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The Uses of Medievalism in Early Modern England: Recovery, Temporality, and the "Passionating" of the Past

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The premodern past was desired and deployed in a myriad of different ways in sixteenth-century England. The period of the English Reformations produced a generative, complex, and paradoxical range of feelings for the premodern. Many sixteenth-century texts were multiply medievalist, making use of literary figures, generic forms, and cultural phenomena in unexpected ways. Various senses of temporality—understandings of the shapes and nature of cultural time—were often foregrounded. Reformation historiography was often sectarian and combative, but also sought tangible contact with the textual remains of the past. These feelings for the premodern were then unavoidably present in the 1590s, but were subject to use in nascent literary forms that were self-consciously avant-garde in different ways. Antiquity and archaism were brought together with a heightened sense of contemporaneity. In prose fiction, the premodern could be used in different forms of scandalously risqué, comic, and autobiographical narratives. In historical poetry produced in the same decade, a new literary mode made poetic capital out of a heightened emotional discourse associated with premodern history and culture.

Keywords

Medievalism, temporality, Reformation, historiography, prose fiction, historical poetry, emotion.

> Yes, yes my good brother, there is *Quoddam tertium* a third place that all our great grand-mothers haue talkt of, that *Dant* heth so learnedly writ of, and that is Purgatorie. What syr are we wiser then all our forefathers and they not onely feared that place in life, but found it after their death … And / yet if thou wert so incredulous that thou wouldest neither believe our olde beldames, nor the good Bishops: yet take *Dick Tarlton* once for thine Author, who is nowe come from Purgatorie. (Creigh and Belfield 1987, 146–7)

At the beginning of a remarkable, deliberately scandalous fictional prose text published in 1590, following the death two years earlier of the first Elizabethan celebrity actor, Richard Tarlton, we find the text's narrator in dialogue with the "ghost" of that very actor. The setting of the dialogue is concrete and deliberate in its sense of contemporaneity, shaping the moment of the text's origin when, "as most men doe," the narrator is "sorrowing . . . for the death of *Richard Tarlton*" (144). The narrator offers a sort of critical digest of the state of popular theatre at this moment: "although I sawe as rare showes, and heard as lofty verse, yet I inioied not those woonted sports that flowed from him" (144). The details suggest a consciousness of Kyd's and Marlowe's avant-garde and seminal experiments with forms of theatrical tragedy, while the "witty iests" and "pleasing and merry conceits" the narrator misses sound proximate to the "jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits" dismissed in the prologue to *1 Tamberlaine* (1-3). Like a theatrical weathervane, the text's narrator can be seen at the moment when the vogue for "such conceits as clownage keeps in pay" dissipates and is led instead—lamentably, perhaps—to Marlowe's "stately tent of War" (prologue, 2-3). What seems to be a theatrical *in memoriam* for Tarlton's "conceits," though, develops into something very curious indeed: an apparently polemical and experiential defense of the concept of Purgatory, the "third place" whose social, devotional, and emotional existence was

supposed to have been effaced along with the abolition of chantries in England in the 1540s, approximately two generations before.

"Tarlton's" discourse is fraught with the polemical and combative energies of the Reformation and of generational time. "Our great grandmothers," "our olde beldames," and also "the good Bishops," have urged people to remember Purgatory even as England's recent ecclesiastical history urged them to wipe it from cultural memory. However, what might be read as a popular defense of a distant, and distantly "medieval," cultural phenomenon is, of course, a joke and itself one of Tarlton's "conceits": the narrator's reaction that "I could not but smile at the madde merry doctrine of my friend Richard" (147). After the ostensible need to follow the advice of the "good Bishops," Tarlton's argument against "any upstart Protestant" who denies Purgatory becomes a risqué rehearsal (or pastiche) of Protestant polemic. Purgatory is, apparently, full of Popes, "except the first thirty after Christ . . . and the reason was, because Purgatory was then but a building, and not fully finished" (147–8). Rather than a continuation of the discourse on Purgatory, the reader is then offered a text made up of a sequence of scurrilous translations from Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

In striking ways, Tarlton's *News Out of Purgatory* is multiply medievalist. The passage quoted above takes an aspect of premodern devotional culture as its subject; cites a medieval poet (Dante) in its defense; constructs that concept via a sequential, generational sense of time that makes the premodern past both distant but also tangible in familial, affective, and institutional terms; and is made up of an exercise in medieval translation: the first English translations of some tales from Boccaccio. Where earlier in the sixteenth century Roger Ascham's feelings for the premodern (including Boccaccio, but also Arthurian romance) could be described as sharply hostile, *Tarlton's News* demonstrates an entirely different set of responses. This is partly because, even as it engages with premodern culture in multiple ways, it is also highly conscious of its literary "moment"; it brings together an

intense interest in medieval texts and cultures with a voguish, decorum-breaking effusion of contemporary energy that is characteristic of much Elizabethan prose fiction in the 1590s. The vital mediator between the premodern past and the writerly moment here is the culture of the Reformation, the culture also explored in David Matthews's essay in this collection. This was a culture in which the treatment and argumentative use of the premodern past was itself the key flashpoint of intellectual and scholarly activity, as confessional identities and boundaries were being constructed, and not always in terms of a hostile renunciation of the past. However, while the imprint of that highly polemical culture can be seen in the 1590s, there is a flippant, risqué feeling to its deployment by the ghost of Richard Tarlton; the affective pull of desire for the past is partnered with a clear-sighted sense of its utility for various forms of textual performance. Nostalgia and opportunism go together.

The very multiplicity of medievalism on display, with its various impulses and effects, is key to the picture of early modern feelings for the premodern past described in this essay. I focus here on two related cultural moments: the beginnings of scholarship on England's pre-Conquest past in the 1560s, and the florescence of popular-historical culture in the 1590s, a period more frequently seen as the apex of the English history play as a theatrical form. The marks of ideological conflict, the controversial—sometimes even scandalous—nature of engagement with the premodern past, are omnipresent.

At every point an encounter with the premodern past is also underpinned by a consciousness about the writer's relationship with that past—an active negotiation of time and temporality. Other scholars have written about the various ways in which medievalism of all sorts intersects with concepts and understandings of temporality (Trigg 2016). The medieval and early modern periods have been at the center of scholarship about a "cultural history of time" (Le Goff 1960; Burke 2004). But all historiographies might be seen as intellectual experiments with the shape of time, and in the sixteenth century only very

occasionally did the consciousness of temporality suggest a chronology of simple, continuous, let alone progressive, time. In Reformation historiography, discussed in the first part of this essay, the premodern past saw a highly combative type of historical consciousness, and one that necessarily raised questions about how narratives and counter-narratives of cultural time could be used to construct temporalities of both continuity and radical discontinuity between the present and England's past. Later, in the second and third sections, the essay turns to the 1590s, and the related developments in literary medievalism witnessed there. Senses of temporality, pastness, and connectedness in hypermedievalist texts such as *Tarlton's News* were combined with a heightened awareness of contemporaneity in more than one way. Firstly, in the development of a vogue for unscripted verbal performance (or at least the performance of unscriptedness), writing in the 1590s made temporality intersect with cultural assumptions about rhetoric and the ethics of linguistic and literary performance. In a sense, a foregrounded vogue for *extemporality* was key to a notion of what *contemporary* literature was. This takes place in texts that were formed within nascent generic and ethical histories, which simultaneously made a great deal of cultural capital out of a performance of antiquity, a cultural rhetoric of ancientness. These plural senses of temporality—the ancient, the momentary, and the now—worked in tandem.

Almost at the same time, equally self-conscious developments in historical poetics produced a raft of highly affective texts centered on the medieval past. In the writing of both Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton, historical narratives become highly-wrought, emotionally demanding, desiring texts; a form of affective literary ventriloquism that was (again) both *à la mode* and deliberately old, gesturing back to Ovid and Chaucer as it produced what has been called a new kind of "lyric history" (Brown 2004, 178). Just as contemporaries saw Elizabethan prose fiction producing a neologizing literary language, they also saw something distinctly powerful in writers' ability to respeak the premodern past. In

the 1590s, it was possible not only to feel something (indeed, many things) for the premodern, it was possible to "Tarltonise" and to "passionate" it.

Recoveries: sectarian heritage making

According to some, Time—or at least western Christian time—buckled, warped and re-formed in 1563. The first edition of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* appeared, shaping western history as one of apocalyptic fracture between the ideals of Christic, apostolic, and Patristic ages, and the putative spiritual entropy of the later church under the papacy. Where there had previously been "an image of syncretic unity and an essential sameness of time," Foxe's grand narrative (notably similar to that of medieval writers like Joachim of Fiore) pushed historical time towards a sequential vision containing epochs of ideal, decay, and recovery in crisis, a presentism with the Protestant scholar at the heart of the drama of time, as he reclaimed the past in the age of antichrist unleashed. This, for Kemp (1991), is a moment at which the very "Western comprehension of historical time reversed itself" (vi), "[t]he new shape of time involved a great parenthesis driven into time between the distant past . . . and the present . . . a historical revolution . . . so profound that it reversed the Western perception of the past within a single generation, from a perception of unity to one of division and difference, from a stillness to a dynamic motion" (104). For others, perhaps inspired by this idea, "[o]ur very conception of historical periods, divisible into detachable segments of time punctuated by liberating convulsions, is itself the product of a revolutionary aspiration to neutralize the pathologies of time and start afresh" (Cummings and Simpson 2010, 3). This grand cultural-historical narrative is what lies behind Tarlton's assessment of the missing Popes in purgatory, the "first thirty after Christ," who should, in Foxean terms, be idealized, but for Tarlton enable the anarchic bathos of his "conceit" about Purgatory being an unfinished building project (147–8). However, Kemp's image (the "great parenthesis

driven into time"), is suggestive in directing our attention to the material, textual, and even paratextual, nature of Reformation claims on the premodern past. Foxe's original opening to his first book focuses immediately on scholarship as a central battleground of temporality, the "writers and historians" who now, more than ever, have "matter copious to worke vpon," to ensure what can be "reserued and remaine," where "most thinges [are] lost in silence" (I.17). The project of Foxe's tome is itself a sort of manifesto, a rejection of previous scholarship that "semed either not bold enough to tell truth, or not afraid enough to beare with vntruth and tyme" (I.17). Thanks to Foxe, "we" in "these reformed times" can now see the "prodigious deformities & calamities of those former dayes" (I.17). Foxe's project is, therefore, both aggressively hostile and selectively recuperative, finding both radical alterity and crosstemporal identification in every document. It was also extremely generative, producing a sequence of works that claimed to rediscover the past and its relationship to the ecclesiastical, theological, and political present. What is remarkable, apart from the way in which religious controversy acted as the primary "motor of historiographic production" (Womersley 2010, 10), is the way the textual and material existence of the past remains such a prominent and vital part of this discourse. Foxe is always at pains to share the ostensible material reality of his vision of the past, asserting—for example—that Bede had translated John's Gospel into Old English because:

> I haue sene a boke at Crowland abbay, which is kept there for a relike. The boke is called S. Guthlakes Psalter. And I wene verely it is a copy of the same, that the kinge did translate, for it is nother English, Laten, Greke, nor Hebrue, nor Douche, but somewhat soundinge to oure English. And as I haue perceiued sith þe time, I was last there, being at Andwarpe the Saxon tounge doth sound likewise after oures, & it is to oures partly agreable. (Foxe 1563, 3.615)

The autobiographical, testamentary assertions of this ("I haue sene," "I was last there") go hand-in-hand with the concrete materiality of texts and languages: the past is not just claimed rhetorically, but in terms of the physical codex itself as "witnessed" by the historian, just as the apparent strangeness of Old English and its linguistic proximity to Frisian ("somewhat sounding," "partly agreeable") seem to be worth significant attempted description. It is this palpable need for the material reality of the premodern object that is often pronounced in Reformation discourse. In considering the much-commented-on desires for authority and authenticity (Echard 2008; Gordon 1996), we should note that authenticity also depends upon the details (fictional or not) of the object: the codex, the paratext, the punctuation, and even the individual grapheme in orthography become vital in the reclamation of the premodern.

However, this Foxean historiography of antipathy and reclamation was not a singular thing, but part of a wider milieu of historiography as riposte and reply, in which a sequence of polemical reclamations of the medieval past "answered" each other in a combative dialogue. The extraordinary historiographical energies of this moment were powered by an overtly ideological desire for the past, in which history and counterhistory were a form of controversial debate about how sixteenth-century England should feel about and identify itself (or not) with its distant cultural past.

Almost straightaway, Foxe's work attracted replies from both English and continental writers and historians, which necessitated subsequent reply and riposte, as the text of the *Acts and Monuments* grew and altered its shape and emphases in further editions in 1570, 1576, and 1583. Among the first counterhistoriographies was that of Thomas Stapleton, a Catholic exile in the Low Countries whose reply to analogous Foxean activities on the continent took the form of the first entire English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 1565, two years after the first edition of Foxe. Stapleton's text spoke back to

Foxean historiography in its own terms, and balanced its combative urges with an attempt to reimagine an England unshorn of connections to continental western Christendom. The peculiarly English nature of Bede's text is repeatedly stressed, from the title page—which introduces the usually "venerable" Bede as also specifically "Englishman"—onwards. The title page also makes use of an English translation of Colossians 1:21 to pitch itself back across the channel: "You being sometimes straungers and enemies in understanding . . . now reconciled in the body of his fleshe." Bede, trailblazing proto-Tyndalian scriptural translator to Foxe, here becomes an alternative historiographical icon in an attempt to urge Reformation England to be reintegrated into the body of the Church from which it had severed itself.

What is perhaps as impressive as the translation itself is the panoply of paratextual work Stapleton does to shape Bede as a Counter-Reformation writer. The text begins with an audacious epistle addressing Queen Elizabeth that is daringly polemical in its scope. Addressing "these perilous times of schisme and heresy," Stapleton makes it clear that his project is expected to "profit" the "deceiued consciences of my dere countremen" (2v). In a notably medievalist moment, he even shapes his own address to Elizabeth on the template of an Anglo-Saxon analogy: his gesture is meant to mimic the dedication of Bede's original Latin text to Ceolwulf (729–37), "one of your most Noble progenitours" (2v) The most forceful of Stapleton's paratexual tactics, though, is inserted—like a very large parenthesis—between the introductory epistles to Elizabeth and to the general reader. Here, the reader finds a voluminous paratexual section entitled "Differences betwene the primitive faithe of England continevved almost these thousande y.res, and the late pretensed faith of protestants: gathered out of the History of the churche of England compiled by Venerable Bede an English man, aboue DCCC. yeares paste" (3v). This extraordinary paratextual list consists of forty-five points of doctrine, including sacramentalism, purgatory, masses for the dead, pilgrimage, the efficacy of works, and so on, all with the support of book and chapter

references to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The polemical paratext is occasionally accompanied by explanatory commentary: "It is a negatiue religion. It hath no affirmatiue doctrine but that which catholikes had befor. Al that is their own, is but the denial of oures" (4r). The attempt to reincorporate the English past into the wider body of Catholic Christendom is accompanied by some stridently sectarian pronouns.

This counterhistoriography, and the very substantial contribution it made to the knowledge of the premodern past in sixteenth-century England, was almost immediately met by another historiographical riposte. This is, as others have noted, the first appearance of Old English in print—in 1566, the year following Stapleton's translation of Bede (Frantzen 1990, 43–4; Leinbaugh 1982). At the heart of this production was a network of scholars and printers closely associated both with Foxe and Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury. *A Testimonie of Antiquitie* (1566) identifies itself as printed by John Day, the same printer behind Foxe's increasingly voluminous *Acts and Monuments*. Its paratextual strategies, like Stapleton's, do a huge amount of work in shaping the way in which Old English and Anglo-Saxon religious culture were introduced to a readership. The title page asserts a connection between the pre-Conquest past and confessional present in very similar terms to Stapleton's paratextual devices: "shewing the auncient fayth in the Church of England touching the sacrament of the body and bloude of the Lord here publikely preached, and also receaued in the Saxons tyme, aboue 600. yeares agoe" (Parker 1566). Where Stapleton has used Colossians 1:23 to situate his translation of Bede, the *Testimonie* uses a passage from Jeremiah 6 ("Goe into the streetes, and inquyre for the olde way") to shape its agenda as a "public" and publicizing discovery of a different kind of continuity, focused on a putative identification between Anglo-Saxon theology and the commemorative (rather than "embodied") Eucharistic thinking of mid-Tudor English Protestantism. The preface, as Stapleton's had done, situates itself in the controversial moment, noting how "Great

contention hath nowe been of longe tyme" about the nature of the Eucharist, "in the inquisition and determination wherof many be charged and condemned of heresye, and reproued as bringers up of new doctryne" (A2r). The purpose of this text is to act as a polemical reply to this accusation of novelty; and the antiquity of the text, its material history, and indeed its material appearance, are all judged for polemical effect. The preface addresses the arcane history of the text with a narration focused on textual history, noting how the obscurity of the Old English can be explained, apparently, by clerical obfuscation and conspiracy, the codices being "made out of the waye since the conquest by some which coulde not well broke thys doctrine" (A4v). The source manuscript itself is apparently defaced in "a few lynes, wherin dyd consiste the chiefe poynte of the contruersie," where they "be rased out by some reader" (A5r). Again, the material detail, the "witnessing" of the text itself plays a key and dual function, both scholarly and polemical. The preface has some other remarkable claims to make, including the assertion that the notorious Viking attacks on Jarrow and Lindisfarne were a kind of divine punishment for "monkerye" (B8v), in a way that curiously updates Wulfstan's famed *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* for a Protestant readership. Likewise, the preface's characterization of Aelfric, the putative author of the Old English homily at the heart of the text, partakes in a notably quasicritical selective reading, in which monasticism is roundly condemned while the intellectual product of it is held to be authoritative and idealized to the point of fetishization.

It is this fetishizing of the Old English itself that is most vital. At the heart of the text is a facing-page edition in which an Old English original is matched with an early modern translation. Eths, thorns, ashes, and wynns are all present, for the first time. What might now look familiar to students of Old English must have appeared entirely alien to the readers of the printed text (assuming that the very small number of people able to read Old English in the 1560s in England was probably limited to the Parker circle itself). The text, claiming to be

part of an ancient, mutual "Saxon" culture, must also have had an unprecedented and obscure appearance. Other paratexual devices (especially printed marginal annotations) work to reinforce the theological import of the text's contents. Comments such as "*No transubstantiation," "*Differences betwixt Christes natural body, and the Sacrament therof," "*Difference," and "*Not the body that suffred is in the housell" often gather together to force interpretative focus on particular passages (E3r). But the ostensibly theological focus of the text requires the alien shape and form, the actual graphemes, of Old English. The final page of the text provides a "key" to the letter forms, "translating" them into sixteenth-century equivalents. The summative impression of all this purposely learned detail is, of course, a certain demonstration of authenticity. However, the "authentic" here is worth recognizing as the remarkably odd thing it is: both apparently "democratizing" and arcane in its scholarly detail; simultaneously ancient, alien, and avant-garde.

The generative effect of controversial historiography in the 1560s, led by scholars like Foxe, Stapleton, and the Parker circle, was a struggle over the possible meanings of the ecclesiastical (and therefore national) history of England. It was also about the constructedness of senses of the premodern past and its possible relationships with the present. While these examples of Reformation culture are sharply sectarian in their attempt to reconstruct the past, the cumulative effect must have been "crucial not so much for the popularization of history but for making people increasingly aware of the plurality of competing, even contradictory, accounts of the past" (Lander 2010, 58). In terms of the affective attractions of this culture, we might also observe that it desired a performance of tangibility. It seems to have been insufficient to assert that, for example, the Anglo-Saxons worshipped or wrote or thought in a particular way, which was putatively comparable to the practices of any confessional identity that existed in the 1560s. One needed to show it: the material text, its history, the effacements and conspiracies it had been apparently subject to,

and its texture and appearance down to the level of its orthography. The desire to see and touch the past in this milieu (or at least to think that one was doing so) is palpable. The mid-Tudor years, among other things, endowed to the later sixteenth century a desiring, argumentative archaeology of the premodern as paradoxically distant and physically immediate and concrete. As Foxe proclaims to have seen an Old English gospel at Crowland Abbey, Tarlton's ghost proclaims himself an authentic authority on the nature of purgatory because he has just been there and seen it. Tarlton's "conceit" is distinctly Foxean in this sense, even as, in its flippant satirizing of such a desire, it shows how medievalism could be very different by the 1590s, marked by the energies of the 1560s, but able to play with the scandalous possibilities of sectarian histories that were not yet fully past.

Temporality and extemporality: The medievalist moment of Elizabethan prose fiction

The moment of *Tarlton's News*, and its combination of medievalism with religious polemic and risqué comedy, gave rise to a remarkable sequence of texts, as the Reformation's culture of riposte and reply tended to produce a running "dialogue" of sequential compositions. Just as this can be seen in Tyndale's and More's copious polemics in the 1520s and 1530s, it is visible in the medievalist interactions with the pre-Conquest past described above, and again in the combative sequences of 1590s prose fiction. These works were also all clearly medievalist. *Tarlton's News* was immediately followed into print by *The Cobler of Caunterburie* (1590), which situated itself on the title page as "an Inuectiue against Tarltons newes out of Purgatorie." This text, like the previous one, was a miscellaneous collection of prose narratives. Many of these were, again, translations from Boccaccio, but the collection also shaped itself as a brilliant updating of the structural games of Chaucer's own *Canterbury Tales*. Cobbler, Smith, Gentleman, Scholar, Old Wife, and Summoner are all given "portrait" descriptions before narrating their own tales during a barge journey between Billingsgate and

Gravesend, replying to each other just as Chaucer's pilgrims "quyte" one another between Southwark and Canterbury. *The Cobler of Caunterburie* then produced "replies" in the form of Robert Greene's *Greene's Vision* (1592) and Henry Chettle's *Kind Heart's Dream*, the last of which contained the "invectivues" of a sequence of ghosts, including Richard Tarlton and the very recently deceased Robert Greene.

It is as part of this sequence that Robert Greene's *Greene's Vision* (1592) needs to be read. Scholars such as Cooper (2005) and Munro (2013) have been interested in the medievalism of Greene's text, especially its staged debate between the figures of Chaucer and Gower; and Maslen (2008) relates it to a wider group of "repentance" narratives attached to Greene. However, Greene's "vision" of the great Ricardian poets is part of the very peculiar mechanics of the text as a whole, and of how his text functioned within the sequence of medievalist texts of which it is an immediate part. Most importantly, *Greene's Vision* is presented as an articulation of a deathbed repentance for an unethical literary life. However, the very shape of the text is made up of the "momentariness" of this—the rhetorical performance of the very moment of Greene's death, which dictates the structure and purposes of the text. The vision is introduced not by Greene himself at first, but by a "literary executioner" (possibly Henry Chettle, who connects his *Kind Heart's Dream* back to the aftermath of Greene's death and his literary remains): "It [*Greene's Vision*] was one of the last workes of a wel known Author . . . Manie haue published repentaunces vnder his name, but none more vnfeigned then this, being euerie word of his owne: his own phrase, his own method" (A3r). This is followed by Greene's own epistle to the reader, written in autobiographical and apologetic terms: "Gentlemen, in a vision before my death, I foresee that I am like to sustaine the shame of many follies of my youth" (A4r). The shame is not generalized, but is attached to the market-driven economics of writing, the "laciuious Pamphleting," "which I haue wrote to get money" (A4r). The epistle ends claiming the

forthcoming text as “my last will and testament,” and is signed off, brilliantly, “Yours dying. Robert Greene” (A4v). The testamentary nature of the epistle shapes it as the product, almost, of the very moment of Greene’s death, reinforcing the title page’s advertisement that the text was “written at the instant of his death.” This play between the “unfeigned” authenticity of deathbed repentance and the inescapable economic necessities of Greene’s writing are vital to the text. The text “proper” begins by linking it overtly to *The Cobbler of Caunterburie*, which Greene, apparently, has been “burdened with the penning of” (B1r). It is this connection to the Chaucerian “invective” against *Tarleton’s Newes* that begins the narration of Greene’s highly-wrought affective state, and introduces the central, emotional process of literary composition itself: “I wared passing melancholy [. . .] in a discontented humor I sat me down vpon my bed-side and began to cal to remembrance what fond and wanton lines had past my pen” (B1r).

The melancholic “humor” leads to the writing of the “Ode” that makes up the first part of the text, marked off from the previous narration with the subtitle “Greene’s Ode, Of the uanitie of wanton writings.” The paratextual device of the subsection or subtitle is key to the text’s progression, as each autobiographical narration of Greene’s guilt-stricken emotional state produces a sequence of “set-piece” literary productions. The “Ode” produces, though, ever more emotion: “After I had written this Ode, a déepe insight of my follies did pearce into the center of my thoughtes, that I felt a passionat remorse” (B2r). This leads in turn to another set-piece, titled “Greenes trouble of minde,” which is even more heightened in its somatic language:

> When I doe […] but glaunce mine eye at the obiect of my sinne […] I am pierced with so sharpe a passion, that I cannot conceale the greef of my conscience, but it bursteth foorth in sighes and groanes insomuch that I thinke life an enemie to my

> weale, and I wish the beginning of my dayes had béene the hower of my departure […] To thée [Christ] I come (ouer heated with the thirst of sinne). (B3v)

Greene's overheatedness is part of a desperate, psalmic prayer to Christ, whose "passionate penance" is, at least rhetorically, related to Greene's own writerly *apologia*. It is at this point that Greene falls asleep and is approached by the visionary figures of Chaucer and Gower. The explicit medievalism of this moment is again "multiple." Lucy Munro and Helen Cooper have both noted the deliberate archaism of Greene's meter in his Chaucerian set-piece descriptions of both poets, and their appearance mimics (or inspired) a theatrical trope for the appearance of medieval figures. Both Chaucer and Gower appear with "in diebus illis, hung upon their garments," an image that reappeared in *A Knack to Know a Knave* (printed 1594), a popular play by the Strange's Men company, which played, according to Philip Henslowe's diary, in 1592 at the Rose (Jones 2011). On the stage, it is the character "Piers Plowman" who appears similarly adorned. It is possible, given previous attempts to connect Greene, already a prolific playwright at that point, to the authorship of the play, that this medievalist image of medieval poets might be something peculiar to Greene. The set-piece descriptions of Chaucer and Gower also mimic those of the narrating characters in the Chaucerian *Cobbler of Canterburie*, the text that prompted Greene's "Vision."

Again, we see something that is not simply using the gestural language of antiquity, but is multiply medievalist: a text which is cognizant of both the medieval past and the mediated medievalism of previous sixteenth-century texts. The debate itself, rehearsing common arguments about the various functions of literature to educate and entertain, is perhaps less important than the way this functions in the wider scope of Greene's text. Where Chaucer and Gower offer different arguments about the relationship between literary pleasure and moral purpose, the culmination of this is a remarkable shift in the wider narration of

Greene's literary career. Ostensibly siding with "moral Gower" over Chaucer, Greene offers yet another apology:

> Onely this (father *Gower*) I must end my *Nunquam sera est*, and for that I craue pardon: but for all these follies, that I may with the Niniuites, shew in sackcloth my harty repentaunce: looke as speedily as the presse wil serue for my mourning garment, a weede that I know is of so plaine a cut, that it will please the grauest eie, and the most precize eare. (H1v)

Gower is happy to shake Greene's (rather slippery) hand, while Chaucer "fumes" at his defeat; but the obvious triumph is that of the "presse" that will speedily produce the texts of *Greene's Never Too Late* and *Greenes Mourning Garment* for sale. The fact that both had already appeared in 1590 makes the marketing purposes even clearer. In an even more evasive feint, Greene then has a further vision of Solomon, who condemns both medieval poets and defends theology as the only licit form of textual production. Greene then rehearses his "repentance as advertisement" all over again. The "passionate" humors and melancholic guilt that had initiated the whole text return as Greene awakes with Solomon's stern sententiousness in his ears: "I started and awoake, and found my selfe in a dreame … a sodaine feare tainted euery limme, and I felt a horror in my conscience, for the follyes of my Penne" (H3v). The quasisomatic drama of Greene's repentance returns, again, as an advertisement. The apparent promise "to séeke after wisdome so highly commended by *Salomon*" comes with the more pressing promise of renewed textual production: "as you had the blossomes of my wanton fancies, so you shall haue the fruites of my better laboures" (H4r). The repentance of Robert Greene, of which the medievalism is an integral part, is, and has always been, a marketing ploy, a great "conceit" to sell more copy. The apparent

"antiquity" of the premodern here is at play in something scandalously novel—both antiquity and autobiography are a performance designed to enable a forthright economic motive.

It is this audaciously ephemeral engine of literary composition that contemporaries were to protest, and in terms that are extremely telling. Gabriel Harvey, in criticisms which were to spark the notorious "Harvey-Nashe" quarrel, addressed the recently deceased Robert Greene as "the king of the paper stage" who had "gone to Tarlton" (E3r). Harvey's condemnation plays on the sense of a wider awareness of Greene's style, and in curiously neologizing terms: "who in London hath not heard of his dissolute and licentious living … his piperly extemporizing and Tarletonizing . . . his impudent pamphleting, fantastic interluding and desperate libelling." Addressing Nashe in the same terms, he went on to condemn Nashe for his similarly "Tarltonizing wit," and the wider zeitgeist of "this Martinist and counter-Martinist age, wherein the spirit of contradiction reigneth, and every one superaboundeth in his own humour, even to the annihilating of any other without rime or reason." The connections Harvey makes in his coinages here are vital to understanding one of the central paradoxes of medievalism in 1590s prose fiction. For Harvey, the extemporality he associates with Tarlton, the theater, Martinism, Greene, and Nashe is the problem of the age. What is produced "for the moment" is also lacking decorum in rhetorical, social, and ethical terms.

Cultural historians have located ways in which senses of Time in the period, drawn from classical traditions, became entrenched in connections to rhetoric and politics (Paul 2014). The Greek "*Kronos*" (sequential, linear time) existed alongside "*Kairos*" ("occasion" or "auspicious" time in the sense of the "moment"). These concepts, mapped onto Latin notions of rhetoric, became in the sixteenth century a way of thinking about everything from verbal performance to political action (roughly speaking, ethical versus "Machiavellian" politics). The medievalism of prose fiction in the 1590s might be usefully seen through the

lens of these terms. Where the texts from *Tarlton's News* to *Greene's Vision* construct the premodern past as distanced from the present in terms of linear time (chronologically alien and antique, viewed with the visual identification of "in diebus illis"), they also partake in what Harvey saw as an overabundance of extemporalism, of "occasional," opportunistic, and ephemeral literary production. The senses of the past produced by these texts play on different, perhaps even divided, temporalities. The ancient becomes present in the moment, precisely because extemporality—"Tarltonizing," to use Harvey's verb—has become an overpowering part of what contemporary verbal performance, either on the page or stage, was seen to be.

Passionating the past: the affective rhetoric of historical poetry

The ostentatiously affective language Greene used to describe his "repentance" found its apogee in that of a simultaneous literary vogue that developed in the poetry of the 1590s. Just as *Tarlton's News*, Greene's writing, and Harvey's attack on it all demonstrated a heightened consciousness of the cultural "moment," others were to take stock of the state of the English literary scene in suggestive ways. This literary stock-taking also shows how vital the premodern was to contemporary literature. In 1598, Francis Meres published his *Palladis Tamia, or Wit's Treasury*, which contained "A comparatiue discourse of our English Poets, with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets" (279). It offers a broad assessment of the literary scene of the 1590s, including the following passage on Michael Drayton and Samuel Daniel:

> As euery one mourneth, when hee heareth of the lamentable plangors of *Thracian Orpheus* for his dearest *Euridice*: so euery one passionateth, when he readeth the afflicted death of *Daniels* distressed *Rosamond.* […]

> As *Accius*, *M. Attilius* and *Milithus* were called *Tragoediographi*, because they writ Tragedies: so may wee truly terme *Michael Drayton Tragoediographus*, for his passionate penning the downfals of valiant *Robert of Normandy*, chast *Matilda*, and great *Gaueston*. (Meres 1598, 280-1)

As scholars have noted, Meres's gathering together of the two poets, and the entirely medieval nature of the subject matter listed, is accurate in identifying a contemporary vogue for the medievalist poetic complaint in the 1590s, started by Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592). This was a "new kind of history," one that "combines lyric with historical narrative," and one that, in its tendency to articulate a specifically female voice, challenged "the self-assertive masculinity of epic historical narratives through its exploration of the personal and political consequences of desire" (Brown 2004, 179–80). Van Es (2008) and Budra (1995) have noted the deep roots of this "new" lyric history in both classical and native traditions, especially Ovid's *Heroides* and *The Mirror for Magistrates*; but it is Meres's language in describing the two poets that is most significant here. In its unusual use of "Passionate" as both a verb and an adjective, Meres identifies something vital to this writing. The word, for Meres, seems to relate writerly, compositional activity, on the one hand, to a form of performative reader response, on the other. The "passionate penning" of tragedy is proximate to the effect such writing is imagined to have on a reader, who will "passionate" on reading the lamentable downfalls or disgraces of this sequence of medieval figures (Henry II's mistress, the disinherited son of William the Conqueror, the victim of King John's illicit desire, the famed "favorite" of Edward II). Suggestively, one of the few other attestations of the word used in this way appears in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, when Titus complains that he and Lavinia "want our hands, / And cannot passionate our tenfold grief / With folded arms" (3.2.5–7). The act of "passionating" seems in this instance to have a distinctly

performative sense, one that suggests gestural acting as well as verbal lamentation. Taken together with Meres's imagined reader response to Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond*, this gives us a sense of the heightened connection between historical poetry and contemporary reception. The premodern is the subject of a contemporary poetic vogue here because it *moves* the reader to enact or mimic the "passionating" figures of the past. In Meres's comparative "discourse," in his comparison of Daniel's Rosamond to the Ovidian narrative of Orpheus and Eurydice, there is also a very acute observation. Ovid's own writing of Orphean complaint in the *Metamorphoses* used an echoing emphasis on the called vocatives of the lovers (X.1–85), movingly mimicking the desperate calls of Orpheus for the lost soul of Eurydice. Just so, the highly affective "passionating" of both Daniel and Drayton depended on a comparable emphasis on effects of voice, on using poetry to respeak the voices of the premodern dead.

The passionate penning tended to rehearse an approach to the premodern past that was familiar from earlier, historiographical interactions, particularly those of Foxe. The *Acts and Monuments* was designed, in 1563, to ensure what could be "reserued and remaine," to recover what might be "lost in silence." Drayton's career would include playwrighting for the Admiral's Men, contributing to such Foxean plays as *1 Sir John Oldcastle* (1600), whose prologue similarly urged: "let faire truth be grac'te, / Since forg'de invention former time defac'te" (Hebel 1931, I.395). His earlier medievalist poetic "legends" in the 1590s frequently adhere to the generic and historiographical senses laid out in the terms of Meres and Foxe. In his dedicatory epistle to Henry Cavendish, which introduced Drayton's "Legend" of Piers Gaveston (1593), Drayton opined that Gaveston's "name hath been obscured so many yeeres," and had been "over-past by the Tragaedians of these latter times" (Hebel 1931, I.158). The text ended with a "historical note" citing John Stow as the authentic source for his historical poem. His *Matilda* (1594) opened with the ventriloquized voice of

King John's lover, whose life had been "too long conceald" by "blacke oblivion" (I.214). When *The Tragicall Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandy* appeared alongside the Gaveston and Matilda poems in 1596, it did so with a complimentary sonnet that emphasized that Drayton's work "restor'd his former fame" (I.248). The deeply Chaucerian visions of Fame and Fortune in that poem end by offering the "lost" book of Robert, Duke of Normandy "T'amaze the world with his sad Tragedy" (I.303).

This recuperative response to the past clearly shares much with the antiquarian and historiographical efforts outlined earlier, and which Vine (2010)—writing explicitly about antiquarianism—has termed a "dynamic, recuperative, resurrective response to the past" (3). However, the nature of Drayton's 1590s historical poetry is focused, very self-consciously, on the generic language of tragedy. In a dedicatory epistle to Lucy, Countess of Bedford, Drayton would characterize himself as "Still paynting passions in these Tragedies" (Hebel 1931, I.306), and in the same text would shape narrative junctions in his poem with metageneric commentary: "Each line shall be a history of woe"; "Each letter must containe a tragedy" (I.351). The poems frequently contain such gestures. In *Mortermeriados* (1596), Drayton describes Edward II reading a historical chronicle, renarrating the reigns of medieval monarchs from William the Conqueror onwards as a sequence of tragic narratives that act as a lamentable mirror of his own reign. The opening of the Matilda legend has her recounting her relation to Daniel's Rosamond, Lucrece, and Jane Shore, in a sort of literary roll call of the central figures of "female complaint" literature in the 1590s. This is all part of a very distinct cultural moment, most famously articulated by Shakespeare's Richard II in his desire to "let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings" (3.2.1565–66). Both in verse, and on stage, the premodern past adhered most powerfully to tragedy, even though it was also deployable, at the same time, as the scandalously scurrilous matter of prose satire.

These dual energies of historical poetry—historiographical and literary, recuperative and tragic—were joined in poetry by a strongly prosopopoeic development. John Kerrigan (1991) has written of "[t]he necromantic and prosopopoeic devices of the genre," and the ways these "could satisfy that desire to hear 'dead men speake [,]' to 'call to counsel those that are dead and gone'" (33). As Foxe, Stapleton, and the Parker circle had to "show" the remains of the premodern past, 1590s poets had to ventriloquize them, to respeak the voices of the dead. This need to "en-voice" the premodern, coupled with Meres's well-observed emphasis on the reader's response to such acts of ventriloquism, produced a "passionating of the past" that was affective partly because it was demanding. These poems were designed not to be casually observed but to demand emotional response, to require that the temporal and chronological distance between medieval subject, contemporary poet, and reader be effaced in an emotional moment of connection. The "resurrective" or "necromantic," as well as the recuperative, energies of this poetry are everywhere. Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), the text that Meres focuses on in his formulation of the "passionating" responses of readers, and that was the catalyst for much of Drayton's poetry, begins in just such terms:

> Ovt from the horror of Infernall deepes,
> My poore afflicted ghost comes here to plain it,
> Attended with my shame that neuer sleepes,
> The spot where-with my kind and youth did staine it.
> My body found a graue where to containe it.
> A sheete could hide my face, but not my sin,
> For Fame findes neuer tombe t'inclose it in.
>
> And which is worse, my soule is now denied,

Her transport to the sweet Elisian rest,
The ioifull blisse for ghosts repurified,
The euer-springing Gardens of the blest:
Caron denies me waftage with the rest.
And saies, my soule can neuer passe the Riuer,
Till Louers sighs on earth shall it deliuer. (Daniel 1592, 1–14)

Yeo (2017) has explored the curious ways in which this writing preempts some of the dominant tropes of later, specifically gothic, literature. We might also, though, look backwards in time at this moment, because Rosamond, disgraced mistress of Henry II, is—despite Daniel's classicism—a purgatorial soul. The "infernal deepes" from which the afflicted ghost comes seem to be pre-Christian in their frame of reference ("Elisian," "Caron," the uncrossable Styx); but they are unavoidably proximate to the "third place" that produced Tarlton's ghost at the beginning of this essay. Most importantly, the stranded spirit of Rosamond doesn't cry out in complaint with no hope of relief but awaits deliverance that is dependent on the readerly response of the living, the "Lovers" on earth whose "sighs" can be efficacious, allowing her "soule" to "passe" and join those "repurified" ghosts. In assessing other forms of early modern popular culture, Wiseman (2009) has explored how "archetypal" narratives might share space, how—in a way neatly reminiscent of Meres's comparison of Daniel's text to the Orpheus myth in Ovid—both the image of Lot's wife looking back at Sodom, and of Orpheus looking back towards Eurydice, might be active in the same early modern text. There is no need here, though, for that interpretative leap. The unavoidable proximity to pre-Reformation culture is startling, as the prosopopoeic nature of ventrioloquizing the ghosts of the dead goes back as a literary trope to one of the first flashpoints of the Reformation itself, in Thomas More's *Supplication of Souls* (1529). In

More's text, the ghosts of the dead would "In most pytuouse wyse continually calleth & cryeth vppon your devout cherite," precisely because their existence was at risk of effacement by polemical cultural amnesia, in the form of Simon Fish's brutal economic attack on the existence of Purgatory (111). The usually quiet souls, sustained by remembrance, "do now in thys oure great fere of our vtter losse for euer of your louyng reembraunce and relyefe … importunately byreue you of your reste wyth cryenge at your eares." The prosopopeia was itself something that attracted the scorn of More's opponents. When Foxe reprinted Fish's text in the *Acts and Monuments*, his marginal comment sneered that "sayth M. More, the soules themselues did heare euen into Purgatory. Belyke M. More himselfe stoode behind ePurgatorye doore the same time, or els how could he tell, that the soules did heare hym?" (More 1990, 413 note23). Despite Foxe's own desire to rescue (bits of) the premodern past from silence, the "fiction" of the crying voices from Purgatory was something to be dismissed. It was also precisely what made historical poetry in the 1590s, a generation after Foxe, so attractive to its readers. In critical discussions of Daniel's and Drayton's poetry, the ghostly aspect of their poetry is frequently attributed to its place in the *Mirror for Magistrates* tradition; but it is the ghost's need not only to be heard, but helped, that brings historical complaint poetry very close to Reformation controversy over Purgatory. This purgatorial voice of Rosamond, articulated in "secular" historical verse in the 1590s, rather than theological polemic in the 1520s, can be seen to have moved away from, to have been almost freed from, the primary environment of ideological polemic; but this is still palpably about the desire to hear the dead, to be connected to them through the emotional connection of remembrance. The "passionating" of the past observed by Meres in Drayton and Daniel is a highly emotive act of looking back, in more than one way.

Daniel's Rosamond was clearly important as an imaginative prompt for Drayton, as—along with his self-consciousness about literary genre—his poems frequently imagine the

aural phenomenon of voices of the dead. Drayton's Gaveston, closely echoing Daniel's Rosamond, appears "From gloomy shaddowe of eternall night," "from those Ghostes, whose eyes abhorre the light . . . I come a wofull tale to tell . . . sighing the scenes from my tormented hart" (I.159, ll. 1–6). Drayton's tendency to dwell on the act of writing itself, the focus on each "line" or "letter," similarly sees "every accent as a dead mans cry." The distended corporality of Drayton's imagery, so often close to the grotesque, is similar in imagining "chanells serve for inke, for paper stones . . . And for thy pens, a heape of dead-mens bones" (I.353, 1541–43), but always with the emphasis on speech, on "Death-telling apparisions." Lucanesque scenes of civil combat are full of "mangled bodies" but also of cries "As though the Spirits had howled from beneath" (I.321, 434–35). Edward II's ghost, despite the placatory efforts of Isabella, still "appears, / And cryes revenge, revenge, unto his Sonne" against Mortimer (I.384, 2633) in ways that clearly recall the personified figure of Kyd's dramatic writing and look forward to *Hamlet*. Isabella herself ends the same poem with a verbal proclamation to the dead, cursing Edward III with the incantatory desire to "invoke the wretched spirits beneath" (I.392, 2902–3). Following her death, Matilda's father, shockingly, calls down a personified "Revenge," but in order to direct his efforts downwards: "And from the grave Ile dig her body up," in a desperate attempt at revivifying reunion with his daughter. The character's immediate repentance for the thought—"O pardon Heavens these sacrilegious words" (I.242, 995)—does nothing to abate the rhetorical pitch of desperation to hear the voices of the dead that circulate constantly in Drayton's writing. The embodiment of voice in this poetry is precisely what made it seem, to Meres, most "passionate," and most likely to make readers "passionate" in response.

Williams (2010) has rightly written of the premodern having a "persistent and provocative presence" in Renaissance English Literature, even as such a chronological phenomenon is also described as a "culture of medievalism, *avant-la-lettre*," before the

necessary chronological and cultural distance that might make that possible (214). Others, focusing on continental European phenomena, have found early modern culture to have "its own variety of medievalism(s)" (Montoya et al. 2010, 3). In its many experiments with the temporality of the past, sixteenth-century England developed a number of ways of "feeling" the past that could be—almost simultaneously—emotive and expedient, tragic and desiring, scandalous and controversial. The repeated sounds of the crying voices of the dead in historical poetry give us some sense of the high pitch of desire for contact with the premodern past, ventriloquizing what I describe above as a "performance of tangibility," even at the same moment as figures like the "ghost of Richard Tarlton" could make multiple uses of medievalism in scandalously comic extemporal performance. Neither of these novel, voguish forms of medievalism is quite free from the paratextual struggles of Foxean, and counter-Foxean, time.

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