Catholics who remained faithful as embarrassments and impediments. In the post-Christian West the faith is under pressure from an increasingly hostile secular culture, increasingly reinforced by political power; and one wonders if the faithful there will stand as true as their brothers and sisters in China.

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CHIVALROUS TO A FAULT

Nigel Saul: *Chivalry in Medieval England*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. xiv, 416.)

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Given the recent grumblings by the saps at the bottom—by which I mean *us*, the 99 percent—it is bracing (okay, perhaps disconcerting is more accurate) to read a book about chivalry, those touted codes of honor that dominated among the medieval 1 percent. Yet Nigel Saul's recent *Chivalry in Medieval England*, published simultaneously by Harvard University Press on this side of the Atlantic and by the Bodley Head back in his native UK, does just that, swimming against the stream of both popular culture and academic writings, which tend to focus on historical narratives counter to dominant structures of power and privilege. Saul makes no apologies for his topic, and in his lengthy volume crisply defines chivalry, maps its historical contours, and considers the ways it shaped other elements—architectural, legal, sexual, lexical—of late medieval life. Saul's discrete topics of analysis in turn contribute to his overall claim, namely that chivalry's effects still linger into the present day, affecting all 100 percent of us.

Saul's openly teleological aims shape the book's organization, and he proceeds chronologically, moving from "The Origins of Chivalry" (chapter 1) to chivalry's medieval zenith in "Edward III and Chivalric Kingship, 1327–99" (chapter 6). From chapter 7 on he dilates on chivalry's contributions to specific aspects of medieval culture, bracketing off various topics such as "Chivalry and Nobility," "Chivalry and Violence," "Chivalry and Crusading," and "Chivalry and Fortification" as areas that merit more detailed exploration. The chapters "Chivalry and Fortification" and "Chivalric Literature, 1250–1485" also allow him to reverse his view to consider the ways physical space and written narrative shaped chivalric ideals. In the closing chapters of the book, Saul turns to the legacy of chivalry, looking at its reinterpretation during the fifteenth-century Wars of the Roses, a time when chivalry became

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associated with "the service of the state" (346), before its eventual decline. (It is worth noting that Saul's definition of chivalry, which rests on codes of military behavior, allows him to locate chivalry's decline in the late thirteenth century—thus earlier than most other critics, with Renaissance scholars often arguing that, repackaged and retooled, chivalry continued to perform important ideological work well into the seventeenth century.)

At his strongest, Saul makes shrewd insights about chivalry's ability to produce and maintain social categories unavailable in earlier eras. Such is the case in his discussion of heralds, who over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries became "registrars of chivalry … the men whose collective memory recorded its visual repertory" (58). This limning of specific groups helps him make larger points about the impact of chivalry on the conception of individuality. As he argues, the knightly markings of heraldry rewrote upper-class identity and reshaped basic understandings of aristocratic self-fashioning. At the same time, an emerging late-medieval emphasis on individual achievement was checked by chivalry's emphasis on the common good, a value that helped "subordinat[e] … individual interests to strategic need" (134).

Saul also presents compelling evidence of chivalry's material effects, traces of which he sees in castle placement and architecture. As he aptly demonstrates, castle location was "influenced by a policy of … cultural appropriation" (244) with Normans building deliberately on ancient sites to justify their own power. Further, the "proliferation of castles in the English heartland" (247) far away from any contested borders highlights the powerful ideologies of class and privilege at play behind their construction.

Where Saul's book falls short is in its uncritical embrace of a model of social evolution, one strikingly reminiscent of Steven Pinker's very recent *Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Viking, 2011), a book that uses Darwinian jujitsu to argue that humans have, over time, become less violent. Thus we find Saul deploying a tired binary of "savage" and "civilized" to argue that chivalry contributed to a "more humane system" of war (368). Just as Pinker brackets off messy "exceptions" to his thesis (wars of decolonization, the state violence that in this country has incarcerated 1 out of every 100 citizens), so too does Saul finally admit that this idea of compassion was "one applied selectively in the Middle Ages" (368). Yet this caveat does not exempt him from his earlier (and problematic) evolutionary assertions, ones that prompt him to read the hairstyles of the "shaggy-looking" (13) Celts as markers of their lack of development. This view of chivalry as fundamentally progressive becomes even more problematic when read against the Crusades, a series of wars that celebrated their own violence and brutality. Indeed, this reader wished for a much more nuanced discussion of violence itself, a topic treated with much care under the pen of theorists like Arendt and Fanon (to name just two) but ill defined and undertheorized by Saul.

This tendency for unnuanced and uncritical reading becomes more pronounced when Saul turns to literary works, which he often cites out of

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context or misrepresents. For instance, in his rush to show heroism in the early Old English epic *Beowulf*, Saul describes the villain Grendel as "a creature of chaos and darkness" (183). But while true to a point, this characterization fails to acknowledge that Grendel is described as the kin of Cain, is motivated by recognizably human emotions, and is killed when Beowulf tears off his suspiciously man-shaped arm in an act that calls into question Beowulf's own humanity as much as it does Grendel's monstrosity. In short, the real monster is already in the hall, in the warriors themselves. Similarly, to read Chaucer's Knight as "a representative figure who could embody the highest chivalric ideals of the age" (231) is to ignore the fact that this same Knight appears in dirty clothes on a half-starved horse accompanied by his ne'er-do-well son. That the Knight tells a story questioning his own place at the top of the social order throws into relief the problems that beset chivalry from the onset, namely its own claims to legitimacy. Finally, to argue that Chaucer's "remodelling of [the Wife of Bath's tale] was so extensive that the views expressed in it can be taken as [the poet's] own" (175) is quite simply wrong.

Finally, I cannot end this review before noting the poor decision (whether by Saul or by the editors at Harvard) to group *Chivalry*'s many and quite beautiful images in the middle of the volume without any indication of where they are discussed. Thus when Saul notes that a "duel with Saladin was to be depicted on a set of thirteenth-century Chertsey tiles" (226), one has no idea if this image is reproduced in Saul's book. (For the record it is not.) And when Saul gives a detailed reading of the Bayeux tapestry, the reader does find a corresponding image, although not one really needed to prove his point.

In sum, although I like Saul's impulses and very much appreciate his talents as a historian—and to this end I recommend his 1986 volume, *Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280–1400* (Clarendon, 1986)—*Chivalry* tries to do too much with evidence that is too thin. In the end, Maurice Keen's classic *Chivalry* (Yale University Press, 1984) still sets the standard for this topic.

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