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The Gates of Hell: Invasion and Damnation in an Anonymous Old English Easter Vigil Homily

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In an Easter homily from the first series of his *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric of Eynsham follows his principal source — Gregory the Great's *Homilia XXI in Evangelia* — in drawing a typological link between Christ's harrowing of hell and Sampson's escape from the besieged city of Gaza (Judges 16.1–3).¹ As Sampson disdains to leave Gaza empty-handed, carrying with him the very gates of the city, so too Christ breaks down the doors of hell and returns to heaven with the souls of the righteous as his spoils.² In his adaptation of this passage, however, Ælfric builds upon the typological connection established by Gregory, moving towards a moral or tropological conclusion:

For ðan þe ure hælend crist tobræc hellegatu. & generode adam & euan & his gecorenan of heora cynne. and freolice of deaðe aras & hi samod: & astah to heofonum. þa manfullan he let beon bæftan to þam ecum witum & is nu hellegeat belocen rihtwisum mannum. & æfre open unrihtwisum. (ll. 165–70)

Therefore our Saviour Christ broke down the gates of hell and redeemed Adam and Eve and His chosen of their descendants, and rose freely from death together with them, and

¹ Cited from 'XV *Dominica Pascae*', in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the First Series: Text*, ed. by Peter Clemoes, Early English Text Society, s. s., 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 299–306. Translations are my own throughout. On Ælfric's use of Gregory in this homily, see M. R. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, Early English Text Society, s. s., 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 119–27. Ælfric offers the same interpretation in his translation-cum-commentary on the Book of Judges (*The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo: Volume One: Introduction and Text*, ed. by Richard Marsden, Early English Text Society, o. s., 330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 190–200 (p. 198, ll. 253–66)). A similar typological understanding of the escape from Gaza is suggested by the representation of this scene on two stone monuments from the ninth century: the Cundall-Aldborough cross shaft and the Masham column. See further, Jane Hawkes, 'Anglo-Saxon Sculpture: Questions of Context', in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. by Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 204–15 (pp. 206–11).

² Gregory, *Homilia XXI in Gregorius Magnus. Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. by Raymond Étaix, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 173–79 (ll. 149–54): 'Samson uero nocte media non solum exiit, sed etiam portas tulit, quia uidelicet Redemptor noster ante lucem resurgens, non solum liber de inferno exiit, sed ipsa etiam inferni claustra destruxit. Portas tulit et montis uerticem subiit, quia resurgendo claustra inferni abstulit et ascendendo caelorum regna penetrauit' ('Truly, Sampson not only went out in the middle of the night, but also carried off the gates, for our redeemer, rising before daybreak, not only went out free from hell, but also destroyed the very gates of hell. He carried off the gates and went to the summit of the hill, because by rising he carried off the gates of hell and by ascending he entered the kingdom of heaven.').

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ascended to heaven. He allowed the sinful to remain behind in that eternal torment, and the gate of hell is now locked for righteous men, and ever open for the unrighteous.

Ælfric's insistence that only the righteous were redeemed during the harrowing may have been intended to clarify a point of doctrine left potentially ambiguous in Gregory's Latin.³ Ælfric's final comment, however, shifts the focus of the homily from an understanding of the harrowing as a discreet moment in salvation history to a recognition of its ongoing moral significance for humanity in the present.⁴ The indeterminacy of the simultaneously open and closed gates of hell can be resolved only at the personal level, in accordance with each individual's moral standing.

Extending Gregory's typology in this way, Ælfric draws upon the potentially rich signification of gates and doorways as architectural features. The typological connection to Sampson's escape from Gaza presents the harrowing in terms of a violent escape from captivity, focusing attention on egress from a bound and defended space. Christ's destruction of these gates thus dramatizes an instance of failed containment, in which the enforced openness of the entrance to hell is positively valued. However, as Ælfric's focus shifts from historical past to tropological present, and from a focus on egress to a focus on ingress, the signification of the gates of hell is inverted, such that the impenetrability of hell as an enclosure is valorised and the final image of the open gates of hell is made to carry negative moral connotations.

The central importance that the gates of hell assume in Ælfric's brief explication of the harrowing should not perhaps be surprising. Anglo-Saxon depictions of hell are not generally rich in architectural details, tending to focus instead upon the pain and torment inflicted therein. The gates of hell do, however, feature prominently in depictions of the infernal regions, especially in contexts which interpret the torments of hell in terms of imprisonment and containment.⁵ As we have seen already in this issue, Anglo-Saxon writers were keenly aware of the essentially liminal nature of gates and doorways as thresholds on the boundary between defined spaces.⁶ My concern in this paper is, however, less with the liminality of gateways than with their multivalency; their potential to allow or to deny movement across a threshold can fundamentally define the nature of the space beyond a doorway — a fact which is particularly evident in vernacular Anglo-Saxon depictions of hell. In the absence of detailed depictions of other architectural features such as walls and buildings, it is frequently upon the image of these gates that the conception of hell as a bound space rests. With the example of Ælfric's account in mind, therefore, the present article will focus upon the depiction of the gates of hell in one anonymous Old English Easter homily, examining how the presentation of the gates of hell in this text exploits the potential of doors and doorways to signify in multiple ways, and how this impacts upon the spatial understanding of hell as a bound space. The homily I focus on has received little attention and less praise from modern readers, perhaps not unreasonably.⁷ In the context of the current collection of essays, however, it is worth stressing the extent to which even so apparently unsophisticated a text can be seen to engage meaningfully with the signification of architectural representation.

³ Godden, *Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, p. 126.

⁴ Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), p. 23.

⁵ Lori Ann Garner, *Structuring Spaces: Oral Poetics and Architecture in Early Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), pp. 83–85.

⁶ See the above article by Karl Kinsella. See also Johanna Kramer, *Between Earth and Heaven: Liminality and the Ascension of Christ in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 107–46.

⁷ According to Jackson J. Campbell, the anonymous Anglo-Saxon homilist was 'a writer of very minor talent' and

The homily in question survives in two late copies. The earlier of the two is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41, a famous manuscript containing principally a copy of the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, executed in a hand dated to the first half of the eleventh century.⁸ A large-scale and handsome volume, the manuscript seems to have been intended as a high-status production. But already by the mid-eleventh century, use was made of the generous margins left by the original design of the manuscript, into which were copied some seventeen texts of varying lengths — in both Latin and Old English — by a scribe writing in an angular hand distinct from either of those in which the *Old English Bede* was copied.⁹ The present homily is one of these, copied into the margins of pages 295–301 of the manuscript (Cameron no. B8.5.3.2).¹⁰ This text of the homily was edited by William Hulme in 1904.¹¹ However, Hulme seems to have been unaware of the existence of a second, slightly shorter, copy of the homily which occupies pages 72–75 of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 303, a twelfth-century collection of homilies, mostly by Ælfric (Cameron no. B8.5.3.3).¹² This second version of the homily has never yet been independently edited, although its text is collated with that of CCCC MS 41 in the edition of the latter text of the homily in an unpublished dissertation by Jocelyn Price.¹³

Apparent scribal errors and corrections indicate that both surviving texts were copied from pre-existing manuscript copies, but Price's study of the differences between the two texts suggests that, whilst these exemplars were similar in most details, the surviving copies bear witness to distinct recensions of the homily.¹⁴ It is possible, then, that the homily — which for convenience I shall refer to as the 'Corpus homily' — enjoyed a longer and more diverse circulation than these two late witnesses would seem to suggest.¹⁵ The homily opens with a bookish reference to certain unnamed volumes from which the contents of the homily have apparently been drawn: 'her sagað an þissum bocum' ('it says here in these books', p. 610, l. 1). This deictic reference to 'þissum bocum' reflects something of a formulaic opening in vernacular homilies, but the frequency with which the Corpus homily refers to a putative textual source — especially in its opening section ('her sægeð', p. 610, l. 13, p. 611, l. 20; 'hit

the homily itself is 'rather poorly written': 'To Hell and Back: Latin Tradition and Literary use of the "Descensus ad Inferos" in Old English', *Viator*, 13 (1982), 107–58 (pp. 141–42). Cf. Antonette di Paolo Healey, 'Anglo-Saxon Use of the Apocryphal Gospel', in *The Anglo-Saxons: Synthesis and Achievement*, ed. by J. Douglas Woods and David A. E. Pelteret (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985), pp. 93–104 (pp. 99–100).

⁸ N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), no. 32. Cf. Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), no. 39.

⁹ For an attempt to unravel the complex sequence of marginal additions to the manuscript, see Thomas A. Bredehoft, 'Filling the Margins of CCCC 41: Textual Space and a Developing Archive', *Review of English Studies*, n. s., 57 (2006), 721–32.

¹⁰ Cameron numbers are cited from Angus Cameron, 'A List of Old English Texts', in *A Plan for the Dictionary of Old English*, ed. by R. Frank and A. Cameron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 25–306.

¹¹ William H. Hulme, 'The Old English Gospel of Nicodemus', *Modern Philology*, 1 (1904), 579–614. The text is cited from this edition.

¹² Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 57.

¹³ Jocelyn M. Price, 'An Edition of the Anonymous Old English "Harrowing of Hell" Homily found in the margins of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 41, pp. 295–301' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2004). This edition came to my attention only in the final stages of preparing this article. I have, however, attempted to take account of Price's work in what follows.

¹⁴ Price, 'Edition', pp. 192–99.

¹⁵ Price, 'Edition', pp. 200–05.

sagað', p. 610, ll. 9, 11; 'cwæð se writtere', p. 611, l. 31) — seems unusually insistent.¹⁶ It is tempting to assume that these references indicate the existence of one or more direct textual model(s) for all or part of the Corpus homily, either in the vernacular, or perhaps more likely in Latin. The identification of any such source has, however, proved problematic, and the Corpus homily remains, I think, unique in the surviving record for its precise combination of details and motifs, the origins of which are not to be found in any one single surviving source.¹⁷

In the later CCCC MS 303 copy, the homily is identified by the Latin rubric *Sermo in resurrectione domini* ('Sermon on the Resurrection of Our Lord'). Together with its opening statement that Christ's resurrection took place 'on ðas niht [...] þe nu to niht wæs' ('on that night which was now tonight', p. 610, ll. 2–3), this clearly indicates that the homily was intended for delivery at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. No such descriptive rubric is attached to the text in the earlier copy in CCCC MS 41, but the homily is preceded in this manuscript by a Latin quotation from Psalm 117.24 ('haec est dies quam fecit Dominus exultemus et laetemur in ea' ['this is the day which the Lord hath made: let us be glad and rejoice therein']), the text of which was used as a gradual in the liturgy for Holy Week. The homily does not, however, address the events of the resurrection as recorded in the canonical Gospels. Rather, the homily consists of a dramatic account of the harrowing of hell, followed at greater length by an account of the last days and of the terrors of judgement day.

Given its subject matter, the appearance of the gates of hell as a dominant image in the Corpus homily might not be surprising. Yet the extent to which the entrance to hell features as the focal point of dramatic action in this text is nevertheless striking. Structurally, the gates of hell perform an enveloping function, appearing prominently in the opening and closing episodes of the homily and providing a basic thematic unity that connects the different parts of the text. However, a comparison of the contrasting ways in which these features are presented across the homily as whole suggests an attentiveness to their potential for multiple signification that recalls that evident in Ælfric's Easter homily.

Christ's Entry into Hell

The harrowing of hell is, of course, a highly appropriate topic for an Easter homily, and points of connection between the celebration of Christ's victory in hell and the liturgy of the Easter Vigil in particular make this an especially fitting subject for the Corpus homily.¹⁸ In his resurrection at Easter, Christ breaks out of hell, releasing in the process the righteous

¹⁶ For variants of this formulaic opening, see, for example, Vercelli homilies X and XV. A closer parallel for the insistent reference to a source in the Corpus homily might be found, however, in Vercelli homily IX, in which the opening reference to 'þeos halige boc' ('this holy book', l. 1) is recalled repeatedly throughout the text (ll. 32, 84, 115, 144, 214), though no direct source for the homily has been identified. The Vercelli homilies are cited by line number from *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. by D. G. Scragg, Early English Text Society, o. s., 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). The possibility that the deictic references in the Corpus homily might have been self-referential and performative, or that they might have come to be understood in this way, is perhaps suggested by the evidence of the CCCC MS 303 copy of the text, in which the opening formula is rendered singular rather than plural ('her segh on þissere boc', p. 72, l. 34) and in which an exhortative aside — not present in the CCCC MS 41 text — directs the audience: 'understandeð þæt ge beforan eow rædan geherað' ('understand that which you hear read before you', p. 74, ll. 29–30).

¹⁷ Cf. Campbell, 'To Hell and Back', pp. 141–42; Price, 'Edition', pp. 135–87.

¹⁸ Tamburr, *Harrowing of Hell*, pp. 5–10; M. Bradford Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 139–41.

souls imprisoned within. As the typological link to Sampson's escape from Gaza suggests, this release is frequently presented as a kind of gaol break in patristic and early medieval literature. Yet accounts of the harrowing are also, of course, narratives of invasion: a breaking in as well as a breaking out. So much is evident from even a cursory examination of the impressive miniature of the harrowing contained in the mid-eleventh century Tiberius Psalter (London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C. vi, fol. 14^r (figure 1). Looking at this miniature, one's eye is immediately drawn to the massive figure of Christ, apparently stooping down to lift the righteous from the jaws of a gaping hell-mouth. Despite the benevolence that this pose suggests, something of the violence of the Harrowing is also evident in the miniature. In the foreground, Christ tramples upon the captive figure of Satan, and behind and to the left of him we see the door of hell, standing open, at an angle that seems to suggest that it has been wrenched violently off its hinges.¹⁹ Images such as this one, which place emphasis on the ferocity and sense of invasion associated with the harrowing, suggest an alternative way of conceiving of hell as a bound space. They show how, rather than as an oppressive, prison-like enclosure, hell might be conceived in terms of a stronghold: a place defended from within, equipped with doors whose purpose is not only to keep its inhabitants in, but also to keep invaders out. It is a conception that imagines the enclosure of hell not as punitive, but as protective.

This is an aspect of the harrowing that is given particular prominence in the narrative account of the Corpus homily:

Men þa leofestan, her sagað an þissum bocum ymbe ða miclan gewird þe to ðisse nihte wearð: þæt ure Drihten, Hælend Crist, on ðas niht gewearð, þe nu to niht wæs, þæt he of deaðe aras to midre nihte, and he astah niðer to helwarum to þan, þæt he wolde þa helle bereafian, and swa gedyde, and þæt ealdor deoful oferswiðan. And hit wearð him cuðlice ætiwed þæt he swa wolde gedon. Þæt dioful is geciged and nemned Satanas, þæt is, ealdor deoful inwite; and he rixað and wunað in helle nypewardre. Vre Drihten astah in ða helle to ðan, þæt he wolde þa halga saula þanon generian. Hit sagað þæt þa comon manige men to hellegatum, and þa men wæron atelice and swiðe laðlice gewordene. And hit sagað þæt ða men wæron þære helle and ðara deofla geatweardas, þæt hi woldon þa helle belucan wið uris Drihtenes fore and wið his þydercyme. Her sægeð þæt hi wurdun hrædlice afyrhtede, þa ure Drihten com an þas niht to ðære hellegatum, þæt ða loco burstun and niðer feollon ongean hine. And he eode þa ing, ure Drihten, and bræc þa helle and nerede ða halgan sawla ðe an ðan wite ær lange sæton. And hi wæron þa sprecende, þa helware, him betwunum, and hi cwædon: 'Hwæt taliað we hwæt ðes cempa sie ðe into us gæð? Taligað we hwæðere usse geatweardas slapen, þa ðes fyhtling in to us eode? Oððe taligað we hwæðer he hæbbe his ware gesette wið usne ordfruma? Oððe he hine ofslegene, and þurh þæt he into us eode?' (p. 610, ll. 1–22)

Beloved men, it says here in these books about the great event which occurred on this night: that it pleased our lord, Christ the saviour, on this night which was now tonight, that he arose from death in the middle of the night,²⁰ and he descended down to the inhabitants

¹⁹ This illustration, which is indebted to the iconography of the Utrecht Psalter, has been discussed by K. M. Openshaw, who argues that the depiction of Christ trampling the devil provides 'the visual key' to a series of illustrations in the manuscript which comprise a 'typological picture programme of the triumph of Christ over Satan': 'The Battle Between Christ and Satan in the Tiberius Psalter', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 52 (1989), 14–33 (pp. 19, 32). See also Kathleen M. Openshaw, 'Weapons in the Daily Battle: Images of the Conquest of Evil in the Early Medieval Psalter', *The Art Bulletin*, 75 (1993), 17–38.

²⁰ On the impersonal use of *geweorðan* in this construction, see T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), s.v. *geweorþan* V. I. a. (β).



Figure 1. Christ Harrowing Hell, Cotton Tiberius C. vi, fol. 14^r. © The British Library Board.

of hell, because he intended to plunder hell and to overcome that chief devil, and so he did. And it was clearly made known to him [i.e. the devil] that he [i.e. Christ] intended to do so. That devil is called and named Satan: that is, the chief devil in torment;²¹ and he reigns and dwells below in hell. Our lord descended into hell because he intended to deliver from there the blessed souls. It says that many men then came to the gates of hell, and those men were become terrible and very horrible. And it says that those men were the gatekeepers of hell and of the devils, and that they intended to lock hell against our lord's approach and against his coming. It says here that they were suddenly afraid, when our lord came on that night to the gates of hell, and that the locks burst asunder and fell down before him. And then he entered in, our lord, and broke open hell and delivered the holy souls that had previously sat long in torment. And then the inhabitants of hell were speaking amongst themselves, and they said: 'Lo, who do we think that champion might be, who enters into us? Think we that our gatekeepers slept when the warrior came into us? Or think we that he has agreed his treaty with our leader? Or that he has slain him, and by means of that he entered into us?'

There is, to my mind, a pleasingly dramatic quality to this account of Christ's entry into hell. Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis that the account places on the gates of hell themselves, both in the description of how they were locked against Christ's coming and in the subsequent speech of the inhabitants of hell, in which the inability of the gatekeepers to withstand his entry is again raised. The result of the inclusion of these details is to focus attention on the entrance to hell as the locus of dramatic action, emphasising the violent and invasive aspect of Christ's entry. This emphasis is produced, moreover, by a combination of details that cannot be precisely paralleled in any other surviving harrowing narratives of a comparable date.

The major source of information about the harrowing throughout the medieval period was the Latin text of the apocryphal *Evangelium Nicodemi*. Accordingly, in his edition of the CCC MS 41 text, Hulme suggested that the *Evangelium* was probably the textual source referred to in the opening of the Corpus homily, despite the extensive differences between the depiction of the harrowing in the homily and that in the Latin apocryphon.²² More recently, however, Jackson J. Campbell has emphasized the apparent independence of the Corpus homily's account, not just from the *Evangelium*, but from all other sources of information about the harrowing which may have been available in Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, the idiosyncrasy of the homilist's account led Campbell to suggest that the writer may in fact have been 'merely remembering a few odds and ends about the Descent which he had read long before'.²³ It seems likely, however, that the selection of these 'odds and ends' reflects a more careful approach to the construction of the text than Campbell allows for, and it is the case at least that comparison of the Corpus account of the harrowing with those in texts such as the *Evangelium* can help to throw light upon the Old English text's particular interest in the gates of hell as a significant architectural feature.

One of the more striking details in the homiletic narrative of the harrowing is the description of how these gates were defended by their demonic guardians. While the gatekeeper of hell was to become an established comic feature in dramatic representations of the harrowing in the later medieval period, amongst Anglo-Saxon texts the Corpus homily's reference to gatekeepers is unusual.²⁴ It is a detail that might, however, stand comparison with

²¹ My translation here follows the reading from CCC MS 303: *ealdor deofol on wite*.

²² Hulme, 'Gospel of Nicodemus', pp. 590–91. Cf. Healey, 'Apocryphal Gospel', pp. 99–100.

²³ Campbell, 'To Hell and Back', p. 142.

²⁴ The familiarity of the dramatic figure of the gatekeeper of hell is suggested by Shakespeare's later parody of the

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a similar episode in the account of the harrowing in the *Evangelium*. The medieval tradition of the *Evangelium* is notoriously complex and poorly understood, and individual copies of the apocryphon vary considerably in outline and detail.²⁵ A common feature of many of the *Evangelium* texts, however, is the description of how Hades, or sometimes Satan, orders his followers to bar the gates of hell and resist Christ's entry into the infernal realm. This episode is dealt with only briefly in the recension of the apocryphon generally identified as *Evangelium A* — the recension most likely to have been known in Anglo-Saxon England:

Et dixit inferus ad sua impia officia: Claudite portas crudeles aereas et vectes ferreos supponite et fortiter resistite, ne captivemus tenentes captivitatem. (V (XXI):1)²⁶

And Hades said to his impious servants: 'Close the cruel gates of bronze and put bars of iron upon them, and resist strongly, lest holding them captive we be captured.'

As it stands, this passage bears only a general resemblance to the equivalent account in the vernacular text. Nothing in the Corpus homily equates to the direct speech in *Evangelium A*, nor to the biblical allusion to brass gates and iron bars.²⁷ At the same time, there is no parallel in the Latin text for dramatic details included in the Old English text such as the multitude of gatekeepers, their terrible appearance, and their sudden fear at Christ's approach. However, if we turn to the recension of the Latin text known as *Evangelium B*, we find that the treatment of this episode is both more extensive than in *Evangelium A*, and closer to the account found in the Old English homily:

Tunc Satanus dux mortis advenit, fugiens territus, dicens ministris suis et inferis: Ministri mei et omnes inferi, concurrite, portas vestras claudite, vectes ferreos supponite, et pugnate fortiter et resistite, ne tenentes captivemur a vinculis. Tunc impia official eius omnia conturbata sunt et coeperunt portas mortis cum omni diligentia claudere, serasque et vectes ferreos paulatim iungere, omniaque ornamenta sua strictis manibus tenere et proclamare ululatus dirae vocis ac terribilissimae. (II (XVIII):2)²⁸

Then Satan, prince of death, approached, fleeing in terror, saying to his servants and the infernal ones: 'My servants and all of the infernal ones, run together, close your gates, put bars of iron upon them, and fight strongly and resist, lest they seize us and we be captured with chains'. Then all his impious servants were troubled and they began to close the gates of death with all care, and one by one to attach bolts and iron bars, and to grasp all their equipment tightly in their hands, and to give cry in a fearful and most hideous voice.

Manuscripts of *Evangelium B* appear from the late-eleventh or early-twelfth century, and there is no evidence that *Evangelium B* was known in England before 1200.²⁹ The medieval tradition

role in his famous depiction of the Porter in *Macbeth* Act II scene 3. See further, Glynne Wickham, 'Hell-castle and its Door-keeper', *Shakespeare Survey*, 19 (1970), 68–74; Kurt A. Schreyer, *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 135–61. In an Anglo-Saxon context, the image of the sleeping guardians recalls the sleep of the Geats during the famous account of Grendel's approach to Heorot at *Beowulf* ll. 703b–09, as well as the more clearly comic image of the sleeping sacristan in the *Visions of Leofric* discussed in the above article by Karl Kinsella.

²⁵ See further, Zbigniew Izydorczyk, 'The Unfamiliar *Evangelium Nicodemi*', *Manuscripta*, 33 (1989), 169–91.

²⁶ Cited from *Evangelii Nicodemi pars altera sive Descensus Christi ad Infero: Latine A*, ed. by Constantine von Tischendorf, in *Evangelia apocrypha* (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1876), pp. 389–416.

²⁷ Cf. Psalm 106.16; Isaiah 45.2.

²⁸ Cited from *Evangelii Nicodemi pars altera sive Descensus Christi ad Infero: Latine B*, ed. by Constantine von Tischendorf, in *Evangelia apocrypha* (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1876), pp. 417–32.

²⁹ Izydorczyk, 'Unfamiliar *Evangelium*', pp. 181–82; Thomas N. Hall, 'The *Euangelium Nichodemi* and *Vindicta*

of the apocryphon was marked, however, by considerable ‘cross-pollination’, and it has been suggested that the account of the *Descensus* contained in *Evangelium B* might have circulated independently before its incorporation within the longer text.³⁰ With this in mind, the mini-narrative of the defence of hell contained in *Evangelium B* offers a tantalizing parallel to that in the Old English homily. Again, there is nothing in the Old English text that parallels the direct speech in the Latin account — attributed here to Satan rather than Hades — but the *Evangelium B* text differs from the shorter *Evangelium A* account not only in narrating the actions of the gatekeepers, but also in granting the gatekeepers some degree of subjectivity through the reference to their distress at the coming of Christ (‘conturbata sunt’).

In both of these details, the *Evangelium B* text resembles more closely the account in the Corpus homily than does the *Evangelium A* account. The resemblance might, moreover, be supported by some further, admittedly rather indistinct, parallels between the two accounts. The vernacular text’s description of the guards as ‘þære helle and ðara deofla geatweardas’ (‘the gatekeepers of hell and of the devils’), for example, might potentially reflect a misreading or variant of the statement in the Latin that Satan addressed ‘ministris suis et inferis’, while the homily’s account of the ‘terrible and very horrible’ appearance of these gatekeepers (‘atelice and swiðe laðlice’) recalls the Latin construction describing the hideous voices of Satan’s followers (‘dirae [...] ac terrimae’). Even in the homily’s description of the arrival of many men at the gate of hell (‘þa common manige men to hellegatum’) we might see an echo of Satan’s order that his followers should ‘run together’ (‘concuritte’) to bar the entrance way.

None of these resemblances is sufficient to posit a relationship between the Corpus homily and either the *Evangelium B* account of the harrowing or its putative forerunner — though such a relationship is not impossible. Comparison of the two accounts as analogues is, however, still instructive. Although the architectural image of the gates of hell features in both texts, it is the vernacular homily that focuses particularly upon this feature as a narrative locus.

In the homily, the account of the fear of the gatekeepers at the coming of Christ is immediately followed by a description of how the locks of the gates of hell burst open and fell down against Christ’s approach (‘ða loco burstun and niðer feollon ongean hine’). Details such as this are commonplace in narrative accounts of the harrowing, but a close analogue for this description can again be found in the *Evangelium B*, which recounts Christ’s entry into hell in similar terms: ‘portae mortis et serae comminutae et vectes ferrei confracti sunt et ceciderunt in terram’ (VIII (XXIV), ‘the gates and bars of death were shattered and the bars of iron were broken and fell to the ground’). However, where the vernacular homily describes the destruction of the gates of hell directly after the account of the terror of the gatekeepers, so that the failed defence of hell occurs in a single continuous action centred around the architectural feature, in the Latin text the defence of the gates and Christ’s dramatic entry are separated by some five chapters’ worth of lengthy speeches uttered by Satan, by Hades, and by the patriarchs awaiting the coming of Christ.

The Corpus homily’s focus on the gates is maintained, moreover, in the incredulous speech of the devils that immediately follows Christ’s entry into hell. As Campbell notes, speeches expressing the confusion of the devils are found in many accounts of the harrowing, but his further suggestion that the particular questions asked in the Corpus homily are ‘totally different

saluatoris in Anglo-Saxon England’, in *Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source*, ed. by J. E. Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36–81 (pp. 53–54).

³⁰ Izydorczyk, ‘Unfamiliar *Evangelium*’, pp. 180, 184.

from any others' must be redressed.³¹ In fact, the ultimate source for these questions is to be found in the Latin account of the harrowing that circulated from the mid- to late-fifth century in three related sermons from the so-called 'Eusebius Gallicanus' collection:³²

vbi iam ianitores dormierunt, cum iste bellator claustra uexabat? [...] Numquidnam iste cum auctore nostro composuit? aut forte aggressus et ipsum uicit, et sic ad nostra regna transcendit? (*Homilia XII*, ll. 17–24)³³

Where slept the gatekeepers, when that warrior was rattling the gates? [...] Surely he has not made a treaty with our leader? Or perhaps he attacked and conquered him, and thus he approaches into our realms?

The homilies in question are known to have been available in England from at least the eleventh century, and may have been available much earlier.³⁴ Moreover, the account of the devils' accusatory speech common to all three homilies seems to have also circulated independently. From at least the tenth-century, this passage appears as an interpolation in some copies of the influential account of the harrowing known as 'Pseudo-Augustine' *Sermo 160* (comprising most of section two in the text printed by Migne).³⁵ That this text was known in Anglo-Saxon England is clear, although whether or not the interpolated text was available is less certain.³⁶ Moreover, a similar, but not identical, extract from the 'Eusebian' homilies — containing the parallels with the Corpus homily — also appears as a preface to the Latin text of the *Evangelium Nicodemi* in seven surviving British manuscripts dating from the twelfth century onwards.³⁷

³¹ Campbell, 'To Hell and Back', p. 141. The incredulity of the devils may plausibly relate to the typological link between the harrowing and the exchange of speeches in Psalm 23.7–10 drawn in the *Evangelium Nicodemi* and other texts. Cf. Kramer, *Between Heaven and Earth*, pp. 129–30 and n. 49.

³² *Homilia XII 'De pascha, I', Homilia XII A 'De pascha, I A', and Sermo 8 'De resvrrctione Domini'* in Eusebius 'Gallicanus': *Collectio Homiliarum*, ed. by Fr. Glorie, 3 vols, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 101, 101A, 101B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970–71), i, 141–50; ii, 881–86. For a discussion of the problematic provenance of this collection, see Lisa Kaaren Bailey, *Christianity's Quiet Success: The Eusebius Gallicanus Sermon Collection and the Power of the Church in Late Antique Gaul* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 29–38.

³³ Cf. *Homilia XII A*, ll. 20–27; *Sermo 8*, ll. 50–57.

³⁴ J. E. Cross, 'Saint-Omer 202 as the manuscript source for the Old English texts', in *Two Old English Apocrypha and their Manuscript Source*, ed. by J. E. Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 82–104 (p. 102 n. 40).

³⁵ Cited from *Sermo CLX. De Pascha, II*, in *PL*, xxxix, cols 2059–61. See further, Zbigniew Izydorczyk, 'The *Evangelium Nicodemi* in the Latin Middle Ages', in *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. by Zbigniew Izydorczyk (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), pp. 43–101 (pp. 49–50, 98).

³⁶ The *Sermo 160* account lies behind the harrowing material in the ninth-century 'Book of Cerne', as well as the homiletic treatments in Blickling homily VII and in the Easter homily contained in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 121, and perhaps also the entry for 26th March in the *Old English Martyrology*. None of these texts, however, bears any trace of this reference to the sleeping gatekeepers. See further, David N. Dumville, 'Liturgical Drama and Panegyric Responsory from the Eighth Century? A Re-Examination of the Origin and Contents of the Ninth-Century Section of the Book of Cerne', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n. s., 23 (1972), 374–406; Anna Maria Luiselli Fadda, "'De descensu Christi ad inferos": una inedita omelia anglosassone', *Studi Medievali*, 13 (1972), 989–1012; J. E. Cross, 'The use of patristic homilies in the Old English Martyrology', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 14 (1985), 107–28 (pp. 117–20); Donald Scragg, 'A Late Old English Harrowing of Hell Homily from Worcester and Blickling Homily VII', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), ii, 197–211.

³⁷ Izydorczyk, 'Unfamiliar *Evangelium*', p. 180. For details of these manuscripts, see Zbigniew Izydorczyk, *Manuscripts of the Evangelium Nicodemi: A Census* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), nos. 44, 46, 72, 143, 146, 159, 228. Although always attributed to Augustine in these manuscripts, the text of

The similarities between the Latin text(s) and the corresponding speech in the Old English homily are too close to be explained as the homilist's vague reminiscences of a text read long ago. That some version of the Latin text lies behind the reference to the sleeping gatekeepers in the vernacular homily seems beyond doubt, though whether this was a 'Eusebian' homily, an augmented text of *Sermo 160*, or an unidentified intermediate source cannot be said with any confidence.³⁸ There is nothing, however, either in the 'Eusebian' homilies or in *Sermo 160* that equates to the wider dramatic emphasis in the Corpus homily on the gates and gatekeepers of hell. Indeed, the particular combination of details in the Corpus homily — the defence of the gates of hell, their dramatic destruction, and the ironic reference to sleeping gatekeepers — appears to be unparalleled in harrowing narratives available in the early medieval period. The effect of this narrative sequence is not only to emphasize the violence of the harrowing, but also, through the dramatic focus upon the gates of hell, to present the event from the perspective of the demonic inhabitants of hell as a terrifying invasion of an apparently secure and defended place. This aspect of the harrowing receives considerably more attention in the homily than does Christ's departure from hell and his release of the righteous prisoners, which is dealt with relatively briefly.³⁹

The focus on the gates of hell in the early part of the Corpus homily thus conceptualizes the architecture of hell in defensive terms. To an extent not paralleled in other accounts of the harrowing, the homilist presents a narrative of invasion focused around the image of the gates themselves and their failure to prevent incursion from without. This emphasis is in stark contrast, however, to the depiction of hell as a bound space that we find in the later part of the Corpus homily.

Judgement Day

The account of the harrowing and resurrection with which the homily begins occupies a little more than a third of the longer text edited by Hulme (p. 610, l. 1–p. 611, l. 30). Following a short description of the terrors of the last days (p. 611, l. 31–p. 612, l. 8), the bulk of the homily — a little more than half of its total length — then consists of an account of judgement day (p. 612, l. 8–p. 614, l. 5). In their presentation of Christ's agency as saviour and judge, the connection between these two moments in salvation history — the harrowing and judgment day — might seem inevitable, and yet this specific juxtaposition is perhaps made less commonly than might be expected. The clearest parallel for this combination of elements in the Corpus homily comes, in fact, from another Old English Easter homily, Blickling homily VII (*Dominica Pascha*). Despite general similarities, however, the treatment in these two homilies is sufficiently different in detail to make any direct connection seem unlikely.⁴⁰

the passage in fact reflects the 'Eusebian' homilies (corresponding to *Homilia XII*, ll. 10–27) more closely than it does the printed text of *Sermo 160*.

³⁸ So, too, Price, 'Edition', pp. 149–52.

³⁹ 'And ure Domine nam þa Adam be his handa and teah hine up of þære helle and ealle ða halgan saula þe ðæron wæron. And on ðæne dæg, ðe nu to-dæg is, micelne here þara halegra saula he lædde mid him up of ðære helle and brohte to heofenum and gefylde þa setl mid þam saulum ðe lange ær weste stodon' (p. 611, ll. 26–30, 'And then our Lord seized Adam by his hand and drew him up from hell, and all of the souls of the holy who were therein. And on that day, which is now today, he led a great host of the holy souls up with him from hell and brought them to heaven and filled with those souls the dwellings that had long previously stood desolate').

⁴⁰ Campbell, 'To Hell and Back', p. 138.

The final section of the Corpus homily opens with a description of Christ's appearance, seated on his throne with the wounds of his passion displayed, and recounts the terror of that moment for the souls awaiting judgement, before proceeding with an account of Christ's words to mankind (p. 612, l. 31–p. 613, l. 17), for which the ultimate source was the influential *Ego te, homo* address from Caesarius of Arles' *Sermo 57*.⁴¹ Following the conclusion of this speech, the text of the homily in CCCC MS 41 — but not that in CCCC MS 303 — continues with a rare homiletic motif known as 'delivering the damned', which describes how the Virgin Mary, St Peter, and the Archangel Michael successively intercede with Christ on behalf of a portion of the sinful (p. 613, ll. 18–30). Though apparently sufficiently widely-known to be condemned on doctrinal grounds by Ælfric, this intercession motif survives only here and in a slightly more developed form in Vercelli homily XV.⁴² Its omission from the copy of the Corpus homily in CCCC MS 303 — the major point of difference between the two copies of the text — may reflect its unorthodox and theologically problematic nature.⁴³ In both witnesses, however, the final entry of the blessed into heaven is preceded by a striking depiction of St Peter locking the entrance to hell after the descent of the damned:

And nimað þanne þa deofolo ða lafe and lædað to helle, and he gæþ þonne æfter, Sanctus Petrus, and belicþ þa helle and wyrpð þa cæge on þone grund, þa næfre siððan Gode an geminde ne cumað. (p. 613, ll. 31–33)

And then the devils shall seize that remnant and lead them to hell. And he, St Peter, shall go after them, and lock hell and cast the key into the abyss, so that it will never afterwards come into the mind of God.⁴⁴

This description of the locking of hell is both arresting and unusual. No Latin source or analogue has been identified to date, but alongside the Corpus homily, it can be found in two further, apparently related, Old English homilies. Of these, one is, again, Vercelli homily XV. Here, as in the CCCC MS 41 text, the locking of hell follows directly from the 'delivering the damned' motif (ll. 184–99). The other analogue is the homily known as Assmann XIV (ll. 130–39), a composite homily that may well be drawing upon a version of Vercelli XV at this point.⁴⁵ In this text, however, as in the copy of the Corpus homily in CCCC MS 303, the locking of hell is not preceded by the 'delivering the damned' motif.

The possible relationships between these three homilies are difficult to discern, but certain similarities of structure and subject matter are evident. The account of judgement day in both Vercelli XV and the Corpus homily includes the details of Christ displaying his wounds, the delivering of the damned motif (in the longer Corpus text only), and the locking of hell. The

⁴¹ See further *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. by Scragg, pp. 140–42. On Caesarius' influence more broadly, see Joseph B. Trahern, 'Caesarius of Arles and Old English Literature: Some Contributions and a Recapitulation', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976), 105–19.

⁴² For Ælfric's condemnation, see 'XXXIX In Natale Sanctum Uirginum', in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series: Text*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, *Early English Text Society*, s. s., 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 327–34, ll. 184–98. See further Mary Clayton, 'Delivering the Damned: A Motif in OE Homiletic Prose', *Medium Aevum*, 55 (1986), 92–102; Thomas D. Hill, 'Delivering the Damned in Old English Anonymous Homilies and Jón Arason's Ljómur', *Medium Aevum*, 61 (1992), 75–82; Price, 'Edition', pp. 174–86.

⁴³ Sarah Cutforth, 'Delivering the Damned in Old English Homilies: An Additional Note', *Notes & Queries*, n. s., 40 (1993), 435–37.

⁴⁴ The translation of 'on þone grund' as 'into the abyss' here reflects the variant reading 'on þone seað' ('into the pit') in CCCC MS 303 (p. 75, l. 25), as well as the explicit statement that Peter casts the key into hell in the textual analogues cited in the following discussion. The capitalization and word division of the final clause reflects Price's correction of Hulme ('Edition', p. 214).

⁴⁵ *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. by Bruno Assmann, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 3 (Kassel: XXXX, 1889), pp. 164–69.

omission of the delivering the damned motif in Assmann XIV may be explained by doctrinal concerns, as has been suggested in the case of the shorter Corpus text, but the sequence of events in Assmann XIV does include, before the condemnation of the damned, an abbreviated version of the same *Ego te, homo* address (ll. 124–30) that appears in both versions of the Corpus homily. A textual lacuna at the corresponding place in the surviving copy of Vercelli XV raises the likelihood that this detail originally formed part of this homily as well, providing the source for the abbreviated account preserved in Assmann XIV.⁴⁶ The treatment of these details in the two versions of the Corpus homily is not sufficiently close to either Vercelli XV or Assmann XIV to suggest direct borrowing. However, the similarities in the structure of the accounts, including the use of very rare homiletic motifs, strongly suggests that a common source underlies all three vernacular accounts of judgement.⁴⁷

The effect of the description of the locking of hell — in all three homilies — is clearly to emphasize the finality of damnation. This is especially clear in the Corpus homily. In both Vercelli XV and Assmann XIV we are told that Peter locked hell because he could not bear the sight of the suffering of the damned:

& þonne wendeð him sanctus Petrus þanon fram þære helle dura, & he ðonne weorpeð ða cearfullan cæge ofer bæc in on þa helle. Ðis he deð for ðam þe he ne mæg locian on ðæt mycle sar & on ðam myclan wanunge & on ðam myclan wope þe þa earman sawla dreogað mid ðam deoflum in helle tintrego (Vercelli XV, ll. 195–98).

And then St Peter shall turn then from the door of hell, and he shall then cast the dreadful key over his shoulder into hell. He shall do this because he is unable to look upon that great pain, and upon that great lamentation, and upon that great weeping that the wretched souls endure amongst the devils in the torments of hell.⁴⁸

This statement undoubtedly fits the compassionate presentation of Peter as intercessor in the ‘delivering the damned’ motif, but it nevertheless seems unsatisfactory as an explanation for the emphasis on the locking of hell in these texts.⁴⁹ As we have seen, the equivalent passage in the Corpus homily is quite different, with Peter apparently casting the key of hell into the abyss in order to forestall any possibility of divine mercy in the future (‘þa næfre siððan Gode an geminde ne cumað’).⁵⁰

The emphasis on the finality of judgement in this passage from the Corpus homily recalls the illustration of the locking of hell that forms part of the famous judgement miniature contained in the Winchester *Liber Vitae* (London, British Library, MS Stowe 944, fol. 7^r:

⁴⁶ *Vercelli Homilies*, ed. by Scragg, pp. 250–52. Cf. D. G. Scragg, ‘The Corpus of vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints’ Lives before Alfred’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 8 (1979), 223–77 (pp. 231, 245–46).

⁴⁷ For further discussion, see Clayton, ‘Delivering the Damned’, pp. 94–96.

⁴⁸ Cf. Assmann XIV, ll. 135–37.

⁴⁹ Indeed, this explanation of Peter’s actions runs counter to the common Gregorian notion that the sight of the torments of the damned in fact reinforces the joys of the blessed in heaven. On this motif, and especially its use in the Old English poem *Christ III*, see Timothy D. Arner and Paul D. Stegner, ‘“Of þam him aweaxeð wynsum gefea”: The Voyeuristic Appeal of *Christ III*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106 (2007), 428–46. Cf. below note 53.

⁵⁰ The metaphorical description of damnation as ‘not coming to the mind of God’ seems to have had some formulaic currency in Anglo-Saxon England. Accounts of judgement in both *Christ III* ll. 1536b–37a (‘Nales dryhtnes gemynd | siþþan gesecað’ [‘afterwards they will by no means come to the lord’s mind’]) and Cynewulf’s *Elene* ll. 1302b–03 (‘Gode no syððan [...] in gemynd cumað’ [‘never afterwards ... come into the mind of God’]) express the torments of the damned in this way. In the poem *Daniel*, on the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar’s soul is said to turn ‘in godes gemynd’ (‘into the memory of God’, l. 629b) following his return to sanity and to the true faith after his period of madness.

figure 2), an image which seems to draw upon just this same homiletic motif.⁵¹ Albeit that it is an angel, rather than St Peter, depicted here locking hell, the miniature resembles the homiletic accounts closely in its representation of the angel locking the door of hell, turning away, and throwing the key over its shoulder into hell.⁵² Architectural detail dominates the depiction of heaven and hell in the upper and lower registers of this miniature, and there is a clear and strong opposition between the open door of heaven at the top of the page and the closed door of hell at the bottom.⁵³ In both cases, the door functions as a means of inclusion and exclusion, but where the one welcomes and secures, the other confines and constrains. In this contrast, hell is again depicted as a secure enclosure — not least through the paradoxical image of the key of hell apparently passing through a solid wall in the bottommost register. Logically, this detail undercuts the conception of hell as a hermetically sealed space. Less pedantically, however, the image powerfully suggests the hopelessness of those imprisoned within — as is dramatically realised in both the Vercelli XV and Assmann XIV accounts, in which the noise made by the key falling into hell is imagined: ‘eala, broðor mine, hu mycel & hu hlud bið se cynll þonne seo cæge fealleð in ða helle’ (‘alas, my brothers, how great and how loud will be the knell when that key falls into hell’, Vercelli XV, ll. 198–99).⁵⁴

Conclusions

The locking of hell, in both text and miniature, expresses the torments of the damned in architectural terms. A locked door to which there is no key effectively ceases to function as a door. Its potential for varied signification is denied, as the meaning of both the door and the space beyond is defined absolutely. Curiously, although their presence is implicit in the act of locking hell, neither copy of the Corpus homily actually refers directly to either doors or gates at this point. This is in contrast to the accounts in both Vercelli XV and Assmann XIV, where doors are specifically mentioned. Nevertheless, it is in the Corpus homily that the dramatic motif of the locking of hell contributes most significantly to the wider thematic structure of the text.

The Corpus homily is unique in several details. No other text from Anglo-Saxon England can match the emphasis that the homily places on the gates of hell as a locus for the dramatic action of the harrowing — an emphasis that seems to have been the result of deliberate selection and organization of material. Nor is the emphasis on the gates of hell as a defensive feature matched in comparable texts from this period. At the same time, the juxtaposition of this account of the harrowing with the dramatic ‘locking of hell’ motif that we find in the

⁵¹ Cf. Catherine E. Karkov, ‘Judgement and Salvation in the New Minster *Liber Vitae*’, in *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Kathryn Powell and Donald Scragg (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2003), 151–63. As Karkov demonstrates, the composition of the miniature contributes significantly to the manuscript’s theological and political message regarding the salvific benefits of both royal patronage and ecclesiastical intercession.

⁵² This connection has been discussed by David F. Johnson, who explains the appearance of two keys in the bottom register of the miniature as an example of simultaneous representation of sequential action (‘A Scene of Post-Mortem Judgment in the New Minster *Liber Vitae*’, *Old English Newsletter*, 34 (2000), 26–30 (p. 26)).

⁵³ This opposition is also emphasized by the contrast within the miniature between the upwards gaze of the two sinners being thrust into hell in the bottom register and the downward gaze of the two figures looking out of a window in the upper register. This opposition has been connected to the Gregorian idea that the vision of the joys of heaven forms an additional punishment for the damned and the vision of the torments of hell enhances the bliss of the saved (Johnson, ‘Post-Mortem Judgement’, pp. 27–29). Cf. above note 49.

⁵⁴ Cf. Assmann XIV, ll. 138–39.



Figure 2. The Liber Vitae Judgement Scene, MS Stowe 944, fol.7^r. © The British Library Board.

Corpus homily is not mirrored in either of the other surviving witnesses to this motif. The result of this juxtaposition is a text dominated by an architectural conception of hell. Both the terror of the devils at the harrowing and the suffering of the damned on judgement day are represented in the homily through the respective opening and closing of the gates of hell. But the contrasting representation of these gates — first locked from within to keep invaders out, then locked from without to keep captives in — serves a didactic as well as a structural purpose.

We have seen at the beginning of this article how, in his own account of the harrowing, Ælfric exploits the multiple signification of doorways in order to promote a tropological message regarding the urgency of moral choice: within the world, the gates of hell are simultaneously open or closed to each individual based upon their actions and intentions. The approach in the Corpus homily is different. The structure of the Corpus homily creates a contrast according to which the same architectural feature — the gates of hell — comes to represent, in the first instance, salvation, and, in the second instance, damnation. But whereas Ælfric presents these alternatives in terms of simultaneous and unrealized potentialities, the Corpus homily establishes a contrast between the significance of the gates in the past at the harrowing — at the moment at which salvation becomes available to mankind — and their significance in the future at judgement — at the moment at which salvation (or damnation) becomes a reality for each individual. In this way, we might think, the homily depends upon an analogical interpretation of the gates of hell as an architectural feature, viewing their changing significance in the context of salvation history. What both texts have in common, however, is that for each author, the didactic message of the text is founded upon a keen sensitivity to the rich potential signification of architectural representation.