

BOOK REVIEWS

The North Sea World in the Middle Ages. Edited by Thomas R. Liszka and Lorna E.M. Walker. Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2001. 302 pages. \$45.00 US.

This volume collects the papers of a 1996 conference held at St. Andrews, Scotland: seven of the twelve contributors come from the University of St. Andrews. Its avowed purpose was to explore the medieval world centred on the North Sea, and to view the North Sea littoral as a connected cultural area. It has to be said that this purpose has, on the whole, not been achieved. A couple of the contributors (Vickie Ziegler, Robert W. Frank) seem to have written standard academic articles on, respectively, legal process in the Tristan story and competition between saints' shrines, and then added "in the North Sea world" to their titles. Their topics do indeed come from the North Sea world, as does almost anything on English, Scottish, Norman or Scandinavian subjects, but they have little to say on cultural contacts.

Some contributors, however, have made the effort to address the change of focus recommended by the conference, of whom the most wide-ranging is Paul Bibire, with an article on "North Sea Language Contacts in the Early Middle Ages." This challenges several long-accepted opinions. Was the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* correct to say that the Scandinavian raiders of 787 were the first who "sought out" (*gesohton*) England? Perhaps it was, but we have steadily mistranslated the Anglo-Saxon word, which could well mean "attacked"—thus implying that Scandinavian contacts were in fact normal, but normally peaceful. There is some evidence for this view, and linguistic evidence, Bibire argues, for the association of Old Northumbrian specifically, and before the Viking era, with Old Norse. The Dark Age invaders of Britain, then, already contained a Scandinavian minority, a conclusion confirmed by Hans Frede Nielsen's recent work on Old English and 'Early Runic.' One of the many corollaries of this demonstration is rejection of the now-popular placing of *Beowulf* in a late Anglo-Scandinavian context. Bibire regards this as "improbable" on several grounds, and unnecessary now that we can see an *early* Anglo-Scandinavian context.

Further international connections are demonstrated by Haki Antonsson, who relates a familiar motif from *Njáls saga* to the literature of the Crusades; and by Clive Sneddon, who relates the early Anglo-Norman poem on *Brendan the Navigator* to ninth- and tenth-century works, and the Irish 'immrama' tradition behind them. Gareth Williams defends saga accounts of the life of Hákon *Aðalsteins fóstri* from modern skepticism, and argues that they "may well preserve an authentic [tenth-century] tradition."

A group of solidly-researched articles meanwhile deals with specifically Scottish affairs. This reviewer (once resident in the village of St. Fillans in Perthshire) was especially pleased to read the full account of "The Cult of St. Fillan in Scotland" by Simon Taylor, and fascinated by the map of associated sites in Strath Fillan. The area of the cult, Taylor suggests, may represent "the limits of Dál Riata expansion in the very poorly documented early sixth century." The saint's protection of the key fortress of Dundurn may explain why his fame was outshone, but not completely displaced locally, by the cult of Columba. In similar style Colin J.M. Martin considers "Seafaring and Trade in East Fife," with particular reference to the *Journal* of Alexander Gillespie, a seventeenth-century merchant skipper, whose carved doorway still survives in Elie as "the Muckle Yett." Lorna E.M. Walker's "Culture and Contacts in the Scottish Romanesque," copiously illustrated, shows strong similarities between architecture on the Scottish east coast and the Cotentin in Normandy, and suggests a "legacy of Viking colonialism." Also copiously illustrated is Rosemary Muir Wright's "The Rider on the Sea-Monster," which begins with a decorated psalter from Corbie in northern France, compares it with the iconography of several other manuscripts, and suggests that "this transmission of text and Antichrist image" might also have been "the business of the Irish monks," who readily associated Antichrist, Leviathan, and the dragon ships of North Sea raiders.

Finally, relatively narrowly-focused articles include Ziegler on "Tristan's Duel with Morolt," as mentioned above, Robert R. Edwards on "Lydgate's *Troy Book* and the Confusion of Prudence," and Thomas R. Liszka's insistence on "The *South English Legendaries*," which shows in detail how editorial decisions have obscured the medieval sense of an open text. All these articles, like Robert W. Frank's on "Shrine Rivalry in the North Sea World," are interesting and worthwhile in themselves, but only loosely connected to the volume's declared theme. Four Courts Press, it should be stressed, has done an outstanding job of book production, with excellent plates, and no detected typographic errors at all—especially welcome in a time of declining standards.

T.A. Shippey

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England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225. By Robert Bartlett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. xxx, 772 pages. \$45.00 US.

Robert Bartlett's book represents a monumental and impressive achievement. This is a big, bold, lavish work, a valuable addition to the New Oxford History of England series, and a must-have for anyone interested in a key period in the history of the English kingdom. The challenge that Bartlett undertakes here is tremendously difficult. The task of distilling down to manageable

proportions the massive scholarship that has informed the study of the Norman and Angevin periods is no easy feat, yet the end result is entirely satisfactory. Bartlett's arguments reflect faithfully the sum total of recent studies in a volume that is at once comprehensive, comprehensible, informed and balanced.

Survey texts, by their very nature, are required to range far and wide chronologically and thematically; modern readers have come to expect in addition that such works address a host of subjects that have only recently become the focus of historical enquiry. Bartlett's book accomplishes both tasks. The 'traditional' topics familiar to students of Norman and Angevin England are all examined here, including the steady increase of monarchical authority, crown-magnate relations, the development of the common law, the evolution of governmental institutions, the organization of the church and the so-called 'feudal system,' the latter a term that Bartlett employs only sparingly, sensitive to the current debates about its usefulness as a descriptor. There is much here that will be familiar to scholars and students alike, and so should it be, for the study of legal, political and constitutional history has engaged enquiring minds since the days of Glanvill and Bracton themselves.

Nevertheless, a good third of the book explores areas that historians writing fifty years ago and more would never have deemed worthy of serious examination, and that indeed were excluded from the first comprehensive series on English history published by Oxford University Press in the 1950s. Bartlett devotes no fewer than 76 pages, for example, to a delightful review of the mental world of medieval people in a chapter engagingly entitled "Cosmologies." Under this general rubric he discusses notions of time (past, present and future), beliefs about animals and their relationship with humans, the place of angels, demons and fairies in the *mentalité* of English men and women, rich and poor alike. In another long chapter dedicated to an examination of 'the course of life' he presents a mine of information about childhood, marriage, family life and death. Both chapters are soundly based on a wealth of very recent scholarly work; together they elevate the book from the realm of the merely conventional survey text to an interesting and invaluable reference manual.

Although Bartlett's command of recent historical scholarship is evident in every page of this book, the footnotes make it clear that he is interested above all in the practice now current among medievalists of 'letting the sources speak for themselves.' His decision to keep the notes minimal is sound, for a text aimed primarily at undergraduates should not be encumbered with too much subsidiary material. Bartlett's choice of primary sources, moreover, ranges as far and wide as does the stuff of his main text. His references to papal decrees, chronicle accounts, financial rolls, philosophical treatises and court records (among others) demonstrate subtly both the abundance and the variety of materials that have survived to the present day, as well as the usefulness of each kind of document to the study of political, economic, social and cultural history.

This book is above all praiseworthy for its readability. Bartlett writes in elegant, simple language, and his explanation of such key terms as 'knight's fee,' 'honour' and 'serfdom' are models of clarity and brevity. There are, moreover, several passages striking in their beauty. A work as massive as this is not, perhaps, designed to be tackled in a single (long!) session, but rather to be consulted for up-to-date information on specific topics and as a starting point for more detailed research. As a reference manual of this sort it is highly commendable, but students and teachers alike may find it difficult to put the book down and to avoid reading on. Given the size and importance of this work, its price is great value for money, and the press is to be congratulated for ensuring that this work is affordable to all and sundry.

If there are any weaknesses in this otherwise solid survey text it is the lack of attention the author devotes to the history of Britain's other realms, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Bartlett reviews at some length England's relations with continental rulers, with the papacy and with distant Constantinople. By contrast, readers interested in a similarly thorough assessment of the English crown's relations with its Celtic neighbours will find the book disappointing in its sparse allusions, and altogether less comprehensive in this respect than was the series published in the 1950s. But as a survey of the century-and-a-half of English history after the Norman Conquest it will prove a fine companion, and will stand as an authoritative text for many years to come.

Cynthia J. Neville

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The Egerton Genesis. By Mary Coker Joslin and Carolyn Coker Joslin Watson. London: British Library, 2001. xxviii, 313 pages. \$75.00.

The Egerton Genesis (British Library MS Egerton 1894) is a manuscript of the first half of the fourteenth century. It is small in both size and length; in its present state there are only twenty leaves, and it was probably only a few leaves longer in its original, complete form. But for the art historian it possesses a considerable importance. The surviving leaves contain 149 illustrations, generally four to a page, quartered, illustrating the Old Testament Book of Genesis. The geographical origins of this manuscript, the identity of the artist responsible for its composition, the factors that shaped his highly distinctive designs and the purposes for which it was commissioned and by whom are all questions that have intermittently engaged art historians since its acquisition by the British Museum in 1860, without establishing any consensus. The present book aims to offer a reassessment of all these questions. In addition, it includes colour plates of every page of the manuscript, together with new transcriptions of the captions that accompany a number of the pictures.

Central to the argument of the book is the identity of the artist, whose hand has been discovered in several other English manuscripts of the period. Joslin and Watson believe him to be a Flemish artist, Michiel van der Borch, active in the Low Countries in the 1330s, with an established corpus of illustrated manuscripts there. Even if one were convinced by the cumulative weight of stylistic analogies on which this conjecture is based, it is not easy to reconcile this attribution with other aspects of the argument of this book. The authors assert, but do not demonstrate, that "in the late 1330s or early 1340s van der Borch emigrated to England, probably Norwich," and worked there for "about ten or fifteen years" (227). A little later his arrival has been moved to "probably in the early 1340s" (247); still no firm evidence appears. Instead, conjecture hardens into the contours of a highly implausible biography: "The artist sensed the unresolved tensions in mid fourteenth-century Norwich. He may have noticed growing resentment against the obligation to pay tithes He noticed with interest the activities and products of stone carvers of Norfolk" (247–48). We are told that van der Borch remained in England until after the Black Death; but this speculation is dependent on a by no means secure dating of the Derby Psalter to 1348 or later, and the belief that the Egerton Genesis can be placed in the improbably precise time frame of 1350–1353 because these years fall within "that brief window of time, approximately 1348–1355, during which ... men and women exhibited the most extreme behaviours and society suffered the most critical disruptions" (199).

Throughout dates and chronologies are established on such impressionistic grounds and then elevated into the status of facts. The same can be said of attributions; it is noted (213) that other scholars have divided the Flemish corpus of van der Borch between two different artists, but the specific arguments are not engaged. Moreover, if one accepts the hypothetical biography it is not easy to reconcile with other arguments here, most notably that van der Borch was heavily influenced by the medieval English drama, as is maintained at length (137–60). How, in a brief period in an alien culture, he could have been able to absorb sufficient of the style and language of the drama to apply it successfully to his art is not explained.

Other aspects of the argument of this book are not wholly clear. It often seems to shift its ground rather puzzlingly. For example, the commentary on one plate notes, without elaboration or further reference: "Abraham's armour features a plate-metal collar and a skirted jupon, features which link it to the Hastings Brass in Elsing, Norfolk, of 1347" (79). It is not explained what significance the reader is intended to attach to this point, nor how these artifacts are "linked." Much later, there is another reference to the Hastings Brass:

The plate collar appears on the brass of Sir Hugh Hastings, in Elsing, Norfolk, dates, 1347, as does a flared skirt of thin material In the manuscript, however, the hip-length garment whose scalloped

edge ends above the skirt resembles rather a slightly later garment, the fitted leather *jupon*, which was worn over a short mail *haubergeon* and first appears in brasses on that of John de Cobham, Cobham, Kent, in 1354. (179)

It is now even harder to see what point is being made (or to establish precisely where either brass is).

There is rather too much of this kind of thing to inspire confidence. To take a few examples from the opening pages. We are told that the "Egerton Genesis was meant for the entertainment of a middle-class patron and his friends" (9), but, again, no evidence is advanced to sustain such a view (it is hard to see how it could be). The account of the manuscript is often unhelpful. We are told that this scribe "was right-handed" (16), but not how this was established or why it matters. We are told that "six chapters, Genesis 45–50, lack illustration" (18). This is indeed so, since the manuscript as it now exists, ends at Genesis 44. They "lack illustration" because they are not there. Arguments tend to shift in level of assertion, sometimes within a few pages. We are told of "the designer, who was both artist and scribe of the first folio" (15); the same assertion is reiterated on the next page; but a few pages later, this hand has become "probably that of the artist himself" (20).

Too much of the argument here tends to function by accretive reiteration, unsupported by clear and compelling evidence. It is good to have the images of this curious manuscript readily accessible, and the descriptions of these images are often helpfully detailed. But the larger problems of origin and attribution still remain unresolved.

A.S.G. Edwards

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The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages. By Katherine Ludwig Jansen. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. xvii, 389 pages. \$39.50 US.

Mary Magdalen is familiar to us today as the red-haired mourner at the foot of the Cross in so many images of the Crucifixion, and as one of the first people to hear the news of the Resurrection, and to meet the risen Christ. But in the Middle Ages she was given an elaborate history, from youth to death, and her cult became extremely important. Gregory the Great, in a sermon preached in 591, was apparently the first to conflate her with another New Testament Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and also with the unnamed sinner who washed Christ's feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with perfumed oil (Luke 7.37–50). According to legend, she converted the pagan king of Marseilles and performed miracles there before retreating to a lonely cave where she lived ascetically till her death. By the twelfth century, her cult was well established. Both St. Maximin in Provence and

Vézelay in Burgundy claimed to have her body and other relics, and became major pilgrimage sites; Petrarch visited her cave several times, and left a poem about her.

Jansen gives an absorbing account of the development of Mary Magdalen's legend and cult in the later Middle Ages, and of its many paradoxes. The conflation with the penitent woman who washed Christ's feet added an early career of prostitution, or at least extreme promiscuity. Yet she was also celebrated as the first witness to the Resurrection, apparently chosen before the Virgin Mary, and is often named as especially beloved by Christ (Margery Kempe was clearly rather jealous of her). She is frequently referred to as "apostola apostolorum," the apostle to the apostles—an extraordinary title in a church which denied women the right to teach or preach publicly. There was certainly a fashion in the Middle Ages for stories of 'holy harlots,' but Mary Magdalen far outstripped the others. She was understood to represent both Martha and Mary, the active life and the contemplative life; this made her especially popular with the mendicant orders. She was the patron of many convents, hospitals and homes for former prostitutes—but also of perfumers and glove-makers. Her cult took on political overtones when the Angevin king Charles II showed a special devotion to her.

The originality of this well-written and wide-ranging study lies in its emphasis on the role of the mendicants, and of preaching generally, in developing the cult of the Magdalen, especially in Italy. Jansen examines her chosen texts and images "according to the demands of the communities that produced them" (14), to show how the Magdalen became the model of penitence and devotion to Christ for both clergy and laity, men and women, so that one can almost speak of an "imitatio Magdalenae" (92). The book has 50 fascinating black-and-white illustrations showing the Magdalen preaching and performing miracles. Her power and influence are well conveyed by the image on the cover: it shows the Bishop of Assisi kneeling at the feet of the Magdalen, who towers above him as she holds his hand and he gazes up at her. Much more common, however, both during and after the Middle Ages, were images of the penitent Magdalen, whose ultimate meaning, according to Jansen, "was a message of hope" (232).

Elizabeth Archibald

University of Bristol

Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300–1500. Vol. 1, Northern England. By Anthony Emery. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 449 pages. £ 90.00.

In all honesty, this is not a book that I would have chosen to review. I am a practising architect, interested in contemporary architecture and its architects, and I must confess to being almost a layman when dealing with topics relating to medieval architecture. I ask readers to bear this in mind.

The book's front jacket shows a beautiful colour photograph of Warkworth Castle, while the back shows the reconstructed cell at Mount Grace Priory, which I have visited on more than one occasion. It is a beautiful ruin. Its present inhabitants, black-faced sheep and lambs, mix at ease with the striking black-and-white Holstein cows. Together they leisurely stroll around or eat grass from what was the floor of the dining-room and Great Hall. What a change a few centuries make. The jacket photographs give a taste of the quality of the many photographs and illustrations to follow, albeit in black-and-white.

Mr. Emery includes a photograph of himself on the back flap and his smiling countenance suggests a man happy at his vocation. He has chosen an onerous task. Volume 1, under review, contains 200 houses with 400 more to follow in Volumes 2 and 3. Without doubt, when the three volumes are complete they will become a significant addition to the library shelves of any serious architectural historian, in England and Wales at least.

Fellow laymen, do not pass Mr. Emery's Introduction unread. In it we are told that the study is concerned with the houses of the crown, aristocracy, and gentry. However, in order to fully illustrate the development of these houses, we are also given a condensed history of England and Wales, spanning the medieval period and covering the construction of the houses almost to the present day. We find out how political and social changes not only affected the design process of the houses, but also, sadly, led to the destruction of so many of them. It is hard to believe it when Mr. Emery tells us that in 1955 fine houses were being destroyed at the rate of one every five days.

The book divides Northern England into three regions: Northumbria, Cumbria and Lancashire, and Yorkshire. A map on the opening page of the Introduction clearly defines each region and the area covered in Volume 1. Each region is broken down into different aspects of the study: Historical Background, Architectural Development, and Survey. In each case the Survey aspect is by far the longest and most detailed and is indeed the meat of the book. In it, most of the houses selected for inclusion are described in great detail, complete with photographs, drawings, and plans. There are two smaller "thematic sections": Licences to Crenellate and A Way of Life. Each region's description is complete with bibliographies and appendices for those with a greater thirst for knowledge on the subject.

The Historical Background informs us that in the early thirteenth century there were few castles. undefended sovereign and feudal houses were common. War, principally from England's neighbour to the north, soon changed that. Fortification became necessary. The crown was weak in the north and as a result older established families with their own armies became almost royal houses. They not only kept the peace on the homefront, but played important roles abroad in war. The profits and prestige gained from these wars was reflected in the palace fortresses they built, many of them extremely opulent and theatrical in plan and space. Fortification, nevertheless, remained a very important aspect in the continuing development of the house. Further south,

away from the Scottish border, it was sometimes used as an added design feature.

The section Licence to Crenellate tells us just that. A licence was required to add crenellations to one's house. The licence was a development of aristocratic culture and was a privilege signifying royal approval. Many examples illustrate the development of crenellation, and we are shown graphs and tables listing the numbers and regional distribution of the licences issued over three centuries.

The Way of Life section is a colourfully written treatment of the lifestyle typical of leading families of the times. Some of the information is staggering, including the number of staff required to run such a household, or the number of beef cattle required to feed it. Mr. Emery compares such a family's annual food consumption with that of a present-day hospital. Two thousand people attend a feast ... and we thought we had swinging parties in the sixties. The Great Hall's regular function was to serve strangers, with an average of 57 fed every day of the year. Mind you, breakfast was served at 6:00 a.m. after a half hour in the chapel. Still, I imagine one could get used to a quart of beer for breakfast. I was a little disappointed this section was so short.

The Architectural Development pages name the different types of house forms included in the study, plus explicit reasons for so many radical changes during its development. From the undefended house we progress to the defended house, fortified houses, palace fortresses, castles, towers and tower houses, gatehouse towers, hall and cross wing houses, and finally, to residential additions to all those listed. This list seems awfully long, but we must remember that we are reviewing development over a period of a couple of centuries.

In the Introduction we are told that this book, which gave the writer unbroken pleasure over a period of eight years, would serve its purpose if it encourages others to examine the subject in more detail. I intend to make sure that I have copies of the maps on pages 27, 284, and 290 with me the next time I drive through the north Yorkshire countryside. I will then be able to visit some of the houses Mr. Emery has described for us. I'm already looking forward to it ... a late morning visit and then a nice pub lunch overlooking the village green or maybe the town marketplace. At the beginning I said that I am a contemporary architect. I should qualify this by saying that I have the deepest respect for fine old buildings and nothing but the highest regard for Anthony Emery and his work.

Peter Cochrane

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The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower. English Literary Studies Monograph Series 85. Edited by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo. Victoria, BC: Department of English, University of Victoria, 2001. 240 pages. \$26.00 paper.

"Introduction: The Medieval Professional Reader and Reception History, 1292–1641," by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, defines the "professional reader" of the book's title as "someone whose job it is to prepare a text for the reading public, someone whose job description (supervisory scribe, corrector, annotator, editor, illustrator) allows him to filter the text for presentation to the patron or reading community" (8); Kerby-Fulton makes the case, using the example of the Red Ink Annotator discussed by Kelly Parsons, that the work of the professional reader is a practical tool for excavating reader response. Four original essays by different hands follow.

"Framing the Canterbury Pilgrims for the Aristocratic Readers of the Ellesmere Manuscript," by Maidie Hilmo, presents the Ellesmere *Canterbury Tales* as an aristocratic preserve, marked off like an aristocratic medieval pleasure garden by ornamental trelliswork, and entered first by the Knight, made more aristocratic in the illumination than in the words of the text. In her argument, other pilgrim portraits are elevated (Prioress's, Wife's, Squire's) to provide models of courtly bearing for an aristocratic audience, and some pilgrims are mocked (Merchant, Miller, Cook, Summoner) to confirm conservative social attitudes. The article is rich with illustrations (fifteen) and a mass of endnotes documenting the extensive previous research on this important manuscript.

"Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations: Notes toward the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles 1300–1641," by Carl James Grindley, is an essay at two tasks: developing a methodology for classing marginalia into data that can be worked with, and then presenting the marginalia from two C-text manuscripts, BL Additional 35157 and Huntington Library MS HM 143, as an illustration of the methodology. The former is a task challenging in the doing and opaque once applied; the "data" as presented are already necessarily subject to heavy interpretation in their classification and it is hard to imagine how these classifications could be used by subsequent scholars. Presentation of the marginalia is useful, but unnecessarily difficult to decode on the page.

"The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience" by Kelly Parsons is by contrast much simpler in its presentation of marginalia: the sixty pages of appendices giving Red Ink Annotations, Red Ink Corrections, and Red Ink Rubrications are clearly laid out, and the running headings on each pair of pages allow even a casual reader instant recognition of where in the text of *Kempe* (whether the EETS edition or the single manuscript itself) and where on the manuscript folio the Red Ink Annotator's marks appear, and what those marks are. The appendices and five pictures of manuscript pages support an elegant and intriguing argument that the anno-

tator was customizing Mount Grace Carthusian priory's manuscript for circulation among a female lay audience.

"Scribe D and the Marketing of Ricardian Literature," by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, is a joy to read: a skilfully unfolded, engagingly told story about the supervision of the Taylor manuscript of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* by Scribe D, and about the Westminster clientele for the oeuvre of Scribe D and his associate Scribe Delta, who between them created a canon of secular exemplarity, specializing in Gower and Trevisa. To borrow adjectives used by Kerby-Fulton or Justice of the curve of Scribe D's *y* descender, this is "winning, jaunty" scholarship (221) and a splendid note on which to end.

Melissa Furrow

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Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition. By Hugh White. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. 278 pages. \$65.00 US.

Any book reminding us that medieval morals were not as uniform and unenlightened as is still popularly supposed is a fine addition to the library stacks. Hugh White's first-rate effort will serve as just such a memorandum, forcing us specifically to recognize that sexual morality in the Middle Ages is as vexed and interesting as anything else under the sun.

Moving from biblical verse to patristic commentary, and from twelfth-century academic treatises to fourteenth-century vernacular poetry (French and Middle English), White takes into account a vast range of texts that throw light on his thesis. Considered in the abstract, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness* proposes what might seem to be a rather straightforward argument, namely that in the Middle Ages the language of *natura* and *kynde* characterized an ambivalent vision of the human potential for goodness, it being the case that such nature terms might at any time allude on the one hand to cosmic order imprinted on the psyche and on the other to an anarchic tendency towards disorder located at the site of human sexuality. From this perspective the nature tradition is marked by two main currents of thought, but the author goes on to show how these currents are themselves further ramified by manifold variations in and among specific texts. It is in dealing with these fine-grained, incremental differences among the many available ethical positions in the literature that White's learned study profits the most.

In Western metaphysics the conception of nature as *vicaria Dei*, God's deputy, implied a benign moral force at work in the world. The early sections of the study explore the antecedents of such metaphysical optimism, beginning with the relevant remarks of Paul and Augustine and then moving on to the subtle involutions of the medieval schoolmen. Here the development of natural law theory out of Stoicism is traced back to Cicero, who proposed that *recta ratio* actually accords with spontaneous natural impulse. There arose from this innovative idea the scholastic notion of *naturalis ratio*, a bold syncretism given added thrust by Paul's remarks to the Romans to the effect

that the Gentiles have the law written on their hearts. Aquinas correspondingly held that all humans everywhere had fairly reliable access to the first principles of morality via the natural, intuitive capacity of *synderesis*. Such rudimentary precepts as those contained in Christ's summarial commandment (love of God and neighbour) and in the golden rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you) were understood to inform natural reason in virtue of which anyone, unaided by revelation, could have access to moral law.

But White is at pains to show that such an affirmative vision of nature was not the only one to have had currency in the Middle Ages. A rival conception has its provenance in the work of the Roman jurist Ulpian, to whom is attributed the idea that *Jus naturale est, quod natura omnia animalia docuit* [Natural law is what nature has taught all animals] (21). White's originality probably lies in his insistence on the parallel and perplexing influence of this formulation. The Ulpianic claim effectively enabled medieval thinkers to posit an instinctual, non-rational sexual impulse as something humans have in common with the animals. In White's words, "the way is very much open for thinking of the animal in human beings, and the not wholly regulated sexual behaviour in which the human being's animal side may be expressed, as more natural than the rational side and the behaviour which reason counsels" (39). For instance, nature as undifferentiated sexual urge could now be seen as extenuating, even as it induces the most illicit acts. Incest, polygamy, adultery, and homosexuality could be considered venial "bi weye of kynde" (*The Book of Vices and Virtues*), since in one respect such behaviour was at least not *unnatural*. White argues that such "kyndely synne" (*Cursor mundi*) constituted a nuanced third term in medieval ethics, positioned between virtue and vice proper, thereby introducing into the domain of morality a range of subtle discriminations which may sometimes have prevented the reduction of all morals into rigid absolutes.

The book goes on to apply what is set forth in the first part vis-à-vis nature in the literary-historical matrix to the *Roman de La Rose* and to the works of John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer. White argues here that the fourteenth-century English writers in particular share a skeptical regard for that optimistic naturalism which presupposed a fundamental congruency between inborn inclination and moral order. Both Chaucer and Gower, it is held, variously stage a contest between contrasting conceptions of nature with the effect of challenging if not outright debunking a complacent natural law theory; that is, each poet advances a view of moral autonomy profoundly qualified by the refractory effects of chance, circumstance, and blind instinctual drives. Chaucer offers a "vision of humanity let down, or even victimized, by Nature" (255). The latter chapters are perceptive and well-argued, and throughout White shows that the more sophisticated writers of the period would have had a difficult time recognizing anything familiar in the pervasive modern caricature of "medieval morals."

Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century. Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 29. Edited by Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. xii, 242 pages. \$69.95 US.

From thirteenth-century verse chronicles and late medieval saints' lives to plays by Middleton and Burney, from Romantic epic poetry to Victorian novels, this edition covers instances throughout eight hundred years of literary history in which the Anglo-Saxons became an exemplum of nationhood, a nostalgic image of the past, a means of social critique, and, as in the case of Lady Godiva, a cultural myth.

This volume responds to a recent interest among medievalists in how the study and recreation of Anglo-Saxon literature and history can serve various ideological functions. Books like Allen Frantzen's *Desire for Origins* (1990) set the groundwork for studies that generally concentrate on Anglo-Saxon scholarship from the early modern period to the present day in England and America. The focus of this book, however, is on novelists, playwrights, and poets and on the construction of an English national identity, beginning as far back as the thirteenth century.

In order to interest an even broader audience than just Anglo-Saxonists, Donald Scragg's introduction offers a brief summary of Anglo-Saxon history, while Old English quotations are translated throughout the volume. Scragg's introduction also attempts to provide an historical context for the following essays by offering a stream of examples of medieval to modern writers who take up the Anglo-Saxons as their subject.

Essays by Carole Weinberg on Layamon's *Brut*, Sarah Mitchell on the thirteenth-century metrical chronicle by Robert of Gloucester, Jill Frederick on the South English Legendary, and John Frankis on Trevet, Chaucer, and Gower explore these medieval writers' interests in establishing a sense of nationhood by defining their relation to the Anglo-Saxons and the Norman Conquest. Turning to later periods, Leah Scragg's essay on *Edmund Ironside* and Julia Briggs's study of Middleton's *Hengist* demonstrate how early modern playwrights use the image of an edenic Anglo-Saxon past as an exemplum by which to judge or justify contemporary political situations. That the same material could become grounds for debate between opposing political positions is illustrated in Jacqueline Pearson's study of how women writing in the 1790s, particularly Burney and Yearsley, used Anglo-Saxon stories to comment indirectly on the French Revolution. Lynda Pratt's discussion of Cottle and Pye's epic poems on King Alfred and Andrew Sanders's essay on novels by Bulwer and Kingsley explore conflicting nineteenth-century views of the Anglo-Saxons as models of true Britishness and patriotism.

The last three essays look at the subject from different angles. Edward B. Irving, Jr. writes on Tennyson's version of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, the only study in this book to focus on the imitation of Anglo-Saxon literary style, while Daniel Donoghue provides a fascinating reception history of the story

of Lady Godiva, originally an eleventh-century woman named Godgifu who is briefly mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* but who gradually acquires a detailed legend. Donoghue's discussion of how Godiva's story has so faded in our day that we know her mainly as the logo on a chocolate box resonates with T.A. Shippey's provocative essay which concludes the book. Pointing out that the current popular consciousness is marked by an almost total lack of knowledge about the Anglo-Saxons, Shippey traces the ways in which the image of Anglo-Saxon origins has been sacrificed since the nineteenth century to serve the causes of British unity and imperialism. Shippey's essay provides a theoretical and historical context in which to place the myriad examples of creative writers' responses to the Anglo-Saxon past that are offered in the volume as a whole.

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