



PROJECT MUSE®

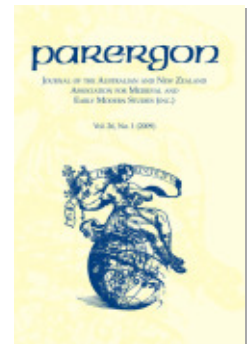
Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West (review)

Genevieve Young

Parergon, Volume 26, Number 1, 2009, pp. 280-283 (Review)

Published by Australian and New Zealand Association of Medieval and
Early Modern Studies (Inc.)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.0.0139>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/362899>

Montague [bishop of Norwich] reused some of the arguments that we identified in the [John] Feckenham–[Richard] Horne controversy. And while they were doing so, they were taking positions that were profoundly controversial within their own churches’ (p. 224).

This book offers a Catholic prequel to the standard religious history of the second quarter of the seventeenth century. Tutino demonstrates that the remnants of Catholicism (theology and practice) in its many forms evolved from the Elizabethan Church Settlement onwards, and proved both significant and influential. The topic remains worthy of analysis in order to gain an integrated understanding of the early modern religious history of England.

Dolly MacKinnon
School of Historical Studies & Faculty of Music
University of Melbourne

Tyler, Elizabeth M. and Ross **Balzaretti**, eds, *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 16), Turnhout, Brepols, 2006; hardback; pp. x, 265; R.R.P. €80.00; ISBN 9782503518282.

This is a valuable collection of conference papers examining texts from Italy, Francia, Scandinavia and England between the seventh and twelfth centuries, originally delivered at medieval congresses during 1999. The editors chose to forgo an introductory outline of chapters in favour of an explanation of key terminology. This introduction will help orientate readers who are more comfortable in either a History or an English department. Historians’ fears especially may be allayed as the editors stress that while form is paramount, the ‘linguistic mediation of history’ is a way to consider the past; a way to contemplate ‘real people’ (p. 3). The introductory emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration is reflected throughout particularly in contributions that grapple with the historical and literary approaches to particular texts (see especially Pizarro and Tyler). The introduction does not draw specific connections between chapters but hints at the overarching aims and structure of the book. The chapters are arranged to foreground form over other organising principles; to juxtapose contributions that deal with texts often not understood as history-writing (p. 3).

The role of narrative in legitimising and authenticating particular representations of the past emerges in each of the first three chapters concerning

documentary texts. Ross Balzaretti's 'Spoken Narratives in Ninth-Century Milanese Court Records' briefly considers historians' attitudes to written evidence, oral history and narrative before comparing and contrasting spoken narratives in judicial proceedings and Andrew Bergamo's *Historia*. Balzaretti challenges his reader to reflect on the relationship between reported speech in 'documentary' and 'literary' texts. A stimulating aspect of this chapter is its several allusions to intersections between the study of spoken narrative in judicial proceedings and other areas of study, for instance the recovery of peasants' spoken narrative (p. 27).

Sarah Foot's 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters' considers performance, time and embedded narratives in the process of establishing individual charters as historical narratives. Foot draws attention to the opposite relationship between memory and history, whether history is concerned with preserving the past or preserving a version of that past.

Julia Barrow's chapter 'William of Malmesbury's Use of Charters' is focussed on the 'theme of narrative' not the 'identification of forgeries' (p. 69). Nevertheless, William of Malmesbury's knowing exploitation of forged charters is contemplated as Barrow considers authenticity and the desire to entertain among other reasons for the inclusion of forged, or even the forging of, documents.

Two subsequent chapters concern chronicles, which like documentary texts occupy a problematic niche in historical study. Joaquín Martínez Pizarro's immediate subject in 'Mixed Modes in Historical Narrative' is the lack of surviving fiction from the Middle Ages as he explains the literary scholar's interest in medieval historiography as the only extant source of 'narrative devices and styles and their evolution' (p. 92). Pizarro considers the incorporation of discordant narrative elements in the chronicles of Marcellinus and Fredegar, drawing attention to their evolution in the latter. Pizarro raises for discussion the relationship between examples of scenic narrative in the chronicles, popular legend and late antique romance; and the role of the latter as model or source.

Stuart Airlie's 'Sad Stories of the Death of Kings' contextualizes the *Chronicle of Prüm* and its author in part one as background to his particular reading of the text in part two. Airlie's interpretation of the chronicle focuses on the entry for 888, or rather the meaning attached to the events of this year by Regino and its pervasive impact on the representation of particular episodes but also the structure of the history.

Nick Everett's 'Narrating the Life of Eusebius of Vercelli' and Elaine Treharne's 'Ælfric's Life of St Swithun' consider how hagiography has been approached by scholars as a less than straightforward historical source and the possibilities it presents for studying the past. Everett attempts to redress the neglect which the only surviving hagiographic text about Eusebius of Vercelli has endured at the hands of historians willing to mine its contents for historical data while dismissing the *vita* itself as a 'corrupt construction of the past' (p. 135). In this respect Everett finds common ground with the *vita's* anonymous author. He demonstrates the hagiographer's efforts to rehabilitate the Bishop of Vercelli, whose defence of orthodoxy was subordinated in earlier histories to other leading figures like Hilary of Poitiers. Treharne clearly demonstrates her initial observation that the study of individual texts or groups of texts within their 'textual and cultural context' may reveal the potential of a hagiographical text to become a 'historical narrative' capable of conveying the 'concerns' of the time (pp. 168-9). She attests to this process by considering the relationship between Ælfric the hagiographer, his account of the ninth-century monk St Swithun, and the Benedictine reform movement of the tenth century.

Catherine Cubitt's 'Folklore and Historiography' considers hagiographical texts but her specific interest is in oral tradition, a subject touched on by earlier contributors (e.g. Balzaretto, Airlie). Cubitt's purpose is to 'examine some of the evidence for popular oral stories in Anglo-Saxon England' and 'to explore reasons why this material has been neglected' (p. 190). She examines evidence of oral stories in three Anglo-Saxon Latin hagiographical texts (*Vita et Miracula sancti Kenelmi*, *Passio Eadmundi*, *Vita sancti Ecgwini*) summarising their contents and highlighting motifs that seemingly derive from or are modelled on oral stories. With great respect for pioneering scholars who largely ignored oral tradition, Cubitt concludes with a fascinating and detailed account of modern Anglo-Saxon scholarship assessing why such an important avenue into Anglo-Saxon culture was, until recently, overlooked.

Elizabeth Tyler's 'Poetics and the Past' clearly bridges the gap between the study of form and 'real people' in her discussion of the 'language of treasure' in Old English Verse and more specifically *The Battle of Maldon*. This chapter's study of form and content demonstrates the contemporaneity of 'timeless poetic convention' but also the way 'form and style' may inform modern scholars about 'late Anglo-Saxon society's relationship with the past' (pp. 225-7).

Judith Jesch, meanwhile, utilizes narratological techniques to explore 'The Meaning of the Narrative Moment' in two related texts; an anecdote describing

the context of a praise poem performed before Óláfr Haraldsson and the reconstructed poem itself. Jesch seeks to establish that the reconstructed poem *Hofuðlausn* can be studied as a narrative, why such a mode was adopted and its relationship to the historiographical aims of praise poetry.

From the perspective of this reviewer, more historian than literary scholar, this is an accessible collection of papers that help bridge the methodological gap, real or perceived, between disciplines. Judith Jesch alone identifies connections between her own and other contributions (Airlie and Foot). This offers insight into how contributors, who experienced the collaborative environment of the conference so vividly described in the preface, thought their work related to other contributors. Additional efforts to demonstrate the chapters' interrelatedness would not have been in vain. Still, read in concert, the different contributions are complementary. Together they provoke reflection on the permeable generic boundaries between different historical texts, between 'conventional' histories and documentary texts, between oral and written, fiction and non-fiction.

Genevieve Young
Faculty of Arts
Department of Ancient History
Macquarie University

Tyrwhit, Elizabeth, *Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Morning and Evening Prayers* (The Early Modern Englishwoman 1500-1750: Contemporary Editions), Susan M. **Felch**, ed., Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; hardback; pp. 216; 2 b/w illustrations, 3 figures; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN 9780754606611.

This critical edition presents the two versions of Elizabeth Tyrwhit's *Morning and Evening Prayers* to appear in print in the sixteenth century. First printed in 1574, Tyrwhit's prayer book was then included in a longer version, differently arranged, in Thomas Bentley's large compilation of devotional material, *The Monument of Matrones*, in 1582. Susan M. Felch prints both versions separately in her edition, allowing access to the full range of Tyrwhit's prayers and valuable comparison between their arrangements in the two Early Modern printed versions.

Elizabeth Tyrwhit served as a lady of the Privy Chamber for Queen Katherine Parr during the final years of Henry VIII's reign. She was a vital member of 'Parr's evangelical circle' (p. 5), at the vanguard of Lutheran-