5 Becoming postSaxon, or, a Biochemical Vita Ælfredi

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Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts, postSaxon Futures.

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The previous chapter began with a discussion of Susan Reynolds’s ‘What Do We Mean When We Say “Anglo-Saxon”?’, which explored the initial attestations of this compound in the political language of King Alfred. Discussing Reynolds enabled Chapter 4 to argue that ‘Anglo-Saxon’ was invoked by Alfred to claim sovereignty over his political subjects. However, it was not until much later that the compound became vested in a political theology of sovereignty, to which Benjamin Thorpe, the nineteenth-century’s first Anglo-Saxonist, was professionally and ontologically bound. Thorpe’s writings express the emergence of an Anglo-Saxonist ‘being,’ a state of mind that is devoted to (and inhabited by) a racial-colonial Anglo-Saxon sovereign. While Reynolds’s essay provides an important starting point for considering the development of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ it likewise meditates upon the continued scholarly devotion to this Anglo-Saxon sovereign. Consequently, this chapter returns to a different moment in ‘What Do We Mean When We Say “Anglo-Saxon”?’ in order to consider the racial-colonial politics that keep scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ‘being’ Anglo-Saxonists.

After tracing the ninth-century etymology of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ Reynolds quotes its definition in the first 1844 edition of the Ox-
Ford English Dictionary (OED) by James Murray. The adjective ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is a ‘collective name’ that is not only ‘extended to the entire Old English people and language’ prior to 1100 but also stands in for contemporary ‘English’ peoples ‘who are of Teutonic descent…whether subjects of Great Britain or of the United States.’ Murray’s definition, as quoted by Reynolds, invokes ‘Anglo-Saxon’ as a ‘collective’ adjective that is set upon ‘extension:’ from body to voice, past to present, Britain to America. It manages the perceived relationship between racial origins, national unification, and political destiny in the Victorian period. As a term of expansion, the OED’s ‘Anglo-Saxon’ becomes an all-encompassing expression that ‘subjects’ the entirety of a person — mind and body — within its semantic domain. Indeed, as Chapter 4 argued, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ suggests itself to be a signifier marked by a sovereign.

Upon quoting Murray, Reynolds’s essay draws connections between its ninth- and nineteenth-century uses, and she cautiously writes that ‘right through the “Anglo-Saxon period,” therefore, the term “Anglo-Saxon” invites us to beg questions and confuse our own ideas with those of the period we study.’ In other words, Reynolds surmises that whether or not Alfred’s ninth century offers a premonition of the nineteenth, what matters is that we are ‘invited’ to be caught up in the semantic orbit of ‘Anglo-Saxon.’ Such an assessment asks us to consider, very carefully, not simply the word’s expansionist enterprise or its ethnopolitical and raciolinguistic aspirations during ninth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, but, moreover, the sovereign disposition of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ upon which the field of Anglo-Saxon studies continues to turn.

Yet as soon as Reynolds articulates the ‘questions’ and ‘confusions’ ‘invited’ by the semantics of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ — as

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2 Reynolds, ‘What Do We Mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”?’ 396.
3 Ibid., 414.
soon as she points towards the risks that we run by using terminologies that locate late-twentieth-century scholarship within the trans-temporal orbit of the ninth and nineteenth centuries—Reynolds follows up with a conclusion that prohibits pause, short-circuits contemplation, and reveals its continued sovereign status. ‘It would be overpresumptuous,’ she writes, ‘to attempt to stop the terminological world of historians—let alone of the general public—and try to get off.’ Although ‘Anglo-Saxon’ shows itself to be a signifier that is fundamentally troubled at both temporal ends (in Alfred’s early medieval moment and in our own contemporary one), Reynolds’s study of it leads to questions and confusions but not reflection. Although her essay shows the ethnopolitical impetus behind the compound Anglo-Saxon, which, in the nineteenth century, becomes racialized and nationalized, Reynolds, herself, begs her readers not ‘to stop’ using it and not ‘to get off’ the academic merry-go-round that keeps this term in circulation.

Reynold’s position can, perhaps, be understood in its political and academic context. In 1980, Rhodesia, Britain’s final colony, achieved independence after 14 years of conflict, to which The Guardian stated, ‘Britain is no longer a colonial power.’ In 1982, Britain attempted to assert its claims against Argentina in the Falkland’s War, a failure that has been considered the last action of its Empire. And, in 1983, the constitutional establishment of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists (ISAS) institutionalized a formal community of scholars who study ‘Anglo-Saxon England.’ Is there a connection between the neocolonial politics of Margaret Thatcher’s Great Britain, the postcolonial establishment of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, and the cautionary words of Reynolds, published in 1985? Yes. Does the terminological duty to ‘Anglo-Saxon’ shared by ISAS and Reynolds act as an unconscious, scholarly, post-facto bulwark against the political realities of decolonization? Yes. The professional-ontological project of ‘being’ an Anglo-Saxonist—a process

4 Ibid.
that requires the incorporation of a racial and colonial Anglo-Saxon sovereign — cannot ‘be’ in a postcolonial ‘state.’ To say it a different way: our signifiers, inherited long ago, have shaped our professional being into a figure that has limited our means of being or becoming postcolonial.\footnote{The professional and political activities of the 1980s discussed in this paragraph give texture and nuance to Chapter 1’s statements about the feminist and poststructuralist scholarship that was championed by a small number of scholars of the 1980s and 1990s and was also brought into sharp relief in Allen Frantzen’s \textit{Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990). In comparing the establishment of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists (ISAS) in the early 1980s to the publication of Frantzen’s book in 1990, one can see more clearly the battle lines that were drawn within the field during these decades and the ways in which critical theorists understood themselves in relation to the politics of postcolonialism.}

As Chapter 4 likewise argued, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is a sovereign term that continues to ‘rule’ its Anglo-Saxonists because it encodes, within its conceptual fibers, the sovereign figure king Alfred, whose body has been translated from a fleshly material into a corpse-like specter of sovereignty (and, as Thorpe’s scholarship indicated, a sovereign textual \textit{corpus}). As the previous chapter explained, Alfred no longer inhabits a living, corporeal body that is chronically ill and sickly as he once did in Asser’s \textit{Life of King Alfred}. Nor can Alfred’s material corpse be found as it could in John Spelman’s \textit{The Life of Ælfred the Great}. In the process of rendering Alfred sovereign, all of Alfred’s material remains are lost, giving leave for ‘him’ to be imaginatively reconstructed and circulate — in portraiture, in painting, and, ultimately, in the bronze statue at Winchester — as a ghostly ef-figy of English sovereignty.

Yet Alfred’s sovereign, effigial form, has not lasted, despite being cast in bronze. In the early 1990s, a few years after Britain was no longer an empire and could not exercise sovereignty over the Falklands (and a few years after ISAS and Reynolds insisted upon their postcolonial devotion to ‘Anglo-Saxon’), writings about Alfred’s sickly body began to proliferate. While concern over his illnesses has, since the eighteenth century, been an is-
sue that scholars were wont to elide,7 a 1991 article, ‘Alfred the Great: a diagnosis,’ published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine reconsidered them within a modern medical context. Using Asser’s Life and Bald’s Leechbook in order to build its case report, the essay diagnoses Alfred’s adolescent troubles with ficus as hemorrhoids or ‘perianal lesions,’ which often signal the early onset of Crohn’s disease:

an illness that begins in early adult life, approximately one half beginning during the twenties, and 90% between the ages of 10 and 40 years…characterized by relapses and remissions. In an attack there is abdominal pain, diarrhoea

7 While Spelman’s Life of Ælfred the Great and Wise’s Life of King Alfred acknowledged Asser’s discussion of Alfred’s suffering body, Charles Plummer’s lecture series, ‘The Life and Times of Alfred the Great,’ perceives this material as an interpolation that creates an ‘atmosphere of morbid religiosity’ (The Life and Times of Alfred the Great: Being the Ford Lectures for 1901 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902], 28). In other words, Plummer cannot bear to contemplate Alfred as a human body, whose material flesh is subject to unsovereign decay. After finding Alfred’s ficus and his unnamed, adult illnesses improbable (footnoting that, if one should wager a diagnosis, it would be epilepsy), he claims that ‘[p]ersonally, I should not be sorry to let all these passages go; for it seems to me quite inconceivable that Alfred could have accomplished what he did under the hourly pressure of incapacitating disease’ (ibid.). While Stevenson’s 1904 edition of Asser’s Life includes this ‘interpolated’ material, he follows Plummer’s assessment, stating that chapter 74 ‘is supplied entirely by the author, and it is an instructive specimen of his confused arrangement and puzzling phraseology’ (Asser’s Life of King Alfred together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser, ed. William H. Stevenson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904], 294n74). After quoting Plummer’s statement regarding the morbidity of Asser’s narrative, Stevenson continues to discuss Alfred’s illnesses for several pages that end by assessing the ficus, which Alfred may have had in youth, as ‘haemorrhoids’ (296n74). Deep concern for Alfred’s fleshly, physical body continues into the twentieth century: Dorothy Whitelock omits chapter 74 from her own translation of Asser’s Life (English Historical Documents, 500–1042, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, volume 1 [2nd, revised ed., New York: Routledge, 1979], 290n5). Likewise, she admits that concern over Alfred’s adult illness underlies the desire among Plummer, Stevenson, and others to discredit the Life tout court (The Genuine Asser [Reading: University of Reading, 1968]).
sometimes with mucus and blood, that may alternate with periods of constipation. There may be fever and wasting depending on the severity of the illness. Some sufferers, a minority, experience eye problems (iritis), joint pains (without any destructive pathology) and skin problems.8

For the first time, Alfred’s body and its mysterious symptoms are discussed from within the terminological frame of medical scholarship, which documents his age, symptoms, treatments, and the pathology of Crohn’s disease. This clinical approach to Alfred—written in the postcolonial moment of the early 1990s—implicitly acknowledges England’s diminished sovereignty from an empire to a nation-state via its medical assessment of the king. For the first time in centuries, Alfred has a corporeal body with an anus, eyes, joints, and skin. No longer cast in bronze—no longer monumentalized as a static and unmoving figure—Alfred’s body emerges as a non-cognitive, biological actor with atypical bowel movements, ‘pains,’ ‘problems,’ and (potentially) a variety of debilitating side-effects. While the case report presents him as a diseased organism, all faith is not lost in Alfred’s (or Anglo-America’s) sovereign form. ‘Ass- ser gives us a picture of a stricken monarch who suffers almost unremittingly from his symptoms,’ yet the report maintains that Alfred ‘was able to fight, study, pursue his leisure interests, worship and govern.’9 While the king’s body becomes unsovereign, the sovereignty of his kingship remains unchallenged.

Shortly after the Royal Society of Medicine published an article on Alfred and Crohn’s disease, Anglo-Saxonists began to take into account this diagnosis. Consequently, a very different

9 Ibid. Note that a response to Craig’s essay appears in the ‘Letter to the Editor’ section of the same journal, in which it is argued that Alfred’s extended pain may have resulted from ‘haemorrhoidal disease and complications’ rather than Crohn’s. St. Ficare’s disease is suggested as an alternative to ‘haemrrhoids’ (F.I. Jackson, ‘Alfred the Great: A Diagnosis,’ Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 85, no. 1 [1992]: 58).
kind of Alfredian biography arises in Alfred’s Smyth’s 1995 *King Alfred the Great*. Smyth’s Introduction, which critiques Alfred scholarship as a field not only ‘enmeshed in polemic and the politics of academe’ but also a casualty of ‘the networks of patronage which have come to control the subject in England,’ stylizes his biography as ‘iconoclastic’ and ‘polemic.’

Smyth insists that Asser’s *Life of King Alfred* is a forgery that paints the king as a ‘neurotic saintly invalid,’ who is, moreover, ‘depressive,’ ‘obsessive,’ ‘sickly,’ ‘fanatical,’ and suffering from an illness that was ‘ghastly,’ ‘gruesomely,’ ‘mysterious,’ ‘repulsive,’ ‘crippling,’ and worst of all, perhaps, ‘self-inflicted.’ Whereas previous generations of scholars had simply omitted Asser’s claims regarding Alfred’s illnesses or elided a discussion about them, Smyth is overly attentive to Alfred’s disease-ridden body. He depicts it as a grossly unsovereign from — physically and psychologically — in order to dismiss Asser’s *Life*. By focusing his attention on Alfred’s embodied, ‘fleshy,’ and ‘obscenely alive’ figure, an insistent, scholarly ‘we’ emerges:

> even when we discard the monastic image of the invalid… king, it is still a daunting task to cross a thousand years in time and hope to recover the picture of the genuine Alfred… we can never make the bold claim of having sat in the royal chamber with this man. There are times however, when Alfred allows us to draw near to his presence and when through his own writings, we can observe him through an opaque screen. And what we perceive then, is no ordinary man, but a

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11 Ibid., 204.


13 Here, I point back to the language of Eric Santner and Elaine Scarry, which I discussed at length in relation to sovereignty in Chapter 4 of this book.
gifted ruler who was himself ever concerned with how we in succeeding generations, would view him.\textsuperscript{14}

Smyth’s consideration of Alfred’s physicality re-embodies the king, so to speak, in such a way that he is no longer simply a bronze statue. For Smyth, Alfred, once again, has a body. Consequently, Alfred can be thought of in relation to an embodied, scholarly ‘we’ who study him.

While Smyth’s biography was the subject of many scathing reviews by members of the small, but tight-knit network of Alfredian history, it has enabled these scholars to contemplate biographical relationships between Alfred and those who write about him. In so doing, Anglo-Saxonists approach the realities of postcoloniality, yet renew their allegiances to Alfred and to Anglo-American sovereignty. Essays appearing in the years following Smyth’s biography articulate present-tense connections between the king and his historians. Janet Nelson’s review of Smyth’s book highlights an interview by Dorothy Whitelock about her highly-anticipated but never-completed book about the king:

Whitelock’s Alfred, she told her interviewer, was above all ‘a very valiant man.’ ‘But what disclosures will there be?’ the journalist persisted. ‘It’s straight history,’ Whitelock replied briskly, ‘it’s not going to be anything startling.’ Whitelock’s translation of Asser in \textit{English Historical Documents}, volume I, had omitted chapter 74, and also omitted Asser’s two other episodes, chapters 14–15, and chapters 95–7, involving revelations of ninth-century sexuality which could qualify as startling. That a scholar of Whitelock’s generation and experience should have found unpalatable Asser’s account of Alfred’s illness, and its intimate relationship with his spirituality and his sexuality, calls for our understanding…. John Cunningham in the \textit{Guardian} interview [on Whitelock’s commissioned but never-completed biography of Alfred] achieved the right

\textsuperscript{14} Smyth, \textit{King Alfred the Great}, 602.
combination of shrewdness and sympathy: ‘On why she never married, Dorothy Whitelock says just: ‘A vast number of young men of my generation died in the First World War…. I never had that feminine desire to run a home…. I can cook adequately: I can grill chops and steaks and make chicken casserole. Fresh vegetables can I cook and I can boil eggs.’ She smiles….’

Richard Abel’s self-reflective essay, ‘Alfred and his Biographers,’ contemplates Smyth and Plummer’s work in relation to his own:

And what of my Alfred? When I signed the contract to write my book back in 1988, I, like Smyth, had planned to say something new on the subject….I was going to drag Alfred off his pedestal at Winchester as surely as American soldiers and freed Iraqis were to pull down the statue of Saddam Hussein…. And I failed…. To paraphrase Plummer, I found myself putting the received story into my own words, and ‘arranging in my own way, what has been previously written by others or myself.’

Patrick Wormald suggests, in ‘Living with Alfred,’ that these autobiographical attachments may be about family ties as well as personal ones:

Might one even nurse a suspicion that Professor Keynes, great-nephew of [John Maynard Keynes,] the most distinguished civil servant the British government has ever had and the one economist universally acknowledged as a genius, naturally prefers to dwell on the title ‘king of the Anglo-Sax-

ons’ that our hero bears in his official documents and (by implication) on his coins...as opposed to the hazier vision of an Angelcynn, ‘English people,’ which as yet subsisted only in the dreams of the likes of Bede? 17

In which case, I [Patrick Wormald] would have to admit that my own conception of a scholar-king at odds with his military nobility’s indifference to learning probably grew out of my experiences as an Eton ‘King’s Scholar’...If post-modernism teaches us anything, it is that any text must be read as an artefact. But with Alfred, texts bring us uniquely close to their protagonist. 18

Whitelock’s ‘valiant’ Alfred and her promise of writing ‘straight history’ point to an ‘Alfred’ shaped by her memories of the First World War, where ‘a vast number of young men of [her] generation died.’ Abels’s references to ‘American soldiers’ and ‘freed Iraqis’ track his position as a professor in the U.S. Naval Academy. Keynes’s family ties him to the British government and to academic virtuosity. Wormald’s youthful identity as a ‘King’s Scholar’ (my emphasis) marks his intellectual precocity at Eton as one in future service to the Crown. These anecdotes from some of Anglo-Saxon studies’ most gifted scholars, all of which were published in the late-nineties and early two-thousands, reveal deep devotions to British and American sovereignty in a postcolonial era—devotions which are expressed in and maintained by their scholarly interpretations of Alfred.

Consequently, while Patrick Wormald claims that Alfred’s ‘mind and body’ should be medically assessed, discussions that consider Alfred’s physical illnesses still return to representationalist readings of him. 19 Paul Kershaw, Janet Nelson, and David Pratt have written about Alfred’s piles, or hemorrhoids, and his Crohn’s disease, then directed attention away from these con-

18 Ibid., 3, 4.
19 Ibid., 6.
ditions, by assessing his medical symptoms in relation to critiques of warrior-aristocrat values, conflicts between Alfred's clerical and lay callings, Continental sources vested in physical suffering, and the pressures of 'excess education.' In the writings of these scholars, Alfred returns, if not to his place as Angulsaxonum rex, then to one who is still Anglo-Saxon. Through their Anglo-Saxonist devotions, the racial and colonial empires of England and the United States remain undiminished.

While Anglo-Saxonists evade the material realities of Alfred's physical body, his corpse finally makes its appearance. On January 17, 2014, British news outlets published stories claiming that a piece of Alfred's pelvis may have been found. Below the headlines, images of the engraving of Alfred used in John Spelman's *Life of Ælfred the Great* and the 1901 Winchester Statue of Alfred — effigial figures discussed at length in Chapter 4 of this book — appear next to a photograph of the pelvic fragment (see Figs. 1–4). Alfred's sovereign form sits across from a supposedly material fragment of 'the man himself.' The undecayed, corpse-like figure of a king is confronted with a broken piece of 'his' corpse.

A year after 'Alfred's' pelvic fragment is found — as if in response to its recovery — John Niles's *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon*


21 Nelson, 'Waiting for Alfred.'


23 Wormald, 'Living with King Alfred,' 17.


25 Notably, osteological and genetic testing of this bone fragment proved inconclusive.
ANGLO-SAXON(IST) PASTS, POSTSAXON FUTURES

Figure 1. Detail from Sarah Griffiths and Ben Spencer, ‘King Alfred the Great’s Bones Discovered in a Museum: Remains Inside Box are Thought to Belong to Anglo-Saxon Ruler,’ Daily Mail, January 17, 2014. Image Courtesy of Alamy.

Section of human pelvis has been carbon-dated within lifetimes of Alfred the Great and son Edward the Elder

Figure 2. Detail from Maev Kennedy, ‘Archaeologists May Have Found Remains of Alfred the Great,’ The Guardian, January 17, 2014. Image Courtesy of Martin Argles and The Guardian.
Figure 3. Detail from ‘Bone Fragment “could be King Alfred or son Edward”’, *BBC News*, January 17, 2014.

Figure 4. Detail from Nick Collins, ‘King Alfred the Great Bones Believed to Be in Box Found in Museum’, *The Telegraph*, January 17, 2014. Image Courtesy of Alamy.
England, 1066–1901, a survey of the history of Anglo-Saxon studies, asks, in its introductory chapter, ‘Has the time come to retire that hyphenated term “the Anglo-Saxons” as one that has outlived its usefulness?’26 ‘Like all terms of classification,’ Niles continues, ‘we should feel free to discard them if they are felt to imprison us in habits of thought that have outlived their usefulness.’27 Niles concludes his book by discussing the Winchester Statue, where he ruminates on the ‘usefulness’ of Alfred. In 1901, Niles writes, Alfred’s statue rendered him ‘fully human,’ yet of ‘transcendent dignity.’28 However, Alfred’s ‘high point…in the modern period…also marked the end of an era, for in that same year Queen Victoria passed away.’29 The year 1901, he explains, ‘has seemed a fitting stopping point in part because it marks the start of a new century and hence represents a special moment in the eternal, if vain, quest for a future that is more enlightened than the past,’ because ‘the concerns of one generation are often a dead issue for the next.’30 Niles’s association between the erection of Alfred’s statue and Victoria’s death and his assertion that Alfred’s ‘high point’ at the turn of the century is now a ‘dead issue’ for the post-Victorian ‘generation[s]’ doubly marks the king’s body as a corpse. Yet Niles continues to allow ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and Alfred to take pride of place as ‘matter[s] of habit and convenience’ rather than acts of faithful allegiance. For while he claims that the ‘concerns of one generation’ are ‘dead’ and gone, Niles’s book title includes the phrase ‘Anglo-Saxon England,’ and Alfred’s Winchester statue serves as its cover art (see Figure 5). Although materialized into a corpse, the sovereign force of Alfred’s Anglo-Saxon corpse-like presence keeps us circling it—keeps us from ‘getting off’—as a consequence of ambivalence and melancholy, affective states of those haunted

27 Ibid., 35.
28 Ibid., 366.
29 Ibid., 328.
30 Ibid., 355, 354, my emphasis.
by a ghostly ‘old guard,’ as discussed in the first chapter of this book.

In order to understand the process by which nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonists became devotees of Alfred (and subsequent generations have maintained these devotions in the face of postcolonial politics), Chapter 4 concluded with a discussion of Anglo-Saxonist ‘being.’ It argued that in the nineteenth century, becoming a professional Anglo-Saxonist was a disembodied, cognitive process by which the student arrived at a perfect and complete understanding of the entire Anglo-Saxon corpus, a body of grammar and texts into which Alfred’s sovereign, corpse-like ghost was folded. Being an Anglo-Saxonist was a professional and an ontological state of mind that, on account of its cognitive emphasis, expresses a being that is inhabited by and consequently devoted to a ghost.

For twenty-first-century Anglo-Saxonists, the ontological force of our professional appellative weighs heavily upon us.31

Living not in a colonial but in a post-colonial age, positioned not towards a Cartesian ‘being’ but a Deleuzian ‘becoming,’ we are personally out of step with the ethnopolitical, raciolinguistic, and professional orientations woven, long ago, into the semantic fibers of ‘Anglo-Saxonist.’ Yet, as the previous chapter argued, if the dead sovereign ‘Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons,’ which lies at the bedrock of our professional signifier, keeps us being Anglo-Saxonists, might it, consequently, prohibit us from becoming something else so long as we maintain, by ‘habit’ and ‘convenience,’ signifiers that are not our own? For, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues, Being is not simply a matter of colonialism, but also of coloniality:

...long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday.32

Maldonado-Torres’s discussion of coloniality leads him to consider the philosophical, ethical, and juridical processes of decoloniality, its apposite state. However, in order to locate one’s self within a decolonial subjectivity, this chapter argues that one must first turn away from colonial ‘being’ and open oneself to

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decolonial ‘becoming.’ Such political-ontological repositioning invokes Deleuze, and his intellectual partner, Guattari, whose initial writings not only challenge a Hegelian ontology of Being but are also written during the second half of the twentieth century, in (and to) the time of mid-to-late-century European decolonization. Consequently, Deleuze can be understood as a philosopher whose refiguration of ‘Being’ as ‘becoming’ articulates philosophical decolonization from a European vantage point.

Deleuze, I believe, offers Anglo-Saxon studies and its Anglo-Saxonists one (of many) possible paths towards decolonizing the field. His philosophy, which understands the critical value of ‘becoming’ as a conversation between participants, requires that we take experiential positions with diverse and multiple others; make alliances with heterogenous organisms whose ‘populations…vary from milieu to mileu’; and sidestep the structuralist efforts of taxonomic classification and genealogical trees via rhizomatic conceptual mapping.

Embracing becoming requires, first, that we emotionally give up, or at least loosen the ties that bind us to ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and

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33 Despite the timing of his oeuvre, Deleuze has only recently been put in conversation with postcolonial theory. As Simone Bignall and Paul Patton write in ‘Deleuze and the Postcolonial,’ ‘the problematic lack in mutuality, or else the mutual disregard, which previous scholarship has highlighted as characteristic of the relationship between Deleuze and the postcolonial…[,] despite the abundance of Deleuzian motifs in postcolonial discourse,’ may express ‘the more worrying possibility that his silence on colonialism conceals a certain Eurocentric self-interest, a neo-imperial motivation or a hidden or unacknowledged desire to deflect attention away from the political concerns of the postcolony’ (‘Deleuze and the Postcolonial: Conversations, Negotiations, Mediations,’ in Deleuze and the Postcolonial, ed. Simone Bignall [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010], 1–2). Yet Bignall, Patton, and the collection of writings that they introduce short-circuit this problem by explaining that Deleuzian philosophy does not, and can never, express postcolonial theory. Rather, the two are engaged in conversations ‘between participants and between the respective terms and stances they bring to the discussion’ — in other words, between Deleuze and the postcolonial (8).

‘Anglo-Saxonist.’ Yet, for each of us, this is a personal process. For myself, I found it necessary to return to the body of King Alfred, the dead sovereign around which the nested terms ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ are formed. I began to write a speculative micro-history of Alfred’s body that tracks its purported engagements with ‘piles’ and Crohn’s disease, its eventual death and decay in the grave, and its fragmentary ‘recovery’ during the 1999 and 2013 excavations of Hyde Abbey. I wanted this work of creative non-fiction to attend to Alfred as a biochemical organism that, in life and in death, challenges and exceeds his ‘Anglo-Saxon’ parameters. And I hoped that by allowing Alfred to become something other than ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ I might be able to mourn him. As an act of mourning, however, it required my own participation as well. As I narrated Alfred’s organismic decay, I found myself—like Alfred’s other biographers—writing about my own family, namely, its obsession with a genealogy that descends from fathers to sons. His story of sickness and decay became interleaved with a story about my schizophrenic mother who took it upon herself to research all seven branches of the Ellard family who migrated from pre-Revolutionary Virginia to the Mississippi Territory. While my mother’s research was a product of her mental illness, her outsider’s perspective on the Ellards enabled me to contemplate my family differently and with skepticism, for the first time. As I narrated physical changes to Alfred’s living flesh as it endured illness, old age, death, and post-mortem decay, I had to confront my attachments to a series of Ellard men—the sovereign patriarchs of my family.

While I drew connections between my professional and personal selves, unlike the autoethnography of Chapter 1, this was not a retreading of old paths. As I made a new narrative for Alfred, for the first time in my life, I had an open conversation with myself about my family’s ghostly presence in my life. I was forced to recognize that Jonathan Ellard, who homesteaded in northern Alabama during Andrew Jackson’s administration, was involved in the removal of Chickasaw native peoples. I was challenged to come to terms with the activities of his son, James Bennett Ellard, who moved to northern Mississippi, fought in
the 8th Mississippi Calvary, and owned slaves, possibly as late as the 1880s. Yet it was not the biographical particulars of these men that were hard to acknowledge. The names, photographs, and stories of these and other Ellard men were lionized by my family, especially my father, who became a member of the Sons of the Confederacy through his descent from James Bennett. What was hard — and ‘hard’ is not the word for this process, because feelings have no words — was facing an idyll of the South that is maintained by the Ellards through its unbroken narrative about family. Writing their stories forced me to put into words and, consequently, to narrativize my intergenerational, emotional attachments to the South. Namely, that, like my father, and his father, and his, I have possessed a repugnant love — and have embraced the terrible violence — of American colonialism, slavery, and racism. That, like all of these Ellard men, I could not bring myself to whole-heartedly disavow the Confederate flag, the sovereign signifier that not only haunts my family’s genealogy but moreover maintains it. That I have loved — and have not known how to stop loving — something that has been passed on to me as a trans-generational haunting.

Writing about Alfred’s physical body required that I consciously confront these realities about my family, engage the emotions that result from admitting something so horrid about oneself, and give narrative voice to all of it. It required that I look these ghosts in the face and bury them so they might ‘Rest In Peace,’ and I might find a way out of Anglo-Saxon studies and the Anglo-Saxon South. By attending to Alfred’s material corpse rather than his sovereign, corpse-like ghost in my writing, I have been able to unfix a narrative about Alfred, my family, and myself. I have been able to recognize that Alfred is no longer (if he ever was) ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ and I am no longer (if I ever was) an ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ but a scholar of postSaxon becoming.

A Biochemical *Vita Ælfredi*

*Named after Dr. Burrill B. Crohn, who first described the disease in 1932 along with colleagues Dr. Leon Ginzburg and Dr.*
Gordon D. Oppenheimer, Crohn’s disease belongs to a group of conditions known as Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD). Crohn’s disease is a chronic inflammatory condition of the gastrointestinal tract that most commonly affects the end of the small bowel (the ileum) and the beginning of the colon, but it may affect any part of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, from the mouth to the anus. While the signs and symptoms can range from patient to patient, and some may be more common than others, Crohn’s presents by way of the following: abdominal pain, fever, and clinical signs of bowel obstruction or diarrhoea with passage of blood or mucus, or both.\textsuperscript{35}

It all started when he was much younger: \textit{Ficus. Fic. Figs. Fuck.} As Alfred sat for hours over a wooden trough filled with hot stones and steaming herbs, he experimented with alliterative poetry. While the warmth gave him some immediate relief, the figs always came back. They were disgusting. He felt disgusting. Alfred’s body was always there, calling attention to itself in the most embarrassing ways.

When these heat treatments didn’t work, Alfred’s physician recommended a more aggressive course of action. Herbs were gathered. A wolf was killed, its jaw was burnt, and its ashes collected. It’s hard to know which was worse: the hot, cakey smears that were applied to his bottom, the herbal drinks meant to purge the figs (and everything else) from his body, or the time-consuming rituals passed down from some magician of the very dark and deep past.

Although problems with the body were, as they always have been, the cost of living, there is a certain unspeakability surrounding the asshole. No one wants to talk about a real, functional one even though it’s the first insult every schoolboy learns. For the asshole really is the perfect metaphor for an unlikeable body until things—like hemorrhoids—make their presence known. On the toilet, the asshole suddenly retreats from its sta-

anglo-saxon(ist) pasts, postsaxon futures

tus as a delightful signifier to a sphincter of painful, burning materiality that no one wants to name, much less to talk about. Even the *Lacnunga*, in a detailed recipe for relieving hemorrhoids, becomes prim when approaching the asshole, instructing the afflicted to apply a hot ointment ‘to þæm setl’ ['to the seat'] of the patient’s body.

With the *Lacnunga’s* statement as the only Old English guide for approaching the material asshole, we might return to Alfred, who may or may not have felt a similar obliqueness towards discussing his medical *dolors*. Unfortunately, for him, hemorrhoids were the first and early sign of a much worse condition. If, as a young man, he was able to keep quiet about the problems with his *setl*, by the time Alfred was an adult, there was no privacy to be had regarding the matter. While one can usually grin and bear the discomfort of walking, riding, and even shitting with a hemorrhoid, frequent diarrhea is a far more difficult problem to hide.

The constant back and forth, back and forth, back and forth to the toilet, waiting for his bowels to stop churning; the dehydration and fatigue that often times left him pale and sometimes kept him in bed; the painful swelling of his abdomen and upper thighs — all these symptoms, inevitably apparent to those who shared in the close quarters of his living environment, disclosed that Alfred was not well. Worse than a hemorrhoid, this shit, this bloody, mucusy, shit, which he felt himself to be living in, was unbearable. It marked the asshole as an oozing communicant, which mouthed vile, rotten, and painful things. And it was not just Alfred’s asshole that was talking. From inside his body, Alfred found himself in constant, excruciating conversation with the real voices behind his problems. The thousands of anaerobic microbiota that had colonized his gut sent him a message of abdominal pain, fever, and cramping.

Alfred soon understood the dysfunctional communications messaged to him by these bacteria. When he looked at the mucus and blood facing him in the toilet, his healthcare worries turned to feelings of personal disgust, shame, and depression. It was then that Alfred’s alliterative experiments turned from *ficus*
towards the *halig fæder*, from the *setl* of his asshole to that of the heavenly throne:

*Halg fæder, thu on heofon,*

*Ac, min fæder, pater noster,*

*dismiss us,*

*no,*

*debite me*

*from each of evils*

*from coming temptations*

*from his shit,*

*from min self,*

*from his body,*

*from min corpus,*

Ælfred,

Amen.

As Alfred transformed the material sounds of his body into the familiar tones of spiritual comfort, he burnished the abject within into a poetics of his rightful self.

Poetic self-fashioning is not only the gambit of kings and princes, despite what historians may say. Because it is not just regal figures who have bodies in disrepair. Such is the case of Dora Lou. Legally blind, Dora Lou is my mother’s first cousin, who was born and still lives in the piney woods of McHenry, Mississippi. In the dirt road that leads to her home, in the outhouse that sits squat in her yard, she is the face of a poverty rarely seen these days in the rural South. For my mother, Dora Lou’s blindness is that site of disrepair against which she has always situated her upbringing. ‘Poor Dora Lou,’ my mother would say as she shook her head. It was an expression that ignited other memories: of an alcoholic uncle, of a Pentecostal grandfather, of a mother she disdained. But above and beyond all these things which she hated about her childhood past, Dora Lou and her McHenry home reminded my mother that she was descended from a father born out of wedlock. Her father’s illegitimacy stuck in my mother like
a sand spur, and when she traded her name in for ‘Ellard,’ my mother tried her hand at poetry. She researched the genealogy of her husband’s family in order to creatively figure herself as the newest member of its long history.

The comforting projects of poetry are often short lived, however. Not only for my mother but also for Alfred. Despite his alliterative prayers, during periods when his intestinal problems were especially violent, no foods could sit with him, and at last he called for a new physician. Upon his arrival, Bald palpated the king’s swollen stomach. He considered the location of his fingers, feeling the tautness of muscle, hidden beneath swollen, spongy tissue. He examined Alfred’s setl, touching a fissure — a tear — that seemed to extend at least a few inches up the muscle tissue into the anal canal. That would explain the sharp, burning pain, which Alfred complained of during his bowel movements. When he slid his fingers out, Alfred’s microbiota delivered a fart that declared their interior victory over his body. Bald smelled his fingers, wiped them, then looked in the toilet, examining the mucosal leavings of Alfred’s last shit. While he had seen this presentation before, in those cases, the patients, all of them older and much poorer, had not lived long.

No one — neither the physician nor the patient — wants to examine a body in this condition. A visit with the doctor can be embarrassing and painful, and speaking to one’s gastroenterologist is grossly intimate. Such intimacy might begin with a medical history, describing the problem. But talk, inevitably, leads to feeling, and feeling to touching, and touching leads to hidden places, and the body yields itself to hands that search, clinically, for non-verbal evidence of infection, disease, metastasis, parasite. Although Alfred’s body was that of a king, by the time Bald had finished with him, its royal patina had worn off, and Alfred was just another chronically sick man who couldn’t stop shitting himself. Intimacy can do that to you.
So: Bald prescribed a treatment. Perhaps a change in diet would help. He told the cook not to prepare meat for a week. He cautioned against milk and eggs. He consulted several books in the Winchester monastery and wrote Northumbria to ask what resources might be available there. Wearmouth and Jarrow had several Mediterranean texts on healing, or so he had heard.

Aside from a few charms, Bald found nothing written on the subject, but the change in diet did seem to help at first. After a few weeks, Alfred’s abdominal swelling subsided, and his morning trips to the toilet decreased from 10 to 7. Small, but meaningful victories for a body in pain. Relief, unfortunately, was not long lasting. Alfred was under stress, and his illness began to return. Unable to find a recipe for lasting, palliative treatment, much less a cure, Bald was dismissed from the court. In his absence, other physicians appeared. They, too, wouldn’t keep their hands off Alfred, feeling him up from the inside-out before prescribing tinctures, pulses, pastes, and teas. Although food masked the taste of some remedies, others were terrible. They left a bitterness in Alfred’s mouth that went straight to his intestines. When local doctors exhausted their attempts at a remedy, those from outside Winchester were consulted. More roving hands. More searching for answers inside his ass. More intimacy. Alfred’s undiagnosable condition became widely known, and a steady stream of healers, some well-intentioned, others charlatans, arrived at the king’s hall, hoping to take their turn and, by skill or by luck, deliver a biological miracle unto Alfred and his setl.

More often than not, however, the combination of unpalatable brews and searing topical remedies administered by Alfred’s revolving door of physicians sent him to the shitter, where he continued to contemplate his situation in silence:

\[ \text{Ac, min fæder, } \text{rex aeternalis,} \]
\[ \text{make min wholebody } \text{min poorbody whole} \]
\[ \text{halig, as pu eart } \text{a halo around the heart.} \]
As ic sit upon þis setl, min setl,
sinful setl kingly in its aeternality,
Ælfred rex, Amen.

‘Poor Dora Lou.’ The sound of her name, like an arrow of time, shot into the past and landed on my mother’s father. He was born in the small house in McHenry where Dora Lou now lives. He was a bastard, my mother never failed to remind, because his last name — Herring — belonged to a man he never knew. My grandpa’s illegitimacy was a canker and an obsession for my mother. She would burst into tears when she talked about it. In those moments, when her face showed the terror of sexual sin, I could see the straightjacket of the Pentecostal South buckle tight around her.

Although my mother talked incessantly about her upbringing, she did not like going home. Actually, she was hostile towards it. When we did go to my grandparents’ house and to see Dora Lou, what I remember most was driving down the Gulf Coast. Crossing Pascagoula and Moss Point into Kreole (where my grandma and grandpa lived); then on to Gautier and Biloxi, on the way to McHenry, was an experience of wonder and disgust. Even if I was asleep as we crossed the truss bridges that connected these towns, the pogy plants always woke me. The smell of fish meal processing was revolting, and it meant that we were almost there. While the stench of the pogies lasted only as long as the bridges did, the highway that stretched from Moss Point to Biloxi passed by a coastal slurry made up of seafood, maritime industries, and filth. After Omega Protein (from whence the pogy smell came) and Ingall’s shipyard, we’d stop, sometimes, at inlets where my mother used to gig flounder. Here, brown sand met browner water. As a kid, these brackish waterways were polluted by her refrain, ‘Poor Dora Lou,’ and the story of sexual transgression that followed from it.
Many rivers and their tributaries lead into the Gulf Coast: the Tombigbee and Coosa flow into Mobile Bay; the Chickasaway and Leaf head to Pascagoula; and, of course, the great Mississippi runs the spine of the state and empties into New Orleans. While frequently imagined as highways for people and goods, these rivers are likewise the intestinal tracts of the South. Rivers pass sediment and waste to coastal wetlands, which act as kidney filtration systems. Once this water is cleaned, it moves into river deltas that pour into the Gulf, where seafood, ships, and processing plants have moored themselves for nearly a century.

Up river, where it is cleaner, is where the Ellards live. Up river, where there are fewer digestive problems, is where the Ellards live. Down river, where the smell of fish guts pollutes the air, is where my mother is from. Down river, where things are filtered and flushed out with no thought to memory, is where my mother is from.

Down river, no birth certificates, cemetery plots, or family stories exist that would locate a past worth finding. Not only was my grandpa a bastard, but his family was poor and illiterate. Herring men wore coveralls and got their hands dirty at the shipyard. Herring ladies did not play bridge or bake cakes — their kitchens smelled of gumbo and boiled shrimp. There was no thought to the past or to pedigree. When my mother married my father, she left the Herrings and McHenry. She left Dora Lou. She turned her nose up at the chickens, the outhouse, the screen door, the boggy woods, and Mississippi's wastewater. She could no longer smell the industrialized coast; she would no longer gig flounder at dusk or travel rickety bridges. Her home and her surname would be my father's. Her house would be full of the Ellards' old furniture and photos. Her past would now be traceable from here to the Civil War and the American Revolution. In grafting herself to my father's family tree, my mother would claim the sexual cleanliness and legitimacy denied her on account of her father and become a 'Southern Lady.' She would write herself into its shoots, branches, and blossoms; she would carve her name into its sturdy trunk and deep roots. In an attempt to rid herself of a sin that smelled like the entrails of Pas-
cagoula’s Gulf Coast, my mother began a project of arboreal poetry.

Had physicians of the late ninth century benefitted from twenty-first-century urulogy, biomedical diagnoses, and pharmacological advances, Alfred might have been medically healed. At the first signs of stool problems and abdominal pain, he probably would have been given a colonoscopy and an endoscopy. He might even have been admitted into the hospital, where a CT scan and barium x-ray would have been ordered to diagnose his problems. Once his asshole had been handled with light and heavy machinery, photographed from the sphincter all the way up to his guts, and discussed (in the most sanitary terms) by a medical team, Alfred may have been discharged with a treatment plan that entailed a daily dosage of 6g sulfasalazine, 1mg folic acid, and Mesalamine enemas as necessary. Yet, it’s hard to say for sure. Crohn’s, like its sister conditions, IBS, colitis, and leaky gut, is treatable with a variety of medications, but rarely do patients find themselves symptom-free. For the Western medical community does not know what causes, or cures, Crohn’s. While alternative practitioners have found success by eliminating high-roughage vegetables, soft cheeses, and other difficult-to-digest and bacteria-flourishing foods, biomedicine has yet to advocate for treatment plans other than pharmacological ones.

Yet Alfred, like so many of us today, was not ambivalent towards his illness. Absent the benefit of Western medical science and modern, alternative medicines, Alfred began to find the timing and rhythm of his flare-ups. His body’s ear became attuned to a bacterial orchestra that would play after certain meals. While Alfred learned to order and avoid certain foods, fasting was, most often, the only way to stay away from the toilet and from the doctors’ roving, searching, cold hands. One could not, however, avoid food forever, and alongside the continued medical remedies prescribed to the king were religious ones, as some believed that Alfred was not afflicted by an undiagnosable...
illness but possessed by spiritual darkness, a sin which his own biographer attributed to sexual desire. Perhaps Alfred could be cured if the devil was chased from his hiding place, and Alfred atoned for his sinful thoughts and actions. Holy water and incense cleansed his body and his royal residence. *Pater Nosters* were prescribed. An amulet was made for him to wear. On a scrap of parchment, which was rolled up and tied to Alfred’s inner thigh, was a charm that had been a long time in the making:

\[
\text{Ac min fæder} \quad \text{ond the angels of heofan}
\]
\[
\text{from feondes costung} \quad \text{and physicians hands}
\]
\[
\text{free me,} \quad \text{Ælfred Angulsaxonum rex.}
\]

Can alliterative poetry become an arboreal project? Did the root bulb of Alfred’s medical intimacies grow into a tree from which my family branches? As my mother muttered, ‘Poor Dora Lou’ and repeated the story of her family’s disgrace, she looked up the Ellards’ birth, death, and marriage records. She began to build upon what was known about the family from its Calhoun County homestead to those in Trussville, Alabama; Anderson and Pendleton, South Carolina; and Hamilton County, Virginia. As she left the cemeteries of Calhoun and looked elsewhere for vital records, my mother’s research began to track the Ellard family line back through time and place from the Mississippi Territory of the early 1820s to America’s pre-Revolutionary colonies.

In drawing up the Ellard family tree, my mother found a long colonial history sheltered in the first names of its many men. She pruned and shaped these branches to give more light to them so they could grow, lopping off the many women and girl children who could have been touched and would not pass on their surname, cutting away other, incontinent brothers and sons who had neither children nor patriotic spirit. Through William Washington Ellard and Andrew Jackson Ellard, my mother
found cleanliness, godliness, and legitimacy. Surely, there was no sin in these names, which refracted the whitewashed narratives of American sovereignty and settlement. These men had not been stained by the hands of sexual misdeed. Their bodies knew nothing of noxious, downriver pollution. In them, my mother escaped the damnation of her own body, raised near the dirty, intestinal waterways of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast. In their names, she cultivated alliterative connections between the Jonathans, Jameses, and Jesses of the many generations. Through her labors, the Ellard family tree grew straight and tall in clean waters. She refigured narratives of American colonialism into a romance of the Confederacy, carving out a place for herself at its base. Here, under the branching shade of my family, she purged from herself the intimate sins of adultery, illegitimacy, and the consequent genealogical void that had made her not only unclean but also suffering from environmental dyspepsia.
In Virginia, she found a man, Amos Issac Allerd, whose son, Jonathan Ellard, travelled with his wife, Rutha McAdams, to Pendleton, South Carolina, after Independence Day after the Cherokees had been removed. But the Carolina mountains were too steep: they needed flatter land. So they followed the Appalachians southward, so they followed the path of ‘Indian’ removal, so they made their way for themselves towards Alabama, then Mississippi, where they named their children William Washington and Andrew Jackson in celebration of America’s victories. There was also another son — James Bennett — who founded Ellard, Mississippi, owned slaves, fought for the Confederacy, and became the trunk of my family tree.

So James B. begat
Jesse Jonathan,
who begat
Chester Dare,
who begat
Jesse Jonathan,
who begat
Jesse Sugg
who married
Margo Herring

E
L
L
A
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D
While my mother never knew it, her research trod old paths. In a book that I used to look at when I visited my grandmother’s house as a kid were pages and pages of genealogical charts that traced the family line back through time. From north Mississippi to Virginia, then across the Atlantic, the Ellards set sail from Britain sometime around the mid-eighteenth century. At this point, the Mississippi genealogist’s research became speculative and aristocratic. There was a knight in the family and, shooting off of some branch, a duke. As the Ellards began to resemble the characters of a medieval bedtime story, their surname started to reshape itself in the direction of an even more distant and earlier moment of the ‘Middle Ages.’ Ellard elasticized from Allerd into Elward, Allard, Aillard, and Aylward. Recently, I looked up the spelling variations on a less-than-reputable ancestry website. From its own ‘archives,’ the site ‘excerpt’ the following:

The origins of the Ellard surname lie with the Anglo-Saxon tribes of Britain. The name Ellard began when someone in that family worked as a keeper of a hall. The surname Ellard is composed of the elements hall, which denoted one who was employed at such a manor-house or hall, and ward, which was originally applied to one who was a watchman.

As if conjuring the ghosts of its surname, an Anglo-Saxon ‘hall ward’ returns in the ancestors of my family. William Washington and Andrew Jackson — the sons of Jonathan Ellard — valorize American coloniality and settler colonialism, part of the glorious duties of the Anglo-Saxon race. Likewise, upon arriving in north Mississippi, giving the area his name, owning slaves, and fighting for the Confederacy, James Bennett Ellard exercised his patronymic right as a ‘hall ward’ of what so many have called ‘the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland.’

Ellard, Allerd, Aylward, Hall-Ward: surnames and specious etymologies make their way down, down, deep into Calhoun County soil, where the tap root of my family’s tree draws water from Alfred’s ‘Anglo-Saxon’ signifier.

Yet, all organic things, no matter how attentive the arborist, are subject to aging. Crowns flatten. Branches droop and sag, tired of carrying the weight of the past. As a child without siblings, the only name that my mother could add to the trunk of the Ellards’ family tree— which had begotten so many sons of colonial America and the Confederate South— was my own. Unfortunately, as a girl, my name would never do. Without another James or Jesse or Jonathan to keep it strong and healthy, the survival of my family’s tree was questionable. I girdled its trunk. I could get pregnant. Hands. Touching. No. The potential for illegitimacy all over again was too much to contemplate. Something must be done.

Something would have to be done about all this body. Alfred couldn’t take it. Yet, it kept coming, and they kept coming, and the touching, and the remedies, and the touching, and the intimacies, and the touching, and the coming. Nothing was clean anymore, even his amulet. Although he had tried, at first, to keep it neat and dry, over time it had become soiled. When he finally took the thing off, the ink had worn off the parchment, and the only writing legible was Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex, smudged, in reverse, onto the inside of this thigh. At a distance, it just looked like a shit stain.

\[\text{collection/voices/id/2952}, 2. \text{It is noteworthy that when invoking the ‘Great Anglo-Saxon Southland’ in this address, Gov. Wallace also said, ‘In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny...and I say... segregation now...segregation tomorrow...segregation forever’ (ibid.).}\]
Some days the smudge was so faint it seemed like it would come off with just a little more scrubbing. On others, the writing stood out in high contrast to his near-translucent skin. No one, except probably Alfred, could even read the letters. But because Alfred could read it, it bothered him. Bothered him so much that he kept trying to remove it, applying oils, pastes, soaps: any kind of topical that might remove the brown stain. Once, he rubbed the area raw only to find that when the redness had abated and new skin had grown back, so had the words.

After a while, Alfred’s relationship to this mark extended from intense, focused attention to absented-minded caress. Sometimes his hand would drop to the inside of his thigh, and his palm would press down on the small area. Other times, it would trace the lettering with a finger. Ælfred, Angulsaxonum rex, hot within him.

As his body aged, Crohn’s gave way to a phenomenon more insistent than the microbiota which had caused it. Alfred’s joints ached. His teeth started to rot. He began to stoop, to lose his hearing, to be short of breath. He felt stiff in the mornings, and sometimes he forgot things. It was unclear whether or not the Crohn’s had relented or gone into remission, but these days Alfred’s trips to the bathroom seemed to result from incontinence rather than from microbial activity. Perhaps he had just gotten used to it. For Alfred had learned, many years ago, to stay away from inflammatory foods, fast regularly, and keep to an exacting routine, mostly in avoidance of the psychological effects that shitting oneself on a regular basis can have on people with even the sunniest dispositions. At any rate, the physicians had failed, a long time ago, to give Alfred any relief, and he sent them all away. He could not abide any more conversations about his bowels. He could not abide any more fingers inside his skin. Yet, no matter how many years passed or how many hot baths he took, the inky phrase from his amulet remained, a loose and distorted tattoo on his inner thigh. It now looked like a birthmark, or maybe a blood vessel that had ruptured:
Ac min fæder,  
Ic feel myself aging.

From inside to outside,  
my entrails chase me,

the soft stink snakes down, figure-eights down

my intestinal highway, passing kidneys, gall bladder, and colon:

organs that have long since failed to function appropriately. Ic
find myself loose, min

fæder, a fleshy falling softness that rolls off the bone, that tears
at the first

touch of my parchment, casting shadows of a phrase once ar-
ticulate but now only

a faint murmur Ælfred Angul x rex.

Perhaps the relationship between Cleanliness and Godliness
is less about being clean and more about the preparative acts
of scrubbing, pressing, starching, covering up, sitting straight,
crossing your legs, chewing with a closed mouth, peeing with a
closed you-know-what, keeping yourself to yourself, all so that
that you remember: 1) God is the only man who cannot get you
pregnant; and 2) love is a close and touching word — say it, and
someone might get hurt.

Despite her adherence to Cleanliness, Godliness, and these
Two Cardinal Rules, my mother was afraid. Although she had
managed to excoriate her body through faith in God and in the
Ellards, her daughter’s name challenged her talent as an allit-
erative arborist. It was not Jessica or Jacqueline or Joanna, but
Donna Beth. It did not refract the patriarchs of the Ellard line
but sounded like a cry for Dora Lou.
Poor Dora Lou. A reverberation, a noise, the sound of leaves rustling. The hall wards felt a chill breeze blow past them. Alfred felt it rapping at his arthritic bones. His vision was leaving him now, and as the world grew dark around him, he smelled pine and dirt. He heard chickens and the creak of a door swing open. Something scraped against the floor. In the dark of Alfred’s newfound blindness, he was not sure if he was living, or if death had come. A tiredness pressured his body. He was losing form.

\[Ac min fæder Ic feel within myself a failing falling. A flailing felling. A folding feeling. Smells radiate towards touch, fingering me with a clinical strength that does not make me shy away from my fleshiness. Sounds take me in arms and tenderly caress the flabbiness of my body, like a blind woman who knows the world by hand. As these senses feel each crease, they transmit their olfactory and vibrations into my body as Ic flail and fail to find some gospel text. Noli me tangere will not prevent her. She folds the pieces of skin together and feels me, Ælfred, rex.\]

Alfred awoke on the toilet. Uncertain how he got there, more uncertain how to get up, he remained slumped over the latrine until its odor got the best of him. Reaching out, he used the wall as a guide to find his way back to bed. His breath was rattling and shallow. Fluid had begun to fill his lungs. As Alfred fell asleep for the last time, the microbiotic orchestra, which had been so rhythmically active within him for so many years, made way for other ‘players.’ These new wards of his body did not abide the same processes of biological life. Cells and tissues became disorderly as Alfred slipped into a state of permanent metabolic failure. In death, his body no longer pulsed to the rhythms of Crohn’s, which had become so familiar to him. It moved in what could be called a disorganized arrhythmia: changing color, oozing liquids, becoming limp, then turgid. There was no regular
speed or predictable timing to anything. And so they buried him.

Underground, however, Alfred was not inert. He became even busier than ever as the biochemical operations of his body attuned themselves to a subterranean, biotic ecosystem. Alfred began to move in time — to be touched and, now, for the first time, to touch back — to move with the rhythms of blowflies, rodents, and microbes; the temperature of his coffin; and the fibers of his linen shroud. Alfred engaged wholeheartedly in the micro-ecosystem of his burial site, whereby his skin pigmentation, biological sex, and defining physical features were becoming unknowable, at least without the help of a taphonomist or a forensic osteologist.

Through the years, Alfred was dug up and moved several times over. At first his ligamented body, which held together cartilage and bone, was able to tolerate the disturbance. Several translations later, it fell apart, unable to endure the physical stress of it all. First situated in the microclimate of Winchester’s new cathedral, then in Hyde Abbey, Alfred started to petrify. Sedimentary particles filled interstitial spaces, making his bones denser and heavier. Isotopes from the soil concentrated in them. Alfred became radioactive.

While my mother’s pruning restricted unwanted growth at the trunk, branches, and leaves of the Ellard family tree, she could not control what happened below ground. Here, the women, second sons, and stillborn and non-surviving children grow. Here, the illegitimate, insane, and mixed-race relatives take refuge. Unbeknownst to her, the tap root of the Ellard tree is not neat like its foliage. It snakes and knots. It folds over itself. Its hidden tubers thwart the linear poetics of her genealogy. To know this, however, she would have to go digging in the dirt:
At first, he was found by accident. In 1788, convicts digging in the rubble of Hyde Abbey came across three lead coffins. The coffins were opened, the bones dumped out, and the lead fittings were sold. In 1866, amateur antiquarian, John Mellor, claimed to have recovered some of the scattered bones, which he attributed to Alfred. He sold them to the vicar of St. Bartholomew’s Church near Winchester, who reburied them in an unmarked grave in the churchyard. Still, Alfred was sought out. Again, he was handled. In 1999 and 2013, excavations of the abbey and churchyard, respectively, exhumed more bones, tested them, and then shelved them for storage.

Then, in March 2013, click — click — click . — click, click, click . — .. .. — . ccccccc — cc-cc-cccccccccclick, click . — . cccccccccccccccccclick. — .. The crackle of a Geiger counter detected 14C. Its long-distance transmissions, the telegraphy of radiocarbon, spelled out the letters A – L – F – R – E – D. Or did they?

I don’t know. But it was springtime. In Dora Lou’s front yard, trumpet daffodils began to bloom. She had planted them years ago, like my grandmother, like my mother, like everyone else in Mississippi. And on the label of the brown paper sack, which the bulbs came in, read: Narcissus ‘King Alfred.’
No one can predict the paths of mourning, and no one can predict where these mourning paths will lead. The second Movement of this book began by revealing a professional genealogy that positioned Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, as the sovereign ‘father’ to Anglo-Saxon studies’s many British ‘fathers’ described in the first Movement of this book. Alfred’s patrilineage not only guards and maintains the professional signifier ‘Anglo-Saxon’ but also keeps us being ‘Anglo-Saxonists.’ ‘Being’ and ‘becoming’ are ontological positions and processes. In the context of this book, they are generated and maintained by the narratives we construct for our professional selves. When I set out to write Alfred’s ‘Biochemical Vita,’ I meant to uproot the family tree of Anglo-Saxon studies by creating a new narrative: a biography that tracks Alfred’s physical body as an organism of dynamic change, death, and decay. By focusing on the ‘life’ of Alfred’s body, I hope to render him unsovereign and thereby create narrative conditions that would enable us to mourn him. Mourning, however, is an act of unmooring that refigures the entire self. Approaching Alfred’s patrilineal relationship to Anglo-Saxon studies quickly became a family matter, and the early drafts of Alfred’s ‘Biochemical Vita’ interleaved a story of the king with one of my Southern family. These intersections created an imaginary genealogical connection between Alfred, ‘father’ of the Anglo-Saxons, and the Ellard’s settler-colonial and Confederate ‘sons.’ Yet, as Alfred’s body failed him, and it began to deteriorate, the Ellard narrative of settler-colonialism and slave-holding met a similar fate: it was exposed and uprooted. Being ‘Anglo-Saxon’ — now expressed in personal as well as professional terms — is no longer tenable.

The Alfred–Ellard genealogy of ‘Biochemical Vita’ is an act of mourning that generates what Tayana Hardin calls a ‘new fiction.’38 ‘Biochemical Vita’ takes, as its conceptual entry point,
first, an understanding that the narrative of Alfred’s sovereign, undecaying corpus is an ‘old’ story made up of Asserian half-truths that maintains itself under the sign of coloniality; and, second, it understands that in order to displace Alfred and the narratological and ideological worlds that he shoulders, a new story—a new fiction—must be attempted. This act of casting aside one dodgy account of Alfred (for Asser’s Life is more ‘court propaganda’ than historical ‘fact’) for another is not a simple exchange because, as I just mentioned, Asser constructs Alfred’s form out of a sovereign cloth that is limned with colonial aspirations. Generations of Anglo-Saxonists have genuflected before, blessed, and kissed these garments in acts of faith, love, and trust in an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ power that stretches between the triangulated poles of academic scholarship, race, and empire. Abandoning such a sovereign narrative form requires the emotional work of mourning, a scholarly-affective labor that can only come from that place within me that needs to be made to feel, and to acknowledge my feelings as matters of bereavement, so that I can direct all this emotional energy towards finding words that describe what is inside me and root ‘it’ out. ‘Biochemical Vita’ confronts the ghosts of my Southern family. It interleaves their presence with this most ghostly father of Anglo-Saxon studies in order to mourn them. To give them organismic bodies that live, die, and decay so that they can no longer haunt us. Absent this haunting, we can imagine other, non-fatherly genealogies and rhizomatic, narrative routes for a once-Anglo-Saxon studies. This is mourning. This is a new fiction— for the field and for myself.

As a new fiction, it trespasses all manner of borderlands: professional and personal boundaries, critical and literary genres, stories taken as academic truths and those dismissed as folklore; prose and poetic forms; and Englishes, old and new. While such supposed disrespect for how scholarship should compose itself may seem inappropriate, ‘Biochemical Vita’ be-

a world together,’ in the classroom and in the poetics of literary criticism (Pedagogy 18, no. 3 [2018]: 532).
longs, in fact, to a relatively old form called ‘paraliterary’ writing or ‘fictocriticism.’ As Gerrit Haas writes, fictocriticism is a term ‘evoked to subsume motivated experimental writing practices that confound, and thereby problematise’ literary genres. These practices are ‘playful in tone,’ ‘experimental in attitude,’ and ‘ethically motivated.’ Yet for anthropologist Michael Taussig, fictocriticism is not a flighty distraction from hard-nosed criticism but ‘a love of muted and even defective storytelling as a form of analysis,’ whose ‘swerve in writing…is what trips up thought in a serpentine world.’ As Taussig recognizes the disruptive, necessary force of ‘defective’ stories, he underscores his work as that which strays from customary paths in order to alter lines of thinking. Fellow anthropologist Kathleen Stewart takes this Taussigian line one step further by writing fictocriticism as a mode that can topple our preoccupation with grasping the world, intellectually, by channeling the power of affect. Her writing ‘perform[s] some of the intensity and texture that makes them [affects] habitable and animate’ so that she may show the limits of intellectual abstractions.

‘Biochemical Vita’ disrupts and ‘trips up’ the biography of Alfred, the Ellards, and their shared racial-colonial metanarrative. In so doing, it affectively performs the work of mourning these Anglo-Saxon fathers. Further, in joining together the professional and personal in this new, postSaxon fiction, ‘Biochem-
ical Vita’ joins together and shifts the book’s focus from the role that ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ play in British contexts to the role of these terms in America. In the U.S., ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ remain attached to fantasies of nation and empire that are inseparable from an American racism that is trenchantly directed at both Native peoples and African Americans. Mourning my profession’s terms in relation to America’s colonial and racial histories requires that I abandon the familiar topics and comfort zones of my field and become completely lost in unfamiliar academic waters. Mourning is truly an unmooring, and I become intellectually decentered and emotionally upended. No longer an ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ or a ‘medievalist,’ I feel homeless yet open, for the first time, to processing the wide-reaching, ongoing impact of my field’s signifiers on non-white bodies, identities, and narratives in America. This intellectual and emotional process becomes, for me, a ‘becoming postSaxon’ — an ontological repositioning that is both professional and personal.

The third Movement of this book, ‘postSaxon futures,’ invites a once-Anglo Saxon studies to reposition itself in relation to temporalities, bodies, and methods once excluded by its racial and ethnopolitical signifiers so that the field might enter into a speculative conversation about what it might mean to become ‘postSaxon.’