Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, History Commons, Philosophy Commons, and the Renaissance Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra/vol42/iss1/1

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quidditas by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
From the Editor

Quidditas is the annual, peer-reviewed, on-line journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. The journal’s content is eclectic, publishing articles focused on medieval and early modern topics from all disciplines. The journal also accepts “Notes” for short articles pertaining to factual research, bibliographical and/or archival matters, corrections and suggestions, pedagogy and other matters pertaining to research and teaching. The journal also welcomes contributions to our “Texts and Teaching” section which seeks review of literature essays, articles on teaching approaches and other aspects of pedagogy, and short reviews of individual textbooks and other published materials that instructors have found especially useful in teaching courses in medieval and early modern disciplines. These features furnish readers and contributors venues not available in other scholarly journals. Membership in the Association is not required for submission and publication.

Quidditas is hosted by Brigham Young University at the University’s Scholarsarchive. The website makes searching and downloading more flexible. One may search, and download full volumes, or individual articles found by searching author, title and/or key words. All volumes from Volume 1 to the present appear on the site. (http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra)

Quidditas is a Latin legal term that originally meant “the essential nature of a thing.” In the 1300s the word became “quiddite.” in French. In the early modern English it became, “quiddity,” meaning “logical subtleties” or “a captious nicety in argument” (OED), and is so used in Hamlet (“Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?” (Act V, scene 1, lines 95–97). Thus, the original Latin meaning, together with the later implied notions of intense scrutiny, systematic reasoning, and witty wordplay, is well suited as the title of the journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association.

This year’s volume, 42 (2021), demonstrates the eclectic nature of Quidditas. Articles are written by up-and-coming and established scholars on such varied topics as Anglo-Saxon poetry, medieval English drama, Tudor chronicles and novels, fables as a global genre, portraying Hamlet’s Ophelia, and approaches to teaching about premodern women and gender.

Membership Information

The annual cost of membership in the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association is $25, with an additional $5 fee for joint memberships.

For information contact: https://www.rmmra.org/membership/
Notice to Contributors

Quidditas, invites submissions from all aspects of medieval and Renaissance and early modern disciplines: art, literature, history, music, philosophy, religion, languages, rhetoric, Islamic and New World cultures, global regions, comparative and interdisciplinary studies. Online format enables publication of long articles and extensive illustrations. There is no subscription fee. Quidditas is easily available from any computer. Authors will be informed about the disposition of manuscripts within three months of receipt.

Articles in Quidditas are abstracted and indexed in MLA, Historical Abstracts, Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index, America: History and Life, EBSCOhost, and Oxbridge Standard Periodical Directory, and Ex Libris has designated Quidditas as a peer-reviewed journal in its SFX Knowledgebase. Quidditas includes a “Notes” section for short articles pertaining to factual research, bibliographical and/or archival matters, corrections and suggestions, pedagogy and other matters pertaining to the research and teaching of medieval and Renaissance disciplines. Our “Texts and Teaching” section seeks longer review of literature essays, articles on teaching approaches and other aspects of pedagogy, and short reviews of individual textbooks and other published materials that instructors have found especially valuable in teaching courses in medieval and early modern disciplines.

Membership in the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association is not required for submission or publication.

Guidelines for Submissions

Please send your submission electronically in MS Word (.doc or .docx) to the appropriate editor below. Use The Chicago Manual of Style (16th ed.). The author’s name must not appear within the text. All articles must include a short abstract (200 words maximum) before the main text, and a bibliography of works cited at the end. A cover letter with the author’s name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and manuscript title must accompany all submissions.

Documentation: Quidditas uses footnotes. No endnotes or parenthetical citations, please. Since submissions must include a full bibliography, all footnotes, including the first footnote reference, should use abbreviated author, title, and page. For example: Bibliographical entry—Nirenberg, David. Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. First and subsequent footnotes—Nirenberg, Communities of Violence, 22-24. Do not use ibid. Subsequent references to the same work should continue the use of abbreviated author, title and page number.

Please send Articles and Notes to:
Dr. James H. Forse, Editor: quidditas_editor@yahoo.com

Please send submissions for “Texts and Teaching” to
Dr. Ginger Smoak, Editor: ginger.smoak@utah.edu
Executive Board and Editorial Advisors (2021)

President: Sarah Davis-Secord, University of New Mexico
Treasurer: Samantha Dressel, Chapman University
Abby Lagermann, University of Colorado, Boulder
Affiliations Officer: Jonathan Davis-Secord, University of New Mexico
Membership Officer: Kristin Bezio, University of Richmond
Jessie Bonafede, University of New Mexico
Jessica Brown, Adams State University
Maia Farrar, University of Michigan
Margaret Harp, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Alani Hicks-Bartlett, Brown University
Andrea Knox, University of Northumbria
Jeff Moser, University of Northern Colorado and Arapahoe Community College
Vincent Patarino, Colorado Mesa State University
Marybeth Perdomo, Perdue University
Bretton Rodriguez, University of Nevada, Reno
Jacob Thomas, Idaho State University
Corinne Wieben, University of Northern Colorado

Ex-officio Members

Jean R. Brink, Arizona State University, Emerita
Paul A. Dietrich, University of Montana
James Fitzmaurice, Northern Arizona University
Susan Frye, University of Wyoming
Nancy Gutierrez, University of North Carolina, Charlotte
Francis X. Hartigan, University of Nevada, Reno
Kimberly Johnson, Brigham Young University
Thomas Klein, Idaho State University
Jennifer McNabb, University of Northern Iowa
Darin Merrill, Brigham Young University, Idaho
Carol Neel, Colorado College
Charles Odahl, Boise State University
Glenn Olsen, University of Utah
Charles R. Smith, Colorado State University
Ginger Smoak, University of Utah
Sara Jayne Steen, Montana State University
Jeffrey H. Taylor, Metropolitan State University of Denver
Paul Thomas, Brigham Young University
Todd Upton, Metropolitan State University of Denver
Jane Woodruff, William Jewell College
# Table of Contents

## Articles

**The Good, The Bad, and The Monstrous** *(Allen D. Breck Award)*  
Jesse Bonafede 6

**Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b-124b: An Old English Poetic Romano-British Arts Encomium*  
Liam O. Purdon 24

**Hellish Indigestion: Consumption as Knowledge in Medieval Descensus Christi Accounts**  
Harley Joyce Campbell 79

**Contemporary History in Early Tudor English Chronicles: 1485-1553**  
Barrett L. Beer 100

**Humorous Spaces and Serious Magic in William Baldwin’s Beware the Cat**  
Ashley Ecklund 129

**The Fable as a Global Genre: Marie de France, Ulrich Bonerius, Don Juan Manuel and Kalila and Dimna**  
Albrecht Classen 152

**“There’s Rosemary, that’s for Remembrance;” Suicide Ideation and Portraying Ophelia’s Madness**  
Ian Borden & Sarah Borden 188

**“What’s Hecuba to him?” Grieving Parents On and Off the Early Modern Stage (Delno C. West Award)**  
Catherine Loomis 204

## NOTES

**The Birthplace of Saint Wulfthryth: An Unexamined Reference in Cambridge University Library Additional 2604**  
Jessica C. Brown 221

**Sir John Cheke, Chamberlain of the Exchequer, 1552-53**  
James D. Alsop 226

## TEXTS AND TEACHING

**Teaching Premodern Women and Gender**  
Lucy C. Barnhouse 236

**Premodern Pedagogies: Queer Medieval Materiality**  
Hilary Rhodes 238

**Visualizing Women: Teaching Modern Images and Medieval Texts about Pre-Modern Women**  
Esther Liberman Cuenca 246

**What She Said: Recovering Early Modern Women’s Experiences through Court Records**  
Jennifer McNabb 252
The Allen D. Breck Award is given in honor of Professor Allen D. Breck (1914-2000), a founder of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. Professor Breck also served as Chair of History at the University of Denver, for 20 years. As Professor Emeritus he became the historian of the University of Denver, writing *From the Rockies to the World—The History of the University of Denver*. His specialties included medieval and church history, particularly John Wyclif. He also taught Anglican studies at the Hiff School of Theology, and wrote, edited, or contributed to histories of Jews, Methodists, and Episcopalians in Colorado and books on medieval philosophy, the lives of western leaders, and the relationships between science, history, and philosophy. In addition to his involvement with RMMRA, he was a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and belonged to the Medieval Academy of America, the Western History Association, and the Western Social Science Association.

The Breck Award recognizes the most distinguished paper given by a junior scholar at the annual conference.

**Recipient of the Breck Award for 2021**

**Jessie Bonafede**

**University of New Mexico**
The Good, the Bad, and the Violent: Analyzing Beowulf’s Heroic Displacement and Transgressive Violence during the Grendel Quest

Jessie Bonafede
University of New Mexico

Heroic actions are often associated with altruistic feats of humanitarianism, but in Beowulf, the connection between heroism and performative acts of violence reveal significant complications concerning how the poem codifies violence for social honor. A central conflict arises with the poem’s contrasting presentation of Beowulf’s dominance and physical power before and during the Grendel quest with the relatively low social status he incurs amongst his maternal kin group, the Geats. In this paper, I use anthropological and sociological theories of collective violence and dominance versus prestige hierarchies to rethink how violence interplays with the poem’s treatment of lineage and other social influences informing appropriate tribal exchanges and effectively designating what constitutes heroism versus infamy. With this approach, I offer a critique of Beowulf’s heroic performance as a socially displaced and transgressive character who must use his alterity to exploit non-normative opportunities for using dominance and acquiring prestige.

Violence plays a central role in Beowulf. From structuring the main narrative to shaping the poem’s many digressions, violence surfaces as a primary element informing the poem’s many characters’ interactions, their behaviors, and their primary aspirations. While Beowulf’s exploits at Heorot may tantalize and entertain, scholarship should question how the poet’s intricate portrayals of violence serve to satisfy and challenge concepts of alterity and heroism, which appear deeply invested in the social celebration and critique of reciprocal demonstrations of violence. Although Beowulf’s decision to help Hrothgar and the Danes may at first appear as the altruistic underpinnings of a warrior hero cast in the epic genre, a careful examination of the poem’s treatment of lineage and social influences that inflame tribal boundaries from within and between groups reveals Beowulf to be less a hero than a displaced and socially transgressive character caught within a precarious social position amongst the Geats struggling to overcome it. By applying
theories of collective violence and dominance versus prestige social hierarchies, I argue that the poem effectively compounds Beowulf’s transgressive qualities through his lineage, actions, and behaviors, offering an additional critique of his character’s heroic performance and alterity through violence.

A significant contradiction concerning Beowulf’s heroic identity exists between his social standing while with the Danes and the one he enjoys amongst his Geatish kin, which complicates the poem’s coding of violence for social honor. While at Heorot, characters remark on Beowulf’s physical stature and reputation for aggressive action, suggesting a strong connection between heroism and one’s potential for success through the explicit use of violence. Even Beowulf in heroic style brags about his violent abilities which he verifies for the Danes by upholding his boast and slaying Grendel and Grendel’s mother. Yet, this heroic perception is drastically overturned once Beowulf arrives home and takes an audience with his king and maternal uncle, Hygelac. Here the poet reveals that

\begin{verbatim}
Hean wæs lange, 
swa hyne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon, 
ne hyne on medobence micles wyrðne 
dryhten Wedera gedon wolde; 
swyðe wendon þæt he sleac wære, 
aedeling unfrom. (2183b-2188)
\end{verbatim}

Long was he [Beowulf] lowly, as the Geats did not deem him worthy of much, nor would the lord of the Weders grant him much honor among the mead-benches. They truly thought him to be inept, a feeble nobleman.

While scholars have often dismissed this passage as flawed or relegated it to folkloric motif, the use of “Geata bearn” and “drihten Wedera” carries important social and political implications concerning King Hrethel’s patrilineal kin and tribe, in particular his royal sons, and their apparent perception and treatment of Beowulf.\(^1\)

\(^1\) This and all subsequent citations from Beowulf are taken from Klaeber, Klaeber’s Beowulf. The translations that follow quotations in Old English are my own.

\(^2\) For a discussion of Beowulf’s low status, see Klaeber’s commentary for line 2183b in Klaeber, Klaeber’s Beowulf, 236.
Suddenly, Beowulf’s previous accomplishments alluded to in Heorot erode in Hygelac’s hall, but the reasons remain obscured. From this passage, a major distinction can be drawn between the social value or importance of patrilineal versus matrilineal tribal identification for status acquisition influencing the poem’s heroic context and the social codification of appropriate and heroic versus inappropriate and unheroic or even monstrous uses of violence.

The poet clearly establishes Beowulf’s Geatish royal identity through his maternal line (that of Hrethel’s daughter), and Beowulf’s residence within his maternal tribe appears to contribute greater status to him abroad than at home amidst Hrethel’s kin. Erin Shaull has noted that there are 14 instances in the poem where Beowulf is identified as Ecgtheow’s son, but only in the poet’s narration and never from a character addressing Beowulf directly. From these instances, Shaull determines that Beowulf’s paternal lineage is evoked during times of weakness, such as the fight against Grendel’s mother and the dragon, while his affiliation with the Geats occurs during times of triumph, such as the battle against Grendel. Beowulf’s consistent self-identification with Hygelac also focalizes on service to and acceptance by his kin and lord, so when Ecgtheow is evoked before Beowulf addresses Hygelac about his quest, it further signals the social and political insecurities of his character’s group membership amongst the Geats. Furthermore, by likening the Geats’ displeasure with Beowulf to a general and blanketed lack of esteem and ability, the power of the community in recognizing, bestowing, or withholding honor as social status from warriors surfaces as a key regulating factor of warriors’ actions despite their physical abilities or heroic aspirations.

Anthropologists and sociologists collectively identify two primary strategies for societal status acquisition, which can operate together

3 In line 375, Hrothgar identifies how Hrethel offers Ecgtheow his “angan dohtor” (only daughter) in marriage.

4 Shaull, “Beowulf’s Father(s),” 3.

5 Shaull, “Beowulf’s Father(s),” 7-10.
and in varying combinations. First is status gained through dominance, or an individual actant’s use of force and power against others, including fear tactics. Second is status gained through prestige, or the societal recognition and rewarding of an individual due to their skills or contributions to the group. While dominance strategies may allow individuals to quickly stand out from others, prestige strategies heavily regulate individual status and power by the group either condemning or condoning an actant’s behavior with punishments and rewards. Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto argue that within stratified societies, as people become functioning members of the established group, often group-based social hierarchies begin to inform which social powers and privileges individuals possess “by virtue of his or her ascribed membership in a particular socially constructed group such as a race, religion, clan, tribe, lineage, linguist/ethnic group, or social class.” This has significant implications for understanding how dominance and prestige strategies interact within Beowulf at the level of the individual character and collective tribe: having a partiality and talent for violence does not guarantee social honor.

6 See Waal-Andrews, Gregg and Lammers, “When Status is Grabbed,” 445-446. The authors offer an important literary overview of anthropological scholarship concerning dominance and prestige social systems and strategies for status acquisition within each respective system.

7 See Goode, The Celebration of Heroes, 7. Goode defines prestige as “the esteem, respect, or approval that is granted by an individual or a collectivity for performances or qualities they consider above the average.” By extent, failure to acquire appropriate amounts of prestige could negatively impact an individual’s standing within the community and their access to community-based goods and services, ultimately having life or death consequences. Due to the role of the community granting or withholding prestige, prestige hierarchies can function as forms of social control for individuals by further instilling group identification and privileging those who contribute to group goals.

8 See Waal-Andrews, Gregg, and Lammers, “When Status is Grabbed,” 457. The authors discuss how their research indicates that the current hierarchical system(s) within the group will greatly inform individuals’ success when pursuing dominance versus prestige strategies for status acquisition. As individual actants engage with others, it is not in isolation but rather filtered through the cultural ideologies informing the very structure of their communities. Such findings can add clarity to Beowulf’s conflicting image as a dominant, imposing warrior that the Geats may love and accept yet have little respect for prior to his defeat of Grendel. Clearly, being physically powerful and performing violent acts influences character status and reputation in Beowulf, but being able to perform violence successfully is not the only factor determining social standing within the poem.

9 Sidanius and Pratto, Social Dominance, 32.
The scholastic efforts of John M. Hill and Peter Baker have helped to expose important features informing the poem’s portrayal and development of the warband, motivations underpinning characters’ social engagements, and violence as the marker of cultural success. Hill examines the reciprocal nature between lords and retainers and reasons that the foundation of this reciprocal lord-retainer relationship is not one of altruism, but of social debt for status encouraging social order: one’s participation in violence mandates the promise of gifts, or is evoked in the reverse from situations where gifts have already been bestowed upon retainers to consolidate their participation in future violent engagements. Baker’s development of an economy of honor offers insights into how wealth, its acquisition, distribution, and meaning, functions in association with performative acts of violence for the acquisition of honor. In order for this poetic economy to operate and for characters to be successful, heroes must actively partake in violent acts to enhance their individual and group identities. Mastery over a prescribed enemy economically and symbolically augments the warrior’s honor or weorð through possession of his enemy’s loot and his reputation for dominance, which in turn benefits the king and tribe via the warrior’s continued...

10 Both Hill’s and Baker’s efforts assist with answering difficult questions concerning the high level of risk associated with violence strategies and character motivations for participating in violent exchanges, as well as countering simplistic justifications for or the generalized acceptance of violence as the mere fundamental business of heroic and villainous warriors. Considering the ways in which violence permeates the early medieval culture, from the Kentish and Anglo-Saxon law codes, human remains and injuries from Anglo-Saxon archaeological records, and historical chronicles, such as Bede’s Ecclesiastical History, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and the Annales of Cambriae, concerns regarding the use of violence and its material, political, and very real human costs has connections well beyond the parchment and into the very culture(s) producing and consuming literary works. For discussions concerning violence and the Anglo-Saxon law codes, see Gates and Marafioti, Capital and Corporal Punishment; Hyams, “Feud and the State”; Oliver, The Beginnings of English Law; Richardson and Sayles, Law and Legislation; Simpson, “The Laws of Ethelbert”; and Wormald, Legal Culture. For discussions concerning violence, warriorship, and archaeology, see Davidson, “The Hill of the Dragon”; Harke, “Early Saxon Weapon Burials” and “Warrior Graves’”; and Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs.

11 Hill, The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic.

12 Baker, Honour, Exchange and Violence.
membership.\textsuperscript{13} That said, questions still persist concerning what kind of violence gets used, by whom, and when; precisely how legitimate versus illegitimate forms of violence are coded; and how individual versus collective action and identity manifest and break down because of violence.\textsuperscript{14}

Throughout the poem, patrilineal tribal identification appears to be the primary form of societal organization with a ruling (royal) family at the top of the hierarchy that can trace its lineage back to a central powerful patriarch. The importance of patriarchal lineage functions to activate strong social boundaries between tribes and consolidate group identity within the tribe. Additionally, the poem presents two secondary influences on societal hierarchical structure: patrilocal marriage alliances in which a woman from one tribe marries into the natal kin group of her husband, and retainership where a warrior from a different tribal affiliation takes up residence and pledges service to a lord of a different tribe. The implications for either arrangement appear to help broker, if ineffectively, intertribal violence by providing offspring that bond and invest social interests between tribes or by offering a place of refuge and opportunity for

\textsuperscript{13} See Baker, \textit{Honour, Exchange and Violence}, 35-76. Baker notes that while treasure can enter the poem’s economic system via manufacturing, gifting between nations, paying tributes or wergilds, and even scavenging battlefields and graves, that these are subverted by the poem’s emphasis on treasure seized during violent engagements between factional tribes.

\textsuperscript{14} See Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, “Making Sense of Violence,” 1-5. Anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois in their introduction to the collection \textit{Violence in War and Peace} argue that the use of violence within cultures are heavily influenced by the customs and structures of power within specific cultures: “Cultures, social structures, ideas, and ideologies shape all dimensions of violence, both its expressions and its repressions.” Violence can take many forms, and as it gets integrated into the social structure, it becomes cloaked in “part of the routine grounds of everyday life and transformed into expressions of moral worth.” Still, it is critical to remember that while violence leads to destructive outcomes and causes harm, societies consistently develop ways to permit, encourage, and enjoin its usage with morality and a sense of duty that sustain multiple layers of socio-political, economic, public and private norms. Furthermore, see Tilly, \textit{The Politics of Collective Violence}. Tilly offers a useful typology of violence and framework for identifying how relational exchanges between individuals and groups function to impact the character of violence strategies, as well as motivate people’s participation or nonparticipation. Of particular interest for this discussion of \textit{Beowulf} are his insights concerning violent rituals, broken negotiations, and coordinated destruction as collective violence strategies within societies, and how these strategies respond to motivational factors, like us-them boundaries and polarization versus brokerage strategies within and between societies. By considering the interplay between these various mechanisms that influence individual versus group violence, \textit{Beowulf}’s character motivations and interactions within his kin group and among the Danes reveal significant social pressures that impede and facilitate his success and failures.
marginalized or exiled warriors. Such is the case for Beowulf’s father, Ecgtheow, who takes up residence at Heorot after Hrothgar pays wergild for the “fæhþe mæste” (459) that he commits. Interestingly, while the specific details of Ecgtheow’s fæhþe mæste remain obscure, it is clear that Ecgtheow’s actions have significant social consequences for his own character and Beowulf. Immediately after learning of Hrothgar’s intercession, we learn that “ða hine Wedera cyn / for herebrogan habban ne mihte” (461b-462) (then the nation of the Weders was not able to have him [Ecgtheow] due to the terror of war). The Geatish royal house’s decision to ostracize Ecgtheow and refuse him sanctuary as a result of his offense raises questions as to Ecgtheow’s personal tribal affiliation with them as well as the complexity of intertribal political networks in play. Since the Geats fear war as a result of harboring Ecgtheow due to the fæhþe mæste, it suggests that doing so would incite great enmity from an undisclosed third party. David Wilton has offered a significant reassessment of the Old English word fæhða which he argues carries more specific meanings for a singular hostile act or offense committed by an individual.15 While this does not exclude the possibility for retributive conditions, it significantly redirects focus to the individual at fault within the society opening up more possibilities for understanding how such groups respond to the use of violence by and against others, either through wergild negotiations, like Hrothgar, or through ostracization, like the Geats. Regardless, this homicide indicates a grave transgression of current intertribal affiliations and culturally appropriate or sanctioned violence strategies—a possible behavioral characteristic that will become central to Beowulf’s own actions within the poem.

Ruth Lehmann and Erin Shaull offer strong linguistic evidence for Ecgtheow’s inclusion in the Scylding royal Swedish lineage and the complications this adds to systems of inheritance and decisions for

15 See Wilton, “Fæhða Gemyndig: Hostile Acts.” By examining the phrase fæhðe ond fyrene in Beowulf, Wilton reasons that fyrene should be understood as apposition to the fæhðe, therefore creating a common intensified link between a specific hostile act as a crime, rather than in addition to it, like feuding-cycles.
offering refuge to exiled warriors. Given evidence for marriage alliances, and their propensity to fail, Ecgtheow’s marriage to Hrethel’s daughter may have fallen within this tradition as a means to quell previous hostilities and deactivate intense social tribal boundaries; but when Ecgtheow commits his great crime, the marriage becomes subjected to a breach of negotiations in which the Swede’s resume enmity and the Geats reclaim their princess, much like Queen Hildeburh in the Finn episode. The final result is that tribal hostilities reignite starkly across lineage-based social boundaries between the Geats and the Swedes overriding and polarizing social bonds across the tribes.

Though the circumstances of Beowulf’s residence in Geatland remain ambiguous, a half-Swedish paternal lineage and his father’s crime help clarify and compound the apparent prejudice and alterity his character experiences from his youth until his return from Heorot. Not only must Beowulf’s character bear the social cost of his father’s crime, but he must also reside, compete and cooperate with kin who remain at war with his paternal lineage, the Swedes. Since the typical or tacit expectation is that offspring identify through their tribe’s patriarch, Beowulf suffers status displacement within a group-based social hierarchy that privileges paternal lineage as a key marker of prestige.

Given the context of Beowulf’s social polarization, his decision to assist Hrothgar should not be interpreted as a definite marker of heroism; after all, heroism operates within the domain of prestige

16 See Lehmann, “Ecgþeow the Wægmunding,” 1-5, and Shaull, “Ecgþeow, Brother of Ongenþeow,” 269. By analyzing the linguistic features of the Scylfings along with Germanic and Old English naming practices that favor frontal alliteration, Lehmann argues that Ecgþeow fits the alliterative vowel pattern of Ongenþeow, Onela, Eadgils, and Eanmund, thus designating him as Swedish. Shaull extends Lehmann’s conclusions by focusing on the shared deuterotheme of þeow between Ecgþeow and Ongenþeow, likely associating them as a younger and older brother.

17 Interestingly, Hrothgar states that he “hine cuðe cnhihtwesende’ (372) (knew him as a boy), suggesting that at some point Beowulf was at Heorot, most readily explained by Ecgþeow’s residence there. Later, Beowulf states that Hrethel took him in at age seven (2428-2431). For a discussion on fosterage practices and influences on the text, see Klaeber’s commentary for line 2428 in Klaeber, Klaeber’s Beowulf, 245.
and thus relies heavily on confirmation by one’s society. Rather, Beowulf’s decision functions as a shrewd attempt to overcome the socially imposed hierarchical barriers he faces: first, through asserting his supreme individual dominance over the fierce Grendel and second, by effectively brokering peace between the Geats and the Danes upon his success. Assigning heroism to Beowulf’s quest is not as straightforward as it may appear, especially concerning how Beowulf violates the lord-retainer relationship with Hygelac and the current intertribal polarization that exists between the Geats and Danes. While scholarship has relied upon face-saving tactics and Beowulf’s potential obligation to Hrothgar because of Ecgtheow, the fact remains that the Danes and Geats are hostiles at war and Grendel is not the Geats’ enemy. According to Mary Dockray-Millar, a warrior’s power or dominance within the heroic context is not guaranteed but rather must be actively and aggressively earned through winning certain masculine-aligned attributes that will demarcate him as a high-status warrior. The perceived risk of death associated with the individual’s actions as devotion to group goals instead of self-interest also factor into society’s labeling the individual as heroic and granting him prestige. But the hostilities between the Geats and Danes complicate this process and point towards it being socially transgressive, if not outright foolish, due to the threat that Grendel poses and to whom.

Beowulf’s actions raise a rather insidious question of whose social goals he is pursuing and if these are reasonable within the poem’s heroic context. When speaking to Hygelac about his journey, Hygelac’s response reveals significant tensions between individual and group interests. Hygelac exclaims:

18 Dockray-Miller, “Beowulf’s Tears of Fatherhood,” 1-10. Dockray-Miller likens the poem’s dependency on oath- and risk-taking to what Gillian Overing terms as the “ultimate masculine statement—I will defeat the monster or die” trying. The possibility for death becomes a significant aspect of warriors seeking prestige through dominance displays, and such displays should ideally progress group goals respective of social hierarchy. Unfortunately, as Dockray-Miller suggests, the male bonds that sustain such a warrior society are fragile and subject to shift and degrade.

What happened to you on that journey, dear Beowulf, after you suddenly resolved to seek a fight at Heorot far off across the salty sea? Did you in any way remedy the widely known miseries of Hrothgar, the renowned king? I for this anxiety of mind have been agitated over your expedition with surging sorrow and heavy grief, for I did not trust the venture of my dear man. I long urged you not to challenge that slaughter-guest, instead, to allow the Danes to settle the feud with Grendel themselves. I give thanks to God for allowing your safe return.

Attention is initially focused on Beowulf’s impulsive decision to sail to Heorot and fight Grendel which places Beowulf’s decision outside of normative expectations: as an unanticipated decision, it becomes inextricably linked with Beowulf’s personal desires over that of the tribe. Furthermore, Hygelac calls attention to Beowulf’s actions opposing his own advisement which resonates at the level of kinship bonds and hierarchical obligation: as Hygelac’s retainer, he should act in accordance with his provider’s wishes. It stands to reason that for Hygelac’s character and the Geats more broadly, they doubt how Beowulf’s goal will benefit the tribe. Hygelac’s doubt about Beowulf’s abilities continues to signal Beowulf’s lower status and the perceived futility of any group rewards: it is the Danes’ problem, so let them handle it without negatively depleting the Geats of warriors, armor, wealth, and reputation. Additionally, when compared to other intertribal engagements presented in the poem, encounters between tribes lead to either coordinated destruction or brokerage via marriage: neither of which Beowulf attempts at Heorot. Once again, the poem presents important social and relational mechanisms coding intertribal engagements and its association with appropriate violence-based strategies. But the
transgressive qualities of Beowulf’s actions are exactly what afford his character the opportunity to demonstrate his dominance abroad in order to achieve prestige from the Geats. By helping their Danish enemies overcome Grendel’s terror, he procures personal renown for his extraordinary power as well as brokers lasting peace with the Danes, which benefits the Geats since it closes the social boundaries that have been keeping them apart. Before leaving Heorot, Hrothgar declares:

“Hafast þu gefered þæt þam folcum sceal,  
Geata leodum ond Gar-Denum  
sib gemænu, ond sacu restan,  
inwitniþas þe hie ær drugon . . .”  (1855-1858)

“You have made it so that the people of the Geats and Danes will nurture mutual peace and lay to rest conflict, the enmity previously harbored...”

Yet Beowulf’s shrewd decision-making and success are still dependent upon his physical abilities to dominate his target foes through violence. Interestingly, the poet offers ways in which Beowulf is not only capable of extraordinary feats of violence, but even has an affinity for it that may also extend beyond normative socio-cultural boundaries. The flyting episode with Unferth presents an excellent opportunity to question Beowulf’s preoccupation with violence, especially concerning his competition with Breca. The fact that Beowulf capitalizes on the extreme feat of slaying nine sea monsters after five nights in the water to manipulate Unferth’s flyting and promote his own dominance raises concerns about prestige.20 We learn from Unferth’s version of the story that Breca is

20 For a detailed and insightful summative analysis of the Unferþ episode’s connection to Norse literature, see Clover, “The Germanic Context,” 466. Clover argues that

The relation of the Unferþ episode to the Norse flytings . . . is immediate and detailed, both with respect to situation (the hostile investigation into the reputation of a newcomer by a man who stands in a delegate relation to the king and is explicitly known as a man of words) and the nature of the speeches themselves: in form (Claim, Defense, and Counterclaim); in tone (the blend of insult, competitive boasting, and curse); in the use of sarcasm (most characteristically in concessive clauses); in the emphatic I/you contrast and the use of names in direct address; in the combat metaphor; in the matching of personal histories and the exposure of dubious or shameful deeds (and their sarcastic reconstruction); in the telltale preoccupation with the moral negotiability of past events; in the use of familiar oppositions and paradigms; and in such correspondences of detail as the charges of drunkenness and fratricide and the Hell curse. The only conspicuous incongruity is the absence of a sexual element - but then the Beowulf poet is not known for developing the erotic dimensions of his gothic tale.

What is most useful about Clover’s analysis for this argument, is how her assessment of the
rewarded by his society for completion of the contest, while Beowulf effectively is not, and these points remain undisputed by Beowulf’s version. Furthermore, this match was completed during their youth, the likely period of time that the Geats held him in low regard. If the purpose or stakes were to finish the swimming match, then Beowulf did not fully adhere to the parameters of the competition for status; though he may have exceeded (as he claims) in demonstrating greater power or dominance, his actions ultimately fail to warrant him social prestige as it does for Breca. Beowulf claims that

“Breca næfre git
  æt headolace, ne gehweper incer;
  swa deorlice dæd gefremede
  fagum sweordum—no ic þæs fela gylpe— . . .” (583b-586)

“Never yet at battle play has Breca, nor either of you two, carried out as bold a deed with shining swords—I do not boast of this— . . .”

However, by his own admission, the killing of sea creatures was reserved for defensive purposes and should not be taken as the primary objective of the contest: “Hæfdon swurd nacod, þa wit on sund reon, / heard on handa; wit unc wið hronfixas / werian þohton” (539-541) (“We had naked swords, hard in our hands, when we swam in the ocean; we intended to defend ourselves against whales”). Whether his dispatchment of the sea monsters happened or consequently benefitted all sea travelers as Beowulf claims, the fact remains that defense against sea whales was secondary to the swimming contest and his actions, though impressive, are not enough to secure heroic honor and social status.21

The literary and social components involved in flytings reveal elements associated with Tilly’s framework of violent rituals as a prominent form of collective violence: most specifically, the reliance on coordinated group identity through a stylized enactment of us-them boundaries; the adherence to a publicly scripted interaction aimed at inflicting damage (physical or social) as group members compete for priority within a recognized arena, such as the mead-hall; known scorecards and fixed or finite stakes; a clear differentiation between (proper) participants and targets, such as warriors and outsiders; and finally, the presence of monitors and/or spectators: see Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 101.

21 For a discussion of boasting words in *Beowulf*, see Nelson, “Beowulf’s Boast Words.” Nelson argues for redefining the meaning and function of the two types of boasting words and their compounds that appear in *Beowulf*: beot and beotword, and gylp, gylpword, gilpwide, and gylpspræc. She advocates for understanding gylp as boasting or bragging and beot as a promise or vow to the hearer. This context lends support for Beowulf’s claims to have slain nine sea monsters, or at least some of them.
That said, Beowulf’s success against these sea enemies (identified as aglæcan in line 556) foreshadows the poet’s obfuscation of the aglæca identity during Beowulf’s fight with Grendel, effectively conflating the hero with the villain and complicating how violence and heroism interact. Although Beowulf has his beot to socially fall back upon, the poet’s decision to have him fight unarmed via a hand lock completely intensifies the power element of his dominance display, setting his character well apart from any warrior who attempted the fight before him. But the fight also solidifies Beowulf’s aggressive nature and propensity for destructive violence, perhaps his father’s disposition. The poet emphasizes Beowulf’s commitment to the total destruction of his foe:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nolde eorla hleo ænige þinga} \\
\text{þone cwealmcuman cwicne forlætan,} \\
\text{ne his lifdagas leoda ængum} \\
\text{nytte tealde. (791-794)}
\end{align*}
\]

The protector of men did not wish by any means to let that deadly visitor go alive; he did not consider his [Grendel’s] lifedays of use to any of the people.

This disregard for life may seem fitting for a warrior fighting in battle, but it signals Beowulf’s singlemindedness: the monster must die. This becomes a peculiar sentiment when placed within the poet’s previous conflation of Beowulf with Grendel. The poet revisits the intensity and savagery of this behavioral disposition by claiming that “\text{wæs gehwæper oðrum / lifigende lað}” (814b-815) (each was loathsome to the other while alive). Here, there is no longer a distinction between what makes a warrior’s use of violence heroic versus condemnable except for the influences and primacy of the society that supports each actant. It should not be surprising then when Beowulf “\text{Nihtweorce gefeh, / ellenmaerpum}” (827b-828) (Rejoiced in the night’s work, from heroic deeds) that the initial claim focuses on the delight Beowulf takes in the violence he afflicts against Grendel. Cleverly, the poet adds apposition that functions to socially relegate those extreme, even bestial actions to the social
plane of prestige, thus legitimating Beowulf’s heroism over his and Grendel’s monstrousness for the audience. Although Hrothgar and the Danes will rejoice in Beowulf’s efforts, perhaps it should come as no surprise that upon his departure, Hrothgar counsels Beowulf on proper leadership and cautions him against committing the atrocities of bloodlust previously enacted by Heremod. As discussed, dominance through force evokes status through fear and Beowulf has proven himself mightier than most. This fear becomes tamed through society’s influence over warriors as the community grants or withholds prestige from them based upon the social perception of their violence use, who benefits from it, and why.

On the surface, Beowulf appears to be a typical warrior seeking status through actively dispatching foes and saving communities. However, by applying anthropological and sociological theories of violence alongside theories of social dominance versus prestige hierarchies, scholarship can explore multiple ways in which Beowulf’s character effectively defies normativity, further complicating the poem’s concerns regarding authority, governance, and appropriate violence usage. The history and development of early medieval kingdoms in Britain is a history fraught with dynamic cultural and political changes, including evolving ideas about secular and ecclesiastic authority, kingship and governance, legal codes for corporal and capital punishment, and even burial practices and locations based on social standing. Furthermore, violent invasions from across both land and sea borders continued to cultivate anxieties concerning outsiders and their potential impact on and place within society.

Approaching violence from these perspectives reveals new opportunities for distinguishing and reading the poem’s displays of violence in deeper conversation with the poem’s representation of

22 For considerations of legal developments and their connection to the body and violence, see O’Keeffe, “Body and Law,” and Gates and Marafioti, Capital and Corporal Punishment. Additionally, for a discussion of archeological evidence for victims of war, homicide, and executions, the significance of burial sites, and considerations of evolving legal systems, see Reynolds, Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs.

23 For a discussion of how arrivals and departures functions within Beowulf, and the threats they can pose, see Hill, Narrative Pulse of Beowulf
intertribal politics and various digressions, such as the Finn episode and recount of Heremod, and developing historical socio-political landscapes. The poem offers important clues for determining the source of Beowulf’s heroic motivations: a questionable paternal lineage and an affinity for violence that transgresses the poem’s presentation of intra and intertribal politics. Given his inability to perform dominance in a socially appropriate way that would cause the Geats to grant him prestige within the group’s social hierarchy, Beowulf must use his alterity to his own advantage. Where he may transgress social expectations, these will ultimately become the mechanisms by which he both thrives and later dies.

Jessie Bonafede is currently a PhD student in the Department of English and Literatures at the University of New Mexico (UNM) specializing in medieval literature. Her research focuses on Old English heroic poetry, Arthurian romance, and literary representations of violence, conflict, cooperation, and status-seeking strategies. Central to her study of violence in literature are the anthropological and sociological theories of collective violence and dominance versus prestige social hierarchies. In addition to her research, she teaches early British Literature and composition classes at UNM and is the Institute for Medieval Studies Outreach Fellow to the local secondary schools.

Bibliography


Shaull, Erin M. “Beowulf’s Father(s) and Fatherlessness.” In *Viator* 48, no. 1 (2017): 1-16.


*First Page of Beowulf
Cotton MS Vitellius Axx
Manuscript c. AD 910-1010*
Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b-124b: An Old English Poetic Romano-British Arts Encomium

Liam O. Purdon
Doane University

Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b-124b, commonly called The Ruin, is an Old English poem that has suffered both from physical damage, and from a kind of interpretive “damage,” the result of critical resignation in response to the work’s physical condition, revealing itself as much in continued critical acceptance of the work’s title as in continued acceptance of the critical assumption that the work’s total effect is forever lost to us. Enough of the poem’s whole and fragmentary lines exist, however, to confirm the purpose of two distinct emphases that draw attention to a yearning for restoration of the cultural traditions once shaping and stabilizing Roman-occupied Britain. These emphases consist of two perceptual acts in an imagined past. The first is the implicit act of looking forward toward imminent restoration of a Romano-British fortress-city that has suffered cataclysmic destruction at the hand of the barbarian. The second is the implicit act of looking backward from the same imagined temporal vantage point to the fortress-city’s heyday to appreciate fully the various arts, engineering and otherwise, that once, through their mastery and practical application, insured the stability of the nearly-four-hundred-year-long Roman occupation of Britain, making life livable and comfortable for those of the ‘far-flung kingdom’ stationed in Britannia.

While the Exeter Book continues to attract scholarly attention, critical interest during the last three decades in one of its most puzzling works, Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b-124b, or The Ruin, as it came to be known in the nineteenth century, has dropped off considerably.

1 Leo, Carmen, as the complete title of his study suggests, was one of the first to entitle the Old English poem as The Ruin, identifying the work’s emphasis upon destruction.

2 While the 1990s witnessed at least three studies fully devoted to the poem, in the next decade, of the six studies treating the work thematically and textually, at least three incorporated this critical assumption about the poem’s emphasis upon destruction as part of broader examinations of other issues arising in other Old English works. In the following decade, two studies focused on how the poet historicizes Anglo-Saxon society through the imagined experience of Roman ruins. These studies, chronologically, include Morgan and McAllister, “Introduction: The Ruin,” 106-08; Klinck, The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition, 61-63, 70, 103-05, 208-19; and Znojemská, “‘The Ruin’,” 15-33; in the next decade, Abram, “In Search of Lost Time,” 23-44; Howe, “An Angle on this Earth,” 3-27; Orton, “The Form and Structure of The Seafarer,” in Old English Literature, 353-81; Liuzza, “The Tower of Babel,” 1-35; Daily, “Questions of Dwelling,” in New Medieval Literatures 8, 175-214; and Orchard, “Reconstructing,” in Intertexts, 47-70; and in the most recent decade, Beaston, “The Ruin,” 477-89; and Critten, “Via Rome,” 209-31. An
This recent change in scholarly attention given this poem, a symptom perhaps of a larger trend in medieval studies, is unfortunate for several reasons. First of all, this imaginative work, though significantly damaged in manuscript (see following pages), remains one of the most technically innovative examples of Old English poetry, a distinction acknowledged and painstakingly confirmed by scholars since the third decade of the last century.

Thematically, too, this poem continues to remain one of the most enigmatic examples of the elegiac form in Old English, if in fact it is an example of that form at all. It does not, like The Wanderer or The Seafarer, appear to lament the transitory nature of human endeavor or existence. Rather, through an implicit process of comparison and contrast effected by alternation between descriptions of harrowing ruins in an imagined, seemingly unspecified temporal point in the past, and descriptions of what seems to be a vibrant Romano-British legionary fortress-city in its heyday in an imagined, seemingly unspecified prior time, it appears to yearn for restoration of an early and shorter version of this paper was presented at the Second Annual Symposium on Medieval & Renaissance Studies, June 16-18, 2014, at the Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, St. Louis University.


4 Krapp and Dobbie, The Exeter Book, lxv, call attention to the fact that, though its tone is predominantly elegiac, the poem is distinct from other lyric-elegiac works in the Exeter Book in a number of ways, including internal rimes in lines “5b, 7b, 11b, 31b, 39b, together with the unusual concreteness of vocabulary, and the use of a number of words elsewhere unrecorded in Anglo-Saxon.” In acknowledging the poet’s use of hapax legomena among other things, Lee, The Guest Hall of Eden, 150-51, identifies the poet’s method as being something close to that of a twentieth-century “imagist” poet. Renoir, “The Old English Ruin,” in The Old English Elegies, 150, takes this insightful assessment of distinct un-usualness one step further by calling attention to the poet’s effective deployment of what amounts to an Old English affective stylistics. In comparing the poem to several famous examples of Old English poetic elegy, he observes on the same page—and it is worth repeating this point in full—that the poem “... contains no philosophical statement and offers no clue whatsoever regarding the status, sex, situation, or state of mind of its speaker. In effect, it has a speaking voice but no speaker, and no actual human action takes place within its time frame or is mentioned having taken place or being about to take place. Such activity—in contrast to action—as we are asked to evoke is purely imaginary, is of a general nature, would have taken place generations before, and claims no connection with the speaking voice or any specific person in the poem. In other words, whereas the physical frame of reference is merely ambiguous and accordingly enables dedicated scholars to hold out for Bath or Chester or some other location, the emotional frame of reference is a total vacuum, which the modern reader must fill from his or her own reading of the text. As a result of this vacuum, the specific quality of the extant text—that is to say, such aspects thereof as produce its effect upon the audience—must perforce become a focal point for the reader intent upon enjoying the poem as well as for the critic attempting to analyze it.”

5 Kennedy, Old English Elegies, 19, was one of the first to make this distinction.
even older social, political, and even economic order insuring the peacefulness and prosperity that, in more peaceful, bountiful days, made life worth living for occupying troops under the boreal climate of Britannia, the northwest limit of Rome’s brādan rīces (37b), or ‘of the far-flung kingdom.’ Finally, while deploying a unique poetic strategy that establishes anachronistically its focus by alternating between the opposite acts of looking forward and backward probably during the first and second complete centuries of Roman occupation in Britain, especially including in that temporal focus the latter century’s—that is, the third century’s—last and tumultuous decade, the poem appears, as the only work in all of extant Old English poetry, to take the unusual, daring step of implicitly identifying recuperation and mastery of the creative thinking fundamental to various types of arts of a long-vanished culture to be the most practical, almost sacramental, means of revitalizing private as well as public well-being within contemporaneous early British culture.

To view this most curious specimen of Old English poetry in this way, as an Old English poetic Romano-British arts encomium, might well be judged idiosyncratic. But so much within the poem, as well as so much surrounding it in the Exeter Book, invites just such an approach that, not to consider it in this light would seem an error or, at the very least, a lack of critical due diligence. Publication quite some time ago of Fred C. Robinson’s advice regarding the need always to remember to examine what is immediately before or after any Old English work in manuscript, a precaution voiced by him and others for at least a decade before, did prompt some in the last century to begin to question critical orthodoxy regarding the poem. Those efforts, accordingly, established the possibility of viewing the work as something of a riddle, an “exercise in ingenuity,” like the poems immediately preceding and following it in manuscript, or even as an example of the Latin “encomium urbis” tradition, a much older literary form, dating from the first century and continuing in popularity down through the twelfth.

While concern for textual and conventional thematic matters in

6 “Old English Literature,” in Old English Literature in Context, 11.

7 On the riddle quality of this work, see Johnson, “The Ruin as Body-City Riddle,” 397. The riddle as “exercise in ingenuity,” an observation made by Williamson, A Feast of Creatures, 8, is certainly an observation that can be applied to this poem. On this poem as example of the “encomium urbis” tradition, see Lee, “The Ruin: Bath or Babylon,” 443-55.
the work continued to attract the lion’s share of critical attention, this new interest, fortunately, was given renewed impetus and new, distinct focus and direction by Anne L. Klinck, first in the 1980s, through her study of the initial burn hole in the manuscript, and, later, in the 1990s, through her thorough critical edition of the poem. One of the conclusions in her first study—namely, that enough evidence is now retrievable to suggest the first damaged passage emphasizes “not the wreckage of the buildings, as has been assumed, but their remaining impressiveness”—and one of the conclusions in the introduction to her critical edition of the poem—namely, that the movement in the piece, toward its end, is not in the direction of the eschatological but rather the reverse, in the direction of a more vital past, which minimizes the conventional elegiac while emphasizing the triumph of the human imagination—have established, when considered together, a new critical vantage point from which to understand and appreciate what is latent and sophisticated in the work. Not to seize the interpretive opportunity afforded by these two insightful and thorough scholarly efforts, especially in light of the many conclusions about the poem advanced by other studies coming before and after them, would be a mistake. What follows, thus, is an attempt to realize several implications of this new direction in thinking about the work, which cannot but further elucidate and advance understanding of the poem’s uniquely appreciative early British view of several distinct aspects of the Roman occupation of Britain, a perspective hitherto given short shrift by scholars and critics of Old English literature, but certainly inviting further scholarly and critical investigation and consideration.

I

To approach this unique poem from the viewpoint of its celebrating the triumph of the human imagination focused on redemption of society through appreciation and recuperation of the arts, engineering and otherwise, associated with a culture no longer present except in


9 “A Damaged Passage,” 68, and The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition, 63, respectively. Also see for celebration of the memory of better times, Brandl, “Venantius Fortunatus,” 84.
ruins requires careful reassessment of what those arts are, as they are explicitly and implicitly presented in the poem’s lines, and how and why, in this particular work, the poet utilizes such things as frequently-deployed conventional and unconventional language, images, and alliteration, as well as innovative rhetorical strategies, such as parataxis, to call attention to the effect and value of those arts. But before turning to these important considerations regarding the poem in general, and to the poet’s technique in particular, it is necessary, first, to review preliminarily some of the actual or implicit problems—the physical, perceptual, and interpretive challenges—with which the poem continues to present contemporary readers and scholars.

Most noticeable—and most distressing—among these concerns is the actual physical condition of the codex containing the poem. The mutilation caused to the manuscript at some point in the later Middle Ages, either by water corrosion or by an implement like a hot iron\(^{10}\)—the codex, it has been suggested, might even have been used, at some point, as a cutting board of some sort\(^{11}\)—has resulted in lacunae from line 12a to line 17a, and again at the poem’s conclusion, from line 42b to line 49b. While attempts have been made to reconstruct the sense of some of the missing lines from the first lacuna, no comparable effort has yet been made in regard to the second. So much of the manuscript has been lost as the result of the second lacuna, in fact, that many may still be tempted to conclude, as Klinck herself once observed, that “the total effect of the poem is lost to us,”\(^{12}\) though the process of reconstruction begun by her offering sound conjecture about what was destroyed by the first burn hole can be pursued further, and taken up again, hopefully with equally convincing success, in regard to the poem’s second area of damage.

Yet another problem having to do with the text, a perceptual one, involves the perpetuation of a general interpretive misunderstanding of the poem’s contents. This misperception has arisen from the continued critical habit of giving the work the title of *The Ruin*,

---

10 Kennedy, *Old English Elegies*, 5, 18-19, identifies the damage as either that of water corrosion or fire. Also see Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, xiv.


a title appearing in editions and translations of the poem down to the present day, and one which has encouraged critical assumptions about the work that may not even be supported by the poem’s extant contents. Related to and resulting from this problem is perpetuation of confusion over what actually appears to be in ruins in the poem’s two sections offering accounts of destruction. One critic, for example, has claimed the poet acknowledges the wall’s destruction at least three times, a destructive engineering feat, if from battle and not simply from aging, that would have taxed even the most fully equipped and technologically advanced hostile forces of the barbarian, Scots from the northwest and Picts from the north.13 While the jury may still be out about there being something in the thinking of scholars and critics of Old English prose and poetry that does not like a wall, are the accounts of destruction here actually those of the wall? Or do these passages in the poem offer astounding, imagined visual images of destruction affecting the buildings enclosed and protected by the wall, the Romano-British fortress-city’s defensive bulwarks?14

Added to the unfortunate condition of manuscript degradation and potential editorial misperception is a long history of trying to construe the poem’s startling, problematic first line. It is not the line’s first hemistich— Wrǣtic is þes wealstān! (1a)—that has caused puzzlement, but instead the second— Wyrde gebrǣcon (1b). Ever since the early nineteenth century, this second hemistich has been rendered in contemporary English or Latin, in either one of 13 Keenan, “The Ruin as Babylon,” 115, makes this repeated claim about the wall’s destruction. For a sampling of this tendency in thinking regarding the wall, see Doubleday, “The Ruin: Structure and Theme,” 377, who indicates several times the wall is either crumbling or demolished; Gordon, Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 84, who describes the walls as “fallen”; Johnson, “The Ruin as Body-City Riddle,” 400-04, who describes everything in ruins, including walls; Kennedy, Old English Elegies, 21, who describes the walls as “shattered”; Panofsky, “The Ideological Antecedents,” 282, who states the destructive forces of destiny, as the poem indicates, leave “only wreckage” in their wake; Talentino, “Moral Irony in The Ruin,” 3, who suggests the crumbling walls “are, in part, the result of a crumbling social structure”; and Wenzersdorf, “Observations,” 175, who concludes the walls are ruined. An early, solitary voice maintaining the wall is not the site of ruins, however, is that of Irving, “Image and Meanings in the Elegies,” in Old English Poetry, 154-55. While not acknowledged by Irving, it is necessary to remember that the barbarian knew enough not to put military assets in jeopardy through a frontal assault on a wall but rather to assail such monumental architectural structures at their weakest points, like the gate or the bastion. Hadrian’s Wall, as Collingwood and Myres observed quite some time ago, Roman Britain, 155, “down to the end of its history . . . never fell before a frontal attack. It was captured by the enemies of Rome only when its garrison was either withdrawn or else in league with those same enemies.” Recently, Orton, “The Form and Structure of The Seafarer,” in Old English Literature, 357, describes the city in the poem as being rubble, and avoids mention of the wall’s condition.

14 From what the poet presents, the imagined ruins appear to be those of a Romano-British fortress city like Calleva (Silchester), rather than those of Hadrian’s Wall, though the ruins could very well be those of a large milecastle located somewhere along the Wall.
two ways. First, it has been construed to mean ‘Fates destroyed [it],’ which treats Wyrde as a nominative plural with an implied antecedent object—i.e., the wall-stone construction. It has also been understood to mean ‘destroyed by Fate,’ which treats gebräcon, the plural preterit, as the past participle gebrocan, with Wyrde as a singular in the instrumental case, what the poem’s first translator and editor believed to be the case when recasting the half line in Latin simply as “Fāto disruptum.” Neither solution offered thus far construing the line, however, is satisfactory for several reasons. The first is that, barring the possibility of scribal error, one as adept at description and manipulation of his wordhord as the poet would not have inadvertently confused a plural preterit with a past participle, particularly when later he includes that very same past participle in the work, and especially when his text is “otherwise consistent in its spelling of strong past participles.” The second reason is that translation of Wyrde as a nominative plural does not make sense grammatically since the implied antecedent object appears in manuscript as a nominative, not as an accusative.

And even if scholars were to persist in arguing the poet intentionally committed a mistake in the first line’s second hemistich as part of some innovative, creative poetic strategy, two very obvious things having to do with sense in the poem, things hitherto possibly overlooked by critics, clearly challenge the basis of such an interpretive assumption. The first is that the implied wall permitting the perception of the splendid wall-stone construction, which in turn leads to the first

15 Raffel’s modernization of the line, ‘Fate has smashed these wonderful walls,’ Poems, 27, l.1, illustrates this interpretive tendency.

16 Kennedy’s modernization of the line’s second hemistich, ‘wasted by Fate!’ An Anthology, 8, l.1b, illustrates this interpretive tendency.

17 Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 253.

18 Renoir, “The Old English Ruin,” 170, n27.

19 Evidence may exist in the manuscript for scribal confusion between þæs and þes, as has been suggested by Klink in The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition, 208, but no evidence exists for there ever having been any confusion between þes and þisne, a grammatical distinction that would have been dictated by an antecedent accusative in the line’s first hemistich.
hemistich’s initial exclamation of awe-inspiring wonder, cannot have been destroyed or reduced to a pile of rubble prior to the eighth-century authorial moment of the poem, the currently accepted date of the poem’s composition. Then as now, expression of awe-inspiring wonder in response to a wall-stone construction is more likely to occur than not if that wall-stone construction exists, or at least a substantial part of it. The second thing arguing against Fate or the Weird Sisters having left the wall in shambles is the simple fact that such an outcome contradicts the poem’s most evident emphasis on the monumental wall’s timeless permanence which, as opposed to the impermanence of what it encloses, is directly remarked by the poet two noticeable times, and in two imaginatively different ways—first, at line 9b, in terms of the wall’s massive solidity as it has continued to stand through the ages, raeghaer ond rēADFāh (10a), ‘grey with lichen and red-stained,’ while differing reigns have come and gone; and next, at lines 19b-20b, in terms of its construction as the master-builder and workers erect it, marvelously binding or cramping its fitted footing stones together, walawīrum (20b), ‘by strips of metal,’ in the northwest limit of the ‘far-flung kingdom,’ encompassing the “urbs” or city, the very heart of the Roman conception of the social, political, and economic unit that comprised one of the essential building blocks of imperial unity throughout the empire.

Accordingly, if the poet’s use of Wyrde at the beginning of the first line’s second hemistich is not to be considered a mistake, or a plural nominative, or a singular instrumental, then the grammatical logic of the half line, as well as Wyrde’s final vowel, can only permit translation of it in one final way—as a plural accusative followed

20 Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition*, 15-21, indicates the terminus ad quem for the manuscript to be no later than 950 C.E., and does not dispute the poem’s date of composition offered by Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies*, 34-37, who assigns the early eighth century as the terminus a quo for the poet.

21 The single bath’s wall at line 39b, a smaller version of the fortress-city’s monumental bulwark, functions similarly as principal enclosure or barrier housing and protecting the heated waters, Weal eall befēng (39b), and so insures continuation of the Roman cultural public health tradition of bathing or “lāvātīo.”
by a plural preterit with an implied antecedent plural nominative. Objection to this hitherto overlooked way of translating this second half-line certainly must immediately begin with the last part of this proposed translation since the subjective complement in the line’s first hemistich, *wealstān*, that hemistich’s subject placed in the subjective complement’s position through a reversal of the half-line’s contents to emphasize the predicate adjective *Wrǣtlic*, is actually a singular. But since the subject is more likely than not a large portion in the eighth century of a still-standing ‘wall-stone construction,’ if not a complete wall, in this instance being remarked quite excitedly, with the same awe and wonder that the vista afforded by Hadrian’s Wall even today elicits in the mind of the observer standing on that monumental structure, looking both to the north and south of it, then it cannot be forgotten that what is a singular here also can be understood as a plural since such a construction is wrought by many stones following a certain design to form a singular totality, a wall-stone construction or, simply, a wall. The wall-stone construction’s uniqueness of being one and many at the same time, a plural singular, like the Roman battle formation of the “testūdo” or the Anglo-Saxon battle formation of the “battle hedge,” is a paradoxical notion challenging the reader’s attention in

22 The idea here of one being many, and many being one, by no means a notion foreign to the Anglo-Saxon mind, can trace its origin at least partly to the Macedonian military formation of the line or the *phalanx*, a battle formation associated initially with Alexander the Great. Probably aware of this effective Greek military formation, Caesar, in *The Conquest of Gaul*, 60-61, identifies the Belgae as warriors who employ a modification of this formation, what later will be called the “testūdo,” when he observes that they form a defense by locking “their shields over their heads.” He also refers to this defensive unity made out of multiplicity, this *e pluribus unum*, as a “shield-wall” that the Romans are forced to tear down by hand, as Fowler observes in *Julius Caesar and the Foundation*, 158. Tacitus introduces the idea of the tortoise, in the broadest sense of the word—that is, the “testūdo,” when remarking the use of the “shield-wall,” the “dense array of the ‘testūdo,’” or a “dense array of shields,” in the *Annals* and *History*, in Church and Brodrioff, *The Complete Works of Tacitus*, 554-55, and 608, respectively. Virgil uses the same term, the formation from many of the singular unity described as the “tortoise shell,” in the *Aeneid*, Book IX, lines 505 and 514, in Rhoades, *The Poems of Virgil*, in *Great Books*, 13: 292-93. And not to be forgotten is the notable and famous visual representation of the “testūdo” in part of the bas relief on Trajan’s Column remarked by Fowler, *Julius Caesar and the Foundation*, 159. So when the author of *The Battle of Maldon* writes in Whitelock, *Sweet’s Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 119—

Þǣr ongēan gramum gearowe stōdon
the same way as do the Old English riddles appearing before and after the poem in the Exeter Book by “calling forth our powers of recognition and realization,” thus can connect the two halves of the poem’s first line, logically, by offering the second hemistich an implied antecedent plural of what the wall-stone construction consists—i.e., the massive stones—which results thus in a new, surprising, but logical translation of the complete first line as follows:

‘Wondrous is this wall-stone construction! [Those stones] crushed the Fates.’

Understanding this paradox of the wall-stone construction’s unique quality of being a singular and plural at the same time has the implicit effect of binding the two half-lines together—it offers, that is, a metaphoric and metamorphic “mortar” by means of an innovative, implied medial enjambment, joining and coursing the words or verbal “cut stones,” as it were, of the line’s two hemistiches—though of course such a treatment of Wyrde, the word completing the line’s internal alliteration, as a plural accusative, immediately raises two other critical objections. Crushing the relentless, implacable Fates or Weird Sisters, the Greco-Roman personification

\begin{quote}
Byrhtnōð mid beornum. Hē mid bordum hēt

wyrce ðone wīhagen, and þat werod healdan

fæste wið fēondum (ll. 100-103)—
\end{quote}

the introduction of the idea of ‘making the war-hedge for battle,’ as Charles W. Kennedy translates “wyrcan þone wīhagen” in Robertson, The Literature of Medieval England, 160, is not some sort of novel imaginative creation, though the Anglo-Saxon botanical imagery used to describe this unity formed by a multiplicity of shields in this instance differs from the reptilian imagery usually employed by the Roman authors.


24 This imaginative description of how elements of the first line’s internal structure cohere has been offered to me by contemporary American poet Roy M. Scheele.
of human destiny, is, philosophically, an act considered impossible. Even Ovid’s Jupiter himself, for example, makes it very clear he has no power over Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, the necessity above and behind gods and men, when in response to the story of Dryope he quiets the other gods by exclaiming:

What recklessness is this? What reverence
Is left me? Do you think yourselves so mighty,
So powerful, that the Fates are less? I tell you
The Fates returned his years to Iolaus,
The Fates made warriors of Callirhoe’s children,
The Fates rule you, so you had better like it;
They rule me too; if I had power to change them,
Years would not now be bending down my son,
My Aeacus; Minos and Rhadamanthus
Would still be in their prime, my own son, Minos,
Who rules but feebly now, since men despise him
For the sad weight of age.26

Secondly, turning Wyrde into the direct object of the first line’s second hemistich appears to confuse continuity of sense between the first line’s second half and the first half of the second line. But this exclamatory exaggeration implicit in overcoming the dominance of an absolute principle that even the king of the Olympians, the ruler of the universe, has no power to challenge and subdue is just the hyperbolic and even nearly riddle effect, it would appear, the poet hopes to achieve, at the beginning of the poem, to emphasize, by means of both grammatical and syntactical paradox, the wondrous solidity and permanence of the wall’s construction, and, by implication, the equally wondrous thinking that conceived

25 Gayley, The Classic Myths, 38. Malone, “The Old English Period,” in A Literary History, 89, indicates the poet’s Wyrd answers to the idea of Fate of classical antiquity, and may even be conforming “to some classical literary model.” Timmer, “Wyrd in Anglo-Saxon Prose and Poetry,” iii: 213, makes the point that wyrd, as it is used in Old English, stands for the Christian concept. Refining this point, he adds that such words in poetry “are used which originally belonged to heathen terminology and which through representing ideas common to both the old and the new faith have become adapted to Christian terminology.” This observation may be true for much of Anglo-Saxon poetry, but as the remainder of this essay will attempt to demonstrate, it does not appear to be true in the case of this particular poem, the exceptional quality of which challenges the orthodox absoluteness of the rule repeated by Timmer and perhaps still believed by many that “no genuinely heathen poetry in Anglo-Saxon has come down to us.”

26 Ovid, Metamophoses, 221, ll. 429-40.
of, designed, and created that structure in the first place. The eternal solidity and permanence of the bulwark, the arresting and astounding expression of the architectural and engineering genius behind Roman imperial unity insuring and thus affording peace and prosperity for the imported southern European culture in the far-flung northern latitudes of Britannia, as opposed to the temporal modifications of the wall or the burgstede (2a), the ‘fortified places’ or ‘bastions,’ built on or into the wall, that in the first hemistich of line 2 are said to have ‘broken apart,’ burston (2a), is therefore fully distinguished most effectively and startlingly by the poet in the two parts of the poem’s first line to free the reader or auditor by means of wonder from the poem’s initial actual moment in time and space, as it were, and to appreciate fully the profound difference between that moment and an imagined present moment in the past, centuries before, when the reality of the poem’s actual initial moment of composition could not even have been anticipated by the most creative imagination and forward-looking Romano-British mind.

II

Translating the poem’s initial line in this new way—as an exclamation in response to the eternal paradoxical quality of Romano-British monumental architecture’s permanence and singular splendor—precludes the possibility in the poem of an introductory conventional Old English elegiac-lyric expression of mourning in response to

27 The hyperbolic effect achieved by the poem’s first line also implicitly emphasizes the feature of the wall-stone construction’s eternal quality. In discussing the Weird Sisters in his *The Great Mother*, 228, Neumann makes the point that the archetype represents the “three temporal stages of all growth (beginning-middle-end, birth-life-death, past-present-future).” The destruction at the beginning of the poem of this seemingly unassailable absolute embodied by Fate eliminates the notion of allotted time and so situates the wall-stone construction beyond the positive time of created reality, a condition not without precedent in Western thinking. The idea associated with Hermes Trismegistus, appearing in the first and chief fragment of the Hermetic *Corpus, Poimandres*, and dating from as early as the third century C.E., that, as observes Thorndike, *A History of Magic*, 1: 290-91, “the chosen few who possess gnosis or are capable of receiving nous can escape the decrees of fate as administered by the stars and ultimately return to the spiritual world, passing through ‘choruses of demons’ and ‘courses of stars’ and reaching the Ogdoad or eighth heaven above and beyond the spheres of the seven planets,” may have been known by the poet in the eighth century, enabling the positing of an intellectual and practical challenge to the absolute idea fundamental to the medieval conception of inexorable fate.
the transitory condition of creation and the inevitable destruction of all human endeavor. This change in tone, emphasis, and focus alone, should give pause to anyone ready to continue the editorial identification of the poem as The Ruin. More importantly, however, it invites an alternative way of considering how the image sequences or series of tableaux of construction and destruction function in the forty-nine complete and fragmentary lines of the work. To determine how this is so, attention should first be turned to reassessing the purpose of the two image sequences or tableaux of destruction. Contrary to some criticism of the poem, these tableaux have to do, not with the ruined state of a fortress-city’s wall, but rather with the ruined state of its dwellings and other buildings enclosed by the wall. In the first destruction account (2a-9a), for example, ‘fortified places’ are said to have ‘burst’ or ‘broken apart,’ burgstedeburston (2a). These places are not the walls but rather the ‘bastions’ that have collapsed, usually the result of having been undermined during battle. In addition, the rest of the description (2b-6a) includes the fate of towers and roofs, and the archway gate itself. After that follows description of interment of those who designed, built, and maintained the fortress-city and its monumental defensive wall (6b-9a). In the second destruction account (25a-32a), the reverse occurs. First is described the slaughter of the garrison (25a-29a), then attention turns to the buildings (29b-32a). Again, what are in shambles are the dwellings and other structures within the enclosure. The wood-beam building construction, including the distinct red arches finished with tiles (a Roman, not a Germanic, architectural feature), is remarked and said to be part of a scene of ‘dwellings’ that grows ‘dismal,’ a scene of collapse, of everything within the enclosure in a heap and broken, now decaying:

\[\text{Forþon þās hofu drēorgiað} \\
oнд þuēs tēaforgēapa tigelum scēadeð, \\
hrosthēames rōf} \] (29b-31a)

29 Renoir, “The Old English Ruin,” 149.
Therefore, these dwellings grow dismal,
and these red-arched [structures] tiles part from,
support for inner framework of roof’

In addition, the temporal context of destruction in both image sequences is not the same kind of temporal context of destruction imaged by the “shattered galleries, ‘mid roofless halls,” “relics of kings!” that Wordsworth’s “Stranger” wanders through “with timid footsteps.” Wordsworth’s “Stranger’s” hesitant footsteps in the 1827 published sonnet, “Composed among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales,” are more or less contemporaneous with Wordsworth himself. The destruction in the Old English poem, on the other hand, is not experienced in the early eighth century, the time of the poem’s composition, but rather in an imagined past, at a moment in time hundreds of years even before the Saxon invasion of Britain, and at a moment at least many months, if not a year or even two, after the cataclysmic attack that had led to the Romano-British fortress-city’s having been overrun and its buildings left in shambles.

The poet’s focusing of attention anachronistically on the relationship between these two moments in time by means of the poem’s “time shifts,” hundreds of years prior to the eighth century, is engaged in for two reasons. The first is to reconstruct imaginatively a point in time in Romano-British history that invites the eyewitness act of looking forward by considering the visual evidence of harrowing destruction that has occurred sometime before, in the recent, not too distant past. What is being anticipated through this temporal reconstruction’s reorientation of perspective is the imminent restoration of the fortress-city, the return of this eorcanstān (36b), this ‘precious stone,’ this beorhtan burg (37a), this ‘bright fortress-city,’ to its former splendor. How such an expectation is justified and evoked by the poet is evidenced three ways in these two destruction sequences or tableaux. The first is through the absoluteness of the destruction evidenced within the installation itself. Such carnage would necessitate the replacement of the garrison, perhaps through

31 Calder, “Perspective and Movement,” 443. For a different, more recent view regarding the function of the poem’s dual temporal perspective and the way in which it parallels the same in Alfredian prose works, see Critten, “Via Rome,” 211.
reassignment of several cohorts of a legion to the empire’s northwest frontier. What is recounted throughout the second image sequence or tableau of destruction, the shorter and chronologically earlier of the two scenes of ruin, beginning at line 25a and ending at line 29a, is the very moment when the fortress-city is initially attacked, the moment of the cataclysmic confrontation and disaster. Auxiliaries, as well as the fortress-city’s legionaries—secgrōfra wera (26b), ‘. . . brave [men] with swords’ (26b)—the poet indicates, suddenly find themselves engaged with the enemy in a titanic struggle consisting of numerous battles at different locations when the fortress-city, as well as probably a large portion of the frontier and province, is completely overrun by the barbarian, the invading forces from north of Hadrian’s Wall. The scale of this staggering military clash is suggested here in two ways. The first, the spatial, consists of the adverbial marker used to modify where it is those slain in battle have fallen—wīde (25a), ‘far and wide.’ The second, the temporal, consists of a description of the carnage’s short- and long-term horrifying consequence—wōldagas (25b), ‘the days of pestilence’ that have no doubt resulted from and followed annihilation of the fortress-city’s former garrison.32 The line immediately following this disturbing description may seem an exaggeration—

Swylte eall fornōm secgrōfra wera (26a-26b)
(Death all of [them] took away [all] of the brave [men] with the sword).

But it may also in fact be a hauntingly accurate account of the slaughter’s terrible extent. The destruction, at the hands of the enemy, is complete; no one is left to bury the dead.

This annihilation of the fortress-city’s garrison, as well as the presumed massacre of all left within the fortress-city, provides the logic for presenting this scene of destruction’s brief second part, the destruction of things made. As with the fortress-city’s inhabitants

32 Frank, A History of Rome, 544, indicates, as do others, that plague did break out in the empire’s eastern provinces, decimating extremely large portions of the various populations, toward the end of Valerian’s rule (253-258 C.E.) in the joint-rule with his son, Gallienus (253-268 C.E.). If it is the case that the author of Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b-124b, has imaginatively set the events of his poetic meditation at this temporal moment in the final decades of the third century, as this essay will later attempt to demonstrate, it is conceivable the reference to the ‘days of pestilence’ may also be acknowledgment of the plague’s final arrival in this northwest frontier of the empire, as we know it did, to compound the problem of the fortress-city’s destruction.
following the slaughter, so with what was encompassed by the enclosure of the formidable wall. The fortress-city, the poet reveals, again through a simple preterit, is left in ruins—Brosnade burgsteall (28a), ‘the city site crumbled.’ This destruction is made even more startling by the additional fact that no one is left living who might engage in the work of restoration—bētend crungon (28b), ‘repairers died in battle.’ Accordingly, the most vulnerable part of the fortress-city’s wall fortification—wīgsteal (27a), ‘the bastion’—is described as a ‘waste place’ or a ‘deserted site’—wēstenstaþolas (27b). The Romano-British laborers and engineers who were called upon to rebuild what nature or the barbarian had destroyed were also the professional soldiers, the legionaries, who manned the fortress-city’s fortifications and met the enemy on the field of battle. It is for this reason the repairers whom the poet mentions died in battle are also described as the ‘troops’ who have ‘fallen to the ground’—hergas to hrūsan (29a). This massacre complete, the immediate fate of the fortress-city is sealed, and part of the empire’s northwest defensive line is thus left compromised and vulnerable to further attack and pillage.

The second way expectation of restoration is made to seem justifiable is suggested by the poet through evocation of a period of enough time having passed since the initial destruction to warrant belief in the imminent arrival of hoped-for, and perhaps even expected, replacements to re-garrison the outpost as well as other sites in the province and along the frontier. Evocation of this period of time having passed is first established by simple temporal distinction between an anachronistic “then,” the moment of initial imagined destruction and slaughter, and an anachronistic “now,” the moment of initial imagined perception in the later days of that destruction’s aftermath. This imagined perception of the fortress-city’s material destruction is articulated by the poet in the present tense, beginning with the memorable half-line, brosnað enta geweorc (2b), ‘work of giants crumbles,’ which introduces in part an expression like that present in MS Cotton Tiberius B. i’s Maxims II to emphasize the ingenuity of the work of giants, the Romans, and to associate

33 Scullard, Roman Britain, 79.
that work with heavy-stone construction.\textsuperscript{34} While nearly the rest of this scene is conveyed by means of the same verb tense, either actually or implicitly, to emphasize the immediacy of its perception, the destruction recounted in it is distinguished from the event that precipitated the harrowing destruction, the cause, which literally and immediately precedes it in the poem and is set in the preterit—\textit{burgstede burston} (2a), ‘fortified places broke apart,’ an expression also found elsewhere in Early English poetry and used to evoke the association between inevitable destruction and the transitory quality of all human endeavor.\textsuperscript{35} The difference in time between the cause-event and the condition-effect, however, is not introduced here to evoke the reason for elegiac mourning, but rather, surprisingly, to explain the degree of dilapidation perceived in the anachronistic moment of “now,” in which the latter is understood to have occurred.

Suggestion of enough time having passed to warrant restoration is further established imaginatively by the poet through evocation of the duration of a measurable period of time having passed. One way in which this temporal evocation is effected results by expression of the physics of dilapidation in the first image sequence or tableau. The poet obviously presents this condition without knowledge of the law of gravity, but what is described is gravity’s effect over time. The first examples mentioned to reveal this consequence have to do with the damaged roofs of the fortress-city’s buildings that, through neglect, have now begun to collapse under their own weight—\textit{hrōfas sind gehrorene} (3a), ‘roofs are caved in.’ Other examples mentioned to illustrate the same natural law’s effect over a period of time are the most noticeable features of the fortress-city seen from afar, the towers that are leaning and beginning to fall down—\textit{hrēorge torras} (3b), ‘towers collapsing.’ Next, to continue this implicit evocation of time having passed, attention is directed to the principal natural process associated with dilapidation—that

\textsuperscript{34} Dobbie, \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems}, in \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records}, Vol. 6, 55.

\textsuperscript{35} Cf. \textit{Wanderer}, lines 73a-77a.
is, rot and decay. Damaged roofs once again occupy the focus of the imagined visual field, though this time, quite inventively, in the form of the hapax legomenon scūrbeorge (5a), ‘storm-protections.’ These structures, the poet indicates, have been partially destroyed by a number of forces. Most noticeable about them is that the roofs are said to be ‘gashed’—scearde (5a). What emphasizes the temporal impression of duration here, in regard to the roofs, is the description of how some have fallen ‘from age eaten away,’ ældo undereotone (6a). Inclusion of the dative through the word ældo suggests a period of many months, if not a year or two. Damage from water or infestation, when maintenance is no longer present, never happens overnight.36

Suggestion of duration is also made in this image sequence by the implied condition of spare time or leisure—not the leisure or “ōtĭum” enjoyed by the Romano-British garrison legionaries at the baths, the hydro-mechanical sites mentioned later in the poem, but rather from the way in which things can be done in or around the deserted fortress-city, without any sense of urgency, now that enough time has passed since the fatal unleashing of the furious assault upon the installation’s inhabitants, fortifications, and buildings.

36 The second way the spatial here helps further situate perception at a time later than the initial cataclysmic destruction is through the poet’s utterance of hrim on lime (4b), ‘hoar-frost upon mortar,’ another of the poem’s haunting images. The hoar-frost in this instance must certainly be construed as the natural phenomenon associated with the colder weather of the winter season in a boreal climate. The mortar it has settled on, part of the frontier-system structure’s masonry that has fallen into disrepair through lack of maintenance for some measurable period of time, is an early sign of nature’s reclamation of things made, the beginning of the natural process of dissolution, demonstrable evidence of the working of that something there is that does not love a wall. But the figurative implication here of the word lime—that is, the mortar or masonry associated with the Roman conception and construction of the “limes” or ‘boundary-path’ or ‘boundary-line,’ the expression of the ‘far-flung kingdom’s’ extent and the historical reality from which our whole conception of “limit” may in part derive—cannot be ignored. That barrier’s condition of being hoar-frost encrusted conveys the idea of desolation, but the history of such condition at this line of demarcation between southern European culture and civilization’s most northward advance and northern European culture and civilization’s capillary response to such expression of force also implies the potential for imminent renewal. The restorations punctuating the history of that line of demarcation, including at least two in number by the implied anachronistic time in the poem of cataclysmic destruction, would suggest such a possibility. Thus, the image of collapse suggested by the frost, which focuses attention on the mortar or masonry that is disintegrating, may actually also be a harbinger of imminent recovery as much as it is a natural sign of decay.
This extra time available, the result of enough time having passed since the initial cataclysmic confrontation, is acknowledged, in this intervening period of relative peace and tranquility, to have permitted exploitation of what is to be found among the ruins of the fortress-city. One example of this relation between time and exploitation arises when it is indicated in the poem, through use of the past participle, that ‘storm-protections’ may have been ‘cut down’—scorene (5b). Such structures would certainly have provided ready abundance of fuel or building material in the form of timber. Another like example offered here is that of the archway gate. This structure, when unhinged and broken up, could be used for the same purposes as the roof timbers. What is more, since the barbarian, the invader from the north, never occupied the Romano-British fortress-cities he overran, and since the gate represented military as well as economic control of the frontier by a formidable foreign presence the barbarian had grown used to hating, hrīngeat berofen (4a), ‘archway gate taken away,’ also may be a means of acknowledging the barbarian’s having wreaked havoc, in cold fury, without any pressing concerns to distract him, the very act of what eventually would come to be known as “vandalism.” Such kinds of unhurried instances of wanton destruction occurring at the beginning of the third century, for example, are amply documented archeologically at Hadrian’s Wall.37

One final way duration is implied here is through a kind of rhetorical evocation of dilapidation by means of an artfully deployed “asynthetic parataxis” in this part of the poem consisting of a sequence of participial phrases, a memorable noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, and at least one passive verb construction:

*hrōfes sind gehrorene hrēorge torras; hrīngeat berofen, hrīm on līme; scearde scūrbeorge, scorene, gedrorene, ældo undereotone* (3a-6a)

(’roofs are caved in towers collapsing, archway-gate taken away, hoar-frost upon mortar; storm-protections gashed, cut down, fallen, from age eaten away’).38

37 Collingwood and Myres, *Roman Britain*, 156.

38 Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies*, 70, was first to note and identify this tendency in the structure of the verse.
The absence of the adhesive quality always effected by a conjunction in series of phrases and at least one independent clause constituting an extended period, like the passage here, creates the impression of a building’s wall-stone construction starting to come apart, the words as “stones,” as it were, now only loosely aligned, the result of many months, if not a year or two, of neglect, weathering, and the inevitable “powdering,” without maintenance, of the conjunctive mortar that once bound them together.

The final way expectation of restoration appears to be justified is evoked by the historicity of a number of elements actually included or implied in the destruction sequences or tableaux. The implicit among these appear to have the function of anchoring the work’s anachronistic moment of “now” in a time when the periodicity of restoration had become, more than not, a reality in the memories of those stationed in the empire’s northwest frontier. It is not difficult to understand how such an expectation might have become something easily confused with fact in the thinking of those individuals, given the general historical context in which the poem’s anachronism appears to be set.39 During the nearly four-hundred-year-long occupation of Britain, Rome was called upon to restore order and control in this part of the empire four times before the empire’s administrative and economic collapse eventually led to withdrawal from the island—the first, a little more than a decade following completion of Hadrian’s Wall; the next, at the very beginning of the third century; the next, at the very end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth; and the last, approximately three quarters of the way through the fourth century.40 Reinforcements were moved from other imperial provinces

39 Doubleday, “Ruin 8b-9a,” 124, suggests, like Leslie, Three Old English Elegies, 28, an element of Christian teleology is introduced here. This terminus ad quem of sorts associated with the impression of duration evoked at this point in the poem by introducing an implied future perfect tense (a kind of paulo-post-futurum), through another, brief periphrastic construction, appears to incorporate the early medieval Christian tendency of defining the Apocalypse as completion of a hundred generations. Writing in the early eighth century, at least a century after the beginning of Britain’s conversion to Christianity, the poet could easily have been aware of such a notion. But equally possible in this implied future perfect’s introduction, through reference to the master-builders’ burial sites, is the suggestion of pagan cultural continuity, the continuity of Romanity in the British province extending so far into the future as possibly to reach, not the Christian Apocalypse, but simply creation’s end.

40 The first of these major restorations occurred approximately twenty years after the Wall’s initial construction under direction of A. Platorius Nepos (ca.127 C.E.), shortly
during each of these restorations to re-garrison forts and fortress-cities throughout the island, though for obvious reasons attention was always focused primarily on Hadrian’s Wall, the principal, massive frontier-structure or “limes” in the north, “with its core of rough stone and mortar—essentially a concrete structure—faced on either side with ashlar, [containing] over two million cubic yards of material.”

In addition to what must have been perceived as an inevitability in the northwest imperial province—that is, the frontier system’s once and future restoration—the first of specific features in the poem’s destruction sequences having historical quality about them arises in the reference to the burial of the waldenwyrhtan (7a), the ‘master-builders’ or the ‘king’s builders,” whose deaths, logically, had to have preceded the catastrophic onslaught that led to the fortress-after Antoninus Pius succeeded Hadrian. The work begun at this time (ca. 140-42 C.E.) was conducted under the direction of Q. Lollius Urbicus, the new governor of Britannia, who, in reopening Agricola’s road over the Cheveot Hills, rejuvenated the Hadrianic frontier-system and even established the second frontier barrier or “outer ‘limes,’” an earthen one, to the north at the Forth-Clyde isthmus known as the Vallum Antonini. The next major restoration, a little more than half a century later, followed Clodius Albinus’s disastrous removal of many of the garrisons from Britannia to fight in Gaul in his unsuccessful bid for the empire’s throne. The resulting flood of destruction at this time along the Wall and in the north, from York to Chester, prompted the victor, Septimius Severus, as one of his first acts as emperor, to send a new governor to Britannia, Virius Lupus, whose first order of business was to reconstruct all that had been destroyed, including the walls of York (ca. 192-208 C.E.). A second order of business, carried out by Severus himself, was to re-institute in part the previous political program of Pius by ravaging the lands to the north to subdue the barbarian, in much the same way Lollius had done before, and in much the same way Agricola had done before him. After an unbroken peace lasting for nearly a century following these campaigns and the death of Severus at York in 211, the third major restoration of Britannia was undertaken by Constantius Chlorus, one of the two Caesars appointed in 293 C.E. by Diocletian, the one given the command of Transalpine Gaul. Like Severus before him, Constantius, known as “Redditor Lucis Aeternae,” immediately put himself to the task of restoring to Britannia the light of Roman culture and civilization, which included reconstruction of parts of the Wall and public buildings, re-fortification of the Saxon Shore as well as fortification of parts of the west coast, rebuilding of the fortress of York with its multangular tower, which stands even today, and perhaps even the re-fortification and adding of bastions to the walls of London (ca. 296-306 C.E.). Following the collapse of Diocletian’s tetrarchy, which left Constantine master of the empire, and a series of emperors following him, the final restoration of the Wall was undertaken near the end of the fourth century under the direction of Count Theodosius (ca. 368 C.E.), the distinguished soldier Valentinian I sent out to Britannia, whose reorganization of the four provinces now comprising the diocese of Britannia—Britannia Prima, Britannia Secunda, Maxima Caesariensis, and Flavia Caesariensis—included re-fortifying the Wall and rebuilding many of its smashed buildings, as well as inauguration of a coastguard system to support the defensive system of the Saxon Shore, which eventually permitted establishment of a fifth British province henceforth known as Valentia, with its own governor of consular rank.

41 Collingwood and Myres, Roman Britain, 135.

42 Robinson, “Notes and Emendations,” 363, suggests the builder’s association with royalty conveys the idea of the “very best.”
city’s being overrun. These individuals, who may have lived to old age, could not have received burial, according to custom, if there had been, at the time of their decease, no one living within the fortress-city to bury them in the Roman grave yards usually located well beyond the city’s defensive walls. While the remains of these dead, as the poet indicates, are held by the Eorðgrāp (6a), the ‘earth-clutches,’ what is also indicated is that they have been this way, in their graves, for a considerable period of time since they are forweorene (7b), since they are said to be ‘ decayed.’

Acknowledging this condition of interment provides an approximate terminus a quo for the construction of the wall and the fortress-city it protects, the moment in time when the master-builders and work details first began building this beorhtan burg (37a), this ‘bright fortress-city.’ Buried bodies in a state of decay indicates the practice of inhumation rather than cremation, a burial practice in Romano-Britain that became more and more common following the end of the second century.43 Such a distinction may not lead to identification of the actual Roman fortress-city at the heart of the poem, a subject encouraging debate about the work for over a century,44 but it does

43 Cunliffe, Roman Bath discovered, 89, makes this point about the area surrounding Bath, an example illustrative of practice identified elsewhere.

44 Details in this “oldest example of formal description in English literature,” as Krapp and Dobbie, The Exeter Book, lxiv, initially describe the poem, have led to the identification of several forts or fortress-cities as the actual site of the poem. Most popular among these identifications has been the city of Bath, the Roman Aquae Sulis. In the nineteenth century two antiquarians arrived at this conclusion independent of each other’s work. The first was Earle, “An Ancient Saxon Poem,” 259-70, “The Ruined City,” 29, and Anglo-Saxon Literature, in which he states, in reference to the poem: “This is no vague poetic composition . . . [it] . . . suits the old Brito-Roman ruins of Akeman (Bath) after 577; and it suits no other place that I can think of in the habitable world,” quoted in Kennedy, Old English Elegies, 20. The second was Leo, Carmen, 5. Since then many have lent their support to this identification, especially after the early 1960s, when archeological evidence gradually became available about that ancient city and its principal attractions, the baths as well as the Temple of Sulis Minerva. Among these are Baker, “Weal in the Old English Ruin,” 328, whose argument assumes Bath as the location; Calder, “Perspective and Movement,” 442, who acknowledges Bath by quoting Wrenn and refuting Keenan; Cunliffe, Roman Bath discovered, 94, who quotes Kershaw to substantiate his claim for Bath; Hotchner, Wessex and Old English Poetry, who summarizes all previous attempts at making this identification; Kershaw, Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems, 52, who indicates no evidence exists of other cities with baths like those of Bath, which resemble the description in the poem; Leslie, Three Old English Elegies, 23-27, whose claim for Bath, the most convincing of all, includes the issues of water pressure, the number of baths, and the circular pool; Mackie, “Notes on Old English Poetry,” 92, who concludes the location must be Bath; Sieper, Die altenglische Elegie, 233, who identifies a wall in the poem as belonging to the reservoir at Bath; Wentersdorf, “Observations on The Ruin,” 171-80, who elaborates on Leslie’s argument; and Wrenn, A Study of Old English Literature, 140, who states The Ruin is the “first topographical poem in English” and is “an elegiac meditation on the ruins of an actual and once Roman city, which has been convincingly identified as Bath.”

Arguments against Bath’s being the site of the poem, far fewer in number than those identifying Bath as the site, include Haverfield, “Romano-British Somerset,” in Page, The Victoria History, I: 224, who points out that Bath was never more than a “lightly fortified rest center for Roman Britain,” and that the hot springs were nearly inactive by the eighth century; Herben, “The Ruin Again,” 73, who observes the poem’s gushing waters are not geo-thermal, and that there is a circular bath at Mumrills; Krapp and Dobbie, The Exeter
suggest that what has at least been imaginatively beheld and is,
ultimately, source of the poet’s initial expression of wonder, even as late
as the eighth century, represents an architectural achievement dating
probably at its earliest from a time at the beginning of the third century,
the period of the frontier-system restoration programs initiated by
Severus, and later continued by Caracalla—a time that was witness,
as historians have frequently reminded us, to widespread stone-
wall and stone-building construction projects in Romano-Britain.

Another feature of the poem having historical quality about it, one
related to the chronological implications of the change between the
practice of inhumation and the practice of cremation in Britannia,
has to do with the destruction wrought by the barbarian. As the poet
gives an account anachronistically of the initial imagined onslaught,
the picture that results is one of carnage and widespread devastation.
Such annihilation and near apocalyptic destruction may call to mind
events happening in the third century’s last decade in Britannia
following the attacks of the northern tribes on the entire frontier
system. No events like these had occurred prior to this time in the
third century. Despite the anarchy that had broken out throughout
the empire following Caracalla’s murder in 217 C.E., an anarchy
that irretrievably destabilized the eastern imperial provinces and
continued to worsen under the eighteen or more emperors who took
the throne afterward before the accession of Diocletian, the four soon-
to-be newly-organized provinces of Britannia continued to enjoy an
unbroken peace for most of the century, the result of the reforms
instituted by Severus prior to and during that century’s first decade.

Book, lxiv-lxv, who indicate Bath was not in ruins at the time of the poem’s composi-
tion; and Malone, “The Old English Period,” 88, who doubts that the poem’s author “had
in mind one site only.” Other locations advanced as the actual site of the poem include
Deva (Chester), and any one of several legionary fortress settlements, such as Corstopitum
(Corbridge), Vercovicium (Housesteads), and Vindolanda (Chesterholm), along Hadrian’s
Wall. A figurative site as the location includes the allegorical concept of Babylon advanced
by Keenan, “The Ruin as Babylon,” 109-17. The argument for Chester was advanced by
Dunleavy, “A ‘De Excidio’ Tradition,” 115-18. The argument for the Wall was advanced
location at all, but rather a composite, imagined site, in the spirit of Kemp Malone’s obser-
vation, include Greenfield, A Critical History, 214, Krapp and Dobbie, The Exeter Book,
present study favors this perspective.

45 See Birley, Septimius Severus, 244-68, especially 259.
However, events in Britannia leading up to the eventual confrontation between Constantius and Allectus approaching the end of the third century—namely, rebel Gallo-Roman Carausius’s establishment of a short-lived, independent British empire in 286 or 287 C.E., his subsequent murder in 293 C.E. by Allectus, his own finance minister, and Allectus’s usurpation of the throne and almost immediate removal of troops from nearly all the Roman fort and fortress-city garrisons, like Albinus’s disastrous strategy a century before, to mount a defense in the south against the inevitable challenge from Rome, this time spearheaded by Constantius—left the occupied territories in Britannia vulnerable to attack, an opportunity the barbarian wasted little time in seizing, leaving most of the defensive system to the north in shambles for a number of years before the usurper could be hunted down and defeated, and before a new program of restoration, the third, could be instituted at the end of the decade and the beginning of a new century, both at the Wall and throughout Britannia’s newly organized provinces. The destruction wrought at this time throughout the land cannot have been much different than that imagined by the poet in the Old English poem. Nor, too, could the ensuing disintegration and dilapidation of buildings during the time following the initial onslaught have been unlike what is described in the poem.46

46 Reference to the ‘bastion,’ at this point in the poem, is important since it also is a circumstance setting the work in time following Severan restoration programs, which instituted the building of this kind of defensive structure. What is more, there is no lingering presence of the marauder in the description except for the implicit isolated instances of vandalism, and no indication or anticipation of a mobile army’s approach, a reality that does not appear in Britannia before 360 C.E., as Collingwood and Myer observe in Roman Britain, 284-88. The terminus ad quem of the anachronistic moment of “now” in the imagined past, thus, has to be some time long before the last half of the fourth century, at least half a century before the arrival of Count Theodosius and the beginning of the fourth restoration (ca. 368 C.E.), when the mobile army first begins to make its appearance in the diocese’s newly established provinces. This fact, combined with the terminus a quo of the anachronistic moment of “then” in the poem’s imagined past as having to be some time after the first decade of the third century, given the archaeological evidence of changed burial practice as well as the fact of continued peace in the province for most of the century, appears to identify with some degree of certainty the imagined period of the past in the poem—the period of time between the anachronistic “then” and “now”—as occurring more than likely leading up to and during the tumultuous years of the third century’s last decade when order was finally restored by Constantius Chlorus. The evidence in the poem suggesting this timeframe of Romano-British history as focus of attention supports Critten’s observation that the poem...
The second reason Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b-124b, focuses attention anachronistically on the relationship between the two moments in time prior to the eighth century is to reconstruct imaginatively a temporal point in Romano-British history that invites the act of looking backward by considering visual evidence of construction through the objects of the wall, the wall-stones, and other structures that the wall encloses. These two sequences or tableaux of construction in the poem, the first following from line 9b to line 24b and the second following from line 32b to line 49b, call attention primarily to the condition and permanence, as well as cultural purpose as defensive enclosure, of the fortress-city’s wall. Contemplation of the condition and permanence of these things, not for the purpose of being comforted by nostalgia, is decidedly limited by the first burn-hole in the manuscript affecting lines in the poem beginning at 12a and ending at 17b. But enough of this section devoted to the condition of construction, both appearing before and after the lacuna, as well as enough retrievable fragmentary material on the periphery of the lacuna contributing to the same descriptive end—material that has been carefully documented and assessed through dedicated editorial and scholarly effort—now is available to support further conjecture about how the poet evokes the source of the wall’s permanence in three startlingly poetically inventive ways.

The first of these has to do with the wall’s nearly animated quality. The structure, as it is perceived in the anachronic moment of “now” in the imaginatively reconstructed past, is presented by the poet as being almost a living thing. This effect is suggested first by personification. What is described in these lines is not just a formidable enclosure. It is a thing that has ‘lived to see’ changes occurring more than likely circulated in the same milieu as Alfredian prose works (222), since its treatment of historical events is more orderly than Bede’s confused account of the same and related events, especially in Book I, chapters 11 and 12, of A History, 50-53.

47 Johnson, “The Ruin as Body-City Riddle,” 402-05, calls attention to this feature of the poet’s language at this point in the poem.
around it—*Oft þæs wāg gebād* (9b). In addition to its evidencing this degree of animate/sensory response, the wall, as it is further considered, also reveals something of will—a dogged perseverance. This feature of its animation is suggested two ways, one in response to nature, the other, in response to artifice. The latter can be heard in the fact that the wall has lived to see, come and go, one reign after another—*Oft þæs wāg gebād . . . / rīce æfter ōþrum* (9b, 10b). The idea of ‘reign’ here, no doubt, is that of the emperor, the central administration of the empire. But the eighteen or more emperors who populate the third century between Caracalla and Diocletian are probably not what the poet has in mind when using the word *rīce*. More than likely, at the forefront of thinking here, are the significant administrations whose policies had a direct effect on the “limes” in Britannia, usually in the form of re-garrisoning the frontier system. Included in this group, if known at the time, would probably have been the administrations of Pius, Severus, Caracalla, Valerian, Diocletian, and Constantius, and closer to home, those perhaps of the unsuccessful challengers Albinus, Carausius, and Allectus.

Perseverance as a distinct feature of the wall’s animation in regard to nature is presented through the wall’s seemingly timeless ability to withstand the full, continuing destructive force of the weather. Remaining unaffected by any meteorological phenomena, the wall stands firm, as the poet declares—*ofstonden under stormum* (11a), ‘having withstood assault of storms.’ The timeless quality of this singular steadfastness is also indicated by the weathering clearly visible on the surface itself of the wall’s many stones. The color of their surface, over the years, has been changed to grey-green, by lichen growing on them, and rust-red, by the oxidation of the iron cramps that secure the footings and probably some coursing of stones above—*raeghār on rēadfāh* (10a), ‘grey with lichen and red-stained.’

48 Jumbled and confused as it is at times, even Bede’s history provides names of many Roman emperors for his contemporary readers. Furthermore, Bede’s reference to “ambitious despots” leading warrior Britons off to their deaths (51) may even be acknowledgement of Albinus, Carausius, or Allectus, or any combination of two of them.

49 In arguing Chester may be the actual site of the poem, Dunleavy, “A ‘De Excidio’ Tradition.” 116-17, calls attention to the red Bunter Sandstone on which Chester stands. This stone, he suggests, is the source of the color referred to in line 10a. While there certainly is something to his argument about the use of Bunter Sandstone in Romano-British
The next way the poet reveals the wall’s source of permanence is through an anatomy of the wall’s architecture itself, which moves the anachronistic moment of imagined perception of the wall retrospectively along the poem’s now implicit historical continuum. The poet begins this further backward-looking examination, first, by calling attention metaphorically to a previous collapse of the fortress-city’s buildings—Stēa[p], gēap gedrēas (11b), the ‘High, [the] arched [buildings] fell.’ This act of distinguishing between buildings whose relatively weak architectural structure, over time, has caused them to collapse, and the wall, the solidity and design of which has enabled it to continue to stand and to endure the elements, invites further consideration of what constitutes this unique quality of the wall put in place at the time of its construction, a measurable time prior to the assault upon the fortress-city, as we have seen, that eventually leaves the city buildings in ruins. Revelation of the wall’s unique structure insuring its longevity follows immediately and, though fragmentary, appears to be evinced by the poet in two different, but complementary, ways. The first of these has to do with body structure itself. Suggesting strength, hardness, density, stability, substantiality, and unity, the poet’s description, begun in the present tense, acknowledges, in the first damaged line of the first lacuna, the continuity of the wall’s remarkable order and spatial dimension. More than likely, what can be retrieved from the line’s second hemistich—[n]um gehēapen (12b), ‘[wonderfully?] piled high’—underscores the unwavering position of the stones despite the time that has passed since their initial installation and coursing.

Klinck, “A Damaged Passage,” 165, suggests that gehēapen (12b), ‘piled up,’ and not gehēawen, ‘cut (down),’ is the more likely word in this instance, yet another example of the poet’s tendency to use strong forms of commonly weak verbs, a point she reaffirms in her edition of the poem, The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition, 212, n12a-b, and so invites the conjectural reconstruction of [n] in [n]um as [r] in wundrum (12b), ‘wonderfully.’ Keeping the MS reading of the line here makes sense when considered in light of weall wundrum hēah, which appears in Wanderer, 98a.
What is more, this implied continuity of construction is anticipated in the line’s first hemistich by the adverb *giet*, as well as by the line’s first word, *Wu[n]að* (12a), if Klinck’s argument regarding the sense demanded by the first hemistich’s adverb is correct. Since its construction, the wall has thus ‘remained steadfast,’ despite the changes, even the catastrophic events that have happened to what was contained within its perimeter, and behind its archway gate.

The second way the poet conducts the anatomy of the wall’s structure is by calling attention to the relationships implicit in the wall’s body structure through identification of the means connecting the stones above the footings—that is, by revealing what is fundamental to the vertical and horizontal runs of the wall-stone construction. It is at this point that significant damage to the manuscript appearing in the first lacuna is encountered (a gap of 9.5 cms. follows). Only the line’s first word and two possible letters are retrievable here. Not much can be made of the letters except to identify them, as Klinck and Leslie, before her, have done. The verb *Fēlon* (13a), however, offers conjectural interpretive possibilities. Klinck has indicated that ‘persisted’ or ‘have persisted’ for that verb “would accord well with ‘remains’ in the previous line.” This conjectural rendering of the word’s sense, she suggests, is consistent, both literally and figuratively, given *Fēlon*’s relationship to *Fēolan*. If her surmise is correct, then the function of line 13 would be, in part, to reaffirm the enduring quality of the wall’s body structure articulated by the previous line. If, however, the third person preterit of the verb *Fēlon* is rendered as ‘they adhered’ or ‘they have cloven,’ another conjectural interpretive possibility, then the adhesive quality binding the stones would be what emerges in this instance as the object of scrutiny and favorable remark. Such an emphasis would not be unanticipated, given the function of mortar in Roman wall-stone construction,


52 *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition*, 212, n13a, and, *Three Old English Elegies*, 70, n13, respectively.


and especially given the importance attached to the principle of the triad, the third thing of some sort, the tertium quid, that always is necessary to join two disparate things together, even though cement was rarely used in late-medieval large-stone construction.  

The phrase *grimme gegrunde[n]* (14a), ‘severely ground,’ which Klinck puts at the beginning of the next line in view of the two words’ double alliteration, is construed by her to mean something having to do with weapons, though even the lineation of the fragments here is uncertain owing to continued manuscript damage (a gap of 8.75 cms. follows gegrunde[n]). What perhaps led Klinck to this conjecture might be the pervasive image in Middle English poetry of sharpening the sword or axe, the most memorable example of which is heard when Sir Gawain, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, approaches the Green Chapel to meet his doom. But an equally plausible explanation of the two words in the phrase here should not be ignored, especially if the adhesive quality of mortar, the means of bonding the stones and establishing and securing their coursing in the wall, is, in fact, being suggested by the word *Fēlon* at the beginning of the previous line. The act of ‘severely grinding’ or rubbing down to a powder silica, aluminum, lime, and (sometimes) clay, a necessary step in preparing mortar’s ingredients, may introduce the masonry process of levigation at this moment to explain perhaps how the connection—the action of that third thing of some sort, that masonry tertium quid—between the stones actually is prepared in anticipation of construction. The possible reconstruction offered by Ferdinand Holthausen, and accepted in part by Klinck, of the next fragmentary line follows:

\[ . . . hædre scān heofontungol . . . (15a and 15b) \]

(‘. . . brightly it shined the heavenly luminary . . . ’).

55 On the importance of the tertium quid in medieval thinking, see Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 43-44.

56 “A Damaged Passage,” 166.

57 Gawain’s advance is suddenly stopped when hearing the “wonder breme noyse . . . / As one upon a grundleston hade grounden a syþe.” See Davis, 61, ll. 2200-02.


As reconstructed here, the line certainly does not extend this idea of mortar’s adhesive quality. However, while Holthausen’s *heofontungol* is conjectural, agreement exists that *heo*’s placement at the beginning of the MS second half-line indicates the original presence of a longer word. Substitution of *heofontimber*, ‘heavenly structure,’ for *heofontungol*, words of approximately the same length, could thus extend the sense of the adhesive while invoking the Platonic triad, which logically would not be out of keeping with a poetic meditation on the seemingly divine binding quality of wall-stone construction cement. Reference to the condition of being ‘ingenious’ and to the ‘ancient craft’ or ‘ancient work,’ at the end and beginning of each hemistich, respectively, comprise the next fragmentary line:

\[\text{-------} \text{g orþonc ǣrsceaft} \text{-------} \]  
\((16a-16b)\).

These references would not be unexpected expressions included in a conclusion to an analysis of the medium that makes a wall-stone construction cohere, that makes many stones, one stone-construction, or a wall. Nor would what is included in the final fragment of this portion of the poem be out of keeping with the conclusion to the anatomy of sorts that has just preceded it. While only the letter *g* is identifiable in the first half line of line 17 (the first half of the line is missing), the second hemistich’s expression *lāmrindum bēag* (17b), ‘with clay coating [painted plaster] it curved or bent,’ perhaps the most memorable instance of an hapax legomenon in the poem, aptly completes the anatomy by providing a masonry metaphor having to do with the process of “dressing a wall,” or by providing what today would be called, to complete the previously used anatomy metaphor, the closing up or finishing of the procedure.

The final way the poet evokes the permanence of the wall, which implicitly moves further back in time the current retrospective visualized meditation on the wall to yet an earlier anachronistic point in the imagined past when the wall was first constructed and the fortress-city first established, introduces the idea animating the

---

engineering principle fundamental to the wall’s construction—the principle, for the poet, that presumably informed and enabled all Roman large-stone works, such as fortifications, dams, aqueducts, bridges, etc., to stand indefinitely, as many examples have until the present day. What is revealed at this point in the poem is that the footing of the wall, the course of the wall’s foundational stones that holds everything positioned above in place, is established by taking what is naturally occurring, the large stones, and treating them coercively by means of the engineering art of wall-stone construction—that is, by fitting and binding them together with that third thing of some sort, that tertium quid, which in this case is the iron strip, in the form of a ring, or cramp. Like the fasces, the Roman symbol of magisterial authority and power of unity through the determined application of various arts to nature, embodied by the inextricable bound bundling of rods around the ax, this like kind of architectural “bound bundling,” a wonder to behold, then as now, makes the footing course consisting of many stones, as well as every course of stones above it, one stone, a “wāg” or a ‘bulwark,’ a unity resulting from multiplicity:

\[
\ldots \text{in hringas hygerōf gebond} \\
\text{weall walānwīrum wundrum tōgædre} \quad (19a-20b)
\]

(‘\ldots into rings the stout-hearted bound [the] wall with strips of metal wonderfully together’).

It is important to remember here that while the *hygerōf* (19b), the ‘stout-hearted,’ actually engaged in the physical labor of setting the stones at the beginning of the wall’s construction, it is actually the *hwætrēd* (19a), those ‘acute in thought,’ who conceived of this engineering principle in the first place that forever physically and politically changed Britannia’s landscape and the eventual history of the island’s occupation by Rome. It is no accident the poet thus identifies these two parts of the work force by means of adjectival terms that clearly distinguish them, for while the project could not have been undertaken without the stout-heartedness and physical strength of those ready and obliged to toil willfully, it could not have even been begun without the determination of the chief
engineer, master-builder, or ‘royal artisan’—that is, he who was ‘acute in thought,’ hwætrēd—whose mind, in an instant, the poet indicates, preserves the full likeness of its divine creator, “The Firste Movere of the cause above.” Though engagement of mind here does occur within time and space—Mōd mo/nade (18a), ‘Mind prompted,’ as the conjugation of the verb indicates, what comes of this engagement appears to be expression of the neo-Platonic conception of the original concept of a thing, or the “Idea”—yneswifne gebrægd (18b), ‘quick-minded clever idea,’ which, instantaneously moving the retrospective anachronistic meditation on the wall now to time before time—that is, into the imagined infinite “Now,” when mind is perfectly “waiting upon” the unmoved mover—permits introduction of the paradoxical event consisting of the presence in the created or profane of the uncreated or the divine. Thus, not a moment of diminution, what the poet offers here is a moment of augmentation, an imagined glimpse of “Lux Aeterna’s” effect in and on the world through an idea generating and resulting, in this instance, in an eternal monumental architectural construction.

The implicit consequence of this implied divine fostering presence in actuality, of course, is the unique construction of the wall, which insures its eternal duration. The explicit consequence of this implied presence, the description of which follows immediately in the poem, consists of what the wall, as enclosure or enceinte, engenders in turn—namely, the vibrant community of the fortress-city. In fact, the vigor and energy of this community appear to be a direct function of the informing indwelling presence of something divine in and about the wall’s physical presence and structure. This resultant liveliness or animation is evoked by the poet in two remarkable ways. The first, to give it the breadth and depth of three dimensions, is through an appeal to all five senses, emphasized by the use of the present tense and a brief, second deployment of an asyndetic parataxis (21a-23b), this time almost creating the illusion of convivial comradeship through a syntactical concordant discord. The visual, thus, is revealed immediately through the brightness of the city’s many buildings—Beorht wāron burgræced (21a), ‘Bright were dwellings in the fortress-city.’ The tactile is suggested by the

61 Macrobius, On the Dream of Scipio, 86. Also see note 27 above.
baths—*burnsele monige* (21b), ‘bathhouses many.’ Sound also can be heard in either of two ways—indistinctly, in a kind of background noise, from the ‘great noise of a company of warriors,’ *heresweg micel* (22b), or distinctly and fully from ‘the mirth or celebration of men,’ *mondrēama full* (23b). And smell and taste are evoked by the many ‘mead-halls’ found within the city and, presumably, by the many cups of drink consumed therein—*meodoheall monig* (23a). The second way the energy and vigor of this Romano-British community are suggested is through the expression of social interaction. Explicit examples of this condition include the already-mentioned indistinct and the more distinct, emotionally-generated sounds coming from the taverns. In their cups, the warriors and men, in throngs, join in voice, indistinct and distinct, to create this effect. Implicit examples also are present. The many ‘high-arched structures,’ the bright dwellings—*hēah horngestrēon* (22a)—imply individuals living in close proximity, presumably enjoying each other’s company, unified at least by the same purpose that had put them there, together, at the empire’s northwest frontier. The baths that are many, presumably both public and private, are also sites of such implied interaction. While always places of relaxation, hygiene, and ceremonial ablation, they were, like their counterparts in the empire’s southern regions, places where the latest of community interest was shared and the greatest of individual attention was understood to be given, either by slave or facility attendant.

**IV**

Contributing to this liveliness of the fortress-city engendered and insured by the wall’s divinely-inspired and divinely-informed permanence that paradoxically can crush even the Fates is the wall’s cultural purpose as a defensive enclosure or enceinte, which is revealed by the poet three ways. The first of these, the one having to do with the expansionist militarism fundamental to the Roman Empire, occupies attention at the beginning of the initial, undamaged portion of the second scene of construction in the poem,
starting at line 32b and ending at line 34b. The presentation of this aspect of purpose before the other two makes sense given the emphasis Rome placed upon territorial expansion through conquest as principal means of realizing imperial political and economic policies. The great company of warriors among the ‘many men,’ the *beorn monig* (32b), are described as being dressed in their war gear or ‘war-trappings’—*wīghyrstum* (34b)—in this instance, the tunic with cloak, the leather apron with the metal discs, the leather sandals with the iron-studded soles, the “*pīlum*” perhaps in hand (reminiscent of Minerva’s lance), and the large belts with the double-bladed, pointed sword and dagger. Unusual about some of these trappings, however, is their brightness, suggesting decoration of sorts, the decoration reserved for special occasions and certainly not worn in combat. The war gear’s trappings in these instances are said to have ‘shined’—*scan* (34b)—and these particular warriors are apparently decked out in precious metal—*goldbeorht* (33a), ‘bright with gold’—wearing all kinds of decoration on their dress—*glēoma gefrætwed* (33b), ‘brightly adorned’—and appearing as a wonder to behold, “*wlonc*” (34a), or that which is ‘splendid.’

So bright and ornamental is the appearance of some of these men, in fact, that it invites illustrative comparison with that of one C. Gavius Silvanus, a legionary, perhaps even a member of the Praetorian Guard, who was singled out by Emperor Claudius for his service in Britain. In the inscription recording this particular military honor, Gavius is said to have been granted “neck-chains, armlets, medals and a gold crown in the British war.” Scullard, *Roman Britain*, 39.

While no such service distinction is evident in the Old English poem, the unsullied, almost luminous condition of the attire of some of these warriors, as the poet amplifies it through synonym, suggests, nevertheless, that something unusual is happening—perhaps that the legionaries here are celebrating a battle won and heroes identified and rewarded, or are just celebrating new arrivals, whose joy and conviviality have not yet been tempered by the hardships soon to be experienced through life and work as members of a frontier fortress-city garrison. The implicit energetic joyousness of this social gathering also suggests
that others of the fortress-city may be drinking with these new comrades in the many small taverns, the “cauponae,” found within the city’s walls. Such an inference would make sense at an installation of this sort since a battle won or the arrival of reinforcements would always have been cause for extended, exuberant celebration. The wine, not ale, consumed by these soldiers and men, probably “vīnum”—rather than the usual fare, “ācētum”—given the specialness of the occasion and its general festive atmosphere, calls attention to the second way the wall serves the cultural purpose as defensive enclosure. This way has to do with economics, the reason in the first place for the ‘far-flung kingdom’s’ presence in this part of the world. Reference to the wine that has raised the spirits of all those who now are in their cups, veterans and possibly newly-arrived legionaries alike, may not be a moralistic expression of disapprobation, as some have hitherto suggested. Rather than being ‘wicked with wine,’ in other words, the members of the garrison appear, instead, to be enjoying the alternative, a joyful time, the result of their intense social interaction and being ‘elated with wine’—“wīngāl” (34a). This joyful behavior certainly calls attention to the communal liveliness of this installation. But what it also reveals by implication is perhaps a renewed spirit of optimism in the province regarding its increasing commercialism, the result of the reason for the conquest, in the first place, and the result, in the second place, of the subsequent centuries of occupation. The wine in the cups now, more than likely, is not the importation of a luxury

63 Focusing on the “martial noise, the mead-halls, the drinking, and the riches of a legendary tribe,” without a “toga in sight,” and on inclusion of the rune at the beginning of line 23b, Critten suggests the poem’s speaker is imagining a Germanic past (218), much the way Beaston does previously when suggesting the speaker populates the city with Germanic warriors (484). These moments in the poem, however, reveal not only a truth about members of all warrior cultures—that they are alike when celebrating arrival of reinforcements or victory—but also a clue as to who they actually are: their drink of choice, wine (wīn, as in wīngāl), is not on the menu at Heorot.

64 See, for example, Talentino, “Moral Irony,” 9-10; Doubleday, “The Ruin,” 378-79.

65 As an adjective, gal may imply “wicked” as Talentino argues rather tortuously, but it may also be introduced here to offer the less censorious implication of ‘gay,’ ‘light,’ or ‘wanton.’ See, for example, all entries under this word in Bosworth-Toller, An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 359, and Clark-Hall, A Concise Anglo-Saxon dictionary, 147.
article from the Continent, which it had been in the first and second centuries, though such foreign trade did continue to some extent until the Saxon invasion. Rather, it is probably evidence of the new agricultural industry within Britannia itself, competing with that of Celtic beer, capable of satisfying the growing demand for a good that had previously been considered solely a trade item of Roman and Gallic merchants. The edict of Emperor Probus in the 270s C.E. permitting home-grown wine, making policy what had no doubt been custom for some time, probably did much to stimulate this feature of Britannia’s Romanization through industry and commerce. What is more, a new socio-economic reality affecting the empire’s northwest frontier province in the later third century cannot be ignored: while the volume of imports into Britain was declining by this time, and while Britannia was experiencing significant demographic changes, it was actually, in great part, becoming more self-sufficing.66

More important than products of agriculture, however, is the poem’s next identification of one of Britannia’s oldest and most valuable exports, excluding slaves. As the warriors energetically clink cups and participate in their rounds of drinking, the poet reveals that the principal source of their immediate delight, the object of their ‘gaze’ (35a), is the precious metal sylfor (35a), as well as the searogimmas (35b), the ‘cunningly wrought jewels,’ the curious finished gem stones mined from the land. Though not an article of commerce since it was considered state property, silver quickly became the principal product of the flourishing Romano-British lead-mining industry, an industry established within six years of the Claudian invasion of the island and primarily, but not exclusively, based geographically along the Mendips and the Pennines. Historically, lead had been very much in demand by Romans, especially for complex plumbing construction involving water-pipes, sluices, cisterns, etc. But the “chief object” in working the lead, as Collingwood and Myers explain, “. . . was to obtain silver,” which was extracted from the ore by cupellation.67 The ‘cunningly wrought jewels,’ testimony regarding

66 Collingwood and Myers, Roman Britain, 227.

67 Collingwood and Myers, Roman Britain, 229-31.
Romano-British miners’ engineering activities and Romano-British jewelers’ artistic expertise, were also a product of the limited gold-mining and the widely diffused bronze-working industries. The former occurred primarily in Dolaucothy in Carmarthenshire, where goldsmiths worked on the spot, close to the mines, as archeological evidence indicates. And bronze workers, found in most towns of any considerable size, accounted for much of the production in that metal and in related handicrafts, though evidence of large-scale operations has been found in the north and west.

Acknowledging these sources of wealth by means of a series of prepositional phrases, as the poet does, thus permits consideration of their value discretely as well as creating, rhetorically, the impression of an alteration in focus regarding each precious item itself, as seen by one individual, moving progressively by reverse telescoping from generality to specificity and then, by reversing the process itself, by moving from specificity to generality again, before coming to the observation’s conclusion:

\[ \text{sēah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas, on ēad, on ǣht . . .} \]  
\[ (35a-36b) \]

(‘[where] one gazed upon treasure, upon silver, upon cunningly wrought jewels, upon riches, upon possessions . . .’).

Calling attention to ‘treasure,’ then to cupellated ‘silver,’ then to the ‘cunningly wrought jewels,’ then to ‘riches,’ and then, finally, to ‘possessions,’ before readying for the end, dramatizes and so emphasizes the engineering of lead smelting and cupellation, the artistry of jewelry-making, and the financial reward resulting from both, expressed at the center of this process of subject-focus telescoping. The reason for doing this, however, is not so much to foreground specific examples of such finely wrought Roman-British work, specimens of which today, lamentably, are few and far between, though serendipitous discoveries of such evidence have been made and do continue to occur.\(^6\) Instead, it appears to be done

\(^6\) Scullard, Roman Britain, 131, indicates a hoard of jewelry—armlets and necklaces, mostly—was found at Pumpsaint village, in southwest Wales, a site where goldsmiths probably worked. Beaston, 477-78, calls attention to the Anglo-Saxon treasure hoard accidentally unearthed in Staffordshire in 2009. But not much more Romano-British work is available except minor finds such as those reported under the Portable Antiquities Scheme.
to underscore the importance of the miners’, engineers’, and artisans’ skills, or “artĭfĭcĭum” itself in its most general, positive sense. Emphasizing the fact that the Romano-British were masters of such arts and skills, as well as masters of other arts, such as those of war, commerce, masonry, mining, and large wall-stone construction, as the poem has thus far done explicitly and implicitly, prepares for the final revelation of the Romano-British also as leaders in the advanced engineering art of hydro-mechanics, the combination of civil and mechanical-engineering arts that made possible the experience of the principal social as well as near-spiritual activity of Rome’s Mediterranean culture, bathing or “lăvātĭo,” even in the boreal climate of northern Britannia. Accordingly, the conclusion to this extended expression of amazement, anticipated by one prepositional phrase after another, is the distinction of the beorhtan burg (37a), the ‘bright fortress-city’ of the brādan rīces (37a-37b), of the ‘far-flung kingdom,’ by means of the implied comparison between it and the eorcastān (36b), the ‘precious stone,’ or gem, a thing whose material splendor results as much from its intrinsic worth as from the artistic effect of skillfully cutting and shaping it by the artisan or jeweler:

\[
\text{on eorcanstān}, \\
on \ pās \ beorhtan \ burg \ brādan \ rīces \ (36b-37b)
\]

(‘upon [this] precious stone, 
upon this bright fortress-city of far-flung kingdom’).

Considering the fortress-city in this figurative way, as well as suggestively identifying the presence of the divine in it, as previously in the wall-stone construction, invites, as the poem’s remaining fragmentary lines do, examination of how the poem presents the Romano-British as masters of the particular combination of advanced civil-, mechanical-, and hydro-mechanical engineering arts, and why this mastery, which resulted in this cynelic pĭng (48b), this ‘kingly or splendid thing,’ is significant culturally. Lamentably, however, this portion of the poem is not fully intact owing to the that have since revealed some precious metal work in other parts of Roman Britain. See, for example, Worrell and Pearce, “Finds Reported,” Item 15: 419. Also see Birley, Life in Roman Britain, 122-24.
second, more extensive, instance of manuscript damage starting at line 42b and continuing until the work’s end. But again, as is the case in regard to the poem’s first lacuna, enough fragmentary evidence has been retrieved here, through painstaking editing and prudent conjecture, to call attention to a consistency of emphasis on the part of the poet that appears to point with admiration, one more time, in the direction of the various engineering arts and artistic skills associated with Romano-British culture.

In order to focus on this combination of engineering arts, attention at this point in the poem is turned, not to the fortress-city’s burnsele monige, but rather, for purposes of illustration and careful consideration, to just one bæð, to emphasize instructively its unique architectural permanence, arrangement, and mechanical complexity. Unlike the tall, graceful arches of wood-framed buildings, the dwellings of the legionaries, that are gebrocen to beorgum (32a), that are ‘broken into a heap,’ victims of Fate like their builders, as the poem earlier indicates (24a and b), the bæð, the social center of fortress-city life,\(^{69}\) consists of permanent heavy-stone construction like the enormous wall encompassing it, and like the even greater wall encompassing the city:

\[
\text{Stānhofu stōdan; strēam hāte worep,} \\
\text{wīdan wylme (38a-39a)} \\
\text{('Stone buildings stood; moving water with heat gushed,} \\
\text{with wide surging').}
\]

This feature of the bath, probably the direct result of the Severan and Caracallan frontier-system heavy-stone restoration programs initiated at the beginning of—and continuing through—the third century C.E., is a practical use of indigenous construction material since, as a structure, this building housing running waters, pools, sluices, etc., had to be reinforced and made as sound as the fortress-city’s defensive bulwarks to contain the pressure exerted by the water while withstanding its long-term corrosive effect. In addition to the solidity of its construction, this particular building is shown to be carefully designed so to permit movement of waters under pressure, waters that ‘gush’ or flow out, and that can even be

\(^{69}\) Scullard, Roman Britain, 101, makes this point in regard to baths found in most fortress-cities. They were not only necessary for hygiene, but also functioned “as social centers where citizens could meet, exercise or relax, and gossip.”
made to ‘surge’ or move as if in waves, within pools or baths.\textsuperscript{70}

This achievement in hydro-mechanics and other engineering arts, implicit in the first description of the moving and surging heated waters, is elaborated in the later, fragmentary lines of the poem comprising the final part of this second scene of construction. Despite the extensive damage to the manuscript at this point, at least two things about this combination of engineering arts, the poet indicates, should be remembered, to appreciate the sophistication of Roman expertise in these related fields. The first is the control of the water’s volume and temperature. The gushing of the water, suggested by word-choice and verb conjugation, is something that can be determined implicitly by the facility operators. They can ‘let’ hot waters gush or, by implication, stop such movement of flow, which implies knowledge, to some degree, of water pressure, and knowledge of manipulating piping running from an aqueduct of some sort:

\begin{verbatim}
Lēton þonne gēotan ofer h[ārn]e stān hāte strēamas
(42a-43b)
\end{verbatim}

(‘They let therefore gush over grey stone hot moving waters’).

The second is the ability to direct the flow of large volumes of water from one containment facility to another. The waters gush over the ‘grey stones’ and presumably continue through some sort of course or lead pipe until reaching the ‘circular pool’—

\begin{verbatim}
[0]þæt hringmere hāte-
(45a)
\end{verbatim}

Important to remember here, too, is that, though flowing, the water remains hot even after having arrived at its destination, where other baths are said to be located:

\begin{verbatim}
Lēton þonne gēotan ofer h[ārn]e stān hāte strēamas,
un[đ]--
[0]þæt hringmere hāte--

(42a-46b)
\end{verbatim}

(‘They let therefore gush over grey stone hot moving waters,
and until the circular pool with heat’).

\textsuperscript{70} As they advanced in the hydro-mechanical engineering arts, so did Roman engineers engaged in other equally advanced civil-engineering endeavors. See, for example, the technique of cambering and creating precision-cut stone mosaic patterning of road pavements in important imperial roads, especially those leading to and not distant from Rome. See Von Hagen, The Roads, 8-71.
What this final distinction suggests is that the hydro-mechanical system, along with heating and plumbing systems, envisioned here is, indeed, a complex of systems including lead pipes, ducts, pools, hypocausts, furnaces, etc., functioning in concert, like that found in many even modest Romano-British fortress-city baths of the late third century. 

The importance of mastering all the engineering arts drawn together to create and maintain the baths is indicated by the poet through revelation of the unique, rejuvenating, nearly spiritual, experience that the hot moving waters have on one immersed in them. These hot moving waters, gushing with wide surging, within permanent and solid enclosures, provide the opportunity for hygiene, relaxation, and social interaction, all of which activities have the potential to be as gratifying and pleasurable as they are necessary for continued good health. But because the facility itself represents the perfection or even apotheosis of concerted practical application of several Roman engineering arts to recreate ingeniously the cultural bathing experience of the southern or Mediterranean world in the northern latitudes of Britannia, the site's architectural and engineering accomplishment appears also to invite the opportunity for engagement in the aesthetic experience of the spirit of the place. The bath, in other words, appears to be presented as being as divinely inspired and informed—as having,

71 Scullard, Roman Britain, 102, indicates an illustrative example of this complexity of plumbing is implicit in the baths at Calleva (Silchester), where, moving through the entry way into the building, first is located the latrine next to the portico, afterward the palaestra and apodyterium, then the frigidarium, next the tepidarium, and, finally, the caldarium. Whether the complexity of the plumbing in the poem suggests that of Aquae Sulis, however, remains to be seen. A number of things said by the poet may or may not point in this direction. His use of burnsele, for example, suggests multiple bath-houses within a fortress-city rather than pools within one establishment; his description of the hot waters reaching the circular pool reveals a misunderstanding of the cold plunge effect afforded by the great Circular Bath of Aquae Sulis, which dates from the early second century; his references to hot waters can be explained by hypocausts and furnaces that were often used to heat water where hot water was desired, so the description of the ‘waters surging with heat’ does not necessarily imply a geo-thermal spring; and his interest in water pressure can be accounted for by sluices from aqueducts and pumps that could be engaged quite easily to create a gushing effect. Yet Leslie’s three-part argument, Three Old English Elegies, 23-25, offered nearly half a century ago regarding Auqae Sulis as the subject of the poet’s poem, is still very convincing if the poet’s early-English lack of understanding of the Circular Bath’s ablutionary function is excused and if reference to þeōr þa baþu wǣron is substituted for burnsele in Leslie’s discussion. See Blair, Roman Britain, 105-06, for such a conjecture.
in this case, its own genius loci, in its design and construction—
as do the skillfully wrought gems and thoroughly smelted lead to
produce cupellated silver before it, as well as does the fortress-city’s
stunning bulwark construction introduced at the beginning of the
group of other Romano-British achievements lauded by the poet.

Indigenous Italic religion, the nucleus of archaic Roman religion,
depended on the belief that spirits, or numina, existed in natural
objects and controlled human destiny. These same spirits were held
in awe and placated with offerings and prayers. The object of such
placation was to secure peace between gods and humankind. This
peace, a contractual propitiatory and expiatory relationship, insured,
in turn, harmony as well as the correct order for living, growing things,
producing things, etc. Early on, numina in the form of Janus or Lares
and Penates, household gods, were also recognized and therefore
associated with constructed space—the former with the threshold,
the latter with the larder and hearth. Lares and Penates, illustratively,
are memorialized in Book III of Virgil’s Aeneid as Aeneas encounters
them in his dream. They, the very ones he had carried from Troy, tell
him to flee Crete and move on to Hesperia to establish the new city.73
The logic for associating numina with other examples of constructed
space, thus, was well established in Roman thinking and archaic
religious observation and practice long before the Old English poem’s
earliest implied anachronistic temporal moment in the past when
the imagined fortress-city was first constructed and enjoyed a peace
insuring that its baths could be used to their fullest extent as sites for
and sources of physical rejuvenation, social enjoyment, and even
spiritual contemplation, especially for bathers in a state of repose.

Just what god or goddess would be associated with the marvel of the
civil- and hydro-mechanical arts needed to construct such facilities
as the baths was partially determined early in Roman history, too,
by the association between Minerva and the mindful spirit of skill,
72 For thorough and instructive discussion of the classical genius figure as it pertains here,
see Nitzsche, The Genius Figure, 7-41.
73 Virgil, Aeneid, 292-93, ll. 505-14.
an association to which Etruscans had given shape by means of the appearance of Pallas Athena,74 and one that was perpetuated by the scientific branches of the Roman armies spearheading the expansion of the empire.75 Accordingly, the late first-century construction of the geo-thermal baths in Britannia at Aquae Sulis (Bath), with the temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva, an arrangement of buildings acknowledged by the Roman writer and medieval curriculum author Solinus in his late-third-century Collectanea rerum memorabilium, a collection of notable phenomena from the empire that identifies the Romano-British geo-thermal baths as a site over which the goddess duly presided, demonstrates just how firmly established the linkage was between the rejuvenating waters of the bath and Minerva or the mindful spirit of skill which was as fundamental to the engineering arts as to all forms of artistic endeavor, even as early as the first decade following the Claudian invasion of Britain.76

Hardly is it a rational or even an imaginative leap, thus, to suggest that Romano-British legionaries made the association between Minerva and the baths in fortress-cities other than the Roman geo-thermal spa located at Bath. Those less elaborate facilities, like the one at Calleva (Silchester), as an illustrative example, may not have had temples dedicated to the goddess or even ornamentation on their buildings like the famous decorative Gorgon head, at Aquae Sulis. But this association was still there at least in thinking, if not in minor statuary, frescoes, or even floor mosaic pictorial representations like that of the Capitoline Triad’s “regulator of great destinies.”77 Just how much of that linkage was known to later generations, especially to that of the eighth-century Old English poet, however, has not yet been ascertained, though the poem’s possible association with Alfredian works may be a fruitful means of discovering the answer. But what is stated in the poem at this point suggests an understanding that the possibility of animistic

74 Frank, History of Rome, 51.
75 Collingwood and Myers, Roman Britain, 263.
76 Cunliffe, Roman Bath discovered, 8. Cunliffe also points out that the second-century geographer Ptolemy calls Bath Aquae Calidae.
77 Dumézil, Archaic Roman Religion, I: 306-10, offers this characterization of Minerva’s function. Also see Ferguson, The Religions, 34 and 215.
aesthetic experience, in the anachronistic moment of the fortress-
city’s heyday in the poem’s imagined past, involves implicitly the
potential presence in the bath of a numen of some sort, or at least
a mindful meditative readiness to be accepting of such a presence.

This nod in the direction of idolatrous Roman religion’s implicit
system of polytheism associated with advanced engineering
arts skill certainly does not invite consideration of the poet’s
possible incorporation in the work at this juncture of yet another
historical feature of Roman social life associated with the bath—
namely, the annual bathing event of Fortuna Virilis (also, later,
the celebration known as the Veneralia) occurring on April 1, the
day “Roman women of the lower class honored Fortuna Virilis,
who represented good fortune in relations with men,” by bathing
with men in their baths. That would be going too far, even for a
creatively innovative and daring poet like the poem’s author. The
assumed license and potential for immodest behavior associated
with such an activity, however, would not have been unknown to
the eighth-century poet like him, especially in light of what previous
reformists and moralists in the not-too-distant past had to say about
Roman baths and bathing culture during the late-imperial period.

But as the poem turns attention at this moment to the facility’s wall, not
simply to its well or pool, as Stuart A. Baker suggested some time ago,—


79 Doubleday, “The Ruin,” 380, observes that the “use of the baths to promote adultery is
reproved by Quintilian as well as by Christian moralists; the Justinian code made lascivious
mixed bathing (‘commune lavacrum viris libidinis causa’) grounds for divorce.” He
adds, however, that despite “the Church’s disapproval, the practice of mixed bathing seems
to have continued through the medieval period, as the penitentials show.” Some of his
citations are worth repeating here to illustrate how concerned the moralists really were in
regard to the baths and the kind of cultural experience associated with them. See, for example,
the condemnation of lascivious mixed bathing in Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagoge*,
III, v, in *Opera*, Stühlin, I, in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei
Jahrhunderte*, XII, 254-55. Also see the example of lascivious mixed bathing as grounds
for divorce in *Codex Justinianus*, V, 17, 11, in *Corpus iuris civilis*, II, 213.

80 “Weal in the Old English Ruin,” 328-29.
what becomes clear is that the bath’s wall of heavy-stone reinforced construction, like the fortress-city’s bulwark fostering the vibrant, lively city, encompasses by virtue of its similar steadfast presence yet another kind of vibrancy, another “gem,” as it were, one even more valuable than all the precious metals and stones mentioned earlier in the poem. This vibrancy or “gem,” an interpretive ambiguous figurative image-cluster, consists of the bath’s wall itself, the hot waters it permits continued experience of, and the implied transformative act of bathing, of being immersed in those rejuvenating waters, ‘for the bright bosom,’ the imagined presence of a polysemous metonymy, the beorhtan bōsme (40a).  

The first facet of this implicitly animated “gem,” of this rejuvenating ‘heated moment for the spirit,’ provides initially the literal one, the source of a life-sustaining effect, the bath itself, in Britannia’s boreal climate, a life-sustaining effect like that of nourishment for the new-born provided by the actual anatomical beorht bōsm or ‘bright bosom.’ Offered also simultaneously by this singularly creative image-complex, the animated “gem’s” next facet, this next rejuvenating ‘heated moment for the spirit,’ is the allegorical one, in which the beorht bōsm, ‘the bright breast,’ introduces the idea of the source of life, the ‘womb,’ as bōsme is memorably used figuratively elsewhere in Old English poetry, in such lines as lides bōsme (Brunanburh, 27) and brimes bōsme (Andreas, 444).  

And finally, the last facet of this startling animated bathing image-complex “gem” introduces yet another—and the last—rejuvenating

81 While the poem’s emphasis is upon celebration of Romano-British mastery of various arts, the poet, revealing his Christian awareness of the need to pierce the Scriptural letter to arrive at an “inner meaning” consistent with God’s word, nevertheless approaches his conclusion about that Romano-British mastery by presenting it partly in terms of the hermeneutical “treatment of Scripture” presented by Saint Augustine in On Christian Doctrine. See Miller, Chaucer, Chaucer, 53-57, and Saint Augustine, On Christian Doctrine.
‘heated moment for the spirit,’ the anagogical one, another source of life, this time the rational as well as imaginative creativity of mind in life, through implied presence of the beorht bōsm, the metonymy in this instance of the presence of the intellectually nourishing and creative goddess Minerva or Pallas Athena, the goddess associated with the creative mind and skill, as well as with brightness, usually through illuminating flashes like those of lightning.\textsuperscript{82} This instantaneously perceived triple analogy, indeed a metaphoric cluster of hermeneutical rejuvenating ‘heated moments for the spirit,’ the consequence of which is a sudden participatory heightened consciousness resulting in singular creative authorial insight, like the moment of the previous full-blown creative idea, in a flash, experienced earlier in the poem by the hwætrēd (19a), the ‘acute in thought,’ for securing the wall to crush even the implacable Fates, demonstrates now fulfillment of the poem’s total effect—expression of the early medieval British mind’s engagement in the same kind and degree of creative thinking or participation in Romano-British “Lux Aeterna,” the creative vigorous thinking informing the culture of the ‘far-flung kingdom’ that once enabled cultural and practical adaptation to living in the boreal climate of Britannia for nearly half a millennium. It is for this reason that the immediately following, nearly humorous, exclamation—a rarity in Old English poetry and so an expostulation calling attention to itself for purposes of emphasis—Þæt wæs hȳðelic (41b), ‘That was handy!’, references, without moralizing, this moment of achieved creative insight, this sudden and complete early-medieval British link with the Romano-British past.\textsuperscript{83} Such a judgment is thus an acknowledgement of having attained the same clarity and power of the creative mind, the same participation in “Lux Aeterna,” which earlier lines of the

\textsuperscript{82} For this and related attributes, see Gayley, \textit{The Classic Myths}, 23.

\textsuperscript{83} The conclusion here regarding convenience rather than moral probity, the absence of the tropological or moral significance, is not unexpected given the poem’s emphasis, not on conformity to Scriptural direction, but on the always pagan creative interface between the divine and the actual.
poem have previously praised in a variety of ways regarding the
demonstrable creativity of the Romano-British mind. Articulated
convincingly here, in other words, is acknowledgment, thus, of a
very meaningful point of connection between the experience of
Romanity and that of Christianized early-medieval British culture.  

VI

Much of what appears in Codex Exoniensis, fols. 123b -124b, is thus
recast by the poet to give it, yet again, new and stunningly different
meaning. This fact about the poem may explain the motive for the two
instances of manuscript destruction that, ironically and lamentably,
affect the image sequences or tableaux of construction in the work.
Indeed, it is not difficult to understand how the creative efforts in
the poem to recuperate distinct features of Romanness might have
been considered anathema to orthodox belief by anyone professing a
zealous Christian piety in the tenth or immediately following centuries,
the time when damage to the codex is believed to have occurred.

The world the poet appears to long for and to desire restoration of,
in authoring the poem, is materially, as well as spiritually, quite
different in many respects from the new Christian world of the
eighth century in which he lives. However, what separates him most
dramatically from his contemporaries appears to be his conviction
that a connection between the two can exist—that in restoring various
Roman arts from almost half a millennium before, especially those
of civil and other related engineering specialties, lies perhaps the
most efficacious means by which “trends toward fissiparousness
rather than unity” in his present world might be reversed to make
a more decent place for people to live and work in. For the poet,
the idea appears to have currency that meaningful culture resides
in an aesthetic experience, so advanced and exquisite, as to be
something approaching in likeness to a spiritual awakening. The
engineering arts and spiritual enlightenment, in other words, appear
to be inseparable, and in its highest form this combination appears to

84 While Renoir makes the point in “The Old English Ruin,” in The Old English Elegies,
150, that the poem contains no “philosophical statement,” from what has just been demon-
strated, it is safe to conclude now that such actually does occur, at least implicitly.

85 Conant, Staying Roman, 439-700, 378.
provide the opportunity to recognize divinity in the actual, expressing itself through the genius of artisans, architects, and engineers alike.

Is the poet, thus, an eighth-century Ruskin, a prophet and scourge of contemporary society? Such a suggestive identification is farfetched at the very least, but he certainly appears to anticipate something of a Ruskin in his emphasis upon the various engineering and other arts and skills mastered by the Romans as being a principal way by which the forces resulting in early-medieval British dispersive society might begin to be countered to restore a cultural wholeness insuring peace and prosperity that previously made life worth living for the Romano-British in one of the empire’s frontier system’s fortress-cities located in the northwest part of the ‘far-flung kingdom,’ the imperial province once known as Britannia.

Liam O. Purdon, Professor of English language and literature, teaches at Doane University in Crete, Nebraska. Professor Purdon is author of The Wakefield Master’s Dramatic Art, co-editor of The Rusted Hauberk, an essay collection, and of Conversations with Tom Robbins, an interview collection, and translator of Armando Zegrí’s La Gran Experiencia del Pacífico.

Bibliography


Hellish Indigestion: Consumption as Knowledge in Medieval *Descensus Christi* Accounts

Harley Joyce Campbell  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Present throughout medieval iconography and drama, the hellmouth relays a frightening glimpse of what awaits sinners after death. However, our perception of the hellmouth becomes complicated when we study these images in conjunction with Hell’s portrayal as a speaking character. Ascribing anthropomorphic qualities to Hell makes its theological implications more approachable for a non-clerical audience, effectively forming connections between human sinners and a figure of unimaginable monstrosity. This essay examines the medieval Latin Gospel of Nicodemus and its first Middle English descendant, the verse Digby Harrowing of Hell, in terms of how these texts describe the physiology of Hell and Satan, as well as how they imagine the descent of Christ into Hell and evil’s reaction to Him. Parallel to this close reading is a discussion of the significance of the sacramental Eucharist as a physical means through which Christ’s divinity may be apprehended. By juxtaposing these concepts, this essay positions Satan as an exemplum of a bad consumer incapable of fully knowing Christ and Hell as the more knowledgeable figure by means of meditatio and ruminatio.

Introduction

In the preface to Nicholas Love’s early fifteenth century *Mirror of þe blessed lyffe of oure lorde Jesu cryste*, pseudo-Bonaventure begins with a commendation of St. Cecilia and her method of meditating upon the gospels:

> And so with a likyng & swete taste gostly chewyng in þat manere þe gospell of crist she set & bare it euer in þe priuyte of her breste. In þe same manere I conseil þou do. ... For soþely þou shalt neuer finde, where man may so perfitely be taght,... for to stable his herte aȝeynus vanitees & deceyuable likynges of þe worlde... as in þe blisseed life of oure lorde Jesu...¹

This incitement to consider and internalize the Word of God in a literally, somatically-figured way comes on the heels of Love’s recommendation that, in order for laypeople to learn the love of Christ, knowledge of Him must be communicated to them in a

manner befitting their “comun vndirstondyng,” “as children hauen
neede to be fedde with mylke of lyȝte doctrine & not with sadde
mete of... contemplacion.”

For Love, chewing and digesting food is
equivalent to reading the Word of God, pondering it, and internalizing
it as a model for righteous life. Even when one receives the right
sort of nutrition, the line between proper use and sin is razor thin:
the spiritually delicious “likyng” taste of the Word easily collapses
into “deceyuable likynges,” worldly pleasures that carry none of the
nourishment of Christ’s love. A major concern of devotional practice
for Love and others was that the experience did not stop with the
physical, or human, aspect. As Caroline Walker Bynum has argued,
the emphasis on the spiritual component of the physical sign extends
to the Eucharistic theology of the period. Whereas earlier Christians
understood the Eucharist as “a communal meal that bound Christians
together and fed them with the comfort of heaven,” later medieval
interpretations shifted toward perceiving “an object of adoration”
with “Christ at the moment of his descent into the elements.”

The ideal interpretation, therefore, of any physical sign of Christ is one
that preserves the proper signification, and knowledge of Christ in
a form appropriate to humankind, conveyed through signs, should
always lead to the knowledge of the signified, the godhead: “Þat by
þo þinges þat bene visible & þat men kyndly knoweþ he be stired
& rauysheþ to loue & desire gostly inuisible þinges.”

One of the most ubiquitous images related to problematic consumption
in the medieval period is the hellmouth. Present throughout
iconography and drama, the hellmouth relays a frightening glimpse
of what awaits sinners after death, with the damned clearly on
display through the mouth’s fanged entrance and Satan often lurking
nearby. As Robert Lima has argued, iconography of the hellmouth
combines “two distinct images”: “that of a great beast swallowing
a living human being,” and “that of the eternal punishment in the

2 Love, Mirror, 10.

3 Bynum, Holy Feast, 53.

4 Love, Mirror, 10.
Our perception of the hellmouth becomes even more complex, though, when we study these images in conjunction with Hell’s portrayal as a talking, and ostensibly thinking, character. We find that Hell is often portrayed with an emphasis on physical characteristics and actions. Ascribing anthropomorphic qualities to Hell, a figure of unimaginable monstrosity, makes its theological implications more approachable for a non-clerical audience. “Spedefull & edifyng” though these depictions of Hell may be, they nonetheless contain deeper meanings that are important for the audience to discern, just as the ubiquitous physically-focused portrayals of Christ the man must lead to knowledge of the godhead.6

In this essay, I examine the Gospel of Nicodemus B-text, an early medieval Latin apocryphal work that details the crucifixion, resurrection, and Harrowing of Hell, in comparison to its later Middle English descendants to see how they describe the physiology of Hell and Satan, as well as evil’s reaction to Christ.

In particular, I examine the earliest Middle English version7 of the Gospel of Nicodemus, a poem called Harrowing of Hell that is extant in MS Digby 86. Prior scholarship8 on Harrowing of Hell has been relatively scant and has not focused extensively on the

6 Love, Mirror, 10.
7 Fein, “Middle English Poetry,” 167. Susanna Fein locates the first known appearance of the Harrowing of Hell in MS Digby 86; later copies of the poem appear in MS Harley 2253 and the Auchenleck MS. In his introduction to the EETS edition of Harrowing of Hell, Hulme observes that all the earliest Middle English versions of the Gospel of Nicodemus are in verse. Hulme, The Middle-English Harrowing, vii. For a brief discussion of the Digby, Harley, and Auchenleck versions of the poem, see Hulme vii-xi. While an explanation for this phenomenon is outside the scope of this article, I would suggest that the presence of multiple dialoguing voices, in addition to the dramatic potential of the hellmouth’s striking appearance, makes verse a sensible medium. For the dramatic possibilities of Harrowing of Hell, see Turville-Petre pp. 59, Lundeen pp. 391-396, Nelson pp. 49-55, and Tamburr pp. 113-119.
8 Turville-Petre, Fein, and Lundeen have studied Harrowing of Hell based on its presence within a multilingual collection and its dramatic properties, respectively. Nelson, in contrast to most of the readings of MS Digby 86, examines the non-liturgical elements of this poem and considers it reflective of “gentry perceptions of power” during the late thirteenth century. Nelson, “Performance of Power,” 49.
theology of the text. Yet the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and *Harrowing of Hell* are apt testing grounds for Caroline Walker Bynum’s seminal theories of eating in the medieval world, namely the consumption of the Eucharist to engender intimate knowledge of Christ and Christ’s relentlessly indigestible body as a symbol of triumph over death. I relate textual images of Hell and Christ to common medieval views of the Eucharist as a representation of Christ’s sacrifice and the transition from human to Spirit which makes the Harrowing possible. Moreover, I discuss the significance of the sacramental Eucharist as a physical means through which Christ, or God the Son, may be understood. By juxtaposing these concepts, I aim to demonstrate that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and *Harrowing of Hell* can be read as relevant to Eucharistic theology in that they demonstrate both the success and failure of that sacrament.

In essence, Hell and Satan are exempla of bad consumers, both in terms of eating badly and taking in the knowledge of Christ in an inappropriate or ineffective way, but Hell is somewhat recuperated through the use of mouth- and consumption-based imagery.

**The Eucharist as a Sign**

Before delving into a specific examination of the *Descensus Christi* texts, it is useful to establish how the Eucharist functions as a sign for writers of the medieval era. On the one hand, the Eucharist is excessively ordinary; though it acts as the focal point of the Mass, it consists of humble elements. Caroline Walker Bynum reminds us that, within the original materials of the Eucharist, which were “the basic foodstuff of the Mediterranean diet – bread and wine,” there is

---

9 One notable exception is Kaija Närä’s 2009 chapter on medieval representations of the devil, where she reads the popularity of Harrowing of Hell-related images and writing as attempts to downplay Satan’s power over humanity and diminish the effects of his antagonism against God. Närä, “‘I Make.’” Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England*, also devotes significant attention to *Harrowing of Hell*, though his aim tends more towards comparison of the various medieval versions of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.


nothing particularly godly, nor even reminiscent of Christ the man. This ordinariness follows from early Christian interpretations of the Eucharist, which were predicated upon the communal aspect of communion. Whereas later medieval Christian thought was highly concerned with “awe-inspiring and cultic reverence of the actual body and blood of Christ,” the older tradition hinged on “His eschatological presence in... the ritual” of Eucharist for the purpose of remembering the Last Supper as one of Christ’s “salvific acts.”

Regardless of the particular contemporary view of how the Eucharist was meant to function, an emphasis on the presence of Christ in the sacrament was paramount. The ability to see the Eucharist for what it was meant to be (i.e. Christ’s body and blood), rather than for what it merely looked like (i.e. bread and wine) was, for one thing, integral to how Christians characterized themselves. Christians could consider themselves superior to practitioners of animal sacrifice, for example, because “they ate real human flesh,” yet “their sacrifice was invisible,” or mentally perceived, rather than “literal and bloody.” As Eucharistic ritual evolved during the twelfth century to include the elevation of the Host, the visual elements of communion were increasingly made to symbolize not just the Passion in general but the body of Christ crucified. As a reincarnation of Christ’s crucified body, the Eucharist has the power to re-present Christ’s sacrifice for His consumers. Importantly, the idea of reliving Christ’s works through the Eucharist is not confined to liturgy but also appears in medieval vernacular theology, such as Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ:

13 See above; Bynum, Holy Feast, 53.
14 Snoek, Medieval Piety, 32.
16 Snoek, Medieval Piety, 55.
Though Christians will not be able to see Christ sharing a meal with them until after the Second Coming, the futurity of Christ’s statements in *Meditations* can also be taken to encompass the present moment – Christ is both eaten by and eating with Christians during communion, present spiritually through the medium of the Host in what Miri Rubin calls constant “generative and generous” motion. By reenacting Christ’s “wendynge” via the sacramental ritual, the priest reclaims the Last Supper from the past and makes salvation accessible to his parishioners in real time. Similarly, the image of Christ eating at the Last Supper hearkens to the popular medieval trope of Christ as a mouth, able to eat like other humans do while speaking and embodying the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His incarnation.

What is particularly meaningful about the presence of Christ in the Host is that the Eucharist does not signify His presence alone but the partakers’ *transformation* into Him. Of particular interest here is Augustine’s concept of Eucharist, which informed much of vernacular theology’s take on the matter. For Augustine, “Eucharistic piety is expressed in the many exhortations in his sermons urging the congregation to be the Body that they eat in the sacrament,... the invisible church, which is the thing signified by this visible sign.”

17 *Meditations*, lines 259-60, 267-68, 273-76.

18 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 106.

19 Walter, *Middle English Mouths*, 111.

20 For example, of the elements of Augustine’s *Confessions* that Jacobus de Voragine chooses to replicate in *The Golden Legend*, Christ self-identifying as food is a prominent one. See Walter, *Middle English Mouths*, 112 n.131.

invisible signified, Maggie Kilgour claims that “Augustine’s primary difficulty with the Christian doctrine [lies] in his inability to conceive of a Word that could be made flesh, a God who was in any way substantial.”22 In avoiding the fleshiness of an overly literal Eucharistic interpretation, Augustine builds a model of reciprocal consumption. Just as Christ’s presence during the Eucharist means he is consumer and consumed, Augustine imagines God incorporating the faithful into Himself: “grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me.”23 Augustine’s approach follows the older tradition, mentioned above, of focusing on the Eucharist as a salvific act but also meshes well with worship of Christ’s body when emphasis remains on the symbolism thereof.24 The transformation Augustine posits notably avoids the somatic, digestible quality of normal food. The food of the body of Christ, instead, supersedes normal bodily processes and changes the consumer. Indeed, even if “cultic reverence of the actual body and blood of Christ” was a side effect of Eucharistic practice, such may not have been the liturgical intention.25 Exploring the refinement of Eucharistic teaching in the fourteenth century, Miri Rubin cites the anonymous Latin tract-sermon “De eukaristia” as an example of how the Host was meant to be viewed symbolically: “the sermon... reminded the hearer that the eucharist had been established under the form of wine and bread so as to test faith, to avoid abhorrence of raw flesh, and to save the body of Christ from the ridicule of heretics.”26 From an Augustinian point of view, bread and wine test faith because the consumer is challenged to think of them as Christ’s body and blood, not as physical nourishment nor as “raw flesh.”27 Rather, there is a double

22 Kilgour, *From Communion*, 50.

23 Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.10.

24 Referencing *Confessions* 13.23, Kilgour notes that “Man is elevated over nature by virtue of his ‘superior’ powers... to use the symbolism of the sacraments, which for Augustine are epitomized by the Eucharist.” Kilgour, *From Communion*, 57.


26 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 91.

27 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 91.
signification at play here, where the Eucharist signifies Christ’s human substance, which signifies the salvific effect of his humanity. The conclusion drawn from this layering of meanings is paramount for the medieval Christian to understand, because, in Maggie Kilgour’s words, “the unhealthy eater is in fact also an unhealthy reader who mistakes matter for spirit, the sign for the signified”\textsuperscript{28}. This connection between eating and understanding originates from a long tradition of food representing religious texts and complex theology,\textsuperscript{29} as evidenced by the section from Love’s \textit{Mirroure} above and a wide variety of other medieval works. The physical act of eating, when done in a temperate, measured way, breaks up a large piece of food into manageable bites; in the same way, “chewyng”\textsuperscript{30} on an idea leads to \textit{sapientia}, or the material, affective knowledge that supplements \textit{scientia} (learned knowledge).\textsuperscript{31} Though \textit{sapientia} occurs through the body, a fallible tool, its experiential nature allows for a deeper understanding of God than intellectual knowledge alone can.\textsuperscript{32} Bad consumption, on the other hand, implies a lack of moderation, whether in the amount of “chewyng” or in the size of one’s appetite. In most cases, gluttony and swallowing food whole are associated with misunderstanding, though, as I will discuss further with regard to Hell, medieval Eucharistic theology may provide an exception to the latter.

\textbf{Thinking with Your Stomach – The Gospel of Nicodemus} 

With the signification of consuming the Eucharist in mind, let us now turn to a group of texts that elaborate upon the aftermath of the crucifixion, the \textit{Decensus Christi ad Inferos}. We will begin by examining the “oldest surviving record”\textsuperscript{33} of Harrowing tales, the

\textsuperscript{28} Kilgour, \textit{From Communion}, 48; my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{29} For a helpful overview of the concepts in this section, see Walter, \textit{Middle English Mouths}, 78-80 and 83-91.
\textsuperscript{30} Love, \textit{Mirror}, 11.
\textsuperscript{31} See Walter, \textit{Middle English Mouths}, 79, 81, 92-95.
\textsuperscript{32} Walter, \textit{Middle English Mouths}, 93.
\textsuperscript{33} Ehrman and Pleše, \textit{Other Gospels}, 255.
Gospel of Nicodemus B-text, which “was by far the most influential source about the Harrowing of Hell for late-medieval Europe.”

Even before we learn the particulars of the Descent, the text draws our attention to corporeal markers of Christ’s works. The outer narrative of the story tells us that the account we read was physically recorded by the spirits of “Simeon and his two sons,” who were resurrected by Christ: “When those who had arisen heard [the invocation to make an oath] they made the sign of the cross on their faces and said to the chief priests, ‘Give us paper, ink, and pen.’ They brought these things. When they sat down, they wrote as follows....”

This detail of Simeon and his sons writing down an account of the miracles may seem trivial, but by categorizing the B-text as a physical remnant of the Harrowing, rather than an oral retelling, the writer compares the tale to other tangible signs of Christ’s victory over death, including the resurrected souls of Simeon and his sons, the “sign of the cross,” and perhaps Christ’s body itself.

Following this framing physicality and some prophetic lessons on the coming of Christ, we learn how Satan and Hades, the personification of Hell, react to Christ’s impending arrival. The text’s first description of Hades immediately links him with glutinous consumption; Satan addresses Hades as “O all-devouring and insatiable one,” an epithet which the forefathers later repeat. Even though Hades seems somewhat anthropomorphized by his dialogue with Satan, the relation between this depiction and later iconography of Hell, which features the gaping animalistic maw crammed full of souls, is clear. Hades continues to build his own image as a consumptive being when he recounts the earlier resurrection of Lazarus, which happened before the Passion and, in Hades’s opinion, may be cause for concern:

34 Tamburr, Harrowing of Hell, 104.
35 Ehrman and Pleše, Other Gospels, 260.
36 Ehrman and Pleše, Other Gospels, 262.
37 See Bynum, Resurrection, 192-96 for a selection of twelfth-century iconographic examples of the hellmouth.
If [Jesus] set others free from the grave, in what way and by what power will he be seized by us? Not long ago I devoured a certain dead man named Lazarus, and soon afterwards someone from the living forcefully dragged him from my intestines through a word alone. I suppose that this was the one about whom you are speaking. If then we receive that one here, I am afraid that we might somehow be in danger with all the others. For see, I can sense that all those whom I devoured from the beginning are stirred up, and I am pained in my belly. It does not seem to me a good sign that Lazarus was previously snatched from me. For he flew out from me not like a corpse but like an eagle, so quickly did the earth cast him forth.

At this point in the narrative, Hades’s understanding of Christ is completely couched in terms related to his own body – more specifically, to his stomach. The belly ache Hades feels in the current action of the Gospel reminds him of the one he felt when Lazarus “flew out” previously, and he essentially fears that Christ will attack his digestive system and cause him to vomit forth the souls he has devoured once more. Though grotesque, the image is not unusual; Antony Eastmond and Liz James count “at least fifteen references” to vomit throughout the Bible. The Nicodemus writer portrays Hades’s indigestion as, in Eastmond and James’s words, “the good contents…purged from the bad body.” A soul marked by Christ, whether His own or that of His followers, cannot be corrupted by the demeaning, earthy process of digestion, and Hades appears to have some awareness of this dynamic.

38 Ehrman and Pleše, *Other Gospels*, 262.

39 In their article “Eat, drink... and pay the price,” Antony Eastmond and Liz James explore the Byzantine iconography of Hades, which has a similar basis to that of the Western tradition (for example, in Isaiah 5:14 “Therefore hell hath enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds”) and seems to only diverge in a tendency to portray Hades along more godlike or anthropomorphic lines. In ninth-century Byzantine “marginal psalters,” Hades “was regularly depicted as fat and old, bald and dark, often a giant and often in a loincloth.” Otherwise, descriptions of the Harrowing’s impact on Hades are remarkably consistent with those in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Eastmond and James cite the *Gospel of Bartholomew* writer, Ephrem the Syrian, and Romanos the Melode as all using images of Christ attacking Hades’s stomach, i.e. portraying the Harrowing as digestive distress. Eastmond and James, “Eat, drink,” 179-180.

40 Eastmond and James, “Eat, drink,” 180-81.

41 Cf. Bynum, also studying Romanos, notes that Hades vomits up Christ because “Jesus is the ‘celestial bread’ that hell ‘cannot digest’.” Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 40.
Satan, however, has a markedly different reaction to Christ’s arrival than Hades does. Whereas Hades “[thinks Jesus] is coming… to raise all the dead,” Satan thinks their visitor is a mere man who will be entrapped like all the rest:

> There is a certain one named Jesus… who calls himself the Son of God. But this one is a human…. Now that he has died, be prepared so that we can keep him securely here. For I know that he is human, as I heard him saying “My soul is deeply grieved unto death.”

Satan perceives Jesus’s fear of death as precluding Him from being a deity and therefore lumps Him together with the rest of humanity. This assumption is Satan’s fatal misreading of Christ. Ironically, Satan recalls that many of the souls he has already claimed were “‘through a word alone… brought… back to life’” by the man he regards so dismissively. Satan and Hades have both been privy to the action of resurrection through Christ’s Word, so why do these two hellish figures interpret Christ so differently?

I suggest that the reason behind these contrasting viewpoints is the method by which each character has received knowledge of Christ. Satan knows of Christ through visual and auditory signs only; he has seen the man crucified, observed His miraculous works, and heard His lament on the cross. Satan’s experiences are entirely different from Hades’s. Whereas Satan has received Christ in external, visible ways, Hades has undergone something much closer to communion. Hades has consumed the souls of the righteous patriarchs, who

42 Ehrman and Pleše, *Other Gospels*, 262.

43 Ehrman and Pleše, *Other Gospels*, 262.

44 Cf. *Confessions* 3.7, where Augustine responds to nonbelievers asking whether the patriarchs would be acceptable to God when they committed polygamy, murder, and animal sacrifice: “I also did not know that true inward justice which judges not by custom but by the most righteous law of almighty God. By this law the moral customs of different regions and periods were adapted to their places and times, while that law itself remains unaltered everywhere and always. It is not one thing at one place or time, another thing at another. Accordingly Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and David, and all those praised by the mouth of God were righteous. When untrained minds judge them wicked, they judge “by man’s day” (1 Cor. 4:3) and assess the customs of the entire race by the criterion of their own moral code.” Considering the slippage of time inherent in the Eucharist and the Harrowing (see p. see p 84 above and p 94 n.67 below), the righteous patriarchs were members of the body of Christ even when Hell originally consumed them.
are members of the body of Christ. In the words of twelfth-century theologian Peter Comestor, “Christ’s body is indeed the universal church, that is, the head and members are Christ and the believers.”

Likewise, common thought held that, even when the Eucharist was taken from the original Host and separated into innumerable pieces, the body of Christ maintained its original signification. Therefore one can argue that Hades has been steadily ingesting bits of the body of Christ as he receives the souls of those who will be saved. Hades’s long-term diet is reminiscent of the constant and active motion required for meditatio, or repeated “chewyng,” which monastic texts considered necessary for “knowing inwardly and experientially.”

The meditatio, and also ruminatio, or the regurgitation of food to re-chew it, that Hades undergoes suggests he may have some level of sapientia regarding Christ’s true identity. In accordance with the medieval understanding of the learning process, Hades’s knowledge of Christ exceeds the mental and has an explicitly physical component. Satan, however, has by his own admission only seen and heard Christ and is missing the component of taste, which means he is subject to “an indirect mode of knowing.” Therefore Satan lacks the opportunity to internalize (literally and figuratively) the body of Christ to the extent that Hades has.

45 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 38.

46 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 107. The idea of Christ’s presence “in every particle of the Eucharist” would become especially important in later medieval attempts to confirm the doctrine of concomitance; see Bynum, *Resurrection*, 316.

47 Walter, *Middle English Mouths*, 95.

48 While sound also plays an important role in the medieval sensory experience, taste seems to be privileged in texts related to the Harrowing, in part due to the omnipresent imagery of the hellmouth, but perhaps also due to the more passive nature of hearing. Chewing, eating, tasting, and digesting all act upon the consumed material and thereby become part of the process of discernment, whereas the pervasive quality of sound subjects the auditor to good and evil indiscriminately, requiring selective listening on the part of a ‘good listener.’ For a general discussion of both senses, see e.g. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, 63-83 and 105-116.

49 Walter, *Middle English Mouths*, 94.
Hades’s capacity for digestion is further demonstrated when the “bronze gates” and “iron bars,” imagistic replicas of his teeth, are destroyed and “the King of glory [comes] in” to the hellmouth, “as a human; and all the dark places of Hades [are] enlightened.”

Christ entering Hades in his human form mirrors the sacramental bread and wine entering the mouths of Christians, and it is upon this intrusion of the original Host that Hades is “enlightened” to a better understanding of Christ. By destroying the mechanism for chewing, the text invites further connection to Eucharistic consumption, in that “swallowing [the sacrament] whole... equate[s to] believing without questioning.”

Swallowing the Eucharist whole does not erase the possibility of ruminatio and, according to Katie L. Walter, may even necessitate it so that Christ’s identity is not just believed but reflected upon. “Immediately” after Hades takes in Christ’s body, he recognizes Him as “the one who is humble yet exalted, the slave and the master, the soldier and the king, the one who has authority over the dead and the living.”

In the ensuing action, we see that “none of the dead is left in” Hades because all the souls of the righteous were released from bondage at the destruction of the gates; therefore, Christ’s body has acted as both a revelation and an emetic substance.

Following the purging (and, possibly, rumination) of his misgotten meal, Hades seems fully aware, for the first time, of Christ’s power and the meaning hidden behind the signs of His human body: “everything you [Satan] gained through the tree

50 Ehrman and Pleše, Other Gospels, 263; my emphasis.

51 Walter, Middle English Mouths, 99. This belief also reflects anxiety within medieval pastoral instruction surrounding the breaking of Christ’s body-as-Eucharist by the chewing of consumers. Walter discusses the complications of this model especially on pp. 98-102.

52 Ehrman and Pleše, Other Gospels, 263.

53 Ehrman and Pleše, Other Gospels, 264.

54 See Bynum’s arguments on digestion, especially Holy Feast pp. 40 and Resurrection pp. 27, 56. Bynum reads Christ’s body as “undigested and indigestible flesh” (Resurrection, 56) that breaks the digestive cycle to which normal human flesh, which decays and can be broken down, is subject.
of knowledge you have lost through the tree of the cross. All your joy has turned to grief. Wanting to kill the King of glory, you have killed yourself.” Here, Hades participates in what Rachel Danford calls “the etymological loop formed by mors-morsus-remordere,” or death-bite-gnawing remorse: “The bite of the conscience [can] save believers from the bite of death, provided it [inspires] them to move their own mouths in prayer and confession.” Though Hades plans to do all manner of “evil things” to Satan, Hades takes this action because he has “received” Satan from Christ “to hold [him] fast.” Thus after chewing, swallowing whole, and ruminating on the body of Christ, Hades becomes co-actant with Christ, albeit in a hellish way, as they both “swallow up death forever.”

**Medieval Satan, the Bad Interpreter**

I now will turn to the Digby version of *Harrowing of Hell* to further examine the connection between hellish consumption and understanding Christ. In this section I aim to expand one of the concepts I have already begun to discuss: in John Hallwas’s words, the “widely known medieval theory… [which] held that Satan failed to recognize the divinity of Christ when he brought about His death.” The scope of this failure was subject to debate, with the Augustinian opinion holding that Satan can only know as much as God allows, Gregory the Great and Bede’s assertion that Satan did not understand

---

55 Hades’s reference to the tree of knowledge, of course, returns our thought to the very first biblical episode of problematic eating. In iconographic and literary traditions throughout early Christianity and the medieval era, both Eden and Hell are bound by gates, and humans are expelled through those gates. This line encapsulates Christ’s act of redemption along with its original motivation in a manner that emphasizes their respective bodily experiences. For an overview of the concept of an enclosed Eden, or *hortus conclusus*, see Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, 121-134 and McAvoy, “The Medieval *hortus conclusus*,” 5-8.

56 Ehrman and Pleše, *Other Gospels*, 264.

57 Danford, “‘Cast Not’,” 7.

58 Ehrman and Pleše, *Other Gospels*, 264.

59 Isaiah 25:8 (NRSV).

the redemptive impact of Christ’s divinity, and the Thomistic notion of demons lacking an innate understanding of God, among others. Most of these interpretations rely upon Satan’s interaction with Christ during the Temptation, but, as I note below, neither the *Gospel of Nicodemus* nor the Digby *Harrowing* seem to reference that event and assume that Christ is just another human come to hell.

The writer of the Digby *Harrowing* makes the interesting choice of starting the poem *in medias res*; instead of building up to Christ’s arrival in hell with a tense conversation between Satan and Hades, we see Christ announcing his presence by monologuing on the trials he has suffered in human form:

> “Harde gates haui gon,  
> Serewes soffred moni hon,...  
> Almest so muchel hit is ago  
> Suþþe þat i bicom furst mon;  
> Suþþen haui ðoled and west  
> Boþe chele, hounger and þurst...”

The similarities between the *Gospel of Nicodemus* B-text and this later adaptation keep the audience’s focus on Christ’s body. Whether Christ has a human or deified form at this particular moment is not clear, but He insistently draws us into the narrative of His suffering while on earth. The first “serewes” He mentions are not the general event of crucifixion but the particular “chele, hounger and þurst” he experienced while on the cross, which emphasizes the senses and the digestive system. This highly evocative image falls in line with later medieval devotional emphasis on Christ’s wounds and crucificial suffering. Indeed, the point of the Eucharist in this period is to experience hunger as suffering and allay that suffering with the “bleeding and broken flesh” represented by the

61 For an exploration of Satan’s misunderstanding within theological contexts, see Saunders, “The Devil and the Divinity of Christ,” 536-553.


63 Hulme, *Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, lines 31-34.

64 Hulme, *Middle English Harrowing of Hell*, line 34.
To eat God... was finally to become suffering flesh with his suffering flesh; it was to imitate the cross.”

Even earlier in the scene, Christ mentions the “Harde gates,” which refers to the hardships of human life. By virtue of the Harrowing, in Peter Stuart Macaulay’s words, “[fusing] all human time,” Christ’s reference to gates also serves as a visual reminder of the gates of Hell and the teeth of Eucharist consumers through which His body passes.

Another divergence from the Gospel of Nicodemus to the Digby Harrowing is in Satan’s interaction with Christ. The Harrowing, in line with other contemporary adaptations of the same subject matter, features a great deal of debate between Christ and Satan. Much of this conversation consists of Christ telling Satan in no uncertain terms who and what He is. Referring to the Latin Gospel of Nicodemus, Karl Tamburr posits that “Satan is more obtuse and literal-minded, like other evil characters in medieval literature who cannot distinguish the letter from the spirit;” the same holds true in the Digby Harrowing poem. We notice especially that Satan fixates on physical signs of consumption but does not understand their meaning:

[Satan:] “Adam þe houngrie com me to,
Mani redes he gan me do;
ffor on appel þat ich ȝaf him
He is min and al is cun.”

[Christ:] “Satanas, hit was min,
Ƿe appel þat þou ȝeue him,
Ƿe appel and þe appeltre,
Boðen veren maked þoru me”

65 Bynum, Holy Feast, 54.

66 “gate” n.(2), MED: “a harsh action or experience.” The MED specifically attributes this definition to the Digby Harrowing quote used here.

67 As discussed earlier, the multiplistic imaging of Hell’s gates is in part possible due to the nature of the Harrowing, which “provides a link between past, present and future” in its “fusion of all human time” “by the physical gathering together of the righteous of the Old Testament era... and by references and echoes recalling past events in God’s scheme of salvation, and anticipating such future episodes as the Last Judgment.” Peter Stuart Macaulay, quoted in Tamburr, Harrowing of Hell, 130.

68 Tamburr, Harrowing of Hell, 106.

69 Hulme, Middle English Harrowing of Hell, lines 77-84.
Among the signs common to Biblical narratives, the apple holds special relevance to heretical knowledge. Augustine, for example, “[glosses] the forbidden fruit as a figure for heresy.”\footnote{Jager, \textit{Tempter’s Voice}, 41.} Avitus of Vienne later develops a more specific, sense-based meaning for the fruit in his verse adaptation of Genesis: “The truth is embodied not in God’s word, [Eve] now learns, but in the apple, described as a tasty vessel of divine secrets…. In order to know…Eve must experience the taste (\textit{sapor}) of the fruit, an implied contrast with the wisdom (\textit{sapientia}) embodied in God’s Word.”\footnote{Jager, \textit{Tempter’s Voice}, 44-45.} By laying claim to the apple, then, Satan also positions himself as the originator of heretical, sense-driven knowledge in opposition to the truth of God’s Word.

What Satan does not realize is that he has merely relayed the apple; God, not Satan, created the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Satan’s misunderstanding of the apple’s provenance shows that he cannot differentiate between physical remnants of his actions and physical remnants of Christ. Tamburr sees this misinterpretation as one of the common tropes of texts related to the Harrowing and clarifies that the fault lies entirely with Satan: “Satan was not tricked because he was given a clear sign that Christ was greater than any man; the devil simply failed to understand this sign.”\footnote{Tamburr, \textit{Harrowing of Hell}, 115.} The contrasting language used by Satan and Christ to describe the apple emphasizes Satan’s problem. Christ acknowledges the divine origins of the apple and tree, while Satan, like the unhealthy consumer who only perceives bread and wine when he eats the Eucharist, sees only the vessel, the “giving” but not the “making.” Extending Augustine’s theories of consumption, the apple itself is innocuous. Augustine states in \textit{Confessions} 10.31 “It is not the impurity of food I fear but that of uncontrolled desire,”\footnote{Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, 10.31.} or gluttony. We can see the apple in the Digby \textit{Harrowing} as playing a similar role to that of the

righteous fathers’ and Christ’s bodies in the Gospel of Nicodemus B-text. Satan attempts to interpret these signs but fails because, in Augustine’s words, his “‘god is [his] belly.’” Simply put, Satan’s obsession with proving dominance, exemplified through his boasts of inciting the crucifixion in the Gospel of Nicodemus and of causing the Fall in the Digby Harrowing, stems from his inability to see the signified behind the signs of body and apple.

The fourth century bishop Gregory of Nyssa wrote that these signs are no mere ‘accidents’ – their fleshy beauty is “congenial and kindred to [Satan] himself,” who fixates on the sensuous. To be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with the sensuous, so long as it is not used as an isolated point of worship. This is especially true of the Eucharist, which relies upon the sense of taste to be taken in and understood by its consumers. Here, the bodily experience of eating presents the opportunity to approach the divinity of Christ, and meantime emulate his humanity, because of the redemptive power of the body of Christ. According to Eric Jager, humans have the ability to grasp all senses of the Eucharist and its associated physical remnants of Christ because they learned language to compensate for “the fallen body…[inhibiting] the free exchange of mind or spirit.” Satan, however, is not so fortunate. Intrinsic to human understanding of Christ is faith in His presence within the signs He creates. Consuming His body, a sign with momentous meaning, cyclically “signifies this inner, spiritual eating of faith.” By thinking only in terms of visible signs, Satan prevents himself from consuming, let alone digesting, the truth of Christ’s identity and salvific grace; Hades in the Gospel of Nicodemus only just escapes this fate by virtue of having consumed so many members of Christ’s body and engaging in the practices of meditatio and ruminatio.

75 Constas, “Last Temptation,” 156.
76 Jager, Tempter’s Voice, 59.
77 Cary, Powerlessness, 250.
The struggle to understand Christ’s physical signs is in direct contrast with the knowledge of God granted through unity with him in the consumption of the Eucharist. As this essay has demonstrated, medieval narratives of the Harrowing of Hell couch this lesson in dramatic terms, using the ubiquitous image of the hellmouth to show the salvific effect of Christ passing triumphantly through His consumers’ mouths.

Harley Joyce Campbell is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her research interests include medieval and early modern literature, popular religion, hermeneutics, and gender studies.

Bibliography


*Harrowing of Hell: Fresco by Fra Angelico, c. 1430*
Contemporary History in Early Tudor English Chronicles: 1485-1553

Barrett L. Beer
Kent State University

English chronicles published between 1485 and 1547 are studied here to determine how they dealt with contemporary history. These chronicles obviously covered the distant past, but many end well before the date of publication. Today contemporary history is of great importance to the public as evidenced by a variety of published works, periodicals, and most recently the internet. An analysis of early Tudor chronicles reveals that while many were indifferent to the recent past, others clearly laid the foundation for a focus on the contemporary era. The recognized authors of the chronicles included in this study are Richard Arnold, John Byddell, Johann Carion, Richard Fabyan, Edward Hall, John Hardyn, John Mychell, and William Powell. Most of the chronicles appeared in more than one version and included the work of writers who were not the recognized authors, especially Richard Grafton.

This essay examines English chronicles published during the period from 1485 to the death of Edward VI in 1553. It focuses on the coverage of the contemporary period while most studies of chronicles have emphasized the medieval period.1 Today we have intense interest in current events and contemporary history via TV, newspapers, and the internet. The 16th century reader had only chronicles. As most literate people read only English, Latin chronicles such as Polydore Vergil were inaccessible to them.2 Furthermore, ordinary readers had little or no access to manuscript chronicles. Compared with a modern reader, the early Tudor reader had a limited choice of English language chronicles that were available in print in which he could familiarize himself with contemporary history. The chronicles included in this study are Richard Arnold, Customs of London; Robert Fabyan, New Chronicles of England and France; John Hardyn, The Chronicle from the First Beginning of England… unto reign of Edward IV; John Byddell, A Short Chronicle from

---

1 Bennett, English Books and Readers 1475-1557, 123-134; Woolf, Reading History in Early Modern England, 13-78.

2 Historia Anglica, Basil, 1534.
Henry IV; William Powell, A Cronicle of Yeres; John Mychell, A Breuiat Cronicle; Johann Carion, The Three Bokes of Cronicles; and Edward Hall, The Union of Two Noble Families. They were printed during the reigns of Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Edward VI, and many appeared in multiple editions that contained significant additions and revisions.

The official or recognized author of a chronicle often did not write the last part of the chronicle which addressed the contemporary period. Some of were deceased; for example, Robert Fabian died in 1512 before any of his work was published; John Hardyng died in 1456 long before the beginning of the Tudor era; Johann Carion died in 1537; and Edward Hall died in 1547 before the appearance of the last editions. Therefore, it is important to consider the writers who continued the chronicles into the contemporary period following 1485. One cannot overestimate the importance of Richard Grafton who composed continuations of Hardyng and Hall and perhaps the last edition of Fabian before publishing his own chronicles during the reign of Elizabeth. Walter Lynne continued Carion’s chronicle after several earlier revisions and additions. The role of printers who produced the short chronicles including John Byddell and John Mychell must also be considered. Another printer, William Rastell (1508-1565) prepared the 1533 edition of Fabian’s chronicle.

During the reign of Henry VII the only English chronicle that appeared was Richard Arnold, Customs of London probably printed by A. van Bergen at Antwerp in 1503. The author actually gave the chronicle no title, but its nineteenth century editor, Francis Douce, called it Customs of London. It has been suggested that it was really not a chronicle because it was organized around mayoral years and listed city officials. Nevertheless it was praised by John Stow for the author’s fervent love of good learning and account of

3 Mychell’s chronicle appeared in some 20 editions in two verions.


5 STC 782.
the charters, liberties, law, constitutions and customs of the city of London. Arnold was a citizen of London and a merchant who died about 1521. Arnold’s chronicle makes no contribution whatsoever to contemporary history as it ends during the reign of Henry VI in the early fifteenth century. The last entry describes the reconciliation between Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, brother of Henry V and Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester in 1426; the two took each other by the hand in the presence of the king and parliament as a token of love and accord.⁶

In contrast, chronicle production flourished during the reign of Henry VIII. The first chronicle to appear was Robert Fabyan, The New Chronicles of England and France published in 1516. This edition was followed by editions in 1533 and 1542. Fabyan, who was a sheriff and alderman of London, died in 1513. Since the first edition did not give the author’s name, there is a question as to the chronicle’s actual authorship.⁷ The last sections of the latter two editions were obviously the work of another writer. The edition of 1516 was printed by Richard Pynson who may have added to Fabyan’s text although it does not go beyond the author’s death.⁸ The reign of the first Tudor is preceded by a stern denunciation of Richard III:

of whom tedyous it is to me to wryte the Tragedyous Hystory except yt I remembre that good it is to wryte and put in remembraunce the punyschment synners to the ende that other may eschewe to fall in lyke daunger.⁹

He added that Richard put ‘into secret death’ the two sons of his brother.¹⁰ Fabyan offered a brief one-page account of the reign of Henry VII whom he praised for keeping the land in continual peace

⁶ Peter C. Herman, ODNB. Douce, ed., The Customs of London.
⁷ M.-R. McLaren, ODNB.
⁸ STC 10659.
¹⁰ Fol. 228v.
and tranquility. The papacy saw the king as the defender of Christ’s church. Henry VII’s sumptuous endowment of the monastery at Westminster was, according to the chronicle, greater than any king since the Norman Conquest. The chronicle ended with the observation that Henry VIII began his reign but offered no narrative of the early years of the reign. The reader of the 1516 edition found it nearly devoid of the history of the thirty-one years following the battle of Bosworth.

The second edition, published in 1533 by William Rostell (1508-1565) with the title Fabyans Cronycle Newly Prynted, extended its predecessor by seventeen years, but would also have disappointed a reader interested on contemporary history, especially the reign of Henry VIII.11 Rostell, a London printer and legal writer, was a prominent member of Sir Thomas More’s circle and his principal publisher.12 This edition, covering 233 folios, gives a fuller account of the Tudors than its predecessor, but it is confined to merely six folios. The author salutes Henry VII and gives thanks to the Virgin at the beginning. The text is organized around the mayors of London and gives many details about the city. The king’s marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV, and the birth of Prince Arthur are noted. In 1489 a revolt of the commons in the North occurred in which Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, was slain because of his personal unpopularity and the collection of taxes. The chronicle records many executions including that of Perkin Warbeck. There is a puzzling reference to a gracious miracle at the end of July 1506 shown by “oure Lady image of Barkyng by a mayden chylde that a carte laden wyth stone yode ouer.”13 Toward the end of the reign, Henry VII “of his goodness” released prisoners from prisons in London and sumptuously endowed the monastery at Westminster. Although details about the king are limited, there was lavish praise at his death. In two paragraphs the author wrote

11 STC 10660.
12 J. H. Baker, ODNB.
13 Fol. ccxxiii.r.
that the “magnificent and excellent prynce Henry” kept the country in peace and tranquility. “Hys actes passed all the noble actes of hys noble progenytours synce the conquest.” “His great policy and wisdom” were admired by other Christian princes, and he might be called the second Solomon. The section ends with a pious “amen.”

Although the account of the first Tudor is brief and uncritical, it could be argued that it represented a first step toward the concept of a new monarchy especially with respect to the king’s wisdom and support of the church. If it is assumed that this narrative was written by the printer, William Rostell, a follower of Sir Thomas More, the religious views are clearly understandable. In sharp contrast to the account of Henry VII, the coverage of his son is limited to two short paragraphs. Considering that this edition appeared after twenty-four years of the new reign had passed, any progress in the direction of contemporary history was nullified. The reader learned only that Henry VIII was the rightful inheritor of the crown and began his gracious reign with best wishes for success.

The last editions of Fabyan’s chronicle published in 1542 reflect the break with Rome and appear to be the work of two different printers. The first, STC 10661, states that it was printed by William Bonham (1497-c. 1557), a sub-tenant of John Rostell, although it has been argued that this reference is incorrect. The second, STC 10662, was printed by John Reynes (d. c. 1545), a native of the Low Countries, best known as a binder and a leading stationer in England. Both printers were located in St. Paul’s churchyard, and each version consists of 490 pages. The section on Henry VII is similar to the 1533 edition with the notable exception of references altered to reflect the break with Rome. The salutation to the Virgin

Fos. ccxxxi.v.-iv.r.

Fol. ccxxxiv.r. The 1533 edition was printed on December 31, 1533.

The EEBO entry for this edition states that it was “printed by [Richard Grafton] for William Bonham” dwelling at the sign of the king his arms in Paul’s churchyard, but the text itself gives only Bonham’s name.

E. G. Duff, ODNB,
Mary is omitted, references to the Pope become the bishop of Rome, and the curious reference to our lady of Barking has been removed. In addition the spelling has been modernized. The major difference from the 1533 edition is a detailed account of the reign of Henry VIII down to 1541 covering pages 483-90.

This narrative of the reign of Henry VIII covering the period nearly down to the publication date in 1542 is the earliest example of contemporary history. The frost of 1517 is noted stating that “all menne with cartes might passe between Westminster and Lambeth,” but the break with Rome is the topic of greatest importance. Written from the perspective of the king’s government, the chronicle noted that legates sat at Black Friars to consider the king’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Another brief entry noted the deposition of Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor. Official policy was reflected in the observation that a parliament met “for the enormities of the clergy” and that the king was divorced by due process of law. Subsequently, the bishop of Rome with all his false usurped power was abolished quite out of the realm. Sir Thomas More and John Fisher, bishop of Rochester were beheaded as well as Anne Boleyn. The rising in Lancashire was described as a “foolish commotion.” The reader also learned about uncontentious matters such as Henry’s marriage to Jane Seymour, the birth of Prince Edward, and his mother’s death.

The chronicle recorded further aspects of the Henrician reformation stating that all idolatry was forbidden, and that friars, monks, canons, and nuns changed “their new found garments, forsoke their cloisters and came home again to their mother churche this xxi. yere,” and that Bibles were to be placed in all parish churches. Executions were extremely prominent among the entries for the reign. The list included Thomas Cromwell who was beheaded for treason without any indication of his role in the Reformation. Other prominent figures were the marquess of Exeter, the countess of Salisbury, and Walter, lord Hungerford. Clergy were also numerous among the king’s victims: the abbots of Reading, Glastonbury, and
Colchester. Among the lower orders there was a Welshman hanged for prophesying the king’s death and two yeomen of the king’s guard hanged for robbery as an example to others. But the entries included an example of the king’s mercy as the bishop of Chichester and Dr. Nicholas Wilson were delivered out of the Tower of London and pardoned. The chronicle ends in July 1541 with a tribute to the king and Prince Edward:

Whose highness Jesu long preserue, with his noble ympe prince Edward, and his noble counsaill, in honor, weth, and prosperitee, long to endure. 

Amen

The Chronicle of Iohn Hardyng from the firste begynnyng of Englande…vnto the reign of kyng Edward IV… was published by Richard Grafton in two versions in January 1543. As Hardyng died c. 1465, his portion of the chronicle written in verse ended in the fifteenth century and obviously made no contribution to contemporary history. The continuation by Grafton, however, is of importance as it offers two very different accounts of the reign of Henry VIII. The first version, STC 12767, covered the reign in merely two pages, fos. 145v.-146r., while the second, STC 12766.7, was substantially longer covering fos. 145v.-160v. The narrative of the first Tudor king begins with extravagant praise. As the king came to London, “all parties saluted after the moste louyng fassion that thei could deuise” and thanked God that he had sent them a “kyng to gouerene the realme, whiche before was ruled by a cruell and hatefull tiraunt.” The account that follows is primarily biographical and is not organized around the terms of the mayors of London. It includes details about domestic conflicts and conspiracies, relations with Scotland and France, and some interesting religious references. The pope is referred to as the bishop of Rome, and it is noted that priests were commanded to pay money for the maintenance of the “commonweale,” references that clearly reflect the views of Richard

18 Fabyan (1542), 489-90.
19 Fol. Cviir.
20 Fos. 120r., 142r.
Grafton. When Henry VII was approaching the end of his life, he offered a general pardon except for thieves and murderers. He is said to have had a merry and laughing countenance, wit like Solomon, and a character that was fair and just. As one who defended many poor people from the power of greater men, the deceased king was undoubtedly in that place “where euerlastynge ioye and gladnesse remaineth for euer and euer.” Ending with an effusive eulogy, this edition of the 1543 chronicle offers an excellent example of what must be called contemporary history, but everything changes with the subsequent reign of Henry VIII.

The chronicle ends with only a two page account of the first 34 years of Henry VIII’s reign. The author states that he is offering a small conclusion touching this most noble and excellent prince and for the “closing up” of this present work. The narrative mentions the birth of Prince Edward, but there is nothing about the king’s wives and daughters. The chronicle goes on to state that Henry VIII did three great things: He abolished the authority of the pope and restored the “holy and moste blessed woorde of God to the entente that wee might knowe our duiety to almighty God…and live a Godly and christen life one with another.” Secondly, he took away superstition and idolatry, and finally he dissolved and suppressed all counterfeit sects and false religions. In the future it was hoped that Prince Edward would display the virtues of his father, prudence “policie and godly iudgement”. The account concluded with the following: “To this all true Englishe heartes saie, Amen.” The reader who acquired this edition of the 1543 chronicle to learn about the reign of VIII would have been sorely disappointed, but the second version offered genuine insight into recent history.

The second version—STC 12766.7—also the work of Richard Grafton, like the first, condemns Richard III and offers a similar favorable but uncritical account of the reign of Henry VII. It is the

21 Fol. 144v.

22 Fos. 145v.-146r.
lengthy narrative of the second Tudor covering fifteen folios that sets the two versions apart. The text is organized around the king’s regnal years ending in December (30 Henry VIII) 1538. Grafton begins with the king’s marriage and a very detailed account of the events surrounding the coronation of Henry and Catherine of Aragon which curiously omits the name of Henry VIII’s first queen.\(^{23}\) However, subsequent entries contain select details of the king’s family history. While the birth and death of their first son are recorded as is the birth of Princess Mary, the omission of the momentous divorce proceedings is amazing. Also missing from the narrative is any mention of the king’s marriage to Anne Boleyn (January 1533) and the birth of Princess Elizabeth. There are short entries that record the death of Queen Catherine, the execution of Queen Anne, and the king’s subsequent marriage to Jane Seymour followed by the birth of Prince Edward and his mother’s death. The text merely states the “lady Katheryn,” princess dowager, died and was buried at Peterborough and that “Queen Anne” was attainted of treason and beheaded.\(^{24}\)

Later history in the Hardyng chronicle involved the historic break with Rome. The chronicle states that Cardinal Wolsey was “deposed” but gives no explanation of the circumstances that ended his career. The next year Parliament reformed diverse enormities of the clergy, but the author gave no indication what these enormities were. Subsequently, the reader learns that Parliament made the king supreme head of the church and was granted first fruits and tenths.\(^{25}\) A further entry states that idolatry was forbidden, images destroyed, and monks and friars “changed their garments.”\(^{26}\) These fragmentary references provide a few basic details relating to the king’s religious policy but clearly do not give a satisfactory account of the Henrician Reformation.

\(^{23}\) Fol. 147r.

\(^{24}\) Fol. 159v.

\(^{25}\) Fol. 159v.

\(^{26}\) Fol. 160r.
The chronicle gives considerable attention to foreign relations and wars with France and Scotland, but most of the accounts are brief and fragmentary. In June and July 1512 [3 Henry VIII] the Scots made “sondrie entres vpon the borders of England,” but no details of the incursion are included.27 The battle of Flodden resulting in the death of the Scottish king, James IV, was neither mentioned nor celebrated, but merely noted as an invasion of England leading to an English victory and the death of an unnamed king as well as the creation of the earl of Surrey as duke of Norfolk.28 A final reference to Scotland cites the burning of Jedworth/Jedburgh and other towns by the earl of Surrey in 1523.29

Conflict with France received greater attention. The chronicle mentioned the “wonderful war” between the king of France and the bishop of Rome in which the French won “bonony” [Bologna] in 1511 and put the bishop to flight. In 1513 war with France began with a disastrous naval attack followed by an invasion in which the king’s army captured Therouanne [Turwyn] and Tournai.30 In October 1517 a treaty ceded Tournai to the French, but the chronicle merely states that it was delivered to French king. War resumed, and in 1522 the earl of Surrey, lord admiral, burned towns and castles in France.31 Later the duke of Suffolk took 10,000 troops to France and “destroyed many towns” according to an account of eight lines. In 1525 peace was made between England and France, and two years later Cardinal Wolsey went to France and returned to London “with great triumph.”32 The chronicle also lists many executions beginning with Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, but the charges against them were not given. Other important individuals executed

27 Fol. 155r.
28 Fol. 157v. Dated 5 Henry VIII.
29 Fol. 158v.
30 Fol. 157r.
31 Fol. 158v.
32 Fol. 159r. For a different view see Elton, England under the Tudors, 94-5.
were Edmund de la Pole, Edward Stafford, duke of Buckingham, the nun of Kent, Sir Thomas More, John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, Friar Forest, as well as a number of lesser persons. The last recorded executions were of Henry Courtenay, marquess of Exeter, Henry Pole, lord Montague, and Sir Edward Neville beheaded for high treason in December 1538.

The author of the Hardying chronicle concludes that Henry VIII did three great things during the first thirty years of his reign. First, he abolished the usurped authority of the bishop of Rome and restored the word of God in English; second, he took away superstition and idolatry; and third he dissolved the cloisters and suppressed all counterfeit and false religion. Finally the author offered thanks to Henry VIII and hoped for a good future under his son, Edward, and closed saying: “To this all true English hearts say Amen.”

Although this version of the chronicle was published in January 1543/4 as was the earlier edition, its chronological coverage did not go beyond 1538. It was more contemporary than the other version but clearly fell short of being a fully up to date account. Both editions of the chronicle were dedicated to the duke of Norfolk who fell from power and was imprisoned in the Tower in the autumn of 1546. Consequently, a reader of the chronicle only a few years after publication would have found it strangely dated.

The reign of Henry VIII also saw the publication of seven editions of short chronicles that would have been attractive to readers who could not afford the larger works. In 1540 John Byddell published A Short Cronycle… covering the period from the reign of Henry IV in 48 pages. The chronicle lists the mayors and sheriffs of London for each year followed by short entries for important events. The reign of Henry VII begins with the king’s marriage to the eldest daughter of Edward IV and the birth of his two sons, Arthur and Henry. In 1501 Arthur married Katherine, daughter of the king of

33 Fol. 160v.
35 STC 9985.5 No foliation.
Spain followed the next year by the marriage of Margaret, the king’s daughter, to the king of Scotland. An event not related to the royal family was a fire at Norwich in 1507 that burned a “great part” of the city. The section on the reign of Henry VII ends with his death and burial at Westminster. Byddell offered no eulogy or assessment of the first Tudor king’s achievements in what can only be seen as a superficial seven page account that offered little to a reader wanting to understand the significance of the reign.

The section on Henry VIII begins differently with the observation that the new king began his “most gracious reign,” but subsequent entries differ little from the previous reign. It lists the births, deaths, and marriages of family members and offers a cursory account of foreign relations. The events leading to the Henrician Reformation begin with the meeting of legates at Black Friars in 1528 “for the kynge’s maryage.” This is followed by a reference to the deposition of Cardinal Wolsey in October and a brief mention of a Parliament that met for the “enormities of the clergy” the next year. In 1534 Parliament granted the king the first fruits and tenths of all spiritual “policislios.” While there are further references to the executions of the nun of Kent, More and Rochester, and three Charterhouse monks for denying the king to be the supreme head of the Church of England, the reader wanting to learn about the Henrician Reformation would have been gravely disappointed. The chronicle ends with the king’s marriage to Anne of Cleves on January 6, 1540. Byddell asked God to “send long lyfe togyther with moche procreasion and long continuance of theyr issue.” Since this edition has no monthly publication date, it is not possible to know what, if anything, occurred between the marriage and the actual publication. However, the marriage was nullified the following June, a fact that indicates that the chronicle must have been published shortly after the king’s marriage. This edition clearly qualifies as one providing the reader with up-to-date contemporary history or current events.

Two years later in 1542 Byddell published a substantially revised second edition of his short chronicle. This version not only extended
the earlier one but added details missing from it especially with regard to religious reforms. In 1532 a new entry stated that it was “enacted that no man shoulde sue any appeals to Rome,” and the following year an entry saying that the bishop of Rome “with all his false usurped power [was] abollyshed quy out of this realme....” An intriguing omission from this edition is a reference to Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne of Cleves, the very topic that concluded the first edition. On May 6, 1540 the chronicle mentions a proclamation that Bibles should be placed in every parish church “redy for all sortes of people to rede and here gods worde at conuenyent tymes.”37 In July the chronicle cites a royal proclamation limiting the observance of holy days. The last entry on 10 March, 1541 refers to a “maid” boiled at Smithfield for “poysonyng dyuers honest persons.” Both editions of Byddell’s chronicle were relatively up to date and would have been useful to a reader interested in contemporary events.

The publication of short chronicles continued into the reign of Edward VI with no fewer than five editions published during the short reign.38 In 1552 William Powell, a prominent London printer, published A Cronicle of Yeres from the Begynnnynge of the Worlde, the last of three editions published during the reign.39 Like other chronicles it was organized around the terms of the mayors and sheriffs of London. One might assume that readers interested in contemporary history would be been interested in the last years of Henry VIII as well as the reign of the young king. In June 1546 the author noted that Dr. Edward Crome preached at Paul’s Cross and confessed that he had been seduced by naughty books contrary to the “true doctrine of Chryst.” There was also a reference to the burning of Anne Askew for heresy. The celebration of peace with France received the most attention during the final years of the reign. On June 13, 1546 there was a solemn procession in London

37 Page 30 in EEBO edition.
38 For a list of editions see Beer, “Small Mid-Tudor Chronicles and Popular History: 1540-1560,” 81-2.
39 STC 9989.
giving “laude and prayer to God, the author of peace.” During the night time “great fyers with much ioye and gladness” continued the celebration. On August 21 the Lord High Admiral of France arrived in London and stayed two nights at the bishop of London’s palace before Prince Edward received him with the “nobleste companye that euer was seene.” When the admiral returned to France, he was presented with “many sundry gyftes.” All of Powell’s praise is in marked contrast to the judgment of G. R. Elton that the French war had been a futile disaster.\(^\text{40}\) The chronicle ends with a notation of the beheading of the earl of Surrey for treason on 19 January, 1547 followed by Henry VIII’s death eight days later. Powell praised the king under whom “we his people of Engelande lyued a longe a ioyful and a peasable lyfe rebuted from the errour of idolatry to the true knowledge of God his worde.”\(^\text{41}\)

Edward VI’s reign began with the phrase saying that our most gracious sovereign lord began his reign…. It goes on to describe the procession from Westminster to London before the coronation when the king was accompanied by his uncle, Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset and lord protector, but it omits an explanation of the process whereby Seymour acquired his lofty office.\(^\text{42}\) Subsequently, there is a reference to the invasion of Scotland led by Somerset and John Dudley, earl of Warwick with a reference to William Patten, The Expedicion into Scotlende (1548). Aspects of the Edwardian Reformation that are mentioned include the innovation of offering communion in both kinds, the removal of images from churches, and the marriage of priests, which was granted lawfully “by the laws of God.”\(^\text{43}\) Notably absent from this short chronicle was any reference to the new English liturgy contained in The Book of Common Prayer. There are however notations referring to the popular rebellions of

41 Fol. C.4r.
42 Fol. C.4v.
43 Fol. C.5v.
1549. The Western Rebellion in Devon and Cornwall was designated as a “rising” after which the “chief captains” were brought to the Tower of London and hanged while Kett’s Rebellion in Norfolk and Suffolk was an “insurrection” leading to the chief captain, “Kyte,” and his brother being taken to Norwich and hanged in chains. In neither rebellion did the author indicate the causes of the conflicts or any sympathy for the rebels. In a similar manner the political conflicts of Edward’s reign received superficial treatment. Thomas, lord Seymour, brother of the Protector, was simply put to death for divers treasons and condemned by Parliament. Later Somerset himself was sent to the Tower “to the great lamentation of many” without any reason for his demise. When he was released, Powell observed that there was “great rejoysing of people.”

Details about the impact of the Reformation included the burning of Joan Bocher “for the horrible heresy that Christ toke no fleshe of the vyrgyn Mary” and the deprivation of Bishop Bonner for manifest contempt and continual disobedience. In July 1551 a great sweat occurred in London claiming 800 lives in a single week, and then it ceased “thankes be vnto God.” The chronicle ends in January 1552 with the execution of Somerset for conspiring against “certeyne of the kings maiesties pryuy counsayle,” but the names of the councilors and the issues involved are wholly omitted. Powell unquestionably supported the Edwardian Reformation and was probably wise to detach himself from the political conflicts involving Somerset and the duke of Northumberland since his chronicle was published in 1552. Powell clearly recognized the importance of contemporary history as he devoted five pages of the 42 page chronicle to the reign of Edward VI while the longer and complete reign of Henry VII received merely three pages.

Appearing in the same year were two editions of a short chronicle published at Canterbury by John Mychell. The first, STC 9968, ends 13 January 1552, and the second, STC 9969, ends 25 February. This

44 Fol. C.5v.
45 Fol. C.5v.
chronicle and that of Powell are very similar as the early chroniclers borrowed freely from one another. Mychell’s account of the last years of Henry VIII is about the same as Powell’s. Both celebrate the peace treaty with France enthusiastically and offer a solemn eulogy for the deceased king. One major difference between the two chronicles occurs during the reign of Edward VI when Mychell omits any reference to the execution of Thomas Seymour, the Protector’s brother. Later the Mychell chronicles simply state that Protector Somerset was committed to the Tower. Mychell and Powell agreed that Bishop Gardiner was imprisoned for his manifest contempt, continual disobedience, and rebellion against King Edward. The earlier edition of Mychell’s chronicle ends on 13 January with an entry about the sea overflowing at Sandwich while his later edition as well as Powell’s work include the execution of Somerset nine days later. One reason for the publication of two editions within a mere six weeks is Mychell’s comment that he wanted to include travel data in the earlier edition, but some of his data was unreliable. The later edition includes details about the length and breadth of England and distances from towns to London. It was, of course, during those few weeks that Somerset was executed. The publication of the later edition also suggests popular demand for Mychell’s small chronicles; in fact a third edition appeared in 1554 appropriately revised for the reign of Queen Mary.  

In contrast to the small chronicles printed during the reign of Edward VI, a larger, quarto work consisting of 279 folios plus an introduction and a table of things worthy of memory appeared in 1550. Walter

46 For an edited text of the chronicle see Beer, ed., The Canterbury Chronicle, Kent Archæological Society. STC 9970.
Lynne, a committed Protestant reformer, translated Johann Carion’s The Three Bokes of Cronicles and made additions of his own that suggest a serious interest in contemporary history.\textsuperscript{47} The Latin chronicle written by German Lutherans ended in 1532, but Lynne not only published the translation but also added a section entitled “Brief Annotations gathered out of divers Historiographers….” consisting of eight folios that brought the historical narrative forward to 1550. He dedicated his work to Edward VI and explained that he had written of “principall stories” of the past eighteen years throughout Christendom and apologized for any omissions.\textsuperscript{48} He went on to say that historiographers or “story writers” must tell the truth even if it gives offense and added that he had abstained from everything that might be “tedious and bitter as much as the truth might suffre.”\textsuperscript{49} Lynne’s narrative begins in 1546 with the mission of the bishop of Durham and Viscount Lisle to France. He noted that Nicholas Shaxton, the former bishop of Salisbury, recanted and denied religious truths that he had formerly professed followed by the burning of Anne Askew for opinions “consonaunt to the truth” and contrary to the Six Articles. These entries clearly reveal Lynne’s opposition to the Henrician reaction, views that could presumably be safely revealed in 1550. The chronicle mentioned the attainder of the Howards and the execution of the earl of Surrey, but gave more attention to European events. The account ended with the simple statement that Henry VIII ended his life and was buried at Windsor, but it is significant that there was no eulogy for the deceased monarch.

Lynne’s tone changed dramatically as he moved on to the reign of Edward VI. He stated that Protector Somerset and the council governed with “great mercy and gentilnesse” and promoted true religion, and

\textsuperscript{47} STC 4626. Beer, “Walter Lynne and Johann Carion’s The Three Bokes of Cronicles (1550).”

\textsuperscript{48} Lynne actually only covered the years 1546-1550.

\textsuperscript{49} STC 4626, Fol. 279r. and v.
he added that images and beads were put down. His account of the Edwardian Reformation included references to the dissolution of chantries, the introduction of communion in both kinds, and the institution of the marriage of priests “by the laws of God.” There was also a reference to the release of Hugh Latimer from imprisonment. A puzzling omission is any mention of the introduction of the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549. The rebellions of 1549 were referred to as insurrections of “rustikes”, and Lynne praised the “noble” earl of Warwick for the pacification of the Norfolk revolt. His political outlook changed when he wrote that Somerset had been committed to the Tower of London to the great lamentation of “very many” and was later released with “greate reioysyng of muche people,” phrases that appear in other contemporary chronicles. The conclusion in which Lynne apologizes for any errors or omissions is followed by a section titled “Breuely to Close Vp,” where he emphasizes Lent preaching before the king, the deliverance of Somerset, changes in the diocese of London, and the sequestration of Bishops Gardiner, Bonner, and Heath. Finally he wrote, “Let vs styll valiauntly fight with a two-edged sworde against the maliciouse kyng of Egypte or blasphemouse byshop of Rome and all his trayterouse trayne, after the godly example of the first Josias.” At this point the author sounds more like a religious enthusiast than a genuine chronicler. The last entry in the chronicle is May 1550, and the chronicle itself is dated 20 August 1550. Despite its deficiencies, Lynn’s addition offered an up to date narrative that would have been of great value to readers interested in contemporary history.

Edward Hall (1497-1547), The Union of Two Noble Families… is the most important and best known chronicle included in this study. It appeared posthumously in two editions in 1548 and 1550. Richard Grafton printed the earlier edition, and he and Steven Mierdman

50 Fol. 272v.
51 Fol. 275 r. and v.
52 Fol. 279 r. and v.
printed the second. It places an emphasis on the Tudors that marks a significant departure from previous chronicles and reveals a much greater interest in contemporary history. The chronicle covers only the period from Henry IV to Henry VIII, but both editions merely mention the accession of Edward VI. In the modern edition the reign of Henry VII covers 83 pages or 9.6% of the text while Henry VIII’s reign occupies 363 pages or 42% of the text. 

Space allocation in the 1550 edition is as follows:

- Beginning to Edward IV---185 folios
- Edward IV---- 61 folios
- Richard III----35 folios
- Henry VII-----61 folios
- Henry VIII----263 folios
- Edward VI----7 lines

Hall was educated at Eton and Cambridge and became a prominent lawyer and Member of Parliament. He served in Parliament during the 1530s and was therefore an eye-witness to the events of the Henrician Reformation. He associated with the political elite of his day, and in 1535 Henry VIII asked the city of London for “our well beloved subject Edward Hall to be now promoted to the office of under-sheriff.” It has been suggested that Hall may have been encouraged to undertake chronicle writing as a result of a link with the son of Robert Fabyan. Hall died before the publication of the first edition in 1548 and in his will bequeathed the chronicle to Richard Grafton. Therefore the printed versions are based on the editorial work of Grafton. It is significant that Grafton noted that before his death Hall was affected by old age. According to

53 An edition of 1542 is not listed in the BL or STC. See the important article on Hall by Peter C. Herman in ODNB.

54 The modern edition was published in 1809 and reprinted in 1965. The reign of Richard III covers 47 pages or 5% of the whole. It is entitled “The Tragical Doynges of Kyng Richarde the Thirde.”

55 STC 12723. Copy at BL. STC 12723a., the version at the Huntington Library, contains approximately 1360 pages in various foliations. Foliation varies in other copies of the 1550 edition.
Grafton, he was “a man in the later tyme of his lyfe not so paynful and studious as before he had been.” The modern reader would be likely to translate Grafton’s observation as dementia. In the preface to the 1548 edition Grafton wrote that Hall’s narrative went on only to 24 Henry VIII (1532); “the rest he left noted in diuers and many pamphlets and papers” which Grafton said that he gathered together and compiled without any addition of his own. Grafton’s modesty notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine that the papers of a man suffering mental decline could have been assembled without any input from an editor. Therefore, one can argue that the contemporary portion of Hall’s chronicle reflected the work of Richard Grafton.

Hall’s chronicle begins with the author’s dedication to Edward VI as “defender of the Catholike faith” and under God supreme head of the churches of England and Ireland. The marriage between the young king’s grandfather and grandmother led to the union of the two noble houses of Lancaster and York, and he prays for the king to be victorious over all of his enemies. In humility he dismissed the chronicle as a “simple and rude work.” Hall’s dedication is followed by a short statement of Grafton to the reader where he mentioned Hall’s mental decline and stated that he had made no additions of his own. Like Hall Grafton asked the reader to judge him charitably.

The account of the reign of Richard III is entitled “The Tragical Doynges of Kyng Richard the Thirde” and begins with the following statement: “…I abhore to write the miserable tragedy of this infortunete prince, which by fraude entered, by tyrannye proceded, and by sodayn death ended his infortunete lyfe….” The chronicle speaks of the “lamentable murther of his innocente nephews” but adds that their death has “come in question that some remained longe in doubte whether they were in his daies destroied or no.” Excerpts from Sir Thomas More’s account follow, stating that the princes were “murthered by the cruel ambicion of their vnnaturall vncl.”

56 1809 ed., vii. Taken from 1548 edition; the 1550 edition has a different preface by Grafton.

57  Page 374.

58 Pages 377-379. The material from More is based on an unpublished manuscript that was consulted by Grafton. See Sylvester, ed., St. Thomas More, The History of King Richard III, xii., 3.
The subsequent narrative is overwhelmingly hostile to Richard, but there are a few exceptions. For example, Hall observed during the first year of the reign: To please common people parliament enacted “good lawes and profitable estatutes” against strangers and foreign wares that were not enforced owing to his early death. Later the establishment of the Council of the North was cited as Richard’s most important creation. The preceding observations notwithstanding the chronicle leaves no doubt about the author’s hostility to Richard III. He is described as a man small and little of stature whose body was “greatly deformed, the one shoulder higher than the other.” His reign is characterized as one of “infamie and dishonor.” He would have been praised if he had continued as Protector, but Hall wrote that “I remitte the punishment to God of his offences committed in his lyfe.”

The tone of the chronicle changed dramatically as the author described the reign of the first Tudor as “The Politique Gouernaunce of Kyng Henry VII.” Unlike earlier chroniclers the author often wrote in the first person. After the king’s coronation and marriage, he asked Parliament to pardon “all men” discharging them of all offences and pains of death. Furthermore, lands were to be restored to those who would submit to his clemency. There is extensive coverage of rebellions and seditious conspiracies during the reign as well as foreign relations. At the end of the reign when his health was failing, the king “of his liberalite” again offered pardons to all men with the exception of thieves and murderers. Henry VII received lavish praise at his death as one who was sober, moderate, honest, and affable. The king abhorred pride and “arrogancy”, but Hall offered no comments on his religious devotion or any critical observations.

59 Page 381.
61 Page 421.
62 Page 423.
63 Pages 504-5.
The reign of his son and successor is described as “The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII” in the longest section of the chronicle. One of the earliest entries for the new reign was the arrest of two of Henry VII’s dedicated officials, Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, who were imprisoned in the Tower of London prior to their execution. The story of the late king’s funeral follows. A large part of the new king’s first year is focused on the coronation with great emphasis on the ceremonial details that accompanied it. As the chronicle moves forward, the author describes the war with France as well as the conflict with Scotland in great detail. This approach suggests that the contemporary reader appreciated the blow by blow narrative complete with descriptions of the apparel worn by the combatants. After some sixty pages in the modern edition, Thomas Wolsey appears as he is appointed bishop of Lincoln, the first step in his upward ecclesiastical progress. Hall describes him as a good philosopher, very eloquent, and full of wit; he adds that Wolsey excelled all others for pride, “couetous and ambicion… as you shall hear after.” Hall’s fascination with events that some historians might term trivial is illustrated by his account of women present at the Field of the Cloth of Gold where Henry VIII and Francis met in 1520 to promote peace between the two kingdoms:

To tell you the apparel of the ladies, their riche attyres, their sumptuous iuelles, their diversities of beauties, and the goodly behauior from day to day sithe the first metyng, I assure you ten mennes wittes can scace declare it.

Of course, the chronicle dealt with more important matters such as relations with the Holy Roman Empire including events in Italy and the capture of the Pope. But for the contemporary English reader nothing was more important than events leading to the king’s divorce from Queen Catherine of Aragon and the break with Rome. Hall states that Henry VIII “was in a great scruple of his conscience and not

64 Page 505.
65 Page 567.
66 Page 618.
quiet in his mind” when he was secretly informed by divers divines that he was living in adultery with his brother’s wife. However, the king learned that the court of Rome would not “dispence with God’s commandement and precept.”

Following this is the text of the king’s oration and Queen Catherine’s defense. Anne Boleyn appears as a woman whom “the kyng much favoured in all honestie…” The queen’s ladies and gentlewomen said that Anne “so entised the kyng and brought him in such amours,” but Hall said that this was contrary to the truth. Following the initial appearance of Anne Boleyn, the text moves on documenting the fall of Wolsey, the appointment of Sir Thomas More, “a man well-learned whose wit was fine,” as lord chancellor, and the entry of Thomas Cromwell into the king’s service. At this time copies of Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament began to appear in England, but the bishop of Lincoln ordered all copies to be burned. Subsequently the bishops not only forbade the circulation of Tyndale’s text but also declined to authorize the preparation of a new translation.

The chronicle continues with a description of the king’s marital relations, a subject that would have been of great interest to contemporary readers. Beginning with the year 1532—24 Henry VIII—Richard Grafton, not Hall, became the principal editor of the chronicle with the result that Grafton’s historical perspective may well be dominant. The reader learns that Anne Boleyn was “moche in the Kynges fauour,” but the “common people” did not know the king’s true intent and thought the Queen’s absence was for her own sake. Later in the year Anne was created Marchioness of Pembroke and then married the king secretly. However, according to the author, few people knew of the marriage until she was great with child.

---

67 Page 753.
68 Page 759.
69 Pages 759-69.
70 Page 788.
lengthy account of the queen’s coronation follows, and also the birth
of Princess Elizabeth. Later Queen Anne suffered a miscarriage
after which she was sent to the Tower and beheaded with a sword.
Henry VIII next married Jane Seymour who bore Prince Edward,
“nowe our souereign Lorde and Kyng Edward the sixte” before
her untimely death. The king’s marriage to Anne of Cleves was
brief, according to the chronicle, because it was not legal. Similarly
Queen Katherine Howard did not enjoy her dignity long as she was
beheaded for “dissolute liuyng.” The king’s sixth and last wife,
Katherine Parr, was merely mentioned.

The chronicle details the major events of what later generations called
the Henician Reformation, but contemporary readers may well have
seen it of less importance than conflicts with France and Scotland
and executions. Henry VIII’s queens were not the only persons
suffering execution, because the author of the chronicle adds many
others. There was Elizabeth Barton, the holy maid of Kent, followed
by John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, who “very maliciously refused
the king’s title as supreme head” and Sir Thomas More upon whose
death the chronicler commented that he could not tell whether I
should call him a “foolishe wyseman or a wyse foolshe man.” Thomas Cromwell was another victim at whose death many rejoiced,
“especially religious men,” because he did not favor “any kynde of
Popery.” At the lower end of the social scale the chronicle listed
executions of persons involved in the rebellions in Lincolnshire and
Yorkshire. The author had complete contempt for the common man,
writing that the “inhabitants of the North Parts” were at this time
“very ignorant and rude… knowing not what true religion meant but
altogether noseled in supersticion and popery.” The major events of

71 Page 805.
72 Page 825.
73 Page 841.
74 Page 817.
75 Pages 838-9.
76 Page 820.
the Henrician Reformation are recorded, but contemporary readers may well have seen them as of secondary importance. For example, buried in a long paragraph dealing with a Christmas celebration and the appointment of Sir Thomas Audley as lord chancellor and Queen Katherine’s loss of her title to become merely princess dowager, is the passage of the Act in Restraint of Appeals. The chronicle states that Parliament made an act “that no persone should appeale for any cause out of this realme to the Courte of Rome.” Subsequently Parliament “made many and sondry good wholesome and godly statutes, but among al one special statute” authorizing the king to be Supreme Head of the Church of England. All papal authority was abolished, and God was to be “euerlastyngly praysed therefore.” The monastic dissolution was noted when the “great and fatte abbottes” gave Henry VIII all religious houses valued at three hundred marks and under in hope that their great monasteries should “haue continued still…. “ A person identified only as “one” said in Parliament that these were as “thornes.” The chronicle offered only fragmentary accounts of the doctrinal issues that were central to the Henrician Reformation. The Ten Articles, according to the chronicle, were published by the bishops and clergy in “a book of religion” that mentioned only three sacraments. The book was delivered to the people but “ignorant” priests were offended. Three years later England moved toward greater orthodoxy in the Act of Six Articles, but the chronicle failed to offer a detailed discussion of its content, and the author’s Protestant sympathies were revealed as it was termed a whip with six strings.

77 Page 795.
78 Page 816.
79 Page 819.
80 Pages 819-20. Cf. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 200 where the ambiguity of the Ten Articles is stressed. Dickens described the act as an example of the English talent for concocting ambiguous and flexible documents.
81 Page 828. Cf. Peter C. Herman in *ODNB*. 
The account of the last years of Henry VIII was dominated by military conflict. In Scotland the English won a major victory at Solway Moss in 1542 which was followed by a long list of towns that were burned, and four years later England and France made peace with an agreement that England would retain Boulogne until 1554. The king’s speech to Parliament on December 24, 1546—probably his last—praised his subjects. The author said that he “foloweth worde for worde, as nere as I was able to report it.” The king stated, “No prince in the world more fauoreth his subiectes then I do you,” but added criticism of the clergy for sowing discord. Nevertheless the king’s oration gave such comfort “that the lyke ioye could not be vnto them in this world.”

Executions continued during the last years with the burning of Anne Askew and three others. Both the duke of Norfolk and his son, the earl of Surrey, were charged with high treason with Surrey suffering execution before the king’s death. According to the chronicle, death came to Henry VIII, and he “yelded hys spirite to almightie God and departed thys worlde.”

Whereas Henry VII received an effusive eulogy, his son had nothing. The chronicle ends with the coronation of Edward VI “whome Jesu preserue, long to reygne ouer vs.” Since the last printing of the chronicle appeared as late as 1550, contemporary readers would have been left with a work that was scarcely up to date. Richard Grafton, of course, lived on well beyond this date, but readers in the years immediately following 1550 would have had to look elsewhere to learn about the early years of Edward VI.

The above criticism notwithstanding, Hall’s Chronicle is the most important work of its kind that appeared during the early 16th century, and it unquestionably had the greatest effect on contemporary historical scholarship. In 1555 Queen Mary issued a proclamation calling for its destruction, but John Kingston issued another edition as early as 1560. Earlier commentators held that the chronicle endorsed the Tudor myth of divinely sanctioned dynastic origins and the absolute
necessity of order; on the other hand, Peter C. Herman has stressed Hall’s skepticism toward the Henrician court’s chivalric play-acting. He concludes that the chronicle “presents a more complex narrative than has been generally allowed…”

Whatever view one takes of Hall’s views, there can be no question that his lengthy and detailed account of the reign of Henry VIII provided contemporaries with invaluable information about the recent monarch.

This study has focused on eight chronicles several of which appeared in more than one version. Arnold’s chronicle, the only one published during the reign of Henry VII, made no contribution to contemporary history. The two earliest editions of Fabyan’s chronicle published in 1516 and 1533, respectively, also made no significant contributions to contemporary history. The third edition (1542) however is the earliest example of a chronicle with an up to date narrative as it covers the reign of Henry VIII to the date of publication. The author of Hardying’s chronicle died in 1465, but Richard Grafton produced two versions in 1543. Neither would qualify as good examples of contemporary history since the first version offered only two pages on the reign of Henry VIII while the second ended in 1538.

The short chronicles, published in numerous editions between 1540 and 1554, represent a new departure in scholarship. Their size and low cost appealed to a larger readership than longer works, and each offered up-to-date accounts that must have explained their popularity with contemporary readers, many of whom were presumably of the lower classes. Walter Lynne’s continuation of Carion’s chronicle published in 1550 also gives a narrative that ends just before the date of publication. Although the last early Tudor printing of Hall’s chronicle in 1550 fails to cover the reign of Edward VI, the lengthy and detailed history of the reign of Henry VIII constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary history. Therefore, we may conclude that the early Tudor era witnessed a triumph of contemporary history that paved the way for the modern age.
Barrett L. Beer is Professor of History Emeritus at Kent State University. His published works include books on John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, John Stow, and the rebellions of 1549. He has edited chronicles of Stow and John Mychell. His most recent publication is “Walter Lynne and Johann Carion’s The Three Bokes of Chronicles (1550),” Notes and Queries, 2019.

Chronicles


Bibliography


Beer, B. L. “Small Mid-Tudor Chronicles and Popular History.” *Quidditas* 37 (2016), 57-84.

Beer, B. L. “Walter Lynne and Johann Carion’s The Three Bokes of Chronicles (1550),” *Notes and Queries* (2019), 1-4.


Ferguson, M. G. “Richard Grafton.” *ODNB*.

Herman, Peter C. “Edward Hall.” *ODNB*.


*Grafton’s Chronicle (1569)*
Humorous Spaces and Serious Magic in William Baldwin’s 
Beware the Cat

Ashley Jeanette Ecklund
University of Oregon

“And I am sure you are not ignorant of the Hermit whom as S. Augustine writeth, a witch would in an Asses forme ride upon to market” – Maister Streamer, Beware the Cat

When spaces transform in William Baldwin’s Beware the Cat, the transition is marked with humor, consistently signaling magic to follow. As an amalgamation of folklore, including magic that manifests around, for, and through cats, Baldwin’s work offers adventure, laughter, and danger alike. Some cats are diabolical, worshiping or holding the soul of a witch; however, their wit constitutes a jocular contrast to that of our interior narrator, Maister Streamer, whose quotation above demonstrates a serious misunderstanding of St. Augustine’s beliefs. Though Beware The Cat was published at the start of the early modern period, the folklore it contains speaks with medieval magic, and as such, characters debate and grapple with their conflicting and evolving views of the magical elements within their stories. Thus, Beware the Cat, though imbued with humor, is equally weaved with cultural meaning, and on a meta level, the text’s multilayered framing welcomes the simultaneity of this reading.

In William Baldwin’s Beware the Cat, spaces transition within the momentum of socio-political humor as a prerequisite for magic. In this article, public, private, wild, urban, and bodily space are delineated according to their magical detail and humorous transition phase. A variety of magic flows throughout the stories, and according to medieval usage, include diabolical (witch transformation), common (philtre creation), and natural (astrology).

1 Beware the Cat is not a novel, poem, or a short story; its unique structure contains up to four simultaneous frame narratives and comprises three sections which progress the main plot. Each section’s primary narrator is “Maister Streamer,” who is telling three companions magical cat stories from their shared bedroom within the King’s court. On each page of the text, our narrator, in the role of recording a story that is not his, leaves

1 Rider, Magic and Religion, 46-69; Davies, Popular Magic, 67-91; Bailey, “Diabolic Magic,” 361-92

2 Spelled both “Stremer” and “Streamer” in the text.
comments to readers in the margins which are often hilariously ironic or sarcastic. Throughout the discussion to follow, these comments will be marked with (MC) to signal “margin comment;” this paratext is included in our analysis because the content is vibrantly parallel to Streamer’s storyline, achieving a constant presence of external narration. While listening to Streamer’s narrative, and that of our scribe/exterior narrator, we get taken into additional interior narratives for the characters Streamer meets, and beyond that, into the lives of the cats who can talk and engage in a society of their own.

**Baldwin as a Mid-Tudor Writer**

Before we begin with the story, let us briefly get to know Baldwin and his context. The slice of Sixteenth century that pertains to William Baldwin’s work, between 1530 and 1580, has markedly been ignored in scholarship until the last decade. However, more scholars are now observing the dynamic social contexts of mid-Tudor literature and the complexity of its inscription. For instance, while writing *Beware the Cat*, Baldwin is “stuck in the middle of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, from medieval to renaissance, from catholic to protestant, from community to individualism…” As such, Baldwin’s work reflects tensions of between[ness] and becoming, not unlike the literature of modernism.

To start, how is Baldwin’s work identifiably mid-Tudor? *Beware the Cat*’s narrative structure reflects the time period’s transformation from a collaborative and oral literary tradition to the integration of mass-produced text copies available for the individual reader – hello printing press. The setting of a group of story-tellers at court, which frames this short prose piece, is not just an artistic choice but a direct reflection of what the typical reading experience was in early modern Europe. Since orality required extraordinary memory

---

3 Maslen, “William Baldwin,” 511: Mid-Tudor literature is said to have been “neglected in large part because it seems to speak with such an impenetrable accent, seems incapable of understanding the grand historical shifts it sits inside, and seems (at best) like a momentary amusement that quickly grows tedious the longer one has to keep sorting out what it is saying.”


and listening skills, the “oration” of Streamer in *Beware the Cat* consistently misinforming the audience, immediately signals the opportunity for risible group interaction. As this article’s title suggests, the story is also representative of “a characteristic trait of Tudor books: ambiguity that is often playful.”6 However, early modern “playfulness” may be cited in more ways than one, as is observed in later works known for sardonic jokes, gloomy or grisly irony, and acrid sarcasm, such as Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1589). Overall, then, “Mid Tudor culture is a bewildering fusion of the serious and risible, real and imagined, and every detail of *Beware the Cat* alerts us to the consequences of this fusion”7 – indeed there is a frustrated lightheartedness in comparing popes to witches.

This literary period is also known for the notion of *copia*, associated with the literary-sigh-of-relief which accompanied Elizabeth I. *Copia*, as a formal writing trait, is abundance in descriptive moments and the playing with the sound of words; often noted in lengthy lists.8 In Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat*, during the “third parte of Maister Streamers Oration,” Streamer begins with a continuous flow of incorrect observations about the moon as an object in Astronomy. This is flagged by a margin comment from our external narrator: “Astronomers are deceived;” here, Streamer describes a “waxing and waning,” “eb and flowe,” “neither to nepe and spring: but the neping and springing…,” “high or lowe,” and a moon that “ful by means of spring, had fully cast….” This continues in iterations for a full page - all for the conclusion that “it is not the Moon that/ causeth the Sea to eb and flowe….”9 Though jovial sections like this are of interest to this article, there is a breadth of tone in Baldwin’s work overall. For instance, in the poem that accompanies *Beware

6 Pincombe and Shrank, “Prologue,” 50.

7 Maslen, “William Baldwin,” 554: here Maslen’s article seems to posit examples of oppressive government in *Beware the Cat*. He sees them speaking to the threatening consequences of social deviation and simultaneously the dangers of unverified information.


the Cat, in the 1963 edition, The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth, Baldwin somberly addresses his political concerns. This work “takes its point of origin in a historical event, but it does not allow that event -the King’s death- to limit its poetic horizons. The actual funeral of the young monarch is the absent centre of a poem whose real and urgent concern is with malaise at the level of the nation…”10 Similarly, Beware the Cat is set at Christmas, inspired by a night Baldwin had at the King’s court, when Edward VI was still alive.11 This observation, from the Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature (2009), helps to explain the high number of allegorical-readings for early modern texts. There is a noticeable fusion of serious social concern and entertainment, underscoring political meaning through its play, “which illustrates the exuberantly proliferating energies of mid-Tudor literature…; it is wildly eclectic, and it flaunts its book-learning.”12 Baldwin’s employment of “book-learning” in Beware the Cat, as we will observe in more detail later, works as a double mechanism for creating laughter and engaging an informed audience.

On the topic of historical context, we may wonder why Beware the Cat was published posthumously, about sixteen years after it was finished; its print release was so far removed from Baldwin, and its time of creation, that readers in 1570 were convinced Baldwin was trying to posit Streamer as a real person.13 The social milieu of the Tudor period was rife with life threatening religious and political debate, so authors had to be careful when and how they expressed their thoughts, as is most famously connected to the struggle of protestant writers living in Queen Mary’s England.14 As such, Baldwin is thought to have had publishing aliases. During Baldwin’s life, “fiction

10 Pincombe and Shrank, “Prologue,” 45.
12 Pincombe and Shrank, “Prologue,” 45.
14 Maslen, “William Baldwin,” 512: The imagination of authors was at issue because beliefs, or even just jokes taken to heart, could lead to execution based on the “consequences” of violent censorship.
is dangerous territory,”¹⁵ because even representationally, “truth emerges with difficulty in the mid-Tudor world”¹⁶ due to varying levels of censorship alongside tumultuous publishing practices. For instance, it is theorized that Baldwin was unable to publish The Funerals under Mary because it was too “unruly,”¹⁷ and likewise with Beware the Cat possibly due to its turbulent pope jokes. Even under Edward VI and Elizabeth I, though, authors and entertainers still had to be careful not to offend the respective monarchical regime.¹⁸

Reputation and Critique

Baldwin’s Funerals of King Edward the Sixth is one of his career’s seminal works. It is a poem about the sickness of the monarchy as a political body, portrayed via the vivid and detailed symptoms of Edward’s dying body.¹⁹ In another, more somber work, the poem “Canticles [1549]… Baldwin paraphrases in verse the Song of Solomon; the project is perfectly constant with one of the central tenets of the religious reformers; the translation of the bible would make it more available for people… The Canticles or Ballads of Salomon is thus in accord with the writing which others around Whitchurch [printing press where he lived and worked] were doing.”²⁰ Though Baldwin’s Funerals is one of his notable works, he is typically not trophied for his poetry, especially his shorter poems, nor did he seem to be in his time; however, his prose and a collection of clichés have drawn considerable attention. The latter is titled A Treatise of Moral Philosophy (1548) is comprised of quotations incorrectly assigned to classic philosophers, something Streamer would do, and was widely popular in his lifetime.²¹ I image Treatise to be like a coffee-table

¹⁹ Pincombe and Shrank, “Prologue,” 43.
²⁰ Holden’s Introduction: Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 8.
²¹ Holden’s Introduction: Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 7-8.
book in the twenty-first century, and perhaps proof of Baldwin’s frequent interest in humor. However, scholars initially discovered Baldwin due to his editing of the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559); in this way, he was connected to a prominent “circle of Protestant writers and reformers,” and by 1560, “there was praise for Baldwin and a clear connection between him and the literary group of the Inns of Court.” For example, Jasper Heywood writes “of Baldwyns worthie name, Whose Myrrour dothe of Magistrartes, proclayme eternall fame’… in the ‘Preface’ of his translation of Seneca’s *Thyestes.*”

Considerable scholarship on *Beware the Cat* locks onto the story’s allegorical and satiric modes, which makes sense given the socio-political contexts outlined above. For instance, William P. Holden, in the editor’s introduction to the 1963 addition, offers a comparison between *Beware the Cat* and the later novel *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1726) by reading the story as a text which seeks to critique society through a cat representation of the erroneous human world - to comment on the politics and religion of its time via an “outside” civilization as Swift does in his later novel. Though he also noted that *Beware the Cat* attempts to be reminiscent of *The Canterbury Tales* (1392) in structure and with its “easy informality of a group” setting and its inclusion of “a number of minor stories.” Similar to Holden’s Swift reading, Christina Wald’s article “Baldwin: Beware the Cat,” (2015) focuses also on the cat society as a mimic, but with a heavier focus on religion than the flaws of monarchs. However, as a pivot point for our discussion here, Holden read *Beware the Cat* also as an illustration of Baldwin’s bias against medieval thought which aligns in some ways with an article by Robert Maslen, “William Baldwin and the Tudor Imagination,” (2009) positing *Beware the Cat* as a warning against uncontrolled imagination as a pre-positivist threat. In this vein, Streamer is key for expressing this concern of unchecked fact.

22 Holden’s Introduction: Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 7, 10.
25 Wald’s article discusses representations of Catholicism within Streamer’s cat world.
Though it is fair to suggest a Humanist lean for Baldwin, this article veers away from a static position for *Beware the Cat*’s use of medieval folklore. I do not seek to underscore the stories in *Beware the Cat* as “old wives’ tales” nor do I draw the conclusion that Baldwin was concerned with “spreading irrational beliefs based on deceit,” “transmitted from generation to generation, in defiance of evidence and reason.”²⁶ This is because, as Maslen himself points out, Baldwin was writing in a time when literature was struggling to articulate its own representations²⁷ - as is easily observed today, social chaos can engender multiplicity in belief systems.

**The Story: Ireland, St. Johns Wood, and the World of Cats**

The first section of *Beware the Cat* contains mini stories that explain and contextualize Streamer’s interest in cat magic. The second section spans Streamer’s adventure while attaining a magic “philtre,” or potion, which allows him to understand cat language. The final section is dedicated to Streamer’s observations of a cat-court case, which is held below his window each night. This third section occurs after he consumes the language-enabling “philtre,” so it offers the most detail on quotidian cat society. This essay will focus on sections one and two because within their chaos spatial transformation is ubiquitous. In section one, Streamer shares a folk tale that he heard from a “Churle” (a name for “all farmers & husband men”), while visiting “Yreland,” about a “Kern” (foot soldier/peasant), who was living in a “Fassock” (prairie).²⁸ In this scene, Ireland, now Wexford, is a “wast wilderness.”²⁹ Note, in this period, wilderness equates to wildness, which is significant for understanding the kinds of magic portrayed in Ireland’s spaces. From the perspective of Ireland as a colony, Streamer enters a peripheral space conducive to supernatural danger. In contrast to twenty-first century modernity, proximity significantly

²⁸ Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 32.
²⁹ Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 32.
impacted views of otherness, since travel, communication, and intercultural contact was more difficult to attain. As explained in the text’s introduction, “The locale is first Staffordshire [where Streamer goes to visit a friend and begins his cat magic inquiry, which was] isolated and strange to London of the mid-sixteenth century. There cats might well speak. From Staffordshire, the setting becomes Ireland, an area even wilder…. In Ireland, cats not only speak, but eat whole sheep and kill men.”

From start to finish, the wilderness of the first section contrasts the London cat-courtroom in which Streamer is studying by section three; the latter is coded as sophisticated and positivist and the prior wild and diabolical. In London, Streamer uses natural and common magic; however, witch transformation, though talked about in England, stays in Ireland.

Rather than psychologize supernatural beliefs, our analysis here recognizes text-based evidence, which suggests how magic changes in its uses and form depending on space. *Beware the Cat* is estimated to have been written between 1552 and 1553, well before it was published between 1568 and 1570, and is known to reflect “what the age of Elizabeth liked to look back to…” - offering us a look at medieval folklore from an Early Modern perspective. People in the 1500’s were experiencing a shifting causal ontology, but still, Baldwin was “no modern voice crying in the superstitious wilderness.” At this time, people were neither “‘conservatively superstitions’ or ‘enlightened’” but “for the most part border-line cases…He [Baldwin] attacks witches and witchcraft; but it is notable that his witches are Irish, of a nation notoriously [from the early modern English prospective] violent, strange, and untrustworthy...The *magic* and medicine of England were far better,” for instance. For these reasons, our interest here is on the humor surrounding spatial transformation, where the

30 Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 15.


32 Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 17.

33 Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 17. Italics added.
magic occurs, rather than looking for a mockery within the magic itself. Though it utilizes parody, *Beware the Cat* is not solely satiric.

The story begins in a grave manner. The Kern is out at night to murder a family who are “his maisters enemy,” with his horse keeper as a travel partner. They ride “into his cuntrire, & in the night time entered into a town of two houwse and brake in and sule the people…” (MC “this was an Irish town”). After killing the targeted family, they steal a cow and a sheep which causes the now past family’s dogs to start barking boisterously (MC “Irish Curs bark sore”). They quickly hide in a nearby church. Through this event, a church, which is normally a public space, transforms into a private space; Baldwin addresses this with humor, and as he does this, their magical events begin:

…in to a church, thinking to lurk ther til midnight was past, for there he was suer that no man would respect or seek him, for the wild Irish men had Churches in such reverence, *til our men taught them the contrary*, that they neither would nor durst either rob ought thence, [MC ‘The wilde Irishe men were better then we in reverencing their Religion’]… while this Kern was in the Church: he thought it best to dine for he had eaten little that day, [MC ‘The olde Irish diet was to dine at night’] wherefore he made his boy go gather sticks and strake fire with his feres, and *make a fire in the Churche and killed the Sheep*, and after Irish fashion layd it there upon and rosted it, but when it was ready and that he thought to eat it *there came in a cat* [MC ‘a malapert gest that cometh unbidden’] and set her by him, *and said in Irish, Shane joel, which is give mee some meat*…[MC ‘a cat did eat a sheep’].

The words “til midnight” probably signified for the period’s readers as a foreshadowing of magic to come because specified times of day, days of the year (as we will see in the “Philtre” creation), and amounts of time were detailed often in medieval spells. It is also important to note that Streamer is thought to be a humorous character in general, insofar as his knowledge is reliably deficient. For instance, he performs the “Philtre” making process incorrectly, and

34 Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 32.

35 Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 32. Italics added.

mis-explains Albertus Magnus’ astrology, as we will see in section two.\textsuperscript{37} In this scene, the text displays Streamer’s misnomer of the stereotype that the Irish were pagan when he says, “for the wild Irish men had Churches in such reverence, til our men taught them the contrary.” Additionally, the external narrator’s echo of that concept extends sarcasm to both Streamer and the Catholic Church. Further, the Kern starts a fire in this Church and slaughters a sheep and cow in it (categorically pagan), which is not what the English “we” did for “reverencing their Religion.” Thus, the descriptions of the wild area’s Irishness is the socio-political joke that Streamer misses.

As this humorous dialog is placed, the church transforms into a space for, in this instance, diabolical magic.\textsuperscript{38} The cat that has arrived does not only speak a human language, but also asks for meat until she has eaten both the entire cow and sheep, which is far beyond the capability of her physical body. This power of disproportionate consumption is found throughout medieval folklore; thus, once the cat enters, the tone switches to a serious portrayal of magic – this initial transition is complete. After the cat eats the first large animal, the men start to become afraid and note that “like a cormorant not satisfied therwith [the cat] asked stil for more, wherefore they supposed it were \textit{the Devil}, and therefore thinking it wisdom to please him killed the Cow which they had stolen.”\textsuperscript{39} This confirmation of the “diabolical” is taking place inside a Church, signaling that the space has been transformed in a powerful way.

The second transition of this mini story opens with a new line of humor. The two men had been planning to cook the Cow’s hide for themselves, eat some, and make shoes out of the rest, which readers are told would be cooked for tomorrow night’s dinner. Certainly, there have been people in such hunger, but the

\textsuperscript{37} “Wel maister Streamer (quoth he) I knowe you are not so ignorant herein as you make your self; but this is your accustomed fashion alwaise…” (35).

\textsuperscript{38} In this story, the cat is quickly identified as a demon, and it is not surprising that later we also find out it is a transformed witch. “Diabolic magic” is understood here as magic that relied on the power of demons. For more on diabolic magic, and its connection to witchcraft consider Michael Bailey’s “Diabolic Magic.”

\textsuperscript{39} Baldwin, \textit{Beware the Cat}, 32. Italics added.
circumstance of the cat eating all of their meat first was paralleled with the margin comment: “Kerns for lack of meat eat their shoos rosted,” as if this were a trait of “Kerns” that had nothing to do with a magic cat’s gluttony. In the moment following this humor:

The Cat had eaten three quarters and called for more, wherfor they gave her that which was a seething [the shoes], and douting lest when she had eaten that, she would eat them to because they had no more for her: they got them out of the Church and the Kern tooke his horse and a way he rode as fast as he could hie. When he was a mile or two from the Church: the moone began to shine, and his boy espied the cat upon his maisters horse behind him…

Once they are outside the church, back into a public sphere, the comedy ceases, and the moon has risen, signaling that the new space is a magical one. The mini story’s protagonist, “the Kern,” now begins a “life and death” battle with the cat, who we soon find out is a prominent witch named Grimmalkin. He stabs the cat and kills it, but while it is flung back through the air, “such a sight of Cats” appear and attack the boy riding behind him. Quickly, the boy is “killed and eaten up.” During this portion of the story, Baldwin’s margin comments are also somber: “Cats did kill and eat a man.”

After the narrative is concluded, Streamer and his companion who told him this story engage in a discussion about bodies as magical spaces. As the conversation progresses, we see a familiar comedic framework. They begin with a discourse on the cat’s hunger and the viability of it eating two large farm animals. Streamer’s unnamed fellow storyteller suggests that maybe the cat did not actually eat all of the meat, but “although she [Grimmalkin] asked all, but took her choice and left the rest by as wee see in the feeding of many things.” With this neutral-toned logic, the storyteller is suggesting that the cat asked for it all, but possibly only for the purpose of making the best selection of meat, rather than eating it all. Then, for striking joke, he says, “Which Pope all things considered,

40 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 33.
41 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 33.
42 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 33.
43 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 34.
devoureth more at every mele then Grimmalkin did at her last supper,” (MC “The Pope a great waster”). Feeling satisfied with that conclusion, their concern then turns to the cat’s connection with a witch’s soul, and specifically that “Witches may take on them the liknes of other things” and “that a Cat hath nine lives, that is to say, a witch may take on her a Cats body nine times.”

While Streamer becomes further intrigued by Grimmalkin, who we find out is also the leader of cats and a witch known everywhere, not just in Ireland, he shares his initial impression that “a woman being so large a bodie, should strain her into the body of a Cat or into that forme.” The unnamed friend finds this hilarious and makes a joke about Streamer’s intelligence because the serious magic at hand is obvious to him. In this moment, he mocks Streamer’s attempt and says that “one would creep into his mothers belly again: that other would bring Christe out of Heaven to thrust him into a peece of bread.” This humor is immediately followed by his instructional and serious explanation for witch to cat transformation: “For although witches may take upon them Cats bodies, or alter the shape of their or other bodies yet this is not doon by putting their owne bodies therinto but either by bringing their soules for the time out of their bodies and putting them in the other, or by deluding the sight and fantasies of the seers.” Here he makes clear to Streamer that the transformation is not a mundane body contortion, but a serious and powerful magical transformation. Accordingly, Baldwin’s margin comments for these portions of the dialog include “transsubstantiationers destroy christes manhood” (next to Streamer’s and his companion’s comedic retort), followed by, “How Witches transforem their shape” (instructional tone to accompany the latter portion of the discourse).

44 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 34.
45 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 35.
46 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 35.
47 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 35.
48 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 35-6.
49 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 35.
There is a third and final scene to the kern’s story, which we have not yet discussed because the post-kern-story dialog above will work to clarify it. While Streamer and the unnamed kern-story narrator are discussing witch transformation, it becomes clear that only some cats are diabolical because they are transformed witches, and further, that non-witch cats are naturally logical and have language:

why then sir (said I [Streamer]) doo you think that naturall cats have wit & that they understand one an other, what else maister Streamer (quod he) there is no kinde of sensible creatures but have reason and understanding whereby (in their kinde) eche understand eth other, & doo therin some points so excel...men soules went into beasts, & beasts souls into men, and every one according to his desert in his former body.\(^{50}\)

Thus, “naturall cats” having their own society, at least in this folklore collection, is just how things are and instead of being associated with magic have become a matter of natural science, but as we will see soon, being able to understand the language of cats, since they are another “kinde,” is not only a magical experience, but also one that requires a great deal of magical preparation. This cultural complexity is essential for our interpretation of the humor in the scene that takes place after Grimmalkin’s murder.

The “Kern” was able to narrowly escape and return safely to his home, even after the boy was killed. He lived in a different town, and thus, his travel to it signals a new space and new cycle of transformation. He enters his home and takes off his protective clothing, described in detail as armor, which initially seems like a neutrally toned and explanatory part of the story. He then sits down at his table and begins to tell his wife what had happened to him and the boy. At this moment, his wife’s six-month old kitten overhears their conversation and interrupts them: “‘hast thou killed Grimmalkin?’ & therwith she plunged in his face, and with her teeth took him by the throte, & ere that shee could be taken away: she had strangled him” (MC “A Kitling killeth the Kern that slew Grim.”).\(^{51}\) This kitten is not described as demonic or a witch;

\(^{50}\) Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 38.

\(^{51}\) Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 33.
instead, she is portrayed as a normal house cat whose “labor to
revenge her [Grimmalkin’s] death” is the action (MC “Bees love
and obey their governour”). The magic of her understanding the
man’s language is announced through the humor of her attack. The
size of an animal, when imbued with diabolical magic, did not have
proportionate power limitations, but in this instance, the attacker is
a house kitten. Thus, her attack on the full grown man, right after he
takes off his armor, could have been seen as comical (MC “the kerns
armour”). Additionally, the socio-political analogy of bees from the
margin comment signals the presence of comedy within the action.

Once the humor ceases, the serious implications of the cat’s
language ability is extended. It ends with one of Streamer’s
company saying that he heard about Grimmalkin’s death from a
friend who also had a cat (MC “A very straunge coniecture”) who
was spreading the news all the way to the cats in London (MC
“Each realme knoweth what is doon in all other”). As such, the
focus is redirected back to testimonies of the cat society. Between
the moment of comedy and the end of this section, we transition
from rural Ireland back to urban London, and leave Streamer in
his bedroom, as he tells us “this former talke so troubled me that
I could think of nothing else” - seriously contemplating magic.

After hearing multiple cat stories, Streamer closely watches a group
of cats who meet under a “dead mens quarters” and cry below his
bedroom window. As he does this, he gets increasingly inspired to
find a way to understand them and begins to guess at what they are
discussing: “for one Cat groning as a Beare dooth, when Doges
be let slip to him, throwled out so lowe and loud a base, that in
comparison of an other Cat which crying like a yung Childe sqelled

52 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 33.
53 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 33.
54 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 39.
55 It seems the Irish can understand their Irish cats without a “Philtre,” but as Streamer
struggles to understand the cats of London, it becomes clear that he needs a lot of magic to
do so. The text does not address this in any way.
out the shriking treble…Wherfore to the intent I might perceive the better the cause of their assembly, and by their getsures, perceive parte of their meaning.”56 These observations of cat persona and language use frame our next episode of humor. Streamer then decides that a cat is meowing (he cannot directly translate their language yet) “as it were laughing at somewhat which they heard the other Cat declare.”57 The cat laughing, and us laughing at Streamer’s premature guess, announces the beginning of section two.

After section one’s storytelling action, Streamer cannot sleep and instead “lay devising” a plan to understand the world of cats. He then realizes that he “had read in Altus Magnus works, a way how to be able to understand birds voyces.”58 Our external narrator, as expected, underscores Streamer’s research as humorous by repeating the subject “birds” in a margin comment “How to understand Birds.” This mocking margin reminds us that the goal is to understand cats, not birds. Regardless of the incongruity in his plan, Streamer still uses the bird guide from Magnus, who he does not understand in more ways than one. 59 As explained the editor’s introduction, “Streamer’s carrying out of the instructions of Albertus Magnus is studiously wrong…Albertus Magnus’ instructions require that the practitioner go hunting on ‘S’ Judas day’ and collect certain parts of animals. Streamer goes hunting on the wrong day; but then he does not hunt, he begs promiscuously for animals and parts of animals from hunters;”60 these errors are quite amusing indeed and commence a tediously long and humorous transformation of his body, and other spaces along the way.

Streamer briefly, and poorly, summarizes the “Philtre” recipe he is endeavoring to create as follows: “take two in thy company, and upon

56 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 39.
57 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 40.
58 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 40.
59 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 40.
60 Holden’s Introduction: Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 16.
Simon and Judes day early in the morning, get thee with Hounds into a certain wood, and the first beast that thou meetest take and prepare with the hart of a Fox, and thou shalt have thy purpose, and who so ever thou kisest shall understand them as well as thy self."

Streamer, apparently unafraid of “an experiment,” travels into a forest, a notoriously magical and dangerous space in both early modern and medieval European culture, to gather ingredients. The joke is again enhanced through the margin comment which also draws our attention to the fact that Streamer proceeds alone -without any hunting dogs or the two companions mentioned: MC “Men and dogs fraid out of their wits in prooving an experiment.”

While in the forest, he begins asking around for animals, which engenders a humorous encounter with a group of hunters. Naturally, the hunters he meets get nervous about his intentions, but Streamer ensures his listeners that the hunters are the problem, rather than himself: “I would shew you my minde of these wicked superstitious observation of foolish hunters, for they be like as seemeth me to the papists, which for speaking of good and trewe words: punish good & honest men. Are not, Apes, Owles, Cuckowes, Beares and Urchins Gods good creatures? Why then is it not lawful to name them?”

When he says “good and honest” while evoking God, Streamer addresses the insinuation that he is engaging in diabolical magic. The differentiation is important. He clearly considers his magic natural or common, and thus, not needing to be subject to the judgement of the hunters. For this portion of the text, the editor for

61 Holden’s Footnote on this scene provides a viable source for reading a parody of “William Copland’s The Boke of Secretes of Albartus Magnus, and provides an enhancement of our discussion: “Associate with the two fellows…. & go into a certayne woode with dogges as too hunte…” Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 41.

62 Voltmer, “The Judge’s,” 160: However, this notion can be observed in an array of texts from articles on medieval culture to Shakespeare plays like Titus Andronicus or A Midsummer Night’s Dream. For more on the earliest forest connotations consider Wilson and Southam’s text The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-modern Europe, 2000.

63 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 41.

64 Baldwin, Beware The Cat, 41: “I asked them if they had seen any where any hedgehog that morning…”

65 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 41.
our edition includes a footnote explaining that “Urchins: hedgehogs or porcupines, [are] traditionally associated with magic,” so the superstitiousness of the hunters is a question of Streamer’s motives afterall, creating dramatic irony in the fact that Streamer considers the hunters “wicked.” Also, Streamer’s comparison of the hunters to papists is echoed immediately by the margin comment “Supersticious hunters ar kin to papists,” doubling the comedic value of the scene.

Regardless of this awkward encounter, the hunters eventually decide to give Streamer a fox to hunt with, which helped him finally get a hedgehog. However, during the scene of the Hedgehog’s capture, the fox tries to take his belt of dead animals forcing him to kill it, which stops the humorous introduction to the forest space. Though the fox’s wit could be read as jocular, the death of these animals is addressed with a specific ritual, and the space is subsequently magical. Specifically, Streamer recites incantations for a serious purpose. For the fox he explains, “I killed him saying, Iavol sheleg hutotheca Iiscud and to make up the messe, brought him hom with the rest,” and for the hedgehog’s death he relates, “I killed straight with my knife, saying, Shavol swashmenth gorgona Iiscud & and with the other beasts hung him at my girdle.” As we can now expect, the respective margin comment follows this tone, and explains, “Albertus saith if a man when he prepareth any Medicin tell allowed why he maketh it: it wil be of more force. This concludes the hunting scene, and the new space is Streamer’s home where he begins to lay out the animal bodies.

Streamer’s friend, Thomas, visits unexpectedly during the preparation of the potion ingredients, ironically, with a dead cat. The cat had been trapped and killed because it was “doing evill turnnes,” and Thomas brought it so they could eat it for dinner. However, Streamer also needed this cat for his magic recipe, and, likely feeling protective after his interaction with the hunters, he decides to lie about this. He

66 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 41.
67 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 42.
68 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 42.
confesses to his audience that he “had taken some of the greace the
inwards and the hed, to make (as I made him [Thomas] beeleeve) a
medicine for the gout” (MC “Cats greace is good for the gout”). The
humor here is intensified by Streamer’s claim to be honest at the
start of the scene: “I will hide nothing from you, [to the people he is
telling his story to], but declare from point to point how I behaved
my self bothe in making & taking of my Philtre…” Though funny,
this claim is not entirely false because he is not, presumably, lying
to us; instead, he lied to Thomas by saying that he only needs the cat
fat for a gout cure. Though this level of audience involvement is a
product of Baldwin’s social context, it adds richness to our analysis
of intent. Streamer reports that “Thomas was departed with his
Cat: I shut my Chamber doors to me, and flaied my Irchin, wishing
oft for Doctor Nicholas or some other expert Phisition to mak the
disseccion, for the better knowledge of the Anotomy” (MC “A solitary
man is either a god or a beast”). In other words, it is laughable
that Streamer is nervous about how to cut up the animals. However,
this humor, on cue, transforms his house into the now private, and
secret, “Philtre” making space of magic; he begins to make an
application for his ears and a lozenge out of herbs and animals.

Before Streamer steps out to the street to test his creation’s ability
to translate cats, we discover the lozenge contains cat feces because
he “took the cat the foxes and the kites out of the wine [which was
boiling to create a jelly], and put them in a Morter & added to them
of new cats dung an ounce of musterd seed garlike and pepper…
made losenges and trociskes” (MC “The wholsomest things are not
always most toothsome”). While we laugh at the thought of “cats
dung” being “toothsome,” Streamer signals that he is departing
from his private space and into the public street: “…I took an ounce
of Alkakengy in powder…and heating in a frying pan my pillows
afresh & laid them to mine eares, and in a boxe, I went out among
the servants…” Now in the public space, Streamer aims to test

69 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 42.
70 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 41.
71 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 42.
72 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 44. Italics added.
73 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45.
his hard work and hopes to hear a cat speak as translated by the ear “pillows,” which he is wearing. This sequence concludes a space transformation cycle, but instantly we enter a new one. While waiting in the street, Streamer gets annoyed by “a shrewd boy… that needs would knowe what was in my boxe, and I to sause him after his sawsines;” out of spite, Streamer convinces the insolent boy to eat one of his “pilles” (MC “The ungrations should be ungratiusly served”). He tells the boy that by eating it he will “understand wonders: but also propheeye after them” (MC Straunge things are delectable). As the boy takes the lozenge, he “began to spittle and spit, saying by Gods bones it is a Cats toord. At this the company laughed apace, & so did I [Streamer]…verifying it to be as he said”

Directly after this laughter has concluded, Streamer takes his own lozenge to show the boy that “it was not evil,” and the serious magic advances: “While this pastime endured [eating his lozenge in the street]: me thought I heard one [a cat] cry with a loud voice, what Isegrim, and therefore I asked whose name Isegrim, saying that one did call him, but they [the people around him] said that they knew none of that name, nor heard any that did call. No quoth I (for it called stil) hear you no body?”

Streamer can now hear the cats, and has heard a cat specifically say a name which no bystander heard. He realizes the magical concoction has worked and goes back to his “chamber;” he says, “for it was past nine of the clock, and because the houre of Saturnus colde dominion approached: I put on my gown & got me privately to the place in the which I had vewed the Cats…”

For Streamer, the magic is that he can now understand their language, which leads him into section three of Beware the Cat, when he fully emerges into their world by spying on a cat-court case (MC “Many noises in the night which all men hear not”).

74 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45.
75 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45. Italics added.
76 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45.
77 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45.
78 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45.
79 Baldwin, Beware the Cat, 45.
80 Baldwin, Beware The Cat, 46.
Thus, the scene concludes with a serious tone and a continuation of the magical plot. Section three opens with a full moon. As we have seen, conceptions of magic are portrayed as spaces of social tension and serious intersections of early modern culture and medieval folklore. This serious magic is offered through the stories in *Beware the Cat* via comedic spatial transformations. Many scenes throughout the first two sections begin with a context of place and a foreshadowing of magic to come. This leads readers into Baldwin’s witty surprises as spaces take their magical shape. After the comedy disappears, we are left with a profound sense of what early modern audiences might have discussed insofar as their history with medieval magic and their experience with folk tales. In future research, the cultural significance of this text may be expanded through the exploration of the relationships between women and cats and the final section’s cat-court hearing as possibly significant to studies on gender representation in the early modern period. However, the question I want to leave you with now is this: How are magic spaces signaled in early modern folklore? “… there be many strange humours in many mens [people’s] heads”81

*Beware the Cat* and Contemporary Literature: Lilliputians and Cats and Bears, Oh My!

As mentioned in this article’s context sections, William P. Holden’s work compares Baldwin’s *Beware the Cat* to Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, based on his reading of a representational governance critique. As a contrasting supplement, I would like to briefly parallel *Beware the Cat* with a piece of short fiction from nineteenth-century American humorist Thomas Bangs Thorpe, “The Big Bear of Arkansas” (1843). Thorpe’s short fiction takes place on a steamboat floating down the Mississippi River, a public space with limited access, much like Baldwin’s room in the King’s court. The external narrator, a city-slicker, intellectual type, is taking note of what becomes the internal story and talks to readers directly. The internal narrative frame is formed by a brutish and boisterous fellow

81 Baldwin, *Beware The Cat*, 43.
boat-passenger whose personality differs greatly from the outside observer - sound familiar? The internal story tells of a phenomenon with a particular bear, told with a mix of genre elements including romance and realism, which occurs in rural Arkansas. This man could certainly be our nineteenth-century Streamer and Arkansas his wild Ireland. This modern Streamer then delivers what sounds like pieced together mini stories based on animal magic as a cohesive personal narrative to a group of peers gathered around him. Finally, just as the external narrator of *Beware the Cat* applies authority to an obviously clownish character, the same occurs for “The Big Bear.”

Our voice in the margins of Baldwin’s text concludes, “I knew these things wil seem mervelous to many men, that cats should understand and speak, have a governour among them selues, and be obedient to their Lawes, and were it not for the approved authoritie of the Extaticall Author of whom I heard it: I should my self be as doutful as they.”

Similarly Thorpe’s external narrator observes, “when this story was ended, our hero sat some minutes with his auditors, in a grave silence; I saw there was a mystery to high connected with the bear… It was also evident that there was some superstitious awe connected with the affair… I was put ashore at my place of destination, and I can only follow with the reader, in imagination, our Arkansas friend…”

The intersections mentioned here could become a separate article; to summarize, Baldwin and Thorpe share a non-canonical presence in literary study plus their group story-telling mode, vacillating dialect, amusingly crude interior story narration, and frame narrative structure, make them a captivating match. These aspects also demonstrate how *Beware the Cat*’s scope exceeds its allegorical framework.

82 Baldwin, *Beware the Cat*, 62, Italics added.

83 Thorpe, “The Big Bear of Arkansas,” 141. Violence warning: Thorpe’s “The Big Bear of Arkansas” engages racist language and scenarios. Additionally, this story is insensitive to nonhuman subjects (it goes far beyond Streamer’s vulgar “Philtre” making). On the same token, this work may provide useful historical context for eco-criticism projects; Thorpe’s stories tend to focus on the gross and excessive taking of animal life which aligns with actual decreases in animal populations during the nineteenth century (the history of the black bear population in Arkansas, for example, speaks directly to the fiction; there are also stories about bees and alligators).

84 Thorpe, “The Big Bear of Arkansas,” 135: “I read in history that varmints have their fat season, and their lean season. This is not the case in Arkansaw, feeding as they do upon the spontenacious productions of the sile, they have one continued fat season the year round; though in winter things in this way is rather more greasy….”
Ashley Jeanette Ecklund is a PhD student in English Literature at the University of Oregon where she teaches writing composition. Previously, she worked as an Academic Advisor for the University of Colorado (Boulder and Denver) with an MA focused on higher education administration (from California State University, Chico). Her work as a PhD student includes digital and spatial humanities, translation studies, Hauntologies, post-structuralism and critical theory. Though much of her course work has centered on the early modern period, her dissertation topic is heading towards twentieth-century short fiction.

Bibliography


The Fable as a Global Genre:
Marie de France, Ulrich Bonerius, Don Juan Manuel,
and Kalila and Dimna

Albrecht Classen
University of Arizona

As much as recent scholarship has tried to develop a new approach toward world or global literature, the essential problem continues that in those efforts simply writers and poets from the various countries and continents are placed side by side without any consideration of inter- and transdisciplinarity, if not shared meaning and critical exchange. Drawing from the tradition of medieval fable literature, however, we face a truly productive approach in recognizing what global literature could really entail since the various writers across the continents addressed, broadly speaking, the same issues and fundamentally agreed on the critical values in all of human life. Studying fables within the framework of world literature opens intriguing perspectives because differences in the use of language, the cultural framework, the religious background, and the literary sources employed by the various writers basically fall away. This allows us to recognize a universal discourse on the essential concerns in all of human life, whether we look at Persian, French, German, or Spanish fables. Vices and virtues have been with people throughout time across the world, so it is little wonder that fable authors can be identified as some of the most important contributors to global literature.

Globalism Past and Present

‘Global,’ a very fashionable term today, means that humankind at large slowly but surely realizes that we are all living under similar or even the same conditions and either profit or suffer from them and can no longer hide within our parochial territory as a safe haven from dangers coming from outside. In order to survive here on earth as the human race we must accept the fact that we all contribute both negatively and positively to this world, and in order to preserve it for future generations we all must do our part and help. I like to think that even this short article will support those efforts by way of raising our historical-cultural awareness, understanding, and sensitivity concerning universal aspects that have been relevant for all people here on earth throughout time, whether they knew or accepted it or not.
Undoubtedly, our generation is not at all the first one to realize that; other cultures had already developed extensive perspectives about themselves and the many peoples and societies beyond them. To be sure, the Romans had entertained a kind of global economic and cultural network and indirectly had contacts even with the Chinese; the Vikings during the early Middle Ages developed their own global outreach, traveling, looting, settling, fighting, and meeting people from Newfoundland all the way to the Black Sea, Russia, and Persia; since the seventh century the Muslim world opened up global dimensions in their world exploration/conquest; and the Christian Europeans created their unique universal perspective since the end of the fifteenth century.¹

Currently, a global market economy seems to connect people across the world, which is additionally promoted by global tourism, but we tend to forget that a truly global approach in our life would entail much more profound human interconnectivity creating a sense of shared values and ideals pertaining to, e.g., justice and freedom, aesthetics and spirituality, social responsibility and embracing the human community.² By focusing on medieval fable literature from several different language areas, this paper intends to demonstrate that a global society has actually always existed predicated on fundamental values and ideals shared by people across all borders and boundaries.³ Irrespective of religious or ideological differences, all great world leaders have consistently subscribed to those universal concepts, whether we think of Lao Tze, Confucius, Gautama Buddha, Socrates, Jesus Christ, Marcus Aurelius, ¹ Hansen, The Year 1000.

² These issues have already been discussed by many intellectuals; see, for instance, James, Globalism, Nationalism; James and Steger, Globalization and Culture; see also the online article, http://www.polyarchy.org/essays/english/globalism.html; Nye, “Globalism Versus Globalization. https://www.theglobalist.com/globalism-versus-globalization/.

³ Aldridge, The Reemergence of World Literature. By contrast, Capoferro, “Fables and the Fantastic,” 1605-10, proves to be little insightful because he quickly sidetracks the entire issue by sliding entirely into the world of fictional literature and without paying attention to fables and to the medieval tradition.
Saladin, Mahatma Gandhi, Dalai Lama, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, or Ruth Bader Ginsberg. On a more esoteric level, virtually the entire intellectual elite across the globe today is in agreement that we live in a heliocentric universe, that the earth is ca. 13 billion years old, that evolution is the fundamental mechanism bringing about constant change in the cycle of life, and that the ongoing robotization and digitization is affecting the entire world population, though not every group or individual at the same pace and with the same intensity. What will this transhumanism mean and bring for us in the next decades?4

Global is Human

Global factors have thus always determined human existence, and we profit the most from all historical research if we accept the direct connections between our world and that from the past in a universal framework since there is no guarantee at all that old foes of human life will not come back and exert their impact on people around the globe.5 Dealing with evil, as Beowulf did with the dragon (ca. 700), engaging with love and marriage as Marie de France did in her lais (ca. 1200), searching for honor as Gawain did in the anonymous Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (ca. 1370), facing death as the Plowman did in Johannes von Tepl’s Plowman from Bohemia (ca. 1400), laughing about human beings as Sebastian Brant did in his Ship of Fools (1494), or searching for the inner truth as Dr. Faustus did in the anonymous novel from 1587, represents essential tasks we in the Humanities are asked to handle and to come to terms with in a critical, hopefully also comparative fashion. True literature knows no barriers, is not limited by linguistic hurdles, and is not hampered by religious or political differences because it addresses fundamentally


5 Joseph P. Byrne, The Black Death; Pest: Die Geschichte eines Menschheitstraumas; Aberth, Plagues in World History; The Oxford Handbook of Global Studies; Headrick, Humans Versus Nature.
human concerns and the critical issues determining all. But how do we practically engage with the global through literary means without becoming victims of almost meaningless universalism?

All existence has always been subject to the same forces within the same framework of birth and death, irrespective of the cultural conditions, rituals, ceremonial criteria, etc. The rest falls into the categories of culture, political systems, and religion, i.e., the human-made supra-structures, but even in those areas there are universal similarities which allow us to move easily from the present to the past and back again. What has been most challenging for people throughout time has been their desire to determine, structure, regulate, or guide the human interactions by means of laws, rules, principles, norms, ideals, and values. No society exists without those, but every stricture has also provoked counter-movements, whether we call them illegal and criminal or revolutionary and liberating. In short, the issue depends on the interaction between the individual and the collective. Naturally, this always has led to frictions, conflicts, even violence.

Tragically, of course, when looking back, we also witness extensive abuse of laws and the rule of the authorities throughout time, if we think of the Inquisition, the witch craze, the Holocaust committed by the Nazis under Hitler, and the Holodomor by the Russian Communists under Stalin. Humankind does not seem to grow up and shed the worst of its own inclinations. Instead, (no) thanks to globalism, the necessary weapons to cause massive damage and death to a people (genocide) are shipped all over the world, securing huge profits for the dealers and bringing countless suffering to the victims.

Let us then be clear, literature and the Humanities unequivocally prove to be essential platforms for the exploration and determination of what constitutes to be human, whether we are concerned with the quest for God, for the self, for culture, for love, for happiness, or with the quest for the meaning of life and death. The desire to realize global perspectives seems to miss this point to some extent when conceived only as an additive process, and yet might be right on target,

depending on how we approach the issue, especially as integratively and communicatively as possible. Creating an epistemological tapestry with countless threads and knots taken from every continent might not be the best approach at first, particularly because this could result in an incohesive patchwork without much meaning. By contrast, focusing on what appears to have been universally shared concerns and efforts by people across time and space opens significant windows toward a meaningful global analysis predicated at least on some interdisciplinary, if not transdisciplinary methodology.

The Fable as a Global Player

For this paper, I want to focus on one literary genre which appears to have been highly popular in many different cultures both past and present, the fable, and which thus could serve well as a foundation for global explorations within the humanities. While the western world was deeply influenced by Aesop and his creations, the eastern world, and then also African or American cultures, witnessed their own compositions of fables. In fact, we can talk here about a universal phenomenon, whether the individual poets knew each other or not insofar as fables address the fundamental human conditions which are shared across the world and throughout times. The common values and ideals of fables have always been those that make constructive social interactions possible by exposing human frailty and shortcomings. Curiously, early members of the Catholic Church had formulated this already in very powerful terms by identifying a list of seven deadly sins (Pope Gregory I, 590), which are, unfortunately, the same the human race continues to suffer from until today, and the seven virtues


9 Modernism, Postcolonialism, and Globalism; World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Globality; see also, regarding the great relevance of international organizations to address global issues, Rohac, In Defense of Globalism. I have engaged with the same issue in another study, “Persia in German Baroque Literature.”
Prudentius, d. 410) – our universal human ideals and values. Preachers, confessors, and other figures of high prestige and authority have mostly controlled the power to address those sins directly, but most writers need to resort to a literary veil to protect themselves from the authorities. The fable, predicated on speaking and acting animals, has always served exceedingly well to formulate criticism, mockery, protest, or warnings without facing immediate counter-attacks. Globalism, here more defined as humanistic universalism, finds its most vivid and valuable expression in fable literature, whether the individual poets knew of each other’s works or not. While the teachings of the Church were of a highly theological nature, the fables appealed to ordinary people and simplified the issues through the use of practical examples. In order to build on a small scale a basic model for how we can meaningfully pursue global literature already in the Middle Ages, I will subsequently examine the fables by the Anglo-Norman Marie de France, the Swiss-German Ulrich Bonerius, by the Castilian prince Don Juan Manuel, and the famous collection of medieval Indian (Panchatantra) later translated into the Persian fables, *Kalila and Dimna*. We find many other fable collections also in Arabic, such as *Marzubannama* by Marzuban (ca. 1220) or *Fakihat al-Khulafa’ wa Mufakahat al-Zurafa* by Ahmad ibn Arabshah (1389–1450), and we could easily widen our perspective by including fables also from other cultures and languages throughout the world. In essence, however, the fundamental concerns by all those poets from the classical to the medieval period, and from then until today, do not seem to have changed profoundly; the issue always is focused on human virtues and vices.

10 Wagner, *The Seven Liberal Arts*; Rubin and Sells, “Fable,” 400–01; Blöcker, *Studien zur Ikonographie*; see also the very useful, even if not fully scholarly, article online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins (last accessed on Jan. 20, 2021).

11 Coenen, *Die Gattung Fabel*.

12 As to the genre of the European fable, see Dithmar, *Die Fabel: Geschichte, Struktur, Didaktik*; Coenen, *Die Gattung Fabel*. But, to reemphasize this important point, fables were written all over the world; see, for instance, Singh, *The Rani of Jhansi*; Elswit, *The East Asian Story Finder*; Eberhard, *Chinese Fables & Parables*, 15.
Fables as Timeless and Universal Literature

Fables have been recognized as critically important contributions to literature for a long time, and we would carry coals to Newcastle if we were to review and discuss the scholarly discourse on this genre going back well more than two hundred years by now once again. A modern definition of the fable, concise and yet comprehensive, would be: “A brief verse or prose narrative of description, whose characters may be animals . . . or inanimate objects . . . acting like humans; or, less frequently, personified abstractions . . . or human types, whether literal . . . or metaphorical . . . . The narrative or description may be preceded, followed, or interrupted by a separate, relatively abstract statement of the fable’s theme or thesis.”¹³ Fables have been composed in all of world literature and have constituted a major genre because they contain a significant didactic message which is regularly contained within an entertaining narrative about human misfortune, success, failures, misery, happiness, ignorance and stupidity, and intelligence and wit.¹⁴ As Ian Gordon formulates it,

In broad terms, a beast fable, or apologue as it is occasionally called (see separate entry), is a form of allegory. It tells a story on one level which clearly points to further meaning on another level. The animals, or inanimate things, which act or speak in the story at the narrative level, represent a different meaning when their actions, or conversations, are interpreted by the reader at a human level. It is of the essence that the classical, or Aesopian, fable should be short, vivid, and to the point. One of its principal features is that its allegorical meaning conveys some sort of moral, social, or political lesson. The author describes animals or inanimate things conversing in human speech in order to illustrate some precept, such as prudence. Such precepts are usually more effective when pithy.¹⁵

¹³ Rubin and Sells, “Fable,” (see note 10), 400. See also the detailed and precise article “Fabel” in Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch, 254-55, which comes along with an extensive bibliography

¹⁴ Blackham, The Fable as Literature; Dicke and Grumbmüller, Die Fabeln des Mittelalters, 60; see now also Caspi and Greene, Parables. For a collection of Chinese fables, see Davis and Chow-Leung, Chinese Fables and Folk Stories; for a short selection of African fables, see https://www.worldoftales.com/African_folktales.html#gsc.tab=0 (last accessed on July 20, 2020). For Arabic fables, see Marzubannama by Marzuban (ca. 1220) or Fakihat al-Khulafa’ wa Mufakahat al-Zurafa’ by Ahmad ibn Arabshah (1389–1450).

Some of the most influential and popular fables ever written, apart from those by Aesop, originated in India, compiled in the collection known as *Kalila and Dimna*, or the *Bidpai Fables*, from around the third century B.C.E., which I will discuss more at length below.

The available corpus is, of course, so huge that we could not even do justice to it in an entire monograph. Instead, the purpose here is to observe a selection of commonly shared ideals and values and to identify hence some of the crucial reasons why particularly fables spread so much across the world and appealed to audiences throughout time. The fable as such can thus be identified as a contributor to globalism. In order to illustrate this phenomenon, I will focus on three European collections of fables from the Middle Ages and one collection from medieval India.

**Marie de France**

Each of our source texts has already been extensively discussed by scholarship, so it will not be necessary to go into every detail once again. Instead, the focus will rest on the phenomenon that these fables, irrespective of their specific historical and cultural context, fundamentally addressing universal issues critically important in all of human life. The subsequent selection of examples can only be subjective, but the overall conclusions will allow us to comprehend more in detail the global ethical, moral, political, and philosophical concerns which she shared with other fable authors. I will deliberately focus on some of her fables that have mostly escaped scholars’ attention, but I will argue that they are just as valuable within any humanistic context as countless other fables by authors across languages and cultures.

In “Des lievres e des reines” (no. 22), the hares make up their mind to leave their home because they are too much bothered and endangered by dogs and people. But when they get to a pond with frogs which all have jumped into the water for safety, they realize the foolishness of

their efforts. They are only aiming for a pipe dream, hoping to find safety in a utopian world, and yet such an ideal existence would not be possible to come by: “For such a land you’ll never see / Where one has not a thing to fear” (28–29). In her epimythium – a very common narrative feature of fables at large – Marie remarks that life is never going to be absolutely safe and secure, free from all toil and struggle. She does not address the issue of political freedom, certainly an important topic in many other of her fables, but she warns her readers about leaving their homes just because they imagine that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence – already a proverbial statement. Moreover, as we are told, life is determined by constant endeavors, conflicts, miscommunication, and danger, but running away from the challenges will not solve them at all.

In “De la chalve suriz” (no. 23), the issue focuses on the problem of treason, certainly a universal issue dealt with by every society in the world with harsh counter-measures. When a war breaks out between the animals and the birds, the bat watches from the sideline to determine quickly who the prospective victor would be. Since the animals at first seem to enjoy superiority, the bat joins them, until the fortune of war tips with the birds overwhelming their opponents. The bat immediately abandons the animals and wants to be part of the birds, which they observe with disgust, so they bring the bat to a trial, whereupon the Creator condemns the bat never to be able to see either animals or birds, or to see the daylight in the first place. As the narrator then emphasizes, traitors deserve to be treated like that, receiving punishment for their lack of loyalty. Specifically, any vassal ought to observe his pledge of commitment to the lord and should not waver at all; the punishment for treason as in this case would be the loss of honor and possessions (61). Shame and ill repute would be the outcome of such a lukewarm supporter who would always look out only for his own advantage and thus would betray all values. We do not need to go into further details or to look for historical, political, or military examples to determine

the extremely negative evaluation of treason in all human societies, so it does not come as a surprise that Marie also voiced her clear condemnation of this ethical and political crime through this fable.

Very similar to this case proves to be the next one where a widow immediately betrays her deceased husband whom she pretends to mourn next to his recently dug grave. When another man appears who needs her help to cover for his crime – he had cut down a relative from the gallows in order to bury that man so that the family shame would no longer be visible, although the king had threatened the same punishment if anyone dared to do so – she falls for his erotic seduction, offers him to dig up her dead husband and to hang him in the other man’s stead. Although not a fable in the narrow sense of the word, Marie’s text underscores the same concept, her harsh condemnation of those who betray all trust placed in them.

The basic plot can be traced through many channels back to the antique account of the “Widow of Ephesus” by Petronius (Satyricon xi; first century C.E.), but there are many examples in medieval historical accounts confirming the common interest to protect families from public shaming by way of hiding the corpse of an executed person. Although Marie perpetuates here the ancient stereotype of the unreliable wife, certainly a misogynist concept, and this even by a female writer, the narrative fits well into her general concern about treason as a grave danger to the social, ethical, and moral cohesion of any society.

A most remarkable case proves to be “Del lu e de l’escarbot” (no. 65) in which a beetle crawls into a wolf’s anus and makes him totally terrified. Subsequently, a war is declared between the four-legged animals and the insects, which quickly turns out victorious for the latter as soon as a wasp has stung the hart in the side. The narrator emphasizes that the fable teaches us to respect the simple folks who, when amassed, can easily gain the upper hand: “The lesser know best how, indeed, / To aid themselves in times of need” (59–60) – certainly a stunning comment from a writer who

herself belonged to the highest echelons of medieval feudal society!

Finally, in “Del leün malade, del cerf, e del gupil” (no. 71), a sick ion is advised to eat a deer’s heart to recover. While the deer manages two times to get away from being killed, it is no longer lucky the third time. The focus, however, rests on the fox who secretly eats the heart itself and then denies it all when a court is assembled to determine the culprit. The fox defends itself successfully by insisting that a deer who would be caught and killed for the lion’s sake despite previous warnings could not have had a heart. This excuse appears acceptable to the lion, so the fox goes scot-free, which leads the narrator to formulate this epimythium: “The wise man has more acumen. / His talk deceives the other, who / Believes the smart man’s lies are true” (72–74).

On the one hand, the criticism targets the foolish deer who comes back to the very same court where they want to kill it; on the other, the fable exposes the fox for its deceptiveness and smart talk which helps it to get out of even the worst possible scenario. Although Marie employs the term “sage” for the fox and people like it, she really means to condemn the false talkers and liars who know how to turn everything around by creating, what is now the modern term, fake news or fake accounts, which thus gets them off the hook, although they are completely guilty.

There are many other fables in which the poet warns her audience about foolishness, ignorance, arrogance, and plain stupidity, and presents cases where individuals do not want to listen to advice and do not take any precaution in plain sight of mortal danger, such as in “De la bisse e de sun feon” (no. 92). The fawn does not want to pay attention to its mother’s warning because it does not understand the hunter’s preparation to kill them. The poet hence concludes: “For many men these words are apt: / Fools do not cry until they’re trapped. / When fools don’t heed what wisdom says, / They’re dupes of their own stupid ways” (33–36). And finally, at least for our discussion, in “Del gupil e del chat” (no. 99), a cat and a fox
spend time together, and the latter brags to the cat that it would know hundred tricks how to escape from the dogs. The cat admits knowing only one, which it then also applies immediately when the dogs chase after them, jumping into a thorn bush where it is safe.

The fox is lost, caught by the dogs, and the cat calls out to it in vain to resort to its wealth of strategies to get out of this calamity, but it is too late, especially because the fox had only bragged to the cat. For the narrator, the conclusion is quite obvious, and so for us. Liars cannot be trusted, and a “sage can trip them up, if he / But listens to them carefully” (43–44). But more importantly, which might actually go beyond the actual content of the fable, and yet holds absolutely true: “An honest man is held more true, / His words more often heeded, too, / More suasive in a legal case / Than anything a liar says” (45–48).

Before Marie concludes her collection with an epilogue, she also alerts her audience in “De la femme e de sa geline” (no. 103) that it would be in vain to try to change people’s nature, as illustrated by a hen which just needs to scratch in the ground to find some food even if its lady would place a basket filled with grain in front of it. Even if people were to gain many riches, as we learn from the epimythium, “And yet they cannot change, indeed, / Their nature or accustomed ways, / The lust within, for all their days” (24–26).

There are many more examples we could cite here to confirm that Marie’s fables emerge as a true treasure trove of universal truths, insights, and valuable advice. She has much to say about political injustice, dictatorship, even tyranny, she warns about injustice, unfairness, repression by the mighty and powerful, and she alerts her readers/listeners about the danger of individual foolishness, stupidity, and carelessness, and this in a dangerous world. If we did not know that she completed her collection sometime around 1190/1200, we could have easily dated her texts in modern times because her teachings are of timeless relevance and value.


20 While it would be impossible to engage with the large number of specialized studies on
We can identify some of the major classical and early medieval fable collections by Aesop, Phaedrus, Babrius, Avianus, the Romulus (later known as Isopets) as sources used by Marie, but many other oral folk tales and fables from around the by then known world might have influenced her as well.\(^{21}\) We can confirm solidly that she was an unabashed poetic voice who resolutely utilized the genre of the fable to express much sharp criticism of her contemporaries in their moral, ethical, spiritual shortcomings and in their failure to practice their mind more clearly. She also did not hesitate to voice strong opposition to the abuse of power by the high and mighty of her time, such as in “Del lu e de l’aïgnel” (no. 2), “De la suriz e de la reine” (no. 3), or “Del chien e de la berbiz” (no. 4).\(^{22}\) Wherever we turn in her collection of fables, we constantly discover a wise poet who appears to have had a very good comprehension of human nature and could speak about it in a way which proves to be understandable until today, where- and whoever we are.

**Ulrich Bonerius**

German scholarship tends to call this Bernese Dominican priest without the Latinizing ending of his name, Boner. He completed his *Der Edelstein* around 1350 and drew, very similar to Marie de France, from a variety of the same ancient sources, and then added Marie’s fables, see, especially Whalen, “‘Par ceste fable’: Fabliaux and Marie de France’s Isopet,” 517-32. Theoretical attempts to read race into Marie’s fables, as attempted recently by Annika Pattenaude, “Fabled Difference,” 143-58, do not make sense to me. She observes, correctly, that Marie identifies class differences, but she misreads those comments as a confirmation of the traditional class structure, which the poet does not reject, but also does not approve, depending on the circumstance. Race must enter the picture in this reading because it is allegedly always implicated in all medieval texts where power elements are reflected on. Theory here trumps critical philology.

\(^{21}\) Warnke, *Die Quellen*, 128. Based on the table of contents, he does not reach any significant alternative insights than Warnke; it remains obvious, but unprovable whether Marie had access to those non-European sources. Laid. *L’élaboration du recueil de fables de Marie de France*. Due to COVID-19, I could not consult the book, but see online: https://www.honorechampion.com/fr/index.php?controller=attachment&id_attachment=1904.

\(^{22}\) Classen, “The People Rise Up,” 17-29. See also the anthology *Medieval Political Theory: A Reader: The Quest for the Body-Politic*, 24-25.
a number of his own compositions, as the Anglo-Norman poet had done, into the fold of his exactly one hundred fables.\textsuperscript{23} Apart from parallels in the use of sources, Bonerius also addressed countless topics concerning human shortcomings, foibles, ignorance, and vices. It would be a disservice to future Medieval Studies to read either poet in isolation, especially because the didactic messages contained in this anthology of fables are of such a universal, timeless value and resonate across cultures and periods.\textsuperscript{24}

Drawing from the subheadings provided for each fable, we can quickly gain a clear understanding of the range of topics addressed in each fable: lack of understanding (no. 1), sloth and suffering (no. 2), slander (no. 3), unjust violence (no. 5), disloyalty and deception (no. 6), false witnesses (no. 7), evil company (no. 8), excessive greed (no. 9), thanklessness (no. 11), mockery by the fools (no. 14), evil advice (no. 17), foolish vanity (no. 18), lack of foresight (no. 23), distrust (no. 28), excessive fear (no. 29), roguery (no. 37), vanity (no. 39), hypocrisy (no. 43), lack of constancy (no. 44), arrogance (no. 46), treason (no. 55), self-love (no. 56), envy and hatred (no. 60), unjust punishment (no. 65), fake bragging (no. 68), and ingratitude (no. 71), etc.

There are many parallels with much of medieval didactic literature, whether we think of Thomasin of Zerklaere or Hugo of Trimberg, to mention just two of the most important Middle High German representatives active before this Swiss Dominican author.\textsuperscript{25} Bonerius fully embraced his self-set task to reach out to people, to present to them entertaining verse narratives, and thus to provide them with


\textsuperscript{25} Sowinski, Lehrhafte Dichtung des Mittelalters, 103; Dichtung und Didaxe, 9; Prodesse et delectare.
fundamental teachings, mostly hidden behind the veil of animal lore. There is much more, however, to each fable or account – sometimes, as in the case of Marie, there are not even animals involved. Bonerius has the individual animals interact with each other in complex debates, there tends to be considerable development in the narratives, and there is always an epimythium with the poet’s own interpretation.

Let us examine just a handful of his fables to gain a better understanding of this poet’s approach to the genre. In “Of a Snail and an Eagle” (no. 64), which is not included in Marie’s collection, a snail bitterly complains about its inability to fly, so it approaches an eagle to ask for help. But, instead of teaching the snail how to fly, the eagle only carries the snail in its talons, and once it is high up in the air, it lets it drop to the ground, which shatters the miserable snail’s shell, of course. It still can speak and voice what it has learned: “he who desires / what its nature does not grant, / must pay for it dearly” (p. 153, 37‒39). However, this is not the full outcome; instead, the poet intervenes, as is usually the case, and comments on several points. First, honor can only be achieved if the person desiring it invests a lot of effort. Second, the narrator himself confesses that he would never desire what nature cannot provide to him, which reminds us immediately of Reinhold Niebuhr’s famous “Serenity Prayer,” first coined in 1932.

Furthermore, Bonerius urges his audience to strive for “stable peace” (p. 153, v. 45) and to stay away from such adventurous but futile, if not foolish desires. Finally, addressing those who are stubborn enough to aim for skills that are really beyond their reach, he recommends that they ought to wait until they would have developed enough plumage to fly: “since no one without feathers should try to fly” (p. 153, v. 50). The mockery is obvious, but so is the serious warning not to go beyond one’s own nature, as the silly snail tried to do with disastrous consequences.

26 Goldberg, Geschichte des Gebets; see the outline online about various versions. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer#:~:text=It%20is%20commonly%20quoted%20as,wisdom%20to%20know%20the%20difference. The common formula is: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, / courage to change the things I can, / and wisdom to know the difference.”
A rather unusual, yet highly meaningful fable proves to be “Of the Sun and the Wind” (no. 66) where the two big forces, the Sun and the Wind, compete against each other trying to gain the recognition by Jupiter as to who is the mightier one. As the narrator emphasizes from the start, arrogance and pride motivated this fight and should never have erupted because no good result could be expected from it. The wind is the instigator of the challenge, and both then go to Jupiter to ask for a judgment. In order to determine this case, both then must try to force a man to take off his clothes on his own. They select an unsuspecting pilgrim on the road, but when the storm blows with all its might, making the man freeze and shudder, the former holds even more tightly to his clothing in order to stay warm. As soon as it is the sun’s turn, it shines intensively on the pilgrim, who is immediately pleased with this change of weather and happily takes off his coat and suit. This settles the case, and Jupiter can easily determine that the sun indeed is much stronger than the wind (p. 157). As simple as this didactic tale proves to be, the poet’s subsequent comments deserve our full attention. First, he emphasizes that rude force rarely if ever achieves the desired effect; second, rude behavior is especially useless because it is the source of evil. In order to change a situation or a condition, a soft and gentle approach would be the only efficient method because “You win without great effort / with softness and patience. / He who wants to live and prosper / should not be rude” (p. 157, v. 57–60).

In another quasi-fable – quasi because it involves two friends and a bear – we learn about the fundamental value of true friendship, which was of greatest significance in the Middle Ages and the early modern age.²⁷ In “Of Two Fellows and a Bear” (no. 73), two men track through a forest having sworn complete loyalty and trust to each other. But as soon as a dangerous bear suddenly approaches them, one of them quickly flees up to the top of a tree, abandoning the other man. In his desperation, the latter simply drops to the ground in the hope that the bear might assume that he is dead and

²⁷ Friendship in the Middle Ages.
thus would leave him alone. Indeed, that is the case, although the bear sniffs around his head and only then leaves him alone. Once the situation is clear again, the other friend comes climbing down and then inquires about what the bear might have whispered into his ears. The response by the other rips apart all pretenses and exposes clearly what was wrong in that situation:

. . . “You ought to be more on guard of him who is sitting in the tree, that’s my advice to you! After all, when it is getting very dangerous, he will abandon you because he is the red one.” (p. 172, 41‒48)

The reference to the ‘red one’ is an anti-Jewish comment, which does not concern us here. Instead, the critical point is Bonerius’s warning about false friends who cannot be relied on, whereas truly good friends bring out the best in oneself (v. 53). Dangers thus serve exceedingly well to test an individual’s loyalty, but most people would, unfortunately, not pass that test: “A true friend is a rare treasure” (v. 59). In “Of a Goose that Laid a Golden Egg” (no. 80), a man owns a miraculous goose, but he is not content with what it produces every day. Out of excessive greed, he thus decides to kill the goose and to cut it open to get all the golden eggs he suspects to be inside at once. As the poet emphasizes: “His greedy heart wanted too much, / which he had to regret at the end” (p. 189, v. 17‒18). The message contained in this fable is very obvious and does not need to be dissected in detail. However, Bonerius goes one step further, as is often case in his closing statements, and offers a sort of Boethian teaching about the true nature of all goods. Extreme greed would only bring about disappointment because the hunger for material goods can never be satisfied. The more one owns, the more there is fear of losing those goods (p. 189, v. 31‒33). In addition, which closely mirrors Boethius’s observations in his famous De consolatione philosophiae (ca. 524), “. . . It is the nature of goods / that they have never satisfied / a heart, irrespective of what people are saying” (p. 190, v. 35‒37).


Let us examine briefly one more fable to gain conclusive and exhaustive evidence for the argument that fable authors have always spoken about and to all people throughout time and across the world. In “Of Four Oxen and a Wolf” (no. 84), there are four strong oxen who enjoy a close friendship and help each other out whenever there is a need. Their bonds make them so strong that no other animal ever dares to attack them, until one day a wolf arrives who takes one of the oxen aside and starts talking about treasonous behavior by the others. Ironically, the wolf himself claims to be the oxen’s friend (p. 199, v. 29), whereas the others it pretends want to kill him, which turns truth upside down – almost a reminder of the slanderous abuse of the public media in modern western societies, especially in the USA (see the wide-spread slogan of the allegedly ‘fake news’).

The wolf spreads the same false rumors among the other three oxen, and each one of them believes rather this sly creature than the former friends, meaning “they lost the trust in the others” (p. 200, v. 50). Once the four animals are so misled about the others, they all separate from each other, which gives the wolf free rein finally to attack one of them, killing and eating it, without the others coming to its rescue. The same then happens to the other three oxen, which the narrator comments by stating: “malice makes many people feel sorry [at the end]” (p. 200, v. 56).

The narrator strongly warns his audience to resist evil rumors and not to believe made-up stories because all that would destroy even the best friendship: “Lying hurts the soul” (p. 201, v. 79). Since each ox believed the wolf’s deceptive words, instead of communicating openly with the others, they all lost their faith in the friends, and when danger approached one of them, none rushed to his help. True friendship, by contrast, would have helped them all to preserve their lives, certainly a universal theme which would resonate throughout the world, both then and today.

As Bonerius concludes in his epilogue, although his fables were written in a simple language, they contain, as he claims, deep wisdom hidden underneath the external cover, the peel of
the sweet fruit. While many contemporaries would use highly sophisticated language in their sermons or advice, without knowing really what they are saying, these fables provide true pearls of deep understanding, so “He who reads it or listens to those who read it to him, / will always be blessed” (p. 246, v. 33‒34).

The ultimate truth conveyed in his Edelstein might hence be contained in the last story, “Of a King and a Barber” (no. 100) – not a fable, but included in a collection of fables – where a king pays a wise master a high price for his advice offered on the market. The man only writes down these words: “‘You ought to keep in mind / the end of your deeds and remember / what will happen with yourself in the future . . .’” (p. 242‒43, v. 35‒37).

Those words the king then has inscribed over the door to his private chamber, and those indeed then protect his life. A barber is hired by a group of courtiers who would like to see the king assassinated and hope to use him for that purpose. However, when the barber reads the epitaph, he is deeply shocked, trembles, pales, and thus betrays himself and quickly confesses once apprehended what his intention had been.

In the epimythium, Bonerius formulates his own message as clear as can be, and it certainly speaks to all people globally throughout time: “He who wants to keep the end in mind, / will not regret earlier deeds. / The end is the crown, not the struggle itself” (p. 244, v. 91‒93). Such an insight could not be claimed by representatives just of Christianity or Judaism, but of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam, etc. This is true wisdom, and this last fable by Bonerius carries this timeless message.

**Juan Manuel, El Conde Lucanor**

One of the best medieval Castilian writers was Don Juan Manuel (1282–1348), whose collection of fables, *El Conde Lucanor*, or *Libro de los ejemplos del conde Lucanor y de Patronio*, has also attracted much interest and attention by scholars and general readers. Originally composed in 1335, it experienced a tremendous

---

30 Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor*. 
The collection consists of three major parts, the first consisting of 51 ejemplos, i.e., didactic examples; the second, comprising sententiae and proverbs; the third, a kind of theological treatise on how to secure the salvation of one’s soul. Following various earlier models (e.g., Petrus Alfonsi, Disciplina clericalis), the overall narrative scheme is predicated on conversations between the Conde Lucanor and his advisor Patronio, the latter serving as the storyteller who provides with his narratives the desired teaching or lesson. Many times, Patronio does not resort to the fable, but in a good number of his accounts he does, obviously drawing from a wide range of older sources which also might include Arabic, Persian, or Indian tales (Panchatantra?). We can often recognize those fables from other collections, which does not diminish their value at all, on the contrary. For instance, in “What happened to the swallow with the other birds when she saw flax being sown” (no. 6), the issue that worries Count Lucanor pertains to possible hostility by his neighbors who are actually stronger than him. The fable told by Patronio illustrates powerfully how to approach such a situation, which can easily be applied to countless others until today. In this fable, a swallow observes a farmer planting flax, and she immediately realizes the future danger for herself and the fellow birds. Flax, once having grown, can be transformed into nets and snares, so the swallow goes to the other birds and advises them to uproot all the young plants collectively in order to avoid future dangers. As to be expected, no one wants to listen to its advice, both ignorant of the threat to their existence and too dull to understand the connection between flax seeds and future plant matter in the hands of a farmer. The swallow appeals to the other birds repeatedly, all to no avail, until it is already too late, with the flax having grown so much

31 Blecua, *La transmisión textual de “El conde Lucanor”*. 

that birds would not be able to pull them out of the ground with their claws and beaks. Having realized the changing condition, facing the unavoidable threat to its existence, the swallow turns away from the other birds, submits under the farmer’s protection and thus enjoys safety and a good livelihood. As the conclusion tells the audience: “From that day forward swallows have lived under man’s protection and are safe from him; but the other birds, which refused to take precautions, are caught every day in nets and snares” (67). For Patronio, this hence means that his lord should take precaution and act wisely in the face of imminent danger: “the wise man understands from the first sign or indication the harm that can befall him, and takes precaution to prevent it happening” (69).

Of course, this fable only makes sense in the specific situation when one lord is threatened by others who are clearly superior to him, but who then accept him as their allied partner if he accommodates himself with them in time to prevent major damage to himself and his country. Looking for a discussion on freedom, for example, would not take us anywhere, whereas the central intention of this fable is to alert the audience to the great importance of precaution in everything one does on a daily basis.

The example chosen here pertains to two horses which tend to fight against each other. However, when they are suddenly threatened by a lion, they change their minds, join forces, and thus manage together to chase the lion away. From that day on, the two horses are best companions, having learned their lesson. “For a man should do a great deal for his family and neighbours and tolerate a great deal from them in order to avoid being harmed by outsiders” (79).

In “What happened to a fox and a cock” (no. 12), Don Lucanor is at a loss what to do in face of numerous enemies surrounding his territories and whether he should abandon his own fortresses at the margin of his lands or not. The subsequent fable illustrates the strong message that to stand firm ground would always be better than to flee and thus to demonstrate one’s fear and insecurity. Patronio relates of

33 For bibliographical references and the historical background, see England, ed. (see note 30), 329. Each individual narrative is accompanied by such commentary.
a cock that is chased by a fox but can flee onto a tall tree where it is entirely safe. The fox, however, attacks the tree with all its might as if it could indeed fell it with its teeth and tail. This frightens the cock so much that it eventually flies to another tree, and then to another, and so forth, until the end of the forest, and then the fox is able to catch and to kill it as its food. The advice resulting from this fable is as follows: “if you are resolute from the beginning, you will be safe, as the cock would have been if it had remained in the first tree” (95). The more general recommendation, however, is of a rather philosophical kind because the prince should, like all reasonable people closely observe rationality and think through the entire situation before he would make any move, “for it is a fact that those in danger who defend themselves are much more likely to escape than those who flee” (97).

In a rather convoluted but powerful fable, “What happened to the lion and the bull” (no. 11), we learn of a close friendship between these two animals, which makes them to the uncontested rulers over all herbivores and carnivores. In order to undermine and destroy this friendship, which the other animals recognize as being the greatest source of strength for the two, they ask the fox and the ram, both being more trusted by the bull and the lion respectively according to their kind, to sow discord between them. Intriguingly, they manage to do so not by talking to the two rulers, but to their confidants, the bear and the ram. Although the bull and the lion do not believe those rumors at first, those continue to spread and build up, which soon enough creates actual friction between both, which subsequently turns into hatred and violence, and thus they lose their original power.

As Patronio illustrates in his epimythium,

because they failed to understand that their status and power over all the other animals depended upon their friendship and mutual help, and because they gave up the benefits of their friendship and were unable to guard against the bad advice given them by those wishing to become oppressors instead of oppressed, the lion and the bull came out of this very badly: where they had previously ruled over all the animals, they came to be ruled over by them. (143)
As before, this Castilian author emphasizes the great relevance of friendship which must be strongly supported and protected against ill advice, suspicion, and rumors. There are, as Patronio observes too many people out there who operate with “deception and trickery” (145). Friendship can be safely maintained if both sides understand clearly that they need each other and provide assistance to the others even under the worst circumstances, which then builds and extends mutual trust and love: “durará el amor entre vós” (144; friendship between you will last).

Finally, let us also consider briefly the last story, although it is not a fable in the traditional sense, with no animals appearing as the actors. Here a proud king is suddenly replaced by an angel who takes on the king’s appearance, which leaves that man in utter shambles. He suffers so badly for a long time that he abandons all of his previous pride and becomes a very humble man repenting all of his previous sin. Once he has changed his heart entirely, the denouement takes place, the angel reveals his own identity and allows the king to return to his previous position on the condition that he abandon for good the sin of pride (319). Since that is the case, and the old or new king truly demonstrates that he has learned his lesson, the angel then leaves and allows the changed man to run his country in a humble manner, looking out for his people.

This then leads Patronio to conclude his lesson, which can stand for the entire collection of tales, filled with profound insights into the many human shortcomings and failures, and yet also in the potentials for reform and growth in virtue, humbleness, and wisdom:

And if you, my lord Count Lucanor, wish to earn God’s grace and a good reputation in this world, do good works and do them well, without hypocrisy or deception, and above all else, guard against pride, and be humble, without cant or hypocrisy; but your humility should always be in line with your estate, so that you will be humble, but not humbled [omildoso, mas non omillado]. (321)

It is worth noting in passing that a twentieth-century German writer, Werner Bergengruen (1892–1964) obviously picked up the same story...
and rendered it into his own version, “Der Kaiser im Elend” (published first in 1946; The Emperor in Misery), which underscores, at least in this case, the universal meaning and value of medieval fable literature and related genres as they influenced modern literature as well.  

*Kalila and Dimna*

To round off our reflections and to widen the perspective regarding the universal, i.e., global nature of fable literature, let us also consider some examples in the medieval Persian collection titles *Kalila and Dimna*. It was originally compiled sometime between the third century B.C.E. and the third century C.E. in India under the title *Panchatantra*, and has been preserved in its latest iteration from ca. 300 C.E. In the mid-sixth century C.E., the physician Burzoë, at the request of Chosroë I Anoshirvan, ruler of Persia from 531 to 579, translated those tales into Middle Persian. This collection, in turn, was translated into Old Syriac not long afterwards, and in the middle of the eighth century, the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa’ translated it into Arabic; this became the source for many other translations, such as into Greek by Simeon, son of Seth, in ca. 1050, then into Old Slavonic, and Medieval Italian. A Hebrew translation by Rabbi Joel appeared at the end of the twelfth or early thirteenth century, which

34 Bergengruen, *Die Sultanrose und andere Erzählungen*, 78-95. I do not think that anyone else has ever recognized this indirect connection with this Spanish text, although it is well known that Bergengruen drew from many different historical-literary sources and predicated many of his novels and short stories on medieval and early modern narratives and accounts. There is, however, another possibility as well. The same story, maybe one of the earliest versions of its kind, is also contained in the *Gesta Romanorum* (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, so, more or less contemporary with *Conde Lucanor*) as no. 59, “Of excessive pride, and how the proud are often brought to extreme humility: a notable tale.” *Gesta Romanorum: A New Translation*, 147-53. See also Bänziger, Werner Bergengruen, 47-53. Bergengruen seems to have learned of this story through the *Gesta* in German translation, but he also might have read a version of the *Conde Lucanor*. All three texts are, to be sure, thematically and conceptually closely related.

35 Munshi, *Kalila and Dimna*. For very convenient brief summaries of most of the fables, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kal%C4%ABla_wa-Dimna (last accessed on Jan. 22, 2021). This also includes links to various digitized versions.

36 *The Panchatantra Reconstructed*; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchatantra. For a succinct overview of the various stages in the history of research on this work and an excellent summary of the individual tales, see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchatantra (both last accessed on Jan. 22, 2021).
Giovanni da Capua translated into Latin by the end of the thirteenth century. This, in turn, became the source of the German translation by Antonius von Pforr in 1480 (printed). A Spanish translation of the text by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ appeared in 1251 (anonymous), and many other translations into different languages followed.\(^{37}\) There are some shared motifs in the eastern and the western tradition, and the ethical ideals prove to be surprisingly similar, which underscores once again the supreme importance of fables for the exploration of world literature. For our purposes, it does not matter whether they served as a kind of ‘mirror for princes’ or as generally didactic works.\(^{38}\)

It is not our task here to provide a detailed discussion of this major piece of world literature, to analyze its structure, language, imageries, etc. What matters here only concerns the universal messages contained in the fables, such as in “The Contentious Turtle and the Ducks” (pp. 31‒32). Here, the turtle and the ducks live peacefully together in a pond, when the water suddenly dries up. This forces the ducks to leave, and the turtle begs them to take it with them. They are hesitant since they do not trust that the turtle could strictly follow their advice. Whatever people might say about the sight, the turtle would have to keep its mouth shut, otherwise, disaster would strike.

The turtle must hold on to a stick which the ducks carry up into the air by means of its mouth. But as soon as people espy this curious sight and call out the funny turtle, the latter cannot hold out for long and eventually yells back at them, but it falls to its death. The ducks remind the turtle, and thus also the readers: “‘Well-wishers give advice. The fortunate heed it’” (32). It is wisdom, after all, combined with practical knowledge, nevertheless what animals are involved and what the actual difficult or dangerous situation might be. As much as the ducks tried their hardest to protect their friend from a dangerous situation, they were apprehensive of his inability to observe self-discipline and the strong advice they had given him. And


\(^{38}\) Luce, “Mirror for Princes (Islamic),” 1916-20; Bratu, “Mirrors for Princes (Western),” 1921-49
indeed, the turtle could not resist to fight back against people’s foolish comments and ridicule, although this then brings about its own death.

Not very different, and yet adding a nuanced perspective, in “The Bird That Tried to Advise Monkeys” (34–35), a bird observes monkeys foolishly trying to use a firefly to start a fire and to get warm in a stormy cold night. A man observes the bird’s efforts to instruct them of the uselessness of their attempt, and he warns it that this attempt would lead nowhere: “To attempt to reform such persons is like testing a sword on a stone or hiding sugar under water” (34). But the bird does not heed him, flies down to the monkeys in order to teach them, and those immediately grab it and kill it. This little fable proves to be valuably in various ways because it first exposes the monkeys in their foolishness, second, it demonstrates that ignoramuses cannot be taught; and third, the narrator voices admonishment not to abandon one’s own caution and to mingle with one’s enemies just because there seems to be time to offer advice.

In “The Iron-Eating Mice” (38) a merchant entrusts a large amount of iron to a friend before he has to go on a journey. The other proves to be an untrustworthy person because he sells the iron and pockets the money. When the friend later returns and wants his iron back, he is told that mice have eaten the iron which had been deposited in a cellar. The cheated merchant seems to accept this explanation, but the next day he abducts one of the friend’s sons. It is unclear whether he kills him or sells him into slavery, but the boy is gone missing, and when this calamity is announced in the city, the other man explains that a hawk had carried off the son. His friend scoffs at this explanation as being an impossibility of nature, whereupon the other man retorts: “In a city in which mice can eat a hundred maunds of iron a hawk can carry off a child” (38).

As in all three other fable collections, the narrator here also offers a commentary, which proves to be extensive and leads to additional points that do not need to be discussed here. Nevertheless, the ethical and didactic messages are very clear and strongly formulated, but interestingly in such a way that they
are not subject to any cultural or political conditions. This and all the other accounts could have been told within any other context, which easily explains the great popularity of *Kalila and Dimna* – and by the same token also the popularity of the other fable collections. However, the structure of this story-telling sequence is highly complex, often one fable leading directly over to another, and each illuminating the previous one. And stories about animals interacting with each other – often in a hostile manner – are often followed by those about people and their misfortune or ignorance.

But then there are also accounts that combine the animal with the human world and thus teach their own lessons, one of which proves to be “The Mouse That Was Offered the Sun, the Could, the Wind, and the Mountain in Marriage” (90‒91). A baby mouse is dropped by accident by a kite in front of a holy man who takes it home but prays that it be turned into a human creature. This is then the case, and the little girl soon grows up and reaches a marriageable age. The holy man then invites her to choose a husband, and she only wants to be married to a strong and powerful man. The subsequent effort to find such a person soon proves to be ironic because whoever she is offered to (the sun, the cloud, the mountain) admits that he is not the strongest and so defers to the next stronger entity. Not even the mountain can claim to be all-powerful and actually refers to the mouse because “‘He can gnaw into me and make his home in my heart, and I cannot even think of getting rid of him’” (91). However, the mouse refuses to marry the girl because his wife must be of his own species, so the holy man prays again, the young woman turns back into a mouse, which concludes the story with a happy end.

Even though this fable is embedded in a rather complex narrative context, in itself it relates the universal observation that a good marriage can only be between likes, and not unlikes. Moreover, the girl’s dream of being associated with the most powerful person in the world soon shatters because each of those who seem to fit that category prove to be rather inferior to others, which then

closes the circle with the mouse emerging as stronger than even a mountain, and thus emerges as the ideal marriage partner after all. The parallel to one of the fairy tales in the famous collection by the Brothers Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (first vol. in 1812), “Von dem Fischer un syner Fru” (no. 19; Of the Fisherman and His Wife), though not a fable as such, appears striking and would invite further discussions, but the medieval legend of St. Christopher who similarly had looked for the strongest person in the world in vain had also already addressed the same issue. But in our context, we recognize the universal theme of the illusion of one individual believing that he is the strongest in the world, when such a claim easily can be deconstructed, though the question of what defines strength crucially depends on the categories applied here.

The fable is certainly humorous in general; and it humors also those guilty of arrogance, and advises the listeners to view life in relative terms. The opposite is the case in “The Pair of Doves That Stored Up Grain” (166–67) in which tragedy concludes the fable as a result of ignorance and lack of communication. A pair of doves collect grain during the summer and deposit it in their nest to keep it for the winter. But the heat dries up the grain and makes it shrink, and when the male dove returns and finds the storage much reduced, he believes that his female partner had eaten much of it. Although she insists repeatedly that this is not the case, he is so furious that he beats and kills her, only to realize during winter, when the rains have returned, which make the grain swell up again, that he had been wrong and had killed an innocent person.

Although the male dove then moans and bewails the horrible outcome, the wife is dead, and he then formulates the only relevant lesson

---

40 *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 140-57. The *fairy tale was first recorded, based on oral accounts*, by Philipp Otto Runge, who sent it to Johann Georg Zimmer, the editor of Achim von Arnim’s famous collection of folk songs, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806), and through the latter the Grimms learned about this story. See Runge, Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, „Von dem Machandelboom“ „Von dem Fischer un syner Fru“. Zwei Märchen textkritisch herausgegeben und kommentiert von Heinz Rölleke. Schriftenreihe Literaturwissenschaft, 79. The medieval version of St. Christopher is contained, for example, in Jacobus de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend*, no. 100, vol. 2, 10-14. We are obviously dealing with an archetypal motif here.
here: “The worst part is that remorse has no benefit!” (167). In the subsequent reflections, the narrator offers much more extensive comments, warning the king of observing rationality, perspicacity, understanding the consequences of one’s actions, and acting prudently in all matters in life. Applied to the ideal of kingship, we are told: “A successful monarch is one who reflects on the end results and consequences of his actions and who inflicts little harm, does good, and listens to the words of his counselors” (167). As is often the case, the commentator goes so far as to emphasize that one should worry about the person who is impetuous to do evil and about the person who could do good but refrains from it. Moreover, one should stay away from those who regard good and evil as almost indistinguishable, who are not afraid of the torments of the afterlife, who happily transgress all moral and ethical norms, and, finally, who do not keep their hearts “from greedy, envious, and harmful thoughts” (167).

Altogether, we can certainly conclude that the fables and many other tales in *Kalila and Dimna* address the wide range of human shortcomings, failings, worries, misconceptions, fears, cowardice, and evilness, but also formulate ideas how to improve one’s life, how to avoid wrongdoings, how to listen to good advice, and how to perform by ethical standards. In some fables, typically Indian animals appear, but in most cases, the fables contain universal messages related by and about animals as they can be found all over the world.

By the same token, hence, these are fables that were popular in many different languages and cultures not only because of their high entertainment value, but particularly because of their universal messages. Once again, we thus observe that discussing fables from across the world lays the groundwork for a powerful new approach to world literature.

**Conclusion**

I have examined a selection of fables from four sources, Marie de France, Ulrich Bonerius, Don Juan Manuel, and the anonymous
author/s of Kalila and Dimna, covering Anglo-Norman, Swiss-German, Castilian Spanish, and Indian/Persian/Arabic etc. literature. I have not tried to argue that fable x was directly based on fable y, etc. In many cases, there was probably a direct or indirect dependency, but overall, it would be a highly contested and tricky endeavor to postulate specific bridges between so-called source texts and later manifestations of fables. Much more important proves to be the realization that all the authors included here had powerful messages for humankind at large, addressing fundamental concerns about vices and virtues, about ignorance versus rationality, about ethical concerns versus mean-spirited, evil, and malicious behavior. What we can certainly confirm is that in essence there are not huge differences among these fable authors concerning their ideals and intentions, and we could easily resort to many other examples from Arabic, South-American, Siberian, or African fables, only to reach the same insight that the literary discourse, here allegorically predicated primarily on the appearance and operations of animals, addresses universal human concerns, desires, fears, ideals, and values.

In light of global challenges we all face today, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or global warming, we are suddenly reminded by these medieval fables that we all are part of the human family and need to listen to simple but straightforward advice, as formulated consistently by fable authors throughout time and across the world. The differences between Marie’s *Fables* and *Kalila and Dimna* are only small to some degree, but not in essence. People need to learn, as we hear from medieval and modern fables, from western and eastern fables, humbleness, alertness, critical thinking, rational approaches in their lives, loyalty, honor, and trust. Ulrich Bonerius and Don Juan Manuel offer many insights even for us today, and in face of the entire fable literature we are suddenly confronted by the realization that literature is the expression of humanity at large, and hence enjoys the highest priority in all our lives.
Historical or linguistic boundaries are, as the fables tell us, ultimately meaningless because they practice what recent literary theoreticians have preached, to accept that we live within a global universe. Incorporating *Kalila and Dimna* into the discourse of western medieval fable literature, we gain not only new perspectives concerning world literature, we also recognize how much poets throughout time and in many different cultures actually pursued the same values and purposes, to improve people’s lives by way of literary entertainment and instruction, just in the way as the Roman poet Horace had already formulated it in his *Ars Poetica* (65–8 B.C.E.), Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae.

**Dr. Albrecht Classen** is University Distinguished Professor of German Studies at the University of Arizona, Tucson. He was born in Germany in 1956, emigrated to the United States in 1984, received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in 1986, and began his academic career at the University of Arizona in 1987. He gained tenure and promotion to Associate Professor in 1992, and promotion to Full Professor in 1994. He has published currently 110 scholarly books and ca. 750 articles on medieval and early modern literature, along with ca. 2400 book reviews. He is the editor of the journals *Mediaevistik* and Humanities Open Access. He has received numerous awards for teaching, research, and service, most significantly the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Band from the German government in 2004, the Five Star Faculty Award, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2012 Arizona Professor of the Year, the rank of a Grand Knight Commander of the Most Noble Order of the Three Lions (GKCL) in 2017, and the German Academic Exchange Service Excellence Award in International Exchange in 2020.

Bibliography


Classen, Albrecht, “Persia in German Baroque Literature: Sa’di’s Rose Garden and Adam Olearius’s Embassy to Persia. Global History and World Literature from a Pre-Modern Perspective,” to appear in *Orbis Litterarum*. 


Classen, Albrecht, “Two Great Fable Authors from the Middle Ages – Marie de France and Ulrich Bonerius. New Perspectives on the Reception of an Ancient Literary Genre,” to appear in Medievalia et Humanistica.


*Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 6 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).


*Kinder- und Hausmärchen gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Zürich: Manesse Verlag, 2002).


Prodesse et delectare: Case Studies on Didactic Literature in the European Middle Ages/ Fallstudien zur didaktischen Literatur des europäischen Mittelalters, ed. Norbert Kössinger and Claudia Wittig (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019).


Singh, Harleen, The Rani of Jhansi: Gender, History, and Fable in India (Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, 2014).


Verräter: Geschichte eines Deutungsmusters, ed. André Kritscher (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar, 2019).

Wagner, David L., The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

Warnke, Karl, Die Quellen des Esope der Marie de France (Halle a. d. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1900).


Whalen, Logan E., “‘Par ceste fable’: Fabliaux and Marie de France’s Isopet,” “Li
premerains vers.” Essays in Honor of Keith Busby, ed. Catherine M. Jones and Logan

Wheatley, Edward, “Rereading the Story of the Widow of Ephesus in the Middle Ages and

Wilpert, Gero von, Sachwörterbuch der Literatur. 8th, improved and expanded ed. (1955;

World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Globality: Beyond, Against, Post, Otherwise, ed.
Gesine Müller and Mariano Siskind. Latin American Literatures in the World, 4
(Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

An Arabic drawing from the book dating to the year C.E. 1220
depicting both “Kalila” and “Dimna”
"There’s Rosemary, that’s for Remembrance:"
Suicide Ideation and Portraying Ophelia’s Madness

Ian M. Borden & Sarah Imes Borden
University of Nebraska

Ophelia’s madness in Hamlet is too often portrayed or understood in a generalized fashion. Historical analysis of the play, as well as historical and recent reviews of Ophelia’s performance show how Ophelia has been considered a character controlled by outside forces, and her madness lacking direction or purpose. Applying the concept of suicide ideation to the character’s actions illuminates both our historical understanding of the character, and provides modern day performers a cohesive and focused model from which to draw.

The impetus for this paper comes from seeing too many productions of Hamlet where the performance of Ophelia is one of generalized madness or hysteria. No particular mental illness seems to be the cause for Ophelia’s distress, leading to unspecific choices on stage. Of course, Ophelia’s madness is not described by Shakespeare with any form of modern terminology, and it is potentially dangerous to apply modern thinking or understanding to works from the early modern era. However, Gertrude’s description of Ophelia’s death by drowning, “her garments, heavy with their drink,” hardly seems possible after Ophelia has appeared on stage in a state of undress, often in a single torn shift and bare feet. We would argue, also, that to most twenty-first century viewers and readers, Gertrude’s description suggests clearly that Ophelia committed suicide. Using then, a fully modern concept of suicide, and allowing Ophelia to go through a stage of suicidal ideation, helps both to illuminate Shakespeare’s text and provides modern day performers a cohesive and focused model from which to draw.

Having Ophelia run across the stage in torn clothing, muddy bare feet, and practically throwing flowers at the other actors, “randomly crazy” as she is unfortunately often performed, is problematic. Firstly, although not born noble, if a woman of Ophelia’s era and social standing appeared in such an undressed state in public, she
would probably be chased by a servant or two, desperate to re-clothe her. But more importantly, such depictions are potentially reductive, pejorative, and insulting to those who actually suffer from mental illness.\(^1\) As one actor responded to our survey, “I’ve had directors tell me to be crazy and I always fucking hated it,” because it is unspecific as an acting choice, and prevents an actor from performing the role with any true agency.\(^2\) As Hamlet is not a passive character, neither is Ophelia.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA)\(^3\), the layperson’s definition of suicidal ideation is the act of killing yourself, most often as the result of depression or other mental illness. They also note that people who have actively begun to plan committing suicide engage in a series of recognized behaviors. These include talking about committing suicide, exhibiting drastic changes in behavior, preparing for death by writing a will and making final arrangements, giving away prized possessions, losing interest in personal appearance, and a preoccupation with death or dying. Also of note is that a person who has recently experienced serious losses or the death of loved ones can be more prone to suicidal ideation, particularly if they withdraw from friends or social activities and family. Notice how these descriptions clearly coincide with what Ophelia experiences during the play.

In performance, Ophelia regularly seems no less disempowered or driven by outside forces, a phenomenon that extends back over nearly 200 years. An 1847 review of a performance of Hamlet at the Marylebone Theatre provides an excellent example of the expectations for the role during the 1800s, and praises Miss Amelia Huddart as Ophelia:

---

1 Imes Borden, Survey.
2 Imes Borden, Survey.
3 The American Psychological Association is a scientific and professional organization that represents psychologists in the USA, and is the largest organization of psychologists in the world. It is a non-profit corporation and has published a scholarly journal, *Psychological Review*, since 1894.
Miss Huddart appeared as the Ophelia of the scene; but she scarcely complied with its demands upon the feeling and the intellect of the performer. From the moment the destiny of the gentle maiden is connected with that of Hamlet, her doom is sealed; for it is clear that sadness and sorrow will step in between her and the accomplishment of her hopes and that her ‘young Days’ are to be forever shaded. Miss Huddart rather mistook the meaning of her part; and so made Ophelia more girlish than such a serious nature could ever be in the natural course of things. Otherwise her performance was just and pleasing in no ordinary degree; and when she passed away from the scene like a beautiful air – a delightful vision – the very forgetfulness of her in the remainder of the tragedy left the soul to dream of the departed.

A review of the more famous Harriet Smithson’s Ophelia from 1827 describes how she displayed a “wealth of mannerisms, a disjunction of movement, an irregularity, one might even say a disconnectedness of gesture and words,” from which “one believes that she’ll finish with convulsions.” An 1826 essay echoes Smithson’s work by stating that

In the madness of Ophelia there are no intervals of reason; she exhibits a state of continuous distraction, and though she is presented to observation in only two short scenes, the duration is sufficient for effect.

This idea of the role can also be found in the performance of Ophelia by Ellen Terry, described as “a consistent psychological study in sexual intimidation, a girl terrified of her father, of her lover, and of life itself.” The focus is on the state of madness itself, rather than allowing the actress to have agency to move within the play.

However, such depictions of a powerless and mad Ophelia are not consigned only to the nineteenth century. Recent major productions have also portrayed Ophelia as subject to outside influences, just with more modern variations. In the last decade, famous productions of *Hamlet* have shown Ophelia to be driven mad by abuse from her father, falling victim to the dictates of a police state, or starting the play as already institutionalized. In Andrew Scott’s 2017 Hamlet,
we first see Ophelia “restrained with wrist ties in a wheelchair.” In this production, Jessica Brown Findlay’s Ophelia “is childishly bald and very fragile.” Ophelia “whirls across the space” in 60s-inspired baby doll dresses. There are bows on her shoes, bows at the bottom of her bare back and bows floating demurely from her neckline. She is a cute gift for the other characters (particularly the male ones) to paw over. Hamlet and her father Polonius (Peter Wight) are both preoccupied by running their hands over and through the silky bobbed hair of the “pretty maid.” Ophelia is passed around like a little doll and used by Polonius with zero regard for her own desires.

In the 2015 production starring Benedict Cumberbatch and directed by Lindsey Turner, Ophelia is portrayed by Sian Brooke as both “ditsy” and “a genuinely disturbed Ophelia.” Brooke’s Ophelia has “her shoulders hunched inside lacy dresses a half-size too big, [and] projects a girlish fragility from the start that’s snapped like a twig by her bereavement.” Her final scene ends with Ophelia scrambling “over a hill of refuse.” Rory Kinnear’s 2010 production, with Ophelia’s “galloping madness” seen as a liability, Ophelia is “done in by the state: a casualty of being a loose cannon.” Ruth Negga performs Ophelia as “embarrassingly insane,” “a gamine slip of a thing whose real madness sends her careering around stage with rubbish-laden supermarket trolleys.” Each production has attempted to put a modern layer on their productions, yet Ophelia continues to be a character envisioned as being controlled by the other characters in the play. These production or performance choices portray Ophelia as a passive character and not actively pursuing her

7 Loveridge, Lizzie. “Hamlet.”
8 Haute Culture. “Review.”
14 “Hamlet – review.”
own objectives, rendering Ophelia as nothing more than a tragic character, “too good for the corrupt world in which she finds herself.”

Ophelia becomes active through the process of suicide ideation. As mentioned above, it is always difficult to apply twenty-first century psychological understanding to an early modern theatrical production (also recognizing that the word “suicide” does not appear in print until 1656). However, Shakespeare clearly asserts the actuality of a suicidal death. In Act 5, scene 1, when Hamlet unknowingly sees Ophelia’s funeral procession, he remarks,

The Queene, the Courtiers. Who is that they follow,  
And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken,  
The Coarse they follow, did with disperate hand,  
Fore do it owne life; ‘twas some Estate.

We forget that for Shakespeare’s first audiences, the disparity between Ophelia’s funeral and what would normally happen to the body of someone who committed suicide is stark. At the top of Act V, Scene 1, Shakespeare reminds us of this, also:

Other. Will you ha the truth on’t: if this had not beene a Gentlewoman, shee should have beene buried out of Christian Buriall.

Gravedigger. Why there thou say’st. And the more pitty that great folke should have countenance in this world to drowne or hang themselves, more than their even Christian.

Without the money and position noted by both Hamlet and the Gravedigger, even the suspicion of suicide would have prevented Ophelia’s body being placed in consecrated ground. In fact, the body of a suicide victim was customarily subject to significant abuse, not just burial outside of a churchyard, but outside the city walls entirely. It was common for the bodies of suicide victims to be dragged through the street, sometimes with a sled underneath, sometimes not. The body might then be hung upside down in a public place for several days. Finally, the body would be buried face down outside the town or city, and often placed at a crossroads with a stake through driven through the torso, as described by John Weever:

And we use to bury such as lay violent hands upon themselves, in or near to the highways with a stake thrust through their bodies, to terrify all passengers, that by so infamous and reproachful a burial, not to make such their final passage out of this world.\textsuperscript{16}

As Clare Gittings states, “This continued to be the highly prescribed treatment for the bodies of suicides until 1821.”\textsuperscript{17}

If Shakespeare is so clearly intimating suicide, then we must reinterpret Ophelia’s dialogue and actions. When Opheliatells Laertes, “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance,” her words suggest suicidal ideation, one aspect of which is “making preparations”:

Often, a person considering suicide will begin to put their personal business in order. This might include visiting friends and family members, giving away personal possessions, making a will, and cleaning up their room or home.\textsuperscript{18}

As Jennifer Cassarella explains, other suicide warning signs include severe sadness or moodiness, hopelessness, sudden calmness, withdrawal, changes in personality or appearance, or recent trauma or life crisis. Many of these are consistent with the dissociative behavior that Laertes describes as “a document in madness.” However, there is no absolute set of criteria or specific actions that are congruent with depression and suicidal thinking (which is why mental health professionals are forced to ask patients if they are experiencing suicidal ideation). Both depression and mania may be present, but suicidal people may also feel resolved, grateful, even happy to finally have a plan. In our survey of 60 actors, the most common responses in describing a suicidal state were a feeling of depression, but also having the possibility of anxiety and anger. Most importantly perhaps, was the idea of feeling relief at having a plan, and the ability to have concrete actions. The idea of Ophelia being suicidal, then, shifts the performance of Ophelia’s distraught mental state from a generalized and inaccurate depiction of psychosis to a specific pattern of behavior congruent with suicide planning.

\textsuperscript{16} Weever, \textit{Ancient funerall monuments}. 22.

\textsuperscript{17} Gittings, \textit{Death, Burial and the Individual}. 72.

\textsuperscript{18} Casarella, Jennifer, “Recognizing Suicidal Behavior.”
So how does the play point towards suicide? Many might feel, as does Barbara Smith in her article, “Neither Accident nor Intent: Contextualizing the Suicide of Ophelia,” that “for a woman premarital sex is ruinous,” and “According to the prevailing religious and cultural beliefs, there would be no hope of salvation for a suicide.”19 If this remains true, then Ophelia remains without agency. However, suicide is not always an act of desperation, and especially on stage, may be interpreted as an act of redemption.

Angela Bolen describes how early modern authors, John Donne the most famous, viewed suicide as a redemptive act through which a woman could regain her virtue. William Vaughan notes in *The Golden-Groue*, that “we must not violently seek after death, unless where that chastity is put in danger intimating thereby, that it is lawful for a woman to kill herself for preserving of her chastity.”20 Phillip Stubbes, in *The Anatomie of Abuses*, asks, “what kind of punishment whoredom ought to have?” and answers his own question by stating, “[those], who have committed the horrible act of whoredom, adultery, incest, or fornication, should drink a full draught of the Moises cup, that is, taste of present death as God’s word doth come.”21 More recently, Janet Clare has noted that “suicide produces definitive theatrical images for female virtues.”22

We know these ideas permeated into the theatrical scripts, as well. Bolen suggests that both *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness* give us contemporaneous staged depictions of a woman redeeming her virtue through the act of suicide. In *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*, the Lady seeks to avoid being raped by the Tyrant and so asks Govianus to stab her to death with his sword. When he refuses, she takes his blade and kills herself. This is a perfect example of Vaughan’s supposition that it is lawful for a woman to kill herself for preserving of her chastity. The visual picture that follows confirms this. When the Lady’s tomb is opened, a voice is heard by Govanius saying “I am not here,” as the stage directions note,

19 Smith, “Neither Accident nor Intent: Contextualizing the Suicide of Ophelia.” 101.


21 Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*. 56

22 Clare, *Early Modern Suicide*. 245.
On a sudden, in a kind of noise like a wind, the doors clattering, the tombstone flies open, and a great light appears in the midst of the tomb; his Lady, as went out, standing just before him all in white, stuck with jewels, and a great crucifix on her breast.

Such a strong visual picture of the lady in white and adorned with jewels and a crucifix must signal redemption. There is no condemnation at all for the suicide.

In Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, the woman’s suicide is not to prevent corruption, but to find redemption from it. Mrs. Frankford, having had a liaison with Wendoll and now wishing to atone for her actions, proclaims, “Oh, to redeem mine honour, […] I’d hazard/ The rich and dear redemption of my soul!” She finds this salvation by starving herself to death, exclaiming,

> I never will nor smile, nor sleep, nor rest;  
> But when my tears have wash’d my black soul white,  
> Sweet Saviour, to thy hands I yield my sprite.”

The end of the play reunites husband and wife, and he pardons his wife shortly before her death.

These examples illustrate that the redemption of a sexually corrupt female character was necessary and possible through the depiction of suicide. They show also that this was an accepted idea, and that it was explicitly portrayed on stage. Ophelia, too, may be redeeming herself through suicide. We would argue that there has long been an acceptance of a sexual relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet, as suggested very charmingly in an anonymous article from 1835,

> If, however, I do not misapprehend his purpose, the poet meant through the whole piece to indicate, that she had, in the intoxication and abandonment of passion, already yielded the prince so much, that the warnings and hints of Laertes come too late.

There is also an argument that the two had already been effectively married, with Ophelia describing a per verba de futuro marriage when she says that Hamlet

23 Act IV, Scene 4.
24 Act III, Lines 104-110.
hath importun’d me with love,
In honourable fashion,” and “given countenance to his speech […]
with all the vowes of Heaven.26

Such a marriage was relatively common in the period and considered ecclesiastically binding. However, while generally accepted, a spousal marriage was expected to be followed by a more formal ceremony, as many theological writers of the era insisted. Without such a formal ceremony, Ophelia could easily imagine herself sexually corrupted.

Within the script, however, there are also clues to how the audience is meant to understand Ophelia’s death. Gertrude’s monologue in Act 4, Scene 7 where she describes Ophelia’s drowning, tells all who were not witnesses the manner of her death. Such a description was an important part of the eulogy, especially for women. By the time of Hamlet’s writing, the eulogy had become a public evaluation of the life of the deceased, to the point that they were frequently printed and published. As Betty Travisky and Adele Seeff attest, the bed of the dying woman “was used as a kind of stage from which to act out the last role of her life,” and the duty of family, friends and ministers that gathered with her was to testify as to how well she had prepared for death, in the tradition of the ars moriendi27, for a peaceful end was interpreted as evidence of the departed soul’s successful passage into paradise.28

Examining Shakespeare’s dialogue of course points to just such a public description when Gertrude bursts into the chamber, exclaiming,

One woe doth tread vpon anothers heele,
So fast they’l follow: your Sister’s drown’d Laertes.29

Gertrude continues with her description of Ophelia’s death, describing how

26 Act I, Scene 3.

27 Ars moriendi translates as “the art of dying.”


29 Act IV, Scene 7.
Ophelia dressed fantastically, her head crowned by a coronet. She also seems at extraordinary peace, singing and incapable of feeling “distresse.” Comparing this to the idea of a peaceful end described above, Gertrude’s words suggest a eulogy according Ophelia a peaceful end, and thus entering paradise. So even though the gravedigger and his friend debate whether the suicidal Ophelia ought to have been buried in holy ground, we have earlier been given a picture of a serene Ophelia passing to the next world, and thus helping the audience accept her burial in the churchyard.

Whatever the reasoning that establishes Ophelia’s mindset, portraying her death not as an accidental act of madness, but rather a planned suicide creates a stronger and more effective result on stage. But how to go about implementing that idea? To explore how our peers went about the process of creating a performance within a framework of erratic behavior clearly defined by the script, we created a survey of male and female actors from approximately age 18-60. The survey was anonymous, advertised as suitable for acting students and working performers alike, and asked three open-ended questions about how they would research then create a character that had been written as displaying erratic or socially unacceptable behaviors. After asking age, research habits, and

30 Act IV, Scene 7.
responses to the word “crazy” as opposed to “suicidal,” the respondents were invited to type anything they would like for us to know about their thoughts or feelings on this subject matter.

Performers were asked how they would approach building a character with demonstrably erratic behavior. In the first part, we asked them to imagine they had been instructed to explore building a character with a mental illness, and to narrow down that research to focus on two imaginary scenarios. In the first, performers were asked for the three verbs that came to mind in overcoming an in-text obstacle while being “crazy.” Actors used the following words in their responses, many of these appearing multiple times: “screaming, mania, buzzing, fear, anxiety, wild, snapping, twitching, self-soothing, urgent, out of control” and “frantic.” These choices reflect the random madness asked of many actresses who play Ophelia.

In addition to working towards an interpretation that may be inauthentic, some of the response to our survey made it clear that many performers were uncomfortable using the very common but pejorative term “crazy.” In fact, it became evident that using a term such as “crazy” undermines the performer and the character. In a time when society is starting to treat those with mental illnesses as deserving of the same compassion reserved for those with severe physical conditions, using reductive terms such as “nuts,” crazy,” or “hysterical” are at the very least not appropriate and arguably counterproductive.

When asked instead to provide three words that actors associate with suicide, the most common answers were sadness, isolated, empty, quiet, disconnected, careless, unheard, caged in,” followed by “feeling resolved, having a strategy” and “one last lashing out.” The contrast with the words associated with crazy is quite profound. You can probably imagine already that these words would lead to a performance that is more focused, intentional, and active. In turn, this changes the agency with which the character of Ophelia is played.

More specifically, awareness of suicidal ideation as a motive for the character’s actions can focus character research toward
specific characteristics. It provides depth and understanding that the events within the play, especially the death of her father, can lead past generalized grief to the specificity of suicidal ideation. Obviously, the approach to Ophelia’s “mad scene” becomes far more active and precise with the idea of suicide ideation. Her disheveled appearance, and the giving away of flowers, as well as the snatches of song, all fit with the APA hallmarks of suicide preparation. As mentioned earlier, these include drastic changes in behavior, preparing for death by making final arrangements, giving away prized possessions, losing interest in personal appearance, and a preoccupation with death or dying. However, suicide ideation might even give a different character arc to Ophelia, such that there is a possibility even with the first encounter between Ophelia and Hamlet that suicide ideation could be involved in Ophelia returning Hamlet’s letters. Whatever the decisions of the actress, the concept of suicide ideation provides agency and specificity that is often missing in performance and the descriptions of the role.

Examining Ophelia’s madness as deliberate acts of suicidal ideation, rather than random acts of craziness changes the perception of the character. It helps reveal the character in studying the play as a work of the early modern period. It also alters how Ophelia is imagined in performance, from an actor’s choice of actions to a designer’s selection in costuming. When she says, “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance,” there is purpose and decision behind it. There is agency. Ophelia is no longer subject only to the outside manipulations of the other characters in the play, but instead an active, self-actualizing character who chooses her own fate.
Sarah Imes Borden is the author of Stage Warriors: Women on the Front Lines of Dangerous Drama, a book that celebrates women who produce theatre under shockingly hazardous conditions around the globe. Her career as an actor includes stints in Baltimore, New York, Hong Kong, England, and Italy, although the most enjoyable may have been trying to kill her husband every night in The Three Musketeers at the Black Hills Playhouse where she played Milady. She also teaches for the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film at the University of Nebraska, and her celebrated class on Captain America won her a “No Prize” from Marvel comics.

Ian Borden is an Associate Professor of Theatre Studies and Performance for the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film at the University of Nebraska, and serves as Affiliate Faculty for the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program. On stage, he works as an actor, director, and fight director, and is a Certified Teacher with the Society of American Fight Directors, staging violence from Canada to the Bahamas to Spain. You can also see his work in the upcoming film, La Flamme Rouge. Ian’s directing credits include The Tempest for Capitol Shakespeare, Cymbeline for the Grand Valley Shakespeare Festival, and Ana Caro’s Agravio for the Caron School. His research interests include translation of siglo de oro plays as well as studying the intersections between English and Spanish theatre. He is co-editor of a new anthology, The Entremés for Performance: Translations of Short Spanish Golden Age Plays due to be released by Aris and Phillips in 2022.

Bibliography


Stubbes, William. 1585. *The anatomie of abuses containing a discoverie, or brieve summarie of such notable vices and corruptions, as nowe raigne in many Christian countreyes of the worlde: but (especially) in the countrey of Aligna: together, with most fearefull examples of Gods*. London: Richard Iones.


Vaughan, William. 1608. *The golden-groue moralized in three booke: a worke very necessary for all such, as would know how to gouerne themselues, their houses, or their countrey. Made by W. Vaughan, Master of Artes, and graduate in the ciuill law*. London: Simon Stafford.


Weever, John. 1631. *Ancient funerall monuments within the united monarchie of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the islands adiacent with the dissolved monasteries therein contained: their founders, and what eminent persons haue beeene in the same interred. As also the death and b*. London: Thomas Harper.

*British Actress Florence Gerard as Ophelia*
*Unknown Photographer, c. 1880*
DELNO C. WEST
AWARD WINNER

The Delno C. West Award is given in honor of Professor Delno C. West (1936-1998), one of the founding members of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. Professor West was Professor of History at Northern Arizona University where he served for a time as Chair of the History Department and Director of the Honors Program. Professor West was a president of the Association and the general coordinator of three annual meetings that were held in Flagstaff and at the Grand Canyon. His teaching centered around medieval Europe, and he published widely on the history of Christianity. His numerous books and articles include the *Libro de las Profecias* of Christopher Columbus (1991).

The West Award recognizes the most distinguished paper given by a senior scholar at the annual conference.

Recipient of the West Award for 2021

Catherine Loomis

Rochester Institute of Technology
Among those affected by the very high infant mortality rates in early modern London were members of William Shakespeare’s acting company. During Shakespeare’s time as a playwright and actor, members of his company lost more than a third of their children in infancy or childhood. Shakespeare’s plays often refer to or feature children who are, or who are presumed to be, dead or dying. His actors performed losses they and many members of their audience had actually experienced. The communal nature of playgoing and Shakespeare’s expansive empathy enabled the theater to teach its practitioners and audience how to grieve.

Among “the many miseries happening to Man in this life” enumerated by James Bentley in The Harmonie of Holie Scriptures (1600) is this: “Chyldren are smothered in the cradle, fall into the fire, are drowned in the water, over-run with beastes, poysened with Spyders, murthered, plagued, or infected with the corruption of the ayre.” To this harrowing list, William Shakespeare adds children killed in war (1 Henry VI 4.7; 3 Henry VI 1.3, 2.5, 5.5; Henry V 4.7); assassinated (Richard III 4.3); self-slaughtered (Romeo and Juliet); or left to the fatal devices of a huntsman (Pericles 4.1), a castle wall (King John 4.3), or a hungry bear (Winter’s Tale 3.3).

In addition to these stage pictures, Shakespeare recalls the death of children in figures of speech: Joan of Arc looks at a weakened France as a mother looks “on her lowly babe / When death doth close his tender-dying eyes” (1 Henry VI 3.3.47-48) while the Duke of Suffolk assures Queen Margaret he prefers death with her to life without her by proclaiming: “Here could I breathe my soul into the air, / As mild and gentle as the cradle-babe / Dying with mother’s dug between its lips” (2 Henry VI 391-393). Shakespeare recalls the death of children in heart-rending reports: the vicious murderers of the nephews of Richard III are reduced to near-sentimentality when

1 Bentley, The Harmonie, 120-121.

2 Shakespeare’s works are cited from Riverside Shakespeare.
they report on the delicate beauty of the alabaster arms and rosy lips of the princes whom they have smothered (Richard III 4.3.1-22). Shakespeare recalls the death of children by having worried mothers anticipate those deaths: fearing for her son Arthur’s life, Queen Constance laments “But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud / And chase the native beauty from his cheek / And he will look as hollow as a ghost . . . And so he’ll die” (3.3.82-86). Dead children themselves recall the deaths of children when they return as ghosts to haunt Richard III the night before the Battle of Bosworth Field (4.3.118 ff). Among the ways parents react to these deaths are with weeping—the Duke of York is memorably offered a handkerchief soaked in his murdered son’s blood to wipe his eyes (3 Henry VI 1.4.79-85; 157-163); with howls, as Lear presents Cordelia’s corpse to what is left of his court (5.3.258); with fury, as Alonso asks those trying to comfort him for the loss of Ferdinand to shut up (The Tempest 2.1.9; 25; 106-107; 128; 171); with silence—Macduff must feel his grief before he can speak of it (Macbeth 4.3.208-221); or with carefully patterned laments like the ones delivered by the many women who have lost sons to Richard III (4.4.9-135). The frequency with which Shakespeare presents children who are, or who are presumed to be dead, or who are dying is, as scholars have noticed, remarkable: from the infant Dromios to pretty Rutland to Verona’s star-crossed lovers and their friends, to Mamilus and his infant sister, and the three-year-old Miranda, Shakespeare made use of this difficult motif throughout his career and in all genres. Given how painful it is even to imagine the death of a child, it is worth considering what value can be found in enacting and watching those irreparable losses on stage.

Recent scholarship on Shakespeare’s use of children in his plays focuses on the way these characters “evoke concerns about political stability, threats to authority, the continuity of community values, pregnancy and birth, processes of maturation, education, moral training, and employment experiences away from home” with infants being especially useful when examining issues of “legitimacy,

3 See Garber, Coming of Age; Rutter, Shakespeare; Scott, The Child; Cherniak, “Dying Young,”’103-126; and the essays in Chedgzoy et al., Shakespeare and Childhood.
inheritance, deformity, abandonment and infanticide.” 4 Childhood as a metaphor “has long been used to characterize the condition of those who, because of class, gender, disability, or race, are excluded from full membership of civil society.” 5 Particularly in Shakespeare’s history plays, dead children “put on display the oppressive nature of ambition, war and the revenge ethic. They constitute primarily, in other words, a screen on which butchery is projected and made visible.” 6 Some argue that Shakespeare’s use of this motif is rooted in biography: “like his own dead Hamnet, the named young children who die in the plays are all boys.” 7 I would like to supplement these analyses by looking at the ways putting dead and dying children on stage might have engaged the memories of those who acted in and attended performances of Shakespeare’s plays. By bringing a dead child back to living memory, Shakespeare and his company performed the painful but necessary work undertaken by the mourning mothers of Richard III: giving sorrow “scope” by speaking of it can at least begin to “ease the heart” (4.4.130-131).

Early modern infant mortality rates are as indiscriminate as they are difficult to contemplate. Studies sometimes array the numbers by family: of John and Mary Arden Shakespeare’s eight known children, their first two—Margaret and Joan—died in infancy, and a third, Anne, died at age eight on April 4, 1579, when her brother William was 14. Hamnet and Judith Sadler, the Shakespeares’ neighbors and possibly the godparents of their twins, lost seven of their 14 children; Shakespeare’s daughter Judith lost all three of hers. 8 More frequently, however, historians count the deaths of infants and children by parish, whose registers are the usual source

4 Lawhorn, “Appendix I. Children in Shakespeare’s plays” (233-249) in Chedgzoy et al., 233; 237.
7 Fletcher and Novy, “Father-child identification.” (49-63) in Chedgzoy et al, 61. See also Smith, “‘Almost the copy of my child that’s dead’: Shakespeare and the Loss of Hamnet,” 29-40.
8 The royal family was not exempt, with four of James and Anna’s children dying between 1598 and 1612, three of them in infancy or childhood.
of our statistics. Reviews of early modern parish records generally conclude that 20 to 25% of infants did not reach their first birthday and that 30 to 35% of children did not reach their tenth, with higher numbers in the London parishes. The deaths of children affected not only families and parishes, but also other social groups, theater audiences among them. Shakespeare’s references to or images of dead or dying children must have played on the memories of audience members who could hardly have avoided experiencing the death of a child directly or within a close social network. Comparisons are odious, but it is difficult to imagine early modern parents watching with indifference as the Capulets and their Nurse discover and mourn Juliet’s death, or as Mamilius’ death is announced. As Queen Margaret declares after watching the murder of her son Edward, the thought of one’s own child should “[stir] up remorse” (3 Henry VI 5.5.64) in witnesses to the death of someone else’s son or daughter. The power of a dead or dying child to evoke a communal memory links the private experiences of the audiences to the public display on the stage, and has the potential to haunt all hearers.

It is not only audience members whose memories of dead or dying children are at play in the theater however. During Shakespeare’s career, the 26 members of his repertory company listed in the First Folio lost at least 29 of 82 children. Richard Burbage, the actor who first played Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and other of Shakespeare’s heroes, lost at least five children between 1603 and 1616—Frances, Richard, Juliet, Julia, Winifred, and possibly a sixth, Anne; John Heminges lost at least three and possibly as many as seven between

9 Infant mortality figures are notoriously difficult to calculate for this period. The 20-25% estimate is from Stone, The Family, Sex, and Marriage. 25-30 and 67-69, but see recent work by demographers who arrive at lower numbers such as Wrigley and Schofield, The Population History of England 1541-1871 and Razzell, “Infant Mortality,” 45-64. Early modern men and women were not unaware of these numbers: a 1593 sermon notes “our life is but a short life: as many little skuls are in Golgatha, as great skuls: for one apple that falleth from the tree, ten are pulled before they bee ripe, and the parents mourne for the death of their children, as often as the children for the decease of their parents.” Smith, The Sermons, 556. See also the assurance that “thousands” of parents are mourning lost children offered by a sample condolence letter in M. R.’s 1615 A President for Pen-Men, sig. Gv.

10 The numbers are larger when the children of actors in other companies with which Shakespeare was associated are included.
1590 and 1613; and Henry Condell lost six between 1599 and 1614. Shakespeare himself lost his 11-year-old son Hamnet in 1596 and his infant nephew in 1607. As difficult it is to imagine audience indifference, it is perhaps even harder to imagine an actor who has recently lost a child merely reciting “O me, O me! My child, my only life! / Revive, look up, or I will die with thee! / Help, help! Call help” (4.5.89-91) or “O child, O child! my soul, and not my child! / Dead art thou! Alack, my child is dead, / And with my child my joys are buried” (4.5.62-64) or any of the most lamentable lines of *Romeo and Juliet* 4.5. Hamlet’s windy suspirations of forced breath and other actions that a grieving man might play would not have been a stretch for a recently bereaved father.

Scholars can be forgiven for not having noticed the losses sustained by the Lord Chamberlain’s and King’s Men and their wives. Although E. K. Chambers carefully includes details from the parish records, naming the actors’ children and giving the dates of their births and deaths, The History of the Elizabethan Stage is nearing its 100th anniversary, and is more challenging to read than the results of internet searches. A more recent source, the electronic edition of the Dictionary of National Biography, mentions the deaths of the actors’ children, but without providing much detail. Of Burbage: “Between 1603 and 1619, the couple had eight children (the last born posthumously to Richard) baptized at St. Leonard, Shoreditch, all but one dying young”; of Hemmings: “fourteen children, between 1590 and 1613 of whom probably about half survived to adulthood”; of Condell: “Nine children were born to the Condells . . between 1599 and 1613, of whom only three survived infancy”; of Augustine Phillips: “Of the several children born to Phillips and his wife, Anne, only daughters (and not all of them) survived infancy”; of Robert Armin: “His will mentions a wife Alice; their three known children all died in infancy”; of John Shank: “Of their several children only Elizabeth (bap. 1612), John (possibly baptized on 16 March 1616) and James (bap. 1619) seem to have survived into adult life.” 11 Regardless of the level of detail, the outline of the

story is clear and devastating: the actors and their wives were losing children at a rate equal to or exceeding the parish average, and the actors were appearing in plays where such deaths were frequently referred to or enacted.

The deaths of infants present a particular difficulty when considering early modern plays and their staging. Children who, like Henry VIII’s “died where they were made, or shortly after / This world had air’d them” (Henry VIII 2.4.193-194) are used on stage by Shakespeare and others to create pathos or to signify horrific destruction as Macbeth’s witches do with their birth-strangled babe and bloody apparition, or as Lady Macbeth does when she imagines dashing out the brains of a nursing infant, an image Thomas Hughes, in the 1587 tragedy The Misfortunes of Arthur, explicitly links to political destruction:

The Argument and Manner of the Fourth Dumb Show. During the music appointed after the third act, there came in a Lady courtly attired with a counterfeit child in her arms, who walked softly on the stage. From another place there came a king crowned, who likewise walked on another part of the stage. From a third place there came four soldiers all armed who, spying this Lady and King, upon a sudden pursued the Lady, from whom they violently took her child, and flung it against the walls; she, in mournful sort wringing her hands, passed her way. Then in like manner they set on the king, tearing his crown from his head, and casting it in pieces under feet, drive him by force away, and so passed themselves over the stage. By this was meant the fruit of war, which spareth neither man, woman, nor child, with the end of Mordred’s usurped crown.  

Remembering these dead children means remembering the costs of usurpation or civil war, or the ways in which the sins of the father—greed, ambition, murder—will be visited on the children. As a collective cultural memory, these children can serve as a blunt and memorable warning to act to avoid political dissent. But for the haunted parents in Shakespeare’s audience or in his acting company, the reminder, particularly if presented in visible form, would not be a general or political one: grief fills the stage up of their absent child. When the actors demonstrate the “forms, moods, and shapes

12 Hughes, Certain Devise, 32.
of grief” (Hamlet 1.2.82)—tears, yes, but also carefully wrought poetry that outlasts monuments—Shakespeare teaches his audience the value of speaking what they feel, not what they ought to say. We say that the dead are well, but not, perhaps, when they are our children.

References to or depictions of the deaths of infants and children in plays can serve the same function Shakespeare’s sonnets claim to be performing: using poetry to preserve memory. The sonnets’ narrator promises that his powerful rhymes will defeat time and continue to give life to the lovely boy, but this is part of an elaborate iambic seduction. The role of the dead and dying children on stage is different: they offer comfort—other parents have experienced these terrible losses and survived them—or lessons in how to grieve—“tell o’er your woes again by viewing mine” (Richard III, 4.4.39), or examples of behavior to avoid—when fighting the French, don’t leave the boys with the luggage. But the presence of dead and dying children on stage, particularly in the form of historical figures, can also help the process of storing their brief lives in the memories of the living. Macduff’s horrified “I cannot but remember such things were, / That were most precious to me” (4.3.222-223) demonstrates his brain’s immediate defense against the trauma of his loss, but he will, in his final fight with Macbeth, announce that unless he kills Macbeth, his “wife and children’s ghosts will haunt [him] still” (5.7.16) showing that he does remember, and finds strength in that memory. William Muggins, in a section of his long lament over a virulent outbreak of bubonic plague in 1603, describes many parents losing their children, and emphasizes that remembering dead children is inescapable:

Art thou a father, or a mother dear?
Hadst thou a son, or daughter of thy side?
Were not their voice, sweet music in thy ear,
Or from their smiles, couldst thou thy countenance hide?
Nay, were they not, the glories of thy pride?
I doubt too much, thy love on them were set
That whilst thou livest, thou canst not them forget. 13

13 Muggins, Londons Mourning Garment Sig.B3r.
Like the sonnets, and like Ben Jonson’s elegies for his daughter Mary and his son Benjamin,¹⁴ what the plays promise is that in these eternal lines to time, the child can live on in memory even after the parent has died.

The horror evoked by early modern rates of infant mortality can understandably lead to forms of denial. The argument that high infant mortality led to disengaged parenting in the medieval and early modern period¹⁵ has been frequently critiqued but continues to offer the same comforting story we tell ourselves to get through last night’s news broadcast: they could not possibly mourn for or miss their children as much as we would ours.¹⁶ Both secular and religious sources enjoined parents not to mourn the loss of a child immoderately—*Politeuphuia or Wit’s Commonwealth* (1598) coldly commands “Be not discomforted at the losse of children, for they were born to die”; Anthony Copley’s 1595 collection *Wits, Fittes, and Fancies* quotes a countess who advises her neighbor “not to dote too dearly upon her little Babe, least the losse of it should grieve her all too nearly”; and Thomas Bentley is one of many preachers to offer a long list of scriptural examples of modest mourning that does not “prefer . . . natural affection to [G]od’s will”¹⁷—but it is

---

¹⁴ Jonson wrote poems memorializing his daughter Mary, who died “at six months’ end,” and his son Benjamin who “wast lent” to his parents for seven years. Jonson, “On My First Daughter.”

¹⁵ See Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*. Lawrence Stone concurs: “to preserve their mental stability, parents were obliged to limit the degree of their psychological involvement with their infant children.” *The Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 70.

¹⁶ Keverne Smith rightly notes that Ariés and Stone based their analyses primarily on accounts left by fathers: “it is important to remember that we have a greater amount of direct evidence from this period of fathers’ than of mothers’ responses, and it might be that many mothers were more deeply affected than the surviving records suggest.” “’Almost the copy of my child that’s dead’: Shakespeare and the Loss of Hamnet,” 29-40, 30.

¹⁷ N. L., *Politeuphuia Wit’s Commonwealth*, 58; Copley, *Wits, Fittes and Fancies* (London, 1595) 197; Bentley, *The Sixth Lamp*, 37. Copley also shares this anecdote: “One who had 8. daughters, his wife was brought a bed of a ninth and so soone as it was christened, it died: He seeming to take it verie heauilie, a friend of his came to comfort him, and said: Hauing so manie faire daughters besides, what neede you lament so grieuouslie for the losse of one? He answered: Oh giue mee leaue, for this was truly a good one” (196).
difficult to believe such advice could be followed in actual practice.\textsuperscript{18} It certainly isn’t followed on stage.

Shakespeare engages a wide range of characters in acts of mourning, meaning sorrow is being performed by all manner of company members: the boy actor or player of women’s parts cast as King John’s Constance lamenting at length the death of her son Arthur; the trio of mourners for Queen Elizabeth’s children in Richard III; the comedian playing Juliet’s nurse; the men, hired or otherwise, playing mourning fathers in the history plays, Titus, and Macbeth; Richard Burbage as Lear and probably Leontes. Barring new evidence, we cannot recover the degree of engagement the actors felt when performing these lines, but when the Hecuba speech causes Hamlet’s First Player to turn color and have “tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect / [and a] broken voice” (2.2.525-556), Shakespeare forces us to confront the question of whether or not reciting the lines causes the actor to cry real tears. Hamlet asks “What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?” (2.2.559), and the answer may be an image of a personal horror including one that, like Hecuba’s, involves the death of children.\textsuperscript{19} Shakespeare repeatedly uses dialogue to draw attention to characters who are weeping, including parents who are mourning lost children: one example among many is the father who has killed his son in 3 Henry VI, a man who weeps “showers . . . Blown with the windy tempest of [his] heart” (2.5.85-86), and who thereby reminds the audience of the Duke of York’s earlier incessant showers of tears for his son Rutland, tears that arrive after a long

\textsuperscript{18} The anonymous author of a 1630 tract written to console a friend who had recently lost a son offers a more likely account of a parent’s reaction: “I know you doe now feele what it is to bee a Father; and therefore to barre you altogether from lamenting & sorrowing in such an Accident as this [The death of your beloved Sonne] were as unreasonable, as to chide a Man, for shewing himselfe sensible, when a Tooth is drawne, or a Leg or an Arme is sawd off from his body.” I. C., A handkercher. See also John Herbert’s opening apology in his June 3, 1602 letter to Robert Cecil: “The occasion of my sudden departure from Court was the extremity of sickness of my daughter, mine only child. Yourself being a father, I hope will bear with the natural imperfection of parents in loving their children.” Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland, 998.

\textsuperscript{19} Although Niobe is the type of a mourning mother for most early modern English poets, Hecuba also prompted observations like “A mothers love unto a childe exceeds, / And death of him hir endlesse torment breeds.” Ogle, The Lamentation of Troy, sig. B3r.
prologue in which the Duke tries not to weep, and tears that nearly cause York’s bitter enemy Northumberland to cry as well (1.4.79-83; 143-151).

Critic Anne Barton, analyzing Hamlet’s use of The Mousetrap to help establish Claudius’ guilt, offers this assessment of the use of a play to cross the barrier between the emotions portrayed by the characters and those felt by the audience:

What Hamlet does not reveal to the players is his private, and more unorthodox, understanding of how art may acquire a temporary and unpredictable dominion over life: how dramatic fictions can comment upon the situations in which individual members of the audience find themselves in ways far more complex and disturbing than any mere exemplary tale.

Shakespeare’s complex and disturbing use of dead or dying children on stage must have been painful to see or perform. As Leontes observes in the Winter’s Tale, even after sixteen years of mourning for his son, Mamilius “dies to me again when talked of” (5.1.120). If guilty creatures sitting at a play are expected to rise and confess their crimes, what are mourning creatures meant to do? As most editors note, Hamlet’s confidence that the play’s the thing to convince an audience member to confess is based on a historical event in Norfolk that is carefully explained in the 1599 A Warning for Fair Women, a domestic tragedy “diverse times acted” by Shakespeare’s company: a woman “sitting to behold a tragedy” being performed by a traveling troupe found herself “so moved with the sight” of a murder similar to one she had committed that she “Cryed out, the Play was made by her, / And openly confesst her husbands murder.” What is less frequently noted, however, are two conditions the anonymous playwright imposes: the play was “written by a feeling pen / And acted by a good Tragedian.” Hamlet’s long list of advice to the traveling players seems to demand a natural or realistic acting style;

20 There are no stage directions, buried or explicit, calling on Margaret to cry as she witnesses the murder of her son Edward in Act 5, scene 5, but on stage her fury is often punctuated with howls or sobs.

21 Barton, Introduction, Hamlet, xxiii.

22 A Warning for Fair Women, 32.
was Shakespeare making “good tragedians” out of his company members by asking them to hold a mirror up to their grief while speaking moving and harrowing lines about the death of a child?

As easily overlooked as E. K. Chambers’ biographical details about the acting companies is a less fashionable truth about early modern literature, including drama: that as poetical as it might be, its primary purpose was not entertainment but moral improvement. And this may be the difficult answer to the question of why so many parents are being haunted as they act in or hear Shakespeare’s plays. One account of a playwright’s power to “drown the stage with tears” in order to “make mad the guilty, and appall the free” (*Hamlet* 2.2.562; 564) even after they leave the playhouse is found not in Philip Sidney’s or anyone else’s defense of poesy, but in a 1608 pamphlet about England’s efforts to conquer Ireland. The pamphlet’s pro-English author recounts the kidnapping of an English captain, his wife, and his children, and the Irish fighters’ use of the wife to gain entry into an English fort where, once inside, they kill all of the English soldiers. At the end of a detailed description of the battle, the pamphlet writer offers this analysis of the relationship between tragic events and theatrical representations of those events:

> There is no good nature, that beholding on a common Stage any Tragedie, wherein be represented the miseries of any one man, or the ruine or desolation of a whole Countrie, will not accompanye the outward motions of the Actors, with some inward affection, yea, sometime with teares and vehement compassion, which if wee doe in a Play, whereof the matter is many times untrue, and but invented, Then the practises and horrible cruelties of this Carey Adoughertie and his associates . . . ought much more to move us to commiseration. If we greve when we see cruelties set forth in plaies, because the like have either happened to us heretofore, or may betide us hereafter, then [we have] not onely good cause to lament and be sory for the untimely endes of those silly soules, but to feare also what may happen to others by the like rebellious Tirannie….

The theater, the pamphlet writer argues, is where we learn to grieve. Shakespeare’s mourning parents offer an array of responses that might

be familiar to those who grieve: they withdraw from the world like Pericles (4.4.25-31), curse their child’s killers like Queen Margaret (3 Henry VI 65-67), promise vengeance like Leonato (Much Ado 5.1.73-76), visit their child’s grave daily for 16 years like Leontes (Winter’s Tale 3.2.234-243), face suicidal despair like Gloucester and Alonso, or, like Hermione, collapse and seem to die themselves (Winter’s Tale 3.2.148-149). They do not recover quickly or dismiss the loss. While there are occasions where a dead son or daughter unexpectedly returns, children like Hero, Marina, Imogen, Perdita, Ferdinand exist in the realm of comedy and romance, and their reunions with their parents are often tempered by sorrow and a deep awareness of lost time. In the tragedies and history plays, as in reality, a dead child is “gone for ever” and “dead as earth” (King Lear 5.3.260; 262). But it is also in these plays that showing “the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (Hamlet 3.2.23-24) demonstrates we do not face those pressures alone.

Whether a child dies in a play because of murder, illness, parental discord (as in The Winter’s Tale), or powerful natural forces (as in The Tempest), for some members of Shakespeare’s acting company and their audience, the child died again when talked of. That the community in and around the Globe Theatre was willing to accept the distraction and pain this brought shows that these reminders of a child’s “pretty looks,” sweet words, and “gracious parts” (King John 3.4.95-96) were of use to them whether as comfort or as cautionary tale. Awareness of the high infant and child mortality rates in early modern London, and the high rates among the Lord Chamberlain’s and King’s Men, can help 21st century readers understand that these brutal acts are staged not to shock or entertain the audience, but to allow them—as we must allow ourselves during the pandemic and its aftermath—to confront devastating losses as part of a community that can lessen grief by sharing it.

24 Although he is not Fidelio/Imogen’s parent, Cymbeline’s Arviragus, looking at what he believes to be the corpse of his young brother, wishes for an oblivion that nearly matches Shakespeare’s time as a parent and playwright: “I had rather / Have skipp’d from sixteen years of age to sixty, / To have turn’d my leaping time into a crutch / Than have seen this” (4.2.198-201).
Catherine Loomis holds a Ph.D. from the University of Rochester, and an M.A. from the Shakespeare Institute. She taught at the University of New Orleans, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the Rochester Institute of Technology. She is the author of William Shakespeare: A Documentary Volume (Gale, 2002), The Death of Elizabeth I: Remembering and Reconstructing the Virgin Queen (Palgrave, 2010), and essays on Shakespeare, Elizabeth I, and early modern women writers. She and Sid Ray edited the collection Shaping Shakespeare for Performance: The Bear Stage (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 2015).

Appendix: Number of Actors’ Children Baptized and Buried

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Actor as listed in First Folio</th>
<th>Number of Children baptized by 1616</th>
<th>Number of Children died by 1616</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Shakespeare</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Burbage</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Heminge</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustine Phillips</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Kempe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Pope</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Bryan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Condell</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Sly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Cowly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lowin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Crosse</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Cooke</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Gribnour</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Armin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ostler</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Field</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Underwood</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Tooley</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ecclesstone</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Taylor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Benfield</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Gough</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Robinson</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Shank</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Rice</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hughes, Thomas. Certain Devises and Shewes Presented to her Majesty. London, 1587.


Newes from Ireland. London, 1608.


Smith, Keverne. “‘Almost the copy of my child that’s dead’: *Shakespeare and the Loss of Hamnet*.” *Omega* 64.1 (2011-2012) 29-40.


Notes

The Birthplace of Saint Wulfthryth: An Unexamined Reference in Cambridge University Library Additional 2604

Jessica C. Brown
Adams State University

Cambridge University Library Additional 2604 is a fifteenth-century miscellany that is largely comprised of East Anglian and Kentish saints’ lives. It also includes a vita of Saint Edith—the patron saint of the convent at Wilton in Wessex. This vita names the birthplace of Edith’s mother, St. Wulfthryth, as ‘Lesing’ in Kent. I suggest that this unique reference may come from a desire to firmly connect Edith’s mother as well as Edith herself to a Kentish heritage.

Cambridge University Library Additional 2604 (CUL 2604) is an important miscellany of saints that has only recently received scholarly attention. The content, dialect, script, artistic features, and ownership history of this manuscript indicate that it was probably produced in East Anglia in the late fifteenth century.¹ It contains the vernacular lives of twenty-two saints, all but three of whom are women. Of these women, six belong to the pre-Norman family who founded and led the monastery at Ely: Æthelthryth, Sexburh, Eormenhild, Eorcengota, Whitburh, and Wærburgh. The manuscript also includes several saints who were Kentish or had ties to Kent: notably, St. Eanswith who founded one of Kent’s earliest religious centers at Folkstone, and St. Eadburh who was an abbess of Thanet and venerated at Lyming.² Though their legacy was centered in East Anglia, the Ely group had clear ties to Kent. Sexburh was married to King Eorcenbehrt, and she founded Milton and Minister in Sheppey for herself and her daughter, Eormenhild, before they left and became abbesses at Ely.³ This manuscript is clearly concerned with the families of royal women

¹ O’Mara and Blanton, ‘Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 2604,” 237-47.
Blanton and O’Mara’s article outlines some of the major arguments that they will discuss in their upcoming edition of CUL 2604. Their work will provide important insights into the manuscript’s provenance and historical context.

² Yorke, Nunneries, 23.

³ Yorke, Nunneries, 26.
who set the stage for Christianity in Eastern England. Hild and Modwenna are the only British saints included who were not widely associated with this region. Saint Edith is also included. Though she was the patron saint of Wilton, she was born in Kent to King Edgar and Saint Wulfthryth. Her life in CUL 2604, includes unique details about her family that create further links to Kent—details that may or may not have been fabricated by CUL 2604’s author. Though much of this manuscript is translated from John of Tynemouth’s Sanctilogium Angliae, the author adds the birthplace of Edith’s mother on folio 69v:

Blessid Edith the virgyn was the doughtir
of kynge Edgar and of Wolfride
that was a dukes doughtir born in
Kent in a small village callid Lesing which Wolfride
kynge Edgar had purposed for to wedde.
But she wold not for as sone as seynt Edith was
borne she made hir selfe a nonne of Wilton abbey
and at laste was abbes ther made by seynt
Ethelwolde bishop of Wynchestre.  

Tynemouth’s vita reads as follows:

Beata virgo Editha filia fuit Edgari regis, et Wlftrudis, regii ducis filie,
quam rex insolubilibus votis regno sociare disposuerat; sed partu explicito caste viuere,
quam illecebris deseruire maluit, propter deum,
habitumque monialium de manu sancti Ethelwoldi episcopi apud
Wiltoniam suscepit.

The blessed virgin Edith was the daughter of King Edgar and Wulfthryth, the daughter of a noble leader, whom the king arranged to join in an insoluble royal vow. But after giving birth [she] clearly preferred to live chastely near God more than to diligently serve enticement, and she received the monastic habit at Wilton from the hand of Saint Æthelwold, the bishop.

4 O’Mara and Blanton, ‘Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 2604” 237-47, Blanton and O’Mara have argued that CUL 2604 does not emphasize family connections that would tie the Ely saints to their Kentish sisters—for example, the author fails to mention that Eadburh is Sexburh’s sister in law. They suggest that by omitting the genealogies that were present in CUL 2604’s source texts, the manuscript seems to separate the Kentish saints from the Ely group.

5 This was transcribed from the Harvester Microfilm series.

6 Horstman, Nova Legenda Anglie, 311.
Clearly, the reference to Wulfthryth’s birthplace at Lesing did not come from John of Tynemouth’s account. Indeed, it seems to be unique to CUL 2604. Though it is a small detail, it is significant given the sparse references to Wulfthryth in the historical record.

Other accounts that reference Wulfthryth include The Wilton Chronicle, Gosceline of St. Bertin’s ‘Life of St. Wulfhild,’ and William of Malmesbury’s histories. Though she was probably responsible for establishing and running the convent at Wilton, most records focus on her virgin daughter, Edith, and include Wulfthryth as something of a footnote or back story. Where she is discussed, the details of her life vary widely. For example, The Wilton Chronicle claims that she was the daughter of ‘Syre Godwin,’ but this was probably a confusion with Earl Godwine of Wessex whose daughter was also named Edith and was associated with Wilton. Goscelin’s ‘Life of St. Wulfhild’ claims that Wulfhild and Wulfthryth were cousins. In this account Edgar attempted to first marry Wulfhild, and when that proved unsuccessful, he entered a relationship with Wulfthryth. There also seems to be some question as to how formal Wulfthryth and Edgar’s relationship was—accounts range from rape in William of Malmesbury to ‘insoluble vows’ in Goscelin of St. Bertin’s Life of Saint Edith.

Whatever the case, according to Goscelin, Edgar took Wulfthryth to Kemsing, Kent where she gave birth to Edith. Shortly afterwards she repudiated her ‘husband’ and took the veil. Though her daughter was probably born in the East, Wulfthryth’s background seems to be rooted in Wessex. She and her cousin were educated in Wilton, Edgar met them there, and she returned after their separation—which makes the reference to a Kentish birthplace remarkable.

7 Dockray-Miller, Saints Edith and Æthelthryth, i, 100.

8 Yorke, Barbara ‘The Legitimacy of St. Edith’ 97-113.

9 Edith’s veneration continues to be associated with Kemsing into modernity. A miraculous well associated with her is still set aside in the center of town. See Hasted, “Parishes: Kemsing,” 32-50.

10 Hollis, Writing the Wilton Women, 26.
Given CUL 2604’s interest in the royal families of Kent and East Anglia, it is possible that Wulfthryth’s birthplace was manufactured in order to establish deeper connections between the saints in Wessex and Kent. Edgar’s influence on the Benedictine reforms and the history of pilgrimage to Wilton would make the western connection appealing to a Kentish/East Anglian audience. Of course, if Wulfthryth was truly born in Kent, it would also make sense that she would give birth to her daughter in Kemsing (as most sources claim).

I found no modern location in Kent by that name, but I will speculate on two possible candidates. The first is a property called ‘Lessyng’ that is referenced in a 1502 manorial survey of the Manor of Brook[e] near Ditton. The document states that a property called ‘Apuldur Feld’ is ‘next to a land callyd Lessyng land on the east syde’.  

Another option could be Lidsing, which is located near Chatham. This area was more established than the area near Ditton; it contains a village and a medieval chapel of ease. Wallenberg’s Place Names of Kent describes a number of alternate spellings for this location:

‘Lidisina’ c. 1100 Text Roff; ‘de Lidesings’ 1201 FF; ‘Lidesing, de Lidesinge’ 1226 Ass; ‘de Lidesinges’ 1251 FF; ‘de Lydesynge’ 1270 Ass; ‘de Lydisinges,’ ‘de Lydisinge’ 1278 Ass; ‘Lydefynge,’ ‘Lytesyng’ 1278 QW; ‘Lidesinge’ 1296 Ipm; ‘Lydesinge’ 1311 Ch; ‘de Lydesingg’ 1313 Ass; ‘Lydesynge’ 1318 FF, etc.

Earlier spellings tend to favor ‘i’ and, with a few exceptions, they eventually develop into ‘y.’ Some of these exceptions include ‘Ledesynge 1382 Pat; 1383 Reg Roff’ and ‘Leggyn 1530 ArchC 23, 143-4’. The Old English ‘y’ largely unrounded into ‘i’ in early

11 See the Kent Records Office MS U49 M16.
12 This location and some elements of Kentish dialect features were kindly suggested to me in a personal correspondence by Sheila Sweetinburgh with the help of Paul Cullen. Any mistakes are, of course, mine.
14 Wallenberg, Place Names of Kent, 131-2.
Middle English; however, it became ‘e’ in Kent. It is not impossible that dialectal confusion between ‘i,’ ‘y,’ and ‘e’ could be to blame for CUL 2604’s ‘Lesing.’

In any case, both modern Lidsing and the Ditton area are about twenty miles from Minister at Sheppey which Blanton and O’Mara name as a candidate for CUL 2604’s provenance. Inventories taken during the Reformation indicate that the abbey had a vernacular miscellany of saints’ lives. It was also founded by St. Sexburgh of Ely and dedicated to her; the manuscript’s focus on East Anglian and Kentish saints would make this abbey a logical contender for CUL 2604’s provenance. If the compiler of CUL 2604 was indeed connected to Minister at Sheppey, it makes sense that he or she would try to associate Wulfthryth with the nearby landscape.

Jessica C. Brown currently is an assistant professor of English at Adams State University. She specializes in medieval women’s mysticism and influence on the hagiographic tradition. Her current project focuses on late medieval adaptations of pre-Norman female saints’ lives.

Bibliography


15 Jespersen, A Modern English Grammar, 64.

16 O’Mara and Blanton, ‘Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 2604’ 237-47.


MS U49 M16, Kent Records Office.


Sir John Cheke, Chamberlain of the Exchequer, 1552-53

James D. Alsop
McMaster University

The most obscure aspect of Sir John Cheke’s public career is his tenure as a Chamberlain of the English Exchequer. This study confirms that Cheke’s chamberlainship was a sinecure, albeit one of prestige and profit. Attention is also paid to the three rising gentlemen who held office under Cheke: Robert Creswell, Roger Higham, and William Hunwyke.

The standard accounts of John Cheke’s career provide scant information on his Exchequer chamberlainship, even though this was the most lucrative and prestigious office acquired prior to the final, chaotic, weeks of the Edwardian regime. This research note, based upon a thorough study of all existing institutional records, provides a corrective. It rounds out our knowledge of Cheke’s officeholding and removes some errors in previous scholarship.

Sir John Cheke, royal tutor and gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Edward VI, took the oath as one of the two Chamberlains of the Exchequer before William Paulet, Marquess of Winchester, Lord Treasurer of England, on 18 October 1552. His fellow Chamberlain was Francis Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. Cheke’s immediate predecessors were Sir Anthony Wingfield (1550-52) and before him Thomas Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (1543-50). This was distinguished company for the first Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge. Normally (as in the cases of Talbot, Wingfield, and Wriothesley), the post was an honor reserved for a privy councilor. Indeed, Wriothesley served as a Secretary of State for three years before a Chamberlain’s place became available to him; Cheke was inserted into the Privy Council as an unprecedented third Secretary only on 2 June 1553. Wingfield was a cousin of the late Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk; his wife Elizabeth was a daughter and


2 Exchequer, King’s Remembrancer Roll: The National Archives [hereafter TNA], E 159/331.
co-heir of the Earl of Oxford. Cheke’s wife, Mary neé Hill, was a daughter of a serjeant of the royal household. While holding a chamberlainship, Wingfield was Comptroller of the Household, Talbot was President of the Council in the North, and Wriothesley was Lord Chancellor (1544-47). Cheke was above his ‘station’. No wonder that Cheke, albeit high in the King’s favor in the summer of 1552, had to fight off an immediate, and unprecedented, attempt to share the chamberlainship. Wingfield died on 15 August 1552. Cheke was informally awarded the position at the Council meeting of 25 August. Nonetheless, on the next day John Godsalve, clerk of the Signet, wrote to William Cecil, a Secretary of State and Cheke’s brother-in-law and ally, asserting that there existed a prior understanding whereby he and Cheke would share the office. Godsalve would be disappointed. Cheke was appointed for life by letters patent, alone, on 12 September 1552.

The office of Chamberlain was a distinguished sinecure. In precedence, the two incumbents ranked immediately below the Lord Treasurer, and above the Undertreasurer of England, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the four barons. Cheke’s annual salary was £52.3s.4d., plus a livery allowance each year of £13.6s.8d. out of the Great Wardrobe. All three of the Exchequer clerkships which lay in Cheke’s gift to bestow were entitled to collect fees from the public. However, there exists no record of the private arrangements (if any) which Cheke may have made to share in these fees. Cheke was allowed his salary from the day of Wingfield’s death.

6 Register of Privy Council actions: British Library [hereafter B.L.], Royal Ms. 18. C. XXIV.
7 State Papers Domestic, Edward VI: TNA, SP 10/14, fol. 149.
8 Patent Rolls, Edward VI, IV, 404.
10 Patent Rolls, Edward VI, IV, 404.
is no evidence within the records of the Exchequer between August 1552 and July 1553 that Cheke engaged in the institutional work or actions beyond the ceremonial level. He benefited from the status of the position, the salary, and the patronage. However, his only known fiscal task was as an external Exchequer accountant: Cheke was on the commission to collect the third payment of the Relief, a parliamentary tax, in the city and county of Cambridge. Unlike many Exchequer officeholders, Cheke did not even avail himself of the right to sue, or be sued, in private legal disputes in the Court of the Exchequer – a valuable perquisite of office. Prior to his appointment, Cheke, who was rapidly acquiring a landed estate centered in East Anglia, had numerous dealings with the Court of Augmentations, but few, if any, with the Exchequer. He did possess friendships among well-placed members of the institution. Sir Thomas Chaloner was a Teller, 1550-52, albeit an absentee one who relied upon a deputy, his brother-in-law and successor Thomas Farnham. An even closer long-time friend and supporter, Peter Osborne, became Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancer on 26 August 1552. Nevertheless, the Exchequer in the late Edwardian years was largely dominated by religious conservatives, led by Lord Treasurer Winchester, Undertreasuer and Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir John Baker, several of the barons, and the Teller (and antiquary) Nicholas Brigham, later a personal treasurer to Queen Mary.

11 Patent Rolls, Edward VI, V, 351, 362. The third payment was due in Easter term 1551, but receipts arrived at the Exchequer every term until Michaelmas 1554. Cheke was one of 46 individuals on the commissions, drawn from the elite of the city and county.


13 For examples, see Court of Augmentations records: TNA, E 315/218, fol. 37 (20 May 1547), E 101/163/3, fol. 8 (14 June 1547), E 315/219, fol. 135 (20 August 1548), E 315/225, fol. 14 (8 May 1551), and fol. 198 (8 June 1553). Also relevant is the record book of the Royal Commission on Debts, 1552: TNA, E 163/12/14, fol. 27v (19 January 1552).


In the mid-Tudor period, some Chamberlains used their Exchequer patronage to place their own servants or family members in the institution, others chose to utilize existing personnel. Cheke followed the latter course. As Writer of the Controlment Roll, Cheke removed Wingfield’s appointee, and personal servant, John Crickote or Crickcaste. In his place, Cheke employed Crickote’s deputy, William Hunwyke, gentleman of Halstead, Essex. Hunwyke had earlier been clerk to John Raymond, Wriothesley’s appointee in this position. No firm evidence has been uncovered that Cheke and Hunwyke possessed a personal tie. However, it is surely suggestive that after his appointment Hunwyke, whose normal residence was at Halstead, also acquired a residence at Stoke-by-Clare, Essex, across the Stour River from Cheke’s residence and estates in Stoke-by-Clare, Suffolk.

The individual selected by Cheke to serve as Deputy Chamberlain to strike the Tallies was also a career Exchequer clerk and a rising gentleman. Roger Higham, or Heigham, had served a decade as Deputy Chamberlain in the Exchequer of Audit to three successive Chamberlains, Robert Radcliff, Earl of Sussex, Wriothesley, and Wingfield. On 7 November Cheke moved him to the Exchequer of Receipt, at twice his previous salary. He was a younger son of Robert Higham of Werneth, Cheshire, and he established a gentry family at

17 Wingfield, “Last Will and Testament:” TNA, Prob 11/36, fol. 57-7v.
21 Patent Rolls, Philip and Mary, I, 362.
22 Exchequer, Tellers’ Rolls, expenditure (salaries): TNA, E 405/207-497.
23 Exchequer, The Black Book of the Receipt: TNA, E 36/266, fol. 74. The Deputy Chamberlain (Audit) and the Writer of the Controlment Roll (Receipt) each had a long-established annual salary of £5 a year, and the Deputy Chamberlain to Strike the Tallies had £10. Fees were more lucrative, but would have been shared with their private clerks and, possibly, the Chamberlain. For example, in, or shortly after, the reign of Edward VI, the clerk to the Writer of the Tallies and the Deputy Chamberlain to Strike the Tallies shared a fee of either 12 pence or 18 pence for every tally created: B.L. Lansdowne Ms. 171, fol. 289-9v. On average during the reign, 844 tallies were struck each year: calculated from the Receipt Rolls, TNA, E 401/1176-1202.
Maldon, Essex, centered upon the manor of Jenkin Maldon. The earliest known notices of Higham in the historical record date from 1536-7, when he acquired several leases and estate offices from the Franciscan Abbey of the Minories of St. Clare without Aldgate (the Minories). Following the dissolution in 1538, he remained receiver of the same lands in the first Court of Augmentations; Higham subsequently surrendered this office for an annual life pension of £12.6s.8d. His elder brother, John Higham, was receiver for the lands of Waltham Abbey in the Court of Augmentations. Higham was M.P. For Gatton, Surrey, in the Parliament of 1545. The History of Parliament Trust biography of Higham attributed his return to the patronage of Sir Roger Copley, but there exists no known documentary evidence and the author of that biography was not aware of Higham’s patronage tie to Wriothesley in 1545.

For Cheke’s final appointment, his Deputy Chamberlain in the Exchequer of Audit (the Upper Exchequer), he selected an individual with both a long history in that department and established ties to Cheke, or to Cheke’s circle. Robert Creswell had served in the Exchequer of Audit from at least 1532 as an assistant to (Sir) Christopher More when the latter was secondary to the Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancer and then King’s Remembrancer, 1542-49. Creswell developed an extensive private practice as an attorney for Exchequer accountants. In 1545 Creswell purchased for his

24 Visitations of Essex, 62; B.L., Additional Charter 5982. Higham’s property holdings in 1557 are specified in his will and in the Inquisition Post Mortem: P.C.C., TNA, Prob 11/41, fols. 74-5v; TNA, C 142/116/73.
26 B.L. Lansdowne Ms. 662, fol. 32v.
27 B.L. Lansdowne Ms. 662, fol. 19v.
30 In 1548, for example, he served as attorney for at least thirty-two accountants: Lord Treasurer’s Remembrancer, Memoranda Roll, TNA, E 368/324.
residence the manor of Polling, Hampshire. He was closely tied to Sir John Mason, for whose last will and testament Creswell was later an overseer. Mason and Cheke were friends of long standing, and members of the same family circle. By his marriage to Mary Hill in 1547, Cheke became Sir John Mason’s son-in-law (Mason married Mary’s widowed mother, 1541). In Cheke’s last will and testament, written on the day of his death, 13 September 1557, he appointed Mason as overseer. Creswell was linked to Mason as early as 1543 when he collected the salary due to the latter as clerk of the Privy Council. Later, the two men received bequests from John Warner, Dr. of Physic, of All Souls, Oxford – another associate of the same circle. Other evidence from 1552 linked Creswell to Peter Osborne and his family. After Cheke was appointed to the Exchequer, it was Creswell who served as his agent to collect the salary payments due to Cheke as Chamberlain.

The precise date of Cheke’s removal from office remains uncertain. However, it is not true that he held the chamberlainship until 2 November 1553. This was the date of the formal appointment of Richard Strelley as his successor, who was retroactively entitled to the salary from 8 September. However, Cheke was not paid up to 7 September. He had been placed under house arrest, and

31 Letters and Papers, Henry VIII, XX. ii. 266 (33). Creswell later resided at Odiham and was a justice of the peace for Hampshire, 1554-59: Fritze, “Faith and Faction,” 375.
34 TNA, Prob 11/40, fol. 12.
35 Tellers’ Roll: TNA, E 405/113 (expenditure, salaries). See also the three wage and annuity payments to Mason in Michaelmas term 1560: TNA, E 405/126, mem. 11.
38 Declaration of the State of the Treasury: TNA, E 405/496 (expenditure, salaries).
39 This is the date given in: Johnson, “Cheke”, I, 626.
40 Patent Rolls, Philip and Mary, I, 4, 193.
his possessions inventoried, on 26 July 1553. On the next day he was imprisoned in the Tower; on 12 August he was found guilty of treason. That verdict possibly voided the life grant of his chamberlainship. Cheke was not paid any of the half-year salary due on 29 September. On this date William Hunwyke received his own final salary payment. Higham was paid up to Easter 1554. Thereafter, Henry, Lord Stafford’s appointees received the salaries formerly held by Hunwyke and Higham. Creswell remained in office under Strelley, and then Stafford. Strelley was seriously ill by the date of his appointment, and died on 23 January 1554. Stafford received the vacant office on the following 23 February. Neither the appointment, nor the payment, records of the Exchequer reveal actions by Strelley in respect to the three establishment positions in his gift. It appears that Cheke’s three appointees continued in office (two after 29 September) without formal re-appointment. However, there exists no reason to believe that Cheke retained the chamberlainship much after Mary’s accession. Whether he surrendered it prior to his conviction for treason, or was deprived, is at present unknown. In July 1553, Cheke held three positions at Court. His place as a gentleman of the Privy Chamber apparently terminated on 6 July, the date of King Edward’s death. The office of a Secretary of State ended on 19 July, when Queen Jane’s regime fell. However, the chamberlainship was held under a life grant. A good deal remains uncertain about Cheke prior to his release from confinement and the issue of a general pardon on 28 April 1554.

42 TNA, E 405/499 (expenditure, salaries).
43 TNA, E 405/499 (expenditure, salaries).
44 TNA, E 405/499, 507, and 510 (expenditure, salaries).
46 Johnson, “Cheke”, 626.
for all offenses prior to 1 October 1553.\textsuperscript{47} Precisely how and when he ceased to be a Chamberlain of the Exchequer cannot now be determined.

In conclusion, as Chamberlain, Sir John Cheke advanced three long-serving Exchequer clerks, assisting each in their successful efforts to establish themselves amongst the gentry. One, Creswell, was linked to Cheke’s own circle; another, Crickote, may have developed some ties. Cheke apparently valued the office for its prestige and salary, and perhaps as a stepping stone into the Privy Council and beyond. Few mid-Tudor Chamberlains made much of this post,\textsuperscript{48} and then only when other opportunities were not readily available. Cheke possessed a strong power base in the Privy Chamber centered upon the young King. The grant of a Chamberlain’s office in August 1552 was a suitable reward and a recognition of royal and regime favor: it afforded prestige, salary, patronage and no duties. The Exchequer has never been assigned a large role in Cheke’s career, but its records are complex and successive biographers may be forgiven for leaving the topic obscure. What can be discovered is now on the historical record.

\textit{James Alsop is Professor Emeritus of History at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. He was educated at the universities of Winnipeg, Western Ontario, and Cambridge, and has published extensively on the financial history of the Tudor and Early Stuart period. His current research project is the Elizabethan poet Barnabe Googe.}

\textbf{Bibliography}


\textsuperscript{47} Johnson, “Cheke”, 626; Bryson, Cheke.”


British Library, London. Additional Charter 5982; Lansdowne Manuscripts 2, 171, 662; Royal Manuscript 18. C. XXIV.


Godsalve, John. Letter to William Cecil, 26 August 1552. State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI. In the National Archives, SP 10/14, folio 149.

Higham, Roger. “Inquisition Post Mortem, 1557.” In the National Archives, C 142/116/73.


Johnson, S. E. “Heigham, Roger.” In Commons, 1509-1558. II, 331.

Johnson, S. E. “More, Christopher.” In Commons, 1509-1558. II, 616-7.


Thorpe, S.M. “Strelley, Robert.” In *Commons, 1509-1558.* III, 397-8.


TEXTS AND TEACHING

Teaching Premodern Women and Gender

Lucy C. Barnhouse
Arkansas State University

In her influential *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, Judith Bennett asked “Who’s afraid of the distant past?” Fifteen years after this book’s publication, the question remains relevant. Teaching the history of women and gender in the premodern world presents linked pedagogical challenges. Most students enter college with little to no background in premodern history. Many find premodern primary sources, when taught with the same pedagogical scaffolding as modern sources, inaccessible due to real or perceived strangeness. These challenges can be compounded by the challenges of teaching women’s and/or gender history. This roundtable addresses strategies for productive pedagogy — in both curriculum design and student engagement — in areas of history that may be doubly unfamiliar to undergraduates. The authors, who have experience at institutions of varying sizes and types, and of teaching to diverse audiences, engage with questions such as:

- How do we help students deal with the (perceived) challenges of studying the premodern past?
- What do students find most exciting in the history of premodern women and gender?
- How can we help students process emotional responses to this material?
- In teaching women’s and gender history, how do we help students think critically about resonances between the present and the premodern past?
In my own experience of teaching the history of women in the premodern world, students articulated strong emotional reactions to the injustices and inequalities of past societies. To discourage a view of history as inherently progressive, and to encourage frank discussion, my students and I came up with a collective class ritual. We committed to discussing the sources with intellectual rigor and historical empathy… and ending each day with a mutual exhortation: be angry, make change! At the end of the semester, students wrote of their plans to use what they had learned in conversations with friends and family, as well as in future coursework. I could ask for no better outcome. The articles below present a range of ways in which students can be not only introduced to an unfamiliar past, but shown how to use that past to engage the present.

Lucy Barnhouse is Assistant Professor of History at Arkansas State University. Her forthcoming monograph, Houses of God, Places for the Sick, examines the place of hospitals in the religious and social networks of late medieval cities. She has made an edition and translation of leprosy examination letters for punctu’s Medieval Disability Sourcebook: Western Europe, and contributed to the collection Leprosy and Identity in the Middle Ages: From England to the Mediterranean. She teaches a wide variety of courses in premodern and medical history, and is a founding member of the Footnoting History podcast.
In this paper, I address some of the challenges facing medieval queer history in the classroom, in academic scholarship, and in public-facing work. My intentions are to dynamically integrate some common pedagogical questions with supporting literature to explore them, and argue that any comprehensive study of premodern men, women, and gender must take queer history into account. The subject may feel intimidating, but I encourage all historians to familiarize themselves with the material, gain confidence in teaching it, and integrate it even outside of dedicated courses on the history of gender and sexuality. The below is offered as a brief methodological primer, intended to facilitate conversation, and by no means an exhaustive review of a swiftly growing discipline. For the purposes of this piece, “queer history” is understood as roughly akin to but not identical with “LGBTQ history,” as established post-Stonewall and the emergence of the modern gay rights movement.

The word “queer” is useful as a wide-ranging signifier precisely because of its lack of formal boundaries. We often have a sense of what is “queer” only in comparison to what is usual, acceptable, or normative, and the word contains a distinct connotation of violating these standards in any manner perceived as outside the mainstream. But we must specify whose mainstream that is. Practices that may seem, to us, unambiguously charged with same-sex desire, clearly worthy of being signified “queer,” might not have been at all unusual to medieval peers. We must not assume that modern gendered norms are a timeless standard, or erase the nuances, complexities, and contradictions of human identity, behavior, and desire for centuries.

This piece, therefore, focuses on strategies for responding to: 1) ignorance, 2) belief in a “conspiracy of historians,” and 3) minimalization or compartmentalization. To the first: the widespread

1 See Burgwinkle, “État Présent: Queer Theory and the Middle Ages”; Hollywood, “The Normal, the Queer, and the Middle Ages”; Klosowska, Queer Love in the Middle Ages; and Mills, “Queer is Here.”

2 Zeikowitz, Homoeroticism and Chivalry. See also Ailes, “The Medieval Male Couple.”
popular idea of the Middle Ages does not seem to allow an existential framework for queer individuals, behavior, or community. Students often assume that there were no queer people in the medieval world, or that they hid or repressed their desires, or that they were persecuted by the supposedly omnipotent and intolerant Catholic church. Cases such as John/Eleanor Rykener, the fourteenth-century genderfluid London sex worker, are useful for introducing individual queer lives as embedded in a particular time and place.\(^3\) While there were certainly medieval ecclesiastics who railed against sodomy, the mere existence of a public discourse against queer behavior was no more equivalent to a self-observed prohibition on it than it is today.\(^4\) It is crucial to emphasize the difference between rhetoric and reality, and the shortcomings of using legal and textual sources to make generalizations about everyday activities and private beliefs.\(^5\) Separating students from their stereotypes about the medieval church can be arduous. But – just as they do today – queerness and religion existed in both cooperation and conflict in the medieval world.\(^6\) This requires attention to the difficulties of doing social history on subjects who are rarely the recording voices and often transmitted in hostile historiographic frameworks. Thus, a passage that one scholar might read as clearly referent to queerness can become, in the eyes of another, an empty or even accidental signifier.

Such complexities can fuel the second response, which I have termed the “conspiracy of historians.” This belief insists on a

---

\(^3\) Publications on Rykener include Boyd and Karras, "‘Ut cum muliere’”; Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; Karras and Linkinen, “John/Eleanor Rykener Revisited”; and Goldberg, “John Rykener and Richard II.” The last article, however, has noted flaws; this and the case overall are re-analyzed in a forthcoming book chapter by the present author, “(Re)-Reading John/Eleanor Rykener: The Materiality of Queerness in Late Medieval England.”


queer history that has been systematically destroyed, denied, or covered up by scholars everywhere. Such claims, needless to say, have little in common with the realities of diverse modern-day academics and their investigative projects. Moreover, this rhetoric often comes from those who identify as politically leftist, rather than conservatives who dismiss queerness as a contemporary aberration. When historians challenge the simplistic social media narrative that equates queerness with positive morality, or point out the many difficulties in studying the subject, they are attacked as elitist gatekeepers determined to hide the truth. Dealing with this mindset is not easy, and can be intensely frustrating. This ties into the much larger problem of digital disinformation, and highlights both the urgent need for historical education in the West and disturbing questions as to why it has been so relentlessly devalued.\(^7\)

The desire for queer history to always have been “real,” to recover a narrative disrupted and damaged by modern homophobia, and to feel as if the community’s long-term survival is far more robust than its enemies would like us to believe, is deeply understandable. Any destabilization of the queer past can ripple uneasily onto the endangered queer present, and this leads to the third category of response, that of minimalization. In cases where queer behaviors, narratives, or references exist in the sources, some analyses interpret it as “merely” rhetoric. However, rhetorical or textual queerness is very much its own category of premodern queer history, and must be taken seriously regardless of whether it can be connected to the physical activities of one material historical body. Dismissing rhetorical queerness, moreover, correlates queerness solely with active sexuality, and reinforces the troubling norm where historical queer relationships are only thought of as valid if they can be proven to have been physically consummated.\(^8\) This, of

---

7 Pedagogical manuals on this subject include Wassermann, *Teaching in the Age of Disinformation*, Journell, ed., *Unpacking Fake News*, and Bennet and Livingston, eds., *The Disinformation Age*.

8 The “merely rhetoric” approach and its shortcomings are critiqued in Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature*, pp. 73–74.
course, is impossible, and leads us down the path where we end up deliberately refusing the opportunity to conclude anything.

In closing, while popular media (mis)representing the Middle Ages can often be the bane of historians, constructively and creatively engaging with this material is a critical task for the responsible scholar. There are also moments where it is surprisingly useful. For example, the 2020 film *The Old Guard* featured an immortal gay couple, a Muslim and a Christian, who originally met during the crusades. Using it as a teaching tool can open engaging interpretative pathways, especially in the study of a queer history that is not merely white, male, and European, and address the ways in which “Saracens and sodomites” are still used as the “gays and Muslims” stigmatized in modern political discourse. The ongoing reckoning with racism in the academy, and the decolonization of the curriculum, must therefore additionally incorporate premodern queer histories that focus on people and cultures outside the West, including those of Africa, Arabia, and Asia. Since the present and future of LGBTQ people remains unsettled, understanding their past is more critical than ever, and I encourage us all to pursue it with more care, consideration, and compassion.

9 See Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics, and Mass Media* and *Remaking the Middle Ages*; Evans and Marchal, eds., *The Uses of the Middle Ages*; and Holsinger, *Neomedievalism*.

10 On teaching *Game of Thrones*-related material, see Larrington, *Winter is Coming*; Frankel, *Women in Game of Thrones*; and North, Alvestad and Woodacre, eds, *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers*.


12 For a study of how “Saracens” functioned in the medieval European imagination, see Tolan, *Saracens*. On how the categories of “Saracen” and “sodomite” intersected and informed each other, especially in medieval Iberia, see Hernández Peña, “Reclaiming Alterity.”


14 Recent texts such as Rogers and Roman, eds., *Medieval Futurity*, are vital to continuing this discussion.
Hilary Rhodes received her PhD from the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds in 2019. Her research interests include crusade history, medieval gender, social, and queer history, medieval and modern historiography, and the role of the ‘imagined medieval’ in modern culture. Her first monograph, The Crown and the Cross: Burgundy, France, and the Crusades, 1095-1223 was published in 2020. She currently is an adjunct faculty member at the College of Arts and Sciences, Maryville University, St. Louis.

Bibliography


Visualizing Women: Teaching Modern Images and Medieval Texts about Pre-Modern Women

Esther Liberman Cuenca
University of Houston-Victoria

This paper examines two visual texts for teaching a course called “Saints, Wives and Witches” at the University of Houston-Victoria: Jennifer A. Rea’s graphic novel Perpetua’s Journey (Oxford, 2018), which illustrates the eponymous North African martyr’s third-century prison diary, and the film Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen (2009), directed by Margarethe von Trotta, who drew on feminist readings of Hildegard of Bingen’s writings for the purposes of dramatization. The course itself followed a chronology that took students from antiquity to the early modern period and was divided into thematic units that highlighted women’s intersecting identities with regards to religion, marital status, and social class. The graphic novel and film helped achieve two goals. The first was to give students broad exposure to ancient, medieval and early modern history, presenting the history of women and gender as one with themes and analytical frameworks that can be applied to different cultural contexts. The second was to allow students to visualize women through artistic media, depicting these women’s own words. The strategy to achieve both goals required laying groundwork early on in the class, having lectures that introduced pre-modern history and key concepts in women’s and gender studies.

What animates my teaching at a relatively small, regional Hispanic-Serving Institution is the challenge of getting students interested in women and gender in the pre-modern world—a subject about which I am passionate—when pre-modern and non-US history are not seen as important to higher education in the Texas curriculum. I called my upper-division medieval course “Saints, Wives, and Witches” (rather than a more accurate title such as “Women in the Pre-Modern West, 200-1800”). In this course, women and gender are examined within the context of social rank and marital status, such as the noblewoman who influenced major political developments, the townsman who served as merchant and producer, the wife and mother who provided the basis of family life, and the singlewoman
who formed her own household independent of male relatives. I also devoted discrete weeks to marginalized women and religious minorities, such as Muslim and Jewish women, as well as non-elite women who were peasants, indentured servants, serfs, and slaves.

While the course followed a chronology that took students on a journey from antiquity to the early modern period, I divided the course into thematic units that highlighted women’s intersecting identities with regards to religion, marital status, and social class. This organization allowed lectures and discussion sessions to be focused on women’s and gender issues that my predominantly older and first-generation college students could relate to in their own lives. Because much of pre-modern writing on women’s lives was created by men, the course mainly covered attitudes towards women in legal, religious, and secular literature of the period. The main texts assigned for this course were Emilie Amt’s *Women’s Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (second edition) and Sandy Bardsley’s highly accessible survey *Women’s Lives in the Middle Ages*. To highlight women’s voices, I relied on primary source texts written by pre-modern women, including two that engage with more recent media in very distinct ways: Perpetua’s diary as it appears in Jennifer A. Rea’s graphic novel *Perpetua’s Journey*, and the film *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* (2009), directed by Margarethe von Trotta, who drew on feminist readings of Hildegard’s writing for the purposes of dramatization.

Several weeks at the beginning of the course are dedicated to discussing women’s religious identities as they developed alongside Christianity in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Rea’s graphic novel on Perpetua and Felicity, whose martyrdoms occurred in early third-century North Africa (and were recorded in a diary written by Perpetua), is an impressive piece of scholarship. It not only depicts the events as told by Perpetua (and the male author who continued her story after her death) in vibrant images, but also provides a critical translation of the primary source, historical
essays written for an undergraduate audience that places the diary in its context, and—crucially, in my case—a set of reading questions for students, who may use these questions to guide their analysis or come up with essay topics. For this assignment, I asked students to first read Part I of the book, which is the graphic history of Perpetua and Felicity’s martyrdom, and Part III, which is the translated text of Perpetua’s prison diary. Then, students were to answer a few of the reading questions in the back of the book that deal with the topics of identity, making the graphic history, and the primary source itself. In answering these essay questions, students were to draw information or evidence from Rea’s scholarly essays included in Part II of the book. Though the graphic novel illustrates how Christianity developed as a minority religion in the Roman Empire subject to sporadic persecutions, the story itself is told by Perpetua and through her eyes as drawn by artist Liz Clarke. The modern, artistic interpretation of the story—from the skin color and dress of the protagonist to the conditions of the prison and the transformation of Perpetua into a man as part of a divine dream sequence—turned out to spark a very productive discussion thread with the students.

The topics in “Saints, Wives, and Witches” that struck a chord with the students were the gendered division of labor, the wage gap, attitudes about sex work, and the limits of women’s agency in the political sphere. For the latter topic, I created a separate packet of Hildegard von Bingen’s writings, which included excerpts from her work of mysticism and her letters to political figures, to accompany the students’ viewing of the film Vision. As a secondary source, I assigned Carolyn Walker Bynum’s article “Fast, Feast, and Flesh,” which is a good summary of some of the arguments she made in her influential book Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The assignment prompt asked students to discuss how issues in women’s spiritual and mystical practice, as described by Sandy Bardsley and by Carolyn Walker Bynum in her article, are reflected in the film Vision. I also asked them to consider how and when women in this film are able to exercise agency, and how well the film was able to interpret the
sources produced by Hildegard herself. This assignment allowed students to read broadly on a subject, including primary, secondary, and tertiary (textbook) readings, as well as engage with how modern representations of famous medieval women interpret their lives through a historical lens. The result of our discussion was that students were able to better understand how female mysticism and ascetic practice intersected wielding political power in the Middle Ages.

Instead of a final exam, I assigned a short research paper that students presented to their classmates in a seminar scheduled during the allotted two-hour exam period. This final assignment was perhaps the most gratifying pedagogical experience that I have had in my career because it functioned as a type of consciousness-raising session for the predominantly female students in the class. The paper prompted students to examine the theme of continuity versus change, exploring an issue that deals with women or gender in one or more of the medieval primary sources in the assigned sourcebook. This exploration of continuity versus change involved some modicum of research because students also had to compare their chosen medieval topic with a similar women’s or gender issue prevalent in contemporary society. I provided the students a guide on how to research their papers by directing them to relevant databases and search engines. The theme of continuity and change is a particularly contested one in pre-modern women’s history, given that some of the livelier scholarly debates have centered on whether women had a golden age during the later Middle Ages and then suffered a decline in the early modern period, or, if in fact, the social inequalities women endured continued through the Middle Ages and never really changed in the early modern period.

In this final paper, students engaged with voices beyond theirambits and looked inward at their own lives as people who deal with gendered issues every day. The papers presented in the seminar were interesting, heartfelt, and engaged with relevant literature. One of my favorites was by a Latina student who presented a
paper with the title “Machismo: Gender Socialization in Latino Culture.” She analyzed a male author’s gendered expectations of his aristocratic daughters in the late fourteenth-century manual *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, an excerpt from which we read together in class. According to my student, female inferiority and subjugation to male bravado and social dominance are particular qualities of *machismo* in Latin culture that begin at a young age for both men and women through gendered socialization. Two students wrote on the wage gap, marshaling evidence from contemporary sources such as the US Bureau of Labor, and comparing this information with a medieval source that mandated dairymaids be paid less than men who performed the same tasks. One student, who confessed to me that she was religious and had a keen interest in religious history, examined Caesarius of Arles’ sixth-century rule for nuns found in *Amt’s Sourcebook* and compared it to the type of autonomy that nuns have today after the reforms of Vatican II.

Students that come from underserved populations and public high schools and HSIs have a deep and abiding hunger to learn about social history, women’s and gender issues, and stories that are hundreds if not thousands of years old. The interest may not be immediately there because they have had little exposure to it, but curiosity and desire to learn about pre-modern women can be stimulated by helpful framing, by provocative readings and compelling narratives, visual sources such as films and graphic novels, and, most importantly, by helping students draw comparisons between how gender was constructed, experienced, and often subverted as a category in both the past and the present. It was my hope that students take the class because of its intriguing title but then find unexpected surprises with the primary and secondary source texts that seem interesting and relevant to their everyday lives. Medieval women, it turns out, had very “modern” problems!
Esther Liberman Cuenca is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Houston-Victoria. She teaches courses on digital, medieval, modern, and women’s and gender history. She has edited an issue on medieval pedagogy in the journal EuropeNow titled “Campus Dispatches: Teaching Medieval in Modern Plague Times.

Bibliography


What She Said: Recovering Early Modern Women’s Experiences through Court Records

Jennifer McNabb
University of Northern Iowa

Much of the fame of early modern England’s church courts today is based on their reputation as “women’s courts.” Because ecclesiastical law allowed women to initiate suit and to be sued in their own names, the courts’ records are full of women’s words. But the task of discovering women’s experiences through these records is a methodologically complex one. Words attributed to women, for example, come to us courtesy of the male church court clerk, whose education and legal experience shaped the written record of legal oral proceedings. And while women filing suit gives the appearance of female agency, it was male kin who provided the material support to pursue a cause under the law and whose interests helped sustain the continuance of legal action. The advantages of using these sources in today’s college classroom are many. Documents recounting dramatic verbal confrontations, physical altercations over pews, and secret pregnancies captivate students’ attention. These centuries-old dramas help humanize the past and allow students to encounter ordinary women whose names do not appear in traditional textbooks. These sources offer students access to a more complicated depiction of women’s actions and identities than those associated with the handful of famous early modern women.

I incorporate exercises using ecclesiastical court records into a range of introductory and upper division courses on European history and the history of England to give students an understanding of the lives of non-elite women, a topic often neglected in textbook treatments of the period. Testimony provided by litigants and witnesses in England’s ecclesiastical courts offers compelling narratives about early modern life from a variety of perspectives in terms of age, status, and sex. In addition to censoring disorderly or deviant behavior, ecclesiastical justice allowed women to initiate litigation in their own names. The courts heard actions of defamation, unpaid tithes or uncertain tithe rights, contested ownership of pews in the parish church, probate disputes, and breaches of faith, including

1 See Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage; Outhwaite, Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts; Shepard, Accounting for Oneself; Donahue, Law, Marriage, and Society; and University of Nottingham’s Archdeaconry Resources, https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/archdeaconry/introduction.aspx (accessed 17 January 2021).
those involving courtship, matrimony, and marriage. Many of these are topics about which students have considerable curiosity; they are fascinated by early modern insults hurled in streets and churchyards and are intrigued by the reports of broken promises, jilted lovers, and illicit sex that drove litigants into court. I trade on and promote that curiosity as I introduce early modern primary sources into my classroom. In transcription from my own research files, depositions allow students to explore how women talked about marriage, family, household, and neighborliness before ecclesiastical authorities. Digitized witness statements available online offer important insights into the processes of their production that reveal women’s active participation in creating the documentary record of their words. Together, transcribed and digitized depositions allow students to reflect on church court records as both narrative and material constructions in which early modern women played pivotal roles.

In instance litigation – suits instigated by private individuals rather than agents of the court – witnesses were called on behalf of either the plaintiff or the defendant, with the expectation that whatever testimony they provided would support a favorable legal outcome for the party who produced them. Modern police procedurals have trained our students to think that some witnesses tell the truth and others are lying, so it is essential to help them understand that early modern

---


3 Recognition of these circumstances has shaped the work of many empirical bibliographers and historians of the book, who make a convincing case for the value of paying particular attention to the practical processes by which early modern documents were created and to the materiality of the recorded word. Samuelson and Morrow, “Empirical Bibliography,” 83-109.

4 I use transcriptions of documents produced by the Chester consistory, whose records are housed at Cheshire Archives and Local Studies: Deposition Books of the Consistory Court of Chester (hereafter, CALS EDC 2/3-2/9), and Cause Papers of the Consistory Court of Chester, 1560-1653 (hereafter, CALS EDC 5), consisting of procedural papers (libels, responses, interrogatories, depositions, articles, and sentences).
depositions do not present objective “truth.” They instead represent plausible versions of truth, designed to benefit one of the litigants.\(^5\)

The procedures of early modern England’s ecclesiastical courts both afforded and mediated the ability of female deponents to shape their legal narratives. I talk through these processes with students: witnesses were called before ecclesiastical officials and asked to respond orally to a series of questions, called interrogatories, written in advance by legal representatives of parties at suit.\(^6\) Witnesses were deposed in the presence of a court clerk, who recorded spoken responses in writing. These were not verbatim transcripts, however, since the clerk needed to frame depositions in language meaningful within the parameters of ecclesiastical law. Written accounts were then read back to deponents, who had the opportunity to call for changes as a condition of their acceptance, which they indicated by endorsing the document with a signature or other mark. I encourage students to see extant depositions as an intersection of oral and literate cultures, a negotiation based on what a deponent spoke, what a clerk decided to write, and what both negotiated as an acceptable textual representation of oral testimony.

In a time when women’s voices were routinely associated with the category of gossip, court depositions present an important opportunity to hear women talking in a forum that accorded respect to their stories, on subjects over which they were believed qualified to offer evidence. I help students identify gender-specific narrative strategies in women’s depositions that suggest a tension between speaking with authority and acknowledging the perceived limits of women’s expertise. A deponent in a defamation suit from 1575, Margaret Mainwaring, concluded her testimony by noting although witnesses Katherine Jones, Elizabeth Johnson, Alice Massie, and Elizabeth Bristowe “be women,” their reputations for honesty “are to be credited.”\(^7\) I make it a point to discuss with students why women might appear

\(^5\) Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*; White, *Content of the Form*; Richardson, *Clothing Culture*.


\(^7\) CALS EDC 5 1575, no. 2
to destabilize their own position with phrases that seem to express uncertainty and why it is important not to take them at face value.

In the diocese of Chester in northwest England, my own area of study, defamation suits were dominated by women – who spoke, heard, and were the subjects of insulting speech – and matrimonial suits, by definition, included women, so I focus on these two types of litigation in classroom exercises. Women’s testimony in these suits shows them negotiating and contesting the law and contemporary social conventions. Defamatory speech revolved around the issue of sexual honesty for women, and students can see in deponents’ narratives anxieties about female sexual reputation that could have significant consequences, as when wives facing rumors of sexual impropriety related that their husbands had thrown them out of the house until they could clear their names. Such circumstances offer a valuable opportunity for class discussions of the complex issue of assigning agency in early modern legal action. While defamation suits might name married women as plaintiffs and defendants, for example, it was husbands who paid the costs associated with litigation, since wives lacked independent material resources under the law. After all, when a man’s wife was branded a whore, he was, by implication, a cuckold; a husband’s failure to support a legal objection to the assault on his wife’s reputation could appear to signal his lack of authority and to broadcast his own failings. These suits certainly offer valuable access to early modern women’s words and actions, but they require students to understand context and motivations for proper interpretation.

Matrimonial causes feature fractured relationships where one party alleged that an exchange of consent, outside the oversight of the church, had created indissoluble marriage, and the other party rejected that claim. Women made up approximately one-third of the witnesses.

8 The scholarship on defamation is robust. For two helpful discussions accessible to students, see Gowing, “Gender and the Language of Insult,” 1-21, and Ingram, “Law, Litigants and the Construction of ‘Honour’,” 134-60.

9 In 1570 Anne Newton’s husband was “much offended” by reports of her adultery, for example, as documented in CALS EDC 2/9 p. 19, and witnesses reported that Elena Hodgkin’s husband “evicted her from his house and compayne” after she was defamed as a whore (CALS EDC 5 1585, no. 1).
in matrimonial contract suits in the diocese of Chester, in part because private marriages and consummation frequently took place in domestic spaces, considered the preserve of women. Young female servants could serve as star witnesses, given their familiarity with the movements of members of the household. From their testimony, it is clear that women were familiar enough with the words, actions, and circumstances that created the legal proof or at least the appearance of binding marriage to provide convincing narratives concerning the legitimacy of their own and others’ relationships: their testimony demonstrates an understanding that particular combinations of sex and words made marriage. When women spoke of marriage as either plaintiffs or defendants, they alternately indicated clear understanding of matrimonial law or claimed ignorance of it, depending on circumstances, a marked contrast to male litigants, who stressed their knowledge of the law. In court women constructed realities concerning sex and marriage through words accorded legitimacy and delivered publicly, providing a subjective truth that gives us valuable information about their agency, actions, and attitudes.

The digitization of ecclesiastical court records in recent years allows for consideration of their physical condition and the processes by which they were created, which also enriches students’ understanding of women’s experiences. Digital images reveal early modern depositions as unstable texts. Alterations were a regular feature of the documents and show women as partners in the production of written accounts. While some changes reveal the attempt to eliminate what were possibly scribal errors, elaboration or retraction of text captures the negotiation of witness and scribe. Added text – above lines, in margins – served to expand or explain information previously provided by the witness. Records also contain numerous examples of material being eliminated, although the successful obliteration of text makes discerning its contents and an analysis of changes impossible. Where the original text can be read, though, a comparison of the first and second versions can demonstrate the attempt of witnesses to renounce information that exposed them or their preferred party to censure or to correct the clerk’s transmission of the spoken word.
into written form. Depositions need to be understood as presenting multiple perspectives on – or versions of – women’s testimony to the reader at the same time; one sees simultaneously the first draft of the testimony, written by the clerk to record the deponents’ spoken answers, a revisions phase, comprised of any subsequent stylistic or content changes required by the interchange between the recorded and the recorder, and the final draft, the version deemed sufficiently accurate to secure the witness’s signature or mark of approval.

Emendations negotiated during the course of recording witness testimony, perhaps unsurprisingly, focus on the same key issues that shaped broader storytelling patterns: the precise words spoken on the occasion of defamatory speech or marriage and the behaviors, interaction, and reputations of the parties involved. This usefully signals the reciprocal construction of legal realities between women and institutional authority and allows students to glimpse the intersections among early modern law, social custom, and women’s lived experiences.

Jennifer McNabb is Professor and Head of the Department of History at the University of Northern Iowa. She is a past president of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. McNabb has received numerous teaching awards, and she has released two courses for The Teaching Company: “Renaissance: The Transformation of the West” (2018) for The Great Courses and “Witchcraft and the Western Tradition” (for Audible.com; a third course, “Sex, Love and Marriage in Medieval and Early Modern Europe” is forthcoming). Her research has been published by Amsterdam University Press and in The Sixteenth Century Journal, the Journal of the Woooden O, Women’s History, and Cheshire History.

Bibliography

Primary

Manuscript Transcriptions

Cheshire Archives and Local Studies. Deposition Books of the Consistory Court of Chester (EDC 2/3-2/9) and Cause Papers of the Consistory Court of Chester, 1560-1653 (EDC 5).

Online Digital Resources

Archdeeconry Resources, University of Nottingham, https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/archdeeconry/introduction.aspx

The Bawdy Courts of Lichfield, https://lichfieldbawdycourts.wordpress.com
Cause Papers in the Diocesan Courts of the Archbishopric of York, 1300-1858, University of York, https://www.dhi.ac.uk/causepapers/


Depositions of Southwest England, 1500-1700, University of Exeter, http://humanities-research.exeter.ac.uk/womenswork/courtdepositions

Secondary


