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### *Reviews*

Copies of books for review should be sent to the Editor, *Leeds Studies in English*, School of English, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom.

## Chaucer's Osewold the Reeve and St Oswald the Bishop (from the *South English Legendary* and Other Sources)

Thomas R. Liszka<sup>1</sup>

Everyone knows Herry Bailly's name. But interestingly, in all of the *Canterbury Tales*, his name is given only once, in the Cook's Prologue (I.4358).<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, he is called only 'the Host'. Indeed, Chaucer did not give names to most of his Canterbury pilgrims. Of the ten pilgrims to whom Chaucer gave names, the names of five are mentioned only once: those of the Host, the Prioress (Eglentyne, I.121), the Friar (Huberd, I.269), the Miller (Robyn, I.3129), and the Monk (Piers, VII.2792); and two are mentioned twice: those of the Wife of Bath (Alys, III.320, and Alisoun, III.804) and the Nun's Priest (John, VII.2810 and 2820). By contrast, in leading up to the Reeve's Tale, Chaucer works the Reeve's name, 'Osewold', into his narrative three times — once in the Miller's Prologue (I.3151) and twice more in the Reeve's Prologue (I.3860, 3909). It might appear then that the name was a detail of some importance to Chaucer.<sup>3</sup>

J. A. W. Bennett and Susanna Greer Fein both argue for an association of Chaucer's Osewold with St Oswald the Bishop (died 922). Bennett points out that the 'name [...] carries a suggestion of the North' because of its association with the Northumbrian saint whose vita was written in Cambridgeshire.<sup>4</sup> And Fein — building on J. A. Burrow's identification of St Oswald as an example of a *puer senex*, a youth deserving the honor of age and demonstrating its wisdom<sup>5</sup> — argues that 'the name's chief importance for Chaucer' was the 'inverted applicability' of that characteristic of the saint for his Reeve. As she puts it, 'the name Oswald

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Christine Cooper-Rompato, Juris Lidaka, and Sandra Petrulionis for their valuable comments and suggestions on drafts of this article, and to Samuel Findley for his help with the analysis of the translations from Latin. I dedicate this article to Dr. J. I. Miller, who taught me the ways of the world and to whom I owe my career.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations of Chaucer are from *The Wadsworth Chaucer: Formerly The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 1987) and are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Only one pilgrim's name is mentioned more times than the Reeve's in the text proper. The Cook's name is given four times in the prologue to his unfinished tale (Hogge, I.4336, and Roger, I.4345, 4353, and 4356). References to Chaucer the pilgrim's name are difficult to count. It is mentioned explicitly only in the five rubrics to his tales — 'Heere bigynneth Chaucer's Tale of Thopas', etc. The Man of Law refers to Chaucer by name in the text proper while praising his works (II.47), but the reference is possibly to Chaucer the poet. To appreciate the irony, it is not necessary for us to imagine that the Man of Law knows that Chaucer is present. Similarly, the Clerk's Tale ends with the 'Lenvoy de Chaucer', but it is even more doubtful that the reference is to Chaucer the pilgrim, or even that the Clerk makes it.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp.

calls attention to the Reeve's morbid obsession with time, which did not ripen him to early saintliness but left him, with his "olde lemes" and "coltes tooth", decrepit in his veniality'.<sup>6</sup>

As further support of this association of Chaucer's Osewold with St Oswald the Bishop, I would add that Chaucer may have had a particular incident in mind from the life of St Oswald reminiscent of the confusion of beds on which the Reeve's Tale is based. In both the saint's life, as it is recounted in the *South English Legendary* (*SEL*), and in Chaucer's tale, characters get into wrong beds, and consequently demons are encountered (metaphorical ones, in Chaucer's case) and characters are beaten horribly. If Chaucer did have this incident in mind, the link between the tale and its teller, which has appeared weak to many,<sup>7</sup> should appear stronger. The Reeve is telling a tale whose resonances with events from his namesake's life, for those who might recognize them, reflect his desire to embarrass the Miller, in ways beyond those already evident, and whose differences from it reveal his own shortcomings in comparison to the virtues of the bishop and saint.

Oswald's life could have been familiar to Chaucer and his audience from several sources which I will discuss below, but the *SEL* seems the most probable. This was a collection of Old Testament history, narratives from Christ's and Mary's lives, saints' lives, and other related texts, existing in various combinations and current from the second half of the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Oswald's vita in this collection usually extends to 222 lines. While it survives in 18 *SEL* manuscripts, the versions are quite consistent in general content, and there are no significant variant readings among them that would call into question the points I make below.<sup>9</sup> The vita highlights: 1) his close relationships with Saints Oda and Dunstan, Bishop Oskytel, Kings Athelstan and Edgar, and even Pope John; 2) his becoming a canon secular and then his devotion to the monastic life, while taking on the bishoprics of Worcester and York; 3) his several confrontations with the devil; 4) his participation with Bishop-Saints Dunstan and Athelwold in the enforcement of a policy to remove lecherous/*luþer* (married?) priests from their churches and to confiscate their property; 5) several miracles, including one in which a sinking boat loaded with monks who had come to hear him preach is raised from the depths; 6) his practice of housing, feeding, clothing, and washing the feet of twelve poor men each day; and 7) his heroic calm and continued religious activity in the face of old age, sickness, and death.

96–101.

<sup>6</sup> Susanna Greer Fein, "'Lat the Children Pleye": The Game betwixt the Ages in the Reeve's Tale', in *Rebels and Rivals: The Contestive Spirit in 'The Canterbury Tales'*, ed. by Susanna Greer Fein, David Raybin, and Peter C. Braeger (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), pp. 73–104 (p. 79). John Matthews Manly speculated that Chaucer may have had a particular reeve in mind. Indeed, he cites intriguing evidence that someone mismanaged property with which Chaucer was familiar and which may have been in Norfolk. See his 'The Reeve' and 'The Miller', in *Some New Light on Chaucer: Lectures Delivered at the Lowell Institute* (1926; repr. New York: Peter Smith, 1951), pp. 84–101. But unfortunately, Manly was unable to identify his hypothetical 'tricky Reeve of Baldeswelle' by name (p. 93).

<sup>7</sup> See Fein, 'Lat the Children Pleye', p. 74, esp. n. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See especially O. S. Pickering, 'The *Temporale* Narratives of the *South English Legendary*', *Anglia*, 91 (1973), 425–55; Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n. s. 6 (Leeds: University of Leeds, School of English, 1974); O. S. Pickering, 'The Expository *Temporale* Poems of the *South English Legendary*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n. s. 10 (1978), 1–17; Thomas R. Liszka, 'The *South English Legendaries*', in *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Thomas R. Liszka and Lorna E. M. Walker (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 243–80; and *Rethinking the 'South English Legendaries'*, ed. by Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), in which the previous essay is reprinted (pp. 23–65).

<sup>9</sup> See the appended apparatus of all substantive variants among the manuscripts of the two passages from the *SEL*

There are two relevant passages from the *SEL*, both relating to his encounters with the devil. The first establishes that, when Oswald was a monk, the devil often came to him at night to torment him ‘wanne he was al one inis bede’ (I.73, line 66).<sup>10</sup> The phrase ‘inis bede’ (italicized in the quote below) was probably originally intended to mean ‘in his prayers’ or ‘in his devotions’ — consistent with Charlotte D’Evelyn’s gloss for *bede* in the *SEL* edition (III.43) and with the version of the line as it appears in five manuscripts, with readings related to *beodes* rather than *bede*. However, I submit that, given the two references to night in the context (also italicized), the half line, as it appears in most of the manuscripts, could easily have been read or misread as ‘when he was alone in his bed’. Indeed, in place of ‘wanne he was al one inis bede’, one manuscript has the reading ‘as he allone in bed lay’. In this episode, the devil would roar, but the good saint could easily defeat him by making the Sign of the Cross:

¶His breþeren were wel glad of him • þo hi vnderȝite  
 Þat holy lif þat he was on • for noþing hy nolde him lete  
 In orisons he was *nizt* & day • & in oþer gode þinge  
 Þer of þe deuel hadde envie • and þoȝte him þerof bringe  
 Ofte he com in deorne stude • *biniȝte* him to afere  
 Wanne he was al one *inis bede* • & made reuful bere  
 Ac wanne þis holyman hurde him • so deoluoliche rore  
 Þe signe he made of þe crois • & ne hurde him namore  
 Þo þe deuel ysey þis • þat he nemiȝte him come wiþinne  
 He þoȝte mid oþer felonye • þis holyman wyne  
 (I.73, lines 61-70; emphasis mine)

(His brethren were very happy for him, when they understood the holy life that he was leading. They would not discourage him for anything. He was in prayers, night and day, and performing other good actions. For that reason, the devil had envy, and intended to bring him out of it. Often, he came to his private place at night to frighten him when he was alone in his prayers [or ‘in his bed’] and made a dismal outcry. But when this holy man heard him roar so distressfully, he made the Sign of the Cross and heard him no more. When the devil saw this, that he could not possess him, he decided to defeat this holy man with other treachery.)

The second passage contains the parallel to the Reeve’s Tale. In this passage, Oswald’s ‘deorne stude’ or private place is unambiguously a bed. While Oswald was praying one night and while all but one of the other monks ‘in hore bede lay • aslepe’, that last monk, on returning from his bath, accidentally ‘lay in seint Oswald is bed’. Four devils accost him, ask him how he could be so bold as to lie in his master’s bed, and when the monk does not have a good answer, they beat him until he cries out and makes ‘such bere’. Obviously, he is not the match for them that Oswald is. The other monks who come running also chastise the monk for his presumption, but the episode ends happily with shrift, penance, and forgiveness:

As inis pryuey orisons • seint Oswald a nizt was  
 & is monekes in hore bede lay • aslepe it biuel bicas

quoted below. And see Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, 146–48, for a discussion of text of the vita as a whole.

<sup>10</sup> All quotations from the *SEL* and the reference to its glossary are from *The South English Legendary: Edited from Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 145 and British Museum MS. Harley 2277 with Variants from Bodley MS. Ashmole 43 and British Museum MS. Cotton Julius D. IX*, ed. by Charlotte D’Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, Early

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P[at] o monk him let baþie • and þo he hadde ydo  
He lay in seint Oswold is bed • ac to raþe he com þerto  
Vour deuelen come & esste anon • wat he dude þere  
In þe bed þat is maister was • & hou he so hardy were  
¶Þo he nemiȝte non encheson vinde • faste hi him toke  
And bete him so sore þoru þe cri • al þe monkes awoke  
And come & holpe him hasteliche • & esste wat him were  
And wat he in þulke bedde dude • & wy he made such bere  
He was yknewe of al is gult • and among hom al yssriue  
And sede is penance was inou • þei is gult were forȝiue  
¶Seint Oswold forȝef it him • & bad þe monkes also  
By þulke cas ywar hy were • efsone to misdo  
(I.76, lines 153–66)

(As Saint Oswald was in his private prayers one night and his monks in their beds lay asleep, it happened by chance that one monk was bathing himself. And when he had finished, he lay in Saint Oswald's bed, but too rashly he came thereto. Four devils came and asked anon what he was doing there in the bed that belonged to his master, and how he could be so presumptuous. When he could not give a reason, they took him fast and beat him so sorely that, because of his cries, all the monks awoke and came hastily and helped him and asked what was happening to him and what he was doing in that bed and why he made such an outcry. He was made aware of his guilt by all and among them all, absolved. And they said he had had penance enough, though his sins had been forgiven. Saint Oswald forgave him for it and bade the monks also that, by that example, they should be wary again to misdo.)

Beyond the setting in a bedroom and the basic plot of someone's entering a wrong bed by mistake and the culmination in a horrible beating, several ideas will be important to note for the Reeve's Tale — especially, the agency of devils in the punishment of the presumptuous, the spiritual superiority of Oswald to the presumptuous monk, and the inevitable, if unstated, hint of sexuality in a story involving a bed, devils, and a naked bather.

Of course, closer sources for the plot of the Reeve's Tale as a whole have long been known and are discussed and edited by Walter Morris Hart and Peter G. Beidler.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Beidler calls the basic story 'one of the most popular fabliaux in medieval Europe'. However, he argues that, rather than following any one source exclusively, Chaucer 'drew upon his memory of several of them to fashion his own wonderful story'.<sup>12</sup> I would argue that, in this fashioning, while Chaucer took most of the story from the more obvious sources and analogues, once the sexual comedy begins, he focused on the confusion of beds in order to evoke the parallel with the episode from St Oswald's life.

In particular, with respect to the first young man's sleeping with the daughter, an event which does not involve a confusion of beds, Chaucer bypasses content of significant comic and narrative potential available in the sources to achieve his focus. Aley's entrance into the daughter's bed begins the comic action, but Chaucer uses only five lines of poetry to tell this

English Text Society, o. s., 235, 236, 244, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1956–59) and are cited parenthetically in the text. The translations are mine.

<sup>11</sup> W. M. Hart, 'The Reeve's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), pp. 124–48 [first publ. 1941]; Peter G. Beidler, 'The Reeve's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002–5), 1 23–73.

<sup>12</sup> Beidler, 'The Reeve's Tale', 23, 26.

part of the story (I.4193–97). In the comparable parts of both versions of *Le Meunier et Les .II. Cleres*, however, after the father locks his daughter in a trunk for her own protection, the clerk who approaches her makes a lover's plea and then wins her love via a trick. He offers her a ring, which he claims is gold and has the magical ability to restore her maidenhead, when in actuality it was something he had taken from an andiron in their fireplace. The narration in both versions, without the locking of the daughter in the trunk, fills approximately 35 lines and is as entertaining as the mistake made by the wife in entering the other clerk's bed. In *Ein Bispel van .ij. Clerken*, the clerk similarly woos the daughter and wins her by giving her a fraudulent golden ring that is really from their fireplace. There is no claim of magic and the daughter sleeps in a conventional bed rather than a trunk; nevertheless, the narration is developed through 30 lines of poetry. In the *Decameron* version (IX.6), Boccaccio may seem to narrate this part of the story as briefly as Chaucer does. From the time all are in their beds to Pinuccio's enjoyment of the daughter only two sentences pass, but really Boccaccio crafts the entire story to culminate in this moment. Because Pinuccio and the daughter had previously fallen in love, Pinuccio plans a way to sleep with her without their reputations' suffering dishonor. He and his companion employ a trick, claiming to be returning from a journey late at night and to require lodging, so that the girl's father will allow Pinuccio the opportunity to sleep in their house. He does not seize an opportunity of the moment as do his companion and all of the men in the other versions of the story.

Chaucer, however, despite these opportunities for development, moves quickly past Aley's initial venture to focus on John's crafty shifting of the cradle from the foot of the miller's and his wife's bed to the foot of his own. Thus begin over 100 lines of comedy based on the mistakes and consequences of the wife's and then Aley's entering the wrong beds. Chaucer makes significant use of details in the analogues, but he has clearly focused on events reminiscent of the episode from St Oswald's life.

\* \* \*

While Chaucer does nothing to make his readers aware of his borrowings from his other sources, Chaucer invokes the saintly name that he has given his Reeve, Osewold, three times leading up to the tale. Apparently, through this crescendo of allusions, he wished to invite a comparison between Osewold and his bishop namesake, one which I think develops nicely Chaucer's previously well-recognized characterization of the Reeve as someone who inappropriately acts as if he were a priest.<sup>13</sup>

We are told that the Reeve's 'top was dokked lyk a preest biforn' (I.590) and 'tukked he was as is a frere aboute' (I.621). He objects to the tale that the Miller proposes to tell because 'it is a synne and eek a greet folye' (I.3146). And the Host recognizes his exposition of the four embers of old age — boasting, lying, anger, and covetousness — as inappropriate 'sermonyng', then adds, mockingly, 'the devel made a reve for to preche' (I.3883–903).<sup>14</sup> Chaucer has the Miller similarly mock Osewold's pretension in several ways, but especially by

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 284 n. 70, and, more recently, Bryan Carella, 'The Social Aspirations and Priestly Pretense of Chaucer's Reeve', *Neophilologus*, 94 (2010), 523–29.

<sup>14</sup> A detail perhaps suggested by St Oswald's reputation as a great preacher. In another episode from his life, both in the *SEL* (I.76, lines 171–72) and in many of the other versions mentioned below, monks come by the boatload, literally, to hear him preach.

having the carpenter in his tale perform a kind of exorcism with botched, nonsensical prayers (I.3479–86).

If the narrative told by Chaucer's would-be priest is compared to the version told about the sainted, super priest, additional mockery of the Reeve becomes apparent, as events seem twisted from the way they should appear. First, in both narratives, persons get into wrong beds. In the saint's life, this is an act of presumption which culminates in the beating of the presumptuous person. But Chaucer's Reeve gets it wrong. In his story, though Aleyn and the wife enter the wrong beds, neither appears presumptuous and neither, except for Aleyn's bloodied nose, is beaten. Indeed, they seem rewarded. Aleyn enjoys the daughter and, in the process, wins her love (becoming her 'deere lemman' and her 'goode lemman'), and he retrieves the stolen grain (I.4240–48). The wife, though duped, is nevertheless pleased ('so myrie a fit ne hadde she nat ful yoore' — I.4230). In the Reeve's version, the presumptuous monk's character and punishment are transferred to the miller Symkyn, the pilgrim Miller's representative in the tale. Symkyn takes too much pride in his wife's lineage and his own cleverness, and he receives the horrible beating both from the clerks and, worse, from his own wife, who unwittingly strikes the first blow.

The stories are similar also in that real or, in the Reeve's Tale, figurative demons punish the guilty party in the bedroom. In St Oswald's life, devils beat the presumptuous monk. So, if there were a closer modelling of the Reeve's Tale on the saint's life, the clerks who beat Symkyn should play the devils' roles — and, to some extent, they do, but they do so only briefly and metaphorically. Aleyn is said to go 'a twenty devel way, | Unto the bed ther as the millere lay' (I.4257–58). And when the fighting begins and the wife feels attacked, she cries 'awak, Symond! The feend is on me fall' (I.4288). But, while she believes that the clerks are fighting with each other and that one of those clerkly fiends has fallen on her, readers know that the specific 'feend' who has fallen upon her is none other than her own miller husband Symkyn — not those doing the beating, but the recipient of the beating.

So, in his own version of this episode from Oswald's life, the Reeve has been able to characterize his stand-in for the Miller as both the presumptuous guilty party and as the devil! At the same time, those Reeve's Tale characters who actually correspond to the presumptuous monk are rewarded and get to administer the punishment to Symkyn. It would seem then that someone who knew Oswald's life, or maybe a real priest, would find these ironies amusing.

A final disparity between the stories cements our impression of the Reeve as a very poor would-be priest and the loser in the comparison. He ends his tale not with penance and forgiveness of the presumptuous, as the saint's life does, but with 'the proude millere wel ybete' (I.4313). Chaucer, by juxtaposing the narratives in our minds, characterizes Osewold as clearly inferior to his namesake and his priestly pretense as presumptuous. Susanna Grier Fein persuaded us of the 'inverted applicability' of one of St Oswald's characteristics to the Reeve, but Chaucer may well have intended more.

\* \* \*

These interpretive possibilities, no matter how far we take them, depend on Chaucer's knowledge of St Oswald the Bishop's life as it appears in the *South English Legendary* or a version similar to it. Theoretically, such knowledge might have come from his own church-going experience and be evidenced in liturgical sources. However, despite St Oswald's youth in Canterbury and Ramsey Abbey, his having been a monk in Fleury and Winchester, having founded seven monasteries, and being both Bishop of Worcester and later simultaneously

Archbishop of York, his cult was more local than national. There seem not to have been any churches dedicated to him.<sup>15</sup> The various St Oswald churches seem all to have been dedicated to St Oswald the King and Martyr. Moreover, although his name is included in calendars and litanies in a number of places, he seems to have had major feasts only at Ramsey in Cambridgeshire, Worcester, and perhaps Evesham (within Worcester's influence).<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no record of Chaucer's having visited these three places. But the truth is that there are great gaps in our knowledge of where Chaucer may have travelled within the island from his residences in London and Kent. An exception, however, might be instructive as to the range of his travel. Derek Pearsall notes that, as a page with the Countess of Ulster's household, Chaucer went within a few years' time to Woodstock (near Oxford, about half way from London to Worcester), to Bristol (as far away as Worcester, though further to the south), and to Anglesey, Liverpool and Doncaster (all twice as far north from London as either Worcester or Cambridgeshire and spanning the breadth of the island), in addition to other locations closer to home.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, then, we should not be surprised if Chaucer did at some time find his way to Worcestershire or Cambridgeshire. His wife Phillippa may have lived estranged from Geoffrey in Lincolnshire, which is due north of Cambridgeshire.<sup>18</sup> If so, Chaucer may have visited her. And, of course, with respect to Chaucer's setting the Reeve's Tale in Cambridgeshire, Bennett allows that Chaucer somehow 'knew what he was talking about' with respect to his handling of several matters of local color and importance.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, speculation that Chaucer could have heard the details of St Oswald's life from the pulpit remains, at best, inconclusive.

It is much more probable that he read a life of St Oswald. Chaucer (or someone thoroughly familiar with his works, speaking for him) in the famous 'retraction' does not retract, and indeed thanks, Jesus, Mary, and 'alle the seintes of heven' for allowing him to write or translate 'bookes of legendes of seintes' (X.1087–88) that are now lost to us. From one of these books, presumably, St Cecelia's life was reappropriated to become the Second Nun's Tale. It is unthinkable that Chaucer would have composed these books without hagiographic source material at hand. Indeed, he credits 'Frater Jacobus Januensis in Legenda' for his etymologies of Cecelia's name (VIII.84–85); he must, therefore, have seen the *Legenda Aurea*. Unfortunately, Oswald's life is not in that large collection. But Chaucer clearly had access to additional materials as well. Sherry Reames, in her summary of Chaucer's sources for the Second Nun's Prologue and Tale, mentions several, including two Latin abridgements of the *Passio S. Caeciliae*, one from the *Legenda Aurea* which Chaucer acknowledged and a second whose use she had previously discovered.<sup>20</sup> And Robert Boenig has argued that Chaucer used the *SEL* life of St Kenelm in composing the Nun's Priest's and Prioress's Tales.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Frances Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications; or, England's Patron Saints*, 3 vols (London: Skeffington, 1899), i, 413–15 (p. 415) and iii, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Thacker, 'Saint-Making and Relic Collecting by Oswald and His Communities', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. by Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt, *The Makers of England*, 2 (London: Leister University Press, 1996), pp. 244–68 (esp. pp. 264–65).

<sup>17</sup> Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 38–39.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 141–42.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Sherry L. Reames, 'The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Corrales and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002–5), i 491–527.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Boenig, 'Chaucer and St. Kenelm', *Neophilologus*, 84 (2000), 157–64. Furthermore, other scholars, notably Ann S. Haskell, have argued for the importance of allusions to saints' names in the *Canterbury Tales* and other works by Chaucer: *Essays on Chaucer's Saints* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

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Moreover, Boenig argued for a relationship of the Kenelm vita to the other sources of the Nun's Priest's Tale, similar to the one I see here:

I am not arguing that the *Life of St. Kenelm* suggested the bird-in-tree motif to Chaucer, for the close analogues to the Nun's Priest's Tale [...] all include the treed rooster. Doubtless Chaucer simply appropriated the detail from his direct source. But I do suggest that the influence perhaps worked the other way around: given Chaunticleer and his tree, the reference to the murdered boy king who dreamed himself as a bird in a tree was perhaps inevitable.<sup>22</sup>

And he argued that important parallels between the stories of Kenelm in the *SEL* and the martyred boy of the Prioress's Tale were suggested to Chaucer by the 'imaginative connection' he saw 'between him and Kenelm'.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, the chances are good that Chaucer, and much of his audience, could have known a version of the *South English Legendary*. The collection's popularity can be deduced from the large number of manuscripts extant today. While undoubtedly many more copies were available in Chaucer's day, remnants of 63 *SEL* manuscripts of all sorts including either *sanctorale* or *temporale* texts survive. These include 25 complete or substantially complete manuscripts of the *sanctorale* collection and fragments of 15 additional manuscripts that may once have been similar in scope.<sup>24</sup> Oswald the Bishop's life is contained in 18 of these manuscripts, and thus was probably widely distributed among the manuscripts now lost. Dialectal studies indicate that the surviving manuscripts originated in areas away from London, but Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Miscellaneous 108, among the earliest of *SEL* manuscripts (though not containing St Oswald the Bishop's life), is now known to have been owned in the fifteenth century by Henry Perveys, a London draper and the son of John Perveys, a former mayor of London.<sup>25</sup> So other *SEL* manuscripts could easily have made their way to London and been available to its notables as well.

Chaucer may also, or alternatively, have known Oswald's life from some other source. Earlier Latin versions of the life of St Oswald, and notably the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi Eboracensis Archiepiscopi et Confessoris* of Eadmer, which became the standard life, lay the foundation for the *SEL* story. It contains the episode of a monk who falls asleep in a place special to Oswald where he is tormented by demons. However, Eadmer's version differs in some important particulars. When the monk, named Ægelricus, returns from his bath, he goes not necessarily to Oswald's bed, but either to a place where Oswald frequently sits ('Osualdus sedere

<sup>22</sup> Boenig, 'Chaucer and St. Kenelm', pp. 159–60.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> For the total of 63, see my accounting in Virginia Blanton, 'Counting Noses and Assessing the Numbers: Native Saints in the *South English Legendaries*', in *Rethinking the 'South English Legendaries'*, ed. by Heather Blurton and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 233–50 (p. 247 n. 5), which offers a correction to my previous accounting in 'The Dragon in the *South English Legendary*: Judas, Pilate, and the "A(1)" Redaction', *Modern Philology*, 100 (2002), 50–59 (pp. 50–51 n. 2). The accounting is based especially on Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, viii–x, 70–130, whose sigla I employ. For the total of 25 here, I include MS Z (New Haven CT, Yale University Library (Beinecke Library), MS Takamiya 54, a manuscript that was not known at the time of Görlach's publication), and I exclude MS I from his 'major manuscripts'. For the total of 15, I include his MSS Ar, Be, Bp, Br, Cd, Gr, Lm, Pr/Wm, Rm, Qb, Ua/Wa, Ub, Wh, Ax, and Uz.

<sup>25</sup> See *Havelok*, ed. by G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. xiii–xiv, crediting A. I. Doyle. See also Christina M. Fitzgerald, 'Miscellaneous Masculinities and a Possible Fifteenth-Century Owner of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108', in *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108: The Shaping of English Vernacular Narrative*, ed. by Kimberly K. Bell and Julie Nelson Couch, *Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts*, 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 87–113.

frequentius morem habebat<sup>26</sup>) or — because the verb *sedere* may be taken more generally — to an unspecified place that Oswald frequently occupies, and it is there that Ægelricus sleeps. Moreover, the monk sleeps there not by mistake, except in the larger sense of the word, but because he did not revere the sanctity of the place ('non ergo ueritus sanctitatem loci'). In other respects, Eadmer's version is generally consistent with the *SEL* version:

Frater quidam erat, professione et habitu monachus, nomine Ægelricus. Hic, laxatis balneo membris, cum fessus quiescere opus haberet, locus quietis, uae misero, is primus occurrit quem uenerandus praesul Osuualdus sedere frequentius morem habebat. Non ergo ueritus sanctitatem loci quam fuerat ex assiduitate pontificis nactus, in eo sese deiecit, somno inibi ac dulci quiete uelut sibi pollicebatur fruiturus. Et iam quiescentem lenis sopor inuoluit, sed absque mora eum ab ipsa quiete irruens demonum multitudo atrociter euoluit. Astant quippe illi plures teterrimi spiritus, et ab eo districta examinatione perquirunt quatenus illius mentem dementia ceperit quae sibi, ut se in loco tanti pontificis collocaret, surripere potuit. Ad quod rationem quam pro sui excusatione proferret nullam habentem, inuadunt, torquent, laniant, hac et illac trahunt, ab imo sursum rapientes, de sursum ad ima deicientes. Quid miser ageret? Sciebat ubi erat, nec se tanta angustia inuolutum uel loco auellere, uel ad subueniendum quenquam poterat interpellare. Tandem tamen uiolento conatu erupit in uocem, et horrido clamore infremuit. Qui circa erant ex abrupto dormientis sono perterriti, accurrunt, uociferantem pulsant, pulsantes excitant, excitatum quid dormiens passus sit diligenter interrogant. At ipse pauens ac pallens quo ausu, quid fecerit, quid aut a quibus audierit, quid pertulerit ex ordine pandit. Ad quorumcunque ergo noticiam istud perlatum est, non soli uiro, sed et iis quae sua intererant deinceps honorem ac reuerentiam per omnia deferebant.

(There was a certain brother named [Ægelricus] who was a monk both by his vows and in his dress. When this man had relaxed his limbs in the bath, he was weary and felt a need to sleep; alas for the wretch, the first place of rest which suggested itself to him was that which quite frequently the venerable bishop Oswald was accustomed to occupy. And so, not intimidated by the sanctity of the place which it had obtained from its frequent use by the bishop, he laid himself down upon it intending to enjoy sleep and sweet rest there, just as he had promised himself. And when gentle slumber had just enfolded him in rest, without delay a multitude of hideous demons rushed upon him, and rudely snatched him from that peacefulness. For many extremely ugly spirits stood around him and asked him with insistent cross-examination what sort of madness had overrun his mind, which might seduce him in this way to set himself down in the place of such a great bishop. He had no justification which he could offer in response to this as an excuse for himself and so they attacked him, tortured him, mangled him, dragged him back and forth, snatching him up on high from the depths and then casting him down again to the depths from on high. What was the miserable wretch to do? He knew where he was and yet was unable either to tear himself away from the place in which he was so tightly constrained or to cry out for someone to come to his aid. Nevertheless, with violent effort he finally recovered his voice and roared loudly with a hideous scream. Those who were nearby were thoroughly

<sup>26</sup> The edition and translation are from Eadmer of Canterbury, *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. by Andrew J. Turner and Bernard J. Muir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 215–89 (pp. 276–77). However, I made two modifications to their translation to make it closer to the Latin text, marked with square brackets. Turner and Muir substitute 'Æthelric', the name of an actual monk of Worcester in Oswald's day, for 'Ægelricus' (see p. 276 n. 103). And where the Latin has the unspecific 'uiro', they substitute the man intended, i.e., 'Oswald'. For an earlier edition of the vita, see Eadmer, *Vita Sancti Oswaldi Eboracensis Archiepiscopi et Confessoris* [sic], in *The Historians of the Church of York and Its Archbishops*, ed. by James Raine, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores*, 71, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1879–94), II, 1–59 (episode on pp. 33–34).

*Chaucer's Osewold the Reeve and St Oswald the Bishop*

terrified by the unexpected cry of the sleeping man; they ran to him, struck him as he cried, by striking they awoke him and when he had awakened they persistently questioned him about what he had experienced in his sleep. And, terrified and pale, he revealed step by step how bold he had been and what he had done, what things he had heard and from whom, and what he had suffered. Whenever this event was later brought to the attention of anyone, they paid honour and reverence in all matters not only to [the man] himself, but after that to those things which were important to him.)<sup>26</sup>

Eadmer's vita survives in three manuscripts. One was Eadmer's autograph, which would have been kept at his monastery in Christ Church, Canterbury. Another was a copy kept at the monastery of Pershore in Worcestershire, which Oswald founded. The third is of uncertain provenance, but is a collection of saints' lives, primarily English, and associated texts that may have been at Ramsey Abbey in Cambridgeshire.<sup>27</sup>

Some versions of Oswald's life lack the episode in question. The earliest life of Oswald, composed soon after his death in 992 by the monk Byrhtferth, also at Ramsey Abbey, does not contain it.<sup>28</sup> Of the lives or other works derivative of Eadmer's vita, three lack it: William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, the Worcester Lectionary, and an anonymous life in a collection from Romsey Abbey in Hampshire.<sup>29</sup> But two others — a vita by Senatus of Worcester<sup>30</sup> and another from John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium* (sometimes ascribed incorrectly to John Capgrave)<sup>31</sup> — do narrate the episode of the presumptuous monk who sleeps in a place that Oswald frequently occupies. In these, as in Eadmer's account, the place is similarly identified indirectly by verb forms related to *sedere*, and so may or may not be a bed.

Two English versions are indebted to Eadmer: the *SEL* vita and also a revision of the *SEL* text into English prose undertaken after 1438 for addition to the *Gilte Legende*. Though written after Chaucer's death, it may preserve evidence of other, no longer extant versions of the story that he might have encountered. The Oswald life in the *Gilte Legende* has the episode of the monk, sleeping specifically in a bed belonging to Oswald, as in the *SEL*, but it contains an emphasis on the importance of keeping matins not found in other versions:

but in a nyght, as this holye man and alle his monkys were at Matyns, except one monke that wente to bath hym and lefte the Matyns, and when he had do he wente and layde hym downe to slepe in Seynt Oswaldis bedde. And anone the devylle came theder and tormentyd hym fulle sore, that he cryed and made a grete noyse that alle the monkis herd it and came theder anone and fownde hym in Oswaldis bedde. And thaye askyd hym whye

<sup>27</sup> *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. by Turner and Muir, cvi–cxxiv.

<sup>28</sup> Available as *Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis* in *Historians of the Church of York and Its Archbishops*, ed. by Raine, i, 399–475; see also 'Preface', i, lxx–lxxvii. For the identification of the author as Byrhtferth by Michael Lapidge, see Donald Bullough, 'St Oswald: Monk, Bishop and Archbishop', in *St Oswald of Worcester: Life and Influence*, ed. by Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt, *The Makers of England*, 2 (London: Leister University Press, 1996), pp. 1–22 (p. 2).

<sup>29</sup> For identification of these Latin works and of the English works mentioned in the next paragraph, see *Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, ed. by Turner and Muir, cxxi–cxxvii. The life from Romsey Abbey is available as *Vita S. Oswaldi*, in *Historians of the Church of York and Its Archbishops*, ed. by Raine, ii, 489–501.

<sup>30</sup> Available as *Vita Sancti Oswaldi Archiepiscopi*, in *Historians of the Church of York and Its Archbishops*, ed. by Raine, ii, 60–97 (episode on pp. 85–86).

<sup>31</sup> Available as *Vita Sancti Oswaldi, A Joanne Capgrave Conscripta*, in *Historians of the Church of York and Its Archbishops*, ed. by Raine, ii, 502–12 (episode on p. 508). Turner and Muir state incorrectly that in this version the monk slept in Oswald's bed (*Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald*, cxxvii). The life is also available as *De Sancto Oswaldo Archiepiscopo et Confessore*, in *Nova Legenda Anglie: As Collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave, and Others, and First Printed, with New Lives, by Wynkyn de Worde a.d. m d xiii*, ed.

he made suche a noyse, and he tolde theym that the devylle vexyd hym so sore because he kepte not Matyns and because that he laye in Oswoldis bedde. And then he repentyd hym, and the holye man forgaue hym that trespas and chargid his monkys to be euer after at Matyns and other seruyce in the church.<sup>32</sup>

Hamer and Russell characterize the main part of the *Gilte Legende*, not including Oswald's vita, as 'a close translation, with slight modifications of the contents, of Jean de Vignay's *Légende Dorée* of about 1333–40, which in turn is a close translation of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, completed about 1267'. The Oswald vita is one of twenty-one supplementary or 'additional lives', added to the main collection in three manuscripts. These additional lives are primarily English saints' lives and, except for one, drawn from the *South English Legendary*.<sup>33</sup>

Among these additional lives, Manfred Görlach characterizes the *Gilte Legende* rendering of the St Oswald life as similarly 'very close' to its source, the *SEL* version. However, Görlach notes that no source for the emphasis on keeping matins has been found. Because the content did not come from the *SEL*, which was otherwise closely followed, he concludes that the detail suggests the existence of other now lost works or even oral traditions available to the *Gilte Legende* reviser and, I would add, to Chaucer as well.<sup>34</sup>

\* \* \*

So, while there seems to be a variety of ways that Chaucer could have known the details of St Oswald the Bishop's story, his encountering a *South English Legendary* version seems to me the most likely. And those readers of Osewold's story in the *Canterbury Tales* who recognized the parallels to St Oswald's story and, more importantly, Chaucer's departures from it could not have failed to appreciate additional levels to the Reeve's attack upon the Miller and additional richness and irony in Chaucer's characterization of his pilgrim Osewold as a man who fancies himself a priest but who is a very poor match for his priestly and saintly namesake.

## Appendix: Substantive Variant Readings among the *SEL* Manuscripts for the Lines Quoted.

The sigla are from Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. viii–x.

61–70, 153–66] *lines lost, missing leaf X.*

61–70] *lines lost, missing leaf Qa.*

61 His] þe N; were wel glad] glad were G; wel] ful wel W, *omitted* PYTDER; glad] *omitted* W; of him] ynow R, *omitted* E; of] with T; þo] when GY; hi] him J, hy hym B; vnderȝite] thider ȝete W.

by Carl Horstmann, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), II, 252–60 (episode on p. 257).

<sup>32</sup> Available as *St Oswald*, item 13 in *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the 'Gilte Legende'*, ed. by Richard Hamer and Vida Russell, Early English Text Society, o. s. 315 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 173–78 (episode on p. 177, lines 95–106).

<sup>33</sup> *Supplementary Lives in Some Manuscripts of the 'Gilte Legende'*, ed. by Hamer and Russell, xiii–xv (quoting p. xiii). They note that among the three manuscripts of the *Gilte Legende* that preserve the additional lives, one is unfortunately now missing the quire that contained the Oswald vita. The vita is also one of six of these additional lives that were incorporated in a manuscript of Mirk's *Festial*.

<sup>34</sup> Manfred Görlach, 'The South English Legendary, *Gilte Legende* and Golden Legend', in *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, *Anglistische Forschungen*, 257 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1998), pp. 71–145 (pp. 106, 124–25).

- 62 Þat(1)] þe VWGYTDER; he was] was hym RB; he] him VMAJ, saynt Oswald G; was] ladde WGDE; on] *omitted* WGDE, of Y, ine T; hy] *omitted* WR, he T; nolde] wolde W; him] he W, *omitted* MT.
- 63 In orisons he was] he was in orisoun G; orisons] his orisones V, his praiers W, bedes E; was] lay W; niȝt & day & in] day & nyȝt for be G; oþer gode] alle oþer G, alle goode oþer P, al oþir goed Y, holi E.
- 64 Þer of þe deuel hadde envie] the deuel had envye ther to W, þe deuel hedde þer to onde E; Þer of þe deuel] þe fende þerto G; Þer(1)] & þer B; deuel] feende Y; envie] comye R; and] *omitted* A; him þerof] þerof him PEB, þer fro him Y; þerof(2)] þer out of V, out to W, þerof to GTR, þerof owt J, out to D.
- 65 Ofte] fful ofte G, wel ofte B; deorne stude] derke stede WB, priue stedes PY; biniȝte him] hym by nyȝt G.
- 66 Wanne] as G; was al one inis bede] in his beodes was V, alone in his bed was W, allone in bed lay G; bede] bedys QPYB; &] a M; reuful] ful rewful W, rulich PYRB, reupfol E; here] chere WGY.
- 67 Ac] but GYT, *omitted* W, & AD; wanne] þo G; þis holyman] he E; hurde him] him herde ER; deoluolliche] rewfully WGR, dreduolliche AJQDEB, doelfully YT.
- 68 Þe signe he made] he made þe signe G; he made of þe crois] of þe crois he made on him VW; þe(2)] *omitted* T; &] and þenne VMAJPYDB, *omitted* W, þo E; ne hurde] he ne herde B; ne] *omitted* QYTDE; hurde] herde he VMAPDE, he herde WQYT, herde of G; him] *omitted* MD, it AJ.
- 69–70] *reversed* M.
- 69 Ðo] but G, when Y, *omitted* TD; deuel] feende Y; ysey] ne sei A; þis] *omitted* VGMAJPYDERB, wel W; þat he] *omitted* G; nemiȝte] ne mihte wiþ drede V, myȝt nat WY, þerwiþ he may not G, ne miȝt þer wiþ MANQTDRB, miȝte þer wit J; him come] come him WGMPYDE, him ouercome T; wiþinne] ynne G.
- 70 mid] wiþ VWGAJQPYTDB; oþer] anoþur W; felonye] folye WR; þis] þat M; wyne] to winne VWGMPYTDRB.
- 153 As] *omitted* ER, as he B; in] *omitted* M; is] *omitted* VQaGA; orisons] preyzeres PY; seint] *omitted* B; a] on a W, in G; was] at his bok was V.
- 154 &] as Qa; in hore bede lay] leiȝe in here bed T; in hore bede] *omitted* W, abedde M; hore] *omitted* G; bede] beddes QaPY; lay aslepe] aslepe were WQa; lay] weore V, *omitted* GMAJDER; aslepe] *omitted* PYDB, & slepe TR; it] as hit VWYTB, *omitted* GED, at hit P, as R; biuel] fyl VWQaAPYTERB; bifel þere G, þer fel D; bicas] in a cas Qa, siche a cas G, þat cas M, a cas J, a wonder cas D.
- 155 Þat] þat þe J, þe CNQ, ak PE, but Y, *omitted* T, þer R; him let bapþie] þer was þat him bathed Y; him let] let him VWG; him] he him J; let] *omitted* P; and] ac Qa; þo] when YE; ydo] so do GPY.
- 156 lay] leide him VWQaE, ȝede G, eode ligge A, ȝede ligge J, ȝode lygge P, ȝeode to ly Y; in] into G; ac] *omitted* WG, & MERB, but YTD; raþe] sone Y; he(2)] *omitted* EB.
- 157 Vour] *omitted* W; deuelen] fendes GY; come] come þere T, þer com D; & esste anon] anon & and axid T, anon & axid D; esste] askeden him VWQaGMPY; anon] *omitted* VGME.
- 158 In þe bed þat is maister was &] lyand in his mayster bed G; þe bed þat is maister was] his maystres bed þo D; þe] *omitted* VWMAJER; hou] whi D, *omitted* E; he so hardy] so hardi he T; so] *omitted* M.

- 159 Þo] and þo G, when Y, *omitted* T; ne] *omitted* WGYT; non] *omitted* VQaMAJPDE, no W; encheson] cause W; hi him] him hi P; toke] bounde and toke E.
- 160 And] *omitted* VQaM; bete him so sore] so sore heo him beote VW, so sore þey beten hym Qa; bete] hii bete M; so sore þoru þe cri] þat he cryed so þat G; so] *omitted* T; sore] þer E; þoru þe cri ] þat M; þoru] and þorw V, þat þurgh WQaAJPYDERB; þe] his VWQaAJDER; al þe monkes] he his felawes G; al] þat alle N.
- 161 And(1)] thei WER; &(2)] to GYTE; holpe] *omitted* GYE, vpe R; hasteliche] *omitted* W; esste] askd hym WE; him(2)] he.
- 162 And(1)] *omitted* D; in þulke bedde dude] dude in þat bed Qa; þulke] þat WGQPYTER; wy he] *omitted* Qa; he made] madist þou T; bere] a bere W, chere Y.
- 163 yknewe] beknow W, wele knowen G; of] *omitted* E; al(1)] *omitted* WQaGMPYER; and among hom al] to alle and E; and] *omitted* DR; yssriue] hii stryue R.
- 164 And] þei D; sede] *omitted* E; is penance was] he hedde penaunce VWG, þat hadde penance Qa; þei] þe N; is gult were] hit were hym R; is(2)] þe VQa, þat G; gult] synne W.
- 165-66] *omitted* M.
- 165 for<sub>3</sub>ef it him] hit for<sub>3</sub>af E; it him] hym þere G; þe monkes] þese oþere G; þe] his WE.
- 166 By þulke cas ywar hy were] to ben bi þulke cas iwar V, & be a war of þat cas Qa, þat þai shuld by hym be war G, þat þei bi þat cas were war D; þulke] þat WQPYTE; ywar hy were] to be ware W, þat hi were ywar PY, þei were war TER; efsone to] & eft no more þat þou Qa, & no more G; to misdo] amys to do T, mis to do E.