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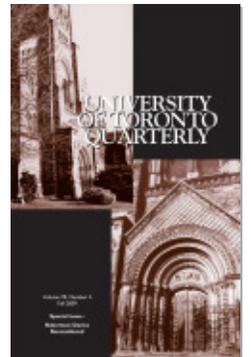
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Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages, Translating Cultures

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Christendom. These are roughly dated to the decades before Chrétien's *Conte du graal* and they constitute something of a local mini-tradition. In the third part, as no contemporary written explication of these images is extant, Goering provides an investigative review into what they might mean and how they might have come to figure so prominently in the region. From there, through biographical and ecclesial connections, Goering also speculates judiciously on how the Grail could have made the leap from this originary ecclesial context – and from the hands of the Virgin – to a more northern literary setting in Chrétien's romance and, ultimately, to the rest of Europe and the world.

The regional details and historical background of this Catalonian context are fascinating and Goering does an admirable job presenting them. His concluding hypothesis identifying a possible real-world inspiration for the Grail knight Perceval is, on the whole, unconvincing, if only because it raises so many more questions than it effectively answers – and many more than the author could deal with in such a brief study. The book is expensive for its small size, but it has wonderful colour reproductions of the frescoes of St Clement of Taüll in addition to extensive black-and-white reproductions. *The Virgin and the Grail* is a study that anyone can read and enjoy, and it is engagingly structured as an intelligent and fun historical investigation. While serious Grail enthusiasts may be left wanting more, anyone with an abiding interest in this enduring symbol will enjoy this book and its contribution to our understanding of the Grail's artistic origins. (MATTHEW GIANCARLO)

Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams, editors. *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages, Translating Cultures*
Cambridge University Press 2005. 298, 15 plates. US \$80.00

This intelligent, rich, well-organized collection of essays explores the profitable intersection of medieval and post-colonial studies. It introduces readers both to current trends in each field, and to the many ways that the methodologies of medieval studies can inform and be of use to post-colonial scholarship. Along with an introduction from the editors, both medievalists, and an afterword by a post-colonialist, the body of the collection is broken into three main areas: 'The Afterlife of Rome,' 'Orientalism before 1600,' and 'Memory and Nostalgia.' Within these sections, essays discuss the representational work done by texts and images ranging from the 'postcolonial void' of post-Roman Britain, to the writings of nineteenth-century colonial theorists and medievalists. The volume itself describes a journey, with an earlier focus upon medieval European works, mostly from England, France, and Spain, that gives place to a later focus on colonialist texts that enlist the help of

medieval analogies and methodologies to negotiate the ruptures and displacements of their colonialist situation. This book will interest not only medievalists and post-colonial scholars but also a variety of scholars interested in material culture, issues of translation and transformation, and the urgencies of historical encounter, cultural encounter, memory, and nostalgia.

The introduction by Ananya Jahanar Kabir and Deanne Williams refocuses medieval post-coloniality from exploration of the mechanisms of hegemony and subversion to an acknowledgment of cultural encounter as wonder, which becomes, in their reading, a mode of arresting attention and instigating complex, absorbing, politically freighted translations. In their frontispiece reading of the Limbourg brothers' *Très riches heures* of Jean, duc de Berry, wonder conduces to the questioning of paradigms rather than the mystification and rendering up of objects for consumption and delectation. This focus on wonder works to return delight and urgency to the drearier landscapes of post-colonial studies in which power and knowledge are inexorably transacted and internalized in ever-fissuring new hegemonies; in this, I think the collection succeeds. The collection also shows how the temporal distance that seems medievalism's curse can inform post-colonial methodologies, by drawing attention to the way texts and images necessarily index a multiplicity of representational frames stemming from different sources, translated and altered across time, accumulating deep histories of accreted interpretation, in effect becoming sites where temporal/cultural disjunctions play out, can be excavated, traced, and genealogized, to yield not teleology but continual contest and fascinating *detournement*. The collection also draws attention to the centrality of medieval studies to colonialist discourse itself; the ways that the medieval past as fantasy of original purity, or an arena of imperial conquest and civil uplift, seeps in as analogue to colonialist divisions of the world and appropriations of periphery to metropole, with all their discontents.

A brief review prohibits doing justice to the consistently rich contributions that make up the body of this collection. The essays by Nicholas Howe, Alfred Hiatt, Seth Lerer, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, James G. Harper, Michelle R. Warren, Roland Greene, and the two editors provide explorations of consistently high quality.

The collection's valuable afterword, by Africanist and post-colonial scholar Ato Quayson, gives a non-medievalist's-eye view of what draws methodologies of the collection together and what post-colonial scholars might want to make note of. He describes (1) a focus on material cultural objects as layered indexes of accreted and often conflicting interpretations, (2) the use of historical emblemization and complex

invocations of pasts such as Rome, and (3) a focus on situated human translations of past forms into a 'personal theater of contemplation and action.' He finds especially that 'the careful work of embedding that we find in medieval scholarship has methodological resonances for postcolonial studies' and proves it by discussing actual beds and the ubiquity of embeddedness in Shakespeare's *Othello*, in a way that shows how it might be unpacked medievalist-style. He ends by suggesting the possible benefits of deepening the retrospective field of such hybrid, mixed, translational, and metamorphic concepts as magical realism, as part of a general need to transcend the limitations of disciplinary habits and pedagogies.

All in all, this rich volume performs groundbreaking work. It combines a breadth of analytical and disciplinary fields with richly interrelative meditations on shared concepts such as translation, indexing, memory, nostalgia, and detournement. It is complex without fussiness, well edited, and beautifully illustrated where needed. Both medieval and post-medieval scholars interested in not just disciplinary appropriations of theory but the capacity for truly interdisciplinary conversations between them would do well to take a long look at this collection. (CHRISTINE CHISM)

Ann Dooley. *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge*
University of Toronto Press. x, 298. \$75.00

In the medieval Irish text *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, 'Cattle Raid of Cúailnge' (the modern-day Cooley Peninsula in Co. Louth), there is an episode toward the end that features the story's hero, the defender of Ulster Cú Chulainn, in yet another situation of grave danger, brought about by his perennial nemesis Medb, the queen of Connacht. This crisis, however, occurs not on the battlefield but on the sidelines, where Cú Chulainn is champing at the bit, trying to recover from his many wounds and pull himself together so that he may join his fellow Ulstermen in their climactic battle against the cattle-raiding invaders of the province. The power of Cú Chulainn's heroic positive thinking notwithstanding, he suffers a setback: 'His wounds opened afresh; Medb had sent two handmaids to lament over him and make his wounds open again, telling him how Fergus [his beloved foster father] had fallen and Ulster broken in battle while he was kept from the fight. [None of this is true.] But he smashed their heads together, so that each was stained grey from the other's brains.'

Not only does this vignette exemplify the unique ability of medieval Irish heroic literature to be memorably 'over the top' and yet wry at the