



# Still Thriving

On the Importance of Aranye Fradenburg



STILL THRIVING  
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edited by Eileen A. Joy



dead letter office: basement

**BABEL Working Group**

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STILL THRIVING: ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ARANYE  
FRADENBURG

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The **BABEL Working Group** is a collective and desiring-assemblage of scholar-gypsies with no leaders or followers, no top and no bottom, and only a middle. BABEL roams and stalks the ruins of the post-historical university as a multiplicity, a pack, looking for other roaming packs with which to co-habit and build temporary shelters for intellectual vagabonds. We also take in strays.

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Cover Image: Catherine Deneuve as Aranye Fradenburg in *It Keeps Getting Better* (2013).



Scan with smartphone to listen to  
Aranye Fradenburg's brain waves.™





It must be vanilla-wonderful to be a fallen angel surrounded by other lambent sylphids who share all your pain and all your memories, your wings, your span, your ambition, and your dark side—the dark side that gives your light its body.

~ Eleanor Johnson





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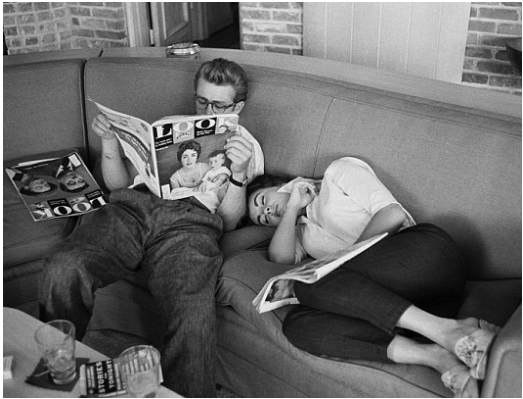
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Preface

Like a Radio Left On / on the  
Outskirts of Identical Cities  
Living (with) Fradenburg

Eileen A. Joy

We are beings who can neither live nor die  
without artful signification.

L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, "The Liberal Arts  
of Psychoanalysis"

. . . obscure / forces are at work / like a radio left on / on the outskirts of / identical cities.

Ben Lerner, "Doppler Elegies"

Like a radio left on, in the poet Ben Lerner's parlance, on the outskirts of identical cities—and also, like the strains of a Lushlife Project downtempo "Budapest Eskimos" soundtrack emanating from a diamond mine—Aranye Fradenburg's work has operated as a groovy and "obscure force" in medieval studies, and also in the humanities more broadly, for the past 20 or so years as a powerful and palpably explicit influence, first, upon work in Middle English literary (especially Chaucer) studies, especially those inflected by psychoanalytic, symptomatic, and "discontinuist"/non-alteritist historicist approaches to the Middle Ages. And second, her work has operated as a potent and insistent voice on the arts of living, on *eudaimonia* (flourishing), on the importance of pleasure/enjoyment (in its lighter and darker valences), on sentience/sensation, the feeling arts, on techniques of living, and care of the self. On the linguistic level, her work has richly explored what she calls the "living on"-ness of the always-traveling, transitive, open-ended, and non-linear signifiers and processes of signification that enable (and sometimes disable) the intersubjective formations between various actors, living and dead, past and present, so crucial to

our desires, to our sufferings and passions, to our ability to affiliate with and relate to others, and thus, to living our shared lives, for better and worse. And it must be noted, too, that one of the "obscure forces" that Lerner speaks of in his "Doppler Elegies" (in addition to death and catastrophe) is love, a subject which has played no small role in Fradenburg's intellectual, and I would also say, political-humanist concerns. One could go further and say that, like Lerner, Fradenburg has been our scholarly poet of the "obscure forces" at work, not only in our university professions, but in the personal lives that can never be completely disentangled from that thing we call "work."

Fradenburg has been a hero of mine for a long while now for insisting, over and over again throughout her writings, that in all times and places we misunderstand ourselves, and therefore, unknowing—and the self-fictionalizations (some constructive, some destructive) predicated upon that unknowing—have to be taken into account, whether we are studying the past or just trying to understand ourselves and our own experiences. As she put it so eloquently in her magisterial book *Sacrifice Your Love*, with regard to medieval studies, we "cannot confine the work of knowing the Middle Ages to replicating, however hopelessly and/or heroically, medieval cultures self-understandings. We also should explore how medieval cultures, like all others, may have mis-



understood themselves."<sup>1</sup> And with regard to our own self-understandings, and in a way that is resonant with many of the discourses circulating in the university today under the aegis of object-oriented philosophies and various strains of post/humanist thought, Fradenburg wrote in the same book,

. . . the effect of subjectivity is produced by the interplay of insentience with sentience.

The telescopes that help us see the stars, the buildings that house the shelters that are our bodies, are insentient; and yet we extend sentience through them. But the more we make the machines and products that extend subjectivity into the world, the more insentience is part of us, or we are part of it. Forces are at work within us that do not "mean" anything; parts of ourselves cannot account for themselves. The work cannot account for itself, or disclose anything about itself, or even be questioned.<sup>2</sup>

This excerpt is part of a much longer and very complex discussion having to do with forms of alienation produced by labor, modes of produc-

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<sup>1</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 77–78.

<sup>2</sup> Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, 13.

tion (scholarly and artistic), aesthetics, courtly love, desire, libidinal economies, the Law, enjoyment, sacrifice/loss, political ethics, and community, and I can't do justice to all of that here. In any case, Fradenburg's theoretical project in this book, especially with regard to, say, Chaucer studies and medieval chivalric literature and culture more broadly (in its broadest temporal dimensions, then to now), is well-known and registered across a vast array of scholarship within medieval studies that has been undertaken under this book's tutelage.

My own continual return(s) to the passages cited above have more to do with my own interest in and use of Fradenburg's thinking, which, of unconscious necessity or intention, is highly idiosyncratic and personal. Thus, for me, these passages have long operated as watch-phrases for my own work, where I have striven to always keep in mind the unavoidable blind spots and "obscure forces" of everyone's understanding of everything, including ourselves. Scholarship of medieval literature, or any literature, really, for me, becomes a valuable project of tracing productive errancies and sites of incoherence and crafting creative critical approaches that, in Eve Sedgwick's memorable formulation, aim to be "additive and accretive," desiring "to assemble and confer plenitude on an object [such as a text or textual object or author-object] that will then have

resources to offer an inchoate self.”<sup>3</sup> This has something to do as well with what Bryan Reynolds has called a transversal poetics that defy “the authorities that reduce and contain meanings,” and also seek to “understand and empower fugitive elements [in texts and other artifacts, and in particular spaces] insofar as doing so generates positive experiences.”<sup>4</sup> And this sort of work might be crucial for the future, if we agree with Frandeburg (and I do) that,

To be able to anticipate, plan, project a future or into a future, we have to not know for sure, because we have to suspend judgment even while exercising it, knowing that we don’t know (everything). Ethics—and ultimately psychoanalysis—emerges from a willing of this suspension, a paradoxical knowing of non-knowing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You,” in Sedgwick, ed., *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 27–28.

<sup>4</sup> Bryan Reynolds, “Transversal Poetics and Fugitive Explorations: Theaterspace, Paused Consciousness, Subjunctivity, and Macbeth,” in *Transversal Enterprises in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Fugitive Explorations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7 [1–26].

<sup>5</sup> Aranye Frandeburg, “(Dis)continuity: A History of Dreaming,” in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, ed. Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Frederico (New York: Pal-

In relation to my own current work on Foucault's late writings on "care of the self," I have been returning (a lot) recently to Fradenburg's 2002 book *Sacrifice Your Love*, where I have been struck both by how apropos to our moment and compelling this book still is and also by how Fradenburg's entire oeuvre seems to continuously circle back (with important renovations of thought) to this earlier book's project to draw attention to the important inter-relations between embodiment and signification, between pleasure and virtue (where "virtue" is seen to have something to do with world-building), between subjectivity and Otherness, and between art and what she calls, in her essay "Living Chaucer" (and following the biological sciences) the "living process."<sup>6</sup> It feels timely to me, therefore, to spend some time now thinking about Fradenburg's trajectory of thought over the past ten years or so, especially as it culminates, or expresses itself, in this important (and moving) essay, which originated as the Biennial Chaucer Lecture at the meeting of the New Chaucer Society in Siena, Italy in July 2010.

I offer one cautionary note here, therefore, to say that I am not attempting in this brief Preface (which is also a tribute, or call it a love letter) to offer a comprehensive account of Fradenburg's whole body of work, nor to assess all of its merits

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grave Macmillan, 2009), 96 [87–115].

<sup>6</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 64 [41–64].

(of which there are many) in relation to the larger field of medieval studies. Here I merely celebrate the originality and importance of a scholar who has urged me to think, and also to *feel*, differently—about my field, yes, but more importantly, about the world in which I live. Over the years, I have come to value and to gather close to me, with a certain intense ardor, the work of scholars who have helped me, not just to think, but to live more creatively and more mindfully, and in this sense, Fradenburg joins Sara Ahmed, Zygmunt Bauman, Lauren Berlant, Jane Bennett, Leo Bersani, Kathleen Biddick, Judith Butler, John Caputo, Thomas Carlson, Jeffrey Cohen, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Carolyn Dinshaw, Michel Foucault, James Earl, Cary Howie, George Kateb, Anna Kłosowska, Jonathan Lear, Emmanuel Levinas, Michael Edward Moore, Martha Nussbaum, Bill Readings, Joan Retallack, Claude Romano, Eve Sedgwick, and Simone Weil as writers who always hover nearby in my study. This list is highly personal, and of course I admire and am influenced by many scholars beyond these, but these authors stand out for providing to me what, for lack of a better term, I will call my spiritual reservoir, comprising my scholar-gypsy companions.

Some of the scholars in this list also stand out even further for their attention to and care for the role of the humanities and the university, and of creative thought more generally, in relation to personal and social life, and thus they have also

been crucial to me and others in relation to the heterotopic and desiring-assemblage projects of the BABEL Working Group.<sup>7</sup> Fradenburg, along with Bennett, Bersani, Nussbaum, and Readings, is particularly noteworthy in this regard.<sup>8</sup> When reading Fradenburg closely, no matter what the specific texts or subjects under close scrutiny (Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, the *Knight's Tale*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, etc.), what she seems to always be talking about is something she says more explicitly in her essay, "Group Time: Catastrophe, Survival, Periodicity"—that "enjoyment is the matrix of knowledge, and knowledge is not diminished thereby." Further, "Interpretation and explanation are activities central to libidinal structuration and vice versa. . . . We thereby reclaim our technical work [the humanities] as the work of desire, and desire as that which makes the world."<sup>9</sup>

Fradenburg has become one of our most important advocates for the importance of the "liberal arts" (and of creativity, confabulation, and play, more particularly) to personal and more

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<sup>7</sup> See BABEL Working Group at: <http://www.babelworkgroup.org>.

<sup>8</sup> Especially now that she has published *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, "Group Time: Catastrophe, Survival, Periodicity," in *Time and the Literary*, ed. Karen Newman, Jay Clayton, and Marianne Hirsch (New York: Routledge, 2002), 232 [211–238].

broadly social “thriving” and thus her recent essay, “Living Chaucer” (cited just above) feels like both the consummate culmination of her career’s various theoretical trajectories thus far, while it also offers (within the context of her more recent forays into neuroscience and evolutionary biology) a striking and enlivening departure for a couple of reasons: first, because she moves closer than she has in previous work to embracing the value and necessity of shared minds (and thus, for all of their precariousness and dangers, somatic-affective community-assemblages). And second, because she also articulates more forcefully than she has before that literature/language is not *only* a signalling system that only-always defers, or devolves, to other signalling systems, which are therefore in a continual Derridean slippage that, perhaps, never admits of a Real, or is always pointing to the ways in which language can only ever be falling away from that Real (blah blah blah, I’m so tired of and bored by these theories of lack/non-coincidence between language and everything else), but rather, that language and the literary arts may actually have the power to change history, and even more so, possesses a presence that is not negligible with regard to how we are affected by the past (or even to how we understand and negotiate our “selves” and our experiences in the present). As Fradenburg herself puts it in “Living Chaucer,”

undead life seems more apt a description

of the signifier's mode of existence (as Derrida himself thought) than does simple absence or nonexistence. I wrote in *Sacrifice Your Love* about this form of "being-as-signifier": given how susceptible we are to the signifier's designs, there is more connectedness than we think between living subjects and dead letters. Nature's signifiers vary in their realizations, but something, a shape, insists.<sup>10</sup>

There is some resonance here with what Anna Kłosowska writes in *Queer Love in the Middle Ages*, that,

all fiction corresponds to an absolute reality—not of existence, but of desire that calls fiction into being, performed by the authors and manuscript makers; and continuing desire for it performed by the readers, a desire that sustains the book's material presence across the centuries. That desire is incorporated in an existence. It is the backbone of an identity. It is an essential part of the bundle of motives that lie behind all that the body does. A part essential because it is retrievable, but also because it is privileged: art reveals more of life than life does.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," 44.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Kłosowska, *Queer Love in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7.



I am reminded of when I was at University College Dublin in June of 2009 for a 3-day seminar, organized by Michael O'Rourke and Noreen Giffney, devoted to the oeuvre of Leo Bersani.<sup>12</sup> On the first day, when we were revisiting the span of Bersani's writings prior to his then-current book *Intimacies*, co-authored with Adam Phillips, at one point, I got extremely excited during the discussion of Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's essay on Terence Malik's film *The Thin Red Line*, an essay I absolutely love and have made use of in my own scholarship numerous times,<sup>13</sup> and one of the seminar's participants said something to me that, in my memory of it, went something like this, "But, Eileen, why are you getting so excited about this? After all, we're talking about a text, and what we do is talk about texts, and we read theory to see what we can do with it in relation to texts, and this is not about life. You're acting like

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<sup>12</sup> See Eileen Joy, "Reading Leo Bersani: A Retrospective," *In The Middle*, June 2011, 2009: <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2009/06/reading-leo-bersani-retrospective.html>.

<sup>13</sup> See Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, "One Big Soul (*The Thin Red Line*)," in Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 124–178. See also Eileen A. Joy, "The Signs and Location of a Flight (or Return?) of Time: The Old English *Wonders of the East* and the Gujarat Massacre," in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 209–229.

we're supposed to read Bersani for life." And I thought: we're NOT supposed to read Bersani—and let's face it, theory more generally—for LIFE? Fuck: how come no one TOLD me that? It was a funny (and frankly, infuriating) moment, but also one that convinced me more than ever: um, yes, theory is for life: DUH! We read theory—whether Derrida, Foucault, Bersani, Jane Bennett, Graham Harman, Roland Barthes, Fradenburg, and I could go on—for life: for LIFE! So I relate this anecdote to also say that Fradenburg's scholarship isn't just about Chaucer or medieval literature or even psychoanalytic and evolutionary approaches to literature more broadly; it's about life, it's about how we, in her own words,

need knowledge of how to do things every day in every way in our real environments; and we are not yet very close to eliminating the contingency and changefulness of living. When it comes to talking, listening, courting, negotiating, playing basketball, playing the violin, making peace, leading an organization, the humanities teaches us how to live successfully—how to adapt to, and (re-)create, our circumstances, by seeing more keenly, hearing more polyphonically, interpreting more humbly, richly and carefully, speaking to each other more persuasively, and much, much more.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Aranye Fradenburg, "Frontline: The Liberal Arts of Psychoanalysis," *The Journal of the American Academy*

Relationality, intersubjectivity, aliveness, resilience, care of the (confabulated) self and also of others, playfulness, healing, the arts of living, and thriving seem, increasingly, to be the key watchwords and concerns of Fradenburg's work, and at the same time, the so-called "literary" mode is still central to these concerns, such that,

Interpretation and relationality depend on one another because all relationships are unending processes of interpretation and expression, listening and signifying. In turn, sentience assists relationality: we can't thrive and probably can't survive without minds open to possibility, capable of sensing and interpreting the tiniest shifts in, e.g., pitch and tone.<sup>15</sup>

Although it may seem, that in some of her recent writings, Fradenburg has been turning more toward biological and cognitive studies and away from a concentrated focus on medieval literature, per se, her essay "Living Chaucer" tells a different story about a long and warm companionship with Chaucer in which the "literary friendship" Fradenburg feels for Chaucer "is an attachment his work actively solicits, to a degree and in ways unique to his corpus but consistent both with premodern

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of *Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 39.4 (2011): 589–609.

<sup>15</sup> Fradenburg, "The Liberal Arts of Psychoanalysis."

and contemporary understandings of the signifier and its role in intersubjective, hence also political and social, process."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Chaucer's poetry is central to Fradenburg's thinking on something she has written eloquently about before in numerous pieces, and also expressed in her essay "(Dis)Continuity: A History of Dreaming," where she writes that, "we all live in many different times; different times live on in us and our practices,"<sup>17</sup> and therefore, with regard to literature (Chaucer's poetry, for example) and its role in personal and social mental life, we might say, following Fradenburg, that it enables a "shared attention," which is a form of sociality productive of progressive change in history. Literature is also, by its very nature, playful, and thus crucial, as Fradenburg writes, to the sorts of becomings that enable important psychic transformations:

Play values experimentation. When we play, we are more open to the new, from within and without. We become "neophiles" and innovators, making active use of our imaginations. Playing and pretending are crucial to the becomings of living creatures, to adaptation and behavioral flexibility; . . . Play teaches "vital skills"; it is transformative and transforming. We can neither thrive nor survive without it. And it

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<sup>16</sup> Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," 41.

<sup>17</sup> Fradenburg, "(Dis)continuity: A History of Dreaming," 88.

is highly contagious, a powerful medium of affect transmission.<sup>18</sup>

This resonates with Joan Retallack's argument—with which I am in more than warm agreement—that, “To become adult in our culture (which for most of us means to become compliantly productive) is . . . to be increasingly disabled for the kinds of humorous and dire, purposeful play that creates geometries of attention revelatory of silences in the terrifying tenses that elude official grammars.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of Fradenburg's “Living Chaucer” essay is its emphasis on the idea that authors, texts (and the textual objects enclosed and projected therein), and readers form somatic-affective, and thus, inter-subjective assemblages and signifying networks over time, and what this means is that

Chaucer's words “live on” because the patterns they create really do change our minds and bodies. I believe this viewpoint to be a helpful alternative to our perennial question about whether we are representing the past rightly. Whatever representations of the English past we fashion, they are all in part the result of changes wrought in us, consciously and noncon-

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<sup>18</sup> Fradenburg, “Living Chaucer,” 57.

<sup>19</sup> Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 62.

sciously, by living with Chaucer. The signifiers of the past are in us, whether we understand them “rightly” or not; we will never be certain what they mean, but we will certainly have been possessed by them. And our possession by (and of) past signifiers further transforms their range of meanings.<sup>20</sup>

Further, “symbols enable living process. Or, to put it another way, living is an art,”<sup>21</sup> and literature forms one very important component of what might be called shared sentience (something I argue for myself in work on reading vis-a-vis various object-oriented philosophies),<sup>22</sup> one that would be woefully impoverished and less able to transform itself in positive, open-ended ways, without poetry, without literature and other fine arts. Those of us who work in the humanities, it seems to me (and urged by Fradenburg’s and others’ thought), must never stop laboring and fighting to stress this point, which might also be put like this: Living is an art; the arts are crucial for living. Our scholarly work, also—and this cannot be stressed enough—is also an art, if we could

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<sup>20</sup> Fradenburg, “Living Chaucer,” 45.

<sup>21</sup> Fradenburg, “Living Chaucer,” 45.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Eileen A. Joy, “Weird Reading,” *Speculations* IV (2013): 28–34, and “Like Two Autistic Moonbeams Entering the Window of My Asylum: Chaucer’s *Griselda* and Lars von Trier’s *Bess McNeill*,” *postmedieval* 2.3 (2011): 316–328.

just better grasp and practice this fact. We do not just study and write about the literary arts, but rather, extend and reinvent and multiply them in “our own words,” our own styles, our own idioms. Form matters and plays no little part in *how things turn out*.

“Living Chaucer,” similar to Fradenburg’s book *Staying Alive*, is extraordinary for the ways in which it brings together neuroscience (with its concepts of neuroplasticity and mirror neurons), evolutionary and behavioral biology, studies of animal communication, psychoanalysis (Freud on mourning and melancholia, D.W. Winnicott on play), and medieval philosophy, among other subjects, to ultimately argue for literature, and Chaucer’s poetry especially, as a form of therapeutic care and counter-melancholic “working through,” enabled through a shared attention that is always about the process more so than the end, or finish, of anything. Chaucer himself, through his poetry, is a kind of “premodern psychologist” whose continual suspension of so-called final meanings creates what Fradenburg describes as a “friendly” liminal clearing in which so-called self-knowledge can really only be accessed communally, or in the company of good listener-conversationalists with a predisposition to welcome the Other (like Chaucer himself!). Through Chaucer’s art, we undo our isolation and move closer to the sort of fellowship so crucial for living, and for thriving (together). As Fradenburg herself puts it, in what for me is the most moving line of

the essay, and worth bracketing,

What enables us to risk change is the feeling that we are understood and (therefore) accompanied.<sup>23</sup>

In the final analysis, as Fradenburg herself avers, play and shared attention are so important to so many species, including humans, that they may even be an end in themselves. We might also call this learning, or the university: the endless (playful, but also at times, sorrowful) processes we must commit ourselves to, with their open-ended (Chaucerian) mutliplicity of perspectives, and their cultivation of the non-utilitarian arts of life which may have more to do with personal and social well-being than we have previously imagined. For this, and many other reasons, Fradenburg's work hails us to this inter-temporal pedagogical-artistic project, and asks us, not just to innovate our scholarship accordingly, but to reclaim the humanities itself as the site of care and healing, and thus, of love itself, especially when we understand love (as I do), in Lauren Berlant's terms, as a form of "emotional time," where "it is possible to value floundering around with others whose attention-paying to what's happening is generous and makes liveness possible as a good, not a threat."<sup>24</sup> Fradenburg's work is itself that sort of

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<sup>23</sup> Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," 60.

<sup>24</sup> Lauren Berlant, "Starved," in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew



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generous attention-paying, by which we are enriched, enlivened, and most marvelously of all, *accompanied*.

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Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 85–86 [79–90].

# 1: More Blue Doors

Patricia Clare Ingham



When, in late September of 1990 and a new graduate student, I first presented myself in the Sankey Room on the 4th floor of South Hall (arguably the ugliest building on UCSB's campus), I was on my 3rd doctoral program in as many disciplines, and rather feeling the strain. Over the course of the preceding six years, I had begun a PhD in medieval history at UCLA, leaving after a single quarter; I had begun another in Systematic Theology/Ethics at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, leaving after the M.A. I'd learned a lot; but I'd developed a love/hate relationship with

academic medievalism. Here to give it another go, I felt unsure that I would thrive in the field.

On that late-September day, at that first coffee hour for newbies, I met Aranye (then Louise) Fradenburg in the flesh, the star feminist medievalist, herself recently wooed away from the shady groves of Dartmouth to the quonset huts of UCSB. (Current and former occupants of South Hall will want me to note that those huts are perched on the loveliest of bluffs, overlooking the Pacific, and in view of the purple California Coastal Range.) I buttonholed Aranye with the clearly aspirational, if also anxious, exclamation: "I'm a medievalist!" ("Me, too!" she replied, with characteristic kindness).

Within a week or so of our meeting, she had painted her office door a beautiful shade of powder blue. Aranye's blue door stood out amid an ugly expanse of identical office portals in yellow-grey reminiscent of mid-century Soviet utility. That blue door staked a vivid aesthetic and institutional alternative, claiming the worth of apparently superfluous matters like door color. Painting it, in the pre-quarter hubbub, probably took time away from what some would have us see as other "crucial" things; it also wagered time, labor, and imagination on well-being for the institution as well as those lives lived within it.

These memories—Aranye's blue door; her early welcome—revive as I conjure what it meant to read, in class only a few weeks later, the final passage from the essay, "Voice Memorial: Loss

and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry." Herself, circa 1990:

If we can grieve for our particular losses, and admit futurity to our interpretations, we can perhaps begin to outline an alternative to the hermeneutics of transcendence. In doing so we could perhaps recognize that the seeking of community in the form of undifferentiated . . . unions predicated on identity can never be anything other than a defense against loss; we could also consider the possibility that historical community might be re-imagined as the promise of relationship between irreducible particularities. . . . In doing so, we might be able to construct a medievalism that is politically compassionate.<sup>1</sup>

I didn't fully grasp, then, the brilliance of the essay's multi-layered interventions, but this culminating paragraph simply knocked me out. I began to feel, sharply, the outlines of why I had left those other programs. I recognized that I'd sought an "alternative to the hermeneutics of transcendence," in which we might "grieve our losses" and "admit to the futurity of our interpretations." And I wanted to consider the possibility of reimagining "historical community" in just such

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<sup>1</sup> Louise O. Fradenburg, "Voice Memorial: Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," *Exemplaria* 2.1 (1990): 202 [169–202].

terms. I hoped to be a part of the “we” trying to construct a “politically compassionate” medievalism. This aim—Aranye’s and now, I hoped, mine, too—claimed, like the recently-painted powder-blue door, a rich and inviting alternative. I felt charged-up: intellectually (what could a medieval studies look like without the anchor of anachronism hung round its neck?), professionally (what historical particulars might I re-imagine?), and personally (I love that color! Where’s an ugly door for me to paint?). For five years that door reminded me—every time I walked by it, or stopped in front of it, or hung out in its doorway—that here I would not just survive, not only live, but thrive. Graduate school still challenged (I lived on a shoe-string; failed a language exam; lost out on a fellowship), but Aranye’s blue door made me want to labor and to make things lovely, to read and to be rebellious, to attend to things essential and to things superfluous, to rejuvenate the halls or pages that I frequented.

My own medievalist acts of *renovatio* trace a lineage to Aranye’s innovative interventions, and to that blue door. My current book project rethinks medieval traditions of newness, and redeploys the wacky but utterly consequential medieval rhetoric of the newfangled in this spirit. I am interested in a medieval account of the New as a response to what seems to me today’s near unanimous agreement that the defense of the University should emphasize its capacity to foster innovation. Trading in such imperatives, many take for

granted just what innovation entails, confident of when and how we recognize it: as the natural possession of STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Math) fields? Pursued through disciplines thought to be especially useful? Unavailable through “traditional” (that is, humanistic) ones, the latter increasingly understood as expendable if enjoyable?

Premodern ways of thinking about the new can challenge these assumptions in multiple ways, as Aranye’s own work regularly teaches us: via the creative power of an artistic “culture of copying”; by re-reading the influential distinction between “use” and “enjoyment” originating in Augustine; perhaps most crucially by rewriting the history of the premodern etymology through which curiosity’s links to *cura*, or care, came to police the border separating the essential things which deserve our care from those apparently inessential, superfluous things that should properly lie outside it. What I call my “newness” project feels especially urgent as I watch, from a short distance, as trustees, administrators, and regents dismantle the University of California,<sup>2</sup> unmaking this place where I once thrived. The current “crisis” (so-called) in Higher Ed has been pursued deliberately (which is not to say with deliberation). It began with cuts that date from the time that I was just leaving UC. Amid “crisis capitalism,” with its rhetorics of austerity,

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<sup>2</sup> On which subject, see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, ed. Eileen A. Joy (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013).

## STILL THRIVING

decisions are made daily that put at risk or gut those things deemed superfluous, and for entirely specious reasons. And, everyday, students and faculty at UC (and elsewhere) fight to keep programs, faculty and TA lines, classes, and research plans alive. In that context we might note, as many did during the medieval centuries, that accounts of innovation and of newness harbor important ethical ambitions. We might, that is, lend an ear to those debates, contested histories, and fanciful imaginings.

So I end with what I take to be an ethical injunction: MORE BLUE DOORS, literally and figuratively. Following Aranye's innovative example, we will continue to intervene critically on the side of survival and for the living, while still reserving time for dreaming up newly envisioned experiments in human thriving.

## 2: Come Flourish with Me Critically Mixing Pleasure and Politics

Randy P. Schiff



In his recent book *Gardens*, Robert Pogue Harrison offers an especially powerful engagement with Epicureanism.<sup>1</sup> As I thought of Aranye Fradenburg's recent critique that evolutionary functionalism disallows us to see surviving and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).



thriving in mutual relation with each other,<sup>2</sup> Harrison's study illuminated for me a continuity between Epicurus's inspiring cultivation of the self and Fradenburg's materialist blurring of art-nature boundaries, and also led me to recognize that a problematic Epicurean tendency to retreat is repaired by Fradenburg's insistence on moving criticism beyond its disciplinary comfort zones. To appreciate the Epicurean anticipation of Fradenburg's anti-functionalist exploration of artfulness and expressiveness throughout the animal world, consider when Harrison turns to the work of W.S. Merwin and of Pietro Laureano to assert that agriculture arose from gardening: reductive assumptions of exploitative human pre-history melt away, as we see it is enchantment and play that come first, only later to be reduced to secondariness by those cultivating the awareness that one can ground one's economy in land appropriation and alteration.<sup>3</sup>

Harrison's Epicureans are attractive critical precursors, concerned with cultivating patience in the present, hopefulness regarding the future, and gratitude vis-à-vis the past.<sup>4</sup> However, if those

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, ed. Eileen A. Joy (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Harrison, *Gardens*, 40.

<sup>4</sup> See Harrison's recovery of Epicurean efforts to cultivate *ataraxia*, or philosophical happiness, in a discussion aimed at dispelling reductive readings of Epicureans as simply being pleasure seekers, in *Gardens*, 74–79.

of us shaping the humanities model ourselves after them, we have much to fear—for Epicureans, hopeless about the *polis*, sever all viable connections between their verdant academy and the political world of the city, retreating into private, if pleasant, gardens.<sup>5</sup> Fradenburg's resolute refusal to see art and play as secondary, luxurious pursuits, and her insistence on seeing surviving and thriving on one plane (coeval with each other), allow us to eschew the Epicurean procurement of philosophical pleasure through the sacrifice of political relevance. Fradenburg does not take us to the illusory safety afforded by garden walls, but instead encourages us to travel through a vibrant world energized by countless self-aware beings—to embrace a cosmos full of busy, wonderful sentience. Fradenburg's cultivation of Epicurean artfulness highlights the material interconnections between us, other animal agents, and the territories we all mark and thereby create—and she also insists that humanities disciplines need to be active outside of our intellectual gardens, avoiding the quietist mistake of walling off our discipline from sciences wrongly seen as occupying other, less ludic, more functional, spaces.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harrison, *Gardens*, 72–73.

<sup>6</sup> On the humanities' need to vigorously defend their place within the current academy, see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 239–252, and also *Staying Alive*.

Fradenburg's recent work—elements of which I had the pleasure of seeing recently performed at the University at Buffalo, SUNY—wards off Epicureanism's depoliticizing impulse, while preserving its powerful emphasis on the primacy of the ludic and the ritual. Play must be taken seriously—Fradenburg shows us through her compelling engagement with current evolutionary thinking, joy and art serve life by making life worth living.<sup>7</sup> Fradenburg's critique of functionalism highlights the ways in which the humanities and the putatively "hard" sciences each cultivate natural subjects. Such a vigorous defense of the humanities' institutional footing (as equal to the sciences, and also partners with them) should resonate in a new academic environment in which humanists' deployment of hard scientific methodologies is increasingly paralleled by the emphasis on chance, creativity, and imagination in disciplines like physics, mathematics, and biology.

Fradenburg insists that art is "biocultural enhancement"—that it is not something utterly new as representation, but that any art builds on or within patterning found everywhere in nature.<sup>8</sup> Much as constructivist physicists like Karen Barad reject binary correspondence models that alienate investigators from the nature they observe,

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<sup>7</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, "On Display: Showing, Hiding, and Staying Alive," paper presented as Juxtapositions Lecture, Department of English, University at Buffalo, SUNY, April 22, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Fradenburg, "On Display."

and instead see discursive practices as co-constitutive of reality,<sup>9</sup> so does Fradenburg undermine the secure humanist picture of an interior self securely aloof from the exterior world: rather, exteriority is already there inside of us.<sup>10</sup> This erosion of the wall between self and other dovetails with the ethical task of breaching academic barriers, enabling modes of political activism needed in an age in which public universities find themselves under acute, sustained siege. If, as Donna Haraway argues, the first step towards enabling all to flourish is recognizing one's material enmeshment with other agents, objects, histories, and fantasies,<sup>11</sup> then Fradenburg's critique of exceptionalist interiority encourages the enhancement of already-existing affiliations with other players—human, nonhuman, and otherwise.

In tracing patterning both within and without, Fradenburg pursues a key Epicurean practice that follows from the conviction that we, constructed of the same atoms as anything else in the cosmos, come and go as does any matter, with neither self nor soul transcending the same stuff of which anything—whether it be other animals, plants,

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<sup>9</sup> See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 132–185.

<sup>10</sup> Fradenburg, "On Display."

<sup>11</sup> See Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 98–105.

plastic, or stars—are made.<sup>12</sup> Rather than unsettling us, this knowledge should bring a renewed sense of kinship with others improperly thought of as absolutely Outside. Epicurus, however, following a self-assured cynicism that Fradenburg enables us to recognize in evolutionary functionalism, counseled that philosophers retreat from the *polis*. Fradenburg's current work, which targets the misguided humanist practice of mimicking the pragmatism of the allegedly "hard sciences" while abandoning the humanities' vital investments in play and pleasure, does not follow this unfortunate political path. Much as it is wrong to think that we can separate the historical objects of "serious" medievalism from the critic's ludic manipulation,<sup>13</sup> so ought we not think that the artful expressiveness traditionally studied by humanists has no serious place in such weighty political concerns as negotiating environmental crisis or determining how universities can thrive.

Fradenburg's critique of functionalism links the humanities with the biological sciences in the collaborative shaping of an evolutionary thought that eschews reductive models (such as in most evolutionary psychology) that misread all actions, mechanisms, organs, and organisms as being simply adaptive. As Fradenburg powerfully reminded us in *Buffalo*, there simply is no functional

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<sup>12</sup> See Harrison, *Gardens*, 74–75.

<sup>13</sup> See Louise O. Fradenburg, "'So That We May Speak of Them': Enjoying the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 28.2 (1997): 210 [205–230].

explanation for why nightingales sing—and it is only when we get away from the misreading that there is always some adaptive reason for any behavior or any morphological fact that we can see how enmeshed we are, as agents who become parts of larger organisms as we variously mark out territories, in multiple strategies of play and self-announcement. Most mutations are, Darwin makes clear, simply random; most changes are, individually, simply a blip on a screen filled with virtually countless genetic differences.<sup>14</sup> Expressiveness and artful thriving are no less important than the mating or territorialist violence too often stressed by functionalists.

By moving us away from an unrelenting focus on pragmatic pursuits of zero-sum advantage, Fradenburg reintegrates artistic works within the larger web of natural processes—what Haraway analyzes as the complex dance of entangled species.<sup>15</sup> Fradenburg's recent interest in blurring the distinction between human and natural media also performs crucial work in ecocriticism, a discipline which, while having long ago recognized the need to remove the human from the epistemological center and to see the world more from the perspective of nature itself, has not always been as willing to see cultural productions and technologies as *also* natural. *Our* play is serious, too.

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<sup>14</sup> See Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1977), 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> See Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 26–32.

In recent conversations about a new formalist call for “surface” reading,<sup>16</sup> I recall being especially delighted, considering the potential quietism of such a practice,<sup>17</sup> with Fradenburg’s announcement that she is “not so ready to give up on the hermeneutics of suspicion.”<sup>18</sup> One more aspect of Epicureanism allows me to see how powerful Fradenburg’s politics can be, especially when I think how easy it is, as I so often do, to give into the dark side of paranoid indictment of the powers-that-be. Always emphasizing habits of cultivation, Epicurus encouraged *suavitas*—a generosity and openness to conversation that, Harrison explains, was diametrically opposite to the intentional “boorishness” of the Cynics.<sup>19</sup> I myself was able to thrive as a graduate student precisely because of the *suavitas* that Fradenburg cultivat-

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<sup>16</sup> I refer here to the thought-provoking February 2012 *Exemplaria* symposium, “Surface, Symptom, and the State of Critique,” organized by Elizabeth Scala at the University of Texas at Austin; see <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/exemplaria/Information.php>.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus anticipate that their advocacy for “surface” reading could solicit accusations of their being “politically quietist,” in “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 16 [1–21].

<sup>18</sup> I draw this quote from L.O. Aranye Fradenburg’s presentation at the roundtable “Rethinking the Category of Love: Cognition, Emotion, and Biopolitics,” Modern Language Association Convention, Seattle, Washington, January 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, *Gardens*, 77.

ed both in the classroom and in our lives on the borders of the academy—an openness to multiple ideas and methodologies, a strong desire to engage with arguments, and to see one’s ethical sphere as going beyond the university and into the public that informs it. I am very glad to see in Fradenburg’s recent work this *suavitas* moving beyond the human political world, into a vibrant, multi-species field of active, artful agents, which affords the humanities ever more opportunities to bring about more and more varied flourishing.





### 3: Provision and Provisionality

Julie Orlemanski



When I chose the title for my comments some months ago, I was motivated by the thought that Aranye Fradenburg's scholarship counts under the rubrics of both "provision" and "provisionality." Which is to say, by the first word, that her books and articles, her talks and her pedagogy, *sustain*: they are *provisions*, victuals, supplies one packs for the journey, intellectual food-stuffs, nourishment laid in for times of want. And, by the second word, that the knowledge she's produced

always comports itself in recognition of its partialness, its own *provisionality*; she opens what she knows to the fact that it is conditioned and conditional, contingent in the last instance—because as she writes in her essay “Driving Education,” in her book *Staying Alive*, as “mortal creatures,” we never get to the bottom of all “the forces that have formed us,” and thus we have a “responsibility . . . to keep our knowledge disciplines open and unsettled.”<sup>1</sup> Or, as she memorably wrote in *Sacrifice Your Love*, “group norms of our technique . . . both structure our desire and produce what counts as knowledge, as well as providing the seedbeds of change. But *there is no other kind of knowledge than this; this is what knowledge is, and we make it.*”<sup>2</sup> Help for the future and openness to what comes—provisional provisions, we might call it, or sustaining openness; I carry her work with me: a paperback, battered photocopies. I carry her insights in mind as I make my way forward.

The terms “provision” and “provisionality” also strike me because they abut the territory of *need*—which in today’s discourse of neoliberal austerity has become, as it were, the safe zone. If you are declared needful, requisite, *de rigeur*,

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<sup>1</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013), 32–33.

<sup>2</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 50 (her emphasis).

then you're safe; you won't be cut from the budget; you won't be quietly starved off the rosters. (In a crisis, we are told, everything but the few necessary provisions will count as provisional.) The important matter, then, lies in how our needs are foreseen: who determines what is and will be required? "Provision" and "provisionality" derive from the Latin verb *providere*: to see in advance, to see beforehand, to take precautions. And this is the root of divine providence: that mode of foresight that would completely saturate time, contingency, and lack. The term "provision," then, moves along two vectors: nourishing and open, as well as providential and paranoid: Aranye has been involved with the critique of the latter, and the practice of the former.

Within higher education, it is increasingly technocratic administrators who assign to themselves the task of mimicking providence's totalizing scope. From a perspective that is "free" from the bias of any particular department, any singular liberal art, university administrations assert their executive authority to act in times of crisis and to determine what is actually needful. Of course, what is most often propagated is the institutionalization of this necessity for providential foresight itself—as in the widely disseminated graph marking the point in April 2011 when senior administrators in the University of California system came to outnumber faculty.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See "UC Administrators Crossed the Line," *Keep California's Promise*, September 19, 2011: <http://keepcali>

The highly articulated, though ultimately untenable, distinction between need and desire, between the minimum necessary for survival and the excess wasted on pleasure and enjoyment, has long been the object of Aranye's analyses. In her 1999 discuss of "Needful Things" in *Piers Plowman*, she wrote, "The concept of need does much of its ideological work in the context of the severance of the law from desire. The distinction between need and desire permits the association of desire with superfluity and the law with necessity."<sup>4</sup> This cutting the distinction between need and desire ever closer to the bone is perhaps the primary gesture of austerity, the act that the perception and the experience of crisis provokes.

"Today, all around the world, the future of the humanities stands on the edge of a knife," Aranye writes on the first page of *Staying Alive*. She continues, "The value of the liberal arts—its generous range of subjects and methods, its emphasis on teaching students how to think—seems to have plummeted." Part of the business of Aranye's book *Staying Alive*—as well as her recent essays like "The Liberal Arts of Psychoanalysis"<sup>5</sup>—is to

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forniaspromise.org/2001/ucs-administrators-crossed-the-line.

<sup>4</sup> Louise Fradenburg, "Needful Things," in Barbara A. Hanwalt and David Wallace, eds., *Medieval Crime and Social Control* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 50 [49–69].

<sup>5</sup> Aranye Fradenburg, "Frontline: The Liberal Arts of Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the American Academy of*

offer *alternatives* to the neoliberal valorization of the vocational; that is, to describe the *thriving* that is fostered by speculative thought and by play: to provide a vocabulary for perceiving and recognizing modes of value that differ from market logics. It seems to me that developing such a rhetoric is essential—especially because the discourse of austerity does not propagate itself exclusively at the level of rational arguments, and therefore it cannot be countered exclusively at that level. Austerity's propagation also has a powerful affective dimension.

I will cite again Aranye's essay on "Needful Things," but in place of "the testing, disciplining, and managing of *the poor*" that she writes about there, I am going to read the sentence as though it were about education: "The testing, disciplining, and managing of *education (and of the humanities in particular)* becomes a way to test, discipline, and manage the structuring of the subject's and community's relation to its *jouissance*, its 'inner antagonism'; is a way, in short, to *endure*, to surmount loss, to attain the fantasy of superexistence."<sup>6</sup>

It will never be enough to poke holes in the claims of austerity. It is important to generate the means for alternative forms of "groupification," alternative provisions for the communities we seek to realize, and this is one of the reasons why I find Aranye's recent writings so important and

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*Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 39.4: 589–609.

<sup>6</sup> Fradenburg, "Needful Things," 57.

timely, such an important provision in the long “crisis” and the neoliberal forms that perpetuate it. Indeed, in preparing my response chapter for *Staying Alive*,<sup>7</sup> I was struck by the fact that academic-activist reflexivity makes up a vital part of contemporary humanistic practice. By “academic-activist reflexivity,” I mean the claims about higher education currently being made, and made public, by students, teachers, researchers, administrators, and alumni, often writing in a variety of formats, from Twitter to journalism to mass-market books. While these proliferating accounts of higher education differ from one another, they manifest a shared sense of dissatisfaction with neoliberal changes to academic life, or the ways in which higher education has been rendered increasingly amenable to, if not indistinguishable from, commercial and financial markets.

These writings are activist insofar as they seek, explicitly or implicitly, to mobilize a collectivity or to catalyze institutional change. They pursue these ends in part by giving an account of the kind of thing that higher education is right now—what configuration of persons, practices, moneys, attitudes, affects, and technologies. Considered as both acts of information and of rhetoric, activist-academic writings, I would argue, offer counterexamples to the rebuke of scholarly “critique” proffered recently by, say, Bruno Latour, or Sha-

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Orlemanski, “An Army of Lovers,” in Fradenburg, *Staying Alive*, 51–73.

ron Marcus and Stephen Best.<sup>8</sup> Academic-activist reflexivity is occupied with revealing the unacknowledged circumstances that determine knowledge-production—yet it does so with an expectation of helping to materially transform those circumstances. Its flexible decorum and range of media imply that higher education's archive of self-awareness is in effect constructing something new—new and still inchoate collective *subjects of address*. This archive is pluralizing and expanding what we talk about, and *who we talk to*, when we talk about higher ed.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" remains the most powerful challenge to scholars' apparent faith in the efficacy of critical knowledge. This famous essay is, among other things, a call for the *tactical* analysis of how knowledge empowers the particular communities we belong to, or fails to empower them. The queries Sedgwick posed deserve to be asked anew: "What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 225–248, and Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108.1 (2009): 1–21.



effects?"<sup>9</sup> The recent wave of activist-academic self-articulations, in which Aranye's writings participate, moves toward what seem to me the right sorts of answers to Sedgwick's questions: answers that are local, affective, provisional, and tactical. In a climate of generalized crisis, these speech-acts speculatively address *new constituencies for higher education*.

I want to close by thanking Aranye for the intellectual provisions that her thought and work have been, sustaining victuals for the task of thinking—and to thank her for that self-aware provisionality that acts to hold her works open to new readers and new futures. I also want to express my support for the project of activist-academic writing in which her most recent work participates, and the new and newly mobilized communities of higher education that the discourse promises to constitute.

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<sup>9</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Performativity, Pedagogy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 124 [123–151].

## 4: Critical Thriving Chaucer, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and the MLA

Kathy Lavezzo



During the mid-1990s as a Teaching Assistant at the University of California in Santa Barbara, I had an experience I wish all medievalists could have: listening to a large lecture course on the *Canterbury Tales* delivered by Aranye (then Louise) Fradenburg. I was drawn to Santa Barbara's PhD program because of Aranye's astonishing oppositional readings of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the *Prioress's*

*Tale*, the *Manciple's Tale* and other texts.<sup>1</sup> But little did I know the knowledge I would gain from her accessible yet unfailingly brilliant undergraduate lectures on Chaucer. One such lecture was on the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. We are accustomed to think of that text as Chaucer's most slippery tale. In Charles Muscatine's classic formulation, "the shifting style and the succession of topics" covered by Chaucer "never rest long enough to serve a single view or a single doctrine or an unalterable judgment."<sup>2</sup> More recently but in a similar vein, Peter Travis writes that the tales Menippean satire tends "to unravel and deconstruct the totalizing patterns of thinking that are distinctive to certain traditional discourses," so much so that it seems "absolutely unreadable."<sup>3</sup> Aranye, however, located at the core of the tale a single interpretation, one that distilled for Santa Barbara students the stakes of this challenging narrative. In keeping with the coincidence of her lecture with Thanksgiving break—a holiday centered on eat-

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Louise O. Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism and the Prioress's Tale," *Exemplaria* 1 (1989): 69–115; "The Wife of Bath's Passing Fancy," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 8 (1986): 31–58; "The Manciple's Servant Tongue: Politics and Poetry in the *Canterbury Tales*," *ELH* 52.1 (1985): 85–118.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 242.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading the Nun's Priest's Tale* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 340.

ing a bird—she pointed out to the class how Chaucer, in narrating Chanticleer’s escape from the fox, tells a tale about how not to be eaten. Like latter-day beast fables about Bugs Bunny or the Road Runner, the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* is about nothing less than staying alive. Chanticleer, moreover, emerges from his ordeal a better, cannier, and more clear-sighted bird than before, having learned from his encounter with the fox to no longer allow flattery to fool him.

Chanticleer’s experience is a lesson Chaucerians might take to heart, as we all are faced right now with a direct threat to Chaucer’s institutional valuation by “the world’s largest scholarly society in the humanities,” the Modern Language Association.<sup>4</sup> Recently the MLA has proposed lumping all three medieval English MLA divisions into one “Early English” division, a move that would eliminate the current division on Chaucer. The MLA’s effort to consolidate English divisions (in both medieval and other periods) appears to be motivated by a desire for institutional vitality based upon a commendably progressive and liberal multiculturalism. A March 28, 2013 email sent to the Chaucer Division executive committee by MLA President Marianne Hirsch and MLA First Vice President Margaret Ferguson alludes to “the disproportionate number of divisions in English in relation to other fields like African and East

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<sup>4</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “Of America,” *MLA Commons*, April 15, 2013: <http://president.commonsonline.org/2013/04/15/of-america/>.

Asian," and to possible "new comparative divisions on hemispheric, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Pacific, Indian Ocean, and indigeneity." In her presidential column in the Summer 2013 MLA Newsletter, Hirsch writes that she finds "the MLA's imperial 'of America' troubling and the split between English and 'foreign' languages frustrating."<sup>5</sup> Hirsch's references in the letter to the fact that "the humanities are neglected and underfunded in the age of economic globalization" and to "numerous planetary networks of intellectual exchange" the MLA has yet to engage, makes explicit a theory of how a more democratic and inclusive attention to "underrepresented world languages" would enliven and enrich an MLA suffering from widespread austerity policies.<sup>6</sup>

There is much to commend in Hirsch's proposal. But should she bemoan the gap between English and "foreign" languages? Is Hirsch correct to desire a thriving international MLA multitude? Following Alain Badiou's critique of Gilles Deleuze (the "philosopher of the thriving rhizomatic multitude"), Slavoj Žižek has queried the embrace in recent decades of a proliferation of diverse subjectivities, political and sexual.<sup>7</sup> Žižek points out that "apropos of today's multicultural-

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<sup>5</sup> Hirsch, "Of America."

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, "Of America."

<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2002), 269.

ist celebration of the diversity of lifestyles, . . . this thriving of differences relies on an underlying One: on the radical obliteration of Difference, of the antagonistic gap."<sup>8</sup> To posit a thriving proliferation of linguistic positions, that is, is to create a medium or container whose absence of antagonism—a supposed easy-going roominess—allows all those positions to circulate, but also obliterates the dyad or binary necessary to engage difference. The proliferation of multiplicity and diversity ultimately leads us to sameness and similitude. I cite Žižek's critique of the thriving multicultural multitude, not because I am against multiculturalism and diversity, but because I think that the thriving of the academy depends upon its retention of a searching analytical approach. As the MLA expands—and of course it should—to encompass an ever more diverse and larger number of literary perspectives, it's crucial to approach those literatures with not so much a celebratory but a critical eye.

Why, though, should Chaucer stay alive? How might the *Nun's Priest's Tale* provide us with a rationale for retaining the MLA Chaucer division? We might respond to such questions by demonstrating how the father of English poetry anticipates the very proliferation of difference Hirsch seeks. We could highlight, for example, the linguistic heterogeneity of the tale, which mixes Latin maxims and Old French interjections into its

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<sup>8</sup> Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*, 238.

Middle English. And, following the lead of critics like Peter Travis, we could cite other multiplicities present in the tale. This most self-conscious of narratives contains aspects of virtually all of the other Canterbury Tales; immanent in the tale is a heterogeneous crowd of possible perspectives, valences, subjectivities and organisms (from humans to birds, butterflies and even mermaids). But contrary to Travis, I would like to return to Fradenburg's insight and ask if the slippery multiplicity of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* is the means by which Chaucer the poet—like the cock—stays alive? If, as Fradenburg puts it, sovereignty can deploy “multiplicity and difference” to “compel multiple desires to gather round its splendor,” is the *Nun's Priest's Tale* the prime instance of a Chaucerian poetic sovereignty (or sovereign multitude) around which fascinated scholars have long gathered?<sup>9</sup>

In other words, we shouldn't retain the Chaucer Division because of the splendor attached to the medieval writer as the father of English poetry. Neither should we enshrine Chaucer for how progressive—how proto-liberal or proto-multicultural—his poetry is. Rather, by critically analyzing Chaucer and his oeuvre, we discover its function as a goad to rethinking pressing questions about identity and alterity. Aranye has modeled such an approach through her oppositional criticism of,

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<sup>9</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 75.

for example, anti-Semitism and the Prioress; or class, gender and capitalism and the Wife of Bath. As such groundbreaking essays affirm, we should retain Chaucer insofar as critical—not celebratory—attention to his corpus continues to unhinge, transform, and trouble received ideas about being in the world, both then and now.





## 5: Sacrificial Enjoyment

Paul Megna



Volume 80 of *The Minnesota Review* (2013) contains an essay cluster proclaiming “The Medieval Turn in Theory.” In the introduction thereto, Andrew Cole observes that a great deal of recent scholarship is devoted to demonstrating “how medieval our modern theory really is.” As Cole points out, the contributors to the volume—Kathleen Biddick, Amy Hollywood, Bruce Hol-singer, Maura Nolan and D. Vance Smith—have taught us a great deal about postmodern theory’s premodern roots. Most recently, Cole and Smith coedited *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory*, a collection of

essays that explores the manner in which modern continental philosophy (i.e. theory)—including the work of G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger and Theodore Adorno—is shot through with medieval and medievalist discourses. The volume's title—"The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages"—constitutes a challenge to Hans Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966), which indulges in a criminal other-ing of the medieval era as a socio-historical cesspool out of which modernity triumphantly arose. The subtitle of Cole and Smith's collection—"On the Unwritten History of Theory"—dramatically suggests that, to a large extent, the annals of intellectual history utterly fail to acknowledge modern theory's debt to medieval discourses. As Cole acknowledges in his introduction to "The Medieval Turn in Theory," however, scholars have been engaged in this important work for some time. To give just one example, Bruce Holsinger's *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (2005)—the title of which, of course, riffs on Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979)—came out in 2005. I remember buying my copy at Borders, when that was still a thing.

The question, therefore, is not "why does the history of theory remain unwritten?" but, "why do we insist upon writing it and rewriting it?" The answer, as any one of L.O. Aranye Fradenburg's students will readily tell you, is enjoyment. If the title *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages* works on

an allusive level, it also works on a purely literal level, insisting that the Middle Ages are legitimate (i.e., worthy of our attention). As medievalists, we enjoy pointing out the legitimacy of the Middle Ages to our friends, loved ones and, above all, modernist colleagues (whether they enjoy hearing about it is an entirely different question). We enjoy this practice for the altogether obvious reason that it legitimates our somewhat esoteric life choices (or so we hope) in the eyes of the others for whose approval we desperately yearn. To be sure, we enjoy stressing the medieval era's legitimacy because we actually believe that it is important for theorists to recognize the historicity of the ideology to which they cannot help but subscribe. How enjoyable could our chosen subject of study be, after all, if we felt it didn't urgently require our intellectual labor? Of course, if we're being honest with ourselves, we enjoy asserting theory's debt to pre-modernity because medieval studies involves a lot of beautiful and unusual words, as does theory, and we seem really smart when we're able to point out how much these two seemingly distinct lexicons actually have to do with each other. It's a good thing that we enjoy it too, because, as Fradenburg points out, "we could not, even if we wanted to, stop creating, or more properly re-creating, new prostheses of memory."<sup>1</sup> For Fra-

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<sup>1</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 252.

denburg, a plethora of modern subjects—hermeneutic theorists, to be sure, but also practitioners of games like Dungeons and Dragons and the makers of popular movies such as *Babe*—engage daily in an incessant process of becoming-medieval that amounts to a sustained enjoyment of the past. Even when we criticize the past for producing the foundations of cultural biases that still plague us today, we enjoy doing so.

Many might recall the *Exemplaria* panel at the 2011 International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan on “Surface versus Symptomatic Readings,” or the subsequent symposium at the University of Texas at Austin in February 2012 on that topic, “Surface, Symptom, and the State of Critique.” Although the original panel’s participants—Ruth Evans, Mark Miller and Bruce Holsinger—were varied in their enthusiasm (or lack thereof) for new, ostensibly less-skeptical modes of surface reading, for the most part they agreed that “the hermeneutics of suspicion” (by which Paul Ricoeur originally meant the skeptical mode of ideology-critique pioneered by Nietzsche, Marx and Freud) still has a vital role to play in medieval studies. Of course, part of the reason that we breathed a collective sigh of relief upon learning that we are still allowed to be suspicious is that we enjoy suspicion, whether we call it discourse analysis, ideology critique, or deconstruction. Despite our best intentions, however, we enjoy totalizing too. Fradenburg puts this

point best when she states: "containment is a mode of enjoyment."<sup>2</sup> Early in her book *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (2002), she adeptly asserts that the theory of "subversion and containment" has become "something of an analytical cul-de-sac for Foucauldian new historicism."<sup>3</sup> By pointing out that "containment" is a mode of enjoyment, Fradenburg disturbs the implicit morality under-girding the New Historicism, which almost always casts subversive ideology as radical (i.e., good) and containing ideology as hegemonic (i.e., bad). Fradenburg neither cleanses containment of its oppressive history by associating it with enjoyment, nor does she make enjoyment the utopic experience that subversion can never quite bring about. "Enjoyment," she writes, "is what it is, and it can entail suffering for the other."<sup>4</sup>

If Fradenburg acknowledges that we can potentially enjoy the other's suffering, however, she holds that we more frequently enjoy our own suffering for the other, which we perform through the art of sacrifice. For Fradenburg, both Chaucer's culture and our own maintains a hyper-economy of sacrifice, which is fueled by the Western subject's propensity to enjoy ceding time, energy, life and love to a higher order—the big Other. She neither disputes nor disregards a Nietzschean historiography that sees Christian

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<sup>2</sup> Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, 76.

<sup>3</sup> Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, 76.

ideology as effecting “a transvaluation of all values.” She does not deny the need to unmask perfidious ideology. Instead, she argues that when we do so we’re sure to find a kernel of enjoyment. Should we be suspicious of sacrificial enjoyment? Of course; but we should always keep in mind that the same enjoyment that fuels the hyper-economy of sacrifice also fuels the hermeneutics of suspicion. Fradenburg’s work, therefore, does not invalidate ideology critique; but it also doesn’t allow us to consider the historical subjects who we study as mere dupes of ideology. She reminds us that they enjoyed asserting the legitimacy of their sacrifices, just as we enjoy asserting the legitimacy of ours. While the medieval turn in theory is worth celebrating, therefore, it is not enough. Until we “own our stake in enjoyment,” as Fradenburg urges us to do, we can never adequately celebrate how truly medieval our modern theory really is.

#### CODA

In the preceding remarks, I contextualize Aranye’s theoretical interventions alongside the work of contemporary critics who underestimate the extent to which enjoyment facilitates our writing of history and theory, in and out of the academy. Since writing this, I have been given occasion to reflect more deeply upon Aranye’s intervention into my own life, as did so many of the wonderful papers performances at the BABEL Working Group’s roundtable session on “Thriving” at the

2013 International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, Michigan) that gave rise to this volume. I've recently come to recognize how desperately I initially needed to benefit from Aranye's thought. Her philosophy of enjoyment has taught me to complicate my natural cynicism without succumbing to an equally reductive optimism . . . or at least to try to adopt a less bipolar worldview. For that I am forever grateful.





## 6: living / riddle

Daniel C. Remein



Reading the poem that does not appear when  
the magician starts or when the magician finish-  
es. A climbing in-between. Real.

Jack Spicer, *A Textbook of Poetry*

Arguing that medieval romance can be read other  
than as either a flight from history or a consolida-  
tion of various reactionary desires, Aranye Fraden-  
burg arrives at the seemingly simple proposition

that “sentience is always shifting.”<sup>1</sup> I find the ambiguous degree of transitivity in the gerundive complement ‘shifting’ particularly useful, suggesting a variety of possible loci of sentience and a variety of afferent and efferent causes and results of the shifting in question: I shift in my seat, that cat shifts in its sleep, that lake shifted how I think about ecosystems, the continent shifted. Moreover, as published in 2004, this sentence has been for me a sort of prescient talisman—suggesting ways in which maintaining a commitment to say, reading poems closely would not mark one as a ‘reactionary’ and in fact might even usefully serve the ecological and object-oriented commitments that have thickened medieval studies in the past few years. “[Medieval] romance,” argues Fradenburg, “generally focuses on the range and history of lived relations between subjects and objects whose sentient status is always up for grabs, indeterminate, but nonetheless ineradicable as residual, and whose uncertain sentience is both sublime and abject, a matter of extreme curiosity.”<sup>2</sup>

Fradenburg links the shifting of sentience to wonder: “Like injury, wonder transforms sentience; we feel it when boredom or ease change into maximum attention. Romance turns these shifts of sentience into a life-world.”<sup>3</sup> Fradenburg frames wonder here as sensory-affective (we feel

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<sup>1</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Simply Marvelous,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 25 [1–27].

<sup>2</sup> Fradenburg, “Simply Marvelous,” 25.

<sup>3</sup> Fradenburg, “Simply Marvelous,” 6.

it), but also as an element in a poetics of processing the varieties of sentience-shifting by making a space in which they become perceptible. Romance is here given pride of place as the poetics behind such marvelous makings insofar as it obsesses over and motivates our attempts to interface with something like the Real: "Romance is fascinated by how, and why, we move between different levels and kinds of attentiveness and awareness."<sup>4</sup> The mid-century systems theorist Silvan Tomkins would suggest that such constant shifting of afferent and efferent information currents stimulates the affect he calls interest, which most basically motivates the re-compiling of interactions between an organism's systems moment to moment.<sup>5</sup> What shifts my sentience is the shifting sentience, the sentience-shifting of the incompletely overlapping sentience-shifts going on all around.

So it is important to remember that the Real is not necessarily an undifferentiated annihilatory neant. And this is why turning to a certain linguistic poetics can involve, even require, attention to a shifting cosmos. Fradenburg argues: "Through its operations of showing and hiding, art reveals the dimension of desire in economic activity. Subliming and de-subliming the (sentient) objects of desire that circulate through the economies of group enjoyment are among the primary means

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<sup>4</sup> Fradenburg, "Simply Marvelous," 7.

<sup>5</sup> Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, Vol. 1 (New York: Springer, 1962), 336–344.

by which romance provokes wonder.”<sup>6</sup> The study of or turn to language, or the question of human ‘access’ to the world as spurned by Object-Oriented, Speculative Realist, and ecological thought,<sup>7</sup> are perhaps both less of a barrier to either ecological or object-oriented thinking than they may appear. More troubling are assumed (representational) ontologies of language and poetics that frame a turn to what language makes as the throwing up of an impassible barrier between our perceptual activity and an o/Other that is as inaccessible as it is undifferentiated. The prevalence of assuming that thinking about language means thinking about a poetics which can imagine language-world relations only in terms of the yawning gap of signifier-signified marks a failure to think the shifting by which things made with language interact with cosmos composed of inter-shifting perceptual systems.

Sentience is always shifting. Fradenburg notes that, “It is not easy to love the signifier; it is noth-

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<sup>6</sup> Fradenburg, “Simply Marvelous,” 16.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Ray Brassier, *Nihil Bound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011); Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009); Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008); and Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

ing more than an iterrable mark"<sup>8</sup>—and yet, the things that can iterate, the pitter-patter proto-vibrations of the trace: these are emergent phenomena not dissociable from the fabric of the physical universe (yes, this is a vulgarization of "the materiality of the signifier"). Especially we medievalists (what, with our penchant for allegory, our not uncritical historicizing) have an obsession with moving too quickly to the side of the signified, the represented, often even when trying to think ecologically; a failure to love not only the signifier, but the various materialities of the signifier and their non-semiotic, non-mimetic, and non-representational functions. We thus, in writing and in pedagogy, face an impoverishment of our critical lexicon for registers on which the illocutionary and the perlocutionary can be reasonably imagined to operate by a secular imagination. Thinking and making wonder, as the inter-shifting of sentient entities, can help. Taken as poetics instead of symptom, wonder appears as the conditioning *techne* of interesting and ethical relations with a varied cosmos: it would construct the provisional space at the intersection of a Venn diagram between the phenomenal field of two perceptual systems—a phenomenological architecture attentive both to the logic of the psychoanalytic subject (driven and desiring), and to our increasing need to pay attention to what Ian Bogost calls the

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<sup>8</sup> Fradenburg, "Simply Marvelous," 12.

'alien phenomenology' of glaciers, foxes, or cities.<sup>9</sup>

Romance's main strategy (according to Fradenburg) accords well with the sense of wonder as an epistemologically-oriented affect, usually related to rarity (i.e., value) and ignorance of cause (like the sort of wonder theorized by scholastics and well-studied by Carolyn Walker Bynum and Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park<sup>10</sup>). But, as Liza Blake has been arguing, medieval and Renaissance poetry often makes up/implies its own discourses of physics and cosmology entirely alternate to the scholastic conversation.<sup>11</sup> And indeed, beginning as early as the Old English Riddles, an alternative concept of wonder was also afoot—a wonder obsessed with the mundane and not resolved by an epistemological telos requiring a representational or semiotic/value-laden logic.

The text of the three-line Old English poem constituted by Riddles 68 and 69 of the tenth-century Exeter Book makes for a perfectly brief example: "I saw that creature going on the path,/ she was ornamental, adorned [or worked over]

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<sup>9</sup> See Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102.1 (1997): 1–27, and Lorraine J. and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Liza Blake, "Early Modern Literary Physics," PhD diss., New York University, 2013.

with wonders./ A Wonder happened on the path,  
 water happened as bone" ["Ic þa wiht geseah on  
 weg feran;/ heo wæs wrætlice wundrum ge-  
 gierwed./ Wundor wearð on wege; wæter wearð  
 to bane"].<sup>12</sup> Such a poem—a riddle you can solve  
 as simply as 'a puddle freezing over'—links won-  
 der and ornament to the point of tautology. Sen-  
 tience-shifting is here the result not of magical  
 leaping across the abyss between signifier and  
 signified, but, as the riddle narrates, of an orna-  
 mentation of the physical world. The poem posits  
 and then adorns the wonder of the world/the  
 order of the world as 'ornament' (recall that the  
 Greek term *cosmos* harbors all these concepts).  
 Riddles 31 and 32 begin with an even more tauto-  
 logical and more explicitly cosmological formula:  
 "Is þes middangeard missenlicum / wisum gewlit-  
 egad, wrættum gefrætwad" ["this middle earth is  
 in a variety of ways beautified / adorned with or-  
 naments"]. Of course, one could read this as an  
 expression of Augustinian piety—attributing won-  
 der to the wondrous origin of the world in 'God.'  
 But, as Mary Carruthers notes in arguing against  
 an "over theologized" and "over moralized" me-  
 dieval studies, "Medieval art is not only explained  
 by considerations of semiology and representa-  
 tion, mimesis . . . but also by persuasion" (on the

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<sup>12</sup> George Phillip Krapp and Elliott Von Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).



level of somatic experience).<sup>13</sup> Carruther's advises, "In the presence of any artefact, our first question could then be not 'What is it (and what does it represent)?' but 'What is it doing (and what is it asking us to do)?"<sup>14</sup> While these lines of OE poetry may inevitably fall into a representational logic, they also have a non-semantic ornamental aesthetic force. The poem produces variation. Riddling is this: not occulting a signified with code, but living and making with language the variation of shifting sentience beyond the measure of coding; taking hilariously seriously a recent joking tweet from Bruce Holsinger: "let's see a big national rag publish a feature on the ANALOGUE humanities."

As Carruthers also reminds us, medieval aesthetics valued *varietas* for its production of the sensation of mixture rather than the *dignitas* of classical rhetoric. As the mixture of sentience-shifting, wonder keeps us interested by shifting our sentience in/as a modulating provisional space for entities on the edges of our sentience—the result of sensory-affective-effective kinetics and textures below—no, to the side of—the level of semiotic/formal system—shiftings which constitute the variety of provisionally ontologically distinct entities we call the cosmos. "Any litany attests to

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty*, 14.

marvels," writes eco-poetics critic Jed Rasula.<sup>15</sup> Variation is perhaps the rhetoric of non-representational force, and so of thriving sentience. The driven and desiring subject may face a troubled 'access' to the real while at the same time perceptibly co-emerging with a variety of other alternate provisional perceptual systems on a variety of scales. Fortunately, the varieties of medieval poetics—from Riddle to Romance—already teaches us, as medievalists, that the desires of object- and language-oriented thinking may not always coincide, but might interface.

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<sup>15</sup> Jed Rasula, *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 123.











W. dreams, like Phaedrus, of an army of thinker-friends, thinker-lovers. He dreams of a thought-army, a thought-pack, which would storm the philosophical Houses of Parliament. He dreams of Tartars from the philosophical steppes, of thought-barbarians, thought-outsiders. What distance would shine in their eyes!

~Lars Iyer

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