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Early Medieval English Studies

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Feminist Approaches to Early Medieval English Studies

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Introduction

In January 2016, the field of early medieval English studies was rocked by the revelation that one of its most prominent emeritus scholars had released a men's rights manifesto on his website, arguing that feminism had completely dominated academic discourse at the expense of men. In the ensuing weeks, further allegations of misogyny and sexual harassment among early medievalists multiplied, dovetailing with the cultural energy of the #MeToo movement to launch an ongoing conversation about women's place in the field, both as scholars and as subjects of study. For many, these developments seemed retrogressive after consistent progress throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. More women were earning PhDs and publishing scholarship in the field, building formidable international reputations and occupying prestigious positions in the highest reaches of academia. Even feminist criticism seemed more or less mainstream; it was no longer radical to suggest that a research project could incorporate or even focus exclusively on early medieval women, and many books and articles were informed by a feminist perspective, even if they weren't explicitly feminist in nature. Perhaps this is why the collective conversation caused such upheaval; it seemed to reveal an undercurrent of misogyny within our field that should have been impossible in the twenty-first century. How could a field in which women scholars are so visible, and where a great deal of feminist work has won critical acclaim, simultaneously harbor such retrograde thinking about feminism and the academy?

In the aftermath of 2016, conversations about the state of the field—who defines it, who it is for, who belongs, and who doesn't—have proliferated on social media, at conference panels and roundtables, and in blog posts and journal special issues. The result is a long-overdue and much-needed reconsideration of how early medievalists, and medieval studies more broadly, demarcate both their objects of study and their methods of inquiry. As these conversations have reminded us (again), our fields of study are not ideologically neutral. Like sand in mortar, the values and beliefs of those who defined the discipline are inherent in its very foundations; they underlie every aspect of our work. Some fear that the structure of the

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field will disintegrate if its foundations are called into question, but those values and beliefs are not consistent with the ones that inform twenty-first-century scholarship because they emerge from a historical context that was explicit about its commitments to a narrow definition of the Middle Ages as coterminous—temporally, geographically, and ideologically—with Western Christendom. The field now known as early medieval English studies was born at the height of British imperialism, with the goal of bolstering British claims to cultural (understood as racial) superiority over its colonial subjects. During this period of European hegemonic expansion, continental scholars looked to Old English language and literature as evidence of the unity of a Germanic racial identity, and interest in Old English in the early United States was similarly due to an investment in the "Saxon myth."[1] The field grew in an environment where women, people of color, and openly LGBTQ+ voices were almost entirely absent and lent its historical authority to the restrictive definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity" that undergird heteronormative structures of gender and desire rooted in presumptive Whiteness. In both scholarship and curricula, early medieval English materials supported claims to White, male, European superiority.[2] Like all institutional structures, academic disciplines are designed to uphold the power of those who created them; as a result, the traditional scholarly paradigms of early medieval English studies embody the patriarchal and imperial values of their origins in White supremacy. The goal of this volume is to assist in the vital project of rewriting those paradigms.

In striving for this goal, we do not mean to suggest that feminism is the only, or even the best, remedy for what ails early medieval English and medieval studies. We see our theoretical and political commitments as one strand of a multivalent effort to rethink the parameters of our discipline and to create a scholarly community that is rigorous, inclusive, and diverse. To help effect this change, we seek a return to the originary promise of feminism as both a critical and a political practice. From its earliest days, feminist theory laid out the project of recovering the voices of people who had been silenced within the dominant paradigms of historical inquiry. By the later twentieth century, when feminist theory reached its ascendency

1 Hans Sauer, "Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Nineteenth Century: Germany, Austria, Switzerland," in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Philip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 455–71; Stanley R. Hauer, "Anglo-Saxon Language," *PMLA* 98, no. 5 (October 1983): 879–898.

2 Mary Dockray-Miller, *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage in the American Women's College* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

in the academy, it revealed an even more radical notion: that the structures of inquiry themselves shaped the objects of our study, and that feminist questions could never really be answered within patriarchal paradigms. Feminist theory thus offered the promise of critiquing, pushing back, and even dismantling those paradigms in favor of new forms of inquiry that challenged the very foundations of most academic disciplines. As historian Joan Wallach Scott put it, "I do not think we should quit the archives or abandon the study of the past, but we do have to change some of the ways we have gone about working, some of the questions we have asked. We need to scrutinize our methods of analysis, clarify our operative assumptions, and explain how we think change occurs. Instead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled."[3] Placing women and gender at the center of a critical analysis fundamentally shifts its perspective and results in a literal refocusing of the material. Traditional understanding and conventional wisdom recede from view as new possibilities enter our frame of reference, changing what we are able to see, say, and know about the objects we study. This means, of course, that "our methods of analysis" and "our operative assumptions" will have to change as well, to accommodate different perspectives and the new forms of knowledge they reveal. Feminism, along with a variety of other critical methodologies, proposed a wholesale reconfiguration of epistemology, and the past forty years have witnessed dramatic shifts in the baseline assumptions that underlie academic work in the humanities, social sciences, and beyond.

The prospect of change has fueled no small amount of resistance to, and resentment of, feminist intersectional praxis. Medieval studies has been peculiarly resistant to the shifts that have taken place elsewhere in cultural studies, and such conservatism has been a constitutive influence on early medieval English studies over the past four decades. As a result, it is difficult to quantify the impact of feminist theory on the field. Inaugurated in the mid-1980s, early medieval English scholars' feminist analysis began (as it did in most fields of literary study) with the recovery of women's voices and women's perspectives. These early studies, now landmarks of literary criticism, worked to situate women in relation to the dominant modes of understanding early medieval English culture. Helen Damico, Jane Chance, and Helen Bennett placed women at the center of their analyses of traditional heroic discourse in Old English literature, establishing a key role for women

3 Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986), 1053–75, at 1066–67.

in the field's most prestigious texts.[4] Historian Christine Fell, meanwhile, sought for traces of women's lives and experiences in a historical record that largely excludes them, enabling scholars to see women's influence in early medieval history and assert their presence and agency in the early medieval English world.[5] In 1990, Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen edited a collection of *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, in the hope that "the presentation of an anthology might promote work in a much neglected area of Anglo-Saxon studies."[6] Publications like these, along with many others, went a long way toward legitimizing feminist criticism as a viable approach to early medieval materials—despite the fact that feminism in the academy was already on the decline within a decade of Damico and Olsen's watershed volume.[7]

The belatedness of feminist criticism in early medieval studies was keenly felt by scholars in the early 1990s who saw this late acceptance as a missed opportunity for a real critical overhaul of the field. At the same time that *New Readings* sought to celebrate and stimulate work on women in Old English, Bennett, along with Clare Lees and Gillian Overing, expressed frustration at the field's continued resistance to feminist criticism. They catalogue a certain amount of acceptance for the recovery of women's work and female voices within the texts, but they criticize scholars' reticence to embrace the possibility of a true epistemological shift. Especially in fields with a narrow focus and clearly defined critical approaches, such as language and literature, they pointed out, scholars were unlikely to undertake explicitly feminist work. In other words, work on women in early medieval English studies could find a place in the field as long as it adhered to conventional methodologies and did not threaten traditional scholarly paradigms. The impact of feminist theory on the workings of the field, then, was minimal at best, in distinct contrast to the state of other comparable fields of cultural studies.

Unfortunately, that is almost as true today as it was in 1990. In an effort to compile a data set that would allow for a diachronic comparison of feminist work in early medieval English studies since the early 1980s, we undertook

4 Helen Damico, Beowulf*'s Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986); and Helen Bennett, "The Female Mourner at Beowulf's Funeral: Filling in the Blanks/Hearing the Spaces," *Exemplaria* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 35–50.

5 Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

6 Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, eds., *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), vii.

7 Susan Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 878–902.

to survey the proceedings of the biennial conference of the organization then known as the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists (ISAS)[8] since its inaugural meeting in 1983, using these papers as a bellwether of trends and currents in the field. Using the official reports of the meetings published in the journal *Anglo-Saxon England* (1983–2015) and the conference websites (2017–2019), we counted the number of speakers at each meeting, how many of those speakers were women, and how many addressed women or gender in their papers. We construed the critical category of "women or gender" quite broadly, including in our count papers on female-centered texts like *Juliana* or *Wulf and Eadwacer*, as well as texts associated with women, such as the Gospels of Judith of Flanders and the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, and papers on masculinity and sexuality.

The results of this survey reveal some interesting and, from our perspective, surprising trends. It was both surprising (to us) and heartening to note that women scholars have been central figures in early medieval English studies for quite some time. At the first ISAS meeting in 1983, for example, eight of the twenty-five speakers were women. By 1995, women accounted for half the speakers at the conference, a ratio that has remained the same or even grown since then. Over the last decade, more than half the conference presenters have been women, and in 2015, women accounted for fully two-thirds of the speakers. Keynote lectures, which became a regular part of these meetings in 1999, tell a similar story. At least one speaker, out of two or three keynotes at each conference, has been a woman. These data indicate that the field itself is not inimical to women scholars, whose work finds audiences at the flagship conference as often as, and sometimes even more often than, their male colleagues.

When we turn to analyze feminist work within the field, however, a very different picture emerges. In that inaugural ISAS conference in 1983, no papers dealt explicitly with women or gender. The first such paper was offered (by a man) in 1985, with single papers also offered in 1991 and 1993. The 1995 conference finally saw a paper on gender offered by a woman—the same year that women finally made up half of the slate of presenters. Still, only three of the thirty-five papers presented dealt with women or gender. And even that number was high; papers on women or gender account for between 3% and 5% of the conference program throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In 2017, when the ISAS conference expanded to include concurrent sessions for the first time and offered a record sixty-seven papers, 12% of

8 The organization's membership voted in 2019 to rename itself the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England.

them concerned women or gender. (In the program for the 2019 meeting, that number was back down to 8%.) The numbers for keynotes are equally dismal; only two keynotes in the last twenty years have dealt with gender. The data from the ISAS biannual conference, then, depict a field that is approximately 50% female, but where feminist criticism (very broadly construed) accounts for around 5% of the scholarship. While women are well represented among scholars of early medieval England, scholarship on women and gender is not.

The data of publications in the field's flagship journal, the annual *Anglo-Saxon England*, are even less encouraging. During the years 1983–2017, the journal published 380 research articles; 134 were authored or co-authored by women, for a ratio of approximately 35%. In that period, only sixteen articles (4%) dealt with women or gender—primarily articles about woman-focused or woman-owned texts. Only two, in thirty-five years, engage with gender as an explicit critical category. In the flagship journal, then, as at the flagship conference, women's participation in scholarship is clearly visible, but feminist scholarship is not. Even more distressing is the apparent fact that feminist work was actually more prevalent in articles of the 1980s and 1990s than it has been since 2000.

The proceedings of the biennial meetings of ISAS and the publication record of *Anglo-Saxon England* do not represent the entirety of the field, of course, but we would submit that they offer a useful snapshot of what could be considered the mainstream of early medieval English studies. It would be illuminating, though beyond the scope of this brief Introduction, to collect similar data for doctoral degrees and dissertations, as well as the wider publication of books and journal articles.[9] And it would be similarly productive, though we suspect even more damning, to undertake a survey of work by scholars of color and scholarship on race. Taken together, however, these examples allow us to make some general observations about the place of women and of feminist inquiry in early medieval English studies. First, it is impossible to assert that feminist analysis has ever been mainstream, let alone dominant, in in field. Despite the general acceptance of women

9 Christopher Abram has undertaken a comprehensive survey of women's scholarship on *Beowulf*, including dissertations, articles, monographs, edited collections, editions, and translations. He finds that (1) women are greatly underrepresented as critics, editors, and translators of *Beowulf*, in comparison to their presence in the field and their work on other Old English texts, and (2) feminist work still accounts for only a fraction of the published criticism on the poem, as of 2018. Christopher Abram, "Does *Beowulf* Have a Gender Problem? (Spoiler: Yes)," Roundtable presentation, 53rd International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, May 2018.

as full participants in scholarship, their presence has not reshaped the fundamental paradigms, established centuries ago, that govern scholarly engagement with early medieval England. The mere presence of women does not guarantee a feminist revolution, of course. As recent work by Mary Dockray-Miller has shown, women's early involvement with early medieval English studies in the women's colleges of the nineteenth-century United States functioned as an explicit denial or subversion of their femininity; taking on the masculine discipline of the Old English language was a way to demonstrate academic rigor despite their gender.[10] It would be foolish to assume that all, or even most, women scholars would or should want to work on gender, but it seems equally foolish to assume that almost no one does. Something is keeping scholars from engaging with gender in early medieval English studies, despite relative gender parity in the field. Women are welcome, so long as they do not make gender explicit.

Outside the admittedly narrow scope of the ISAS conference and the flagship journal, feminism feels more prevalent in early medieval English studies. Dockray-Miller offered a comprehensive overview of this kind of work in 2008, while still noting (almost two decades after *New Readings*) that such work was "new" and that the influence of feminist work on Old English had yet to find its way into the scholarly mainstream or the undergraduate curriculum.[11] Readers will no doubt be able to rattle off a long litany of scholars, in addition to those listed above, who have contributed excellent work on women and gender to our collective knowledge of the period. Feminist scholarship of early medieval England runs the gamut from traditional philological analysis that just happens to be about women-centered texts to radical reshapings of the period when viewed through a feminist lens. The very fact that this work is not well-represented at the field's most prestigious conference or in its flagship journal indicates that feminist work has been running parallel, rather than central, to the discipline's primary concerns for the past four decades. The field has allowed it to exist on the margins and has occasionally acknowledged it as part of modern academia but has never accepted it as central to the prestige structures of the discipline.

Bennett, Lees, and Overing traced the source of this reticence to the overwhelmingly masculinist biases of the discipline, which cast themselves as standards of "rigor" and "clarity": "Much of what is not feminist about recent criticism on/of women in the literature is not, or not only, that it is

10 Dockray-Miller, *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage*.

11 Mary Dockray-Miller, "Old English Literature and Feminist Theory: A State of the Field," *Literature Compass* 5 (2008), 1049–59, DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00581.x.

not consciously employing this or that variety of feminist critical theory, but that it does not more consciously acknowledge the masculinist (call them binary, traditional, patriarchal, patristic) premises upon which it operates, and that the potential for feminist hypotheses is closed down by the need for 'clarity', definition, and a concept of structure that relies on the principle of opposition."[12] Their words are just as applicable today as they were almost thirty years ago. The same traditional methods and scholarly standards continue to govern the production of knowledge—methods and standards derived from the explicitly imperialist, implicitly racist, and predominantly misogynist cultural paradigms of nineteenth-century Britain. In other words, the very standards by which scholarship on the early medieval English world—particularly its literature—was judged are predicated on a set of values and expectations inimical to a feminist project that embraces multiplicity, diversity, and ambiguity as positive epistemological and aesthetic values. Put yet another way, the scaffolding of early medieval English studies was built by men, for and about men; feminism had a hard time getting a foothold, and by the time it did, much of its most radical cultural force had already been spent. Feminism's revolutionary critical potential, we suggest, is precisely what has kept it sidelined within early medieval English studies for all these years.

Nearly three decades after Damico and Olsen's volume and Bennett, Lees, and Overing's call for a more methodologically open and inclusive field, then, early medieval English studies enjoys the fairly regular presence of women's voices, both in the source material and in the scholarship. Despite an exponential increase in scholarly work by and about women, however, the field has remained peculiarly resistant to the transformative potential of feminist critique. In the meantime, feminist theory itself has undergone some radical transformations. By the mid-2000s, critics seemed to reach a tentative consensus that the feminism of the late twentieth century had lost its revolutionary edge, overtaken by cultural changes that rendered it deradicalized and politically impotent.[13] In response, feminism reimagined itself, largely in response to long-standing critiques by scholars of color, as one of the many axes that intersect in projects of social justice and political change. In 2022, feminist criticism cannot consider gender in isolation from other categories of identity

12 Helen T. Bennett, Clare A. Lees, and Gillian R. Overing, "Anglo-Saxon Studies: Gender and Power: Feminism and Old English Studies," *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (Fall 1990), 15–24, at 18.

13 For an overview, see "Theories and Methodologies: Feminist Criticism Today," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (October 2006): 1678–1741, featuring Shanna Greene Benjamin, Julie Crawford, Marianne DeKoven, Jane Elliott, Susan Stanford Friedman, Susan Gubar, Astrid Henry, Sharon Marcus, Sinead McDermott, and Toril Moi.

or material existence; it is better conceptualized as one methodology among many, along with sexuality and critical race studies, studies of Indigeneity, decolonization, and social inequality, and environmental justice, that seek to reframe assumptions about the production of knowledge and the potential for political action. The recognition that gender intersects with other categories of identity in local and specific ways adds urgency to the long-standing call for forms of knowledge-making that recognize multiplicity and fluidity as fundamental to the process of analysis. In other words, feminism may no longer function as a self-contained field, but its commitment to its original project of challenging the unacknowledged assumptions that underlie scholarly discourse has gained a new and pressing impetus in the twenty-first century.

The transformation of feminist thought since 2000 does not render it impotent or irrelevant. While gender, as an analytical category, cannot and should not lay claim to the kind of universality it assumed in the 1970s and 1980s, it is still capable of providing some of the critical leverage necessary to dismantle the prevailing paradigms of academic discourse, especially in early medieval English studies. The events of 2016, in medieval studies and beyond, demonstrate that the foundations of academic fields and institutions remain steeped in colonial exploitation and show the continued need for this kind of radical, revisionist potential. Excellent work by scholars such as Dorothy Kim, Sierra Lomuto, Adam Miyashiro, Seeta Chaganti, Matthew X. Vernon, M. Rambaran-Olm, and the scholarly organization Medievalists of Color have helped us to see the layers of colonialism, White supremacy, and ethnic and linguistic nationalism that form the foundations of medieval studies and the extent to which every aspect of academic life, in scholarship and in teaching, is compromised by those foundations.[14] They have created

14 Dorothy Kim, "Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy," *In the Middle* (28 August 2017), accessed April 19, 2019, http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/teaching-medieval-studies-in-time-of.html; Sierra Lomuto, "White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies," *In the Middle* (5 December 2016), accessed April 29, 2019, http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/12/white-nationalism-and-ethics-of.html; Adam Miyashiro, "Decolonizing Anglo-Saxon Studies: A Response to ISAS in Honolulu," *In the Middle* (29 July 2017), accessed April 29, 2019, http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/07/decolonizing-anglo-saxon-studies.html; Seeta Chaganti, "Confederate Monuments and the *Cura pastoralis*," *In the Middle* (27 February 2018), accessed January 13, 2021, https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2018/02/confederate-monuments-and-cura.html; Matthew X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages* (London: Palgrave, 2018); M. Rambaran-Olm, "Anglo-Saxon Studies, Academia and White Supremacy," *Medium* (27 June 2018), accessed April 29, 2019, https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3; "On Race and Medieval Studies," *Medievalists of Color* (1 August 2017), accessed April 29, 2019, http://medievalistsofcolor.com/statements/on-race-and-medieval-studies/.

an epistemic shift in how we can think, write, and talk about medieval materials—even how we define what counts as "medieval" to begin with. As a field, we now face the challenge of shifting our work to new foundations—an exciting opportunity to rethink what we do, how we do it, and why it matters. At the same time, we recognize that we do not all occupy a level playing field. We began this project with a diverse slate of contributors that gradually grew less so over the six years of its production. Too many of our valued colleagues are drastically under-resourced, and they faced challenges of ill health, family commitments, and competing work claims that forced them to withdraw. The volume is poorer for the loss of their contributions, and the situation highlights the urgency of restructuring our scholarly institutions to better support vulnerable scholars.

This is one reason why we see renewed urgency for feminist criticism—that is, criticism focused on women and gender, but also criticism that challenges received wisdom and destabilizes longstanding assumptions, celebrates multiplicity and fluidity as generators of meaning, and recognizes difference, in many forms, as productive. We seek to build coalitions with colleagues whose work in critical race studies, the politics of colonialism and Indigeneity, the histories of sexuality and gender identity, and environmental justice will allow us to reframe our field in terms that meet the needs of twenty-first-century scholars. Such work will change how we undertake scholarship of the early medieval period, but it also has the potential to radically alter the construction of the field itself, as vast new configurations of knowledge emerge from these changes in perspective. It is in this spirit that we offer the essays collected here: to center women and gender in our narrative of the early medieval English world, and to see how that recentering shifts the paradigms that govern our inquiry and reshapes the very foundations of our work. As Scott wrote more than thirty years ago, we do not seek to abandon the archives or to compromise the rigor of scholarly methodologies that are rooted in expert knowledge and historical specificity. We do recognize, however, that the tools of our trade—philology, historicism, paleography, codicology, archaeology, and even close reading—are not ideologically neutral, so we attempt to deploy them with deliberation, consciousness, and self-awareness. The work presented here is willing to engage with the discipline's most foundational assumptions about early medieval England not as a priori principles but as products of a particular time and place. By explicitly challenging earlier criticism and systematically showing how its investments and ideologies have limited the ways we think about our materials, the essays in this volume take up the dual enterprise of both dismantling the critical apparatuses of previous

generations of scholars and building new models informed by a broader and more inclusive perspective. Taken together, they represent an attempt to further the epistemological shift of medieval studies and to show what becomes possible when scholars approach the Middle Ages with a desire for diverse, inclusive, and potentially radical forms of knowledge.

Our volume opens with a metacritical consideration of how feminist analysis changes approaches to the study of the early Middle Ages by altering the lenses through it is viewed. The contributions of many women have been claimed by men, as Jane Toswell presents in "The Lost Victorian Women of Old English Studies." These women had their contributions published by male authors, such as W. W. Skeat and J. A. Giles, who claimed sole authorship. The contribution of medieval women is often ignored as well, since they tend to create textiles rather than large works of stone sculpture. Christina Lee in "Embroidered Narratives" argues that textiles offer evidence for women's literacy and their power in political exchanges, when such items were given as gifts. Even those medieval women who are vividly remembered, such as Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, find their true history becomes overwritten by the stories that each generation tells about them. In "Remembering the Lady of Mercia," Scott T. Smith catalogues the multifarious ways in which many eras grappled with the intractable parts of this virago's story. After considering what lenses we have historically used to write and rewrite our stories of the Middle Ages, our collection turns to four lenses of our own: affect theory, virginity, medical discourse, and women's literacy.

Displays of emotion are often connected to women's expression, yet this sequence of essays on affect asks readers to revise their connection of emotional performance to displays of masculinity and femininity. E. J. Christie turns his attention to masculinity in "Be a Man, Beowulf: Sentimental Masculinity and the Gentleness of Kings." Christie opens by exploring the influence of Victorian attitudes toward manliness on twentieth-century medievalists such as J. R. R. Tolkien. He then goes on to examine Beowulf's characterization as "manna mildust ond monðwærust" as a Christian formula "relaying gentleness, meekness, and obedience," vis-à-vis its treatment by Victorian scholars who treated Beowulf as a paragon of masculine energy, and later by Tolkien, for the poem is about not duty and loyalty but grief and regret. Masculinity is likewise the focus of Alice Jorgensen's essay "Shame, Disgust, and Ælfric's Masculine Performance." Jorgensen argues that whereas "[t]he ideal male body is contained, chaste, ordered in its passions, orthodox in its beliefs," Ælfric depicts the disgusting male bodies of Herod and Arius as "a convulsive rejection of all that is pagan, excessive, sinful, and mired in the body's appetites, especially sex."

The essay "explores the conjunction between disgust and gender in Ælfric's writings, arguing that it is an important aspect of how Ælfric constructs his masculine authority as a preacher."

In many literary texts virginity remained the ideal for religious women. Two essays interrogate how early, influential male authors tackle the problem of virginity. In "The Ornament of Virginity: Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* and the Virtuous Women of the Early English Church," Emily V. Thornbury argues that a text written for a female audience, albeit by a man, can reflect the intellectual lives of its addressees. Aldhelm diverged from his Mediterranean sources by representing virginity as acquired ornament, but the metaphor reflects both "the kind of martial imagery loved by Old English poets" and "early medieval conceptions of an aesthetic practice often associated with women: ornamentation." In Thornbury's analysis, "Aldhelm's striking conceptualization of virginity as an ornament suggests he thought of ornament itself in a way that was not derived from his literary sources, but instead likely reflects cultural presuppositions that his addressees, as fellow early medieval people, would have shared." Thus, she concludes, "Taken as a whole, Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* shows that women could be imagined—and perhaps imagined themselves—as warriors for virtue as well as discerning readers, and as artisans fully engaged in the construction of their moral selves." One of the most famous early medieval English virgins is Æthelthryth of Ely, but rather than turning to Ælfric of Eynsham's account, as many scholars do, Lisa M. C. Weston returns to his source in "Chaste Bodies and Untimely Virgins: Sexuality, Temporality, and Bede's Æthelthryth." In Weston's reading of Bede's prose narrative and hymn, the two texts "create a particularly telling epistemological and ontological connection between sexuality and temporality." By refusing reproduction and disrupting dynastic succession, and by occupying both sacred time and secular time, virgins entangle temporality, gender, and sexuality, and thus "reveal contradictions that inherently problematize monastic identity in early medieval England."

Medical texts are the subject of the fourth cluster of essays. In "*Monaðgecynd* and *flewsan*: Wanted and Unwanted Monthly Courses in Old English Medical Texts," Dana M. Oswald focuses on a phenomenon specific to the female body: "half of the adult population of early medieval England menstruated." "The treatments in the leechbooks specific to menstruation, either provoking or preventing it," she argues, "exhibit the male/textual desire to exert control over women's reproductive bodies, and, in the absence of their voices but the presence of their textual bodies, the desire of women to claim control of their actual bodies." In "Dangerous Voices, Erased Bodies:

Reassessing the Old English *Wifgemædla* and Witches in *Leechbook III*," Erin E. Sweany rereads one particular remedy traditionally interpreted as a defense against a female witch. After a thorough assessment of the evidence, Sweany argues that the remedy may actually serve a female patient struggling with her mental or emotional health. "Ultimately," she concludes, "the dominant reading and history of scholarly treatment of this entry, when context is considered, reveals more about our own emotions than those of the people who compiled and used *Leechbook III*." Finally, in "Women and 'Women's Medicine' in Early Medieval England, from Text to Practice," Christine Voth explores not just medical texts but charms, prayers, homilies, and penitentials, to identify and analyze the gender-specific corpus of early medieval women's medicine, specifically gynecological and obstetric care.

We finally see women's own writing in our final cluster of three essays on women's literacy. Aidan Conti discusses the career of an early medieval English nun who traveled to the continent in the late eighth century in "The Literate Memory of Hugeburc of Heidenheim." By writing the lives of her kinsmen Willibald and Wynnebald, Hugeburc became the only known female hagiographer of the period. Moreover, her work is one of the only accounts of interactions with Islam in the Holy Land between the early seventh century CE and the end of the eleventh century. Yet importantly, Conti concludes, "If making Hugeburc, who remained anonymous for so long, visible is a feminist act, so too is the unfurling of the concrete histories her cultural work inscribes, work that serves Western Christendom's imagined claims to foreign holdings and its vision of a regulated social order." Matthew T. Hussey, in his essay "A Road Nearly Taken: An Eight-Century Manuscript in a Woman's Hand and Franco-Saxon Nuns in Early Medieval English Intellectual History," reevaluates a cluster of understudied late seventh- and early eighth-century texts and manuscripts produced by female writers for female readers, suggesting a scriptorium of nuns in Bath under the influence of the Frankish church. Moreover, Hussey contests the pejorative assessment of this work by past scholars. Both Hussey and Conti offer evidence of female authors, scribes, and scholars working with and within the early medieval English church. In light of this evidence, and cross-referenced with how much we do not know about the scribe of Cotton Vitellius A.xv, Stephen M. Yeager opens "a conversation about three possibilities: first, that the *Beowulf* manuscript may have been intended for a readership of women; second, that it may have been copied by women scribes; and third, that the poem itself may be attributed to a woman poet." Yeager's essay "'Historical Accuracy', Anonymity, and Women's Authorship: The Case of the Case for *Beowulf*" offers an important reminder of how fundamental questions have

been foreclosed by the assumptions, constraints, and blind spots we have inherited from our scholarly predecessors.

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Metacritical Considerations

1 The Lost Victorian Women of Old English Studies

M. J. Toswell

Abstract
The focus here is on some of the Victorian women scholars who very significantly but without acknowledgment advanced the study of Old English: the fierce philologist Anna Gurney, who prepared and quietly published the first translation of the Old English Chronicle materials; the widow Mary Conybeare, who assembled and developed the rest of the material in John Josias Conybeare's highly influential volume *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, the *atelier* of women who did most of the work in the many editions of W.W. Skeat (his wife, his daughters, the translators Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson, and even T.O. Cockayne); and Elise Otté, who provided significant philological aid to her stepfather Benjamin Thorpe in the preparation of his editions.

Keywords: Anna Gurney, Elise Otté, Mary Conybeare, W.W. Skeat *atelier*

Many women—mostly in England, and mostly in genteel but not affluent households—accomplished a great deal for the field of Old English studies that has gone largely unnoticed. When this project began, examples of women scholars, acknowledged, more often under-acknowledged, and most often unacknowledged, multiplied rapidly. Mabel Day did much of the work of Israel Gollancz, with cursory thanks and occasional acknowledgments, including the completion of his edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* a decade after his death.[1] Ida Gordon, more obviously in the field of Old

1 Murray McGillivray reminded me of this point in conversation. This project has been particularly collaborative, and I am very grateful to the many scholars referenced here and to many others who offered leads and advice. I gave versions of this paper to the Medieval Symposium of the International Association of University Professors of English (IAUPE) conference at Poznan

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English, produced her own excellent edition of the Old English poem *The Seafarer*. She was closely involved with the Leeds group of medieval scholars, including her husband, former teacher, and doctoral supervisor E. V. Gordon and his close friend J. R. R. Tolkien. The former Ida Pickles published one article based on her thesis in 1934, but after her husband's death in 1938 she completed his projects under his name, and went on to her own as well. To support her young family she was a lecturer, and eventually a senior lecturer, at the University of Manchester. Although she held a higher degree than her husband had when he moved from Leeds to become the Smith Professor at Manchester in 1931, it seems unlikely that Ida's scholarly abilities were properly acknowledged during or after her husband's lifetime.[2] Similarly, W. W. Skeat points out in passing that Joseph Bosworth's second wife, the former Anne Margaret Elliot, did significant work collating manuscript readings for his work on the *Orosius*.[3] More such scholars no doubt exist, and more work remains to be done on the scholars I have chosen to focus on here: Anna Gurney, Mary Conybeare, the women of the Skeat *atelier*, and Elise C. Otté.

Some work has been done to identify women whose scholarship was undervalued or ignored in the field of Middle English studies. There is, for example, the famous case of Hope Emily Allen inviting Sanford Meech to co-edit *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and his subsequent attempts to efface her existence from the work.[4] Similarly, John M. Manly received much

in July 2018, and for the Oxford Medieval English Seminar on October 21, 2020, and received many useful comments from scholars at both events. I have not been able to spend a lot of time with nineteenth-century literary magazines and suspect a very great many learned women will be found in those pages, though by initials or indirect references only. One Victorian medievalist did explicitly comment on the accomplishments of various scholarly women in the field; as Thijs Porck points out, Joseph Bosworth in his *Essentials of Anglo-Saxon Grammar* (London: Longman etc., 1841) in a dedicatory note to Elizabeth Haigh mentions Elizabeth Elstob and Anna Gurney by name, and animadverts to several other women: see Thijs Porck (@thijsporck) "Rev. Dr. Joseph Bosworth (1788-1876) dedicated his 'The Essentials of Anglo-Saxon Grammar' (1841) to Elizabeth Charlotte Haigh (née Borrell)," Twitter, October 27, 2018, https://twitter.com/thijsporck/status/1056256761332666370.

2 Ida Gordon's one article published after her thesis on the sagas of the Vestfirðir was "The Murder of Thorgrímr in Gíslasaga Súrssonar," *Medium Ævum* 3 (1934): 79–94. She published several articles on her own while also finishing her husband's edition of *Pearl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), the edition of *The Seafarer* (London: Methuen, 1960) and a book on *Troilus and Criseyde* in 1970 after her retirement in 1968. Her library is at St. Andrews University, and some letters, including exchanges with Tolkien, are at Leeds University Library. Work remains to be done on Ida Gordon.

3 "Introduction," in *A Student's Pastime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), lxviii.

4 For some of these stories see the excellent *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005). The seventy-two entries in this work do not include any of the women discussed here. For female scholars of early medieval English

acclaim and scholarly recognition for his work on Chaucer, especially on the records of his life and the text of the *Canterbury Tales*, but his colleague at the University of Chicago, and the co-editor of those works, Edith Rickert, remains unknown and largely unacknowledged. Mary Haweis singlehandedly made Chaucer popular in the nineteenth century with her stories and adaptations; and Caroline Spurgeon, an important Chaucer scholar in her own right, had to fight to be appointed the first woman professor of English in England, at the University of London.[5]

In the field of Old English studies, the groundwork has been laid. Several excellent theses, by Julie Towell, Robyn Bray, and Helen Brookman, lead the way.[6] In the field of history of the language, there remains work to be done. For the backgrounds of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, research has found the male mental health patient who provided many citations, but not the many women who did the same (perhaps with less interesting back stories).[7] The *OED* introduction points out that Lady Craigie, wife to the editor W. A. Craigie, revised the arrangement of the entries for *U* in 1917–1918, but the details of her work remain unheralded.[8] Some women scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United Kingdom are maddeningly hard to identify because they are subsumed under surnames and the supposedly honorific "Miss" or "Mrs." Here I hope only to give some hints about a few of their stories, and to point the way towards how to uncover more of them. We may perhaps in future references to the works they abetted or drafted offer their

studies in the United States, see Mary Dockray-Miller, *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage in the American Women's College* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot, 2017), especially "Appendix 2: American Women who Taught Anglo-Saxon at the Collegiate Level before WWI," 84–96, and Appendices 3 and 4 on Anna Robertson Brown and Mary Gwinn, 96–126.

5 See, for example, the essays by Margaret Connolly on Mary Haweis (1848–1898), William Snell on Edith Rickert (1871–1938), and Juliette Dor on Caroline Spurgeon (1869–1942) in "Eminent Chaucerians? Early Women Scholars and the History of Reading Chaucer," ed. Richard Utz and Peter Schneck, *Philologie im Netz* (Philology on the Net) Supplement 4 (2009), accessed February 20, 2022, http://web.fu-berlin.de/phin/beiheft4/b4i.htm.

The early history of Middle English scholarship itself is best approached with David Matthews, *The Making of Middle English, 1765–1910* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

6 See Julie Ellen Towell, "The 'rise and progress' of Anglo-Saxonism and English national identity: Old English literature in the nineteenth century" (PhD dissertation, Wayne State University, 2003). I will refer to Bray and Brookman below.

7 See Simon Winchester, *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary* (London: HarperCollins, 2005).

8 For example, in addition to the work of Lady Craigie mentioned in the preface, the two women who did most of the work on Skeat's edition of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, Miss Wilkinson and Miss Gunning, appear prominently in the prefaces to the dictionary fascicles. Skeat presumably recruited them to do work for the *OED* as well as for his own editing projects.

names too, so that although they were effaced in the original publications, we can restore them to their rightful places now, if we can winkle them out.

Anna Gurney (1795–1857)

In 1819, the first translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was published in England, by someone identified on the title page simply as "A Lady in the Country." The soubriquet hid Anna Gurney, the younger half-sister of Hudson Gurney, and youngest child of Richard Gurney and his second wife Rachel. Hudson Gurney was a gentleman-scholar in Norfolk, based to the north of Norwich, but very involved in the learned currents of his day as the long-standing vice-president in charge of publications of the Society of Antiquaries. He probably helped arrange publication for his young sister of a couple of pieces in *Archaeologica*, and he must have overseen her first steps in foreign and medieval languages, given that he was already a grown man when their father died in 1811. Eight years later, she published her translation. Gurney states in a brief preface that her work was well advanced when she learned that a full collected edition, with translation and notes, was about to be published. Her work had perforce depended on printed texts and not manuscripts, but she went ahead with publication, but "for private circulation" in a form which might be "convenient for reference." The edition to which she referred, by James Ingram, did indeed emerge several years later, in 1823. However, it is worth noting that although Ingram said he was producing a collective edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, his work has never garnered many plaudits. It could even be argued that it wrongly overshadowed Gurney's forceful and solid translation. Eric Stanley, for example, states:

> Among the very best translators from Old English is Anna Gurney, whose life, as recorded by *DNB*, was impressively triumphant, and whose work has received recognition from Norman Garmonsway in an excellent study.[9]

The "impressively triumphant" life to which Stanley refers is a genuinely remarkable tale. Gurney was paralyzed when a toddler and had very limited

9 E. G. Stanley, "Translation from Old English: 'The Garbaging War-Hawk', or, The Literal Materials from Which the Reader Can Re-create the Poem," reprinted in *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987), 83–114, at 104. Stanley later points out that only the school of translators who look to Miss Gurney as their model avoid the dangers of "poeticizing literalism" (108).

mobility, such that she spent her life in a wheelchair. She learned many languages, established a school with her partner Sarah Buxton, accomplished a significant amount of scholarly work, bought and learned to use a Manby mortar to save sailors from a shipwreck, engaged in political and religious disputes of the time both inside the influential Gurney family (two brothers served as MPs) and outside as she strongly influenced parliamentary debate on issues surrounding the abolition of slavery.[10] The family was a Quaker one, but Anna Gurney's decisive and incisive mind shows an independence of thinking even beyond the Quaker norms. Her cousin Elizabeth Gurney Fry worked for prison reform; Anna worked hard on the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire, but otherwise focused quietly in Norfolk on learning and writing. Many scholars came to her at Northrepps Cottage near Overstrand, or corresponded with her extensively. For example, Sir Francis Palgrave and Gurney had a lively correspondence, and he writes a dedicatory epistle to her in his *History of England* in the first volume, focused on the early medieval period and published in 1831.[11] He might first have been introduced to Anna Gurney as the son-in-law of Dawson Turner, a close friend of Hudson Gurney's, but the letters they exchange suggest they developed their own highly engaged scholarly and personal relationship. Many letters to and from her survive in other archives; she was clearly a treasured and indefatigable correspondent as well as a fine and independent-minded scholar.[12]

Gurney's papers in the Norwich County Archive demonstrate that she intended to revise her translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, since they

10 For details see G. N. Garmonsway, "Anna Gurney: Learned Saxonist," *Essays and Studies* 8 (1955): 40–57, and now M. J. Toswell, "Anna Gurney: The Unknown Victorian Medievalist," in "The Study of Old English in Nineteenth-Century Europe," ed. Haruko Momma and M. J. Toswell, special issue, *Poetica* 86 (2016): 69–86. Some excellent material and analysis, which deserves wider recognition, is to be found in Helen Brookman, "From the Margins: Scholarly Women and the Translation and Editing of Medieval English Literature in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2011). Chapter 2 concerns Anna Gurney; other chapters investigate Lucy Toulmin Smith and Jessie L. Weston. Brookman recently advanced her argument with further research into some of Gurney's letters; see her "Accessing the Medieval: Disability and Distance in Anna Gurney's Search for St Edmund," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 10 (2019): 357–75.

11 See Francis Palgrave, *History of England Volume 1* (*Anglo-Saxon Period*) (London: Murray, 1831). Gurney was well known in English learned circles: an anonymous review republished in *The London and Paris Observer* 303 (15 May 1831): 305–306 refers to his "dedicatory Epistle to that distinguished Anglo-Saxon scholar, Miss Anna Gurney."

12 The Gurney Archives are deposited with the Norfolk County Record Office in Norwich; the catalogue is at http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk/, accessed July 3, 2015, and I am grateful to the archivists for access to the collection.

include an unbound copy sporting marbled end-papers and marked throughout with her own relatively extensive notes in the margins. For example, she underlines "Emperor" twice on page 2, and writes "Caesar" in the margin, but later crosses out the note. Later on the same page for "overcome in a terrible battle" she has a very wavy underline, and in the margin "griesly" (presumably for "grisly") and below that in pencil "grievous." Most pages have similar entries, correcting small points or offering translations with greater nuance.[13] Gurney was a notable scholar, and it seems clear that she was contemplating the publication of a revised translation. However, that is not what happened to her translation. We have no evidence from her letters or notes as to what transpired, but it would appear that she permitted John Allen Giles (1808–1884) to use her work, with only the slightest hint of acknowledgment. J. A. Giles has perhaps a claim to be an early journeyman scholar, willing to prepare whatever work a press might want. He himself claimed in a trial in 1855 that he had published 120 volumes, which is a substantial accomplishment for someone not yet fifty. In the late 1840s he seems to have produced nearly ten of these, one of which, in 1849, was a translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* produced for Bohn's Antiquarian Library.[14] In the preface, Giles makes two illuminating remarks. First, he acknowledges that Gurney provided the translation that he uses as the basis for his own work:

> More than 120 years passed before this historical record [the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*] again attracted the notice of the public, or the labours of an editor. It was then translated into English throughout from the text of Gibson by a learned lady still living, Miss Gurney; to whom, both my enterprising publisher and myself are largely indebted for her kindness in facilitating the present edition, and to whom we gladly take this opportunity of acknowledging the debt.
>
> Miss Gurney's translation was printed for private circulation, and did not receive the final polish of the fair translator, who was deterred from bestowing further labour upon a work which was shortly to be undertaken by one of our ablest antiquaries.[15]

Gurney's translation is presented here by Giles as lacking polish, and also presented as a document which *facilitated* this work. Giles kindly

13 See Norfolk Record Office, Gurney of Bawdeswell Collection, RQG 410.

14 J. A. Giles, ed. *The Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849).

15 Giles, ed. *The Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*, xliii.

and patronizingly *acknowledges* the debt to Gurney. Giles's implication, of course, is that he has provided the polish, and taken the rough-hewn work of Anna Gurney and made it into something worthy of publication. Later in the introduction Giles adds a further annoying and illuminating comment, as he admits that he used Petrie's edition with its collations of the six manuscripts, but that this edition only went to 1066:

> But, as the edition of Mr. Petrie extends only to the year 1066, it has been necessary to form a text for the latter portion of the Chronicle from other sources. To effect this the translation of Miss Gurney, has, with the consent of that amiable lady, been taken as a ground-work, and numerous additions, variations, and notes, have been introduced by a collation of her text with that of Dr. Ingram.[16]

In other words, Giles lightly revised Gurney's translation by reference to Petrie's Latin edition collating six manuscripts while saying that he was doing a new and idiomatic translation, but after the year 1066 he simply used Gurney's text, with some collation to the pre-existing edition of Ingram. Once again, the patronizing tone is in evidence referring to Gurney as "that amiable lady." The correspondence between Gurney and Giles does not survive, which is unfortunate. Gurney's surviving letters do suggest a woman of great generosity and goodness of soul, but there is an elegance and scholarly precision to her writing that was wholly lacking in Giles. She probably regretted letting him have access to her work.[17]

Anna Gurney only published a few pieces of scholarship, although it is clear from the notes of her executors that they found large quantities of translations and analyses in her files after death. It seems particularly unfortunate that the forthcoming publication of an edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle by James Ingram, former Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford and about to become president of Trinity College, Oxford in 1824, meant that she decided not to publish her translation but simply to make it available in private circulation. Few copies survive, as a result. And then, having been so carefully polite about not stepping on the toes of James Ingram, it seems the more annoying that the prolific John

16 Giles, ed. *The Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*, xliv.

17 Work remains to be done on Gurney. At her death, Lucy Rushmore (one of her executors) attempted a list of translations and analyses she had prepared and ready for publication. There are over thirty, which seem all to have been lost (RQG 412), and there is a separate entry for a translation of Snorri Sturleson's *Ynglinga Saga* (COL 7/27).

Allen Giles would "borrow" her translation and use it for his publication. Since Ingram's edition was a two-column one with Old English on the left and a facing translation on the right, and presumably Giles had access to this text since he used it for the Old English when Petrie's edition ran out, it seems striking that he chose rather to use Anna Gurney's text. It was the right call, as her translation is livelier and more accurate than that of the former professor of Anglo-Saxon. Yet, since Giles essentially just assembled the volume from an Old English text and Gurney's translation, it seems unfair that her work was not acknowledged as that of a translator, on the title page.

Mary Conybeare (1790–1848)

Well-known is the story about how John Josias Conybeare (1779–1824) assembled a wide array of poems in Old English, edited them, and translated them, partly while he served as Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford between 1808 and 1812, and then Professor of Poetry from 1812–1821. Similarly well-known is the fact that after his death in 1824 his brother William, a geologist of some distinction, completed the work of his *magnum opus* and in 1826 published the *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, the first real attempt in England to present and translate the surviving poetry of the period.[18] John Earle, a later Rawlinson chair, describes it in his book as having "had a great effect in calling the attention of the educated, and more than any other book in the present century has served as the introduction to Saxon studies."[19] Conybeare's was the book on the shelves of the educated elite of the United Kingdom and North America, those who were interested in literature and the origin stories of the English. Longfellow had it, and so did William Morris. Robert Southey received his copy as a gift from Mary Conybeare, but used it and referred to it, as did the brothers Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm, and Sir Walter Scott. Conybeare's contribution to Old English scholarship has often been underrated or dismissed, partly because Conybeare (like his brother William) was also a well-known geologist, and furthermore a beloved vicar, first in Cowley and later in Batheaston, publishing extensively in the field of theology as well. He did not focus solely on early medieval English topics, writing

18 John Josias Conybeare, edited by his brother William Daniel Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Harding and Lepard, 1826).

19 John Earle, *Anglo-Saxon Literature* (London: SPCK, 1884), 45.

also on early French poetry, and he was a scholar and antiquarian in the tradition of the Society of Antiquaries (though he did not join the Society, but merely published several times in *Archaeologia*). Conybeare was genuinely engaged with Old English, unusually for a Rawlinson professor at that time, but he was not solely interested in this field. However, at the unexpected end of his life his focus was on completing the *Illustrations*, which he had announced and set up a subscription list for nearly ten years earlier. He had published a sequence of articles about Old English poetry just after he left the Rawlinson chair in 1812 (all in 1813 and 1814), but in 1817 he sent out a letter to appear in *The Gentleman's List* advertising the future publication of *Illustrations of the Early History of English and French Poetry* and inviting subscribers to the publication, for the express purpose of building a school in Batheaston. The letter indicates that Conybeare planned to put together some lecture notes, many of his publications on Old English and early French poetry, and to assemble collations he had completed, for example of *Beowulf*. He also planned to include a French text he called *Rout of Roncesvalles*, now better known as the *Chanson de Roland*.

My concern here is the role played by Mary Conybeare in finishing and publishing her husband's already-subscribed *Illustrations* after his unexpected death. Robyn Bray's 2013 thesis about J. J. Conybeare is illuminating on this point, and is also the only scholarship on the topic. Bray usefully also provides transcriptions of correspondence, notably letters from William to Mary about the work, and has done much archival work investigating the background and the significance of the *Illustrations*.[20] At Conybeare's death, about eighty pages had progressed past proofs, and just over eighty more pages were typeset, as the preface of the book indicates. He was, Bray points out, in London overseeing the progress of the book when he died quite suddenly, apparently having an apoplectic fit one day in June and dying the following day. The letters Bray provides

20 See Robyn Bray, "'A Scholar, a Gentleman, and a Christian': John Josias Conybeare (1779–1824) and his 'Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry' (1826)" (PhD dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2013), available at http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4709/, accessed August 18, 2015. Bray's thesis considers the preparation and publication of the book in very great detail, as well as the biographies of the two brothers and the reception history of *Illustrations*. She makes the argument about the importance of Mary Conybeare in the publication of *Illustrations*, but does not go as far as I do in wanting the widow to have publishing credit for the work. Partly, no doubt, that is because we have only the letters written by William D. Conybeare to his sister-in-law and not hers to him (as deposited in the Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies Service and edited by Bray). For all the information in this section I am deeply indebted to Bray's thesis.

make it clear both that Mary had Latin and that she was unhappy about William's choices with respect to the texts in the volume. Only William's half of the correspondence survives, edited by Bray, but he is clearly answering very scholarly questions and responding to questions as well on the content of the publication. The letters also reveal that Mary used her own funds to pay what William considered to be a bill from the printer that she should ignore since legally he was responsible for the publication as the second author, and she, as the widow of the first author, was not. Elsewhere William claims that he has added only a hundred pages of the 382 that the book is being printed at, and that Mary should underwrite any losses on the rest. This contradicts the statement in the book's preface that at Conybeare's death only eighty pages were printed and eighty more pages typeset. By William's account, he added only a hundred pages to the 160 the preface lists, which means that about 120 pages are unaccounted for.

The correspondence, even though only one side of it survives, reveals that an extensive negotiation is taking place, and that Mary appears to have her own set of materials, and possibly of proofs, so that both she and William are entering corrections and additions to the material. They also appear to have wrangled over the title page, with Mary wanting William's role to be saved for a page or so later in the volume. That is, she wanted her deceased husband to be the sole author listed on the title page. Mary lost that battle. Elsewhere in the correspondence, she does appear to have prevailed in another battle, this one an issue of scholarship. The sources of all the materials are carefully presented in the table of contents, and several pieces from *Archaeologia* are reprinted exactly as they appeared in publication, not revised as William wanted. The correspondence is fascinating, and Mary's input is clearly engaged and scholarly. That is, although it clearly never occurred to her to put her own name on the title page, Mary seems to have been very closely involved indeed in the editing, proofreading, and publication. She was also solely responsible for the distribution as she seems to have been the one who sent out copies of her late husband's volume to subscribers and to scholars in the field. She may well have had the editing of the missing third of the volume in her charge too, although the surviving documentation does not provide enough information. Her name should have been on the title page. We should, acknowledging the extent of her role as devoted widow and learned spouse, well able to engage in debate and negotiation with her husband's brother, list her as co-author now.

The Skeat *atelier*

An *atelier* generally refers to a studio in which a master painter leads a team of apprentices, assistants paid and unpaid, and other artists in the creation and completion of many works of art. For some products of the *atelier*, the leader will be obviously working hard, and for others the leader will simply organize and coordinate the work of subordinates. Invariably, an *atelier* is highly productive or it collapses, and it is always difficult to discern where the master has placed a brush on the canvas, and where not. W. W. Skeat (1835–1912) is perhaps more famous for his work in Middle English, especially his editions of *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, or for his successful championing of the English Dialect Society and its dictionary project, or for his involvement in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. For scholars of Old English, however, he is best-known as the editor of the one set of prose texts edited in the nineteenth century whose edition has only just now been superseded: Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* in two volumes.[21] I want to argue here first, that Skeat essentially ran an *atelier* for this project, and second, that this project could well serve as a model for how Skeat accomplished much of his scholarly publication. Moreover, I want to argue that most of the members of Skeat's *atelier* were women and were not paid for their labor, but they should now be acknowledged for their work.

Skeat himself states in the last paragraph of the "Preliminary Notice" to volume one of the *Lives of Saints*:

> The modern English version of the Homilies, though revised by myself, is almost entirely the work of Miss Gunning, of Cambridge, and Miss Wilkinson, formerly of Dorking, who with great perseverance have translated not only most of the text as contained in this first part, but nearly all of the remaining Lives belonging to the same series.[22]

21 I worked with the Skeat archive in King's College London for three stints—an exploratory visit in July 2016, during which I was helped by Adam Cox as Archives Assistant, then a week in March 2018 and two individual days in May 2018, when I was helped by Katrina DiMuro, Archives Assistant, and Lianne Smith, Archives Services Manager. I am very grateful for their assistance. It should be noted for the record that Skeat did also publish a synoptic edition of the vernacular gospels under his own name, which remained in use for over a century, but that work was the completion of a project begun by John Mitchell Kemble.

22 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. 1, ed. Walter W. Skeat. EETS o.s. 94 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1890), vii. The volume was originally published in two parts, o.s. 76 in 1881 (up to 256), and o.s. 82 in 1885 (to 553).

At the end of the preface to the second volume of the same work, Skeat makes a similar point:

> Amongst these my chief thanks are due to Miss Gunning, of Cambridge, and the late Miss Wilkinson, for the preparation of the greater part of the English translation which accompanies the old text.[23]

Skeat further refers to their "great perseverance and care" and notes that although he revised the whole text (including the six texts for which he did his own translation or used other translations), "the alterations made were, on the whole, inconsiderable."[24] Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson, always a matched pair, also appear in the preliminary matter to several other Skeat productions: for example, volume six of his Chaucer edition has the following:

> As regards the Glossary, I have much pleasure in recording my thanks to Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson, of Cambridge, who prepared the "slips" recording the references, and, in most cases, the meanings also, throughout a large portion of the whole work, with praiseworthy carefulness and patience. My obligations to these two ladies began many years ago, as they undertook most of the glossarial work of my smaller edition of the Man of Law's Tale (with others); work which is now incorporated with the rest. It required some devotion to analyse the language of Boethius and the Romaunt, of Melibeus and the Parson's Tale, all of which they successfully undertook.[25]

In other words, these "two ladies" prepared the glossary for Skeat's six-volume edition of Chaucer. They are also among those thanked for preliminary work in the early fascicles of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and they seem likely to have been quite adept at the kind of detailed language work demanded by Professor Skeat.

Today, of course, the translators of the Old English text into a readable and readily comprehensible modern English version would be listed as co-authors, and the historical linguists who prepare glossaries tend to get

23 *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. 2, ed. Walter W. Skeat. EETS o.s. 114 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900), liv. This volume was also originally published in two parts, with o.s. 94 to 224 in 1899, and o.s. 114 to 474 in 1900.

24 Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. 2, lv.

25 See W. W. Skeat, *Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. 6, *Introduction, Glossary and Indexes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), xxii.

special recognition of their contributions. Special recognition does not, in the twenty-first century, mean a few generous comments near the end of the "General Introduction" of an edition with only one named editor.[26] The *Lives of the Saints* was strikingly not an edition with a great deal of paratext: the annotations are few and are focused largely on the manuscript evidence for each homily, there are sparse textual notes indicating detailed collation of the manuscripts for the texts in the collection, and there is no glossary. In fact, the two volumes consist of a short introduction by Skeat, the transcription, the translation, and a scant ten pages in each volume of notes and references. Skeat says in his comments, as quoted above, that he revised the translations produced by the Misses Gunning and Wilkinson, but then he also indicates that those revisions involved "inconsiderable" alterations. We can, therefore, conclude based on Skeat's own comments that Skeat is really not responsible for the translation. The Skeat Archive frequently includes notes on the manuscripts of the saints' lives, and Skeat clearly did do considerable work in looking for these texts and seeing what parts of particular lives appeared in other manuscripts and other contexts. His introduction to volume 2 provides useful material on this, and sifts through the available published material on Ælfric, particularly on his corpus, by Dietrich and by Cockayne.

Then, however, we come to the question of the transcript. Kathryn Maude in a recent article quotes Skeat's own comments provided above and concludes sarcastically that "[h]alf of the work in this edition, then, has been done by Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson, whose translations of the Lives run alongside the transcription made by Skeat."[27] My concern here is with the other half of the volume, beginning with the transcription from the manuscripts. Did Skeat do the transcription himself? It would appear not. The Skeat archive includes transcriptions of many of the Ælfrician saints' lives, but the hand is not Skeat's, nor is the layout and formatting his. A point worth pursuing is that Skeat seems to have served as literary executor for his former King's College School teacher, T. O. Cockayne, who died by pistol shot in 1873.[28] Early in his career Oswald Cockayne published on Greek and Latin, but for the last fifteen years of his life his focus was Old and Middle

26 Kathryn Maude makes the same point that I make here, using exclusively the evidence quoted here from a prefatory note to the *Lives of Saints*, in "Citation and Marginalisation: The Ethics of Feminism in Medieval Studies," *Journal of Gender Studies* 23 (2014): 247–61, at 254.

27 Maude, "Citation and Marginalisation," 254.

28 See now Daniel F. Kenneally and Jane Roberts, "Oswald Cockayne (*c.* 808–1873): Clerk in Orders, Schoolmaster, Scholar," in *Poetica* 86 special issue *The Study of Old English in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Ed Haruko Momma and M.J. Toswell (2016): 107–37. Anne van Arsdall provides

English, and he is particularly well-known for his three-volume *Leechdoms*.[29] Some of his notebooks for this edition survive in the Skeat Archive; his hand for transcription and annotation is particularly striking: crabbed, elegant, using Old English letter forms for difficult letters, very upright, and quite difficult to read. Precisely the same hand transcribes the manuscripts of the Ælfric saints' lives, and into very similar notebooks to those used for the medical material.[30] Moreover, Skeat acknowledges that he had Cockayne's transcriptions of these texts, and more, that he used them, in the preface to volume 2. He explicitly describes them as having "two drawbacks," the first being the use of Old English characters and the second that marks of contraction were disregarded (Cockayne, following the classical tradition, probably silently expanded abbreviations). Skeat concludes, "Otherwise, it is extremely correct; as might have been expected."[31] Earlier in this paragraph Skeat notes that the transcription for this volume was lost in large part and had been re-transcribed. He states explicitly: "in default of other help, I made the transcript of sections 33–36 myself." These sections are the last four texts of the volume, the lives of Euphrosyne, Cecilia, Chrysanthus and Daria, and Thomas. They account for ninety pages of the volume (forty-five subtracting the translation), and Skeat considers it noteworthy that he had to make the transcription himself for just about one-quarter of the volume. The conclusion is relatively obvious. Skeat clearly did not ordinarily transcribe the texts he published (since he clearly provides this information here as something unusual in his experience), save where he explicitly says. Maude asserts that Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson did half the work of the publication with their translation and she implies that Skeat did the other half. In this she appears to be wrong, though she would no doubt be

extensive information about Cockayne in the first two chapters of her *Medieval Herbal Remedies: the Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2002).

29 T. O. Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country before the Norman Conquest* (London: Longman, Green, 1865).

30 The Skeat Archive includes many notes and notebooks which are by Oswald Cockayne, and I suspect as many as three or four boxes in the archive were Cockayne materials that Skeat did not feel comfortable jettisoning, while he happily got rid of his own preliminary notes and drafts. Part of the transcription of the Ælfric lives of saints is at 4/2/1 and 4/2/2, in Cockayne's hand and with a pencil collation written in above, also in a very neat hand. 4/2/3 has some translation from Ælfric, but the hand is small, neat, and pointed—not Cockayne, nor Skeat. This box consists of many matching bound notebooks, also including transcriptions from the *Liber Scintillarum*. There are also a number of looseleaf letters addressed to Cockayne here and in some later boxes.

31 Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. 2, liv.

irked to learn that in addition to not doing the translation, Skeat also did not do nearly all the transcription. He had Cockayne's superb work, and he appears to have had other help as well.

Before returning briefly to Skeat's translators and glossary-makers, I want to discuss some of that other help that Skeat had. George Parker of the Bodleian Library transcribed many manuscripts for Skeat, including *Piers Plowman*, *Joseph of Arimathea*, various songs and ballads, and much more.[32] His wife, Frances Parker, seems also to have done some work; she contributed a list of Oxfordshire words to the English Dialect Society, and then produced a far longer supplement for an issue involving five different reports on dialects in different areas of Britain, which then required a glossary, prepared by her husband.[33] Parker's daughter also seems to have done transcriptions, though possibly not for Skeat.[34] In the archive, Skeat's own hand is rather large and a bit sloppy; he often used pencil, and marked sections that he had already sent to press and had had returned with blue pencil to avoid confusion. The archive in general has transcriptions and notes in many hands. Often, fair copies of texts that Skeat published, clearly being returned by a press after use, are definitely not written by Skeat. Two more specific pieces of evidence also appear in the archive: first, a set of British library tickets in the name E. Brock accompanies some transcripts,[35] and second, a letter to Skeat in 1890 appears from someone he was attempting to recruit as a manuscript assistant.[36] The

32 For example, Skeat Archive 4/9 includes a transcript from Bodleian Library MS 16 in an envelope labelled from George Parker to Reverend Professor W. W. Skeat.

33 My thanks to Matthew Townend for pointing me in this direction. Skeat provides the information in his "Introduction" to *Series C. Original Glossaries*, English Dialect Society (London: Trübner, 1881).

34 According to the editor, Miss A. F. Parker transcribed the relevant manuscript in 1890 "under the direction of her father, Mr. George Parker, senior assistant in the Bodleian Library. My sincere thanks are due to her for the fidelity and skill with which she accomplished a difficult task": see *John Bale's Index of British and Other Writers*, ed. Reginald Lane Poole with the help of Mary Bateson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), xxvi.

35 Box 4.18. E. Brock seems likely to be Edmund Brock, who edited the "Alliterative Morte d'Arthur" as *Morte Arthur, or The Death of Arthur*, EETS o.s. 8 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1871), and other texts as well. Andrew Breeze is investigating Brock's work.

36 The letter is at 17/3, and the proposal appears to have been to collate a transcription with four other manuscripts. The writer, in Vienna, provides Skeat with the hourly rate to be charged, and an estimate of the time the job would take. One example of the other material in the archive is a notebook with Q&A materials by four women (Miss M. Ellis, Miss C. Ellis, Miss Douglas and Miss Thomas) on various medieval topics, each answer lasting a couple of pages, and then notes by Skeat on the authorship of various medieval texts. The notebook is at Skeat Archive 17/9. The women seem to have been students.

Skeat *atelier*, then, included a broad range of individuals who completed the transcriptions for Skeat, after he had identified and taken notes on the manuscripts.

Next, there is the participation of Skeat's own family. The Skeat archive includes a considerable number of envelopes addressed to Mrs. Skeat, some from Oxford University Press with stamped indications that proofs are included.[37] It seems likely that Skeat's wife organized, and probably participated in, proofreading. Proofs went to her directly. Elsewhere, Skeat thanks his daughter, Miss Clara L. Skeat, for preparing an index of words for his *The Science of Etymology*.[38] Several packages of proofs and other materials in the archive are also addressed to "Dr. B. M. Skeat," with the same address in Cambridge as Skeat himself. This is Bertha Marian Skeat, Skeat's first child, born in 1861. She was a student at Cambridge in the mid-1880s and completed her examinations in medieval and modern languages. She was not, of course, permitted to take a degree or to enter for an advanced degree at Cambridge. She appears to have obtained a teaching certificate in Cambridge, and a doctorate in Zurich, and later co-founded a school for girls, Baliol School, in Sedbergh. Her thesis at Zurich was an edition of the Middle English *The Lamentatyon of Mary Magdaleyne*, so she was well qualified as a medievalist.[39] Proofs and other materials were also posted to her in Sedbergh, and some materials were mailed by her from Sedbergh, so she did some of the family work even while headmistress of a school. She appears to have handled issues of images and permissions, for the press addressed material along these lines specifically to her. In later life, Bertha continued her work in the family business, even publishing some work in the annals of the English Dialect Society. She never married and was buried beside her parents.

Skeat was apparently very much opposed to allowing women to study at Cambridge, stating that "[e]ven the B.A. degree would enable them to take 5 books at a time out of the University Library … I am entirely opposed to the

37 For example 2/3 has Skeat's edition of Chaucer's *Astrolabe*, addressed to Mrs. Skeat at 16 Normanton Road.

38 Skeat Archive 13/4 proofs of *The Science of Etymology*. A note on p. x reads, "For the Index of Words, which I have carefully revised, I am indebted to my daughter, Clara L. Skeat." The proofs themselves have occasional evidence of the Skeat scrawl, but quite a lot of very neat copperplate writing not only marking typographical errors but asking questions and probing the argument. I suspect that Clara did a lot of work on this volume.

39 Bertha M. Skeat published the thesis as *The Lamentatyon of Mary Magdaleyne* (Cambridge: Fabb & Tyler, 1897). She dedicates the work "to my Father and my Mother" and in the short account of her life on the last page she lists "Professor the Rev. Dr. Skeat" first amongst the professors and teachers under whom she has studied and to whom "my thanks are specially due" (64).

admission of women to 'privileges' of this character."[40] Skeat's attitude to the emancipation of women seems obvious here. But this view is contradicted by his treatment of his own family. Skeat had two sons (including Walter William, a prominent anthropologist noted for his work on the Malay Peninsula), and three daughters. All three of his daughters completed degree courses at Newnham College. Bertha, as noted above, also completed a doctorate at Zurich. The second daughter, Clara, is listed as a science teacher in 1901, and she continued to live in the Skeat home at 2 Salisbury Villas (today 27 Station Street) in Cambridge into her late thirties. The third daughter, Ethel Skeat, became a noted geologist, receiving a doctorate late in life from Trinity College Dublin for her contributions in the field.[41] Skeat was also a founding member of a society pursuing the higher education of women at Cambridge, and he taught students at the nascent Newnham College as a member of its committee of management.[42] Like his friend Henry Sidgwick, the principal founder of Newnham, Skeat may not have been a feminist and he certainly held contradictory views about the education of women, but his daughters probably did have his financial and emotional support in order to complete degree programs and work independently.

Michael Lapidge, in a fine study of Skeat, comments that his edition of the saints' lives has not been superseded, and notes that "[i]t is rumoured that a large team of scholars is now contemplating the Herculean task which Skeat undertook and brought to completion by himself."[43] Although in a footnote Lapidge does refer to Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson, he has significantly overstated Skeat's accomplishment here. This edition was not the product of one individual, but the work of the Skeat *atelier*. Skeat appears to have requested the destruction of all his personal papers and letters after

40 Skeat made the comments in a letter to Henry Sidgwick in June 1887, now in the Newnham College archives. I have not seen the letter, but it is much quoted (and the quotations vary significantly): see, for example, Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge: A Men's University—Though of a Mixed Type* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975), 89.

41 See *The Role of Women in the History of Geology,* ed. C.V. Burek and B. Higgs (London: the Geological Society, 2007); Ethel Skeat is referred to passim by her married name of Ethel Woods. Evidence about the Skeat household in several censuses is provided at https://capturingcambridge.org/hills-road-area/station-road/27-station-road-salisbury-villas/, accessed February 20, 2022.

42 See *The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* 17 (January 1874), 42 and 79. I did not find Skeat's name in the lists of those permitting women to attend their lectures, however. See also Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Newnham: An Informal Biography* (London: Faber, 1936), 91.

43 Michael Lapidge, "Walter W. Skeat," in *Interpreters of Early Medieval Britain*, ed. Michael Lapidge, The British Academy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 37–47, at 42.

his death.[44] There are scattered references to his sons ripping and tearing up all his correspondence. No doubt the evidence identifying Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson was there lost. One elegant handwritten translation of an Old English sermon survives in the Skeat Archive, which looks to be a version of Wulfstan's sermon on the First Sunday in Lent, and could perhaps have been completed by any member of the Skeat family, or by Miss Gunning or Miss Wilkinson.[45] Miss Gunning is always listed as being of Cambridge, but Miss Wilkinson is initially of Cambridge and later of Dorking.[46] They are given as together contributing between 5,000 and 8,000 quotations for the first two letters of the *New English Dictionary*, and elsewhere a Miss J. E. Wilkinson and Miss Gunning of Cambridge are cited by J. A. H. Murray as reading books for the dictionary and extracting 7,500 quotations (which may well be the same accomplishment).[47] The two women are unusual in almost always being listed together, and they also always seem to have done a great deal of work. Skeat was lucky to have them in his *atelier*, along with at least three women from his own family, and an extended group of transcribers and helpers he recruited through colleagues and friends. The surviving notebooks and materials in his archive clarify that his notes on etymology, his etymological dictionary, and his work on dialect all tend to be in his own hand. So also are notes on manuscripts and on which texts appear in particular manuscripts; it seems clear that he often did go through manuscripts in order basically to catalogue them, to list their contents for transcription, but only rarely to transcribe them himself. He found the materials, organized their transcription and translation, wrote introductions, and wrote the separate books and dictionaries about the English language that were his own genuine and individual contribution. Somehow, in future references to these materials, we will have to find a way to reference the Skeat *atelier* for works like the saints' lives and the Chaucer and *Piers Plowman* editions.

44 The archivists at King's College told me that the family went through the archive and eliminated a lot of material, fulfilling Skeat's wishes. They did not provide a reason.

45 The document is item 16/1 in the archive.

46 I made some preliminary efforts to identify these women, and found some tantalizing hints, but was really not successful. More research, given the stability of their locations, would repay the effort. Daniel Thomas provided me with the evidence of an anonymous reviewer of the edition of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* who never mentions Skeat but focuses entirely on the work of Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson in the *British Quarterly Review* 75 (1882): 259.

47 "List of Readers and Works Read for the Society's Dictionary 1879–1884," in *Thirteenth Address of the President to the Philological Society*, J. A. H. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University, 1884), 141; for the "Appendix to the Preface" to the *OED* by J. A. H. Murray, see http://public.oed.com/wp-content/uploads/Volume-I-A-and-B.pdf, accessed February 20, 2022. The reference is at xv.

Elise Charlotte Otté (1818–1903)

Elise Otté offers an entirely different paradigm for analysis: she was the strong-minded half-Danish stepdaughter of Benjamin Thorpe. She appears to have found her work of preparing his Old English scholarship for him so annoying that in 1840 she left England for America to build a better life for herself. Some years later she briefly returned to work for him, but she then moved to St. Andrews in Scotland to work on scientific research, and she established her own research agenda, writing books on the history and culture of Scandinavia. For her, however, we have no archival materials to explore, and only the evidence of her life and publications, and what others said in print about her. Our principal source on her connection to Thorpe is Edmund Gosse, the poet and art critic who had deep connections to Scandinavian materials.[48] His obituary of her, published in *The Athenaeum* on 2 January 1904, is our only direct source for Elise Otté as doing significant amounts of work on Thorpe's publications in Old English. We have some corroborating evidence that she heavily criticized her stepfather and found his regime onerous, both in her sudden departure for America and in an addendum to Gosse's obituary published by a woman who knew both Otté and Thorpe, E. S. Day. The story is an interesting one and will reward investigation beyond that provided here.

Otté was the daughter of a Danish father and an English mother, so she was bilingual from a young age. Her father died in Santa Cruz in the Danish West Indies when she was very young, and her mother returned to Denmark, where she met and married Benjamin Thorpe, who was there to study Old English with Rasmus Rask. There is extensive corroboration for Thorpe's time in Denmark, which marked the beginning of his work in Old English (previously the only evidence we have about him is that he was a banker in Paris). He studied there for four years, and at the end of that time he published his translation of Rasmus Rask's *Anglo-Saxon Grammar* in

48 Gosse wrote an obituary: "Miss Otté," *The Athenæum* (2 January 1904), 15. I have not yet found other references to Elise Otté in Gosse's very extensive publications; presumably he met her through his many Scandinavian contacts, though I can find no direct reference in, for example, *Sir Edmund Gosse's Correspondence with Scandinavian Writers*, ed. Elias Bredsdorff (Gyldendal: Scandinavian University Books, 1960). Gosse's extreme statements about the way Benjamin Thorpe oppressed and hounded his stepdaughter to do his work are somewhat refuted in some additional notes to the obituary sent in by E. S. Day, and published two weeks later, also in *The Athenaeum* (16 January 1904), 82–83. Gosse's views are reflected in the very useful website on Germanic Mythology at http://www.germanicmythology.com/scholarship/EliseCOtte.html, accessed June 18, 2018. These views have recently been added to the Wikipedia entries for Benjamin Thorpe and Elise Otté.

1830. He also moved back to England with his new wife, the former Mary Otté, and his new stepdaughter Elise. Given that we have little outside information, it is perhaps worth noting that Elise Otté, aged twelve at the time of the move back to England, did not take her stepfather's surname.

According to Gosse, Thorpe required his stepdaughter to learn several modern languages as well as Old English and Old Norse, and required that she help him with his scholarship. Since she was born in 1818, Otté was of an age to have been instrumental in Thorpe's big publications in Old English in the late 1830s and 1840s, although Gosse unfortunately does not provide details. Thorpe published very heavily between 1830 and 1845, and since Gosse describes Elise Otté as helping him in his work from a "tender age," it seems quite possible that she was involved in much of this work. Thorpe published mostly editions, the Junius manuscript in 1832, "Apollonius of Tyre" and his textbook for learning Old English in 1834, the Paris Psalter both prose and verse in 1835, the laws and institutes in 1840, gospels and also the Exeter Book in 1842, ten volumes of homilies from 1843–46, and so on. The workload is certainly a heavy one, made more explicable if Otté were carrying a significant portion of it. In 1840, as Gosse tells the story, she escaped, all the way to Boston. She studied physiology at Harvard, and her interest in science marks the rest of her life. We do have some independent corroboration of her activities at this point, from two of her diaries deposited with the John Quincy Adams archive in the Massachusetts Historical Society.[49] In the materials with the archive she is listed as a private tutor who travels to New York and Canada with Adams and the Grinnell family in 1843. We have no authority other than Gosse for her decision to return to England and to her work with Thorpe, apparently in the mid-1840s, more specifically to help with the edition of the Old Norse poetic *Edda* (eventually published by Thorpe in 1866, although Gosse says 1856). The edition of the *Edda* may well have been in part her project, given her greater fluency in the relevant languages.

Gosse contends that about 1849 she escaped Thorpe again, this time to work with the Welsh physician George Edward Day when he accepted the Chandos Professorship of Anatomy at St. Andrews University in Scotland. From this point, we have excellent outside corroborating evidence for Otté's independence and excellence as a scholar. She began publishing under her own name, notably with concise grammars of Danish and Swedish, and two

49 The Massachusetts Historical Society online catalogue ABIGAIL describes this as two volumes in a box, the "Elise Charlotte Otte Diary, 1843," http://balthazaar.masshist.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First, accessed February 20, 2022.

histories of Scandinavian countries. She also translated and published works by several Scandinavian and German scientists, including Alexander von Humboldt. One further corroborating piece of evidence is available in this subject area as well: Benjamin Thorpe began work on a translation of part of Johann Martin Lappenberg's history of England in 1834, but did not complete and publish the work until 1845, when Otté had returned.[50] After his death in 1870, Otté prepared a second edition of this work, and her prefatory "Note" suggests very close knowledge of what Thorpe included and discarded; note also her own inclusion of that discarded material, as well as revisions and the creation of chapters. The new edition is described on the title page as revised by E. C. Otté, and it was published in 1881.[51] This volume is the only one I can find of Thorpe's extensive *œuvre* in which Otté's name appears anywhere; notably, it was published after his death, and could not have been published without Otté's revisions. Moreover, although she is careful to be entirely calm and precise in her comments about materials left out and put in the previous version, the very fact that Otté comfortably alters the material in the translation suggests both her mastery of the material and her disagreement with Thorpe about its presentation.

More work needs to be done on Otté and her career as a translator and as unacknowledged assistant for her stepfather. There are problems with Gosse's obituary, given the very excessive and overblown nature of his claims, and given his own career as a polemic poet and thinker.[52] He seems to have used only hyperbole to describe Thorpe's "tyranny" and his "oppression" of his stepdaughter, forcing her to aid in his work. After all, she did choose to return to Thorpe's home after she trained as a physiologist at Harvard, and after she had earned her own living as a private tutor for some years. Moreover, E. S. Day, the daughter of George Edward Day (Otté's employer for her scientific work for some decades), corrects many points in Gosse's rather tendentious obituary, including his misunderstanding about the group of scientists that Otté worked with in Scotland, her parentage and

50 Johann Martin Lappenberg, *A History of the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, trans. Benjamin Thorpe (London: John Murray, 1845). Thorpe's "Translator's Preface" provides the information about when he started the work. It is certainly the case that when he started the work Elise Otté was in his house, but 1844 would be early for her return to England even according to Gosse's timeline.

51 J. M. Lappenberg, *A History of England Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, trans. Benjamin Thorpe, rev. ed. E. C. Otté, 2 vols (London: George Bell, 1884).

52 The only other scholarly comment I can find on Otté is a few sentences in Rosemary Ann Mitchell, "'The Busy Daughters of Clio': Women Writers of History from 1820 to 1880," *Women's History Review* 7, no. 1 (1998): 107–34. Mitchell concludes that "Her vacillations between independence and discipleship shed light on the ambiguities of the father-daughter relationship" (111). See https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029800200164, accessed February 20, 2022.

age at the time of her death, and where she first lived in England as a young child. Day states that Otté did not live with Thorpe when she emigrated to London with him and with her mother (which seems unlikely on the face of it since she was at best twelve), and she also argues against Gosse's claims with respect to the state of Otté's health. On this point she states that Otté did not suffer back injuries from nursing Day in his last years but rather had a spinal curvature which developed decades previously. She finishes with comments on Benjamin Thorpe, her "dear old friend":

> A bookworm and an oddity he certainly was, but he was much more than that. I visited him and his charming wife from 1862 until the time of his death; and whatever his stepdaughter found him, to me he was the kindest of hosts, making me free of his library, and giving up many hours in order both to interest and please me. It is not every old scholar of over eighty who will take pains to make learning beautiful in the eyes of a schoolgirl, as I then was.[53]

On Otté, therefore, some further research seems necessary to me. The trustworthiness of Edmund Gosse is a point to pursue, since George Edward Day's daughter found so very many errors of fact and interpretation in his obituary, which is our clearest evidence for Otté as helpmeet to her stepfather. One or two other notices of Otté's death look simply to have been brief versions of Gosse's comments, and are in no way original. The *DNB* entry is also a Gosse effort, although with some further material in its second iteration, especially on her Scandinavian knowledge. Certainly, later in life Otté demonstrates considerable historical knowledge of Denmark, Iceland, and Scandinavia more generally.

We do know from Elise Otté herself that she held strong views on suffrage, and the evidence of her independence of mind and movement corroborates her firm, if somewhat stilted stand. She published her comments in the 1879 volume *Opinions of Women on Women's Suffrage*. Her highly logical argument on the matter takes up the question of those women who do not want suffrage and might see having the right to vote as "burdensome and distasteful." First, she points out that similar comments might apply to men but "no one would for a moment pretend that any such individual contingencies could be advanced as reasons why Englishmen should not retain their constitutional right of having a voice in the election of those who legislate upon the questions which most closely affect the interests of

53 E. S. Day, letter to *The Athenæum* dated January 7, 1904, published January 16, 1904 (83).

each individual member of the community." She states that should women suffer from this ignorance and indifference, then "it would seem the more imperative that they should be made participants with men in the exercise of those electoral duties and privileges to which Englishmen are wont to point" to claim their enlightened and superior state.[54] Women should get the vote so that, like men, they can complain about the difficulty of exercising it prudently and judicially. Elise Otté was a sharp and independent thinker, listed in the suffrage volume as a figure from literature and the arts, and the author of *Scandinavian History* "& c."—evidence that she saw herself as a serious academic.

On the question of whether Elise Otté should share in the publication credits of her stepfather Benjamin Thorpe, a firm conclusion cannot as yet be reached. She certainly had the languages and the historical knowledge, and it would appear that she did not speak well of Thorpe and felt that he did take advantage of her work. Certainly, for the first edition of the Lappenberg translation she should be listed as co-editor, given the certainty with which she produced the second edition and made her editorial decisions (although the counter-argument that Thorpe prevailed and presented the translation as he wanted it would certainly be available). But for some of Thorpe's other works, further evidence is necessary. I think that evidence can be found, though not by me.

The business of scholarship involves sharing ideas and sometimes work of various kinds; most of us entrust our work to others before we even submit it for publication, in the hope that our more egregious errors will be caught for us, and our awkward syntactic and lexicographical moments highlighted. In revising this chapter, I was able to take advantage of two very careful readers and their queries, before the paper ever went into submission. We all have stories about situations in which insufficient credit was given for ideas and for words by one scholar to another whose work was borrowed or read unofficially. And perhaps we all recognize that the strong can prey on the weak. Many universities now have explicit policies about how graduate student work does not belong to the supervisor and the details of attribution must be clearly laid out. Certainly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, where my first case study began with Anna Gurney, her behavior in stepping back and offering only a private circulation of her translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was exemplary—perhaps too exemplary. Mary Conybeare was content to do

54 *Opinions of Women on Women's Suffrage* (London: Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, 1879), 25.

a lot of work behind the scenes and as the devoted widow wanted only *J. J. Conybeare* on the title page of her husband's last work, also perhaps too exemplary an approach. Elise Otté, made of sterner stuff, took her opportunity to revise her stepfather's work and to get her name on the title page, although her only opportunity came after his death, and it seems possible that she should have more credit for her accomplishments on Benjamin Thorpe's Old English editions. And Walter W. Skeat, the grand Victorian patriarch, acknowledges the work of others on his productions, but in prefaces and introductions and never on the title page. Were it not for those acknowledgments, we would not have the names of the women who did the lion's share of the work for his publications—so at least he recognized their contributions. But now, in the twenty-first century, we can do better than that.

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2 Embroidered Narratives

Christina Lee

For Betty[1]

Abstract
This essay discusses the significance of embroidery in the culture of Early Medieval England. Largely the work of women, such objects have been understudied in the cultural, religious and economical history of the period. The essay argues that this omission is partly based in gender stereotypes which have favored some material culture over these remains. The essay discusses some of the remaining artefacts, as well as the significance of textiles as objects in gift-giving contexts.

Keywords: Women, embroidery, textiles, textile production, *opus feminile,* gift giving

This essay will argue for the importance of embroidered textiles as artifacts that provide a unique window to the participation of women in Early Medieval England in the political, socio-economic, and intellectual life of the period.[2] Textile gifts played a significant role in the creation of relations, but the study

1 This paper could not have been written without the seminal work of Elizabeth "Betty" Coatsworth, to whom the essay is dedicated. I was her research assistant between 1998 and 2001 on the *Manchester Medieval Textiles Project*, which she co-directed with Gale Owen-Crocker, and I am grateful that she opened my eyes to this important source. My sincere thanks go to Rebecca, Renee and Robin who allowed me to participate in this project. I am grateful for their work and friendship. A special thank you goes to Dr Alexandra Lester Makin who read a draft of this paper and provided most generous feedback. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for helpful comments. All mistakes are mine.

2 Since writing this essay a seminal book on Early Medieval English embroidery was published by Alexandra Lester Makin, *The Lost Art of the Anglo-Saxon World: The Sacred and Secular Power of Embroidery* (Oxford: Oxbow Press, 2019).

Norris, R., Stephenson, R., & Trilling, R.R. (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to Early Medieval English Studies*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2023
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of textiles remains a specialized (and mostly gendered) area of research. This essay will consider the reason for such attitudes. While the surviving textile evidence pales in comparison to what remains of other sources, it is nevertheless a significant resource of female expression and agency.

Early medieval people were careful and snazzy dressers, if we can believe the evidence we get from graves. Tablet-woven borders, embroidery, and jewelry did not just enhance the beauty of costume but were also markers of class and gender.[3] Iconography shows changes in fashion (and artistic style) from the rather rigid depictions in eighth-century Lichfield/St Chad Gospel (Litchfield Cathedral, MS Lich. 1) to the billowing style of the eleventh century, evident in depictions, such as Hope and Humility in the Cotton version of the *Psychomachia* (London, British Library, Cotton Cleopatra C. viii 17r), or the dress of Queen Emma in the manuscript of the New Minster *Liber Vitae* (London, British Library, Stowe MS 944, fol. 6). All of these items had to be made by a skillful textile worker. It is often assumed that textiles were made in domestic environments by the women of the home, but even there the production of enough clothing for the family and extended kin was a time-consuming and highly skilled occupation. Cloth had to be made by producing yarn from fiber in complex processes of retting (linen) or carding (wool) and then spun into yarn of different thickness and strength. Textiles were woven; at first on the warp-weighted horizontal loom, and from the ninth-century onward on horizontal looms and then the treadle loom, which was (re)introduced around the turn of the millennium.[4] Weavers used patterning and colors to achieve interesting effects. Garments had to be cut and sown and expensive garments were further adorned with, for example, tablet-woven borders. Evidence from material culture and iconography suggests that textile work was predominantly the domain of women: as makers and commissioners, and as producers of wealth and revenue.[5] While the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis* suggests that by the end of the period men may have been involved in the making of textiles, they

3 For scholarship see, Gale Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004); Penelope Walton-Rodgers, *Cloth and Clothing in Early Anglo-Saxon England, AD 450–700* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007), Kathrin Felder, "Networks of Meaning and the Social Dynamics of Identity. An Example from Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology PIA* 25, no. 1 (2015): 1–20.

4 Gale Owen-Crocker, "Dress and Identity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology,* ed. David Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91–116.

5 For an overview view see Laura Michelle Diener, "Sealed with a Stitch: Embroidery and Gift-Giving among Anglo-Saxon Women," *Medieval Prosopography: History and Collective Biography* 29 (2015 for 2014): 1–22, at 4–6.

appear to have been the exception even then.[6] Embroidery continued to be a female sphere, even when textile production became a male-dominated occupation in the medieval period.

The contribution that women made to the economies of their time as producers or workers of fabric have often been overlooked, but there has been a welcome reconsideration of *opus feminile* in recent years.[7] This revaluation has led to some consideration of the importance of women's labor by textile and art historians,[8] but there is still a need to bring this research to a wider attention within research into early medieval England and to give it equal status to other material culture, such as sculpture and metalwork which is regarded as the result of supposedly "masculine" work. Textiles were not just garments to wear; the genre also includes tablecloths, wall hangings, and other artifacts: items of prestige, given as gifts to kings and saints. As such they are an important currency in the creation of political ties, as well as networks of prayer and commemoration.[9] A good example is that of Bugga, an eighth-century nun, who seeks prayers of intercession for her dead parents from Boniface (also known under his English name, Wynfrið). In exchange she sends him a gift of an altar cloth and money: "Et per eundem portitorem tibi transmitto nunc quinquaginta solidos et pallium altaris" (and for their journey [lit. ferrying (to a heaven)] I send you now fifty solidi and an altar cloth).[10] Gift exchanges of this kind are

6 The 1134 inventory lists: "one cope of black *purpura,* well decorated and star-spangled all over, which Wulfstan first, and later Guthmund worked upon, but Ralph completed…." This is followed by an orphrey made by Prior Thembert; Janet Fairweather ed., *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth, Compiled by a Monk of Ely in the Twelfth Century; Translated from the Latin, with an Introduction, Notes, Appendices and Indices* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005); Bk II, I, chap. 50, 358. I am grateful to a comment made by Dr Lester Makin that perhaps the male contribution to the garment may not be the stitches but the metalwork of the item.

7 Several major research projects in England and especially Scandinavia have delivered important collections of research. Among them are the *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing* under the direction of Gale Owen-Crocker, http://lexisproject.arts.manchester.ac.uk/, accessed February 24, 2022, and the ongoing work of the Copenhagen Centre for Textile Research. The centre has done a significant revaluation of the Birka textiles in Sweden, https://ctr.hum.ku.dk/, accessed February 24, 2022.

8 Among the very significant studies are the Relics of St. Cuthbert, which include significant textile sources and which I discuss further on: C. F. Battiscombe ed., *The Relics of St Cuthbert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

9 Diener, "Sealed with a Stitch," 2.

10 Letter 16 (AD 722), Reinhold Rau ed., *Die Briefe des Bonifatius, Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius: nebst einigen zeitgenössischen Dokumenten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 62.

not unusual; Boniface himself liked to create networks with important contemporaries through gifts, including textiles.[11] Thus he sent Bishop Pehthelm a donation of a white coat embroidered with dots (pallium albis stigmatibus variatum) and a "shaggy" (villosam) cloth to dry the feet of his fellow religious in the Maundy service.

Opus feminile: Woman's Work and Economic Impact

The main focus of this essay is the use of textiles as objects of prestige exchanges, but it should not be forgotten that they could also be paid as taxation (same as food stuffs) and had an important role in medical care.[12] Clearly the labor of spinning, weaving, and manufacture was an important aspect of economy, which raises the question of whether there were specialist workshops, run by women. For example, was the "clean cloth" required in many medical recipes, made at home or by specialist weavers?[13] We know that wide-ranging trade connections in early medieval Europe created access to all kinds of exotic items, but we are less aware if there was still a need to finish raw materials, such as the silk thread which is used for a surgical procedure described in *Bald's Leechbook* to close a cleft lip?[14] Our scant knowledge of physicians in early medieval England, with few named persons and even less evidence for surgeries, suggests that practitioners were usually men, but it is possible that the specialized material for their work is dependent on skilled women.[15] While comparisons between dif-

11 Reinhard Rau, ed. and trans., *Briefe Bonifatius*, letter 32, 106.

12 For the use of textiles in medical applications see Christina Lee, "Threads and Needles: The uses of Textiles for Medical Purposes," in *Textiles, Text, Intertexts*, *Festschrift for Gale Owen-Crocker*, eds. Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederik (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 103–17.

13 See Herbert J. de Vriend, ed., *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS o.s. 286 (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), 58.

14 Oswald Cockayne, ed., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science before the Norman Conquest*, 3 vols, Rolls Series 35 (London: Longman, Green 1864–66), II:56.

15 The question of female healers is fraught with difficulty since there is not much evidence. Named healers are male, but this does not mean that women did not participate in healing or at least in the acquisition of the *materia medica* which were required. Many ingredients for remedies are from the garden or farm, such as butter or leek, and there has been a suggestion that the so-called "cunning women" had some association with healing. See Tania M. Dickinson, "An Anglo-Saxon 'Cunning Woman' from Bidford-On-Avon," in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings*, ed. Catherine. E. Karkov (New York: Garland, 1999), 359–74. Recently scholars such as Emily Kesling and Christine Voth have pointed to female ownership of medical texts and healing associated with female saints; Emily Kesling, "The Royal Prayerbook's

ferent medieval cultures should always be made with caution, we may nevertheless take a careful look at early medieval Scandinavia. Here female manufacturers produced fine twills and intricate expensive goods in urban workshops which were then carried to all areas of the Viking world, including the British Isles.[16] It is also likely that in the wake of such trade skilled textile workers migrated to other parts in order to start businesses, which subsequently led to changes in the economy of these areas.[17] In the Western Isles of Scotland flax cultivation arrives with the Vikings—and we should assume that this labor-intensive fiber was grown there because conditions were ideal for it.[18] Flax requires a high level of humidity and water for retting and it is thus not inconceivable to consider that the Scandinavian women of the Western Isles arrived not just as an appendage of male settlement, but as entrepreneurs in their own right.[19]

One of the most difficult challenges for the study of textiles is that fact that so little of it has survived, in particularly from the pre-Christian period. While there is a fair amount of surviving textile evidence (albeit much of it in fragments), and while many more textiles only survive as imprints, which means that it is replaced by the metals on which the fiber decayed, examples of embroidery are rare. Penelope Walton Rogers counts only three specimens from early graves: two in women's graves and one from a male burial.[20] All of them have a demonstrable "high end" context—and one of them is from

Blood-Staunching Charms and Early Insular Scribal Communities," *Early Medieval Europe* 29, no. 2 (2021): 181–200.

16 Michael Parker-Pearson et al., "Cille Phedair: the Life and Times of a Norse Period Farmstead," *Land, Sea and Home: Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-Period Settlement, at Cardiff, July 2001,* ed. John Hines, Alan Lane, and Mark Redknapp (Leeds: Maney, 2004), 252.

17 In fact, Michelle Hayeur Smith claims that women across the North Atlantic Viking diaspora gained stronger roles in households and regional economies: "Some of these more powerful roles appear to have arisen not only from producing cloth, that was vital to the medieval economy but from the very nature of textile work"; *The Valkyries' Loom: The Archaeology of Cloth Production and Female Power across the North Atlantic* (Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2020), 23.

18 Eva Andersson Strand, "Tools and Textiles: Production and Organisation in Birka and Hedeby," in *Viking Settlements and Viking Society: Papers from the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Viking Congress*, ed. S. Sigmundsson et al. (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2011), 13. In order to fulfill the most basic needs for a medium Norse household of ten people, two women would need to perform 325 days of labor each; see Hayeur Smith, *Valkyries' Loom*, 101 and Table 5.5. Her work is based on research by Tom McGovern. Even with recycling and a limited set of clothes, this suggests that perhaps not all textiles were made on the farm.

19 Christina Lee, "Costumes and Contacts: Evidence for Scandinavian Women in the Irish Sea Region," in *The Vikings in Ireland and Beyond: Before and after the Battle of Clontarf,* ed. H. Clarke and R. Johnson (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), 284–96.

20 *Cloth and Clothing*, 101.

a so-called "relic box" at Kempston in Bedfordshire. The purpose of these small, cylindrical containers, which are found in seventh-century high status graves, has been much discussed. Ideas have ranged from work boxes to containers for relics, but we tend to think now that these are associated with some form of religious function.[21] Prior to the availability of burial in hallowed ground as part of a churchyard, relics may have been used to create sanctified spaces in cemeteries.[22] In the period of Conversion such sites will have housed Christians and pagans alike, and while burial is often complex and has many regional variations, there have been suggestions that the so-called "founder graves" contained items which were representative for their kingroup.[23] The inclusion of textile "relics" in any such burials suggests that women were seen as mediators of religious and fulfilled an important function of creating links between the various generations of the kingroup.

Falling Through the Cracks: Disciplines and Discomfort

While the significance of textiles in the economic, political and religious life of early medieval England should be evident from the examples above there are reasons why research into them feature so little in the discussions around culture and identity in early medieval England. Whereas most scholars can comfortably distinguish an early hand from a later script, few would be able to tell the difference between a woman's costume from the sixth century in contrast to that of the tenth century. At a time when discussions around the "veil" are ubiquitous, we may wish to consider that the way in which people dressed is not always a question of "frivolous" fashion or ethnic

21 Catherine Hills, "Work-Boxes or Reliquaries? Small Copper-Alloy Containers in Seventh Century Anglo-Saxon Graves," in *Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology, Papers in Honour of Martin Welch*, ed. Stuart Brookes, Sue Harrington, and Andrew Reynolds (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 14–19; see also: Elizabeth Crowfoot, "Textile Fragments from 'Relic Boxes' in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Textiles in Northern Archaeology: NESAT III*, ed. Penelope Walton and John P. Wild (London: Archetype Publications, 1990), 47–56. In Scandinavia needle cases were found in high status female graves, such as Birka grave 943. This burial of a woman also contained weights which identify her as a potential trader; Eva Andersson Strand and Ulla Mannering, "An exceptional woman from Birka," in *A Stitch in Time: Essays in Honour of Lise Bender Jørgensen*, eds. Sophie Bergerbrant and Sølvi Helene Fossøy (Gothenburg: Gothenburg Archaeological Studies, 2014), 301–16, at 307.

22 Sally Crawford, "Votive Deposition, Religion and the Anglo-Saxon Furnished Burial Ritual," *World Archaeology* 36 (2004): 87–102.

23 Duncan Sayer, "Death and the Family: Developing Generational Chronology," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 26 (2010): 59–91.

identity, but of individual choice which may reflect personal belief. Textiles do not normally feature in the syllabi of university courses or anthologies on early medieval England. The neglect of this type of evidence occurs for several reasons. To begin with, the study of textiles is a specialist subject and requires expert knowledge, and therefore textile studies are discussed by specialists in separate papers and journals which are not always apparent to other scholars. Many of the practitioners, who are almost all women, are located outside departments which traditionally study early medieval England, such as English, History, or Archaeology, and in many cases they are employed in research institutions outside universities, such as museums. Additionally, many textile historians research as independent scholars, which means that they may not be included in conference calls or invited to participate in other forms of academic dissemination. I would also like to argue that the omission of textile evidence also has a gender bias, since other forms of material culture, such as metalwork or sculpture, which are presumed to have been made by men, are included.[24]

While reconstructions of dress have played a significant role in the discussion of migration and identity,[25] the makers of such dress have not. The textiles from burials have been studied in depth by textile historians, such as mother and daughter Grace and Elizabeth Crowfoot, who have shown that materials and techniques can show cultural connections with other parts of the world as much as the gold and garnets of metalwork, but also that there appear to be ways in which people learned their craft from others. While many archaeological reports contain a report on textile remains, very few include the outcomes in the general discussions unlike considerations of dress accessories, such as brooches or buckles. If textile work is taught by mothers to their daughters, then there will be visible differences in techniques—which again can be used for the study of mobility. There is a wholly untapped area of comparative research.

If spinning and weaving in early medieval England are mentioned at all in scholarly discourse it is often in the context of literature. This is especially evident in the case of the famous peaceweaver, *freoðuwebbe,* mentioned in the poems *Widsið*, *Beowulf*, and *Elene*—a term that has been discussed much in relation to gender, agency, and social position.[26] While the *freoðuwebbe*

24 The sculpture of early medieval England, unlike in Scandinavia where we have named rune carvers, was made by anonymous craftspeople.

25 For a recent critical study see James Harland, "Memories of Migration? The 'Anglo-Saxon' Burial Costume of the Fifth Century AD," *Antiquity* 93, no. 370 (2019): 954–69.

26 To name but a few: Larry Sklute, "*Freothuwebbe* in Old English Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970): 534–40; Maren Clegg Hyer, "Textiles and Textile Imagery in the *Exeter*

commands on interesting role in these texts, it is restricted to few women who are shown in the context of male politics. Recently Megan Cavell has shown that while weaving and binding are used as a metaphor in many Old English texts, the evidence for "real" textiles is rare.[27] So perhaps the omission of textile work and materials in much of the scholarship of early medieval England is justified by the paucity of mentions in literary works?

It is perhaps because textile production is primarily associated with women that this kind of occupation conjures up uncomfortable connotations of restriction and domesticity in some scholars (to which I will return below). There may also be an assumption that this kind of work was done largely by lay women who had leisure time, and was not an output of women who were participants in cultural discourses, which may be a reason why so much precedence is given to other forms of material culture. Since the 1980s a significant rise in feminist studies of women in early medieval England has produced some extremely fine work, encompassing literary depictions of female characters, historical queens, and religious women. While there have been many efforts to make women of the period visible, most examinations are centered on the context of their place in heroic society, or in relation to male power, male teaching, and exhortation. Studies of medieval women are often done on the normative template of maleness—thus women can only gain recognition on a scale which is dominated by male activities (fighting, ruling, etc.), whereas uniquely female areas of activity, such as child rearing or textile working, are overlooked and sometimes dismissed.[28]

It is worth considering that characteristics which we regard as relating to femaleness or maleness may not the same as those of people in early medieval England, and that it is important to see how gender identities were constructed during this period. The binaries of woman versus man, and a reductionist approach which sees one only in connection with the other, have been queried by Clare Lees and Gillian Overing.[29] While it now is generally agreed that biological gender and gender identity are two different things,

Book," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* I, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 29–39; and most recently Megan Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

27 *Weaving Words*, 18.

28 While research has recently begun to query binary representations of the past, popular culture such as the television series *Vikings* stresses the idea that a woman's story is only interesting if she adopts traditionally male roles, such as "warrior."

29 "The Clerics and the Critics: Misogyny and the Social Symbolic in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance,* ed. Clare A. Lees and Thelma S. Fenster (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 18–39.

we may want to query what exactly was regarded as uniquely feminine in the society of early medieval England.[30] Lees and Overing remind us that, unlike in later periods, there is no overarching concept of "woman": "A woman in this culture is a wife, or a queen, or a relative of a man or his family, a lover, but she rarely is 'woman' in either the misogynist or existentialist sense of the term."[31] Just as the period of early medieval England has been constructed through differentiation, in terms such as "Pre-Conquest" and the like, the classification of women through binaries such as "powerless/powerful" limits our understanding.[32]

There may be a reason why researchers are so hesitant to consider traditional forms of female work: as a type of labor which is undoubtedly undertaken by women it became associated with their limitations, because it is associated with domesticity and with it an idea that such work restricted women's movement outside the home or that it even constrained them to subservient roles away from male halls of power. Evidence is drawn from literary passages, such as *Old English Maxims I*: "Fæmne æt hyre bordan gerisað, widgongel wif word gespringeð" (A woman should be at her embroidery, a roving woman arises talk; lines 63b–64a).[33] These lines seem to support the idea that textile work was not only reducing women's ability to move freely, but also limited them to enforced domesticity, especially when we consider that the next lines declare that her looks will deteriorate if she does not follow this advice (lines 64b–65). This seemingly misogynist statement does, however, require some form of contextualization. We need to be very careful not to mistake modern ideas associated with needlework for medieval realities. The notion that embroidery restricts women's development and freedom can be traced as far back as the eighteenth-century when

30 The seminal work is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, 10th Anniversary Edition* (London: Routledge, 1999) and Toril Moi's "What is a Woman?" in *What is a Woman and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 369–93. Butler's ideas have been influential in the way we think about gender identities in discussions of medieval burial archaeology: see, for example, Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past* (London: Routledge, 1999).

31 Lees and Overing, "Clerics," 25. There are few texts that centre on the functions of the female body; exceptions are medical texts (of which only few have survived), which focus mostly on fecundity, and Bede's inclusion of Gregory's advice to Augustine in which he declares menstruation to be a disease; Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds. and trans, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), Bk I, 27, p. 92. I'd like to thank the reviewer for pointing me to Bede.

32 Lees and Overing, "Clerics," 25–26.

33 *The Exeter Book,* ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott van Kirk Dobbie; *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* III, (London: Routledge, 1936), 159.

writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft rejected needlework as confining the faculties that women could otherwise employ. It should be remembered that Wollenstonecraft wrote in response to ideas of the Enlightenment expressed in works such as *Emile* by the influential author Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[34] However, the "frivolousness" of needlework only applied to aristocratic women and those of the nascent bourgeoisie; for lower-class women needlework remained as a useful industry which allowed them to earn an independent income.[35] Needlework thus attained a doubly negative association: as a lower class occupation, and therefore not seeming for women who did not need to earn an income, and at the same time as a frivolous pastime which limits the intellectual potential. Thus participation in the intellectual sphere and needlework are posed in opposition, but we need to understand that this perception does not apply to the early Middle Ages. Instead, embroidery is an occupation which is the privilege of powerful women and the produce of this labor can bring about power and connections, as well as one in which they can participate in intellectual discourses.

Connecting Threads

Returning to the passage from *Maxims I*, it should be noted that while the term *fæmne* is usually translated as "women." However, it predominantly occurs in context of virginal women and the Virgin Mary.[36] For example, it glosses *virgo/innupta* "virgin, unmarried woman" in Aldhelm's glosses[37] and is used for Eve in the Old English *Genesis* poem.[38] Thus the line in *Maxims* I seems to indicate a specific type of woman: unmarried or virginal. The circle of women for whom this advice is intended is therefore restricted: it could be intended for a royal nun, or an unmarried noble woman, or both.

34 *Vindication for the Rights of Women,* 75. Cited in C. Hivet, "Needlework and the Rights of Women in England at the End of the Eighteenth Century," in *The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women's Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Isabelle Baudino, Jacques Caree and Cecile Revauger (London: Routledge, 2016), 37–46, at 39. Wollenstonecraft had herself experienced the hardships of a life as a seamstress, Hivet, "Needlework and the Rights of Women," 45.

35 "Needlework," 42.

36 *Dictionary of Old English A to I* online, eds. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018) accessed February 25, 2022, https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.

37 Arthur S. Napier, ed., *Old English Glosses: Chiefly Unpublished* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 12.

38 A. N. Doane, ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 1978), l. 884, "freolucu fæmne."

There is ample evidence for such women in historical sources, and a fair few of them are involved in the making of embroideries. For example, according to the eleventh century *Liber Eliensis* the eleventh-century noblewoman Æðelswið retired to the monastery at Coveney, near Ely. Rather than getting married, she spent her days producing gold embroidery and splendid tapestry at her own expense with her *puellulae* (group of young girls).[39] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg offers an impressive catalogue of royal ladies who are either producers or commissioners of such works in early medieval Europe.[40] Such items were "acts of piety and devotion, … made as special gifts for churchmen, favourite saints, and for the adornment of the 'supreme spouse', along with the 'hall and table of the Lord.'"[41] From Aldhelm's description of Bucge, daughter of King Centwine of Wessex (679–685) we hear that she was not just the founder of a church, but endowed it with all kinds of objects, including gold-embroidered altar cloths.[42] It is interesting to note in this context that the author of the *Liber Eliensis* feels compelled to tell us about such splendid objects, which are usually neglected by other authors, such as Bede, for example, who does not mention the splendid stole and maniple that St. Æðelþryð (636–679), founder of the monastery at Ely, produces for St. Cuthbert.[43] These items need to be understood in the context of medieval giftgiving, where the gift entitles the giver to a return. These textiles created bonds of gratitude and obligation between the donor and the recipient, and the most likely returns were intercession and commemoration. It also placed these women at the heart of ceremonies which were traditionally not a female domain, such as the altar. As donors they were "present" in ceremonies normally hidden from sight, such as the preparation of the host

39 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, Bk II, chap. 88, 187–88. See also Christine Fell, with Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* by (London: British Museum Publications, 1984), 41; Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Holy Women and Needle Arts: Piety, Devotion, and Stitching the Sacred, ca 550–1150," in *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage and Authority in Latin Christendom* ed. Katherine Smith and Scott Wells (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 83–110, at 96.

40 Schulenburg, "Holy Women."

41 Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 84.

42 Fell, *Anglo-Saxon Women,* 119. For a more comprehensive list of church hangings from various sources, see Alexandra Lester Makin, "Embroidery and its Early Medieval Audience: A Case Study of Sensory Engagement," *World Archaeology* 52, no. 2 (2020): 298–312.

43 Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 90–91; Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 30. It is unclear if the author of the *Liber Eliensis* is referring to the St. Cuthbert relics here, which of course are much later. The text claims that these objects were made from gold and precious stones and shown to people quite frequently on request. The coffin was opened in 1104 and the twelfth-century Reginald of Durham tells us that Cuthbert's unruly hair was tended to regularly by a cleric named Alfred, so it is possible that some confusion took place.

and wine for the Eucharist. Schulenburg writes that the value of such gifts is clear since they were recognized by the church as major donations and were carefully recorded on inventories: "They became part of an ecclesiastical *memoria* and thus provided these women artists and donors with certain immortality."[44]

These objects are in essence on par with inscriptions in *liber vitae.* They have the same purpose: to create bonds between the living and dead by acts of donation and memory recreation. In the same way as written records fossilize the name and status of the donor (such as the king, duke, etc.), these objects also retain memories of the status and power of the giver and allow the makers a place in the economies of power. Schulenburg considers the motivations for such donations: "As custodians of memory … [women] were responsible for the well-being of their own souls and those of their family and friends," she writes, further underlining that such objects are in the same as inscribed altar crosses, calendars which recovered the names of the nobility to be remembered and prayed for.[45] These very personal gifts create the bonds vital for the spiritual wellbeing of the family—as such they are equal to donations, such as gold crosses which are bequeathed to monasteries as items of piety and with the hope that the saint, who is resident in the institutions through relics or the invocation of their name, will reciprocate these gifts with intercession or healing. In the image of the bequest of a gold cross to the New Minster at Winchester by Queen Emma and Knut (BL Stowe MS 944, fol. 6) mentioned above, the cross is positioned on what appears to be two altar cloths. It is very possible that these two, although not listed among known lists of donations, were also a part of the gift since Emma in particular, is known for her textile donations to Ely and Winchester.[46] Emma's handiwork of a pall of *purpura* decorated with gold and precious gems is celebrated in the *Liber Eliensis*,[47] and she was an astute political mover who wielded significant power and influence in her time.

It is quite possible to read the advice for a woman to stay at her embroidery as a reminder that such items have inherent power: as a royal woman, and

44 "Holy Women," 84 and 105.

45 "Holy Women," 105.

46 Catherine Karkov, "Emma: Image and Ideology," in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov, Janet Nelson, and David Pelteret (London: Routledge, 2009), 515–16.

47 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis,* Bk II, chap. 79, 176. *Purpura* is the most precious silk cloth in early medieval England, and it can be made in various colours. The Old English term is *godweb*; Gale Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England,* 2nd rev. ed (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 211.

perhaps a veiled woman, she wields more influence through the creation of precious gifts than she would in activities such as the king's circuit or pilgrimage.[48] The passage is framed by instructions for noble men: the earl who must control his troops and the defamed man who must stay in the shadows (lines 63–67), and appears in the context of royal obligation—gift-giving, command, and being liberal. It is therefore possible that the *widgongel* (wandering, roving) is not primarily about a woman's agency and choice to move freely, but centered around the ties that bind this society.[49]

Textiles play a central role in the creation of ties between royal power and spiritual care. They clothed priests and adorned altars and were a visible reminder of the generosity that endowed these institutions. In return for this largesse the donors could secure intercession for themselves and their kin. In many cases, as I will show in some case studies below, these were designed to be worn as close to the holiest as possible: on the body of an archbishop or covering the bodies of saints and their tombs. While chronicles and charters remained unseen for much of the time, these objects were made to be visible at the center of power. In some cases they were embroidered with the names of the donor. Just as some Ottonian princesses joined royal monasteries to collect and write the deeds of their male kin,[50] noblewomen in Early Medieval England created memorable reminders of the power of their families, and by extension their own memory.

Textiles and Female Literacy: Some Examples

As we have seen, embroidered textiles are quite rare in the period before Christianization (with a caveat that this may be based on the conditions of survival), this changes post-Conversion. Early embroideries, as far as we can tell from the few extant examples, may have been imported, but the need to furnish Christian ceremonies and buildings leads to creations made from

48 We may consider a letter from Boniface to Bugga in which he recommends that she should defer her pilgrimage because of the considerable dangers ahead; he also thanks Bugga for the gifts and vestments she had sent with her query; Rau, *Briefe*, 94–96.

49 This is not just restricted to early medieval England. Inscriptions on textiles are mentioned in medieval continental courtly narratives; see Ludger Lieb, "Woven Words, Embroidered Stories: Inscriptions on Textiles," in *Beyond Pen and Parchment: Inscribed Objects in Medieval European Literature*, ed. Ricarda Wagner, Christine Neufeld, and Ludger Lieb (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 209–20.

50 Gerd Althoff, "Gandersheim und Quedlingburg: Ottonische Frauenklöster als Herrschafts- und Überlieferungszentren," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 25 (1991): 259–82.

precious materials, such as silk and gold-covered thread. Inventories, such as the already-mentioned *Liber Eliensis*, give an idea just how much of it was produced and survived until the post-Conquest period.[51] Most of these have disappeared since even religious clothes are subject to fashions and it is quite possible that theft, reuse, moths, and time were also not conducive to preservation. It is also clear that, unlike in the case of manuscripts, there seems not to have been much call for the collection of whatever may have survived from the early medieval English period.

Among the surviving corpus there are a range of different types of embroidery: (1) embroidered inscriptions, (2) embroidered images, or (3) a mixture of both. I want to specifically consider objects that have some form of inscription. One of the earliest inscriptions, albeit not from an English context, is on a pillow which Alpheidis (born ca. 794), sister of the Frankish king Charles the Bald and abbess of St. Stephen at Reims, made for the translation of the remains of St. Remigius in 852. The embroidery is gold thread on red Persian or Byzantine silk and has a Latin inscription which tells us that the work was composed and executed by Alpheidis at the request of Bishop Hincmar.[52] The inscription around the borders of the pillow would have framed the head of the saint and been visible at the time of deposition. It includes a request for her prayers to be "carried beyond the stars."[53] It is clear that when Alpheidis was commissioned with this task she wanted to be remembered as not only the maker, but also in the intercession of the saint as a donor of an expensive gift.[54]

Such inscriptions matter to our understanding of female literacy and are a unique female voice from a period where relatively little other evidence has survived.[55] Betty Coatsworth in her seminal article remarks: "Textile inscriptions associated with early medieval England have never been looked at as a significant body of material in their own right, from the point of paleography, language, grammar or punctuation, or their content

51 Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 94.

52 Elizabeth Coatsworth, "Stitches in Time: Establishing a History of Anglo-Saxon Embroidery," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* I, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 1–28, at 8; Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 92; the pillow.

53 Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 92. In her note Schulenburg writes that while the embroidery has greatly deteriorated it was included in an inventory of 1646.

54 Images of the embroidery (with detailed pictures) can be found on a page made by the photographer Dr. Geneva Konbluth, http://www.kornbluthphoto.com/Coussin.html, accessed August 13, 2018.

55 Other examples for female literacy are Aldhelm's *De Laude Virginitate*, dedicated to the nuns of Barking, and the so-called "Boniface Correspondence" in which the missionary asks for texts to be made for him.

or relationship to the works from which they form a part, with perhaps the exception of the Bayeux Tapestry. They are not included in lists or surveys of inscriptions."[56]

In the corpus of the surviving embroideries there is some discussion about the origin and provenance of these portable objects, and for years there have been arguments for or against an early medieval English origin for objects such as the Bayeux Tapestry (which is in fact an embroidery—the images on tapestries are woven in whereas here the images are stitched), are of an English provenance or not. In the context of the lives of early medieval aristocratic women such ethnic definitions may be a red herring: the involvement of women in missionary activities, marriage policies, and the lively gift exchange system means that there is a potentially wide range of items from different geographical backgrounds which become incorporated in such works. This is not the place but there has been a lot of emphasis on "ethnic identity markers" in archaeology, especially burial archaeology, but many graves are assembly casts with objects from many different areas. We can observe that there are different dress styles, but whether the "Kentish veil" was a statement of ethnic identity or simply a marker of rank, or even a fashion statement, needs discussion.[57] Textiles are generally assigned an origin by their technique (where geographical comparisons can be assigned) and imagery. One such example is the *bursa* of St. Willibrod (Utrecht, Netherlands), which is made from a gold-brocaded tablet-woven band, patterned with a simple vine scroll and possibly made in eighth- or ninth-century England.[58]

Since royal women were actively involved in the early English missionary movement to the continent, there are a range of embroideries which have a putative English origin. One of the most prominent is the so-called *casula* of Saints Harlindis and Relindis, now in Maaseik, Belgium, which is dated to the ninth century.[59] These sisters were part of the missionary movement to the continent. As an abbess, Harlind communicated with both Boniface

56 Elizabeth Coatsworth, "Inscriptions on Textiles Associated with Anglo-Saxon England," in *Writing and Texts in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Alexander Rumble (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 71–95, at 71.

57 A number of high-status burials at Kentish sites such as Sarre were found to have had gold-brocaded headbands, which were interpreted as fillets that held a head veil, and the remains of a long scarf or veil which covered the upper body were found at Mill Hill, Deal in Kent; for a list of references, see Elizabeth Coatsworth and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Medieval Textiles of the British Isles AD 450–100: An Annotated Bibliography*, British Archaeological Reports British Series 445 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 21.

58 Coatsworth, "Stitches in Time," 8.

59 The Maaseik embroideries were studied in detail by Mildred Budny and Dominic Tweddle, in "The Maaseik Embroideries," *Anglo-Saxon England* 13 (1984): 65–94, plus plates.

and Willibrod, whereas Relindis was renowned for her embroidery skills and copying of manuscripts.[60] The *Vita* of the saints mentions that the sisters were skilled in textile arts, but that the abbey they founded at Aldeneik also hosted other works by their hands, including a richly decorated gospel book and a psalter.[61] It also mentions decorated textiles described as *palliola* which correspond to the surviving embroidered *casula* and *velamen*. The *casula* contains eight pieces of gold-and-silk embroidered strips, and the monograms may have originated from an altar frontal.[62] The connection with early medieval England has been assigned on the basis of the decoration on the embroideries which were stitched on top of the cloth and the decorative foliate ornaments which are compatible with metalwork and stone carvings from southern England in the early ninth century.[63] The four corners of the H-shaped centerpiece carry the letters *A* and *O*, alpha and omega.[64] This is not the only inscription on this item, as Coatsworth describes: "Fragments of red and beige silk tablet woven braid, brocaded in gold thread, edge the strips of embroidery with arcades and roundels, … and part of that braid carries letters."[65] The meaning of the letters "IAVSV" remains unclear but it has been suggested that they are early medieval English display capitals and their setting among arches is compared by Budny and Tweddle to manuscript illustrations.[66] The connection between textile decoration and other media, such as stonework and manuscripts, shows that the executors of such items were not just acquainted with contemporary art, but used it for their own media. A ninth-century soumak braid or girdle found in the tomb of an archbishop at Sant'Appollinare in Ravenna contains fragmentary sections of Psalm 123.[67] The letters have an insular appearance, so they may have been made by a female artisan who was trained in the textual culture of Early Medieval England.[68]

60 Elizabeth Coatsworth, "Humeral Veil (?) from Maaseik, Known as the *Velamen* of St Harlindis," in *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe*, ed. Elizabeth Coatsworth and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 341–43, at 341; for a background see Steven Vanderputten, *Dark Age Nunneries: The Ambiguous Identity of Female Monasticism 800–1050* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 54–56.

61 Budny and Tweddle, "Maaseik Embroideries," 68.

62 Coatsworth, "Stitches," 9.

63 Budny and Tweddle, "Maaseik Embroideries," 66.

64 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 76; Budny and Tweddle, "Maaseik Embroideies," 75–76.

65 "Inscriptions," 78.

66 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 78, Budny and Tweddle, "Embroidery," 81–82.

67 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 74. Soumak is an early medieval weaving technique which uses a technique of wrapping thread around the weft. It is suggested that it is an imitation of Byzantine weaving; Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 74.

68 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 74.

Even more interesting than the *casula* is the so-called *velamen* of St. Harlindis at the same church. A *velamen* is a type of veil or scarf. This contains the inscription:

> Square I: HOC PARVuM Mu/NuS eRLVINuS SV
> Square II: SORORE SUA [S]CO PETRO OFFE[R]/RECVRAuIT PRO/ ANIMELLIV[S]
> transcription: Hoc parvum munus erluinus su Sorore sua [s](an)c(t)o Petro offe[r]/re pro/ anime illiu[s]
>
> (Erluinus at his own … this small gift … by [or with] his sister took care to offer St. Peter for his [or her] soul.)[69]

We do not know who Erluinus is, nor his sister, but the inscription is reminiscent of texts associated with other donations, such as Bugga's altar cloth given to Boniface, which she describes as "parva in speciae" (small to look at).[70]

Coatsworth writes that the display capitals letters are early medieval English or Frankish in a mixture of square capitals and uncials.[71] While the items may not be identified with certainty, the fact that they contain the same type of inscription as known from other media, such as manuscripts is a strong indicator of their origin. Additionally, the association with the relics of a saint of early medieval England, underlines again the importance of such gifts in the creation of ties across the English Channel. In the same way as charters use the formula "for the benefit of my soul," women used such objects to have their names recorded, to connect themselves with saints and churches on their own authority. The fact that noble women create networks of their own volition alone should place textiles into the center of studies around memory and *memoria*.

It appears that the "propaganda" value of such items was well understood and applied in other areas as well. Not all of the splendid embroideries were aimed to be used in a strictly religious context; we hear of queens who work precious garments for their husbands and in at least one case, for the queen herself. According to Goscelin, Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor, made an alb containing a portrait of herself kissing Christ's feet, a position usually

69 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 80.
70 Rau, *Briefe*, 62.
71 "Inscriptions," 80.

assigned to Mary Magdalene.[72] The image connects Edith with biblical narrative, and while her depiction as the sinner Mary Magdalene may not seem to be the most flattering comparison for a queen—especially one rumored to have lived in enforced celibacy with her husband—it is the same kind of performative humility which is expressed in written documents, such as letters. It also shows that she is aware of the biblical narrative in which Mary is a companion of Christ (Luke 8:2) and a witness to the resurrection (Mark 16:1) and is thus elevating her own role in the process.

Hidden in Plain Sight?: The St. Cuthbert Textiles and Political History

As mentioned above, written inventories, such as the *Liber Eliensis* record a large quantity of embroidered textiles, and they are a testament to female patronship and literacy. While many of these items seem to have been carefully preserved and passed on, there are cases where changes in political power and circumstances may have led to a re-appropriation of named embroideries? One of the most significant embroideries from early medieval England is the so-called "Stole of Cuthbert." It is one of three textile objects donated to the saint by King Athelstan on his visit to Chester-le-Street in AD 934.[73] Both of Cuthbert's *vitae* talk about vestments and a head cloth, which were buried with the saint when he died in AD 687 and which were still intact ("unsoiled") when the coffin was opened in AD 698.[74] When St. Cuthbert's coffin was opened in 1827 and the relics were removed, they found various textiles aside from the maniple and stole. These included silk remains and some Egyptian tabby—by which we denote a type of weave—as well as a soumak braid from the region of modern Uzbekistan, all dated to AD 720–800, so the items must have been deposited after the first opening of the coffin. Since there are no known openings between AD 698 and

72 Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 103. See also Diener, "Sealed," 4. Gregory the Great, in his Homily 33, fused Mary of Magdala with the unnamed woman who anoints Christ's feet in Mark 14:3 and Mary of Bethany. He also called her a prostitute, which becomes her predominant attribute; J. M. B. Porter, "Prostitution and Monastic Reform," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 41 (1997), 72–79, at 72.

73 Elizabeth Coatsworth, "The Embroideries from the Tomb of St Cuthbert," in *Edward the Elder 899–924*, ed. Nick Higham and David Hill (London: Routledge, 2001), 292–307. The definitive analysis of the artifacts from the burial is still C. E. Battiscombe's edited volume of *The Relics of St Cuthbert*.

74 Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert; Anonymous Life*, Chapter XII, 131, and *Bede's Prose Life* XLII, p. 293.

the translation of the coffin to Chester-le-Street, we can assume that the embroidered textiles known as "stole and maniple" may have been donations by the King Athelstan when he visited the shrine at Chester-le-Street. As previously shown, such donations created personal ties between the donor, the maker and the recipient, but in this case the political history behind these items raises some questions of why they were chosen to be included in what clearly was a gift to an important saint.

The so-called "maniple" of St. Cuthbert,[75] which depicts figures, such as Peter the Deacon, St. John the Evangelist, and John the Baptist, has been made or commissioned by Ælfflæd, second wife of Edward the Elder, which is clear from the embroidered inscription: "ÆLFFLÆD FIERI PRECEPIT" (Ælfflæd had this made). It was clearly intended as a high-status gift to Bishop Friðestan of Winchester by the queen since it carries the inscription: PIO EPISCOPO FRIÐESTANO (for the pious bishop Friðestan),[76] but whether the bishop, who was deposed in 931 CE, ever got this gift is debatable. When Edward the Elder died in 924 two of his sons contended for the kingship: Athelstan, son of his first wife Ecgwyn,[77] and Ælfweard, his son by his second wife Ælfflæd. By the time Edward the Elder died, Ælfflæd had been deposed in favor of a Kentish noblewoman, Eadgifu, who also had a son and potential contender with the king: Edmund, who would take the crown in 939 CE. Both women may have speculated on the influential position of dowager queen. Ælfweard died soon after being nominated king in Wessex in 924 and relations between Athelstan and Bishop Friðestan may not have been the most cordial, since he is not recorded as having attended the coronation of Athelstan in 925. Relations between Ælfflæd and her stepson may not have been the best either, since as the mother of the deceased King Ælfweard she must have been supporting his case, but this remains speculation, since we know little about her life at this point. Her second son Edwin may have also been a contender for the throne, but we know very little about him. Edwin drowned in 933, and spurious sources suggest he did so because he rebelled against the king.[78] It is clear that Athelstan's claim to the throne was supported in Mercia, where he had grown up and was known, but that it took the *witan* of Wessex over half a year to accept his claim to kingship,

75 A maniple is a long strip of cloth worn over the arm of the priest during the celebration of the Eucharist.

76 Coatsworth, "Embroideries from the Tomb of St Cuthbert," 296.

77 There is some speculation that Ecgwyn was not a wife, but a concubine.

78 Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: the First King of England* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 39–43.

which may support the idea that there may have been some hesitation in the choice of Athelstan as king.

The stole has survived in eight fragments and the embroidery shows a range of prophets from the Old Testament, as well as inscriptions which name the various figures. Once again Ælfflæd is named as the commissioner/maker and Friðestan as the recipient.[79] The embroideries are fashioned in various colors on a background of a couched gold thread on what is presumed to be silk. The iconography on all of the embroideries is interesting: firmly rooted in the traditions of the tenth century, such as acanthus leaves and tendrils, which are recognizable from manuscript illuminations of the period. The choice of biblical figures where the stole depicts Old Testament prophets, flanked by St. Thomas and St. James at either end, shows that the designers who planned and outlined the iconography were literate in biblical narratives and commentary and made choices about inclusion and exclusion of prophets. The maniple, which is similar in style, is decorated with figures from the New Testament and Church history, such as St. John the Baptist, St. Gregory the Great, and Paul the Deacon. In the major examination of the stole and maniple of St. Cuthbert it was observed that the iconography is unique since it depicts Old Testament prophets on the stole, rather than New Testament saints, as well as the choice of the inclusion of St. Thomas, who was not a popular saint in England before St. Thomas Becket.[80] In a recent essay Alexandra Lester Makin has pointed out that such objects were not just transmitting messages of theology, but were designed to enhance the sensory experience of the congregation:

> As the light touched each embroidered figure, it activated that image, so each was spiritually present: the divine light making the invisible visible. As the maniple and stole moved, causing light to flicker over the embroidered faces, the eyes would appear to follow you, to directly engage with you, creating a bond that was considered a form of touch; they were blessing you and drawing you towards spiritual enlightenment. This is not only a visual and metaphysically tactile experience; it is a kinaesthetic one. The movement of the vestments brings the divine light reflected in

79 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 81.

80 Elizabeth Plenderleith, Christopher Hohler, and R. Freyhan, "The Stole and Maniples," in *The Relics of St Cuthbert*, ed. C. F. Battiscombe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 375–96, at 398–99. See also R. Freyhan in the same volume, who looks at the stylistic influences which are traced back to Sassanian and Byzantine sources: "The Place of the Stole and Maniple in Anglo-Saxon Art of the Tenth Century," in *The Relics of St Cuthbert*, ed. Battiscombe, 375–96.

> the gold to life, activates it, if you will; thus the witnessing clergy and congregation also observed the divine through and in motion.[81]

The inclusion of the textiles in the tomb of St. Cuthbert leaves a range of questions open which concern the position of the dowager queen in the tenth century. Friðestan came into office in 909, and the deposed Queen Ælfflæd may have tried to forge ties with this bishop to secure her position as the future king's mother. Coatsworth writes that the manufacture of the pieces would have taken well over eight months,[82] which leaves a fairly small window for the dating, since the queen was deposed in 917 or 918. She may have tried to use these items to continue her relations with the bishop even after being put aside, but no longer than AD 924 when her stepson ascended to the throne.

I have always wondered why Athelstan chose to include these items into the coffin of St. Cuthbert—a saint whom he clearly venerated. Athelstan is known as a great benefactor of religious institutions, and yet his bequests were made with purpose. The king was no stranger to using his female kin to suit his own political ambitions. More than any other king in early medieval England Athelstan made use of his existing family relations by marrying his half-sisters (by Ælfflæd) into every significant royal house in Western Europe in an attempt to safeguard alliances.[83] Given the prestige of embroidered textiles we may consider that the king, who fought in a brutal campaign against the Scots in 934, may have wished for spiritual assistance from northern saints. However, why present the saint with a set of secondhand clothes, albeit very costly ones? Would the monetary value of these items supersede the value of intercession from a now deposed bishop? We know very little about Athelstan's relationship with Ælfflæd, but was he really intending, as Gale Owen-Crocker suggests, to place the queen close to one of England's premier saints by proxy of the textiles?[84] The king grew up in the household of his aunt Æðelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, and he was thus no stranger to influential women. It is quite possible that

81 "Embroidery and its Early Medieval Audience," 308.

82 "Embroideries from the Tomb of St Cuthbert," 296.

83 Sheila Sharp writes: "Of the countries facing the eastern seaboard of England, the central three—Germany, Flanders and Francia—were all joined to England by marriage in a flurry of dynastic bridal activity unequalled again until Queen Victoria's time." "England, Europe and the Celtic World: King Athelstan's foreign policy," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 79 (1997): 197–220, at 198.

84 "Anglo-Saxon Women: the Art of Concealment," *Leeds Studies in English* 33 (2002): 32–33.

by AD 934 Ælfflæd had died and that this deposition was undertaken on behest of the queen, or part of a late reconciliation.

Stitching Histories

There is a further group of embroidered narratives that is an interesting window into women's participation in the production of text and historiography. While gold embroideries were most likely produced to adorn the vestments of clerics and the elites and embroideries were made to adorn churches, tapestries are a form of narrated history, often commemorating important events. Wall-hangings, such as the one bequeathed by Wulfwaru to St. Peter's in Bath,[85] did not just add "considerable cheerfulness,"[86] they are texts in their own right. They narrate the deeds of their (male) kin and they establish relationships to saints. A famous example is the embroidered or woven hanging that Ælfflæd, widow of Byrhtnoth of the "Battle of Maldon" fame, bequeathed to the monastery at Ely. *Liber Eliensis* narrates that this hanging depicted her husband's deeds.[87] Tapestries may have once adorned every nobleman's hall, but in this case the donation of the tapestry was connected to a large donation of land, as well as a golden torque.[88] This gift was clearly meant to elevate both her husband's standing (who was already a patron of Ely), as well as her own, and ensured that his deeds, whether on the battlefield or as a benefactor, were remembered by the laity and clergy. In this sense the tapestry is as much a "text" as any other biographical writing. Sadly the object has not survived, unlike the poem of "The Battle of Maldon," since would be interesting to compare the two texts. What is clear is that Ælfflæd used this donation to continue the memory of her husband, and with it her own.

We do not know how many tapestries depicting secular events were made in early medieval England, but we should consider that tapestries were used as a form of historical document. Our best-known surviving narrative examples is the Bayeux Tapestry, an embroidery which retells the events around 1066 in two media: image and Latin text. Such mixed narratives of text and image are not unusual in manuscripts, for example in the Old English Hexateuch, a mid-eleventh century manuscript which also

85 Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 62.
86 Fell, *Anglo-Saxon Women,* 47.
87 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis,* Bk II, chap. 63, 163. Diener, "Sealed," 14–15.
88 Diener, "Sealed," 14–15.

contains Ælfric's preface to Æthelweard, or Cotton Junius 11, a tenth-century manuscript with biblical poems. Unlike in manuscripts, the language in the embroideries, including the Bayeux Tapestry, is always Latin. While the choice of language does not necessarily mean that the female embroiderers were Latinate,[89] it is to be assumed that they at least understood what they stitched, as the close correlation between the images and texts shows. Further evidence that the female embroiderer knew about different text types can be derived from the choice of stitches they made to perform their task. The letters, as Coatsworth has pointed out, are made in stem, split, and chain stitch, allowing for small stitches which produce a continuous line that works well for lettering. She states that the letters on the embroidery are majuscules, but are not like sections in manuscript texts, rather they resemble inscriptions on metalwork and sculpture.[90] It is quite possible that these media not only share common features, but that they also actively emulate them. Stone crosses, such as Bewcastle, Cumbria, have patterns not unlike "tabby" weaves (a weave where the warp is alternately laid over and under the weft threads), and others, such as Ireton, Cumbria, have decorated borders—not unlike the borders in embroidered textiles.[91]

The Bayeux Tapestry arguably remains the most studied textile from early medieval England, and there have been plenty of debates about its origin. Most scholars accept that it was commissioned by the new Norman overlords, possibly Bishop Odo, half-brother to William the Conqueror sometime around 1068 CE, but that it was made in England, since the figures resemble those of eleventh-century manuscript illuminations from southern England.[92] Readings of the Tapestry have veered between propaganda and subtle subversion, but the dating of it is interesting as well: it falls into a period that is either before or during what has been named "The Harrying of the North," a savage campaign to quell the rebellion of northern areas against the new Norman overlords who retaliated with utmost brutality by killing and destruction of crops which led to a devastating famine. The Tapestry—which in its final, now lost section, shows the Conquest and coronation of William—may have been seen as a suitable piece of propaganda, made by complicit or forced English women.[93]

89 See note 6 above.

90 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 90.

91 Betty Coatsworth, pers. comm. The sculptures are, of course, earlier than the Tapestry, but there seems to be a similarity which continues in various media.

92 Coatsworth, "Inscriptions," 88.

93 William's wife, Mathilda was herself a commissioner and maker of embroideries; Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 99.

Whoever made the Tapestry had a good understanding of how texts are structured, since it is not dissimilar to those of manuscript illuminations from the eleventh century, such as the *Illustrated Hexateuch*: the text and the illustration form independent narratives, given depth to the central story. Gestures and signs in the illustrations provide the syntax, whereas the ornamentation gives the images semantic depth. What it shows is that both illustrator and embroiderer have to be literate in the two media: text and image. They may not have been made together and they may have been designed at different points.[94] The designer of the Tapestry was clearly Latinate and was intimately familiar with the events leading up to the Norman Conquest. The examples cited here allow us to see glimpses of possible female literacy, and not just of religious women, but also of aristocratic lay women who often commissioned and potentially also made these items.

Conclusion

While the gender of the designer(s) of the Bayeux Tapestry may never be known, the fact that women such as Alpheidis and Ælfflæd named themselves on other textiles should indicate that textiles were seen as suitable media for expression and networking on their own accord. The evidence from letters, inventories of precious textiles which were subsequently lost, and text sources that show queens and noblewomen creating and commissioning precious items all show the importance of textiles as currencies of a female economy. These objects afforded women agency and power. For this reason alone, the study of textiles deserves to take center stage in a feminist renaissance.

Women created texts in textile. Many of these are now lost, but the small surviving corpus is an important addition to the study of what we know about women in early medieval England: these objects can tell us about the levels of knowledge of biblical and exegetical understanding by the choices made, to the saints they endowed and the religious figures they chose to give prominence to. They can tell us about literacy and networks of power. Textiles give us an indication of the materials available to women, among which are silks from the Far East and Byzantium,[95] gold, and gems. Inventories and wills show that these precious items were a currency in themselves; just as

94 Coatsworth, "Inscribed," 88.

95 These items may have contained woven images and offered glimpses of places geographically far removed from the world of the woman who was using them.

kings used rings and land to cement friendship, women used textiles to create their own bonds—bonds of intercession, of political alliance and friendship with high-ranking men, and (we should also assume) other women.

While some of the techniques of these objects have been studied, there remains a need to examine other aspects of textiles: the language, imagery and purpose, and provenance. Much of the evidence has decayed, partly because the material is more perishable than metalwork, but also because there was no Matthew Parker of embroideries. While there may have been fewer examples of embroidered texts than manuscripts in the first place, judging from inventories of the period, there still seems to have been a substantial corpus. The fact that they were not collected and cared for in the same way as manuscripts is significant and related to the perception that these items, manufactured and commissioned by women, were not as important as parchments. It would be interesting to have at least part of the embroideries of Queen Emma, wife of two kings, Æthelræd and Cnut, and commissioner of her own legacy in the *Encomium Emmae*. She seems to have carefully chosen the altars of the saints she endowed (among which are those dedicated to Æðelthryð and Bartholomew).[96] The marriage between Cnut and Emma was a match made in (political) heaven from which both benefitted greatly. The queen was a shrewd operator in the union and the object may give us an idea as to whether or not she chose to include aspects of Scandinavian imagery in such important gifts. Cnut needed Emma to support his reign, and the position of queen gave her opportunities to establish her own legacy. Texts and textiles cemented her reputation. She is still the only woman of her period with two portraits made in her lifetime, a feat which most of her male contemporaries could not manage.

Not all of these textiles were necessarily made by queens or royal women themselves; it is perfectly possible and likely that they oversaw the making of precious embroidery in workshops. The existence of such workshops, as for example, that of Æðelswið and her circle of young women, indicates that monastic institutions were not just centers of manuscript production, but also centers in which other forms of memory-creation were made.[97] From their workshops came important gifts which created and cemented relations between rulers and religious, between secular and ecclesiastic power, and

96 Schulenburg, "Holy Women," 98. Karkov suggests that Emma supported Ely because it was also the burial place of the murdered ætheling Alfred, who is presented as a "saint-in-the making" in the *Encomium*. It allowed the Queen to be the mother of a martyred son, and compare herself with Mary, mother of Christ; "Emma: Image ad Ideology," 516.

97 Fairweather, *Liber Eliensis*, 88.

between the living and the dead. The surviving items also demonstrate that those who made them were literate in script and scripture. There is a need to include the relationship between this medium and other forms of text, including art in any discussion of the culture of early medieval England.

In this essay I have argued that the reason why so much of the textile evidence has been neglected is partly because it has fallen foul of modern gender associations with an implication of domesticity, fatuity, and infringement that has been attached to embroidery in the centuries after the Conquest. The significance of such objects in the gift economy, but also, as has been shown, in the innovation of design and assumption of techniques from far outside early medieval England, has been grasped by only a few. While textile work was a woman's domain, perhaps stringent ideas about biological sex and the gendering of such labor are red herrings. The idea that some men were involved in the making of precious garments is a tantalizing suggestion that instead of seeing such items through the lens of sex, they should be seen through a lens of power: commissioned by women and men who had the means to do so, made by women and perhaps men, who had the intellectual training to create complex and multifaceted narratives in this medium. Embroidered textiles distort some of the binaries we have about women in the period: they demonstrate the role of royal and religious women as partners in the propagation of cults and the narration of history and act as important links between memory of their kin and spiritual aid.

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3 Remembering the Lady of Mercia

Scott Thompson Smith

Abstract

Æthelflæd, known to contemporaries as Lady of the Mercians, was a significant political power in early medieval England. She worked closely with her brother, King Edward the Elder, to secure and expand territorial authority, most prominently through the construction and maintenance of fortified boroughs. In later historical writing, however, Æthelflæd has been figured as both an anomaly and casualty of history, one unjustly excluded from official records. Since the early twelfth century, writers have issued charged pleas to remember Æthelflæd, recirculating key primary and secondary sources, and commenting and elaborating upon those materials. Within this ongoing tradition of protest and commemoration, Æthelflæd has long provided a flexible focal point for challenging assumptions and categories of gender.

Keywords: Æthelflæd, chronicles, historiography, virago, medievalism

On June 12, 2018, BBC News published an online article with the provocative lede, "How does a ruler defeat bloodthirsty invaders, secure a kingdom and lay the foundations for England—and then almost get written out of history? Be a woman, that's how. Exactly 1,100 years after her death Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians, is emerging from the shadows."[1] Written to observe

1 Grieg Watson, "Aethelflaed: The Warrior Queen Who Broke the Glass Ceiling," accessed January 15, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-44069889. Major commemorations were held for Æthelflæd in Gloucester and Tamworth in the summer of 2018. Among the many events at Gloucester was a mock funeral procession, complete with a Viking ship and a local actress playing the part of the dead Æthelflæd as she was carried to St. Oswald's Priory. See "Gloucester Funeral Procession Honours Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians," accessed January 15, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-44429911. Tamworth held its AethelFest in July 2018, which included an academic conference dedicated to Æthelflæd, along with several other events, such as a tasting of Aethelflaed Ale from the Tamworth Brewing

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the 1,100-year anniversary of Æthelflæd's death, the piece gives a succinct overview of her political career in the early tenth century, along with a short video clip that features street interviews with British citizens, most of whom have no idea who this "warrior queen" was.[2] The article exhibits several hallmarks of recent coverage of Æthelflæd in popular media: she was an singular woman of her time, exceptional for her achievements in a world dominated by men; she was a successful warrior or war-leader in the fight against the Vikings; she has been nearly forgotten by history; and she is only now beginning to receive the attention she deserves. These ideas are not new. Indeed, they have been recurrent motifs in representations of Æthelflæd since at least the early twelfth century. Writers have long issued pleas to remember Æthelflæd—through the recirculation of key primary and secondary sources, the elaboration of those materials, and finally the creation of new content that then feeds back into the system. This essay surveys some of that process of reception and circulation as it has occurred in historical writing (or in writing that presents itself as historical), with attention to some ways in which Æthelflæd has provided a vehicle for contesting past and present assumptions about gender.[3]

A Conspiracy of Silence

In an influential essay published in 1959, F. T. Wainwright surveyed the historical evidence for Æthelflæd's career, which is largely (but not exclusively) contained in the section of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle known as the Mercian Register.[4] Wainwright notably presented Æthelflæd as a woman

Co.; in May, the city unveiled a new statue of Æthelflæd in the roundabout outside its railway station. For the Tamworth events, see "Aethelflaed," accessed January 15, 2021, http://www.visittamworth.co.uk/aethelflaed.

2 For Æthelflæd generally, see Marios Costambeys, "Æthelflæd," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1:401–3; Mary Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 43–76; Joanna Arman, *The Warrior Queen: The Life and Legend of Æthelflæd, Daughter of Alfred the Great* (Stroud: Amberley, 2017); Tim Clarkson, *Æthelflæd: The Lady of the Mercians* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2018); and Margaret C. Jones, *Founder, Fighter, Saxon Queen: Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword History, 2018).

3 I have an essay in preparation on representations of Æthelflæd in drama, poetry, historical fiction, and film.

4 F. T. Wainwright, "Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959), 53–69.

wronged by history, contending that she had suffered from "a conspiracy of silence among her West Saxon contemporaries" and that "the blanket of official policy has kept her achievement out of the national record."[5] Wainwright's article was later included in the 1990 anthology *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, where his view of Æthelflæd became more pronounced within the larger context of the book's commitment to feminist scholarship.[6] Wainwright's influential assessment has helped to establish Æthelflæd in the modern imagination as a strong woman nearly excluded from history by the machinations of patriarchy.[7] This idea of an enforced silence around Æthelflæd, in addition to the evocative gaps in the historical record, has long motivated writers, popular and academic, to fill this absence with their own additions and inventions.

Wainwright's notion of a conspiracy of silence rests in part upon the presentation of Æthelflæd (or lack thereof) in various versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The A-text notes only her death in 918, followed by the full transference of her political authority to Edward, while Æthelweard's Chronicle in its obituary notice gives her the title *regia soror* (the king's sister) and records her burial at Gloucester.[8] The B- and C-texts, however, contain the Mercian Register, a fragmented series of annals that interrupts the chronology of previous annals and ends in what appears to be an incomplete sentence.[9] These annals run from 896 to 924 and focus on Æthelflæd as *Myrcna hlæfdige*, or Lady of the Mercians, mentioning Edward only in the entries for 921 and 924. Indeed, as Pauline Stafford has noted, these annals provide "the longest sustained treatment of a woman anywhere in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles."[10] In both the B and C manuscripts, moreover, the

5 Wainwright, "Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians," 53.

6 *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 44–55.

7 One recent assessment, for example, describes Wainwright as "the first historian to consider Æthelflæd seriously," one "who single-handedly rescued Æthelflæd from obscurity"; see Jane Wolfe, *Æthelflæd: Royal Lady, War Lady* (Chester: Fenris Press, 2001), 13 and 20.

8 Æthelweard says nothing, however, of Æthelflæd governing in Mercia after Æthelred's death. *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 53.

9 For the Mercian Register, see Paul E. Szarmach, "Æðelflæd of Mercia: *Mise en page*," in *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honour of Fred C. Robinson*, ed. Peter S. Baker and Nicholas Howe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 105–26; Pauline Stafford, "'The Annals of Æthelflæd': Annals, History and Politics in Early Tenth-Century England," in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 101–16; and Scott T. Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 167–73.

10 Stafford, "Annals of Æthelflæd'," 101.

Mercian Register appears as a discrete unit set off from the surrounding annals by strings of barren annal numbers at its beginning and end. Paul Szarmach, noting the similarities in the layout of B and C, has observed that "[t]he layout and design of the *Mercian Register* as well as certain of its internal features mark it as a separate text."[11] By framing the Mercian Register with empty annal-numbers, "[t]he scribe acknowledges in visual terms the integrity of this narrative section, its separateness, and by implication its unique origin."[12] The B and C manuscripts accordingly set apart the political career (and gender) of Æthelflæd, giving her a prominence in these inset annals that is all the more remarkable when considered against her scant mention in the A-text.

In terms of content, the Mercian Register has several provocative gaps that call attention to the possibility of things left unsaid, or even suppressed. A compelling sense of incompleteness and implication, for example, emerges from the annal for 919: "Her eac wearð Æþeredes dohtar Myrcna hlafordes ælces onwealdes on Myrcum benumen ⁊ on Westsexe alæded ðrim wucan ær middum wintra; seo wæs haten Ælfwyn"[13] (Here also the daughter of Æthelred, lord of the Mercians, was deprived of any authority among the Mercians and taken among the West Saxons three weeks before midwinter; her name was Ælfwynn). The grammar of the first clause suggests missing content. The use of *eac* in the opening adverbial phrase, unique to this annal within the Mercian Register, specifically looks to a syntactical precedent that is absent. Also, the annal identifies Ælfwynn as the daughter of Æthelred, with no mention of Æthelflæd; accordingly, the Mercian Register never names Æthelflæd as a mother, perhaps distancing Ælfwynn from the West Saxon patriarchal-dynastic line.[14] Whatever the reason, Æthelflæd's absence here is striking, especially considering her prominence in the preceding annals. And while Ælfwynn's fate once taken into Wessex remains unknown, the annal's placement of Ælfwynn's name in final position suggests something of a quiet memorial. Indeed, some have read this entry as a terse acknowledgement

11 Szarmach, "Æðelflæd of Mercia," 107.

12 Szarmach, "Æðelflæd of Mercia," 108.

13 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 4, *MS B*, ed. Simon Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 50. Ælfwynn appears only this once in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle but her name does appear in three charters. She appears in the witness list of two Latin diplomas, S 367, dated to 903 (where she appears without a title among the ealdormen [*comes*]), and S 225, dated to 915 or 916 (where she appears in second position, after Æthelflæd, and where she is wrongly titled *episcopus*); she is also named with Æthelred and Æthelflæd in a Worcester lease dated to 904 (S 1280). See Maggie Bailey, "Ælfwynn, Second Lady of the Mercians," in *Edward the Elder, 899–924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London: Routledge, 2001), 112–27, at 117–22.

14 See Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering*, 72–76.

of a violent West Saxon suppression of Mercian independence with Edward cast in the role of belligerent aggressor.[15] Wainwright, for example, observes that "[t]he words of the annalist who wrote of the deposition of Ælfwynn in the Mercian Register are heavy with resentment," while F. M. Stenton describes Edward's move as "a violent act of power."[16] The annal does not provide enough information to justify such interpretations fully, but its impression of redacted content surely suggests enough to inspire them.

Additionally, the insertion of the Mercian Register within the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle raises important questions about possible source material for these distinctive annals. Charles Plummer long ago suggested that "Elfledes Boc," a lost work listed in an early twelfth-century catalogue of books in the library at Durham Cathedral, was "not impossibly the Mercian Register," supposing an independent northern version of that text as it existed before its integration in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[17] The Mercian Register itself also includes some

15 For the political relationship between Wessex and Mercia, see Simon Keynes, "King Alfred and the Mercians," in *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. Mark A. S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville (Woodbridge, UK and Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998), 1–45; Pauline Stafford, "Political Women in Mercia, Eighth to Early Tenth Centuries," in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2001), 35–49; Nicola Cumberledge, "Reading Between the Lines: The Place of Mercia Within an Expanding Wessex," *Midland History* 27 (2002): 1–15; and Charles Insley, "Collapse, Reconfiguration or Renegotiation? The Strange End of the Mercian Kingdom, 850–924," *Reti Medievali Revista* 17 (2016): 231–49. For numismatic evidence, see Catherine E. Karkov, "Æðelflæd's Exceptional Coinage?" *Old English Newsletter* 29, no. 1 (1995): 41.

16 Wainwright, "Lady of the Mercians," 68; F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 330. Similarly, Ann Williams writes that the 919 annal "bitterly records" the removal of Ælfwynn; see *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500–1066* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 84.

17 Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892–99), 2:lxxii, note 1. The book-list appears in Durham, Cathedral Library B. IV. 24, fols. 1v–2r. *Elfledes Boc* appears among those texts identified as being written in English (*Libri Anglici*). See "Vetus catalogus librorum qui in armariolo Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelmensis olim habebantur," in *Catalogues of the Library of Durham Cathedral at Various Periods, from the Conquest to the Dissolution*, ed. Beriah Botfield (London, 1838), 1–10, at 5.

R. M. Wilson proposed that the name Elfled here may refer to Ælfflæd, the second wife of Edward of the Elder, named in an embroidery as the donor of a stole that was found in St. Cuthbert's tomb; see *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1970), 75–76. The stole was originally intended as a gift to Frithestan, bishop of Winchester from 909 to 931, but it was later included among the gifts from King Æthelstan to the shrine of St. Cuthbert, given most likely in 934. Among those gifts were three gospel-books, one of which is British Library, Cotton Otho B. ix, written in Latin on the continent in the late ninth or early tenth century and currently surviving only in fragments after the Ashburnham fire of 1731; see Simon Keynes, "King Athelstan's Books," in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 143–201,

content that suggests lost source material. One especially compelling instance occurs in the annal for 917, when Æthelflæd loses four of her thegns in a fight for the borough at Derby. The Chronicle here provides a rare mention of personal emotion: "�sþær wæron eac ofslegene hire þegna feower ðe hire besorge wæron binnan ðam gatum"[18] (four of her thegns who were dear to her were also slain there within the gates). The adjective *besorg* appears only eleven times in the Old English corpus, with this annal being its only occurrence across the several versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Based on the rarity of such expressions of personal grief in the Chronicle, and on the presence of two dative absolutes in the annals for 913 and 917, Paul Szarmach has suggested that the Mercian Register bears the trace of a lost Latin source, perhaps one written in verse.[19] While hypotheses like these are difficult to confirm, the very suggestion of lost sources contributes to the enduring sense of something missing in Æthelflæd's story as it survives in contemporary English historical sources.

Mightier than Caesar

Later medieval writers would fill these gaps with their own additions and embellishments, with two twelfth-century chroniclers, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, being especially influential in shaping the transmission of Æthelflæd's story. William of Malmesbury includes an account of a painful childbirth and Æthelflæd's subsequent renunciation of sexual relations with her husband:

> Inter haec non pretermittatur soror regis Ethelfleda Etheredi relicta, non mediocre momentum partium, fauor ciuium, pauor hostium, immodici cordis femina, quae pro experta difficultate primi partus, uel potius unius, perpetuo uiri complexum horruerit, protestans non conuenire regis filiae ut illi se uoluptati innecteret quam tale incommodum post

at 170–79; and Sarah Foot, Æthelstan, *The First King of the English* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 121–24. Wilson suggests that the *Elfledes Boc* in the Durham book-list was a gospel-book, written in English and perhaps bearing an inscription that identified it, like the embroidered stole, as a gift of Ælfflæd. Wilson's suggestion is inconclusive, but it does call into question the certainty of identifying *Elfledes Boc* as a lost source text for the Mercian Register. Simon Keynes has also observed recently that such an identification "is a pleasant but entirely wishful thought"; see "Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 1, *c. 400–1100*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 537–552, at 550.

18 Taylor, *MS B*, 50.

19 Szarmach, "Æðelflæd of Mercia," 118–19.

> tempus urgeret. Virago potentissima multum fratrem consiliis iuuare, in urbibus extruendis non minus ualere; non discernas potiore fortuna an uirtute ut mulier uiros domesticos protegeret, alienos terreret.
>
> (At the same time we must not overlook the king's sister Æthelflæd, Æthelred's widow, who carried no small weight in party strife, being popular with the citizens and a terror to the enemy. She was a woman of great determination who, after having difficulties with the birth of her first, or rather her only, child, abhorred her husband's embraces ever after, declaring that it was beneath the dignity of a king's daughter to involve oneself in pleasures which would be followed in time by such ill effects. She was a virago, a very powerful influence and help in her brother's policy and no less effective as a builder of cities; it would be hard to say whether it was luck or character that made a woman such a tower of strength for the men of her own side and such a terror to the rest.)[20]

William seems uncertain how to account for such power in a woman. Indeed, her renunciation of marital sex and the maternal function notably removes Æthelflæd from traditional female roles. William's gendered language presents her insistently as a woman—she is named a sister (*soror*), widow (*relicta*), woman (*femina*, *mulier*), mother, daughter (*filia*), virago—and at the same time, somehow, as something other than a woman. Indeed, the word order in the passage's final sentence establishes a gendered contrast (*mulier*/*uiros*) even as it sets a singular woman within larger companies of men. Much of this gender tension is manifest in the word *uirago*. Formed through the addition of the feminine suffix *-ago* to the masculine noun *uir*, the word conflates the masculine and feminine genders within a single lexeme. *Virago* is glossed as *ceorlstrang fæmne* in the Antwerp-London glossaries,[21] working from Isidore's *Etymologiae*, which defines *uirago* as a woman who "acts like a man."[22] Similarly, Adam names Eve as *uirago* in

20 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, completed by R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1:198 and 199.

21 David W. Porter, ed., *The Antwerp-London Glossaries: The Latin and Latin-Old English Vocabularies from Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus 16.2—London, British Library Add. 32246*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2011), 48. See also Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), no. 775; and David W. Porter, "On the Antwerp-London Glossaries," *JEGP* 98 (1999): 170–92.

22 "Virago vocata, quia virum agit, hoc est opera virilia facit et masculini vigoris est. Antiqui enim fortes feminas ita vocabant. Virgo autem non recte virago dicitur, si non viri officio

Ælfric's homily "De initio creaturae" because she was formed from Adam's rib: "heo is ban of minum banum. ⁊ flæsc of minum flæsce. beo hire nama uirago. þæt is fæmne for ðan ðe heo is of hire were genumen" (she is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; let her name be *uirago*, that is, a maid because she is taken from her man).[23] The word also appears in some Anglo-Latin texts, where it generally describes transgressive women who challenge masculine authority in some way. Frithegod of Canterbury (ca. 950), for example, calls Saint Æthelthryth *famosa uirago* in a positive sense,[24] whereas the *Vita S. Dunstani*, composed in the very late tenth century, labels Æthelgifu, who is also likened to Jezebel, as *impudens uirago*, in a clearly negative sense.[25] William of Malmesbury uses *uirago* approvingly in the *Gesta regum* to describe secular women who wield political power. Kirsten A. Fenton has argued that the word "implies that women could and did become metaphorical men if they displayed manly qualities" and that for William "such women were exceptional in their display of manly actions and behavior."[26] In this view, powerful women become masculine as they move out of traditional female roles into positions traditionally occupied by men. William's presentation of Æthelflæd was frequently incorporated in later chronicles, while his idea of a woman warrior both formidable and chaste would become an abiding component in subsequent depictions of Æthelflæd.

fungitur. Mulier vero si virilia facit, recte virago dicitur, ut Amazona." Isidore, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 2:34 (XI.22). "A 'heroic maiden' (*virago*) is so called because she 'acts like a man' (*vir* + *agere*), that is, she engages in the activities of men and is full of male vigor. The ancients would call strong women by that name. However, a virgin cannot be correctly called a heroic maiden unless she performs a man's task. But if a woman does manly deeds, then she is correctly called a heroic maiden, like an Amazon." *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 242.

23 *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the First Series*, ed. Peter Clemoes, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 182. Compare the Latin Vulgate, Gen. 2:23: "haec vocabitur virago quoniam de viro sumpta est." *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. B. Fischer et al., 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

24 *Frithegodi monachi Breuiloquium Vitae Beati Wilfridi*, ed. A. Campell (Zürich: Thesaurus Mundi, 1950), 26 (line 542). See also Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695–1615* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 166–71.

25 This Æthelgifu was the mother of Ælfgifu, wife to King Eadwig (r. 955–959) until Archbishop Oda ended the marriage in 958 due to consanguinity. See *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 70.

26 Kirsten A. Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the Works of William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 51–52.

Like William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon presents Æthelflæd as a *uirago*, a woman exceptional for her masculine qualities. Indeed, Henry was so impressed by Æthelflæd that he composed his own panegyric poem for her, even if he does misidentify her as Æthelred's daughter.[27] Henry introduces the verse with a celebration of Æthelflæd's extraordinary prowess, through which she would have surpassed all men in virtue—*uiros uirtute*, in a nice bit of wordplay—had not she died too soon:

> Hec igitur domina tante potentie fertur fuisse, ut a quibusdam non solum domina uel regina, sed etiam rex uocaretur, ad laudem et excellentiam mirificationis sue. Et ut estimatum et dictum est, nisi fati uelocitate prerepta fuisset, uiros uirtute transisset uniuersos. Vnde ad tante probitatis memoriam camenam diuturnitatis largitricem uel pauca dicere compulimus:
>
> O Eilfleda potens, O terror uirgo uirorum,
> Victrix nature, nomine digna uiri.
> Te, quo splendidior fieres, natura puellam,
> Te probitas fecit nomen habere uiri.
> Te mutare decet, sed solam, nomina sexus,
> Tu regina potens rexque trophea parans.
> Iam nec Cesarei tantum meruere triumphi,
> Cesare splendidior, uirgo uirago uale.
>
> (This lady is said to have been so powerful that in praise and exaltation of her wonderful gifts, some call her not only lady, or queen, but even king. And the view has been put forward that if fate had not snatched her away so swiftly, she would have surpassed all men in valor. In memory of such prowess I have forced the muse, granter of immortality, to say just a little:
>
> O mighty Æthelflæd! O virgin, the dread of men, conqueror of nature, worthy of a man's name! Nature made you a girl, so you would be more illustrious; your prowess made you acquire the name of man. For you alone it is right to change the name of your sex: you were a mighty queen and a king who won victories. Even Caesar's triumphs did not bring such great rewards. Virgin heroine, more illustrious than Caesar, farewell.)[28]

27 Paul Szarmach has suggested that this verse, along with certain parallel and rhyming phrases in William, may further indicate a lost Latin source for the Mercian Register ("Æðelflæd of Mercia," 121–22).

28 Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English Peopl*e, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 308 and 309.

Henry's poem is full of soaring praise and gender confusion. The repetition of *uirgo* at the beginning and end of the poem emphasizes Æthelflæd's chastity, while the repeated *u-* words (aside from the final *uale*) call attention to gender: *uir* (male) appears three times in some form, *uirgo* (female) twice, and *uictrix* (female) and *uirago* (male-female) once each. Æthelflæd appears as a *uirago* so powerful Henry that must call her a man, a *rex* mightier than Caesar. Æthelflæd is so remarkable, it seems, that Henry cannot fit her within a stable pattern of gender. William and Henry together established Æthelflæd as a fearsome warrior and reluctant mother, two identity categories that move her away from traditional gender roles. Indeed, Betty Bandel has forcibly argued, with specific attention to Æthelflæd, that post-Conquest chroniclers were often unable to account for prominent women without describing them as displaying "manlike" virtues.[29] William and Henry each present Æthelflæd as a wondrous figure, a woman who performs across and destabilizes gendered divisions.

Later medieval and early modern historians would largely work from William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon as a foundation, often repeating their content verbatim. Some writers might differ from William and Henry on certain points, as when Gaimar claims that Æthelflæd could not bear any children,[30] a statement that erases her motherhood, but later chroniclers would generally follow their example. Ranulph Higden, for example, incorporates William's account nearly wholesale, as well as Henry's poem, in his sprawling and influential *Polychronicon* (completed in the mid-fourteenth century).[31] In his English translation of the *Polychronicon*, completed in 1387, John Trevisa maintains *uirago* rather than render it in English ("Þues strong virago Elfleda"),[32] marking the word's debut into

29 Betty Bandel, "The English Chroniclers' Attitude Toward Women," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1955): 113–18. See also Christine Fell, with Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (London: Colonnade Books, 1984), 92, which makes much the same argument.

30 "Dis e huit anz quant out regné, / Merceneland resçut en fié; / Elflet sa sour l'en herita, / sicum Edelret comanda; / pur ço k'enfanz ne pout aveir, / quant el morust, sin fist son hair" (lines 3493–98). (When he had been on the throne for eighteen years, he came to hold Mercia in fee. His sister Æthelflæd had inherited it, as king Ethelred had ordered. As she could have no children of her own, she made Edward her heir on her death.) Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis, History of the English*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 190 and 191.

31 *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis*, ed. Churchill Babington and J. R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 9 vols. (London: 1865–86), 1:411–22.

32 Ronald Waldron, ed., *John Trevisa's Translation of the* Polychronicon *of Ranulph Higden, Book VI* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2004), 23.

the English language, at least according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Trevisa also preserves *uirago* in his translation of Henry's verse, although he omits the Henry's prefatory note to the poem:

> In preysyng of þues Elfleda, Henricus, libro quinto, made þys dyte:
> O Elfled my3ty, O mayde mennene drede,
> Vyctrys of kunde, wel worþy þe name of a manne,
> and þe wel bry3ter, now kunde haþ ymaked a mayde.
> Godnes haþ þe mad to habbe þe nam of a manne;
> Kunde techeþ þe to chaynge nou3t bote þe name.
> My3ty kyng & queene, vyctoryes to araye,
> Cesar hys triumphes were no3t so moche worþy.
> Nobeler þan Cesar, mayde virago, vare well.[33]

Overall, Trevisa gives a close translation of Henry's composition, faithfully matching the content of each line and twice maintaining original vocabulary (*uictrix* and *uirago*). Line 5 shows a more substantial change, which somewhat obscures the transformation of sex that is more directly stated in Henry's original line. Still, Trevisa's Englishing of Henry's encomium effectively transmitted the idea of Æthelflæd as *uirago* into the vernacular, helping to broadcast further the idea of Æthelflæd as a warrior-woman.

This martial image would remain available to later writers to embellish and develop as they reworked the historical materials they inherited from the medieval chroniclers. Robert Fabyan included his own version of the Æthelflæd verses in his *New Cronycles of Englande and of Fraunce*, completed in 1504 and published in 1516. While Fabyan's account of the painful childbirth closely follows the wording of Trevisa, his more compressed adaptation of the poem seems to be his own:

> Cezers tryumphis were nat so moche to prayse,
> As was of Elfleda, that sheldes so ofte dyd rayse.
> Agayne her enemyes, this noble venqueresse
> Virago and made, whose vertue can I nat expresse.[34]

Fabyan's rhyming lines compress the content of the original verse but preserve the core image of the chaste virago, along with the now conventional

33 Waldron, *Trevisa's Translation*, 26.

34 Robert Fabyan, *New Cronycles of Englande and of Fraunce*, ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1811), 178.

comparison to Caesar. Fabyan adds new battle imagery with the lines "that sheldes so ofte dyd rayse / Agayne her enemyes," which can be read to mean both Æthelflæd herself raising a shield and her commanding others to do so (i.e., she appears as both combatant and commander). Finally, the final phrase "whose vertue can I nat expresse" suggests more than a conventional humility trope. Even though Fabyan omits the descriptions of Æthelflæd changing her sex, his final line suggests that she still occupies a gender position that escapes conclusive definition within conventional terms.

Virtues More than Female

For centuries, historians would explain Æthelflæd's accomplishments through statements that Æthelflæd was a woman with a masculine spirit. Derived mainly from medieval chroniclers, celebrations of Æthelflæd's manlike qualities became something of a motif that endured in historical writing into the early twentieth century.[35] Part of the process involved working with and recasting inherited materials to serve particular creative and ideological purposes, and to fit Æthelflæd within recognizable categories of gendered activity.

An early example of this process appears in John Milton's *The History of Britain*, first published in 1670, although Milton had been at work on the project intermittently since the late 1640s. Milton consulted a range of sources, including Abraham Wheelock's edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (1643), which provided the Old English text alongside a Latin translation.[36] Wheelock had used British Library, Cotton Otho B.xi (MS G) as his base text, which was itself a copy of British Library, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173 (MS A); accordingly, the Chronicle as printed by Wheelock contains no information on Æthelflæd aside from the notice of her death in 922 (for 918). However, Milton also made discerning use of

35 Thomas Hodgkin, writing in the early twentieth century, for example, introduces Æthelflæd as "Edward's manlike sister"; see *The History of England from the Earliest Times to the Norman Conquest* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1906), 321.

36 Abraham Wheelock, ed., *Historiae ecclesiasticae gentis Anglorum* (Cambridge, 1643). See also Angelika Lutz, "The Study of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the Seventeenth Century and the Establishment of Old English Studies in the Universities," in *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Timothy Graham (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 1–82, at 34–40; and Patrick V. Day, "Rectifying a Chronicle of Contradictions: The Political Context of Abraham Wheelock's 1643 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*," *Explorations of Renaissance Culture* 43 (2017): 81–107.

other medieval sources, including William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. Milton clearly used Henry of Huntingdon, for example, as the source for his economical description of Æthelflæd sending an army into Wales, followed by her capture of Derby the following year.[37] Still, Milton does not include any of the other substantial information that Henry gives for Æthelflæd's activities between 911 and 918, while he titles her only as "the Kings Sister," disregarding Henry's regular use of *domina Merce* (Lady of Mercia). Likewise, Milton makes modest additions to the sparse notice of Æthelflæd's death in Wheelock, drawing upon the more expansive accounts in William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon: "*Elfled* his Sister a martial Woman, who after her Husbands Death would no more marry, but gave her self to public affairs, repairing and fortifying many Towns, warring sometimes, dy'd at *Tamworth* the Chief Seat of *Mercia*, wherof by gift of *Alfred* her Father, she was Lady or Queen."[38] Milton's phrase "a martial Woman" is equivalent to *uirago*, while the end of the sentence belatedly acknowledges Æthelflæd's status as Lady of the Mercians, even if the preceding statement that she received that rank as a gift from her father does make that status subordinate to patriarchal authority. Moreover, Milton greatly compresses the details of Æthelflæd's fortifications and campaigns, and he omits entirely the more sensational material that he found in both William and Henry (he makes no mention of Henry's poem, for example). As a result, Milton gives Æthelflæd more space in his historical narrative than he found in Wheelock, but that space remains circumscribed in comparison to the more expansive treatments in the twelfth-century chroniclers. Still, Milton does present Æthelflæd as an exceptional figure. When he reports that Æthelstan was fostered in Mercia, he states: "He had his breeding in the Court of *Elfled* his Aunt, of whose vertues more then female we have related."[39] Like William and Henry, Milton imagines Æthelflæd as something other than woman, assigning her a gender identity that approaches the masculine even as it remains predicated on the feminine.

While Milton does not describe Æthelflæd directly as masculine, others would make that dual gender category explicit. David Hume, for example, in his *History of England*, frames Æthelflæd's refusal of the marriage bed, as given in William of Malmesbury, as one proof of her exceptional nature:

37 *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. French Fogle (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1971), vol. 5, part 1, 297. Milton says the fortress was taken "by a sharp assault," which likely renders Henry's "castellum acerrime inuasit" (*Historia Anglorum*, 306).

38 *Complete Prose Works* 5.1, 300.

39 *Complete Prose Works* 5.1, 313.

"This princess, who had been reduced to extremity in child-bed, refused afterwards all commerce with her husband; not from any weak superstition, as was common in that age, but because she deemed all domestic occupations unworthy of her masculine and ambitious spirit."[40] Hume may have been less than impressed with the early medieval English generally but his Æthelflæd transcends the failings of her age, turning her talents to the public good. Likewise, John Lingard, whose work was intended to break from the historiography represented by Hume,[41] correlates a masculine nature with success in warfare: "For a few years the government of Mercia, during the frequent infirmities of Ethered, was intrusted to the hands of Ethelfleda, a princess whose masculine virtues and martial exploits are celebrated in the highest strains of panegyric by our ancient historians."[42] Such equations have proved especially attractive to modern representations of Æthelflæd, which often foreground her status as a woman warrior among men.

Æthelflæd's "manlike" qualities were also seen as facilitating or reflective of virtues other than martial prowess. Indeed, the motif of her "masculine spirit" provided a versatile means for presenting and justifying a range of extraordinary qualities. Sharon Turner, for example, in his monumental *History of the Saxons* (1799–1805), acclaims Æthelflæd primarily for her wisdom:

> The most exquisite luxury which aged parents can enjoy, when the charms of life and all the pleasures of sense are fast fading around them, is to see their parental care rewarded by a dutiful, affectionate, and intelligent offspring. Alfred enjoyed this happiness, which he had so well merited. Æthelfleda, his eldest, became a woman of very superior mind: such were its energies, that they even reached a masculine strength. She is extolled, in the ancient chronicles, as the wisest lady in England. Her brother Edward governed his life in its best actions by her counsels. After she was married to Ethered, the governor of Mercia, she built several cities, and upon all occasions displayed a statesman's skill, and an Amazonian activity.[43]

40 David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols. (London, 1759–62), 1:71. The first volume, which covers the early medieval period, was published last in the series. See also R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 74–84.

41 John Vidmar, *English Catholic Historians and the English Reformation, 1585–1954* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 52–74.

42 John Lingard, *A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans*, 14 vols. (London: J. Mawman, 1819–31), 1:204.

43 Sharon Turner, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 3 vols., 3rd ed. (1799–1805; London, 1820), 2:270.

For Turner, Æthelflæd's exceptional mind gives proof of "a masculine strength" and "statesman's skill," which help qualify her as an Amazon (equivalent to a *uirago*, as Turner observes in a footnote).[44] Moreover, this sentimental portrait notably imagines Æthelflæd as a reward for her father and a guide to her brother—Turner frames her worth in terms of the support she offers the men in her family, thus affording her a gendered status that is both exceptional and subordinate. Many assessments of Æthelflæd, however, measure her positively against the men of her family, comparing her favorably to her father Alfred,[45] elevating her above her brother Edward,[46] and/or eclipsing her husband Æthelred.[47] In these cases, Æthelflæd is deemed equal or superior, rather than subordinate, to her male peers.

A Suitable and Worthy Heroine

The one characteristic of Æthelflæd that seems to have fascinated most is her reputation as a warrior. Many of the assessments that claimed a "masculine

44 See also Mrs. Matthew Hall, *Lives of the Queens of England before the Norman Conquest* (Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1854), 343: "Ethelfleda, the first-born of Alfred's children by Queen Elswitha, was esteemed the most learned, as she was the most remarkable, woman of her time, and singularly distinguished for masculine spirit and abilities."

45 "After the death of her consort, Æthelflæd continued to conduct the government of Mercia, in which she proved herself a daughter worthy of her illustrious sire" (J. M. Lappenberg, *A History of England Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, trans. Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols. [1845; London, George Bell and Sons, 1884] 2:109); "In talent she more nearly resembled her glorious father than any of his children; and equally to her mother was she indebted for those noble qualities which made her illustrious" (Hall, *Lives of Queens*, 343).

46 "The loss of so active a coadjutrix was bitterly lamented by Edward, who, though a wise and active king, does not seem to have possessed those military talents which were so pre-eminent in his sister. It is, however, very probable that 'the lady of the Mercians' possessed like her father more valuable qualities than mere warlike skill" (Hannah Lawrance, The *History of Woman in England and Her Influence on Society and Literature*, vol. 1 [London, 1843], 135–36). See also Rosemary Ann Mitchell, "'The Busy Daughters of Clio': Women Writers of History from 1820 to 1880," *Women's History Review* 7 (1998): 107–34; and Benjamin Dabby, "Hannah Lawrance and the Claims of Woman's History in Nineteenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal* 53 (2010): 699–722.

47 "Ethelred died in 911, and his widow, Ethelfleda, succeeded and surpassed him. In those savage times the emergence of a woman ruler was enough to betoken her possession of extraordinary qualities" (Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 4 vols. [London: Cassell, 1956], 1:101); "Æthelflæd was a far superior ruler to her husband Æthelred, and made Mercia a kingdom to be feared, repelling foes from her borders and bringing unruly neighbours under her control" (Alex Burghart, "Æthelflæd: Iron Lady of Mercia," *BBC History Magazine*, August 2011: 60–63, at 61).

spirit" for Æthelflæd saw that spirit manifest in her success in battle, and while no tenth-century sources indicate that Æthelflæd ever personally engaged in combat, the warrior role has long been an essential feature of her story in the modern imagination. Francis Palgrave, for example, framed Æthelflæd as a famous female knight from epic romance: "The 'lady,' as she was emphatically styled, possessed the sturdy valour ascribed to the Bradamante of Ariosto; the whole character of the 'bold virago,' as the monkish writers call her, resembles that of heroine of romance; and Ethelfleda's wisdom was not inferior to her valour."[48] While Palgrave fits Æthelflæd to a fictional model, H. O. Arnold-Forster later imagined a more militaristic Æthelflæd roaming the front lines: "Æthelfleda soon became a well-known figure in the National War. Clad in armour, with a sword in her hand, and mounted on a white horse, she herself led the Mercian troops into battle. She was known to her people as 'The Lady of the Mercians' and she bore herself as a worthy daughter of her father, King Alfred."[49] Such a fanciful description would seem more at home in fiction than in history, but it illustrates how vivid such depictions could become as writers embellished the sparse historical record and built upon the suppositions of secondary sources. A comparable example appears in *Cassell's Illustrated History of England*, which provides a brief description of Æthelflæd that bears a number of familiar elements: "Edward was materially assisted in these struggles by his warlike sister Ethelflæd, the widow of the Alderman of Mercia, who, despite her sex, appears to have delighted in arms. Aided by her brother's troops, she attacked the Welsh, who had sided with the Danes, and obliged them to pay tribute to her."[50] Again we see Æthelflæd as an oddity of gender, breaking stereotypes through her love for combat, but fulfilling them in her dependence on her brother's support. What makes this presentation more remarkable, however, is the full-page illustration that precedes the text, which shows Æthelflæd on horseback, sword in hand and leading a charge against the Welsh.

This image, frequently reproduced online, visually realizes the running desire to imagine Æthelflæd as a woman warrior in the thick of combat, still a commander and strategist perhaps, but most clearly a hands-on fighter.[51]

48 Francis Palgrave, *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1842; London, William Tegg, 1869), 163.

49 H. O. Arnold-Forster, *A History of England from the Landing of Julius Cæsar to the Present Day*, 3rd ed. (London: Cassell, 1899), 66.

50 *Cassell's Illustrated History of England from the Roman Invasion to the Wars of the Roses* (London: Cassell, 1909), 46. An earlier eight-volume version (1870–74) does not contain the image of Æthelflæd, although it does contain the same text.

51 There are no comparable images of Alfred, Edward, or Æthelstan in the book, in terms of size or content.

Fig. 3.1 ***Cassell's Illustrated History of England from the Roman Invasion to the Wars of the Roses***

London: Cassell and Co., Limited, 1909, 45. Public domain.

Depictions of Æthelflæd as a warrior, in combination with accounts of her wisdom and chastity, encouraged associations with the profile of Judith in the Old English poem bearing her name. In 1892, T. G. Foster first proposed that the Old English *Judith* had been inspired by Æthelflæd. Foster saw a clear parallel between Æthelflæd's campaigns against the Danes and Judith's own leadership of the Bethulians to victory over the invading Assyrians:

> Æthelflæd then is Mercia's Judith, for she by no ordinary strategy, we are told, raised her kingdom and people to their old position. She, like the Hebrew Judith, abandoned the older strategy of raid and battle, not indeed to murder the Danish chief, but to build fortresses and beleaguer her enemies. Æthelflæd is then a suitable and worthy heroine to have stirred a contemporary poet to his theme.[52]

52 T. Gregory Foster, *Judith: Studies in Metre, Language and Style* (Strasbourg: Karl J. Trübner, 1892), 90. Consequently, Foster dates the composition of Judith to sometime between 915 and 918, with the claim that *The Battle of Brunanburh* was influenced by *Judith*.

Foster cites William of Malmesbury as confirmation for his thesis but offers little substantial evidence to support his case.[53] Accordingly, many scholars have remained skeptical. B. J. Timmer dismissed Foster's theory roundly in his 1952 edition of *Judith*,[54] while Mark Griffith said nothing about it at all in his own 1997 edition.[55] The uncertainty surrounding Foster's argument, however, has not deterred several writers from repeating it.[56] Flora Spiegel has revisited the question most recently, challenging many of Timmer's objections and concluding that some relationship between Æthelflæd and the poem "should therefore be evaluated as a serious possibility, rather than dismissed as a quaint joke at the expense of romantic Victorians such as Foster."[57] Spiegel provides a valuable corrective to offhand dismissal, but in terms of Æthelflæd's modern reputation, her defense demonstrates the abiding attraction of notions of Æthelflæd as a warrior.[58] Indeed, Spiegel's phrase

53 Still, Foster's argument held some standing in the early twentieth century. The first edition of *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, for example, draws connections between the Mercian Register, the *Elfledes boc* from the Durham catalogue, and the Old English *Judith*, positing a lost "book of Aethelflaed" as a common source. See John S. Westlake, "From Alfred to the Conquest," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature,* vol. 1, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: cambridge University Press, 1907), 108–48, at 110 and 141–42.

54 B. J. Timmer, ed., *Judith* (London: Methuen, 1952). Ironically, on one occasion Timmer confuses Judith and Æthelflæd as he refutes Foster: "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle does not go into raptures over Judith but simply calls her *Myrcena hlæfdige*, or merely *Æðelflæd*, and only gives information about her deeds" (Timmer, ed., *Judith*, 7). The error was corrected in the second edition, published in 1961.

55 Mark Griffith, ed., *Judith* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997).

56 See Anne Echols and Marty Williams, *An Annotated Index of Medieval Women* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992), 11–12; Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 26; Antonia Fraser, *The Warrior Queens* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 154; Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450–1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 61 and 74; *The Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, ed. Richard North, Joe Allard, and Patricia Gillies (Harlow: Pearson, 2011), 402; Bryan Weston Wyly, "Cædmon the Cowherd and Old English Biblical Verse," in *Beowulf & Other Stories: A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, ed. Richard North and Joe Allard, 2nd ed. (2007; Harlow: Pearson, 2012), at 214; and Arman, *The Warrior Queen*, 174–82.

57 Flora Spiegel, "The Heroic Biography of Æthelflæd of Mercia and the Old English *Judith*: A Re-Examination," *Quaestio Insularis: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic* 5 (2004): 111–44, at 144.

58 Spiegel acknowledges (but does not fully engage) the cultivation of Æthelflæd in feminist historiography of the late 1980s and 90s and its free use of legendary material. At the same time, however, Mary Dockray-Miller still claimed "The feminist history movement has, by and large, passed her [Æthelflæd] by" (*Motherhood and Mothering*, 62). Such notices of historical neglect have been especially persistent in treatments of Æthelflæd.

"heroic biography" reminds us of the abiding influence that certain narrative expectations have played in the ongoing construction of Æthelflæd's story.[59]

The vision of Æthelflæd as a formidable woman warrior strong enough to be a man has proven especially attractive in recent decades, especially in the popular press and online. *Uppity Women of Medieval Times*, for example, tells us that, "Aethelfled for one couldn't get enough of the battlefield" until she "finally caught the wrong end of a mace in a battle at Stratfordshire in 918."[60] *The Encyclopedia of the Amazons* likewise notes that Æthelflæd "fell in battle in June 918 at Tamworth in Staffordshire."[61] This prevailing image of Æthelflæd as a woman warrior fighting in a masculine world wary of strong women has also made its way into online communities. One can find the theory, for example, that Æthelflæd inspired J. R. R. Tolkien to create the character Eowyn in *Lord of the Rings*:

> While he got his inspiration from many sources (and did not welcome speculation on such matters!), it is, however, hard to ignore certain similarities between Middle Earth and Anglo Saxon England. For example both had: just one woman to fight on horseback; one woman to lead men in battle; one woman to help rule her people when destiny called. Taking everything into consideration, it is quite likely that the legends of Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians, inspired Tolkien to create Eowyn, Lady of the Rohan.[62]

The text appears next to an image of actress Miranda Otto in helmet and armor, screaming a defiant battle-cry in the Peter Jackson film *The Return of the King* (2003), a juxtaposition that implies Æthelflæd must have looked somewhat the same when she fought the Vikings. Popular portrayals like this one circulate freely and have become influential participants in the diffuse networks of representation that determine the perception and reception of Æthelflæd.

59 The word *heroic* (or some variation thereof) was a mainstay in descriptions of Æthelflæd in historical writing, especially in (but not limited to) the nineteenth century. The examples are too numerous to cite here.

60 Vicki León, *Uppity Women of Medieval Times* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1997), 30.

61 Jessica Amanda Salmonson, *The Encyclopedia of Amazons: Women Warriors from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 3.

62 Brian S., "Aethelflaed: Daughter of Greatness," posted August 28, 2005, accessed January 15, 2021, http://girlswithguns.org/aethelflaed-daughter-of-greatness/. Like so many others, the article begins by protesting Æthelflæd's undeserved obscurity.

Fig. 3.2 The Æthelflæd statue at Tamworth Castle, designed by H. C. Mitchell and sculpted by E. G. Bramwell. The statue was raised in 1913

Photograph by the author.

Since the 1990s, these representations have increasingly favored the depiction of Æthelflæd as a warrior. A comparison of public monuments in Tamworth encapsulates this development quite clearly. The grounds at Tamworth Castle today contain a statue of Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, raised upon an ornately sculpted pedestal.[63]

63 The statue bears an inscription from its raising in 1913 "to commemorate the building of the castle mound by Aethelfleda, the Lady of the Mercians." A second inscription was added

Fig. 3.3 The Æthelflæd statue sculpted by Luke Perry and raised in 2018

Photograph reproduced by permission of Tamworth Arts & Events, Tamworth, UK.

Æthelflæd holds a bared sword in her right hand as she smiles down upon an adoring child (likely Æthelstan) cradled within the shelter of her left arm. The image captures the popular legend of Æthelflæd as it existed at the time of statue's creation in 1913: a nurturing woman warrior dedicated to fostering the growth of the West Saxon dynasty and English nation. For the 1,100-year anniversary of Æthelflæd's death, however, Tamworth commissioned a new statue, which was installed on May 20, 2018.

The contrast between this metal statue, which stands six meters high, and the older stone statue at Tamworth Castle demonstrates an escalating investment in the image of Æthelflæd as a warrior. The Æthelflæd of 2018, wearing armor with a shield strapped across her back, looks boldly forward, a spear extended in her left hand as her right hand rests on the pommel of a massive sword that also serves as pedestal and base for the statue. This angular and imposing effigy is all fighter, with no cherubic child at her skirts. Indeed, the creator artist Luke Perry describes Æthelflæd in an interview

in 2013, on the "Anniversary of the re-fortification of the burh of Tamworth, ancient capital of Mercia."

as "a bad-ass warrior queen who should not have been forgotten by history." Perry describes the older Tamworth statue as "the Victorian image of her, which was motherly, maternal and submissive. That's totally wrong, she was a warrior."[64] The new Tamworth statue represents a dramatic revision of Æthelflæd's local image, one which aggressively broadcasts a warrior identity.

More Valuable Qualities than Mere Warlike Skill

Past writers have looked to other qualities in Æthelflæd other than success in warfare, however. Historians like Sharon Turner praised Æthelflæd for her intelligence and wisdom, while others have similarly valued other virtues, often through creative embellishment of the historical record.

One remarkable depiction of Æthelflæd's compassion appears in antiquarian John Throsby's *Memoirs of the Town and County of Leicester*, published in 1777. Throsby dedicates several pages to Æthelflæd, the first few being somewhat standard in content and style, repeating William of Malmesbury's story of "disliking the severe pangs of child-bearing," followed by a short description of her admirable martial abilities. Following this, however, Throsby turns his attention to Æthelflæd's presence at Leicester, with an account that depicts her compassion in a most dramatic fashion:

> She relieved, in many places, the distresses of mankind, where the horrors of war had made miserable. The city of Leicester, she beheld with the tenderest compassion which had been honoured by a royal Residence; but whose beauty and strength had fallen to decay by the annihilating power of war.—Its miserable inhabitants she succoured. Its wasted dwellings she bid to rise from their ruinous heaps, in pleasing order. Propagation under her kind influence poured forth her multiplying increase to supply the devastations of a vindictive foe.[65]

This would seem to be a local tradition independent of the written sources. The Mercian Register states that Æthelflæd gained control ("begeat on hire

64 Smith, Adam, "Giant Sculpture of 'Bad-Ass Warrior Queen' Who Fought Vikings Unveiled in Tamworth," *Metro*, May 22, 2018, accessed January 15, 2021, https://metro.co.uk/2018/05/22/giant-sculpture-of-bad-ass-warrior-queen-who-fought-vikings-unveiled-in-tamworth-7567508/. The event was supported by a social media campaign that encouraged citizens to post pictures of themselves imitating the new statue's stance and attitude, with the hashtag #dotheaethel.
65 John Throsby, *Memoirs of the Town and County of Leicester* (London, 1777), 119–20. Hall quotes this description in *Lives of Queens*, 348, crediting the author incorrectly as "Thoresby."

geweald") of Leicester in 918, doing so without a fight ("gesimbsumlice").[66] Throsby's more elaborate account presents Æthelflæd as a redeemer, directing attention to her restoration of Leicester and its people; in his florid description, she brings alleviation from war, rather than war itself. This presentation also demonstrates, again, how Æthelflæd frequently inspired writers to creative addition and embellishment. Throsby ends his vignette with the standard plea that Æthelflæd not be forgotten: "may her name adorn the page of history to the remotest time, inspiring princes with her exalted sentiments of munificence."[67] For Throsby, Æthelflæd's most important virtue was a kindness that inspired her to productive action for the benefit of place and community.

In a more extensive case of creative license, J. Llewelyn Prichard's *The Heroines of Welsh History* reimagines the story of Æthelflæd in ways that are frequently flamboyant and often ahistorical. Prichard's unconventional mélange of apocryphal legend and pure invention with the citation and evaluation of historical sources creates a sensational narrative that shows Æthelflæd (unsurprisingly) breaking away from established gender roles. In doing so, Prichard both amplifies and modifies the conceit of Æthelflæd as a masculine woman:

> If a woman, under any circumstances, can stand excused before the judgment seat of man, for subduing those attractive graces which make her lovely in his eye, her soft demeanour, retiring gentleness, and yielding flexibility of character, to trespass over the sexual boundary with which nature has fenced his prerogatives—to put on the stern characteristics of manhood—not the masquerading foolery of the helmet and war-boots of Mars upon the shrinking frame of Venus—but the dire, fateful earnestness of the life or death hazards of the day of battle—then surely Elfleda is not only uncensurable, but feelingly commendable for the subsequent part she took in repelling personally the aggression of ambitious neighbours and every description of marauders or assailants. The unenviable functions which she embraced, glowing as the results of her daring appear in the dubious lustre imposed by success, was not a matter of choice, but literally enforced upon her by the merciless necessity which environed her position.[68]

66 Taylor, *MS B*, 50.

67 Throsby, *Memories of the Town and County of Leicester*, 120. One might note that Throsby imagines Æthelflæd as an inspiration for royal men here, not for royal women.

68 T. J. Llewelyn Prichard, *The Heroines of Welsh History: Comprising Memoirs and Biographical Notices of the Celebrated Women of Wales* (London, W. & F. G. Cash, 1854), 232–33.

In a muddle of gender stereotypes, Prichard exonerates Æthelflæd from transgressing the "sexual boundary" to enter the masculine realm of war—her assumption of that mantle was forced upon her by necessity, he argues, framing it as a regrettable course but freeing Æthelflæd from blame. There is a sense of embarrassment here, even as Prichard invests Æthelflæd as a reluctant warrior who "personally" defeats all aggressors and enemies, as if she were an army of one. In this schema, she is exemplary despite her shifting gender, while most writers have presented her masculine nature as a sign or outcome of her general excellence. Moreover, Prichard presents Æthelflæd's decision to assume manly virtues as a heroic act, in the form of a dramatic monologue in which she stirs herself to action:

> Deprived of the natural support of the dependent state, her womanly condition unprotected by the powerful arm and daring heart of man, she said to her soul in the extremity of her helplessness, "my husband is in the grave, my father's sleep is dreamless of my woes,—my brother—let me not think of him!—no, I have none to help me—then I will be a man myself—in far as in me lies, I will emulate his virtues, and nerve my woman's heart with manly resolution."[69]

Facing a lack of "natural support" from the men in her family—Prichard presents Edward as something of a villain—Æthelflæd must step away from masculine company even as she becomes a man herself. Accordingly, she is figured as both passive and active, while her resolve for independence is both daring and tragic. Despite its conservative gender politics, Prichard's revision reconfigures the longstanding trope of the mannish woman—one that seems to make him somewhat uncomfortable—by providing a justification that both frees Æthelflæd of censure and makes her even more exceptional in the bargain.

A more recent book steps far away from the convention of Æthelflæd as a *uirago*, the woman who acts like a man. In his *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings*, Don Stansbury insistently presents Æthelflæd as a woman who did not emulate masculine traits. "Ethelfled was not a woman who succeeded in a man's world by turning herself into a man," he bluntly states.[70] As a woman, Stansbury claims, she provided an alternative to the cyclical violence perpetuated by men, yet her story has remained untold: "History

69 Prichard, *Heroines of Welsh History*, 233.

70 Don Stansbury, *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings* (South Brent: Imogen Books, 1993), 201.

has ignored Ethelfled. It has consigned her to the footnotes."[71] Stanbury combines the examination of primary and secondary sources with imaginative reconstruction, scholarly analysis with melodramatic polemic, as he constructs his own vision of Æthelflæd. For Stansbury, Æthelflæd offered a better style of leadership, one that valued peace over violence:

> It is important to know that one of the people who stood against this rising tide of violence eleven centuries ago and proved that it was possible for the civilised way to survive was a woman. She showed that there was another way. It was a woman's way. She did not try to succeed in a male dominated world by copying the men, by being even more fierce and aggressive and bloodthirsty than they were. There was quite enough of that without her adding to it. Violence was the problem not the solution. Her way was different and it was what people needed.[72]

For Stansbury, the essentialist concept of the "woman's way" provides an unrealized solution to the violence that has plagued both past and present. Even when describing her military actions, Stansbury presents Æthelflæd as a force for peace. When describing the winning of Derby, for example, Stansbury explains that the 917 annal from the Mercian Register, which describes Æthelflæd's sorrow at the loss of her four thegns, "contains a very unusual element. It expresses love and a sadness at the waste of life. In her moment of greatest triumph, Ethelfled was thinking and feeling as a woman would feel. She loved her men and they doubtless loved her and they won the battle for her. In the midst of so much hatred and so much fear, love was proving itself to be more powerful."[73] Despite the title of his book, Stansbury's Æthelflæd is not a warrior-woman defined foremost by her success in combat; instead, he presents her as a force for peace within a "world that men had dominated and made dangerous."[74] The gender binarism is starkly clear—Æthelflæd was great because as a woman she remained free of toxic masculinity. With passionate investment, Stansbury claims Æthelflæd as an occasion for making a larger argument about womanhood as a corrective counterpoint to masculine violence. He ends with a vehement indictment of Æthelstan as a warmonger, and with a closing claim that Æthelflæd would have chosen a higher path. "History needs to show how

71 Stansbury, *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings*, 218.
72 Stansbury, *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings*, 1–2.
73 Stansbury, *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings*, 208.
74 Stansbury, *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings*, 198.

people have tried to limit violence and construct a better way," he writes. "We have needed to know about Ethelfled."[75]

May Her Name Adorn the Page of History

The motif of an imperiled Æthelflæd on the verge of being forgotten has long provided an occasion for reinterpretation and reinvention as means of remembering. From William of Malmesbury's plea that we not overlook Æthelflæd (*non praetermittatur*), to online projects to "resurrect knowledge of the First Lady of the Mercians,"[76] the impulse to memorialize Æthelflæd has been steady and insistent. Indeed, the supposed conspiracy of silence that Wainwright saw among Æthelflæd's contemporaries has become for subsequent generations an imperative to speak. The provocative blanks in the historical record have provided a generative space for writers to construct their own Æthelflæd, often as a transgressive challenge to—or confirmation of—different gender hierarchies and assumptions. Æthelflæd's long reception history shows how she has provided a flexible site for expressing and contesting different constructions of gender, identity, and history. As a result, Æthelflæd has remained both a remarkable historical agent in her own right, and a compelling figure through which later eras could articulate their own desires and anxieties about the intersections of past and present.[77]

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75 Stansbury, *The Lady Who Fought the Vikings*, 220.

76 *Aethelflaed Rises*, accessed January 15, 2021, https://aethelflaedrises.wordpress.com/.

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Affect Theory

4 Be a Man, Beowulf

Sentimental Masculinity and the Gentleness of Kings

E. J. Christie

Abstract
While early critics of *Beowulf*, almost exclusively male, projected their gender expectations onto the poem and found their protagonist "manly," it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the gentleness ascribed to early medieval English kings attracted close consideration. This essay makes a small contribution to the feminist recovery of the diversity of ways to be male by examining the Old English discourse of gentleness, and rereading in the context of a crisis of masculinity. Yet, while Old English didactic texts distinguished between meekness and anger, duty and "slackness," all such ideas about courage became emphatically gendered only in their reception. It is clear, in other words, that though Beowulf was always male – criticism made him "a man."

Keywords: Masculinity, Gender, Kingship, Historiography, Romanticism, War

Tolkien's "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" has been celebrated as the origin of modern criticism of the poem, making a convincing case for its aesthetic unity and, furthermore, depicting the poet as "a brooding intellectual, poised between a dying pagan world and a nascent Christian one."[1] Though it is less often the focus of contemplation than some of Tolkien's other observations, this idea of the poet is a central aspect of Tolkien's wider view of the poem as a "tale of men dying."[2] The "brooding intellectual" and the courageous man of action are opposed masculine types and the

1 Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles. *A Beowulf Handbook* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1997), 5.
2 Gillian R. Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 70.

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interplay between them is evident in the history of *Beowulf* criticism. Considered against contemporary discourses of masculinity, Tolkien's essay can be understood not so much as a point of origin for modern criticism but, to echo John Niles's observation, as a "mid-life crisis" in the reception of the poem.[3] It is the culmination of a tradition of Romantic historiography that posits a specifically masculine historical agency. Tolkien's emphasis on mood and feeling in reading *Beowulf*, in particular, evokes Romanticism's "sentimental masculinity" which, among other things, opposed the "morbid antiquary" with the "vital man of feeling," positing the latter as the ideal historical authority.[4] While early critics of *Beowulf*, almost exclusively male, projected their own gender expectations onto the poem and thus found their protagonist "manly," it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the gentleness ascribed to early medieval English kings attracted close consideration. By examining the discourse of gentleness revealed in Old English literature, and reading Tolkien's essay in the context of a well-documented crisis of masculinity provoked by the clash of Victorian gender scripts with the horrors of mechanized war, this essay makes a small contribution to the feminist recovery of the diversity of ways to be male.[5] In particular, the moralizing accusation of "slackness" that characterized inertia, fear, and failure of duty in World War I soldiers offers a potential continuity with the Old English discourse of moral character. Yet it is clear that while Old English didactic texts distinguished between meekness and anger, duty and "slackness," all such ideas about courage became emphatically gendered only in their reception. It is clear, in other words, that though Beowulf was always male—criticism made him "a man."

To the extent that critics of the nineteenth century evaluated Beowulf's character, it was only in so far as he was, like his story, "a picture of a whole civilization," as a manifestation, for example, of "English national character" or of "the Anglo-Saxon" construed as a continuous and implicitly masculine historical agent.[6] If a vision of masculinity was to be found in their idea of

3 Bjork and Niles, *A Beowulf Handbook*, 5.

4 Mike Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History, 1790–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17–19. The terms "morbid antiquary" and "vital men of feeling" are from the title of Goode's fourth chapter. A summary of Romantic historicism, including the connection of masculinity, feeling, and historical authority, can be found at the end of his introduction.

5 See Clare A. Lees, ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xv–xvi, and "Men and *Beowulf*" in *Medieval Masculinities,* 129–48.

6 Archibald Strong's claim that *Beowulf* is a "picture of a whole civilization" is quoted from J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics" in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 53.

the poem, it is one that cannot be separated from ideologies of nation and race. As early as Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805), Beowulf was perceived as a masculine type. Between Turner's Romantic historiography and Tolkien's celebrated essay, a specifically English concept masculinity passed through Victorian and Edwardian iterations, both of which reciprocally sustained and were sustained by wider rationalizations of British Imperialism.

Sharon Turner writes in *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, a work that had "a powerful influence on historical thought for the succeeding half-century,"[7] that *Beowulf* "as picture of the manners, and an exhibition of the feelings and notions of those days … is as valuable as it is ancient."[8] His work outlines the story of *Beowulf* by translating select passages. In Turner's reading, Beowulf's character is epitomized in his response to Hrothgar when they meet in Heorot (an exchange that constitutes Fitt VI). Having just boasted that he will meet Grendel on equal terms by forgoing weapons and armor, Beowulf is nevertheless mindful of potential failure and concludes with a contemplation of his own demise that Turner calls a "manly speech."[9]

Na þu minne þearft
Hafalan hydan, ac hē mē habban wile
D[r]ēore fāhne, gif mec dēað nimeð:
Byreð blōdig wæl, byrgean þenceð,
Eteð āngena unmurnlīce,
Mearcað mōrhopu— nō ðu ymb mīnes ne þearft
Līces feorme leng sorgian.
Onsend Higelace, gif mec hild nime,
Beaduscrūda betst, þæt mīne breost wereð,
Hrægla sēlest; þæt is Hrædlan lāf,
Wēlandes geweorc. Gæð ā wyrd swā hīo scel.[10]

7 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, s.v. "Turner, Sharon (1768–1847)," by H. R. Loyn, accessed July 8, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27866.

8 Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons: Comprising the History of England from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, 4th ed. 3 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Reese, Orme, and Brown, 1823), 280–81. Turner's *History* was first published in four volumes between 1799 and 1805. It went into six more editions before the seventh and final, posthumous edition, published in 1852. I cite throughout from the three-volume fourth edition of 1823.

9 Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 291.

10 Lines 445b–455b. R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John D. Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 17–18. All quotations of *Beowulf* are from this work.

(You will not need to bury my head, but he will have me as a grim trophy if death takes me: he will take my bloody corpse, intending to defile it, eat it alone without remorse, smatter the moorlands—you will not need to grieve long about my body's sustenance. If the battle takes me, send to Hygelac that best of battle-shirts, the glorious garment that guards my breast. That is Hrethel's treasure, Weland's work. Wyrd goes ever as it must.)

(Turner's Translation of lines 445b–451b:

If death should take me away,
Bear me from the bloody slaughter;
Eat over the solitary wanderer unmourningly.
Mark my hillock with the simple flower;
Nor do thou about the fate of my body long sorrow.)

Though the general picture of Beowulf contemplating his own defeat and demise as well as his wish to return his armor to Hygelac are clear in Turner's translation, the central, horrifying detail of that death—that he imagines Grendel will eat him—is entirely mistranslated. Turner renders the verbs of this passage, *byreð*, *þenceð*, *eteð*, and *mearcað* (449a) as imperatives addressed to Beowulf's audience rather than third-person present indicatives (implying the future) describing the action of Grendel. He thus imagines the whole progression as Beowulf's stoic prearrangement of his own funeral. Where Grendel means to eat Beowulf's corpse (*byrgean þenceð*), Turner sees Beowulf reminding Hrothgar to have him buried; where the poem describes Grendel smattering (*mearcian*) the higher, dry lands enclosed by moor (*morhopu*) with Beowulf's guts, Turner has Beowulf asking his survivors to "mark my hillock with the simple flower." In Turner's defense, some confusion persists about the meaning of lines 447a and 448b–451b. In 447a, editors usually emend the manuscript *deore* (adj. fierce, formidable) to *dreore* (n. dripping blood) in order to make sense of it. *Byrgean* (448b) could be one of two verbs meaning to feast or to bury respectively.[11] Nevertheless, what is apparently manly about this speech is precisely the unflinching contemplation of one's own death, culminating in the famous, gnomic acceptance of fate. Despite the lack of a possessive, *morhopu* might reasonably be translated "hillock," but "the simple flower"

11 *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online,* ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), s.v. "Byrgan1", "Byrgan2."

is pure interpolation and, moreover, a detail that marks Turner's own sentimental historiographical outlook, a "predilection for romance" that was criticized in his own time.[12]

Elsewhere in *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, Turner documents the character of historical Anglo-Saxon Kings. He writes of his Saxon ancestors "manly intellect" derived from their prehistoric nomadic condition, in which the harshness of life formed "manly virtues" into "pleasing habits"; he seeks the childhood origins of King Alfred's "manly character"; and finally, he laments that while King Edmund of East Anglia was praised for such "milder virtues" as "affability, gentleness, and humility" that he was nevertheless "deficient in those manly energies" that might have saved his kingdom from Vikings.[13] It is plain that, to Turner, Anglo-Saxon kings were above all "manly" and, furthermore, that this manliness was energetic, forged in harshness, a combination of strength in both body and mind. Finally, however praiseworthy gentleness might be, it was not manly. Turner's description thus expresses an ancient set of gender stereotypes characterizing maleness as energetic, vigorous, and active, such that contemplation, introspection, and passivity had to be explained and defended.

Turner's first volume was published in 1799, at the end of the same decade begun by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Though its successive revision and republication throughout the nineteenth century made it a popular Victorian vision of the national past, bearing this moment of origin in mind foregrounds Turner's essentially Romantic historiography. Mike Goode traces a Romantic model of historical authority resting in "manly feeling" to Burke's reflections, arguing that Burke "remade the well-known eighteenth-century character type of the man of feeling, a sentimental and sexual type whose manliness and sociality were already open to dispute" into a man of "historical feeling" by "ground[ing] competence to know the past in male feeling."[14] As Goode demonstrates, this version of historical competence persisted and competed with the rising Victorian attempt to remake history as a science, and thus to characterize the professional historian as dispassionate. The nineteenth century balanced two visions of history with two concomitant visions of masculinity competent to encounter and interpret the past. When I turn to Tolkien's interpretation of *Beowulf*, below, it will be apparent that his critique of the "mining" of Beowulf for historical facts and his perception of Beowulf, the *Beowulf*-poet, and himself as "men in history" reaches back to

12 Loyn, "Turner, Sharon (1768–1847)."

13 Turner, *A History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 1:212, 18, 489, 513, 514 respectively.

14 Goode, *Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History*, 50.

this Burkean model of historical knowledge grounded in masculine sensibility. Before arriving in the twentieth century, however, it is instructive to dwell on just how hyperbolic the reading of masculinity in *Beowulf* could become.

A century after the first publication of *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, Henry Shattuck Verrill would, like Turner, perceive stoicism in the face of death, a "grit to face the facts of existence" as the defining trait of Beowulf,[15] who he also sees as the prototype of the modern "Anglo-Saxon." Though a figure of little significance in the history of early medieval English studies, Verrill's views epitomize a transatlantic vision of "English manhood" that echoes in American racial discourse throughout the late nineteenth century.[16] In 1899 Verrill, Harvard Graduate, Chair of English Literature at Park College, Missouri and associate editor of its literary magazine, the *Park Review*, published in the pages of that magazine a discourse on "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf" which he had previously read before the historical club of Park College.[17] It is a polemic on the superiority of the "Anglo-Saxon race" that attempts to explain the "industry and valor" that mark the English and American greater than his European competitors as a historical and racial characteristic.[18] Specifically, in the character of Beowulf he finds the archetype of the modern Anglo-Saxon man, for Beowulf is "above all a muscular fellow,"[19] the "prototype of the college athlete" who arrives on the shores of Denmark with a "manly bearing."[20] His heroic tale is nevertheless "not father to our present low desire for prize-fighting, springing rather from that healthier love of muscle which has always had a part in the English ideal of manhood."[21] He represents "the fortitude which stand English and American in good stead on the field of battle" and the "sense of duty" that calls men to put their nation before themselves.[22] He might be likened to Dewey or Nelson, as he is indeed, "our first naval hero."[23] Above all, the "Anglo-Saxon" possesses, like Beowulf, "the grit to face the facts of existence."[24] Modern critics are quick to point out, of course, that neither Beowulf nor any character in his poem is an Anglo-Saxon. Nevertheless,

15 Henry Shattuck Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," *The Park Review* 1 (1899): 7.

16 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 4, 15.

17 Park College, Missouri, founded in 1875, is now Park University. See https://www.park.edu/, accessed July 12, 2020.

18 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 2.

19 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 3.

20 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 4.

21 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 4.

22 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 4–5.

23 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 5.

24 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 7.

this courage in the face of existential challenge is the very characteristic that Tolkien will identify as the "Northern theory of Courage."

Verrill's essay is a mélange of muscular Christianity, social Darwinism, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant self-satisfaction, and by his own admission "sophomoric enthusiasm."[25] Connecting British commercial success and dominance in war to supposed racial characteristics, and ostensibly describing an antecedent that would explain his modern masculinity, Verrill in fact projects a vision of idealized nineteenth-century masculinity into the past. It is a vision intermingled with nation, race, and history and with Verrill's own consciousness of himself as a cerebral rather than physical man, whose effort in historical research is metaphorized as physical labor "with pick and shovel." The reason for "Anglo-Saxon" domination in the nineteenth-century world of industry and civilization, the mysterious racial matrix of success, he reasons, must be found by "thinking men" rather than "men of action" because "the explanation, not lying on the surface, can be obtained only with a pick and shovel."[26] He explains further that, since only the old can explain the new, in *Beowulf* "the historian looks for the germs of modern Anglo-Saxon life."[27] Verrill thus imagines for himself a vigor not slackened by bookishness, a muscular intellectualism that connects him in ethnic and historical continuity with the Anglo-Saxons. He is, like Tolkien's *Beowulf* poet, a "brooding intellectual" with the special task of translating history for his race. Most remarkable among the many remarkable assumptions of Verrill's essay is the default masculinity of the racial past: in seeking an "Anglo-Saxon" in which to discover the characteristics of his imagined race, to explain their historical ascendancy, Verrill reaches automatically and unquestioningly for a vision of masculinity. In his imagination, "Anglo-Saxondom" appears indeed to be a form of masculinity. Perhaps Verrill was taken by and Anglo-Saxon spirit when he joined a group of "westward excursionists" in 1901 and, struck by a fever, died a few months shy of his twenty-ninth birthday. He would certainly have been satisfied to be lamented by his obituarist in the *Hamilton Literary Magazine* as representing "the highest type of noble Christian manhood."[28]

It would not be long before the ideals so blithely expressed at the end of the nineteenth century would come under threat. The advent of industrialized warfare in the early twentieth century is conventionally seen as a

25 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 10.

26 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 1.

27 Verrill, "The Anglo-Saxondom of Beowulf," 3.

28 Verrill graduated Hamilton College in 1892 with a master's degree, before pursuing the same degree at Harvard. See "Necrology: Class of 1892," *Hamilton Literary Magazine* 36, no. 1 (1901): 88.

crisis for the stoic vision of "manliness" that was the norm in preceding eras. Medical discourses that emerged to explain psychological traumas engendered by World War I increasingly clarified that such traumas were rational and human responses, rather than a failures of duty, discipline, or character.[29] The War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell Shock" issued findings in 1922 in which a new, psychoanalytic understanding of fear confronted Edwardian visions of "manliness" with new expectations of masculinity.[30] A consensus, generally following Eve Sedgwick's work, that Victorian manliness was overthrown in this moment has more recently been questioned in the face of some evidence that it persisted beyond the end of the war and continued to inform, for example, the reflections of veterans decades later.[31] While this gender script may not have been shattered, however, scholars suggest that it was undermined and confronted by new expectations of men formed, for example, by the mid-century reformulation of Britishness in the wake of World War II.[32] In the militarized culture required by the Great War the standard of male behavior was idealized in figure of the soldier and the contrast between contemplative and active men became one between soldiers and civilians: men whose social roles entailed "reserved" occupations by necessity felt their masculinity questioned, as did even some soldiers stationed on peripheral fronts.[33]

For some of *Beowulf*'s earliest and most prominent twentieth-century critics, a fixation with epic heroism and medieval militancy was thus a projection of very contemporary concerns. Interwar critics debated the merits of Shakespearean protagonists in terms opposing masculine action and inaction: in *What Happens in Hamlet?* (1935), published in the same year he became Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English at the University

29 See Michael Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity: The 'War Generation' and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 343–62; Anthony Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness," *History* 99, no. 334, (January 2014): 40–72; Praseeda Gopinath, *Scarecrows of Chivalry: English Masculinities after Empire* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

30 Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 334; cf. Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War, and the Decline of Victorian Manliness," 50–52.

31 Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 345.

32 Gopinath, *Scarecrows of Chivalry*, 22–40.

33 See Juliette Pattinson, "'Shirkers', 'Scrimjacks' and 'Scrimshanks'?: British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914–45," *Gender & History* 28, no. 3 (November 2016): 709–27 and Justin Fantauzzo and Robert L. Nelson, "A Most Unmanly War: British Military Masculinity in Macedonia, Mesopotamia and Palestine, 1914–18," *Gender & History* 28, no. 3 (November 2016): 587–603.

of Edinburgh, and just one year before Tolkien's essay, John Dover Wilson characterized Hamlet as a study of the conflict between two masculine types, the "procrastinator" and the "vigorous man of action."[34] As Linda Georgianna suggests, *Beowulf* critics of the mid-twentieth century were tempted by the analogy to Shakespeare's military aristocrats to understand Beowulf's cliff-top monologue before confronting the dragon as a soliloquy.[35] Following Edward Irving's reading of the poem's structure as one which moves from action to discourse about action, Georgianna sees *Beowulf's* meditation upon heroism as staging the tension between the desire to act and "immobilizing sorrow."

Tolkien himself, a second lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers, deferred enlistment until after graduation and records in his letters the disapprobation that dogged him as a result. In a letter to Christopher Tolkien, who was at the time serving in World War II, Tolkien describes his own enlistment in terms of the active/contemplative binary:

> In those days chaps joined up, or were scorned publicly. It was a nasty cleft to be in, especially for a young man with too much imagination and little physical courage. … I endured the obloquy, and hints becoming outspoken from relatives, stayed up, and produced a First in Finals in 1915. Bolted into the army: July 1915 … May [1916] found me crossing the Channel … for the carnage of the Somme.[36]

Tolkien's self-assessment, "too much imagination and little physical courage" mirrors the conventional opposition of contemplation and action that defined masculine character. Tolkien suffered "trench fever" after the Battle of the Somme and was sent home after less than a year in France, never to return to the war. Though trench fever is not in the first instance a psychological disorder, its enduring stress on the body includes debilitating symptoms often including "neurasthenia"—nervous exhaustion indicated by symptoms like fatigue, anxiety, and depression. Soldiers sent home for cases of neurasthenia accounted for forty percent of casualties that same

34 Quoted in E. G. Berry "Hamlet and Suetonius," *Phoenix* 2.3, Supplement to Volume 2 (1948), 74; on Wilson's academic career see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Wilson, John Dover (1881–1969)," by Harold Jenkins, accessed January 3, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36964.

35 Linda Georgianna, "King Hrethel's Sorrow and the Limits of Heroic Action in Beowulf," *Speculum* 62, no. 4 (1987): 833.

36 Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 53.

year.[37] In a letter to Geoffrey Smith of August 1916, little more than a month after the battle of the Somme, Tolkien records his feelings on the death of his friend Rob Gilson: "Still I feel a mere individual at present," he writes," with intense feelings more than ideas but very powerless."[38] Tolkien's experience was typical of men of his generation, "young officers socialized by their public school education in the stoic ideal," who found their stoicism unequal to the horror of modern war.[39] It is in this context of wartime discourses of masculinity, where action is opposed with emotion and immobility, that we should understand Tolkien's claims about Beowulf.

If Anglo-Saxon "manliness" is a discursive construct of the nineteenth century, one of its apparent opposites, "slackness" suggests a potential continuity in gender script between the early Middle Ages and the early twentieth century: from *Beowulf* to the letters of Tolkien's contemporaries, young soldiers of World War I, "slackness" names a failure of courage and duty.

The adjective form—"slack"—meaning "lacking in energy or diligence, inclined to be lazy or remiss, lax in regard to one's duties" (*Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. "slack") has been continuously in use since the Old English period. Beowulf himself is described as *slēac* when the poem recounts his unpromising beginnings:

> Swyðe wendon, þæt he *sleac* wære,
> *æðeling unfrom*. Edwenden cwom
> tireadigum menn torna gehwylces.[40]
>
> (They believed certainly that he was *feckless*,
> *an unchiefly prince*. A reversal came
> to that glorious man for each of his troubles.)

Slēac, meaning slothful or lazy, may be distinct from *slæc*, careless or remiss—the ancestor of modern English "slack."[41] If these words are in

37 Shepherd qtd in Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War, and the Decline of Victorian Manliness," 52.

38 Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 10.

39 Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 343–44.

40 Lines 2187–89, Fulk et al., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 7.

41 I accept the authority of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. "slack" adj.), which treats *sleac* and *slæc* (> PDE "slack") as variants of the same word; *OED Online*, accessed December 4, 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/181226?rskey=kWA9Ta&result=4&isAdvanced=false. Compare *Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, s.v. "sleac," "slæc," ed. T. Northcote Toller et al., comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichy (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2014), accessed August 18, 2018, https://bosworthtoller.com/. Erik Björkman argues that though

fact etymologically distinct, they overlap semantically such that the moral disapprobation attached to dereliction is nevertheless applied also to sloth, and the apposition of *slēac* with *unfrom* creates a clear picture of an unheroic figure in accord with the failure of character that is evident wherever either of these forms appears. An *æðeling* is a member of a princely family, one of the appropriate line and status to rise to rulership.[42] *Unfrom*, derived from the adjective *fram*, is usually translated as "weak"; that is, as a negation of the simplest sense of *fram*: strong, courageous, brave. In this case however—in apposition with *sleac*—it seems most likely to indicate a failure of character than of strength. The word implies that Beowulf is feckless and lethargic, the very opposite of the energetic and aggressive prince who should become king. A further clue to the depth of meaning in this adjective can be gleaned from its use as a gloss in the Regius Psalter (British Library Manuscript Royal 2.B.v) where the genitive form *fromra* glosses *principum*.[43] In this sense, *fram* means princely, or "becoming of a chief." In line 2188a, then, his people see the young Beowulf as an etymological contradiction, an "unprincely prince," and a social problem: someone technically eligible for a role that they are nevertheless unfit to perform. This is the sense, I think, in which to understand *fram*: as an analogue of Latin *virtus*, "the sum of all the corporeal or mental excellences of man, strength, vigour; bravery, courage; aptness, capacity; worth, excellence, virtue."[44] Though *virtus* obviously "struck the ear of the ancient Roman much as 'manliness' does the English speaker" it is nevertheless layered with such abstract meaning such that it can be sensibly applied to not only to animals and abstractions, but also to women.[45]

The moral but not necessarily gendered dimensions of slackness are also apparent in Bede. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede records that he himself knew a monk who, though a skilled smith, would more often "sit or lie day

these words are commonly treated as variant spellings, the alternation of the pure vowel and diphthong cannot be explained in this environment; see "Zur Engliscan Wortkunde," *Anglia* 39 (1915): 359–71. Citing Björkman, Klaeber's glossary treats the ascription of "slackness" to *Beowulf* as an accusation of laziness distinct from a remissness or lack of diligence; see Fulk et al., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 435.

42 Frederick M. Biggs, "The Politics of Succession in 'Beowulf' and Anglo-Saxon England," *Speculum* 80, no. 3 (2005): 725.

43 *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online,* ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), s.v. "fram."

44 Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*: *Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary. Revised, Enlarged, and in Great Part Rewritten* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), s.v. "virtus."

45 Myles Anthony McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4n13, 24.

and night in his smithy, than join in song and prayer at church" ("he ma gewunade in his smiðþan dæges & nihtæs sittan & licgan, þonne he wolde on cirican syngan & gebiddan") and was "very much devoted to drunkenness and the many other excesses of a *slack* life" ("Ðiode he swiðe druncennisse & mongum oðrum unalefednessum ðæs *slæcran* lifes").[46] The Old English translation "mongum oðrum unalefednessum ðæs slæcran lifes" renders quite closely Bede's Latin "et ceteris uitae remissioris inlecebris" (and all the other allurements of a more remiss life). Notably, *remissus* can also mean mild, relaxed, lenient—resonating with the *mildheortness* lauded in Alfred's translation of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, which proposes a teacher should be a "father and a ruler in teaching" but a "mother in compassion, so that he is neither too strict in instruction, nor too lacking [*slæc*] in humanity" ("ðæt he sie hiera fæder & reccere on lare, & hiera modur on mildheortnesse, ðæt he huru ne sie to stræc on ðære lare, ne to slæc on ðære mildheortnesse").[47] If Alfred perceived these terms as gendered then they entail a curious paradox: a failure to be masculine in the deployment of a feminine trait.

Where these Old English texts seem primarily to understand "slackness" as a term of moral disapprobation—a failure to remain active with regard to the spiritual or heroic life—it is clear that the early twentieth century conflated this failure far more emphatically with gender. Just as Turner had opposed "manly energy" with the gentleness of King Edmund, the founder of the Boy Scouts movement, Sir Robert Baden-Powell (1857–1941), in an article on teaching patriotism published in 1915, insisted that young men should not be "wishy-washy slackers without any go."[48] Young soldiers writing home during World War I expressed their anxiety about remaining stoic in just these terms. For them, being "slack" was the failure of the energetic and athletic demeanor that defined British masculinity and defended British Empire. Enlisted officer Reggie Trench wrote to his girlfriend in 1912 that Sir Henry Newbolt's patriotic poem "The Vigil," published in *The Times* on the first day of the war, made him "feel rather a slacker." After years at war, John Rappaport wrote to his fiancée from the Front just ten days before he was killed, describing his threatened resolve: "I do so want to remain keen and good, but it's awfully hard," he protests, "one is apt to get so slack."[49]

46 Thomas Miller, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, vol. 2, EETS o.s. 95, 96 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1890), 442.

47 Henry Sweet, (ed.), *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, EETS o.s. 45, 50 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 123–24.

48 Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness," 44.

49 Laurence Housman, ed., *War Letters of Fallen Englishmen* (Philadelphia: Pine Street Books, 2002), 221–25; qtd in Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness,"

It is in precisely these terms that Lionel Jane understands the character of King Alfred. In the introduction to his translation of Asser's *Life of Alfred* (1908), Jane describes Alfred's character—as he believes Asser's life shows it—in a starkly Edwardian idiom. For Jane, "Alfred stands out first of all as the strong man struggling with adversity and gaining hard-won triumph … he does not despair even in the darkest hour, for he believes in the justice of his cause and is supported by the conviction that, come what may, he must still do his duty."[50] Alfred, Jane goes on, "believes in the active life: he is an accomplished hunter and excels in manly sports, despite his ill-health; he lives laborious days … while he is no bookworm, he is fully alive to the importance of training the mind," and furthermore, he promotes education so that he may repair the "moral damage" caused by Danish invasion through the "promotion of civilization." Alfred triumphs, finally, as the result of an "indomitable will" through which he overcame all obstacles, including the "slackness of his subjects."[51] Jane's image of a man promoting civilization through his indomitable will is the hallmark of Edwardian masculinity, just as the opposition of duty and slackness, manliness with the potential inertia of the intellectual "bookworm," form its attendant anxieties.

Jane's introduction paraphrases his translation of Asser in a chapter Jane calls "Alfred's Troubles," which documents the interruption and resistance Alfred encountered to both his defense of Wessex and his intellectual reform. Asser writes that sometimes his commands were not obeyed quickly enough because of the laziness—"slackness" in Jane's translation—of the people (*propter pigritiam populi*) but sometimes simply because projects were started too late and left his kingdom susceptible to attack.[52] Jane also offers "slackness" for Latin *otiose* where Asser describes the education of Alfred's children, Edward the Elder, who reigned after his father (899–924) and Ælfthryth, his youngest child and later Countess of Flanders. Asser's account of their upbringing poses interesting questions about vigor, education, and the perception of gender at Alfred's cosmopolitan court. Both Edward, the eldest male and future king, and Ælfthryth, the youngest daughter, are described in the same breath, apparently exposed to the same education and expectations. Both are given training in the liberal arts, as Asser writes "even before they had the capacity for *gentle* skills, hunting, that is to say, and similar crafts appropriate to nobility, they were seen to be studious

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50 Lionel Jane, trans. *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), xli.

51 Jane, trans., *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, xliii.

52 Jane, trans., *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 78.

and clever in the liberal arts" ("Ut antequam aptas *humanis* artibus vires haberent, venatoriae scilicet et ceteris artibus, quae nobilibus conveniunt, in liberalibus artibus studiosi et ingeniosi viderentur").[53] At court in their adulthood, they exhibit laudable qualities of humility, kindness, and mildness to strangers as to countrymen (*humilitas, affabilitas, lenitas*). Despite their pursuit of a noble—and therefore presumably active—life, they are never "allowed to live idly and carelessly" (*otiose et incuriose vivere permittuntur*) but persist in reading and the "frequent use of books" (*frequentissime libris utuntur*).[54] Perhaps swayed by Asser's noun *vires*, Jane supplies "manly" for *humanis*.[55] There is, however, little precedent for giving that adjective this meaning. The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* defines *humanus*, "human,"—as distinct from animal, divine, or diabolic—and it takes a fourth sense "humane, kindly, or decent."[56] In the sense that it is distinct from divine, perhaps Asser means to designate arts like hunting as "noble" or "secular." While Asser's text seems to be most alert to the moral associations of activity and idleness with *class* rather than gender, Jane sees "manliness" in accord with the gendered expectations that contrast duty and slackness in his own times.

We should thus consider Tolkien's assessment of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf*-poet against this accumulated history of perceiving "Anglo-Saxon" masculinity—from Turner's assessment of Beowulf's "manly" speech and the "manly" intellect of the Anglo-Saxons as a race, to Verrill's conflation of race and masculinity in the figure of Beowulf and his desire to include his own intellectual pursuits as similarly essential, vigorous contribution to an "Anglo-Saxon" history he perceives to extend into his own day, to Lionel Jane's characteristic Edwardian contrast of Alfred's energetic, epoch-making genius with the "slackness" of his people. If nineteenth-century readers

53 W. H. Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred, Together with the Annals of Saint Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 58.

54 Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 59.

55 As do Turner (*The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 3:13) before him and Lapidge and Keynes after him. Asser's text modifies verbs with *viriliter* several times, each case specifically describing military confrontations: for example, Alfred's audaciously setting up camp directly before the gates of the Viking-held city of Eddington in 878 before his historic defeat of the "Great Heathen Army" (Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 56) or the citizen's bold defence of their city at the Siege of Paris in 885 (Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 69).

56 The same is true in classical Latin where *humanis* quite clearly indicates civilization, kindness, and human affairs as opposed to the superhuman. "Manly" briefly took this meaning, too, during the fourteenth century. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Manly, adj.," accessed December 4, 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/113558?rskey=mPbVIh&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

saw in Beowulf a national or racialized "manliness," Tolkien's experiences at war encouraged him to emphasize a more individual and yet a more universal character: a "man" in history. "Beowulf is not, then, the hero of an heroic lay, precisely," writes Tolkien in his celebrated essay, "[h]e has no enmeshed loyalties, nor hapless love. *He is a man and that for him and many is sufficient tragedy*."[57] What does Tolkien mean in this last, italic line? That the tragedy of being human is tragedy enough for Beowulf and, therefore, tragedy enough for critics to believe in value of his tale? Or does he mean, as I think he does, that the tragedy of existence as man is also sufficient tragedy for men generally speaking?

It might be objected that Tolkien's statement is uncertain ground on which to found an argument about the perception of Beowulf's masculinity, since Tolkien quite possibly, or even quite certainly, means that Beowulf is "a man" in only the general, non-gendered sense. Even conceding that Tolkien meant not to gender Beowulf in this statement, I'd suggest, as many feminist scholars have, that the apparent non-gendered use of "man" cannot truly be neutral: it inevitably connotes masculinity and, furthermore, implies maleness to be the default gender of humanity.[58] If Tolkien's literary criticism eschews the instrumentalism of the philologists he criticized, it is nevertheless traditional in the sense that "[m]odern historiography inscribes the stories of the few—the hegemonic males—as generic, human history."[59] However, the immediate context of Tolkien's essay as well as the specific cultural context of interwar Europe, suggest profoundly that Tolkien perceived Beowulf's condition as a specifically masculine one: the nature of courage as the confrontation of evil with unbending will was a theme resonating through both academic and public discourse about masculinity at the time.[60] For Tolkien, the implied masculinity of the historical agent is an essential element of the poem's meaning creation.

57 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 68, original emphasis.

58 See Janice Moulton, "The Myth of the Neutral 'Man'" in *Sexist Language: A Modern Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin, 100–15 (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), esp. 101–2.

59 Fenster, "Preface" in Lees, *Medieval Masculinities*, x.

60 See J. A. Mangan, "Duty unto Death: English Masculinity and Militarism in the Age of the New Imperialism," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, nos. 1–2 (January/February 2010): 124–49, as well as: Fletcher, "Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness"; Pattinson, "'Shirkers', 'Scrimjacks' and 'Scrimshanks'?"; Fantauzzo and Nelson, "A Most Unmanly War: British Military Masculinity"; Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity"; Gopinath, *Scarecrows of Chivalry*. For the specific effects of World War I on academic culture see Marie-Eve Chagnon and Tomás Irish, eds., *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (New York: Palgrave, 2017).

Tolkien's Beowulf is to some extent an epic hero of the ancient mold—symbolizing the confrontation of his culture with national threats—but a hero nevertheless personally and tragically realigned with the grand curve of history. In Tolkien's view, he becomes an existential hero, "a man at war with the hostile world,"[61] whose confrontations with physical threats force him, and us, to confront more fundamentally his helplessness against the inevitability of time: the martial courage of the epic hero, in Tolkien's eyes, is underwritten by existential courage. "Northern literature," he surmises, bequeaths the modern world this specific "theory of courage" as "unyielding will" in the face of the "deadly and ineluctable" threat of mortality;[62] Beowulf is thus "[s]omething more significant than a standard hero, *a man* faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy of house or realm."[63]

Tolkien's appreciation of the poem turns on his perception of both the poet, his central character, and modern readers like himself as "men in history." Though he champions "criticism" by contrast not only with historiography but also with comparative folklore, it is remarkable how often Tolkien engages with problems of historical perspective: the guiding motif of Tolkien's essay, both in its characterization of the poet and of the problem in historical criticism, is the "mood" of a man gazing back into history on the cusp of a paradigm shift.[64] For him an appreciation of the "history" in the poem stems from an interest not in history qua history but in that antiquarian perspective itself. The poem is "a fusion that has occurred at a given point of contact between old and new, a product of deep thought and emotion."[65] He concludes, for example, on the now widely recognized point that *Beowulf* "when new was already antiquarian" and thus relates events of a fictionalized past "weighted with regret, and he expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have which are both poignant and remote."[66] He consistently emphasizes, in other words, that the art of the poem is linked to feeling, mood, emotion evoked particularly in looking back, in the act of reflection on loss. This emphasis on feeling as the key to historical understanding links Tolkien to the Romantic historiography which, during the nineteenth century, competed with the rising self-conception of professional historians as scientists. It also connects

61 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 67
62 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 70, 68.
63 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 66 (emphasis added).
64 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 70.
65 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 70.
66 Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 88.

him with contemporary discourses about masculinity evolving in response to modern war.

To Tolkien, it seems, the actual hero of *Beowulf* is the poet himself: the bookish, introspective writer weighing his own meaning as a witness to the irrevocable retreat of the past and the inevitable limit of his own life. Tolkien's letters reveal him, in the wake of World War I, wrestling with the same isolating and "immobilizing sorrow" that Georgianna identifies in Beowulf's speech before the dragon fight; he sees Beowulf, as Lionel Jane saw Alfred, as one who must "do his duty" even in the darkest hour. Yet, unlike Jane, who is at pains to distinguish Alfred's life of the mind from that of the "bookworm," Tolkien expresses more sympathy for passive emotional life of the observer, rather than the actor. Recognizing his young self as a man with "too much imagination and little physical courage,"[67] he shifts the emphasis in his depiction of men in Beowulf from the man of action to the man of feeling. His definition of Beowulf's heroism seems thus to rest not so much in the dutiful response, but in the existential situation: heroism is simply to be in the world.

Does the "northern theory of courage" make room for gentleness? What in Old English literature accounts for the "manliness" perceived by readers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Looking back through the normative lens of post-medieval gender scripts, the gentleness ascribed to *Beowulf* (line 3181a) is problematic: gentleness might be perceived to feminize a character who as a warrior and a leader must, in the minds of nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers as we have seen, epitomize masculinity. This line describes Beowulf as "manna mildust ond monðwærust" (the mildest of men and most gentle) and the effect of this description on our perception of the character has been the center of some debate.[68] Pursuing Klaeber's suggestion that the phrase *milde ond monðwære* is a religious formula, Mary Richards examines its parallels to conclude that this final eulogy does not blend pagan and Christian ideals as the poem is often taken to do, but offers a definitive assertion of Beowulf's Christian excellence.[69] For Charles Wright, however, the appellation *manna mildost* reflects a pregnant overlap in pagan Germanic and Christian expectations, since the world *milde* (Lat. *mitis*) represents both the generosity

67 Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 53.

68 To add the uncertainty (*monðwær*)*ust* is an editorial intervention. The manuscript is damaged so that only the superlative suffix is clear.

69 Mary Richards, "A Re-Examination of *Beowulf* ll. 3180–3182," *English Language Notes* 10 (1973): 167.

and patience that was a traditional virtue in Germanic kings even as it evokes the meekness celebrated by Christian scripture.[70] Reconsidering the potential direction of influence between Germanic ideals of kingship and Christian morality, and expressing skepticism about Wright's argument, Gernot Wieland argues that "since all our sources about Germanic Kingship are Christian … we cannot be certain that the concept of 'mildness' was not introduced by Christians."[71] The subtext of Wieland's critique is that Wright's explanation effects a Germanic rescue of Beowulf's character from feminizing Christianity. While Wright focuses on the potential of *milde* to mean "generous" (a characteristic of kings suitable in "modern judgement," as Tolkien might have observed), Wieland suggests that we must understand its reference in *Beowulf* to its more common pre-Christian meaning, "affable."

The Dictionary of Old English Corpus reveals many more examples of the paired adjectives *milde* and *manþwære*, amplifying Richard's case for the emphatically Christian sense of mildness conveyed by this line in *Beowulf*. Outside of *Beowulf*, this collocation is found only in religious texts (with the possible exception of *Elene*, which substitutes "milde and bliþe," the latter another Germanic translation of the theological vocabulary of Latin and Greek).[72] *Milde* and *manþwære* occur in collocation frequently in a variety of spiritual contexts from glosses on scripture to homiletic and confessional texts. Whereas OE *mild* translates Latin *mitis*, in glosses on scripture *mildheortness* renders *misericordia* and *monþwærnyss* characteristically glosses *mansuetus* (gentleness, meekness). In the fragmentary "Descent into Hell" the angel Gabriel is "milde on gemyndig and monþwære"; the glossator of the Paris Psalter inserts the collocation ("milde mode and manþwære he onfehð fægere") in Psalm 146:6 to render the simple adjective of the Vulgate's *suscipiens mansuetos Dominus*, "the Lord Lifts up the meek."[73] The Blickling Homily for Palm Sunday recounts the Gospel passage in which Jesus sends Peter and John to say to the daughters of Sion "þæt heora cining cymeþ, milde

70 Charles Wright, "Moses, Manna Mildost (Exodus, 550a)," *Notes and Queries* 31, no. 4 (1984): 440–43.

71 Gernot Wieland, "Manna Mildost: Moses and Beowulf," *Pacific Coast Philology* 23, nos. 1–2, (1988): 87.

72 Wulfilla's Gothic translation of Galatians 5:23, for example, likewise renders Gk. ἀγαθωσύνηο (goodness) with Go. *Bleiþei*. See Gerhard H. Balg, *The First Germanic Bible Translated from the Greek by the Gothic Bishop Wulfilla in the Fourth Century* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1891), 157.

73 George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 146; Roger Gryson, ed., *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 4th edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 150.

and monþwære…",[74] while an anonymous Rogationtide homily attributes these qualities to God Himself: "God ælmihtig is swyðe mildheort and manþwære."[75] A further anonymous homily adjures its audience to be gentle ("uton beon earmum mannum milde and manþwære") in language that closely reflects the penitential *Scriftboc*.[76] In its instructions to the confessor, this text stipulates that a penitent should come fearfully and humbly to confess, after which he should be instructed, among other things, to "beo earmum mannum milde and manþwære." Finally, according to the Benedictine Rule "if brothers are appointed to do impossible things" they should nevertheless undertake to obey "mid ealre manþwærnesse & gehirsumnesse."[77] These examples confirm still more firmly than Mary Richards suggested that, in the tenth century of the *Beowulf* manuscript, *milde and monþwære* is a Christian formula—meeting the alliterative needs of Beowulf's meter—but relaying gentleness, meekness, and obedience of the sort scripturally affirmed and expected of Christians and, still more specifically, of monks.[78]

The virtue of gentleness was explored by at least two authoritative early English texts: King Alfred's version of the *Cura Pastoralis* and Alcuin of York's *De Virtutibus et Vitiis.* Alcuin's *De Virtutibus et Vitiis*—produced expressly as a *speculum* for military aristocrats like Count Wido of the Breton March, suggests an opposition between proneness to anger on the one hand and *accidia* or idleness on the other.[79] Gregory's text makes this

74 Richard Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, EETS o.s. 58, 63, 73 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 71. Morris's edition renders plural what in scripture is singular: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Matthew 21:5, KJV). Although I consulted print editions cited here, most of these examples were initially discovered by searching the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*.

75 Joyce Bazire and James E. Cross, *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 142.

76 Previously known as the Confessional of Pseudo-Egbert, this text survives in three eleventh-century manuscripts: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 190, Bodleian Library MS Junius 121, and Laud Misc. 482.

77 H. Logemann, ed., *The Rule of S. Benet. Latin and Anglo-Saxon Interlinear Version*, EETS o.s. 90 (London: Trübner, 1888), 114.

78 An authoritative summary of such qualities can be found in Galatians (5:22–23), in which Paul proclaims that the "fruit of the spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity" ("Fructus autem Spiritus est caritas, gaudium, pax, patientia, benignitas, bonitas, longanimitas, mansuetudo, fides, modestia, continentia, castitas"): see Gryson, ed., *Biblia Sacra*, 1807.

79 See Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and "Translation of Alcuin's *De Virtutibus et Vitiis Liber*," *The Heroic Age: A Journal of Early Medieval Northwestern Europe* 16 (2015), https://www.heroicage.org/issues/16/stone.php.

opposition explicit when he advises that an aggressive personality and a mild personality must each be encouraged to grow, but in different ways. While an angry personality is apt to mistake a lack of self-control for zeal, gentleness is prone to timidity because "forðæm sio bieldo & sio monnðwærnes bioð swiðe anlice" (gentleness and timidity are very alike).[80] Thus, he goes on, "Oft eac ða manðwæran weorðað swa *besolcne* and swa *wlace* and swa *slawe* for hiora manðwærness ðæt hie ne anhagað nane with nytwierðes don" (Often likewise the gentle become so *inactive* and so *mild* and so *slothful* because of their gentleness that they cannot achieve anything profitable).[81] Finally, Gregory suggests, "Oft, eac sio godnes ðære monnðwærnesse bið diegellice gemenged wið sleacnesse" (Often, moreover, the good quality of gentleness is inwardly confused with slackness) thus placing *monðwærness* on a continuum with *sleacness*.[82] For Gregory, gentleness itself is a positive trait, though often confused with moral failings like sloth, idleness, and timidity.

Gregory's discourse does not explicitly or even implicitly gender these traits. Henry Sweet's translation (1871) of these lines in the *Pastoral Care*, by contrast, renders *wlacu* "effeminate," supplying a connection between "mildness" and gender that is not evident in the original text.[83] Hugh Williams's translation of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* (1899), similarly genders an accusation of inactivity where the Latin text is far less explicitly gendered. According to Gildas, when the Romans refuse to send legions back to defend Romanized Britons, they adjure them to defend themselves from "nations in no way stronger than themselves, unless they became effeminate through indolence and listlessness" ("gentibus nequaquam sibi fortioribus, nisi segnitia et torpore dissolveretur").[84] But *dissolvere*, the verb Williams translates "became effeminate," means literally to loosen or disunite, and by figurative extension, to be lax, remiss, or licentious. Stereotypes certainly exist in Latin connecting softness, suppleness, and their metaphorical moral connotations, with the feminine. It's possible that Gildas is indeed accusing the Britons of losing their erections, their stiff upper lips, of being both physically and constitutionally "soft." Williams direct translation, however, takes a possible connotation of this description and makes it the explicit meaning. There is less evidence

80 Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 287.
81 Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 289.
82 Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 289.
83 Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 289.
84 Hugh Williams, ed., *Gildas, De excidio Britanniae, fragmenta, liber de paenitentia, accedit et Lorica Gildae* (London: David Nutt, 1899), 37.

that the Old English word *wlacu* includes such connotations in the first place. *Wlacu*, which I have translated "mild," glosses *tepidus* and its literal sense, "lukewarm," is used figuratively several times in Old English.[85] Elsewhere in *Pastoral Care*, for example, this word functions as part of an extended metaphor about heat and cold derived from Revelation 3:16.[86] In Alfred's version of the *Pastoral Care*, in other words, gentleness could be confused with, or lead to, excessive inactivity, but in itself could be equated with neither blameworthy indolence nor femininity. Later, influential interpreters of Old English literature like Henry Sweet, however, were apt to see mildness as effeminate and to convey this gendered judgement in their translations.

Old English literature describes actions as "manly" using the adverbs *manlic*, *werlic*, and *þegnlic*. Both *werlic* and *þegnlic*, for example, gloss *viriliter* in the scripture. "Expect the Lord, do manfully, and let your heart take courage, and wait for the Lord," proclaims Psalm 26:14 and most Old English glosses, like the Eadwine Psalter (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1), offer *doð werlice* for the Latin *viriliter age* here and in similar lines in Psalm 30 and Joshua 1:18.[87] The anonymous translator of the Old English Heptateuch (BL MS Cotton Claudius B. iv) prefers *ðegenlice* for a parallel sentiment in Joshua 1:18, "beo ðu huru gehyrt & hicg ðegenlice" ("confortare, et viriliter age"; take courage and do manfully).[88] But Old English leaves no record of an abstract noun **werlicnyss* equivalent to *virilitas*. A possible contender, *menniscness*, is used clearly to indicate humanity opposed to *godcundnyss*, rather than masculinity opposed to femininity. These three adverbs, with one exception, do not occur in heroic poetry. *Beowulf* describes Hrothgar's

85 *Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, s.v. "wlacu," https://bosworthtoller.com/36326, accessed August 18, 2018.

86 Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 445–47.

87 "Therefore," says Augustine in his commentary on this text, "whoever loses his vigour, loses endurance, has become effeminate," yet "in one man are both male and female, such a one in Christ is neither male nor female" ("Ergo qui perdidit sustinentiam, effeminatus est, perdidit vigorem. Hoc viri, hoc feminae audiant, quia in uno viro vir et femina. Talis in Christo nec masculus nec femina est"). See Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, vol. 36, col. 211. Several manuscripts including whole or part of Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* survive from early medieval England: see Helmut Gneuss, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), § 170 and 171. Both Bede and Ælfric appear to have been familiar with this work. On Augustine's intermittent theological struggle with gender see Margaret Cotter-Lynch, *Saint Perpetua across the Middle Ages: Mother, Gladiator, Saint* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 63–86.

88 Compare, for example, the use of *ðegenlice* in such martial contexts as Ælfric's Lives of the Saints (e.g., Maccabees, The Forty Soldiers) and *The Battle of Maldon*.

magnanimity (line 1046) as *manlic* when he rewards Beowulf with "wicga ond wæpna" (line 1046) for his service. In the context, the assessment of Hrothgar as a king for his generosity, the adverb must be taken to describe nobility. It is possible that gender and nobility are so fully conflated in this word that nobility is especially perceived as a masculine trait.[89] It seems just as likely that the adverb functions as an assessment of *human* characteristics that Asser's *Life of Alfred* attributes to Alfred's noble children male and female alike: humane, obliging, commodious.

In Old English literature, we can see a clear moral discourse opposing vigorousness and slackness, primarily with regard to the spiritual life. To some degree, it seems evident, masculinity was conflated with virtue in Old English much as it was in Latin—as words for "manly," having the qualities of men, suggest simultaneous identifications of class and quality: nobility and generosity for example. *Beowulf* never describes its hero as manly or reflects on the qualities that make him a male as opposed to female. In most situations, Old English texts promote gentleness as a humane rather than masculine or feminine sensibility—one that Turner sees profoundly at odds with "manly energies" required for war. The ideal of "Anglo-Saxon" manliness represented in works like those of Sharon Turner, and by the end of the nineteenth-century amplified in a racial discourse exemplified by Henry Shattuck Verrill, thus make fictional kings like *Beowulf* and historical kings like Alfred into paragons of vital masculine energy even as they identify their own, contemporary masculinity as originating in innate racial properties demonstrated in the history of northern European cultures. Teachers and translators like Jane, Hugh, and Sweet supply gendered versions of Old English history. By contrast, and under the influence of his own experiences of loss and regret as well as evolving gender expectations in and around the World Wars, Tolkien shifts the emphasis on men in *Beowulf.* While still ascribing to a "northern theory of courage," he focuses on the historical perspective of the poet summoning a martial hero as a symbol of existential courage. The central feelings of the poem are for him not duty or loyalty so much as grief and regret. Throughout all these engagements with "Anglo-Saxon" masculinity, the opposition of the contemplative and the active persists. Verrill insists that as a "thinking man" it must fall to him to reconstruct the history even as he metaphorizes historical research as physical labor. Jane describes the education of Alfred and his children as an energetic pursuit that must be distinguished from the activities of the "bookworm." Tolkien understands himself as imaginative rather than physical; but the story of the man of action becomes meaningful

89 See Scott Thompson Smith, "Remembering the Lady of Mercia" in this volume, pp. 000–000.

only as it is told by the poet, and interpreted by himself, both "men of feeling." Despite his famous rejection of earlier historical readings of *Beowulf*, Tolkien's interpretation of the poem illustrates the persistence of a tradition of reading Old English literature as evidence of an historical-masculine subject.

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5 Shame, Disgust and Ælfric's Masculine Performance

Alice Jorgensen

Abstract
In the "Letter to Brother Edward" Ælfric expresses disgust at reports of women who eat and drink on the privy during beer parties. Misogynistic disgust at the leaky bodies of women is widespread in western literature, but when Ælfric depicts disgusting bodies they are usually male bodies, reflecting anxieties about masculine authority. Ælfric idealizes a male body that is sealed, chaste and pure, a site from which disgust can be expressed rather than inspiring it. Ælfric's signals of disgust are part of his construction of an authoritative preaching voice. However, he is not free of misogynistic disgust, and the anomalously extreme emotion of the "Letter to Brother Edward" suggests an authority under threat from the uncontrolled, messy bodies of women.

Keywords: disgust, masculinity, Ælfric of Eynsham, women

In the third and final section of the "Letter to Brother Edward", a short text of the late tenth or early eleventh century now convincingly ascribed to Ælfric, the homilist allows himself an unusually vehement expression of emotion.

> Ic bidde eac þe, broðor, forþam ðe þu byst uppan lande mid wimmannum oftor þonne ic beo, þæt þu him an þing secge, gif ðu for sceame swaþeah hit him secgan mæge; me sceamað þearle þæt ic hit secge ðe. Ic hit gehyrde oft secgan, and hit is yfel soð, þæt þas uplendiscan wif wyllað oft drincan and furþon etan fullice on gangsetlum æt heora gebeorscipum, ac hit is bysmorlic dæd and mycel higeleast and huxlic bysmor þæt ænig man æfre swa unþeawfast beon sceole þæt he þone muð ufan mid mettum afylle and on oðerne ende him gange þæt meox ut fram and drince þonne

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> ægðer ge þæt ealu ge þone stencg, þæt he huru swa afylle his fracodan gyfernysse. Ic ne mæg for sceame þa sceandlican dæde, þæt ænig mann sceole etan on gange, swa fullice secgan swa hit fullic is, ac þæt næfre ne deð nan ðæra manna ðe deah.[1]
>
> (I ask you also, brother, because you are up the country with women more often than I am, that you say one thing to them, if however you are able to say it to them for shame; I am greatly ashamed to say it to you. I have often heard it said, and it is an evil truth, that these country women will often drink and even eat foully on privies at their beer-parties, but it is a shameful deed and a great folly and a disgraceful shame that any one should ever be so disorderly that he fill the mouth above with food while at the other end the excretions go out of him and that he drink then both the ale and the stench, so that he indeed satisfy his base gluttony in this way. I cannot for shame speak about the scandalous deed—that anyone should eat on the privy—as foully as it is foul, but no-one who is virtuous ever does it.)

This text is recurrently concerned with boundaries, pollution and the disgusting.[2] The first section deals with clean and unclean food, specifically the biblical prohibition on eating blood. In the second, Ælfric rebukes Edward for adopting Danish dress, "ða sceandlican tyslung" (this shameful dress), in a manner that "his agen cynn unwurþað" (dishonors his own kindred). Here Ælfric shows a concern for the management of male bodies and how they display nationality, kindred, and honor. It is the section already quoted, however, that contains the most spectacular outpouring of disgust, directed,

1 Mary Clayton, "An Edition of Ælfric's *Letter to Brother Edward*," in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 263–83, at 282, lines 6–17 (my translation). On Ælfric's authorship see 264–69; the letter was first ascribed to Ælfric by John Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection,* EETS o.s. 259–60 (London, 1967–68), 1:56–57. The major editions of Ælfric are cited and abbreviated as follows: Pope = Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*; CH I = *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The First Series: Text*, ed. Peter Clemoes, EETS s.s.17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); CH II = *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series: Text*, ed. Malcolm Godden, EETS s.s. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); LS = *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols in 4 parts, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (London: Kegan Paul, 1881–1900); Fehr = *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung*, ed. Bernhard Fehr (Hamburg: Henri Grand, 1914); Assmann = *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. Bruno Assmann (Kassel: Georg H. Wigand, 1889).

2 This feature of the text was first briefly explored by Nigel Barley, "The Letter to Brother Edward," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79, no. 1 (1978): 23–24.

as Carolyne Larrington observes, at women eating and drinking to excess right by the facilities they need for purging their over-consumption.[3] Mary Clayton points out that the practice may actually have been both a male and a female one: the pronouns for much of the passage are masculine. Yet, "Ælfric … focuses his disgust on women."[4]

The present chapter explores the conjunction between disgust and gender in Ælfric's writings, arguing that it is an important aspect of how Ælfric constructs his masculine authority as a preacher. In relation to the burgeoning field of emotions history, it builds on previous work on Ælfric's uses of shame.[5] It also enters a continuing conversation about gender in the tenth-century Benedictine Reform, a movement in which Ælfric is a major (though in some ways idiosyncratic) figure. It responds to the view of scholars such as Pauline Stafford, who argues that, although the Reform saw the regulation and founding of women's as well as men's houses, "[the Reformers'] concern with sexual purity readily aligned 'woman' with … impurity … 'Woman' was impure body."[6] To examine disgust is to ask questions about attitudes to the body. In Ælfric's writings the body frequently disappears into spiritual meanings: he instructs his audience to understand not "lichamlice" (bodily), but "gastlice" (spiritually).[7] In the lives of the martyrs, bodily mutilation cannot mar spiritual truth, and thus, for example, when St. Agatha has her breast cut off she affirms that her breast is still whole "on minre sawle" (in my soul).[8] However, Agatha's female body is here asserted even as it is transcended; the body has a habit of reappearing. Ælfric wields disgust as part of an effort to control the gendered body, both represented and real—and, I will argue, it is often the male, not the female, body that is in question.

3 Carolyne Larrington, "Diet, Defecation and the Devil: Disgust and the Pagan Past," in *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola MacDonald (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), 138–55, at 146–47.

4 Clayton, "An Edition of Ælfric's *Letter to Brother Edward*," 274.

5 Specifically, this chapter is an extension of my own previous studies: "Historicizing Emotion: The Shame-Rage Spiral in Ælfric's *Life of St Agatha*," *English Studies* 93, no. 5 (August 2012): 529–38 and "'It Shames Me to Say It': Ælfric and the Concept and Vocabulary of Shame," *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2013 for 2012): 249–76.

6 Pauline Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Past & Present* 163 (1999): 3–35, at 9.

7 See, e.g., CH II.39, "In Natale Sanctorum Virginum," line 87, cited and discussed by Shari Horner, "The Violence of Exegesis: Reading the Bodies of Ælfric's Female Saints," in *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 22–43, at 23–26.

8 LS "Agatha," line 126; Horner, "Violence of Exegesis," 31.

Disgust

Some initial attention needs to be given to the contours of disgust. Some form of disgust seems to be a human universal and can be viewed as a product of evolution. The substances foregrounded in the "Letter to Brother Edward"—blood, food, and excrement—are typical elicitors of what Paul Rozin, in a series of publications with various collaborators, has called "core disgust." For Rozin, disgust "is best described as a guardian of the mouth against potential contaminants,"[9] and core disgust is directed at animals such as cockroaches, prohibited foods, and products of the body such as shit, semen, and blood.[10] Avoidance of such substances has adaptive value in protecting against pathogens.

However, the domain of disgust in most cultures is far broader than this biologically adaptive core, extending to such diverse objects as taboo sexual acts, death, abnormal bodies, social or racial outgroups ("interpersonal" disgust), and certain kinds of moral violation ("sociomoral" disgust).[11] A consistent feature of disgust is the fear of pollution or contamination by contact, which can only to a certain extent be explained in terms of hygiene. For Susan B. Miller, disgust is "the gatekeeper emotion," primarily a psychological device for protecting the integrity of the self.[12] Other theorists, such as Martha Nussbaum, argue that disgust polices the divide between human and animal: disgust hedges around those things that remind us of our animal nature—eating, defecating, sex, body products such as mucus and blood, the squelchy, meaty interior of the body, and everything that relates to our most terrible weakness, mortality.[13] This rejection of the mortal and the animal is often misogynistically projected onto women. As

9 Paul Rozin, Laura Lowery, Sumio Imada, and Jonathan Haidt, "The CAD Trial Hypothesis: A Mapping Between Three Moral Emotions (Contempt, Anger, Disgust) and Three Moral Codes (Community, Autonomy, Divinity)," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, no. 4 (1999): 574–86, at 575.

10 Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark R. McCauley, "Disgust: The Body and Soul Emotion," in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Tim Dalgliesh and Mick Power (Chichester: Wiley, 1999), 429–45, at 431–44; also Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and Clark R. McCauley, "Disgust," in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2000), 637–53, at 639–41.

11 Rozin et al., "Disgust" (1999), 435–36; "Disgust" (2000), 642–44 (in this article the term "moral" is used rather than "sociomoral"). Larrington, "Diet, Defecation," 143–44, offers an overview of how Rozin has wrestled with the extension of "core" disgust into the moral domain.

12 Susan B. Miller, *Disgust: The Gatekeeper Emotion* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 2013), Chapter 1 (eBook, unpaginated).

13 Rozin et al., "Disgust" (1999), 434–35; "Disgust" (2000), 641–42; Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000),

Nussbaum explains it, "Women give birth, and are thus closely linked to the continuity of animal life and the mortality of the body. Women also receive semen … In connection with these facts, women have often been imagined as soft, sticky, fluid, smelly, their bodies as filthy zones of pollution."[14] Julia Kristeva's account of the abject, which powerfully invokes disgust, associates it strongly with the maternal and sees abjection of the maternal—rejection of that intimate, boundary-troubling, sticky connection of blood and milk—as core to achieving psychic integrity; her theoretical paradigm has been criticized for potentially naturalizing misogyny.[15] Whether natural or not, misogynistic disgust is widespread and has a long history in literature. Winfried Menninghaus, focusing largely on German-language aesthetics and philosophy, finds that "With the single exception of Winckelmann, the disgusting has the attributes of female sex and old age with all the writers treated here."[16] In classical Latin, examples of misogynistic disgust include Juvenal's sixth satire, with its images of Messalina carrying the smell of the brothel back to the imperial bed and of women pissing on the altar of chastity, and Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*, which imagines a lover losing all passion when he sees a woman's genitals or becomes aware of her menstrual blood.[17] In medieval literature disgust is part of the arsenal of antifeminist texts such as Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio*, which invites the addressee to consider childbearing and "the horrible instruments they employ to take away their superfluous humours" in demonstration of the contention that "[n]o other creature is less clean than woman."[18]

In early medieval culture, however, the domain of disgust was fairly restricted. Writing on the Icelandic sagas, William Ian Miller remarks that "disgust is there, but … [has] no real idiom separate from shame":[19] in a

87–98. See also William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), xiv.

14 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 111, drawing on Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, 101–5 and passim.

15 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Imogen Tyler, "Against Abjection," *Feminist Theory* 10 (2009): 77–98.

16 Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 7.

17 *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. Susanna Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library 91 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 244–45 and 260–61; Ovid, *The Art of Love, and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley, Loeb Classical Library 232 (London: Heinemann, 1929), 206–7.

18 *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 167.

19 Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, 147.

world of low privacy and living standards, the scope for fastidiousness was limited. In Old English, there is no specific noun or verb for disgust. The only reference to disgust in the *Thesaurus of Old English* appears in an entry for "Weariness, Tedium, Disgust", which lists one term, *æmelnes*;[20] this word sometimes glosses the Latin *fastidium* (as stated in the *Dictionary of Old English*, sense 1a), though in Ælfric it consistently means "sloth."[21] It is hard to think of examples of disgust in Old English heroic poetry. However, in religious literature, with its prominent concern for purity, disgust plays a more visible role.

In Ælfric's case, disgust is manifested rhetorically in three main ways. One is through reference to shame, which can be used to express avoidance and fear of contamination, as it does in the "Letter to Brother Edward." One is through the use of the language of dirt and pollution, represented in the "Letter" in the forms *fullic* and *fullice*.[22] Tracing this language (specifically, the adjective *ful*) reveals a pattern similar to his use of shame adjectives such as *bysmorful*:[23] while Ælfric does label as *ful* substances like excrement and blood, he most frequently uses this term in "sociomoral" domains, above all to signal disgust towards pagan gods and practices[24] and to condemn wantonness, lust, and sexual immorality.[25] In lives of female virgin martyrs, clusters of shame and dirt language attend the struggles of the saints to resist paganism by preserving their *clænnes*, their "purity," "chastity," or "virginity": for example, St. Agnes is threatened with being "fullice gebysmrod" (foully

20 *A Thesaurus of Old English*, s.v., "11.06|02 (n.) Disinclination to act, listlessness: Weariness, tedium, disgust," http://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/category/?id=16212, accessed April 20, 2018.

21 *Dictionary of Old English: A to H* online, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto, 2016), https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/, accessed April 20, 2018. See also Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford, 2000), 682 (glossary entry for *ǣmelnyss*).

22 Other terms include, among others, the adjectives *ful*, *unclæne*, *geblanden*, *gefyled*, and *gewidlod*, the nouns *besmitenes*, *unclænnes*, and *fylþ*, and the verbs *afylan*, *besmitan*, *besylian*, (*ge*)*unclænsian*, and (*ge*)*widlian*: see *Thesaurus of Old English* s.v. "04.06.02.01 (adj.) Dirty, unclean" and subcategories, and "04.06.02.02 (adj.) Foul, filthy, squalid" and subcategories, consulted 26 April 2018.

23 See Jorgensen, "'It Shames Me to Say It,'" 268–72.

24 In a corpus search for *ful* in Ælfric conducted in May 2017 I found 107 occurrences, of which I counted 20 as attached to pagans, pagan gods, pagan rites and paganism. *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project 2009) https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/.

25 By my count, 22 of 107 occurrences: *Galnes* "wantonness" 10x, *forliger* "fornication" 6x, *sinscipe* "intercourse" 2x, *besmitennes* "sexual defilement" 1x, *lust* "desire" 1x. One might also add *myltestre* "prostitute" 2x.

shamed/foully raped).[26] The third manifestation of disgust is in descriptive passages that seem designed to inspire revulsion. The "Letter to Brother Edward" aside, however, such passages in Ælfric do not obviously belong to the paradigm of misogynistic disgust: they mostly feature not female bodies but male ones. In these descriptions, concerns over bodily and religious purity become bound up with anxieties about masculine authority and power.

The Disgusting Male Body

As Gabriella Corona observes, Ælfric's early works show a "preoccupation with inadequate secular leadership."[27] A stock character in the *Catholic Homilies* and *Lives of Saints* is the wicked male authority figure, usually a king or judge, who persecutes the righteous. These figures are portrayed as excessive in every way, prone to extreme anger, lust and violence. This is sometimes made revoltingly concrete in the disintegration of their bodies. So, for example, the wicked judge Martianus in the "Passion of Julian and Basilissa" dies crawling with worms, as does King Antiochus in Ælfric's version of Maccabees.[28] A more extended example is Herod, in the sermon on the Holy Innocents. The following is a short extract from a lengthy description.

> Hine gelæhte unasecgendlic adl. his lichama barn wiðutan mid langsumre hætan: ⁊ he eall innan samod forswæled wæs ⁊ toborsten. Him wæs metes micel lust. ac swa þeah mid nanum ætum his gifernysse gefyllan ne mihte … Wæterseocnys hine ofereode beneoþon þam gyrdle. to þam swiðe þæt his gesceapu maðan weollon. ⁊ stincende attor singallice of þam toswollenum fotum fleow. …
>
> (There seized him an unspeakable disease: his body burned on the outside with protracted heat, and on the inside at the same time he was all consumed and broken apart. He had a great desire for food, but however

26 LS "Agnes," line 120. Shari Horner discusses *besmitan, gewæmman* (both "to defile, pollute") and *bysmorian* (to shame/disgrace) as rape terms: "The Language of Rape in Old English Literature and Law: Views from the Anglo-Saxon(ist)s," in *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack and Lisa M. C. Weston (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 149–81, at 166–72; see also Jorgensen, "'It Shames Me to Say It,'" 266–67.

27 Gabriella Corona, "Ælfric's Schemes and Tropes: *Amplificatio* and the Portrayal of Persecutors," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 297–320, at 316.

28 LS "Julian and Basilissa," line 430; "The Maccabees," lines 544–58.

> his greed could not be satisfied with any meat … Dropsy afflicted him beneath the belt, so much that his genitals seethed with maggots, and a stinking poison perpetually flowed from his bloated feet …)[29]

Ælfric has compiled this description from material in Rufinus's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Haymo's Homily 12,[30] and he takes from Rufinus his explicit interpretation of Herod's sufferings: they are God's vengeance upon him and foreshadow the tortures he will experience in Hell.[31] They also dramatize the evil of his soul. As the enemy of Christ, Herod is an example of Ælfric's association of the *ful* with the pagan. Moreover, his afflictions relate specifically to his faults as a ruler.

Herod's is a predatory kingship. He kills those he should protect—the Holy Innocents, most obviously, but also his own sons and the Jewish elders;[32] appropriately, his body encroaches, exceeds its bounds, and threatens to consume what is around it. It is also hollow, lacking in integrity, a concrete image of the lies on which his power is built, for he is a usurper who gained the kingdom "mid syrewungum ⁊ swicdome" (by plotting and deceit).[33] Most strikingly, Herod's bodily disintegration represents the hypertrophe of the appetites of the secular ruler. The conventional feasting of the lord[34] becomes an insatiable hunger or *gifernes* (greed/gluttony). There are also overtones of sexual excess in the prominence of Herod's genitals in the description, the more intriguing because this is not the Herod who adulterously married Herodias but another member of that confusing family. The implication of lust is of a piece with the explicit stress on gluttony; according to Isidore, Alcuin, and others, gluttony leads to lust.[35] The monstrous Herod recalls Holofernes in the Old English *Judith*, another destructive, consuming ruler, who leads his men into a drunkenness close to death and seeks to defile the virtuous Judith, but who instead is ignominiously killed by her. Karma Lochrie has written on how Holofernes's drinking, lust, and violence exist not as an aberration but as an extreme of warrior masculinity.[36] Herod too

29 CH I.5, "Natale innocentium infantum," lines 127–30 and 132–34.

30 Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, 43–44.

31 CH I.5, lines 124–27.

32 CH I.5, lines 149–62.

33 CH I.5, lines 63–64.

34 See Hugh Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and their Consumption in Old English and Related Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999).

35 Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, 94–96.

36 Karma Lochrie, "Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Politics of War in the Old English *Judith*," in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*, ed. Britten J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1–20, at 5–9.

represents powerful secular masculinity pushed to its ruinous conclusion. The overwhelming disgust he invites is acted out in the passage through the figures of his doctors, who are unable to approach him because of the "stincende steam" (stinking miasma) that comes from his mouth.[37]

The figure whose bodily disintegration seems to be most significant for Ælfric is tied not to secular but to ecclesiastical authority. This is the heretic Arius, whose death voiding his own guts on the privy Ælfric recounts no fewer than six times. The six passages occur in the sermon "De fide Catholica" from the first series of *Catholic Homilies*,[38] Pope's homily X for Pentecost,[39] the homily for the feast of a confessor edited by Assmann,[40] the pastoral letter for Wulfsige,[41] and the English and Latin versions of the first pastoral letter for Wulfstan.[42] In several of these passages Ælfric comments that Arius dies "swa æmtig on innoðe swa swa his geleafa wæs" (as empty in his entrails as his belief was).[43] There is thus a transparent symbolism to his horrid end—bodily emptiness is spiritual emptiness—but in context the Arius story also resonates with concerns about the authority of the church and the special status of the clergy. As Paul Antony Hayward points out, Arius is condemned at the synod of Nicaea and his opponent is a bishop, so the story uses his death to underscore the authority of synods and bishops to defend orthodoxy.[44] In the pastoral letters the topic of ecclesiastical authority and the condemnation of heresy is closely associated with injunctions to clerical celibacy. Thus the filthy death of Arius becomes a counterpoint to the *clænnes* that priests ought to espouse. In the "Letter to Wulfsige" the Arius story is immediately followed by the statement that the same synod forbade men in orders to have any woman in their house, apart from their mother, sister, or aunt.[45] Ælfric explains that under the Old Law priests

37 CH I.5, line 136.

38 CH I.20, "Feria III De fide catholica," lines 213–31.

39 Pope X, "Dominica Pentecosten," lines 159–69.

40 Assmann IV.195–202. Here Arius appears in a list of sinners, mostly blasphemers and heretics, who are punished by God.

41 Fehr Brief I.9–11.

42 Fehr Brief 2.47–55, and Brief II.50–58.

43 Pope X, line 167; see also Fehr Brief 2.55, and Brief II.58.

44 Paul Antony Hayward, "Before the Coming of Popular Heresy: The Rhetoric of Heresy in English Historiography, c. 700–1154," in *Heresy in Transition: Transforming Ideas of Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ian Hunter, John Christian Laursen, and Cary J. Nederman (Aldershot: Routledge, 2005), 9–27, at 15–16.

45 Fehr Brief I.13, pp. 3–4: "Hy gecwædon þa ealle mid anrædum geþance, þæt naðer ne bisceop ne mæsse-preost, ne diacon, ne nan riht canonicus, næbbe on his huse nænne wifman, buton hit sy his modor, oððe his swustur, fæðu, oððe modrige, and se-þe elles do, þolige his hades." (Then they all said with resolute opinion that neither a bishop nor a mass-priest, nor a deacon,

were permitted to marry, but they offered animal sacrifices; the purity of the Christian sacraments requires celibacy.[46] Bodily purity, orthodox belief, and priestly authority are intertwined, with Arius as their abject opposite.

In the figures of Herod and Arius, Ælfric presents cases of the abuse and corruption of masculine power, secular and ecclesiastical, and prompts revulsion towards heresy, paganism, tyranny, and sin, all of which are associated with filth and excess of the body. He also marshals disgust in the service of an ambitious standard of clerical purity. He perhaps needs the visceral power of disgust to argue his point, because in opposing clerical marriage and concubinage he was condemning a large number of the priests in early medieval England.[47] For Ælfric and for other writers of the Reform, celibacy is a key distinction between religious and laity, and highlighting the failure of the secular clergy to stay celibate contributes to the construction of a Benedictine monastic identity.[48] Ælfric's use of disgust is thus aimed at both the disciplining of real bodies and the policing of social and symbolic boundaries.

Two questions arise. First, though chastity marks the boundary of holy and unholy, religious and lay, it rejects the sexual and reproductive roles associated with men and women. Does the chaste religious man remain masculine? Second, given that his spectacular descriptions of the disgusting body foreground the male body, is Ælfric free of misogynistic disgust?

nor any true canon, should have any woman in his house, unless it be his mother, or his sister, or his paternal or maternal aunt, and whoever does otherwise, let him lose his order.) See also Brief II.82, pp. 102–3, which has almost identical wording but is separated from the Arius story.

46 Brief I.21–22, p. 6: "Hy mihton þa wel habban wif on þam dagum. Forþam þe hy næfre ne mæssedon, ne menn ne husledon; ac offrodon nytenu on þa ealdan wisan." (They could well have wives in those days. Because they never celebrated mass or administered the sacrament to people, but they offered animals in the old way.)

47 Julia Barrow argues that this was more common among the lower clergy: see *The Clergy in the Medieval World: Secular Clerics, their Families and Careers in North-Western Europe, c. 800–c. 1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Chapter 2; for comment, Conrad Leyser, "Review Article: Church reform—Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing?" *Early Medieval Europe* 24 (2016): 478–99, at 488–91. See also Catherine Cubitt, "Images of St Peter: The Clergy and the Religious Life in Anglo-Saxon England," in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. Paul Cavill (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 41–54, at 48–53.

48 See Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries," 7–8; Cubitt, "Images of St Peter," 48–50; Robert K. Upchurch, "For Pastoral Care and Political Gain: Ælfric of Eynsham's Preaching on Marital Celibacy," *Traditio* 59 (2004): 39–78, at 71–78; and for a broader and deeper investigation of Benedictine identity, Rebecca Stephenson, *The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Ælfric, and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

Clænnes and masculinity

In Vern Bullough's much-quoted phrase, masculinity has tended to rest on "impregnating women, protecting dependents, and serving as provider to one's family."[49] Yet, as Robert Upchurch shows, Ælfric not only enjoins clerical celibacy, he presents various grades of celibacy as desirable for laymen.[50] Moreover, female saints can be models of chastity for men to follow: Ælfric's version of the *Life of St. Æthelthryth*, which concludes with the story of the chaste marriage of a layman, is a much-discussed example.[51] Medieval Christianity placed a high value on virginity, to the extent that one might argue Bullough is wrong to regard sexual activity as consistently central to masculinity. Isabel Davis, in a study of masculinity in later medieval writers, argues that Langland "negotiates a more privileged position for marriage and fatherhood within his theological poetics" but does so with "hesitation:" this is a "new set of ethics."[52] It has also been argued that saints and holy people could represent a

49 Vern L. Bullough, "On Being A Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, Thelma Fenster, and JoAnn McNamara (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 31–45, at 34; quoted, for example, by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, "Introduction: Rethinking the Medieval Clergy and Masculinity," in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1–15, at 3. Thibodeaux notes that the requirement of celibacy must have had a different impact on men entering religion in adulthood, having already absorbed secular standards of masculinity, as opposed to oblated monks brought up in the monastery (5). Ælfric himself may not have been an oblate: see Christopher A. Jones, "Ælfric and the Limits of 'Benedictine Reform,'" in *Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Magennis and Swan, 67–108, at 104–7. Rebecca Stephenson takes issue with Jones's argument that Ælfric's plain Latin may reflect his deficient early education, but this addresses only part of the case for Ælfric having been a later entrant to Winchester: "Ælfric of Eynsham and Hermeneutic Latin: *Meatim sed et rustica* reconsidered," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 16 (2006): 111–41.

50 *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses*, ed. Robert K. Upchurch (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 19–26; Upchurch, "For Pastoral Care and Political Gain," 39–60. Upchurch points out that Ælfric goes further than his source, Augustine, in requiring couples to be abstinent after the woman's menopause: "For Pastoral Care," 49–54.

51 Some readings include: Gwen Griffiths, "Reading Ælfric's Saint Æthelthryth as a Woman," *Parergon* 10 (1992): 35–49; Peter Jackson, "Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage: A Reconsideration of the *Life of St Æthelthryth*, lines 120–30," *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 235–60; Paul E. Szarmach, "Ælfric and the Problem of Women," in *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy*, ed. Jane Roberts and Janet Nelson (King's College London: Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2000), 571–90, at 579–80; Winter Suzanne Elliott, "Sex and the Single Saint: Physicality in Anglo-Saxon Female Saints' Lives" (PhD dissertation, University of Georgia, 2004), 63–66.

52 Isabel Davis, *Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14.

"third gender," transcending ordinary gender roles, and this idea has been applied to Ælfric's writings.[53] However, to create the space for a third gender or to promote virginity demanded a constant rhetorical effort in a society where political and social power in the secular sphere were exercised and transmitted through patriarchal biological families.[54] Despite the dominance of the surviving written texts by Christian and indeed monastic ideology, Christian standards of purity could be troubling for medieval men. Janet Nelson has argued that the male aristocrats Gerald of Aurillac, Charles the son of Louis the German, and King Alfred all experienced deep religious anxiety over sexuality, and also over that other lynchpin of early medieval (non-servile) masculinity, the bearing of weapons.[55]

Considering Ælfric's approach to arms-bearing helps to illuminate how he negotiates the relationship between *clænnes* and masculinity. Arms-bearing was of enormous importance to early medieval English secular masculinity and is far more prominent than sexuality in literary representations; the Old English term for "man" as opposed to "woman" is *wæpnedman*.[56] Nonetheless, warfare was, like sex, an activity those in religious life were supposed to renounce (they did not always do so, as is suggested by the deaths of Bishop Eadnoth of Dorchester and Abbot Wulfsige of Ramsey in the Battle of Ashingdon in 1016).[57] As Ælfric puts it in the discussion of the Three Orders of Society appended to his homily on Maccabees ("Qui sunt oratores, bellatores, laboratores"), again employing the language of dirt and disgust, "Næs nan halig godes þeowa æfter þæs hælendes þrowunga. Þe æfre on gefeohte his handa wolde afylan" (There was no holy servant of God after the Savior's passion that would ever defile his hands with

53 Rhonda L. McDaniel, *The Third Gender and Ælfric's "Lives of Saints"* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018).

54 The centrality of the family and reproduction to politics in this era is brought out in Pauline Stafford's work on queenship, e.g., *Queen Emma and Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and "Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe. Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London, April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 3–23.

55 J. L. Nelson, "Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (Harlow: Longman, 1999), 121–42.

56 See Stacy S. Klein, "Gender," in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, ed. Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 39–54, at 41–43.

57 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock with David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker, second (corrected) impression (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1965), s.a. 1016 CDE, with Eadnoth's see and Wulfsige's abbey named in the footnotes.

fighting).[58] However, Ælfric draws on the common trope of spiritual warfare to represent the religious life, and chastity specifically, as a transformed version of secular militancy.

In "Qui sunt oratores," the religious life is presented as an analogous but higher calling to the literal warfare of the aristocracy:

> and se woruld-cempa sceall winnan wið ure fynd
> and se godes þeowa sceall symle for us gebiddan.
> and feohtan gastlice. wið se ungesewenlican fynd.
> Is nu for-þy mare þæra muneca gewinn.[59]
>
> (and the worldly warrior must fight against our enemies, and the servants of God must always pray for us and fight spiritually against the unseen enemies. Therefore the combat of the monks is greater.)

Clænnes itself is achieved through toughness, force and self-control, as indicated for example in these comments on the ascetic life of John the Baptist:

> Hu mæig beon buton strece ⁊ neadunge. þæt gehwa mid clænnysse þæt gale gecynd þurh godes gife gewylde; Oððe hwa gestilð hatheortnysse his modes mid geþylde. buton earfoðnysse?
>
> (How can it be without force and compulsion that someone with chastity controls wanton nature through God's grace? Or who calms the irascibility of his heart with patience without difficulty?)[60]

The psychomachia of chastity and the spiritual fight are scarcely to be distinguished. In the introduction to the "Admonitio ad filium spiritualem" the reader is told:

> Heo gebyrað to munecum and eac to mynecenum þe regollice libbað for hyra Drihtnes lufe under gastlicum ealdrum Gode þeowiende gehealdenre clænnysse swa swa Cristes þegenas campiende wið deoflu dæges and nihtes.

58 LS, "Qui sunt oratores, bellatores, laboratores", lines 857–58.

59 "Qui sunt oratores, bellatores, laboratores," lines 820–23.

60 CH I.25, "Nativitas Sancti Iohannis Baptistae," lines 161–63. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, 207, gives the source passage from Pseudo-Augustine: Ælfric has changed the order to place chastity at the head of the passage.

> (It [this tract] pertains to monks and also nuns who live according to the rule, for the love of their Lord, under their spiritual superiors, serving with steadfast chastity, just like Christ's servants, fighting against the devil day and night.)[61]

As this passage indicates, women also can live chastely. However, I can find no examples of Ælfric calling female saints *godes cempan* (soldiers of God), a phrase he uses of male saints including Paul, Martin, Sebastian, George, Alban, and Denis.[62] Martial language remains overwhelmingly masculine. The trope of spiritual warfare, therefore, allows Ælfric to deploy the high value placed on warrior masculinity in early medieval English culture for the benefit of monks and priests. This strategy was consistent through Ælfric's career even while his attitude to literal warfare shifted; as he produced works for aristocrats such as Æthelweard, Æthelmær, and Sigeweard, and as the renewed Danish threat became more pressing, he became more willing to depict the violence of secular men in a positive light where its ends justified it.[63]

The negotiation between religious and secular modes of masculinity in relation to violence, sex, and purity comes into focus in the "Passion of St. Edmund," an example that makes striking use of the rhetoric of disgust. The "Passion of St. Edmund" is among Ælfric's earlier works and, following the Latin *vita* by Abbo, it portrays Edmund, who in fact probably died in battle, as a martyr shot to death for refusing to submit to heathen overlordship.[64] Edmund is at once an exemplary king, who shows care for the Christian souls of his people and a willingness to fight on their behalf, and a holy figure, pure of both sex and bloodshed. His sexual purity is demonstrated in the

61 "Admonitio ad filium spiritualem" in *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Hexameron of St. Basil … and the Anglo-Saxon Remains of St. Basil's Admonitio ad filium spiritualem*, ed. H. W. Norman, 2nd ed. (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), 32–56, at 32.

62 CH I.27, "Natale Sancti Pauli," line 46; CH II.34, "Depositio Sancti Martini," line 7 and LS "St. Martin" line 106; LS "Sebastian" line 454; LS "George" lines 60 and 152; LS "Alban" line 61; LS "Denis" line 133—here "cristes cempa" (soldier of Christ) rather than "godes cempa."

63 John Edward Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 192–246; Malcolm Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England," in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray and Terry Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 130–62.

64 Abbo, *Life of St Edmund*, in *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), 65–87. See Antonia Gransden, "Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*," *Revue Bénédictine* 105 (1995): 20–78, at 31–40 on Abbo's hagiographic models. Abbo wrote around 985. Clemoes reads the preface to "St. Edmund" to mean Ælfric's translation followed only a few years later: "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works," in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach with Deborah A. Oosterhouse (London: Routledge, 2000), 29–72, at 39.

wholeness of his body: at translation not only is his corpse found incorrupt but his severed head has joined itself back on, a demonstration, in Ælfric's words, that he "buton forligre … leofode and mid clænum life to criste siþode" (lived without fornication and journeyed to Christ with a chaste life).[65] The balancing act between military kingship and the suffering heroism of martyrdom is worked out in the scene between Edmund, his bishop and the Danish messenger.[66] Edmund declares that "me nu leofre wære þæt ic on feohte feolle wið þam þe min folc moste heora eardes brucan" (I would prefer to fall in battle provided that my people might enjoy their territory)[67] but the bishop points out he does not have the forces to fight. Edmund responds that it was never his custom to flee and defies the messenger, using a stark antithesis of dirt and purity to express his revulsion: "Witodlice þu wære wyrðe sleges nu. ac ic nelle afylan on þinum fulum blode mine clænan handa" (Indeed you would deserve to be killed now, but I don't wish to defile my clean hands with your foul blood).[68] In this compressed, emotive speech multiple implications are skillfully layered: Edmund is a king who is entitled to pass judgement of death; he is a warrior who could kill the messenger himself; but at the same time he rejects, as a holy saint should, the pollutions of paganism and violence (it is left artfully unclear to what extent it is the body of the pagan, and to what extent bloodshed itself, that defiles). What I wish to emphasize here is the efficacy of a staging of disgust—derived from the source-text, but selected, simplified and sharpened by Ælfric—in positioning Edmund as *both* a warrior king and a virgin martyr. In addition, his performance of disgust is a performance of authority: while Herod's and Arius's bodies are objects of disgust that express the hollowness of their authority, Edmund's clean, whole body is a site from which disgust can be expressed, and his fastidiousness, his wholeness and his authority reinforce each other.

Disgust, Authority, and the Female Body

I have argued that Ælfric's deployment of disgusting male bodies such as Herod and Arius enacts a convulsive rejection of all that is pagan, excessive,

65 LS "St. Edmund," lines 187–88.

66 On how Ælfric's St. Edmund departs from Germanic models of heroism see Hugh Magennis, "Ælfric and Heroic Literature," in *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 31–60, at 44–45.

67 "St. Edmund," lines 65–67.

68 "St. Edmund," lines 85–86.

sinful, and mired in the body's appetites, especially sex; and that it is bound up with ideas about authority and power. The ideal male body is contained, chaste, ordered in its passions, orthodox in its beliefs, and, if clerical, correctly celebrates the rites of the church and pursues the spiritual fight; if non-clerical, it carefully negotiates the potential pollution of warfare. However, it remains a masculine body, even though it strikingly reorders secular masculinity. What, then, of female bodies?

There are various ways of reading the comparative invisibility of the female body in Ælfric's works. One is, with Alison Gulley, to argue that the body is ultimately not that important in comparison to spiritual meaning.[69] Another is to conclude that both represented and real female bodies need to be especially carefully controlled. This is the line taken by Clare Lees and Gillian Overing, who argue that "[Ælfric's] saints remain resolutely female, however much they invite cross-gendered identification" and that their depiction betrays "a certain nervousness about the power of the gaze."[70] More recently Andrew Rabin has argued that Ælfric's *Life of St. Eugenia* and the treatment of St. Æthelthryth in the Old English version of the Ely Foundation Charter express the need both to protect and to control the female body in light of "the law's vulnerability to unregulated or unconstrained female sexuality."[71] Katy Cubitt refers to Ælfric's "fear of women and sex" and picks out, among other passages, the insistence in his homily for the Passion of John the Baptist that no wild beast is worse than an evil woman.[72] She also stresses that Ælfric's projected audience is largely male.[73] Elaine Treharne offers a further dimension, showing how Ælfric tends to diminish women's roles and focus his attention largely on men. Where he does address women, he expects them to be obedient and submissive: the widow Anna, for example, is praised for the negative virtues of eschewing luxury and chatter and not wandering abroad.[74] The examples adduced by these scholars suggest that Ælfric's attitude to the female body is suspicious, cautious, and repressive;

69 Alison Gulley, *The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2 and passim. For evaluation, see Renée Trilling's review in *JEGP* 116 (2017): 225–28.

70 Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 130 and 131.

71 Andrew Rabin, "Holy Bodies, Legal Matters: Reaction and Reform in Ælfric's *Eugenia* and the Ely Privilege," *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013): 220–65, quotation at 261.

72 Catherine Cubitt, "Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Gender and History* 12 (2000): 1–32, at 23 and 16; CH I.32, "Decollatio Sancti Iohannis Baptistae," lines 172–89.

73 Cubitt, "Virginity and Misogyny," 17.

74 Elaine Treharne, "The Invisible Woman: Ælfric and his Subject Female," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 37 (2006): 191–208, esp. at 198–200.

the disgusting female body must fall within the realm of those topics he avoids because they are too dangerous or unedifying for his audience.[75]

In addition, as we have seen, Ælfric's uses of disgust are frequently bound up with concerns about authority; and he explicitly genders authority as male. In the sermon on the Day of Judgement edited by Pope, there is a sequence of pairs of people, one of whom will be taken and one of whom will be left on that day of wrath. The second pair, the two women at the grindstone, are interpreted, following Bede's commentary on Luke 17.35, as those immersed in the cares of worldly life. Ælfric expands Bede's brief statement that they are presented as women because "consiliis… peritorum regi eis expedit" (it suits them to be guided by the counsels of the more experienced):[76]

> Be þysum he cwæð twa, and nolde cweðan twegen,
> for þam þe hi soðlice ne beoð on swylcere fullfremednysse
> þæt hi sylfe magon hy[m] sylfum wissian,
> ac hy sceolan lybban be heora lareowa wissunge,
> bisceopa and mæssepreosta, and heora misdæda betan
> be heora scrifta tæcinge, and of heora tilunge
> don symle ælmyssan; ac hi ne magon swaþeah
> þam beon geefenlæhte þe ealle þing forleton
> for þæs Hælendes lufon, and hym æfre þeowodon.
>
> (About these he said "two women," and wouldn't say "two men," because they truly are not in such perfection that they may guide themselves, but they must live according to the guidance of their teachers, bishops and mass-priests, and atone for their misdeeds according to the instruction of their confessors, and always give alms from their labors; but however they cannot be the equal of those who leave everything for the love of the Savior and always serve him.)[77]

Similarly, when the transvestite saint Eugenia is chosen abbot of the monastery where she is hiding, "Ða wearð þæt mæden mycclum hohful. hu heo

75 On Ælfric's avoidance of certain kinds of material, see Joyce Hill, "Ælfric, Gelasius, and St George," *Mediaevalia* 11 (1985): 1–17; E. Gordon Whatley, "Pearls before Swine: Ælfric, Vernacular Hagiography, and the Lay Reader," in *Via Crucis: Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross*, ed. Thomas N. Hall with Thomas D. Hill and Charles D. Wright (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 158–84.

76 Pope II, 595.

77 Pope XVIII, "Sermo de die iudicii", lines 119–27.

æfre wæras wissian sceolde" (then became the maiden extremely anxious [about] however she was to direct men).[78]

Finally, although there is no female description to compare to Herod or Arius (the closest is perhaps Jezebel being consumed "þurh fule hundas" (by foul dogs)),[79] there are a number of passages that suggest human messiness and weakness are associated with the female, especially through the role of the mother in bringing forth the mortal body. The virgin motherhood of Mary is, of course, celebrated, sometimes even in aspects that today can be targets for disgust, such as lactation. In Pope's homily IV Ælfric tells how a woman calls out to Christ "Eadig is se innoð þe ðe to mannum gebær, and gesælige syndon þa breost þe þu gesuce" (Blessed is the womb that brought you forth as a human being, and blessed are the breasts that you sucked),[80] explaining that this affirms the true humanity, the "menniscnysse," of Christ against heretics who would deny it.[81] It is central to orthodoxy that Christ is fully human as well as fully God, and this humanity is derived from the body of the mother. But the mother also transmits the stain of original sin, and, while this does not occur in Jesus's case, the mother is thus the vessel of everything that is dirty and corrupt in humanity. This is clear from the Christmas homily edited by Pope:

> Gyf seo sunne scinð, swa swa we geseoð oft,
> on fulum adela(n & heo be)fyled ne bið,
> micele swiðor mihte se ælmihtiga Godes Sunu
> butan eallum fyl(ðum) beon of hyre acenned,
> ⁊ heo mihte beon micclum geclænsod
> þurh his halg(an mihte) ⁊ he næs befyled
> ⁊ hyre mægðhad is ansund, þonne heo butan hæmede (bær).[82]
>
> (If, as we often see, the sun shines on a foul place of filth and it is not defiled, much more could the Almighty Son of God be born from her

78 LS, "Saint Eugenia, Virgin," lines 121–22.

79 LS, "Book of Kings," line 354.

80 Pope IV, "Dominica III in quadrigesima," lines 52–53.

81 Pope IV, lines 276–81: "Eac þæra gedwolmanna þe dwelodon embe Crist, and sædon þæt he nære on soðre menniscnysse, ealle heo oferswiðde mid soðum geleafan, for ðan ðe se innoð wæs eadig soðlice þe Godes Sunu abær, and ða breost þe he seac on his cildhade wæron gesælige, swa swa heo sæde." (Also with respect to those heretics who erred concerning Christ and said that he was not truly man, she overcame them all with her true faith, because that womb was truly blessed that bore God's Son, and the breasts that he sucked in his infancy were fortunate, as she said.)

82 Pope I, "Nativitas Domini," lines 420–26. Lacunae in the text are filled following the suggestions in Pope's apparatus and are presented in parentheses.

> without any filth, and she could be cleansed through his holy power and he was not defiled and her virginity is whole, when she bore a child without sexual intercourse.)

It is startling to see, even under erasure, an analogy between Mary's body and "adela," "filth" or "a place of filth."[83] It suggests that, while Ælfric is no Juvenal, and while he is prepared to celebrate the purity and sanctity of an Æthelthryth or an Agatha, deep down he does view women as fundamentally dirty.

Preacherly Authority and the Performance of Disgust

This chapter has explored crossing-points of disgust, authority, and gender in how Ælfric represents certain male and female bodies and advocates chastity and orthodoxy. In conclusion, I want to relate this back to his own performance as a preacher, which is also a performance of both authority and masculinity. To focus on performance is to place the body of the preacher center-stage, and this is by definition a male body since the priestly role was exclusively a male one.

I noted at the start that the kind of overt expression of feeling found in the "Letter to Brother Edward" is atypical. Much more often, Ælfric engages with emotion not by mentioning his own, but by prompting or cuing audience responses through the use of narrative detail and affective language, especially adjectives such as *bysmorful* and *ful*. In his use of such language, Ælfric assumes the position of an arbitrator, who can pronounce on what is and is not acceptable and direct the feelings of others. This use of adjectives is also to a certain extent detached: it connects the feeling to the object rather than the subject. Ælfric is well-known for a generally cool tone, in contrast (especially) to the more exciting and excitable Wulfstan. Clare Lees has written beautifully on how central to his work is the exposition of doctrine, the setting out of the foundations of belief, rather than more heated exhortation.[84] Mary Swan has shown how, in comparison to the homilists of Blickling III and Bodley Homily V, Ælfric makes relatively little use of the first person, but when he does it is part of a careful construction of the authoritative voice of the teacher.[85] The

83 The source identified by Pope is from Pseudo-Augustine, "Contra quinque hæreses."

84 Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Chapter 2.

85 Mary Swan, "Constructing Preacher and Audience in Old English Homilies," in *Constructing the Medieval Sermon*, ed. Roger Andersson, Sermo: Studies on Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation Sermons and Preaching 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 177–88, at 184–86 and 188.

effect of all this is to minimize the presence of Ælfric's own body and feelings in his texts. Its precise impact would depend on the mode of reception. Where the texts were used for private reading, the body of the preacher must have all but disappeared into the body of the book, as a textual and yet still male voice—speaking from the tradition of the Fathers—of moral and doctrinal truth.[86] Where the sermons were delivered orally—and Jonathan Wilcox argues that the *Catholic Homilies* were widely circulated and preached[87]—they scripted a performance of the kind of controlled, emotionally and physically continent masculine authority Ælfric associates with figures like John the Baptist and Edmund, and opposes to hideous parodies like Herod or Arius.

What, then, of moments when Ælfric deliberately draws attention to his own disgust or shame? There are a number of passages in which Ælfric in various ways expresses discomfort or anxiety over a subject, though only three where he directly says he is ashamed. The first is the "Letter to Brother Edward." The second is in the sermon on Auguries: "Us sceamað to secgenne ealle ða sceandlican wiglunga þe ge dwæs-menn drifað" (It shames us to tell all the shameful sorceries which you foolish men practice).[88] This statement, couched in the preacherly first person plural, advertises the need to retain control over a subject potentially corrupting or disturbing to his audience, but in which he must fulfil his obligation to deliver moral teaching. The third, however, signals shame and discomfort while suppressing significant details, and this is the account of the Sodomites in Ælfric's translation of Genesis:

> Se leodscipe wæs swa bysmorfull þæt hig woldon fullice ongean gecynd heora galnysse gefyllan, na mid wimmannum ac swa fullice þæt us sceamað hyt openlice to secgenne.[89]
>
> (This people was so disgraceful that they wished to fulfill their lust foully, against nature, not with women but so foully that it shames us to say it openly.)

86 Ælfric clearly envisages the *Catholic Homilies* will be read as well as preached: Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, xxii–xxiii. The *Lives of Saints* seems designed first and foremost as a reading collection, and yet it includes homiletic as well as narrative pieces; for a list of public and private occasions on which it was probably used, see Jonathan Wilcox, "The Audience of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* and the Face of Cotton Caligula A. xiv, fols. 93–130," in *Beatus Vir: Studies in Early English and Norse Manuscripts in Memory of Phillip Pulsiano*, ed. A. N. Doane and Kirsten Wolf (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 219–63, at 258–59.

87 Jonathan Wilcox, "Ælfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care," in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 52–62.

88 LS "On Auguries," lines 100–101.

89 *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, ed. Richard Marsden, volume 1, EETS o.s. 330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

Similarly in Pope XVIII he mentions the "sceamlicum" (shameful) deeds of the "fulan" (foul) Sodomites, but does not reveal exactly what they are.[90] Here we see Ælfric exercising a kind of rhetorical hygiene; fastidious expressions of shame and disgust, coupled to studied vagueness, indicate his stewardship of a learning that he cannot always share—perhaps all the more obviously since his audience might well need no reminding what the Sodomites were up to. Again, performing shame and disgust mean performing as an authoritative teacher, controlling unsuitable leaks of shocking information just as he seeks to control the messy urges of the body. Moreover, the careful avoidance of contamination by even the naming of such dreadful sexual sins stages the personal purity of the preacher, whose authority and office rest on his *clænnes* of body, tongue, and mind.

This leads the discussion back to the anomalous emotionality of the "Letter to Brother Edward." To some extent this must be because it is a different kind of performance to the others under examination here: it is apparently a private letter, written in Ælfric's personal voice and in the first person singular, and directed not to the women he wants to admonish but to his intermediary, Edward. However, it is also produced at the limits of Ælfric's ability to control bodies and behaviors and beyond the reach of his personal intervention. The women on their privies are out of place and out of control, enacting in a nightmarishly literal way the association of appetite and filth that haunts Ælfric's language of the *ful* and the *clæne*; and as women they are especially offensive because they should be under authority, and because they are inherently dirtier than men. They force themselves into Ælfric's language, demanding a response that ruptures his usual calm and discretion in a manner that is evidently distressing to him. Disgust is a tool of authority for Ælfric; but it is also, on occasion, a symptom of authority under threat.

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90 Pope XVIII, lines 69 and 74. See Malcolm Godden, "The Trouble With Sodom: Literary Responses to Biblical Sexuality," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 77 (1995): 97–119, at 103; also my own earlier discussion in "'It Shames Me to Say It,'" 275, which I recap and slightly modify here.

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Treatments of Virginity

6 The Ornament of Virginity

Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* and the Virtuous Women of the Early English Church

Emily V. Thornbury

Abstract

Though the female addressees of Aldhelm's late seventh-century *Opus de uirginitate* are known to us only by name, the contents of this sprawling twin work of prose and verse suggest that he composed it with an awareness of these women's prior reading and knowledge. Aldhelm's startling characterization of virginity as an ornament acquired through labor thus likely reflects a shared cultural conception of ornament as something not frivolous or dispensable, but constitutive of the value of an artwork. Such a view of ornament may in turn explain a major divergence between the prose *De uirginitate* and its somewhat later verse companion, in which a psychomachia with Virginity as martial heroine has been substituted for a polemic against women's elaborate attire.

Keywords: Virginity; reading; Aldhelm; ornament; theology; aesthetics

Premodern women are most often known to us, not through their own words, but as the subjects or addressees of works written by men. Even when the recipients of such texts were demonstrably real people, the works themselves do not always provide much insight into those women's views: often, as many scholars have shown, female patrons or dedicatees were primarily ideal abstractions or intellectual stalking-horses for the texts' male authors.[1] Yet this does not mean that texts written by men for

1 See, for instance, Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'," *Church History* 67 (1998): 1–31, whose reading of Gregory of Nyssa's life of St. Macrina shows the degree to which Gregory's narrative transforms his own sister into an avatar of his theological concerns. This epistemological pessimism is not universal, as

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women are necessarily useless for understanding women's intellectual lives. In some instances, such works demonstrate that their male authors did know about, and were responding to, the particular interests of their patrons or addressees. And, more broadly and commonly, the form and intellectual presuppositions of such texts reveal structures of thought and cultural values shared across a society.[2] It is not altogether quixotic, then, to argue that Aldhelm's *De uirginitate*—a sprawling, elaborate *opus geminatum* that represents the first great work of Anglo-Latin literature—contains, among much else, recoverable traces of the thought of its female addressees.[3]

The chronologically prior prose section opens with an extended address to these women by name, and attributes the impetus for the work itself to the prompting of their letters. In the course of the text, Aldhelm refers repeatedly to the women's reading in specific terms, noting particular books he knows them to have read as well as praising their knowledge in general. More broadly, Aldhelm presents earlier treatises on virginity as monuments to, and records of, the women to whom they were dedicated, and indicates that his own treatise is meant to act in the same way: as a monument through which its addressees will be known to posterity. So while the reality of an intellectual dialogue between Aldhelm and a number of professed religious women can (barring the recovery of their letters) no longer be verified, the idea of such a dialogue is an inseparable part of the text. Through the moments that the *De uirginitate* specifically represents as shaped by its addressees' thought, we can—at the very least—perceive the learning that was imaginable for educated Englishwomen of the late seventh century.

demonstrated by Helene Scheck and Virginia Blanton, "Women," in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, ed. Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 265–79.

2 The same, indeed, might be said of other cases between authors and addressees of radically different backgrounds—clergy and laymen, for instance, or commoners and upper nobility.

3 In an *opus geminatum*, identical or nearly identical material is presented in prose and verse (this differentiates it from a *prosimetrum* like Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, which alternates sequentially between verse and prose). Though the verse and prose portions of an *opus geminatum* could, and often did, circulate separately, its author usually conceived of the two as part of a single, unified work. The form was popular in early medieval England, especially during the earlier period: see Peter Godman, "The Anglo-Latin *Opus Geminatum*: From Aldhelm to Alcuin," *Medium Ævum* 50 (1981): 215–29, and Gernot Wieland, "*Geminus Stilus*: Studies in Anglo-Latin Hagiography," in *Insular Latin Studies*, ed. Michael Herren (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 113–33. Though there is not space to discuss it here, the pairing of prose and verse to form a whole lends itself to metaphors of gender complementarity, which Aldhelm explores in his *Carmen de uirginitate*.

Moreover, Aldhelm's reshaping of his late antique source texts, and of his own prose text in his creation of a verse "twin," help us to better understand early medieval English conceptions of an aesthetic practice often associated with women: ornamentation. Aldhelm's striking conceptualization of virginity as an ornament suggests he thought of ornament itself in a way that was not derived from his literary sources, but instead likely reflects cultural presuppositions that his addressees, as fellow early medieval Europeans would have shared. This idea of the ornament of virginity seems to have prompted the greatest single divergence in content between the prose and verse parts of the work. Though mirroring each other in their earlier sections, the *Prosa* concludes with several chapters warning women against elaborate attire before returning to more general admonitions to virginity and a final direct address. Based primarily on Cyprian's *De habitu uirginum*, these chapters wrestle with, and ultimately fail to reconcile, conflicting ideas about nature and the moral valence of visible artistic labor.[4] The verse, however—which is explicitly presented as a complement to the prose and fulfillment of the whole—cuts this discussion entirely and replaces it with a Battle of the Virtues and Vices in which Virginity is a conquering military leader. This revision presents us with glimpses into the intellectual world of early medieval England that—whether or not they responded to the thoughts of actual women—touch on women's outward self-construction and on the imaginative possibilities afforded by female warriors and thus help us better understand the imagination of women in early medieval English culture.

De uirginitate and the Female Readers of the Early Medieval English Church

Women's absent presence prompted his treatise on virginity, Aldhelm writes in the first chapter of his *Prosa de uirginitate*:

> Iamdudum ad pontificale profiscens conciliabulum fraternis sodalium catervis comitatus almitatis vestrae scripta meae mediocritati allata satis libenter suscipiens erectis ad aethera palmis immensas Christo pro sospitate vestra gratulatabundus impendere grates curavi; quo stilo non solum ecclesiastica promissorum votorum foedera, quae fida pollicitatione

4 Aldhelm cites Cyprian by name; Rudolf Ehwald identifies the precise source passages in his edition: *Aldhelmi Opera*, MGH Auct. Anti. 15 (Berlin, 1919), 315–16. For Cyprian's text, see Laetitia Ciccolini, ed., *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi De habitu uirginum*, CCSL 3F (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016).

> spopondistis, ubertim claruerunt, verum etiam melliflua divinarum studia scripturarum sagacissima sermonum serie patuerunt.[5]
>
> (Some time ago, when, accompanied by throngs of fellow-monks, I was on my way to a public assembly called by the bishop, your kind letters were brought to me; and as I very gladly received them, I took care to give extensive thanks to Christ, with hands raised to the skies, rejoicing for your good health. In this composition not only were the ecclesiastical compacts of sworn vows, which you had pledged with a faithful promise, abundantly evident, but likewise the mellifluous studies of divine scriptures were clear in the exceedingly well-considered arrangement of your words.)

Three things about his correspondents "shine forth," as Aldhelm himself might put it, from this quasi-epistolary beginning. First, the women themselves are not attending this synod: it is left unstated whether this is because they are women (though the gender of the "fraternal throngs," *fraternis … catervis*, might suggest this) or because they reside outside this diocese. And yet through their letters, two qualities of these women nonetheless manifest themselves to Aldhelm, their reader: their vows, and their learning. The whole of the ensuing treatise is centered on these two characteristics: praise of them, exhortations to them, and embodiments of them.

The *De uirginitate* belongs, then, to a specific subset of treatises on virginity; it is imagined as praise of a quality its addressees already possess (or rather, as we shall see, are in the process of developing), instead of persuasion to a decision not yet made. In this, it resembles Ambrose's *De uirginibus ad Marcellinam*, composed for a sister already vowed to virginity, more closely than it does treatises written for women still considering such a vow, such as the letters of Jerome and Pelagius to Demetrias.[6] But like all of these patristic works, Aldhelm's was addressed to individual women, whom he names in an elaborate salutation:

> Reverentissimis Christi virginibus omnique devotae germanitatis affectu venerandis et non solum corporalis pudicitiae praeconio celebrandis,

5 *Prosa de uirginitate* I, in Ehwald, ed., *Aldhelmi Opera*, 229. All translations from the Latin are my own unless otherwise noted; but—like, I expect, all contemporary Anglophone readers of Aldhelm—I have benefited greatly from the translations and commentaries found in Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), and Michael Lapidge and James Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009). (I cite the updated paperback reprints; the original editions appeared in 1979 and 1985 respectively.)

6 On the latter, see below, pp. 179–80.

> quod plurimorum est, verum etiam spiritalis castimoniae gratia glorificandis, quod paucorum est, Hildilithae, regularis disciplinae et monasticae conversationis magistrae, simulque Iustinae ac Cuthburgae nec non Osburgae, contribulibus necessitudinum nexibus conglutinatae, Aldgithae ac Scolasticae, Hidburgae et Berngithae, Eulaliae ac Teclae, rumore sanctitatis concorditer Ecclesiam ornantibus, Aldhelmus, segnis Christi Crucicola et supplex Ecclesiae bernaculus, optabilem perpetuae prosperitatis salutem.[7]
>
> (To the most reverend virgins of Christ, to be venerated in every sensation of devout kinship, and to be celebrated not only for the praiseworthy quality of physical chastity (which belongs to many) but especially to be glorified for the grace of spiritual chastity (which belongs to few): to Hildelith, teacher of the discipline of the rule and of monastic life; likewise to Justina and Cuthburh and also Osburh (joined closely in associative bonds of relationships); to Aldgith and Scolastica, Hidburh and Berngith, Eulalia and Tecla, in unity ornamenting the Church with a reputation of sanctity: Aldhelm, sluggish servant of the Cross of Christ and humble slave of the Church, sends his desire for their perpetual well-being.)

This list's specificity has long intrigued scholars. The twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury identified Hildelith as the abbess of Barking; he and most readers since have taken the following names to be women in the same community.[8] Scott Gwara, however, has recently gathered some charter evidence to argue that the women named were abbesses of double monasteries throughout England.[9] But whether these women were part of a single house (as I still tend to believe) or dispersed, the list of names indicates that Aldhelm wishes to recognize them as individuals as well as sharers in avowed religious status. Although they may or may not have been

7 *Prosa de uirginitate* (hereafter *PdV*), salutation, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 228–29.

8 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), II.73.13 (228). On the addressees more generally see Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 51–52.

9 Scott Gwara, *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa de Virginitate cum Glosa Latina atque Anglosaxonica. Praefatio et Indices*. CCSL 124 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 47–55. The primary reason I find this argument unpersuasive is Aldhelm's use of the singular for "magistra" in addressing Hildelith: elsewhere he is careful to use the plural for qualities that apply to all of his addressees, and to use a salutation proper to an abbess for only one of the women named would hardly be respectful to the others. Gwara's work, however, well demonstrates William of Malmesbury's ingenious use of historical documents.

known to him in person,[10] Aldhelm's salutation suggests that his treatise is directed not to an amorphous group of nuns, but to each of these named women, who were known to him as having certain qualities in common.

Learning—skill as readers and writers—was one of those qualities, highlighted in the first chapter as manifest in the women's letters, and returned to throughout the *Prosa de uirginitate*. In Chapters IV–VI, Aldhelm uses the metaphor of the bee to represent such learning as inseparable from monasticism. The bee is a perfect allegory for the regular life, he contends, because of its perfect obedience, its virginity, and its unwearying diligence in gathering nectar, which is an analogue of reading:

> Nam quemadmodum examen arta fenestrarum foramina et angusta alvearii vestibula certatim per turmas egressum amoena arvorum prata populatur, eodem modo vestrum, ni fallor, memoriale mentis ingenium per florulenta scripturarum arva late vagans bibula curiositate decurrit.[11]
>
> (For just as the swarm, with a struggle leaving the narrow holes of its combs and the cramped threshold of the beehive in squadrons, plunders the pleasant expanses of the meadows, in the same way your retentive wit of mind (unless I'm mistaken), ranging widely through the blossoming fields of the scriptures, hastens with thirsty curiosity.)

The sentence continues, enumerating as the nectar of these "bees" not only the whole of scripture, but also patristic commentary, secular history, grammar, music, and poetic meter. With *vestrum* (your, plural) and *ni fallor* (unless I'm mistaken) it also returns attention to the rhetorical situation, reminding its readership that the speaker, the "I" of the text, has reason to believe that they have already read and absorbed an extensive range of texts.[12]

While the bee metaphor might be read as a general encomium, the text at several points enters into a more specific and individual dialogue with its readers *as* readers, reaching outward to other texts they might know. The citations of sources scattered throughout the prose treatise frequently seem to serve as suggestions for further reading as well as authorizing

10 Michael Lapidge argues that the unusual participle *conglutinata* indicates that Osburh was Aldhelm's sister: "The Career of Aldhelm," *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 15–69, at 19.

11 *PdV* IV, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 232.

12 On the strong emphasis on intellectual culture in the bee metaphor, see further Augustine Casiday, "St Aldhelm's Bees (*De uirginitate prosa* cc. IV–VI): Some Observations on a Literary Tradition," *Anglo-Saxon England* 33 (2004): 1–22.

gestures. In Chapter XIII of the *Prosa*, this suggestion is made explicit, as Aldhelm extricates himself from a full discussion of the virtues and vices by advising that

> haec, inquam, si vestra curiosae sollicitudinis solertia plenius animadverti maluerit, non modo .X. collationes patrum a Cassiano, Massiliensis parrochiae archimandrita peculiariter dictandi facundia praedito, digestae patenter propalabunt, verum etiam Gregorius, sedis apostolicae praesul, a quo rudimenta fidei et baptismi sacramenta suscepimus, libro moralium XXXI per allegoriam luce clarius elimavit.[13]
>
> (if, I say, your shrewdness of scholarly zeal wishes to attend to these things more fully, not only will the ten *Collations of the Fathers* composed by Cassian—an abbot of Marseilles, who was especially endowed with eloquence in composition—explain them clearly, but also Gregory, bishop of the apostolic see, from whom we received the foundations of faith and the sacraments of baptism, allegorically explained them clearer than light in his *Moralia in Job*.)

Here Aldhelm recommends the texts as appealing reading as well as reliable sources, highlighting the *Collations*' elegant style and the particular relevance of Gregory to readers whom he identifies as fellow-English through the first-person plural of *suscepimus* (we received).

Expectations of his readers' prior reading may have shaped the text in more subtle ways. For instance, the Virgin Mary is given surprisingly little space in Aldhelm's text; she is mentioned briefly in Chapter XXXIX, as the text turns from men to women, and takes up only a few sentences in the next chapter, which she shares with St. Cecelia. However, this brevity would be less startling if the audience could be assumed to know one or more of the earlier discussions of Mary's virginity. Ambrose's *De uirginibus ad Marcellinam*, for instance, devotes a long chapter in Book II to her life and virtues.[14] If Aldhelm knew that his addressees had already read his

13 *PdV* XIII, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 242.

14 Peter Dückers, ed., *Ambrosius: De uirginibus/Über die Jungfrauen*, Fontes Christiani 81 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 212–36. See Dabney Anderson Bankert, Jessica Wegmann, and Charles D. Wright, *Ambrose in Anglo-Saxon England, with Pseudo-Ambrose and Ambrosiaster*, Old English Newsletter Subsidia 25 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1997), 36–38, for a conspectus of early medieval English manuscripts and attestations. While Bede seems to have had access to *De uirginibus*, it is not clear whether the treatise was known in southern England in the seventh century: see Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006),

main sources on Mary, extensive treatment of her life could—as with the virtues and vices—be omitted as redundant.

While this explanation of the Virgin Mary's relatively brief discussion might be speculative, an expectation of earlier reading explicitly shapes the discussion of Eustochium in Chapter XLIX, which Aldhelm cuts short with:

> Sed et residua canonicarum commentariola scripturarum, quae praefatus divinae legis interpres et matris solertia et virginis compulsus industria desudavit, universa singillatim commemorare pertensum est, quae vestrae sagacitatis fılosofıam per patentes librorum campos curiose cursitantem nequaquam delitescere reor; cui etiam exortatorium de virginitate servanda insigniter edidit opusculum.[15]
>
> (But as for the rest of the commentaries on the canonical scriptures—which the aforementioned translator of the divine law labored over, prompted by the intellect of the mother and devotion of the maiden daughter—it would be tiresome to describe them individually: I believe the zeal for wisdom of your intellect, ranging eagerly across the open fields of books, by no means allows them to lie hidden; for her [=Eustochium] likewise he notably prepared a little admonitory treatise about the preservation of virginity.)

The readers are imagined as familiar with Jerome's biblical commentaries and perhaps also with some of his letters, especially that to Eustochium instructing her on the life of a virgin, to which Aldhelm alludes in the final clause of this sentence.[16] Moreover, the literary relationship between Jerome, Eustochium, and Paula (her mother, mentioned earlier in Chapter XLIX) evokes that between Aldhelm and his female correspondents. The similarity is verbal as well as situational. The uncommon term *solertia* (intellect; wit), for instance, is attributed in this chapter to both Paula and (earlier) to Eustochium: in the quote from Chapter XIII above, it is the

279, although Lapidge proposes it as a structural model for Aldhelm's prose treatise (*Prose Works*, 56): more work in this area is needed.

15 *PdV* XLIX, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 303–4. (Following several of the glosses, I have rendered *pertensum* as *pertaesum*.)

16 *Epistle XXII ad Eustochium*, in *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae. Pars I: I–LXX*, ed. Isidore Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1910), 143–211. On the letter's reception, and on Jerome's relation to the intellectual lives of his patrons, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 367–71.

property of the addressees, as it also is in Chapter III (and, in Chapter IV, of the bees to which they are compared). Jerome, meanwhile, *desudavit* (sweated over) his composition, as Aldhelm described himself doing over the *Prosa* in its conclusion (Chapter LX). This, too, is a relatively rare word: Aldhelm uses it only six times in his entire surviving corpus, and in four of those instances it signifies strenuous intellectual labor.[17] The discussion of Eustochium in Chapter XLIX thus flatters both author and audience. It does so not merely by invoking a likeness between the early medieval English and the great age of patristic writing through subtle verbal correspondences, but by offering an appealing model for what patristic treatises were and did. In this vision, the finished text is as much a mirror of the talents of the women who inspired it—who "compelled" its production through their active intellectual virtues—as of the man who wrote it. Through it, the women are immortalized, knowable to posterity.

The means by which this feat is achieved is suggested in the second half of Chapter XLIX. This section describes Demetrias, who was an heiress of the *gens Anicii*, the daughter and granddaughter of consuls and—more importantly—of actively pious Christian women who were major patrons of the late fourth- and early fifth-century Church.[18] Although Augustine of Hippo as well as Jerome wrote hortatory letters to Demetrias via her mother and grandmother as she considered taking a vow of virginity, Aldhelm appears to know of her primarily—perhaps solely—through a letter of Pelagius.[19] It seems unlikely that Aldhelm knew the author of this treatise on virginity had been one of Augustine's theological *bêtes noirs*, who had been condemned as a heretic in 417.[20] Certainly he leaves

17 Besides these two instances, *desudo* appears as a metrical example in the *De pedum regulis* (*Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 172), and John of Egypt is described as *desudans* in his eremitic practice in Chapter XXIX of the *Prosa* (267). But in the conclusion to *De pedum regulis* Aldhelm also describes himself as the first English-speaker to have *desudasse* over Latin quantitative meter (202), and in Chapter II of the *Prosa* he compares his addressees' studies to an athete *desudans* over exercises (230).

18 Patrick Laurence, "Proba, Juliana et Démétrias: Le christianisme des femmes de la *gens Anicia* dans la première moitié du Ve siècle," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 48 (2002): 131–63; and Anne Kurdock, "*Demetrias ancilla dei*: Anicia Demetrias and the Problem of the Missing Patron," in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900*, ed. Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 190–224, which also provides a valuable account of Demetrias's later life as a patroness of Christian works.

19 On Demetrias's role in the three texts written to her, see Andrew S. Jacobs, "Writing Demetrias: Ascetic Logic in Ancient Christianity," *Church History* 69 (2000): 719–48.

20 In the early Middle Ages, the letter circulated—ironically enough—as part of collections of Jerome's letters, although readers like Bede (and, it would seem, Aldhelm), doubted the attribution to Jerome: see Ali Bonner, "The Manuscript Transmission of Pelagius' *Ad Demetriadem*:

the treatise's author nameless, even as he effusively praises its language: it is, he says, "volumen prolixa et lepida sermonum serie digestum" (a volume composed with a flowing and lovely arrangement of words), its points made "eleganter" (elegantly).[21] Most of the paragraph consists of verbatim quotes from the treatise, beginning with descriptions of Demetrias herself. The literary merit of the treatise is thus represented as embodying and perpetuating the memory of a particular woman as well as the ideal life to which she was dedicated. Through a reflexive analogy (of a sort prompted by the verbal correspondences between Aldhelm's work and Jerome's), the chapter on Demetrias and Eustochium presents the addressees of Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* with an earthly, literary futurity through the treatise itself, alongside the promise of heavenly immortality. Thus while Hildelith, Cuthburh, Osburh, and the other women to whom the *De uirginitate* was addressed might not have been physically present to Aldhelm, his work insists on their presence nonetheless. Though their letters are not (so far as we can tell) directly quoted, the knowledge manifested in those letters is represented as shaping Aldhelm's treatise in several particular instances, and likewise as the generative principle that brought into being the text through which they will be known to future readers.

The Ornament of Virginity

The female recipients of Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* are thus imagined as an active presence within the work, their reading informing its contents even as the book itself becomes, in some sense, their avatar. The theory of virginity expounded by the text can thus be plausibly seen as in dialogue with what Aldhelm understood or assumed to be the beliefs held by his audience. Several scholars have argued that the treatise's theology of virginity has been tailored to reflect the cultural standards of these early medieval English nuns. I would go further and suggest that the *De uirginitate*'s conception of virginity as an ornament represents a daring work of cultural translation, one intended to make the virtue coherent with early medieval English habits of thought.

The Evidence of Some Manuscript Witnesses," *Studia Patristica* LXX: *Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Held in Oxford 2011*, vol. 18, *St. Augustine and His Opponents*, ed. Markus Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 619–30, esp. at 623–24.

21 *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 304.

The assumptions underlying Aldhelm's work are intriguing and important because they represent a blend of values. Documents surviving from the sixth and seventh centuries show that importing Christianity to early medieval England required a long campaign of cultural translation in order to make a Mediterranean religion comprehensible as well as desirable to the inhabitants of an island in the North Sea. From Pope Gregory's suggestion that Jewish ritual might help missionaries reimagine pagan festivals in acceptably Christian terms,[22] to Theodore and Hadrian's patient descriptions of polenta, cucumbers, and other mysterious features of Near Eastern life,[23] people with pastoral responsibility worked to bridge overt gaps between the early medieval English and Christian teachings.

Aldhelm was undoubtedly part of that work: from his treatise on Latin meter to his pastoral letter to the Cornish king on the celebration of Easter, he seems to have been deeply engaged in the project of integrating not simply the Roman church, but Latinity itself, into Britain. This, as many have shown, involved adjustments large and small to the needs of an early medieval English audience. To take an example close to the present discussion, Michael Lapidge has pointed out that the tripartite hierarchy of sexual continence that appears in many writers as *uirginitas, uiduitas, coniugium* (virginity, widowhood, marriage) is, in Aldhelm's treatise, represented as *uirginitas, castitas, iugalitas* (virginity, chastity, marriage), potentially opening the middle rank to those who had extricated themselves from marriages to living partners. Lapidge thus suggests that *castitas* was thus a "newly devised category" that "allowed Aldhelm to praise by implication those Barking nuns such as Cuthburg who had spurned their marriages."[24] While women who had renounced living partners to enter the religious life were not unique to early medieval England, Aldhelm indeed seems to have taken initiative in creating a theoretical space for them. Even Venantius Fortunatus—a sixth-century Italian poet who spent some years effectively

22 Flora Spiegel, "The *tabernacula* of Gregory the Great and the Conversion of Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 1–13.

23 See Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 35, 370, and 374.

24 Lapidge, "Introduction to Aldhelm's Prose *De Virginitate*," in *Prose Works*, ed. Lapidge and Herren, 53–7, at 56; for further discussion see Sinéad O'Sullivan, "Aldhelm's *De virginitate*: Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?" *Peritia* 12 (1998): 271–95, at 281–84. Although G. T. Dempsey disagrees that Aldhelm allows a positive space for the formerly married, he does argue that the martial imagery of the treatise is an adaptation to the values of a warrior culture: Dempsey, *Aldhelm of Malmesbury and the Ending of Late Antiquity* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), esp. 65–142.

in service to Radegund, a Thuringian princess who renounced marriage to the Frankish king in order to become an abbess—did not reconfigure inherited categories in the ways Aldhelm did, although he wrote an extended poetic encomium to virginity.[25] Fortunatus's outsider status in Merovingian society may have something to do with this difference.

It seems plausible, then, that Aldhelm's substitution of *castitas* for *uiduitas* represents a form of cultural accommodation. But some of the deeper differences required a more complex effort to reconcile, in part because—built as they were upon some of the most fundamental assumptions of each culture—they were more difficult to recognize. The whole of Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* was part of this labor of cultural translation. Drawing extensively upon patristic theology, it presented early medieval English readers with many examples of orthodox thought on what had become a distinctive cultural practice within Christianity,[26] but refracted through a quite different cultural prism. By describing virginity as an ornament, Aldhelm conceptually alters it in ways that most likely reflect the cultural presuppositions he shared with his early medieval English addressees.

Virginity is imagined as physical adornment taken up by holy people throughout both the prose and verse parts of *De uirginitate*. In the *Carmen*, for instance, the shift from male to female saints is described thus:

> Tempus adest sacras metris vulgare puellas,
> Qualiter integritas virtutum culmen adeptis
> Virginibus dederit nitidas gestare coronas.[27]
>
> (The time has now come to make known in verse the holy girls: how Integrity, summit of the virtues, will have given shining crowns to wear to the virgins who have taken it up.)

In this interestingly reflexive formulation, the virgin saints are both agents and recipients: their "shining crowns" are granted them by virginity, and yet they themselves have "acquired" or "achieved" the virtue by which they

25 On Fortunatus's *De uirginitate* (Poem 8.3) and his intellectual relations with Radegund more generally, see Brian Brennan, "Deathless Marriage and Spiritual Fecundity in Venantius Fortunatus' *De virginitate*," *Traditio* 51 (1996): 73–97.

26 Sinéad O'Sullivan provides an overview of Aldhelm's principal influences in "Patristic Pastiche." For the development of Christian thought on virginity and celibacy more generally, see Brown, *Body and Society*, and Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

27 *Carmen de uirginitate* (hereafter *CdV*), lines 1660–62, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 422.

are visibly adorned (*adepta* is the past participle of *adipiscor*, to achieve by effort). Likewise, Justina is described as adorned when she is martyred along with her virgin spouse:

> Sic geminis felix ornatur virgo triumphis:
> Martira cum roseis rubuit veneranda coronis,
> Candida virgineis florebat femina sertis;
> Cum qua martirii meruit vexilla cruenti
> Crudus athleta Dei Cyprianus fuso cruore
> Sicque poli pariter scandebant sidera sancti,
> Ut praedira necis pariter tormenta tulerunt.[28]
>
> (Thus the fortunate virgin is adorned with twin triumphal honors: while the revered martyr grew red with a rosy crown, the white maiden blossomed with virginal wreaths; with her, Cyprian, the new-recruited athlete of God, earned the banner of bloodstained martyrdom through his outpoured blood, and so together they ascended to the stars of holy heaven, since together they bore the appalling torments of death.)

Here, the boundaries between woman and ornament dissolve as Justina takes on the colors of the crowns associated with her saintly status: she, not the red roses she is imagined wearing, *rubuit* (grew red), just as Justina and not her (lily) wreath of virginity is *candida* (bright white) and *florebat* (flourished; blossomed). Her ornaments transfigure her, visually as well as spiritually. To pass over these descriptions as verbal flourishes is to misunderstand them—and, indeed, to misunderstand Aldhelm's style and his conception of ornament. For him, as for most early medieval people, to adorn something was not to overlay it with something extraneous, but to transform it through a perceptible manifestation of effort. Virginity, conceived as an ornament, is thus the end result of lifelong endeavor, rather than an innate quality preserved by withdrawing from the world. This idea is expressed most clearly in the *Prosa*'s chapter on Martin of Tours, who

> quique pro adepta integritatis corona et fausta virginitatis infula, quas velut regale diadema ac gemmatas crepundiorum lunulas indefessis viribus meta tenus servare satagebat, miris virtutum signis effulsisse memoratur.[29]

28 *CdV*, lines 1876–82, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 430.
29 Chapter XXVI in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 261.

(likewise because of the acquired crown of chastity and the blessed fillet of virginity, which up to the end he labored with unfailing efforts to preserve like a royal diadem and jeweled ornaments of amulets, is said to have shone forth with miraculous signs of virtue.)

This version of virginity is not precisely purity, in the sense of an unstained, inborn state of being which must be defended from the incursions of the world. Instead, it is imagined as something acquired through one's own striving: so Martin's crown is *adepta* (taken up, won), and must be maintained *indefessis uiribus* (with unfailing efforts). But when it has been gained, the crown of virginity has a transfiguring effect, enabling its possessor to perform miracles.

Because it is the external, visible sign of continuous labor, this sort of ornament is also easily imaginable as a trophy: Aldhelm's pervasive descriptions of virginity as the crown or banner gained in an athletic contest thus blend into—and flow from—his depiction of it as an ornament. Thus, the *Carmen* introduces the sisters Chione, Irene, and Agape as winners of a contest in which Virginity and Martyrdom are simultaneously judges and prizes:

Tempore quo rigidos saevi tormenta tyranni
Anthletas Christi cogebant ferre cruenta,
Tres simul illustres sumpserunt forte sorores
Splendida purpureis plectentes serta coronis,
Dum simul integritas candens et passio rubra
Virginibus Christi cumulabant praemia dupla;[30]

(During the era in which the torments of a savage tyrant were trying the stern athletes of Christ with bloody sword, it happened that three illustrious sisters together put on splendid wreaths intertwined with purple crowns, when shining-white Integrity and red Martyrdom awarded a twofold prize to the virgins of Christ.)

Like the other martyrs of the Diocletian persecution, the sisters are *anthletas Christi* who, notably, are described as having actively "put on" (*sumpserunt*) triumphal crowns in the colors of the virtues who go on to award them these "prizes" (*praemia*). Their virtues are imagined as the visible result of their successful efforts—the sign of their triumph, rather than its precondition.

30 *CdV* lines 2194–99, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 443.

In Aldhelm's depiction of it, then, virginity is the beautiful, desirable, transfiguring reward for a strenuously active life. But such a conception proved to be more difficult to reconcile with his patristic sources than perhaps he first realized.

The Look of a Virgin

To imagine virginity as an ornament was to bring it into a complicated relationship with biblical and late antique discourses on the subject of women's appearance. Women's fine clothing, elaborate hairstyles, and jewelry were condemned in the Epistles.[31] Patristic commentators continued this discourse and directed it toward virgins with special intensity. To make such views palatable to their audiences, they generally used one or both of two strategies: characterizing adornment as a burden, or reimagining it as spiritual.

Building on Paul's words in I Corinthians,[32] writers often characterized virginity as a liberation from men's gaze and from the necessity of effort to conform oneself to it, as Ambrose does in *De uirginibus*:

> Vos vero, beatae virgines, quae talia tormenta potius quam ornamenta nescitis, quibus pudor sanctus verecunda suffusus ora et bona castitas est decori, non humanis addictae oculis alieno errore merita vestra pensatis. … Solus formae arbiter petitur deus, qui etiam in corpore minus pulchro diligat animas pulchriores.[33]
>
> (But you, fortunate virgins—who are unfamiliar with such torments in the guise of ornaments, whose modest faces are suffused by a holy shame and for whom proper chastity serves as beauty—you may contemplate your merits not as slaves to human eyes, subject to the error of another. … Only God is required as a judge of beauty, who indeed esteems bodily beauty less than he does more beautiful souls.)

31 The key biblical texts on this topic are I Timothy 2:9–15 (especially v. 9) and I Peter 3:1–6.

32 I Cor 7:34: "et mulier innupta et virgo cogitat quae Domini sunt, ut sit sancta et corpore et spiritu; quae autem nupta est cogitat quae sunt mundi, quomodo placeat uiro" (a woman unmarried and a virgin thinks of the things pertaining to the Lord, that she might be holy in body and spirit; but she who is married thinks of the things pertaining to the world, whereby she might please her husband).

33 *De uirginibus* I.30, ed. Dückers, 150.

Augustine and Pelagius also pursued this line of thought.[34] Yet at the same time, virginity itself was imagined as an outwardly recognizable state, one that, as Ambrose wrote, shaped the entirety of its possessor's demeanor:

> Virginem mihi prius gravitas sua nuntiat pudore obvio, gradu sobrio, vultu modesto, et praenuntia integritatis anteeant signa virtutis. Non satis probabilis virgo est, quae requiritur, quam videtur.[35]
>
> (Her dignity first announces a virgin to me with ready modesty, sober step, modest countenance: and the standards of virtue must precede her as heralds of integrity. She who must be discovered to be a virgin is not as commendable as she who can be seen to be one.)

The blurring of inward qualities with the outward signs of wealth and power (here, a procession complete with heralds and standard-bearers) is characteristic of the second strand of discourse on ornament, in which women were encouraged to imagine virtues allegorically, as concrete adornments. So, for example, Pelagius writes that

> Optima ornamenta sint aurium verba Dei, ad quae sola paratus esse debet auditus virginis eaque pretiosissimis lapidis anteferre. Omnia prorsus membra decorentur operibus sanctitatis totaque virginalis animae pulchritudo, gemmati monilis instar, vario virtutum fulgore resplendeat.[36]
>
> (The best ornaments for the ears are the words of God, for which alone the hearing of a virgin ought to be prepared, and which she should prefer to the most precious of stones. All the limbs, indeed, should be decorated with holy deeds, and the entire beauty of the virginal soul, like a jeweled necklace, should shine with the variegated gleam of virtues.)

Aldhelm took up both elements of this rhetoric; in Chapter XVII of the *Prosa*, he integrates them into an elaborate mirror-image contrast between the married woman burdened by physical adornments, and the virgin elevated by spiritual ones. Though the virgin may outwardly appear "inculta

34 Augustine, *De bono coniugali* and *De sancta uirginitate*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 76 (*De sancta uirginitate* § 11); Pelagius, *Epistula ad Demetriadem/Brief an Demetrias*, ed. and trans. Gisbert Greshake (Freiburg: Herder, 2015), 146 (§ 24).

35 *De uirginibus* III.13, ed. Dückers, 294.

36 Pelagius, *Ad Demetriadem* § 24, ed. Greshake, 146–48.

criniculorum caesarie et neglegenter squalente capillatura" (with uncombed mane of curls and carelessly unwashed hair), nonetheless she "cum palma virginitatis coronam gloriae in capite praefert" (bears, along with the palm of virginity, a crown of glory upon her head).[37] In Aldhelm's version of this patristic topos, the virgin is more truly and permanently adorned than an ordinary woman of the world.

Toward the end of the *Prosa*, however, Aldhelm returns to the problem of women's attire, and from a different angle. No longer apologetic, but polemic, Chapters LV–LVIII attack the very idea of adornment as fundamentally immoral. As usual, Aldhelm draws on a wide range of sources, but the bulk of his material in these chapters is taken from the *De habitu virginum* of Cyprian, whom he cites by name and quotes verbatim. Inverting, at the beginning of Chapter LVI, the appeal to the audience in Chapter XVII, Aldhelm quotes Cyprian's condemnation of adorned virgins as, at best, seeking men's attention, and at worst, prostitutes resembling the Whore of Babylon.[38]

In the second half of Chapter LVI, he takes up Cyprian's theological argument that adornment is misdirected labor: a useless, even blasphemous defacement of an originally perfect Creation. Such rejection of human artifice is characteristic of an important strain in Classical and Christian thought; but it fundamentally conflicts with the conception of virginity as an acquired ornament which has been developed in the course of the *Prosa de uirginitate*. Aldhelm mitigates this conflict rather than confronting or working through it, as he fixates on the example Cyprian gives—the Technicolor sheep God chose not to make—in a way that unbalances the original argument's fundamental premises:

> Numquid ille conditor et creator omnium Deus hirsutas bidentum lanas et setosa vervecum vellera non potuit rubro conquilii sanguine aut cruento bacciniorum fuco inficere seu certe purpureis tincturae muricibus naturaliter colorare, si hoc nostris usibus commodum et utilitati profuturum solerti praescientia providisset … Et quid ille, de quo dictum est: *qui vivit in aeternum, creavit omnia simul,* cum conderet orbem, originaliter creare nequiverit, {quod} nunc mortalium industria stolidis et superfluis adinventionum argumentis addere et amplificare contendit? Unde inclitus idem Cyprianus, Punicorum pontifex, infit:

37 Chapter XVII in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 246.
38 Chapter LVI in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 315.

> *Neque enim Deus coccineas aut purpureas oves fecit aut herbarum sucis et conquiliis tingere et colorare lanas docuit.*[39]
>
> (Could God, that founder and creator of all things, have not imbued the hairy wool of sheep and the bristly fleeces of wethers with the red blood of shellfish or the bloody dye of berries, or indeed certainly have naturally colored them with the purple dye-whelk, had he with his expert prescience foreseen it would be suitable to our needs and to our advantage … ? And was he, of whom it is said "He who lives eternally, created all things likewise" (Ecclesiasticus 18:1), unable to originally create that which now the industry of mortals strives to augment and enlarge upon with stupid and superfluous schemes of ingenuity? Whence that same renowned Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, said: "God did not make scarlet or purple sheep, or teach them to dye and color their wool with the juice of plants or with shellfish.")

Although the sheep seem to prompt him toward his usual style, Aldhelm reins in his paragraph with a quotation that simply restates his opening premise, emphasizing that here, even his imagery is based upon authority. Curiously, though, he repeatedly allows the focus to drift from the Christian world to the pagan one. In the part of the passage omitted here, he supplements his fantasia on sheep with a quotation from Virgil's *Eclogues* (IV.42–5) describing the earthly paradise to come, and concludes the chapter with two lines from the *Aeneid* (IX.614 and 616) ridiculing elaborate dress. Aldhelm introduces this final quotation with the remark:

> Sed quid mirum, si apostolorum oracula et iurisperitorum scita praefatas fribulorum naenias abominetur, cum etiam gentiles gentilibus et paganis pagani quasi ridiculosum subsannantis gannaturae opprobrium legantur improperasse hoc modo cum infami proverbiorum elogio cachinnantes ac cavillantes?[40]
>
> (But what wonder is it if the oracles of the apostles and the decrees of those learned in law abominate the aforementioned trifles of frivolity, when even the gentiles are read to have reproached the gentiles, and

39 *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 316. Cyprian's example is derived in its turn from Tertullian: see *De cultu feminarum* I.viii, in F. Oehler, ed., *Tertulliani quae supersunt omnia* (Leipzig: Weigel, 1853), 1:710, who is quite explicit that such artifice is diabolical.

40 *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 316.

> the pagans the pagans, as with some absurd scorn of laughing mockery, guffawing and making fun with a scornful proverbial maxim in this way?)

With his Virgilian quotations, Aldhelm diffuses the import of Cyprian's remarks and alters their direction. Instead of dwelling on the blasphemy of attempting to rival the Creator, he emphasizes its superfluity and absurdity. From a mortal sin and danger, fine dress has become a joke: a joke, moreover, directed finally against the "gentilibus et paganis" (gentiles and pagans). Though evidently believing the issue was important enough to require an extended discussion, Aldhelm complicates his rhetoric about artifice to an extraordinary degree. Through his extensive reliance on Cyprian's direct words, he blurs his own authorial ethos in a way that suggests an inability or unwillingness to claim responsibility for the words himself; and his use of Virgilian quotations entangles the matter further by adding pagan speakers and audiences to the mix and lightening the tone.

Ultimately, Aldhelm allows his account of the problem of women's adornment to remain self-contradictory. He does not concede the wrongness, uselessness, or futility of artifice in general, as is made clear by a comparison he makes in his final chapter, LX:

> Hactenus interea formosae virginitatis speciem et venustum pudicitiae vultum componens diversis virtutum coloribus quasi fucorum floribus depinxi, quemammodum solent nobilium artifices imaginum et regalium personarum pictores deauratis petalis toracidas ornare et pulcherrima membrorum liniamenta fabrefactis cultibus decorare.[41]

> (So, thus far I have depicted the beauty of lovely virginity and the fair countenance of chastity, blending the varied colors of virtues like the tints of flowers, just as artificers of the images of noblemen and painters of royal personages are accustomed to adorn busts with gold leaf and to decorate the outstandingly beautiful lineaments of forms with skillful care.)

At no point does he deprecate the skill or purpose of the artists of his simile (although, with an elaborate flourish of humility, he does go on to describe the artists themselves as far less beautiful than their subjects). Nor, in fact, does he concede the futility of adorning the body. The central biblical exemplum of the chapters on women's attire is Judith, described in Chapter LVII: Aldhelm connects her success in killing the Assyrian general

41 *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 321–22.

to her adornment of herself. In his account, ornaments give the body a power it would otherwise lack, a power that can be used destructively. While Judith's example coheres with his overall vision of virginity as an acquired ornament, the conflict with Cyprian's total rejection of adornment quoted in the preceding chapter is allowed to remain unresolved.

Virginity as Weapon

We cannot, of course, know how Aldhelm's addressees reacted to the discourse on adornment presented in Chapters LV–LVIII of the *Prosa*—or whether such reactions had anything to do with Aldhelm's total excision of this material when he composed the companion *Carmen de uirginitate*. All that can be said is that he did not versify these chapters, but instead ended his poem with a newly composed allegorical war between Virginity and the eight Vices, somewhat on the model of Prudentius's *Psychomachia*.[42] The replacement of a polemic on women's attire with a series of battle scenes seems, at first glance, wholly arbitrary; but some of Aldhelm's reading may have helped him (and perhaps his audience) associate the two. Pelagius, in particular, concludes his discussion of spiritualized adornment with this connection:

> Et haec tibi ornamenta, quae dixi, etiam munimenta sunt maxima. Ipsa te ornare Domino et contra diabolum armare possunt qui per leve interdum quodcumque vitium ad animam ingreditur, et si virtutum propugnacula non resistant, nostro nos pellit loco et continuo de hoste fit dominus.[43]
>
> (And these ornaments which I have described are for you likewise the greatest fortifications. These very things can adorn you for the Lord and arm you against the Devil, who occasionally makes a sortie against the soul through some small vice, and if the garrison of virtues does not resist, expels us from our own stronghold and instead of a continual enemy becomes a master.)

Whether inspired by earlier treatises like Pelagius's or not, the conclusion of Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate* represents a major departure from the

42 On Aldhelm's knowledge of Prudentius's poem, see Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 171–8.

43 *Ad Demetriadem*, ed. Greshake, § 24, 148.

conclusion to the *Prosa*. This perhaps appears most clearly in the treatment of the biblical Judith. As mentioned above, she appeared in Chapter LVII of the *Prosa* as an example of the peril an adorned woman presented to men, even when she is guided by God. But in the *Carmen*, Judith represents the triumph of chastity over lust:

> Quid referam Iudith generosa stirpe creatam
> Prostibulum regis temnentem corpore puro
> Et stuprum sceleris calcantem corde profanum?
> Civibus idcirco mortis discrimina passis
> Casta cruentatum gestavit bulga tropeum
> Servans integrum devota mente pudorem.[44]
>
> (What shall I say of Judith, born to a noble lineage, with a pure body scorning a king's whoredom, and trampling in her heart the profane fornication of sin? For which reason the chaste woman brought back a bloody trophy in a bag to citizens in mortal peril, preserving unimpaired modesty in her devout mind.)

The emphasis on Judith's nobility, and the power of a chastity that is destructive to her enemies and protective of her and her fellow-citizens, aligns her with the virgin martyrs rather than the more ambiguous Old Testament figure in the latter chapters of the *Prosa*.[45] She also serves to balance the immediately preceding example of Joseph, who preserved his chastity against the advances of Potiphar's wife. The conclusion to the *Carmen*, indeed, seems scrupulously gender-balanced in its discussion of resistance to vice, oscillating between feminine-gendered terms for its imagined addressees (e.g., *virgo*, 2586), masculine-gendered (e.g., *bellator* and *miles,* 2648 and 2654), and those like *animae* or *mentes* which imply no biological sex (e.g., 2641–2). Unlike the final chapters of the *Prosa*, the *Carmen*'s psychomachia does not imply that women are uniquely vulnerable to particular sins. Rather, through examples like Judith as well as its vision of Virginity as an armed woman, this new passage sustains the athletic and martial imagery developed throughout the text's hagiographical narratives.

44 *CdV* lines 2560–65, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, 457.

45 As a chaste widow, Judith would also represent a good example of Aldhelm's reconfigured middle category of *castitas* (discussed above, p. 181–82), which seems to have encompassed all chaste women who were no longer physically virgins.

The final image of warfare in the *Carmen* is not precisely spiritual, however, but literary. In the course of a request for intercessory prayers, the addressees are exhorted to defend the *De uirginitate* against critics:

> Sed vos, virgineis comit quas infula sertis,
> Hoc opus adversus querulos defendite scurras.[46]
>
> (But you, O women whom the fillet adorns with virginal garlands, defend this work against carping slanders.)

The image of adornment returns as part of this call to arms to an emphatically feminine audience (*vos … quas*), who—especially following the psychomachia episode—could be presumed to understand that the *virgineae … sertae* (virginal wreaths) were not merely the insignia, but the constituents, of their martial power. After imagining the various grammatical criticisms that could be levelled against the work (and against which the addressees would presumably need to protect it by commentary or correction) the passage develops into an allegory of the writer-warrior:

> Talia sed timidus dictator tela pavescat,
> Qui propriis numquam confidit belliger armis
> Cassida nec capiti discit praetendere metri
> Nec spinam lorica noscit defendere prosae;
> Armet sed dextram capulus ceu parma sinistram
> Cruraque non careant ocreis nec femina ferro
> Neu timeat scriptor terrentis ludicra linguae![47]
>
> (But the fearful author fears such missiles [of criticism], who never trusts in his own weapons as a warrior, nor learns to cover his head with the helm of meter or to defend his back with the mail-shirt of prose; but let the hilt arm the right hand, and the shield the left, and let not the shins lack for greaves or the thighs a sword, nor let the writer fear the foolishness of a scathing tongue!)

Here, as verbal skill is envisioned as armaments for the physical body, the text presents a startling convergence in line 2854. The Latin for "thigh," *femur*, has two possible plural forms (*femora* and *femina*): Aldhelm has chosen

46 *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, lines 2832–33, 468.
47 *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Ehwald, lines 2849–55, 469.

the less-common one, which is identical to the Latin word for "woman." The ambiguity opens up space for the female addressees to be imagined as co-warriors—and fellow-authors. If the chapter on Eustochium and Demetrias in the *Prosa* had promised them immortality through a treatise dedicated to them, this final passage hints that they might also create a war memorial of their own.

The substantial changes in content that we see in the final portion of the *Carmen de uirginitate*, then, solve a problem that the *Prosa* had created for itself by adapting Cyprian's polemic against adornment. In the verse, the concept of virginity as an ornament acquired by active labor is never in conflict with the text; rather, the recurrent imagery of the virtue as a jewel, wreath, or trophy is extended naturally into the weapon with which virginity wins and is won. Nor are women's bodies envisioned as a danger or impediment to such a life of virtue.

Was the excision of the discourse on women's clothing, and the replacement of it with a battle scene, a response to the reactions of the addressees whose knowledge and reading practices formed so important a part of Aldhelm's treatise? Or was it perhaps a recognition of the intellectual problem that he had created for himself in the later chapters of the *Prosa*? We can continue to hope for the discovery of a letter or two to settle such questions. In the meantime, however, the *De uirginitate* as it survives does give us some glimpses into the thought of educated early medieval English women of the late seventh century. As we have seen, the *De uirginitate* displays some clear expectations of how, as well as what, Aldhelm's addressees would have read. It also demonstrates a striking conception of virginity as an acquired ornament that conflicted, in part, with late antique thought from the Mediterranean, but which proved more compatible with the kind of martial imagery loved by Old English poets as well as early Christian Latin writers.[48] Taken as a whole, Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* shows that women could be imagined—and perhaps imagined themselves—as warriors for virtue as well as discerning readers, and as artisans fully engaged in the construction of their moral selves.

48 The appeal of this idea was not limited to women—Aldhelm's *opus geminatum* was popular with early medieval English men as well, and indeed may have helped his male readers work through ideas about gender adapted to their lives as early medieval Christians. For a discussion of Judith in *CdV* as a role-model for tenth-century English clerics, see Rebecca Stephenson, "Judith as Spiritual Warrior." (My thanks to Dr Stephenson for letting me read her article prior to publication.)

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7 Chaste Bodies and Untimely Virgins

Sexuality, Temporality, and Bede's Æthelthryth

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Abstract

Bede's double inscription of Aethelthryth in both narrative and hymn interrupts the temporal linearity of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* just as her adamant refusal of dynastic reproduction disrupts and threatens the futurity of the Northumbrian royal line. Her militant choice of virginity over marriage and of eternity over worldly time provides a female model for the male community to whom and for whom Bede writes. Bede dismantles binary gender as time-bound, but he does so by appropriating women's lived experience and literary expression. As both historical subject and devotional object, Aethelthryth thus constitutes a pivotal but problematic figure in Bede's theoretical engagement with the entanglement of temporality, sexuality, and gender that underwrites monastic identity, male and female, in early medieval England.

Keywords: Bede; Aethelthryth; Sexuality; Virginity; and Temporality

Æthelthryth of Ely ranks among the most well-known saints of early medieval England. Yet more often than not modern interrogation of her sanctity focuses on her story as retold by Ælfric rather than as presented in its first extant textualization—and Ælfric's source—the *Historica Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* of the Venerable Bede. As Catherine Cubitt notes, Ælfric's *Life of Æthelthryth* (alongside his lives of other earlier virgin martyrs like Agatha and Lucy) serves the purposes of the Monastic Reform movement, offering a homiletic model for male readers far different from the original female congregation that first commemorated her.[1] Bede's Æthelthryth, while

1 Catherine Cubitt, "Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Gender and History* 12 (2000):1–32. See also Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late*

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equally appropriated by a male monastic reader/writer and rewritten to suit his ideological and textual ambitions, has received less critical attention.[2]

It is the purpose of this essay, therefore, to focus attention on Bede's (re)writing of Æthelthryth into the history of Northumbria—and indeed into the regnal history of a king with particular connections to Bede's home monastery of Wearmouth/Jarrow—Book IV, Chapter 19 of the *Historia*. It will seek to interrogate the Æthelthryth who appears in the *Historia* not only as historical subject—in both secular dynastic and monastic historical narrative—but also, indeed particularly, as a devotional object in Bede's hymn in her honor. That interpolated text, comprising the whole of Chapter 20, situates her in an alternative (and markedly female) spiritual lineage descending from the Virgin Mary and the Roman virgin martyrs.

This double rewriting makes Æthelthryth a pivotal figure in Bede's text, a figure who speaks (back) to as well as for Bede's own identity as monk, as historian and exegete, and as a poet within monastic community. Her story and the accompanying hymn in her honor together constitute, indeed, Bede's most extended and explicit discussion of virginity, inherently engaging with the nature of (human) dynastic history and its conflicted relationship with (divine) eternity. Together the prose narrative and the hymn radically problematize both virginity and history, and create a particularly telling epistemological and ontological connection between sexuality and temporality. Granted, the works of the Venerable Bede may not immediately suggest themselves as a site for the exploration and interrogation of questions about the entanglement of temporality with gender and sexuality, especially as raised by feminist and queer theorists like Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Freeman, Lee Edelman, and Victoria Browne.[3] As this essay will argue, however, in Bede's writings, time and its inscription in history are intricately and intimately tied to bodies, especially the chaste bodies of monastic subjects like Æthelthryth—as well as Bede himself.

Anglo-Saxon England (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), esp. 133–53; Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), esp. 125–32; and Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), esp. 65–129.

2 But see, significantly, Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 19–63.

3 See especially Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004) and A. J. Kabir, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2005); Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities and Queer Histories* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004); and Browne, *Feminism, Time and Nonlinear History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

Theorizing Virginal Time

In Bede's writings, and most especially in the double *Life of Æthelthryth*, the entanglement of temporality, gender, and sexuality reveals contradictions that inherently problematize monastic identity in early medieval England. By rejecting earthly propagation monastic men and women potentially disrupt hegemonic discourses of futurity and dynastic succession. By living simultaneously in both secular and sacred time, they are simultaneously part of and removed from history and time.

Bede's interest in temporality—in the reckoning of time, in history, and in the end of time and its eternal aftermath—is explicit throughout his writings. His *De temporibus*, along with the associated *De natura rerum*, and the *Expositio Apocalypseos* likely represent some of his earliest compositions (all circa 708).[4] Both the *De temporibus* and the later, more thorough and detailed *De temporum ratione* conclude with extensive world-historical chronicles extending from Adam to the "present day" and looking forward to the ultimate end of time and history. The *Chronica minora* appended to the *De temporibus* provides a very brief summary of events in biblical, Roman, and Church history through the year 705. The First Age extends from Adam through Noah and is measured in life spans and lineages. The Second takes the line of Noah up to the time of Abraham, and the Third from Abraham to David. At this point, gentile as well as Hebrew rulers and historical events begin to constitute the matter of history. The Fourth Age takes the Hebrew people from David to the Babylonian Captivity, and the Fifth from then until the Incarnation. The on-going Sixth—*annus Domini*—and its history is dominated by Roman and Church history, by the succession of emperors and popes. Bede's refutation of a popular belief that the "present" age would end around the year 800 resulted in his being accused of heresy—charges he was at pains to deny and against which he defended himself in his *Epistola ad Pleguiniam*.[5] And as Faith Wallis argues,

4 Peter Darby and Faith Wallis, "Introduction: The Many Futures of Bede," in Peter Darby and Faith Wallis, eds., *Bede and the Future* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2014), 1–21, see 7 for chronology. For Bede's engagement with temporalities throughout his writings, see Máirin MacCarron, *Bede and Time: Computus, Theology and History in the Early Medieval World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

5 The 800 date is based on a reading of each age as lasting exactly 1,000 years. Bede's ages vary in length, being determined and defined by significant scriptural "turning point" rather than precise duration. See Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012). As Alan Thacker argues ("Why did Heresy Matter to Bede? Present and Future Contexts" in *Bede and the Future*, 47–66) this accusation would continue to color Bede's future exegetical and historical works.

Bede's first work of exegesis, his commentary on the Book of Revelations was similarly directed toward both proving his orthodoxy and the acuity and accuracy of his temporal reckoning.[6] Bede revisits the framework of history in the updated and more expansive *Chronica majora* appended to the later *De temporum ratione*. Exposition in that work extends to discussion of future times: it critiques predictions and beliefs about the remainder of the Sixth Age and the Second Coming and adds entries on the overcoming of heresies to its list of world-historical events. It also comments on the "eternal Sabbath" of the Seventh Age, into which each soul enters upon earthly death, and defines an Eighth "Age" beyond the created, earthly world, and therefore inherently beyond secular time.

More local narrative historical accounts, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, the *Historia Abbatum Monasterii in Wiremutha et Gyruum*, and other hagiographical texts, similarly witness Bede's interest in temporality. Nor was this by any means merely an abstract or theoretical issue. The extensive discussion of the Easter Controversy and the Synod of Whitby in the former details especially the differences between Roman and Celtic computistical formulas, thereby revealing time and its measurement to be an important component of contemporary monastic culture.[7] The marking and correct celebration of liturgical seasons and feasts were essential to the practices that disciplined and defined life in foundations like Wearmouth/Jarrow. As Roy Liuzza has noted, for Bede and his fellow monks time as both experienced and measured "was emphatically connected to one's physical situation in a particular place"—and "temporality depended on corporality."[8] More generally, as Bede explains in the *De temporam ratione*, the nature of the seasons aligns with the elements and humors of the human body: winter, for example, is cold and wet, as is water, and as are the phlegmatic humors.[9]

Bede's engagement in his writings with gender and sexuality is less direct and consequently perhaps less immediately apparent. Certainly, a concern with sexuality as lived out in his contemporary England—and especially its regulation—motivates his inclusion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Pope

6 Faith Wallis, "Why did Bede Write a Commentary on Revelation?" in *Bede and the Future*, 23–45, at 23.

7 *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), hereafter abbreviated EH, III.5.

8 R. M. Liuzza, "The Sense of Time in Anglo-Saxon England," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 89, no. 2 (2012–13): 131–53, here 134.

9 *De temporum ratione*, Chapter 35. See also Liuzza, 135–36. One may perhaps wonder, too, whether Bede's easier acceptance of the different lengths of world-historical ages is at all based in his experience of the more widely variant lengths of summer and winter days.

Gregory's answers to Augustine of Canterbury's enquiries on lawful marriage and bodily purity. Inclusion of these questions, as Clare Lees argues, "reminds us that Christianity brings a religion not only of the book but also of the body" and that "that body is sexually differentiated and gendered."[10] And if regulation of the gendered body, especially in regard to sexual behaviors, is fundamental to early medieval Christianity, the subsequent development and conversion of the English kingdoms is facilitated by marriages and alliances. Thus, however seemingly under-theorized sexuality may be in Bede's works (especially in comparison with his detailed computistical texts), one specific aspect of sexuality—heterosexuality within legitimate marriage—does recur throughout the *Historia*. So, too, references to the chastity and/or virginity of saintly models of faith and life reveal that aspect of sexuality to be integral to monastic life in particular, and to the spiritual and cultural capital of Christian English kingdoms more generally. While it is equally a requirement of monks and nuns—the oblation of elite children (including Bede himself) implies male as well as female virginity—chastity nevertheless arises as an issue more directly and explicitly when the monastic subject in question is female.

Not that marital status does not enter into discussion of male piety. The East Saxon Sebbi, for instance, abdicates and retires to a monastery only after obtaining his wife's consent and well after producing and raising two sons, Sighard and Swefred, to take his place.[11] Yet when King Sigebert of East Anglia abandons his earthly rule for life in a monastery, his conversion is problematic because he refuses to bear arms against Penda of Mercia's invading pagan army, not because of his marital status or need to produce an heir.[12] No male oblates are explicitly named in the *Historia*: no male model is thus cited for Bede's own experience of being raised in male monastic community at Wearmouth/Jarrow. On the other hand, numerous royal women—Earcongota, daughter of Earconbert of Kent, for example, and Ethelburga and Saethryd, daughter and step-daughter of Anna of East Anglia, all sent to Gaulish convents, as well as Aelffled, daughter of Oswy of Northumbria, vowed from birth to Whitby—are singled out for having been dedicated as children to monasteries and raised in virginity.[13] Bede

10 EH I.27. Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, 138.

11 EH IV.11.

12 EH III.18. This contradiction between martial masculinity and Christian abstention from arms may also play out in a particularly marked form in the conversion story of the pagan priest Coifi, EH II.14.

13 EH III.8. On the variant strategies by which elite families allied themselves with God and His Church in the conversion period, see Clare Stancliffe, "Kings Who Opted Out," *Ideal and*

names the women of Barking Abbey generically *virginum Deo dedicatrum* and *consecratis Christo virginibus* (virgins devoted to God and consecrated to Christ) as well as *famularum Christi* (Christ's female servants) and *ancellis Dei* (handmaids of God) in ways that attribute a significant gendered difference to female monasticism."[14]

Chastity—if not virginity in its most narrow form—is equally a defining characteristic of many if not most of the powerful and influential abbesses who figure in the *Historia*—women who converted to monastic life as adults and became religious "mothers" after a career as secular mothers (or at least wives), exemplified by Hild of Whitby. And the communities these women, whether early oblates or later converts, ruled were likely similarly diverse. Further, the paradoxical distinction and elision of difference between virginity and chastity foregrounds the sexuality of women. That foregrounding (as Clare Lees and Gillian Overing argue in regard to Aldhelm's problematic inclusion of widows and divorced wives as virgins in his *De Virginitate*) troubles early medieval English religious discourse and its inscription of women's bodies and subjectivities. For Aldhelm, in his *Prosa* and the *Carmen de Virginitate*, virginity and the associated rejection of sexual reproduction radically redefines natural and unnatural sexuality. Subsequently, consequently, the collision of secular and sacred sexualities results—especially in the case of the female virgins he catalogues—in gruesome and extravagant martyrdoms. As Lees and Overing observe, this violence toward female bodies profoundly troubles a text ostensibly directed to a female audience, the women of Hildilith's Barking, who would have read his words in very physical, sexed, and gendered bodies of their own. Aldhelm attempts to (re)construct his model readers in the text, exposing and allegorizing the sexualized and brutalized bodies of his martyrs—and virgin bodies more generally—into signs that transform them into symbolic commodities.[15] Much less theoretical (as well as less extensive) than Aldhelm's exploration of the topic, the *Historia* enacts a similar shift in the meaning of genealogy, dynasty, and (re)production. But with a difference: for Bede, virginity forces engagement with eternity as beyond linear, secular time and human history.

Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald A. Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 154–76.

14 EH IV.7–9.

15 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 110–24. See also Carol Braun Pasternack, "The Sexual Practices of Virginity and Chastity in Aldhelm's *De virginitate*," *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack and Lisa M. C. Weston (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 93–120.

Æthelthryth's Virginity and Disruption of Dynastic Temporality

In Book Four, Chapter 19 of Bede's *Historia* we read that King Ecgfrith of Northumbria "accepit … coniugem nomine Aedilthrydam, filiam Anna regis Orientalium Anglorum … quam et alter ante illum vir habuerat uxorem, princeps uidilicit Australium Gyruiorum uocabulo Tondberct. Sed illo post modi cum temporis, ex quo eam accepit, defuncto, data est redi praefato" (married a wife named Aedilthryda (Æthelthryth), the daughter of Anna, king of the East Angles. … [S]he had previously been married to an ealdorman of the South Gyrwe, named Tondberht. But he died shortly after the marriage and on his death she was given to King Ecgfrith).[16] Such a marital career seems typical enough for an elite English woman of the late seventh century, even a future abbess like her sister Seaxburh, wife to Eorcenbert of Kent and mother to virgin oblate Earcongota. Æthelthryth's identity is initially as Anna's daughter, and then as first Tondberct's and later Ecgfrith's wife. Her body constitutes a commodity traded among nascent kingdoms in order to facilitate diplomatic alliances and (potentially) to ensure the continuity of dynastic lines. Indeed, the grammar of the passage renders Æthelthryth the object of others' actions: Ecgfrith *acceptit* her as *coniugum* just as Tondberht *habuerat* her as *uxorem*. Even as a grammatical subject she is initially paired with the passive: *data est*. Only when she ultimately disrupts any expectation of silent, passive compliance with secular roles does she become the active grammatical subject of her own narrative. Despite two marriages (we are told) she "perpetua tamen mansit virginitais integritate gloriosa" (still preserved the glory of perfect virginity)—the first time she figures in the active voice—and after twelve years her union with Ecgfrith remained unconsummated despite the king's promising Bishop Wilfrid estates and money if the churchman could persuade the reluctant bride to sleep with her husband.

Bede's Æthelthryth thus disrupts history—and the *Historia*—by resisting the trade on which the culture depends for its temporal and political continuity.[17] Her exemplary, ideal virginity, that is, like that of all sanctified

16 Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds. and trans, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), Bk 4, 19, p. 390.

17 Use of the metaphoric "trade" here draws, of course, upon Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Raya R. Reitor (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210; and Karen Newman's "Directing Traffic: Subjects, Objects, and the Politics of Exchange," *Differences* 2 (1990): 41–54. For the role of elite early English women as peaceweavers and guarantors of dynastic succession, see Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens:

virgins, male and female, threatens the end of history by denying procreation.[18] And nothing signals the anxiety this produces in the culture and in the text so much as Bede's attempts discursively to "save" virginity for Northumbrian as well as Christian hegemony.

In a classic virgin martyr narrative—one set in the days of the early Church, like those that constitute many of Aldhelm's stories and those on which Æthelthryth may well have modeled her stalwart virginity—her story of resistance to (hetero)sexuality would take a violent turn. But these events happened within Bede's lifetime (albeit his early childhood) and their occurrence, let alone their retelling, recontextualization, and re-historicization, in a Christian Northumbria requires a different narrative trajectory. Moreover, Ecgfrith appears frequently in Bede's *Historia* as a supporter and sponsor of the Northumbrian Church. His reign sees the ecclesiastical councils of Hertford and Hatfield and the Synod of Twyford. He was a strong supporter and ally of both Saint Cuthbert and Benedict Biscop—and he was, perhaps even more significantly, a donor and patron of the latter's foundation and consequent expansion of Wearmouth/Jarrow.

In line with such a narrative back story, therefore, Ecgfrith eventually allows Æthelthryth to follow her desire "ut saeculi curas relinquere atque in monasterio tantum uero regi Christo seruire" (to relinquish the affairs of this world and to serve Christ, the only True King, in a monastery). Preserving something of secular kinship, he sends her to be trained under his aunt Æbbe at Coldingham (in Northumbria). A year later, however, she returns to her ancestral East Anglia to build her own monastery at Ely and to become, "uirginum Deo deuotarum perplurium mater virgo et exemplis uitae caelestis esse coepit et monitis" (by the example of her heavenly life and teaching, the virgin mother of many virgins dedicated to God), a situation that both repudiates and fulfills the demands of secular dynastic

University of Georgia Press, 1983). For the way these roles could be translated into the foundation and rule of monastic houses, see Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003).

18 Compare Lee Edelson's rejection in *No Future* of "reproductive futurity" and modern heteronormative culture's glorification of the child as a guarantor of what José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) terms "straight time" in his argument for a creative and contrary, queer appropriation of the past to imagine and incite a desired future. Neither Edelman nor Muñoz addresses medieval texts. Nevertheless, their theoretical perspectives offer usefully provocative readings of phenomena like virginity. Aldhelm's female virgins, for example, by spurning earthly sexuality rhetorically naturalize what is initially defined as (in earthly terms) unnatural. For a similar reading of Aelfric's virgin saints, including Æthelthryth, see Rhonda L. McDaniel, *The Third Gender and Aelfric's Lives of Saints* (Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), esp. 193–99.

futurity and simultaneously creates a powerful model of a different kind of cultural (re)production.

After seven years as abbess Æthelthryth dies. In fact, she dies twice—or at least in Bede's narrative two somewhat disparate accounts of her death and its meaning coalesce in one deathbed scene. In the first she explicitly dies of the plague—a secondary wave of the Justinian Plague—that swept through England in the last years of the seventh century, decimating many monasteries including Bede's own Wearmouth/Jarrow. According to references elsewhere in the *Historia*, this plague first appeared in Kent during the summer of 664, soon after the May 1 solar eclipse. Sometime between 666 and 675 it struck Barking in Essex. Moving slowly but inexorably northwards in recurrent waves over the next two decades, it probably reached Ely sometime in 679 or 680.[19] In 686 it struck Wearmouth and Jarrow, where it dispatched all the choir monks except Abbot Ceolfrith and a small boy. Even if Bede was not himself this boy (as subsequent legend would have it) he would, as a novice of some thirteen to fifteen years old, have experienced the trauma of Abbot Eosterwine's death at Wearmouth in March. That the plague continued to spread actively over winter suggests that what originally arrived in Britain as the bubonic plague and was transmitted via fleas probably became, as it spread, pneumonic plague, passed from human victim to human victim through the air and intimate contact. If so, the scene of the dying Eosterwine giving each of his Wearmouth brethren the kiss of peace takes on a chilling, lethal irony.[20]

In any event, the plague represents a calamity that Æthelthryth may have prophesied: "sunt etiam qui decant, quia per prophetiae spiritum et pestilentiam, qua ipsa esset moritura, praedixerit, et numerum quoque eorum qui de suo monasterio hac essent de mundo rapiendi palam cunctis praesentibus intimauerit" (some say that she possessed the spirit of prophecy, and that in the presence of all the community, she not only foretold the plague that was to cause her death, but also the number who would die of it in the convent).[21] In Aldhelm's catalogue of virgins, visions are especially associated with Daniel and other (male) Old Testament prophets, and (of course) with John the Evangelist as the author of the Book of Revelations. Indeed, for his male virgins prophecy is at least as much a characteristic

19 EH III.27 and IV.708

20 *Historia Abbatum* in *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, vol. 4, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 364–87, here 371–72. On the course and nature of the plague, see J. R. Maddicott, "Plague in Seventh-Century England," *Past & Present* 156 (1997): 7–54.

21 EH IV.19

(and consequence) of virginity as the gruesome and often sexualized martyrdoms suffered by his female saints. In Bede's *Historia* both male and female monastics enjoy the gifts of prophecy and visions. And perhaps because virginity, in its rejection of dynastic reproduction and secular futurity, is associated with non-linear, unnatural temporality, the visions Bede recounts most often mark the transcendence of earthly, natural life and time. A miraculous light identifies the site in which the plague-stricken nuns should be buried, for example, and thereby establishes the sanctity of Ethelburga's Barking. Both Ethelburga's death and that of Hild of Whitby are announced in the visionary experiences of their "daughters". In East Anglia the Irish pilgrim monk Fursey also enjoyed the gift of prophecy and experienced a noteworthy vision of Heaven and Hell. The Northumbrian Dryhthelm's similar vision prompts his conversion and entrance into the community at Melrose.[22]

In the second account of Æthelthryth's death, however, the one more explicitly foregrounded in Bede's narrative, mortality results from a tumor on her neck—perhaps literally a plague bubo[23]—interpreted more allegorically. Its punitive reminder (and rebuke) of earlier vanity and the necklaces she once wore as an earthly queen constitutes a fitting conclusion to her presentation as a model of asceticism and bodily privation. The scar of that literal and metaphorical "tumor" marks both her body and her consequent legend. Sixteen years later (in 692 or 693) her sister and successor as abbess Seaxburh—a widowed wife and mother who, unlike her sister, did fulfill her royal dynastic duties before retiring to a monastery—has Æthelthryth's body disinterred and translated into a new tomb. At this time "corpus sacrae uirginis ac sponsae Christi" (the body of the holy virgin and bride of Christ) is found "incorruptum inuentum est, ac si eodem die fuisset defuncta siue humo condita" (as uncorrupt as if she had died and been buried that very day). The only difference, a doctor named Cynefrith testifies, is that what had been a gaping wound in her throat (the mark of his evidently less than completely successful excision of the tumor) has healed to only the slightest of scars. Refocusing on the saint's corporality, on her physical remains, this narrative replaces, idealizes, and generalizes the earlier story of the living woman—and renders her (or her body) once more an object of cultural capital. As in all translation accounts, as that body-become-relic is transferred into a new tomb-shrine, the saint's charisma becomes that

22 For the importance of visions in early medieval England, see A. J. Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

23 Maddicott, "Plague in Seventh-Century England," 21.

of her surviving community. Narrative focus is thus shared between the miraculous body and those who experience such miracle(s) of sanctity. Bridging the generational divide, this account reinforces the continuity of the community, the succession of this virgin mother of many virgin daughters. Æthelthryth's body did not guarantee the Northumbrian secular dynasty, then, but it does ultimately support the monastic dynasty of Ely—and perhaps also those of Northumbrian houses like Wearmouth/Jarrow and early medieval English Christianity more generally.

But this double death, especially in conjunction with Æthelthryth's interruption of Northumbrian history, also foregrounds the role gender plays in Bede's compilation and overwriting of stories like hers. The chronicles that accompany the *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione* are drawn from the very similar (and similarly systematic) chronicle that makes up part of Book V of Isidore's *Etymologies*, chronologically neat lists of lineages and rulers synthesized from biblical, Roman and Christian sources. By contrast, in writing his *Historia,* Bede gathered together source texts of a wide variety of genres acquired from an extensive network of contemporary correspondents as well as derived from previous historians and literary models. In the *Historia*'s prologue he cites and thanks especially Albinus, Nothelm, Daniel, Esi, Cynibert, and the monks of Lastingham and Lindisfarne.[24] He does not, it should be noted, acknowledge any women among his informants, even when he chronicles communities ruled by abbesses—and even when he includes in his narrative texts that probably originated in those communities.

Yet although he rarely notes the literacy, let alone the literary production, of these women explicitly, Bede was well aware that monastic women (as well as men) read and even wrote. And he engaged with these women. His *Expositio* of the Canticle of Habbakuk, for example, is explicitly directed to an anonymous nun of an unnamed Northumbrian house. As Benedicta Ward notes, it is significant that Bede expects her to be able to read and understand the complexities and subtleties of his argument.[25] In the *Historia,*

24 On Bede's network of correspondents and the effect and influence of such networks on his development as a poet, see Emily Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. 183–97.

25 "'To My Dearest Sister': Bede and the Educated Woman," in *Women, The Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St, Hilda's Conference*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 105–11. For more generalized studies of women's literacy during this period, see also Joan Nicholson, "*Feminae Gloriosae*: Women in the Age of Bede, *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 15–29; Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992); Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, "Women and the Origins of English Literature," *History of British Women's Writing 700–1500*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 31–40; and

his account of Hild—and possibly Caedmon and the Synod of Whitby—may have come from that community, even as his version of the *Life of Saint Gregory*, too, seems to owe much to an extant anonymous Whitby *vita*.[26] He does explicitly cite a particular *libellus* (most likely from Hildilith's Barking) as the source for his lives of the East Saxon Ethelburga and King Sebbi.[27] With the exception of that Barking *libellus*, however, the archive of collected and interpolated texts that is the *Historia* rarely admits what it owes to female sources. As for Æthelthryth specifically, Virginia Blanton and Diane Watt have argued, Bede's most likely source of information would have been the women of Ely, perhaps in the form of a no longer extant saint's life.[28] Yet if the *Historia* does appropriate such a text—as it appropriates texts from other women's communities—it does so by overwriting it, by excluding or diminishing female agency and experience, and by foregrounding the evidence and agency of singular, named and significantly male witnesses like Cynifrith and Wilfrid over the plural and communal witness of the corporate female community.[29]

Thus, for example, Æthelthryth's prophetic gift is diminished in Bede's version: the vagueness of "many say" casts doubt even as it introduces the

Diane Watt, "The Earliest Women's Writing? Anglo-Saxon Literary Cultures and Communities," *Women's Writing* 20 (2013): 537–54, and "Literature in Pieces: Female Sanctity and the Relics of Women's Writing," *Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature,* ed. Clare A. Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 357–80.

26 Peter Hunter Blair, "Whitby as a Centre of Learning in the Seventh Century," *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday,* ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3–32; Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 253–58 and 261–70; and J. E. Cross, "A Lost Life of Hilda of Whitby: the Evidence of the Old English *Martyrology*," *Early Middle Ages Acta* 6 (1979): 21–43.

27 On literary culture at Barking, most famously the community to which Aldhelm directed his *De Virginitate*, see Diane Watt, "Lost Books: Abbess Hildelith and the Literary Culture of Barking Abbey," *Philological Quarterly* 91 (2012): 1–21; Stephanie Hollis, "Barking's Monastic School, Late Seventh to Twelfth Century: History, Saint-Making and Literary Culture," *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture: Authorship and Authority in a Female Community*, ed. Jennifer N. Brown and Donna Alfano Bussell (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press/Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 33–55; and Lisa M. C. Weston "The Saint-Maker and the Saint: Hildelith Creates Ethelburga," *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 56–72.

28 Virginia Blanton, *Signs of devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England 695–1615* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), esp. 31–56; and Diane Watt, "The Earliest Women's Writing?" 540–42.

29 On overwriting of women's narratives, see Diane Watt, "Lost Books"; Lisa M. C. Weston, "*Sanctimoniales cum Sanctimoniale*: Particular Friendships and Female Community in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Sex and Sexuality*, 35–62; and Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, esp. 111–24, and "Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production," *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 35–65.

possibility. No other visions—indeed no miracles other than the incorrupt body—mark her sanctity. As Diane Watt observes, this distinguishes Æthelthryth's life from those of Hild or Ethelburga, both of which are rich in visions and miracles.[30] While the saint's deathbed address to her congregation may be taken verbatim from a longer extant Ely *vita*, as Blanton suggests, few if any other direct inclusions—and few female witnesses—appear in Bede's redaction.[31] Seaxburh's likely role as instigator of the *vita* as well as of the saint's translation—and the one may well be linked to the other—goes unmentioned; nor does Bede have much to say about kinship connections linking Ely to other women's communities. Rather, in his narrative, as Watt argues, "Bede overwrites Æthelthryth's life in order to make it fit his ideal of virginity."[32]

Bede's transformation of Æthelthryth's body into spiritual and cultural capital is not, however, without attendant anxiety. It remains a scar of sorts in history and the *Historia*. Her stalwart virginity temporarily displaces the dynastic and military history of Northumbria. That story—Ecgfrith's story—resumes in Chapter 21. Backing up to a time at least a year before Æthelthryth's death, and long before her translation, to the ninth year of Ecgfrith's reign (i.e., 679), the text tells of a great battle between Northumbria and Mercia—a battle waged, as it happens, despite attempts to weave peace through the marriage of the Northumbrian Ostryth to the Mercian king Aethelred. Peace is, in fact, achieved not through marital politics but by the intervention of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury: once again, it seems, the secular dynastic economy, enacted in the trade of female bodies, cedes to the charisma of the sacred. Yet Northumbrian dynasty and history do continue. Ecgfrith remarries—a Kentish princess, Eormenburg, who reifies an arguably even more powerful alliance than that through Æthelthryth to East Anglia—and fathers a son to continue the Northumbrian royal line beyond Ecgfrith's death in battle in 685.

Æthelthryth's physical and narrative bodies both provoke anxieties revealed in Bede's need to provide multiple named and (significantly) male witnesses—Cynefrith as well as Wilfrid *et multi alii*, "and many others"—to substantiate the truth of so unlikely a sequence of events. But if readers find her stalwart virginity difficult to believe, Bede argues, "nec

30 Watt, "Earliest Women's Writing?" 5.

31 EH IV.19. Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 49.

32 Watt, "Earliest Women's Writing?" 3. Clare Lees and Gillian Overing make a similar point in respect to Aelfric's version of Bede's Aethelthyrth: *Double Agents*, 17, and "Before History, Before Difference: Bodies, Metaphor, and the Church in Anglo-Saxon England," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11 (1998): 315–31.

diffendaum est nostra etiam aetate fieri potuisse, quod aevo praecedente aliquoties factum fideles historiae narrant, donante uno eodemque Domino, qui se nobiscum usque in finem saeculi manere pollicetur" (we need not doubt that this which often happened in days gone by, as we learn from trustworthy accounts, could happen in our time too through the help of the Lord, who has promised to be with us even to the end of the age). Virginal, incorrupt, untimely, and uncanny in its sacred, alien, queer integrity, that is, Æthelthryth's sanctified body witnesses the power of the Divine to overlap with and transcend even as it seems to disrupt the lived, secular time of human beings. Æthelthryth's physical incorruption provides both bystanders at Ely and Bede's readers a clear sign of her miraculous integrity and sanctity, even if the concurrent violation of the natural process of decay nevertheless also marks her body as outside of time. It troubles the distinction between past and present even more certainly (and tangibly) than her previous ability to prophesy witnesses an overlapping of present and future during her virginal life. As Cynthia Turner Camp argues, the spectacle of "untimeliness" on display in such translation accounts is excessive, and "becomes a historiographic problem as well as an ontological one. The undecayed body appears to freeze time" and "the temporal folding of excess past into the present … has a natural affect: discomfort and disruption."[33] Such encounters with bodies out of time—bodies "unnaturally" preserved—force witnesses to engage with a dead but still resonant and haunting deep past, and thereby enchant or sanctify a site, marking it as temporally numinous.[34] Æthelthryth's untimeliness as much as her integrity and sanctity becomes that of the community of her chaste "daughters" at Ely.

Bede's Virgin Poetics and the Hymn to Æthelthryth

While the scar of Æthelthryth's story does not by any means represent the only instance of a woman's life—a narrative of monastic foundation connected with a powerful abbess—appropriated, overwritten, and assimilated in the *Historia*, it is unique in one regard. Æthelthryth's life

33 Cynthia Turner Camp, "The Temporal Excesses of Dead Flesh," *postmedieval* 4 (2013): 416–26, at 418.

34 On this topic see, for example, Christina Fredengren, "Unexpected Encounters with Deep Time Enchantment: Bog Bodies, Crannogs and 'Otherworldly' Sites. The Materializing Powers of Disjunctures in Time," *World Archaeology* 48 (2016): 482–99.

is the only one celebrated in verse as well as prose, a fact that further establishes it as Bede's most explicit and extended engagement with female sanctity and an idealized monastic virginity. This celebration constitutes, moreover, an unusually extensive authorial interjection: Bede's further interruption of what is already a (prose) disruption of dynastic and political history takes the form of a hymn on the subject of virginity, a "hymnum uirginitatis … praeconium eiusdem reginae ac sponsae Christi, et ideo ueraciter reginae quia sponsae Christo" (a hymn on virginity … in honor of this queen and bride of Christ, and therefore truly a queen because the bride of Christ).[35] He does so, he explains, "morem sacrae scriptura, cuius historiae carmina plurima indita" (according to the method of holy scripture in which many songs are inserted into the history). That this hymn is, moreover, one that Bede himself composed some years earlier, most likely for original performance at Wearmouth/Jarrow, suggests that it—and Æthelthryth's life—may have had a particular resonance for Bede and his community.

In joining Chapter 20's hymn to Chapter 19's *vita*, in retelling and recontextualizing Æthelthryth's story in both prose and poetry, the *Historia*'s shift into *prosimetrum* situates this double treatment as an example of an *opus geminatum*.[36] Developed out of Classical rhetorical practice and the genre of Christian scriptural paraphrase—the retelling of biblical narratives in classical Virgilian epic language in the style of Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale*—*opera geminata* on hagiographical themes became prominent in the burgeoning Anglo-Latin literary tradition. Early in his career Bede wrote a prose version of Paulinus of Nola's metrical *vita* of Saint Felix; he subsequently revised the earlier anonymous Lindisfarne *Life of Cuthbert* first into verse and then into prose. The most well-known example of the genre, however, is Aldhelm's *Prosa* and *Carmen de Virginitate*, and it is tempting to read Bede's double celebration of Æthelthryth as (in part, at least) an homage and response to Aldhelm's theorizing of virginity. In his *Historia* Bede praises Aldhelm as a poet, and specifically cites his writing of "de virginitate librum eximium, quem in exemplum Sedulii geminato opera et versibus exametris et prosa" (a most excellent book on virginity

35 EH IV.20

36 On this genre, see Bill Friesen, "The *Opus Geminatum* and Anglo-Saxon Literature," *Neophilologus* 95 (2011): 123–44; Gernot Wieland, "Geminus Stilus: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Hagiography," *Insular Latin Studies: Papers on Latin Texts and Manuscripts of the British Isles, 550–1066*, ed. Michael Herren (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 113–33; and Catherine A. M. Clarke, *Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Texts, Hierarchies, Economies* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), esp. 145–70.

both in hexameter verse and in prose, producing a twofold work after the example of Sedulius).[37]

Echoing in part Aldhelm's catalogues of exemplary lives, Bede's hymn situates Æthelthryth within a world-historical choir of virgins:

Alma Deus Trinitas, quae saecula cuncta gubernas,
adnue iam coeptis, alma Deus Trinitas.
Bella Maro resonet; nos pacis dona canamus,
munera nos Christi; bella Maro resonet.
Carmina casta mihi, fedae non raptus Helenae;
luxus erit lubricis, carmina casta mihi.
Dona superna loquar, miserae non proelia Troiae;
terra quibus gaudet, dona superna loquar.
En Deus altus adit venerandae Virginis aluum,
liberet ut homines, en Deus altus adit.
Femina virgo parit mundi devota parentem,
porta Maria Dei fémina virgo parit.
Gaudet amica cohors de Virgine matre Tonantis;
virginitate micans gaudet amica cohors.
Huis honor genuit casto de germine plures,
virgineos flores huius honor genuit:
Ignibus usta feris virgo non cessit Agathe,
Eulalia et perfert ignibus usta feris,
Kasta feras superat mentis pro culmine Tecla,
Eufemia sacras kasta feras superat,
Laeta ridet gladios ferro robustior Agnes,
Cecelia infestos laeta ridet gladios.
Multus in orbe uiget per sobria corda triumphus,
sobrietatis amor multus in orbe uiget.
Nostra quoque egregia iam tempora virgo beauit;
Aedilthryda nitet nostra quoque egregia.
Orta patre eximio, regali et stemmate clara,
nobilior Domino est, orta patre eximio.
Percipit inde decus reginae et sceptra sub astris;
plus super astra manens percipit inde decus.
Quid petis, alma, virum, sponso iam dedita summo?
sponsus adest Christus; quid petis, alma, virum?
Regis ut aetherei matrem iam, credo, sequaris,

37 EH V. 18.

tu quoque sis mater regis aetherei.
Sponsa dicata Deo bis sex regnaverat annis,
inque monasterio est sponsa dicata Deo,
Tota sacrata polo celsis ubi floruit actis
reddidit atque animam tota sacrata polo.
Virginis alma caro est tumulata bis octo Novembres,
nec putet in túmulo virginis alma caro.
Xre, tui est operis quia vestis et ipsa sepulchro
inviolata nitet; Xre, tui esto operis.
Ydros et ater abit sacrae pro vestis honore;
morbi diffugiunt, ydros et ater abit.
Zelus in hoste furit, quondam qui vicerat Evam;
virgo triumphat ovans, zelus in hoste furit.
Aspice, nupta Deo, quae sit tibi Gloria terris;
quae maneat caelis aspice, nupta Deo.
Munera laeta capis, festivis fulgida taedis;
ecce venit sponsus, munera laeta capis.
Et nova dulcísono modularis carmina plectro,
sponsa hymno exultas et nova dulcísono.
Nullus ab altithroni comitatu segregat Agni,
quam affectu tulerat nullus ab altithroni.

(All-bounteous Three in One, Lord of all time,
Bless mine emprise, all-bounteous Three in One.
Battle be Maro's theme, sweet peace be mine;
Christ's gifts for me, battle be Maro's theme.
Chaste is my song, not wanton Helen's rape.
Leave lewdness to the lewd! Chaste is my song.
Divine the gifts I tell, not Troy's sad siege;
Source of earth's joys, divine gifts I tell.
Eternal God comes down to Virgin's womb;
To set men free eternal God comes down.
From Virgin-mother springs (God's wicket gate)
The Sire of all, from Virgin-mother springs.
Glad the bright virgin-choir to know God born
Of Virgin's womb, glad the bright virgin-choir.
Her glory made it grow, that holy plant;
Those virgin flowers, her glory made them grow.
In furnace fierce stood virgin Agatha,
Eulalia stands firm in furnace fierce.

Keen lions yield to Thecla's spirit high,
To chaste Euphemia keen lions yield.
Laughs at the sword (of finer temper she)
Agnes, and Cecily laughs at the sword.
Many the laurels won by holy hearts
O'er the wide world many laurels won.
Nor lacks our age its Æthelthryth as well;
Its virgin wonderful nor lacks our age.
Of royal blood she sprang, but nobler far
God's service found than pride of royal blood.
Proud is she, queening it on earthly throne;
In heaven established far more proud is she.
Queen, wherefore seek a mate, with Christ thy groom?
To Him betrothed, queen, wherefore seek a mate?
Royal Mother of Heaven's King your leader now;
You, too, maybe, a mother of Heaven's King.
She, pledged to God her spouse, twelve years had reigned,
When in the cloister she was pledged to God.
To heaven devoted, there she won new fame,
And breathed her last, to heaven devoted there.
Veiled in the tomb sixteen Novembers lay,
Nor rots her virgin flesh veiled in the tomb.
XT, Thine the power! Even in the sepulcher
Her vesture gleams. XT, Thine the power!
Yields to those holy weeds each frightful plague;
Disease aghast yields to those holy weeds.
Zeal frenzied tears the foe that conquered Eve;
Triumphs the saint, zeal frenzied tears the foe.
Affianced to the Lamb, now famed on earth!
Soon famed in heaven, affianced to the Lamb!
Many thy wedding gifts while torches blaze,
The Bridegroom come; many thy wedding gifts.
Ever on sweetest harp thou sing'st new songs,
Hymning thy Spouse ever on sweetest harp;
Ne'er parted from the Lamb's high company,
Whom earthly love ne'er parted from the Lamb.)[38]

38 EH IV.20. The fullest and most detailed explication of this poem is that offered by Stephen J. Harris in his *Bede and Æthelthryth: An Introduction to Christian Latin Poetics* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2016). Harris frames his reading as an example of the literary practices

At the same time, and also like Aldhelm's text, Bede's hymn on virginity inherently speaks to his own construction as a monastic subject. In this remarkably and tellingly personal addition to the vita incorporated into the *Historia*, that is, Bede appropriates Æthelthryth as a figure speaking to and defining his own identity as poet and as monastic virgin—vowed since childhood as an oblate—in his own right.

Although he is today most commonly remembered and read as a historian, Bede was also a poet and the author of treatises on grammar and metrics: his *De arte metrica* became a standard medieval school text. The list of his works appended to his *Historia* mentions both "librum hymnorum diverso metro sive rhythmo" (a book of hymns in diverse meters and rhythms) and "librum epigrammatum heroic metro sive elegiac" (a book of epigrams in heroic and elegiac meter), neither of which have survived in their original forms.[39] But individual examples of Bede's poetry are extant. His *De die iudicii*, a 163-line poem in dactylic hexameters, circulated widely and saw later translation into Old English verse. Its theme—Judgement Day—ties it explicitly to his interests in temporality and eschatology. A number of his hymns became part of the canon of later medieval liturgical performance: beside the hymn on Æthelthryth, there are songs to celebrate feasts of the Holy Innocents, the Ascension and Pentecost, the Nativity and Decollation of St. John the Baptist, the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, two hymns in honor of St. Andrew, and one each for St. Agnes and SS. Peter and Paul, the patron saints of Wearmouth/Jarrow. As supplements to the inherited repertoire of Ambrosian hymns, each finds a place in the monastic calendar and liturgy, and, often composed in an even number of stanzas, seem designed particularly for communal antiphonal performance. The hymns thus celebrate and constitute community as voices unite in the choir, and earthly singers are joined with the saints they praise.[40]

This is especially true of his hymn to Æthelthryth. Like her body, Bede's hymn is multiply closed and virginally intact. Imitating earlier alphabetic works, including ultimately Psalm 118 and Proverbs 31, the poem is composed in twenty-seven couplets, each beginning sequentially with the letters of the alphabet (minus *J*) and then those of the word *amen*. Each chiasmic couplet

Aldhelm attributes to his female audience at Barking. However speculative, this reading usefully and intriguingly interrogates the ways in which early medieval English women—at Barking or Ely or elsewhere—may have received and responded to Bede's (and Aldhelm's) appropriation, overwriting, and idealization of their lives and experiences.

39 EH V.24.

40 Michael Lapidge, "Bede the Poet" (Jarrow Lecture 1993), reprinted in *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 313–38; and *Bede's Latin Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2019), esp. 112–53.

is composed of four half-lines with the first duplicated in the fourth so as to create an envelope for the second and third. Thus, the first line—*Alma Deus Trinitas, quae saecula cuncta gubernas* (Bounteous triune God, you who governs all times)—is completed by the second—*adnue iam coeptis, alma Deus Trinitas* (bless now this undertaking, bounteous triune God). The initial couplet's enclosed half-lines explicitly connect divinity with the ordering of time, and both divinity and temporality with poetry. There is also an intriguing mix of genders in the first couplet's frame, *alma Deus trinitas*: *trinitas* is grammatically feminine, *Deus* masculine.[41]

Within the second couplet of this closed virginal body of a poem, Bede references Virgil and epic poetry—and epic's themes of dynastic struggle and conquest—while distinguishing his own song as renewing and reconceiving as it reuses Virgilian formulae and diction. His *adnue iam coeptis* to the Lord of time in the first couplet, for example, echoes Virgil's address to Jupiter *adnui coeptis* in *Aeneid* IX.622. As Stephen Harris notes, the poem is "built from allusion" and the medieval literary practice of *compilatio*, the collection and redeployment of poetic formulae and rhetorical "flowers" from earlier poets.[42] This reuse is in service, however, of radically different themes. "Bella Maro resonet" (let Virgil sing of war), Bede's song will be of peace and Christ's gifts. Let Virgil sing of Helen's rape and of the siege and destruction of Troy; as for Bede, "carmina casta mihi" (a chaste song is mine). "Dona superna" (divine gifts) are his to tell rather than the "miserae proelia Troiae" (the spoils of miserable Troy). Virgil (and history) may extol a masculine, warrior narrative of conquest and empire, but the "dynastic" descent Bede sings is not the creation of empire. Nor is it even the patrilineal descent of the Hebrew patriarchs or the succession of Greek and Roman emperors and later popes that characterizes of the chronicles that accompany his *De temporibus* and the *De temporum ratione*. The matter of history (as well as epic) is the subject of the first six ages; the prose *Historia* details similar secular and imperial lines. Bede's poem celebrates instead a counter-history of the end of history, of entry into the Seventh Age upon earthly death and eventually the Eighth of heavenly eternity, revealed in a monastic line matrilineal in its descent from Mary and thus to be distinguished from patrilineal secular dynasties.

Indeed, temporality and its transcendence are intrinsic to this matrilineal line, from the first couplet in which God is he "who governs all times" to the last invocation of post-historical Apocalypse, as this poem sings instead

41 The formula *alma trinitas* also appears in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*, line 58.

42 See Harris, *Bede and Æthelthryth*, 88–125 on Bede's appropriation and reuse of earlier poets' diction and formulae.

the spiritual engendering of virgins. The second four couplets link the Incarnation, beginning the Sixth Age, to the virgin choir of Revelations that will transcend it. This section begins with the temporal paradox of the Eternal God descending to the Virgin Mary's human womb, the Created giving birth to the Creator, the divine Parent. And though the matrilineal line could be said to be bracketed by divine masculine figures, Mary is the physical progenitor.[43] Just as the feminine *alma trinitas* encloses *Deus*, so the Virgin's womb contains the Divine.

Thereafter Mary's glory manifests in a line of virgin flowers (*virgineos flores*): Agatha and Eulalia, Thecla and Euphemia, Agnes and Cecilia, who in the subsequent four couplets are paired according to iconic martyrdoms by fire, beasts, and sword—traditional virgin martyrs all, numbered, for example, in Aldhelm's compilation catalogue in the *De Virginitate*. Bede's catalogue culminates in the English Æthelthryth, whom he praises in a final fifteen couplets replete with imagery of the virgin as Bride betrothed not to an earthly but to the Heavenly King. His praise ends with her translation and its witness to her virginity's power to overcome plague and death. Like Mary, Æthelthryth overcomes the consequences of Eve's fall: if Eve's sin resulted in the "curse" of childbirth that characterizes the secular descent and history, the virginal generation of more virgins by Mary and Æthelthryth constitute a contrary and untimely end of history.

The very last few couplets, spelling "amen" to the hymn, focus apocalyptically on the coming of the Bridegroom at the end of history. Bede concludes his hymn, in fact, by describing the hymns sung by Æthelthryth and the virgin choir of Brides. "Et nova dulcisono modularis carmina plectro" (ever new songs you—i.e., Æthelthryth—play on a sweet-sounding harp), he proclaims, "sponsa hymno exultas et nova dulcisono" (as a new bride you exult with sweet-sounding hymns). The echo of *nova carmina* and *nova sponsa* is particularly telling in its identification of poetry with virginity. In effect, the hymn begins and ends with the making of hymns by virgin poets inside and outside of time.

43 Harris draws attention to Marian devotion at Wearmouth, and to Bede's composition of both a hymn to Mary and a sermon on the Feast of the Purification: *Bede and Æthelthryth*, 140. See also Éamonn Ó Carragáin, "The Wearmouth Icon of the Virgin (A. D. 679): Christological, Liturgical, and Iconographic Contexts," in *Poetry, Place, and Gender: Studies in Honor of Helen Damico*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Press, 2009), 13–37; and on Marian devotion in early medieval England more generally, Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Interestingly, the chapel at Barking to which Hildilith translated the bones of both monks and nuns from earlier cemeteries was dedicated to Mary. The immediate source of Bede's *tonantis*, a Virgilian by-name for Jupiter, is probably Aldhelm's repeated use in his *Carmen de Virginitate* (at lines 10 and 86, for example)

And appropriately so, perhaps: in most virgin martyr narratives, the saint's sufferings convert the audience within the texts—even as the texts themselves convert or strengthen the conversions of their readers. Virginity is ideologically viral, and literarily so as well. It spawns communities—like Æthelthryth's Ely and (of course) Bede's own Wearmouth/Jarrow. It also generates texts—like the *vita* on which Bede's account is based, his own overwriting of it, and the excessive, digressionary hymn he adds to it—by providing both subject matter and the verbal formulae in which virgins and virginity are commemorated and praised.[44] Æthelthryth, singing ever new songs in veneration of the Lamb of the Book of Revelations, ultimately becomes a figure for the poet, for Bede himself, as the voice of a virginal community both male and female and perhaps beyond gender as much as beyond time.[45]

But this ultimate inclusion of Bede within a putatively female virgin choir of *sponsae* of the *Sponsus*/Lamb is by no means unproblematic. Does it represent yet another appropriation of female voice, a final overwriting of Æthelthryth and of the Ely women's memory and celebration of their "mother"? Or does the logic of what one might call virgin poetics require that gender be (at least theoretically) abandoned as time-bound? Allegorically any (or, rather, every) human soul, including Bede's, could be figured as Anima, as at least grammatically feminine. And there is, after all, neither male nor female with God—except, of course, in so far as the bridal metaphor's power differential designates Christ as the Bridegroom (*Sponsus*) and human souls (male or female) as Brides (*Sponsae*). However it may be read, this final turn remains a queer moment in the text. If virginity disrupts temporality by subverting history and genealogy, as Æthelthryth's story suggests, perhaps temporality (or, more exactly, transcendence of temporality at the end of time and history) troubles gender and sexuality as well by blurring gender difference in transcendental, eternal monastic virginity.

44 Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet*, terms "spectral communities" those networks of literary influence from which poets derive their vocabulary and on whom they model their style. On a similar construct of literary affinity as a form of artificial kinship, see Lisa M. C. Weston, "Where Textual Bodies Meet: Anglo-Saxon Women's Epistolary Friendships," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010) 231–46; "Conceiving the Word(s): Habits of Literacy among Earlier Anglo-Saxon Monastic Women," in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogues*, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 149–67; and "Saintly Lives: Friendship, Kinship, Gender and Sexuality," in *Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, 381–405.

45 Something similar happens in Bede's poem *De die iudicii*, in which the speaker's elegiac voice traces a transition between exile in this world/time to virgin community in eternity. Significantly here, too, the figures of flowers mark that transition.

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Medical Discourse

8 *Monaðgecynd* and *flewsan*

Wanted and Unwanted Monthly Courses in Old English Medical Texts

Dana M. Oswald

Abstract

This essay discusses the Old English remedies for menstruation, placing early medieval texts in conversation with contemporary controls exerted over women's reproductive bodies by both politics and medicine. By examining not only the presences that contribute to our understanding of early medieval women's bodies in the medical tradition, but also the absences, this essay considers the potential experience of ordinary and not extraordinary women, who grappled with the dangers of reproduction and a medical tradition that could offer little practical help for gynecological concerns. While the medical texts themselves are a part of the dominant patriarchal textual tradition, the medical needs invoked by the remedies offer a pinhole view into the lives and experiences of women.

Keywords: medicine, remedies, menstruation, reproduction, Old English, women

The title *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, published by the Doctor's Group in 1970, was meant to "emphasize women taking full ownership of their bodies."[1] The

1 Note: I am indebted to the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, for the time its fellowship program granted me to begin research on this project, and to my colleagues within the Institute for their generous intellectual support and community, and my own department and college for supporting my research. I am grateful to the Society for Feminist Scholarship in the Middle Ages, and particularly to my writing group sponsored by this organization, including Kathryn Maude, Claire Jones, and Roberta Magnani. I am also grateful to Christine Voth, who graciously shared both her forthcoming editions and inspiring conversation, and to Robin Norris, Robyn Malo, and Dana Roders, who assisted my research.
Our Bodies Ourselves, History, accessed June 15, 2017, http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/history/.

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book itself grew from women's negative experiences with male physicians, as executive director Judy Norsigian notes: "Part of why (the booklet) got off the ground is because women wanted to change this kind of environment in which what women had to say, where what women reported about their own experiences, could be so readily discarded...."[2] *Our Bodies, Ourselves* openly discussed taboo topics, including menstruation, birth control, and abortion. Indeed, the ideology of the book is encapsulated by its 1973 Preface, which states:

> When we first started talking to each other about this, we found that old expectations had nudged most of us into a fairly rigid role of wife-and-motherhood from the moment we were born female. Even in 1969, when we first started the work that led to this book, we found that many of us were still getting pregnant when we didn't want to. It was not until we researched carefully and learned more about our reproductive systems, about birth control methods and abortion, about laws governing birth control and abortion, and not until we put all this information together with what it meant to us to be female, that we began to feel we could truly set out to control whether and when we would have babies.[3]

Our Bodies, Ourselves was a revolutionary book whose aim was to give women access to knowledge about their bodies and the systems that regulated them, attempting to leave aside shame and taboo, and to advocate for personal control over reproduction and thus control over the shape of one's own life, as well as one's own body.

Our Bodies, Ourselves attempted to give back to women the control over their reproductive bodies that perhaps they held, to at least some degree, before men became the primary medical caregivers (and not just the producers of medical texts) for women's reproductive health. It is a text that gives women access to knowledge about their own bodies, wishing to demystify natural but often culturally abjected processes. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was a work that attempted to reshape the gynecological medical system, a system controlled and dominated by men from at least the fourteenth century in England, when midwives were replaced by surgeons. Although female

2 Jackie Wilson, "From Filthy Trash to Iconic Resource: Our Bodies Ourselves at 40," *CNN*, October 5, 2011, accessed June 15, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/05/health/our-bodies-ourselves-40th-anniversary/index.html.

3 http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/history/preface-to-the-1973-edition-of-our-bodies-ourselves/, accessed June 15, 2017.

midwifery persisted and evolved, the division between learned men and experienced women both preceded and succeeded the shift from midwife to surgeon.[4] Women's expertise in questions of gynecology and fertility was being subsumed and controverted in England long before the fourteenth century.[5] Although they were likely the primary facilitators of childbirth in early medieval England, midwives are absent in the medical texts, the *Lacnunga* and the leechbooks. We might think of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as the successor of the unwritten book early medieval midwives might have produced, had they perpetuated knowledge through textual means. Such a book might not have offered efficacious practices, any more than other medical texts of the time, but it would likely have offered a clearer view of the practical concerns of women and the means by which these concerns were addressed.

Medical texts like the *Lacnunga* and the leechbooks present women's bodies only *in extremis* and exclude almost entirely the experience of childbirth, suggesting its provenance in the world of women practitioners.[6] Simultaneously, though, these texts show us a subset of women's desires in regard to their leaky bodies: their desires to stop potentially excessive menstrual periods, and their desires to stimulate missing menstruation. These desires, invested as they are in questions of fertility and reproduction,

4 See Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Peregrine Horden. "What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine?" *Social History of Medicine* 24, no. 1 (2009): 5–25. Christine Voth, in this volume, also discusses the rise of women's medicine beginning in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.

5 Kontoyannis and Katsetos suggest that women are the primary practitioners of women's medicine until the move in the Enlightenment to turn midwifery from "a 'mystery' to a 'science'"; Maria Kontoyannis and Christos Katsetos, "Midwives in Early Modern Europe (1400–1800)," *Health Science Journal* 5, no. 1 (2011), 32–36, 32. However, Jane Sharp's 1671 *The Midwives Book* suggests the shift was well underway prior to 1690. See also Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England 1660–1770* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Lisa M. C. Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," *Modern Philology* 92, no. 3 (1995), 279–93; and Karen Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, and Practices," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See also Erin Sweany, in this volume.

6 Medieval people, like contemporary ones, did not experience gender as this simple male/female binary, but rather existed in the world in a range of ways, and in bodies that may or may not have fit neatly into binaries or social and even medical expectations. The medical texts, however, rely on a system that groups all bodies into a single gender category, *mon*, or specifically indicates that certain remedies, rarely, are meant for female bodies. In this chapter, I use the language employed by the medical texts, which relies on a gender binary of male/female and man/woman. The texts use this language, but I do not wish to suggest that this binary is either real or universal.

also reflect men's desires for women's bodies. Such systems of written, learned expertise made men experts on women's bodies and consequently constructed women as either ignorant inhabitants of their own reproductive bodies or dangerous practitioners of folk medicine (at best) and witchcraft (at worst), while simultaneously requiring them to manage the regular, but also textually invisible, care of women's bodies. Therefore, this is an essay about absence—about both presence in absence, and absence in presence. In a literal way, this essay is concerned with the nature of presence and absence in the same sense as medieval women and practitioners were; it is concerned with what to do when a menstrual period is present—in some cases, far too present—but also with what to do when a period is absent, along with all the attendant concerns over causes and consequences of the absence of menstruation. This is an essay concerned with the silencing of women, with the diminishment of their voices and practices, and with the domination of their bodies and desires (for origin and otherwise). The treatments in the leechbooks specific to menstruation, either provoking or preventing it, exhibit the male/textual desire to exert control over women's reproductive bodies, and, in the absence of their voices but the presence of their textual bodies, the desire of women to claim control of their actual bodies.

A primary absence in the tradition of medical writing is indeed the absence of the figure of the midwife, whether the role merits consideration as professional, or merely by local practice, expertise, or reputation. There must, we presume, have been midwives. M. L. Cameron addresses this problem explicitly, saying:

> I have described the physician as "he," because there is no evidence that women practiced medicine. Yet it is most unlikely that Anglo-Saxon society differed in this respect from most others and that there were no women practicing some form of medicine. Surely there were women midwives and village women gatherers of herbs and wise in their use and women learned in charms and amulets. But there is not a shred of evidence for their existence.[7]

7 M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 22. Audrey Meaney reframes the category and identifies these women instead as "cunning women," affiliating them with magic and setting them in opposition to the dominant religious tradition, in *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, British Archaeological Reports 96 (Oxford: BAR, 1981), 249. Monica Green, too, argues against the presence of women in the field of gynecology, marking their attendance upon women as separate from this learned medical approach; see Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*. She has critiqued the bifurcated idea of the birthing

We have no early medieval English descriptions of a midwife's work; no stories of birthing queens assisted by women called midwives; no lawsuits, even, against midwives. Despite the deficit of women healers in the medical tradition, we have one small indication of their presence: they have a name whose rarity indicates both an acknowledgment of their function and also the desire to overwrite or exclude it in describing most medical reproductive practices. The Old English word for midwife, *byrþþinen* or *beorþorþinen,* female servant for birthing, appears in only three places in the corpus of Old English writing, and only one of these is in the medical tradition.[8] We might then think that the word for "midwife," like the word for "womb," is one that is either erased or ignored as irrelevant to the learned and literate world.[9] However, the fact that it appears at all—and specifically in a

chamber as a women's space invaded by men, and suggests of medieval medicine more generally that "Female medical practitioners can be shown to exist, but they were almost always practising alongside or in competition with males"; see "Gendering the History of Women's Healthcare," *Gender & History* 20, no. 3. (2008), 487–518, 495.

8 This word occurs once in the *Old English Herbarium* (*OEH*), once in *The Old English Prudentius Glosses,* as an equivalent to the Latin word *obstetrix,* and in *Genesis,* according to the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project 2009), accessed January 5, 2018, https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/. *OEH* offers a remedy for genital itching and pain with a specific emendation to women, suggesting that the common practice of poultice application should be "do hyre man fram hyre byrþþinene" (made for her by her midwife), in Hubert Jan de Vriend, ed. *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS o.s. 286 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984), 123.2. In this remedy, nothing of the recipe itself is changed. The only variation is who makes and offers the compound and treatment. There is nothing notable or out of the regular scope of treatment in this recipe; many other remedies call for the laying on of poultices to the genitals, with no specification that a midwife should perform this action. Of note in the *Genesis* occurrence is the potential female authorship of the Junius 11 manuscript, suggested by Mary Dockray-Miller: "This sort of accurate depiction of babies and mother in the Junius 11 maternity illustrations implies an illustrator intimately familiar with babies and their needs … I would like to suggest in addition that the manuscript may have been produced by as well as for women," and further, "The drawings of mothers and babies do not show that the illustrator of Junius 11 was a woman; they do force us to question the scholarly community's unthinking assumption of the maleness of the creators of the manuscripts." See Dockray-Miller, "Breasts and Babies: The Maternal Body of Eve in the Junius 11 *Genesis*," *Naked Before God*, ed. Benjamin Withers and Jonathan Wilcox, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 250, 251.

9 The absence of this language is discussed in greater depth in my book in progress, *Old English Maternal Bodies.* Wilfrid Bonser notes some linguistic alternatives as well: "The Anglo-Saxon word for childbirth, beorþer, also means a foetus. It occurs in such phrases as beorþor-cwelm, meaning maidservant or midwife. The phrase cild-hama, meaning child-covering, or the womb, occurs occasionally in glossaries"; Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Publications of the Wellcome Historical Library, 1963), 264. However, I have found only two occurrences of "beorþor" or any variant spelling, and found that the phrase "beorthor-cwelm"

medical text—suggests that midwives were likely a part of the medical tradition in early medieval England, whether or not the role was "professed and acknowledged."[10] This division, between the learned physician and the midwife, marks a division, too, for women; under the guidance of the first, the woman is depicted as obediently subject to a system of authority and shockingly ignorant of the processes of her own body, whereas with the potential of the invisible alternative, the midwife, a woman might be part of a system of knowing through experience, wherein, just as with *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, she might be able to manifest some control over her own reproductive experience, destiny, and practices.[11]

The textual tradition offers us a presence for understanding medieval medicine—it is, after all, all that we have—but it, too, is a presence constituted by absence. Our understanding of early medieval English medicine comes primarily from manuscripts London, British Library, Harley 585 and London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii, which, respectively, contain the Old English *Herbarium* (*OEH*), the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* (*OEM*), the

only appears once, and only in the Oliphaunt Old English glossaries, according to the online corpus (intriguing, as *Bosworth-Toller* defines *cwelm* as "destruction, death" and *beorþorcwelm* as "a dead birth, a miscarriage, an abortion"; see *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, ed. T. Northcote Toller et al., comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichy (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2014), accessed January 5, 2018, https://bosworthtoller.com/.) *Cildhama*, at least, does seem to mean womb, but occurs only eight times and only in glossaries.

10 Michael Wright, "Anglo-Saxon Midwives," *ANQ* 11, no. 1 (1998), 3–5, 4. Wright here examines the linguistic evidence in light of its source material, noting that while it seems unlikely that women were not attended by other women during birth, we do not have enough linguistic evidence to argue for a professional class of midwives: "It is reasonable to assume that Anglo-Saxon women giving birth were attended by other women. What is not clear is whether this attendance was given on an informal basis, or whether there was a group of professed and acknowledged midwives … Linguistic evidence cannot resolve this uncertainty, but it certainly does not seem to point to the existence of a group of professed midwives" (4). In this volume, Voth offers a strong possibility for female physicians and practitioners.

11 I am aware of the dangers of this kind of dichotomy and posit it here as part of a system of presence, which we have access to, as opposed to absence of evidence with regards to alternative medical practices. As Green suggests of medieval women's medicine, "it is neither a story of women's unfettered control over knowledge of their bodies nor of deliberate male attempts to eradicate that control"; "Gendering," 493. She convincingly argues here for the division of spheres in thinking about the roles of facilitators and the notion of women's control over reproduction: "I argue for the need to set the history of women's healthcare into a larger nexus of analyses: the history of midwifery needs to be part of the history of both medical professionalisation and women's healthcare generally, not treated as an isolated topic, while the history of contraceptives and abortifacients needs to be set into larger questions of demographic history—whatever emotions or motives we would like to see at play in any individual woman's decision to limit or disrupt her fertility, her decisions also had an impact on society as a whole"; "Gendering," 488.

Lacnunga, Bald's Leechbook (*BLB*), and *Leechbook III* (*LBIII*).[12] These texts include a range of remedies and medical information that derive largely, although not exclusively from ancient sources, and which are universally acknowledged to be "bad medicine," as David Wootton has argued.[13] Peregrine Horden adds that "most techniques were transmitted orally and through clinical experience. The role of texts was limited and oblique, even in the most literate settings."[14] So the texts that we have, that tell us everything we know of early medieval medicine, are not only inefficacious at best and dangerous at worst, but also likely far removed from actual practices of care, not only in terms of who practiced medicine, but also how they practiced it. The remedies we read are a cipher; that is, they reveal *something* about medieval medicine and bodies and practices, but what is it that they

12 Quotations from the *OEH* and *OEM* are from de Vriend, ed. *The Old English Herbarium*, EETS o.s. 286. Unless otherwise noted, translations of *OEH* are from Ann Van Arsdall, ed. *Medieval Herbal Remedies: The Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (New York, Routledge, 2002); translations of *OEM* are from Maria D'Aronco and John P. Niles, *Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts, Volume I: The Old English Herbal, Lacnunga, and Other Texts*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, forthcoming). Texts and translations, unless otherwise noted, of *LBIII* are from Debby Banham and Christine Voth, eds. and trans., *Old English Medicine in British Library, Royal D. xvii, Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts*, vol. 2, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, forthcoming). Other editions and translations consulted include Thomas Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country before the Norman Conquest* (London, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864); J. H. G. Grattan, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952); Edward Thomas Pettit, *A Critical Edition of the Anglo-Saxon Lacnunga of BL MS Harley 585* (unpublished dissertation, King's College London, 1996). For an excellent overview of these texts and their manuscript contexts, see Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*. Cameron suggests that not all medical practitioners would have been religious; laymen also seem to have practiced medicine, and this might explain why so many texts were translated from Latin to Old English: "If laymen were physicians, they must have been reasonably well educated, as surviving medical documents draw generously on Latin medical texts and give ample evidence that they were intended to be manuals for practicing physicians and that they were so used. Perhaps it was because lay physicians could not be expected to be proficient in Latin that there was so much translation from Latin medical works into English. But there is equally good evidence that physicians were members of religious orders" (19). Certainly some religious women, like the nuns of Whitby in the late seventh century, were involved in medical care as well.

13 David Wootton, *Bad Medicine: Doctors Doing Harm Since Hippocrates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Horden writes: "Let us concede that early medieval medicine did not work," suggesting that we are better served by not only consider biomedical efficacy, but also "therapeutic success," focusing on a patient's beliefs regarding treatment, and allowing for more complexity beyond whether a treatment works or not (most commonly not). See Horden, "What's Wrong," 20.

14 Horden, "What's Wrong," 18.

reveal, if not how medicine was practiced on actual medieval bodies? They reveal beliefs about bodies, beliefs informed by earlier traditions and by the religious status of the scribes and compilers of such manuscripts; about practices that might or might not be taking place in monasteries serving as infirmaries; about cultural practices of exclusion and abjection.[15] They are a record of some forms of belief about women's bodies, providing at once evidence of men's beliefs about women's bodies *and* evidence of women's bodies. That is, they offer representations of actual, and not exceptional, early medieval women, in the sense that we normally understand women present in the tradition to be exceptional. The concerns of the women as reflected by remedies are both ordinary, in their implied ubiquity, and extraordinary, in what they reveal about the possible control by women over their own bodies.

The majority of remedies are for ordinary ailments—headaches, stomachaches, earaches, toothaches. Despite the imminent danger presented by childbirth, the most common subject of remedies in relation to women's bodies is menstruation. Indeed, menstruation is enormously important; it is indicative of the health of a woman, of her status in regard to conception and childbearing, and of her safety after birth. Menstruation is of concern both in its presence and its absence, as well as in its quality and duration. The textual focus on menstruation instead of childbirth reveals a concern with the reproductive viability of women, leaving the actual processes of childbirth up to (textually absent) midwives. The primary medical concern with women's bodies is about controlling and harnessing their flow in service of fertility. It is a cultural benefit for women to be able to produce children; indeed, ensuring regular menses is a basic component of treatment for infertility. And yet, embedded in the language of "provoking flow" is a notion of control over reproductive potential; such a remedy might be used to hamper as well as to promote fertility. These medical texts, written and read by men, offer knowledge to promote fertility and attempt to regulate and dominate women's bodies and that which they produce. But even as such learned texts silence the voices of women by overwriting actual practices and bodies with textual ones, they cannot fully efface the desires of women, which are not always consistent with the desires of the patriarchal systems they inhabit. Through their attempts to promote and harness women's

15 R. A. Buck suggests a male author for the leechbooks: "There are a number of linguistic clues throughout the Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks that identify men, rather than women, as the writers and compilers of the medical treatises." See "Woman's Milk in Anglo-Saxon and Later Medieval Medical Texts," *Neophilologus* 96, no. 3, 467–85, 469.

fertility by controlling menstruation, the medical texts also, paradoxically, indicate the potential for women to regulate their own menses and fertility according to their own desires.

Menstrual Terminology in Medical and Penitential Texts

Despite the fact that half of the adult population of early medieval England menstruated, the language for this function appears, for the most part, only in two genres: the medical texts and the penitentials, with rare appearances in other religious texts. That such a mundane occurrence appears so rarely demonstrates the taboos with which it is associated, as well as the narrow worldview of authors. Menstrual taboos, unsurprising though they may be, and dangerous to the lives of women today in many parts of the world, account for much of this occlusion. In a surprising way, however, menstruation allows more space for women in the Old English literary tradition, rather than less.[16] In a textual tradition that rarely features women at all, menstruation specifically allows women to appear in both the medical texts and penitentials, rather than being subsumed under the general category of *man*.[17] Their menstruation is what separates their bodies from men's bodies and requires thoughtful consideration of regulation of space and access. While the medical texts figure all bodies as the generic male body in most remedies, remedies for menstruation, by their very nature, can only be about women.[18] So, too, are rules regulating behavior of menstruating women in penitentials specific to only this category of person. Within both genres, almost all of the language used to describe menstruation applies also to blood flow in more general terms: this is not a question of what menstruation is called, but rather if it has its own discrete name. Despite women's ownership of this biological function, the language for the function is tucked tidily inside the language for general bleeding: there is no name that differentiates menstruation from any other kind of bleeding. Therefore, menstruation functions as a present absence in

16 Research focused explicitly on the subject, however, is extremely limited. While menstruation appears in discussion for both genres, little scholarship takes it as a primary subject. One of the only pieces to do so is Charles T. Wood, "The Doctors' Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 56, no. 4 (1981): 710–27.

17 Indeed, even the longest poem in Old English, *Beowulf*, which features several female characters, only includes the speech of a single named woman.

18 The standard male body as the medical body is still a problem in contemporary medicine and one which continues to endanger the lives of women.

these texts; it is named, but does not merit its own unique name. It can be discussed, but primarily through the framework of the familiar category of bleeding that might happen to any body.

The medical texts compress the category of menstruation, both through its organizational annexing as a subset of general blood flow, and the narrow range of language for menstruation. They most often deploy the terms *monaðgecynd* and *flewsan*. *Monaðgecynd* occurs thrice in the corpus of Old English literature.[19] *Flewsan,* a broader term meaning a discharge from any part of the body,[20] occurs thirty-five times, most frequently in the *OEH*. An alternate spelling, *fleusa*, is exclusive to the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, and refers to Christ's healing of the bleeding Veronica.[21] Veronica's troubles are never

19 This term occurs only in *LBIII* and is defined only by its Latin referent, *menstruum*, in the *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary,* suggesting an authorial discomfort, perhaps typical of its nineteenth-century origin, with the term and also the function it describes. As we work to de-colonize the field of Old English studies, as well as to make a space for studies of women and gender, it is important to note the origin of many of the tools that have served the field since the nineteenth century. *Bosworth-Toller* is an indispensable research tool for scholars, but like many of the volumes in the Early English Texts Society (EETS) and editors and translators like Cockayne, it is complicit in the nationalistic, white supremacist, patriarchal rhetoric of its time. Thanks to Adam Miyashiro for contextualizing the colonial history of EETS in his talk "Race, White Supremacy, and the Middle Ages," International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, May 13, 2018. These tools actively efface and misrepresent certain elements of texts, as with my examples in this section, which demonstrate a squeamishness about women's bodies that in some cases make it difficult to determine the actual nature of a text or manuscript. We must use these tools with awareness, and replace them when they no longer serve us. The new Dumbarton Oaks series on medical texts is a prime example of this much-needed action. The *DOE*'s ongoing work will also continue to promote these important changes.

20 According to the *Dictionary of Old English* Online Corpus, the term occurs approximately 35 times. The *DOE* offers six definitions: 1. General flow/eye maladies; 2. "Excessive discharge of semen"; 3. "In women, excessive flow of blood or other discharge from the reproductive organs"; 4. Flux from the belly/diarrhoea/dysentery; 5. "Referring to the woman diseased … for twelve years"; 6. Lust. Most of these definitions cite a single occurrence; only the definitions specific to menstruation (5 occurrences listed from 2 texts) and flux from the belly (3 occurrences listed from 2 texts) offer multiple occurrences, suggesting that though the term itself is a general one, it is used most frequently in reference to menstruation. See *Dictionary of Old English: A to H Online*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016).

21 There is a fascinating connection between Veronica's own bleeding, and the tradition of her veil, upon which Christ's face becomes imprinted through its own production of fluids. Mary Swan notes that Veronica is cured of a "haemorrhage"; see "Remembering Veronica in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature,* edited by Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 19–40, 23. Two of the three occurrences in the text emphasize that this bleeding has taken place for twelve years, connecting her to the biblical story of Jesus's healing the bleeding woman; J. E. Cross, *Two Old English Apocrypha and Their*

spelled out precisely, although her particular malady (twelve years of *flewsan*) affiliates her with a perpetual state of uncleanness, thus making her touching of Jesus and consequent healing especially remarkable. Veronica is the only named woman in the Old English corpus whose menstruation is explicitly mentioned, and for her, it appears only because it is a fundamental part of religious narrative that precedes the early English text.[22] The emphatic phrase, *blodryne*, or "blood-coursing," occurs only once in the medical texts in reference to menstruation, in the *OEM*, referring elsewhere to nosebleeds.[23] Of all these terms, only *monaðgecynd* is specific to menstruation, and its occurrences are both rare, and limited to a single text (*LBIII*).

Despite the limited language for menstruation in medical texts, they represent menstruation as a natural process and are concerned with its correct functioning; penitential texts, however, use language that emphasizes the taboo nature of menstruation. Language for menstruation appears in the penitentials to delimit the spaces women can occupy when they menstruate. Specifically, menstruation disallows women in the penitentials, particularly those of Theodore, from communion.[24] The Old English word for menstruation in this more penitential/confessional context is *monaðadl,* and it appears four times. *Bosworth-Toller* effaces the referent of the term, generalizing it to mean "a disease that occurs at intervals of a month," implying that any person might experience such a disease, while all of the

Manuscript Source: The 'Gospel of Nichodemus' and 'The Avenging of the Saviour,' with contributions by Denis Brearley, Julia Crick, Thomas Hall, and Andy Orchard, *Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1996), 249–93. Voth offers a brief but compelling reading of the Veronica tradition in her essay in the present volume.

22 And, as Swan notes, she is removed from one of the three extant versions of this text altogether; "Remembering Veronica," 34.

23 De Vriend, *OEM*, 2.3. *OEM* uses the term "blodryne" five times, with the other four occurrences referring to general bleeding, or, most commonly, nosebleeds. It seems to also occur in the gospels, referring to the story of Veronica. It occurs a total of 21 times in searches of the corpus of the *Dictionary of Old English.* Cockayne refuses to translate this phrase, and instead uncharacteristically chooses to use Latin in his translation of the Old English, saying "ut menstrua fluant" instead; *Leechdoms*, 333. Indeed, when this phrase appears in reference to nosebleeds, he has no compunction about translating it into English as "blood running"; *Leechdoms*, 347, 349 (twice in the same passage), and 353. *A Thesaurus of Old English* suggests *monaðseoc* as an alternative term for menstruation, but the idea of moon-sickness, though perhaps originally grounded in the connection between monthly cycles and emotional instability, is not fundamentally connected to menstruation, nor is it experienced solely by women. Animals and humans are treated for it in the remedies. See *Thesaurus of Old English*, accessed January 9, 2018, http://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/category/?type=search&qsearch=menses&word=menses&page=1#id=1846. It does not appear in any medical texts as referring to menstruation.

24 Stefan Jurasinski, *The Old English Penitentials and Anglo-Saxon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 81.

occurrences of it are explicitly specific to menstruation. Of these terms for menstruation, only *monaðadl* implies a disorder, connecting the idea of monthly with *adl*, meaning "a disease, pain, a languishing sickness, consumption, morbus, languor."[25] In the penitentials, menstruation is configured as an illness in need of treatment, a disease that only women can experience. Women's monthly ejections from confession and communion result not from a regular biological function, the language suggests, but rather from a defect, a disease.[26] Alternatively, medical texts *are* usually treating menstrual disorders, but the language they use to identify and respond to such disorders does not qualify regular menses as inherently disordered.

Compared to the penitential texts, the medical texts seem positively egalitarian; they do not condemn women for the functions of their bodies, despite the limitations of the language they employ. While it is useful to read these medical texts in tandem, it is important to reiterate their differences, and the ideological problem of assuming that because they use the same or similar language, they universally refer to the same processes or problems. Like the language they use for the treatment of women's bodies, the texts that include these remedies are not uniform in their content, style, or origins. *Lacnunga* is known for its local and superstitious remedies.[27] Alternatively, the remedies of the *OEH* and the *OEM* are often formal and formulaic, although *OEM* seems to be less fussy about women's bodily functions, as it offers several remedies for menstrual problems, using variations in language for women's conditions and offering remedies not present in the other manuscripts for afflictions having to do with conception, sexual pleasure, and virility. The remedies in *LBIII* are often, perhaps mistakenly,

25 *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, s.v. "monaðadl." Accessed January 5, 2018.

26 Heide Estes discusses menstruation as a disability in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, noting, "Menstruation, like hunger and fever, is the result of original sin but is not sinful in itself. Yet the text's repetition that menstruation constitutes 'untrymness' creates a special category of infirmity particular to women, beyond the general states of hunger, etc. The characterization of menstruating women as 'untrym' suggests that the way later medieval as well as modern societies structurally disable women is also operative in Bede's account of menstruating women." ("Untrym" means weakness or illness.) See Estes, "Menstruation, Infirmity, and Religious Observance from Ecclesiastical History, in *Medieval Disability Sourcebook: Western Europe*, ed. Cameron Hunt McNabb (Santa Barbara, CA: punctum books, 2020), 342.

27 Pettit calls *Lacnunga* "the foremost extant repository of Anglo-Saxon medical folklore," and notes that despite its reputation as superstitious, its contents would have offered at least some benefit to those who used it: "by my conservative reckoning at least ten percent of the herbal remedies prescribed may have been of some physiologically therapeutic effect for minor afflictions." See *Critical Edition*, 140.

affiliated with magic and paganism.[28] The most mysterious are the remedies from *BLB*, because only the chapter headings for this subsection of the text remain.[29] These texts may or may not represent the same ailments in their varying deployments of language in reference to menstruation. The semantic grounds of these phrases often overlap and contradict, making it difficult to decipher, in some cases, whether the remedy is meant to soothe pain, to provoke a menstrual period, to purge a miscarried fetus or placenta, to prevent conception, or to provoke an abortion.

It is important to acknowledge and value the indeterminacy of these texts and the complications of their language rather than to seek absolute answers; to do otherwise is to ignore our situatedness in our historical moment, and to violate the conditions of the texts themselves. Although each of the medical texts offers a similar set of remedies responding to women's ailments, each manuscript works according to its own logic and range: for example what one genre, or even one text understands as "unclean" might have little to do with another genre's or text's use of the same word. This makes collating remedies and being certain that they address the same symptoms difficult, even when they do use the same language. In the following sections, I have grouped remedies according to basic functions of stopping or starting menstruation; the texts in which they exist do not necessarily conceive of their remedies as participating in these particular and discrete categories. They do, however, use formulaic language that indicates these as the desired results. However, within each of these two categories, a variety of complications or conditions informs the need for the result: a woman might wish to stop or start her flow for a variety of reasons, and so remedies that suggest the same result do not necessarily treat the same condition. Just as the language for menstruation is varied and often vague, we must understand the categories for treating it as similarly pliable. By tracking patterns across texts and by leaving these categories broad enough for flexibility and variation, we can witness not only what these texts choose to represent, but also what they choose to leave out. Their patterns of absence and presence, of naming and not naming, allow us unprecedented access to early medieval English understandings of the bodies of women.

28 Voth's work in progress, "The West Saxon Leechbook," will suggest a more complex interpretation of the material found in this text.

29 H. M. Cayton notes that *BLB* is particularly important in that it is an "English compilation," which does not derive from a single Latin source; particularly crushing is the loss of the "long section of forty-one 'crafts' concerning gynaecology" that remain, tantalizingly, only in the chapter headings, in *Anglo-Saxon Medicine with its Social Context* (PhD dissertation, Durham University, 1977), 40.

Remedies for Stopping Flow

The story of Veronica, who bled for twelve years, offers some insight into what a woman might be seeking in the remedies aimed to stop flow, often identifiable through the formulaic phrase *wið wifa flewsan* (for a woman's flow). However, these remedies seem to treat only the symptom, bleeding, without articulating or identifying the cause of such bleeding in many instances. Without addressing a cause, these remedies cannot have been successful, and might indeed in a number of cases caused harm. What causes might a woman have for such bleeding? A likely culprit is menorrhagia (heavy menstrual bleeding), a condition that affects approximately thirty percent of the current population of women of reproductive age and is linked to a number of resulting and underlying conditions from anemia to polycystic ovaries.[30] The persistence of such conditions across time means that medieval women may have been affected at a similar rate, although Harlow and Campbell note that

> [h]istorically menstruation was a relatively infrequent event in a woman's life as a considerable proportion of reproductive life was spent in pregnancy or lactational amenorrhoea. As societies move from high fertility to low fertility, women spend a greater and greater proportion of their reproductive lives menstruating.[31]

While the remedies are not precise about the kinds of bleeding that require cessation, they do specifically address the need to staunch blood flow after childbirth. Never mentioned in remedies for stopping flow, however, is miscarriage, despite the likelihood of its high frequency.[32]

General remedies for stopping flow operate on the principal of a drying-up poultice, which of course would do little to address any of the potential causes for excessive or unwanted flow. For instance, one remedy from the *OEH* suggests that sitting on a boiled plant will dry up the liquid with vapor,

30 Siobán D. Harlow and Oona M. R. Campbell. "Menstrual Dysfunction: A Missed Opportunity for Improving Reproductive Health in Developing Countries," *Reproductive Health Matters* 8, no. 15 (May 2000), 144.

31 Harlow and Campbell, "Menstrual Dysfunction," 143.

32 See Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, on the difficulties of early medieval pregnancy: 5, 17, 182. Sally Crawford notes the likelihood of prolonged breastfeeding as a response to the high infant mortality rate, which would in turn have an impact on a woman's fertility and ability to produce multiple children, in *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 74.

"æþme heo gewrið,"[33] while another calls for use of pounded nettle mixed with honey spread onto wet wool: a practitioner should "smyre ðonne þa geweald mid þam læcedom ond syþþan hyne þam wife gesyle, þat heo hyne hyre under gelecge, þy sylfan dæge hyt þone flewsan beluceð" (smear the genitals with the medication. Then give it to the woman, so that she can lay it under her. That same day, it will stop the bleeding).[34] Both remedies employ the same kind of metaphor for the desired outcome: the former claims to bind up or even wrap around (*gewrið*) the "moisture," by means of a hot vapor, whereas the latter proposes to "lock up" (*beluceð*) the flow as quickly as possible. While the outcome of the remedies here is clear: binding up or locking up the flow, it is only the symptom, the *flewsa*, that they treat, rather than any clear cause. These remedies therefore articulate and confirm notions about women's leaky bodies as vessels in need of locking or binding up by external forces, those provided by men as authors of these texts, who will find the means of "locking" and "binding," an apt metaphor for their treatment of women's lives as well as their bodies. Through this kind of linguistic mastery, women's bodies, overflowing with liquids, are set up as out of control and in need of authoritative male intervention. It is only by means of this figure of knowledge and authority that such an unruly body can be constricted and made to behave.

Like the vapor that locks up a leaky body, smoke, too, can be applied to a body exhibiting an excessive flow of blood. This remedy in *LBIII* is meant to resolve the problem of a flow that is *to swiþe* (too strong) by applying smoke to the genitals (performed while the patient is clothed) with coal-heated horse dung: "Gif wife to swiþe offlowe sio monað gecynd genim niwe horses tord, lege on hate gleda, læt reocan swiþe betweoh þa þeoh up under þæt hrægl þæt se mon swæte swiþe" (If a woman's menstruation flows out too much: Take fresh horse manure, put on hot embers, let it smoke profusely between the thighs up under the clothing, so that the person sweats heavily).[35] As in the previous example, the focus remains on the symptoms rather than the cause. What is unclear is whether the smoke is meant to dry up the liquid, like the vapor discussed previously, or, via a connection with the humors, the sweating of the person being treated is meant to reconfigure the balance of the body as a whole. Here, only the

33 De Vriend, *OEH*, 175.2. Van Arsdall translates this as "It takes away all the smell of the fluid from her," whereas I read "æþme heo gewrið" to indicate binding up/drying up by means of a vapor, particularly in relation to the similar remedy for nettle, and a lack of concern here with smell, and more with staunching blood flow, although the two might well be related.

34 De Vriend, *OEH*, 178.6. Translation by Van Arsdall.

35 Banham and Voth, *LBIII*, 3.38.3.

problem—too much blood—is stated, while both the cause *and* the solution remain absent in the remedy. In other words, the remedy offers a remedy without a clear sense of the desired resolution, and focuses only on the problem and the method. Further, this treatment is clearly both unpleasant and unproductive, marking a woman's body as thoroughly abject and foul. Such a treatment serves to reiterate and perhaps even exacerbate the abject nature of the reproductive female body.

In contrast to this smoking treatment, the medical tradition's response to postpartum bleeding is quite different, indicating a distinction in treatment relative to cause, and suggesting that the previous treatments would not have been used universally to stop *all* kinds of gynecological blood flow. After all, in a practical sense, it might be difficult but also dangerous to treat the genitals of a woman who has just given birth with smoking horse dung. Instead, this postpartum remedy calls for the eating and drinking of herbs, and in both texts, again, uses the same language: "Gif blede to swiþe æfter þam beorþre nioþowearde clatan wyl on meolce sele etan and supan þæt wos" (If [she] bleeds too much after the birth: Boil the lower part of goosegrass in milk, give to eat and sip the liquid).[36] Notably, this remedy responds to complications from childbirth—a topic that is barely addressed in the medical texts, despite high rates of death for women in childbirth at the time.[37] Its language parallels that of the previous remedy, with the bleeding being *to swiðe*, and like the previous remedy, it offers no clear articulation of the expected result. Will the bleeding stop? Slow? Lighten? Will this remedy offer pain relief or somehow staunch a hemorrhage? This remedy responds to a frequent problem but offers frustratingly little information about the results it might produce to help a woman in urgent need. The entire category of the dangers of childbirth is reduced to a single remedy, and one that is nondescript about the causes of postpartum bleeding. The presence of this single and brief remedy indicates the absence of any sort of detail regarding what happens in and after childbirth in the medical texts at large. Its presence articulates an awareness of the dangers presented by the process of giving birth, but its brevity indicates the absence of the myriad solutions we must assume were attempted during many actual births during this time period.

36 Banham and Voth, *LBIII*, 3.37.6.

37 See Duncan Sayer and Sam D. Dickinson, "Reconsidering Obstetric Death and Female Fertility in Anglo-Saxon England," *World Archaeology* 45, no. 2 (2013), 285–97. I do not wish to suggest that early medieval English communities were not deeply concerned about the deaths of women in childbirth, but rather that the remedies do not offer a response to this clearly widespread social and medical problem.

Taken as a whole, these remedies to stop flow, in essence, wish to make absent the all-too-troubling presence of unwanted and excessive bleeding. They respond to situations that might well have been life-threatening for the women experiencing them, and yet they are outnumbered in the medical texts, by far, by more daily maladies like nosebleeds and upset stomachs. The ubiquity of such mundane ailments explains the variety and range of treatments for them. While there is only one remedy that offers care for a woman bleeding excessively after giving birth, there are no fewer than four remedies in just *OEM* aimed specifically at "arousing" sexual desire in men.[38] Women were dying at high rates in childbirth, likely as a result of postpartum bleeding; that the medical texts address the problem so rarely and so inadequately demonstrates not only a textual absence of learned knowledge to care for women, but also a rhetorical centering of the needs of the male body above those of the female. While their care may have fallen to unnamed midwives, the problem of death in childbirth extended beyond the female sphere and impacted the social body at large, and so its absence in the medical texts, texts which are rarely efficacious at any rate, is notable. Men's bodies, desires, selves are fully present in the medical texts, and women's, with a few exceptions, are absent.

Remedies for Provoking Flow

If the reasons a woman might wish to stop a flow are obvious, the reasons for starting one become more complicated. We, perhaps correctly, might assume that a woman who seeks to provoke menstruation does so because she wishes to regulate and promote her fertility by restoring a missing or irregular cycle. Certainly a woman's fertility contributes to her value in early medieval England, a value that is further fetishized by the context of nutritional deficiency and disease in this time and place.[39] However, it would be wrong to suggest that all menstrual remedies ultimately support patriarchal systems by means of ensuring fertility; some suggest a more radical function. Pregnancy is not always welcome, and the desire to provoke

38 De Vriend, *OEM*, 1.10, 3.13, 4.10, and 12.14. This is a clear predecessor for the current investment in men's virility and the lack of medical coverage for women's health in America.

39 Women's *wergild* is based on their age and thus their capacity to marry and bear children. Cameron, in *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, argues that the lack of dietary iron would have affected childbearing women most of all, as they require twice as much iron as men (17), and notes the ubiquity of Malaria and also of rickets, which would have contributed to anaemia and negatively impacted fertility (10).

a flow might have as much to do with avoiding pregnancy as with enabling one. Although the remedies are rarely explicit about the reason for provoking a flow, their patterns of language may help distinguish the problems they are meant to address. In the remedies, the menses may be stirred,[40] or *gecigde*, called forth or summoned, or they may be identified as absent, *forstanden*.[41] Remedies that do not identify a symptom may be just doing their due diligence in offering some remedies for women, but that absence might be more revolutionary. Intentionally or otherwise, remedies that offer women a means of provoking a flow of blood, or that suggest that such a thing can be done, disclose a truth about women's lives. Even if such a remedy might not be efficacious, it shows that a woman might *desire* to determine for herself not only when she menstruates, but also, as a direct result, when or if she reproduces. It is the coded language—the very vagueness—of these remedies that allows them to exist in texts authored by religious men and supported by the fundamental symbol of the patriarchy, the church. Such remedies leave space for the presence of a class of women operating some control over their own fertility, stirring or summoning not just a regular cycle, but perhaps preventing or dislodging conception.

In this way, textual occlusion and absence might serve to promote or depict women's desires. By leaving out details, remedies do not, and do not need to, specify why a woman might wish to summon her menstrual cycle. Indeed, most remedies provide little detail, serving as part of a long list of potential uses for herbs, particularly in *OEH*, as is the case for Bishop's weed: "eac hyt ða monoðlican forð gecigeþ" (also it summons forth menses).[42] Similarly, *OEH* proposes the use of shepherd's purse, St. John's wort, and German iris to "stir up" menses, with iris treating even long-term amenorrhea: "hit þæra wifa monoliðlican astyreð þeah hy (ær) langæ forlætene wæron" (it stirs the women's menses, even though they might have been absent for a long time).[43] The vagueness of this final phrase might be an attempt to treat a wide range of women, from those with nutritional deficits, to those who might have been nursing one, or even a series of children over a number of years thus suppressing menstruation, even to those, the remedy seems to suggest, past menopause. If we read this remedy as indicative of the category of "stirring" as a whole, it suggests an affiliation

40 De Vriend, *OEH*, uses variations of the phrase *wið wifa monaðlican astyrigenne* (for the stirring of a woman's monthly [discharge]) at 150.1, 152.1, 158.2, 164.1, 165.4, and 173.1.

41 This word appears only twice in the corpus, both in *LBIII* in reference to the same remedy. *DOE* defines this word, specific only to these occurrences, as meaning "to stop, cease."

42 De Vriend, *OEH*, 164.1, translation mine.

43 De Vriend, *OEH*, 158.2.

with promoting or restoring fertility. Alternatively, it would be unorthodox, although not impossible, to infer that menses *forlætan* (absent) might be those missing due to an unwanted pregnancy, particularly given the wide semantic range of the word, which here suggests interruption of a natural flow, but elsewhere means "to allow," "to release," or even "to abandon."[44] Therefore, *forlætan* is a word that can be its own opposite (both allowing and abandoning), and so it expresses rather poetically the problem of the present-absence of a menstrual cycle, one that a woman either might wish returned so that it might soon be absent, or one that a woman might just wish returned. The absence of expressed motive leaves space for a range of possibilities that may or may not have been understood by the men writing these texts.

The language in the *OEM* remedy, which calls for a more elaborate ritual, implies even more strongly a contraceptive impulse, informed further by its rhetorical placement following a remedy using similar methods to "cleanse" or purge a woman.[45] Whereas previous remedies invoke stirring of the menses by compounds, this one sounds more like a command for a rush of blood, and it relies on the woman herself to perform these ablutions proactively and independently:

> Eft gif heo wylle þæt ðæt hyre blodryne cyme to, cembe eft hyre heafod under morbeame, and þæt feax þe on þam cambe cleofige, somnige and do on anne telgran ðe sy adune gecyrred, and gesamnige eft; þæt hyre byþ læcedom.
>
> (Again, if she wants to have her flow back: let her comb again her head under the mulberry tree, and gather the hair that sticks to the comb and place it on a twig that is turned downwards, and afterwards gather it; this will be her remedy.)[46]

44 *DOE,* "forlætan," where "to let, allow" is the first definition. This remedy is listed under definition 17, "to leave off, cease, stop; break off, interrupt." Most other remedies from the leechbooks appear under definition 19: "to cease to contain, let escape, release (confined fluid); to let, shed (blood); release, discharge (bodily fluid acc.); 19.a. to unleash, let flow (bloodshed acc., upon the earth, to and dat.)." These other remedies clearly invoke the flowing of blood, rather than restraining it, as the *DOE* suggests for three remedies including 72.1 in *BLB*, and *OEH* 26.3. 15. "to abandon, renounce."

45 *DOE* defines this use of the verb as "to cleanse or purge of bodily impurity," and the use of *geclænsode* in the same remedy as to be "purged of bodily impurity, of menstrual blood, or afterbirth." As a comparison, a person may also be similarly "cleansed" of demonic possession.

46 De Vriend, *OEM*, 2.03. This remedy also appears to be referenced in the chapter headings for *BLB*.

It is the woman who must locate the tree, and must comb, gather, and place her own hair. Her remedy is entirely contained in her own body and action, in contrast with most other remedies that seem to be compounded for or enacted upon women. The terminology here and in *BLB*, *blodryne* and *blodsihtan* respectively, suggests something rather more gushing than a simple return to a regular cycle, suggesting if not cleansing, then something like it: something like abortion.[47] These remedies that wish to provoke menstruation, then, may be more complex than just attempting to assist and facilitate conception. They may be, in part, about forestalling it.

While these remedies leave open the potential for reproductive control by what they do not say, only one remedy explicitly comments on what might be expelled from a woman's body with a returned menstrual cycle, establishing its function as an abortifacient.[48] The *OEH* lists a second function for bishop's wort, beyond its use to "call forth" menses; by means of pounding the bishop's wort with wine or honey, and consuming it *or* applying it to the genitals, it will both "stir" the menses, *and* lead out *tudder*, offspring: "Wyþ ða monoðlican to astyrigenne … hyt þa monoðlican astyreþ ond þæt tudder of þam cwiðan gelædeþ" (For the stirring of menstruation … It stirs menstruation and brings out the fetus from the womb).[49] This remedy is explicitly NOT about helping with a difficult labor, or expelling a *deadboren*, stillborn, child. It declares its purpose not once, but twice: to stir up menses. While giving birth (to either a living or dead child) leads to bleeding, it does not lead to bleeding of the *monaþlican*, monthly sort. Rather, if a *tudder* is being brought out from the womb in the service of reviving a monthly flow, it might well be as a result of either circumventing conception or causing abortion.[50] This remedy demonstrates the potential of remedies, particularly

47 *DOE Online* defines both as "flow of blood, bleeding, haemorrhage," with *ryne* meaning "running," and *sihtan* meaning "draining"; *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, s.v. "sihtan." Accessed January 5, 2018. The desire for cleansing might well be motivated by patriarchal notions of cleanness, but a woman might also seek a different kind of cleansing. Voth also discusses remedies for abortion in this volume.

48 There is a specific category of remedy to help women purge or cleanse themselves of "deadboren" or stillborn children. I address this category in my book in progress, as it is not explicitly connected with menstruation.

49 De Vriend, *OEH*, 165.4. Translation mine.

50 Conception at this time was believed to be an extended process, culminating at forty days when the fetus was "ensouled." I discuss this at greater length in my work in progress. Perhaps John M. Riddle refers to this remedy when he writes, "Anonymous recipe manuscripts written and copied at monastic scriptoria contain abortifacients (as menstrual regulators) and contraceptives. A ninth- or tenth-century manuscript has a prescription for cleaning the belly of a woman who cannot purge herself," in *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 104.

those provoking flow, to serve women in ways that might be contrary to the desires of the patriarchy at large, hidden in plain sight and resting on the abject nature of menstruation.[51]

All of the medical manuscripts offer remedies that might be understood to be abortifacients, but the coded language offers just enough doubt, just enough absence to adhere to religious and legal prohibitions against abortion. *OEH*'s previous remedy may clarify the desired effect of a remedy contained in *LBIII*. Like this remedy, the remedy in *LBIII* suggests a return to menstruation connected to the prevention of conception or pregnancy: here, the woman's flow is depicted as having been "obstructed" by something—"Wiþ þon þe wifum sie forstanden hira monaþgecynd…" (In case a woman's menstruation is obstructed…)[52]—perhaps by a tumor, but also perhaps by a fetus. The indeterminacy serves to open rather than foreclose the possibility. This elaborate remedy calls for boiling, drinking, bathing, and then bathing while drinking, but all of this must take place in alignment with the woman's expected menstrual period: "Þu scealt simle þam wife bæþ wyrcean and drenc sellan on þa ilcan tid. Þe hire sio gecynd æt wære ahsa þæs æt þam wife" (You must always make the bath for the woman and give her the drink at the same time as [her] menstrual period might be. You must ask this time of the woman).[53] This remedy requires a great deal of

51 I do not suggest that the men using or writing this book fully understood or even recognized the potential of this remedy. Rather, I suggest that it demonstrates the possibility of reproductive control for women, couched in language just vague enough and just uncomfortable enough to occlude its potential from those who might see it as abject.

52 Banham and Voth, *LBIII*, 3.38.1. In its entirety: "Wiþ þon þe wifum sie forstanden hira monaþgecynd wyl on ealað hleomoc and twa curmeallan sele drincan and beþe þæt wif on hatum baþe and drince þone drenc on þam baþe hafa þe ær geworht clam of beor dræstan and of grenre mucgwyrte and merce. And of berene melwe meng ealle to somne gehrer on pannan clæm on þæt gecynde lim and on þone cwið nioþoweardne þonne hio of þam bađe gæþ and drenc scenc fulne þæs ilcan scences wearmes and bewreoh þæt wif wel and læt beon swa beclæmed lange tide þæs dæges do swa tuwa swa þriwa swæþer þu scyle." (In case a woman's menstruation is obstructed: Boil in beer brooklime and two centauries, give to drink, and bathe the woman in a hot bath, and drink the drink in the bath. Have already made for you a poultice of *beor* dregs and of green mugwort and celery and of barley flour, mix all together, stir in a pan, apply to the genitals and below on the vagina when she gets out of the bath, and drink a cupful of the same cup, warm, and wrap the woman up well, and let her be poulticed like that for a long time of the day. Do this twice or three times, whichever you need to.)

53 Banham and Voth, *LBIII*, 3.38.2, translation mine. Banham and Voth, in their work in progress, translate it: "You must always make the woman the bath and give her the drink at the same time, so that the nature/birth *æt ware ahsa* of it to the woman," indicating the difficulty of the passage that they are working to untangle. Pollington renders this last part thus: "at the same time as would be normal for her [menstruation] ask this [time] of the woman," in *Leechcraft,* 394. Marijane Osborn notes, in reference to a different remedy, that "only the emmenagogue

labor, and very specific elements that must occur in a particular order and for an extended duration. A woman cannot undertake this on her own; she requires an expert to assist her, but she must also be a participant, obedient to the terms of the remedy.

However, the remedy relies on the woman's knowledge of her own body. She has to know and provide specific information in order for the timing to be correct and the remedy to succeed. Put simply, the physician needs to know the timing of the woman's cycle, so that he can try to provoke her cycle at the correct time—not too early, and, most importantly, not too late. If a woman is missing a period (and she knows when it ought to arrive), then it seems likely that she would be pregnant. If her periods are irregular or missing, then she would be unlikely to know when her period should begin. Logically, then, this specific provocation of menses seems to be about ending or preventing a potential or progressing pregnancy, rather than repairing an irregular cycle. It also suggests a woman's knowledge of her own body.

These remedies—few of which would have been safe or expedient—exist in a medical tradition that fundamentally excluded women from its practice. Likely, they were never really used to treat women, since the vast majority of women would have turned to other women for such knowledge and healing practices. Instead, these remedies reflect beliefs and ideas about women's bodies and reproduction, some of which derive from classical tradition, some from local practices, and all framed by the people in institutions that produced such texts. They participate in the textual construction of women's bodies, but they are so incomplete, so strange, that, even in the fiction of the bodies they seek to treat, they cannot and do not circumscribe women's agency over their own unruly bodies. Even so, some of the practical concerns and requirements for and of women's reproductive bodies exist within these pages, pushing both transcriber and translator to interact with unfamiliar body parts, distasteful effluvia, and taboo procedures. Medical texts include information meant to regulate not only menses but potentially also reproduction. Whether or not the men who transcribed and used these texts understood this language, and whether or not these texts were ever used in England to treat women, the texts both set forth and conceal the potential for women to control their own reproduction. The trick of remedies is that they are not individual; they exist to serve not one person,

brooklime would have effect on expelling the placenta," suggesting its known efficacy for this function; Osborn, "Anglo-Saxon Ethnobotany: Women's Reproductive Medicine in *Leech Book III*," in *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, ed. Peter Dendle and Alaine Touwaide (London: Boydell, 2008), 151.

but to serve a class united by similar suffering; they respond to the needs of women at large and turn individual maladies into a community bound by common physical experience. These remedies give us a small window into the experience of a woman attempting to regulate her reproductive potential in a textual culture that rarely acknowledges women and that depicts their bodies even more rarely.

Manipulating Maternity via Menstruation

Because of the dangers of giving birth in the early Middle Ages, attested to by the disproportionate number of young women in graveyards, it is strange that so few remedies related to childbirth exist. We know the likelihood of maternal loss from the remaining cemeteries;[54] motherhood did not come easily or safely to many women in this period. Indeed, Sayer and Dickinson suggest that "Everyone would have known someone who had, or would, die in childbirth."[55] Maternal mortality, then, was rampant, and dangers to both mother and child were significant, and yet there are few remedies for help in childbirth. The only remedy in the tradition with attention to difficulty in labor is difficult to comprehend, suggesting a woman bathe herself in parsnip emulsion prepared for her by a practitioner.[56] This remedy captures the relationship between physician and laboring woman, demonstrating the remarkable disconnect between the world of childbirth and the world of written and learned medicine.[57] The physician boils this plant, and then turns everything over to the woman, with no real instructions, except an indication that doing as she is told will allow her to "be healed."

What this remedy reveals is that in childbirth and delivery, while women likely were not going it alone, they were not attended by the men who wrote

54 Andy Boddington notes "another notable feature, common in many archaeological populations, is higher female mortality during early adulthood; this no doubt associated with the high infant mortality and together they represent the strains and hazards of pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing;"; "Raunds, Northhamptonshire: Analysis of a Country Churchyard," *World Archaeology* 18, no. 3 (February 1987), 417.

55 Sayer and Dickinson, "Reconsidering Obstetric Death," 293.

56 De Vriend, *OEH,* 82.1: "Feldmoru/pastinaca siluatica: Wið þæt wifmen earfuðlice (earfoþlice) cennen genim þas wyrte þe we pastinacam siluaticam nemdun, seoð on wætere, syle þonne þæt se man hyne þær mid beðige, he bið gehæled." (Wild carrot or parsnip: If a woman has difficulty in giving birth, take the plant we call *pastinaca siluatica*, simmer it in water, and give it so that she can bathe herself with it, she will be healed.)

57 As Voth notes in this volume, there are no medical texts for a typical pregnancy, suggesting the reliance of women on other women during childbirth, rather than on physicians (see pp. 000).

the manuscripts, as the manuscripts have little to offer by way of knowledge about typical births.[58] While those men participated in dialogue about the maintenance of *monaðgecynd* and *flewsan*, they had very little of use to offer women. They wrote about women's bodies in vague and general terms, using men's bodies as the default in the medical texts as a whole, and, on the part of both authors and early translators, revealing an unsurprising Kristevan abjection of women's leaky bodies. Yet these texts offer us access to some kind of middle ground with regards to the "real" lives of early medieval English women. They are not graveyards, which give us actual bodies to be interpreted using their locations, placements, and surroundings. They are not literary texts, which give us specific characters who function primarily in relation to their narrative or rhetorical purposes (which is not to say that medical texts do not operate by means of their own rhetorical purposes). Medical texts seek to reveal truths about kinds of symptoms, and therefore about the kinds of bodies that experience those ailments. While the truths about these bodies and their disorders are framed by the worldviews of the texts' authors, editors, and scribes—a penumbra that is useful and valuable under its own terms—the bodies they describe are bodies like our own. They are bodies that bleed, or don't bleed; bodies that conceive, or cannot; bodies that give birth, or die trying. There is a truth in the nature of the bodies, even as they are mediated by the limitations of the text, and there is a truth in the pattern of solutions presented by these texts. The truth is that all bodies, not just women's, are unruly, but that the rules of the social order decide which problems merit attention, whether or not the solutions they provide work. These texts leave midwives and childbirth absent; they invoke but never name abortion; they give methods for starting or stopping menstrual periods but use vague language to do so. They allow us to see what women might want for their bodies, but they leave the motives frustratingly absent. But in that absence is possibility, a place where women, through absence, might constitute their own desires and regulate their own reproductive destinies.

In a culture wherein women's bodies are mediated at every turn by men's legislation, mores, and judgment—today's culture, that is; a culture wherein 600 people line up around a North Carolina women's clinic to say that abortion is a "man's issue,"[59] and wherein black women in the United States

58 See Voth, in this volume.

59 "Christian Group Protests Outside North Carolina Clinic, Calls Abortion 'a Man's Issue'," Women in the World, *New York Times Live*, June 13, 2017, accessed June 15, 2017, http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2017/06/13/christian-group-protests-outside-north-carolina-clinic-calls-abortion-a-mans-issue/.

are dying in childbirth at higher rates than twenty-five years ago[60]—as much as yesteryear's—can we say that women's medicine is or has ever been about women's bodies? In other words, were women better off before women's health was part of patriarchal systems of medicine? Does representation matter, or does existence inside the record fundamentally turn women into objects to be read to, as well as read by, the men who dictate the rules of culture at the expense of women's agency? Perhaps it is better to be covert, to fly below the radar and to escape the policing of and diminishment by patriarchal culture. Or perhaps it is time to insist on embracing the knowledge and experience of women, even when we must find presence in absence. This essay and indeed this volume seek to inject and exalt what has been abjected, and to amplify the voices and experiences of women, both historical and at present.

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60 Linda Villarosa writes, "This tragedy of black infant mortality is intimately intertwined with another tragedy: a crisis of death and near death in black mothers themselves. The United States is one of only 13 countries in the world where the rate of maternal mortality—the death of a woman related to pregnancy or childbirth up to a year after the end of pregnancy—is now worse than it was 25 years ago"; see "Why America's Black Mothers and Babies are in a Life-or-Death Crisis," *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2018, accessed May 31, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/magazine/black-mothers-babies-death-maternal-mortality.html.

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9 Dangerous Voices, Erased Bodies

Reassessing the Old English *Wifgemædla* and Witches in *Leechbook III*[1]

Erin E. Sweany

Abstract

Entry 57 of *Leechbook III* is a brief, vague remedy that is ambiguous but has a long history of being interpreted as a reference to witchcraft. This essay assesses how potential female voices and bodies in the Old English medical corpus have been interpreted as agents of harm by modern scholars, based on thin philological evidence. This essay relies on a combination of lexis, syntax, and context to interpret a thinly attested Old English illness label and propose a previously overlooked female patient in *Leechbook III*. The case of *wif gemædla* serves as a reminder that scholarship of early medieval English medicine continues to rely heavily on nineteenth-century translations and editions, which has left us with a legacy of outdated editorial and cultural assumptions that now require updating.

Keywords: medicine, charms, women's bodies, women's voices, mental health, *Leechbook III*

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> It seems hardly wise therefore to argue backwards from sixteenth-century conditions beyond this date … The chain does not seem strong enough, and we should be at fault in breathing life over it from the anecdotes of post-conquest writers, those men who, looking back over the past, wove into history from their own experience and knowledge many legends of evil women and demonical arts, until at last mediæval historians were themselves unable to disentangle fact from fantasy, and hitherto innocent men and women of earlier generations were condemned for dabbling in black arts which they cannot have known.
>
> Jane Crawford, 1963 (114–116)

> *Wiþ wif g[e]mædlan g[e]berge o[n] neahtnestig rædices moran þy dæge ne mæg þe se gemædla sceþþan* (Against/in the case of *wif gemædlan*, partake of a radish root at night-fasting, [on] that day the *gemædla* will not be able to injure you).[2]
>
> *Leechbook III*, c. 875–900 (Entry 57)[3]

Entry 57 of *Leechbook III*, above, is a brief, vague remedy recommending that *someone* (it is not clear who) consume a radish to remedy *something* (it is not clear what). The source of the ambiguity stems from the challenges of assessing how the affliction that the charm claims to remedy—*wif gemædla*—should be best understood. *Wif* (woman) is clear enough, of course, in purely philological terms, but its semantic relationship to *gemædla* is not. And we do not have a clear sense of what *gemædla* means, occurring as it does only twice in the Old English corpus (in this remedy and in the table of contents of *Leechbook III*, pointing to this entry).[4] It has most often been speculatively understood as a kind of speech. Combined with *wif*, the affliction has been interpreted over the centuries as a harmful vocal performance made by a woman, often even referred to as witchcraft. Considering the philological murkiness of *wif gemædla* and the anti-feminist nineteenth-century environment in which it was initially defined, it is past time for a reassessment of Entry 57.

2 Transcribed from C. E. Wright, ed., *Bald's Leechbook: British Museum Royal Manuscript 12 D. Xvii*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 5 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955). Bracketed letters indicate the expansion of a manuscript abbreviation. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

3 The manuscript text includes regular numbering of the chapters and my labeling of this entry as Entry 57 coincides with the manuscript numbering. The numbering is contemporary with the text, and the body of the text is preceded by a numbered table of contents.

4 The word is nearly a *hapax legomenon* and only is not by the technicality of it appearing in the table of contents that copies the opening phrase of the chapter to which it points. Its morphology indicates that it is the object of the prepositional phrase that begins the remedy and thus is the most likely affliction label, meaning that it is a key part of understanding Entry 57 as a medical remedy.

This article reviews the history of translation of (*wif*)*gemædla* and the cultural and textual contexts of Entry 57, assessing how potential female voices and bodies have been interpreted by both the Old English medical corpus itself and by nineteenth-, twentieth-, and even twenty-first-century scholars. A considerable number of translators have clung to the figure of a hostile woman based on thin philological evidence. To read *wif* as the agent of harm in this remedy necessitates that we understand the radish component as an edible preventative against, or treatment for, a human causing harm to another human. This would be unprecedented in the Old English medical corpus. The closest analogous texts ask for protection against (mostly cattle) theft. Even those charms do not claim to prevent harm but are primarily asking for the thief to not be able to hide their actions, making the charm potentially restorative rather than preventative. Rejecting the *wif* as the agent of harm on these contextual grounds, I therefore make a joint philological, historicist, and contextual case for understanding the *wif* of Entry 57 instead as the patient. The case of *wif gemædla* serves as a potent reminder that the lexical evidence informing philological inquiry is always imbricated in cultural values and interpretations. Scholarship of early medieval English medicine continues to rely heavily on nineteenth-century translations and editions, which (as in the case of *wif gemædla*'s long interpretation as a woman's harmful or malicious speech) has left us with a legacy of outdated editorial and cultural assumptions that now require painstaking updating.

The Many Ambiguities of Entry 57

Let us begin with the relationship between *wif* and *gemædla*, which (as I indicated above) is murky. Syntax and morphology suggest that the words form a compound, since it is common for a modifier in an Old English compound (*wif*, in this case) to be uninflected. If *wif* were not a modifier in a compound but rather a stand-alone reference, its syntactic placement in the remedy—coming just after a preposition and before that preposition's object—would be odd. It is thus more likely that *wif* is a modifier. Past scholars have usually treated *wif* as such, but that has contributed to the interpretation of *wif* as an agent of affliction (and thus an agential force of the *gemædla*).

This view of *wif* as an aspect of the affliction that Entry 57 is supposed to treat or prevent has been reinforced by the consistent interpretation of the *þe* as necessarily distinct from *wif*. The *þe* is read as the patient/

victim who needs to eat a radish to protect themselves from the adversarial *wif*(*gemædla*).[5] I contend that these interpretations overlook the possibility that *wif gemædla* refers to an affliction *of* women. Thus, the *wif* (woman) of the compound would be a sufferer of *gemædla* and the *þe* (you) of the second independent clause could refer to her. Entry 57 would then be instructing the *wif* who is a victim (or at risk) of *gemædla* to eat a radish, and not a woman performing some kind of dangerous speech against someone else. The crux of the mystery of Entry 57 is thus an issue of how *wif* is semantically related to *gemædla*. Grammatically *wif* could be either the agent or victim of affliction, however, I argue that culturally it is more likely that she is the patient.

There are no compelling clues about the nature of *wif gemædla* elsewhere in the entry, which has few components. The use of radishes as a cure is not especially informative. Though radishes are a medicinal food in Old English, they are not associated with any particular kind of affliction.[6] They are *materia medica* (the "stuff/materials of medicine") in cures for various common aches and pains, damaging bodily humors, vague disorders of the heart and lungs, worms, and health issues manifesting on the skin (*wens* and thick eyelids, for example). Radishes are ingredients in salves and other medicinal mixtures, and some remedies direct that they be consumed whole (sometimes with a bit of salt). One remedy against worms calls for ground radish seed to be consumed in wine.[7] Finally, radish is one of nearly sixty ingredients in a *halig sealf* (holy salve) that is used in an elaborate Christian performance to expel the devil from all of a person's body parts

5 Some editors (such as Felix Grendon, see below) treat the reference as one word (*wifgemædla*) and some print two separate words (*wif gemædla*). There is a notable amount of space between the words in the manuscript, but as discussed above, syntax and morphology suggest a compound. However, given the murkiness of the sensical relationship between *wif* and *gemædla* (which I will further discuss below), and the importance of this murkiness in the scholarly history of Entry 57's interpretations, I will retain the manuscript reading of *wif gemædla*, not to challenge the likeliness of the reference as a compound but rather to call attention to the uncertain conceptual relationship between the compound components. Exceptions to this are made when quoting editors and translators who have treated the reference as one word.

6 Outside of five glossaries, the only Old English references to radishes (OE *rædic*, *hrædic*, *redic*) occur in the medical corpus. There are forty-two total references to radishes in the Old English medical corpus (twenty in Bald's *Leechbook*, fifteen in *Lacnunga*, six in *Leechbook III*, and one in the Omont Fragment).

7 Entry 46, by Cockayne's numbering, in the first book of Bald's *Leechbook*. T. O. Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England: Being a Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country before the Norman Conquest* (London: Longman, Green, 1865), II:114.

and restore the person to health.[8] In sum, there is little consistency among its varied uses to suggest a specific affliction referenced by Entry 57, but it is equally apparent that there are no clear associations between radishes and women or between radishes and threatening verbal performances. Yet despite the semantic ambiguity of the affliction referred to and the rather all-purpose medical utility of radishes, Entry 57 is consistently interpreted as instructions for a radish to be consumed against some sort of threatening verbal performance by a woman—that is, the *wif* is understood to be an agent of harm. After reviewing in greater detail the (mis)translation history of Entry 57, I will offer cultural evidence that supports the understanding of *wif* as a patient in need of aid rather than as an affliction.

The Translation History of Entry 57 as Witchcraft

Between 1864 and 1866, T. O. Cockayne published the first editions and translations of Old English medical manuscripts as part of his three-volume collection *Leechdoms, Wortcraft, and Starcunning of Early England*. Within this work, appended to Bald's *Leechbook*, is *Leechbook III*, which contains the remedy *Wiþ wif gemædlan* (Entry 57). Cockayne translates this entry as "Against a womans [sic] chatter; taste at night fasting a root of radish, that day the chatter cannot harm thee."[9] While *gemædla* may or may not refer to an utterance (a topic I address below), the implications of Cockayne's tone must be addressed. Cockayne is consistently dismissive of women's speech in his interpretation of *Wiþ wif gemædlan*, as can be seen in his word choice of "chatter" (above) and his translation of the table of contents entry as "against womens [sic] prating."[10] These translations confidently interpret

8 Entry 63 in J. H. G. Grattan and C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

9 Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, II:342–43.

10 Cockayne's edition, the first full edition of Bald's *Leechbook* with *Leechbook III*, is still the most current, complete published edition with a Modern English translation. There are two unpublished editions that I am aware of: the 1984 University of Denver dissertation of B. M. Olds and the digital edition compiled by Brooke Bullock in 2014 as an undergraduate senior thesis. See B. M. Olds, "Leechbook III: A Critical Edition and Translation" (PhD dissertation, University of Denver, 1984) and Brooke Bullock, ed., "Leechbook III: A New Digital Edition," May 2014, accessed December 30, 2016, http://leechbookiii.github.io/. There is further a forthcoming edition by Debby Banham and Christine Voth for the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library: *Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts, Volume II: Bald's Leechbook and Leechbook III: Old English Medicine in British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii*. Wright's 1955 edition is a facsimile edition and contains no transcription or translation.

gemædla not only as an utterance but moreover one that achieves nothing of worth, while simultaneously attempting to effect harm. These two dubious implications have, in powerful ways, set the tone for the treatment of Entry 57 for over a century.

Cockayne's misogynistic treatment of women's voices easily morphed in later scholarship into an interpretation of the remedy as protection against witchcraft—which meant that women's voices in Entry 57 became understood as a medium for witchcraft. Felix Grendon's 1909 translation, like Cockayne's, relies on an uncertain reading of *gemædla* as a reference to a verbal performance, but adds a presumption of superstition. Grendon, in his 1909 compilation of Old English texts that he classifies as charms, is the first to explicitly suggest that *wif gemædla* is a reference to witchcraft.[11] Grendon notes that, in regard to *wifgemædla*, "something like 'bewitchment' or 'spell' is meant.'" He further titles the entry "Against a Witch's Spell."[12] This attribution of malicious agency to women, and particularly women's voices, that can be circumvented through *materia medica* represents women as dangerous, yet controllable with the right kind of knowledge. Certainly these implications are distasteful to a twenty-first-century reader, but there is also very little textual evidence to recommend them as accurate. Grendon's translation is problematic because it compensates for scant lexical evidence with which to translate *wif gemædla* by leaning on an extremely speculative and misogynistic history of translation of the entry as well as on faulty context. Grendon's edition extracts texts from their manuscript contexts in order to present a catalogue of Old English magical texts, but this extracting and cataloguing resulted in a reception of each entry in the edition that is significantly different from how they would have been received by their contemporary audiences. Without its medical context, Entry 57 is semantically adrift, and subsequent translations have relied overly much on anachronistic ideas of early medieval English women, magic, and medicine.

The seductive speculation about women's malicious voices is relied on through the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. C. E. Wright, in his 1955 facsimile edition of Bald's *Leechbook* and *Leechbook III*, preserves Grendon's categorization of Entry 57 as a charm and Grendon's titling of the entry ("Against a Witch's Spell"). Audrey Meaney, in a 1989 article, classifies

11 Grendon classifies Entry 57 as a "charm remedy," a label which has little to do with form or performance but rather is applied to remedies "in which superstition is either the most important or the sole element." There is no verse or verbal performance elements to the *treatment* in Entry 57 and so I do not align with Grendon in his labeling of the remedy as a charm. Felix Grendon, "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," *The Journal of American Folklore* 22, no. 84 (1909): 136, 213.

12 Grendon, "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," 236.

the entry as one of two examples of "black magic" in the medical corpus and offers a translation of "malicious gossip or backbiting"— a translation quite like Cockayne's mid-nineteenth century translation in its acceptance of the idea that early medieval people were dismissive of, and hostile to, women's speech.[13] This interpretation of *gemædla* as an utterance by dangerous, injurious women, persists. R. A. Buck, in a 2000 article, claims that the presence of this word in Entry 57 "provides a link to the well-documented historical tradition of desired silencing of women and the persistent attitude that women's talk is idle, complaining, excessive, and bothersome [and even] pushes the notion a bit further, suggesting the belief of physical harm to the man as a consequence [of women's talk]."[14] Because scholars like Meaney and Buck are uncritically relying upon these early translations, they do not interrogate the accuracy of this stereotype in early medieval English cultural and medical contexts. While certainly the Christian compilers and audience of *Leechbook III* would have been familiar with biblical warnings about life with contentious women being unpleasant,[15] there is no Old English tradition of verbally contentious women.

The Role of Utterances in Medicine

To further evaluate the likelihood of *gemædla* signifying an utterance, let us turn to the role of utterances in the context of Old English medical texts. Utterances are not represented as dangerous in the medical corpus. The voice is a powerful tool throughout the corpus as a means of performing charming and praying to petition for protection and good health.[16] Throughout the medical corpus, voices are presented as performing benevolent formulae, such as the appeal to powerful plants in the *Nine Herbs Charm*.[17] In this

13 Audrey L. Meaney, "Women, Witchcraft and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. G. Scragg, Audrey L. Meaney, Anthony Davies, Peter Kitson, and S. J. Parker (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 1989), 41–56.

14 R. A. Buck, "Women and Language in the Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks," *Women and Language* 23, no. 2 (2000): 49.

15 Proverbs 21:9 and 21:19. *The Bible*, Douay-Rheims version.

16 Distinctions between charming and praying are quite artificial. Karen Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 1–71.

17 Edward Pettit, in the introduction to his edition of another Old English medical text (*Lacnunga*), makes a similar point, remarking that in terms of pagan beliefs and practices, Bald's

charm, a speaker asks specific herbs for their help because they have power against many agents of health affliction.[18] The verbal formula that expounds on the herbs' powers and effectiveness is to be sung over the herbs as they are gathered, as well as sung over and even *into* the body of the ill person. And while certainly utterances are employed in remedies that seem to recall a pagan Germanic past (the *Nine Herbs Charm* references *Woden*), there are far more Christian than pagan utterances in the medical corpus.[19] For example, one of several entries just in *Leechbook III* that proscribe Christian verbal performances is Entry 62, which lists three specific masses that are to be sung over the *materia medica* for which the entry calls. The resulting mixture is then to further be treated to a performance of a litany, a creed, and the *Pater noster*.

Gender is a significant aspect of textually conveyed voices in the medical corpus. While most are either unmarked or male,[20] the Old English medical corpus is also an important source for the powerful voices of women, as we have seen from work done on the Old English childbirth charms by Audrey Meaney and Lisa M. C. Weston, who have made particularly valuable contributions to the representations of mothering women in the Old English medical corpus.[21] These charms (primarily *Lacnunga* 161–63) are *remedial* and focused on the reproductive functions of a female body and female-gendered social roles; they are to be performed by women for the purpose of conception, birth, and childcare.[22] They are for *se wifman se hire*

Leechbook, *Leechbook III*, and *Lacnunga* "bear direct testimony only to the benevolent remedial aspects of this obscure world." See Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Appendices*, 2 vols (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), I:li.

18 For a discussion of the Old English representation of illness as a collection of foreign, attacking agents see Erin E. Sweany, "The Anglo-Saxon Medical Imagination: Invasion, Conglomeration, and Autonomy" (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2017), Chapter 1.

19 Pettit reminds readers that "it is difficult to discern 'purely heathen paragraphs'—there are (unsurprisingly) many remedies that make no reference to religion, but equally those that do are either ostensibly entirely Christian … or, where pagan elements may well be present … they are combined with Christian elements." Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585*, I:xxxvii.

20 See the discussions of gendered words in the Old English medical corpus in: Buck, "Women and Language in the Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks," 44–47; Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," 280.

21 Meaney, "Women, Witchcraft and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England"; Lisa M. C. Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic: The Old English Metrical Childbirth Charms," *Modern Philology* 92, no. 3 (February 1, 1995): 279–93.

22 For further discussion of women's medicine in the Old English medical corpus, see Christine Voth's and Dana Oswald's essays in the present volume.

bearn/cild afedan ne mæg (the woman who is not able to nourish her child). Entry 161 seems to refer to nourishment in the womb and thus is a charm to prevent miscarriage, whereas 163 may refer to the inadequate production of breastmilk.[23] Weston points out that these charms "turn [the speaker's] magical force not outward, as in other charms, but back upon herself."[24] For example, Entry 161 instructs the performer to, among other things, step over a grave while uttering "Ðis me to bote þære laþan lætbyrde, / þis me to bote þære swæran swærbyrde, / þis me to bote þære laðan lambyrde" (This to me [is] a remedy for the painful slow birth, this to me [is] a remedy for the laborious oppressive birth, this to me [is] a remedy for the grievous debilitating birth). This is thus unlike the prevailing interpretation of Entry 57 of a woman directing her speech for the harm of others.

The utterances in the childbirth charms, indeed all the utterances referenced by the Old English medical corpus, are protective and curative. And in fact, Pettit notes that "[h]uman agency [all agency, not just verbal agency] as the cause of affliction appears rarely in [Old English] medical texts."[25] My consideration of Entry 57 within its medical context demonstrates that if it were a medical remedy *against* a harmful human utterance directed *at* another human, as is suggested by the prevailing translations of it, then it attains a dubious and singular distinction in the corpus, standing alone as a unique remedy against a unique affliction.[26] Our interpretations, it turns out, have been hampered by a history of labeling powerful women's voices as witchcraft. Furthermore, while feminist scholarship of the medical corpus has focused on the reproductive body, a woman who is presented as other than actively reproductive is as deserving of empathetic scholarly treatment and reading as the reproductive female body.

23 Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," 288–91.

24 Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," 288.

25 Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585*, I:xxxiv.

26 The only possible parallel would be the charm for unfruitful land recorded at the conclusion of the Old Saxon *Heliand* in British Library Cotton MS Caligula A.VII This charm is stated to be a *bot* (remedy) for land that does not *wel wexan* (grow well) or has been harmed by *dry* (magic/a magician) or *lyblac* (poison/witchcraft/sorcery). This charm involves the collection and blessing of sod from a field accompanied by verbal performances. There is a reference to women's voices as powerful and potentially dangerous at the conclusion of this charm, but that danger is not only from women. Rather, the charm concludes with the injunction that the charm be not overcome by *cwidol wif* (witty woman) or *cræftig man* (wise man). It is notable that while *cwidol* glosses Latin *dicax* (eloquent, witty) in three of its four occurrences in the OE corpus, the first translation offered by the *Dictionary of Old English* for its other occurrence, in the charm under discussion, is "jabbering." Also, this charm is quite elaborate, requiring much more in terms of performance and ingredients than radish consumption.

Witchcraft in Early Medieval England

Around the year 948, a widow was accused of harming a man and was drowned in retaliation. An account of an Ailsworth land transfer recounts that the land had come into the hands of the family of Wulfstan Uccea due to this accusation and execution.[27] While Anthony Davies considers this to be the only record of an historical witch in early medieval England, it is a parallel case to *wif gemædla* in that when you dig further into the record, its interpretation as witchcraft becomes dubious.[28] The recorded facts of the matter are that a woman, a widow, is drowned after she and her son are accused of causing harm to a man (Wulfstan's father) with iron stakes: "hi drifon [i]serne stacan on Ælsie Wulfstanes feder" (they drove iron stakes into Ælsie, Wulfstan's father). Davies interprets this accusation of piercing with *stacan* as an accusation of image magic: driving pins into an effigy of a person to cause harm through the representation of harm.[29] Andrew Rabin, in his edition of the text, repeats Davies's claim about image magic;[30] however, the Old English does not indicate that there was an effigy involved, only that there was some evidence as to guilt in the form of a *morð* (death; that which causes death; murder) dragged from *hire inclifan* (her inner chamber).[31] Like Entry 57, there is no explicit mention of witchcraft in this record, and yet it is so easily assumed to be a record of a witchcraft accusation.[32] The

27 The source of this charter is the mid-twelfth century London, Society of Antiquaries, MS 60, fols. 54v–55r. The Old English is from the edition in Rabin, "Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law: A Student Edition of Five Old English Lawsuits," *Old English Newsletter* 41, no. 3 (n.d.): 33–56. Translations are my own.

28 Davies concludes that the other accounts are "little more than literary constructs" motivated by Anglo-Norman politics. Davies, "Witches in Anglo-Saxon England: Five Case Histories," in Scragg et al., *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, 41.

29 Davies, "Witches in Anglo-Saxon England," 49–50.

30 Rabin also expresses doubt that the widow was genuinely believed to be practicing witchcraft and wasn't rather the victim of a land-grab by those more powerful than her. Rabin, "Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law," 43.

31 Rabin implies that there may be a link between the widow and wild beasts when he notes that "The word *inclifan* (nom. *incleofa*) is also that used to describe a lion's den." "Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law," 43n6.

32 Davies connects the accusation against the widow and her son to a prohibition in the *Old English Penitential* against anyone driving *stacan on ænige man* (stakes into any man/person); see "Witches in Anglo-Saxon England," 50 (Old English qtd from Davies n. 71, which is IV.13 from Raith's *Die Altenenglischen Version des Halitgarschen Bussbuches*). The penitential record presents the strongest case that the widow was accused of witchcraft since the prohibition, while not mentioning witchcraft or effigies, is, in some penitential records, grouped with entries that *do* clearly mention witchcraft. Davies further offers that the drowning of the woman may have been justice via the "cold water ordeal" wherein an accused person is innocent if they sink in

vagueness of *morð* invites interpretation and the prevailing interpretations suggest that the appeal of finding witches has resulted in witches. Carole Hough, however, sees no barrier to understanding this as an account of entirely non-magical physical violence perpetrated by a woman.[33]

Furthermore, if this is a record of a witchcraft accusation, it is important that this case is not gendered; both the woman and her son are accused of the violence. The son escapes into outlawry and thus is not necessarily spared by his accusers. The following review of witchcraft in Old English records stresses that more care needs to be taken when considering whether an Old English record might be referring to witches or witchcraft—and, if so, what these things might have actually looked like to early medieval people. Witches, witchcraft, and magic are present in Old English texts, but Karen Jolly warns us against drawing too many conclusions about any actual early medieval practices since cultural concepts concerning witchcraft and magic only begin to be systematized post-1100.[34] The Old English medical texts are a product of the period that Jolly terms the conversion period: a time of intense intermingling of traditions. Ecclesiastical texts collapsed non-Christian religious practices and pre-medieval magical practices together as a way of discouraging any non-Christian belief systems.[35] Thus it is not surprising that most of the clear references to witches and witchcraft in

a body of water while bound in ropes and guilty if they float. Davies's research shows that the Ailsworth incident took place over a decade before the cold water ordeal is recorded as a form of trial for any crime, and several decades before it is recorded as a form of trial for practicing magic. Davies ultimately concludes that "It is possible … that the widow of Ailsworth underwent the cold water ordeal … It is more likely that she was simply drowned as the charter says" (50). Since the record states that the widow was taken by a man and drowned at London bridge (rather than undergoing a trial), Davies considers this case to be more likely a miscarriage of justice, since the proscribed penalty for witchcraft at the time was far lighter than death.

33 Carole Hough, "Two Kentish Laws Concerning Women: A New Reading of Æthelberht 73 and 74," *Anglia* 119, no. 4 (January 2002): 565–66.

34 "Pagan magic, Germanic or classical in origin, merged in condemnatory lists. In all of these cases, the Christian cosmology is asserted as obliterating, demonizing, or demoting pre-Christian cosmological structures, while particular folk practices, such as blessing herbs, were adjusted to fit that Christian cosmology. This paradigm shift resulting from the conversion phase colors everything we read about popular practice in the early Middle Ages and suggests caution in making assertions about the actual practice of magic in this period … The post-twelfth-century world, a period of rapid intellectual change … began to define magic in new ways and to make distinctions between different kinds of magic (high and low, white and black), definitions that had far-reaching implications." Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices," 20.

35 See Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices," 15; Peters, "The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic, and Witchcraft: From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century"," in Jolly et al., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, 184.

Old English texts occur in religious texts: primarily, the writings of Ælfric and the penitential record.

Given that prohibitions against witchcraft were a way of discouraging non-Christian practices, both malicious and benevolent actions get lumped into this category in religious literature. One section of the *Old English Penitential* contains penances for those who use witchcraft to kill, to encourage someone to love them, or attempt to cure their own children. The prohibition against a woman curing her child "mid ænigu[m] wiccecræfte. oððe æt wega gelætan þurh eorðan tyhð" (by means of any witchcraft or causes [the child] to be drawn through the earth at [cross] roads)[36] links women with medicine and witchcraft, but besides the additional prohibition that women not cure their children by placing them on the tops of ovens, the remaining penances have nothing to do with medicine. Christine Voth, in her essay in the present volume, points out that designating the remedial practices of women in the penitentials may have been a matter of asserting social power by the church as the designation "discredited them and their practices within the eyes of the church, and perhaps their communities." Outside of the penitentials, witchcraft and medicine are linked by Ælfric in a few sermons and homilies.[37] In the sermon *Passio Sancti Bartholomei*, Ælfric explains that seeking health "æt unalyfedum tilungum oððe æt awyrigedum galdrum oððe æt ænigum wiccecræfte" (by means of disallowed treatments or by means of cursed incantations or by means of any witchcraft) is "þam hæðenum mannum gelic" (like those heathen men). By following this injunction that ill people should only seek their health "æt his drihtne" (from his Lord), Ælfric confines all other practices, including myriad practices offered in the extensive Old English medical corpus, to the realm of heathenism—which is, as we see in Old English penitentials and the writings of Ælfric, the realm of *wiccecræft*. However, Ælfric does concede, in the same sermon, that the use of herbs for healing is acceptable, as they are allowed by Augustine: "Se wisa agustinus cwæð þæt unpleolic sy þeah hwa læcewyrte þicge" (The wise Augustine said that consuming medicinal plants is, however, not dangerous).[38] Thus, while some of the practices in the

36 Allen J. Frantzen, "Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database," accessed April 25, 2019, http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php.

37 These instances are collected and reviewed in Audrey L. Meaney, "Ælfric and Idolatry," *Journal of Religious History* 13, no. 2 (1984): 119–135.

38 Ælfric does warn, immediately following this concession, that we should recall that the plants have healing power because they were created thus by God and so we should not collect herbs in any way that acknowledges that the healing power is any but that of God (such as singing any *galdor* ["poem, verse, charm, spell, incantation"] over the plant). He thus allows

Old English medical corpus (such as the *Nine Herbs Charm*) may have been disallowed in Ælfrician terms, by those same terms not all secular, material medical practices were disallowed to Christians. Most importantly of all, in the few instances where medicine and witchcraft are linked, the witchcraft aims to achieve curative, benevolent goals rather than harmful, malicious goals. Indeed, Meaney remarks that Ælfric "seemingly deliberately omitted the possibility of hurtful magic" in his preaching.[39]

Only a few penitential entries explicitly prohibit verbal performances of any kind by *wifas* (women). For example, Entry 28 (Text A) of the Old English *Canons of Theodore* warns that "hwylc wif wiccunga bega and þa deoflican galdorsangas, blinne and fæste an ger and þa [þreo] æfæstenu" (whichever woman undertakes witching and those devilish incantations, cease [these practices] and fast for one year and then [undertake] three quadragesimal fasts).[40] The majority of actions that the penitential entries forbid women to perform are not verbal.[41] As is the case with witchcraft and medicine in penitential literature, then, there is not an especially strong link between witchcraft and verbal performances in Old English sources.

Finally, we should beware a default gendering of witchcraft as feminine in our interpretations of these sources. While the above penitential example genders *wiccung* as a female activity, the prohibitions against *wiccung*, *wiccecræft*, *ættorcræft, lyblac*, *galdorsang*, *galdorcræft*, *halsung*, and *drycræft* are generally not gendered in the Old English corpus but rather are actions prohibited from the ambiguous, indefinite relative *hwa* (whoever) or the universal *man* (person). No one, not just women, should engage in activities that seek power, change, or information from non-Christian sources,

that some medical herbal use does not contradict his imperative to seek health only from God. There is another instance of Ælfric distinguishing acceptable methods of healing in *De auguriis*, a sermon that deals quite a lot with the relationship between magic and its relationship to the devil. In *De auguriis*, Ælfric seems to distinguish medicine from magic when, after a list of prohibitions, two of which are seeking information about health from a witch and redress from illness or misfortune from a witch, he reminds the listener to appeal only to God for such assistance and that "læcedom is alyfed fram lichamena tyddernysse" (medicine is allowed for bodily weakness). Ælfric of Eynsham and Peter Clemoes, ed., *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies: Text. The First Series*, EETS s.s. 17 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 449–50; Ælfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints, Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, trans. Gunning (Miss.) and Wilkinson (Miss.). EETS o.s. 76. (London: N. Trübner, 1881), 378.

39 Meaney, "Ælfric and Idolatry," 135.

40 R. D. Fulk and Stefan Jurasinski, eds., *The Canons of Theodore*, EETS s.s. 25 (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).

41 Some of these prohibited activities involve vocal performances (*galdorsang* and *halsung*), as in Entry 28, but most do not.

and everyone, not just women, might be tempted by these activities.[42] An oft-overlooked article, "Evidence for Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England," by Jane Crawford (quoted in the epigraph) acknowledges the relatively ungendered nature of Old English witchcraft: "No particular attention is directed to the *cwidol wif* any more than to the *cræftig man*, suggesting that as yet the Anglo-Saxons were without the concept of especially evil women magicians."[43] And Crawford further points out that *wiccan* and *wiccige* do not make genders clear, and that we do not get the clearly feminine *wicce* until Ælfric.[44] Old English also makes available a masculine form of the word: *wicca* (though it is, admittedly, used considerably less than the feminine *wicce*). Additionally, there are other male-gendered words for those practicing magic besides *cræftig man* such as *dryman* and *wiglere*. Allen Frantzen concedes that women are not the exclusive targets of witchcraft prohibitions in penitential literature but ultimately dismisses Crawford's claims, asserting that "there is no doubt that in the penitentials women and not men were expected to have performed these evil acts."[45] I do not agree with the strength of the latter statement given the rarity of the gendered specification *wif* and the clear references to male clerics in sections on love magic. The manipulative and selfish, although not inherently malicious, act of gaining someone's love by means of food, drink, or incantations is clearly labeled as witchcraft in the *Old English Penitential* and is also either ungendered or ascribed to men—the most severe punishments for concocting love potions are levied on clerical figures (clerics, deacons, and mass priests), which would have been exclusively male positions.[46] While it

42 Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle claim that early medieval English witchcraft is gendered female. Both claims rely too much seemingly on the authors' own sense of what counts as magic rather than any clear early medieval labels of such and both claims ignore the prohibitions against men in their analyses. See Lawrence-Mathers, "The Problem of Magic in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Reading Medieval Studies* 33 (2007): 87–104; Raiswell and Dendle, "Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon and Early Modern England: Continuity and Evolution in Social Context," *The Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 4 (2008): 738–767.

43 *Cwidol wif* and *cræftig man* are from the charm for unproductive farmland, briefly discussed above.

44 Jane Crawford, "Evidences for Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England," *Medium Ævum* 32, no. 2 (1963): 106.

45 Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 11.

46 "Gif hwa wiccige ymbe æniges mannes lufe…gif hit læwede man do. Fæste he healf ger. Wodnesdagum [ond] frigedagum … Gif hit bið cleric fæste an ger twegan dagas on wican … Gif he beo diacon. Fæste .iii. ger twegan dagas on wican." (If anyone use witchcraft in regard to another's desire … if a layman does it, he is to fast half a year on Wednesdays and Fridays … If it is a cleric, he is to fast 1 year for 2 days [each week] … If it is a deacon, he is to fast 3 years for

certainly is the case that Ælfric wrote more disparagingly of women than men in regards to witchcraft, even he did not confine those practices to women;[47] furthermore, Jolly reminds us that ideas about magic, which are mainly pejorative, survive in a corpus that preserves primarily the voices of the literate, clerical elite and that the medical roles of women are "relatively invisible."[48] Thus, I contend that it is shortsighted to treat witchcraft in Old English and early medieval texts as predominantly gendered female.[49]

The Alternative Translation History of *Wif gemædla*

Existing alongside the reading of *gemædla* as an utterance is a persistent, but far less prominent, reading of the word as an emotion word or word for non-normative mental state, usually translated as "fury" or "madness." Furthermore, there is an earlier and now almost unknown translation

2 days each week.) Text and translation Frantzen's. See Frantzen, "Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database," Y44.14.01-04, accessed April 25, 2019.

47 Women and witchcraft are, of course, intertwined in biblical texts and this is reflected in some of Ælfric's writings, but even he does not associate only women with nefarious magical practices. In some text added to *De auguriis* in two manuscripts a compiler has appended two Ælfrician-authored texts warning about the falseness of magic (as it is warned to be just an illusion cast by the devil). The first text warns against the male-gendered *dryman* who caused a woman's community to think she had been turned into a horse ("Macarius and the Magicians"). The second text is about the female-gendered *wicce* that Saul called on to raise Samuel from the dead ("Saul and the Witch of Endor"). It is notable that a compiler appended two warnings against magic and its nature as a devilish illusion to *De auguriis*, one for a magic practitioner of each gender. Furthermore, John C. Pope believes Ælfric intended these two short pieces to go together (Pope, 1:788). Even in *De auguriis*, where Ælfric uses the feminine pronoun *heo* in several of his explicit references to witches and magic, he does not make magic the exclusive domain of women as he also refers to *drymen* and more often uses the (likely gender-neutral in this instance) *he* and *man*. See Ælfric of Eynsham, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. John C. Pope, 2 vols. EETS o.s. 59, 260, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1:786–98; Ælfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 365–83.

48 Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices," 6–7, 31.

49 Frantzen, whose editions and scholarship on the Old English penitentials are currently inescapable when discussing these texts, demonstrates a readiness to adopt an anti-feminist position in this 1983 argument that is, in retrospect, unsurprising given his vehement rejection of feminism in his 2015 blogpost "How to Fight Your Way Out of the Feminist Fog" (since removed from his blog but expanded into a self-published book). Frantzen's positions and use of rhetoric from the notoriously misogynist men's rights movement should call into question his prior assertions on gender, women, and feminist criticism. For elaboration on Frantzen's positions, see the introduction to this volume, or J. J. Cohen's rejection of Frantzen's position in "On Calling Out Misogyny," *In the Middle*, 16 January 2016, accessed September 23, 2021, https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/01/on-calling-out-misogyny.html.

of *gemædla* as a reference to menstruation. These translations survive primarily in the lexicographic history of the word, which has seemingly not been adequately attended to in scholarship of *Leechbook III* Entry 57.

Wifgemædla as a reference to menstruation dates back at least to Joseph Bosworth's 1838 *A Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language*. Curiously, in this first edition of Bosworth's dictionary, *mædlan* is recorded as a variant of *maðelian* with the translation "to speak" while *wifgemædla* is translated as *mulierum menstrua* (no English translation is provided, as was common for references to menstruation in the nineteenth century).[50] In Bosworth's 1868 abridged version of his 1838 dictionary (*A Compendious Anglo-Saxon and English Dictionary*), *wifgemædla* is still translated as *mulierum menstrua* but the entry "gemædla 'menstrua'" is added (*mædlan* is slightly modified to *mǣdlan* and retains the translation "to speak").[51] By the 1882 Bosworth-Toller, *gemædla* is translated as "talk" and *wifgemǣdla* as "a woman's fury." Both of these translations cite as examples *Leechbook III* Entry 57 even though they may have quite distinct connotations: the first associated with speech and the second with emotion/mental state. In Thomas Northcote Toller's 1921 supplement to Bosworth's dictionary, Toller abandons the association of *gemædla* with speech and instead suggests "fury" or "madness" in place of an utterance.[52] However, these translation options are only available if one checks the supplements to Bosworth-Toller; within the main volume *gemædla* retains its translation as "talk." J. R. Clark Hall's 1894 *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* translates ±*mædla* as 'chatter' and *wifgemædla*

50 Bosworth records the source of the translation *mulierum menstrua* as the *Liber medicinalis*, which is a curious Latin medical treatise written in verse and thought to date back to the second century CE. A thorough comparison of Late Antique references to menstruation and modern uses of those references is beyond the scope of this essay, but I do think it is worth noting that an initial examination of the one verse about menstruation in the extant portions of the *Liber medicinalis* does not provide a clear explanation as to why Bosworth associates *wifgemædla* with menstruation.

51 In this version of his dictionary Bosworth attributes the translation of *gemædla* as *menstrua* to Edward Lye's 1772 *Dictionarium Saxonica et Gothico-Latinum* and William Somner's 1659 *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum*, both of whom refer back to the *Liber medicinalis*. In this paragraph I have included macrons where they appear in the cited dictionaries.

52 Toller, in his 1921 supplement to Bosworth-Toller, further advises that *gemǣdla* (fury, madness) should be substituted for *gemædla* (chatter), but the only place that the translation "chatter" appears in the history of Bosworth-Toller or Bosworth's dictionaries, that I have found, is in the translation of Entry 57, as offered as an example of word usage, and not in the main definition list. It is notable that the translation of "chatter" seems only to appear in the lexicographic history after Cockayne publishes his edition of the Old English medical corpus that contains this same translation, and the 1898 edition of Bosworth-Toller cites Cockayne's edition in the entries for *gemædla* and *wifgemædla*.

as "woman's talk ?" but by 1931 has suggested translations that reflect a stronger understanding of *gemædla* as an emotion/mental state word: ±*mǣdla* "madness"; *wifgemǣdla* "woman's fury." This translation persists most recently in M. L. Cameron's 1993 book *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* as "mad behavior" but is otherwise not prominent in scholarship that addresses Entry 57.[53]

My essay thus far has set out that: in the case of *Leechbook III* Entry 57, witchcraft does not convincingly fit a medical or more generally early medieval English context; and furthermore, even the understanding of *gemædla* as an utterance is tenuous. In what remains of my essay I will argue that there is more contextual support for *gemædla* as a reference to a mental or emotional experience or capacity (suggested by the seldom chosen translation options of "fury" and "madness"), occurring as it does in a medical text and in an entry with no clear performative elements. The translation of *gemædla* as "fury" or "madness" also necessarily carries with it the implication of a woman as a patient—a sufferer of an affliction rather than an agent of someone else's affliction. This option is both grammatically and conceptually reasonable but has not, to my knowledge, been put forward.[54] What is necessary to support this option is both the willingness to read the suggested female body in Entry 57 sympathetically (rather than pejoratively and with hostility) and an acceptance of lexical ambiguity that brings contextual clues into better focus. Entry 57, for all of its brevity (consisting of barely over a dozen words), provides a tangled history of translations wound round by unexamined post-medieval emotional responses to women that are obscuring a potential record of early medieval English female affect, health, and accompanying contemporary cultural responses. All of these layers are valuable as long as we attend to their precise temporal and cultural contexts.

With an alternative to *gemædla* as an utterance available, what rationale have scholars and editors given for sticking to this translation? Cockayne discusses very few of his translation choices at all, let alone in detail, but in his glossary he does write that *gemædla* is a noun meaning "speech" derived from the verb *mædla* [sic] meaning "to speak."[55] Meaney elaborates on Cockayne's choices by suggesting that *gemædla* derives from *maðelian*

53 M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.

54 With the related exception of the earliest edition of Bosworth's dictionary that, by understanding *wifgemædla* as a reference to menstruation, was also understanding the woman in Entry 57 to be a patient.

55 Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, II:387.

(to speak, make a speech, or to harangue with speech). I suspect that there is comfort in the dominant trend of tracing *gemædla* back to *maðelian* because it provides a decent data set with which to work. But the justifications for this relationship are lacking, minimal, or suspect. Considering the usual uses of *maðelian*, it seems unlikely that it would even appear in a medical manuscript referring to doing harm. After all, translators do not consider the speech of Beowulf, Byrhtnoð, or even Elene to be "idle chatter" or "haranguing speech," or even dangerous speech in and of itself, and these characters of Old English literature all deliver speeches that are described with some form of *maðelian*. And, to return to the topic of derivation, the formation of *gemædla* from *maðelian* is not clearly more likely than the formation of *gemædla* from the adjective *gemad* (foolish, senseless, mad; Toller's suggestion) or from the related verb *gemædan* (to make insane or foolish; with, perhaps, an intrusive *l*).[56] Unfortunately, there is no clear lexical evidence, on its own, that directs us in choosing between the possible readings of *gemædla*. In its medical, manuscript, and linguistic contexts, *wif gemædla* requires us to accept that there may not be a lexical data set that will help us to establish a translation.

As the lexical evidence alone cannot resolve the matter, we must look to context for further interpretive clues. I propose that we begin by considering the *wif* as the patient in Entry 57. The explicit references to women's bodies that are present in the rest of *Leechbook III* are exclusively references to women as patients (and most, perhaps unsurprisingly, are references to reproduction and mothering).[57] Buck catalogues the entries as follows: "We find drinking potions and amulets for women who are not able to have children; bathing potions to get rid of afterbirth, drinking potions for expelling a dead fetus, eating and drinking remedies to stop bleeding after childbirth, and wise instructions for prenatal care."[58] As *Leechbook III* only otherwise includes women's bodies as vitally generative and in need of medical help,[59] it would be an aberration for women suddenly to be cast as dangerous—as agents of someone else's affliction.

56 Buck rejects this derivation due to vowel length. She notes the macrons over the vowels in the dictionary entries of *gemǣd/gemād*. However, there is no way to establish the vowel length of the *æ* in Entry 57's *gemædlan*. The vanishingly few instances of it are not of the declensions that might indicate such information, and the prose nature of these instances does not allow metrical stress to offer up a hint.

57 There are also indirect references to women's bodies in the form of *materia medica* in *Leechbook III*: breastmilk is called for as an ingredient in entries ii.6, iii, and xlvii.

58 Buck, "Women and Language in the Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks," 47.

59 The exceptions are Entry 6 and Entry 47, both of which reference women in regard to their curative products. Entry 6 calls for, as *materia medica*, a woman's spinning whorl; and Entry 47 calls for the breastmilk of a woman who has born a male child. Buck also regards the entry for

Syntactically, Entry 57 follows two very common structures in the Old English medical corpus. Both structures are of the form *wiþ x* [affliction], where the preposition *wiþ* (for, against) frames the treatment as a thing or practice that is in opposition to the harm a body is experiencing and *x* is a variable that can be either an adversarial source of the affliction or that which is afflicted. Entries in *Leechbook III* that illustrate *x* as adversary include the following examples: *wiþ hundes slite* (in case of/against the bite of a dog), *wiþ feondes costunge* (in case of/against temptation of a fiend), and *wiþ ælfadle* (in case of/against elf-disease).[60] In the case of the second structure, *x* is a body part/ability affected by the affliction that appears immediately following *x*; this structure does not insist that *x* be an adversary. This formula is found throughout the medical corpus but is easily observed within *Leechbook III* itself in the entries: *wiþ ear wærce* (for ear pain), *wiþ toþ ece* (for toothache), and *wið ceoc adle* (for cheek disease).[61] In these cases, the ear, tooth, and cheek are not adversarial but rather the suffering, afflicted body part. The *wærce*, *ece*, and *adle* are those things against which the remedy will contend, and the things which afflict the *ear*, *toþ*, and *ceoc*. *Wiþ wif gemædlan* could be reflecting either one of the reviewed formulae above, and it is important that our interpretation follow what contextual clues we do have. And, based only on syntax, *wiþ wif gemædlan* need not be understood as something like "in the case of/against [the damaging actions/experiences of a woman]," where *wif* is an adversarial, body-threatening agent. It is equally plausible to understand the phrase as meaning something like "in the case of/against the *gemædla* that afflicts a woman," where *wif* is a suffering subject.

And indeed, when considering *gemædla*'s potential derivation from *gemad*, Latin–Old English glossaries also support a reading of the *wif* in *wif gemædla* as a sufferer of some kind of non-normative mental or emotional state. The glossaries associate *gemad* with Latin *amens* and *vecors* and these words generally convey a kind of intellectual lack or some other variety of cognitive non-normativity, including a sense that one is not in control of the intensity of one's own emotions. Lewis and Short offers for *amens* the

"þæm mannum þe deofol mid hæmð" (Entry 61) as a reference to women; but, since the universal *mann* is used rather than a clear reference to women, I contend that more work is needed on the references to sexual deviance in the medical corpus (work that is beyond the scope of this essay).

60 Respectively entries 34, 58, and 62 as found in Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*. As entries 36 and 44 demonstrate, sometimes an affliction is presented without a source: *wiþ cancre* (in case of/against cancer); *wiþ lusum* (in case of/against lice).

61 Respectively entries 3, 4, and 6 in *Leechbook III* (according to Cockayne's numbering); and there are many more examples of the same structure just within *Leechbook III*.

translation options "out of one's senses, beside one's self, senseless, mad, insane, frantic, distracted" and for *vecors* "destitute of reason; senseless, silly, foolish; mad, insane."[62] Furthermore, the Old Saxon and Old High German cognates, provided by Bosworth-Toller from Toller's 1921 supplement, are *gimed* (OS) and *gemeit* (OHG) and are linked to the Latin *stultus* "foolish, simple, silly, fatuous," *bardus* "stupid, dull of apprehension," and *stolidus* "dull, senseless, slow of mind, obtuse, stupid, stolid" (sense II).[63] Thus, Old English–Latin translations and Germanic cognates demonstrate that *gemad* likely indicates a non-normative mental state or perceived intellectual lack. If we accept the possibility of the derivation of *gemædla* from *gemad*, then even the "fury" option of *gemædla* as present in Bosworth-Toller's translation of *wifgemædlan* as "a woman's fury" and Toller's supplemental emendation of *gemædla* as "fury, madness" is questionable. It is striking that this choice of "fury," being a synonym of Modern English "mad," works unquestionably as an emotion word and also preserves *wif* as a dangerous agent projecting some kind of force, all the while avoiding a connection with the idea of an utterance. "Fury" as a translation poses the problem that in Modern English it operates as an emotion word but also often suggests that one person's emotional state is threatening to someone else. This choice of a translation that preserves the *wif* as threatening likely reflects post-medieval associations with women more than it does early medieval associations.

I therefore find it more likely that Entry 57 asks us to attend to the unwell body or mind of a *wif*, and this reading is further strengthened by the presence of radishes as edible remedies to the *gemædla*. Because Entry 57 recommends that the radish be eaten, it is significant that edible preventatives are not used as protection against other humans in the rest of the Old English medical corpus. This is in addition to radishes having no special associations with any particular affliction, as reviewed above. In early medieval English medicine, patients consume *materia medica* primarily as cures for an afflicted body rather than as a preventative or treatment against malicious harm by a human.[64] And if the woman is the patient, *gemædla* is then much more likely to be a mental or affective state (that she is suffering) rather than a verbal

62 Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *Harper's Latin Dictionary: A New Latin Dictionary. Founded on the Translation of Freund's Latin-German Lexicon Edited by E.A. Andrews, LL.D.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880).

63 Translation options of the Latin are from Lewis and Short.

64 While malicious human agents do not seem to be a danger that early medieval English medicine can be a treatment for, the Old English medical corpus is rife with *nonhuman* malicious actors, as I argue in my dissertation: Sweany, "The Anglo-Saxon Medical Imagination: Invasion, Conglomeration, and Autonomy."

utterance (that she or another is making) to effect harm. It is more reasonable to read in Entry 57 a woman who is the victim of some sort of emotion and/or mental state regarded and experienced as non-normative, rather than a woman who is a projector of the madness (that is, to regard *gemædla* as a weapon of the *wif*). This interpretation would rely on the derivation of *gemædla* from *gemad*, which we see in Toller's definitions of *gemædla* as "fury" or "madness," as reviewed above. And here might be another reason why the dominant reading of *gemædla* has persisted. In light of the choices: the image of a woman either as a figure who might be capable of assault—whether by voice or feeling—or a figure who must be cured of her emotional or mental state for her own good, the attraction to the witch (the assaulting, powerful woman) in our modern moment makes a certain kind of sense. A dangerous woman wielding her speech intentionally might be a more appealing way to read Entry 57 to late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars than a woman who is a danger to herself—and still, perhaps, others—due to uncontrollable emotion or non-normative emotional capacity.

Is *gemædla* an emotion word or an indication of intellectual ability or normativity? Or is it an utterance? Is the *wif* a patient or an agent of harm? The corpus does not provide the evidence needed to answer this question definitively, but "witch" is certainly not a descriptive enough label to encompass its possibilities and has attendant with it a covey of dubious interpretations based on negative assumptions about women. What we can tell definitively is that *wif gemædla* was understood to be curable and, indeed, curable by radish ingestion. Beyond this, we must grapple with the relationship between possibilities of lexis, syntax, and context. There are many Old English terms for illness throughout medical corpus for which there is no straight line to Modern English disease terminology. Accepting some lexical ambiguity of illness words in the Old English medical corpus and exploring the experiences associated with those words to understand their function in the witnesses we have of them, is a necessity for attending to, as the medical humanities asks, the lived experience of embodied affliction rather than just arriving at a standardized label for it. This might also give scholars more pathways to exploring the experiences of occluded bodies (such as women's bodies and the bodies of disabled people). If *wif gemædla* refers to a mental or emotional affliction of women then the specification of *wif* in Entry 57 may hint that women's and men's emotions were regarded differently from one another.[65] This is just one topic among many to which

65 Beyond the scope of this paper is a comparison of entries with suggestions of emotions or cognition/behavior/intellect that use the (rather ambiguous) Old English *mon* (man).

a more rigorous and sympathetic reading of *wif gemædla* might contribute. Furthermore, accepting lexical ambiguity when it is genuinely present allows for informative contextual frames to come into better focus, opening up the possibilities of the questions we can ask about the term as a reference to an experience that the dearth of lexical evidence would otherwise foreclose. And while context may be an obvious resource to appeal to for thinly attested words, the practice of scholarship will assure that we always have new understandings of early medieval English context. Thus, reminders about the value of context and reconsiderations of translations will continue to be important practices to ensure that textual interpretations are not relying on outdated assumptions.

I have attempted to allow contextual frames to inform my understanding of the *hapax legomenon* (*wif*)*gemædla*, thus opening up the reference from one of simplistic violence directed by a woman towards someone else to a set of possibilities of embodied, gendered cognition and affect. And while I cannot definitively say that *gemædla* refers to the experience or state of a woman rather than to an utterance by a woman, I do assert that reading Entry 57 definitively as dangerous speech, as has been done for most of its scholarly history, occludes the woman's body in favor of a threatened (if implied) male body and misses the opportunity of exploring the sick body of an early medieval English woman in a non-maternal context. There is work to be done in identifying female patients and the words used to describe them—some of which may be (mis)interpreted in ways that emphasize certain kinds of (primarily malicious) femininity. The bodies of patients are quite vague in nature in Old English medical texts—passive and indistinct[66]—and the bodies of women are rendered even more invisible due to the scarcity of entries that refer explicitly to women and a fixation on reproductive capacity when women are referred to.[67] We could debate whether there is an early medieval English moral judgement of women's experiences being made with the ascription of *gemædla* to women; but that debate will be more productive if we recognize and reject anachronistic readings of early medieval English women. Ultimately, the dominant reading and history of scholarly treatment of this entry, when context is considered, reveals more about our own emotions than those of the people who compiled and used *Leechbook III*.

66 See Chapters 1 and 3 in Sweany, "The Anglo-Saxon Medical Imagination."

67 Bosworth's earliest dictionaries (1838, 1868) demonstrate, in the translation of *wifgemædla* as a menstruation reference, that this fixation is durable. And while Bosworth does cite earlier sources in support of this reference, the logic of these citations, upon examination of those earlier sources, remains opaque (see above).

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10 Women and "Women's Medicine" in Early Medieval England, from Text to Practice

Christine Voth

Abstract
Despite the belief that that the menstrual cycle was predictable and therefore treatable, many of the extant charms to prevent excessive menstrual bleeding, miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal death suggest that medical intervention was either unavailable or unsuccessful. The textual evidence for remedies for women's medicine assumes the care and cure by an educated medical practitioner. However, the actualities of care for women who were not part of the privileged elite is less easy to deduce. Through an examination of extant penitentials and homilies, this chapter demonstrates the men of the church were aware of – and condemned – the treatment, prevention, and prognostication involved in "women's medicine" by those not sanctioned by the church: midwives and others.

Keywords: medicine, charms, *Bald's Leechbook*, *Lacnunga*, women's bodies, reproduction

The majority of Old English medical remedies are gender-neutral, providing possible cures for illnesses and ailments that affected both women and men. This is demonstrated either by a focus on the remedy and its component parts, or through the use of OE *mann*, the semantics of which is "human being" rather than the masculine noun "man."[1] As many vernacular medi-

1 Christine Rauer, "*Mann* and Gender in Old English Prose: A Pilot Study," *Neophilologus* 101 (2017), 139–58.

Norris, R., Stephenson, R., & Trilling, R.R. (eds.), *Feminist Approaches to Early Medieval English Studies*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2023
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cal remedies are translations, OE *mann* may be the preferred translation for gender-neutral Latin *homo*, a pattern noted by Christine Rauer in the translations of the *OE Martyrology*.[2] Janet Nelson and Alice Rio also noted that Latin law codes throughout Medieval Europe use gender-neutral *si quis* (if anyone) or *homo* (a person), only employing female nouns or pronouns when the laws apply specifically to women.[3] When OE medical remedies differentiate between the sexes in diagnosis and treatment, women are specified by *wif* or *wifmann* and men by the use of *wer* or *wæpned/man*(*n*) or *man*(*n*). Almost all of these instances are in relation to obstetric concerns, including conception. Of the nine occasions in which a remedy specifies the sex, *wif* is paired with *wæpned* in four, two of which are in relation to the conception of a child of the desired sex, and a third which specifies the practitioner use the milk of a woman nursing a male child.[4] Similarly, *wif* is paired with *wer* twice: once in a remedy for conceiving a child of the desired sex, the other in a remedy warning that failure to follow through with the directions of the remedy will result in conceiving a child of no gender (*androginem … naþer ne wer ne wif*).[5] Finally, *wif* is paired with *man*(*n*)/*mon*(*n*)/*men* in three remedies, one of which references sexual intercourse.[6] Not counted in these instances are two remedies in which *man*(*n*)/*mon*(*n*)

2 Rauer, "*Mann* and Gender," 144–49.

3 Janet Nelson and Alice Rio, "Women and Laws in Early Medieval Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 103–14, at 104.

4 *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto, Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009). Boolean and proximity searches for [fragment] *wif* + *wæpned* + Cameron number B21. The fourth instance is quoted below.

5 *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, Boolean and proximity searches for [fragment] *wif* + *wer* + Cameron number B21. Only instances referring to human beings were counted (w*if* and *wer* are commonly used to differentiate types of the same plant).
Medicina de Quadrupedibus, Chapter 5.12: "To þan þæt wif cenne wæpned cild: haran hrif gedryged & gesceafen oððe gegniden on drinc drincen butu. Gif þæt wif ana hyt drinceþ, ðonne cenð heo androginem, ne byþ þæt to nahte, naþer ne wer ne wif." (So a woman can conceive a male child: let them both drink hare's womb, dried and scraped or crushed, in a drink. If only the woman drinks it, she will generate an androgynous child; that is nothing, neither male nor female.) Text of the *OE Medicina de Quadrupedibus* is taken from Hubert Jan de Vriend, *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS o.s. 286 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); translations of the *OE Medicina* from Maria D'Aronco and John P. Niles, *Medical Texts from Early Medieval England, Volume I: The Old English Herbal, Lacnunga, and Other Texts*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

6 *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, Boolean and proximity searches for [fragment] *wif* + *man*|*mon*|*men* + Cameron number B21. I did not count instances in which *man/n* had *wif* as an antecedent (see n. 8 below).

have *wif* as an antecedent, providing succinct examples of the gender-neutral OE *man*(*n*) whether as a translation for Latin *homo* or as a semantic choice by the compiler.[7]

These rare textual examples do not preclude the reality that the medieval practitioner or their late antique predecessors envisioned a male body as the norm[8] and the female body only when necessary, such as when a remedy specifies gender. A remedy from the medical compendia known colloquially as *Bald's Leechbook*,[9] reminds the practitioner that the body of a man differs from that of a woman or a child, and each should be treated accordingly:

> Do þu ða læcedomas swilce þu þa lichomon gesie, forðon ðe micel gedal is on *wæpnedes* ond *wifes* ond cildes lichomon, ond þam mægene þær dæghwamlican wyhtan ond þæs idlan, þæs ealdan ond þæs gongan, ond þæs þe sie gewin þrowungum ond þæs þe sie ungewuna swelcum þingum.
>
> (Do those treatments for the body you behold, because there is a great difference in the body of the *man* and a *woman* and a child, and in the strength of the daily laborer and the idle, and the old and the young, and he who is battle-wounded and he who is untroubled by such things.)[10]

Despite this caveat, few remedies outside of those in which reproductive organs are involved make this differentiation.

As noted above, the majority of medical remedies that specify gender can be found in the treatments presented for those conditions unique to women: menstruation, fertility, childbearing, childbirth, lactation, and menopause.[11]

7 The first is found in the table of contents for a chapter dedicated to the treatment of women's diseases (Chapter 60) in the second book of London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii: "Oþþe gif *men* cwið sie forweaxen, oþþe gif *man* semninga swigie…" (Or if the womb is distended in *one*, or if *one* suddenly goes quiet…). Another example from the third book in the same manuscript in a gynecological remedy: "Gif wife to swiþe of flowe sio monaðgecynde genim niwe horses tord, lege on hate gleda, læt reocan swiþe betweoh þa þeoh up under þæt hrægl þæt *se mon* swæte swiþe." (If a woman's menstruation flows out too much: take fresh horse manure, put on hot embers, let it smoke profusely between the thighs up under the clothing, so that *the person* sweats heavily.) All translations from *Bald's Leechbook* and *Leechbook III* are taken from Debby Banham and Christine Voth, *Medical Texts from Early Medieval England, Volume II:* Bald's Leechbook *and* Leechbook III: *Old English Medicine in British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

8 Little has changed from medieval to modern medicine in this regard.

9 London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii.

10 *Bald's Leechbook*, Book 1, Chapter 35.10, Banham and Voth, *Medical Texts II*.

11 *DOE Web Corpus* search turns up 125 instances in which medical remedies make specific references to women. Not all of these are gynecological in nature.

Hippocrates believed that the regularity of a woman's menstrual cycle was the center of her physical well-being, and disruptions of this rhythm for any reason other than pregnancy could be resolved by returning a woman to her natural cycle.[12] Medieval thinking connecting a woman's physical well-being to her menstrual cycle is certainly apparent in the medical corpus, much of which has been passed down from the classical and late antique periods. The menstrual cycle was predictable and therefore presented something treatable.

By comparison with the late Middle Ages, the surviving corpus of women's medicine through the twelfth century is small, and there are some manuscripts that make no mention of these concerns at all. This is because gynecology and obstetrics was not a prominent area of medical study until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which saw the combined emergence of Islamic medicine in the West and the advent of medical treatises focusing on women and their unique medical concerns.[13] This includes the tripartite medical compendia compiled in the twelfth century and attributed to a woman physician, Trota of Salerno, the Latin manuscripts of which were circulating in England by the early thirteenth century.[14] That is not to say that the early medieval corpus of English medicine doesn't have plenty to offer. A study of the available evidence relates the shared experiences of a portion of the populace marginalized in written works from England ca. 800 to ca. 1200.[15] Even the women who chose a chaste, religious life, and who are perhaps the most represented females in Old English and Anglo-Latin literature, were not exempt from gynecological concerns.

12 Helen King, "Female Fluids in the Hippocratic Corpus: How Solid was the Humoral Body?" in *The Body in Balance: Humoral Medicines in Practice*, ed. Peregrine Horden and Elisabeth Hsu (New York: Berghann Books, 2013), 25–52, at 38.

13 Monica H. Green, "From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000), 5–39. Gynecological and obstetric remedies may not have been of consequence to the male compilers of some of the medical corpus, especially if those medical compendia were intended to be used in male monasteries. For more on the absence of women in the medical corpus, see Dana Oswald's contribution in this volume, "*Monaðgecynd* and *flewsan*: Wanted and Unwanted Monthly Courses in Old English Medical Texts."

14 Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). Monica H. Green, "A Handlist of the Latin and Vernacular Manuscripts of the So-Called Trotula Texts. Part I: The Latin Manuscripts," *Scriptorium* 50 (1996), 137–75.

15 The oldest fragment of Old English medicine (Louvain, Université Catholique de Louvain, Centre Général de Documentation, Fragmenta H. Omont 3[2]) dates to the ninth century, and the latest to the late twelfth century (London, British Library, Harley 6258 B).

In this chapter, I examine the medical care of women in early medieval England through a variety of contemporary sources to explore how women's conditions were treated and by whom, and how the treatment of women's medicine may have differed based on the social standing of the woman in question. Women's medicine in early medieval England is deserving of its own feminist renaissance, primarily because it has not been the dominant subject of study in over twenty years.[16] The research presented here has its foundation in that earlier scholarship and will examine the biological functions of the female reproductive and life cycles both as medical practitioners recognized them and in practice. The first part of this chapter will introduce and analyze the written evidence for women's medicine, both within and without the medical corpus, with an eye toward understanding the potential scope of gynecological and obstetric care for women in early medieval England. The second part will explore the actualities of caring for women during pregnancy, miscarriage, or stillbirth. In this section, I will examine aid given to those seeking birth control or help with fertility and conception. I have pieced together evidence for this kind of medical attention from charms and prayers in the margins of manuscripts, and through contemporary homilies and penitentials that called out women for practices unsanctioned by the church.

The Corpus

The corpus of texts and manuscripts examined for this chapter is wide-ranging, comprising both medical and non-medical sources. Medical sources provide insight into the breadth of gynecological and obstetric conditions as

16 Audrey L. Meaney, "Women, Witchcraft and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Donald Scragg (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1989), 9–39; Marilyn Deegan, "Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts: A Preliminary Survey," in *Medicine in Early Medieval England, Four Papers*, ed. Donald Scragg (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1989), 17–26; M. L. Cameron, "Gynaecology and Obstetrics," in his *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 174–84. Lisa M. C. Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic: The Old English Metrical Childbirth Charms," *Modern Philology* 92, no. 3 (1995), 279–93; Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 56–73.
More recent studies have addressed women's medicine under the topic of magic or folklore: Anne Lawrence-Mathers, "Magic in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Reading Medieval Studies* 33 (2007), 87–104; Karen L. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Anglo-Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

well as the types of treatments available to practitioners in early medieval England. Remedies found in medical manuscripts may have been restricted to certain members in society, which is why it is necessary to look beyond medical texts in order to ascertain the realities of gynecological and obstetric care.

My focus in the medical corpus is on those manuscripts in the vernacular as they comprise the majority of the extant English medical texts. The surviving vernacular sources exist not merely as rote translations from Latin sources, but as conscious constructions intended to facilitate understanding of each herb's medical use.[17] The *Old English Herbarium* was a particularly prolific text in early medieval England with four surviving manuscripts.[18] The book of animal-based medical remedies, the *Old English Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, appears to have been translated at the same time as the *OE Herbarium* and is appended to the *Herbarium* in all the vernacular manuscripts.[19]

Of the original medical compilations, the earliest is the mid-tenth-century manuscript London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii. The Royal manuscript contains three books, the first two of which were compiled together, separating out disorders into external (Book I) and internal (Book II); both are organized from head-to-foot (*a capite ad calcum*) in the classical manner. Together these books are known as *Bald's Leechbook* due to a colophon at the end of Book II naming a certain Bald as the patron and owner of the book of remedies. Based on linguistic analysis, the third book in the same manuscript, *Leechbook III*, appears to have been compiled in the early tenth century as a companion to *Bald's Leechbook*.[20] Royal 12. D. xvii is a mid-tenth-century copy of these medical compilations and shows many layers of additions and emendation to its translations and adaptations of

17 Manuscripts of the *OE Herbarium* and *OE Medicina* include: London, British Library, Harley 585 (s. x/xi); London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius C. iii (s. xi); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 75 (s. xi); London, British Library Harley 6258B (s. xii2).

18 Linda E. Voigts, "Anglo-Saxon Plant Remedies and the Anglo-Saxons," *ISIS: The History of Science Society* 70 (1979), 250–68. An early Latin manuscript (no longer surviving) of the Herbarium Pseudo-Apulei was used as a source for several remedies in *Bald's Leechbook*: Audrey L. Meaney, "Variant Versions of Old English Medical Remedies and the Compilation of *Bald's Leechbook*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 13 (1984), 235–68. Conan T. Doyle, "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Disease: A Semantic Approach" (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2017).

19 De Vriend, *Herbarium and Medicina*, xi–lv; Voigts, "Anglo-Saxon Plant Remedies," 250–51. Translations of the *OE Herbarium* from Anne Van Arsdall, ed. *Medieval Herbal Remedies: The Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

20 Christine Voth, "An Analysis of the Anglo-Saxon Medical Manuscript London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii" (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2015).

classical and late antique medicine, suggesting it was a working medical manual.

Another medical compilation that is part of this corpus is London, British Library, Harley 585, which includes a miscellaneous collection of remedies and charms known as the *Lacnunga*. This manuscript was brought together some time in the early eleventh century.[21] It also contains an incomplete translation of the *OE Herbarium* and the *OE Medicina*. The *Lacnunga* collection represents a wide range of practical and social medicine practiced in a less formal setting than *Bald's Leechbook* and *Leechbook III*.[22] The collection is thematically important as it appears to have been made with a focus on writing down remedies that had previously been part of oral tradition.[23]

In order to understand how treatment for gynecological and obstetric concerns may have been treated on a practical level, I have examined a number of sources outside of the medical corpus, including contemporary penitentials and homilies. Penitential texts and sermons shed light on how the church viewed certain societal practices and may offer insight on the practice of medicine in medieval English communities. For both the penitential texts and the homilies, I have once again focused on the vernacular collections, which stem from earlier Latin sources.[24] The surviving corpus of vernacular penitentials and homilies also do not represent simple translations from Latin originals. Some collections of OE penitentials demonstrate evidence of having undergone emendation and revision in order to fit actual confessional situations.[25] These collections were frequently copied into the same manuscripts, include the *Scriftboc*, the *OE Penitential*, and

21 Edward Pettit, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, Mellen Critical Editions and Translations 6A–6B, 2 vols. (London, Edwin Mellen Press, 2001)

22 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 107.

23 Julia Bolotina, "Medicine and Society in Anglo-Saxon England: The Social and Practical Context of *Bald's Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga*" (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2016). Pettit, *The Lacnunga,* I:i–xxxiv. Emily Kesling provides an excellent analysis of the *Lacnunga* and its association with the Latin liturgy in her book *Medical Texts in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2020), 95–129.

24 John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal* libri poenitentiales *and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

25 Franzen, *Literature of Penance*, 133. The names of the different penitential collections are taken from Allen J. Frantzen, "Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database," accessed February 27, 2018, www.anglo-saxon.net/penance.

the *OE Handbook*, often with accompanying material, including homilies.[26] Vernacular homilies are a variable and changing collection, showing ample evidence of innovation and borrowing. Sermons were delivered to both lay and clerical audiences.[27] Those homilies intended for the public demonstrate a desire on behalf of those preaching to meet the particular spiritual needs of their flock. Although often organized to follow the liturgical calendar, sermons presented opportunities to address contemporary ecclesiastical concerns.[28] Among the homilies examined for this chapter are those penned by Ælfric of Eynsham, including his *Catholic* Homilies[29] and his *Lives of Saints*.[30] I have also consulted the collection of anonymous vernacular homilies in the Vercelli Book as these were compiled and copied together at the end of the tenth century, and are therefore contemporary with much of the medical corpus.[31]

Finally, I have looked at a variety of other non-medical sources in order to uncover how women's medical conditions were treated. One that is of particular importance is a ninth-century Mercian prayerbook known as the *Royal Prayerbook* (London, British Library, Royal 2. A. xx). This manuscript contains a number of charms against excessive bleeding among its varied contents. Michelle Brown and Jennifer Morrish have both suggested this manuscript may have belonged to a female physician;[32] I will examine that claim below. The *Royal Prayerbook* is not the only non-medical source to include charms against bleeding or for a difficult childbirth. Many of these

26 Brussels, Bibliothéque Royale 8558-63 contains the *OE Handbook* and the *OE Penitential*; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 190 includes the *Scriftboc* and the *OE Penitential*; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201 and 265 and London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii include the *OE Handbook*; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121 includes the *OE Penitential*, the *OE Handbook* and the *Scriftboc*; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 482 includes the *OE Penitential*, the *OE Handbook* and the *Scriftboc*.

27 Mary Clayton, "Homiliaries and Preaching in Anglo-Saxon England," *Peritia* 4 (1985), 207–42.

28 One example would be Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, written after the invasion of King Swein Forkbeard.

29 Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 439–50.

30 Walter W. Skeat, ed. and trans., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 2 vols in 4 parts, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (London: Kegan Paul, 1881–1900).

31 Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, CXVII; Donald Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

32 Michelle Brown, "Female Book Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England: the Evidence of the Ninth-Century Prayerbooks," in *Mercia, an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle Brown and Carol A. Farr (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 57; Jennifer Morrish, "An Examination of Literature and Learning in the Ninth Century" (Dphil. Dissertation, Oxford University, 1982).

charms can be found in manuscripts frequently associated with priests or bishops, and I will address one charm in particular that was included in a late vernacular homiliary (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85).

In an era in which no birth records survive, and medical sources do not provide details of patient care, it is important to look throughout the surviving corpus for evidence of the treatment of women's medicine. In the following sections, I will analyze the available textual evidence in order to provide a more complete view of the types of gynecological and obstetric practices that may have been available in early medieval England.

"Women's Medicine" in the Medical Texts

With few exceptions, medieval women were subject to the advent of menarche between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, although Roberta Gilchrist noted that adverse dietary conditions could result in delayed onset of puberty.[33] Reaching menopause sometime around the age of fifty was also contingent upon a number of factors, not least diet and access to medical care.[34] Regular gynecological concerns could range from minor pain to life-threatening hemorrhage. Childbirth in particular was one of the most dangerous experiences of a medieval woman's life, as the Old English prognostic on the development of a fetus notes:

> On þam teoþan monþe þæt wif hit ne gedigð hyre feore, gif þæt bearn accenned ne biþ, forþam þe hit in þam magan wyrð hire to feorhadle.
>
> (In the tenth month, the woman will not escape with her life if the child is not born, because it turns into a deadly disease in her belly.)[35]

We know that the fetus does not become a disease (*feorhadle*) after forty weeks of pregnancy, but a post-term woman would be at significant risk for stillbirth and death if she could not go into labor naturally. Childbirth was precarious, and possibly one of the leading causes of death amongst

33 Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 41–42.

34 Vern Bullough and Cameron Campbell, "Female Longevity and Diet in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 55, no. 2 (1980), 317–25.

35 Roy M. Liuzza, ed. *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A. III* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2011), 200–201.

women between the ages of sixteen and forty.[36] Knowledge of this may have been a motivating factor for some women in pursuing religious orders.[37]

Medical remedies specific to women outside of the field of gynecological and obstetric concerns are rare, thus medical practitioners may have defined "women's medicine" as that pertaining specifically to reproduction in one form or another. Chapter 60 in Book II of *Bald's Leechbook* boasted the largest collection of remedies pertaining to women, with the table of contents entry indicating there were forty-one in all:

> Læcedomas wiþ wifa gecyndum forsetenum ond eallum wifa tydernessum: gif wif bearn ne mæge geberan, oþþe gif bearn weorþe dead on wifes innoþe, oððe gif hio cennan ne mæg, do on hire gyrdels þas gebedo swa on þisum læcebocum segþ. Ond manigfeald tacn þæt mon mæg ongitan hwæþer hit hy se cild þe mæden cild beon wille. Ond wiþ wifa adle. Ond gif wif migan ne mæge. Ond gif wif ne mæge raðe beon geclænsod. Ond wiþ wifa blodsihtan. Ond gif wif of gemyndum sie. Ond gif þu wille þæt wif cild hæbbe oþþe tife hwelp. Oþþe gif men cwið sie forweaxen, oþþe gif man semninga swigie, an ond feowertig cræfta.
>
> (Remedies for obstructed genitals of women and all infirmities of women: if a woman may not bear a child, or if a child becomes dead in the belly of a woman, or if she may not give birth, put the prayer on her girdle just as this medical book says. And the many signs that one may know whether it will be a boy child or a girl child. And for the disease of women. And if a woman cannot urinate. And if a woman cannot be purified quickly. And for haemorrhage of women. And if a woman is out of her mind. And if you desire that a woman have a child, or a bitch [have] a pup. Or if the womb is distended in one, or if one [the womb?] suddenly goes quiet. Forty-one remedies.)[38]

Unfortunately, this chapter is part of a larger gathering that is missing from the manuscript, and the table of contents entry is all that remains. This monumental chapter would have provided various herbal-based remedies and charms for conception, stillbirth, and problems with labor and delivery.

36 Duncan Sayer and Sam D. Dickinson, "Reconsidering Obstetric Death and Female Fertility in Anglo-Saxon England," *World Archaeology* 45, no. 2 (2013), 285–97.

37 Dyan Elliott, "Gender and the Christian Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, eds. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–32, at 22.

38 Banham and Voth, *Medical Texts II*.

After delivery, there were remedies for if a woman begins to hemorrhage or if she cannot pass the afterbirth, or if she has difficulty with urinating. Despite the loss of the forty-one *Bald's Leechbook* remedies, fifty-one remedies for gynecological and obstetric concerns survive in other extant medical texts from the period in addition to the fetal development prognostic mentioned above, and another prognostic on pregnancy omens in the same manuscript.[39] Using the above table of contents as a guide,[40] it is possible to examine both the types of conditions and the kinds of treatments presented.

Gynecological issues that are addressed in the other medical texts include remedies for abnormally heavy or prolonged menstruation ("wið wifes flewsan"), known medically as *mennorhagia*. The *OE Herbarium* also includes two remedies for womb pain ("wiþ cwiþan sare") that does not specify if the symptoms are related to pregnancy. The *OE Medicina* has two for what it classifies as "women's troubles," or "the disease the Greeks call *hystem cepnizam*."[41] The Latin term is *hysterica pnix*, or "hysterical strangulation," a condition in which the womb is believed to have moved up into the chest seeking out blood or moisture.[42] The resulting symptoms include loss of voice, fainting, difficulty or obstructed breathing, "a seizure of the senses, clenching of the teeth … convulsive contraction of the extremities, upper abdominal distention."[43] These manifestations of *hysterica pnix* bring to mind the disease addressed in *BLB* II.60.TOC that is described as when a woman is "out of her mind" ("gif wif of gemyndum sie"), and explains why that particular remedy is found in the chapter on gynecology and obstetrics. The term *ungemynd* (confusion, loss of mind) is also found in *Leechbook III* in a chapter including remedies for attack by the devil and his temptations.[44] Similarly, remedies in book one of *Bald's Leechbook* for those who suffer from "falling sickness"

39 Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols. 42v–43r; Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 212–23.

40 Hereafter referred to as *BLB* II.60.TOC.

41 *OE Medicina*, Chapter 3.7: "Wið wifa earfodnyssum, þas uncyste Grecas hatað hystem cepnizam: heortes hornes þæs smælestan dustes bruce þry dagas on wines drince, gif he feforig sy drince þonne on wearmum wætere; þæt bið god læcecræft." (For women's troubles, the disease the Greeks call *hystem cepnizam*: use the thinnest powder of deer's antler and give it to drink in wine for three days, if she has a fever give it to drink in warm water; this is a very good remedy.) De Vriend, *Herbarium and Medicina*, 240; D'Aronco and Niles, *Medical Texts I*.

42 Helen King, "Once upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates," in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G. S. Rousseau, Elaine Showalter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3–90, at 14.

43 Owsei Temkin, trans. *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1956), 149.

44 *Leechbook III*.64.TOC: "Wið deofle liþe drenc, ond ungemynde, ond wiþ deofles costunga" (Against the devil, a light drink, and for loss of mind, and against the temptations of the devil). Banham and Voth, *Medical Texts II*.

(*brœcseoc*) such as seizures or epilepsy, are classified under the heading of "feondseocum men" (demoniacs), as their symptoms presented as if they were under attack by an invisible source.[45] The inclusion of "loss of mind" with those who are "fiend-sick," likely arises from the similarity in symptoms, including "strange and violent fits: (those affected) would tear at themselves and collapse to the ground, often wallowing or foaming at the mouth."[46]

Unsurprisingly, a large number of gynecological treatments in the medical corpus includes remedies to bring on a woman's menses ("wiþ ða monoðlican to astyrigenne"). This is consistent with the classical theory that regulation of the menstrual cycle was important to treating women's conditions, mentioned above. Interruption of a woman's menses can be caused by malnutrition, anaemia, hormonal imbalance, early onset menopause, or even pregnancy. Even though no remedy refers specifically to the cause of the disrupted or failed menstrual cycle, presumably the person preparing the remedy to bring on the menses would know that the particular herbal ingredients also had abortifacient qualities as stated in this remedy from the *OE Herbarium*:

> Wyþ ða monoðlican to astyrigenne genim þysse ylcan wyrte sædes tyn penega gewihte on wine gecnucud ond gedruncen oðde mid hunige gecnucud ond to ðam gecyndelican lime geled, hyt þa monoðlican astyreþ ond þæt tudder of þam cwiðan gelædeþ.
>
> (To stimulate menstruation, take ten pennies' weight of the seeds of this plant [*Uiola*/Wallflower], either pounded and drunk in wine, or mixed with honey and put on the sexual organ. It brings about menstruation and takes the fetus from the womb.)[47]

This last is the sole medical reference to abortion in the corpus, although it is likely that many emmenagogic remedies also had abortifacient properties, they may not necessarily have been used for that purpose.[48]

45 Audrey L. Meaney, "The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Disease," in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall, and David Klausner (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 12–33.

46 Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle, "Demon Possession in Anglo-Saxon and Early Modern England: Continuity and Evolution in Social Context," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 4 (2008), 738–67.

47 *OE Herbarium*, Chapter 165.4. De Vriend, *Herbarium and Medicina*, 210; Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 221.

48 Monica H. Green, "Gendering the History of Women's Healthcare," *Gender & History* 20, no. 3 (2008), 487–518, at 499. John Riddle claims that statements of abortifacient qualities of certain herbs are missing from the *OE Herbarium*, even though they are recorded in the Latin

Obstetric concerns make up the greatest number of women's medical remedies in all the extant medical texts, focusing on when pregnancies go wrong, such as when the mother fails to go into labor, labor does not progress, or in cases of a stillbirth. Post-delivery problems are also addressed, such as cases of hemorrhage ("wiþ wifa blodsihtan"), if a woman cannot urinate after giving birth ("gif wif migan ne mæge"), or she needs to be "purified" ("gif wif ne mæge rađe beon geclænsod"). Post-birth "purification" in the sense of a woman being given ecclesiastical approval to return to church seems an unlikely reading for the verb *geclænsod* in *BLB* II.60.TOC, even though the same verb (clænsian) is used in the penitentials.[49] Of all the available remedies, only *OE Medicina* uses the same verb in a remedy to aid in conception of a male child:

> Eft, to þam ylcan: haran sceallan wife, æfter hyre *clænsunge*, syle on wine drincan; þonne cenð heo wæpned cild.
>
> (Again, for the same: give the woman, after *cleansing/purging*, hare's testicles to drink in wine; she will give birth to a male child.)[50]

The phrase "after her cleansing" here seems to suggest that the patient would have been given something to bring on menstruation. The remedy in *Leechbook III* suggests "cleansing" is a means of helping a woman pass the afterbirth, described as "what is natural [that] will not come away from the woman" ("gif of wife nelle gan æfter þam beorþre þæt gecyndelic sie").[51]

tradition of Pseudo-Dioscorides and Pseudo-Apuleus, the works that form the herbal tradition in Anglo-Saxon England; see *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 103–4. In the above article, Monica Green demonstrates many areas in which Riddle's work on abortion and contraception are built on faulty principles, especially at 499–502.

49 From the *Scriftboc*: "Wif þæt ðe gæð in cyrcan ærðon heo *clæne* sy hire blode, fæste xl nihta" (A woman who enters the church before she has been cleansed of her (menstrual) blood is to fast 40 nights). Frantzen, "Penitentials Database." For more on the topic of post-natal women and the church, see Becky R. Lee, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth: A Window onto Medieval Perceptions of Women," *Florilegium* 14 (1995), 43–55.

50 *OE Medicina*, Chapter 5.13. De Vriend, *Herbarium and Medicina*, 250; D'Aronco and Niles, *Medical Texts I*.

51 *Leechbook III*, Chapter 37.3: "Gif of wife nelle gan æfter þam beorþre þæt gecyndelic sie: Seoþa eald spic on wætre beþe mid þone cwiþ oððe hleomoc oþþe hocces leaf wyl on ealoþ sele drincan hit hat." (If after the birth, what is natural will not come away from a woman: simmer old lard in water, bathe the genitals with it, or brooklime or mallow leaf, boil in beer, give it to drink hot.) Banham and Voth, *Medical Texts II*.

Additionally, the *OE Herbarium* includes remedies for "a woman's cleansing" or "purifying the womb":

> Wið wifa afeormungæ genim þas ylcan wyrte pastinacam, seoð on wætere, ond þonne heo gesoden beo mengc hy wel ond syle drincan, hy beoð afeormude.
>
> (For a woman's cleansing, take the same plant, simmer it in water, and when it is soft, mix it well and give it to drink. She will be cleansed.)[52]
>
> Þeos wyrt conize on wætere gedoden ond sittendum wife under [geled], heo ðone cwiþan afeormaþ.
>
> (This plant, fleabane, simmered in water and laid under a seated woman, purifies the womb.)[53]

Neither of these remedies mentions childbirth but both read as if they are intended to help dispel excess blood: one is given in a drink; the other is used externally. Neither appears to make specific reference to hemorrhage (*blodsiht/flewsa*). Therefore, the sense of cleansing or purification that is being portrayed by OE *geclænsod* in *BLB* II.60.TOC would appear to be emmenagogic, in which the uterus is stimulated either to expel the afterbirth after delivery or to bring on menses before they would normally be expected, the result being both a return to a normal cycle and an increase in chances for conception.[54]

Difficulties with conception ("gif wif ne mæge geberan"), stillbirth ("gif bearn weorþe dead on wifes innoþe"), and delivery ("gif hio cennan ne mæg"), were not only female-specific medical concerns, but they present some of the most varied approaches in the medical texts. Similar to the treatment of other gynecological and obstetric concerns, there are a number of herbal-based remedies for bringing on labor in the case of a stillborn baby, or to encourage labor to progress in case it has stalled.[55] But there are also a number of alternative remedies for these situations. *BLB*

52 *OE Herbarium*, Chapter 82.2. De Vriend, *Herbarium and Medicina*, 122; Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 184.

53 *OE Herbarium*, Chapter 143.2. De Vriend, *Herbarium and Medicina*, 186; Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies*, 212.

54 Green, "History of Women's Healthcare," 501.

55 *Leechbook III*, Chapter 37; *OE Herbarium*, Chapters 63.1, 82.1, 94.6, 104.2, 143.3; *OE Medicina*, Chapters 5, 10.

II.60.TOC recommends a prayer be placed in the pregnant woman's girdle for one or all of the above-mentioned conditions ("do on hire gyrdels þas gebedo"). This is the earliest reference to a girdle prayer in England, and the missing text may have a textual antecedent in the *Royal Prayerbook*'s apocryphal letter from Jesus to King Abgar of Jerusalem (fol. 12r/v), also known as the *Epistola salvatoris*. The bearer of the letter in the *Royal Prayerbook* was guaranteed divine protection against all enemies and natural disasters.[56] Although the letter in the *Royal Prayerbook* does not specifically mention pregnancy, later witnesses of these amuletic letters frequently included prayers for the safe delivery of a child and were popular in the late Middle Ages as a ward against miscarriage, stillbirth, and difficulties in labor.[57]

Similarly, the *Lacnunga* presents prayers and charms as alternatives to herbal remedies in the case of stillbirth and miscarriage and the inability to breastfeed.[58] The following charms that appear in a single chapter in the manuscript have been thought by some to be one larger charm against "delayed birth," and performed over a period of time.[59] The use of the same verb phrase "afedan … ne mæge" in each introductory sentence may have signaled a single origin to the early translators. However, *afedan* has multiple meanings—"rear, nourish, support, raise"[60]—and each charm focuses on a slightly different meaning; therefore, I think it is important to treat each as a separate entity. The first charm is a sequence of actions and verbal incantations for a woman passing through the necessary boundaries toward having a healthy child,[61] and it would be performed after a miscarriage or loss of a child, or even as a preventative measure:

56 The *Royal Prayerbook*'s letter is the earliest witness to the *Epistola salvatoris* in England. Christopher Cain, "Sacred Words, Anglo-Saxon Piety, and the Origins of the Epistola salvatoris in London, British Library, Royal 2. A. xx," *JEGP* 108, no. 2 (2009), 168–89.

57 Don C. Skemer, "Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion in the Late Middle Ages," *Scriptorium* 55, no. 2 (2001) 197–227.

58 Harley 585, fol. 185r/v.

59 Godfrid Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1948); E. V. K. Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942); J. H. G. Grattan and C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); Meaney, "Women, Witchcraft and Magic," 23–25.

60 *Bosworth Toller's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, s.v. "afedan," ed. T. Northcote Toller et al., comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichy (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2014), accessed January 10, 2018, https://bosworthtoller.com/.

61 Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," 287.

Se wifman se hire cild afedan ne mæg: gange to gewitenes mannes birgenne ond stæppe þonne þriwa ofer þa byrgenne, ond cweþe þonne þriwa þas word:

"Þis to me bote, þære laþan lætbyrde;
þis to me bote, þære swæran swærtbyrde,
þis to me bote, þære laðan lambyrde."

Ond þonne þæt wif seo mid bearne ond heo to hyre hlaforde on reste ga, þonne cweþe heo:

"Up ic gonge, ofer þe stæppe, mid cwican cild, nalæs mid cwelendum, mid fulborenum, nalæs mid fægan."

Ond þonne seo modor gefele þæt þæt bearn si cwic, ga þonne to cyrican, ond þonne heo toforan þan weofude cume cweþe þonne:

"Criste, ic sæde, þis gecyþed."

(The woman who cannot rear her child: let her go to a dead man's grave and then step thrice over the grave, and then say these words thrice:

"This is my remedy for the loathsome slow birth. This is my remedy for the grievous black birth. This is my remedy for the loathsome, misformed birth."

And when the woman is with child and goes to her husband in his rest, then let her say:

"Up I go, over you I step with a living child, not with a dying one, with a child brought to full-term, not with a doomed one."

And when the mother feels that the child is alive, then let her go to church, and when she comes before the alter, let her say,

"To Christ, I have said, this is made manifest.")[62]

The charm requires the woman to perform in three stages: stepping over a dead man's grave to ward off the death of her future children due to delayed labor (*lætbyrde*), stillbirth (*swærtbyrde*), or deformities (*lambyrde*); stepping over her sleeping husband to assure her pregnancy sustains to term (*fulborenum*); and finally, going to a church upon feeling the fetus move, to declare her desire to keep her child. This final oral recitation is truncated in comparison with the earlier two, and may represent a later adaptation of the charm to include Christian elements, as seen in other charms with Germanic origins.[63] Sarah

62 All translations from the *Lacnunga* are my own. Weston provides a more detailed analysis of this and the other two charms from the *Lacnunga* in her article "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic."
63 Karen Jolly, "Anglo-Saxon Charms in the Context of a Christian World View," *Journal of Medieval History* 11 (1985) 279–93, at 279, 284, and 286.

Larratt Keefer proposed that this part of the recitation may once have been longer, perhaps patterned after the *Magnificat*, but she also suggests that the obvious variation from the earlier formula appears to be the result of monastic interference.[64] Meaney offers an alternative interpretation that this final part of the charm demonstrates the mother's intention to baptize the child.[65]

The second, shorter charm in the *Lacnunga* is for a woman who has lost a child either very late in birth or early after delivery as a grave is once again involved:

> Se wifmon se hyre bearn afedan ne mæge: genime heo sylf hyre agenes cildes gebyrgenne dæl, wry æfter þonne on blace wulle ond bebicge to cepemannum ond cweþe þonne:
>
> "Ic hit bebicge, ge hit bebicgan þas sweartan wulle, ond þysse sorge corn."
>
> (The woman who cannot rear her child, let her take part of her own child's grave, then wrap it in black wool and sell it to traders and then say:
>
> "I sell it; you sell it; this black wool and seeds of this sorrow.")

In this case, the woman is to sell some of the earth of her deceased child's grave, wrapped in black wool in "an inverted reference to the white clothes of baptism."[66] In the black earth of the grave are the figurative "seeds of sorrow," dug up and exchanged in order to assure a healthy child in the future.

Finally, the third charm appears to be a remedy for a woman having difficulty breastfeeding as it focuses on the ability of a woman to provide nourishment, not only to her child, but to herself:

> Se man se ne mæge bearn afedan: nime þonne anes bleos cu meoluc on hyre handæ ond gesupe þonne mid hyre muþe, ond gange þonne to yrnendum wætere ond spiwe þærin þa meolc, ond hlade þonne mid þære ylcan hand þæs wæteres muð fulne ond forswelge; cweþe þonne þas word:
>
> "Gehwer ferde ic me þone mæran maga þihtan. Mid þysse mæran mete þihtan. Þonne ic me wille habban ond ham gan."

64 Sarah L. Keefer, "A Monastic Echo in an Old English Charm," *Leeds Studies in English* 21 (1990), 71–80.

65 Meaney, "Women and Witchcraft," 24.

66 Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 4 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 96.

> Þonne heo to þan broce ga, þonne ne beseo heo no, ne eft þonne heo þanan ga; ond þonne ga heo in oþer hus oþer heo ut ofeode, ond þær gebyrge metes.
>
> (The one who cannot feed her child, let her take milk of a cow of one color in her hand and then sip it with her mouth, and then go to running water and spit the milk therein, and then scoop up a mouthful of the water with the same hand and swallow it; then let her say these words:
>
> > "Everywhere I have carried the glorious strong son by means of this glorious, strong food. I will keep him and go home."
>
> When she goes to the brook, let her not look back, nor again when she goes from there, and then let her go into a house other than that from which she went out, and there let her eat food.)

In this ritual, the taking-in of nourishment in various forms is acted out: the woman must milk a cow and then hold the milk in her mouth. Spitting the milk into running water symbolizes her desire for her own breast milk to flow. After reciting the charm, she then goes to a friend's home and eats; keeping herself healthy will aid her ability to feed her child. Finally, the change of physical location is symbolic of a new life.

What stands out about the above three charms from the *Lacnunga* is that not only are they thoroughly performative acts, requiring a woman to traverse to rivers, graveyards, and churches, but that they are to be carried out by the woman herself, without an intermediary. With the exception of the final lines of the first charm, they contain no prayers or blessings or appeals for heavenly intervention. Instead, these charms focus on the physical manifestations of death (a grave) or nourishment (milk). Within the textual tradition of medicine, these three charms are a glimpse of more traditional, or "folk," medicine that does not require physician's supervision or priestly blessing and may represent the types of remedies available to women whose financial means did not allow for them to seek expert medical care. Furthermore, these charms epitomize the alterity of infertility, representing a barrier between the woman afflicted with infertility or the loss of her child and society as a whole. They also place a heavy burden on the woman as the one responsible for the pregnancy or neonatal loss and the inability of her body to provide nourishment either through her breasts or her womb.

The textual evidence provides a disparate range of remedies for gynecological and obstetric concerns, from drinks and ointments to charms and amulets. They address medical conditions that are universal to women and

present today even with modern medical advances. The efficacy of these medieval remedies is debatable, but many of the herbs have emmenagogic properties recognized today, and the prayers and hopes of today's infertile woman who cannot afford expensive treatments are little different from medieval charms and amulets. I will come back to the topic of folk medicine and care for women, but for now, I turn to sources of women's medicine that are not overtly part of the medical corpus.

"Women's Medicine" in a Non-Medical Context

The only non-medical book to focus on women's medicine is the *Royal Prayerbook*: one of four extant small-sized books produced in Mercia in the early ninth century, including the Book of Cerne, the Book of Nunnaminster, and the Harley Prayerbook.[67] As I mentioned when introducing my corpus, it has been proposed that perhaps this manuscript was made for, or was once the property of, a female physician. However, it bears no resemblance in content to the extant vernacular medical corpus from the early medieval England. The *Royal Prayerbook* is a Latin manuscript with a contemplative focus on healing through Christ's miracles. It contains no medical remedies, but the two groups of prayers or charms for the cessation of bleeding (fols. 16v, 49r/v), focus on a specific kind of blood flow: menstrual. These charms, as I will refer to them hereafter, present as prayers, but according to Lea Olsan, a charm is a "performative speech act" that may be found in both medical and religious contexts.[68] Charms may contain actual prayers, but they also contain an incantation of some sort and may require the actors to perform in some other way, such as seen with the *Lacnunga* charms above.[69]

The manuscript opens with excerpts from the Gospels, but with an unusual twist: the four evangelists' accounts are changed from their biblical order, with Matthew's accounts of Christ's healing miracles being presented last, just before a series of hymns and prayers. Within the selections from the Gospel of Matthew are four miracles in which women were healed, including the "Veronica," or the "Haemorrhoissa," account of the woman who touches

67 Cambridge, University Library, Ll. 1. 10; London, British Library, Harley 2965; London, British Library, Harley 7653. Michelle Brown, "Mercian Manuscripts? The 'Tiberius' Group and its Historical Context," in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. Michelle Brown and Carol Farr (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 281–91.

68 Lea Olsan, "The Inscription of Charms in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999), 401–29, at 402.

69 Olsan, "Inscription of Charms," 403–4.

Christ's hem and is healed of her bleeding after twelve long years.[70] This account features again in two charms against bleeding that begin with an excerpt taken from *A Solis Ortus Cardine*, a Latin poem by the fifth-century poet Sedulius in which the life of Christ is narrated in twenty-three stanzas:

> Rivos cruoris torridi
> Contacta vestis obstruit:
> Fletu rigante supplicis
> Arent fluent sanguinis.[71]
>
> (Streams of blood dried up.
> Blood ceased with the touch of the garment,
> by the suppliant's flowing tears;
> the streams of blood dry up.)[72]

Citing the miracle of the Veronica, the suppliant requests that her own flow of blood ceases, just as for the woman who touched Christ's robes. The first of these charms comes at the end of the second quire of the manuscript on fol. 16v, after the apocryphal letter from Christ to King Abgar mentioned above. It is repeated (with some textual differences) on fol. 49 r/v. The second charm is significantly longer, beginning with a short Latin benediction, and both begin with *signum crucis* drawn in the left margin. The charm against bleeding then continues onto 49v, where the reader is once again instructed to make the sign of the cross before reading a charm that contains instructions to write out and carry an amuletic prayer in (corrupt) Greek that includes the name Veronica.[73] The final part of the charm, marked by a fourth *signum crucis* repeats the *Rivos cruoris torridi* formula, adding a plea for Veronica to intervene on the suppliant's behalf to "free me from

70 The biblical account of the veil of Veronica and the Haemorrhoissa were conflated sometime in the early Middle Ages in the transmission of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Church History*. The name Veronica would come to be associated equally with the woman who touched Christ's hem and the account of the woman who used her veil to wipe Christ's bloody face. Emma Sidgwick, "At Once Limit and Threshold: How the Early Christian Touch of a Hem (Luke 8.44; Matthew 9.20) Constituted the Medieval Veronica," *Viator* 45, no. 1 (2014), 1–24.

71 Peter G. Walsh and Christopher Husch, eds. and trans. *One Hundred Latin Hymns: Ambrose to Aquinus*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 90–91.

72 Translation is my own.

73 "COMAPTA OCOГMA CTY ГONTOEMA EKTYTOΠO +Beronice. Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus, salutis me, CACINCACO YCAPTERE per Dominum Ihesum Christum." (NB: Beronice is the Latinate version of the Greek Veronica: Βερενικη.)

the blood," followed by more corrupt Greek.[74] In keeping with this pattern, the manuscript closes with *A Solis Ortus Cardine* in its entirety (fol. 51r/v).

These charms are not for generic blood flow cessation as suggested by Godfrid Storms when he truncated them,[75] but charms involving prayers and invocations to Christ and saints to cease the excessive flow of blood unique to women, with the performative ritual focused on the sign of the cross and oral performance, as suggested by the repetition of the *Rivos cruoris torridi* formula.[76] The type of abnormal menstrual bleeding addressed by these charms would leave the patient anemic and sick and potentially infertile. Infertility as a comorbidity of irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding may also explain why there is a focus in the Gospel excerpts on the parents of John the Baptist: Zechariah and Elizabeth, a couple who suffered life-long infertility, and who were given the miracle of a child in their old age.

It is important to note that even regular menstruation was viewed outside of any medical context in early medieval England as a disease rather than a biological function. The Old English term in medical context is *flewsa* (flux). References to menstruation only appear in two other contexts in this period: homilies and penitentials. In both, the term used is *monaðadl*, or "monthly disease." Heide Estes notes that in the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the process of menstruation itself is referred to as "illness/sickness" (*untrymnes*). "[T]he text's repetition that menstruation constitutes 'untrymness' creates a special category of infirmity particular to women."[77] The penitentials and homilies in which menstruation is addressed focus on the unclean nature of the cycle itself: if a man and a woman participate in intercourse during her menstrual cycle, the man is required to pay penance for twenty to forty days.[78] Although Bede writes that women should not be restricted from attending church during their menstrual period, the Old English penitentials say otherwise: any woman who attends church or partakes of the Eucharist is to fast for twenty days.[79] Menstruation was an "unclean" disease, and conception

74 "Beronice libera me de sanguinibus. Deus, Deus, Salutis me. AMICO CAPDINOPO ΦΙΦΙΡΟΝ ΙΔΡΑCACIMO."

75 Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 196–200.

76 P. M. Jones and Lea T. Olsan, "Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 89 (2015) 406–33, at 410–11.

77 Heide Estes, "Menstruation, Infirmity, and Religious Observance from Ecclesiastical History, in *Medieval Disability Sourcebook: Western Europe*, ed. Cameron Hunt McNabb (Santa Barbara, CA, punctum books, 2020), 341–44.

78 *Scriftboc*, Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

79 *Scriftboc*, Frantzen, "Penitential Database." These restrictions applied to women religious as well.

that may occur during menstruation was thought to result in a child born with physical impairments or a sinful nature, which was to be avoided.[80] The disease of menstruation may have prevented women in early medieval England from attending church once a month, but what would it have meant for a woman with excessive menstrual bleeding, already physically impaired by a disease that may have restricted her from marriage, childbirth, or other activities most often associated with "womanhood"? Unfortunately, the attitude of the church that menstruation was an unclean infirmity suggest she also may have experienced marginalization through social restrictions due to her condition. Returning to the question of the purpose of this manuscript, it is important to point out how it differs from the extant medical corpus. The *Royal Prayerbook* was created as a Latin manuscript; vernacular glosses were added to several of the prayers by a subsequent owner, sometime in the late tenth or early eleventh century. The prayerbook had no original vernacular texts in it, whereas the other medical books are primarily vernacular creations or translations. I am reluctant to make a judgement that a woman physician's "leechbook" would differ so significantly from a man's: in Latin instead of the vernacular and with focus on prayers, hymns, and gospel excerpts over actual remedies. As a medical manual, the *Royal Prayerbook* would have provided a very limited range of healing for a woman physician, if that was, indeed, its purpose. While the evidence is overwhelming that this manuscript was created for a woman, I do not believe it was intended for one who was interested in healing others, but one who was focused on healing herself. A woman whose life had been ravaged by prolonged menstrual problems and subsequent infertility could contemplate, pray, and perform the various charms with the hope of healing and perhaps the miracle of childbirth late in life through the texts in this manuscript.[81] The Greek amuletic charm the suppliant is instructed to copy may have been paired with the amuletic charm at the end of the apocryphal letter from Jesus to King Abgar, providing the reader with dual talismans promoting good health and warding off excessive bleeding.

The conscious compilation of this manuscript demonstrates that it must have been very difficult for medical practitioners in this premodern

80 Irene Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 86–88.

81 It is possible that this book may have belonged to a female monastery. However, the focus on the miracle of the conception and birth of John the Baptist presents a level of hope for future fertility that is inconsistent with a monastic environment.

society to cure ongoing, debilitating illnesses.[82] Had the original owner of this manuscript gone through repeated, failed medical treatments before turning to contemplative material, prayers, and charms that focus on spiritual intervention? Although the vernacular medical corpus lists several treatments for gynecological and obstetric concerns, there is no evidence available to indicate their overall efficacy. Of course, women seeking help for fertility and/or gynecological concerns likely took advantage of every available means of help: performing charms, seeking spiritual guidance and contemplative material, and pursuing medical attention in order to elicit a cure. The importance of the *Royal Prayerbook* to this study is that it is one of the few sources in which we see medical treatment from the patient's perspective. Like the women who sought out fertility aids such as the charms written down in the *Lacnunga*, the owner of the *Royal Prayerbook* must have used the combination of texts found within the book to help cope with a gynecological illness that may have prevented her from having a normal life.

The Treatment of "Women's Medicine"

The actualities of healthcare for women in early medieval England are, to be blunt, complicated. The vernacular medical manuscript collection and the *Royal Prayerbook* mostly likely served a limited audience; that is, the textual evidence for remedies for women's medicine, particularly herbal-based remedies, assumes the care and cure by a medical practitioner, particularly one who was educated enough to read and well enough placed to have access to a medical manuscript.[83] This same physician may have served in a specific environment such as a monastery, and was of service to a select few with access to or the financial means to pay for medical care. Similarly, the original owner of the *Royal Prayerbook* must have been from a wealthy or noble family. She was either well-educated and able to read Latin, or she had regular access to a priest who could read to her. Moreover, she was either financially capable of commissioning the manuscript or in position to receive one as a lavish gift. But noble women and those of

82 We can read the same frustrations in the medical community in Bishop Asser's late ninth-century accounts of the suffering of King Alfred. While his work has strong hagiographic overtones, it may not have exaggerated King Alfred's medical condition, the number of doctors who attempted a diagnosis, and its untreatable nature. William H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred together with the Annals of St Neot Erroneously Ascribed to Asser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904).

83 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 104–5.

means were not the only ones who suffered from gynecological problems or needed care during childbirth.

The corpus of women's medicine noticeably focuses on when pregnancies and labor go wrong. Apart from a single entry in *Leechbook III* on prenatal care,[84] and the injunction against certain foods in a pregnancy prognostic,[85] no medical treatises exist on what one should anticipate in a typical pregnancy and delivery in early medieval England.[86] This information was likely spread through oral tradition, rather than textual, from woman to woman. Pregnancy and childbirth progressing normally, as well as other women's medical issues, were probably attended to by other women.[87] Historical evidence does not survive to tell us whether these women were recognized medical specialists or mothers and grandmothers sharing empirical knowledge. The vernacular translation for a midwife is *byrþþinenu*, but it only occurs twice in the corpus of Old English, both times

84 *Leechbook III*.37.5: "Georne is to wyrnanne bearneacnum wife þæt hio aht sealtes ete oððe swetes oþþe beor drince. Ne swines flæsc ete ne naht fætes. Ne druncen gedrince ne on weg ne fere. Ne on hors to swiðe ride þy læs hio þæt bearn of hire sie ær riht tide." (A pregnant woman must be warned vigorously against eating anything salt or sweet, or drinking beor, and not eat pork or anything fatty, nor drink so that she gets drunk, nor travel on the road, nor ride on a horse too much, so that the child does not come out before the right time.) Banham and Voth, *Medical Texts II*.

The injunction against horseback riding is repeated in the homily *De Infantibus non Baptizandis* that John Pope attributes to Ælfric of Eynsham, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplemental Collection*, *Volume I*, EETS s.s. 259 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967), 56 and 69. See also Winfried Rudolf, "Anglo-Saxon Preaching on Children," in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. Susan Irvine and Winfried Rudolf (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 48–70.

85 "[G]if wif biþ bearn eacen feower monoð oþþe fife and heo þonne gelome eteð hnyte oþþe æceran oþþe ænige niwe bleda þonne gelimpeð hit hwilum þurh þæt/þonne þæt þæt cild bið disig. Eft, is oþer wife beþon gef eceð fearres flæsc oððe rammes oþþe buccan oþþe bæres oþþe hanan oþþe ganran oþþe æniges þara neata þe strynan mæg þonne gelimpeð hit hwilum þurh þæt/þonne þæt þæt cild bið hoforode and healede." (If the woman is four or five months pregnant and frequently eats nuts or acorns or fresh fruits, then it sometimes turns out that because of that the child will be foolish. Again, there is another way for that: if she eats the flesh of bulls or rams, or bucks or boars, or cocks or ganders, or of any animal that can engender, then it sometimes happens that because of that, the child will be hunchbacked and deformed.) Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 212–13.

86 This may not be overly surprising. Even though classical and Late Antique authors, including Hippocrates, were interested in conception, fetal development, and obstetrics, and books of gynecology were written by physicals like Soranus of Ephesius, their works were not transmitted as a whole in early medieval England; extracts of their works may have comprised some of this lost chapter, but with all authority removed. Green notes that the Salernitian compilation of women's medicine attributed to the woman Trota does not include information regarding normal pregnancy and delivery issues; "History of Women's Healthcare," 495.

87 Weston, "Women's Medicine, Women's Magic," 281; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 103.

as a Latin translation for *obstetrix*.[88] The low frequency of this term does not necessarily predicate its popularity in everyday use but may indicate that either *byrþþinenu* was not a recognized professional term or else there may have been little reason (for men) to document the term.[89]

Gleaning evidence for the practice of women's medicine in medieval towns and villages is difficult at best as no sources survive to detail this facet of women's life. It may be possible to infer from vernacular penitentials and homilies that the men of the church were aware of—and in many cases, condemned—the treatment, prevention, and prognostication involved in women's medicine by those not sanctioned by the church.[90] The *OE Penitential* and *OE Handbook for the Confessor* both identify the means by which a woman might bring about an abortion "with drink or with other diverse things":

> Gif wif hire cild amyrð innan hire *mid drence oððe mid oðrum mislicum þingum* oððe formyrþred syððan hit forð cymð, fæste x ger, þa iii on hlafe ond on wætere, ond þa vii swa hire scrift hire mildheortlice tæcean wylle.
>
> (If a woman murders her child while it is inside her, or after it comes out, *with drink or with diverse other things*, she is to fast for 10 years, 3 on bread and water, and 7 as her confessor mercifully prescribes for her, and repent it ever after.)[91]

The highlighted phrase is missing in the older, vernacular penitential collection known as the *Scriftboc* and the Latin original, suggesting it was added later, perhaps as priests became aware of the ways and means women might be exercising their options to birth control. The wording of this addition to the penitential echoes that of many of the medical remedies that call for herbal drinks to bring on menses or labor in the case of a stillbirth. In his homily "On Auguries," Ælfric notes that "some

88 *DOE Web Corpus*; *OE Herbarium*, Chapter 123.2; Herbert D. Meritt, *The Old English Prudentius Glosses at Boulogne-sur-Mer*, Stanford Studies in Language and Literature 16 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

89 My gratitude to Dr Debby Banham for consulting with me on the use of this term, and for pointing out that documented Old English is not necessarily consistent with popular use of the language. The documentation that survives from this era was produced in a heavily male-dominated field, so this may be another reason for the low frequency of this and other terms relating to women.

90 Meaney, "Women and Witchcraft," 18–22; Lawrence-Mathers, "The Problem of Magic," 90–98.

91 *OE Penitential*, Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

[women] kill their children before they are born, or after"[92] in order to hide their infidelity. Although abortifacient herbs typically prescribed as emmenagogues may have been available and known to local practitioners or midwives, Monica Green noted that this does not necessarily mean they were widely used for the purpose of abortion.[93] Infanticide, which is referenced both in the penitential text and the homilies, may have proved less perilous to the mother.

In the vernacular penitentials, women are the ones accused of witchcraft (*drycræft*), the performance of incantations (*galdorcræft*) and other sorcery (*unlibban wyrce*),[94] and in Ælfric's homily, they are accused of the creation of love philtres and other forms of love magic.[95] The *OE Penitential* specifies penance for all who "practice auguries or omens" (*hyltas oððe hwatunga*), but adds a harsher penalty for women who cure their children through witchcraft (*wiccecræft*) or by dragging them through the earth at a crossroads.[96] Ælfric must have been familiar with this particular penitential text since he mentions it almost verbatim in his homily "On Auguries," calling the women *gewitlease* (witless) for their actions.[97] Although this is not an example of "women's medicine" as it has previously been defined, I note it here for two important reasons: these texts show women as agents of family or folk medicine, and the practice of folk medicine was classified by the church as heathen practices or witchcraft.

Designating these women as witches discredited them and their practices within the eyes of the church, and perhaps their communities: "magic is most often a label used to identify ideas or persons who fall outside the norms of society and are thereby marked as special or non-normative, either for the purpose of exclusion or to heighten a sense of mysterious power

92 "Sume hi acwellað heora cild ærðam þe hi acennede beon, oððe æfter acennednysse þæt hi cuðe ne beon ne heora manifulla forligr ameldod ne wurðe ac heora yfel is egeslic and endeleaslic morð." Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 374–75.

93 Green, "History of Women's Healthcare," 499–505.

94 *Scriftboc*: "Gyf wif drycræft ond galdorcræft ond unlibban wyrce ond swylce bega fæste xii monað oððe þreo æfesteno, oððe xl nihta gewite hu micelu seo fyren seo." (If a woman practices magic and incantations and sorcery and the like, she is to fast twelve months or the three forty-day fasting periods or forty days; ascertain how great the sin is.) Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

95 "Sume hi wyrcað heora wogerum drencas oððe sumne wawan þæt hi hi to wife habbon" (Some of them devise drinks for their wooers, or some mischief, that they may have them in marriage). Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 374–75.

96 *OE Penitential*: "gif heo tilað hire cilde mid ænigum wiccecræfte, oððe æt wege gelætan þurh eorðan tyhð forðam hit is mycel hæðenscipe" (for that if she cures her child with any witchcraft, or at a crossroads lets it be drawn through the earth, for that is a very heathen practice). Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

97 Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 374–75.

inherent in their status."[98] Even though the practice of witchcraft or sorcery is condemned in other homilies and in law codes,[99] Ælfric's homily and the penitentials are unique in focusing on women as practitioners of magic.[100] The contemporary collection of sermons in the Vercelli Book includes the practice of witchcraft and sorcery in a list of sins, but without any reference to the gender of the sinner.[101] The comparison here suggests that the Vercelli homilies were offering generic moral teachings often seen in homiletic texts, thus allowing them to be amended as the situation necessitated. Thus, Ælfric and the men who documented and emended the late penitential collections were addressing a contemporary societal concern as they saw it: these churchmen objected to the disruption of the female social sphere (as they defined it) by women acting as healers.

Drawing a sick child through the earth at a crossroads represents an attempt to elicit a cure based on sympathetic medicine.[102] Sympathetic medicine is a form of symbolic transference, either as a means of taking away something bad or the application of something good through contact or actions, and is a common feature of charms.[103] Crossroads were common meeting places, but they were also places of illicit burials (suicides),[104] thus the mother may have hoped to transfer the child's illness onto a passing stranger or into a grave of one already damned. It is also possible that the symbolism of the crossroads is simply a cross, and thus the worried mother's actions symbolized an act of transferring her child's suffering onto Christ. If this possibility were considered by Ælfric and the confessors, then the punishment was meted out not because a woman was performing a heathen action, but because she was performing a Christian one. Nevertheless, in order for this to have been brought to the attention of Ælfric and to warrant emendation in the vernacular penitentials, it must have been practiced by more than one woman. This example is also an analogue to the *Lacnunga* charms for a healthy pregnancy in

98 Karen Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions of Magic," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3, *The Middle Ages*, ed. Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters (London: Athlone Press, 2002), 6–12, at 6.

99 Meaney, "Women and Witchcraft," 17–21; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 102; Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle: Niermeyer, 1906–16).

100 Meaney, "Women and Witchcraft," 18: "whenever Ælfric uses a pronoun for a witch it is always feminine."

101 Vercelli Homily IV; Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, 95.

102 Meaney, "Women and Witchcraft," 24.

103 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 109–10.

104 Helen F. Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith*, Studies in Early Medieval Britain (London: Routledge, 2013), 301.

which the woman traverses a grave in a means of transferring death to death in order to assure the life of her unborn child. The action of taking soil from a grave or stepping over one to transfer "death to the dead"[105] must have been seen by the church as desecration, even if that grave belonged to one's child. Sympathetic or transference healing crossed into the arena of heathen practices, such as nature worship, and Ælfric condemns practices that seek healing without a focus on the spiritual realm:[106] "It is not allowed to any Christian person to fetch his health from any stone, nor from any tree."[107] The *Lacnunga* charms for a healthy pregnancy include only a single Christian element, and the performance of charms that do not include Christian invocations or without a priestly intervention would be anathema to someone like Ælfric. This alone would warrant the condemnation of female healers as performers of magic and witchcraft.[108]

Some, if not most, of the instances in which a woman was called out for heathen practices and witchcraft were times when women were performing as agents of medicine, either for themselves or for others.[109] This might include creating amuletic charms for pregnant and parturient women, or even concocting a fertility drink. In the cases of women performing magic, incantations, and sorcery, the *Scriftboc* recommends that the confessor "ascertain how great the sin is," and in the cases of abortion, the *OE Penitential* allows the confessor to be merciful in his judgement.[110] While it is up to the confessor to prescribe whatever penalty he sees fit, these emendations suggest he could assess situations in which perceived witchcraft was in fact

105 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 109.

106 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 90.

107 "Se cristena mann ðe on ænigre þissere gelicnysse bið gebrocod, and he ðonne his hælðe secan wyle æt unalyfedum tilungum, oððe æt wyrigedum galdrum, oþþe æt ænigum wiccecræftr … Nis nanum cristenum men alyfed þæt he his hæle gefecce æt nanum stane, ne æt nanum treowe, buton his sy halig rode-tacen, ne æt nanre stowe, buton hit sy halig Godes hus; se ðe ells deð, he begæð untwylice hæðengild." (The Christian person, who in any of this like is afflicted, and he then seek his health with unallowed practices, or with cursing charms, or with any witchcraft … It is not allowed to any Christian person to fetch his health from any stone, nor from any tree, unless it be the holy sign of the cross, nor from any place, unless it be the holy house of God, he who does otherwise, undoubtable commits idolatry.) "The Passion of St Bartholomew," in Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, 449–50; Benjamin Thorpe, ed. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, vol. 1, *Sermones Catholici: in the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version* (London: Ælfric Society, 1844), 24.

108 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 103.

109 Meaney, "Women and Witchcraft," 19.

110 *Scriftboc:* "gewite hu micelu seo fyren seo" (one should ascertain how great the sin is); Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

women taking their own or their family's physical well-being into their own hands, and thereby offer a mitigated penance.

One final source may expand our understanding of what role the church played in women's medicine. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 85 is a mid-eleventh-century copy of an anonymous vernacular homiliary. In it, the main scribe includes four Latin charms with Old English rubrics and directions, copied between two homilies on folio 171r/v. The last of these is a charm *Wið wif bearneacnu* (for a pregnant woman) that was to be written on "virgin wax" ("wexe ðe næfre ne com to nanen wyrce") and then bound to the right foot of the laboring mother.[111] The location of this charm in a book of sermons suggests it fell upon the priest to recite and write it down when charged to pray and encourage a woman during a difficult labor. This charm, calling upon Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist and Mary, mother of Christ to come to the aid of the woman in labor is the earliest recitation of the "Holy Mothers" sequence frequently used in later medieval pregnancy amulets and charms.[112] A priest being summoned when labor has gone wrong was another form of medical intervention available to a woman in this era, although the frequency of this occurring is impossible to determine.[113] The priest's role would not be clinical, but to act as healer of the soul, and as such he could write out this (or other) charms, pray for the safe delivery of the child, and be available to administer last rites.

Eddius Stephanus's account of the grieving mother who attempts to have her deceased infant baptized by Wilfrid only to have him brought back from the dead suggests another reason why a priest might be present at a difficult birth.[114] If a newborn could not survive until his or her mother was able to bring him to

111 "Wið wif bearneacnu: 'Maria virgo peperit Christam elizabet sterelis peperit iohannem baptistam; Adiuro te infans sies masculus an femina per patram et filium et spiritum sanctum, ut exeas et recedas et ultra ei non noceas neque insipientiam illi facias amen; Videns dominus flentes sorores lazari ad monumentum lacrimatus est coram iudeis et clamabat. *lazare ueni foras* et prodiit ligatis manibus et pedibus qui fuerat quatriduanus mortuus.' Writ ðis on wexe ðe næfre ne com to nanen wyrce ond bind under hire swiðran fot." (For the pregnant woman: "Maria, virgin, bore Christ. Elizabeth, sterile, bore John the Baptist. I beseech you, infant, whether you be masculine or feminine, by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you come forth quickly and depart, and no longer do harm nor (make) foolishness. Amen. The Lord, seeing the sisters of Lazarus weeping at the tomb, wept in the presence of the Jews and cried out: *Lazarus, come forward!*, and he came forth, bound hand and foot, who had been dead four days." Write this on wax that has not once come to be used and bind under her right foot.) Translation is my own.

112 Jones and Olsan, "Performative Rituals," 415–16.

113 Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 45–46.

114 "Eddius Stephanus: Life of St Wilfrid," in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J. F. Webb (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 106–84, at 126–27.

church to be baptized, priests may have been able to intervene at delivery in the cases of weak, dying, or stillborn infants. The *Scriftboc* puts to responsibility for the death of an unbaptized or "heathen" child on the parents, prescribing three years penance.[115] However, in the later *OE Handbook*, the responsibility falls on the priest.[116] This provides motivation for the church in England to intercede in the delivery of medical care to or by women, particularly when the situation may result in the death of the mother and/or child.[117]

As I have shown here, there appear to have been multiple approaches to the care and treatment of women's medicine in early medieval England, although no single means of treatment guaranteed success. Prayers, contemplative material, and charms are evidence of self-care: women taking their medical conditions into their own hands, particularly when the charms have very little religious context, like those found in the *Lacnunga*. Another layer of women's medicine is that undertaken by doctors or priests whose intervention was likely limited to very specific circumstances, such as the financial capabilities of the patient or an emergency during delivery. However, as the *Royal Prayerbook*'s collection suggests, medical intervention itself may not have been fruitful, thus compelling women to turn to self-care. Finally, the evidence of women acting as agents of medicine for their own families suggests care being provided from woman to woman in the cases of labor and delivery, and perhaps even in relation to birth control and fertility concerns.

115 *Scriftboc:* "Cild gif hit hæðen swelte, fæste his fæder ond his modor ðreo winter" (If a child dies a heathen, his father and mother are to fast three years). Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

116 "Gif untrum cild hæþen gewite ond hit on preoste gelang sig þolie his hades ond bête hit georne ond gif hit þurh freonda gymeleaste wurðe fæstan, þreo ger on hlafe ond wætere, ond þa ii ger iii dagas on wucan, ond behreowsian hit æfre." (If an unhealthy child dies a heathen, responsibility for that belongs to the priest. He is to forfeit his rank and repent it earnestly; and if it came through the negligence of friends, they are to fast for three years on bread and water, and for two years, three days in the week and repent it ever after.) Frantzen, "Penitential Database."

117 The mid-twelfth century penitential manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc 482), which may have been compiled for the instruction of parish priests includes a passage alluding to post-birth baptism. It is an adaptation from the New Testament book James 5:14–16 and reads: "forþam hit is awriten, þæt ælc þæra manna þe þas gerihto hæfð, þæt his sawl bið gelice clæne æfter his forðsiðe ealswa ðæt cild bið þe æfter fulwihte sona gewit" (because it is written that every man who has these rites, his soul will be as clean after his death as that of the child who dies immediately after the baptism). This passage is repeated twice in the manual, suggesting its importance. Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 70–73.

Conclusion

Gynecological and obstetric remedies make up a small proportion of the vernacular medical corpus that survives from early medieval England, but they provide insight into the medical and social conditions women may have faced when confronted with diseases unique to their bodies and the treatments available to them. Many treatments incorporate the Hippocratic model that calls for returning a woman to her natural menstrual cycle, but others demonstrate the limitations of early medieval (and sadly, modern) medicine, such as in the cases of miscarriage and stillbirth.

Much of women's medicine survives through male channels, but it is possible to find the female voice in the textual evidence. The *Lacnunga* charms, in their oral, performative nature, show women as agents of their own care, moving into the realms of natural and sympathetic magic in their attempts to cure issues such as lactation problems, miscarriage, and conception after stillbirth and infant death. These actions and attempts at cures may have put women in direct conflict with the church, and they were censured for it. Female agents of medicine may also have included the local wise woman who offered advice and herbal curatives, or the patient herself, placing her hope in charms and recitations. The *Royal Prayerbook* offers alternative means of female healing agency through meditative material focusing on spiritual well-being as well as the performance of charms. Evidence of female agency in medicine and healthcare suggests that even when medical treatment was readily available, many female reproductive conditions were beyond the capabilities of early medieval physicians. Undoubtedly, women were at the heart of "women's medicine" in England. Whether they were helping themselves or others, their reliance upon male agents, either doctors or priests, was secondary to their own desires and abilities.

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Women's Literacy

11 The Literate Memory of Hugeburc of Heidenheim

Aidan Conti

Abstract
The English nun Hugeburc of Heidenheim wrote lives of two kinsmen, Willibald and Wynnebald, and became the only female hagiographer of the Carolingian period. Hugeburc's work represents an important milestone for the construction of institutional memory in a region undergoing Christianization. While writing hagiography can be seen as a feminist act, the power structures and world views inscribed in these works conform to dominant ideologies in the Christianization process. To assess the cultural work these texts perform, this chapter looks beyond the quality of Hugeburc's Latin to better understand the hierarchies that the texts construct, revealing that while Hugeburc's activities challenge a discursive arena that is almost exclusively male, her writings uphold a patriarchal and Christian world view.

Keywords: Hugeburc of Heidenheim, Christianization, nuns, cultural memory, cultural work

For a medieval studies that increasingly sees itself as feminist, postcolonial, and global, the life and work of Hugeburc (or Hygeburg) of Heidenheim (fl. 780s) offer a wealth of material.[1] An English nun who migrated to

1 For recent overviews of Hugeburc's works, see Rodney Aist, *The Christian Topography of Early Islamic Jerusalem: The Evidence of Willibald of Eichstätt (700–787 CE)*, Studia Traditionis Theologiae 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); James Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World, 690–900* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Walter Berschin, *Biographie und epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter III,* Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen philologie des mittelalters X (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1991), 18–26. Overviews of Hugeburc's life are less prominent, but Pauline Head's "Who Is the Nun from Heidenheim? A Study of Hugeburg's *Vita Willibaldi*," *Medium Ævum* 51

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Bavaria in the wake of missionary activity on the edges of Frankish rule, Hugeburc sparks the modern imagination because both her life and work overturn conventional notions and broaden our conceptual understanding of the Carolingian age. The only known female hagiographer of the period, Hugeburc wrote the lives of two of her kinsmen, both of whom travelled widely and both of whom were instrumental in the development of ecclesiastical institutions in Bavaria: namely, Willibald (d. ca. 787), bishop of Eichstätt and founder of the double abbey at Heidenheim, and Wynnebald (d. 760 or 761), the first abbot of the monastery at Heidenheim.[2] These lives, which go under the title *Vita germanuum Wynnibaldi et Willibaldi*,[3] preserve the remarkable story of Willibald's travels in the early part of the eighth century to not only Rome (720–723), but also present-day Syria, Jerusalem and environs (724–726), as well as Constantinople (727–729) before his return to Italy, and ten years at Monte Cassino (729–739) after which he was called to Bavaria and became bishop of Eichstätt (740). Consequently, Hugeburc's writing offers the only extant narrative account from Western Christendom of interactions with Islam in the Holy Land during the eighth century; it also represents one of a handful of accounts from the period after Persian and then Islamic societies governed the region and before the Crusades, in other words from the early seventh century CE until the very end of the eleventh.[4] While Hugeburc's account of Wynnebald's life is less studied, he is also remarkable for his travels (chiefly to Rome) as well as his role in the establishment of Christian

(2002), 29–46, centers Hugeburc's life. Shorter entries can be found in Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes, and Donald Scragg, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), s.v. "Hygeburg," and the introduction to the translation of part of her work in T. F. X. Noble and T. Head, *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 141–64, at 141–43.

2 Berschin, *Biographie und epochenstil,* provides the dates 760 for the death of Wynnebald and ca. 787 for Willibald. Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*, 761 and 787 respectively.

3 Oswald Holder-Egger, *Vitae Willibaldi et Wynnebaldi auctore sanctimoniali Heidenheimensi*, MGH, SS 15.1 (Hannover, 1887), 80–117; translated by C. Talbot with revisions by Thomas Head in *Soldiers of Christ*. The title comes from München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 1086, 44v; on the composition of the works (with particular reference to Willibald's travels), see Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*, 253–55. When referring to the work as a whole I will use *Vita germanuum*; when referring to individual lives as they are now edited, *VWill* for the *Vita Willibaldi* and *VWynn* for the *Vita Wynnebaldi.*

4 In addition to Hugeburc's retelling of Willibald's travels in the eighth century, we can note Bede's treatment of Arculf's travels in the seventh century, and the account of Bernard of Mont-St-Michel in the ninth. These are included in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades,* 2nd rev. ed. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2002).

institutions in Bavaria. Given the extraordinary contents of the *Vita germanuum*, especially Willibald's voyage to the Holy Land, it is not surprising that much academic attention has focused on the travels found in Hugeburc's work.

In this essay, I consider approaches to Hugeburc that have elided her role in the cultural work of hagiography in a frontier. Arguing that Hugeburc acts as an important figure for the construction of institutional and cultural memory in a region undergoing Christianization, I then examine her texts to analyze the particular worldview and power structures she inscribes. In this endeavor, I hope to recenter Hugeburc's role in the production of sanctity in early medieval Europe. While this work can in an important way be regarded and positioned as feminist (in that it argues for the importance of the female author), I will not argue that Hugeburc represents a form of proto- or pre-feminism as is sometimes staked out when we endeavor to reassert feminine voices from the past and in so doing situate in the past a nascent feminism that charts a course towards present-day feminism. Rather, in addition to asserting the struggle for equality, I take as axiomatic that feminism involves praxis as Sara Ahmed describes:

> Living a feminist life does not mean adopting a set of ideals or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world (in a not-feminist and antifeminist world); how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls.[5]

With Ahmed's concerns in mind, Hugeburc's work raises a number of questions about the type of world she inscribes into being when she writes the hagiography of her relatives. In writing the biographies of foundational figures of the ecclesiastical institutions of the region, Hugeburc herself creates histories that will become concrete for subsequent generations as "solid" in Ahmed's terms as the walls of the religious buildings her writing accompanies. Consequently, a feminist reading must, I believe, examine the *vitae* of these two brothers with an eye toward the social relationships, systems and histories they create in the written record and so in the social memory of the region. For in confirming and transmitting a particular

5 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1.

form of historical understanding, these stories, in turn, affect and shape the possible futures that their audiences can imagine.

Approaching Hugeburc: Identifying the Nun of Heidenheim

Typically, Hugeburc's story involves the academic forensics that led to the identification of her name in the first third of the twentieth century. While the works themselves record that they were written by "an unworthy Saxon woman" (*ego indigna Saxonica*),[6] Hugeburc's name was only attributed to the work when the code in München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 1086 (fol. 71v, early 9th century) was deciphered.[7]

In this cipher, which immediately precedes the text of the *Vita germanuum,* abbreviations, such as *secd*, are interspersed with consonants, such as the *g* thereafter, as well as partial words, such as the end of a gerundive, *rdidando.* While it is now clear that the abbreviations stand for ordinal numbers—*pri* for "first", *secd* for second, *ter* for "third", *quar* for "fourth" and *quin* for "fifth"—the abbreviations lack any mark for grammatical gender (an *a* following *scd* would denote *secunda* for example), nor is the noun to which the adjectives refer explicit. Consequently, expansion of the abbreviations is tentative, rather than certain. However, knowing that the ordinals refer to vowels, we can posit that the adjectives refer to *littera* or *vocalis* (both feminine) and arrive at the following:

Secunda **g** quarta. quinta. **n** prima. **s** prima **x** quarta **n** tertia.
c prima. **n** quarta. **m** tertia. **n** secunda. **h** quinta. **g** secunda.
b quinta **rc** quarta **r. dinando. h** secunda **c. scr** tertia.
b secunda. **b** prima **m**

Alternatively, if we simply replace the abbreviations with Arabic cardinal numbers, we can envision the cipher in the following code-like format:

2 g 4 5 n 1 s 1 x 4 n 3 (-)
c 1 n 4 m 3 n 2 h 5 g 2 (-)
b 5 r c 4 rdinando h 2 c s c r 3 (-)
b 2 b 1 m

6 *Vita germanuum,* 86, 27–28.

7 See Bernhard Bischoff, "Wer ist die Nonne von Heidenheim?," *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktinerordens*, 49 (1931): 387–97; also Head, "Who Is the Nun?," 29–30.

Fig. 11.1 Hugeburc's cipher. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 1086, fol. 71v, lines 4–7[8]

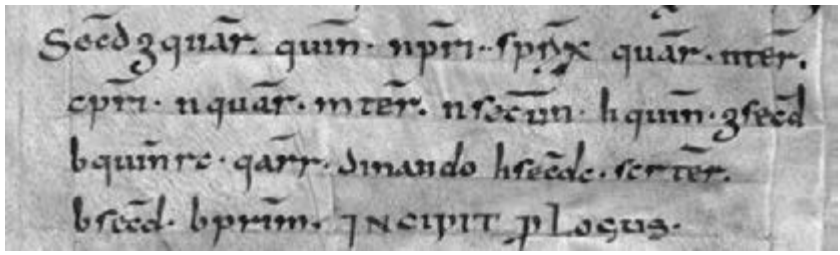

Image reproduced by permission of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Germany.

Substituting the numbers for the vowels to which they correspond yields the following sentence: "Ego una Saxonica nomine Hugeburc ordinando hec scribebam" (I, a Saxon woman with the ordained name Hugeburc, wrote these things).

While similar ciphers were widespread in early medieval written (and spoken) culture, the specific execution of Hugeburc's code is said to be unique.[9] Partial parallels in other early medieval code traditions include, for example, the substitution of a vowel with its adjacent consonant seen in a number of scribal codes.[10] On the other hand, Bede in his *De temporum ratione* mentions a code in which letters can be substituted with numbers. While Bede's system is described in terms of oral communication (so as to hide messages while meeting in groups), the principle could, as we see here, be applied to written communication as well.[11] In this regard, Hugeburc works within a broader tradition, but is unique in her execution, a fitting depiction of much of Hugeburc's literary activity.

8 A full image of the cropped detail is available at: http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0006/bsb00064004/images/index.html?id=00064004&groesser=&fip=eayaxdsydyztseayaxsxsxdsydenyztseayaxsen&no=190&seite=146, accessed August 30, 2021. I am grateful to the Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum (MDZ) for allowing use of the image via an Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

9 See Head, "Who Is the Nun?," 30 with reference to William Levison, "St Boniface and Cryptography," *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 290–94; and also Benjamin A. Saltzman, "*Vt hkskdkxt*: Early Medieval Cryptography, Textual Errors and Scribal Agency," *Speculum* 93, no. 4 (2018): 975–1009, esp. 983–85.

10 http://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2018/03/cracking-a-medieval-code.html, accessed April 8, 2019.

11 *De temporum ratione*, I (272, lines 82–89), C. W. Jones, *Bedae Venarabilis Opera, Pars VI, Opera Didascalica 2*, CCSL 123A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

While the recovery of Hugeburc's name would suggest her centrality, nonetheless academic attention to the woman and her works has been rather limited in its interests and approaches, revealing, I believe, a number of blind spots and prejudices within the field of early medieval English studies and, indeed, arguably within medieval studies more broadly. Not only has her role (and indeed her name) in her work been frequently elided, the texts she wrote are often viewed as peripheral for a number of institutional and historical reasons. Foregrounding Hugeburc and her cultural work represents part of a broader effort to assert the pivotal and central role women played in early medieval textual culture in general and memory culture in particular.[12] In a region and period in which ecclesiastical institutions were recently founded and in which their roles and reputations were in the process of being developed and consolidated, Hugeburc employs literate practices in the writing of holy biographies of her kin as part of an emergent monumental memorial culture.

These literate practices and the form of cultural memory they facilitate, while seemingly inevitable within a determinist framework of progress (that is traditional models of development and literacy), are not autonomous or neutral activities, but rather, when viewed in terms of more recent studies of literacy, ideologically driven and sustaining acts that establish and re-enforce political and social hierarchies.[13] As a result, in addition to reasserting Hugeburc's centrality in our consideration of her work, I aim to explore from a feminist standpoint the social role of Hugeburc's works and the way that they challenge, support, or enable social stratification. Her texts help elevate her male relations to saintly status within a region in which she and her relations are new arrivals intent on changing indigenous customs to conform to those of the dominant ideology of Christianity; we cannot say

12 See, for example, Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press); and Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe*, 900–1200 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

13 On ideological approaches to literacy, see Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Three important studies that form the core of "new literacy studies" include in addition to Street's work, that of Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). A useful overview of new literacy studies, which at this time are rather less new and more orthodox, can be found in David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 22–28, or alternatively Harvey J. Graff, *Literacy Myths, Legacies, and Lessons* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013).

that early medieval missionary activity was steeped in imparting a Christian way of life without recognizing the hierarchies that this historically and socially situated imparting brought with it. Against this background, I will examine two episodes in particular in the lives of Willibald and Wynnebald that highlight the politics of Hugeburc's work, namely Willibald's balsam smuggling and one of the few miracles attributed to Wynnebald. While asserting Hugeburc's prominence represents an assertion of equality for women writers, I recognize that her work and its social function are not necessarily egalitarian.

Reasserting the Cultural Work of Hugeburc

In reasserting Hugeburc's role in the cultural work of her texts, it is important to distinguish this process from one which asserts the unique qualities of her work and the achievement of the author. An emphasis on cultural work, as described by Jane Tompkins, explores how texts provide a society with means of thinking about itself, of defining aspects of a shared social reality, and expressing and shaping the social context that produced them.[14] As a result, while Hugeburc is a central figure in this cultural work, the aim is not to assert her singularity or the particular literary merits of her work. To understand better how Hugeburc's cultural work has been overlooked, a consideration of traditional academic attention to her, attention that shows not so much neglect as marginalization, is in order, even as contemporary work promises to change the traditional picture of this important figure.[15]

To a certain extent, the degree to which Hugeburc is overlooked reflects the disciplinary and institutional focus of early English studies within departments of English literature and language and departments of history where England and the Continent are often distinct fields of enquiry. As a female hagiographer working on the continent and writing in Latin, her hagiographies fall outside conventional bounds of the vernacular canon of English literature. Furthermore, her work, written before the age of Alfred,

14 Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200.

15 See, for example, Diane Watt, "Exemplary Lives of Anglo-Saxon Missionaries," *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 91–116; see also Head, "Who Is the Nun?" and Ora Limor, "Pilgrims and Authors: Adomnán's *De locis sanctis* and Hugeburc's *Hodoeporicon Sancti Willibaldi*," *Revue Bénédictine* 114, no. 2 (2004): 253–75.

precedes much of that which is literary in the English language and so is more visible to those who work within a Carolingian rather than an English framework. Although her hagiographic works are about English men, their lives and careers are not part of the history of the island, which they left when young. Moreover, even within the treatments of the Bonifacian mission to the continent, Hugeburc and her work occupy a rather peripheral space. Although her works circulate within a hagiographic dossier which includes the *Vita Bonafatii*, she was not one of the many female correspondents of Boniface's circle.[16]

However, the marginalization of Hugeburc is not solely due to disciplinary configurations. Even when her literary work stands centered, her role is often overlooked. Academic assessments largely reveal a pattern in which the activities of Willibald are foregrounded while Hugeburc's literary efforts are found wanting. Given that Willibald's journeys were reported by Willibald to Hugeburc and her associates, some critics, like Walter Berschin, see Willibald's account as a separate work that was incorporated at times verbatim into Hugeburc's *vita*.[17] Indeed, Hugeburc's preface asserts that she repeats the words of Willibald, an authenticating technique to give the text the authority of truth and to eschew the appearance of fabrication or embellishment:

> suisque oculis venerandi viri Willibaldi corporaliter cognita … haec omnia intimando pergstringimus … sicut illo ipso vidente et nobis referente de ori sui dictatione audire et nihilominus scribere destinavimus, duobus diaconibus testibus mecumque audientibus, 9. Kal. Iulii, pridie ante solstitia, Martii die.[18]
>
> (We relate all these things that were known bodily through the very eyes of the venerable man, Willibald … just as he himself saw these things and related them to us from the dictation of his own mouth we resolved to hear them and so write them down—with two deacons as witnesses who heard them with me—on Tuesday the twenty-third of June, the day before the summer solstice.)

16 A useful overview of the Bonafatian circle with particular reference to one of the female correspondents can be found in Kathryn Maude, *Berhtgyth's Letters to Balthard*, Medieval Feminist Forum Medieval Texts in Translation 4, Subsidia Series 7 (2017).

17 Berschin, *Biographie und epochenstil*, 18–26. See also Aist, *Christian Topography*, 8: "The respective contributions of Willibald and Hugeburc are self-evident due to the divergent styles of their Latin."

18 *VWill,* 87, 10–23.

Willibald's story, she writes, is known not from the turns of apochryphal stories (*non apocriforum venia erratica*),[19] but because she, together with two clerical witnesses, wrote from Willibald's dictation. The idea that Hugeburc wrote verbatim, or nearly verbatim, Willibald's own words is often repeated and upheld with recourse to a mistake in the primary manuscript for the work. In one sentence which describes a brief stay near the Jordan, the text states, "pastores dabant nobis acrum lac bibere" (shepherds gave *us* [*nobis*] bitter milk to drink), where one expects "them" (*illis*) in the third person hagiographical narrative.[20] As a result, so the argument goes, we have an account dictated by Willibald which was then copied nearly verbatim with the necessary shifts from Willibald's first-person account to the third-person for hagiography. The one instance in which the change of perspective was not actualized—the retention of *nobis*—serves to reinforce the hypothesized method.

Based on this premise, scholars can and do analyze the *itinerarium* (or *hodoeporicon*) of Willibald as something separate from Hugeburc's hagiography. Then, perhaps not unsurprisingly, when the whole work is considered, her contribution (which is seen to comprise the introduction, Willibald's early childhood, and his life after he takes up his position in Eichstätt) is seen as not only superfluous, but also not particularly successful. For example, Michael Lapidge calls her Latin style "much indebted to Aldhelm … [and] often impenetrable."[21] Similarly, Thomas Noble and Thomas Head assert: "Critics agree that it is interesting that a woman should have tried to imitate Aldhelmian Latin, but revealing that her education … was insufficient to permit her to achieve her goal with complete success."[22] These assessments seem to consider Hugeburc's efforts to imitate Aldhelmian style as a curiosity, rather than the common idiom of Hugeburc's social familiars, other women in the missionary field.[23] By contrast, Aldhelm's own prose is not seen as an

19 *VWill,* 87, 20–21.

20 *VWill*, 96, 9–10. Cited by, among others, Katherine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 46 and Eva Gottschaller, *Hugeburc von Heidenheim: Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Heiligenbiographien einer Nonne des achten Jahrhunderts* (München, 1973), 89. For a more capacious understanding of the convergence of the voices of Hugeburc and Willibald, see Watt, "Exemplary Lives," 102.

21 Lapidge, in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 246.

22 Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, 142.

23 On the general proclivity to disparage the correctness of women's writing, see Matthew Hussey's "A Road Nearly Taken: An Eighth-Century Manuscript in a Woman's Hand and Franco-Saxon Nuns in Early Medieval English Intellectual History" in the present volume, especially pp. 344–45 and 361–64.

anomaly, but rather the product of a virtuoso, "flamboyant … consisting of excessively long sentences built up of synonymous phrases often linked by alliteration and adorned by a dazzling variety of unusual grecisms."[24] Even as we recognize the grammatical lapses and difficulty in Hugeburc's Latin, the focus on its style, an important aspect of modern formalist analysis and indicator of the contemporary educational environment, nevertheless pushes aside the cultural significance of Hugeburc's work. Whatever its grammatical and stylistic shortcomings, the *Vita germanuum* promulgates a vision of sanctity and serves to inscribe notions of model behavior for the communities in which it was written, transmitted, and copied.

Failure to see Hugeburc's work as a cohesive cultural work, a failure facilitated by the plain language of the travelogue contrasted with the elaborate style elsewhere, have produced curious outcomes. In a particularly glaring effacement, a recent anthology of medieval pilgrimage writing excerpts the *hodoeporicon* of Willibald and ascribes the text as anonymous.[25] This denial of her authorship not only underscores an unfamiliarity with Hugeburc herself, but also testifies to the peripherality of the period to our understanding of pilgrimage and to Christian relations with the Near East. Indeed, even if this period is considered a low point in contact, trade, and travel, nevertheless the very fact that we have a written travel account from this period should and does in fact demonstrate how entwined these worlds, often considered distinct, always were.[26]

In a less immediately striking example, Rodney Aist's book-length and careful study is devoted to Willibald's account, its relation to those of other pilgrims, and its accuracy. While Hugeburc's authorship is recognized, the division of the work into his account and her writing leads to seemingly quixotic readings, wherein convenience dictates which words are his and which are hers. For example, in examining the textual description of the *sepulchrum Salvatoris* which Willibald is reported to have visited, Aist notes that the descriptions of the *sepulchrum* do not show a direct verbal link to Matthew's account with the exception of the phrase *ad ostium monumenti,*

24 Lapidge, in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 26.

25 Brett Edward Whalen, ed., *Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages: A Reader,* Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 16 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011). That Hugeburc is rendered as "anonymous" stems from the use of the Jerusalem Society translation (1895) of Hugeburc's work, which appeared before Bischoff's identification. That this edition was used suggests that the earlier medieval period (essentially, between late antiquity and the late Middle Ages) is less well known to those working on the later medieval period.

26 Michael McCormick, "New Light on the 'Dark Ages': How the Slave Trade Fueled the Carolingian Economy," *Past & Present* 177 (2002): 17–54 on the travel routes in this period.

a direct quotation from Matthew 27:60 where the phrase appears in the clause "quem angelus revolvit ad ostium monumenti" (which the angel rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre).[27] In this case, Aist considers the possibility that Hugeburc inserted the phrase during her revisions. However, in the description of the *Calvarie locus*, which occurs earlier in the text, Aist sees the echoes of Matthew's phrasing as indicative of Willibald's use of scriptural language, which while echoing the Bible, almost never shows a literal dependence upon the scriptural text.[28] In short, some biblical phrasing is Willibald's; in other cases, it is seen as Hugeburc's. His phrasing is authorial; hers an interpolation.

The story of Willibald's travels emphasizes the importance of the text in creating a Holy Land that readers (and listeners) could envision as a living testimony of the truths imparted by the Bible. The elision of Hugeburc's role in transmitting this knowledge to us rests on a number of points: first, that the text of Willibald's travels were dictated, an idea supported by the incorrect use of a first person pronoun in the manuscript that serves as the base text; and second, the issue of style, which has been employed to suggest that Hugeburc's and Willibald's contributions to the work can be distinguished. As noted above, many readers have contrasted Hugeburc's elaborate, yet not quite successful, Latin style with the simple, declarative statements of the travel narrative. Such analysis yields two registers in the work—one ornate, with neologisms, rare words, and unexpected word order, the other mundane and matter-of-fact.

There are two challenges to using a distinction in style as the basis for separating Hugeburc's work from Willibald's account. The first is that the distinction does not always hold.[29] We see, for example, evidence for elaborateness within the travel account.[30] In particular, in Chapters 8–10 which describe Willibald's journey to and stay in Rome, the prose is largely florid with certain phrases that can allegedly be attributed to Willibald. Similarly, the chapters covering Willibald's years in Monte Cassino (32–34), employ an elaborate style although the information, one presumes, relies on Willibald. Those who endeavor to maintain a distinction between her writing and his words have posited that Hugeburc deliberately intended to

27 Aist, *Christian Topography*, 124–27.

28 Aist, *Christian Topography*, 109.

29 Gottschaller, *Hugeburc*, 82: "Hugeburcs Stil ist … nicht einheitlich durchgehalten." This lack of uniformity posits both that there is an identifiable style that is Hugeburc's and that it is difficult to maintain the distinction.

30 Aist, *Christian Topography*, 8–9.

distinguish the two styles or, alternatively, began to embellish the entire work before abandoning the effort.[31]

Second, insomuch as there is a distinction between the two registers, we see similar registers in the *Vita Wynnebaldi* for which there is no basis for taking Wynnebald's travel as dictation.[32] Eva Gottschaller's stylistic analysis finds that the miracle of the church bell (Chapter 11) is richly elaborated, but that the subsequent miracle at the mill is related in simple terms.[33] The scene for the miraculous ringing of the church bells is set with the decision to build a new monastery for the saint, which Hugeburc relates in elaborate, lengthy prose:

> Cumque episcopus noster Willibaldus cum cuncta populariae multitudinis copie, cum iuniorum subditorum agminibus aecclesiam fabricare conponereque disposuit, ubi sanctus Christi confessor in copore requiescebat, maioram quam priora, ut, sicut ille vir virtutibus veneratus, mirabilibus magnificatus, faustus fulgebat, ita iam tunc in augusto almoque Tonantis templo celeberrima creverint divine laudis modulationes.[34]
>
> (And when our bishop, Willibald, with all the abundance of a popular multitude, with battles lines of younger subordinates, decided to build and set up a church where the holy confessor of Christ [Wynnebald] rested in body, greater than the previous ones, so that, just as that man, celebrated for his virtues, magnified by his miracles, shone favorably, so then at that time, the most celebrated melodies of divine praise would grow in the Thunderer's great and nourishing temple.)

This sentence is replete with alliteration (for example, *vir virtutibus veneratus*, *mirabilibus magnificatus*, *faustus fulgebat*), synonymous phrasing (*fabricare conponereque*) and poeticisms (such as the epithet "Thunderer" used for God).[35]

31 Aist, *Christian Topography*, 9 based on Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*.

32 Gottschaller, *Hugeburc*, 99–100.

33 Gottschaller, *Hugeburc*, 99: "Nicht volkstümlich gehalten, sondern sogar besonders reich gestaltet ist das Glockenwunder in Kapitel 11, das auch in der Bonifaz-Vita vorkommt. Dagegen ist das sich unmittelbar anschließende Wunder in der Mühle in sehr einfachen worten beschrieben."

34 *VWynn,* 115, 1–5.

35 The epithet *tonans* refers classically to Jupiter, but is applied to God in early Christian poetry, such as, for example, Dracontius (ca. 455–ca. 505): "Unda beata nimis, meruit quae tecta polorum, / celsa fauore Dei, iussu suspensa Tonantis." *De laudibus Dei*, I, 142–43 in C. Moussy and C. Camus, ed. and trans. *Dracontius: Louanges de Dieu, Réparation* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1985–1988).

Similarly, in relating the miracle itself Hugeburc employs a less verbose but nevertheless elaborate sentence in which several alliteration-rich ablative absolutes invoke the presence of Christ, God, and the saint, before the finite clause which is embellished with two prepositional phrases emphasizing the lack of human intervention:

> Confestim, Christo cooperante, domino Deo dispensante sanctique confessoris suffragante patrocinio, illa glocka in aecclesia sine manibus hominum, sine omnium adminiculo se ipsam commovere cepit.[36]
>
> (Straightaway, as Christ assisted and as the Lord God arranged and as the advocacy of the holy confessor favored, the bell in the church without the hands of humans, without the support of anything, began to move itself.)

By contrast, in the subsequent miracle the depiction of the young woman who arrives at the mill is related more prosaically. In three periods, Hugeburc employs a high degree of parataxis, clauses connected by *and* (*-que* or *et*). Subordination is temporal and causal, rendered in *cum*-clauses, a *quando*, and a *postquam*-clause. The sequence as it progresses has the reiterative feel of a story that goes "and when … and … and when … when":

> Cumque illa veniebat ad monasterio, alius homo fuit aduc molans farinam monachorum illic prope habitantium, et illa moram faciens expectabat, quando locum haberet. Cumque ille abiret, illa ambulabat et molabit. Postquam illa molaret, esuriebat, tulit de farina domini sui et fecit sibi panem et manducavit.[37]
>
> (And when she came to the monastery, another man was there milling the grain of the monks who lived nearby. And she tarried and waited since he occupied the place. And when he left, she walked up and milled. When she milled, she grew hungry, took from the grain of her master and made bread for herself and ate.)

We see then in the life of Wynnebald that Hugeburc employs variation in the register used to depict the miracles attributed to the saint. Whatever the origins of the difference—one may reflect literate sources and learning, the other oral accounts related within the community—Hugeburc unites

36 *VWynn*, 115, 8–10.
37 *VWynn*, 115, 20–24.

the different modes of diction within a single literary work that constructs the sanctity of both brothers.

The debates around style then have served to distinguish and foreground the travels and ecclesiastical career of Willibald (and to a lesser extent the career of his abbot brother) at the expense of recognizing the social role Hugeburc's text plays in the creation and development of a written culture of memory in the region. Using the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann allows us to consider more cogently the role Hugeburc and her work play in the development of institutional Christian memory.[38] In this framework, institutional memory forms an important official element of a broader cultural memory, which entails the handing down of collective knowledge and touches on the social roles that this collective memory enables and enacts. In the case of Eichstätt and Heidenheim, the introduction of written texts on foundational figures represents a form of cultural transformation whereby an oral pagan past becomes a literate Christian present. Subsequently, the institutional communication of these texts—that is, the repetition and reception of their contents—represents an important part of a complex of shared symbols (such as rites, clothing, food, and images) of cultural formation that creates and preserves collective identity.[39] In other words, as Catherine Cubitt has argued for early saints in pre-Conquest England, saints "were not … passive figures for remembrance in Anglo-Saxon monasteries but active figures since, through their exemplary power, their actions and words informed the lives of others."[40] In this vein, as Hugeburc's work is transmitted over time, it is incorporated within a written tradition of hagiography centered around Boniface and those close to him, and it is also reworked to fit the liturgical readings in a later *passionale sanctorum*.[41]

In this respect, Hugeburc's insistence on her reproduction of Willibald's account serves to authenticate the tale (which must have seemed extraordinary) for her audiences. Such a rhetorical stance is similar to a number of other authenticating techniques that serve medieval hagiography from the *Life of Ethelwold* by Wulfstan (d. 1023) to William of Malmesbury's *Life of*

38 See, for example, Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis,* ed. Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 210–26; and Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

39 Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 119–20.

40 Catherine Cubitt, "Memory and Narrative in the Cult of Early Anglo-Saxon Saints," in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Yitzak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29–66, at 34.

41 Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*, 30.

Wulfstan, bishop Worcester (ca. 1008–1095).[42] While much scholarly attention has cited Hugeburc's authentication to insist on the proximity of the writing to Willibald's own speech and words—indeed, this may be the only saint's life that is represented as dictated directly by the saint—Hugeburc's insistence that she writes what he saw, as well as her cryptic self-identification, also serves to underscore and highlight the obverse, namely that is it *her* writing that preserves and presents this account for future generations.

The Social Imagination of the *Vita germanuum*

In reasserting the centrality of Hugeburc's role in the construction of saintly figures for her community (and beyond), the worldview, or "topography of the thinkable", that the texts enshrine is paramount for understanding the political imagination of the period.[43] For as much as her work represents a form of collective memory, the ideas and forms (the symbolic meanings) expressed within collective memories also shape the scope of the possible that is the imaginary, be it political or social, in which the members of the group see themselves.[44] In Hugeburc's writing, we come into contact with a rich storyworld that underscores the complexity of the medieval social imagination. The lives of these two brothers provide not only an expansive geography that can be imagined through their travels (especially in the case of Willibald), but also depict, for example, the wonderous possibility of healing and the unifying feeling of singing in unison in praise of a common divinity. In addition, the lives also inscribe a specific vision of a society ordered by proper and salutary Christian conduct. In presenting hereafter a reading of Hugeburc that emphasizes the social regimen served by the models of her relatives, I do not wish to convey that Hugeburc presents a

42 See *Vita Ethelwoldi*: "ne tanti patris memoria penitus obliuioni tradatur ea que presentes ipsi uidimus et quae fideli seniorum relatione didicimus in his scedulis summatim perstrinximus," Michael Winterbottom, ed., *Three Lives of English Saints*, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), 33; and *Vita Wulfstanti,* 1: "cognoscetis me nichil dicere quod non sit solida ueritate subnixum, quod non sit probablium uirorum testimonio compertum, adeo antiquorum mentibus insederunt uisa, adeo iuniores amplectuntur audita," M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson, ed. and trans., *William of Malmesbury: Saints' Lives*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

43 Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Heterotopia," *Philosophy Today* 51 (2010), 24.

44 Cornelius Castoriadis, "Temps identitaire et temps imaginaire: L'institution sociale du Temps," in *L'institution imagniaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 311–19, translated by Kathleen Blamey as *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Benedict Andersen, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso Books, 1991).

joyless and rigid view of the world. Indeed, it is the joy and wonder promised by her vision of a Christian present that renders the models of behavior inscribed in the brothers' lives so compelling.

A poignant example of Hugeburc's structuring can be found in the portrayal of the inhabitants of the region around Heidenheim before the foundation of the abbey. Scholarship has indicted that early medieval missionary accounts routinely and often depict regions that are to be converted as more pagan than they actually were.[45] However, in depicting the paganism in Sualaved at the time of Wynnebald's arrival, Hugeburc seems to draw on descriptions of paganism found in the *Vita Bonafatii* and lists of practices from the *Indiculus superstitionum*, sources which "reflect not simply paganism, but a mixed, syncretic environment dressed up as paganism."[46] Indeed Hugeburc's account presents evidence of professed Christians and clergy in the area, even as she emphasizes the many delusions of pagan depravity such as idolatry, divination, incest, fornication, and others too numerous to name. Within the same lengthy catalogue, Hugeburc singles out the behavior of the priests in the region as even worse than pagan practices (*quod hiis adhuc peius est*). Rather than serve the holy altar, they are engaged in impure behaviors and fornication. Moreover, members of both the laity and clergy were stained by unlawful copulation with concubines.[47] In short, the region has been exposed to Christian practices and order, but in such a way and with such aberrations that the area is beyond the possibility of reform of amelioration and must be entirely purged of ungodly behavior. By rendering the region as entirely overrun by ungodly practices (even among those who were meant to be godly), Hugeburc creates an imagined cultural landscape which can then be entirely reshaped by the work and actions of the saint.[48]

In this manner, pagan, unchaste, and unlawful designate both the non-Christian in the imaginary, but also always potentially pre-Christian. Given the portrayal of religion in Sualaved within a pre-Christian imaginary, it is telling that Hugeburc refers to the Muslims of the Holy Land as pagans

45 Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001), 65.

46 Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*, 130.

47 "[P]lurima paganice pravitatis prestigia, multos diabolice fraude deceptos idolatria colentes, alii aruspicia observantes, alii divinationes demonium dicentes, alii incantationum fribola facientes, alii negromanticas, sed et alios multas, quas nunc longum est enumerare … et quod hiis adhuc peius erat, quod multi, qui sacerdotalis ordinatione presbiteros et sacre altare deservire debuerant, inmunditia et fornicatione magis quam divina servitutis sollertia subditi et refrenati fuerant, aliosque laicorum et clericorum concubinas iniuste copulationis societate contaminatos." *VWynn*, 111, 36–112, 1.

48 Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*, 131.

(which is sometimes paired with Saracens).[49] Such terminology facilitates her audience's seeing the Muslims of the Holy Land as engaging in pagan activities (such as the worship of false idols, appeals to divinators and engaging in ruinous rites), but also as a potential missionary field in which they are imminently ready to be transformed into Christians. In this manner, the living memory of missionary activity in Germany can be employed to envisage the unknown customs of the Muslim inhabitants of the Holy Land.

To elucidate further the political imagination that informs and is produced by Hugeburc's holy biographies, I will look at two particular episodes from the *Vita germanuum*, one relating to Wynnebald, the other to Willibald. Neither life of these two men is particularly rich in remarkable miracles.[50] The life of Willibald, composed while the saint was still alive, obviously presents no post-mortem miracles; his travels to the Holy Land seem to be ample merits for sainthood. As Diane Watt reveals, the work is "less a hagiography, in the traditional sense … than a naturalistic pilgrimage narrative."[51] However, a particular episode during his travels evokes a comparison to possible martyrdom, which I will turn to after looking at Wynnebald.

To Wynnebald on the other hand, a small number of miracles are attributed. Not only does Wynnebald's story exhibit typical tropes of the saintly, such as the sweet smell emanating throughout the church after his death,[52] the *vita* also recounts a few brief stories. In one episode, a daughter of his uncle is cured of a paralyzing pain in her right arm and hand after visiting his tomb.[53] In another, the bell of the new church built over the resting place of the saint rings of its own accord, an event also found in the *Vita Bonafatii*.[54] In a third (and commonplace) episode, the saint's body, exhumed for translation, is found to be incorrupt.[55] Slightly more

49 "[P]agani Sarracini," *VWill*, 94, 14; "ad paginis Sarracinis," *VWill*, 95, 24.

50 See Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World*, 278.

51 Watt, "Exemplary Lives," 102.

52 "[T]am magna et tam miranda suavissimi odoris nectar," *VWynn*, 114, 33.

53 "Similiter et alio tempore evenerat, quod una de sua parentella, sui avunculi filia, quae plus quam duos annos magna dolore constricta tenebatur in dextera manu et in brachio illo, et sic ut iam paralitica et pene arida fiebat; tunc illa properans venit ad illum locum sepulture eius; nec longum fuit postea quam illic veniebat, quod pristina ille restituta erat sanitas." *VWynn*, 114, 40–44.

54 *VWynn*, 115, 9–10: "illa glocka in aecclesia sine manibus hominum, sine omnium adminiculo se ipsam commovere cepit." Cf. Willibald, *Vita Bonafatii*, ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Ger. 57 (Hannover, 1905) 53, lines 21–23: "aecclesiaeque gloccum … humana non continguente manu, commotum est."

55 "Tunc illi extimplo illum moventes de selpuchro … leviter de terra levaverunt, toto corpore integrum, omnibus membris munitum, ita ut nec capillus de capite eius minuetur." *VWynn*, 116, 11–14.

distinctive within the litany of curative stories is a short exposition of the loosening of the bonds of a pitiable man (*miser*), who, led to the monastery by guards, is allowed to petition the saint.[56] Describing the man as a *miser*, evoking compassion and his possible poverty, Huguburc relates that the man, who was to be punished for his crimes, asks his guards' permission to petition the saint. Weeping and kneeling in the church, the *miser* asks the saint to loosen his bonds. The saint in turn raises the praying man and causes the bonds to fall from his hands with no human intervention, after which the once pitiable, now joyous man is able to depart. The forgiveness shown to this man, whose crime is not elaborated but whose poverty is suggested, stands in stark contrast with another miracle that is related after the saint's death.

Hugeburc's twelfth chapter presents the most detailed miracle, referred to briefly earlier, in Wynnebald's life, recounting the story of a servant (*ancilla*) from the village near the monastery. This servant comes to the monastery to grind the grain of her lord, but must first wait for another man to finish at the mill. Presumably due to the wait, the servant becomes hungry and after she has begun to grind her lord's grain, she takes some of the flour and makes herself bread so that she has something to eat. As a result, she recognizes that the quantity of her flour will fall short of its expected measure. To remedy the situation, the woman takes some of the flour from the monks' store. However, after this substitution the mill suddenly stops producing flour for the servant. Shaking and crying, likely due to fear of being found out, the servant tells the miller of her plight. The two then prostrate themselves and pray to Wynnebald. Only after admission of the sin does the saint deign to help the woman, at which point the flour begins again to be produced from the mill.

In this miracle, we see a reversal of the mercy-giving role that one might expect from a saint who in the case of the pitiable man (*miser*) immediately forgives transgression. Indeed, the miracle of this story is not forgiveness or the appearance of divinely produced flour to address the missing measure, but the *halting* of the milling of grain which forces the compunction of the servant. In this sense, rather than obviating punishment, the saint instigates it; meal is withheld until the servant confesses. Indeed, Wynnebald's role as an enforcer of moral norms and social mores, a prominent feature of his life, is made explicit at the conclusion of the chapter, where Hugeburc informs us that those deeds the saint disdained as perverse while he was

56 "Tum ille miser, mente mestus, corpore ligatus, pia suffragia sancti illius petivere desiderabat licentiamque suos deprecabat ductores aecclesiam intrare." *VWynn*, 117, 18–20.

living he continued to forbid after he was crowned in heaven.[57] In his life then, Wynnebald served as a model for Christian behavior. In his death, as a saint, he continues to enforce ideas of proper conduct. In the case of the pitiable man, we learn that in some cases forgiveness is possible on appeal to the saint. In the case of the servant, who took from the monks' flour, compunction must be demonstrated by admission of the wrong before forgiveness can be granted.

In a manner similar to her structuring of class and gender difference, we see that Hugeburc also structures religious difference in recounting Willibald's journeys within the Muslim-held territories of the Holy Land. When Willibald arrives in Tyre for a second time, this time in preparation for his departure from the Holy Land, we learn that he had bought some balsam the last time he was in Jerusalem and that he filled a calabash (bottle-gourd) with it. While details regarding the rationale for the procurement of the balsam are omitted,[58] the narrative provides full, near technical, details of Willibald's efforts to hide the balsam:

> emebat sibi balsamum et replevit de petre oleo et fecit intus in munerbam et secavit illam cannam parem munerba, ita ut in margine ambo erant similes plane, et sic claudebat os munerbe.[59]
>
> (he took a hollow reed that had a bottom to it and filled it with mineral oil and put it inside the calabash. Afterward he cut the reed equal in length to the calabash so that the surfaces of both were even and then closed the mouth of the calabash.)

This effort succeeds in deceiving the officials at Tyre who smell only the mineral oil despite their seemingly complete check of Willibald's belongings:

> Cumque omnia exquirentes nihil invenerunt nisi unam munerbam, quam habuit Willibaldus, illamque aperientes, odorabant, quid intus fuisset. Cumque odorabant petre oleam, qui intus in canna fuerat supra, et balsamum, qui intus erat in munerba subtus petre olea, non repperierunt, et sic eos reliquerunt.[60]

57 "Ideo non est dubium, quod ille vir venerandus … facinora, quae prius vivendo abhominaverat in perversis, tunc coronatus in caelestibus vetaverat in vivis prave agentibus." *VWynn*, 115, 34–36.
58 While Hugeburc provides no details, balsam is used to scent chrism, which may provide a religious motive for Willibald's actions.
59 *VWill*, 101, 6–10.
60 *VWill*, 101, 13–16.

> (But when they had thoroughly examined everything and could find nothing except one calabash that Willibald had, they opened it and sniffed at it to find out what was inside. And when they smelled mineral oil … they did not find the balsam … and so let them go.)

This outcome belies what must have been a rather tense scene for the future bishop. As we learn later (in Talbot's translation): "If they [the authorities] had found anything they would certainly have punished them and put them to death."[61] Willibald's evasive tactics, at least in Talbot's translation, smack of bravado, a young man tempting death but cheating it with his cunning. In the Latin, however, the transgression and attendant capital punishment is phrased so as to enhance the holy credentials of the protagonist. Hugeburc writes that had they been caught they would have been punished and martyred: "si aliquid invenissent, cito illos punientes martyrizarent."[62] In this light, Willibald's ruse becomes saint-like; Hugeburc's language elevates Willibald's flaunting of local laws to a profession of his faith when confronted by pagan authorities. The raconteur's tale of smuggled contraband and the subsequent brush with death is transformed into an act of Christian heroism.

It is salutary to read Willibald's actions and would-be martyrdom next to the experienced martyrdom of Boniface, whose *vita* precedes Willibald's in the earliest account of Willibald's life (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 1086). In Boniface's second attempt to convert the Frisians in 754, he calls for a meeting to confirm the converted. But Boniface and his associates are met not by converts; in their stead, brigands arrive who kill him and his companions. Because Boniface's martyrdom occurred during the act of proselytism in the missionary field, comparison with Willibald's would-be martyrdom facilitates a link between missionary activity in Europe and possible conversion in the Holy Land. And yet, from a more critical perspective—that is, if we observe these events outside of the Christian framework that Hugeburc constructs—Willibald's story justifies a transgression against foreign laws, a transgression ennobled by the affective language of martyrdom. This use of affective language to elicit feelings that are not congruent with events is reminiscent of Sara Ahmed's analysis of the way in which the language of love is employed by modern

61 Talbot, trans. in Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ,* 59. The Latin, discussed below in the paragraph, reads "si aliquid invenissent, cito illos punientes martyrizarent" (*VWill*, 101, 12–13).
62 "Cumque veniebant illi ad urbe Tyro, illi cives urbis tollentes eos constringebant et omnem scirfam eorum exquirebant, ut repperirent, si aliquid habuissent absconditum, et si aliquid invenissent, cito illos punientes martyrizarent." *VWill*, 101, 10–13.

groups that preach hate.[63] The rhetorical conversion of smuggling into possible martyrdom allows the readers of the *Vita* to associate Willibald with the positive value of professing a Christian faith and endeavoring to convert the pagan. This narrative of martyrdom then repositions the smuggling Christian subject as one who is at risk of being murdered by non-believers, by those very people who have allowed him to live as a guest in their lands for several years. In this regard, Willibald's travels are not simply a rare eye-witness account, but an important piece in the European project of claiming the region of its sacred texts as its own. The lands of Jesus's life and teaching, regions presently under control of non-Christians—non-believers within Hugeburc's perspective—become an integral part of Western Christendom's patrimony.

At the time of Hugeburc's writing in the last quarter of the eighth century, the holy lands of Christendom were far removed from the daily life and preoccupations of inhabitants in Bavaria. Being able to present an eye-witness account of these lands together with the visits of both brothers to Rome brought the most holy sites of Christianity and the religion's most important Latin city into greater proximity for a population that might only otherwise imagine these places as remote, if at all. By making distant geographies more conceptually proximate, Hugeburc's hagiographies present a rich source for the medieval social imagination, whatever their stylistic or factual shortcomings. Moreover, they present a way of seeing the world that lauds a regulated Christian life and those who promulgate the behaviors that are associated with such a life. In writing the stories of ecclesiastical founders, Hugeburc presents subjects of model Christian behavior within a community that is developing Christian habits and identities. She thereby occupies a central role in the cultural reproduction of the ideals expressed in these narratives, literary monuments that will serve to inform local and regional communities. In appropriating the language of martyrdom for smuggling and in demonstrating that forgiveness for servants is withheld until the sin is confessed, Hugeburc's work inscribes notions of social and religious hierarchy. On the one hand, the prejudices and differences reinforced by these stories seem obvious, but that they are so self-evident attests to the power of unspoken ideology. By making these implicit and concrete histories

63 Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 123: "hate is renamed as love, a renaming that 'conceals' the ambivalence that it exercises (we love *rather than* hate). The conversion of hate into love allows the groups to associate themselves with 'good feeling' and 'positive value'. Indeed, such groups become the ones concerned with the well-being of others; their project becomes redemptive, or about saving loved others."

explicit they may lose some of their durance and reveal the hierarchies and social structures that the process of Christianization entailed.

The disposition of the woman behind these histories, and her personality, remain opaque, sometimes contradictory. As Pauline Head has shown, it is difficult to determine Hugeburc's position in relation to her self-declaration of authorship. She cloaks her work in the tropes of modesty, calling herself "unworthy", but at the same time announces herself as a Saxon nun and furnishes her name through her cipher. Protesting her lack of stature and asserting her modesty, "half-fearful, half-defiant" as one critic has described her,[64] Hugeburc inserts herself in her writing in a way that both conforms to and defies prevailing rhetorical conventions and customs of her day as she forges the hagiographic credentials of her kin. In short, the intentions behind her endeavor and her self-representation are beyond our grasp and indeed our remit. While her activities challenge a discursive arena that is almost exclusively male, we nevertheless recognize in that challenge that Hugeburc's writings uphold a patriarchal and Christian dominance. As Janet Nelson poignantly remarks, "Certain women, in certain contexts, were encouraged, posthumously and perhaps also in their lifetimes, to speak up; but beyond them we glimpse other beneficiaries, individual or collective, who were always male."[65] If making Hugeburc, who remained anonymous for so long, visible is a feminist act, so too is the unfurling of the concrete histories her cultural work inscribes, work that serves Western Christendom's imagined claims to foreign holdings and its particular vision of a regulated social order.

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64 Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 35; cited by Head, "Who Is the Nun?," 43.

65 Janet Nelson, "Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages", in *Women in the Church*, ed. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53–78, at 74.

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12 A Road Nearly Taken

An Eighth-Century Manuscript in a Woman's Hand and Franco-Saxon Nuns in Early Medieval English Intellectual History

Matthew T. Hussey

Abstract
Some medieval studies scholarship has foregrounded perceived shortcomings in scribal hands as well as mistakes in the Latin of a constellation of texts and books from late seventh- and early eighth-century English foundations. These assessments have diverted scholarly attention from these otherwise revealing works. By recentering these textual artifacts by means of historical, literary, paleographical, and documentary research, the Frankish influence on early English religion and learning can be recovered, and at least one extant manuscript may be ascribed to a nun's hand: an early eighth-century copy of Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma* written by an anonymous nun in the monastery at Bath.

Keywords: Early medieval England, manuscript studies, women scribes, literary history

Introduction

In a foundational survey of evidence for women owning and writing books in early medieval England, Michelle P. Brown notes, "extant books produced in early Anglo-Saxon England offer only slender evidence of female production or ownership."[1] Naturally, we find what we look for. As Clare Lees

1 Michelle P. Brown, "Female Book Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Ninth-Century Prayerbooks," in *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Essays Presented to Jane Roberts*, ed. C. Kay and L. Sylvester (Antwerp: Rodopi, 2001), 45–67, at 50.

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and Gillian Overing have asked and answered, "Women's writing in the early Anglo-Saxon period? Women? Writing? What, were they writing? Of course they were. We just need to read, listen, and write our literary histories differently."[2] One way to read differently is to examine a cluster of late seventh- and early eighth-century texts and manuscripts that are frequently marginalized, and thus understudied, but for which there is some evidence that they may have been produced in circles of women readers and writers. These circles can be localized to southwest Mercia in centres that eventually became part of the Worcester diocese. While the Frankish church was a powerful influence on the nascent English church, notably in Kent and Northumbria,[3] there is evidence of a localized impact at a nunnery in Bath in the decades before and after the year 700. This evidence is largely diplomatic, but it is also codicological; a handful of books and fragments survive that show Frankish influence in script and construction. This Frankish influence manifests in handwriting that has been judged by scholars to be lesser or faulty, thus relegating these manuscripts to the sidelines of literary and intellectual history. Why examine books described as "derivative" or "awkward,"[4] when the restrained classicism of the Codex Amiatinus or the ravishing overload of the Lindisfarne Gospels loom so large? And scholarship has similarly marginalized a constellation of Latin texts from roughly the same period and milieu. Letters by seventh- and eighth-century English nuns, especially in the collection whose epicenter is Boniface, are called emotional, even "heart-rending,"[5] but in scholarship, they are also disparaged and thus devalued. In terms of standards of correctness (more or less rightly) their Latin is called things like "weak," "rough," and "problematic"[6] and whatever literary value they have (whatever *that* is) is

2 Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, "Women and the Origins of English Literature," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 31–40, at 39.

3 James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon, 1986), 116. See also Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946) for a fundamental study of that influence. Several Frankish foundations had links to early medieval England. Bede specifically mentions Brie, Andelys, and Chelles and their connections with Kentish and Northumbrian houses; see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 3.8.

4 E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 11 vols. and supplement, with 2nd ed. of vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934–71); cited as *CLA* with volume and item number: *CLA* 9.1426 and 2.265.

5 Andy Orchard, "Beorhtgyth," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes, and Donald Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 61.

6 Respectively: Patrick Sims-Williams, "An Unpublished Seventh- or Eighth-Century Anglo-Latin Letter in Boulogne-sur-Mer MS 74 (82)," *Medium Ævum* 48 (1979): 1–22, at 7; Lisa M. C. Weston, "Conceiving the Word(s): Habits Among Earlier Anglo-Saxon Monastic Women," in *Nun's*

seen to come from their imitation of Aldhelm or Virgil or Arator. In some of the criticism, the erroneous Latin is linked to emotional excess, in effect drawing on long-standing stereotypes of women as ruled by emotion, lacking discipline and control. I hope to counter this strand of scholarly appraisal, and its unintended (or maybe even intended) dismissal of women's writing.[7] By taking these bibliographical and literary efforts not as shoddy botch jobs, but as witnesses to intense work, cultural and ideological investments, and a specific intellectual and embodied striving, I hope to re-evaluate these texts and books in the history of medieval studies, and to understand better in a local political, religious, and literary context the kind of women's writing Lees and Overing remind us to discover. By reading against the grain, a counter-history of early medieval English books and letters becomes clear, one in which women were not ruled out of the sacerdotal and missionary work of the early church, and one where Frankish books, teaching, and practice rivaled Roman and Irish.

The Würzburg *Synonyma*

Recently, Felice Lifshitz has analyzed the manuscripts of the English cultural province in early medieval Francia to illuminate nuns' literary, theological, liturgical, and codicological work there.[8] One peculiar manuscript, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek M.p.th.f.79, an early eighth-century copy of Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma*,[9] may allow us to thicken Brown's "slender

Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogues, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013) 149–67, at 165; D. Patricia Wallace, "Feminine Rhetoric and the Epistolary Tradition: The Boniface Correspondence," *Women's Studies* 24 (1995): 229–46, at 240.

7 Aidan Conti traces a similar dynamic regarding the hagiography of Hugeburc, where academic "attention … shows not so much neglect, as marginalization," p. 323), an attention that "reveals a number of blind spots and prejudices within the field of early medieval English studies," p. 322); see "The Literate Memory of Hugeburc of Heidenheim" in this volume, pp. 317–41.

8 Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture*, Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

9 *CLA* 9.1426; Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England Up to 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), no. 946 (hereafter *ASM* with item number); N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), no. 400; Hans Thurn, *Die Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), 3.1: 66; Charles D. Wright, "Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.f.79," in *Manuscripts in Austria and Germany*, Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in Microfiche Facsimile 24 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015), 183–91.

evidence of female production or ownership" in England. The unusual uncial script of its first eight leaves strives to reproduce a Frankish uncial.[10] The main hand of these leaves is capable and clear when writing in an insular half-uncial, to which it reverts for a telling moment, but is belabored and painstaking when grinding out the Frankish-styled uncial.[11] This concerted effort to imitate Frankish uncial would seem to be a witness to the exchanges between Frankish and English foundations in the seventh and eighth centuries. My analysis of Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek M.p.th.f.79 (henceforth the Würzburg *Synonyma*) takes up the other end of the relationship explored by Lifshitz, the Frankish cultural province in southwest England, where this manuscript, and those related to it, suggest a nuns' scriptorium in Bath at the border of Mercia and Wessex.

The Würzburg *Synonyma* is a nearly complete copy of Isidore's consolatory dialogue and rhetorical handbook that breaks off just before the text's conclusion, suggesting the loss of at least a leaf or two at the end.[12] Three quires remain: the first a quire of eight, mostly written in uncial with numerous erasures and corrections; the second and third are quires of ten, and are written in a few versions of "Anglo-Saxon minuscule" that ease into cursive in the last lines of some leaves.[13] The sections of text are marked by simple large initials, some touched in yellow. On the whole, it is a very spare and unadorned piece of work. The first and second quires are very sporadically glossed with Old English in various hands using drypoint.[14]

10 Bernhard Bischoff, "Die Kölner Nonnenhandschriften und das Skriptorium von Chelles," in *Karolingische und ottonische Kunst. Werden, Wesen, Wirkung.* VI. internationaler Kongress für Frühmittelalterforschung, 1954. Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie 3, ed. Hermann Aubin et al., (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1957), 395–411; reissued in expanded form in *Mittelalterliche Studien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschicte*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1966–1981) 1:16–34; Rosamond McKitterick, "Nun's Scriptoria in England and Francia in the Eighth Century," *Francia* 19, no. 1 (1992): 1–35, at 5–6; Matthew T. Hussey, "Anglo-Saxon Scribal Habitus and Frankish Aesthetics in an Early Uncial Manuscript," in *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound: Materially Engaged Readings of Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 15–37, at 32–34.

11 Hussey, "Scribal Habitus."

12 On the early literary history of the *Synonyma* in England, see Claudia Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words: Isidore's* Synonyma *in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), esp. 47–52; on the manuscript's full details see Charles D. Wright, "Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.f.79," in *Manuscripts in Austria and Germany*, 183–91.

13 As described by Lowe in *CLA* 9.1426 and his *English Uncial* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 22.

14 Josef Hofmann, "Altenglische und Althochdeutsche Glossen aus Würzburg und dem weiteren angelsächsischen Missionsgebiet," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 85 (1963): 27–131, at 57–60.

More drypoint glosses in Old High German were added for Book I, and these date to the early ninth century. Based on the structure, scripts, and glosses of the manuscript, the book has been dated to the first half of the eighth century, perhaps the first quarter, and was likely written in a Southumbrian center.[15] The manuscript likely had come to an East Frankish center by the late eighth or early ninth century, perhaps as part of the Bonifacian or post-Bonifacian mission and network, perhaps via Mainz.[16] An ex libris of the thirteenth century shows the book was in Würzburg by the later medieval period, and it may have even been catalogued as part of the Würzburg foundation by 1000.[17] Moreover, the editor of Isidore's *Synonyma* suggests that the manuscript served as an exemplar for a ninth-century copy made in Würzburg.[18] In its origins in a southern center in the early eighth century and arrival at a *nachbonifatianischen* centre by the late eighth century, the book's history reproduces the hypothetical manuscripts requested by Boniface from Eadburg in Kent: nuns' scriptoria produced crucial texts for the early English mission.

Frankishness

Developing suggestions in the work of E. A. Lowe and Rosamond McKitterick, I have argued that the first quire of the Würzburg *Synonyma* is an English manuscript that strives to emulate a kind of Frankishness in handwriting and structure. To recap evidence for this, the first quire of the codex is of eight leaves, drypoint ruled in bands (a headline and baseline) with slits in the margins as guides. The quire is arranged with the hair-side of each bifolium facing out. These features are more or less representative of early

15 For a conspectus of assessments of the manuscript by Lowe, Bischoff, and T. Julian Brown, see Wright, "Wurzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.f.79"; for the narrowing to the first quarter of the century, see Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 202–3, and Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 9.

16 Hofmann, "Altenglische und Althochdeutsche Glossen," 58–58, and Hans Thurn, *Die Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984), 3.1: 66.

17 Wright, "Wurzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.f.79," 184 citing Hermann Knaus, "Bistum Würzburg: Würzburg Domstift," in *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1979), 4.2: 948–94, at 987, and Hartmut Hoffmann, *Die Würzburger Paulinenkommentare der Ottonenzeit*, MGH Studien und Texte 47 (Hannover: Hahn, 2009), no. 198.

18 Jacques Elfassi, ed. *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Synonyma*. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 111B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), xliv.

Frankish bookmaking.[19] The two other quires are of ten leaves with irregular arrangement, single-ruled. E. A. Lowe observes that early insular books, though they vary wildly, tend to be in gatherings of ten leaves.[20] The script in the first quire likewise follows a Frankish model.[21] The uncial script is characterized by thick ductus and square aspect, with heavy forks or wedges for many serifs or terminals and several unusual letterforms, such as the *B* with a flattened and squared upper chamber, looking like a Cyrillic *Б* and the uncial *A* whose bowl is constructed of a banjo-like loop. Despite several peculiarities, the structure of letters, ductus and aspect, and overall look of the script seem modeled on an uncial like that which appears in a small cluster of books from northeast Frankish foundations; I saw analogues in two manuscripts, now Paris, Bibliothèque National, lat. 152 and lat. 17654,[22] and these books have been attributed to either Jouarre or Chelles in the late seventh and early eighth centuries.[23] Taking the physical structure and peculiar uncial of the Würzburg *Synonyma* together, it appears that the scribe aimed to emulate a Frankish book, at least for the first quire. In her striving to replicate a script her hand was not accustomed to, the scribe's performance in the uncial leaves is uneven, inconsistent and marked by copying mistakes and corrections. By not matching the forms and execution of higher status manuscripts, books like the Würzburg *Synonyma* are often seen as missteps off progress's highway whose milestones are Eadfrith and Eadwig Basan and Eadwine. The triumph of the Roman and then Carolingian church in England may hide earlier Frankish influences as well as codicological roads not taken.

Network

While the main script in the first eight leaves of the Würzburg *Synonyma* betrays Frankish aspirations, some features of decoration show strong

19 Hussey, "Scribal Habitus," 17–19.

20 *CLA* 2.x–xi; cf. Richard Gameson, "The Material Fabric of Early British Books," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume I: c. 400–1100*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13–93, at 41–43.

21 *CLA* 9.1426 and Rosamond McKitterick, "The Diffusion of Insular Culture in Neustria Between 650 and 850: The Implications of Manuscript Evidence," in *La Neustrie: Les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 á 850*, ed. Hartmut Atsma, Beihefte der Francia 16/11 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1989), 395–432, at 415.

22 *CLA* 5.552 and 5.670.

23 Bischoff, "Nonnenhandschriften"; McKitterick, "Nun's Scriptoria"; *CLA* 6: xxi–xxii; Hussey, "Scribal Habitus," 33–34.

Fig. 12.1 Detail from Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek M.p.th.f.79, fol. 1v.

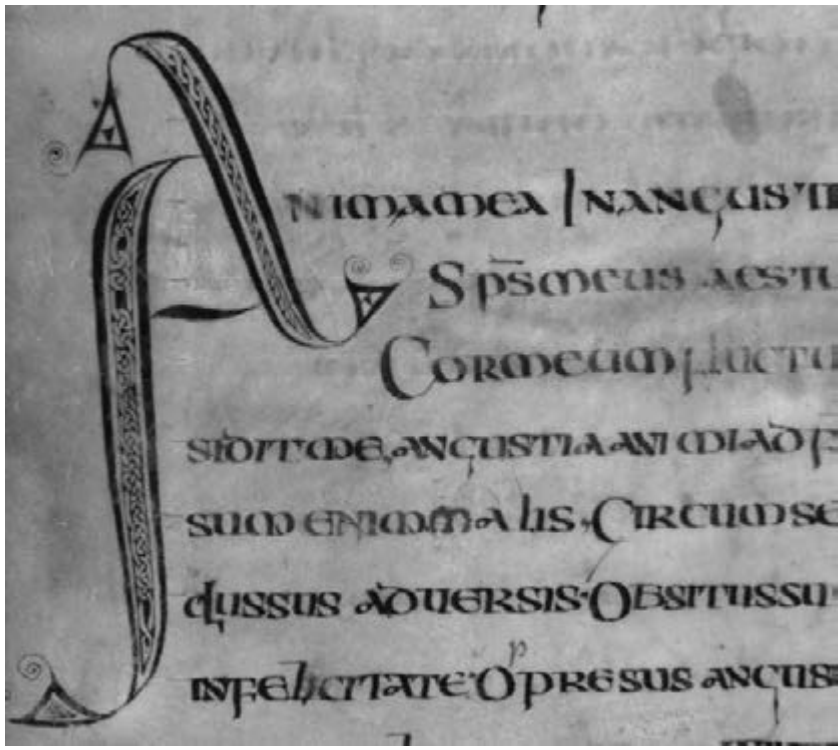

Image reproduced by permission of the Universitätsbibliothek Würzburg, Germany.

similarities with other early English books, suggesting a tangle of interconnections perhaps located in southwest Mercia, and perhaps, specifically, the foundation at Bath. Most striking is the lovely large capital initial *A* on fol. 1v of the Würzburg *Synonyma* (see figure 1).

Patrick Sims-Williams pointed out that T. Julian Brown saw this initial, with its bold outlines and "ribbon-like sweep" to be similar in style to the initials in Oxford, Bodleian Library Hatton 48, a late seventh- or early eighth-century copy of the *Rule of St Benedict* (see figure 2).[24]

24 Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 202; Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 2–4. On Hatton 48 and possible dates in the mid-eighth or late eighth century, see *ASM,* no. 631; D. H. Farmer, *The Rule of St Benedict: Oxford, Bodleian Library. Hatton 48*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 15 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1968); Michelle P. Brown, "Writing in the Insular World," in Gameson, ed., *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, 121–66, at 146; Christine Franzen, "Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 48," in *Worcester Manuscripts*, Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in Microfiche Facsimile 6 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1998), 15–18.

Fig. 12.2 Detail from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Hatton 48, fol. 1r.

Image reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK.

Hatton 48 is crucial in this web of interconnected manuscripts because Sims-Williams has made a compelling case for its origins. As a *de luxe* copy in large format with spacious two-column layout and large initials simply and precisely drawn, it was unique for the eighth century. This was a period when the *Rule* was not (yet) popular in England, and here we have a sumptuous copy. Furthermore, the scribe apparently was aware of more than one version of the *Rule*, suggesting its origin in a center where the text could be compared and studied. Sims-Williams lines up evidence for Bath as the most likely place where such a copy would be written. Bath was dedicated to St. Peter, but also, unusually for its time, St. Benedict. Bath's foundation charter was attested by Wilfrid, who was a strenuous advocate for the use of the Benedictine *Rule*. Hatton 48's characteristics are best explained by an origin at a precociously Benedictine abbey in the south or southwest, probably in the Worcester diocese, to which the manuscript

Fig. 12.3 Detail from Boulogne-sur-Mer, Bibliothèque Municipale 74 (82), fol. 53r.

Image reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque Municipale de Boulogne-sur-Mer, France.

came at least by the eleventh century: Bath was absorbed into Worcester holdings before 781.[25] Bath fits Hatton 48.[26] The Würzburg *Synonyma* shares a rather rare trait with Hatton 48, and ergo may have come out of the same bookish scene.

Sims-Williams points up another rare feature in Hatton 48 that links its decorative initials to a Frankish-influenced codex: Boulogne-sur-Mer, Bibliothèque Municipale 74 (82). This eighth-century copy of Apponius's commentary on the Song of Songs has large decorative initials that are marked by "bands of triple black lines" crossing the outlines of the vertical shafts of letters (see figure 3).

This kind of triple banding is found in Hatton 48; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 17177 fol. 8r; and St. Petersburg, Russian National Library Q.v.I.18.[27] St. Petersburg Q.v.I.18 is the famous St. Petersburg (or Leningrad) Bede, written in the middle or second half of the eighth century in

25 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 9.

26 This evidence and conclusions from Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 112, 118, 201–5.

27 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 3 and *Religion and Literature*, 202.

Fig. 12.4 Detail from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 17177, fol. 8r.

Image reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque National, Paris, France.

Wearmouth/Jarrow.[28] It is clearly not a Southumbrian manuscript, nor connected to a Frankish-influenced foundation, and its use of the triple banding is markedly different from the others in this group: several sets of triple bands are used in each initial's components.[29] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 17177 is a collection of various fragments, and fols. 5–12 preserve a fragment of the Latin translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles, written perhaps in Southumbria or Mercia, or perhaps a continental center with English influence.[30] The initial is triple-banded much like Hatton 48 and also evokes that "ribbon-like sweep" seen in Hatton 48 and in the Würzburg *Synonyma* (see figure 4).

As mentioned, the triple banding occurs in large initials in the Boulogne-sur-Mer Apponius, though without quite as pronounced "ribbon-like sweep" as found in the Hatton 48, Paris 17177, and the Würzburg *Synonyma*, though it may be evoked in the *A* on its first folio (see figure 5).

28 *ASM*, no. 846.

29 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 3n25 cites D. H. Wright, "The Date of the Leningrad Bede," *Revue Benedictine* 71 (1961): 265–73, suggesting that the motif in the Bede may have Italian origins.

30 *ASM,* no. 900.5.

Fig. 12.5 Detail from Boulogne-sur-Mer, Bibliothèque Municipale 74 (82), fol. 1r.

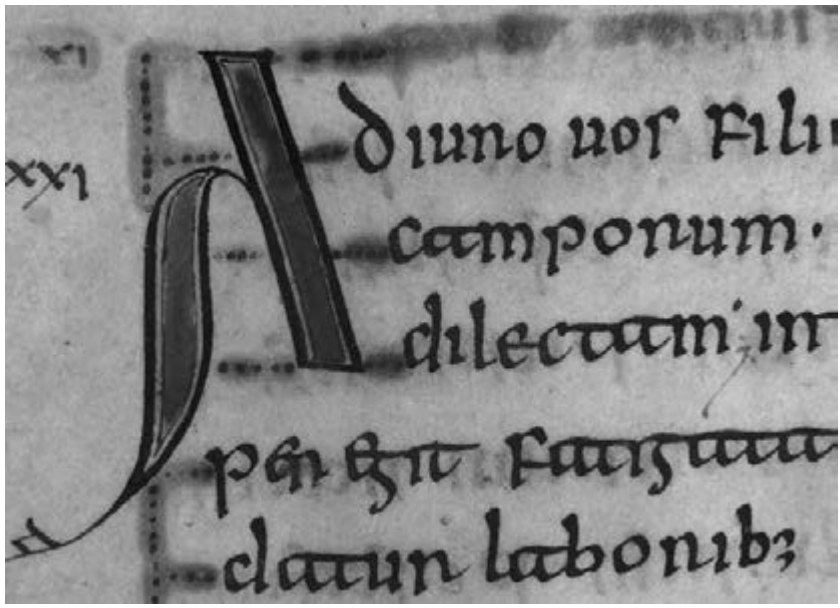

Image reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque Municipale de Boulogne-sur-Mer, France.

Moreover, the Boulogne Apponius contains as an epilogue to the main text a poetic letter written by one Burginda exhorting an unnamed youth to a more devout life. Burginda is a Frankish and woman's name. The paleographical evidence, this Frankish name, along with the fact that the text of the Apponius is based on a recension that circulated in northeast Francia (rather than the one used in Northumbria by Bede), suggests that the manuscript was written in a Southumbrian centre with Frankish connections, probably housing nuns as authors and scribes. Sims-Williams argues that this Frankish-influenced center would most likely be Bath, and the paleographic links among these manuscripts bring the Apponian epilogue of the nun Burginda, as well as the Würzburg *Synonyma* and Paris, BN lat. 17177 into this scene as well.

Bath

In its earliest decades, those just preceding and shading into the period when these manuscripts were likely written, Bath was founded under at least partly Frankish auspices. Osric, king of the Hwicce, instituted

Bath in 675, when he granted 100 hides of land for the foundation to be headed up by the abbess Berta.[31] *Berta* is a Frankish name. In 681, a charter by Æthelmod, with King Æthelred of Mercia's consent, grants land to the foundation at Bath, then headed by the abbess Beorngyth, whose name is English, and her prioress, Folcburg, whose name is Frankish.[32] In the first two generations of leadership at Bath, there is first a Frankish abbess and subsequently a Frankish second in command. Beyond the leadership roles at the inception of the Bath monastery, the charter bears further signs of Frankish influence. The list of witnesses of the foundation charter begins with the king, Æthelbald, and the archbishop, Theodore, but third is Leuthere, the bishop of Winchester. Leuthere came as a replacement for his uncle, Agilbert, and both men were Franks with connections to Jouarre.[33] Leuthere's Frankish influence can be seen in the Bath foundation charter, which deploys a Frankish "humility formula"[34] found alongside Leuthere's name in other charters as well, showing a "slight and ephemeral appearance of Frankish custom" in these early West Saxon charters.[35] After Leuthere, the Bath foundation charter is subscribed by Wilfrid, companion of Leuthere, who had studied and was consecrated in Gaul. His years first in Lyon and then elsewhere in Francia likely lie behind Wilfrid's commitment to Frankish liturgical practices, his promulgation of the Benedictine *Rule* (which was esteemed in Frankish Columbanan houses), and his understanding of episcopal power and

31 This is recorded in a charter now preserved in the twelfth-century Bath cartulary Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 111; see Sawyer 51, printed in J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, 6 vols. (London: Bentley, Wilson, and Fley, 1839–48), no. 12; on the charter's authentic elements see Patrick Sims-Williams, "Continental Influence at Bath Monastery in the Seventh Century," *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975): 1–10, at 1–6; Heather Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdom*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series (Oxford: BAR, 1988), 218–23; and Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 104, 111–13.

32 On the names' ethnicities, see Sims-Williams, "Continental Influence," 2–3. On the position of prioress or deaconess, see William Hunt, *Chartularies of the Priory of St Peter at Bath*, Somerset Record Society (London: Harrison and Sons, for the Somerset Record Society, 1893), xxxvi, and for the charter, 6–7.

33 Agilbert was likely related to the Frankish royal family and was a cousin to Ado, the founder of the monastery at Jouarre and the brother of Theodechild, who was Jouarre's first abbess. James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon, 1986), 58 and Sims-Williams, "Continental Influence," 4–7.

34 Paul Fouracre, "Leuthere," in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 284.

35 Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), 226–28.

status.[36] Bath appears to have been an exponent of a monastic mission network of the Frankish aristocratic houses that included Jouarre and Chelles.

This extension and development of a Franco-Saxon monastic mission and culture in Bath may have a very specific genesis. As Patrick Sims-Williams highlights, Chelles was refounded as a daughter house to Jouarre by Balthild, the English widow of Clovis II, between 657–664. As abbess, she pulled Bertila and other nuns and monks from Jouarre into service at Chelles (both were Columbanan double houses), and as Rosamond McKitterick has made clear, there were substantial English influences in these houses: not just Balthild but other political, cultural, and codicological ties.[37] Bertila is remembered in her *vita* for her energy and generosity in the Franco-Saxon mission:

> ut etiam ab transmarinis partibus Saxoniae reges illi fideles ab ea per missos fideles postularent, ut illis de suis discipulis ad eruditionem vel sanctam instructionem, quam audierant esse in ea mirabilem, dirigeret, seu etiam qui virorum et sanctimonialium coenobia in illa regione construerent. Quam religiosam petitionem pro salute animarum non denagavit, sed cum consilio seniorum, exortantibus fratribus, grato animo cum magna diligentia et patrocino sanctorum seu et voluminibus multis librorum electas personas et devotissimos homines illuc direxit, ut per eam fructus animarum etiam in illa gente accresceret et cum Dei gratia multiplicaretur.[38]
>
> (Faithful kings from the parts of Saxondom across the seas would ask her through trusty messengers to send some of her followers for teaching or sacred instruction (which they had heard that she possessed to a marvelous degree) or even those who might establish monasteries of men and women in that region. For the good of their souls, she did not refuse this religious request; rather, with the counsel of the elders and the encouragement of the brothers she did send, with a thankful heart,

36 Simon Coates, "The Construction of Episcopal Sanctity in Early Anglo-Saxon England: The Impact of Venantius Fortunatus," *Historical Research* 71 (174) (1998): 1–13, at 1–2; Patrick Wormald, *The Times of Bede, 625–865*: *Studies in Early Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 5–11; Alan Thacker, "Wilfrid," in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 474–76, at 474.

37 McKitterick, "Nuns' Scriptoria," 1–2, 5–6, 25–30.

38 Wilhelm Levison, ed., *Vita S. Bertilae Abbatissae Calensis*, MGH SS rer. Merov. 6 (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1913), 95–109 at Chapter 6, 106–7.

> chosen women and very devout men thither with great diligence, with both saints' relics and many volumes of books, so that through her the yield of souls increased even in that people, and, by the grace of God, was multiplied.)[39]

Bath just very well may be one of the 'coenobia' established by Bertila's 'discipulis,' two of whom may have been recorded in the early Bath charters: Berta and Folcburg (and Beorngyth, the second abbess of Bath may be an Englishwoman returning from Francia to help out, though this is pure speculation). Frankish books sent by Bertila, not dissimilar from those that McKitterick identifies with seventh-century Chelles and Jouarre, became models for scribes at a center in southwest Mercia, explaining the unusual uncial quire of the Würzburg *Synonyma*.[40] In the last part of the seventh century and the first decades of the eighth, scribes at Bath looked to the Frankish books of their early abbesses and benefactrix, aiming to reproduce their distinctive script in the same way that Herrad Spilling has argued happened in Fulda in the ninth century, where older books provided models to imitate and replicate, or McKitterick has suggested happened in the Cuthswith Codex: "the book itself acted as a teacher."[41] With the imitative uncial of the Würzburg *Synonyma*, the scribe may show an aesthetic and ideological veneration of her Frankish founders.

It appears Bath was founded through the efforts and resources of local Mercian aristocracy (Osric), Frankish-influenced missionary clergy (Wilfrid and Leuthere), and Frankish monastic outreach by Bertila and her followers. Staff, such as Berta and Folcburg, and books with scripts and codicological structures like Paris lat. 17654 and lat. 152 could have been sent to foundations such as Bath. And the scriptorium at Bath may have produced books at least in part modeled on these Frankish donations, as seen in the Würzburg *Synonyma*, with the scribes either following the models from Jouarre or Chelles, or the teaching of Frankish-trained masters. Were this all the case, it

39 Translation by Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 110.

40 McKitterick, "Nuns' Scriptoria," 5–6, and at 27: "we may have to envisage therefore some instruction reaching England from Francia, as far as setting up a scriptorium and establishing scribal discipline in female religious houses."

41 McKitterick, "Nuns' Scriptoria," 26 citing Herrad Spilling, "Angelsächsische Schrift in Fulda," in *Von der Klosterbibliothek zur Landesbibliothek: Beiträge zum zweihundertjährigen Bestehen der Hessischen Landesbiobliothek Fulda*, ed. Artur Brall. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1978), 47–98. The Cuthswith Codex is Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek M.P.th.q.2, on which see *CLA* 9.1959, *ASM* 944, Ker 401, and Charles D. Wright, "Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.q.2," in *Manuscripts in Austria and Germany*, 173–81.

would be no guarantee that the Würzburg *Synonyma* (or books like it) were written by women and circulated and read in a women's (only) community, because one would expect Bath to have been a double house for both monks and nuns overseen by an abbess as at Jouarre, Chelles, and other houses in the Columbanan mission field. Indeed, it is conventional wisdom that nunneries in early medieval England in this period were only found in double houses. Frank Stenton perhaps is apt here: "The double monastery was obviously a normal feature of the earliest English monasticism, and, indeed, it is doubtful whether any houses for women were ever founded in this period."[42] Helen Jewell states that "pre-Viking English nunneries were all double houses."[43] But recently, historians have opened up the question. Sarah Foot suggests "little is known about the internal organization of early Anglo-Saxon nunneries other than a substantial proportion (although possibly not all) housed men and women."[44] Foot returns to this possibility and the slightness of the evidence, concluding that "it is impossible to say with any confidence whether or not there were any exclusively female houses in England in the pre-Viking Age."[45] Despite the general evidence that nunneries were usually part of double houses, Bath may have been different.

Foot points up the possibility that there were exclusively female houses in early medieval England, and some evidence of Bath's founding is suggestive that Bath may have been founded as a nunnery, and not a double house.[46] The evidence for this is found in the Bath foundation charter of 675. In this document, Osric donates land:

> At uero nunc cum gratia superna longe lateque profusius enitesceret, cenobialia etiam loca sparsim uirorum sparsimque uirginum Deo famulantium erigenda statuimus, ut ubi truculentus et nefandus prius

42 Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 161.

43 Helen Jewell, *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 46.

44 Sarah Foot, "Nunneries," in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 336–37, at 336.

45 Foot, *Veiled Women Volume 1: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 51; see also Foot, "*Flores ecclesiae*: Women in Early Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," in *Female Vita Religiosa between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Structures, Developments and Spatial Contexts*, ed. Gert Melville and Anne Müller (Berlin: Lit, 2011), 173–85. The classic account of the Frankish double house and its impact in England is Mary Bateson, "Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1899): 137–98.

46 This is suggested by Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 120–21.

> draco errorum deceptionibus seruiebat, nunc uersa uice ecclesiasticus ordo in clero conuersantium Domino patrocinante gaudens tripudiet.[47]
>
> (But indeed now, as the supernal grace had shone out more profusely far and wide, we have commanded the establishment of monastic foundations, for servants of God, here for men and there for women, so that where the ferocious and wicked worm of error formerly had served falsehoods, now, on the contrary, the ecclesiastical order of those living in the clerical habit might exult, rejoicing in the Lord's protection.)

Clearly, Osric is in part motivated to found distinct houses for men and women "sparsim … sparsimsque," as dispersed and separate,[48] in hopes of avoiding serpentine sin. This would fall in line with the powerful reform archbishop, Theodore of Canterbury (668–690), who strongly preferred single-sex monasteries. In what is transmitted as his *Penitential*, Theodore stated that "non licet viris feminas habere monachas neque feminis viros; tamen nos non destruamus illud quod consuetudo est in hac terra" (it is not permitted for men to have monastic women, nor women men; however, we will not abolish that which is customary in this land).[49] The archbishop felt it should not be permitted to have double houses, and yet was grudgingly willing to permit them out of respect for custom, and Theodore, indeed, attested the Bath foundation charter. A new foundation may not have been allowed as 'customary.' Moreover, later in the charter, Osric is recorded as donating land "ad construendum monasterium sanctarum uirginum" (for the construction of a monastery for holy virgins).[50] The adjective "sanctarum" is in the feminine. The stated purpose to separate monks and nuns, and the construction of the monastery for holy (female) virgins may be telling. Despite doubts about women-only houses in early England in the pre-Viking Age, it would seem that Bath was founded as a separate women-only nunnery rather than as a double house, in which case, a manuscript produced there before the middle of the eighth century would have been written by a nun. That Bath was for nuns only seems to be taken as given by several historians of early English monastic history. In his survey of religious houses in England,

47 Susan E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of Bath and Wells*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 13 (London: British Academy, 2007), no. 1, pp. 53–54 at p. 53.

48 Richard Ashdowne, David Howlett, and Ronald Latham, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1975–2013), 16.3143.

49 Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), 3:195.

50 Kelly, *Charters*, no. 1, p. 53.

Dom David Knowles takes Bath to be an "early mon[astery] of nuns."[51] John Blair assumes Bath was an "important nunnery."[52] Barbara Yorke proceeds naming Bath a nunnery.[53] As an exclusively female foundation, Bath may represent an unusual case for early English monasteries, especially in the sphere of Frankish influence.[54] Still, Bath may have been solely a nunnery well into the eighth century,[55] and there is a tenable case that Bath's scriptorium produced a handful of books in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. The Würzburg *Synonyma* is plausibly one of those books. Perhaps rethinking the painstaking script from these books, a different kind of intellectual and literary history can be recovered.

Women's Writing in Eighth-Century Southwest Mercia and Wessex

The *Synonyma* certainly played an important role in the intellectual world of the Franco-Saxon cultural provinces in the eighth and ninth centuries. If we consider the Würzburg *Synonyma* a book written by and for a nunnery at Bath, a foundation with Frankish connections, it is also useful to note the numerous copies made in the English cultural province in Francia: Claudia Di Sciacca describes the six from Frankish centers influenced by the English mission of the eighth and ninth centuries.[56] The text had "extraordinary status among the women of the Main valley communities" in the wake of the English mission there.[57] This was likely the case in southwest Mercia and Wessex as well, in light of the Würzburg

51 David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London: Longman, 1971), 59.

52 John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 279.

53 Barbara Yorke, "The Bonifacian Mission and Female Religious in Wessex," *Early Medieval Studies* 7 (1998): 145–72, at 164 and *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London: Continuum, 2003), 26 but cf. 54.

54 Of course, it may have housed at least some men; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 121; Foot, *Veiled Women*, 52. McKitterick describes it as a double house: "the *Vita Bertila* records the contingent of nuns and books sent from Jouarre to the nuns at Bath, a double monastery"; see "Nuns' Scriptoria," 29.

55 Bath had been taken over as an exclusively male monastery by 758 when Cynewulf, king of Wessex 757–86, donated land to the "brothers" of the community. See Sawyer 265, printed in Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus*, no. 193; Barry Cunliffe, "Saxon Bath," in *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England*, ed. Jeremy Haslam (Chichester: Phillimore, 1984), 345–58, at 349; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 160–61.

56 Di Sciacca, *Finding,* 72–74.

57 Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 150.

Synonyma. Isidore's text served as "an extremely rich and inspirational source for devotional and penitential themes,"[58] as well as "justification for the disciplined monastic lifestyle."[59] Lifshitz compellingly argues that the *Synonyma* was especially useful for women ascetics in the early Middle Ages, as it provides a script for informal penitential practices, and does so in a way (but for a single section) that does not mark sexual difference.[60] The text's dialogic structure and repetitive style made the lexicon and sentiment of penitential anguish clear and easy to understand, especially for those learning Latin as a non-native language. The Würzburg *Synonyma* is sporadically glossed in drypoint, in both Old English and Old High German, suggesting some study in such a capacity. Within the network of women's foundations in Frankish foundations in southern England and English foundations of Francia, the *Synonyma* was part of a collection of texts read and copied by women.

Apponius's Commentary on the Song of Songs might also be seen as part of this network. As discussed above, the Boulogne copy has initials that share stylistic features with Hatton 48; Paris, BN lat.17177; and the Würzburg *Synonyma*, with its main script an "Anglo-Saxon minuscule" of a "rather stately type."[61] Sims-Williams makes a case for its origins in Bath, where a Frankish woman, Burginda, produced a cento of Apponius's commentary and added her own colophonic letter to the end, in which she exhorts a renowned young man ("inclite iuuenis") to a virtuous life. Burginda is likely not the scribe of the manuscript,[62] but her centonization of Apponius and her letter represent a literary Frankishness of a sort to complement the Frankishness seen already in the Würzburg *Synonyma*. Lifshitz has shown that another centonization of Apponius's treatise was made in the English cultural provinces of Francia in the eighth century, likely by nuns, to whom Apponius's allegorization of the Song of Songs' erotic desire into

58 Di Sciacca, *Finding*, 174.

59 Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 149.

60 Lifshitz, *Religious Women,* 149–71, esp. 161–62.

61 *CLA* 6.738; the minuscule in the Apponius was compared to the minuscule in the Würzburg *Synonyma* by T. Julian Brown; see Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 2.

62 See Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 7 and 11; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 204 and 213; Richard Gameson, *The Scribe Speaks? Colophons in Early English Manuscripts*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2002), 7; cf. McKitterick, "Diffusion," 419, and James J. John "The Named (and Namable) in *Codices Latnini Antiquiores*," in *Scribi e colofoni. Le sottoscrizioni di copisti dalle origini all'avvento della stampa, Atti del seminario di Erice, X Colloquio del Comité international de paléographie latine (23–28 ott. 1993)*, ed. Emma Condello and Giuseppe De Gregorio (Spoleto: Centro Italiano Di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, 1997), 106–21, at 116.

spiritual love appealed.[63] Burginda's cento of the Apponius is distinct from the Continental version, but her work—indeed authorship—is parallel. Exegesis of the Songs of Songs had another draw for women theologians and writers; as Hannah Matis has made clear, early medieval exegesis of the Songs of Songs, beginning with Bede, systematized "a particular reading of the Song, adopted and further simplified by the Carolingian exegetes, which depicted the church and clergy in maternal terms. One of the consequences was the early medieval exegetes' articulation of a vocabulary to express clerical authority through the female body, specifically the maternal female body."[64] Apponius's exegesis in particular recast the Song of Songs as an allegory for the unfolding revelation of salvation history.[65] In doing so, Apponius's commentary reaffirms the biblical research, pastoral care, and mission work of monastic women in the early church: they are agents of this salvation history. The study and interpretation of the Song of Songs in Franco-Saxon monastic circles in both Francia and England suggests shared cultural resources and mission.

Accordingly, we can see women copying and reading patristic and exegetical texts in these early manuscripts, but what of women *writing* or *composing*? Burginda's authorial act in her centonization of Apponius's commentary is one kind of evidence of women writing in the early Middle Ages, if we listen and write our literary histories differently, but her letter to the famous youth is clearly her authorial composition. However, the critical reception, especially the early critical reception, of Burginda's literary epilogue has set her authorship apart from the mainstream of early medieval English literary history. In her letter, even as she strives to emulate some of the most difficult authors available to her and to refashion them into a spiritual exhortation, her grammar deviates from classical correctness, and for this reason her work has been described in somewhat less than generous terms. Indeed, the Latinity of many of the extant texts by English women in the early medieval period, just like the handwriting in Frankish-influenced manuscripts of the circles in which they worked, is frequently impeached. The judgments on these authors' Latinity are not incorrect. When held up

63 Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 198–99. For the text and a discussion of its relationship to Apponius's full text, see B. de Vregille and L. Neyrand, eds., *Apponii In Canticum Canticorum Expositionem*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 19 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), xxvii–xxviii and 391–463.

64 Hannah Matis, "Early Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs and the Maternal Language of Clerical Authority," *Speculum* 89 (2014), 358–81, at 359.

65 Arthur G. Holder, "The Patristic Sources of Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001): 370–75, at 372–74.

to the standard of strict grammatical rectitude, often represented by these authors' models (Virgil, Aldhelm), and holding to the rigid constancy of Latin textuality, solecisms in the work of Leoba, Ecgburg, and Berhtgyth (and others) are clear. However, until very recently, in the relatively few critical accounts of these texts, scholars have foregrounded these errors. Pointing out the mistakes in deponent verbs or in mixing up indicative and subjunctive emphasizes that the writer's "ambition" is "scarcely-fulfilled," instead of elucidating that ambition itself.[66] And indeed, often the grammatical errors are set up alongside these texts' emotive intensity; though likely unintentionally, such literary histories suggest that these early medieval women's letters and poetry are so excessively sentimental and women's Latin training is so basic, that the emotional contents deform the precision of the language. As Fell pointed out, "we are doing a disservice to the women of the Bonifacian correspondence if we depict them as more emotional or more self-pitying than their male counterparts. The letters from men … over and over again reveal mental, emotional, and physical suffering and stress."[67] The critics analyzing these works qualify and marginalize them, even as they seek to understand them.[68]

Women who wrote letters and poems (in those letters) in and around Boniface's circle have been pointedly called out for their errors. Christine Fell noticed this dynamic in some of the early scholarship on the work of Leoba (Leofgyth). Fell drew attention to G. F. Browne's condescending description of Leoba's work in his *Boniface of Crediton and His Companions* (1910): "It is sad to say that although Leoba declares she has not done this audaciously, it is an audacious piece of copying from the treatise on the construction of Latin verse by Aldhelm of Malmesbury. Both in her prose letter and her verse,

66 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 11: "scarcely-fulfilled ambition."

67 Christine Fell, "Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 41.

68 These critical acts are complicated. These writers' works are ambitious, rich, and densely allusive, but technically and grammatically, they admit faults. It is a question of emphasis, rather than one of inaccuracy to call these errors to the fore. And while I am critical of this emphasis, it is one found in the work of scholars who have blazed the trails that I am limpingly following. For instance, I rely utterly in this essay upon Patrick Sims-Williams's foundational research into southwestern English intellectual culture and religious history, and yet I note that Sims-Williams is one of the scholars whose work repeatedly points to these errors in script or grammar. My own essay on the Würzburg *Synonyma* aesthetically judges the script. Here, I seek only to follow Lees and Overing in their suggestion that we listen differently and write our histories differently: grammatical errors or a crabbed scribal hand may occur, but such negative descriptors tend to win out, and in so doing they occlude the human work, aesthetic aspiration, and personal and institutional bonds that the early letters, poems, and books can illuminate.

she copies wholesale."[69] As Fell rightly points out, Browne's accusations of plagiarism scarcely apply to the formulaic construction of early medieval literature.[70] Ephraim Emerton's 1940 translation of selected letters from the Bonifacian correspondence describes Leoba's verse as "awkward"; and this volume was important and influential enough to be reprinted with a new introduction in 2000.[71] Sims-Williams describes Burginda's Latinity several times: she has "weak command of Latin" and describing the possibility that Burginda's short missive may have been preserved as a model of epistolary style, he adds parenthetically: this "motive is hardly likely in the present instance!"[72] He suggests that "any literary merits in her piece are entirely due to her use of Vergil, Arator, and the *Carmen ad Flavium Felicem*."[73] Yet Sims-Williams remains attuned to the complexities of this difficult text and its historical moment: "This composition's scarcely-fulfilled ambition and its imperfections themselves are an interesting reflection on the education a vii–viii c. woman might receive. Burginda has been taught grammar, but not thoroughly."[74] Here, it is worth bearing in mind Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt's challenge to the "stereotypes of women's illiteracy and lack of education."[75] Peter Dronke, whose *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* is a standard reference on Latin texts by women, describes Berhtgyth's Latin as "simple and limited" and "yet this makes her utterances more touching," putting together technical errors and poor training with emotive content.[76] Ecgburg gets away a little less scathed; her "use of tenses and conjunctions is

69 Fell, "Some Implications," 38 citing G. F. Browne, *Boniface of Crediton and his Companions* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910), 81. Ironically, Browne himself copies audaciously, for he lifts this passage from his own work and publishes it again in 1919 as part of his *The Importance of Women in Anglo-Saxon Times; The Cultus of St. Peter and St. Paul; and Other Addresses* (New York: MacMillan, 1919), 38–39.

70 Fell, "Some Implications," 38 citing Michael Lapidge, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse," *Literature Compass* 31 (1979): 209–31, at 230; this has subsequently been explored by Andy Orchard, "Old Sources, New Resources: Finding the Right Formula for Boniface," *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001): 15–38.

71 Ephraim Emerton, trans., *The Letters of St. Boniface* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 40; repr. with new introduction by F. X. Noble (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

72 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 7.

73 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 16, with many of these descriptions reiterated in *Religion and Literature*, 212–19.

74 Sims-Williams, "Anglo-Latin Letter," 11.

75 Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, "Writing a History of British Women's Writing from 700–1500," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500*, ed. McAvoy and Watt, History of British Women's Writing 1 (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 1–27, at 10.

76 Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 30.

idiosyncratic," and while Sims-Williams praises the virtuosity of Cyneberg's letters, he qualifies the letters of Ecgburg and Burginda as "less polished" and "beginner's essays."[77] Orchard examines Berhtgyth's adaptation of the octosyllabic metrical line, especially that of Æthilwald, and points out that she is "less ambitious and less accurate than her predecessors [Aldhelm and his circle]" and that metrically one of her poems is "execrable."[78] Like Dronke, Orchard's work links technical error with emotion: Berhtgyth's texts are "mawkish and touchingly pathetic."[79] In a standard reference volume, Leoba's Aldhelmian verses that close a letter to Boniface are called "halting,"[80] and in 2001, her letter is described as an "undergraduate essay, albeit a rather superior one" and that she has a "shaky grasp of Latin grammar."[81] Berhtgyth's third letter is described as "anguished" but that it "verges on incoherence" despite aesthetic patterning of sound that intensifies its effects.[82] With the texts by these authors characterized as erroneous and overly emotional in foundational scholarship on them, it is no wonder that more recent histories carry on. Jane Stevenson calls Leoba's a "brief colourless poem,"[83] and in a work of popular history, Michael Pye reports that Burginda's "wordy" composition in the Apponius manuscript "misfires" and "makes a mess."[84] These emphases on the letters' and poems' faults can result in a shunting of their real interest to the margins.[85]

This is also the case for manuscripts that do not rise to the aesthetic heights that paleographers sometimes seem to expect. Admittedly, in my own attempt to understand and recuperate the atypical uncial handwriting in the first eight leaves of the Würzburg *Synonyma*, I called the script "inexpert and uneven" not to mention "rough" and "scruffy."[86] Lowe simply

77 Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 222 and 242.

78 Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon Studies 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67.

79 Orchard, *Poetic Art*, 65.

80 Andy Orchard, "Leofgyth," in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 282.

81 Orchard, "Old Sources," 32.

82 Orchard, "Old Sources," 37.

83 Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Late Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93.

84 Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World: How the North Sea Made Us Who We Are* (London: Penguin, 2014), 64.

85 Or, as Conti makes clear in the case of Hugeburc, such approaches "have elided her role in the cultural work of hagiography"; "The Literate Memory," p. 319). However, while Conti recenters Hugeburc's work to demonstrate its legacy in constructing social memory that is constitutive of dominant Christian culture, my essay focuses on marginalized texts that demonstrate a cultural Frankishness that flourished but then vanished from the early English church.

86 Hussey, "Scribal Habitus," 16.

notes that it is derivative (from Frankish models).[87] The Cuthswith codex is in a fifth-century Italian uncial that Lowe calls a "beautiful bold uncial of the oldest type" but the English supply leaves are called, in what rings as a disappointed tone, "very correct, but distinctly imitative."[88] D. H. Wright suggests that the English scribe "merely did his unequal best to reproduce the unfamiliar letter forms"[89] (apparently despite being "very correct"). Another manuscript probably from the Worcester diocese, Worcester, Cathedral Library Add. 4, is a fragment of Paterius's collection of Gregory the Great's exegesis that evinces some Frankish influence.[90] Lowe describes the script as an "awkward, imitative uncial by a hand not accustomed to this type of writing."[91] Qualifying these scripts in terms of subjective aesthetic taste has an effect that Elaine Treharne has argued "covertly either privileges or devalues" particular scribal endeavors.[92] And the language of "awkward" and "imitative" and "unequal best" tends to foreground a failure in the scribes' work, even as it paradoxically indexes the effort or ambition, an ambition a reader might naturally pass over, seeing as these results are poor at best. Such a dynamic is not wholly dissimilar from drawing attention to grammatical and metrical faults in the Latinity of nun's letters alongside their emotional excesses, with the result that judging this scholarly and writerly work substandard devalues or even hides what otherwise might be seen as a fascinating and illuminating ambition, one that can tell us something about late seventh- or early eighth-century English literary culture.

Writerly Ambition and the Franco-Saxon Cultural Scene

The Anglo-Latin letters by Berhtgyth, Leoba, and Burginda were undoubtedly written by women, and a few manuscripts from the same (or an exceedingly similar) monastic scene may too have been written by women. In these,

87 *CLA* 10.1426.

88 *CLA* 10.1433a and 1433b.

89 D. H. Wright, "Some Notes on *English Uncial*," *Traditio* 17 (1961): 441–56, at 450. However, see M. B. Parkes, who observes that the supply leaves present a trial of word separation, in "The Contribution of Insular Scribes of the Seventh and Eighth Centuries to the 'Grammar of Legibility,'" in *Grafia e interpunzione del latino nel medioevo: Seminario Internazionale, Roma, 27–29 settembre 1984*, ed. A Maierù (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1987), 15–30, at 18 and 24–26.

90 *CLA* 2.265; *ASM* 772.

91 *CLA* 2.265.

92 Elaine Treharne, "The Good, the Bad, the Ugly: Old English Manuscripts and their Physical Description," in *The Genesis of Books: Studies in the Scribal Culture of Medieval England in Honour of A.N. Doane,* ed. Matthew T. Hussey and John D. Niles (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 261–83, at 272.

their writers' intense ambitions can be made clearer by focusing on what appears in literary and manuscript histories as shortfalls. The Anglo-Latin letters have been addressed more thoroughly in this regard. These authors construct their letters from the *de rigeur auctores* of their day: Aldhelm, first and foremost, but Virgil, Arator, and others as well.[93] As Lisa Weston has shown, these intertextual performances draw on concepts of kinship, gender, and virginity and construct a literate subjectivity "within a network of relationships and influences associated with the previous works of quasipaternal, certainly patriarchal authorities."[94] In their letters, the women of Boniface's circle produce their own "membership in an extended *familia*."[95] Be they the elegiac longing in Berhtgyth or the claim on orthodox authority in Leoba, the efforts these writers make in their letters aim for incorporation in the pastoral, intellectual, and spiritual society of the early church. The bounds of epistolary convention and poetic formulae are at times exceeded and disrupted, given the ambition of these texts. As D. Patricia Wallace has shown for the analogous letters of Ecgburg, and Eangyth and Bugga to Boniface, the writing fits "longstanding rhetorical and literary traditions" but "combines … sexuality with epistolary conventions to write a more intensely emotional letter."[96] In so doing, a letter such as Ecgburg's "makes an issue of gender; her letter begins to escape the restrictions of the epistolary tradition as it exhibits breaks in logic and other slippages away from conventions."[97] In their claims on authority, their constructions of social bonds, and their expressions of loss and longing, both personal and historical, the letters stretch the bounds of convention, and the letters' ambitions reveal a paradoxical position: both inclusion and exile, membership and isolation.

Stephanie Hollis traced this paradox in the Conversion era. In the earliest period, women were included in the pastoral work and the evangelical mission of the church, an ecclesiastical culture that encouraged intense male–female relationships that Lifshitz describes for Frankish foundations

93 The scholarly edition makes this clear: Michael Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH Epp. sel. 1, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1955); for analysis, see Lapidge, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry," 230–31; Orchard, *Poetic Art*, 66–67 and "Old Sources."

94 Lisa M. C. Weston, "Where Textual Bodies Meet: Anglo-Saxon Women's Epistolary Friendships," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 231–46, at 236.

95 Weston, "Textual Bodies," 234.

96 D. Patricia Wallace, "Feminine Rhetoric and the Epistolary Tradition: The Boniface Correspondence," *Women's Studies* 24, no. 3 (1995), 229–46, at 235 and 239.

97 Wallace, "Feminine Rhetoric," 231.

in the English cultural province as syneisactic.[98] The nascent church in Conversion-era England needed women as teachers, scholars, even confessors; it was non-hierarchical in some ways, inclusive, allowing women, like those in the Bonifacian circle, not to mention powerful abbesses like Hild in Whitby, dynamic roles. Hollis suggests that in the early years of Boniface's correspondence, this strain of Christianity was "humane" and "egalitarian."[99] However, over the course of Boniface's career, things changed. As the church formed and developed, the Roman authoritarian and sacerdotal model took hold, transforming roles for women; there was "a Pauline rejection of women in ministry."[100] Nuns were enclosed and marginalized, double monasteries slowly dwindled away, and the humane and egalitarian Christian community was lost.[101] The letters of personal lament reflect "the loss of this earlier version of the Christian *familia*."[102] Thus, the ambitions of the letters such as those by Berhtgyth longing for her distant brother or Burginda exhorting her unnamed youth to weep while remembering her name strive to express paradox, in the second language of Latin forms. As Wallace describes, they push at convention to reach for something new: poetic, gendered, and historical forging of community, while simultaneously acknowledging distance.

The "derivative" manuscripts of these women's networks do something similar. To the people that made these books, on the ground, in that particular moment, a Franco-Saxon ambition was crucial; it was meaningful enough to forgo the techniques and results of a typical or more comfortable English script and stretch out for something else. A nun in Bath copying Isidore's *Synonyma* labored for a specific effect: Frankish allegiance. Such

98 On the origins and developments of the early church and its more open and egalitarian (to a limited extent) organization, see Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, Chapter 1; Scheck, *Reform and Resistance: Formations of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), Chapter 1 gives a deeper theological background; Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992) discusses the dynamic passim.

99 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 130; see also Yitzak Hen, '"Milites christi utriusque sexus": Gender and the Politics of Conversion in the Circle of Boniface," *Revue Bénédictine* 109 (1999): 17–31.

100 Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women*, 63.

101 On this transition, see Shari Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* (Binghamton: State University of New York Press, 2003); Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, Chapters 3 and 4, passim; Foot, *Veiled Women*, Chapter 2; and Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001; repr. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 35–37.

102 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 138.

books were experimental, adapting bibliographic traditions for corporate and devotional aims. The texts were important, but the material form of the book mattered too, perhaps emulating books sent by Bertila of Chelles or another in a Frankish sister nunnery and thus placing the scribe, her library, and her readers in a transnational intellectual and religious network spanning the kingdom of Hwicce as far as northeast Francia. Books with Frankish codicological structures and script might stand as monuments to an extended *familia*, including nuns at Jouarre and Chelles as well as at Bath. These acts, and these material artifacts of these acts, would remain ideologically active, reminding readers and authors of founders and networks. Beyond their historical moment, now in our literary histories, such books can be seen to synthesize and fashion an aesthetic standard for a manuscript culture in an emerging Franco-Saxon Christian world, whether or not that standard became mainstream. In a different look at this codicological history, these deviant books need not be driven into some cultural dead end. Had not hierarchical and authoritative Roman ecclesiastical power shut down the more inclusive and egalitarian genesis of the early mission in England and later Germany, such scripts may have held sway for a time, as would have the female communities that produced and read them.

More broadly, these commitments to Frankishness can tell us something about these writers' ambitions for their church in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Frankish outreach was instrumental to the early English church.[103] This "*francitas*" would seem to draw primarily on Columbanan, and subsequently, Benedictine monasticism. Jouarre, the mother house of Bertila's Chelles was founded by Ado, a follower of Columbanus, and the nunnery's first abbess was Theodechild, who came from Faramoutier. Faramoutier itself was Columbanan (and Benedictine),[104] as were the related houses Andelys, Jouarre, and Chelles.[105] These Frankish foundations were often double houses, and this is where Bath may differ, under the pressure of Theodoran redesign of the English church in the late seventh century. Nonetheless, the women-led houses in Francia and England, including Bath, were central in the work of the mission in the Columbanan tradition. Edward James describes the Columbanan model of monastic formation: rural centres of education and lay outreach, largely independent from the bishop, mainly foundations for royal or aristocratic families, and involved

103 Campbell, *Essays*, 59.
104 Bateson, "Double Monasteries," 151.
105 Campbell, *Essays*, 58.

in missionary work.[106] In following Frankish models of writing, a nunnery's scriptorium evinces a commitment to the mission work, scholarship, education, and independence of this Columbanan legacy. These principles would be flexible and useful in the pioneering church in southwest Mercia (or north Wessex depending on the times) and elsewhere in England, in which nuns were doing many things that later the church ruled against: Hollis traces the ministries of abbesses, whose work was quite close to that of male ecclesiastics. Women such as Hild or Eangyth, like Fara at Brie in Francia before them, played roles very similar to that of confessors, and their work preaching or teaching to their communities and lay people verged on sacerdotal. Drawing on the Irish practices propagated by Columbanus, and in part out of sheer necessity, the early church in Francia and England seems to have been more open, flexible, and egalitarian.[107] Hollis observes: "Where the church struggles for survival, at the continental mission and in England, mutual interdependence prompted a vision of the church, not as an officially constituted hierarchical entity, but as a mystical unity wrought through love and suffering of Christ for humanity, which equalized the value of all its members and endowed them with power to exercise an efficacious ministry."[108] This vision must have been shared: Frankish women and men, some of them likely taught by the disciples of Columbanus, came to England to aid in the foundations of the church, bringing with them this energizing and powerful idea of Christian community and purpose. Frankish books by English nuns are signs of the commitment to this idea.

As the work of Jane Schulenburg, Stephanie Hollis, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing, Sarah Foot, Felice Lifshitz, and others has shown, in its need for men and women to do the hard work of the mission in the conversion period, the early church was more egalitarian, but this would change. Abbesses and nuns served in ways similar to their male counterparts, but this so-called "golden age" (and it was never that golden, of course) was ended by the reforms beginning in the mid-eighth century and especially under the Romanizing institutional reforms of the Carolingian church. We see the seeds of this transformation as far back as Theodore's reforms in England in the seventh century and sharpening in the mandates from Pope Zacharias propagated by Boniface himself by the mid-eighth century.

106 Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 130–34; for an in-depth analysis of the close ties between early English royal and aristocratic families and monastic foundations (as in Francia), see Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*.

107 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 130–37 and Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, 13–15.

108 Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 132.

Hollis, Weston, and Watt have shown how the potent elegiac letters of some of the nuns in Boniface's circle reflect that historical change: their letters mourn the absence and losses they have experienced. And in their performances of gender and desire, they also challenge convention, in effect challenging these historical pressures. Still, those pressures prevailed. Lifshitz illuminates a poignant moment of this change in her reading of Rudolph's *Vita* of Leoba: Boniface had requested to be buried in a single grave with his friend, confidant, and ally, Leoba, but with the reforms of the church, the monks of Fulda thought differently, and buried them separately in 782 before translating her body and relics even further away in 836. "It was the end of an era."[109] The ultimate success of the Roman and Caroline reforms meant that our histories have similarly banished these women—their lives, letters and books—from the centers of power that they began and began in. That banishment is in part expressed and enacted through the pejorative assessments of their work in that formative era. Not only did that early era end, but that era became a marginalized dead end in our histories of early medieval England, a dead end constructed by scholarly dismissal of women's work.

Early Franco-Saxon cultural experiments where men and women participated and worked had precedent, but no legacy. Rather than write them out as halting failures, we might consider their meaning in their moment and how they might haunt later English historiography: the repression of Hild by Bede in his history,[110] the displacement of Leoba from Boniface,[111] the *cri de coeur* of Berhtgyth in her isolation.[112] These moments demonstrate the ways in which early medieval English and Frankish institutions deprived themselves of great thinkers, leaders, and writers in their move to enclose and marginalize women in the eighth century. Those losses become clearer if we rethink the bits of evidence that do survive: letters and books. Taking the Würzburg *Synonyma* as a book written by a nun at Bath aiming to reproduce a Frankish uncial reveals the intellectual and literary world and work of the early church in Mercia, suggesting the spiritual allegiance, ideological aims, and personal commitment of a road not taken.

109 Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 15.

110 Lees and Overing, "Birthing Bishops, Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production," *Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 35–65; rev. and repr. as Chapter 1 in *Double Agents* (2001; repr. 2009).

111 Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 13–15.

112 See Kathryn Maude, *Berhtgyth's Letters to Balthard*, *Medieval Feminist Forum* Medieval Texts in Translation 4, Subsidia Series 7 (2017): 1–24 for a full treatment of Berhtgyth's work; see also Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 142–43; Weston, "Textual Bodies," 241–43.

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13 "Historical Accuracy," Anonymity, and Women's Authorship

The Case of the Case for *Beowulf*

Stephen M. Yeager

Abstract
This essay collates and synthesizes many works of feminist Old English scholarship in the service of a thought experiment: what if *Beowulf* was written and/or inscribed by a woman, by women, and/or for an audience of women? How might these possibilities shape our interpretations of the text? In particular, the article identifies possible connections to the *Encomium Emmae reginae*, to the lives of women and transgender saints, and to women's and dual-house monastic foundations. The themes of monstrosity and travel are shown to resonate with gendered anxieties about childbirth and maternity, and Beowulf the "bear-man" is read as a gender-neutral confessor figure who models the ideal virtues of both abbots and abbesses.

Keywords: Emma of Normandy, Hrostvit of Gandersheim, Hild of Whitby, St. Margaret of Antioch, St. Euphrosyne

The term "historical accuracy" in the title of this essay refers to that aspect of a vision of history whereby it conforms to the dominant positions in the published, peer-reviewed scholarship that interprets a given corpus of primary historical evidence. As Adrienne Shaw and other scholars of historical gaming have argued, unexamined notions of historical accuracy can constrain conversations about the past to accidental fields of likely probability, where interpretations of the evidence predominate not because of their unique adherence to the facts, but because of convention and

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convenience.[1] Similar constraints commonly shape scholarly representations of the past, as plausible claims go unexpressed only because everyone assumes beforehand that no one will give them credence, though even this presumption may be false—the majority may be more open to alternative framings of history than we expect.

As Diane Watt discusses in the introduction to her important recent book, early medieval women's authorship is an excellent example of an area of study where progress has been hampered by critical deference to underexamined notions of historical accuracy.[2] Though European culture's patriarchal structures did indeed limit medieval women's access to education and writing, this is hardly a sufficient reason to assume that any given anonymous medieval text was written by an author who identified as a man, especially if the text in question seems at all unusual. Such assumptions seem particularly tenuous in light of that mounting body of evidence suggesting that women's readership and authorship was actually rather common in the early medieval period.[3] Hence there is considerable value to what Watt calls her "speculative" approach, which corrects the tendency of such inherited assumptions to exclude medieval women (and the scholars interested in them) from debates about history and its implications.[4]

Drawing on these studies, on Carol Clover's formative arguments about the configurations of socially constructed gender and biological sex in early

1 Adrienne Shaw, "The Tyranny of Realism: Historical Accuracy and the Politics of Representation in Assassin's Creed III," *Loading…* 9 no. 14 (2015): 4–24; on video games and cultural heritage texts like *Beowulf* see also Xenia Zeiler and Suzie Thomas, "The Relevance of Researching Video Games and Cultural Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (2020): 1–3.

2 Diane Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100* (London: Bloombury, 2020).

3 See also Diane Watt, "Lost Books: Abbess Hildelith and the Literary Culture of Barking Abbey," *Philological Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (2012), 1–22, and *Medieval Women's Writing* (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2007), and also for example Helene Scheck and Virginia Blanton, eds., *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe*, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013 and 2015); Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Frankia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Jane Stevenson, "Anglo-Latin Women Poets," in *Latin Learning and English Lore*, vol. 2, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 86–107; Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Ashgate, 2000); Joan M. Ferrante, *To The Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Rosamond McKitterick, "Women's Literacy in the Early Middle Ages," in *Books, Scribes, and Learning in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994); Fred Robinson, "Old English Poetry: The Question of Authorship," *ANQ* (1990), 59–64; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

4 Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion,* 1–20, esp. 10–14.

medieval Northern Europe,[5] and on our increasingly nuanced understanding of textual authority in Old English writing,[6] this essay will apply to the poem *Beowulf* the presumption of Watt and others, that the categories "woman" and "author" are themselves too fraught to assess the likelihood of women's authorship in the irreducibly ambiguous evidence of anonymous medieval texts and textual traditions.[7] Specifically, this essay asks: what would it mean for the Old English poem *Beowulf* if we simply chose to read it as if it were written by a woman, copied by a woman, or intended for an audience of women? Given that the dearth of evidence is so profound that possibilities along these lines are as likely to be true as they are to be untrue, why not proffer full, cogent, and detailed explorations of the possible readings that such theories would open up, and treat them as seriously as we have treated theories that implicitly assume the poem's authors, scribes, and audience(s) to be men?[8] Perhaps the most obvious implications of this framing concern the manuscript juxtaposition of *Beowulf* with the poem *Judith*, but I have decided to deliberately ignore these points of entry, in favor of less obvious but similarly compelling reasons to read *Beowulf* as women's poetry.[9]

5 Carol Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (1993): 363–87. On the challenges of historicizing categories of gender and sexuality see also David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–21, esp. 13–15; Carol Braun Pasternack, "Negotiating Gender in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages,* ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 107–142.

6 On the different configurations of Old English textual authority see, for example, Manish Sharma, "Beyond Nostalgia: Formula and Novelty in Old English Literature," *Exemplaria* 26, no. 4 (2014): 303–27; Thomas Bredehoft, *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); A. N. Doane, "Beowulf and Scribal Performance," in *Unlocking the Word Hoard*, ed. Mark Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 62–75; Seth Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). On the link between these two topics of gender and authorship see especially the scholarship of Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, whose work spans not only questions of authority and scribal performance, in *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), but also depictions of women's agency, in *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), esp. 151–245.

7 Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion,* 2.

8 This essay is hardly the first to make this sort of claim about an early or anonymous author. One of the best-known examples is Andrew Dalby's exploration of the idea that Homer (or the other poet of the same name who wrote the *Iliad and Odyssey*) might have been a woman: *Rediscovering Homer* (New York: Norton, 2006).

9 On *Judith* see, for example, Hugh Magennis, "Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*," in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 5–18; Susan Kim, "Bloody Signs: Circumcision and Pregnancy

As I have indicated above, there are many critics working in Old English studies to uncover the evidence for women's readership and authorship in the period. Nonetheless, it is my sense that the specific possibilities for women authors and readers of *Beowulf* have only ever been tentatively addressed by the dominant scholarly conversation around the poem—perhaps out of deference to the common reading of the poem as an aggressively masculinist text, most recently manifest in the decision by Maria Dhavana Headley to translate the famously difficult first word *Hwæt* into the modern slang term "Bro!"[10] Be that as it may, Fred Robinson does briefly cite Paull Baum's speculations about a woman author for the poem in a footnote to his argument about the possibilities for female authorship in early medieval English literature generally, advanced in a brief article ambiguously titled "Old English Poetry: The Question of Authorship" that appeared not in a medieval studies journal but in *American Notes & Queries*.[11] Though we would do well to respect the ambivalence suggested by Robinson's circumspect way of attaching his name to the possibility that we might read *Beowulf* as women's poetry, I think we can still agree that if the co-author of one of the most respected textbooks in the field thinks a case might be made, then the question deserves at the very least to inspire one of those arguments that rage for decades before they are entertainingly summarized for undergraduates in critical introductions to the text.[12] Instead, my sense is that even feminist readers of *Beowulf* like Gillian

in the Old English Judith," *Exemplaria* 11 (1999), 285–307; Ann Astell, "Holofernes' Head: Tacen and Teaching in the Old English Judith," *Anglo-Saxon England* 18 (1989), 117–33; Peter Lucas, "Judith and the Woman Hero," *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992), 17–27. On *Beowulf* and *Judith* see Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 4–12; Peter Lucas, "The Place of Judith in the Beowulf Manuscript," *Review of English Studies* 41 (1990), 463–78.

10 Headley, *Beowulf: A New Translation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020). On masculinism in *Beowulf* see, e.g., Clare A. Lees, "Men and Beowulf," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 129–48. See further the queer-theoretical approaches to masculinity in the text overviewed by Basil Arnaud Price, "Potentiality and Possibility: An Overview of *Beowulf* and Queer Theory," *Neophilologus* 104 (2020): 401–19, especially Clark, *Between Medieval Men,* 130–43.

11 Robinson, "Question," citing Baum, "The Beowulf Poet," *Philological Quarterly* 39 (1960): 389–99, at 393–94. See also Richard J. Schrader, *God's Handiwork: Images of Women in Early Germanic Literature* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), who says of Baum: "while his reasons are spurious, the idea is not far-fetched" (49). *American Notes & Queries* is a generalist journal which publishes short works on the literature of the English-speaking world.

12 The textbook in question is now in its eighth edition: Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 8th ed. (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).

Overing and Clare Lees, Mary Dockray Miller, Susan Kim, Shari Horner, Megan Cavell, Stacy Klein, Roberta Frank, Elaine Tuttle Hansen, and others have rarely done more than intimate the possibility of women authors and readers in the vicinity of *Beowulf*, emphasizing instead the ultimate impossibility of ever answering such questions.[13]

Of course the caution of these women has been absolutely consistent with the larger skepticism of postwar medieval studies about the applicability of modern terms and concepts to medieval manuscript evidence.[14] Nonetheless, I have chosen to simply set aside the methodological issues to address rather the implicit political ones. As I have said, I am hardly the first reader of *Beowulf* to speculate about its possible women audiences, scribes, and authors. If I am (as it seems) one of the first to express my speculations in print, it is only because my privilege protects me from the sorts of personal attacks that commonly damage and even end the careers of queer and trans scholars, women scholars, Indigenous and Black scholars, scholars of color, and contingent faculty when they attach their names to speculative theses. I write this piece at a time when activist scholars are working to transform the field from a site of white supremacy, misogyny, and other forms of active harm into a site of active repair.[15] My intention in writing it is to contribute

13 For example in Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Mary Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Asa Mittman and Susan Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013); Shari Horner, *The Discourse of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* (Binghamton: State University of New York Press, 2003); Megan Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Stacy Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Joan Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Roberta Frank, "*Quid Hinieldus cum femininis*: The Hero and Women at the End of the First Millennium," in *La Funzione dell'eroe germanico*, ed. Teresa Paroli (Roma: Il Calamo 1995), 7–25; Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Women in Old English Reconsidered," *Michigan Academician* 9 (1976): 109–13. Surveys of feminist approaches to Old English poetry include Stacy S. Klein, "Gender," in *A Handbook to Anglo-Saxon Studies,* ed. Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 39–54; Mary Dockray-Miller, "Old English Literature and Feminist Theory," *Literature Compass* 5/6 (2008): 1049–59; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Gender Roles," in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Robert Bjork and John Niles (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 311–24.

14 Summarily presented recently in the introduction to *The Medieval Manuscript Book*, ed. Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–16.

15 Histories of harm and plans for reparation are surveyed for example by Mary Rambaran-Olm, Breann Leake, and Micah Goodrich, "Medieval Studies: The Stakes of the Field," *postmedieval*

to these ongoing efforts, answering a request made by Tarren Andrews on behalf of Indigenous Studies that our field should "ask what it might look like to 'extend an invitation to' rather than 'engage with'" approaches and communities that have been historically marginalized within (or even excluded entirely from) Old English studies.[16]

It often happens in my real-life conversations that I will realize, belatedly, that I have spoken over someone else, and cut them off from what they were planning to say. My strategy for addressing this harm when it occurs is to repeat the last idea they expressed, as a way of signaling my intention to listen and my hope that they will continue speaking despite my rudeness. Even when my paraphrase is wrong, the effort generally seems to work, as my errors can sometimes give my interlocutors a welcome chance to clarify their original points. Similarly, my aim in this essay is to synthesize and repeat my understanding of what feminist readers of *Beowulf* and other Old English poetry have argued in their publications about the women authors and readers of the period, before they were interrupted by the field and its arbitrary strictures of so-called historical accuracy. My hope is that I might invite these other readers to return to their thoughts and continue them, at the same time that they might invite new voices to join in and carry the conversation even further.

Specifically, I will use the rest of this essay to invite further conversation about three possibilities: first, that the *Beowulf* manuscript may have been intended for a readership of women; second, that it may have been copied by women scribes; and third, that the poem itself may be attributed to a woman poet. My summaries of these questions will provisionally synthesize extant studies and readings, by the women cited above and others, to show that I believe there is nothing revolutionary whatsoever about reading the poem in this way. If anything, I believe there are more examples of existing readings that will come into sharper focus if female authorship and readership is openly presupposed, than there are new problems raised by such suppositions.

11 (2020), 356–370; Christine Warmbrunn, "Dear Tolkien Fans: Black People Exist," *The Public Medievalist* (Sept. 24, 2020), accessed February 21, 2022, https://www.publicmedievalist.com/tolkien-fans-black-people/; Dorothy Kim, "Introduction the Literature Compass Special Cluster: Critical Race and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 16, nos. 9–10 (2019), e1249; Donna Beth Ellard, *Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts postSaxon Futures* (New York: punctum, 2019); Jonathan Hsy and Julie Orlemanski, "Race and Medieval Studies: A Partial Bibliography," *postmedieval* 8 (2017), 500–31, 527–31.

16 Tarren Andrews, "Introduction: Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts," *English Language Notes* 58, no. 2 (2020): 1–17, at 2.

Women Readers, Women Scribes

The body of our ignorance about *Beowulf* is vast, but a brief summary of it will help to define the parameters of the discussion. We do not know who copied its manuscript, or where they did it, or why. We do not know when it was copied, and since the evidence of the two scripts is contradictory, analysis of the question arguably reveals more about the contingency of our dating criteria than it does about the likely date range of the text.[17] Analyses of dialect and meter have attempted to establish a provenance, but it is my view, at least, that not everyone agrees about what this evidence means.[18] We do not know a single fact about the person or people who wrote *Beowulf*: there are no explicit contemporary allusions to the text, no obvious signatures or other attributions in the manuscript, and very little concrete evidence of any kind. The story's best analogues tend to be brief, tenuous, dated much later, and/or to not be English, and so they provide little help for establishing an immediate context.[19] Finally, as I have stated above, there are many basic methodological challenges to any criticism that would engage with early vernacular poetry and manuscript culture, so for example we do not even know whether modern concepts of "authors" or even "scribes" are useful for thinking about the people who made the words of the poem exist on the parchment in the way that they do.

Let us stick, then, to the dominant positions in the secondary criticism cited above, and assume a date for the manuscript between the start of Æthelred's reign and the end of Cnut's, and an audience in the vicinity of their courts that spans the secular and religious spheres. Given the connections noted by Helen Damico between *Beowulf* and the *Encomium Emmae reginae*, I would suggest that Emma of Normandy is a helpful model for imagining an intended female audience for the *Beowulf* manuscript.[20] Like Thryth,

17 R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xxv–xxxv; Kevin Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

18 Eric Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse: Poetic Tradition and Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 23–52; Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014); Roberta Frank, "A Scandal in Toronto: *The Dating of Beowulf* a Quarter Century On," *Speculum* 82 (2007): 843–64; Robert Fulk, "Old English Meter and Oral Tradition: Three Issues Bearing on Poetic Chronology," *JEGP* 106 (2007): 304–24; Peter Orton, *The Transmission of Old English Poetry* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

19 *Klaeber's Beowulf*, xxxvi–xliii; Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 98–162; Theodor M. Andersson, "Sources and Analogues," in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Robert Bjork and John Niles (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 125–48.

20 Helen Damico, "Beowulf's Foreign Queen and the Politics of Eleventh-Century England," in *Intertexts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Paul Szarmach*, ed. Virginia Blanton and

Emma was a foreign bride with a posthumous reputation for difficulty;[21] like Freawaru, Emma was a peace offering, first married to Æthelred to unite England with Normandy against the Danes, then married to Cnut with similar goals; like Hildeburh, she mourned the deaths and injuries of both husbands and sons when the peace sought by her marriages failed to hold; like Wealtheow, she had good reason to fear the usurpation and death of her two sons Alfred and Edward, and she tried to protect them with the patronage of a warrior from across the sea; like Hygd, she helped resolve the difficult question of which of her kinsmen should succeed to the throne after her husband's death, and ended up seeing both of her choices become king in turn.

Let us imagine further, and still arbitrarily, that the scribes or perhaps commissioners who assembled this manuscript for a woman like Emma were themselves women, and were, moreover, the inhabitants of a religious house—say, Wilton or Nunnaminster.[22] If a woman's religious community

Helen Scheck (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 209–40. On Emma and the *Encomium* see also Elizabeth Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c. 1000–c. 1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh Century England* (London: Blackwell, 1997).

21 "Thryth" or "Modthryth" appears in *Beowulf* at line 1931. On this figure see Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood*, 78–88; Gillian R. Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 70. The connection between Thryth and Emma is suggested further by the coincidence that the later legend of Emma and the Plowshares, itself a possible influence on the Middle English romance *Athelston*, falls into the same "accused queen" narrative that also manifests in legends about the two queens of two kings Offa, described in the *Vitae duorum Offarum*, one of whom is named "Dreda" and either of whom could be the figure alluded to in *Beowulf*: Nancy B. Black, *Medieval Narratives of Accused Queens* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 69–71; L. A. Hibbard, "Athelston, a Westminster Legend," *PMLA* 36 (1921): 223–244; Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury, Ronald B. Herzman eds., *Four Romances of England: Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997); Michael J. Swanton, *The Lives of Two Offas: Vitae Offarum Duorum* (Devon: The Medieval Press, 2010).

22 On women's literacy in Wilton, Nunnaminster, and other women's foundations at this period see Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion*; 117–58; Stephanie Hollis, "Wilton as a Centre of Learning," in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and* liber confortatorius, ed. Stephanie Hollis, with W. R. Barnes, Rebecca Hayward, Kathleen Loncar and Michael Wright (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 245–80; Jane Stevenson, "Anglo-Latin Women Poets," 93–100; Peter Robinson, "A Twelfth-Century Scriptrix from Nunnaminster," in *Of the Making of Medieval Books: Medieval Manuscripts, Their Scribes and Readers, Essays Presented to M.B. Parkes* (London: Scholar Press, 1997), 73–93; Thomas Hall, "Preaching at Winchester in the Early Twelfth Century," *JEGP* 104, no. 2 (2005): 189–218; Mary Dockray-Miller, *Saints Edith and Aethelthryth—Princesses, Miracle Workers, and their Late Medieval Audience: The Wilton Chronicle and the Wilton Life of St Aethelthryth* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

gifted a manuscript to a wealthy patroness like Emma, or even if it simply produced one for its own enjoyment, then one would expect the manuscript to contain at least a subtext encouraging its female audience to join the house, become a nun, and bring their money with them, as did so many noble widows in this period. Such a subtext may indeed be read into the terrible lives of the women in *Beowulf* listed above, and also more generally into the joint themes of monstrosity, travel, and warrior culture in the manuscript, as these all figure in fairly straightforward ways the horrors of marriage, maternity, and secular womanhood in this era.[23] For example, an aspect of monstrosity not typically emphasized in relation to *Beowulf* is its connection to anxieties around childbirth, as these may be focalized around the specific fear that one's children might be marked by congenital disabilities.[24] Whether or not the actual children of women like Emma suffered from such biological conditions, they certainly ran the danger of moral monstrosity, in the vein of Holofernes, Alexander, Cain, and Grendel. And so I ask: what if the lurid catalogue of the horrors of the outside world found in the *Beowulf* manuscript is designed to first excite the interest of noblewomen like Emma, but then to warn such women that if they succumb to pride and agree to (re)marriage, then they risk putting themselves in the power of the foreign monsters who are their tyrannical and violent husbands and sons?

There are many ways of following up on this hypothesis. For example, we may build on Donna Beth Ellard's recent study to read *Beowulf* as an expression of a (potential) child-bearer's ambivalence towards marriage and family.[25] One particularly exciting path forward might be to conduct comparative studies of the *Beowulf* manuscript and the works of tenth-century author Hrostvit of Gandersheim (ca. 935–973), as her works are concerned with similar themes of paganism, monstrosity, and masculine violence and she is barely one degree of separation from medieval English women's religious houses and their literary output. The networks of possible textual connections between the contexts of the *Beowulf* manuscript and those of Hrostvit's milieu are complex, but there

23 Discussions of maternity and monstrosity in *Beowulf* have typically focused on the figure of Grendel's Mother, for obvious reasons: Paul Acker, "Horror and the Maternal in *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 702–16; Renee Trilling, "Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel's Mother Again," *Parergon* 24, no. 1 (2007): 1–20.

24 On monstrosity and the *Beowulf* manuscript see, for example, J. J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1999); Mittman and Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts;* Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*.

25 Ellard, "*Beowulf* and Babies," in *Dating Beowulf: Studies in Intimacy,* ed. Daniel C. Remein and Erica Weaver (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2019), 97–119.

are some obvious starting points.[26] First, Hrostvit praised Eadgyth—the English wife (and so foreign bride) of Otto I—in her *Gesta Oddonis*, whose sister Eadburga founded Nunnaminster and became the subject of a fragmentary *vita* in the twelfth-century manuscript Oxford Bodleian 451 that was copied by a Nunnaminster scriptrix.[27] Second, one of the most important collections of early English women's writing appears in the "Boniface correspondence" associated with St. Boniface, the archbishop of Mainz (672–754).[28] Boniface's successors would claim the rights of the diocesan over nearby Gandersheim abbey in a conflict with the bishop of Hildesheim that began shortly after Hrostvit's death (987–1015 CE). Adam S. Cohen and Anne Derbes have argued that this conflict informed the representation of the Fall on the bronze doors of Hildesheim (ca. 1007–1015 CE), and they suggest moreover that the bishop Bernward who commissioned the doors might have been influenced by the Old Saxon/Old English poem *Genesis B.*[29] There are, then, many possible paths for future investigation.

Another possible approach to imagining a woman's readership for *Beowulf* is provided by the other virginal dragonslayer in the Old English corpus, St. Margaret of Antioch. Like Beowulf, Margaret also has a wrestling match with a black, man-shaped demon, and her fluid gender is suggested by those early versions of her life in which she disguises herself as a man.[30] It is

26 One helpful overview of these connections is Rosamond McKitterick, "Ottonian Intellectual Culture in the Tenth Century and the Role of Theophanu," *Early Medieval Europe* 2, no. 1 (1993): 53–74.

27 Hrostvit, "*Gesta Ottonis*," in *Hrostvithae Liber Tertius: A Text, With Translation, Introduction, and Commentary,* ed. and trans. Mary Bernardine Bergman (Covington, KY: The Sisters of Saint Benedict, 1943), 94, lines 75–97. On Eadgyth see also Jane Stevenson, "Anglo-Latin Women Poets," 91; Simon Keynes, "King Athelstan's Books," in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 143–201, 148–49; Christina Lee, "Eclectic Memories: In Search of Eadgyth," *Offa* 58 (2001 published 2004), 277–85. On Bodley 451 see Hall, "Preaching"; Robinson, "Twelfth-Century Scriptrix." On Hrostvit's themes see, for example, Maud McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins* (Palgrave: 2003), 85–110; Katharina M. Wilson, "The Saxon Canoness Hrostvit of Gandersheim," in *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. Katharina Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 30–63.

28 Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion*, 69–115.

29 Adam S. Cohen and Anne Derbes, "Bernward and Eve at Hildesheim," *Gesta* 40, no. 1 (2001): 19–38.

30 Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Paul E. Szarmach, "St. Euphrosyne: Holy Transvestite," in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and their Contexts*, ed. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 353–65, 354.

noteworthy that the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303 *Life of Margaret* (Ker, *Catalogue*, 57 art. 23) is in a collection that also contains Aelfric's prose *Judith* (art. 73), and that another version, in London BL Cotton Otho B.x (fol. 195), is in the same collection where an Old English *Life of St. Euphrosyne* (Ker, *Catalogue*, 177 art. 10, fol. 61v) directly precedes another witness of the same *Life of St. Christopher* appearing in the *Beowulf* MS (art. 11, fol. 69).[31] This context of circulation and the presence of dragons, demons, prideful pagans and childless heroes in Margaret's legend make it a relatively close parallel to the similar convergences of texts and themes appearing in the *Beowulf* manuscript.

In later years, St. Margaret would become the patron saint of childbirth. If Beowulf is indeed a "bear's son,"[32] then his association with this animal ties him also to the theme of maternity, as the ferocity of mother bears defending their cubs is already proverbial in the Old Testament (Hosea 13:8). Yet the poem also makes much of the fact that Beowulf has no children (lines 2729–31), and that he views the entire nation of the Geats as the benefactors of his will (2797–98). I propose that we think about this connection between Beowulf and Margaret through Robin Norris's reading of the Old English *Life of St. Euphrosyne* cited above, and so consider that this poem about Beowulf the quasi-maternal, (apparently) virginal, Margaret-like demon-wrestler and dragonslayer might be another gender- and genre-bending attempt to meet the demand among women readers for lives of women confessors.[33] As a work of "woman's literature," then, *Beowulf* would integrate the matter of an "old wives' tale" about a monster-fighting bear-man into the quasi-legendary history of Geats and Danes to figure how the brides of Christ may operate as sexless but effective political leaders in a patriarchal heroic society—neither "wifmenn" nor "waepnedmenn," but something in between.[34] Beowulf's description of his careful, protective stewardship arguably sounds more like that of a great abbot or abbess cultivating good

31 D. G. Scragg, "The Corpus of Anonymous Lives and Their Manuscript Context," in Szarmach, *Holy Men and Holy Women*, 209–30. The third and final *Life of Margaret* appears in Cotton Tiberius A.iii; see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 186 art. 15.

32 *Klaeber's Beowulf*, xlii–iii; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 121.

33 Robin Norris, "Genre Trouble: Reading the Old English Vita of Saint Euphrosyne," in *Women Writing Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 121–139. See also Clark, *Between Medieval Men*, 195–209. On Beowulf's hagiographic analogues see Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 149–51.

34 "Women" and "men," where the marker of the latter's gender is his possession of a weapon; contrasted, e.g., in *Beowulf*, line 1284. Beowulf is famously unable to use a sword effectively, and the poet herself calls attention to this fact at, e.g., lines 2682–87.

relationships with neighboring lords than it does like a great king expanding his territory:

> næs se folccyning,
> ymbesittendra ænig ðara,
> þe mec guðwinum gretan dorste,
> egesan ðeon. Ic on earde bad
> mælgesceafta, heold min tela,
> ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela
> aða in unriht. (733–39)
>
> (There was no king, of any neighbouring area, who dared to approach me with warriors or to threaten terrors. In the land I awaited contingencies, I held well my [possessions], I sought no contrived conflicts, and I did not swear many oaths wrongfully.)

For the remainder of this essay, I will sketch out how we may apply this framing to read *Beowulf* as a sort of mirror for religious women, and abbesses in particular.

Women Poets

Near the beginning of *Beowulf*, we see the creation of an enclosed space named Heorot, whose establishment occasions a song whose theme is obviously connected to that of Caedmon's famous hymn.[35] Given the broad parallel between this scene and Bede's legend, I propose that we imagine the newly founded Heorot as a pagan prefiguration of the dual-foundation monastic space of Hild's Whitby, where Caedmon's miraculous composition took place.[36] Bede's myth famously effaces Hild herself from the history of Whitby and of Old English poetry, in a manner that Watt suggests is

35 On the importance of the enclosure as a metaphor connecting virginity to women's religious spaces see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture 1150–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially Chapters 1 and 2. Of particular interest is her discussion of the many early medieval English virgins who are remembered for acts of endowment and foundation, at 57–67.

36 The parallel is strengthened somewhat if we allow the possibility that Heorot is coded as a space of pagan worship, argued by, e.g., J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 329–38. Then the song that marks the foundation of Heorot would be parallel to the hymn that, for Bede at least, marks a moment of foundation of the Christian Old English poetic tradition: Sharma, "Beyond Nostalgia."

consistent with his larger pattern of "overwriting" women authors in his works.[37] And as Lees and Overing observe in their important reading of the episode, Bede's characterization of Hild as a mother is crucial to her effacement in his text: as they say, maternity is "doubly appropriated" by Bede, as it is "emptied of its gendered force and specificity and reabsorbed into the masculine economy as a means of production under masculine control." In brief, "maternity is sterilized."[38] I would suggest, then, that we may read the parallel episode in *Beowulf* as attempting a strategic version of this same sterilization and erasure, emptying maternity of its gendered force so that it may negotiate with but ultimately withdraw from the masculine economy of power as a strategy for protecting a community of religious women.

It is noteworthy that the poem's juxtaposition of the story of creation and the story of Cain and Abel skips over the story of Adam and Eve, but only after suggesting it in lines 99–101:

> Sægde se þe cuþe
> frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,
> cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga eorðan worhte†,
> wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeð,
> gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan
> leoman to leohte landbuendum
> ond gefrætwade foldan sceatas
> leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop
> cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.
> *Swa ða drihtguman dreamum lifdon*
> *eadiglice, oððæt an ongan*
> *fyrene fremman feond on helle.*
> Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten… (90–103)

> (He spoke, who could describe the first creation of men long ago, and said that the almighty made the earth, the brilliant plain surrounded by water, set triumphant the sun and moon lights as light to land-dwellers, and adorned the corners of the earth with branches and leaves, shaped each life for each of the species that dwelled there alive. *So the noble humans dwelled in joys happily, until one began to commit crimes, a fiend in Hell.* The grim spirit was called Grendel…)

37 Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion*, 14–18, 21–39.

38 Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 26. For another compelling reading of this episode see Sharma, "Beyond Nostalgia."

The lines I have emphasized here seem at first to be an allusion to these original dwellers in paradise and their fall at the hands of the devil. Then in line 102, we learn that in fact the previous four lines were not about Adam and Eve at all—this "devil" is named Grendel, and so the noble humans must be the Danes and the paradise defaced Heorot.[39] In this feint, which briefly casts Grendel the descendant of Cain in the role of the devil who tempted Eve, we see an implicit reading of the story of creation that will hold for the rest of the poem. Insofar as Cain's mother is, through her son, the ultimate progenitrix of the race of monsters that will personify the culturally destructive forces of masculine territorial aggression throughout the poem, Eve's original sin is tightly linked to her decision to have sex and have children.[40]

It is perhaps important here that Grendel is given the longest lineage of any character in the poem, and that this (monstrous) continuity is contrasted with the constant subversion of primogeniture in the dynastic successions described in the poem. Scyld Scefing is an orphan, Hrothgar and Hygelac are younger brothers, Beowulf is a cousin, and in each of these instances discontinuity in the royal bloodline leads to long-lasting, peaceful regimes. Lines 12–19 of the poem, which cite Scyld's foundation of a royal line as proof of his excellence as a king, are part of a larger pattern of comparison between this figure and the childless Beowulf—though perhaps there is more to be made of the irony implicit in the clearest parallel between the two, which is that their pagan funerals are both lavishly and mournfully described.[41] Perhaps this opening blandishment to the effect that filial continuity in the royal line does indeed bring peace to a nation serves only to introduce the culturally received notion that the remainder of the poem will ironize and undermine, starting with the famously ambiguous lines at the conclusion of Scyld's funeral: "men ne cunnon … hwa þæm hlæste onfeng" (men do not know … who received that cargo; 50–52). Scyld may have founded a royal line, but the question of who inherited his wealth is pointedly left open for debate.

Read in this way, then it would seem that the poem's construction of heroism is directed towards the impossible task of imagining a mode of

39 On Grendel the "enemy in hell" in these lines and his connection to Cain see *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 121–23; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 64.

40 On Cain and the race of monsters see Ruth Mellinkoff's two-part article "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in *Beowulf*," in *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979): 143–62 and *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1980): 183–97.

41 On these funerals see Gail R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

gender-neutral virginity that may neither threaten nor be threatened by the dominant masculine symbolic order, and in particular its impossible mandate to procreate and pass power to one's descendants in the future. While it might be putting too fine a point on it, it is nonetheless the case that Grendel—whose descriptions, as we well know, slide back and forth between words meaning "monster" and words meaning "man"[42]—cannot be slain with a phallic sword, but is defeated only when Beowulf grips and constrains him.[43] Grendel's attempted *raptus* of Beowulf leads directly to his symbolic castration (enacted twice), just as surely as Holofernes's seduction of Judith led to his own, and just as surely as Roman pagan men suffer humiliation and death when they attempt to force themselves on holy virgins in the conventional hagiographic *passio*.

The great difference between Beowulf and the women in its hagiographic analogues is that his fight against Grendel is not the climax, but the introduction of his story. The heart of the poem is what happens next, in the series of digressions and adventures which model in different ways versions of the question: how does one live as a virtuous woman in the early medieval North Atlantic? As many have said, the secular women of the poem offer no helpful model along these lines: motherhood, wifehood, and even daughterly filial duty all lead only to suffering.[44] The alternatives to their subjected femininity presented by the poem are threefold: Grendel's mother, Hrothgar, and Beowulf himself. In the first instance, Grendel's mother confounds the symbolic order in the poem through her profoundly literal embodiment of the animal and biological condition of femininity and motherhood, through which her precise, measured vengeance for her son practices both the retributive justice of the masculine realm and the instinctive guardianship of the bear protecting her cubs.[45] Perhaps the radical suppression of Grendel's mother undertaken by the Danes and Geats, who ride out in full force against her as they never did against Grendel himself, serves to represent

42 Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Beowulf, Lines 702b–836: Transformations and the Limits of the Human," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 23, no. 4 (1981): 484–94. See most recently Adam Miyashiro, "Homeland Insecurity: Biopolitics and Sovereign Violence in Beowulf," *postmedieval* 11 (2020): 384–95.

43 For a study of binding in OE poetry and its relation to gender see Megan Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies*.

44 Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood,* 77–115; Hansen, "Women," 117; Schrader, *God's Handiwork,* 36; Baum, "The Beowulf Poet," 393.

45 On Grendel's mother as a bear protecting her cub see James Paz, *Nonhuman Voices in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Material Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2017), 34–58; Acker, "Horror"; Trilling, "Beyond Abjection."

the likely consequences that await women who exercise agency so unapologetically.[46] They are dehumanized, excluded from the system, and subjected to violence, and for these pragmatic reasons their efforts must be categorized as failures.

The second, similarly dissatisfying model is Hrothgar, who is the formal, rational alternative to the materiality and affect of Grendel's mother. Hrothgar may be feminized, as Stacy Klein has written, and he may advocate the feminine virtues of patience and humility, but he ultimately remains a husband and a father, and so he cannot serve in the final instance as a model for feminine political authority.[47] The impossible, quasi-monstrous figure for the ideal fusion of Grendel's mother and Hrothgar is Beowulf himself, who returns to the Geats a sexless synthesis of the two models. Moving beyond his success as a wrestler of demons, on the model of martyrs like Margaret and Juliana, Beowulf has been transformed by his journey into a confessor able to speak to masculine authority for the benefit of his community, and to keep his enemies at bay. He is gracious when Hygelac condescendingly questions his strength and intelligence; he sees the folly of Freawaru's marriage, and seems not to marry himself; and like so many women leaders of early medieval religious communities, his greatest failure is his inability to ensure that his community might thrive after his death without his great strength and reputation to protect it, as indeed the rich endowment he amasses to guarantee its stability and autonomy leads rather to its invasion and destruction—a sad conclusion whose particular consequences for women are emphasized at Beowulf's funeral by the mournful figure of the singing *Geatisc meowle* (Geatish woman; 3150).

Indeed, given that *Beowulf* is an elegiac and ambivalent poem about a vanished age, when communities under constant threat of invasion and war managed only imperfectly to keep those forces at bay, we may ask: what if the nostalgia for the nations of the Geats and Spear-Danes in the poem expressed a memory of the great female and dual religious houses of

46 On the suppression of Grendel's mother see Trilling, "Beyond Abjection"; Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 101–2, and "The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel's Mother," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 248–61; Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood*, 88–96; Mary Kay Temple, "*Beowulf* 1258–1266: Grendel's Lady-Mother," *English Language Notes* 23, no. 3 (1986): 10–15; Helen Damico, Beowulf*'s Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) 122; Christine Alfano, "The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity: A Reevaluation of Grendel's Mother," *Comitatus* 23, no. 1 (1992): 1–16.

47 Klein, *Ruling Women*, 87–123, esp. 111–13.

the early medieval period, that "golden age of female monasticism" before women's houses were threatened (and in many cases destroyed) in the invasions and raids of the ninth century?[48] Might not the mournful singing of the Geatish woman figure the mourning of widows whose desire to escape the humiliation and slavery of marriage was frustrated by their sense that in their own time, women's religious houses only rarely outlasted their founding royal patronesses?[49] Might this not explain why the horrors of marriage and secular life should be such a persistent theme in this poem's telling of the legend of Beowulf, whose half-pagan world of quasi-historical myth provided a relatively open conceptual space that enabled the poet to present not only the virtues a great abbess ought to have, but also the sorts of contradictions and failures that have always faced such women when they undertook the doomed, heroic, and (in the opinion of some) monstrous task of pushing back against the patriarchy?

Though it may seem as if I have phrased these questions rhetorically, they are in fact sincere. I acknowledge that my rapid survey of earlier scholarship and more-rapid summary of possible readings has surely ignored some obvious challenges and insufficiently addressed others, moved quickly through or completely ignored complex and nuanced debates, and committed many other sins against our basic methodologies. Nonetheless, I hope that I have sketched out a few helpful points for reviving an overdue conversation about the possible women's authorship and readership of the poem *Beowulf*. First, the many digressions in the poem's narrative concerning the lives of women suggest the presence of women in the audience, who would find such digressions pertinent to their own experiences. Second, we may identify Emma of Normandy as one potential audience member who would have found these digressions particularly pertinent to her own experience, though certainly any noblewoman of the period might relate to them. By the same token, women's religious houses are highly plausible venues for the scriptorium that produced the manuscript of *Beowulf*, especially given the theme of monstrous masculinity running through the manuscript's texts. Finally, the analogues to *Beowulf* among women saints' lives enable us to frame the poem as fundamentally concerned with the question of how to practice feminine, virginal virtue in a masculine world of patrilineal, territorial aggression, which framing is highly amenable to theories of women's

48 Dockray-Miller, *Motherhood*, 10. See also Foot, *Veiled Women*. On nostalgia in *Beowulf* see Susan M. Kim, "'As I Once Did with Grendel': Boasting and Nostalgia in Beowulf," *Modern Philology* 103, no. 1 (2005): 4–27.

49 On the ambiguity of this woman see Helen Bennett, "The Female Mourner at Beowulf's Funeral: Filling in the Blanks/Hearing the Spaces," *Exemplaria* 4, no. 1 (1992): 35–50.

authorship. It is my hope that whether or not these investigations lead to new insights and readings, the exploration itself will prove useful, both as a step towards a better understanding *Beowulf* and as a step towards our more pressing task of opening up our field to let new voices speak.

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