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Woman is the Measure of All Things

Authoritarianism and Anti-Humanism in the Criticism of Anglo-Saxon Poetry

Michael Bryson

As Late Antiquity transitions into the Early Middle Ages, amid such works as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*) of 731, and the epic poem *Beowulf*, thought to have been completed sometime between 700 and 1000, a new (or renewed) spirit is appearing in European poetry. In a literary and scribal tradition dominated by what Miriam Muth calls "a consistent narrative that exemplifies the bond of loyalty between a warrior and his lord,"[1] there is an awakening of love poetry that looks back to the traditions of an earlier time, one in which Ovid was the model more than the Church or the Emperor. In this poetry, the value of human life, and the pressing nature of human concerns, are found not in the dictates and doctrines of the Church (or the demands and dogmas of the Empire), but in the private desires of the heart. In the discourse presented in this poetry, Man—or more accurately—*Woman* is the measure of all things, not God, the Church, or the Empire. Two poems in particular have survived, first collected in the Exeter Book (c. 960–990 CE), which each present an alternate view of life and the world—a view that "has little in common with the personal poetry of native tradition, the poetry of the scops," but one in which one might instead "look to classical antiquity for models."[2] In "The Wife's Lament" and "Wulf and Eadwacer," we have the "only two surviving Anglo-Saxon poems featuring a female speaker," [3] works which Stanley Greenfield calls "poignant poems of love-longing," and crucially identifies as "the first of their kind in the secular literatures of western Europe."[4]

But like the Hebrew שיר השירים, *Shir ha-Shirim*, or the *Song of Songs*, a love poem that itself rose to full prominence in the days of a censorious Empire, [5] these stirringly passionate poems have been "rewritten" by censorious and imperious scholars and interpreters for so long that Greenfield's making of a simple observation about them being love poems has become a radical act. An authoritarian, anti-humanist (and even *anti-human*) tradition of reading these poems—much like that which surrounds the *Song of Songs*—has long insisted that the value of these poems lies not in their passionate words, but in the empty spaces between them, spaces that are then filled with the arid speculations of a style of criticism that itself seeks to be the measure of all things.[6] But before we spend time exploring why that is, and how that kind of anti-humanist reading of poetry works, let us look at the poems themselves:

The Wife's Lament

I sing this wretched song of my absolute sadness,
my journey into exile, that I might tell
what hardships I have dwelt in since I grew up,
new or old, never more than now.
Always I have suffered torments, miseries and wretchedness.

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First my lord departed hence from his people
over the waves' destructive uproar; I could not sleep for fear
of where my lord might be on Earth.
Then I departed on my journey, to follow and seek to serve,
a friendless wandering exile, my poverty caused
by men who undertook to think and plan, my lord's own kin,
that he might separate us through secret counsel,
that we two might live far apart in this worldly realm,
where I live most horribly, grieving and longing
since my lord commanded me here to this hard dwelling.
I have few that are close in this place,
few loyal friends; therefore my heart was sad
when I found my equal, my companion
unhappy and miserable,
hiding his intentions, planning murder.

Happy in our outward manner, we very often boasted
that nothing could divide us except death alone,
nothing else—now all that is changed;
now that is as if it had never been...
Our love, our friendship … I shall for now, and for long,
My dearly-beloved's feud endure.
He called me to remain in this forest grove,
under this oak-tree, in this earthen-hovel,
this ancient cave, in which I am tortured with longing.
The valleys are dark here, the mountains high,
the towns blasted by overgrown thorn-bushes,
joyless dwellings. Too often, I am cruelly afflicted here
because of the departure of my lord. Earthly friends,
do you live and love, occupy beds, or graves,
while I walk alone at dawn
under oak-trees, and through this earthen-hovel?
There must I sit the long summer day;
there must I weep and mourn my wretched exile,
my many hardships that will not ever let me
give rest to my sorrows and my griefs,
nor all the longing that afflicts me in this life.

Always may the young man be burdened, be sad at heart,
have hard and bitter thoughts in mind; likewise, if he shall have
happiness and cheer, let him also have sorrow and grief,
enormous and in multitudes. Keep him dependent on himself
for all his worldly joy, surrounded by foes, stained by enmity
in distant lands and by strange folk, since my lover sits
under rocky cliffs, surrounded by storms,
my despondent friend, floodwaters rising around him
in a dark and dreary house, where he endures and suffers
much heartfelt-sorrow, since he too often remembers
a more joyful dwelling. Woe shall be to all of us
who wait in longing for one we love.[7]

In "The Wife's Lament" (a title only affixed to the poem in the nineteenth century), readers have an enigmatic and passionate poem in which a woman[8] expresses anguish over her loss of a past life and love, over her current exile from all that she has loved and known, and describes herself as "eal ic eom oflongad," [tortured with longing]. As her "giedd wrecce" [song of wretchedness/ exile] ends, she describes loving one who is no longer near as a kind of torment: "Woe shall be to all of us / who wait in longing for one we love." It seems to be a straightforwardly passionate poem dedicated to a female experience of loss and loneliness and desire.

In a similar vein, the short poem "Wulf and Eadwacer" gives every appearance of being a poem of frustrated passion and longing, representing the voice of a woman whose lover is torn from her by military and tribal divisions, and the threat of war:

Wulf and Eadwacer

My people treat him like a sacrificial gift,
And they will devour him if he comes threatening war.
We are so different.
Wulf is on one island; I am on another.
His island is fortified, surrounded by fens.
This island is filled with slaughter-crazed men.
And they will devour him if he comes threatening war.
We are so different.
Wulf tracks my hopes like a bloodhound,
When I sit, crying, in the rain
He clasps me within his warrior's arms,
Such joy to be held, such pain to be let go.
Wulf! My Wulf! Pining for you
Makes me sick; your rare visits
Have starved me more than lack of meat.
Do you hear, Eadwacer? Our poor whelp,
Take, Wulf, to the woods.
That man easily tears what was never made one:
Our song together.[9]

In this poem, a woman cries out in desperation over her longing for a man with whom she can never settle down and establish anything like a life of comfortable and daily routine. Her passion is for a man separated from her, different from her, and that passion makes both her *and* him different—outcasts, in a sense, within their respective peoples: *ungelice is us*. Their song, never given a chance to be made one, will be (and in fact, already is) torn to pieces by the jealousies and hatreds of others. That poor whelp, which serves as a figure for their love,[10] will die in the woods, in the exile the poem describes in both physical and emotional terms. The speaker's "desire for Wulf," as Marilynn Desmond has argued, is "a desire not sanctioned by the social or legal structures of her culture, [and it] makes her an exile, an exile from herself as much as from her community."[11]

Despite the seeming clarity of their surfaces, however, much of the scholarship that surrounds these works (in a pattern of critical activity that has become all too familiar in recent decades[12]) very often dedicates itself to arguing away the passionate exclamations of love, desire, and longing each poem's female voice expresses. Desmond, with a certain arch yet deftly-targeted irony, presents the problem as one of "patriarchal sensibilities" and "phallic authority" exercised by "modern scholars and editors":

> *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, as anonymous, female-voiced lyrics, have occasionally disturbed the patriarchal sensibilities of modern scholars and editors, who have reacted with appropriate phallic authority by emending the texts and producing elaborate allegorical readings, thus silencing the female speakers of these two poems and erasing women from Anglo-Saxon literary history. These critics characteristically support such textual appropriations by their assumptions, sometimes only implicitly expressed, that within the structures of Anglo-Saxon culture women were essentially mute.[13]

But rather than leave such women merely "essentially" mute, why not take the necessary steps to mute them entirely? For instance, David Clark, though he notes that the suggestion is "somewhat tongue-in-cheek," holds out the possibility that "[t]he speaker is a young man

[...] imprisoned on an island and socially ostracized for engaging in a sexual relationship with another man,"[14] before he goes on to argue for "one further possible interpretation [...] namely, that [Wulf and Eadwacer] is a poem about love between two men and by a male speaker, but that the love described is not conceived of as sexual," and goes on to warn against "heterosexist assumptions" in reading either poem.[15] Note how comfortably such a seemingly radical gesture as Clark's (with its warnings about "heterosexist assumptions") supports the very "patriarchal sensibilities" that Desmond decries. In Clark's reading, the very possibility of a female voice is simply erased. Such silencing of the inconvenient or oppositional voice, whose perspectives and passions will simply not fit the paradigm du jour, is all too often the basic working method of literary scholarship.

Stanley Greenfield illustrates the same problem in a slightly different way: in writing about the critical reception of "Wulf and Eadwacer," he argues against those who would minimize or even erase the idea of love in the poem. He specifically opposes the idea (expressed by Dolores Frese, who cites it from David Daiches) that the "'intense, romantic passion' of a sexually tormented woman is a theme which [...] is 'quite uncharacteristic of Anglo-Saxon poetry as it has come down to us.'"[16] He then goes on to oppose Marijane Osborne's notion (borrowed from C. S. Lewis—one borrows from another who, in turn, borrowed from another, and thus the same arguments tend to get made again and again) that

> romantic or sexual love was not the literary commonplace before the twelfth century that it has been since; other loves took precedence [...] Our cultural assumption is that if someone in literature is longing for someone else, it is likely to be a case of romantic or erotic love. But this is not an assumption that an earlier audience would share."[17]

The arguments that Greenfield opposes are frequently made in a number of different areas, though their structures are generally quite similar: the basic claim is for an unbridgeable gap between whatever *now* the critic writes from, and whatever *then* the critic writes about. We are assured, by the all-knowing critic, that our assumptions about the literature of any given *then* are misinformed; beyond that, we are commanded to disregard, lest we be accused of naivete, even our own emotional responses—for we are authoritatively informed that the emotions of *now* bear little or no resemblance to the emotions (if any) of the *then* in question. Once this point is ceded, the critic now controls the argument with the reader, who has been made properly compliant.

Perhaps the most prominent of such critics is Paul Zumthor, who insists that modern readers have no way of relating—*as* human beings—to texts written *by* human beings who lived, moved, and had their being in a different time and place: "A first obvious piece of evidence becomes clear to our eyes: the remoteness of the Middle Ages, and the irrecoverable distance separates us [...]. Medieval poetry belongs to a universe that has become foreign to us."[18] For Zumthor:

> When a man of our century confronts a work of the twelfth century, the time that separates one from the other distorts, or even erases the relationship that ordinarily develops between the author and the reader through the mediation of the text: such a relationship can hardly be spoken of anymore. What indeed is a true reading, if not an effort that involves both the reader and the culture in which the reader participates, an effort corresponding to that textual production involving the author and his own universe? In respect to a medieval text, the correspondence no longer occurs spontaneously. The perception of form becomes ambiguous. Metaphors are darkened, comparisons no longer make sense. The reader remains embedded within his own time; while the text, through an effect produced by the passage of time, seems timeless, which is a contradictory situation.[19]

But this is tendentious at best, and always has been.[20] For example, Osborne's insistence that "romantic or sexual love was not [a] literary commonplace before the twelfth century"[21] will not hold up to even a cursory reading of Homer's treatment of Odysseus' longing for Penelope,[22] or Virgil's treatment of Dido's passion for Aeneas,[23] much less Musaeus' portrayal of Hero and Leander[24]—though some scholars, like Elaine Baruch, will dismiss much of this latter material by claiming that we can "discount the Greek romances [like *Hero and Leander*] as sources because their relationships are strictly physical, whereas romantic love glorifies the object spiritually as well as physically,"[25] thus revealing the fourteenth-century Petrarchan lenses through which she understands the entire concept of "romantic love." Note, especially, Baruch's use of the word *object* in her description of "romantic" love in poetry. By his time, Petrarch is on the receiving end of a two-century tradition of taking the female presence in poetry (as, for example, in the poetry of the Troubadour and Trobairitz poets of the 11th and 12th centuries) and transforming speaking and desiring *subjects* into spoken-of and desired *objects*. Italian poetry in this period (beginning with the early sonnets of Giacamo da Lentini like *Io m'aggio posto in core a Dio servire*, but especially evident in such works as Guido Guinizelli's *Al Cor Gentil* and Dante's *La Vita Nuova*) shifts its emphasis from a focus on the *here* to a focus on the *hereafter.* This is consistent with the kinds of anti-humanist discourse (found as far back as Plato in his attempted refutations of Protagoras in *Protagoras*, *Theaetetus*, and the *Laws*) that insists that the measure of all useful things (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον) is not humanity (ἄνθρωπος), but is to be found in the forms, or the divine itself. In this pre-Petrarchan and then Petrarchan poetry, the female *object* is never an end in herself (and never considered as a subject with desires of her own), but is treated as a step toward heaven, and the love of God, for the male poetic voice.[26]

As Greenfield points out, the critics with whom he contends are very careful to avoid any mention of the passionate (and therefore inconvenient) "Wife's Lament" in their arguments: "Particularly noticeable in both Frese's and Osborn's essays is the almost complete absence of reference to 'The Wife's Lament,' the poem most similar to 'Wulf and Eadwacer.'"[27] Greenfield goes on to maintain that it is "ill-advised to discredit as un-Anglo-Saxon a passionate situation for reading either" poem.[28]

However, what Miriam Muth refers to as the "authoritarian approach"[29] to literary criticism, will not be overcome quite so easily as calling it "ill-advised." In her view, "The Wife's Lament" represents a challenge to the prevailing orthodoxies of Anglo-Saxon scholarship, and so "the large majority of criticism [...] has either ignored, refuted, or reframed [...] the poem" likely because it "depicts a first person speaker who addresses her emotional response directly to the reader rather than placing her experiences in a social, ancestral, or didactic context."[30] The rewriting of this poem by the majority of its critics goes to the extent of displaying a near-total refusal to take it as it appears, a refusal which includes

> an unwillingness on the part of modern critics to contemplate a female narrator in the Anglo-Saxon corpus. Along with the enigmatic poem *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the *Lament* is one of only two surviving Anglo-Saxon poems featuring a female speaker. In this context, the poem appears to represent a voice that was already marginalized in the speaker's own society: that of a female exile. Instead of drawing this voice back into the center of critical debate, however, critics such as Benjamin Thorpe, Rudolph Bambas, and Jerome Mandel have chosen to query the text and suggest instead that the unexpected female speaker is the result of scribal or editorial errors. This theory is based on the assumption that the use of feminine grammatical endings in the text is the result of scribal error, implying a surprisingly systematic failure of the scribal copying process. First suggested by early editor Thorpe in 1842, the theory remains surprisingly current.[31]

As with the "authoritarian approach" to readings of the *Song of Songs*, so also, it seems, goes the "authoritarian approach" to Anglo-Saxon poetry. If the text does not comply with the pre-existing requirements of the critic (whether theological or ideological), then it is simply *forced* to submit:

> Take, for example, the argument of Rudolph C. Bambas. Bambas explains that according to Anglo-Saxon poetic conventions "the only matters worth celebrating in verse are the affairs of heroic war chiefs."[32] Operating under this assumption, he concludes that a female speaker is therefore a practical impossibility. Given the fact that so few Anglo-Saxon texts survive, Bambas's claim must be based directly on those scant and randomly selected texts still extant, making any generalizing conclusions somewhat tautological. In essence, Bambas's line of argument is that because so few texts with female speakers have survived, such texts did not exist, meaning that those texts that do exist are not rare examples of [a] less common form, but the results of scribal error. According to this logic, any unusual textual forms at all would be subsumed into the form and genre of the majority, despite that majority itself being based on a very small sample of works.[33]

Bambas' argument was supported, although from a different angle, by Martin Stevens, who argued that "the attribution of [The Wife's Lament] to a woman speaker on grammatical grounds is at best doubtful."[34] Though these views were soon enough strongly opposed by other scholars (especially by Angela M. Lucas[35]), and are certainly not universally held today, [36] the "authoritarian" argument *against* reading the voice of the poem as female has not gone away, having been exhumed by Jerome Mandel, who argues that "it is not necessary to view the speaker as a woman."[37] It is not necessary, despite the poem's repeated use of feminine word forms, presumably because Mandel's and Bambas' and Stevens' desire to see their own face in the glass that is "The Wife's Lament" drives their readings of the poem (and one can only wonder at the form their Calibanesque rage at *not* seeing their faces in that glass would take). As Muth puts it:

> the argument for a male speaker is so strained that it holds up an intriguing mirror to the masculinist face of twentieth century Anglo-Saxon scholarship, which goes to great lengths to portray the gender roles of the Anglo-Saxon world in its own image [as part of] a concerted effort to silence the tenth century speaker of the poem and to mold the multivalent text into hermeneutic unity.[38]

This phenomenon illustrates the core of the problem we confront when reading the works of those scholars, teachers, and critics charged with the eminently humanist task of the preservation, transmission, and interpretation of literary history and form: once committed to a particular point of view, all too many critics appear to be unable and/or unwilling to see in any other way (and the current author is not claiming immunity—this seems to be an inherent hazard of the profession). In this sense, *a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.* The critic interprets the text, violently, if necessary, in such a way that it can be fit into the Procrustean bed of his or her established intellectual, ideological, and theological commitments. Even critics who *seem* to want to resist this kind of authoritarianism, end up making gestures of submission in their own writing. For example, Claire Lees *seems* to want to argue for a recovery and recognition of a female voice in "The Wife's Lament," but ends up affirming the primacy of the male individual instead, trapped by the very language and conventions of her own analytical frame:

> if we are to read the elegies as one place in the poetry where the internal psychological state of the individual matters, then it follows that in Anglo-Saxon England that individual is male,

> even when, or perhaps especially when, that voice is universalized. Pertinent examples are the warrior voice of *The Wanderer*, and the peculiarly literal and metaphoric voice of *The Seafarer*. Located in the intersection between gender and genre, the female voice of, for example, *The Wife's Lament* has to be accommodated within, or abjected from, the conventions of the male.[39]

Sometimes, the stretching and cutting of texts to fit the "bed" of the critic's interpretive frame involves wholly denying one of the text's defining features—and in the aforementioned case of Bambas, that means arguing that the "female" voice of the poem is a mistake, and that if we learn to read the poem correctly, we will, of course, hear the actually *male* voice of the poem's speaker. As Muth observes, "[g]iven the absence of any recognizable masculine perspective in the poem, the one interpretation that is directly at odds with the text is that which would deny the speaker to be a female voice,"[40] which is precisely the interpretation the critic, Bambas, provides. In other cases, all that is required is to bury the poem under an avalanche of specialized vocabulary (called "jargon" by reprobate readers). For example, it is possible, in a discussion of the poem's powerful emotional content, to speak of emotion entirely without anything that even begins to resemble human feeling. The quality of mercy may, or may not, be strained, but in such instances, the quality of literary criticism is quite nearly strained beyond all recognition:

> This text invites empathetic engagement from its audience through emotional contagion, made possible through the combination of imagery produced in the mind in the process of making sense, and the embodied emotional response produced automatically while entertaining a recognisably affecting scenario created during that act of interpretation. In this brief comment, weeping, anguish, and longing are all foregrounded, and grief is represented as active, encompassing, and time-consuming. The reader is required to call up not only narrative schema, but also emotional schema, created from memories, personal experience, and embodied feeling, to fill out the sketchy scenario, make sense of the sequence of ideas, and account for a potential cause for such extreme abandonment to the emotional life. In doing so, the reader enacts feeling, which is implicated in cognitive processing, and thereby becomes emotionally engaged in the narrative. Because we now know that cognition and affect are mutually reliant, it is possible to see how a reader can respond emotionally to culturally remote, poetically communicated fictional narrative, a process that occurs at both the specific and general levels.[41]

By the time artificial intelligence software is writing literary criticism, it may very well sound something like this. In writing about the poetry of love from the perspective of cognitive psychology, some of our critics manage to seem as if they are visiting from an alien world, and perhaps too much is lost in the journey. As Jacques Derrida, a famously non-cybernetic and recognizably terrestrial thinker, once observed: "framing so violently, cutting off the narrated figure's own fourth side so as to see only triangles, one evades, perhaps, a certain complication,"[42] in this case, the complication of human life, and any sense of poetry's relation thereto.

If the text speaks of red, but the critic is committed to blue, the critic will manage to find that all of the text's references to red are actually coded references to blue. If the critic is dedicated to the idea, for example, that all Anglo-Saxon texts reflect *male* experience, that critic will find a way to take a text that *appears* to describe *female* experience and demonstrate that it has actually been describing male experience all along, then go on to explain how misguided we had all been ever to have thought otherwise. The emperor may be as naked as the day he was born, but the critic will describe in fabulous detail the fabric, texture, colors, and cut of the garment he or she is committed to seeing. And this approach is hardly restricted to the Anglo-Saxon era, but is alive and well in the criticism written about the works of every literary period that follows.

Muth makes a trenchant observation that shines a bright light on much contemporary anti-humanist and even authoritarian literary criticism: "For the modern reader, the real mystery is what lies at the root of the many desperate attempts by modern critics to reinterpret the poem's content."[43] These desperate attempts to reinterpret the content of poetry, what Gerson Cohen describes as an attempt to control both poetry *and* the lives and emotions of those who read it, have been with us at least since the days of the early Church father Origen and the first- and second-century (CE) Rabbi Akiba, for whom the *Song of Songs* had to be "rewritten" by reading it allegorically, because "if love could not be ignored, it could be channeled, reformulated, and controlled."[44] In case there was any doubt about the connection between theological readings that insist texts be "rewritten" to fit an approved template of meaning, and modern, supposedly "secular" literary criticism, Muth helpfully dispels that doubt: "[a]nother popular interpretation of ['The Wife's Lament'] has been based on Christian allegory, presenting the speaker as the mournful Christian Church longing to be reunited with her beloved Christ."[45] Rabbis, priests, and literary critics—though this might sound like the setup for a joke, it is, instead, a list of those with shared interpretive principles and techniques who use those tools to circumscribe the available readings of poetry, ensuring (or at least enforcing) the orthodoxy of those readers who fall within the purview of their respective authorities. While discussing the critical attempt to channel, reformulate, and control readings of "The Wife's Lament," Muth observes: "Given the amount of critical smoke obfuscating this short, 53-line poem, it is valid and necessary to ask: who started the fire and why did they do it?" She then goes on to note that "[t]his line of questioning brings the critical response to the poem into sharp focus, offering a revealing history of repressive reception."[46]

The question that finally arises is the one first made famous by the Russian author Nikolay Chernyshevsky in his 1863 novel, Что делать? [*What is to be done?*] What can oppose this kind of repressive reading practice? Perhaps this might be of some use: the kind of humanist, *humane and human-centered*, literary criticism that many scholars have been calling for since Eve Sedgewick's own call for reparative reading, which she envisioned as teaching "the many ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them."[47] As Vera Pavlovna sings near the beginning of Chernyshevsky's novel, Просветимся—и обогатимся [*Let Us Enlighten and Enrich Ourselves*]. The kind of reparative practice through which we might enlighten and enrich ourselves would advocate for *un*channeled, *un*reformulated, and most definitely *un*controlled (by that literary clergy for whom control always seems most urgent) readings of poetic and other literary expressions of love. Unfortunately, however, in pursuit of such a practice, there will be, at every turn, critics whose professional purpose seems to be, as Muth puts it, to generate "critical smoke," and for whom love must be defined reductively as a "convention" or a "literary commonplace," a result of exposure to "emotional contagion" or in one especially egregious case, as "a citation" of the perceived experiences of others.[48] Those on the reparative path will encounter eminent scholars who describe individual poets as "sick," [49] and others who would—if only they could—*literally* rather than merely *interpretively* rewrite the poems and other literary productions upon which they expound.[50] But this, perhaps, is an understandable side-effect of what Noam Chomsky once called "the self-selection for obedience that is [...] part of elite education."[51] It reflects—both in what was transmitted *to* and what is transmitted *by* the critic, the goals that Fichte, the German Idealist philosopher, once described for *der neuen Erziehung* (the new education):

> If you would have power over a man, you have to do more than merely address him; you must shape him, and shape him so that he cannot want otherwise than you would have him want.[52]

Such anti-humanist critics as we encounter, and often argue against, often seem unable or unwilling to see poetry as anything other than a self-referential system of conventions, tropes, and signs,

already dead on the page, irrelevant except for the urgent need felt by the critics to make sure that readers be trained to see as they see, and read as they read. *Obedience*, once self-selected, becomes the lens through which such critics read, and the pattern after which they would shape readers in their own image, so that they cannot want otherwise.

But along the way, perhaps we should remember the voice of the speaker of "The Wife's Lament," an unmistakably female voice

> that departs from the dutiful deference to God that shapes many other Anglo-Saxon poems, in order to show an altogether more vivid fragment of the brittle individuality forced upon someone excluded from [...] communal life, both as a woman and as an exile.[53]

We should also remember the desire and frustration expressed by the equally-unmistakably female voice in "Wulf and Eadwacer," where we cannot readily tell what the precise relationship is between the speaker and Wulf, and the speaker and Eadwacer, which can be literally translated as Property-Watcher, or Goods-Watcher, a dreary if entirely likely euphemism for "husband." For those on the reparative path, Eadwacer is a familiar enough type. Shari Horner argues that Eadwacer "in effect prohibits [the speaker's] expression of joy; he is the guardian [...] who tries to limit the possibility both of earthly love and of female creative expression,"[54] rather after the fashion of many critics of the poem itself.

The question, however, remains: is the speaker a married woman, involved in an affair with a warrior from another island? As Helene Scheck contends, if

> we take Wulf to be [...] a lover with whom she began a relationship after her marriage, [much of the poem suggests] her pleasure and guilt in continuing the affair, a possibility that finds parallels in the stereotype of the adulterous woman as presented in Old English literature, but may also be a genuine expression of the ambivalence and instability of adulterous love.[55]

If we read the voice that cries "Wulf! My Wulf!" in this way, then her complaint—"Pining for you / Makes me sick; your rare visits / Have starved me more than lack of meat"—becomes what is perhaps the first sympathetic portrayal of "the adulterous woman [...] in Old English literature," a positive presentation akin to that suggested by Audrey Meaney, who argues that the poem strongly emphasizes "that Wulf is unacceptable to [the speaker's] society, and that she herself offends society by loving him." And yet, here, a critic makes an all-too-rare life-and-love-affirming move, one that makes her analysis a sharp and vibrant contrast to much of the criticism that surrounds these elegies. As Meaney writes: "our sympathies are with her; and surely it is the Anglo-Saxon poet's recognition of the fact that powerful passion will not be constrained by the normal bonds of society that gives this poem its universal appeal."[56]

Life and love and longing are here, and they are real, despite the best efforts of societal law-givers and law-enforcers, and "the many desperate attempts"[57] of the critical re-writers and re-interpreters of poetry past and present. But as small a sample of these passions as we see in the *frauenlieder*, or female laments, of two Anglo-Saxon poems, they plant the seeds for traditions that follow, especially for the eleventh- and twelfth-century poetry of a group of Occitanian singers and poets we have long since learned to call the Troubadours.[58] From that combined Arabic, Spanish, and Occitanian root[59] springs the flowering orchard of so much of later poetry, from the German Minnesingers, to the Italian poets of the *dolce stil novo* (culminating in the works of Dante and Petrarch), to Shakespeare, the Romantics, the Wildean aesthetes, and the powerful works of modern authors like the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda[60] and the Syrian poet Nizār Qābbanī.[61] But even as we have seen poetry thrive, expressing that "powerful passion [that] will not be constrained by the normal bonds of society," so we have also seen—from the days of Origen

and Akiba until now—the anti-humanist attempts to channel, reformulate, and control it grow stronger, more systematic, and infinitely more destructive.[62] It is this systematic destruction, this ancient and ongoing attempt to control the minds and hearts of others, that a reformulated and more truly universal humanism should, and must, stand against.

Such a reformulated humanism is what Edward Said defined, late in his career, as that which "must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom."[63] Poetry is only a small part of that necessary struggle, but it is the battleground that contains all others—for it represents, as Plato feared, all of life in its blend of passions, failings, and (as Goethe describes it), eternal striving: *Es irrt der Mensch, solang er strebt*[64] [Man makes mistakes as long as he strives]. Such mistakes, and such relentless striving to overcome them have characterized the always-imperfect humanist project since Protagoras, and that unyielding human spirit will, one hopes, continue to oppose tyranny, domination, and abuse long into the future.

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Notes

1 Miriam Muth. "Delete as Appropriate: Writing Between the Lines of Female Orality in The Wife's Lament." *Women and Language: Essays on Gendered Communication across Media*. Edited by Melissa Ames and Sarah Himsel Burcon (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2011), 66.

2 Albert C. Baugh and Kemp Malone. *The Literary History of England: Vol 1: The Middle Ages (to 1500)* (London: Routledge, 1967), 91.

3 Muth. 64.

4 Stanley B. Greenfield. "'Wulf and Eadwacer': All Passion Pent." *Anglo-Saxon England*, Volume 15. Edited by Peter Clemoes, Simon Keynes, and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14.

5 Caesar Augustus sought, through legislation, to control the sexual mores and behaviors of his people. The *Lex Iulia de Maritandis Ordinibus* of 18 BCE restricted marriage between the social classes, and the *Lex Iulia de Adulteriis Coercendis* of the same year made adultery punishable by banishment. By the end of the first century CE, the *Song of Songs*, which had long been enjoyed as a *secular* love song, was redefined at the Council of Jamnia as an allegory of the love between Yahweh and his people, and thus rendered "safe" for inclusion into the developing Hebrew canon. See Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian. *Love and its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton's Eden* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017).

6 Two brief examples of this kind of censorious rewriting (drawn from the treatments of the *Song of Songs*) will suffice here to illustrate both the strenuous lengths to which such critics will go, and the antiquity of this critical tradition. Before looking at Origen's strained interpretation, let's look directly at the opening words of the young woman's song at 1:2. (All translations in this chapter are my own, and the Hebrew Biblical text is quoted here from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by Karl Elliger and Willhelm Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.):

יִשָּׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי־ טוֹבִים דֹּדֶיךָ מִיָּיִן׃
[Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for your loving is better than wine.]

For Origen, this is far too direct, erotic, and physical. So, in his hands, this is transformed into an allegory for the relationship between Christ (the Bridegroom) and the Church or the individual believer (the Bride):

> propter hoc ad te Patrem sponsi mei precem fundo et obsecro, ut tandem miseratus amorem meum mittas eum, ut iam non mihi per ministros suos angelos dumtaxat et prophetas loquatur, sed ipse per semet ipsum veniat et osculetur me ab osculis oris sui, verba scilicet in os meum sui oris infundat, ipsum audiam loquentem, ipsum videam docentem. Haec enim sunt Christi oscula quae porrexit ecclesiae, cum in adventu suo ipse praesens in carne positus locutus est ei verba fidei et caritas et pacis"
>
> (Origen. *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques. Vol 1. Texte de la Version Latine de Rufin*. Edited by Luc Bresard, Henri Crouzel, and Marcel Borret (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991), 180)
>
> [For this reason I beg you, Father of my spouse, pouring out this prayer that you will have pity for the sake of my love for him, so that not only will the angels and the prophets speak to me through his ministers, but that he will come, and "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" by his own self, that is, to pour his words into my mouth with his breath, that I might hear him speak, and see him teach. For these are the kisses of Christ, who offered them to the Church when at his coming, he made himself present in the flesh, and spoke the words of faith and love and peace.]

For later Hebrew readers of the *Song of Songs*, such as the writers and compilers of the *Babylonian Talmud*, the sensuality therein posed a similar dilemma, which they solved in a similar way, by interpreting various sensual/erotic details as references to the Sanhedrin, the judicial body appointed in each Israelite city:

> שררך אגן הסהר אל יחסר המזג וגו' שררך - זו סנהדרי [...] בטנך ערימת חטים מה ערימת חטים הכל נהנין ממנה אף סנהדרין הכל נהנין מטעמיהן
>
> ("Tractate Sanhedrin." *Hebrew English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*. Edited by Rabbi Isidore Epstein (London: Socino Press, 1969), 37a))

[Your navel is like a round goblet which lacks no wine: that navel—that is the Sanhedrin [...] Your belly is like a heap of wheat [*Song of Songs* 7:2]: even as we profit from wheat, so also we profit from the Sanhedrin's reasonings.]

For a more in-depth discussion of this tradition of critical rewriting of the *Song of Songs*, see Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian, *Love and its Critics* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017), 37–57.

7 Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,
minre sylfre sð. ic þæt secgan mæg
hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox,
niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.
A ic wite wonn minra wræcsiþa.
ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum
ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare
hwær min leodfruma londes wære.
ða ic me feran gewat folgað secan,
wineleas wræcca for minre weaþearfe.
ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan
þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc,
pæt wit gewidost in woruldrice
lifdon laðlicost; ond mec longade.
het mec hlaford min her heard niman;
ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede,
holdra freonda; forþon is min hyge geomor.
ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde,
heardsæligne, hygegomorne,
mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne,

bliþe gebæro. ful oft wit beotedan
pæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana,
owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
is nu swa hit no wære
freondscipe uncer. sceal ic feor ge neah
mines felalcofan fæhðu dreogan.
Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe,
under actreo in þam eorðscræfe.
eald is þes eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad;
sindon dena dimme, duna uphea,
bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxne,
wic wynna leas ful oft mec her wraþe begeat
fromsiþ frean. frynd sind on eorþan,
leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,
þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
Þær ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg,
þær ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas,
earfoþa fela; forþon ic æfre ne mæg
þære modceare minre gerestan
ne ealles þæs longaþes þe mec on þissum life begeat.

a scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
heard heortan geþoht; swylce habban sceal
bliþe gebaro eac þon breostceare,
sinsorgna gedreag; sy æt him sylfum gelong
eal his worulde wyn. sy ful wide fh
feorres folclondes þæt min freond siteð
under stanhliþe storme behrimed,
wine werigmod, wætre beflowen
on dreorsele, drogeð se min wine
micle modceare; he gemon to oft

wynlicran wic. wa bið þam þe sceal
of langoþe leofes abidan.

("The Wife's Lament." *The Exeter Book*, Part II. Edited by W. S. Mackie (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 152, 154.)

8 As Muth remarks, "the speaker's use of female adjectival and pronomial endings in phrases of self-description [...] leaves no doubt that she is a woman" (Muth, 64).

9 Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife;
willað hy hine aþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð.
ungelic is us.
wulf is on iege ic on oþerre.
fæst is þæt eglond fenne biworpen
sindon wælreowe weras þær on ige;
willað hy hine aþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð
ungelice is us.
wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum hogode;
þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt.
þonne mec se beaducafa bogum bilegde,
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað.
wulf min wulf wena me þine
seoce gedydon þine seldcymas
murnende mod nales meteliste
gehyrest þu, eadwacer uncerne earne hwelp
bireð wulf to wuda
þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs
uncer giedd geador.

("Wulf and Eadwacer." *The Exeter Book*, Part II. Edited by W.S. Mackie (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 86.)

10 Greenfield, 12–13.

11 Marilynn Desmond. "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy." *Critical Inquiry* 16. Spring 1990, 587.

12 For an in-depth discussion of this pattern, based in what Paul Ricoeur has called the hermeneutics of suspicion (*les herméneutiques du soupçon*), see Bryson and Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, 10–22. See also Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

13 Desmond, 574.

14 David Clark. *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.

15 Ibid., 31.

16 Greenfield, 7.

17 Ibid.

18 "Une première évidence éclate aux yeux: l'éloignement du moyen âge, la distance irrécupérable qui nous en sépare [...] la poésie médiévale relève d'un univers qui nous est devenu étranger" (Paul Zumthor. *Essai de Poétique Médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 19).

19 "Lorsqu'un homme de notre siècle affronte une œuvre du XIIe siècle, la durée qui les sépare l'un de l'autre dénature jusqu'à l'effacer la relation qui, ordinairement, s'établit entre l'auteur et le lecteur par la médiation du texte: c'est à peine si l'on peut parler encore de relation. Qu'est-ce en effet qu'un lecture vraie, sinon un travail où se trouvent à la fois impliqués le lecteur et la culture à laquelle il participe? Travail correspondant à celui qui produsuit le texte et où furent impliqués le auteur et son propre univers. A l'égard d'un texte médiéval, la correspndance ne se produit plus spontanément. La perception même de la forme devient équivoque. Les métaphores s'obscurcissent, le comparant s'écarte du comparé. Le lecteur reste engagé dans son temps; le texte, par un effet tenant à l'accumulation des durées intermédiaires, apparaît comme hors du temps, ce qui est une situation contradictoire" (Ibid., 20).

20 The source of this argument is the now-infamous thesis of Jacob Burckhardt, who argues that we cannot understand people who lived in the Middle Ages because they understood themselves in a way that is unfamiliar to us today, not as individuals who may be part of a whole, but *strictly as pieces of that larger whole*:

> Im Mittelalter lagen die beiden Seiten des Bewußtseins—nach der Welt hin und nach dem Innern des Menschen selbst—wie unter einem gemeinsamen Schleier träumend oder halbwach. Der Schleier war gewoben aus Glauben, Kindesbefangenheit und Wahn; durch ihn hindurch gesehen erschienen

Welt und Geschichte wundersam gefärbt, der Mensch aber erkannte sich nur als Race, Volk, Partei, Corporation. Familie oder sonst in irgend einer Form des Allgemeinen.

[In the Middle Ages the two sides of consciousness—that turned toward the world and that turned toward the inner self of man—were dreaming or half awake under a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, childish partiality, and delusion, through which the world and its history appeared in miraculous hues, but Man recognized himself only as a race, a people, a party, a corporation, a family, or otherwise in any general or common form.]

(Jacob Burckhardt. Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch
[The Culture of the Renaissance in Italy: An Essay]
(Basel: Schweighauser, 1860), 131.)

One wonders, perhaps, at how Peter Abelard and Heloise D'Argenteuil would have reacted to being described in such a way, much less such figures as Guilhem de Poitou, Bertran de Born, or Dante Alighieri (or the Francesca de Rimini the latter poet so famously describes in his *Inferno*). Though it has not always gone by the same name, the anti-humanist (even *anti-human*) trend in scholarship has deep roots.

21 Marijane Osborne. "The Text and Context of Wulf and Eadwacer." *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*. Edited by Martin B. Green (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 183–184.

22 Odysseus, when offered immortality by Calypso, can think only of return to Penelope, whom the goddess describes as "σὴν ἄλοχον, τῆς τ᾽ αἰὲν ἐέλδεαι ἤματα πάντα" [Your wife, she that you ever long for daily, in every way.] Homer. *Odyssey*, 5.210. Volume I, Books 1–12. Edited by A.T. Murray (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1919). Their reunion in the *Odyssey* is among the most romantic stories ever told in any language anywhere, and the poem is not shy about narrating the passionate and sexual element of that reunited love.

23 Dido *begs* Aeneas (her *romantic and sexual* lover) not to leave her:

mene fugis? per ego has lacrimas dextramque tuam te
(quando aliud mihi iam miserae nihil ipsa reliqui),
per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos,
si bene quid de te merui, fuit aut tibi quicquam
dulce meum, miserere domus labentis et istam,
oro, si quis adhuc precibus locus, exue mentem

(*The Aeneid*. 4.314–19. In *Virgil*, 2 vols. Edited by H. Rushton Fairclough.
Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960))

You're running from me? By these tears and by your hand,
(since there is nothing else for my miserable self),
through our marriage, by the way our wedding took place,
if I have deserved well of you, or if there was anything
sweet about me, have mercy on a falling house, and yet,
I pray you, if there is room for prayers, change your mind.

24 Hero, on learning of the death of Leander (her *romantic and sexual* lover), commits suicide:

ῥοιζηδὸν προκάρηνος ἀπ᾽ ἠλιβάτου πέσε πύργου.
κὰδ δ᾽ Ἠρὼ1 τέθνηκε σὺν ὀλλυμένῳ παρακοίτῃ,
ἀλλήλων δ᾽ ἀπόναντο καὶ ἐν πυμάτῳ περ ὀλέθρῳ

(Musaeus. *Hero and Leander*. Edited by Thomas Gelzer
(Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University
Press, 1973), ll.341–43)

with a rushing sound, she fell head-first from her high tower.
Hero died next to her dead husband,
and at last in death, each had joy in the other.

25 Elaine Baruch. *Women, Love, and Power: Literary and Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (New York: NYU Press, 1991), 27.

26 For a full discussion of the transition in poetry from the early Sicilian poets, through the *dolce stil novo* school, to Dante and Petrarch, see Bryson and Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, 300–330.

27 Greenfield, 8.

28 Ibid., 9.

29 Muth, 62.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 64.
32 Rudolph C. Bambas, "Another View of the Old English Wife's Lament." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 62 (1963): 303.
33 Muth, 65.
34 Martin Stevens. "The Narrator of The Wife's Lament," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 69. (March 1968), 73.
35 Angela M. Lucas. "The Narrator of The Wife's Lament Reconsidered." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (June 1969): 282–297. For Lucas, "the interpretation which maintains that the narrator is a woman need not hinge entirely on the [feminine] grammar of the first two lines, and there are undercurrents of tone and emphasis in the poem which lead one towards understanding it as the lament of a woman separated from the man she loves" (282).
36 As Shari Horner argues, "most critics now agree that the speaker is a woman" (*The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 49), and "[r]ecent feminist studies of the elegy have [...] put to rest earlier theories that the speaker is male" (62, n. 57). Along similar lines, Patricia A. Belanoff notes that "Kemp Malone [has] argued that our two Old English poems were the Germanic representatives of an international genre of women's songs designated by their German name, *frauenlieder*" ("Women's Songs, Women's Language: Wulf and Eadwacer and The Wife's Lament." *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. Edited by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 193), and argues, based on the work of Cixous, Irigiray, and Kristeva, that "the language of the *Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* [...] is different because the poem's are women's songs, a genre which inevitably entails a differentness of language" (194).
37 Jerome Mandel. *Alternative Readings in Old English Poetry* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 154.
38 Muth, 73.
39 Clare A. Lees. "At a Crossroads: Old English and Feminist Criticism." In *Reading Old English Texts*. Edited by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 157.
40 Muth, 72–73.
41 Antonina Harbus. "Affective Poetics: The Cognitive Basis of Emotion in Old English Poetry." In *Anglo Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*. Edited by Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 30.
42 "[E]n cadrant aussi violemment, en coupant la figure narrée elle-même d'un quatrième côté pour n'y voir que des triangles, on élude peut-être une certaine complication" Jacques Derrida, "Le Facteur de La Vérité." *Poetique* 21 (1975), 108.
43 Muth, 68.
44 Gerson Cohen. "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality," *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 14.
45 Muth, 64. On the idea of reading "The Wife's Lament" as Christian allegory, see M. J. Swanton, "The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message: A Reconsideration," *Anglia* 82 (1964), 269–290; W. F. Bolton, "The Wife's Lament and the Husband's Message: A Reconsideration Revisited," *Archiv* 205 (1968), 337–351.
46 Ibid., 68–69.
47 Eve Sedgewick. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 150–151.
48 Citing Jonathan Culler's work *On Deconstruction* as his authority, Stone delivers what he fancies is the death blow to the idea of love in poetry: "Saying 'I love you,' that is, is always a convention, a citation; it does not so much distinguish an individual as it makes him resemble everyone else." Gregory B. Stone. *The Death of the Troubadour: The Late Medieval Resistance to the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 7–8.
49 Stanley Fish is on record as regarding the English poet John Donne's work as "sick," and the poet himself as equally "sick," someone who can be read only through "the pleasures of diagnosis." Stanley Fish. "Masculine Persuasive Force: Donne and Verbal Power." In *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*. Edited by Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 223.
50 Easily the most famous example of this is Paul de Man, who in his work *Allegories of Reading* (1979), rewrote (by the simple insertion of *ne*) a passage from Rousseau's *Confessions*. As first pointed out by Ortwin de Graef, de Man "adds a negation to Rousseau's sentence, as if this did not make a difference, as if one was entitled to do so on the basis of the main clause" ("Silence to be Observed: A Trial for Paul de Man's Inexcusable Confessions." In *(Dis)continuities: Essays on Paul de Man*. Edited by Luc Herman, Kris Humbeeck, and Geert Lernout (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), 61). As Marc Redfield later notes, "de

Man manipulates the quotation" ("Mistake in Paul de Man: Violent Reading and Theotropic Violence." In *The Political Archive of Paul de Man: Property, Sovereignty and the Theotropic*, edited by Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 111). Rousseau's original runs thusly:

> Mais je ne remplirois pas le but de ce livre si je n'exposois en même tems mes dispositions intérieures, & que je craignisse de m'excuser en ce qui est conforme à la vérité.
>
> (Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Les Confessions*, Vol. 1. (Lausaunne: Francois Grasset, 1782), 151).

> But I would not fulfill the purpose of this book if I did not expose at the same time my internal dispositions, and if I feared to excuse myself for what conforms to the truth.

But de Man renders the second part of Rousseau's sentence as "que je [ne] craignisse de m'*excuser* en ce qui est conforme à la vérité" (*Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 280), which he translates as "if I did not fear to *excuse* myself by means of what conforms to the truth," creating a statement whose significance is precisely the *opposite* of that found in the plain meaning of the text. Even Jacques Derrida was famously vexed by de Man's willful rewriting of Rousseau's text, asking: "Why does he cut the sentence, mutilating it or dismembering it in this way and in such an arbitrary fashion?" before concluding that de Man's mistranslation "risks making the text say exactly the opposite of what its grammar [...] says, namely that Rousseau does not fear, he does not want to fear, he does not want to fear to have to excuse himself" ("Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) ('Within Such Limits')." *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf, edited by Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller, and Andrzej Warminski. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 311, 338–339). As we will see throughout this book, though the techniques will differ (as most will not resort to actual textual emendation), such rewritings of texts by critics have long since become commonplace.

51 Noam Chomsky. Online discussion that took place on LBBS, Z-Magazine's Left On-Line Bulletin Board. Posted at rec.arts.books, November 13, 1995 03:21:23. Accessible at http://bactra.org/chomsky-on-postmodernism.html.

52 "Willst du etwas über ihn vermögen, so mußt du mehr tun, als ihn blos anreden, du mußt ihn machen, ihn also machen, das er gar nicht anders wollen könne, als du willst, das er wolle." Johann Gottlieb Fichte. *Johann Gottlieb Fichte: Fichtes Reden an die Deutsche Nation*. Edited by Samantha Nietz (Hamburg: Severus, 2013), 32. Fichte's idea is reflected in Spivak's fairly recent description of Humanities education as an "uncoercive rearrangement of desires" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Righting Wrongs." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2004), 526). The "uncoercive" nature of such "rearrangement" is perhaps best attested to by the experience of one of my colleagues who had the occasion to observe a discussion of this idea in a group of Ph.D. students. One student in the group noted the possibility that such "uncoercive rearrangement" might merely be a covert form of coercion. *Every other student in the group* condemned that idea, and the discussion was quickly dropped.

53 Muth, 73.

54 *The Discourse of Enclosure*, 46.

55 Helene Scheck. "Seductive Voices: Rethinking Female Subjectivities in The Wife's Lament and Wulf and Eadwacer." *Literature Compass* 5, no. 2 (2008), 224.

56 Audrey L. Meaney. "The Ides of the Cotton Gnomic Poem." *Medium Ævum* 48, no. 1 (1979), 36.

57 Muth, 68.

58 For a discussion of these poets in their context, see Bryson and Movsesian, *Love and its Critics*, Chapter 4.

59 For the Arabic influence on Troubadour (and thus most of Western) poetry, see Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

60 Neruda's poem, "Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche" [I can write the saddest verses tonight], from his 1924 collection *Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Canción Desesperada* [Twenty Poems of Love and a Song of Despair], is among the most powerful modern laments that stands in the tradition of the old Anglo-Saxon elegies.

61 Qābbanī, whose work was harshly condemned by the authorities of his time and place, was an inspiration to younger readers trying to find a place for their own humanity amidst the antihumanism of clerical authority:

> His pointed criticism of the social milieu was directed at the relationship between the sexes in particular. His [...] rejection of the blunt misogynist attitudes which left the Arab woman under the constant scrutiny of patriarchal canons [informed his call] to liberate the body from sexual repression and more specifically, to allow the Arab woman to cherish her erotic ecstasy openly and freely. Controversy erupted instantly: Sheikh al-Tantāwī characterized the poems as "blasphemous and

stupid," while young Syrian readers treated the collection as a kind of manifesto of their culturally suppressed sexuality.

("'Only Women and Writing Can Save Us From Death': Erotic Empowering in the Poetry of Nizār Qābbanī." In *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, ed. by Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 141.)

62 One major common thread between figures as chronologically far removed from one another as Plato (whose Socrates argues for the banishment of poetry and poets in the *Republic*) and many modern critics (whether Marxist, feminist, new-historicist, post-humanist, anti-humanist, or otherwise), is the idea that art should be (must be) approached solely through a political/theoretical agenda. A poem (or a painting, for that matter) seems now to exist primarily as a site of contention, an arena of combat between warring ideologies, a proving ground for various sorts of muscular (and non-aesthetic) criticisms to contend for yet one more "victory" over largely imaginary opponents. As the Mexican art critic Avelina Lésper notes, art and art criticism have reached the point that "Una obra se legitima con una cita de Adorno, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Benjamin. Las obras existen por el discurso teórico y curatorial, negando el razonamiento lógico" [A work is legitimized by citations of Adorno, Baudrillard, Deleuze, or Benjamin. The works exist for a theoretical and curatorial discourse, denying all logical reasoning.] (*El fraude del arte contemporáneo* [*The Fraud of Contemporary Art*] (Bogotá: Libros Malpensante, 2015), 18). In the more extreme case of Leon Trotsky, for example, the argument is that all art is inherently political, *and in fact must be a servant to the politics of its day*: "Споры о «чистом искусстве» и об искусстве направленческом [...] Нам они не к лицу. Материалистическая диалектика выше этого: для нее искусство, под углом зрения объективного исторического процесса, всегда общественнослужебно, исторически-утилитарно" [disputes about "pure art" and directed (political) art [...] do not suit us. The materialist dialectic is higher than this: for her art, from the perspective of an objective historical process, is always a public servant, historically utilitarian.] (Литература и революция [*Literature and Revolution*] (Moscow: Политиздат [Politizdat], 1991), 134). But as Leo Tolstoy contends, art is perhaps the ultimate *humanist* endeavor, an attempt to bring human beings into communion across borders of time, space, and language:

> искусство есть одно из средств общения людей между собой. Всякое произведение искусства делает то, что воспринимающий вступает в известного рода общение с производившим или производящим искусство и со всеми теми, которые одновременно с ним, прежде или после его восприняли или воспримут то же художественное впечатление.
>
> [Art is one of the means of communication between people. Every work of art causes the perceiver to enter into a certain kind of communication with the one who produced or is producing the art, and with all those who, simultaneously with him, before or after him, have perceived or will perceive the same artistic impression.]
>
> (*Что такое искусство?* [*What is Art?*], Л. Н. Толстой [L. N. Tolstoy], Собрание сочинений в 22 томах [Complete Works in 22 volumes]. *Russian Virtual Library* 15, 78). https://rvb.ru/tolstoy/01text/vol_15/01text/0327.htm

Unfortunately, it seems that Trotsky is more contemporary than Tolstoy where the criticism surrounding art and poetry is concerned. What Neema Parvini has referred to as "an incredibly dangerous [...] and above all anti-human way of thinking" ("Rejecting Progress in the Name of 'Cultural Appropriation.'" *Quillette*, August 22, 2018. http://quillette.com/2018/08/22/rejecting-progress-in-the-name-of-cultural-appropriation/) is—and has been since Plato—the form of thinking that has been most determined to reduce poetry to ideology and most opposed to the expansions of human possibility, even when that opposition comes in the form of seemingly liberal and liberatory rhetoric.

63 Edward Said. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 29.

64 Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe. *Faust* (Munich: Wilhelm Goldman Verlag, 1978), l.317.