This volume of *Quidditas* is dedicated to Harry Rosenberg

Harry Rosenberg (1923-2010) was a founder of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association (1968) and an active member of its Executive Council for more than thirty years. Twice he served as RMMRA president (1980-81, 1989-90), and four times he was host and organizer of the RMMRA annual conference (1971, 1977, 1988, and 2001). He also served for many years as a member of the RMMRA journal’s editorial staff as Associate Editor for History (1984-2003). No member of the Association rendered greater service to the RMMRA over a longer period than Harry Rosenberg.

Harry’s scholarly work reflects the same dedication to service: he was, late in his career, still a member of seven professional organizations (a founding member of two of them); he refereed articles for five journals; he produced 23 entries for the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson (Garland, 1990, 2nd rev. ed., 1997); he contributed a chapter on the early medieval church in *A History of Christianity*, ed. T. Dowley (Dowmans, 1990); and over the course of a career spanning six decades, published over 90 learned and gracious reviews of scholarly books on late antiquity and the early middle ages. He also published on Bishop Avitus and the role of bishops of Vienne, conducted research and presented papers on the role of the bishop in early medieval government, on Pope Hormisdas and Edward Gibbon.

Like the RMMRA and the history profession, Colorado State University benefitted enormously from Harry’s dedication, especially at the administrative and University level. For ten years early in his career he was chair of the CSU Department of History, a period when the Department grew from twelve to twenty-one faculty and developed a joint Ph.D. program with the University of Colorado at Boulder. Elected to the University Faculty Council almost continuously from 1962 to 1999, he served as Faculty Council representative to the CSU Governing Board in 1984, serving two terms, and he served as the first elected chair of Faculty Council in 1988, again serving two terms. He also served a total of eighteen years, nearly always as chair, on major Faculty Council standing committees. He chaired search committees for provosts and a president of the University and was active in campaigns for the Library
and Library outreach. Long interested in the history of the American West, he began in 1984 a stint of more than fifteen years as Coordinator of the American West Program, a summer series of free weekly programs bringing historians, writers, impersonators in period costume, music, films and the like to the campus and to the Fort Collins Community.

During his forty-six-year career at Colorado State University, Harry received numerous awards for distinguished service and for the distinguished professor he was. Truly a gentle man and a true gentleman, he was a friend to virtually everyone so fortunate as to know him.

Ave atque vale.

Charles Smith, Professor of English Emeritus
Colorado State University, Fort Collins

Obituary

Harry Rosenberg (1923-2010) died in Poudre Valley Hospital on September 9 after a determined struggle against prolonged illness. Surviving family members include his wife Nancy Hart, children Stephen Rosenberg, Susan Nord and her husband Michael, Stanley Rosenberg and his wife Joy, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Adeline Steinberg Rosenberg.

Adopted son of William and Rose Rosenberg, Jewish immigrants from Russia and Lithuania respectively, Harry went at a young age with his parents to St. Lake City, Utah, and then to Vernal, Utah, where his father owned and ran a general store and apartment house. In the fourth grade, he was cited by the Uintah County superintendent of schools for reading the most books and writing the best book reports of any student in the district. With great pride he often cited his tenure as batboy for the Vernal Merchants baseball team as the beginning of his passion for spectator sports. Later Harry moved with his family to Los Angeles where he attended junior high and high school and met his first wife, whom he married in 1947. Her interest in the First Hebrew Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles caused them both to break from their traditional Jewish heritage.
Despite the loss of an eye during childhood, Harry received a special waiver to serve in the Army Air Corps (1942-46) and, in particular, to clerical service with the 306th Bomb Group in England. Experiencing England’s history and culture aroused what became a lifelong interest in ancient and medieval history. Following discharge, he entered the University of California, Berkeley, graduated *cum laude* in history in 1949, and with stints as an instructor at Stanford and the University of Washington, completed his Ph.D. in medieval history and literature at the University of California, Berkeley in 1959.

In 1959, he began what became almost a half-century career at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, a career distinguished by remarkable contributions to the University, to his profession, and to the Fort Collins community, notably to the Fort Collins Symphony where he was a member and president of the governing board and established an annual young artist competition. A devoted father, grandfather, and great grandfather; mentor to countless students and junior colleagues; gracious, good-humored, and equal to nearly every task he undertook, Harry Rosenberg will always be missed by those who knew him.

Condensed from the obituary found at http://www.coloradoan.com/article/20100912/OBITUARIES/9120344/1023/Harry Rosenberg 13/09/2010 08:49

*Quidditas* is a Latin legal term that originally meant “the essential nature of a thing.” In fourteenth-century French the word became “quiddite.” In the early modern period, the English adaptation, “quiddity,” came to mean “logical subtleties” or “a captious nicety in argument” (OED), and is so used in Hamlet (“Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?” 5: 1, 95–97). Thus, the original Latin meaning, together with the later implied notions of intense scrutiny, systematic reasoning, and witty wordplay, is well suited to the contents of the journal.

**Editor:** James H. Forse, *Bowling Green State University, Emeritus*

**Reviews Editor:** Jennifer McNabb, *Western Illinois University*

Articles appearing in *Quidditas* are abstracted and indexed in *MLA, Historical Abstracts, Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index*, and *America: History and Life, Standard Periodical Directory*, and *EBSCO*. 
Notice to Contributors

Quidditas is the annual, on-line journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. The editor and editorial board invite submissions from scholars whose work falls within the domain of all Medieval and the Renaissance disciplines: literature, history, art, music, philosophy, religion, languages, rhetoric, or interdisciplinary studies.

Quidditas also now features a “Notes” section for short articles (2 to 12 pages) pertaining to factual, bibliographical and/or archival matters, corrections and suggestions, pedagogy and other issues pertaining to the research and teaching of Medieval and Renaissance disciplines. Our “Reviews” section features a “Review Essay” and a “Texts & Teaching” focus: short (3 to 7 pages) reviews describing texts and books instructors have found especially valuable in teaching upper level courses in Medieval and Renaissance disciplines. We also welcome longer literature-review articles. Membership in the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association is not required for submission or publication.

All submissions are peer-reviewed. Submissions must not have been published elsewhere. Long articles should be 20 to 30 double-spaced manuscript pages. Long articles, notes, and review articles should follow The Chicago Manual of Style (14th ed.), footnote format. The author’s name must not appear within the text. A brief (200 word) abstract should accompany all long articles. A cover letter containing the author’s name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and title of paper must accompany all submissions. Authors of accepted works will supply a copy of the manuscript compatible with Microsoft Word on a CD.

E-mail submissions in Microsoft Word are accepted, but should be followed by two hard copies. Please send submissions for Articles and Notes to:

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Membership in the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association is available at an annual cost of $25, with an additional $5 fee for joint memberships. For further information contact:

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Call for Papers

The Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association

Faith and Doubt in the Middle Ages and Renaissance
April 7-9, 2011: Salt Lake City, Utah

The Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association invites panel and paper proposals on the conference theme:

“Faith and Doubt in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.”

The Conference will be held at the Crystal Inn in downtown Salt Lake City, just ten minutes from the Salt Lake City International Airport. Our keynote speaker will be Raymond Waddington, Professor of English at the University of California at Davis. He is the author of numerous articles, essays, and books including Aretino’s Satyr, 2004; The Expulsion of the Jews (co-editor), 1994; The Age of Milton (co-editor), 1980; The Mind’s Empire, 1974; and The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry (co-editor), 1974. He also serves as Senior Editor of the Sixteenth Century Journal.

The RMMRA seeks to provide an interdisciplinary forum for the discussion of all aspects of European medieval and Renaissance studies. We welcome abstracts addressing, among other topics, the literary, historical, scientific, religious and cultural representations of faith and doubt and their various permutations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. However, as in previous years, abstracts, papers, and sessions on all aspects of the study of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance are also welcome.

Proposals for panels or abstracts for papers should be directed to one of the co-organizers: Kimberly Johnson (kimberly.johnson@byu.edu), Ginger Smoak (ginger.smoak@utah.edu), Michael Walton (waltonmar@aol.com).

Abstracts are due January 31, 2011.
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The Allen D. Breck Award is given in honor of Professor Allen D. Breck (1914-2000), a founder of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. As Professor of History at the University of Denver, he also served for 20 years as department chair. As Professor Emeritus he became the historian of the University of Denver, writing *From the Rockies to the World—The History of the University of Denver*. His specialties included medieval and church history, particularly John Wyclif. He also taught Anglican studies at the Hiff School of Theology, and wrote, edited, or contributed to histories of Jews, Methodists, and Episcopalians in Colorado and books on medieval philosophy, the lives of western leaders, and the relationships between science, history, and philosophy. In addition to his involvement with RMMRA, he was a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and belonged to the Medieval Academy of America, the Western History Association, and the Western Social Science Association.

The Allen D. Breck Award recognizes the most distinguished paper given by a junior scholar at the annual conference of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association.
Politics and Play:
The National Stage and the Player King
in Shakespeare’s Henry V and Macbeth

Kristin M.S. Bezio
Boston University

This article examines the intersection between theatrical and political discourse in early modern England. It argues that the dialog surrounding early modern discourses of monarchy intersects specifically with theatrical notions of performance by means of the social contract implicit in English Common Law. The link between the political stage and the theater is perhaps most transparent in the metaphor of the theatrum mundi. Because the theatrum mundi requires the active participation of the audience, they must always be included in the theatrum mundi as participatory citizens in its illusory world. They are drawn into the conversation between stage and state on the very nature of sovereignty and on their own role within the construction and operation of the larger body politic; that conversation also appears in Macbeth’s correlation of “life” to the “poor player” (5.5.24).

In Shakespeare’s Henry V, this appears most obviously in Henry’s scenes of disguise, in which the king himself offers the theory that kings only rule by the grace of “ceremony . . . general ceremony” (4.1.236), that is, through the power of monarchical performance. In Macbeth, we see the opposite of Henry’s performance; Macbeth’s ambition renders him incapable of participating in the “ceremony” Henry describes. Ultimately, the plays seek to articulate that performance determines the power and authority of the king, and that it is within the power of the populace-audience to accept and authorize their ruler based on the type and quality of his (or her) performance.

Political and theatrical spaces overlapped across the boundaries of state and stage in early modern London as the populace traversed the geographical lines of city and Liberties to attend the theaters.
The drama they patronized rests upon a medieval tradition of public pageantry that shares its performance space with the politicized locale of the scaffold that was also the site of sermons, coronations, and executions. Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and *Macbeth* address the political concerns of the Elizabethan and Jacobean regimes in terms that are explicitly theatrical, using the language and space of the theater to participate in and influence the popular understanding of national polity. Because the theater functions as a microcosmic world in which the players, stage, and audience all represent analogous positions in the larger outside world, the expectations held of the players can be extended similarly into the world outside the playhouse.

The importance of understanding the monarch’s role in terms of performance relates not only to dramatic participation in the social debate on the nature of rulership, but also on the way in which monarchs themselves came to understand and enact their public roles. As Michael Braddick and John C. Walter note in their introduction to *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society*, public power must be actively negotiated by those who wish to gain and to keep it. Following this paradigm, then, monarchs must negotiate their power, and they do so through performative relations with their subjects.

In her first reply to Parliament’s petition that she execute Mary, Queen of Scots in 1586, Elizabeth equates the public role of the monarch with that of a player: “for we princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed.” Elizabeth’s understanding of her place in the English national polity was evident in pageantry, public progresses, and ceremonial portraits. Her performative identity as the Virgin Queen helped not only to secure her solitary hold on the English throne, but also created her immortal identity as the mother of England’s Golden Age—regardless of the objective truth behind her ageless mask.

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The parallel between stage and state functions is in both directions, enabling the drama to reinforce the implicit social contract between the populace and the monarch. In this contract, the nation relies upon the ruler to maintain their rights as established by Common Law. Likewise, the ruler relies upon the loyalty and the willingness of the populace to obey royal dictates and decrees. The balance of this contract is maintained by the monarch’s awareness that royal power comes from and is owed to the nation, not to God or bloodlines. The theatrical audience, in turn, assumes the role of the nation in the playhouse. As members of this temporary populace, the audience’s response to the actions on stage conditions them to a participatory role within both the theater and the real world outside its walls. In the history plays in particular, participation in the theatrical polity—by applauding Macbeth’s death, for instance—encourages parallel participation in the national polity.

Because a play’s location and events cannot be realistically represented on the stage, the audience must invest imaginatively in the theatrical illusion in order to create the contextual setting—what Richard Weimann terms the **locus**—of the drama. This relationship is made transparent in the prologue of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*:

```
CHORUS Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Into a thousand parts divide one man
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i’th’ receiving earth.
For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings (Henry V 1.0.19-28).
```

If the audience refuses to imagine the **locus** described to them, if they refuse the play’s attempt at negotiation, there can be no transformation from stage—the **platea**—to the **locus**. Because their participation in the creation and maintenance of the **locus** is necessary, the audience must always be included as citizens in the play’s illusory world.

---

Failed theatrical performance ruptures the fluid transformation from *platea* to *locus*, but also from player to character, exposing the person beneath the theatrical façade. Failed monarchical performance creates a similar scission between the ruler’s private body natural and public role as the head of the body politic. But while the punishment for theatrical ineptitude is the audience’s withholding of applause (and, presumably, the additional funds earned by a lengthy run), the public consequences of monarchical failure are much more severe, as we see dramatized in *Macbeth*. But before we examine the failure of kingly performance, we will look at its success.

Having established the *locus* in the opening Chorus, *Henry V* turns from the contract between the players and the audience to the political corollary between the monarch and the populace. When Henry descends among his troops, he explores the duality of his identity as both mortal man and king, reminding the audience that a king is, like a player or commoner, also a man:

*HENRY* I think the King is but a man, as I am: ... his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet when they stoop they stoop with the like wing. Therefore when he sees reason of fears as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are. Yet, in reason, no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, lest, he, by showing it, should dishearten the army (*HS 4.1.102-112*).

Here, Henry takes off the mantle of kingship, dissecting it from outside of its boundaries while nevertheless remaining within them. He drops out of blank verse into prose and leaves behind the royal “we” in favor of the more simple “I.” The first person plurals in the speech, however, recall the royal pronoun even as they refer explicitly to Henry, Williams, Bates, and Court—and to the English soldiers as a whole. Henry claims that the king is made of the same stuff as the common soldier, yet he acknowledges that his role requires him to behave differently, “lest he, by showing it, should dishearten the army,” a reminder that kingship is the product of performance.

Alone on stage, Henry continues to struggle with the lack of distinction between himself and the commons he impersonates.
He explains to the theatrical audience that “general ceremony” is all that divides the monarch from the common man:

HENRY
And what have kings that privates have not too,
Save ceremony, save general ceremony?
And what art thou, thou idol ceremony?

... 
I am a king that find thee, and I know
’Tis not the balm, the scepter and the ball,
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,

... 
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
That beats upon the high shore of this world,
No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,
Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave (H5 4.1.235-237, 256-258, 261-265).

In this lamentation, Henry reinforces the lack of distinction between his royal persona and his mortal physical form. The invocation of “ceremony” here is a reminder that Henry’s power is—like the power of the stage—performative. But with such “ceremony” comes obligation, for, he notes, it is also the cause of kingly responsibility.

But even as “ceremony” robs Henry of sound sleep, it also keeps his throne and his person secure. Following the battle at Agincourt, Henry manipulates Williams and Flewellen into a challenge by exchanging gloves with Williams, then giving Williams’ glove to the Welsh captain. When the truth is revealed, Williams defends himself by pointing to the performative division between the king and the common man:

WILLIAMS Your majesty came not like your self: you appeared to me but as a common man – witness the night, your garments, your lowliness; and what your highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you take it for your own fault and not mine, for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence; therefore I beseech your highness pardon me (H5 4.8.51-57).

Both Williams and Henry recognize that when he assumes the role of monarch, Henry becomes untouchable, even to a man who was able to strike him when his identity as king was unknown. Williams
further comments on the importance of “ceremony,” recognizing that once Henry adopts the persona of the king, he is no longer a private man, but also implicitly reminding Henry that when his performance ceases, he also ceases to be king. Williams is rewarded for his bravery in confronting his king, but also for properly performing the role of subject once Henry has re-adopted his kingly persona—a reward that encourages the audience to likewise distinguish between performative success and failure by their monarch.

The “ceremony” that divides monarch from subject reappears in *Macbeth* in the very different context of post-Gunpowder Plot Jacobean London, and is preoccupied with the consequences of failed monarchical performance. While Elizabeth’s dedication to sovereign pageantry helped promote her popularity even after her death, James’ lip-service to monarchical performance fell far short of the example set by his predecessor. Although James wrote in *Basilikon Doron* that “Kings being publike persons, by reason of their office and authority, are as it were set (as it was said of old) upon a publike stage,” his devotion to the doctrine of divine right undermined his ability to fulfill the performative example set by Elizabeth, and, consequently, his rule was reflected in much of the drama as a potential performative failure. In this context, *Macbeth* articulates the fear that James’ inadequate performative negotiation of power could disintegrate into tyranny or create the potential for usurpation.

As a play, *Macbeth* is steeped in theatrical discourse and metaphor, but its focus is on the failure, rather than the success, of monarchical performance. Like *Henry V*, *Macbeth* begins with a choric introduction to the time and space of the play’s *locus*:

1 WITCH When shall we three meet again?  
In thunder, lighting, or in rain?  
2 WITCH When the hurlyburly’s done,  
When the battle’s lost and won.  
3 WITCH That will be ere the set of sun.  
1 WITCH Where the place?  
2 WITCH Upon the heath.  
3 WITCH There to meet with Macbeth.  
ALL Fair is foul, and foul is fair:  
Hover through the fog and filthy air (*MB* 1.1.1-8, 11-12).

---

The Witches’ prologue explains the action of Macbeth in explicitly negative terms that connote deception rather than performative rule. The key distinction between performance and deception that appears in the contrast of Henry and Macbeth is that while Henry performs the role of king in order to reify that role, Macbeth uses deception not as a tool of performative negotiation, but as the means by which to fulfill his unnatural ambition.

The central difference between Henry and Macbeth rests—rather obviously—on the fact that Macbeth commits regicide in order to gain the crown. While Henry waits (more or less) for his father’s death before he claims the role of king, Macbeth refuses to allow “Chance [to] crown [him] / Without [his] stir” (MB 1.3.144-145), saying,

MACBETH I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know. (MB 1.7.80-83).

Here, “false” appears in two valences: first, the “False face” of public appearance; second, the “false heart” that considers treason and betrays its king. But the “fairest show” to which Macbeth refers is as “false” as both “face” and “heart.” Unlike monarchical performance, this “show” is designed to permit transgression through concealment—deception rather than performance. Lady Macbeth describes this relationship in her advice to her husband on public appearance:

LADY MACBETH Your face, my Thane, is as a book, where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like th’innocent flower,
But be the serpent under’t (MB 1.5.62-66).

Here, the play remarks on the reciprocal nature of the performative relationship between subject and sovereign; both have a duty to perform their roles for the sake of the nation, as we saw Williams demonstrate in Henry V. In choosing ambition over national
security, Macbeth neglects the performance of his public duty as a subject, a pattern of failed performance that continues even after he has achieved the crown.

Banquo’s death and the appearance of his Ghost at the banquet mark the beginning of the disintegration of Macbeth’s monarchical performance. Knowing Banquo is dead, Macbeth attempts a “show” of sorrow for his missing thane: “Here had we now our country’s honour roof’d, / Were the grac’d person of our Banquo present” (*MB* 3.4.39-40). His speech seems appropriate, displaying awareness of the need to negotiate his power with his thanes as the source of “our country’s honour,” with himself at the head of the collective body politic. However, “The Ghost of BANQUO enters, and sits in MACBETH’s place” (*MB* 3.4.40.1). When Rosse asks Macbeth to join them five lines later, Macbeth says, “The table’s full” (*MB* 3.4.45). As king, he is expected to sit and eat with his thanes, a ritual that acknowledges their importance as supporters of his power. Banquo’s Ghost fills the king’s empty seat, causing Macbeth to be unable to fulfill his role.

Macbeth attempts to regain control over his public image, but Banquo’s presence undermines the attempted performance:

*MACBETH* I drink to th’general joy o’th’whole table,
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss;
Would he were here!

*Re-enter Ghost.*

To all, and him, we thirst,
And all to all.
*LORDS* Our duties, and the pledge.
*MABCETH* Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee! (*MB* 3.4.88-92)

The arrival of the Ghost interrupts public ceremonial ritual, truncating the exchange before Macbeth can return his thanes’ pledge of loyalty. Lady Macbeth’s rebuke—“You have displac’d the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admir’d disorder” (*MB* 3.4.108-109)—articulates the problem of failed monarchical
performance: both Macbeth’s act of regicide and his inability to perform the role of king bring “disorder” into the commonwealth.

In the intervening acts, Macbeth’s tyranny is compounded by murder and made the foil of Macduff and Malcolm’s discussion of proper and improper kingship. In Malcolm’s enumeration of tyrannical vices—all presumably possessed to one degree or another by Macbeth—the audience sees the consequences of lapsed performance. Macbeth himself next appears as not only failed at monarchical performance, but as rejecting the viability of performance as a means of negotiation altogether, disparaging performance and players alike as transitory and unimportant:

MACBETH Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing (MB 5.5.24-28).

Macbeth does not understand the significance or power of performance, either in a theatrical or a socio-political sense. What we have learned from Henry V is the “sound and fury” of the political stage does, in fact, signify something. The “poor player” is the king whose rule will either triumph, like Henry’s, or fail, like Macbeth’s. The irony of this speech, of course, is that even Macbeth, the “idiot, full of sound and fury,” is not “heard no more.” The “poor player,” perhaps even more so than the king, is heard publicly and repeatedly, the platea of the stage granting him significant political power. Despite Macbeth’s failure, the play’s message is ultimately positive, for, at its conclusion, Malcolm succeeds in producing a kingly performance, returning the political space of Scotland to the theatrical space in which it originated.

Malcolm’s concluding speech, in which he performatively negotiates his power with the thanes who stand before him as representatives of the nation, gestures toward the positive potential of the reign of James I, linguistically uniting Scotland and England. The speech demonstrates Malcolm’s “king-becoming virtues” and permits him to enter into the role of king:
MALCOLM  We shall not spend a large expanse of time,
Before we reckon with your several loves,
And make us even with you. My Thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be Earls; the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour nam’d.

. . .

— this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
We will perform in measure, time, and place.
So thanks to all at once, and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crown’d at Scone (MB 5.9.26-30,
37-41).

In this formal address, Malcolm promises to repay the thanes who
have been loyal to him, negotiating their approval of his power by
raising them to the rank of Earls, an action that hybridizes Scottish
with English rule by adopting an English rank into the Scottish
nobility. Malcolm concludes by invoking divine endowment—
“the grace of Grace”—as the fiction he “will perform in measure,
time, and place,” producing an example of how a ruler might fuse
absolutist claims with performative negotiation.

In *Henry V* and *Macbeth*, then, we see the drama entering
into political discourse and debate: in the later play, the atmosphere
indicates a profound dissatisfaction with the type of ideological
stance that minimizes or eliminates the significance of performance.
As in *Macbeth*, much of the drama of the Jacobean period articulates
the fear that James, a king who ruled under the auspices of a divine
right claim, might began to cause performance to, as Macbeth says,
“signif[y] nothing,” a profound doctrinal change from Elizabeth’s
dedication to both performance and pageantry. What we learn
as the audience of both plays is that performance signifies far
more than nothing; in fact, it is performance that creates the very
process of signification that Macbeth disparages and which Henry
and Malcolm manipulate in order to succeed. It is “ceremony,”
the process of performative negotiation, which creates the public
persona of the king, whether on the scaffold-stage of the theater or
on the political stage of the state. But, in the end, the drama does not
focus exclusively on the necessity of the monarch to performatively
negotiate his or her power, but it also encourages the populace-
audience to recognize and participate in their own role of endowing,
ratifying, and maintaining the power of the sovereign in state as they
do the player-king on stage.
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Macbeth sees Banquo’s Ghost
Act III, scene iv

Putting on the Garment of Widowhood:
Medieval Widows, Monastic Memory, and Historical Writing

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The idea of the widow in communal memory and historical writing was a resonant and multi-faceted concept for monastic writers of the Middle Ages. This essay focuses on the function and meaning of widowhood in two examples of early medieval historical writing, by one male and one female author, to illustrate how monastic authors engaged significant and enduring aspects of widowhood during the Western European Middle Ages to construct institutional histories. Images of female memory and widowed piety (especially because the widow represented the Church who awaited her spouse, Christ) were useful in describing the experiences of women who held important associations for monastic institutions: the resonances of the Scriptural vere vidua transformed female founders’ previous experiences with worldly marriage into a sacralized state of chastity and remembrance in widowhood, and facilitated such women’s presence in the community’s historical memory.

Introduction: Vidua et Memoria

The idea of the widow in communal memory and historical writing was a resonant and multi-faceted concept for monastic writers of the Middle Ages. This essay focuses on the function and meaning of widowhood in two authors of early medieval historical writing—one male and one female—to illustrate how monastic authors engaged significant and enduring aspects of widowhood during the Western European Middle Ages. Images of female memory and widowed piety (especially because the widow represented the Church who awaited her spouse, Christ) were useful in describing the experiences of women who held important associations for monastic institutions: the resonances of the Scriptural vere vidua transformed female founders’ previous experiences with worldly marriage into a sacralized state of chastity and remembrance in widowhood, and facilitated such women’s presence in an institution’s history.
Two examples of foundation narratives, the tenth-century hagiography of St. Rictrude by Hucbald of Saint-Amand (840-ca. 930/932) concerning the foundation of Marchiennes, and the *Primordia Coenobii Gandershemensis* of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (936-ca. 1000?)¹, illustrate the ways that the ideal of chaste widowhood rationalized women’s participation in monastic life. Both Hucbald’s *vita* and Hrotsvit’s *Primordia* also engage what Patrick Geary has described as the “memory of women” in the tenth century: Geary argues that “elaborate mental categories” concerning women operated with special and iconic resonance in memory-keeping at the turn of the first millennium: “the place of women in the carefully selected, restructured, and present-minded discourse” became a concern for monastic writers as they recovered their institutions’ history from the obscurity of the previous centuries, endeavors which often required authors to reconcile the historical roles women had played in the distant past with contemporary understandings of gender and gender roles.² Elisabeth van Houts has also noted the significance of female imagery in this process, although she resists Geary’s gendered ‘division of labor’ in memory, suggesting instead a model of gender in historical writing in which memory functioned collaboratively between men and women; the changing political and economic conditions of the central Middle Ages encouraged texts that served institutional and familial needs.³ Similarly, Leah Shopkow has suggested that clerical authors’ proximity to female family members, particularly mothers, rather than an abstracted idea of a folkloric female custodianship of memory, encouraged attention to women’s roles in families and foundations in the content and construction of historical texts. All of these understandings of gendered memory, however, suggest a dynamic relationship between

¹ Hrotsvit’s death date is not known for certain, but Katharina Wilson places her death at the turn of the millennium; other scholars suggest an earlier date, ca. 973 or shortly thereafter, the same year that she completed the *Primordia*. Katharina Wilson, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: A Florilegium of Her Works* (Cambridge: D. S Brewer, 1998) 2.


the authors’ and subjects’ social experience and the conventions into which these experiences could be molded in historically reconstructing women’s participation in male monastic institutions. In the case of matron-founders, the widow’s spiritual capacities rationalized a woman’s essential material and political contributions to an institution’s foundation history.

In both Hucbald and Hrotsvit’s texts, widows were integral to institutional memory. Hucbald’s construction of Rictrude focused on how the saint’s widowhood facilitated her patronage and religiosity at her convent, Marchiennes. He built her sanctity around her chaste widowhood and the notion that her matronly continence fostered the virginity of her daughters, thereby distinguishing her as a worthy devotional figure within the larger project of revival of her family’s cult. Hucbald engaged Rictrude’s experiences in widowhood as a theme that structured her vita. Her widowhood represented a pivotal position between married life and sexual renunciation, thus reframing her personal history as larger metaphor for her life that explained her transition from the concerns of secular society to the institutions of a professed religious. A professional hagiographer with access to an extensive library, Hucbald often engaged boilerplate definitions of the widowed state—extracted from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and the letters and treatises which Augustine and Jerome wrote to their widowed patrons—to demonstrate Rictrude’s candidacy as a saint, typifying the Carolingian tendency to fortify scanty historical information with didactic texts to fashion a ‘useable past’ and an edifying example from fragments of historical documentation.

Hrotsvit accomplished a similar feat in her narrative of her own convent’s origins, but in a different and much more original fashion than Hucbald. Hucbald’s creation of Rictrude as a holy widow followed a pattern that engaged many of the most enduring topos of widowhood throughout the Middle Ages. Unlike Hucbald and many of her contemporaries such as Odilo of Cluny (whose vita of the Empress Adelheid was also much concerned with her wid-
Hrotsvit invoked the patristic discourse on widowhood more subtly to characterize the female founders of her convent at Gandersheim. Drawing on liturgy and the image of the New Testament widow Anna’s prophetic gifts in the Jerusalem temple, Hrotsvit constructed a highly original depiction of the convent’s founder and patron, Oda, to illuminate the saintly origins of Gandersheim. Hrotsvit not only recounted the convent’s history through a lineage of female patrons, but also interpreted it through a feminized view of memoria. Whereas Hucbald dutifully marshaled the didactic potential of the received tradition on holy widowhood to demonstrate Rictrude’s sanctity, Hrotsvit creatively constructed a history of the convent through Oda’s lineage that not only demonstrated their family’s contributions to the institution, but also how Oda’s experience as a widow characterized the spirituality of the institution itself, even as her worldly lineage affirmed the convent’s connections to its royal patrons.

**Hucbald, Hrotsvit, and the “Profession” of Widowhood in the Early Middle Ages**

Hucbald of Saint-Amand’s life of St. Rictrude and Hrotsvit of Gandersheim’s poem on the origins of Gandersheim drew on some well-established traditions concerning holy widowhood in Carolingian hagiographical writing. Writers of the Carolingian Renaissance, eager to recapture the histories of ancient saints as well as commemorate present ones, routinely drew on theological ideas about widowhood garnered from the writings of prominent theologians of Late Antiquity (in particular Jerome and Augustine), and integrated these into the conventional topoi of sacred biography in increasingly detailed formulas. Around the turn of the fifth century, the Church Fathers Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine had identified key concepts about female chastity that became the basic boilerplate for defining the status of the chaste widow in the medieval West. The most important of these was the *vere vidua* of Paul’s description in 1Timothy 5: 3-16. She who was “really a widow” was the wife of just one husband, lived chastely, and carried out numerous good...
works. Other important medieval associations with this image of the *vere vidua* were the New Testament widow, Anna, who lived in the temple for many years fasting and praying, and thus was granted the gift of prophecy and the ability to recognize Jesus as the Savior. The Old Testament widow Judith, who defeated the Assyrian general Holofernes through her chastity and sobriety in widowhood. Authors also characterized chaste widowhood in relationship to other forms of female chastity such as virginity and married continence, using the metaphor of the thirty-, sixty-, and one hundred-fold fruit (earned respectively by married, widowed, and virginal women) to denote the progressive heavenly rewards that maintaining chastity in each state conferred.

The themes that defined the state of consecrated widowhood for a Christian audience had emerged in the letters and treatises to and for the widowed patrons of the bishops and theologians of the early Church, texts that became staples of medieval monastic libraries and were the most often-read materials after the Bible itself in the monastic curriculum. Early Church synods had also addressed the practice of widows who undertook vows of chastity and described such women as a serving a chaste “profession” (*viduitatis servandae*).

4 For a fuller discussion of the ideal of chaste widowhood in the Middle Ages, see also Katherine Clark, *Pious Widowhood in the Middle Ages* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2002).

5 The trope originated in a treatise attributed to Cyprian (ca. 200-258), *De centesima, sexigesima*, in which the author referred to martyrs, celibates, and those living in marital continence. Fidel Rüdle, “Einige Bemerkungen zur Bewertung der Witwenschaft in der patristischen und frühmittelalterlichen Theologie. Mit ausgewählten Texten,” in *Veuves et Veuvage dans le haut Moyen Age* (Paris: Picard, 1993) 21. Jerome most famously applied this formula in his polemic *Adversus Jovinianum* specifically to counter Jovinian’s assertion that one’s sexual status did not matter to one’s salvation. Ambrose did not explicitly engage the framework of specific merits for the three states, but followed a similar set of relationships among marriage, widowhood, and virginity, illustrated by the Biblical figures of Susannah, Anna, and Mary; see Ambrose: *Select Works and Letters*, tr. Rev. E. DeRomestin and Rev. H. T. F. Duckworth, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1955) 391. Augustine engaged in this trope reluctantly, perhaps in response to Jerome’s intense engagement with it; he preferred to assess the authenticity of one’s devotion to each state rather than compare their merits, and refers to it in his treatise on virginity rather than on widowhood. Medieval authors, however, associated this formula with Augustine’s writings to widows; Augustine, *De virginitate*, *PL* 40 Ch. 46, 423.
Consecrated widows pursued a recognized way of life, established by patristic discourse and performed in full view of secular society, that was characterized by both sexual renunciation and service to the Christian *ecclesia*.

Medieval monastic writers, whether or not they had much actual pastoral contact with widows, thus had ample material to draw on when describing the widowed state in hagiography. Writers of the Carolingian Renaissance were eager to create new didactic materials as well as study patristic ones; they preserved patristic images of the ‘real’ widow in new *florilegia*, and also gradually incorporated this framework for female chastity into new *vitae* describing the lives of matron saints. Julia H.M. Smith suggests, for example, that Hucbald knew Aldhelm’s treatise on female chastity, *De Virginitate,* a compendium of patristic writings that would have lent Hucbald the language of the tripartite hierarchy of chaste merits. Carolingian hagiographers, moreover, suffered from a paucity of original sources on and models for female saints. Hagiographies for men often served as only partial and imperfect examples for women’s *vitae*, as they expressed different activities and spiritual gifts than those considered appropriate for women. Hagiographers thus attempted “to formulate an understanding of female sanctity…informed by the beliefs, ideology and cultural resources of the Carolingian church,” particularly those drawn from antiquity.  

The patristic staging of women’s lives into categories measured by their physical chastity, with attendant moral attributes and behaviors appropriate to each state, also provided useful frameworks for Carolingian authors as they attempted to reconstruct the lives of  

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figures who had often lived in the distant past and for whom there were few extant sources after the chaos of the early medieval Dark Ages. Images of the widowed saint began to emerge in hagiography based on a number of ingredients: information that could be gleaned about the life of the saint, conventional expectations about the real experiences and duties of early medieval women in society, and the theoretical constructs provided by theologians of the Carolingian court such as Notker and Hincmar of Rheims.

In Merovingian vitae, widowhood functioned as a transitional moment that permitted a woman entry into a convent. Perhaps the best example of widowhood’s function in the Merovingian hagiography is evident in the life of St. Radegund, whose position between marriage and the convent resembled contemporary examples of deaconesses and vowed widows. Radegund’s escape from her husband through her consecration as a deaconess and her eventual widowhood functioned as both literal and spiritual thresholds that prepared her for claustral life. Radegund’s vitae thus established an understanding of widowhood as a liminal time when a married saint began to separate herself from the world and progressed spiritually toward the convent. The continuation of Radegund’s cult into the early seventh century made that characterization available to other hagiographers writing about widows. 

Images of widowhood in the Carolingian and Ottonian periods became more closely and explicitly connected to patristic discourse in the vitae of women saints. Many Carolingian hagiographers reconstructed the lives of women who lived in the distant past and turned to the language of widowhood described in patristic

9 Baudonivia’s vita, written ca. 600, continued the promotion of Radegund’s cult. Thereafter the extent of her veneration is poorly documented through the period of invasions until the early eleventh century, when a revival of her cult began. Her tomb, whose whereabouts had not been known to the twelfth-century monastics at Holy Cross, was “rediscovered,” and her crypt renovated. Magdalena Carrasco associates a twelfth-century manuscript containing the two vitae and miniatures illuminating the vita of Fortunatus (the images that presumably accompanied Baudonivia’s version have been removed from the manuscript and lost) with Holy Cross’s post-invasion attempts to revive Radegund’s cult. See Carrasco, “Sanctity and Pictorial Hagiography: Two Illustrated Lives of Saints from Romanesque France,” in Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe, eds. Renate Blumenthal-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 63-64.
sources and contemporary florilegia concerning widowed chastity to fill gaps in the narrative in the absence of verifiable biographical detail. Trends in Carolingian religiosity—the discouragement of extra-monastic consecration of widows, and new developments in female sanctity—encouraged a more prominent and thorough treatment of widowhood in Carolingian saints’ lives as modes of female pious expression outside the cloister’s walls diminished. Inherent in this development was not only a misogynistic pessimism about widows’ ability to maintain chastity outside the cloister, but also a royal and ecclesiastical awareness of widows’ vulnerable legal and social position. Both Hucbald’s vita and Hrotsvit’s plays and poems articulate the dangers of consecrated female chastity outside of the monastic environment.

Carolingian hagiographers thus addressed widows’ experiences such as marriage and motherhood, albeit filtered through the prescriptive and theological interpretations, in novel ways in the construction of female saints’ lives. The anonymous life of St. Clothild (d. 544), for example, demonstrated the growing sophistication of widowhood’s hagiographical representation. The vita of this Merovingian saint was written in the late ninth or tenth century, ostensibly to preserve her memory among the clergy of Tours. In St. Clothild’s cult was limited to this region, probably because she never established a convent that endured to foster her sanctified memory. McNamara suggests that the life can be dated to around the turn of the tenth century because of its substantial borrowings from a contemporaneous work, Hincmar of Reims’ Life of Remigius; Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, 38. The desire to “rebuild” the cult of the saint is evident in the author’s prefatory remarks that earthly aedifices fall (and presumably need to be reconstructed), whereas the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem stand forever, Vita Chrothildis, MGH SRM 2 Ch. 1, 342; tr. McNamara, 40.

Quidditas 29

11 The theologizing of hagiographical texts occurred in the broader perspective of the Carolingian Renaissance, in which monks were encouraged to fill their scriptoria with copies of older works and also to generate new ones for educational purposes. The problem of reconciling Christian matrons’ marriage and motherhood with holy activities was not a new one in the Carolingian period, but it did receive novel attention. An increasing sophistication in the expression of widowed piety may have been less a sign of a particular interest in widows per se than of authors’ desire to display their knowledge of patristic texts and their proficiency in linking important passages from patristic scholarship to newer material in their own compositions.
12 St. Clothild’s cult was limited to this region, probably because she never established a convent that endured to foster her sanctified memory. McNamara suggests that the life can be dated to around the turn of the tenth century because of its substantial borrowings from a contemporaneous work, Hincmar of Reims’ Life of Remigius; Wemple, Women in Frankish Society, 38. The desire to “rebuild” the cult of the saint is evident in the author’s prefatory remarks that earthly aedifices fall (and presumably need to be reconstructed), whereas the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem stand forever, Vita Chrothildis, MGH SRM 2 Ch. 1, 342; tr. McNamara, 40.
the opening lines of her *vita*, Clothild’s hagiographer described the entrance to the heavenly Jerusalem as flanked by

A chorus of virgins, dearest and most pleasing to God, garnished with a fruit of a hundred-fold, gleams in God’s presence in His heavenly palace like stars in the sky. The flock of virgins is followed by an assembly of holy widows and faithful wives who, though they cannot return fruit a hundred fold, harvest sixty and thirty fold and are numbered with all the saints justly rewarded with eternal felicity. The blessed and venerable Queen Chrothilda [Clothild] is of that collegium.\(^{13}\)

Clothild’s holy widowhood was thus an essential component of her sanctity; the language of theology that had existed for centuries in didactic treatises was now engaged explicitly to describe a certain type of female saint.

Pious widows therefore came to have a distinctive and nuanced representation within the ranks of nuns in the Carolingian period. The Carolingians, interested in preserving lineage history, also reversed the tendency in Merovingian to minimize the femininity and worldly experience of widowed saints, and, rather, incorporated these elements as part of the widowed saint’s spiritual development and institutional importance. Both Carolingian and Ottonian rulers claimed authority as religious as well as political leaders, and employed monasteries and the episcopate in their administration as tools of state. Saints’ lives promoted the cult of their saintly subjects

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13 Chorus enim virgineus Deo gratus et carissimus centesimo fructu decoratus, sicut stelle in celo, ita ante Deum fulget in celesti palatio. Hoc agmen virgineum sequitur contio sanctarum viduarum et fidelium coniugatarum, quae quamquam centesimum fructum non reportent, tamen sexagesimo fructo et tricesimo fructu gaudent et cum sanctis omnibus cuminumantur et aeterna felicitate digna remuneretur. De quarum collegio exitit beata et venerabilis regina Chrothildis, *ibid*; tr. McNamara, 40-41. This is the earliest example I have found where the threefold harvest paradigm was explicitly stated in the *vita* of a widowed saint. The vision of the choirs of women bore remarkable resemblance to the text of a sequence composed by Notker the Stammerer (840-912) for a feast celebrating holy women. In Notker’s lyric, the devil was confounded by the heavenly hosts at Christ’s resurrection: And so now you see maidens vanquish you, hated one, and married women bearing sons who please God/And you groaned that widows remain perfectly loyal to their husbands, you who once persuaded a maiden to abjure the faith she owed to her Creator (Nunc ergo temet virgines vincere cernis, invade./Et maritatas parere filios deo placitos./Et viduarum maritis fidem nunc ingemis integram./Qui creatori fidem negare persuaseras virgini), Notker, *In natale sanctarum feminarum*, in *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, ed. and tr. Peter Godman (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 320-321.
as part of the history of their religious houses, but also presented a favorable representation of a saint’s dynastic ties. Hagiography in the eighth through the tenth centuries was thus extremely concerned with validating the authority and holiness of the dynastic line that provided patronage and protection to the convent or monastery, and this tendency persisted among Ottonian hagiographers as well. Hagiographers engaged questions of marriage and motherhood rather than dismissed them because they did not conform to an ideal of virginal sanctity; they allowed holy women’s experiences during their widowhood to play a structural and symbolic role in the articulation of female sanctity. Indeed, the combination of the longevity of Ottonian widows and the imperial family’s interest in commissioning historical texts in the tenth and eleventh centuries generated an unprecedented focus on female participation in the creation of family memory.\textsuperscript{14}

**Widowhood and Narrative in Hucbald’s *Vita Rictrudis***

Just as the Carolingian version of Clothild’s life reinterpreted her role as a widow and presented a new model of widowed sanctity, the life of St. Rictrude (614-688) by the monk Hucbald of Saint-Amand further developed the themes of widowhood in later Carolingian hagiography.\textsuperscript{15} A monk, priest, notary, professional hagiographer (he authored six vitae as commissions from neighboring monasteries), and teacher of august age at the time he was writing the *Vita Rictrudis*, Hucbald drew on a lifetime of literary study in the liberal arts of the Carolingian Renaissance to compose his narrative.\textsuperscript{16}

Hucbald wrote Rictrude’s life around 907, ostensibly for the clerics and nuns of Marchiennes, who had requested a vita to commemorate their sainted abbess, whose legend and even grave

\textsuperscript{14} Elizabeth Van Houts, *Memory and Gender* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 70.

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Gregory of Tour’s depiction of Clothild, which praised her chastity and virtue but made no reference to her widowed piety, *Historia Francorum* III.18.

site and relics had fallen into obscurity.\textsuperscript{17} Earlier written accounts of Rictrude’s life had been lost, and Hucbald’s \textit{vita} was probably written with the intention of reviving the cults of the sainted founders—Rictrude’s children as well as herself—and redressing accusations that the current nuns were lax in their duties.\textsuperscript{18} In constructing his \textit{vita} of the ancient founders, Hucbald emphasized the holy heritage of the Marchiennes foundation, especially Rictrude’s marriage and motherhood, the noble lineage of her husband, and her role as the matriarch of a family of saints.\textsuperscript{19}

Hucbald’s reconstruction of an older narrative afforded him the opportunity to insert theological reflections on Rictrude’s widowhood, making it an integral part of her saintly life. Hucbald drew upon non-hagiographical sources to supplement often scanty biographical material about saints from a distant age, thereby generating texts that offered distinctly Carolingian perspectives on morality and pastoral care, creating what Julia H.M. Smith has termed a “biography without narrative…[which] suggests the limits of the adaptability of the hagiographical genre conceived from the fusion of classical and biblical literary traditions.”\textsuperscript{20} For lack or avoidance of a clear biographical narrative, Hucbald characterized Rictrude as an exceptional woman who, through her roles as a holy widow and spiritual mother, articulated the Carolingian Church’s understanding of pious widowhood, and in particular its conventional viewpoint

\textsuperscript{17} McNamara, 195. Julia H. M. Smith notes that Hucbald’s \textit{vita} generally indicated a monastic rather than lay audience; often concerning saints from the distant past, the lives were intended to be used to strengthen the saints’ commemoration and provide liturgical materials for feast days and other ritual celebrations, “The Hagiography of Hucbald of Saint-Amand,” 522. Karine Ugé suggests that the convent was a foundation for both men and women, \textit{Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders} (York: York Medieval Press, 2005), 97.


\textsuperscript{19} Her husband Adalbald was venerated as a saint after his death; in her widowhood, Rictrude’s daughters went with her to the convent, where one became an abbess; her son also became an abbot, McNamara, 195; Hucbald of Saint-Amand, \textit{Vita Rictrudis} AASS Vol. 16 (12 May), 1.1, 81.

that pious widowhood belonged within the confines of monastic life. Rictrude first chose a vow of chastity in the world, then turned quickly to the cloister as an escape from worldly trials and the locus for her holy career. Although Hucbald attributed to Rictrude powerful qualities, such as the spirit of prophecy, these powers were always exercised within the limits of Church authority, either contained within the convent of Marchiennes or under the supervision of her confessor, the saintly bishop Amand.  

Like Clothild, Rictrude enjoyed a harmonious marriage that was consonant with the Christian view of married chastity, but was presented as a mere prelude to her widowed chastity: her husband Adalbald joined himself to her “not for concupiscence but for love of progeny.”  

Their union was a reminder to all Christians that married people should, like Adalbald and Rictrude, faithfully render the conjugal debt and keep the marriage bed honorable and unsullied, as the Apostle taught. Indeed, Hucbald’s discussions of all three states of female chastity—in marriage, in widowhood, and in virginity—served as mini-sermons on the subject for the community’s women, suggesting a heterogenous community of oblates and novices who were virgins, widows, and perhaps laywomen residing or being educated at the convent, illuminating for each stage of life how Rictrude’s example represented the correct expression of female chastity.

Hucbald depicted Rictrude and Adalbald’s relationship as both decorous and loving, an appropriate union of two noble lineages in a consensual and companionate marriage that founded a dy-

21 Amand was clearly a touchstone for Hucbald’s portrayal of Rictrude’s sanctity, not only as the patron of Hucbald’s own house but also as a well-known and venerated saint to whom he could attach the more vague history of Rictrude and her children; see Karine Ugé, Creating the Monastic Past, 98ff.

22 Causa vero uxoris ducendae non fuit incontinentiae, sed carae sobolis habendae, Vita Rictrudis Ch. 5, 564; tr. McNamara, 203.

23 Et ne multis immoremur secundum Apostolus erat illis honorabile connubium et thoris immaculatus, Vita Rictrudis, 1.9, 83, tr. McNamara, 203.

nasty of saintly figures. The couple produced four children: their three daughters, Clotsendis, Eusebia, and Adalsendis entered the convent of Marchiennes with their mother, and Clotsendis later became abbess; their son, Maurontus, whose cult would later become significant to the monastery of Marchiennes, became a priest. When Rictrude’s husband was killed by wicked relatives, she miraculously experienced foreknowledge of this event before the news reached her. She mourned him together with the “tearful tears” of her household, but understood immediately, thanks to the wise counsel of her bishop, Amand, that she must remain a widow according to the teachings of the Apostle.

Hucbald thus structured vita’s narrative around several important points in Rictrude’s personal history: the dutiful establishment of a pious lineage through marriage, the crisis point in which she might be forced to remarry, Rictrude’s voluntary affirmation of her widowhood, and, ultimately, her transition to convent life as a nun. The vita’s discourse on widowhood—from Rictrude’s deprivation of her spouse to her affirmation of chastity in his absence—thus was instrumental in moving the saint through a series of stages toward full participation in the convent life of Marchiennes: “widowed by Adalbald but a lover of God and beloved by God,” Rictrude accepted chastity as both a consolation and a call to follow Christ.

25 Smith notes that Hucbald’s positive representation of marriage appears at first extraordinary in the context of the more negative treatment of marriage in Carolingian hagiography, but is actually quite typical of Carolingian views of consensual marriage expressed in other genres, such as the De Institutione Laicali of Jonas of Orléans; Smith, “The Hagiography of Hucbald of Saint-Amand,” 539.

26 Vita Rictrudis., 1.10, 83; tr. McNamara 203. In the twelfth century, Maurontus’ activities—as portrayed in a comprehensive history of the convent, the Polyptique (ca. 1116-1121) and a new vita dedicated to Maurontus—eclipsed Rictrude’s role in Marchiennes’ history, creating a “male tutelary saint” as the convent’s key figure as part of an extended argument in the reform era that the community’s nuns were lax in their practice, and that the convent should be re-established as a male house; see Ugé, Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders, 123-125, 131-133.

27 Vita Rictrudis., 1.11, 83; tr. McNamara 204.

28 Luctu lugentium, ibid I, 1.11, 83; tr. McNamara 205; 1.12, 83; tr. 205.

29 Adalbaldi relicta, sed dei dilectrix, et a Deo dilecta, ibid., II.13, 83.
Rictrude’s widowed chastity, however, was affirmed. Although fully committed to a vow of continence, Rictrude nevertheless experienced a series of trials that tested her chastity. Both secular perils and the temptation of the devil led Rictrude to change the locus of her widowed sanctity from the secular world to the claustral one: initially expressing her chastity through a vow and the assumption of the widow’s weeds (vestibus viduitatis), Rictrude solved the problems of worldly and demonic temptation by withdrawing into a convent.

The first challenge to Rictrude’s widowed chastity while living in the world arose when the Merovingian king, Dagobert, motivated by lust, greed, and “the envy of the devil,” attempted to betroth himself to Rictrude and “strove by stealth to thwart the healthful advice of the Prelate and the pious vows of the holy matron.”

Rictrude, however, devised a plan to thwart the king:

She invited the king and his optimates, and with the salty seasoning of the banquet, they all enjoyed the sweetness of her talk…[and] He supposed that she sought to please him and his company. Following the salubrius advice of her renowned counsellor, the Prelate Amand, she invoked help from the terrible name of God and, to the stupefaction of the king and all the others, she covered her head with a veil blessed by that holy bishop which she drew from her bosom. The king was stirred to wrath and left the banquet, abandoning the unwelcome food. And she, pinning her thoughts truly on the Lord, committed herself and hers totally to His will that they might be nourished by Him and always comforted in the solace of His mercy.

30 Sed ecce, et salubri Praesulis consulto, et pio sanctae Matronae voto invida diaboli nititur obviare subreptio; ibid., 1.13, 84; tr. McNamara 205. Dagobert’s political interests would have been well served by the marriage; Rictrude’s husband Adalbald had been an important noble, the brother of Erchinoald, who became the mayor of the palace under Clovis II. Rictrude came from Gascony, a Gallo-Roman region not under the political control of the Frankish kings, and which experienced incursions from Visigothic rulers. Dagobert was probably interested in marrying Rictrude in 636 because an alliance with Rictrude would have been advantageous for controlling Gasgoine nobility and for combating Basque raiding in the countryside; McNamara, Sainted Women, 195-196.

31 Cum ita regem suspectum reddidisset, veluti ejus voluntati parere vellet; in praedio suo, hoc est in villa a Baireio, opiparum et regiae condignum magnificente instruit convivium. Invitat cum optimatis regem, et inter prandendum sale conditorum omnes laetificat sua-vitate sermonum. Postquam exempta fames et amor compressus edendi, Tum multo clara exhilarans convivio Baccho, Surgit, et non trepide sed constanter, non tepide sed ferventer,
Hucbald’s narration of the scene between Dagobert and Rictrude resembled the tale of another widow, the Old Testament figure Judith, who defeated her enemy, Holofernes, in the luxurious and sensual setting of a shared meal. Rictrude’s triumph, however, was a spiritual battle of wits rather than a literal slaughter. She humiliated the king publicly and undermined his plan to pressure her into marriage. Like Judith, the widow Rictrude was armed with chastity and sobriety. She seduced the ‘enemy’ into believing that his was an easy victory but did not actually compromise her virtue; her chastity served as the weapon that protected her and allowed her to liberate her people.

Whereas Judith bore a sword, Rictrude’s weapon was non segniter sed sagiciter, non muliebriter sed viriliter, quod conceperat mente, perficit opere. Primoque sciscitatur a rege, si concederat sibi in domo sua quod vellet agere, libera coram eo uti potestate. Ille autem annuit propeere, reputans quod sumpto poculo, ut moris est pluribus in cogendo bibere; se vel convivias suos deberet acticare. At illa, secundum salubre sui consiliatoris Amandi incitii Praesulis consilium ex suo sino prolatum, invocato terribilis Dei nomine et auxilio, capiti superponit, ipso rege et cunctis stupendibus, jam benedictum ab eodem pontifice velum. Illa vero jactans cogitatum suum in Domino, totam se suosque ejus commissit a rbitrio, ut ab eo enutrirentur et solutarentur misericordi semper solatio; Vita Rictrudis, 1.14, 84; tr. McNamara 206; cf. Vulgate, Judith 12.

32 Karine Ugé has suggested that Hucbald essentially lifted this scene from the seventh-century life of the virginal saint Gertrude of Nivelles, one of a circle of women, who, like Rictrude, were part of the monasticizing movement in northern Flanders that closely tied its institutions to Carolingian Klosterpolitik; see Ugé, Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders, 126 and McNamara, 197. It is likely that Hucbald had seen this vita; he seems to have delved liberally into a variety of manuscripts, both pedagogical (for example Isidore’s Etymologies) and hagiographical for his sources. However, apart from the fact that in both vitae Dagobert attempts to take a bride in a social setting, the two incidents bear little narrative or linguistic resemblance to each other, and the essential issue of the veil in Rictrude’s narrative is Hucbald’s innovation, as it does not occur at all in Gertrude’s life (cf. McNamara’s translation of the Life of Gertrude, 223, and the Latin vita, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH.SRM 2:447-474). Hucbald was familiar with the Carolingian history, Gesta Dagoberti (perhaps borrowed from the libraries of Saint-Bertin or Saint-Denis) and the Vita Amandi that also contained details about Dagobert’s courtship, which may account for the king’s prominent role in Rictrude’s story (in addition to the fact that Dagobert was generally a favored villain in many Carolingian narratives); Smith, “Hagiographer at Work,” 164 and “The Hagiography of Hucbald of Saint-Amand,” 537.

33 Mark Griffith, Judith (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997) 67. Griffith refers to a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon poem on the feats of Judith, which he considers “an amalgam of Christian saint’s life and vernacular heroic form, exemplary in purpose,” 81. While there is no textual evidence explicitly connecting Hucbald’s Vita and the Anglo-Saxon text, both probably drew on Jerome’s introduction to the Book of Judith in the Vulgate, which referred to Judith as an example of chastity for both sexes. A later text that exploited Judith’s heroic example for both spiritual and political ends was Aelfric’s prose adaptation of the Judith story, written ca. 1000. Aelfric wrote the text for a female monastic audience as a lesson in female chastity, but also sent a copy of it to a secular nobleman, Sigewoard, as a model for the idealized Christian warrior, instructive not only for Judith’s positive example but Holofernes’ negative one (for a full discussion of this interpretation see Stacy.
the veil of widowhood. The widow’s veil and clothing represented a longstanding symbol of the widow’s consecration to chastity in canon law and the Gelasian and Gallican Sacramentaries that constituted a visible sign of her vow of continence and the penalties incurred by suitors who violated it. 34 Christian exegetes treated the Judith story’s violent aspects gingerly, and often emphasized Judith as a mere instrument of God’s divine will to counterbalance the elements of the story that elevated Judith as an example of unchecked female power. 35 In Rictrude’s defeat of Dagobert, the potential of female sexuality lured the enemy into danger, but (as medieval exegetes also noted with respect to Judith), the heroine’s piety and deliberately sober clothing served as a reminder and protection of her chaste status.

Rictrude’s self-veiling as a declaration of her widowed profession was done in an unorthodox setting, but was consistent with canon law and liturgical practice. The veiling of a widow required clerical supervision; according to canon law, bishops performed the veiling of virgins, whereas the widow’s consecration was overseen by a priest, and the widow placed the veil on her own head rather than receiving it from the celebrant. 36 In this case, Rictrude acted

S. Klein, “Aefric’s Sources and His Gendered Audiences,” in Essays in Medieval Studies 13, Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association, eds. Thomas Bestul and Thomas N. Hall, 1996, 111-119). Judith seems to be of particular topological interest to tenth and early eleventh-century insular authors; the same dynamic may be functioning here in Hucbald’s use of the Judith story: Judith provided an ideal topical model for Rictrude’s chaste widowhood, whereas Dagobert was unflatteringly likened to Holofernes, an immoderate warrior and ruler.


36 Smith suggests that Hucbald was familiar with Isidore’s De Ecclesiasticis Officiis and the Liber Ecclesiæ of Amalarius of Metz, both of which were extant in the Saint-Amand library, and might have lent insight into the ecclesiastical boundaries of this act; see Smith, “A Hagiographer at Work,” 161. Although bishops were not supposed to veil widows, the frequent iteration of this point in canon law and liturgy suggests that in fact they often did preside over such ceremonies; in the later Middle Ages William Durandus commented that he had witnessed a bishop in Ostia blessing two widows; see Guillelmi Duranti Rationale Divinorum Officiorum I-IV, ed. A. Davril and T.M. Thibodeau. CCCM 140, II.45-46, 243.
with Bishop Amand’s approval; he had counseled Rictrude’s actions in advance and consecrated the veil. The dramatic setting of Rictrude’s veiling, however, confirmed clerical superiority over the secular forces opposing her chastity and established a strong relationship between Rictrude and Amand, whose guidance and patronage as a well-known bishop saint (and namesake of Hucbald’s own institution) supported the case for Rictrude’s own sanctity. In this example and others throughout the vita, Rictrude’s widowed chastity, though lacking the perfection of virginity that normally marked a saint, was useful; it allowed Hucbald to distinguish Rictrude as a pious matron whose victory over King Dagobert proved the superiority of the monastic preference for chastity over the designs of worldly men.

Following the confrontation at the banquet, Rictrude distributed her remaining wealth and “put on the garments of widowhood” so that “what she had borne three-fold in the conjugal life” might be doubled, “for in widowhood her seed yielded fruit six-fold.”

Rictrude’s veil and dress marked her widow’s mourning as a deeper sort of spiritual bereavement, “veiled with sorrow and penitent

37 As Karine Ugé has shown, one of Hucbald’s strategies throughout the Vita Rictrudis was to prove the entire family’s claims to sanctity through ties with already well-established saints; see Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders, 123 ff.

38 Induitur viduitas vestibus, Vita Rictrudis, 1.15, 84; tr. McNamara 207; Ac primum facultatibus et possessionibus sibi relictis, ordinatione prudenti distributis, et spinosis hujus seculi curis a terra cordis sui penitus extirpatis; quae antea in conjugal vita ferrebat trigesimum, postmodum, duplicato germine, fructum coepit in viduitate ferre sexagesimum; ibid., 1.15, 84; tr. 207. Hucbald had some knowledge of Anglo-Saxon literature and may have consulted a copy of Aldhelm’s treatise De Virginitate in Saint-Amand’s library (Smith, “Hagiographer at Work, 166-168). In addition to composing hagiographies, Hucbald also was a music theorist and wrote treatises on harmonics and psalmody; he might have become familiar with the “orders” of women through the lyrics of Notker on this subject. Hrabanus Maurus, who wrote a commentary on the book of Judith, was also interested Judith’s change of clothing and the contrast between the dress she adopted for her seduction of Holoferenes and her clothing in private life as a widow; his terms contrasted the former “vestimentum laetitiae” with her latter “vestimentum viduitatis,” Expositio in librum Judith X, PL 109, 584. Hucbald might have used patristic sources in the original, such as as Jerome’s Adversus Jovinianum and Augustine’s De Sancte Virginitate, but Smith notes that Hucbald seems to have preferred to cite Carolingian florilegia and exegesis, rather than works of the Church fathers in the original; Smith, A Hagiographer at Work,” 168, 170.
mourning.”

The dark garments were an outward expression of her interior transformation from pleasing a husband to pleasing Christ:

She changed the habit of her mind as she put a new habit on her body. She threw off the elaborate clothes which adorned her in marriage when she thought of worldly things, how she might please her husband. But one who has stripped away all the burdens of the world, though she appears as a widow divided from a husband, is not divided in mind but is always solicitous for the things of the Lord only, how she might please God. She put on garments of widowhood, which expressed her contempt of this world through her appearance.

Hucbald’s description of the process was suggestive of the liturgy for the consecration of widows in the later tenth-century compilation of the Romano-German Pontifical, in which the celebrant blessed the widow’s clothing and emphasized the change in the woman’s identity and her commitment to continence through the donning of the widow’s clothes:

Lord, open your eyes of majesty for the blessing of this garment of widowhood, so that she who pleased her husband and the world by the wearing of ornate garments might be worthy to gain your grace in sacred benediction…Lord God eternal, giver of celestial virtues, we humble petitioners pour out our prayers to you, that you might find this your servant worthy to consecrate, whom you have caused to be converted from her earlier way of life, putting off the old man and putting on the new, having been converted, just as Anna the prophetess abandoned [her old life] for a long time in fasting and prayer, clothed in the garments of widowhood to your glory in the temple, so too may this your daughter devote herself to you alone, God, in your church, with devoted mind.

39 Ut principale animae id est mens, velanda signetur moeroris et poenitentiae luctu; Vita Rictrudis, II.15, 84; tr. McNamara, 207. Dyan Elliott suggested the useful term “spiritual bereavement” to interpret the widowed state.

40 Sicut mutaverit habitum mentis, sic mutat et corporis. Pompas projicit vestes, quibus ornavatur nupta, cogitans aliquando ea quae sunt mundi, quomodo placet viro: et tum cum eis exuitur omni seculi hujus impedimento, ut quamvis videretur vidua, id est, divisa a viro, jam non esset divisa animo; sed solicta semper quae Domini sunt solummodo, quomodo placet Deo. Induitur viduitas vestibus, quae ipsa sui specie monstrarent contemptum mundi istius, Vita Rictrudis, II.15, 84; tr. McNamara 207. Hucbald’s text underscores the liturgical language with a paraphrase Paul’s exhortation that the widow might concentrate on pleasing God rather than a husband, 1 Cor. 7:34.

41 Aperi quaesumus Domine oculos maiestatis tuae ad benedicendam hanc viduitatis vestem, ut quae in vestibus ordinatis [sic] viri sui usibus aut seculo placuit, in sacris vero benedictionis tuae gratiam consequi mereatur…Domine Deus uirtutum celestium etern donator tibi supplices effundimus preces, ut hanc famulum tuam consecrare digneris, quam
Having abandoned the “elaborate clothes” of marriage for the “garments of widowhood,” Rictrude also adopted the monastic practices of strenuous vigils, constant prayers, fasting, and the wearing of a hair shirt. As a widow living in the world, Hucbald noted, she turned consciously from the worldly activities of Martha to the contemplative life and spiritual bereavement of Mary. Unfortunately, Rictrude’s temptations did not end with Dagobert. Despite Rictrude’s perfect conduct in widowhood, ultimately, she could not completely fulfill the duties of her state until she entered a convent. A literary contemporary of Hucbald’s, Haimo of Auxerre, wrote that “widows and continents earn the sixty-fold fruits, for they sustain the tribulation of having known the pleasures of the flesh.”

Haimo’s rather backhanded praise suggests that the source of the widow’s reward was also the source of her most pernicious challenge. In Rictrude’s case, demonic pressures plagued her as long as she remained in the world. Although she fulfilled all of the requirements of widowed piety, none of these measures was powerful enough to counteract the ill effects of the libidinous “demonic suggestions” that persistently troubled her. (Hucbald declined to mention what, precisely, the demons suggested, perhaps wishing to discourage the imagination of his readers).

42 Vita Rictrudis II.15, 84; tr. McNamara 207. For the benediction in the Germano-Roman Pontifical, see PL 138, Benedictiones, consecrationes, et ordinationes variae from Vind. Theol. 359, 1099.

43 Sexagesimum vero fructum viduae et continentiae proferunt, dum voluptatem carnis experite longiorem tribulationem sustinient, Haimo of Auxerre, Homiliae de tempore, Hom. 22.170, cited in Katrine Heene, The Legacy of Paradise: Marriage Motherhood and Woman in Carolingian Edifying Literature (Franfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997) 126. Hucbald had ties to the Auxerre school and may have been directly familiar with Haimo’s work. He received his education at the abbey of St. Germaine d’Auxerre and worked with Remigius of Auxerre to establish the Rheims school for liturgical song.

44 Et ut quondam expertas corporis voluptates, et molestas evinceret daemonum suggestions, cum nimiiis vigiliis et orationibus continuis, crebra ducens jejunia, esophorio amicitur ciliicio; cuius assiduis punctionibus edomaret libidinis punctiones..., Vita Rictrudis, 1.16, 84; tr. McNamara 207.
Rictrude’s (and Hucbald’s) solution was to turn to the monastic life and enter the convent at Marchiennes. Hucbald urgently exhorted his female audience to follow Rictrude’s example:

Oh, hear these most truthful things, I pray! Let your ears receive them all—you who have ears to hear, to whom it has been given to rise to chastity, the privilege of angels, and thus to acquire the society of the most famous companion to sound out the sweet melody of the new song. Hurry! Hasten! Run! Remember Lot’s wife and never seek to look back.

Hucbald represented Rictrude’s initial widowhood as a pivotal position between her life in the world and life in the convent and an occasion to discuss the challenges vowesses faced in secular life. Rictrude suffered inner torments and anxieties concerning her chastity in the world. Hucbald, himself a product of the monastic ideal, described convent life as the most perfect expression Rictrude’s sanctity. There, the spiritual trials of her widowhood had a salutary rather than destructive effect. He likened the convent to a “gymnasium” where

she would run, competing in the arena of this present life, struggling in contention against the Devil. She was anointed with the oil of celestial grace lest the wicked adversary get a hold to restrain her.

Implicit throughout Hucbald’s text was the assumption that the institution of consecrated widowhood in the world would not make one sufficiently agile to elude the devil’s grasp, and was indeed so prone to failure that even the most exemplary woman could

45 According to McNamara, Rictrude built a convent there on allodial lands of Adelbald’s, McNamara, Sainted Women, 196.

46 Haec cum verissime ita sint, audite, obseco, et auribus percipite omnes qui habetis audiendi aures, quibus adhuc fas est ad angelicae privilegia castitatis assurgere, et tam praecarum contubernii societatem aquirere, atque cum eis tam dulcem novi cantici melodiam personare. Properate, currite, festinate, ac memores uxoris Loth, retro respicere nolite, Vita Rictrudis, 1.18, 85; tr. McNamara, 208-209.

47 Gymnasium monasteriale; ubi stadium vitae praesentis, agonizando percurreret, et contra diabolum luctando decertaret, palaestrorum more sic nuda, ne in aliquo ab adversario maligno teneri posset, et oleo peruncta gratiae coelestis ingreditur, ibid., 1.19, 85; tr. McNamara, 209.
not persevere successfully. Hucbald deliberately elicited this conclusion through Rictrude’s initial intention to stay in the world, and her subsequent abandonment of that plan in favor of a convent, a spiritual *gymnasium* that was better suited to religious exercise.

Although the distinctions of worldly rank and sexual experience should have dissolved with the entrance to the convent, Hucbald transformed Rictrude’s biography into hagiography by emphasizing her role as a chaste widow within the convent, not only distinguishing the widow as different from virginal entrants, but also as a mentor and guide to them. As Karin Ugé has noted, Hucbald emplotted the life of Rictrude within the foundation history of Marchiennes; her life before and after her entry into the convent, where she served as abbess, were thus major structural elements in recalling the foundation’s history.  

As a former wife, Rictrude was the mother of earthly children; as a chaste widow, Rictrude became the chaste mother of a spiritual dynasty. Upon entering Marchiennes, Rictrude espoused her three daughters to monastic life:

> After a continent profession of widowhood to God, and after the assumption of the holy clothing of a nun’s habit, she showed herself holy as a living sacrifice. She was not content to please God in herself alone, for she offered the first fruits of earth, that is her womb, sacred and excellent, to the holy undivided Trinity: that is, her three aforementioned daughters, white as doves, as most gracious offerings that with immaculate body and heart, preserving perpetual virginity they might follow the Lamb… therefore, Rictrude, the faithful woman of God who had devoted herself to him in holy continence, espoused her three daughters at one time, while they were still young, to Christ as husband… [and] taught her daughters to live by her example.  

48 Karine Ugé, “The Legend of Rictrude: Formations and Transformations,” *Anglo-Norman Studies: proceedings of the Battle Conference* (23, 2003) 286. It is not explicit in Hucbald’s vita that Rictrude became abbess, but she is generally thought to have acted in this capacity (although some twelfth-century sources position her rather as a nun than as an abbess); see also Ugé, *Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders*, 134.

49 Post professam Deo viduitatis continentiam, et post sumptum sanctum sanctimonialis habitus indumentum; seipsam tantummodo exhibere oblationem vivam, sanctam, Deoque placentem non contenta; etiam terrae, hoc est ventris sui, sacras ac praeceipias sanctae et individuae Trinitati offert primitias, praefatas videlicet tres filias, candidas veluti columbas, gratissimas illi scilicet hostias; ut corde et corpora immaculatae, et perpetuam virginitatem servants, Agnum… Rictrudis igitur Dei fidelis femina, quae se totam illi in sacra devoverat
All three daughters took nuns’ vows, and Rictrude’s middle daughter, Eusebia, was venerated as a saint. Hucbald expressed a spiritual as well as physical dimension to Rictrude’s motherhood, both toward her children and toward the nuns in her convent after she became abbess. The natural pairing of widows and virgins that paralleled the mother-daughter relationship was a commonplace in Jerome’s well-known letters and treatises to women, and also echoed elsewhere in Carolingian theology. Just as Jerome identified a spiritual as well as a physical nurturing by Paula of her virgin daughters, so too did Hucbald emphasize the mentoring role that bound Rictrude to her daughters and nuns. At Marchiennes, Rictrude gained the companionship not only of her children but also of the nuns who were the “fruits” of her chaste widowhood.

Thus from the ashes of spiritual bereavement arose both physical and spiritual children. Rictrude’s own flesh and blood children were conceived in a chaste and honorable marriage bed. Her spiritual protégés—the monastic virgins whom the widowed protected and taught—were the fruits of her widowhood that preceded her heavenly reward. Hucbald praised Rictrude’s entry into the monastic life, her spiritual leadership, and the establishment of a pious legacy through her children. In the Vita Rictrudis, the family’s pious lineage adorned the history of the convent of Marchiennes, and the cloister in turn was the perfect setting for the jewel of Rictrude’s widowed chastity.

“Look Who They Are Calling Saints:” The Profession of Widowhood as Holy Corrective

Of all the late Carolingian hagiographies that engaged the topoi of consecrated widowhood to demonstrate the transformation of a continentia; tres quoque filias uni despondit viro Christo, in aetate adhuc tenera…suoque exemplo filias vivere edocet; Vita Rictrudis, II.18-19, 84-5. In this case I have used my own translation rather than McNamara’s more elegant one, as McNamara’s translation does not emphasize the pivotal nature of this description in the narrative; the Latin offers a series of constructions with the word “post” that suggests the offering of her daughters as a consequence of Rictrude’s own conversion; cf. tr. McNamara, 208-210.

50 See Jerome’s Ad Eustochium (Epitaphium sanctae Paulae), Ep. 108, CSEL v. I. 55, Ch. 20.
worldly matron into a monastic saint, Hucbald’s identification with the discourse on widowhood was the most extensive, and this was no accident. Widowhood was an immensely useful construct for Hucbald not least because both the house of Marchiennes and Rictrude’s family as its founders were in reality only mediocre candidates for cult status. Throughout its history, Marchiennes appears to have languished in the shadow of its richer and more powerful neighbor, Saint-Amand, and had failed to nurture Rictrude’s cult. Hucbald’s prologue expressed deep concerns about the dearth of available sources. Perhaps worse from a hagiographical standpoint was that Rictrude’s family, despite the saintly pedigree that Hucbald ascribed to it, was riddled with conflict and violence. The mother and children’s entry into the convent may in fact have been prompted by the infighting surrounding Adalbald’s murder, and two of Rictrude’s daughters, Adalsendis and Eusebia, died prematurely in the convent. While the girls’ deaths enhanced Rictrude’s position of widowhood’s “spiritual bereavement,” these episodes also revealed Hucbald’s narrative as a fabric that was easily unraveled by local memory, or even a reader’s close scrutiny. Eusebia’s demise was particularly problematic, as she died as the result of a severe beating, a correction for monastic disobedience which Rictrude herself ordered. The reason for the altercation was the daughter Eusebia’s preference for residence in a neighboring convent, Hamage, where her great-grandmother Gertrude had appointed Eusebia abbess at the age of twelve. According to Hucbald, Rictrude feared Eusebia had too much freedom at Hamage and desired her daughter’s companionship at Marchiennes. Eusebia may indeed have preferred Hamage, and the status and freedom of being its abbess, to living under her mother’s authority in Marchiennes. She may also

51 Ugé, *Creating the Monastic Past in Medieval Flanders*, 98.

52 Although Hucbald characteristically ‘spins’ this event in support of claiming sanctity for Rictrude’s entire lineage, Patrick Geary suggests that the entry of the entire family at once into the convent might have been politically motivated by the ascension of Ebroin (who was perhaps involved in Adalbald’s murder) as Mayor of the Palace; Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, cited in McNamara, 209 n. 58.
have enjoyed a closer relationship with her great-grandmother than
with her mother. In any event, Eusebia repeatedly stole away from
Marchiennes to return to Hamage to complete its vigils and offices,
resulting in Rictrude’s order that her son, Maurontus, issue a beat-
ing as punishment for the girl’s disobedience. Hucbald hastened
to explain that Rictrude only sought to avoid spoiling her child by
sparing the rod. However, in writing the vita, Hucbald was forced
to sanitize this most unpleasant episode in which the “holy moth-
er” Rictrude ordered her daughter Eusebia to be beaten by her own
brother. So over-zealous was Maurontus in his duties that he perma-
nently damaged Eusebia’s health, and the story had clearly persisted
in local memory such that Hucbald had to confront it in the vita:

We are pleased to sharpen our pen a little in order to confound
those who would slander the righteous with forked tongues and
misplaced pride. Such folk would lay their tongues to heaven
itself and still not fear to malign people who are free of earthly
burdens and, as we believe, reigning with God in heaven. So
in their cunning they have observed: ‘Look who they are call-
ing saints: a mother who attacked her innocent daughter for
wanting to serve God; a daughter who deserted her own mother
and fled her as an enemy; a son who, with his mother’s con-
sent, branded his sister like a fugitive taken away in secret, or
like a condemned thief whipped her so viciously that she nearly
died…What will be given—what assigned—to the accursed
tongue? Only the sharp point of the arrow, that is, the lance of
God Almighty’s word from the quiver of the Holy Scripture.”

53 Vita Rictrudis, III.25-27. Gertrude had raised her great-granddaughter Eusebia at
Hamage; when Rictrude ordered Eusebia back to Marchiennes, using the King’s authority
to overcome Eusebia’s reluctance, Eusebia returned Marchiennes with Gertrude’s relics.
An anonymous vita of Eusebia composed about one hundred years after Rictrude’s rep-
resented the beating episode as evidence of Eusebia’s sanctity through suffering, and was
clearly more sympathetic to her side of the story. This hagiographer extended Eusebia’s
lifetime into middle age and claimed that she ruled Hamage for twenty-three years as ab-
bess; Ugé, Monastic Past, 102-103.

54 Libet paulisper exacuendo stylum protelare, quo illorum perfodiantur linguae, qui
loquuntur adversus justos in justitatem in superbia et in abusione; qui ponunt in coelum os
suum, dum eis detrare non verentur, qui quam exempli de terrenis, cum Deo in coelestibus
regnare creduntur. Aiunt enim strophas commentantes hujusmodi: En, quales isti dicuntur
esse Sancti, Mater inoxiam insequitur filiam, Deo militare volentem: Filia sicut hostem, sic
propriam execrator et refugit matrem: Filius matre consentanea, sororem refugiam,
asportato clam signo proditam, dirisimis velut furti ream afficit verberibus pene usque ad
mortem…Quid dabitur, aut quid apponetur ad linguam dolosam, nisi sagittae potentis acu-
tae, id est verborum Dei omnipotentis jacula, ex sanctarum prolata Scripturarum pharetas?
Hucbald’s defense of Rictrude’s family began with a *catena* of citations on the theme of “judge not, lest ye be judged,” followed by a chapter in which Hucbald inoculated the reader against what must have been quite plausible skepticism about this family’s sanctity among contemporaries. He reframed the violent events through the mother-daughter relationship established earlier in the *vita*. His warnings against gossip and judgment notwithstanding, Hucbald had few options in this instance but to characterize Rictrude’s beating of her daughter—implausibly—as simply dutiful parenting.\(^{55}\) On the whole, however, Hucbald’s fashioning of Rictrude’s image as a saintly widow who mentored her virginal daughters lent him ample material to reinterpret the foundation’s history in local memory, and to explore the positive sides of Rictrude’s sanctity within an otherwise quite problematic biography. In Hucbald’s hands as a professional historian and historiographer, the dignity and sacrality of chaste widowhood distinguished Rictrude as a successful celibate, a mother of virgins, and a worthy candidate for commemoration by the house whose origins Hucbald closely associated with the her family.

Despite Hucbald’s deftness with this difficult hagiographical mission, it is not clear that the *vita* circulated widely or in the long run fully accomplished the task of reviving her cult at Marchiennes. Within the next century, Hucbald’s *vita* was rewritten as a verse life, probably by the monk John of Marchiennes, without significant change to the original content. Thereafter a series of revisionist texts, including *lives* of Eusebia, Maurontus (who seems to have been essentially a fabrication of Hucbald’s and who emerges as an important male patron saint of the foundation in the twelfth century) and a comprehensive history, the *Polyptique*, articulated changing needs in the community’s self-identification and sense of its own

\(^{55}\) See McNamara, 198-199 and Ugé’s analysis of the evolution of Rictrude’s legend as part of the creation of a “useable past” for Marchiennes in *Creating the Monastic Past*, 118 ff. On the struggles between Rictrude and Eusebia, see Ugé, 101-102 and 128ff; cf. also Ineke van’t Spyker’s analysis of Rictrude’s motherhood in her essay, “Family Ties: Mothers and Virgins in the Ninth Century” in *Sanctity and Motherhood*, 165-191.
history. The later texts criticized the foundation’s history as a female house; they cited lax caretaking on the part of the nuns, and were profoundly concerned with defending the convent’s properties against secular interference. The later texts also privileged Maurontus as the leading figure in the convent’s foundation history. Karine Ugé has argued that contemporary pressures to reform the institution as a male house drove the need to rewrite its history under the patronage and protection of a “male tutelary saint,” in part to stem criticism of the nuns and encourage the reform of the convent which had begun in 1024.

In Hucbald’s day, however, Rictrude was clearly still the convent’s key figure, and his construction of Rictrude’s life as the framework for the convent’s history showed that hagiographers had developed a coherent, inter-textual discourse on holy widowhood—gleaned largely from Carolingian Renaissance scholars’ reflections on the topic—that proved useful for promoting the cults of matron saints. Widowed saints functioned as a matronly counterpart to the virgin saint in their own right as opposed to merely articulating widows as either viragos or incomplete virgins. Hucbald followed a typical Carolingian pattern of expanding on patristic traditions to fill in scanty historical information and fashion a useable past and edifying example from fragments of documentation; Scripture, patristic letters, and Carolingian treatises on widowhood thus offered rich

56 Ugé provides a fascinating analysis of the intricate fabrications that developed from the tenth to the twelfth centuries concerning whether Marchiennes was indeed founded on Rictrude’s lands. She argues that both Marchiennes and Hamage were probably founded on lands donated by Adalbald’s family. In Hucbald’s vita, the connection is vague; in later histories of Marchiennes, monastic authors explicitly identified Rictrude (based on tradition or even just wishful thinking) as the convent’s foundress, often contrary to fact and evidence, Creating the Monastic Past, 97, 131.

57 Ibid., 131. The tendency to rewrite Marchiennes’ history that began around the turn of the millennium illustrates a pattern of the erasure of feminine origins in favor of a male figure as founder of the lineage that Patrick Geary observed in family histories in the central Middle Ages: “Thus reconstruction of family histories meant coming to terms, under differing needs and circumstances, with the relative importance of such marriages and of the women who put not only their dowries and their bodies but their personalities and kinsmen to work on behalf of their husbands and their children. Over time, the ideological imperative of illustrious male descent could best be fostered if memory of the women who made their rise possible was removed from center stage in favor of the audacious acts of men,” Geary, Women at the Beginning: Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2006) 43-44.
textual possibilities to illustrate piety in both secular life and in the convent. The hagiographical discourse could not erase an ecclesiastical preference for perfect, intact virginity over widowed celibacy, but Rictrude’s widowhood created a pivotal position between married life and sexual renunciation, a state that allowed her to express what must have been a fairly common experience for many matrons: the transition from the business and structures of secular society to the institutions of professed religious. As examples of chaste asceticism, as advisors and protectors of virgins, and as dynastic mothers who raised pious children, holy widows facilitated the inclusion of married women and matrons in the medieval cult of saints.

**Hrotsvit’s Historical Writing:**

*Widowhood and The Primordia Coenobii Gandershemensis*

Just as Hucbald found Rictrude’s widowhood essential to his recreation of Marchiennes’ institutional memory, so too did Hrotsvit use the widowhood to characterize the sanctity of her convent’s patron, Oda. Hrotsvit’s use of the commonplaces of widowhood were more complex, however: not only did she use images of the *vere vidua* to characterize an individual figure, but she also engaged them more thematically to show how the true widow’s spiritual bereavement created and inspired the piety of the women important to her foundation’s history. Hrotsvit created a history of her monastic world in which women’s contributions—initiating foundations, nurturing and sustaining the monastic community, and demonstrating spiritual gifts such as prophecy and visions—were not merely proof of a saintly lineage, but rather essential to Gandersheim’s history, its embodiment of the monastic ideal, and its intercession on behalf of the secular rulers who supported the convent.

Hrotsvit is best known today as the author of eight verse legends and six plays; her surviving theatrical works represent the earliest recorded Germanic dramas. She was the only known female poet to produce works in those genres in the Central Middle Ages and a remarkable exemplar of the classicizing scholarship of the Ot-
tonian Renaissance. While the particulars of the circulation of her works remain disputed, her works were most likely well known and even performed within the literary milieu of the Ottonian court.\textsuperscript{58}

The historical Hrotsvit however, is elusive. Almost everything we know about her derives from information she provided herself in the highly topological prefaces to her dramas, verse legends, and histories. External evidence suggests a noble background, since her admission to Gandersheim as a canoness would have depended on high social rank, but outside of our general knowledge about the privileged status of the Gandersheim canonesses and the literary world of the Ottonians, we know little about Hrotsvit herself.

Both by her own account and by the consensus of contemporary scholars, Hrotsvit was more comfortable and had a greater fund of literary exemplars in her legends and dramas than her historical works, although similar themes (such as idealized characters, a moralizing tone, and a theatrical narrative quality) pervade her entire corpus of writings. Of all of Hrotsvit’s texts, the \textit{Gesta} and \textit{Primordia} were the least reliant on specific extant models.\textsuperscript{59} The \textit{Primordia}

\textsuperscript{58} Peter Dronke argues that Hrotsvit’s distinctive rhymed prose (leonine, or rhymed hexameter), offers “notable parallels” to that of Rather of Verona, a luminary of the Ottonian court, and further posits that she perhaps spent time there as well as being educated in the convent. He also suggests that Hrotsvit’s imitation of Rather was quite deliberate, and that through the 960’s Hrotsvit’s connections with the Ottonian court were “far-reaching.” Hrotsvit also had a strong connection with Bruno of Cologne; Theitmar of Merseberg comments in his \textit{Chronicon} that Bruno had a great love of comedies and tragedies, both the reading of them and their performance “a personis variis;” Dronke argues that Hrotsvit might well have written her plays for Bruno and others at the court, including Rather of Verona and Luitprand of Cremona. Another indication that Hrotsvit was part of an inner circle of Ottonian literary lights arises in the preface to her plays, where she says that “there are others again who cling to the sacred page and who, though the spurn other works by pagan authors, still rather often tend to read the fictive creations of Terence; and while they take delight in the mellifluence of the style, they become tainted by coming to know and impious subject-matter.” Given Bruno of Cologne’s known predilection for Terentian comedy, Dronke suspects that the hyperbolic claim that “some” read Terence even when spurning other pagan authors such as Virgil and Cicero might be aimed at Bruno as a teasing provocation by his protégé; Dronke \textit{Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (d. 203) to Marguerite Porete (d. 1310)} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 56-58, 69-70. (Cf. Hrotsvit’s Latin: Sunt etiam alii sacris inherentes paginis qui licit alia gentilium spermant Terentii tamen fingmenta frequentius lectitant et dum dulcedine sermonis delectantur nefandarum notitia rerum maculantur; W. Berschin, \textit{Hrotsvit Opera Omnia} (Munich and Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2001) 132.

\textsuperscript{59} Wolfgang Kirsch, “Hrotsvit von Gandersheim als Epikerin,” in \textit{Mittellateinsches Jahrbuch: Lateinische Kultur im X. Jahrhundert} (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann Verlag,
Coenobii Gandershemensis was her final and most mature work;\(^\text{60}\) Hrotsvit’s undertaking of historical writing at the most mature point in her career is significant. Her verse epics were highly original and constituted a hybrid genre that were influenced both by Hrotsvit’s flair in her dramatic works and by the practical constraints of historical verisimilitude and plausibility. Hrotsvit’s preface to the Gesta Oddonis resonated with a sensibility—one that perhaps exceeds the requirements of a typical modesty topos—the task of accurately portraying historical events vexed her, whether because of a paucity of sources, or because of embarrassing conflicts of interest in the storytelling. In the Gesta, Hrotsvit was forced to recall difficult moments between the family of her abbess and patron Gerberga, and Otto I that were all too well-known in the historical record.\(^\text{61}\)

Like Hucbald of Saint-Amand, the Saxon canoness Hrotsvit wrote at the behest of patrons (in the case of the Gesta Oddonis, her abbess Gerberga), and was concerned with reconstructing the events of a distant past for which the evidence was often both scanty and problematic. Hrotsvit’s historical and hagiographical task in these two cases, however, was not explicitly to spin a saint’s life out of meager threads of sacred history, but rather to negotiate a past (and present) filled with conflict and competing factions within the Ottonian house. As scholars have noted, her epic on the deeds of Otto the

60 Homeyer, 448; Wailes, 218.

61 In the introduction to the Gesta dedicated to her teacher, Gerberga, Hrotsvit describes historical writing as confusing and exhausting, like traveling without a guide “through a vast unknown ravine, where every path lies concealed, covered by thick snow.” (Anne Lyon Haight, Hrotswita of Gandersheim: Her Life, Times, and Works, and a Comprehensive Bibliography (New York: The Hroswitha Club, 1965) 29.
Great was characterized by the tactful negotiation of such conflicts. Writing the *Gesta Oddonis* between 965 and 968, Hrotsvit was confronted with the uncomfortable problem that Otto I’s rule had twice (in 939 and 941) been challenged by her abbess Gerberga’s father, Otto’s brother, Henry of Bavaria (d. 955). Although the disputes between the two brothers had been more or less settled with the conquest of Italy and Henry’s role in facilitating the union of Otto I with his second wife, Adelheid of Burgundy, Hrotsvit must have felt obliged to deal with it as a widely-known issue, and was cautious in her representation of this delicate matter.62

In contrast to Hrotsvit’s history of Otto I, her *Primordia Coenobii Gandershemensis* (composed between 973 and 983)63 permitted...
ted an untroubled picture of the imperial family’s sacred lineage and its beneficent role in the foundation’s history. However, composing the convent’s narrative required Hrotsvit to negotiate another set of ‘family’ problems, namely the challenges to the convent’s autonomy by the oversight of not one but two episcopal sees, Hildesheim and Mainz, even though Gandersheim enjoyed intellectual and political relationships with both.\(^{64}\) The \textit{Primordia} was most probably compiled with Hrotsvit’s dramas and legends together in one codex, dating from ca. 1000 at the Regensburg monastery of St. Emmeram. The history was detached from the rest of the book, possibly with sections of the \textit{Gesta Oddonis}, in the eleventh or twelfth century, and remained at Gandersheim (possibly as documentation to underscore the convent’s privileges that had subsequently deteriorated under influence from local episcopal and noble interference) while the rest of the codex was sent to St. Emmeram.\(^{65}\) Although the Gandersheim canonesses of Hrotsvit’s time had close intellectual and personal ties to the bishops of both Hildesheim and Mainz, around the turn of the eleventh century, the tension over Hildesheim’s ju-

\textit{Gesta Oddonis} and was her last work (or next to last, as some scholars believe that she might have composed lives of the patron saints of Gandersheim, whose relics were given to its founders by Pope Sergius with the founding of the monastery), 218.


\(^{65}\) Head, “Hrotsvit’s Primordia,” 143. The St. Emmeram codex— with a latter-day binding and still minus the \textit{Primordia}— is now held in the manuscript collection of the Bavarian State Library, Clm 14485. An explanation of the fate of the codex was suggested by Hans Götting: the codex might have been designated as a gift to the St. Emmeram monastery through a testamentary bequest of Gerberga, Hrotsvit’s abbess. The Gandersheim nuns might have detached the history of their own convent from the manuscript, along with another \textit{carmen} to the the convent’s patrons, attributed to Hrotsvit but now lost. Götting also suggests that the reason for separating the \textit{Primordia} had to do with supporting Gandersheim’s claims in a legal dispute. The \textit{Primordia} was detached from this codex and survives only in copies dating from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. As Götting demonstrates, in 1525, a Benedictine monk, Heinrich Bodo of the monastery of Clus rediscovered the \textit{Primordia}, and there after the text was used as a source by historians of Gandersheim and exists in copies dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Götting, 61-62. Leah Shopkow has noted that such an arrangement indicates Gerberga considered herself to be Hrotsvit’s personal patron, and that the work was considered to belong to Gerberga herself rather than the convent; alternatively, the \textit{Primordia} is Hrotsvit’s only work that does not have a preface, which rather indicates the opposite, the work might have “belonged” to the community for liturgical and historical purposes; Götting, “Die Überlieferungsschicksal von Hrotsvits \textit{Primordia},” in \textit{Festschrift für Hermann Hempel} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3 vols, 1972) 94-98.
risdiction—which might well have already been an issue at the time Hrotsvit was writing the *Primordia*—erupted in the so-called “Gandersheimer Streit,” a lengthy conflict in which Hildesheim claimed authority over Gandersheim, and was not definitively settled until 1028. In the *Primordia*, Hrotsvit effaced such tensions concerning Gandersheim’s ancient privileges and its status as an autonomous convent by emphasizing the convent’s papal protection and its rise through the able stewardship of Oda, its founder and patron.

While the audience for the *Primordia* is not certain, it potentially fulfilled a variety of functions. On a political level, it invoked the convent’s autonomy as a critical part of its ancient origins, and the celebration of these origins implicitly exhorted external patrons to continue to support the convent, suggesting an extra-claustral readership as well as the convent’s own use of the text. As a royal monastery, Gandersheim claimed independence from episcopal jurisdiction, submitting only to papal authority, and Hrotsvit’s description of these privileges was essential to the convent’s history from its inception. The *Primordia* might even have been commissioned during a heightening of these tensions to demonstrate the independence of the community.66 No foundation documents survive for the convent, and though they may have been extant in Hrotsvit’s time, the poem functioned as the convent’s foundation document and a reminder of the sisters’ accumulated immunities, privileges, and holdings, which had been well established in the early days of the foundation and had recently been renewed (in 972) by the Imperial imprimatur of Otto I.67 Within the convent the use of such a history for liturgical and commemorative purposes would be manifold, not only as an artifact of the convent’s privileges, but also as edifying reading in the convent’s refectory and as part of the celebration of

66 The catalyst for the controversy was the decision of Sophia, abbess of Gandersheim and daughter of Otto II and Theophanu, to request Willingis of Mainz rather than Bernward of Hildesheim—though both were in fact present at the ceremony—to officially consecrate her as abbess, and encouraged him to claim Gandersheim for his see based on Fulda’s rights over the monastery of Brunhausen; see Forse, “Religious Drama,” 62, Katharina Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers*, 45 n. 37, and Hans Götting, *Das Bistum Hildesheim* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1973-1984), 87ff.

67 Homeyer, 443-444 n. 20.
the feast days of the founders. Hrotsvit clearly connected the present-day nuns with their illustrious founders, and provided a hagiography of its founding family and notable miracle stories that would have had significant liturgical applications, and would have been essential to the formation and preservation of the convent’s institutional memory.

Hrotsvit, like Hucbald, found widowhood useful in articulating the history of her convent. Like Rictrude’s role in the foundation of Marchiennes, Oda’s piety facilitated the convent’s origins as well as all of its privileges (both directly through her petition for papal protection, and indirectly through her daughter Liudgard’s marriage to Louis the German and hence Queen Liudgard’s confirmation and protection of the convent’s rights). Indeed, Hrotsvit developed Oda’s sacred lineage even more prominently, and in more complex ways, than Hucbald did in Rictrude’s vita. In comparison to Hucbald’s strategy of “biography without narrative” in Rictrude’s life, Oda’s biography formed the warp and woof of Hrotsvit’s tale, explaining both the history and the quality of Gandersheim’s spiritual life. Hrotsvit documented the convent’s external establishment through the lineage of its founders, Liudolf and Oda, and its privileged independence from both local episcopal and secular authority and obedience to the apostolic see alone. Through carefully chosen moments in the house’s sacred history, Hrotsvit recounted the convent’s origins through allusions to the Nativity and described its historical and spiritual character as a templum that recalled the Jerusalem Temple and the presentation of Jesus to Simeon and Anna in the Gospel of Luke (2:36-38). The term templum in the Primordia thus signified not only a monastic church per se, but also the nature of the Gandersheim foundation as similar to the spiritual powers of the widow, Anna, who spent her widowhood in the temple devoted to fasting and prayer, and thereby received the gift of prophecy.

68 Head, “Rara Avis,” 144, 148.

69 Homeyer suggests that Hrotsvit’s verse legends, written in hexameter form, were meant to be read aloud, and the same could be true of the verse history, all but four lines of which were composed in leonine, or rhymed, hexameter, Hrotsvita Operae, 36, 499.

70 See above, n. 20.
Rather than merely recording the lineage of the convent’s patrons, Hrotsvit interpreted from the miracles surrounding the foundation narrative a spiritual lineage that Oda and her daughters created and bequeathed to the sisters of Gandersheim. Within this framework, Oda’s chastity, first in marriage, and then in widowhood, functioned throughout the text as an instrument of both virtue and prophecy. Oda’s widowhood facilitated her residence in the convent, enhancing the piety she had already demonstrated her marriage with a new capacity to immerse herself fully in convent life. Through Oda’s example, and her production of a sacred line of abbess-daughters, the Liudolfing women imparted a devotional model to the community that characterized the prayers and memoria of the Gandersheim sisters through parallels with the Biblical widow Anna’s long vigils in the temple, connecting the ancient founders with the devotional life of the contemporary convent.

Hrotsvit’s narrative choices in the Primordia were both original and striking. Although Hrotsvit probably shared, or even surpassed, Hucbald’s knowledge of classical and patristic writings on chaste widowhood from letters, treatises, and Carolingian florilegia, Hrotsvit did not merely reiterate the standard tropes she would have known from these texts, but instead crafted an origins narrative that took the notion of the widow’s devotion as the very fabric of the convent’s devotional life and underpinned the structure of her narrative of its history.

71 For example, an acquaintance with Jerome’s letters (if not the writings of Augustine or even a general acquaintance with Carolingian florilegia on female chastity) would likely have made Hrotsvit aware of the tripartite hierarchy of chastity’s merits that the Church Doctors so avidly explained to widows. Moreover, if Stephen Wailes’ assertion that Hrotsvit knew Hrabanus Maurus’s (776-856) commentaries on Paul to the degree that they provided “guidance to Hrotsvit’s understanding of flesh and spirit in individuals and in human communities” is correct, then Hrotsvit would have known Hrabanus’ writings on widowhood and his notion that there was an “ancient order” of women who elected to live in widowed chastity; Wailes, 27ff. Hrabanus Maurus commented on the prayer and chastity ascribed to the “order of widows” in the ancient church in his Ennarrationes on the letters of Paul, and incorporated the paradigm of the sixty-fold fruit for widows in both his commentary on Matthew as well as in his treatise on numbers in De universo; Rabanus Maur, Ennarrationes in epistolas b. Pauli, PL 112, 23.5, 616; Commentarium in Mattheum, PL 107 V.13, 495; De universo, PL 111, XVIII.3, 493. Reconstructing Hrotsvit’s classical literary influences and resources in the Gandersheim library, scholars believe that Hrotsvit knew works by Horace, Ovid, Statius, Lucan, Boethius, Terence, and Virgil; moreover, the Byzantine empress Theophanu, wife of Otto II, spent time in Gandersheim and may have introduced Greek language and texts into the convent. Hrotsvit was also familiar with a variety of texts including Prudentius, Fortunatus, Jerome, Alcuin, Bede, Notker, and Ekkehard, as well as the Vulgate, liturgical texts, and hagiographical legends, Wilson, Medieval Women Writers (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 31. On the influence of Byz-
Like many monastic histories and hagiographies of the Carolingian period, Hrotsvit’s historical writing functioned in part a project to recapture fragments of history from an earlier time and refashion them for present purposes. It also served the purpose of cultivating the favor and patronage of the Imperial house. In the *Gesta Oddonis*, Hrotsvit articulated the dearth of sources that many scholars admit as more than a mere modesty topos. In the *Primordia*, however, Hrotsvit showed no such hesitation in writing about her own convent. Her narrative drew on communal memory as well as texts such as the late ninth-century prose and verse *Life of Hathumoda*, the convent’s first abbess, by Agius of Corvey. Julia H. M. Smith notes that Hathumoda’s *vita* demonstrates a typical problem in late Carolingian hagiography: it was difficult for authors to reconcile women’s spirituality, which was oriented toward interiority, visions, and kinship, with the predominantly male hagiographical conventions in which saintly deeds were accomplished through secular activities, influence, and authority. In the *Primordia*, however, Hrotsvit reinvited Hathumoda and her kin in an Ottonian mold that celebrated holy matrons for their responsible exercise of power and virtue as the spiritual equals of the convent’s cloistered virgins. Hrotsvit not only rationalized female founders’ roles in the establishment of the

antique culture, see: *ibid, Florilegium*, 8. Peter Dronke suggests that among these classical and medieval authors Hrotsvit was in particular familiar with the letters of Jerome and his treatise *Contra Vigilantius*, Ovid’s *Fasti*, and possibly Priscian’s grammar, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, 296 n. 45 and n. 47, 297 n.57 and n. 60.

72 See especially Stephen Wailes’ argument suggesting that Hrotsvit was uncomfortable with the political events of the *Gesta Oddonis* and saw the *Primordia* effectively as a corrective to the concerns she had to overcome in writing the former; Stephen L. Wailes, *Spirituality and Politics in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 2006) 206ff.

convent, but also structured her account of its history around three generations of holy women, each characterized by chastity, visionary power, and deft stewardship of the Gandersheim foundation.

Hrotsvit’s narrative began with the decision of Duke Liudolf of Saxony (d. 866) and his wife Oda to found a convent for women. Throughout the work, Hrotsvit presented Liudolf as a revered founder and patron, but always in partnership with Oda, the convent’s spiritual advisor and mother. The foundation fulfilled a prophecy told to Oda’s mother, Aeda, by John the Baptist, who had appeared to Aeda as she lay prostrate before his altar. John had informed her that her “descendant” would “establish a cloister for holy virgins and a triumphant peace for his realm,” and also that her progeny would one day ascend to imperial rule, thus immediately combining the fate of Gandersheim Convent with the Liudolfing/Ottonian lineage.74

Hrotsvit positioned Oda as the driving force behind the foundation; by urging her husband “frequently in loving and persuasive speech” (exhortabatur blandis nimium suadalis) to realize Aeda’s prophetic vision, Oda and Liudolf established a house for women at Brunshausen in 852, and began work on the new convent buildings for the Gandersheim foundation.75 They made a pilgrimage to Rome on behalf of the convent, where they met with Pope Sergius, who blessed their project with the relics of Popes Anastasius and Innocent. Hrotsvit suggested that Sergius confirmed Liudolf’s request


75 Primordia, ed. Berschin, 309; tr. Head, 244. Homeyer suggests that the papal meeting probably consisted of permission to build the foundation and a papal blessing, not the full immunity—comparable to those desired by Cluny’s founders and consistent with those sought by other tenth-century reforming foundations—that Hrotsvit suggested in the poem. Agius in the Life of Hathumoda states they received permission “cum apostolica auctoritate et episcopali benedictione” as opposed to Hrotsvit’s formulation: “hoc est apostolici iuris.” The patronage of the two pope-saints, Anastasius and Innocent, seems important to Hrotsvit for their apostolic connections rather than for any specific attributes of their cult; for Hrotsvit, papal authority and the vision of John the Baptist seem to confirm the holiness of the convent rather than local saints or episcopal authority, Hrotsvithae Opera, 452.
that the convent be freed from any authority by earthly lords and rather governed by “the authority of the apostolic ruler alone,” a significant request that Hrotsvit strongly emphasized, perhaps because Gandersheim’s autonomy had become a contentious subject with the Hildesheim bishops, (significantly, Hrotsvit makes no mention of Hildesheim’s episcopal authority over the convent’s governance).  

As was the case in many Carolingian foundation narratives, Gandersheim was the happy product not only of temporal patronage but divine blessing, and a succession of nature miracles propelled the foundation story forward. The appearance of miraculous lights in the sky in the Gandersheim forest at All Saints prompted Liudolf, “with the approval of his beloved wife,” to move the Brunshausen convent to that site in 865, and to build a church and monastery on the spot that the lights had designated (the building of which took twenty years to complete). Liudolf died prematurely, leaving his sons and wife Oda to complete the building of the convent, but the miracle, which was repeated two more times, including on the day of the consecration of the new monastery on November 1, 881 (the anniversary of the miraculous lights), confirmed for Hrotsvit that “the construction of our monastery was begun under God’s patronage.”

While Hrotsvit described Liudolf’s death with all the appropriate honor due to her convent’s founder, and noted that his “revered remains” were buried in the “ancient church,” she nevertheless followed the medieval convention of interpreting the husband’s demise as serving the greater purpose of allowing the surviving spouse to live as a holy widow who fostered the interests of the convent:

76 Rectoris apostolici solum, Primordia, ed. Berschin, 312; tr. Head, 245.
77 Consensusque suae dilectae coniugis Odae, Primordia, 315.; tr. Head, 246.
78 Coenobi sub honore dei constructione nostro, ibid.
79 Cuius in antique corpus venerabile templo/Tunc gremio terrae commendatum fuit apte. Hrotsvit added that his bones were later transferred to the new church; Primordia, 317.
Perhaps God took [Liudolf] from this world when he had scarcely attained the warmth of middle age, in order that thereafter the heart of the eminent lady Oda would be intent upon God and, with no further thought of earthly love whatsoever, might be able to devote [herself] more fully to the things of God.”

Meanwhile, the couple’s daughter, Hathumoda, had been chosen as the foundation’s first abbess. Trained since the age of twelve at the convent of Herford, Hathumoda was the recipient of the next nature miracle that guided the foundation. In the process of building the convent, the builders lacked sufficient quarries of stone. One day when Hathumoda was deeply absorbed in fasting and prayer (nocte dieque, borrowing the Scriptural passage describing the prophetess Anna in the temple), a miracle occurred through which the abbess discovered a quarry that would permit the continued work on the convent. A bird led Hathumoda to the monastery’s construction site, where a dove directed her to a new stone quarry. The monastery was completed, as the “heavenly support that she was seeking was at hand, quick to take pity on her requests.”

The three miracles—Aeda’s vision of John the Baptist, the lights at All Saints that encouraged Oda and Liudolf to select the monastic site, and the birds that helped find the stone to complete the project—were typical miracles for monastic foundation legends. They underscored that the foundation was divinely blessed well before the Hildesheim bishop, Wicbert, officially consecrated it, signaling Gandersheim’s autonomy through the divine origins of the convent. Gandersheim’s royal privileges had been confirmed under the late Carolingian kings, and had been renewed and the convent’s lands generously enriched by the Saxon emperors Otto I and Otto

80 Forsan ad hac illum mundo dues abstulit isto/Dum vix aetatis febres tetegit mediocris/Ilustris domnae post haec ut plenius Odae/Mens intente deo posset tractare superna/Expers carnalis totius prorsus amoris,” Primordia, 317-318, tr. Head 247

81 Homeyer sees echoes of both Virgil and Walafrid of St. Gall in this episode; Homeyer, 446-447.

82 Nec mora, caelestem, quam quaerabat, pietatem/Sensit adesse sui votis promptam miserere; Primordia, 315; tr. Head, 247.
I, but Hrotsvit nevertheless demonstrated an interest in asserting and preserving these privileges, perhaps in anticipation of, or response to, the incipient disputes that arose over episcopal jurisdiction and culminated in the “Gandersheimer Streit” of 1002-1028.

Beyond their undoubtedly useful function of confirming the convent’s blessed heritage and traditional privileges, the nature miracles also highlighted the visionary power and prudent caretaking of the three generations of Liudolfing women as essential to Gandersheim’s history. As in her dramas and legends, Hrotsvit joined medieval hagiography to a classicizing verse pattern (in this case, leonine hexameter, a meter appropriate for an epic history), and infused the whole with her singular philosophy of female virtue achieved through chastity and prayer.

Karl Leyser’s work on Ottonian women suggests that the demographics and social structure of the Saxon nobility virtually assured that women, especially widows, would be responsible for the maintenance of family piety and memory. In Hrotsvit’s hands, the influence and pious efficacy of the Liudolfing noble matrons forged an elegant connection among the three generations of women (Aeda, Oda, and Oda’s daughters) through the miracles that marked the history of their convent, and the good deeds that sustained the foundation to the present.

In this trinity of women, Oda was undoubtedly the most significant figure. She instigated the foundation and carried it forward as the founding mother of the convent, surviving the death of its male patrons, her husband Liudolf and then her son Duke Otto of Saxony. In contrast to Hucbald, who tended to use a series of heav-

83 Homeyer, 442-443; see also Götting, 87ff.
85 Interestingly, Hrotsvit elected to write only about Liudolfing abbesses, 852-919; her history ended with Oda’s daughters, after which non-Liudolfings filled that role until the accession Hrotsvit’s own abbess, Gerberga II, who was a niece of Otto I.
86 Whose death elicited Hrotsvit’s profound lamentation; Otto had, “in accord with the wishes of his dear mother, mercifully cherished and lovingly advanced the cause of the virginal band of Christ’s handmaids” (Concordando suae votis carae genitricis/Auxilio regum, quibus exhibuit famulatum/Ipsum virgineum coetum Christi famularum/Fovit cle-
ily interpreted vignettes rather than a narrative history of Rictrude to craft her *vita*, Hrotsvit used biography to organize her narrative, fusing Oda’s literal widowhood with allusions to the spiritual duties of widows and virgins to the Gandersheim foundation and the souls in its care. Hrotsvit’s characterization of the chaste spiritual lineage of Oda and her daughters is in many ways quite singular and original, but as Leyser has observed, the influence, authority, and longevity in widowhood of the significant women in the Ottonian dynasty was unprecedented in medieval history and may well have influenced their representation in history and historiography.\(^\text{87}\) Hrotsvit’s treatment of Oda was personal and familiar, especially compared to late Carolingian authors like Hucbald, or other Ottonian writers such as the Cluniac abbot, Odilo of Cluny (who consciously modeled his depiction of the Empress Adelheid on Jerome’s writings to and about widows), or Theitmar of Merseberg, who adopted a rather conventional *catena* of Scriptural references to describe chaste widows such as Hathui.\(^\text{88}\) Hrotsvit avoided the typical clichés about widowhood and virginity from patristic sources, and rather cut a figure of her female forbears out of whole cloth rather than creating a conventional patchwork of references to the Church Fathers.

At the consecration of the new Gandersheim monastery, Oda withdrew into the convent and, before her death in 913, lived to see (mementor nec non provexit amanter), *Primordia*, 326; Head, 251.  

\(^\text{87}\) Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 50. Hrotsvit was not the only Ottonian historian who chose to organize her historical representation quite pointedly around her subject’s personal biography: the model of the Empress Mathilda’s sanctity established in her *vita posterior*—possibly female-authored—was also highly original and shaped less by hagiographical *topoi* than by the biography of the subject. Although they also drew on existing texts such as Biblical passages, venerable authorities such as Sulpicius Severus, and even on Hrotsvit’s *Gesta*, Mathilda’s hagiographers subtly worked the themes of Mathilda’s ideal conduct in virginity, marriage, and widowhood into her role as a dynastic mother and wife, and fit examples of each stage of that triune division into the course of her life’s events, rather than the other way around.

\(^\text{88}\) The best analysis of Ottonian models of female sanctity, with particular attention to the novel aspects of Mathilda’s *vita*, is Patrick Corbet’s *Les saintes ottoniens: Sainteté dynastique, sainteté royale, et sainteté féminine autour de l’an mil* (Sigmaringen: 1986). For Adelheid’s *vita*, see Herbert Paulhart, ed., *Die Lebensbeschreibung der Kaiserin Adelheid von Abt Odilo von Cluny*. Graz and Cologne: Herman Böhlaus Nachf., 1962; for Theitmar of Merseberg’s characterization of the widowed abbess Hathui, see his *Chronicon* MGH. SRG VII.3, 400.
three of her daughters serve as abbess, acting as the moral compass of the foundation:

Then the esteemed lady Oda, dwelling within the enclosure of the monastery often scrutinized with vigorous care all the actions and devotion of the kindred sisters, their manners and their way of life. I est any woman contemptuous of following the law of the ancestors should presume to live unproven under her rule, nor lest there be any place for carrying out an illicit act, and by her example she showed how things were to be done. And, just as the sweet love of a prudent mother, now prohibiting, through fear, her daughters from error, now persuading to will the good through friendly counsel, so this holy woman instructed her dear pupils, now with the commanding law of a powerful lady, now with the soothing manner of a sweet mother, so that in one similar life they all together might serve the king, whom the stars of the sky celebrate.\(^9\)

Oda thus served the convent as a sort of arch-abbess, and her moral oversight and example functioned as the convent’s rule. Though not a virgin or even explicitly consecrated as a nun herself (according to Hrotsvit’s text),\(^90\) Oda lived in widowed chastity among the nuns, and retained an organizational and spiritual seniority even when her daughters officially ruled as abbesses of the convent. Like Rictrude’s spiritual lineage of virgin daughters, Oda’s mentorship was significant to the foundation’s history—but much more unequivocally positive than the troubled relationships in the *Vita Rictrudis*.

89  Domna tamen conversando venerabilis Oda/Intra claustra monasterii cura vigilanti/Scrutatur coniunctarum persaepe sororum/Actus et studium, mores, vitae quoque cursum,/Ne vel contempta maiorum lege sequenda/Vivere lege sua reprobe praesumeret ulla,/Vel locus illiciti foret ulius peragendi/Exemplque suo praemonstravit facienda./Et, ceu prudentis dulcis dilectio matris/Nunc terrore suas prohibet delinquere natas./Nunc etiam monitis bona velle suadet amicis./Sic haec sancta suas caras instruxit alumnas./Nunc domi-natrixs mandando iure potentis/Nunc etiam matris mulcendo more suavis./Quo vita simili cunctae communiter uni/Servient regi, iubilant cui sidera caeli,*Primordia*, 322.

90  Thomas Head interprets the text in this way, suggesting that it was common for Ottonian noblewomen to retire to their own foundations; Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, 254 n. 25. Hans Götting cites various contemporary sources that interpreted Oda’s role: a copy or draft of a now-lost confirmation of the convent’s privileges issued by Arnulf of Carinthia referred to the foundress Oda living “in the habit of a nun” (in sanctimoniali habitu), MGH Diplomata (Arnulf, D Arn. 107), 158-159. A Hildesheim Denkschrift from around this time referred to Oda simply as “domna,” Götting, *Das Bistum Hildesheim*, 85.
As Katharina Wilson has argued concerning Hrotsvit’s dramas, virtue and chastity were practically synonymous qualities in these texts, and thus maintaining chastity in the face of danger was a typical literary path for proving virtue in the lives of the virgin martyrs.\(^91\) This interpretation is relevant for the characterization of Hrotsvit’s female ‘heroines’ of the verse history of Gandersheim not only as a literary formula but also from the perspective of Ottonian women’s lived experience. Karl Leyser has commented on the real sexual dangers Saxon noblewomen indeed faced growing up in the homes of ambitious and incestuous kin, and remarks on the apparent “promiscuity crisis” decried in contemporary penitentials.\(^92\) Hrotsvit portrayed the Saxon convent of Gandersheim and its three generations of female leaders as the valiant products of chastity, and perhaps the unfortunately all-too-real social context indicated by Leyser sharpened and magnified Hrotsvit’s valuation of the empowering nature of heroic virginity. Hrotsvit differed from most of her contemporaries in extending this heroism, despite the sexual perils of the world, to matrons living in widowed chastity: rather than portraying them as endangered by either human or demonic temptation outside the convent, Hrotsvit highlighted Oda’s prudence and holiness throughout her life, and the particular contributions of her worldly knowledge and experience to the foundation’s origins.

In Hrotsvit’s narrative, the chastity of the virgin-abbess Hathumoda paired with the virtue and wisdom of the matron Oda created and nurtured the institution, both through miraculous events and daily leadership. Hrotsvit did, however, include an incident that reminded the reader of both the worldly challenges to female chastity and its rewards. After Hathumoda died of plague (nursed tenderly by her mother Oda), she was succeeded by her younger sister Gerberga, who unlike the elder Hathumoda, had not originally been

\(^{91}\) Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers*, 39. *Dulcitius* provides an excellent example: three virgins withstand a Roman governor’s attempts to rape them through both divine intervention and their own fortitude, and Hrotsvit even admits some humor to the picture as the evil governor, bewitched, ends up embracing kitchen utensils instead of the girls, who ultimately do earn the crown of martyrdom without damage to their chastity.

\(^{92}\) Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, 64.
destined for the convent but had been betrothed to a nobleman, Bernard. Gerberga’s release from the betrothal recalled the imperiled maiden saints in Hrotsvit’s dramatic works: although betrothed to Bernard, Gerhard had secretly consecrated herself to virginity out of love for the heavenly spouse “by means of the sacred veil of Christ,” though outwardly she maintained the betrothal and the requisite opulent secular dress of her class. When Bernard heard rumors of Gerberga’s vow, he threatened that when he came back from the current war, he would insist on “putting to naught” her “vain vow.” Gerberga merely replied that she would trust in God’s will for the outcome of their dispute and her vow. With what reads almost like a humorous note of self-parody or even stage direction, Hrotsvit commented on how stupidly (inania) Bernard tested God’s will in such a fashion, for of course Bernard fell in battle—not unlike the many pagan or otherwise evil men who threatened Hrotsvit’s virgin martyrs in her dramas and legends and were struck down by divine intervention—while Gerberga, still virginal, protected by her vow, succeeded Hathumoda as abbess.

There are a few interesting issues surrounding this rather typical anecdote: first, Hrotsvit, like Hucbald, ignored the repeated prohibitions against self-veiling and secret vows in canon law, and did not even mitigate Gerberga’s autonomous action through the approval of a bishop or other male authority figure; it was a matter settled within the family. Oda had in fact sided with Bernard concerning the betrothal: Oda had encouraged Gerberga to maintain the elaborate secular dress befitting her position as Bernard’s betrothed

93 On the mother-daughter relationship between Oda and Hathumoda in Agius’ Vita, see Smith, 26-8.
94 Sed sese Christo clam consecraverat ipsa/Caelesti fervens sponso velamine sacro, Primordia, 319; Head, 248.
95 Tui votum penitus pessumdabo vanum, ibid.
96 Ottonian authors favored such anecdotes in which God punished hubristic claims with a premature demise; cf. in Odilo’s Epitaphium Adelheidis Theophanu’s challenge to Adelheid’s sovereignty, and the Byzantine empress’ subsequent premature death, “Odilo of Cluny, Epitaph of the August Lady, Adelheid,” translated by David A. Warner, in Head, Medieval Hagiography, 264-5.
(admittedly under some pressure from Bernard). Hrotsvit withheld comment on Oda’s role in the affair, and instead praised Gerberga’s resourceful preservation of her virginity and her achievements as abbess: she “carefully safeguarded the young flock and instructed it by frequent exhortations to observe those things that were in harmony with its life and to avoid every profane deed.”

Throughout the anecdotes that characterized the female founders of Gandersheim, Hrotsvit noted the challenges to female chastity, but suggested that women’s experience strengthened rather than endangered their continent profession. She identified a shared, rather than hierarchical, spirituality among the widows and virgins in the story. All of the founding women experienced visions or miracles and thus had access to the sacred, but their worldly experience informed their skillful and pragmatic stewardship of the convent. After the incident with Bernard, for example, Gerberga not only kept her flock pure from profane concerns, but managed the convent so successfully substantially increased the revenues of the convent and maintained highly favorable relationships with her royal relations, especially her sister, Queen Liutgard.

Gerberga died in 896, and the leadership of the convent passed to yet another sister, Christina, about whom Hrotsvit says little beyond the usual platitudes. Oda, however, remained the dominant presence throughout her daughters’ abbacies until her death in 913. With Oda’s death, Hrotsvit brought the story full circle with

97 Et, licit abbatissa gregem Gerberga recentem/Caute servaret crebris monitisque doceret/Conservare, suae fuerant quae congrua vitae,/Contra propositum nec quid patrare profanum; Primordia, 322; Head, 249. It is worth noting that like Oda, Gerberga tended to secular as well as spiritual matters: her sister Liutgard married Louis the Younger, the son of the Frankish king Louis the German, and as queen became a great patron of the convent, whose benevolent remembrance of the convent in lands and donations during Gerberga’s rule earned Hrotsvit’s frankly grateful and lavish praise in the Primordia.

98 The rather wan presentation of Christina’s influence might correspond to an erosion of the convent’s autonomy during her rule. Thomas Head suggests that from around this period “Gandersheim had little more independence than an episcopal proprietary church,” but attempted to reassert its privileges in Hrotsvit’s time, “Rara Avis in Saxonia,” 151.
a comment that Oda had fulfilled the “happy promises” of a convent for nuns that John the Baptist had long ago entrusted to Aeda.\textsuperscript{99}

Hrotsvit’s poem developed the themes of the divine purpose of the foundation, its autonomy from local authority, and the literal and spiritual lineage of its members, principally its female founders and leaders, in an interesting fusion of classical epic verse, monastic history, and hagiography. While unquestionably valuable and useful for a variety of purposes to the Gandersheim community, its message concerning the vital role of holy women within the monastic foundations that keep peace in the Ottonian realm might have functioned not only as a ‘useable past’ for the convent’s nuns,\textsuperscript{100} might even have reminded an external audience of the convent’s sacred, autonomous, and feminine history.

All of Hrotsvit’s women, although always acting in God’s service and through his will, displayed a remarkable amount of personal agency for any pre-modern period and particularly for the tenth century. Colleen Richmond has characterized Hrotsvit’s model of “female agency” across her written corpus as consisting of 1) proactive and virtuous behavior in a restricted environment; 2) verbal strength and power; and 3) physical and spiritual strength.\textsuperscript{101} Though Richmond applied these criteria to Hrotsvit’s dramatic works, they also obtain for Hrotsvit’s historical female figures as well. Indeed, while Hrotsvit paid due homage to her esteemed patrons, Liudolf and Duke Otto of Saxony, women held a special place in the fabric of the convent’s institutional history and liturgical practice. Geary’s notion that monastic history around the turn of the millennium at times employed icons of female memory—both women’s memories of the past, and women’s duties as rememberers—to express the process of recapturing lost history is particularly useful in understand-

\textsuperscript{99} In quo laeta procul dubio promissa repleta/Christi Baptistae creduntur primitus esse; \textit{Primordia}, 328; Head, 252.

\textsuperscript{100} Head, “Rara Avis,” 154-155.

Hrotsvit engaged female memory and experience to structure her narrative and to describe her institution’s spiritual history. Her founders inhabited a monastic world in which women’s contributions were not only essential to the convent’s origins but also exemplary expressions of the monastic ideal and testimony to the wisdom of the secular rulers who fostered religious houses. Female agency contributed substantially to the monastic endeavor on all levels (material, communal, and spiritual), and was rooted in particular in the extraordinary spiritual and nurturing powers possible through female chastity. Indeed, Hrotsvit offered little comment either on the nuns’ liturgical offices or of any monastic rule, but rather allowed the founding women’s vigils and virtues to embody the liturgy and daily life of the Gandersheim nuns.

Vigils In the Temple: Widowhood and Gandersheim’s Institutional Identity

Whereas Hucbald emphasized the devil’s snares facing consecrated widowhood in the world, and tacitly invoked the precarious situation of the widow Judith in his characterization of Rictrude’s consecrated widowhood, Hrotsvit infused her narrative of her convent’s history with the secure spirituality of the widow Anna ensconced perpetually in devotion in the temple. In medieval exegesis, Anna was not only understood as a model of female chastity, self-sacrifice, and prophecy, but also represented the vigilance and steadfastness of Christ’s widowed Church. Anna was a widow “of great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow until she was eighty-four,” and “did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.”

Anna’s prophetic powers were confirmed when she and the priest Simeon recognized the Christ child, brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph shortly after his birth, as the Messiah.


between the Biblical Anna and the medieval chaste widow were made explicit in the liturgy celebrating the widow’s consecration, dating from the mid-eighth-century *Gallican Sacramentary*:

Almighty father, holy Lord, eternal God, who is so greatly near in your care for mercy for your human children, we ask that just as you embrace the devotion of virginity, may you likewise mercifully accept the profession of widowhood. Lord, imploring with prayers, we humble petitioners pray that you protect and defend with your aid this your servant who, out of fear of your name with chaste timidity is taking heed for herself, with your help, against the impurities of the flesh and the snares of the enemy. She desired to take up through our hands of humility the clothing of widowhood, so that this, your ready servant, may be like Anna the daughter of Fanuhel in vigils, in abstinence, in prayers, and in almsgiving.  

This liturgy specifically combined the images of the Pauline *vere vidua* and Luke’s prophetess Anna to latter-day consecrated widows, and emphasized how their distinctive dress and actions in imitation of Anna in the temple underscored the vowess’s duties of chastity and the maintenance of a permanent state of asceticism and spiritual bereavement. A similar liturgy was retained in the *Romano-German Pontifical*, compiled in the latter half of the tenth century, and characterized the consecrated widow through her continence; her special clothing marked her conversion to a chaste profession:

Having been converted, just as Anna the prophetess abandoned [her old life] for a long time in fasting and prayer, clothed in the garments of widowhood to your glory in the temple…may this your daughter devote herself to you alone, God, in your church, with devoted mind.  

104 Domine Sancte, Pater omnipotens, aeterne Deus, qui in tantum humano generi miserationis tuae curam inpendis, et ita virginitatis devotionem amplecteris, ut viduitatis professionem elencticem acceptes, te, quaesumus, Domine, precibus inplorans, te supplices deprecamur, ut famolam tuam ill[an] quae ob timorem tuui nominis casto timore sibi prospiiciens, viduitatis indumentum per nostrae humilitatis manus percipere postulavit, tuo auxilio contra inlecebras carnis atque insidias inimici munies praesidio ac defendas, ut sit famola tua ill[a] Anna filiae Fanuhelis similis in vigiliis, in abstentia, in orationibus atque eleemosynis prompta. “Benedictio super viduam veste mutandam,” *Sacramentarium Gallicanum*, PL 72, 570. Mabillion thought this text described sixth-century Gallic practice, but printed it in the *PL* from an eighth-century manuscript found at Bobbio, Italy (now BNF lat. 13246, known as the *Bobbio Missal*). A complex manuscript that both contained traditions from Francia and also underwent many additions and changes, it probably was a Gallican sacramentary written in Burgundy and influenced by Irish tradition; see Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources* (Portland, Oregon: Pastoral Press, 1981), 108 and Yitzhak Hen, *The Bobbio Missal* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 1-4.

105 Induens novum conuerti fecisti, ut sicut Anna prophetissa multis temporibus vestibus uiduitatis induta in templo gloriae tuae ieiuniis et orationibus fideliter deseruisti, sic et haec
Hrotsvit’s references to Anna’s symbolism as a prophet and widow were both original and subtle. Hrotsvit never mentioned Anna explicitly in the *Primordia* but nevertheless described female devotion at Gandersheim from the very beginning of the narrative through allusions to the piety and prophecy of Anna and the significance of the Jerusalem temple. This reading of Hrotsvit’s intentions is certainly interpretative, but Jay Lees’ similar observation of Hrotsvit’s oblique use of theme and image in other instances suggests that such subtlety was part of Hrotsvit’s *modus operandi*. Lees noted, for example, that in the *Gesta Oddonis* Hrotsvit implicitly played on the etymology of the term “Saxon” as a synonym for “rock,” signaling an implicit alliance between emperor and papacy, arguing “as usual, Hrotsvit does not spell things out for the reader but neither does she make difficult the leap.”

Hrotsvit implicitly invoked the language associated with Anna in the temple to characterize the chaste heroines of her convent’s history, particularly the term *templum*, to denote Gandersheim’s most divine and significant moments.

The first miracle revealed to Aeda that initiated the foundation suggested that Aeda imitated Anna’s prayerful vigils, as “this Aeda was frequently accustomed to resign herself and her whole life to the Lord in prayer.” Aeda thus received the vision of John the Baptist, in similar fashion to Anna’s receiving the gift of prophecy through her many years of prayer and fasting in the opening chapters of Luke’s Gospel. Hrotsvit reserved the use of the term *templum* only for certain crucial events in the convent’s history, however; while Aeda was instructed to build a *claustrum*, and Oda persuaded Liudolf to erect a *coenobium*, Hrotsvit first introduced the idea that her monastery’s church was a *templum* when Pope Sergius granted Odo and Liudolf the right to erect a religious house, and endowed it with the relics of Saints Anastasius and Innocent with the under-

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standing that they “will be perpetually venerated in a chapel of the aforesaid monastery [templo] built through your munificences with the chanting of sacred hymns there night and day with the constant illumination of a bright lighted taper.”

Sergius invoked the image of the temple as a sacred space where the saints’ relics would be venerated by the nuns day and night, nocte dieque, using the same words that described the perpetual vigils of Anna. In contrast, when Hrotsvit engaged more contemporary or mundane topics (such as the confirmation of lands, immunities, and privileges) she tended to describe the convent as *coenobium* and its church as *ecclesia*. Moreover, Hrotsvit frequently paired the term *templum* with the verb *coepere*, to begin, associating Gandersheim’s origins with Christ’s natal story, and the sacrality of the moment of his recognition in the ancient temple. The association of the Gandersheim cloister’s chapel as a *templum*, i.e. as a place of duty, chastity, and vigilance, is striking not only because the central figure in Hrotsvit’s poem was a powerful widow whose chaste virtue was essential to the Gandersheim foundation, but also because it is likely that Hrotsvit was at the same time identifying her convent with a strong spirit of *renovatio* that looked to the pristine origins of the Church, and of Christ its founder, for its identity. The implication throughout the text that the Ottonian royal family shared their origins with the Liudolfing founders also promoted the sacral nature of Ottonian rule and its leadership in religious renewal and reform.

108 Haec in coenobii venerare iam memorati/Finetenus templo vestri munimine facto/Noctedieque sacris illic resonantibus hymnis necnon accessno praeclare lumine semper, *Primordia*, 313, tr. Head 245. The term *templum* was used in rather elevated circumstances to describe monastic foundations in Carolingian texts; see DuCange (1887), Vol. 8, 52, who finds the term used in the Glossar. Lat. Gall. ex Cod. Ref. 7692 to denote the nave of a monastery, and Niermayer, who notes that after the eleventh century *templum* was used with the connotation of the catholic *Ecclesia* as a whole, as well as both a cathedral and a collegiate church. It is certainly possible that part of Hrotsvit’s use of the word *templum* also has to do with the relative ease, in hexameter, of employing a two-syllable rather than multi-syllabic word like *coenobium* or *ecclesia* to fit into the meter. Hrotsvit’s use of the term is not random, but quite oriented toward the most sacred and divine moments in her convent’s history.

109 Cf. *Primordia*, 313 l. 212, 323 l. 446.

110 On Hrotsvit’s works within the context of *renovatio*, see Dronke, *Women Writers*, 59; on this spirit of reform among the literary lights of the Ottonian court, including the bishoprics of Hildesheim and Mainz, see Forse, 52-4.
With Sergius’ papal privilege and blessing secured, Hrotsvit continued the parallels between the image of the Biblical widow Anna and the founding women’s vigilant devotion in the Gandersheim “temple” to chart the convent’s spiritual history. The place where the church (templum) was to be established was determined by a miracle that invoked both vigils and beginnings: like the shepherds in Luke’s gospel who in illo tempore, i.e. Christmas night, received an angelic sign from the heavens, some of Luidolf’s swine-herds keeping watch over their animals on All Saints eve saw miraculous lights in the sky. They summoned Luidolf and reported the miracle. When Luidolf himself observed the lights again the next day, he ordered “with the approval of his beloved wife, Oda,” that the land should be cleared, and construction of the monastery begun.\textsuperscript{111} The couple’s recognition of the miracle echoed Anna and Simeon’s recognition of Christ as the Messiah in the temple.\textsuperscript{112}

Likewise, Hrotsvit strongly invoked the language associated with Anna in the temple to describe the fasting and vigils of Hathumoda as the convent’s first abbess. Dedicated to fasting and prayer at the church’s altar, Hathumoda received a miracle that allowed her to discover a miraculous source of stone for the monastery’s construction:

A delay therefore ensued in the completion of the church [tem-plit], but the abbess Hathumoda, hoping that those who believe can obtain through faith all things in the Lord, wearied herself with continuous and unstinting labor, serving God night and day with holy ardor. She gave herself to fasting and holy prayers, when one day as she lay prostrate before the altar, a pleasing voice ordered her to rise and follow a bird...she proceeded rapidly where the Holy Spirit had led, until she arrived at the site of the notable temple now begun.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} In qua fundandum fuerat praenobile templum/Ordine dispositio cernuntur lumina plura…Consensususque suae dilectae coniugis Oda…coenobia sub honore dei constructio nostri; Primordia, ed. Berschin, 314-15.

\textsuperscript{112} Anna and Simeon were not a married couple, but Christian exegesis understood them as parallel representatives of the two sexes, indicating that the message of Christ was revealed to both man and woman together; see Ben Witherington, Women and the Genesis of Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 208.

\textsuperscript{113} Unde moram templi partitur perfectio cœpti/Abatissa sed a domino sperans Hathumoda/Impetrate rite credentes omnia posse/Frangebat sese nimio persaepe labores/Nocte dieque deo sacris studius tumulando…Nam ieiundando sacris precibusque vacando/Cum prostrato die quadam iacuit secus aram…Perrexit citius, quo duxit spiritus almus/Donec ad cœptum pervenit nobile templum, Primordia, 315-316, tr. Head 247.
Through Hathumoda’s miracle, the walls of the monastery and church \textit{[monasterio cum templo]} could be finished because the dove had revealed a quarry with a sufficient amount of stone.\footnote{Unde monasterio cum templo moenia coepti/Omnia materiam possent traxisse petri-nam, Berschin, 317.} The episodes in the narrative were further affirmed when, upon the dedication of the convent church at All Saints in 880 (a date which Oda herself had chosen), the miraculous lights returned to mark the divinely-designated site for Gandersheim.\footnote{Ibid., 321.} Hrotsvit described the monastery as a temple on one other instance, at Liudolf’s death, when the sisters sadly buried him in the original church \textit{[antiquo corpus venerabile templo]}, though his grave was later moved to the new church.\footnote{Ibid., 317.} This point in the text marked the beginning of Oda’s widowhood as part of Gandersheim’s divine plan, permitting her leadership in the convent as a kind of ex-officio abbess, now devoted “more fully to the things of God.”\footnote{See above, n. 80.}

As Karl Leyser has argued, “the Ottonian historians played a part in the sacral ascent of the \textit{stirps regia}. They interpreted the historical process as a manifestation of divine justice and in it successful kings were bearers of the divine will,” including Hrotsvit’s first historical epic poem, \textit{The Deeds of Otto}, in this characterization.\footnote{Leyser, \textit{Rule and Conflict}, 84.} Hrotsvit’s concept of sacred history in the \textit{Primordia} involved a skillful interweaving of biblical and literary \textit{topoi} with the authority of both genealogical and spiritual lineage. Working within a political framework that was often fraught with conflict, Hrotsvit nevertheless maintained important relationships across rival factions, handling the internal strife within the Ottonian line and tensions between competing bishoprics. Like Hucbald, Hrotsvit drew on a variety of genres in the construction of her monastic history. She infused the masculine Liudolfing lineage history associated with Gan-
dersheim with feminized themes, structuring the narrative around a veneration of heroic chastity that so profoundly shaped her dramas and legends, and drew on images of Anna and the unswerving devotion of the widowed Ecclesia to characterize her foundation. In the stirps regia tradition, Hrotsvit employed all of these elements to underpin a narrative of an unbroken female spiritual lineage colored by varieties of virginal and widowed chastity that was transmitted from Oda and her mother Aeda through Oda’s three Liudolfing daughters who served as abbesses, implying also that their traditions prevailed among the present inhabitants of the house.

**Conclusion**

Women who sought the religious life after marriage followed a trajectory of spiritual development toward the cloister; a recognized, even ritualized form of widowed piety enabled the transition from one state of life to the next. As a nun, the widow’s previous married status was theoretically effaced as she merged with her new community, and her status as a married woman and widow theoretically blurred with that of the nuns who had entered the convent as virgins. Practically speaking, however, a widow who entered into a religious community brought with her a proven maturity and experience that colored her spirituality in positive ways. Hrotsvit integrated this notion of widowhood through Oda’s personal history and a topological use of Anna’s chaste vigilance in the temple to express a devotional history of her convent.

In many respects, this literary synthesis paralleled the ‘double life’ of the widow in medieval representations: the construct of “widow” often represented real persons with social rank and influence, yet at the same time, the hagiographies of such women translated their experiences into conventional models of female holiness that were dominated by a larger discourses concerning female chastity and spirituality. In monastic histories and hagiographies concerning widows, representations of widowhood on a spiritual level paralleled the practical concerns of a widowed or repudiated spouse.
Widowhood formalized the period of mourning and organized the chaos of spousal loss into a cogent state with consistent expectations and rules. Following the death of a spouse, a widow needed to make important choices: whether or not to remarry (which was discouraged by Church authorities); whether to enter a convent, if she chose not to remarry; and how to protect her reputation, personal autonomy and perhaps her physical well-being and that of her children, if she elected neither of the above actions.

Rictrude’s life best expressed the medieval understanding of widowhood as a threshold that facilitated a new phase of a woman’s spirituality, often crucial to monastic memory because it was the event that joined Rictrude’s personal history to a monastery’s institutional history as she transitioned into convent life. Hrotsvit’s epic history also linked Oda’s widowhood to the convent’s origins story, but it was original and unique in its situation of widowed and virginal chastity as equally meritorious, with both modes of female chastity and experience lending strong leadership to the convent’s worldly concerns as well as facilitating a profound connection with the divine. Hucbald’s model was doubtless the more conventional expression of medieval understandings of the “profession” of widowhood in early medieval prescriptive texts and hagiography, in which widowhood served as an essentially transitional phase between marriage and the convent, yet there is also evidence that widows like Oda, who proposed to live in permanent chastity without explicitly becoming a nun occupied a particular—if unusual and sometimes fragile—niche in society. Pious widows seeking the structured devotion and proximity to religious community still engaged in secular life, often to the benefit of the monastic community that claimed them as founders, benefactors, and spiritual ancestors. Unlike many authors of the Carolingian age and her own, Hrotsvit seemed completely comfortable with Oda’s interstitial role in this respect, and was one of the few authors of the period who did not express caution about the threats to chastity that widows faced in the world, or mistrust of uncloistered vowesses who abused their
freedom to pursue secular pleasures. Rather, the widow Oda was the real heroine of the epic poem, and the Scriptural widow Anna provided the template for the depth and sincerity of the canonesses of Gandersheim’s spiritual life.

In both Hucbald’s and Hrotsvit’s texts, the widow’s role invites reflection upon the complex elements in play that created medieval images of female chastity: spiritual ideals, institutional identity, and individual agency all contributed to the creation of texts that defined the chaste widow in prescriptive and historical texts. Whereas Hucbald tended to shape his widow, Rictrude, to conform to theological and monastic norms, Hrotsvit’s holy founders provide communal leadership that superseded the nuns’ general obedience to Church authority or the specific tenets of monastic discipline. Steeped in a cross-hatching of learned traditions, Hrotsvit’s shaping of her convent’s history suggested in certain respects a radical in Saxonia. In composing a strongly matriarchal history and hagiography of the Liudolfing/Ottonian patrons of Gandersheim, Hrotsvit provided a vision of widowed spirituality as an integral part of her convent’s formidable history.

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Albrecht Dürer: woodcut from the Roswitha editio princeps (1501)
One of the themes weaving in and out of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is that of virtue: Gawain's shield proclaims his virtue, yet at the end of the Green Chapel scene, he exclaims vice has destroyed his virtue, leaving him "faulty and false." This scene has troubled critics and students, however, for many consider his reaction excessive for his default on the rules of a courtly game. The present paper contends that the notion of virtue written for Gawain naturalizes embodied virtue. While both religious and lay writers tended to argue that one possessed predisposition to moral or political virtue at birth, both camps strenuously argued that the individual must choose to develop these virtues, often through disciplining the body and mind. This notion of virtue underlies what Danielle Westerhof calls "embodied virtue" associated with chivalry. Gawain's version of virtue, however, often seems to omit the means of embodiment prescribed by chivalry: instead, he appears to treat it as wholly innate. He eliminates the possibility of viewing virtue as an embodied practice, the dominant model proposed by theologians and philosophers alike. In so doing, Gawain disallows both his own responsibility to choose virtue as well as the possibility of amendment. He is left with an absolutist construction of virtue that predicts his response to Bertilak at the Green Chapel.

Near the end of the fourteenth-century English poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Gawain laments his choice to keep the green scarf proffered as a charm against death at the hands of the Green Knight. This act, he vociferously opines, negates his claims to virtue: he asserts that retaining the lace proves him "fawty and false" and lacking the virtues that knightly "kynde" (nature) embodies (2374-75; 2382-83).¹ Certainly, by the terms of the game, Gawain should relinquish the lace at dinner that day, but his self-excoriation

¹ All line numbers refer to The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (rev. ed.), ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: Exeter UP, 1987).
for breaking a rule in a courtly game seems excessive.\textsuperscript{2} Gawain’s reaction reveals a construction of virtue that differs sharply from the construction of virtue common to both standard contemporary religious instruction of laity and manuals of late medieval chivalry. In the latter models, an individual may embody virtue though habit or by developing an innate quality.\textsuperscript{3} Gawain, however, locates the “right stuff” – the virtue that elevates knights above all others—in inherited qualities alone. In this view, the “right stuff” is quite literally “stuff,” part of one’s material being. To this end, he assigns his merit to his kinship with nobles (356-57) and the traits innate to knights (2380). But this construction of embodied virtue omits both embodiment’s habitual quality and the body’s influence on rational choice, and it prepares Gawain for failure: in locating virtue in “kind,” or nature alone, he renounces his ability to discipline the material brain and physically-triggered passions through reason. His failure to fulfill completely chivalric expectation is thus both inevitable and excruciating: he avoids the ongoing self-policing that virtue entails, and any misstep will be read as an irrevocable judgment of his immutable worth.

Medieval philosophical and theological constructions of virtue do not generally present it as a static or wholly innate quality. One of the most famous encapsulations of the virtues is in Thomas Aquinas’ \textit{Summa Theologiae}, a thirteenth century compendium of systematic theology. Thomas defines virtue as “a \textit{habitus},” or operative habit.\textsuperscript{4} W. D. Hughes explains \textit{habitus} as “a settled and steady disposition of a rational being towards a type of activity.


\textsuperscript{3} A thorough treatment of embodied knightly virtue is Danielle Westerhof’s \textit{Death and the Noble Body in Medieval England}, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2008), 43-55.

Good habit, virtue; bad habit, vice.”

While the steadiness of such habit might make a trait appear inherent to the subject, any habitus results from an individual’s choice to nurture it. These habitūs fall into three categories: intellectual virtue, consisting of “wisdom, science [knowledge], and understanding” (1a2ae 57); moral virtues (justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence), comprehending those virtues that act on the “appetitive part of the soul” and cause people to “choose rightly” in accordance with reason (1a2ae. 58); and theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), infused by grace for the purpose of directing humanity towards its supernatural end (1a2ae.62). Intellectual and moral virtue perfect humanity towards its natural end, a good and just life, and do not require divine infusion (1a2ae62). All virtues are “perfected,” or completed, by repeated action (1a2ae55); they may be undermined by neglect or sin (1a2ae53). No one has virtues innately, though one may have predispositions to intellectual or moral virtue from birth (1a2ae.63). Such virtues may be called “embodied” in that behavior actualizes what would otherwise be abstract concepts. Further, they are embodied insofar as the body completes the action initiated by the reason and will—whether by performing action or remaining passive when one might otherwise be tempted to act violently and rashly.⁶

Similar models of virtue permeate the religious instruction mandated for England’s laity by Archbishop Pecham (1281) and subsequently by Archbishop Thoresby (1357).⁷ Four times per year, a priest instructed his flock on the seven virtues (theological plus...


moral or cardinal virtues). While some might simply view sins as individual mistakes to be enumerated at one’s annual confession, others developed a more nuanced interpretation of virtue and sin as tendencies. R. N. Swanson writes that the focus on virtues expanded laypeople’s religious obligations to include “what a Christian was expected to do” as well as believe: virtue was active.

Three representative fourteenth-century English treatises present virtue as a habit. Summa Virtutum de Remediis Anime divides virtue into three categories, the last of which most directly concerns the seven virtues expected of practicing Christians: the natural virtues are “powers of soul and body,” perhaps innate but often developed through physical or intellectual exercise; the political virtues, which are “acquired by the deeds that are good by their nature”; and, finally, the virtues of grace, which originate with divine infusion and concern people’s supernatural end. This taxonomy of virtues roughly parallels Aquinas’ intellectual, moral, and theological virtues. The Book of Vices and Virtues and Fasciculus Morum, on the other hand, focus almost exclusively on those virtues that concern an individual’s supernatural end. They present virtue as tailoring one’s actions to what pleases God most. All of these virtues, too, demand choice and action; all must be maintained or practiced, with the possible exception of a prodigious gift such as a facility for language. This, then, is the religious context for a fourteenth century layperson’s knowledge of virtue: virtue is construed as a habit rather than an innate, immutable essence.

8 Boyle details both the original impetus and the English bishops’ programs in “Fourth Lateran Council,” 30-36, and “The Summa Confessorum,” 245-52.


Chivalry itself has its own complex set of interlaced virtues, including but not limited to those expected of a practicing Christian. This intertwining stems from chivalry’s multiple facets: a knight is at once a devout layman, a military officer, and an aristocrat.\textsuperscript{13} According to William Caxton’s edition of \textit{The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry}, “The office of a knyght is to mayntene and defende the holy feyth.”\textsuperscript{14} A knight is to meditate upon the twelve articles of faith and demonstrate such virtues as “fayth, hope, and charyte.”\textsuperscript{15} They were also to demonstrate the cardinal virtues (sometimes called political virtues) of fortitude, justice, temperance, and wisdom, which subordinate impulse to reason and render the subject a better citizen.\textsuperscript{16} But Caxton’s text links embodiment of the four cardinal virtues to a knight’s faith, though the cardinal virtues traditionally pertain to a person’s temporal life; without faith, it states, a knight “may not haue in hym good custommes.”\textsuperscript{17} The depiction of knightly conduct as “good customs,” or good habits, underscores the importance of \textit{habitus} in chivalric virtue; the good customs distinguish the knight as one who upholds his obligations. Finally, the aristocrat was to demonstrate courtesy, generosity, loyalty, and moderation, traits that differentiated him from those equally wealthy but lacking “noblesse,” which came to be equated with a moral perfection of nobles that exceeded what the rest of humanity could imitate.\textsuperscript{18} Chivalric virtue, thus, entailed such wide-ranging traits as religious piety, justice in yielding to each his or her due, politeness, fortitude in enacting all these virtues to the highest degree, and, finally, that indefinable perfection in all virtues (noblesse). These, then, are the virtues that distinguish knights from others.

\textsuperscript{13} This construction is from Maurice Keen, \textit{Chivalry} (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1984), 16-17.


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ordre of Chyvalry}, 90.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ordre of Chyvalry}, 90-91.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ordre of Chyvalry}, 90.

\textsuperscript{18} Westerhof, \textit{Death and the Noble Body}, 50.
Noblesse, the predisposition to attain greater perfection in virtue than others people, is described as an inherited superiority of both body and behavior; by itself, if was no virtue. Indeed, The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry remarks, “And lyke as go hath gyuen to hym and herte to thende that he be hardy by his noblesse / So ought he to haue in his herte mercy . . . .” In other words, God gives the knight his nobility and the heart to sustain it; noblesse is thus given rather than developed. Lest one surmise that noblesse might be graciously infused at any stage of life, Ordre of Chyvalry insists that only the nobly born may become knights. But by itself, noblesse cannot complete a knight’s virtue: that process required the knight maintain the body and manners befitting a knight. Diet and physical training develop the proper body for a mounted warrior, and religious observance and personal reflection develop the theological and moral virtues outlined by Aquinas (and nearly every other medieval commentator on the virtues). In this vein, Llull asserts that birth alone does not confer virtue: he enjoins knights exercise both their physical fortitude (through hunting, a typical upper class pastime) and their moral virtue, and his perception that knights need reminding of their duties suggests that they must be instructed in proper practices. Geoffroi de Charny, another commentator on chivalry, provides glimpses of the concern that birth does not inevitably entail moral virtue when he laments such practices as powerful lords pillaging peasant lands or wantonly damaging crops. And this embodied virtue requires reason to assess and avoid courses of action as necessary: virtue required a knight to control wisely both body and mind so that he bodied forth,

19 This paragraph summarizes Westerhof, Death and the Noble Body, 43-55. Interpolations from Caxton and Charny are my own.

20 Ordre of Chyvalry, 40. Translation: “And as God has given him a heart to the end that he should be strong in his noblesse, so he ought to have mercy in his heart.”

21 Ordre of Chyvalry, 57.

22 Ordre of Chyvalry, 31

pun intended, the innate *noblesse* he shared with other knights. Embodied knightly virtue, thus, is embodied through substance *as well as* through chosen, reasoned action that shapes and disposes that substance. Gawain ignores the latter means of embodiment, much to his own detriment.

If Gawain’s first speech superficially participates in this tradition of embodied virtue, it ultimately expresses only a material origin for goodness. In asking Arthur to allow him to face the Green Knight (who seems more than happy to play his “Christmas game” with Arthur, who for his part seems more than happy to oblige), Gawain stresses that his personal virtue derives only from the blood he shares with Arthur: “Bot for as much as 3e*\textsuperscript{24} ar myn em I am only to prayse; / Ne bounté but your blod I in my bodé knowe” (356-57).\textsuperscript{25} If kinship to Arthur is his only virtue, that virtue derives from some heritable quality. Further, in locating his own nobility in the blood he shares with Arthur and portraying both his excellence and his blood as contained in his body, Gawain somatizes his virtue. Though one might counter that this is simply a figurative and hyperbolic gesture of deference, subsequent events reveal Gawain’s account of his virtue to be rigidly material.

Gawain’s outburst at the Green Chapel unequivocally portrays knightly virtue as an unchanging monolithic essence. Upon Bertilak’s disclosure of his identity and his knowledge of Gawain’s default, Gawain exclaims,

\begin{quote}
Corsed worth cowarddyse and couetyse boðe!
In yow is vylany and vyse, þat vertue disstryez (2374-75).
\end{quote}

[Cursed be both cowardice and covetousness both!
In you is villainy (i. e., low born behavior) and vice, which destroy virtue.]

Here, he explicitly identifies his virtue as the loss that so pains him: vice has destroyed his virtue, leaving him to an unfavorable self-

\textsuperscript{24} I cannot find a font to duplicate “yogh” from Middle English. The Arabic number “3” is used to signify “yogh.” Words in which “3” substitutes for “yogh” are indicated by *.

\textsuperscript{25} “Only insofar as you are my uncle do I merit praise; I have in my body no worth but your blood.”
assessment of his ability to uphold the requirements of knighthood. In describing his virtue as “destroyed,” he implies that virtue is a static quality that can be destroyed in one event. He portrays it as lost through one foolish mistake, as if it were a substance or an object rather than a habit that can only be lost through consistent neglect or a pattern of vice. Gawain’s equation of villainy, a term connoting behavior of villeins and thus people less noble than he, with vice strongly associates virtue with gentle birth.26 In this passage, he deviates from the standard construction of virtue as habit embodied either through practice or through innate predisposition: while such writers as Llull require that knights be born to nobility, the bulk of his manual for knights emphasizes the choices they must make in order to manifest that nobility; the quarterly sermons issued over contemporary pulpits were to present virtue as a pattern of chosen behavior, though the original impetus might be infusion.

Later in the same scene, Gawain further equates knighthood with innate moral virtue:

For care of þe knokke, cowardyse me ta3t*
To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake:
þat is larges and lewté, þat longez to kni3tez.*
Now am I fawty and false and ferde haf bene euer
Of trechereye and vntrawþe . . . (2379-84).

[Because of fear of thy stroke, cowardice taught me
To ally myself with covetousness, to forsake my “kind”;
That is largess and loyalty that is particular to knights.
Now I am faulty and false, who have ever feared
Treachery and faithlessness (or lying) . . . .]

“Kynde,” at this time, might mean either “nature” or “kindred”27; here, it can signify both Gawain’s own innate personality and those who share his chivalric nature. Both, he claims, are permanently lost: he has “forsaken,” or completely abandoned his nature, and his misstep proves he lacks virtues of generosity and loyalty (“larges and lewté”) that knights demonstrate. Gawain’s self-depiction as having “forsaken” his nature implies his membership in knightly “kynde” cannot be regained; the intensive prefix “for-” denotes

completeness. He has, he says, been found “fawty and false,” words that connote irrefutable evidence of inadequacy. In the same passage, he proclaims, “Al fawty is my fare,” as if one mistake can be generalized to a monolithic, unchangeable character. In his description, he has been assayed as one would assay a cup to ascertain its gold content, and he has been found to lack something in his substance.

Gawain’s final accounting of the incident reckons his missteps in terms like those of fourteenth century vernacular treatises on the virtues, but he departs from their norm in treating his mistake as disqualifying him from any claim to virtue. In his eyes, the vices of covetousness (commonly named among the sins) and cowardice (not named among the seven deadly sins, but certainly a deficit of the cardinal virtue of fortitude) stain him permanently:

Lo! Lorde,” quoþ þe leude, and þe lace hondeled
þis is þe bende of þe blame I bere in my nek.
þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I la3t* haue
Of couardise and couetise, þat I haf ca3t* þare.
þis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne.
And I mon nedez hit were wyle I may last;
For mon may hyden his harme bot vnhap ne may hit,
For þer it onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer (2505-2512).
[Lo, lord,” said the man, and fingered the lace,
“This is the bend [heraldic term] of the reproach I wear on my neck.
This is wound and the loss I’ve taken on
For cowardice and covetousness, which I caught there.
This is the token of the lie (or infidelity) that I was taken in.
And I must wear it as long as I live,
Because a man may hide this deeds but cannot undo them,
For where it is once fixed [with secondary sense of “stained” it cannot be removed.”]

28 “My conduct is wholly faulty.”

29 The following provides a useful summary of the “two confessions” arguments: Foley, “Gawain’s Two Confessions Reconsidered,” 73-79.

30 An analysis of cowardice as a vice is offered by Tony Hunt, “Gawain’s Fault and the Moral Perspectives of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” Trivium, 10 (1975), 1-3, 11-12.
Gawain proclaims he wears the green scarf before the court in token of having been “tane in tech [stain] of a faute” (2488). Representing a misdeed as a stain, or “tache,” is common in treatises like The Book of Vices and Virtues: “Goddes worde,” reads the text, “is a myrour wher-ynne men seen þe tecches of herte.” But The Book of Vices and Virtues and its kindred rest on the premise that such stains can be removed through confession and amendment: confession is “baþing,” or washing that restores the soul to cleanness.

In the same passage, Gawain also portrays his misdeed as a wound that can never heal: the green scarf, he claims, is the “bende” (a heraldic device) denoting the scar on his neck. As he must wear the badge of his ill fame forever, his wound must also last forever. This image of sin also recalls the devotional and instructional literature of the time: sin was often represented as a wound. For example, lechery, according to the Book of Vices and Virtues, blinds a person. The same treatise, however, assures its readers and their parishioners that confession offers the means by which all are “clensed and heled”; the anonymous compiler invokes the example of Namaan, who was “heled of þe sekenesse þat he hadde,” as a figure of regeneration after confession.

While Gawain appropriates the common language of virtue, vice, and confession, his underlying assumptions differ starkly from the norm: he does not present virtue or vice as habits, and his “confession” explicitly states that he cannot be restored to moral health and virtue.

Though he might use the language associated with the dominant models of virtue, Gawain quite clearly flouts it in these

31 “Caught in the stain of a fault.”

32 Vices and Virtues, 224. Translation: “For God’s word is like a mirror in which people see the spots on their hearts.”

33 Vices and Virtues, 224.


35 Vices and Virtues, 222.

36 Vices and Virtues, 224.
scenes. Religiously-directed and chivalric virtue were habitūs and could not be destroyed so much as supplanted by vice, another habitus. Gawain’s assertion that one misdeed cannot be undone may be technically true, but one trivial deed does not destroy an overall habit of virtue. With respect to one’s ultimate supernatural end, a pattern of such misdeeds would not constitute irrevocable failure unless one died without having made a proper confession. Chivalric embodied virtue rests on innate nobility strengthened through habit: Llull, who dictates that knights can only be selected from the nobility, asserts that chivalric virtue requires consistent work; Geoffroi complains about nobles who fail to live up to their obligations. The reaction of Gawain’s fellow knights reveals that judge him to embody well the virtues they prize and do not consider his gaffe an indelible stain on his chivalric merits: after all is known, Bertilak acclaims Gawain superior to all other knights to the degree a pearl is superior to white peas (2364-65); Arthur’s court assesses Gawain as having “honored” their community (2520). A knight’s habits of piety, courtesy, and justice embody his noblesse: the body itself completes actions predisposed by an inherited capacity for moral virtue and made likelier by reason’s training.

Gawain’s notion of embodiment, however, gravitates toward an absolutist extreme when he somatizes his moral choices: he attributes his failure to “þe faut and þe fantasye of þe flesche crabbed” (2433). If he considers the body to be the sole source of chivalric virtue, he also depicts it as the sole source of his mistake accepting the green lace. In accusing “fantasye,” Gawain blames his body for his misdeed: “fantasye” denotes a phase in the perception process, and medieval commentators locate it in the physical brain rather than the immaterial reason. Certainly, medieval medical writers

37 “As þe perle bi quite pese is of prys more, / So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay kny3tez.”

38 “Fantasy,” n., 1a, b, Oxford English Dictionary Online.

generally hold that the physical brain, vulnerable to illness as much as any other part of the body, might skew perception.\textsuperscript{40} Certainly, too, countless religious writers and pastors cautioned their audiences that they should not submit to the temptations of the flesh; \textit{The Book of Vices and Virtues}, for example, warns its audience about lechery, the sin that “longen alle þinges þat a mannes fleisch is meued to.” \textsuperscript{41} The flesh’s influence, however, does not force its complete domination over reason; if it did, the very virtues, vices, and sacraments to which Gawain refers would be irrelevant, for there one could not choose to practice virtue or expunge comfortable vice.

Ironically, while Gawain professes an absolutist, purely material version of embodied virtue, he ignores the question of how to monitor and right the material stuff of his body so that he may demonstrate the knightly “right stuff.” Such diverse people as Thomas Aquinas, the medical writer Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and the famed physician Avicenna contend that the physical body influences choice: the brain itself is a physical organ as fallible as any other,\textsuperscript{42} and it may relay faulty perceptions; and the appetites react to the brain’s perception and initiate an instinctive rather than coolly, completely rational reaction; and the body the appetites influence the brain, which itself is an organ that may be affected by its own physical chemistry or injury. Gawain, however, does not truly acknowledge the physical limitations on perception, nor does he admit how irascible and concupiscible appetites trigger socially unacceptable reactions. His basic humoral composition predisposes him to misperception, yet he ignores the possibilities of controlling it through diet, exercise, or the medieval equivalent of cognitive therapy.\textsuperscript{43} Instead, Gawain abandons his purportedly superior body to its own devices, with the result that he foreordains his failure;

\textsuperscript{40} Kemp and Fletcher, “The Medieval Theory of the Inner Senses,” 562ff.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Vices and Virtues}, 44. Translation: To this sin “pertain all things to which a man’s flesh is moved.”

\textsuperscript{42} Patrick Cruttwell, \textit{Physiology and Psychology in Shakespeare’s Age,} “Journal of the History of Ideas, 12 (1951), 82.

\textsuperscript{43} Anderson, “Medieval Medicine for Sin,” 160.
in so strictly materializing virtue, he ignores reason’s ability to question his reactions and shape his actions so he may more truly embody the virtue he claims; in materializing virtue, he requires of himself impossible, immutable, monolithic perfection.

Gawain is half right in blaming his misstep on his “fantasye” and the “flesh crabbed” of which it is a part: the physical brain and the appetites it influences do affect choice. Avicenna’s influential notion of perception argues that five “inner wits” controlled the processes of perception, but will and abstract reason could bridle these brain-bound faculties. In order, the phases are “common sense,” the conduit from the external senses; imagination, which retains images; then cogitatio, the faculty that makes new images of the old ones; aestimativa, often rendered as “instinct;” and finally, memory, which banks information for use by cogitatio, aestimativa, and reason. Reason may inspect what cogitatio offers before allowing instinct to act, or it may short-circuit inappropriate instinctive responses.

Others (e.g., Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Thomas Aquinas, and Guy de Chauliac) posit more, fewer, or different faculties, but they still represent perception as housed in the brain’s ventricles, while reason and will comprised the immortal soul.

Avicenna is representative of medieval medicine in showing that “commanding motive faculty” (the passions) takes cues from aestimativa and prompts action. These passions, too, develop from the flesh Gawain maligns. The anonymous Isagoge states that the emotions are distributed solely by the heart through the “vital spirits.” Similarly, Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomaeus


47 Knuuttila, Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, 221-22.

Anglicus’ *De Proprietatibus Rerum* states that “vital spirits” come from the heart and engender

wrath, fight, indignation, envy, and such passions that arise in other beasts . . . But in men such passions be ordained and ruled by certain reason” (3.15).

Aquinas writes that the initial impetus of the appetite originates in the body: the organs of sense identify something external to the subject to which the appetite reacts. The passions consist of irascible appetite that causes desire to avoid something and concupiscible appetite that causes desire for things that are “taken to be pleasurable or useful in achieving pleasurable things.”

The irascible appetite, in the taxonomies of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, results in “hope, courage, anger, despair, [or] fear,” several of which are familiar aspects of Gawain. Whether irascible or concupiscible, for Aquinas passion is “a movement . . . a process in which a transition is made from potency to act”; reason may intervene between impulse and action if it judges the impending action to be unacceptable.

All these processes are grounded in physical organs rather than reason, and they may certainly influence action—unless reason restrains them. According to Avicenna, either reason or medical remedies could check these appetites if they should become

49 On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus. Translation: Irascible appetites engender “wrath, fighting, indignation, envy, and such passions that arise in other beasts . . . but in men, such passions be ordained and ruled with certain reason”


51 Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 222.


disproportionate through overstimulation or illness. One might, for example, cajole oneself out of reacting wrathfully to a perceived slight, or one might avoid certain foods that made one irritable and more likely to overreact. Bartholomaeus, as quoted previously, states that reason must control the effect of emotion; reason must inspect perception and stifle reactions inappropriate for civilized humans. If the irascible, or avoidant, appetite is not identified before it influences instinct, the individual will react on the basis of fear and instinct rather than reason. Aquinas writes that moral virtue, that practice of the reasoning soul, restrains these appetitive reactions (1a2ae58). Not one of these oft-invoked writers advocates allowing the passions to operate unchecked. Gawain, however, fails to check his appetitive reactions with reason; instead, he allows his instinct to govern, whereas the perfect knight would rely on the carefully-trained second nature consisting in part of fortitude and temperance.

Gawain’s disparaged “fantasye” does contribute to his inappropriate retention of the lace, but only insofar as it and the appetites so triggered remain unexamined. Gawain accepts monstrous combinations of images (cogitatio) and allows them to feed into his instinctive assessment, which then leads to undesirable instinctive action. He accepts the green lace because “hit come to his herte / Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym jugged were” (1855-56). Cogitatio combines stored images, but apparently Gawain’s is faulty, as it does not weigh any of the possible objections to a token that both smacks of magic and also requires that he default on his agreement with Bertilak. Instead, he reacts emotionally: it

54  Knuuttila, Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, 223.

55  Whiteford, “Rereading Gawain’s Five Wits,” 225-34, contends that Gawain’s failure lies in the aestimativa, from which he is distracted by Lady Bertilak’s actions.

56  “It came into his heard that this was a treasure destined for him”

57  Richard H. Green, in “Gawain’s Shield and the Quest for Perfection,” holds Gawain guilty of lacking faith. A contrasting view is presented by T. McAlindon, in “Magic, Fate, and Providence in Medieval Narrative and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” Review of English Studies n.s., 62 (1965), 121-39. Gawain, however, does not weigh either option so carefully.
came to his heart (emphasis mine) that he should accept this; reason does not assess the situation at all. Further, he acts on instinct: he accepts the scarf to protect himself from the “jeopardy” that awaits. In other words, instead of standing fast in the face of adversity, he metaphorically flinches. Bertilak himself assesses Gawain’s fault in terms of visceral instinct: “Bot þat was for no wylyde work, ne wowing nauþer / Bot for 3e* lufed your lyf,” he says (2367-68).58 Regardless of how “natural” such an act seems to a modern reader, it constitutes a serious lapse in chivalric virtue, for it proceeds from instinct rather than the reason that was to restrain that instinct and replace it with steely fortitude.

Gawain’s instinct (aestimativa) and the subsequent passion are also problematic functions of the flesh: often, his gnawing fear of losing his self identity runs unchecked on other and forces instinctive actions that reason might deem undesirable. The first bedroom temptation scene reveals avoidance rather than a reasoned response: when Lady Bercilak first enters his bedroom, he feigns sleeping, rationalizing that “More semly hit were / to aspye wyth my spelle in spacequat she wolde” (1198-99).59 He avoids speaking first because he fears committing some undefined gaffe that would be “unseemly.” When she teases him that he can’t be Gawain, he asks “freschly” (eagerly)60 why so (1294), and the next lines reveal that he “ferde” (feared) that he had failed in form (1295). In the last temptation scene, “He cared for his cortaysye, lest craþayn he were / and more for his meschef 3if* he schulde make synne / and traytor to þat tolke þat þat telde a3t”* (1773-75).61 His vaunted courtesy derives from his fear of being found lacking and ironically is no virtue at all: virtue requires reasoned restraint of misperception and instinctive actions.

The final meeting at the Green Chapel reveals both problematic cogitatio and the same pervasive fear of losing his

58 “But that was for no craftiness, nor for wooing either, but because you loved your life.”

59 “It would be more mannerly / To figure out her intent surreptitiously.”

60 Andrew and Waldron, Glossary, 320.

61 “He fretted over his courtesy, lest he should churlish / And more for his injury if he should sin / And be a traitor to that man who owned the house.”
status. His cogitatio runs wild when he approaches the Green Chapel, heightening his anxiety and the probability of an explosive reaction: he mutters to himself that it would be appropriate for the Green Knight to say “deuocioun on þe Deuelez wyse” in such a place, which he pronounces “the corsedest kyrk” he has seen (2192-96). By the time he reaches the Green Chapel, his fancy has predisposed him to react suspiciously and fearfully. When faced with the Green Knight and his axe, Gawain reacts instinctively before the falling axe (he flinches) (2265-67). Most readers will excuse Gawain’s quailing before the axe, but Gawain’s own vaunted chivalric virtue is incompatible with slipping into instinctive fear, and for such an emotional rather than trained reaction Bertilak twits him: “þou are not Gawayn,” says Bertilak, “þat is so goud halden / þat neuer ar3ed* for no here” (2270-71). Bertilak does remark, however, that this is a forgivable instinct (2267-68) and only a minor fault in an otherwise sterling record (2364-65), but such is cold comfort to one who predicates his virtue on an innate and immutable essence.

Gawain’s responds to Bertilak with shame and anger, other irascible reactions to a perceived threat. Bertilak’s revelation of his identity and his knowledge of Gawain’s “fault” makes “al þe blod of his [Gawain’s] brest blende in his face” (2371). Blood, carrying spirits that cause emotion and reflexive action, inundates his face and brain. Then he “schrank for schome” (2372), indicating that he wants to avoid that shame. Immediately thereafter, he flings the green lace at Sir Bercilak, spewing angry self-denunciation.

Bertilak’s cheery rebukes foreground Gawain’s true weakness: his faulty perception of the price of being found not to be a monolith of innate virtue. He cannot fail at any point, according to his cogitatio and aestimativa; if he does fail, he will lose his

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62 “Devotions in the Devil’s manner”; “the most cursed church.”
63 “You are not Gawain, who is held so good and never feared anything.”
64 See the section in irascible spirits above.
65 “All the blood of his chest burst into his face.”
66 “Shrank for shame.”

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chivalric identity forever. His mind, through the faculties that retrieve
and project possibilities, keeps him in omnipresent fear. Gawain
acknowledges as much when he says that he “ferde [has] ben euer /
Or trecherye and untrawþe” (2382). With such fear, Gawain’s mind
is forever primed to avoid a perceived threat. And, indeed, fear
dictates much of his life: he lives in fear of being found wanting,
whether in courtesy, chivalric virtue, game rules, or Christian virtue.
Ironically, the self-image he so desperately tries to protect rests on
untenable philosophy that devalues reasoned practice and dissuades
him from monitoring his own physically-mediated impulses.

Gawain’s body composition is the third element of the
perfect storm presented by his problematic flesh: in medieval
humoral medicine,\(^{67}\) he would be called melancholic of nature, a
physical trait thought to exacerbate the very problems of perception
and overreaction Gawain demonstrates. Medieval medical writers
characterize the melancholic individual in terms of meticulousness,
humility, momentary mental paralysis in the face of a challenge, fear
of an untimely end, obsessive dread, and undue worry.\(^{68}\)

At his best, Gawain uses the meticulousness and humility
associated with the melancholic temperament to the advantage of the
court. Using his finely-honed verbal skills and nominating himself
for an unpleasant task, he averts impending catastrophe in Camelot,
as Arthur wants to take on the Green Knight if no one else does:

> “Wolde 3e,* worþilych lorde,” quoþ Wawan to þe kyng,
> “Bid me bo3e* fro þis benche and stonde by yow þere,
> þat I wythoute vylanye my3t* voyde þis table,
> And þat my legge lady lyked no ille,
> I wolde come to your counseyl bifore your cort ryche.
> For me þink hit not semly—as hit is soþ knowen--
> þer such an askyng is heuened so hy3e* in your sale,
> þa3* 3e* yourself be talenntyf, to take hit upon youseluen,
> Whil mony so bolde you aboute vpon benche sytten

\(^{67}\) Medieval medical theory holds that there are four humors in the human body—choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood—and the balance between them in a healthy individual partly determines his or her character and physical traits.

\(^{68}\) Lynn Thorndike, “De Complexionibus,” *Ists*, 49 (1958): 407; Trevisa, *De Proprieta-
tibus*, 4.11.
[If you would, “noble lord,” said Gawain to the king, “Ask me to leave this bench and stand there by you, So that I may leave the table without being churlish And if it didn’t displease my lady, I’d like to offer counsel before your great court. It doesn’t seem appropriate to me, truth be known, When such a question is put up so stridently in your hall, That though you are willing, to take it on yourself While so many valiant knights are sitting around you at the table That I dare not hope never under heaven to see doughtier Nor better bodies on the field when battle is raised. I am the weakest, I know, and feeblest of wit, And of least consequence should I lose my life, truth be known. Only insofar as you are my uncle do I merit praise; I have in my body no worth but your blood. And since this is so petty a concern that it does not fall to you, And I have asked you first, grant it to me.”]

In this speech, Gawain defers repeatedly to his uncle and aunt, first on the basis of table manners (one should ask to be excused), then as a courtly gesture to the lady, then, finally, asking permission to let Arthur off the proverbial hook (or axe). He also averts what could become a squabble over an unwanted privilege by claiming that he would be least missed if he were to perish and has asked first. Here, his basic predisposition correlates with his courteous and carefully-scripted entreaties. If this scene might be taken as proof that his virtue is his by nature, one must counter that Gawain’s real virtue lies in his reasoned use of the materials with which he has been endowed: caution, delicacy, and humility, all nurtured through proper upbringing in the court.

Gawain’s fastidiousness also manifests itself in his obsessive and fearful attention to maintaining his reputation. In particular, the temptation scenes show him straining to meet Lady Bertilak’s
expectations of his courtesy, which forms part of the basis of his chivalric reputation. He walks a verbal tightrope in gently parrying Lady Bercilak’s double-entendres without rebuffing her harshly or accusing her of saying more than she actually is. In the first temptation scene, she refers to his courtly reputation and states “3e* are welcum to my cors / Yowre awen to wale” (1236-37), to which he replies that he is unworthy of her attentions, as he cannot be the man so represented (1240-47). Later, when she teases him that he is not Gawain because he has not demonstrated the requisite courtesy, he is described as having “ferde lest he had fayled in fourme of his castes” (1295). Though he is depicted as courteous, he remains essentially fearful and self-absorbed; he does not express concern for his interlocutor’s feelings. Instead, he fetishizes these rules of courtesy to defend himself against being accounted “craþayn.” Lady Bertilak’s dainty assaults on Gawain’s self-image, which rest on misperceived requirements of virtue, risk exacerbating Gawain’s obsessive tendencies and pushing them into the realm of disorder.

Eventually, Gawain begins to illustrate the perils of a melancholic temperament pushed too far without remedy: he begins to exhibit signs of ill mental health. Gilbertus describes one kind of madness as follows: “But comonly þo þat han þis sikeness of malencoly, þe han moche sorowe, and dreden myche of þing þat is not to drede, and þenken of þing þat is not to þenke on.” Bartholomeus provides a slightly longer description of melancholy that has become an illness:

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\text{Melancholia . . . is a suspeccioun of þat hath maiestrie of þe soule, þe which comþ of drede and of sorwe. And þese passiouns beth divers: manes hathe mania and manes þat hatte malencolia, by diverse greuynge and hurtynge of worching, for in mania}
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69 “You are welcome to my body, to take as your own.”

70 He “feared that he had failed in the pattern of his speech.”

71 Faye Marie Getz, *Healing and Society in Medieval England: A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 14. Translation: “But commonly those who have this illness because of melancholy—they have much sorrow, and dread greatly things that are not to dread, and think of things that don’t bear thinking about.” Note: Gilbertus differs from Bartholomaeus in defining mania; for Gilbertus, it is a general term, while for Bartholomaeus it is a specific kind of madness.
principalich þe ymaginacioun is ihurt and the oþir resoun is ihirt. And þese passiouns comeþ somtyme of malencoly metis; and sometyme of dringke of stronge wyne þat brenneþ þe humours and turneþ hem into askes; sometyme of passiouns of þe soule, as of besynes, and grete þouGtes of sorwe, and of to greet studie, and of drede (7.6).

[Melancholia is a suspicion that has control of the soul, which comes from dread and sadness. And these passions are different: madness called mania and madness called melancholy, by different damaging mechanisms, for in mania the imagination is the most injured; with the other, reason is damaged. And these passions come at times from melancholy meats, and on occasion from drinking strong wine that burns the humors and turns them to ash, sometimes from the passions of the soul, for example from fussiness, and from negative thoughts, from fear, and from thinking about things that don’t bear thinking about.]

While these accounts differ in discussing natural or unnatural melancholy, they describe similar behaviors: needless meticulousness, worry, rumination, undue suspicion, faulty perception, and skewed reason. Cogitatio and aestimativa suffer under these conditions, generating faulty images to which the appetites will react.

On the last full day of his stay, Gawain shows symptoms of a brain compromised by disproportionate melancholy. He has nightmares, a traditional sign of imbalance. The last temptation scene commences with a description of Gawain muttering in his sleep: “In dre3* drooping of dreme drauleþ þat noble” (1749). As Peter Whiteford notes, the medieval theory of dreams held that dreams combine images from waking without reason’s steadying influence; after waking, these images might remain in the memory as fact. Gawain’s mind has presented him with disordered, disturbing images that make his acceptance of the lace more likely: grisly imaginings stoke the cogitatio and prepare aestimativa to initiate a fearful reaction.

The next night, he experiences insomnia, both a sign of melancholy and a predictor of an unstable waking mind. Almost

72 “In deep sleep of dreams, that noble murmured.”
73 Whiteford, “Rereading Gawain’s Five Wits,” 231-32.
point for point, he matches Bartholomaeus’ description of sleep deprivation, which might originate with dry humors such as melancholy or choler:

Wakynge ouer mesure is defaute my3t* to slepe and is an euel of þe brayne contrary to litargye. And þis euel comeþ of to grete meunge of þe brayne and dryness of reed choler or black choler, or intertemperat hete, and of to salte humours. Of alle þise comeþ inordinat wakynge, and angwisch folowiþ, colour changiþ, and besy þouGtis encresiþ and rauynge and vnresonable suspiciouns. (7.9)

[Insomnia is a lack of power to sleep and is an ailment of the brain contrary to lethargy. And this illness comes of too much movement of the brain and the dryness of red choler or black choler [melancholy], or excessive heat, and of too salty humors. Of all this comes insomnia, and anxiety follows, color changes, and obsessive thoughts increase, as well as raving and unreasonable suspicion.]

Just so, the night before his meeting with the Green Knight, “ þe leude lystened fil wel, þat le3* in his bedde— / þa3* he lowkez his liddez ful lyttel he slepes / Bi eche kok þat crue he knwe well þe steuen” (2005-7).

The next day, his grisly imaginings of the Green Knight as a servant of the devil conform to the melancholic tendency to morbid conjecture or “suspicion”: “Wel bisemez þe wy3e* wruxled in grene / Dele here his deuocioun on þe Deuelez wyse” (2190-91). His individual constitution fed lurid images to his cogitatio, making an in appropriate reflex action likely.

And such a reflex reaction there is: Gawain, faced with the vitiation of his claim to monolithic, innate chivalric virtue, abandons the learned courtesy and explodes into an instinctive, defensive verbal response. His meticulousness rears up in frightful form: for keeping the green lace that should have been given to Bercilak in fulfillment of the terms of their game, Gawain considers himself

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74 “The man listened carefully who lay in his bed— / Though he looks at his eyelids, he does not sleep much / He heard each cock that crowed.”

75 “It would fitting for the man in green / To worship the Devil here.”
“fawty and fals” (2384) and adds, “Al fawty is my fare” (2386). This one petty act proves the substance of the whole, and it is not a substance that he wishes to claim. In response to this loss, he bodies forth the raving and paranoia befitting the sleep-deprived melancholic rather than the courtesy of a self-possessed knight. He accuses vice, Bercilak, and women in general for having betrayed him (2375, 2379, 2414-26). He also accuses his body, which both demonstrates his materialist conception of virtue and, paradoxically, his disavowal of any willful choices in the failure (2435).

But Gawain may moderate this aspect of his problematic flesh, too, or he may circumvent it with reason. The brain’s very physicality, writes Patrick Cruttwell, means that it was considered as “liable to the humours as any other part,” and therefore to be treated medically. Gilbertus writes that the man suffering from melancholy “must leue malencolius metis and vse metis þat ben moiste, as fisshe and ripe fruytis, and borage.” Such a person should also “absteyne from long fasting and also from ydelness, from wræþþe, from waking, from colde.” Bartholomaeus states explicitly that melancholy may result from fussiness, food, worry, and dread (7.6), thereby implying that controlling these factors mitigates the problem. He also states that reason must control the emotions that might otherwise cause inappropriate reactions (3.15).

Gawain, however, follows precisely the wrong dietary and activity program, often because he fears being found discourteous. As any good guest would, he accepts (“graunteþ”) his host’s proposed game: he is to lie abed while the rest of the men hunt; at the end of the day, they will swap their winnings (1096-1109). Implicitly, the game would be presented to Gawain at dinner; it is difficult to imagine how a single knight on horseback would ferry

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76 “My conduct is wholly faulty.”

77 “Physiology and Psychology in Shakespeare’s Age,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12 (1951), 82.

78 Getz, *Healing and Society*, 14. Translation: He “should avoid melancholy foods and use foods that are moist, such as fish, ripe fruit, and ‘borage.”

79 Getz, *Healing and Society*, 3. Translation: He should “abstain from long fasting and also from idleness, from wrath, from waking, from cold.”
home the game described. In order to be a good guest, he must appreciate (and eat) his prize the first two days. Unfortunately, all his edible winnings exacerbate melancholy. The deer of the first day’s hunt are phlegmatic meat, according to Gilbertus, and therefore prone to exacerbate melancholic temperaments, and as they are all female, they are even more phlegmatic than other deer. Boar, while Galen praises pork as the most nutritious of all foods, is an older, and thus drier meat—again, prone to exacerbate problems with melancholy. Overmuch rest, as in the case of lying abed while the rest of the men go hunting, resembles as the “ydleness” against which Gilbertus warns. The one trump card he retains, despite his deepening melancholy and passivity, is his reason, should he choose to acknowledge his need for it. But here, as elsewhere, he chooses to abdicate his responsibilities for practicing reasoned choice.

Gawain’s construction of embodied virtue, in the end, sets him up to fail in embodying the virtue he prizes. This strictly material virtue is innate, instinctive, self-sufficient, and evident in all a knight’s deeds. If it is innate and completely sufficient to uphold the requirements of chivalry, then the knight need not choose to practice it; it practices itself and cannot fail. This rigid, monolithic conception of virtue entails that any failure at any point proves a knight’s substance; the judgment is irrevocable. For this reason, Gawain lives in fear of committing unknightly conduct, as a single act could prove him lacking. Such fear, however, reveals inappropriate perceptions disinterred from memory by cogitatio when Gawain needs to assess himself again; he has misunderstood what his training as a knight was to have taught him, and he replays this misperception each time he feels himself teetering on the brink of a mistake. Such misperception generates mistaken instinctive act—in this case, the acceptance of the green scarf and, what is

80 I have been unable to find any evidence for foxes being considered food, and Bercilak complains that all he has to offer is the animal’s pelt (1944).

81 Getz, “Healing and Society,” 2.

82 Brenda S. Gardenour, “Women in Science,” Medieval Science, Technology and Medicine, 522-24; also, while it is scattered throughout, Bartholomaeus often refers to the phlegmatic nature of female animals.

worse, Gawain’s complete abandonment of his vaunted courtesy in his last interview with the Green Knight. He charges his body as the culprit in his misdeeds, yet his reason has always had the power to override the body’s misperceptions, instincts, or predispositions. But it remains uncalled, as Gawain does not admit his need for it. In so doing, Gawain chooses against practicing virtue: he does not commit to choosing what reason dictates for a knight; instead, he trusts in the body’s instinctive reactions. In his vision of himself as superior in degree to other human beings, he sacrifices the one thing that makes true embodied virtue possible: reasoned choice.

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Saints and the Social Order: 

Alexander Barclay’s *The Life of St. George*

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This paper examines *The Life of St. George*, Alexander Barclay’s 1515 translation of a humanist Latin prose poem. Barclay, who styled himself a laureate in the tradition of Lydgate, adapts laureate poetic practice in order to address a noble audience in a bid to gain court patronage. Barclay’s emendations and additions transform the hagiography of England’s patron saint into a commentary on traditional English ideals of citizenship and good governance, aimed at an audience comprised of both common citizens and noble elites, including, as this paper argues, the young king Henry VIII.

Based on textual evidence found in his extant works, the literary career of early Tudor poet Alexander Barclay was marked by a long struggle to gain patronage and preferment at Henry VIII’s court. Barclay, a Benedictine (1475?-1552) and a self-styled “laureate,” authored a number of adaptations of popular Latin poems over a 15-year period in the early sixteenth century. His first published work, *The Ship of Fools*, based on Sebastian Brant’s *Narrenschiff*, appears to have functioned as a bid for royal patronage. The poem contains a number of passages praising the king of England, but between the time Barclay finished the work in 1508 and the time it was published at the end of 1509, Henry VII died and Henry VIII acceded to the throne. Accordingly, “at some time between April and December” of 1509, “the finished translation was revised, apparently by Barclay himself.”

References to Henry VII were quickly revised to reflect the change in rulers. For example, a description of the king’s dress, which displays “inwarde prudence” and “godly wyt and grauyte” —

1 Barclay appears to have joined the Franciscan Order sometime after 1520; thus, later writers sometimes describe him as a Franciscan. See Beatrice White, Introduction to *The Eclogues of Alexander Barclay*, EETS o.s. 175 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1928), xli.

a passage which would have best described Henry VII—was annotated with the marginal comment, “Laus svmma de grauitate eximia Henrici Anglorum regis, viij (High commendation of the extraordinary seriousness of Henry VIII, King of England).”

Alistair Fox argues that the “inconsistencies and emendations” found in The Ship of Fools show Barclay scrambling to change his text to more effectively seek patronage in the new regime. It is obvious from Barclay’s next extant work, his Eclogues, that Barklay failed to secure that patronage. The Eclogues, which date to 1513-14, reflect Barclay’s bitterness at the court patronage system and those poets who did gain preferment at the court of Henry VIII. The first three Eclogues translate a satirical letter on court life by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, which Barclay transforms into pastoral dialogues featuring an old shepherd who tries to persuade a younger shepherd of the disadvantages of being a courtier. Fox reads Eclogues I-III as a dramatization of Barclay’s own feelings about his lack of patronage. Barclay chooses not to retain the satirical tone of his source text, instead creating a serious dialogue on the corruption and unpleasantness to be found at court “not only to justify a life away from court, but also to reconcile himself to his rural existence” at the monastery at Ely.

Despite the Eclogues’ attack on court life, the poem contains a direct petition for patronage. The fourth Eclogue is a dialogue between a rich man, Codrus, and a poor poet, Minalcas, who voices his grievances against unfair, miserly patrons. In the midst of these complaints Minalcas recites a 300-line elegy on the death of Sir Edward Howard, son of the Duke of Norfolk. Howard, who served as


5 Ibid., 46.

6 White, Introduction to The Eclogues of Alexander Barclay, EETS o.s. 175 (London: Oxford UP, 1928), xx.
the lord admiral of Henry VIII’s navy, died at sea during an engagement with the French in 1513. In the elegy, Barclay depicts the “Towre of virtue and honour, into the which the noble Hawarde contended to enter by worthy actes of chiualry,” lamenting that Fortune turned her favor against him (IV, ll. 1071-1078). “In the course of his fiction, Barclay has thus managed to depict his need [and] offer a sample of the flattering panegyrics he can provide for his intended patron,” which ultimately succeeded in securing the Duke of Norfolk’s support.

Barclay’s *The Life of St. George*, published by Richard Pynson in 1515, must also be read in light of the author’s efforts to secure patronage. The *Life of St. George* is an amplified adaptation of a Latin text by a contemporary continental humanist – in this case, the *Georgius* of Baptista Spagnuoli Mantuanus (1448-1516), or Mantuan. Mantuan’s works were popular products for the sixteenth-century book trade; nine separate editions of the *Georgius* were printed in Europe between 1507 and 1513. By translating Mantuan’s verse Barclay continued to “turn into English writings whose continental successes would have engendered confidence in their marketability in England,” as he had with *The Eclogues* and *The Ship of Fools*. Barclay’s translation reworks Mantuan’s version of the *vita* of St. George, turning a “primarily religious and moral” text into a poem deeply concerned with civic order and exemplary moral leadership within the English realm – a poem of advice and criticism addressed toward the Tudor political elite who have either rewarded or rejected Barclay’s poetic efforts.

Other poets before Barclay had used hagiography to address themes of politics and leadership. Authors like John Capgrave and John Lydgate used the vehicle of the saint’s life to exhort their royal patron to virtuous behavior. Karen Winstead’s study of Capgrave’s

7 Fox, 53-54.


10 Nelson, xvi.
Life of St. Katherine and Fiona Somerset’s study of Lydgate’s St. Edmund and St. Fremund in particular have revealed relationships between hagiography and advice-to-princes literature. Yet in these works, the characters of Sts. Katherine, Edmund, and Fremund also allegorize the rule of the king contemporary to the text, Henry VI, and reflect anxieties about the king’s qualities and capacities as a leader. Writing almost a century later, Barclay expresses similar concerns about the nature of contemporary rule and governance of the English kingdom, describing the characteristics of strong, virtuous leaders and the ideal relationship between rulers and subjects.

Politics was a perennial concern of early sixteenth-century English literature, and the legend of St. George was a particularly fitting vehicle for an early Tudor-era author to explore political themes. Historically, St. George enjoyed popularity throughout medieval Europe as a military cult-figure, especially during the Crusades, but from the reign of Richard I (1189-99) he was regarded as a special protector of England. Edward III, who was particularly devoted to the saint, was the driving force behind a royal cult of St. George, establishing the Order of the Garter and St. George’s Chapel at Windsor between 1347 and 1349.

Edward’s successors strengthened the kingdom’s ties to the saint; George was officially made England’s patron saint after Henry V’s victory at Agincourt in 1415, marking the development of a national cult of St. George. In following decades the saint came to be “identified as a patron of the English monarchy and the English nation, rather than of any one specific sovereign.” These ties to crown and country meant that the saint could be appropriated for po-

12 Fox, 3-10.
14 Riches, 113.
itical propaganda. During the Wars of the Roses, both Lancastrian and Yorkist monarchs utilized St. George’s popular following and image to help legitimize their respective governments.¹⁵

Early Tudor monarchs followed the example of prior regimes in promoting their ties to St. George. After the Battle of Bosworth, Henry VII presented a standard with the red cross to St. Paul’s, London. His chapel at Westminster houses a statue of St. George and the dragon, and the figure of the saint also appears in two different places on Henry’s tomb. During the reign of Henry VIII, coins (the “George Noble”) were issued depicting the saint. By Barclay’s time, St. George was firmly connected in popular imagination with England’s national identity and with the English monarchy. This association facilitates Barclay’s use of the saint’s life to discuss political power and social order in early sixteenth-century England.

Before presenting the St. George story, however, Barclay lays out his credentials and aims as a poet. Barclay’s poem can speak to and about power because it, like his other work, is firmly embedded in a long tradition of high-culture laureate poetry. Barclay claims to be “lawreat” (118) early on in The Life of St. George. His career has obvious parallels with Lydgate’s, the first laureate in English poetic tradition: both poets were Benedictines, and both authored poems (often vernacular translations of Latin sources) for noble patrons. Yet though Barclay tries to adopt the trappings of laureateship, his circumstances were markedly different from fourteenth-century poets like Capgrave or Lydgate.

When English humanist poets, like Barclay, styled themselves as “laureates,” they drew attention to their university education and their ability to act “as translators, transmitters, and interpreters of culture” through literary production.¹⁶ Following the precedent of Petrarch, sixteenth-century poets could receive honors called laureations from universities (though many writers – includ-

¹⁵ Bengtson, 327.
¹⁶ Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 163.
The laurel garland was bestowed for excellence in the faculty of grammar, but laureateship was not just an academic honor. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, students of humane letters had become so valuable to the [English] nation that the king himself took part in honoring them. . . . the laurel was granted to scholars who . . . had rendered themselves capable of teaching poetry and oratory to others and of using their pens in the service of the State.18

Laureateship was no longer the province of poet-monks receiving patronage from secular and ecclesiastical princes. Laureation implied close ties to government and politics; attracting a patron from among the ranks of powerful nobles or court officials could help a writer win monetary compensation as well as institutional employment (such as advancement to an ecclesiastical office or a bureaucratic post) for their literary output.19 In England Henry VII had established the paid position of King’s Poet, first awarded to French humanist Bernard André in 1486.

Writing within a court patronage system, laureate poets needed to be attuned to their historical and sociopolitical milieu, especially since their work might be used to reaffirm the power of the patron. But the poet’s relationship to court power structures was complex. Though important enough to address the princely patron with advice and even criticism, the laureate was subservient and in service to the crown. Because laureates were still servants, they needed a separate authority in order to address those in power and to comment on contemporary historical and political events. Late-medieval laureates attempted to adopt what Robert J. Meyer-Lee describes as “a timeless, autonomous authority that reflects, but is

17 Barclay’s educational credentials cannot be verified, but based on textual evidence from *The Ship of Fools* and Barclay’s translation of Sallust, most biographers agree that he received a degree at either of the English universities, and that he seems to have been “acquainted . . . with the humanist circle in Paris.” (see White, “Introduction” to *The Eclogues of Alexander Barclay*, viii-ix).


not reducible to, the parallel embodied authority of the prince.”

To generate this authority, Lydgate adapted traditions and practices used by monastic historical writers. As Meyer-Lee explains, monastic historians incorporated biographical information into the preface of their work “as an analogue for the veracity of the history it reports,” reinforcing recorded events with “the factuality of a named, historically specific author.” Lydgate and other poets in the laureate tradition introduced first-person passages or other biographical material into their work as a way of affirming a specific and authoritative voice, separate from the authority of the patrons they addressed.

Lacking both university laureation and an official court post, Barclay must rely on older literary traditions in order to demonstrate his authority as a laureate poet and the authority of his poetic output. Barclay inserts himself into the text of the prologue of the *Life of St. George*, describing his humble talent and pledging “selfe and seruyce” (94) to the poem’s first dedicatee and patron, Thomas Howard, Second Duke of Norfolk (Barclay states that his translation was undertaken by the Duke’s “commaundement” in line 76 of the prologue). He derives further authority from “the tradition which conceived literature to be a means of propagating virtue . . . which dominated the English Renaissance” in the early Tudor period. To set himself apart from his contemporaries, Barclay insists on his unique moral authority. In his opening invocation, the poet petitions the Virgin to help him avoid the “vayne gestes and fruytes” (110) of “raylynge poetes” (113) who call on Venus and “may the reders / to vicious lyfe excyte” (117). After all, he says, “he which is lawreat/Ought nat his name / with vyce to vyolate” (118-19). This passage is aimed at court-sponsored laureates—most likely John Skelton, whom Barclay disparages as a “rascolde poete” in his Fourth


21 Meyer-Lee, 69.

Barclay maintains that he differs from these so-called laureates because he tries to convey moral principles through his poetry, unlike those of his peers who had commoditized their verse in service of the Tudor political machine.  

Barclay also exhibits his authority as a scholar and translator on the printed page. As with the bulk of his works translated from Latin, the text appears in a bilingual format, with the full Latin text of the original work being printed in the outer margins of the page. The Life of St. George, like a number of other Barclay translations, uses different typefaces to present the two texts: a larger blackletter for the English verse and a smaller blackletter for the Latin prose in the margin. David Carlson believes that this “distinctive” format was likely agreed upon by Barclay and Pynson, perhaps at the time of their first collaboration on the 1509 Ship of Fools.

This format mirrors the centuries-long tradition of attaching textual authorities in the form of marginal glosses and commentary to the text proper, which act as both a reference and “an external sanction, reproduced visually by a display on the page of one’s sources or auctors.” Textual apparatuses accompanied the work of many humanist poets, including that of Mantuan, whose poems were often used as textbooks of Latin grammar. And dual-language text was used a century earlier by vernacular poets like John Gower, whose English chapters in the Confessio Amantis are framed by Latin verses, perhaps indicating that he “intended the Latin verses to serve as an important aid to reading, even as a primary means of entry . . . into the larger poem.”


24 Meyer-Lee, 193.


27 Nelson, Introduction to The Life of St. George, xvi-xvii.

The marginal Latin text of Mantuan’s *Georgius* acts as a similar framework to Barclay’s work, an entry point or reference which facilitates study of the Latin and English poems, as Barclay explains in the prologue to his translation of Sallust’s *Bellum Jugurthinum*:

> I haue also added vnto the marge of this my tr[n]slacion to thintent that such as shal dysdane to rede my translation in engl-\[\textit{ys}h\]e : may rede this hystorie more co[m]pendously & more obscurely written in laten. Which hystorie : parauenture shal apere more clere & playne vnto theym in many places by help of this my tr[n]slation.\textsuperscript{29}

The Latin text acts as a pedagogical tool, but it also demonstrates Barclay’s learning and poetical abilities to readers, including current potential patrons. In *The Life of St. George*, the dual-text format provides evidence of Barclay’s facility with Latin, his familiarity with humanist scholarship, and his proficiency as a translator and interpreter. With such skills in high demand at the Tudor court, Barclay’s unique presentation format displays his Latinity and scholarship: proof of his ability to excel as a laureate in service of patron and country.

Barclay relies on disparate authorities to support his claim of laureateship. In order to prove his poetic credentials he tries to recreate the authority of the Lydgatean tradition in his poetry. Barclay also links his writing to humanist scholarship, both by his choice of base text and by displaying Mantuan’s Latin text alongside his verse adaptation. Barclay attempts to straddle both the medieval and the humanist poetic tradition, using old and new authorities to assert that he is qualified to address princely patrons with criticism and advice. Though writing outside the Tudor court, when Barclay calls himself a laureate, he defines his work in relation to court power structures and politics in the English realm.

Barclay’s *Life of St. George* is deeply concerned with the power relationship between government and the governed, which Barclay locates when possible into the context of contemporary English society. In the course of the narrative, Barclay introduces two kingdoms. The first, Silene, is a city-state beset by maladies. Terrorized by a dragon, the people live with poisoned air, water, water,

\textsuperscript{29} *Cronycle of the warre against Iugurth*, sig. A4\textsuperscript{v} (London, Richard Pynson, ca. 1525).
and food, as well as the imminent threat of being selected as part of the dragon’s daily meal. Their rulers are unable to defend their city from the dragon and can do no better than to “sacyate” (573) its appetite by sacrificing the citizens twice a day. As protectors of the realm, they fall far short of their duty to the people. No wonder then that the community, “With wrathfull chere / and thretnyng yerful” (611-12) shows no mercy when the lot falls on the king’s daughter. Many versions of the George story portray a passive citizenry mourning for the princess, but Barclay gives the governed a voice, echoing a history of rebellion against weak or unpopular monarchs in late medieval England. Like Henry VI or Richard II, the king of Silene is powerless and ineffectual in dealing with threats to his realm and even to his own family.

The king’s lack of political and military power contrasts with the prowess of George, who faces the dragon and kills it almost immediately. George preserves the king’s “lynage” (986) by rescuing the princess, ensuring dynastic continuity. After saving the citizens from physical danger, he reverses their spiritual maladies by converting them to Christianity. George endows churches and gives to the poor (1217-18), supporting the masses rather than endangering them as did the king and his council. He also introduces a new social hierarchy to the city. He institutes a clergy, completing the traditional three orders of society, and endows people of all ranks with access to Christian ritual through holy days and feasts.

Barclay links the city’s social hierarchy to contemporary English practice by describing an annual play instated by the people to commemorate George’s triumph over the dragon (1156-59), recalling the civic dramas enacted in late medieval English towns. The driving force behind these pageants was not city governors, but citizens who formed groups such as guilds in order “to give religious meaning to their labours and to participate in [a] collective manifestation of civic pride.”

Pageants and feasts involved com-

mon citizens in the city’s social structure. Charles Phythian-Adams describes civic ceremony as “a valued instrument through which the basic divisions of humanity, by sex, age and wealth, could be related to the structure of the community.”

Pageants “often provided at least the opportunities for bringing together in celebratory circumstances those who might otherwise be opposed or separated in their separate spheres.” Ritual turns social and economic disparity amongst the city’s population into wholeness. By helping to institute religious and civic ceremony, St. George promotes unity among the citizens where formerly there was strife.

After freeing the people of Silene from the dragon, George enters the city “as one inspyred / with heuynly sapynce” (1010). He delivers a sermon introducing Silene to basic Christian beliefs. Although 34 lines (ll.1079-1113) are missing from the sole extant copy of *The Life of St. George*, the saint’s speech is obviously much longer and more detailed than in Mantuan’s Latin poem, where the speech is only 33 lines long. In a striking departure from the base text, Barclay opts not to translate a long list of mythical monsters to which Mantuan compares George’s dragon. Instead Barclay supplies George with an eleven-stanza discourse to the people of Sylene, instructing the members of each social class on their responsibilities within the political realm.

George charges the king and his subjects to obey God’s laws and to “let no newe doctryne” (1258) corrupt their faith. He exhorts the citizens, “obey your kyng and lorde/ Obserue vnto hym / loue and fydeltye/ Auoyde Rebellyon,” (1261-63) and counsels the nobles to be charitable to the commoners. George also reminds the


32 Phythian-Adams, 63-64.

33 See Mervyn James, “Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town,” *Past and Present* 98 (1983), 9.

34 Barclay comments at line 1247, “Lector amice: hec fabulosa pretermisi non exposita quorum loco: a nobis vulgaria hec inseruntur verumptamen baptiste carmina pretermittere non statui. que hec sunt.”
city’s leaders they are examples to their subjects, for good or ill:

A vcyous prynce / is a plage mortal
And foule example / to all his comonte
Occasyon to folowe / his vyle enormyte.
Lyke wyse his lyfe / establyd in vertue
Shalbe example / to all his regyon
His lyfe / his maners / and vertue to insue (1307-12).

In Silene, George imposes both spiritual and political order in a land where a weak ruler endangers the populace. George next encounters Dacian, the Roman judge of Persia, whose repressive rule contrasts with George’s defense of Christian ideals and the Christian faithful in Dacian’s realm. Dacian is a tyrant, a “Iudge iniust” (1636) who is extreme in his persecution of his Christian subjects. While the king of Silene misguidedly sacrifices his people in hopes of preserving the greater whole, Dacian is willfully cruel to his citizens. He persecutes his Christian subjects, including his wife, who converts after witnessing George’s miracles. Dacian seeks to overcome the saint to promote himself, confidently asserting that he will win “immortal glory” (2257) for oppressing George and the other Christians.

Barclay appends some 28 lines to his translation of Mantuan’s passage describing the persecution of the Persian Christians, delineating Dacian’s tyranny. In these stanzas Dacian is indiscriminate in his slaughter of the populace:

. . . where a paynym / one crysten sawe and knewe
He lost hys lyfe / by paynes vyolent
Thoughte it were euyn / before the sacrament (1622-24).

By killing even the Christians’ associates Dacian goes above and beyond the statute condemning Christians who refuse to sacrifice to pagan gods. Sadistically finding “most laude / in greatest cruelte” (1642), Dacian institutes numerous methods to exterminate people: “Some [are] brent / som boyled / some flayne . . . Some hedyd / some caste to bestes,” (1630-31).
Tyranny and unjust rule were matters of concern to Medieval and Renaissance political theorists. The prince could be a divinely-inspired enforcer of law, but he could use the law to enforce his personal will—perhaps not for the common good. John Trevisa, translating Giles of Rome’s *De Regimine Principum* in the 14th century, defined tyranny as “þe worst eligarchia;” the result of “whanne fewe men ben lorde and ben not good and vertuous but riche and my3ty and louen not þe comune profit but desireþ here owne profite.”\(^{35}\) Following the argument of Aristotle’s *Politics* (Book V), Trevisa states that “þe firste cautel [quality] of a tyrant is slynge and destroyenge of excellent men,” the second being “destroyenge of wise men.”\(^{36}\)

Dacian, as described by Barclay, fits this definition of the tyrant not only because of his personal wickedness, but because he persecutes and kills so many of his subjects. “He dyed the streys . . . with vermell blode,” leaving bodies lying in the “gutters of the strete” (1643-44). In torturing and killing Thamyr, the “most sure inchantour / of all the hole cyte” (1669), and even the city’s queen, Dacian is guilty of destroying some of the most renowned figures in the city – all of whom die as Christians. He pursues his own fame, refusing to protect the common good. But ultimately Dacian’s pride, self-assurance, and even his belief in the pagan gods cannot “socoure” (2380) either himself or his city. God destroys the heathen temple, and eventually annihilates Dacian, his “armyd men” (2652), and other city elites.

George, in contrast, advocates for the Christian community and all who come into contact with it. He pursues the common good, trying to stop the slaughter of Persia’s Christians and their pagan associates. Barclay implies that George’s efforts could have wide-reaching effects, since similar anti-Christian campaigns are carried out “In egypt / Syry / in Naples / Grece / and Spayne / In Fraunce / in Flaunders / and Brytayn lesse / & more” (1606-07). By extension, George represents all the Christian faithful, particularly

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36 Trevisa, 340 (ll. 30-31), 341 (line 1).
the English, championing their beliefs and challenging the injustices perpetrated against them.

The two leaders of Persia and Silene rule to the destruction of their realms, Dacian because of wickedness and the king of Silene because of weakness. Their personal flaws dictate their inability to rule in their subjects’ best interest. Twelfth-century English theologian John of Salisbury asserted that the prince “as head of the body politic represents the whole people, as well as rules them,” and if the head is weak or corrupt it will lead the body to weakness and corruption.  

This idea would resonate even in Barclay’s time, reinforced by scripture and by medieval authorities like Aquinas. Believing that “the way a king lives his life determines the fate of his people,” Barclay and his audience would see a causal effect between the weak king of Silene and the tyranny of the dragon, between the evil judge Dacian and his pagan subjects’ violent end. Barclay’s additions to Mantuan’s text heighten the two rulers’ poor leadership skills, establishing Silene’s king as vacillating and ineffective and Dacian as a sadistic tyrant. Each stands as an example of a bad prince whose actions directly affect the well-being of his subjects. George is a counterexample, a strong, virtuous leader who protects the citizens of Silene and the Christian faithful physically and spiritually.

As England’s patron saint, St. George also acts as an omnipresent champion of the nation and its faith. Like a medieval king, who was considered “the guardian of the public appurtenances which served the benefits and security of the whole body politic,” St. George is heavenly steward over the temporal and spiritual health of the English people and the English crown. And Barclay invokes the saint as such in a final orison to protect England and its leaders:

38 Ibid.
39 Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 190.
Presereue thy royalme / in peas and vnyte
Represse rebellers / and men presumptuous
Defende thy prynce / from all aduersyte
In longe succession / of chauncys prosperous
Expell from his grace / all thynge contraryons [sic]
Graunt helth / and welth / good lyfe and charyte
Within thy royalme / contynually to be (2682-88).

The leader who emulates the saint, who upholds divine law as a defender of the faith and example of virtue, will be equally effective in preserving the peace and safety of his kingdom.

Although Barclay inherits the themes of strong and weak rulership and threats to the realm from Mantuan and the St. George legend, he grounds his translation in a specifically English political tradition. First, he describes Silene’s government according to English practice. The “kynge and comonte and lordes” (568-69) hold “parlyament” (563) to discuss how to deal with the dragon (Mantuan’s word is consilium, line 171). Barclay further explains in the heading to Cap. V that their solution “was ordeyned by Act of Parlyament.” Barclay’s description mimics standard parliamentary procedure: the king calls Parliament and meets with the Lords and Commons, who together issue an “Act.”

In a passage entitled “Apostrophe ad anglos,” Barclay further aligns his verse to English political theory by exhorting his audience to “vse noble besynes / And thynges that at ende / may helpe a comon welth” (327-28). The idea of the “common wealth” or “common weal” began to take shape in England and Scotland during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “the two words were used indiscriminately” in Barclay’s time, both in the sense of “public welfare” or “general good” and the sense of “the whole body of people constituting a nation or state, the body politic.”

Barclay’s near-contemporary Edmund Dudley (ca. 1462-1510), author of the treatise The Tree of Commonwealth (1509), uses the term in the former sense—applying it to the welfare of the entire English nation—when he describes

that it is each citizen’s duty “most hartely to pray for the prosperous contynewance of his liege souuereign lord and thencrease of the comonwelth of his native countrie” and “to do all things that might furder or sounde to thencrease and helpe of same.”

Arthur B. Ferguson suggests that “the idea” of commonwealth “was conservative, even reactionary in its implications, inspired in large part by a suspicious distaste for the changes taking place in early sixteenth century England.” He argues that “the ideal . . . was little more than a vigorous and impassioned re-statement of orthodox medieval theory.” Most Tudor theorists acknowledged that their society could no longer be classified into three estates, but they still applied the medieval idea of the body politic to their changing world. English humanists maintained that this social hierarchy was divinely instituted, although it was made less rigid through personal excellence in earthly pursuits. Accordingly, early 16th-century writers wielded the idea of commonwealth to express traditional views of community and public good in the face of shifting social and political ties, economic change, and political unrest. The concept was almost “exclusively a social and ethical ideal” drawn from established thought, but it was a concept distinctly applied to the English nation.

When Barclay exhorts his audience to follow St. George’s example in upholding “a common wealth,” he evokes this social ideal, “the idea that every member of the community had a role to play, and should dedicate his labours to the common good.” George upholds the state and the social order by instituting a tra-


44 Ferguson, 12-13.

45 Ferguson, 14-15.

ditional Christian body politic in Silene during his life and by defending the English nation in the afterlife. England's patron saint fulfills the obligations of the good prince and advocates an ideal society in which the several estates coexist in equity, righteousness, and unity. Barclay's changes, additions, and embellishments in The Life of St. George address the various members of English society, advising them on their duties to the common good of their country. His poem also comments on the characteristics of an ideal leader, who uses chivalric prowess and moral strength to maintain order, institute and uphold Christian law, and defend his faith and realm. In advocating long-held ideals of right rule and citizenship, The Life of St. George becomes more than a retelling of a religious story, it becomes a piece of advice to the estates, and particularly to those in power.

Barclay's moral advice on the duties of leaders may be aimed at the English governing class in general, but the text points to a more specific audience. The first is comprised of Barclay's patrons, the two dedicatees of The Life of St. George, both of whom had close ties to England's patron saint and the English crown. Barclay first addresses the work (in vernacular verse) to Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk, whom he had successfully petitioned for patronage in the Fourth Eclogue. The Duke was a member of the Order of the Garter and of Henry VIII's Privy Council. He and his father, John Howard, first Duke of Norfolk, had fought with Richard III at Bosworth, and in response Henry VII had stripped the family of their dukedom. Yet Thomas Howard proved himself an able and loyal servant to the Tudors, both as an administrator and advisor to Henry VII and Henry VIII and as a military commander. At age 70, Howard decisively defeated the invading Scots at Flodden in 1513 and was rewarded with his lost dukedom in February 1514.

47 See Aristotle, The Politics, Book IV, or Trevisa, III.ii.32.

48 This double dedication is not unique among Barclay's extant works. Barclay would later dedicate his Warre Agaynst Jugurth to Howard, with a second dedicatory passage in Latin to John Veysey, the Bishop of Exeter; The Mirrour of Good Manners was dedicated to both Sir Giles Alyngton and Richard, Earl of Kent.

49 Nelson, Introduction to The Life of St. George, xv-xvi.
second dedicatee (in a separate, Latin prose passage) is Nicholas West, who was consecrated bishop of Ely not long after the Latin dedication was dated. West, as dean of Windsor, had repaired and renovated its George chapel a few years previously. In the aftermath of tensions with France and Scotland, he served as an ambassador to France twice, helping to secure peace and an alliance with the French in April 1515. West’s nomination to the bishopric at Ely was brokered by Thomas Wolsey as a reward for this diplomatic success. Barclay was a member of the monastery at Ely, so in dedicating The Life of St. George to his new bishop, he demonstrates his poetic ability to a new superior and potential benefactor with court ties.

In his portrayal of St. George, Barclay’s emphasis on the dual nature of leadership—service both to the temporal and spiritual needs of the commonwealth—is significant in light of the two spheres represented by his intended patrons: the Duke of Norfolk, a famed English military leader and the senior member of the Privy Council, and West, an influential member of England’s clergy. George, in his first guise, is a strong young knight who slays the dragon and establishes a new government in Silene, and in his second guise is an ascetic “of age aunycyent” (1696) who challenges the tyranny of the pagan judge Dacian. As an allegorical depiction of both physical defense and care of souls, the character of George embodies the separate spheres of leadership the dedicatees possessed. The moral and political advice Barclay conveys throughout his poem would be appropriate to these two leaders, who were close to the crown and heavily involved in matters of state.

In return for his poetic service, Barclay would expect his dedicatees to confer patronage upon him, or to use their influence at court to promote him to other sources of patronage, including the “ultimate patrons,” the king and queen. As shown earlier in this paper, Barclay had previously sought patronage from an unrespon-

50 Ibid.

51 Maria Dowling, Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII (London; Dover, NH: Croom Hel, 1986), 18.
sive royal audience. From a close reading of his *Eclogues*, Barclay appears to have felt that he was being overlooked by the king in favor of “railing poets” like Skelton, whose work eschewed didacticism and advice-giving in order to entertain Henry VIII and his circle. Despite his prior failures, however, Barclay offers advice and criticism to a court audience aside from the 2nd Duke of Norfolk and Bishop West: King Henry VIII, whose symbolic ties to England’s patron saint were personally significant and widely apparent to many observers.

The celebration of St. George’s Day was a significant state occasion for all English monarchs since Edward III founded the Order of the Garter, but it was of even greater personal significance for Henry VIII. Though Henry VII died on the evening of April 21, 1509, his death was kept secret for two days and was not announced to the court until April 23, St. George’s Day. Henry VIII was publicly proclaimed king the following morning. His first official act as king, a general pardon, was issued April 23, 1509. Thus the saint’s feast day marked the approximate time when Henry gained the crown, an important anniversary for the King.

England’s martial patron saint greatly appealed to the athletic Henry, who loved jousting and was eager to prove himself on the battlefield in the years after his accession. The king appropriated St. George’s image during the first decade of his reign. Venetian envoy Piero Pasqualigo described Henry as he appeared on St. George’s Day 1515, dressed in his sumptuous Garter robes and sporting “a pendant St. George entirely of diamonds.” This collar was only worn on St. George’s Day. Later, in 1521, Henry VIII introduced smaller St. George pendants that he and his Garter knights could wear for everyday use – the king is known to have owned three such

52 Fox, 42.
The King also owned several suits of armor and a crown adorned with St. George’s image. A set of silvered and engraved armor dating from 1515, meant to commemorate the marriage of Henry and Katherine of Aragon, depicts St. George slaying the dragon on the breastplate and scenes from St. George’s life are engraved on the horse armor. Wearing these items at tournaments and other events solidified a physical, iconographical link between England’s patron saint and the young king.

In choosing to adapt the legend of St. George into English verse, Barclay takes advantage of the king’s personal connection with and interest in the saint to address the monarch with advice about the art of governance. One approach Barclay uses in The Life of St. George is his portrayal of the young soldier George, whom he often describes in mythical terms. George displays extraordinary talent at wielding weapons, controlling his horse, and battling evil. According to Barclay, Hercules himself is not “so crafty in wrastlynge” or “in all poyntes of strenght” as George (297-300), nor could he have dispatched the dragon as easily as did George (523-25, 908). After he defeats the dragon, the people wonder if George isn’t Hercules in mortal guise (969). Barclay compares George to Hercules a number of times, at lines 452, 908, 969, and 1161, although Mantuan never mentions the hero. William Nelson notes that “Barclay omits many of the classical allusions which he finds in his source” while adding select others; he attributes this to Barclay’s desire to write “for a general audience” and his lack of deep classical learning. But as a university-educated writer, especially one associated with European humanists, Barclay must have had some understanding of the classical allusions in his source. It is unlikely that he would have omitted them out of ignorance or incomprehension.

56 Diana Scarisbrick, Tudor and Jacobean Jewellery (London: Tate, 1995), 81-82.


58 Introduction to The Life of St. George, xxii.
These references to Hercules may have been familiar to Barclay’s audience in another context; they parallel contemporary descriptions of King Henry VIII, who was in his mid-twenties when the *Life of St. George* was written. One of his diplomats would later recall the young Henry as a sort of classical hero:

Even Hercules of old could hardly have bent the yew bow so well with the sinewy strength of his arms … and, in wrestling, Pollux would have been no match for him in striving for the wreath of oak leaves. Whenever he sought to turn the powerful neck of a warhorse … you would think he was Castor himself; and if he put on his shining armour, his splendid helmet with nodding crest, and his gilded breastplate, he would excel even Trojan Hector. When he hunted deer through the woods with nets and a pack of hounds, not even Hippolitus … could have surpassed him in glory.59

Henry’s subjects were familiar with comparisons of the tall, strong king to the heroes of myth. His jousts with his close friend Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, were likened to the battles of Achilles and Hector, and writers throughout the realm praised Henry for his athletic prowess and youthful good looks.60 Barclay himself, in *The Ship of Fools*, praised the young king as surpassing “Hercules in manhode and courage” and “Achylles in strength and valyance” (II:205-07). This passage and later references in *The Life of St. George* echo popular descriptions of Henry VIII, linking Barclay’s title character with the king. Barclay’s choice of subject matter, and the language he employs to describe St. George, evoke recognizable symbolic connections between the saint and King Henry VIII.

Barclay uses St. George to exhort his noble patrons and King Henry VIII, whose public image was intertwined with that of England’s patron saint, to be virtuous protectors of their country and faith. In portraying a young, talented knight, “predestyne / and chosen of god” to be a leader (380-81), Barclay invites favorable associations between Henry VIII and the hero of the poem. Before his martyrdom St. George is a chivalrous knight who is active in arranging the affairs of government and preserving peace and order, espe-

cially as a young man in Silene. Even in Persia, despite advancing years, St. George rushes to defend the faith against an evil tyrant. Throughout his life St. George continually upholds and maintains Christian beliefs and civil order, protecting and promoting others’ physical and spiritual well-being. Though not a king himself, St. George embodies the traits of a good monarch, who in Tudor political theory was bound both legally and by moral responsibility to his subjects. Like Capgrave and Lydgate before him, Barclay uses the legend of a saint to address a royal audience with observations and advice about the nature of English governance. St. George exemplifies the ideal monarch’s active moral, political, and martial defense of the common good of the realm.

Barclay also has more specific advice for the young king Henry. At the end of Cap. II of the Life of St. George, Barclay reprimands English youth who “spende … tyme in thriftles game / The grounde of vyce and rote of wretchynes” and who “haue delyte in pleasour corporall” (325-26, 374). He warns these “thoughtles youth” that they may be led “to rouyne / By beaute, ryches, fre wyll, or lyberte / And yll example” (376-79) and exhorts them to “fle from suche foly” (327). Barclay, who conceived of the role of poetry as promoting virtue and warning against vice, here echoes the concerns of several humanists at the Tudor court who disliked Henry’s eager engagement in warfare, hunting, jousting, pageantry, and games, instead of attending to “tedious details” of ruling. Richard Pace, the King’s Secretary, would lament to Wolsey in August 1520 that Henry was again neglecting business: “The King rises daily, except on holy days, at 4 or 5 o’clock, and hunts till 9 or 10 at night. He spares no pain to convert the sport of hunting into martyrdom.”

At the time Barclay published The Life of St. George, Henry VIII’s older advisors were concerned about the coterie of young men

61 Franklin L. Baumer, The Early Tudor Theory of Kingship, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1940), 5-6, 12.
62 Lacey, 40.
63 Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-1547, II.i.950.
known as the king’s “minions,” friends and jousting companions in their late teens and early twenties whom Henry gathered about him between 1513 and 1516. These young men “were a constant source of anxiety to the king’s men of business”64 and others close to the king; Queen Catherine “frowned on his gambling . . . and sport- ing with them, especially as he was losing as much as six or seven thousand ducats in one evening and carousing more than was good for him.”65 By 1519, Cardinal Wolsey, the Duke of Norfolk, and several other older members of the king’s Privy Council decided that these young men’s rowdy behavior and over-familiarity with the king needed to be checked. They convinced Henry to banish four of the offenders from court and replace them with “sad and ancient knights.”66 Barclay’s criticism of frivolous English youth echoes the opinions of Henry VIII’s senior advisors—including the poem’s patron, Norfolk—who disapproved of the king’s choice of companions and his dedication to pleasure and sport.

Barclay addresses The Life of St. George to multiple audiences in the hierarchy of English political leadership and artistic patronage. His praise and advice is aimed at older men like the Duke of Norfolk and Bishop West, who combat internal and external threats to order and peace, as well as at leaders of a younger generation, the king and his minions. All would have an interest in the story of the nation’s patron saint, but none more so than Henry VIII, who claimed the image of St. George as a personal symbol. Barclay takes advantage of this connection, shaping his poem to discuss specific aspects of English politics and to draw comparisons between St. George and king Henry VIII. Barclay uses the legend of St. George to exhort his noble audience—both existing patrons like the Duke of Norfolk and potential patrons like the king—to uphold the common good of the English nation. St. George’s example warns against tyranny and promotes a Christian leadership

66 Edward Hall, Chronicle (London: J. Johnson, 1809), 598.
that combines benevolence, moral strength, and active defense of faith and nation.

If Barclay was expecting to attract further attention from royal patrons, his efforts were again unsuccessful. He never received patronage from the king or queen, though he continued to publish his verse for several more years: *The Mirror of Good Manners*, based on a Latin work by Domenico Mancini, about 1518; a revision of John Stanbridge’s Latin textbook *Vocabula* in 1519; the Sallust translation about 1520; and the *Introductory to Write and to Pronounce French* in 1521. Barclay finally received a court post near the end of his writing career, perhaps through the auspices of Norfolk.\(^{67}\) In April 1520, Sir Nicholas Vaux asked Wolsey to enlist Barclay “to devise histories and convenient raisons to florisse the buildings” being constructed for the English court at the Field of the Cloth of Gold.\(^{68}\)

After this commission, Barclay ceased writing within the course of a year. Perhaps, as Alistair Fox surmises, Barclay’s creativity was fueled by his efforts to gain a court post, and once he reached that goal, he lost the motivation to write. Fox also ties the end of Barclay’s literary career to the death of his primary patron, the 2nd Duke of Norfolk, in 1524.\(^{69}\) A more likely cause for the cessation of Barclay’s literary output is his move from Ely to become a Franciscan friar sometime after 1520-21. Based on letters received by Wolsey in 1528-29, Barclay appears to have joined the Franciscan order’s reformed, or Observant, branch.\(^{70}\) As one of Barclay’s biographers notes, “monks and friars had different traditions, objectives, and ways of life,” and in joining the Franciscans Barclay would be devoting his intellect to the study of theology rather than to translation and writing.\(^{71}\) Though the reasons for this change are lost to history, Barclay consciously abandoned his career as a poet, and thus his need for patronage, in favor of a different vocation.

\(^{67}\) Fox, 54.

\(^{68}\) *Letters and Papers*, III.i.737.

\(^{69}\) Fox, 55.


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Woodcut: Frontispiece from Lyfe of Seynt George (1515)
Satire in Boaistuau’s Théâtre du monde

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Le Théâtre du monde [Theater of the World] (1558) of Pierre Boaistuau was an encyclopedic compilation in three books presenting a litany of vices and miseries in human life; the book proved to be an early modern “bestseller” and was reproduced in many editions and translations across Europe. Boaistuau, the first editor of the tales of Marguerite de Navarre, also edited other story collections, besides investigating religious matters, early modern science and medicine including prodigies and monsters, and other developing forms of knowledge. The Théâtre du monde manifested topoi including the theatrum mundi with its vast spectacle displayed for the reader, as well as the contemptus mundi in the portrayal of vices and miseries; the miseria hominis topos found its counterpart in Boaistuau’s Bref discours de l’excellence et la dignité de l’homme (1558) with its corresponding topos of the dignitas hominis. Rather than striving for originality, the compiler borrowed authority and legitimacy from patristic and humanist sources through imitatio, erudite sources that were evident or disguised. Drawing on a range of scholarly perspectives on satire including its early modern forms, we find that Boaistuau’s satire emerged through critiques of elements of society both religious and secular, through evocation of human corruption and wretchedness, and through the conventional invective and moral purpose being subverted by fascination for the spectacle, accompanied by subtle disillusionment emerging from a sense of the absurd.

Le Théâtre du monde [Theater of the World] (1558) of Pierre Boaistuau (c. 1517-66) is a compilation in three books presenting a litany of vices and miseries in human life.1 The text went through nearly seventy printed editions between 1558 and 1622 in France alone. Beginning in 1566 the Théâtre du monde was translated into Latin, Italian, Spanish, German and English, often in bilingual editions.2 Boaistuau’s book generated imitations as

1 Boaistuau compiled his encyclopedic text from erudite material and anecdotes mainly from humanist and patristic sources; favorite borrowed authors included Augustine and Erasmus, whereas Boaistuau did not consistently name his direct sources such as Estienne Dolet, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, Erasmus and Pedro Mexía.

well as translations. Although scholars such as Michel Simonin, Jean Céard, Richard Carr, Tom Conley and Ann Blair have studied the writings of Boaistuau, the Théâtre du monde is not especially well known, when we consider that this sixteenth-century writer, translator, editor, and humanist contributed to the sub-genres of both the histoire tragique [tragic story] and the histoire prodigieuse [wondrous story], the latter of which dealt with monsters. As Céard has demonstrated, marvels, monsters and prodigious phenomena were of great interest to sixteenth-century readers; the work of the surgeon Ambroise Paré, Des monstres et prodiges [Of Monsters and Prodigies] (1573), likewise nourished that fascination. Boaistuau was the first editor of the stories of Marguerite de Navarre, published with alterations and distortions, under the title Histoires des amans fortunez [Stories of Fortunate Lovers] (1558); in 1559 Claude Gruget essentially restored the Queen of Navarre’s unfinished text, renaming it the Heptaméron.

Boaistuau also composed a treatise much shorter than the Théâtre du monde, the Bref discours de l’excellence et la dignité de l’homme [Brief Discourse on the Excellence and Dignity of Man] (1558), whose title echoed the treatise De dignitate et excellentia hominis Libri IV [On the Dignity and Excellence of Man in Four Books] (c. 1452-53) of Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459).  Manetti’s text was composed as a belated response to the influential treatise


De Miseria humanae conditionis [On the Misery of the Human Condition] (c. 1195) of Cardinal Lotario dei Segni (1160/1-1216), who became Pope Innocent III in 1198. Boaistuau’s Bref discours also recalled the oration later named De hominis dignitate [On the Dignity of Man] of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94). The Théâtre du monde imitates the tripartite structure, with chapters, of the De miseria humanae conditionis. The Bref discours deals with the topos of the dignitas hominis [dignity of man], which complements the corresponding topos of the misery of man in the Théâtre du monde. Together, the two texts of Boaistuau illustrate a paradox concerning the human condition – or two sides of the same coin.

Boaistuau describes the Théâtre du monde as “quasi Satyres et anatomies de vices” [nearly satires and anatomies of vices] (47). This is the only time that he directly refers to satire as a defining attribute of his text. Besides the overarching theatrum mundi topos, the contemptus mundi topos also nourishes Boaistuau’s satire. The same contemptus mundi topos had been prevalent in Lotario’s late


7 For an analysis of the twelfth century penchant for the interplay of dialectical opposites in scholastic thought, religious conversion, romance, legal disputes, and gender, see Constance Brittain Bouchard, Every Valley Shall Be Exalted: The Discourse of Opposites in Twelfth Century Thought (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003). I would remark that the penchant, which is found in biblical passages and which also meshes with the Platonic harmony of opposites and with paradox, does not end with the twelfth century. Boaistuau (among many others) frequently engages in the discourse of opposites. Richard Carr explores this in Boaistuau’s work through what Carr calls the “tragic paradox between man’s potential greatness and his present misery” (225) in the last chapter of his book Pierre Boaistuau’s “Histoires Tragiques”: A Study of Narrative Form and Tragic Vision, 221-51.

twelfth century *De miseria*, which likewise contained satire. The present analysis attempts to illuminate the nature of Boaistuau’s satire within the *Théâtre du monde*. While Boaistuau vacillates between moralizing condemnation and pity for the human condition at all social levels, still, occasional grim humor may be discerned in a work with an otherwise indignant, serious tone. Although the author-compilator does not employ certain forms commonly found in satire such as verse structure, parody, or mock encomium, nonetheless Boaistuau’s popular work will be positioned within the broader context of early modern satire.

As compilations, Boaistuau’s two texts, the *Théâtre du monde* and the *Bref discours* display Renaissance humanist knowledge in keeping with the principles of *imitatio*; their sources are sometimes announced and at other times disguised. Boaistuau’s sources incorporate sacred and secular authors, ranging from ancient to contemporary. They include the Bible and patristic texts, especially St. Augustine’s *De civitate dei* [*City of God*], of which Boaistuau produced an unfinished translation, as well as Pliny, Plutarch, Erasmus, Piccolomini, Agrippa, and others. Boaistuau’s texts merit study today as examples of early modern epistemology, because the compilation was an important encyclopedic form, and because the

9 See Donald R. Howard, ed., *On the Misery of the Human Condition* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), Introduction. Concerning works with the *contemptus mundi* topos, Howard writes, “Ostensibly these evils of the social order illustrate how the world deserves to be despised; yet the implication was that particular abuses should be reformed, so that in some degree the works have a satiric function” (xxvi). Howard cites Maccarrone’s critical edition of the *De miseria* (Lugano: Thesaurus Mundi, 1955), noting that Lotario’s treatise has also been called *De contemptu mundi*, a reference to this type of writing that appears in Europe from the twelfth to the seventeenth century (Howard, xxiv-xxv). The idea of “contempt of the world” is found in Jerome and other patristic authors; themes include corruption of the natural order, the mutability and vanity of earthly things (according to I John 2:16, these include lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life), evils of the social order, and punishment or reward in the afterlife (Howard, xxv-xxvi).

10 The critical editions of Michel Simonin, *Théâtre du monde* (Geneva: Droz, 1981) and *Bref discours* (Geneva: Droz, 1982), diligently document Boaistuau’s sources, including instances where Boaistuau cites a source that his source cites – in other words, Boaistuau might disguise the secondary source he uses, referring only to a canonical or authoritative text as if his citation were directly derived from it rather than from the secondary source. Boaistuau seems to engage in citation practices that today we would consider negligent, rather than a calculated subversion of authority in this context.
publication of the *Théâtre du monde* was a success in its time. They are not radical or original texts, but their interest lies in part in the way that the compiler imposed a structure on an unwieldy body of diverse information, and what that structure reveals about how early modern readers understood themselves and the world around them. Our contemporary disciplines of knowledge are much more compartmentalized than they were in the sixteenth century, and theology was not isolated as a discrete system from science.

Literary scholars used to tend to study texts that were extraordinary for their time, and Boaistuau’s writings stand in contrast to such texts. In his *Literary History of France: Renaissance France* (1974), McFarlane dismissed Boaistuau as “a hack polymath, a jack-of-all-trades who did a vast amount of translation, adaptation and vulgarization.” This judgment reveals a preoccupation with the idea of an elusive, ultimately authoritative text that presents an original intellectual accomplishment, a work of genius. Indeed, from our current scholarly perspective, Boaistuau transgressed the rules of authorship, plagiarism, and citation of sources. He substantially altered Marguerite de Navarre’s collection of novellas for his 1558 edition, just as he altered the sources used in his compilations *Bref discours* and *Théâtre du monde*, also published in 1558.

Boaistuau called himself an ordinary man, and his work a “Rapsodie ou Recueil de diverses auctoritez” (47) [Rhapsody or collection of various authorities]. He did not claim authority on his own merit, but instead derived it from the *auctores* from whom he borrowed. In the preface to the reader of the *Théâtre du monde*, Boaistuau writes:

> Je ne fais point ici office de Censeur ou reformateur de vices, (me recongnoissant homme comme les autres) . . . je ne m’attache qu’aux vices, et non point aux personnes (49).\(^\text{13}\)

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13 This quotation is similar to the passage on priests quoted below (TM 153).
I am not taking up here the office of Censor or reformer of vices, (recognizing myself as a man like others) . . . I attach myself only to vices, and not to persons.

He denounced the abuses in the world, “voulant sur telz abus mespriser” (44) [wanting to heap scorn on such abuses], as he stated in the last line of a sonnet inserted at the beginning of the Théâtre du monde. Boaistuau’s Théâtre du monde contains the shadow of a satire on the notions of authorship and imitation, for if compilators and writers only cite other sources who cite still other sources, then true authority seems hollow, a web in mise en abyme of signs pointing to other signs. In a religious context, Boaistuau comments through a series of antitheses (without synthesis) on the diversity of religious beliefs in his time and uncertainty about correct doctrine:

Encores ce qui nous doit donner plus grand terreur, sont les diversitez des opinions qui sont entre nous, et les erreurs desquelles nous sommes enloperez : car ce que l’un dict estre blanc, l’autre le dict estre noir : ce que l’un appelle jour, l’autre l’appelle nuict. Ce qui est lumiere à l’un, est tenebres à l’autre. Ce que l’un trouve doux, l’autre le juge amer. Ce qui est Jesus Christ, verité, et paradis à l’un, est Antichrist, mensonge et enfer à l’autre (170-71).  

[Again what must give us the greatest terror is the diversity of opinions that are among us, and the errors from which we are enveloped: for what one says is white, the other says is black: what one calls day, the other calls it night. What is light to one, is shadow to the other. What one finds sweet, the other judges it bitter. What is Jesus Christ, truth, and paradise to one, is Antichrist, the lie and hell to the other.]

Christian theologians were supposed to embody impeccable authority, but in debates of the Reformation, this was called into question during theological disputes where uncertainty reigned. In a plurality of opinions and voices, the compilator poses the

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14 Boaistuau draws upon Erasmus, and perhaps Josse van Clichtove and Bernard of Clairvaux for this passage (Simonin, TM, note 295). Boaistuau’s passage also reflects the growing doctrinal confusion from the early decades of the sixteenth century about official ecclesiastical teaching (such as that on justification, exploited by Martin Luther) in light of the theological schools and tensions between conciliar and curial positions on authority. See, e.g., Alistair McGrath, Reformation Thought: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 28-37.
question: who speaks with reliable authority?  Boaistuau does not engage in controversy by taking a defiant position on this point.15

15 Simonin, Céard and Carr do not indicate that Boaistuau was a Huguenot.  I have found few references to Boaistuau's potential Protestant leanings: for instance, Simonin in his article “Notes sur Pierre Boaistuau,” in L'encre et la lumière (Geneva: Droz, 2004), 8, note 40, cites Charles Sorel in Le berger extravagant (Rouen: Berthelin, 1646, I:501), who called Boaistuau a Huguenot, but the epithet could be gratuitous (part of Sorel’s polemic), rather than historically exact.  In anglophone scholarship, Alan W. Bates in Emblematic Monsters: Unnatural Modern Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, B.V. 2005) calls Boaistuau a “Protestant” (65 and 72), apparently basing this claim in part on the fact that early in 1560 Boaistuau traveled to England and presented to Queen Elizabeth a beautiful illuminated manuscript edition of the Histoires prodigieuses (now in the Wellcome Library in London, ms. 136; see Simonin, “Notes sur Pierre Boaistuau,” in L'encre et la lumière, 11), and in part on a passage indicating that Boaistuau viewed monstrous births as emanating from God’s judgment and wrath (Emblematic Monsters, 72-73).  Bates states: “wonder books were generally written by Protestants of various persuasions, whereas the writers who dealt most extensively with the natural properties and classification of monsters were Catholics” (65).  This seems insufficient to qualify Boaistuau as a Protestant.  Bates erroneously calls Boaistuau a “native of Paris” (72) (Boaistuau was originally from Nantes, which was then part of Bretagne).  In his article “Good, Calm, Regular and Orderly: Early Modern Classifications of Monstrous Births” (Social History of Medicine 18:2 [2005], 145, note 34), Bates cites R. Po-Chia Hsia, “A Time for Monsters: Monstrous Births, Propaganda, and the German Reformation,” in Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes, eds., Monstrous Bodies, Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 67-92) to buttress his distinctions between Catholic and Protestant uses of monsters; however, Hsia was focusing on Reformation Germany, and we cannot extrapolate that the religious and political discourse involving monsters was identical in France.  Furthermore, Hsia states: “The discourse on monstrosity, as we shall see, is essentially unstable and slippery.  Both Protestants and Catholics interpreted the same monstrous prodigies for their own advantage” (80).  Boaistuau had an abiding fascination for monsters, and if his source, Conrad Lycothene, author of the Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon (Basel, 1557)—a source Boaistuau used for his Histoires prodigieuses—was Protestant, this did not make Boaistuau a Protestant.  In the chapter on Boaistuau’s Histoires prodigieuses, Jean Céard in his book Des monstres et prodiges (Geneva: Droz, 1977, 1996, 252-72) writes, “Raconter, en effet, est le dessein de Boaistuau” (253) [to recount, in effect, is Boaistuau’s design], or again, “Boaistuau cherchait à édifier” (265) [Boaistuau sought to edify].  Céard notes that Boaistuau sought to bring astonishment and pleasure to his readers, which seems a fine summary of our compiler’s intent.  Lynda Gregorian Christian in her 1969 Harvard dissertation published as Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea (New York: Garland, 1987), for her part, calls Boaistuau a “Protestant” and a “French Huguenot” (113), apparently basing this assessment at least in part on the circumstantial evidence that Boaistuau admired and imitated Augustine: “like Augustine, he composed in Latin” (113), and “Augustine’s philosophy of the radical depravity of human nature was enthusiastically endorsed by the Calvinists of the Reformation” (113).  It seems more prudent to identify Boaistuau as an “evangelist” at best, since being a grand lecteur of Augustine or Erasmus does not necessarily imply that one is a Huguenot.  Boaistuau was indeed imbued with the writings of Augustine, Erasmus and Marguerite de Navarre, among others: interested in reform of vices and corruption, but not necessarily a full-fledged Protestant who broke with the Latin Church, rejected its papacy, or espoused doctrines of Calvin, Luther, or Zwingli (Boaistuau’s true views would have been well hidden indeed).  Herbert Weisinger has pointed out that Calvin used the prevalent theatrum mundi topos in the Institutio Christianae Religionis [Institutes of the Christian Religion] (see I, 6, 2), “Theatrum mundi: Illusion as Reality,” in The Agony and the Triumph (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 1964), 59-60.  In a single reference to Calvin in his critical edition of the Théâtre du monde, Simonin compares Boaistuau’s invective against papal corruption to Calvin’s (Institutio...
Before scrutinizing Boaistuau’s text further, let us briefly clarify the meaning of satire within the scope of this article. The term *satire* is of mixed etymology. It comes from the Latin term *satura*, meaning a mélange containing disparate elements, as in the Roman term *lax satura*, a platter of fruits and nuts. The Roman satirist exposed matters public and private – human malice, foibles and vanities. Thus Roman satire was heterogeneous, incorporating various components. Satire exploits other genres; we may view it as a mode rather than a genre, since satire has exhibited mixed genres since antiquity. The other origin of the definition of satire comes from the Greek *satyros*, and thus the connotation of satire as a low and vulgar form. These two etymologies were conflated in antiquity as well as during the Renaissance. Françoise Lavocat has shown

*Christianae Religionis [Institutes of the Christian Religion] IV, 7, 22): see TM note 17, 235-6. Boaistuau’s invective is hardly exceptional: anticlericalism has existed for almost as long as the established Latin Church, and Gregory VII (Hildebrand), Bernard of Clairvaux and many others condemned clerical, monastic, episcopal or papal corruption for a range of purposes long before Wycliffe, the *Devotio moderna*, or the Reformation itself. While criticizing the papacy in the mid-sixteenth century might indicate reformist sympathies, Boaistuau seemed to be more concerned with denouncing generic corruption and suffering than with doctrinal wrangling, controversy, or iconoclasm. In a different vein, one is also reminded of the delightful paradoxical and satirical tale 1.2 in the *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), in which a Frenchman, Jehannot [Giannotto], attempts to convert a Jew, who insists on traveling to Rome to see the papacy for himself, to good effect. František Graus comments on the implication of tale 1.2 that “God must be exceptionally merciful, because he has not destroyed Rome yet” (‘The Church and its Critics in Time of Crisis,” in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 67, note 4). Boccaccio’s tale explored a central paradox that nourished anticlericalism: a corrupt institution (or an institution with corrupt representatives) purporting to offer moral guidance and the way to salvation.

16 On varieties of Roman satire, see Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae*, 10, 1, 93 (Winterbottom). Satire first coalesced as a literary form in Rome, where poetic genre was closely tied to meter, as it was for the Greeks (e.g., epic, elegy). The satires of Ennius, Lucilius, Horace, and Juvenal were composed in hexameter. I thank my colleague Lee Fratantuono for comments concerning the classical material for this article.

17 Charles Knight in *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4, asserts that satire is pre-generic and not a mode but modal, a “frame of mind” and a “mental position”; the novel later becomes satire’s richest, most useful genre.

18 Françoise Lavocat, *La syrinx au bûcher: Pan et les satyres à la Renaissance et à l’âge baroque* (Geneva: Droz, 2005), 234-80: “Le satyre de la fable ésopique qui dénonce l’hypocrisie des hommes soufflant le chaud et le froid adopte en fait la même posture que le satiriste indigné par les vices de ses contemporains” (235) [The satire of the Aesopic fable that denounces the hypocrisy of men breathing hot and cold in fact adopts the same posture as the satirist indignant about the vices of his contemporaries].
that the conflation was deliberate and virtually unanimous in the
sixteenth century, despite or rather because of the etymologies, one
reason being the presence in theater of the irreverent satyr character.
This has interesting implications for the teratological interests of
Boaistuau, in light of his choice of book title, though the *Théâtre du
monde* is not a play. It was not until the early seventeenth century
that Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614) in his *De satyrica Graecorum
poesi et Romanorum Satira libri duo [Two Books Concerning the
Satirical Poetry of the Greeks and Romans]* (1605) distinguished
between *satura* and *satyros* (and even after that, the *satura/satyr*
conflation persisted into the eighteenth century). According to
Casaubon, satire was preoccupied with virtue and vice. While this
preoccupation is not valid for all satire of all periods, it is consistent
with much early modern satire including that of Boaistuau.

It might seem inconsistent that early modern satire, being
inherently concerned with correcting or subverting mores, at the
same time should be conceived as a mixed, impure form.\(^{19}\) The
loftiest genres possessed formal and rhetorical conventions, whether
theological or classical (e.g., tragedy, epic) in origin. While satire
also possessed classical rhetorical conventions (cf. Menippean
and Varronian satire), satire’s heterogeneous form and language
permitted the writer to convey ideas in ways that were not possible
by means of more rigidly structured genres. Satire adopted and at
times parodied genres in order to manifest its ideas, and the analyst
of satire must consider its rhetorical strategies. Satire has been used
to attack distortions of the truth, to “correct perception” as Charles
Knight puts it.\(^ {20}\) This correction of perception is essential to satire’s
power, and it might involve the imposition of a moral code, or it
might skewer conventional morality as hypocritical. According to

\(^{19}\) Examples of the mixed form in Renaissance satire include *Stultitiae laus [Praise of
Folly]* of Erasmus, the work of Jean Bodin and Béroalde de Verville, and *coq-à-l’âne* (a
satirical epistle in verse, developed by Marot, which wanders from one subject to the next).
Satire often takes the form of a miscellany (less organized than the encyclopedic form), as
it does in the examples above and in Boaistuau, among others.

\(^{20}\) Knight, *The Literature of Satire*, 3.
Gilbert Highet,\textsuperscript{21} the satirical author seeks to induce some blend of contempt and amusement, however bitter, in the reader. While Boaistuau condemns both vice and hypocrisy, our author-compilator never subverts morals to the point of abandoning them; instead, he reinforces those morals through diatribe against corruption in diverse contexts. Knight identifies other central aspects of satire:

\begin{quote}
The skeptical but observant satirist recognizes that some people are evil, but all are foolish not only because they do foolish things but because they are unaware of their folly. They are errant in action but blind in perception. Hence they are incurable unless perception is changed . . . . The satiric frame of mind, of which Democritus is an emblem, comprises complex and even paradoxical qualities . . . . The satirist is on one hand the dispassionate observer of humanity, and, on the other, the irate attacker of particular individuals. His mode of both observation and attack is representation.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Whereas discussion of virtue and vice is part of moral discourse, the mocking of ugliness, clumsiness, foolishness, bad taste, or stupidity is not (unless the offended reader judges the satirical mockery itself to be immoral because unfair or uncharitable). Knight claims that satire is “independent of moral purpose”\textsuperscript{23} since some satire does not impose the norms of a moral code, but norms are still at issue even if they are undermined rather than reinforced, and even if such norms are not timeless and universal. All social conventions exist and evolve relative to their time, place and culture; thus, paradoxically, norms are always contingent. In his 1994 book \textit{Satire: A Critical Reintroduction}, Dustin Griffin argues that the functions of satire are inquiry and provocation rather than moral instruction and punishment.\textsuperscript{24} However, the former two do not necessarily preclude the latter two. Some satire, including that of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{22} Knight, \textit{The Literature of Satire}, 3.
\textsuperscript{23} Knight, \textit{The Literature of Satire}, 5.
\end{flushleft}
Boaistuau, is indeed intended for moral instruction and punishment, yet Boaistuau’s provocation is ultimately conventional in its vigor.

Griffin dismissed as insufficient and passé the seminal work on satire from the 1950s and 1960s of figures like Ronald Paulson, Northrop Frye, Maynard Mack and Gilbert Highet. Griffin wrote:

From the point of view of the best current criticism of satire, the old theoretical consensus is clearly inadequate . . . . [V] vigorous and probing criticism of individual texts has not led to a new theoretical consensus, and nonspecialists continue to rely on outdated assumptions.  

However, it seems to me that although our critical and theoretical vocabulary has evolved since that time, the careful reader will find that the theories of these scholars accommodated the complexity and ambiguity of satire. What have changed are trends in scholarship, including the moral climate of scholars of satire since 1960, and hence their own readings of satirical texts, but the satirical texts themselves from the past and their moral contexts remain. I am not ready to discard the scholarship of that older generation, because their analyses, grounded in the classics, are useful for our understanding of the ways that early modern readers understood satire. The fact that Boaistuau identifies his own text of Théâtre du monde as a satire indicates his understanding of satire’s function, even if it conflicts with our definition of satire, or with the frequent association of satire with verse and prosimetrum during the Renaissance.

Concerning satire written in the vernacular languages, the Théâtre du monde was published before Antonio Minturno’s 1564 treatise in Italian, Arte poetica, which discussed satire, and Boaistuau died in 1566, before the birth of the satirist Mathurin Régnier (1573-1613). Marot and Rabelais, among others, made use of satire before Boaistuau did so, and the French poetic treatises of Thomas Sébillet (1548), Barthélemy Aneau (1550), and Jacques Peletier du Mans (1555) covered the category of satire. According to the Dictionnaire Huguet, the word satyre and related forms appear infrequently in

French before 1558; one early example of the verb satyriser occurs in
dizain 104 of Maurice Scève’s Délie (1544). Besides treatment in the
vernacular tongues, Neo-Latin satires were published and classical
satires circulated. Francesco Robortello (1516-67) discussed satire
and satyrs according to Aristotelian categories, posing the question
of whether satyra was mimetic and belonged to history or poetry.
Boaistuau for his part studied the writings of Desiderius Erasmus
(1466-1536), and drew upon his work frequently. Let us note that
in his youth Erasmus composed a contemptus mundi treatise, De
contemptu mundi [On Disdaining the World], published in 1521.

Whereas the French poetic treatises of Sébillet, Aneau, and
Peletier discussed satire with reference to coq-à-l’âne and Marot,
still, the emphasis on vices was consistent with Boaistuau’s satire.
Peletier called satire “un Genre de Poème mordant” [a type of caustic
poem], asserting that “la satyre est comme le fiel de l’Histoire: car
en elle ne se descrit que la verité des Vices.” [Satire is like the bile
of History: for in it is described the truth of Vices.] Ingrid de Smet
observes that Renaissance humanists were preoccupied mostly with

26 For an analysis of Neo-Latin satire, see Bartolomé Pozuelo, “Méthodologie pour l’ana-
lyse des satires formelles néo-latines,” in La satire humaniste: Actes du Colloque interna-
tional des 31 mars, 1er et 2 avril, 1993, ed. Rudolf de Smet (Brussels: Peeters Press, 1994),
19-48. Pozuelo includes graphs comparing the components of satire in Roman satirists as
well as Neo-Latin authors.

27 Aristotle, Poetics, 1449.

28 See Lavocat, La syrinx au bûcher, 245-46.

29 See The Collected Works of Erasmus, tr. Erika Rummel (Toronto: University of To-
miseria treatise, Bernard of Clairvaux’s Meditatio de humana conditione, and the Rhyth-
mus de contemptu mundi attributed to Anselm, as well as classical quotations from pagan
authors to illustrate a Christian theme. Rummel notes that the mature Erasmus was em-
barrassed about this commissioned work and insisted it did not express his own views on
monasticism (130). The epilogue, Ch. 12 of Erasmus’ De contemptu mundi, contains a
critique of monastic corruption (Rummel finds it to be an expression of Erasmus’ personal
convictions, 133), in rhetorical contradiction to the foregoing exhortation to young men to
join monastic orders. These two sides of the argument correspond to the dialectical op-
position between the miseria hominis and dignitas hominis topoi, and between exaltation
and wretchedness.

30 Jacques Peletier du Mans, Art poétique (1555), in Traité de poétique et de rhétorique
formal verse satire: Menippean satire, blending prose and verse, was recognized by the mid-sixteenth century and considered to be older than formal verse satire, but its nature was not elucidated until the early seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{31}

According to Maynard Mack, satire belongs to the rhetorical category of \textit{laus et vituperatio}, praise and blame, and the exposition of virtues and vices.\textsuperscript{32} Thus satire has a moral intent, just as Boaistuau’s work does. For Mack, tragedy and satire occupy opposite ends of the literary spectrum: satire asserts the validity and necessity of norms, systematic values and meanings in recognizable codes, whereas tragedy undermines or dissolves norms and values; tragedy brings a sense of irrationality and complexity to experiences, because the character is victim more than agent.\textsuperscript{33} François Cornilliat\textsuperscript{34} has analyzed the rhetorical techniques of praise and blame which were brought to bear in the verbal adornment of \textit{Rhétoriqueur} writings, in which one purpose was to bring moral order to an uncertain, impure world. This intent to impose meaning is consistent with Boaistuau’s use of epideictic techniques. Satire provides an affirmation of recognizable moral categories within chaos and complexity. Boaistuau evokes these moral categories throughout the \textit{Théâtre du monde}. He develops satire through such traditional vices as avarice, gluttony, and pride.\textsuperscript{35}

Jean Céard, in his analysis of the satire in the second and third


\textsuperscript{33} Mack, “The Muse of Satire,” 194.

\textsuperscript{34} François Cornilliat, \textit{Or ne mens: couleurs de l’éloge et du blâme chez les Grands Rhétoriqueurs} (Paris: Champion, 1994).

books of *Les Tragiques* of Agrippa d’Aubigné,\(^{36}\) employs a literary spectrum for tragedy and satire similar to Maynard Mack. Céard writes that satire for d’Aubigné is characterized by “une liberté de parole” [freedom of words], which the poet identifies as *licence*.\(^{37}\) Like d’Aubigné (as Céard points out),\(^{38}\) Boaistuau’s explicit use of satire is rare.

Northrop Frye\(^{39}\) develops a literary spectrum with irony at one extreme and satire at the other: satire exists where there are clear moral norms, and sheer invective contains little irony. On the other hand, if the reader is unsure of the author’s position, then there is irony with little satire. While this range is useful, the two poles of invective and irony would not necessarily apply to all Renaissance satire. The identification of satire within this spectrum is fairly straightforward in the case of Boaistuau: his satire contains invective and his position is usually clear, and thus the irony relative to the satire is restrained. George Test among others finds that invective is distinguished from mere verbal abuse by its greater use of imagination, though he questions the utility of classifying texts as satire according to categories based on emotional states.\(^{40}\) Test points out that invective is rarely found in a pure state but exists in satire as an element among others.\(^{41}\)

Both humor and invective depend on established conventions, and the *Théâtre du monde* stays within those boundaries. When the audience recognizes those shared conventions, it participates in a virtual community of readers *avant la lettre*. The following ambiguous passage illustrates both the shared conventions and the


\(^{37}\) Céard, “Le style tragique,” 188.

\(^{38}\) Céard, “Le style tragique,” 188.


\(^{40}\) George A. Test, Satire: Spirit and Art (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991), 103.

\(^{41}\) Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art*, 103-4.
hint of satire lurking beneath them:

Car la reigle des anciens philosophes a toujours esté veritable, que l’homme commect beaucoup de vices en ce monde, la punition desquelz Dieu garde en l’autre, excepté la coulpe que l’homme commet d’avoir mal nourry ses enfants, lequel a de coustume de porter la peine et la punition de son filz en ce monde : car le pere ne peut donner à son filz que la chair fragile et mortelle, par la corruption de laquelle la vie prent fin, mais par la bonne doctrine et par la science, l’eternelle renommée et memoire s’acquiert. (118)

[For the rule of the ancient philosophers has always been true, that man commits many vices in this world, the punishment for which God keeps in the other, except for the blame that man commits in having nourished his children badly, (man) who is accustomed to bring the pain and punishment of his son into this world: for the father cannot give to his son but the fragile and mortal flesh, by the corruption of which life reaches its end, but by the good doctrine and by knowledge, eternal renown and memory are acquired.]

In the passage cited above, we find an accumulation of disparate elements: Christian “bonne doctrine” (not specified), an early modern preoccupation with “science” (knowledge), and “renommée et memoire” which could be located in either the divine realm in a Christian context, or the secular realm in a worldly context (also not specified). The Ancients [anciens philosophes] had prized such renown in antiquity, and likewise early modern humanists valued the acquisition of fame for their accomplishments—preferably acquired before their death. The father bequeathes to his son the same corrupt post-lapsarian flesh that constitutes his own: however, in light of the reference to God, inferred as the father [père], the son [filz] could be read also to mean Jesus. Thus the passage contains a satirical commentary within the juxtaposition of opposites: even the Lord’s own son inhabited the same “chair fragile et mortelle” as does hapless humanity. And since he was crucified, what hope remains for the rest of us? Eternity is attainable only through right doctrine and right knowledge, for science is not
doctrine, and not accessed through ecclesiastical sources. If piety and orthodoxy were Boaistuau’s only concern, then science would not be mentioned as a worthy means to attain fame. The humanist compilator has assembled the incongruous pairings of science and doctrine, praise for the Christian God and ancient philosophers, and conventional blame for corrupt mortal flesh, the antithesis of eternity. As evidenced by his other writings, Boaistuau has a taste for scientific knowledge, for the grotesque, and for the absurd (Fr. absurde, 12th c. Fr. absorde, from Latin absurdus,²² signifying discordant; absurd implies going against reason or common sense). Portrayal of the absurd through the disposition of incongruous elements constitutes one aspect of Boaistuau’s satirizing. Incongruity is one basis of humor, and is a frequent device for satire (though not all incongruity is humorous).⁴³

To return to Meynard Mack’s configuration for satire, we find that Boaistuau’s portrayal of humanity in the Théâtre du monde uses techniques of both tragedy and satire by turns, and this inconsistency reflects the nature of the compilation as a mixed form. According to Boaistuau, human beings are both agents and prey to fortune and miseries beyond their control. As God’s noblest creatures, they possess free will, but also have limits and flaws that cause suffering in the world. The Théâtre du monde as a hybrid text is unified by the trope of the theatrum mundi and the theme of miseries in a moralized Christian context, but otherwise the structure is not rigorous. Concerning the theatrum mundi, as Herbert Weisinger put it, “Art imposes order on nature. Our metaphor, then, confirms the life of art as it consecrates the art of life.”⁴⁴ Where humanity is portrayed as tragic, the response is pity and lament, as when Boaistuau discourses at length about God’s wrath against the sins of humanity, wrath that

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²² The Oxford Latin Dictionary defines absurdus as: 1. of sounds, out of tune, discordant (Cicero); 2. of persons and their characters, awkward, uncouth, uncivilized (Cicero, Sallust); and 3. preposterous, ridiculous, absurd (Terence, Cicero).


manifests itself in the world as the scourges of famine, pestilence and war. Boaistuau as a moralist also seeks to improve society by satirizing it. Where Boaistuau employs satire, I would surmise that the reader’s response ranged from moral indignation, abhorrence, or scorn to amusement for the vices described.

The title *Théâtre du monde* is satiric rather than tragic, though the subject treated is mainly tragic, and both are reinforced by the *theatrum mundi* topos later used by Jean Bodin and many others. Although tragedy is a category of drama, the work is not a play to be performed, nor is the work conceived as a fictional narrative. Theater implies a contrived spectacle for the reader to contemplate, and Boaistuau repeatedly refers to the *spectacle de misères* [spectacle of miseries]. Boaistuau fulfills the rhetorical requirement of appealing to the interests and emotions of the reader. His text is authoritative because of the canonical works compiled within it, rather than due to originality or “genius” on Boaistuau’s part. And yet the compiler indirectly acquires intellectual status by association with and absorption of the sources that he assembles and integrates into the compilation.

The *Théâtre du monde* contains both prose and verse as does Menippean satire, while it is not a novella. Anecdotes and stories are embedded in the text: the compilation is a blend of genres and styles, including homily and invective. Boaistuau’s tone intersperses piety with bitterness, praise with denunciation:

[Voyant ce grand gouffre de misères, auquel l’homme est plongé depuis sa naissance jusques au sepolcivre, [ils] ont appelé nature marâstre, et usurière, qui fait payer tant d’interests à l’homme de son excellence, et dignité” (202-3).

[Seeing this great gulf of miseries, into which mankind is plunged from his birth until the grave, they have called nature an evil step-mother, and usurer, who makes man pay so much interest from his excellence and dignity].

The text’s inconsistencies do not seem to bother Boaistuau, for it is intended to be inclusive and comprehensive, rather than restricted or purified in either style or content. Boaistuau’s cornucopian compilation reflects the diversity of the world, a vast theater of nature created by God which contains instances of coincidentia oppositorum (coincidence of opposites), thus contributing to the compiler’s satire. In the Bref discours, Boaistuau seeks to moderate the bleak subject matter of the Théâtre du monde:

Quand a moy il me suffira pour nous degouster quelque peu des miseres de l’homme, lesquelles (peut estre) j’ay traité d’un stile trop tragique, si je descris succinctement quelque dignité et excellence de l’homme, à fin d’adoucir et moderer la fureur de nostre stile et faire congnoistre à ceux qui nous penseroient trop tetriques, ou severes censeurs des œuvres de Dieu, quel est nostre jugement de la generosité de l’homme, le seul esprit duquel vaault mieux que tout ce qui peut estre d’excellent en toutes autres creatures . . . (43).

[As for me, it will suffice for us to taste a few miseries of man, which (perhaps) I have treated in too tragic a style, if I describe succinctly some dignity and excellence of man, so as to soften and moderate the furor of our style and make known to those would think we were too horrid or severe censors of the words of God, what is our judgment of the generosity of mankind, the only spirit of which is worth more than anything that can be excellent in all other creatures . . .]

Boaistuau provides counter-balance for the material presented in the Théâtre du monde by writing about human beings as God’s most precious, noble creatures, who constitute the Creator’s “chef-d’œuvre,”46 and who are heir to salvation through Christian faith. Since Boaistuau’s two texts essentially present opposing viewpoints, one to portray human excellence and dignity, and the other human misery, taken together, the pair of texts constitutes an extended rhetorical exercise in duality. However, a comparison of the length of each text reveals that Boaistuau found far more to say on misery than on excellence, which tells us about his own worldview as well.

46 Boaistuau, Bref discours, 39 and 48.
as about most readers’ predominant fascination with trouble rather than virtue. Trouble and virtue coexist in his texts as in the world, which is reflected in them. Boaistuau contrasts the soul with the body that it inhabits, and presents the Gnostic principle that the soul is good whereas the body is evil and corrupt. Boaistuau finds the duality of human existence useful to combat blasphemy and the grave sin of pride:

[N]ostre Dieu nous a voulu créer de deux substances, l’une terrestre, et l’autre celeste, à celle fin que si nous venons à nous enfler ou eslever par orgueil, la vilité de la creation de nostre corps, qui n’est que terre, cendre, et pourriture, nous reprime et retienne. Et quand l’homme voudra murmurer contre son Dieu, contemplant sa misere au regard des animaux, incontinent après avisant la dignité de son ame, il soit eslevé et quasi ravy d’un desir ardent de penetrer jusques au ciel, pour reconnoistre son createur.

Our God wanted to create from two substances, one earthly, and the other divine, to that end that if we want to puff ourselves up or exalt ourselves with pride, the vileness of the creation of our body, which is but earth, ash, and rot, represses us and holds us back. And when man will want to murmur against his God, contemplating his misery in view of the animals, incontinent after acknowledging the dignity of his soul, he might be elevated and nearly ravished by an ardent desire to penetrate as far as heaven, to recognize his creator.

This passage occurs in the *Bref discours*, rather than the *Théâtre du monde*. Apparently the basis of man’s dignity does not abide within the physical body, but in the soul, which saves humankind from descending to a state of utterly abject misery. Suffering induces a bitter response in people (as illustrated in the Book of Job and elsewhere), and Boaistuau seeks to narrow the gap which separates human beings from their divine Creator by reversing the plunge into misery, far from God, and replacing it with exaltation and worship (a standard sermonic technique). The passage synthesizes Boaistuau’s elaborate portrayal of the absurd state of human nature as he defines it, in accord with Christian

47 Boaistuau, *Bref discours*, 42.
doctrine. Having dispensed with the Epicurean idea that the soul dies with the body, Boaistuau asserts that it is because human beings are God’s exalted creatures, with pure and divine souls—“nostre ame, laquelle est celeste et divine” (41) [our soul, which is celestial and divine]—that they should not degrade themselves through sin and corruption, but instead should strive to transcend their physical state in the world in order to be closer to God. This state of human duality, while conventional, contributes to Boaistuau’s satire, and it is the background to the miseria hominis topos developed in the Théâtre du monde, a topos that consumes more than thrice as many pages as the dignitas hominis.48

Boaistuau asserts that human misery is a scourge from God, sending pestilence, war and famine when He is angry with his creatures, who sin and forget their humble place in relation to God’s greatness. The spectacle of misery is a manifestation of God’s wrath, though God does not despise humanity:

Car toulx ces maulx, et ceste mer de miseres, . . . ne vient point de la haine de Dieu, mais de la malice, et corruption de l’homme (203).

[For all these evils, and this sea of miseries, . . . does not come from the hatred of God at all, but from the malice and corruption of mankind].

Two decades after Boaistuau, Michel de Montaigne would write in his essay “De la moderation” (I, 30) on the same miseria hominis topos.49 Though Montaigne was indisputably the greater writer, both Montaigne and Boaistuau, readers of Lotario’s De
miseria humanae conditionis, perceived the troubled state of existence of human beings made still worse by their civilization, as well as by their passions.

Within a moral framework, Boaistuau’s satire functions often by means of invective directed towards human nature and society. His satire is distinguished from straightforward invective and the sermon genre in two ways: first, Boaistuau juxtaposes incongruous elements, creating the peculiar mixture that characterizes the Roman conception of satire; and second, the encyclopedic form of his compilation invites the reader’s interest and fascination, which leads to contemplation of the miseries, presented in the static form of the theatrum mundi, where everyone is on stage because the stage encompasses the totality of existence. The fascination of the spectacle of miseries in the Théâtre du monde undermines the objective of moral edification and high seriousness of the work, hence the effect of the absurd that emerges. The amusement at the world’s miseries might comprise early modern Schadenfreude, as well as a response to perceptions of the absurd, as we have seen.

Let us examine some examples of Boaistuau’s targets for satire, in which he attacks men and women, many occupations, and various social levels, through the writer’s harsh commentary. Occasionally grim humor emerges from the thicket of angry denunciations, particularly when the target involves the social or religious élite. For instance, Boaistuau compares doctors unfavorably with animals, who at least are able to cure themselves. Despite their university training, the physicians’ cures are not efficacious: “la pluspart de leurs medecines laxatives ne sont autres choses que vrais marteaux pour assomer les hommes” (88) [their laxative medicines in large part are none other than true hammers to smash men]. Such satire against doctors, an established topos, persisted in the face of advances in medicine and anatomy, disciplines which nonetheless relied heavily on traditional authors including Galen and Hippocrates. Consistent with his interest in medicine and monstrous forms, Boaistuau discusses women and childbirth with a blend of
revulsion and pity, lamenting women’s suffering and condition (and that of their progeny):

Mais pendant les neuf mois, combien donne il de peine et tourment à la mere à le porter ? … Outre combien d’angouesse et de martire ont les pauvres à les enfanter ? en quel danger sont elles lorsqu’elles enfantent ? Les unz sortent quelquefois les bras en premier, les autres les piedz, les autres les genoilz, les autres de travers, mais ce qui est plus cruel, et que nous ne pouvons apprehender sans horreur, il nous est force quelquefois appeller les chirurgiens, medecins, et barbiers au lieu de sages femmes, pour desmembrer, dechirer les enfans, et les tirer par pieces (103-4).

[But during the nine months, how much pain and torment it gives the mother to carry it (the child)? . . . Moreover, how much anguish and agony do the poor things have in giving birth to them? In what danger are they when they give birth? Some come out sometimes arms first, others feet first, others the knees, others sideways, but what is more cruel, and what we cannot apprehend without horror, is that we are forced to call surgeons, doctors, and barbers instead of midwives, to dismember, rip out the newborns, and cut them into pieces.]

While the subject of childbirth is not original, Boaistau’s development of it contrasts with that of Lotario in the De miseria (I, 6); as Simonin wryly notes, it is also the medical reality in the mid-sixteenth century. Boaistau continues with the remark: “Voilà doncques le premier acte de la tragedie de la vie humaine” (105) [This then is the first act of the tragedy of human life]; this remark underscores his trope of the theater.

Turning to machinations of the court, Boaistau denounces the sophisticated corruption, hypocrisy and manipulation of courtiers: far from being free to do as they please, they are constantly burdened with having to indulge their monarch’s whims and transform their temperament as necessary, for their livelihood depends on flattery and favor. Boaistau writes:

50 Simonin, in TM, note 134. Lotario dei Segni (Innocent III) presents the false etymology of “Eva” in I, 6 as coming from interjections of sorrow and suffering, and his treatment of women and childbirth is very brief and eschews detail.
Beaucoup à la court t'ostent le bonnet, qui te voudroient avoir osté la teste. Tel ploye le genoil à te faire reverence, qui se voudroit estre rompu la jambe à te porter en terre. Tel y est appelé Monsieur qui merite nom de bourreau (141).

[Many at court take off their hat for you, who would like to have taken your head off. This one bends his knee to do reverence to you, who would like to have broken your leg to bring you to the ground. That one is called Sir who deserves the name of executioner].

Every form of idle pastime and corruption is available at court. Courtiers constantly fear betrayal by poisoning or other means. All run after money and power, including merchants. Princes and rulers cannot rest because of many cares, and they are vulnerable to flattery, another form of poison Boaistuau describes in scathing terms. People in power, “les gens de bien,” spread injustice through the same purpose that Boaistuau himself denies fulfilling in his own writing, as he claims in the Preface to the Théâtre du monde: that is, the “office de censeurs et reformateurs de vices” (145) [office of censors and reformers of vices:

Ils accusent, ils espient la vie des autres: ils imposent nouveaux malefices, et quelquefois ne sont pas contents de faire perdre les biens, mais mesmes poursuivent la vie, et sont causes d’en faire conduire plusieurs au gibet, desquels la vie est innocente devant Dieu” (145).

[They accuse, they spy on the lives of others: they impose new instances of malevolence, and are the cause of so many being led to the gallows, whose life is innocent before God].

Instead of reducing vice, such people increas and perpetuate it, according to Boaistuau. One of the worst crimes for Boaistuau is the perversion of virtue through deception—hiding corruption and malice behind a façade of good character and worthy actions. Boaistuau seeks to demonstrate that as an observer and valid member of society, he is not deceived by hypocrisy, and apparently he derives satisfaction from revealing the truth through his writing, as well as through storytelling, so as to correct vices. This tendency,
though it is heavily moralized and based mainly on his readings in traditional sources, nonetheless could be an early modern antecedent of the inquisitive interest that drives the investigator or the social researcher. While Boaistuau perpetuates some of what came to be called “les idées recues” [received ideas], he also undermines others; e.g., the customary desirability of money, power, amorous pursuits, luxury, and beauty, the last of which he calls “une tour assaultée” (166) [a tower assaulted]. Instead of bringing well-being and satisfaction, such vanities produce only woes. A similar fate awaits the proud, the ambitious and the greedy. Boaistuau’s social commentary is not limited to those at the top of the hierarchy; he also comments on the masses, pointing out that people respect only a speaker with status (attained through wealth, by means of which one could purchase a title and thereby join the noblesse de robe):

Le pauvre crie, nul ne l’escoute: mais on demande qui il est.
Le riche parle, et tout le monde luy applaudist, et esleve ses parolles avec admiration jusques au ciel” (161).

[The poor man shouts, and no one listens to him: but one asks who he is. The rich man speaks, and everyone applauds him, and raises his words with admiration to heaven].

Popes and other lofty figures in the ecclesiastical hierarchy are characterized as fortunate; they come to power without struggle, bloodshed or military conquest, and their rule is called secure in comparison to unstable worldly power. They are affluent and honored by secular rulers. Boaistuau apostrophizes the reader:

Mais si tu veux bien consider la fin de la tragedie, tant s’en fault que tu les doives juger estre heureux ou leur porter envie, que mesmes tu les doibs plaindre ou avoir pitié d’eux (149).

52 Cf. Ch. 11 of Machiavelli’s Principe [The Prince], composed c. 1513 and published posthumously in 1527.
[But if you would like to consider the end of the tragedy, such is needed for this, that you must judge them to be happy or bear them envy, that still you must lament their lot or pity them].  

Following St. John Chrysostom, Boaistuau asserts that one ought to pity the popes because to fulfill the role of leading the Church is a heavy responsibility. The Pope is to be a “serf public, qui mesprise quasi son propre salut pour conserver celui de son prochain” (149) [a public servant, who nearly scorns his own salvation in order to protect that of his fellow]. Paradoxically, the exalted pontiff, the Vicar of Christ, is placed in the lowest role of servitude, just as Christ washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. Boaistuau lifts up those who suffer in abject misery by reminding readers of their divine souls created by God. Conversely, by means of the traditional typological comparison with Christ in the passage cited above, Boaistuau pulls down the Pope from his glorious seat so that he may humbly serve his constituents, rather than savoring the abundant power and luxury at his disposal. He cites Platina as a source for the lives of the popes, and reports: “vous en trouverez de si scandaleuses qu’il y a beaucoup de loups parmi ces pasteurs” (150) [you will find some among them so scandalous that there are many wolves among these pastors].

The clergy does not escape scathing treatment from Boaistuau’s satirical pen. Boaistuau implies that Christianity is in danger under such unstable circumstances, as the increasing tensions from 1559 onward leading to the religious wars between Catholics and Huguenots in France would confirm. In accord with longstanding

53 The notion of taking pity on popes would undermine an argument for Boaistuau being a Huguenot.

54 According to Simonin’s note 242, the source is Epist. ad Hebreos [Letter to the Hebrews], cap. 13, Homil. 34, P.G. 63, col. 233.

55 John 13:1-15. (The ritual Mandatum is observed on Maundy Thursday, as part of the Easter liturgy).

56 Baptista Platina of Cremona (1421-81), De vita et moribus summorum Pontificum [Concerning the Lives and Manners of the Supreme Pontiffs]. According to Simonin, this text was “une autorité équivoque” (see Simonin, ed, TM, note 245).
traditions of anticlerical conventions,\textsuperscript{57} Boaistuau condemns the priests’ decadence and taste for opulence, claiming that they prey on their flocks instead of taking care of them. Writing carefully so as not to implicate himself, Boaistuau reveals an awareness of the risk in discussing the subject of ecclesiastical corruption: “C’est aux mauvais auquelz je m’adresse: c’est aux vices et non point aux personnes” (153) [It is to the bad ones that I address myself: it is to vices and not to persons]. This statement precedes a section detailing the myriad sins of the priesthood,\textsuperscript{58} though Boaistuau is careful to praise the good, moral, and erudite clergy, and to avoid engaging in \textit{ad hominem} satire or slander. Thus piety alternates with traditional denunciation in \textit{laus et vituperatio}. Boaistuau’s mixed approach with the clergy allows aspects of his compilation to resonate with Catholics and Huguenot readers alike in a tense and politically charged milieu.

When humankind loses understanding of itself and its place, one consequence is the disruption of the natural order of things when God sends miseries: for example, a horde of bees takes over a house and sends the rightful occupants fleeing (201). The satirical topos of the \textit{monde à l’envers} [the world turned upside down] emerges through Boaistuau’s diatribes against hypocrisy, in which bad actions are named as good attributes of good character:

\begin{quote}
Car ceux qui sont iraconds et colères, bruslent en leurs passions:
qui meurdrissent l’un, et tuent l’autre, nous les appelons magnanimes, et forts, et disons qu’ils ont le point de honneur
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} On anticlericalism, see Dykema and Oberman, eds., \textit{Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe} (Leiden: Brill, 1993). For a concise history of anticlericalism, see José Sánchez, \textit{Anticlericalism: A Brief History} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972); Sánchez defines anticlericalism as a form of dissent in reference to the power of the clergy, and he distinguishes between ideological and pragmatic anticlericalism, noting that often boundaries are fluid (3-11). For anticlericalism in France, with emphasis on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Alec Mellor, \textit{Histoire de l’anticléricalisme français} (Tours: Mame, 1966).

\textsuperscript{58} Boaistuau writes: “Mais combien y a au contraire, de Prestres par le monde qui sont confitz en telle ignorance, qu’à peine peuvent ilz lire leur messe, . . . qui saçent mieulx courtizanner ou s’employer à quelque autre vanité [. . .] Bref, sont les vrayes sansues qui ne servent de rien qu’à tirer le sang et la substance des pauvres biens de l’église en pompes, delices, et excès, au lieu de maintenir les pauvres, et s’entretener la jeunesse aux ars liberaux et autres disciplines divines et humaines” (TM, 154-55).
en grande recommandation. Ceux qui séduisent plusieurs filles et femmes, et qui suivent l’amour lascif, nous appelons cela porter amitié. Ceux qui sont ambitieux, et qui par tous moyens illicites tachent à se faire grands en dignitez, nous les appelons graves, honorables, gens de menée, et d’exécution. Ceux qui sont avaritieux, et qui se font riches en brief temps, et qui deterrent leur prochain, par milles subtilitez et inventions, nous appelons cela en nostre vulgaire . . . estre bon mesnager (204-5).

[For those who are irascible and angry, burn in their passions: those who murder the one, and kill the other, we call them magnanimous, and strong, and we say that they are greatly recommended to have the high point of honor. Those who seduce a number of girls and women, and who follow lascivious love, we call that bearing friendship. Those who are ambitious, and who by every illicit means strive to make themselves great in dignity, we call them grave, honorable, leading people, and of great execution. Those who are avaricious, and who make themselves rich in a short time, and who hold back their neighbor, by a thousand subtleties and inventions, we call that in our vulgar tongue . . . to be a good manager of one’s affairs.]

Boaistuau illustrates the commonplace, derived from antiquity, that vice and virtue are close (cf. the Latin adage “Vicina sunt vitia virtutibus”).

59   Aristote observes in Book I of the Rhetoric that when one seeks to praise or blame a man, one identifies vicious or virtuous qualities that are close to those found in the man (such as when stupidity is identified with honesty, or a passionate and excitable character is considered frank, or rashness is named courage). Boaistuau indirectly borrows this idea for the Théâtre du monde, in order to comment on people’s distorted perceptions of one another. This leads him to comment, “Voilà comme nous preposterons toutes choses” (205). Préposter signifies to reverse or

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turn over, literally to put the first thing last (pre/before becomes post/after), which disturbs the proper order of things. Drawing upon his encyclopedic knowledge, Boaistuau himself reverses conventional worldly opinion through an alchemical and anatomical metaphor, while criticizing the avaricious: “l’or et l’argent [ne sont] autre chose qu’un vray excrement de la terre” (210) [gold and silver are none other than a true excrement of the earth]. He continues by naming three dangers, “les plus grands maquereaux de ce monde” [the three greatest enticements of this world] which are “liberté, jeunesse, richesse” (221) [liberty, youth, riches].

The passages from the Théâtre du monde cited above do not seek to elicit pity from readers, nor the restoration of a rigid moral rectitude, nor do they evoke the pathos of tragedy, but instead they conventionally present the bitter flavor of satire concerning the mores of Boaistuau’s society. What is the solution? What is to be done about the human condition? Despite the heavy presence of religious sources in his compilation, the reader is left with the impression that Boaistuau is not entirely satisfied with the ecclesiastical position on the human condition in the world and with the Christian exhortations to confess, pray and turn to faith in God for solace. If Boaistuau emphasizes the difficulty of discerning between virtue and vice in the human character, as well as the difficulty of assessing the clergy and valid doctrine in a time of religious uncertainty, then moral rectitude is a distant target indeed. The miseries in the Théâtre du monde are tinged with the shadow of doubt. This doubt, as well as compassion, emerges in Boaistuau’s satire of love, when Cupid strikes, people waste their lives due to what he calls love’s “mortelle poison”, “cruelle maladie”, and “affliction d’esprit”. In a parody of the Pygmalion myth, Boaistuau relates the story of a rich Athenian youth who fell in love with a public statue and made a fool of himself (219). In the context of Boaistuau’s acquired medical knowledge, we read that just as the cause of “ceste maladie” of love is in dispute, so

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61 Simonin claims that Boaistuau took this parody from Athenaeus and Mexía; see Simonin, TM, note 422. The Athenaeus reference is to Book 13, paragraph 605 of the Deipnosophistae; Athenaeus alludes to but does not recount the Ovidian story of Pygmalion; rather, it is Cleisophus of Selymbria and others whose stories are recounted by Athenaeus.
is the cure: astrologers, physicians, philosophers and others propose origins and solutions for the lovelorn, but none are definitive (214).

Boaistuau satirizes old age and death, which contrast with youth and beauty. He laments the body’s decay and final descent into corruption. This is followed by enumeration of the various shameful ways of dying, including illness and suffering, which conclude with “une charoigne vile et puante” (226) [a vile and foul-smelling corpse]. Here tragedy outweighs satire in Boaistuau’s text. This section is accompanied by a reminder that all souls face God’s judgment. However, Boaistuau also remarks that all the tombs, monuments and mausoleums in the world cannot disguise the ugliness of death. The passage presents a bitter commentary on the human yearning for status and renown in the face of the universal fate of mortals.

In this brief analysis, we have seen that Boaistuau includes satire within the mixed form of the Théâtre du monde, based on techniques of representation, diatribe, and incongruity. The fact that Boaistuau published the Théâtre du monde and the Bref discours de l’excellence et dignité de l’homme, both in 1558, each at cross-purposes with the other, constitutes an incongruous pairing in itself, an exploration via coincidentia oppositorum of the dichotomy of the traditional rhetorical categories of virtue and vice expounded through laus et vituperatio. The game is given away, however, by the greater length of Boaistuau’s discourse about miseries on his figurative world stage. The satire of writers like Rabelais or Erasmus is more complex, subversive and unconventional about notions of authority. In Boaistuau there is more indignation and force than subtle mockery or serio ludens. Boaistuau seeks to impose moral clarity on the turmoil that he perceives through his observation and reading. This includes the anticipation of just retribution at the Apocalypse for the sins, vices and corruption that he denounces throughout the book. But the vast spectacle of miseries accompanied by human vice and corruption escapes justice in the cornucopian theater of the world that Boaistuau evokes (divine justice not yet being imposed),
hence the writer-compilator’s response of satirizing such a world. Despite the fact Boaistuau has not composed an original text, still, satire is possible within the encyclopedic genre of the compilation. The disarray of worldly corruption corresponds well to the jumbled elements in Boaistuau’s text, forming a spatial satire within the heterogeneous form itself, a theater of fascinating disorder.

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**Appendix: Works by Pierre Boaistuau (1517-66), listed in chronological order**


*Histoires des amans fortunez,* 1558. Edited (and altered) by Boaistuau, from the unfinished nouvelles by Marguerite de Navarre (sister of François I), subsequently reedited by Claude Gruguet and published as the *Heptaméron* (1559). Boaistuau’s edition caused a scandal; it offended Jeanne d’Albret, who suppressed it because Marguerite de Navarre’s was not mentioned in the preface.

*Histoires Tragiques,* 1559. This was a translation and adaptation from the *Novelle* of Matteo Bandello (1485-1561), a Dominican friar.

*Carr, Richard A., ed. Histoires tragiques / Pierre Boaistuau. Paris : H. Champion (Société des textes français modernes), 1977.* This book was a commercial success, with five separate printings in 1559 alone, including a special printing dedicated to Queen Elizabeth. This work of Boaistuau is also known because story II, 9 from the *Novelle* of Matteo Bandello (1485-1561) was used by Shakespeare as a source for *Romeo and Juliet*. Bandello’s source for this story was Luigi da Porto (1485-1529), whose source in turn was Masuccio Salernitano (1410-75).

*Histoires Prodigieuses,* 1560-1582, in 5 volumes; an anonymous sixth appeared in 1594. On monsters. With François de Belleforest (1530-1583).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


LE THEATRE
DU MONDE, OUI IL
EST FAICT VN AMPE DISCOVRS
des miseres Humaines. Fait en Francois, par
P. Bosyfau, surnomme Launay, de nou-
ueullement traduit en Aleman, tresfu-
tile pour apprendre tant Aleman
que Francois.

Ein schauplatz oder spiegel
der Welt / darun weitewuffig ausges-
surt wirt vom Menschlichen Ellend. Gemache auff
Franzoyisch durch P. Bosyfau genant Launay / und
jetz erneulich mit Deutsch vorgelesen / vorans auf folglicher
so weit erouch als Franzoyisch zu lernen.

COLONIAE,
Apud Ioannem Gymnicum.
M. D. LXXXIII.
Cum Privilegio Caroli Maiori ad decennium,
“Hand Hand Shooke”:
Compassionate Touch in George Chapman’s Hero and Leander

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Chapman begins his continuation of Marlowe’s Hero and Leander by announcing that he intends to “censure the delights” which the lovers have enjoyed without the sanction of ceremony. However, the narrator does not maintain this attitude of stern judgment. As readers of Chapman’s Hero and Leander have often noticed, the narrator continuously shifts his tone, sometimes censuring the lovers and sometimes sympathizing with them. Chapman’s poem is thus as deeply concerned with the problem of appropriate compassion as it is with the containment of Eros. The narrator’s vacillation between censure and compassion can be fruitfully considered by examining early modern understanding of the passions as contagious. Compassion is a matter of being literally touched by the emotions of others. While Chapman argues that this powerful experience may overwhelm good judgment, he also defends it as useful and humanizing. Chapman portrays the ceremony of the Eucharist as gracing this precarious but essential experience of compassion.

George Chapman begins his continuation of Marlowe’s Hero and Leander by announcing that his version will take a sober, moralizing turn. In a tone “more harsh (at lest more hard) more grave and hie,” he intends to “censure the delights” which the lovers have enjoyed without the sanction of ceremony.\(^1\) The narrator does not maintain this attitude of stern judgment though. A few hundred lines into the story, softened by the sight of beauty in distress, he calls on

\(^1\) George Chapman, The Poems of George Chapman, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 3.1-10. All subsequent citations of Chapman’s poetry are from this edition. References denote section (where applicable) and line number.
the heavens to pity Hero (3.385). As readers of Chapman’s *Hero and Leander* have often noticed, the narrator continuously shifts his tone. Gerald Snare describes the poem as torn between a “moral and erotic voice fundamentally in conflict throughout, a conflict that is never settled.”

Other readers see the narrator as vacillating between censure and sympathy. D. J. Gordon comments that Chapman “both condemns and pities the lovers.”

John Huntington argues that Chapman ultimately champions pity, rejects censure, and questions the validity of ceremony: “in a universe controlled by violence and lacking any truly ceremonial principle, moral condemnation or approval is superfluous; pity is the only possible moral attitude.”

These readings highlight a conflict between the narrator’s censorious detachment and his sympathetic attachment to the lovers. I suggest that Chapman is working out a mean between these conflictive responses, a perspective that is neither coldly detached from, nor painfully immersed in, the feelings of others. He finds a useful model for appropriate compassion in ceremony, which he sees as beneficially shaping and channeling the passions rather than eliminating them.

Chapman’s perception of touch as both a sense experience and an emotion is central to this conflict and its potential resolution. For Chapman and his contemporaries, being touched was not simply a metaphor for compassion; they saw themselves as permeable to a range of influences, including emotions, which might pass from body to body. One was quite literally touched by another’s emotions.

While Chapman demonstrates that this intense


experience can overwhelm good judgment, he rejects the alternative of an untouchable, censuring distance. He argues that sharing in the emotions of others is also a humanizing, necessary foundation for communities. Chapman’s *Hero and Leander* portrays the ceremony of the Eucharist as directing the experience of touch to these good ends, gracing the precarious but essential experience of emotional contagion.

Early modern accounts of the passions depict their potentially overwhelming force and contagious nature. Passions were thought to be incited and furthered by agents moving through and between permeable selves. In *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1604), Thomas Wright explains this process:

> When we imagine any thing, presently the purer spirits, flocke from the brayne, by certaine secret channels to the heart, where they pitch at the dore, signifying what an object was presented, convenient or disconvenient for it. The heart immediately bendeth, either to prosecute it, or to eschew it: and the better to effect that affection, draweth out other humours to helpe him, and so in pleasure concure great store of pure spirits; in paine and sadnesse, much melancholy blood.

Wright explains that passion-motivating spirits flow through channels in the body and set in motion its liquid humors. Emotion, experienced as the physical flow of spirits and humors, was considered both powerful and contagious. As Bruce Smith puts it, this “rush of humors” was so strong “that reason or judgment could be, quite literally, overwhelmed.” The spirits which move the humors may

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7 On analogy between humors and the workings of the passions see Paster, *Humoring*, 150-51. For the liquid nature of the passions, see also *Humoring*, 1-6 and *The Body Embarrassed*, 7-13.

not only course through the channels of a single body, but may flow from person to person or from a wider environment, causing the transfer of emotion from one person to another.\(^9\)

The Renaissance Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino’s account of emotional contagion offers a way of understanding how passion works in *Hero and Leander*. According to Ficino, erotic attachment is facilitated by spirits carried in the bloodstream, which can send out rays through the eyes. An observer can contract love and various other infections borne along with these rays. In the case of erotic attraction, the rays are absorbed into a vaporous spiritual substance that carries the beloved’s image through the eyes and into the heart of the viewer, infecting him or her with passionate attachment.\(^10\) The observer is literally invaded by the substance of the beloved, taking on his or her “colors, or features, or feelings, or gestures.”\(^11\) Chapman’s characters are vulnerable to this intense experience of emotional permeability.

Mood-altering spirits, traveling through watery media, spread emotional contagion throughout *Hero and Leander*. When Venus learns that Hero has not only fallen from her chaste service to the goddess but also attempted to dissimulate her fall, the environment mirrors her reaction. Venus’s anger generates dark clouds whose impenetrable darkness impedes her attempt to return to the heavens until Apollo dispels them as rain. This rain falls in potent, piercing drops that infect bystanders: “In every drop a torturing Spirit flew, / It pierst so deeply, and it burnd so blew” (4.343-44). Venus’s contagious chagrin spreads to her surroundings and showers those near her with similar pain.

Similarly, Hero and Leander infect their surroundings, including the narrator, with emotions that travel through liquid

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\(^9\) See note 5.


\(^11\) Ficino, 164-65.
When Leander returns from seducing Hero, white roses appear to spring from the water dripping from his body. The narrator remarks on the instantaneous transformation of “all objects that in compasse came / Of any sense he had” (3.88-89). Leander’s amorous mood and beautiful presence fill his surroundings: “Love-blest Leander was with love so filled, / that love to all that toucht him he instilled” (3.84-85). This love-filled sentence suggests the narrator too has been infected and transformed by his exposure to Leander’s emotions.

The narrator absorbs not only Leander’s amorous mood, but also Hero’s sorrowful tears. As the sorrowing Hero shrouds herself in her cloak, the narrator comments, “Yet might an imitating eye well see, / How fast her cleere teares melted on her knee” (3.307-08). An “imitating eye” suggests mimesis, describing how the artist carefully observes Hero in order to imitate or paint her. This imitation is not a detached recreation of Hero’s likeness, but the artist’s reenactment of Hero’s emotion. Infected by Hero’s tears, the narrator also weeps along with her, becoming like her. The Renaissance art theorist Lomazzo describes pity as this kind of imitation: pity “causeth weeping and hollowe eies; bringing the bodie by a certaine imitation, unto the same passions wherewith it is affected. So that the mercifull man conceaveth the same passions which the poore & grieved do.”

Like Lomazzo, Chapman perceives pity as an experience in which one mirrors the actions and emotions of another who is suffering.

Chapman is wary of how identification with another may overwhelm judgment. Admiring the lovely Leander, the narrator moralizes “love is sweet and faire in every thing” (3.81). When Leander is out of his immediate sight and the narrator contemplates Hero’s desolation, he revises this sympathetic judgment. His

conquest seems more forceful than sweet: he has “made Mars his Cupid” (3.211). As the narrator describes the weeping Hero, he similarly absorbs her mood, and his voice becomes difficult to distinguish from Hero’s. When Hero decides to dissimulate her sin, an italicized, aphoristic phrase sums up her conclusion: “Beautie in heaven and earth this grace doth win, / It supples rigor, and it lessens sin” (3.395-96). These lines occur at a transitional point between Hero’s interior monologue and narrative commentary. While the italicized phrases generally appear to be the narrator’s moralizing comments on the action of the poem, it is difficult to attribute this saying definitively to either the narrator or to Hero. Proximity to the weeping Hero momentarily infects the narrator who not only weeps with her, but identifies with her morally suspect thinking for a moment. The narrator then pulls back to criticize a conclusion that results from Hero’s “sharpe wit, her love, her secrecie, / Trouping together” (3.397-98). Chapman advises his readers that being touched by, and thereby identifying with, another’s feelings may interfere with good judgment.

Touch is seen as impeding good judgment partly because it is viewed as the lowest form of sense perception, allied with a deluded attachment to the merely material world. Chapman alludes to the myth of Narcissus to criticize the sensual nature of Hero’s attachment to Leander. Hero resembles Narcissus when she attempts to console herself by embroidering an image of Leander swimming. She finds her illusion so convincing that she reaches out to embrace it.

In working his fayre neck she did so grace it
She still was working her owne armes t’imbrace it:
That, and his shoulders, and his hands were seen
Above the streame, and with a pure Sea greene
She did so quently shadow every lim,
All might be seene beneath the wave to swim. (3.70-75)

Hero’s attempt to embrace an image of her lover swimming recalls Narcissus’s captivation by an image reflected in a pool. Ovid describes Narcissus as acknowledging the illusory nature of his reflection but still longing for touch: “Still may it be mine to gaze on what I may
not touch, and by that gaze feed my unhappy passion.”¹³ Narcissus wastes away, losing his own substance as he longs for an intangible image. Like Narcissus, Hero pathetically longs for an image that she cannot actually embrace.

Chapman draws on a Neoplatonic interpretation of the myth of Narcissus, which criticizes touch as a medium of merely sensual, deluded love. In his Commentary on the Symposium, Ficino argues that Narcissus fails to recognize his true “substance and character.” Instead, “the soul admires in the body, which is unstable and in flux, like water, a beauty which is the shadow of the soul itself.”¹⁴ Chapman was familiar with this passage and versified it in his poem “A Hymne to Our Saviour on the Crosse” (1612),¹⁵ lamenting that the soul, too often enamored of bodily beauty, thus forgets its true, spiritual identity:

Hence came the cruell fate that Orpheus
Sings of Narcissus: who being amorous
Of his shade in the water (which denotes
Beautie in bodies, that like water flotes)
Despisd himselfe, his soule, and so let fade
His substance for a never-purchast shade. (235-40)

Hero’s vain attempt to embrace a watery image of beauty makes her a type of Narcissus. She tries to embrace the image of a beloved other; its physical beauty consists of shadows rather than substance.

From a Neoplatonic perspective, Hero’s longing to touch Leander puts her on the lowest rung of the ladder of love. In Castiglione’s widely influential Book of the Courtier, Pietro Bembo


¹⁴ Ficino, 140-41.

describes a hierarchy of love that stretches from sensuous desire for physical beauty to spiritual union with the divine. Among the lowly senses, touch is inferior to sight and hearing. Lovers who try to grasp beauty will be disappointed: one cannot “by any means enjoy beauty nor satisfy the desire that it incites in our souls by touch.”

Chapman illustrates this kind of delusion in his poem *Ovid’s Banquet of Sense*. Failing to appreciate the more sublime delights of hearing and seeing Corinna, Ovid tumbles down the Neoplatonic ladder of love by insisting on touching his beloved. Raymond Waddington argues that Chapman compares Ovid’s desire for physical and emotional proximity with the experience of viewing an anamorphic statue of Niobe. As Niobe’s features dissolve into a confused mass when the viewer comes too close, so Ovid’s judgment is corrupted when he tries to get too close to Corinna: “If Ovid then gets too close, commits his presumptuous act, he then loses perspective, the sensory data overwhelm his intelligence, and he perceives only nonsense.”

According to Waddington, *Ovid’s Banquet of Sense* depicts Chapman’s “drive to disengage from a too immediate involvement in order to arrive at a dispassionate decision.” In *Hero and Leander*, Chapman also demonstrates that judgment can suffer when one comes close enough to touch or by touched by another. Hero’s attempt to grasp a mere image of Leander shows her immersion in a sensuous and misdirected passion. Similarly, when the narrator comes too close to Hero, he loses his ability to make reasonable judgments.

However, Chapman’s does not simply condemn touch. His account of Hero’s attempt to embrace her own artwork reflects not only Neoplatonic distrust of bodily beauty, but also a more ambivalent attitude towards touch. This passage mixes praise and apprehension about new techniques in the visual arts, which create...
the illusion of three-dimensional palpability on a one-dimensional surface. Hero is a skillful artist who achieves this lifelike effect: “she did so queintly shadow every lim, / All might be seene beneath the wave to swim” (3.74–75). Hero’s “shadow[ing]” is a technique of shading that evoked some apprehension about the creation of lifelike illusion. In his preface to his translation of Giovanni Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’Arte della Pittura, Scultura et Architettura*, Richard Haydocke comments that perspectival art creates an illusion “whereby the unskilfull eye is so often cozened and deluded, taking counterfeit creatures for true and naturall.”

Leon Battista Alberti’s foundational and influential treatise *On Painting* describes perspective as accommodating desire for touch; however, he also warns the artist and viewer against indecorously indulging this desire, mistaking shadow for substance. Alberti introduces his treatise, which includes a substantial section on the art of perspective, with an allusion to Narcissus, whom he presents as the founder of painting: “I used to tell my friends that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus . . . . What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?” Alberti allows the artist to embrace the subject, but he also warns the artist and viewer to distinguish between illusion and reality, restraining desire with decorum and reason. In his *Apologhi*, Alberti warns artists or viewers to respect the illusory nature of their contact with the beloved subject of the painting. In one of these parables, a fish attempts to leap into the trees “painted” on the surface of its


21 Alberti’s works were available, though rare, in sixteenth-century England. *On Painting* was owned by John Dee and Inigo Jones, and perhaps cited by Sidney. See Gent, 26, 68, 72, 80.

pond (“arbores pictas in fontis superficie”). The reflection disappears as the fish breaks the surface, provoking the trees to comment, “Are you so foolish that even pretend trees flee you?”

With this Horatian allusion to the indecorum of fishes swimming through the branches of trees, the tale warns artist and viewer against mistaking the image painted on the surface of the canvas for palpable reality.

Chapman’s connection of Hero with Narcissus suggests that he is thinking on similar lines. By portraying her as an artist deluded by her own illusion, he deepens his critique of the sense of touch as a source of misinformation, and he may sharpen his warning against the way passion can overwhelm judgment.

With the allusions to perspectival art that run through this passage, Chapman argues that the senses and passions create illusions. However, he also celebrates the ability to create this lifelike illusion. He demonstrates that sense and passion may cloud judgment, but also champions the experience of feeling what another feels. The sixteenth-century art theorist Lomazzo writes that an artist should strive to achieve an appearance of “motion . . . that comeliness, and grace in the proportion and disposition of a picture, which is also called the spirite and life of a picture.”

In his preface to Ovid’s Banquet of Sense, Chapman echoes this passage to describe how shadowing imparts this enargeia or vitality to an artwork:

> It serves not a skilfull Painters turne, to draw the figure of a face onely to make knowne who it represents; but hee must lynn, give luster, shaddow, and heightening; which though ignorants will esteeme spic’d and too curious, yet such as have the judiciall perspective, will see it hath motion, spirit and life.

A perspectival image offers a deluding illusion of depth and


25 Haydocke, tr., 1.23.

palpability, which can deceive the unwary. In this passage, however, Chapman argues that the truly judicious are not those who simply see through the illusion, but those who appreciate how the artist breathes “motion, spirit, and life” into a work. Endowing a lifeless object with vitality is both a sign of virtuosity and a desirable exercise in empathy.

Chapman thus offers opposing perspectives on Hero’s affectionate attempt to touch her creation; she may be overpowered by the delusions of sense or she may masterfully endow a lifeless substance with lifelike qualities. Ultimately though, it may be his readers, rather than Hero, that Chapman subjects to judgment. Hero’s fear of hurting her image of Leander seems comically delusional: “in her strength of thought, / she feared she pricked Leander as she wrought” (4.57-58). Nevertheless, the narrator exhorts readers to exercise imaginative participation in the sufferings of others: “They double life that dead things griefs sustayne: / They kill that feele not their friends living payne” (4.62-63). Chapman’s narrator defends Hero and criticizes readers who cannot feel what others feel.

Hero’s attempt to embrace her image of Leander is thus open to conflicting readings. She may show a sensual attachment that the Neoplatonic distrust of touch would condemn. On the other hand, she displays a laudable power to create the appearance of life and to evoke feeling. Chapman requires his readers to try out these various and conflicting points of view just as an anamorphic image requires viewers to experiment with different locations until they find one that makes the image intelligible. Having explored a range of attitudes toward sense and feeling and having thus dislodged readers from their assumptions about them, Chapman invites his readers to consider a “judiciall perspective” that represents a feeling judgment. While he argues that sense and passion can delude, he does not reject them. Indeed, he warns that attempting to suppress emotion is arrogant and culpably uncharitable.

Chapman warns against placing unwarranted confidence in one’s ability to control emotion. The narrator praises Hero and
exhorts other ladies to take up embroidery in order to manage their unruly passions:

That their plied wits in numbred silks might sing
Passions huge conquest, and their needels leading
Affection prisoner through their own-built citties,
Piniond with stories and Arachnean ditties (4.118-21).

The phrase “passions huge conquest” reads ambiguously, suggesting not only mastery of passion, but also subjection to it. An embroiderer or poet who imagines she has mastered affection may actually be passion’s prisoner. Chapman’s allusion to Arachne, metamorphosed into a spider for daring to match her weaving skill with Minerva’s, criticizes excessive confidence. Chapman’s praise of “Arachnean ditties” foreshadows the ultimate metamorphosis of Hero rather than celebrating her triumph over emotion. Venus answers Hero’s creation of Leander’s image by creating Eronusis, who wears a robe that outdoes Arachne’s weaving: “never was Arachnes web so glorious” (4.302). With this ironic celebration of the triumphs of art, Chapman warns that passion cannot easily be controlled, at least not by human efforts.

Chapman not only questions whether passions can be controlled but whether they should be suppressed. Like many of his contemporaries, Chapman criticizes Stoic and Epicurean ideals of detached tranquility which appear to conflict with Christian notions of pity. For instance, in his commentary on Seneca’s De clementia, Calvin disputes his assertion that clear judgment comes from a mind free from the perturbation of pity. According to Seneca, “pity is a sickness of the mind brought about by the sight of the distress

of others, or sadness caused by the ills of others which it believes come undeservedly. But no sickness befalls the wise man. His mind is serene and nothing can happen to becloud it.”

Seneca argues that the wise man will assist others without becoming emotionally involved in their suffering: “He will bring relief to another’s tears, but will not add his own.” Calvin rejects such detachment as arrogant: “the Stoics would like people to judge their ‘wise man,’ as if he as it were from his lofty citadel looks down on Fortune’s game in human affairs, and considers his own and others’ misfortunes have nothing to do with him.” Like Calvin, Chapman criticizes the validity of judgment obtained from the lofty fortress.

Chapman’s account of Leander’s death portrays the dangers of immersion in passion, but also critiques detachment from his suffering. Leander battles “Seas mixt with the skie,” which hurl him “as high as heaven” (6.182, 184). Leander’s final struggle with the towering waves that overcome him emblematizes the way he has allowed his passions to exceed bounds of decorum and reason. The narrator’s comment on Leander’s situation: “Blisse not in height doth dwell” (6.184) may thus censure his untrammeled emotion, his submersion by towering waves of passion-driven humors. However, Chapman may also direct this criticism at the censuring narrator or reader who assumes a position of lofty detachment from Leander’s suffering.

This association of bliss, height, and observing someone else’s struggles in a stormy ocean evokes Lucretius’s philosopher


29 “Succeret alienis lachrymis, non accedet.” Calvin’s Commentary, 370, 371.

30 “Hac re potissimum sapientem sum censeri volunt Stoici, si velut ex editissima arce fortunam spectet in rebus humanis ludentem, & nihil ad se pertinere casus suos aut alienos reputet.” Calvin’s Commentary, 371-73.

31 On the commonplace of passion as a raging sea, see for instance Smith, 36 and Paster, Humoring, 2.
who, freed from superstition, looks down in self-congratulatory bliss on the errors of less happy mortals:

Pleasant it is, when on the great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another’s great tribulation: not because any man’s troubles are a delectable joy, but to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant … . But nothing is more delightful than to possess lofty sanctuaries serene, well fortified by the teachings of the wise, whence you may look down upon others and behold them all astray, wandering abroad and seeking the path of life.32

While Lucretius points out that there is no pleasure in witnessing the suffering of others, he does invite readers to indulge in complacent contemplation of their own escape from suffering.

Chapman counters Lucretius’s definition of “blissful” [suave] detachment. In Euthymiae Raptus, Chapman argues that painful emotion may actually be pleasure. “Griefe, that dischargeth Conscience, is delight” (195). Such grief includes compassion for the suffering of others. In Hero and Leander, the narrator’s aphorism, “Blisse not in height doth dwell,” first appears to offer detached judgment on the unblissful heights that menace Leander, but actually argues that true bliss does not come from lofty isolation from the struggles of other human beings.

For Chapman the ideal response to suffering is modeled by divinity’s compassionate descent to share in earthly concerns. The deities who appear in Chapman’s Hero and Leander do not observe the play of human suffering from the lofty height enjoyed by Lucretius’s philosopher or by the unconcerned divinities he imagines living far from mortals. Chapman’s gods descend “downe to the Destinies” (5.22) to plead for mercy. Chapman contrasts these compassionate gods with hard-hearted humanity. When the gods are unable to save Hero and Leander, the narrator comments that they

are “pierst with our humane miseries more then men” (5.25-26). Gods who are permeable to the suffering of others offer a pattern for humanity. Commenting on his translation of the *Iliad*, Chapman justifies the weeping of the Greek heroes because Christ also wept. Such weeping is “a president of great and most perfect humanitie.”

In *Eugenia* (1614), an eulogy for Lord Russell, Chapman argues Christ’s sorrow for Lazarus is a pattern for human compassion: “Oh why wept mans great Patterne for his friend, / But these affections, gravely to commend?” (1014-15). Rather than being a weakness, the ability to grieve can be both godly and humanizing.

In *Hero and Leander*, Chapman represents the passions of erotic attraction and compassion as contagious, passed from the sufferer to an observer who may be literally touched by spirits that travel through gaze or tears. These contagious passions can be damaging; the narrator makes mistaken judgments when he is overcome by sympathy or attraction. However, Chapman rejects the alternative of detached, distanced judgment, and he praises contagious sympathy for others. Ceremony bridges this apparently conflictive stance on the passions; it shapes and sanctifies the otherwise perilous experience of emotional contagion, transforming it into a benevolent bond.

Chapman frames his poem with references to ceremony. Near the beginning he gives a detailed description of the goddess Ceremony, who admonishes Leander for his neglect of ritual. The concluding section features the story of Hymen and Eucharis, whose names allude to core sacraments in the English church. These ceremonies give decorous shape to the senses and passions.

Chapman’s understanding of ceremony as a gracing of the passions reflects contemporary debate in the English church. One year before the printing of *Hero and Leander*, Richard Hooker published the fifth book of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, defending the church of England against reformers who perceived its sacraments as idolatrous. D. J. Gordon’s foundational essay

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on *Hero and Leander* demonstrates that Hooker’s defense offers a useful perspective on how ceremony functions in Chapman’s poem. While Gordon does not discuss the Eucharist, his analysis offers insight into how Chapman sees ceremony as shaping the passions into decorous and beneficent forms.

Gordon begins his discussion of ceremony by analyzing its first appearance in the poem, where Ceremony descends from Heaven to rebuke Leander for neglecting her rites.

The Goddesse Ceremonie, with a Crowne
Of all the stars, and heaven with her descended,

...  
And in a chaine, compact of eares and eies,
She led Religion, all her bodie was
Cleere and transparent as the purest glasse:
For she was all presented to the sence (3.112-13, 116-19).

Gordon demonstrates that Ceremony’s chain of “eares and eies” can be clarified by turning to Hooker, who argues that Ceremony edifies by moving the affections and stirring the senses:

Now men are edified, when either their understanding is taught somewhat whereof in such actions it behoveth all men to consider or when their hearts are moved with any affection suitable thereunto; when their minds are in any sort stirred up unto that reverence, devotion, attention. [U]nto this purpose not only speech but sundry sensible means besides have always been thought necessary . . . .

In *Hero and Leander* Ceremony’s appeal to ear and eye sets in motion a powerful rush of spirits that flow to the heart and incite action. Ceremony departs, having literally “pierst Leander’s heart” (3.155); he immediately resolves to remedy his fault by marrying Hero. Ceremony thus makes a beneficial use of the powerful rush of the emotions, turning them towards a decorous expression. The goddess brings heavenly order to earth by employing sense and

passion as necessary and effective channels to the heart.

Ceremony works through sense and passion to motivate good actions; it also artfully and decorously shapes desire. In his description of the goddess Ceremony, Chapman associates her with decorum and grace. By the light of her eyes, “Moralitie and Comeliness / Themselves in all their sightly figures dresse” (3.135-36). Citing George Puttenham, Gordon points out that “comeliness” or decorum was an all-embracing criterion of the appropriate and beautiful that was relevant to “the conduct of social intercourse in all its aspects of dress, speech, action, and creation.”35 The passage Gordon quotes from Puttenham defines “comeliness” as “good grace,” a key quality that Chapman associates with Ceremony.36 Accompanied by the Hours and Graces (3.142), Ceremony reproves Leander’s untimely and excessive passion, his “bluntnes in his violent love” (145-46).

[She] tolde him how poore was substance without rites,
   Like bils unsignd, desires without delites;  
   Like meates unseasond; like ranke corne that growes 
   On Cottages, that none or reapes or sowes: 
   Not being with civill forms confirm’d and bounded, 
   For humane dignities and comfortes founded: 
   But loose and secret all their glories hide, 
   Feare fils the chamber, darknes decks the Bride (3.147-154).

According to Chapman, Ceremony puts bounds on passion, potentially a chaotic force. Her “civill forms” provide a basis for civilized, communal life in contrast to nature unredeemed and to secret, singular passion. These bounds of Ceremony do not eliminate passion, but grace it. Under Ceremony’s direction, dress is “So orderd that it still excites desire, / And still gives pleasure freenes to aspire” (3.55-56). Ceremony shapes and refines desire with grace-conferring art.

35 Gordon, 112.
Gordon’s discussion of ceremony in *Hero and Leander* focuses on marriage; however, his ideas about how ceremony shapes passions can also be applied to understanding how the Eucharist works in the poem.37 As marriage hallows and stabilizes erotic desire, so the Eucharist graces passionate pity and sanctifies the lowly sense of touch. This ceremony thus offers a model of decorous compassion both for the narrator and the poem’s readers.

Near the end of *Hero and Leander*, Chapman links the Eucharist with marriage. The goddess Teras tells a story of the marriage of Hymen and Eucharis, which contrasts with the tragically precipitate romance of Hero and Leander. The tale exemplifies love sanctioned by ceremony. It also presents a union of marriage and communion, which demonstrates how ceremony decorously shapes both Eros and compassion.

Among the many trials that test the lovers, Eucharis and her friends are captured by pirates. Chapman compares the weeping friends to mourners at a wake who let their tears fall into a shared bowl of wine:

> The golden boale drinks teares out of their eine,  
> As they drinke wine from it; and round it goes,  
> Each helping other to relieve their woes. (194-96)

Like the rain shower that embodies Venus’s chagrin, the water Leander shakes from his body, or Hero’s tears, the cup of wine mixed with tears is a liquid medium for emotional contagion. Unlike these instances, though, this experience of shared pain relieves rather than increases sorrow. Chapman’s image of “mutuall raies” that pass between the sympathetic friends presents passionate attraction, which has been made graceful and decorous.

> So cast these virgins beauties mutuall raies,  
> One lights another, face the face displeases;  
> Lips by reflexion kist, and hand hand shooke,  
> Even by the whitenes each of other tooke. (5.197-200)

37 See Gordon, 110-16. For a discussion of how the ceremony of marriage functions as a symbol for social order in *Hero and Leander*, see Waddington, 161-70.
This image of shared sorrow is strikingly specular. The women’s “lips by reflexion kiss.” Doubling of “face” and “hand” in the phrases “face the face displaies” and “hand hand shooke” creates the image of mirrored hands and faces. The beneficial, mutual illumination shared by the friends may allude to passages in Dante’s *Purgatorio* and Spenser’s *Amoretti* which depict a lover’s progress from painful, narcissistic frustration to sanctified love. Like Eucharis and her friends, Dante’s hopeful souls in Purgatory mirror a love that increases in power through reflection: “and the more souls there are that are enamored there above, the more there are for loving well, and the more love is there, and like a mirror one reflects to the other.” Spenser’s *Amoretti* (1595) charts the lover’s progress from sensual, self-absorption to a love that harmonizes human and divine love. He describes this love as a beneficial reflection: “Yet since your light hath once enlumined me, / with my reflex yours shall increased be.” Like Dante and Spenser, Chapman transmutes the narcissistic gaze into a graced and beneficent illumination.

The transformative and healing gaze shared by the friends is intertwined with touch. Their gaze is a decorous and purified version of the exchange of spirits that occurs in erotic attraction and that makes looking a means of touch. While seeing their reflections in each other, these women experience a decorous touch denied to the frustrated Narcissus: “Lips by reflexion kist, and hand hand shooke.” Narcissus wastes away, longing for his illusory, untouchable reflection. Hero pathetically attempts to embrace her embroidered image of Leander. Eucharis and her friends meet with palpable, sympathetic flesh when they reach out to each other.

Chapman’s portrayal of this graceful, decorous touch bridges extremes in contemporary dispute about the nature of the Eucharist.


While Catholics might find a tangible presence in the Eucharist, Protestants tend to understand this presence in figurative ways.\textsuperscript{40} As John Staines has demonstrated, there was a connection between how early modern theologians thought about a divine presence in this rite and how they perceived the workings of compassion. He argues that Protestants are simultaneously rejecting the Catholic doctrine that Christ is literally present in the Eucharist and representations of compassion as a communicable, bodily experience.\textsuperscript{41} Chapman’s depiction of the Eucharist parallels that of theologians who negotiate a stance that falls between extremes, who see the Eucharist as including a graced and beneficial, if not exactly literal, contact between divinity and human or as the site of a benevolent contagion that spreads compassion among the members of a congregation.\textsuperscript{42}

Hooker describes the Eucharist as a medium for spiritual benefits conveyed through touch: “with touching it sanctifieth.”\textsuperscript{43} This description is left open; he does not clarify exactly what is touching. While not specifying a bodily contact with divinity through the sacramental bread and wine, Hooker maintains a notion of holy touch. What he means by this rather vague account of sanctifying contact could be more fully understood by referring to his description of the “sensible touch” of godly compassion. In his fifth book of \textit{Laws}, devoted to a discussion of ceremony, Hooker


\textsuperscript{41} Staines,101.


writes that God experiences a “feelinge pitie” for human beings. The incarnation renders this divine pity in a tangible form; it makes possible “intercession to god for synners and [the ability to] exercise dominion over all men with a true, a naturall and a sensible touch of mercie.” The sanctifying touch experienced in the Eucharist, like the incarnation, is a medium for divine grace and compassion.

This notion of sanctifying touch partially illuminates how Chapman might see the Eucharist as a beneficent contagion. John Jewell’s “Homilie of the Worthie Receiving and Reverend Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ” could serve as an even closer gloss for Chapman’s image of friends communicating compassion through their clasped hands and gazes. Jewell describes a communicable compassion spread throughout a tightly-knit community that sees themselves reflected in one another. According to Jewell, the Eucharist unites a congregation in a “strait knot of charitie.” The members are instructed to see themselves in others, to regard their “neyghbours health of soule, wealth, commoditie and pleasure as [their] owne.” This rite evokes a benevolent identification with others that promotes their well being. The Eucharist sets in motion “the large spreading abroad of brotherly kindnesse with many other sundry graces of God.” The congregation experiences a decorous and graced contagion of fellow feeling.

Jewell describes the Eucharist as conferring grace on participants. This rite brings them “sundry graces of God,” “marveilous graces,” and “heavenlye graces.” Through heavenly grace, ceremony also transforms and shapes communicable

44 Hooker, Book 5, section 51.1, page 211.
46 Jewell, 403.
47 Jewell, 400, 401.
passion. Chapman conflates this heavenly grace with the graces of civilization. Eucharis’s name, which literally translates as “good grace,” alludes both to a rite of communion and to Puttenham’s “good grace” of decorum. With their linked hands and gazes, Eucharis and her friends also evoke images of the Graces, typically pictured as three women who stand in a circle and clasp hands. This image portrays a sharing of benefits and gratitude which makes civilization possible.  

Image including more than the traditional three women would have been available to Chapman in the work of the sixteenth-century mythographer Vincenzo Cartari. Cartari’s Le Imagini includes an image of four graces and an explanation of how they emblematize the graceful bonds of community.

So the Graces keep human beings together, because the benefits which human beings do by turns for each other, are the reason that they are dear and gracious to each other, whence they are joined by the beautiful knot of friendship, without which no doubt humans would be much inferior to the other animals, and cities would become caves or rather not exist.


50 Cartari 559-61. D. J. Gordon argues that Vincenzo’s Cartari’s Le Imagini is the source for Chapman’s images of the four winds and of Venus’s dove-drawn chariot and his inspiration for Eronusis (104-05).

51 “Così le ratie tengono i mortali insieme raccolti, perché i beneficii, che à vicenda si fanno gli huomini l’un con l’altro, sono cagione, che l’uno all’altro è caro e grato, onde stanno congiunti insieme del bel nodo della amicitia; senza la quale non è dubbio alcuno che gli huomini sarebbono inferiori di gran lunga à gli altri animali, e le città diverrebono spelonche, anzi pure non sarebbono” (Cartari 556). My translation.
The Graces symbolize a beneficent contagion, a flow of kindness and benefits that unites a community. Conducting compassion through linked hands, Chapman’s young women figure both Jewell’s “strait knot of charitie” and Cartari’s “beautiful knot of friendship.” With this conflation of decorum and heavenly grace, Chapman distinguishes their communicable compassion from turbulent, judgment-corrupting passions. Eucharis and her companions set in motion a flow of compassion that binds human communities into a harmonious whole.

In *Hero and Leander*, Chapman portrays his characters’ hearts and bodies as permeable to the joys and sufferings of others. They experience intense, disquieting vulnerability to emotions that can corrupt their judgment. Chapman demonstrates that his narrator errs when literally touched by the emotions of the lovers. However, he argues that the narrator is also mistaken in his attempts at untouched, censuring judgment. Chapman defends ceremony as a mean between these contrasting, equally erring extremes; it redirects, rather than eliminates, the powerful experience of touch. The ceremony of the Eucharist channels a flow of sympathy, shaping it into a decorous and civilizing charity. This beneficial touch communicates compassion and unifies communities. Although Chapman begins the poem with a call to censure, he actually champions this sanctified ability to feel what others feel: “Ah, nothing doth the world with mischieve fill, / But want of feeling one anothers ill” (5.25-28).
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Thomas Carew’s masque Coelum Britannicum, performed at Whitehall on Shrove Tuesday of 1634, deploys an image of conjugal perfection in order to codify a fiction of national union. Not only are Charles I and Henrietta Maria models of moral and political comportment powerful enough to reform the profligate court of Jove, their harmonious marriage also provides the inspiration for reconciliation between England, Scotland, and Ireland. In order to assert this fiction of unification, the masque invokes images of sexual transgression, symbolically enacts their removal, and equates the strength of Britain with the absence of the deviant monarch, James I. Yet by summoning the figure of Ganymede as a source of moral contamination within Jove’s court, Coelum Britannicum invokes the troubling specter of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, whose influence within the royal bedchamber continued to inform representations of manipulative counselors and vulnerable kings long after his death. Although the masque’s treatment of unification demands that figures who reinforce Charles I’s political authority replace those who represent moral and cultural transgression, the text’s apparent substitute, Henrietta Maria of France, functions not as antidote to the sodomitical favorite, but rather as an equally transgressive figure that the masque struggles to contain.

Thomas Carew’s masque Coelum Britannicum, performed at Whitehall on Shrove Tuesday of 1634, presents Charles I and Henrietta Maria as such powerful exemplars of civic, sexual, and religious purity that they inspire the reformation of one of the most profligate of classical figures: Jove. This image of the virtuous royal couple depends on a ritual cleansing of Jove’s court and his satisfactory reunion with his estranged wife, Juno, which is confirmed for us by the recently installed plaque reading “CARLOMARIA” on the immortal couple’s bedchamber door.¹

Yet the masque’s depiction of Jove’s transformation, enacted partly through the banishment of Ganymede from his bedchamber, recalls the frequent associations between this mythic coupling and an historical pairing familiar to the viewers of the performance: James I and his final favorite, George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham. By invoking the figure of Ganymede as a source of moral contamination (albeit one of many), the text introduces anxieties about the relationship between the two Stuart courts, which are linked not only by the familial relationship of James and Charles, but also through the continued political alliance of Charles and Buckingham after his father’s death. Performed six years after Buckingham’s assassination, Coelum Britannicum attempts to renounce the figure of Ganymede, replacing him with the figure of the reconciled wife (Juno/Henrietta Maria), who is eventually secured her rightful place at her royal husband’s side.

Carew’s panegyric to his monarchs, with its emphasis on heterosexual harmony and the absence of extramarital deviance, also functions as a model for the “marriage” of England with two unruly consorts, Scotland and Ireland, and promotes an image of England’s gentle mastery over its internal colonies. Rather than deploy a classical analogy to promote unification over dissent, the final section of the masque constructs a distinctly English historical scene in which the landscape moves from the uncivilized world of the ancient Britons, described as “wild Inhabitants” (873), to the civilized community of “moderne Heroes” (859) over which Charles allegedly presides. Whereas the first two-thirds of the masque advances civic morality over sexual unruliness (1-842),

2 While Carew’s theatrical representation of his royal patrons has received critical attention, few scholars have addressed the masque’s later preoccupation with the unification of the realm, let alone how the moral focus of the earlier section works in relation to the cultural vision of the masque’s conclusion. For discussions of Carew’s masque that address the masque’s engagement with Caroline court politics, see Martin Butler, “Reform or Reverence? The Politics of the Caroline Masque,” in Theatre and Government Under the Early Stuarts, eds. J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 138-42; Joan Altieri, “Responses to a Waning Mythology in Carew’s Political Poetry,” SEL, 26 (1986), 112-13; and Jennifer Chibnall, “To that secure fix’d state: The function of the Caroline masque form,” in The Court Masque, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: MP, 1984), 85-91.
the conclusion emphasizes political concord over cultural disorder (843-1143). In order to assert an image both of civic morality and cohesive national boundaries, *Coelum Britannicum* appropriates images of deviance, symbolically enacts their removal, and equates the strength of Britain with the absence of the deviant monarch.

Part of my objective is to examine the familial and political pasts that haunt Carew’s masque, and to consider the ways in which images of sexual deviance and political transgression, however much they may seem to be repudiated within the text, work to expose the masque’s central fictions of marital and national concord. Ultimately Carew’s recollection of the wayward court of Jove, replete with images of misrule, marital strife, and sexual transgression, invokes too many specters of the past for either the moral or political fictions of *Coelum Britannicum* to claim any legitimacy. Because Carew’s model of virtue as embodied in the marital union of Charles and Henrietta Maria serves as the foundation of the political consummation between England and its colonies, Carew’s text provides an opportunity to consider the extent to which the conflation of sexual deviance with other modes of cultural transgression functions as a means through which representations of the nation may be codified. The masque’s preoccupation with legitimizing a joint royal succession, as well as a construction of a heterosexuality that allegedly grounds the nation, ultimately exposes the limits of moral discipline as a model for political transformation.

I

Martin Butler has called *Coelum Britannicum* “the archetypal Caroline fiction,” largely owing to the exaggerated panegyric that the text embodies, noting that through his participation in the masque form, Charles I “liked to be seen in the posture of a reformer” with his masques “celebrat[ing] a dignified renovation.” Indeed, the very subject of *Coelum Britannicum* is reformation, commencing with the appearance of Jove’s messenger, Mercury, who announces that his sovereign’s shame has led him to reform his own court, not to
mention his marital relations, upon the earthly model of England’s conjugally harmonious and politically triumphant rulers. Although, as Butler points out, the function of Charles as reformer is central to the masque’s fiction, Carew’s projection of the king as part of a marital partnership that has the power to inspire and transform is the key to understanding the masque’s complex representations of marital harmony over nuptial dissidence. The opening lines of the masque introduce Charles’s consort, Queen Henrietta Maria of France, as a collaborator in the “renovation” they represent: she functions as an equal partner in the production and dissemination of this royal virtue. The central effect of Carew’s depiction of this aspect of the Caroline court is to link conjugal perfection to civic morality as it is embodied in disciplined, chaste rule. Mercury’s representation of Charles and Henrietta Maria underscores both marital and political concord, describing England’s rulers as “Twins of Love and Majesty” (48), suggesting they are virtually indistinguishable in their sentiments and dignity. Moreover, he claims that their conduct has shaped the behavior and values of both earthly and heavenly courts:

Your exemplar life
Hath not alone transfus’d a zealous heat
Of imitation through your virtuous Court,
By whose bright blaze your Pallace is become
The envy’d patterne of this underworld,
But the aspiring flames hathe kindled heaven. (62-67)

As exemplars of virtue, England’s king and queen set a model of conduct for their own courtiers, becoming the “envy’d patterne” of the “underworld” ruled by Charles, while, at the same time, extending their influence to the heavens. This archetype of marital harmony, contrasted by the marital strife of Jove and Juno, becomes the central feature of the English royal couple’s model of reform for the gods and their heavenly subjects.

At the same time that Carew’s opening passage emphasizes the personal virtues of Charles and Henrietta Maria, it also stresses their success as rulers, especially with regard to their ability both to command and influence their subjects. Rather than resorting to
“awfull frownes / To fright [their] Subjects” (51-52), their “calmer
eyes / Shed joy and safety on their melting hearts / That flow with
cheerful loyal reverence” (52-54), thus providing potential emulators
not only a model of marital chastity, but also one of effectual rule.
Just as they are “twinned” in love, they are also coupled in majesty.
Instead of inspiring awe and fear, Charles and Henrietta arouse in
the court what is already present in their own marital union: love
(“melting hearts” [53]) and unwavering devotion (“loyall reverence”
[54]). Jove, Mercury announces, intends to affirm Charles’s virtue
not only by emulating him, but also by installing him as “the bright
Pole-starre of this Hemispheare” (94), with his queen, “the faire
Consort of your heart, and Throne” (97), by his side. The ultimate
reward for this virtue is an unlimited sphere of command via heavenly
guidance from an earthly authority, with human king and consort
“alone dispenc[ing] / To’th’world a pure refined influence” (102-3).
Instead of marking the human ruler as the lieutenant of God on earth
(although a classical rather than a Christian one), Carew reverses
that position with Jove deriving his authority from his willingness to
emulate his human counterpart’s almost divine sovereignty.

*Coelum Britannicum* takes as a given its central premise:
Charles and Henrietta Maria are indeed exemplars of civic and
sexual virtue, discrete virtues that are united unequivocally in their
heterosexual union for the nation’s benefit. Certainly one objective
of this fiction is to deploy a convincing representation of their virtue
in opposition to Puritan counter-narratives circulating in the 1630s.
One of the most relevant and urgent of these challenges to Caroline
ideology was the publication of William Prynne’s *Histriomastix*
(1632), which leveled a range of charges associating moral corruption
with the established church and, more covertly, challenged the royal
authority and individual chastity of the queen and king. Prynne’s
charge that female actors display “mannish impudency” and invite
“temptation to whoredome, and adultery,” together with his comments
on French actresses,⁴ was widely accepted as a criticism of Henrietta

Maria for participating in masques at Whitehall. Prynne, moreover, also singles out kings who fill their courts with players, attributing such practices to the advice of bad counsel, covertly implicating both the current king and his father for their associations with the powerful Duke of Buckingham. Prynne’s tract contends that the regulation of sexuality is necessary for judicious rule, connecting the management of the household (and one’s wife) to the administration of state affairs (and one’s counselors). As is evident from the punishment Prynne’s writing provoked, his criticisms indirectly implicate Charles and Henrietta Maria in a web of sexual deviance and gender transgression that dramatically links theatricality and religious transgressions to the downfall of the state.

As a contrastive response to Prynne’s polemic, in which courtly immorality is responsible for the larger ills of society, Carew’s masque presents a world in which courtly and, especially, marital chastity is present and works to ensure both the sexual and

5 The first performance at court after Henrietta Maria came to England, Racan’s Artenice, included not only a speaking role for the queen—and one much larger than any her predecessor, Queen Anne, had performed—but also the appearance of the queen’s female companions in men’s roles. See Charles Carlton, Charles I: The Personal Monarch, 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 1983), 158. For Prynne’s discussion of women in men’s apparel, see Histriomastix, 200-01.

6 For Prynne’s discussion of players at court, see Histriomastix, 250, 428-29, and 451; on the subject of evil counselors, see 153, 214-15.

7 After being tried for sedition and libel by the Star Chamber, Prynne, himself a barrister of Lincoln’s Inn, was found guilty, imprisoned for a year, fined five thousand pounds, stripped of his university degrees, and had his upper ears cropped. After continued criticism of crown and church, in 1637 the remainder of his ears were removed and he was branded with the letters SL (Seditious Libeler). See Carlton, 141, and Pauline Gregg, King Charles I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 275-6.

8 However exaggerated such charges may have seemed to either Prynne’s colleagues at the Inns of Court or the inhabitants of Whitehall, they were plausible enough for both institutions to commission masques defending the royal couple’s reputation while, at the same time, attending to each of the two groups specific political agendas. James Shirley’s The Triumph of Peace, presented to Charles and Henrietta Maria by the Inns of Court on February 3, 1634, for example, objects to the practice of granting monopolies. David Norbrook points out the masque itself is also covertly critical of Charles, endorsing his political authority, but emphasizing “that the king’s peace had to be maintained with the aid of Law—a point that the lawyers anxious about the king’s constitutional position wanted him to remember” (“The Reformation of the Masque.” The Court Masque, ed. David Lindley [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984], 104). See also Butler, 128.
civic morality of the nation. Both Prynne and Carew, however, emphasize the importance of a specific kind of male-female relation that determines the success of their conflicting agenda. Each text evidences a preoccupation with heterosexuality that requires more than simply reproductive accomplishment or appropriate affective displays evidenced by Mercury’s emphasis on the importance of marital fidelity. While the term “heterosexuality” might seem hopelessly anachronistic in such an historical context, both texts nonetheless codify a heterosexuality that, while not synonymous with modern categories of identity, functions transhistorically in a political context. In the world of Carew’s masque, heterosexuality is always conjugal, marked by specific, gendered roles (men are expected to rule, women to submit to that rule), and represents the reproductive couple as central to the political objectives of the nation-state. Despite the obvious difference between *Histriomastix* and *Coelum Britannicum*, in each text the presence of normative heterosexuality is absolutely central to the workings of a harmonious and just government, whether it is conveyed through a radical dissenter’s emphasis on appropriate female behavior or a court poet’s insistence on the presence of marital fidelity. While Prynne’s polemic deploys a strategy for reform, offering a critique of the established church and, less directly, the crown, Carew’s masque endorses the established hierarchies that inform both of these institutions, anticipating a trickle down effect in which the chaste model of the monarchs spreads its influence throughout the court and, eventually, to the people.¹⁰

Carew’s masque provides an effective artistic enactment of the royal couple’s heterosexuality, yet this idealization of their

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marriage as the foundation for royal authority can only be codified through the prior possibility of heterosexual failure—specifically, the relationship of Jove and Juno, which represents a non-normative sexuality via marital infidelity that proves disruptive to conjugal relations and, ultimately, civil order. Jove’s marital deviance provides a stark contrast to both Charles’s purity and his command over both his consort and his subjects, particularly as it underscores the contamination of both Jove and the community over which he rules. The marital discord that proves so disruptive to Jove’s court is directly related to Jove’s inability to provide an archetype of exemplary rule, revealing the importance of the Caroline court as an exemplar of personal and political authority. Jove betrays a lack of erotic self-discipline, and, faced with a jealous wife, the god becomes entangled in a battle of wills that reflects the inefficacy of his household rule:

\[
\ldots \text{prone to heats of lust},
\text{He acted incests, rapes, adulteries}
\text{On earthly beauties, which his raging Queene,}
\text{Swolne with revengefull fury, turn’d to beasts,}
\text{And in despight he retransform’d to Stars,}
\text{Till he had fill’d the crowded Firmament}
\text{With his loose Strumpets . . . (75-81).}
\]

Jove’s initial punishment—Juno’s transformation of his victims into beasts—is clearly a wife’s challenge to her husband’s authority. In his counter attack, Jove transforms the beasts into stars, elevating their status within the heavens in defiance of his wife. Eventually, however, this minor triumph over Juno reflects Jove’s personal defeat, as those stars announce his “shame / . . . to the world” (82-83). Although Mercury, speaking directly to Charles and Henrietta Maria in the Banqueting House, prefaxes his summary of the marital strife in heaven with the claim that now “Jove rivals your great vertues, Royall Sir, / And Juno, Madam, your attractive graces” (69-70), evidence of the continuing battle of wills emerges with the entrance of Momus (104), God of Mockery, who reminds viewers that Jove, in fact, has only initiated the process of “learn[ing] to lead his owne
wife” (269). In other words, Jove has by no means mastered this domestic objective. While Henrietta Maria is figured as Charles’s equal—his “twin” (48) as Carew puts it—she is also, unlike the raging Juno, a model of feminine comportment: if she is working in consort with her husband, they are of the same mind or she has sublimated her desires to accommodate his political objectives.

Although as rulers Charles and Henrietta function as inspiring models for moral reform, Mercury’s panygeric is undermined by the satirical barbs of Momus, which challenge this image by not only creating doubt regarding the effectiveness of the human models who inspire his transformation, but also by questioning Jove’s motives for the reformation of his court.11 Momus’s abrupt and rude entrance is met with Mercury’s directive, “let this Presence [Charles and Henrietta Maria] teach you modesty” (124); Momus, in response, quips “Let it if it can” (125). Later, he offers the audience his interpretation of Jove’s proclamation, in which his subjects are “exhorted” (205) to comply with his new regime:

Jupiter upon the inspection of I know not what vertuous Presidents extant (as they say) here in this Court, but as I more probably ghesse out of the consideration of the decay of his natural abilities, hath . . . disclaimed, and utterly renounced all the lascivious extravagancies and riotous enormities of his forepast licentious life (195-202).

Momus seems skeptical enough about the Caroline court’s “virtuous Presidents” (196), suggesting at the very least that the virtue of England’s rulers is not dependable enough to either teach him (Momus) modesty or Jove chastity. While Jove appears, through Mercury’s assessment, to have repudiated his past behavior, Momus contends that Jove’s need to institute change is a result of his waning sexual potency (198) rather than a sincere investment in the “reciprocation of conjugal affection” (262). Moreover, Momus acknowledges what he believes is Jove’s fundamental albeit

concealed motive: “he apprehends a subversion of his Empire, and
doubts lest Fate should introduce a legall succession in the legitimate
heire, by repossessing the Titanian line” (230-33).

Not only does Momus deflate the image of Charles
and Henrietta Maria as legitimate models for Jove and Juno’s
reconciliation, he also further destabilizes the possibilities for
harmonious matrimony by invoking the precedent for immoral rule
in Stuart England that the figure of Ganymede represents. Thus
Momus also ushers the text from its focus on deviations of normative,
conjugal heterosexuality (the predatory, adulterous behavior of
Jove) to its brief but significant focus on the sodomitical practices
associated with Jove and his page. The reformation of Jove’s court,
Momus announces, includes special instructions for his cupbearer:
“Ganymede is forbidden the Bedchamber, and must only minister
in publique. The gods must keep no Pages, nor Groomes of their
Chamber under the age of 25, and those provided of a competent
stocke of beard” (250-54). If, as Bruce Smith contends, the tale of
Jove and his cupbearer “was the best known, most widely recognized
myth of homoerotic desire” in the period, then the introduction
of Ganymede at this moment reminds viewers that Jove’s sexual
indiscretions actually move beyond the heterosexual transgressions
that Mercury details. Nor is the prohibition regarding “Groomes”
directed at Jove exclusively: it is extended to all gods who might
employ beautiful youth in their households to serve their pleasures,
suggesting this is not a localized but possibly a widespread problem.
This anxiety regarding Ganymede’s youth, coupled with Momus’s
prior comments about Jove’s old age and feebleness, speaks to
concerns regarding the exploitation of the aged by the youthful, as
well as the actual function of pages and grooms within the more
subversive locale of the royal bedchamber. Ganymede’s role as

12 For discussions of the masque that examine Ganymede in relation to the profligacy of
James’s court, see Michael B. Young, King James and the History of Homosexuality (New
York: New York UP, 2000), 110; and Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong, The Theatre of the

13 Bruce R. Smith, Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics
minister to Jove not only satisfies his personal needs and desires, but also implies access to power that extends beyond their personal relationship: one that trades sexual favors for undue influence over matters of court preferment and policy.

Because Momus’s introduction of the same-sex elements of Jove’s lust recalls the frequency with which allusions to Jove and Ganymede were deployed to criticize James I’s relationship with the Duke of Buckingham, it implicitly reminds viewers that if Charles provides a model for Jove’s reform, then James I functions as an analog for Carew’s representation of Jove’s profligacy. An example of this representational tradition, which betrays the anxiety over misplaced power in the Jove/Ganymede relationship, is the anonymous poem “The Warre of the Gods” (1623), in which the gods stage a rebellion against Jove because of his unnatural love for Ganymede. When the speaker describes “Great Jove (that sways the imperial scepter / With his upstart love / That makes him drunk with nectar),” whom the rebels intend to “remove” from his place of power, one can easily imagine a revolt of frustrated courtiers against Buckingham, also considered an “upstart,” who has so enthralled his king that he is allowed to rule alongside him. Curtis Perry has addressed how the “institutionalization of intimacy” during James I’s reign resulted in “bedchamber patronage,” a system in which individuals who enjoyed continual access to the king’s presence were at a decided political advantage. Momus’ reference to the role of the youthful royal favorite in the bedchamber—an office to which Buckingham was admitted at the age of twenty-three—seems dangerously close to criticizing James indirectly through the inevitable association of the former monarch with the Roman god. Although the masque’s passing acknowledgment of Jove’s Ganymede, embedded among references to other heavenly transgressors, may seem somewhat minor within the masque itself, it reminds viewers of the ways in which this homoerotic coupling was invoked as useful analogy for criticizing the relationship of James I and his influential courtiers.

14 Quoted in Smith, 202-03.
It would seem that to assert fully Charles’s virtues as both a man and a ruler, *Coelum Britanniæcum* would need to banish any sordid remnants of the present king’s family history. As Michael B. Young suggests, this particular masque may have given “Charles the satisfaction of accomplishing in the fictionalized world of the masque what he was never able to accomplish in the real world—the reformation of his father’s behavior.” But while Jove can proclaim his reforms through the mouthpiece Mercury, the continued presence of Ganymede in Jove’s court points to only a partial reformation, suggesting that the deviant practices of the past have not entirely been purged from the present. Ganymede’s removal from Jove’s bedchamber is not precisely a form of complete exile, but rather functions as a reintegration into the more public spaces of the court, where his behavior can be at the very least monitored if not entirely repressed. In contrast to the allegorical figures—Plutus (Riches), Poena (Poverty), Tiche (Fortune), and Hedone (Pleasure)—who appear and are rejected for succession during the long inquisitorial “free Election” (420) section in which both Mercury and Momus examine possible candidates for installation in the Heavens (460-842), Ganymede, who never appears on stage in the masque, is seemingly absorbed into the court with his fellow courtiers. Clearly what Ganymede is forbidden is not complete access to Jove but unlimited private access to the monarch, a privilege that Jove’s reforms seem to grant exclusively to his reconciled queen, Juno. Instead of the “exile” by death suffered by Charles’s favorite, Jove’s Ganymede is repositioned in the more public spaces of the court where he can be subject to surveillance and, if necessary, discipline.

Yet Ganymede’s presence is a continual reminder of the past: just as he lingers within Jove’s court, so too does he—and all the

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16 Young, 110.

17 While Mercury conveys Juno’s rage at the objects of Jove’s extramarital desire, he does not link her frustrations specifically with Jove’s relationship with Ganymede. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Henrietta Maria was known to have disliked Buckingham, and, in turn, Buckingham’s continued affective and political importance in the Caroline court after the king’s marriage was very much at the queen’s expense. It was only after Buckingham’s assassination that the queen’s relationship with her husband took center stage at court. See Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 168.
associations he represents for Stuart rule—linger dangerously at the margins of Carew’s masque. However much Coelum Britannicum would present the royal marriage of Charles and Henrietta as the idealized political coupling upon which all marriages can be successfully modeled, their conjugal happiness is already tainted by the prior pattern of royal marriage present within recent English history: the shadow of Charles’s royal parents, inevitably figured in the warring image of Jove and Juno provided by Mercury. The recollection of Ganymede in Carew’s masque recalls rather than erases the associations between Charles and James, creating a link with Buckingham and the anxiety his presence had created. Along with his father’s throne, Charles also inherited one of his father’s most troubling personal and political legacies. Charles I’s continued alliances with Buckingham after his father’s death kept alive fears regarding the seductive power of the Ganymede-like favorite, and implicated the king, politically at least, in the sexual transgressions of his father. Because Buckingham informed the domestic and international politics of both Stuart administrations, the link Carew entertains between the fictional Ganymede of Jove’s court and the real-life English Ganymede has the potential to undermine rather than elevate England’s ruler. While Jove’s “loathsome staines” initially alludes to the taint of James I’s reign, those marks of transgression are borne by Charles regardless of his own personal moral integrity.

The abrupt departure of Momus prior to the explicit introduction of political unification might suggest a momentary containment of the skepticism he promotes, yet we are nonetheless left with an image of deviance that subverts the transformational power that Charles and Henrietta Maria embody. Momus’s final recommendation is “to expunge in the Ancient, and suppresse in the moderne and succeeding Poems and Pamphlets, all past, present, and future mention of those abjur’d heresies” (218-20). This attempt to stifle debate in the world of the Gods fails to eradicate fully the underlying anxiety with regard to the function of sexual deviance in
relation to the management of the state. Momus’s earlier declaration—“it is therefore by the authority aforesaid enacted, that this whole Army of Constellations be immediately disbanded and casheered, so to remove all imputation of impiety from the Cellestial Spirits” (213-16)—reveals that the process of reformation is simply a cover. The masque as disciplinary mechanism removes the “imputation” or charge of deviance, yet fails to eradicate the offending behavior that led to the attribution in the first place. The absence of Momus at the conclusion of these proceedings leaves too many questions open, inviting viewers to link the censorship recommended for Jove’s court with the possibility of similar methods of control in the court of Charles I. In introducing the subject of censorship, Momus acknowledges the potential for political and sexual dissidence that lurks behind the marital fiction.

II

Carew’s representation of a unified Britain in the final section of Coelum Britannicum depends not only on the success of Carew’s image of normative heterosexual marriage, but also on the expulsion of sexual deviance from the artistic space occupied by the fictional and historical figures at Whitehall. While the opening section of the masque focuses primarily on Mercury’s flattering address to Charles and Henrietta Maria, emphasizing their ability to rule and inspire their immediate English subjects, Mercury’s early reference to three “warlike” nations that “bend / Their willing knees” (49-50) before Charles and Henrietta Maria’s throne signals the colonial preoccupations of the concluding section of the masque. Although England is also marked as submissive to the king’s authority, its inclusion alongside Scotland and Ireland fails to obscure the reality that England is, according to Mark Netzloff, the “core” region and Scotland and Ireland merely “peripheral” regions within Britain.  

England may be perceived as a superior nation, but by having all three nations bow before the king, Carew’s masque demonstrates an attempt to achieve what Netzloff calls a “replace[ment of] national identification with affiliation to a composite monarchy ruling over distinct kingdoms.”\(^{19}\) In *Coelum Britannicum*, the character of the royal couple justifies such a replacement, with their conjugal harmony serving as a precondition for the successful management of colonial strife and, ultimately, the reconciliation of nations.

Although Mercury remains in the concluding section of the masque to orchestrate the transition from the rejection of supplicants to the decisive moment of the royal couple’s ascension, the final segment shifts from the mythical-literary world of Jove and Juno to the mytho-historical world of Britain itself. However, unlike the earlier portion of the masque, in which two members of Jove’s court, Mercury and Momus, engage in a dialogue that undermines a consistent, unassailable representation of the relationship between moral and political authority, the later section of the masque includes little direct debate and largely accepts the truth of its assertions. After the departure of Momus, Carew introduces a new figure, the Genius of the Kingdoms, as well as players representing each of the three nations, who offer four songs in which they endorse Charles and Henrietta Maria’s rule as the solution to the larger domestic challenge of internal colonialism. The middle section of the masque—with Momus’s more explicit criticisms of both heavenly and earthly royal courts—is structurally contained, and the mechanisms of censorship that Momus endorses at Jove’s court appear to be fully operative in the final section of Carew’s entertainment. Following the structure of the play, in which the royal couple’s panegyric is followed by evidence of immortal deviance, the final scene offers both the proof of Charles and Henrietta’s worthiness, and stages the reward promised them at the masque’s opening.

*Coelum Britannicum’s* spectacular conclusion nonetheless betrays an anxiety about its fictions, partly through its unwillingness

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\(^{19}\) Netzloff, 9.
to detail specific cultural transgressions and possible solutions to political challenges, but also through its preoccupation with the subject of succession. While anxiety over succession is present in Jove’s world, it plays a more pronounced role in the discussion of Charles and Henrietta Maria as exemplars for the united political bodies of three nations often in conflict with each other and their sovereign on religious, political, and economic matters. In the latter half of the masque, Mercury confirms Charles and Henrietta Maria’s legitimacy, as both lovers and rulers, when he explains the reward they will enjoy at the masque’s end: “you shall see / The sacred hand of bright Eternitie / Mould you to Stars, and fix you in the Sphere” (862-64). The fourth and final song makes plain the outcome of this statement, as the Chorus “Crowne[s] this King, this Queene, this Nation” (1111). Like the wedding masque that uses the occasion of a culturally mixed marriage to bring together both the couple and their respective nations,20 *Coelum Britannicum* serves as a post-wedding masque that reinforces the royal marriage by representing Charles and Henrietta Maria’s succession to the heavens—their “crowning” within the performance space of Whitehall—as complimenting their determination to rule successfully over England, Ireland, and Scotland. Moreover, the succession of England’s royal couple to their place in the Heavens works symbolically to sanction the political authority of Henrietta Maria, who was never officially crowned as England’s queen owing to her Catholicism. The masque itself functions as a de facto succession ceremonial, investing in her the symbolic authority that she was denied nearly a decade before.

The unification section of the masque traces the evolution of Britain from an unruly tribal culture to a more civilized modern nation reaching its apex under Caroline rule. Rather than marking the past as a potential blot or “staine” on England’s present authority, as does the earlier portion of the masque, *Coelum Britannicum* represents Britain’s early history as a necessary stage in its anticipated movement toward political unity and cultural cohesion. The production notes for the theatrical setting provide a visual narrative complementing the poetic text’s acknowledgement of the past as that which must cede to a more refined model of civic authority. Prior to Mercury’s initial entrance, Carew’s text describes a scene depicting the “ruines of some great City of the ancient Romans, or civiliz’d Brittaines” (37-39), once glorious but now in a state of disorder and decay. This visual image not only sets the stage for Mercury’s discussion of Jove’s disorderly court, but also anticipates the textual acknowledgement of the pagan world of ancient Britain in the final scene. The closing architectural image is of Windsor Castle in the distance, “the famous seat of the most honorable Order of the Garter” (1085-86), which provides a reference to the Caroline embodiment of English moral refinement and political unity.21 The pagan ruins of the opening scene and the dominant image of Windsor at the conclusion construct a trajectory that moves the viewer from a confrontation of the unruly past to the reward of the orderly present—in which both sexual and cultural reform are complete. With the final image of the masque resting on the castle, *Coelum Britannicum* confirms Charles’s reign as the ultimate signifier of a world characterized by moral refinement and political unity.

Despite their position as exemplary rulers, both Charles and Henrietta Maria must witness this theatrical transformation from the disorderly past to the civilized present before they can be officially installed as the rulers of heaven and earth. The royal

21 Orgel and Strong (70) note that the rituals of the Order of the Garter “became a model for the High Church Ceremonial,” which, in the context of my discussion, would work to undermine the image of Windsor as distinctly English. These rituals likely reflected the old ceremonies of the Catholic Church, many of which were being reintroduced through the reforms of William Laud.
couple is subject to a history lesson that situates their present rule in the context of various stages of Britain’s past—from the pagan days of Roman occupied Britain to the pre-Reformation days of medieval Catholic Europe. Prior to the introduction of the Genius and the players representing the Three Kingdoms, Mercury promises to deliver “Those antient Worthies of these famous Isles / That long have slept” (856-57) to the king and queen. First, however, they must “beholde the rude / And old Abiders” (870-71), described as “naked, antient, and wild Inhabitants” (873). After the appearance of representatives of the three kingdoms, situated on a huge mountain above the “wild and craggy” (901) scene associated with Britain’s history, the Genius commands the nations in the first song to call forth “their aged Priests” (886), a chorus of Druids and Rivers, so that they might “warne their hearts, and waves” in the “bright breams” (904) of the royal couple. This ritual is contrived to force those associated with Britain’s past to recognize the superior model of present-day Britain, yet the holding back of the more appealing “Worthies” (856) reminds the royal couple of “the point from which their full perfections grew” (872). Although Charles and Henrietta Maria are elevated throughout the text as models of virtuous authority, they, along with the masque’s other viewers, are forced to confront the nation’s past, much in the same way Momus had forced a momentary confrontation between Charles and his family history.

Central to the revisionist myth of English civility that Mercury promotes is the masque’s indirect acknowledgement of Scotland and Ireland as, to borrow a phrase from Christopher Hill, the “dark corners of the land,” whose unruly inhabitants—associated with the natural, wild spaces of the colonial margins—threaten to corrupt England as Britain’s moral center. Rather than directly acknowledge current challenges with these nations, however, Carew diplomatically turns to the seemingly neutral subject of pre-Christian Britain and its warring, unruly peoples, which represents the antithesis...
of the civilized world of Charles’s court. The unification section reveals a “more grave Anti-masque of Picts, the natural Inhabitants of this Isle, [and] antient Scots and Irish” (880-82), who dance at the “wilde and woody” (879-80) base of an emerging mountain. These “antients” are summoned from “those shades where dwells eternall night” (875) so that they might see the wondrous light of the court. The “rudeness” of these inhabitants, undoubtedly in need of discipline and reform, assumes a lack of refinement (OED 3.a.) that places them outside of an orderly and sophisticated world associated with the present court. In typical anti-masque fashion, they are the necessary prelude to the subsequent masque of the Three Kingdoms, in which each nation is guided to reconciliation by the Genius—and in which the reconciliation reinforces both the authority of the king and the unity of the royal couple.

Although references to Ganymede are decidedly absent in the concluding section of Carew’s masque, his specter remains as the anxiety over sexual transgressions is connected to the masque’s ultimate preoccupation with national unity. It is worth noting that the real-life anxieties regarding the Duke of Buckingham’s influence over the monarch extended beyond the power dynamics of the bedchamber to include anxiety over international politics, linking sexual contamination with cultural and/or religious infiltration. As Perry has pointed out, “political disorder of various kinds […] attracted accusations of sodomy” (1054) in early modern England.

and created a great deal of slippage between categories of deviance. While Buckingham was a Protestant, his familial and political alliances with Catholics, his role in the failed marriage negotiations for the proposed match between Charles and the Spanish Infanta, and his conflicts with low-Church members of Parliament not only helped sustain anti-papist sentiments in England, but also frequently connected the crimes of the sodomite with the threat of foreign, Catholic infiltration.24 Alexander Gil’s poem “For the Kinge,” for instance, another seventeenth century text that details the manipulation of Jove by Ganymede, provides evidence that links the figure of the sodomite to contemporary anxieties regarding religious conversion and foreign infiltration. The poem’s more topical references to “Spanish treaties that may wound / Our countries peace our Gospell sound” (19-20) likely allude to the proposed match between Charles I and the Spanish Infanta, while mention of “the poisoned baits / Of Jesuits” (31-32) acknowledges fears regarding the corrupting influence of priests from foreign nations.25 By placing the speaker’s frustration with the powerful and seductive “Ganymede” alongside the king’s perceived willingness to collaborate, or at least cooperate,

24 For discussions of Buckingham’s alliances with Catholics, see Gregg, 75-76; and Roger Lockyer, Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, 1592-1628 (Longman: New York, 1981), 278, 321, and 358-9. On the response to the Spanish marriage negotiations, see David M. Bergeron, Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of England and Scotland (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 172-5, Gregg, 72-4, and Carlton, 47-9. For an overview of Buckingham’s conflicts with parliament, see Gregg, 84-102. Buckingham also was implicated in treasonous activities during the early reign of Charles I. The House of Commons charged Buckingham with supplying ships to the French knowing that they might be used against France’s own Protestant subjects, while the House of Lords accused him of being, in part, responsible for the failed attempt to seize the Spanish port of Cadiz. Although the agreement with France stipulated that the ships would not be used against the English, and the military failings of the Spanish mission were compounded by factors beyond his control, Buckingham’s activities raised concerns regarding the Catholic leanings of both the favorite and his sovereign (Gregg, 147, and 152-3; Lockyer, 308-31).

with foreigners, as well as his alleged vulnerability to the enticements of Catholics, Gil’s poem presents Ganymede as the conduit for other transgressions seemingly unrelated to sexual excess.

While many early modern examples of England’s political vulnerability emphasize the powerful threat of Rome, whether through its French or Spanish allies, they also reveal something more immediately related to the concerns of *Coelum Britannicum*: the power of England’s adjacent regions to provide—or fail to provide—sufficient geopolitical barriers. The perception that both Stuart courts were defined by a crypto-Catholicism that endangered England’s spiritual and physical security was alive long before the virulent rhetoric of the 1640s, in which both the queen and the late favorite were the frequent targets of radical Protestants calling for both religious and governmental reform.26 This concern regarding sexual deviance, religious affiliation, and foreign infiltration feeds into adjacent anxieties about England’s relationship with its internal, political others: those peopling the colonies that Carew’s masque attempts to purge of their transgressions and to unite with England. Although Perry argues that this anxiety over bedroom patronage was not in evidence prior to James’s arrival in England, it is worth remembering that James’s rule in Scotland was tainted by his overly intimate relationships with two prominent Catholics: his cousin, Esmé Stewart, Duke of Lennox, whose arrival in Scotland from France was perceived as a threat to both Scotland and England’s security in the face of continued Catholic opposition; and George Gordon, Earl of Huntly, who was arrested for participating in two Spanish Catholic conspiracies to infiltrate England by way of Scotland.27


For discussion of the Duke of Lennox’s activities on behalf of France and the imprisoned Mary Queen of Scots, see David Harris Willson, *King James VI and I* (New York: Henry Holt, 1956), 36; and David Bergeron, *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 41. On Huntly’s initial act of treason in 1589, when he and a group of Scottish lords wrote to Philip II of Spain offering their support should he invade Scotland, see Bryan Bevan, *King James VI of Scotland and I of England* (London: Rubicon Press, 1996), 38-9 and Willson, 101-03; on Huntly’s later involvement in Jesuit plots, specifically the “Spanish Blanks” incident during the winter of 1592-93, see Willson, 114-15.
the case of Lennox, anxiety over his influence focused not only on his potential threat as a Catholic recently arrived from the French court, but also on fears that he would “draw the king to carnal lust.” Such lusts were overtly associated with religious transgression and treason in complaints raised against Lennox, who was accused of “seeking to seduce the King by filling his ears with wicked devices and speeches and withdrawing his residence to places frequented by Papists, full of traitorous persons to his estate, and overflowing with all kinds of whoredom.”

Just as Scotland was widely perceived as a site through which Catholic traitors could infiltrate England, so, too, were England’s other colonies perceived as weak communities easily penetrated by slippery Catholics who would be welcomed by local recusant conspirators. Well after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Wales was perceived as a viable site for Catholic infiltration and treasonous activities, and Ireland, although separated from England by water, was perhaps understood as the most unruly and resistant colony to English attempts at colonization and religious reform. Although it is coincidental that the sex scandal associated with the criminal trial of Earl of Castlehaven for sodomy and rape is connected to Ireland, one of the rude nations featured in Carew’s masque, the fact that the rhetoric surrounding the trial was not limited to sexual transgressions

28 Calander of State Papers, Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603, 13 Vols., v 6, ed. Joseph Bain, et al. (Eds. Calendar of the State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603, 13 Vols. [Edinburgh: General Registry House, 1898-1969], v. 6, 149.

29 CSP Scot, v 6, 151.

30 The Council of the Marshes reported in 1601 a “great backsliding of religion in these parts” (quoted in J. Gwynfor Jones, Wales and the Tudor State [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989], 103), suggesting a continued concern with the implications of Wales vulnerability for England. Moreover, the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 was preceded in the summer of 1603 by two pro-Catholic plots in Wales: the Main Plot and the Bye or Priest’s Plot (Geraint Dyfnallt Owen, Wales in the Reign of James I [Wolfeboro, N.H.: Boydell Press, 1988], 68-73). As for Ireland—which was under threat of Spanish invasion in 1625—the appointment of Sir Thomas Wentworth in 1633 as Lord Deputy of Ireland “brought law and order” to the country, but Wentworth’s methods “alienated every group in Ireland” (Carlton, 82-3).
reinforces the association between national or regional difference, Anglican dissent, and sexual impropriety. The documents relating to the trial reveal a concern regarding both the alleged Catholicism and the Irish connections of the accused, implying that the Earl’s sexual deviance is indicative of a greater problem: the inability to rule nations such as Ireland, where the realities of religious and political dissent challenge the very notion of unity that the crown attempts to project.  

Carew’s representation of those “rude / And old Abiders” (870-71), whose attributes are associated with the ancient pagan ruins of Roman Britain, works to expose the unruly aspects of the untamed margins of the nation, linking them with the classical, pagan world of Jove’s court, and, quite possibly, Catholic Europe. While Buckingham is connected to the figures depicted early in the masque—Ganymede and Jove’s other elevated subjects who are, presumably, disciplined and reabsorbed into the court—he is also implicitly associated with the “Celtic fringe” with which the final section of Carew’s masque concerns itself. These unruly ancient Britons bare both an actual and structural relation to figures presented earlier in the masque: in particular, the anti-masque group that occurs prior to the trial scene represents “naturall deformity” (305) and, prior to performing a dance in “monstrous shapes” (304), is commanded by Mercury to return to “the Fens, Caves, Forrests, Deserts, Seas . . . and resume [their] native qualities” (302-303). Although sexual deviance is not a factor in the “grave” more dignified anti-masque that features these ancient Britons, the function of the anti-masque ultimately links the earlier anti-masque figures with the “rude . . . Abiders” (870-71) of the conclusion (35). Despite this difference, the cumulative impact of the various dances presented during the Mercury/Momus dialogue—whether representing “severall vices,  

31 Although Castlehaven had inherited Fonthill, an estate in Wiltshire, from his mother, the Earldom was an Irish title. While he was suspected of having Catholic leanings, his son James was a confirmed Catholic and spent a great part of his career trying to convince the English crown that he could practice his faith and remain a loyal subject. See Cynthia Herrup,  

expressing the deviation from vertue” (374), “Gypsies” (627), a “Battell” of potentially rebellious subjects (718), or “the five Senses” (808)—have the effect of conflating a variety of transgressions that signal disorder in opposition to the masque’s larger picture of marital harmony as a precondition for national unity. While the figures occupying the earlier anti-masques are irrecoverable, banished with the figures of vice they compliment, all of the anti-masque figures, including those representing Britain’s pagan past, represent the unsettling possibility of future transgressions.

In its concluding section, then, Carew’s masque augments earlier anxieties regarding sexual deviance by associating them with a host of new ones relating to cultural deviance. One figure of interest, Ganymede, a seductive favorite often equated with a real-life counselor eager to facilitate foreign, Catholic alliances, is displaced by the disruptive individuals peopling the sometimes rebellious colonies under the king’s jurisdiction. This problem of disciplining unruly subjects, regardless of their transgressions, betrays its resilience in Carew’s representation of the inhabitants of Scotland and Ireland, who are not banished but rather represented as individuals who can be transformed by the example of English virtue and civility. This rescue operation, like the reformation of Jove through the repositioning of Ganymede, rids the court of its links to the past and paves the way for the symbolic union of “the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland” (888-89).

Before this reconciliation can occur, however, the text must also confront its more recent Catholic past—and does so using a strategy that skirts the issue that the presence of Catholicism has not yet been purged from England’s present. The concession to Catholicism that many feared would result from a possible Spanish match was realized when Charles acquired his French bride, with provisions made for the new queen to practice her faith and for the crown to loosen its sanctions against English Catholics. Henrietta Maria is not only in attendance at the Whitehall performance as

32 Gregg details as special concerns the freedom with which English Catholics “frequent[ed] the chapels established for the queen and her attendants, trouble over numerous saint and feast days she observed” and “over the number of her priests” (159).
an audience member and *de facto* participant, but her presence provides a trace of the very Catholic connections that, especially in the minds of Puritan radicals, threatens her husband’s political objectives. Taken as a whole, Carew’s direct acknowledgement of Queen Henrietta Maria in the masque’s concluding section seems to minimize her potential threat, especially given that this particular masque was not one in which, unlike her own entertainments, she actively collaborated with a poet. Yet the masque also limits her authority by largely confining her role to the reproductive function. The earliest reference to the queen, for example, is in the text’s description of her “Impresse” (25), which depicts her as a Lily with “three lesser Lilies springing out of the Stemme” (27), clearly signaling her successful production of three heirs. In the concluding scene, the figure representing Eternitie acknowledges “the ripe fruits” the royal couple’s “chaste bed” (1129) as the source not only of royal progeny, but also of future generations of British heroes. These generative allusions emphasize the importance of both moral inspiration and the actual production of royal progeny and would seem to confine the queen by the end of the masque to her properly subordinate position as wife and mother.

Despite the largely recuperative representation of the queen, Henrietta Maria is both a Catholic and hails from a foreign nation. Like Buckingham, she provides an implicit link between the text’s initial and prolonged treatment of sexual deviance and its final solution to the problem posed by cultural outsiders, particularly as it was her moral character that was perceived to be under attack in Prynne’s polemic. Unlike the opening sections of the masque, which flirt with the possibility that Charles will collapse into James/Jove through his connection to Ganymede, the later half of the masque avoids any direct associations with the proto-Catholic elements of Charles’s court until the moment in which Henrietta Maria is singled out in the third song. The scenic imagery that precedes this song, in which the chorus comprised of the Kingdoms singles out the queen for praise, features a rendering of well-ordered gardens
and walkways leading toward an Italianate “Princely Villa” (1020) that alludes to the extravagant and deceptively ordered world of the early modern foreign Prince. The song itself describes the heroes of Britain’s medieval Catholic heritage: Prince Arthur, St. George, Sir Guy, Beavis, or some “true / Round-Table Knight” (1030-35). While these references might be read as acknowledging the valor of medieval England without directly connecting it to the alleged Catholic transgression of Charles’s court, they suspiciously appear within the context of an elucidation, in a song, of the queen’s own power to subdue. Henrietta Maria is described as a gentle conqueror, whose “Divine aspects . . . becalme the Ayre” (1027-29), and who is invited to conquer through “peacefull pledges” (1037) offered as an example to the Catholic warriors of old. At the same time, however, the Kingdoms entreat her to provide a model for this peace through her own submission to the aims of her husband’s nation. By figuring the Queen as both conquering and conquered, the text invites readers to consider whether it is feasible for the queen to occupy both positions simultaneously.

Even if the masque ultimately represents Charles as the opposite of Jove—a commanding husband and effective ruler—the text raises questions about his ability to bring off the actual political accomplishment of unification. Although the masque’s conclusion depends on the cooperation of nations willing to defer to an exemplary ruler and his obedient wife, the desired objective is already problematized by the appearance of figures representing the unruly inhabitants of its pagan and Catholic past. Moreover, this symbolic representation of union, however much it may reinforce the fictional virtue of Charles’s court, does not solve the challenge of British unification. Indeed, the three kingdoms question their ability to remain united in the absence of the Genius of Britain, whose “soul held [them] together” (1005). The Genius’s promise—“I will my force renew, / And a more active Vertue bring / At my return”

33 In The Theatre of the Stuart Court, Orgel and Strong reproduce an Indigo Jones drawing that closely resembles Carew’s description of this scene, noting that it was inspired by the Italian painter and engraver Antonio Tempesta (586-8). The formal garden described in the text was introduced into English garden design during the reign of James I (41).
would seem to point to the inadequacy of human mortals to effect such change. While offering a solution to the challenges of conflicting nations, the Genius defers the moment of ultimate unity brought about by Charles’s virtue to some unspecified moment in the future: he excites our anticipation for reconciliation and renewal, yet offers a hope in no way justified by the political situation. That Charles is intended to perform the spiritual, guardian-like function of the Genius in the real world that exists beyond the confines of the masque entertainment is apparent. Whether he is capable of doing so, is less than certain. What is obviously missing in Coelum Britannicum is a clear acknowledgement of the present-day Scots and Irish, engaging in Presbyterian or Catholic dissent—an omission clearly necessitated not only by the reverential function of the court masque, but also by the impossibility of accounting for and transcending past failures to unite these three nations as one political and spiritual body.

Coelum Britannicum functions as both a symbolic, sexual purgation of the court of Charles’ father James I, represented in the masque by the wayward court of Jove, and an assertion of England’s political dominance, represented through the masque’s elaborate final scene. Both the marital and national fictions of Coelum Britannicum attempt to codify royal power through the myth of union, and the text rationalizes obedience through the myth of political and cultural progress. While its nations are reconciled through Carew’s poetic fiction, the stubborn presence of unruly subjects and distrustful nations would seem to mark the masque’s failure to completely assert its ideology. The masque both acknowledges and attempts to suppress both Britain’s pagan and Catholic past, which leads to the emergence of a civilized Protestant Britain made up of three cooperative nations whose submission to the king erases a more relevant history: not one of barbarity or incivility, but rather one marked by documented religious and political tensions. Yet the displacement of current political anxieties onto the past, with modern Ireland and Scotland only acknowledged
through their willingness to submit to an English ruler, underscores the political disenfranchisement and cultural assimilation attendant upon any union between nations. Although the 1625 marriage of Charles and Henrietta Maria is re-legitimized through the staging of their joint succession, this rendering of their authority via normative sexuality comes at a price. In order to construct heterosexuality as the foundation for civic morality, the masque reveals that this image of the royal marriage must grapple with the very images of sexual and cultural deviance it would repudiate in order to call itself into existence.

In erasing both the history of James I’s indiscretions and the history of centuries of turmoil between England, Scotland, and Ireland, *Coelum Britannicum* implies that a united Britain not only failed to exist, but also could never have existed under the allegedly wayward misrule of James I. As a figure in need of transformation, but one forever associated with the former king’s failure to reform, Ganymede is perhaps the most problematic character within the masque’s political mission to present Charles and Henrietta’s rule (and marriage) as uncontaminated. In relating Jove’s non-heterosexual transgressions, the masque invites witnesses to rethink the stability of the royal marriage, and to question, however silently, the political efficacy of the king himself. In the end *Coelum Britannicum* offers not a convincing statement on the relationship of moral virtue to political authority, but rather an opportunity to consider how and why the sodomite, an indispensable signifier for political corruption during James I’s reign, continues to garner such power in the political fictions of Charles I. As long as Charles’s court via the masque’s author embraces the classical analogies deployed to criticize his father’s reign, and as long as rhetoric surrounding the sodomite incorporates adjacent anxieties regarding cultural others, such court sponsored entertainments open up rather than limit the range of possible interpretations. While both the repudiation of Ganymede and the civilizing of the unruly inhabitants of England’s internal colonies would seem to support Carew’s paean to royal
heterosexuality, the current queen shadowed in the masque—Henrietta Maria of France—serves not as the bastion of normative heterosexuality that triumphs over examples of sexual deviance from the recent past, but rather as a culturally dangerous figure the masque also struggles to contain.

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

The West Award recognizes the most distinguished paper given by a senior scholar at the annual conference.
“Talk of Marriage” in Northwest England: Continuity and Change in Matrimonial Litigation, 1560-1640

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This article suggests that the matrimonial culture of northwest England from 1560 to 1640 was marked by a complex range of strategies, values, and processes that emphasized matrimony as a performative process. While present-tense language of consent created, in the words of sixteenth-century lawyer Henry Swinburne, the “Substance and indissoluble knot of Matrimony,” people in the northwest consistently identified other words, actions, and attitudes that also communicated matrimonial intent. Litigation from the diocese of Chester’s two consistory courts features considerable “talk of marriage” by litigants and deponents and reveals an enduring emphasis in the northwest on public performance of matrimonial consent through cultural, social, and economic negotiations and exchanges. This evidence also suggests ways in which rival notions about matrimonial propriety began to alter the cultural framework through which people in the northwest interpreted marriage prior to the civil wars.¹

In A Treatise of Spousals, sixteenth-century lawyer Henry Swinburne sought to produce a convenient digest of law pertaining to

¹ Research at the West Yorkshire Archives Service at Leeds (hereafter, WYAS Leeds) and the Borthwick Institute in York in 2007 was funded by a grant from Western Illinois University’s University Research Council, College of Arts and Sciences, and Department of History. I would like to express thanks to Jim Forse and Abby Lagemann, my fellow panelists in the “Continuity and Change in the Tudor North” session at the joint meeting of the Wooden O Symposium and Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association meeting in August 2010, to the audience of the panel, and to the Executive Board of the RMMRA for their selection of this paper for the Delno C. West Award.

The phrase “talk of marriage” is one employed repeatedly by early modern litigants and witnesses in consistory court suits involving disputed matrimony from northwest England. It is employed in the records both as a descriptor of the negotiations of prospective spouses, kin, and friends that predated marital vows and as a more generic, catch-all phrase to describe discussions of matrimonial values and practices. See below for a discussion of the methodologies used to evaluate “talk of marriage” in this article.
the making of marriage. He opened his text by defining spousals as “a mutual Promise of future marriage” and then complicated that characterization through an extensive discussion of the complex relationship between spousals and matrimony in early modern English theory and practice. The fact that indissoluble marriage could be effected in a variety of ways in early modern England made Swinburne’s task of synthesizing erudite opinion with popular attitudes an especially challenging one. Although the Church of England sought to institutionalize its control over the making of marriage, the failure to reform English marriage law until 1753 meant that early modern matrimony continued to be governed by medieval canon law, a circumstance that offered prospective spouses extra-ecclesiastic options.


3 Swinburne, Treatise of Spousals, 1.

siastical means of creating legitimate marital unions.\textsuperscript{5} Swinburne noted, for example, that the reciprocation of matrimonial consent in present-tense language (\textit{per verba de praesenti}) constituted “the end or execution of Marriage,” regardless of its publicity, location, witnesses, or clerical supervision.\textsuperscript{5} His text also acknowledged that spousals could feature objects and actions whose exchange or performance possessed the ability to transform matrimonial intent into “the very Substance” of marriage.\textsuperscript{7}

Swinburne’s text provides a detailed explication of the means by which “irregular marriages” lacking the direct oversight of the Church could be performed so as to be recognizable by witnesses as constituting a valid union.\textsuperscript{8} It thus serves as a testament to the fact that multiple meanings of and paths into marriage coexisted in early modern England. Another valuable source used by scholars to evaluate the form and function of early modern matrimony is litigation concerning disputed marriage filed in England’s network of church courts, administered by bishops and their agents. These


\textsuperscript{6} Swinburne, \textit{Treatise of Spousals}, 74.

\textsuperscript{7} Swinburne, \textit{Treatise of Spousals}, 6.

\textsuperscript{8} By “irregular marriage” I refer to those unions formed by means and circumstances other than those recommended by the church, enumerated in note 4 above.
consistory courts had jurisdiction over a range of spiritual matters, including marriage, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and possessed power both to initiate process *ex officio* (from the office of the bishop) and to entertain litigation instigated by laypersons against one another (instance suits). This essay uses office and instance suits to explore continuity and change concerning the words, actions, and attitudes whose performance signified the making of marriage in early modern England. I argue that litigation from the consistory courts at Chester and Richmond reveals an enduring emphasis in northwest England on the public enactment of matrimonial consent through cultural, social, and economic negotiations and exchanges, even as rival notions about matrimonial propriety began to alter the “cultural frame” through which people interpreted the performance of marriage prior to the civil wars.

To investigate “talk of marriage” in the early modern northwest, I use libels, responsions, interrogatories, and depositions from approximately 180 matrimonial suits heard by the Consistory Court of Chester, the Consistory Court of Richmond, and the archiepiscopal court at York, which served as the court of appeals for both consistories, from 1560 to 1640. Marriages and their formation in

9 I thus subscribe to the assertion of cultural historians and new historicists that performative symbols work “not merely because of their metaphorical power but also by virtue of their position within a cultural frame.” Robert Darnton, “History and Anthropology,” in *idem, The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990), 342. For an overview of recent trends in cultural history, see Karen Harvey, ed., *The Kiss in History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005), especially the editor’s “Introduction,” 1-15.


11 For the Chester consistory, see Cheshire Record Office, Deposition Books of the Consistory Court of Chester, 1554-1574 (hereafter, CRO EDC 2/6, 2/7, 2/8, or 2/9), consisting
the northwest were the subject of additional suits in the collections under consideration, but their records contain only formulaic, procedural documents and thus were not included in this sample. The suits examined here involved disputes concerning child marriages as well as those featuring spousals entered into by individuals who by virtue of age were deemed capable of expressing matrimonial consent.\textsuperscript{12} It can be argued that such materials are flawed because they represent fractured rather than “normal” matrimonial activities and because litigants and witnesses employed fictional elements in their narratives to bolster their legal claims.\textsuperscript{13} However, even if matrimonial litigation represents failed courtship and even if testimony of witness testimony and identified below by their folio or page references (following the style used in the individual deposition books), and Cause Papers of the Consistory Court of Chester, 1560-1653 (hereafter, CRO EDC 5), consisting of procedural papers (libels, responsions, interrogatories, depositions, articles, and sentences) and referenced below by year and file number. The cause paper materials for Richmond are found in the following record classes at WYAS Leeds: RD/AC/1 (Allegations, Articles or Libels), RD/AC/2 (Responsions), RD/AC/3 (Interrogatories), RD/AC/5 (Attestations and Depositions), RD/AC/6 (Further Articles or Exceptions), and RD/AC/7 (Sentences). See also WYAS Leeds RD/A class for the Act Books of the Consistory Court of Richmond. The appeals material for both courts is housed at the Borthwick Institute: Ecclesiastical Cause Papers at York: Files Transmitted on Appeal, 1500-1883 (hereafter, Borthwick Institute Trans CP). Only appeals files at York have been examined; matrimonial suits heard by the Consistory Court of York in its own diocesan jurisdiction have not been considered here. These archival sources are supplemented by Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., \textit{Child-Marriages, Divorces, and Ratifications, &c., in the Diocese of Chester, A. D. 1561-6} (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897), which includes transcriptions of both child marriage suits and matrimonial contract litigation, and the small handful of suits dated after 1640 in the CRO EDC 5 collection. One hundred thirty-two of the 179 total suits deal with irregular marriage between parties over the ages of consent, and 47 are child marriage suits. For “talk of marriage,” see note 1 above.

\textsuperscript{12} Swinburne’s treatise distinguishes between two distinct types of spousals related to the life-cycle, those contracted by children under the “ripe or lawful Age of Marriage” and those contracted by individuals who had reached the canonical ages of consent. See \textit{Treatise of Spousals}, Chapters 6-8. For a discussion of the features and occasions of child marriage in the northwest, see the discussion below.

contains fictive elements, the fact remains that respondents and deponents told stories they believed to be persuasive and to have resonance with both popular practice and law; the rhetorical strategies they employed thus needed to be both plausible and recognizable to be effective. To provide a counterbalance to the purposefully constructed narratives in legal actions focusing on disputed matrimony, I have also surveyed more than 2,200 additional, non-matrimonial instance suits filed in Chester’s consistory for incidental “talk of marriage.”¹⁴ This litigation, stemming from defamation, pew and testamentary disputes, and controversies over tithe payments, represents an important and underutilized source for courtship and matrimony. It reveals that deponents in a range of legal actions, although ostensibly commenting on matters sometimes only tangentially related to matrimony, found ample occasion to communicate their ideas about the words, actions, and attitudes that signified marriage in the northwest.

Among the matrimonial suits filed in the consistories at Chester and Richmond with some regularity during the period under consideration were those concerning marriages initiated on behalf of children younger than the official age of consent. As Swinburne notes, the canonical impediment concerning age meant that child marriages contracted for those under the age of seven were invalid due to the parties’ inability to give mental or physical consent. Contracts made for children between the ages of seven and twelve (for girls) or fourteen (for boys) were binding in the same way that contracts made by future-tense language (per verba de futuro) were; they became unbreakable as a consequence of sexual intercourse and an exchange of consent after the attainment of the age of maturity.¹⁵ The suits sampled for this article indicate that although the majority of the child marriage cases in the northwest were concentrated in the

¹⁴ To create a broad sample of the plentiful cause papers of the Consistory Court of Chester, I examined all the court’s business in the first and sixth years of each decade under investigation as well as the years 1571-79, 1591-94, 1611-19, and 1631-34 in the CRO EDC 5 collection. The total number of suits from the collection considered in the sample years is 2,251.

¹⁵ Swinburne, Treatise of Spousals, Chapters 6-8.
1560s and 1570s, they continued with some frequency through the 1630s. Evidence for the continuance of child marriage is not only contained in contract litigation between child spouses, however; glimpses of more “successful” child marriages appear in other types of suits. For example, a cause from 1593 alleging the adultery of Marie Cragg includes the assertion of her husband, Richard Cragg, that he “was but tend[e]r of yeares by the p[er]swasion & p[ar]tie by the threatning[es] of his fath[e]r [when] he did intermarie w[i]th the said Marie.” According to witness testimony, the marriage was subsequently ratified by both parties, and the couple had two children. Had Marie’s later adultery not come to light, evidence of what was likely a child marriage that had, for a time at least, been found acceptable by both parties would not exist in the records. Clearly the strategies of Richard Cragg’s father had worked as he (and other fathers, mothers, kin, and guardians in the northwest, no doubt) intended: the marriage was validated without recourse to legal action when the children reached the ages of consent.

These suits concerning child marriage indicate that the issue of age could spark controversy on the occasion of a ruptured relationship, as age played a seminal role in determining the validity of expressed consent. When Robert Wainwright rejected his child marriage to Christiana Williamson and married Elizabeth Golborne instead, questions concerning age prompted diverse responses from deponents in the subsequent litigation filed on Christiana’s behalf in 16   For an overview of the canonical position of the church concerning the invalidity of child marriages, see Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984), 68. For an assessment regarding regionalism and child marriages, see Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage*, 128-29. In her study of marriage and the Consistory Court of Chester from 1570 to 1670, Catherine Frances argues that the majority of suits involving the breakdown of relationships did not feature age or force, and she does not consider child marriage as a category in her analysis of matrimonial litigation (see “Making Marriages in Early Modern England,” 42). I contend that child marriage and disputes concerning age are important to an understanding of the matrimonial culture of the northwest. See Jennifer McNabb, “Ceremony Versus Consent: Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Reputation in Northwest England, 1560-1610,” *Sixteenth Century Journal 37*, no. 1 (2006): 9-33 for additional considerations of this issue.

17   See CRO EDC 5 1593, no. 9.
1637.\textsuperscript{18} While the deponents were universally agreed that Christiana was younger than the canonical age of consent at the time of the marriage in May 1634, Robert’s age was considerably more contested. According to some, he was at least fourteen years old and “of good judgem[en]t and disc[re]c[i]on”; others insisted that he was “about thirteene years of age & no more.” The discrepancy was of vital importance: if he had been fourteen at the time of the marriage ceremony, his words and actions on that occasion as well as during the time that followed had the power to bind him to Christiana. The debate intensified over charges that the parish register in Christleton had been tampered with; testimony revealed that two entries for Robert Wainwright existed in the record of baptisms, the first from October 1619 and another from January 1624.\textsuperscript{19} Witnesses weighed in on the veracity of the entries, plumbing their memories to offer testimony concerning other public and personal events contemporary to Robert’s birth. Thomas Johnes, for example, advocated for the earlier baptismal date of 1619 by recalling that two women in town “were with child when the said Elizabeth Wainwright, deceased, was with child of the said Robert Wainwright” and concluding that the women “had two daughters borne and christened the said yeare [1619] that the said Robert Wainwright was christened.”

Deponents and litigants from the northwest voiced the opinion that couples could display consent or dissent by both verbal and non-verbal means.\textsuperscript{20} Witnesses in child marriage suits focused in their responsions and attestations not on precise words spoken by or

\textsuperscript{18} CRO EDC 5 1637, nos. 13 and 14. For additional debates over age at marriage, see, for example, CRO EDC 5 1575, no. 23; 1613, no. 46; and 1616, no. 74.

\textsuperscript{19} The existence of these two entries further required deponents to affirm there was just one man named Wainwright in Christleton who had been married during the years under consideration, thereby negating the possibility of two married men registering the baptism of a legitimate son named Robert. The witnesses also attempted to weigh in on a debate over the age of Robert’s younger brother, Thomas. Some implied that the second entry for Robert was a clerical error, intended to record Thomas’s baptism instead.

\textsuperscript{20} According to the law, actions alone could not make spouses the same way words could, but the evidence from litigation suggests that witnesses believed actions could have powerful performative value. See R. H. Helmholz, \textit{Marriage Litigation in Medieval England} (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974), 27, for a discussion of performative words in medieval England.
on behalf of litigants who had been younger than the canonical ages of consent at the time of marriage; they emphasized instead expressions of a later refusal of assent as demonstrated by various verbal, visual, and economic markers. Those seeking to nullify child marriages and their supporters, for example, stress in their statements to the courts the absence of gifts, affection, sexual intercourse, and cohabitation independent of adult guardians subsequent to a church marriage ceremony and particularly after the spouses reached the canonical ages of maturity.

Testimony suggests that friends, neighbors, and kin both watched carefully for the performance of behaviors that could act to ratify a child marriage and took the opportunity to play their own roles in such performances as a means of acknowledging their acceptance of a match as valid. The Williamson v Wainwright and Golborne suit featured witness testimony from a range of observers: servants in the Williamson household, neighbors and acquaintances of all three parties and their parents, and several relatives of the litigants. In addition to commenting on the ages of Christiana and Robert at the time of their marriage, witnesses also discussed the couple’s subsequent cohabitation in the Williamson household and their signs of assent or dissent from the union as they grew to maturity. All were agreed that Robert resided in the Williamson household upon the conclusion of his marriage with Christiana, but consensus broke down over the particular circumstances of his treatment in the house of his child bride. Margaret Wright, who lived as servant in the household for fifteen months, affirmed that she had often seen the couple alone “both in the chamber where hee himself [Robert] laye and likewise in the chamber where she [Christiana] laye.” Supporters of Christiana’s cause, like Eleanor Newall, noted that Robert’s new father-in-law kept him “in good & handsome close

21 The typical formula in depositions from witnesses of child marriage ceremonies usually involved a simple identification of the parish church in which the ceremony took place followed by an assessment of the ages of the parties involved.

22 The discussion of this suit is drawn from CRO EDC 5 1637, nos. 13 and 14.
& apparell” and thoughtfully supervised his education; she testified that she had served as an audience to Richard Williamson’s repeated admonishments to Robert to be more devoted to his studies. John Maddock, by contrast, painted a picture of Robert’s ill treatment at his father-in-law’s hands, claiming that Robert had been forced to perform the role of servant in the Williamson household and that he stayed there only because he had “noe other place of refuge,” a justification Robert’s own response to the court echoes. Accounts of mealtimes further included assertions that Robert had been made to serve the family and guests on at least one occasion and that he normally ate with the servants, although his mother-in-law always served him meat before the others.

Swinburne’s text discusses the ways in which even small gestures between child spouses who had reached the age of maturity could serve as “Deeds” by which “the former Spousals are confirmed.” To “imbrace or kiss each other” signified consent to matrimony, as did “calling or naming each other Husband and Wife.” According to testimony, such “Deeds” appear to have had considerable cultural significance in the northwest. Anne Brodhurst, “one of the next neybores” of Helen and Thomas Gleave, testified in 1570 to hearing “Helen diverse tymes in familier talk…call [Thom-as] husband and he hath called her wife.” In Jane Sworeton’s response from a suit filed in 1616, she denied having “sate vpon the knee” of Thomas Mosse of her “owne free will & accord” but confessed that she sometimes “washed & starched” Thomas’s “lin-nens,” gestures other witnesses used to testify to her later assent to a marriage concluded when she was younger than twelve. Observations of similar “Deeds” also joined the more substantive testimony in Williamson c Wainwright and Golborne. Elizabeth Prince, for example, testified that “shee hath seene & obserued them [Robert

23 Swinburne, Treatise of Spousals, 21.
24 Ibid.
25 CRO EDC 2/8, fols. 325r-327r.
26 CRO EDC 5 1616, no. 14.
and Christiana] severall times kisse and imbrace one the other in a loueinge & kinde maner as man & wife ought to doe.”

Witnesses in contract suits involving spousals between those of “ripe Age” also highlighted a variety of actions such as public affection, cohabitation, and sexual intercourse that served to signify the performance of spousal roles and to engender a popular perception of legitimacy among neighbors and kin, frequently identified in the records by the phrase “common fame.”

Forty percent of the spousals suits, for example, include testimony alleging sexual intercourse between purported spouses, and one-fifth comment on their cohabitation. Just under one-sixth of the suits describe other displays of physical affection such as kissing. According to testimony from 1640, for example, John Brenand and Maria Wilson “kissed eich other” after Brenand’s promise of marriage, an act witnesses recognized as creating a binding contract. A number of the suits refer to a pattern of multiple gestures between alleged spouses, the collective weight of which allowed witnesses to note that the couples were “comonly reputed & taken for lawfull man & wife” by their family, friends, and neighbors.

In 1593, for example, a deponent testified to hearing John Derwall refer to Ellen Taylor as “my wiefe” and recounted that on the morning of Christmas Eve 1592, John greeted Ellen with the phrase “Good morowe, wiefe,” to which she responded, “Good morowe, husband.”

27 CRO EDC 5 1637, no. 14.

28 For a treatment of spousals and “common fame” in the Consistory Court of Chester’s jurisdiction, see McNabb, “Ceremony Versus Consent,” 55-81, and McNabb, “Fame and the Making of Marriage,” 9-33.

29 Testimony concerning sexual intercourse was, of course, particularly important in suits alleging futuro vows, as intercourse could transform promises for future marriage into present consent. Such information was also a regular feature of suits alleging praesenti vows and promises to marry.

30 See the essays in Harvey, The Kiss in History, passim, for an illuminating discussion of the need for an understanding of the history of gestures such as kissing.

31 CRO EDC 5 1640, no. 23.

32 This language comes from CRO EDC 5 1616, no. 14, but variations of this theme appear with regularity in the sources.

33 CRO EDC 5, 1593, no. 52.
Swinburne notes that to “give and receive Gifts and Tokens either of them, to or from the other” helped to signal and establish consent between couples, a practice the litigation from the northwest affirms as a regular feature of matrimonial activities.\textsuperscript{34} Nearly forty percent of the matrimonial contract suits considered here discuss the exchange of objects between prospective spouses, and the items described range from wedding clothes and love letters to coins, aprons, and gloves. These articles were commented on at length by those who had been present at their exchange, carried gifts from one party to another, or knew of their existence through the confidences of giver or receiver. Witnesses frequently attached significance to gifts in material terms, including an assessment of the monetary value of tokens of affection in their testimony. The level of detail in deponents’ comments also indicates performative aspects of gift exchange; the giver initiated the performance by selecting and sending a token, the intended recipient then either accepted or refused the offering (and occasionally reciprocated with a gift of his or her own), and witnesses and go-betweens served as an audience and frequently as temporary custodians of objects in transit.\textsuperscript{35}

The records further indicate the emergence of certain patterns concerning the types of gifts employed in various stages of courtship. The commentary of litigants and deponents suggests that both men and women considered money an object suitable to express varying degrees of matrimonial interest. Mention of monetary gifts appears in suits with and without testimony of the exchange of matrimonial words between purported spouses; gifts of money also accompanied alleged “promises” to marry as well as future- and


present-tense vows. The practice of bending or breaking a coin between prospective spouses to signify assent to matrimony warrants particular attention, as it appears with regularity in the suits featuring gift-giving, perhaps because it symbolically communicated the sharing of affection and material resources initiated by marriage. Witnesses and litigants described occasions of bending or breaking a coin in rich detail, as when an unnamed witness carefully noted in 1617 that Alice Hulme kept “the one half” of the gold coin she broke with Gerrard Hey while he kept “the oth[er].”

Matrimonial intent was also represented by the exchange of personal keepsakes and household stuff. Examples range from the “hart of gold” given by Elizabeth Bird to Morgan Edmund in 1562 to the “c[er]ten juell[es] of sylver” Godfrey Walthew removed from his own neck and placed around the neck of Katherine Knowles after their exchange of vows as described in a suit from 1607. Witnesses noted in *Williamson c Wainwright and Golborne* that, in addition to the small sums of money Robert Wainwright gave Christiana Williamson, he once sent her “two penniworth of pairs [pears]” and “cakes”; on another occasion, she gave him “a pare of roses for his shooes.”

To Elizabeth Golborne, the woman Robert subsequently married, he sent, “in token of his love and affection,” a pair of gloves, a silver whistle, and a silver “seale.”

No gift had greater symbolic power to effect marriage, though, than a ring, a fact Swinburne underscores in his treatise.

36 The phrase “promise of marriage” appears with some frequency in the records, but the degree of commitment it was intended to represent is unclear. It seems to be a term of considerable elasticity, used by witnesses to comment on relationships ranging from those that featured initial discussions of matrimony to those that indicated advanced negotiations concerning financial settlements and impending marriage.

37 CRO EDC 5, 1617, no. 20.

38 Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, 187; CRO EDC 5 1587, no. 42.

39 CRO EDC 5 1637, no. 14.

40 He notes, for example, that future tense vows could be made binding when “the Man delivereth to the Woman a Ring, and doth put it on her fourth Finger.” Swinburne, *Treatise of Spousals*, 71. For a discussion of rings as material economic objects of exchange in early modern England, see Stephanie Chamberlain, “‘Rings and Things’ in *Twelfth Night*: Gift
Evidence from the northwest indicates popular subscription to the notion that the giving and receiving of a ring could serve as a powerful performance of consent to matrimony. In a personal response from 1621, for example, Thomas Orrell stressed that he did “never give vnto the pl[ain]t[iff] [Margery Hollinsed] any gould ringe,” as other witnesses had testified, clearly understanding the power that particular object represented as confirmation of his ratification of a marriage.41 Just under half of the suits whose records included testimony concerning gifts featured rings, and the occasions of the giving almost without exception indicate an advanced stage of courtship involving an alleged uttering of matrimonial language in the present or future tense. For example, a suit from 1596 included testimony that James Bankes and Ellen Lucas “dyd pledge & giue ether to other there faith and trouth, and thereappon the said James putt a ringe appon the said Ellen’s ffinger” to mark the occasion of their matrimonial contract.42 Rings were also singled out in office suits filed on grounds of clandestinity; witnesses seeking to demonstrate the propriety of private marriages noted the use of rings, as prescribed in the marriage ceremony found in the Book of Common Prayer.43 A suit filed in 1579 noted that when Janet Braithwaite and Robert Cavnet spoke “certayne woord[es] of matrimonie” to each other, Robert gave Janet “a ryng of sylver,” and another from 1625 recounted that the curate of Wrexham married John Pickering and Elizabeth Page “according to the forme layde downe in the book of Com[m]on Prayer w[i]th the vse of a ringe and other ceremonies saveinge ban[n]es of m[at]r[im]onie were not published neyth[e]r anie lycense p[ro]cured.”44


41 CRO EDC 5 1621, no. 14.

42 CRO EDC 5 1596, no. 42.

43 “Clandestine” refers essentially to a private marriage, often in domestic settings, that lacked the publicity of the banns or a marriage license.

44 WYAS RD/AC/2/34, and CRO EDC 5 1625, no. 47.
Nearly one-quarter of the suits describe economic arrangements between couples that publicized their commitment and allowed friends and kin to judge matrimonial legitimacy, and these suits demonstrate a considerable continuity across the decades examined. After Ralph Wood and Jane Cloughe exchanged consent to marry in 1572, witnesses reported that Ralph had “vsed other her necessarie good[es] about[es] the said Jane her house as familierlye as thoughe they had ben his owne.”\footnote{Borthwick Institute Trans CP 1573/3.} Six decades later, witnesses reported that Richard Bradley approached “diu[er]s p[er]sons” indebted to Ellen Pemberton after the completion of their matrimonial contract and threatened to sue those who failed to make good on the “debt[es] w[hi]ch he said was due to his said wiefe Elen.”\footnote{CRO EDC 5 1633, no. 60. The tangled relationship between Bradley and Pemberton is also the subject of 1634, nos. 62 and 128.}

Against the backdrop of elements of continuity in the performance of matrimony in the northwest, the records suggest change in the frequency with which disputes over the making of marriage came before the courts. Matrimonial litigation was the subject of a long but fairly steady decline in terms of its percentage of the Consistory Court of Chester’s business: it constituted over 60 percent of cause paper files that survive from 1565 but just 5 percent of those from 1635.\footnote{McNabb, “Fame and the Making of Marriage,” 17. The actual numbers of matrimonial suits remain relatively constant into the early seventeenth century; the dramatic increase in the numbers of defamation suits, tithe disputes, testamentary business, and conflicts over pews and other religious spaces, however, meant that these causes replaced matrimonial suits as the dominant types of instance litigation. As indicated below, however, these other types of suits yield valuable information on matrimonial culture in the northwest.}

An examination of the Consistory Court of Richmond’s act books suggests that the proportion of matrimonial suits before that court declined over time as well: a sample from the 1570s indicates that at least 12 percent of the court’s annual instance litigation involved matrimonial issues, while a sample from the 1620s indicates that 3 percent of the instance litigation \textit{per annum} involved disputed
matrimony.\textsuperscript{48} While R. B. Outhwaite cautions against equating a decline in contract litigation with the elimination of irregular marriage, patterns of litigation in the northwest suggest certain alterations in matrimonial values and practices, perhaps connected to the growing integration of the northwest into the national polity and an acceptance of the need for a more formal entrance in marriage.\textsuperscript{49}

The sources indicate that people in the northwest were beginning to subscribe to the notion that the process of performing matrimony was less effective and appropriate at communicating consent than a single, public act sanctioned by the Church. This may have been the result of a refusal by the consistory courts to uphold irregular marriage, but unfortunately, the uneven survival of the courts’ judgments in the cause papers makes this difficult to ascertain. Few case files contain final sentences, and those that do often lack additional substantive documentation shedding light on the details of the dispute; the dearth of contextualizing information thus renders such final decisions unhelpful in gauging the courts’ stance on irregular marriage. Incidental talk of marriage in non-matrimonial litigation does, however, suggest a new desire for orderliness and formality in the making of marriage in the northwest. Beginning in the early 1600s, deponents asked to attest to their suitability as witnesses were questioned about the propriety of their own marriage ceremonies, discussions absent from the records of suits from previous decades. A defamation suit filed by Katherine Graddell against David, Margery, and Ellen Dobb in 1631, for example, required witnesses to provide testimony as to the occasion and duration of their marriages as well as the more usual information regarding their place of residence, their relationship to the litigants, and their financial worth.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} The act books from Richmond are unfortunately defective and thus prohibit any definitive measure concerning the frequency of matrimonial contract disputes in the court’s business. The samples used here are found in WYAS Leeds RD/A/0/2, Act Book of the Consistory Court of Richmond, 1570-1573, and RD/A/7B, Act Book of the Consistory Court of Richmond, 1624-1628.

\textsuperscript{49} See \textit{Clandestine Marriage in England}, 41, and note 9 above for literature on early modern Cheshire.

\textsuperscript{50} CRO EDC 5 1631, no. 34.
In response to the interrogatory about marriage in that suit, Hugh Francis of Chester responded “that he was married about a yeare and a halfe since, in St John’s Church, about nyne or ten of the clocke in the daie time by M[aste]r Lloyd curate there, beinge three times first asked in the s[ai]d church,” an account that doubtless met with the approval of the court as a result of the ceremony’s strict adherence to proper form.51 The implication contained in such questions and responses is that reliable and respectable witnesses were those who followed the Church’s prescribed methods of making marriage.52

Defamation suits from the second half of the period under consideration also indicate an increasing intolerance of premarital pregnancy in the northwest. Bearing a child, when coupled with other words and gestures of matrimony, had, during the sixteenth century, served as a powerful signifier of matrimonial assent; during the seventeenth century, by contrast, numerous defamation suits were filed to combat charges the spouses had a child together before marriage.53 For example, in 1637 John Fletcher sued Elizabeth Marsh for defamation for reporting that his wife had borne their child four weeks before their marriage.54 Such evidence demonstrates that bearing a child prior to or shortly after a church wedding had become subject to some measure of disapproval from members


52 Such interrogatories were likely devised to cast doubt on the testimony provided by a witness whose marriage was considered suspect, although the responses provided do not always indicate which of the deponents was the true target of the question.

53 The records from the northwest courts indicate, for example, that the occasion of pregnancy might initiate an ex officio suit for fornication that resulted in the couple’s declaration of their impropriety at the solemnization of their subsequent marriage. See, for example, WYAS RD/A 3 B, Consistory Court of Richmond Act Book, 23 September - 14 December 1579, fol. 14v., involving an office case against John Walker and Jane Hutchinson of Grinton from 1579; they were required to admit their “fault” on the day their marriage was solemnized in the parish church of Grinton. An office suit against John Ayerigge and Agnes Etherington from 1585 includes the assertion from John that the pair had made a “contract between them selves and were desyrous to have bene married” before their child was born, a circumstance he claims had in fact transpired. See WYAS RD/A 4, Consistory Court of Richmond Act Book, 26 April 1585 - 29 July 1588, fol. 28v.

54 CRO EDC 5 1637, no. 104.
of a couple’s community, not a prompt for popular acceptance of the performance of matrimonial consent.

This essay suggests that the matrimonial culture of northwest England from 1560 to 1640 was marked by a complex range of strategies, values, and processes that emphasized matrimony as a process driven by the performance of matrimonial assent. While present-tense language of consent created the “Substance and indissoluble knot of Matrimony,” people in the northwest talked consistently in various types of litigation of other words, actions, and attitudes that also communicated matrimonial intent. It is well documented that these alternate signifiers of matrimony eventually declined in importance in England, in part as a result of the Church’s growing success in inculcating an understanding of its rules for publicity and orderliness in marriage. The civil wars also brought in their wake an experiment with civil marriage and the suspension of the consistories, which eliminated a key legal forum for disputed matrimony. Additionally, the increasing efficiency of early modern bureaucracy and record-keeping concerning matrimony likely reduced the necessity of symbolic and real exchanges, gestures, and actions that had previously constituted the performative ritual of making marriage. A study of litigation heard by the ecclesiastical courts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, serves as a reminder that matrimony, rather than being fixed and universal in its form and function, has a performative history, the investigation of which is necessary for a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of early modern English society and culture.


56 Some of this stems from the early modern “reformation of manners,” a subject about which the literature is substantial. For an overview as related to the history of gesture, see Harvey, *The Kiss in History*, passim.


58 See Keith Thomas, “Afterword,” in *The Kiss in History*, 198.
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Although King Lear’s half-line “You are a spirit I know” (IV.vii.49) has no internal punctuation in the Folio or Quarto versions of Shakespeare’s play, most modern editors add a comma between the words “spirit” and “I.” This spurious comma forces the line to be interpreted to mean “I know that you are a spirit” rather than “You are a spirit that I know,” whereas, without punctuation, both interpretations are viable. I argue that the latter reading is not only possible, based on Shakespeare’s syntactical practices, but also preferable, based on both the immediate context of the line and the theme of recognition (and misrecognition) developed throughout the play. Therefore, I contend that this comma represents an inappropriate and unfortunate emendation of Shakespeare’s text.

In act IV, scene vii of Shakespeare’s King Lear, Cordelia, having been reunited with her father, asks him a question. Their exchange, as given in the First Folio, reads as follows:

Cor. Sir, do you know me?
Lear. You are a spirit I know, where did you dye? (IV.vii.48-49)

My focus is on the first half of King Lear’s line: “You are a spirit I know . . . .” As it is punctuated—or to be more precise, as it is not punctuated in the First Folio—the line is syntactically ambiguous. In Shakespeare’s day, as in ours, the line may be interpreted to mean either “You are a spirit that I know” (where I know is a relative clause) or “I know that you are a spirit” (where you are a spirit is a complement clause). That the latter reading has been uniformly preferred is evident from the fact that nearly every modern edition of the play inserts a comma—unsupported by Quarto or Folio—into the line so that it reads, “You are a spirit, I know.”

1 Q1 (The Pied Bull Quarto) reads, “Cord. Sir know me, / Lear. Yar a spirit I know, where did you dye”; Q2 (The N. Butter Quarto) reads, “Cor. Sir, know ye me? / Lear. Y’are a spirit I know, when did you dye?”

2 Of the 15 modern editions of King Lear I’ve examined, all but one insert a comma. These include most of the major editions—Cambridge, Oxford, Arden, Norton, Riverside, the New Variorum, and so forth. The only one I’ve found that doesn’t include the comma is the 1949 Oxford edition, edited by George Ian Duthie. However, the 1960 Cambridge
I argue that the alternate reading, “You are a spirit [that] I know” is not only possible but preferable, that it not only fits the immediate context of the line better but also elucidates the theme of recognition that is developed throughout the play. Thus, what drama critics often interpreted as the continued ravings of a madman may in fact represent the beginnings of a tender reconciliation between father and daughter and one of the first glimmerings of Lear’s growing awareness of the true identity of those who surround him.

This relative-clause reading is possible because we know Shakespeare regularly used constructions with zero relative markers, which occur when a relative clause lacks an initial pronoun, as in “the play ^ I saw” instead of “the play that I saw” or “the actor ^ I admired” instead of “the actor whom I admired.” In order to resolve authorship issues involving Shakespeare’s collaborative and apocryphal plays, Jonathan Hope has studied Shakespeare’s use of relative pronouns, distinguishing between zero relative markers, who/whom, which, and that. Shakespeare employed each of these options at various times, as seen in the following lines: “The reverent care ^ I beare unto my Lord” (2H6 III.i.34); “Against the Capitoll I met a Lyon, / Who glaz’d upon me, and went surly by” (JC I.iii.20-21); “That honour which shall bate his sythes keene edge” (LLL I.i.6); and “Let Fame, that all hunt after in their lives” (LLL I.i.1). In a total of 11 canonical Shakespearean plays, Hope has identified 277 instances of zero relative markers, representing 10-15% of the relatives in these plays. Of these, 231 occur in the objective case, as does the one in the line from King Lear. Therefore, reading this line as “you are a spirit ^ I know” fits into Shakespeare’s normal syntactical practices.

The immediate context of the line further demonstrates that this reading is preferable. In the Folio and Second Quarto, Lear’s edition, edited by Duthie and John Dover Wilson, puts the comma back in, as does every edition thereafter.

3 Jonathan Hope, The Authorship of Shakespeare’s Plays: A Socio-Linguistic Study (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 27-53; the Shakespearean examples of the various forms are drawn from Hope, Shakespeare’s Grammar (London: Arden-Thomson, 2003), 108-11, as is the use of a caret to represent a zero relative marker.
line is the answer to a question posed by Cordelia, and thus must be examined in its light. In the First Quarto, Cordelia’s line is an imperative (“Sir, know me”), but the response she is trying to elicit is the same. Many languages have distinct words for knowing intellectually (which we might call comprehension or cognition) and for knowing experientially (which we might call acquaintance or recognition), but in Early Modern English, know can mean either one, although the concepts are still somewhat different. In her question (or in her imperative), Cordelia uses “know” in the sense of recognition: “Sir, do you know me?” (IV.vii.48). Lear’s answer, interpreted as “You are a spirit that I know” likewise refers to recognition, whereas “I know that you are a spirit” changes the sense of “know” from recognition to cognition, from knowing a person to knowing a fact. In neither sense is Lear’s response as direct as “Yes, I know you; you are my daughter,” but only “You are a spirit ^ I know” can be termed an answer to the original sense of Cordelia’s question. “You are a spirit, I know,” by contrast, merely restates Lear’s previous line, “Thou art a soul in bliss” (IV.vii.46).

In addition, this reading may help resolve the controversy over Lear’s subsequent question, “Where did you die?” (as given in the First Folio and First Quarto), which is sometimes emended to “When did you die?” (based on the less authoritative Second Quarto). I have searched for debate or even simple comment regarding my contention that the inserted comma in “You are a spirit I know” is mistaken and found none, but the where/when dilemma has been widely discussed. John Dover Wilson reviews the debate in a note to his edition of King Lear:

Q 2 was read by [...] most 19 c[entury] ed[itors] exc[ept] Coll[jer] and Schmidt, while Dyce (Remarks (1844), p. 231) found F ‘all but nonsense’, to which Coll[jer] replied: ‘It may appear to others no greater nonsense to ask a spirit ‘Where did you die?’ than ‘When did you die?’’. He is, as Cord[elia] says, ‘Still, still, far wide!’ G[eorge] I[an] D[uthie] (1949) quoting

4 For example, French has savoir and connaître; German, wissen and kennen. Old English likewise had witan and cnàwan, but the meaning of the latter had expanded to cover both senses by the Middle English period, whereas the former, while still attested in Shakespeare’s day (“I wot well where he is” [Rom. 3.2.139]), has become increasingly archaic; see “know” and “wit v.” in the Oxford English Dictionary.
this, restored F and was followed by Al[exander] (1951) and Muir (1952). To J[ohn] D[over] W[ilson] Coll[ier]’s argument is more specious than cogent. Lear, restored to sanity, is ‘still wide’, still bewildered, being ‘scarce awake’, but now quite rational. Remembering that he has been in hell, he thinks at first that he must be in the next world and Cord[elia] ‘a soul in bliss’. The geographical question, ‘where’, would be irrational because pointless […] the question of a madman: and even if psychologically defensible, which rightly considered it is not, would be dramatically inept, a mere puzzle to the reader or spectator, a jarring note in an otherwise perfect movement.5

I accept Wilson’s premise that Lear has been “restored to sanity” by the time this scene takes place, but not his conclusion that “where” is “irrational because pointless.” In order for the question “when did you die?” to make sense—at least in the context of identifying the addressee as a spirit—Lear must not only believe he is talking to someone who has died but also that she was alive the last time they met. However, he has given no indication that he recognizes his questioner up to this point; there are twenty more lines before he hesitantly says, “I think this lady / To be my daughter Cordelia” (IV.vii.69-70). He would therefore have no reason to suppose her death to have been a recent event. On the other hand, if Lear first says “you are a spirit that I know,” the geographic question would fit the context just as well as the temporal one. Lear, believing that he is speaking to a spirit, suddenly realizes that the spirit is someone familiar to him and asks, “where did you die?” as a means to further establish her identity. Thus, “you are a spirit ^ I know” makes more sense than “you are a spirit, I know,” both as an answer to Cordelia’s question and as a precursor to the rest of Lear’s line, especially as given in Folio 1 and Quarto 1.

The same holds true when we look at the larger context of these lines. Lear’s basic problem in this play is his inability to recognize the true worth of human character: he rewards his deceitful daughters and banishes his truthful daughter Cordelia and his loyal servant Kent. This is partly because he cares more about being known

5 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. George Ian Duthie and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960), 257-58 n. 49. Incidentally, this version also adds the comma in question, although Duthie’s 1949 edition, upon which it is based, had not done so. (See n. 2 above.)
than he does about truly knowing others. When Kent, disguised as Caius, follows Lear and offers to serve him, Lear asks, “Dost thou know me, fellow?” (I.iv.27); Kent pretends that he doesn’t. Ironically, it is Lear, not Kent, who is confused about who is who in the scene. Throughout the first half of the play, Lear continues to futilely insist upon recognition from others when he doesn’t receive what he considers to be his due. “Who am I, sir?” (I.iv.80) he asks of Goneril’s steward, for example; later, he demands at large, and in frustration, “Does any here know me? This is not Lear. […] Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (I.iv.232, 236). Regan, incidentally, comments he “hath ever but slenderly known himself” (I.i.295-96).

However, after Lear’s experience on the moor, he begins instead to know others for who they are. Thus it is significant that the encounter between Lear and Cordelia of which I have been speaking occurs in the midst of his growing awareness of truth and recognition of those around him. In act IV, scene vi—just before this crucial passage—he recognizes Gloucester: “I know thee well enough,” he says, “thy name is Gloucester” (IV.vi.177); and in act V, scene iii—not long after—he finally recognizes Kent, who has been serving him all along as Caius: “Are you not Kent?” (V.iii.284). “You are a spirit ^ I know” fits right into this pattern as the first glimmer of recognition—and reconciliation—that culminates when Lear recognizes Cordelia as his daughter, acknowledges that he has misjudged her, and receives her forgiveness.6

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6 See Alexander Leggatt for a discussion of the ways in which Lear’s denial of relationships leads to the loss of his own identity (Shakespeare’s Tragedies [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005], 145-56). Stanley Cavell similarly argues that Lear’s primary motivation throughout the play is to avoid recognition, even in the final scene where he seeks prison (so his love for Cordelia can be confined) and refuses to see his other two daughters (Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003], 57-58, 68-69). However, both Cavell and Leggatt acknowledge Lear’s recognition of Cordelia as a climatic moment in the play—and as a moment of insight, when Lear, however incompletely, recognizes himself (Cavell 45-46; Leggatt 168). Cavell further suggests that the reason Lear is able to recognize Gloucester before anyone else (and that only after cruelly goading him about his eyes) is that Gloucester cannot see him (50-51).
To reiterate, the interpretation I’ve set forth is both possible, given Shakespeare’s established use of zero relative markers, and preferable, given both the immediate and wider contexts of the line. If we take Lear’s response to Cordelia’s question to mean “I know that you are a spirit,” the line merely reinforces his madness. If, on the other hand, we take it to mean “You are a spirit that I know,” it instead reinforces the play’s theme of knowing and recognition—and becomes a tender moment in the tragedy. The comma, found in neither the Quarto nor in the First Folio, simply does not belong.

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“Sir, do you know me?”

King Lear, Act IV. Scene vii

Erratum: Volume 30, page 196, “‘Will in Overplus’ A Review of Shakespeare Biographies”

After the volume appeared on the web site, the author of last year’s Review Essay, Professor Stephannie S. Gearhart, discovered an overlooked mis-attributeion.

Instead of “Moments like these in Wells’ book provoke even the mildly skeptical reader to recall Daisy’s remark in Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby: ‘Wouldn’t it be pretty to think so?’” the sentence should read: “Moments like these in Wells’ book provoke even the mildly skeptical reader to recall Hemingway’s remark in The Sun Also Rises: ‘Isn’t it be pretty to think so?’”
Medieval studies today may be precisely characterized by quidditas. The Aristotelian term quidditas\(^1\) became central to the development of medieval scholastic inquiry in the West when, in 1066 Anselm of Canterbury wrote the *Monologion*.\(^2\) This eleventh-century foray into the revival of Aristotelian thought is also seen in Porphyry’s third-century translations of Aristotle and in Boethius’ sixth-century concern with universals elaborated in his commentaries on universals and categories.\(^3\) For Anselm and the developing model of medieval scholastic thought, the *Monologion* and its immediate successor, the *Proslogion*, assert a double discourse of the difference between quidditas and haeccitas, or what Jacques Derrida would later call the who and the what of being.\(^4\) Together, Anselm’s texts introduced questions of quidditas (essence, thingness, or whatness) and haeccitas (thisness), to the medieval revival and burgeoning tradition of scholasticism. The translation of classical and early Mediterranean

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thought into Western scholastic terms enabled European medieval thinkers to construct a narrative investigation into the human sciences and the methods by which we might attain knowledge of things and, potentially, to offer proofs for the existence of God. In many ways, this is the very locale for contemporary medieval scholarship. Today, the persistent broadening of what it means to define “the medieval” or “medieval studies” is fundamentally a continuation of this scholastic inquiry concerning quidditas. To this extent, although questions of “essence” are complicated, much recent medieval scholarship may be said to offer insight into the whatness or the thingness of the Middle Ages.

In order to take up the current manifestations of quidditas in medieval studies, it is first important to perceive its recent history. Paul Zumthor first wrote Parler du Moyen Age in 1980, and it was translated as Speaking of the Middle Ages in 1986. This critical juncture in medieval studies arrived at a time when literary scholarship was becoming increasingly aware of its cultural and political implications. Ten years prior to the appearance of Speaking of the Middle Ages, Zumthor’s and Hans Robert Jauss’s attention to alterity in language and historical narrative had already helped to inspire a movement from structuralism to post-structuralism among Continental and American readings of medieval poetics. The consideration of medieval poetics as an object of inquiry, or as a thing to be studied as distinct from a philological tradition, but with concerns to recognize linguistic play and a dialectics between fiction and historical narration, illustrated the theoretical potentials that reading poetics might be offered to a budding modernity by way of medieval scholarship. Partly due to Julia Kristeva’s work to refine the potential connections between philology and semiotics by way


of psychoanalysis, medieval literary studies was being resurrected as a way of thinking through the barbarisms of modernity and post-modernity. In this climate, Zumthor’s intervention in medieval studies offered vital historiographical insight that took into account the implications of a reciprocal dialogue between medieval literary, historical, and cultural studies and what was, in American and British, and Continental scholarship, often cordoned off and defined as “theory.”

Zumthor’s concerns with method and epistemic approaches to the human sciences as they are not only evident in, but also dependent upon, medieval literature, contributed to the development of the fecund debate about alterity and identification in medieval studies. This debate, led by scholars including Michael Camille, Stephen G. Nichols, R. Howard Bloch, David Aers, Kathleen Biddick, Aranye Fradenburg, Alexandre Leupin, Lee Patterson, Gabrielle Spiegel, Paul Strohm, and Michael Uebel, centered


around the *thingness* of the Middle Ages as it was produced through our relation to a (knowable or unknowable) historical sense of the past. In a certain regard, we are still engaged in this debate within medieval studies; however, the terms have shifted to account for a fragmentation of the narratives and objects that produce what we (inconsistently and with internal frisson) term the Middle Ages.

Zumthor’s historical and poetic work has also prompted a return to the serious consideration of questions of method among medieval scholarship. In their introduction to *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages*, Andrew Cole and Vance Smith argue that Zumthor’s approach to the Middle Ages in *Essai de poétique médiévale* (*Toward a Medieval Poetics*)\(^\text{18}\) catalyzed thinking about the *thing* of the Middle Ages as a mode of complicating questions of periodization, secularization, even while it initiated a conversation about the implications of medieval literary and historical studies with the broad category of “theory.”\(^\text{19}\) Cole and Smith encourage us to consider together several concerns that have driven medieval cultural studies since their cautious emergence, which coincided with “modernity” and the development of Comparative Literature programs in the United States during the early part of the 20th century. For Cole and Smith, a critique of Blumenberg’s secularization thesis urges a reconsideration of the ways that medieval studies engages literary and critical theory as well as philosophical traditions that review historical and epochal categorization. Further, they extend the intellectual and politico-cultural stakes of the dialogue between medieval studies and theory when they illustrate the ways that modernity itself is a construction that continues medievalist investigations into knowledge, scholasticism, belief structures, and which manifests global concerns about materiality and spirituality.

In addition to the introduction to *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages*, the essays contained in it contribute to the growing

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\(^{19}\) Andrew Cole and D. Vance Smith, *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).
recognition of a genre of medieval studies that once would have been considered “theory,” but which now helps to define medieval studies. Particularly, Andrew Cole’s essay, “The Sacrament of the Fetish, The Miracle of the Commodity” urges an understanding of the thing and its material role in historical culture as a mode of thinking about the Middle Ages as a fetish. Although his essay does not state this overtly, Cole’s reading of the commodity fetish as understood through Hegel and Marx, W.J.T. Mitchell, and William Pietz, locates an historicity of the thing of the Middle Ages in a precise manner that implicitly urges the medievalist to let go of the potential to “use” the medieval, and to turn instead to a valuation of the past as a mode of understanding the profundity of the thing in itself. However, even this characterization does not do justice to Cole’s reading of the sacrament of the fetish because it potentially returns us to a valuation of the thing. If it is possible to arrive at a pure self-consciousness of dialectics through reading, my suspicion is that this might have the potential to liberate us as readers from the bondage of the textual and historical commodity.

In the same volume, Kathleen Davis’s reading of periodicity, “The Sense of an Epoch: Periodization, Sovereignty, and the Limits of Secularization,” cites Dipesh Charkrabarty’s question, “Where is the now?” to usher in a critique of secularization that accounts for the questions of modernity and sovereignty that are determined by a theological view of the Middle Ages and power vis-à-vis Blumenberg, Reinhart Koselleck, Carl Löwith, and Carl Schmitt. For these thinkers, who are also influential to Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the sovereign, and who (in their time) also provoked response by Walter Benjamin, the secularization thesis was a way of finding a legitimacy in the past such that a sovereign power might dominate the populous, bringing the entirety of the past, including the Middle Ages, into the present and creating a world otherwise unto itself. In this hegemonic mode of appropriating the past, the future is determined not by time, but by place, encouraging us to consider with due weight the question, “Where is the now?”
Indeed, creating legitimacy without dominant hegemonic forces is a question of locating the law of the father and the law of the past within the question of how we might think differently about epochal shifts without absorbing alterity into presence, without fetishizing the past, present, or the future.

The genre of medieval criticism that The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages establishes as an “unwritten history of theory,” is evident in the work of Georges Bataille, Gilles Deleuze, Friedrich Hegel, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, Jean-François Lyotard, Karl Marx, and, as Bruce Holsinger illustrated in The Premodern Condition, members of the Annales School. All of these thinkers demonstrate a foundational engagement with the Middle Ages in their work; they approach the quidditas of the Middle Ages in their philosophical, psychoanalytical, and historical inquiries in order to devise ways of thinking about subjects and objects, beliefs and reason, and, the human sciences in general. Today, this genre of scholarship also includes work by Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Slavoj Zizek, all of whom address the quidditas of the Middle Ages through their theological and scholastic concerns to address the human sciences within a broader awareness of global politics and economics.

Emerging among the ever-blurring boundaries of what constitutes medieval studies, and what it means to be a medievalist, is Giorgio Agamben’s clearly defined inquiry into method, The Signature of All Things, On Method, which demonstrates the foundations of medieval scholastic that support the approach to quidditas in textual cultural studies most broadly conceived as an aauratic function of being and language. Through his focus on the essence, or signature, of the thing itself, Agamben echoes Zumthor’s enigmatic insight that language either mediates or does not mediate...
the thing. For Zumthor, “A thing is mediated by language or it isn’t” (59). For Agamben, the signature of all things refers to an aura of presence that is known textually. In his investigation of what is recognizable as the quidditas of the text, he provides a metaphor that serves the spectral and often ineffable qualities that medieval studies once sought to contain, and now recognize for their literary and imaginative documentary remainders. The dialectic produced by thinking about medieval studies and modernity has been evident in all of Agamben’s work for years. Evidently, according to Agamben, method itself is a medieval method that takes into account scholastic and theological foundations that were primary to the development of what we know to be medieval thought about science and religion.

Helping to lead this meditation on belief and its connections to a philosophical history the work of Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy’s work including, Listening, Dis-Enclosure, and Globalization, or the Creation of the World takes a phenomenological approach to a mode of being in the present that also accounts for the way that the past informs and touches the present and future. Known within fields of philosophy and theology, Nancy’s theological inquiries also offer the potential for a reading of the Middle Ages as transhistorical. Along these lines, the work of Alain Badiou has transported a scholastic and Pauline theological inquiry into the realm of philosophy in St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism.

Slavoj Zizek had already contributed to medieval studies when he wrote about Lacan’s understanding of courtly love in The Metastases of Enjoyment. There, Zizek’s argument places the Lady of courtly love in a position of power as she maintains an identity as a “cold neutral screen” upon which the male narcissist projects


his desire. In turn, the male narcissist embodies a particular form of masochism that allows him to sublimate his desire into poetics. This work was taken up by medievalists, including Sarah Kay, whose reading of Zizek and courtly love has led to fecund discussions about troubadour poetics. However, his recent work that begins post 9/11/2001 has shifted to a reading of Pauline theology that marks his work with an underlying ecclesiastical bent. His work like The Fragile Absolute, On Belief, and End Times, deploys Pauline theology to consider ways that faith and fundamentalism have led to a late-capitalist crisis in globalization and terror. In this way, medieval studies are also informing a new discourse about globalization and the current economic crisis that traverses the world.

Partly due to the recognition of the genre of medieval studies addressed above, we are now able to approach the study of the Middle Ages with a sense of its persistence and continuity with socio-economic and global problems, even while we attempt to renew the pleasure and vitality of the process of reading. Thirty years after the publication of Zumthor’s text, we find ourselves still struggling to answer these questions of identification and alterity, but the platform from which the Middle Ages is approached, and the specific subjects that are considered worthy of discussion, have placed medieval studies at the vanguard of literary and cultural criticism and studies.

Scholarship (in general) has arrived at a moment when the very quidditas (or the quiddity) of the Middle Ages is at stake. Who or what is the thing that is known as the Middle Ages? How does our study of medieval literature and culture alter our understanding of the past and inform our approaches to the present and the future? What is the value of the Middle Ages? In current academic climates,


is it more ethical and socially responsible (as well as economically viable) for scholars to approach the Middle Ages as a thing in and of itself, or as a thing that provides a means to further contemporary knowledge? Further complicating these questions are investigations into temporality itself, which scrutinize and interrogate the very possibility of speaking about a past, a present, and a future.

The question of the *quidditas* of the Middle Ages also involves locating medieval studies in space and time. John Ganim’s, *Medievalism and Orientalism* asserted a significant narrative of the means by which orientalism and medieval studies interrelate. Ganim’s work has inspired a new trend in medieval studies, which examines the way that trans-global studies are indebted to many medieval texts.\(^{27}\) This work urges a reconsideration of epochal shifts that transcend the conversations about periodicity in the West, because they also attend to the ways that the Middle Ages take place at different times in different geographical regions. Ganim says,

> As with space, so with time. We no longer conceive of the present moment as the knife-edge of futurity...the historical past has come not to stand for an archaeologically reconstructed otherness, but as a dialogic intervention in the present, which no longer can be thought of as essentially ‘modern.’ On the other hand, we freely admit that the past, like many aspects of cultural identification, is ‘imagined,’ constructed, a fiction by which we allow ourselves to proceed, or not.\(^{28}\)

In addition to the implications that Ganim’s work has had for work in the global Middle Ages, it contributes to the development of a new discourse that allows medievalists to speak about the ways that historicism has turned to historicity, and what Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Frederico have recently termed, post-historicism.

*The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, edited by Scala and Frederico, presents a collection of essays that seek to address

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\(^{27}\) For instance, Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

these very questions that are at the core of defining the *quidditas* of Medieval Studies. Relating historicity to post-historicism, the essays in the collection are attuned to the ways that historical moments leave traces, often mysterious traces, that are accompanied by gaps, and they seek to allow those fissures to speak to the present. Patricia Ingham’s contribution to the collection, “Amorous Dispossessions,” offers a lucid account of anamorphosis and its relation to a form of reading medieval literature. Ingham takes up the mystery of Petrarch’s skull to address the anamorphic uncertainty at stake in an emergent historicity. In the same volume, Maura Nolan addresses the way that history is different from historicism as she states, “A fossil from prehistory is not the same as a text from *recorded* history.” As Ingham analyzes Petrarch’s skull as an object that refuses possession, Nolan puts Augustine’s tooth under the microscope of historicism to create a view of historicism that is dependent on narrative and *writtenness* as a form of bringing knowledge and its lack into critical focus.

George Edmundson takes up Zumthor’s assertion that, “our Middle Ages include a past that is both close and distant, foreign but familiar: isn’t that a traditional definition of the ‘neighbor,’ the person whom, by turns, we exploit and love?” The definition of the Middle Ages as “both close and distant” is akin to (though not precisely the same as), another figure of paradox that medieval studies has embraced, called *extimacy*.

Jacques Lacan coined the neologism *extimacy* to articulate that which is most intimate to being and yet is also external to it. *Extimacy* resembles ideology as *that which is in you more than you*, and it has come to define many textual moments in medieval studies today. Historically (and post-historically), extimacy also informs thinking about the way that temporality defines our field of study.

31 Zumthor, 28-29; George Edmundson, “Naked Chaucer,” in Scala and Frederico, 144.
In “The Negative Erotics of Medievalism,” Thomas Prendergrast and Stephanie Trigg introduce the crucial question, “What is the difference between medieval studies and medievalism studies?” Among the many topics that comprise the discipline of medieval studies, one main question of its quidditas is the question of method. Indeed, what marks a difference between a scholar who works on the Middle Ages, and a form of medievalism that is narrated in the process of literary criticism? How do the ways that we assess and complete the fragmentary knowledge that we have about the Middle Ages define our field of inquiry?

In the same volume, Daniel Birkholz’s fascinating investigation into the topic of biography in the Middle Ages implicitly plays with these questions of quidditas and forms of knowledge by approaching the gaps in our knowledge of biographical material of medieval writers and scholars to create a sense of the past and therefore, “putting documentary faces on our inevitably imagined readers.” As Birkholz explains, “since virtually no medievalist reading can avoid being speculative, the issue is imaginative precision.” Returning literary methods and the imagination to the process of literary analysis. Indeed, Birkholz’s reading leads us to speculate about the genre of biography itself; to the extent that biographical narrative is always fictional and precisely not historically documentary, biography is, then, always post-historical. We are able to determine events and timelines that occurred by way of our reading of literature and historical documents, yet we are always modifying the narratives of those events by way of our engagement with the text (in all of its permutations).

One of the most fecund new movements among medieval scholarship is the sense of fragmentation that scholars are attributing to the Middle Ages. No longer seeking to create whole narratives of a fantasized past, scholars are interrogating the very objects that


34 Ibid.
contributed to the production of these fantasies. This movement to be aware of the way that we fantasize the past also takes into account the way that this fantasy of wholeness is a fetishization of a literary history.

Despite the changes that some of the new work in medieval studies have asserted, scholarship often fetishizes the Middle Ages. That is to say, by tending to invest the past with knowledge that has the potential to change or inform the present and the future, we raise the Middle Ages to the level of a Thing. This fetishization (which involves the affect associated with disavowal of a lack) drives us to sublimate our desire, to produce forms of knowledge, to translate being to event, and to make the Middle Ages work for us in our own political, social, aesthetic, or intellectual agendas. Indeed, fetishization provides motivation and possibility for scholarship itself and it enables us to make the Middle Ages a comprehensible object that is available for study. Through the process of submitting the Middle Ages to a thingness, or a quidditas, various epistemic modes by which we come to think about medieval narratives are produced. Some of these modes involve patterns of thought and methods of study that have become dominant in the discipline, others remain marginal or reflect regressive approaches to scholarship that nonetheless inform new possibility. Through the production of scholarly narratives, analyses, commentaries, and responses to medieval texts and cultural products, we at once embody the process of desire for the past that makes us reify the Middle Ages, and we simultaneously account for its distance from the presence. Scholarship itself is the mediator between the thing of the Middle Ages and it is also the means by which that thing is produced, kept alive, and mobilized.

Suggesting that medievalisms fetishize the Middle Ages is a way of putting the two modes of knowing the past (alterity and identification) in dialogue. The idealization and distancing produced by alterity suggests that we are better off thinking about the past as an “other.” Through “othering” we project or displace our forms of
knowledge and grant sovereignty to the past; paradoxically though, also invests our own interpretations and analyses with a privileged agency that draws boundaries around our object of inquiry as well as ourselves as scholars. Alternately, identification creates a fantasy of whole knowledge and allows and offers a kind of presentism that has recently been revived. What is at stake in this vacillation between identification and alterity is precisely the way in which medievalism offers itself as a form of knowledge that may be valuable. In both cases, the position of the scholar is protected and the position of the past is hermetically, coherently produced. Medieval studies today then, has the option to choose instead a revolutionary view of the way that narratives of the past are dispersed, and the scholar is necessarily always aware of her position as a genealogist, documentarian, or writer of fiction. Our scholarship is a sort of surplus value that is parasitically determined by the textual object, the discourses surrounding it, and an awareness of historicity. The very structure of the fetish offers a potential for thinking through the surplus value of the thing, and of the thing that we make an object when we call it the past. As Zumthor demonstrated in Speaking of the Middle Ages, the question of the Middle Ages as a thing, or as an object of inquiry, also prompts a consideration of the possibility that this thing has the potential to speak.

In her reading of the fetish and curiosity, Laura Mulvey illustrates the way that poetry offers life to inanimate objects is precisely linked to the critic’s approach to that object as a being in an of itself, or as a fetishized thing that speaks. In Mulvey’s view, our dialogue with the object determines the manner in which narrative (and therefore history) is produced. She sees that the work of the native American political artist Jimmie Durham, “collapses the boundary that demarcates the ‘once upon a time’ of nostalgia and invokes a potential mobility and flexibility of social being and a potential mediation and exchange of culture.”35 By foregrounding the animation of the inanimate object, I suggest that Durham

35 Laura Mulvey, Fetishism and Curiosity (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), 158.
produces a poetics of presence that offers a depth of understanding to the way that the *quidditas* of the Middle Ages is taking on its own narrative form in criticism today. Durham’s poem is called “Object” and it reads:

*Object*

It must have been an odd object to begin with.

Now the ghosts of its uses

Whisper around my head, tickle the tips

Of my fingers. Weeds

Reclaim with quick silence the beams, pillars

Doorways. Places change, and a small object

Stands defiant in its placelessness.

Durable because it contains intensely meanings

Which is can no longer pour out. (1964)36

As scholars and readers, we avoid calling things objects. We want agency in our own work, and we contrive the notion that to be ethical, the object must also gain or be allowed to present its own agency. To be “objectified” is to be reduced in a pejorative manner. To turn the subject into a thing is a bad thing indeed. Rather, we consistently seek ways to give the “thing” life. We animate, we narrate, we allow for the uncanny product of the cultural life of things. This movement to become ethical in our reading of the object as an other, and in our production of a concept of the Middle Ages, has combined with post-humanist studies to become a sub-genre of criticism that devotes attention to *things*.

The first two issues of the new journal, *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* (published by Palgrave), gather a number of short essays that offer meditations on post-humanism

36 Cited in Mulvey, 175. Also see her, *Jimmie Durham* (New York: Phaidon Press, 1995).
as it relates to medieval and early modern studies. Though there are too many essays in the collection to mention all of them, together they illustrate the way that conversations about post-humanism are directly engaged with questions of thingness. The reflection on thingness and the whatness of the human or post-human is precisely a conversation about quidditas.

However, this scholarship also offers a self-consciousness and meta-critical narrative that recalls the foundational questions at the core of scholastic inquiry into Being and Thingness. Indeed, scholarship within the domain of post-humanism seeks to account at once for the daily practices and ideological functions of the practices of defining the human, even while illustrating the modes of production and organization that contributed to the creation of those structures. In this regard, studies in medieval post-humanism move toward a conscious awareness of the process of fetishization that occurs in the production of historical narrative of ostensible wholeness. Furthermore, this awareness has led the movement from quiddity (the whatness) to haeccity (the thisness) of medieval post-humanism. Moving from the general to the particular has led scholarship to seek to identify differences among narratives so that distinct experiences might be viewed in their individuality.

Yet, even this move toward the haeccity of particular experience among post-human subjects or objects privileges a mode of communication across gaps that may not be possible to attain through scholarship. As Zumthor enigmatically suggests, “A thing is mediated by language or it isn’t” (Speaking 59). We might consider unraveling this statement to signify on the one hand the reification of things by way of the linguistic mediator, or, on the other hand, the immanence of things in and of themselves. This distinction is one of the questions motivating readings of Duns Scotus by Heidegger and Deleuze, both of whom investigate the questions of quidditas and
haecditas in their work. These studies, which merit the category of “medievalist,” by virtue of their philosophical engagements with scholasticism and production of methods of thought that have become important to medieval studies scholarship, have also invigorated a scholarly pursuit of the modernity of the Middle Ages.

When we fetishize, we invest things with life. Yet, there is potential freedom and imagination in the conception of the double consciousness of the thing itself—the object of desire—as something that speaks. The speaking thing—the Middle Ages, becomes a thing that wants, as well as a thing that has wants. It is on the crux of wanting, in the sense that it lacks, and it also has the ability to desire. In this sense, the object, this thing, wants to be known. To the extent that it stands on its own and has recorded itself in a manner that Alain Badiou would call the truth-event, the Middle Ages do not need us to produce narratives about it. Yet, we value medievalisms because they allow for a crucial site of return, of potential for knowledge, for the imagination to take the past and to sublimate it—to translate and transfer it to a mode of thinking about potential futures.

New work in theory in general addresses the question of history and aesthetics. For instance, Jacques Ranciere and The Politics of Aesthetics asks, is there a particular form of modernity to the question of aesthetics, or might the value of poetics also be found aesthetically within the study of the Middle Ages? For Ranciere, this question is put in terms of the end and the return—the concept of mourning and indeed, mourning of and for the future as well as the past. If there is a categorically medieval aesthetic, one might say that it encapsulates and epitomizes this elegiac mode of futurity. In this sense, the poetics of the Middle Ages do not want; rather, they are complete in their blending of poetics and politics.

Referring specifically to the literary qualities of medieval studies, Zumthor provocatively asks, “But was ‘literature’ something

medieval?” (59). In relation to an object which is precisely animated, the imagined “medieval” as a conceptual and as a temporal, as well as an aesthetic category suggests that a literary heritage is determined by way of the past. In Zumthor’s words, this is captured by a dialectics of reading the past:

The only thing that justifies the effort of our reading is the pleasure it gives us....The pleasure of being confronted with historical knowledge, in an apparent mutual refusal—a tension and, once again, a rupture between two different ends which, however could never be separated without running the whole enterprise....

Knowledge (that is, our ‘human sciences’) functions for us at the source of that pleasure, in the same way as an archetypic story functions for people of other societies—as ‘sacred history’ for people of the Middle Ages. However, it would be fallacious to mark stages, a progression, a chronology between those terms of equivocality: the irreplaceable and delicious equivocality of the inexhaustible (93).

We are hard-pressed to find work on the past that does not seek to make some kind of productive or commodifiable use of that knowledge in order to make a better future. As Lee Edelman has written, the death drive leads us all to think through a future that does not produce.38 We must value the past and the present without thinking about them as objects for the production of a future. We must value without consuming. The passage cited above from Speaking of the Middle Ages continues in this way,

Whatever we do, we will never possess anything. That much we know. What remains is the derisive freedom to trace signs on paper, a small thing, like the designs in the naked twigs on a maple tree under my window. They are pretending to have caught the whole winter sky in their net—and who knows? Perhaps they have really caught it. (93)

Yet, there is a surplus value within poetics; something that might be caught, even if for a fleeting moment. Pleasure, aesthetics, poetics, and even knowledge of the thing are always perceived as luxuries in times of need. Surely we are living in one of these times of economic crisis that threatens the integrity of the thing itself. Yet, we need the pure pleasure of poetics mediated, as it necessarily is, through dialectics, and we need these things because that pleasure returns us to a responsibility of historicity.

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Works Cited


