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AN NLH FORUM

Medieval Fictionalities

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"WHO HAS FICTION?" The question serves as the main title of Julie Orlemanski's bracing essay published several issues ago in *New Literary History* 50.2. The subtitle, "Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," points to Orlemanski's concern with the periodization of fictionality at the hands of its contemporary theorists: that is, the seeming will among literary historians to identify a particular "mode of referentiality" (her phrase) as the exclusive jurisdiction of the modern novel as it has developed since the eighteenth century. The most confident proponent of such a view has been Catherine Gallagher, whose influential essay "The Rise of Fictionality" claims the novel's mode of fictionality as a clear historical rupture that departed from earlier, supposedly less self-reflexive varieties of fictionality in literary cultures that lacked "a *conceptual category* of fiction." Indeed, Gallagher argues, "From the outset, novelistic fictionality has been unique and paradoxical. The novel is not just one kind of fictional narrative among others; it is the kind in which and through which fictionality became manifest, explicit, widely understood, and accepted." In sum, "the novel discovered fiction."

Gallagher's argument is hardly a blunt instrument, however. One of the many virtues of Orlemanski's essay is its awareness of "the dissatisfactions of a historically unmoored fictionality" of the kind that "The Rise of Fictionality" so forcefully countered. Rather than simply correct Gallagher's overdetermined view of "what counts" as fiction, then, Orlemanski locates the essay's periodizing impulse within broader ideologies of secularism and disenchantment, "those widespread narratives of historical difference that recount modernity's emergence from a credulous past." This "credulous past" is the space of fable, fantasy, allegory: in short, the putative space of the medieval.

As Orlemanski's essay went to press, *NLH* received another submission taking on the complex subject of medieval fictionality. As Michelle Karnes argues in "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," though with somewhat different implications, the medieval literature of the marvelous, particularly as found in the era's travel literature, has much to teach us about the creative capacities of readerly ambivalence with respect to the truth claims of miracle and legend. Karnes helpfully underlines the circular

logic of Gallagher's claims: "Unsophisticated attitudes toward literature as [Gallagher] presents them resemble unsophisticated attitudes toward religion: a simple people find truth claims under every rock. In order for literature to play with credibility, readers cannot be unduly credulous, and so the absence of fiction in the Middle Ages becomes evidence of a readership not skeptical enough to enjoy it."

Both essays demonstrate that medieval fictionality was a vast and varied milieu of story and truth-claim, credulity and unbelief, every bit as sophisticated, self-knowing, and playful as the fictional modes of the novel—and exhibiting many of the very attributes imputed by Gallagher to this modern form. At the same time, Orlemanski and Karnes both work in the field of Middle English literature, and like Gallagher's, their disciplinary and institutional homes are departments of English. What does medieval fictionality look like from the perspectives of other literary traditions? How does the historical character of fictionality change when viewed through the lenses of other disciplines and fields? Does fictionality in post-Conquest England look anything like it does in, say, Han Dynasty China, or late medieval Germany, or pre-Conquest England?

In the spirit of such questions, the journal solicited responses to these two essays from seven scholars working in a number of ancillary fields. Several of these respondents have made their own contributions already to the study of medieval fictionality, which has generated substantial interest in recent years from Monika C. Otter, D. H. Green, Jesús R. Velasco, Monika Fludernik, and Steven Justice, among others. Contributors were invited to respond to the two essays while offering their own takes on the category of medieval fictionality from the perspectives of their disciplines and specialties. Orlemanski and Karnes responded in turn, and the result is a substantial cluster of reflections on this endlessly provocative subject.

We have posted the entirety of "Medieval Fictionalities," including the original essay by Orlemanski, on our website as a single PDF, available as a free download. Our hope is that the contributions and exchanges presented here will spark additional reflections on a subject with broad implications for literary scholars working across the early periods and into modernity. The cluster of essays and responses gathered here may also serve as a provisional model for future *NLH* forums: somewhat less ambitious than a full-fledged special issue, but allowing for extended and collaborative reflection on a subject of theoretical interest across multiple subfields and specialties.

Bruce Holsinger, Editor

Who Has Fiction?
Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages

Julie Orlemanski

I N HER COMMANDING AND WIDELY CITED 2006 ESSAY "The Rise of Fictionality," Catherine Gallagher argues that the novel's distinctive mode of referentiality—namely, its reference to nonactual people with regular-sounding names—should be identified with the emergence of fictionality as such.[1] "The novel is not just one kind of fictional narrative among others; it is the kind in which and through which fictionality became manifest, explicit, widely understood, and accepted," Gallagher writes.[2] The claim is that "the novel discovered fiction," novelists "liberated fictionality," and "widespread acceptance of verisimilitude as a form of truth . . . created the category of fiction" (RF 337, RF 341). Gallagher positions her arguments in contrast to universalist accounts of fiction, which at least since Aristotle have cast fiction-making as coextensive with cognition and culture. Against such sweeping conceptions, Gallagher cites "mounting historical evidence" and "recent scholarship" on the transition from what Barbara Foley has termed the "pseudofactual novel"—wherein editorial frameworks and documentary feints purport the factual truth of narratives, however disingenuously—to the abandonment of such pretenses later in the eighteenth century, as novelistic realism came into its own (RF 337).[3] This change, pinpointed to the years between 1720 and 1742, is seen to mark the emergence of fiction itself (RF 344). Most of "The Rise of Fictionality" is occupied with the formal, thematic, and epistemic tendencies that made the realist novel distinctive, but Gallagher also calls on the *Oxford English Dictionary* to claim that prior to the eighteenth century, the "*conceptual category* of fiction" was "lacking" (RF 340, emphasis original). The lexical evidence is debatable, but it evokes a pregnant correlation between fiction's crystallization as a literary concept and the realist novel's coming-to-be.

Gallagher is of course aware of a major counterindicator to the eighteenth-century invention of fictionality: that is, the enormous corpus of nonmodern, non-novelistic narratives that also suspend referential truth claims. To address these, she posits a crucial feature shared by "romances, fables, allegories, fairy stories, narrative poems—all premodern genres

that were not taken to be literal truth but that obviously had no inten-tion to deceive" (RF 338). They all deflect semantic earnestness only by means of what Gallagher calls their "blatant incredibility": "earlier fictions could be distinguished from lies *if* they were manifestly improbable" (RF 338, emphasis mine). And it is from this distinction that "The Rise of Fictionality" goes on to delimit fiction, in an act of definition that is also an act of periodization. "Fictionality that operates only in this one way," Gallagher writes—that is, only by blatant incredibility—"cannot be said to stand on its own as a separate category from fantasy. Plausible stories are thus the real test for the progress of fictional sophistication in a culture" (RF 339). The abrupt severing of fiction from fantasy is not explained further, and "fantasy" remains tellingly undefined. It forms a catch-all for those disparate premodern genres neither believed nor believable, cordoned off outside the analytic of fiction. The distinction is a terminological fiat upon which the "rise" of fictionality depends.

The present essay grows out of an interest in how concepts seeded with narratives of periodization and historical difference—concepts like fiction—operate in literary studies today. In its narrowest compass, my argument tussles with Gallagher's definition of fiction, insisting on the importance of what it leaves out even as I acknowledge the dissatisfac-tions of a historically unmoored fictionality. After all, norms of semantic unearnestness do vary across milieux, and writing what is known not to be known as true can entail metaphysical, gnoseological, institutional, and rhetorical considerations that differ from place to place and epoch to epoch. Scholarly approaches to fiction at present can be divided (as I explain) into "universalist" and "modernist" schools, whose divergence poses questions about how best to ground fiction's definition. I look to the high and late Middle Ages as my case study for regarding fiction as historically contingent but irreducible to the referential conventions popularized by the realist novel. Among the chief dissatisfactions of Gal-lagher's and others' accounts, I suggest, is their repetition of ideologies of secularism and disenchantment, those widespread narratives of his-torical difference that recount modernity's emergence from a credulous past. The entanglements between fictionality and disenchantment are neither superficial nor accidental because both notions have historically involved judgments about the organization of belief and its proper limits. In the framework of the secularization thesis, possessing fiction—which is to say, having the literary infrastructure for a "willing suspension of disbelief"—becomes the mark of an achieved secular modernity.

This essay ultimately resists such an account by arguing for a *hermeneutic* conception of fictionality—a critically pared-down and in some sense *unfinished* notion that assumes its determination in encountering the

record of past thought and action. This conception emerges out of the idea that fiction-making happens at the interface between language's fundamental capacity to portray the nonactual and the various regularizations of that capacity in literary genres, rhetorical commonplaces, and habituated social functions. Since (in this account) there is no polestar for fictionality, no signpost independent of contextual vicissitudes, other approaches to fiction's historical life are needed. Or, if the answer to "Who has fiction?" is everyone, the relevant question becomes *how* people have it. My minimalist conception thus treats fiction as a demarcational phenomenon, a semantic mode of unearnest reference that depends on the recognition by some interpretive community of a representation's distinction from one or another idiom of actuality—from history, philosophy, factuality, religious doctrine, a sacrament's performative efficacy, or everyday speech. These changeable regimes of truth then are a primary vector of fiction's historical variability and determination; when they change, fictionality changes too. My attenuated definition maintains fiction's distinction from lie and error but leaves unspecified what discourses fictionality is defined against; how its recognition is cued; and what its purposes, effects, and modes of presentation are (though I consider only language-based fictions here, leaving aside non-verbal media such as painting or mime). Such a pluralizing, hermeneutic conception lays the groundwork for comparison within and across literary periods, or what I call a comparative poetics of fiction.

The pages that follow present several overlapping arguments about conceptualizing fiction within the density of historical time. In the first section, I draw on the insights of postsecular critique to show how the ideological premises of secular modernity have persisted in the study of fiction. Rather than abandoning the notion, however, I redeploy it hermeneutically in the field of high and late medieval writings. The aim of the second section then is not to arrive at a unified account of medieval fiction but to reflect on the plural conventions of suspending referential truth claims, and of commenting on that suspension, in medieval writing. Like Steven Justice asking, "Did the Middle Ages believe in their miracles?" I provisionally accept the totalization of the period in the interest of describing its heterogeneity, dynamism, and specificity.[4] This discussion makes a case for what is to be gained from a hermeneutic conception of fiction, namely, a reshaping of the term's meaning in the present and a freshly critical account of the relation between concepts and practices. The essay's final section links this hermeneutic conception to an important trend in medieval studies, a trend of arguably anachronistic scholarship on topics like medieval disability and medieval race, which deploys modern constructs in non-

modern archives. This trend is related to the influence of postcolonial and decolonial thinkers on medieval studies, especially in respect to the critical energy to be drawn from the friction of concepts. The temporal distance intervening between a notion and what it seeks to name offers the chance to provincialize our ways of knowing and undo the seeming solidity of the way we map the world. Overall, these reflections on fictionality transpire in the borderlands between literary history, literary theory, and historical method, and from there seek to inflect the disciplinary life of the concept of fictionality.

I

Scholarly conversations about fictionality are a heterogeneous bunch, unfolding disparately among philosophers, narratologists, anthropologists, cognitive scientists, literary theorists, and historians of literature, culture, and *mentalités*. One possible way of sorting and mapping this varied discourse would be by asking, *Who has fiction?*—or, *To whom does fiction-making belong, as capacity and practice?* Such a diagnostic query would, I think, give rise to two families of answers. On one side would be those thinkers who share with Aristotle the sense that fiction-making is almost coextensive with the human, characterized as we are by the propensity for "mimesis as make-believe," as Kendall Walton terms it.[5] Whether such "universalists" identify fiction with narrative or also count other practices of representation and play, they decline to restrict it to a historically or culturally defined set of people, at least not explicitly. The variability of fiction across genres, media, historical periods, and cultures is widely acknowledged. But those differences fail to assume prime analytic importance. From the universalist side of fiction studies, the answer to who has fiction would likely be a shrugging "everyone!"— before these thinkers return to giving general accounts of fiction and how it operates, albeit accounts most often substantiated with examples drawn from Western modernity, especially novels.[6]

On the other side of fiction studies are those who take a more historical approach to the topic by treating fiction as something that arises or is invented at a particular point in history—even if they disagree about what that moment is. The most influential of these accounts center on the genre of the novel and identify the origin of fiction with the development of novelistic realism in the mid-eighteenth century and its growing influence across the nineteenth. These accounts link fiction's coming-to-be to developments in mass literate culture and (in many versions) to changes in collective mentality resulting from the Protestant

Reformation, the scientific revolution, industrial capitalism, or the credit economy.[7] But there are "births" of fiction pinned to other historical moments as well. In *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction,* Mark Payne argues that the bucolic poet is the first to create a fully fictional world.[8] Margalit Finkelberg attributes the "birth of literary fiction" to innovations in ancient Greek philosophy, and Nicholas Lowe, in "Comic Plots and the Invention of Fiction," focuses on the comic playwright Antiphanes.[9] David Konstan argues that the "rise of the ancient novel marks the moment of the invention of fiction" in the second century CE.[10] According to Isaac Miller, Augustine of Hippo effects the "invention of fiction" in his "commitment to the ontological reality of narrative."[11] C. S. Lewis understands sixteenth-century writers to conclude "an age-old debate; and that debate, properly viewed, is simply the difficult process by which Europe became conscious of fiction as an activity distinct from history on the one hand and from lying on the other."[12] Gordon Teskey spots the rise of fictionality, or "the peculiar sense of the literary as constituting an autonomous world," just after the Protestant Reformation, as "something new in the long Tudor century, even if many elements that went into it existed before."[13] Fiction is understood to be "invented" in the Middle Ages as well, as I discuss below, particularly around the genre of courtly romance. This group of scholars might be called the "modernists" of fiction because they seek to identify the factors that made fiction possible only from a certain discursive moment onward. In whatever way each would respond to the question "Who has fiction?"—the answer would not be *everyone.*

    To identify what might be unsatisfying in the modernist account, I turn back to Gallagher's essay as both a particularly influential articulation of the paradigm and one helpfully explicit about the logic of its claims. (The "universalist" account returns for evaluation at the end of this section.) In "The Rise of Fictionality," one might notice, the arguments for fiction's eighteenth-century emergence are bolstered by broad epochal characterizations. "Modernity is fiction-friendly," Gallagher explains, "because it encourages disbelief, speculation, and credit" (RF 345). Novels promote the "flexible mental states [that] were the sine qua non of modern subjectivity" (RF 346). Such swiftly invoked descriptions remind readers of what they are already expected to know, about "England's early secularism, scientific enlightenment, empiricism, capitalism, materialism, national consolidation, and the rise of the middle class" (RF 345). Gallagher's rather ingenious intervention in "rise of the novel" scholarship is to enlist these commonplaces not in the explanation of literary realism, as Ian Watt and others have done, but in the explanation of fictionality. Though Gallagher's broad brushstrokes are familiar enough,

it is worth reflecting on the fact that they paint a shadow portrait of the nonmodern as well. If modernity encourages disbelief and speculation, or if modern subjectivity is defined by flexibility of mind, then this also tells us something about the nonmodern. Early novels were tasked with discouraging "faith," cultivating "skepticism," and training readers "in an attitude of disbelief" because, one is given to understand, belief and faith had not yet been overcome (RF 346). Insofar as novels seek to suspend readers' disbelief, "disbelief is thus the condition of fictionality" (346). That such a condition was epistemic and historical is precisely what the essay argues, in establishing what it calls "the modernity-fictionality connection" (RF 345). "Indeed," Gallagher concludes, "almost all of the developments we associate with modernity—from greater religious toleration to scientific discovery—required the kind of cognitive provisionality one practices in reading fiction" (RF 347). Such cognitive provisionality, it is implied, was unrealized in earlier periods.

In these claims that fiction corrodes faith, depends on disbelief, helps produce a distinctively modern subjectivity, marches in step with religious tolerance and scientific discovery, and appears only in the mid-eighteenth century, one can discern a neat homology between "The Rise of Fictionality" and the grand récit of the secularization thesis.[14] This is the much-criticized but still-ubiquitous plot that arcs from a past society of sacral "enchantment" to the rationalization and reason of a disenchanted modernity. Although the notion of *Entzauberung der Welt* ("demagicification, or disenchantment, of the world") is credited to the sociologist Max Weber, Weber is far from the earliest thinker to propound a story that goes something like this: the rise of intellectualized religion, empirical science, and/or global capitalism, together with the destruction of traditional forms of community, leached the world of supernatural agency. While this process gave rise to modern alienation, disenchantment is ultimately a fortunate fall, allowing for the calibration of a truer and more sophisticated relation to the world. The variable iterations of this story are what Jane Bennett has called "disenchantment tales."[15] The secularization thesis and its tales trace what are portrayed as two entwined processes: disenchantment (or the erosion of myth, magic, and irrational belief from human access to reality) and secularization (or the privatization of religion and establishment of avowedly nonreligious institutions and discursive domains). Weber, Hans Blumenberg, and Charles Taylor are among the best-known commentators on these interwoven processes, but their studies should not be taken as definitive—either as definitive analyses or definitive symptoms—of the long-standing and heterogeneous matrix of the secularization thesis.[16] As Sara Lyons has recently explored, Weber drew his language and

thematics of disenchantment from German Romanticism, extrapolating *Entzauberung* from a moment in Friedrich Schiller's 1788 poem "Die Götter Griechenlands," on the un-godding or de-divinization of nature.[17] Romanticism was one episode in what has been the long consolidation of the normative sense that modernity is defined against the enchantment that precedes it; the twentieth-century development of the social sciences was another such episode.

At least since the stadial histories of the Enlightenment, then, claims for the uniqueness of modern circumstances have functioned to locate what is nonmodern outside the jurisdiction of a whole range of concepts—the individual, rationality, reflexivity, and historical time, among others. Inside the terms of the disenchantment plot, the Middle Ages have played the part of modernity's credulous foil—as have non-Western, "nonmodern" cultures where "enchantment" still reigns. Pioneering arguments by Johannes Fabian and Dipesh Chakrabarty have drawn attention to the geocultural politics of this periodizing scheme, and scholars of the Middle Ages and medievalism have in recent years built upon postcolonial theory to explore the implications of the parallel, or analogous, structural positions of medieval and non-Western peoples in the story of disenchantment, each occupying the place of childish immaturity or relative irrationality.[18] As Carol Symes summarizes, "Just as the cultures of the Near East, North Africa, and India were acknowledged to be birthplaces of 'Western' civilization *as well as* dusky backwaters, so the Middle Ages became the dark womb of modernity."[19] Academic literary studies took shape in the nineteenth century as part of the becoming-hegemonic of this distinctive conceptual grammar, one materialized in the global exercise of empire, racialization, and colonial extraction. It was one among a number of intellectual disciplines in formation during this period, which took shape between, on the one hand, the scientific management of cultural alterity, and, on the other, the cultivated experience of meaning across difference (e.g., historicism and history, ethnology and anthropology, philology and literary history). When medievalists or postcolonialists work to demonstrate the blind spots of current concepts, or the hierarchies constitutive of methodological schemata, they alike aim to *provincialize* modern analytical protocols and to grapple with their limits. Part of the present essay's aim is to do something like that for fiction.

As I have already begun to suggest, one response to the periodizing imperative of the secularization thesis is to adopt the "modernist" paradigm of fictionality for other periods and corpora. "Fiction was invented in England in the 12th century; we might pinpoint a few years around the 1150s as the crucial moment," writes Laura Ashe.[20] For Ashe, the

fictionality of medieval romance is defined by its peering "inside the minds and experiences of other people," making it the "forerunner of the novel."[21] Ashe's account reiterates truisms of the secularization story backdated to the Middle Ages: "It was in the romance that individuality emerged"[22]; "Where social expectation subordinates the individual to the higher cause, there is no need for fiction"[23]; only with the valorization of heterosexual love "is fiction made possible, for now the individual is justified for his own sake"[24]; and twelfth-century fiction participated in "one of the greatest shifts in English society," a new view of nationhood that would be "the foundation of the concept of a parliament and a public sphere."[25] Ashe's claims build on and participate in an extraordinarily generative corpus of scholarship on the development of French romance. However, much of this scholarship conceives of fiction in decidedly secularist terms, holding it to be "a function of the emancipation of vernacular language from Latin, of secular language from religious language," as Monika Otter observes.[26]

Per Nykrog in "The Rise of Literary Fiction," describes fiction being "brought into existence as a specific and intelligent form by the writers of the 1170s" in sharp distinction from both Latinity and orality.[27] The ideology of medieval fiction, in Nykrog's account, indexes the individual's "responsible freedom to form his destiny and direct his activity, an experience that constitutes the essence of what is called *humanism.*"[28] Walter Haug identifies the fundamental tension of Christian poetics to be "between hymnic praise and desperate admonition, between the transfiguration of the world and the denial of it," a deadlock broken only by the development of courtly romance: "This state of affairs holds absolute sway until well into the twelfth century. Then, however, against the background of this theoretical scheme, literature—in the sense of fiction—is discovered as an independent medium of human experience."[29] Peter Haidu, writing about the twelfth century, accepts that "there was something inherently disquieting, from the theological viewpoint" about fiction.[30] He continues:

Now fiction can, of course, bring religious values into play by imagery and example as well as by direct didacticism: there is no difficulty in conceiving of a religious rhetoric deployed through *écriture* and, indeed, the examples are many. But at a more profound level, at the level of the fundamental mode of existence of the text, on the level of its ontological status, the activity of writing can easily be viewed as inherently threatening. . . . In the context of a world constituted as God's trace, fiction is not the addition brought before our eyes to enrich our lives by an imaginative genius in imitation of a creative *Deus sive Natura*, it is the *subtraction* of a richness that existed before the arrival of *écriture*. . . . That is to say, fiction, in this historical context, is a form without correct content.[31]

Haidu finds that fiction, within this "world constituted as God's trace," is fundamentally menacing to religiosity. But what accounts of religiosity and fiction operate here?

I follow Talal Asad in the conviction that "there is nothing *essentially* religious, nor any universal essence that defines 'sacred language' or 'sacred experience.' But," Asad continues, "I also assume that there were breaks between Christian and secular life in which words and practices were rearranged, and new discursive grammars replaced previous ones."[32] There is certainly warrant for identifying *local* conflicts between clergy and court in the twelfth century; clerics' anti-romance pronouncements are well known.[33] The point is not to deny the historical existence of distinctions between religiosity and its others, or fiction and its others, but to contest their essentialization. Postsecular critique and the scholarship informed by it have sought to disaggregate the interlocking binaries that structure secularist ideology: enchantment and disenchantment, nonmodernity and modernity, belief and knowledge, compulsion and freedom, immediacy and mediation, folklore and literature, fantasy and fiction. Certainly, one might dispute the periodizing force of Gallagher's "fictionality" by searching out verisimilar fictions from the Middle Ages—and some medievalists have done just that, attending to detailed quotidian descriptions, realistic dialogue, or lifelike characters fitted out with social identities and psychological interiority, whether in romance or other genres.[34] But ultimately this leaves novelistic realism in place as a criterion. Among the disadvantages of collapsing medieval fiction into narrative realism or courtly romance are that doing so muffles the polyvocality of Christian Latinity so as to stage fiction's rise. More so, by failing to challenge the novel as the model for fictionality, it ends up telling teleological, modernity-oriented stories that leave intact the secularist antithesis of religion and fiction.

About this enduring antithesis, it is worth observing that there is a long tradition in the West of both distinguishing and deriving fictionality from categories of bad belief. As early as the Pre-Socratics, poetic narratives of the gods were the occasion for splitting audiences between the gullible and the sophisticated, which is to say, between those who didn't understand fiction properly and those who did. The division could be cast diachronically (Xenophanes's "fabrications of earlier times") or synchronically (Heraclitus's assertion that the masses "trust in poets of the common people").[35] Mythographic explanations by way of euhemerism, natural symbolism, and moral allegory were common in Classical and Hellenistic Greece, and continued to be so in Roman thought and in late antiquity. Collections of mythological stories for elite consumption were part of a vast mythographic project that simultaneously generated

sites of fictionality and of epistemic difference.[36] In the Middle Ages, the pagan poets were understood to narrate with an authority ironized and qualified by Christian revelation, and the classical gods became one of the signatures of literary fiction, demarcating practices of nonliteral reference and overt invention. Then, starting early in the Reformation, Protestants began to yoke Roman Catholicism to medieval romance, collapsing religious dispensation and literary genre alike into the category of bad belief.[37] As Michael McKeon has shown, by the seventeenth century, "romance" denoted both narrative genre and epistemological mistake.[38] Richard Hurd's well-known 1762 *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* muses on the historical life of romance, "faery," and fictionality. In Chaucer's age, Hurd concludes, "The wonders of Chivalry were still in the memory of men, were still existing, in some measure, in real life." But as time marched on, rationality advanced, and in the age of Spenser and Milton, "reason was but dawning, as we may say, and just about to gain the ascendant over the portentous spectres of the imagination."[39] In Hurd's own age, the process was complete: "The magic of the old romances was perfectly dissolved" and reason had driven "the tales of faery . . . off the scene."[40]

Indeed, to exercise the "willing suspension of disbelief," in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's resonant phrase, one must have some quantity of disbelief and skepticism to proceed from, dispositions not thought to be in ready supply in the so-called age of faith. Coleridge's influential discussions of fictionality in the *Biographia Literaria* set up a series of historicized oppositions between religious faith and "poetic faith."[41] More generally, Romanticism helped to secure in the West a particular historical topology for belief, defined by remote zones of primal immediacy, and a present era mediated by the melancholic frameworks of art and fiction, with Christianity playing changeable roles in the middle distance. It was supposedly modernity's strong separation of verifiable from unverifiable claims that allowed for the emergence of an alternative, à la Matthew Arnold: culture poised as mediator between religion and science, with fiction synthesizing the opposition of delusion and fact.

This literary-historical tour, admittedly breakneck, is meant to stage the remarkably longstanding correspondence between the theorization of fiction and the positing of naiveté elsewhere. That network of epistemological and historical assumptions is still vivid in the concepts of fiction available in literary studies today, given hyperbolic expression in James Wood's invocation of "the true secularism of fiction—why, despite its being a kind of magic, it is actually the enemy of superstition, the slayer of religions, the scrutineer of falsity."[42]

"The true secularism of fiction." By now, the secularization thesis and its disenchantment tales have been subject to years of critique. As Asad commented in 2003, "If anything is agreed upon, it is that a straightforward narrative of progress from the religious to the secular is no longer acceptable."[43] In 2014, Jared Hickman and Peter Coviello concurred: "Disenchantment, a swing from superstition to rationality, credulity to skepticism, eschatological fanaticism to liberal tolerance: ours is a scholarly moment no longer persuaded by the clarities of these stories of modernity, nor by the neat dichotomies nested within them. So the secularization thesis is dead."[44] Yet postsecular critique continues to grapple with what might be called the *undead* status of the "disenchantment of the world," which has proved harder to keep in the ground than its debunking would suggest. This is in part because it lives on in our concepts and categories: in how they map the world and in how they determine what can be compared and what relations are legitimate.

"Universalist" accounts of fictionality might seem to eschew the plot of fiction's "rise." Yet as their arguments move from preliminary and trivial claims to richer ones, general theories of fiction can be observed presuming what are in fact highly particular epistemologies (like that of analytical philosophy) or cultural formations (like aesthetic autonomy, or the epistemic prestige of "the fact"), or they draw their examples entirely from novels. In other words, historical exclusiveness creeps back in. The advantage of a *hermeneutic* conception of fiction is that it transforms those factors that create a conundrum for "universalist" accounts—the present horizon of expectations, its poor fit with other horizons, and the common ground that nonetheless makes one recognizable to the other—into elements in a self-critical project of *enacting* meaning across historical distance and contextual difference. Thus a better framework for the scholarly conversation about fiction—instead of a competing series of births, rises, and inventions, or, alternately, a set of noncoincident general theories—may be a comparative poetics of fiction, one attentive to changes in what fictionality has been demarcated against, and how, across milieux. To make use of the concept of fiction as we find it in the present, we need to reckon with the impulse to periodization deposited in it over its history of use, and to reevaluate our relation to that impulse. A hermeneutic approach would have the benefit of preventing the lion's share of world literature—fables, romances, allegories, and stories containing "talking animals, flying carpets, or human characters who are much better or much worse than the norm"—from failing what Gallagher terms "the real test for the progress of fictional sophistication in a culture" (RF 339).

II

This call for a hermeneutics and comparativism of fiction may from one angle resemble a return to historicism. Discourses of truth—or the conventionalized genres for securing veracity, certainty, and performative felicity—vary across contexts, so it stands to reason that the procedures of fiction-making (which suspend one or another species of discursive truth) would vary too. It is historicism that asks after the contextually specific ways that fiction has been demarcated and elaborated. But a hermeneutic comportment to the past declines to think that we can leave our modern categories entirely behind. Hermeneutics entails a different relation to those temporal crossings sometimes labeled anachronism. In order to understand why a certain temporal leap needs to be part of fiction's historical study, which opens it to the concept's meaning in the present, it is important to think through the role of the most ready-to-hand resource for specifying the *idea* of fiction in its historical variation—namely, the theoretical vocabularies of other eras and contexts. It is to the affordances as well as the limitations of such vocabularies that I now turn.

In the case of medieval literature, that theoretical vocabulary is part of what has been termed medieval literary theory, or the corpus of mostly Latin commentaries, prologues, grammatical and rhetorical treatises, and other descriptive and prescriptive texts in which medieval thinkers—and the Classical and late-antique writers who were important to them—reflected on the operations of reference, representation, signification, and language.[45] Indeed, in this body of writing a number of important formulations on fictionality are cited and recited over the course of the Middle Ages. The fourth-century theologian and former rhetorician Lactantius influentially defines poetry in terms of its deviation from true events: "It is the business of poets elegantly and with oblique figures to turn and transfer things which have really occurred into other representations."[46] Historical deeds (*quae gesta sunt vere*) are transformed into fictions, not unlike how proper sense receives a tropic "turn" in rhetorical figures—making good on the common etymological root of *fictio* and *figura*. Another widely available theory, drawn from Ciceronian rhetorical manuals, is the threefold rhetorical classification of narratives according to their degree of truthfulness, as *fabula*, *argumentum*, or *historia*—"the oldest and most constant generic taxonomy in the Middle Ages."[47] *Fabula* is neither true nor verisimilar, *argumentum* is fictional but narrated according to the conventions of accepted reality, and *historia* tells of actual occurrences.[48] Both *fabula* and *historia*, in turn, received extensive independent theoretical elaborations; *fabula* to map

its mercurial relations to truth; *historia* to demarcate it from romance, lie, and error.[49] Allegorical integument extended the polysemousness of biblical writing to other texts in what is arguably a theory of fictionality and its interpretation.[50] The Latin translation of Averroes's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, surviving in over twenty manuscripts and excerpted and referred to in numerous others, provides yet another resource for medieval theories of fiction.[51]

Medieval accounts of *poetria*, *res ficta*, *figmenta*, *fabula*, *argumentum*, and *integumentum* are attractive rebuttals to charges of premodern conceptual naiveté. Semantic distinctions between proper and poetic signification, divisions of fictional genres on the basis of verisimilitude, and awareness that hermeneutic premises affect the operations of reference all testify to the Middle Ages' sophisticated accounts of fictionality (though none, of course, correspond precisely to the present-day paradigm of prose fiction). Medievalists have drawn on the vocabularies of the grammatical, rhetorical, and commentarial traditions to great interpretive effect. But the *severalness* of these contemporary theories also suggests their partialness, or the failure of any one of them to be a governing account of fictionality, constitutive of or sufficient to the varied instances of medieval literary fiction. This partialness resonates with Zygmunt G. Barański's contention that in the Middle Ages literary texts were perceived less as exemplars of singular genres than as "storehouses of examples with which to illustrate *every kind* of textual characteristic": "No single category could even begin to suggest the full character of a work."[52] Thus an influential thirteenth-century commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* announces (quite unexceptionally) that the poem is narrated in the full panoply of referential modes: *historia*, *argumentum*, *fabula*, and *comedia*.[53]

Yet beyond the peculiarities of medieval literary theory, scholars might question the assumption that theoretical articulations are adequate to explain the literature roughly contemporary to them.[54] Literary making, after all, enjoys a degree of independence from its theorization. In narrative invention as in other cultural undertakings, practice has its own logic. A sculptor may carve ivory exquisitely without having read a treatise on the art. In such a case, technique concretizes knowledge: the nature of the medium, the aesthetic constitution of viewers, and the repertoire of traditional forms are remarked in facture. Something like this is true for narrative and poetic arts too. There are plenty of medieval literary practices—for instance, writing in alliterative verse, or composing the ribald stories known as fabliaux—that gave rise to hardly any explicit mention. Other compositional undertakings—like the elaboration of exempla or the invention of personifications—drastically outmatch their footprint in theory. Description and prescription stand in variable rela-

tions to composition. The comparativist Renato Poggioli observes that "*unwritten* poetics have existed in every age, either alone or alongside written ones."[55] Hans Robert Jauss considers "the discrepancy between poetic theory and literary production" essential to literature's historicity.[56] People can and do create self-aware imaginative works without recourse to vocabularies to categorize and analyze them. Medieval literary theory illustrates how those charged with systematizing literary knowledge or translating it into analytical registers fulfilled those tasks, but it does not exhaust the record of literary reflexivity.

   This argument joins up with that of Nicolette Zeeman, who in her provocative 2007 essay "Imaginative Theory" argues that the "full extent of [medieval] literary self-theorization—whether Latin or vernacular— only becomes apparent when we recognize that much of it is expressed in figured or even metaphorical form."[57] Zeeman contends that the "critical prioritization of the explicit" in recent scholarship has led to impoverished accounts of medieval literary reflexivity because of a failure to recognize "literary theory expressed in 'literary' form."[58] As a complement to the corpus of explicit and preceptive theory, then, she points to the many medieval motifs, generic cues, and rhetorical figures that perform reflexive and theoretical work in particular texts. Zeeman's arguments suggest the usefulness of generating accounts of medieval fictionality based on how poetic and narrative texts *themselves* disposed the rhetorical, thematic, and allusive resources at hand to cut distinctions between different modes of being and different kinds of reference. Such accounts would be hermeneutic insofar as they would depend on our recognizing in the concrete properties of medieval texts the claims about language, meaning, textuality, and discourse being made there. Insofar as literary history is concerned with poetic and narrative *practices*, and not just propositions about literature, we should be alert to the ways that imaginative writing conceives itself differently than does its contemporary meta-discourse. Part of the task of literary scholarship is to produce new conditions of visibility and explicitness for the claims of literary practice.

   What would facilitate such acts of recognition? The line of research that has been most thoroughly explored to this point concerns *genre*, which stands as an important midlevel category for mediating between particular literary texts and what I've portrayed as the vast and protean discursive mode of fictionality. Though genres raise their own difficulties of identification and nomination, they are useful in being acknowledged as sets of coordinate conventions transmitted through instantiation as much as precept.[59] Genre might also be seen as one element in a broader and more scalarly varied repertoire of "commonplaces" that

helped define medieval fictionality. Commonplaces, as I use the term, encompass both the shared topoi of nonactuality in medieval writing and the regularized situations of imaginative invention, or the common *places* where fiction-making happened. The aim of a catalogue of fiction's medieval commonplaces would be to generate something like a maximalist map of medieval fictionality, without lapsing into, as Jorge Luis Borges has it, "a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire"[60]—in other words, while still allowing for some degree of generalization and abstraction.

What would we find on such a map? The catalogue would need to include recurrent motifs, genres, literary modalities, and performative contexts. For instance, relevant motifs would encompass the pantheon of pagan gods, which acted as operators of fictionality as well as catalysts for articulating the historical, scientific, and psychological truths that fictions could cipher; the framework of games, especially chess, whose avatars and rule-bound confines mirrored fictions' self-differentiation from their contexts; states of psychological solipsism, like madness, dreaming, and intoxication, which bracketed empirical reality and gave rise to private but consequential alternatives; episodes of ekphrasis, with their apotheosis in Pygmalion; sensory errors, especially optical misprisions, paradigmatically that of Narcissus; and metonymies of deception like masks, disguises, lying, counterfeiting, hypocrisy, and euphemism, which could serve as moralized or ironized figures of fictionality. One recurrent narrative structure of medieval fictionality was that of ontological nesting, or the structured distinction between different layers of narrative reality, as in dream visions, framed story collections, or French dits. In such works distinctions between diegetic domains (between dreaming and waking life, heaven and earth, or tale and teller) echoed and invited reflection on the ontological differences between the text and its referents.

Our catalogue would be still ampler. Medieval literary genres associated with fictionality must include, of course, courtly romance, which portrayed presumptively inaccessible psychological interiority, stressed the fabricated and artificed nature of its contents, wove marvels through the shadowy historicity of its materials, and distinguished itself semantically from contemporary historical genres like the chronicle; beast fables, which served as the standard exemplification of fabula, as in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*: "Poets named 'fables' (*fabula*) from 'speaking' (*fari*) because they are not actual events that took place, but were only invented in words. These were presented with the intention that the conversation of imaginary dumb animals among themselves may be recognized as a certain image of the life of humans"[61]; personification

allegory, with its speculative reorganization of the relations of abstraction and concrete particulars; and the parable, Jesus's enigmatic narrative form in the Gospels. The literary mode of parody, or the intentionally humorous imitation of discursive kinds, often reinhabited the generic conventions of earnest discourse with fictional content. Specialized spheres of medieval textual production also cultivated roles for fictionality. In medieval dialectic, *impossibilia, sophismata*, and other speculative scenarios honed the precision of logical articulation, in what Virginie Greene has called the "logical fictions" of medieval philosophy.[62] Within law, legal heuristics required *fictio legis*, or the provisional acceptance as true what is known to be false.[63]

And there would be more. In some cases fictionality could derive from performative contexts. In lay religious drama, the extraliturgical status of mystery plays and the artificed quality of dramatized miracles fore-grounded the fictional mode. These dramas portrayed events understood to be historically true, but to the extent that they were reenacted, they were also fictions. Jesus is not really crucified on the streets of York; the eucharistic wafer bleeds in this case by stagecraft, not divine miracle. Specific plays thematized or contested such fictionality. As Sarah Beckwith notes, "The line between liturgy, church, and theater is a line that needs to be drawn and redrawn."[64] Considered as scripts for performance, even the Psalms could become fictional. As David Lawton writes, there was "a spectrum of relation possible between reader and Psalms, rang-ing from identification to distance."[65] When someone pronounced the Psalmodic "I" and took on the voice of David, the speech-act could be understood as a mix of truth and untruth. An analogous negotiation took place vis-à-vis gospel meditations, or the contemplative discipline according to which medieval Christians were to imagine themselves as participants in the life of Christ.

These last examples suggest the risk of a certain reductio ad absurdum in my minimalist conception of fiction and its maximalist map in the Middle Ages. Do deictics like *I, now, here*, and *this*, as they float free of determinate reference, always tip into fictionality? To answer yes would be to make the category of fiction so broad and historically untethered as to be trivial. What matters more than taxonomy (Do gospel meditations count as fictions?) is the translation of the question into medieval terms: How did the historical counterfactuality of gospel meditations inflect the truth they were understood to possess, according to (for instance) sacramental models of time and cognition? How did texts for meditation acknowledge their proximity to, but difference from, works of visionary mysticism? Did the "fictionality" of meditations matter differently in the case of women or lay people? Fiction's hermeneutic challenge lies in our

being able to recognize the often tacit or contextual traces of fiction's demarcation, to follow such fiction-making into the discursive milieu from which it acquired its purpose and power, and, finally, to bring those discoveries back to the concept of fiction as such.

It should be stressed that none of the commonplaces catalogued above is, on its own, sufficient for deciding whether a text is fictional or not. Each commonplace is polyvalent, subject to contextual determination, and signifies more strongly when accompanied by others. Yet all were conventional vehicles for the medieval negotiation of and reflection on overt invention and reference to nonactual things. To attend to commonplaces like these is to trace patterns in the "imaginative theory" of medieval fictionality. It is also necessary to acknowledge that the fictional texts in which they circulated did not entirely renounce a relation to truth—but the same is true for novelistic realism, which was regularly understood to communicate moral, philosophical, social, and psychological insights. Honoré de Balzac, at the outset of his realist novel *Père Goriot*, declares, "All is true"—a statement that does nothing to cancel the work's fictionality, but declines to give up its claim to verity.

The moral of all this, I hope, is clear. The hermeneutic status of concepts is exaggeratedly clear in the case of *medieval* fictionality: "fiction" picks out a set of texts composed and read in a milieu where the concept (at least in its full modern sense) was not present. But the protean nature of fiction-making should encourage us to extend our sense of the hermeneutic condition beyond the special alterity of the Middle Ages. Then as now practice outstrips theory; it obeys different logics and stands in no automatic relation to its external conceptualization. A comparative poetics would offer ways of opening up questions about what remains unsettled in the present-day notion of fiction. For instance, at what scale does the definition of fiction apply, to the whole work or to component parts? Modern philosophers have tended to make fictionality's unit the propositional statement, while the literary marketplace sorts texts and genres in their entirety by whether they are fictional or not. Referentiality can be stabilized at various levels. Late-antique and medieval readers often attended to the referential dappling of narratives, as in Servius's influential commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, wherein he notes the poem's "containing true things alongside fictions (*fictis*), for it is obvious that Aeneas did come to Italy, but it is understood that Venus speaking with Jove or Mercury being sent as messenger is made-up (*conpositum*)."[66] Distinctively modern genres like the historical novel include admixtures of fact crucial to many readers' enjoyment, and they do so without fracturing the story's discursive unity. A comparative poetics of fiction encourages us to ask how referential

dappling continues to operate in phenomenologies of reading or how fictionality should be scaled.

Another unsettled question: Whose understanding instantiates fictionality? Or, if fiction names what is known not to be known as true, who possesses that knowledge? The question has received numerous answers in modern theory: John Searle locates fictionality "in the illocutionary intentions of the author"; Walton centers it "not on the activity of fiction-makers, but on objects—works of fiction or natural objects—and their role in appreciators' activities"; and the so-called "contract" model of fiction posits an implicit semantic agreement established between writer and reader.[67] Textual cultures in the Middle Ages, however, draw attention to the temporal, geographic, and cultural distances that intervene between writers and readers, and to the shifts in semantic mode that can transpire in the interval. Medieval readers of Classical literature generally understood themselves to be engaged in what we now call fictionalism: they took certain claims—about the existence and nature of the pagan gods especially—to be literally false but worth entertaining as true in limited ways, and (as they thought) at odds with the original authors' intentions or original audiences' beliefs. The pantheon, then, was the occasion for fictionalism's attendant acts of epistemological, religious, and historical self-differentiation, as well as hermeneutic encounter. The reciprocity between historically variable practices of fictionalism—between the medieval treatment of the pagan gods and, say, modern appreciation of religious texts as essentially cultural phenomena ("the bible as literature")—may throw light on the long entanglement of fictionality and disenchantment, discussed above.

A last example: what genres or text-types maintain an unstable relation to fictionality? In the present, one thinks of lyric poetry and the complex referentiality of the first-person pronoun, from dramatic monologues to confessional poetry.[68] In the Middle Ages, genres portraying exotic *mirabilia* maintained a changeable referential disposition, as did collections of exempla, in which individual stories may or may not have pretensions to factuality despite their claims to didactic truth. Not all genres impose a consistent referential mode, but this does not preclude particular texts or subgenres from manipulating the line between actuality and invention, nor does it necessarily reflect any want of semantic sophistication. Queries like the three just posed—and there are more like them—exemplify some of the issues that a comparative poetics of fiction might lay open. These stand to pluralize the literary-critical concept of fiction by returning it to its volatile interface with language's capacity to depict what is nonactual and the reinventions that result.

III

In concluding, I want to acknowledge that if one cares about the historicity of fiction, Gallagher's claim about the anachronism of "medieval fictionality" cannot be simply dismissed. Gallagher writes that it is only "retroactively and, we should notice, *anachronistically*" that premodern genres like romances, fables, and allegories are "proclaimed fictional" (RF 338, emphasis original). Although the present essay has been pitched against the discrediting force of that claim, the claim nonetheless raises real questions. Might it not be a distorting act of categorization to stretch one word, "fiction," around such diverse medieval phenomena as imagination, mimesis, pagan myth, virtuality, counterfactuality, example, ideal, lie, trope, experiment, romance, *fabula*, *argumentum*, phantasm, *engin*, allegory, invention, and dream? Does calling a work fictional threaten to flatten historical difference, or universalize modern literary traditions? Since *all* concepts abstract from concrete particulars and subsidiary categories, it cannot be merely a loss of specificity that is troubling. The crux of the matter seems to be whether a concept should be contemporary with what it conceptualizes. Yet as I have argued, this idea of contemporaneity itself needs scrutiny. Medieval thinkers *did* have theoretical accounts of fictionality, but access to such accounts was not a necessary condition for narrating what was known not to be known as true. The responsiveness of literary practice to conceptual vocabulary is itself historically variable, and making or doing always has some autonomy from theory.

Any comparative work must grapple with the uneasy status of the categories and concepts that organize comparison. The stability of comparison's central terms, of what is being compared, is always at risk in the plurality of their instantiations. Of course, the consolidation of comparative methods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries celebrated the universal reach and epistemic decisiveness of its concepts. Such a "critical prioritization of the explicit" (to return to Zeeman's phrase) is one way that rationalized modernity has valorized itself and misrecognized its others, dismissing what (to borrow the idiom of G. W. F. Hegel) is merely "in itself" (*an sich*) in favor if what is properly "for itself" (*für sich*).[69] Other cultures may have economies, religions, family structures, and forms of referential play—so the thinking goes—but it is we who possess the *concepts* of economy, religion, kinship system, and fictionality—and this supposedly makes all the difference. Like postsecular critique, decolonial theory has dissented from this prizing of conceptual explicitness by "disturb[ing] the notion that theoretical and conceptual frameworks must necessarily precede praxis, as well as the

idea that meaning is only conceptually derived."[70] But methodological questions remain about how to recognize and articulate the intellection compacted into praxis, especially when the terms we have for naming that intellection are, as Gallagher contends, anachronistic.

As Ania Loomba writes in her remarkable 2009 essay, "Race and the Possibilities of Comparative Critique," "The most productive potential of comparison is that it can establish connections and relations across seemingly disparate contexts and thus challenge provincialism and exceptionalism."[71] "But," she continues, "it is precisely this potential of comparative thought that has fed into the development of 'global' or 'universal' paradigms that posit a hierarchical relation between the entities being compared or simply exclude large chunks of reality from its domain . . . Such comparison was foundational to disciplines such as anthropology, but more broadly to religious, literary, and cultural discourse."[72] In other words, comparison is part of the knowledge system by which modernity has advanced its hold, justified itself, and claimed to know comprehensively. Its potential is nonetheless that it enacts a scholarly imaginary distinct from modernist or universalist accounts, one that is attuned to relation across variation and that declines to make *comparanda* stand in relations of succession or teleological development. Loomba focalizes her arguments through both postcolonial studies and scholarship on the premodern world, two fields that jar and grate against modern categories. The interest of what does not fit comparison's, and modernity's, organizing terms leads Loomba to wager on the possibilities of what she calls comparative critique. The comparative poetics of fiction I have sketched above likewise aims to make the dissonance of the concept, its explanatory friction, a part of the knowledge it generates.

The present essay, then, has sought to operationalize a hermeneutic model of concepts by accounting for "medieval fiction." In doing so, I follow the lead of a number of exciting conversations in medieval studies, organized around the interaction between nonmodern archives and arguably modern notions like subjectivity, sexuality, race, and disability.[73] These several lines of debatably anachronistic scholarship might be seen to eventuate in a new paradigm for how concepts work in literary studies; one aim of the previous pages has been to give a methodologically reflexive example of that paradigm. To drive the point home, I turn in closing to a powerful recent example of this scholarship, centered on the concept of race. The Middle Ages is often held to be a period *before* race emerged—before the Atlantic slave trade, before European colonialism, before scientific racism. However, in her monograph *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages,* Geraldine Heng redefines the term in such a way that it can be used to query the medieval archive. She writes:

"race" is one of the primary names we have—a name we retain for the strategic, episte-mological, and political commitments it recognizes—attached to the repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups. Race-making thus operates at specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment. My understanding, thus, is that *race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content.*[74]

As this definition makes clear, more fundamental to Heng's account than race itself is *race-making*, a collective activity of essentializing differences and instituting hierarchies on their basis. Such undertakings can be observed "repeating" across historical time, and race designates the relational category that emerges from race-making. *The Invention of Race*, then, is not about the history of race as an *idea*, and Heng's definition pointedly ignores questions of anachronism. It is concerned with the repertoire of practices that today, now, we can recognize under the rubric of racialization, however such activities were designated in the past. The role "we" play in this account ("one of the primary names *we* have," "a name *we* retain") marks its disposition as hermeneutic—grounded not in the presence of the past to itself, but in the interaction between readers now and the record of past thought and action.

Heng lays out a double motivation for her mobile and abstracted conception of race. First, it makes available to medievalists the intellectual tools and practiced reflexivity of critical race studies. In doing so, it opens up new archives to the historical and comparative study of racialization. Second, her usage promises a more supple and perspicacious account of race itself, as a concept in the present—one alert to the "ability of racial logic to stalk and merge with other hierarchical systems," including class, religion, language, and sexuality.[75] In this account, race uncoupled from the modern discourse of biological racism is better at tracking the mercurial logics of racialization in the twenty-first century, like culturalist paradigms of xenophobia and Islamophobia. At its most ambitious, then, Heng's *Invention of Race* calls for a mutually transformative encounter between medieval studies and critical race studies, with the notion of race at stake between them. It is precisely the double directionality of the inquiry, into the historical life of our disciplinary categories and into the present significance of the medieval archive, that makes it properly hermeneutic, critical, and comparative.

Undoubtedly, fiction and race are very different notions, each making distinctive demands on us when we use them in the study of the medieval

past. Nonetheless, each has a history entwined with modernity's forma-
tion, an imperial coming-to-be that was also the setting for literary studies'
intellectual and institutional development. Decolonial and postsecular
critique make us rightly wary of the macronarratives of sociocultural
evolution and disenchantment deposited in such concepts. We can and
should track the genealogies of ideas like "the subject," "sexuality," "re-
ligion," "literature," "race," and "fiction," each of which cuts the cloth
of reality in historically determined ways. But we also have to contend
with the fact that our notions, in all their historical contingency and will
to power, remain how our discipline understands the world. To echo
Heng, they are the terms "we" have, that are charged with the strategic,
epistemological, and political commitments of our field. It is by means
of a reflexive and hermeneutic use of such concepts that we organize
the labors of recognition and misrecognition that, as I understand it,
constitute reading.

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NOTES

1   A basic note on terms: *fictionality* nominalizes the quality of being fictional; it is more
abstract than the noun *fiction*, which names a concrete instance of being fictional (or the
entire class of such instances). The difference between the two is not great since any fic-
tion can be said to possess fictionality.

2   Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel* vol. 1, *History, Geography,
and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 337 (hereafter
cited as RF). An important recent reconsideration of "The Rise of Fictionality" came to
my attention only after the present essay was in draft; see Monika Fludernik, "The Fiction
of the Rise of Fictionality," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 1 (2018): 67–92.

3   Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Ithaca,
NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 107. Other influential scholarship in this vein includes
Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia Univ.
Press, 1983); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987); Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in
the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994); Ian Duncan, *Scott's
Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), es-

pecially his chapter "The Rise of Fiction," 116–44; Everett Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996); and John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," *Representations* 61 (1998): 6–28. For a revisionary account that nonetheless leaves crucial aspects of this historiography in place, see Nicholas D. Paige, *Before Fiction: The Ancien Régime of the Novel* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

4   Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1–29.

5   Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990).

6   Examples include such heterogeneous arguments as Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As if": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fiction of Mankind* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935); John R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (1975): 319–32; Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986); Dorrit Cohn, "Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 4 (1990): 775–804; Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*; Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Why Fiction?* trans. Cohn (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2010); Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010); and Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh, "Ten Theses about Fictionality," *Narrative* 23, no. 1 (2015): 61–73.

7   See related bibliography in note three, above.

8   Mark Payne, *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007).

9   Margalit Finkelberg, *The Birth of Literary Fiction in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Nicholas J. Lowe, "Comic Plots and the Invention of Fiction," in *The Rivals of Aristophanes: Studies in Athenian Old Comedy*, ed. David Harvey and John Wilkins (London: Duckworth and the Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 259–72.

10   David Konstan, "The Invention of Fiction," in *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, ed. Ronald F. Hock, J. Bradley Chance, and Judith Perkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 3.

11   Isaac Miller, "St. Augustine, the Narrative Self, and the Invention of Fiction," *Qui Parle* 8, no. 2 (1995): 55.

12   C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 319.

13   Gordon Teskey, "Literature," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 388.

14   On the secularist bent of "rise of the novel" scholarship more generally, see Amardeep Singh, *Literary Secularism: Religion and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), especially the chapter "The Critical Tradition and the Modern Novel: from Daniel Defoe to James Wood," 1–24; Kevin Seidel, "Beyond the Religious and the Secular in the History of the Novel," *New Literary History* 38, no. 4 (2007): 637–47; Vincent P. Pecora, *Secularization without End: Beckett, Mann, Coetzee* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2015); and David Diamond, "Secular Fielding," *ELH* 85 no. 3 (2018): 691–714.

15   Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 56–57.

16   Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

17 Sara Lyons, "The Disenchantment/Re-enchantment of the World: Aesthetics, Secularization, and the Gods of Greece from Friedrich Schiller to Walter Pater," *Modern Language Review* 109, no. 4 (2014): 879. Also see H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, "Introduction" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Gerth and Mills (London: Routledge, 2009), 51.
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The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction

Michelle Karnes

T HE INVENTION OF FICTION POSTDATES the Middle Ages, according to fiction's most authoritative biographers.[1] Among them is Catherine Gallagher, who defines fiction, in part, as "believable stories that d[o] not solicit belief."[2] Simultaneously plausible and imaginary, fiction inspires affective commitment without conviction. It elicits "'ironic' assent" from a reader who entertains as credible stories that she knows to be invented (RF 347). Gallagher excludes medieval literature on the grounds that its readers confused believability with truth claims (RF 338–39). They believed what was believable, and if the story that inspired belief was made up, then it was culpably misleading. In other words, a whiff of plausibility led readers to identify either truth or fraud. Outright fantasy was unobjectionable because it did not pretend to convince, but persuasive inventions were bound to confuse. In a similar vein, Roland Barthes concludes that medieval authors made no effort to create a reality effect, perhaps because medieval readers were not equipped to experience one.[3]

Julie Orlemanski is right to argue that the secularization thesis—the linear history of Western society's progressive disenchantment and increased skepticism—underlies Gallagher's comments about premodern and early modern literature.[4] Unsophisticated attitudes toward literature as Gallagher presents them resemble unsophisticated attitudes toward religion: a simple people find truth claims under every rock. In order for literature to play with credibility, readers cannot be unduly credulous, and so the absence of fiction in the Middle Ages becomes evidence of a readership not skeptical enough to enjoy it. In other words, literature can only play a game—can only invite a sort of belief that recognizes its own as-if-ness—if the reader is in on it. Sophisticated belief is skeptical, and the people of the medieval, Latin West were childishly accepting.[5] One can hear the echo of James Frazer, the anthropologist who famously argued that societies advance from magic to religion to science. Withholding belief unless convinced otherwise, in his case by scientific evidence, becomes the mark of societal maturity.[6]

The suggestion that medieval readers were capable of only two relatively unsophisticated responses to imaginative literature (I do or I do

not believe it) is the focus of this article. Critics have long known that "truth and falsehood are not literary categories," but if medieval readers evaluated it only according to those ill-fitting terms, then they could not adequately appreciate it.[7] Complex literature would fare poorly in the hands of such diminished readers, and they in turn would leave medievalists with a meager field of interpretive options. I argue for heartier readers with the aid of medieval travel literature, and specifically of its marvels. I claim that they represent possibilities neither true nor false, offered to readers who did not need to label all textual content either one or the other. Marvels instead appeal to imagination precisely because of their resolute indeterminacy. Of course it is unlikely that all readers responded to marvels in the same way, and some were surely more concerned with their realness than others. However, the range of responses that marvels elicited is broader and richer than has typically been allowed. To mark out the breadth of that range, I turn primarily to *Mandeville's Travels* and show that it expects to find a reader who can enjoy cognitive uncertainty.

That does not make medieval readers potentially Gallagherian consumers of fiction who playfully pretend that inventions are real. Rather, they might be relatively uninvested in distinguishing the one from the other. They might even take pleasure in stories that plausibly belong to either category. The key difference between such a reader and Gallagher's lies in the possibility that medieval marvels, unlike the plots of realistic novels or even marvels in later literature, might be real. Medieval philosophers often used the example of magnets, with their improbable ability to create action at a distance, to exert force over iron without being in physical contact with it. It is a gateway marvel that, once pondered, facilitates belief in greater marvels. After witnessing it and like marvels, Roger Bacon writes, "Nothing is difficult for me to believe."[8] There was always a possibility, however remote, that a marvel could be real as long as it had not been disproven and it respected nature's laws, whether as they were currently understood or as they might be understood better. For that reason, marvels invited neither ironic assent nor a willing suspension of disbelief. They required only that readers not be preoccupied with definitively separating real from imaginary things. This is emphatically not to suggest that they were insensible to differences between the two. Rather, I claim that leaving the dividing line between them unfixed was a creative principle as much as an intellectual one. It was sometimes appropriate as a matter of epistemic and theological humility, but it could also pique imagination and generate pleasure.

Marvels serve especially well to guide an investigation into medieval reading and fictionality because scholarship has told two incompat-

ible stories about them, one about their believability and one about their impossibility. Marvels discovered in romance were protofictional inventions, but marvels discovered elsewhere, as in travel literature, chronicles, or natural philosophy, were accepted as truths. To begin with the first, literary history has long assigned a special status to the marvels of romance. As emblems of fiction, marvels are seen to anticipate the realist novel. Francis Dubost comments on the marvel's allegiance with fiction: "The marvel is in the same class as [*assimilée à*] fiction, forming the ambiguous mode of representation between being and non-being, of phantasms, of words without things, of images without substance [*consistence*]."[9] Marvels are creatures of imagination and self-contained fictions, but only in the context of romance, a genre that they help to constitute. Douglas Kelly writes that "marvels are indeed the primordial stuff—the *hyle*, as it were—of romance," which relies on them to create its imaginary otherworlds.[10] Romance without marvels would be matter without form, and as any Aristotelian knows, matter cannot survive without form. If marvels are essential to romance, and if the marvels within romance anticipate fiction, then it follows that romance is the foundation upon which fiction is built, that it should be "the novel's immediate fictional precursor" (RF 339). Through its own unmistakable inventedness, romance apparently lends marvels the patina of implausibility that they lack elsewhere in medieval culture. That is, marvels uniquely as they exist in romance might invite the skepticism that makes readers, and texts, sophisticated.

   The story of the novel's emergence from romance and its marvels sits uncomfortably next to an equally authoritative and well-established account of medieval credulity. Outside of romance, marvels are still thought to inspire uncomplicated belief. Thus one of their most "disquieting" (*inquiétant*) features, according to Jacques Le Goff, is "the very fact that nobody questions their seamless presence in everyday life."[11] They are normal, as believable as anything encountered in the course of daily affairs. As they appear in travel literature, they might be accepted at face value. Regarding Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa's *Le Devisement du monde*, for instance, Suzanne Yeager writes that it "was accepted for its facts; it was perceived as an account of actual events."[12] The Middle Ages as a whole is often associated with such willingness to believe marvels, a tendency rejected at least by the Enlightenment, which "is still defined in part as the anti-marvelous."[13] The enchanted Middle Ages forms a contrast with disenchanted modernity, and attitudes toward marvels play as large a role as anything in marking the division.[14]

   Even painted in such broad strokes, such readings call attention to a fundamental difference in the work that scholars ask marvels to perform,

either to inspire belief or to provide an escape from it. Both readings were proposed decades ago, and both have taken fire from scholars who recognize their inadequacies, but both persist in the absence of alternative models. They are especially useful because they align neatly with the two options that medieval readers are traditionally allowed: to believe or disbelieve. Readers did not believe marvels when they appeared in romance, but were otherwise credulous. Indeed, perhaps paradoxically, the two sustain each other: the believability of marvels outside of romance is the norm against which romance innovates. It cannot be different unless it departs from another tradition. Inversely, claims made for the inventedness of marvels in romance imply that readers accepted marvels elsewhere as facts. Nonetheless, it is hard to see how so stark a contrast can be sustained when the selfsame marvels appear in both domains. In other words, it is unlikely that a reader, upon finding a description of a rock that tests a woman's virginity in a work of natural philosophy, judged it to be real, but when he found the exact same marvel in a romance he thought it a fanciful invention. Even if we were to entertain so implausible a scenario, it would pose another conundrum. It would require a medieval reader to recognize that the *same marvel* might be either believed or disbelieved, perhaps even to be aware of her own shifting judgments about it, which is precisely what such readers were not supposed to be capable of.

Because the marvels of medieval literature and philosophy are seldom studied together, such inconsistencies have managed to escape much scrutiny. Travel literature helps to expose them because it brings together marvels of both sorts, both natural philosophers' marvels and those drawn from a long literary tradition. Returning to Gallagher's portrait of the premodern reader above, we might assume that he is perfectly suited to travel literature. Unlike romance, which consists of figments that do not pretend to be true, it is potentially persuasive literature that combines claims both true and false. According to Gallagher's model, such literature would have to be fraudulent. Because it is not obviously false, it asks to be believed and, where it invents, it misleads its reader. In a situation where medieval authors ask their readers to believe them, readers comply. Consistent with this perspective are the claims that *Mandeville's Travels* "engages in much deception" and is an "imposture."[15] Of course readers were only deceived if they believed the text whole-cloth. The marvels of travel literature therefore offer a prime opportunity to consider the supposed gullibility of medieval Western Europeans in response to literature that did not deserve their trust. This should be precisely the sort of literature that proves the credulity of the medieval reader. Instead, it reveals the capacity of medieval authors to keep their

readers in doubt about the ontological status of their objects. Such doubt enlivens imagnation, but that is not to support the reading that marvels are the seeds of fiction.[16] Possibly real and possibly not, they ask for a reader who is willing to enjoy uncertainty rather than merely pretending to do so.

* * *

Although marvels are often mischaracterized as supposed facts, medieval philosophers understood them to be possibilities or, to be more precise, they considered them not to be logically impossible. Regarding such marvels as the reported ability to survive without food for twenty years, for instance, Nicole Oresme writes, "The causes of such particulars are unknown to us, and it is enough for me that it not be concluded to be impossible."[17] Were such a marvel to be refuted, it would be inappropriate to entertain it, but absent that, there is no harm in considering its possible mechanisms. Thanks above all to John Murdoch, scholars have written extensively about the tendency of late-medieval natural philosophers to reason *secundum imaginationem,* that is, as Hans Thijssen defines it, to reason "in all imaginable ways within the realm of the logically possible."[18] In other words, they do not confine themselves to what was known to be true of nature, or what Aristotle said about nature, but they instead entertain hypotheticals, often stemming from suppositions about God's absolute power. This method of analysis creates generous boundaries for philosophers' speculations. They confine themselves to the logically possible more than they do to the real or demonstrable. Logical impossibility does not exclude a great deal, and if marvels simply need to steer clear of it, then they can comfortably push against the boundaries of implausibility.

Arguing for the nonimpossibility of marvels is a far cry from arguing for their truth. As Oresme writes on several occasions, nobody knows the upper limits of divine potential. The "highest limit" in natural matters—how big a man might be, for instance—"is not known or knowable except by God."[19] Nature varies wildly at the level of the particular. That is why declaring marvels to be impossible was often considered an act of hubris. They should not be rejected out of hand, but those that had not been decisively demonstrated should not be upheld as certain truths or believed with dogmatic conviction either. Thus Jacques de Vitry addresses the claim that Alexander the Great encountered birds in Persia who could restore health to ill travelers who made eye contact with them. Jacques brings up Brendan, the sixth-century Irish monk who was, at the time

Jacques was writing, soon to be canonized. He too met unusual birds, including some inhabited by human spirits who were serving penance. He concludes, "Whether it is true or possible, we leave to the judgment of the prudent reader."[20] The more authoritative Brendan lends credence to Alexander, as one sort of marvelous bird lends credence to another, but even here, the intent is not to prove either marvel true. Notice that, when Jacques leaves the reader to determine "whether it is true or possible," possibility is the minimum threshold. Jacques calls for a reader who accepts that a marvel might be real because he knows that some marvels do exist, but who otherwise withholds judgment. Elsewhere, he expressly contrasts the belief that marvels ask for with the sort that scripture requires.[21] The variety of belief that secular marvels should inspire is provisional, with low stakes. It is not faith or conviction but a willingness to accept that creation has its surprises.

Showing that some philosophers and chroniclers kept an open mind about marvels hardly proves that authors of travel literature did so too, or expected the same of their readers. Such evidence is provided by travel texts themselves, and *Mandeville's Travels* makes the case especially well. Written in the mid-fourteenth century in Anglo-Norman by a person yet to be identified, it pretends to be the record of an English knight who traveled extensively. It is full of claims that its author, whom I will call Mandeville for convenience, actually visited far-off lands, and repeatedly asks its reader to believe them. Such efforts to shore up the author's authority were hardly uncommon. As Mary Campbell writes, with slight exaggeration, "The anxious, even florid, claim to veracity and reliability is a conventional feature of any premodern, first-person narrative of travel."[22] In Mandeville's case, such efforts are purely rhetorical. His text is an amplified compilation of earlier travel records and chronicles, in no sense a record of his own ambulations.

Does this mean that Mandeville lies? Some scholars suggest so. Iain Higgins, for instance, writes that *Mandeville's Travels* is one of "many medieval texts that violate the good faith" of readers "by presenting as true what is only partly so, or not even so."[23] Why should literary invention, or reinvention, qualify as dishonesty? Presumably, it is because of the text's use of the first person and because the medieval genre of travel literature does contain some verifiable facts about geography, flora, fauna, natural resources, and various cultural and religious practices. It does often record details of actual travel, even if not that of the author who presents them. But those elements never stand alone. They are always mingled with implausible marvels and elements that belong most properly to literary history. Indeed, such history often trumps experience. As Sebastian Sobecki writes, "Preferment [is] given to texts . . . over

experience," with the result that spectacular tales or objects sometimes appear even when the author might have known better.[24] Unmingled truth is simply not its goal. Even in classical antecedents like those of Herodotus and Ctesias, the genre is resolutely mixed, made up of both observation and invention.

Its composite nature has had the effect of raising the bar for the works' invented content, as though it too consists of intended facts that often fail to reach their target. Editors suggest as much by including notes that declare whether a particular detail in a medieval travel text is true, partly true, or false. They respond to marvels as though they constitute truth claims. The approach is rooted above all in the work of nineteenth-century orientalists like Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, who sought to extract truth from the texts, identifying flights of fancy so that they might be either rationalized or dismissed. Insofar as they presuppose a reader who asks, "Is this marvel real?" they respond to authors' efforts to pique their curiosity. However, they resist the open-endedness of the texts by seeking to foreclose uncertainty, to prioritize truth, and to replace possibility with conviction. They distort the texts by subjecting them to different expectations. For the texts' authors, like natural philosophers, marvels might be questions, but they resist easy answers. Often, they claim a space just shy of logical impossibility, and that is what makes them fascinating.

The authors of travel literature take advantage of the license that the philosophy of marvels also gives them. They encourage their readers to believe them with appeals of the sort, "I was there and I saw it," but partly because they recognize that their readers are quick to doubt their claims.[25] Shayne Legassie persuasively shows that travel texts inspired skepticism in their medieval audiences, who were increasingly drawn to them all the same.[26] An author like Mandeville plays with the question of belief, but not in the manner of the eighteenth-century author described by Gallagher. He knows that authors' touting of their own credibility is conventional in the genre—he was only able to borrow heavily from it because he was well-read in it, after all—and he knows that his reader will likely doubt him. A similar conviction led the thirteenth-century traveler John of Plano Carpini to ask his reader, "If for the attention of our readers we write anything that is not known in your parts, you ought not on that account to call us liars."[27] He claims to report only what he saw or heard from people he considered trustworthy, and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity, even as he writes about men who have no joints in their legs, a land where the sunrise is so loud that it kills Mongol invaders, and the Mongol use of fat gathered from human victims as fuel to burn the houses of their enemies. In contrast, there

is good reason to doubt Mandeville's sincerity, but that does not mean that we should call him a liar. He writes into a genre that covers a range of possibilities and is not necessarily assumed to be true.

Gallagher writes that fiction is like paper money: it lacks intrinsic value, but its users, knowing that, pretend otherwise (RF 347). In the same way, fiction asks us to believe in a thing even as we know better. We might be tempted to attribute to Mandeville's reader a similar perspective, which is an especially appealing prospect because the Mongol use of paper money is an object of fascination within medieval travel literature. Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa even comment on the arbitrariness of its value: "The sheet that is valued at ten bezants does not weigh one."[28] We might wonder whether the medieval reader similarly overvalues marvels. If she were similar to Gallagher's reader of realist fiction, we might conclude that she playfully inflates their value, wondering at them even while recognizing that they are unworthy of it. Such a reader, through her affect, might pay ten times what the marvel is strictly worth, and enjoy doing so. One problem with this possibility is that medieval travel literature does not require assent at all. It requires, rather, a shrugging "maybe," and perhaps nothing more than a "probably not." Also, because the marvels of travel literature might be real, unlike the objects of the realist novel, they might be worth all the wonder they can elicit. Their special power lies in that possibility, and in the difficulty of discounting it conclusively.

A reader might object that Christopher Columbus had the *Devisement* with him when he traveled to North America, that Vincent of Beauvais cites John of Plano Carpini at length, or that Roger Bacon does the same for his predecessor, William of Rubruck. Such gestures might reflect faith in the texts' contents. I have already commented on the willingness of natural philosophers to consider what is not impossible, and I think it is a mistake to read their quotations as endorsements. The absence of "pure" geography also left early explorers with little alternative than to consult such texts if they were seeking insight into lands off the beaten track. That does not mean that they failed to recognize their composite nature. Far more useful than speculating about such decisions is inquiring into the methods of the texts, which have not received enough critical attention. Seeing, for example, how Mandeville borrows from his predecessors and elaborates on them, we cannot doubt that he noticed what modern scholars do, namely that marvel stories tend to be handed down across the ages, from Pliny or Aesop to Isidore of Seville to Vincent of Beauvais and so forth. Such stories live only to change, a quality that Anthony Bale captures when he calls them memes. Using the example of *Mandeville's Travel*, he defines the meme as "a shared cultural repre-

sentation that prospers through being copied and adapted, rather than through its relationship or likeness to an original."[29] Bale's argument helpfully shifts attention away from the issue of fidelity, which is not to say that medieval readers were indifferent to it, but that marvel stories were not beholden to it. As he notes, "The meme has the capacity to be at once idea *and* thing, image *and* place."[30] Its value depends not on the recovery of an original, or on measuring the distance of a representation from it. Memes are reworkable, relocatable, and reinterpretable. Mandeville does not hesitate to put his own imprint on the stories he adopts, in some fashion like Chaucer retelling Boccaccio.

<center>* * *</center>

To support this reading, I focus on two scenes from *Mandeville's Travels*. The first involves magicians "who perform plenty of wonders" (*qe font trop de mervailles*) at the Mongol Khan's court.[31] They make the sun and moon seem to appear and disappear, and "they make the most beautiful young women in the world dance, as it seems to the people, and then they make other young women appear carrying golden cups full of mare's milk, and this they give to the lords and the ladies to drink. And they make knights jousting in their arms appear . . . And they make hunts in pursuit of stags and boars appear along with running dogs."[32] The detail about magically transported cups full of drink, whether wine or milk, is likely drawn from Mandeville's frequent source Odoric of Pordenone.[33] It also appears in Marco and Rustichello's *Devisement*, although it is not clear whether Mandeville was familiar with the text.[34] The rest of the description is not included in Mandeville's sources. In other words, from the core detail about cups magically transported across the room, Mandeville adds illusory ladies dancing and serving, and men jousting and hunting. The marvels do not perfectly match that of the traveling cups because the cups seem to be physical objects that lords and ladies can drink from. But there is a logic to Mandeville's amplification in this scene that trumps consistency.

He draws the surrounding stories from any number of possible sources. Pre-Christian, initially oral traditions have beautiful women gathering in fields at night and troops of armed men jousting and hunting.[35] The scenes are often characterized as illusions or as products of magic, but the people seen might also be identified as corpses inhabited by demons or souls stuck in purgatory.[36] As is to be expected with legends of this sort, the history of their development is complicated, self-contradictory, and nonlinear. Nonetheless, the specific legends that Mandeville appeals

to had already arranged themselves into a trio before he adopted them. Identifying the figures involved as illusions rather than demons or souls from beyond the grave, Mandeville appeals to their popular representation. By introducing them into a scene he adopted, he insists that marvels are creative representations, expressions of an author's imagination and a provocation to the reader's.

The grouping of the separate legends about dancing ladies, knights jousting, and men hunting has precedent within natural philosophy, literature, and visual art, although scholarship has not attended to its frequent appearance in the different venues. In *Sir Orfeo*, the poet tells us that the eponymous king often sees a series of scenes on hot afternoons, as he wallows in the woods. He describes three: first, the fairy king and his men hunt; second, an army of knights appears; and third, knight and ladies dance.[37] The first two disappear as quickly as they arrive; Orfeo "nist whider þai bi-come" and "nist whider þai wold."[38] The third likewise passes by him. They might be illusions and they might not. But the *Orfeo*-poet, like Mandeville, adds one unfamiliar scene to the familiar trio. Rather than magically moving cups, *Sir Orfeo* has women hawking, and among them, Herodis. This fourth scene jostles Orfeo out of his stupor, first when the hawking reminds him of past joys, and second when he sees Herodis and follows her. The unusual response that the scene elicits from him, as he laughs and seeks human companionship relinquished many years earlier, registers the oddity of the scene. It is unlike the others. The trilogy of scenes sets the poet's variant in relief, fittingly containing his character Herodis, and advancing his plot. Situating fairyland somewhere between illusion and aristocratic play, the inherited marvels both thematize uncertainty and reproduce it.

The three appearances recur in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*.[39] In the company of his brother, the squire Aurelius auditions a cleric who might help him out of a bind. Aurelius will be allowed to sleep with his beloved, Dorigen, if he manages to make black rocks off the Breton coast disappear. The cleric suggests his ability to perform the vaunted feat through a display of his considerable powers. Before Aurelius and his brother, he concocts images of knights jousting, of a gruesomely detailed hunt, and of a beautiful woman (here Dorigen) dancing.[40] These are the same three illusions that we have come to know.[41]

Chaucer's scene speaks to the tale's interest in the power of illusions of various sorts. Dorigen, worried that her husband abroad will not be able to return home safely, obsesses over black rocks that might cause his ship to falter. She stares from the cliffs near her house, pondering the rocks, thinking of death: "ther wolde she sitte and thynke / And caste hir eyen dounward fro the brynke" watching the "grisly rokkes

blake" that make "hir herte quake."[42] Thinking, looking down from a high cliff, fearing her husband's death and presumably contemplating her own, she develops an obsession in real time, under the reader's eye. It leads her to make an irrational promise to Aurelius: clear away the rocks, and she will be his lover. Her fixation on one sort of illusion, the damage that the rocks might wreak, is matched by Aurelius's with her, and both are mirrored in the cleric's magic show. Its illusions show the power of imagination given free rein, of the obsessed person's susceptibility to images.

Whereas *Sir Orfeo* uses the three appearances to disorient both Orfeo and the reader, Chaucer uses them to express the danger of illusions that overstep their boundaries. Chaucer, like Mandeville, is clear that these are mere illusions, as fleeting as Dorigen's thoughts about rocks should be. But they threaten to be made real. Although the magician makes the rocks merely seem to disappear, adding one more illusion to his quiver of tricks, the magic act turns her hypothetical promise to Aurelius, and Aurelius' promise to pay the clerk a hefty sum for his efforts, into firm commitments. Optical illusions can have concrete consequences, either physical or financial. The fact that illusions create the threat of unwanted sex and of financial ruin shows their particular power, especially to those in delicate mental states. The lovelorn are especially vulnerable to them. In this context, it is significant that the Franklin distinguishes Dorigen's husband, Arveragus, from the other characters because he is not prone to imagination. "No thyng list hym to been ymaginatyf," and so he is not consumed by illusions in the manner of his wife and her suitor.[43] As I have argued elsewhere, it is precisely a robust faculty of imagination that makes someone both capable of producing powerful illusions and susceptible to them.[44] Dorigen and Aurelius, placed in implicit contrast to Arveragus, seem to be captive to the faculty.

As Chaucer extends the power of illusions to the physical world, so Mandeville gives them a concrete home within it. He places the magicians who produce such illusions on the map, specifically inside the Mongolian empire. However, he imports such tricks to a different end. Uninterested in the power they might exercise over susceptible minds, he treats them as the prodigious feats of the most masterful magicians. Prestige marvels advertise the learnedness of the people and cultures that produce them. Fantastic marvels were often associated with foreign lands, and so William of Auvergne writes that "fantasies of illusions abound to the greatest degree now" in Egypt, and Odoric of Pordenone writes of India that "in the whole world, there are not such and so many marvels as there are in this region."[45] While marvels involving monstrous peoples and fantastic beasts can come from any region that is, from the author's

perspective, far off and unfamiliar, marvels produced by enchanters or magicians tend to come from cultures deemed sophisticated, such as Egyptian, Indian, and Persian. This is not surprising, since expertise in illusion-making and related acts of magic was thought to be the product of advanced learning.[46] By assigning this particular set of marvels to Mongol enchanters, Mandeville flatters the Mongols. As Geraldine Heng notes, early Christian visitors to the Mongols sometimes painted them as backwards or as savages, while later visitors more often saw them as civilized, the inheritors of Chinese cultural authority who were led by a great ruler.[47] Mandeville's enchanters are philosophical prodigies in a first-tier civilization.

When Mandeville takes a prearranged collection of marvels and places it on a map, he projects imaginative content onto geographical space in an unmistakably literal way. Of course geography had long been imaginative, organized according to theological, literary, or moral principles rather than strictly cartographical ones. What is distinctive about Mandeville is his decision to plot marvels, realizing the double-meaning of the word "plot" by creating a map that follows the contours of a preestablished narrative. The particular marvels that he entrusts to the Mongols make the imaginative component of his geography all the more salient because they were thought to emerge from the imagination. William of Auvergne specifically addresses two of the illusions here under discussion—the dancing ladies and knights in battle—and roots both in imagination. He sets out to determine what sort of being the objects seen possess. Are the knights real, are they riding real horses, and are they wearing real arms?[48] His favored interpretation is that they are not. Demons instead make images of them appear, whether to tempt deluded people into serving them, or to act as agents of God and inspire penitence for sin. He writes, "All that seems to be there or be done there is only there and done through a vision or an illusion or a phantasm."[49] The illusions are, in other words, one of three sorts of imaginative phenomena; the distinction here involves little difference.

As he addresses two of Mandeville's three illusions, William refers his reader to his earlier explanation of how such illusions can be created, which itself gives pride of place to the faculty of imagination. Demons, he there explains, use it as their canvas, making whatever they want appear within it. Speaking specifically of demonic possession, he writes, "No thinking person today doubts that evil spirits spiritually attack holy men by means of their thoughts and imaginations: how can this be if the spirits do not have access to their souls, and if they do not have the ability to paint thoughts of this sort in their imaginations, and perhaps in their intellective power?"[50] As a natural faculty, imagination lies in

demons' purview, and they can use it to manufacture illusions that are indistinguishable from the images gleaned through perception. Their power lies in their ability to confuse purely mental phenomena with extramental ones. They rely for this devious work on imagination because it is both the repository of sensed images and the source of illusions, such as those that feature in dreams. It can confuse the two, leaving someone incapable of distinguishing between them. This very indeterminacy enlivens imagination, which is uniquely capable of creating it.

Whether or not Mandeville was familiar with the well-established link between illusions and imagination, as Chaucer appears to have been, his additions to the story of the self-moving cups are striking insofar as they subject the Mongol enchanters' illusions to his own imagination. They are at once spectral and witnessed, tied to a geographical location that gives them a sort of realness, but placed there by Mandeville's invention. This example shows with special clarity how marvels play with the possibility of their own realness. They are at once notional and situated in geographical space. The different layers of play, one created by the marvels themselves and another by the use that Mandeville makes of them, create a puzzle that is not meant to be solved. However, it is not just the puzzle that elicits interest but the possibility it contains, namely that magicians can create illusions such as the ones that Mandeville describes. The marvels entice the reader because they cannot easily be classified. In this respect, the reader is much like Aurelius and his brother, enthralled by the illusions placed before them in part because they cannot account for them.

One point to stress is that marvels such as the ones Chaucer and Mandeville play with by no means act like facts or fact-aspirants. They admit of imaginative alteration and thematic repurposing, and they change in the light of day, without any effort at concealment. The same features appear in another familiar marvel adapted by Mandeville, women who have two pupils in a single eye. Mandeville might have drawn the story from any number of sources, although he does so with a twist. The usual claim is that a certain group of people, usually women (Pliny includes men) from Scythia, known as Bithiae, have double pupils or "pupillas geminas" in one eye, which gives them the power to kill or bewitch others. Such is the report of Ovid, Pliny, Solinus, Bacon, Vincent of Beauvais, and others. Mandeville instead claims that women with "precious stones in their eyes" kill people by looking at them, just "as the basilisk does."[51] The substitution of "pupillas gemmas," or pupils that are gems, for "pupillas geminas," or twin pupils in one eye, is a clear minim error; "geminas" and "gemmas" would look the same in the absence of strong ligatures. The error is perhaps original to Mandeville; I have found it

nowhere else. It is more likely that he intended to include a well-attested marvel than invent a new one.

The fact that Mandeville compares the women to the mythical basilisk makes his reference most similar to that of Bacon. In a chapter that begins by observing "there is no harm in truth," piquing its reader's interest with the promise of shocking truths that might seem harmful, Bacon quickly outlines his doctrine of the multiplication of species.[52] He adopts from al-Kindī the idea that all things, animate and inanimate, celestial and terrestrial, send off invisible images of themselves, or species, through which they affect other things, as the magnet does when it attracts iron. Such images or rays are what the senses perceive, and in the case of various marvels it is how agents of various sorts influence one another. In this way, "The basilisk kills with its sight alone" and, a few sentences later, "In Scythia there is a region where women have two pupils in one eye" and have the power to kill men by looking at them.[53] They can exercise such power when enraged, and indeed it is often the case with marvels of this sort that strong emotion is necessary for the imagined harm to take effect.

Bacon's aim in grouping the two marvels is to comment on the particular powers of the soul, which can express themselves through the eye. The marvels ultimately show that the "dignity of human nature" makes it capable of doing greater deeds than other creatures.[54] He does not attribute such feats to imagination in particular, though philosophers in the Latin West reassigned bewitchment and like marvels to the imagination in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[55] Bacon nonetheless highlights the power of the mind to shape the world in its image. The double-pupiled women can enact the harm they envision, realizing through their eyes the soul's ability to turn mental images into physical realities. The soul exercises its dominion over matter, which is inferior to it. Through this marvel, Mandeville again registers the fact that many marvels were thought to originate in the mind, even if they also find a place in the world.

Mandeville imports the marvel of the double-pupiled and now begemmed women into the domain of travel literature. Its wide-ranging sources—poetic, philosophical, and historical—make it hard either to dismiss as a complete fabrication or to accept as established fact. It is potentially familiar to the reader, but as with the marvelous illusions discussed above, it becomes more concrete by being fixed on a map. Mandeville places it not in Scythia but on an island seemingly near India. More importantly, he surrounds the women with similarly unusual women on nearby islands. The women with gems for eyes are followed by a description of an island where men fear that women have serpents

in their vaginas, and so they pay other men to take their wives' virginity. After that comes a story about women who mourn childbirth and celebrate the death of their children.[56]

The text uses thematic connections to determine geographical ones. The stories of the women are not just grouped in the text but also in the world, with all proximate and located in the "Ocean Sea." They are like each other and near each other, as though reminding the reader that *topos*, or place, is the root of "topic." The unusual women are therefore "near" in two respects, conceptual and physical. The text acts like a rhetorical exercise, assigning places to different inherited ideas, projecting mental content out onto the world with its synapses intact.[57] Its use of marvels that themselves originate in the mind's images has special import in this context. They show travel literature to itself be invested in the potency of the mind's contents, which breathe it into being. As idea becomes text, so its marvels breach the distance between the mind and the world outside. They invite the reader to live in the same intermediate space, to enjoy the possibility that spectacular things might exist without passing firm judgment.

Travel literature is not representative of medieval literature as a whole, but it does help to establish a range of possibilities for what such literature can be. Through arresting marvels that flirt with their own impossibility, it suggests that medieval readers were not jurists, tasked with the separation of truth from falsehood, but were capable of enjoying indeterminacy and maximizing the boundaries of possibility. This does not make travel literature a precursor to realist fiction, which is a claim that has been made about travel literature as well as romance. Mary Campbell, for instance, suggests that we might understand *Mandeville's Travels* as "realistic prose fiction," and Paul Zumthor comments on travel literature's "unavoidable kinship with fiction."[58] Travel literature instead combines the real and the imagined in a distinctive way. Existing things—countries, religions, animals—submit to creative representation. They are real, not realistic, and yet they too signify as possibilities. There is surely a sense in which the accuracy of various of travel literature's details shores up the fictions that accompany them. But the fictions likewise color the truth we discover about, for instance, Mongol feasts. The real and the invented inform each other, with the result not just that invented things look like real ones, but that real things look like invented ones. They are difficult to disaggregate, and do not ask to be disaggregated.

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This article argues that the marvels of travel literature act as unlikely possibilities that are not meant to be judged either true or false and that excite the imagination precisely because they are indeterminate. It is fitting to conclude with Umberto Eco, who observes that the Western European Middle Ages showed little interest in compartmentalizing truth and falsehood. This is a feature of what he characterizes as the period's encyclopedic approach to knowledge. He creates a contrast with ancient philosophers for whom knowledge was concerned with classification, with identifying "man" as a species of "animal" and "flower" as the genus of "daisy." In the encyclopedic Middle Ages, understanding a rock meant not properly locating it in a classificatory system but understanding its properties. The result was something more like an encyclopedia entry, but distinct from a modern encyclopedia in one key respect: the medieval encyclopedist, following Pliny, "does not make the slightest effort to separate reliable empirical information from legend."[59] That is, he does not distinguish fact and fiction as separate categories.

Even limited exposure to medieval natural philosophy shows what he means. Thomas of Cantimpré, describing animals in sequence, includes *caco* or Cacus, the fire-breathing giant killed by Hercules, alongside *capra* (she-goat) and *cefusa* (monkey).[60] Jacques de Vitry transitions from camels to mythical creatures, like manticores and eales, and then back to hyenas without observing any difference in kind among them.[61] The transition from scientific information to creatures from legend can be jarring because a fundamental organizing principle in the contemporary classification of knowledge, as Eco notes, is that the two should be partitioned, the real from the imaginary.[62] Gallagher shares his perspective, writing that "the primary categorical division in our textual universe is between 'fiction' and 'nonfiction'" (RF 336). Eco's observations can be applied to medieval travel literature, which likewise tends toward inclusion rather than exclusion, and which encourages connections across seemingly dissimilar phenomena. Climate, character, marvels, and other features are correlated. For instance, the people of Kerman, on the edge of Persia, have a better temperament than their Persian neighbors because of the soil. When it changes, so too does their character.[63] The world pretends to be coherent, and marvels help to make it so. The instinct here is to draw things of different sorts together, not to pull them apart.

Eco's reading of the Middle Ages sharply opposes Gallagher's. Where she sees a preoccupation with truth and falsehood, along with an overeagerness to discover truth, he finds an instinct toward inclusivity that deemphasizes the very opposition. He does not claim that people in the period or its encyclopedists *failed to recognize the difference* between, say,

manticores and hyenas, and that point is worth stressing. Neither does he pretend that his observation holds across genres. His would not be a fair characterization of medieval Christian theology, surely. For my purposes, the great value of Eco's analysis lies in a conclusion that he does not draw: that medieval depriviling of the opposition between truth and falsehood might be viewed as a choice, even an aesthetic choice. It does not need to imply a gullible people who believed what they were told, a nondiscriminating people who thought mythical creatures were as real as the ones on their farms, or a simple people who were slow to make rational judgments. This is crucial, because the assumption that medieval readers were not in charge of their affective or cognitive responses to texts, that they were reactive rather than deliberative, is an especially pernicious one. All the same, it easily dissolves through a single act of the will. We can instead imagine medieval authors as agents who use particular devices to cultivate particular responses, and readers who are self-conscious about them. The evidence supports such possibilities, and they in turn support more satisfying interpretations of medieval texts.

It is important to make the case for purposefulness in medieval marvels because claims about medieval credulity continue to rely on them. Eco puts his finger on the key impediment to understanding them, which is a medieval tendency not to discriminate categorically between legends and facts. Much follows from recognizing this now-disfavored form of nondiscrimination. Among other benefits, it helps to make authorial choices visible as choices. When Dante places real-life characters alongside mythological ones in the afterlife, he makes a specific point about an afterlife that synthesizes lived and read experience. When a natural philosopher includes the philosopher's stone—supposedly able to convert base metals into precious ones—in a list of stones, mundane and otherwise, he suggests that what does exist is as exciting as what might exist. When Mandeville scatters implausible marvels across the globe, he manufactures a world as vivid in its reader's imagination as it is in its supposed reality.

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<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1   Some medievalists have contested this exclusion. Julie Orlemanski critiques its assumptions in "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 145–70. Laura Ashe instead argues that fiction first appears in the twelfth century. See Ashe, "The Invention of Fiction," *History Today* 68, no. 2, (2018).

2   Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 340–41 (hereafter cited as RF).

3   Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 143–44.

4   Orlemanksi, "Who Has Fiction?" 146.

5   See Steven Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" *Representations* 103, no. 1 (2008): 1–29, for a strong argument against the common claim that belief came easily to people in the Middle Ages.

6   James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922).

7   Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), 17.

8   Roger Bacon, *De secretis operibus et de nullitate magiae* 6, in *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, ed. J. S. Brewer (London: Longman, 1859), 1:437. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

9   Francis Dubost, "Merveilleux et fantastique au moyen âge: Positions et propositions," *Revue des langues romanes* 100, no. 2 (1996): 19.

10   Douglas Kelly, "The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Melusine Romances," in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996), 33. For a similar reading, see Karen Sullivan, *The Danger of Romance: Truth, Fantasy, and Arthurian Fictions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2018), 93.

11   Jacques Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval: Essais* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1985), 26.

12   Suzanne M. Yeager, "The World Translated: Marco Polo's *Le Devisement dou monde*, *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*, and Their Medieval Audiences," in *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West*, ed. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Amilcare Iannucci, with John Tulk (Buffalo, NY: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008), 159.

13   Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 368.

14   Scholars have disputed both sides of this contrast. See, for instance, Justice, "Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?" and Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001). For an endorsement of medieval enchantment and an argument that it ought to persist in the modern world, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2015), 9.

15   Iain Higgins, *Writing East: The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 75; and Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2017), 92.

16   The seminality of marvels is a position most often advanced by scholars of medieval romance, which is a genre I do not have space to consider here, but see my *Medieval Marvels and Fictions*, in progress.

17   Nicole Oresme, *De causis mirabilium* 3.4, in *Nicole Oresme and the Marvels of Nature: A Study of His* De causis mirabilium *with Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Bert Hansen (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985), 220.

18   Hans Thijssen, "Late-medieval natural philosophy: Some Recent Trends in Scholarship," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 67, no. 1 (2000): 173. For more on reasoning "secundum imaginationem," see John Murdoch, "From Social into Intellectual Factors: An Aspect of the Unitary Character of Late Medieval Learning," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. John Emery Murdoch and Edith Dudley Sylla (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 1975), 271–339, and Edward Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy in the Late Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2010), 238–39.

19   Oresme, *De causis mirabilium* 4.6, ed. Hansen, 288. Oresme gives the example of a man's size in *De causis mirabilium* 4.3, 276.

20   Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* cap. 90, ed. and French trans. Jean Donnadieu (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 374.

21   Jacques de Vitry, *Historia orientalis* cap. 92, 406.

22   Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), 141.

23   Higgins, *Writing East*, 75.

24   Sebastian Sobecki, "New World Discovery," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 6.

25   Hayton of Corycus, *Flos historiarum*, ed. Dulaurier et al., *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades*, Documents Arméniens (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906), 2:129.

26   Legassie, *Medieval Invention of Travel*, 59–93.

27   John of Plano Carpini, *Historia Mongolorum* pref., in *Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Enrico Menestò (Spoleto, IT: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, 1989), 228.

28   Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa, *Devisement du Monde* 96, in *Milione, Le Divisament dou monde*, ed. Gabriella Ronchi (Milan: Arnaldo Mondadori, 1982), 440. English translation by A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, *Marco Polo, The Description of the World* (London: George Routledge and Sons Limited, 1938), 1:239, modified.

29   Anthony Bale, "'ut legi': Sir John Mandeville's Audience and Three Late Medieval English Travelers to Italy and Jerusalem," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 38 (2016): 208.

30   Bale, "'ut legi,'" 210.

31   John Mandeville, *Le livre des merveilles du monde* 25, ed. Christiane Deluz (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000), 394.

32   Mandeville, *Le livre des merveilles du monde* 25, 194–95. Higgins, *The Book of John Mandeville with Related Texts* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, Inc., 2011), 142, modified.

33   Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio* 30, in *Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, Sinica Franciscana, ed. Anastasius Van Den Wyngaert (Florence: Ad Claras Aquas, 1929), 1:482.

34   Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa, *Devisement* 75, 403.

35   Claude Lecouteux, *Chasses fantastiques et cohortes de la nuit au Moyen Age* (Paris: Imago, 1999), 8. For more on the distinct legends, see Lecouteux, *Chasses fantastiques*, 13–25, 45–52, and 81–124. On the wild hunt, see also Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 172–78.

36   Green, *Elf Queens*, 177–78.

37   *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd ed., ed. A. J. Bliss (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), ll. 283–302. Neil Cartlidge considers analogues for *Sir Orfeo*'s wild hunt and wild horde in "Sir Orfeo in the Otherworld: Courting Chaos?" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 201–9.

38   *Sir Orfeo*, ll. 288, 296.

39   Robert Cook notes the similarity between the two scenes in "Chaucer's Franklin's Tale and *Sir Orfeo*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 95, no. 3 (1994): 333–36.

40   Chaucer, *Franklin's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), ll. 1189–1201.

41   The version of the story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the fifth story on the tenth day, does not contain them.

42   Chaucer, *Franklin's Tale*, ll. 857–58, 859, 860.

43   Chaucer, *Franklin's Tale*, ll. 1094.

44   Michelle Karnes, "Marvels in the Medieval Imagination," *Speculum* 90, no. 2 (2015): 327–65.

45   William of Auvergne, *De universo* 2.3.23, in *Guilielmi Alverni, Opera omnia* (Orleans-Paris, 1674; rpt. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963), 1:1065aA. Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio*

18, ed. Van den Wyngaert, 457. Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa write that Indians are especially skilled in the diabolical arts and enchantments. See *Devisement* 74, *Milione*, 94.

46 Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 100–1.

47 Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), 290, 359.

48 See William of Auvergne, *De universo* 2.3.24, 1:1065–67.

49 William of Auvergne, *De universo* 2.3.24, 1:1066aF. William broaches demons at 1:1066aG. He touches on souls in purgatory briefly at 1:1067aC-D.

50 William of Auvergne, *De universo* 2.3.23, 1:1061bD. William holds open the possibility that demons can act on the intellect directly, but scholastics more often reject this. See, for instance, Albertus Magnus, *In Sententiarum* 2.8.10, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Vivès, 1890–95), 27:185; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.104, in *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XII P.M. edita* (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882–1976), 14:325–26.

51 John Mandeville, *Le livre des merveilles du monde* 31, ed. Deluz, 449.

52 Bacon, *De secretis operibus artis et naturae* 3, 528. On Bacon's doctrine, see David Lindberg, *Roger Bacon's Philosophy of Nature: A Critical Edition, with English Translation, Introduction, and Notes, of* De multiplicatione specierum and De speculis comburentibus (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), liii-lxxi.

53 Bacon, *De secretis operibus artis et naturae* 3, 529. In the following sentence, Bacon paraphrases Ovid's description of the same marvel.

54 Bacon, *De secretis operibus artis et naturae* 3, 529.

55 For example, Oresme attributes the power of the basilisk to "a forceful thought or imagination," *De configurationibus* 2.38, in *Nicole Oresme and the Medieval Geometry of Qualities and Motions: A Treatise on the Uniformity and Difformity of Intensities known as* Tractatus de configurationibus qualitatum et motuum, ed. and trans. Marshall Clagett (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 382.

56 See Mandeville, *Le livre des merveilles du monde* 31, ed. Deluz, 449–51.

57 On topics as places of invention, see Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 151–78; and Mary Carruthers, *Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 33–39.

58 Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 123; and Paul Zumthor, "Dire le voyage au Moyen Âge," *Liberté* 35 (1993): 79–94, 86.

59 Umberto Eco, *From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014), 26.

60 Thomas Cantimpratensis, *Liber de natura rerum* 4.19–21, ed. Helmut Boese (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1973), 120–21.

61 De Vitry, *Historia orientalis* 88, ed. Donnadieu, 360.

62 Eco, *From the Tree to the Labyrinth*, 28.

63 Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa, *Devisement* 35, 343–44.

Fictionality in Early and Medieval China

Sarah M. Allen and Jack W. Chen

D ID WE ALWAYS HAVE FICTION? The answer depends not only on how "fiction" is defined but also on our understandings of "have" and "we." This subject is the central concern of Catherine Gallagher's influential essay to which Julie Orlemanski and Michelle Karnes respond in their own essays. Regarding Gallagher's historicist thesis, Orlemanski rightly points out that theoretical articulations of a literary phenomenon are not required to validate the existence of that literary phenomenon, that one may have fiction even if there isn't an explicit discourse about it.[1] Orlemanski also rightly criticizes narrow construals of fictionality, wanting to move the conversation beyond the arbitrary confines of a single literary tradition and beyond an unquestioned insistence on narrative literature to the exclusion of other genres and discursive modes. Karnes is more focused on the specific question of what it means to remain uncommitted to belief when reading a marvelous tale and how this state of pleasurable suspension opens up other possibilities of fiction in the Western medieval period.

Speaking of "we," the term "fiction" can only be a translated concept in the premodern classical Chinese context, which casts its critical concerns in ways that the Western tradition would find similarly strange. This does not, however, mean that premodern China did not have fiction. The concept of fiction has heuristic value in calling attention to modes of literary representation that were not consciously articulated, yet might nonetheless be not only present but in fact pervasive as forms of practice. Take, for example, the representation of Confucius in early philosophical writings (it should be noted that the term "philosophy" is equally foreign to premodern Chinese textual categories, as it is a modern Western term that has been retroactively applied to what are traditionally called "Masters' writings.") When Confucius appears in the *Analects,* we conventionally treat this as Confucius himself speaking, and the words that he speaks as more or less accurate transcriptions compiled by his disciples over the decades after his death. When Confucius appears in the *Zhuangzi,* a work of playful and profound philosophical essays attributed to Zhuang Zhou (the dating of this work is complicated; the

putative author is traditionally thought to have lived sometime during the fourth century BCE), we find a Confucius who says foolish things and behaves utterly unlike the Confucius that we recognize as the sagely teacher and ritualist.[2] Zhuangzi's Confucius we recognize not as the historical Confucius but as a character in a philosophical fiction and as one of the many characters, some with landish names that are clearly made up, who perform dialogues that rehearse questions of metaphysics and epistemology.

A different example would be the early *yuefu* (music bureau) poem, named for the Han dynasty office that was charged with the collection and composition of songs for the imperial court. One of the guiding principles of poetry in classical China was the dictum that the poem expressed what was intently on the speaker's mind and, as such, constituted a nonfictional statement that, if interpreted correctly, would allow the reader to know the mind of the poet. However, yuefu poems were written in the voices of typological speakers: soldiers on campaign, husbands abandoning their families, women in the loneliness of their boudoirs, and the like. No one reading a yuefu poem would confuse the speaker and the poet. There is a kind of fictionality at work here, particularly given the hermeneutical expectations under which classical Chinese poetry operated, and yet the yuefu poem also affirms a more general or abstract truthfulness about the typological figure it represents. This general or abstract truthfulness may be one of the conditions of poetry itself, the way in which it allows one to slip without remark from the specific to the general, for the reader to inhabit the poem's fictive subjectivity and for that to be nonetheless truthful.

Of course, one might object that the above two examples take fiction in its broadest sense, and as such, anything may be considered "fiction." So let us then turn to medieval Chinese prose narratives of the sort now often known as *zhiguai* (recorded anomalies), *chuanqi* (transmitted marvels), *zazhuan* (miscellaneous accounts), or simply *xiaoshuo* (minor talk or tales).[3] These prose narratives were identified by modernist writers like Lu Xun as the first emergence of conscious fictionality in China, though how they exhibit fictionality is perhaps more complicated than Lu Xun would admit. The dominant hermeneutic mode for narrative was historiographic, as the discursive mode of history garnered the most prestige and represented publicly recognized, officially stable knowledge (which did not mean that it was not ideological or understood as potentially ideological).[4] At the same time other narratives claimed to reveal historical truths elided in the formal record. These included fantastic legends about historical kings and items of more recent hearsay, such as stories about romantic entanglements, shady political machinations,

dreams that prove real, and encounters with anomalous creatures such as ghosts or were-beasts. While these tales were not presented or consumed as products of an author's imagination—from all evidence, they were read and received as historical material, albeit of less reliable status—we see in such tales an attention to the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the actors whose experiences comprise the narratives in a way that might strike readers today as distinctly fictive.

Part of the difficulty in assessing the nature of fictiveness in medieval Chinese narrative is there was no clear distinction between more and less fictional narratives. Shorter, freestanding narratives were usually called *zhuan* (accounts) or *ji* (records), neither of which identified the tale as explicitly fictional or explicitly nonfictional—just that it was a narrative. The term "zhuan" was also used for the biographical accounts that comprised a major subsection of standard dynastic histories, which were assumed to be factual or based on reliably factual sources, while *ji* could be used for historical records and travelogues. However, it is not just the case that a "fictional" zhuan was not distinguished from a "historical" zhuan, but also that a given narrative might contain both. Sometimes bits of "fictional" narrative made their way into the historical record, compensating for gaps in knowledge and complicating the line between what was officially recognized as stable knowledge and what might be less reliable. In many ways, the status of fictionality or historicity was a question of framing and context.

This epistemological uncertainty—raised as a central theme in Karnes's essay—distinguishes these narratives' fictiveness from the more overt fictiveness of the Zhuangzi's stories about Confucius or the vignettes of a yuefu poem. Especially to contemporaneous readers who lived in the world the stories describe, part of their appeal surely lay in the inherent implication that the events described may be true (or partly true), however implausible they seem. Levels of belief varied from reader to reader (and writer to writer), whether the story at hand concerned a local bureaucrat's affair with a courtesan or his encounter with a ghost. But as both Orlemanski and Karnes argue was the case for medieval European audiences, the absence of a recognized genre of "fiction" (and a word to name it) did not result in gullible readers who either believed a story true or dismissed it as a deception. Rather, early and medieval Chinese audiences, like their European counterparts, were sophisticated consumers of narrative who recognized—and enjoyed—the indeterminacy of these stories.[5]

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NOTES

1   Here, Julie Orlemanski echoes Eric Hayot, who has made similar points in responding
to the New Lyric Studies, arguing against the kind of historical nominalism that would
deny the existence of lyric when and where there was no explicit term for it, and insisting
on a more cosmopolitan scope for understanding lyric. See Hayot, "Against Historicist
Fundamentalism," *PMLA* 131, no. 5 (2016): 1414–22.
2   The dating of the *Analects* and the *Zhuangzi* is a complicated issue. For both, the earli-
est textual evidence is Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), though tradition dates Confucius
to the sixth century BCE and Zhuang Zhou the fourth century BCE.
3   By medieval, we refer to the period between the end of the Han and the end of
the Tang dynasties, or roughly the second through tenth centuries CE, though there is
much debate on the use of "medieval" in the Chinese context. Note also that the term
xiaoshuo in modern Chinese denotes "fictional narrative" in the Western sense, though in
premodern China it was used more broadly to refer to everything from gossipy accounts
("minor talk," in the literal sense of "xiaoshuo") to questionably reliable tales (which may
be historical or fictive or both).
4   See Andrew H. Plaks, "Toward a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," in *Chinese
Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Plaks (1977; Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ.
Press, 2014), 309–52.
5   There is more to say about the possibilities of fiction in later periods of Chinese literary
history, and there are grounds to claim that something that might be called "the novel"
developed in the sixteenth century, as oral storytelling and historiographic traditions were
transmuted into a new cultural form. However, this is a different argument from the one
we are making here.

Medieval Fictions vs. the Fetish of Modernity

Carol Symes

Before reading Michelle Karnes's and Julie Orlemanski's pair of essays, it had never occurred to me that fiction would be yet another invention claimed for modernity. Yes, that's the way modernity's game is played; and still I marvel that our modernist colleagues never seem tired of playing it, or insisting on the ontology of their favorite fetish.[1] Don't they have any other tricks up their sleeves? And why do some medievalists get tricked into playing along, either by moving the counter back to the twelfth century or positing medieval fictionality as inherently vernacular and thereby denying the existence of Latin or oral fictions?[2] (This reminds me of the silly but still prevalent assumption that medieval Latin comedy wasn't really comedy because, well, it was medieval and Latin.[3]) It's therefore refreshing to see Orlemanski and Karnes contesting this modernist heuristic and insisting instead on fiction's contingency and the crucial role of the reader in its determination. Orlemanski calls for "a comparative poetics of fiction, one attentive to changes in what fictionality has been demarcated against, and how, across milieux," in order to "map" its contours and "performative contexts" in any given place and time. As she cleverly notes, this would also help to dismantle the very "knowledge system by which modernity has advanced its hold, justified itself, and claimed to know comprehensively" and, as a result, to establish itself atop a hierarchy that is always in danger of collapsing and that apparently requires constant assertions of epistemological *inventio* to keep itself propped up.[4]

Orlemanski's argument for fiction "as a demarcational phenomenon . . . that depends on the recognition by some interpretive community" is closely akin to my argument for medieval theater, which cannot rely on preexisting, enclosed structures but must be delineated by performers and recognized by spectators.[5] Meanwhile, Karnes puts her finger on what makes not just fiction and theater but most medieval cultural phenomena so troubling to "modern" subjectivities: their "depriviledging of the opposition between truth and falsehood"—to which I would add their refusal to operate within the anachronistic generic boundaries that they have been retroactively assigned.[6] We strive to understand a world in which *historia* meant a tale of chivalry, an historiographical narrative,

and the liturgical office for a saint's feast. The very fact that *we* divide the word into separate categories is telling. The fact that liturgy itself is a postmedieval construct means that the people of this era did not articulate a divide between the business of divine worship and daily life.[7] This is not to say that such divisions weren't made, but we must remain skeptical of our own attempts to distinguish how they were drawn and maintained. "When Mandeville takes a prearranged collection of marvels and places it on a map, he projects imaginative content onto geographical space in an unmistakably literal way," as Karnes observes, "plotting" these marvels in freshly meaningful surroundings.[8] When Rustichello of Pisa casts Marco Polo's *Devisement du monde* in the mode of a courtly romance—the introductory lines are, as Sharon Kinoshita points out, "virtually identical" to those of his Arthurian *Méliadus*—he delays the entrance of his protagonist exactly as Chrétien de Troyes would delay the naming of Lancelot or Yvain. His audience was free to construe the book as simultaneously description, diversion, and catalog of diversity.[9]

Efforts to recover the ways that medieval authors, readers, listeners, and users engaged with texts, and thus to recover the work those texts performed, is essential to countering the essentialist projects that modernity and its apologists keep trying to foist upon us. For example, a recent study of (the fictional) John Mandeville's *Le Livre des merveilles* shows that the deliberate global (re)location of its recounted marvels lends the book a very specific utility, enabling it to function as a *mappa mundi* and mnemonic network. John Wyatt Greenlee and Anna Fore Waymack argue that this "mapping of the world through a Christian European imaginary had far-reaching consequences" because "the connections among climate, global positioning, and moralized racial habits which Mandeville charts have a long *nachleben* in European perceptions of equatorial spaces and peoples."[10] Their deeply contextualized reading reveals a global mentality prevalent among readers of the mid-fourteenth century, a mentality that was also trained to appropriate that globe. "How might we re-evaluate texts and artifacts from this era with a global perspective as the default? How might this habit of mental appropriation have informed the ambitions and agendas of late medieval explorers like Christopher Columbus?"[11] Such questions are much more productive than the question of who has fiction.

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NOTES

1   Carol Symes, "When We Talk about Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 715–26.

2   As cited by Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 151.

3   Symes, "The Performance and Preservation of Medieval Latin Comedy," *European Medieval Drama* 7 (2003): 29–50.

4   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 155, 160, 164.

5   E.g. Symes, *A Common Stage: Theatre and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007); Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 147.

6   Michelle Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2019): 225.

7   Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy*, ed. Helen Gittos and Sarah Hamilton (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 239–41.

8   Karnes, "Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 220.

9   Marco Polo [and Rustichello of Pisa], *The Description of the World*, trans. Sharon Kinoshita (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2016), 1, n. 1; cf. xvii.

10 John Wyatt Greenlee and Anna Fore Waymack, "Thinking Globally: Mandeville, Memory, and Mappaemundi," *The Medieval Globe* 4, no. 2 (2018): 100.

11 Greenlee and Waymack, "Thinking Globally," 101.

Pastourelle Fictionalities

Carissa M. Harris

"What genres or text-types maintain an unstable relation to fictionality?" asks Julie Orlemanski in her call for a newly capacious, historically comparative notion of medieval fictionality.[1] Michelle Karnes analyzes the medieval travel narrative as one useful example of this instability because it "is potentially persuasive literature that combines claims both true and false."[2] The pastourelle—defined loosely as a verse debate between a man and a woman on the topic of sex and consent—is another genre that productively mines this instability to a variety of ends. It is fertile ground for thinking through Orlemanski's and Karnes's ideas about fictionality because it is a literary narrative genre with a distinguishing set of "commonplaces," to use Orlemanski's term, which incorporates real-life elements of sexual violence and survival.

Many pastourelles are framed as decidedly *non*fictional. A typical pastourelle is framed through the perspective of a socially and economically privileged man who claims to relate a recent experience: "Throughe a forest as I can ryde. . . . I sawe a fair mayde come rydyng," states one.[3] Another narrator pits the pastourelle's ostensibly unvarnished truth against the idealized fictions of romantic love:

> All to lufe and nocht to fenyie,
> All to pure and nocht to plenyie—
> Sic freitis I hald nocht wirth a fass.
> Harkin and I sall tell yow fow it wass:[4]
> [To love completely and not feign,
> To be impoverished and not complain—
> I do not hold such superstitions worth a tassel.
> Listen and I shall tell you how it really happened.]

The narrator proceeds to detail a rape that they observe as a bystander, positing the pastourelle's visceral rape narrative as "fow it wass" (how it really happened) in marked contrast to worthless "feigning" and "freitis" (superstitious beliefs, fancies).

Often, however, pronoun shifts reveal cracks in the pastourelle's façade of veracity. These shifts move the lyric's perspective from the masculine aggressor's "I" to the more detached third-person observer. *Throughe a forest as I can ryde*, whose opening stanzas detail a knight's first-person account of propositioning a maiden with unwanted courtly compliments ("I speke to hur of love, I trowe," line 6), moves abruptly to a third person perspective when the man escalates his tactics after the maiden refuses: "He toke then owt a good golde ryng" (line 17) and "He toke hur abowte the mydell small" (line 25). Such shifts in pronouns and perspectives sharply displace audience identification with the narrator-rapist and highlight the pastourelle's status as fictional narrative rather than unmediated first-person experience. They remind us that these lyrics are not simply crude sexual boasts by powerful men, but are instead deliberately fictionalized framings of those boasts that work to underscore their status as fiction and to remind readers how such pernicious fabrications construct courtly masculinity.

The pastourelle's fictionality has multiple effects, which function both to reinforce and to challenge rape culture. As I have argued elsewhere, the genre's unstable mix of truth and fiction naturalizes its embedded rape myths, which are widespread false beliefs that blame victims and excuse perpetrators.[5] Numerous pastourelles feature women whose initial "no" eventually turns to "yes," verifying the fiction that women's resistance is perfunctory and always crumbles eventually. In *Still undir the levis grene*, a man threatens a maiden who declares that she "suirlie feiris" (most assuredly fears) him.[6] According to the male speaker, the exchange concludes with the woman forgiving him before the two share a mutually pleasurable kiss: "This brocht wer we to blyss" (Thus we were brought to bliss) (line 162). His claim that coercion can lead to shared bliss is a fiction that works in multiple ways: for male readers, it validates these forceful tactics' efficacy, whereas for female audiences, it normalizes male aggression as a precursor to erotic pleasure.

Critics unwilling to grapple with the genre's sexual violence have used its fictionality as a convenient interpretive escape hatch.[7] Evelyn Birge Vitz contends that pastourelles enable readers to enjoy rape fantasies, insisting that the genre's "fantasies in fiction" allow audiences to "toy with . . . deeds and identities that they would not necessarily choose for themselves."[8] William D. Paden claims that feminist scholars who highlight the problematic fiction of pastourelle women claiming to enjoy rape "lose sight of the fictionality of the genre."[9] In other words, the pastourelle's dramatizations of popular rape myths such as "she liked it" and "it wasn't really rape" are above critique precisely because they are fictional. But I am convinced that the genre's fictionality operates

in numerous directions that are at once illuminating, harmful, and generative: as Karnes says, "The real and the invented inform each other, with the result not just that invented things look like real ones, but that real things look like invented ones."[10] The pastourelle incorporates key rape myths and presents them as truth at the same time that it turns the real and pervasive trauma of sexual assault into a fictional narrative that enables readers to critically analyze the intersectional operations of power, violence, and coercion.

Even as the pastourelles disseminate rape culture's falsehoods under the guise of unmitigated candor, their fictionality also operates in a more remediating fashion, for they contain consolatory fictions for past and present victim-survivors. They stage scenarios where aggressors are disempowered and where victims are able to refuse successfully, to fight back eloquently, or to escape. Pastourelles depict cornered, threatened women who use a variety of resistance strategies that may well have resulted in retaliatory violence in real life, such as laughing at or insulting their assailants. Some lyrics feature women who eventually do consent, only to disparage the man's sexual performance immediately thereafter: *I met my lady weil arrayit* closes with the disgusted woman declaring, "Ye dow not, man!" [You are useless, man!] as the humiliated man dresses himself and prepares to leave.[11]

The pastourelle, with its fusion of consoling fictions, rape myths, and purported nonfictionality, shares striking parallels with *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit,* the longest-running prime-time drama in US television history.[12] The show's brand of pop culture sexual violence combines "ripped from the headlines" plotlines and realistic details about rape and abuse with rosy fictions about the criminal justice system by portraying empathetic police officers who believe survivors and disempowered perpetrators who suffer legal consequences for their actions.[13] Orlemanski asks, "If fiction names what is known not to be known as true, who possesses that knowledge?"[14] The unstable fictionality regarding sexual violence shared by medieval pastourelles and contemporary media, such as *Law and Order: SVU,* grants victim-survivors the epistemological privilege of understanding best the demarcations that distinguish truth from fiction. Furthermore, these texts' fictionalizing of sexual violence's all-too-real trauma and their comforting fantasies of resistance, escape, and justice enable victim-survivors to examine their own experiences critically and to imagine empowering alternatives that are fictional for now—but need not be in the future.

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NOTES

1   Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 162.

2   Michelle Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 212.

3   *Throughe a forest as I can ryde* (*Digital Index of Middle English Verse* 5908), in *Subjects of Violence: Women, Consent, and Resistance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris, and Elizaveta Strakhov (forthcoming), lines 1, 5.

4   *All to lufe and nocht to fenyie*, in *Subjects of Violence*, ed. Baechle et al., lines 1–4.

5   Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2018), 103–49, esp. 115–19. For a discussion of the most prevalent rape myths, see Diana L. Payne, Kimberly A. Lonsway, and Louise F. Fitzgerald, "Rape Myth Acceptance: Exploration of Its Structure and Its Measurement Using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale," *Journal of Research in Personality* 33, no. 1 (1999): 27–68.

6   *Still undir the levis grene*, in *Subjects of Violence*, ed. Baechle et al., line 131.

7   I am grateful to Sarah Baechle for stimulating my thoughts on this topic.

8   Evelyn Birge Vitz, "Rereading Rape in Medieval Literature: Literary, Historical, and Theoretical Reflections," *Romantic Review* 88, no. 1 (1997): 5.

9   William D. Paden, "Rape in the Pastourelle," *Romantic Review* 80, no. 3 (1989): 344.

10   Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 223.

11   *I met my lady weil arrayit*, in *Subjects of Violence*, ed. Baechle et al., line 45.

12   Ilana Kaplan, "As 'SVU' Makes History, Mariska Hargitay Makes Olivia Benson's Mission Her Own," *New York Times*, September 25, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/25/arts/television/mariska-hargitay-law-and-order-svu.html.

13   For more on *SVU's* consoling fictionality for survivors, see Emily Nussbaum, "Trauma Queen: *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*," in *I Like to Watch: Arguing My Way through the TV Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2019), 255–59; and Roxane Gay, "I Thought Men Might Do Better Than This," *New York Times*, October 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/opinion/weinstein-kavanaugh-one-year.html.

14   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 162.

The Fuss about Fiction:
A View from Medieval German Studies

Sara S. Poor

Michelle Karnes's and Julie Orlemanski's two thought-provoking essays offer responses from the perspective of medieval English studies to Catherine Gallagher's 2006 essay, "The Rise of Fictionality." As with many (most?) attempts to define something as modern or in connection to modernity, Gallagher sets the beginning of (real? true?) fiction with the emergence of the realist novel—or, in other words, when novelists begin to write "believable stories that do not solicit belief."[1] Both essays critique Gallagher's argument correctly, in my view, as another case of the "modern" needing an opposing foil against which to define itself; a medieval literature that does not present its imagined reality as plausible versus "sophisticated" modern novels that present fictions as plausibly real. Orlemanski's dense and insightful methodological analysis and Karnes's elegant case study point out the inherent flaws in this thinking. My response to these papers is not to disagree with them, but rather to offer some observations from the perspective of someone in a neighboring field: medieval German studies.

Fictionality—its definition, its specific form in medieval German literature, and its working in various medieval literary contexts—has been a topic of interest since Hugo Kuhn addressed it in an essay in 1952.[2] The wider field of Germanistik has also long been fascinated with these questions, perhaps most definitively pursued in the 1970s by the research group "Poetik und Hermeneutik" (Poetics and Hermeneutics), which was led by Wolfgang Iser and Dieter Heinrich, and which resulted in a 567-page volume of essays published in 1983.[3] The subsequent debates about theorizations of the fictional in the field of *Altgermanistik* (medieval German studies) have taken up various elements of this earlier discussion and gone in various directions.[4] As Orlemanski notes, many of these discussions also grow out of Walter Haug's foundational work on medieval literary theory.[5] It would be impossible in this short response to do justice to the vast amount of work on this topic published in German. Suffice it to say that many of the points made by Orlemanski and Karnes as to the variability of fictional modes, their appearance in an

equal variety of literary forms, and the pushback against modernists' definitions of fiction that use the "medieval" as a foil, continue to be discussed in the context of medieval German literature. This is evidenced not least by the continuing and recent production of volumes of essays devoted to the topic.[6]

It is also worth drawing attention to a version of the 1980s debate that occurred around the topic of mystical literature, a subfield of Altgermanistik, and that still impacts scholarship today. This conversation began after Siegfried Ringler's groundbreaking book on vernacular hagiographical and mystical literature appeared in 1980, a book that, in addition to offering an innovative description of a new genre (the so-called *Gnaden-Leben* or "Life of Grace"), also presented editions of two vernacular examples of it.[7] In his review of this book, medieval historian Peter Dinzelbacher protested against Ringler's claim that it was impossible to glean anything about a person, personality, or the experience of a historical person from texts like these since they were so beholden to the rhetorical conventions of the genre.[8] Dinzelbacher claimed that the source was not about a "literary fiction" but about a historically documentable person. He then asked: "Why should the use of a specific literary form make it impossible to access the actual experience behind it?"[9] The reaction among German literary scholars to this obviously undertheorized defense of the "source" as such was an overdetermined swing in the other direction. Represented most definitively by Ursula Peters in her 1988 monograph on thirteenth- and fourteenth-century women mystics, this line of thinking (which at times can seem like a doctrine itself) claims not only that the texts offer no access to actual experience but, more importantly, that the *only* legitimate approach to such texts is a literary or rhetorical one.[10] Such texts can be analyzed only as literary constructs embedded in and determined by the literary and rhetorical traditions and conventions within which they emerge. While not everyone who came after Peters has toed this line,[11] her approach continues to hold sway in German literary studies of religious literature.[12]

While one of the more recent essay collections cited above (*Zwischen Fakten und Fiktionen*) suggests that historians have by now developed more nuanced approaches to their sources than Dinzelbacher, what stands out in German scholarship on fictionality in relation to Karnes's and Orlemanski's essays is the inherent assumption about authorial agency that underlie these discussions. The attempts to define and delineate fiction, fictionality, or the fictive circle around ideas about invention: in German, *das fingierte* (that which is made-up), an idea that clearly implies an agent who is inventing things or making things up. Yet agency as a concept does not come up per se. For all its problematic doctrinal pres-

sure to deny an authorial presence or even responsibility for a given text, the German discussion of mystical writings foregrounds authorial agency in this denial. Indeed, scholars often feel compelled to offer disclaimers such as: "When I refer to the author's name, it should be understood as the 'author persona' constructed by the text and not as referring to an actual author or person."[13] In addition, the usual problems faced by medieval literary scholars related to medieval authors—such as the lack of independent historical evidence about them—are made more pressing when it comes to religious content because the author of the content is understood to be God himself. For a woman writer of mystical revelations, this problem is even more pressing, since she generally has no institutional authority for making claims about religious truth in a public way. In the case of visionaries like Hildegard of Bingen or Mechthild of Magdeburg, the authorial responsibility is explicitly attributed to God.

What this contrast suggests to me is that perhaps we could add yet another element to Orlemanski's guide to writing about fiction going forward: namely, the recognition that authorial agency (implied whenever we talk about the invention inherent in something we label as fiction or fictional) is another of the modern "notions" that *we* have. It is equally a notion that our disciplines continue to use in order to understand the world, even though such notions vary historically and may seem anachronistic for that reason.[14] Or, to borrow Orelmanski's invocation of Geraldine Heng, just as "race designates the relational category that emerges from race-making," the "author" contributes to the relational category that emerges from fiction-making.[15] The addition of this category would be productive as long as we understand fiction-making, in its widest sense as both Orlemanski and Karnes propose, as one that would include not only the creation of a self-reflexive narrator of romance but also the deployment of the tools of the fabliaux to narrate miracles associated with a local saint and her relics or the use of courtly love imagery to approximate union with God.

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NOTES

1   Michelle Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2019): 209; citing Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 340–41.
2   Hugo Kuhn, "Soziale Realität und dichterische Fiktion am Beispiel der höfischen Ritterdichtung Deutschlands" [Social Reality and Poetic Fiction: The Case of Courtly Chivalric Literature], in *Dichtung und Welt im Mittelalter* [Literature and World in the Middle Ages] (1952; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1959), 22–40.

3   Wolfgang Iser and Dieter Heinrich, eds., *Funktionen des Fiktiven* [The Functions of the Ficticious] (Munich: Fink, 1983).

4   As outlined more recently by Ursula Peters and Rainer Warning in "Vorwort," in *Fiktion und Fiktionalität in den Literaturen des Mittelalters* [Fiction and Fictionality in the Literatures of the Middle Ages] (Munich: Fink, 2009), 9–28, esp. 9–11.

5   Julie Orlemanski, "Who has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 152 and 29n; citing Walter Haug, *Vernacular Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: The German Tradition, 800–1300, in Its European Context*, trans. Joanna M. Catling (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) (first published as Haug, *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts. Eine Einführung* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985]).

6   In addition to Peters and Warning, *Fiktion und Fiktionalität*, see Merle Marie Schütte, Kristina Rzehak, and Daniel Lizius, eds., *Zwischen Fakten und Fiktionen: Literatur und Geschichtsschreibung in der Vormoderne* [Between Facts and Fictions: Literature and Historical Writing in the Premodern Period] (Würzburg: Ergon, 2014). The best place to go for a succinct account of the debates is Jan-Dirk Müller, "Literarische und andere Spiele: Zum Fiktionalitätsproblem in vormoderner Literatur" [Literary and other Games: On the Problem of Fictionality in Premodern Literature], *Poetica* 36, nos. 3–4 (2004): 282–311; and "Die Freiheit der Fiktion" [The Freedom of Fiction], in Schütte et al., eds., *Zwischen Fakten und Fiktionen*, 211–31.

7   Siegfried Ringler, *Viten und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien* [Hagiographical and Visionary Literature in Medieval Convents] (Munich: Artemis, 1980). The two edited texts included in the volume are "Das Gnaden-Leben des Friedrich Sunder, Klosterkaplan zu Engelthal" and "Die Vita der Schwester Gerdrut von Engelthal."

8   Peter Dinzelbacher, "Review: Siegfried Ringler," *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien* (Munich: Artemis, 1980), *ZfdA* 111, no. 2 (1982): 64.

9   Dinzelbacher, "Review," 64: "Wieso soll eine spezifische literarische Formung es unmöglich Machen, daß dahinter wahres Erleben faßbar wird?" All translations are my own.

10   Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum: Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* [Religious Experience as Literary Fact: On the Prehistory of Women's Mystical Texts in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries] (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988).

11   For a summary and critique of this approach, see Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 6–8. See also Susanne Köbele, *Bilder der unbegriffenen Wahrheit: Zur Struktur mystischer Rede im Spannungsfeld von Latein und Volksprache* [Images of Uncomprehended Truth: On the Structure of Mystical Speech Between Latin and Vernacular] (Tübingen: Francke, 1993), 22, where she finds that the absolute distinction made by Peters obscures the "Fiktion des Faktischen genauso wie die (wahrheitsfähige) Faktizität des Fiktiven" [the fiction of the factual as much as the facticity (capacity for conveying truth) of the fictive].

12   A more recent example of the continued influence of Peters's approach can be found in Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch, vom Ich zum Autor: zur Text- und Autorkonstitution in Überlieferung und Rezeption des "Fliessenden Lichts der Gottheit" Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Tübingen: Francke, 2010). See also Poor, "Review: Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch - vom Ich zum Autor.etc. Monatshefte* 105, no. 4 (2014): 703–5.

13   This statement is an approximation of such disclaimers, which one often hears more explicitly in oral presentations of work on this topic. An example of how such a disclaimer appears in a more specific context can be seen in a recent essay on the poetics of sound in Mechthid von Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. After a discussion of the

manuscript transmission and various editions of the text, and just before the author begins her own textual analysis, we read: "Welcher Textinstanz die Reime in E [the Einsiedeln manuscript] zuzuschreiben sind, muss ebenfalls offen bleiben. Entsprechend kann es nicht darum gehen, Aussagen über einen Personalstil zu treffen—auch wenn der Titel des Beitrags dies aus rhetorischen Gründen behauptet." [Attributing the rhymes in E (the main manuscript in Einsiedeln, Switzerland) to a particular version of the text(i.e., a version molded by an editor or created by an author, Mechthild) must also remain open. Correspondingly, the aim here cannot be to make claims about a personal style—even if the title of this essay does so for rhetorical reasons.] Caroline Emmelius, "Mechthilds Klangpoetik: Zu den Kolonreimen im *Fließenden Licht der Gottheit*" [Mechthild's Poetics of Sound: On Assonance in the *Flowing Light of the Godhead*] in *Literarischer Stil: Mittelalterliche Dichtung zwischen Konvention und Innovation. XXII Anglo-German Colloquium Düsseldorf*, ed. Elizabeth Andersen, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 263–86, esp. 276. Another strategy is merely to express agreement with the scholar or scholars who first made this intervention—usually Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als Literarisches Faktum*, and/or her student, Susanne Bürkle, *Literatur im Kloster: Historische Funktion und rhetorische Legitimation frauenmystischer Texte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999).

14 Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 166.

15 Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 165.

Fake News

Katharine Eisaman Maus

WHEN CATHERINE GALLAGHER CLAIMS that pre-eighteenth cen-
tury people lacked "fiction" she does not, of course, mean that
they had no imaginative narrative. Instead she claims that the
increased attention to quotidian life in the realistic novel, by blurring
the distinction between the imaginary and the true as its predecessors
do not, highlights the necessity of making that distinction.[1] There are
a variety of ways to challenge Gallagher's assertion, several of which
Michelle Karnes and Julie Orlemanski make or allude to: that "realistic"
fiction in fact did exist in earlier periods; that medieval writers and crit-
ics were able to make sophisticated distinctions between truth, falsity,
and the domains between; that in some circumstances those distinctions
mattered more than in others. (In this last respect, I suspect we differ
little from our forebears: witness urban legends and celebrity news,
often consumed in the checkout line at the grocery store, in a spirit of
bemusement.) Another way to challenge Gallagher—and other theorists
of the "rise of the novel"—might be to question the extent to which the
form is actually "realistic." Gallagher claims that novels, unlike earlier
genres, assign "ordinary English proper names, such as 'Tom Jones' or
'Pamela Andrews'" to their characters.[2] But "Pamela" is derived from
Philip Sidney's sixteenth-century prose romance, *Arcadia,* and no one
thought to name actual girl-babies Pamela until *after* the success of
Samuel Richardson's novel. So when Richardson chose a name for his
heroine, he combined the ho-hum "Andrews" with something outland-
ishly "literary"—much as does his novel. For the young servant women
with whom *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* was apparently wildly popular, the
idea that a landed gentleman would desist from a campaign of sexual
harassment of a vulnerable employee in order to propose marriage was
likely as pleasurably remote from their own circumstances as any flying
horse or magic carpet.

Yet another way of disputing Gallagher's assertion is to complicate
her silent equation of truth with the world of ordinary experience. For
these are not necessarily the same thing. After all, the veracity of Chris-
tianity manifests itself not by conforming to but by violating quotidian
expectation: miracles, descents of angels, resurrections from the dead.

Jesus's parables describe the Kingdom of Heaven by upending normal routines and protocols. Perhaps, then, it is not the world of ordinary experience that conduces to truth, but disruptions of that world. Yet which violations are trustworthy guides to transcendent truths and which are unreliable—or worse, deliberately faked? In late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, several whiplash alterations of the national religious settlement have the effect of producing several hotly contested, mutually incompatible visions of religious truth. John Donne writes:

> Fool and wretch, wilt thou let thy soul be tied
> To man's laws, by which she shall not be tried
> At the last day? Will it then boot thee
> To say a Philip, or a Gregory,
> A Harry, or a Martin taught thee this?
> Is not this excuse for mere contraries
> Equally strong? Cannot both sides say so?[3]

Donne trembles anxiously at the prospect of being found lacking on the Last Day, when souls will be summarily judged, and he knows that he needs to obey God's law, not man's (the Catholic king, Philip II of Spain, or Pope Gregory, the Reformed Henry VIII or Martin Luther). Yet what is that law? "Both sides" stridently claim to be right, but their arguments cancel one another out. On the one hand, for post-Reformation believers of all confessional persuasions, the nonverisimular can become not a flight from truth but a path into it. On the other hand, some flights from verisimilitude are simply lies or impostures. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religious polemic takes the form of satire, savaging the wrong kind of religion for its fraudulence, its covert self-seeking, its myopic materialism, and its adherents for their uninformed credulity. Anticlerical satire, of course, is not new: witness Geoffrey Chaucer's venal Pardoner. But after the Reformation such satire becomes not so much an attack on clerical malfeasance as the demarcation of a limited horizon of plausibility. Theoretically, "our" miracles are good while "their" miracles are bad; in practice, the satiric perspective seems to subject all marvels to suspicious scrutiny.

   In different genres, in other words, different kinds of events present as "true." And an efflorescence of experimental and mixed genres in the first few decades of the seventeenth century seem concerned with exploring the implications of this context-dependent variability. The troubling of truth claims is perhaps addressed most self-consciously in the new genre of tragicomedy, the most distinguished examples of which are written by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher in the first decades of the seventeenth century. At the end of Shakespeare's

The Winter's Tale, the statue of the "dead" Queen Hermione comes to life. But before she does so, Paulina, Hermione's lady-in-waiting, tells King Leontes: "It is required/You do awake your faith."[4] Leontes' confidence in Paulina and openness to the statue's marvelousness cancels the murderously jealous distrust that had led him, sixteen years before, groundlessly to accuse his wife of adultery with his best friend. Once this distrust is purged, Hermione can rejoin the realm of the living. Yet even while the scene mimics a miracle, it is clearly stage-managed by Paulina, who has apparently concealed the supposedly dead Hermione until Leontes' penance is complete. In other words, her *coup de théatre* is precisely the sort of episode that the Reformers complained about when they satirized the faked miracles of priests and monks, with their uncannily responsive statues of saints and martyrs. Moreover the play does not unequivocally endorse "faith," for even while its happy ending requires Leontes to reconstruct his ability to trust Hermione (and other women), its pastoral scenes mock gullible rustics and their susceptibility to being conned by the unscrupulous petty criminal Autolycus. Critics of tragicomedy since the early seventeenth century have been split on whether its outrageous violations of the reality principle—what Ben Jonson called Shakespeare's "mak[ing] nature afraid in his plays"[5]—are wonder-inducing marvels, or merely cheap tricks; and modern academic criticism, while agreeing about the congruence between the finale of *The Winter's Tale* and a religious miracle, has reached no consensus on what that congruence might mean.[6] Shakespeare seems to be playing with the idea that our conception of the plausible is a subset of genre decorum, that "truth," in other words, is a more labile and context-dependent conception than, say, Bertrand Russell might acknowledge.

What happens if different systems of genre decorum collide? In *Othello*, Desdemona falls in love with the exotic hero because she is captivated by his eventful life story, so wildly different from what she has experienced herself as the sheltered daughter of a wealthy Venetian. Othello's autobiography resembles the travel narratives that, as Karnes demonstrates, were not necessarily wholeheartedly endorsed by their readers.[7] Yet Desdemona, listening with "greedy ear," enthusiastically accepts the veracity of Othello's narration. Othello's tale does not merely entrance her, but transforms her into something of an adventurer herself: "That I love the Moor to live with him, / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world."[8] But the guilelessness of Othello and Desdemona leaves them open to the machinations of Iago, whose perspective is that of the satiric debunker: "Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor," he scoffs to Roderigo, "but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies."[9] The very forthrightness and

resolution that serves Othello well in war—the traits that make him a hero of romance—disable him against Iago's cynical account of lustful Venetian women. Whereas *The Winter's Tale* and other tragicomedies stage miracles and magic overturning the predictable effects of human error and sin, in *Othello* satire triumphs, at least at the level of plot. Although not, perhaps, describing exactly the same relationship between "truth" and "fiction" that concerns Gallagher, such generic blending represents a sophisticated grappling with a similar set of issues.

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NOTES

1   Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 336–63.

2   Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," 344.

3   John Donne, "Satire 3," *John Donne. Oxford Authors Series*, ed. John Carey (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), ll. 93–99.

4   William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Romances and Poems*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), 5.3.94–95.

5   Ben Jonson, "The Induction on the Stage," *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. John Creasar, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 4, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ll. 94–95.

6   For instance, see Andrew Gurr, "The Bear, the Statue, and Hysteria in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1983): 420–25; Peter G. Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997); T. G. Bishop, "*The Winter's Tale*; or Filling up the Graves," in *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 125–75; Marion O'Connor, "'Imagine Me, Gentle Spectators': Iconomachy and *The Winter's Tale*," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, vol. 4, *The Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 365–88; and Richard Wilson, "The Statue of Our Queen: Shakespeare's Open Secret," in *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion, and Resistance* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), 246–70.

7   Recent critics who have discussed the relationship between Othello's autobiography and travel narrative include Philip Collington, "Othello the Traveller," *Early Theatre* 8, no. 2 (2005): 73–100, and Joshua Fisher, "Passing for Truth: Wonder Tales and Their Audiences in *Othello*," in *Wonder in Shakespeare*, ed. Adam Max Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 195–213. Three essays in the recent collection, *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World*, ed. Patricia Akhimie and Bernadette Andrea (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2019) deal with Desdemona's response to Othello and her own desire for adventure.

8   Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), 1.3.245–247.

9   Shakespeare, *Othello*, 2.1.213–214.

Apocrypha and Fictionality

Brandon W. Hawk

Perhaps the greatest benefit of Catherine Gallagher's claims about fictionality for scholars of premodern literature is that her work has sparked critical reassessments of fictionality long before the eighteenth century.[1] Since scholars like Monika Fludernik, Julie Orlemanski, and Michelle Karnes have recently retheorized such concepts in relation to premodern literature, scholars now have new starting points for inquiry.[2] The following reflections come out of two starting points raised by these pieces: first, Orlemanski's question, "What genres or text-types maintain an unstable relation to fictionality?" (WHF 162); and, second, Karnes's claim that "medieval readers were not jurists, tasked with the separation of truth from falsehood, but were capable of enjoying indeterminacy and maximizing the boundaries of possibility."[3] Considering biblical apocrypha provides a way to bring these notions together and to explore issues concerning premodern fictionality, since premodern sources reveal a prevalent "explicit and ongoing discourse of fictionality" around this text-type.[4] Biblical apocrypha possess a particularly tense relationship with fictionality, demonstrate the joy of indeterminacy for readers, and challenge modern epistemological assumptions of literary study.

Apocrypha are generally defined as works that are biblical in character and focused on biblical subjects, but which remained excluded from the biblical canon as constructed across the history of Christianity.[5] This definition already concedes fluidity between "canon," seen as authoritative (true, factual), and "apocrypha," seen as dubious (false, fictional). We might even adapt Gallagher's words to suggest that "the historical connection between the terms *apocryphon* and *fiction* is intimate."[6] The applicability of this formulation to apocrypha is all the more pronounced considering that Gallagher's main subject of the novel began as a sort of pseudohistorical literary type and morphed into a genre defined by fictionality, not unlike apocryphal narratives. Yet the connection between apocrypha and fiction is productively unstable, as fissures in such definitions relate to epistemic perceptions of factuality and fictionality. Even boundaries between "canon" and "apocrypha" shift depending on textual communities and readerly assumptions. For example, Roman

Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Indian Christian communities all conceptualize differing boundaries for their biblical canons.[7] Reasons for such differences hinge on any given community's assessments—as Orlemanski puts it, "the recognition by some interpretive community of a representation's distinction from one or another idiom of actuality" (WHF 147).

At the root of their existence, biblical apocrypha are excluded from the received canon (however conceived by the specific textual community). Playing with belief, doubt, and plausibility, they resist what Karnes has identified in scholarship adhering to the secularization thesis as "the two options that medieval readers are traditionally allowed: to believe or disbelieve."[8] Turning to premodern "theoretical vocabularies" about apocrypha (WHF 156), even an authoritative figure like Augustine of Hippo indicates fluid distinctions between factuality and fictionality in apocrypha: "We may, however, leave aside *fictions* [fabulas] contained in scriptures that are called *apocrypha*, because their origin is hidden and not evident to the Church Fathers, from whom the authority of the *true Scriptures* [ueracium scripturarum] has come down to us by a very sure and well-known succession. Although some *truth* [ueritas] is found in apocrypha, nevertheless because of their many *falsities* [falsa] there is no canonical authority."[9] Similarly, Jerome declares that "many faults are interspersed in [apocrypha]" even as he recommends reading them cautiously, and elsewhere he mentions the "nonsense and ravings of apocrypha."[10] In early medieval England, Aldhelm echoes and expands Jerome's assessment about the "ravings of apocrypha like a horrendous-sounding thunder of words" and derides the "ditties of apocrypha and dubious frivolities of other fables," even though he relied on them for his poetry.[11] Throughout early English manuscripts, apocrypha and related terms are glossed in Latin and Old English with several meanings: "secret"; "secret writings"; "occult"; "doubtful writings"; and "false scriptures, apostasy."[12] Within the discourse of fictionality surrounding apocrypha, other late antique and medieval authors express similar ambivalence.[13] None of this hindered the popularity of apocrypha: besides numerous later translations and adaptations, around 140 manuscripts survive of the Greek *Protevangelium of James*, nearly 200 of the Latin *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, over 400 of the Latin *Gospel of Nicodemus*, around 180 of the Latin Pseudo-Marcellus *Martyrdom of Peter and Paul*, and around 300 witnesses to the *Apocalypse of Paul* (across languages).[14] Biblical apocrypha thrive in epistemic liminal spaces between perceptions of truth and fiction, "prompting judgments, not about the story's reality, but about its believability, its plausibility," in Gallagher's words about modern fictions; and, at the same time, apocrypha testify to Karnes's

idea of a "pleasure in stories that plausibly belong to either category" of fact or fiction.[15]

Considering biblical apocrypha and fictionality poses an epistemological crux: who decides what is factual, fictional, verisimilar, (im)plausible, and so on?[16] Scholars often struggle with epistemologies across cultures, geographies, and temporalities.[17] Shifting assessments of apocrypha for different communities and individuals remind us, as Fludernik suggests, that "fictionality . . . to some extent lies in the eye of the beholder."[18] For some, the Bible and apocrypha might evoke a sense of mimesis "fraught with background" from lack of realism; for others, biblical elements like those in apocrypha do represent verisimilitude.[19] Within the wide corpus of apocryphal literature, forms, genres, styles, and conventions differ radically, challenging scholarly assumptions. Some apocrypha contain truth-claims, while others eschew them. Recent studies have emphasized that specific apocrypha were composed for a variety of reasons, including not only deception but also aspects concerning fictionality and verisimilitude, such as entertainment.[20]

Biblical apocrypha also challenge trends in scholarship on fictionality that might reify eurocentric and nationalist literary histories. One such trend is a focus on national literatures, like the British novel. Premodern apocrypha afford a much wider scope since they were composed and circulated in networks across Afro-Eurasia, in places as distant as the North Atlantic, North and East Africa, the Middle East, China, and India, and in a diverse array of languages such as Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Coptic, English, Ethiopic, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Hebrew, Irish, Italian, Old Norse, Latin, Slavonic, Spanish, and Syriac. With this scope in mind, biblical apocrypha have the capacity to provincialize literary histories and understandings of fictionality.[21] Orlemanski suggests how paying attention to premodern literature has the capacity "to *provincialize* modern analytical protocols and to grapple with their limits" in terms of periodization (WHF 151). Biblical apocrypha similarly provincialize scholarly conceptions of culture, geography, and languages, revealing a wider scope that expands outward toward a capacious Middle Ages full of unexplored fictions.

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<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1   See Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 337–63.
2   Monika Fludernik, "The Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 1 (2018): 67–92, which includes an invaluable survey of the subject; Julie Orlemanski, "Who

Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 145–70 (hereafter cited as WHF); and Michelle Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020).

3   Karnes, "Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 223.

4   Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 356.

5   For overviews of the field and relevant trends, see Tony Burke, *Secret Scriptures Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eedrmans, 2013); and Annette Yoshiko Reed, "The Afterlives of New Testament Apocrypha" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 2 (2015): 401–25.

6   Adapted from Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 337, where she evokes *novel* instead of *apocryphon*.

7   See, e.g., Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2017). Other communities and canons might be cited, but these examples stand as representatives for the diversity of Christianity.

8   Karnes, "Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 212. On the secularization thesis and challenges to it, see WHF 150–55.

9   Augustine, *De civitate Dei, Libri XI-XXII*, ed. B. Dombart, A. Kalb, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 48 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1955), 491, emphasis mine; all translations are my own. Isidore of Seville used this passage when defining "apocrypha" in his widely popular *Etymologiae*, at 6.2.52. See *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1911). On the term *fabula*, see WHF 156–57.

10   Jerome, *Epistula* 107.12, in *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, 2nd ed., *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 55 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 303: "multaque his admixta uitiosa." For discussion of this passage, see Brandon W. Hawk, *Preaching Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2018), 3–5; Jerome, *Commentariorum In Epistolam Beati Pauli Ad Ephesios Libri Tres*, in *Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844–64), 26.535: "apocryphorum ineptiae et deliramenta."

11   *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Rudolf Ehwald, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi* 15 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1919), 256 and 313: "apocriforum deliramenta velut horissona verborum tonitrua" and "apocriforum enim naenias et incertas fribulorum fabulas nequaquam."

12   These terms appear as "secretum," "dyrngewrita," "occulta," "tweoniendlicra gewrita"; as well as "falsorum sciptorum" and "wiþersacana;" see Hawk, *Preaching Apocrypha*, 125.

13   For these and other examples from Western European authors, see Els Rose, *Ritual Memory: The Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Commemoration in the Early Medieval West (c. 500–1215)* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 42–78.

14   See entries in *e-Clavis: Christian Apocrypha*, https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/. For examples of the popularity and prevalence of apocrypha, see Jane Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), on apocalyptica in Byzantium; Rose, *Ritual Memory*, on apocryphal acts in Western Europe; and Hawk, *Preaching Apocrypha*, on early England, with reference to the Continent.

15   Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 346; Karnes, "Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 210.

16   See WHF 162: "Whose understanding instantiates fictionality?"

17   For one poignant discussion, see Zhang Longxi, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005), esp. 1–7.

18   Fludernik, "Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality," 78.

19   See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 12.

20   See Burke, *Secret Scriptures*; and Reed, "Afterlives." On deception, see esp. Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013). On apocrypha as fanfiction, see Hugo Lundhaug, "Textual Fluidity and Monastic Fanfiction: The Case of the Investiture of the Archangel Michael in Coptic Egypt," in *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult and Persona*, ed. Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, Alexandros Tsakos, and Marta Camilla Wright (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 59–73; and Kasper Bro Larsen, "Fan Fiction and Early Christian Apocrypha," *Studia Theologica* 73, no. 1 (2019): 43–59.

21   See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000; repr. 2008).

Medieval Fictionality from a Narratological Perspective

Monika Fludernik

Having published an essay taking exception to Catherine Gallagher's thesis regarding the rise of fictionality—an essay that appeared too late for the two authors to whose contributions I am here responding—my remarks will first discuss the assumptions on which their arguments are based and then turn to methodological questions.[1]

As Julie Orlemanski points out in her fine analysis of Gallagher's rise of the fictionality thesis, Gallagher collapses the rise of the novel proper (discounting earlier authors frequently treated as representatives of the genre—Aphra Behn, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe) with the discovery or "invention" of fictionality, aligning both with the institutionalization of realism. Fictionality in her conception consists in the conjunction of invented plot and characters whose names sound familiar and who could therefore point to a truthful account of events, evoking a verisimilar setting.[2]

As medievalists, both Orlemanski and Michelle Karnes are obviously not very keen to adopt a view in which fictionality is taken not to have existed in the Middle Ages. Both are therefore in favor of a concept of fictionality that can be unmoored from the eighteenth century without buying into a universalist notion of unvarying manifestations of fictionality through the ages. Orlemanski's concern is to treat "fiction as a demarcational phenomenon, a semantic mode of unearnest reference that depends on the recognition by some interpretive community of a representation's distinction from one or another idiom of actuality," while framing the distinction between the actual and the fictional in terms of "changeable regimes of truth," thereby allowing for "historical variability."[3]

This move, as I may point out as a narratologist, can be seen in analogy with the debate between, on the one hand, structuralist narratology, which assumes the existence of a finite list of categories that can be applied to any narrative in any historical period or medium[4]; and a historicized narratology that has yielded the subdisciplines of classical,

medieval, early modern, modern, postmodern, even postcolonial nar-ratologies.[5] A comparable debate is ongoing between diachronic nar-ratology and historical narratology, with the latter arguing for specific nonuniversalist features of medieval narratives, while the former position claims there are universal categories with historical manifestations.[6]

Another common ground between the two essays is their reflection of the postcolonial critique of orientalist othering. Applied to the Middle Ages, this analogy helps to foreground the secularist preconceptions (should one say, superstitions?) of scholars working on literature after 1700 regarding what they see as medieval naivety—belief in miracles and divine ruling of the world—linked to a parallel thesis of the rise of individuality or subjectivity in the Renaissance.[7] There, too, the opposing viewpoint would try to demonstrate a continuity between late medieval and modern manifestations of subjectivity or see a shift in their quality, without denying the medieval text's expressions of individual psyche. Geoffrey Chaucer has of course figured extensively in the rejection of exclusively modern subjectivity, with *Troilus and Criseyde* a key counter-example to the image of the naive, religion-infested, and non-realistic medieval text.

As Orlemanski astutely delineates, the classic and medieval tracts on distinguishing *fabula*, *historia*, and *argumentum* do not reflect the full scale of medieval fictional practice and fail to take into account the extensive intertextuality of medieval writing.[8] Nor do most theories of fictionality, including modern ones, accommodate drama, spectacle, and performance in their models. Again, we encounter a parallel with narratology, which has only recently turned to plays as members of the narrative (macro)genre.[9] Another important consideration introduced by Orlemanski is her shrewd contention that fictionality might vary across genres and perhaps even subject matter.[10] Orlemanski calls for a herme-neutic approach that should prepare the way for a critical establishment of a poetics of fiction across different periods but with contextual (read: historical) inflection. Karnes's contribution illustrates the adequacy of such an approach by focusing on genre (the travelogue) and on magic and miracle, elements treated condescendingly by modern critics as features that expose a superstitious medieval worldview. Karnes's fine analysis notes how the novel is set up in opposition to romance, which—for Gallagher—includes all fictional narrative from the Greek novel to Behn. She argues that, rather than demonstrating medieval readers' gullibility in the face of religious indoctrination, medieval audiences can in fact be shown to have a very sophisticated practice of interpretation with regard to the improbable and unbelievable.

It is striking that both essays start out from an understanding of fic-tionality that distinguishes truth or actuality from nontruth, i.e. fiction.

Orlemanski's definition, though it brings in the "interpretive community," does so only in order for this community to manage the "distinction" between fiction and nonfiction.[11] German accounts of fictionality referenced under the *Institutionenmodell* (institutional model) of fictionality[12] position the audience's recognition and reception of fiction on the level of fiction's social *acceptability*, which may be seriously threatened and destroyed by religious powers, as Françoise Lavocat has shown in her study *Fait et fiction*.[13] Her account of the transhistorical and transcultural (as well as the transmedial) aspects of fictionality is based on the ups and downs of fiction's acceptability at particular points in history and in particular cultures. From that perspective, fictionality becomes a resource for imaginative writing and aesthetic appreciation. The second key point about the tradition of the institutional model concerns the characterization of fiction not as a representation of the nonactual but as a depiction of a world that encourages readers' (or listeners') immersion. According to the institutional model, fictionality consists in bracketing questions of truth, factuality, and current relevance (i.e. does this statement concern me in my decisions about what to do/not to do in the world right now?). Yet the didacticism of medieval texts, which often try to teach people what to do, aspires to influence its audience in direct ways in its own historical moment. On a diachronic view, then, we might want to reconsider the notion of fictionality's real-world relevance.

German studies of medieval fictionality have recently adopted the institutional model. Sonja Glauch's seminal essay on fictionality in the Middle Ages doesn't define fictionality as a quality of texts, or ontologically as representing nonexistent fictional worlds, or as the exercise of the free imagination (*freier schöpferischer Erfindung*), but as based on the intended (medieval) audience and its expectations in the reception of the text.[14] Glauch, like Orlemanski and Karnes, considers fictionality in medieval writing to be dependent on generic context (myth was neither factual nor fictional); it functions differently when used in the form of inserted speech by historical figures, or as autonomous fiction, for instance in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain* (ca. 1180).[15] She also proposes to call allegorical fictions *speculative fictionality*. Walter Haug's comments on the centrality of exempla in medieval literature, and on their inherent contradictoriness, likewise suggest that the opposition between truth and lying (fiction) cannot be maintained so neatly in the Middle Ages.[16] He proposes that the fictionality in Gottfried of Strasbourg's *Tristan und Isolde* resides in the experientiality of the protagonist's *aventure*, supplanting exemplarity as the primary medieval mode of fiction.

Given the many debates and discussions about fictionality in the literature of the Middle Ages, Orlemanski's and Karnes's contributions here, as well as other criticism on the issue, cannot, it seems, move

much beyond the irresolvable question of whether fictionality can be defined in one generally acceptable manner or if it needs to be historically inflected, thereby allowing for a different understanding of the fictional in, say, the Middle Ages. It is clear that new publishing venues, as well as the increased importance of authorship in the early modern period, influenced how fictionality came to be conceived as invention and as institutional practice. Since our understanding of what we would now call the literary market in antiquity or the Middle Ages cannot but remain speculative, the institutional model does not deliver any convincing insights for pre-1500 literature. As a consequence, the discussion of fictionality before the Renaissance will continue to be mired in ontological questions.

<div align="right">UNIVERSITY OF FREIBURG</div>

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1   Monika Fludernik, "The Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 1 (2018): 67–92; responding to Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 336–63.
2   Michael McKeon, by contrast, sees the rise of the novel and its realism as a dialectic move. See "The Eighteenth-Century Challenge to Narrative Theory," in *Narrative Concepts in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Liisa Steinby and Aino Mäkikalli (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2017), 39–77.
3   Julie Orlemanski, "Who has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 147. The phrase "unearnest reference" suggests that Orlemanski is using Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh's "Ten Theses about Fictionality," *Narrative* 23, no. 1 (2015): 61–73.
4   F. K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans. Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980); Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978); Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997); and David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Oxford: Blackwell/Wiley, 2009). But note that Susan Lanser's work is an early account positing gender-based variations of the universal. Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992).
5   A current example of this orientation is the *Handbuch historische Narratologie*, ed. Eva von Contzen and Stefan Tilg (Stuttgart, Germany: Metzler, 2019).
6   Fludernik, "The Diachronization of Narratology," *Narrative* 11, no. 3 (2003): 331–48; and Eva von Contzen, "Why We Need a Medieval Narratology: A Manifesto," *Diegesis: Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Narrative Research* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–21.
7   See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980, 2005); and Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
8   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 156.

9   For drama narratology see Brian Richardson, "Drama and Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 142–55; Ansgar Nünning and Roy Sommer, "Diegetic and Mimetic Narrativity: Some Further Steps Towards a Narratology of Drama," in *Theorizing Narrativity*, ed. John Pier and José Ángel García Landa (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 331–54; Fludernik, "Narrative and Drama," in *Theorizing Narrativity*, 355–83; and Jan Horstmann, *Theaternarratologie: Ein erzähltheoretisches Analyseverfahren für Theaterinszenierungen*, Narratologia 64 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).
10   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 162.
11   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 147.
12   See Tilmann Köppe, "Die Institution Fiktionalität," in *Fiktionalität: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, ed. Tobias Klauk and Tilmann Köppe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 35–49.
13   Françoise Lavocat, *Fait et fiction: Pour une frontière* (Paris: Seuil, 2016).
14   Sonja Glauch, "Fiktionalität im Mittelalter," in *Fiktionalität: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, ed. Tobias Klauk and Tilmann Köppe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 387.
15   Glauch, "Fiktionalität, " 396. See also, Renate Burrichter, *Wahrheit und Fiktion: Der Status der Fiktionalität in der Artusliteratur des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Fink, 1996).
16   Walter Haug, "Literaturtheorie und Fiktionsbewußtsein bei Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas von England und Gottfried von Straßburg," in *Fiktion und Fiktionalität in den Literaturen des Mittelalters*, ed. Ursula Peters and Rainer Warning (Munich: Fink, 2009), 219–34.

Synchronous Fictions

A Response by Michelle Karnes

I AM GRATEFUL TO BRUCE HOLSINGER for soliciting these thoughtful and thought-provoking responses to my and Julie Orlemanski's articles. They expand the temporal and geographical parameters of our arguments in crucial ways. Together they insist on the contingent nature of fiction, not just across particular times and places but inside them. They show too how fiction resists transparency, with Sarah M. Allen and Jack W. Chen, for instance, writing that "part of the difficulty in assessing the nature of fictiveness in medieval Chinese narrative is there was no clear distinction between more and less fictional narratives."[1] In my reading of travel literature in the Latin West, that haziness is more a feature than a bug: opting not to distinguish degrees of fabularity, its authors also chose not to draw clear boundaries around truth and falsehood. I focus on marvels as puzzling phenomena whose appeal is based at least partly on their ontological indeterminacy. These marvels are more provocative as possibilities that can be neither proven nor definitively disproven than they are as pure inventions or clear facts. I suggest that this indeterminacy points to a feature that is more broadly visible (although certainly not everywhere) within the literature of the medieval Latin West: a fondness for situations where questions of truth and falsehood are bracketed or unresolved. I turn briefly to medieval theories of imagination in order to suggest that the faculty was piqued precisely by such irresolution. John Mandeville, as I read him, leans into such uncertainty. This irresolution is neither a universal feature of late medieval Western European literature, nor one confined only to it. I do think, however, that it is especially prominent in the period's literature, as suggested by its fondness for marvels. I focus on marvels in travel literature because they resist Gallagherian dismissals of premodern literature particularly well. Both Orlemanski and Katharine Eisaman Maus stress the protean nature of both fiction and fiction's conception of truth. As Maus writes, "In different genres, in other words, different kinds of events present as 'true.'"[2] The special power of marvels is that they play with that very murkiness—maybe marvels are true, maybe they are not, and it is hard to know one way or the other—and turn it to their advantage.

Orlemanski's pathbreaking essay is dense with rich and original insights, but I will confine myself to considering two. Drawing on the work of Nicolette Zeeman, she questions a scholarly "assumption that theoretical articulations are adequate to explain the literature roughly contemporary to them."[3] Suggesting that we "be alert to the ways that imaginative writing conceives itself differently than does its contemporary meta-discourse," she concludes that "practice outstrips theory."[4] Indeed, theory should not act as a constraint: interpretation would be much the poorer if it had to be tethered to it. Her position would be valid even if the late medieval Latin West had more theory to offer—if it were, say, more like classical Arabic literature, which is more heavily theorized than any medieval literature I know. In that tradition, the defense of contemporary poetry that preferred excess and ornateness to more natural or sedate language gave rise to enthusiastic debate.[5] Focusing on deliberately provocative assertions such as "the best poetry is the most untruthful" (*khayru al-shi'ri akdhabuhu*) or "the best poetry is the most truthful" (*khayru al-shi'ri aṣdaquhu*), poets and their critics considered poetic figures, the logic of poetic meaning, and the creativity of the imagination with as much care and subtlety as one could wish.[6] It did not depend on such theorizations for its sophistication. Similarly, German fiction is not better because German scholars have devoted themselves with particular energy to the topic of fictionality, as Monika Fludernik and Sara S. Poor both show. But neither was it hampered by them.

Following Zeeman's argument that the "critical prioritization of the explicit" can impede literary criticism, I would add that critics are often suspicious of the period's theory and consider it to be flattening.[7] Theory only forecloses debate if it is made univocal, but it too submits to creative interpretation. When treated not as an end but as a provocation to further discussion, as in the case of the dictums I just quoted, it is less the supervisor of poetry than its fan. In fact, there is a rich medieval tradition of pondering the truth or falsehood of poetry and poetic figures that is rooted in the "extended Organon" of the Alexandrian philosophers, that is, the definition of Aristotle's logical works that included both his *Rhetoric* and his *Poetics*.[8] One of the three language arts that together comprised the trivium, logic was expressly tasked with distinguishing truth from falsehood. When Aristotle's logic was defined in such a way as to include poetry, philosophers gamely asked about its own brand of truth and falsehood. This was particularly true of Arabic philosophers, though it is also possible to find among Latin scholastics the conviction that "poetics belongs to the craft of logic."[9] The point was not to definitively classify poetry as either true or false but to show how it strained against those categories. Such inquiries can surely contribute to our understanding of fiction in the period.

Similarly, to pick up on Orlemanski's example, it is constructive to study medieval conceptions of race in tandem with modern ones. However, it is noteworthy that the dominant medieval classification—the division of the world among Noah's sons, such that Ham's descendants live in Asia, Shem's in Africa, and Japheth's in Europe—features little in recent discussions of race in the Middle Ages. Such a classification should not circumscribe our discussion of the topic, but it should contribute to it. As Carol Symes suggests, we might also better understand how medieval conceptions of race influence modern ones. I agree with Orlemanski and Zeeman that medieval literature from the Latin West is no less sophisticated for its disinclination to theorize itself in a formal way within the period proper. But the theoretical paradigms that do exist might offer useful insights without acting as limitations.

I would also extend Orlemanski's final argument about comparitivism as a method. She writes that the "comparative poetics of fiction . . . aims to make the dissonance of the concept, its explanatory friction, a part of the knowledge it generates."[10] Instead of rejecting fiction as a concept anachronistic to the Middle Ages, then, she finds value in a method that places "nonmodern archives and arguably modern notions" in a mutually enlightening conversation with one another.[11] I would suggest that comparative literature within a historical period can function similarly. For instance, in the book from which my article is partly drawn, I compare the treatment of marvels in the literature and philosophy of the medieval *dār al-Islām* and of the Latin West. Sometimes the influence of the former on the latter is clear; sometimes there is no evidence of influence. Such comparison helps to alienate the familiar, to create dissonance in a way that revises our conceptions. It also runs similar risks, such as the imposition of a hierarchy that prioritizes the literature of Western Europe or the understanding of other traditions through its terms. It risks homogenization and the erasure of real differences. As Edward Said has most famously shown, those are not just potential risks but committed errors, and they have had grave consequences. There is a key difference between synchronic comparison and the transtemporal brand discussed by Orlemanski in that conceptual terminology is usually imported from later periods. But our understanding of medieval concepts can benefit as much, I think, from cross-cultural comparisons as from cross-temporal ones.

<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1   Sarah M. Allen and Jack W. Chen, "Fictionality in Early and Medieval China," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 233.
2   Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Fake News," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 250.

3   Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 157.
4   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 158, 161.
5   For an introduction to this criticism, see Alexander Key, *Language Between God and the Poets: Maʿnā in the Eleventh Century* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2018), 196–240; and Lara Harb, *Poetic Marvels: Wonder and Aesthetic Experience in Medieval Arabic Literary Theory* (dissertation, Department of Middle Eastern Studies and Islamic Studies, New York University, 2013). For an anthology translating some of the primary texts, see Mansour Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory: The Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1988).
6   See, for instance, Mansour Ajami, *The Neckveins of Winter: The Controversy over Natural and Artificial Poetry in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1984); and Christoph J. Bürgel, "Die Beste Dichtung ist Die Lüegenreichste: Wesen und Bedeutung eines Literarischen Streites des Arabischen Mittelalters im Lichte Komparatistischer Betrachtung," *Oriens* 23–24 (1974): 7–102.
7   Nicolette Zeeman, "Imaginative Theory," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 226, cited in Orlemanksi, "Who Has Fiction?" 158.
8   See, especially, Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).
9   Umberto Eco, *From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2014), 102. See also Black, "Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias* in Medieval Latin and Arabic Philosophy: Logic and the Linguistic Arts," in *Aristotle and his Medieval Interpreters*, ed. Richard Bosley and Martin Tweedale (Calgary: Univ. of Calgary Press, 1992), 25–83.
10   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 164.
11   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 164.

What We Ask of Fiction

A Response by Julie Orlemanski

THERE ARE FEW GREATER INTELLECTUAL delights than a trove of insights about precisely one's own scholarly obsessions. I'm enormously grateful, then, to this forum's participants, who have brought their varied expertise to bear on some of the questions animating Michelle Karnes's essay and my own. The several literary genres that these pieces identify as standing in a mercurial or vexed relation to fictionality—travel literature (Karnes), biblical apocrypha (Brandon Hawk), philosophical fictions and other genres of early Chinese poetry and narrative (Sarah M. Allen and Jack W. Chen), mystical literature (Sara S. Poor), pastourelle (Carissa M. Harris), and tragicomedy (Katharine Eisaman Maus)—testify to an array of research paths open to a comparative poetics of fiction, or a mode of inquiry sensitive to the varied means of distinguishing a discourse from idioms of actuality. Allen and Chen, for instance, offer a small-scale demonstration of fiction's "heuristic value," as they track some of the gradations between "epistemological uncertainty" and "more overt fictiveness" in a corpus where the concept of fiction is absent.[1] Hawk's account of medieval apocrypha will be particularly helpful to me as I continue tracking the long entanglement of fictionality and disenchantment. The apocryphal dynamics of desacralization, fictionalism, and literary reinvention bear directly on fiction's relation to "bad belief" and offer a provocative contrast to the cultural work of medieval mythography.

The quicksilver conceptual agility that characterizes the pieces in this forum testifies, I think, to the fact that interpreting fictionality requires a constant movement among what might be called discourse's different modes of existence. Just as linguists study language according to strategically reductive paradigms—semiotically (as a closed system of self-referential signs), pragmatically (in terms of a word's function and reception), or semantically (in terms of a word's referential meaning)—the task of identifying fiction invites a narrowed focus, concentrating attention on the semantic disposition of literature, or on how readers are invited to regard the entities to which literature refers. As Lubomír Doležel observes, fictionality is located primarily on the "axis" running

between "representation" and "world," rather than the semiotic "nexus 'signifier (*signifiant*)/signified (*signifié*)'" or along the rhetorico-pragmatic "'sign-user' axis."[2] But when we move past merely identifying fiction to interpreting it, literature's semantic play must rejoin its formalist and pragmatic dimensions. The pieces here ably demonstrate how to bring these aspects together. For instance, the scholarly debate about mystical literature mapped by Poor puts pressure on the interaction between the "semiotic" and "semantic" aspects of literature: if a text is constituted entirely from "the rhetorical conventions of [its] genre," and is thus linked to other texts via an internally referential system of differences, does that conventionality then affect the text's place along Doležel's "word-world" axis?[3] In other words, how does intertextuality redound upon reference? Meanwhile, Harris's foregrounding of "the real and pervasive trauma of sexual assault" asks that we pay attention to the pragmatic ways in which pastourelle's fictions are put to use, both to naturalize "rape myths" and to act as "consolatory fictions for victim-survivors."[4] Finally, Monika Fludernik's emphasis on the *Institutionenmodell* of studying fictionality, which is concerned with "the level of fiction's social *acceptability*" rather than the existence of its referents, stands as a challenge to the account of fiction I've just offered.[5] Fiction defined by its social value would fall on Doležel's pragmatic "sign-user axis" rather than on that between representation and world.

As Fludernik acknowledges, the institutional model may have relatively little to say about pre-1500 literature—which is why "discussion of fictionality before the Renaissance will continue to be mired in ontological questions."[6] Clerical polemics against courtly romance probably represent the most direct articulations of fiction's social standing in the Middle Ages—a fact that threatens to return us to fiction's twelfth-century "invention." For my part, I admit to not being eager to leave behind ontological questions, or more accurately, questions about writers' and readers' ontological commitments—their senses of the kinds of being that narrated entities variously have, and how those assorted modes of existence are registered in discourse. But it is fair to suppose that such ontological questions tend to dissolve the decisive strokes of fiction's history. Received literary-theoretical labels, generic categories, and discursive institutions are all phenomena conducive to histories of emergence and development. These are things that begin and evolve. By contrast, a comparative poetics of fiction, rather than relying on such classifications, seeks instead to open up their "black boxes," to inquire into how exactly reference operates within them. This methodological impulse derives from what I take to be the task of literary criticism, to produce new conditions of recognition for the achievements of literary

practice, achievements that will always be distinct from the metalanguages available to describe them.

Preceding my own essay and known to me only after its drafting, Fludernik's important 2018 essay "The Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality" is a state-of-the-field report on fiction's historical study. Although I have space here only to nod to it, I do wish to acknowledge a couple of its crucial insights. In reviewing several important monographs in the field, Fludernik shows how these scholars' divergent definitions of fiction are best understand as *premises*, containing in ovo their respective approaches to fictionality.[7] This is certainly true of my own definition, the "*unfinished*," hermeneutic quality of which inoculates it in advance against origin stories and sets me up to discover fiction as always emerging anew at "the interface between language's fundamental capacity to portray the nonactual and the various regularizations of that capacity."[8] The fact of this perpetual reinvention is indeed one of my premises, the justification for which I sought to explain over the course of my essay. I also defined fiction as a "demarcational phenomenon," dependent on "the recognition by some interpretive community of a representation's distinction from one or another idiom of actuality."[9] This demarcational quality means that fiction is necessarily *relational*—a point also elegantly expressed in Wolfgang Iser's claim that fiction is "an act of boundary-crossing which, nonetheless, keeps in view what has been overstepped."[10] This relational quality is one of the reasons that I find Fludernik's thesis about the "*rise of factuality*" to be such an important reframing of fiction's "rise."[11] It renders fiction's "peculiar connotation as an entirely separate realm opposed to factual discourse" historically contingent rather than definitional.[12] It also chimes with Maus's skepticism about whether an empiricist model of truth, as "'the world of ordinary experience,'" ought always to serve as the diacritical counterpart of fiction.[13] I share with Maus a preference for attending to the multiple regimes of truth whose boundaries fiction might cross. Fludernik's "rise of factuality" helps account for processes of literary-historical change without blotting out other and earlier models.

One way that Karnes's wonderful essay "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction" strikes me as especially generative is in its exploration of the interacting textual scales that may shape a reader's semantic experience—in this case, the interplay between a "marvel" and the genre in which it is depicted. As Karnes observes, travel literature was only one of the kinds of writing where marvels thrived in medieval literature. Natural philosophy and romance each had just as distinctive a claim on the wondrous, and the self-same marvel could circulate across all three genres. How then are we to understand the transit of these durable

bits of lore as they passed in and out of generic frameworks, each with its own norms of truthfulness? What were medieval readers' attitudes toward such cross-generic circulation? Karnes raises this question when she speculates about the plausibility of a medieval reader who "upon finding a description of a rock that tests a woman's virginity in a work of natural philosophy, judged it to be real, but when he found the exact same marvel in a romance he thought it a fanciful invention."[14] Did a marvel bring its own semantic weather with it, or was it absorbed into the larger discursive climate surrounding it? I am struck by how Karnes's investigation resonates with a series of rich reflections about historical fiction from Catherine Gallagher. Writing about *War and Peace*, Gallagher notes how the novel's dramatis personae invite a "switching" between semantic modes; the contrast between how fictional characters and historical persons are described makes it "obvious" that the author is "fully conscious of shifting referential gears" between these two categories.[15] To illustrate this Gallagher traces what she calls "a *modal* arc" in Tolstoy's portrayal of Napoleon, showing that readers and author alike "make a distinction between the fictional bits" and "the historical parts."[16] Napoleon, then, seems to bring his own semantic atmosphere with him, and the narration is responsive to the modal microclimates of its own story-world. Karnes's sensitive account of medieval marvels likewise shows how a text like *Mandeville's Travels* might knowingly draw readers through a differentiated set of semantic dispositions. Such phenomenologies of literary reference constitute a promising way forward, I think, for reconceptualizing fiction and its others.

I remain curious about what "fiction" means to Karnes. She carefully distinguishes the "potentially persuasive" character of medieval travel literature from "romance, which consists of figments that do not pretend to be true."[17] Marvels are not the "seeds of fiction," but they do, perhaps, express the "possibilities of medieval fiction."[18] Does travel literature, then, count as fiction, or would it be part of a broader category like "lore"? Or are these the wrong questions? I continue to reflect on how to reconcile what Karnes aptly calls "the medieval deprivileging of the opposition between truth and falsehood" with my own account of fictionality, which depends on fiction's distinction from one or another idiom of actuality.[19] As Fludernik observes, fiction's varied definitions tend to express scholars' divergent premises and research agendas. We have different intuitions about what to ask of the category of fiction. It may be rare to find another thinker who proceeds precisely from one's own sense of what counts as fiction and why this should be so. It is a happy fact, however, that Karnes and the other contributors to this forum provide brilliant company in the effort to rethink literary semantics past

and present. They offer new meridians for charting the contact zones of fictional worlds, possible worlds, and the various discourses by which we name, know, and change our own.

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NOTES

1   Sarah M. Allen and Jack W. Chen, "Fictionality in Early and Medieval China," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 231, 233.

2   Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 2, 5, 10.

3   Sara S. Poor, "The Fuss about Fiction: A View from Medieval German Studies," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 244.

4   Carissa M. Harris, "Pastourelle Fictionalities," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 241.

5   Monica Fludernik, "Medieval Fictionality from a Narratological Perspective," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 261.

6   Fludernik, "Medieval Fictionality," 262.

7   Monika Fludernik, "The Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 1 (2018): 73–77.

8   Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 146–47.

9   Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction?" 147.

10   Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), xiv-xv.

11   Fludernik, "Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality," 84.

12   Fludernik, "Fiction of the Rise of Fictionality," 84.

13   Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Fake News," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): TK. Maus is quoting Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 338.

14   Michelle Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 212.

15   Catherine Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do? Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters," *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 318.

16   Gallagher, "What Would Napoleon Do?" 321.

17   Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 212.

18   Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 213.

19   Karnes, "The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction," 225.