

Reviews

MARY C. FLANNERY, *John Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame* (DS Brewer, 2012) ISBN 9781843843313 (hardcover); 195 pages; £55.

At the heart of *John Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame* are illuminating readings of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, *Troy Book* and a handful of his shorter poems and mummings. Based on these readings, Mary C. Flannery recasts Lydgate as an ambitious and confident promulgator of fame for himself and his patrons, building on and adding new insights to the work of scholars such as Maura Nolan and Paul Strohm who have challenged the older view of Lydgate as mere Lancastrian propagandist. Like her predecessors, Flannery forces us to read Lydgate again and acknowledge the art and literary ambition in his public poetry.

Flannery also positions this book as an answer to those scholars, foremost among them Seth Lerer, who have portrayed Lydgate as an anxious imitator of Chaucer constantly in the shadow of the greater poet. Given this stance, however, the choice to open her book with a chapter on 'Chaucerian Fame' risks relegating Lydgate once again to a secondary position. Whether or not this risk pays off depends on how convincing one finds Flannery's conception of a Chaucerian poetics of fame. There are eloquent readings of aspects of fame in Chaucer's works, but extrapolating conclusions about Chaucer's attitudes to poetry and his relative lack of confidence as a poet from these readings troubled me. For example, while I agree that the narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde* calls attention to the limitations on narrative freedom imposed by source material (falling within literary tidings or reputation in Flannery's wide definition of fame), the attribution of the narrator's attitudes to Chaucer himself—'Chaucer consistently depicts the composition of poetry as a process steered by chance'—is problematic. Such statements replicate the limitations of studies like Lerer's but in reverse: I felt that I was reading Chaucer through a distorting prism of Lydgatean poetics. Happily, the remainder of the book does not rely on one's agreement with this presentation of Chaucer and, in fact, it is an excellent riposte to those who would portray Lydgate as an anxious Chaucerian.

Chapter 2, 'Fame and the Advisory Tradition', surveys the role of fame in late medieval advice literature. Flannery highlights the ambivalent position of fame in these texts as something princes must both fear and value, silence and circulate. All the texts warn about the dangers of fame as well as repeat commonplace advice as to how princes might control it. Methods discussed include censorship, the use of informants, propaganda, and virtuous action. Drawing on the work of Sarah Tolmie, Flannery argues that an additional claim begins to (re-)emerge in Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*: professional poets are the best purveyors or withholders of fame. Flannery ends the chapter by arguing that this idea, only nascent in Hoccleve, becomes more fully developed in the works of Lydgate.

This is an intriguing argument, but rather than immediately explore how Lydgate develops this role of the professional poet in his own advice literature, the next chapter, 'Loose Tongues in Lydgate's England', first digresses into medieval legal means

of controlling speech. Its purpose is to establish Lancastrian anxiety about rumour and reputation, an anxiety that Flannery argues Lydgate provokes in some of his shorter poems and in the *Fall of Princes*. These close readings of Lydgate's poems are well done, particularly the excellent discussion of the *Fall of Princes*, but the link between them and medieval law, a general anxiety about fame, seemed less relevant than the similar anxieties and ambivalences Flannery identified in the advisory literature in the previous chapter. The legal material was useful background to Lydgate's Lancastrian milieu, but I wonder whether it would not have been better placed in an introductory chapter so that it did not interrupt and somewhat sidetrack the interesting analysis of Lydgate's development of the advisory tradition.

The integration of legal history and Lydgate's poetry is more successful in Chapter 4, 'The Poet's Verdict', which centres on the exchange between Queen Brunhilde and Bochas in the *Fall of Princes*. Bochas weighs the testimony of Brunhilde, who claims her infamy is undeserved, against the evidence of previous written authorities. Medieval legal concepts and processes, such as *infamia facti* (infamy of fact), *bona fama* (good reputation) and the use of witnesses to establish both, are useful background to this fictional deposition. The exchange is presented by Flannery as an idealised example of the poet as a 'textual judge of fame' and hence a key moment in understanding Lydgate's conception of the role of a poet.

Chapter 5, 'Promotion and Self-Promotion', explores Lydgate's use of the image and tropes of the laureate poet in the *Troy Book* and two of Lydgate's theatrical pieces, *Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London* and *The Mumming for the Mercers of London*. Flannery identifies in these texts a translation of laureate ideology from classical and continental culture to Lydgate's England, and from strictly literary realms into new literary and performative contexts. The final chapter, 'Lydgate's Fortune in the *House of Fame*', explores Lydgate's adaptation of Chaucerian vocabulary and imagery in the prologue to the *Fall of Princes* and the *Mumming at London*. The readings of all these texts are intelligent and thought provoking, making me wish room could have been found in the final chapter for Flannery's views on Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*.

John Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame is a useful addition to the growing shelves of Lydgate studies. Particularly helpful are the many examples of sensitive and intelligent close-readings of Lydgate's works. It is all too easy to dismiss large chunks of Lydgate as simply aureate decoration or characteristic prolixity, but Flannery shows the rewards of more careful attention. The idea that fame is the key to understanding Lydgate's laureate self-fashioning fits well with the public advisory poetry discussed in this book. Whether it is a useful model for the rest of Lydgate's works, particularly his religious poetry, is worth testing.

Joni Henry
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

JOHN HUDSON, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England: Volume II, 871–1216* (Oxford University Press, 2012) ISBN 978-0-19-826030 (hardcover); 984 pages; £150.

This is the second volume—following Richard Helmholz's *Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640s* (2004)—of a series which aims to provide 'a detailed survey of the development of English law and its institutions from the earliest times until the twentieth century', under the editorial guidance of John Baker. This volume starts with the reign of Alfred, omitting the earlier material which survives from the laws of Æthelberht (c.600) until the ninth century. Hudson justifies this decision with regard to the overarching legal narrative of his work, noting Alfred's 'role in the political development of England', and the fact that 'his reign marks the beginning of greater continuity in the available evidence' (xiii). Already 984 pages long, the volume clearly cannot include everything, and this focus on the later Anglo-Saxon era certainly allows for a more cohesive and detailed discussion. At the same time, it seems a pity that students of the earliest records of English law will not be able to benefit from the meticulous elucidation which characterises the scholarly approach of Hudson, and of the *Oxford History* series more widely. The work ends with the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, and a discussion of its legal implications.

The cover states that the volume is aimed at a broad audience of 'academics, students, and practitioners'. Unlike some legal historians, Hudson writes in a style accessible to the non-specialist: little prior knowledge is assumed, and cross-references guide the reader to earlier discussions of topics within the text. The volume is structured in three sections: late Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman and Angevin England. Within these time frames, the material is divided thematically in a way which encourages the reader to investigate the continuities between Anglo-Saxon and Angevin law, as well as their differences. All three parts have chapters entitled 'Kings and Law', 'Courts', 'Land', 'Movables', 'Theft and Violence', 'Status', and 'Marriage and Family'. In Parts II and III, Hudson also inserts extra chapters to reflect the developments and complexities of later law, such as 'Borough Law' and 'Procedure in Land Cases'. Every chapter is then subdivided into numbered topics. An appendix discusses the sources used in the legal history of this period. There are two comprehensive indexes, one of 'names, places, and non-legal texts', and another of 'subjects'. The latter includes entries for modern and medieval terminology (although not for variant Old English spellings). The appendix on sources of legal history is very brief, giving a generalised overview of the main types of historical record. Although this concision will disappoint readers hoping for a discussion of legal literature along the lines of Patrick Wormald's *Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (1999), it provides helpful initial orientation in a complicated field, clearly delineating the main critical issues raised by these texts and directing the student towards further reading. Overall, the volume is thoughtfully structured and easy to use, not only for experts, but also for beginners.

Hudson's work is the first complete legal history of the period since that of F.W. Maitland in the nineteenth century. It also fills many of the lacunae left by Patrick Wormald, whose untimely death prevented the publication of the second volume of his *Making of English Law*. Aside from its synopsis of legal history, much of the detail covers new ground: for example, the chapters on forest law discuss the twelfth century in far

more depth than previous studies. However, this is not only an important survey: this book represents the culmination of Hudson's thought on the development of the common law over his career. Turning away from Maitland's influential view of the common law as a product of the administration of Henry II, Hudson continues to explore the ways in which its genesis can be seen as a more gradual process. He is also prepared to revise his own views. Whilst his previous works stressed the importance of the century after the Conquest to the formation of common law, Hudson here lays greater emphasis on the contribution of the Anglo-Saxons to Norman legal innovation. He notes the Norman adoption of Anglo-Saxon England's 'powerful royal government, significant elements of a durable court structure, and important aspects of law relating to theft and violence' (xiii). Although reluctant to ascribe too much weight to the importance of the Anglo-Saxon era in the formation of later law, Hudson suggests that its ideological legacy was significant: aspects of law which did not survive the Conquest (such as the royal control of bookland, land granted to a private owner by written charter) may also have offered important precedents and models of authority for Norman administration.

Hudson's interest in the ideological connections between Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman government is consonant with the broad view he adopts of the functions of law within society, rendering his work valuable to those working outside the field. Positioning his volume at the centre of various different approaches to legal history, he writes that it 'regards law as shaping and being shaped by social practices and by the aims and acts of individual participants', as well as 'treating social actions in a particular way, fitting a vast variety of situations into a restricted number of abstract forms' (4). Rather than focussing exclusively on abstract developments in case law, Hudson's work is illuminated by an interest in social history. His concern for the non-specialist reader is again seen in the volume's plentiful inclusion of interesting, entertaining, and sometimes shocking examples of medieval law in action. Students of literature, as well as historians, will therefore find it an indispensable companion to early and high medieval views of justice. This is a landmark contribution to the study of law in the period, and will doubtless remain the standard text on the subject for years to come.

Sara Harris
MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

BILL BURGWINKLE AND CARY HOWIE, *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture: On the Verge* (Manchester University Press, 2010)
ISBN 9780719080296 (hardcover); xii + 216 pages; £55.

Studies of medieval hagiography have long grappled with graphic depictions of saints in *vitae*. Images of saints naked and beaten, penetrated by tormentors' weapons, and experiencing orgiastic rapture have often been described as 'pornographic', and Kathryn Gravdal, Robert Mills, and Virginia Burrus are among those who have explored the idea. In this book, however, Bill Burgwinkle and Cary Howie go beyond such earlier studies. Rejecting conventional notions of pornography and hagiography, the authors seek to re-orient research by redefining and refining the categories under investigation. From the

first page, familiar notions of pornography (as the graphic depiction of sex acts) and sanctity (as holy inviolability), are left by the wayside.

In *Sanctity and Pornography*, the authors are quite clear: 'you can't know pornography when you first see it' (53). Certainly, you can recognise it upon second look, when you are familiar with its generic gestures, but pornography is, in essence, that which is known only *when felt*. To be pornographic, they argue, an object must elicit a response: always, but not exclusively, bodily. It is this fundamental characteristic which, for Burgwinkle and Howie, defines both pornography and medieval hagiography, and which therefore grounds their text. In the medieval period, religious devotion shifted from a primarily public practice to a more private undertaking: devotees were increasingly urged to meditate on sacred images in private prayer, and iconography accordingly changed to feature more realistic bodies with which the devotee could identify more readily. Just as medieval iconography facilitated the union of viewer/reader with viewed body, the authors contend, so pornography's appeal is based on the imaginary transfer of sensations from another's body (on screen) to one's own. As the viewer reaches out to the image, s/he loses the sense of the image *as image*, instead locating it within the viewing self. Momentarily, then, the demarcation of subject/object is dissolved as the viewer is returned to his or her own body, the only body whose sensation s/he can actually feel. The image—pornographic or hagiographic—penetrates the viewer. Pornography, as the authors explain in their opening chapter ('Looking at Images'), is thus understood not as a genre in and of itself, but instead as 'a mode of reception, a collaboration with the text that elicits a particular [and expected] somatic reaction in the viewer' (21).

The rhetorical figure of parataxis, a form of juxtaposition denoting a lack of syntactical conjunction and subordination, is the focus of chapter two ('Pornography and Parataxis'). Parataxis as 'a process of visualization' is, the authors propose, one which governs medieval hagiography, medieval epic *and* modern pornography (67). Moreover, parataxis – which can be deployed both as syntax (the paratactic phrase) and as narrative (the paratactic passage) – is inherently '*paractactile*': its elements touch one another. This juxtaposition produces an intensification of our sense not only of the difference between things, but also of their interconnection, as each marks the other's limit. In this way, the body's incorporation in the world – the body is never totally distinct from the world outside itself – is highlighted. For Burgwinkle and Howie, that which is alongside me in parataxis cannot be recognised unless I abandon the desire for domination over it. Only once I recognise the paratactic object as non-subordinate, different to me but also implicated in me, can I myself become visible (66–8).

The third chapter ('Looking at Saints') deals directly with hagiography. Instead of experiencing annihilation, Burgwinkle and Howie argue, suffering martyrs 'become even more themselves' and provide a fantasy of transcendence over the body, through the experience of the body into which the viewer can tap (75–6). (Harnessing the fantasy of transcendence is similarly central to pornographic viewing, the authors claim.) The viewer's identification is mobile, shifting between the torturer and the tortured. In a detailed investigation of manuscript illuminations from the *Speculum historiale* and the *Legende dorée*, the reader is invited to situate him/herself in relation to medieval images, whilst the authors provide only scant categorical analyses alongside detailed description. The authors provide a list of organising questions, and a list of six axiomatic principles which repeatedly emphasise the ambiguities of the images, in which beauty and

ugliness, religiosity and aesthetically pleasing nudity co-exist. As the reader is encouraged to position him/herself across the temporal periods and discourses under discussion, the polysemous nature of the images is brought to the fore.

The reciprocal relationship between pornographic/hagiographic image and viewer—each both touching and being touched—is discussed in chapter four ('Saints, Sex and Surfaces'). The surfaces of images enter into haptic dialogue with the viewer, withdrawing or accepting touch, but always pushing the viewer back into their own body. By touching itself, an imagined body touches us. To touch, however, is not necessarily to take: in holding an object, a hand does not need to close, but can lay open and 'take precisely by being taken' (126). This is a form of analogical touch, touching across, which allows differing worlds (sacred/profane) to be made known as reciprocal and mutual entities. Analogical touch may be transcendent, but it is a decidedly material transcendence. Saints are 'intensifications of bodily surface', a surface which glows due to repeated touching (130). All objects and bodies have been repeatedly touched before, and an individual's act of 'retouching' (touching again) invokes the erotic presence of all these antecedents. Thus, as a viewer 'retouches' the saint or porn star they touch all those who have performed the action before, merging with a collective whilst simultaneously remaining single.

In chapter five ('The mundane and the mystical/sex and exchange') the authors reject the idea of mysticism as a highly subjective experience which impoverishes language and excludes others. Instead, they argue that mysticism is a movement beyond the self which depends on an encounter with an independent, physical other. Thus, any mundane interaction between self and other in society can be mystical, though not necessarily religious. The mystic is defined by his or her recognition of the brittleness of subjectivity, and by the move towards divine union in which subject/object boundaries are removed. Returning to the self after rapture entails the recreation of a functionally coherent subjectivity, usually by an act of confession which details the rapturous experience. Returning from ecstasy, however, the mystic may not be the same 'self' that entered divine union initially: subjectivity must be re-shaped, and a 'different sense of self and reality' established (156).

A final chapter ('On the verge') posits pornography and hagiography as likewise offering 'a glimpse into a normally invisible everyday erotics'. Such an erotics refers to the experience of being 'most fully within' time, inhabiting it to the point of stretching it towards both death and eternity. This experience the authors describe as 'being on the verge', a condition that closely resembles that most banal of states: boredom. Boredom, for these authors, is always 'a mode of asking,' since it rests upon waiting for things one thinks one wants (163-66). Pornography and hagiography each persist in deferring the satisfaction of such asking: for as long as possible, they resist giving us the money shot, or the saint's death. Both categories, moreover, can accommodate surprise alongside the expected events of death and orgasm: death can be recast as life in hagiography, and pornography endlessly arranges and rearranges bodies. Both can provide more than what we expected. Rather than being on the verge of *something*, pornographic and hagiographic bodies exist in the suspension of the verge itself: 'just as prayer is not merely *for* an object, so are these bodies on the verge given up, resiliently exposed' (176).

Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture is itself avowedly paratactic: it is a self-conscious exercise in non-conjunctive association—a linkage of medieval and modern material without subordination. This critical manoeuvre is mostly successful,

but at times it feels unsatisfying; connections between material from different eras are often oblique or not fully fleshed out. However, this intermittent denial of satisfaction is partly deliberate, and the authors assert that the book itself is 'on the verge', leaving the reader in suspended animation. Parataxis, we are told, challenges all readers 'to figure out how reflexivity might accommodate a world of objects' (63). The concluding remarks of the volume suggest one option. '[W]e', the community of scholars, are invited to 'caress me'—conflating in the pronoun 'me' the book, its authors, and the sources they 'touch'. This notion of the caress, taken from the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, is defined as a 'real, withdrawn, non-appropriative, non-identifying' touch, a touch which is in some sense both pornographic and hagiographic (184–6). This caress will, perhaps, reveal the reciprocal relationship between our academic selves and the objects of our study, and show us the mystical in our mundane work.

This volume ably responds to some critics' categorisation of hagiography as an 'over-privileged' and even hackneyed subject of medievalist research (74). Analysis of hagiographic sources, familiar and little-known alike, is here shown to be excitingly productive via the authors' innovative treatment of the material. Moreover, the text's engagement with both male and female saints is a welcome addition to the field, in which such a comparative approach is often sorely lacking. The body of the saint, male or female, takes centre stage in these essays, and contextualising comments on gender offer further avenues for investigation. Modern sources, often excluded from academic study due to their graphic or erotically populist content, are examined intently. The significance of these materials is drawn out deftly, with often surprising results. *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture* has much to offer medievalists and modernists, inspiring new theoretical approaches and challenging academic praxis across the temporal divide.

Alicia Spencer-Hall
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON

Saint Augustine: The City of God (De Civitate Dei) Books 1–10,
Introduction and translation by William Babcock, *The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*, Volume 1/6 (New City Press, 2012) ISBN 9781565484559 (paperback); liii + 348 pages; £21.50 (\$29.95)

This first volume of the anticipated new two-volume translation of St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* lays the groundwork for a grand and beautiful edifice within an even grander project. The New City Press has undertaken the first complete English translation of the entire corpus of the Bishop of Hippo (354–431 CE), and the series is now only 11 volumes short of the planned 48. Comprising full scholarly editions of each work, including a number of sermons and texts on the Donatist controversy never before translated, this series extends and perfects the availability of a late-patristic thinker whose importance to Western thought in the Middle Ages and beyond is incalculable.

The *City of God* (c.413–26) is a response to particular historical situation, but its scope is vast. Like a city, Augustine's argument is both sprawling and governed by

architectonic purpose. It contains, in its many surprising alleys and courts, reflections on angels as well as empire, on Plato and on power, on suicide and on sanctuary, on theatre and on theurgy. Framed as an indirect reply to the anxieties of one Roman African, Volusian, the *City of God* is addressed to another Roman correspondent Marcellinus. Augustine works from this to question both the supervenience of the new rites of the Christian Church on the Roman religion and the fundamental compatibility of its new concepts of virtue with allegiance to the Roman Empire and *ethos*.

The work begins historically *in medias res* with the vivid conjuration of the very recent Sack of Rome by Alaric and the Goths in 410. This cataclysm had severely shaken both Christian and pagan assumptions concerning the impregnability of Rome, and Augustine also speaks to the fears of those who associated the abandonment of the old gods with the loss of their protection. If the foundation story of Rome in Virgil's *Aeneid* must begin with the fall of Troy, Augustine's vision of the truly blessed City of God glows through the ruins of Rome. Augustine uses the narrative of the sanctuary which the Christian churches provided as an exemplar on which to found his denigration of the violence-permitting temples and unstable idols of the pagan Roman religion. A phoenix is discerned amidst the ashes: at the moment that the glorified symbol of Roman *imperium*—its sacred city—seemed most threatened, the true city of piety stood unshaken, sheltering its friends and its foes alike. Augustine is engaged in erecting and unveiling—*contra paganos* (against the pagans), as its full title runs—the reality of the mystical City of God, that eschatologically determined community encompassing transcendent realms and realities whose earthly expression is the Church. He adopts the form of the Roman *mythos* as a foreshadowing of the true, speaking *cum* to speak *contra paganos*.

These first ten books are perhaps the most polemic: they prepare the ground, as the African bishop pulls down pagan orthodoxies, recovering materials to build anew. Arguments of transcendence and subsumption rather than contradiction or negation concede limited value to the Roman virtues. Nevertheless Augustine has a real sense of the final opposition of the two cities at the end of all things, using this apocalyptic gaze to delineate dichotomies in the mixed state of the *saeculum*, sorting what tends to the good from what tends to evil. However, Augustine's belief that evil is fundamentally more like non-being leads him also to the conclusion that morally reproachable forms of individual and collective life are less than real. Since such forms of life are founded in words with real—if only half-disclosed—meaning, it is precisely through the ideals any culture shapes in language that reality can be unveiled. This explains his almost allegorical use of Roman political and ethical terms: *civitas* and *civicus*, *polis* and *pietas*. For Augustine, the task of the translator—word-choice in a contemporary context—matters greatly.

It is sometimes said that texts with the significance of the *City of God* need a new translation for every age. However given that Robert Dyson's translation in the excellent Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series only appeared in 1998, following Henry Bettenson's for Penguin in 1972, the English-speaking reader might now seem to be spoilt for choice. Nonetheless, the advantage of this situation is evident from Augustine's own advice in *De Doctrina Christiana*: sense is best derived through comparative readings, the underlying univocity of meaning by meditation on a series of mediating signs. The comments on translation in *De Doctrina Christiana* are concerned with the ultimate text that is *sacra scriptura*; lacking expertise in Greek and Hebrew, and

so himself dependent on the translator's art, Augustine remarks that 'a comparison of those translators who have kept most clearly to the words' is the most desirable means of reading, if necessary checked against the original. In a time when few medievalists can boast prowess in Latin, this is especially sound advice. Augustine used multiple Latin versions of the Bible besides Jerome's, including his own, and one great advantage of the edition under review is that, where past translators have used pre-existent English versions of the Vulgate for scriptural citations, Babcock renders each scriptural quotation directly and individually.

In the *City of God* itself, Augustine takes a further step. Using the example of the divinely inspired Septuagint—the Greek version of the Old Testament rendered by seventy translators at the orders of Ptolemy II in the third century BCE—he argues that the privileged translation can itself be an illuminator of underlying truth even, potentially, beyond what is evident in the primary text. In Augustine's theory of language the sign is very much a referent: a word is for use and its end is enjoyment of the thing. In the case of *sacra scriptura*, this means that the fulfilment of the text, that to which all its signs ultimately refer, is the love of God, and of self and neighbour for his sake. Augustine also placed his *De civitate dei* under the aegis of his God. His account suggests that translation can form a part of the exegesis of sense, furnishing, with the intermediary power of God's grace, layers of simultaneous meaning which enrich our comprehension of the deep veracity, the fulfilled sense, of the signs.

To provide one example of how Babcock fulfils this goal in his latest translation, we should look to his account of one especially interesting passage in Book II of the *City of God* in which Augustine deals with what constitutes the fulfilment of Roman, and specifically Ciceronian, ideals of government. Augustine sees Cicero—a martyr to the cause of the ideal form of the Roman Republic against the travesty of the imperial account—as engaged in a parallel project to his own; and he draws on Cicero's definition of the *res publica* as both 'goods' and 'the good' in common. As Babcock is careful to note, 'republic' had not (in Augustine's era) garnered the sense of a specific democratic form of government that it has today. In his translation, therefore, the 'republic' is the 'common good of a people'. Seemingly straightforward, this nonetheless breaks with the entire English tradition (most recently exemplified by Dyson) of translating the phrase as 'commonwealth'. The latter is a more direct Anglo-Saxon equivalent which, like the archaic 'commonweal' (Bettenson's choice), once referred to more than just material flourishing. That it no longer does so leaves us conceptually bereaved, for we are past a point where 'commonwealth' has any resonance with the contemporary lexicon for ideals of government. 'Common good', on the other hand, is a phrase both immediately comprehensible and gaining in currency, especially with the take-up in modern communitarian politics of the ideas of Catholic Social Teaching (a movement which emphasises the importance of man's full flourishing as more than mere consumer or voter and which extols the quest for the common good across religious boundaries). By using terms which encourage us to apply this definition of what true popular sovereignty means to our contemporary situation, Babcock makes this properly a 'living 21st century translation', as the New City Press series is called.

As a whole, this translation fully justifies the praise that has already been heaped on it. Lyrical without any sacrifice of sense, it compares consistently well with both Dyson and Bettenson and is certainly the most beautiful and up-to-date of the existing versions. As well as his stylistic elegance, Babcock also manages to convey Augustine's

not absent humour and irony (see, for example, the arch account in Book IV of the 'throng of godlings'—the many obscure Roman *numina* including Cardea, god of the door hinge, and Fortuna Barbata, who favours the first facial hair of young men). The reader may, however, regret that Bettenson's practice of rendering the many quotations from Virgil *as verse* has not been adopted by Babcock. (Nonetheless the sheer number of such quotations is a constant reminder of how much the Father of the Church was the product of his rhetorical education.)

Babcock takes the unique step of removing the titular headings which have formed an integral part of the work since the first printed edition, but which are in all probability non-authorial. Dividing each of the work's twenty-two books into short chapters, this apparatus is a superimposition which can over-direct or even mislead the unwary reader. Its absence has a clarifying effect, allowing the narrative to flow, and this is especially important in these first ten books which are structurally through-composed and not easily compartmentalized. Babcock nonetheless aids the reader discreetly by the inclusion of his own more occasional—and much less invasive—sub-headings. It is a sign of his humility as a translator that the bulk of his introduction, after a surprisingly tender short essay on Augustine's 'story of two loves' (of God and of self), is a highly intelligent account of the whole work supplemented by *aide-memoire* summaries at the beginning of each book. The notes are comprehensive enough to suffice for any level of reader and are given as footnotes for ease of reference (neatly including the kind of material on key people and events that is glossarial in the Cambridge University Press edition). The paperback price is perhaps not quite as affordable as other editions when the two volumes are taken together, but not only is this a more convenient format than those hefty tomes, it is also a truly new, elegant and intelligent translation well worth both the committed Augustinian's and the neophyte's while. A more 'enduring city' will also be obtainable, at the very reasonable hardback prize of £60 for both, when the second and final volume appears later in 2013.

Arabella Milbank
EMMANUEL COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

MARK ATHERTON, *There and Back Again: JRR Tolkien and the Origins of The Hobbit* (IB Tauris, 2012) ISBN 9781780762463 (hardcover); 288 pages; £20.

Given the huge amount of interest in recent years in all things Tolkien, this book might be in danger of being dismissed by scholars as belonging to the genre of 'popular non-fiction' and hence lost to the fires of Mordor. However, this would be a mistake, for Mark Atherton—a lecturer in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English at Oxford—is well placed to explicate the life and literature of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973), that notable medieval philologist and Oxford don who was also the author of *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937) and *The Lord of The Rings* (1954-5). In the three parts of this book, Atherton details the plots, mythologies and languages that go to form *The Hobbit*, providing a unique insight into Tolkien's biography and, along a road less travelled, the sources of his ideas for that novel. Atherton succeeds in treading a difficult line, catering

to the needs of the casual reader as well as those of the scholar. The prose is accessible but also provides a wealth of illuminating technical and biographical detail.

The first part of the book, 'Shaping the Plot', focuses on the plot, themes and setting of *The Hobbit*. Chapter 1 comments on Tolkien's earliest childhood memories and provides a fascinating insight into the setting for Hobbiton. Atherton cogently argues that this setting is derived largely from Tolkien's early experiences of rural Worcestershire, rather than (as is commonly believed) Oxford. Atherton further points to specific family, friends and experiences in Tolkien's childhood which might have provided useful models for people, places and things in *The Hobbit*. Moving on to Tolkien's literary influences, Atherton refers in particular to Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), the American novelist Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* (1922), Edward Wyke-Smith's *The Marvellous Land of Snergs* (1927) and the corpus of Edith Nesbit, especially *Five Children and It* (1902). Atherton asserts that Tolkien was innovating within the form and genre of 'Comic Novels' rather than simply standing on the shoulders of literary giants, and his discussion is both interesting and convincing.

Tolkien's personal connections are also discussed, including those he developed while at Oxford. Not least among these were the Inklings, a group of intellectuals which included CS Lewis and the novelist Charles Williams. The Inklings appear in a rich chapter which particularly exemplifies Atherton's overall approach to content and structure throughout the entire book. Among the subjects covered here are: the influence of Tolkien's mother on his early forays into art and languages; parallels with the work of the Scottish anthropologist, poet, novelist and folklorist Andrew Lang (1844–1912); and Tolkien's developing interest in Old Norse, Old English and later medieval literature. (Tolkien had a particular fascination with *Beowulf*, of course, which Atherton discusses here.) The literary, visual and structural representation of the character of Smaug, the dragon in *The Hobbit*, is then examined in some detail, and the chapter concludes by suggesting a parallel between Smaug and the great Leviathan of the Old Testament. In common with the other chapters, Atherton presents each of these discussions as bite-size chunks, thus making it possible to dip in and out of the book at will, while retaining key pieces of information which still form a cohesive whole.

In the second part of the book, 'Making the mythology – The Book of Lost Tales', Atherton turns to a more detailed review of the many myths and legends that form the basis of *The Hobbit* and to Tolkien's original plan to create a mythology which was dedicated to England. Atherton ranges widely in this section from 'The English country house and its myths' to 'Literary myth and the Great War', the latter chapter offering an insightful discussion of the effect of Tolkien's war experiences. In this section Atherton also weighs up the influence on Tolkien of writers as diverse as Chaucer, Boccaccio, William Morris, Edward Thomas, Francis Thompson and Robert Graves.

Tolkien's first civilian job after the First World War was at the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where he worked mainly on the history and etymology of Germanic words. This interest in words, word forms, borrowing and the natural evolution of language was something that Tolkien carried with him all of his life and this fascination carries over into his works of fiction as well as his scholarship. It is in the third part of the book, 'Finding the words', that we explore this part of Tolkien's life and where we see Atherton the linguist and philologist most clearly. Philology is a technical subject at the best of times and Atherton might have fallen into the trap of descending into a technical treatment of 'Hobbit-linguistics' but instead he manages to keep the discussion

detailed, yet at the same time, light and accessible. Basics in Germanic philology are covered quickly and Atherton uses this foundation to discuss 'The appeal of philology' for Tolkien and how this interest in the history and structure of languages including Old English, Old Norse and Middle English, led to Tolkien creating his own. Atherton goes on to consider Tolkien as 'word-collector', the roots of his rhymes and riddles, and his use of dialect. Finally, a discussion of Tolkien's interest in the fourteenth-century text *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* is exceptionally helpful in closing out the narrative.

Although *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has received a significant amount of scholarly and literary attention, it is unusual to find a book which focuses so exclusively on *The Hobbit* and which interweaves Tolkien's biography and literary influences so effectively. In addition the book also tracks his development as a medieval specialist and scholar. According to Atherton, Tolkien began writing as a minor war poet and a mythographer, using his background in Old English for inspiration. His encounter with Middle English only began when he returned to Oxford after the war to work on the *OED* and to teach part-time. During this period Tolkien began his first academic book, *A Middle English Vocabulary*, and in 1920 he moved to Leeds University where, in collaboration with the Canadian philologist E.V. Gordon, he published his great edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1925). Evidently Tolkien's love of all things western—the literature and dialects of Mercia, the West Midlands and Lancashire—blended with a growing interest in West Yorkshire, and Atherton duly explores his fascination with Walter Edward Haigh's *A New Glossary of the Dialect of the Huddersfield District* (1928) and the many parallels he found there with the north-west-midlands dialect of *Gawain*.

The book includes some useful appendices, as well as comprehensive notes and bibliography. The index is rather sparse by comparison, but it could be argued that it is in any case somewhat superfluous given the piecemeal presentation of the material. Numerous black and white illustrations and photographs add to what is a lively, detailed and illuminating discussion, providing an original and timely take on Tolkien's life, interests, scholarship and especially on *The Hobbit*, the Tolkien novel which has most recently been adapted for film. This book is definitely one of the jewels in Smaug's cave.

Tony Harris
SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE