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## A Rose both White and Red: Middle English and Tudor Memory

An approach to periodisation emphasising continuity between medieval and early modern has asserted itself in recent years, over the preceding model which viewed the two periods as separated by a profound historical rupture. Here I argue that while this newer model has done important work for literary studies, its usefulness is at an end. I propose instead a messier model (via Jonathan Gil Harris and ultimately Michel Serres) of temporal hybridity and polychronicity. Emblematic of this approach is the Tudor rose imagery found in Hall's chronicle and later more explicitly in literary contexts. I explore polychronicity through an examination of the testimony of the early fifteenth-century Lollard William Thorpe, whose avowedly self-authored testimony circulated in manuscript (in Middle English) after his heresy interrogation by Archbishop Arundel. The testimony was printed in Antwerp in 1530 by an unknown sympathiser with religious reform and enthusiastically taken up by John Foxe in the first edition of his *Acts and Monuments* (1563). Foxe's discussion of it, and particularly its linguistic character, shows how in his hands it becomes a polychronic document. For Foxe, Thorpe is modern (as a precursor of the reformed English church) but preposterously so (as an early fifteenth-century figure). The archaic, medieval character of Thorpe's language (usually for Foxe a marker of a superstitious past) must here be retained (as the guarantor of Thorpe's precocious modernity). The contradictory project of *Acts and Monuments* is to bracket off a past to which there must be no return, while at the same time not only invoking that past, but also pointing to the ways in which it clearly anticipates the present.

Keywords: Lollardy; Middle English; polychronicity; Reformation; William Thorpe

## 1 The Fair Conjunction of Tudor History

When the Earl of Richmond, victorious at the battle of Bosworth Field in William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, concludes the play with his promise to "unite the white rose and the red," his speech comes with a sense of era-defining finality (5.5.19). The earl's accession as Henry VII will put an end to the baronial strife between the houses of York and Lancaster (not yet generally known as the Wars of the Roses) and he will usher in the Tudor dynasty, symbolically clearing the way for the late Tudor world in which Shakespeare's audience lives. Richmond is, technically, a medieval character and at some level, an Elizabethan audience was perhaps aware of that. But his role here is to announce the modernity in which those audience members live.

The historical Henry VII, of course, had no reason to be so confident that anything old had ended or new begun. His immediate predecessor, after all, had lasted just two years. He himself would be at war in defence of his own shaky claim to the throne within a couple of years of the victory at Bosworth. It was not until the accession of his son Henry VIII that writers began to seem a little more confident about the Tudor dynasty. It was probably on the occasion of Henry's coronation that John Skelton sounded the theme of unity in a poem which begins by referring to the twinned symbols of the houses of York and Lancaster. "The rose both white and rede / In one rose now dothe grow [...]" Skelton proclaims, before proceeding to the "kingis line moost streight" ("A Lawde and Prayse," lines 1–2, 10). Lineage and straight lines are the poet's concern here; these are what guarantee Henry VIII's place on the throne.

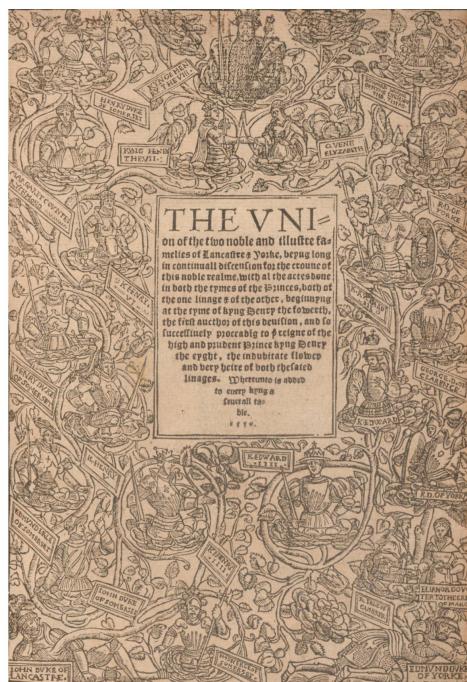
At the same time, Stephen Hawes similarly if more wordily apostrophised the first Tudor:

Two tytles in one thou dydest well vnyfye  
 Whan the rede rose toke the whyte in maryage  
 Reygnyng togyder ryght hygh and noblye  
 From whose vnyd tytlys and worthy lygnage  
 Descended is by ryght excellent courage  
 Kynge Henry the .viii. for to reygne doultes  
 Unyuersall his fame honour and larges. ("A Ioyfull medytacyon," lines 36–42)

This commonplace imagery is perhaps most associated with Edward Hall's chronicle, *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke*, first published by Richard Grafton in 1548, soon after Henry VIII's death. Here Hall wrote that the earlier Henry's marriage to

Elizabeth, heiress of York, meant that “the redde Rose” of Lancaster “was vnite and ioyned with the white Rose, whiche was the cognisance and ensigne of the noble progeny of Yorke” (Fol. ii<sup>r</sup>). The division between the families “was suspended and appalled in the person of their moste noble, puissant and mighty heire kyng Henry the eight, and by hym clerely buried and perpetually extinct” (*The vnioun of the two noble and illustrate famelies* Fol. i<sup>r-v</sup>).

In the second edition of this chronicle, printed in 1550, this union of the roses was visually represented. The woodcut border surrounding the title depicts two tangled rosebushes ascending either side of the image and coming together at the top. One bush emerges from the chest of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, at the bottom left-hand corner, another from Edmund, duke of York, depicted on the opposite side of the image. The two bushes join near the top of the page where Henry VII holds hands with his queen, Elizabeth. Sitting in a rosebud above all is their son Henry VIII. The dynasty of which the first Henry Tudor could hardly be confident is thus represented in visual form and the groundwork laid for a linear, providential, supersessional historical scheme.



**Figure 1.** Title-Page to Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustrē Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke*. London: Richard Grafton, 1550. Reproduced courtesy of The Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, George A. Aitken Book Collection, Call number Af H141 +542uc.

It is this historical conception, whether we accept it or not, which continues to inform the most basic scholarly assumptions in medieval studies and early modern studies. The very terms we continue to use – medieval, Renaissance, early modern and, of course, the concept of a medieval ‘after-life’ itself – themselves encode the same logic of supersession promoted by Skelton, Hawes, Hall, and ultimately Shakespeare. My chief interest here (reflecting the larger project from which this work is drawn) is in writing in Middle English and its sixteenth-century fates.<sup>1</sup> Like the Middle Ages as a period, Middle English seems to be ineluctably caught up in a linear and supersessional temporal scheme: its ‘middle’ character means that it cannot be thought about without reference to what lies on either side of it, preceding, and following. It is therefore relentlessly linear.

Indeed, there is perhaps no conventional period boundary in English history more invested in the supersessional than this, “the deepest periodic division,” as Brian Cummings and James Simpson call it, a divide which “works less as a historical marker than as a massive value judgment,” as Margreta de Grazia has it (Cummings and Simpson 3; de Grazia 453). Is there any other way of doing time than the supersessional? In this essay I want to explore what might be gained by pushing against the grain of linearity and attempting to explore, in Jonathan Gil Harris’s words, “the past’s untimely power” (20). Harris reminds us of perhaps the best-known alternative to the supersession model. In a conception deriving ultimately from the work of Michel Serres, time can be thought of as pleated and folded rather than smoothly linear. For Serres, we always live alongside both the futuristic and the archaic; a historical circumstance may be “polychronic” and “multi-temporal,” revealing “a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats” (60). What might result if we try to reimagine the late Middle Ages and the early Tudor period in these kinds of terms?

The rosebush woodblock apparently first used in Grafton’s 1550 edition of Hall’s chronicle offers a way to explore this. The object itself would seem to be designed very specifically to illustrate an account of the Wars of the Roses, using the combined rosebushes to represent a linear, supersessional vision of history. The hierarchical verticality of the image leads the eye up to Henry VIII, who is obviously the dominant figure: awake and staring fixedly at the viewer, unlike his distant, sleeping York and Lancaster progenitors. Henry is a lively presence, though he was in fact already dead when the image made its debut.

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<sup>1</sup> Provisionally entitled *Marvellous Darkness: Medieval Presence in Tudor England*.

Despite its apparent historical specificity, the woodblock survived, was passed down, shared, or sold, among printers and reused in new, specifically literary contexts. It appears as a woodcut border on the title page of Thomas Marshe's 1555 printing of John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (McKerrow-Ferguson 75), and is later associated with the *Canterbury Tales* in the complete works of Geoffrey Chaucer edited by John Stow in 1561 and Thomas Speght in 1598.<sup>2</sup> With each of these appearances, Henry has receded a little further into history, potentially reminding viewers of the history that has elapsed since. There is a sense in which – like any representation of a dynasty – the rosebush image represents linear history. It is a linear history, however, which has stopped. Because of its verticality it cannot be extended by the turning of a page or (in the fashion of a medieval genealogical roll) further unscrolling. It is designed to put an end to a history. Like Skelton's and Hawes's poems, the image is very concerned with the indisputable *directness* of the Tudor lineage.

In fact, of course, the earlier Henry's claim to the throne of England was notoriously weak, his accession owing a great deal to battlefield success and what Mark Greengrass calls a "straightforward coup" (264). In spite of their claims of directness, the poets' words and the rosebush image struggle to portray it. Shakespeare's Richmond refers to the "fair conjunction" he himself represents (5.5.20), a phrase which conceals the fact that there were two rival claims to the throne. Hawes, too, concedes this with his mention of the "vnyd tytys and worthy lygnage" which necessarily put the two houses and their claims in parallel. Skelton's reference to the "kingis line moost streight" elides the parallel claims altogether. It is not surprising that the rosebushes threaten to, and frequently do, loop back on themselves as if to reverse direction; they are anything but "streight."

At the same time, for all its attempts to lead the viewer upwards and *away* from the medieval past, the rosebush image is inescapably medieval in its iconography. Most mid sixteenth-century viewers would have had little trouble recognising the juxtaposition of the archaic and the futuristic here in this obvious version of the medieval Tree of Jesse, a representation, ubiquitous on church walls and elsewhere, of the lineage of Jesus Christ. But unlike the Jesse Tree with its depiction of the inevitability of biblical prophecy and history, the supersession of the Old Testament by the New, the Tudor rosebush shows *two* lines of history, inevitably competing with one another. The

<sup>2</sup> Marshe printed *Troy Book* as *The auncient historie and onely trewe and sincere cronicle of the warres betwixte the Grecians and the Troyans*, STC 5580. For the larger context on the Chaucer publications see Megan L. Cook, *The Poet and the Antiquaries*.

Jesse Tree delivers its own futurity in the form of Christ and his promise. But the Tudor rosebush image is contradictorily doubled, showing anything but direct or straight lineage and instead exhibiting a tangled mass of genealogical possibility, out of which ultimately emerge what appear to be Yorkist and Lancastrian claims to the throne which are exactly parallel.<sup>3</sup> The unity the image wishes to illustrate must be premised on the dual Yorkist and Lancastrian claims. The only way for this duality to be resolved is for the representative of one claim to kill the other.

Visually referring to the medieval past and its own origins in that past, the rosebush image undermines its own aspiration to depict new departures. The image is an instance of both what Harris calls a “temporality of conjunction” and a “temporality of explosion.” The different aspects of the image speak to one another, indeed depend on one another, exemplifying a conjunctive logic. But at the same time “the apparition of the ‘old’ text shatters the integrity of the ‘new,’” compromising “the illusion of its wholeness or finality” (15). Significantly, the past the rosebushes aim to supersede seems never to have died. The dukes of Lancaster and York are not recumbent on tombs like distant ancestors, but instead relaxed in sleep; like Jesse in the original image, they are dreaming the future. Overall, then, the image of the combined white and red roses, whether in verse or graphic form, never quite manages to suppress the spectral presence of the disunity it claims is extinct, undermining the purposes avowed for it by both chroniclers and poets.

In recent decades – in recognition of the problem I outline here – medievalists and early modernists alike have become used to a model rather different from the longstanding presupposition of explosive rupture between the two periods. In works too numerous to list here, going back to Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars* in 1992 (itself succeeding revisionary accounts of the English Reformation in the 1980s), we find an emphasis on the many continuities between the periods, the lack of a definitive break.<sup>4</sup> This model of continuity or conjunction has been widely influential and has offered a substantial corrective to the earlier model of rupture. As Cummings and Simpson put it, “To continue to exist politely on either side of the divide is to ignore the way that the works we study, and the way in which we study them, are implicated in the complex history” of the terminology

<sup>3</sup> See Bishop, “Father Chaucer and the Vivification of Print.” What has been missed, however, is the problem created by the fact that the rosebush image effectively combines *two* Trees of Jesse.

<sup>4</sup> On the historiography see further Wooding, *Tudor England*, 88–90, 583–584n7.

we use (4). This model of continuity has not been without a backlash.<sup>5</sup> But the reconceptualisation of periodisation that the continuity model has brought about is profound.

Part of my purpose here, nevertheless, is to suggest that this model has reached the limits of its usefulness. Emphatically, I would not for a moment suggest winding it back. Yet while it has done a great deal to break down the sense of a necessary rupture around 1500, it has also, I suggest, ultimately allowed us to maintain the old divisions. To go a step further, as I think we now need to do, we require a model which allows more back-and-forth, more hybridity, more pleats and folds (like those of Serres's now very well-used handkerchief). Or, to remain with a metaphor closer at hand, a rose-bush that puts out tendrils, extending itself in all directions and occasionally re-rooting itself in the soil it had previously left. I am concerned here with what we might call, after Francois Hartog, regimes of historicity: “the way in which a given society approaches its past and reflects upon it” and “the modalities of self-consciousness that each and every society adopts in its constructions of time and its perceptions” (9). I propose that when we sign up to a conjunctive model we necessarily fall in with a narrative of linearity and supersession in the terms of which we still align ourselves with the early modern narrative of convulsive change. I want to argue against that here and I want to do so by suggesting not only that it is a current methodological necessity, but also that early modern discourse itself, in its attitudes to the medieval past, was ineluctably hybrid.

## 2 Burn Before Reading: Thomas More and Heresy

In the prologue to his *Eneydos* – the *locus classicus* for discussion of the English language and translation in the late fifteenth century – William Caxton notes how he had recently been shown some material written in what he calls “the olde and auncyent englysshe,” which at first, he says, baffled him, seeming more like German than English (A.iv). Caxton might be exaggerating: he has an evident commercial interest in asserting that he is doing a far

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<sup>5</sup> Cummings and Simpson's *Cultural Reformation* volume represents a strong attempt to enact the continuist model, with its avowed aim “to initiate new periodic conversations [...] across the standard boundaries of the ‘medieval’ and the early modern” (5). This aim is, ironically, resisted by a few contributors who persist with the conventional periodisation. One of these, Stephen Greenblatt, published his *The Swerve* the following year, emphatically restating the older position with its subtitle, *How the World Became Modern*.

more sweeping job than simply putting things into printed form. But it seems clear that one option for viewing the literary-linguistic past involves a sense of its opacity, its difference.

This consciousness of linguistic difference extended, by the 1540s at the latest, even to the language of Chaucer. It is, wrote Peter Ashton in 1546, “by reason of antiquitie [...] almost out of vse” (qtd. in Spurgeon 87). By 1589, and George Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie*, such terminology is standard. The language of Langland, Chaucer, and Lydgate, Puttenham says, “is now out of vse with vs” (3:120). The expression is a clear synonym for ‘old.’ In Thomas Elyot’s 1538 *Dictionary*, *obsoletus* is glossed as “decayed, olde, oute of vse, worne, as a garment, whan it is bare” (“obsoletus”).

When a Tudor writer appears to dismiss something as ‘old’ English it is usually in order to consign the same old English to a despised pre-Reformation past. However, the converse sometimes applies: when the same writer wishes to retrieve something from that past as being of continuing value, the same quality of oldness is shown to reveal a surprising modernity. A classic instance is in an often-quoted passage in the preface to William Thynne’s complete works of Chaucer in 1532, attributed to Sir Brian Tuke. Tuke marvels at how such an excellent poet as Chaucer arose “whan doutlesse all good letters were layde a slepe throughout ye worlde” (Aii<sup>v</sup>). This is to be “marueyled” at because Chaucer belongs to that unenlightened past and is old, yet displays a surprising modernity.

The Thynne Chaucer – the first printed complete works – has often been seen as significant in the fortunes of Middle English writing in the period. Indeed, when it comes to thinking about the contest over what is old, and when it came to be thought of as ‘old,’ with hindsight 1532 looks like a significant moment of rupture with the past. The rise to influence of Thomas Cromwell, Thomas Cranmer and Anne Boleyn began in that year; on the conservative side, Lord Chancellor Thomas More composed the first part of his *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer*. In that work, More briefly concerned himself with medieval English texts. Considering the abundance of heretical books which have become available and offering ways to combat them, More imagines a world in which the disputes of the present time might be rendered unnecessary. It would be better, he states, if unlearned readers concerned themselves neither with the books of heretics, *nor* with More’s own work. Instead, he recommends various good reading practices:

For surely the very best waye were neyther to rede thy [i.e. the *Confutation* itself] nor theyrs [the heretics’] / but rather the people vnlerned to occupye them selfe besyde theyr other busynesse in prayour, good medytacyon and

redyng of such englysshe booke as moste may norysshe and encrease  
deuocyon. (8:37 lines 25–29)

As other medievalists have been, I am interested in the “englysshe books” here:

Of whyche kynde is Bonauenture of the lyfe of Cryste, Gerson of the folowynge of Cryste, and the deuote contemplatyue booke of Scala perfectionis wyth such other lyke / then in the lernyng what may well be answered vnto heretykes. (8:37 lines 30–33)<sup>6</sup>

These works are respectively Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*; Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi* (typically attributed at the time to Jean Gerson and here obviously referred to in its early sixteenth-century English adaptation), and Walter Hilton’s *Scala Perfectionis*. Looking to such works, More “hankers after an age of innocence,” as James Simpson puts it, “in which English lay readers were unbothered either by the works of ‘heretics’ or of their respondents” (450). That “age of innocence” is the medieval past, a world in which *present* writing – whether heretical or orthodox – is rendered unnecessary, precisely by the appeal to a prior state of being. More’s reading list of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works suggests nostalgia for a less contested time. There were those, as we have just seen, for whom this kind of writing could already be characterised as outmoded, as superseded. But there is no question of that for More. For him, the work of these medieval writers is precisely what his readers in 1532 should be putting to use. More does not say they are old, or ancient; he simply says they are English, and that we should be reading them.

The conservative More, importantly, was not drawing on an obscure archive to make this point. Each of the titles he mentions was widely available and, we must assume, widely read throughout the first half century of print. Love’s *Mirror* was a popular work which was still circulating in manuscript while also being frequently printed: following its first production by Caxton in 1484 it became one of the staples of early English printing. The *Imitatio Christi* was translated into English by William Atkinson and printed by de Worde in 1502 and again in augmented form by Pynson in 1504. Later, it appeared several times in various versions from different presses, including those of de Worde, Robert Redman, and Robert Wyer.

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<sup>6</sup> Other medievalists to have noted the passage include Sargent (196–197) and Connolly (129). See also Thompson (“Love in the 1530s”).

Hence More could be confident that anyone reading *his* work could also get access to these recommended texts.<sup>7</sup>

It is these kinds of texts, far more than the better-known Chaucer and John Gower works, that represented the printed continuity of Middle English written culture in the period and also accounted for a large amount of the ongoing manuscript circulation. We seem then to have in them an indication of the truth of the gnarled and knotted nature of the Tudor rosebushes, their tendency to defeat linearity and supersession in favour of growing back towards an earlier time. Nothing has yet been superseded, much as such figures as William Tyndale or Cromwell might wish that to be the case. To insist on this point and mark the ongoing prevalence of Middle English devotional prose is then to participate in a continuist narrative, one which sees not supersession but continuation across the medieval-early modern divide, much as Duffy and his followers have argued.

And yet, at the same time, continuity itself points to the hybridity with which such figures as More are obliged to engage. Indeed, I argue that More contributes to that cultural hybridity, further complicating a narrative of continuity (just as much as that of rupture). Attempting an unequivocal opposition between the heterodox and orthodox, the desirable past and the disordered present, More effectively proposes that the detection and eradication of heresy is a zero-sum game. One of his favourite metaphors is that of the “poison” of heresy, which leads him to the necessity of the complete extirpation of books in which such poison is found. A heretic might recant. But poisonous books must simply be burned: the *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* frequently refers to the burning, whether hypothetical or actual, of Tyndale’s translations. But More has already shown himself to be keenly aware of the hybridity of his own culture, in that it is not possible for him to combat heresy in print without also explaining that same heresy and thereby keeping it alive. This means that, ironically, his own work preserves the memory of heresy. Hence More’s otherwise peculiar suggestion in the *Confutation* that it would be best if *his own work*, along with the heretical books, were unread. For him it is the present moment that is untimely rather than the medieval past.

In this imagined scenario, it is entirely logical that if all heretical books were burnt the record of such heresies must also be destroyed. Only then could a previous world without heresy be restored, because such writings as the *Confutation* constitute moments of direct contact between the orthodox and heterodox; to read them is inevitably to touch and touch upon that

<sup>7</sup> See on this Connolly, *Sixteenth-Century Readers* 130.

which is being confuted, leaving the unlearned reader open to the taint of the heretical knowledge that More must deploy. As More immediately goes on to say that such total oblivion is in truth impossible, he projects the reality, a hybrid or tangled rosebush of a culture, in which incompatible things exist, polychronically, alongside one another.

The theoretical answer to this problem is a return to late medieval textuality. It is the obvious and only solution: to walk religious culture back to where it was before, in the childhood of such men as More and the days of his parents, the world of Chaucer, Love, Mirk and Hilton, which still existed in abundant printed books and circulating manuscripts in More's own day. Yet even that world, as More must surely have realised, is itself an illusion. The 'age of innocence' was of course anything but. Love's *Mirror*, for instance, was an explicit riposte to Lollardy, produced at the height of the 'premature Reformation.' More's solutions to the present crisis are based on a set of unstable oppositions. His own posited absolute difference between the late medieval past and the early modern present collapses. Evangelical reformers appear committed to rupture with the past. In fact, however, what they end up espousing is something quite different; like More, reformers end up with something more hybridised, necessarily revelling in polychronicity. To illustrate this final point, I want to turn to a passage about medieval textuality in the 1570 second edition of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, commonly known as the *Book of Martyrs*.

### 3 English Spoken Here: William Thorpe, John Foxe, and Old English

When John Foxe printed the Lollard dialogue *Jack Upland* – routinely but wrongly attributed to Chaucer in the period – he offered it "in the same old English, wherein first it was set forth" (1583 4:285). "Old English" (here as usual meaning Middle English) clearly brings with it the value of antiquity, even for ardent reformers. While such English is, obviously, a marker of Chaucer's medieval character, it is also the key to his recuperation as an adherent, *avant la lettre*, of the Church of England (albeit, in this instance, via a wrong attribution). What is striking about Chaucer's supposed Protestantism is its literally preposterous character.<sup>8</sup> I want here to use a different moment offered by Foxe to explore a fuller instance of the way in which old

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<sup>8</sup> Chaucer's role as proto-Protestant has been much discussed (e.g. Simpson 41–42; Georgianna).

English served as a guarantor of authenticity and, paradoxically, of modernity.

The Lollard William Thorpe was examined by Archbishop Arundel in 1407 for his suspected heresy. In the supposedly autobiographical testament which resulted, Thorpe makes it clear that he did indeed hold Wycliffite views, and shows himself as outmanoeuvring Arundel in argument. Thorpe was not condemned; the testimony was somehow put into circulation in manuscript and became a valuable record for early sixteenth-century evangelicals of their medieval precursor. The testimony exists today in a single English manuscript and two Latin ones, but was known in the sixteenth century from a print produced in English in Antwerp around 1530, which itself has independent authority. This text was one of several Lollard “revenant texts” to appear in print around this time, as Greg Walker notes, “disrupt[ing] ideas of chronology and periodisation by being of no period and of several simultaneously” (132). As Walker also notes, several of these texts (Thorpe’s among them) then reappeared in the 1560s and 1570s. Foxe used the 1530 printed version of Thorpe’s testimony in producing his own version in the first edition of *Acts and Monuments* (1563); for him, naturally, Thorpe is a heroic precursor of the English church, whose apparent first-hand testimony allows the reader to experience “the maruelous force & strength of the Lordes might, spirit and grace, working and fighthing in his Souldiers, and also speaking in their mouthes” (1563 2:195). Thorpe’s existence in 1407 demonstrates the great value of Lollardy for the sixteenth-century reformer, in that it provides a handy answer to the perennial question: Where was your church before Luther?

In the original printed edition of Thorpe’s testimony, produced in Antwerp in 1530, the compiler noted the following:

This I haue corrected and put forth in the english that now is vsed in  
Englande / for ower sothern men / nothyng thereto addynge ne yet therfrom  
mynysshynge. And I entende hereafter with the helpe of God to put it forthe  
in his owne olde english which shal well serue / I doute not / bothe for the  
northern men and the faythfull brothern of scotlande. (A2v)<sup>9</sup>

The assumptions are quite typical of the period, as we have already seen: medieval English is outdated and difficult to read, because of diachronic linguistic change. Never mind that just two years later, Chaucer’s English is

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<sup>9</sup> Hudson (227–248, esp. 245) suggests that this work – like other early prints of Wycliffite material – shows every sign of being a conservative version of a manuscript original.

thought perfectly acceptable in William Thynne's complete works. Old English is not, however, viewed through a purely diachronic lens: the implication here is that what is spoken in 1530 in northern England and Scotland is something very like this old English. Thorpe's "owne olde english," it turns out, is not utterly out of use.

In 1563, Foxe noted that he was printing from what he thought was a version made by Tyndale (that is, the earlier print) and that Tyndale himself had Thorpe's own manuscript. Echoing the earlier compiler, Foxe said that "To the text of the story we haue neither added nor diminished" (195). In the 1576 edition, he expanded on the nature of the text as follows.

To the text of the story [ie Thorpe's testimony] we haue neyther added nor diminished: But as we haue receyued it, copied out, & corrected by maister William Tindal (who had his owne hand writing [i.e., Thorpe's manuscript]) so we haue here sent it and set it out abroade. Although for the more credite of the matter, I rather wished it in his own naturall speache, wherein it was first written. Notwithstanding, to put away al doubt & scrouple herein, this I thought before to premonishe and testifie to the reader, touchyng the certaintie hereof: that they be yet alyue which haue sene the selfe same copy in his owne old English, resembling the true antiquitie both of the speache, and of the tyme: The name of whom as for recorde of the same to auouche, is M. Whithead, who as he hath seene the true auncient copie in the handes of George Constantine, so hath he geuen credible relation of the same, both to the printer, and to me. Furthermore the said maister Tindall (albeit he dyd somewhat alter and amend the English thereof, and frame it after our manner) yet not fully in all words, but that somthing doth remayne, sauering of the olde speache of the tyme. (1576 5:535)

What this slightly contorted passage seems designed to negotiate is the fact that Foxe has not actually seen the Thorpe manuscript and Thorpe's own "naturall," that is to say medieval, "speache." Lacking that "hand writing" himself, Foxe must use the 1530 printed rendition of the testimony (here attributed to Tyndale), which was itself already a partial modernisation, while assuring the reader of the existence of the manuscript original on which that print was based, which others "yet alyue" have seen.

The original manuscript operates here as an elusive contact relic of the early Church of England. In its place, Foxe must make do with a secondary copy, the version made and adjusted by "Tyndale," which means that Foxe's readers of a printed work are distanced still further. It is directly for this reason that Foxe assures the reader that in the "Tyndale" copy there remain traces of that same old English which is the guarantor of the antiquity of Thorpe's precocious Protestantism. Foxe's aim in his re-presentation of Tyndale's re-presentation of Thorpe's testimony is to invoke or at least ges-

ture to the existence of what Ulinka Rublack has called a “grapho-relic:” a handwritten document or textual relic of early evangelicalism which stands in, for later reformers, as a contact relic (“Grapho-Relics”). In Foxe’s account there is no talk of a still-existing old English in the north; in 1576, it seems, Foxe sees “old English” as a little further distant in time than it had been for the 1530 printer.

But far from lamenting the rude and old English of the medieval past, Foxe here desperately *seeks* old English as the guarantor of the relic’s authenticity and efficacy. There is nothing remarkable about Thorpe’s religious position without its antiquity; Thorpe is a man who is, preposterously, out of his time. Hence paradoxically, while “old English” clearly places Thorpe in the past, it also has the role of highlighting Thorpe’s precocious *modernity*.

The general thrust of Foxe’s book is a rigidly linear historicism the point of which is to contrast an unenlightened past with the present. “The polemical account of the Middle Ages offered by Foxe and other Protestant reformers,” as Jesse Lander writes, “promoted a perception of historical change that served to confirm their claim that the world was witnessing the dawn of a new age” (“Monkish Middle Ages” 94). It is not a surprise to find that the *Oxford English Dictionary* credits Foxe (in the 1570 *Acts and Monuments*) with the first use of the period term “Middle Ages” in English (“middle age *n.* and *adj.* *A.n.2*”). But at the same time Foxe enacts a form of nascent philology, acknowledging the difference of the past *not* to condemn it but rather to argue for its utility for the present. Another way of thinking about this is that Foxe *needs* hybridity; he needs an English which is both modern (and therefore readable) *and* ancient (and therefore genuinely indicative of the present in the past, the atemporality of the early ‘reformer’ Thorpe). To misconstrue Skelton only slightly, how can a rose be *both* white and red? How can Thorpe’s testimony be both ancient and modern? The Tudor claim to the throne required the resolution of a paradox, two lines turned into one. Foxe needs Thorpe’s elusive original language, which is decisively absent, to make itself present. He needs the past and present to intermingle.

#### 4 Conclusion: The Future is Rosy

It is scarcely possible to think about Foxe’s version of Thorpe’s testimony without having recourse to a model of temporality more complicated than a simple linear one which would string out in a line Thorpe’s manuscript

testimony, the 1530 print edition, and Foxe's own version. As Walker recognises (following the art historians Christopher S. Wood and Alexander Nagel), the Thorpe text is an "anachronic artefact," "warping productively our sense of the linearity of book history" (131). We know little about the circulation of the manuscript(s); the first print presents the testimony as both of, and out of, its time; Foxe, finally, offers a version in 1563 which partakes of that of 1530 and gestures towards an earlier manuscript he has never seen. It is a performance of polychronicity in which Foxe's attempt to touch the past – avowing that he knows people who saw the manuscript – is explicit. The contradictory project of *Acts and Monuments* is to bracket off a past to which there must be no return, while at the same time not only invoking that past, but also pointing to the ways in which it clearly anticipates the present.

In the same way, I argue *we* scholars need a sense of polychronicity when we think about medieval and early modern, a sense of the way in which the archaic and futuristic were juxtaposed. This clearly goes beyond a model of continuity and is much messier than that model. Our emphasis on the continuity between medieval and early modern has done great work; I propose that we could now do with crumpling the handkerchief, seeing a little more back and forth, tangled like an ancient bush which reaches into our present while remaining firmly rooted in the past.

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