Mood Change/ Collective Change

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Mood Change (Julian)

for Vincent Gillespie, whose lessons still inspire

> 991. Here Ipswich was raided; and very soon after that Ealdorman Byrhtnoth was killed at Maldon, and in that year it was first decided tax be paid to the Danish men because of the great terror which they wrought along the sea coast. That was at first 10 thousand pounds. Archbishop Sigeric decided on the decision.[1]

[1] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed. Michael Swanton (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), 127. The quotation comes from The Canterbury Manuscript F. An alternative version of the year appears in Manuscript (E): "Here Ealdorman Bryhtnoth was killed at Maldon, and in the same year it was first decided that tax be paid to the Danish men because of the enormities which they wrought

The year 991 will never be complete. It endures, subject to remaking and revision.[2] At the time, the year must have been anticipated, welcomed, dreaded. Seasons change. Years turn. And by their passage those who live on stand recruited as mnemotechnical relays to their passing. The future, the effect of the future is never wanting, never lacking. The future happens all the time. You and we, as well as the life cycles or runtime of all its variously animated wetware (animals, plants, fungus, machines), all that "lives on," constitute the medium by which, in which, the future presences.[3] The dead stand recruited also, "dying on" by way of memory, external memory devices (memorials, tombs, etc.) and resuscitated into the fictive or factish uses of things deemed "past" in successive presents. Liveliness finds itself distributed across the continuum, from which notions of life and death, past, present, and future, find themselves extracted. The humanities cohabit with the charnel house of the collective. Our readings perform variously secular or sacred resurrections.[4]

Here, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the year 991 finds itself transcribed or translated according to a regime of description that we can only partially access and that manifests differently in its multiple manuscripts (A through H). The *Chronicle* inventories the eventfulness of the year; names names (Ipswich, Maldon, Byrhtnoth, Sigeric); remarks the narrative-building precedents (the first paying of a tax or tribute) along with its author, the agent that gives the advice, who decides the decision ("*ræd*

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along the sea coast. That was the first ten thousand pounds. Archbishop Sigeric decided on the decision." For this variation, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 126.

[2] On the concept of a year as continually subject to remaking, the year never being "finished," see Bruno Latour's discussion of "backward causation" in Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 168–173.

[3] On "wetware" as the biosemiotic factor to media platforms and technologies, see Richard Doyle, *Wetwares: Experiments in Post-Vital Living* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[4] On the "factish" as the putative entity that fractures into what we more readily process as "fact" and "fetish," an entity irreducibly "made" (fiction) but also with referential power, see Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, trans. Catherine Porter and Heather Maclean (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1–66.

gerædde")—the repetition or redundancy of the word "advise" or "decide" emphasizing the magnitude of the act, the "cut" or cutting that finishes one moment and inaugurates a new and escalating present as the tax exceeds its serial repetition and grows. The *Chronicle* captures also the affective geography of the country, the "enormities," "wonders" or "spectacles" ("*wundræn*" in MS F) or the "great terror" ("*mycclan brogan*" in MS E) "by the seacoast."[5] The tax figures an outward flow of resources indexed to the affective inundation of the coast. But it does not see off the terror exactly so much as it introduces an attenuated temporality. The present seems frozen, static, hollowed out by the anticipation of violence. Oriented to a future no one wants, the present is found wanting, goes missing, freezes, hostage to a serial repetition. Time pools.

Enter whomever it was that wrote or commissioned or codified or merely copied the burned fragment of a poem we call "The Battle of Maldon." In the poem, Bryhtnoth dies on, lives on, sur-vives into the present future, beyond the *Chronicle*'s announcement of his demise. And whatever the circumstances of the battle, which this poem revises and replays, this time round he's mad and moody, out to effect a mood change that might also render a mode of collective change. Bryhtnoth orders his men to dismount; marshals them. Metaphorical falcons fly from hands. Things are getting serious. No time for sport. The seafarers ask for their tax. "And it is better for you all that you should buy off this onslaught of spears with tribute money," says their spokesman in one translation, "we are prepared to establish a truce in return for gold."[6] Do yourselves a favor. Disperse; dispense your gold; and save yourselves the shock and awe, the "onslaught" we shall bring. But Bryhtnoth's having none of it; speaks for his men; for his people; offers a tax or tribute of "spears . . . deadly points and tried swords / payment in war-gear which shall be of no benefit to you in battle to pay you, pierce, slit, and slay you in storming battle" (46–47).

The battle begins, or it would, if the sea and the river

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[5] See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, Vol. 8, MS F, ed. Peter S. Baker (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 86, and Vol. 7, MS E, ed. Susan Irvine, 61.

[6] *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. Donald Scragg (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1991), 19, lines 31–33. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text, cited by line number.

Panta didn't get in the way; arrest the fray; "Because of the water there, neither group could reach the other: / there the flood tide had come after the ebb, / the tidal streams had locked up the land. It seemed too long to them / to the time when they could wield spears against one another" (64–67). And so they wait; their desire for battle pooling, stayed and augmented by the delay; amped and amping up. This waiting, a product of the locale, of the environs, of the agency of the flood, figures also a replaying of or reply to the escalating series that is, that was, the tax. The carefully reckoned tax that decides, that cuts or cross cuts the present finds itself overwritten by this other pooling of desire, of an anticipation that is already completed, finished and that awaits expression merely. Violence shall erupt and rewrite the present by an expenditure of flesh become poetic affect. The terror wrought by the sea coast, a sea coast affectively re-written by the seafarers finds itself answered in kind, reversed or, better still, rejoined by its like, pushing outwards.[7]

Such a mood change as it courses through Bryhtnoth and his men proves uncritical, post-critical. It cannot know as it does, even as it might seek to know as it becomes. Its emphatic singularity leaves it open to doubt, to criticism, reappraisal, reprisal. Bryhtnoth will be judged to have yielded too much ground: his too-much-ness will condense into pride. The seafarers (guileful or gleeful) see the problem—advancing along a narrow and defended causeway leaves them at a serious tactical disadvantage;

[7] For a revisionist reading of the poem that calls its criticism of the tax and accordingly its date into question, see Leonard Neidorf, "Aethlred and the Politics of the Battle of Maldon," *JEGP* 111.4 (October 2012): 451–473. Neidorf takes the poem's relative equanimity towards the seafarers or Vikings in its representations to be at odds with a project of direct political intervention or criticism and asks readers to rethink the poem's relation to the politics of the 990s. Neidorf's argument is persuasive, but I would suggest that the poem's recuperation of the moment of battle and the active seeking after death following the death of one's lord or leader reprograms the act of participating in battle as an aesthetic, mythic end in and of itself. Accordingly, the seafarers are necessary agents in making good on this death-seeking and death-loving endeavor. On the mythic function of the poem see, John D. Niles, "Maldon and Mytho-poesis," in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R.M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 445–474.

and so they ask to cross in order to join battle. "Because of his pride" (89) or "overconfidence" ("*ofermode*"), Bryhtnoth allows them to do so. The word defies parsing or parses too much, signifying an "over" or "too much" heart or mood. And this "too-much-ness" proves key. For I am not interested in whether Bryhtnoth did right or wrong. Instead, I venture that the script the poem follows aims to reverse the tax, and by advocating for an aesthetic response *in extremis*, orchestrates a super- or over-plus, a plus-sized writing or over-writing of his present. Mood change. "*Mod*" change. Collective change.

Bryhtnoth dies; Godwine and Godwig flee, "turned from the fight and sought the wood, / they fled into that place of safety and saved their lives" (193–194); but the hostage stays, Bryhtnoth's men rally; live on; die on (with him); moral philsophemes, patterns of a variously anachronistic heroic ideal, summoned to do service in a present that aims to produce altered futures. Bryhtnoth's "*ofermode*" or "too-much-ness" spills beyond his veins, an ecstatic drug that courses through the collective. His example in battle provides a template for the actions that follow, for the further recruitment of his men who live on or die on with him. The poem serves a delivery tool for this rhetorical pattern or software, equipment for living and dying, input for an aesthetic, affective re-education but not quite a counter-pedagogy.[8] The mode it employs offers a joyful, violent, courting of limits, writing beyond or into the limits, which it aims to over-flow and so to rewrite the rules for making futures. Bryhtnoth, while he lives, is all noise. He bellows. He laughs, party to a jocund, sado-masochistic splendor or spectacle as he faces off with the "warrior" who's first to wound him—to their mutual delight (134–139). Such is the hypnotizing high of tuning yourself to the hyper-reference of a world configured to the limit, as Bryhtnoth offers, that limit, that risk, the aesthetic heft required to the undoing of a decision, the further cutting of the cut to the present, the tax that weighs upon the future.[9]

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[8] For this modeling of literary texts as equipment, see Kenneth Burke "Literature and Equipment for Living," in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 293– 304.

[9] On the homoerotic/homophobic quotient to the exchange with the warrior—sometimes translated as "churl," "peasant," or

Byrhtwold, who speaks and dies last, just before the poem cuts out, names the orientation Bryhtnoth embodies and requires. He condenses the script; returns us to the word *mod*, which he inclines towards the more, to moreness, offering a recipe for the constitution of an *ofermode*:

> *Hyge sceal py heardra, heorte py cenre,*
> *mod sceal py mare py ure mæg˙en lytlap.*
>
> [The spirit must be the firmer, the heart the bolder, courage must be the greater, as our strength diminishes.] (312–313)

Marking and inhabiting the death of his lord, which serves as the limit to his own living on, Bryhtwold prescribes the rate or quotient to the affect of the moment. Mood must augment, must incline towards the more. "Courage must be the greater." It must augment, its rise calibrated by the rate at which "our strength diminishes." These lines prescribe what sounds like an extreme titration that linearizes a collective. The affective hits of "*ofermode*" course through them all, in series, by Bryhtnoth's cutting off and down, constituting them as a single fleshly *thing*.

The logic Bryhtwold names might then be understood already to recognize the biopolitical articulation and management of the collective as an aleatory body, as "flesh" to be variously differentiated and parceled out in different forms, to be dosed with so many rhetorical, somatic, and psychological uppers and downers.[10] As each

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"yeoman" in lines 130–133 of the poem, see, Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from "Beowulf" to "Angels in America"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 105–106. Frantzen remains one of the most astute readers of this moment, carefully entertaining possibilities as to how the moment's choreography, the way a relationship of sorts is established between the two men, is inflected by differentials of nation, social rank, and skill. On the joy/danger/erotics of such limit testing see I draw on Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[10] For this notion of governmentality and "flesh" see Roberto Esposito's recasting of Foucauldian bio-power in Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (London: The Polity Press, 2011), 140–141. See also, Cary Wolfe's key proposi-

of Bryhtnoth's surviving men speak, we hear the process by which he finds himself constituted as part of a single fleshly *thing*, subject to a biopolitical articulation of the collective as "flesh" to be variously drugged up and parceled out in different forms (which includes its listeners and readers, then and now). Here, that flesh finds itself well and truly dosed. And so Anglo-Saxon flesh is configured to answer the undifferentiated inundation of Seafarers.

What then do we learn from this poem with regard to the future/s we want? Coming after the battle even as it replays it, "The Battle of Maldon" rewrites the event at Maldon as already, before the fact, a refusal of the tax and it does so in mythic and mythologizing mode, marshaling a set of aesthetic forces to its end and so offers a lesson in the rhetorical efficacy to be claimed by the looping, pooling, and re-orientation of relations between our successive "nows." The poem rewires the meaning of that day in 991 when battle was joined at Maldon, and in so doing seeks to intervene in the way the year is archived. But the poem's violent, lyrical, ecstatic, coercive mode and mood remains almost entirely neutral. The poem offers no viable mimetic politics. Instead, it documents the process by which Bryhtnoth's constitutive "too-much-ness" orchestrates a violent, mimetic over-writing of individual bodies as it collectivizes the group, literally marshals them to its martial ends. The poem offers, at best, an ambivalent set of pleasures, a time-bound belonging, as it translates the violence of the battle as event into its own semiotic and lyric "flesh," which it offers to its readers.

Fragment from a burned manuscript, the poem offers no exits; no products; even as it produces a set of material and affective changes among the men it depicts. The lesson lies not in the positing of an image a particular kind of future, filling in the future before the fact—such was the time machine that Sigeric authored with the tax for which he advocated. Instead, the poem offers a hyper-awareness and orientation to the present, to the now-time of decision, pitting itself against a moment that has passed by and to which it emphatically insists that we return. Then again, there is the figure of the pause that comes with the river Panta and the sea:

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tions in *Before the Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

> Because of the water there, neither group could reach
> the other:
> there the flood tide had come after the ebb,
> the tidal streams had locked up the land. It seemed too
> long to them
> to the time when they could wield spears against one
> another. (64–67)

For battle to be joined, for the future the poem finds lacking to find itself un- or over-written, the human participants to the action, the "flesh" or wetware of the poem, have to agree to a crossing. They momentarily join forces against the land and the water that come between and that stall or arrest the action. What then if we allowed these watery agents, the river and the sea, to rebel against their brute physicality or apparent metaphoricity in the poem, and so to manifest as some third thing, a third force that interrupts and stays the action of the poem and its world? When the tide ebbs, both sides must agree to fight, must work together in order to make battle possible. Anglo-Saxon and seafarer flesh accommodate the other. How then to identify and occupy those moments when this third thing, the environs, what comes between, ebb away, and appears to offer us unfettered decisions? How to understand these localized, time-bound moments, keyed to the infrastructures we inhabit as renewable nodes of radical choice, a choice whose possibility and openness the poem archives even as it decides?[11]

Once upon a time, it was all the rage for readers and critics of "The Battle of Maldon" as well as serious archaeologists of to visit Northey, in Essex, and to cross or edge up to the causeway and even to re-enact the poem in order to discover if Bryhtnoth and the spokesman for the seafarers really could have called back and forth to each other over the water. Even as such antiquarian longing may raise hackles or induce wry smiles, the pedestrian

[11] It is precisely this moment of human misrecognition, the reduction of the world to an obstacle to human violence, with which Michel Serres begins *The Natural Contract* as he seeks to imagine human collectives that are not predicated on the routinized forgetting of the world and the normalization of violence as part of human societies, see Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. William Paulson and Elizabeth MacArthur (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 1–27.

traffic or fetish labor of such readers-become-travelers and re-enactors is not so very different from what today constitutes the labor of reading in what we name the humanities. Even as the register in which they understood their labor to count might have been misdirected, such antiquarian impulses to go *there* augur a certain kind of epistemological advantage to be had from the poem's sense of place, the *thisness* of the *thing* that happened *there*.[12] And it is this *thisness* or *thereness*, pseudo-deictic as it maybe, that ultimately matters.

The challenge for me and for those of us housed in the humanities, as I see it, remains tied in fostering modes of aesthetic experience, modes of perception, that enable us to access this order of proximity to *things* (places, persons, historical moments). For then, perhaps, we shall come to know and embody or feel what the river and the sea seem, in this poem, to know already, namely that power is weak. The water, keyed as it is to the affective heft of anticipation as it courses through the poem's flesh, designates the presence of a generalized flesh of being, the aleatory body that power seeks somehow to harness and manage, but which so exceeds its governmental dosing as to constitute a pure contingency, capable of generating still other futures, futures for which we have neither script nor name. I end, then, by advocating not a radical present or closure of the future as ideological lure—not "no future"—but, in a stricter framework still, an insistence on a judicious emptiness, the future something that cannot, perhaps should not, be imagined, for it resides in and is produced by the way we re/draw the relationships between texts, readings, lives, deaths, events, today.

The future is never lacking then. It wants for nothing, even as it taxes our present circumstances with its open-

[12] See for example such essays or book chapters reporting on the location of the battle as, George R. Petty Jr. and Susan Petty, "Geology and the Battle of Maldon," *Speculum* 51.3 (July 1976): 435–446; George and Susan Petty, "A Geological Reconstruction of the Site of the Battle of Maldon," in *The Battle of Maldon: Fact and Fiction*, ed. Janet Cooper (London: Hambledon, 1993), 161–169; O.D. Macrae-Gibson, "How Historical is the Battle of Maldon?" *Medium Ævum* 39 (1970): 89–107; John McN. Dodgson, "The Site of the Battle of Maldon," in *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. Scragg, 170–179; Roger Schmidt, "A Trip to Maldon," *Rendez-Vous* 38.2 (Spring 2004): 59–63.

ness, its radical blankness, remaining emphatically yet to be written.[13]

COLLECTIVE CHANGE (JULIE)

When Julian mentioned that he was thinking of thinking through *mood change* and *collective change* by way of the "Battle of Maldon," I thought I would try too.

But I was surprised to discover how strong my resistance
ran to the changes of mood that rippled through the
poem's martial collective, that flooded across those
individuals as they transformed
themselves into an agglomerated *unit*
glowing brighter as bodies came undone (combusting
that fragile, integral, organismal thing,
with a jubilant *there! you have it!* dying
in great sweet spiels of ideological trash,
dense curlicues of rhetorical *manifestation*
blowing out the dials of an austere
and taciturn poetry. . .).

In any case, as someone who's used up dreamless nights
dull-puzzling to think *collective change*,
I found the whole thing distasteful: the synecdochal
consolidation around Byrhtnoth,
over-hearty, mooded unto excess, *proud*,
pumped up with the supercharged selfhood
of the collective subject, making
his awesome gestures of decision
that go on being realized for a long time after,
that go on being realized even now.

Some lines from before the battle:

Ða þær Byrhtnoð ongan beornas trymian,
rad and rædde, rincum tæhte

[13] For a critique of "reproductive futurism" and the articulation "no future," see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). On the need to maintain the future as strategically blank, see Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx and Engels Reader*, 2nd edn., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 595.

hu hi sceoldon standan and þone stede healdan,
and bæd þæt hyra randas rihte heoldon
fæste mid folman, and ne forhtedon na. (17-21)

[Then Byrhtnoth began to encourage them there, he rode about and gave them advice, taught the warriors how they should stand and maintain the position, and urged them to hold their shields properly, securely with their hands, and not to be afraid at all.][14]

When I read these lines (lit up as they are with the light of soft organs beneath warriors' skin), I want to tell Byrhtnoth to just *lay off*, stop the aesthetic education he never stops delivering at those junctures where we can't help but listen, lean into him, mimic his postures, let him adjust our grip and loosen our fear.

After all, it matters
what we're standing for, doesn't it?
And how the decisions are made?

There is something about how the poem's speeches go, spooling out from one body after another as each gives up its mad red soul, that makes me suspicious. Loyalty's compulsive tic, sacrifice and resacrifice:

hi woldon þa ealle oðer twega,
lif forlætan oððe leofne gewrecan. (207-208)

[they all wanted one of two things,
to give up their life or to avenge their beloved lord.]

Collective mourning works itself out
until no one's left standing but the collective itself
(the lines of light that yoked men together,
still visible *sans* men) and a great sweet cloud of mood
and the Vikings who've gone back to their ship.

In fall of 2011
I made some experiments of myself

[14] "The Battle of Maldon," in *Old and Middle English c.890-c.1450: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Treharne (London: Blackwell, 2010), 156–169.

in a standing-off crowd.

At OCCUPY BOSTON I marched in marches
and shouted in public spaces where I felt the force
of not having shouted there before
and the impossibility, really, of ever shouting there alone.
I sat through very long meetings,
distended vacuoles of *process*,
that sometimes succeeded in
engineering a sequence of voices
that made communication's unknown amplitudes ring,
the muteness of which
I hadn't been able to specify before.
But lots of times the long meetings failed,
and I was embarrassed.

Some principles of the Occupy movement were: horizontal democracy, peaceful disobedience, radical inclusiveness, mutual aid. "Decide to be a part of this!" the thing said to me. "Decide to join up" had to keep being decided again, which made it different from the military contract of coercion and brotherhood, belonging and conscription, which has a long history of getting shit done, the Vikings remind us.

Hi bugon þa fram beaduwe þe þær beon noldon. (185)

[Then those who did not want to be there turned away from battle.]

they þone wudu sohto (193)

[they sought the woods]

Just so our protest community was excruciatingly porous,
voluntarist;
we kept seeping out of it.
How does one decide what collective
to change oneself into?
Not just to pledge allegiance to the land of my circumstance (to defend to death wherever already I am),
but also not to subject, say, every chant, every protest sign,
every comrade to the scrupulosity of my sniff-test, to my
hygienic, self-important decisionism . . . .

You
test the wind,
I guess,
and estimate if you still coincide
    with the collective project underway,
whatever mix of means and ends is materialized
    in the community there,
lodged like a cyst in time and space,
practicing its new pantomimes of justice.

One gets
very exhausted
when one realizes the collective won't survive the scene of its standing. And, as predicted, there is soon occasion for the trampled grass to be viciously replanted. A mural commemorates the feeling of feelings that won't be allowed to linger there.

And so one talks about it a short time after, but already far from the project whose velocity gave one's articulations sense. Which is what makes it different from heroic poetry, I suppose—from which the collective goes on glowing and emitting its moods that settle on the reader in a fine radioactive dust blown back from the year 991, still capable of being resisted and capable of being felt.