

# Leeds Studies in English

New Series XXXIX

2008



*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
2008

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New Series XXXIX

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School of English  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, England

ISSN 0075-8566

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2008

Edited by

Alfred Hiatt and Andrew Wawn



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*Leeds Studies in English* is an annual publication from the School of English, University of Leeds, England. An international refereed journal, *Leeds Studies in English* publishes articles on Old and Middle English literature, Old Icelandic language and literature, and the historical study of the English language.

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## *Eorodcistum in The Battle of Brunanburh*

Paul Cavill

There are four occurrences of the word *eorodcistum* in Old English, all in verse (for the spelling variants and examples, see the discussion below).<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is to reach some conclusions as to what the compound means, and to discuss the implications of this for the interpretation of the passage in *The Battle of Brunanburh*. I propose briefly to consider the etymology of the elements in the compound, then the examples in verse, and then translations of the compound and inferences drawn from them by various interpreters.

### *Elements of the Compound*

#### *Eored, eored-*

There is no doubt that the first part of the compound was originally a compound itself: *eorod* is made up of *eoh* 'horse' + *rad* 'riding, an expedition, a road', and that it most likely referred originally to a group of horsemen. The (now) simplex *eorod*, *eored* seems to mean 'horsemen' in verse, as in, for example, *Exodus* where Pharaoh's army, repeatedly described as including horses and chariots in the biblical source, is said to shine (*eored lixan*; l. 157b), and it clearly refers to horsemen in the *Maxims*:

Eorl sceal on eos boge, eorod sceal getrume ridan,  
fæste fepa stondan.

[The nobleman goes on horseback, the horsemen ride in a band, the foot-soldiers stand firm.]<sup>2</sup> (*Maxims 1* ll. 62–3a)

But in prose, it is more often a Roman legion or a band of men: Ælfric uses it



frequently to translate Latin *legio*, as in: 'An eorod is ge-cweden on ðam ealdan getele | six þusend manna . and six hund. and six and syxtig' [One legion is said in the old reckoning to be six thousand six hundred and sixty-six men].<sup>3</sup> A rapid review of the compounds with *eorod-* as first element shows that only in one, *eoredmann*, does the word refer unequivocally to a rider or horseman.<sup>4</sup> A phrase in *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* makes these distinctions clear: 'ic þe write be þære unarimedlican mengeo his weoredes, þæs wæs buton unarimedlican fepum, sixtene þusend monna & eahta hund eoredmanna' [I will write to you about the countless multitude of his troop, which comprised (not counting an innumerable number of foot-soldiers), sixteen thousand men and eight hundred cavalry].<sup>5</sup>

### *Cist, -cist*

There is some doubt as to the etymology of the second element of *eorodcistum*. It might be *cyst* 'choice; excellent, precious; the best', from *ceosan*, as the *Dictionary of Old English* suggests (under *cyst* 1, 2, 2a).<sup>6</sup> But it might be *ci(e)st* 'a company', following Bosworth-Toller, who do not supply an etymology.<sup>7</sup> John C. Pope suggests the word is 'unrelated to *ceosan* and should be normalized as *ciest*, an i-stem from \*CÆSTI-, meaning simply *band, troop, crowd*. Cf. Old Norse *KOSTR, pile, heap*.<sup>8</sup> Bernard Muir gives *CHEST* as the OED headword under which the element falls, but without specifying which of the OED senses might be appropriate.<sup>9</sup> The Old English *Exodus* is the only poem in which the simplex is used, and the only verse source which has the element in compounds other than *eorodcistum* where the meaning is concerned with a gathering. In the *Exodus* poem, the Israelite soldiers muster to fight the Egyptians in tribal detachments:

Wæs on anra gehwam æðelan cynnes  
alesen under lindum leoda duguðe  
on folcgetæl fiftig cista;  
hæfde cista gehwile cuðes werodes  
garberendra, guðfremmendra,  
X hund geteled, tireadigra.

[In each [detachment] of the noble race, tried warriors of the people chosen [to fight] under shields, there were fifty companies; each of the companies of the famous host numbered one thousand glorious spear-carrying warriors.] (*Exodus* ll. 227–32)

While the context makes it clear that these men were selected, as they did not include the young or old (ll. 233b–46), it seems to me that the number and tribal configuration of the detachments is what is important in the word *cist*, rather than the fact that they were composed of chosen men. This is perhaps borne out by the use of *cist* in this poem as second element in the compounds *gudcyst* (l. 343) and *herecist* (ll. 177, 257 and 301), where the Egyptian army (l. 177), the Israelite army (ll. 257, 301), and the Simeonite detachment (l. 343) are referred to in a general sense. Thus while it is possible that the *Dictionary of Old English* definition (s.v. *cyst* 4), 'band of chosen men; picked host, troop (perh. a parallel formation to Lat. *legio* <*legere*>)', accurately indicates the etymology and formation of the element *cist* (from *ceosan*, and calqued on Latin *legio*), it does not necessarily give appropriate prominence to the idiomatic sense of the word or element which, like *legio*, might well have rapidly lost any sense of the company having been 'picked' or 'chosen'. The idiomatic sense seems to be 'troop, detachment'.

*\*Eored-cist*

Bosworth-Toller, under *eóred-cist*, glosses the word with 'A company, troop', and adds '[*eóred a band, troop; cist a company*]: this represents the most general sense of the two elements put together. The *Dictionary of Old English* glosses 'troop, band; perhaps "band of chosen men"; only in dative plural: in bands': this represents the general sense of the elements, but holds out the possibility that the second element is *cyst* from *ceosan* and might carry the lexical freight of that etymological source. The *Thesaurus of Old English* includes this term with others such as *here* and *þreat* in the category 'An armed force/band',<sup>10</sup> which emphasises the supposed military connotations of the compound more than Bosworth-Toller's gloss does.

There is some unclarity about the etymology of the second element of the compound and it may not be possible to resolve that; however, the idiomatic use of the term seems fairly clear, and I turn now to the examples in Old English verse. Since discerning the particular sense of *eorodcistum* in the *Battle of Brunanburh* is my aim in this article, I will leave that aside for the moment and examine the other instances first.

*Use of the compound in Old English verse*

In *The Phoenix*, the reborn bird is described in lines that loosely follow the source, Lactantius's Latin *Carmen de ave phoenix*; the bird reveals itself to the world before flying off to its own realm:

þonne he gewiteð wongas secan,  
his ealdne eard of þisse eþeltyrf.  
Swa se fugel fleogeð, folcum oðeaweð,  
mongum monna geond middangeard,  
þonne somniað suþan ond norþan,  
eastan ond westan, eoredciestum,  
farað feorran ond nean folca þrypum  
þær hi sceawiþ scyppendes giefe  
fægre on þam fugle, swa him æt fruman sette  
sigora soðcýning sellicran gecýnd,  
frætwe fægerran ofer fugla cyn.

[When he departs to seek the plains of his ancient home from this land, and as the bird flies and reveals itself to nations, to many people throughout the world — then from south and north, from east and west in bands (*eoredciestum*) they gather, they travel from far and near in hosts of nations where they see the Creator's beautiful gift in the bird, as the true King of glory ordained for it in the beginning a more wonderful nature and more beautiful decoration than the race of birds.] (*The Phoenix* ll. 320–30)

This is an expansion of Lactantius's lines:

Huc venit Aegyptus tanti ad miracula visus  
Et raram volucrem turba salutat ovans. [...]   
Alituum stipata choro volat illa per altum  
Turbaque prosequitur munere laeta pio.

[(All) Egypt comes here for the wonders of this sight and an exultant crowd greets the rare bird. [...] The phoenix flies through the air accompanied by the choir of birds, and the crowd follows, rejoicing in its pious office.] (*Carmen de ave phoenix* ll. 151–52, 157–58)<sup>11</sup>

Here *eoredciestum* is one of the words which expands *turba* 'crowd' in the Latin. The context makes it clear that the crowd is a miscellaneous group, and that the people are neither mounted on horses nor a 'chosen band'. There are no specific military connotations at all. Here the word is best reflected by the term '*en masse*'.

In *The Panther* a rather similar scenario is envisaged. The Panther emits a pleasant smell which draws the attention of people and makes them follow it:

Þonne of ceastrum ond cynestolum  
ond of burgsalum beornþreat monig  
farað foldwegum folca þrypum,  
eoredcystum, ofestum gefysde,  
dareðlacende; deor efne swa some  
æfter þære stefne on þone stenc farað.

[Then from cities and royal palaces and from town houses many a troop of warriors travel on the roads in hosts of nations, in bands (*eoredcystum*) impelled hastily on; the animals likewise travel after the voice in the scent.] (*The Panther* ll. 49–54)

Once again, the context shows that the people are miscellaneous drawn from various places to follow the scent of the panther, and that they are not necessarily mounted on horses nor are they a select band. The militarised vocabulary does not disguise the fact that the followers of the panther are people and animals of all kinds. This is reinforced by the meaning attributed to the word 'panther' and the possibility that in the source(s) of the allegory, the animals and people represent the Jews and the Gentiles in their responses to Christ:

Sic et dominus noster Iesus Christus, uerus panther, omne humanus genus [...] per incarnatione ad se trahens: Captiuam duxit captiuitem [...] Panthera enim omnia capiens interpretatur. [...] Et sicut de ore pantherae odor suauitatis egreditur, et omnes qui prope sunt et qui longe (id est Iudaei, qui aliquando sensum bestiarum habebant, qui prope erant per legem; et gentes, qui longe erant sine lege), audientes uocem eius, repleti et recreati suauissimo odore mandatorum eius, sequuntur eum.[...]

[So also our Lord Jesus Christ, the true panther, drawing to him by his incarnation the whole human race [...] led captivity captive. For "panther" is to be interpreted as "all-capturing". [...] And just as from the panther's mouth a smell of sweetness comes out and all who are near or

far (that is the Jews who once had the instinct of animals, who were near through the law, and the Gentiles who were far off without the law), hearing his voice, filled and restored by the most sweet smell of his commandments, follow him [...]] (*Physiologus: Panthera*)<sup>12</sup>

The passage from *Elene* refers to an army about to cross the Danube to attack Rome:

For fyrda mæst. Feðan trymedon  
eoredcestum, þæt on ælfylce  
deareðlacende on Danubie,  
stærceðfyrhðe, stæðe wicedon  
ymb þæs wæteres wylm.

[The greatest of armies advanced. The foot-soldiers fell into formation, into troops (*eoredcestum*), so that in a foreign nation on the shore of the Daunbe the resolute spear-warriors camped beside the surge of the water.] (*Elene*, ll. 35–39a)

The troops here are foot-soldiers, the primary meaning of *feða*, as may be seen from the *Maxims* lines and *Letter of Alexander* quoted above. P. O. E. Gradon notes the glosses *getrym(m)ed feþa* for *cuneus* 'wedge, phalanx', which reinforces the point that these are not mounted men.<sup>13</sup> And once more it is to be noted that they are not 'picked men' in any specific sense, but the ordinary foot-soldiers of a great army.

The passage from *The Battle of Brunanburh* refers to the routing of the Scots and Norse forces in 937:

Wesseaxe forð  
ondlongne dæg eorodcistum  
on last legdun lapum þeodum,  
heowan herefleman hindan þearle  
mecum mylenscearpan.

[The West Saxons in troops (*eorodcistum*) for the duration of the day onwards pursued the hateful people, savagely hacked those fleeing the battle from behind with milled-sharp swords.] (*The Battle of Brunanburh* ll. 20b–24a)

The thrust of this passage is to contrast the generality of the West Saxons with the generality of the *Sceotta leode* [people of the Scots, l. 11] and *mænig* [...] *guma norþerna* [many a northern warrior, ll. 17–18]; and to make a parallel between the West Saxons and the Mercians (*Myrce* l. 24). There is no mention of horses and no sense that these are specifically 'picked men'. It is in fact one of the main points of the poem that the West Saxons (and Mercians) *en masse* defeated the coalition forces and left their corpses for the beasts of battle to enjoy. The highly bombastic Latin poem quoted by William of Malmesbury mentions that the raiding forces used horses in ravaging the local country:

Marcuerant totis uiridantia gramna campis,  
egra seges uotum deriserat agricolarum;  
tanta fuit peditum, tam barbara uis equitantum,  
innumerabilium concursus quadrupedantum.

[In every meadow the green grass had withered, and the sickly grain had mocked the prayers of the husbandman; so great and so barbarous was the great mass of men both foot and horse, the concourse of innumerable steeds.] (*Gesta Regum Anglorum* II.135)<sup>14</sup>

But in the entire range of early material about *Brunanburh*, there is no reference to the use of horses in the actual battle.

The translation of the Old English poem into Latin by Henry of Huntingdon<sup>15</sup> might be thought to lend some credence to the notion that *eorodcistum* was construed in the early post-Conquest period as having some connotation of 'picked men', as Henry apparently translates the word into Latin as *prius electi*. The first version of Henry's *Historia Anglorum* was complete and in manuscript by 1131.<sup>16</sup> Henry makes a serious attempt to render the Old English closely, as he claims:

De cuius prelii magnitudine Anglici scriptores quasi carminis modo proloquentes, et extraneis tam uerbis quam figuris usi translatione fida donandi sunt. Vt pene de uerbo in uerbum eorum interpretantes eloquium ex grauitate uerborum grauitatem actuum et animorum gentis illius condiscamus.

[The English writers describe the magnitude of this battle in a kind of song, using strange words and figures of speech, which must be given a faithful translation, rendering their eloquence almost word for word, so that from the solemnity of the words we may learn of the solemnity of the deeds and thoughts of that people.] (*Historia Anglorum* V.18)

But it is clear that Henry did not understand the Old English completely.<sup>17</sup> His rendition can be set out thus to show the relation of the Latin to the original:

Wesseaxe forð  
*Gens uero Westsexe*  
ondlongne dæg eorodcistum  
*tota simul die, prius electi,*  
on last legdun lāpum þeodum  
*post indefessi, inuise gentis*  
heowan herefleman  
*globos strauerunt*

[Latin: All that day the people of Wessex, first chosen, then unwearied, laid low the masses of the enemy race.] (*Historia Anglorum* V.19)

Henry generally gets the gist of the Old English, though there are parts that defeat him altogether. He has the habit of rendering words or parts of words that he recognises, whether they are accurate or not, thus showing that he is linguistically aware but not always well-informed. The obvious examples of this are his translation of Old English *froda* and *guðe* as personal names, as noted by Diana Greenway.<sup>18</sup>

But more entertaining are his translation of *afaran Eadweardes* (l. 7) 'sons of Edward' as *defuncti Edwardi* 'of the departed Edward' (where Henry recognises ME *afaren* 'to depart'); *glad* (l. 15)<sup>19</sup> 'glided' as *hilariter* 'gladly'; of *hæleþa nanum* (l. 25) 'to none of the warriors' as *Sanitas* [...] *nulla* 'there was no safety'; *blandenfeax* (l. 45) 'grey-haired' as *verbis blandus* 'smooth in words'; and *hasewanpadan* (l. 62) 'grey-coated' as *buffo liuens* 'the livid toad' (where Henry recognises ME *padde* 'a toad'). These examples show Henry's habit of making some sort of sense of the words from what he knows. Interestingly, in not a few of these types of error he is followed by much later translators: James Ingram coins personal names such as Hildrinc ('The hoary Hildrinc/ cared not to boast [...]') and Inwood ('Nor old Inwood/ and

Anlaf the more/ [...] could laugh [...]') and also has 'glad' for the past tense singular of OE *glidan*;<sup>20</sup> the early nineteenth-century Icelandic translation of the Old English poem by Jón Espólin also has 'leifdu val gulum / póddum' [they left the slain to the yellow frogs (ll. 97–98)], for *hasewanpadan*, as noted by Andrew Wawn.<sup>21</sup>

In the present case, if we are to attempt some sort of reconstruction of Henry's procedure, it seems possible that he interprets *on last* as meaning 'behind, afterwards' in a temporal sense, hence *post*, as this partly motivates *prius* 'first' which is necessary to make sense of *on last – post*; and he possibly also reads *eored-* as some form of *erst* 'first'. The part of *eorodcistum* he clearly recognises is the *-cistum*, which he translates as *electi* 'chosen'. If the term were a simplex this might be correct, but in this case it must be regarded as an expedient. Henry has particular difficulty with poetic compounds as has already been demonstrated, and *eorodcistum* is a further example. The point here is that Henry's translation constitutes an unreliable guide to the actual meaning of the Old English; he has no sense of this compound as an independent semantic entity, but is giving his best attempt at a piecemeal literal translation of the surrounding words and the elements, *de uerbo in uerbum*.

### *The sense of eorodcistum*

From the evidence of the four occurrences in Old English poetry it is possible to reach two clear conclusions about *eorodcistum*. Firstly, it has nothing inevitably to do with horses; secondly, it does not refer to 'chosen bands'. In the two properly military contexts, *Elene* and *Brunanburh*, it may (and probably does) refer to gatherings of men in particular formations, though even here it still refers to the entire mass of men on foot; but in the other two contexts it seems to mean assemblages of people, or everyone (and even animals) *en masse*. In the light of the evidence above that in two out of four of the occurrences the word refers to people or animals in general, not even the *Thesaurus of Old English* categorisation, 'An armed force/band', which correctly removes any reference to horses or chosen men, can be thought accurate.

In all contexts, the word is adverbial in function, referring to the manner in which people gathered, journeyed, were organised or pursued their enemies. This raises the question whether it is appropriate to gloss it as if it were a noun with a dative plural inflection. Certainly, it is that natural tendency to deduce a noun that



has led to the mistaken glosses that have been discussed here. The roughly parallel word *floc(c)mælum* 'in groups' is given as an adverb in the *Dictionary of Old English*. Though the verb of motion is not as consistent as it is with *feran/faran flo(c)mælum*, there is nevertheless a verb of motion present in each case with *eorodcistum*. Given the lack of evidence for a nominal form, it seems to me that at the very least there should be an asterisk to indicate a hypothetical form for *\*eored-cist*, and that (whatever the etymology) a more accurate analysis and gloss for *eorodcistum* and variants would be 'adverb; *en masse*, in bands'.

### *Translations and interpretations*

The pull of etymology and tradition is strongly in evidence in modern glosses and translations of *The Battle of Brunanburh*. Pope, in his *Seven Old English Poems*, glosses *eorod-cyst* 'picked company' and [*eorod*]-*ciest* 'band of horsemen', thus giving the two erroneous translations as alternatives.<sup>22</sup> Similar is Michael Swanton: '*eorodcistum* [...] (*eored* "mounted troop", from *eoh* "war-horse"); but perhaps here, less specifically, it means "elite troops".<sup>23</sup> Early in the nineteenth century Ingram translated the compound 'with chosen troops', and this remains in the *Dictionary of Old English*, as has been seen.

Other scholars perpetuate the more specific, horse-related mistranslation. Dorothy Whitelock's influential version has: 'The whole day long the West Saxons with mounted companies kept in pursuit of the hostile peoples [...]'.<sup>24</sup> And Swanton's translation runs:

All day long  
the West Saxons with elite cavalry  
pressed in the tracks of the hateful nation [...] (p. 108)

Burton Raffel's translation gives us:

All the battle  
Became the Wessex cavalry endlessly  
Hunting a broken enemy [...] <sup>25</sup>

This is interesting in itself, but in relation to *The Battle of Brunanburh* it is important to the question of the location of the battle. There is a strong tradition in

which *eorodcistum* has been translated as having to do particularly with horsemen and cavalry and this has been used by historians to draw entirely erroneous conclusions about the location of the battle. It is intriguing to see how these apparently innocuous translations are used. Alfred P. Smyth wishes to argue for a site for the battle somewhere in the area of Bedfordshire, in the area called *Bruneswald*, so he notes, '[...] the West-Saxon pursuit (on horseback) lasted "the whole day long"'.<sup>26</sup> He goes on, 'The Anglo-Saxon poem in stressing the day-long pursuit of the fugitives from *Brunanburh* which was cut short by nightfall, implies that the battle was fought far from the Scottish and Strathclyde borders and far away from the coast [...] The Anglo-Saxon poem clearly rules out a coastal location [...]' (pp. 45–46). Cyril Hart prefers to locate the battle at Bourne in Lincolnshire and objects to Smyth's idea on the grounds that fenlands are inhospitable to horses: 'Smyth's location for the battle is weakened still further by the statement in the OE poem that the West Saxons pursued Olaf on horseback to his ship, which is said later in the poem to have been moored on *Dingesmere*. [...] Even if a [...] large mere had been located there [on the River Welland], it is unlikely that it could have been reached on horseback.'<sup>27</sup>

Michael Wood summarises the information available about the battle, before going on to address the question 'Where then did the battle take place?', in this fashion:

As in many famous battles of the period the final advance was made at dawn, and in a huge and savage struggle the English won a complete victory. The earliest sources describe a regular pitched battle between dense infantry lines, not a rout. Bands of West-Saxon troops who were probably mounted (*eorodciste*) then harried the defeated invaders in a sustained pursuit which lasted *ondlongne dæg*, 'all through the day', a phrase which perhaps indicates that the battlefield was at least the best part of a day's ride from the ships. This account leaves an obvious implication: that after Athelstan had made his Mercian rendezvous and launched his rapid attack on the invaders, the battle took place in the region between the hostile peoples, and the lost *burh* therefore lay in the border zone between the Northumbrians and the southern English.<sup>28</sup>

Paul Hill rules out Bromborough on the Wirral as the site of the battle:

It has been argued [by Hill himself] that Bromborough, despite the strength of the etymological argument, is an unlikely place for the battle of Brunanburh since the site is walkable from the shore. This would make a mockery of the Brunanburh poem which states that all night long (sic), mounted companies chased the Vikings until they reached their ships.<sup>29</sup>

And much more reasonably, Higham also invokes the cavalry translation in his discussion of the battle-site: 'Defeated there [on the Mersey], the fugitives perhaps made for Meols, the only beach-head site in the vicinity likely to have offered even a small number of vessels by which to effect an escape from the mounted English soldiers still harrying them.'<sup>30</sup>

The point here is not to deny that either side in the battle had horses: such a suggestion would be close to absurd. But C. Warren Hollister's discussion rightly draws attention to 'the absence of any positive reference in Old English sources to the participation of Anglo-Saxon cavalry in battles'.<sup>31</sup> The evidence above does not support the notion that the Old English poem gives warrant for a pursuit of the defeated troops by 'elite cavalry' or 'mounted companies', with the implication that the West Saxons had specialised mounted forces. Nor can this single word, *eorodcistum*, have implications for the geography and location of the battle-site such as those that have been mentioned above: the battle and escape might have, and probably did, spread over a relatively small area. The arguments I have mentioned are not only semantically flawed in that *eorodcistum* does not refer to West-Saxon 'elite cavalry', they also make assumptions about the battle that might be thought implausible: that the Viking forces also had cavalry, for example, in order to escape the pursuit, or that the flight was an orderly affair in a single direction. What the poem actually says is that the West-Saxons *en masse* harried the fleeing troops from behind for the whole day. This seems to be something much more like a process of 'mopping up' after the first onset and breaking of the ranks than the headlong chase over substantial distances deduced by some writers.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All poetic texts are quoted from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–42). Translations are my own except where otherwise attributed.

<sup>2</sup> See Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 45–50, for a consideration of the verb *sceal* and its meaning in this context.

<sup>3</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94 and 114 (London: Oxford University Press, 1881–1900; rpt 1966 in 2 vols), II, 158 (St. Maurice and his Companions), II. 12–13.

<sup>4</sup> Using the online Old English corpus, *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus in Electronic Form*, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Sharon Butler, Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, ed. by Andy Orchard, in his *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf'-Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 228–29, Orchard's translation. The Latin has *exercitus* for *weored*, *pedes* for *feþa* and *eques* for *eoredmann*.

<sup>6</sup> *Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form, A–F*, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. by Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller (London: Oxford University Press, 1898; repr. 1973), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement*, ed. by T. Northcote Toller, with revised and enlarged addenda by Alistair Campbell [1972] (London: Oxford University Press, 1921; repr. 1980).

<sup>8</sup> *Seven Old English Poems*, ed. by John C. Pope (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1966), p. 138. Cleasby-Vigfusson (*An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, ed. by Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, 2nd ed. with a supplement by Sir William Craigie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957)) does not clearly list this 'pile, heap' sense for *kostr*, prefacing the entry with 'a choice, the fundamental notion being trial'.

<sup>9</sup> *Leoð. Six Old English Poems: A Handbook*, ed. by Bernard James Muir (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1989), p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> *A Thesaurus of Old English*, ed. by Jane Roberts, Christian Kay with Lynne Grundy, 2 vols, King's College London Medieval Studies, 9 (London: King's College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1995), under item 13.02.10.01.02.01.

<sup>11</sup> Text from *The Phoenix*, rev. ed. by N. F. Blake (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), p. 95. Translation from *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in*

*Translation*, trans. by Michael J. B. Allen and Daniel G. Calder (Cambridge: Brewer, 1976), p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> Text and translation from *The Old English Physiologus*, ed. by Ann Squires (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1988), pp. 105–8.

<sup>13</sup> *Cynewulf's Elene*, rev. ed. by P. O. E. Gradon (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1977), p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Text and translation from William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum, The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), I, pp. 220–21.

<sup>15</sup> Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum, The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 310–15.

<sup>16</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. by Greenway, p. lxxvii.

<sup>17</sup> In a brief examination of Henry's translation, Edith Rickert, 'The Old English Offa Saga, I', *Modern Philology* 2 (1904), 29–76, points to three features, '(1) various blunders, often absurd, due to a misunderstanding of the words; (2) a successful removal of much distinctively Old English coloring; (3) the retention of a few phrases unmistakably Old English in idiom' (pp. 37–8). She lists several examples in the first few lines of the text.

<sup>18</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. by Greenway, pp. 312–13.

<sup>19</sup> Line numbers refer to the Old English poem; the Latin translations are those of Greenway.

<sup>20</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Rev. James Ingram (London: Dent, n.d. [original 1823]), pp. 84–87.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Wawn, 'Anglo-Saxon Poetry in Iceland: The Case of *Brúnaborgar Bardaga Quida*', *LSE n.s.* 37 (2006), 473–90. Wawn suggests that Jón's mistranslation here may have been spontaneously generated from the Old English (p. 483) of Langebek's edition, which reads 'thane hasean padan' (p. 482). I am grateful to Robert Bjork for the reference, and to Professor Wawn for a copy of the article.

<sup>22</sup> *Seven Old English Poems*, ed. by Pope, p. 162, s.v. *eorod*.

<sup>23</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed. by M. J. Swanton (London: Dent, 1996), p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. and trans. by Dorothy Whitelock, with David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Burton Raffel, *Poems and Prose from the Old English*, ed. by Alexandra H. Olsen and Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ll. 20–22.

<sup>26</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin: The History and Archaeology of Two Related Viking Kingdoms*, 2 vols (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1987), II, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw* (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), p. 519 fn. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Wood, 'Brunanburh Revisited', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 20 (1980),

200–17, at pp. 205–06. I am grateful to Michael Wood for stimulating *viva voce* discussion of the site of the battle.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Hill, *The Age of Athelstan: Britain's Forgotten History* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004), p. 144. Hill echoes John Henry Cockburn, *The Battle of Brunanburh and its Period Elucidated by Place-Names* (London: Leng, 1931), when the latter writes (p. 45, Cockburn's bold font), 'Bromborough is only 10 minutes' **walk** to the Mersey. That is not a "long pursuit."

<sup>30</sup> N. J. Higham, 'The Context of *Brunanburh*' in *Names, Places and People: An Onomastic Miscellany for John McNeal Dodgson*, ed. by Alexander R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1997), pp. 144–56 (p. 155).

<sup>31</sup> C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 134–40, quotation from p. 135.

*Meotod, the Meteorologist: Celestial Cosmography in  
Christ and Satan, lines 9-12a*

Miranda Wilcox

*Christ and Satan*, the last poem in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, begins with an eighteen-line description of the creation of the universe in which Christ constitutes the physical and temporal elements of heaven and earth. The first six lines of *Christ and Satan* imagine a cosmographic map as the Creator frames the dimensions of the cosmos formed out of the four elements:

þæt wearð underne eorðbuendum,  
þæt meotod hæfde miht and strengðo  
ða he gefestnade foldan sceatas.  
Seolfa he gesette sunnan and monan,  
stanas and eorðan, stream uton sæ,  
wæter and wolcn, ðurh his wundra miht.<sup>1</sup>

[It became clear to the earth-dwellers that the Creator had might and strength when he established the corners of the land. He himself fixed the sun and moon, stones and earth, the Ocean outside the sea, water and cloud, through the might of his wondrous powers.]

The poet notably diverges from the chronology of creation as recounted in the first chapter of Genesis. The poetry instead echoes allusions to the creation and cosmological images in sapiential books of the Bible, especially Psalms and Job.<sup>2</sup> Although expressed in vernacular renditions of biblical language, the cosmic structures in the prologue are imagined according to a model of the universe in the hybrid cosmology developed by patristic exegetes who syncretised Hebraic scriptural accounts of creation with Hellenistic astronomy and physics.<sup>3</sup> Early Latin Christian scholars applied an exegetic methodology driven by the

'handmaiden' attitude to secular learning, namely an attitude that 'secular disciplines, especially natural philosophy and science, should not be studied for their own sakes, but only to understand and explicate holy scripture and theology.'<sup>4</sup> One of the most significant areas in which patristic exegetes turned to the dominant theories of the origins and mechanics of the world in Greek natural philosophy was in explications of scriptural accounts of creation.<sup>5</sup>

The next two lines of *Christ and Satan* provide an example of the assimilation of Greek astronomy with the scriptural narrative of the creation of the celestial regions. Lines seven and eight locate the planet earth in relation to other heavenly bodies:

Cleowne ymb lyfte clene ymbhaldað  
meotod on mihtum, and alne middangeard.<sup>6</sup>  
[The Creator in his might entirely supports the sphere around the air, and  
all middle-earth.]

Emily Thornbury recently suggested emendations to these lines which allude to the theory that 'the heavens were structured in a series of concentric spheres surrounding the earth, the lowest of which was the air breathed by living creatures.'<sup>7</sup> Greek natural philosophers, as early as the fifth century BC, proposed models of a geocentric universe comprised of revolving nested homocentric spheres.<sup>8</sup> Patristic exegetes adopted the general concept of the sphericity of the universe in their hexaemeral commentaries without delving into the complex mathematics of various configurations of epicycles and eccentrics that explained planetary motion. As Christianity spread through Western Europe, these patristic commentaries became authoritative texts for medieval Christians, and when patristic cosmology was codified by Latin encyclopedists it became the orthodox Christian worldview.

The next four lines provide an example of the syncretism inherent in much of the patristic cosmology and the main focus of this paper. These lines situate the creator, who is Christ, as inhabiting heaven, a cosmic region which has its own geographic features distinct from earth, but not so distant as to prevent Christ from gazing on the terrestrial regions and controlling terrestrial weather:

he selfa mæg sæ geondwlitan,  
grundas in heofene, godes agen bearn.  
and he ariman mæg rægnas scuran,



dropena gehwelcne.<sup>9</sup>

[He himself is able to see through the sea, the foundation in heaven, God's own Son, and he is able to count the showers of rain, each of the drops.]

The image of an aqueous and solid barrier between the celestial and terrestrial regions in lines nine and ten caused confusion for the poem's modern editors, especially those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The manuscript reading of 'grundas in heofene' seemed particularly nonsensical; how could there be *grundas* in heaven, and how could Christ see through such *grundas*? In 1857, Christian W. M. Grein suggested emending 'heofene' to 'geofene' (ocean) rendering the line, as a subsequent editor M. D. Clubb translated it, to mean 'he can see through the ocean, the very bottom of the deep'.<sup>10</sup> Grein's emendation was adopted by subsequent editors: Friedrich Graz, Peter J. Cosijn, M. D. Clubb, and George Philip Krapp.<sup>11</sup> The most recent editor, Robert Finnegan, argues against this emendation after concluding that the manuscript reading of *heofen* describes 'the ability of *godes agen bearn* to look *through* the sea to the foundations of creation, which foundations are set in heaven.'<sup>12</sup> I argue further that the manuscript reading 'grundas in heofene' in line ten provides the key to recognizing lines nine through twelve as a perfectly sound explanation of the transparent firmament and the celestial ocean, two key elements in patristic cosmography. The firmament or *grundas* was imagined as a solid spherical boundary that separated the celestial waters or *sæ* from the earth's atmosphere and prevented the earth from being flooded by the celestial waters except when Christ permitted rain to fall as described in lines eleven and twelve.

The concept of the firmament and celestial waters reveal the considerable effort and ingenuity that early Christian exegetes made to harmonize the model of the universe portrayed by divine authority in scripture with the scientific authority of contemporary Hellenistic cosmologies. Fourth- and fifth-century Christian exegetes of Genesis, namely Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine, discovered a remarkably consistent cosmographic model throughout the Old Testament. A modern biblical commentary summarizes:

The ancient Hebrews imagined the world as flat and round, covered by the great solid dome of the firmament which was held up by mountain pillars (Job 26. 11; 37. 18). Above the firmament and under the earth was water, divided by God at creation (Genesis 1. 6, 7; cf. Psalms 24. 2; 148.

4). The upper waters were joined with the waters of the primordial deep during the Flood; the rains were believed to fall through windows in the firmament (Genesis 7. 11; 8. 2). The sun, moon, and stars moved across or were fixed in the firmament (Genesis 1. 14-19; Psalms 19. 4, 6).<sup>13</sup>

The creation of the firmament is described in Genesis 1. 6-7; God divides the waters above and below a *firmamentum* in all known versions of the Vetus Latina, a *stereoma* in the Septuagint, and a *raqia* in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>14</sup> The Bible provides almost no explanation of what the firmament is aside from its name. In Classical Latin, a *firmamentum* was 'a strengthening, support, prop', an appropriate word to render Greek *stereoma* 'a solid body', which in turn rendered the problematic Hebrew *raqia* in terms of its verbal definition in Syriac, 'to strengthen'.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of a firmament was easily adapted by Basil, followed by Ambrose and Augustine, to align with prevailing Aristotelian astronomy; the firmament was considered the boundary or lowest level of the outermost sphere of the heavens, usually called the sphere of the fixed stars, in a universe composed of seven or eight concentric spheres rotating around Earth.<sup>16</sup> However, the presence of waters existing above the firmament was harder to explain in terms of Greek physics.

Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine struggled to reconcile the biblical insistence of the presence of waters in the heavens above the firmament with the Greek doctrine of the relative weights and positions of the four elements and with the Stoic conception of fiery heavenly spheres.<sup>17</sup> According to Greek physics, the heaviest elements (earth and water) were drawn downwards by their weight and the lighter (air and fire) were drawn upwards by their lightness; thus, the universe's equilibrium would not be maintained if there was water in the fiery and airy heavens.<sup>18</sup>

In his third Lenten homily based on the book of Genesis, Basil argued that the waters above the firmament were necessary to regulate the temperature of the universe; the waters provided a cooling buffer between the earth and the burning sun and other igneous heavenly bodies.<sup>19</sup> For Basil, the firmament was not solid but firmer than the lighter and fiery substances in the celestial regions and, like a valve, steadily filtered the celestial waters to earth as rain through the firmament to moderate the temperature produced by heavenly fires.<sup>20</sup>

Ambrose transmitted a generalized explanation of Basil's theory that the waters above the firmament acted as a coolant for the fiery heavenly

constellations. In his *Exameron*, rain on earth originates from these celestial waters:

in caelo, cum sit ignitus et micans fulgentibus stellis polus, aqua esse possit intellegi, quae uel supra caelum est uel de illo superiore loco in terram largo frequenter imbre demittitur.<sup>21</sup>

[Since the pole is fiery and glitters with shining stars, in heaven there might be understood to be water, which is either above the heaven or from that high position falls frequently to earth in a heavy rain shower.]

Ambrose further elaborates how the waters above heaven reveal the grand cosmic balance:

ideoque pondere et mensura examinavit uniuersa; numerata enim sunt ei et stilicidia pluuiarum, sicut in libro Iob legimus. sciens uel rerum facilem defectum fore uel solutionem uniuersitatis, si alterum exsuperaretur altero, ita utriusque temperauit dispendia, ut neque plus ignis exquoqueret neque exuberaret aqua quam inminutio fieret utriusque moderata, quae et superfluum detraheret et necessarium reseruaret.<sup>22</sup>

[And thus God balanced all things with weight and measure; even the drops of rain are numbered by him, as we read in the book of Job. Knowing that either there would be a tendency toward a failure of things or a dissolution of the universe if one element was dominated by the other, thus he tempered the imbalances of each so that neither would the fire consume nor the water drown, more than what would be an appropriate measure in each, so as to remove the excess and retain what was essential.]

The interaction between the super-celestial waters and the firmament in Ambrose's conception of the universe is not just as a temperature regulator but a fundamental process that contributed to the grand cosmic balance of its design.

Augustine was more hesitant to adopt theories of classical astronomy than either Basil or Ambrose, especially when they contradicted the scriptural account.<sup>23</sup> In *De Genesi ad litteram* II. i-viii, Augustine rejects the argument that the universe was ordered by God's capricious omnipotence; instead, he argues that God's creation is ordered by physical principles that we can discern if we stretch our reason to understand their proper natures.<sup>24</sup> Augustine reviews the

doctrine of the ordering of elements by weight and suggests that there could be water above the firmament in the rarified form of vapor, which is lighter than air and heavier than the fiery heaven; such a conception would not challenge the Hellenistic theory of elemental weights nor Genesis 1. 6-8.<sup>25</sup>

The cosmographic explanations of Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine were summarized and standardized in one of the most widely consulted medieval handbooks of natural philosophy: Isidore's *De natura rerum*. By the sixth century, the debate about celestial waters between Christians, who claimed the Bible as their authority, and their secular peers, who claimed Greco-Roman science as their authority, had ceased; Isidore presents the synthesis of scripture and astronomy as the accepted worldview without contradiction. Although his cosmological summaries are still fraught with inconsistencies, these inconsistencies were not to be reevaluated and revised until the tenth through thirteenth centuries, when Arabic and Greek Aristotelian astronomical texts became available in Western Europe.<sup>26</sup> Isidore described *caelum*, heaven, as

rotundum, volubile, atque ardens esse dixerunt. Cuius sphaeram super aquas esse putaverunt, ut in ipsis volvatur, eiusque incendium temperent.<sup>27</sup>

[rounded, spinning, and burning. They thought that its sphere was above the waters, so that as it is rolled [in circuit] on them they would temper its burning.]

He explains the mechanics in greater detail in chapter XIII:

Cuius quidem coeli naturam artifex mundi deus aquis temperavit, ne conflagratio superioris ignis inferiora elementa succenderet. Dehinc circulum inferioris coeli, non uniformi, sed multiplici motu solidavit, nuncupans eum firmamentum propter sustentationem superiorum aquarum.<sup>28</sup>

[The creator of the world, God, certainly tempered the nature of this heaven with waters, so that the burning of higher fire would not set the lower elements on fire. Then he made the circle of the lower heaven, not having one zone but multiple zones, solid by motion, calling it the firmament because it supports the higher waters.]

For Isidore, the waters above the heavens formed a cooling layer that protected the material world from the empyrean fire of the spiritual realms.<sup>29</sup>

Two Irish treatises written in the seventh century, *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* by the 'Irish Augustine' and *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, reveal a strong insular interest in celestial cosmology.<sup>30</sup> These treatises probably relied exclusively on Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and the Bible for their conception of the firmament, celestial waters, and theories of rainfall. The Irish scholars were intrigued by the possibility that the celestial waters were created as reserves for the Flood.<sup>31</sup> With this premise, they considered two alternatives: either the waters returned above the firmament after the Flood, and the usual pattern of rainfall continued; or there had been no rainfall before the Flood, and the water that fell from the firmament during the Flood became the source for the current pattern of evaporation and rainfall in the terrestrial atmosphere.<sup>32</sup>

In the early eighth century, Bede adapted much from Isidore's *De natura rerum* in his own popular scientific treatise, *De natura rerum*, as well as in his commentary on Genesis, *In Genesim*.<sup>33</sup> Bede also drew on the Irish *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, Basil, Augustine, Ambrose, as well as Pliny, and he distilled their commentaries into concise summaries. In his commentary on Genesis, Bede references Basil's comparison between the purity, solidity, and transparency of *crystallinus lapidis*, crystalline rock, which was thought to have been made from congealed waters, and the 'solidified substance of waters in the firmament of heaven' (*firmamentum caeli substantiam solidarit aquarum*).<sup>34</sup> Bede also quotes Ps. Clement via Rufinus's translation regarding the formation of the firmament on the second day of creation:

Iam uero aqua quae erat intra mundum in medio primi illius caeli terraeque spatio, quasi gelu concreta et crystallo solidata distenditur. Et huiusmodi firmamento uelut intercluduntur media caeli ac terrae spatia idque firmamentum caelum conditor appellauit, antiquioris illius uocabulo nuncupatum, et ita totius mundi machinam cum una domus esset in duas diuisit regiones.

[Now, indeed, the water which was within the world in the middle of the space between that first heaven and earth is expanded, hardened like ice and solidified like crystal. And the middle region of heaven and earth is shut off as it were by a firmament of this kind, and the Creator called this firmament 'heaven', so-called from the name of that older one, and thus

he divided the fabric of the whole world, although it is one structure into two regions.]<sup>35</sup>

Bede addresses the function of the firmament and celestial sea in *De natura rerum*:

VII. De caelo superiore: Caelum superioris circuli proprio discretum termino et aequalibus undique spatiis collocatum uirtutes continet angelicas. [...] Hoc Deus aquis glacialibus temperauit ne inferiora succenderet elementa. Dehinc inferius caelum non uniformi sed multiplici motu solidauit, nuncupans illud firmamentum propter sustentationem superiorum aquarum.

VIII. De aquis caelestibus: Aquas super firmamentum positas, caelis quidem spiritalibus humiliores sed tamen omni creatura corporali superiores, quidam ad inundationem diluuii seruatas, alii uero rectius ad ignem siderum temperandum suspensas adfirmant.<sup>36</sup>

[Concerning the higher heaven: heaven, separated by the particular boundary of the higher circle and positioned with equal intervals on both sides, has angelic Powers. [...] God tempered this place with icy waters so that the lower elements would not be set on fire. Henceforth the lower heaven was not strengthened by uniform motion but by multiple motions; it is called the firmament on account of its support of the higher waters. Concerning the celestial waters: some affirm that waters were positioned over the firmament, indeed lower than the spiritual heavens but yet higher than every corporeal creature, indeed they were reserved for the inundation of the Flood, but others say more correctly that they were suspended to temper the fire of the stars.]

Bede's *De natura rerum* became the standard textbook of natural history for generations; multiple manuscripts were produced and circulated in the Carolingian Empire and late Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>37</sup> Surviving manuscripts, references in Anglo-Saxon library catalogues, and citations by Anglo-Latin authors suggest that Ambrose's *Exameron*, Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*, and Isidore's *De natura rerum* were known in England during the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>38</sup> However, to pinpoint any one as the single source for *Christ and Satan* would be impossible; it is more likely that the patristic cosmology portrayed in

these texts would have been dispersed widely enough to have been the accepted world view among educated Anglo-Saxon Christians.

So prevalent was the patristic cosmological model in the early Middle Ages that its circulation was not limited to just medieval scientific and exegetical treatises, the model was also transmitted through liturgy. The first two stanzas of the hymn *Inmense caeli conditor* of the New Hymnal articulate the cosmographic details outlined above:

Inmense caeli conditor;  
Qui, mixta ne confunderent,  
Aquaе fluenta dividens  
Caelum dedisti limitem

Firmans locum caelestibus  
Simulque terrae rivulis,  
Ut unda flammas temperet,  
Terrae solum ne dissipet.

[Infinite creator of the sky, you who divided the floods of water in two so that they should not mix and cause confusion and who set the sky as a boundary, establishing a place both for the streams of heaven and those of the earth so that the water might mitigate the flaming solar heat and might not dissolve the soil of the earth.]<sup>39</sup>

In this hymn, the Creator separates the terrestrial and celestial waters, and the celestial waters regulate the temperature of the fiery heavens.

*Inmense caeli conditor* was sung on Mondays at Vespers; it was the first in the weekly cycle of hexaemeral hymns sung at Vespers. The hexaemeral Vespers hymns were not part of the Old or Frankish Hymnals.<sup>40</sup> The first manuscript evidence of this hymn cycle appears in the earliest New Hymnals, which were produced on the continent in the ninth century.<sup>41</sup> The New Hymnal most likely developed into a core of forty-one hymns during the period of Carolingian liturgical reform led by Benedict of Aniane during the reign of Louis the Pious (813-40).<sup>42</sup> Changes in Carolingian liturgy occurred at the same time as a renewed Carolingian interest in astronomy, in particular the geometrical models of the celestial spheres found in Macrobius, Pliny, Martianus Capella, and Calcidius.<sup>43</sup> The hymn *Inmense caeli conditor* appears first in this milieu of liturgical and scientific innovation and can be traced to two psalters which were

compiled with additional liturgical material at St. Gall and Trier in the first half of the ninth century.<sup>44</sup>

While it is difficult to determine how early the Carolingian liturgical and scientific innovations spread to England, there is ample evidence of reciprocal transmission of scholarship across the English Channel throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. The earliest extant Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the New Hymnal dates from the end of the tenth century.<sup>45</sup> The Vespers hymn cycle occurs in all five of the extant Anglo-Saxon hymnals; these hymnals, compiled in the tenth and eleventh centuries, served both Benedictine monasteries and cathedral canons.<sup>46</sup> *Immense caeli conditor* has an interlinear Old English gloss in the eleventh-century Durham Hymnal, but there is not a close relationship between the vocabulary of the hymn gloss and *Christ and Satan*.<sup>47</sup> Again, it is impossible to claim that *Immense caeli conditor* was a source for *Christ and Satan*; yet the hymn shows that Anglo-Saxon monks living in the late-tenth and eleventh centuries would only have had to participate in the Office to learn patristic cosmography.

Let us now return to *Christ and Satan* in light of patristic conceptions of the firmament and celestial waters. The poem articulates the essential characteristics of the patristic cosmic model: the *sæ* in line nine is the celestial sea which functioned as celestial coolant above the firmament and as a reservoir for terrestrial rain showers, and the *grundas in heofene* in line ten is the firmament, the solid spherical boundary that separates the celestial waters from the earth's atmosphere. From his heavenly position of glory, Christ can see through the transparent firmament to the terrestrial world below.<sup>48</sup> The raindrops in line eleven result when the celestial sea leaks through the sluices of the firmament upon Christ's command. The manuscript reading *grundas in heofene* should not be emended to *grundas in geofene*; such an emendation would obscure the cosmographic images in *Christ and Satan*.

The final lines of the prologue to *Christ and Satan* complete the cosmological model; Christ establishes the temporal cycles of the universe, an appropriate corollary to the construction of the physical framework of the universe:

Daga enderim  
seolua he gesette þurh his soðan miht.  
Swa se wyrhta þurh his wuldres gast  
serede and sette on six dagum  
eorðan dæles, up on heofonum,



and heanne holm.<sup>49</sup>

[He himself set the number of days through his true power. Thus the Maker planned and established through the spirit of his glory in six days the portions of earth, up in the heavens, and the sea below.]

These lines, like the rest of the prologue, echo the sapiential language of the Old Testament.

Creation is complete after Christ orders the physical and temporal aspects of the cosmos. The description of the creation of the cosmos ends with a question that emphasizes the ineffability of God's omniscient and creative power:

Hwa is þæt ðe cunne  
orðonc clene nymðe ece god?<sup>50</sup>

[Who is there who knows the artifice entirely except external God?]

In spite of the rhetorical nature of the question, there is a certain degree of irony that the poet has tried to do this very thing—understand the mechanics and structure of God's creation—by articulating cosmographic images borrowed from patristic cosmology, a syncretic model which was developed in the scriptural exegesis of Basil, Ambrose, Augustine, and seventh-century Irish monks, codified in scientific handbooks by Isidore and Bede, and authorized in the liturgy. Perhaps the question can be rephrased for the modern scholar: who can appreciate the poet's artifice except someone who has explored the cultural context of the poet's perception of the cosmos?<sup>51</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Christ and Satan*, lines 1-6. Except where noted, the text follows *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by George Philip Krapp, ASPR 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 133-58. In line five, I follow the reading of T. D. Hill, 'Apocryphal Cosmography and the "stream uton sæ": a note on "Christ and Satan", lines 4-12', *Philological Quarterly*, 48 (1969), 550-54.

<sup>2</sup> See notes in *Christ and Satan, An Old English Poem*, ed. by M. D. Clubb (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 45-50.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of early medieval cosmology, see Philip Grierson, 'The European Heritage', in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. by C. Blacker and M. Loewe (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), pp. 225-58. A more recent study by Barbara Obrist, *La cosmologie médiévale. Textes et images*, vol. 1: *Les fondements antiques* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), traces the transmission of Greco-Roman mathematical astronomy through the early Middle Ages; Obrist does not address the syncretism of biblical cosmology with the Greco-Roman science in Christian patristic exegesis.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Grant, *Science and Religion: From Aristotle to Copernicus* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 105; see also pp. 111-14.

<sup>5</sup> Grant, *Science and Religion*, pp. 114-35.

<sup>6</sup> *Christ and Satan*, ll. 7-8. I follow Emily Thornbury's emendations and translation of these lines in her 'Christ and Satan: "Healing" Line 7', *English Studies*, 87 (2006), 505-10.

<sup>7</sup> Thornbury, 'Christ and Satan', p. 508.

<sup>8</sup> Obrist, *La cosmologie médiévale*, pp. 53-140, 293-96. See also M. R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 83-85, 148-62, 179.

<sup>9</sup> *Christ and Satan*, ll. 9-12a. See the digital version of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, p. 213 at the Bodleian Library, *Early Manuscripts at Oxford University*, <<http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msjunius11>>, [accessed 20 September 2007]. The eleventh-century West Saxon Corrector changes *se* in line nine to *sæ* and *heofene* in line ten to *heofenon*.

<sup>10</sup> Christian W. M. Grein, *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Poesie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Wigand, 1857), I, p. 130; *Christ and Satan*, ed. by Clubb, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the history of the emendation, see *Christ and Satan*, ed. by Clubb, p. 48, and *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, p. 231.

<sup>12</sup> *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition*, ed. by R. E. Finnegan (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 91. C. R. Sleeth also maintains the manuscript reading in *Studies in Christ and Satan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. by Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 339.

<sup>14</sup> *Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel*, ed. by Petrus Sabatier and Archabbey of Beuron (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1949-), II: *Genesis*, ed. by Bonifatius Fischer (1951), pp. 10-12.

<sup>15</sup> Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879; repr. 2002), p. 752. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper, 1889), p. 1427. On the difficulties of translating *raqia*, see H. Torczyner, 'The Firmament and the Clouds, *raqia* and *shehaqim*', *Studia Theologica* 1 (1948), 188-96 (p. 189). Ambrose offers additional etymologies in *Exameron*, ed. by K. Schenkl, CSEL 32.1 (Vienna, 1897), II.iv.15 (pp. 54-55).

<sup>16</sup> Basil, *Hexaameron*, III is translated into Latin by Eustathius, *Ancienne version Latine des neuf Homélie sur l'Hexaéméron de Basil de Césarée*, ed. by Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta and Stig Y. Rudberg (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), pp. 31-45. Ambrose, *Exameron*, I.vi (pp. 16-23), II.iii-iv (p. 46-59). Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, ed. by J. Zycha, CSEL 28.1 (Vienna, 1894), II.i-x (pp. 32-48).

<sup>17</sup> Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Aequae super caelos (Gen 1:6-7): The First Faith-Science Debate?', *Milltown Studies*, 29 (1992), 92-114. See also Marina Smyth, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1996), pp. 94-225.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of Aristotle's concept of elemental weights, see James E. McClellan and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 73-76.

<sup>19</sup> Basil, *Hexaameron*, III.v (pp. 37-38).

<sup>20</sup> Basil, *Hexaameron*, III.vii-viii (pp. 40-43).

<sup>21</sup> Ambrose, *Exameron*, I.vi.20 (p. 17, ll. 7-11).

<sup>22</sup> Ambrose, *Exameron*, II.iii.12 (p. 51, ll. 7-14). Compare to Basil, *Hexaameron*, III.v.

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of Augustine's cosmography, see Leo C. Ferrari, 'Augustine's Cosmography', *Augustinian Studies*, 27 (1996), 129-77.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, II.i (pp. 32-35).

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, II.ii-x (pp. 35-48). See also his *Retractiones*, ed. by Almut Mutzenbecher, CCSL 57 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), II.vi.2 (p. 94, ll. 17-19).

<sup>26</sup> Stephen C. McCluskey, *Astronomies and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Isidore, *De natura rerum*, XII (PL 83, col. 984).

<sup>28</sup> Isidore, *De natura rerum*, XIII (PL 83, col. 986-987). See also Isidore, *De natura rerum*, XIV (PL 83, col. 987).

<sup>29</sup> Isidore, *De natura rerum*, XII-XIV (PL 83, col. 981-987). See Thomas O'Loughlin, 'The Waters Above the Heavens: Isidore and the Latin Tradition', *Milltown Studies*, 36 (1995), 104-17.

<sup>30</sup> *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, ed. and trans. by F. P. MacGinty (unpublished doctoral dissertation, National University of Ireland, 1971). *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, ed. and trans. by M. C. Díaz y Díaz (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1972), iii-iv (pp. 100-10). For an analysis of seventh-century Irish cosmology, see Smyth, *Understanding the Universe*.

<sup>31</sup> *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, I.vi (pp. 23-28); *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, III.v (p. 102-04).

<sup>32</sup> *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, I.vii (pp. 28-32). In spite of the meteorological role of the celestial waters, Augustine, Isidore, Irish commentators, and Bede observed that rain also resulted when small particles of moisture coalesced into clouds and became sufficiently heavy; see Bede, *De natura rerum*, ed. by C. W. Jones, CCSL 123A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), XXXIII (pp. 221-22). Riddle 3 (ll. 36-58) presents an additional meteorological model; see *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), pp. 182-83. In 'Stoic Cosmology and the Source of the First Old English Riddle', *Anglia*, 112 (1994), 1-25, Michael Lapidge argues that the first three riddles in the Exeter book describe a unified conception of the Stoic cosmic force, *pneuma*.

<sup>33</sup> Bede, *De natura rerum*, V-VIII (pp. 196-200), and Bede, *In Genesim*, ed. by C. W. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), I.241-324 (pp. 10-12).

<sup>34</sup> Bede, *In Genesim*, I.258-59 (p. 10).

<sup>35</sup> Bede, *In Genesim*, I.314-20 (p.12). Translation by Calvin B. Kendall, *On Genesis: Bede* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 77-78.

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *De natura rerum*, VII-VIII (pp. 197-99).

<sup>37</sup> C. W. Jones, 'Manuscripts of Bede's *De natura rerum*', *Isis*, 27 (1937), 430-440. W. M. Stevens, *Bede's scientific achievement* (Jarrow: Jarrow Lecture, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 254-55, 279-80, 285, 310.

<sup>39</sup> *Immense caeli conditor*, ll. 1-8. Edited and translated by I. B. Milfull, *The Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church: A Study and Edition of the 'Durham Hymnal'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 145-47. Also edited in *Early Latin Hymns*, ed. by A. S. Walpole (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), no. 74, pp. 281-82, and in *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, ed. by C. Blume and Guido M. Dreves, 55 vols (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1886-1922), LI, no. 35, pp. 35-36.

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<sup>40</sup> Helmut Gneuss, 'Latin Hymns in Medieval England: Future Research', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Russell Hope Robbins*, ed. by Beryl Rowland (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1974), pp. 407-24 (p. 410), and 'Zur Geschichte des Hymnars', *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch*, 35 (2000), 227-47 (p. 237).

<sup>41</sup> Gneuss, 'Zur Geschichte des Hymnars', pp. 239-40; Josef Szövérfy, *Die Annalen der lateinischen Hymnendichtung. Ein Handbuch*, 2 vols (Berlin: Schmidt, 1964-65), I, pp. 141-42.

<sup>42</sup> Gneuss, 'Zur Geschichte des Hymnars', pp. 235-43; Alice L. Harting-Corrêa, 'Make a merry noise! A ninth-century teacher looks at hymns', in *The Church and the Arts: Papers Read at the 1990 Summer Meeting and the 1991 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical Historical Society*, ed. by Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 79-86; Donald A. Bullough and Alice L. Harting-Corrêa, 'Texts, chant, and the chapel of Louis the Pious', in *Charlemagne's Heir, New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-40)*, ed. by Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 489-508. For an overview of the Carolingian liturgical revival, see Ruth Ellis Messenger, 'Whence the Ninth Century Hymnal?', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 69 (1938), 446-64.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens: Roman Astronomy and Cosmology in the Carolingian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Stephen C. McCluskey, *Astronomies and Cultures*, pp. 131-64; Bruce Eastwood and Gerd Graßhoff, *Planetary Diagrams from Roman Astronomy in Medieval Europe, c.a. 800-1500*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 94, pt. 3 (Philadelphia, 2004); and Obrist, *La cosmologie médiévale*, plates 1-118.

<sup>44</sup> St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex Sangallen 20, pp. 361-62 is digitized at CESG: *Codices Electronici Sangallenses* <[http://www.cesg.unifr.ch/virt\\_bib/manuscripts.htm](http://www.cesg.unifr.ch/virt_bib/manuscripts.htm)> [accessed 9 June 2007]. Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS lat. 116, fols 95-97, is described in M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Latin Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library at Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1921), p. 214.

<sup>45</sup> Gneuss, 'Latin Hymns', pp. 410-11, 413, and 'Zur Geschichte des Hymnars', p. 241.

<sup>46</sup> See list of manuscripts in Milfull, *Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, pp. 145-47.

<sup>47</sup> Milfull reproduces the gloss in *Hymns of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, pp. 145-47.

<sup>48</sup> God is depicted as controlling the universe from His position above the firmament in Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, ed. by L. Bieler, CCSL 94 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), IVm1 (p. 66, ll. 19-22); see the Old English renditions in *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. by Walter Sedgefield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 36.iv (p. 105, lines 3-28), and *Alfred's Metres of Boethius*, ed. by Bill Griffiths, rev. ed. (Middlesex: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1994), XXIV. 28-41 (pp. 122-25).

<sup>49</sup> *Christ and Satan*, ll. 12b-17a.

<sup>50</sup> *Christ and Satan*, ll. 17b-18.

<sup>51</sup> I am very grateful to Don Chapman, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, and Michael Lapidge for commenting on earlier versions of this article.

*Laxdæla* Dreaming:  
A Saga Heroine Invents Her Own Life

Ármann Jakobsson

*The four dreams*

It is probably not a matter of debate that one of the most memorable scenes in the entire saga corpus is when the young Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir relates her four dreams to the renowned sage Gestr Oddleifsson from Hagi on Barðaströnd, in chapter 33 (out of 87) of *Laxdæla saga*. The dream narrative goes as follows:

Úti þóttumk ek vera stödd við læk nokkurn, ok hafða ek krókfald á höfði ok þótti mér illa sama, ok var ek fúsari at breyta faldinum, en margir töldu um, at ek skylda þat eigi gera. En ek hlýdda ekki á þat, ok greip ek af höfði mér faldinn, ok kastaða ek út á lækinn,—ok var þessi draumur eigi lengri [...] Þat var upphaf at öðrum draum, at ek þóttumk vera stödd hjá vatni einu; svá þótti mér, sem kominn væri silfrhringr á hönd mér, ok þóttumk ek eiga ok einkarvel sama; þótti mér þat vera allmikil gersemi, ok ætlaða ek lengi at eiga. Ok er mér váru minnstar vánir, þá renndi hringrinn af hendi mér ok á vatnit, ok sá ek hann aldri síðan. Þótti mér sá skaði miklu meiri en ek mætta at glíkendum ráða, þótt ek hefða einum grip týnt. Síðan vaknaða ek. [...] Sá er inn þriði draumur minn, at ek þóttum hafa gullhring á hendi, ok þóttum ek eiga hringinn, ok þótti mér bætr skaðinn; om mér þat í hug, at ek mynda þessa hrings lengr njóta en ins fyrra; en eigi þótti mér sjá gripr því betr sama, sem gull er dýrra en silfr. Síðan þóttumk ek falla ok vilja styðja mik með hendinni, en gullhringrinn mætti steini nökkurum ok stökk í tvá hluti, ok þótti mér dreyra ór hlutunum. Þat þótti mér líkara harmi en skaða, er ek þóttumk

pá bera eptir; kom mér þá í hug, at brestr hafði verit á hringnum, ok þá er ek hugða at brotunum eptir, þá þóttumk ek sjá fleiri brestina á, ok þótti mér þó, sem heill myndi, ef ek hefða betr til gætt, ok var eigi þessi draumr lengri. [...] Sá er inn fjórði draumr minn, at ek þóttumk hafa hjálm á höfði af gulli ok mjök gimsteinum settan. Ek þóttumk eiga þá gersemi; en þat þótti mér helzt at, at hann var nökkurs til þungr, því at ek fekk varla valdit, ok bar ek hallt höfuðit, ok gaf ek þó hjálminum enga sök á því ok ætlaða ekki at lóga honum, en þó steypðisk hann af höfði mér ok út á Hvammsfjörð, ok eptir þat vaknaða ek. Eru þér nú sagðir draumarnir allir.<sup>1</sup>

[I seemed to be standing outdoors, by a stream, wearing a tall head-dress that I felt did not suit me at all well. I wanted to change the head-dress but many people advised against it. I refused to listen to them, tore the head-dress from my head and threw it into the stream. The dream ended there. [...] In the beginning of the second dream I seemed to be standing by a lake. I seemed to have a silver ring on my arm which belonged to me and suited me especially well. I treasured it greatly and intended to keep it long and well. But the ring slid from my arm when I least expected it and fell into the lake and I never saw it again. I was filled with a sense of loss much greater than I should have felt at losing a mere object. After that I awoke. [...] In the third dream I seemed to have a gold ring on my arm; it was my own and seemed to make up for my loss. I expected to have the pleasure of owning this one longer than the previous one. All the same it wasn't as if it suited me so much better, not if compared with how much more costly gold is than silver. Then I fell and reached out my hand to break my fall, but the gold ring struck a stone and broke in two, and I thought I saw blood seep from the pieces. My feelings afterwards were more like grief than regret. I realised that there had been a flaw in the ring, and upon examining the pieces I could see other flaws. All the same I had the impression that if I'd looked after it better the ring might still have been in one piece. The dream ended here. [...] In my fourth dream I seemed to have a gold helmet on my head, set with many gems. This treasure was mine. But it did seem to me that it was too heavy for me to bear. I could hardly manage it and held my head bowed. I didn't blame the helmet for this, however, nor did I intend to get rid of it. But it fell suddenly from my head and into the



waters of Hvammsfjörð, after which I woke up. Now I have told you all the dreams.']<sup>2</sup>

We are not informed of even the slightest hesitation on Gestr's part, before he suggests the following interpretation:

Glöggst fæ ek sét, hvat draumar þessir eru, en mjök mun þér samstaft þykkja, því at ek mun næsta einn veg alla ráða. Bændr mantu eiga fjóra, ok væntir mik, þá er þú ert inum fyrsta gipt, at þat sé þér ekki girndarráð. Þar er þú þóttisk hafa mikinn fald á höfði, ok þótti þér illa sama, þar muntu lítit unna honum, ok þar er þú tókt af höfði þér faldinn ok kastaðir á vatnit, þar muntu ganga frá honum. Því kalla menn á sæ kastat, er maðr lætr eigu sína ok tekr ekki í mót. [...] Sá var draumr þinn annarr, at þú þóttisk hafa silfrhring á hendi; þar muntu vera gipt öðrum manni ágætum. Þeim muntu unna mikit ok njóta skamma stund; kemr mér ekki þat at óvörum, þóttú missir hann með drukkun, ok eigi geri ek þann draum lengra. Sá var inn þriði draumr þinn, at þú þóttisk hafa gullhring á hendi; þar muntu eiga inn þriðja bónda. Ekki mun sá því meira verðr, sem þér þótti sá málmrinn torugætri ok dýrri, en nær er þat mínu hugboði, at í þat mund muni orðit siðaskipti, ok muni sá þinn bóndi hafa tekit við þeim sið, er vér hyggjum, at miklu sé háleitari. En þar er þér þótti hringrinn í sundr stökkva, nökkut af þinni vangeymslu, ok sátt blóð koma ór hlutunum, þá mun sá þinn bóndi veginn; muntu þá þykkjask glöggst sjá þá þverbresti, er á þeim ráðahag hafa verit. [...] Sá er inn fjórði draumr þinn, at þú þóttisk hafa hjálm á höfði af gulli ok settan gimsteinum, ok varð þér þungbærr; þar munt þú eiga inn fjórða bónda. Sá mun vera mestr höfðingi ok mun bera heldr ægishjálm yfir þér. Ok þar er þér þótti hann steypask út á Hvammsfjörð, þá man hann þann sama fjörð fyrir hitta á inum efsta degi síns lífs. Geri ek nú þenna draum ekki lengra.' (pp. 89–91)

[I can clearly see what the dreams mean, but you may find the fare lacking in variety, as I would interpret them all in a very similar way. You will have four husbands; I expect that the first man to whom you are married will not have been a match to your liking. As you thought you bore a great head-dress, which you felt suited you poorly, you will care little for this man. And since you removed the head-dress and threw it into the water, this means that you will leave him. People say things have

been cast to the tide when they refer to getting rid of possessions and getting nothing in return. [...] In your second dream you thought you had a silver ring on your arm. This means you will be married to a second, fine man for whom you will care greatly and enjoy only a short time. It would not surprise me if he were drowned. There is no need to dwell any longer on this dream. In your third dream you thought you had a gold ring on your arm. This represents your third husband. He will not surpass his predecessor to the same extent that you felt metal to be rarer and more precious. But if my guess is right, there will be a change in religion around that time and this husband of yours will have adopted the new religion, which seems to be much nobler. When the ring appeared to break in two, in part because of your own carelessness, and blood to seep from its parts, this signifies that this husband will be killed. It is then that you will see most clearly the faults of that marriage. [...] It was in your fourth dream that you bore a gold helmet set with gems on your head, which was a heavy weight for you. This signifies that you will marry a fourth time and this husband will far surpass you. The helmet seemed to fall into the waters of Hvammsfjord, which indicates that this fourth husband will have an encounter with the same fjord on the final day of his life. I can make no more of this dream.] (p. 45)

It seems so neat and, perhaps, somewhat obvious—too obvious, even—almost as if it were a mistake on the author's part.<sup>3</sup> Four dreams, four precious objects and four husbands. It would seem almost incredible that Guðrún had not thought of this interpretation herself; indeed I will suggest in this article that this may be precisely what the saga's intended audience was expected to infer.

As palpably true as the interpretation is, even before the truth of Gestr's fourfold prophecy is confirmed by what follows, this dream narrative is not merely a symbolic illustration of the future. It raises many other questions, and in this paper I will discuss some of the ambiguities of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and her four dreams. My analysis seeks to suggest that the narrative is deliberately ambiguous, that the saga author (by which term I mean the authorial figure that every textual interpretation needs to refer to) intended it to be so, and that a thirteenth-century audience could reasonably be expected to have been aware of such complexities.<sup>4</sup> One of the premises for the following study is thus that modern readers are not necessarily more sophisticated than pre-industrial ones, although the modern interpreter does have access to learned analytic vocabulary

not available to the saga's mediaeval audience. We may thus begin by allowing that to the implied audience, a dream is not just a dream, and its interpretation not necessarily straightforward.<sup>5</sup>

I will be concentrating on three issues raised by the dreams and their role in the saga: 1) the curious role of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir herself, often seen as a typical strong-willed and, in this instance, glamorous saga woman but nevertheless a figure who may also be regarded as strikingly anomalous; 2) the representation of the four husbands in the dream, and the interpretation of the imagery used; 3) the existentialist problems which the dreams pose, especially as Guðrún goes on to 'live' them.<sup>6</sup>

It is not just that these dreams come true, it is also necessary to explore how and why they become true, and whether this was inevitable or not. It is my hope that this study, though limited in scope, will cast some light on the complex imagery and metaphorical language of *Laxdæla saga*, as well as its sophisticated understanding of the human psyche.

### *The cunning woman*

When considering the representation of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir it seems a good idea to start with her interlocutor, Gestr Oddleifsson the wise. The very fact that these two people were involved in the conversation quoted above tells us something about both of them, although perhaps more about Guðrún. Gestr is, in fact, a well-known figure from *Landnámabók* and in *Íslendingasögur* such as *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Brennu-Njáls saga* and *Hávarðar saga*, in which he periodically saunters onto the stage to prophesy or to provide shrewd commentary on the action.<sup>7</sup> In *Laxdæla saga* he is thus in a familiar role, introduced as 'höfðingi mikill ok spekingr at viti, framsýnn um marga hluti, vel vingaðr við alla ina stærri menn, ok margir sóttu ráð at honum' (p. 87) [an important chieftain and an especially wise man, who could foretell many events of the future. Most of the foremost men of the country were on good terms with him and many sought his advice', p. 43]. Guðrún, on the other hand, is merely a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old girl, and thus it is somewhat unexpected that when she meets this renowned sage, the two begin to chat as if there were no generation (or other) gap between them: 'taka þau tal saman, ok váru þau bæði vitr ok orðig' (p. 88) [they struck up a conversation; their discussion was both shrewd and lengthy, p. 44].

The wise man and the teenage girl might at first sight seem a strange couple and even more remarkable is the fact that the saga highlights their common eloquence and wisdom. Even at fourteen, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is very comfortable in making witty small-talk with one of the wisest men in Iceland. It is this that makes Guðrún special. Even in today's culture of apparent equality, a fourteen-year-old girl talking to a professor on an equal footing would be considered a somewhat strange phenomenon. And that is precisely what Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is: a strange phenomenon. In the saga overall she is not just a woman with many husbands. And although she might with some justification be regarded as glamorous—she and the handsome Kjartan Ólafsson are later described as well suited for one another (p. 112)—beauty is never her principal asset or accomplishment.

Even in modern responses to *Laxdæla saga*, Guðrún is often regarded primarily as an exceptionally good-looking, refined and glamorous woman—to take just one example, Jane Smiley calls her 'the most beautiful woman ever born in Iceland', but makes no mention of her intellect.<sup>8</sup> The saga itself, on the other hand, draws attention to her mental powers rather than her looks.<sup>9</sup> Guðrún is indeed said to be good looking but her appearance is never described in detail (although her costume is so depicted, after the death of Bolli, p. 168). Detailed physical descriptions are, in fact, reserved for the men of the saga, in particular Kjartan Ólafsson, whose good looks receive extensive and exaggerated attention (pp. 76–77).<sup>10</sup>

Guðrún, on the other hand is said to be 'kvenna vænst, er upp óxu á Íslandi, bæði at ásjánu ok vitsmunum. [...] Allra kvenna var hon kœnst ok bezt orði farin; hon var örlynd kona' (p. 86) [the most beautiful woman ever to have grown up in Iceland, and no less clever than she was good-looking [...]] She was the shrewdest of women, highly articulate, and generous as well', p. 43].<sup>11</sup> It may be noted that there is no particular statement made about her looks. While the description of Kjartan draws special attention to his face, eyes, hair and body, Guðrún is not described specifically at all. She may have had long hair or red hair; she may have been tall or short; we are not told whether her eyes were particularly striking. Guðrún, then, is certainly a handsome woman, but, more importantly, she is extremely wise, clever, eloquent and 'örlynd' (generous, or quick-tempered). While I am not sure that the saga is implying that Kjartan was not similarly wise, clever or eloquent, nothing is explicitly stated about these accomplishments in his portrayal.

With this description of Guðrún in mind, it becomes less surprising that she is not only dreaming of her fate at fourteen years of age, but is also carrying on intelligent conversations with wise chieftains in their prime. Later the saga, the main obstacles to attacking Bolli are his valour and the wise counsels of Guðrún and her father Ósvífr (p. 163). And it is indeed Guðrún's wisdom that makes her so attractive to the men of Iceland, such as the extremely handsome Kjartan Ólafsson: 'þótti Kjartani gott að tala við Guðrúnu, því at hon var bæði vitr ok málsnjöll' (p. 112) [Kjartan enjoyed Gudrun's company, as she was both clever and good with words; p. 57]. She may be a good-looking woman but it is her eloquence rather than her beauty which captivates him.

This is the first curious and neglected aspect of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir's dreams and their interpretation. The saga is a narrative about a precocious girl who is able to engage in intelligent conversation of the kind that would normally be restricted to men of some stature, in the fundamentally unequal society of mediaeval Iceland, albeit with an occasional superwoman included in the group of dominant men.<sup>12</sup>

Bearing in mind who Guðrún is, we may now return to the question of what she is doing when she calls for a prophecy by narrating her dreams to Gestr. Is she entirely innocent or is she playing some intellectual game? At first sight, of course, there is nothing peculiar about the narrative. A teenage girl has had puzzling dreams that she does not understand. She tells them to the wisest man in the region when she meets him by chance, and he explains their meaning to her. On the face of it there seems to be nothing suspicious about this, except, of course, that Guðrún is not an ordinary teenager. Soon after this, she has not only obtained a divorce from her husband but is giving her new lover advice on how to get rid of his wife (p. 95). And this plot, like all her plots, is cunning and subtle.

There is nothing simple about Guðrún in *Laxdæla saga*. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, the interpretation of the four dreams is actually quite straightforward. As a dreamer Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir almost resembles King Sverrir, whose long journey to the throne included prophetic dreams that eventually became less and less subtle in implying that his future lay with the throne of Norway.<sup>13</sup> When she approaches Gestr she tells him that these dreams have been worrying her 'en engi maðr hefir þá svá ráðit, at mér líki, ok bið ek þó eigi þess, at þeir sé í vil ráðnir' (p. 88) [No one has yet been able to interpret them to my satisfaction, although I don't insist that they be favourably interpreted; p. 44]. She does indeed not insist at all. It is almost as if she is goading him to find the dead husbands in the dream. Or are we to believe that this extremely clever

woman had not thought of husbands at this point? I think that such a view would be as naive as thinking that just over a decade before the Christianization of Iceland, Gestr is referring to a new and much nobler religion without any particular faith in mind.

Guðrún's reaction, when Gestr offers his interpretation, is interesting: she 'setti dreyrrauða, meðan draumarnir váru ráðnir; en engi hafði hon orð um' [had grown blood-red while listening to her dreams being interpreted, but kept silent; p. 45]. She keeps her composure, though, and remarks only that she will have plenty to think about, if all this should come to pass (p. 91). But she is visibly upset and this is also somewhat strange. Is she so surprised that this is not just a dream about vanished treasures? Or had she been laying a trap for Gestr? Did she perhaps not expect him to unravel the riddle so quickly? Or did she think that he would find it too simple and offer something more complex? We will return to this point presently, but for now we may simply note the obvious fact that Gestr's interpretation of the dreams perturbs Guðrún, in the wake of his earlier responses that had been restricted to sardonic one-liner responses, such as 'Era sjá draumr minni' [No less remarkable is this dream] and 'Eigi fara í þurrð draumarnir' [The source of your dreams is far from drying up] (p. 88-89; p. 44).

Another legitimate question is: did Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir really dream all this? Or has she been inventing the dreams, and, if so, to what purpose? Most modern experts would doubtless hesitate to wager that an actual tenth-century Guðrún really had these four recurring dreams. But would a thirteenth-century audience have been any more uncritical? Might it not have been the intention of the saga creator to hint at the possibility that Guðrún had never dreamt anything of the kind? And that possibility, in turn, raises interesting questions about the prophetic nature of her dreams, to which I will also return presently. But, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> *Laxdæla saga* tends not to illuminate riddles but deliberately leaves them for the audience to wrestle with.

After having unravelled Guðrún's dreams, Gestr Oddleifsson has fulfilled his most important function in the story, though he will make two further appearances of some significance.<sup>15</sup> These, however, do not occur until after he has met Kjartan Ólafsson and his fosterbrother Bolli on the way from Guðrún and told his son that Bolli will eventually kill Kjartan (p. 92; p. 46). Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, however, remains at the forefront of the saga. She marries four men, loves a fifth and ends up as an old woman at Helgafell. At the conclusion of the saga the theme of her husbands reappears. Guðrún's son, Bolli Bollason, comes to visit and asks his old mother to identify the man whom she had loved the most.

Guðrún, subtle as ever, does not really answer but says positive things about three of her husbands, while dismissing the fourth. But Bolli persists and secures the reply: 'Þeim var ek verst, er ek unna mest' (p. 228) [Though I treated him worst, I loved him best; p. 119].

The most striking thing about this famous answer is that it is not really an answer. Several scholars have tried to solve the puzzle and identify the person whom Guðrún loved most, and several intelligent and fascinating solutions have been proposed;<sup>16</sup> and, of course, generations of *Laxdæla saga* readers have also been free to speculate. But, when *Laxdæla saga* is regarded as a text, dismissing for a moment the possibility that Guðrún might have existed and that the answer might hark back to real truths and a long tradition, the answer is, of course, simple: *Guðrún does not say whom she loved most.*<sup>17</sup> The answer is left to the audience.

Of course, the enigmatic nature of the answer does not mean that it is devoid of meaning. On the contrary, Guðrún and the saga reveal a good deal. To begin with, the emphasis in the sentence is not on the best-loved man, but on Guðrún herself: *I was worst to him that I loved the most.* She is, in fact, not answering the question posed by Bolli but a different question, about her own feelings and guilt. Which brings us to the heart of the matter: the name of the most-loved lover is perhaps not all-important; it is the emotional life of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir herself that is first and foremost in her mind. Her enigmatic answer does not reveal the identity of the man in her life, but it does reveal that Guðrún is the subject in her own story.

It is Guðrún's inner life that is essential, and this in turn may explain why so little is said about Guðrún's appearance, while Kjartan and so many other handsome men of the saga are described in detail. It is her wisdom that matters most. This is hardly surprising if we regard her as the subject of this narrative; the self to whom this story happened. In the life of every individual, even in the age of mirrors and photographs, physical appearance can never be quite as important as thoughts and feelings. And Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is the self of that part of *Laxdæla saga* which deals with her love life.

Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir's enigmatic answer is not just subtle but also very subjective. No facts are given, only an insight into what an old lady is feeling. In my view this also makes it feasible to regard Guðrún's dreams as a statement of her inner life rather than as a prophecy about the fate of four men—she wants these dreams to be known and she already knows what they mean. Perhaps they were also meant to be a riddle that Gestr should have had to work harder to solve.

The arguments in support of such a proposition would be, firstly, that the dreams should not have been so difficult to interpret for Guðrún herself; secondly, that Guðrún is visibly upset when she has heard the interpretation; and, thirdly, that Guðrún's inner life is demonstrably a theme in the saga, and that the narrative of her mysterious answer to her son is obviously linked to the prophetic dreams at the beginning of her story.

The first and second riddles of the husbands establish Guðrún as the main subject of the saga, much as Egill Skalla-Grímsson (who, incidentally, is Kjartan's grand-father) is the dominant figure in *Egils saga*. Also, like Egill, she wants to go abroad with the person she adores, in her case Kjartan (p. 115), but is not allowed to leave. In that case, her desires are completely at odds with accepted social norms, since the two are not yet married. And Guðrún's desires are emotionally driven, as she herself says: 'ekki ann ek Íslandi' (p. 115) [it's not Iceland that I love; p. 58]. It is indeed not Iceland that she loves—and since Guðrún is Guðrún, we have to finish the sentence for her: she loves a man called Kjartan.

The main plot of *Laxdæla saga*, the story of Kjartan, Bolli and Guðrún, is fomented by a woman's desires. Interestingly, Guðrún blushes again when she hears about Kjartan's friendship with the royal (and truly noble) Ingibjörg: 'gekk á brott ok var allrauð. En aðrir grunuðu, hvárt henni þætti þessi tíðendi svá góð, sem hon lét vel yfir' (p. 127) [She walked away blushing. Other people suspected that she hardly thought the news as good as she implied; p. 65]. And she changes colour again later, when Kjartan insists that she now must relinquish the seat of honour, traditionally hers, to his new wife Hrefna: 'Guðrún heyrði þetta ok leit til Kjartans ok brá lit, en svarar engu' (p. 139) [Guðrún heard his words, looked at Kjartan and changed colour but said nothing; p. 71].

Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir may be a handsome woman, but first and foremost she is wise and emotional; so wise that the wisest men in Iceland clearly think of her as operating on their own level, so emotional that she cannot speak of her emotions except in riddles. She is a complex figure who does not show or articulate her feelings.<sup>18</sup> Thus her story is framed by two riddles that she has either dreamed or invented. *Laxdæla saga* does not tell us the solution to her last riddle, and neither is it clear whether Guðrún actually dreamed anything or what she intended to do with her dreams. But the two riddles still provide a key to the complex psyche of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir.



*Decorative men*

The four unexplained dreams and the riddle of Guðrún's greatest love combine to make her affairs with men an important, and perhaps the most important, theme of the saga. In her dreams, she reveals quite a bit about her attitude towards these men. Her husbands belong to her ('his treasure was mine').<sup>19</sup> They are her jewels and precious objects. She does not like the first one but loses the other three through a series of accidents. But none of them figures in the dream as an individual, they are just not equally decorative. Even the flaw in the gold ring (which represents Bolli) is the fault of Guðrún herself, as she states: 'þótti mér þó, sem heill myndi, ef ek hefða betr til gætt, ok var eigi þessi draumr lengri' (p. 89) [All the same I had the impression that if I'd looked after it better the ring might still have been in one piece; p. 44]. The responsibility is not Bolli's but her own.

In Guðrún's dream, her husbands are firmly objectified. She is not just subject but also agent. They are just decorative objects. It is not strange that *Laxdæla saga* has often been regarded as an unusually feminine<sup>20</sup> and female-centred saga,<sup>21</sup> reflecting a more feminine point of view, and perhaps even composed by a woman.<sup>22</sup> One of the main reasons for this is that Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is so clearly the main subject of her part of the saga—it is even feasible to suppose that the saga is constructed around her life.<sup>23</sup>

However, though the women in *Laxdæla saga* are strong and active and though it may even be possible to detect an ironic stance towards some of the male heroes,<sup>24</sup> the activities of the *Laxdæla saga* women are in no way atypical for the saga genre. The *Laxdæla* women, for example, often goad men towards revenge, as other saga women tend to do,<sup>25</sup> but they do not take up arms themselves, except Guðrún's rival Bróka-Auður, who has to dress like a man in order to do it. There are far fewer women than men in the saga. They are less visible 'onstage', as it were. And, last but not least, the women are not described as carefully, even lovingly, as the men are.

*Laxdæla saga* is also unusual in that, although it is possible to find instances of the familiar male gaze which is used to dominate women,<sup>26</sup> the text itself is not preoccupied with focusing on the women but rather on the men.<sup>27</sup> They are described in far greater detail, especially Kjartan Ólafsson (pp. 76–77) and Bolli Bollason (pp. 224–25). There is an unusual episode in which Helgi Harðbeinsson's shepherd provides his master with an unusually detailed description of the men coming to attack Helgi (pp. 187–89). And there is the strange and almost erotic scene in which Guðrún barges in on Kjartan Ólafsson,

now married to Hrefna, when he is about to dress in the morning (p. 139). So, for the most part, the women and men of *Laxdæla saga* are gazing at beautiful men, while Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is remarkable mostly for her inner life.

In light of all this, the metaphors about men and jewels need not surprise us. These are not confined to the dreams but pervade the saga. One of the first things revealed about Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is that she has more finery than other women: 'Guðrún var kurteis kona, svá at í þann tíma þóttu allt barnavípur, þat er aðrar konur höfðu í skarti hjá henni' (p.86) [She took great care with her appearance, so much that the adornments of other women were considered to be mere child's play in comparison; p. 43]. When she dreams about her future, she sees treasures and adornments. Soon after the dreams have been interpreted, she marries for the first time and the marriage seems to revolve around finery as well. According to the marriage contract, not only is Guðrún to be in control of the household purse and receive half of the estate, but should there be a divorce her hapless husband is also required to buy her all the beautiful things (*gripi*) that she wants. However, Guðrún's hunger for finery knows no limit (she is *erfið í gripakaupum*) [avid in demanding purchases of precious objects; p. 47], which naturally puts a severe strain on the marriage. In the end the husband strikes her and she promptly divorces him (pp. 93–94).

Given that the men in her life are represented as jewels in Guðrún's dreams, it is tempting to infer that Guðrún's addiction to beautiful things is really an addiction to men. As it turns out, the real motive for the divorce is not that Guðrún needs more jewels but rather that she has met a man whom she desires.

Yet if the dreams tell the life story of Guðrún, it might be argued that this biography is marked by a strange absence. There is a gem missing—Kjartan Ólafsson himself, whose depiction in the saga is so striking and extensive that if other men are jewels he must be regarded as the saga's most precious stone. And indeed Kjartan, too, ends up being objectified as a precious item, when he is given a *motr*, a white head-dress, by the princess Ingibjörg. In presenting Kjartan with this head-dress, she instructs him to present it to his future wife and specifically mentions Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, of whom she has obviously heard and whom she may respect (p. 131).<sup>28</sup> However, when Kjartan returns, Guðrún is married to Bolli and he ends up presenting the head-dress, along with himself, to Hrefna (p. 133). He clearly sees the gift as being intended for his wife, whoever she might be, rather than for Guðrún specifically.<sup>29</sup> That is, of course, a matter of debate as Ingibjörg had mentioned Guðrún's name.

If the head-dress is a symbol for Kjartan, its history becomes fraught with meaning. Ingibjörg presents it to Guðrún, through Kjartan, which means that she is relinquishing this great treasure of a man to her greatest rival. He, on discovering that Guðrún is married, presents Hrefna with both the head-dress and himself. Guðrún, however, desires both the head-dress and the man and in the end robs Hrefna of both. When Kjartan is her guest at Laugar, she apparently surprises him while dressing and soon after she asks Hrefna if she can take a long look at the symbol for Kjartan as well, even though he has expressively forbidden it. Hrefna, of course, being both proud of the head-dress and obliging by nature, cannot but grant her this wish (p. 140).

Guðrún's reaction is, as her reactions usually are, subdued: 'Hon rakði motrinn ok leit á um hríð ok ræddi hvárki um löst né lof' (p. 140) [Guðrún unwound the head-dress and looked at it awhile, without either praising or criticising it; p. 72]. This is not unlike her previous reaction, when she had heard about Kjartan's friendship with the king's sister. And when Kjartan threatens Bolli, after the head-dress had disappeared, she comments: 'Nú þó at svá sé, sem þú segir, at þeir menn sé hér nökkurir, er ráð hafi til þess sett, at motrinn skyldi hverfa, þá virði ek svá, at þeir hafi at sínu gengit' (p. 144) [And even if it were true someone here was involved in the disappearance of the head-dress, in my opinion they've done nothing but take what rightfully belonged to them; p. 73]. She comes as close to admitting her guilt in the disappearance of this precious garment as she possibly can, obviously having no wish to conceal her actions from Kjartan, while at the same time declaring her rights to the head-dress (and, also, to Kjartan).

Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir has all the best adornments. She has a craving for finery. She dreams of her men as finery. In her ensuing feud with Kjartan she is obviously referring to her dream by first destroying the head-dress, her symbol for Kjartan, and then by having him killed. She lost her husbands in a dream but the man whom she never married is destroyed by her in real life. And by doing this, Guðrún also bursts out of the autobiography that she had dreamt in her youth.

### *A pre-dreamed existence*

The dreams of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, whether real or imagined, are clearly symbolic and they revolve around her desires for jewellery and men.<sup>30</sup> It is also worth noting that Guðrún is always near a brook or a sea or a fjord in her

dreams—in modern psychoanalytical theory, water may represent transformation, the flow of life, or be connected with sexual desires, and the dreams may indeed well be described as Guðrún's sexual autobiography. Also noticeable is the obsession with death. Like a minuscule *Ynglinga saga*, this mini-narrative tells the story of the husbands of Guðrún through their various deaths and dismissals. Life cannot be narrated the way death can. All their other qualities are secondary in the dream, the manner of the husbands' deaths is the fundamental part of their lives, thus enabling Guðrún to conceal from the audience of *Laxdæla saga* whom it was that she loved most. The dreams do not tell us such things but are more like obituary notices: divorced – drowned – killed in battle – drowned.

I have argued previously, however, that we do not really know whether the dreams actually happened. Perhaps Guðrún's anxieties and desires are not really all that unconscious and her so-called dreams are in fact her own invention—a way to dramatize the future and wrap herself in an enigma. The first attempt, if Guðrún's red face is to be taken as a sign, was punctured by Gestr; her second, however, was so successful that after seven centuries of debate, we cannot identify the man she loved the most.

Dreams and riddles are the polite woman's way of expressing herself. Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir is very subtle, someone who hides her feelings. Love between her and Kjartan is never mentioned, except for the one time when she says 'ekki ann ek Íslandi'. For the most part, Guðrún's inner life is not shown in *Laxdæla saga*. She, like everyone else, reveals herself through her reactions, and, as she is a polite and sophisticated woman, these tell us little. It is only in the dreams that we come to know Guðrún, and perhaps in the last part of her long life.

When she is on her way to church, she has a vision about her husband's death and is much shaken (p. 223). Knowing that this is the fourth and last husband enables her to focus on saving her immortal soul.<sup>31</sup> She drives away an old sibyl from the church floor at Helgafell by her bitter tears of repentance (pp. 223–24), and she ends the saga as the first eremitical nun in Iceland, with her life belonging to the past. We are given one last glimpse into her mind, through which we learn nothing about whom she loved the most, but a good deal about her preoccupation with her past crimes and misdemeanours.

It is not difficult to believe that she is worried about her salvation. In this story of power and love, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir has been a ruthless manipulator of other people's lives from an early age. She abuses her first husband Þorvaldr and Bróka-Auðr, the wife of her second husband, in order to move from one marriage

to the next.<sup>32</sup> She then has Kjartan killed, with the same stroke wrecking the life of the innocent Hrefna. Bolli is later killed in revenge, having been goaded by her to take part in the attack on Kjartan. Guðrún's life has revolved around control, and her reaction to Þorkell Eyjólfsson's death demonstrates how the dreams help her in this endeavour.

In her dreams Guðrún seems carelessly to be losing beautiful objects, mainly headwear and rings. But those dreams are in fact her way not of losing anything but rather of gaining control over her own fate. The dreams are Guðrún's autobiography, where a chaotic future is subsumed within a grand ordered and structured narrative. Her unruly life metamorphoses into a fixed text, the story that Guðrún is going to live. Thus the dreams turn out to be prophetic after all, whether they were actually dreamed or not. After they have been explained, Guðrún is able to act out her fate, and she indeed has a hand in her first divorce and in the violent death of her third husband. She also keeps on marrying until she has had four husbands, as in the dream, but will not marry again once the dreams have come true.

When Guðrún has heard Gestr's interpretation, she replies: 'mikit er til at hyggja, ef þetta allt skal eptir ganga' (p. 89) [I shall have plenty to think about if all of this comes to pass; p. 45]. These enigmatic words may mean that although Guðrún is not altogether happy with this narrative, she accepts it as her life and is going to live according to the dreams. Perhaps this is the reason why she can interpret her fourth husband's dream correctly and obviously foresee his death (p. 215), but also why she still replies in an oblique fashion when he narrates it to her. Guðrún either does not want to change what has already been dreamed, or she does not want to frustrate Þorkell with an autobiographical dream such as the one with which she has been living since her youth.

Are the dreams Guðrún's fate or does she have a free will? We might say that in her own eyes and those of the saga, Guðrún is responsible. She could have changed her fate but chose not to do so. Guðrún lives the dreams as if they were her fate, rather than seeking to fight against them—except when she meets Kjartan Ólafsson.

Did she perhaps see in him the ring from the third dream, the third husband whose religion was far better than heathen customs, but whose marriage with her was full of flaws and blemishes?<sup>33</sup> While this is conceivable, the other possibility is that Kjartan was something entirely different, the one man who was absent from her dream. It was neither a part of the dream autobiography to love him nor to kill him. In her relations with Kjartan, Guðrún changes her story. Is that why

she undertakes spinning work on the day of Kjartan's death (p. 154). Suddenly, she has recast herself as one of the fates, a free agent in her own story. Perhaps that makes the life and death of Kjartan more important to her than any of the husbands—and indeed it might be he who is occupying her mind in her old age—the one story that she has made for herself and that was not a part of the dream.

The death of Kjartan is obviously an important reason for the guilt which materializes in her bitter tears of repentance on the church floor and in the melancholy solitude of her final years. Nevertheless, she seems to retain a kind of pride, along with an inclination boldly to decide her own fate, be it good or bad; it is that which makes her turn a question about whom she loved the most into an answer about whom she treated worst.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Laxdæla saga*, *Íslensk fornrit* V, ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1934), pp. 88–89.

<sup>2</sup> *The Saga of the People of Laxardal*, transl. by Keneva Kunz, in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, 5 vols, ed. by Viðar Hreinsson (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), V 1–120 (p. 44).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A.C. Bouman, *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1962), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bouman, *Patterns*, p. 111. The exact age of *Laxdæla saga* is of no great importance to this study; it may have been composed in the 1240s (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Formáli', *Íslensk fornrit* V, p. xxxiv), in the 1250s (Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarvíga sögu*. *Studia Islandica* 50 (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa menningarsjóðs, 1993), pp. 252–53) or in the 1270s (Rolf Heller, 'Das alter der Laxdæla saga', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 97 (1968), 134–55). There is, however, a general agreement that the saga dates from the thirteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> The most important studies of dreams in the sagas are those by George Dunham Kelchner, *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and their Affinities in Folklore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), and Robert James Glendinning, *Träume und Vorbedeutung in der Islendinga Saga Sturla Thordarsons: Eine Form- und Stiluntersuchung* (Bern and Frankfurt a. M.: 1974); the latter, unfortunately, is mainly concerned with *Sturlunga saga* and thus does not discuss Guðrún and her dreams.

<sup>6</sup> Many scholars have discussed the dreams and their function in the narrative structure: see especially Heinrich Beck, 'Laxdæla saga—A Structural Approach', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 19 (1977), 383–402. I have also wrestled with these issues: see Ármann Jakobsson, '(Miðalda)kona verður til: Forleikur að grein eftir Dagnýju', *Kynlegir kvistir tindir til heiðurs Dagnýju Kristjánsdóttur fimmtugri 19. maí 1999*, ed. by Soffía Auður Birgisdóttir (Reykjavík: Uglar og ormur, 1999), 75–80.

<sup>7</sup> On his role in the community, see Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Galdur og forspá í ríkisvaldslausu samfélagi', in *Galdur og samfélag á miðöldum*, ed. by Torfi H. Tulinius (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2008), pp. 73–83.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Smiley, 'Distant Voices', *The Guardian*, 8 April 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See also Loren Auerbach, 'Female Experience and Authorial Intention in *Laxdæla saga*', *Saga-Book*, 25 (1998), 30–52 (pp. 36–38).

<sup>10</sup> See Ármann Jakobsson, 'Konungasagan Laxdæla', *Skirnir* 172 (1998), 357–83 (pp. 357–64).

<sup>11</sup> I am not sure that *er upp óxu á Íslandi* should be translated as 'ever to have grown up in Iceland'; I would also argue that *kvenna vænst* could be translated simply as 'a very beautiful women': a translation is always an interpretation, of course, and in this case I believe that the translator overstates Guðrún's beauty—in line, of course, with a long tradition.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Gunnar Karlsson, 'Kenningin um fornt kvenfrelsi á Íslandi', *Saga*, 24 (1986), 45–77; Carol J. Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 363–87; Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> See Ármann Jakobsson, 'Sinn eiginn smiður: Ævintýrið um Sverri konung', *Skírnir*, 179 (2005), 109–39.

<sup>14</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, 'Some Types of Ambiguities in the Sagas of the Icelanders', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 119 (2004), 37–53.

<sup>15</sup> See Bjarni Guðnason, *Túlkun Heiðarviga sögu*, pp. 136–38.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Aðalsteinn Davíðsson, 'Um Laxdælu', *Mímir* 3 (1964), 14–16; Hermann Pálsson, *Leyndarmál Laxdælu* (Reykjavík: Menningarsjóður, 1986), pp. 9–24; Svava Jakobsdóttir, 'Skáldskapur og fræði', *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, 60/4 (1999), 52–61 (pp. 60–61), and several others.

<sup>17</sup> See Ármann Jakobsson, 'Some Types of Ambiguities', p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Jonna Louis-Jensen, 'A Good Days Work: Laxdæla saga, ch. 49', *Twenty-Eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday 28 April 1993* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1992), 267–81 (p. 276): 'Throughout the saga Guðrún exercises remarkable self-control; the only reaction she shows to a particularly harsh treatment by a man who has just killed her husband is a smile (it is up to the reader to imagine what kind of smile)'.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. this remark of Ursula Dronke ('Narrative Insight in *Laxdæla saga*', *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, ed. by Mary T. Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 120–37 (p. 129)), when analyzing the conversation of Guðrún and Kjartan (*Laxdæla saga*, p. 115), before he goes abroad: 'How much already she thinks she owns him!'.

<sup>20</sup> Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 'Formáli', *Íslensk fornrit* V, pp. ix–x.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Cook, 'Women and Men in Laxdæla saga', *Skáldskaparmál*, 2 (1992), 34–59.

<sup>22</sup> Helga Kress, "'Mjök mun þér samstaft þykkja"—Um sagnahefð og kvenlega reynslu í *Laxdæla sögu*', *Konur skrifa: til heiðurs Önnu Sigurðardóttur* (Reykjavík: Sögufélagið, 1980), 97–109; Auerbach, 'Female Experience'.

<sup>23</sup> *Laxdæla saga með formála, skýringum og skrá*, ed. by Aðalsteinn Eypórsson and Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1993), p. x.



<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Cook, 'Women and Men'; cf. Ármann Jakobsson, 'Konungasagan Laxdæla'.

<sup>25</sup> See Rolf Heller, *Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländersagas* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1958).

<sup>26</sup> Helga Kress, "'Gægur er þér í augum": Konur í sjónmáli Íslendingasagna', *Yfir Íslandsála: Afmælisrit til heiðurs Magnúsi Stefánssyni sextugum 25. desember 1991* (Reykjavík: Sögufræðslusjóður, 1991), 77–94.

<sup>27</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, 'Konungasagan Laxdæla'.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dronke, 'Narrative Insight', p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> As does Bouman, *Patterns*, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Bouman, *Patterns*, pp. 146–47.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Gabriele Bensberg, *Die Laxdæla saga im Spiegel christlich-mittelalterlicher Tradition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 261–311; Bjarni Guðnason, 'Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir och Laxdæla saga', *Scripta Islandica*, 50 (1999), 9–30 (pp. 20–28).

<sup>32</sup> On this episode, see William Sayers, 'Sexual Identity, Cultural Integrity, Verbal and Other Magic in Episodes from Laxdæla saga and Kormáks saga', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 107 (1992), 131–55.

<sup>33</sup> Bouman (*Patterns*, pp. 126–32) suggests that when Guðrún sends Bolli off to kill Kjartan, she may have been hoping for a different outcome to their conflict (as Bolli himself suggests, *Laxdæla saga*, p. 155), and that she might suspect (or wish) that Kjartan is the fourth husband in her dreams.

## January's Genesis: Biblical Exegesis and Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*

Mike Rodman Jones

Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* must have one of the strangest reputations of all *The Canterbury Tales*. It is simultaneously one of the most widely read pieces of medieval literature, and one of the least liked. Eschewing the breezy slapstick bawdry of the *Miller's Tale* and failing to maintain the necessary 'high style' for its debating classical gods and apostrophes on betrayal and fortune—deeply evocative of the *Knight's Tale*—the *Merchant's Tale* often appears in Chaucer scholarship as not only the ugly duckling of Chaucer's fabliaux, but a 'savagely ironic' 'scene of moral desolation'.<sup>1</sup> That what is seen to be essentially a fabliau should attract such sentiment might seem odd, but part of the problem is indeed generic.<sup>2</sup> For the *Merchant's Tale* is read, taught, and discussed as a fabliau, yet barring the sketchiest of fabliau set-ups, the fabliau narrative itself makes up roughly 400 lines of what is nearly a 1200 line text.<sup>3</sup> The text is in fact full of distinctly non-fabliau material; long discourses on prudential and advisory matters, dramatic apostrophes, and most famously the 'marriage encomium': a notoriously difficult passage which dominates the opening of the text.<sup>4</sup> This passage, usually described as homiletic or mock-homiletic, is one of the densest areas of biblical citation and quotation in the whole of *The Canterbury Tales* outside the *Parson's Tale*, and it is this connection between the *Merchant's Tale* and the Bible, or more specifically biblical exegesis, on which I focus in this essay.

Scholarship on 'Chaucer and the Bible' has been neither voluminous nor particularly thin on the ground, but as a recent survey of this area notes, much of it has grown up in the daunting and rather eccentric shadow of D. W. Robertson's extraordinary analysis in *A Preface to Chaucer* (1962).<sup>5</sup> Whilst my argument is broadly that biblical exegesis is vital to the construction of meaning in Chaucer's

*Merchant's Tale*, I do not here follow a 'Robertsonian' approach, which always ran the risk of producing 'biblically based homilies on Chaucer instead of contextually sensitive criticism'.<sup>6</sup> Instead of reading 'through' Chaucer's text to the essentialist battle between *caritas* and *cupiditas* that Robertson argued was being played out in *The Canterbury Tales*, I want to focus far more on the surface of the text, and the way that the *Merchant's Tale* invokes biblical exegesis, particularly on Genesis, in forming its meanings.<sup>7</sup>

That Chaucer was aware of exegetical tradition is not really in doubt; the number of explicit references displaying variations on Prudence's 'therfore seith Seint Austyn' (VII. 1617) makes it clear that Chaucer was aware of both the substance and the stylistic characteristics of a deeply authoritative tradition of biblical exegesis.<sup>8</sup> But what I want to argue is that the *Merchant's Tale*, and the marriage encomium in particular, invokes biblical exegesis on Genesis 1-3 from essentially two different traditions: not only this highly influential Augustinian strand, but also that of the thirteenth-century Italian writer Albertanus of Brescia. These traditions of exegetical thought on Genesis work as a vital context to Chaucer's writing here, in both explicit and implicit ways. In particular, I focus on three central aspects of Genesis exegesis. First, I argue that the marriage encomium's invocation of Genesis 2. 18 is both explicitly, visually, and stylistically linked to exegetical thought on Eve's creation, particularly the problematic Vulgate term 'adjutorium', 'helper'. Secondly, I discuss the way that Chaucer's tale acts to re-write, to reverse, the gender dynamics of exegetical thought on the creation of male and female bodies in Genesis. Finally, I argue that the *Merchant's Tale* uses the disjunctions between different strands of exegetical thought about Eve, rationality, and female counsel to form its political meanings.

### *Paradisal Labours (I)*

And herke why—I sey nat this for noght –  
That woman is for mannes helpe ywroght.  
The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked,  
And saugh him al allone, bely-naked,  
God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,  
"Lat us now make an helpe unto this man  
Lyk to himself"; and thanne he made him Eve.

Heere may ye se, and heerby may ye preve,  
That wyf is mannes helpe and his confort,  
His paradys terrestre, and his disport. (IV. 1323-32)<sup>9</sup>

This passage in the 'marriage encomium' of the *Merchant's Tale*, a passage in which Genesis is evoked in order to explicate the benefits and purposes of marriage, is also one of the most densely glossed passages in early manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*. In a large number of these manuscripts, including Hengwrt and Ellesmere, scribes annotate the passage with Latin marginal commentary, tracing the relationship between vernacular encomium and Latin source. What Manley and Rickert term the 'elaborate Latin glossing' of the marriage encomium is remarkable in a number of ways.<sup>10</sup> Scribal annotations here act to link Chaucer's text in a tangible, visual way with a long, influential tradition of exegesis on Genesis. The exegetical moments in the marriage encomium do not appear in a vernacular vacuum, but are deeply rooted in their relation to an authoritative Latinate tradition of biblical commentary and explication. In this case, the source of the marriage encomium's evocation of Genesis does not originate directly in the Vulgate, but, as editions of *The Canterbury Tales* often note, via Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei* (1238) and, in other passages, from his *Liber consolationis et consilii* (1246).<sup>11</sup> It is both the importance of Albertanus as an *auctor* that Chaucer returns to repeatedly when writing about Genesis and marriage—in both the *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee*—and more broadly the relationship between the evocation of Genesis in the *Merchant's Tale* and the influential Latin traditions of exegesis, particularly Augustinian thought, that I argue to be a vital catalyst in the creation of meaning in Chaucer's text.

The substance of the passage above similarly links it closely to the stylistic and methodological habits of exegesis. The first seven lines are essentially a sparse narrative of Genesis 2. 18, and in a characteristically exegetical manner, the passage re-quotes the scriptural text within its own narrative and explicatory account of the biblical text. This is a dense overlaying of passages, including biblical 'base text', biblical paraphrase, Latin paratext and vernacular exposition. Indeed, the direct speech of God in Genesis 2. 18, appropriated by the exegetical voice, serves to produce a sense of close proximity to the scriptural text, a sense of the fidelity of the exegetical point to the actual substance of the biblical passage. But, of course, this ostentatious show of interpretative 'plainness' is destabilized by the movement from paraphrase and quotation to explication. The

marriage encomium's exegesis, for all its apparent proximity to both Genesis and Albertanus's *Liber de amore Dei*, quickly becomes a sequence of over-stretched *non sequiturs*. What can be 'seen' in the passage is clearly not necessarily what it 'proves' (IV. 1330). The word 'preve', with its accompanying sense of determining finality, is a necessary precursor to what comes next: the sudden movement from the sparse scriptural 'helpe'—a vital but vexed term for exegetes—and the hyperbolic build up of 'confort', 'paradys terrestre' and 'disport'. Whilst the overblown 'paradys' echoes throughout the *Merchant's Tale*, reinforcing the image of a distorted or grotesque Eden throughout the text, the rhyme of 'confort' and 'disport' is repeated in the *Merchant Tale's* most notorious biblically-inflected passage (IV. 2147-8): January's wrenching of the Song of Songs into the 'olde lewed wordes' (IV. 2149) used to entice May (and, unsuspectingly, her serpent-like 'naddre' (IV. 1786), Damyan) into his garden.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, traces of the Genesis narrative are still present in January's *hortus inclusus*, a garden with associations, as many critics have noticed, that hover somewhere between Eden, the Song of Songs, and the *Roman de la Rose*, and the purpose of which is significantly and solely sexual amusement and play—albeit 'disport' of a kind that January does not expect, even as the fabliau framework of the *Merchant's Tale* demands it.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst the speaker of the marriage encomium remains difficult, even impossible, to identify completely with either January or the Merchant-narrator, the text's invocation of exegesis on Genesis, foregrounded by the marginal annotations, places the passage firmly in the context of patristic and scholastic attempts to explicate the meaning of Genesis, attempts which, significantly, also focus on the ambiguities surrounding the biblical word 'adjutorium', 'helper', in Genesis 2.<sup>14</sup> Augustine, who returned to exegesis on Genesis no fewer than five times, was both massively influential for later biblical exegesis, and tangibly perplexed by the nature and role of Eve signalled by the term 'helper' in the Genesis narrative.<sup>15</sup> In his fullest account of Eve's creation, Augustine writes:

Aut si ad hoc adjutorium gignendi filios, non est facta mulier viro, ad quod ergo adjutorium facta est? Si quae simul operaretur terram; nondum erat labor ut adjumento indigeret, et si opus esset, melius adjutorium masculus fieret: hoc et de solatio dici potest, si solitudinis fortasse taedebat [...] Quapropter non invenio ad quod adjutorium facta sit mulier viro, si pariendi causa subtrahitur.<sup>16</sup>

[Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude [...] Consequently, I do not see in what sense the woman was made as a helper for the man if not for the sake of bearing children.]<sup>17</sup>

The rhetorical question that Augustine begins with here seems to be a way of forming an article for debate or answer, yet its puzzled interrogative essentially returns in the form of Augustine's 'non invenio'. The question of the nature of Eve's status as 'adjutorium' is a vexed one, and Augustine's attempt to explicate the term as a procreative duty through deduction, whilst clearly influential, actually works to overpower the biblical text.<sup>18</sup> The explicit cause of Eve's creation is the Vulgate's 'non est bonum esse hominem solum', 'it is not good for man to be alone', the sentiment that Chaucer elaborates with the image of Adam 'al allone, bely-naked' (IV. 1326): precisely the solitude that Augustine identifies and rejects as the motivation for God's creation of a female companion.<sup>19</sup>

The association between the term 'adjutorium' in Genesis 2. 18 and the idea of procreation originated in Augustine's earliest exegetical account, and there also it was problematic:

Incipit exponi quomodo sit facta femina: et facta dicitur in adjutorium viri, ut copulatione spirituali spirituales fetus ederet, id est bona opera divinae laudis; dum ille regit, haec obtemperat; ille a sapientia regitur, haec a viro. Caput enim viri Christus, et caput mulieris vir.<sup>20</sup>

[Hence, Scripture begins to explain how the woman was made. It says that she was made as man's helper so that by spiritual union she might bring forth spiritual offspring, that is, the good works of divine praise, while he rules and she obeys. He is ruled by wisdom, she by the man. For Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman.]<sup>21</sup>

This earlier 'literal' interpretation is of course figurative, rendering Eve's children as 'bona opera divinae laudis', 'the good works of divine praise', rather than the literal 'filios' of Augustine's later writing, but the overpowering of the rather

sparser text of Genesis is familiar. Here, the imposition of Pauline thought on gender, specifically I Corinthians 11. 3's 'omnis viri caput Christus est caput autem mulieris vir', 'Christ is the head of all men, but man is the head of woman' works to project a strict vertical gender hierarchy onto a biblical text which does not necessarily bear it out. This foundational exegesis on Genesis can be seen to overpower the biblical text, in a way that is being deliberately evoked by Chaucer in the *Merchant's Tale*. Using exegesis on Genesis as the basis for a discussion of marriage might suggest, both to author's and readers' minds, interpretative gymnastics which sometimes border on what Alcuin Blamires has characterised as 'exegetical wizardry'.<sup>22</sup> Just as Augustinian thought on the motives and purpose of Eve's creation in Genesis is frequently characterised by an exegetical overpowering of scriptural texts, so Chaucer's marriage encomium works by building up from 'helpe' to the multiple roles of 'conforte', 'paradys terrestre', and 'disport'.

But the purpose of Chaucer's exegetical writing here is two-fold. Whilst the speaker of the marriage encomium over-stretches Genesis' term 'helper', he simultaneously omits the primary meaning of 'adjutorium' as construed by the vast majority of the exegetical tradition: procreation is in fact the one thing that has disappeared. However, procreation as the purpose of marriage does make an appearance in the *Merchant's Tale*, but outside the exegetical material of the marriage encomium, and more clearly in January's voice:

Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten;  
Yet were me levere houndes had me eten  
Than that myn heritage sholde falle  
In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle.  
[...]

If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,  
Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,  
By cause of leveful procreacioun  
Of children to th'onour of God above,  
And nat oonly for paramour or love;  
And for they sholde leccherye eschue,  
And yelde hir dette whan that it is due;  
Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother  
In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,  
And lyve in chastitee ful holily.  
But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I. (IV. 1437-40; 1446-56)

January's argument is a dense conglomeration of established thought about marriage—the 'proof' of his blunt claim to 'woot the cause why / Men sholde wedde' (IV. 1441-2)—but it develops significantly out of an argument not in favour of marriage, but in favour of specifically marrying a much younger wife; someone who, according to January's estimate, should be less than a third of his age.<sup>23</sup> January's sudden focus on procreation as an important correlative of marriage is also rather less straightforward than one might expect.

As Lawrence Besserman has noted, January's hyperbolic desire to be eaten by hounds rather than forgo the production of children to secure his 'heritage' is intricately wrought with potentially ironic overtones, both biblical and Ovidian.<sup>24</sup> But most importantly, it is already a distorted version of what an overwhelmingly influential exegetical tradition thought of as the 'cause why / Men sholde wedde'. Procreation appears, but only to defend January's refusal of a wife older than twenty years of age (IV. 1417). January's argument throughout this section is a glaringly self-interested appropriation of established thought on marriage, which viewed it as a necessary control of the inevitable dangers of a fallen and pernicious human desire, a concept encircled by the Pauline maxim that 'melius est enim nubere quam uri', 'it is better to marry than to burn' (I Corinthians 7. 9). January takes this idea and contorts it into an argument 'proving' that he needs a young wife, or will inevitably turn to adultery, potentially leaving the stability of his heritage and the fate of his soul in jeopardy. Vitally, it is January's omission of his own responsibility and agency in this eventuality that problematizes the passage. But the familiarity of some of these ideas about marriage is strikingly Chaucerian in tone. They are the ideas propounded by the rather endless homiletic commonplaces of Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, which connects marriage and Genesis in its assertion that 'God made it, as I have seyde, in paradys', and virtually repeats January's point about 'leveful procreacioun' (IV. 1448-9): 'Trewe effect of mariage clenseth fornicacioun and replenysseth hooly chirche of good lynage, for that is the ende of mariage [...] as seith Seint Augustyn, by manye resouns' (X. 918; 920). The sentiments, then, are familiar, but have been distorted under the pressure of January's ruthlessly selective self-interest: the 'lynage' to be protected by procreation in the *Merchant's Tale* is not 'hooly Chirche's', but January's.

Importantly, January's pre-empting of the Parson's commonplaces on marriage screech to a halt on the line: 'But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I' (IV. 1456). This is obviously an echo of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* (III. 112)—one of many in the *Merchant's Tale*—and one that carries with it Chaucerian connotations of what we might call a 'revisionist' exegesis on certain biblical



texts.<sup>25</sup> The Wife's paraphrase of Matthew 19. 21 to argue against the imperatives of 'greet perfeccion' (III. 105) produces a kind of exegetical template for January, one that throws an interrogative light on the integrity of the exegete even as it acts as a testament to their self-interestedness (or intellectual energy, depending on the reader's view of the Wife of Bath).<sup>26</sup> The sudden denial of the previous ten lines with the brusque, confident self-definition of 'that am nat I', made more self-possessed by the mock-politeness of 'sires, by youre leve', leaves a reader in a rather perplexed situation in the *Merchant's Tale*. Whilst Alison's line is amongst Chaucer's funniest and is surely designed, on some level, to be comic, January's—an almost exact replica of it—doesn't seem to be. January's masculinist and aristocratic assertion of self-interest is, in the context of the *Merchant's Tale*'s complex denunciations of his 'lewed wordes', not funny but frightening.

In the final section of this essay, I argue that it is January's similarly assertive performance of receiving counsel, coupled with his flagrant and implacable refusal of it, that shapes the meaning of much of the *Merchant's Tale*. It is just this ostentatious awareness of a long clerical tradition of exegesis on Genesis and marriage which acts to highlight the ruthless, megalomaniacal drive towards masculine sexual prerogative—the centrality of 'disport' in January's 'paradys terrestre'—that characterises January's palimpsest of Genesis.<sup>27</sup> The foregrounding of exegetical thought on Genesis in the *Merchant's Tale* works not simply to produce a comparison between an 'ideal' paradisaical marriage and the realities of January's and May's relationship; it is more specifically exposed to be a performative veil over the tyrannical assertion of masculine desire that is ultimately 'bely-naked'.<sup>28</sup>

### *Words, Bodies, and Derivation*

The invocations of Genesis exegesis in the *Merchant's Tale* reach further, however, than a single moment in the marriage encomium: Genesis is in the veins of Chaucer's text. The heightened focus on physical bodies in the text—from January's 'slakke skyn' (IV. 1849) to the blunt detail of 'algate in it wente!' (IV. 2376)—while to some extent a product of the tale's generic form, also relates the text closely to the focus of exegetical thought on Genesis, which frequently centred on Adam's and Eve's bodies, the sequence of creation of those bodies, their physical origins in the earth or each other, and on the gender dynamics which arose from these bodily connections.

One of the most fundamental biblical passages on the physical nature of Eve, Genesis 2. 23-24, is again invoked directly by the speaker of the marriage encomium:

O flessch they been, and o flessch, as I gesse,  
Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.  
[...]  
Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel;  
She seith nat ones "nay," whan he seith "ye."  
"Do this," seith he; "Al redy, sire," seith she. (IV. 1335-6; 1344-6)

The text's 'O flessch' again originates in the exegetical stockpile of Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei*, where Albertanus quotes the Vulgate's 'erunt duo in carne una', 'they were two in one flesh' to argue 'that a wife is to be cherished'.<sup>29</sup> Yet again, scribal marginalia traces the idea to Latinized exegesis, highlighting the exegetical connections of the vernacular text.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, the text's exegetical practice characteristically stretches the point of the biblical and exegetical passage to absurdity. 'O flessch' leads, in a process similar to the previous 'preve', to the idea of 'oon herte', in a way that constrains the possibility of individuality, and in particular the enunciation of the female voice. The unity of bodies leads to a forced unity of words: as masculine and feminine bodies are synthesised, so are their hearts and voices, constricting the wifely voice to monosyllables.

Again, Chaucer's text is evoking a ubiquitous strand of exegetical thought on Genesis and the relationship between male and female bodies which focused on the apparently derivative and auxiliary nature of female bodies and words. As Alcuin Balmires has argued, 'On the basis of a selective reading of the Book of Genesis, patriarchy in the medieval West constructed woman to be *secondary* in creation, and *primary* in guilt'.<sup>31</sup> It is the idea of this derivative, 'secondary' nature of Eve which is the context for the marriage encomium, and which forces the synthesis of 'O flessch' into the constriction of the female voice to 'nay' and 'ye'. Adam's speech on discovering Eve in Genesis 2. 23 focuses simultaneously on this idea of physical and verbal derivation: 'hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis et caro de carne mea haec vocabitur virago quoniam de viro sumpta est', 'Now this is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh. She shall be called 'woman' because she is made from 'man'. While Adam originated in the soil to which, following the fall, he would inevitably return (Genesis 3. 19), Eve's origin in Genesis 2 was the

original, masculine, created body, and her very name, significantly applied to her by Adam, acted as a verbal reminder of this origin.

Again, this derivative relationship was commented on, and elaborated on, frequently by exegetes such as Augustine. For example, in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine writes:

Vocavit ergo mulierem suam vir, tanquam potior inferiorem, et dixit: Hoc nunc os de ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea [...] Quod autem dictum est, Haec vocabitur mulier, quoniam de viro suo sumpta est; ista origo nominis, et interpretatio in lingua latina non apparet. Quid enim simile habeat mulieris nomen ad viri nomen, non invenitur.<sup>32</sup>

[As the master, the man gave a name to his woman, his inferior, and said, "Now this is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh" [...] It said, "She will be called woman because she was taken from her man". This derivation and interpretation of the name is not apparent in the Latin language. For we do not find any similarity between the word, 'woman' (*mulier*), and the word, 'man' (*vir*).]<sup>33</sup>

Augustine's need to explain the derivation of 'woman' here is striking given that the Vulgate makes the necessary connection by using the word 'virago', a word denoting a kind of *mulier fortis*. Augustine's explanation here, and eventual dismissal of the problem as 'caused by the differences in languages' is problematic precisely because his explication of the scriptural passage depends on a clear hierarchy of rule and power.<sup>34</sup> The power to name Eve as woman is predicated on her being 'inferior' to Adam, an elaboration on the biblical text. The physical origins of the female body in Genesis come to imbue Adam with linguistic power over Eve. The Vulgate's 'virago'—perhaps suggestive of a rather more combative Eve than Augustine had in mind—becomes rather awkward in this context, and is consequently explained away.

But the connections between masculine physical and linguistic primacy that are made by Augustinian exegesis was never far removed from later thought, and reappear regularly in elaborated ways. For example, in a remarkable passage in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas wrote:

Videtur quod mulier non debuit produci in prima rerum productione. Dicit enim Philosophus quod *femina est mas occasionatus*. Sed nihil

occasionatum et deficiens debuit esse in prima rerum institutione; ergo in illa prima rerum institutione mulier producenda non fuit.

[It seems that woman ought not to have been produced in the original production of things. For the Philosopher says that the female is a male *manqué*. But nothing *manqué* or defective should have been produced in the first establishment of things; so woman ought not to have been produced then.]<sup>35</sup>

Aquinas, as he frequently does, elaborates on Augustine's exegesis by turning to Aristotelian 'science', in this case *De Generatione Animalium*.<sup>36</sup> Aquinas is here working in established scholastic methodology: constructing articles for inquiry with a 'pro' and 'contra' argument. In this case, the 'male *manqué*' thesis is demonstrably not Aquinas's final word on Eve. He returns to the question, again taking resource to Aristotle's text, complete with its astonishing explanation that females are produced because of environmental phenomena such as southern winds, 'qui sunt humidi ut dicetur in libro *De Generatione Animalium*', 'which are damp, as we are told by Aristotle'.<sup>37</sup> But while Aquinas works to ensure that Eve's place in original creation is supported by scholastic analysis, the idea of the derivativeness of the female body never leaves the exegetical project. Even while it is countered in some way, it remains ubiquitous and persistent.

But whilst these elaborations on the text of Genesis 2. 23-24 do influence the marriage encomium's hyperbolic over-stretching of 'O flessch' and its associated dynamics of linguistic power between male and female voices, I want to argue that the *Merchant's Tale* actually works to reverse these dynamics. It is January's body, or at least his perception of it, rather than May's, that appears as derivative in Chaucer's text. January's bodily self-image is dependent upon and derived from its contact with the female body. When January enters into marriage in the *Merchant's Tale*, what he gains is a construction and renewal of masculine identity, in a way that combines aspects of public recognition and reputation, and simultaneously private perceptions of bodily capability and virility.

January not only attempts to transform himself through marriage with May in terms of a moral reform of his voracious sexuality—though whether this is motivated 'for hoolynesse or for dotage' (IV. 1253) the narrator leaves pointedly ambiguous—but also in terms of masculine stature or status in a perceived public sphere. The 'heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse' (IV. 1577) that January fosters around his choice of a bride is performed in the very public arena conjured up by the image of the 'mirour' and the 'market-place' (IV. 1582-3). January's visions of

marriage are based on ideas of a wife as a commodity value in the public exchange and construction of competitive male identity. The idealised body of May—'myddel small [...] armes longe and sklendre' (IV. 1602)—provides January with a medieval 'trophy wife'. May's physical body acts simultaneously in appearing to be the product and manifestation of January's financial power. And as with his choice of bride, so with the ceremony itself. The magnificence of January's ceremony, 'ful of instrumentz and of vitaille, / The mooste deyntevous of al Ytaille' (IV. 1713-4), is, like much of January's characterisation, sharply similar to that of the last aristocratic Italian man to throw a wedding feast in *The Canterbury Tales*: Walter in the *Clerk's Tale*.<sup>38</sup> The image of January dancing with Venus' 'fyrbrond' in hand 'biform the bryde and al the route' (IV. 1727-8) captures the essential point that January's wedding is above all a public performance, a spectacle, a way of constructing masculine identity via the reactions of the public gaze.

The re-creation of January through his interaction with May is repeated in the comparative privacy of the bedroom scene of May and January's wedding night. January, in consoling May for the 'trespace' and 'offense' (IV. 1828-9) of the sexual consummation of the marriage, gleefully promises that, now married, they 'han leve to pleye us by the lawe' (IV. 1841). The 'pleye' described is the sexual play gestured at repeatedly through the word 'disport'. But what is clear is January's bodily unsuitability to the 'play' itself. The foregrounding of parts of his aged body by the narrator works to undermine any sense that January should be 'playing' with such a young wife, and serves to expand the distance between the reality of January's body and the self-image he clearly gains from physical interaction with May's sexualised body.<sup>39</sup>

In the line following January's promise to 'play' comes a narrative interjection that undermines his actual physical capability: 'Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawne' (IV. 1842). The juxtaposition of the verbs 'pley' and 'laboureth' serve to create a double impression of January at the point of his first sexual contact with May. Proclaiming to 'pley', a word connoting physical ease and enjoyment, January actually 'labours', toiling against his unresponsive physical body.<sup>40</sup> May's response, though unexpressed to January, clearly supports the narrative judgement rather than January's: 'She preyseth nat his pleying worth a bene' (IV. 1854). The return from 'labour' to 'play', and May's negative opinion, works to condemn January's vision of lithe sexual play as pure self-deception, but notably, January's self-image as young Casanova remains intact as he retires in the morning 'al coltish, ful of ragerye' (IV. 1847). If the narrator, reader, and

certainly May herself are under no illusions about January's sexual talent, what is plain is that January *is*; his physical interaction with the body of May transforms the actuality of age into the 'heigh fantasye' of youthful virility. The interaction of physical bodies acts to intensify the self-deception that caused January to characterise himself as a 'blosmy tree' that becomes 'neither drye ne deed' (IV. 1463). Again, like January's original choice of May, his sexual interaction with her actually works to invert the assumptions about original and 'derivative' bodies of male and female found in the exegetical tradition connecting Genesis to the gender dynamics of medieval marriage. The way in which January is transformed and rejuvenated through his relation with May's body seems to invert Aquinas's conclusion and suggests instead that January is in fact a kind of 'May manqué': formed and rejuvenated in reaction to the native characteristics of May's body.

A vital aspect of the *Merchant's Tale*, as I argue above, is January's public, performative formation of his identity. But what this performance opens up is the possibility of judgements that January might not want. May's (presumably silent) appraisal of January's sexual performance, signalled by the word 'preyseth' (IV. 1854), is related semantically to a broad theme of judgement and discernment that threads through the text, from the debates of the counsellors, Placebo and Justinus, and the 'mirror in the market place', to January's metaphorical and literal blindness, and May's punning connection of 'mysconceyveth' with 'mysdemeth' (IV. 2410) at the close of the text.<sup>41</sup> The language of 'avysement' and 'preyseth' leads us into the language of public consultation and advisory discourse: the kind of language that, as numerous critics have noted, brings January ever closer to his counterpart in the preceding *Clerk's Tale*.<sup>42</sup> Yet again, there are important connections to be made between the status of female counsel—such an ostentatiously broached topic in the latter part of the marriage encomium—and the exegetical traditions that underpin so much of the *Merchant's Tale*.

### *Paradisal Labours (II): Reason and Counsel*

The *Merchant's Tale's* marriage encomium, as Donald Benson saw its structure, consisted of three fundamental points, each couched within a body of exegetical lore.<sup>43</sup> The ultimate point of the encomium concerns, rather strikingly, wifely counsel: the imperative that a husband should 'werke after his wyves reed' (IV. 1357). That counsel and advisory discourse are an important aspect of the *Merchant's Tale* is obvious enough; the glaring 'non-debates' of January's

counsellors, Placebo and Justinus, connect Chaucer's text to a long tradition of anticurial satire and advisory literature going back at least as far as John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1159).<sup>44</sup> But while counsel in the *Merchant's Tale* might seem to be a virtually self-explanatory presence, much more can be made of the connections between reason, counsel, and the Genesis narratives which underpin the marriage encomium and make up such a vital part of it. Moreover, more must be made of the intersections between Genesis, ideas of reason and counsel, and the political resonance of the Italian setting and sources of the *Merchant's Tale*, something I return to at the close of the essay.

For thanne his lyf is set in sikernesse;  
He may nat be deceyved, as I gesse,  
So that he werke after his wyves reed.  
Thanne may he boldely beren up his heed,  
They been so trewe and therwithal so wyse;  
For which, if thou wolt werken as the wyse,  
Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede. (IV. 1355-61)

The marriage encomium's final focus appears in a patterned repetition of the words 'reed' and 'wyse'. Wisdom, reason and counsel—and explicitly female counsel—are presented as the easy way to 'sikernesse' and security. But, as always with this encomium, the homiletic imperatives of the passage come with the tangible possibility of self-parody. The proximity of 'deceyved' to the rather absent-minded 'I gesse', the hyperbolic sense of certainty in 'He may nat be', the repetition of 'reed', and particularly 'wyse', in four out of five lines that sounds suspiciously like vacuous reiteration: the parroting of received wisdom that occurs throughout the marriage encomium seems to be happening here too. Indeed, it is the citation of received wisdom, particularly the 'evidence' of female biblical figures, that again demonstrates the *Merchant's Tale's* proximity to exegetical tradition. But what is really striking about the exegetical tradition that informs the marriage encomium here is its self-contradictory nature. Chaucer was heir to two sharply contrasting traditions of thought on female rationality, wisdom and counsel.

The first of these, epitomised by Augustine and Aquinas, focused discussion on the comparative irrationality of Eve. For example, Augustine, in attempting to explain the fall, wonders:

Fortasse secundum sensum carnis, non secundum spiritum mentis viveret [...] sed quod fortassis illa hoc nondum perceperat quod sit in agnitione Dei, et viro regente ac dispensante paulatim fuerat perceptura.<sup>45</sup>

[perhaps that she was living according to the spirit of the flesh and not according to the spirit of the mind [...]] But perhaps the woman had not yet received the gift of the knowledge of God, but under the direction and tutelage of her husband she was to acquire it gradually.]<sup>46</sup>

Again, Augustine's thinking is actually tentative and professedly provisional, something signalled by his repeated 'fortasse', 'perhaps', throughout the passage. But the opposition of female 'sensus carnis' and male 'spiritus mentis', and the assertion of masculine governmental and rational superiority was again a hugely influential thread of exegetical thought. Augustine's earlier construction 'ille a sapientia regitur, haec a viro', 'He is ruled by wisdom, she by the man', was amongst the most foundational of exegetical ideas in the Middle Ages.<sup>47</sup> Aquinas concurs in the *Summa*'s discussion of pre- and post-fall subjection: 'naturaliter in homine magis abundat discretio rationis', 'the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man', and goes on to spend a great deal of time constructing a kind of domestic 'body politic' image out of the origins of Eve's body in Adam's rib, rather than his head or foot.<sup>48</sup> All in all, Augustinian thought constructed the first woman, and all women, as comparatively lacking in reason, the foundation of *sapientia* and the primary faculty that we might associate with wisdom and counsel.<sup>49</sup>

But the marriage encomium shows Chaucer's awareness of an exegetical tradition, exemplified by Albertanus's compilation of biblical exempla, which used exegesis to assert the exact opposite of this Augustinian tradition. The encomium's repetition of 'wyse' and 'rede', its imperative to 'Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede' (IV. 1361), is followed by a compendious list of biblical figures from Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber consolationis et consilii* which is designed to illustrate the biblical origins and authority of female counsel. As before, this sequence of figures—Rebecca, Judith, Abigail, Esther—is surrounded in early manuscripts by Latin glosses, visually foregrounding the authoritative connection between scriptural text and vernacular encomium.<sup>50</sup> This list has become something of a 'crux within a crux' in Chaucerian scholarship, but what is striking here is the close connection between Chaucer's text and Albertanus's exegetical compendium which, like *Liber de amore Dei*, made strong connections between biblical exegesis and prudential and advisory discourse. Most strikingly



of all, the evocation of Genesis, and particularly the creation of Eve in Chaucer's text (via Albertanus), is echoed again in one amongst many connections between the *Merchant's Tale* and the *Tale of Melibee*.<sup>51</sup>

And the same bountee in good conseillyng of many a good womman  
may men telle./ And mooreover, whan oure Lord hadde creat Adam,  
oure forme fader, he seyde in this wise:/ 'It is nat good to been a man  
alloone; make we to hym an helpe semblable to hymself.'/ Heere may ye  
se that if that wommen were nat goode, and hir conseils goode and  
profitable,/ oure Lord God of hevene wolde nevere han wrought hem, ne  
called hem help of man, but rather confusioun of man. (VII. 1101-5).<sup>52</sup>

The motivation for Eve's creation in Genesis 2. 18 is again portrayed through an appropriation of the direct speech of God in the biblical passage, just as occurs in the marriage encomium (IV. 1328-9). But Albertanus's text focuses sharply on Eve's 'help', the status of 'adjutorium' that so troubled Augustine, and sees the term 'helper' as, explicitly, 'advisor', 'for without the help and counsel of women the world would not be able to endure'.<sup>53</sup> Whilst Albertanus's exegesis hedged somewhat by recording antifeminist material as well, his emphasis on female reason, wisdom and counsel, and the way biblical exegesis was offered to cement these ideas, was what Chaucer repeatedly turned to Albertanus for.<sup>54</sup> Against the exegetical tide, some authors offered exegesis on Genesis which emphasised female counsel in a way that must have been, to some extent, controversial and contested.<sup>55</sup> This differing emphasis on the significance of Eve's creation in Genesis was similarly enunciated in another text to which Chaucer returns repeatedly, remarkably the text that Christine de Pizan lambasted as full of 'excessive, violent, and totally unfounded criticism, denigration, and defamation of women': the *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>56</sup> The introduction of the figure 'Raison', notably female, is accompanied by the following assertion, rendered in the Chaucerian translation:

Hir goodly semblaunt, by devys,  
I trow were maad in paradys,  
[...]  
God hymself, that is so high,  
Made hir aftir his ymage,  
And yaff hir sith such avauntage

That she hath myght and seignorie  
To kepe men from all folye (3205-6; 3210-14).<sup>57</sup>

The final line here: 'To kepe men from all folye' echoes back to Albertanus's *Liber consolationis et consilii*, and forward to both *Melibee* and the *Merchant's Tale*. While Chaucer is surely heir to the exegetical tradition that could be referred to by a simple 'as seith Seint Augustyn' (X. 920), he was also sharply aware of a very different strand of exegetical thought, one that produced connotations of female rationality and counsel as a check on masculine 'folye' whenever Genesis came to the fore.<sup>58</sup>

The presence of female counsel as one of the main themes of the marriage encomium is, I think, crucial to the wider meanings of the *Merchant's Tale*. Yet that presence is, strangely, what has been noted as an absence. Donald R. Benson's formative article on the marriage encomium describes the place of wifely counsel in the text before adding 'the old man [January] reveals no interest whatsoever in this subject [...] nor is wifely counsel a significant issue in the tale's action'.<sup>59</sup> In Benson's account, the absence of wifely counsel in the tale is another reason to conclude that 'we can only accept the passage as a major Chaucerian crux, a tantalizing anomaly' which refuses interpretative closure. But this absence is pointed and deliberate. The combination of female counsel's appearance in the encomium with its glaring absence throughout the rest of the tale works to focus the more politicised aspects of the *Merchant's Tale's* meaning.

Much of this politicized meaning depends on the language of counsel in the tale, a language it shares with both *Melibee* and the *Clerk's Tale*. But whilst this vocabulary of advice abounds in the *Merchant's Tale*, the actuality of counsel is repeatedly prevented. It is not just that Placebo and Justinus, the actual counsellors of the text, fail to produce anything like 'counsel'—Placebo is baldly sycophantic, Justinus is not necessarily any better—it is that the text emphasises over and over again the public, performative, even ostentatious spectacle of January using the political facade of counsel while ruthlessly suppressing it.<sup>60</sup> 'And syn that ye han herd al myn entente, / I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente' (IV. 1467-8) he says. But the words 'entente' and 'assente', brought together by rhyme, actually clash: January's 'entente' is absolute, and his theatrical request for 'assente' is utterly empty of the need or desire for wider advisory opinion. When Justinus does venture a qualification against January's 'entente' to marry a young wife, his counsel is met with the violent outburst 'Straw for thy Senek', and the assertion that 'Wyser men than thou, / As thou hast herd, assenteden right now /

To my purpos' (IV. 1569-71). Placebo sycophantically pleads that January has no need 'Conseil to axe' (IV. 1480), and he is ultimately right: in asking for counsel, January simply demands 'assente'. Meeting with his retinue of 'freendes' after choosing May as his bride to be, January requests, essentially, silence: 'And alderfirst he bad hem alle a boone, / That noon of hem none argumentes make / Agayn the purpos which that he hath take' (IV. 1618-20). This is, strikingly, an almost exact replica of the bullish, tyrannical Walter of the *Clerk's Tale*, who coerces his 'counsellors' into agreement with just the same 'boone':

And forthermoore, this shal ye swere: that ye  
Agayn my choys shul neither grucche ne stryve; [...]  
And but ye wole assente in swich manere,  
I prey yow, speketh namoore of this matere' (IV. 169-70; 174-5).

Walter and January, aristocratic Lombards both, utilize the language of counsel but actually offer only two choices: consent or silence. Whilst scholars have located this antipathy towards advice as a key aspect of January's self-delusion, what is being picked up on by Chaucer here is precisely what was raised as a vital aspect of marriage in the encomium, and something that acts from line 1374 onwards as a metaphorical 'elephant in the room': female counsel.<sup>61</sup> From the point that a reader leaves behind the marriage encomium, with its exegetical compilation of biblical examples of female 'good conseil' (IV. 1369), it is increasingly obvious that January exists in a world without any counsel whatsoever. His silencing of masculine counsellors leads inevitably to the fact that May is predominantly silent until the generic affiliations of the tale's close prompt her into the language of a virtuoso deception.

It is worth emphasising here the Italianate nature of Chaucer's choice of setting and sources, as both are significant. David Wallace's monumental *Chaucerian Polity* (1997) has focused attention on the way that Chaucer's travels to Italy in the 1370s may have affected his writing, and indeed his sense of the political life of fourteenth-century Europe. Chaucer is portrayed, like Milton in the 1630s, as an English writer rejuvenated by Italianate literary culture who simultaneously developed a rather critical awareness of political phenomena in southern Europe.<sup>62</sup> It is no accident that Chaucer's major source for large sections of the marriage encomium in the *Merchant's Tale* is Albertanus of Brescia, 'one of the most popular and widely disseminated of all medieval authors', but also one who combined first-hand experience of the connections between intellectual

labour and political discourse in Italy with a repeated assertion about the importance of counsel, and frequently female counsel, in shaping governmental practice.<sup>63</sup> Neither can it be a coincidence that January is introduced as 'dwellynge in Lumbardye [...] born was of Pavye' (IV. 1245-6), linking him in geographical, and indeed political, terms with the Clerk's remarkably detailed locating of Walter in Saluzzo (IV. 57-63), the thumbnail sketch of Bernabò Visconti in the *Monk's Tale* (VII. 2399-2406), and above all the warning of the Prologue of *The Legend of Good Women*: to 'nat ben lyk tyraunts of Lumbardye' (G. 354).

While the political language of counsel in the *Merchant's Tale* fits neatly into the text's wider themes of judgement, perception and self-delusion, it surely must also be read in the light of Chaucer's choice of setting, his geographical and political frame of reference, and in particular the presence, or absence, of wifely counsel after it has been so clearly brought into focus at the start of the tale. Many scholars have seen the *Merchant's Tale* as morally bleak, or even 'savage', but it is rather one of Chaucer's most political tales.<sup>64</sup> The place of wifely counsel in late medieval political discourse has been discussed at length, notably by Paul Strohm and Carolyn Collette, in a way that demonstrates the proliferation of a female advisory role in both the literature of the period, and the highly theatrical instances of statecraft that saw Edward III's Queen Phillipa and Anne of Bohemia, for example, effecting changes to royal policy in the later fourteenth century.<sup>65</sup> It is this discourse which, intersecting with the 'sinister potency' of Chaucer's images of Lombard Italy, grounds the exegetical matter of the marriage encomium in a politicised way. Albertanus, an Italian writer whose most important advice for Chaucer in both the *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee* seems to have been to listen to wifely advice—whether in the form of Dame Prudence, Ester, or Eve—was the writer that underpins Chaucer's ideas about the necessity of wifely counsel being a central dynamic of wise marriage.

The palpable absence of female counsel in the tale throws an oblique light on the character of May and the arguments of Proserpine at the close of the tale. May's clever subversion of aspects of January's parroted ideas about marriage—the young wife as wax image (IV. 1430) turned into a way to cut her own set of keys to the garden (IV. 2117), the turning of 'heritage' (IV. 1439) to her 'mysconceyveth' (IV. 2410)—can be read as something slightly different to the callous fabliau manipulation that they are often taken to be. And given the political milieu of the tale, they should be. The ruthless deception of the tale's close is perhaps the only space left for female intelligence in a milieu that so ruthlessly constrains both the female voice and female counsel. The close of the

tale, for all its apparently fable-like antifeminism, can be read as the revenge of female reason. What is foregrounded in the marriage encomium but so conspicuous by its absence in the tale is what comes, in a distorted form, to constitute the most fitting of examples of 'fabliau justice'.

As the *Merchant's Tale* contorts itself into a virtuoso panoply of genres that covers tragedy, fabliau, homily, and fable, the one thing that underpins it in its entirety, from the marriage encomium to the reified 'fall' of its close, is its origins in that most vital of origin texts: Genesis. The exegetical tradition that sought to explicate the biblical text also worked to create dominant ideas about gender, sexuality, and marriage which helped form both literary texts and social practices throughout the Middle Ages. Yet creation, as Chaucer's text testifies, is a complicated thing. Just as Chaucer uses both the stylistic trappings and moral commonplaces of exegesis to create the marriage encomium, his writing demonstrates the malleability, rather than the stable veracity, of ideas about the roles of marriage and women based on Genesis. Moreover, it comes to reverse, rather than repeat, the hierarchy of gendered bodies assumed by much Augustinian thought and, finally, uses the elucidation of Eve's role as origin of female counsel found in Italianate sources to critique the attempt to legitimise the unbridled masculine desire of a 'tyraunt [...] of Lumbardye'. Exegesis can clearly be used to cast a veil over self-interest, but Chaucer also suggests that some forms of biblical exegesis can work to counteract others. Eve can be seen to 'kepe men from all folye', just as she can be seen to lead them into it.

APPENDIX

A TRANSLATION OF ALBERTANUS OF BRESCIA,  
*LIBER DE AMORE DEI*, II. 16.

Parts of the 'marriage encomium' in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* have long been known to originate in Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei*, or to give the text its full title: *Liber de amore et dilectione Dei et proximi et aliarum rerum et de forma vitae* (1238). Chaucer's debt to another of Brescia's texts, *Liber consolationis et consilii* (1246) is equally well known. This text, via the French Dominican Reynaud de Louens's *Livre de Melibee*, is the ultimate source for Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* and for some passages in the *Merchant's Tale*, and appropriate parts of it have been translated and anthologised in easily accessible ways (see, for example, N. S. Thompson, 'The Merchant's Tale' in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (eds.) *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), II. 479-534, 498-500; Alcuin Blamires (ed.) *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 237-242). However, no readily available English translation of *Liber de amore Dei*, either in whole or part, exists to my knowledge. This translation is based on a Latin edition that formed the major portion of the PhD dissertation of Sharon Lynne Hiltz (now Sharon Hiltz Romino), University of Pennsylvania, 1980. The Latin text is available on-line at the following address: <http://freespace.virgin.net/angus.graham/DeAmore2.htm>, and was accessed 17th July 2008. This translation has benefited greatly from the very generous help of both Nick Havely and Alaric Hall. Any errors that remain are entirely my own.

*That a wife is to be cherished*

Surely you ought to love your wife perfectly, because she is part of your body, and is one body with you, as the Lord said when he called her the helper of man. For when he had made man he said: 'Let us make a helper for him', and by extracting a rib from Adam's body he made Eve, and said: 'On account of this a man will leave his father and mother, and cleave [to his wife]: and they were two in one flesh'.<sup>66</sup> And elsewhere the apostle said in the epistle to the Ephesians:

'Love your wives just as Christ loves the Church'.<sup>67</sup> And the apostle adds also: 'So men should love their wives as their own bodies. For he who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever has hate for his own body, but nurtures and cherishes it.'<sup>68</sup> And after that he adds also: 'Let everyone of you love his wife as himself: but a wife should fear her husband'.<sup>69</sup> And it is good for a wife to be loved because she is a gift from God. For Jesus, son of Syrac said: 'A house and goods are given by the parents, but a good and prudent wife is given properly by the Lord'.<sup>70</sup> For it is said that she is a helper to man and greatly needed, as he said also: 'Where there is no hedge, the possession shall be spoiled; and where there is no wife, he mourns that is in need'.<sup>71</sup> And indeed you should remember to love a wife, as it is said that she should have sovereignty over your body. The apostle also said in the first epistle to the Corinthians: A man does not have power over his own body, but the woman. Just as a wife does not have power over her body, but the man. Do not defraud one another, except perhaps by consent for a time, in order to give yourselves to prayer: and return together again, lest Satan tempt you on account of your incontinency.<sup>72</sup>

And elsewhere: 'Let him render the debt to his wife: and likewise the wife to the husband'.<sup>73</sup> So you should ever remember to love your wife and you should never be able to be separated from her except because of fornication. Whence it is said: 'Those that God has brought together, man cannot separate'.<sup>74</sup> Neither believe it to be a sin when the married come together carnally, for by the apostle it is said: 'For fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife'.<sup>75</sup> And elsewhere through him it is said in this way: 'It is better to marry than to burn'.<sup>76</sup> And elsewhere also by him it is said: 'truly, he who gives his virgin in marriage does well: and he who does not give her in marriage, does better'.<sup>77</sup> And elsewhere: 'Are you bound to a wife? Do not complain. But if you have accepted a wife, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she has not sinned'.<sup>78</sup> And also of widows he says: 'A woman is bound by the law for as long as her husband lives, but if her husband should die, she is at liberty from the law: let her marry who she will, only in the Lord. But she will be more blessed if she remains according to my counsel'.<sup>79</sup> Thus the apostle instructs one to act well. He is foolish and heretical who against the saying of the apostle forbids any to marry and commands them to abstain from the nourishment that God created. So the apostle in the epistle to Timothy said: Now the Spirit manifestly saith, that in the last times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error, and doctrines of devils, Speaking lies in hypocrisy, and having their conscience seared, Forbidding to marry, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be

received with thanksgiving by the faithful, and by them that have known the truth.<sup>80</sup>

Neither is the heretic able to say that the statement of the apostle is to be understood to concern divine marriage. For if it is to be understood as concerning divine marriage, according to that authority, it would be better to abstain from divine marriage than to marry in Christ, which is openly false. You should neither adhere to the heretic, nor believe those who say that a wife is to be forsaken, and not enjoyed carnally, for they interpret the gospel perversely when it is said: 'He who leaves his father, or his mother, or his sons, or his lands, or his wife, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess eternal life.'<sup>81</sup> This is to be understood when, by the will of both spouses, it happens that they vow chastity, or they turn to religion with the consent of both, or even one turns to religion with the consent of the other spouse, with the other growing old yet remaining alive and vowing chastity; or even against his desire, if marriage is not consummated through carnal union, because this is true of marriage, just as the decrees, decretals and laws proclaim. Therefore I say that you should not ever refrain from carnal marriage, if it pleases you to have a wife. And you should rather take a wife of good habits and one who has been brought up in good society, than one who has plenty of wealth and is otherwise a bad woman, and rather a girl than a widow. For a certain philosopher said: 'Take a girl for your wife, whatever her age'.<sup>82</sup> And Cato said:

Flee from taking a wife for the sake of dowry,  
Nor wish to keep her if she begins to be troublesome.<sup>83</sup>

Neither make great expense in the marriage of a wife. For Seneca said: 'extravagant weddings are to be avoided'.<sup>84</sup> And if perhaps you find something in your wife which displeases you, you should tolerate it with a calm spirit if it is possible to do so conveniently. For a certain philosopher said: 'There is no wife so good that you will not find something to complain about'<sup>85</sup> and 'there is no fortune so good that it can give no cause for complaint'.<sup>86</sup> And Tullius said in *De Amicitia*: 'there is nothing more difficult than to find that which is in all parts perfect in its kind'.<sup>87</sup> Whence Solomon in Ecclesiastes said: 'one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found'.<sup>88</sup> Although if Solomon should find none, nevertheless Seneca more graciously commended wives over all things, saying: Just as nothing is superior to a good-natured spouse, so nothing is crueller than an aggressive woman. For just as a



wise wife would risk her life for her husband's safety, so a vicious one would count hers as worth more than her husband's death'.<sup>89</sup>

And for this reason a good wife is to be loved. For a certain philosopher said: 'you know good company to be in a good wife; a good woman is a faithful guard and a good home'.<sup>90</sup> And elsewhere he said: 'A pious wife obeys a man's commands'.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, if a wife is bad, you should be able to bear her fittingly. For a certain wise man said: 'you should bear things, rather than blaming them, because it is not possible to change them'.<sup>92</sup> But although you should love your wife, you ought not to give her power over you in your life, nor ought to give her superiority, nor such strength to contradict you. For Jesus, son of Sirac said: 'A woman, if she has superiority, is contrary to her husband'.<sup>93</sup> So that, as you keep faith with her, you will not turn to another during her lifetime but preserve chastity. For the law says thus: 'It is seen to be very unfair when a man leaves his wife for chastity, as he should not relinquish himself'.<sup>94</sup> And Seneca said in his epistles: 'We shall say that a man is dishonest when he demands from his wife the chastity that he himself does not observe'.<sup>95</sup> And Solomon said: 'But he who is an adulterer, for lack of wisdom he destroys his own soul; he surrounds himself with disgrace and ignominy, and opprobrium shall not leave him'.<sup>96</sup>

And neither should you flatter your wife, nor should you praise her too much, or curse her, nor should you correct her sharply with disgraceful words. For Seneca said in *De Formula Honeste Vite*: 'You should acquire no friends through flattery. Praise little, curse less.' For just as too much praise is to be reprehended, so too immoderate cursing; indeed one should be mistrustful of both such flattery and such spite'.<sup>97</sup> Nor should you provoke a wife to anger, if you are able to avoid this, because Solomon said thus: 'There is no head worse than the head of a snake, nor is there anger greater than a woman's anger'.<sup>98</sup> But if perhaps anger breaks out without your fault, you should fear words but a little. For Cato said:

Do not fear the words of an angry wife,  
For when a woman weeps, she fills the tears with ambush.<sup>99</sup>

Then even Seneca said: 'There are two types of tears in the eyes of women; one of certain pain, the other of trickery'.<sup>100</sup> For 'Women's tears are the spice of malice'<sup>101</sup> and 'Ready tears indicate deceit not grief'.<sup>102</sup> And therefore Cato said:

Believe nothing blindly of a wife complaining about the servants;  
For often the wife hates the one the husband likes.<sup>103</sup>

Neither should you adhere to a wife's counsel too much. For a certain wise man said: 'Through their evil counsel women prevail over men'.<sup>104</sup> And it is said in the proverbs: 'a woman's advice is either too costly or too cheap'.<sup>105</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J. D. Burnley, 'The Morality of "The Merchant's Tale"', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 6 (1976), 16-25, (p. 17); Robert R. Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine in the Merchant's Tale', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 342-67, (p. 342). A useful summary of critical attitudes can be found in John Finlayson, 'The Merchant's Tale: Literary Contexts, The Play of Genres, and Institutionalised Sexual Relations', *Anglia*, 121 (2003), 557-80.

<sup>2</sup> Of all medieval literary genres, the fabliau is perhaps the genre that is least likely to be accompanied by expectations of emotional and moral sententiousness. 'Savagery' and 'moral desolation', to some extent, surely come with the generic territory. For a concise and useful account of the genre, see John Hines, *The Fabliau in English* (London: Longman, 1993). On the decidedly conventional morality that tends to accompany these texts of bawdy comedy and sexual betrayal, see pp. 33-37.

<sup>3</sup> On this structure, see *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 884, and Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> The foundational discussion of the difficulties of this passage is Donald R. Benson's 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux', *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979), 48-60. Whilst numerous scholars have reacted to Benson's formulation of this 'crux', no critical consensus, even about the speaker of the lines, exists.

<sup>5</sup> Valerie Edden, 'The Bible', in *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 332-51 (pp. 346-47). See also Lawrence Besserman's account in *Chaucer and the Bible: A Critical Review of Research, Indexes, and Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988), pp. 15-37. Besserman's exhaustive cataloguing of biblical echoes in Chaucer's work is extremely useful and clearly paved the way for his *Chaucer's Biblical Poetics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). A rather mixed bag of essays also exists in the form of *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Besserman, *Chaucer and the Bible*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Robertson's argument, and his methodology—itsself largely based on medieval exegesis—are amply demonstrated by his reading of the *Miller's Tale*, surely one of the hardest texts to read as a biblical homily. See D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 113. For a sensible, eloquent, and often funny critique of Robertson's criticism, see E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 134-153.

<sup>8</sup> See also, for example, I. 187; VII. 259; VII 3241; X. 97; LGW 1690. I view Augustine as the exemplary figure of exegetical tradition because of both the amount of exegesis he produced, particularly on Genesis, and his influence on western intellectual culture in a broader sense. On this influence, see James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> All references to Chaucer's works are to *The Riverside Chaucer*.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Manley and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1940), III, 508-11 (p. 508). The gloss reads: 'ffaciamus ei adiutorium et extracta costa de corpore Ade fecit Euam et dixit propter hec relinquet homo patrem et matrem et adherabit et cetera et erunt duo in carne una' (p. 509); "'Let us make a helper for him'", and by extracting a rib from Adam's body he made Eve, and said: "On account of this a man will leave his father and mother, and cleave [to his wife]; and they were two in one flesh"', from the 'De Uxore Diligenda' section of Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber de amore Dei*. For a translation of the appropriate section of Albertanus's text, see the appendix above. As Roger Ellis describes, this glossing also allows a reader to view the process of translation and therefore confirm the 'publicly professed status of *fides interpre*s' to which Chaucer so regularly, and often so disingenuously, takes recourse. At the same time, through the very act of Latin marginal glossing, Chaucer is cemented in the more authoritative role of *auctor*. See Roger Ellis, 'Translation' in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 443-58 (p. 454).

<sup>11</sup> See for example the tracing of marginal annotations to Albertanus's texts in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 885-6, notes to lines 1311-14; 1325-9; 1362-74; 1375; 1380; 1381-2; 1384-8. To my knowledge, no English translation of *Liber de amore Dei* exists, despite its unquestioned status as one of Chaucer's most important sources in the *Merchant's Tale*. A translation of the section of *Liber de amore Dei* which Chaucer and his scribes used is therefore provided as an appendix to this article.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth A. Bleeth traces the image of 'paradys' throughout the tale, and also notes the echoing of January's 'confort and disport' here. See Bleeth, 'The Image of Paradise in the Merchant's Tale', in *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 45-60. I differ from Bleeth in viewing the encomium passages as deeply connected to exegetical tradition on Genesis, rather than more straightforwardly being 'a wry inversion of the inevitable antifeminist moral' (p. 47).

<sup>13</sup> On the numerous connotations of the garden in the *Merchant's Tale*, see for example Seth Lerer, 'The Canterbury Tales' in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Lerer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 243-94, (p. 270), and Burnley, 'The Morality of 'The Merchant's Tale'', p. 23. Lerer adds both Christ's cross and 'the illicit pear tree of Augustine's

childhood confession' to the possible connotations of the *Merchant's Tale's* pear tree. Searching for a particular significance for a tree-image out of all the possibilities in medieval culture might seem pointless, but I find Lerer's idea of the pear-tree of Augustine's *Confessions* tempting. As I argue below, Augustinian exegesis on Genesis is surely a powerful context for the marriage encomium.

<sup>14</sup> The vexed problem of identifying the narrating voice of the marriage encomium is most clearly summed up in Benson's 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux'. Attempts to provide a solution to this crux include Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine in the Merchant's Tale', and Jill Mann, *Feminist Readings: Chaucer* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), esp. pp. 50-64, 61. Edwards notes that scribes tended to mark the narrative voice of the Merchant-narrator as 'auctor' throughout the tale, and do so during the encomium as well (p. 350). Mann argues that the apparent 'crux' disappears altogether when the encomium is seen to be affected by the inherent irony of the 'dissuasio de non ducenda uxore' genre, epitomised by Deschamps' *Miroir de Mariage*.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine's attempts to explicate Genesis are spread out across the full span of his intellectual activity. They number *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* (388-89); *De Genesi ad Litteram Imperfectus Liber* (393-95); the final three books of his *Confessiones* (397-401); *De Genesi ad Litteram* (401-16); and books 11-14 of *De Civitate Dei* (412-27). On the changing nature of Augustine's interpretative practice in these texts, see Yoon Kyung Kim, *Augustine's Changing Interpretations of Genesis 1-3: from De Genesi contra Manichaeos to De Genesi ad Litteram* (Lampeter: Mellen, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, IX, 5, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 34, 396.

<sup>17</sup> *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols. Ancient Christian Writers, 42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), II, 75. The passage is also reprinted in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine's thought on this point clearly influenced later exegetical accounts of Genesis, for example that of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas concludes that Eve was created 'non quidem in adiutorium alicujus alterius operis, ut quidam dixerunt, cum ad quodlibet aliud opus convenientius juvari possit vir per alium virum; sed in adiutorium generationis'; 'not indeed to help him in any other work, as some have maintained, because where most work is concerned man can get help more conveniently from another man than from a woman; but to help him in the work of procreation'. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. R. J. Batten *et al*, 60 vols (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), XIII, 34-37. Augustine, along with Aristotle, is the most frequently cited author in Aquinas's work.

<sup>19</sup> Donaldson argues that this image itself works to 'vulgarize the creation of Adam and Eve'; see Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer*, p. 39. His interpretation is attractive but not, it seems to me, wholly persuasive.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II, 11, in *Patrologia Latina*, 34. 204.

<sup>21</sup> *Saint Augustine On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske, Fathers of the Church 84 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 100. Blamires' account of how exegetes used this 'wizardry' to iron out interpretative problems about gender is, I think, both important and convincing.

<sup>23</sup> This may, in itself, have seemed problematic to Chaucer's readers. Not only is January fitting neatly into the *senex amans* role of the fabliau genre, but clerical advice on marriage tended to recommend marriages of approximate equality, at least in terms of age and social status. See, for example, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS. e.s. 96 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trübner, 1905), 290/13-15; and Langland's attack on similar matches: *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Dent, 1995), IX. 163.

<sup>24</sup> Besserman, *Chaucer's Biblical Poetics*, pp. 121-22. Besserman notes that this sentiment echoes narratives concerning Ahab and Jezabel in Kings 1 and 2, as well as a perhaps more distant evocation of the story of Acteon in *Metamorphoses* 3.

<sup>25</sup> The clearest reference is, of course, Justinus's citation of Alisoun as an authority on the subject of marriage (IV. 1685). The connections between these two texts, regardless of whether they are part of a strictly definable 'marriage group' as George Kitteredge famously argued, are numerous. For Kitteredge's argument, see 'Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage', *Modern Philology* 9 (1912), 435-67.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, a reader may not have to choose at all. As Isabel Davis puts it, 'her portrait both subverts and confirms the gender arrangements of the society of which she is a product; it both celebrates and demonizes female sexuality'; *Writing Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 108; see also Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation*, *Medieval Cultures* 34 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 79-100. Intriguingly, this line also appears in the rather different environment of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* (VII. 1088). As in a number of cases, *Melibee* rehearses aspects of other tales, particularly the *Merchant's Tale*, but seemingly without the irony that tends to characterise them elsewhere.

<sup>27</sup> I differ here from Richard Neuse's account of the *Merchant's Tale*. Where Neuse sees the use of clerical commonplaces on marriage as a way to construct January as 'a faithful son of the Church' and a way to expose 'the Church's flawed conception of marriage', I see the tale's

criticism levelled largely at January. See Richard Neuse, 'Marriage and the Question of Allegory in the *Merchant's Tale*', *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989), 115-31 (p. 119).

<sup>28</sup> The idea of clerical discourse on marriage, particularly the presence of clerical blessings and the vernacular marriage service, producing such an implied comparison originates in Burnley, 'The Morality of the "Merchant's Tale"', p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> See the translation of *Liber de amore Dei* above.

<sup>30</sup> For the marginal comment, see note 10.

<sup>31</sup> Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II. 13; *Patrologia Latina* 34. 206.

<sup>33</sup> *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, trans. Teske, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> Emphasis on the derivation of 'woman' can also be found in what we might call the 'popular' exegesis of the mystery plays. See for example the Chester Cycle creation play: 'Therefore she shall be called, iwiss / "virago," nothing amiss; / for out of man taken she is': *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. David Mills (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992), II. 149-51. Whilst the biblical texts on which these plays were based were constant, it is notable that the differences between the plays' versions of Eve's creation are a testament to the nuanced differences in exegesis that could be produced from Genesis 2. The N-Town creation play focuses on Adam's power to name Eve: 'Thi wyff thu geve name also': *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), I. 26, whilst the York cycle places the naming of Adam and Eve in the mouth of God—'Adam and Eue 3our names sall be'—omitting Adam's linguistic power over Eve altogether: *The York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (London: Edward Allen, 1982), I. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XIII. 34-35.

<sup>36</sup> 'For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the menstrual fluids are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul': Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I. 1144.

<sup>37</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XIII. 36-37. For related ideas about the anatomical and medical nature of bodies by Aristotle, Galen *et al*, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 38-49.

<sup>38</sup> Walter's equally ostentatious wedding gestures are recorded in the now notorious line 'Whan she translated was in swich riches' (IV. 385). For the significance of this 'translation', see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 132-55, and David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 261-98. I deal with the connections between the *Clerk's* and *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee* in more detail below. It is perhaps significant that Albertanus's *Liber de amore Dei* contains the maxim:

'Nuptias sumptuosas facere vita', 'Sumptuous weddings are to be avoided', wrongly attributed to Seneca.

<sup>39</sup> Many of these details may well originate in Boccaccio's *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*; see N. S. Thompson, 'The Merchant's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), II, 479-534 (p. 483), and the text provided on pp. 502-7.

<sup>40</sup> As Carol Everest has argued, a body of medical literature which connected blindness with sexual over-indulgence may have influenced Chaucer here as well; January's 'labouring' might actually be seen to 'hasten his own demise'. See Everest, 'Sight and Sexual Performance in the *Merchant's Tale*', in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Masculinity in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter G. Beidler (Cambridge: Brewer, 1998), pp. 91-103 (p. 103).

<sup>41</sup> As Blamires notes, 'preyseth' is often taken to mean 'praised'. The accurate sense of 'appraised' relates the word much more closely to the language of counsel, judgment, and perception that is such a ubiquitous aspect of the text. See Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 96, n. 60.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine in the Merchant's Tale', pp. 347-50; Neuse, 'Marriage and the Question of Allegory', p. 115; Lerer, 'The Canterbury Tales', p. 267. As should be obvious from the following discussion, I too see the *Clerk's* and *Merchant's Tales* as closely connected, with both being linked again to *Melibee*. Some of these connections are strengthened by the order of tales, at least in the Ellesmere text. As A. S. G. Edwards notes, however, in 19 manuscripts, including Hengwrt, the *Merchant's Tale* is preceded by the *Squires's*, rather than the *Clerk's Tale*; see A. S. G. Edwards, 'The Merchant's Tale and Moral Chaucer', *Modern Language Quarterly* 51 (1990), 409-426 (p. 413). The connections in my eyes remain very strong either way, just as there are arresting links between the *Knight's* and *Merchant's Tales*, despite the impossibility of their being a 'quitting pair' like Knight and Miller, Friar and Summoner, and Clerk and Merchant. On these connections, see Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 66-68.

<sup>43</sup> See Benson, 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux', p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> See also Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, p. 66. Blamires manages to locate the 'precise moral framework' of January's refusal of counsel in prudential discourse, something which goes beyond the apparently 'self-explanatory' discussions of counsel in the *Merchant's Tale* which litter Chaucerian criticism.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, XI. 42; *Patrologia Latina*, 34. 452-53.

<sup>46</sup> *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, II. 175-76. Also reprinted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 80.



<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II. 11, in *Patrologia Latina*, 34. 204; *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, trans. Teske, p. 111. On the influence of this idea, see Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, p. 71, and his article, 'Women and Creative Intelligence in Medieval Thought', in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olsen and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 213-30.

<sup>48</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XIII. 38-39; for the analysis of Eve's origin in Adam's rib, and its figurative significance, see pp. 42-43.

<sup>49</sup> Augustine's portrayal of his mother, Monica, in the *Confessions* perhaps complicates this somewhat. On this issue, see Richard J. McGowan, 'Augustine's Spiritual Equality: The Allegory of Man and Woman with Regard to *Imago Dei*', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 33 (1987), 255-64.

<sup>50</sup> Manley and Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, III, 509. Whilst some of these figures appear in Deschamp's *Miroir de Mariage*, the list of figures originates clearly from Albertanus's text. See for example *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, II, 498-89.

<sup>51</sup> Albertanus's texts, both the *Liber de amore Dei* and *Liber de Consolatio et Consilii*, are sources for both tales. Chaucer's *Melibee* originates in Albertanus, via the French Dominican Reynaud de Louens's *Livre de Melibee*. The 'crux' of the list of Old Testament female figures lies again in the marriage encomium's constant proximity to self-parody. All the figures can be seen to be representative of female deception, particularly towards their husbands, rather than female virtue. However, a number of scholars have noted, I think rightly, the presence of an identical list in the *Tale of Melibee* (VII. 1098-1102), and the fact that in Chaucer's prose tale, it is virtually impossible to detect any irony attached to their usage. See, for example, Edwards, 'Narration and Doctrine', p. 352; Valerie Edden, 'The Bible', pp. 340-41; and Jill Mann, *Feminist Readings*, p. 60, who notes that the list in *Melibee*: 'can be ironically interpreted only by the most violent kinds of exegetical straitjacketing'.

<sup>52</sup> The passage is very close, though not identical, to Albertanus's in *Liber de Consolatio et Consilii*. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 241.

<sup>53</sup> The translation is from Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 241.

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting, I think, that Albertanus quotes passages such as 'a woman's advice is either too costly or too cheap' in the *De amore Dei*, maxims that potentially work against his ostensibly pro-feminist purpose.

<sup>55</sup> The ubiquity of antifeminist exegesis might make us wonder about the reception of Prudence's phrase 'confusioun of man', given its proximity to similar contemporary texts. See, for example, Chanticleer's deliberate mistranslation of precisely this phrase in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* (VII. 3163-66), or the small mountain of antifeminist lyrics such as 'Of all creatures

woman be best', in *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. Maxwell S. Laria and Richard L. Hoffman (New York: Norton, 1974), pp. 63-64. Strikingly, where a reader might expect an almost inevitable antifeminist gibe here, Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* seems absolutely free from such irony.

<sup>56</sup> Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, p. 286. Christine's attacks were, however, largely directed towards Jean de Meun's contributions. The passage quoted here comes from Guillaume de Lorris's section of the text.

<sup>57</sup> Compare: 'A son semblant et a son vis / part qu'el fu fete ou paravis [...] que Dex la fist ou firmament / a sa semblance et a s'image / et li dona tel avantage / qu'ele a pooir et seignorie / de garder home de folie', *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols (Paris: Champion, 1968), I. 2969-70; 2974-78. Doubt surrounds the authorship of the extant Middle English translation, originating as it does only in Thynne's 1532 edition of Chaucer's works. The doubt only extends as far, though, as the identification of this particular translation with Chaucer. The God of Love would have had little purpose in accosting Chaucer with the words: 'Thow hast translated the Romauns of the Rose, / That is an heresyge ageyns my lawe' (Prol LGW, G. 255-56) if Chaucer had not at some point done just that.

<sup>58</sup> Reason, descending from her 'tour' to provide advice and counsel, is surely evocative of a tradition of such figures, from Boethius's Lady Philosophy to Langland's Holy Church. While this might be explained to some extent by the linguistic connections between abstract qualities and female gender in Latin, the accumulated effect of these figures must surely have acted as a bolster to the association between women and counsel. See Helen Cooper, 'Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 5 (1991), 31-48, esp. pp. 31-32.

<sup>59</sup> Benson, 'The Marriage "Encomium" in the *Merchant's Tale*: A Chaucerian Crux', pp. 58-59.

<sup>60</sup> The language of counsel is again an important point of intersection with *Melibee*. See Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, p. 67: "'the Merchant's Tale" systematically invokes the same imperatives of prudential counsel by travestying them'.

<sup>61</sup> On the connections between vision, blindness and the refusal of counsel as something 'familiar and nameable in medieval moral discourse', see Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics and Gender*, pp. 62-73, esp. p. 69.

<sup>62</sup> A condensed version of Wallace's broadest argument appears in his essay 'Italy' in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown, pp. 218-34. On Milton in Italy see, for example, *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions*, ed. Mario A. Di Cesare (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, p. 214. Much of my discussion here is indebted to Wallace's account of the *Merchant's Tale* and *Melibee*, which is found at pp. 212-46.

<sup>64</sup> See for example Edwards' rating of the *Merchant's Tale* in 'Narration and Doctrine', p. 342: 'by all accounts Chaucer's bleakest and most savagely ironic story'. Other critics see it, I think rather blandly, as a light-hearted and knockabout farce. See Martin Stevens, 'And Venus laugheth': An Interpretation of the Merchant's Tale', *The Chaucer Review* 7 (1972), 118-31; also John Hines, *The Fabliau in English*, pp. 176-96.

<sup>65</sup> See in particular Strohm's 'Queens as Intercessors', in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 95-119 and Carolyn Collette, *Performing Polity: Women and Agency in the Anglo-French Tradition, 1385-1620* (Turnout: Brepols, 2006), esp. chapter 5. Collette differs from Strohm's formative account in arguing that these instances of queenly intercession were—despite their theatrical nature and the obvious benefits that the masculine monarch derived from them—examples of women's ability to tangibly alter the course of political events. This scholarship on queenly counsel intersects with a wider phenomenon of female counsel in the period. See Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 517-43. It is worth noting too that marriage in Italian culture frequently had a politicised role, as either socially cohesive or even as a metaphor for political government in a broader sense. See Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), esp. chapters 10-11.

<sup>66</sup> Genesis 2. 24.

<sup>67</sup> Ephesians 5. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Ephesians 5. 28-29.

<sup>69</sup> Ephesians 5. 33.

<sup>70</sup> Proverbs 19. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Ecclesiasticus 36. 27.

<sup>72</sup> I Corinthians 7. 4-5.

<sup>73</sup> I Corinthians 7. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew 19. 6; Mark 10. 9.

<sup>75</sup> I Corinthians 7. 2.

<sup>76</sup> I Corinthians 7. 9.

<sup>77</sup> I Corinthians 7. 38.

<sup>78</sup> I Corinthians 27-28.

<sup>79</sup> I Corinthians 39-40.

<sup>80</sup> I Timothy 4. 1-3.

<sup>81</sup> Matthew 19. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Alphonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, 26. 2.

<sup>83</sup> Cato, *Distichs*, 3. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Pseudo-Caecilius Balbus, *De Nugis*, 5. 20 (Chilo Lacedaemonius).

- 85 Pseudo-Caecilius Balbus, *De Nugis*, 5. 17. 2 (Zenon).  
86 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 429.  
87 Cicero, *De Amicitia*, 21. 79.  
88 Ecclesiastes 7. 28.  
89 Fulgentius, *Mitologiarum*, 1. 22.  
90 Peter Alfonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, 20. 16-17.  
91 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 108.  
92 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 206.  
93 *Ecclesiasticus* 25. 30.  
94 *Digest*, 48. 5. 14. 5.  
95 Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 94. 26.  
96 *Proverbs* 6. 32-33.  
97 Martin of Braga, *Formula vitae honestae*, 2. 32-35.  
98 *Ecclesiasticus* 25. 22-23.  
99 Cato, *Distichs*, 3. 20.  
100 Pseudo-Caecilius Balbus, *De Nugis*, 5. 17. 5 (Pythagoras).  
101 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 384.  
102 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 536.  
103 Cato, *Distichs*, 1. 8.  
104 Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 365.  
105 Walther, *Proverbia*, 3164.

## Chaucer and Harbledown, Kent

Andrew Breeze

Amongst the things that must puzzle Chaucer's ghost is the heavy weather made of Bobbe-up-and-down, a place figuring in the opening lines of the *Manciple's Prologue*:

Woot ye nat where ther stant a litel toun  
Which that ycleped is Bobbe-up-and-down,  
Under the Blee, in Caunterbury weye?

Comment has been as follows. Skeat noted the usual identification with Harbledown, outside Canterbury on the main road from London, and situated under 'the Blee' or Blean Forest on Canterbury's north side. But he also cited a letter by J. M. Cowper in *The Athenaeum* for 26 December 1868, which proposed that Up-and-Down Field in the parish of Thannington (south-west of Canterbury) was the place Chaucer really meant. The early layout of Canterbury's western approaches was not well understood when Skeat was writing, and he took Cowper's suggestion seriously.<sup>1</sup> He thus helped to give it a prolonged influence, as we shall see.

Manly spoke of Bobbe-up-and-down as a jocular reference to Harbledown, between Boughton under Blean (mentioned in the *Canon's Yeoman's Prologue*) and Canterbury. Yet he cited Cowper's letter, concluding that if he was right the old road was different from the modern one.<sup>2</sup> Robinson referred to Furnivall's collection of allusions to Harbledown by early pilgrims to Canterbury, and also (though in neutral terms) Cowper's letter on the field at Thannington.<sup>3</sup> Donaldson contented himself with identifying 'the Blee' as Blean Forest.<sup>4</sup> Donald Howard spoke of Bobbe-up-and-down as 'probably' Harbledown, though he was vague as to its location, apparently not knowing that Harbledown is where travellers on the

old London road come within sight of Canterbury.<sup>5</sup> Norman Blake, though uncertain of Bobbe-up-and-down's exact whereabouts, was (rightly) sure that it was by Blean Forest, since *Blee* can be nowhere else.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this, Professor Scattergood in his notes on the passage makes confusion worse confounded. Not only does he mention both Harbledown (described as 'two miles north of Canterbury on the old road from London') and Thannington, but he cites a paper by a certain Walter Rye in *Notes and Queries* for 1932, which identified Bobbe-up-and-down as Bobbing, near Sittingbourne.<sup>7</sup> This bewildering range of choices is accurately conveyed by Jill Mann, who notes: 'Although these lines imply that the "litel toun" is well known, it is not easily identifiable. The most likely candidate is Harbledown, two miles north-west of Canterbury, but Up-and-Down Field, in the parish of Thannington Without, and Bobbing, two miles west of Sittingbourne, have also been proposed.' In support of this she cites D. C. Baker's Variorum edition of the *Manciple's Tale*, published by the University of Oklahoma.<sup>8</sup> These ambiguities are relayed by Rory McTurk who, in discussing the pilgrimage to Canterbury and the pilgrimage of life, calls Bobbe-up-and-down somewhere which 'whatever its precise location, does not seem to have been a place of much importance' (correct, as we shall see).<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this note is to liberate readers and editors from the perplexities associated with this question once and for all. It tries to show there can be no reasonable doubt that Bobbe-up-and-down is the village of Harbledown, and not a field in Thannington or a settlement off the main road near Sittingbourne. In this the writer has the benefits both of Ordnance Survey maps at hand, and of having been brought up and schooled in East Kent. He has thus visited or gone through Thannington and Harbledown scores of times, an advantage less easily available to scholars in California, Oklahoma, or Indiana.

Because the arrangement of roads to Canterbury was not clear in his time, Skeat felt that the pilgrims from London might have approached via Thannington, crossing the river Stour upstream from the city. But the difficulties here were cleared up in the 1950s, as noted by Ivan Margery. The original Roman road left Canterbury along a line going westwards to Harbledown, now marked by a footpath (at National Grid Reference TR 140581). When the medieval walls were built the London road was shifted to its present more northerly alignment. Yet this made no difference to the road at Harbledown, which still follows a bend made by the Romans to skirt the valley west of the village.<sup>10</sup> There is, therefore, no reason to think that Chaucer's pilgrims reached Canterbury by any route other than the Roman road from London (always a major highway, since it led to the Channel ports and

the Continent), which went straight through Harbledown.

Nor is there any difficulty in taking 'Bobbe-up-and-down' as Chaucer's jocular allusion to this village, where the road goes with a sharp rise and dip over the crest of a ridge. The colloquial ring of Chaucer's phrase is brought out by *OED*, which records no other instance of *bob* 'to move up and down' before the sixteenth century. It is not hard to think of similar and mainly oral by-names in our own time. Londoners know what 'Buck House' (noted by *OED*) and 'the Gherkin' are; in the West Midlands the Gravelly Hill Interchange is more familiar as 'Spaghetti Junction' (also noted by *OED*); in New South Wales all Sydneysiders recognize 'the Coathanger', and so on. These terms are familiar to millions but do not appear on maps, and may one day baffle a philologist from Mars. It is likely that Chaucer actually envisaged the difficulties his slower readers would have with 'Bobbe-up-and-down', and so glossed it with *Under the Blee, in Caunterbury weye* to make its position, as he thought, quite clear (though unfortunately reckoning without the perverse ingenuity of later critics).

So there is every reason to regard Bobbe-up-and-down and Harbledown as one and the same. Thannington can be ruled out for three reasons. First, it does not lie on the normal and direct route from London, but on a longer way round via a bridgeless crossing of the Stour (maps still show a ford at Thannington). Second, Chaucer would hardly have known a field-name there or called it *a litel toun*, since a field is a field and not a settlement. Third, Thannington does not lie *under Blee*, the great forest north of Canterbury. This is a region of cold and sticky London Clay, unattractive to farmers, so that the area is thickly wooded to this day. Travellers on the old Boughton to Canterbury road still pass miles of dense woodland on each side. In Chaucer's time nobody going to Canterbury on this route would forget Blean Forest, a natural haven for thieves. It contrasts with Thannington, where lighter soils made for a parish of orchards (many of them now grubbed up to provide room for housing estates and warehouses).

It is easier still to rule out Bobbing (TQ 8865), a mile west of Sittingbourne and sixteen miles west of Canterbury. This is neither *under the Blee* nor *in Canterbury weye* at all, but on the road to the Isle of Sheppey. If Harry Bailly had been so inept as to turn the pilgrims off the main road and take them through Bobbing, pithy comments would have been quick to arise.

Let us end by looking at what has been said of Harbledown. It is neither 'two miles north of Canterbury' nor 'two miles north-west of Canterbury', as Professors Scattergood and Mann variously inform us. Harbledown church is just over a mile and quarter west of Canterbury Cathedral. It is situated on a small hill and is thus

conspicuous to travellers. After traversing miles of dreary forest, they would know they were nearing Canterbury. The village is unusual in having an ancient hospital by its church. These almshouses (though much rebuilt) were founded by Lanfranc of Bec (d. 1089) in his last years. His modern biographer speaks of their position 'on the hill of Harbledown, where the traveller suddenly has his first view of the cathedral below him' and where they occupy 'a hollow in the crown of the hill, well drained, generously planned, separate from the city yet not inaccessible.'<sup>11</sup>

So we may end with the cheering reflexion that Chaucer's *litel toun* or small settlement of Bobbe-up-and-doun was surely Harbledown 'hill of Herebeald' on Canterbury's western outskirts.<sup>12</sup> And we may thereby hope to bid everlasting farewell to the red herrings of Thannington and Bobbing long ago supplied by Cowper and Rye, and passed on by certain editors ever since.



NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by W. W. Skeat, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1900), V, p. 435.
- <sup>2</sup> *Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by J. M. Manly (London: Harrap, 1928), p. 654.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by F. N. Robinson, 2nd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 763.
- <sup>4</sup> *Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. by E. T. Donaldson (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1958), p. 415.
- <sup>5</sup> D. R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 79, 163.
- <sup>6</sup> N. F. Blake, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), p. 27.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 952.
- <sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Jill Mann (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 1079-80.
- <sup>9</sup> Rory McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 98.
- <sup>10</sup> I. D. Margery, *Roman Roads in Britain: South of the Foss Way* (London: Phoenix House, 1955), p. 37.
- <sup>11</sup> Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 185-6.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, ed. by V. E. Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 278.

## The Singularity of *Sir Tristrem* in the Tristan Corpus<sup>1</sup>

Sergi Mainer

The late thirteenth-century anonymous *Sir Tristrem*<sup>2</sup> seems a rather naïve and poor composition when measured against the great Tristan romances in French and German. However, a comparative study of the Middle English *Sir Tristrem*, its source, Thomas of Britain's Anglo-Norman *Tristan*, Gottfried von Strassburg's High German *Tristan und Îsolt* and Friar Róbert's Old Norse *Tristrams Saga ok Îsondar*<sup>3</sup> will reveal the idiosyncratic singularity of the Middle English narrative within the Tristan corpus. The first two lines in *Sir Tristrem* already indicate an ambivalent and playful approach to the original: 'I was a[t Erceldoun] / Wip Tomas spak y þare'. The Middle English poet merges the authorial figure of Thomas with the authoritative, pseudo-mythical figure of the visionary Thomas of Ertheldoun.<sup>4</sup> He also transforms the written source into an oral tale. The alleged oral source, prior to a 'fixed' authoritative version of the text, facilitates a freer and less problematic alteration of the original. The direct connection with the author's imagined recitation of the poem also gives an illusion of authenticity. Thus there is an appropriation and displacement of the author and the text: the author becomes legendary and the text an oral story. Hence, the intended meaning of *Sir Tristrem* undergoes a process of manipulation, which results in an altogether different romance. In this article, I shall investigate how, from the rhetorical and topical manipulation of the source, a new Tristan emerges. I shall first refer to the unique position of the text within the English romance tradition. Subsequently, I shall examine how the lack of courtly elements in *Sir Tristrem* conforms to the compositional trends of Middle English romances as a whole, but also operates in a manner specific to *Sir Tristrem*. I shall focus my analysis on the development of *fin'amors*, the centrality of the forest and the impossibility of the hero's integration into society.

Sir Tristrem, the English Romance Tradition and Courtliness

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the gradual political and social separation of England from continental Europe enhanced the creation of a distinctive insular literary culture, rooted in both English and Anglo-Norman sources. Whereas Anglo-Norman romances were certainly addressed to 'gentle audiences', the status of their Middle English counterparts is more problematic. Although some of them may have been composed for the bourgeoisie or the peasantry, those of Anglo-Norman descent were probably written for the same high class public as their predecessors.<sup>5</sup> Generally, both the Anglo-Norman originals and the Middle English romances show similar political concerns regarding the ambitions of the barons. In *Havelok the Dane*, for example, it is suggested that a king's power should lie in the consent of the barons to avoid corruption and tyranny.<sup>6</sup> *Ipomedon* and Thomas's *Tristan* are the only two extant Anglo-Norman romances translated or adapted into Middle English whose focus is love. *Ipomadon* is faithful to the original in maintaining courtly elements and motifs, even if transformed.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, what makes *Sir Tristrem* unique in the Middle English romance tradition is the particular appropriation of its source. It sweeps away the profusion of courtly features, replacing them with an action-based narrative typical of most Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances, yet one that does not maintain the baronial political overtones of the other texts.

*Sir Tristrem* is also innovative in its refusal to adopt from its source many of the sociological and rhetorical components ascribed to courtliness in general and to *fin'amors* in particular. Instead, transgression of courtly norms is at the axis of the composition. Even allowing for the reversed expectations of the *Tristan* romances, the Middle English narrative offers a more radical vision of the love affair between Tristrem and Ysonde than its French, German, and Old Norse counterparts. According to Geoffrey N. Bromiley:

The author of the Middle English version, a late thirteenth-century romance with a complicated stanza form, also drastically cut Thomas's poem. No major episode is actually omitted, but long passages of psychological debate in particular are [...] eliminated.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the omission of 'psychological debates' does not indicate a lack of rhetorical sophistication, but rather the idiosyncratic engagement of most Middle English romances with love, in a rhetorical practice in which an action-based narrative is

preferred to extended psychological insights into the life of lovers.<sup>9</sup> In *Sir Tristrem*, then, the language of courtesy is reduced to a minimum. This creates a sort of love which is set apart from social norms and conventions.

A good example of the Middle English romance displacement of courtliness is provided in the love scenes. In Thomas' *Tristan*,<sup>10</sup> when the two lovers wake up in the morning and discover that Mark has been there, Tristan tells Iseult:

Je me'n voil aler, bele amie,  
Vos n'avez garde de la vie,  
Car ne perez estre provee  
[...]  
Fuir deport et querre eschil,  
Guerpir joie, siouvre peril.  
Tel duel ai por le departie  
Ja n'avrai hait jor de ma vie.  
Ma doce dame, je vos pri  
Ne me metez mie en obli:  
En loig de vos autant m'amez  
Comme vos de près fait avez.  
Je n'i os, dame, plus atendre;  
Or me baisiés au congié prendre.<sup>11</sup>

(*'La rencontre dans le verger'*, ll. 24-37)

[I must leave, fair love, / but you need have no fear for your own life, / since nothing can be proved against you. / [...] / to flee my pleasure and seek my woe, / to abandon joy and court danger. / Our parting gives me such sorrow / that I shall never in my life be happy again. / My sweet lady, I beg you / not to forget me: / when I am far from you, love me just as much / as ever you did when I was near. / My lady, I dare stay no longer here; / kiss me now, as we say farewell.]<sup>12</sup>

In a parallel scene in *Sir Tristrem*, the profusion of courtly language and conventions is reduced to one line: 'Þo was her joie al newe' (l. 2559). The absence of conversations between the two lovers, not only here but in the whole romance, redefines the nature of the love theme. This displacement of courtliness has led Susan Crane to conclude that *Sir Tristrem* 'has lost the significance developed for it by Thomas, and it has not gained a new one'.<sup>13</sup> But the romance

does have a new 'significance', that of *amor vincit omnia*. It is precisely the deliberate scarceness of traditional courtly aspects which gives the poem its own defining features in the Tristan corpus. Contrary to T. C. Rumble's assertion that 'the Middle English poet's alterations of his source suggest his desire to rationalize and to moralise the characters and events of the original',<sup>14</sup> there is rather a conscious attempt to transgress social conventions. If the manners of courtliness serve to rationalise the *foudatz of amors* in the French and German texts, their absence from *Sir Tristrem* makes the poem the most transgressive of them all.

In Gottfried's narrative, the relationship between Tristan's parents, Rivalin and Blanche-flor, is constructed along the lines of the courtly tradition:

'ach, süeze, waz hân ich getân?'  
sprach aber der hövesche Riwalîn.  
si sprach: 'an einem friunde mîn,  
dem besten, deu ich ie gewan,  
dâ habet ir mich beswæret an.'

---

[...] der friunt, des sî gewuoc,  
daz was ir herze, in dem si truoc  
von sînen schulden ungemach<sup>15</sup>

(ll. 750-54; 765-67)

[Ah, sweet woman, what have I done?' was courteous Rivalin's reply.  
'You have annoyed me through a friend of mine, the best I ever had'. /  
The friend she referred to was her heart, in which he made her suffer.]<sup>16</sup>

The interchanges between the future lovers conform to courtly conventions. The personification of the heart and the playful language of the conversation generate the perfect atmosphere for *fin'amors*. The Old Norse saga, in its treatment of this episode, maintains the courtly components; however, *Sir Tristrem* reconstructs the original according to distinctly epic parameters. Lines 124-35, now lost, may have contained the first meeting and exchanges between Rouland ('Rivalin' in Gottfried and 'Kanelangres' in Brother Róbert) and Blanche-flour. But so few lines would have not allowed for an elaborate display of courtly language and imagery. In fact, the subsequent passage concentrates on Rouland's fear for his land not being a safe place for Blanche-flour (ll. 136-43). Love is secondary to the urgent

mood of the narrative. There is no room or time for courtly pomp as renewed war with Morgan is approaching:

Rewþe mow he here  
Of Roulandriis þe kniht:  
Þre hundred he slouh þere  
Wiþ his swerd briht,  
Of al þo þat þer were  
Miht non him felle in fiht,  
Bot on wiþ tresoun þere  
Purch þe bodi him piht.  
Wiþ gile  
To deþ he him diht—  
Allas þat ich while!

(ll. 199-209)

Epic motifs dominate the tone of this passage. Rouland is not fighting for his individual *pretz*, but for the collective objective of keeping his land free from subjection to Morgan. Rouland's destiny and that of his country merge together. The handling of the episode, with Rouland's out-of-measure heroic demeanour and tragic death caused by treason, is an instance of thematic *topoi* typical of *chansons de geste*. Although the action remains the same, the tone generates an altogether different narrative. Renaming the character, Rivalin becomes Rouland, echoing the French Roland of the *Chanson de Roland*, the epitome of an epic warrior, a daredevil knight dying through Ganelon's treason.<sup>17</sup> Even if the author of *Sir Tristrem* was not familiar with the *Chanson*, the Middle English Charlemagne Romances were equally developed within epic premises. The chief difference between *Sir Tristrem* and the Charlemagne romances is that the latter were actually based upon French *chansons*, their tone remaining the same, whilst *Sir Tristrem's* transformation from courtly into epic alters the construction of the text. It displaces the more rhetorically elaborate love story of a *roman courtois*, replacing it with a more condensed narrative. Such a switch favours action both on the battlefield and in the love scenes at the expense of the characters' psychological tribulations on *fin'amors*. By suppressing the proliferation of courtly elements, the epic nature of *Sir Tristrem* defines transgression as the unifying theme which dominates the narrative.

*Identity and Love*

The romance begins before Tristrem's birth. His future is determined when the illicit nature of his conception is revealed:

To hir maistresse sche [a maiden] gan say  
þat hye was boun to go  
To þe kniht þer he lay;  
Sche swouned and hir was wo.  
So comfort he þat may,  
A knaue child gat þai tvo,  
So dere;  
And seþþen men cleped him so:  
Tristrem þe trewe fere.

(ll. 102-110)

Rivalin and Blancheflour father Tristrem outside matrimony. In Gottfried's and Brother Róbert's versions, they get married as soon as they return home. Even if the High German and Old Norse texts also set up the future development of Tristan as a transgressor from birth, the wedding legitimises Tristan in the eyes of the law. Again, however, *Sir Tristrem* defies social conventions: the marriage between the hero's parents is implied in Rohand's words, "Þhis maiden schal ben oure, / Roulandriis to wedde" (ll. 156-57), but never confirmed.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, Rouland dies at the hands of Morgan, and Blancheflour perishes giving birth to their son. Morgan gains control over Ermonie, while Rohand takes care of Tristrem. It is at this juncture that Rohand changes his name to Tramtrist to keep the young boy safe. By way of contrast (most probably following Thomas's original) in both the High German and Old Norse stories, the renaming episode takes place later. Tristan/Tristram himself opts for Trantist for purely practical reasons: he going back to Ireland after having killed Morold; thus he needs to hide his real identity. Crucially, by changing Tristrem's name at a different point, the Middle English romance enables a distinct allegorical interpretation absent from the other texts. If at a purely literal level, the name change prevents Tristrem from being discovered by his father's felonious enemy, in the realm of allegory, thanks to his new identity, the young Tristrem can live and learn according to the courtly and social laws as long as he is unaware of his

real self. A feigned personality keeps him safe from his otherwise unavoidable destiny.

*Sir Tristrem's* conception of destiny differs not only from the other Tristan narratives but more importantly from the official position of the Catholic Church of the time, which broadly agreed with Augustinian dictates:

We assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it. [...] But it does not follow that, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending in the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by his foreknowledge, for human wills are also human actions.<sup>19</sup>

Not only does *Sir Tristrem* challenge coercive social conventions, but it also seems to ignore the Church's belief in *liberum arbitrium* since the general impression that the hearer/reader gets is that at all times Tristrem is subject to a major force which dictates and prefigures his future, thus liberating him from all responsibility for his acts.

*Fortuna*, through the manipulation of two of the four elements, air and water, decisively contributes to the attainment of Tristrem's destiny. First, the winds lead him to England; afterwards, the winds again drive him to Ireland. In England, he finds out his true identity; in Ireland, he meets Ysonde. The discovery of his identity imposes limitations on Tristrem's acts, whereas love becomes the one and only reason for his existence. In chivalric romances, the revelation of identity normally appears as a climactic moment in so far as the hero's *aventure* is usually established at the same time. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrette*, for example, Lancelot knows that he is the Elect as soon as he lifts the tombstone to fulfil the prophecy of the liberator knight (ll. 1900-1933). Identity and destiny are intimately linked. Lancelot's rescue of Guenevere signifies Arthur's court's recognition of his worth as a knight. Even if ironically, this is the catalyst for Lancelot's integration into the feudal world. In *Sir Tristrem*, however, Tristrem's discovery will not conform to the traditional pattern of an ultimate chivalric mission which transforms the main character into the best knight in the world, finding a place for himself in society. To the contrary, his *aventure* will determine his exclusion from society.



The same two elements of water and air are the prime movers in bringing about the lovers' ultimate desire. The Old Norse saga also relates that: 'Nú rak þá svo lengi í hafi fyrir vindi og straumi, að þeir vissu ekki, hvar fóru' (p. 75) ['The ship was driven by winds and waves on the high seas so long that they did not know where they were sailing.'].<sup>20</sup> At this point, both texts project an identical image in which the lovers' fate depends on the works of *Fortuna*:

Ysonde briht of hewe  
Is fer out in þe se.  
A winde ohain hem blewe  
þat sail no miht þer be.  
So rewe þe knihtes trewe,  
Tristrem, so rewe he,  
Euer as þai com newe-;  
He on ohain hem þre-  
Gret swink.  
Swete Ysonde þe fre  
Asked Bringwain a drink.

(ll. 1651-1661)

The author deploys the elements (in particular the wind) to reunite the hero with his illicit love. In both Gottfried's *Tristan* and *Sir Tristrem*, Tristrem (Tristan) and Ysonde (Îsolt) erroneously drink the love philtre. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the love drink operates at two different levels. In the Middle High German romance, Tristan and Îsolt had shown signs of their mutual attraction before they drank the magical beverage. The drug is simply the accelerator of an already existing feeling. It is a device which will help them to lose their inhibitions about social restrictions. Their guilt, though existent, will be diminished as the drink can now take the blame. By way of contrast, in *Sir Tristrem* there is no previous attraction between the two lovers. The beverage functions as the only catalyst and initiator of love. The sense of the workings of magic outside the courtly and feudal domains is much stronger. The potion and its connection to the world of magic displace their love to the realm of the Other. From then on, they are excluded from society and its rules. The Christian, civilised and ordered domain of the court contrasts not only with their extramarital relationship but also with the fear and mystery of the non-civilised world, which in the latter part of the romance is also represented by nature and the forest. Once again, the two lovers

are deprived of their free will. Yet *liberum arbitrium* operates in a completely different way in the saga and Gottfried. In the latter, for example, as Hugo Bekker argues, after drinking the love potion Tristan absolves Brangane of all responsibility (ll. 12,494-502). Tristan and Isolde assert their free will to continue their love relationship to the extent that there is no need to mention the love drink again.<sup>21</sup> This freedom to choose is absent from the Middle English romance.

On their first night together the lovers consummate their passion. The last fragment found so far of Thomas' *Tristan* corresponds to this section of the narrative.<sup>22</sup> The discourse articulated is that of *fin'amors* as delineated in the troubadours' tradition. After a sophisticated wordplay with 'amer' and 'la mer', which accords with the language of courtliness, the lovers:

Entr'els i ad mainte emveisure,  
Car ambedeus sunt en espeir:  
D'ient lur bon e lur voleir,  
Baisent, enveisent e acolent.

(ll. 74-77)

[are very affectionate with each other / since both are hopeful: / they talk about their happiness and their desire, / while they kiss and caress.]

Even when it is implied that they have sexual intercourse – 'Tuz lur bons font privèement, / E lur joië e lur deduit, / Quant il pöent e jur e nuit' [In private they enjoy / their joy and their pleasure, / all day and all night] (ll. 82-84) (my translation) – the text emphasises the psychological pains of their attempts to ignore their feelings and the *jois* of their confession. In *Sir Tristrem* these elements are absent:

Tristrem in schip lay  
Wiþ Ysonde ich niht,  
Play miri he may  
Wiþ þat worþli wiht  
In boure niht & day.  
Al bliþe was þe kniht,  
He miht wiþ hir play;  
(ll. 1684-1690)

The poet's insistence on the sexual aspects of their love and the aforementioned absence of the courtly components present in the French, German and Old Norse versions suggest that the essence of the passion can only be defined along the lines of Andreas Capellanus' *amor mixtus* (l. 473); that is to say, a kind of love based upon sexual desire, as opposed to *amor purus* (love without consummation, l. 470).<sup>23</sup> The more morally acceptable *assai* (*concobitus sine actu*) of *amor purus* is replaced by the *fach* or act of copulation. Such a double transgression would have been regarded as scandalous. Ysonde has betrayed her betrothed (a religious offence against the sacredness of marriage), while Tristrem has violated the very essence of the feudal hierarchy: the vow of loyalty to his lord.<sup>24</sup> Happiness through the *jois* of *amors* will only be accomplished outside feudal/Christian institutions, whose premises the lovers have just undermined.

### *The Forest and the Boundaries of Society*

If in all *Tristan* romances or the saga the lovers are constantly under suspicion at court and never completely secure from their enemies, the three short periods of time they spend in the forest permit them to enjoy their love outside the strict social conventions of the genre.<sup>25</sup> Characteristically, the Middle English romance dwells upon these flights to the forest. The first such moment takes place just after Tristrem rescues Ysonde from an Irish earl, who has won her by slyness due to Mark's negligence as a husband and lover.<sup>26</sup> The author manages to justify the lovers' relationship to some extent. They find a hut, in which they devote themselves to 'gamen' (pleasures) and 'play' (amorous intercourse) for seven days (ll. 1915-1922). Crane suggests that 'the poet has so little affinity for Thomas' *fine amor* that he reduces the lovers' encounters to entirely physical playing'.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, one might see the emphasis on the exclusively sexual aspects of desire, which leaves no room for courtly interchanges, as quite intentional on the author's part and a distinctive feature of his composition. The structural counterpoint of court and forest underlines the fact that the lovers can only achieve their *jois* in the latter.

The literary elements of Tristrem and Ysonde's second stay in the forest accentuate even more the asocial traits suggested previously. The lovers' eviction from Mark's court must also be interpreted as an expulsion from society. In the Middle High German romance, Mark expresses his love towards the lovers (ll. 16,591-16,602). The courtly and the civilised dominate the scene. Even Tristan

and Îsolt's reaction, full of distress and regret (ll. 16,627-16,631), conveys their attachment to courtly life. The manner of their departure, bidding a sad farewell to Brangane and taking gold, harp and weapons with them, prefigures their intention to recreate the courtly life in their exile in the forest. Significantly, in *Sir Tristrem* and in the saga there is no conversation between them and Mark. Neither is there a mention of the utensils they take with them. The Middle English simply states 'Bliþer, wiþouten wene / Neuer ere nar þay' (ll. 2452-53). The Old Norse text subtly differs at this point, stating that 'ihuguðu þau þá lítt, hver þeim skyldi fá vín og vistir, því að guð mun vilja gefa þeim nokkura næring, hvar sem þau voru' (pp. 170-71) [they gave little thought as to who would give them food and drink, for they felt certain that God would provide them with nourishment. (p. 101)]. By not mentioning God, *Sir Tristrem* creates a singular set of connotations, in which the *amor vincit omnia* theme is stressed once more. When it comes to their passion, not even God is necessary; only in the wilderness can they enjoy such freedom. Thus, whereas Schultz claims with regard to the other Tristan romances that the lovers' 'natural habitat is the court, not the forest',<sup>28</sup> textual evidence in *Sir Tristrem* undermines such assertion, once again indicating its own distinctive identity within the corpus.

Furthermore, the lovers' decision to take shelter in the forest, rather than going somewhere else (for instance, to Ermonie, Tristrem's homeland), implies their awareness that desire outside the bond of matrimony can find no place in a repressive social ambience. They live in a cave:

No hadde þai no wines wat,  
No ale þat was old,  
No no gode mete þai at;  
þai hadden al þat þai wold  
Wiþ wille.  
For loue ich oþer bihalt,  
Her non miht of oþer fille.  
(ll. 2491-2497)

This passage dramatically highlights the *amor vincit omnia* theme: facing all sorts of privations, and living almost like animals, the two lovers are mutually dependent. A life led according to their *impetus naturae* negates the very ideals of reason, civilisation and society. There is, one might go so far as to say, a symbolic displacement of time and place suggesting a pre-Christian mythic vision, where

they cannot feel the burden of their sin. The more psychologically elaborate narrative of Gottfried's *Tristan und Îsolt* develops similar notions:

daz selbe hol was wîlen ê  
undêr der heideneschen ê  
vor Corinêis jâren,  
dô risen dâ hêrren wâren,  
gehouwen in den wilden berc.  
(ll. 16693-97)

[The cavern had been hewn into the wild mountain in heathen times, before Corynaeus' day, when giants ruled there. (p. 261)]

Albeit via Christian symbols, the allusions to the times of heathens and giants work to conceptualise the cave as a symbol of the lovers' flight into the uncivilised past.<sup>29</sup> The typical *locus amoenus* is displaced and replaced by a much less pleasant spot in which even food is lacking. Notwithstanding all the adversities, the lovers enjoy their existence thanks to their commitment to love above all. Such a radical shift in location detaches their love from the conventions of courtly literature.

Once Mark accepts the lovers back into society, however, earlier conflicts reappear. Interestingly, Mark admits them to his favour again, when he finds them sleeping together with Tristrem's sword between both. Mark interprets this as a proof of their not having had sexual intercourse. Helaine Newstead points out that, in the European literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a naked sword placed between two sleeping people was a motif which presupposed the couple's intention to preserve chastity.<sup>30</sup> At any rate, in Gottfried, Mark's willingness to forgive Tristan and Îsolt is attributed to the king's blindness, caused by his love for Îsolt: 'schœne daz ist hœne' (l. 17,807) ['in beauty there lurks danger' (p. 275)]. The action-based *Sir Tristrem* does not mention this, creating a very different characterisation of Mark. In *Tristan und Îsolt*, Mark is generally viewed in a more positive light than in either the Middle English romance or the saga. At the beginning Gottfried represents him as a sophisticated courtly monarch and as a caring father figure for Tristan. Mark is reluctant to marry Îsolt because he does not want to jeopardise Tristran's future as the king of Cornwall (ll. 8362-8368). The saga takes the middle ground insofar as it focuses on the legalistic aspects of Markis's succession in detail. Whereas Tristram presents himself as the rightful heir ('löglegur erfingi') to

Markis because he has no children (p. 58), Markis is more than happy to marry after his counsellors, not Tristram, tell him that he should not die without heirs (p. 82). The Middle English romance alters Mark's image profoundly. Mark becomes less courtly and fatherly but certainly more lecherous: he would make Tristrem his heir only if he gets him Ysonde (ll. 1333-1337). In accordance with the less courtly style of the narrative as a whole, Mark's honourable behaviour needed to be minimised to prevent any chance that he might become a more likeable character than either Tristrem or Ysonde.

### *Impossibility of Integration*

Instead of being compatible, *amor* and *militia* operate as two mutually exclusive categories in *Sir Tristrem*: Tristrem can only ever be either a good knight or a good lover, but not both at once. When forced to separate from Ysonde, for example, Tristrem endeavours to recover all the chivalric honour he had lost: 'For he ne may Ysonde kisse, / Fiht he soht aywhare.' (ll. 2298-99). On this occasion, Tristrem for the first time seems to exercise his free will. The frenetic series of knightly adventures which follow show Tristrem questing after something more than knightly *pretz*. He is now trying to become a useful member of society again. In Spain, he is said to have slain three giants: the hero who had disobeyed religious and social conventions now performs the role of the civilising knight, bringing the courtly world to places where it does not exist. In the High German romance and in the saga, the cause-effect relation between Tristan/Tristram's banishment and his willingness to integrate through knightly service is equally present, but much more tenuously. It is the rapid concatenation of events in *Sir Tristrem* that elucidates this aspect of the narrative more clearly.

Nonetheless, while Tristrem sincerely attempts to return to conventional society, the text creates a tension between his rational inclination to reintegration within society and his uncontrollable passion for Ysonde:

Mark, mi nem, haþ sinne,  
Wrong he haþ ous wrouht;  
Icham in sorwe & pine;  
Þerto hye haþ me brouht.  
Hir loue, Y say, is mine,

The boke seyt it is nouht  
Wiþ riht.

(ll. 2665-2671)

Tristrem's blind *foudatz* leads him to deny conventional social norms. His song for Ysonde represents his inability to integrate and, at the same time, foreshadows the future failure of his enterprise. In his world of reverse values, the harmony of the song, which should mediate between the earthly realm and divine truth, is a reaction against both terrestrial and celestial power. This subversion of the feudal/Christian world, where the legitimate husband becomes the vile enemy and illicit love is transformed into the source of all virtues, is a recurrent *topos* in the poetry of the troubadours, whose influence through Thomas's original is evident in this passage. The Catalan troubadour Cerverí de Girona's 'No'l prenatz lo fals marit' is a perfect illustration of this:

No'l prenatz lo fals marit,  
Jana delgada!  
No'l prenatz lo fals jurat,  
que pec es mal ensenyat,  
Yana delgada.  
No'l prenatz lo fals marit,  
que pec es ez adormit,  
Yana degada.  
Que pec es mal ensenyat,  
no sia per vos amat,  
Yana delgada.  
Que pec es ez adormit,  
no jaga ab vos el lit,  
Jana delgada.  
No sia per vos amat,  
mes val cel c'avetz privat,  
Yana delgada.  
No jaga ab vos el lit;  
mes vos y valra l'amich,  
Yana delgada.<sup>31</sup>

[Do not take your false husband/ Sweet Jana! / Do not take your false husband, / Who is a rustic fool,/ Sweet Yana. / Do not take your false husband, / who is foolish and indolent, / Sweet Yana. / He is a rustic fool, / do not love him, / Sweet Yana. / He is foolish and indolent, / Do not allow him to sleep with you, / Sweet Jana. / Do not love him, / the secret lover is better, / Sweet Yana. / Do not allow him to sleep with you; / your friend is a better option, / Sweet Yana.]

The figure of the husband is diminished and satirised. The sacred bond of matrimony is replaced by the pure sentiment of *fin'amors*. The spouse's rights, such as the *debitum conjugale*, are displaced and social conventions criticised: owing to the virtuous aura of *fin'amors*, the only one allowed to lie in bed with the *domna* should be the *ami* and not the husband. This mentality is applicable to Tristrem; but with this code of values in his mind, integration will prove impossible.

Indeed, paradoxically, the more Tristram tries to integrate, the more he separates himself from social conventions. His marriage to Ysonde of the White Hands represents his attempt to become a worthy member of society: 'Wiþ Ysonde, þat may/ Wiþ þe white hand,/ He spoused þat day.' (ll. 2677-79). If in the *fin'amors* tradition, from a psychoanalytic perspective, the male lover symbolically yearns to substitute the figure of the husband in a landless knight's fantasy of power and possession,<sup>32</sup> Tristrem's act is a double perversion of the wife-husband relationship. Not only was he figuratively taking Mark's place when he was with Ysonde, but now he is re-inventing his former lover in the person of Ysonde of the White Hands. In Thomas's *Tristan* this rationale for Tristan's marriage is explicitly given:

Qu'il volt espuser la meschine  
Pur saveir l'estre la reïne.  
[...]  
A sa dolor, a sa gravance  
Volt Tristrans dunc quere venjance;  
A sun mal quert tel vengement  
Dunt il doblera sun turment;  
De paine se volt delivrer,  
Si ne se fait fors encombrer;  
Il en quida delit avoir



Quant il ne puet de sun voleir.

(*'Le mariage de Tristan'*, ll. 206-07 / 214-21)

[because his wish was to marry the maid / so as to discover what the queen's life was like. / [...] / So, Tristan was seeking to find a way to free himself / of grief and pain, / seeking a means to be free of love's malady / which, however, would only double his anguish: / he sought to free himself of pain, / but only succeeded in heaping more upon himself. / He thought he might find his pleasure with the other, / since he could not with the object of his longing.]<sup>33</sup>

The Anglo-Norman *roman* expands the idea implicit in *Sir Tristrem*. As opposed to the sketchy accounts of the lovers' psychological state in *Sir Tristrem*, Thomas of Britain constructs a more elaborate image of the hero's desire: Tristan wants to be able to experience what a social being feels after having been an alien for such a long time. Interestingly and significantly, he thinks that he is dissociating himself from Ysonde, who lives as a member of society in spite of all. He needs to think about her as another individual to separate his destiny from hers. In this way, he will exercise his free will definitively. The Anglo-Norman poet, however, also announces the unsuccessful outcome of his plans. As soon as the ring Ysonde gave him drops from his finger, all Tristan's efforts to become a socially accepted courtly knight collapse inasmuch as he can no longer fight his unavoidable fate. His new renunciation of the social conventions will finally conduct him to Ysonde again. And again his desertion from society will force him into the world of non-civilised nature. Allegorically, he returns to the frontiers of social disapproval and exclusion.

A final displacement occurs when Tristrem, having conquered the giant Beligog, and taken over his castle, orders him to erect the hall of images in his own former property—now belonging to Tristrem. The location of the place itself, a giant's castle, denotes a further emancipation from the real world. It represents a parallel sanctuary where the hero can relive his former *jois*. This signifies his ultimate repudiation of integration. As in the cave, Tristrem challenges temporal and natural time since he cannot defy eternal time. The more elaborate composition of the passage in Thomas' original puts across a courtly description of the scene where Tristan's traits as a *fîn amant* are unveiled:

Por iço fist il ceste image  
Que dire li volt son corage,

Son bon penser et sa fole errur,  
Sa paigne, sa joie d'amor,  
Car ne sot vers cui descobrir  
Ne son voler, ne son desir.

(*'La sale aux images'*, ll. 45-50)

[He made that statue/ because he wanted to tell it what was in his heart, / his good thought, and his wild misconceptions, / the pain he felt, and the joy of love, / since he knew not to whom to disclose/ his longing and his heart's desire.]

As well as the recreation of past events, which is also present in *Sir Tristrem*, Thomas constructs the passage to project Tristan's image as a *fin amant* whose demeanour suffers constant shifts from joy to pain. He also talks to the image as if she were the real Iseult. While on the one hand the notion of self-alienation is even more palpable, in comparison with the Middle English text the transgressive elements are softened by the presence of the language of courtliness and *fin'amors*.

Tristrem's last secret meeting with Ysonde takes place in a forest once more: 'Tvo niht þer þai lye / In þat fair forest' (ll. 3136-37). Although the conclusion of the romance has not been preserved, all other versions of the story end in death. *Sir Tristrem* may differ from those sources in the ways described above, but it shares the illicit love theme based on *foudatz* which determines that ending. Society could not accept such a love and so, in terms of the narrative outcome, death must follow.

### *Conclusion*

The uniqueness of *Sir Tristrem*, then, lies in the way in which it retranslates the Tristan myth. Structurally and rhetorically, the agile narration of events and the amalgamation of scenes replace the courtly ornamentation and the more overtly psychological approach to Tristan and Iseult in earlier versions. This obliteration of courtly components accentuates the subversive nature of the poem's view of religious and social order and precepts. In the same way, although it has been argued that some elements belonging to the troubadour tradition have survived in Thomas's original, the absence of courtly conversations in the particular composition of *Sir Tristrem* draws attention to the sexual desire of the two lovers,

giving the impression that, in Andreas Capellanus' terms, their passion should be regarded as *amor mixtus*. Yet, in the Middle English romance, owing to Tristrem and Ysonde's reversed vision of the world, the apparently negative connotations of the term are re-codified as a positive, desire-led relationship.

The conception of unavoidable destiny further challenges contemporary philosophical and religious ideas. The impossibility of participating in society leads the lovers to enjoy their most precious moments of *jois* in the forest: a place where courtly conventions are not present. Allegorically, they are transported to a secluded pseudo-mythical world prior to the establishment of society and religion. Both the forests and the hall of images, therefore, operate as destabilisers of feudal and Christian precepts, where even temporal and natural times are altered. Such a single-minded passion is governed by the *foudatz* of lovers and is devoid of any kind of chivalric *mesura*. Consequently, Tristrem cannot be a good lover and a good knight at the same time (indispensable elements to become the best of knights), but can only devote himself to one thing at a time. Individual *jois* displaces the socially constructive deeds of knighthood. As well as the dearth of courtly motifs, subtle plot alterations also contribute to the impression that *Sir Tristrem* is the most subversive of all the Tristan romances. The transgression of order at all possible levels—socially, religiously, philosophically—through love constitutes the overarching theme that gives narrative unity to *Sir Tristrem*.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Ruth Evans and R. D. S. Jack for commenting on drafts of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the financial help of the British Academy, which has allowed me to pursue my research on medieval and early modern literature.

<sup>2</sup> *Sir Tristrem* survives only in the Auchinleck Manuscript: <<http://www.nls.uk/auchinleck/mss/tristrem.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> *Saga af Tristram og Ísönd* in *Riddarasögur*, ed. by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson ([Reykjavík]: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan; Haukadalsútgáfan, 1982), pp. 1-247.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas of Ertheldoun (or Erceldoune), who lived in the thirteenth century, was a very popular prophetic figure especially in Scotland. He is mentioned in chronicles, and historical romances such as Barbour's *Bruce* (c. 1375) and Hary's *Wallace* (1476-78). A romance about his life and prophecies survives in four different manuscripts. See *Thomas of Erceldoune*, ed. by J. A. H. Murray, EETS o.s. 61 (1875), p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 3-9.

<sup>6</sup> W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987), p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey N. Bromiley, *Thomas' Tristan and the Folie Tristan d'Oxford* (London: Cutler, 1986), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> As Barron suggests: 'Middle English redactors had a well-known dislike for matters of sentiment': W. R. J. Barron, 'Golagros and Gawain: A Creative Redaction', *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*, 26 (1974), 173-185 (pp. 177-178).

<sup>10</sup> As Pensom argues, Thomas's *Tristan* 'is famous for its rhetorical treatment of the long introspective monologues from both Tristan and Ysolt and the psychological image of sexual love it proposes': Roger Pensom, 'Rhetoric and Psychology in Thomas' *Tristan*', *Modern Language Review*, 78 (1983), 285-97 (p. 285).

<sup>11</sup> For the original Anglo-Norman text, I use the following edition: *Tristan et Iseut: Les poèmes français; La saga norroise*, ed. and trans. by D. Lacroix and P. Walter (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas of Britain, *Tristan*, ed. and trans. by S. Gregory (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> T.C. Rumble, 'The Middle English *Sir Tristrem*: Towards a Reappraisal', *Comparative Literature*, 11 (1959), 221-28 (p. 224).

<sup>15</sup> For Gottfried's romance, I use the following editions: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, ed. by R. Bechstein and P. Ganz, 2 vols (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1978); Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. by A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. by Hatto, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Although traditionally Roland has been regarded as a knight lacking knightly *mesure* as opposed to the wise Oliver, in recent years scholars such as Robert F. Cook have argued that it is not *démesure*, but his duty as a knight owing to his vows to Charlemagne that makes Roland act in such a daredevil manner. Robert F. Cook, *The Sense of the Song of Roland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 147-59.

<sup>18</sup> In Marie de France's *Lais*, for example, marriage is not as important as love. It is either an impediment for lovers to be together in *lais* such as 'Guigemar' or 'Yonec', in which marriage is seen as a prison, or less often it is portrayed in a positive light as long as it is subservient to love in *lais* such as 'Le Fresne'.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. and trans. by M. Dods, 2 vols (New York: Hafner, 1948), V.9.

<sup>20</sup> *The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd*, trans. by Paul Schach (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Hugo Bekker, *Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan: A Journey Through the Realm of Eros* (Columbia: Camden House, 1987), p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> M. Beskin, T. Hurt and I. Short, 'Un nouveau fragment du *Tristan* de Thomas', *Romania*, 113 (1992-95), 289-319.

<sup>23</sup> Andreas Capellanus, *On Love*, ed. by P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> The *Prose Lancelot* goes further than Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette* is so far as Lancelot and Guenevere's transgression is allegorised as one of the key causes of the fall of King Arthur's court.

<sup>25</sup> 'The flight to the forest is the development of an elopement theme very popular with the Irish': John H. Fisher, 'Tristan and Courtly Adultery', *Comparative Literature*, 9 (1957), 150-164 (p. 153)

<sup>26</sup> Mark promised the earl to give him anything he wanted if the latter would agree to play his harp (ll. 1827-1830). When the Irish earl demanded the queen, Mark had to choose between his wife or his word. As a knight, he cannot break his promise, which represents his failure as a husband and lover. This clearly contrasts with Tristrem's extreme attitude, since he sacrifices everything in the name of his single-minded passion for Ysonde.

<sup>27</sup> Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 193.

## *The Singularity of Sir Tristrem in the Tristan Corpus*

<sup>28</sup> James A. Schultz, 'Why Do Tristan and Isolde Leave for the Woods? Narrative Motivation and Narrative Coherence in Eilhart von Oberg and Gottfried von Straßburg', *Modern Languages Notes*, 102 (1987), 586-607 (p. 586).

<sup>29</sup> The saga also alludes to the ancient times of the heathen (p. 101).

<sup>30</sup> Helaine Newstead, 'Isolt of the White Hands and Tristan's Marriage', *Romance Philology*, 19 (1965), 155-166 (p. 158).

<sup>31</sup> For Cerverí's *canço*, I use the following edition: Martín de Riquer, *Los trovadores: Historia literaria y textos*, 3 vols (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1975), III, 1566-67. My translation.

<sup>32</sup> Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 100-02; Georges Duby, 'The Courtly Model' in *A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. by C. Klapisch-Zuber (London: Belknap Press, 1992), II, 250-66 (p. 259).

<sup>33</sup> *Tristan*, ed. and trans. by S. Gregory.

## *Bastard and Basket: The Etymologies Revisited*

William Sayers

The *Oxford English Dictionary* continues to derive *bastard* in its purported original meaning of 'one begotten and born out of wedlock; an illegitimate or natural child' from Old French *bastard* (cf. Mod. Fr. *bâtard*, Prov. *bastard*, It., Sp., Pg. *bastardo*), this in the sense of Fr. *fil de bât*, 'pack-saddle child' (Old Fr. *fil de bast*), to which the "pejorative suffix" *-ard* would have been added.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of Old Fr. *bast*, Mod. Fr. *bât* 'pack saddle' is beyond question, although the emergence of what is clearly an extended or figurative use is difficult to justify or explain at this historical remove. One might have imagined a more plausible image to have been an illegitimate child as conceived on the impromptu bed of a saddle-cloth.

Other lexicographical works are less content with the traditional derivation as found in *OED*. Its nearest French counterpart as a historical dictionary with exemplification, early attestations, history, and etymology is *Le Trésor de la langue française*, completed in 1994 and now available online as *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé (TLFi)*. With some irony, we find listed there the first attestation of *bastard* as one born out of wedlock in the *Domesday Book*.<sup>2</sup> The term also appears in medieval Latin as *bastardus*, earliest in a Catalonian legal context where offspring are listed in a will.<sup>3</sup> It appears in the Latin of Britain in 1139 and all the early attestations are from a quasi-legal context, that is, it is not a term of pejoration but one relating to status.<sup>4</sup> The designation of William of Normandy as *bastard* must also have penetrated to Britain some years before the Conquest, when his ambitions were first recognized.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes: '& Harold cyng, his broþor, gegædrade swa micelne sciphære & eac landhere swa nan cyng her on lande ær dyde, forþam þe him wæs gecyðð þæt Wyllelm Bastard wolde hider & ðis land gewinnan, eallswa hit syððan aeode' (And King Harald, his brother, gathered a greater raiding ship-army and also raiding land-army than any king here in the land had ever done before, because he was informed that William the Bastard wanted to come here and win this land, just as it afterwards came to pass).<sup>6</sup> Other

French examples show *bastard* linked with proper names, although it also had independent status, as when the mid-twelfth-century *Roman de Thèbes* equates 'fil a putain' ('whoreson') with 'bastart'.<sup>7</sup> Figurative uses appear somewhat later; for example, the term is applied to cross-bred horses and raptors perceived as not of true race, a judgment based more on hunting criteria than on speciation.

TLF ultimately concedes that the origin of *bastardus* is 'obscure'. Hans Sperber derived *bastard* from a putative Germanic *\*bansti* 'barn' (cf. Gothic *bansts*), the bastard then being one conceived under less than formal circumstances.<sup>8</sup> This derivation found favour with *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*.<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Dietz promoted the connection with Old Fr. *bast* 'pack-saddle' and fantasised casual relationships between muleteers and the serving girls at inns where they stopped.<sup>10</sup> Generally seen as more plausible is Lothar Wolf's hypothesis of the derivation of a legal term from primitive Germanic through a western dialect such as Old Frisian, in which *bost* is found with the signification 'marriage union'.<sup>11</sup> His argument is founded on a single textual reference in the Upstallsbom laws from 1323. 'Hwaso een kneppa ieffta famna bynna aefta to bosta iout ieffta nymt buta reed dis mondís and dis sibsta eerwa, dera wrberth ayder hondert merka.' (Whoever gives or takes in marriage a young man or young woman within a year of the law [as a minor] without the authorization of the guardian and of the closest heirs forfeits a hundred marks to each of them).<sup>12</sup> Wolf hypothesizes a loan into, or cognate in, Frankish, where his reconstructed form is *\*banstu-*. It is proposed that the archaic Germanic term, ultimately traceable to the Indo-European root *\*bhendh-* 'to link, tie',<sup>13</sup> would have been a quasi-legal designation for a second marriage or semi-formal union with a woman of lesser rank than the first or principal wife.<sup>14</sup> Even more speculatively, Wolf suggests that the later negative affect, apparent in the suffix *-ard*, is the result of Christian judgments on supposed Germanic polygyny. While this does not of itself constitute proof, an etymology that highlights legal status after birth rather than the impromptu circumstances of conception—pack-saddles, inns, barns—is much more in keeping with early medieval concerns and values as we reconstruct them.

While grudging credence is given to Wolf's hypothesis,<sup>15</sup> it is recognized that there are few loans (if loan this be) from the North Sea dialects of West Germanic (Old Frisian, Old Saxon, etc.) into the Frankish that was carried to northern Gaul. And no reflex of this instance of Frisian *bost* is found, for example, in Old Saxon or Old English (or Gothic). We should also have to explain why a word for an (admittedly unspecified) marital union should experience such marked semantic pejoration and—the larger social and legal issue—why a term for a marriage union would be reassigned a slot farther down on the socio-legal scale and come to



designate, in a sole surviving derivative, the offspring from a union with other than a first wife. Last among reservations, if *\*banstu-* is the reconstructed Frankish root, the *-n-* in this consonant cluster would not normally have been lost in an evolution in Gallo-Romance.<sup>16</sup>

At this juncture, given that archaic Rhineland Frankish was lexically influenced by continental Celtic, for example as spoken by the neighbouring tribe of the Belgae, we might scan the scant evidence of Gaulish for some comparable term.<sup>17</sup> But neither is the Indo-European root *\*bhendh-* 'to link, tie' represented by a reflex in Gaulish nor do we have any recorded terminology for marital and other unions, or their offspring. Similarly, none of the Old Irish or Old Welsh terminology for male-female unions as found in the very comprehensive archaic law tracts—ranging from contracts with the family of a first wife to unions based on abduction or rape—has any suggestive vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> Medieval Irish, however, does have a figurative term for an illegitimate child, *mac muine* 'son (child) of the brake' (e.g. brambles) that is suggestive, at least, of the disparaging imagery later found in French *fil de bast* 'pack-saddle child'.<sup>19</sup>

In the following pages a different origin is proposed for English *bastard*, French *bâtard*, and their antecedents and congeners, although it will reference some now familiar elements. English *bast* is a term still current among craftspeople and historians for the inner bark of the lime or linden and, more generally, for flexible fibrous barks put to utilitarian purposes. In earlier societies, this pliable bark was cut into strips to yield a coarse thread, wound into cord and rope, and served as raw material in wickerwork for a variety of practical purposes such as baskets and panniers. *Bast* is a common Germanic word, with earlier forms or cognates in OE *bæst*, MHG, Mod.G., MDu., and Mod. Du. *bast* as well as ON, Da., and Sw. *bast* (but not found in the Gothic corpus). While perhaps not bearing directly on the development of *bastard*, an Old English example from the Samson story in *Judges* will establish *bast* as a term of early English technology: 'Hig ða hine gebundon mid twam bæstenum rapum & hine gelæddon to þam folce' (They then bound him with two ropes of bast and brought him to the people, reflecting the Vulgate, 'Ligaveruntque eum duobus novis funibus, et tulerunt eum de Patra Etam').<sup>20</sup> *Bastum/basto* is well attested in the Latin of medieval Britain, in particular in royal accounts, where there is frequent mention of bast used for ships' ropes. Did the translator misread 'duobus novis funibus' (with two new ropes) and mistake 'novis' for 'navis', with the result that he used a term perhaps indicating ship's ropes?<sup>21</sup>

Earlier German lexicographers, e.g. Friedrich Kluge, pronounced *bast* of

obscure origin (Herkunft dunkel).<sup>22</sup> Nor does *bast* figure in Julius Pokorny's extensive list of Germanic terms traceable to IE roots. I would propose a tie with IE \**bhasko-* 'bundle, clutch (of objects)', reflexes of which are Latin *fascis* 'bundle of sticks', *fascia* 'band, bandage', Gaulish *bascauda* 'basin, bowl' (to which I return below), Old Irish *basc* 'object in wickerwork'.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Gmc *bast* it would initially have referenced the inner cylinder of bark of the lime and comparable trees.

*OED* explains the verb *baste*, which I shall define for present purposes as 'to sew loosely with a long running stitch', as adapted from Old Fr. *bastir* (Mod. Fr. *bâtir*), basically 'to build', cf. Sp. *bastear*, *embastar*, It. *imbastire*. It is more plausibly referred to such forms as OHG. *bestan* 'to patch', MHG. *besten* 'to lace, tie', and these in turn have clear ties with the Frankish \**bastjan*, which meant 'to stitch loosely, plait, weave'. With *baste*, we are, in fact, in the domain of *bast* and the bark of the linden. The term for the material has generated a verb designating uses to which it is typically put. Frankish *bastjan* had a rich heritage in Old French: *bastir* 'fabricate an object; build (a house); surround with fortifications', *bastiment* 'creation', etc.<sup>24</sup> Its fundamental semantics, however, lay with *bast*, and originally referenced the long, loose stitches and open weave that were characteristic of rough stitching and basketry.

Human sexuality is an area in many languages that is strongly marked by figurative usage. It is then proposed that informal or semi-formal sexual unions that would have produced illegitimate children were designated by a derivative of *bast* or *bastjan* that pointed up the loose nature of such less fixed relationships, viewed as comparable to the looping stitch or open weave characteristic of the use of *bast*.

The Old Fr. suffix *-ard* has conventionally been seen as of Germanic, more exactly Frankish origin, and its original semantic value would have been 'strong, hard' (cf. English *hard*), as is evident in the many Germanic personal names that incorporate it. While this valence continued in onomastics, the fall in semantic register of the still active French suffix toward pejoration is striking. A development from 'hard' to 'gross' to 'contemptible' must be envisaged. While this question will not be pursued in the present context, it may be time for a fresh, hard look at the origins of the suffix in non-onomastic formations.

The panniers of pack animals would often have been wickerwork, plaited or woven strips of bark from lime, osier, cane, reeds, rushes, etc. Old French *bast* 'pack saddle, pannier' may be assumed originally to have referenced the material of construction and only later, in a narrowing to one specific use, an object so fabricated (the same process evident in the formation of derivatives of Frankish *bastjan*). The later Old French 'unpacking' of *bastard* as *fil de bast* 'child of the pack-saddle' (but

also 'thread of bast'), first attested from the thirteenth century, would then be a back formation under the influence of folk etymology. Seeing *bastard* as allied with *bast* and perhaps still aware of some link to the typical uses and handling of bast cord and rope, the phrase initially referenced the material, later the product. This folk-etymologizing process continued. The later phrasing, steered by both pronunciation and perhaps evolving materials technology, was *fil de bas* /ba/ 'bastard', now assumed to incorporate French *bas* 'low' (< Med. Latin *bassus* 'low') and meaning 'low-born child'. In summary, *OED*'s etymological note is relatively close to the mark, although its reference to *fil de bast* should be pursued past the pannier or pack saddle to its constituent material.

According to this same lexicographical work *basket* has no cognates in Germanic or Romance. Yet the presence of Old English *bæsten* 'made of bast' encourages us to posit an English cognate of the Frankish verb *bastjan*. Could a form such as *bæsted* have yielded *basket* through a sequence of sound substitutions? Another possibility should also be entertained. A Gaulish term *bascauda* has been deciphered and ascribed the meaning 'basin, bowl'.<sup>25</sup> The suffix *-auda* is elsewhere attested and the root *basc-* is that earlier noted in Old Irish *basc* 'wickerwork object', Latin *fascis* 'bundle of sticks, rods', etc., all deriving from IE *\*bhasko-* 'bundle, receptacle for gathering'. Gallo-Romance derivatives of *bascauda* are Old French *baschoe* and modern Norman *bachol* 'ewer', southern French *bachole* 'hamper for grapes'.<sup>26</sup> In these French examples, we should again understand a term for a material (bast) being applied to objects made of it (baskets), then being extended to similarly shaped objects with comparable purposes, e.g. wooden bowl (cf. the extension of meanings of English *wicker* to 'basket, cradle, chair'). An Old French diminutive *\*baschette*, carried to England before the loss of *-s-*, is then another possible source and could, conceivably, have interacted with a native term for objects made with roughly similar methods and materials.<sup>27</sup>

To stand back, in closing, from this phonological speculation on *basket* and return to *bastard*, why would such a word, if ultimately derived from a Germanic term for a marital union, leave such a small historical imprint, with no attested presence in Frankish, no related forms, nominal or verbal, and no trace of the process represented by the considerable semantic modification from marriage union to offspring of an illegitimate sexual union? A more satisfactory derivation is available in *bast* and its congeners, among which the term *bastard*, at least for the medieval period, continued to be associated with its ultimate etymology, *bast*, and to resonate more widely than at present. Nonetheless, this alternative etymology must recognize

a comparable figurative use and some semantic ins and outs comparable to working in wicker. It seems only appropriate that *OED* should have noted *basket* as a euphemism for *bastard*.<sup>28</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On the issue of whether origins should be pursued beyond the entry of a loan word into English, the first editors of *OED* clearly state this as legitimate and of interest.

<sup>2</sup> Noted by F. Hildebrand, 'Über das fr. Sprachelement im *Liber Censualis* Wilhelms I. von England', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 8 (1884), 321-62 (p. 330) in the entry for Robert Bastard.

<sup>3</sup> Ferran Valls i Taberner, *Els orígens dels comtats de Pallars i Ribagorça* (Barcelona: Casa de Caritat, 1918), p. 38, cited in *Glossarium mediae latinitatis Cataloniae* (Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 1960-), col. 244. The counts of Barcelona were mostly Franks. Here it is more likely that a socio-legal concept rather than a term of disparagement has been carried south.

<sup>4</sup> *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. by R. E. Latham (London: Oxford University Press, 1975-), fasc. 1, A-B, p. 186, s.v. *bastardus*; cf. *bastardia*.

<sup>5</sup> Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. by J. M. Lappenberg (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopoli Hahniani, 1876), Book 3, p. 52; see further *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Otto Prinz and Johannes Schneider (Munich: Beck, 1967-), vol. 2, p. 1391, s.v. *bastardus*.

<sup>6</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. by David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983-96), Vol. 6: *MS D*, ed. by G. P. Cubbin (1996), 1066.12; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed. by Michael Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 195, 197.

<sup>7</sup> *Le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. by Léopold Constans (Paris: Didot, 1890), p. 150; further exemplification in *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommattsch (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1925-2002), vol. 1, col. 863, s.v. *bastart*.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Sperber, 'Romanische Etymologien', *Språkvetenskapliga Sällskapets Förhandlingar i Uppsala* (1906), 152-54.

<sup>9</sup> *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1935), vol. 1, p. 77, entry 936, *bansts*. A number of prominent French and English etymological dictionaries continue to promote the association with barns: *Dictionnaire étymologique et historique du français*, ed. by Jean Dubois et al. (Paris: Larousse, 2006); *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. by Robert K. Barnhart (Bronx: Wilson, 1988); *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, comp. Ernest Klein (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1966-67).

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Diez, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der romanischen Sprachen*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Bonn: Marcus, 1887), p. 45. See too Leo Spitzer, 'Apr. *saludar de lonh*—altfr. *fiis de bast*', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 51 (1931), 291ff., who explains the term as *Maultierssattelkind*. R. A. Hall, Jr., 'L'etimologia di bastardo', *Romanische Forschungen*, 74 (1962), 111-12, working (back) from Italian *bastardo*, claims that the term originally designates the mule (on the basis of the packsaddle it carried) and then an illegitimate son.

<sup>11</sup> *Altfriesisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Karl von Richthofen (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1840), p. 663, s.v. *boste*. This derivation is reflected in *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Karl von Richthofen, *Friesische Rechtsquellen* (Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung, 1840), p. 533, quoted in Lothar Wolf, 'Afr. *bastart* - fiis de *bast*: Ein Ingwäonismus im Galloromanischen', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 81 (1965), 310-24 (p. 316).

<sup>13</sup> Julius Pokorny, *Indo-germanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Bern: Francke, 1959-69), vol. 1, p. 127, s.v. *bhendh-*. Wolf, 'Afr. *bastart* - fiis de *bast*', pp. 316-17, claims that the shift in vocalism, *o* > *a*, and loss of the nasal before a voiceless spirant would have been regular development in "invaenisch", here Old Frisian. In reviewing the many Italian reflexes of the *bastard* word in a more current lexicographical work, Maria Völlono posits an original Old Frankish form \**banstu*, but otherwise subscribes to Wolf's thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Jan de Vries prefers a derivation of Old Fr. *bastard* from a medieval Latin *bastum* 'pack saddle', this from an unspecified Germanic term; Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 28, s.v. *bastardr*, which he sees as a loan from Middle English. He also notes V. Günther's effort to trace *bastard* directly to an unattested ON \**bástr*. The most ambitious current French etymological project, *Dictionnaire étymologique de l'ancien français*, ed. by Kurt Baldinger, Jean-Denis Gendron, and Georges Straka (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval; Tübingen: Niemeyer; Paris: Klincksieck, 1974-), has not yet addressed the letter B.

<sup>15</sup> *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, ed. by Walther von Wartburg (Bonn: Klopp, 1928-), *Germanische Elemente*, A-F, Vol. 15, pp. 72-74, particularly p. 74.

<sup>16</sup> As R. A. Hall, Jr., 'L'etimologia di bastardo', observes, citing OFr. *hanste* 'spear'.

<sup>17</sup> D. H. Green, 'Contacts with the Celts', ch. 8 of his *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 145-63.

<sup>18</sup> Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988); *The Welsh Law of Women: Studies Presented to Professor Daniel A. Binchy on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. by Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Welsh knew a comparable term, the child of 'a woman of bush and brake': Dafydd Jenkins, 'Property Interests in the Classical Welsh Law of Women', in *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. by Jenkins and Owen, pp. 69-92 (p. 91).

<sup>20</sup> 'Judges', *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. by S. J. Crawford (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), XV.13, p. 411. The OE text has been lightly amended as reproduced in *Dictionary of Old English*, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, and Antonette diPaolo Healey (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2003-).

<sup>21</sup> *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, fasc. A-B, p. 186, s.v.v. *basto, bastum*.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, rev. ed. by Max Bürgisser, Bernd Gregor *et al.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), p. 63, s.v. *bast*.

<sup>23</sup> *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, p. 111; *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*, ed. by Xavier Delamarre, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Editions Errance, 2003), p. 68, s.v. *bascauda*; *Lexique etymologique de l'irlandais ancien*, ed. by Joseph Vendryes *et al.* (Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies; Paris: Société nationale de la recherche scientifique, 1959-), B-21-22.

<sup>24</sup> *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, Germanische Elemente*, Vol. 15, A-F, pp. 74-79, s.v. *bastjan*. It is then rather surprising to find an earlier volume of this same work deriving French *bât* (Old Fr. *bast*) not from the same root as the verb *bastjan* but rather from a late Latin *bastum* identified as 'pack-saddle'. This is, admittedly, recognized as a loan from Germanic, but the detour via Latin seems unnecessary to explain the OFr. form; *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, pp. 279-281, s.v. *bastum*.

<sup>25</sup> *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*, p. 68, s.v. *bascauda*.

<sup>26</sup> *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 1, pp. 267-68, s.v. *bascauda*.

<sup>27</sup> Although considering rather different evidence, e.g. *cofinos* equated with *banstas* in the *Reichenauer Glossen* and Picard *banste* 'corbeille', Wolf comes to precisely the opposite conclusion of the present study and categorically states 'Von der Bedeutung "Korb" ausgehend, lässt sich jedoch die Herkunft von afr. *bastart* auch nicht erklären' (p. 315). See the *FEW* entry for Frankish *banst* 'large basket', 15.66-67.

<sup>28</sup> *OED*, s.v. *basket*, sense A. 11. I am grateful to an early reader of this note for this observation and other helpful comment.

## REVIEWS

N.J. Higham, ed., *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*. Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 7. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007. 253 pp. ISBN 9781843833123. £50.

These proceedings of a Manchester conference of 2004 have had a warm welcome, especially from archaeologists, and have already been reprinted. Although most papers in the volume are not about language, there are a few dealing with Old English (particularly regarding links with Celtic) and place-names in England. There is an editorial introduction with sixteen other communications in two sections: history and archaeology, and 'linguistic perspectives'.

In the first section Catherine Hills looks at television's attitudes to Anglo-Saxons and Britons; Howard Williams reviews similar attitudes amongst Victorian archaeologists. Lloyd Laing describes Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon metalwork; Heinrich Härke compares the falls of Roman Britain and the USSR; the editor muses on 'British-ness' and 'English-ness'; Gale Owen-Crocker argues for women's work in British textiles. Damian Tyler reconsiders Mercia and the Britons; Martin Grimmer examines Britons in West Saxon law. Alex Woolf assesses Angles, Britons, and economics; David Thornton scrutinizes Welshmen in the Herefordshire Domesday.

More central to the study of language are the six papers in the second part. Peter Schrijver analyses the British language of AD 400 or so. Richard Coates gives an up-to-date account of Celtic loanwords in English, with a glance at Celtic place-names in England. Hildegard Tristram wonders why the English don't speak Welsh. Oliver Padel considers the British and English toponyms of Devon and Cornwall in the light of Anglo-Saxon conquest; Duncan Probert maps the retreat of Brittonic in south-west Britain.

The Manchester conference (which this reviewer attended) was ambitious in scope. Perhaps it was too ambitious. It concerned itself with archaeology, history, and Celtic and Germanic philology, matters completely understood by none there present. The results inspire mixed feelings. There are two reasons for this. First is the limited and scattered evidence for the subject, which extends over seven centuries from Saxon Advent to Norman Conquest. It would have needed careful organization to give a satisfying account here, with perhaps fewer but more comprehensive papers. A model here is *The Problem of the Picts*, ed. by F.T. Wainwright (Edinburgh: Nelson 1955), a classic assembly of conference papers that



produced a revolutionary advance in knowledge. Such organization was not to be had at Manchester.

Second is work still to be done on many of the questions dealt with. Here we may criticize some of the papers in 'linguistic perspectives'. Richard Coates thus gives new answers to an old problem, the apparent lack of Celtic loanwords in early English. But his work, excellent though it is, shows what remains to do. Too much of it uses this reviewer's desultory research on accidental finds. This is not satisfactory. What is needed is a thorough and methodical sifting of the lexis of Old English (perhaps by a young scholar for a doctorate). Then we may be quite certain if anything exists beyond that miserable collection of Old English forms like *binn* 'bin' and *brocc* 'badger' that have been wearily trotted out since Max Förster's pioneer study of 1921.

There is a similar criticism of attempts to discern a Celtic substrate in Old English syntax. Hildegard Tristram unwittingly shows this in analysis of the Old English Orosius (citing research by Dr Ilse Wischer). Like Mr Peter Kitson, Professor Tristram very strangely ignores evidence (noted long ago by Janet Bately) suggesting the translator was a Briton, dictating to an English scribe. He was probably a Cornishman. If the translator were a Briton, peculiarities of syntax (especially constructions with auxiliary plus verbs ending in *-ende*) are no surprise. But as evidence for Celtic influence on Old English as a whole they are completely worthless.

Finally we come to Oliver Padel's analysis (with maps) of place-names of the far south-west, where a tranche of English forms in north-east Cornwall indicates relatively early English settlement there. One's objections are not to the paper, which is unexceptionable, but to the circumstances in which it is presented. Regrettably, in the absence of a complete and proper survey of Cornwall's place-names—such as the English Place-Name Society's volumes long awaited from Dr Padel—it is difficult to assess satisfactorily the evidence or the conclusions presented in the article.

For students of language, then, *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* is not so much an imposing edifice as an interesting ruin, from which researchers should take what building material they can get. For all its importance in investigating a neglected subject, it is not the last word on the matter. At its best it offers materials (some of permanent value, some merely ephemeral) to let others go further and, one hopes, to solve definitively the questions that it asks.

ANDREW BREEZE

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Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs and Thomas N. Hall, eds, *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xxiv + 420 pp. ISBN 9780802093677. £48.00; US\$ 75.00.

This collection of nineteen new essays focuses on topics reflecting Thomas D. Hill's own research and teaching interests. Its first part, '*Beowulf*', opens with Joseph Harris on 'Beasts of Battle, South and North', calling for 'a broader and looser approach' (p. 5) to interpreting this topos in the context of its Scandinavian and Celtic analogues. James H. Morey surveys the ways in which the kings and princes of *Beowulf* die in 'The Fates of Men in *Beowulf*' and notes how a careful pattern is established to validate Beowulf taking the Geatish throne. Frederick M. Biggs returns, briefly, to 'Folio 179 of the *Beowulf* Manuscript', the point at which the second scribe takes over from the first, and the subject of much scrutiny and discussion of the relationship between the two scribes and the structure of the poem. Biggs argues that a large part of the damage to this folio was accidental, and that it is not a palimpsest.

Part II of the collection, 'Old English Religious and Sapiential Poetry', begins with James W. Earl's 'Trinitarian Language: Augustine, *The Dream of the Rood*, and Ælfric', which considers the theology of the Word. Earl shows how Augustine's *De trinitate* can help illuminate aspects of *The Dream of the Rood*, and notes that Ælfric does not appear to draw on *De trinitate* when writing about the Trinity. In 'The Leaps of Christ and *The Dream of the Rood*', James W. Marchand identifies Hippolytus as the creator of this theme and emphasises how commonly it features in medieval texts. Johanna Kramer's '"Du eart se weallstan": Architectural Metaphor and Christological Imagery in the Old English *Christ I* and the Book of Kells' compares the spatial and architectural imagery of the poem and the Book of Kells illumination of The Temptation of Christ and makes the case for the value of comparing metaphors across textual and pictorial sources. In 'Remembering in Circles: *The Wife's Lament*, *Conversatio*, and the Community of Memory', Sachi Shimomura considers temporality and narrative and the ways in which the poem 'helps to define the social framework of time in OE texts' (p. 125). Alice Sheppard examines the same poem and offers 'A Word to the Wise: Thinking, Knowledge, and Wisdom in *The Wanderer*', in the form of an exploration of how the poem functions as wisdom literature and of its place in the Exeter Book.

Part III, 'Old English prose', opens with Paul E. Szarmach on 'Alfred's

Nero': an examination of Alfred's response to Boethius' treatment of Nero and what it shows of his relationship to the commentary tradition, his views on royal power and his 'speculative political thought' (p. 150). Joseph Wittig continues the focus on the commentary tradition, returning to his work on 'The "Remigian" Glosses on Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae* in Context' to offer an overview of the glosses in question and some thoughts on their origin and their development, which he believes to be the result of 'much active involvement with Boethius's text, by many individuals, and in many centres of learning' (p. 183). Appendices to the article provide an updated version of Pierre Courcelle's list of manuscripts containing Remigian commentary. David F. Johnson asks 'Why Ditch the *Dialogues*? Reclaiming an Invisible Text', notes the striking lack of scholarly attention paid to the OE *Dialogues* to date, discusses the implications of this for the concept of the Alfredian canon, highlights the evidence they offer for the figural reading of saints' lives, and sets the scene for his proposed new edition. 'Hagiography and Violence: Military Men in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*', by E. Gordon Whatley, shows Ælfric presenting warfare and military conduct in a number of Lives and argues that his 'sanitized violence [...] is neither pacifist propaganda nor monastic detachment from the crises of the time' (p. 230). Charles D. Wright offers 'A New Latin Source for Two Old English Homilies (Fadda I and Blickling I): Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo* App. 125, and the Ideology of Chastity in the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform'. Through a detailed comparison of the source, a Pseudo-Augustinian Nativity sermon, and the Old English homilies, Wright demonstrates how Fadda I aligns with an Ælfrician reformist stance on chastity and on the narrow interpretation of the word *clænness*, in contrast to Blickling I. Thomas N. Hall's study of 'Christ's Birth through Mary's Right Breast: an Echo of Carolingian Heresy in the Old English *Adrian and Ritheus*' traces the logic operating behind such an idea as a way of presenting Mary's continuing virginity and offers by way of comparison an illumination in a fifteenth-century Ethiopic manuscript of the birth of Mary from the right side of Hanna.

'Old English beyond the Conquest' is the subject of Part IV's two essays. 'The Peterborough Chronicle and the Invention of "Holding Court" in Twelfth-Century England', by Andrew Galloway, notes that this phrase, common in twelfth-century writings, first occurs in English as part of the work of the Second Continuator of the Peterborough Chronicle, and that this writer's predecessors can be seen as 'bridging the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman world' (p. 308). 'Echoes of Old English Alliterative Collocations in Middle English Alliterative Proverbs', by Susan E. Deskis, traces the continuity and development of this form

and offers a corrective to the view that there is no connection between Old English alliterative verse and the fourteenth-century Alliterative Revival.

Part V turns to 'Early Medieval Latin'. Danuta Shanzer examines 'Bede's Style: a Neglected Historiographical Model for the Style of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*?', and suggests the influence of Orosius and especially Rufinus. Michael W. Herren goes 'Crux-busting on the Danube: *uel Coniectanea in Cosmographiam Aethici, ut dicitur, Istri*', considering the latinity of the *Cosmography of Aethicus Ister* and giving some examples of the principles underlying his own ongoing editing of the text. Michael W. Twomey's 'The *Revelationes* of Pseudo-Methodius and Scriptural Study at Salisbury in the Eleventh Century' shows how the earliest English copies of this text provide insight into its later transmission in England and its use in the interpretation of biblical history. Appendices to the volume list Thomas D. Hill's publications and dissertations directed by him. It is pleasing to see, unusually for a festschrift, a full index to the volume and a most useful index of manuscripts referred to in the essays.

As is clear from the above overview, this is a rich and varied volume containing important new findings by major scholars of the Anglo-Saxon period and offering much to students of Old English and Anglo-Latin.

MARY SWAN

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Judy Quinn, Tarrin Wills, and Kate Heslop, eds, *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 18. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007. xiv + 456 pp., 7 b/w ill. ISBN 9782503525808. €80.00

In its breadth of content and in the distinction of its contributors, this collection is a fitting tribute to its honorand. The range of topics makes the collection more comprehensive in its coverage of Old Norse literature than disparate, and will present any scholar of the field with much of interest.

The opening section, 'Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Old Norse Literature', proceeds from Jürg Glauser's 'The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts' to Vésteinn Ólason's 'The Icelandic Saga as a Kind of Literature with Special Reference to its Representation of Reality'. Vésteinn ponders the division of *Íslendingasögur* into pre-classical, classical and post-classical forms by considering the relationship between the fantastic and the realistic in different

sagas. Meanwhile, in 'Political Echoes: Reading *Eyrbyggja saga* in Light of Contemporary Conflicts', Torfi Tulinius's brief but stimulating analysis of the Fróðá hauntings in *Eyrbyggja saga* suggests that the *dyradómr* echoes thirteenth-century debates over jurisdiction between *goðar* and clerics. Tulinius also notes possible connections between the Fróðá episode and the *Selkollu þáttir* in *Guðmundar saga Arasonar*, a text which has hitherto received little attention from students of Iceland's walking dead. Lars Lönnroth offers a concise survey of 'Structuralist Approaches to Saga Literature'. The section concludes with Diana Whaley's substantial study 'Reconstructing Skaldic Encomia: Discourse Features in Þjóðólfr's "Magnús Verses"'. This is of interest for its consideration of how many of Þjóðólfr's surviving skaldic stanzas about Magnús Ólafsson inn góði are *lausarvísur* and how many belong to longer poems. More important, however, is the fact that Whaley makes the Magnús verse a case study of the principles and methods whereby we can distinguish between fragmentary skaldic poems and *lausavísur*. This affords a significant contribution both to the editing and criticism of skaldic verse.

Section II, 'Old Norse Myth and Society', is one of the strongest in the collection, with a revisionist streak running through most contributions. Stefan Brink's 'How Uniform was the Old Norse Religion?' is in fact a revision and updating—provisional but still extremely useful—of our corpus of continental Scandinavian theophoric place-names. Aspects of Brink's discussion can be disputed: he asserts, for example, that place-names are 'unbiased' sources, representing 'the beliefs and actions of the general population, with no hidden agenda or deliberate program' (p. 106), which strikes me as far from self-evident. But Brink's maps, supported by a discussion and appendix of data, provide a much-needed replacement for the problematic offerings in Jan de Vries's *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*. A map of names mentioning Njörðr—which are discussed in the text but are mysteriously not mapped—would have been useful. Russell Poole's title, 'Myth and Ritual in the *Háleygjatal* of Eyvindr skáldaspillir', is somewhat misleading in that the article does not engage extensively with the myth and ritual school of interpretation to which it alludes, and it might be contrasted with Roberta Frank's recent critique of the scholarly tradition which sees the poem alluding, in Poole's words, 'to the ritual marriage of ruler to land' (p. 155).<sup>1</sup> In its detailed reassessment of how we should read stanzas

<sup>1</sup> 'The Lay of the Land in Skaldic Poetry', in *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*, ed. by Stephen O. Gloescki (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), pp. 175–96.

1-4 and 11-12 of the poem, however, the article is thorough and insightful, and Poole adds to the growing range of work which explores the degree of disjunction between the mythology described by Snorri Sturluson and that implied by his source-texts. In 'Famous Last Words: Monologue and Dialogue in *Hamðismál* and the Realization of Heroic Tale', John Hines makes a case that *Hamðismál* is a subtler and more interesting poem than has hitherto been assumed, arguing that the somewhat confusing order of stanzas in the manuscript can be read as an exploration of failures of communication, as the poem probes the relationship between speaking, acting and listening in a heroic world. Jens Peter Schjødt's 'Óðinn, Warriors, and Death' is a more traditionalist, syncretic approach to studying the worship of Óðinn.

Section III, 'Oral Traditions in Performance and Text', opens with Gísli Sigurðsson's fine '\*The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki'. His approaches here will be familiar to readers of his *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*,<sup>2</sup> but his extension of these to exploring the skein of attested traditions about Guðmundr is convincing, and the article will afford a convenient introduction to some of Gísli's methods to those who have not read his book. The rest of the section concerns poetry. Guðrún Nordal examines 'The Art of Poetry and the Sagas of Icelanders', partly by distinguishing between sagas according to how many verses they quote. Unfortunately, she counts verses only in absolute terms rather than relative to the length of the sagas in which they appear. Thus she groups *Eiríks saga rauða* (with 3 stanzas) among *Íslendingasögur* containing less than five stanzas, and *Njáls saga* (with 34 stanzas in the M-version) among those containing more than five, when *Eiríks saga* has about one stanza for every 2,650 words, whereas *Njáls saga* only has about one for every 2,950 words. Admittedly the knock-on problems for Nordal's analysis are not great, and she suggests several interesting lines of enquiry about patterns in the occurrence of verses, but it is startling that at no point in the editorial process was this fundamental problem picked up. Edith Marold also addresses some interesting issues, by asking whether '*Mansöngur*' is 'A Phantom Genre', analysing the evidence for the medieval meanings of the word, while Stephanie Würth's 'Skaldic Poetry and Performance', raises interesting questions about the extent

<sup>2</sup> Trans. by Nicholas Jones. The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2004), from *Túlkun Íslendingasagna í ljósi munnlegrar hefðar: Talgáta um aðferð*, Rit Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 56 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2002).

to which skaldic verse is to be read as literary, rather than oral, poetry.

Section IV, 'Vernacular and Latin Theories of Language', opens with the contribution to this volume which engages most directly with Clunies Ross's own work: 'Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods: Understanding *Alvíssmál*', by John Lindow. In a departure from scholarly tradition, this article does not much discuss the theories of language implicit in *Alvíssmál*, making its inclusion in Section IV odd: rather, Lindow develops Clunies Ross's concept of negative reciprocity in the sexual relations of the Æsir by asking why, in *Alvíssmál*, we find a dwarf in the role of unwelcome suitor. Reading the poem in its manuscript context, he argues that Alvíss's role echoes that of Óðinn as Þórr's antagonist. Mats Malm, aiming to develop Carol Clover's one-gender model of medieval Scandinavian society, raises the prospect of 'The Notion of Effeminate Language in Old Norse Literature'. Although Malm struggles to find clear evidence of such a register, his search for it is a worthwhile exercise. Kari Ellen Gade's evidence, in 'Ælfric in Iceland', for knowledge on Iceland of Ælfric's Old English grammar of Latin, also strikes me as rather weak, but she nonetheless raises an intriguing prospect. Fabrizio D. Raschella concludes the section with a survey of 'Old Icelandic Grammatical Literature: The Last Two Decades of Research (1983–2005)'.

Although the articles in section V, 'Prolonged Traditions', do not share the close thematic ties of some other sections, they nonetheless constitute some of the most interesting contributions. Geraldine Barnes examines 'The "Discourse of Counsel" and the "Translated" *Riddarasögur*', reading these in the context of the *Konungs skuggsjá*, and focusing on the prominence of useful female counsel in *Erex saga*, *Ívans saga* and the *Strengleikar* relative to their source-texts. Andrew Wawn's '*Vatnsdæla saga*: Visions and Versions' studies nineteenth-century responses to the saga; Wawn accords Halldór Briem's *Ingimundur gamli* consideration rare in the critical literature, but also examines how *Vatnsdæla saga* was handled by the English priest and folklorist Sabine Baring-Gould, who, on the basis of unpublished saga-translations, Wawn identifies as 'perhaps the foremost English scholar of Old Icelandic saga-literature in nineteenth-century Britain' (p. 400). M.J. Driscoll's study of Jón Oddsson Hjaltalin's *Sagan af Skanderbeg* in 'Skanderbeg: An Albanian Hero in Icelandic Clothing' affords a useful introduction to the manuscripts, origins and scope of this little-known saga from around 1800, along with other Icelandic responses to the story of Gjergj Kastrioti, or Skanderbeg.

Section V concludes with a bibliography of Margaret Clunies Ross's work by Anna Hansen. Judging what Clunies Ross will make of the implication that her

publication record is itself a 'prolongued tradition' is thankfully beyond the scope of this review, but the contribution makes a useful and fitting conclusion to a fine volume.

ALARIC HALL

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Rory McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005. x + 218 pp. ISBN 0754603911. £45.00

This is a contribution of unusual distinction to Chaucer studies. It is probably unique and certainly fills a little-noticed gap. All scholars know of Celtic sources for Middle English poetry, such as the beheading match in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the loathly lady in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Most of us then think of them no more. But Rory McTurk, who is at home in Middle English, Icelandic, and Irish, in contrast demonstrates how much can be said on Chaucer's links with Norse and Celtic material.

This he does in five chapters. The first deals with Chaucer and Snorri Sturluson as storytellers, making stimulating comparisons both of their encompassing narrative frameworks or macro-narrations, as also their micro-narrations. The latter include the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, where Chaucer tells of a priest who tells of a cock who tells of a dream which tells of a dream. This might be thought a *ne plus ultra* but has an equivalent in Snorri.

Chapter two discusses Chaucer's 'lost years' between 1361 and 1366 (when he showed up in Navarre). These may have been spent in Ireland. McTurk in any case explores parallels between Chaucer and Gerald of Wales, who visited Ireland in the twelfth century and whom Chaucer may have read. McTurk's thesis is strengthened (though he does not mention this) by the continued popularity of Gerald's books on Wales and Ireland, which survive in copies of the thirteenth and all succeeding centuries. Like Chaucer, Gerald is a perennial 'paperback writer' who has rarely been 'out of print'.

Chapter three turns from Latin writing to Irish itself, exploring shared incidents and narrative structures in *The House of Fame* and the *Canterbury Tales* on the one hand, and *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel* and *Colloquy of the Ancients* on the other. The fourth chapter continues with Irish vernacular literature. It examines the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and native sovereignty myths of hags who, when embraced by a hero, become fair young women. Besides



comparing Irish and English material with new thoroughness, it goes on to find analogies for both in *Laxdæla saga*, a romantic tale that yet has a political agenda.

Perhaps the most original and demanding chapter is the last, which makes a detailed analysis of metre in Irish and in *The Canterbury Tales*, suggesting that Chaucer perhaps took his characteristic five-foot line from *ógláchas*, then the almost unrecorded preserve of folk-poets, but a staple of Irish verse once the official bardic order collapsed in the seventeenth century. If McTurk's conclusions are right, he has made one of the most startling finds in the whole history of English prosody.

Studies on Chaucer as dense, novel, and compelling as this one rarely fall from the press. In his conclusion McTurk refers in mild terms to a Mediterranean emphasis or bias in Chaucer studies: Charles Muscatine and the French tradition, Alastair Minnis and Jill Mann on Continental Latin, Piero Boitani and the Italians, and so on. He seeks to complement (not displace) that by showing what Chaucerians will come across if for once they look not south but north-west. Despite McTurk's lifetime of teaching Norse and Irish, he thus leaves what is less a monument than a pioneer's map, which for years to come will allure bold explorers.

The narrower kind of critic may think McTurk, warmed by vigorous Irish patriotism, overplays his hand, even though his tone is moderate and reasonable throughout. Others will feel he could have gone farther. Future prospectors of Celtic (and no doubt Norse) terrains will thus find hints in points he does not mention. Amongst them are the following. The word *faulding* of the Shipman and Oxford students is from Irish *fallaing* 'cloak'. *Glascursion* in *The House of Fame* is not a Glamorgan bard (editors have been duped by modern forgeries) but may be Gwydion, a wizard in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. Those tales mention too a starling that brings a message from Ireland, perhaps a sibling of the indiscreet stare in *The Parlement of Foulys*. British Gospels in the *Man of Law's Tale* prove that Chaucer, like Gerald of Wales, knew the beauty of Celtic manuscripts. Kayrrud in the *Franklin's Tale* indicates the poet's eye for Breton colour. The Celtic languages also help elucidate his use of idiom, as with 'bear the bell' in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Though Dr Barry Windeatt of Cambridge maintains that Pandarus here compares Criseyde to a male sheep, Welsh poems prove that the allusion is to the birds of falconers, which to this day carry bells.

So, although it ranges widely, McTurk's book points to yet further regions of literature in Britain, Ireland, and beyond that await Chaucerians. It

suggests that a carefully-directed study of Chaucer and literatures in the Celtic languages (to say nothing of Norse) would be a very large and illuminating volume indeed.

ANDREW BREEZE

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Liz Herbert MacAvoy, ed., *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure*. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2008. xv + 239 pp. ISBN 0708321305. £75.

*Rhetoric of the Anchorhold* promises not only to examine 'from a variety of different perspectives the type of rhetoric which we have come to associate with the anchoritic experience during the Middle Ages' (p. 1), but also to consider the ways which 'the often complex webs of association embedded within the rhetoric and imagery of anchoritic literature' journeyed 'from the anchorhold into the wider community of the laity beyond its walls' (p.2). Thus, the text argues for the 'centrality of anchoritic spirituality' in the later Middle Ages (p. 2). *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold* is clearly meant to serve as a successor and companion volume to *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages* (University of Wales Press, 2005), edited by Liz Herbert MacAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards. Contributors include academics long-standing in the field such as the editor MacAvoy, Anne Savage, Bella Millet, and Michelle M. Sauer as well as more recent arrivals such as Laura Saetveit Miles and Fumiko Yoshikawa. Their contributions are organised into three categories, 'Public Performance', 'Private Performance', and 'Bodily Performance', that is, the 'place', 'space', and 'body' of the subtitle. Although these subdivisions provide a useful system for structuring the work, these terms and meanings could be more fully explained in the introduction.

The first section, 'Public Performance: Rhetoric and Space' investigates 'the interaction between rhetoric and specific location' (p. 12). Allison Clark, for example, examines the archival records of medieval Sienna in order to demonstrate the development of the 'eremitic vocation' from 'being primarily an individual pursuit in a loosely defined space, to a highly organized and even schematic representation of the eremitic communities' (p. 19). E.A. Jones's engaging scrutiny of the enclosure ceremony offers a detailed breakdown of its constituent elements as well as a brief discussion of whether the rhetoric of

enclosure matched its historical reality. Millet's article provides readers with a fascinating examination of the ways in which different anchoritic texts address their particular audiences (both actual and implied) as well as their potential for use by a broader range of readers, both religious and secular. Kate Gunn's essay serves as a useful companion piece, comparing the *Ancrene Wisse* with thirteenth-century pastoral literature.

The articles in the 'Private Performance: Rhetoric and Space' section seek to examine the production through rhetoric of 'an anchoritic space which is not only removed from the physical but is also deeply internal and private' (p. 12). Anna McHugh discusses images of enclosed space in the *Ancrene Wisse* in order to demonstrate that these inner spaces 'are speaking spaces where the anchoress and God can effect a rhetorical and intellectual reunion' (p. 93). Sauer examines the tensions that can exist for the anchorite between the concepts of privacy, a 'passive escape' into purely physical isolation, and solitude, an 'active choice' (p. 97). MacAvoy turns to the under-examined texts of the *Speculum Inclusorum* and the *Letter to a Bury Recluse* to investigate the differences in works directed at male and female anchorites, examining in particular the case of Christina Carpenter, an anchoress who abandoned her anchorhold and then chose to return to it. Laura Saetveit Miles examines the use of 'rhetoric of space' in the writings of Julian of Norwich and Bridget of Sweden to reveal how Julian, an anchoress, shares her visionary space with humanity, while Bridget, who had to remain in the world, creates a 'sealed, solitary enclosure' in which she can be alone with God (p. 137). In the final essay in this section, Yoshikawa offers a detailed linguistic study of the personal and impersonal uses of the verb 'think' in the writings of Julian of Norwich. This learned and ultimately convincing paper might with advantage have provided its less linguistically experienced readers with rather more explanation of its terminology.

The final section, 'Bodily Performance: Rhetoric and Corporeality', examines the relationship between 'bodies, affective response and an active bodily performance of anchoritic rhetoric' (p. 12). Anne Savage offers an intriguing, although somewhat speculative, discussion of the ways in which the experiences of anchoresses could inform and instruct lay-women as well as the way in which a 'distinctly feminine spirituality influenced views of the human body, and the theology of the incarnation as expressed in the vernacular' (p. 162). Robin Gilbank examines the connections between Aelred's *De Iesu Puero Duodenni* and his other works, notably the *De Institutione Inclusarum*, written for his sister, an anchoress. The final paper, by Karl-Heinz Steinmetz, examines the motif of the

*latro* (transgressor) in anchoritic texts, especially 'the triangular (or sometimes bipolar) constellation of Christ-*latro-eremita*' (p. 189). The volume concludes with a select bibliography of manuscript, primary, and secondary sources, as well as an appendix of letters concerning the enclosure of Christina Carpenter to accompany MacAvoy's article.

One of the strengths of the volume as a whole is the way that the various contributors frequently refer to each other's papers, thus rendering the volume far more unified than is sometimes the case with essay collections of this kind. However, some readers may feel that the collection as a whole is perhaps too centred upon English texts—although the contributions of Clark and Steinmetz are notable exceptions—and would have benefited from additional continental examples. Moreover, in spite of the strength of its individual entries, *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold* does not directly fulfill one of its stated objectives—that is, to demonstrate how the rhetoric of the anchorhold moved out into the wider medieval community. This may limit the usefulness of the volume to scholars outside the field. Although some of entries refer obliquely to the theme, and Savage addresses the issue specifically, the case for 'the centrality of anchoritic spirituality' in the later Middle Ages still remains to be made.

MARTA COBB

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John J. McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*. Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xi + 160 pp. ISBN 9780754607946. £50.

Early drama scholarship has for some years now been pressing for inclusiveness in the treatment of 'theatre'. When Records of Early English Drama (REED) was at the very beginning of its now majestic career, an external referee was critical of the time wasted, as he saw it, on solemnly entering the cleaning of streets as a matter of dramatic significance. There would now be no hesitation in including this street-cleaning, in preparation, as it was, for a procession and thus an essential part of understanding what procedures led up to this particular 'theatrical' event. But these were facts and, it can be shown, related to a 'theatrical performance'. John McGavin's book seeks to extend 'theatricality' beyond facts of this kind to the everyday world of human behaviour, the way human beings 'theatricalise' themselves and the way spectators perceive this 'theatricality' at the

time, and, taking it even further, to the re-presenting of that 'theatricality' in the chronicles and other narratives of a later period.

The book is structured around eight events which are examined in detail, within the context of numerous minor examples. Chapter 1, *The Public Scene*, centres on John Knox's tale of Sandie Furroure (c.1527), who turns the tables on his accusers in a staged trial, and on the many versions of the supposed plot to abduct Mary, Queen of Scots, and its repercussions, in 1561; chapter 2, *Enacting Revenge*, centres on John Bower's *Scotichronicon* account of the murder of Thomas Knayton by Robert Prendergest (1337-38); chapter 3, *Theatre of Departure*, contains discussion of three events: the Lanercost Chronicle's account of the departure of Alexander II, King of Scots, from Edinburgh Castle in 1241 (according to the *Chronicle*); Bower's account of the departure of Robert III from Haddington (sometime between 1395 and 1400, according to Bower's editors); and Bower's account of Robert III's departure from Scone (1390). Chapter 4 discusses James Melville's 'Diary' account of the lunatic Skipper Lindsay's intrusion into a planned entertainment in 1580, and Chapter 5 follows the *Itinerario* of Sir William Kerr in his visit to the 1624 Jubilee in Rome. An *Afterword* to some extent draws the earlier accounts together but also adds another, the young Sir Alexander Seton's oration, 1633, and his later theatrically-staged thesis defence in 1638.

Of these events, only three involve actual 'theatrical' performance, appropriated, ignored or presented: Robert III's departure from Scone is delayed by a mock harvest rite, Skipper Lindsay makes use of a space cleared for a performance, which is itself left undescribed, and Alexander Seton duly speaks his speech. In the first of these, McGavin alludes to a running concern in the book: did the events really happen? In this case it doesn't seem to me to matter. Bower, writing in the fourteenth century, relates an anecdote made special by its use of a 'theatrical' form, the harvest home procession. It could not be used by itself as evidence of a harvest rite of this kind existing in Scotland in the fourteenth century, but it is excellent evidence that such was familiar when Bower was writing in the 1440s and would be understood by his readers. And, perhaps most important, it makes for a fascinating anecdote. The account of Skipper Lindsay's 'sermon/confession' is also fascinating, not just because of its intrinsic interest but also because of the superb picture it gives of the context of the coming performance: the nature of the space, the expectancy, the positioning of the spectators, the differing effects of Lindsay's words on individuals, as McGavin rightly comments here and later (p.118).

I have varying difficulties with the other 'theatrical' events—not with their interest, which is considerable, but with their 'theatricality'. To take one example: the departure of Robert III from Haddington. A butcher stops the king from leaving by complaining of the non-payment of money owed to him. The king 'was mounting his horse with his foot in the stirrup when a poor butcher raised a commotion asking for an audience and entreating that he withdraw his foot'. The debt is duly settled. McGavin stresses the significance of the liminality of the event—the progress interrupted—the 'heightened, even symbolic, gesture' (grabbing reins in the case of the previous example, the widow at Alexander II's departure (pp.64-5), placing a foot in the stirrup in Robert III's case), as contributing to the 'mimesis of this staged event' (p.67). But, surely, as someone is leaving is the last moment to get an unpaid debt settled. Hardly a 'liminal' moment except in the most ordinary sense. Grabbing the reins is a way of stopping the departure (perhaps not the most tactful), and setting one's foot in the stirrup is a necessary preparation for riding off. Bower gives the moment something of a folk-tale feel with the 'entreating that he withdraw his foot [from the stirrup]' but it doesn't seem to me to make it 'staged'. 'Shaped', yes, 'heightened', yes, but not, for me, 'theatrical'.

The chapter centred on Sir William Kerr's journey to Rome, I found the least satisfying as far as the exploration of the 'theatrical' is concerned, but one of the most interesting for its discussion of a young Scot's experience of what is in effect an early grand tour, though focussed on the Jubilee. It interestingly explores the spectator's reaction to a number of new experiences: pictures, sculptures, fountains, people, and the occasional theatrical event: a tournament or a procession (pp.124-5). But, to me a little oddly, it also includes theatrical events which he did not see, royal entries, plays (pp.112-19). The value is the description and exploration of Kerr's experiences and reactions in general, which, it seems to me, have to be rather forced to serve a 'theatrical' end.

One more detail: the book aims to focus on 'instances where a chronicle text has left us a record of something [...] specially displayed to spectators'; 'The textual record implicitly or, more often, explicitly acknowledges the value of the display for contemplation by spectators, whether these were present at the original event or were to behold the spectacle at second hand through the textual lens of the recorder' (p.2). The most intriguing moment of the Knayton/Prendergest affair is the reported greeting before the fatal thrust: 'Ave, Rabita' or 'Ave, *scilicet*, Rabita'. Was there any display to spectators at the time of the attack? Certainly the murder must have been seen by those around but did anyone hear Prendergest say

'Ave, Rabita'? Did he hiss it through closed teeth in Knayton's ear? (Single spectator who didn't live to profit from it.) Did he call attention to it by crying it out as he thrust the knife in? (Multiple spectatorship.) Did someone mishear and so misreport what he said? (Unreliable witness.) On the other hand, if, as is likely, he was speaking English, did he say, 'Greetings, rabbit!', or was he so carried away that he accidentally dropped into a corruption of Judas's greeting to Christ? Did he actually say it at all? (Bower's invention—for what purpose?) And if he did say it, and in Latin, what did he mean? Did he perhaps say '*rabida*' ('brawler, madman'—very common *t/d* variation and the gender slipping in the heat of the moment—or an additional insult)? Or is Bower reporting that he said 'Ave' *rabide* (madly/wildly). *Scilicet* usually means something more like 'namely'. Could Bower have been specifying that when Prendergest said 'Ave' he was mad with rage? Bower's anti-English tale seems at first to be obvious, but the inclusion of these puzzling words complicates it. Is he really putting into Prendergest's mouth a version of Judas's betrayal moment? 'Did the events really happen' begins to become more important. Is this literary shaping rather than the 'theatricality' of everyday life?

In the Introduction to this intriguing and thought-demanding book, John McGavin tells the story of an experience of his own, a multi-layered account, as a way of examining possible approaches to the narratives of the chronicles. The tale is of a contretemps between a bus-driver and a motorist. As with Knayton and Prendergest there is a brief moment of speech embedded in the story. Before the motorist punches the bus-driver he is heard to say, 'Do you know Mr Pope?', though we are not told who reported this. After reading the whole book, I came back to this statement with new interest. Did the motorist actually say not 'Mr Pope' but 'Mr Poke', so using an old schoolboy trick of the 'Ties up' variety, before poking the bus-driver on the nose afterwards? Or am I merely adding another layer of rationalisation? McGavin admits that there is no way that the reader can know whether the story is true. I couldn't help then wondering what evidence there was that the story *was* true. I had no reason to doubt it except for one piece of circumstantial detail: he was on his way to a *Medieval English Theatre* meeting in a town he declines to name, and later it appears that the date was 1975 (p.11). But the first *METH* meeting was in Lancaster in 1979 and I have a photo showing that John McGavin was there. Similar doubt clusters round each chronicle narrative. I have to confess that I have gone round in circles trying to decide how important it is to know that an event actually happened and in the way described in the chronicle. If it didn't occur in reality then we are looking simply at literary

constructs used for mainly propaganda purposes, anti-English, anti-individual, and not at the presentation of an actual event. 'The transmissory process of witnessing, which turns theatrical event into chronicle narrative in order to permit it to be revisualized, raises intriguing questions' (p.1). There is no doubt about the intriguing questions, but considerable doubt in my mind about the original 'theatricality' of many of the events. But anyone interested (and there is plenty to interest) should read John McGavin's book and decide for themselves.

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Philip Butterworth, ed., *The Narrator, The Expositor, and the Prompter in European Medieval Theatre*. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 17. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007. xiv + 346 pp. 13 b/w illustrations. ISBN 2503525792. €80.

The attitudes of publishers, research assessors, and book buyers to volumes of themed essays may change over time, but there should always be a place for an excellent collection such as this. Philip Butterworth's 'Introduction' is written with the confidence of a man who knows that the 'device' of the book can be laid bare: he has a fine team of scholars, each of whom is on good form, and the volume has a clear mandate, its harmony showing up in explicit, unforced cross-referencing between the contributors, and in the critical terms and occasional secondary sources which they share despite the diversity of their material. But the volume's quality also owes much to the determination of editor, contributors, and publisher genuinely to assist the reader—an appropriate goal for a work which deals with the mediating theatrical functions of narrator, expositor and prompter. The essays are well grouped (and the grouping explained), the sequence permitting an increasingly lateral comprehension of the central topic. Quoted material is both generous and always translated; all notes are immediately available at the foot of the page; key illustrations are there to help comprehension rather than to ornament. Such volumes rarely, if ever, have indexes, but one feels the lack particularly in this case, where the collection manages to come closer than most to the condition of a monograph, and yet also to achieve broader value as an introduction to a number of European dramatic genres and the literary, liturgical, and artistic sources which may have informed them.

The critical energy, indeed 'attack', shown in the individual contributions is



especially welcome in a set of essays where punctilious scholarship is evident, and each contributor seems to feel responsibility for increasing understanding of their field in an international readership. These are not 'safe' studies, but creative, substantial and reflective pieces, which are unafraid to challenge conventional ideas, terminology, or traditional conceptions of play, and which seek out the irregular, unusual, and frankly baffling as well as explaining the normative. Many of the contributors engage with the notion of mimesis itself. This was inevitable, given the book's focus on figures who layer the theatrical experience because they exist both inside and outside the action, constructing or permeating boundaries between the audience and what is seen. Understood best through the functions they perform, these mediating figures are nonetheless variously characterised (not necessarily explicitly) as fools, messengers, vices, priests, preachers, biblical figures, gospel writers, historical writers, even as a king, and may achieve a degree of individual personality in context, if they do not already have it indicated by their historical identity. They gloss, narrate, and manage the spectator's experience of theatrical pace, time and space; sometimes pointing up action; sometimes covering inaction. They may abridge or amplify, authorise or apologise or even offer alternative readings. They may seem distant from the audience or emerge as its representative. Even in the role of prompter, they can step beyond mere practicality to acquire a major theatrical presence, as in cases of prompting done in full view of the audience, though here there are secondary issues about how to interpret visual records: for example, if a character is shown to be semi-visible in a picture, one will sometimes find it hard to prove that that semi-visibility was really part of an audience's experience, and has not been offered by the artist to explain a theatrical function to the picture's viewer. Butterworth's closing essay takes the reader into strange theatrical territory, where the prompter, shadowing the actor, may well have been the originator of *every* line, which was then passed on to the spectator. In this case, as in several others, the volume faces up to the hard questions of practical dramaturgy, insisting that effects be visualised, the self-censoring paradoxes of audience 'belief' be acknowledged, and the alterity of early theatre be exactly measured.

The contributors are careful to attend to the auspices of performance, and, where they are known, to the specific festive occasions which determined the expositors' precise connection to the audience. They are alert to generic parallels and boundaries—one of the strongest features of this fine book. Indeed these essays frequently constitute a valuable introduction for anyone trying to understand the distinguishing features of the genres they select. Some

contributors admirably include prosody in their critical toolbox, but there is a general attention to drama as a form involving a range of media and styles, in changing association with each other: pictures, tableau, mimes, quoted or ventriloquised speech, animate and inanimate 'actors', and so on. Although the focus of the book is on the mediating figures themselves and their function, these essays thus offer assistance for the study of reception and spectatorship, not least because of their frequent attentiveness to the audience experience.

As regards coverage, the collection includes studies of drama from the Low Countries (an essay from Elsa Strietman which critically anchors the collection), France (Peter Happé, Alan Hindley, Mario Longtin), Germany (Peter Happé), Poland (Jolanta Rzegocka), Italy (Nerida Newbigin, John McKinnell), Spain (Max Harris), England (Milla Cozart Riggio, Tom Pettit, Christine Dymkowski, Peter Meredith, David Mills), and Cornwall (Philip Butterworth). The chronological span of the book is very great and like the best studies of early drama, it effortlessly bridges the medieval and early-modern, showing how this division, which is only now being properly questioned in English critical tradition, has much less meaning in other contexts. Nonetheless, it faces up to that tradition, cleverly managing it through two essays on Shakespeare which direct attention towards his invocation of older forms and figures.

I have not singled out individual contributors in this review: all of them participate in the virtues I have described, and deserve to share the thanks of those who would understand early drama. One senses that this book was a labour of love, for many of the contributors and in different respects. Certainly it conveys love of theatre itself and its variegated, challenging value for the past communities which produced it, but also, in a sense, the high quality of the contributions and of the editing reveal the strength and appealing internationalism of the discipline itself. As an example of harmonious cultural work which can bring together a diverse community of scholars, this fine book is a tribute to the field of early theatre, and is appropriately dedicated to the memory of Lynette R. Muir, Professor of French at the University of Leeds.

JOHN J. MCGAVIN

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David Clark and Carl Phelpstead, eds, *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007. 151 pp. ISBN 9780903521765. £10.00.

The processes and motivations underlying the act of making new, of refashioning the past to make it fit for the contemporary, are many and varied. Aesthetic, moral and ideological judgements may all come into play. In the case of a widening enthusiasm for the literary and cultural heritage that harked back to a north European, pre-Christian era, an enthusiasm which gathered pace from the middle of the eighteenth century, the urge to make new was given impetus by the sheer volume of textual and material evidence that steadily became available; most notably, the eddas and sagas set down in medieval Iceland. Exactly how scholars and artists interpreted and invested significance in this material is what this collection of essays sets out to reveal. Of the eight essays, seven are concerned with the impact that northern antiquity had on the English speaking world, while the other concerns a more worrying reception scenario that arose in Germany from the latter part of the nineteenth century. The essays are, as much as is possible, sequenced according to their chronological focus, thus allowing the reader to accumulate an understanding of the historical processes by which Old Norse myth, legend and saga have taken their place in the wider vistas of literary and cultural history.

Although Old Norse literature attracted a much greater readership across Europe from 1755 onwards through the studies of Paul Henri Mallet (translated from the French into English by Thomas Percy in 1770), one point that emerges from Alison Finlay's study of the eddic translations of Thomas Gray is that men of letters had long had access to seventeenth-century Latin versions of Old Norse texts. Gray may have gained inspiration from the gothic sublime that Mallet's work promoted for his 'interpretations' of *Baldrs draumr* (his 'Descent of Odin') and *Darraðarljóð* (his 'The Fatal Sisters'), but he was also directly indebted to the Scandinavian scholarship of the Enlightenment. Similarly, as Carolyn Larrington notes in her study of the English translations of the *Poetic Edda*, 'user-friendly' Latin translations and learned commentaries by Scandinavian scholars often remained an essential supplement for those searching for guidance on the complexities of northern myth. Yet a lack of knowledge of the vernacular, as was the case with Amos Cottle's stirring renditions of eddic verse in 1797, could lead to considerable error. While Cottle's successor, the more linguistically accomplished William Herbert, could claim greater fidelity, the matter of

decorum, of perceived shortcomings in the artistry of the poems or vulgarities deemed inappropriate to the day, was often what governed translators of the nineteenth century. It took some considerable revision to make the harsh gutturals of northern mythico-legendary verse conform in taste, style and the apparatus of meaning to the sensibilities of those schooled in classical antiquity. If translators of more recent decades have been less distracted by such concerns, the balancing act between faithfulness and artistry has never yet been performed to everyone's satisfaction. As Larrington observes, 'translations are not for all time, but simply for their own particular age' (p. 40).

As is well known, translating Icelandic sagas was one of the ruling passions of the prolific Victorian polymath William Morris. Yet, for Morris, this did not mean mimicking saga style, for, as David Ashurst points out in his examination of Morris's infatuation with the Völsung legend, his approach was 'primarily and unabashedly one of re-creation, of refashioning received material' (p. 43). Mentored in Old Norse grammar and literature by the Icelandic Eiríkr Magnússon, Morris came to the Völsungs, in both eddas and saga, through Eiríkr's coaching on *Laxdæla saga*, which Morris refashioned and published as the verse novel 'The Lovers of Gudrun' in 1870. Although Morris's assessment of *Völsunga saga* was not love at first sight—perhaps the misery of Morris's personal life instilled in him a more than customary identification with love triangles—it was not long before he was completely smitten, declaring that aspects of the saga 'touch me more than anything I have met with in literature' and later regarding the whole as 'the grandest tale that was ever told'. The result, also in 1870, was a translation of the saga, replete with eddic interpolations and, in a sense, remastered to sit comfortably with the literary taste of a Victorian readership; then, in 1877, another verse novel, this time with the tragic tale of Sigurd as its focus. It is to this now little known but remarkable accomplishment that Ashurst devotes the latter half of his essay, revealing an eschatological design to the poem that fittingly combines Victorian melancholia with the tragic heroic grandeur of the saga.

As Matthew Townend indicates, it was the absence of text validating the heroic spirit of the old north, rather than the presence of text affirming it, that concerned the late Victorian denizens of what was once a Viking colony in the English Lake District. Surrounded by the material evidence of old settlements and seeing a direct parallel between the ninth-century settlement of Iceland and the tenth-century colonisation of Cumbria, W.G. Collingwood and Charles Arundel Parker set themselves the task of recapturing (or 'recording') the trials and

tribulations of Lakeland Vikings in learned saga style. It was, as Collingwood asserted, an undertaking in which 'scenery and story' were to be united, albeit that, in the end, and for all their topographical and linguistically contextual rigour, these pseudo-sagas 'could never be anything other than wistful and imaginative antiquarianism' (p. 78). Less parochial were the ambitions of J.R.R. Tolkien, who famously set out to deliver 'a mythology for England'. The extent to which Tolkien drew on Old Norse-Icelandic literary sources is well known but, as Dimitra Fimi's essay reveals, less well known is Tolkien's creative employment of the material culture of medieval Scandinavia—actual and imagined. Tolkien's understanding of Scandinavian archaeology most probably derived from his friendship with E.V. Gordon, which was initially forged during their time together at the University of Leeds in the 1920s. Tolkien's depiction of the customs of the ancient peoples of Numenor and their descendents in Gondor, in both the *Simarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, would appear to have been directly influenced by his knowledge of Viking ship burials, something about which Gordon had particular expertise. Somewhat more imaginative and, it is admitted, somewhat more confused is Tolkien's description of the helmetry of the royal houses of Gondor, which is a curious mix of notions about ancient Egypt and images of the headgear of valkyries in romantic art. As Fimi points out, even later film adaptors were at pains to draw a veil over this particular fancy.

Fantasising about the material culture of ancient Scandinavia could, however, have profoundly disturbing consequences, especially when the fantasy is believed to be, and is presented as, the truth. Such was the case among some in Germany from the late nineteenth century, who, as Heather O'Donoghue explains, asserted the magical properties of runes and set about showing how their power could be harnessed in gymnastic exercises and other symbolic rites. Ariosophists, such as Guido von List and Friedrich Bernhard Marby, drew on some of the more wild speculations of early Scandinavian scholars and asserted, amongst other things, that the runic alphabet was nothing less than a record of the tongue of Babel, the word of God that the early popes had conspired to efface and substitute with the Roman alphabet. So, by such adventitious arguments, runes were touted as an expression of the primary genius of the German peoples. These ideas stoked Arian supremacist notions, albeit that eventually even the fascists thought that Marby had gone too far and had so brought their movement into disrepute. What is telling here is that making Old Norse new could have a relatively benign effect amongst a people who were confident of their culture and their place in the world, as was clearly the case with the British, but among those of insecure and anxious

nations, there was sufficient strangeness and wonder in it all to give rise to some extremely ugly propositions.

Rewriting the past for ideological purposes was also the business of the Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown and his collaborator and neighbour, the composer Peter Maxwell Davies. In this case, as Carl Phelpstead reveals, the rewrite concerned the life of Magnús, the patron saint of Orkney. While the chief account of Magnús's life, *Orkneyinga saga*, tells of his chastity, his unwillingness to take arms against the Welsh, opting instead to reach for his Psalter and chant through the hostilities, his slaughter at the hands of his cousin in 1117 and the miracles that followed this 'martyrdom', it also relates how Magnús himself was not above murdering cousins and, at other times, burning enemies inside their own homes. For Mackay Brown and Maxwell Davies, however, these less saintly attributes were of arbitrary significance and, alongside much other laundering of Magnús's 'pacifist' career, they are excised from both Mackay Brown's hagiographic novel, *Magnus* (1973), and Maxwell Davies's subsequent Mackay Brown-inspired opera *The Martyrdom of Magnus* (1977). As Phelpstead remarks, this universalised idealisation of the old Viking warrior is ironic, for Mackay Brown himself had once complained that the truth about the man was hard to access because 'his monkish biographer had smudged the outline with conventional pious platitudes' (p.128).

The final essay in the collection looks not at instances of the present reaching into the past in order to fashion something new but at examples in fiction where the past is seen to reach into the present, provoking equivalent transformations. David Clark focuses his study on a range of novels for children, wherein portals to the world of the Norse gods or the Vikings provide authors with the opportunity to examine the order and values of their young protagonists' lives. Norse myth let loose in the modern world, suggests Clark, triggers a 'defamiliarisation' with the banalities of the present, which in turn provokes a reassessment of that which ordinarily had seemed beyond question. It is a fitting end to a fascinating and exceptionally coherent collection of essays, for as is apparent throughout, when something is made new, much else, for better or worse, is forced to react in order to give it due accommodation. It is toward this rebalancing that *Old Norse Made New* helpfully contributes.

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