

FROM JUVENILIA TO SENILIA: A PERSONAL CASE

Juliet McMaster

University Professor Emerita, The University of Alberta

I APOLOGISE in advance for writing egocentrically. It is not my usual mode. But I *was* a juvenile writer, and I *am* a published author; and since my scholarship is often about childhood writings, I have paid attention to the connections between the juvenilia and the mature writings of the same author. Only recently, I turned my attention to those connections in my own case. And I was somewhat surprised by what I discovered. At least my self-examination will have the merit of coming from the horse's mouth. To what extent my findings may apply to other authors, I am still investigating.

When I was eleven, I received some private tutoring to get me into the local high school (the Kenya Girls' High School in Nairobi). For "History" the tutor took me, inevitably, back to good old 1066 and all that.¹ I had "done" the Norman conquest before. But this time I heard about Hereward the Wake, the Anglo-Saxon hero who formed a resistance movement against William the Conqueror. He holed up in a ruined monastery on the Isle of Ely in the fens of East Anglia, and William, and all the King's horses and all the King's men, couldn't safely find their way across the marshes to cast him out and put an end to the resistance. So much was about the sum total of what I was taught about Hereward the Wake. But it was enough for my purposes. The heroic outlaw and his band of followers were like Robin Hood and his merry men. And I decided to write a historical novel about him.

I began at eleven, consulting no one, and writing strictly in secret. And it says something for my persistence that I kept at it till I was about fourteen. You can deduce the passage of years by the visible evolution in my handwriting (Fig. 1); also by the improving quality of my illustrations, which are many, and in full colour.

I had no idea how to do research so as to find out more about my historical subject—no internet of course, and my access to libraries was limited; but nor did I feel the need. The historical situation as I have outlined it was enough—for my business was fiction, not history. At some point I discovered that Charles Kingsley had written a novel, *Hereward the Wake*, published in 1866, and I duly read it. But by that time it was too late to be influenced by it. I was already doing my own thing; and actually, I liked my own thing better. (No offence, Rev. Kingsley!)

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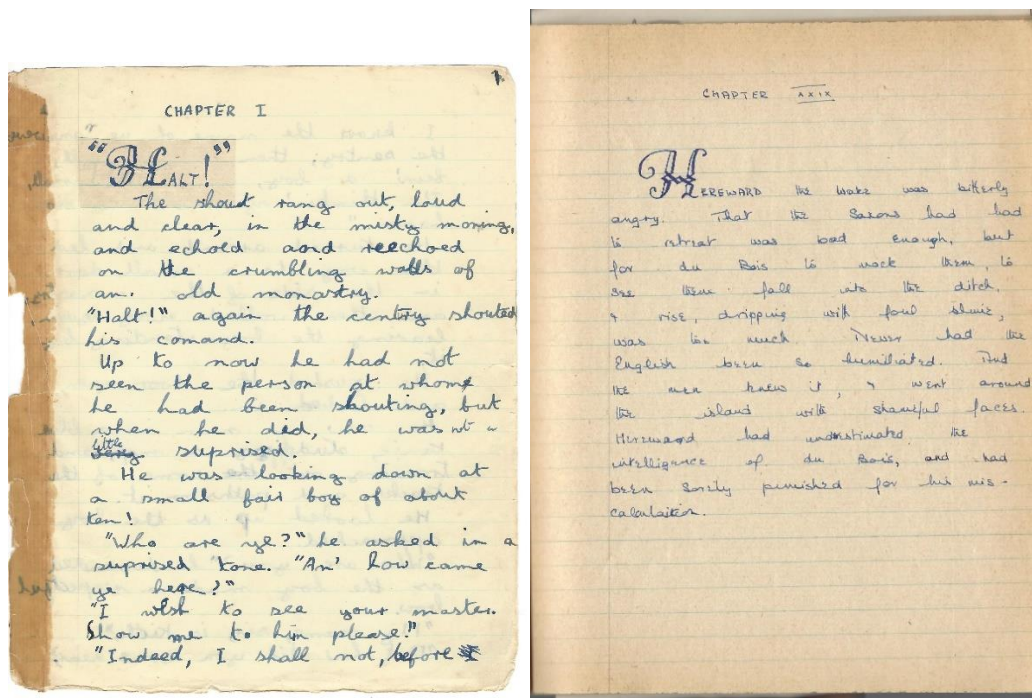


Fig. 1. Hereward the Wake *holograph manuscript, first and last pages, by Juliet Fazgan.*

My protagonist was a ten-year-old boy called Keith. (I'm sorry to say that I spelt his name throughout as "Kieth," conscientiously observing the rule of "I before E except after C"). I kick myself now that I didn't have the guts or inventiveness to create a girl protagonist. But I suppose like other girls of the day (this was 1948) I grew up with the assumption that adventures happen to boys, not girls (though I was certainly all set to have adventures of my own). Keith, having been early separated from his parents, resourcefully finds his own way across the treacherous marshes to the Isle of Ely, and presents himself to Hereward the Wake as a new and competent recruit. Hereward is skeptical because of his youth, but gives him a chance to prove himself. Keith persists, and gathers admiration for his exploits.

The structure is episodic, as the outlaws think up ways to harass the Normans. Episodes include setting two Norman barons (usurpers of Saxon estates) at enmity with each other; releasing prisoners from dungeons; rescuing a condemned Saxon from execution on the scaffold. Some of my own hobbies and interests naturally crept in: horses, and swords, and fencing.

Historical authenticity? Well, unsurprisingly, there isn't much of that. In the illustrations I dressed my outlaws in outfits such as I had seen in swashbuckling movies or ballet: tunics, tights (cross-gartered), and shirts with puffy sleeves. I hadn't much French at the time (and still less Anglo-Saxon!); but I begged and borrowed

what I could, and cooked up names that I thought appropriate; and in dialogue my characters “spoke forsoothly.”

The manuscript, hand-written and bulging with paste-ins and inserted pictures, could have served as an exhibit at the upcoming Sydney conference on Juvenilia and Materiality (but that will now be virtual). I probably wouldn’t have begun it at all but for having been given a hardcover book, lined but otherwise blank. Pasted into the endpapers are pencil portraits of characters in the story: Hereward, Keith, his friend Dave, his particular enemy the Norman Franz Plage. In a loose leaf at the front is a fold-out map of the Isle of Ely as I conceived it, the surrounding fens, and the castles of the neighbouring Norman barons. The chapters are numbered in Roman numerals (such was the convention I was used to); and each chapter begins with an ornate initial (copied from a book I was fond of, Mary O’Hara’s *The Green Grass of Wyoming* of 1946). The initial is carefully pasted in, as it was an after-thought. Once I caught up with my writing, I could draw the initial straight onto the page. By page 157 I had come to the end of the first hard-cover book. But I taped it to another, and kept going. I finally gave up at page 229, at the beginning of Chapter XXIX. The illustrations are many, and in full colour (pencil and watercolour); thirty-six in all, or about one to every six pages of manuscript.

To supply a sample of the prose of this eleven-year-old author of historical fiction, here is the opening of Chapter IV:

DAYBREAK! [with ornate capital D]

The dawn of a day that Kieth would never forget!

To the East, the rim of the sun could just be seen. To the West, were still a few stars which were going out one by one.

Kieth, his heart filled with happiness, was once again making his way across the marsh.

He stepped out of the mud and onto the dry land. As he did so, he heard a familiar burst of laughter to his right, and, turning, he beheld Dave, who was grinning from ear to ear.

“So you’re none the worse for your first job, eh? Haw haw!” cried Dave, stepping forward and, as many times before, bowling Kieth over with a hearty slap on the back. “Good lad! Got them men of de Everest proper mad!—what with lettin’ out their prisoner and settin’ fire to their crops!” (19–20)

With the description of daybreak young Juliet (as I call her, in distinction to old me) is trying for some purple prose. But she throws in humour and some slapstick.

The illustration that goes with the passage dates from a little later (Fig. 2), as she started the illustration project later than the prose narrative. There has been some evolution in her envisaging of the marsh that surrounds the Isle of Ely. At first she thought of a lake of mud, and an island with a clearly defined bank. Then she learned

that the fens were less easily discriminated from land, and that the two alternate and blend, and are not always distinguishable; hence, in this illustration, the green blends into the muddy sea behind Keith. Hero's Friend, as you can see in this passage, is Dave, big and brawny and not too bright. (There's a Hero's Enemy among Hereward's people too: Hugh the Archer, who resents Keith's success.) The gaping hole between the two figures shows Juliet had much to learn about composition; but she is working to make her figures expressive. For "turning, he beheld Dave," she took pains with the placement of Keith's feet to show the sudden turn "to his right." And there is a degree of pose and movement in the three-quarter back view of laughing Dave.

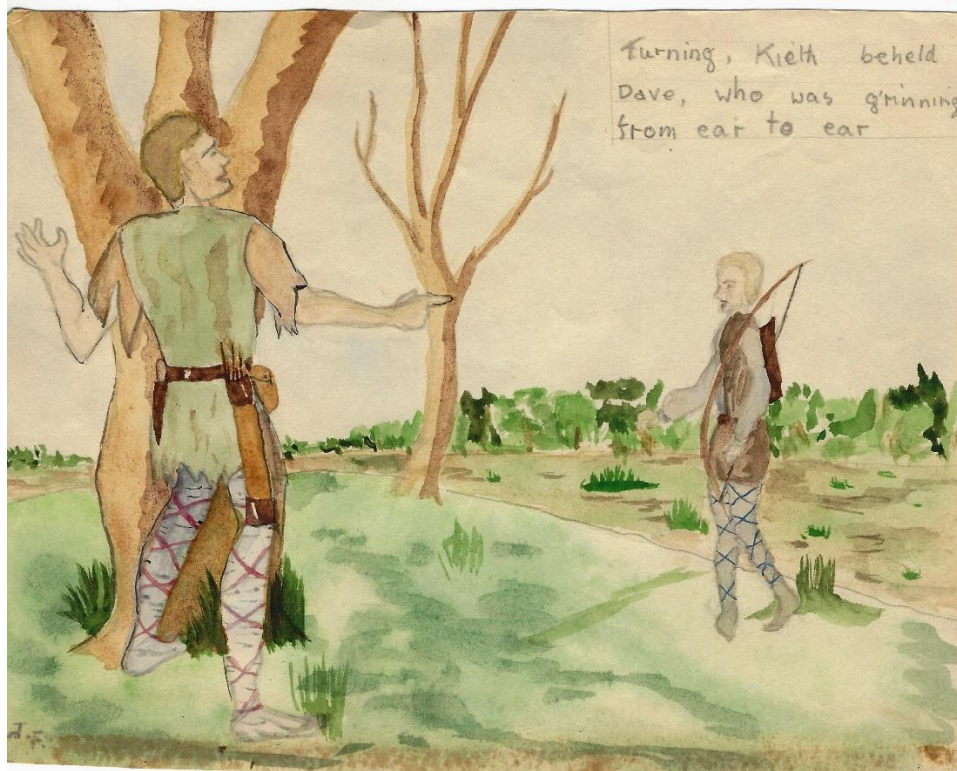


Fig. 2. "Keith beheld Dave, who was grinning from ear to ear," by Juliet Fazan, from *Hereward the Wake*, facing p. 19.

A year or two on, and Juliet has definitely improved in composition, figure drawing, and the management of watercolour (Fig. 3).

Though Juliet never finished her historical novel, she did have burgeoning ideas, recorded in elaborate notes, as to where the narrative was going—so burgeoning, in fact, that they were hard to reconcile, and may have formed one reason for her finally abandoning it. Despite her long commitment, she hadn't yet determined on a title. Her notes reveal that she had two in mind, both as extracted from scenes of dialogue yet to come. "*This Norman Plague*" (if it was spoken by a Saxon); or "*These Stubborn*

Saxon Dogs!” (if it was spoken by a Norman). But Juliet was evidently alert enough to traditional narrative patterns. Where does Keith come from? Before the narrative begins, he has lost his mother, and is alone in the world until he finds his “family” among Hereward the Wake’s followers. There is a mysterious woman with bandaged face who occasionally enters the narrative, and spends a lot of time either ill or incarcerated. And she will turn out to be his mother. Moreover, it will finally emerge that Keith’s father is none other than Hereward the Wake himself. Juliet was on to the birth mystery plot, and not shy of using it to the hilt.



Fig. 3. “... flung himself down on the unkempt grass,” by Juliet Façan, from *Hereward the Wake*, facing p. 189.

She had already abandoned her historical novel in 1952, the time of the Mau Mau in Kenya. Although she wasn’t writing stories any more, she was still composing them in her head, and narrating them to herself in quiet times when she was picking fruit or on walks. One ongoing narrative had to do with a band of kids who set up resistance to a tyranny. Another fantasy concerned an attack by the Mau Mau on her parents, and her heroic rescue of them by her skilled use of the foil. (By then she was a committed fencer, though not an experienced one). Both of these unwritten narratives, I realize now, fed into my later work.

MANY A year passes. Juliet grows up and becomes me; now in Canada not Kenya; and author of sundry books of literary criticism, on Thackeray, Trollope, Dickens, and Jane Austen—but not of any fiction, historical or otherwise. But I have kids, and I tell them stories. A recurring motif of them is a villain called Blackguard; and kids who manage to foil him in his nefarious doings.

Then it seems my early fantasy about rescuing parents from the Mau Mau, my years as a competitive fencer, and my oral stories for my kids began to coalesce; and I felt the need to write an adventure novel for young adults. I asked myself, what sort of an adventure novel would *I*, as a young adult, have liked to read? Well, it would be about kids resisting evil and succeeding by using their skills. It could be set in East Africa among volcanic mountains such as I had climbed when I was a kid. There could be a military coup, and a ruthless blackguard dictator who imprisons or disempowers all adult resistance. But the kids, who have combat skills such as fencing and sharp-shooting, form a resistance movement, take to the mountains, become the “Young Outlaws,” and yes, prevail. And that’s the narrative that I proceeded to write.

I quite consciously developed a set of Robin Hood analogies: my heroine was called Robyn Sherwood: there is a William Crimson (for Will Scarlet), a fat boy called Buldo, skilled at the quarter-staff, for Friar Tuck. I was vaguely conscious of a large analogy with my juvenile historical novel. But the setting was twentieth-century East Africa, not eleventh-century England; my principal personnel were all kids, girls as well as boys, not just one boy among a large company of adult males. This was another story altogether, I thought.

I wrote my young adults’ fiction alongside a full-time career and kids (though the kids proceeded to grow up and have kids of their own). This new venture in adventure fiction lasted a long time—longer than the first (though it was probably proportional as a fraction of my life at the time). I finally found a publisher in Vancouver who gave me a contract for a trilogy; and I thought publication was around the corner. But through the years he required cut after cut, until finally I took it away from him while there was still some of it left, and self-published with Friesen Press. *Blades Against the Dark* came out in 2017.

It was not until I was asked to talk about *Blades*, and give a reading, that I thought I’d go back to take a look at my youthful Hereward the Wake fiction, to see what had carried over. And I was astonished at parallels I hadn’t recognized before. Previously I had been most aware of the differences; now I was struck by the likenesses: the secret hideout (island in the fens with a secret pathway, a subsidiary crater on a volcano, with a secret passageway entrance); the foreign take-over (Norman William the Conqueror, and Blackguard with his army of foreign mercenaries); the youthful protagonists (ten-year-old Keith, and Robyn, Bruce, and Dirk with their young army of skilled outlaws); the episodic structure, with sorties to harass the enemy. When I looked closer, I discovered points of detail I hadn’t realized I’d repeated: for instance, each main protagonist has an Enemy Within, motivated by envy, and an Enemy Without, a man in the opposition who singles out the protagonist for particular

enmity. It was entirely a surprise to me that in the case of the Enemy Within, both are archers (“Hugh the Archer” and William, whose particular weapon is the bow).

What about the pictures? Being still keen on the visual, but much more professionally inclined, I nevertheless found a way to include some graphic work of my own. I made drawings of swords, foils, sabres, daggers; and these became part of the decoration of the printed version. Each page number has a miniature sabre pointing at it. And yes, there were maps, or rather diagram-like pictures with labels. And to internalize these graphics—to make them part of the narrative—I attributed them to a character whose skill is not in a weapon, but art. “Milly *fecit*,” she signs, like a Renaissance painter (Fig. 4). And Milly has added to her map “(diagram only),” much as Juliet had admitted, all those years ago, that her map of Ely was “Not to scale” (Fig. 5).

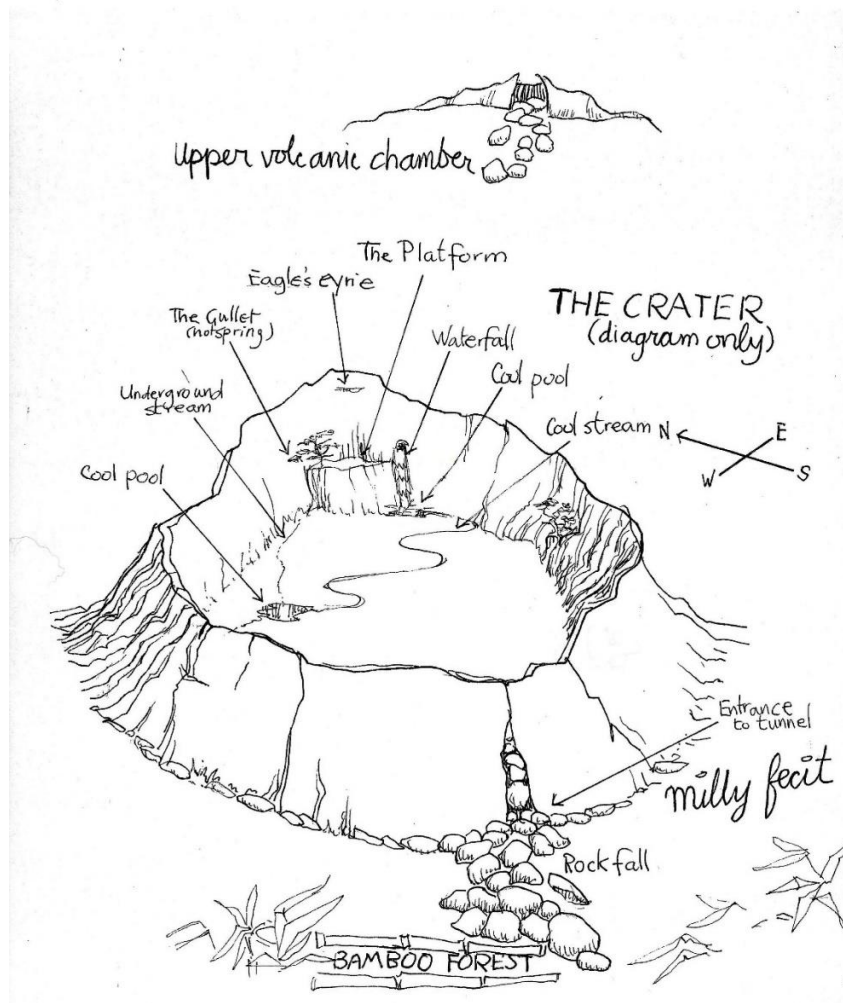


Fig. 4. “The Crater,” by Juliet Façan McMaster, from *Blades Against the Dark*, p. 39.

It seems that when I asked myself what today's young adults would most like to read, I unknowingly answered myself, "They'd like to read what I wrote when I was a young adult"! (Not that I was correct.) In any case, that's what was in me to write for the purpose. It was something of a revelation to me that when I—as a definitely mature author—wrote my adventure novel for young adults, I was actually taking care of unfinished business from my youth.

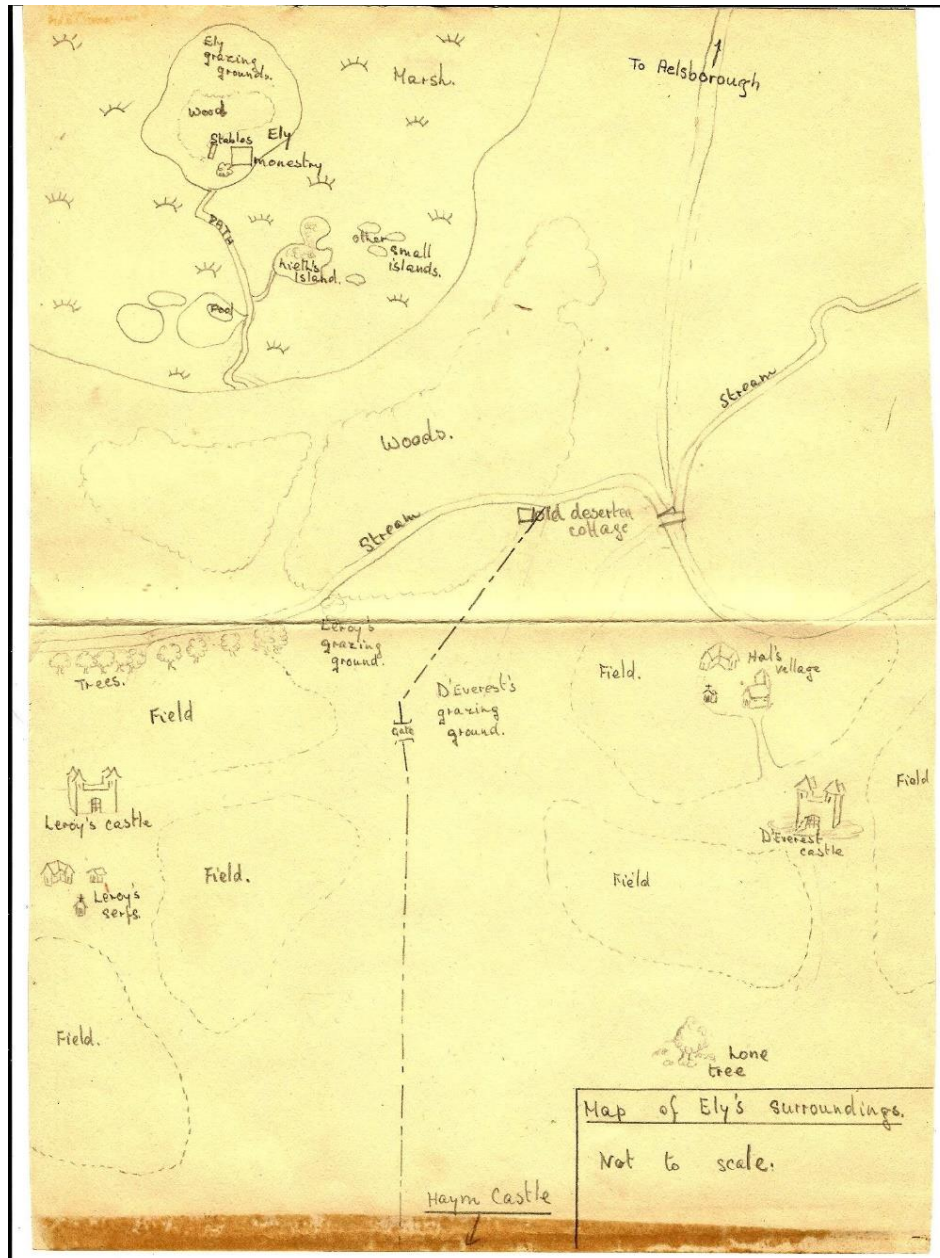


Fig. 5. "Map of Ely's Surroundings. Not to scale," by Juliet Fazan, from *Hereward the Wake*, loose leaf insert.

DISCOVERING this strong inheritance from youthful imaginings to mature in my own case alerts me further to the same inheritance in other writers; and this relation, of course, is one of the branches of the study of juvenilia.

Q. D. Leavis, writing even before the publication of *Volume the Third* of Jane Austen's early writings—though she had read it in manuscript—developed “A critical theory of Jane Austen's writings” that posited a direct descent from some juvenilia to the novels: so that *Susan*, the early version of *Northanger Abbey*, “was probably written up from an unfinished story in *Volume the Third* called ‘Catharine, or the Bower’” (63); “*Lady Susan*, on my [i.e., Leavis's] theory, was expanded into *Mansfield Park*” (63). And *The Watsons* transmogrified into *Emma*. This is going very far indeed in relating early works to later: not just likenesses and partial repetitions, but almost wholesale cannibalising. She presents Austen as a thrifty novelist who wastes nothing, but recycles her abandoned works into her new ones. Not many of us would go this far today; but not many would deny a degree of carryover—from “Catharine,” say, to *Northanger Abbey*.

Sixteen-year-old Malcolm Lowry writes almost obsessively of the last hours of Judge Jeffreys, the brutal “Hanging Judge” of the 1685 Rebellion; and the name fastens on the protagonist of his major novel *Under the Volcano*, Geoffrey Firmin (Grace xii).

“Until I found a bundle of children's writing in the cellar of my mother's house,” Margaret Atwood said in a radio interview, “I'd forgotten the extent to which *The Blind Assassin* had its origins in my early writing” (qtd. in Stovel and Couto xxxiii). These juvenilia, along with the early work of her brother Harold, are now collected in the Fisher Manuscript Library in Toronto. As children, the protagonist of *The Blind Assassin* and her sister lap up the lurid magazines “with stories about other lands, or even other planets. Space-ships from the future ... asteroids where the plants could talk, roamed by monsters with enormous eyes and fangs” (*Blind Assassin* 191): motifs recognizable in the comics and narratives created by young Margaret and Harold Atwood. The story-within-a-story concerns the people of Zycron, a planet with three moons that clearly derives from the Atwoods' space-themed early writings. The ruthless rulers of Zycron, and the society they run, take female slaves and sexually exploit them as a matter of course. And we learn,

The official wives sit in the shadows, eyes bright in the dark ovals of their head-scarves, watching for impertinences. They know they'll sleep alone tonight, but they can whip the captive girls later for clumsiness or disrespect, and they will. (*Blind Assassin* 157).

Even within this story-within-a-story of 2000 lurk echoes and reminiscences of *The Handmaid's Tale* of 1985. The imagination, however fertile, has its recurring elements.

It's no news, of course, that authors are apt to draw on their earlier works—that early versions of the characters and oppositions of *Jane Eyre*, for instance, can be

found in the Angrian sagas. The example of my own case, however, alerts me to the degree to which such self-borrowings can be accidental and unconscious. And there can be food for study not only in what gets carried forward from the early work, but how it develops, and why. To me this evidence of a stable identity and continuous imagination is heartening. Let's not put away childish things—let's treasure them and explore them, because in a real sense childish things continue to be us.

NOTES

- ¹ *1066 and All That*, the parodic British history by W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, was first published in *Punch*. Peter Sabor has demonstrated that this hugely popular parodic history was partly inspired by Jane Austen's take-off of Goldsmith, "The History of England," written at fifteen.

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