. But sometimes he almost resembles the babbling objects of Bunān's mockery; when the audience specifically asks him about swimming strokes or sailor's slang, his answers—lists of unfamiliar terms without definition—are so incomprehensible as to be nearly useless, not only to the modern reader, but probably also to his Isfahani audience.

It is indeed difficult to verify that some of what he is saying might not be made-up nonsense words, or something like the talk of the rambling doctors, barbers, or tradesmen who speak learned nonsense at aggravating length in other Arabic texts.[42] For example, in a story by Tawḥīdī (thought by some to be the author of the *Ḥikāya*),[43] a sick man is plagued by a learned man who babbles at his bedside with utterly nonsensical advice ("It falls to me in what does not fall to one other than me or like me in one who could as well have been me or as though he were of my age or was known by what is not known of him to me that I see that you are not keeping anything but a diet above what is necessary and below what is not necessary," he begins, and goes on from there!)[44] These rants, filled with learned-sounding language in grammatically logical but meaningless bundles, betray, perhaps, the author's disgust with specialized discourses, or with those who affect learning and linguistic skill but actually babble incomprehensibly. In an especially interesting example, a seemingly venerable old man discovers in the middle of the night that the household has run out of sugar.[45] Enraged, he forces all of his family to stand on one foot until his slaves fetch more sugar, meanwhile ranting wildly on a range of subjects, including tax-fraud, the morals of women, and *hadith* concerning proper buying and selling practices. The absurdity of his tantrum undercuts any wisdom found in his disconnected speech.[46] Though Abū al-Qāsim does not rave in precisely the same nonsensical fashion, he raves nevertheless, enough to put the didactic

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[42] It is difficult to verify because all of his words cannot be defined. Most of them can be, however. For some translated examples of true Arabic nonsense, see *The Maqāmāt of Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī*, translated by W. J. Pendergrast, (London, Dublin: Curzon Press Ltd.), pp. 131-4, or the tale of the mad barber in *The Arabian Nights*, translated by Husain Haddawy (New York: Norton, 1990) p. 254 f.. In both the story told by Tawḥidī and the mad barber's tale, the narrator is ill during the visitation of the nonsense-speaker, and the babbling language they report has the air of a fever dream. One must therefore question the reliability of the narrators themselves.

[43] 'Abbūd al-Shāljī published his edition of the text as a lost work of Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Risālah al-Baghdādiyyah* (Koln: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1980) based on the *Ḥikāya*'s extensive quotations of other works of Tawḥīdī as well as resemblances in writing style. Given that the *Ḥikāya* contains hundreds of quotations from as many sources, and given that we have only one manuscript from which to derive information, any argument about the *Ḥikāya*'s authorship can only be speculative.

[44] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, 7 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 5, p. 1923.

[45] Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Al-Akhbār al-Muwaffaqiyyāt* (Qum : Manshūrāt al-Sharīf al-Radī, 1995), pp. 60-9.

[46] Stefan Leder, 'Prosa-Dichtung in der aḫbār Überlieferung Narrative', *Der Islam*, 64 (1987), 6-41.

value of his speech in question. Given the authority of the Arabic language, the locus of eloquence and truth embodied in the Arabic Qur'an (itself an often incomprehensible book),[47] these portrayals are generally subversive, but also evoke anxieties about who has knowledge in a world of dueling discourses; the *hadith* scholars, the debaters, the poets, and the street preachers all make warring claims to power based on various manipulations of the Arabic language and the authority that it represents.

Abū al-Qāsim's esoteric speech may sometimes also resemble expositions of beggar's slang, as in an anecdote in Jāhiẓ's *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* (Book of Misers), in which a miser gives a beggar a more valuable coin than he intends, and then takes it back. When the beggar complains, the miser says that he can tell the beggar is not worth the valuable coin, because he is so well versed in different types of beggars. He then awes his interlocutor into silence by launching into a jargon-filled description of all the types of beggars and tricksters found in his society, each of which he provides with a label and a definition. He is thus able to cover his unsavory act of miserliness with his arcane linguistic knowledge. This story most closely resembles a passage in the *Ḥikāya* in which the other guests ask Abū al-Qāsim if he knows any sailor's expressions. The crasher boldly obliges with a long list of obscure words such as *māshūka*, *kanūr, kadl*, and *mahār* (about which words 'Abbūd al-Shāljī, second editor of the text, can only confess, "I didn't understand them").[48] Abū al-Qāsim's verbal display is impressive, but without any definitions for his terms, his speech provides not even the didactic benefits of the speech of Jāḥiz's basically despicable miser.[49]

Party-crashers themselves crash both physical banquets and banquets of words like the Qur'an,[50] using these discourses parasitically, and twisting them to their own purposes. *Kitāb al-Taṭfīl* tells of a party-crasher who used various quotes from the Qur'an with numbers in them to impress his host into feeding him that number of delicious pastries. Another crasher takes a Qur'an quotation out of context to reassure the host that he has come not to steal his women,

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[47] Interpreters of the Qur'an recognize certain passages as ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*), whose meaning can only be fully comprehended by God (see Leah Kinberg, 'Ambiguous,' in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 6 vols (Leiden, Brill, 2001-2006), I (2001), 70-77.

[48] Al-Tawḥīdī,, pp. 318-19.

[49] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bukhalā'* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1963).

[50] The Qur'an has indeed been referred to as "God's Banquet" (see Van Gelder's *Dishes and Discourse*, also published under the title *God's Banquet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 39-40.

but his food.[51] Abū al-Qāsim may be no less an opportunistic user of the Arabic language. He is certainly a master of all discourses, and uses and abuses them at whim. Azdī himself openly admits to passing many different works off as his own, though indeed many of his numerous unattributed quotations have been traced to another source. Adam Mez, first editor of the *Ḥikāya*, begins his introduction to the text by saying, "If someone posed the embarrassing question to our author, [of what would happen] if someone told his sentences, 'Go back to where you came from,' then very little worthwhile (though a lot disreputable) would remain."[52]

As a sympotic text, the *Ḥikāya* is hardly unique in that regard, resembling, for example, the *Deipnosophistae*, another banquet at which quotations of literature bury the meal itself. As James Davidson describes in "Pleasure and Pedantry in Athenaeus," this banquet, held in Rome, of Greek literature, seems a "separate world," whose sometimes tiresome profusion of quotations exists within their own system of order, and hold the questions of "life, death, and representation" in miniature.[53]

Many scholars feel compelled to trace Azdī's sentences back to their source, whether historical or literary. But to scrutinize the ingredients, to attempt to trace them back to the field where they were grown, may distract us from the work as a whole. This is not to say that there are not many sources of interest in the *Ḥikāya* for the student of material culture; it may indeed prove a veritable gold mine for that interest. However, to appreciate the text in its fullness requires a recognition of the fact that Abū al-Qāsim is weaving a deceptive vision with his luxurious lists and poetic flights of description. By juxtaposition of one with another, all in contrast to the narrative setting, the ingredients of this text are made no longer themselves, but part of a grand microcosmic dish, with its own system of physics. To read this encyclopedic work from beginning to end, instead of mining it for information about an individual topic (though indeed it does invite and facilitate that type of usage), is to discover a world in miniature which is more than the sum of its parts.

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[51] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, pp. 105-6, 116-7. In the second anecdote, the hungry crasher gains access to a party by climbing a wall adjoining the ladies' private quarters. When the master of the house objects, the crasher quotes the Qur'an, Hūd 11:79, "Well dost thou know we have no need of thy daughters: indeed thou knowest quite well what we want," a quotation of the crowds of Sodom, whose lust would not be satisfied by Lot's daughters, but only by his angelic guests (Yusuf Ali's translation).

[52] Mez, p. v.

[53] In *Athenaeus and his World*, ed. by David Braund and John Wilkins (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 298, 303

An Early Flyting in Hary's *Wallace*

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The unique place of flyting in the courtly culture of medieval and early modern Scotland has long been recognised. As Geoffrey Hughes summarises in his recent history of cursing, 'the genre became most highly developed at the Scottish court in the sixteenth century, remarkably among aristocrats and major poets… these texts demonstrate an astonishing use of language so sophisticated and so foul that it clearly belongs to a convention of linguistic versatility quite unfamiliar to us'.[1] However, despite its curious popularity in the Scottish court, fuller understanding of the practice has been hindered by the relative paucity of texts. There are only three full-length flytings now extant, 'The flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie' (c.1503), 'The Flyting betwixt Montgomery and Polwart' (c.1583), and an exchange between Sir David Lindsay and James V dating from c.1536. Of these, the Dunbar and Kennedy piece is the earliest by some decades. The patchiness of the literary record has in fact driven a number of commentators to look beyond the direct context of the poems when trying to understand them, turning to remote sources for parallels and analogues. Thus Janet Smith reads them against the *partimen* and *sirventes* of the Provençal troubadors, while Nicole Meier discusses them in the light of the thirteenth-century English debate poem *The Owl and the Nightingale*.[2] A number of critics have taken an even longer view, and compared them to episodes in Old English and Norse epic, such as Beowulf's duel with Unferth, or Loki's bouts with Freyja, Njörðr and other gods in the *Lokasenna*.[3] As Priscilla Bawcutt comments, critics have been driven to study 'fictional encounters…different in style and far apart in time' in an attempt to comprehend this 'peculiarly Scottish and chronologically limited' practice.[4]

However, one text which has so far escaped serious attention in these investigations is *The Actes and Deidis of the Illustre and Vallyeant Campioun Schir William Wallace*, attributed to the fifteenth-century *makar* 'Blind' Hary, and com-

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[1] Geoffrey Hughes, *An Encyclopedia of Swearing* (New York: Sharpe, 2006), pp.174-76.
[2] Janet M. Smith, *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), pp.53-56; Nicole Meier, *The Poems of Walter Kennedy*, Scottish Text Society 5th Series no. 6 (Woodbridge: Scottish Text Society, 2008), pp.civ-cv.
[3] See for instance Ward Parks, *Verbal Duelling in Heroic Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); E.R. Anderson, 'Flyting in The Battle of Maldon', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 71 (1970), 197-202.
[4] Priscilla J. Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.222.

posed at some point between 1472 and 1479.[5] The *Wallace* has a peripheral link to the context of later flytings. The handful of documents relating to Hary suggest a connection with James IV, as between 1490 and 1492 he is mentioned five times in treasurer's accounts for unspecified services 'at the Kingis commande'.[6] He was also known to poets with demonstrable links to the court, being mentioned several times in the work of William Dunbar and Walter Kennedy.[7] The section of the *Wallace* which has particular relevance to the flytings occurs towards the beginning of the fifth book. Here Hary's hero finds himself in Lannerick, where he is challenged by an English soldier as he and his men leave church: the episode therefore follows the general emphasis on English 'provocation' sparking 'righteous anger' that Anne McKim traces throughout the text.[8] The exchange that follows, before Hary resumes his 'carefully confected brew of bloody fanaticism', is an interesting set-piece.[9] The exchange consists entirely of what Hary terms 'scornys' and 'lychly wordis', as the two men trade obscenities and insults for some twenty lines:

> 'Dewgar, gud day, bone senȝhour and gud morn'.
> 'Quhom scornys thow?,' quod Wallace. 'Quha lerd the?'
> 'Quhy, schir', he said, 'come ȝhe nocht new our se?
> Pardown me than, for I wend ȝe had beyne
> Ane Inbasset to bryng ane wncouth queyne'.
> Wallace ansuerd, 'Sic pardoune as we haiff
> In oys to gyff thi part thow sall nocht craiff'.
> 'Sen ȝe ar Scottis ȝeit salust sall ȝe be –
> Gud deyn, dawch Lard, bach lowch, banȝoch a de'.
> Ma Sotheroune men to thaim assemblit ner.
> Wallace as than was laith to mak a ster.
> Ane maid a scrip and tyt at his lang suorde.

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[5] Matthew P. McDiarmid, (ed.), *Hary's Wallace*, Scottish Text Society 4th series nos. 4-5 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1968-69). Subsequent references appear in parentheses in the text. The probable date of the text is examined by McDiarmid, and further discussed by McClure: see Matthew P. McDiarmid, 'The Date of the *Wallace*', *Scottish Historical Review*, 34 (1955), 26-31; J. Derrick McClure, 'Hary (*b. c.*1440, *d.* in or after 1492)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Colin Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), XXV, 698-99.
[6] Quoted in William Henry Schofield, *Mythical Bards and the Life of William Wallace*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), p.323.
[7] See Priscilla J. Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams, 'Poets "Of This Natioun"', *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, ed. by Priscilla J. Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp.1-18 (p.3). Dunbar refers twice to 'Blynd Hary', once in the 'Lament for the Makars' (v.69) and once in the dramatic fragment 'The Droichis Part Of The Play' (v.10): see *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp.180, 102.
[8] Anne McKim, *The Wallace: Selections* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), p.7.
[9] R. James Goldstein, '"I Will My Proces Hald": Making Sense of Scottish Lives and the Desire for History in Barbour, Wyntoun and Blind Hary', *Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, pp.35-49 (p.47).

'Hald still thi hand,' quod he, 'and spek thi word'.
'With thi lang suerd thow makis mekill bost'.
'Tharoff,' quod he, 'thi deme maid litill cost'.
'Quhat caus has thow to wer that gudlye greyne?'
'My maist caus is bot for to mak the teyne'.
'Quhat suld a Scot do with so fair a knyff?'
'Sa said the prest that last Ianglyt thi wyff.
That woman lang has tillit him so fair
Quhill that his child worthit to be thine ayr'.
'Me think', quod he, 'thow drywys me to scorn'.
'Thi deme has beyne Iapyt or thow was born'. (VI.132-54)

('*Dieu garde*, good day, *bon sieur* and good morn'. 'Whom do you scorn?' said Wallace, 'Who taught you?' 'Why, sir', he said, 'have you not come recently over the sea? Pardon me then, for I thought you were an ambassador to escort a foreign queen'. Wallace answered, 'such pardon as we have to give by custom, you should not ask your part'. 'Since you are Scots you shall be greeted: good day, *daucht* laird*, l'ail, luibh, beannach a De*'. More Southern men gathered near to them. Wallace then was loath to make a din, and made a gesture and tugged at his long sword. 'Hold still your hand', he said, 'and speak your word'. 'With your long sword you make much boasting'. 'From that', said he, 'your dame made little complaint'. 'What cause have you to wear that good green?' 'My greatest intent is only to make you furious'. 'What should a Scot do with so fair a knife?' 'So said the priest that last tumbled your wife. That woman has long tilled him so fairly so that his child is entitled to be your heir'. 'I think', he said, 'you drive me to scorn'. 'Your mother had been fooled before you were born'.)

Even at first glance, there are clear overlaps between this episode and the flyting texts. Despite its comparative brevity, many of the typical flyting themes of 'the grotesque…the physically ignoble' are in evidence, albeit with bawdiness supplanting the usual scatology.[10] Thus the speakers accuse one another of illegitimacy, cuckoldry and sexual impotence, and mock each other's appearance, from their 'wncouth' demeanour to their 'gudlye' clothing. Perhaps the most significant set of insults, however, revolve around nationality, as the English soldier even parodies Scots Gaelic in his abuse of Wallace, stating 'dawch Lard, bach lowch, ban ȝoch a de': according to Murison, this probably means 'bonnet laird, herdsman, God's blessing'.[11] Such focus on national or regional identity

[10] Rachel Annand Taylor, *Dunbar, the Poet and his Period* (London: Faber and Faber, 1931), p.53.
[11] David D. Murison, 'Linguistic Relations in Medieval Scotland', *The Scottish Tradition: Essays in Honour of Ronald Gordon Cant*, ed. G.W.S Barrow (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), pp.71-83 (p.79). Jamieson gives an alternative rendering, 'lazy laid, if you please, God bless you': John Jamieson, ed., *Wallace, or, The Life and Acts of Sir William Wallace of Ellerslie* (Glasgow: Maurice Ogle, 1869), p.377.

has particular importance, since it is a recurrent feature of later flyting contests. It also forms the basis of several insults exchanged by Kennedy and Dunbar, with the former deriding the latter's 'Heland strynd', and arguing that 'ane Lawland ers wald mak a bettir noyis'.[12] Later still Alexander Montgomerie ridicules Polwart in much the same terms, calling him a 'foule mismade mytting, borne in the Merse'.[13] In fact, the specific identities attacked by Wallace and the soldier are also evident in other exchanges. The pattern of 'two speakers, an Englishman and a Scot' haranguing and abusing one another also occurs in the six-line 'miniature Anglo-Scottish flyting' identified by Bawcutt, and spills over into formal exchanges between Dundas and Skelton, which at least recall the tradition of Scottish insult-verse.[14]

However, Wallace's encounter with the Englishman does not only echo the flytings in content, as it also follows their characteristic form. For instance, there is a marked use of alliteration in the insults that are exchanged. The dialogue includes phrases such as 'ȝe had beyne/ Ane Inbasset to bryng', 'wncouth queyne', 'makis mekill bost', and 'gudlye greyne'. This tendency culminates with the snatch of broken Gaelic, with its heavy concentration of b- and d-sounds. Such effects closely correspond to typical practice in flytings, as Thorlac Turville-Petre in particular has noted.[15] The use of alliteration was in fact treated as a key aspect of the form by contemporary commentators: in a 1584 treatise on the 'reulis and cautelis to be obseruit and eschewit in Scottis poesie', James VI prescribes 'Rouncefallis or Tumbling verse' for 'flyting, or Inuectiues', a form which entails 'that the maist pairt of your lyne sall rynne vpon a letter'.[16] More importantly, the dialogic structure of the flytings is also evident here. Rather than merely consisting of disconnected insults, Hary's exchange follows the 'highly stylized' pattern described by Carol Clover, as 'the exchange…is characterized by logical and syntactic parallelism: questions and answers, counterposed speeches, recurrent phrases'.[17] This parallelism is evident in the innuendos and symbols that occur throughout the duel. For instance, both Wallace and

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[12] 'The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedy', in *Poems of Dunbar*, p.78, vv.55-56.
[13] 'The flyting of Montgomery and Polwart', Alexander Montgomerie, *Poems*, ed. by David J. Parkinson (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 2000), p.175, v.12. On this point, see Sally Mapstone, 'Invective as Poetic: The Cultural Contexts of Polwarth and Montgomerie's *Flyting*', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 26 (1999), 18-40.
[14] Priscilla Bawcutt, 'A Miniature Anglo-Scottish Flyting', *Notes and Queries*, 223 (1988), 441-44; Gregory Kratzmann, *Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations 1430-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp.156-57.
[15] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1977), p.118.
[16] James I, *The Essayes of a prentise, in the divine art of poesie*, ed. Edward Arber (London: English Reprints, 1869), p.63.
[17] Carol J. Clover, 'The Germanic Context of the Unferth Episode', *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 444-68 (p.452).

his interlocutor accept the metaphor of 'lang suorde' for the penis, although the Englishman shortens it to a less impressive 'knyff'. It is also evident in the way the speakers seize on and revise aspects of one another's speech: thus Wallace's first riposte to the Englishman takes up his mocking 'pardown me', as he states 'Sic pardoune as we haiff…thow sall nocht craiff'. The Englishman for his part burlesques Wallace's Gaelic after learning he is a Scot. The structure the text assumes in its final lines further emphasises this sense of balance and response, as each speaker often completes a couplet the other has begun: hence when he is asked 'Quhat caus has thow to wer that gudlye greyne?', Wallace replies 'My maist caus is bot for to mak the teyne'. Clearly, the vehemence of the abuse is only as important as the extent to which it engages with and revises the words of the opponent. In short, the exchange in which Hary involves Wallace follows many of the contours of later flyting texts.

The resemblance of this dialogue to other, self-avowed flytings has a number of implications. The piece cannot of course be classified as a full-blooded flyting in its own right, as there is no reason to suppose that it represents a real interchange, especially in a poem that has little 'claim to historical accuracy' as a whole.[18] Nevertheless, it does seem to follow the conventions of flyting fairly closely, perhaps deliberately striving to evoke them. As such, it suggests that these conventions were already in place by the time it was composed. This in turn might allow the date of flyting as a ritual to be pushed further back than has hitherto been possible. Since the *Wallace* seems to date from the 1470s, during the reign of James III, it predates the Walter and Kennedy exchange by at least two decades.[19] Given Hary's connection to the royal court, or at least to noble households at Craigie or Halkerstone, it may even show flyting to be a distinctly aristocratic ritual at this point in its history, as it undeniably was by the sixteenth century.[20] In fact, a similar story is told by another Scottish work of quasi-historiography, Sir Gilbert Hay's *Buik of Alexander*, composed for Lord Thomas of Erskine in c.1460. This features a number of brief insult-exchanges which echo Hary's scurrilous dialogue: throughout the text Alexander trades abuse with a variety of eastern leaders, being branded 'a knaife, ane rever, and ane theife' by Darius of Persia and a 'ȝoung wantoun' by Nicholas of Media, before responding to each in kind.[21] At any rate, the *Wallace* certainly shows some-

[18] David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*, 2 vols (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), II, 507.
[19] McDiarmid, 'The Date of the *Wallace*', 30-31.
[20] M.H. Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London: Routledge, 1987), p.xx.
[21] Gilbert Hay, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conqueror*, ed. by John Cartwright, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1986-90), I, pp.57, 33, vv.2225, 1273. On these exchanges, see G.H.V. Bunt, *Alexander the Great in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994), pp.66-67.

thing of the high value attached to abusive eloquence in Scottish vernacular culture. Hary's objective was to create a national hero, a figurehead for 'the ideal of an independent Scotland', and the fact that he counts an ability to swear impressively among Wallace's powers shows the regard in which such behaviour was held.[22]

[22] Richard J. Moll, '"Off quhat nacioun art thow?": National Identity in Blind Hary's *Wallace*', in *History, Literature and Music in Scotland, 700-1560*, ed. by R. Andrew MacDonald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp.120-43 (p.135).

Marginalia Reviews

The Virgin of Chartres: Making History through Liturgy and the Arts
Margot E. Fassler
(London: Yale University Press, 2010)
ISBN: 978-0-300-11088-3 (Hardcover); 624 pages
£30.00

The Virgin of Chartres is an ambitious work: not only does it offer a thorough and up-to-date history of Chartres, its rulers and religious life in the high Middle Ages, but it is also a pioneering attempt at interdisciplinary research on the part of one scholar, engaging history, literature, musicology, the visual arts and liturgy in an holistic endeavour which is at times a compelling read. It is perhaps not surprising that such a study should come from the pen of Margot Fassler, whose previous work is richly varied in its interests, and whose monograph *Gothic Song* (about the sequence repertory of the Parisian Abbey of St Victor) remains one of the most important books on twelfth-century music culture. Like that book, *Virgin of Chartres* is in large part institutional history, centring on the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres and the history of its cult of the Virgin emanating from the relic *La Sainte Chasse*, reputed to be the birthing-garment of Mary. Unlike *Gothic Song*, *Virgin of Chartres* is not primarily musicological: rather, Fassler's subject is the ways in which liturgical music, ritual and the visual arts were made and re-made over the course of the period under study, especially during the twelfth- and thirteenth-century building campaigns. Central to the entire project is the conviction that the religious and civic life of Chartres were very closely interdependent, and that the Cathedral Canons spared no pains in promoting their cult of the Virgin, resulting in a veritable *Gesamtkunstwerk* of art and liturgy assembled and interpreted over generations.

Fassler begins her account with a new history of the history of Chartres. Woven through this narrative and in preparation for the closer studies later in the book is the theme of how the relic of the Virgin's chemise and the surrounding cult grew in importance for Chartrian religious and political identity. Liturgical creativity is never far away, and Fassler's discussion of Fulbert of Chartres' sermons is one of the more revealing parts of the book, as is the careful account of the peculiarities of Chartrian Marian liturgy – no mean feat considering the difficulty of such study after the loss of most of liturgical sources in various fires through the centuries (including the devastation of World War II). Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of the study as a whole is the attention to detail which Fassler displays on many occasions, in particular the ability to reveal shades of peculiarly Chartrian meaning imparted to apparently commonplace liturgical items within the complex of devotional and liturgical practice at the Cathedral. Thus her chapter describing the creation and performance of the Advent liturgy at Chartres manages to show how the cathedral's liturgy was in many ways typical but in certain ways special, and why that may have been.

If the first two parts of the book are concerned with the more abstract aspects of Chartrian Medieval history-making – the writing of chronicles and ser-

mons and the compilation and creation of liturgies – the second two become more concrete, as Fassler begins to focus on the fabric of the cathedral, beginning with the various building campaigns and finally engaging in close analysis of the stained-glass and sculpture. The account of the campaigns is integrated with discussion of the Dedication liturgies as well as the larger theoretical discourse of twelfth-century reform ideals and new ideas about vision and pious fervour, both 'popular' and institutional. Through this holistic approach which considers neither institutional, nor technical, nor functional concerns in isolation from one another, the liturgical and political life of the cathedral becomes vivid. When Fassler finally begins to closely read the stained-glass and sculpture of Notre Dame, then, it is within a broad and lively context of human activity and interest, rather than in splendid isolation. As with the discussion of the Advent liturgy, Fassler manages to identify and explain the ways in which the community at Chartres received and adapted common motifs and narratives creatively, reflecting upon and shaping its own history through the body of the cathedral, which was often itself figured analogously with the body of the Virgin. In this way the selection of scenes from the life of Christ in the portal capital friezes and the arrangement of the rather anonymous figures on the jamb statues take on meanings possible only at Chartres.

Fassler's interpretative technique largely relies on Medieval memorative practices, by which visual and aural cues were woven into networks of meaning through repeated exposition (and exposure) and were cultivated in ruminative and meditative cognition; thus her exegesis of the artwork of the cathedral is precisely detailed at the same time as allowing for a certain amount of speculation, as when she compares the portal sculpture with the lancet windows and suggests that 'the vibrant colors of the glass were surely matched at one time by the painted robes and jeweled ornaments of the sculptural program', going on to add (perhaps rather wistfully), 'but those can no longer be compared for correspondences' (p.328).

It is in this understanding and acceptance of Medieval memorative practices and their possible applications that both the strength and the weakness of *Virgin of Chartres* lies. More often than not Fassler's encyclopedic knowledge of Chartrian history and liturgy is deployed with such a sure hand that this book is not only an essential compendium of all things Chartrian but also provides many compelling insights into Medieval culture more generally. However, at times the assumption that all aspects of cathedral and civic life were consciously inter-related, made and received as such in the period under study feels a little strained. Even if much of Fassler's material has been studied before in some depth, *Virgin of Chartres* is nevertheless a tour-de-force of academic synthesis; students of all Medieval disciplines will find material of use here, and perhaps more importantly they will find an example of the ways in which our subjects can fruitfully be related and employed together to make compelling history.

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The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan
Joyce Tally Lionarons
Anglo-Saxon Studies
(Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010)
ISBN: 978-1-843-84256-9 (Hardcover); 194 pages
RRP £60 ($99)

At a period when interest in the career and writings of Archbishop Wulfstan (d. 1023) are at a higher level than at any time since the 1950s, Joyce Tally Lionarons has produced a volume that offers both a much needed recapitulation of the scholarship of the last several decades and a valuable new contribution to the field. In the interest of providing an up-to-date critical study of Wulfstan's homilies (something that the field has not enjoyed since Karl Jost's *Wulfstanstudien*, published in 1950), Lionarons sets out to establish clearer connections, on the one hand, between Wulfstan and the manuscripts of his works and, on the other hand, between the existing editions of his homiletic works and these same manuscripts. Accordingly, the first two chapters of the book address, respectively, manuscripts containing Wulfstan's works (or otherwise associated with the archbishop) and the establishment of the canon of Wulfstan's works. The former is organized not by manuscript siglum or shelfmark, but instead, in the order of importance, according to Lionarons, as sources of homiletic, legal, or other texts associated with Wulfstan. There is a certain logic in such an arrangement, but it does make it more difficult for the reader to access information about any given Wulfstanian manuscript.

The second chapter establishes the structural pattern that holds throughout the rest of the book: After a brief discussion of the issues at stake (in this case, a very insightful discussion of both the original and the more recent criticisms of the editions of the homilies), Lionarons then deals with each homily or fragment whose attribution has only recently been established. After a chapter exploring Wulfstan's thoughts on eschatology, the balance of the book is made up of chapters that each address a different type of homily: homilies teaching basic principles of Christian faith, those arising from Wulfstan's role as a bishop and archbishop, homilies that treat sacraments of the Church, the famous *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and finally, homilies related to legal texts or the *Institutes of Polity*. A judicious use of subheadings in some of the later chapters would have made it easier for the reader to keep track of which homilies are the direct focus of a given chapter and which are merely tangentially related to the discussion, but this does not stand in the way of the valuable contributions made by Lionarons to our understanding of Wulfstan's thoughts on eschatology and on the role of his preaching in society.

In chapters 3 and 4, Lionarons is able to demonstrate that some of the distinctive preoccupations of certain Wulfstanian homilies are in fact more pervasive in his canon than has been recognized in the past. Although Wulfstan's treatment of eschatological themes is best known from a set of early homilies, Lionarons notes the appearance of Antichrist in some later homilies by Wulfstan. Similarly, while tracing Wulfstan's adaptation of Ælfric's homily *De initio creaturae* (*Catholic Homilies*, First Series, 1), Lionarons sees evidence that Wulfstan was already beginning to think through the mingling of Old Testament and

New Testament paradigms so skillfully deployed in the later *Sermo Lupi*. The discussion of Wulfstan's archiepiscopal and sacramental sermons in chapters 5 and 6, respectively, demonstrates Wulfstan's emphasis on the practical, active nature of true adherence to the principals of Christian faith and for the growth of the 'holy society' he advocated.

One of the most long-standing and contentious of the questions at issue in Wulfstan studies is that of the relationship between and composition of the three versions of Wulfstan's most famous homily, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Picking up on Simon Keynes's 2007 argument that the *Sermo Lupi* was composed first in 1009-1012, with a definitive version composed in 1014 and a variety of other revisions made later, Lionarons simplifies and tightens the proposed sequence of events, thus providing a plausible but still comprehensible theory of the composition of this famous homily. In Lionarons's theory, we would be left with three major stages of composition, moving from something resembling the medium-length homily to the longer version and finally to the short version.

If this book has a weakness, it is in the failure to fully delineate a larger structure for its conclusions. There is no concluding section, as such, merely a brief, final chapter that considers a very specific topic (homilies based on legal codes or Wulfstan's own *Institutes of Polity*) with a final paragraph that nods to the larger purposes of Wulfstan's work. To select another example from the book, the chapter on eschatology, though useful for tracing the history of medieval ideas about the Antichrist and for spotlighting six early eschatological homilies by Wulfstan, never offers an overarching framework through which to understand Wulfstan's treatment of eschatological themes. Even with these omissions, this volume goes a long way towards filling a gaping hole in Wulfstan studies, and the time is ripe for such a study because, as Lionarons herself notes, in spite of the recent surge of interest in Wulfstan, we have hitherto been left with only scattered (or simply outdated) scholarship on Wulfstan's homiletic prose, and a pair of editions that not only conflict with each other, but also possess their own internal problems. *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan*, while unlikely to find a use in the classroom, provides an excellent picture of the current state of Wulfstan studies, and it will be an invaluable resource for the researcher trying to maintain a grasp on recent work or to extend the field in any way.

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Alastair Minnis
Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
ISBN 978-0-521-51594-8 (Hardcover); 288 pages
RRP £53

Alastair Minnis's most recent monograph begins with the idea of *translation*, not only between languages but across them: a *translatio auctoritatis,* 'a translation of authoritative discourse and methodology into the "vulgar" tongue' (p. x). Simi-

larly, Minnis's definition of the term *vernacular* 'goes far beyond the category of language, to encompass popular cultural beliefs and practices which engaged in complex relationships with those authorized by church and state institutions' (p. xi). This book is as much about authority and exchange as it is about language, although vernacularity, broadly conceptualised, is the context in which ideological and institutional authorities are contested.

Minnis's stature as a scholar of hermeneutics, scholasticism, the commentary tradition and medieval literature qualifies him, as Vincent Gillespie attests on the back cover of this volume, as a 'master exegete of his generation'. In many ways, this book lives up to such praise: it is an ambitious and authoritative survey of Middle English vernacular hermeneutics, addressing the peculiar ideological insecurities attaching to the idea of the vernacular in England especially, and returning to many of the familiar themes that have dominated Minnis's recent work. The book is also something of a compilation. The first four of its six chapters have been published previously as separate articles: the new material consists of a discussion of Margery Kempe, female authority and allegories of marriage, and an opening of the book again on Chaucer's Pardoner's posited homosexuality and his 'relics'. The chapters remain very much discrete discussions, albeit united by a general theme. Overall, the book offers a series of complementary insights, rather than a sustained and developing thesis, not aided by the absence of a unifying conclusion.

The introduction begins by comparing the strident affirmations of their respective vernaculars of Nicholas Oresme and Alighieri Dante; and asking the pertinent question of why 'there is nothing in the corpus of Middle English texts which corresponds to either of Dante's literary-theoretical treatises or Oresme's commentated translations'; why 'neither King Richard II of England nor his Lancastrian successors attempted to emulate the "state hermeneutics" cultivated by the Valois dynasty' (p. 3). Chapter One, entitled 'Absent glosses: the trouble with Middle English hermeneutics', offers a bold and speculative answer, locating the lacuna in the English commentary tradition in the suspicion that attached to vernacular theology in the wake of Arundel's *Constitutions,* which fostered 'a culture of control and repression'. As Minnis observes, 'much Middle English Biblical exegesis produced in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries was of Wycliffite origin' (p. 25), and in a climate in which the Archbishop self-styling himself as the 'hammer of heretics' (p. 27) frowned upon vernacular theology, it was safer for English commentators to conduct their exegesis within the safe boundaries of Latin. Anne Hudson criticises Minnis for being too ready, with Harry Bailly, to 'smelle a Lollere in the wynd' (see her review in *Medium Ævum*, 2010); and the idea of a 'climate of fear' attending on vernacular theology (p. 32), may be felt by some to be an association too far. Nonetheless, Minnis argues persuasively for the identification of Lollardy with the vernacular, emphasised both by Lollards and their opponents; in which English was implicated in risky, demotic theology, in a way not paralleled by the continental vernaculars.

Chapter Two, entitled 'Looking for a sign: the quest for Nominalism in Ricardian poetry', continues this analysis of absences. Discussing Walter Hilton, Robert Holcot, Ralph Strode, Langland's Trajan and Chaucer's Cambyuskan, Minnis concludes that, on the question of the fate of virtuous pagans, 'the signs

are there but they are all too ambiguous' (p. 65): it was a question safely pondered, but only dangerously answered. Chapter Three stays with Langland, to discuss 'Piers's protean pardon': the legalistic questions attending on indulgences, the extent of their efficacy and the relationship between the spiritual object and the state of the penitent; and the significance of the impossible pardon that Treuthe gives to Piers *'a pena et a culpa'* and 'for everemoore after' (B VII. 3-5), which of course he tears in two. As with earlier chapters, Minnis's tendency is always ultimately to find in favour of the orthodoxy of his texts, although allowing for an orthodoxy that sails close to the wind; a tendency that sometimes reduces the paradigm to a binary axis of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, which may not be the most interesting or productive angle of approach. Chapter Four, 'Making bodies', focuses on the trial of Walter Brut, and analyses the connection between confection and conception –the making of Christ's Body in the mass, and in the womb of the Virgin – and its implications for the permissibility of the involvement of women in the sacrament. Minnis draws a fascinating analogy in this chapter between sacraments and language, both as systems in which the relationship between signifier and signified is a fraught one, and in which authority is contested. Continuing the theme of women, language and authority, Chapter Five turns to the hot topic of Margery Kempe's latinity, female exegesis and heterodoxy, discussing her navigation of 'the Scylla of […] Lollard elevation of marriage over chastity' and 'the Charybdis of Cathar misogamy' (p. 123). Not surprisingly, Minnis concludes with Margery that 'I am non heretyke, ne ye schal non preve me' (p. 129). The sixth and last chapter discusses another spiritual sign transplanted into a decidedly vernacular context: Chaucer's Pardoner's spurious 'relikes', or rather, Harry Bailly's simile for them – his 'coillons'. The connection with language, via the analogy of the signifier and the signified, is made through the *ad placitum* relationship of words and objects offered to Amant by Dame Raison in the *Roman de la Rose*, when she asserts that the word *reliques* could as easily signify *coilles* and vice versa, if convention so decreed. This leads into a discussion of real *coillons* as relics, in the Priapic shrines of St Valery and St Uncumber, and an attempt to reach 'a better understanding of the comic discourse surrounding Chaucer's Pardoner and his ridiculous relics', and to 'measure the extent to which they were ridiculous' (p. 162).

Ultimately this discussion does that, its methodology proceeding, as the last paragraph declares, 'from the bottom up' (p. 162). Its survey of vernacular religion, its frameworks of authority, and its engagement with formal hermeneutics and linguistic power structures, is a rich, nuanced and diverting one; and I doubt if anyone was better equipped to write it.

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The York Mystery Plays: Performance in the City
Ed. by Margaret Rogerson
(York: York Medieval Press, Boydell & Brewer, 2011)
ISBN: 978-1-903-15335-2 (Hardcover); 248 pages.
RRP £50.00 ($90).

This unusual and stimulating collection of essays grew out of a conference hosted by the Guilds of York in July 2007, 'Performing the Mystery Plays'. The conference gathered together local mystery play practitioners, including many who were involved in the guild-organized wagon plays of 2006, other early drama enthusiasts from around the United Kingdom and academics of medieval theatre. The resulting book not only contains many interesting insights into the York plays resulting from this collaboration between practitioners and scholars, but also reflects the warmth and enthusiasm that seem to have imbued the entire proceedings. It is not often that a book of essays makes you wish you had attended the original conference.

The editor, Margaret Rogerson, has organized the essays into three well-chosen sections. The first section contains a series of academic essays that consider the York Plays in relation to their medieval communities. Probably the most important of these contributions is Richard Beadle's analysis of the circumstances that spurred the civic authorities to require the compilation of the Register of the York Corpus Christi Play (London, British Library, Additional MS 35290). The Register is usually dated to the period between 1463 and 1477 but Professor Beadle makes a persuasive case for its compilation in 1476, also the year in which the civic authorities called for a formal vetting of the plays and their players. During this period, Richard of Gloucester (Richard III) was very involved in the affairs of York and this essay argues convincingly that he might also have been influential in these moves by the authorities to control the 'production values' of the plays. The idea that the late civic management of the plays could be, in part, a Ricardian project is a fascinating one, which will surely inspire others to revisit the plays. Other essays in this section include Sheila K. Christie's discussion of the Masons' involvement with the plays; Mike Tyler's analysis of group dynamics in the presentation of Noah's family in *The Flood* pageant; and Jill Stevenson's interesting application of cognitive theory to discuss audiences' experience of both the original medieval plays and the 'embodied medievalism' produced by the 2006 performances (although this last piece was slightly weakened by its concluding argument, which focussed on the undoubted ability of the plays' to continue to enchant audiences, but also accepted uncritically earlier ideas that enchantment is typically associated with the Middle Ages and that modern times are inherently disenchanted – neither of which is particularly convincing).

The second section contains edited transcripts of papers delivered at the conference by those who produced the 2006 plays. From tips for licensing outdoor performance sites to the debate over traditional metal-rimmed wooden vs modern rubber wagon wheels, this part of the book will be a treasure-trove for anyone planning to stage the plays. The descriptions and frank assessments of the effectiveness, both artistically and logistically, of various wagon set designs are particularly strong. This section is, however, much more than a practical

guide to staging the plays. Many contributors describe how their careful readings of the plays governed their design, costuming, music and direction – often with innovating and insightful interpretations – for example the description by Tony Wright, from the Company of Butchers, of the wagon design for the *Crucifixion*, with its end-on orientation to the audience and pulley mechanism for raising the cross, is an ingenuous interpretation of the comic banter of the soldiers and the accompanying pathos of the silent Christ's torture. There is also a short and moving piece by Linda Ali from Heslington Church, who performed *The Resurrection – Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene*, reminding us of the powerful effect that the plays retain for people of faith.

The final section of the book consists of essays that study modern performances of medieval drama and other cultural and religious festivals. This section proves the point made elsewhere in the book that combining scholarly investigations with the practical experience of performance can provide useful insights into medieval drama. Performances discussed include the York cycle performances in Toronto, the *Crucifixion* play performed by the Theatre Department at Tel Aviv University, the Siena *Palio* and the Stations of the Cross performed at the Catholic World Youth Day in Sydney 2008.

The book is well presented with a useful index and a reasonably full bibliography. The glossary of Middle English words could be more extensive to assist non-specialist readers as this eclectic, thought-provoking and often amusing book deserves a wide readership. Many of the contributions prove that exchanges between the academic and theatrical community can be extremely fruitful and that questions about medieval performance, reception and interpretation can be explored through theatrical experiment and participation as well as through traditional academic research. It is also a wonderful advertisement for the next conference organized by the York Guilds and Companies to be held on 9th July 2011.

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Fairies in Medieval Romance

James Wade

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
ISBN: 978-0-230-11020-5 (Hardcover); 212 pages
RRP £52.00 ($85.00)

It is nearly fifty years since C. S. Lewis's essay "The Anthropological Approach" more or less put paid to the source-hunting that had occupied scholars of medieval literature for much of the early life of the discipline. Lewis argued for a closer attention to the 'literary' qualities of medieval works and a greater respect for the craftsmanship of medieval writers. This probing critique laid the path open for more explicitly literary approaches to the sorts of 'folkloric' motifs – loathly ladies, witches, taboos, mysterious countries, fairies –that had been the primary subjects of this anthropological criticism. Despite this, it is only in the last decade or so that the exploration of such motifs has been taken up again by literary scholars. The pre-eminent example is Helen Cooper's *The English Ro-*

mance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), which placed such motifs at the heart of an exploration of the medieval romance tradition. A particularly surprising subject of neglect was one of the most archetypical of medieval romance motifs: the fairy. Few scholars had undertaken a specific and extended analysis of the role of fairies in romance before Cooper included a chapter on "Fairy Monarchs and Fairy Mistresses" in her book. More recently, Corinne Saunders also addressed the topic in *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010; reviewed in *Marginalia*11).James Wade's *Fairies in Medieval Romance* is, however, the first full length study of the role of fairies in the genre.

The key contention of Wade's book is that fairies are 'complex and cleverly designed narrative devices that become ideologically central to the concerns of romance throughout the Middle Ages' (p. 149).In four chapters that primarily focus on romances written in England, this book illustrates the usefulness of fairies as 'unmotivated' figures whose actions facilitate narrative progression and whose ambiguous nature allows for the interrogation of range of significant issues.In placing the narrative operations of fairies at the heart of his analysis, Wade proposes what he terms a 'new intentionality'. Eschewing 'historicist constructions of biography' or 'questions of "what the author really meant"', Wade argues for an approach to authorial invention that is 'narratologically focused' and centred on what the author does and how s/he does it (p. 7). This book makes a compelling argument for the sophistication of medieval authors' use of supernatural motifs. The supernatural is rarely taken seriously by modern literary criticism and Wade deserves credit for developing a toolbox of critical approaches that gets under the skin of romances that make ample use of fantastical motifs.

In taking fairies seriously, a whole range of neglected texts – *Generides*, *Melusine*, *Sir Degarré*, *Eger and Grime* – emerge from this book as rather more interesting works than is usually acknowledged.Of course, there are familiar texts too: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Malory's *Morte* and *Sir Orfeo* feature prominently.*Sir Orfeo* stands to benefit particularly well from this and other recent attempts to take supernatural motifs seriously. The romance's numerous ambiguities begin to look entirely artful when they are thoroughly and systematically analysed, rather than put down to the influence of ill-digested 'Celtic' sources, as has so often been the case.*Fairies* also draws on works written in a more historical mode, such as the output of Gerald of Wales, Gervase of Tilbury and Thomas Walsingham. The neglected subject matter of this book provides ample opportunities for new perspectives on, and new comparisons between,texts of very different periods, languages and poetic quality.

After a brief, and largely theoretical, introduction, the first chapter of *Fairies* focuses on Morgan le Fay and maps the shifts in her character throughout the Middle Ages.The second chapter explores the role of Avalon in the medieval literary tradition. Despite being one of the best-known elements of the medieval Arthurian legend, accounts of Avalon have received little concerted study. Wade's discussion provides a valuable and wide-ranging account of the various treatments of this realm, both within and beyond the Arthurian tradition. Chapter Three, "Beyond Orthodoxy: Tests and Quests", discusses the role of fairies in

testing and proving the orthodoxies of the 'real' world. The final chapter, "Fairy Mistresses: Gifts and Taboos", takes a group of motifs that had provided particular grist to the anthropological critics' mill and re-evaluates them in light of more recent narratological ways of thinking. After a brief conclusion, the book features 39 pages of notes and references, a full bibliography, and a good index.

The *New Middle Ages* series has made publishing theory-centred approaches to medieval writing something of a speciality. As such, it is a natural home for a work like this which proclaims its theoretical credentials from the beginning. Wade draws on 'possible worlds' theory, a relatively obscure strand of criticism that 'posits that the range of narrative possibilities within each text reflects a centripetal organisation that makes their intra-narrative worlds autonomous – that is, ontologically and structurally distinct' (p. 2). The concept is certainly a good fit for the narratives under consideration here with their constantly shifting horizons of expectations, what Wade terms each text's 'internal folklore'. Some readers may be slightly put off by being pitched into a complex discussion of this field within the first few pages of *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, but even those who are completely uninterested in theoretical models of this sort will find much to admire in this book. Wade's analysis of his material is strong and he utilises theory in the service of his texts, rather than vice versa. Indeed,the use of 'possible worlds' theory in *Fairies* is something the reader may take or leave according to his/her own tastes – Wade's articulate arguments and close readings stand up readily without the support of this template.

'Internal folklore' is Wade's own coining, and perhaps the most useful theoretical concept introduced in this book since it allows him to deal with apparent narrative inconsistencies in relatively neutral terms. Where other critics might have called the fluctuations in Laudine's character in Chrétien's *Yvain* an artistic defect, Wade merely observes that 'the author does not construct a coherent or complete internal folklore' and goes on to suggest that such incoherence and incompleteness may serve a whole range of narrative functions (pp. 26 -27). There is much to be said for this approach, since chalking a lack of narrative logic up to authorial incompetence tends to shut the door to further serious exploration of the work in question. Wade's way of reading these cruxes allows a lot more space for giving authors the benefit of the doubt and for acknowledging that modern measures of narrative cohesion and logic may not be as universal a standard as we might like to think. Given how little we can reconstruct of medieval ideas of poetic and aesthetic excellence, an approach like Wade's may be as close as we can come to dealing with some of the 'literary' qualities of these texts on their own terms.

The ambiguities and complexities of the fairies of medieval romance present challenges for the scholar, yet Wade has produced a clearly written, concise and, above all, tightly-structured work. The only general quibble I have with *Fairies* arises from this very virtue: the book feels a little too concise. The depth of Wade's analysis ensures that *Fairies* raises a whole range of questions about this body of material. However, in what is a relatively short academic book (149 pages of text, excluding the notes), there is no space for these to be fully explored; for instance, although the role of the author is given detailed consideration, the sort of reader reception these texts might have provoked is largely uncommented upon. However, if the principal criticism one can muster of a book

is that it leaves the reader wanting more, then the book in question must have a lot going for it.

Fairies in Medieval Romance is a book that is long overdue. James Wade has done much to make fairies interesting for medievalists once again and this book will, no doubt, become a fixture on reading lists and in bibliographies.

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Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales, 700-1700
Mark Williams
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)
ISBN: 978-0-19-957184-0 (Hardcover); 256 pages
RRP £60.00

Mark Williams' first book 'Fiery Shapes' explores the literary and practical uses of astrology and astrological figures in Irish and Welsh literature over the course of a millennia. Williams states that the work is not intended as a contribution to the history of science, but a literary analysis of celestial portents, which only on a few occasions can be scientifically assigned a historic basis. Neither does it offer a developmental model of astrology or astrological literature in Ireland and Wales; rather, it is concerned with the particular details of key texts, and the interpretative frameworks they place on the literary invocation of astrological phenomena. Williams' field of enquiry ranges from canonical texts such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Prophetiae Merlini' to poems such as Dafydd Nanmor's fifteenth-century '*Cywydd* to God and the planet Saturn', outside the common scope of literary criticism in the field. Although building on the research of scholars such as Marged Haycock and her invaluable work on the Book of Taliesin, and D. McCarthy and A. Breen's study of astronomical observations in the Irish annals, Williams' study takes him into uncharted waters.

Taking his title from the claim of Shakespeare's famous Welshman Owain Glyndŵr, Williams sets out to explore the persistent association of the Welsh with specifically celestial prophecy and superstition, alongside the modern phenomena of Celtic astrology (xiii-xiv,xxv-xxvii). The first necessary task of the work is the de-bunking of myths, dispelling the romanticised view of Celtic mantic literature, and the figure of the druid at its centre. The groundwork for this is laid by the first two chapters' discussion of Irish sources. Chapter 1 details early Irish annalistic observations of celestial phenomena, and compares the interpretative schema applied to the interpretation of comets by Bede and by astrologers at the Carolingian court. In the case of the latter Williams finds politically-centred interpretations, the comet portends the downfall of kings and the division of kingdoms; whereas the early medieval Irish material integrates astrological figures in apocalyptic narratives which are distinctively local in character. Particularly intriguing is Williams' analysis of a 1054 entry in the Annals of Tigernach, where we see an astrological portent brought into line with Antichrist legends, themselves governed by an innovative process of assimilation, fusing the apocalyptic interpretation of celestial phenomena with Irish

mythological material such as the Morrigan. Williams is concerned with local strategies of adaptation; and remains sensitive to the possibility of international lines of transmission, noting the place of Irish astrologers at the Carolingian court, although he can in this instance find no process of feedback to Ireland itself, as he locates in the movement of astrological material from England to Wales in Chapter 4.

The second chapter tackles the question of the Irish druids head-on. Literary depictions of the druids and their study of the skies, Williams argues, owe much to high medieval representations, conceived in a period long after the disappearance of the influence of druids from Ireland. He explores the semantic slippage between the Magi of the New Testament and the magi, astrologers and diviners denounced by Isidore of Seville, in double-edged retrospective application to astrologer-druids as symbols of the pagan past. In this sense a medieval invention, the literary druids under discussion exist in a Christian framework, representing the demonic power of an old order ultimately defeated by Christianity, as in the sagas; or, as the druid of the mid-seventh-century Life of St Bridget who witnesses the comet which, like the star of Bethlehem, marks the saint's nativity, are integrated into its network of positive Christian signifiers.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 mark a division in Williams' material as we move from early Irish to later Welsh material. Williams is not suggesting the movement of astrological figures and concepts between the two localities (which in terms of extant material appears unsustainable), but rather holds the situation of both, on the western edge of the British Isles, to be analogous in their reception of astrological material and its integration in localised frameworks of meaning. Chapter 3 discusses the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the astrological apocalypse which concludes the 'Prophetiae Merlini' on Welsh conceptions of astrological portents. As Williams notes, the major problem with assessing the Welsh material is that extant manuscripts containing prophetic and astrologically-inflected material are all later than the twelfth century. The model he constructs is essentially the alignment of Welsh interest with cultural influence transmitted from England to Wales through the influence of the 'Prophetiae', although he does allow room for Geoffrey's manipulation of Welsh traditions which assign an astrological interest to the prophet Taliesin. The exact direction of influence between Geoffrey and Welsh sources remains, however, problematic, and although Williams offers a well-evidenced hypothesis, it remains a significant unknown.

In Chapter 4 we are on firmer ground: an assessment of astrological material in late medieval Wales, in the astrological poems of Dafydd Nanmor, and an assessment of the role of practical astrology practiced by Welsh scholars at Oxford and the English court. This suggestive material relating to the interpenetration of Welsh practice and Anglo-Welsh politics is concluded by poetic observations of the 1402 comet associated with revolt of Owain Glyndŵr, and anticipation of the 'mab darogan', the son of prophecy, the restorer of Welsh sovereignty; and a Welsh verse nativity of Arthur, the son of Henry Tudor, cast also as the 'mab darogan'. This chapter makes available, and brings together, a great body of evidence otherwise largely unavailable to non-Welsh speakers, and should prove an invaluable resource to students of astrology, prophecy, and Anglo-Welsh literary and political relations alike. However, Williams' analysis

reveals a principally one-way transmission, of Welsh assimilation of an English discourse. Although this is a subject particularly germane, given the pregnant terms of Welsh political prophecy applied to the early Tudors, for discussion of two-way transmission, it may well be that we simply do not have the evidence to sustain such a discussion in the realm of astrology alone.

The final chapter moves to the seventeenth century to discuss the astrological poetry of the Welsh Puritan Morgan Llwyd, as a 'self-cancelling' application of natural astrology (183). The central conceit of the poems is that fallen man is subject to the influence of the stars, a predisposition to particular sins and sin in general, which can be overcome by unwavering faith in God. Williams places Llwyd in the context of earlier and contemporary ideas, including the translation of astrological medical treatises from English to Welsh, and the movement of this material from educated Welsh men living in England across the border. Again, this is a well-evidenced and compelling argument, but it remains that the pattern Williams observes in his final three chapters appears to be the alignment of Welsh traditions with a dominant English culture. Although he suggests the complexity of the situation, given the broad scope of the work there is simply not the space to open up the question of the movement of material across national lines in both directions, any further. Although the breadth of the work's ambition is also in this respect its limitation, the wealth of material it covers, and its crucial de-mythicisation of Welsh and Irish astrology and associated literary practices, forms an important contribution to an under-studied, and often marginalised, area of literary-historical study.

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