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Coda

## The Ghost in the Machine

*Digital Avatars of Medieval Manuscripts*

On June 26, 2001, the British Library threw a party. Among the attendees were Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport in the UK, and the pop group Mediaeval Baebes, at the time famous for bringing medieval music to the masses. But the real celebrity at the gathering was a book—London, British Library Additional MS 74236, the Sherborne Missal, a fifteenth-century manuscript described as “the largest, most lavishly decorated medieval service-book to have survived the Reformation intact.” Size, it turns out, does matter: the introductory material to the disc version of the library’s digital facsimile of the manuscript remarks that “If size were a criterion of value the Sherborne Missal would automatically qualify. It weighs over 3 stone [42 pounds], measures around 536 × 380 mm and contains 694 parchment pages.”<sup>1</sup> Newspapers such as the *Guardian*, reporting on the opening and the acquisition of the manuscript, echoed these remarks, and reported as well on another extraordinary measurement associated with the manuscript—the cost.

The Sherborne Missal had been on loan to the British Library since 1983, but in 1998 the twelfth Duke of Northumberland, after assessing the costs of inheriting his ancient title and keeping up his ancestral home of Alnwick Castle, home of the Percys since 1309, moved to recoup the manuscript’s assessed value of £15 million. He proposed to sell it at auction; the library responded by hammering out an offer that combined tax concessions, lottery money, and donated funds in order to buy the manuscript for the nation. John Ezard’s column in the *Guardian* on the British Library’s celebration detailed the costs of the agreement: “The chart-topping group Mediaeval Baebes yesterday helped the British Library to take formal possession of a manuscript whose importance as a medieval treasure is rivalled only by its place in the modern annals of tax minimisation. . . . Three years ago its owner, the Duke of Northumberland, threatened to sell it abroad to pay his inheritance tax. The government waived his debt of £9.4m, leaving him due to be paid a

further £5.6m for the value of the missal. Of this, the heritage lottery fund gave a £4.2m grant and the library raised £1.4m."<sup>2</sup> The British people, in other words, had signed a check whose size had to be balanced by something equally significant, and the library offered several counterweights. These included the publicity campaign that emphasized the manuscript's physical heft as well as its cultural significance. Of particular importance to the final pages of this study, however, is another piece of weighty advertising, for in the photographs published of the celebratory party, the Mediaeval Baebes are clustered, not around the Missal, but around the thirty-seven-inch computer screen which is as much part of the library's display of the missal as is the manuscript itself. The display allows visitors access to the library's "Turning the Pages" version of the manuscript. Touching the screen allows one to page through a digital facsimile of the book, zooming in on areas of interest. The result is, according to every account I have read, whether in the library's publicity, in its annual reports, or in the media, unprecedented access.<sup>3</sup> Frequently reproduced are the remarks of the Baebes at the opening party: "By digitising this beautiful manuscript the British Library is doing something very close to our own aims, bringing wonderful medieval art to life for a modern audience, and making it accessible to as many people as possible."<sup>4</sup>

The British Library's Turning the Pages project has been all about access: about broadening access to rare materials, giving more ordinary people (the people who in a real way underwrote the acquisition of the Sherborne Missal) the kind of access to medieval manuscripts that was once reserved for academics and aristocratic owners like the Gowers or the Percys. This laudable project offers a fitting end to *Printing the Middle Ages* because in many ways it takes us back to where we began. I have called this final section a coda rather than a conclusion because it traces a reprise, a return to the impulse to facsimile. The new technology allows reproduction beyond the wildest dreams of the black letter antiquarians and chromolithographers we have met in these pages, but the story of the Sherborne Missal and other projects like it illustrates the extent to which the world of print, and ideas about the representation of the medieval in that world, continue to govern our imagining of, and hence our access to, medieval text-objects.<sup>5</sup> We may find ourselves in a new era (though poised, I would argue, like McLuhan's Elizabethans, precariously and merely at its start),<sup>6</sup> but the past remains very much with us.

### Prologue: Counterfeiting Antiquity

In January 1565 or 1566, Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to William Cecil, later to be first Baron Burghley (1520/21–1598):

I retorne to youe your boke agayn. . . . I had thought to have made up the want of the begynnynge of the psalter. for yt wanteth the first psalme and III verses in the second psalme: and me thought the leaf goyng before the XXVI psalme wold have ben a mete begynnynge before the holl psalter. having david sitting with his harpe or psalterie. . . . etc and then the first psalme wryten on the backe side; which I was in mynd to have caused Lylve to have counterfeted in antiquite.<sup>7</sup>

The book Parker was returning to Cecil was London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian A.i, the Vespasian Psalter, an eighth-century manuscript of interest to Parker and his circle because of its interlinear Old English translations. Parker was proposing to move the image of David with his harp from folio 30v to the beginning of the whole psalter, as well as to supply the missing first psalm and opening lines of the second, offering the services of his artificer, a man named Lyly (perhaps Peter Lily),<sup>8</sup> who, like others in Parker's circle (and Parker himself), was skilled in "counterfeiting antiquity." While Parker returned the Vespasian Psalter unmodified (remembering that Cecil, a famous collector of books, had an artificer of his own), many of the manuscripts in his own collection show signs of similar interventions. Where missing texts could not be provided, Parker might wash out incomplete leaves, and where composite manuscripts had irregular edges, he would cut them to uniform size. In a real sense, then, the archbishop was making manuscripts: filling in or covering up textual lacunae; taking care to "counterfeit antiquity"; making the books that passed through his hands look the way he thought a medieval manuscript should. But this counterfeiting involved effacing traces of real antiquity: as R. I. Page noted in his lectures on the Parker Library, "The manuscripts—whatever their origin—are in a sense sixteenth-century ones."<sup>9</sup>

The habit of repairing manuscripts and early printed books continued throughout the period covered by this study. While our current notions of restoration would regard many formerly common practices as something closely akin to counterfeiting in the pejorative, even criminal sense, earlier bibliophiles such as Parker or Cecil clearly had no such concerns, and collectors of all manner of antiquities routinely "restored" their possessions to their own understanding of original states. In his *Bibliographic Decameron* of 1817, an eclectic and lavishly illustrated set of bibliophilic musings on medieval and early modern books, Thomas Frognall Dibdin writes of John Whittaker the bookbinder, "Give him your imperfect Caxton, and, within a few days thereof, you shall receive it so perfected, that the deficiencies cannot be discovered. There is a sort of witchery in his process; in consequence, I presume, of some nocturnal communication with the ghost of our first printer."<sup>10</sup> Whittaker employed the facsimilist John Harris, whose specialized in

copies of early printed pages and woodcut illustrations and later went to work providing missing pages for early prints in the British Museum.<sup>11</sup> It is often said that a turning point with respect to practices of restoration in Britain was reached after the decision in 1816 not to restore the Elgin Marbles,<sup>12</sup> but medieval manuscripts and early modern books continued to be repaired beyond what we would now accept as normal, both by collectors and by institutions, throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> It would seem that as in Parker's day, authority and value both were aligned with completeness, but Dibdin's metaphor suggests that there is more going on. The facsimile as he understands it offers a direct line, however ghostly, to the past: the re-creation of medieval books is understood as a way to communicate with a world long gone. I hope to have shown in these pages the degree to which this need to touch the past, either through its objects or through their stand-ins, has been part of the transmission of the Middle Ages for centuries of readers.

### Digital Avatars and Medieval Books

Today, digital technologies continue to re-create medieval books for a variety of audiences, and the digital facsimiles, like the hand- and machine-produced examples that have been discussed in these pages, both reproduce and relocate their medieval objects. But our current attitudes toward facsimile differ from Parker's and Dibdin's, and may in fact inhibit our ability to see the extent to which we too are re-creating medieval text-objects according to our own tastes. As technology has enabled ever more exact reproduction, the cheerful refashioning proposed by Parker has been replaced by an emphasis on the photographic, on the exact, with at times an accompanying confidence that perfect reproduction can approach the revelation of an object's truth. David Lowenthal argues that our current obsession with preservation is simply a new kind of delusion: "In practice, material authenticity honours surviving originals, however fragmented. But the authentic worth of unrestored objects divested of recognisable form is solely academic. Aesthetic defence of history's erosions is simply quixotic passion for *pentimenti* and limbless torsos. Our culture is addicted to preserving substance, but erosion, accretion, and chemical change incessantly alter every material object; no work of art ever remains as it was created."<sup>14</sup> When the possibilities of the new media are added to this addiction to preservation, the result is often a hybrid, facsimile-like object that exhibits a range of category confusions. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have described new media "remediation"—"the representation of one medium in another"—as operating according to categories of immediacy and hypermediacy, the former characterized by an emphasis on

transparency and immersion, and the latter by a self-consciousness which calls attention to its own strategies.<sup>15</sup> Many public digitization projects are openly fascinated by the technology they deploy, and indeed the marketing of the new is often part of drawing users to these facsimiles. At the same time, the language of unmediated authenticity often pervades the digital delivery of medieval textual artifacts, claiming to offer a transparent experience of the medieval original.<sup>16</sup> That this offer occurs at precisely the moment when preservation demands the originals be locked away in glass cases, points to a kind of technological bait-and-switch which is becoming increasingly common, at least in the managing of relations between "the public" and the artifacts of the past.<sup>17</sup> It is here that I would combine Dibdin's fanciful reflection on the connection between the facsimilist and the ghost of Caxton, with the rather more ominous implications of the phrase "the ghost in the machine."<sup>18</sup> The persistent desire to make connection with the medieval past as, simultaneously, foreign territory and familiar ancestor, framed as it has been in a need both to touch and to refashion the materiality of that past, is the ghost that continues to direct our contemporary encounters with medieval books. The ease with which that attraction to the material slides into bibliophilia and even the fetishization of the manuscript object poses a particular challenge for our encounters with the texts so materialized. The dispersal of that attraction into a non- (or differently) tactile, digital format, shifts the grounds upon which the facsimile stands.

In his enormously influential *Eloge de la Variante* (1989), Bernard Cerquiglini muses about the ways in which computers might facilitate a new form of editing, one which could simultaneously show what is in medieval artifacts, while also making what is there, understood. He suggests that "the [computer] screen is simultaneously dialogic (it offers a constant interaction between the user and the screen) and multidimensional (through the use of "windows," it allows one to bring together and consult information belonging to separate entities)."<sup>19</sup> This "screenic" presentation frees medieval works from "the two-dimensional and closed structure of the printed page. . . . [it] thus allows the reader to see and consult not only the totality of the manuscripts . . . but also the editions . . . which took these manuscripts as their objects."<sup>20</sup> In a sense, Cerquiglini imagines the computer as a means by which to pry medieval texts from the object-contexts in which they are trapped; screenic presence is a kind of liberation from materiality.<sup>21</sup> It is also, oddly, a different kind of authentic representation: because it allows a reader to "grasp [the] interaction of redundancy and recurrence, repetition and change, which medieval writing consists of,"<sup>22</sup> its processes actually mimic the processes of *variance* and *mouvance* said to characterize medieval manu-

script culture.<sup>23</sup> For Cerquiglini, "computer inscription is variance."<sup>24</sup> Thus the early theorizing of the place of medieval texts in a digital age seemed to point away from the physical object and away from the potential dangers of an excessive focus on the object at the expense of the text which it delivered. There are, however, two problems with this attempt at reimagining our relationships with medieval texts. The first is that it underestimates the powerful need to forge a tangible link with the past, even with all the dangers of fetishization such object-links entail; the second is that it fails in the end to imagine the degree to which the impulse to facsimile would come to govern even this new technology. The digital world has in fact multiplied the number of facsimile representations of medieval texts, and yet in the absence of the affective power of the material book, these facsimiles are often as alienating as they are, apparently, exact.

The image was not, in fact, central to some of the earliest encounters between medieval texts and computer technologies. Among the early efforts to move from the theoretical imagining of digital editing to a real editorial project was Peter Robinson's *Canterbury Tales* project, whose first disc, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, was released by Cambridge University Press in 1996.<sup>25</sup> The goal of the project was, and is, "to determine as thoroughly as possible the textual history of the *Canterbury Tales*." That is, the project began and continues in the textual context, and while its discs provide unprecedented access to some aspects of the manuscripts of the *Tales*, one senses in reading the description of the project that this access is almost by-product of the main emphasis on solving textual questions; most particularly, the vexed question of which one of the two major manuscript witnesses to the *Tales*, the Ellesmere or Hengwrt manuscripts, should be taken as the main source for Chaucer's text and for the order of the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>26</sup> Recounting the long history of debate about the status of these and other *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts, Robinson remarks:

Some 600 years of scholarly effort have failed to reach a consensus about these [textual] questions, or even to indicate whether they can be answered. We now have new and powerful tools . . . with these, there is at last a chance of getting some answer to these questions; and this is the task of The *Canterbury Tales* Project.

The work of the Project proceeds through four stages. Firstly, there is transcription of each manuscript into computer-readable form. . . . Secondly, there is a computer collation of the transcripts against each other. . . . Thirdly, there is analysis of the body of variation, using cladistic methods borrowed from evolutionary biology . . . these computer-assisted methods of analysis, in themselves, are revolutionary. The fourth stage is to present all this in an attractive and usable form.<sup>27</sup>

Robinson's remarks make clear that the Canterbury Tales Project's focus was initially problem- rather than access-driven, and its emphasis was on transcription and textual analysis rather than on facsimile. Nevertheless, the project's first digital publication also included images—in 1996, black-and-white scans from microfilm. Time and technology have moved on, and so has the Canterbury Tales Project. A key shift was articulated in the project's second publication, the *General Prologue* on CD-ROM, which appeared in 2000. Norman Blake and Peter Robinson noted that the response to the first disc had indicated a broader, less advanced scholarly audience than they had imagined, and in response, they had shifted their own sense of their purpose: "One might summarize the shift in our thinking in the last two years, underlying the differences between the two CD-ROMs, as follows: the aim of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* CD-ROM was to help editors edit; our aim now is also to help readers read."<sup>28</sup> Readers were still, at this point, being offered the materials to perform the act of recognition Cerquiglini imagined: this disc, like its predecessor, provided full transcriptions of all witnesses, scholarly editing tools, and images of the originals. It is in the project's next publication that we begin to see a more emphatic shift toward facsimile. Again in 2000, under its new Scholarly Digital Editions imprint, the Canterbury Tales Project produced a full-color digital facsimile of the Hengwrt manuscript.<sup>29</sup> This was still very much a scholarly research tool, and the way Robinson describes his aims suggests that there was a conscious eschewing of what was, by that time, a growing tendency to mount digital versions of beautiful manuscripts. He writes, "we hoped to go some way towards giving an impression of Hengwrt as a physical object, stains, rat chewings, and all."<sup>30</sup> I will have more to say below about the impact of the digital form on the affect of the facsimile; here I would note simply that the Hengwrt facsimile's subsequent trifurcation into "Research," "Standard," and online forms<sup>31</sup> further underlines the pull of facsimile, through the production of ever-cheaper digital editions that gradually strip away the editorial apparatus, leaving finally the digital facsimile alone. Describing the impact of new editorial theory on the work of the project, Robinson remarks, "The danger of editions that seek to join many different texts with images, commentaries, and background materials is that they may become accumulations rather than editions: arrays of information, presented in the mass. Faced with such overwhelming quantities of data, where is a reader to start?"<sup>32</sup> Robinson and the Canterbury Tales Project group have attempted to serve several masters, offering to less expert readers the possibility of approaching something like a critical, informed editorial response to the materials of the Chaucerian textual tradition, while also preserving their original address to a scholarly audience.



It often seemed in the early days of digital imaging that there was a sense that a digital version of a manuscript could somehow be more transparent than a traditional edition. That belief in part expresses a tension between edition and facsimile. The digital revolution allows, as the Hengwrt CD shows, unprecedented access to high-quality color images of manuscripts; this is the transparent, accessible facsimile. But the disc is, like a printed book, a product, one which arises from the complex interactions between many creators and users. The history of the Canterbury Tales Project shows how the digital revolution has been embraced by academics who want to use the inherent ability of the computer to display and manipulate data to address editorial questions, sometimes with ideas about the answers to those questions. And the marketing of the Sherborne Missal implies other interactions, revealing the relationships between academic culture and desire, the custodians of the manuscript objects, and the (perceived) demands of the marketplace. I return then to the British Library, but not, quite yet, to the Sherborne Missal.

One of the earliest digital manuscript projects was the Electronic Beowulf. It began in 1993, and some of its test images were, as the British Library site still notes, "among the first images of medieval manuscripts to be mounted on the internet."<sup>33</sup> In my files, I have copies of some of those early images, but the British Library now displays only one image on its webpage devoted to the manuscript, and offers that image and another for sale through its Images Online service. There are other samples available through the quite detailed Guide to Electronic Beowulf mounted on editor Kevin Kiernan's site at the University of Kentucky.<sup>34</sup> In this case access to the digital facsimile—or rather, free access—has diminished rather than increased since the project first began. Access of another kind is also and increasingly a problem for early experiments in digitizing. Like scholarly books, scholarly digital publications have a tendency to go out of print. And unlike scholarly books, those copies of scholarly digital publications which are sold, can become obsolete as changes in hardware and software render the discs increasingly incompatible with current computers. In the case of the Electronic Beowulf, the British Library has made efforts to keep up with technological change by releasing a new edition for more recent browsers.<sup>35</sup> The problem is of course larger in any case than the long-term viability of digital facsimiles: as all manner of public, private, and governmental bodies store more and more records in digital form, the future accessibility of these records has become a focus for the international library community.<sup>36</sup>

The Electronic Beowulf offers users digital versions of the original manuscript (London, British Library Cotton Vitellius MS A.xv); the two

eighteenth-century transcriptions done by and for Grimúr Jonsson Thorkelín; the early nineteenth-century collations of Thorkelín's edition of 1815 by John Conybeare (1817) and Sir Frederic Madden (1824); and a transcription and edition of the poem. This project appears to be the product of the computer used as Cerquiglini imagined, making visible to a user many of the materials that constitute the history of the transmission of this text, its movement from manuscript to edition. In this realization, the *Beowulf* manuscript object becomes the centre of a nexus of transmissive processes made visible and accessible. And yet the same concerns raised by the Canterbury Tales group about how, exactly, one would use these materials, are issues here as well. A review by William Kilbride in the *Internet Archaeology Review* pointed out that there are in effect six *Beowulfs* here: "These various texts are from many different locations. Thorkelin's transcriptions are now in the Royal Library of Denmark, while the Madden version is in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Only the Cotton Vitellius A xv manuscript and now the Conybeare transcriptions are located in the British Library, the latter only being acquired in 1994. Never before have all these texts been available in one country, let alone in one place." But he goes on to remark that the absence of a translation makes it unlikely that anyone other than the scholarly audience—as also first imagined by the Canterbury Tales Project—will be able to make much use of the riches in the product. In the context of considerable public discussion about the ability of digital technologies to broaden access to rare materials, he finds this omission "truly remarkable," concluding that "it is arguable that Electronic Beowulf doesn't do much to empower the public or enhance our access to these highly prized assets: it simply disenfranchises us in a new way."<sup>37</sup> It will become clear below that I share similar concerns about many current deployments of digital technology with respect to the materials of the medieval world. It is important to end this section by noting, however, that the *Beowulf* manuscript itself is, in some ways, more present through this digital realization than it will ever be to most people, even to those with considerable scholarly credentials. The British Library is extremely cooperative in granting access to even the rarest of materials, provided an adequate case is made, but it is nevertheless the case that "Z" category manuscripts such as Cotton Vitellius A.xv are consulted only rarely.<sup>38</sup> Having been in the reading room myself when the *Beowulf* manuscript was out in the open, I have seen other users of the room behave, upon noticing the manuscript, rather as they do when they spot a celebrity in public. And so we return to the Sherborne Missal and the computer screen.

The Sherborne Missal is displayed through various digital avatars in the British Library and around the world. There are the thirty-seven-

inch screen installations in the exhibition galleries in the library's St. Pancras home, a CD-ROM which one can buy for £12.95 at the library shop,<sup>39</sup> and an online version which one can access for free from anywhere in the world. All of these use the library's "Turning the Pages" software, and the realism of the interface is part of the advertising of this project: "Visitors are able to virtually 'turn' the pages of manuscripts in an incredibly realistic way, using touch-screen technology and animation."<sup>40</sup> The project's concern with realism (of a certain kind) is demonstrated as well by the opening movie which plays when one first inserts the CD-ROM version of the Missal. This is a three-dimensional animation sequence which seems to be intended to create the impression of a private session with the manuscript, as the user is granted a privileged, bird's-eye view of a reading stand isolated in a stone hall. The user, through the camera's point of view, swoops in, slowly climbs the stone stairs of the chamber, and at last witnesses the drama of the volume being turned to her viewpoint, revealed in full, and then closed. Yet this is of course an experience that one does not control: the animation is as constructed as is the case in which the real manuscript sits. It is also noteworthy that the animation presents a conventionalized "medieval" scene that culminates in a conventionalized approach to the book, so that digital technology is used to fulfill traditional expectations. James O'Donnell suggests that "The vital difference between present and future practices [in the dream of the virtual library] will be that the forms of organization of knowledge in electronic media do not resemble those of the traditional codex or book. The methods of production and distribution will diverge from those of the print media even more."<sup>41</sup> In this realization of the Sherborne Missal, I would on the contrary suggest that we are still very much functioning within the traditional world of the book, even as the manuscript goes digital. "Turning the Pages" as a software product also has a commercial aspect (another traditional aspect of the world of print as well, of course). The developer notes, for example, "Turning the Pages is now available as a service to institutions and private collectors around the world. You can attract visitors, increase website traffic and add a revenue stream—at the same time as broadening access to your collection and informing and entertaining your audience."<sup>42</sup> The British Library's realization of the missal is about marketing, and about entertainment, and not about paradigm shifts: this approach means marrying traditional "bookish" assumptions with a particular take on audience expectations of the medieval world, books, and computer technology. But as I have suggested throughout this study, the currents between the popular and the scholarly are not unidirectional. Even as the Canterbury Tales Project produces more stripped-down versions of its products for ordinary users, the developers of Turn-

ing the Pages are working on a new version of their product, one that would include the underlying database technology which has been characteristic of the scholarly Tales discs.<sup>43</sup>

The first thing a user of any of the digital versions of the Sherborne Missal will see is the cover of the closed book. The manuscript binding is an eighteenth-century French one, a reminder of the manuscript's presence on the continent from at least 1703 to 1797, when it was purchased by George Galwey Mills, from the sale of whose books the second Duke of Northumberland purchased it in 1800.<sup>44</sup> There is no immediate indication on the first screen that this is an eighteenth-century binding, though the excellent introductory essay on the disc version does discuss the manuscript's movements and also remarks on the unusual fact that the related Sherborne Cartulary retains its original binding. What seems to be important is simply that the book should begin in closed form, as part of the illusion of turning the pages. To open and flip through the book, online and CD users drag the mouse across the screen, while users at the British Library's display terminals perform the same movement by dragging a finger across the screen. The movement calls up an animated turn. This turn is a major marketing point for the software designers, who compare their product to similar packages on precisely these grounds: "A number of low-end applications have been released that allow you to convert flat pages to a turning book. Most of these were designed to allow brochures to be put on the web. In every instance the page-turning illusion is inferior to *Turning the Pages*, and in most the user has no control over the turn."<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, despite the suggestions—even the reality—of tactile access, this remains a structured simulacrum.

Market forces continue to be a factor in the digital age, just as they were for the first printers. The British Library is straightforward about the economic possibilities of digitization. Its goals for digitization include "[generating] income from those products with market appeal that can be exploited commercially by a partner, or the British Library itself, consistent with the aim of maximising accessibility to the collection."<sup>46</sup> The appeal of some artifacts, such as the Sherborne Missal, is thus pragmatically turned toward the ultimate goal of maximizing accessibility, clearly a worthy ambition. The emphasis on marketing and on public-private partnerships will nevertheless inevitably condition how the exploitable resources are exploited. The opening fly-by of the missal on the disc version is part of the grammar of the digital age, familiar to any user of computer games: it is a translation of the physical object from the past into a format more familiar to the present. In that respect it is no different than the editions that preceded it, and it is no more transparent than they were. It too has its underlying assumptions, but

these are neither Lachmannian nor new philological; they have to do instead with what "the public" wants, or is understood to want. Libraries have no option but to protect the rare objects in their collections, and their efforts to display these objects through the new technology are admirable and exciting. What I am interested in here, however, is the degree to which the form and content of these new, digital facsimiles are governed by long-standing assumptions about the desires of users/readers. The assumptions are those I have been tracing throughout these pages: to borrow from the advertisement to the Smith Froissart discussed in Chapter 5, readers are thought to want—*do* want—to unclothe the gilded clasps and admire the illuminations. They often do not seem to be expected to read, and that has been a problem for medieval texts for many centuries.

An example from another project is helpful here. The National Library of the Netherlands is another major national institution that has made digital access to its medieval collections a focus. The library's site records the thinking that went into the digitization of the illuminated manuscripts in its collection: "In agreement with the ambitions of a national library, publishing sources on the internet must aim at a professional as well as a lay audience. The project, therefore, had to find a balance between its origin as a scholarly catalogue and its additional purpose as a permanent exhibition of one of the nation's most important treasures of medieval art. The original iconographical emphasis of the cataloguing . . . fitted this secondary purpose very well. Research shows that a general audience is first of all interested in the subject matter of images."<sup>47</sup> There is an attempt here to address a professional as well as a popular audience, and the chosen vehicle is the manuscript image. This emphasis on the image was married to the interests of art historians, in the creation of a computer version of the Iconclass system, a descriptive tool for image cataloguing in use in the Netherlands since the 1950s and now realized as a computer-based search tool. Thus the interests of the picture-loving public and of art historians coincide. Textual scholars, however, are less likely to find access to the materials they would need for study.<sup>48</sup>

The digital Sherborne Missal, too, emphasizes the image: the software presents sixteen openings, a total of thirty-two of the 694 pages, and each is lavishly decorated. In fact, the British Library's whole Treasures project emphasizes ornate books. There are at the time of this writing eighteen books available online through the Turning the Pages software, and most are elaborately decorated.<sup>49</sup> The language on sites that use the software underlines this visual appeal, frequently referring to the artifacts and their decoration using terms such as lavish, sumptuous, magnificent, and superb.<sup>50</sup> Oddly, however, the full scope of these

objects is obscured by the process of selection. Most of the Turning the Pages objects are samples rather than complete facsimiles (I will discuss the "Treasures in Full" project further below). A user is informed that she is viewing, for example, "pages 7 and 8," but these numbers refer to the selected images and not to the folio or page numbers of the original. A user who did not read the accompanying text would have no sense, in fact, of the size of the Sherborne Missal, despite the library's description of it as "wonderful and weighty." A problem long identified in the world of digital information has been that of user disorientation, what E. Jeffery Conklin famously called being "lost in hyperspace."<sup>51</sup> Early theorists of the Internet were concerned with the labyrinth of links, a maze in which, thanks to the absence of road maps, one could quickly become lost. A closed system like the electronic facsimile of the Sherborne Missal is clearly a different kind of digital world, and one that on the surface, through the control imposed, is designed to prevent user disorientation. At the same time, the absence of visual cues as to the size of the book in question creates, I would argue, a kind of disorientation which is, like the hyperlinked documents that first raised concerns, specific to the new technology.<sup>52</sup> Ongoing developments of the Turning the Pages technology suggest refinement beyond the initial visual appeal; the National Library of Medicine, for example, has developed what it calls a "Discovery" approach, to take a user beyond the digital facsimile and into related resources on the World Wide Web. The "wow" factor of the digital facsimiles is seen as merely a first step: "The virtual books, whether in kiosks or online, are eye catching. However, we took the opportunity to extend these remarkable electronic objects to information systems."<sup>53</sup> The route into these information systems continues to be the visual, however, and the selection continues to emphasize the most striking pictures.

In the case of the Sherborne Missal, designers seem also to have decided that these should be British pictures. In her essay "The Making of a National Treasure" on the CD version of the missal, Michelle Brown asks, "What is so special about this particular survivor of the Middle Ages?" What follows details the artistic richness of the Missal, as well as the unusual amount of information it contains about its own conditions of production—the artists and commissioners, its place in Sherborne Abbey's history. There is a particular emphasis on the local flavor of the missal, provided by such things as the detailed drawings of birds that adorn some of the pages. It is clear that Sherborne's specialness, and even more, its Britishness, mattered a great deal when it came to raising the money to buy it. These concerns may well have played into the choices made in the digital presentation of the missal. One of the "themes" offered to the user is the bird theme, presented on the CD

version through the Bird Choir page. Each bird can be chosen and viewed in more detail, either from this section or from the featured pages, and a sound file of the birdcall can be played. The enhancements offered by the digital world might mean computer collation to the Canterbury Tales Project, or access to nineteenth-century editions or eighteenth-century transcriptions to the Electronic Beowulf project, but they also mean the ability to hear clips of sixteen different birds. I have made reference throughout these pages to a repeated desire to claim some kind of genealogical link to the past as a powerful motivator in the constant recreations of that past; the Sherborne facsimile's birds are another attempt to link contemporary British passions (for ornithology, for the countryside) to an artifact that is understood to embody an ancestral past.

An artifact's link to an imagined past can have political and ideological ramifications. Debate in the House of Lords over government funding of campaigns to stave off the sale of masterpieces to foreign collectors has used the indigeneity argument, with specific reference to the Sherborne Missal. In May 2000, Lord Strabolgi (David Montague de Burgh Kenworthy, eleventh Baron Strabolgi, a Labour member of the House of Lords) offered these remarks as to when it might, and might not, be appropriate to make efforts to save art treasures for the nation:

Is it better that we should concentrate on saving important works that are an integral part of our national heritage, such as the Sherborne Missal, which was accepted by the Government in part satisfaction of inheritance tax from the Northumberland estate and is now permanently in the British Library? . . . Can we—indeed, should we—always try to retain every work of art of foreign origin . . . ? While we must all be sad at the loss of the Rembrandt, it has gone back to the Netherlands; and the Poussin painting of the “Destruction of the Temple” has been exported to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where of course it has great significance. Great masterpieces belong to the world.<sup>54</sup>

The Englishness of the Sherborne Missal here is part of what makes it worth saving, worth spending so much public money on. David Lowenthal has described the heritage movement as “not a testable or even a reasonably plausible account of some past, but a *declaration of faith* in that past.”<sup>55</sup> Objects like the Sherborne Missal can be seen as focus points for such a faith, for the belief that we can make the direct connection so apparently longed for by the producers of the book-objects analyzed in these pages. This is not to say that the missal is not in fact an important historical artifact, nor that the library has not made an effort to outline its historical significance to audiences; it is simply to observe that the current digital and public-relations delivery to the British public is embedded in a complex story to which history, heritage, bibliophilia, and technophilia all make significant contributions.

There are digitization projects whose objects are not as visually spectacular in the way that the Sherborne Missal is. While the Iconclass system and the resultant emphasis on selections from illuminated manuscripts dominates in many European digitization projects, there are also ventures such as the *Codices Electronici Ecclesiae Coloniensis* and the *Codices Electronici Sangallenses* (CESG), two programs which aim to mount online complete versions of hundreds of medieval manuscripts belonging to the Cathedral Library of Cologne and the Abbey Library of St. Gallen.<sup>56</sup> These digital facsimiles make no attempt to mimic a life-like page turn; indeed, the bindings appear via separate links from the "facsimile," here taken to refer to the manuscript pages themselves. They do, however, offer extremely high-quality, enlargeable images. Here authenticity is understood to reside, not so much in the technological wizardry of the facsimile, as in the embeddedness of each facsimile in the context of a whole monastic library. But in this project, too, initial selection has been made on aesthetic criteria: the two-year pilot proposes to digitize "a selection of the finest illuminated codices."<sup>57</sup> In this case, the needs of researchers appear first in the project description, but the preference for the more attractive manuscripts speaks as well to the public context acknowledged at the end of the description: "At the same time, an intuitive, appealing internet presentation will communicate the medieval codex culture to a wider audience."<sup>58</sup>

Most of the books in the original Turning the Pages project were not what we would think of as literary texts, and I have noted above how the technology has continued to be applied to visually monumental books. The CESG's decision to begin with the more attractive books follows a similar path, despite its broader strokes. *Printing the Middle Ages* has been concerned largely with the fate of medieval literary texts; it would be reasonable to suggest, then, that the Canterbury Tales Project and the Electronic Beowulf are the most relevant of the digitization programs discussed thus far. But I hope I have suggested throughout these pages the persistent tendency for the characteristic materiality of medieval texts—that is, a materiality embodied in rare manuscripts and in rare early prints—to dominate our relationship to them. It is the persistence of a similar tendency in the digital era that makes Turning the Pages of particular interest, because the digital is, of course, not material; or rather, it must be materialized through the new media of the screen and the keyboard. It is worth noting that the British Library's online Treasures in Full project, which does mount digital facsimiles of complete works, includes Caxton's editions of the *Canterbury Tales* and the Winchester manuscript of Malory's *Morte Darthur*.<sup>59</sup> Here a reader can access complete objects, without the animated page turns and audio commentaries characteristic of the Turning the Pages objects. The scholarly audi-



ences anticipated for the Canterbury Tales Project or the Electronic Beowulf would find more useful material here than in most of the Turning the Pages sites, but a public audience is imagined as well, and is well-supported by notes, commentary, transcriptions, and supplemental links. Turning the Pages tries to make old books accessible through a kind of virtual-reality interface, one that fights the elusiveness of bytes with an emphasis on sight and touch. Treasures in Full, on the other hand, accepts the disembodiment characteristic of the digital with, apparently, little concern—perhaps precisely because the artifacts are the familiar canonical objects of English literature and history (others include the Magna Carta and Shakespeare in Quarto).

Much of the publicity and journalism associated with the deployment of digital technologies in the realm of book display is, as I have said, glowing in its assessment of the appeal of the digital. The Smithsonian Institution takes a rather unusual line in describing its own online digital editions, in that it makes no claims to realism: "We recognize that looking at a book online is not the same as turning the pages of a book you pulled from the stacks yourself. However, viewing our collections online can afford you many more riches and rarely will you find yourself with a paper-cut! You are limited only by your own imagination."<sup>60</sup> The Smithsonian's light-hearted take on touching—or not touching—a rare book has its serious side. Projects like the CEEC and CESG are explicit in their hope that high-quality digital facsimiles will protect fragile originals. The Irish Script On Screen project (ISOS) has as its goals to "provide exposure on the internet for a vital part of Ireland's cultural heritage"; to "place these primary materials at the disposal of scholars and students"; and to "contribute to the conservation of these valuable books and documents by creating images of high-resolution detail which, generally speaking, will reduce the need to handle the artefacts themselves."<sup>61</sup> That is, the digital substitutes are offered up to nationalist, scholarly, and popular consumption. The originals, meanwhile, become ever less accessible to any of those purposes.

This study has examined how authenticity has been at once a persistent claim in the postmedieval production of medieval texts, and a fluid reality dependent on the limits of various historical imaginations. To authenticity the digital age has added accessibility, yet this concept is equally plastic. The care lavished on the virtual turn in the British Library's digital facsimiles suggests that access, despite the Smithsonian's gentle attempts to urge otherwise, is still understood ideally to involve some kind of physical connection. The role of the tactile in our experience of books of all kinds is well known. The novelist and essayist Alberto Manguel reflects on this experience: "one doesn't simply read *Crime and Punishment* or *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. One reads a certain

edition, a specific copy, recognizable by the roughness or smoothness of its paper, by its scent, by a slight tear on page 72 and a coffee ring on the right-hand corner of the back cover.”<sup>62</sup> The particular problem attached to medieval texts is that the objects to which we are increasingly offered digital access are themselves all but untouchable; indeed, a desire to define access through the digital is, as noted above, often specifically aligned to a protective desire to remove the artifact from even the limited exposure it may now have.<sup>63</sup> The avatars for these rare objects have, in the history traced in these pages, been books themselves—manipulable, tangible, physical. In an early entry into the discussion of the future of books in the digital world, Geoffrey Nunberg suggested that “it is precisely because these technologies transcend the material limitations of the book that they will have trouble assuming its role.”<sup>64</sup> That is, the physicality of the book is part of its cultural role, whether as public object or private delight. The digital facsimiles I have discussed here all attempt in one way or another to offer these medieval and early modern books to the fulfilling of both roles, and yet I would argue that they are ultimately stymied by the requirement to disembody the objects they display. The resulting tension, between access and absence, creates the ghosts that haunt the digital realm.

Two *Turning the Pages* terminals are found in the Lindisfarne Heritage Centre on the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne. They are placed, along with the photographic facsimile of the manuscript, in their own specially crafted room: “Entry to this highly atmospheric inner-sanctum is via a medieval characterised lobby containing other interactive displays and further educational resource media. Dark high ceilings and spotlight images create a sense of intimacy and reverence, very appropriate for the subject of the high tech computers which host two copies of the ‘Turning the Page’ electronic Lindisfarne Gospels.”<sup>65</sup> As with the animated opening to the Sherborne Missal on CD, the desire seems to be to immerse the viewer/ user in a virtual reality. If it seems odd to offer a visitor to the British Library’s St. Pancras exhibition galleries a choice between the glass-enclosed physical Sherborne manuscript and the somewhat more manipulable electronic one right next to it, the virtual presence of the Lindisfarne Gospels on the isle is even more odd—is, indeed, ghostly—because the Gospels are, of course, not there. A related gospel book, now held as Lichfield Cathedral MS 1, has similarly been digitally repatriated to what some argue is its original home, the parish church of Llandeilo Fawr in Wales, where it is known as the St. Teilo Gospels or the Llandeilo Gospels. The origins of this eighth-century gospel book remain in some dispute: it contains the earliest example of written Welsh, in marginal notes, though whether the book was produced in Wales is less certain. The parish of Llandeilo Fawr, from

which the manuscript was mysteriously removed in the eleventh century, links the page announcing the digitization project to an article by Gareth Morgan in the *Western Mail* which calls the Gospels "Wales' Elgin Marbles," noting that the book now resides "in an English cathedral,"<sup>66</sup> and most Welsh publicity organs remark on the bilingual (English/Welsh) audio commentary provided in the Turning the Pages version. For the Welsh, in other words, the St. Teilo Gospels are a crucial part of a cultural patrimony. Lichfield Cathedral, where the manuscript is known as the St. Chad Gospels, has its own publicity announcements. One of these is headlined "Spreading the Gospel: Digital Technology Turns the St. Chad Gospels."<sup>67</sup> The language of access is here punningly married to the language of mission. Another release, announcing the archaeological unearthing of the original shrine to St. Chad under the cathedral, has as its subtitle "Shrine to be re-united with illuminated Gospels after 1000 years."<sup>68</sup> The release goes on to note that the manuscript was commissioned specifically to adorn the shrine. The emphasis on the physical reuniting of the pieces of the Saxon version of Lichfield's history makes the significance of the material object once again plain, yet even in Lichfield, the Gospels' presence is oddly ghostly, as the book itself is not on continual display. In both Lichfield and Llandeilo Fawr, the computer terminals have a part to play in an ongoing drama of claim-staking, but the simple fact that neither location wishes to give up the ownership of the object itself, indicates the degree to which the material still matters.

Donald A. Lindberg, director of the National Library of Medicine, remarked at the dedication ceremony for his institution's Turning the Pages terminal, "The sensation is uncannily real."<sup>69</sup> Those two words, sensation and uncanny, are where this study ends. The Turning the Pages project attempts to make medieval books "real" to people who are not allowed to touch them, even if they are standing right over them. Visitors to the British Library are permitted to touch a physical body (the screen), and to manipulate a virtual body (the digital facsimile), but the effect is sometimes strangely like a photograph of the dear departed, a reminder of what is lost as much as a comfort of some kind of continuing presence. The screenic presentation seen by Cerquiglini as liberating also haunts us with the substitution of one body for another—a substitution that happened in the world of the printed edition, too, but which we have there at least learned to recognize. The trick with the digital facsimile is that the language of reality and presence, allied with the public mantra of accessibility, implies a kind of transparency, when what is offered is in fact an opaque simulacrum, one that is "uncannily" familiar. The uncanny, Freud tells us, is the return of the repressed, a reminder of our psychic past. The medieval books

are present to us in digital form, yet their absence haunts these recreations. In popular parlance, one could well describe the experience of leafing through the Sherborne Missal online as surreal, but this is also, I think, quite a precise naming of the experience afforded by certain kinds of digital facsimiles. The British Library knows that there is a difference between the real thing and the virtual presence—surely otherwise, the missal could have been sold abroad, so long as the rights to reproduce it digitally had been secured. Great efforts were made to hold onto this “weighty” object. And yet paradoxically, the securing of that physical body has been succeeded by a kind of disappearance, a remaking into the absent presence lurking in its digital avatars.