

PDA Report, Cristina Maria Cervone
period covered: academic year 2016-17

During academic year 2016-17 I was in residence at the Stanford Humanities Center, having been awarded a competitive external faculty fellowship. I was one of nine scholars selected for this highly selective and prestigious award. While at Stanford I worked on two projects, my second monograph and a collaborative project on Middle English lyric which is resulting in a co-edited book.

My monograph-in progress, *Vernacular Poetics of Metaphor: Middle English and the Corporate Subject*, is a study of metaphor and poetics. How do we recognize an “other sense” that springs to life from metaphor? While the nature of metaphor is contested and its neurological mechanisms not well understood, metaphor studies is a vibrant, multidisciplinary field. Yet, most theorists have set aside “literary” uses to study “ordinary” language. This book brings cognitive theory to bear on medieval texts and, conversely, sees value for metaphor theorists in medieval linguistic innovations and the poetics that fostered them. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, when English writers increasingly selected Middle English (as against Anglo-French and Latin) for their thought experiments, metaphor was an important element in — perhaps even vital to — the vernacular’s emerging qualities. I take as a case study a metaphor vibrantly productive in medieval thought, as it is today: the body as used to represent individuality within unity, or “each of us” and “all of us” (“body of Christ”; “body of fellows”). My claim that metaphor plays a significant role in English’s development is new; moreover, it engages questions of contemporary interest: how does thought work? Is metaphor fundamental to thought? Medieval practice, like current theory, suggests perhaps so. For this project, I completed extensive research for the chapter on Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* and outlined the chapter. Some of this research will be pertinent to other chapters as well. I also filled out my research for the chapter on lyric. To better organize my notes, I combined two databases I had been running concurrently. This was a time-consuming project I have been needing to accomplish for some time.

The collaborative project investigates the question, *What Kind of a Thing is a Middle English Lyric?* This project, which I initiated in 2014, has been generously funded by Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, with an initial grant (\$18,000) in 2015 and a second award (\$25,000) in 2016. I am the PI, working in close collaboration with Nicholas Watson of Harvard University. Our project explores what has long been the anomalous standing of the Middle English lyric in both the major fields in which it is researched, Middle English studies and lyric studies, and develops new approaches to the topic. It also aims to provide a body of critical readings of a series of individual lyrics by scholars whose fields of study include not only several areas within Middle English studies but art history, musicology, psychology, theology, and post-modern poetics. Each essay thus addresses the question posed in our seminar title from its own perspective while also focusing closely on specific poems, working outwards from the study of textual detail as well as inwards from a given set of

interests and concerns. We expect the book to be of interest to students as well as scholars; however, this is not a history or survey and does not try to cover the full range of lyrics and lyric types. Rather, its purpose is to raise fundamental questions about these lyrics, how we study them, and why they should matter to students of poetry and poetics and of medieval culture. During the PDA period I co-organized and ran the second seminar at Radcliffe (December 2016) and, together with Prof. Watson, developed the structure of the ensuing publication. Manuscripts are coming in this month (September 2017) for anticipated submission for publication in December 2017 or early 2018. I researched and wrote my own essay for the volume, "Wondering Through Middle English Lyric," while at Stanford, and gathered sources I will need to complete my part of the co-authored introduction, which I will write in Memphis this fall. Some of the research for my essay and the introduction will also be pertinent to *Vernacular Poetics*.

At Stanford, I gave a research talk on *Vernacular Poetics* for the Humanities Center fellows and attended the research talks of all 31 fellows (these included Stanford-based internal fellows and graduate students) as well as daily lunches for the fellows. I presented on the lyric project and *Vernacular Poetics* for the English Department at the University of California, Davis. I gave yet another (different) research talk for the Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies and participated in this organization's other events. By request, I taught a class for a medieval historian (Fiona Somerset). I also spent time strengthening my connections with medievalists and literary scholars in the Bay Area, including in San Francisco and Berkeley.

While at Stanford I worked with an undergraduate research assistant, Emily Elott, a sophomore at Stanford. Such assistance can be invaluable as a second pair of hands and eyes to forward research work; I also consider it to be a mentoring activity. Having had undergraduate research assistants for several previous fellowships, in my experience, such students often go on to take classes on medieval topics when they may previously have had little knowledge of the medieval period; working with undergrads on research can be a way to build interest in the field and to strengthen young scholars' research experience, as well as furthering the project on hand.

I am grateful for the support of the University of Memphis and Stanford University in enabling this research leave, which was productive and eye-opening for me in so many ways. Such opportunities are rare and valuable; I feel incredibly fortunate to have been able to benefit from this one.