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nō stetit. et i cathedra pe  
stilētie nō sedit. **S**ed  
in lege dñi uolūtas ei.

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COVER IMAGE: *Psalterium cum Antiphonis f1r* (Lombardy c. 1475)  
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## *Editorial*

The present Yearbook issue showcases essays by Adam Horn and Robin Phillips-Jones which were submitted as part of last year's Cambridge MPhil course in Medieval and Renaissance Literature. As is customary these essays were selected by the convenors of the course amongst the best work produced during the academic year of 2013-2014.

In “‘Ertheliche honeste thynges’: Langland's Earthward Theology’, Adam Horn offers fruitful new insight into the parameters of self-exploration in *Piers Plowman*. He argues that the inward turn of Langland's poetics, although ultimately leading man closer to God, must first, in the image of Christ in the Harrowing of Hell, involve a movement downwards, towards ‘an intractably sinful self’, where humility in itself equates with knowledge. Using apophatic theology and drawing upon the scholarship of Jill Mann in particular, the essay illustrates this earthward turn by discussing how the poem conflates the limits of language with those of man, and how the relentless process of being humbled is conducive to divine grace. It is in this sense of remoteness that separates man from the divine, Horn suggests, that Langland situates the experience of God.

Robin Phillips-Jones's essay, ‘Authority, Identity, and “the Idea of the Vernacular” in *The Owl and the Nightingale*’, challenges the tendency of recent scholarship to chart the formation of English as a literary language in terms of ‘named authors and identifiable movements’, and argues for an understanding of *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1200) as one of the earliest English texts to display a sense of vernacular self-consciousness. The essay explores how the poem uses and reconfigures the tradition of Latin debate poetry from which it emerged in such a way as to position itself as a piece of specifically English writing. The processes of appropriation and innovation involved are profitably discussed, thus providing evidence of the poet's appreciation of ‘the potentials of his language as a sophisticated, creative medium’.

This issue also contains reviews by Gabriel Byng, Phil Robins, and Arabella Milbank of some challenging and thought-provoking recent contributions to different areas of the field of medieval studies.

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# 'Ertheliche honeste thynges': Langland's Earthward Theology

Adam Horn  
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Will's vision of the 'lond of longynge and love' in Passus XI of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*<sup>1</sup> begins following a rebuke at the hands of Scripture. Will interrupts Scripture's discourse on the perils of riches, which culminates in the warning that 'It shal bisitten us ful soure, the silver that we kepen / [...] and seen beggeris go naked' (B.X.359-60) to speak against the clergy. After his interruption, as Will tells us, 'Scripture scorned me and a skile tolde, / And lakked me in Latyn and light by me she sette, / And seide, "Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt"' (Many know many things and do not know themselves) (B.XI.1-3). Then Will weeps, and then comes the dream of the 'lond of longynge' and its apparently autobiographical concern with 'Concupiscencia Carnis' and 'Coveitise of Eightes', which Will says 'folwed me fourty wynter and a fifte moore' (B.XI.47).

The Latin used to 'lakke' Will, and to force him to give up his role as social critic in favor of the B-Text's most confessional, self-interrogating vision, is a text that was mistakenly attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Cogitationes Piissimae de cognitione humanae conditionis*.<sup>2</sup> Just following the lines cited by Langland, it reads, 'Deum quaerunt per ista exteriora [...] quibus interior est Deus' (They seek God in these outer things [...] when God is more inside themselves than they are) (PL 184, col. 485); in general, the text emphasizes the experience of God as a turn inward, away from the world, in the manner of Augustine's *Confessions*.<sup>3</sup> The concerns of this essay are with the recursively self-interrogating tendencies of *Piers Plowman* exemplified by this inward turn at the start of B.XI, but they are not with those tendencies as represented by Langland's source text, which goes on to say, 'Mens imago Dei est' (The mind is the image of God) (PL 184, col. 487), comparing memory, reason, and the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17*, ed. by A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Dent, 2011), B.XI.8.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, explanatory note to line XI.3; see also *Patrologia Latina* 184, cols. 485-508. Hereafter, references to the *Patrologia Latina* online database are given in parentheses, beginning PL and followed by volume and then column number, separated by a comma.

<sup>3</sup> I have consulted the Loeb edition: *St. Augustine's Confessions*, trans. by William Watts (London: Heinemann, 1919). See, for example, 'tu autum eras interior intimo meo', *Confessions*, III, vi, addressed to God, or the discussion of memory in Book X. I do not mean that Langland and Augustine, or even Langland and the *Confessions*, are fundamentally at odds; see, for instance, *Confessions* X, xvi: 'laboro in me ipso: factus sum mihi terra difficultatis et sudoris nimii' (I work over myself: I have become to myself an earth of difficulty and excessive sweat).

will with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Trinity. It is my sense that *Piers Plowman* has fewer affiliations with this theme of a movement at once inward and upward, a movement toward knowledge of ourselves as images of God and so knowledge of God, than with a different turn: a movement inward and downward, toward an intractably sinful self and an irreducibly particular, immanent world, the humble apprehension of which nonetheless brings us in a kind of rebounding movement—since Langland’s Christ is the Christ of the Harrowing of Hell, the Highest who descends to make himself known in, and to bear up, the lowest—closer to God. As I will show, apophatic or negative theology is a helpful tool for thinking about what Langland is doing as opposed to what Pseudo-Bernard and Augustine are doing; but negative theology proper needs also to be distinguished from the uniquely earthward turn of Langland’s humbled unknowing.

What I mean is put better in an authentic, well-known work of St. Bernard, *De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae* (PL 182, cols. 939-72). There Bernard goes to great lengths to caution against curiosity, the first and by far greatest of the steps of pride: ‘Terram intueri, ut cognoscas teipsum. Ipsa te tibi repraesentabit, quia terra es, et in terram ibis’ (Look at the earth, that you may know yourself. It will show yourself to you, because you are earth, and into earth you will return) (PL 182, col. 957). This version of the injunction to ‘know thyself’ proceeds by means not of an identification with the Trinity but by an identification with the earth itself, with the lowest and most changeable elements of the created world. This identification is well exemplified by the turn at the center of Langland’s poem from a critique of the clergy to specific self-criticism, criticism of the ‘Concupiscencia Carnis’ and ‘Coveitise of Eighes’ that make the self so earthly—here, after all, Will sees himself in the ‘mirour that highte Middelerte’ (B.XI.9)—and voluble. For Bernard and for Langland humility is a kind of knowing; for fallen man it is in fact a necessary condition of knowing, for without humility it is impossible to know oneself and, as Scripture is quick to remind Will, presumptuous to claim to know anything else.

In *Piers Plowman* criticism this earthward-turning tendency is best described in the scholarship of Jill Mann. Mann describes it in terms of Langland’s restless movement between the abstractly allegorical and the material particular, arguing that Langland’s language tends to position the two as equally and importantly real. In ‘Langland and Allegory’,<sup>4</sup> she cites the Tree of Charity of B.XVI as an example of what she means: the Tree is ‘all of a piece with the agricultural realities that pervade the poem’, and so becomes ‘more than a literary trope’; ‘Charity and the growth of an everyday tree become parallel mysteries, neither of which takes precedence over the other’. In consequence, ‘Langland makes us constantly aware of the way in which life is lived at the intersection of the material and the non-material, the concrete and the abstract’.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jill Mann, ‘Langland and Allegory’, in *The Morton W. Bloomfield Lectures, 1989-2005*, ed. by Daniel Donoghue, James Simpson, and Nicholas Watson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), 20-41.

<sup>5</sup> Mann, ‘Langland and Allegory’, 30.

Though here and in her earlier essay ‘Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*’ Mann offers up an array of moments in which Langland grounds even his most difficult allegories in the world of material particulars, her emphasis is not so much on the primacy of the earthly in Langland as on the other side of the equation—the literalizing realization of allegory Langland effects, and the consequent elevation of language as the vehicle of that realization.<sup>6</sup> In ‘Langland and Allegory’ *Piers Plowman* is said to show that language has ‘generative capacities’, capacities to structure our experience and suggest ‘an extra dimension of meaning’ beyond either the concrete or the abstract alone and so, for Langland, a sense of the divine somewhere in the shimmer between. She concludes: ‘Grammar is, says Langland, the “grounde of al” (C.XVII.108); it is [...] an expression he also uses of God. In exploring the powers of language, [Langland] must have felt he was getting close to God’.<sup>7</sup>

Mann’s tendency to emphasize the positive sense of God’s presence in language tends to overlook a sense endemic in *Piers Plowman* that the ‘powers of language’ often leave us further from God than when we started. Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross describe the traditional distinction between negative and positive theologies, the ‘play of absence and presence’ that ‘characterizes the human experience of engagement with the ineffable’.<sup>8</sup> There is a rich sense of the ‘play of absence’ in the poem, of language’s limits as well as of its possibilities. There is a worry that language’s ‘generative capacities’ require a generator, a speaker and a need to speak, without which language itself threatens to become a jumble of empty signs, signposts to nowhere.<sup>9</sup> Nede’s speech in B.XX is the poem’s best example of what I mean:

Homo proponit et Deus disponit (Man proposes, God disposes)—  
 [God] governeth alle goode vertues;  
 And Nede is next hym, for anoon he meketh,  
 And as lowe as a lomb, for lakkyng that hym nedeth;  
 For nede maketh nedé fele nedes lowe-herted...  
     And God al his grete joye goostliche he lefte,  
 And cam and took mankynde and bicam nedy...  
 Forthi be noght abashed to bide and to be nedy,  
 Sith he that wroghte al the world was wilfulliche nedy... (B.XX.33-49)

Nede’s speech represents the poem’s most systematic exhaustion of the powers of

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<sup>6</sup> Jill Mann, ‘Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*’, *Essays and Studies*, 32 (1979), 26-43.

<sup>7</sup> Mann, ‘Langland and Allegory’, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, ‘The Apophatic Image’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium V*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 53-78 (53).

<sup>9</sup> For another reading in this vein, see Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith, ‘“Nede ne hath no lawe”: Poverty and the De-stabilization of Allegory in the Final Visions of *Piers Plowman*’, in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Hewett-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2001), 233-53. She writes, ‘the de-stabilization of allegory [...] is, finally, a means of redeeming the mode, of providing significance within the epistemological void constitutive of allegorical discourse’ (233).

language. Within a burst of three lines, at B.XX.35-7, Nede uses ‘nede’ and its variants as, in order: an allegorical subject, a verb, a possibly non-allegorical subject, an object, and, by way of the archaic genitive ‘nedes’, an adverb. The effect is to see the way any single unit of language depends for its meaning on the necessity, the ‘nede’, imposed by its grammatical usage and ultimately by its user. This lesson is being taught as early as B.I.44-53, when Holy Church tells the ‘Reddite Caesari’ story from the book of Matthew<sup>10</sup>: ‘of whom spak the lettre’ is the operative question (B.I.49). With Nede’s speech especially it is almost impossible to forget who is speaking, because Nede is always talking about himself. We see through the language, to its speaker and his intention; and so it is Nede – and not, as Mann would make it out, language itself – that is the generative power next to God. ‘Homo proponit et Deus disponit’: When language means anything, it always points toward – but never contains – the ‘willful need’, the Incarnational force, of the Word. That same proverb was invoked to chasten a covetous Will at B.XI.37-8, in the dream of the ‘lond of longynge’, but was dismissed by Faunteltee. Here, in mature reflection on the limits of language and of man, it stands.

This negative strain of Langland’s attitude toward certain uses of language runs deep in the poem, typically showing up alongside turns from abstract dispute or explanation to direct personal rebuke – humblings, in other words. As Scripture ‘lakked’ Will in B.XI, and as Nede will rebuke him for not coming to terms with his own neediness in B.XX, Anima attacks him in B.XV when he senses that Will wishes to ‘knowe and konne the cause of alle hire names’ (B.XV.45-6). ‘I se thi wille!’ (B.XV.44), he exclaims, and adds, ‘For swich a lust and likyng Lucifer fel from hevene’ (B.XV.51). As Anima has explained at length, many names can designate the same thing. This much is in line with Mann’s emphasis on Langland’s complication of language beyond simple one-to-one correspondences. But what gets Will in trouble is, I think, what occasionally sends Mann off the mark: he begins to bother himself with purely linguistic questions, questions that have no bearing on the state of his soul, the original subject of his quest. Anima explains, citing St. Bernard twice:

‘Beatus est’, seith Seint Bernard, ‘qui scripturas legit  
 Et verba vertit in opera (Blessed is he who reads the scriptures and  
 turns words into works) fulliche to his power’.  
 Coveitise to konne and to knowe science  
 Pulte out of Paradis Adam and Eve:  
 Sciencie appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam  
 spoliavit (Desire for knowledge robbed man of the glory of  
 immortality).  
 And right as hony is yvel to defie and englymeth the mawe,  
 Right so that thorough reson wolde the roote knowe  
 Of God and of hise grete myghtes – hise graces it letteth. (B.XV.60-6)

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<sup>10</sup> *Matthew* 22.16-21, where Jesus tells the Pharisees to return to Caesar what is his – the coins that have Caesar’s name on them. All references to the Bible are to the Vulgate.

When Mann takes up this passage, she emphasizes the connection between knowing and eating contained in the honey metaphor, and concludes with reference to the Tree of Charity: 'The only way you can know apples, for Langland, is to eat them'.<sup>11</sup> The reading is broadly affirmative of both knowing and eating, and of the connection between the two effected in Langland's language. What Mann does not emphasize, and what she skips over entirely in the celebration of language's generative powers at the end of 'Langland and Allegory', is that it is precisely the inquiry into language for language's sake – what name comes from what cause, *ad infinitum* – that is here cited as an instantiation of 'coveytise', and is deemed worthy of the full vituperative weight of Langland's earthly imagination.

It is not that all knowing is bad. Anima gladly explained his practical roles as Anima, Mens, and so on (B.XV.24-36). It is the case, however, that in *Piers Plowman* there is a deep scepticism, nearly impossible to overemphasize yet almost entirely elided in Mann's readings, of any 'verba' that cannot be connected with earthly 'opera' by more than metaphor. This is the lesson taught by Holy Church at the beginning of the poem, where she assures Will that nothing is 'nedfulle' (B.I.21) but the bare necessities of clothes, food, and drink (B.I.23-5). It is also the lesson the much needier Will of the poem's end, 'hevy chered' and 'elenge in herte' (B.XX.2), is finally fit to learn from Nede himself.<sup>12</sup>

The recent work of D. Vance Smith introduces negative or 'apophatic' theology into his discussion of *Piers Plowman*, but cautions that, 'In one sense, apophatic theology simply restates the ultimate inadequacy of theology as a science [...] in respect of the contingency and limitation of physical and mental signs'.<sup>13</sup> The poem's sense of the contingency and limitation of all science, and of man—a sense of neediness—is all I mean to restate. Smith's later suggestions about Langland's affinities with Dionysian negative theology in particular seem to me misguided; Pseudo-Dionysius's heavily Neoplatonic mystical aporia, opening upward into a divine silence,<sup>14</sup> has its equivalent in Langland only in a kind of downward silence, a stressing of the bare needs of hunger and thirst. The stress is not on the unknowability of God, but on the unfitness of a wandering human Will to know Him on anything but the humblest terms.

In the B.XV passage above, the bitter end of the honeyed 'coveytise to konne' without humility is that 'hise graces it letteth'. To avoid a misleadingly negative sense of Langland's emphasis on being humbled, it is important to stress this emphasis on

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<sup>11</sup> Mann, 'Eating and Drinking', 41.

<sup>12</sup> Jill Mann's 'The Nature of Need Revisited', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 18 (2004), 3-29, rightly emphasizes Langland's 'brilliant stroke' of connecting human, bodily need with the 'ius necessitatis' (right of necessity) that justifies the Redemption of man (27), but glances over the role of spiritual neediness by way of humility in that Redemption.

<sup>13</sup> D. Vance Smith, 'Negative Langland', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 23 (2009), 33-59 (52).

<sup>14</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* ends, speaking of God as known apophatically: 'We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion [...] and [...] beyond every denial'. See *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 141.

grace, understood as the upshot of humility: ‘Deus superbis resistit humilibus autem dat gratiam’ (God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble).<sup>15</sup> The poem’s demanding final refrain, ‘Redde quod debes (Return what you owe)’,<sup>16</sup> in fact comes, in Matthew 18, from the mouth of a servant who, having been forgiven by his master, demands his dues from a servant of his own. ‘Omne debitum dimisi tibi quoniam rogasti me’ (I dismissed every debt of yours because you begged me), the first master reminds and rebukes his servant, before delivering him to torture.<sup>17</sup> What looks like the refrain of legalism is also a reminder that what we owe one another is what we have been given ourselves: forgiveness, grace. Paul says, ‘nemini quicquam debeatis nisi ut invicem diligatis’ (You should owe nothing to anyone, except that you love one another).<sup>18</sup> Aquinas wrote, ‘Gratia, secundum quod gratis datur, excludit rationem debiti’ (Grace, inasmuch as it is freely given, excludes the reckoning of debt).<sup>19</sup>

Beginning ‘Negative Langland’, D. Vance Smith writes, ‘I want to argue here that our collective failure to come to terms with the poem—that is, terms that all readers of Langland can agree are essential to understanding such basic features of the poem as its form—is not a critical failure but a profound reading of the poem’.<sup>20</sup> If Smith means that the ‘failure’ of contemporary criticism to come to terms with the poem is ‘a profound reading’ because it shows that the poem is profoundly difficult, I would agree. But I want to argue that the poem’s essential difficulty—and the reason for the jerky self-reflexivity that makes it so difficult to understand the poem’s ‘basic features’—is due to the difficulty the poem knowingly represents again and again: the difficulty of being humbled. I do not believe it is reductive to say that *Piers Plowman* can be read as a painstaking and even painful acting out of something like Bernard’s ‘Terram intueri, ut cognoscas teipsum. Ipsa te tibi repraesentabit, quia terra es, et in terram ibis’ (Look at the earth, that you may know yourself. It will show yourself to you, because you are earth, and into earth you will return) (PL 182, col. 957). If this reading is reductive, it at least reduces the poem to the terms of Will’s initial request: ‘Teche me to no tresor, but tel me this ilke— / How I may save my soule’ (B.I.83-4). On the other hand, to champion the poem’s difficulty as if the difficulty itself were the poem’s point, and as if failing to read it were to read it well, is a critical movement that threatens to reduce the poem to a ‘nede’-less, unnecessary thing, with no operable ethical weight. It is better in my view to risk seeing the poem as a bit naive—as Mann does, when she identifies in *Piers Plowman* ‘the idealization of poverty’, which is ‘one of the ways the poor are kept in existence’<sup>21</sup>—than to risk reading into it a ‘negative theology’ that, de-theologized, amounts to little more than negativity.

The last piece of advice Will receives in the poem comes from Kynde, just after

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<sup>15</sup> James 4:6.

<sup>16</sup> B.XIX.188, B.XIX.194, B.XIX.261, B.XIX.394, B.XX.309.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 18:23-35.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 13:8.

<sup>19</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 111, 1 ad. 2. I have consulted the Blackfriars edition: *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Gilby, O.P., 61 vols (London: Blackfriars, 1964-80).

<sup>20</sup> Smith, ‘Negative Langland,’ 34.

<sup>21</sup> Mann, ‘The Nature of Need Revisited’, 29.

Kynde has advised him to ‘wend into Unitee [...] And loke thow konne som craft’ (B.XX.204-6). Will asks, in a very slight advance on a question he asked Holy Church at the beginning of the poem (B.I.138-9), ‘Counseilleth me, Kynde [...] what craft be best to lerne?’ (B.XX.207). ‘Lerne to love’, Kynde replies, ‘and leef alle othere’ (B.XX.208). ‘And there by counsel of Kynde’, Will tells us, ‘I comsed to rome / Thorough Contricion and Confession til I cam to Unitee’ (B.XX.212-3). This shriving is an action left incomplete earlier on in the poem’s characteristically stop-and-start conclusion; shortly following his dream of the Harrowing of Hell, Will goes to church, intending ‘to be housled after’ (B.XIX.3), but ends up falling asleep in the middle of mass. It is one of several features of the poem’s final sections that give a sense of real trajectory to a work that threatens always to collapse into formlessness: a trajectory toward a confession. Confession offers Will a humble language of words that have to do with works, words that have a nede and an apprehension of one’s own neediness behind them, words that can stand up to the charge, ‘seipsos nesciunt’ (they do not know themselves). The ‘Unitee’ Will comes to ‘thorough Contricion and Confession’ may be not only the unity of the Church, but also a unity and integrity of the self through humble self-knowledge and acknowledgment.

If, then, the critical difficulty is ‘how to explain *Piers Plowman*’, Smith is right: the poem communicates a sense that what is really necessary, really needful, is something that can be explained over and over and in endless ways, but something that cannot be taught any more easily than one person can teach another to be hungry. If the difficulty is ‘what to do about *Piers Plowman*’, the difficulty is an ethical and personal one—forcefully real, in the Mann sense of making claims both immaterial and material—more than a critical one, and so all the more important. ‘Reddere quod debes (to return what you owe)’ where *Piers Plowman* is concerned might be to cease trying to explain the poem and do something about it—to attend to what is needful, like Conscience who at last leaves off defending the Church and sets out to find *Piers the Plowman*.

In the end, it is in something like this sense of distance between seeker and sought-after at the poem’s close—in something like the sense of an impossible gulf between the divine need and earthly human hunger, and the more occult sense that this distance has already been overleapt from the other side—that Langland locates the experience of God. Mary Clemente Davlin draws attention to the emphatic earthliness of the poem’s close in contrast with the great ‘Mens imago Dei est’ (The mind is the image of God) epiphany at the end of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*<sup>22</sup>: ‘Where God is in *Piers Plowman* does not provide a comfortable ending to the narrative; it cannot, since the poem is about faith in this world, not sight in the next’.<sup>23</sup> The last, rapid-fire sequence of awakenings toward the poem’s close enacts a movement not toward a comfortable ending but toward a less comfortable, more active beginning, a

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<sup>22</sup> The three circles that make up the Trinitarian ‘circulazion’, says Dante, ‘mi parve pinta de la nostra effige’. See Canto XXXIII, lines 127-31. I have used *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, trans. by Charles S. Singleton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 378.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Clemente Davlin, *The Place of God in Medieval Art* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 170.

different kind of awakening: 'right with that I wakede' (B.XVIII.427) pairs with 'Thus I awaked and wroot' (B.XIX.1) to describe, for the first time, the same awakening twice; likewise, 'I awakned therwith, and wrote as me mette' (B.XIX.485) pairs with 'as I wente by the way, whan I was thus awaked' (B.XX.1). This mounting sense of coming awake as not merely something you do, but something you do again and again, culminates in the final and unique 'I gan awake' (B.XX.387), which ends the poem in a moment of endless awakening. It becomes a process – like the process of humbling enacted in confession – that must be accomplished again and again because it is never complete, and because we ourselves cannot accomplish it; we rely on something else to wake us up.

This brings us back to grace, the gift given only to the reliant, the humbled. 'Whan I was thus awaked' (B.XX.1) makes the waking moment into a past participle, an adjective and so a quality of whoever has been woken up. In scholastic thought grace too becomes, strictly speaking, a quality of the person to whom it is given. This is the subject of an inquiry into grace in the *Summa Theologiae*: 'Utrum gratia sit qualitas animae' (Whether grace is a quality of the soul). Aquinas responds, 'super Ps. 103,15, ut exhilaret faciem in oleo, dicit Glossa quod gratia est nitor animae, sanctum concilians amorem. Sed nitor animae est quaedam qualitas, sicut et pulchritudo corporis. Ergo gratia est quaedam qualitas' (On Psalm 103, 15, that he may refresh the face with oil, the Gloss says that grace is a splendor of the soul, winning over holy love. But splendor of the soul is a certain quality, like the beauty of the body. Therefore grace is a certain quality).<sup>24</sup> Aquinas's description of grace by way of oil poured over the face, and by the 'pulchritudo corporis' (beauty of the body), recalls the earthly bent of Langland's poetics. It recalls also the logic of B.XX, where the humbling of contrition and confession, and Conscience's final cry for grace, follow Nede's re-assertion of the importance of earthly needs, and of the willful neediness of the Incarnation. Conscience, who will walk 'as wide as the world lasteth' (B.XX.382), who in his professed neediness 'gradde after Grace' (B.XX.387), is Langland's final enduring image of awakening to, and being awakened by, the divine.

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<sup>24</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, Ia 2ae 110, 2, sed contra.

# *Authority, Identity, and 'the Idea of the Vernacular' in The Owl and the Nightingale*<sup>1</sup>

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It is now accepted that the 'triumph of English' as a literary language in the fourteenth century was not a rapid process, much less an inevitable one, and recent scholarship has become increasingly ready to view the achievements of even our greatest vernacular champion in Chaucer as part of much larger developments. Contributors to the groundbreaking anthology *The Idea of the Vernacular*, for example, take this principle as the starting point for their bringing together of material composed by English writers between 1280 and 1520 which they see as exhibiting the earliest roots of a vernacular self-consciousness, and 'whose accounts of what it is to write in Middle English are not Chaucer-centered'.<sup>2</sup> This more contextual view of the progression of English towards its 'triumph' in the fourteenth century has made important ground in recent years, and yet, despite these new perspectives, our treatment of the narrative of a developing vernacular self-consciousness among early English writers is still characterised by what Treharne calls 'a persistent scholarly focus on named authors and identifiable movements'.<sup>3</sup> Those vernacular texts produced during the murky years of the twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries occupy an uncertain place within this story of 'identifiable movements', tending to fall outside the purview of much scholarship concerned with the development of English vernacular writing. *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c.1200) is one such text.<sup>4</sup> This poem has resisted easy definition because our knowledge of its immediate literary context is so patchy. Indeed, one could say that it has no immediate literary context to speak of, at least not in the English language of the period, making its appearance in the field of a vernacular writing at the turn of the thirteenth century seem like something of a lightning bolt

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<sup>1</sup> In my choice of title I have been inspired by the highly influential volume *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory 1280 – 1520*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999). Since its appearance fifteen years ago this has become the touchstone for any exploration of the various forms of vernacular self-consciousness encountered in English writing from the thirteenth century onwards.

<sup>2</sup> *The Idea of the Vernacular*, Introduction, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English 1020 -1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>4</sup> All references are to Neil Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale: Text and Translation* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001).

from a clear sky. It has been variously described as 'miraculous',<sup>5</sup> 'mysterious', and 'unaccountable',<sup>6</sup> and it is perhaps because of these awkward qualities, as well as its anonymous authorship, that it is afforded but a single, brief nod in *The Idea of the Vernacular*.<sup>7</sup> However I shall argue that *The Owl and the Nightingale* (henceforth O&N) can, in many ways, be viewed as one of the earliest examples we possess of an English poem which exhibits a true sense of its own identity and status as a vernacular production *vis-à-vis* the Latin tradition from which it sprang: in short, that this poem deserves a place at the beginning of any narrative treatment of the growth of an 'idea of the vernacular' amongst post-conquest English writers.

The student approaching O&N for the first time is presented with a daunting range of differing opinions regarding its date, authorship, provenance, and purpose. These questions, and particularly those concerned with unpicking the poem's possible allegorical significances, have tended to dominate critical approaches until now. Yet Holsinger recently drew attention to the 'overlooked nationalistic dimensions' of O&N, and to the important place it occupies in the literary history of an age where the English vernacular was increasingly exploring its purview in the areas of literature, law, liturgy, and many other public spheres.<sup>8</sup> I should like to take Holsinger's comments as the starting point for a reading of O&N as an early expression of vernacular self-consciousness in which we see the emergence of a distinctively 'English' literary voice. However, one may well question the relevance of such a reading to a poem which mentions 'engelonde' only once in its 1794 lines of verse (O&N, 749), and which owes the entirety of its form and premise to the Latin tradition of debate poetry. If O&N is indeed an 'English' poem, it is not so in the same sense as other works produced around the same time, and for which critics have made the same claim. This is clear from its very appearance on the manuscript leaf: composed in the French octosyllables of polite literature, the poem is presented in short lines and double columns with punctuated line endings; in the J-version the text is furnished with a Latin *incipit*, with each line's initial letter set off from the others; the C-version is written in a professional gothic hand, one more usual for works of learned Latin tradition than for vernacular productions. In these visual respects, it has been remarked that O&N bears more resemblance to a European poem than to an English one, which were generally inscribed in continuous prose, and announces what Hahn called 'a vernacularity more continental than insular'.<sup>9</sup> This extends beyond the poem's appearance on the page and to its substance as a piece of literature: if we are to view O&N as an 'English' work, we must appreciate that it does not share in the

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<sup>5</sup> W. P. Ker, *Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 134.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature* ed. by Douglas Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Neil Watson, 'The Politics of Middle English Writing', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 331–53 (332).

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Holsinger, 'Vernacular Legality: The English Jurisdictions of *The Owl and the Nightingale*', in *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. by Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 154–84 (156).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hahn, 'Early Middle English', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999), 61–91 (33).

same English heritage as other early texts like the *Brut* or *Katherine Group*, which can be said to preserve at least some pre-conquest literary traditions, but originated in a *milieu* which drew its inspiration from distinctly continental impetuses. It is the Medieval Latin tradition of debate poetry, which had grown in popularity at the courts of the Carolingians during the ninth century, that stands as its immediate literary backdrop. 'And yet', says Hahn, 'this is an English poem'.<sup>10</sup> Though in style and genre O&N can scarcely be argued to represent any genuine continuity between the literature of pre- and post-conquest England, we shall see that the poem expresses what we might call a form of reactionary Englishness, for it consciously defines itself against the Latinate tradition which gave it life. To appreciate these more nationalistic aspects of O&N, we must first explore something of the literary, social, and educational contexts of the Latin tradition from which the poem sprang.

The Medieval Latin debate poems undoubtedly trace their origins to the classroom: in their representation of a *conflictus* between two opposing parties, the attention they pay to the mechanics of scholarly argument, and their general insistence on resolution, they appear to have been designed in order to train beginning students in the arts of dialectic and debate. The late-twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a virtual domination of the traditional liberal arts by these disciplines, and by the thirteenth century the formal *conflictus* had become the staple of university education in Europe. Students were instructed through disputation, examined through disputation and, upon graduation, began their statutory two years of teaching by presiding over a forty-day flood of disputations.<sup>11</sup> Their study of dialectic was essentially based on the *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* of Aristotle, which contained instruction on how to detect logical fallacies and construct arguments, exhibiting a strict, almost myopic attention to the *conduct* of debate. Little is said of the disputant's obligation to the truth, but only of the formal and rhetorical methods by which he might best his opponent. Within this educational culture of the *conflictus*, the vernacular languages initially had no place: all formal disputation was carried out in Latin, and in the context of their use as educational exercises it is little wonder why the Latin debate poems outnumber their more literary vernacular counterparts so vastly (the body-and-soul debate known as the *Visio Philiberti*, for example, survives in at least 136 different manuscripts). It is hard to believe that any educated person during this period could have been ignorant of them, and the poet of O&N certainly was not.<sup>12</sup> Time and again he exhibits his familiarity with many of the stock dichotomies of the Latin *conflictus*; the alignment of the two disputants with the seasons at O&N, 473-540, for example, draws on the same traditions as the Latin dialogues between Winter and Summer, and the general preoccupation of the contestants with determining who is the more useful to mankind also recalls similar preoccupations of the disputants in the famous Latin debate poem *Conflictus Ovis et*

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, xxxi.

Lini.<sup>13</sup>

Over time, these Latin debates developed into more than simple schoolroom exercises and began to constitute their own distinct literary genre. Although clearly still the work of learned writers, it seems that some were intended to amuse as much as to instruct, and many can be said to represent the reaction from, or the parody of, the sober pursuits of the schoolroom.<sup>14</sup> In many such debate poems, the egos of the disputants become more important than their beliefs and, in their light-hearted depiction of such bad debaters, these more subversive debate poems point to what was probably a reality of academic life then as it is now – that, in the context of an educational system dominated by the adversarial principles of the formal *conflictus*, the clash of scholarly personalities could often become more prominent than the clash of ideas.<sup>15</sup> Hume's interpretation of O&N along these lines, and her view of the poem as a 'burlesque-satire upon human contentiousness' opened a new and fruitful phase of the poem's critical reception, much of which is relevant to our discussion here.<sup>16</sup> Since Hume's proposal, scholarship has tended to move away from its original attempts to read the poem as an allegory and increasingly towards an approach which views O&N as 'a self-conscious commentary upon its own substance – that is, contentious discourse'.<sup>17</sup> Scholarly attempts to allocate a 'winner' for the debate, in particular, have now fallen out of fashion. Indeed, the more one reads over the poem, the more one realizes that its argument really starts nowhere and ends nowhere:

An aiþer azen oþer sval,  
& let þat vole mod ut al;  
& eiþer seide of oþeres custe  
þat alre worste þat hi wuste. (O&N, 7-10)

(And each of them swelled up against the other and vented all her malicious feelings, saying the very worst thing they could about their antagonist's character.)

From the outset, we are in no doubt that we are being presented with an *argumentum ad hominem* – or rather, *ad avem* – and that our disputants are less concerned with arguing any specific point than with attacking the other's 'custe' (character). The birds make nominal efforts to impose a structure upon their debate, but one gets the impression that this is done only so that they can better attack each other: the Nightingale may assert that they should proceed 'witute cheste & bute fizte' (without

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<sup>13</sup> Nicolas Jacobs, 'Conflictus Ovis et Lini: A Model for *The Owl and the Nightingale*?', *SELIM*, 4 (1994), 7-19 (11).

<sup>14</sup> James H. Hanford, 'Classical Eclogue and Medieval Debate', *Romantic Review*, 2 (1911), 16-31 (20).

<sup>15</sup> John W. Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology* (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1991), xviii.

<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Hume, *The Owl and the Nightingale: The Poem and its Critics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 102.

<sup>17</sup> Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, xix.

bickering and quarrelling), with 'rizte segge' (decorum), and 'sckile' (skill) (O&N, 183-86), but neither party sticks to these rules for long. The birds show themselves to be spiteful, vindictive, and dishonest, frequently falling into what Atkins called 'passages of indiscriminate revilings'.<sup>18</sup> This is clearly not an *ad hominem* attack arising from the heat of an otherwise civil debate, but an *ad hominem* attack which takes the formal *conflictus* as both its form and its excuse. The tit-for-tat nature of the birds' dispute is all part of its hilarity: having been accused of filthiness for allowing her chicks to defecate inside the nest at lines 91-138, the Owl flings the same accusation back at the Nightingale, pointing out that her own nest is built 'þar men worpeþ hore bihinde' (just where men stick out their behinds) (O&N, 596). She then accuses the Nightingale of eating 'fule wiztes' (filthy creatures) in the same manner as she herself was accused at lines 85-88. Their point-scoring exchange is not particularly edifying, but it is highly entertaining. Their pomposity, acrimoniousness, and illogic mark the birds out as fundamentally bad debaters; their dispute may range far and wide, touching on some of the greatest controversies of the day, but whether they are arguing about theology or adultery, their usefulness to man or the condition of their nests and scatological habits, we quickly notice that this is, as Hieatt said, a 'debate about nothing in particular which gets nowhere at a furious rate'.<sup>19</sup>

In many ways, the characters of the Owl and the Nightingale serve as realistic representations of the arbitrary and irrational ways in which people do actually argue and, to a large extent, their debate can be viewed as a light-hearted critique of the formal *conflictus* which was practised so obsessively in all aspects of medieval education, and in which a student's commitment to the 'truth' of any given debate was subsidiary to his ability to win an argument. O&N certainly seems to have been written by someone who had a particular concern with, and readiness to poke fun at, the arts of dialectic and debate as they were taught in medieval universities. This is conveyed by the narrator's comments on the Nightingale's thought process after her arguments have been successfully rebuffed by the Owl's speech at lines 549-658. Though she concedes to the soundness of the Owl's rhetorical defence and is now 'wel neȝ ut of rede' (almost completely at a loss what to say), she is obliged to press on with the dispute nonetheless:

Herto ho moste andswere uinde,  
 Oþer mid alle bon bihinde;  
 An hit is suþe strong to figte  
 Aȝen soþ & aȝen rizt. (O&N, 665-68)

(She had to find an answer to this, or else be placed at a disadvantage in everything; and it's a pretty difficult thing

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<sup>18</sup> J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), liv.

<sup>19</sup> Constance Hieatt, 'The Subject of the Mock-Debate Between the Owl and the Nightingale', *Studia Neophilologica*, 40 (1968), 155-60 (159).

to fight against what is truthful and correct.)

Cartlidge sees this, and the other frequent insights into the birds' thoughts as the argument develops, as a device used 'simply to demand attention for the poem by insisting on the delicacy of the situation and the rhetorical virtuosity with which the protagonists handle it'.<sup>20</sup> However I would argue that these allusions make perhaps the poem's fundamental point in their portrayal of the absurd, fixed adversity demanded by the process of the formal *conflictus* which often required its participants to argue 'ažen soþ & ažen rihte' (against what is truthful and correct) in order to win an argument. This reading of O&N as a 'mock-debate' assumes an author with some experience of the university system of formal disputation and, in this context, I would suggest that the possibility of a student audience, perhaps even a student author, is not unthinkable. The deferral of judgement to the mysterious 'Maister Nichole of Guldeforde' certainly reflects the formal processes of the university *conflictus* where determination was reserved for the master alone, and whatever the relation of Nicholas to the poem (some have proposed him as its author), perhaps the most important point to draw from his appearance in the text is the obvious association it makes with university life by use of the title 'maister'. If we can indeed trace the origins of O&N to a university environment then, we must explain the strangest fact of its existence: that it is written in the English vernacular, and not in the institutional Latin of the classroom.

In attempting to discern the ultimate message of the poem's far-ranging debates, Stanley stated that if the poet 'had something fundamental to communicate on these subjects he would have written in Latin'.<sup>21</sup> He takes the fact of its existence in the English vernacular as justification for viewing O&N as a fundamentally light-hearted and unserious piece. While I do not necessarily disagree with Stanley's assessment, I would suggest that although the poet may not have had any particularly serious points to make on the subjects which arise in his debate, there is the possibility that he did have something more 'fundamental' to say about the nature of debate itself. This was precisely something he could *not* say, at such length and with such cheek, in the Latin language of the institution he was currently engaged in laughing at. In many ways, the English vernacular was the essential vehicle for the O&N poet's parody of formal scholastic debate, the practice of which was synonymous with the Latin culture of the universities. This is not to say that Latin debate poems could not themselves contain satirical or burlesque elements. Jacobs, for example, points out that *Conflictus Ovis et Lini* shares something of our English poem's taste for 'gratuitous scatology', but O&N develops at such length and with such 'disconcerting enthusiasm' what is the subject of a veiled reference at lines 11-12 in the Latin piece as to make these elements stand out particularly strongly in our English poem.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the status of Latin and Anglo-Norman during this period, the use of the

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<sup>20</sup> Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald Stanley, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (London: Nelson, 1960), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Jacobs, 'Conflictus Ovis et Lini', 15.

English vernacular seems often to have been marked by 'a certain crudity', and it was perhaps this aspect of the language which the poet of O&N found most suited to his purposes.<sup>23</sup> He parodies the ugliness and absurdity of the adversarial impulses lying behind the formal *conflictus* in a fluently colloquial, vernacular idiom which he uses to maintain an important linguistic distance from his satirical object. There are more elements of direct obscenity in O&N than in other Latin debates which we might call 'parodic', and which are generally more consciously learned and elaborately wordy in their humour.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, O&N's extended portrayal of the 'dirty side' of formal scholastic disputation – ending with the Owl's spiteful exclamation 'a tort ne zive ich for ow alle' (I don't give a turd for the lot of you) – is necessarily carried out in English. The use of the vernacular allows the poet of O&N to break the linguistic boundaries of the formal *conflictus* and laugh at it from the outside.

And yet, in his use of the English vernacular the poet of O&N achieves much more than simply to poke fun at the Latinate culture of formal debate which prevailed in medieval universities. As well as providing the perfect vehicle for his parody, the use of the English language also presented him with a perfect opportunity to experiment with the literary potentials of his native tongue *vis-à-vis* the Latin tradition. According to Evans, the growth of vernacular literatures in Europe during this period was often characterised by a readiness to demonstrate their ability 'to do anything Latin can do'.<sup>25</sup> I would argue that this impulse is certainly present in O&N. In a way, the very length of the dispute in O&N – far longer than in most Latin debate poems – conveys the poet's belief in the potential of English, for he takes obvious delight in showcasing it as a language of energetic debate in as many fields as possible. Holsinger has recently drawn attention to the way the poet partly revives, and partly invents, 'a heterogeneous and amalgamated legal lexicon' which he puts into the mouths of his disputants to show the technical capabilities of the vernacular as a medium for debate, and much has been said of aspects of the poem's use of Latinate rhetoric, particularly strong in passages such as lines 659-706.<sup>26</sup> As discussed above, the basic training in medieval schools was in the use of the language of dialectic, and the techniques learned there could be applied from Latin to the more difficult task of creating styles for writing in the vernacular. This is what Short referred to as 'the vernacularisation of learning' which was witnessed throughout Europe during the twelfth century, and I would argue that in many ways O&N can be seen as a part of this process.<sup>27</sup> However, what is perhaps more interesting than the ways in which O&N declares itself the 'English equal' to the Latin debate poem is the manner in which it asserts its *difference* from Latin tradition and, in doing so, defines itself as a piece of distinctly 'English' literature.

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<sup>23</sup> Watson, 'The Politics of Middle English Writing', 332.

<sup>24</sup> Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, xxxii.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth Evans, 'The Notion of Vernacular Theory', in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, 314-31 (322).

<sup>26</sup> Holsinger, 'Vernacular Legality', 162.

<sup>27</sup> Ian Short, 'Patrons and Polyglots: French Literature in Twelfth-Century England', in *Anglo-Norman Studies 14: Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies, 1991*, ed. by Marjorie Chibnall (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992) 229-49 (231).

If the works of the Latin debate tradition are 'consciously learned', then in many ways O&N is consciously *unlearned*.<sup>28</sup> The poet's knowledge of the formal processes of debate, his legal, theological, and rhetorical wherewithal, and familiarity with the great academic questions of his day mark him out as an educated man, and yet this is all at odds with the seemingly uneducated mentality of his poem's protagonists. An integral element of the university *conflictus*, and of the debate poems concerned with portraying its processes, was the citing of a wide range of authorities in support of one's argument. *The Thrush and the Nightingale* – generally regarded as a close (if disappointing) English descendent to O&N – is the perfect example of a vernacular debate poem which closely follows the conventions of the Latin tradition in terms the citing of authority. Its disputants reference figures from classical, biblical, and literary sources, citing 'Alisaundre þe king', 'Adam, oure furste man', and 'Saumsun þe stronge' amongst others in support of their arguments.<sup>29</sup> Likewise the poet of the *Petit Plet*, a French debate which circulates alongside O&N in both manuscripts, has his disputants utilize proverbial material which they attribute to 'Catun enseinne', an archetypal figure of wisdom from the classical world.<sup>30</sup> Nowhere in O&N does either disputant make such explicit appeal to biblical, patristic, or classical authority, and this absence is indeed notable in an age which valued textual precedence so highly. The only authority which the birds cite is that of King Alfred, to whom were attributed the English collections of proverbial wisdom known as *The Proverbs of Alfred*. Though the *Proverbs* do not contain any particularly unique material, being drawn mainly from Old Testament sources and other collections such as Cato's *Distichs*, they can certainly be viewed as expressions of the 'vernacularisation of learning' which was seen during the twelfth century. This collection survives in four manuscripts, a relatively high number for the period, and their existence attests to a vigorous interest among contemporary English writers in translating classical and biblical wisdom into the vernacular. In doing so, they attributed that wisdom to the most learned and, more importantly, the most *English* figure they could find in their history: it is not Cato, Alexander, or Samson who imparts knowledge in the *Proverbs*, but King Alfred. Not only does Alfred function as a kind of 'English Solomon' in his capacity as a wise king, but also as an icon of national identity and vernacular learning.<sup>31</sup> His reputation as a translator – indeed, as the leader of his own process of 'vernacularisation' in the ninth century – endured well beyond his lifetime, and would have been particularly obvious to university students. Patristic texts like the *Soliloquies* of Augustine and the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great formed an integral part of their study of dialectic and debate, and the lines of transmission of these works from classical to medieval dialogue are exceedingly clear, thanks in large part to the labours of King Alfred himself in translating them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, xxxii.

<sup>29</sup> Conlee, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, 143.

<sup>30</sup> Brian S. Merrilees, ed., *Le Petit Plet*, ANTS 35 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 163.

<sup>32</sup> Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, 101.

In his own capacity as a 'vernaculariser' then, it is little wonder that the poet of O&N chose King Alfred as the voice of authority for his poem. The first of the fourteen proverbs which the birds ascribe to him is particularly interesting when thinking about aspects of vernacular English identity in O&N:

A wis word, þe3 hit bo unclene,  
Is fele manne a muþe imene,  
For Alured king hit seide & wrot:  
'He schunnet þat hine vul wot'. (O&N, 233-36)

(There's a wise saying that many people commonly repeat [even though it's indelicate], which is derived from the conversation and writings of King Alfred: whosoever's aware of their own foulness hides away.)

Cartlidge stated that 'it is not entirely clear why the Nightingale should think that the saying [...] is *unclene*'.<sup>33</sup> However, I suggest that we should read this allusion as an indication of O&N's consciousness of its own status as a vernacular production, and of the distinctiveness it asserts for itself by choosing to quote an English icon as its source of authority. Proverbial sayings in English may have been regarded as somewhat 'unclene' (indelicate), but in the context of O&N's vernacularisation of the Latin tradition of debate-poetry, we are told from the outset that the distinctly English authority of King Alfred will occupy a central place. There is perhaps even a certain nationalistic nostalgia evident in the Nightingale's reference at line 686 to the enduring influence of one of Alfred's sayings – 'an 3ut hit nis of horte islide' (one that has yet to slip from people's hearts). Although there is nothing intrinsically English about proverbial sayings in general, at times the poet even seems to use language suggestive of the pre-conquest tradition of Anglo-Saxon wisdom literature, telling 'euch mon' (every man) to place these sayings 'on horde' (in the hoard), using a phrase which harks back to that Old English concept of the 'wordhord' as the storehouse of orally-circulated wisdom (O&N, 1749).

In its strange lack of reference to any of the conventional authorities of Latin tradition, I believe Cartlidge hits the nail on the head in reminding us of the 'possibility that the poem's discourses were deliberately constructed precisely in order to seem as if they owed nothing directly to literary tradition'.<sup>34</sup> This is exactly the point, for in asserting its uniqueness, O&N asserts too a form of reactionary Englishness. The poem may be so thickly sown with proverbs and maxims that it can be viewed, in Hinckley's words, as a 'monument of gnomic literature', but it is important to note that whilst the language of this monument's inscription was English,

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<sup>33</sup> Cartlidge, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, xl.

much of its matter was drawn from Anglo-Norman and Latin sources.<sup>35</sup> And yet, these sources remain invisible in the text. Cartlidge argues that the poet's telling of the fable of the Owl and the Falcon, for example, follows the version of the Anglo-Norman poet Marie de France so closely that it is hard to believe that he did not know her work, yet no indication of her influence is given.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, most of the sayings ascribed to Alfred cannot be verified in our surviving copies of the *Proverbs*, and it is probably the case that the poet was, in many instances, attempting to 'vernacularise' the wise sayings of Latin authors by simply attributing them to Alfred. The immediate source for the proverb at lines 945-50, for example, was probably the saying found in Cato's *Distichs* – 'impedit ira animum, ne possit cernere verum' (anger so clouds the mind that it cannot perceive the truth).<sup>37</sup> This consistent and pointed lack of reference to the non-English sources to which the poem is clearly indebted shows the relentless preoccupation of O&N with asserting its identity as a piece of *English* writing. Here we have the structure of the formal Latin *conflictus* stripped bare of all its otherwise Latinate features, with biblical, classical, and patristic authorities subordinated to, or transformed into, English ones.

It is for these reasons that we should view the poet of O&N as perhaps our earliest example of someone who truly appreciated what it meant to write in the vernacular. Compared to those other writers who composed in English at the turn of the thirteenth century, he seems truly unique. His decision to write in English was not purely practical in the same way as, say, the texts of the *Katherine Group*, which were designed for delivery to a mass audience simply unable to understand Latin. Neither was it in an attempt to perpetuate the remnants of an Old English literary tradition, as we see in the *Brut*. For the authors of these texts, the choice to write in the vernacular was far more natural than for the poet of O&N, who was working within the bounds of a fundamentally Latinate tradition. It is true that, to a large extent, English was the only language which could sustain his outrageous satire of that tradition, but his poem also stands as an early example of the methods by which an English poet could assert the potentials of his language as a sophisticated, creative medium alongside those of Anglo-Norman and Latin. In our lively poem of debate between Owl and Nightingale we witness the emergence of a fledgling English literary voice, heavily indebted to Latinate influence and yet eager to stand on its own two feet. It will take at least another century to reach its maturity, but we will ultimately hear its resonances in the work of Chaucer himself.

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Hinckley, 'The Date, Author and Sources of *The Owl and the Nightingale*', *PMLA*, 44 (1929), 329-59 (343).

<sup>36</sup> Cartlidge, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, xxxiii.

<sup>37</sup> Arnold M. Duff, *Minor Latin Poets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 604.

John Cannon and Beth Williamson (eds.), *The Medieval Art, Architecture and history of Bristol Cathedral: An Enigma Explored* (Boydell, 2011) ISBN 9781843836803 (Hardback); 476 pages; £60.

Encountering the east end of Bristol Cathedral for the first time is to be reminded of the exceptional inventiveness, wit, and imagination that marked the greatest European architecture of the period. From the last decade of the thirteenth century, and for the first time since various familiar forms had coalesced into the Gothic style in France in the 1140s, the locus of architectural invention moved to England as a series of major projects were conducted in London and elsewhere. The sober, lofty, graceful architecture of the thirteenth century became lush, inventive, and luxurious. Lines which were once straightforward curves and parallels were transformed into double curves ('ogees'), twists, and floral ornamentation. At Bristol alone there are at least seven different types of arch, as well as probably the earliest 'nodding ogee'. Microarchitecture proliferated, filling what would once have been empty walls with fiddly, rippling canopies and vaults. The name given to the style by nineteenth-century antiquarians is unusually apt: 'Decorated'.

Bristol, like so much built in England from around 1290 to the late fourteenth century, is thrilling to visit. The architecture feels clever, complex, and urban, even cosmopolitan, without being mannerist. It takes delight in its own ingenuity and richness, a strong aesthetic answer to any erroneous modern ideas that medieval churches were great bare masses of stone.

Such is the architectural historian's concern with the origins and genesis of forms, however, that Bristol's claim to architectural importance, rather than quality alone, lies in its dating. If the east end belongs to 1298, as its first great modern champion, Nikolaus Pevsner, claimed then it is in the vanguard of the Decorated style and of exceptional inventiveness. If it is of the 1320s, as a detailed monograph on the work by Richard K. Morris suggests, then it is just one clever-clogs design among many.

That this question is still unresolved might seem surprising. Thirty years is a big difference after all, and indeed, no other comparably important church of this period is so poorly dated. One of the most significant essays in this new collection is a forensic examination by Christopher Wilson into the dating of the east end and its role in the development of English and European architecture. Wilson combines documentation and archaeology to argue persuasively for the earlier date, and therefore against Morris's analysis. In doing so he returns the cathedral, or at least its choir, to the centre of questions about the development of English, or even European, architecture.

Attached to the issue of dates are two other points of controversy: the number of master masons, or architects, and with it the number of design changes; and the question of which design sources the church draws upon. Wilson argues for a fast building time, with less space for design changes. More importantly, he argues that sources for the church were not limited to Exeter and Hereford Cathedrals in the

southwest but include designs in eastern England that proceed from the radical inventions of Michael of Canterbury, in turn brilliantly reinvented from French Rayonnant architecture. Claiming Michael as a source for Bristol (although for the liberated use of a multitude of forms and ideas in a single church, rather than for specific features) is in opposition to Morris's claims for regional sources alone. Michael was the doyen of contemporary English architects and designer of much of St Stephen's Chapel in Westminster Palace in 1291-92, now destroyed above crypt level (which is free to visit) but the source of much of the design ideas that dominated English architecture for the following 250 years.

To focus exclusively on Wilson's chapter is, however, to miss some of the most important contributions this book makes to the study of the cathedral as part of the development of English architecture. The scene setting is relatively brief – John McNeil's chapter comprehensively lays out the evidence for the structure of the earliest abbey church. The first building was fairly large and vaulted throughout, and McNeil expounds on the important Chapter House and gatehouse. Interesting too is the historical context for its foundation by the important abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris. Roger Leech provides an account of both the abbey's economic relationship with the town and the early history of the site, including the obscure but enduring cult of St Jordan.

Built as an Augustinian abbey outside the centre of Bristol beginning in the 1140s and stretching over the next few decades, the church did not become a cathedral until after the Reformation. As a mid-ranking religious house, Bristol is of particular interest – so few survived the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s that those that did are important for what they reveal about monastic architecture away from the great monastic cathedrals. Indeed, their high architectural quality (consider, for example, other Augustinian foundations such as Oxford Cathedral, Southward Cathedral, and St Bartholomew-the-Great in Smithfield) suggests the importance attached to these institutions. Jon Canon provides as comprehensive a survey as possible of links between documented acts of generosity to the abbey by the Berkeley family and dated works of construction in the early fourteenth century.

Julian Luxford's analysis of the substantial amount of late medieval work at Bristol, of lesser architectural significance than the 1298 campaign but indicative of a thriving monastic culture (a point also made in James G. Clark's interesting chapter, regarding training, polyphony, and economy, if not academic achievement), is both long overdue and highly important. Luxford's survey of the tower, transepts, nave, cloister, and main gate, as well as other image making in the cathedral, are important contributions to the study of late medieval monastic architecture, while his study of the documentation regarding patronage places the abbey, and not the Berkeleys, at the forefront of providing funds. Of particular note, moreover, are the two choir aisle reredoses, of which I was unaware, and Luxford's accounts of the iconography of the gate and transepts (including a boss of Edward II, looking over his shoulder like a coquettish glamour model and exposing his anus).

The story of the abbey's transformation into a cathedral by Joseph Bettey is

important (probably some rather cunning courting of Cromwell was involved) and invites wider study of other buildings. The reordering of the interior and the destruction of the nave makes for a sad chapter even in a monastic church that survived. Catherine Oakes' account of the unusual survival of Reformation era wall paintings in the Old Deanery sheds new light on image making in a period of religious conflict, often iconoclastic.

Paul Crossley's magnificently erudite examination of the intellectual context for Pevsner's ground-breaking analysis of Bristol's precocity in the 1940s (which accounts for much of the cathedral's reception today) reminds us just how sober-minded modern scholarship is. Gone are the rich, subjective descriptions of walking through long ecclesiastical spaces, and in its place are close analyses of archaeological and documentary evidence. This is as true of scholars working in traditions based in archaeology (McNeil or Luxford in this volume) or the analysis of documents (the most 'theoretical' piece, by Sarah Jane Boss, chronicling the identification of Mary with 'Wisdom' or its house). As Crossley points out, however, Pevsner's analysis of Bristol as a precocious example of the late medieval German hall church is just, well, wrong.

If only every great church could receive a scholarly work on this scale, covering not just its architectural and artistic history but an analysis of its historiography, and geographical and intellectual context. Bristol Cathedral may, however, be peculiarly suitable for study, because of its exceptional fourteenth-century architecture and its overlooked earlier and later histories. I would encourage any prospective PhD student scouting for ideas to read Beth Williamson's epilogue – there cannot be many more promising objects of study than this church, the medieval Augustinian order or the development of English architecture around and after 1290.

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Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (eds.), *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition* (Brepols, 2013) ISBN 978-2-503-54276-8; x + 509 pages; EUR 120.

This volume concerns the corpus of Middle English devotional works deriving from the (probably) early fourteenth-century Latin meditational text on the life of Christ, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (MVC). Of Franciscan origin – or at the very least bearing strong witness to Franciscan affiliation – the MVC was throughout the Middle Ages misattributed to Bonaventure, whose borrowed authority helped to ensure its longevity. Widely disseminated throughout Europe, its impact on late medieval devotional practice was incalculable, not least in England where vernacular translations and adaptations abounded. Especially significant among these was Nicholas Love's early fifteenth-century version, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which was famously endorsed (c. 1410) by Archbishop Thomas Arundel in his campaign against Lollardy.

*The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ* is another hefty volume in the burgeoning Brepols Medieval Church Studies series that has already given us several important essay collections on late medieval devotional issues in England, including most recently Kantik Ghosh and Vincent Gillespie's *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England* (2011). As in that book, the focus here is chiefly on orthodoxy and on the richness and variety of devotional practice that the very term orthodoxy has sometimes obscured. The volume derives, in fact, from the Queen's Belfast-St Andrews University 'Geographies of Orthodoxy' research project, which culminated in a 2010 conference at Queen's entitled 'Mapping the English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ, c.1350-1550'. The project has also given rise to two further Brepols volumes that complement the one under review here: Ian Johnson's monograph *The Middle English Life of Christ: Academic Discourse, Translation and Vernacular Theology* (2013), and Ryan Perry and Steven Kelly's forthcoming collection *Diuerse Imaginaciouns of Cristes Life: Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Beyond*.

Following a fairly brief introduction, Johnson and Westphall's volume is divided into three sections: 'History and Ideology', 'Manuscript Culture', and 'Textual Relations'. The last two are much bulkier than the first, and the emphasis of the book is primarily codicological and textual, though a number of the essays do address some of the broader conceptual issues raised in important recent studies of affective reading in the meditative tradition, including those by Jennifer Bryan, Nicole Rice, Sarah McNamer, and Michelle Karnes. Overall, it must be said, the structure and organization of the volume is slightly perplexing, and one or two of the essays seem to be only tangentially connected to the main theme.

The first section comprises just two articles, where one might have hoped for a more substantial discussion of the historical and ideological backdrop to this large and complex subject. Mishtooni Bose's essay on the far from straightforward relationship between orthodox and dissenting versions of *imitatio Christi* is nevertheless a trenchant and nuanced piece which takes issue with David Aers's somewhat

polarized characterization of these matters in his and Lynn Staley's 1996 book, *The Powers of the Holy*. The first essay, however, is Rob Lutton's piece on the late medieval controversy surrounding contemporary enthusiasm for devotion to the Name of Jesus. Fascinating though this is – not least in relation to Nicholas Love's apparently ambivalent attitude to the Name of Jesus as evidenced by the *Mirror* – it seems a relatively narrow topic with which to open the book.

Lutton's is in fact one of four essays concerned mainly with Love's *Mirror*, but rather strangely these are scattered throughout the book's three sections rather than given a section of their own. Studies by Ryan Perry, David J. Falls, and Ian Johnson offer salutary correctives to a number of received ideas about Love's popular and important text. Johnson's is another essay with a narrow focus, demonstrating that Love's Proheme to the *Mirror* does not merely allude to Augustine's *De agone christiano*, as was previously thought, but instead makes extensive use of it. This rather specific issue is in fact a part of his larger project – outlined more fully in his monograph, already cited – to show that 'vernacular theology', the term introduced by Nicholas Watson in 1995 and now ubiquitous in discussions of the period, is seriously misunderstood if it is regarded as being always in simple opposition to Latinate, clerical learning. Falls argues that we need to pay much more attention to the Carthusian milieu in which Love's work originated: some of the stylistic revisions of the MVC that Michelle Karnes has recently attributed to Love's theological conservatism may, Falls suggests, be better accounted for by the fact that he was adapting a Franciscan text for a specific readership of Carthusian novices at the Mount Grace Charterhouse where he was prior. It was only at a later stage, when Arundel gave it his imprimatur, that an adapted version of the *Mirror* began to be more widely circulated among a lay readership. Perry's focus is on the way Love's text may have actually been used in practice. Invoking Michel de Certeau's model of the reader as a nomadic poacher – a model whose relevance to the Pseudo-Bonaventuran corpus he judiciously weighs up – Perry looks for manuscript and other evidence for the various ways the *Mirror* may have been accessed by 'spiritually ambitious' lay readers, either as a whole or (as foreseen by Love himself) in parts. He argues further that the text should not be seen 'only, or perhaps even primarily, as a meditative text in the affective mould', but as one which is also a 'work of *pastoralia*', 'an introductory step to would-be practitioners of the mixed life', and which offered a lay version of Carthusian devotional practice comparable to the kind of DIY lay monasticism offered by books of hours.

Johnson and Westphall's book also contains substantial essays by two especially distinguished scholars in the field: Michael Sargent, editor of the critical edition of Love's *Mirror* (2005), and Vincent Gillespie, whose numerous articles on late medieval devotional and bibliographic culture have been consistently enlightening. Both have interesting things to say here, but in neither case does their contribution directly address the topic of Middle English lives of Christ. In 'Fatherless Books', Gillespie treats with characteristic acumen and wit the general issue of deliberate misattribution: the circulation in fifteenth-century England of potentially

controversial texts under the assumed credentials of ideologically 'safe' authors, Richard Rolle pre-eminent among them. The MVC circulated widely under Bonaventure's name, of course, but it is not even mentioned by Gillespie. Sargent's essay is also somewhat tangential, his own credentials as Love's modern editor notwithstanding. In 'Organic and Cybernetic Metaphors for Manuscript Relations' he gives us a valuable, learned, and entertainingly illustrated overview of the history of stemmatics and cladistics, together with a conspectus of his own views – formed over forty years as a textual critic of Middle English texts – on both 'the new philology' and the digital future of the critical edition. He discusses a number of important cases in the history of editing medieval texts, including the Kane-Donaldson edition of *Piers Plowman* and the online Canterbury Tales Project. It's a wonderful piece, drawing also on his own recent experience as editor of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. (Anyone seeking an explanation of the length of time it has taken to produce a critical edition of Hilton's text will be well rewarded here.) However, the justification for the essay taking up 68 pages in this particular volume seems doubtful at best.

Among the remaining studies, the most conceptually adventurous and interesting is Allan Westphall's subtle investigation of the concept of spiritual 'sikernesse' in *The Prickyng of Love*, a text which Westphall is prepared to attribute to Walter Hilton. The *Prickyng* is not a version of the MVC, but a translation of another Franciscan text that was sometimes attributed to Bonaventure, the *Stimulis Amoris*. Though it is not a narrative life of Christ, Westphall makes a good case for its relevance to this volume. Following in the wake of Kathryn Kerby-Fulton's work on the cautiously tolerant reception of continental spirituality in late medieval England, Westphall reads the text as 'a treatise on the hermeneutics of Passion meditation' and therefore as a kind of how-to 'companion text [...] to the linear lives of Christ'. He sees the text's preoccupation with 'sikernesse' – which might be glossed as something like 'cautious confidence' as well as 'spiritual safety' – as crucial for understanding its ideological positioning and its concern to guard against the 'potentially deviant ... impulses' precipitated by spiritual ambition.

The other contributions can be more briefly summarized: John J. Thompson considers the place of the MVC-derived *Privoty of the Passion* in Robert Thornton's manuscript miscellanies; Amanda Moss examines a London manuscript containing *The Rule of the Life of Our Lady*, a translation of MVC chapter three; while William Marx discusses the *Liber Aureus and Gospel of Nicodemus*, an overlooked text in which a partial translation of the MVC is spliced together with translated extracts from the Latin apocryphal gospel. The other essays deal with texts that are not actually derived directly from the MVC and might therefore have been better grouped with Westphall's contribution in a separate section: Catherine Innes-Parker offers an intriguing analysis of the little-known Middle English translation of the *Lignum Vitae*, a Latin 'life of Christ' that really was by Bonaventure, though very different from the MVC; and Mary Raschko writes about the Middle English Gospel harmony *Oon of Foure*, a translation from the Latin harmony *Unum ex Quattuor* and a text which, she argues, falls somewhere between meditative life of Christ and Wycliffite scriptural

translation. Finally, as an adjunct to her recent monograph on book production at Syon Abbey in the early sixteenth-century, Alexandra da Costa contributes a fascinating essay on John Fewterer's *Mirror or Glass of Christ's Passion* (1534), a translation not of the MVC, but of Ulrich Pinder's MVC-influenced Latin text *Speculum Passionis Christi* (first printed in 1507). However, since this is the only essay to address material from the sixteenth century, and very much in the context of Reformation controversies, it seems odd not to find it at the end of the volume.

*The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ* certainly provides a wealth of new scholarship that greatly enhances our understanding of this complex corpus of texts. It therefore seems churlish to cavil. Nevertheless, the rationale for the contents and structure of the book as a whole – explained only very cursorily in the introduction – does sometimes seem a strange one and the final impression is that the book falls slightly short of being the coherent and definitive guide to the subject that it might otherwise have been.

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Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) ISBN 978-0-268-03611-9 (Paperback); 416 pages; \$42.

What Barbara Newman proposes in *Medieval Crossover* is nothing less than a new paradigm for reading medieval literature. Her primary hermeneutic is that of the 'principle of double judgment' she finds both of use to the modern critic and inherent in theology and exegesis in the Middle Ages. This principle, threaded through the book, is one of 'both/and'; it permits the sacred and her various forms of the 'profane' to be understood as united in textual and intellectual symbiosis. As in the motet, her 'crossover genre *par excellence*', a sacred *cantus firmus* – the tenor voice which intones a liturgical phrase – is both foundational and yet strangely in counterpoint to middle and upper voices singing longer, and perhaps themselves contrasting, vernacular lyrics. The whole tones precisely as it contrasts, melds, and agrees in a harmony musically dependent on difference. Newman finds this type of situation, with all its interpretative dilemmas, more the medieval rule than the exception.

Gorgeously written, full of piquantly scented and coloured phrases and paradoxes, this book is a garden to be walked through not just by medievalists alone. Indeed it stands as a contribution to the cross-disciplinary secularization debate in its own right. For if the holy and the seemingly unholy engage and co-contribute even in the normatively sacred Middle Ages, this surely opens the way to a more capacious understanding of sacred content in later literature – although this is to read deliberately against Newman's rather provocative foreclosure of 'crossover' in the early modern period. Identifying such a complex sacred-secular 'spectrum' implicitly questions the existence of an end-closed 'secular'. Along the way, she provides fruitful new readings of old and well-carved oaks: engaging with the convergence and divergence of Celtic pagan and Christian chivalric strands in Arthurian romance through *Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charette*, *Percesvale*, the *Queste del Graal*, and the ending of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Newman also cultivates some fertile new crosses; the heresy-accused mystic Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* is located in the soil of a diverse Picard literary culture, and as cross-pollinating with the ecstatic poetry of the Béguines, and even with the 'profoundly profane' *Roman de la Rose* – and its many sacralizations. She introduces us to some rarer and more dangerous strains in her chapter on parody: the *Lai d'Ignaure*, the Middle French *Dispute between God and his Mother*, and the poisonous bloom that is the Latin *Passion of the Jews of Prague*. Finally she renews two old varieties; her last chapter unravels the complementarity of René d'Anjou's devotional and amorous allegories, the *Mortifiement de Vaine Plaisance*, and the *Livre du Cœur Epris*. Demonstrably here, Newman's medievalism is firmly European, acknowledging vernacular exchange and English francophonia as well as latinity.

D.W. Robertson's infamous 'exegetical' approach risked viewing the Middle Ages itself as *hortus conclusus*, as a fair enclosed garden of moral and hermeneutic alterity. Within this garden, all critical interpretation tended towards his

understanding of allegoresis as a perfect decoding: no tree could grow that was not also either tree of life or tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He read with what he considered to be the correct, and medieval, mode of interpretation after Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. This meant a 'wheat-and-chaff hermeneutics' whereby the form exists only for the sacred content, the husk only for the aesthetic pleasure of the hulling. Robertson's readings tended to fetch forth *either* deep irony *or* deep sacrality, charity upheld or cupidity revealed. For Newman the main problem is that, in the wake of the rejection of Robertsonianism, there has been something of a scorched earth policy on these questions. Whilst many cultivators are working individually at their plots, the terrain has been barren of any fresh attempts to posit large-scale interpretative paradigms. In the vacuum, she suggests at points, have arisen the alternatives of either literary 'subversion' whereby texts are archly and in anachronistically modern manner read to be working against the sacred 'norms' or the endlessly mobile and infinitely differentiated Middle Ages, a permanent indeterminacy which can exercise its own effective tyranny. Where others have been tempted to either to tear Robertson's garden to pieces or to question its existence Newman, refreshingly, picks up the rake.

Newman rightly realises that a proper critical return to 'exegetical criticism' requires a new account of medieval exegesis. The relationship of scriptural reading modes to literary ones cannot be got rid of; texts such as Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande* tell us explicitly that vernacular poets could suggest their work be read using a typological process. Newman joins a recent array of critics concerned with the both/and, the paradox, and the irony innate in medieval exegesis and allegoresis: Sarah Kay, Catherine Brown, and Larry Scanlon, to cite just a few. What is particularly innovative here is that she argues that the very division we find in reading medieval texts – which can appear to be between the possibilities of a 'profane' or secular versus a 'sacred' sense – is paralleled, if not originated, in both exegetical practice *and* the theological ideas which underlie and inform it. Her 'principle of double judgment' is rooted in fundamentally theological ground as she points out that salvation history itself involves a 'doubleness' principle, and hence a possibility of double-reading, in the idea of the 'fortunate fall'. The theological principle of *felix culpa* is that by which the narrative of the fall is necessarily a part of the narrative of salvation: the way down is the way up. Second – and evidently in a related fashion – reading the *sensus mysticus* in scripture frequently involves interpretation 'against' the literal 'grain' with its perhaps self-evident immorality. Hence David's adultery with Bathsheba can be, mystically, the rejection of the old law for the new. Exegesis in Newman's account envelopes and even *celebrates* such paradoxes – and suggests the distinct possibility that medieval readers would find the both/and had a certain sense – just as they could read both in moral and mystical senses.

After Newman's first chapter 'Theorizing Crossover', which introduces her paradigm, Chapter Two, 'Double Coding' applies this approach to the Old French and Middle English Arthurian texts listed above. Here she argues that both the 'wheat' of the sacred and the 'chaff' or the erotic or the comedic must be taken seriously.

Newman's readings of Lancelot in the *Morte* and the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, for example, challenge the sense that he must be *either* an erotic hero *or* a perhaps allegorical ideal of Christian chivalry *or* an adulterous anti-hero. Lancelot's quest in the latter to rescue Guinevere from the giant Meleagant includes Christ-like elements of humiliation and ordeal, but is also at times ribaldly comic and – of course – is at the plot-level a story of adultery. C.S. Lewis celebratedly found the moment of the *Charrette* where Lancelot kneels before the 'altar' of Guinevere's bed, the most 'ridiculous' of all in what he still thought of as the 'Religion of Love'. The (in)famous Jacques Ribard reading deals with the problem of a Christianized erotic by a 'Song of Songs' reading, interpreting the whole as a spiritual allegory of the spiritual union of the Soul or the Church with Christ. Robertson's moralistic rather than mystical interpretation draws the inverse conclusion – that the sacred elements are only there as a raucous and biting funny indictment of the deeply anti-Christ-like mode of Lancelot's cupidity. Newman takes new steps here not just with this one text but with the entire question of the relationship between the discourses of profane and sacred love. The text remains both/and: 'Lancelot's love is sublime *and* idolatrous, his behaviour heroic *and* ridiculous.' What is particularly interesting is that Newman seems genuinely to be attempting to navigate between both the danger of reading in only a sacred or only an ironic sense *and* that of culminating in an amorphous open-ended postmodern preference for the text's ahistorical infinite polysemism. The both/and is a hermeneutic that is at the outset based in theological ideas – although perhaps here one feels that Newman could carry her own *felix culpa* argument further. Fallen nature nuances questions of 'justice' and can question a moral perfection so rigidly felt it refuses space for gracious action – such as that of Gawain before his encounter with the Green Knight. One could argue that the double judgment on Lancelot has a great deal to do with the realization that our sinful natures are the means of our redemption, and that it is human 'doubleness' – divine potential in fleshly form – with which this literature is concerned.

In Chapter Three, 'Conversion', Newman demonstrates the historicism of her approach by engaging with the particular context of Marguerite Porete and the Picard literary culture of her time. In Porete's home town of Valenciennes in the fourteenth-century, literary and religious fraternities called *puy*s ('podiums') *de nostre dame* ran poetical, musical, and dramatic competitions based around the composition of the love song proper – the *amoureuse* – and its sacralization and burlesquing in the *serventois* and *sotte chansons* respectively. Newman finds this a convincingly shaded and blended backdrop against which to read Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*. Certainly Porete's 'courtly' tales and dialogues are pressed into mystical service, but Newman is also arguing here for a parallel development and a mutual borrowing of ideas central to the 'metaphysics' of both one and the other love. So she finds in the poetry of the *trouvères* ideas suspiciously akin to Marguerite's of the abandonment and annihilation of the self – for the distantiated 'other' of the lover rather than the divine. I would question this reading only to wonder whether the texts on romantic love, precisely by refusing to cast out intermediate human charity as Porete's perfected soul

finally does, do not pull these ideas *back* from her arguable quietism. The final flourish in this chapter is to argue for a surprising ‘convergence’ of the *Roman de la Rose* and Porete’s *Miroir*. Both the Lover and Porete’s Free Soul depart from Reason and the Virtues for Love – in the one case to lift the soul above, making her mistress of servant virtues, and in the other, eventually, to cause the Lover to sink into a spiral of sin and lechery. Newman argues that both the *Roman* and the *Miroir* are engaged with debates of their age. It is well known that the *Roman* mocks the possibility of a spiritualised *fin’amor*, for its spiritualising allegorisation ironically stresses its grossly corporeal nature – the hard, stiff pilgrim’s staff and its hanging bag or scrip are the means of pornographic suggestion. To expand on Newman, if this relation is a real one then it could be argued that its mockery cuts two ways – both skewering *fin’amor*’s religious aspirations and perhaps entering into the theological debate, critiquing the *demesure* which had also become a feature of sacred discourse, as in Porete’s graduation from the requirements of virtue.

Chapter Four, ‘Parody’, has further theoretical contributions to make. Before the sixteenth-century *sacra parodia* meant precisely the opposite of what it might to us now – not the subversion of the sacred but its elevation by imitation, as when lines from Virgil were pieced together to create full Gospel narratives. Newman argues for the meaningful sacred content enacted even in those texts which ‘parody’ in a modern sense. The *Lai d’Ignaure* features what can be read as a cannibalistic mock-Eucharist where the body of an adulterous lover is fed to his twelve ladies. This not some wildly avant-garde mockery of the sacrament of the altar itself but a parody of one mode of extreme Eucharistic piety in the Beguines – still sacredly serious, as its seemingly ‘other’ reading as romance tragedy might also suggest. Most troubling of all, but given a fascinating treatment at Newman’s hands, is the case of the *Passion of the Jews of Prague*. This is *sacra parodia* in the ancient sense, taking the historical narrative of a fourteenth-century Jewish pogrom and narrating it as a patchwork of Latin gospel texts in the form of a Passion. Here, she argues, whilst the the authorial intent is unremittingly and sickeningly justificatory, the text may unwittingly parody itself. The Jews of Prague play both the part of the populace who condemn and that of Christ condemned: first turned upon for an alleged attack on a Host procession they nonetheless also play disciple and Christ roles including crucifixion-like deaths presented with words used of the Passion. Here Newman’s idea that no generic ‘convergence’ can be *merely* the adoption of forms, but involves, even against the author’s will, the convergence of some inherent content, salvages some redemptive possibility for the text. She convincingly argues that the very use of the Gospel citations and the identification of the victims with Christ must have made it possible for a medieval reader to see horror in the plight of the Jewish victims, and the text as a whole to become the darkest of satires on their persecutors.

One problem with Newman’s paradigm overall – which, it must be stressed, does not take away from the immensely illuminating content of her individual studies – lies in her use of the term ‘secular’. If celtic paganism, classical paganism, the ‘courtly’, historical narrative *per se*, and seemingly any literary form outside a narrow

range of 'sacred' ones (hagiography, mystic devotion) can all be 'secular', the term seems to have become too laden. Does it stand for the non-Christian, or just for the non-clerical or ecclesial? Newman does in passing acknowledge that the first two are actually their own forms of the sacred, and of course her Chapters 4 and 5 hinge on describing the interplay of courtly and devotional 'metaphysics'. If the sacred is early on categorized by Newman as the medieval 'norm', then perhaps the secular is basically the neutral, the generically or the formally constrained—the husk for the wheat. And yet what Newman's work itself shows is that forms and conventions themselves have hybridity, potentially mundane, potentially sacramental. So the 'secular' constantly escapes conventional definition into a series of alternative sacralities, be they the 'metaphysics' used to speak of romantic love, the ghosts of pagan rite in beheading rituals and reborn kings, or indeed the classical pagan world which interlopes into both to allow such possibilities as personified *Amor*. When Augustine used the term *saeculum* it meant something more temporal: precisely the worldly mixity of the 'two cities' with their two loves. This is the state of the world's perpetual middle age, its *medium aevum* between Eden and Jerusalem, whose 'new' is a perpetual renewal of the eschatological orientation of ourselves and the world towards one city or the other. Newman could even have exchanged her 'principle of double judgment' for a theory of the 'secularity' of medieval literature in this sense.

A further caution I have with regards to this book would be one of periodization. Newman identifies an 'early modern shift' which ends her 'crossover' period and the possibility of double judgment, and represents the entry of the 'properly' secular. She argues that this shift allows the imagining of a 'purely secular realm' for which the Middle Ages used the classical era as a substitute, and could nonetheless not properly conceive. Her framing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a 'perfectly secular comedy', the move with which she opens the book, must be questioned—Beatrice Groves, for example, has written on the echos of medieval drama in Bottom's burlesque resurrection, and his 'dream' speech's relationship to Pauline writing. Newman identifies this fairy-world as unquestionably secular, and yet surely her own development of how pagan, giant, and fairy forces in *Gawain and the Green Knight* can appear to represent divine will has not entirely lost its relevance here? Shakespeare's comedy is patterned through with questions about the stability of the governing supernatural order and its relationship to the human one—themes which do not become radically secular overnight.

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