Medieval Disability Sourcebook

Western Europe

Edited by Cameron Hunt McNabb
MEDIEVAL DISABILITY SOURCEBOOK
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Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, Ship of Fools (1490–1500)
Medieval Disability Sourcebook
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Edited by Cameron Hunt McNabb
# Table of Contents

## Historical and Medical Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Cameron Hunt McNabb, Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Mental Competency Inquisitions from Medieval England (ca. late 12th c.–early 15th c.), contributed by Eliza Buhrer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Nuremberg Town Records: Select Entries Pertaining to the “Mad” and Intellectually Disabled (1377–1492), contributed by Anne M. Koenig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon (1389–1449), contributed by Anne Galanaud and Pierre Galanaud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Examining for Leprosy in the Fifteenth Century (ca. 1430–1500), contributed by Lucy Barnhouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Ortolf of Baierland, Arzneibuch, “On Madness” (ca. 1300), contributed by Anne M. Koenig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Religious Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (ca. 382), translated by St. Jerome, contributed by Will Eggers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives (ca. 550–13th c.), contributed by Brandon W. Hawk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Ælfric of Eynsham, Catholic Homilies 1.10 (ca. 989–ca. 992), contributed by Brandon W. Hawk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Augustine of Hippo, The City of God against the Pagans (413–26), contributed by Leah Pope Parker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>William of Canterbury, A Miracle of Thomas Becket: De püero syntectino (Concerning a boy suffering from a wasting disease) (1172–77), contributed by Rose A. Sawyer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Njáls Saga (13th c.), contributed by Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Thomas of Monmouth, The Life and Passion of William of Norwich (1152–70), contributed by Sarah Edwards Obenauf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181</td>
<td>Testimony from the Canonization Proceedings of Charles of Blois (1371), contributed by Leigh Ann Craig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Bernard Gui, On a Miracle of Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1325), contributed by Leigh Ann Craig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>Bede, The Prose Life of Cuthbert (ca. 721), contributed by Marit Ronen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>Bede, The Miracles of King Oswald from Ecclesiastical History (late 9th c.), contributed by Heide Estes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td>The Life of St. Margaret of Antioch (11th c.), contributed by Leah Pope Parker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>Life of Mary of Oegines (Oignies) (ca. 15th c.), contributed by Kisha G. Tracy and Alicia Protze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>233</td>
<td>Marie de France, Bisclavret (ca. 12th c.), contributed by Kisha G. Tracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>Alain Chartier, The Book of Hope (ca. 1429), contributed by Julie Singer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, The Merchant’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales (ca. 1387–1400), contributed by Moira Fitzgibbons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, The Man of Law’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales (ca. 1387–1400), contributed by Paul A. Broyles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, <em>The Wife of Bath’s Portrait, Prologue, and Tale</em></td>
<td>from <em>The Canterbury Tales</em> (ca. 1387–1400), contributed by Tory V. Pearman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>292</td>
<td>Dame Sirith (ca. 1272–82)</td>
<td>contributed by Danielle Allor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304</td>
<td>John Gower, <em>Tale of Constance</em> (1380–90)</td>
<td>contributed by Will Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>313</td>
<td>Thomas Hoccleve, <em>Complaint</em> (1419–21)</td>
<td>contributed by Will Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>327</td>
<td><em>The Book of Margery Kempe</em></td>
<td>(ca. 1450–1500), contributed by M.W. Bychowski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>341</td>
<td>Bede, <em>Menstruation, Infirmity, and Religious Observance</em></td>
<td>from <em>Ecclesiastical History</em> (late 9th c.), contributed by Heide Estes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>345</td>
<td>Bede, <em>Physical Disability, Muteness, Pregnancy, Possession,</em></td>
<td>and Alcoholism from <em>Ecclesiastical History</em> (ca. 731), contributed by Maura Bailey, Autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Battista, Ashley Corliss, Eammon Gosselin, Rebecca Laughlin, Sara</td>
<td>Moller, Shayne Simahk, Taylor Specker, Alyssa Stanton, Kellyn Welch, and Kisha G. Tracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365</td>
<td>Evadeam, <em>The Dwarf Knight</em></td>
<td>from the <em>Lancelot-Grail Cycle</em> (ca. 1220–30), contributed by Kara Larson Maloney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>379</td>
<td><em>Morkinskinna</em> (ca. 1220)</td>
<td>contributed by Ármann Jakobsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>393</td>
<td>Snorri Sturluson, <em>Olafs saga helga</em></td>
<td>from <em>Heimskringla</em> (ca. 1230), contributed by Ármann Jakobsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>411</td>
<td>Snorri Sturluson, <em>The Prose Edda</em></td>
<td>(ca. 1220–40), contributed by Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>419</td>
<td><em>The Cure of the Blind Man</em></td>
<td>from the <em>Chester Cycle</em> (ca. 1531–75), contributed by Kurt Schreyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>428</td>
<td><em>Christ and the Leper</em></td>
<td>from the <em>Chester Cycle</em> (ca. 1531–75), contributed by Kurt Schreyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>434</td>
<td><em>The Entry into Jerusalem</em></td>
<td>from the <em>York Cycle</em> (ca. 1377), contributed by Frank M. Napolitano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>448</td>
<td><em>The Nativity</em> from the <em>N-Town Plays</em></td>
<td>(ca. 1460–1520), contributed by Jeffery G. Stoyanoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td><em>Croxton Play of the Sacrament</em></td>
<td>(ca. 1461–1546), contributed by Cameron Hunt McNabb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Images**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>473</td>
<td><em>The Smithfield Decretals</em></td>
<td>(ca. 1300–1340), contributed by Rachael Gillibrand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>Visible and Invisible Impairments in <em>Images of Medieval Musicians,</em></td>
<td>contributed by Karen M. Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>487</td>
<td>Thematic Table of Contents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>490</td>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Drama**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>419</td>
<td><em>The Cure of the Blind Man</em></td>
<td>from the <em>Chester Cycle</em> (ca. 1531–75), contributed by Kurt Schreyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>428</td>
<td><em>Christ and the Leper</em></td>
<td>from the <em>Chester Cycle</em> (ca. 1531–75), contributed by Kurt Schreyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To tweak the old adage, many hands make quality work. The collaborative nature of this project means that many, many hands had a part in it, and I am thankful for each of them. These hands include the early visionaries of the Society for the Study of Disability in the Middle Ages (SSDMA), who saw the need for such a volume; the contributors, who worked hard to meet the project’s goals and specifications; the copy editors, whose hands have shaped countless details; the publisher, who has graciously supported the volume; and all those who have contributed feedback and encouragement along the way.

The idea for a sourcebook on medieval disability was first conceived back in 2012 by the members of SSDMA. The concept was originally Moira Fitzgibbons’s, and those members first involved were Jonathan Hsy, Wendy Turner, John Sexton, Joshua R. Eyler, Tory V. Pearman, Will Eggers, Julie Singer, and others. I am grateful for their vision for moving medieval disability studies forward and making it more accessible to students. I inherited not just their vision but their ideas and even sample entries when I took over as General Editor. Without these foundational documents, the project would not be what it is today.

This volume boasts forty contributors, myself excluded, and each has worked diligently to make their texts as engaging and accessible to the readers as possible. The contributors hail from numerous disciplines (as well as half a dozen countries and as many languages), and has brought different perspectives and expertise to their entries. They truly were a pleasure to work with.

I am also grateful to the copy-editing skills of Anna Yates and Emma E. Duncan, whose diligence and attention to detail is to be commended.

Many heartfelt thanks must be extended, too, to Eileen Joy and punctum books for their support of the project and open access materials in general. Also, my gratitude to the initial anonymous reader, whose feedback guided the later stages of the project.

This project was several years in the making, and some wonderful colleagues have been with me through the entire journey: a tremendous round of thanks to Frank Napolitano, Kisha Tracy, Will Eggers, John Sexton, Andrew Pfrenger, Paul T. Corrigan, and Charles J. Hulin IV. I am also grateful to Dr. William Hackett, Provost of Southeastern University, who granted me release time to devote to the volume.

Lastly, I owe more thanks than I can give to Joshua R. Eyler, who not only took a chance on me and trusted me with this project but who has stood by me every step of the way. His advice, feedback, encouragement, and support have been paramount in bringing this project to fruition.
Introduction

The medieval biblical play “The Cure of the Blind Man” stages the popular healing of the blind man episode from John 9. In the biblical telling, the disciples ask Jesus, “who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?” Jesus replies, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” This short passage illustrates common misconceptions about disability—namely that it results from sin and needs remedy—but also upends them by calling disability a redeeming “work of God.” Yet, even while seeking to redeem disability, the passage ignores the difficulties that people with some disabilities experience and ascribes the source of the impairment to God rather than to the dynamic physical, mental, and social impairments and constructs that shape what we call “disability.” Neither of the passage’s interpretations of the man’s blindness capture the complex and nuanced category disability represents.

In contrast, “The Cure of the Blind Man” play digs deeper in unpacking disability by informing the audience that the blind man “is your owne neighbour and of your owne kind” (l. 39). Instead of emphasizing either the disciples’ misconceptions or Jesus’ words of redemption, the play focuses on disability as part of our humanity, part of our neighbors’ and our own kind. Although how people interpret and ascribe meaning to disability changes across time and cultures, disability is a universal human experience. It is the condition of our historical neighbors. And of ourselves.

In the Book of John and in the biblical play, the blind man narrates his own story of his healing and interprets it for himself and the Pharisees who question him. But the biblical play also asks the disciples, and by extension the audience, to listen, interpret, and ultimately “remember” (l. 37) the blind man. For figures marginalized by bodily, social, and mental difference, medieval disability studies seeks to do precisely that, and this volume provides a starting point to do so.

Medieval Disability Studies

Medieval texts and Medieval Studies have garnered increased attention recently, partly motivated by medieval-adjacent popular media, like Lord of the Rings and Game of Thrones, and partly by appropriations of the field by modern movements, including white nationalism. But these representations of the period—and the assumptions they generate—drastically oversimplify the complex and varied Middle Ages. In fact, as medieval scholars often point out, using the definite article “the” to describe the Middle Ages fails to capture the period’s diversity, as if we can make any definitive statements about a term that spans almost a thousand years.

Disability studies, too, is burgeoning, moving perhaps from infancy to adolescence as a field. It began as a modern social justice movement advocating for those with disabilities, but scholars have expanded its inquiries to history and literature. The term “disability” presents complexities similar to “the Middle Ages,” including under its umbrella disabilities marked as physical, emotional, and mental; chronic and acute; visible and invisible. There is no singular understanding
or experience of “disability,” nor a definitive representation of it. This volume provides a more nuanced, but certainly not exhaustive, look.

In short, there is no single concept of “medieval disability,” nor a single response to the empirical existence of disability within the period. The sources collected here serve as testaments to the complex and wide-reaching realm of disability in medieval Western Europe. Ultimately, it is up to readers to listen, interpret, and remember what they encounter.

Key Terms and Concepts

Although medieval languages have many terms for specific impairments, most work on medieval disability studies opens with an acknowledgment that the period did not have the term disability nor even a comparable term in Latin or the extant vernacular languages. The term disability, like the terms race, gender, and sexuality, is a modern construct that we use to talk about the texts of the past. However, the absence of a term does not mean the absence of a concept, and while we should use our modern terms conscientiously and cautiously, we can use and benefit from them nonetheless.

Medieval scholar Tory V. Pearman notes that modern discussions of medieval disability have sometimes congregated around “a monolithic view of the Middle Ages as intolerant” or “an equally monolithic view that borders on nostalgic.” However, as Irina Metzler demonstrates in her highly influential Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400, disability was pervasive in the period and attitudes toward it ranged from “intolerant” and associated with sin to ameliorate and apologetic, as seen in the perspectives in “The Cure of the Blind Man.” As Metzler notes, “no discussion of medieval bodies could be complete without reference to sin,” and the relationship between sin and disability is crucial in the period. The treatment of disability in medieval Europe is heavily linked to the Christus medicus (“Christ the Physician”) tradition, which positioned all disease as a manifestation of sin, for which Christ’s redemption was the cure. However, Metzler examines both Old and New Testament treatments of impairment, including the John 9 passage discussed above, and notes they are “not of a uniformed nature”: “Some Old Testament references link sin and physical ‘blemishes,’ one very specific occupation (the priesthood) is barred to some impaired people, and some instances of impairment are mentioned without any qualifying moral overtones. In the New Testament, on the whole, the emphasis is on healing, and, with two exceptions, the spiritual condition of the healed person is not of importance. Faith of the supplicant is of far greater consequence for a successful healing than their sin.” Metzler’s work emphasizes the spectrum of interpretations on disability found in medieval Europe.

The texts in this volume span that spectrum, with significant range and conflict often existing within a single text. For instance, the miracle accounts included in this volume rely on a framework that presents disability as something that needs to be cured (by the saint or shrine in question), but the very saint responsible for the miracles can often do so only because of his or her own disability, itself interpreted as a sign of holiness. Further, the miracles’ narratives simultaneously—and perhaps inadvertently—testify to the community’s aid and support for individuals with disabilities, all while attempting to solidify the Church’s monopoly on cures.

The critical lens of disability studies evokes a number of helpful terms for readers to use while wrestling with these sources. At some points, the European Middle Ages are particularly conducive to the lines of inquiry already established by the field, but in other cases, these theoretical tools need to be adapted in order to accommodate this period and these cultures. I discuss some of the field’s major terms and concepts below and
explore ways in which they can—or cannot—be applied to the sources in this volume.

One of the earliest approaches to disability, termed the medical model, attempts to diagnose and cure impairments. Predicated on disability as bodily or mental difference that is considered “abnormal” and in need of “repair,” such a model always presents those with disabilities as deviant and subordinate, with medicine as the “fix” needed to “correct” the impairment. Medieval scholar Edward Wheatley expands and adapts this framework to discuss how the European Middle Ages has a similar religious model, because “the church's control over discourse related to disability [is] in a manner analogous to the way modern medicine attempts to maintain control over it now.” He cites the pervasive role of the Bible and religious literature in shaping the medieval West’s views on disability. By investigating the Church’s control over miraculous “cures,” the practice of confession, almsgiving and charity, and the Eucharist, Wheatley’s model examines how the Church controlled the bodies of those with impairments and framed the culture's interpretation of disabilities. The religious orientation of numerous texts in this volume demonstrates Wheatley’s theory well, while other entries provide nuance and even resistance to his claims.

Other scholars have explored disability as a social rather than medical phenomenon. The social model first argued for the distinction between the terms impairment and disability. Within disability studies, “impairment” is often used to describe mental or physical functions that impair the daily lives of the individuals who have them. For instance, blindness, deafness, and mobility restriction are impairments. In contrast, “disability” is often defined as a cultural or social construct that limits an individual’s access due to impairment. In the cases listed above, an environment that lacks braille, close-captioning or sign language interpreters, and elevators (just to name a few accommodations) would cast those impairments as disabilities. According to the social model, as expressed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, “it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society.” The texts in this volume document both the impairments of medieval people as well as the ways in which those impairments became or did not become disabilities.

While the social model's terms “impairment” and “disability” are helpful in teasing out some of disability studies’ distinctions and subtleties, Joshua R. Eyler notes, “the [social] model forces the binary opposition of ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’ in ways that at times seem rather misleading.” Eyler prefers the cultural model, proposed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, which argues that “[e]nvironment and bodily variation (particularly those traits experienced as socially stigmatized differences) inevitably impinge upon each other.” Tom Shakespeare’s critical realist model is similar in its emphasis on disability as “the whole interplay of different factors that make up the experience of people with impairments,” including “the independent existence of bodies which sometimes hurt, regardless of what we may think or say about those bodies.” Shakespeare's model provides a framework for analyzing the disciples’ and Jesus’ interpretations of the man’s blindness in John 9: the disciples stigmatize blindness by associating it with sin, while Jesus’ response overlooks the blind man's physical experiences resulting from his impairment.

Shakespeare complicates his own model to include a concept of universal impairment, noting that “impairment is a universal phenomenon, in the sense that every human has limitations and vulnerabilities, and ultimately is mortal” or, in the words of “The Cure of the Blind Man,” disability is our “owne neighbour and of [our] owne kind” (l. 39). Advocating the understanding that all humans will experience impairment at one
time or another is useful in demonstrating disability’s ubiquity, but it also underscores the wide-ranging, varied, and difficult to define spectrum the term encompasses. I have argued elsewhere that universal impairment is crucial for the medieval West’s Christian framework: if impairment is (sometimes) caused by sin, and according to the doctrine of original sin, all are sinners, then all are also impaired. The concept of universal impairment, in “The Cure of the Blind Man” or in Tom Shakespeare’s work, can and should be an avenue of empathy for all our neighbors.

These various disability models have in turn fostered discussion about what language is appropriate for talking about persons with disabilities. Different groups and even individuals within those groups have explored what language best captures their experiences with physical, emotional, or mental disability. Two main lines of thought—and thus language—have emerged from these discussions. The first employs person-first language, which refers to individuals with disabilities as people first and “with disabilities” second, such as a “person in a wheelchair” or a “person with dementia.” This type of language foregrounds commonality (we are all people) and only qualifies that commonality based on disability as a secondary consideration. Person-first language has been employed throughout this entire introduction thus far, and it is the preferred, but not the only, language of the volume.

However, some people with disabilities find that their disability is integral to their identity, not secondary to it. They feel they are not a person first and a disability second but rather the disability so constitutes part of their being that the two cannot be separated. In these cases, people prefer identity-first language, which, as the term suggests, foregrounds a specific social, physical, or religious characteristic that a person presents as an essential component of personhood. This type of language is common in other descriptors—one usually identifies as “Muslim,” “female,” or “African American,” rather than a “person of Islam,” “person who is female,” or a “person who is African American.” Identity-first language is more common in some disability groups than others, and within some communities, preference is split.

With either approach, the important point to note is who is wielding the language about whom. Ultimately, whatever term or identity an individual prefers is what others should use to refer to that individual. Unfortunately, in the medieval texts that follow, the voices of those with disabilities are often silenced, by the authors and recorders of the texts; by the social restrictions of the disabilities themselves; and by their distance from us in time, space, and language. In some instances in this volume, people with disabilities speak for themselves, such as in Margery’s Book or Hoccleve’s Complaint, but in most cases, they are spoken about by others. Readers must be critically aware of the voices that shape their stories, particularly when those voices are not their own.

Another crucial concept in disability studies is the idea of the normate body. Rosemarie Garland Thomson coins this term in her work Extraordinary Bodies to refer to the “normal” body from which all “disabled” bodies deviate: “Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them.” Mitchell and Snyder extend this concept and argue that “[a] normal body...is a theoretical premise from which all bodies must, by definition, fall short...a body divorced of time and space.” The fiction of the normate becomes apparent when certain questions are raised: What height is the normate body? How much does it weigh? How well can it see and hear? In medieval Western Europe, the religious culture once again brought these questions to bear through the lens of Christianity. I have argued elsewhere that for the Christian medieval, Christ is the normate body, although it is unclear precisely what that body is like. Augustine posits that each individual’s resur-
rected body will be perfected, although he admits that he is also unclear on what that might mean. In both constructs, however, the normate body (either Christ’s or the resurrected body) is defined by its lack of sin, a connection that is, as Wheatley, Metzler, and others suggest, problematic.

Disability studies’ roots in activism can be seen in the concepts and approaches outlined above, but theorists have also extended its tenets to history and literature. Two central terms, coined by Mitchell and Snyder, analyze disability’s role in narrative texts: *narrative prosthesis* and the *materiality of metaphor*. They argue that “disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization, and second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device.” Their concept of narrative prosthesis refers to this “stock feature” of characterization or plot in order to signal a conflict or difference that is ultimately cured or resolved. Thus disability serves as a prosthesis for characterization and plot and fails to be authentically represented in the narrative. Similarly, Mitchell and Snyder point out the frequency with which disability is used as an “opportunistic metaphorical device,” an observation crucial to understanding Christian culture in the Middle Ages, which frequently deployed biblical metaphors about blindness, deafness, and lameness, such as in the tales of Constance and Aelfric’s sermon. Mitchell and Snyder’s frameworks call on us to distinguish between exploited uses of disability and authentic representations of lived experiences in the narratives we encounter.

**Intersections at the Margins**

If disability is part of the universal human experience, then it is not surprising that disability studies intersects with other avenues of inquiry both within the period and now. Far from being a niche field, its project of listening, interpreting, and remembering those in the margins is wide-reaching. Mitchell and Snyder recount that their interest in how “disability fit on the map of marginality and identity” began when they considered how disability marks bodies as Other, just as race, gender, and sexuality do. For medieval people, disability was connected to issues of the Self and the Other, and often persons with disabilities were also members of marginalized gender, racial, or economic groups. While some medieval persons with disabilities also appear in the dominant majority, such as Hoccleve, and some do not experience marginalization but rather veneration, such as in many saints’ lives, many are Othered on multiple fronts, such as the Jews in the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* or the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales*. These figures demonstrate how disability contributes to a variety of intersectional identities in the period.

The social, cultural, and critical realist models described above also have much in common with other critical fields, making interdisciplinary intersections fruitful. In particular, drawing on Women’s and Gender Studies, Pearman has developed a *gendered model* to medieval disability in Western Europe. She argues that “[w]hen biblical, medical, and literary representations of the female body merge with the Aristotelian construction of the female body as a deformed male body, a web of Otherness begins to surface, demonstrating the intricate bonds between discursive notions of embodied identity categories.” This “web of Otherness” pervades the texts in this volume: when the person with a disability is female, such as Chaucer’s Wife of Bath or Dame Sirith, the gendered model reminds us that these figures are doubly disabled and doubly marginalized.

More fundamentally, discussions of disability in the European Middle Ages asked what it means to be human. As discussed above, rather than viewing disability as an identity marker for those with specific physical, mental, or emotional impairments, the concept of universal disability calls for disability to be seen as an aspect of everyone’s identity. Texts in the period intrinsically interrogate not only what is the normate self...
but what is the human self. In the physical
sense, some sources connect persons with dis-
abilities to non-human entities, like change-
lings in The Man of Law’s Tale and A Miracle of
Thomas Becket, fairies in Evadear, or animal
images in Bisclayt. In a spiritual sense, saints
with disabled bodies, like St. Margaret and
St. Cuthbert, seem to transcend the tradi-
tional bounds of humanity and border on the
divine. These associations—both positive and
negative—demonstrate an uneasiness about
what constitutes a human body and more
importantly what it means to be human. Dis-
ability and disability studies provide spaces
for texts and readers to explore with these
issues.

The Medieval Disability Sourcebook:
Western Europe

As far back as 2012, the Society for the Study
of Disability in the Middle Ages (SSDMA)
desired to create a sourcebook of medieval
texts that deal with disability for use in the
classroom. At that time, medieval disability
studies was a relatively small field and its
scholarship was mostly limited to academic
conferences and university presses. The SS-
DMA felt it imperative the field be explored
in classrooms and be accessible to students.

Such a desire for accessibility, a central
tenet in disability studies itself, has guided
all of the major decisions of this project.
The press, punctum books, was chosen for
its support for burgeoning, interdisciplinary
scholarship and its open access model. Most
of the texts presented here were taken from
the public domain, which means that they
are older editions but are free from copy-
right, making the sourcebook affordable for
students.

The texts have been translated from or
edited in their original languages in order
to be accessible to a modern English-speak-
ing audience. These considerations, though,
have yielded a collection of texts that rep-
resent Western Europe, only a narrow slice
of a global Middle Ages. They are bounded
by a specific geography and time period and
most are marked by the period’s and culture’s
engagement with Christianity. Likewise, the
disability theories used to explore them are
rooted in the Western tradition. Therefore,
although this volume provides a nuanced
look at disability the period, it is by no means
representative or exhaustive. Moreover, while
these texts may provide a starting point for
thinking about disability and the medieval
West’s global neighbors, those traditions
deserve their own volumes for us to listen,
interpret, and remember. We hope that this
volume will be just one of many and that
more diverse sourcebooks on disability will
be forthcoming.

The volume’s contents have been organ-
ized by genre, beginning with historical
and medical documents that provide crucial
insights into how physicians, politicians,
judges, and citizens viewed a variety of im-
pairments. The second section focuses on
religious texts, including relevant biblical
passages, commentaries, miracle accounts,
and saints’ lives, to explore Christianity’s en-
gagement with disability in medieval Europe.
The next three sections, on poetry, prose, and
drama, survey the literary texts of the pe-
riod. Many of the texts included are staples
of medieval British literature courses, such as
selections from Bede’s Ecclesiastical History,
Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales, and The Book
of Margery Kempe, but many are texts less of-
ten translated and taught in the classroom,
bringing less recognized voices alongside
more canonical ones. The concluding sec-
tion examines visual depictions of disability
in medieval Europe, opening up fields of in-
quiry beyond the written word. Each entry
includes an introduction and bibliography,
as well as textual notes and glosses, in or-
der to highlight disability issues within the
text and serve as springboards for students’
or scholars’ inquiry deeper into the field. All
of these factors are designed to encourage as
many people as possible, inside and outside
the classroom, to participate in medieval dis-
ability studies.
Ultimately, I hope that this volume invites readers to listen to, interpret, and remember the voices and experiences of our historical neighbors; and I hope that participating in such a project of empathy means extending the same to our contemporary neighbors and to our own selves.

**Bibliography**


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Endnotes

1 Tory Vandeventer Pearman, Women and Disability in Medieval Literature (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 5.
2 Irina Metzler, Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400 (Routledge, 2006), p. 38.
3 Ibid., p. 42.
4 Ibid., pp. 42–43.
7 Joshua R. Eyler, ed., Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations (Ashgate, 2010), p. 5.
10 Ibid., p. 73.
11 One reading of the passage might argue that Jesus’ healing of the blind man constitutes attention to and concern for his physical experiences, even as he valorizes those experiences as the “work of God.”
12 Shakespeare, Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited, p. 87.
14 In speaking generally of people with disabilities, the volume will use person-first language. However, when speaking of specific groups or sometimes of a medieval source’s discussion of a specific group, identity-first language may be employed. Discretion was given to contributors in the case of the latter.
16 Mitchell and Snyder, Cultural Locations of Disability, p. 7.
17 McNabb, “Staging Disability in Medieval Drama.”
19 Mitchell and Snyder, Cultural Locations of Disability, p. x.
20 Pearman, Women and Disability in Medieval Literature, p. 5.
HISTORICAL & MEDICAL DOCUMENTS
Introduction

The episcopal court case of Redyng contra Boton offers a rare opportunity to explore issues of mental disability in a low-status person. Records of the lowest social classes rarely survive, since they had little money or status to be considered worth the parchment. Unlike many higher-status people deemed mentally incompetent, William de Bridsall, a crucial witness in Redyng c. Boton, had no inheritance or possessions to be held in trust, and seemed to be of no profit to the crown or any other.

In July 1366, Alice Redyng of the village of Scameston appeared in the consistory court of York to claim that John Boton, a chapman of Scameston, was her husband. John denied the charge. During July 28–29, Alice submitted the reasons for her claim and produced two eyewitnesses to testify on her behalf, including a local beggar named William de Bridsall, who claimed to have overheard the marriage contract in dispute.

Redyng c. Boton took place under very specific conditions. The documents which survive must be examined in the light of their context: a marriage litigation which followed a pre-set procedure and progressed according to the rules laid down by long-distant canonists. Telling a story from this type of material is difficult, says Charles Donahue: “The litigation context distorts the story, particularly if one is trying to tell a story of what happened, as opposed to the story of what happened in the litigation” (Law, Marriage, and Society, 63; emphasis mine).

According to the canonists, a marriage could be contracted by any man and woman where there was no impediment simply by an exchange of words of consent. The words could either be of present consent (e.g., “I take you as my husband/wife”) or of future consent (e.g., “I will take you as my husband/wife”). Words of future consent were not binding, unless they were followed by sexual intercourse, which was then treated as implicit present consent. There was no requirement for a formal ceremony or witnesses: the exchange of words of consent was considered to be the sacrament itself. While the Church urged that a marriage be initiated with the publication of the banns and solemnized in facie ecclesiae and required this solemnization for a marriage to be canonically licit, it admitted the validity of any marriage formed by words of present consent or words of future consent followed by sexual intercourse. It was common in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and into the fifteenth century for parties to contract a marriage outside the formal process the Church prescribed.

In Redyng c. Boton, Alice claimed that they had contracted both with words of present consent and, separately, words of future consent followed by sexual intercourse. Either one of these situations alone created a canonically valid marriage; had their contract been made in front of a large crowd—or better yet—in a church, Alice would never have had to bring her cause to court.

Unfortunately, the alleged contract between Alice and John was made informally and in private, what the Church referred to as “clandestine.” Clandestine marriages could be, and were, contracted almost anywhere: Richard Helmholz notes marriages contracted “under an ash tree, in a bed,…in a blacksmith’s shop, near a hedge, in a kitchen, by an oak tree, at a tavern.” Alice and John allegedly exchanged their vows outside the
sheepfold. Although canonically valid, trouble arose when John denied they had happened. Canon law demanded a minimum of two eyewitnesses to a contract, and without them, no matter how obvious the existence of a contract, the court could not decide in favor of the plaintiff. Alice produced for the court two eyewitnesses to the alleged contract. Alice’s case was extremely weak; she had only the bare minimum for proof in the ecclesiastical courts, and both of the men were only accidental witnesses to the contract, having overheard it without the knowledge of Alice or John at the time.

Any marriage litigation followed the same basic process, which might be adapted slightly to fit the particular circumstances of a given cause. A marriage cause was properly begun with the publication of the libel, or what the plaintiff sought of the court and why. The defendant was then offered the opportunity to submit exceptions, or a response to the libel. The plaintiff then submitted articles, specific arguments which outlined what they intended to prove, and how. After the articles were published, the defendant submitted interrogatories, questions they wished the Official to put to the witnesses being questioned. The goal of the interrogatories was to uncover any inconsistencies or disagreements in the witnesses’ testimonies. The articles and interrogatories were put to the witnesses, who would be questioned individually by the Official of the court. The record of their testimonies, the depositions, were then published openly in the court.

The defendant, John Boton, would present as many arguments as he was able, whether or not they contradicted each other. In Redyng c. Boton, John’s arguments why he could not be married to Alice had two focuses: he argued that Alice was of servile condition and could not contract a marriage, and that her two critical witnesses were unreliable and thus their testimony could not be trusted. Of relevance to this volume, he argued that William de Bridsall, who testified that he overheard Alice and John contract marriage, was a notorious drunk, a beggar, and a stultus (“fool”), and easily corrupted into presenting false testimony. William’s testimony was crucial to Alice’s cause, and so a significant proportion of the proceedings came to revolve around William’s capacity and reliability as a witness.

Redyng c. Boton cannot be read as a straightforward account of the dispute in question, let alone the question of William de Bridsall’s mental capacity. On the question of witness reliability, it is difficult to say for sure that someone is lying. Mental capacity and impairment exist along a spectrum, such that it is possible for William de Bridsall to be mentally impaired in some way while still being perfectly competent to depose. The motivations for both parties to sway the Official are clear, particularly given that Alice had only the minimum number of eyewitnesses to make her case.

Interpreting the texts is likewise complicated by the process by which depositions were received and recorded. They are not at all comparable to modern court transcriptions. The Official recording the witnesses’ testimony did not write down what was said verbatim. It was his job to pick out and record the essential information in what the witness said. Thus we have no way of determining the level of importance which the actual witness might have placed on any aspect of his own testimony.

As legal documents, depositions were recorded in Latin, but the witnesses themselves would have been speaking a local dialect of Middle English. In particular, any of the language regarding William de Bridsall’s mental capacity is highly formulaic. In this edition, I have opted to leave the phrases used to describe mental impairment in Latin rather than speculating what might be equivalent phrasing in modern English because they hold procedural significance. The scribe who recorded the depositions used words and phrases that were semantically significant, as a key issue in Redyng c. Boton was William de Bridsall’s capacity to testify.
Bibliography


Membrane 15 recto
Libel
July 21, 1366
In dei nomine amen. Petit Alicia Redyng de Scameston Johannem Boton Chapman de Scameston pro eo quod iidem Johannes et Alicia matrimonium per verba mutuum consensum exprimentia de presenti ac sponsalia per verba de future carnali copula inter eosdem postmodum subsecta adiunctum libere contraxerunt. Quos quidem contractus matrimonialis et sponsalia ac copulam carna-lem dictus Johannes in presentia dicte Alicie et aliorum fidedignorum sponte sepius et ex certa sciencia est confessus, super quibus in diocese Ebor, ac in villa de Scameston et locis vicinis, laboravit et adhuc laborat publica vox et fama. Per vos dominus Iudex dicta Alicia in virum suum legitimum ad eadem Aliciam in uxorem suam legitime adiudicari dictum quare Johannem ad solempnizandum matrimonium in facie ecclesie ut mores est cum eadem canonice compelli et coherceri ulterior quod sit in premissis et ea contingit in omnibus quod est iustum. Hoc dicit et petit ac probare intendit dicta Alicia coniunctim et diversim [...]

Membrane 10 recto
Exceptions contra Alice Redyng
September 30, 1366
In deo nomine amen. Coram vobis domino officere curia Ebor vestro vel commissare generali excipiendo dicit et in iure proponit procurator Johannis Boton nomine procuratore pro eodem contra Alicia Redyng et contra quemlibet pro eadem in iudicio libere comparentem necon contra intentionem dicte Alicie in quadem causa quam movet contra dictem Johannem petendo eum in virum suum. Quod si dictus Johannis Boton in festo natalis domini vel matrimonium vel sponsalia cum dicta Alicie contraxerat quod dictus procurator non fatetur sed totaliter differe tur non est tum dem Johannes ad solempn-
zandum matrimonium cum eadem quomodolibet compellendus pro eo et ex eo quod dicta Alicia fuit a tempore natalitatis sue et adhuc est serva seu ancilla et servilis conditionis et pro tali ad presentem publice habita et reputata at ex servilis et ancillis domini de Latymer et progenitorum suorum procreata concepta et nata et educata. Idenque Johannis liber et ingenuus notorie* existens igno-

*rans dicte Alicie conditionem servulem sibi in copula carnali adherit, nec a tempore quo de conditione sue extitit cretoratus nec ante nec post factum vel verbo ad habendum ipsam Alicia in uxorem suam consensit sed dissensit et reclamavit tam tacite quam expresse, dissentit et clamatur in presenti. Que sunt publica notoria et manifesta in dio-

cese Ebor et locis vicinis. At super hiis ibidem laboravit et laborat publica vox et fama. […]

Hic dicit, allegat, proponit, et petit ac pro-
bare indendit dictus procurator nomine quo supra coniunctim et diversim iure beneficio in omnibus sibi salvo.

Membrane 14, recto and verso
Articles pro Alice
July 28, 1366

In dei nomine amen. Positiones et articu-

los infrascriptos et contenta in eisdem facit et dat ac probare intendit coniunctim et divi-
sim procuratore Alicie Redyng de Scameston nomine procuratore pro eadem contra Johan-
nem Boton de Scameston Chapman in cau-
sa matrimoniale inter dictas partes in curia Ebor mota et pendente. Et si que positiones sint multiplices eas ponit divisim et sic petit easdem responderi.

In primis ponit et probare intendit dictus procuratore nomine quo supra quod dictus Johannes in die natalis domini ulteriorius pre-
teriti a quocumque contractu matrimoniali seu sponsalitio cum aliqua muliere fuit penitus et solutus.

Item ponit et probare intendit quod post dictum diem natalis domini tractatus habe-

compelled to solemnisation of matrimony of any sort with her, for and from the fact that the said Alice was from the time of her birth and still is a servant or maidservant and of servile condition. And from such time to the present she is publicly held and reputed to be begotten, conceived, born, and raised from a servant and maidservant of the Lord Latymer and of their forebears. And the same John, free and free-born, notoriously being ignor-

ant of the servile condition of the said Alice, adhered to her in carnal knowledge. Not at the time in which she existed in that condi-
tion (being descended from it), nor before nor after, in deed or word, did he consent to having that Alice as his wife, but he disagreed and protested, tacitly and expressly, and he dissents and protests in the present. Whereby the notorious facts are public and manifest in the diocese of York and nearby places. On these facts again the public voice and fame laboured and still labours. […] The said procur-

ator named above says, alleges, proposes, and seeks and intends to prove this together and separately, always to the sound benefit of the court in all things.

Membrane 14, recto and verso
Articles pro Alice
July 28, 1366

In the name of God, amen. The procura-
tor named as procurator of Alice Redyng of Scameston gives and intends to prove, collect-
ively and singly, the positions and below-
written articles for her against John Boton, Chapman of Scameston, in the matrimonial cause moved and pending in the York Curia between the said parties. And although these positions are multiple, he lays them out singly, and he requests they be responded to thus.

In the first, the said proctor named above sets forth and intends to prove that the said John, on Christmas last, was completely free from any matrimonial or spousal contract with another free woman.

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that after the said Christmas day a
batur inter dictos Johannem et Aliciam de matrimonio inter eosdem contraehendo. Item ponit at probare intendit quod dictus Johannes promisit prefate Alicie quod ipsam in uxorem suam duceret et heret. Et quod dixit idem Johannes prefate Alicie quod ipsam habere voluit in uxorem et eam postmodum carnaliter cognovit.

Item ponit at probare intendit quod dictus Johannes et Alicia sponsalia per verba de future carnali copula inter eos postmodum subsequta ac matrimonium per verba mutuum consensum exprimientia de presenti adiunctem libere contraxerunt.

Item ponit et probare intendit quod dictus Johannes dicit contractum sponsaliam matrimoniale et carnalem copulam ut [premittitur] subsequatur in presentia dicte Alice et aliorum fideiligiorum sponte sepius et ex certa scientia est confessus.

Item ponit et probare intendit quod premissa sunt publica nota et manifesta in villa de Scameston diocese Ebor et locis vicinis ac super ibidem laboravit et adhuc laborat publica vox et fama.

Membrane 13 recto
Interrogatories pro John
Undated

Interrogentur testes omnes et singuli ex parte Alicie de Redyng de Scameston contra Johannem Boton de Scameston Chapman producti et producendi de causa sua cuiuslibet dicti sui.

Item si deponant quod dictus Johannes promisit dicte Alicie quod ipsam duceret in uxorem seu quod matrimonium vel sponsaliam contraxerat cum eadem vel quod huius contractum matrimoniale et sponsalia untereos contractum est, confessus contractum tunc ubi, quo loco, quibus, et quos presens tibi, quo anno, quo mense, quo die, qua hora contract concerning matrimony was had between the said John and Alice to be entered into by the same. Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that the said John promised the aforesaid Alice that he would take her and cling to her as his wife. And that the same John told the aforesaid Alice that he wished to have her to wife and that he knew her carnally afterwards.

Likewise he puts forth and intends to prove that the said John and Alice freely contracted a betrothal through words of future consent with carnal joining between them afterward, and matrimony through words of mutual present consent expressing their joining.

Likewise he puts forth and intends to prove that the said John spoke of the betrothal and marriage contract and carnal joining, as said below, in the presence of the said Alice and other worthies very often of his own free will, and from this certain knowledge it was confessed.

Likewise he puts forth and intends to prove that the premises are publicly known and manifest in the village of Scameston in the diocese of York and in nearby places and upon the same the public voice and fame laboured and still labours.

testes omnes et singuli to evaluate their truthfulness by comparing details
Membrane 12 recto
Depositions pro Alice
July 28–29, 1366

Walter Warner de Scameston etatis xliii annos et amplius iure extra et super articulis et interrogetur pendenti bus extra dicit quod novit partes inter quas agitur per septimos annos proxima preteritis. Et dicit super primo et secundo articulis dicit quod secundum communem famam in parochia de Ryllington et Winteringham dicti articuli continent veritatem. Et dicit super tertio et quarto articulis quod a feste nativitatis domini ulterioribus preteritis videlicet a die sancti Johannis Evangelistæ quod die videlicet post horam nonam° ipsius diei prefati, et Aliciae matrimonii prout iste iure didicit ex relato illorum in which hour of the day, and whether once or repeated, and to them in which form of words was the contract or confession of this made, and whether in an agreeable spirit the aforesaid betrothal or matrimonial words were said.

Likewise let the witnesses, together and individually, be interrogated as to how much they have in goods and whether they are secured by consanguinity, affinity, or familiarity of the said Alice, and which party they wish to obtain victory in the cause and whether they are suborned, informed, or instructed, or influenced or corrupted by prayer or by gift to testify on the part of the said Alice against the aforesaid John in the aforesaid cause.

Likewise let William de Bridsall be interrogated as to what his condition and status may be and whether he was or is accustomed to beg for his bread by wandering house to house.

Likewise let each and all witnesses be interrogated as to the source of their said knowledge and on other circumstances from which their spirit of judgement be able or ought to be moved.

Membrane 12 recto
Depositions pro Alice
July 28–29, 1366

Walter Warner of Scameston, aged 43 years and more, a supplementary witness. Questioned about the pending articles [anno] he says that he knows the parties between whom this is conducted for the last seven years. And he says on the first and second articles that according to common fame in the parish of Rillynton and Winteringham, the said articles contain the truth. And he says on the third and fourth articles that from Christmas last, namely on the day of St John the Evangelist, that is, after the hour of nones° of the aforesaid day, this witness learned of the marriage of Alice just as from the report of those
qui eodem interfuerunt audivit contraxerunt fame aliqualiter [...] laboravit a quo festo Pa
scha fuerat dictus contractus matrimonialis divulgatus ita quod ab ipso tempore. Et citra hucusque fame publica tam super ipso con
tractu matrimoniali habito inter dictas part
tes quam carnali copula subsecuta et ipsum contractum matrimonialem precedente in dicta villa de Scameston laboravit, et adhuc laborat publica vox et fame sed ut dicit iste iure numquam audivit prefatum Johannem fateri matrimonialem contractum predictum sed carnalem copulam cum dicta Alicia habi
tam audivit cum fateri vollet. Dicit quod ipsa Alicia si iusticia haberet optineret in causa, quod haber bona fide per se ut dicit. Sic dicit quod prefatus Johannes habuit expeditum ac
cessum ad dictam Aliciam et similiter ipsam Aliciam ad cameram ipsius Johannis et dimi
sit cum eadem diversa bona videlicet lanas et linteum pro paniis faciendum propterea eo quod ipse est mercator et ipsa est mulier bone industrie et bone dives dicebatur ante dictum contractum matrimonialem habitum in dicta villa de Scameston quod prefatus Johannes ipsam Aliciam debet ducere in uxo
rem.

William de Bridsall de Scampston aetatis treginta annorum, vel habens in bonis prae
ter vestimenta sua, aliquam mendicans et sic quaerens victuum suum et aliquam operator in fenis et bladis tempore estivali et autump
nali, libere condicionis ut dicit, non consanguineus, affinis, vel familiaris dictae Alicie et vellet quod optineret in causa eo quod cre
det quod haber iusticiam in causa pro ea, non instructus vel corruptis ut dicit iure et extra super premisis. Super primo articulo requisatus dicit quod continet veritatem pro aliquo quod iste iure unquam scivit. Super secundo tertio et quarto articulis requisatus dicit quod iste iuratus per triennium ulstro pereritis hospitabatur in domo Richardi Fouler de Scamston et uxorem ipsius Richardi eius amica Johannis Boton et ideo prefatus Johannes habet communem accessum ad dictum domum et sepius misit pro Alicia ut veniret illum ad loquendi cum eo et die san

who were present, he heard the fame that in some way they contracted marriage. [...] The fame laboured from Easter that the said matrimonial contract was divulged so from that time. And previously to this point, the public fame laboured as much on the matrimonial contract held between the said parties as on the subsequent carnal knowledge and the matrimonial contract preceding it in the said village of Scameston, and the public voice and fame labours yet, but as this wit
ness says he never heard the aforesaid John to confess the aforesaid matrimonial contract but he heard he wished to have had carnal knowledge with the said Alice. He says that he wishes Alice prevail in the cause if she has justice, which he has good faith for himself as he says. And he says that the aforesaid John had free access to the said Alice and similarly Alice had to the room of the said John, and he distributed through her diverse goods, namely wools and linens for making cloth, and be
cause he is a merchant and she is a woman of good industry and wealth, the said before the said marriage contract in the said village of Scameston, that the aforesaid John ought to take Alice as wife.

William de Bridesall de Scampston, thirty years of age, having nothing in goods except his clothing, sometimes begging and thus seeking his bread and sometimes a worker in the hays and grains in summer and autumn, of free condition as he says, not consanguineus, affined, or related by close friendship with the said Alice, and he wishes that she prevail in her cause because he believes that she has justice in the cause for herself, not instructed or corrupted as a witness as he says and from the above premises. Questioned on the first article, he says that it contains the truth for anything that this witness ever knew. Quest
ioned on the second, third, and fourth articles, he says that this witness through the last three years has been lodged at the house of Richard Fouler de Scameston, and the wife of that Richard is the friend of John Boton, and therefore the aforesaid John has common access to the said house and he often sent for
On the day of St. John, Apostle and Martyr next after last Christmas between the hours of nones and vespers, the aforesaid John and Alice stood before the sheepfold of the said Richard a little ways inside the door. Then Alice said to the aforesaid John: “John, do not say anything to me except that which you wish to stand by, because I have been deceived before. And if you wish to have me as you wife, you will tell me.” And to this John replied: “I wish to have you as my wife and behold my faith: I will take you as my wife.” Alice then said to John, “It pleases me” – in English, “I vouchesaffe” – “what you say now. And I wish to have you as my husband” and each of them pledged their faith to the other to do this. He says that none were present except the aforesaid parties up to this point, and this witness came to them before they knew and heard their speaking and words while standing at the door near them. Thus he says that on the day of St Thomas following that, after the hour of nones of that day and before the hour of vespers, as this witness went into the garden of the said Richard he found the said parties standing next to and close by one bin of grain in the said garden, one man alone with one woman alone, and he heard them, as he says, recite and say the same words in that way which they said and recited them in the aforesaid sheepfold. Whether the said parties knew that this witness heard the aforesaid words between them be put forth, he says that they did in the sheepfold, but not in the garden, and he says concerning the article on the subsequent intercourse that the public voice and fame labours on the aforesaid contract, and the fame laboured for three weeks after and otherwise on the contents in the said articles he does not know to depose as he says.

Lord Roger, the Vicar of Rillyngton, a supplementary witness to the premises, says that he knows the parties between whom the
Thomas Fouler de Scameston, aged 20 years, having in goods to the value of 5 marks, not consanguineous nor affined to the said Alice, not instructed or corrupted as he says, a supplementary witness to the premises. He says that he knows the parties between whom this cause is argued from the previous year. [First article largely illegible.] Questioned on the second, third, and fourth articles, he says that he was present in the garden of Richard Fouler de Scameston, his said father, next to the sheepfold, leaning himself on it, on the say of Saint John the Evangelist after Christmas last in the middle hour after the third day - commonly called “midoverondern” - when the said John and Alice, in the sheepfold, pronounced words of matrimony together in this form, John first saying to Alice, ‘By my faith I will take you to my wife and by my faith I will make you as good a woman as I am a man. Are you not content?’ To which the said Alice at once replied, ‘If you are content, I am content.’ [Remainder of membrane heavily damaged. Thomas Fouler deposes that John asked him not to reveal what he heard, but in confession a friar urges him to not be silent.]

Membrane 11 recto and verso
Petition to present deponents pro John Boton
September 24, 1366

In deo nomine amen. Coram vobis dominus officere curia Ebor vestro ve commissare generali excipiendo dicit et in iure proponit procurator Johannis Boton nomine procuratoris pro eodem contra Aliciam Redyng de Scamston et contra quemlibet pro eadem cordam vobis in indicio liberem comparentem ac contra Walter Warner, William de Bridsall de Scamston, Dominus Roger vicare ut dicitur cause is moved for six years previously. He says, questioned on the said articles, that on the same he does not know to depose except indeed on the contents in the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth articles that in the village of Scamston before the present litigation was moved that the public voice and fame laboured and yet labours.

Thomas Fouler de Scamston etate viginti habens in bonis ad valenciam quinque marcorum non consanguineus nec affinis dicte Alicie non instructus aut [||] corruptus ut dicit iure et extra super premissis. Dicit quod novet partes inter quas agitur per anno proximo preteritis. [...] Super secundo, tertio, et quarto articulos requisatus dicit quod presens fuit in gardenio Richardi Fouler de Scamston proxima bercaria dicti patris sui super eadem se inclinando die sancti Johanni Evangelii proxima festem Natalis Domini ulterioribus preteritis. Dicit quod novet partes inter quas agitur per anno proximo preteritis. [...]

Membrane 11 recto and verso
Petition to present deponents pro John Boton
September 24, 1366

In deo nomine amen. Coram vobis domino officere curia Ebor vestro ve commissare generali excipiendo dicit et in iure proponit procurator Johannis Boton nomine procuratoris pro eodem contra Aliciam Redyng de Scamston et contra quemlibet pro eadem cordam vobis in indicio liberem comparentem ac contra Walter Warner, William de Bridsall de Scamston, Dominus Roger vicare ut dicitur
de Rillyngton, et Thomas Fouler quos dicta Alicia in quadam causa matrimoniale presenta inter partes predictos in curia Ebor motent et pendente produxit dicta et depositiones eorumdem quidem ipsius testibus. Nulla vel modica est pro vos fides adhibenda in causa predicta contra partem dicti Johannis Boton et precipue in ea parte ubi dicere videntur quidem super contractu matrimoniale inter dictos partes inter ut asseritur laboravit publica vox et fama ante presentem litem motere pro eo quidem signa fama fuerat de contractu matrimoniale habentur presento seu aliqualis locutio inde quomodolibet antea habeatur. Et hoc fuerat ex eo quod eadem Alicia per se et amicos suos falso publicavit divulgavit ac publicari et devulgari fecit quidem dictus Johannes matrimonium contractit cum eadem ac ipsa fama presenta a dicta Alicia et amicis et adherentibus sibi in causa predicta et non alius orthus habuit. Et ab alius quam a dicta Alicia et sibi adherentibus in hac parte in nullo tempore creditum fuerat seu quo modolilibet dictum vel predicatum prefutus quod William de Bridsall fuerat et est testis in dicta causa notorius suspectus pro eo et ex eo quidem idem William omnibus temporibus receptionis depositionis et examinatio- nis sue in dicte causa ac ante et post fuerat adeo pauper et notoria pauperitate depressus quidem hostiatur panem suum mendicando querebat. Ad omnibus dictis temporibus fuerat dictus William et adhuc est notorius mente captus et discretionem naturalem nullatenus habeatur, sed propter data et promissa sibi per dictam Aliciam et partem suam suum falsum in dicta causa corruptus et informatus dixit et protulit testimonium. Idemque William fuerat etiam omnibus dictis temporibus male fame conversationis et reputationis inhoneste ac talis qui volbeat defacili denerare et falsum testimoniunm perhibere qui faciliter per dictam Aliciam corrumpi et informari ad falsum dicendo et praedaendo in dicta causa faciliter potuit prout fuerat realiter in eadem causa corruptus et informatus ut prefertur.

mente captus lit. “seized mind,” a phrase used to denote mental impairment
Prefatusque Thomas Fouler in dictis et depositionibus suis notorie dicit et exprimit falsitatem et precipue ut dicit et deponit quidem non fuit dicte Alicie et parti sue consanguineus vel affinis et quidem in bonis habuit et haber ad valenciam quinque marcorum cum idem Thomas fuerat omnibus dictis temporibus dicte Alicie consanguineus et in proximo gradu consanguinitatis idem Alicie et mismia amicitia coniunctus, medicum vel nichil in bonis sed Thomas est et fuit dictis temporibus pauper vilis et abiecta persona dictusque Thomas promotionem dicte Alicie consanguineae sue affectans suum in dicta causa falsum dixit et protulit testimonium ac isdem William de Bridsall et Thomas pro talibus quales supernis specificantur habitis fuerant et per dicta tempora publice reputati habentur et reputantur de presente. Super quibus in diocese Ebor et locis vicinis laboravit et laborat publica vox et fama. Quare petit dictus procuratore nomine quo supra probatis in hoc casu de iure probandis dictis et depositionibus testum predictorum prout natura et qualitas premissorum exigit et requirit nullam seu modicum fidem adhiberi et ulterius fieri secundum naturam et qualitatem eorumdem in omnibus quod est iustum. Hec dicit, allegat, proponit, et petit ac probare intendit dictus procuratore nomine quo supra conjunctum et divisim iuris beneficio semper salvo.

Membrane 9 recto and verso
Articles pro John
October 13, 1366

In dei nomine Amen. Positiones et articulos infrascriptos et contenta in eisdem conjunctum et divisim facit et dat ac probare intendit procurator Johannis Boton de Scamестon nomine procuratore pro eodem contra Aliciam Redyng de Scameston ac contra Walterum Warner, Williamum de Bridsall de Alice, and to put forth false testimony in the said cause, just as he was in reality in the same cause corrupted and informed as was put forth. And the aforesaid Thomas Fouler, in his words and depositions notoriously spoke and pronounced falsity and especially as he says and deposes that he is not consanguineous or affined to the said Alice and her party, and that he had and has in goods the value of five marks, when the same Thomas was at all the said times consanguineous in the second grade of consanguinity to the said Alice, and joined by excessive friendship, having little or nothing in goods, but the said Thomas is and was at the said times a common pauper and low person. And the said Thomas, desiring the promotion of the said consanguineous Alice, said and brought forth in the said cause his false testimony, and the same William de Bridesall and Thomas were held as such men as the above specified, and at the said times were publicly held in repute and reputed at the present. Upon these things in the diocese of York and nearby places the public voice and fame laboured and labours. Therefore the said procurator named above seeks in this cause of law, by testing the words and depositions of the aforesaid witnesses as to the nature and quality of the premises, that they be weighed and demanded to be nothing, or to be cired as little or no faith, and further, to be valued according to the nature and quality of the same in all things, which is just. Here the said proctor by name says, alleges, proposes, and intends to prove by what is above jointly and separately to the sound benefit of the law always.

Membrane 9 recto and verso
Articles pro John
October 13, 1366

In the name of God, amen. The procurator for John Boton of Scameston produces and imparts and intends to prove the positions and articles herein written and the contents in the same, jointly and singly against Alice Redyng of Scameston and against Walter Warner, William de Bridesall of Scameston,
Scameston, dominus Rogerum qui se dicit vicarium de Rillyngton, et Thomas Fouler quos dicta Alicia in quadem causa matrimoniali presentas inter dictas partes in Curia Ebor mota et pendente in testibus produxit, dicta et depositiones eorum, et cuiuslibet eorumdem super exceptionibus dicti Johannis contra dictam Aliciam et eius testes ac contra eam et causam presentam []].

[...] Item ponit et probare intendit quod dictus William de Bridsall omnibus et singulis temporibus receptionis, depositionis, et examinationis suo in dicta causa et ante et post fuerat et est adeo pauper et notorie paupertate depressus quod hostiatim panem suum mendicando querebat ac omnibus dictis temporibus fuerat dictus William et adhuc est notorie mente captus qui nullatenus discretionem habuit naturalem et quod dicte William propter data et promissa sibi predictam Aliciam et partem suam suum falsum in dicta causa corruptus et informatus dixit et pretulit testimonium.

Item ponit et probare intendit quod predictus William de Bridsall fuerat omnibus temporibus antecessit et adhuc est male fame conversationis et reputacionis inhoneste ac talis qui voluit et vult defacieli deierare et falsum testimonium perhibere et talis qui faciliter per dictam Aliciam corrupserit et informariri potuit ad falso dicendum et preferendum testimonium in dicta causa prout realiter fuerat in eadem causa corruptus et ad falsum dicendum realiter informatus.

Item ponit et probare intendit quod predictus Thomas Fouler omnibus et singulis temporibus receptionis, examinationis, et depositionis suo in dicta causa fuerat et est consanguineus predicte Alicie tertio consanguinitate gradu attingens ac eidem Alicie nimia amicitia coniunctus medicum vel nichil habens in bonis ac pauper vilis et abiecta persona promotionem dicte Alicie consanguinitate [||] indebite affectans ac talis qualitas supra descriptur existens suum falsum Lord Roger the Vicar of Rillyngton, as he calls himself, and Thomas Fouler who the said Alice produced as witnesses in the matrimonial cause present between the said parties, moved and pending in the York Curia, their words and depositions, and whichever of them in addition to the exceptions of the said John against the said Alice and her witnesses and against her and her present cause.

[Fame of the contract was published by Alice and her adherents.]

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that William de Bridsall at each and every time of his reception, deposition, and examination in the said cause, and before and after, was and is truly a pauper and notoriously depressed by poverty, that he seeks his bread door-to-door by begging, and that at all the said times the said William is hitherto notoriously mente captus, who in no way has natural discretion, and that the said William, because of gifts and promises to him by the aforesaid Alice and her party, corrupted and informed, spoke and offered his false testimony.

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that the aforesaid William de Bridsall was at all the aforesaid times, and hitherto, is of poor fame, dishonest conduct and reputation, and thus one who wishes and wished to carelessly perjure and to present false testimony and thus one who could easily be corrupted and informed by the said Alice to false speaking and presenting testimony in the said cause, exactly as he really was in the same cause corrupted and really informed to false speaking.

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that the aforesaid Thomas Fouler at each and every time of his reception, examination, and deposition in the said cause was and is consanguineus to the aforesaid Alice in the third degree of consanguinity and joined to the same Alice by undue friendship, having little or nothing in goods and is a common pauper and low-status person,

mente captus lit. “seized mind,” a phrase used to denote mental impairment
unduly desiring the promotion of the said Alice for their consanguinity, and being of such quality described above that he brings forth his false testimony for the aforesaid Alice against the said John in the aforesaid cause.

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that the said William de Bridsall and Thomas Fouler for such reasons were considered the sort of men specified above during the aforesaid times and as yet are in the diocese of York and nearby places and publicly reputed so.

[Alice is of servile condition.]

[John is free-born and was ignorant of Alice’s servile status.]

Likewise he puts forth and intends to prove that the premises are notoriously public and manifest in the diocese of York and nearby places and upon these facts the public voice and fame laboured and labours.

Membrane 8 recto
Interrogatories pro Alice
Undated

Interrogetur testes omnes et singuli pro partem Johannis Boton de Scameston Chap- man contra Aliciam Redyng de eadem producendi: 

[...]

Item si incitantur deponere quod William de Bridsall fuit et est mente captus prout in secundo articulo per partem dicto Johanno traditur continentur. Et interrogetur dicitur de causa scientie, et per quod sciant deponere quod dictus William aliquid recepit seu sibi per prefatam Aliciam promissum fuerat et suum dicere testimonium in haec causa et an viderunt vel audierunt prefatam Aliciam ali- quid promittere seu dare eadem William pro suo testimonio in haec parte.

Item si incitantur deponere quod Thomas Fouler sit consanguineus dicte Alicie. Et interrogetur dicti in quo gradu consanguinita- tis ipsam attingit. Et semper de causa scientie dicti sui.

testes omnes et singuli to evaluate their truthfulness by comparing details  mente captus lit. “seized mind,” a phrase used to denote mental impairment
Robert, filius Philip de Scamston libere conditionis non consanguineus nec affinis partis ipsum producentis non iuratis ut dicit [...] Et primis, super primo articulo requisatur, dicit quod die sancti thome martyris ulterioribus preteritis primo et non ante, audivit famam laborantem super contractu matrimoniale inter partes de quibus agitur. Habito quo die dictes partes fuerat apud Scardburgh in peregrinatione et ibidem erat orta dissentio inter eas sed quae causa nescere iste iure. Et ipso die quod redierint de Scar- dburgh apud Scameston divulgabatur contractus matrimonialis inter dictas partes in commune sed non advertebat an per amicos unius partis vel alterius. Super secundo articulo requisatus dicit quod William de Bridall testes in dicto articulo nominatus est pauper et adeo pauperitate depressus quod hostiatim et per villas vicinis ville de Scameston que- rit victum suum mendicando et non reputat eum valde sapientem quare non videt eum emere nequere vendere sed villatim mendica- re ideo non cognoscit sensum suum. Sed an corruptus vel informatus depositum in present- ta causa nescere iste vire deponere ut dicit. Super tertio articulo requisatus dicit quod super dicto articulo nescere deponere aliter quam supra deponet hoc excepta quod dictus William est pauper. Super quarto articulo requisatus dicit quod Thomas Fouler attingit Alicie de quo agitur in tertio gradu consan- guinitatis quare ave dictorum Thome et Alicie fuerunt sorores carnales et una vocabatur Alicia Redyng et alia Alicia Fouler sed utrum dictus Thomas affectatbat promotionem dicte the said Alice. And let the said witnesses be interrogated in which grade of consanguinity he has to the same. And always as to the cause of their knowledge.

[Question them regarding Alice’s servile status.]

[Question them regarding their relationship to John Boton.]

Membrane 7 recto
Depositions pro John Boton
October 14–15, 1366

Robert, son of Philip of Scamston, of free condition, not consanguineus nor affined to the party that produced him, nor held by oath as he says. [He wishes justice for John Boton.] And firstly, questioned on the first article, he says that on the day of St Thomas Martyr last and not before, he heard the fame labouring concerning the matrimonial contract between the parties concerning whom this cause is conducted. On that day, the said parties were at Scarborough on pilgrimage and while they were there a dispute arose between them but what the cause was this witness does not know. And on that day when they returned from Scarborough to Scameston, the matrimonial contract between the parties was divulged in public, but he did not recall whether through the friends of one party or the other. Questioned on the second article, he says that William de Brid- sall, named as a witness in the said article, is a pauper and so depressed by poverty that he seeks his food by begging door to door and though the villages nearby to the village of Scameston, and he does not consider him very wise because he does not see him buy or sell but to beg village to village, and therefore he does not know his own thoughts. But whether he deposed while corrupted and informed in the present cause this witness does not know to depose as he says. Questioned on the third article he says that on the said article he does not know to depose other than he deposed above except that the said William is a pauper. Questioned on the fourth article, he says that Thomas Fouler strives
Alicie partis ignorat iste iure ut dicit. Preterea dicit predictus Thomas habet in bonis as valencia quattuor vel quinque martiarum et reputat homo fidelis sicut filius patrisfamilias de Scameston debet habere. Et aliter super premensis articulo sive quinto articulo nescere deponere ut dicit quod supra deponet. Super sexto articulo requisatus dicit quod dicta Alicia de Redyng pars in presenti negotio fuit procreata concepta nata et educata de patre servo et servile conditionis domini de Latymer sed mater sua fuit libera et libere conditionis orienda de Knapton. Dicit tum quod postmodum dicta Alicia pars fuit facta libera huius ad tres annos proximo elapsere et amplius per domini Clementem de Chamblayn qui fuit seneschallus magnus dicti domini de Latymer locum tenens et attornatus generale in toto domo suo in regno Anglice cum tota sequela sua. Super septimo articulo requisatus dicit quod dictus Johannes est liber et libere conditionis reputatus et credit quod excedit dictam Aliciam partem in divitiis quare mercator est sed non reputat honorem in persona [...] et de ceteris in dicto septimo articulo nescere deponere ut dicit. Super ulteriori articulo requisatus dicit quod super premensis in forma de positionis sue laboravit et adhuc laborat in villa de Scameston et locis vicinis publica vox et fama.

Thomas son of Ydonson de Rillyngton etatis xxx annos affinis Johannis Boton quare dicit consangunieam suam in uxorem sed nescere quanto gradu, affectans ut dicit quod ipsa pars optineat victoriam in presenti causa que digna est. Iure extra et super premisses dicere requisatus. Super primo articulo requisatus dicit in iuramento suo quod fama sive locutio que habebatur et habetur de contractu matrimoniale inter partes predictas pretendo habito ortum habunt et publicata ac divulgata fuit de et per Thomas Fouler et William de Bridsall qui Thomas ut dicit iste iure est consanguineus dicte Alicie partis in tertio gradu consanguinitatis qui ut credere iste iure affectat victoriam in presenti causa pro parte dicte Alicie ratione consanguinitatis huius et qui Thomas ut dicit est serviens for Alice in that which she urges because of their consanguinity, because the grandmothers of the said Thomas and Alice were blood sisters and one was called Alice Redyng and the other Alice Fouler, but whether the said Thomas desired the promotion of the party of the said Alice this witness does not know as he says. In addition, the said Thomas has goods to the value of four or five marks and he judges him a faithful man just as the son of his father ought to be held in Scameston. And otherwise on the following article or the fifth article he does not know to depose as he says other than what he deposed above. Questioned on the sixth article, he says that the said Alice Redyng in the present business was begotten, conceived, born, and raised from a father who was a servant and of servile condition to the Lord Latymer, but her mother was a free woman and of free condition being born in Knapton. He says then that afterwards the said Alice was made free from that for the past three years and more by the Lord Clement the Chamberlain who was the head seneschal of the said Lord Latymer, holding his place and being his attorney general in his whole house in the English kingdom with all that follows. Questioned on the seventh article, he says that the said John is free and of free condition, reputed and believed that he exceeds the said Alice in wealth because he is a merchant, but he does not judge him honorable in person [...] and on the rest in the said seventh article he does not know to depose as he says. Questioned on the last article, he says that upon the premises in the form of the positions that the public voice and fame laboured and yet labours in the village of Scameston and nearby places.

Thomas son of Ydonson of Rillyngton, aged thirty years, affined to John Boton because he said he is consanguineous by his wife, but he does not know in what grade, desiring as he says that that party obtain victory in the present cause which is worthy. He is a supplementary witness to the premises. Further, the witness was questioned to speak on the premises. Questioned on the first ar-
historical and medical documents

William filius Johannis filii Roberti de Scameston, non consanguineus nec affinis partis ipsum producentis, affectans ut dicit victoriam Johannis Boton in iure suo et non aliter ut dicit iure et extra et super premissis. [...] Super secundo articulo requisatus dicit quod William de Bridsall notorie est pauper mendicans hostiatim et potius reputat stultus quam sapiens sed an aliquid recepit de dicta Alicia pro testimonio suo prebendis vel aliquid si promissus fuerat per eadem nescere deponere ut dicit nisi ex relatu aliorum. Et iste iure dicit quod ante diem receptionis et examinationis dicti William alloqui isto modo William recolat quod tu es homo senex et non perdas animam tuam pro aliqua data vel promissa. Cui dicitus William repondit “Sive anima mea vadat ad celerum sive ad infernum ego tenebo illud quod promissi” sic innuendo
de dicta Alicia. Super tertio articulo requisatus dicit quod dictus William est ut serviens deponet pauper sed de aliqua mala fama de William vel conversatione honesta nescere deponere ut dicit aliter quam supra deponet nec utrum fuerat informatus ad deponendum ut deponet. Super quarto articulo requisatus dicit quod est notorius quod Thomas Fouler attingit dictam Aliciam in tertio gradu consanguinitate ex utraque latere eo quod Alicia Redyng ava dictae Alicie et Alicia dicta del Wald ava dicti Thome fuerant sorores carnales sed ipsas non novit ut dicit. De Alicia Redyng processit Richardis Redyng filius suus carnalis Alicie de quam agitur, et de Alicia del Wald ex alio latere processit Richardus Fouler pater suus carnalis iure dicti Thome et Richardi, et Richardum iste iure novit et vidit ut dicit. Item dicit quod dictus Thomas est serviens patris sui habens in bonis ad valentiam quattuor martiarum quod affectans ut iste iure dicit se credere ratione consanguinitatis huius promotionem dicte Alicie indebite. Et dicit quod si idem Thomas deposuit in presenti causa quod non fuit consanguineus dicte Alicie falsum dixit et deposuit. [...] the fame of the contract on the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas, but he does not know where it began.] Questioned on the second article he says that William de Bridsall is notoriously a pauper, wandering door to door, and he judges him more a fool than wise, but whether he received anything from the said Alice for providing his testimony or if he was promised anything by the same he does not know to depose as he says, except from the judgement of others. And this witness says that before the day of the reception and deposition of the said William, he heard John Boton speaking to William in this way: “William, remember that you are an old man and you should not lose your soul for any gift of promise.” To which the said William replied: “Whether my soul goes to heaven or to hell, I will stand by that which I have promised,” nodding thus to the said Alice. Questioned on the third article, he says that the said William is a pauper—as he deposed, a servant—but concerning any ill fame or honest conduct of William, he does not know to depose as he says, other than what he deposed above, nor whether he was informed to deposing as he deposed. Questioned on the fourth article, he says that it is notorious that Thomas Fouler touches the said Alice in the third degree of consanguinity and from either side because Alice Redyng, the grandmother of the said Alice, and Alice, called “de Wald,” the grandmother of the said Thomas, were blood sisters but he did not know them as he says. From Alice Redyng was Richard Redyng, her blood son, from whom came the Alice who moved this cause, and from Alice de Wald on the other side came Richard Fouler, the blood father of the said Thomas and Richard, and Richard this witness knew and saw as he says. Likewise, he says that the said Thomas is a servant of his father, having goods to the value of four marks, who desires the undue promotion of the said Alice, as this witness says he believes for reason of this consanguinity. And he says that if the same Thomas deposed in the present cause that he was not consanguineous to the said Alice,
Membrane 5 recto and verso
Petition to present deponents pro Alice
October 15 or 23, 1366

[Salutation.] The proctor of Alice Redyng named above, puts forth this petition for her against John Boton and anyone for him appearing in your presence in evidence and against certain exceptions on the part of the said John Boton against the aforesaid Alice, William Warner, William de Bridsall de Scamston, lord Roger the vicar of the church of Rillyngton, and Thomas Fouler, witnesses on the part of the said Alice in the matrimonial cause between the two aforementioned parties moved and pending in the court of York. You will produce in the court the said examinations and depositions of those same witnesses, relating the strength, form, and effect of the same, and against the positions and articles, by the same exceptions elicited, extracted, and contained as it is said in the same. Indeed the said witnesses, together and singly in their words and depositions made and deposed in the said cause, said their truth and deposed their testimony and especially in that part of their depositions and of whatever of the same indeed they said and deposed...

Likewise, that William de Bridsall and Thomas Fouler, witnesses produced for Alice in the said cause, at all times of their reception, examination, and deposition in the aforesaid cause were and yet are both before and after wealthy enough and in nowise excessively or notoriously either depressed by poverty or depressed by anything else, but sufficient at all the aforesaid times, singly and together, and had and have in goods from all according to their status. They were and are, singly and together, able to be honestly and agreeably maintained. The said William de Bridsall, indeed at all the aforesaid times,
membrane 1 recto
articles pro alice redyng
November 6, 1366

Item ponit et probare intendit quod dictus William de Bridsall omnibus temporibus predictis fuerat et adhuc est notorius sane mentis ac discretionem naturalem et sufficientem habens, qui absque omni promissione seu dono sibi per dictam Aliciam seu partem eiusdem dato seu facto suum verum in dicta causa absque omni corruptione et informacione, seu affectione indebita, dixit et protulit testimonium. Prefati qui William et Thomas omnibus dictis temporibus bone fame et conversatione et reputatione honeste fuerunt et adhuc sunt et eorum quilibet fuerat et adhuc est. Ac tales qui pro aliquo deierare seu falsum testimonium perhibere seu ad falsum testimonium in dicta causa seu alia quacumque dicendum et proferendum nullatenus induci poterant, sed homines fideles et fidedigni in dicta villa de scameston et locis vicinis communiter habiti et publice reputati et eorum quilibet habitus fuit et publice reputatus et etiam habentur et reputatur et eorum quilibet habetur et reputation in presenti. Super quibus in diocese Ebor et locis vicinis laboravit et adhuc laborat publica vox et fama. [...]

membrane 1 recto
articles pro alice redyng
November 6, 1366

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that the said William de Bridsall at all times of his production, reception, and examination in the aforesaid cause was and yet is notoriously of sound mind, and having sufficient natural discretion, who, free from any promise or gift given or made to him by the said Alice or her party, said and put forth his true testimony in the said cause without any corruption, information, or undue affection. The aforesaid William and Thomas, singly and together, at all the said times, and yet are of good fame and conduct and honest reputation. And they are, singly and together, such who for anything in no way perjure or present false testimony or are able to be induced to speaking or presenting false testimony in the said cause or in any whatsoever, but are commonly held and reputed faithful men and worthy in the said village of Scameston and nearby places. And, singly and together, they are held and reputed so at the present. On these facts, in the diocese of York, the public voice and fame laboured and labours. [He intends to prove these facts.]
honestae ac tales qui pro aliquo deierare seu falsum testimonium perhibere seu ad falsum testimonium in dicta causa seu alia quando-cumque [dicendum ei proferendum] nullate-nus induci poterant sed homines fideles et fidedigni in dicta villa de scameston et locis vicinis communiter habiti et publice reputati et eorum quilibet communiter habitus fuit et publice reputatus ac etiam habentur et reputantur ac habetur et reputatur eorum quilibet in presenti.

[...] Item ponit et probare intendit quod premissa sunt publica notorie et manifesta in communitate et dioecese Ebor et locinis vicinis ac super hiis ibidem laboravit et laborat publica vox et fama.

Membrane 6 recto
Depositions pro Alice Redyng
November 9, 1366

Geoffrey Rayneson de Rillyngton libere conditionis ut dicit, etatis xl annos fere non consanguineus nec affinis partis ipsum producentis affectans quod illa pars habeat victoriam in presenti causa que [||] ius habet in eadem ut dicit iure et extra super premissis. Super primo articulo requisatus dicit quod die Translatio sancti Thome martyris ulterioribus preteritis iste iure primo et non ante audivit famam tam de contractu inter prefatas partes habito quam de carnali copula subsecuta que fama ut dicit habuit ortum de incolis et inhabitatoribus ville de Scameston. Interrogatus an fuerint amici vel adherentes dicte Alicie illi a quibus primo audivit huius famam dicit quod fuerunt omnes amici utriusque partis sed non credebatur per contractum quoquo contractus matrimonialis habebat inter dictas partes ut dicit, sed a quo primo audivit dictam famam [...]. Super secundo articulo requisatus, dicit quod novit William de Bridsall per aspectum corporis et reputat eum potius sultum quam sapientem quem sepius vidit ostiatim mendicare panem in parochia de Rillyngton sed nescit si cor-

take an oath. They were able in no wise to perjure false testimony or to introduce a false testimony in the said cause, or another at any time, in speaking or bringing it forward, but they are held and publicly reputed honest and worthy men in the said village of Scamston and nearby places, both generally and whichever of them is held and publicly reputed. And they are even held and reputed so, and whichever of them is held and reputed so in the present.

[He intends to prove that Alice is and was of free condition.]

Likewise, he puts forth and intends to prove that the premises are publicly notorious and manifest in the community and dioecese of York and nearby places, and upon these facts the public voice and fame laboured and labours.
ruptus vel informatus protulit suum testimoniun in presenti causa nec aliter super dicto secundo articulo scit deponere ut dicit. Super tertio articulo requisatus dicit quod quid dictus William hospitibatur cum quodam amico dicte Alicie et aliter quam supra deponere nec scere deponere contra eumdem William eo quod non novit eum nisi dictam festem nativitatis beati Johannis Baptiste uterius sequitur. Super quarto articulo requisatus dicit quod bene dedicit per relatum aliorum quos audivit computare quantus consangui-neatis inter Thomam Fouler et Aliciam de Redyng quod sunt consanguinei in tertio gradu consanguinitatis ex utroque latere. Qui Thomas est serviens patris sui qui pater est bonus paterfamilias et dives husbandus et alia de divitis ipsius Thome seu pauperitiae nescere deponere ut dicit, quod numquam audivit eum loqui verbum de presenti causa ne scit de testimonio suo falso sive vero quod perhibent in presenti causa nisi quatenus iste uivre deponet super de consanguinitatis gradibus inter dictum Thomam Fouler et ipsum Alice quam in ea parte falsum dixit et deponet. Et hoc si necesse esset vellet iste uire probare ut dicit per centem homines sumptibus suis propriis. Et alter super dicto quarto articulo nescere deponere ut dicit, nec super quinto articulo proximo sequenti nisi quod dictus William sepius vult inebriari et sic ebrius vultiacere in campis et fossatibus nec scere deponere ut dicit quod non sed bene audivit a vicinis suis quod sic consuevit facere. Super sexto articulo requisatus dicit quod bene audivit dici quod dicta Alicia fuit procreata, concepsta, et nata de patre servo sed dictum quod postmodum per quendam dominum Clementem seneschallum domini de Lytmer fuit manicissa et istsc et dedicit ex relatu aliorum ut dicit. Super septimo articulo requisatus dicit quod Johannes Boton est liber [||] nec scit iste uire ut dicit deponere de divitiis suis nec divitiis prefate Alicie aut aliter super ceteris sequentibus in prefate more foolish than wise, who he often saw begging his bread door to door in the parish of Rillyngton, but he does not know if he was corrupted or informed when he gave his testimony in the present cause, nor otherwise on the said second article does he know to depose as he says. Questioned on the third article, he says that the said William was lodged with a certain friend of the said Alice and other than he deposed above he does not know to depose against the same William because he does not know him, except that from the said feast of St John the Baptist last. Questioned on the fourth article, he says that he well knew through the judgement of others who he heard to calculate the degree of consanguinity between Thomas Fouler and Alice Redyng that they are consanguineous in the third degree of consanguinity from either side. That Thomas is a servant of his father, whose father is a good paterfamilias and wealthy husbandman and otherwise concerning the wealth or poverty of that Thomas he does not know to depose as he says, because he never heard him speak a word on the present cause nor knows whether his testimony which he presented in the present cause was false or true, except to what extent this witness deposed on the grades of consanguinity between the said Thomas and Alice, because in that part he said and deposed a falsity. And this, if it should be necessary, this witness is willing to prove as he says with a hundred men at his own expense. And otherwise on the said fourth article he does not know to depose as he says, nor on the fifth article following it except that the said William often wishes to be drunk and when drunk casts himself onto fields and into ditches and he judges this done from foolishness. Asked whether he saw the said William to do so, he says not but he well heard it from his neighbours that William was accustomed to do so. Questioned on the sixth article, he says that he well heard it said that the said Alice was begotten, conceived, and born from a servant

paterfamilias male head of household
septimo articulo. Super ultimo articulo requisatus, dicit quod fama publica laborat in tota parochia de Rillyngton predicta quod dictus William de Bridsall est pauper homo et mendicus ut supra deponet, et quod dictus Thomas et Alicia sic attingunt in tertio gradu consanguinitatis. Interrogatus qui Alicia fuit facta libera dicit quod nunc ad octo annos elapsae propt audivit diu et aliter super dictos articulos seu interrogatores nescere depone ut dicit.

Johannes Emmotson de Scamston etatis xxx annos libere conditionis consanguineus Johannis Boton sed nescere in quo gradu iure et extra super premisseris. Super primo articulo requisatus dicit quod fama super dicto contractu die translationis sancti Thome ulterioribus preteritis primo quod iste iure scient habuit ortum a dicta Alicia ut dicit. Iste iure interrogatus an iste iure hoc audit dicit quod non sed bene retulit et credere quod ipso die sancti Thome ante horam vesperarum et post horam nonam homines et mulieres ad numerum viginti qui veneant cum dicta Alicia de peregrinatione sua facta apud Scardburgh sedeabant in qualam domo de Scamston potendo et ibi iste iure audivit famam de ipso contractu, et qui sic sedeabant fuerant amici utriusque partis. Et dixerunt quod prefata Alicia ipso die in dicta villa de Scardburgh sic retulit eis et ab illo tempore citá divulgasitur dicta fama per to-tam viciniam. Super secundo articulo requisatus dicit quod William de Bridsall notoriter est depressus pauperitate quare ostiatarim que-rrit panem suum mendicando et videtur sibi quod potius debat dici stultus quam sapiens quare habet caput ita debile et qui bibit in aliqua quantitate notabili de servisia statim inebriatur adeo quod non potest ire ad hospiti- tum suum nisi suffultus auxilia aliiunde, tum discretionem naturalem habet ut dicit sed an fuit instructus vel corruptus per dictam Al- ciam in presenti causa nescere deponere ut dicit, et dicit quod reputatur pauper fidelis ac bone famé pro aliquo quod iste iure sciat father but he says that afterward, through a certain Lord Clement, seneschal of the Lord Latymer, she was manumitted and he knew and learned this through the relating of others as he says. Questioned on the seventh article, he says that John Boton is free and this witness does not know as he says to depose on John's wealth nor the aforesaid Alice's wealth, or otherwise on the remaining aspects of the aforementioned seventh article. Questioned on the final article, he says that the public fame labours in the whole Parish of Rillyngton that the said William de Bridsall is a poor man and a beggar, as he deposed above, and that the said Thomas and Alice thus connect in the third degree of consanguinity. Asked when Alice was made free he says that now to eight years past, as he long heard it, and otherwise on the said articles and interrogatories he does not know to depose as he says.

John Emmotson de Scameston, aged thirty years, of free condition, consanguineous to John Boton but he does not know in what grade, a supplementary witness to the premises. Questioned on the first article, he says that the fame of the said contract first had its origin that this witness knows on the day of the Translation of St Thomas, from the said Alice as he says. This witness, asked whether he heard this, says not but it well related to him and he believes that on that day of St Thomas before the hour of vespers and after the hour of nones," men and women to the number of twenty who came with the said Alice from her pilgrimage made to Scarborough sat in a certain house in Scamston, drinking and there this witness first heard the fame of that contract, and those who were seated thus were friends common to both parties. They said that the aforementioned Alice on that day in the village of Scarborough so related it to them and from that time the said fame was quickly divulged through the whole neighbourhood. Questioned on the second article, he says that William de Bridsall is no-

*hour of vespers...nones before approximately 6pm and after approximately 3pm*
nisi quod potius credere quod falsum dixit in presenti causa quam non. [...] John son of Ralph de Pokethorpe, of free condition, aged thirty years and more, a supplementary witness to premises. Questioned on the first article, he says that he heard it said that the fame which labours on the said contract had its origin from Alice and her friends, and was divulged and published by her and he does not know to depose otherwise on the first article as he says. Questioned on the second article, he says that it is notorious that William de Bridsall seeks his bread by begging door to door which this witness knows from a year past, and he did not him do see any other foolishness in the meantime, nor hear it, except that he was so drunk on the day of All Saints last that he lost his garment. And otherwise on the second article he does not know to depose as he says. Questioned on the third article, he says that he does not know to depose on the same as he says. [Remainder of the deposition is similar to the above.]
quibus fama super dictum contractum matrimonialum habuit ortum nescere iste iure ut dicit. Super secundo articulo requisatus dicit quod William de Bridsall reputatur homo fidelis et deleterius quod iste iure novit in persona eiusdem William est quod est mendicus et aliquo vult inebriari et utrum alium de sit mente captus vel non nescere iste iure ut dicit. Super tertio articulo requisatus dicit quod dicti William et Thomas Fouler reputantur et habentur fideles homines et bone fame salvo hoc quod sic deponit de William et numquam audivit ut dicit quod in aliquam causam deierant seu deierat nec quod potuerunt corrumpi vel corrupti fuerunt in presenti causa vel aliquam alia. [...] Richardus Peckett de Rillyngton libere conditionis non consanguineus vel affinis alius partum predictarum iure et extra super premisses. Super primo articulo requisatus dicit quod novit Walter Warner et Rogerum vicarum de Rillyngton pro bonis hominibus et William de Bridsall novit qui est pauper mendicans ostiarem novit a festum natacitatis sancti Johannis Baptiste vel preteritis et Thomas Fouler non novit et ut dicit nisi infra mensem proxima preteritis umquam audivit loqui et quod habet sufficientem discretionem naturalis reputationem istius iure ut credere iste iure absque omni promissione seu dono sibi dato vel facto per dictam Aliciam seu partem eiusdem suum in presenti causam pretulit verum testimonium. Et dicit quod dictus William reputatur fidelis, bone famae et reputationis in statu suo, qui secundum scientiam istius iure pro aliquod non poterit induci ad deierandum the fame of the said matrimonial contract had its origin this witness does not know as he says. Questioned on the second article, he says that William de Bridsall is reputed a faithful man, and the worst that this witness knows in person of the same William is that he is a beggar and also that he likes to be drunk and whether he is in any way mente captus or not this witness does not know as he says. Questioned on the third article, he says that the said William and Thomas are reputed and held to be faithful men and of good fame and sound mind that he deposes thus of William, and he never heard, as he says, that they perjured, and they were not able to be perverted or corrupted in the present cause or any other.

Richard Peckett de Rillyngton, of free condition, not consanguineous or affined either of the aforesaid parties, a supplementary witness to the premises. Questioned on the first article, he says that he knows Walter Warner and Roger, the vicar of Rillyngton, for good men, and he knows William de Briddass is a pauper who begs door to door and he knows him from the feast of the birth of St John the Baptist last, and he does not know Thomas Fouler as he says, except within the last month when he heard him to speak on the matrimonial contract and the aforesaid carnal knowledge. Questioned on the second article, he says that William de Bridsall, for anything this witness ever knew or heard - except that on the day of All Saints last he saw him so drunk that he was not able to go by himself from the place where he was to his lodging except with the aid of this witness and others - is of sound mind and thus having sufficient natural discretion, the reputation of this witness thus provided, just as this witness holds, who as this witness believes offered his true testimony without any promise or gift given or made by the said Alice or her party in the present cause. And he says that the said William is reputed faithful, of good fame and reputation for his state, who

mente captus lit. “seized mind,” a phrase used to denote mental impairment
vel testimonium perhibendus in presentem causam vel aliqua alia et dicit quod bene au-
divit loqui de dicto Thomas quod est serviens
patris sui et fidelis homo et pro talibus dicti
William et Thomas habentur et reputantur.

Johannes Dogeson de Scamston etatis lvi
annos servus domini de Latymer ac servilis
conditionis [...] non affectans ut dicit victo-
rium plus pro parte dicte Alicie quam pro
parte dicte Johannes iure et extra super pre-
missis. Super primo articulo requisatus dicit
quod novit testes in eosdem descriptos pro
fidelibus hominibus et bone fame et pro tal-
ibus sunt habiti et publice reputati in parochia
de Rillyngton et locis vicinis. Item dicit quod
Alicia de Redyng die festi sancti Johannis
Apostoli et Evangelii infra octavo Nativitatis
Domini ulterioribus preteritis sicut iste iure
venit cum eadem de Malton usque Scamiston
narravit sic quod Johannes Boton et ipsam
fuerant conventi ita quod debet habere eam
in uxorem. [...] Item dicit quod dictam festem
Purificatione Beate Virginis ulterioribus pre-
teritis dictus Thomas Fouler narravit isti iu-
rato quod audivit et presens fuit quod dictus
Johannes affidavit dictam Aliciam et William
de Bridesall prius dictam festem Purificatio-
e hoc idem retulit isti iurato duodecies ut
credere et habere quod dictus William fuit
‘itenus et bene mane’ et dicit in iuramenta
sua quod antrquam dicti Thomas et William
retulerunt premissa ista iurato audivit famam
super hoc contractu matrimoniali inter ipsas
partes habiti laboravit inter amicos et cogna-
tos ipsius Johannis [...] Item dicit quod dictus
William de Bridesall est pauper sed valde fi-
delis qui ut dicit iste iure non potuit induci
aliquiliter ad dieirandum in presenti sive ab-
sque alia causa nec ut dicit pro aliquo quod
ipse iuratus unquam scivit vel audivit fuit
corruptus et instructus ad deponendum in
presenti causam prout deponent, et est ut di-
cit in statu suo homo bone fame sane mentis
sufficientem habens discretionem naturalem
nisi sit inebriatus se servisia et hoc contigit
valde raro. Item dicit quod dictus Thomas
Fouler de eadem est homo valde bone fame
sufficientem habens in bonis vel ad valorum

according to the knowledge of this witness
will not be induced to taking an oath or pre-
senting testimony for anything in the present
cause or any other, and he says he well heard
it said that the said Thomas is the servant of
his father and a faithful man, and for such
the said William and Thomas are held and
reputed.

John Dogeson de Scameston, fifty-seven
years and servant of the Lord Latymer and of
servile condition [...] not affecting as he says
victory for the part of the said Alice over the
part of the said John, a supplementary wit-
tness to the premises. Questioned on the first
article, he says that he knew the witnesses in
the same described for faithful men and of
good fame, and for such they are held and
publicly reputed in the parish of Rillyngton
and nearby places. Likewise he says that Al-
ice Redyng, on the day of the feast of St John
the Apostle and Evangelist, within the octave
of Christmas last, as this witness came with
her from Malton to Scameston, told him that
John Boton and herself were of the agreement
so that he ought to have her as wife. [He saw
John and Alice naked in bed together. Alice
told him they were married, but John denied
it.] Likewise he says that on the said feast of
the Purification of the Blessed Virgin last the
said Thomas Fouler told this witness that he
heard and was present when the said John
swore to the said Alice, and William de Brides-
sall before the said feast of the Purification
told this witness the same a dozen times, as
he believes and holds that the said William
was going and well remaining, and he says in
his judgement that before the said Thomas
and William related the premises this witness
heard the fame of the matrimonial contract
had between the parties laboured among the
friends and acquaintences of John [...] Like-
wise he says that the said William de Brides-
all is a pauper but is very faithful, who as this
witness says could not be induced in any way
to perjure in the present or any other cause
just as he deposed, and William is, as he says,
for his status a man of good fame and of
sound mind, having sufficient natural discre-
sex marciarum et amplius et pro talibus sunt dicit William et Thomas habenti et publice reputati ut dicit. [...] Thomas Megson de Scameston servilis conditionis etatis xl annos iure et extra super premisis, dicit quod non initium advertebat ad fama laboravit super dictum contractum matrimonialem. [...] Item dicit quod William de Brailsall est pauper sed reputata fidelis homo et bone conversationis ac honeste nisi sit aliquam qui est ebrius et homo non contingit nisi magnis festis. Item dicit quod Thomas Fouler similiter est homo bone fame, fidelis ac honeste conversatione, habens in bonis usque quattuor, quinque, ut sex marciarum et pro talibus sunt dicit William et Thomas habenti et publice reputati. [...] Dominus Robertus filius Martini cappel-lanus consanguineus Alicie in quarto gradu consanguinitatis affectans victorian pro parte eiusdem qualiter habet iusticiam ut dicit. [...] Membrane 4(b) verso
Second Deposition of William de Brailsall
Undated
Qui tempore estivali et autumnali querit victua sua ex opera manorum suarum et alii temporibus non.
Qui non potuit laborare propter frigiditatem mendicat ostiatiem.

Membrane 3 recto
Deposition of Alice Redyng
March 22, 1367
[...]
Item an Thomas Fouler fuerat auctor, fautor, vel promotor causae pro parte dicte Alicie contra Johannem Boton. Dicit quod non.
Item an William de Brailsall hostiatiem mendicet panem suum et mendicare consequitur ante et post tempus depositionis sue.
Dicit quod aliquando operatur et aliquod mendicet.

Item an dictus William fuerat tempore depositionis sue ac ante et post levis opinionis vel male fame. Dicit quod est fame bone.

Item an idem William sit vel fuerat tempore depositionis sue mente captus vel quasi adeo quidem naturalem discretionem non habebat. Dicit quod habet et habuit discretionem sufficientem ad perhibendum testimonium veritatem.

Item an Thomas et William testes praedicti affectarant et affectant victoriam in causa contra dictum Johannem Boton. Respondeat lex Marcellus.°

Likewise, whether William de Bridsall begs his bread door-to-door and was accustomed to beg before and after the time of his deposition. She says that sometimes he works and sometimes he begs.

Likewise, whether the said William was at the time of his deposition and before and after it of light opinion or bad fame. She says that he is of good fame.

Likewise, whether the same William is or was at the time of his deposition mente captus° or as it were indeed truly did not have natural discretion. She says that he has and had sufficient discretion to present true testimony.

Likewise whether Thomas and William, the aforesaid witnesses, desired and desire victory in the cause against John Boton. Let the Lex Marcellus’° answer.

Membrane 4, recto and verso
Deposition of John Boton
March 22, 1367

Interrogetur Johannes Boton de Scamston an uncquam carnaliter cognovit Aliciam de Redyng. Dicit quod sit.

Item interrogetur idem Johannem quo tempore prefata Alicia ultimo carnaliter cognovit. Dicit quod non cognovit circa festem Pascalem ultimis preteritis et mulier dicit non die dominica ad noctem proximam post festem purificationis ultimo preteritis fuit unus annus elapsus ultimo cognovit eam carnaliter.

Item interrogetur idem Johannem an circa festem purificationis beate Marie virginis ultimo preteritis fuit unus annus elapsus carnaliter cognovit Aliciam supradictam. Dicit quod non.

Item dicit quod quod pater Alicie de Redyng fuit servus domini de Latymer et moriebatur in magna pestilencia° hunc ad xvi annos vel amplius et credit quod si mater dictae Alicie non eset coniugata esset libera et nescit se dicta Alicia sit liberata vel ancilla.

Likewise, whether Thomas et William testes praedicti affectarant et affectant victoriam in causa contra dictum Johannem Boton. Respondeat lex Marcellus.°

Likewise whether Thomas and William, the aforesaid witnesses, desired and desire victory in the cause against John Boton. Let the Lex Marcellus° answer.

Membrane 4, recto and verso
Deposition of John Boton
March 22, 1367

Let John Boton of Scameston be interrogated whether he ever knew Alice Redyng. He says he may have.

Likewise, let the same John be interrogated at what time he last carnally knew the aforesaid Alice. He says he did not know her around Easter last year. He knew the woman carnally around the Feast of the Purification last year, and he says not on the Sunday night closest to the feast of the Purification last. It has been one year passed since he knew her carnally.

Likewise, let the same John be interrogated whether around the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary last year it was one year passed since he knew the above-said Alice carnally. He says not.

Likewise he says that the father of Alice Redyng was a servant of the Lord Latymer and died in the great pestilence here more than sixteen years ago, and he believes that if the mother of the said Alice was not married

Lex Marcellus probably a reference to Justinian’s Digest magna pestilencia the Black Death mente captus lit. “seized mind,” a phrase used to denote mental impairment
Interrogetur an uncquam promissit du-
cere dictam Aliciam in uxorem. Dixit non et
quod nuncquam contraxit cum ea.

Interrogetur dictus quod nuncquam au-
divit loqui de servitute vel libertate dicte
Alicie antequam fuit propositum in lecto isto
dicit et quod fuerit reputata servilis conditio-
nis apud Scameston per xiii annos per quod
tempus iste iure novit eam. Interrogatus dicit
quod ipse melius credidit quod fuit servilis
conditionis suis per dictos xiiii annos quam
libere eo quod pater eiusdem fuit servilis con-
ditionis.

Membrane 12 verso
Second Deposition of Thomas Fouler
April 8, 1367

Thomas Fouler iuratus et repetitus ex offi-
cio tuum dixit quod cum semel audivit verba
matrimoniale proferri inter partes de quibus
agitur et concordat de verba sic ut [a??] depo-
et et quod sedentes erant partes tempore
presentationis dictorum verborum et quod
est aliqui presentes tunc quod sciat et quod
William de Bridsall et homo fidelis et bone
fama et pro Thomas est habitus et reputat.
[...]

Membrane 6 verso
Sentence
April 9, 1367

In dei nomine amen. Auditis et intellectis
meritis cause matrimoniali mote et penden-
te coram nobis Domini Officere Curia Ebor
commissare generali inter Aliciam Redyng de
Scameston primo personaliter et postmodo
per Magistrum Henricum de Haxholme cler-
icum procuratorem suum in presenti causa
libere constitutam partem accretionem ex
parte una, et Johannem Boton Chapman de
Scameston primo personaliter et postmodum
per Magistrum Johannem de Stanton cleri-then she was free, and he does not know if
the said Alice herself is free or a maidservant.

Let him be asked whether he ever prom-
ised to take the said Alice as wife. He says not
and that he never contracted marriage with
her.

The said John, interrogated, says that he
never heard the servitude or liberty of the
said Alice spoken of before he was laid in
bed, and that she was reputed to be of servile
condition in Scameston for fourteen years,
throughout the time this witness knew her.
He says when asked that he he believed very
well that she was of servile condition through
the fourteen years rather than free because
her father was of servile condition.

Membrane 12 verso
Second Deposition of Thomas Fouler
April 8, 1367

Thomas Fouler, called to witness again and
demanded back by the Official said that, al-
though he heard once the matrimonial words
exchanged between the parties concerning
whom this cause is moved, he agrees on the
words just as he deposed, and because those
seated were parties at the time of the presen-
tation of his words and because in some way
he was present then because he knows, and
because William de Bridsall is a trustworthy
man and of good fame, and to Thomas he was
so considered and reputed. [The public fame
labours on the contract.]

Membrane 6 verso
Sentence
April 9, 1367

In the name of God, amen. Having heard
and understood the merits of the matrimo-
nial cause moved and pending in our pres-
ence, the Lord Official of the York Curia,
commissioner general, between Alice Redyng
de Scameston, at first personally, and later
through Master Henry de Haxholme, her
clerk procurator in the present cause, freely
constituted for the party gathered from one
party, and John Boton de Scameston, Chap-
man, at first personally, and later through
Master John de Stanton, his clerk procurator in the said cause, freely constituted for the guilty party from others appearing in the petition presented to him who follows under the law. [...] We the aforesaid commissioner, with these things having been sworn and clearly discussed in the cause of truth with the spirit of grace invoked, proceed to the definitive summary in this way. Because [...] the said part to have proved their intention in our presence sufficiently from the summons of the judge, we assign the aforesaid John to the same Alice for his wife or legitimate spouse and that John to the solemnization of their matrimony in the presence of the church, as is the custom, with the said Alice, for compelling him according to Church discipline and for cohabitation in the same dwelling [...] in these written documents. This sentence was proper and broad from the Lord Commissioner.
Endnotes

1 Redyng c. Boton. York, England. Borthwick Institute for Archives. CP E.92. It consists of fifteen membranes of varying sizes. The membranes are numbered, but are not arranged chronologically. There is no m. 3, and two membranes are marked “4”. In this edition I have numbered the first m. 4 and the second m. 4(b) for clarity. The text as I have presented it here is in chronological order. I have chosen to normalize all proper names for ease of comprehension. Abbreviations are silently expanded and unreadable passages are marked with standard sigla: †...† indicates a passage where the meaning is unclear from the Latin, while [...] indicates a passage where the manuscript is damaged or otherwise unreadable.

Mental Competency Inquisitions from Medieval England\(^1\) (ca. late 12th c.–early 15th c.)

Contributed by Eliza Buhrer

Introduction

The records below are culled from hundreds of inquisitions involving alleged “idiots” and their land held between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries in England. During the mid-thirteenth century, the English royal courts began to oversee inquisitions aimed at assessing the mental competency of people accused of being “idiots” (\textit{idiota} in Latin), and “natural fools.” While there was no standard set of practices for handling these cases, in most instances, an alleged \textit{idiota}’s interactions with the law began when Chancery received a request to examine them, generally after they inherited or alienated land. These requests could be made by anyone who could pay the requisite fees, but frequently came from people who hoped to be appointed custodians of the alleged’s estate. Once Chancery received a request, it sent a writ to officials in the accused’s town, village, or county, asking them to assess whether the allegations were true, and report back. If the officials determined that the person in question seemed to be an \textit{idiota} after conducting an examination or simply asking people in their community about their condition, the Crown would take their land into the king’s hand, and grant their wardship—the right to manage and profit from their estates for the duration of their lives, paired with responsibility for their care—to people outside their line of hereditary succession. These practices remained largely unchanged until the Court of Wards began to handle cases involving so-called “idiots” in the early sixteenth century.

The records of these cases are significant to both the histories of disability and law because they document the earliest systematic mental competency examinations held in Europe. They also marked the first time the law distinguished between \textit{idiota}, who lacked the capacity for self-governance from birth, and temporarily mentally incompetent people (\textit{non compos mentis} in Latin), who lacked it because of temporary illness or injury. Thirteenth-century legal treatises like the \textit{Prerogative Regis}, \textit{Fleta}, and \textit{Britton} asserted that “fools and idiots” differed from people with other mental disorders because their condition was present at birth, permanent, and uninterrupted by moments of lucidity. They then used this permanence to justify treating them differently than other categories of mentally impaired individuals. Specifically, the Crown could not profit from the lands of people suffering from temporary mental illnesses, but had the right to profit from the estates of people found to be “idiots” for the duration of their lives.

It is unclear why the royal courts began to administer inquisitions involving alleged “idiots.” Ostensibly, it was to prevent their lands from “being wasted or alienated” to the disparagement of their heirs, as noted in the case of Nicholas, son of the earl of Dessemond, below. By granting such individuals’ wardships to people outside their line of succession, the Crown theoretically ensured that people without the capacity to manage their own affairs would not be taken advantage of by less than scrupulous relatives.
Yet in practice, the Crown often chose their guardians for reasons other than concern for their well-being. In some instances, like those of Andrew le Merk and William Berchaud, the Crown gifted wardships to its servants to reward their loyalty. Later, it treated wardships as a saleable commodity, a practice that frequently led to protest from the accused’s relatives, less than pleased to see land leave their family’s control.

In light of the fact that the Crown had financial incentives to confirm allegations of “idiocy,” one question we should ask when reading these cases is whether the people identified as “idiots” by the royal courts would have met our criteria for intellectual disability. It is tempting to make this assumption, since if we assume that the people identified as “idiots” were actually intellectually disabled, then the records of their inquiries present the tantalizing possibility of accessing the lived experiences of people otherwise absent from the historical record. That said, there are reasons to be cautious about conflating legal terminology with medical reality.

History demonstrates that legal terminology frequently fails to reflect reality beyond the courtroom. Today, people who meet the clinical requirements for mental illness often fail to meet the legal requirements for the insanity defense, and of course, the women identified as witches in the courts of Early Modern Europe did not actually commune with the devil. However, like many women accused of “idiocy” in medieval England, they possessed land without male guardians and enjoyed a relatively high degree of legal and economic autonomy. Scholarship on the early modern Court of Wards has also emphasized that the Crown’s ability to profit from the sale of wardships created a strong incentive for it to identify mentally competent individuals as incompetent, and there is no reason not to be similarly cynical when considering the Crown’s motives in medieval “idiocy” inquiries. Finally, the royal courts only involved themselves in matters concerning alleged “idiots” when the individuals in question possessed landed wealth, so the people subject to these inquisitions did not reflect the full set of people born with intellectual disabilities in medieval England. Instead, all we can know for certain is that they represented the set of people who possessed land and were deemed poorly suited to the task of managing it by people who felt they had something to gain by accusing them of “idiocy.”

People ultimately accused others of “idiocy” for a variety of reasons. William de Aston, for instance, claimed that he had been declared an idiot on account of the “malicious suit of certain enemies.” Similarly, Adam le Gayte, the king’s watchmen, requested that the court find William Berchaud to be an idiot and grant him his wardship, just as William was about to inherit the estate of his uncle John Danethorp, also an idiot, whose wardship Adam had held prior to his death. The officials who examined William undoubtedly had an incentive to support his claim, since Adam was a favored servant of the king, who had held John’s wardship by the “king’s gift,” and he claimed that without William’s wardship, he would be unable to support himself. More broadly, the initial findings of these inquiries were frequently overturned, and even when they were upheld there was no consistent criteria for determining whether someone was an idiot. For even as legal treatises held that “idiocy” was a permanent and congenital condition, many of the people accused of “idiocy” had previously been mentally competent, like Robert de Corbrigg who became an idiot only after going to Oxford, or Margery Anlauby, who was declared an idiot after the death of her husband.

Nevertheless, whether the legal “idiots” of medieval England were intellectually disabled or not, the records of their inquiries offer insight into how mental incompetency was defined and treated before intellectual disability emerged as a medical category during the early modern period.
Bibliography


———. “Town and Country: A Comparison of the Treatment of the Mentally Disab-
“Idiocy” in Britton[1] (ca. 1290)

And whereas it sometimes happens that the heir is an idiot from his birth whereby he is incapable of taking care of his inheritance, we will that such heirs, of whomsoever they hold, and whether they be male or female, remain in our custody, with all their inheritances, saving to every lord all other services[2] belonging to him for lands held of him, and that they so remain in our wardship as long as they continue in their idiocy. But this rule shall not hold with regard to those who become insane by any sickness.

Mental Incompetency in the Prerogativa Regis[3] (ca. 1324)

The King shall have custody of the lands of natural fools[4] taking the profits of them without waste or destruction, and shall find them their necessaries from whose fee soever the lands be holden; and after the death of such idiots he should render [it] to the rightful heirs, so that such fools shall not alien,[5] nor their heirs be disinherited. Also, the King shall provide, when anyone who previously had memory and understanding should become of unsound mind as certain people are through lucid intervals[6] that their lands and tenements may be safely protected, without waste and destruction, and that they and their household may live and be reasonably sustained from the profits of the same, and the residue beyond their sustenance be preserved for their use, to be delivered to them when they regain their memory so that such lands and tenements shall in no way be aliened within the aforesaid time; The king should not take anything from the profits for his own use, and if the party should die in such a state, then the residue[7] should be distributed for his soul at the advice of an ordinary.

Andrew le Merk, an “Idiot of Unsound Mind” Entrusted to the King’s Tailor[8] (1285)

To the justices in eyre[9] in co. Essex. As the king is given to understand that Andrew le Merk is an idiot and of unsound mind,[10] so that he is incapable of administering his lands and goods, the king orders the justices to cause Andrew to come before them in their eyre, and to examine him carefully, and if it appear clearly to them that he has been an idiot from his birth and is still, so that the custody of his body and lands ought to pertain to the king, they are to deliver such custody to Adynettus, the king’s tailor, to be held during the king’s pleasure,[11] so that he may cause suitable necessaries to be administered to Andrew, his wife, and his household.

William Berchaud, The Nephew of an “Idiot,” Accused of “Idiocy” by the Man who Held his Uncle’s Wardship[12] (1302)


Writ to the escheator to enquire whether the said William is an idiot or not &c. 2 Aug. 30 Edw. I. Cumberland. Inquisition[14] made at Carlisle on Tuesday before St. Matthew, 30 Edw. I.

Alenburgh. The jury know nothing of the person of the said William or whether he is an idiot or not because they have never seen him for he has dwelt in Holdernesse since his birth, but they have heard say that he has been

services feudal services natural fools fools from birth alien transfer property lucid intervals periods of mental competence residue remaining profits eyre a circuit court presided over by an itinerant justice during...pleasure an indefinite length of time escheator a royal official who handled transfers of property to the Crown Inquisition an inquiry
an idiot from his birth. John de Danethorp who was an idiot from his birth, was uncle of the said William, and the said William, son of Alice his sister, and Joan, daughter of Margery another sister, who is of full age and discretion, are his next heirs. The king committed to Adam le Wayte the wardship of the said John’s lands in Alenburgh, which by his death have been taken into the king’s hand, viz.—a messuage, 14½ a. land, 14½ bovates let to farm to divers tenants, a toft° and 1 bovate° of land which were of John Ravene, 14½ a. meadow, rents of cottars° and herbage° in a place called Alenbank, a custom called ‘breumale,’ a water-mill, and works, held of Sir Thomas de Lucy by cornage° and service of 5s. yearly.

York. Inquisition made at Hedene on Thursday the eve of St. Bartholomew, 30 Edw. I. Outteuneuton. The said William is an idiot from his birth. He holds 12 l. of land, of the inheritance of Geoffrey Berchaude his father, of the king in chief,° as of the honour of Albemarle, by knight’s service, which John Berchaud holds by the king’s commission for the sustenance of the said William, rendering 12 marks yearly at the king’s exchequer.°

Danthorp. The said William, son of Alice one of the sisters of John de Danthorp, and Joan, daughter of Margery another sister, who is of discretion, are heirs of the said John, and by his death have in Danthorp 7 bovates and two parts of a bovate of land, a moiety of a close° containing 2a., tofts called Abbitoft and Dundraghecroft, and tofts and land held by divers tenants (named), held of the king in chief as of the honour of Albemarle, service unspecified; also a capital messuage containing 4a., a moiety of a close called Milnecroft, 8 bovates of land, and a toft and 2a. land which William the smith holds, held of the provost of Beverley, rendering 10s. yearly; and a toft containing 3½a., held of John de Melsa rendering 10s. yearly. All the above have been in the king’s hand from the day of St. Nicholas last, by the death of the said John de Danthorp.

Memorandum (from the escheator?)° that he has personally examined the said William and finds that he is manifestly an idiot, and has been so from his birth, nor does he enjoy lucid intervals,° but, as he has heard, at lunations° is worse and raves with madness. (Undated.)

Petition to the king from Adam le Gayt to grant him what William Berchot is heir of, for what he had of the other fool his uncle has been loyally expended in the king’s service, and he cannot otherwise maintain his estate.

Margery de Anlauby, who became an “Idiot” after the Death of her Husband° (1279 and 1289)

Writ of certiorari° to Thomas de Normanvill, the king’s steward, 9 Sept. 7 Edw. I.

York. Inq. The octave of St. Michael, 7 Edw. I.

Anlauby. Land (unspecified), worth 13 marks yearly, excepting 4s. held of the abbot of St. Mary’s, York, by service of 2 marks
yearly as a free farmer for all services, excepting two suits at the abbot’s court on reasonable summons; and the said Margery fell ill a fortnight before the Purification last and is so infirm that she is not of sound mind; after which date came Robert de Stotevyll of Cottingham, of whom the said Margery held nothing, and without any authority took away John her son and heir, and still unjustly detains him.

Writ of certiorari, concerning the state of the said Margery, whose custody with that of her lands and goods the king sometime committed to William de Beverlaco, deceased, 25 May, 17 Edw. I.


The said Margery is an idiot, not from her birth, but she has been so continuously since the death of her husband nine years ago. William de Beverlaco had her wardship and that of her lands, viz.—of 10½ bovates for eight years, and similarly for a year of 4 bovates which she had by escheat by the death of Alan le Moyn of Hesel; she had also 25s. 3d. rent of assize, and 5s. from cottages; out of all which she paid 2 marks yearly to the abbot of St. Mary’s, York, and, by the grant of her father, 10s. to Josiana her sister, a nun in Swyn, as long as she should live. All the goods arising from the said lands beyond the sustenance of the said Margery, her four children, and household, came to the said William.

The Children of Geoffrey Berthald, All “Idiots” of “Unsound Mind” (1290)

January 24, Westminster. To Thomas de Normanvill, escheator beyond Trent. Order to deliver to John Berthald of Holdernesse the custody of the lands that belonged to Geoffrey Berthald, tenant in chief, in Out Newton in Holdernesse, as it is testified before the king that Geoffrey’s children are idiots and of unsound mind, so that they are insufficient for the rule of themselves and their things and the lands of Geoffrey, which are in the king’s hands by reason of his death, and the king, wishing to provide for the estate of the children lest dilapidation of the lands should be made by their ignorance and fatuity, has granted the custody of the lands to John Berthald during pleasure, so that he may maintain the children reasonably in all necessities and shall render to the king 10 marks yearly for so long as he shall have the custody, and shall cause Juliana, Geoffrey’s daughter, when she come to marriageable years, if she be fit for marriage, to be married out of the issues of the lands, the costs whereof the king will cause to be allowed to him in payment of the ferm.

Joan de la Chaumbre, Found to be an “Idiot” by a Corrupt Escheator (1316)

October 12, 1316, York. To Master John Walewayn, escheator beyond Trent. Order to restore to Joan de la Chaumbre of Whitruckkesmed her lands, and the issues of the same, which were taken into the king’s hands by John Abel, late escheator beyond Trent, who delivered them to the present escheator, pretending that they were in the king’s hands by
reason of the madness of Joan, as it appeared by inquisition taken by John Abel that she was an idiot and mad woman, the present escheator having returned that he had gone in person, by virtue of the king’s order, to her place of residence, and that he had seen and examined her, and that he found that she was not an idiot and had not been at any time from her birth.

Writ of plenius certiorari, the (late) escheator having returned that the lands &c. of the said Joan were in the king’s hand by reason of her idiocy, 4 May, 9 Edw. II. Endorsed by the escheator, that he cannot find any cause in her for being reputed an idiot.

Somerset. Inquisition. Friday after SS. 9 Edward II.
The said Joan is not an idiot nor ever has been.
Whittokesmede. A messuage, meadow, 1½ acres meadow, 18 acres arable, and 2 acres wood, descended to her after her father’s death, and are held of Elias Cotel, knight, by service of ½ d., and suit at his court of Camelforton.

Alexander Tothe, who Lost his Memory on Account of “Malign Spirits” (1318)

October 26, York. To Master Richard de Clare, escheator beyond Trent. Order to cause John de Northgrave, son and heir of Alfred de Northgrave, tenant in chief of the late king, to have seisin of his father’s lands, as he proved his age before Master John Walewayn, late escheator beyond Trent, and the king has taken his homage.

To Robert de Sapy, escheator this side Trent. Order to deliver to John de Yucflete and Joan his wife, mother of Alexander Tothe, son and heir of James Tothe of Middelton, the lands of the said Alexander, which cannot descend to them by right of inheritance, as his nearest friends for his maintenance and profit, the escheator having taken the lands into the king’s hands because he understood that Alexander was a madman and an idiot from his birth, as the king learns by inquisition taken by the escheator that Alexander is not an idiot from birth, that he was of good memory for three years after his birth, and that he was afterwards impaired by malign spirits so that he lost his memory for two years, after which time he recovered his good state, so that he was sufficient for the rule of himself and his lands and chattels had he been of full age, and that he enjoys lucid intervals in the new moon, and that he holds lands in Middelton of divers lords by various services, and that he does not hold of the king, and that he is aged fourteen years.

Robert, Son of Hugh, Son of Ascelin de Corbrigg, who became an “Idiot” after going to Oxford (1333)

Writ to the escheator to enquire whether the said Robert is an idiot, and whether he has alienated any lands, &c., 23 May, 6 Edward III.

August 20, Stow Park, 1333.
To John de Louthre, escheator in cos. York, Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland.
Order not to intermeddle with two messuages, 30 acres of land and 4s. rent in Corbrigg, which he had taken into the king’s hand because of the idiocy of Robert son of Hugh son of Ascelin de Corbrigg, restoring
the issues," but to permit the near friends of Robert, to whom the said tenements ought not to descend or remain, to have the custody of them, so that they may answer for the issues thereof for the benefit of Robert, as the king has learned by inquisition taken by that escheator° that the said Robert is an idiot, of unsound mind, and unfit to govern himself or his lands and goods, and that he was not an idiot from his birth but only for the last 16 years, and that he enjoys no lucid intervals,° and that the said messuages, lands and rent which Hugh son of Ascelin gave to the said Robert his son and to William, Robert’s brother, deceased, and the heirs of their bodies, with reversion to the said Hugh and his heirs, are held of Henry de Percy by the service of rendering 11s. 7d. to him yearly.

Writ to the escheator to enquire whether the said Robert is an idiot, and whether he has alienated° any lands, &c., 23 May, 6 Edward III.

Northumberland. Inq. 10 June, 6 Edward III.

The said Robert is an idiot, but was not so from his birth, for 17 years ago he left Corbrigg for Oxford of sound mind and memory, and when he returned 16 years ago he was an idiot, and from that time has remained so, and has not enjoyed lucid intervals, and if he alienated any lands, he did so in that state. The aforesaid Hugh son of Ascelin, father of the said Robert, gave two messuages, 30a. land, and 4s. rent in Correbrigg to the said Robert and William his brother, to hold to them and the heirs of their bodies, with reversion to himself and his heirs, which William died ten years ago: the said tenements are held of Henry de Percy by service of rendering 11s. 7d.

William, son of Hugh de Correbrigg, and John, son of Thomas de Wytton, are next heirs in blood to the said Robert, and of full age. The said Robert was examined in person by the escheator in the presence of the jury.

**Thomas heir of Griffin de Grenestede, Found to be Sane because he Could Count Money and Measure Cloth** (1341)

11 May, 15 Edward III. Writ to the escheator in co. Southampton, Bedford etc. to inquire whether the said Thomas is an idiot, and whether he has alienated a great portion of his lands and tenements in Kerdyngton, co. Bedford, or not, and who is his heir etc. 11 May, 15 Edward III.

*Endorsed by the escheator that he went in person to Kerdyngton and examined the said Thomas in every way he could as to his state, and that he found him of good mind and sane memory in word and deed, counting money, measuring cloth° and doing all other things.*

**John atte Berton, Who Lost his Memory from Terror and Grief** (1345)

November 17, 1345. Westminster.

To John de Mussenden. Order to restore to John atte Berton his lands, together with the issues thereof, and not to intermeddle° further therewith, as on it being found by inquisition taken by Thomas de Aspale, escheator in co. Southampton, that John was an idiot, the king caused his lands to be taken so that they should not suffer dilapidation and granted them to Thomas de Mussenden for rendering a certain thing at the exchequer and finding John’s maintenance, and John afterwards beseeching the king to order those lands to be restored to him, as he is of sound mind and was so before the taking of the inquisition, the king ordered the eschea-

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**issues profits from the estate**  
**escheator** royal official who handled transfers of property to the Crown  
**lucid intervals** periods of mental competence  
**alienated** sold or given away  
**counting...cloth** customary markers of legal majority for burgesses’ sons  
**intermeddle** interfere
tor° to take an inquisition upon the matter, by which it is found that John was of sound mind from his infancy to the completion of twenty-one years of age and more, having no hope of idiocy, but by the great terror and grief caused by the death of James atte Ber-
ton, his father, he has lost much of his memo-
ry and has remained almost without memory for three years, although he enjoys certain lu-
cid intervals," so that he was reputed an idiot at that time, but afterwards he regained his health and has preserved a good memory for more than the last five years and is at present of sound mind and not an idiot.

Nov. 18. Westminster.
To the treasurer and barons of the exchequer. Order to discharge Thomas de Mussend-
en of 61s. 1d., as on its being found by inquisi-
tion taken by Thomas de Aspale, escheator in co. Southampton, that John atte Berton was an idiot, the king caused his lands in Wotton and Oklee to be taken into his hands, which were worth 101s. 1d. yearly beyond the rents and services due thereon by extent made by the escheator, and on 8 March last the king committed them to Thomas de Mussenden for rendering 61s. 1d. yearly at the exchequer, wishing the remaining 40s. to be reserved for John's maintenance, and afterwards the king ordered Thomas to restore those lands to John and not to intermeddle in further there-
with.

John de Heton, who had a “Fancy in his Head”° (1353–1354)

Writ of plenius certiorari° to William de Notton, William de Fyncheden, John de Bollyng and John de Upton to ascertain whether John de Heton is an idiot or not. 4 July, 27 Edward III.

Writ of venire facias° to the sheriff of York to summons a jury, 4 July, 27 Edward III.

Jury panel, Doncaster, Monday after the Epiphany, 28 Edward III.

York. Examination made by William de Fyncheden and John de Upton on the idiocy of John de Heton, and inquisition of the value of his lands &c. Doncaster, Monday after the Epiphany, 28 Edward III.

John de Heton appeared and was examined and found to be an idiot and incapable of ruling himself or his lands. From his birth, which was on the day of the Annunciation, A.D. 1324, until the feast of St. James, 22 Edward III, viz. until he was 24 years of age, he was in good sense and quite sane; and since then till to-day he has been continuously an idiot, insensible to his surroundings, having a fancy in his head, whereby he remains un-
conscious of his own personality and paying no heed to anything at all. He enjoys no lucid intervals.

The jurors being asked what lands of the said John de Heton have been occupied by others and of the value of his goods and chattels, say that those which he had on the afore-
said feast of St. James, viz. six oxen, price 8s. each, four horses, price 4s. each, and 40 sheep, price 40s., were used by Margaret his wife for the support of him, herself, two sons and one daughter who are under the age of ten years, and of Margery, daughter of Adam de Hop-
ton, married to John, eldest son of the said John, and for the support of his household, up to the feast of St. Michael, 26 Edward III; since when the said Margaret would not dwell with her husband in the company of William de Heton, his brother, and the latter would not let his brother be away from his guardi-
anship in that of his wife. By the mediation of friends the lands of the said John in Myrfield,
Hopton, Estheton and Balne, with a moiety° of his goods and chattels, were assigned for the support of himself, William his son and Joan his daughter, in the guardianship of the said William his brother; and his lands &c. in Estheton and Erdeslawe, with a moiety of his goods and chattels, were assigned to Margaret for her support and that of John, her eldest son, and Margery his wife, daughter of Adam de Hopton. Margaret has remained until now in the household of the said Adam, who intervened touching the lands, goods and chattels assigned to her. In the winter after the assignment all the sheep died of murrain° and there are no other goods or chattels except those which are appraised above. The lands, goods, and chattels hardly suffice for the support of the said John, his wife, sons and household.

The said John has by inheritance the following lands:

Estheton. A messuage,° 80a. land, 7a. meadow, 20a. pasture and 40s. yearly rent of free tenants, all held of Sir Edmund de Langele as of the soke of Wakefeld by service of 15s. 9d. yearly payable by the tenants beside their own rent.

Erdeslawe. Six marks rent payable by the free tenants, held of Robert de Nevyll by fealty only.

Myrlfeld. A messuage, a water-mill, 140a. land in demesne,° 5a. meadow and 37s. rent from free tenants in Myrlfeld and Hopton. All held of Sir Henry, duke of Lancaster, as of the honour of Pontefract, by homage and fealty and by suit of court every three weeks.

Westheton. A messuage, 90a. land, 4a. meadow, 12a. pasture and 25s. 6d. rent of free tenants held of John de [Burnell] by homage and fealty only.

Polyngton in Balne. Thirteen shillings and fourpence rent from free tenants held of Sir Henry, duke of Lancaster, as of the honour of Pontefract by homage and fealty only.

The goods and chattels of the said John are in the custody of William his brother and Margaret his wife. The said William, John de Malet, who married the aunt of the said John, John de Hellay, who married the said John’s sister, are the nearest relations and friends of the said John and can best have the guardianship of him.

Nicholas, Son of Maurice, Earl of Dessemond° (1358)

8 October 1358. Westminster. To the justiciary° of Ireland. Order to cause Nicholas, son of Maurice earl of Dessemond, to come before him and to be examined, and if he find him to be an idiot, to cause all his lands to be seized into the king’s hand and extended by inquisition, and to be delivered for keeping to Ralph earl of Stafford, so that he shall answer to the king for the issues there of over and above the maintenance of Nicholas and his servants, and if necessary to make inquisition whether Nicholas has been an idiot from birth, or how long, and to send the inquisition and extent to the chancery of England° without delay, as the king is informed that Nicholas is an idiot so that he cannot suffice for the governance of himself or his lands, and it pertains to the king to provide for the good governance of the lands of idiots, that they may not be wasted or alienated. By K.
William de Aston, Accused of “Idiocy” by his Enemies° (1402)

Inquisition ex officio.° Gloucester. 16 March 1402.

William Aston of Aston Ingham has been an idiot since 9 Jan. 1400. He holds a tenement called ‘Astonescourt’ in Ley by Westbury, annual value 26s.8d. He and Alice his wife have taken the profits during this time.

July 7, 1402 Westminster

To Robert de Whityngton escheator° in Gloucestershire and the march of Wales adjacent. Order to remove the king’s hand and meddle no further with a messuage° and one carucate° of land at Leyghe in the parish of Wesebury in the said March called ‘Astonescourte,’ delivering to William de Aston any issues° thereof taken; as at the malicious suit of certain his enemies, untruly averring that he was an idiot, the premises were seized into the king’s hand; but he has appeared in person in chancery, and being there duly examined is found of sound mind and discretion, wherefore by advice of the justices, serjeants at law and others of the council learned in the law it is determined that the king’s hand shall be removed.

Christina Goloffre, an “Idiot” who cannot tell Good from Evil° (1404)

Inquisition ex officio. Ilchester. 7 July 1404.

Christina daughter of Thomas Goloffre, son and heir of John Goloffre and Christina his wife, sister and heir of Walter Englyssh, held in her demesne° as of fee i messuage and 24 a. arable and meadow in Ashington of the lady de Sturye of her manor of Ashington by knight service, annual value 10s. She is an idiot from birth, unable to distinguish good from evil and evil from good.°
Endnotes

1 The records, which consist of inquisitions postmortem, letters of patent, letters of close, and a variety of other administrative documents, are held in the British National Archives, mostly in the C series. They are also catalogued in several publications of the British Government, specifically, Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery), Henry III–Henry V, 7 vols. HMSO, 1916–2003; Calendar of Inquisitions Postmortem and Other Analogous Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office, 20 vols. HMSO, 1904–70; Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1216–1509, 52 vols. HMSO, 1891–1901.
4 fatuorum naturalium in the original.
6 sui inmemor in the original.
8 discreta in the original.
13 lucidis intervallis in the original.


Nuremberg Town Records: Select Entries Pertaining to the “Mad” and Intellectually Disabled (1377–1492)

Contributed by Anne M. Koenig

Introduction

As German cities expanded in the later Middle Ages, town authorities were confronted with ever-growing issues of poverty, transience, and illness. In response to the pressures that different needy, marginal, and disruptive populations put on municipal coffers, city governments promulgated new policies and crafted new institutional responsibilities. For instance, over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, German city councils began running municipal brothels, hired and oversaw midwives as sworn town officials, and took over the administration of city hospitals. Such actions were done in the joint interest of public health and morality. They also increasingly allowed city officials to micromanage any aspect of urban life that intersected with the expanding scope of city councils and the ruling elites.

As secular authorities played ever-greater roles in dealing with issues like poverty, civic order, and crime, the lives of the sick and those with disabilities came to fall increasingly under the purview of municipal officials. City councils rarely crafted explicit policies regarding populations affected by disability, but interactions between city officials and persons with physical or intellectual disabilities were frequent. Authorities labeled such individuals by their disability or illness and often identified them in their own bookkeeping as simply “the fool,” the “blind man,” or “the mad woman.” It is only occasionally that a name, an occupation, or other specific identifying detail was included. This labeling suggests that a disability or illness became the most defining identity marker for a person, at least from the perspective of town authorities. It also draws attention to the fact that, with only few exceptions, the illness or disability itself was central to why and how the council intervened in the lives of these individuals.

We know of these interactions thanks to the survival of several types of documents created by the bureaucracy of city governments, namely council log books and city financial accounts. While Nuremberg’s records are the focus below, in part because these records are particularly rich and in part because late medieval Nuremberg was an especially vibrant city, such documents survive from cities as widespread as Munich and Frankfurt to Hildesheim and Lübeck. These civic records are not very “narrative” sources. Their authors did not intend to tell a story; they simply recorded the mundane, day-to-day business of running a town. Council minute books or logbooks produced by city scribes, for instance, merely recorded the decisions that the city mayors made as they presided over all aspects of town management. Even less narrative are the financial books kept by the scribes. These accounting records only note the incomes and expenditures of the city over the course of the year, but in doing so give us glimpses of interactions with the
sick and those with disabilities that involved a civic payout.

Yet despite their limitations, these records show us the reactions that municipal authorities had to those with illnesses and disabilities and they give us glimpses into how authorities understood madness and intellectual disability. Town leaders, and medieval people in general, understood the two conditions to be different; they were not often conflated or confused by onlookers. Nuremberg’s records distinguish between the “mad” (a general category covering those they called “mad,” “senseless,” “out-of-their-minds,” or “reasonless”) and the disabled (called “fools,” “natural idiots,” or simply “weak-minded”). But the management of the two populations were often parallel, and sometimes specifically overlapped. For instance, some towns built rooms or small structures to house the “mad” and the intellectually impaired alike, calling such spaces “fool’s huts” (in Nuremberg, Narrenheuslin, or in Hildesheim, Dorenkisten). These “huts,” moreover, had both juridical and charitable functions: they incarcerated but also cared for these vulnerable populations. Indeed, the management of such spaces often fell under the care of the city hospital.

Offered below is a selection of entries involving madness or intellectual disability that were entered into Nuremberg’s financial accounts between 1377 and 1492 and into their council books between 1450 and 1493. All told, the surviving books from these two bodies of records contain almost 250 entries that involve the “mad” or intellectually disabled. In a typical year, four or five cases could easily pass through the council’s docket, most of them during the summer months. (For perspective: Nuremberg’s population in the fifteenth century was about 20,000.) The persons labeled as “mad” or disabled in these records, moreover, were only a small subset of those who lived their lives in the city but never drew the council’s attention. Most of those who experienced rational impairment were cared for by their families and friends; only when more private methods of management failed—like when a woman with mental illness was not native to the city, when a man with a disability was accused of immodesty, or when a spouse was unwilling to accept responsibility—did public authorities step in. If we keep in mind this silent majority while analyzing the minority “problematic” individuals whose lives left traces in the records, we can begin to comprehend just how central such experiences of mental illness and disability were in the urban landscape.

The entries below reveal that persons experiencing intellectual disability or mental illness were largely at the mercy of the council, whose primary interest was to protect the order and wellbeing of the city. The council therefore responded to these individuals with a range of management techniques, from the helpful or benign to the stern or even persecutory. Expulsion and imprisonment feature prominently. Of particular note is the frequent mention of the town of Regensburg, which despite lying some sixty miles away, was the easiest place to access the Danube river. Nuremberg sent “mad” persons to Regensburg over two dozen times, sometimes as just a first stop before sending them further downriver to Passau, Vienna, and even Hungary. The council, however, also came up with more local solutions. Beatings were sometimes ordered, generally in cases where an impaired person committed a serious transgression. The claim of boisterous, unruly, or even lewd behavior was cited multiple times. Punishments even in these instances were still rare, not least because corporal punishment was forbidden by German law codes, which ruled that individuals who lacked sufficient reason could not be held fully accountable for their actions. In other rare cases, the council authorized “mad” individuals to beg. The city regulated municipal charity and public begging, and records show that at least by the 1470s multiple “mad” individuals, almost all women, were granted this right. Finally, we also find attempts made to house and care for those with mental illness within the city itself. By the end of the centu-
Nuremberg’s council had also created multiple spaces for housing the “mad” within its walls. The council also steadily enlisted the resources of the hospital in maintaining care, and they had entered into negotiations (not always pleasant) with families in attempts to get them to take responsibility for their own family members.

Bibliography


Selected Financial Book (Stadtrechnungen) Entries—German Original

1377 Item d[edimus] von einer Unsinigen xiii s. hl. daz man sie schicht gen Weizzenburg.²

1378 Item d[edimus] xvi s. hlr. einer unsinnigen umb einen pelzt und umb zwen schuh und umb einen slayer.³

1378 Item d[edimus] lx hlr. zu kost von einer unsinnigen die in dem loch gevangen lag.⁴

1385 Item dedimus iii lb. und iii S. hl von dem unsynigen Peter Kursner den man regensburg sant und furbaz gen Wein.⁵

1386 Item dedimus Meister Otten Wunt Artztx ix S. hl von einem Toreten⁶ den er ertzneyt.⁷

1386 Item dedimus dem lochmeister i lb. hlr von einem Toroten der xiii tag gevangen lag.⁸

1386 Item dedimus dem H. Karrenman iii lb. und viii S. hl von einem Toroten zu füren gen Reg[ensburg].⁹

1421 Item de[dimus] iiii s. hllr die Cuntz Statknecht geben het einem unsinnigen pfaffen dem man die Stat verboten und von dannen geweist het.¹⁰

1431 Item de[dimus] i lb hl dem lochüter von einer töroten frawen die xii tag im loch lag und auch für ettlich notdurfft im loch.

1435 Item de[dimus] iii lb xvi s hl das ein töroten fraw gekost hat im loch und gen Regenspurg zufüren.¹¹

1439 Item de[dimus] x x artgelts dem lochütet von zwaen narren die man in daz loch geleg hette.¹²

1458 Item xix s. dem lochüter und zuchtiger vom unsynnigen Endlein mit gerten zu hawen und von hynnen zu schicken.¹³

Selected Financial Book (Stadtrechnungen) Entries—English Translation

1377 Item: We pay 8 silver heller⁹ to drive a mad woman to Weizzenburg.

1378 Item: We pay 16 silver heller to a mad woman for a fur, two shoes and a veil.¹⁴

1378 Item: We pay 60 silver heller for the cost of mad woman⁵ who lies imprisoned in the jail.¹⁵

1385 Item: We pay 3 pounds and 3 silver heller for mad Peter Kursner, who was sent to Regensburg and then further to Vienna.

1386 Item: We pay Master Otto, surgeon, 9 silver heller for a mad man [in the jail] whom he doctored.¹⁶

1386 Item: We pay the prison warden 1 pound heller for a mad man who was in the prison for 13 days.

1431 Item: We pay 1 pound heller to the prison warden for a mentally impaired woman who spent 12 days in jail and for various necessities in the prison.

1435 Item: We pay 3 pounds 16 silver heller that a rationally impaired woman cost [for her time in] the jail and to send her to Regensburg.

1439 Item: We give 10 silver [heller] as payment to the prison warden for two fools who were placed in the jail.

1458 Item: [We pay] 19 silver [heller] to the prison warden and the executioner¹⁷ for whipping mad Endlein²⁰ and sending him away from here.²¹

heller the smallest coin of note in southern Germany, worth one-half of a penny (pfennig) executioner a city employee in charge of all corporal punishments meted out by the city, who, like the prison warden, was given a modest salary but who largely earned his keep through the payments for individual jobs
Selected Council Book (Ratsverlässe)
Entries—German Original

27 Mai 1449 Item den unsinnigen im loch ledig lassen auf urfee. 22
6 Juli 1449 Item den torechten von Rewt auf ein urf[ehd] ledig lassen. 23
9 Juli 1449 Item die unsynnigen frauen austreiben und bestellen, nich mer hereynzulassen. 24
5 Jan. 1471 Item der unsynigen vergont zu beteln. 25
19 Juli 1475 Item den Narren Im loch ligend der die lewt geslagen hat, Im loch mit gerten hawen. und gein newnkirchen füren. 26
24 Mai 1477 Item den Spitalpfleger ze biten ein gedult zu haben mit der frauen die unvernuffig gewesen und wider zu ir selbs komen ist, etlich zeit und nemblich biss die heissen tage verscheyden, in dem Spital zu geduld. 27
31 Mai 1477 Item den Spiegler von den synnen kommen ist, in ein hêwslin in Marstal zu bringen. 28
20 Juni 1478 Item den Narren im loch ligend auss der Stat weisen und mit rẅten zestreichen vor der Stat der Statknechen ursachhalb den er ein frauen erschreckt hat dan ir zu einem kind mislungen ist. 29
27 Aug. 1481 Item Jobsten Tetzels seligen gelassen witiben und Iren vormunden und freunden ist uff ir bete und anbringen vergonnt, desselben hern Jobs Tetzels seligen Sun, der nit bei vernuff sein sol, auff einem turn bei S. Katherin In einem Kemerlein zu enthalten und zu verwaren doch auff Iren Costen und so lang es eins Rats fug ist. 30

11 Mai 1482 Item des Toretten manshalb, der yetz herkomen ist und das lewten vil schaden und unzucht beweist,

Selected Council Book (Ratsverlässe)
Entries—English Translation

27 May 1449 Item: We set free the madman in the jail, on his oath.
6 July 1449 Item: We set free the mentally impaired man from Rewt° on his oath.
9 July 1449 Item: We expel the mad woman and order that she never be let back in.
5 Jan. 1471 Item: We allow the mad woman to beg.
19 July 1475 Item: Regarding the fool lying in the jail who hit people, whip him in the jail and drive him to Neunkirchen.°
24 May 1477 Item: We ask the hospital warden to have patience with the woman who went mad and has come back to herself, and to allow her to remain in the hospital some time, that is, until warm weather comes.
31 May 1477 Item: The mirror craftsman who has gone mad is to be put into a small house in the city stables.
20 June 1478 Item: We order that the fool, lying in the jail, be beaten with whips in front of the city by bailiffs and thrown out of the city because he frightened a woman and she miscarried her child.
27 Aug. 1481 Item: In response to the request and application by the surviving widow of Jobst Tetzel,° she and her legal guardians and friends are permitted to place Jobst Tetzel’s son, who does not have his reason, in a room in a tower by St. Katherine’s [where he will be] contained and kept safely at their cost so long as it is authorized by the Council.

Rewt: either Reut, an area about 130 miles s.e. of Nuremberg, or Reutte, Austria, about 150 miles south.
Neunkirchen (Newnkirchen) a small town 15 miles to the east of Nuremberg
zuerkünden von Wannen er sei damit
er denselb[10] deinen freund heym ge-
schickt werden mochte, wo aber das nie
erfahren wurde den die thunaw ab ze
schickt Se[10] Reich [31]

18 Mai 1485 Item die Selswester, die in der
Ebner Selhuß von den Synnen komen
ist. In der heußlein ayns bei dem New-
en Spital oder im marstal ze nemen Ga.
Holtschuher[32]

3 Juni 1486 Item den Törehnten Nagler
umb sein ungestumikeyt, auß der Stat
zelfüren und ine bedroen, wo er wider
herkome. An. Tetzel.[34]

9 Juli 1489 Item den Jungem Ratsmid[35]
der seiner symne geprechlich ist, Im einen
Narrenheuslin bei dem Spital zu ver-
waren.[36]

27 Okt. 1489 Item einen an der stat arbeit
der einen unsynnigen bruder hat zu
enthaltung desselben, ein kemelrein zu
vergonnen uff sein Cost.[37]

30 Dez. 1492 Item die diern, die ein spieg-
lerin gestochen hat etlich tage in einer
vancknuss zu enthalten, und uff mer-
cung ze haben ob sie bei vernufft sei
oder nit. Schopfen.[38]

we are to find out where he is from
so that he might be sent home to his
friend, or if that is not discovered, to
send him to the Danube River. [Done
by:] Se[10] Reich[32]

18 May 1485 Item: The souls-sister[31] from
the Ebner Soullhouse[32] who has gone
out of her senses is to be put in the
small hut either by the New Hospital[33]
or in the stables. [Done by:] Ga[10]briel
Holtschuher

3 June 1486 Item: We order that the men-
tally impaired nail-maker, because of
his unruliness be driven out of the city
and threatened should he come back.
[Done by:] An[10]thy Tetzel

9 July 1489 Item: We order that the young
brass-smith, whose mind is weak, be
safely kept in a fool’s hut by the hospi-
tal.

27 Oct. 1489 Item: A city worker who has a
mad brother is permitted a small room
to confine him, at his cost.

30 Dec. 1492 Item: We order the serving girl,
who stabbed a mirror craftswoman,
be held some days in a prison and to
observe if she is sane or not. Court or-
dered.

souls-sister a kind of religious person found in southern Germany similar to Beguines
Endnotes

1 The following entries come from the Nuremberg Financial Accounts (Stadtrechnungen) held in the Nuremberg State Archives (Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, hereafter StA N): StA N, Rep. 52, No. 1–22, 177, 179–181 and the Nuremberg Council books (Ratsverlässe) held in the Nuremberg State Archives: StA N, Rep. 60a, Ratsverlässe, Nr. 1–285 (1450–1493). All transcriptions and translations provided by Anne M. Koenig, in consultation with Irene Stahl, ed., Die Nürnberger Ratsverlässe: Heft 1 1449–1450 (Verlag Degner, 1983) and Martin Scheiber, ed., Die Nürnberger Ratsverlässe: Heft 2 1452–1471 (Verlag Degner, 1995). Nuremberg’s records used a variety of terms to denote different kinds of impairment; when it is unclear whether the individual in question was “mad” or intellectually disabled, the English is merely rendered as “mentally impaired.”

2 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 1, p. 83 (Books 1 and 2 of the Stadtrechnungen have been paginated).

3 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 2, p. 150.

4 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 2, p. 152.

5 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 177, f. 151r.

6 This term is particularly problematic. In different contexts it could refer to a person with an intellectual disability, with mental illness, or who was deaf. (Non-speaking deaf people were often falsely seen as being rationally impaired.) Variants of torot and torecht appear throughout Nuremberg’s records and in the 1430s the Nuremberg city scribe used this term almost exclusively.

7 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 177, f. 178v–179r.

8 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 177, f. 199v.

9 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 177, f. 200r.

10 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 6 f. 32r and copied in No. 179, f. 112r.

11 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 180, f.165v.

12 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 180, f. 339r.

13 StA N, Rep. 52, No. 13, f. 84r.

14 This entry is authorizing payment for those items to be given to the woman, not buying them from her.

15 Likely the same woman from the previous entry.

16 “Jail” is perhaps too pleasant a term. The city lock-up was a subterranean prison known as the “loch” or “the hole” that lay directly under the city council building.

17 The entry before this one makes it clear that the man in question was in the jail.

18 H. Karrenman appears in several records. His last name, literally “Cart-man” designates him by trade to be a wagoner or driver.

19 Given the proximity in the accounts of this entry to the one regarding the man imprisoned for 13 days, it is likely the same man.

20 A last name.

21 Beating the those considered “mad” was exceptionally rare. Generally speaking, German law codes forbade the corporal punishment of those who lacked sufficient reason to be held fully accountable for their actions. We have no way of knowing why, in this case, the council chose to ignore the law.


23 Ibid, 166.


26 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 52, f.13r.

27 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 77, f. 12v.

28 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 77, f. 17r.

29 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 92, f. 2r.

30 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 134, f. 5v.

31 This correction was made by the scribe as he was recording the decision.

32 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 144, f. 3r.

33 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 184, f. 5r.

34 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 198, f. 3v.

35 ratsmid = Roitschmied (or red smith), which was a term used for the many workers of Nuremberg’s famed brass crafts industry.

36 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 239, f. 9v.

37 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 243, f. 2r.

38 StAN Rep. 60a, No. 285, f. 6v.

39 Jobst Tetzel had been a member of one of the old, ruling families of Nuremberg and had himself been a member of the town council.

40 Many later decisions record the councilman or city official who was in some way responsible for the directed action.
41 Unmarried women, generally from poorer classes, who followed this vocation took on the duty of praying for the souls of the departed.
42 The Ebner Soulhouse was a modest house for up to 10 souls-sisters, founded in 1280 by the Ebners, one of the oldest ruling patrician families in Nuremberg.
43 The New Hospital (more formally, the Hospital of the Holy Ghost) was a large hospital in the center of town that had been founded in 1330 by a wealthy patrician. By 1400 the care and administration of the hospital were overseen by the city council.
Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon
(1389–1449)

Contributed by Anne Galanaud and Pierre Galanaud

Introduction

In the city of Dijon, numerous tax relief requests were submitted to the tax authorities between the end of the fourteenth century and the mid-fifteenth century. These individual applications represent an invaluable source to decipher the problems of the Middle Age population, including health problems, problems caused by warfare, recurring epidemics, economic crisis, increase of taxes and more general problems. The disability of the head of household and/or a member of their family was frequently presented in order to request a tax reduction. Convincing the tax authorities to grant the request usually required the applicant to be specific about their disability, the function of the person with the disability within the household and the impact of the disability on the finances and the daily life of the family.

These documents also shed light on the view of the tax collector about disability because they indicate the result of the requests, which petitioned to the city authorities for a relief of taxes. The taxes were levied for various reasons by the municipality (such as taxes for the defense of the city) or by the duke (such as the jouages taxes) and the heads of household from Dijon had to pay them virtually every year in this time of warfare. In a number of cases, the fate of the person or family requesting relief can be traced, from recurrent requests submitted year after year or from other sources such as the annual marcs tax registers. As the marcs tax level was based on the value of one’s assets in the city, its changes from year to year reflect that of a given head of household’s wealth.

Age-associated blindness (possibly due to macular degeneration or cataracts) was common and had a major impact on the ability to work among the adult members of the household and on their income. The unwillingness of the tax authorities to take it into account often forced the taxpayer to mortgage or sell their entire estate, eventually becoming a pauper. This is the case of the blind winegrower Vincent de Couchey. In 1422, the year of his tax relief request submission, Vincent was rather wealthy: he paid 25 sols for the marcs tax, an amount that rates him among the top 10% of taxpayers. Two years later the marcs tax collector acknowledged his blindness and exempted him in view of his poverty, indicating that the disability resulted in his ruin. The unwillingness of the authorities to take visual disability into account may have other counterproductive outcomes, as exemplified by the case of Jehan Cuer de Roy’s father who, in spite of his blindness, was commandeered as a watchman on the city walls because of ongoing war.

The progression of age-associated physical weakness is illustrated by the successive requests submitted by Gautherin d’Isier and by Jaquot Le Roy and their wives. The authorities’ response was limited to decreases in the tax level, preceding by several years the acknowledgment of their dependency by the tax collector. Gautherin, a humble winegrower, became a pauper, whereas Jaquot, a wealthy haberdasher, preserved his assets.
The rich cloth manufacturer, Maistre Estienne de Sens, represents another example of worsening health. One year after the submission of a request based on his advanced age, a new document, probably produced by his children, indicated that he was struck with hemiplegia associated with aphasia. He died two years later. Other examples of neurological diseases were documented, such as the continuous tremor that prevented the blacksmith Estienne Beaujeu from working and the epilepsy of Regnault Le Puët’s daughter.

The requests indicate various kinds of support for the disabled persons. They can be entirely dependent on their neighbor’s help and eager to be led to a hospital, such as the blind cobbler Jehan d’Aignay; supported by strangers they can afford to hire, such as Jaquot Leroy; or benefit from costly home caregivers, such as Michelot de Bar sur Aube’s paralyzed mother.

Mobility issues were frequent, and could be the result of mutilating surgery as in the case of Jehannot Mignotet and of Jehan Le Massenet’s wife. The response of the authorities to mobility issues and to chronic diseases was variable, probably insufficient in the case of the leg fistula of winegrower Oudot le Carnoix and of the work accident of carpenter Perrenot Lomme, more efficient in the case of Estienne Beaujeu and Estienne Le Barbier who were fully exempted from their tax.

Mental illness, possibly not considered as a disability by the petitioners, is not present in the requests. The single case of mental disorder appearing in these fiscal documents is written in the tax collector’s hand, referring to his inability to levy a tax from Jaquot de Fouvent who left her home and might have been eaten by wolves.7

In the same line, it should be pointed out that tax relief requests and fiscal documents, although they represent invaluable sources for the late Middle Ages population, leave aside the numerous underprivileged not included in fiscal households,8 as well as those taxpayers who were unable to afford the public letter writer usually required for writing the request.

Bibliography


The blind winegrower Vincent de Couchey

[1422] To the lords, tax collectors and aldermen of the city of Dijon,
(From the) very humbly imploring Vincent de Couchey dit de Tallemer a poor and ancient man (who) cannot see a thing,
(He) henceforth is and will be unable to earn the poor and small living for himself and his wife. Because of his extreme destitution and need, during the present year he had to sell the best vineyard he had...
Nevertheless you taxed him for the first payment of his fouages tax in the amount of 2 francs which is a much too high and excessive tax in view of and considering his poor and small condition in which he can no more earn his living...
He will henceforth have to sell the minimal assets and inheritance that he acquired in the past.
However Jehan Bisot, tax collector for the aforementioned fouages tax for the Saint Philibert parish imposed several tax liens on his assets so that he would have to sell...
My dear lords would you please for God’s sake and as charity consider that the aforementioned petitioner is presently blind and cannot earn a living (and) reduce the aforementioned tax from 2 francs to 20 sols. This is even more than he can pay, while asking to the aforementioned Jehan Bisot to expunge him from his tax liens.
And he will pray for you.

[June 12, 1422] (The tax authority orders) Jehan Bisot to decrease the aforementioned petitioner’s first payment of the present fouages tax by 6 gros. Written at the city chamber...

Jehan d’Aignay’s lost visual clarity

[1430] To the lords, tax collectors and aldermen of the city and commune of Dijon,
(We) very humbly beg you to take pity on Jehan d’Aignay (cobbler), a poor man who is visually challenged. He has neither house nor inheritance nor rent nor any income and he cannot work anymore and will never work in view of his lost visual clarity...
He decided to sell his few possessions... So he owns nothing in the world except the meager bed, which he sleeps upon and the small amount of charity his neighbours give him each day.
If he is sent to a hospital for his final days (he would be willing to go because) he won’t be able to take care of himself or direct his affairs.
Nevertheless you have levied the fouages tax and the defence of the city tax to the sum of 2 and half francs, which sum he cannot ever pay because, in truth he has nothing other than the above mentioned bed.
If you please, reduce the tax for this poor petitioner to 1 franc instead of 2 and half francs as you already did for the other fouage taxes that Jehan Bisot and Nicolas Saint Jon levied, you will do good and be charitable and he will pray to God for all of you.
[February 23, 1430] (The tax authority orders to) expunge the petitioner’s debt by 18 gros on both taxes. Written on the...

Jehan Cuer de Roy’s father

[August 26, 1414] From the duchesse, Jehan Cuer De Roy informed us that, although his father is blind and disabled, the mayor of Dijon commands him to watch on the walls. And thus, upon Jehan’s petition we ask you, if this is the case, to speak about it to the mayor and do as much as you can in order to exempt him from watching on the walls.

Gautherin d’Isier and his wife

[July 1422] To the lords mayors and aldermen of the city of Dijon,
Very humbly implores Gautherin d’Isier (winegrower) living in Dijon in Crais street that as the aforementioned implorer for his great and ancient age and also for the great weakness of his body cannot spend long time working and plowing in order to earn his life...
and that of his wife who is also very poor, weak and ancient woman...However the aforementioned poor implorer was taxed to \(18\) gros which amount is very in excess.

[July 17, 1422] Jehan Bisot expunges the implorer’s debt by \(4\) gros on his tax for the last payment of the present fouages tax.

[October 1422] To the lords mayors and aldermen of the city of Dijon,

Very humbly implores Gautherin d’Isier living in Dijon in Crais street...as the aforementioned implorer and his wife are very ancient people...

The aforementioned Gautherin implorer is in such a condition that he will soon be led to a hospital and he cannot earn a single denier because, due to his weakness and old age, he cannot move unless he has a crutch or a cane in hand...Nevertheless he is taxed to \(14\) gros.

[October 25, 1422] The implorer’s debt is expunged to \(8\) gros.

[June 1423] To the lords, tax collectors and aldermen of the city of Dijon,

Very humbly implores Gautherin d’Isier living in Dijon in Crais street within the Saint Jehan parish that as the aforementioned petitioner and his wife are very poor, weak and ancient people, so much that, because of their ancient age and body weakness they cannot anymore work nor plow...They are so poor that a part of their vineyard is presently hired...The aforementioned petitioner has to pay \(10\) gros for the tax presently levied for the defense of the city.

[June 15, 1423] (The tax authority orders to) expunge the petitioner’s debt by \(4\) gros.

Written by Jehan Bolier on June...

[September 1423] To the lords, tax collectors and aldermen of the city of Dijon,

Very humbly implores Gautherin d’Isier a poor winegrower living in Dijon that as he and his wife are ancient in age, each of them of \(80\) years and more...Because of his ancient age and great weakness of his body, he cannot spend enough time to work and plow, to earn his living and that of his wife who is also very poor, weak and ancient. He and his wife have nothing for their living except the milk of a single cow.

Nevertheless, Nicolas Saint Jon collector for this tax requires \(10\) more gros for the second payment. Thus the petitioner implores to expunge the second payment by the same amount as the first one and he and his wife will sell some of their furniture to pay it.

[September 17, 1423] (The tax authority orders to) expunge the petitioner's debt by \(4\) gros.

Jaquot Le Roy and his wife Jaquobte

[1417] Jaquot Le Roy haberdasher is taxed at \(12\) francs for the fouages, an amount that he cannot pay...As he possesses no house where he can live, he has to pay every year a \(32\) francs rent for housing.

[December 18, 1417] (The tax authority orders to) decrease the petitioner’s debt from \(7\) francs to \(5\) francs \(10\) gros.

[June 1423 & September 1423] Jaquot Le Roy haberdasher is presently old, weak, ancient and suffering from the gout. He cannot go to fairs and markets with his goods as he used to do when he was young and strong. He has no children who could help him and has to rely on strangers to the family who remove his belongings. The rich people in the city who own and sell high value merchandise and who can rely on efficient help in their houses are not taxed as much as the implorer...

[June 16, 1423] (The tax authority orders to) decrease the petitioner’s debt by \(2\) francs...

[September 17, 1423] (The tax authority orders to) decrease the petitioner’s debt by \(2\) francs...

[1430] Jaquot Le Roy haberdasher and his wife Jaquobte are both of them weak and ancient persons, and are together in a bed. They are so sick that they cannot get up and move around, so that strangers have to bring them beverage and food like two small children, and that is a pity. Jaquot has lost his visual clarity and has to be led by the hands without seeing.
Among them is a daughter aged sixteen. She suffers from diseases of Saint Jean and Saint Loup and half of her body is disabled.

Oudot le Carnoisot

[1433 & 1434] Oudot le Carnoisot wine-grower poor and sick man (who) has only a poor and small and ruined house (and has) no vineyard, nor inheritance. He is also very sick because of a fistula in his leg that prevents him from working since Saint Michel’s day and he earns nothing.

Michelot de Bar sur Aube’s mother

[1433] The aforementioned petitioner is in charge of a wife and 4 small children and of his mother who is a very weak and old woman suffering from paralysis. Everyday she needs night and day care provided by two women. This is a heavy financial burden for the petitioner.

Estienne Beaujeu

[1424] (Request from) Estienne Beaujeu blacksmith living in Dijon, as the tax collector Jehan Bisot compels the aforementioned petitioner to pay for each fouage tax the amount of 2 gros, an amount that he could not pay because he is shaking all over and cannot perform his work. He must care for himself, his wife and children and he will become so poor that he will be reduced to begging.

[November 23, 1433] In view of the poverty and disease (of the implorer, the tax authority orders to) totally expunge his tax.

Jehannot Mignotet

[1448] Jehannot son of Jehan Mignotet has had a bad leg for the past 5 years and so much and so seriously (impaired) that he is on the verge of being disabled and that it has to be cut. He cannot earn a living for himself, for his wife, his 4 poor children and his mother who is an old woman aged sixty and more.

Jehan Le Massenet’s wife

[1434] Jehan Le Massenet, cobbler living in Dijon, caring for his wife who has been sick for one year. She is so sick that she was led

[February 26, 1430] (The tax authority orders to) expunge the (12 francs) petitioner’s debt by 1 franc...

Maistre Estienne de Sens

[1422] Estienne de Sens, old and ancient man, who cannot earn a thing...

[1423] Maistre Estienne de Sens, lost half of his body as well as the power of speech... and his children entirely support him. Nevertheless you taxed him to 18 francs, that is 7 francs for the tax for the defense of the city and 11 francs for the fouages tax.

[November 19, 1423] (The tax authority orders to) expunge the petitioner’s debt by 1 franc on the tax for the defense of the city and 2 francs for the fouages tax.

Michelot de Bar sur Aube’s mother

[1433] The aforementioned petitioner is in charge of a wife and 4 small children and of his mother who is a very weak and old woman suffering from paralysis. Everyday she needs night and day care provided by two women. This is a heavy financial burden for the petitioner.

Estienne Le Barbier

[1433] Estienne Le Barbier who lives in Dijon and for 6 years has suffered from stones so awful that everyday he expels by his penis a stone the size of a hemp grain. When the stone goes down into his bladder, he brays and moans like a woman in labor. He thus earns nothing...but most of the time lives from the charity of the lords. In addition, because of the war progress, his sister moved into his place with 4 young children and there is nothing to feed them.

[November 23, 1433] In view of the poverty and disease (of the implorer, the tax authority orders to) totally expunge his tax.

Jehannot Mignotet

[1446] Jehannot Mignotet cares for a pregnant wife and of 3 small children...

[1448] Jehannot son of Jehan Mignotet has had a bad leg for the past 5 years and so much and so seriously (impaired) that he is on the verge of being disabled and that it has to be cut. He cannot earn a living for himself, for his wife, his 4 poor children and his mother who is an old woman aged sixty and more.

Jehan Le Massenet’s wife

[1434] Jehan Le Massenet, cobbler living in Dijon, caring for his wife who has been sick for one year. She is so sick that she was led
to the Pont de Norges (hospital) where it is agreed to cut the ends of her feet...44

Perrenot Lomme

[1417] To the lords and aldermen of the city and commune of Dijon,
(From the) very humbly imploring Perrenot Lomme, carpenter living in Dijon in front of Andrieu Estienne's house. He cares for a pregnant wife with 5 other children, and has neither vineyard nor house nor inheritance. He has been sick for a long time and is bedridden because a piece of wood nearly killed him. He was taxed of 13 gros for the present fouages tax, an amount that he will not be able to pay unless he sells his poor beds where lie his poor wife on the verge of giving birth and his 5 children who cannot earn a single denier. And he has much difficulty (finding) bread for eating.

[December 19, 1417] We decrease the petitioner’s tax by 1 and half gros on one of the taxes.44

[1430] Perrenot Lomme, carpenter poor and sick man...is so sick from his arms that he cannot work anymore...

You have levied the fouages tax and the defence of the city tax to the sum of 2 francs, which sum he cannot ever pay. If you would please to reduce the aforementioned tax from 10 sols...

[March 1, 1430] (The tax authority orders to) decrease the petitioner’s debt by 4 gros on both taxes.45

Jaquote de Fouvent

[1376] (She) became mad and nobody knows where she lives but one says that the wolves ate her.
Endnotes

1 Dijon Tax Relief Requests are unpublished handwritten archive individual documents preserved at the Archives Municipales de Dijon (AMD) with the following references: L 638 (1389–1422, 43 folios), L 639 (1423–1426, 522 folios), L 640 (1430–1432, 436 folios), L 641 (1433–1439, 458 folios), L 642 (1441–1443, 609 folios), L 643 (1444, 439 folios), L 645 (1446–1449, 506 folios). These documents contain more than 3,400 individual requests, 2,679 of which were included by Anne Galanaud in a personal database linked to the Annual Marcs Tax Registers database (see below). The database was used to describe the families, health problems, or security problems in Anne Galanaud, “Démographie et société à Dijon à la fin du moyen-âge (1357–1447) à partir d’une analyse informatique des registres des comptes de l’impôt des marcs,” PhD thesis in History, Franche-Comté University, 2009.

2 The selection, translation and comments of the requests included in the present Sourcebook were realized by Anne Galanaud, PhD, no present affiliation and Pierre Galanaud, MD, UMR996, Inflammation, Chemokines and Immunopathology, Inserm, Univ Paris-Sud, Université Paris-Saclay, 92140, Clamart, France (contributors’ address: pierre.galanaud@u-psud.fr). Tod W. Estroff, MD is acknowledged for advice in the translation from medieval French into modern English.

3 The fouages tax registers are unpublished handwritten archive documents preserved at the Archives Départementales de la Côte d’Or (ADCO).


5 Dijon Annual Marcs Tax Registers are unpublished handwritten archive annual documents preserved at the Archives Départementales de la Côte d’Or (ADCO) with the following references: (B 11483–B 11502). Fifty annual registers dated between 1376 and 1447, were included by Anne Galanaud in a personal database of more than 100,000 annual entries, which identified more than 13,000 individual heads of household. This database, initially designed for Anne Galanaud’s PhD dissertation, was used in the present Sourcebook in order to trace the fate of the heads of household who submitted tax relief requests. Henri Labesse (Paris 4–Sorbonne University) is acknowledged for designing the original application used for the database and for his continuous support and help.

6 Jehan, a member of Dijon financial elite, directly submitted his request to the duchesse who wrote in his favor to the bailiff [Letter of the duchesse, in Joseph Garnier, *Correspondance de la mairie de Dijon: Extrait des archives de cette ville* (Rabutot, 1868), pp. 20–21].

7 The fouages tax collector had to justify that he was unable to tax Jaquote (ADCO, B 11574, 1376, f° 6v).


9 AMD, L 638, 1422.

10 The bracketed text corresponds to additions designed to introduce modern syntax into the fifteenth century text or to provide additional information.

11 20 sols are worth 1 franc and Vincent begs for a 50% decrease.

12 6 gros are worth half a franc and he obtained a 25% decrease.

13 Two years later, Vincent is acknowledged as blind and ruined [“he became blind and lives upon charity” (ADCO, B 11492, 1424, f° 25v)].

14 AMD, L 640, 1430.

15 Although Jehan’s “lost visual clarity” might be the consequence of far-sightedness, he could not work efficiently as a cobbler.

16 Jehan’s total tax amount is reduced from 2 and half francs to 1 and half franc.

17 Five years later Jehan’s marcs tax was decreased from 5 sols to the lower limit of 1 sol, a level that was maintained until his death in 1438 (ADCO, B 11493, 1429, f° 73r, B 11494, 1434, f° 79v, 83
B 11496, 1438, f° 72r), which indicates that he lost the major part of his assets.
18 AMD, L 638, July & October 1422. AMD, L 639, June & September 1423.
19 1 denier is the 240th part of 1 franc.
20 Gautherin was indeed an ancient head of household, mentioned for the first time in 1382 in the marcs tax registers (ADCO, B 11487, 1382, f° 59r).
21 Five years later the marcs tax collector acknowledged the disability of Gautherin and his wife and he exempted them for poverty (“Gautherin and his wife are bedridden since one year and are so poor that they cannot pay” (ADCO, B 11493, 1428, f° 46r)) and three years later they were no more registered in the marcs tax registers, implying that they were probably dead or led to a hospital.
22 AMD, L 638, 1417; L 639, June 1423 & September 1423; L 639, 1424; L 640, 1430.
23 This haberdasher had to give up presenting his goods in fairs and markets because of gout, and from 1423, his successive tax relief requests were based on this disease and on his weakness, whereas his 1417 request was based on (real or alleged) financial problems.
24 Jaquot had to pay 8 francs in June and 8 francs in September.
25 When Jaquot died in 1439 his financial situation was not impaired, in view of his unchanged high level (50 sols) taxation for the marcs tax (ADCO, B 11496, 1439, f° 72r), and his wife Jaqobte survived for at least 8 years, with a preserved financial status (ADCO, B 11497, 1447, f° 42r).
26 AMD, L 638, 1422; L 639, 1423.
27 Maistre Estienne died two years later (ADCO, B 11492, 1425, f° 10v).
28 AMD, L 641, 1433.
29 Michelot’s tax was reduced from 30 francs to 25 francs [December 4, 1433].
30 AMD, L 639, 1424.
31 Estienne’s tax was thus totally expunged, and five years later, when he died, the level of his marcs tax had decreased by 50%, to 2 sols (ADCO, B 11493, 1429, f° 42r), which suggests that, despite his fouage tax exemption, the value of his assets was affected by his disability.
32 AMD, L 646, 1449.
33 The disease of Saint Loup corresponds to epilepsy.
34 “ydeote de la moitié de son corps.”
35 AMD, L 641, 1433 & L 641, 1434.
36 Although Oudot obtained a 4 gros decrease of his 2 francs 1433 tax [November 25, 1433] and a 2 gros decrease of his 8 gros 1434 tax [July 16, 1434], six years later, he was registered as pauper...and deceased by the marcs tax collector (ADCO, B 11496, f° 49r).
37 AMD, L 641, 1433.
38 Estienne was also exempted from the marcs tax as pauper (ADCO, B 11494, 1434, f° 49r).
39 AMD, L 645, 1446 & 1448.
40 From 1447 Jehannot’s mother paid his marcs tax in addition to her own (she was taxed as the widow of Jehannot’s father) while Jehannot was no more registered as a head of household in the marcs tax registers, indicating that Jehannot was considered as fully dependent on his mother by the tax authorities (ADCO, B 11497, 1447, f° 58r & f° 54v).
41 AMD, L 641, 1434.
42 Jehan obtained a 6 gros decrease of his 1 franc tax.
43 AMD, L 638, 1417 & L 640, 1430.
44 The tax initial amount was 7 gros.
45 Perrenot died in 1444 (ADCO, B 11497, 1444, f° 62v).
Examining for Leprosy in the Fifteenth Century¹
(ca. 1430–1500)

Contributed by Lucy Barnhouse

Introduction

The following are letters to and from the council of Frankfurt, and in some cases, from the examining doctors themselves, concerning the late medieval inspection for leprosy, a process known as a Lepraschau, literally “a looking for leprosy.” Those who availed themselves of the inspection hailed from a radius of over 100 kilometers. While leper hospitals are known to have existed in Europe from the twelfth century onwards, the Lepraschau came into existence much later. As cities gained economic and political power, they took over the responsibility for such examinations from hospital communities and members of the clergy. Studies of late medieval medicine have sometimes represented medical professionalization and the practice of medicine as a charitable work as models of thought in competition with each other. These fifteenth-century letters, however, present a view of medicine as simultaneously professional and charitable. In translating the letters, I have kept much of the formal and often involved phrasing used by petitioners, using multiple complimentary adjectives to address the officials by whom their health would be evaluated and certified. Departures from this formality can depend on both the petitioners’ relationship to the council and doctors of Frankfurt, and on their responses to the ways in which they experience leprosy as a social disability. I have also attempted to stay very close to the original in describing leprosy itself. Multiple terms are used for the disease, and for how it affected those diagnosed with it; they might be “burdened” (beladen, belummt) or, more literally, “spotted” (befleckt) with it.

The letters reveal a standardized medical procedure, and a variety of communal responses to the disease. The standard examination for leprosy involved an inspection of every inch of the patient’s skin, not only for distinctive visual signs of disease, but for sensitivity to pain, since nerve damage was a known consequence of leprosy. The doctors would also evaluate their petitioners’ breath and voice, for a smell of corruption and a hoarseness associated with leprosy, respectively. Several of the letters refer to other processes of examination, by local officials or by certified medical professionals, like barbers. In such cases, Frankfurt’s doctors were appealed to for their greater medical expertise; as one letter from the doctors demonstrates, this included access to a considerable medical library. Most of the surviving records are petitions, meaning that the outcome of diagnosis is almost always unknown. The doctors might diagnose petitioners as “clean” from leprosy, “unclean” with leprosy, or “half clean,” a diagnosis meaning that the petitioner would be obliged to return for a follow-up examination to see whether their symptoms had improved or deteriorated. The medically cautious diagnosis of “half clean” might be a source of distress to the examinees.

Two letters were sent to the committee by secular lords, and one by a religious community. Of the rest, a dozen come from private individuals, and eleven from civic authorities. Six of the private letters came from
one disgruntled individual, Henne Maderus. Living just up the Rhine from Frankfurt, he went for a second opinion to the still more renowned examination board in Cologne, which had one of medieval Germany’s oldest and most prosperous leper hospitals. Civic-issued letters typically emphasize the seriousness of the undertaking, and the respect in which the physicians are held. Several such letters specify that the putative lepers have been suspected of having the disease for a long time, or by many; some explicitly request instructions on what steps should be taken if the person in question is leprous. A letter from Aschaffenburg indicates that lepers who were not prosperous might be treated in similar ways to other sick and poor people. The town officials of Weilburg demonstrate concern for the potential threat to public health posed by a woman’s putative leprosy, and also for her well-being. Three letters from the committee to their petitioners do survive, alongside one form letter for such responses, and one list of instructions for the diagnosed leper. The latter reflects the medical view that fire could help to purify air, and prescribes foods believed to be beneficial for both the symptoms and causes of the disease.

Responses to a diagnosis of leprosy were dependent on numerous social variables, including but not limited to the concerned individual’s social status. Following a medical diagnosis of leprosy, the men or women so diagnosed had multiple options open to them, determined by the severity of their symptoms, by their citizenship, and by the resources of their community. While there was a widespread expectation that a diagnosis of leprosy would have social ramifications, those seeking such diagnosis appear to have depended on the doctors for individualized recommendations for how best to manage the disease and accommodate those affected by it. The standardized list of dos and don’ts for diagnosed lepers, presumably sent from the commissioned doctors to the council, contains a definition of “specially set apart” that includes the injunction “not to frequent public kitchens or bathhouses.” This calls into question assumptions about the social meanings of separation for medieval lepers.

Hospital rules and business agreements from the region make clear that lepers might beg in the fields, live together in informal communities, or enter into hospitals. All those entering hospital life gave up their legal rights over property on doing so, as did all others undertaking life in religious institutions. Hospital residence also, however, offered the privileges of community, stability, and support. For those lepers who lived outside hospitals, the question of whether they were met with avoidance or accommodation appears to have been determined more by their existing social relationships than by their disease. Many petitioners to the council and doctors of Frankfurt include requests for instructions on how to help or accommodate those diagnosed with leprosy. The petitions show that men and women believing themselves to have leprosy might suffer significant distress; whether this was a consequence of their medical symptoms, or of fear of the social consequences of diagnosis, is rarely explicit. Petitions to Frankfurt’s committee, as well as the reports and advice of the physicians, show that while diagnosis had significant effects on the ways in which lepers interacted with their communities, it did not put an end to such interaction.

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Medicinalia Nr. 1

Ich Conradus Sassenhusen Medicine Doctor Bekennen mich öffentlich mit diesen Brief das mir fürbracht und geäußert worden ist N. der mit Krankheit der ußsetzikeit belumm und behafft sin sulde. Des so Also han ich den selben N. uff hude disen dag dar diß Brief darum besehen und besucht in wies und forma als man solche lude pliget und ge- wohnt zu besuchen und han yn von den selben Krankheit der ußsetzikeit uff diese Zijt rein und unschuldig erfonden Des zu urkund und Bekenntnis han ich myn Ingesiegel

Medicinalia Nr. 167

Unser willige fruntliche dinste zuvor fursichtigen Ersamen und wysen lieben herren als ir uns eynen brief habt lassen horen den ouwer Ersamket Maderus Henne von Ursel uns antreffende geschrieben hat elagende wie wir yn der ußsetzkeit geschuldiget sullen han / Deshalb er dorj die uwern gedrongen sy Das er sich zu Colne habe lassen beshen da er davon ledig gesaget zy // als sin brief mit mee worten inhielt han wir verhort und lassen uwere fursichtikeit wissen das wir den vorgenanten henchin vor unse besehunge nichts geschuldigt han Dan nach dem wir von ouwer Gesamkeit dartzugeordent und gesast sin soliche personen zu besehen und hennechin vorgenannt als der under syme angesicht fast ungestalt mit der krangheit belumut und von den luden gemyden wart / Ist er eigener bewegung zu uns kommen uns ortmuderlich und dinstlich gebeden yn uff das nehste zu besehen und zu ersuchen / Also angesehen sin innige bete han wir yn vor uns genommen yne besehen und versucht nach unser gewonheit und als sich geburet und han yn befunden das er die zjit mit der ußsetzkeit angefanget und etlicher masse damyde befecllct was das wir gesaget han nach unßn besten synnen und verstentenis und als wir darzu gelobt und geworn han und han yn sonst davor von uns selbs nichts geschuldiget / noch / nach yme gesant dan so vil wir umb siner bede willen getan han und wissen im auch nichts deßhalb schuldig oder

Medicinalia Nr. 1

I, Conrad Sachsenhausen, doctor of medicine, acknowledge openly with this letter that it has been brought to my attention that N. is burdened with leprosy, or rumored to be so. Therefore So I have examined the same N. on this day today that this letter was made, examined in the manner and form that is customary and usual for such people, and have found him at this time to be clean and innocent [of leprosy.] And in testimony and acknowledgment of this I have placed my seal.
plichtig zu sin / Duchte aber hennechin vorgenan / So wonen wir hie by des heiligen Rijchs gerichte sunder geleide / So wollen wir ime oder syme machtboten von sinen wegen rechtes gehorsam sin oder obe er begert vor unserer Ersamkeit dem Rade und biden uwer Ersamkeit diese unse antwort laß zum steen dann wir geschrieben konnen uns auch darauf zum antworten by glyche und rechte zu behalden und zustedingen das wallen wir mit willen allerzijt gerne verdienen gebeten / myn hennen ulm ingesigel des wir andern uns myd Henen gebuchten uff mitwochen nach dionisii anno domini lviii [edge of paper is torn/damaged]

Heinricus lose licenciatius in medicinis henne ulm gnt Augspurg und hans harpe

Medicinalia Nr. 169

Den Ersamen Wysen Burgermeystern und Radt der Stadt Ffranckfurt meynen guten frunden

Madrus Henne bey Ursel und darauff der Rad nit wulde antworten

Ersamen wysen lieben herren Ich enbieten uch mynen dynst zu für / So als ich von den uwern wegen geschrieben han / also hant yr mir widder geschrieben und eyn abeschriefft eyns briefs in uwer schriefft geschicket dar Inn die uwern meldent / wie das sie mich von yr besehunge nit geschuldiget haben / und nach dem sie von uwer ersamkeyt wegen geordent und gesatzt sint etlich personen zu besehen und ich under myyn angesicht fast ungestalt und mit der ußsetzigkeit behamet und von den luden gemeden sii ich in eycher bewegunge zu yen komen sie otmudiglich und dynstlichen gebeden mich uff das nehist zubesesehen und zuversuchen angesehen myn mutighe bede und mich verlegen besehen und versucht nach yr gewonheit und sich geburt und haben mich gefunden das ich die zijt der ußsetzigkeit beflecket sij gewest und mein mir deshalben vor uch zurecht zustene wie dann dieselbe schreifft mit etwe viel me worten inhelt / Han ich verstanden und die mynen guten frunde laßen horen er-
Medicinalia Nr. 170

Den ersamen und wisen burgermeister und rat der stadt frankfurt mynen guden frunden

Mynen fruntlichen dinst zuvor irsamen lieben Herrn also als ich uwer Irsamkeit vormals me geschrieben han als von meyster Henrick den stede arzt und Henchin Augspurger und Meyster Hans Scherer under den portin wegen als dan uwer Irsamkeit wolte verstanden hat was myner forderung an sye ist Irsamen lieben herren uff den uwern Irsamkeit ye versten moge ich den ich sehr gerne thun wolde was uch und den uwern lieb were also wil ich eines thun den der obgenannten person zwene uz dem rade Losin und ichzwene was uns dy in fruntlichkeit entscheiden nach ergangen sachen sal myn wolde und wie thun und uns dar comin gutlichen dag beschidet und biden uch in dar yn gutliche beschedlich Antwort zugeben mich dannach wyse zu richten und wolt mer soliche uwer antworte schicken gein punkten in anyus [sic; Anthis] es laßhent hat geben und In-

ing leprosy from Cologne, where they are accustomed to examine lepers from the entire length of the Rhine. So perhaps your [doctors] did unjustly by me because of hatred, and did not treat me truthfully, so that I have received great damage thereby, and still do so daily. And for this reason, I do not find myself disposed to justify or defend myself before you, my friends, and I trust your honors to take up my command and order to the officials of my gracious lord the Pfaltzgrave, and not to decline it. May it be to you and your [doctors] as I directed in in my first letter. Given under the firm seal of the knight Anthis Kuchen, on the Friday after the feast of St. Luke the Evangelist, 1458.

Medicinalia Nr. 170

To the honorable and wise mayor and council of the city of Frankfurt, my good friends.

My friendly service to the wise and beloved men [of the council]. When I wrote to Your Honors previously, that is to Master Heinrich, the city doctor, and Hennekin Augsburger, and Master Hans Scherer under the gateway, Your Honors well understood what my demand of you was. My dear good lords: I wish that your honors may understand that I am very willing to do what is desired by you and your [experts], and undertake to do the following. Let the above-named persons choose two persons from the council, and I will choose two, who may then represent us and decide equitably between us, concerning what has passed between us. This is my desire, and shall be my conduct. I want a definite answer on a day of judgment, and pray you to give a favorable and decisive answer, and that you may send me an answer with specific points, as Anthis has given his
gesigel jaht da wart daz ich mich gebrauchen zu diser zit dar in hier uff domini nativitatis mitwachen
Maderus Hen von ursel

Medicinalia Nr. 171
Den ersamen und wisen burgermeister und Rad der Stadt zu Francford unser liben herrn
Maderus Henne ab clage us die bescheid der ussetzigkeit Ist Im gesagt ebo das er Reyne besch sy daz er sich dan mache dar under
und sy sie nit ryn sy
Unseren schuldigen dinst zu vor Ersamen wizen lieben Herr Also Maderus Hen von Ursel . Mynet Eyn forderunge an uns zu han von des besches wegen . also wir in besehen han uff die maledie und begert eynen fruntlichen dag mit uns zu halden uff unser siten tzwene uß den rade zu nehmen und uff syner siten wil he auch tzwene den zu gebben uns zu entscheiden nach ußwysunge synes sende breiff hy inne beslossen Also thun wir uch demudeclchen zu wissen was uwer vorsichtige ersamekeit heßen wil und begert von uns zu thunde das uns und henchin recht gescheen moge na ansprache und antworte da wollen wir willich in syn den also na zu geende und wollen us blyben an uch oder an allen den und iglichen in dem rechten dy ir dar zu gebben wollet Datum quarto diem lyeo die martiri post pasca unter Her Henrichs loser stedeartzt ingesigel das wir uff die maele uns gebruchen
Heinrich Loser ingesigel
Oped fratrum physici
Johan Augsburg
Johan Harp uwer undersaher

Medicinalia Nr. 154
Unser freuntlichen dinst und waz wir liebes vermogen zuvor ersamen wesen besondere guten frunde wir laßen uch wissen wie das dieser gegen wurtige henna Kaufmann bi uns in Nerstein verkommt ist / wie das er mit der krankheit der ufseigkeit beflecket sy. / Und han wir virstan den / die daz ire favor to, and confirmed with his seal that I am using at this time, here on the Wednesday within Christmastide.
Henne Maderus of Ursel

Medicinalia Nr. 171
To the honorable and wise mayor and council of the city of Frankfurt, our dear lords.
Maderus, Henne: with a complaint arising from the fact that a decision of leprosy was declared to him, but that he now appears to be clean, and asks what he ought to do under this judgment, if he be not clean.
Our obligation and service to the honorable, wise, and beloved councilmen. As Henne Maderus, of Ursel, has sent a request to us regarding examination, as we have examined him for leprosy. And he desires to have us hold a day of arbitration, where two from the council may come on our side, and he wants to send two representatives as well, to make a decision in light of the display of his letter of diagnosis, herein enclosed. So, we humbly ask that we may know from you, what your honors may advisedly command, and what you wish us to do, that right may be done by Henchin [Madern] and by us, after request and answer. And we are perfectly willing to approach him again, and will abide by your decision in all points and in every detail. Given the fourth day after Easter, the feast of Leo the martyr [April 11], under the seal of Herr Heinrich Loser, civic physician, which we’re using for our business this time.
Heinrich Loser seal
Oped, the physician’s brother
Johan Augsburg
Johan Harp, your apprentice inspector

Medicinalia Nr. 154
Our friendly service, and all that which our love may do, to our honorable and wise and very good friends. We hereby let you know that this present Henne Kaufmann came to us in Nierstein, as he might be spotted with the sickness of leprosy. And we have understood that you have masters by you in
meistere in uch in Franckefurd haben / die sich des virstene und die selben siechen auch wole versuchen und besehen können / Davon so bieten wir euch dinstlichcn fründlichen und ernstlichen nach den selben meistern zu schicken vor uch zu kommen und Yen mit ernste zu sagen und sie zu heißer den bos- genannte Henne Kauffman wole zuunter suchen wie sich das dann geburt ob er solch Krankheit an ime habe oder nit und woll lent uwer Ratfrunde auch daz by schichen solches helfen zuversorgen / Und wie iß dar umb gelegen ist daz wollent uns mit Heyme offen versiegelten Briefe by diesen unseren bitten wissen lassen uns dar nach zu richten und wollent uns dieß bede nit virsagen und euch gunstlich und fründlichen her inne bewysen das wollen wir in Metern machen um uch und die uwern verdienen wo wir morgen geben under unseres Dorfes und Gerichts In gesiegel uff Sonntag vor unser lieben frauwen Naivität anno iv xxxiiij

Schultheiß und Scheffener des Gerichts zu Nierstein

Unser fr dinst zuvor lieben besunderen freunde als se uns Geschrieben hat wie daz Henne Kauffman bij euch zu Niesten verlument sy daz er mit der Krankheit der uß- setzikeit befleckt sy und unsere Meinung ist nach dem unser zuschenken und in zusagen und sie zuhisssen den og. Hennen Kauffman wole zuversuchen wie sich daz gelobt ob er solch Krankheit an Ime habe od. nit. und wie es darum gelegen sy daz wir uch daz sullen in unserem wissen lassen darnaach zurichten des lassen wir euch wissen daz wir umb uwern willen de unsere de solche lude by uns pflegen zu besehen und zuversuchen vir uns virbede han und in die sache befohlen nach den sie dan darum gelobt und gesehen han. Die wieder vur uns kommen sy und han in solcher maße gesagt und erkannt daz sie in also besehen und versucht haben / und erfinden in zudiß zit der sache halber reyne Krankheiten [ohne] alle Arglist und gevere fra. Tertia. aux Datum Nativitatem bre. Marie vg. close. Anno xiiiix xxxiiii

Frankfurt, who are knowledgeable in such matters, and can well inspect and examine such sick persons. Therefore we pray you, humbly, warmly, and earnestly, to send for the said masters, that they may come before you. And we pray that you may seriously charge them to well examine the said Henne Kaufmann, as it is fitting, to say whether or not he has this sickness, and to send some of your council-members to assist as well. And however it may be, we pray you to send us word with a public letter, under seal, via this our messenger. We pray that you may not deny this plea, and show yourselves favorable and friendly to us in this matter, and pledge to repay you and your [experts.] We have given this in the morning under the seal of our village and court, on the Sunday before the Nativity of Our Lady, 1434.

The sheriff and lay judges of the court in Nierstein

Our friendly service to our very dear friends, as they have written to us how Henne Kaufmann, with you in Nierstein, was reputed to be spotted with the sickness of leprosy, and wished us to send for our [experts] and to tell and command them that they should thoroughly and well [examine] the above Henne Kaufmann, according to their oaths, and to say whether he has that sickness or not, and what his condition is. And this we should let you know, so that you might respond accordingly. So, we hereby inform you that, in accordance with your request, we have given commands regarding this matter to those who are accustomed to perform such examinations, and they have taken their oaths and looked [at him] accordingly. And they in turn came to us and reported in the following manner: that they have examined and inspected him, and find that regarding the matter at this present time, he is half free of sickness, without any deception or malice.
Medicinalia Nr. 155

We the council of Frankfurt make known publicly by this letter that Gudrus and Peter Scherer, our citizens, came before us together with one identifying himself as Contze, Landgrave of Hohenlagen in Hessen, and the aforesaid Gudrus and Peter explained how, a short time before this, the aforesaid Landgrave Contze came to them and told them that there were rumors about him regarding leprosy, that he was supposedly unclean burdened and spotted with it. Regarding this, the aforesaid Gudrus and Peter testified before us, and swore on their oath—that they had taken in our presence—that they examined Contze and behaved as is seemly in such matters, and have at this time, in this case, [Contze] is found half-clean, without any malice or deceit. And in acknowledgment of this aforesaid matter, we have had our city seal pressed onto this letter. Given in the Year of Our Lord 1434, four days before the feast of St. Michael the Archangel.

Medicinalia Nr. 156

Unser fruntliche willige dynst Ewer weyßheit mir allem vermögen zuvor an bereit / fürsichtigen Ersamen und weisen besondern lieben Herren und guten fründe / Wir senden uch zeiger dis brifs samt synem eelichen gemahlen / die von uns und der ganzen gemeyn mit der Krankheit der ußsetzikeyt berüchtigt ist derhalber Sie hiebevor auch hie by den Jhenen so von Ewer weyßheit solch krank lude zu besuchti gen verordnet gewest und zu disser zeit wider bescheyden und volenden danach an Ewer weyßheit unser freundlich bit ir wollen uch um unserem Willem solch bemühen und an den verordneten verschaff en das sie fleyß ankeren und die Wahrheit ganzlich erfahren // Damit so sie befleckten wer kein weyther unradt daruß komme Dann wir mochten Ir wohl vergunden das sie ryn erfändig würe uch herrin gutwillig ertzeigen

Given on the third day after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1434.
das wollen wir in dem oder in eyn merern gegen ewer Weisheit widerumb verdynen Datum under unser stadt gemeyn Ingesigel uff Montag nach dem heiligen Ostertag anno M/ xxviiii
Bürgermeister Rat und gantz gemeyn zu Wylburg

Medicinalia Nr. 157
Unsern freundlichen dinst euer Ersamen lieben wissen und besonderen guden fründe wir bidden uch wissen das iser bewißer dißes briefes genant Henne Baddebender unser midde burger beruchtiget ist, und wir selber besorget, daz er beladen sy mit der maletzen sucht. Des han wir vernommen wij das by euch etliche lude syn solden die sich verstehen soll uff dy obegenanten maleczkeit und dy lude besehen konne und probennen und des bidden wir uch umb unseres lieben gn-edigen herren von Menzen und uns disen ebengenannten Henne tzu wissen und bringen an dy jenen dy en besehen und proben konnen von der ognt. malerzheit und das ir uns des egenlich eyn beschrieben Antwort geben wollent wy eß um den ogn. menschen gelegen sy und uch dy jenen bescheiden dy solichs besehen dut her yn daz beste uff das uns und uns ern nachgebure nicht forter schade da von entstehen möge daz woln wir allezyt gut verdienen under unseren Secret Datum anno domini M CCCC xxxix in die blasii episcopi
Bürgermeister und Rad czu Dhuneburg

Medicinalia Nr. 158
Wir Otto Probste, Katherina Eptissin, Katherina priorissin, und die samenzung gemeynlichen des Closters zu Blangkenauwe empbyneden unsirs inges gebede / dem Erbern Rad zu Frangkffort unseren besonderen guden freundens , und biden uwer Erberkeit wissen, und klagen uch das wir ein ingeseyte Jungfrauen unsir kuchemeide eine iztunt lange zit undir uns geweste ist und die ist swache / das wir besorget sine das sie nicht reine sye wish, indeed, that you may report that she is found clean, and would show yourselves favorable [to us] in this matter, and we would deserve this from your honors in this or in other matters. Given under the shared seal of our city, on Monday after the holy day of Easter, [14]28.

The mayor, council, and entire community of Weilburg [an der Lahn]
/ das uns danne gar eyn swere sache were un-
der uns zu wonen / des sint wir underricht
worden / und sine des selben Jungfrauen here
geschigket hane / daz sie moge besehen
werde Biden wir uwer Errsamkeit flelichen,
daz ir umme godis willen, und umme einer
ganzen sammenunge willen disen geinwerti-
gen unsern Bruder mit Namen hans genant
beholfen wollt sine den wir indruwen und
glauben usgeschigket hane / das hier mit der
Jungfrauen zu den Meistern kume, das sie
besehen werde, und eure Ehrsamkeit mögen
genissen, das uns ware werde zugesayt, und ir
auch gnädig sei abi ein gebore dem Meister
to geben was sie arme ist und ir freunde
Elende und keine zuleigung von nymans haid
So ist unser Closter seer notdürftig und hane
maniche elende arme Jungfrauen under uns
ist die keine zuleigunge haben, was alleine
der gemeyne almose der sy siche gebruchen
hir umb bidden wir uwer Ersamkeit und tu-
gent das ir allis euer bestes zu disen sache
wollet thune als wir uch geinzlichen gedru-
wen und glauben / das wollen wir mit einer
ganzen samenunge geine gode mit unserem
gebode flisslichen umb euer Ehrsamkeit ver-
dienen zu tage und zu nacht Gegeben undir
unsir provestes Ingesigel / des wir uns Geme-
ynlichen gebruchen zu disen sachen.

Medicinalia Nr. 164
Wir Heinricus Loße Stedearzt hen harp
Johan Augspurg thun kunt ynen iglichen
menschen daß wir von befelenis wegen der
ersamen wisen unseren liben herren der rade
die von Frankfurth han besehen uff die maledye
/ die vornonfftige konne Hans Fransberger
- widwide des harnesmethir na gelaßen und
han erkannt und bekennen daß disße vor-
genannte widdewe hait an der nasen und an
den lippen ies mundes eyn gestockelte mal-
edie dy man nennet die kanker von eynen
floß de heuptis na dem also Avicenna spri-
chet in den verdenbuche von der üßetzekeit
/ Et cum cancer qui est lepra unius membri
und hait dißer kanker eyn eygenschaffi mit
der rechten gemeyn maledie / und disße wid-
dewe haet nit dye maledie dy da usurplich

Medicinalia Nr. 164
We, Heinricus Loße, civic doctor, Henne
Harp, and Johann Augsburg inform any-
one reading this that we, as commanded by
the honorable and wise council members of
Frankfurt, our dear lords, have undertaken
an inspection for leprosy. We admitted the
prudent relative of Hans Fransberger, wid-
ow of the harness-maker, and have seen and
testify that this above-named widow has on
her nose and on the lips of her mouth the
putrid sickness that is known as “the can-
kerr,” from a flow from the head, of which
also Avicenna speaks in the book of causes
of leprosy: And concerning the cancer that is a
leprosy of the whole body...and this cancer has
shared characteristics with the true, com-
mon leprosy. This widow does not have the
kommet von swächtigkeit oder lebbir dy man nennet in sich selbis maledunge oder lepra universals oder dy gemeyn maledie dy da die gantzen lip beflecken mag / da dorck die lude vilth zu scheiden sint / und also dan disße widdewye dy disße vorbenannte gestorkelte maledie hait an der nasen by den munde mit alsolicher schigkungen zu dem ußfallen also daß davon den atham entzuntlich und sceddellich wirt machen da von schadden kommen mag dar umb sint wir mit redelichen sachen und bedechtelich beweget vilth disße vorg. widdewye von dy lude zu scheiden mit wißsen laube und orlaup unseren liben vorgenannten herren und mag sich gebruchen der freyheit und der almusen alsolicher apgescheiden luden / und daß in alsolicher maße han gethan wante disße sache hait in swere und eyn sunderliche ußrichtunge Datum anno domini MCCCCLVII die veneris quar-ta martii sub sigilli mei Henrici superscripti opidi Frankfurdi phsici jurati ad instanciam et petitionem doctorum hen harp Johan Augspurg huic carte imp(ressum)

Medicinalia Nr. 165
Unser willige dinste zuvor / unde was wir gudes vermogen Ersamen wissen guten fründ-de disse geynwertigen dietze Koch unde Gelichen eeliche lute unser midde Burger hand uns gebeten uch zuschreiben Nach dem die ertzundgenante Gelichen beruchtiget ist biz here etliche Jare das sie beladen sye mid der krangkheide der ußsetzekeyde abe von daz also sye oder nicht / wollen wir eyn wißen han / weren no yemands bie uch in uwer Stadt der da von eyn wißen hette und daruber gesetzte ware Begeren wir von uch un bidten uch rechte fründlichen das ir uns zruwillen den selben vorgnt damidde fürderlichen sin wulle und bestellen das en solichs geden möge das die vorgnt Gele probert werde wie es umb sie gelegen sye und uns des schyn und warheid brengte wie wir uns dar inne halden sullen wullet uch hie inne als gudwillig bewisen als wir uch des unde alles guten besinde gentzlich gluiben und zugetruwen wollen wir leprosy that comes originally from weakness or from the liver, that is called “malady” or “universal leprosy” or “common leprosy” that can mark the whole body, through which many people are to be separated [from other]. Since this widow has this above-named sickness on the nose and near the mouth, so that the diseased skin has the tendency to fall off, and so that the breath becomes damaging and contagious from it, so that harm might come of it, therefore we are—after mature consideration—seriously inclined to direct that this widow should be separated from the healthy, with the wise permission of our dear lords, above-named, and she may have such freedoms and such alms as are customary for such people. And we have behaved in this matter as was seemly in the situation, and have given a weighty and special judgment. Given in the Year of Our Lord 1457, on the fourth Friday in March, under the seal of me, Heinrich the above-signed, sworn physician of Frankfurt, at the request and insistence of the doctors Henne Harp and Johan Augsburg. Thus was this page made.

Medicinalia Nr. 165
Our willing service and all that we may do of good to our honorable and wise good friends. These present, Diete and Geliche Koch, a married couple, our fellow-citizens, have entreated us to write to you, because the above-named Geliche has been rumored for many years now to be burdened with the sickness of leprosy. So, we would like to know whether she is or not, if now there are those by you in your city who have knowledge about such things and are appointed to judge concerning it. We desire of you, and ask you most warmly that you may further the above-named woman’s cause in this, and give orders that, as it is seemly, the above-named Gele may be tested to see how it is with her, and bring us the truth, and the writing about how we should behave accordingly. Please show yourselves favorable in this matter, as we are favorable to you in all things, and trust and believe you entirely, and will diligently
und flüße gerne verdienen uwer beschrieben
antworte geben und unser der Staidt Gies-
Burgermeyster Scheffenn
und Rath zum Gießen

**Medicinalia Nr. 175**

Denn Ersamen fursiechtigenn und
wysenn Burgermeistere Scheffene und Raitd
zu frankfurt mynenn liebenn Herren
Heinrich Wixhuser von siner besehunge
Myennen undertenigen und willigen
dinst Zuvor Ersamen und wysen lieben her-
er, Hans Offsteyner myne Swager hat als
der ihene der mir gewant ist und glymppiger
dann andere den das Amps halber gevore
zuwegenn bringen konne / durch befelhe
meyner Herren der Bürgermeistere von uwer
wyßheit wegen fruntlich und swegerlich an-
braight \ wie wer wyßheit der Raitd gemey-
nlichen überkommen sy mich die gesworne
besehen und examinieren zulassien / dan des
Rades fründe und andere den by mir zusitzen
gvore und zuhandeln schwens und nauss
hien haben / In maissen als obe ich mir der
krangheit der maledy beladen und verlümont
sülle syn ich / Uff solichs myns Swagers an-
brengen Ich yne und Arnolt Swarzinberger
mynen lyden wieder zu uwer wyßheit gefert-
tigt / Sie an myn herren des Rades fründe
werben damit gutlichen virten lassen hain
ire werbunge furter an uwer wyßheit den
Raitd zu bringen das auch zugutem von mir
zuverstetten und offtunen / das mich nit
wenig befremde / derwyle und ich itzt viel
jare und tzütt by uch gesessen der und der-
glichen verlumung von uwer wyßheit / inge-
meynde oder Insündherd nye affter uzunt / so
ich leyder von gottes des herren zuschick-
unge / mit mancherley anderer zufelligen
libes krangheit und bekomernisse myne
selbst und auch myner lieben husfrauen
Georgens myns swagers Ires Bruders halber
angefocht werden und beladen byn ver-
nomen hin / also stumpff und slingen ers-
sucht worden sülte syn / Byn des getruewens
das ich und myner Hausfrauen altern sonder-
study to deserve well of you. Please give your
written answer. Under our seal of the city of
Gießen, on the Friday before Jocunditatis

The major, sheriff, and council of Giessen.

**Medicinalia Nr. 175**

To the honorable, perceptive, and wise
Mayor, officials, and council of Frankfurt,
my dear lords.

Heinrich Wixhuser concerning his exami-
nation

My humble and willing service to the
honorable and wise men, my good lords.
Hans Offsteyner, my brother-in-law, has—as
someone who is related to me—brought my
case before you, “in a friendly and brotherly
manner,” more earnestly than for the sake of
office, through command of the mayor on
your behalf. Now, the wise and unanimous
decision of the council was to have me seen
and examined by the sworn [doctors,] since
my friends on the council, and others who
often sit with me and do business with me
have experienced nausea and disgust as if I
were burdened with the sickness of leprosy,
or rumored to be so. And with this presenta-
tion of my brother-in-law, I and Arnold
Swarzinberger, against him, have prepared
another account of my suffering for your
honors, and entreat that you bring it to my
lords and friends of the council, and weigh
it worthily. I pray also that your wisdom will
take this into account in my favor, and accept
it. I am not a little astonished—as I have sat
among you for such a long time, for so many
years—that this and similar rumors have
been given credence by your honors, whether
some of you or all of you, now or at any time.
So, with whatever sickness or sicknesses I
may be, alas, afflicted by the will of God, and
for the sake of which I and my dear wife have
been attacked and accused by my brother-in-
law (her brother) Georg, let me be tested for
it, and examined concerning the numbness
[of skin] and the sound [of my voice.] You
know the trust that I and my wife (setting
aside [the testimony of] my dear, deceased brother-in-law, to whom God be gracious!

have deserved of you of old. Regarding this, it is your wisdom's intention to examine me in a week's time, and to wait and see if I have recovered enough strength to undergo such an examination. And in this matter you say it is your wish to do so because, on the advice of others, you do not think this evil should be suffered any longer. Now, it's obvious that a sick person like myself can expect only slight improvement or strengthening in a week's time—but I have entrusted this matter to God! So my earnest request to you—made now, and it will be unchanging—is that you may examine me in the same way that you do all others, specially and generally, among the rich and powerful and among the poor, of whatever place or city they be, searching and examining most earnestly, and treating all—rich, powerful, or poor—with the same measure. So let it be, that such a rumor may not damage me and my friends; let your findings be thoroughly justified. So, let it be on whatever day that your honors will undertake my examination, and not deprive me of it, so I am ready to endure anything in accordance with God's will, and to do as is seemly for me, as the consequences of this are the same for rich and for poor, as is most fitting. May your honors favorably understand this writing from me, and take no offense at it, as I desire all good towards you in this and all matters, and I only am concerned because of the short time of preparation for this inspection and examination in order to reach a judgment concerning me and my family in my old age. And my dear wife and I are both much afflicted with sickness, though we have neglected nothing that ought to be done in such matters. We hope that all hereafter may fall out favorably. Given under my seal on Thursday after the Sunday “Oculi” [18 March], 1479.
Medicinalia Nr. 177

To the honorable, cautious, and wise [men] the mayor, sheriff, and council of Frankfurt, my dear lords.

Nicolaus Wynneck, bell-ringer, as advised

Honorable, cautious, wise, and especially beloved lords: May your wisdoms receive my earnest prayer with a ready will before your honors. Your wisdoms know well, through the representation of the mayor and also through writing, how I, a poor man, have requested to undergo examination again, and that that was delayed for me until after the Feast of St. Martin [November 11.] So I pray your wisdoms clearly, as humbly as I can, for God's sake, that your wisdoms may see to it that the same learned men your medical doctors have turned to us in the inspection, and further let me know if I am unspotted, or if I must be put aside from the fellowship of others, and that I may at least know what I do have. And if it's discovered that I do have the sickness of leprosy, and if I am informed unambiguously of this, so I am of the disposition to take this patiently, and to willingly suffer the gift of God, in hopes of thereby winning Heaven. I hope that your wisdoms will show yourselves favorable to me, show me the works of mercy, in a manner befitting my prayer. I will be eternally obliged to you, to pray to God for you. I pray that you will let me know whatever your will is concerning me by the court representative, the friend of your council, and I shall dispose myself in accordance with it. Given on Wednesday before the Feast of St. Nicholas [December 6], 1481.

Nicolaus Wynneck, former bell-ringer of Pharre, your willing [servant]
...germeister zu Aschaffenburg bitten eynen armen...mogen mit der ußsetzikeit verdacht umb gottes...zu besichtigen laßen

Unser Fruntlich dinst zuvor Besondern gutenn frunden unser mitburger Peter Spengeler zeyger diesis briefifs ist by uns be-lumet wie er mit dem ufsatz beladen sy Bitten wir uch mit besunder vlys he wollet die ihenen by uch die sich der dinge zu besehen verstene vermogen den zu probiren umb gotts willen aber er mit der kränckheit beladen sy oder nicht Ist er damit beladen wollet uns das schriftlich zu wissen thun wollen wir den understene zuversehen Ist er aber mit da mit beladen wollet uns auch zu wissen thun wollen wir ime auch helfen mit unserem almüsen als anderen armen luten dann dieser gegenwertig ein zietlangk by uns Gewonet hait sich erlich und fromlich gehalten und ist gantz arme wollet wir in den sachen behillfllich und geraten sin uch auch gutwillig bewysen als wir zu uch vertreuwens haben das sin wir tZu sampt der billichkeit in der glichen und merern zuverdienen willig Da-tum mitwochen nach visitationis beate marie virginis Anno miv lxxxxmo

Vonn uns den Burger meistern zu Aschaffenburg

Medicinalia Nr. 183

Den Ersamen unsern besondern gutenn frunden dem Raite zu Frangfurt.... hant Rein erfunden

Wilhelm vonn gottes gnadenn Lanegraeve zu Hessen Grave von Katzenelenbogen zu Dietz Zu Igregenhorn und zu Nidde

Unser gunstig gesinnung zuvor Ersamen besondern guten frunde Geinwertiger unter unser Kelner Jorge ist in gerucht das er mit der ussetzikeit beladen sj darum haben wir im zu uch gefertigt gutlich bettende ir wullet im durch uwer ertzte und dar zu verordnete nach nettneste [sic] probieren und besichtigen lassen und was sich an ime erfindet uns schriftlich zuerkennen geben dannach wie uns rechten mogen und dar im gutwillig sin das wullin wir in besonderen gnaden gegen uch erkennen Dadtum Alffelt mitwoch nach

Our friendly service to our good friends. Our fellow-citizen Peter Spengeler, bearer of this letter, is reputed among us to have leprosy. And so we most diligently beseech you that those among you who understand examination of such things may investigate him, for God’s sake, [to find out] whether he be burdened with the disease or not. If he is so burdened, please let us know in writing, so that we may be prepared to take care of him. If, however, he is not burdened with leprosy, please likewise let us know. We desire to help him with our alms as we do other poor people, since he has lived with us for some time, has behaved honorably and piously, and is very poor. We wish to act advisedly and helpfully in this matter, and pray that you show yourselves favorable in this matter. You have our trust in this: we have unanimously so agreed, and declare ourselves ready to deserve this at your hands as is most fitting. Given on the Wednesday after the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1490.

From us, the mayor of Aschaffenburg.

Medicinalia Nr. 183

To the honorable members of the council of Frankfurt, our good friends...have found clean. [parchment damaged; the note on the verdict was made after the original superscript]

Wilhelm, by God’s grace Landgrave of Hessen, Count of Katzenellenbogen, of Dietz, of Igregenhorn and of Nidde

Our good favor to our honorable and dear friends. Our cellarer, Jorge, here present, is rumored to be burdened with leprosy, and therefore we have sent him to you, warmly requesting that you would have him most closely examined and tested through your doctors and those commissioned to do so. Please then give us a written report on what his condition is, so that we may act accordingly and be favorable to him in this matter.
This is our wish, sent with testimony of our special grace towards you. Given at Alfeld, on Wednesday after Misericordia Sunday, in the Year of Our Lord 1497.

Medicinalia 179

With friendly service

Item: Who has this illness should be specially set apart from people, not going to public kitchens or bathhouses.

Item: in the future, they should eat more duck, vinegar, and nuts.

Item: those who attend them should not be shy to come into their presence. Their rooms can be kept quite warm, and a window can be opened.

Item: the safest is to take a little candle, and with it to kindle four or five wax tapers in front of oneself.

Item: they should avoid brandy.

Item: they should avoid rotten fruit.

Item: who has a chimney in their chamber should furthermore light a fire in it.

Item: the apothecaries should be free of all leprosy.
Endnotes

1 All transcriptions and translations have been made using the holdings of the Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt, Sanitätsamt: Akten des Rates (Medicina). Individual record numbers are indicated within the text. When possible, I have compared my own transcriptions with those in Karl Sudhoff, “Dokumente zur Ausübung der Lepravorschau in Frankfurt am Main im XV. Jahrhundert,” Lepra: Bibliotheca Internationalis, vol. 13, 1913, pp. 141–70.

2 This first surviving record of Frankfurt’s commission appears to have been created at its inception, as a template for the examining physicians to follow. Conrad Sachsenhausen (d. 1450) was active in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

3 Henne appears to be distressed particularly by the visible symptoms on his face. The letter sent to him by the committee, containing “very many more words” than the contents he summarizes here, is sadly not extant. This letter was presumably a response to the preceding record, Medicinalia Nr. 168, yet another complaint from Henne.

4 In a different hand than the original superscription, presumably an addition by the committee scribe.

5 The letter to the Frankfurt commission is neatly written out with little abbreviation; the one created following the leprosy examination is heavily abbreviated with several interlinear corrections. The letters show a remarkably rapid turnaround time—less than a week!

6 This letter testifies to the considerable social power vested in the hands of the committee. A member of the nobility personally seeks out medical judgment concerning the question of whether or not he is leprous. The surname “Scherer” indicates that Gudrus and Peter were professionally certified barbers, possessing medical knowledge.

7 This letter is somewhat unusual in its reliance on the authority of academic medicine; Avicenna, or Ibn Sina (987–1037), was one of the most influential Islamic scholars of the Middle Ages. The fact that the physicians leave

a phrase defining canker in Latin suggests that they are citing a text directly. I have not found this description of leprosy in Latin translations of Avicenna’s *Canon of Medicine* directly, but frequently as a summing-up of his conclusions in late medieval medical miscellanies, and in the academic medical texts written by Guglielmo da Saliceto (1210–77) and the influential French surgeon Henri de Mondeville (c. 1260–1316.) Frankfurt’s physicians may have wanted to demonstrate their learned expertise to fend off possible criticisms of their severe judgement. The physicians advise that the woman should enter a leper hospital (“be separated from healthy people”), noting that such formal separation is both unusual and less than absolute.

8 The verso is damaged, but conveys that the mayor of Aschaffenburg asks the committee to receive a poor man suspected of having leprosy, and to examine him “for the sake of God,” that is, without charge.

9 One of the counts of Hessen, whose seat lay on the Rhine, approximately 50 miles from Frankfurt. The condition of his cellarer would have been particularly a matter of concern because of the man’s role in supervising the count’s foodstuffs.

10 Vinegar was thought to react with leprous blood, and is now known to function as a mycobacterial disinfectant. Nuts can also kill certain types of bacteria.

11 Sic, for “mehr.”
Introduction

Composed sometime around 1300, the *Arzneibuch* (Book of Medicine) penned by Ortolf of Baierland (Bavaria) was one of the first German-language medical texts. A small textbook of medicine, it would be copied by hand for decades, finding its way into the libraries of physicians, as well as those of monasteries and wealthy layfolk. It would even be printed at least six times in the 1470–80s, making it one of the most popular medical texts in German-speaking areas by the end of the fifteenth century. And yet, little is known of its medieval author and even the dating of the text is uncertain. Manuscript versions of the *Arzneibuch* give some clues: that Ortolf was from Bavaria and that he was “a doctor of Würzburg” and a “master,” both appellations suggesting that he was university-trained. He may have been a physician, though it is perhaps even more likely that he was a surgeon, given both the text’s interest in surgery and archival evidence of a “Master Ortolf” who was a surgeon in Würzburg in 1339.

Whoever he was and wherever he learned his medical knowledge, Ortolf was a gifted medical compiler taking part in a broad trend of medical dissemination taking place in the later Middle Ages. He took a large body of sophisticated university-level medical theory and practice and synthesized it, creating a vernacular handbook of medicine that covered every major area of medieval medicine and healing. The list of the Latin authors he knew (though some only in derivative sources) includes the most famous names of medieval medicine: Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna, Constantinus Africanus, Macer, Isaac and Aegidius, and Gilbertus Anglicus. Ortolf himself offered little content that was truly new to medical theory or practice. His textbook was reductive and simplified, not cutting-edge. But it was not merely a German copy of a Latin textbook. Ortolf chose what to include and what to omit, he decided how to explain complex etiologies in simplified language, and he selected which therapies to offer his audience.

Ortolf began his *Arzneibuch* with chapters that briefly explained the theoretical foundations of medicine: the elements, the qualities of heat/cold and wet/dry inherent in every natural thing, the basic temperaments, the primary organs of the body, and the fundamentals of health and disease from diet and bloodletting to pregnancy and pill-taking. He then included tracts on the pulse and on urine (the two classic diagnostic tools of the medieval physician), and a section on the most famous Hippocratic aphorisms, the “sound-bites” of ancient Greek medical theory and prognosis that were a part of any medical student’s first-year studies. The bulk of the book, however, was Ortolf’s rendition of a typical head-to-foot textbook of diseases. It is here that we find Ortolf’s most sustained treatment of madness.

By the end of the thirteenth century, drawing from the Greek, Roman, and Arabic medical traditions, European medicine had developed a sophisticated approach to explaining and treating madness. While medical theory was largely silent on intellectual disability (finding states of “natural folly” to fall outside their purview), sudden irritation-
ality was perceived, at least by doctors, as a medical problem. Medieval doctors understood various forms of madness as illnesses that were located in the brain. The most common illnesses known to produce irrational behaviors were frenzy, mania, melancholy, and the more catatonic states of lethargy and stupor. All of these illnesses were caused by humoral imbalances or by corrupted humors and vapors that rose up into the brain and disrupted sensory and cognitive functions. (Before the modern age, Western medicine understood the body to be governed by four primary fluids, or humors: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile.) The specific descriptions, causes, and even treatments of madness were exceptionally wide-ranging and often overlapping. Symptomatic behaviors included excessive speech or laughter, debilitating emotional states, superhuman strength, delusions, and a failure to recognize well-known people and things. Causes ranged from head injuries, bad food, and dog bites to shock, childbirth, unrequited love, and even prior demonic possession. Most medical explanations of madness, however, honed in on one or more of the non-naturals, factors external to the body that affected the body’s health: air and environment, food and drink, bodily excretion, sleeping and waking, rest and exercise, and passions of the soul or emotions. Any imbalance in one of these areas could disrupt the health of the whole body, including the workings of the mind. Based on this principle, medieval medicine promulgated an equally wide range of remedies generally related to diet, medication, and environmental therapies both benign (e.g., sweet smells) and extreme (e.g., prescribed confinement or chaining up). Treatment often involved topical applications and ingestible concoctions made from the animal, vegetable, and mineral ingredients that comprised medieval pharmacopeia. Perhaps most striking for modern audiences is the absence of any attempt to talk to those suffering from mental illness. Indeed, there was no such thing as a medieval “psychiatric” approach to mental illness, for the problem was perceived as fundamentally physical. Isolation, protection, and the provision of basic foods and remedies, not talk therapy, was the rule of the day.

We find very little of the complicated Latin specifications of various mental illnesses in Ortolf’s text. Faced with the need to simplify medical theory as well as to determine or invent the best German words for terms that had really only existed in a Latin setting, Ortolf chose not to render the concrete, diagnostic Latin terms for different types of mental illnesses into different German terms. Instead, he called them all unsinnigkeit, or madness. Ortolf also drastically cut the complicated explanations of internal and humoral causations of each kind of madness that the Latin tradition contained, offering instead a synthetic look at the many ways madness could arise and the various symptoms displayed.

Despite his simplifications (and conflations), Ortolf was clearly very interested in madness and his textbook influenced generations of doctors and interested lay readers. Brief discussions of madness are scattered throughout the Arzneibuch and Ortolf explains it at length twice in his head-to-foot discussion of various diseases. These are the chapters presented below. The first section offers a description of mad states that in the Latin tradition fell under the rubric of “frenzy,” but Ortolf rather intriguingly also tacks on therapies for lethargy (the sleeping sickness) at the end of his discussion. The second section, as he states himself, addresses the condition known in Latin as mania, but it also includes discussions and therapies related to melancholy in more sophisticated texts. By taking all of these specific diagnoses and relabeling them all as “madness,” Ortolf was perhaps showing a sensitivity to the practical fact that much of his audience would not likely parse out distinctions between different mental illnesses. But he was also laying the foundation for a general category of mental illness in German culture. Unsinnigkeit was
now claimed as a generic medical term for madness, and its prominent use in Southern Germany in legal and civic records in the fifteenth century suggests that Ortolf’s text had a linguistic impact, and perhaps a medicalizing influence, on cultural conceptions of madness in Southern Germany in the later Middle Ages.

It is also important to note that Ortolf was particularly interested in therapy. His chapters on how to treat the “mad” are far longer than his chapters describing what madness actually is, and his treatments run the gamut: from complex compound medications to simple therapies. This focus on therapy emphasizes again the practical nature of Ortolf’s text. One need only know a few key diagnostic markers of madness in order to understand the condition enough to try out appropriate treatments. Some of those treatments, moreover, are particularly easy to enact. Ortolf’s emphasis on treatment thus serves to draw attention to the treatability and curability of irrational states. In fact, one might argue that the great takeaway from Ortolf’s text is that madness is a physical malady that can be cured by physical therapies. Madness would remain a troubling and anxiety-producing phenomenon in late medieval Germany, but Ortolf’s text suggests that it was not perhaps as mysterious or as irreversible a condition as modern observers might assume.

Bibliography

If a man goes mad

If a man goes mad during an illness or after a bettering of the condition, it is sometimes from a tumor in the head, other times from excess heat and vapor that remains inside him. If it is from a tumor, then you should find that his urine is pale and thin, and the patient continually has a strong heat, and he has an appearance with frightful eyes and is totally mad. If, however, it is from unclean vapor, then his urine is not as white and not as thin and he does not have so great a heat nor such great madness.

You help him thus: You should place the sick man in darkness and others should speak little to him so that he does not become even more mad. Then take vinegar and salt and rub his hands and the soles of his feet with it. Then, if he is constipated, Gilbert in his book teaches that one should make him this clyster: Take mallow and marshmallow root, linseed, fenugreek, and a little salt. Simmer them in four pounds of water and strain it through a cloth and add a little honey to it and olive oil and administer to the patient one pound at a time up into the body with an enema. Or take this, which is just as good: a spoonful of honey and just as much salt and simmer it together until the honey turns black. Then take it off the heat and let it cool a bit and make a suppository from it as long as a finger and position one or two in the body. Then his body will soften. One should also take a hen and cut open from the back and place it on the head and forehead and it is very calming.° [This is also a noble remedy:] Take poppy seeds and white henbane seeds° grind them small and mix them with an eggwhite and breast milk° and spread

henbane seeds also “Pilsenkraut” (lat. Jusquianus), a plant commonly used in therapies for madness, but also often warned against as causing madness
sten und in die oren und in die naßlöcher und an dem schlaffe. Oder nÿm pilensamen zwåy lot und stos es mit gutem wein und strich es dann an die stirne und in die oren und in die naßlocher. Es schleffet zuhant. Du solt auch mercken. Gewinnet der mensch ein sucht das haisset die schlaffenden sucht das ist gut. Wirß aber der mensch unsinnig in einer schlaffenden sucht. So stirbet es. Ist aber der mensch wol beileibe so las im die ader schlahaen vornen an der stirnen. Du magst im auch mandelmilch geben zutrincken oder gerstenwasser du solt auch an die stat legen das es küle seÿ und mit roten weiden bestreichen oder mit rosen. es hilft wol.

Von der unsinne

Mania ist ein siechtumb der haisset unsinnikait und wirt etwen von pössen essen oder trincken. oder von übrigem tranck starckes weins oder von haisser kost als von kno blauch auf und zu sere gefefferter kost oder von einem unsinnigen thýre. das ein menschen gepýssen hat oder vonm angesundem lufe oder von zorne oder von übriger trunkenheit. etwen von übriger feuchtigkeit. oder von dem plut sind sie alle fröleich und singent und lachen oft von gantzem hertzen. so sein sie unterstonden frölich und unterstonden zornig. kompt es aber von hitze oder von dürre so zornent sie gern und schreient und schlahent ander lewt. kompt es aber von kelten und von dürre so trawren sie albeg unnd fürchten das sie nicht fürchten süllen und waÿnent und pergent sich in die vinster. oder sie wenent das sie got sind und das man in das himelreich genomen hab. und etlich wenen das sie vi gutes haben in der hant und enkam in die nÿmant aufgewinnen. etwen so kreent sie als sie hannen sindt. etwen so wol len sie pellen als die hunt und wenen das sie hunt sein oder sie wenen das sie nicht haubt haben.

On the mad

Mania is an illness that is called madness and develops sometimes from bad food or drink. Or from the excessive drinking of strong wine. Or from hot food like from garlic or overly peppered food. Or from a mad animal that has bitten a person. Or from unhealthy air. Or from anger or excessive drunkenness. Sometimes the illness comes from excessive heat or moisture, or from too much blood. [In these cases] the mad are always happy and singing and laugh often from the whole heart. If it comes, however, from blood burned in the body, then they are sometimes happy and sometimes angry. If it comes from heat and from dryness, then they are angry and cry out and hit [themselves and] others. If it comes from cold and dryness, then they are always sad and fear what they should not fear and hide in the dark and cry or they imagine they are God and that Heaven has been taken from them. Some think that they have lots of goods in their hands and no one can open their hands. Some crow as though they are roosters. Others bark and believe they are dogs, or they believe that they do not have heads.

lots a lot is unit of weight typically 1/32 of a pound
Man sol in also helffen sind sie von grosser kranckheit und von trübnüs unsinnig worden. so sol man sie frolich machen und sol in geloben vil gutes dinges die kost sol ring sein als zigenflisch oder junge hüner und newe gelegte aÿr und schön prot und geit man in weine den sol man in mischen mit wasser. Man sol in paden und sol in frawen geloben wan das benympt in den zorn und die unsinnigkei. du solt im lassen die adern bei der minsten zehen auf den fuesse es wart nÿe so gutes nicht. Ditz ist die aller edelste ertzneÿ für alle unsinnigkeit. Nÿm mirabolani citrini kebuli indi sandali violarum iglichs .iii. quintein cinamomi gariofoli lignum aloes spicis kasie lignee petre semis maratri elleboris nigri iglichs als vie ein quintein. radicis fenculi apii scarioli iglichs .v. quintein capilli veneris semen lactuce iglichs .ii. quintein. stos es alles miteinander sewd es mit .ii. pfunten wassers untz das drittayl eingesotten seÿ und solt es drücken durch ein tuch und thu zu dem wasser .iii. pfunten zuchers und sewd es mit dem zucker anderwait untz das wasser wol eingeseid und gib sein dem siechen .iii. quintein mit warmen wein und enhilffet dem das nicht und der sieche vil plutters hab. so las im die ader mitten an der stiren. kompt es aber von übriger hitze so gib im gerstenwasser da lacaricie und wegwart in gesotten seÿ und gib im die lectuarien die da haisset diaporarginatum dÿ reiniget das plut gar sere man so im auch kein pfaster auf das haubt legen ee man im den leib reiniget. Man so im auch das haubt twahen mit einer lawgen da gamilten und uerbene in gesotten seÿ. ist aber ein grosse hitz an dem haubte so bestreich es im mit hauswurtz und mit Rosen und mit frawen milich miteinander getemperirt.

One should help him thus: If a person has become mad from great illness and sorrow, then one should make him happy and promise him many good things. His food should be light, like goat meat or young hens and newly laid eggs and fine bread. And if he is given wine, it should be mixed with water. One should bathe him and promise him women, if that takes away anger and madness from him. One should bleed him from his smallest toe, there is none better. This is the finest remedy for all madness: Take yellow, black and kebule myrobalan, sandalwood, violet, three-quarters each; cinnamon, balsam, clove, aloe-wood, lavender, cinnamon bark, parsley seed, fennel, black hellebore, each a measure; fennel root, wild celery, prickly lettuce, each five measures; venus hair, lettuce seeds, each two measures. Grind it all together and simmer it with two pounds of water until a third boils off and strain it through a cloth. And add to the water three pounds of sugar and simmer it with the sugar another time until the water boils off. Give four measures of it to the sick man with warm wine. And if that does not help and the person has a lot of blood, bleed him at the middle of the forehead. If, however, the madness comes from too-much heat, then give him barley water in which licorice and chicory were simmered and give him the electuary which is called dyaboraginatum and which cleans the blood. One should not lay a plaster on his head before cleaning his body. One could also wash his head with brine in which chamomile and verbena have been simmered. However, if there is a great heat in the head, then smear it with a tempered mixture of houseleek and rosewater and breast milk."

myrobalan trees bearing nut-like fruits, indigenous to southern Asia, that became common in medieval herbals after the influx of Arab medicine. There are five kinds: citrinus, kebulus, indus, bellericus, and emblicus.

three-quarters medieval measurements varied considerably, but this likely meant three-quarters of a lot

venus hair a fern with a number of medicinal uses going back to Greek medicine

dyaboraginatum a remedy made out of borage, a cultivated flowering plant popularly used in medieval German food and medicine
Endnotes

1 The text below has been compiled by Anne M. Koenig based largely on the 1477 edition printed by Koberg in Nuremberg, but in consultation with three earlier manuscripts, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (BSB) Cgm 430 and Cgm 723 and Würzburg, Universitätssbibliothek, Ms. M. ch. f. 79. A copy of the 1477 printing is held in the Bavarian State Library: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 2 Inc.c.a. 642, cited passages on f. 17v–18r and 20r–21r. The edition’s spellings and punctuation have been retained but abbreviations have been expanded. Chapter numbers are those given by modern scholars to the text, most recently Ortrun Riha in her 2014 modern German edition of the text (see bibliography). The English translation of the text, as well as the glosses and endnotes, have also been provided by Anne M. Koenig.

2 Noticing the shifts in topic, the 1477 printed edition breaks up the rest of this paragraph and adds two new titles, the first one here: Ob ein mensch nit geschlafgen mag. A few lines later, after Es schleffet zuhant, the printer inserts the title: Von der schlaffende sucht. I have omitted both, since they do not belong to the earlier manuscript tradition.

3 The 1477 text prints clein (“small”) here, however the manuscript tradition clearly indicates that word is meant to be kein (“no”).

4 The therapy of splitting chickens (or puppies!) and placing the spatchcocked carcass on the head is a surprisingly consistent cure offered across medical and popular texts alike.

5 While not present in the 1477 printed text, the manuscript tradition introduces the next recipe with this endorsement.

6 Breast milk is a common ingredient in medicines, going back to ancient times. Pliny the Elder offers a long chapter on the therapeutic uses of “women’s milk” and includes madness among the list of illnesses that it can cure (Pliny the Elder, Naturalis historia, Bk 28.21). Breast milk (like semen) was understood as a substance made from refining blood, and appears frequently in treatments for certain ailments, particularly those of the ears and eyes. Ortolf himself cites it several times, each time for application to a part of the head.

7 This was another disease of the head, and one that Ortolf treats in the chapter following this one. It could cover any range of conditions, from coma and catalepsy to lethargy and excessive sleepiness. Ortolf notes that it particularly affects the aged.

8 Barley water has long been considered a healthy, restorative beverage, from ancient Greece to modern times. It was generally made by boiling barley grains in water and then, if desired, the strained liquid was sweetened or infused with herbs, fruit, or honey. Because barley water was believed to cool and moisten the body, it was a perfect therapy for “hot” maladies.

9 “Hot” here refers to the quality inherent in a thing, not the temperature at which a food is consumed. Some foods, like garlic, were considered to have “hot” properties, while others, like melon, for instance, were considered to have cold properties. Everything that a person ate thus could disrupt, maintain, or restore the body’s own internal balance between hot and cold (and moist and dry).

10 The Nuremberg edition (as well as other print version from the 1470s) substitutes “drunkenness” here. Earlier manuscripts more correctly identify excessive sadness as a cause for madness. Anger and sadness had long been understood by doctors to be dangerous emotions (or what they called “accidents of the soul”) that had clear somatic effects, from constricting the heart to affecting the brain and its psychological faculties.

11 Nuremberg 1477 omits the reference self-harm, but it is an important part of the manuscript versions of the text, so I have reinserted it in this translation.

12 There is some inconsistency in the pronouns in the first few lines, going from ihn to sie back to ihn. I have rendered it all as a masculine singular, in keeping with the rest of the text.

13 The manuscript tradition has “sadness” or “grief” (trawrichait) not “illness” here. The 1477 printed edition thus twice effaces sadness as a cause of madness (see note 11 above).
RELIGIOUS TEXTS
Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John¹ (ca. 382)

Translated by St. Jerome
Contributed by Will Eggers

Introduction

The Vulgate Bible was translated in the fourth century largely by St. Jerome at the request of Pope Damascus I. The translation quickly became the most influential version from its initial composition through the Early Modern period, finally becoming canon at the Council of Trent. The dating of the original texts of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—is debated, but consensus is that the first written versions of these texts appear in the latter half of the first century CE. The first three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—called the Synoptic Gospels—show a close relationship, with many repeated episodes and word-for-word parallels. Modern scholarly consensus—contested—is that Mark was composed first and that Matthew and Luke expanded upon it, including elements of second source text (the Q-text), of which no examples currently exist. In addition, Matthew and Luke are thought to include materials unique to the communities of Matthew (M-text) and Luke (L-text). Most medieval scholars, however, accepted Augustine’s chronology that Matthew was composed first, followed by Mark and, later, Luke. The Book of John shows substantial textual differences from the other three Gospels and, due to references within the text, most modern scholars consider it the last composed. Each of the Gospels has a slightly different emphasis on often similar materials. Mark, once thought to be a summary of Matthew, is now generally thought to target a gentile audience with an emphasis on action and miracles. Matthew, with its emphasis on placing Jesus in the Jewish tradition, seems to be composed within a community in conflict with the broader Jewish community. Luke targets an educated Greek-speaking audience and places an emphasis on social justice. The Book of John shows more independence from Judaism than the other three gospels, and it places more emphasis on the divine nature of Jesus, as well as a greater attention to the relationship of the individual to the church. John includes fewer examples of healing, suggesting that many episodes have been omitted, as “there are also many other things which Jesus did which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25).

With thirty-one individual instances of healing in the New Testament, it comes as no surprise that episodes mentioning impairment appear with regularity. Most of the episodes are short, focusing on the miraculous nature of the healing and offering few extended representations of the social impact of impairment on those before and after they are healed. The primary emphasis of each is on highlighting the power of Jesus, but healing is sometimes followed by the admonition to “sin no more,” implying a correlation between previous sin and current impairment
(John 5:14). At other times, the key element to healing is the belief of those requesting help. When two blind men ask for help, Jesus queries them about their faith. “Do you believe, that I can do this unto you?” They say to him, ‘Yea, Lord.’ Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith, be it done unto you’” (Matthew 9:28–29). But the Gospels sometimes disconnect disability from sin and belief and cast its healing as a way to glorify God, such as in the John 9 episode on the healing of a blind man. Finally, some examples of healing become metaphors for spiritual rebirth. As noted by the venerable Bede, the episode of the man born blind shows him healing in stages to parallel his spiritual growth (Mark 8:22–25). Aiding those in need of help offers people a chance to act upon their generosity and, in so doing, grow spiritually. “When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind; And thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense” (John 14:13–14). In this example, the maimed, the lame, and the blind are linked to the poor in their inability to repay hosts, which suggests the economic limitations of these groups rather than any immorality. The attitudes toward impairment seen here in the Gospels stand in dialogue with both Greco-Roman and ancient Jewish attitudes. Greek thinkers, including Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, espoused infanticide for those with impairments, and the Romans’ Twelve Tables codified this attitude into law. Ancient Jewish texts presented a more nuanced view. Despite the position that those with impairments should be excluded from leadership positions (Leviticus 21:16–25), the Torah distinguishes between impairments at birth, which are not to be judged, and impairments gained later in life, which indicate divine disfavor. Jesus, in John 9:2–3, follows within this Jewish tradition.

Within the Gospels, impairment is consistently portrayed as something in need of healing and therefore resembles in some ways the “medical model” of disability, though what medieval scholars might identify as medicine might be thought of as religious. Edward Wheatley’s work proposes just such a medieval model of disability, arguing that religious discourses of disability controlled how those with impairments were perceived as much as medicinal discourses do today. Irina Metzler does an excellent job of identifying how medieval theologians looked to healing in the Gospels when discussing the issue of impairment and argues that applying a social model of disability to medieval reception of these texts, highlighting societal stigma and limitations in contrast with impairment, does not accurately reflect the attitudes in medieval Europe. Her work, in addition, challenges the notion that impairment was invariably associated with sin.

The following selection of Gospel episodes is an attempt to provide a range of examples that includes some of the most popular healing stories. When possible, several versions of the same narrative are included to offer the chance for comparison. The episode of Jairus’ daughter, thought to be dead but actually sleeping, for instance, provides a compelling contrast to the healing of dead Lazarus (John 11:44), who the chief priests then want to kill (John 12:9–11). Passing references to healing, such as the off-handed references to the healing of Mary Magdalene, “out of whom seven devils were cast forth,” (Luke 8:2; also appears in Mark 16:5), are not included. Comparing the vocabulary of impairment in the Latin and in the Early Modern English offers opportunities to explore etymological and cultural connections. Many episodes focus on infirmities as a result of being unclean (immundus), the cure for which is cleanliness (munditiae). Physical infirmities (note the Latin root) can often be linked directly to paralysis or leprosy, but many mental conditions (e.g. self-harming, ferocity, epilepsy) are lumped together under the umbrella of possession by demons, a source of suffering and sin that can be expelled and that is not therefore essential to the person.
Bibliography


List of Selected Episodes

Healing while on First Preaching Tour in Galilee (Matthew 4:23–24, Mark 3:9–12, Luke 5:15)

A Leper (Mark 1:40–45, Luke 5:12–15)

Roman Centurion on Behalf of His Servant with Paralysis, at Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–10, Luke 7:2–10)

Demonic(s) at at Tomb (Matthew 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–15, Luke 8:26–39)


Deaf Man with Speech Impediment in the Region of Decapolis (Mark 7:31–37)


Infirm Man at the Pool of Bethsaida (John 5:2–15)

Man Born Blind (John 9:1–41)

Lazarus Raised from the Dead (John 11:11–44)

Including the Those with Impairments at One’s Table (Luke 14:12–14)
Healing while on First Preaching Tour in Galilee

Matthew 4:23–24

[23] And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom: and healing all manner of sickness and every infirmity, among the people. [24] And his fame went throughout all Syria, and they presented to him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and such as were possessed by devils, and lunatics, and those that had palsy, and he cured them.

Mark 3:9–12

[9] And he spoke to his disciples that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. [10] For he healed many, so that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had evils. [11] And the unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him: and they cried, saying: [12] Thou art the Son of God. And he strictly charged them that they should not make him known.

Luke 5:15

[15] But the fame of him went abroad the more, and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

A Leper

Matthew 8:1–4

[1] And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him: [2] And behold a leper came and adored him, saying: Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. [3] And Jesus stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will, be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed. [4] And Jesus saith to him: See thou tell no man: but go, shew thyself to the priest,
fer munus, quod praecepit Moyses, in testi-
monium illis.

Mark 1:40–45
[40] Et venit ad eum lepusus deprecans eum: et genu flexo dixit ei: Si vis, potes me
mundare.
[41] Jesus autem misertus ejus, extendit
manum suam: et tangens eum, ait illi: Volo:
mundare. [42] Et cum dixisset, statim disces-
sit ab eo lepra, et mundatus est. [43] Et com-
minatus est ei, statimque ejicit illum, [44] et
dicit ei: Vide nemini dixeris: sed vade,
ostende te principi sacerdotum, et offer pro
emundatione tua, quae praecepit Moyses in
testimonium illis. [45] At ille egressus coepit
praedicare, et diffamare sermonem, ita ut
jam non posset manifeste introire in civi-
tatem, sed foris in desertis locis esset, et con-
veniebant ad eum undique.

Luke 5:12–15
[12] Et factum est, cum esset in una civitat-
um, et ecce vir plenus lepra, et videns Jesum,
et procidens in faciem, rogavit eum, dicens:
Domine, si vis, potes me mundare. [13] Et ex-
tendens manum, tetigit eum dicens: Volo:
mundare. Et confestim lepra discessit ab illo.
[14] Et ipse praecepit illi ut nemini diceret:
vede, Vade, ostende te sacerdoti, et offer pro
eundatione tua, sicur praecepit Moyses, in
testimonium illis. [15] Perambulabat autem
magis sermo de illo: et conveniebant turbae
multae ut audirent, et curarentur ab infirmi-
tatibus suis.

Roman Centurion on Behalf of
His Servant with Paralysis, at
Capernaum

Matthew 8:5–10
[5] Cum autem introisset Capharnaum,
accessit ad eum centurio, rogans eum, [6] et
and offer the gift which Moses commanded
for a testimony unto them.

Mark 1:40–45
[40] And there came a leper to him, be-
seeching him, and kneeling down said to him:
If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
[41] And Jesus having compassion on him,
stretched forth his hand; and touching him,
saith to him: I will. Be thou made clean. [42]
And when he had spoken, immediately the
leprosy departed from him, and he was made
clean. [43] And he strictly charged him, and
forthwith sent him away. [44] And he saith to
him: See thou tell no one; but go, shew thyself
to the high priest, and offer for thy cleans-
ing the things that Moses commanded, for
a testimony to them. [45] But he being gone
out, began to publish and to blaze abroad the
word: so that he could not openly go into the
city, but was without in desert places: and
they flocked to him from all sides.

Luke 5:12–15
[12] And it came to pass, when he was in
a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy,
who seeing Jesus, and falling on his face, be-
sought him, saying: Lord, if thou wilt, thou
canst make me clean. [13] And stretching
forth his hand, he touched him, saying: I will.
Be thou cleansed. And immediately the lep-
rosy departed from him. [14] And he charged
him that he should tell no man, but, Go, shew
thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleans-
ing according as Moses commanded, for a
testimony to them. [15] But the fame of him
went abroad the more, and great multitudes
came together to hear, and to be healed by
him of their infirmities.
Luke 7:2–10

[2] And the servant of a certain centurion, who was dear to him, being sick, was ready to die. [3] And when he had heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the ancients of the Jews, desiring him to come and heal his servant. [4] And when they came to Jesus, they besought him earnestly, saying to him: He is worthy that thou shouldest do this for him. [5] For he loveth our nation; and he hath built us a synagogue.

[6] Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent his friends to him, saying: Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof. [7] For which cause neither did I think myself worthy to come to thee; but say the word, and my servant shall be healed. [8] For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. [9] Which Jesus hearing, marvelled; and turning about to the multitude that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith, not even in Israel. [10] And they who were sent, being returned to the house, found the servant whole who had been sick.
Demonaie(s) at at Tomb

Matthew 8:28–34

[28] And when he was come on the other side of the water, into the country of the Gerasens, there met him two that were possessed with devils, coming out of the sepulchres, exceeding fierce, so that none could pass by that way. [29] And behold they cried out, saying: What have we to do with thee, Jesus Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? [30] And there was, not far from them, an herd of many swine feeding.

[31] And the devils besought him, saying: If thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. [32] And he said to them: Go. But they going out went into the swine, and behold the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea: and they perished in the waters. [33] And they that kept them fled: and coming into the city, told every thing, and concerning them that had been possessed by the devils. [34] And behold the whole city went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart from their coasts.

Mark 5:1–15

[1] And they came over the strait of the sea into the country of the Gerasens. [2] And as he went out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the monuments a man with an unclean spirit, [3] Who had his dwelling in the tombs, and no man now could bind him, not even with chains. [4] For having been often bound with fetters and chains, he had burst the chains, and broken the fetters in pieces, and no one could tame him. [5] And he was always day and night in the monuments and in the mountains, crying and cutting himself with stones.

[6] And seeing Jesus afar off, he ran and adored him. [7] And crying with a loud voice, he said: What have I to do with thee, Jesus the Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not. [8] For he said unto him: Go out of the man, thou unclean spirit. [9] And he asked him: What...

Luke 8:26–39


[31] Et rogabant illum ne imperaret illis ut in abyssum irent. [32] Erat autem ibi grex porcorum multorum pascentium in monte: et rogabant eum, ut permetteret eis in illos ingredi. Et permisit illis. [33] Exierunt ergo daemonia ab homine, et intraverunt in porcos: et impetu abit grex per praeceps in stagnum, et suffocatus est. [34] Quod ut viderunt factum qui pascabant, fugerunt, et nuntiaverunt in civitatem et in villas. [35] Exierunt is thy name? And he saith to him: My name is Legion, for we are many. [10] And he besought him much, that he would not drive him away out of the country.

[11] And there was there near the mountain a great herd of swine, feeding. [12] And the spirits besought him, saying: Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. [13] And Jesus immediately gave them leave. And the unclean spirits going out, entered into the swine: and the herd with great violence was carried headlong into the sea, being about two thousand, and were stifled in the sea. [14] And they that fed them fled, and told it in the city and in the fields. And they went out to see what was done: [15] And they came to Jesus, and they see him that was troubled with the devil, sitting, clothed, and well in his wits, and they were afraid.
autem videre quod factum est, et venerunt ad Jesum, et invenerunt hominem sedentem, a quo daemonia exierant, vestitum ac sana mente, ad pedes ejus, et timuerunt.


down a steep place into the lake, and were stifled. [34] Which when they that fed them saw done, they fled away, and told it in the city and in the villages. [35] And they went out to see what was done; and they came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at his feet, clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

[36] And they also that had seen, told them how he had been healed from the legion. [37] And all the multitude of the country of the Gerasens besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear. And he, going up into the ship, returned back again. [38] Now the man, out of whom the devils were departed, besought him that he might be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying: [39] Return to thy house, and tell how great things God hath done to thee. And he went through the whole city, publishing how great things Jesus had done to him.

Man with Paralysis at Capernaum

Matthew 9:1–8


Matthew 9:1–8

[i] And entering into a boat, he passed over the water and came into his own city. [ii] And behold they brought to him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee. [iii] And behold some of the scribes said within themselves: He blasphemeth. [iv] And Jesus seeing their thoughts, said: Why do you think evil in your hearts? [v] Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee: or to say, Arise, and walk?

[vi] But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then said he to the man sick of palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. [vii] And he arose, and went into his house. [viii] And the multitude seeing it, feared, and glorified God that gave such power to men.
Mark 2:3–13

[3] And they came to him, bringing one sick of the palsy, who was carried by four. [4] And when they could not offer him unto him for the multitude, they uncovered the roof where he was; and opening it, they let down the bed wherein the man sick of the palsy lay. [5] And when Jesus had seen their faith, he saith to the sick of the palsy: Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.

[6] And there were some of the scribes sitting there, and thinking in their hearts: [7] Why doth this man speak thus? he blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins, but God only? [8] Which Jesus presently knowing in his spirit, that they so thought within themselves, saith to them: Why think you these things in your hearts? [9] Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy: Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say: Arise, take up thy bed, and walk? [10] But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), [11] I say to thee: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. [12] And immediately he arose; and taking up his bed, went his way in the sight of all; so that all wondered and glorified God, saying: We never saw the like. [13] And he went forth again to the sea side; and all the multitude came to him, and he taught them.

Luke 5:17–25

[17] And it came to pass on a certain day, as he sat teaching, that there were also Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, that were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was to heal them. [18] Et ecce viri portantres in lecto hominem, qui erat paralyticus: et quae rebant eum inferre, et ponere ante eum. [19] Et non invententes qua parte illum inferrent prae turba, ascenderunt supra tectum, et per tegulas summiserunt eum cum lecto in medium ante Jesum. [20] Quorum fidem ut vidit, dixit: Homo, remittuntur tibi peccata tua. [21] Et coeperunt cogitare scribae et pharisaei, dicentes: Quis est hic, qui loquitur blas-
The Blind near Jericho (Bartimeus in the Book of Mark)

Matthew 9:27–30

[27] And as Jesus passed from thence, there followed him two blind men crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David. [28] And when he was come to the house, the blind men came to him. And Jesus saith to them, Do you believe, that I can do this unto you? They say to him, Yea, Lord. [29] Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it done unto you. [30] And their eyes were opened, and Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know this.

Mark 10:46–52

[46] And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho, with his disciples, and a very great multitude, Bartimeus the blind man, the son of Timeus, sat by the way side begging. [47] Who when he had heard, that it was Jesus of Nazareth, began to cry out, and to say: Jesus son of David, have mercy on me. [48] And many rebuked him, that he might hold his peace; but he cried a great deal the more: Son of David, have mercy on me. [49] And Jesus, standing still, commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying to him: Be of better comfort: arise, he calleth
Luke 18:35–43


[36] Et cum audiret turbam praetereuntem, interrogabat quid hoc esset. [37] Dixerunt autem ei quod Jesus Nazarenus transiret. [38] Et clamavit, dicens: Jesu, fili David, miserere mei. [39] Et qui praeibant, increpabant eum ut taceret. Ipse vero multo magis clamabat: Fili David, miserere mei. [40] Stans autem Jesus jussit illum adduci ad se. Et cum appropinquasset, interrogavit illum,


Man with a Withered Hand

Matthew 12:10–15


Matthew 12:10–15

[10] And behold there was a man who had a withered hand, and they asked him, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

[11] But he said to them: What man shall there be among you, that hath one sheep: and if the same fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not take hold on it and lift it up? [12] How much better is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do a good deed on the sabbath days. [13] Then he saith to the man: Stretch forth thy hand; and he stretched it forth, and it was restored to health even as
Mark 3:1–5


Luke 6:6–10


Son with Epilepsy near the Towns of Caesarea Philippi

Matthew 17:14–20


Luke 6:6–10

[6] And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And there was a man, whose right hand was withered. [7] And the scribes and Pharisees watched if he would heal on the sabbath; that they might find an accusation against him. [8] But he knew their thoughts; and said to the man who had the withered hand: Arise, and stand forth in the midst. And rising he stood forth. [9] Then Jesus said to them: I ask you, if it be lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy? [10] And looking round about on them all, he said to the man: Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth: and his hand was restored.

Matthew 17:14–20

[14] And when he was come to the multitude, there came to him a man falling down on his knees before him, saying: Lord, have


Luke 9:38–43


[41] Respondens autem Jesus, dixit: O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring hither thy son. [42] And as he was coming to him, the devil threw him down, and tore him. [43] And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and cured the boy, and restored him to his father.

Deaf Man with Speech Impediment in the Region of Decapolis

Mark 7:31–37

[31] Et iterum exiens de finibus Tyri, venit per Sidonem ad mare Galilaeae inter medios fines Decapoleos. [32] Et adducunt ei surdum, et mutum, et deprecabantur eum, ut imponat pity on my son, for he is a lunatic, and suffereth much: for he falleth often into the fire, and often into the water. [15] And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

[16] Then Jesus answered and said: O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me. [17] And Jesus rebuked him, and the devil went out of him, and the child was cured from that hour. [18] Then came the disciples to Jesus secretly, and said: Why could not we cast him out? [19] Jesus said to them: Because of your unbelief. For, amen I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Remove from hence hither, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you. [20] But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.

Mark 7:31–37

[31] And again going out of the coasts of Tyre, he came by Sidon to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. [32] And they bring to him one deaf and
dumb; and they besought him that he would lay his hand upon him. [33] And taking him from the multitude apart, he put his fingers into his ears, and spitting, he touched his tongue: [34] And looking up to heaven, he groaned, and said to him: Ephpheta, which is, Be thou opened. [35] And immediately his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right.

[36] And he charged them that they should tell no man. But the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it. [37] And so much the more did they wonder, saying: He hath done all things well; he hath made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

Blind man at Bethesda

Mark 8:22–25


Jairus’ Daughter at Capernaum

Matthew 9:18–25


& Woman with Issue of Blood at Capernaum

Matthew 9:18–25

[18] As he was speaking these things unto them, behold a certain ruler came up, and adored him, saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come, lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. [19] And Jesus rising up followed him, with his disciples. [20] And behold a woman who was troubled with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment.

Mark 5:22–43

[22] And there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue named Jairus: and seeing him, falleth down at his feet. [23] And he besought him much, saying: My daughter is at the point of death, come, lay thy hand upon her, that she may be safe, and may live. [24] And he went with him, and a great multitude followed him, and they thronged him. [25] And a woman who was under an issue of blood twelve years,

[26] and had suffered many things from many physicians; and had spent all that she had, and was nothing the better, but rather worse, [27] When she had heard of Jesus, came in the crowd behind him, and touched his garment. [28] For she said: If I shall touch only his garment, I shall be healed. [29] But Jesus turning and seeing her, said: Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. [30] And when Jesus was come into the house of the ruler, and saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout, [31] He said: Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. [32] And when the multitude was put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand. And the maid arose.

[33] Et confestim siccatus est fons sanguinis ejus: et sensit corpore quia sanata esset a plagae. [34] Et statim Jesus in se metipso cognoscens virtutem quae exierat de illo, conversus ad turbam, aiebat: Quis te tetigit vestimenta mea?


[43] Et praecepit illis vehementer ut nemo id sciret: et dixit dari illi manducare.

Luke 8:41–56


[46] Et dicit Jesus: Tetigit me aliquis: nam ego novi virtutem de me exissee. [47] Vi- yet speaking, some come from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying: Thy daughter is dead: why dost thou trouble the master any further?

[36] But Jesus having heard the word that was spoken, saith to the ruler of the synagogue: Fear not, only believe. [37] And he admitted not any man to follow him, but Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. [38] And they come to the house of the ruler of the synagogue; and he seeth a tumult, and people weeping and wailing much. [39] And going in, he saith to them: Why make you this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. [40] And they laughed him to scorn. But he having put them all out, taked the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

[41] And taking the damsel by the hand, he saith to her: Talitha cumi, which is, being interpreted: Damsel (I say to thee) arise. [42] And immediately the damsel rose up, and walked: and she was twelve years old: and they were astonished with a great astonishment. [43] And he charged them strictly that no man should know it: and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

Luke 8:41–56

[41] And behold there came a man whose name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at the feet of Jesus, beseeching him that he would come into his house: [42] For he had an only daughter, almost twelve years old, and she was dying. And it happened as he went, that he was thronged by the multitudes. [43] And there was a certain woman having an issue of blood twelve years, who had bestowed all her substance on physicians, and could not be healed by any. [44] She came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment; and immediately the issue of her blood stopped. [45] And Jesus said: Who is it that touched me? And all denying, Peter and they that were with him said: Master, the multitudes throng and press thee, and dost thou say, Who touched me?
And Jesus said: Somebody hath touched me; for I know that virtue is gone out from me. And the woman seeing that she was not hid, came trembling, and fell down before his feet, and declared before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was immediately healed. But he said to her: Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go thy way in peace. As he was yet speaking, there cometh one to the ruler of the synagogue, saying to him: Thy daughter is dead, trouble him not. Jesus hearing this word, answered the father of the maid: Fear not; believe only, and she shall be safe. And when he was come to the house, he suffered not any man to go in with him, but Peter and James and John, and the father and mother of the maiden. And all wept and mourned for her. But he said: Weep not; the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. But he taking her by the hand, cried out, saying: Maid, arise. And her spirit returned, and she arose immediately. And he bid them give her to eat. And her parents were astonished, whom he charged to tell no man what was done.

Infirm Man at the Pool of Bethsaida

John 5:2–15

[2] Now there is at Jerusalem a pond, called Probitatica, which in Hebrew is named Bethsaida, having five porches. [3] In these lay a great multitude of sick, of blind, of lame, of withered; waiting for the moving of the water. [4] And an angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond; and the water was moved. And he that went down first into the pond after the motion of the water, was made whole, of whatsoever infirmity he lay under. [5] And there was a certain man there, that had been eight and thirty years under his infirmity.


Man Born Blind

John 9:1–41


John 9:1–41

[1] And Jesus passing by, saw a man, who was blind from his birth: [2] And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? [3] Jesus answered: Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. [4] I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

[6] When he had said these things, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and spread the clay on his eyes, [7] And said to him: Go, wash in the pool of Siloe, which is interpreted, Sent. He went therefore, and
medieval disability sourcebook


[18] Some therefore of the Pharisees said: This man is not of God, who keepeth not the sabbath. But others said: How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. [19] They say therefore to the blind man again: What sayest thou of him that hath opened thy eyes? And he said: He is a prophet. [20] The Jews then did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight, [21] And asked them, saying: Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then doth he now see? [22] His parents answered them, and said: We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:

[23] But how he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: ask himself: he is of age, let him speak for himself. [24] These things his parents said, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had already agreed among themselves, that if any man should confess him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. [25] Therefore did his parents say: He is of age, ask himself. [26] They therefore called the man again that had been blind, and said to him: Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner. [27] He said therefore to them: If washed, and he came seeing. [8] The neighbours therefore, and they who had seen him before that he was a beggar, said: Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said: This is he. [9] But others said: No, but he is like him. But he said: I am he. [10] They said therefore to him: How were thy eyes opened?


[41] Dixit eis Jesus: Si caeci essetis, non haberetis peccatum. Nunc vero dicitis, Quia videmus: peccatum vestrum manet.

he be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.

[26] They said then to him: What did he to thee? How did he open thy eyes? [27] He answered them: I have told you already, and you have heard: why would you hear it again? will you also become his disciples? [28] They reviled him therefore, and said: Be thou his disciple; but we are the disciples of Moses. [29] We know that God spoke to Moses: but as to this man, we know not from whence he is. [30] The man answered, and said to them: Why, herein is a wonderful thing, that you know not from whence he is, and he hath opened my eyes.

[31] Now we know that God doth not hear sinners: but if a man be a server of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. [32] From the beginning of the world it hath not been heard, that any man hath opened the eyes of one born blind. [33] Unless this man were of God, he could not do any thing. [34] They answered, and said to him: Thou wast wholly born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. [35] Jesus heard that they had cast him out: and when he had found him, he said to him: Dost thou believe in the Son of God?

[36] He answered, and said: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? [37] And Jesus said to him: Thou hast both seen him; and it is he that talketh with thee. [38] And he said: I believe, Lord. And falling down, he adored him. [39] And Jesus said: For judgment I am come into this world; that they who see not, may see; and they who see, may become blind. [40] And some of the Pharisees, who were with him, heard: and they said unto him: Are we also blind?

[41] Jesus said to them: If you were blind, you should not have sin: but now you say: We see. Your sin remaineth.
Lazarus Raised from the Dead

John 11:11–44


[31] Judaei ergo, qui erant cum ea in domo, et consolabantur eam, cum vidissent Mariam quia cito surrexit, et exitit, securi sunt eam dicentes: Quia vadit ad monumentum, ut


Including Those with Impairments at One’s Table

Luke 14:12–14

[12] Dicebat autem et ei, qui invitaverat: Cum facis prandium, aut coenam, noli vocare amicos tuos, neque fratres tuos, neque cognatos, neque vicinos divites: ne forte te et ipsi saw Mary that she rose up speedily and went out, followed her, saying: She goeth to the grave to weep there. [32] When Mary therefore was come where Jesus was, seeing him, she fell down at his feet, and saith to him: Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. [33] Jesus, therefore, when he saw her weeping, and the Jews that were come with her, weeping, groaned in the spirit, and troubled himself, [34] And said: Where have you laid him? They say to him: Lord, come and see. [35] And Jesus wept.

[36] The Jews therefore said: Behold how he loved him. [37] But some of them said: Could not he that opened the eyes of the man born blind, have caused that this man should not die? [38] Jesus therefore again groaning in himself, cometh to the sepulchre. Now it was a cave; and a stone was laid over it. [39] Jesus saith: Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith to him: Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he is now of four days. [40] Jesus saith to her: Did not I say to thee, that if thou believe, thou shalt see the glory of God?

[41] They took therefore the stone away. And Jesus lifting up his eyes said: Father, I give thee thanks that thou hast heard me. [42] And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people who stand about have I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. [43] When he had said these things, he cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth. [44] And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding bands; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: Loose him, and let him go.

rich; lest perhaps they also invite thee again, and a recompense be made to thee. [13] But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind; [14] And thou shalt be blessed, because they have not wherewith to make thee recompense; for recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just.
Endnotes

1 The text is taken from the online Douay-Rheims and Latin Vulgate Bible online at DRBO.org. The website relies upon the following versions of the texts. The Holy Bible Douay-Rheims Version with revisions and footnotes (in the text in italics) by Bishop Richard Challoner, 1749–52, taken from a hardcopy of the 1899 Edition by the John Murphy Company. IMPRIMATUR: James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, September 1, 1899. The Latin Vulgate (Biblia Sacra Vulgata) Clementine Version. Translation from Greek and other languages into Latin by Saint Jerome, about 382 A.D. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Will Eggers.


5 Ibid., p. 13.

6 For another parallel episode, see Matthew 20: 29–34.
Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives
(ca. 550–13th c.)

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Introduction

Like the Bible, many apocryphal narratives from early Christian and medieval literature included stories about miracles concerning disabilities. Just as the canonical gospels feature Jesus performing various miracles to heal disabilities, extrabiblical stories about Jesus also highlight such feats even in Jesus’ infancy. Non-canonical apocrypha, in fact, were widely popular in the medieval world, and influenced an array of literature like sermons, world histories, and poems, as well as visual arts like manuscript illuminations, wall paintings, sculptures, and church architecture. Two of the most widespread apocrypha in the Middle Ages were the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, both of which feature episodes in which the child Jesus was involved with healing disabilities.

Composed in Latin, likely in the early seventh century, Pseudo-Matthew consists of an expanded adaptation of an earlier Greek apocryphon known as the Protevangelium of James. Both recount the story of Mary’s parents, Anna and Joachim, her birth, childhood, and betrothal to Joseph, the birth of Jesus, and the holy family’s flight to Egypt. The following episode about the birth of Jesus and the withering of the doubting midwife’s hand is taken from chapter 13 of Pseudo-Matthew.

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas was originally composed in the second century, probably in Greek or possibly in Syriac. This apocryphal gospel recounts various episodes from Jesus’ childhood, many presaging his later actions and teachings as an adult (as in the canonical gospels). During the Middle Ages, a Latin translation was undertaken and began to circulate paired with Pseudo-Matthew in manuscripts from the twelfth century onward (often called the pars altera [“second part”] because of this designation by the editor Constantine von Tischendorf). The following episode about Jesus’ interaction with his rabbis (Jewish teachers) is taken from chapters 6–8 of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (chapter 31 in Tischendorf’s edition). The other passages are taken from episodes inspired by the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, from an expanded narrative including Pseudo-Matthew, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, and other additions about Jesus’ childhood in the thirteenth-century manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 11867.

All of the episodes presented here include sensational miracles, especially the healings of physical disabilities. In her discussion of canonical Gospel miracles, Sharon V. Betcher highlights “the stock feature of disablement, which always immediately signals cure as resolution,” for example, “in terms of miraculous remediation.” This view is similarly applicable to parallel representations in apocryphal gospels like Pseudo-Matthew and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, as with those presented here. Most of these accounts introduce disabilities for the very purpose of demonstrating miraculous powers—in other words, disabilities exist to be healed. One example appears in the episode in which Jesus teaches the rabbis: it concludes with Jesus giving a blessing, using the type of language that is
directly juxtaposed to that of a curse, calling for the reversal of infertility, blindness, lameness, poorness, death, and other states presented as adversities; in response, “immediately all were restored who had fallen under evil illness” (“continuo sunt omnes restituti qui sub malis deciderant infirmitatibus”). Jesus’ miracle, then, is to do away with those infirmities portrayed as “evil illness” (“malis... infirmitatibus”) —here, disabilities linked to the evil state of the world (a consequence of the biblical fall of humans into sin) that must be overcome through miracles.

The majority of these apocryphal miracles also highlight a symbolic relationship between physical disability and spiritual lack. For example, there is a clear parallel between Salome’s doubt and the subsequent withering of her hand and the story of the apostle Thomas’ doubt in John 20:24–29. The intertextuality between these stories highlights the use of disability as metaphor for spiritual impairment. Representations of physical health as allegories for spiritual health demonstrate the multilayered uses of disabilities found in both the Bible and throughout medieval Christian literature. As seen in the previous example of Jesus’ general healing of infirmities seen as “evil,” bodily health, spiritual righteousness, and miraculous healings are closely aligned.

A number of episodes in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas also pit Jesus against the Jews, creating a cast of anti-Judaism. Much of this is rooted in the theological idea of Christian supersessionism, or the belief that Christianity replaced Judaism. Such anti-Judaism is especially pronounced in the symbolism of Jesus blinding the Jews who speak against him after he curses a boy. Similarly, the idea of physical blindness is meant to symbolize spiritual immaturity, or inability to understand, in the episode with Jesus and his rabbis. Master Levi expresses his amazement at not understanding Jesus, the language of blindness is used throughout the passage, and the spiritual symbolism is further emphasized by the comment about Jesus’ healing of those afflicted with illness at the end of the episode. All of this intersects with what Edward Wheatley has discussed in relation to the trope of blindness used in medieval culture (with roots in the New Testament), especially in literature about the Jews. These episodes in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas participate in the more general trend of using blindness as a motif to express medieval Christian anxieties about Jews.

Bibliography


Factum est autem post aliquantum tempus ut fieret professio ex edicto Caesaris Augusti, ut profiteretur unusquisque in patria sua. Haec professio facta est a praeside Syriæ Cyrino. Necesse autem fuerat ut Ioseph cum Maria profisceretur in Bethlehem, quia exinde erat, et Maria de tribu Iuda et de domo ac patria David. Cum ergo Ioseph et Maria irent per viam quae ducit Bethlehem, dixit Maria at Ioseph: “Duos populos video ante me, unum flentem et alium gaudentem.”

Cui respondit Ioseph: “Sede et tene te in iumento tuo et noli superflua verba loqui.”

Tunc apparuit puer speciosus ante eos, indutus veste splendida, et dixit ad Ioseph: “Quare dixisti verba superflua esse de duobus populis de quibus locuta est Maria? Populum enim Iudaeorum flentem vidit, quia recessit a deo suo, et populum gentium gaudentem, quia accessit et prope factus est ad dominum, secundum quod promisit patribus nostris Abraham, Isaac et Iacob; tempus enim adventit ut in semine Abrahae benedictio omnibus gentibus tribuatur.”

Et cum haec dixisset, iussit angelus stare in iumentum, quia tempus adventerat pariendi; et praecepit descendere de animali Mariam et ingredi in speluncam subterraneam, in qua lux non fuit unquam sed semper tenebrae, quia lumen diei penitus non habebat. Ad ingressum vero Mariae coepit tota spelunca splendore habere, et quasi sol ibi esset ita tota fulgorem lucis ostendere; et quasi esset ibi hora diei sexta, ita spelunca lux divina illustravit; nec in die nec in nox lux ibi divina defuit quamdiu ibi Maria fuit. Et ibi pereit masculum, quem circumvenerunt angelis nascenentem et natum adoraverunt dicentes: “Gloria in excelsis deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.”

Iam enim dudum Ioseph perrexerat ad quaerendas obstetrices. Quia cum reversus esset ad speluncam, Maria iam infanatem generat. Et dixit Ioseph ad Mariam: Ego tibi Zelomi et Salomen obstetrices adduxi, quae foris ante speluncam stant et prae splendore. 

Jesus’ Birth and the Doubting Midwife

Now, it came to pass that after some time a proclamation was made by an edict of Caesar Augustus that everyone should hasten to their native land. This proclamation was first made by Cyrius, the governor of Syria, and made it necessary that Joseph go to Bethlehem with Mary, because Joseph and Mary were from the tribe of Judah and from the house and family of David.

When, therefore, Joseph and Mary were going along the road that leads to Bethlehem, Mary said to Joseph, “I see two peoples before me, one weeping and the other rejoicing.”

To which Joseph responded, saying, “Sit and hold onto your mule and do not speak unnecessary words to me.”

Then a beautiful boy appeared before them dressed in gleaming clothing and said to Joseph, “Why did you say that the words you heard about the two peoples were unnecessary? For she saw the Jewish people weeping because they have withdrawn from God, and the gentile people rejoicing because they have drawn near to the Lord, which he promised to your fathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. For the time has come that by the seed of Abraham a blessing shall be given to all nations.”

And when he had said these things, he ordered the mule to stand still, and instructed Mary to get down from the animal and go into a cave in which there was always darkness because, in its innermost parts, it did not have the light of day. But when Mary went in, the whole cave began to fill with great brightness; and as if the sun were in it, so did the whole cave begin to exhibit the gleaming of light; and as if it were the sixth hour of the day, so did the divine light illuminate that same cave. This light did not withdraw, neither day nor night, until Mary gave birth to a male, whom angels surrounded at birth; and when he had been born on his feet, immediately they worshipped him, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.”
nimio huc introire non audent. Audiens autem haec Maria subrisit. Cui Ioseph dixit: Noli subriedere, sed cauta esto, ne forte indigeas medicina. Tunc iussit unam ex eis intrare ad se. Cumque ingressa esset Zelomi, ad Mariam dixit: Dimitte me ut tangam te.


Audiens hanc vocem alia obstetrix nomine Salome dixit: Quod ego audio non credam nisi forte ipsa probavero. Et ingressa Salome ad Mariam dixit: Permitte me ut palpem te et probem utrum verum dixerit Zelomi.

Cumque permisisset Maria ut eam palparet, misit manum suam Salome. Et cum misisset et tangeret, statim aruit manus eius, et prae dolore coepit flere vehementissime et angustari et clamando dicere: Domine, tu nosi quia semper te timui, et omnes pauperes sine retributione acceptionis curavi, de vidua et orphano nihil accepi, et inopem vacuum a me ire numquam dimisi. Et ecce misera facta sum propter incredulitatem meam, quia ausa fui temptare virginem tuam.


And Joseph, finding Mary with the child to whom she had given birth, said to her, “I have brought Zahel, a midwife, to you; behold, she is standing right outside of the cave, but is unable to enter because of the great brightness.” Hearing this, Mary smiled. Then Joseph said to her, “Do not smile, but take care that she inspect you, in case you need her medicine.” And Mary commanded her to enter.

When Mary allowed herself to be scrutinized, the midwife called out in a loud voice and said, “Great Lord, have mercy! Never before has it been either heard or suspected that the breasts might be full of milk, and yet this newborn makes manifest that his mother is a virgin. No stain of blood is on the child, and no pain was evident in the birth. A virgin has given birth and after giving birth she has continued to be a virgin.”

Hearing this cry, another midwife named Salome said, “Certainly I will not believe this unless indeed I verify it.” And Salome went in to Mary and said to her, “Let me examine you so that I should know if the words that Zahel declared to me are true.”

Now when Mary allowed her examination, as soon as Salome drew away her right hand from the inspection, the hand withered and she began to be most violently stricken by the pain and to cry out, weeping and saying, “Lord, you know that I have always feared you and have taken care of all the poor without the worry of payment. I have taken nothing from the widow and the orphan and I have never sent the destitute away from me empty-handed. And behold, I am made wretched because of my unbelief, because I have dared to test your virgin, who gave birth to the Light and after this birth remained a virgin.”

And while she was saying these things, a brilliant young man appeared beside her saying, “Go to the child and worship him, and touch him with your hand, and he will heal you, because this is the Savior of all who hope in him.” And quickly Salome went to him and worshipped the child and touched
Jesus Teaches the Rabbis

Iterum magister Zachyas legis doctor dixit ad Ioseph et Mariam: Date mihi puerrum, et ego tradam illum magistro Levi, qui doceat eum litteras et erudiat.

Tunc Ioseph et Maria blandientes Iesum duxerunt in scholas, ut doceretur litteras a sene Levi. Qui cum introisset, tacebat. Et magister Levi unam litteram dicebat ei: Responde.

Jesus autem tacet et nihil respondebat. Unde praeceptor Levi iratus apprehendens virgam storatinam percussit eum in capite.

Jesus autem dixit ad didascalum Levi: Ut quid me percutis? In veritate scias quia ipse qui percutitur magis docet percutientem se quam ab eo doceatur. Ego enim te possum docere qua a te ipso dicuntur. Sed hi omnes caeci sunt qui dicunt et audiunt, quasi aes sonans aut cimbalum tinniens, in quibus non est sensus eorum quae intelliguntur per somnum illorum.


Jesus Teaches the Rabbis

Again, Master Zacchaeus, a doctor of the Law, spoke to Joseph and Mary, “Give the boy to me, and I will hand him over to Master Levi, who will teach him letters and instruct him.”

Then Joseph and Mary, soothing Jesus, led him to school, so that he might be taught letters by old Levi. When he had entered, he was silent. And Master Levi said one letter to Jesus, and beginning with the first letter aleph he said to him, “Repeat.”

But Jesus was silent and responded with nothing. At that the instructor Levi was angry, and seizing a storax-tree branch, struck him on the head.

Now, Jesus said to the teacher Levi, “Why do you strike me? In truth you should know that the one who is struck teaches the one striking him more than he learns from him. For I am able to teach you what you are saying. But all these who speak and hear are blind, like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal, in which there is no sense of the things that are understood in their sound.”

And furthermore, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Every letter from aleph° up to tau,” is discerned by arrangement. Therefore, say first what tau is, and I will say to you what aleph is.” And again Jesus said to them, “Whoever does not know Aleph, how are they able to say Tau? Hypocrites! Say first what is Aleph, and then I will believe you when you say Beth.” And Jesus began to ask the names of each letter and said, “Let the master of the Law say what the first letter is, or why it has the hems of the cloths in which the child was swaddled, and her hand was immediately healed. Then she went out and began to cry out and to speak about the great deeds of power that she had seen, and what she had endured, and how she had been cured, so that many believed because of her proclamation.
Cum autem Levi hoc audisset, obstupe-factus est ad tantam dispositionem nominum litterarum.


Tunc Iesus laeto vultu subridens de eo dixit cum imperio cunctis filiis Israel astantibus et auditentibus: Fructificent infructosi et videant caeci et claudi ambulent recte et pauperes fruantur bonis et reviviscant mortui, ut redintegrato statu unusquisque revertatur et permaneat in eo ipso qui radix est vitae et dulcedinis perpetuae.

Et cum hoc dixisset infans Iesus, continuo sunt omnes restituti qui sub malis decidere et infirmitatibus. Et amplus non audebant dicere ei alicui aut audire ab eo.
Jesus Climbs a Sunbeam

Una autem die temporeimale cum sol in sua uirute clarus radiaret extendit se radius solaris attingens a fenestra in parietem in domo Ioseph, ubi cum ludent cum Iesu contribuiles pueri uicinorum per domum discurrentes ascendit Iesus radium solis et positis super eum uestimentis suis sedebat quasi su-per trabem f rimissimum.

Quod cum uidissent colludentes coetanei pueri opinabant se similiter posse facere. Et ascenderunt ut sederent cum Iesu ludentes exemple illius coi teremur.

Iesus autem instantibus Maria et Ioseph lesiones omnium attritorum levi flatu aspirando super locum dolentem sanabat omnes et aer. Spiritus ubi uult spirat et quos uult sanat et sani facti sunt. Haec omnia nunciavert patribus nostris.

Et factum est palam hoc uerbum in Ierusalem et in remoris finibus Iudee. Et multiplicata est fama Iesu per circuitum prouiciarum.

Et uenerunt ut benedicerent eum et ab eo benedicerentur et dixerunt ad eum: Beatus uenter qui te portauit et ubera quae suitisti.

Ioseph et Maria Deo in omnibus gratias que audierant et uiderant persoluerunt.

When the child Jesus had said this, immediately all were restored who had fallen under evil illness. And they did not dare to say any more to him or to hear any more from him.

Jesus Curses a Boy and Blinds the Jews

Alio tempore ambulante Iesu per villam cucurrit unus de infantibus et percussit Iesum in ulnas.

Iesus autem dixit ad eum: Sic sic perfacias iter tuum. Et statim cecidit in terram et mortuus est.

Illis autem uidentibus mirabilia clamauerunt dicentes: Unde est puer iste?

When the boys of the same age playing with him saw, they thought that they were able to do the same. They ascended so that they might sit with Jesus, playing by his example, but they were bruised.

So, Jesus, at the urging of Mary and Joseph, blew a light breath over all the hurt spots and healed all the wounds. And he said, “The Spirit breathes where he wills, and he heals and makes whole whom it wills. They have told all these things to our fathers.”

It came to pass that these words were well known in Jerusalem and in the remote ends of Judea, and Jesus’ fame was multiplied throughout the circuit of provinces. And they came to bless him and to be blessed by him, and they said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that have nursed you.”

Joseph and Mary rendered thanks to God for all that they had heard and seen.
Et dixerunt ad Ioseph: Non opportet esse nobiscum nec habere talem puemum. Ille autem abit et tulit eum.

Et dixerunt ei: Recede de isto loco et si te oportet esse nobiscum doce eum orare et non blasphemare filii autemnostri insensati.

Uocauit Ioseph Iesum et incepit eum docere Ut quid blasphemas et alicui male dicis, habitatores isti hodium habent super nos de loco isto.

Iesus autem dixit: Ego autem tacebo pater. Ipsi autem uideant insipientiam suam.

Et ii statim qui loquebantur aduersus Iesum facti sunt. Et deambulatnes dicebant: Omnes sermones qui procedunt de ore eius exsecutum habent et effectum.

Et cum uident quod faceret Iesus cum furore apprehandit eum per auriculam. Iesus autem turbatus dixit ad Ioseph: Sufficit tibi uidere me non me tangere, tu autem nescis quis ego sum, quia si scires non me contestares et quomium ego sum, ante te factus sum.

Jesus Heals a Boy's Foot

Post hoc ante paucos dies euolutos puer quidam in eodem loco scindebant ligna per cussitque pedem plagam horribilem faciendo, et cum uenisset turba multa ut uideret eum lamentem accurit Iesus cum ipsis et deprecati sunt eum ut leniret dolorem suum. Praesertim cum pater et mater uel ab injury uel doloris eorum eum ait: Credite tantum et fiet quod petistis.

Cumque inalaret magister accessit ad pedem suum Iesus et blandit ad modum medicis fomentantis ait: Surge sanus; in memoria potentie De sanaris.

Ipse autem sanus omnino saltum fecit et gloriavat item in confessione.

Cum autem uindisset turba quae facta fuerant adorauerunt Iesus et dixerunt: Vere credimus quia Deus est tu.

Jesus Heals a Boy's Foot

After this (before a few days went by), in the same place, a certain child was cutting wood and struck his foot, making a terrible wound. When a great crowd came and saw him wailing, Jesus ran to him along with them, and they begged him to soothe his pain.

Especially because the father and mother of the wounded child could not handle his pain, Jesus had mercy on them and said, “Only believe and what you seek will be done.”

After the master (Jesus) went to him, he breathed on his foot and caressed it, like a soothing physician, and said, “Arise whole; remember that you are healed by the power of God.”

Completely healed, he began leaping and also gave glory in confession.

When the crowd saw what had happened, they worshipped Jesus and said, “Truly we believe that you are God.”
Endnotes

1 Endnotes and translations for all of the passages here have been provided by Brandon W. Hawk. Bibliographic information for each passage is included in the following footnotes.
7 This episode is found in chapter 13 of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* in Tischendorf and Hawk. The translation is based on the newer critical edition, *Libri de nativitate Mariae: Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium, textus et commentaries*, eds. Jan Gisel, Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 9 (Brepols, 1997). The Latin text provided for comparison is from Tischendorf’s edition, although the Latin differs from the English translation presented here in details.
8 This episode is found as chapter 31 (part of the so-called pars altera, a Latin translation of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*) of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* in Tischendorf and Hawk. The Latin text is from Tischendorf’s edition.
9 This episode is found as chapter 58 in Hawk. For this and the two following episodes, the translation is based on Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 11867, which is transcribed here with some modernizations of capitalization and punctuation.
10 This episode is found in Hawk, *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, chap. 61.
Introduction

In many ways, medieval sermons are significant witnesses to attitudes toward disabilities. After all, the foundations of many sermons are in the Bible, which (as seen elsewhere in this collection) includes various narratives about people with disabilities. This is particularly true of the Gospels, in which Jesus heals a number of people from blindness, deafness, paralysis, and leprosy. Also relevant are apocryphal acts, in which Jesus’ apostles perform similar miracles involving the same types of impairments. Since sermons so often draw directly on biblical and apocryphal narratives, there is natural overlap. Likewise, disabilities appear in the narratives about martyrs and saints popular for sermons composed for feast days and special occasions in the church calendar. In these lives, infirmities may be found in the people to whom the saints give attention (as imitators of Jesus), or even as part of the story of a saint’s life and passion. For preachers and their audiences, disability was a common concern.

Beyond narrative content, however, sermon authors also provide rich commentaries on these stories. Indeed, sermons on biblical stories prove useful for understanding medieval views of disabilities. What is significant about sermons is that they do not relate the disabilities of medieval people, but the biblical past allows preachers to discuss disabilities in a more abstract manner. This often takes the form of commentary about spiritual health, in which biblical stories stand in for allegories about the spiritual state of the soul. For example, disabilities in the Bible are often linked to ideas about divine punishment for sinfulness or lack of faith, such as in the healing of Bartimeus in Mark 10, but the Bible can also challenge this view, such as in the healing of another blind man in John 9. In some instances, medieval sermons can echo these connections, but they can also portray more complicated representations of disabilities, in keeping with complex and varied approaches to impairment within the period, as highlighted by Irina Metzler and others. Such notions, therefore, combine images of disabilities, questions about physical wholeness, and anxieties about religious health. As Fay Skevington suggests, “a lack of distinction between illness and disability is appropriate when discussing Anglo-Saxon culture”; these distinctions are further broken down in sermons that address spiritual health through metaphors of physical disability and illness. This multilayered characteristic can provide both obstacles for using sermons as sources as well as nuanced and complex medieval perspectives on disabilities for modern readers to puzzle out.

Of the large number of surviving Old English preaching texts, a few offer especially poignant commentaries on biblical narratives about disabilities. One example is the following sermon by Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham (ca. 955–ca. 1010), from his series of Catholic Homilies (1.10), about the story of Jesus healing a blind man in Luke 18:31–43. Ælfric begins his sermon with a translation of the gospel passage into English, and then proceeds with an interpretation that hinges on an extended allegorical reading of blindness signifying humanity’s original sin.
and healing signifying redemption through Christ. In this beginning, he also draws a connection between the physical sufferings of the blind man from his impairment and of Christ at the Crucifixion. More generally, Ælfric’s comments about Christ’s suffering during the Passion also create a stark parallel with human suffering through illnesses and disabilities. These notions raise issues about theodicy as well as Christology, emphasizing theological underpinnings to the problem of pain as well as the belief in Christ as both fully human and fully divine. For Ælfric, both of these theological points are linked to his use of the biblical story to discuss physical impairment as spiritual allegory.

These threads in Ælfric’s sermon are characteristic of the types of patristic interpretations offered by Pope Gregory the Great, who composed the Latin homily from which Ælfric’s text is translated. As Aaron J. Kleist comments, “As with Augustine, Gregory, and Bede, Ælfric associates sight with both understanding and belief.” The disability of blindness, then, signifies something of a spiritual lack, as the man, like all of humanity, was “ablend mid geleafleaste and gedwylde” (“blind with lack of belief and error”). In contrast, as Ælfric states at the start, Christ himself had foresight of his own suffering, amounting to the perfect belief and truth of which humans fall short. Through God’s intervention, however—through Jesus’ miracle—the blind man is able to regain his spiritual lack and to achieve revelatory enlightenment, just as Christians are able to achieve salvation through conversion. Through his allegorical reading, Ælfric presents a more general lesson about collective human nature, belief, and Christian redemption.

Bibliography

Then Jesus took unto him his twelve disciples: and the rest.

Here it is read in this gospel, which now we have heard from the deacon's mouth, that: The Savior took his twelve disciples aside, and said to them, "Behold, we shall go to the city of Jerusalem, and then all the things that were written about me by the prophets will be fulfilled. I shall be betrayed by the people, and they will commit mockery against me, and beat me, and afterward kill me, and I will arise from death on the third day." His disciples did not know then the meaning of these words. Then it happened that they came near to a city that is called Jericho, and there sat some blind man by the road; and when he heard the passing of the people with the Savior, then he asked who passed there. They said to him, that it was the Savior passing. Then he began to cry, and said, "Savior, Son of David, have mercy on me." The men, who went before the Savior, rebuked the blind man, so that he would be silent. Then he cried all the more, "Savior, Son of David, have mercy on me." Then the Savior stood, and he commanded them to lead the blind man to him. When he neared, then the Savior asked him, "What do you wish that I do to you?" He said, "Lord, that I may see." And the Savior said to him, "Look now: your belief has healed you." And right away he saw, and he followed the Savior, and he glorified him. Then all the people who saw that wonder praised God with great excitement.

The beginning of this gospel reading concerned the passion of our Savior, although he did not suffer at this time; but from afar and long before he would make known his passion to his disciples, so that they might not be too afraid at his passion, when the time came that he would suffer. Their minds were afraid at Christ's telling them, but he heartened them again with the words that he said, "I will arise from death on the third day."
Then he would strengthen and encourage their belief with wonders. And then they came to the place where the blind man sat by the path, and Christ healed him before the sight of all the people, so that he might bring belief to them with the wonder. However, in the wonders that Christ worked, they showed one thing through power, and they signified another thing through mystery. He worked the wonders truly through divine power, and with those wonders he encouraged the belief of the people; however, there was another thing hidden in those wonders, according to spiritual understanding. This one blind man signified all humankind, who were blind through Adam's sin, and expelled from the joy of Paradise, and brought to this life, which is compared to a prison. Now we are locked out from the heavenly light, and in this life we may not enjoy the eternal light; nor may we know it except as much as we read about it in books through Christ's teaching. This world, although it sometimes might seem to be joyful, nonetheless is no more like the eternal world than some prison is to the light of day. All humankind was, as we said before, blind with lack of belief and error; but through Christ's advent we were brought out of our errors, and enlightened through belief. Now we have that light in our minds, which is belief in Christ; and we have the hope of the joy of eternal life, although we yet dwell in our bodily prisons.

The blind man sat at the city that is called Jericho. Jericho is interpreted and called "moon." The moon does both wax and wane: for half the month it is waxing, and for half it is waning. Now the moon signifies our mortal life, and the weariness of our mortality. On the one end men are born, on the other end they depart. When Christ came to the city of Jericho, which signifies the moon, then the blind man received sight. That is, when Christ came to our mortality, and received our humanity, then humankind was enlightened. He sat by the path, and Christ said in his gospel, "I am the way, and truth, and life."4
nys, and lif.” Se man þe nan ðing ne cann þæs ecan leohtes, he is blind; ac gif he gelyfð on þone Hælend, þonne sitt he wið þone weig. Gif he nele biddan þæs ecan leohtas, he sitt ðonne blind be ðam wege unbidende. Se de rihtlice gelyfð on Crist, and geornlice bitt his sawle onlihtinge, he sitt be ðam wege biddende. Swa hwa swa oncnæwð þa blindynysse his modes, clypige he mid inweardre heortan, swa swa se blinda cleopode, “Hælend, Dauides Bearn, gemiltsa min.”

Seo menigu þe eode beforan ðam Hælende ciddon ðam blindan, and heton þæt he stille ware. Seo menigu getacnað ure unlustas and leahtras þe us hremað, and ure heortan ofsit-tað, þæt we ne magon us swa geornlice gebiddan, swa we behofedon. Hit gelimpð gelom-lice, þonne se man wile yfeles geswican, and his synna gebetan, and mid eallum mode to Gode gecyrran, þonne cumað þa ealdan leahtras þe he ær geworhte, and hi gedrefað his mod, and willað gestillan his stemne, þæt he to Gode ne clypige. Ac hwæt dyde se blinda, þa þæt folc hine wolde gestyllan? He hrymde ðæs ðe swiðor, oð þæt se Hælend his stemne gehyrde, and hine gehælde. Swa we sceolon eac don, gif us deofol drecce mid menigfealdum geðohtum and costnungum: we sceolon hryman swiðor and swiðor to ðam Hælende, þæt he todræfe ða yfelan costnunga fram ure heortan, and þæt he onlihte ure mod mid his gife. Gif we ðonne þurhwuniað on urum gebedum, þonne mage we gedon mid urum hreme þæt se Hælend stent, se de ær eode, and wile gehyran ure clypunge, and ure heortan onlihtan mid godum and mid cle-num geðohtum. Ne magon ða yfelan geðohtas us derian, gif he us ne liciæ; ac swa us swiðor deofol bregð mid yfelum geðohtum, swa we beteran beðð, and Gode leofran, gif we done deofol forseoð and ealle his costnunga, ðurh Godes fulturn.

Hwæt is ðæs Hælendes stede, oððe hwæt is his fær? He ferde ðurh his menniscnysse, and he stod þurh ða godecundnysse. He ferde ðurh ða menniscnysse, swa þæt he was acenned, and ferde fram stowe to stowe, and dead þrowade, a nd of deade aras, and astah eternal light is blind; but if he believes in the Savior, then he sits by the path. If he will not pray for the eternal light, then he sits by the path not praying. He who rightly believes in Christ, and eagerly prays for the enlightening of his soul, he sits by the path praying. So whoever acknowledges the blindness of his mind, he cries out with his inner heart, just as the blind man cried, “Savior, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

The many who went before the Savior rebuked the blind man, and commanded that he would be silent. The many signify our evil desires and vices that hinder us, and sit in our hearts, so that we may not pray as eagerly as we need. It happens often, when a man desires to cease evil, and to atone for his sins, and turns to God with his voice, then the old vices that he did before will come, and they trouble his mind, and will silence his voice, so that he might not cry to God. But what did the blind man do, when the people wanted to silence him? He cried all the more, until the Savior heard his voice, and healed him. So we shall do likewise, if the devil troubles us with manifold thoughts and temptations; we should cry more and more to the Savior, so that he drives the evil temptations from our hearts, and so that he enlightens our minds with his grace. Then if we continue in our prayers, then with our cries we might cause the Savior to stand, who before passed by, and he will hear our crying, and enlighten our hearts with good and pure thoughts. Evil thoughts might not harm us, if they are not pleasing to us; but the more the devil terrifies us with evil thoughts, so we will be better, and dearer to God, if we despise the devil and all his temptations, through God’s help.

What is the Savior’s standing, or what is his passing? He passed through his humanity, and he stood through his divinity. He passed through humanity, so that he was born, and went from place to place, and suffered death, and arose from death, and ascended to heaven. This is his passing. He stood through divinity; because through his power he is present everywhere, and he needs not go from
to heofonum. Þis is his fær. He stent ðurh ða
godcundnysse; forðon ðe he is ðurh his mi-
hite æghwær andwearð, and ne ðearf na faran
fram stowe to stowe; forðon ðe he is on æl-
cere stowe þurh his godcundnysse. Þa ða he
ferde, ða gehyrde he þæs blindan cylpunge;
and ða ða he stood, ða ðorgea he him gesihðe;
forðan þurh þæs menniscnysse he besargæd
ures modes blindnysse, and ðurh ða godcund-
nysse he forgifð us leoh, and ure blindnysse
onliht. He cwæð to ðam blindan men, “Hwæt
wilt ðu þæt ic ðe do?” Wenst ðu þæt he nyste
hwæt se blinda wolde, ac he wolde þæt se blinda bæde;
forðon ðe he tiht ælacne swiðe gemællic to
gebëðum: ac hwæðere he cwæð on ðære stowe,
“Eower heofenlicæ Fæder wat hwæs ge beho-
fiað, ærðan ðe ge on lichaman ge on sawle:
ne bidde we na lease welan, ne gewitenlice
wurðmuntas; ac uton biddan leoh æt urum
Drihtne: na þæt leoh ðe bið geendod, ðæ bið
mid þære nihte todraefed, þæt ðe is gemæne
us and nytenum; ac uton biddan þæs leohæs
þæ we mægon mid englum anum geseon, þæt
ðæ naefre ne bið geendod. To ðam leohæs
sælicæ uren geleafa us sceal gebringan, swa
swa Crist cwæð to ðam blindan mann, “Loca
nu, þin geleafa þæ gehælde.”

Nu smeða sum ungeælælf man, Hu mæg
ic gewilhaæn ðæs gastlicæ leohæs, þæt þæt ic
geseon ne mæg? Nu cwæð ic to ðam mann,
þæt ða ðing þæ he understynt and undergytan
mæg, ne undergyt he na ða ðing þurh his li-
chaman, ac þurh þæs sawle; þæh-hwæðere ne
gesihð nan man his sawle on ðisum life. Heo
is unuswenlic, ac ðæh-hwæðere heo wissað
place to place; because he is in every place
through his divinity. When he passed, then
he heard the crying of the blind man; and
when he stood, then he gave him sight; be-
cause through his humanity he laments the
blindness of our minds, and through divinity
he gives us light, and enlightens our blind-
ness. He said to the blind man, “What do you
wish that I do to you?” Do you think that he
did not know what the blind man wanted,
he who might heal him? But he desired that
the blind man might pray; because he charges
everyone very urgently to prayers; nonethe-
less he says in another place, “Your heavenly
Father knows what you need, before you pray
to him for anything,” although the good God
desires that we eagerly pray; because through
prayers our heart is inspired and turned to
God.

Then the blind man said, “Oh, sir, do so
that I may see.” The blind man did not ask for
gold, nor silver, nor any worldly thing, but
asked for his sight. For he did not consider
praying for anything except sight; because al-
though the blind man might have something,
he may not see what he has without light.
Therefore let us imitate this man, who was
healed by Christ, both in body and in soul; let
us pray not for false riches, nor for temporary
glories; but let us pray to our Lord for light:
not that light that will be ended, which will
be driven away with the night, that which is
common to us and beasts; but let us pray for
that light that we alone with angels may see,
that which will never be ended. Truly our be-
lief shall bring us to that light, just as Christ
said to the blind man, “Look now, your belief
has healed you.”

Now some unbelieving man will con-
sider, “How may I desire the spiritual light,
which I may not see?” Now I say to that man,
about the things that he understands and
may know, he understands those things not
through his body, but through his soul; none-
theless no man will see his soul in this life.
It is invisible, but nonetheless it guides the
visible body. The body, which is visible, has
life from the soul, which is invisible. As the
 invisible will go out, then the visible will fall down; because, before, it did not stand by itself. The life of the body is the soul, and the life of the soul is God. As the soul will go out, the mouth may not cry, although it will gape; nor will the eye see, although it will be open; nor will any limb do anything, if the body is soulless. So also the soul, if God forsakes it for its sins, it will do nothing good. No man may do anything good, except with the help of God. Nor will the sinful soul be turned wholly to nothing, although it will be deadened to good; but it will be dead to every virtue and happiness, and will be held in eternal death, where it will always be in eternal torments, and nonetheless it will never perish.

How may you now doubt the eternal light, although it is invisible, when you have life from the invisible soul, and you do not doubt that you have a soul, although you may not see it? The blind man, when he could see, then he followed the Savior. The man sees and follows God, who can understand God, and does good works. The man sees and will not follow God, who understands God, and does no good works. But let us understand God and do good works: let us see where Christ goes, and follow him; that is, that we should consider what he teaches, and what is pleasing to him, and fulfill that with works, just as he himself said, “He who will serve me, he will follow me”; that is, he imitates me, and shuns every evil, and loves every good, just as I do. Christ received for himself in this life neither land nor riches, just as he himself said, “Beasts have holes, and birds have nests, where they rest, and I have nowhere that I might lay down my head.” He had as much as he gave, and he lived by the possessions of other men, he who owns all things.

We read in Christ’s book what the people thought about him, that they would seize him, and exalted him as a king, so that he might be their worldly ruler, just as he was divinely. When Christ knew the will of the people, then he fled alone to a mountain, and his companions went to the sea, and the Savior was up on land. Then in the night the
Savior went up on the water with dry feet, until he came to his disciples, where they were on a ship. He fled from worldly glory, when he was chosen as king; but he did not flee from disgrace and insult, when the Jews desired to hang him on a cross. He would not encircle his head with a golden crown, but with thorns, just as it was done at his passion. He would not rule in this life for a while, who rules eternally in heaven. This world is not our homeland, but it is our place of exile; therefore we should not set our hope in this deceitful life, but we should hasten with good rewards to our homeland, for which we were created, that is, to the heavenly kingdom.

Truly it is written, “Whoever will be a friend of this world, he will be considered an enemy of God.” Christ said in one place, that “The path is very narrow and steep, which leads to the heavenly kingdom; and it is very wide and smooth, which leads to hell-torments.” The path, which leads to the heavenly kingdom, is therefore narrow and steep, so that we should earn our homeland with difficulty. If we desire to have it, we should love mercy, and purity, and truthfulness, and righteousness, and humility, and have true love for God and for men, and give alms by our means, and have moderation in our food, and do every other holy thing. We may not do these things without difficulties; but if we do them, then with those labors we may, through God’s help, ascend the steep path that leads us to eternal life. The path that leads to destruction therefore is broad and smooth, because evil desires bring man to destruction. It is very soft for him, and no labor that he does fills his lustfulness, and drunkenness, and he performs covetousness and pride, and he robs the weak, and he does whatever he desires: but those evil practices and similar others lead him without labor to eternal torments, unless before his end he stops evil and does good. The way-faring man is foolish, who takes the smooth path that misleads him, and who forsakes the steep path that brings him to the city. So also we will be truly foolish, if we love the brief soft-
se ðe nimð þone smeðan weg þe hine mislæt, and forlæt ðone sticolan þe hine gebrincð to ðære byrīg. Swa eac we beðð sodlice ungerade, gif we lufið þa sceortan softnysse and ða hwilwendlican lustas to ðan swīðe, þæt hi us gebringan to ðam ecan pinungum. Ac uto niman þone earfoðran weg, þæt we her suñe hwile swincon, to ðy þæt we ecelice beon butan geswince. Eadæ mihte Crist, gif he wolde, on þisum life wunian butan earfoðnyssum, and faran to his ecan rice butan ðrowunge, and buran deade; æc he nolde. Þe ðam cwæð Petrus se apostol, “Crist ðrowode for us, and sealde us bysne, þæt we sceolon fylligan his fotswāðum”; þæt is, þæt we sceolon sum ðing ðrowian for Cristes lufon, and for urum synnum. Wel ðrowað se man, and God gecwemlice, se ðe wind ðo gehwa leahtras, and godnysse gefremað, swa swa he lýrmest meg. Se ðe nan ðing nele on ðissum life ðrowian, he sceal ðrowian unþances wyrsan ðrowunga on þam toweardan life.

Nu geneðæcð clæne tid and halig, on ðære we sceolon ure gimeleaste gebetan: cume forði gehwa cristensu manna to his scrifte, and his dygian gyftas geandette, and be ðis laerowes tæcununge gebete; and tithe ælc oðerne to gode mid godre gebysnumge, þæt eal folc cweðe be us, swa swa be ðam blindan gesweden was, þæt eal his eagan wæron onlihte; þæt is, Eall folc þæt wundor geseah, herede God, se ðe leofað and rixæð a butan ende. Amen.
Endnotes

1 The text and translation are based on The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric, edited and translated by Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols., The Ælfric Society, 1844–1846, vol. 1, pp. 152–65, with some modifications. Endnotes and translation have been provided by Brandon W. Hawk.


5 Matthew 6:8: “enim Pater vester quibus opus sit vobis antequam petatis eum” (“your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask him”).

6 John 12:26: “Si quis mihi ministrat me sequatur” (“If any man minister to me, let him follow me”).

7 Matthew 8:20: “Vulpes foveas habent et volucres caeli tabernacula Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet” (“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head”).

8 James 4:4: “Ergo voluerit amicus esse saeculi huius inimicus Dei constituitur” (“Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world becometh an enemy of God”).

9 Cf. Matthew 7:13: “Intrate per angustam portam quia lata porta et spatiosa via quae ducit ad perditionem et multi sunt qui intrant per eam” (“Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction”).

10 1 Peter 2:21: “Christus passus est pro vobis vobis relinquuens exemplum ut sequamini vestigia eius” (“Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps”).
Introduction

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) was among the most prolific of the early Christian theological writers known as the Fathers of the Church. Born in North Africa to a non-Christian father and Christian mother, Augustine led a tumultuous early intellectual life before converting to Christianity in 386, and eventually becoming bishop of Hippo (modern-day Annaba, Algeria) in late 395 or early 396. His written work remains foundational in Christian theology to this day, and was of particular importance to the development of Christian doctrine in the Middle Ages. The City of God against the Pagans, a lengthy treatise completed near the end of Augustine’s life, defends the superiority of Christianity over other religions despite recent defeats of Rome by heretics and non-Christians (such as the sack of Rome by Goths in 410). The City of God traces a Christian historical trajectory from Creation to the apocalypse, with its promise of the resurrection of the dead and everlasting life. In book 22, Augustine devotes several chapters to discussing the nature of the resurrected body in terms of gender, age, size, and (dis)ability. The passage excerpted below describes the features of the resurrected body, both what the resurrected body will be and what it will not.

Augustine opens the chapter by continuing to respond to a series of questions pertaining to the nature of the body after the resurrection. The implicit questions “about the hair and nails” are: If the body must be resurrected in order for a person to obtain the bliss of the afterlife, and no part of the body will be lost in that resurrection, then what happens to the parts of our bodies that we willingly shed or trim? Will all of the hair and fingernails we have ever grown be restored to horrific effect? Conversely, if the hair and nails that had been trimmed in life are not included in the resurrected body, then is the resurrected body truly the same person?

Augustine unfolds his answer through a series of analogies, which draw upon experiences and expectations of the disabled body to describe the promised resurrected body. He compares the matter of the human body to a clay vessel that (before firing) may be collapsed into shapelessness and then remolded to its previous form, arguing that the vessel is still the same vessel even if individual particles of clay are redistributed to different parts, such as the handle or the base. Likewise, Augustine argues that if a statue is malformed, it can be recast so that the form is perfected, but none of the material is lost. For Augustine this means that there is no need for individuals’ resurrected bodies to “be such as they would not have chosen to be here,” simply because there is an excess or deficiency of material, or because the material is not harmoniously arranged. While this is phrased as reassuring—because one can hope for a “better” body in the afterlife—Augustine’s framework also stigmatizes bodily difference, from being “too thin or too fat” to having “rare and monstrous” deformities. By interjecting that “in any case there is no purpose to deformity but to display in this life the punitive condition of mortality,” Augustin-
tine unambiguously associates “deformity,” and thereby disability, with the humankind’s fallen state subject to sin and death. The resurrected body, in contrast, is characterized by the erasure of what Augustine calls “defect,” in favor of “what is seemly,” a ranking of bodily forms embedded with assumptions about what is universally desirable in a human body.

The resurrected body thus becomes akin to what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has called the “normate,” in that it is “the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries.” Augustine clearly does not expect living bodies to conform to the harmonious form of the resurrected body, and so the normative power of the resurrection body is limited to urging Christians to anticipate that body in the afterlife, rather than obtain that body in the present. Nonetheless, the expectation that some features are not desirable for the eternal afterlife reflects and reinforces lived experiences of disability and bodily difference in Augustine’s time. That is, Augustine’s theological explanations for how the body will be resurrected as the same body, but without “defect,” reflect very real anxieties about and unhappiness with the ways individuals experienced their own bodies in Augustine’s time, much as they do today. Augustine’s reassurance that “none…should be afraid” suggests that he is more concerned with Christians’ feelings about their own bodies, rather than their judgments of others. However, the concept of the resurrection body being only “what is seemly” creates a theological justification for ableist assumptions about what the body “should” be.

And yet, Augustine complicates the notion of “what is seemly” by asserting that the scars of Christ and the martyrs are honorable, even if the same wound acquired outside the service of Christ would be counted a “defect.” In the same closing movement of the chapter that frames blindness as a punishment for sin and casually jokes about blind individuals needing sighted guides, Augustine also opens up the structure of the resurrection body to include space for variation. The general argument of the chapter, that bodies will be resurrected without any disability, thus nonetheless makes room for the possibility that bodily difference can be a positive experience, both for those with scars and those who look upon them. Though it falls substantially short of supporting a full range of bodily diversity (the saints, after all, will have their amputated limbs reattached), Augustine’s articulation of the resurrected body incorporates disability into both negatively and positively coded features of Christian salvation history.

Bibliography


Book XXII, chapter 19

Now how am I to reply about the hair and nails? Having first understood “not a hair will be lost from the body” to mean that there will be nothing deformed in the body, then this is also understood: any matter that would comprise deformity, if it were left in disorder, will be drawn into the greater form of the body, but not at all in such a way that the contour of the limbs is disfigured. It is just as when a vessel is made from clay, and the clay is then regathered into an unformed mass to be sculpted anew. It is not necessary that the same portion of clay that had been the handle return to the new handle, or that the base return to itself. Despite this, the whole returns to the whole; that is, the whole of that clay becomes again the whole vessel, with nothing of itself lost in having been exchanged between the vessel’s parts. Therefore if the hair of the head, which so often has been shaved, or the nails which have been clipped, would by their return comprise deformity, then they will not be restored. However, neither will anything be lost in the resurrection of each person, because the harmony of the body will be restored in the same flesh, arranged precisely in its place upon the body, though changed in substance.

Indeed, the Lord said: “No hair on your head will perish,” which can be understood to mean the number of hairs plentifully affixed, not the length of the hair. This is why elsewhere he said: “The hairs of your head are numbered.” I have not, therefore, said that I believe anything will be lost from a body that is part of its essential nature, but that anything that had been deformed in life (and in any case there is no purpose to deformity but to display in this life the punitive condition of mortality) will be returned such that material wholeness is preserved, with the deformity passing away. For example, a human artist might for whatever reason create a disfigured statue, but then restore the work to beauty by recasting it, so that no substance is added, but still the deformity is taken away.

And if any part of that prior form had protruded indecently, interrupting the balance of its parts, no portion of the whole need be shorn off and cast away, but instead the material may be redistributed and blended in such a way that no ugliness is produced nor is the strength of the sculpture lessened. What then might we think the Almighty Artist capable of? Will he not be able to eliminate any deformities upon human bodies, not limited to those that occur commonly, but also those that are rare and monstrous? These are appropriate for this wretched life, but to the future happiness of the saints they are abhorrent. Will he not thus be able to alleviate any of those unsightly growths in the substance of the body, even if they are of natural causes, without raising the body in any way diminished?

And because of this, none who are too thin or too fat should be afraid that there they will be such as they would not have chosen to be here, had they been able to choose. For all beauty of the body is due to the harmony of its parts, along with particular pleasant complexions. But where there is no harmony of its parts, then for that reason the body is unpleasant, either because it is distorted or because it is too small or excessively large. Therefore, there will be no deformity produced by unharmonious parts, in that place where both anyone that is distorted shall be straightened, and those with little of what is seemly will be made whole from a source that the Creator knows, and moreover those with more beyond what is seemly will have that excess removed, while protecting the completeness of bodily matter. How much more sweet the complexion will be in that place where the righteous will shine just like the sun in the reign of their Father!

It is believed that this brightness in the body of Christ, when he rose again, was concealed from the eyes of the disciples, rather than not there at all. For the weak sight of man would not have borne it, when the disciples were required to attend him closely so that they could recognize him. For the
same reason he also exposed the scars of his wounds to be touched, and that he also took food and drink, not for need of nourishment, but by means of that power which likewise made concealing his brightness possible for him. When something is not seen, although it is present, by those who see other equally present things (as I have previously said about that brightness, that it was unseen by those who saw other things), in Greek is it called ἀορασία,° which our interpreters were not able to translate into Latin, and in the book of Genesis it was interpreted as “blindness.”° This is what the men of Sodom endured, when they were seeking the door of the righteous man,”° but could not find it.° If this had been that blindness in which nothing can be seen, they would not have been searching for a door to enter, but seeking guides to lead them away from that place.

However, for reasons unknown to me, our deep love for the blessed martyrs leads us to desire to see the scars of their wounds, which they have suffered for the name of Christ, upon their bodies in that kingdom. And perhaps we will see them. For it will not be deformity in them, but distinction, and exceedingly in their body will shine a certain beauty, which is not of the flesh but of virtue.° Moreover, if limbs have at any time been severed or torn away from the martyrs, they will not therefore be without those limbs in the resurrection of the dead, because for them it was said: “No hair on your head will perish.” But if in that new age it is seemly that the tokens of their famous wounds be seen in that immortal flesh, then where limbs had been detached by being struck or carved away, there will be visible scars, but nonetheless the same limbs will be restored, not lost. Thus, at that time all defects that have befallen the body will cease to exist; however, the tokens of virtue will not be named or considered defects.

ἀορασία sightlessness  the righteous man Lot
Endnotes


3 This is Augustine’s paraphrase of the line he returns to below, from Luke 21:18.

4 Latin deforme can also be translated as “misshapen,” “formless,” or “ugly.”

5 The Latin word limus, which I translate here as “clay” as part of the pottery analogy, can also mean “mud,” evoking both the biblical creation of man from dust and the decay of the human body into dust between death and resurrection.


8 This line references Matthew 13:43.

9 The Greek ἀοράσια or aorasia translates most literally in English to “sightlessness,” whereas the Latin supplied here, caecitatem translates most directly to “blindness.” The passage in Genesis 19 to which Augustine refers was originally written in Classical Hebrew, but early translations into Latin often depended upon the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. In the late fourth century, St Jerome, a contemporary and correspondent of Augustine, was notably engaged in the monumental task of newly translating the Old and New Testaments into Latin, which became the bulk of the Latin Vulgate Bible.

10 Genesis 19:11. Augustine refers to the story of Lot and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as divine retribution for their sins. Lot had welcomed two angels into his home, and when the men of Sodom sought to abuse his visitors, Lot offered up his daughters in their stead. The men of Sodom refused this offer, and the angels protected Lot’s household by impairing the men’s vision, so that they could not see the door to Lot’s home. Lot and his family are sent out from the city and thus spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

11 Latin virtutis can be translated with moral connotations as “virtue” or “courage,” but it can also carry more physical connotations as “strength.”
A Miracle of Thomas Becket: De puero syntectino
(Concerning a boy suffering from a wasting disease)
(1172–77)
William of Canterbury
Contributed by Rose A. Sawyer

Introduction

As England’s most renowned saint, numerous miraculous cures are attributed to Thomas Becket and many of these were collected and recorded by William of Canterbury in England’s longest miracle collection. Miracles have long been considered a valuable source for the study of medieval attitudes towards and ideas about disability, illness, and death. This particular miracle details the cure of the infant Augustine, who was impaired by a wasting disease before being dedicated to Thomas Becket and miraculously restored in 1172. As Rachel Koopmans observes, William takes a medicalized approach to the recording of miracles. Presumably drawing upon his own study of the substantial number of Latin medical texts available in England during this period, William utilizes precise medical terminology and an understanding of medieval medical theory in order to present a vivid description of and explanation for Augustine’s condition. William diagnoses Augustine as syntecticus (suffering from a wasting disease) and, while he does not settle upon a definite cause, he does suggest that the condition could stem from either an ulcer in his lungs, his loud cries, or another medically defined cause. William’s account of the condition is very similar to Roger Frugardi’s description of ptisys (consumption). Roger was writing in Parma at roughly the same time as William and their language and application of humor al theory is almost identical; both understand the ulcer to be consuming the body’s “essential humidity.” However, after suggesting some medically sound theories, William also references and dismisses an alternative theory for the boy’s emaciated appearance, stating that: “no-one of sound mind credits the fabulous nonsense of the people, who believe children to be substituted or transformed.”

William refers here to the child substitution motif, that is the idea that a child has been removed and another being, a changeling, substituted in its place. Clerical scholars such as Jacques de Vitry (d. 1420) and William of Auvergne (d. 1249) described changelings as demons that take the form of infants who, while being perpetually hungry, do not grow or thrive. While the characteristics of medieval changelings do vary depending upon context, William of Canterbury’s comments reflect his understanding that a section of the population may respond to a child with Augustine’s symptoms by arguing that it was a changeling rather than the original human child. William attributes this belief to the vulgi (people) and, while there is no indication in his account that Augustine’s parents believed that Thomas Becket had relieved them of a changeling child, one has to wonder why William chose to reference the child substitution at this point if not prompted by a careless comment from the parents.

Jean Claude Schmitt, in his seminal monograph on the medieval child substitution
motif The Holy Greyhound, argues that the belief in changelings had three functions: first, to explain sickness or disability; second, to allow burdensome children to be removed from the family; and third, to assuage parental guilt over the death of the child as a result of these rites, since the child had been identified not as sick but as non-human. Schmitt’s study focuses upon an account of the practices in a single rural region of France, and the extent to which his model can be more broadly applied is uncertain. More recently, scholars studying medieval changelings have questioned both the prevalence of changeling belief during the Middle Ages and the extent to which it could be connected to disability.

However, it is notable that, even as William of Canterbury dismisses the idea that a changeling could have been substituted for Augustine, he is at pains to describe the ways in which the infant appeared inhuman or monstrous. William makes vivid comparisons to animal bodies and inanimate objects: Augustine’s arms are “just like two small twigs from the middle of a branch” and he is “an animal portentous to see.” For William, Augustine’s body occupies a type of hybrid space, complicating categories of human and non-human. Thus, he also states that Augustine’s “inappropriate dryness denied [that he was] human,” while “his wailing and alert expression suggested something of the human.” Furthermore, after the miraculous cure, William states that Augustine “having been transformed into a new human, he could acquire again the appearance of his birth and insemination.” The use of the verb transformare echoes William’s earlier description of the beliefs of the vulgi “who believe children to be substituted or transformed.” This is not to suggest that William’s protestations belied a secret belief in changelings; however, it does indicate that even the most medically knowledgeable person might use language that constructed the impaired body as other than or only semi-human.

This text also deals with the notion that having an impaired child was a shameful thing. Augustine’s parents are unwed and Ralph, Augustine’s father, is a priest, thus their relationship is described by William as illicit and sinful. The twelfth century saw the rise of a reform movement focusing on the imposition of clerical celibacy. Jenni Kuuliala has suggested that Augustine’s parents believe that their son’s impairment is a result or punishment for their own sin; however, this interpretation is not clearly supported in the text. Instead, it seems more likely that William figures Augustine’s withered body as the symbolic fruit of his parent’s shameful coupling with the intention of contributing to the debate surrounding clerical celibacy. However, when describing Augustine’s cure, William also states that “the Lord heeds not our sinfulness,” thus indicating that, whatever his own feelings, the Lord is ultimately merciful. If Augustine’s parents did conceal him from others, it might instead indicate a level of concern about the reaction of other people to their child as this concern is reflected in other texts about changelings.

The body of an impaired child is the focus of this source; however, in describing this infant and his miraculous restoration, William provides us with a text that is rich in more than just medieval medical theory. William’s presentation of Augustine’s body is rooted in cutting edge medical theory; however, by studying this source we can also see the tension between his learned approach and the way in which other medieval people instead drew upon their understanding of the supernatural to explain childhood impairment through the child substitution motif. Furthermore, it is clear that other debates, such as the one to do with clerical chastity, could also inform the way in which impaired children were conceptualized and treated.

Bibliography


De puero syntectino

Quia loqui coepi de infantibus, ne, quæso, lector, videatur onerosum si modicum adhuc subjungam quod ad honorem martyris spectat et profectum nostrum, quia ex ore infantium et lactentium perfect Deus laudem ut destruat inimicum et ultorem.

Radulfus quidam, de villa Sumeshelde, Auglicus genere, presbyteratus sublimatus dignitate, dum maledictum legis declinant, quae steriles damnat, suscepit ex consorte thori filium Augustinum.

Qui cum dimidium annum egisset ab ortu, tanta membrorum exilitate et tenuitate demolitus est, ut miserabilem speciem praefret, minus habens carnositatis in toto corpore quam validus aliquis in uno digitorum suorum.

Corporam namque substantiam gravis passio consumerat, ex ulcere pulmonis proveniens, aut ex clamore vagientis vel aliis causis quas physicus assignat; nemo enim sanæ mentis vulgi fabulosa deliramenta credit, quod pueros supponi putat aut transformari.

Prominebat itaque spina, radiolos suos et spondilias patenter ostendens.

Brachia vero dependebant hinc inde, tanquam virgulae duae de medio stipite; eratque miserabilis facies, non facies sed superficies, tanquam vita sine vivente, materia sine forma, corpus sine compositione.

Consumptio substantialis humiditatis et ossea congeries ariditasque deformis hominem negabant.

E contrario vagitus et erecta facies aliquod hominem innuebant.

Hinc confusi parentes nemini videndum portentosum animal exhibuerunt, peccato suo et pudori tenebras quserentes, qui contempto jure matrimonii genium colebant.

Veruntamen non iniquitates nostras observante Domino, gravi morbo levi medicina subventum est.

Nam simul ac martyri voto obstrictus est, colori suo redditus est; ipsaque nocte qua factum est votum, membris assiccatis vigor succrevit, mutuaque societate ossa et vis-

Concerning a boy suffering from a wasting disease

Because I have begun to speak about children, reader I beseech you, may it not seem onerous if I still say a little that concerns the honour of the martyr and our success in proper measure, because out of the mouth of infants and sucklings God perfected praise in order that he may destroy the enemy and the revenger.

A certain Ralph, from the village of Somershall, from the race of the English, having been raised to the office of priest, while he avoided the reproach of the law, which condemns them to be sterile, he procreated a son, Augustine, from the consort of his bed.

He, when half a year from his birth had passed, was diminished with so much weakness and gauntness of his limbs, that he displayed a wretched sight, having less flesh in his whole body than someone strong in one of their fingers.

For in fact, a serious disease, produced by an ulcer in his lungs, or else by the noise of his wailing or from other causes which a physician specifies, had consumed his bodily substance; for no-one of sound mind credits the fabulous nonsense of the people, who believe children to be substituted or transformed.

Thus, his spine was jutting out, revealing openly his ribs and vertebrae.

Truly his arms were hanging down thence from that place, just like two small twigs from the middle of a branch, and his face was wretched, not a face but a mask, as it were a life without living, a substance without shape, a body without structure.

The consumption of his essential moisture and [his body like] a bone heap and his inappropriate dryness denied [that he was] human.

On the other hand, his wailing and alert expression suggested something of the human.

Hence, the troubled parents showed to no one the animal portentous to see, hiding in the shadows for their sin and shame, the
cera coaluerunt, ut novum transformatus in hominem sementivam natalemque recuperet speciem.

Talem ergo eum fuisse a parentibus auditum, penitus vero restitutum oculis perspeximus.

Nevertheless, since the Lord heeds not our sinfulness, he rescued [him] from serious illness with swift medicine.

For, as soon as he was bound by oath to the martyr, he was returned to his own colour; the very night that the vow was made, the vigour in his dried-up limbs overflowed, his bones and vitals grew together in mutual partnership, so that, having been transformed into a new human, he could acquire again the appearance of his insemination and birth.

Then, we heard that he had been like that from his parents, to be sure, we thoroughly examined the restored child with our own eyes.

parents who were maintaining their natural instinct, despite having disregarded the law of matrimony.
Endnotes


4 By stressing that six months had passed since Augustine’s birth, William of Canterbury implies that the infant’s impairment developed after his birth and was not congenital. As changelings were substituted for healthy babies, thus it was more likely for a child that was born apparently healthy before developing an acquired impairment to be labelled a changeling.

5 The usage of physicus is very specific in the twelfth century and means an academically trained practitioner.

6 Infants were thought to have a unique humoral make-up, being full of humoral blood, they were warm and moister than at any stage of life. William’s descriptions of Augustine constantly draw attention to the fact that he is inappropriately dry for an infant due to his “essential moisture” being consumed.

7 Continuous crying is cited by William of Auvergne as one of the behaviors attributed to changelings. It is therefore notable that William of Canterbury chooses to identify Augustine’s pained crying as evidence for the infant’s humanity.

8 William configures Augustine’s impairment as a “portent” or signifier of his parent’s sinful relationship.

9 By describing the miracle as medicine, William effectively overturns all of his preceding theory. To William, human medical knowledge is to no avail compared to divine medicine.

10 According to Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources, sementivus is “of insemination, procreation, propagation, or growth.” Human nature was passed on through semen, thus the use of sementivus references this understanding. William figures Augustine’s cure as a return to the condition of warm moistness that he held at birth and through his conception.
Introduction

The oldest manuscripts that preserve the Icelandic family sagas are from the thirteenth century, but various theories have been put forward as to how old individual sagas or parts of them are. The family sagas generally focus on the period around and between two major events that shaped and changed Icelandic society, the settlement of Iceland (starting c. 870) and the conversion to Christianity (c. 1000).

*Njáls saga* (also known as *Njála* or *Brennu-Njáls saga*) is one of the Icelandic family sagas. It takes place between c. 960–1020 and the conversion gets a fair amount of coverage and is a turning point in the narrative. Therefore Christianity, its symbolism and interplay with pre-Christian culture, and how it affects Icelanders are overarching themes in the saga. Among other prominent themes and driving forces of the narrative are honor and masculinity and how men maintain their social status, often by killing those who have wronged them in any way or getting compensation from them, thus contributing to the feudal system. There is a vast gallery of characters in the saga, but the main focus is on the friends Gunnar and Njáll and their families, particularly their wives Hallgerðr and Bergþóra as well as Njáll’s sons. Although they are not chieftains, both Gunnar and Njáll are prominent men, the former known for his athletic abilities and the latter for his wisdom and cunningness. Despite their abilities, they both get sucked into a vicious cycle of vengeance and are killed as a result.

The chapter presented here combines the concepts of feud, honor, and masculinity, as well as the newly emerged Christian religion. These concepts converge in a minor character, who enters the stage, takes the spotlight for one scene, then leaves and is never mentioned again. His name is Ámundi blindi (the blind) and “he had been born blind, but for all that he was tall and strong.” Ámundi is an illegitimate son of Hóskuldr, who himself is an illegitimate son of Njáll, but often accompanies his three legitimate brothers. As a part of blood feud, Hóskuldr’s brothers kill Práinn Sigfússon but Njáll pays compensation on their behalf to Práinn’s brothers to end the feud and ensure peace. However, Práinn’s brother in law Lýtingr af Sámsstǫðum, who is described as being “tall of growth and a strong man, wealthy in goods and ill to deal with,” feels that he has been left out of the deal and gets his two brothers to help him avenge Práinn’s death by killing Hóskuldr. The three surviving sons of Njáll attack Lýtingr and his brothers and kill the brothers, but Lýtingr escapes and later agrees to pay a monetary compensation to Njáll and his sons to avoid being killed by them.

Ámundi, however, does not receive any of that money, presumably because he doesn’t have a legal status in the matter. He therefore goes to Lýtingr at a parliamentary assembly and asks him for compensation. Lýtingr refuses since he has already paid his dues according to the rules of the society. Because of his blindness and social status, Ámundi’s only option is to pray to God, who in return grants him sight just long enough for him to kill Lýtingr.

Ámundi’s description is very brief, and nothing is said about his role in society, what he does for a living or where he lives, but
he needs the help of others to find his way around the parliament site, and he poses no threat to Lýtingr, until he gets divine help. The nickname “blind” sounds almost neutral, but nicknames in the Icelandic sagas often describe distinctive physical features of the characters. Eyes and good eyesight are however often symbols of power and masculinity and the act of blinding someone is often used as symbolic castration. When the theme of constant feud and revenge within Njáls saga is kept in mind, Ámundi’s blindness makes him less of a man within the society; he is perceived as harmless and incapable of doing his duty as a son and avenging his father’s death.

Between the encounter of Lýtingr and the sons of Njáll and Ámundi’s meeting with Lýtingr, there’s a long account of the conversion of Iceland. The story of Ámundi is the first narrative of Njáls saga within a Christian society and therefore the miracle highlights the new religion. Ámundi laments his blindness and asks God to judge between them, and all of the sudden, he can see, and praises the Lord. Not only does God aid him, but the invocation of Ámundi suggests that it is God’s will that he shall kill Lýtingr. With the help of this miracle and surprise, Ámundi, who sees for the first time in his life and has therefore presumably never handled a weapon, charges forward and kills Lýtingr with an axe. The miracle is only temporary and having carried out his revenge, Ámundi loses his sight again.

This divine intervention highlights that a new faith has emerged and that the new God sympathizes with the helplessness of a blind man, who without his eyesight and divine intervention can’t fulfill his social duty. The placement of this narrative shows that a new power, which is benevolent towards the marginalized, has entered the scene of the saga. Ámundi is not healed permanently, but by asking God to judge between him and Lýtingr, he surrenders to the judgment of a higher being, who rules in his favor. And as Lars Lönnroth interprets the scene, the miracle is a theological reference to the Natural Law, that Ámundi has a right although society has settled the score. It also shows the Christian God as a source of justice and a protector of Icelandic law, even the pre-Christian revenge system. Blindness is sometimes used as a symbol of those who reject Christianity and remain non-Christians, but the opposite seems to apply to Ámundi, since his faith in God enables him to avenge his father.

Bibliography

Sá atburðr varð þrim vetrum síðar á Þing-skálaþingi at Ámundi inn blindi var á þingi, Hóskulds, Njálssonar. Hann lét leiða sík búða í meðal. Hann kom í búð þá, er Lýtingr var inn af Sámsþoðum; hann lét leiða sík inn í búðina og þar fyrir, sem Lýtingr sat.
Hann mælti: “Er hér Lýtingr af Sámsþoðum?”
“Hvað villtú þa mér?” segir Lýtingr.
“Ek vil vita,” segir Ámundi, “hverju þú vil bœta mér fður minn. Ek em laungetinn, ok hefi ek við engum bótum tekit.”
“Bœtt hefi ek víg fður þíns fullum bó-tum,” segir Lýtingr, “ok tók við fðurðaféir þínn ok fðurðurbrœðr, en brœðr minir váru ogildir. Ok varð bæði, at ek haða illa til gört, enda kom ek hart niðr.”
“Ekki spyr ek at því,” segir Ámundi, “at þau hefur bœtt þeim; veit ek, at þér eruð sáttir. Ok spyr ek at því, hverju þú vil mér bœta.”
“Alls engu,” segir Lýtingr.
“Eigi skil ek,” segir Ámundi, “at þat muni rétt fyrir guði, svá nær hjarta sem þú hefur mér hǫggvit; enda kann ek at segja þér, ef ek væra heileygr þeim, at hafa skyldu ek annathvár fyrir fður minn fóður þíns, enda kann ek at segja þér, ef ek þétt mannhafndir, en þó tók þeim Lýting.”
Eptir þat gekk hann út, en er hann kom í búðardyrin, snýsk hann innar eptir búðinni; þá lukusk upp augu hans.
Þá mælti hann: “Lofaðr sé guð, dróttinn minn! Sér nú, hvat hann vill.”
Eptir þat hleypr hann innar eptir búðinni, þar til er hann kemur fyrir Lýting, ok hógr öxi í hófuð honum, svá at hon stóð á hamri, ok kippir at sér þeim Lýtingr fell afbróðaði hann ok var þegar dauðr. Ámundi gengr út í búðardyr-rin, ok er hann kom í þau spor í þinginum, sem upp hófuða lokizk augu hans, þá lukusk aprtri, ok var hann alla ævi blindr síðan.
Eptir þat lætr hann fylgja sér til Njáls ok sona hans; segir hann þeim vig Lýtings.
“Ekki má saka þikum slikt,” segir Njáll, “því at slikt er mjók á kvéðit, en viðvørunarvert, That event happened three winters after at the Thingskala-Thing° that Amund the blind was at the Thing; he was the son of Hauskuldr Njal’s son. He made men lead him about among the booths, and so he came to the booth inside which was Lyting of Samstede. He made them lead him into the booth till he came before Lyting.
“Is Lyting of Samstede here?” he asked.
“What dost thou want?” says Lyting.
“I want to know,” says Amund, “what atonement thou wilt pay me for my father, I am base-born, and I have touched no fine.”
“I have atoned for the slaying of thy fa-ther,” says Lyting, “with a full price, and thy father’s father and thy father’s brothers took the money; but my brothers fell without a price as outlaws; and so it was that I had both done an ill-deed, and paid dear for it.”
“I ask not,” says Amund, “as to thy hav-ing paid an atonement to them. I know that ye two are now friends, but I ask this, what atonement thou wilt pay to me?”
“None at all,” says Lyting.
“I cannot see,” says Amund, “how thou canst have right before God, when thou hast stricken me so near the heart; but all I can say is, that if I were blessed with the sight of both my eyes, I would have either a money fine for my father, or revenge man for man; and so may God judge between us.”
After that he went out; but when he came to the door of the booth, he turned short round towards the inside. Then his eyes were opened, and he said—
“Praised be the Lord! now I see what His will is.”
With that he ran straight into the booth until he comes before Lyting, and smites him with an axe on the head, so that it sunk in up to the hammer, and gives the axe a pull towards him. Lyting fell forwards and was dead at once. Amund goes out to the door of the booth, and when he got to the very same spot on which he had stood when his eyes were

*Thingskala-Thing [Þing] an assembly*
opened, lo! they were shut again, and he was
blind all his life after.

Then he made them lead him to Njal and
his sons, and he told them of Lyting's slaying.

“Thou mayest not be blamed for this,” says
Njal, “for such things are settled by a higher
power; but it is worth while to take warning
from such events, lest we cut any short who
have such near claims as Amund had.”

After that Njal offered an atonement to
Lyting's kinsmen. Hauskuld the Priest of
Whiteness had a share in bringing Lyting's
kinsmen to take the fine, and then the mat-
ter was put to an award, and half the fines
fell away for the sake of the claim which he
seemed to have on Lyting.

After that men came forward with pledg-
es of peace and good faith, and Lyting's kins-
men granted pledges to Amund. Men rode
home from the Thing; and now all is quiet for
a long while.
Endnotes

1 The Icelandic text is from the edition of *Brennu-Njáls saga* in Íslenzk fornrit XII, 272–74, published by Hið íslenzka fornritafélag in 1954, and is used with permission from the publisher. The English translation is by George Webbe Dasent, published in 1861 as *The Story of Burnt Njal: From the Icelandic of Njals Saga*. It is in the public domain and was released on the website of Project Gutenberg in 2006. Notes and glosses have been provided by Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir.

2 *Þing* were held regularly in Iceland, both locally and on a national scale on Þingvellir. Chieftains and farmers met at such assemblies and settled their differences and court cases were held there. *Þingskálar* is the name of the place where that particular *þing* was held.

3 Icelandic names are often translated in this manner, the endings are dropped and special characters are changed.

4 Although this looks like a pun in the English translation, the original text uses the verb *skilja*, which means understand, but does not indicate sight.

5 In the original text the verb *sjá* is used, which, like the English verb “to see,” can have the double meaning of eyesight and understanding.

6 The Icelandic word *gøði* is used for men who in pre-Christian times were at the same time chieftains and priests. After the conversion the word *gøði* was used for chieftains and *prestr* for priests, although at times one and the same man could be both. *Hvílanes* is a place name, the whiteness.
Introduction

During Easter Week in the year 1144, William, a twelve-year-old skinner's apprentice, was found dead in Thorpe Wood, Norwich, a town in East Anglia. According to his biographer, Thomas of Monmouth (d. ca. 1173), the boy had been ritually tortured and crucified by local Jews. This is the first such account of ritual murder by Jews in the English Middle Ages, and that aspect of The Life and Passion of William of Norwich has dominated recent scholarship about William. However, William's death was not the main feature of these contemporary records, for Thomas documents 110 miracles in seven books, eighty of them concerning physical and mental impairments. Below are ten representative examples.

Most of these pilgrims with disabilities were brought to William's tomb by their friends and family (Books III.vii, V.xiii, V.xvi, VI.v, VI.viii, VII.iii, and VII.xiv), while others traveled to the shrine on their own, both with technological aid (Book VI.xi) and without (Book VII.xii). For example, Gilliva (who is blind) is guided by a cord held by her nephew in Book VI.viii, and Agnes (who is wracked with gout) is brought to the tomb in the arms of her mother in Book VII.xiv. Most of the miracles attributed to William took place at his tomb. In one instance, a woman's cancer is cured by William's intervention at her home but the cancer returns when she fails to take a votive to the tomb; upon making the offering at the shrine, she is cured a second time (Book VII.xi). These examples reveal that people with disabilities were not on the outskirts of society in the Middle Ages, even if they wished to be cured of their conditions. To the contrary, they were loved and cared for by their families, friends, and neighbors. These rich networks of support carried people with disabilities, sometimes considerable distances, in search of a cure for a variety of ailments.

Thomas' meticulous record-keeping points to a variety of medical conditions as medieval people understood them. Of the eighty miracles dealing with physical and mental impairment in The Life and Passion, over twenty-five distinct conditions are discussed, all of which were putatively curable by William's intervention. These conditions include being "bent double" (the seven-year-old girl in Book V.xvi, and Matilda in Book VI.xi) and "dumb" (also the seven-year-old girl in Book V.xvi), madness and demonic possession (the son of Richard de Needham and Silverun in Book V.xiii, Robert in Book VI.x, and a clerk also named Robert in Book VII.iii), kidney and knee pain (Claricia in Book III.vii), blindness (Gilliva in Book VI.viii), "a cancer" (an unnamed woman in Book VII.xii), and gout (Agnes in Book VII.xiv). Other conditions that do not appear in the examples below include deafness, dropsy, dysentery, fever, flux, a goiter, palsy, paralysis, toothache, viper attacks, weakness of constitution, and many unidentified illnesses.

The Life and Passion lends itself to a reading through the lens of disability studies both
because of Thomas’ careful record-keeping and because the concept of disability is so closely tied to social context. By taking what Thomas says about these miracles at face value, readers can see the social dimension of the conditions (and their purported cures) as well as how medieval people regarded these afflictions as medical conditions. Readers can detect in these examples a difference between disability and impairment, where “disability” is the social construct and can therefore change over time and place, and “impairment” is the physical condition which does not change regardless of time and place. The social construct of disability in the Middle Ages was not necessarily the same as today: these miracles show that it was often the consensus of those present at the tomb which determined whether the cure was efficacious, thus mapping a social dimension onto the impairment (and transforming it into a disability).

Bibliography


Concerning a certain woman cured of a long-standing sickness.

Not long after this Claricia, wife of Gaufridus de Marc and niece of the brothers Gerold came to the sepulchre of the most blessed martyr seeking a much desired remedy for her infirmity. This lady had been suffering for some years from pain in the reins and knees, nor could she be cured by any physicians, though she spent much upon them. But coming to this worshipful sepulchre by means of those who led her there, or rather by the leading of her faith, standing there for a little while she offered up a prayer, and then bending her knees as far as she was able she applied them all bare to the bare stone. And immediately at the touch of it the aforementioned pain in her limbs began to abate so that she felt already the long lost soundness spreading through her limbs. Thus it came to pass that she who came with her feeble body by the hands of others, when the heavenly medicine did its work, went back safe and sound needing no man’s support.

Concerning the boy who being nigh unto death was cured by the merits of Saint William.

In those days the infant son of Radulfus, Prior Elias’ nephew, was sick unto death and his last hour was at hand. So his father and mother were advised that a candle of the length and breadth of the little boy should be made with utmost haste, and that when it was made they should offer it to Saint William for the restoration of their son, and that without doubt they would receive back their son safe and whole. Wherefore as was advised, straightway the candle was made, and having been brought by the father’s hands it was offered as a votive offering at the sepulchre of the holy martyr. The father on his return rejoiced to find his son safe whom a little while before he had given up for dead.

Of the cure of a second madman.

I also saw another possessed man healed at St. William’s tomb by the divine pity in Whitsun week. He was the son of Richard de Needham, and his mother was named Silverun; and one day he was seized by a devil and began to handle himself so roughly that seven men were hardly able to chain him. He remained in this state, bound, for six days, eating nothing, and sleep entirely forsook him. Thus bound he was at last brought by his parents to the oft-mentioned tomb; and as he approached it he suddenly yelled with a terrible voice and said, “What do you want with me? where are you taking me to? I won’t go there! I won’t go there!” But as he was being dragged thither with some violence he burst his bonds, not by his strength but by that of the evil spirit, and attacking his mother, threw her to the ground and fastened his teeth in her throat. And he would certainly have killed her, had not the people run up and rescued her. Then, gnashing his teeth, and glaring fiercely on the bystanders, he maltreated frightfully all whom he could reach. A crowd assembled; he was savagely seized and bound, and with his hands and feet tied together, was put down willy-nilly beside the holy tomb. As soon as he touched the sacred spot, wonderful to say, neither by voice nor look did he show the least token of madness. After an hour had passed he gently and meekly asked to be loosed, and was unbound by one of the servants of the Church. Thereafter he behaved himself as quietly and tamely as if he had suffered no touch of madness. In a short time sleep came upon him, and he who for many days had not slept at all, as I said, now rested for some little space.
On waking, though he had remained many days without food, he now said that he was exceedingly hungry. Food was brought, he ate and drank, and returned home with his parents and friends, sane and whole, in the greatest joy.

Book V.xvi
Of a girl who was bent and dumb and was healed.

On Maundy Thursday° of the same year,° which Christians call the day of absolution, while Bishop William was solemnizing the mass, there came a woman to the tomb of St. William, with a daughter of seven years old, bent double and dumb. The mother put her down by the tomb in the sight of many, and after praying with tears she sat down beside Godiva the wife of Sibald, son of Brunstan, who was also seated there. After some little time, it happened that she fell asleep. Then, an egg happening to be brought to the tomb, the girl, who had never yet been able to speak or walk, arose in the sight of the said Godiva, took the egg, turned to her mother, and said in English: “Look, mother! I’ve got an egg!” At the sound the mother awoke, and seeing her daughter speaking and walking, burst into tears of joy; and being now assured of her daughter, proclaimed publicly to those present how great benefits the pity of God had conferred on her by the merits of St. William. I ran up and inquired diligently into the facts, and was at once informed by Godiva and many others that they truly knew the woman, and had often seen the deformed and dumb girl.

Book VI.v
Of a second wonderfully mad man who was restored to health.

At another time also we saw a second man out of his mind who was raging fearfully before the tomb of the blessed martyr; his name was Robert, of the parish of St. Michael Conisford at Norwich.° He was subject to attacks of madness at uncertain intervals, and had in consequence come with his mother to St. William, in the hope of being cured. On arriving at the church he began at once to be violent. His mother with tears contrived to coax him into the building and presented him before the martyr’s tomb. But when he had sat quietly for a short time beside his mother, who was praying in the presence of a large crowd of spectators of both sexes, he suddenly began to tremble all over as if he were breaking down altogether; and he suffered indescribably. His eyes flashed fire; he emitted frightful noises. The same mouth gave utterance to every kind of sound: forgetting his humanity he tore off his clothes and stripped himself naked; unable to control himself, he exercised enormous strength. The crowd of onlookers were panic-stricken; all were astonished, some wept, others prayed for the patient’s recovery. What more? By the intervention, as we believe, of the prayers of the holy martyr, God’s pity looked upon the man, drove out the madness of his raving spirit, and gave him sanity for the future. The people were filled with amazement at the miracle, and proclaimed the Divine power to be wonderful in his saint William, and returned to their homes in joy.

Maundy Thursday The Thursday before Easter year the year in which this occurred was 1155, which Thomas mentions in Book V.x St. Michael Conisford at Norwich a medieval parish church that was destroyed during the Reformation
Book VI.viii
Of a blind woman who received sight.

Near the same time, at Lynn in the parish of St. Edmund,° there was a woman called Gilliva, daughter of Burcard a carpenter. She lost her sight by an accident and suffered blindness for three years. To crown her misfortune, such pains and anguish attacked her in the eyelids that for the whole of that time her lashes were always closed, and as it were glued together, and she was never able to open them. At the end of three years she determined to fly for succour to the blessed martyr William, as to her one and only refuge; and this with the more confidence as report had told her that others similarly afflicted had been cured at his tomb. Her young nephew put a clew° of thread in her hand and went before° to guide her, and in this way she reached Norwich and St. William. Standing before the altar she began to pray, and had finished but a little of her prayer when she was interrupted by a sudden and instant attack of pain. Her head reeled, her eyes were smitten with a fiery vapour; she tore her brow and cheeks with her nails, and falling on the ground in agony rolled on the pavement like a mad thing, filling the church with loud and terrifying shrieks. Yet amidst her pain she called aloud with such ejaculations as these: “O gentle boy and martyr William, pity me! many are those on whom thou hast mercy!” A large throng rapidly assembled, who had that day come to the church in procession. All compassionated° her sharp agony; and, moved with pity, poured forth prayers and tears. Both sexes wept, prayed, and cried alike at the pitiful sight. For whose heart could have been so stony as to behold this and refrain from shedding tears? At length after this long torture, at the look of the divine mercy, by the intervention, as we truly believe, of the blessed martyr’s merits, the pain began slowly to abate. Then the woman, feeling that the heavenly medicine was on its way, rose, and lifting her hands to heaven, opened those lids which had been before closed, and could not be opened even for a moment, for the pain they gave her. At once a ray, as I may call it, of blood shot from either eye, and therewith the long night of blindness melted away as if at the dawn of a new light. She that had for long not seen, and had desired the light, now saw; and with joy she said, “Now unto Thee, O God most high, creator and amender of all things, and to thee also, William, most holy martyr of God, I pay the thanks and praises I owe, for that I now receive again rest after so great pain, and sight after three years’ blindness.” With these words she wiped the blood from her eyes and drew near the tomb of the holy martyr. She prayed, and offered a candle that she had brought with her, and, turning to the people, proclaimed that she had received her sight. The bystanders marveled; their sorrow was turned to joy, and all united their voices in extolling the glorious and evident power of the most blessed martyr William, to the praise of God.

Book VI.xi
Of the healing of a certain woman who was wonderfully bent.

There was at that time a woman named Matildis° whom a pitiable weakness had afflicted from her earliest youth. Ever since then, in fact, she had been so weak of body, that owing to the curvature of her spine she was quite doubled up, her legs were twisted together, and her knees pressed one against the other. The consequence was, that when she wished to go from one place to another she had to support her feeble limbs with a

Lynn...St. Edmund  King’s Lynn, Norfolk. St. Edmund was an early English king who ruled East Anglia from 855 until his death at the hands of Vikings in 869  clew cord or rope  before went ahead  compassionated felt compassion  Matildis Matilda
stick and either succeeded in getting a little way, or, sometimes, was not able to do even this. Peter, the priest of Langham, a village in Norfolk, of the Bishop's, had long housed her by way of charity, and supplied her with food and clothing. If she ever desired to visit some shrine for the recovery of her health, he used to have her taken there laid like a sack across a horse. But she was always brought back as she had gone, and no good result followed her pains. When the fame of St. William's great virtue was spread abroad, she conceived the hope of being cured by his means, and with eagerness born of confidence took her stick and started for Norwich. Her steps were helped by the fervent emotions of her mind more than by the material assistance of her feet, and she trusted to her own strength less than to the stick that supported her. Each step was hardly a finger's length, and there was considerable delay between them, so that one watching her progress would judge her to be slower than any tortoise. The result was that, though she started on the twelfth day before Lent, she reached Norwich in the fourth week after Easter. At the moment of her entering the cathedral church, she felt the soles of her feet pricked as if by thorns; but when she stood before the tomb of the glorious martyr, and supporting her feeble limbs on her stick raised her hands in prayer, and poured out her whole soul before God, in the midst of her prayer she was interrupted by a sudden attack of pain. The anguish increased, and she rolled upon the ground, beating it with head, shoulders, feet and hands, and filled the church with cries—behaving herself altogether in a marvellous and pitiable manner. Who, I ask, would be so stony-hearted as to stand and look upon this and refrain his eyes from weeping? At last, after all this anguish, she sat up, and since she was still in a feeble condition, she made her way to the screen, and passed along it by clinging to the shafts, and so finally reached the desired tomb of the blessed martyr. Here, in prayer and thanksgiving, she passed a good part of the day, and then turned to the throng of onlookers and boldly testified to the great things that had been done for her by the merits of St. William. But, inasmuch as a faithless and unbelieving individual was inclined to ascribe the cure to craft rather than miracle, she vowed that she would not leave Norwich until her aforesaid Sir Peter of Langham should come, and by bearing witness to the truth put an end to the wordy contentions of unbelief. And this was accomplished; for she awaited the coming of Peter, and he, when he came, bore witness to the truth.

Book VII.iii
Of a mad clerk healed.
I also saw one Robert, a clerk, son of William de Crachesford, who was troubled in his wits, and mad, being brought to the tomb of the blessed martyr by a number of people. After spending the night there with his friends quietly enough, at dawn he was overcome with sleep and, waking about the third hour, felt that his madness and the pain in his limbs were alike appeased. His friends were rejoiced and rendered thanks to the holy martyr for his recovery, and the people present also exulted at so great and sudden a miracle, for they saw him go away sane, who had come mad.
Book VII.vi
Of a woman twice cured of a cancer.

In the same vill of the Bishop’s was a woman whose name I have forgotten, who suffered terribly in her breast. It discharged a great deal, and was afflicted with a cancer. She was long troubled with it, and got no aid from physicians; so, despairing of man’s help, she betook herself to God’s. She took wax, accordingly, softened it at the fire, and in the name of the holy martyr William applied it to her breast, and let it remain there for some time, praying and making vows with tears to the aforesaid martyr. Wonderful to say, the pain abated at once, and the creeping disease ceased to irritate her, while the discharge also was stayed. But as from day to day she put off presenting the wax I have mentioned to St. William at Norwich in accordance with her vow, the disease again attacked her breast more violently than before. Hence I conjecture that the blessed martyr was minded that her sin in breaking her vow should be expiated by severe punishment, and that she should be reminded to pay her vow by the trouble of a second attack of her disease. She, then, recognising her fault, took the wax and once more applied it to her breast, and in a short while recovered her lost health. She was more careful for the future, and made haste to go to Norwich, where she offered the wax at the tomb of the holy martyr, paid her vow and returned home in joy.

Book VII.xiv
Of a maid cured of gout.

There was at Norwich a maid eight years old called Agnes, whose father was Bondo, surnamed Hoc, her mother’s name being Gunnilda. From her birth she had suffered severely from gout in the hands and feet, being unable to raise herself or even to turn from one side to the other without assistance. To make matters worse, the sinews in her neck were contracted and her left cheek adhered so firmly to her left shoulder that you saw the one imbedded in the other, and the neck could not be bent in any direction whatever without bending the shoulder. All these afflictions therefore she suffered: walk she could not with her gouty feet, nor touch anything with her contracted hands, while the adherence of her head to the shoulder deprived her of the wonted power of seeing, standing, turning, nay, eating: for when she had to take food, it was cut up on the ground or on a trencher and she lay down and fed like a beast, able only to eat what her tongue or teeth caught hold of. In this absolutely helpless state she was turned, raised, and moved about by others’ help. This poor creature was brought in her mother’s arms to the tomb of the holy martyr William at the hour of marins the second Sunday in Lent, and, in presence of the crowds who assembled in greater numbers than usual on that day, by the intercession of the merits of the saint, immediately obtained relief and healing. Hence we ought to consider how great and how merciful is the power of the saints, since it can immediately upon their arrival send back whole those who are destitute of all strength.
Endnotes

Testimony from the Canonization Proceedings of Charles of Blois\(^1\) (1371)

*Contributed by Leigh Ann Craig*

### Introduction

Charles of Blois, Duke of Brittany (1319–64), was a descendant of the French royal family via his mother, Margaret of Valois, sister to King Philip IV “The Fair.” Though remembered by associates for his deep Christian devotion, Charles spent the majority of his adult life defending his claim to the duchy of Brittany (with the support of the crown) in the War of the Breton Succession (1341–65). This conflict eventually claimed his life in the Battle of Auray in September of 1364. Charles was buried at the Franciscan monastery in Guingamp, where, by 1366, pilgrims had begun to appear at his tomb seeking miracles. By 1368, a canonization inquest began hearing testimony related to Charles’ life and deeds, and to the claims of miraculous events at his shrine. The following is an excerpt from the Latin records of that investigation, which were themselves transcribed from the oral, vernacular legal proceedings.

The vast majority of miraculous narratives that appear in medieval European canonization proceedings and miracle collections relate the healing of an illness, injury, or disability. In these excerpts, two different Franciscan friars from Guingamp give their recollections about an anonymous woman’s miraculous recovery from a condition that we would categorize as mental illness. The friars each claim this miracle to have taken place in the summer of 1368, about two years before they gave testimony before the canonization inquest. The woman, they testified, had survived a rape, which distressed her so much that she became *furiosa* (mad) or *demoniaca* (possessed). While the testimony offered by the friars is largely similar, there are narrative differences in the way they describe the woman’s recovery which are worthy of our consideration. In particular, one set of testimony would seem to recount a much more abrupt recovery, while the second offers details of incremental improvement in health status which uses the woman’s reaction to contact with holy water as the measure.

The text is particularly compelling because it offers a glimpse of medieval people—including clerical observers, family members, and a person with a disability herself—as they attempted to come to grips with an invisible disability (i.e., one which does not mark the surface of the body.) The goal of canonization inquests such as the one in which this testimony was preserved was to discern the truth about a miraculous claim. Investigators sought to discount as miracle any recovery of health that could be explained by natural causes. Invisible disabilities—here, a problem of *mens* (mind) or *modum* (manner, bearing, or behavior)—posed a special kind of problem in this context. In the absence of some pre-extant externally verifiable mark upon a body, it was difficult to verify whether the purported recipients of miracles had experienced an impairment at all, much less experienced a miraculous cure. As such, both witnesses were pressed to explain how they knew that the woman was genuinely impaired. Their answers offer us insight into the contemporary social coding of *amentia* (loss of mind), but also into contemporary norms.
about the etiology of amentia and about trauma.

However, it appears, based on this testimony, that the inquest was not the only source of doubt about the anonymous woman’s disability. After her recovery, the woman herself sought written documents to bring to her husband that would offer support of her claims about her former condition. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the woman had arrived at the shrine “without a guide.” Her solitary appearance sets her apart from the majority of the “mad” or “possessed” recipients of miracles, who were typically conducted to shrines—often by force—by the same people who had consigned them to ropes, chains, or other forms of restraint. This woman, however, interpreted and publicly performed her experience of disability without participation from her family or home community. The friars’ letters subsequently provided an authoritative interpretation of her invisible disability that she could use to alleviate doubt from her family.

Bibliography


Witness 120

Father Paganus de Kelen, priest of the order of Friars Minor of the convent of Guingamp, Diocese of Trecor, of the age of fifty-six years or thereabouts...

...Next, asked about other miracles of the Lord Charles, he said that once a certain mad or possessed woman who was bound in iron manacles, just as demoniacs are accustomed to be bound or chained, came to the church of the said Friars Minor of Guingamp in which the body of the said Lord Charles rested; that woman approached the grave of the said Lord Charles, and a certain friar minor of the said convent sprinkled holy water over her, and at once the said iron manacles or chains fell from the hands of that woman, and she, as if stunned, began to say that she had not been able to tolerate holy water for a great span of time; and accordingly it appeared to him, and it appeared to other bystanders, that she began to regain her sanity.

Asked how he knew this,
He said because he saw it and heard it.
Asked in which year, day and month,
He said that he did not remember; it seemed to him, however, that this was in the year of our Lord 1368, after the feast of Pentecost of Our Lord.

Asked from what homeland the said woman was, and what she was called,
He said this, that this woman, as she began thus to recover, said to bystanders that she was from France, and that he did not recall her name.

Asked what words the said woman uttered, when she thus began to recover and was liberated from the chains,
He said that he did not recall, except in accord with the testimony above.

Asked how infirmity befell the said woman, and how the woman had come to the said church,
He said that he had heard it said, and that it was confirmed by that woman after she began to recover her sanity, that she, while married, had been raped by some man of high rank; after which she was so disturbed, and also fearful lest her husband have hate for her because of this thing, that she was made out of her mind and possessed; and that seeing this same woman, some of her neighbors said that she ought to go to Lord Charles and that she would regain her sanity, which she said she did not know how to do, but that it seemed to her that she proceeded day and night by roads, fields and woodlands, and traveled without a guide, until she found her way to the aforesaid church, and she held firmly that she achieved this by the merits of the same Lord Charles.

Asked if he had seen her before this,
He said no. He said, however, that he saw her in the aforesaid church for nine continuous days after the time when she was freed from the bindings or iron manacles; and that the said woman heard Mass in the said church each day, and approached the tomb of the said Lord Charles and kissed it devoutly; and so it seemed to this witness that at the end of the said nine days the said woman was totally healed, such that this could be seen. And then this woman sought testimonial letters from the brothers of the said house to show to her husband, as to how she had been there, and how she had also been healed. Some of the brothers gave this woman the aforesaid letters, which she took, and left that place, and afterwards this witness says he has not seen her.

Asked who was present, when the said woman began to recover her health/sanity,
He said Brother Derianus Parvi of the said convent and many other brothers of the convent, and many laypeople whose names he does not remember.

Asked if the woman was truly out of her mind and mad, or possessed, or pretended to be mad or possessed,
He said that he believed by his oath that the said woman was truly and not falsely possessed or mad. He also believed that she came miraculously to the said place and was healed by the merits of the Lord Charles.

Asked why he believed that she was truly possessed or mad,
He said, because she was thusly tied up, and because of her manner and her deeds, and because she was pale of face, and had her hair loose over her arms, and because of the other things to which he testified above. And because all who beheld her held her to be possessed and mad. And they reported and honored all of the above by public voice and fame in the village of Guingamp, and in neighboring areas in which it was discussed.

**Witness 125**

Father Derianus Parvi, Order of the Friars Minor of the convent of Guingamp in the diocese of Trecor, of the age of fifty-six years or thereabouts...

...Also he said that he saw a certain demented and mad woman; this woman was bound in iron chains, with her hair hanging down around her neck to her shoulders, and she alone, without a guide, inclined herself to come directly to the grave of the said Lord Charles, and stretched out her hands towards the said grave, and as it seemed to that witness, slept for a little while; and roused afterwards, the said woman rose up freed from the said chains; and then one of the said brothers, whose name he did not recall, sprinkled her with holy water, and the said woman said, “holy water does harm to me;” and after a small interval this witness sought from her if at that time it did harm to her? To which the woman responded, “Not so great as before.” Afterwards, holy water was given to her again, and she said it did no harm to her. He said also that the said woman stayed for nine days in the said village of Guingamp, visiting the shrine of the said Lord Charles each day, and by the merits of the said Lord Charles was healed, and cured, and freed from madness and infirmity.

**Asked how he knew that she was mad,**

He said because this woman appeared to be to him by her manner and deeds; and because she was tied up, and all who saw her judged her to be out of her mind.

**Asked how the said woman fell into this infirmity,**

He said that he did not know, except according to what he heard said about her, which is to say that she was raped and violently assaulted by someone of high rank.

**Asked in what year, what month, what day, and who was present when she was thus healed,**

He said that two years ago from the present twenty-sixth of the month of September in the year of our Lord 1371, and of the year, month, and day he does not recall anything else. Brother Paolo Quintini, Brother Alanno Guezonesii, Philippo de Vigou and someone called Colober were present for this, and many others whose names he does not recall.

** Asked about the name of the said mad person,**

He said he did not know her name.

**Asked whether he knew her after this,**

He said no, nor did he see her after this incident, except for the nine days mentioned above.

**Asked for how long the said women was held in the said infirmity,**

He said that he did not know, but he heard from her that it was for about three months.

**Asked in what place she was born,**

He said that according to what he heard her say, she was from the part of France near the diocese or facing the diocese of Le Mans.
Endnotes

2 Furiosa, a general, non-etiological term for loss of mind (comparable to “crazy” in modern English usage) that carries a connotation of active and aggressive behaviors.
3 Demoníaca, literally “devilish” or “demonic.”
4 Sanitatem, a word meaning both soundness of mind (sanity) and soundness of body (health).
5 Turbata fuit, literally translating as “she was stirred up.”
6 Demens, literally “out of one’s mind,” and the root of the English word “demented.”
7 Modum, also meaning “mannerisms” or “bearing.”
8 Malum, also meaning “evil” or “badness,” a word that is nonspecific in connotation and was used across medical, magical, and religious contexts.
On a Miracle of Saint Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1325)

Bernard Gui
Contributed by Leigh Ann Craig

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) was a philosopher, theologian, university professor, and Dominican who is widely considered to be one of the most important representatives of high medieval Scholastic theology. His grave at the Dominican monastery of Fossanova, south of Rome, drew the immediate attention of pilgrims. Indeed, the friars, fearing they would be asked to relinquish the relics of so potentially important a saint, hid his body the day after his death by moving it from a grave near the high altar of their church and reburying it in an adjoining chapel. (They returned it to the original, more honorable location several months later.) Thomas’ formal canonization was approved in 1323, amid many reports of miracles. The miracle below appears in the Life of St. Thomas written by another important figure of the high medieval Dominican order, the French inquisitor and bishop, Bernard Gui (1261–1331). Gui wrote his Life just after the successful canonization of his subject. It seems likely that the events he related here took place within few months after Thomas’ death, as the narrative mentions that the grave was in a different location than the main altar of the church.

This miracle is interesting, from a disability perspective, for its careful navigation of medical and theological concerns, especially as they are presented by a well-educated, scholarly man whose career was greatly concerned with the pursuit of truth in a legal setting. Gui is unusual among the author of these sorts of narratives for his use of learned medical terminology in attempting to describe the girl whose illness was healed. However, his medical observations, while learned, were also uncertain. He refers to three illnesses which appear in the medical compendia of the day: lethargy (a state of semiconsciousness), phrenesy (delirium from fever or inflammation of membranes around the brain), and mania and melancholia (loss of reason from excess humors). Gui suggests that it appeared as though the first of these had developed out of one of the other two conditions. His reference to mania is particularly unusual; while the diagnoses of lethargy and phrenesy, which have concrete external bodily symptoms, appear occasionally in miracle narratives, conditions which might be diagnosed as mania and melancholia are usually instead referred to by a number of more legal or pedestrian terms (such as amens or demens, “out of one’s mind”). Gui also chooses not to declare any of these diagnoses as a singular, pervasive, or internal truth; instead, he uses medical terminology to convey something of the girl’s external “seeming,” and more confidently and colloquially names her condition upon her arrival at the monastery as “half-alive.”

Gui’s diagnostic caution remains continuous as he recounts the actions and conversations that took place at the grave site, and events turn more clearly theological. While the girl’s illness was initially presented as seeming akin to a number of medical diagnoses, she herself eventually explains that it was demonic in origin, claiming that she was “held bound up” by a “black man.” (Demons are frequently represented in hagiographic literature as being black, sometimes with
explicit, racialized references to sub-Saharan African peoples.) The remainder of the miracle figures the unnamed Aquinas of this vision in a role as healer, who first is mentioned defending the girl from the black man, and then passing his hands over the body of the sufferer before declaring her cured. But even here, the nature of the girl’s health crisis is not entirely clear. While the author acknowledges that the girl claimed to have had a vision, he presents those claims not as facts, but as claims made by one person (“she said,” and “a vision was given to the girl”), a dispassionate approach which brings to mind the contemporary debates over discernment of spirit and the possibility of false visions. Further, Gui had already established that she seemed to be ill from phrenesy or mania, etiologies which would suggest that her perceptions might not have been reliable. As such, Gui reports the claim of a vision and also about the outward appearance of both severe sickness and sudden cure, but he never stakes a firm claim about the etiology of the sickness. This caution suggests a strong desire for accurate diagnostic categorization of the girl’s experience, especially coming from an author who was familiar with both learned theology and learned medical diagnoses, and was also writing in a celebratory mode about an illustrious member of his own religious order whose canonization had recently been successful.

Bibliography


In the castle of St. Laurence of the Valley next to the Monastery of Fossanova there lived a certain girl who was struck by some loss of mind; because of this illness, in the time that followed, she was made immobile like a stone, and she was neither able to eat, nor to speak, nor to breathe normally. It seemed as if the infirmity of lethargy had overcome her out of phrenesy or manic passions. As this illness could not be alleviated by medical remedies, her father, hearing the fame of the miracles of Saint Thomas, made a vow and promised her to Saint Thomas, praying that through his merits that she would either be removed from life, or healed by the mercy of God. Therefore he carried the girl half-alive to the monastery, and in the church, by permission, she was carried to the grave of St. Thomas; and he placed her on top of the grave until the monks had returned from the monastery’s altar in the church, to which they had gone so that they might offer thanks. When the father therefore wished to lift his daughter from the tomb out of proper reverence, she said this: “Father, do not touch me, because one great Friar Preacher stands before me, who heals me, and defends me from a certain black man who holds me tied up in this way.” The abbot and monks gathered there, and they prayed that by the merits of Saint Thomas (having heard the prayers of the father), the girl might be freed. Then a vision was also given to the girl in which the aforesaid Friar drew both of his hands from the girl’s head down to her feet, saying to her: “Girl, get up, because you are cured.” At these words the girl got up at once, having been made perfectly healthy.
Endnotes

2 *amentia*, a general term meaning “away from” (ab) one’s “mind,” “understanding,” or “reason” (mens).
3 *letargia*, a learned medical diagnostic category for semi-consciousness or torpor.
4 *phrenesi*, a learned medical diagnostic category for fever delirium, or inflammation of the membrane around the brain caused by excessive hot humor which caused delirium.
5 *maniaca passio*, literally “the disease of mania,” referring to *melancholia et mania*, a learned medical diagnostic term for a loss of reason caused by humoral imbalance.
6 The word used here may also be translated as “evil,” but demons are frequently figured as being black in color.
Introduction

The prose *Life of Cuthbert* was written by Bede around 721, and was based on an earlier anonymous version written between 699 and 705 in Lindisfarne, following the translation of the saint’s body. In it, scholars may find a unique intersection of a variety of attitudes towards impairment and disability common in early medieval England. Through the voices of Cuthbert, the anonymous author, and (overlaying them) Bede, often contradicting perceptions of disability are in dialogue with each other. Several chapters dealing specifically with constructions of disability are brought here, in order to showcase the wealth of interpretations employed by early English writers. Four themes run through Bede’s constructions of impairment and disability in the text: causes of impairment, moral dimensions of it, caregiving, and agency of impaired people.

Cuthbert was likely himself impaired, for most if not all of his life. Suffering from an injury to the knee at a young age, its maleffects seem to have remained with him from that point on. Throughout Bede’s text, there are hints that Cuthbert had a degenerative illness in his leg which caused him pain, flared up periodically, and necessitated his use of a staff for walking. Although the saint’s impairment received very little attention from Bede, its influence is nonetheless evident in Cuthbert’s quoted attitudes, in healing miracles performed by him, and in the way he was remembered.

Several etiologies of impairment are present in the *Life*. First are natural causes, such as weather conditions, defective diet, or pestilence. Classical theories of the four humors and of miasma (the belief that some diseases were caused by “bad air”) as causing disease and impairment were known in early medieval England and were perhaps imported in the mid-seventh century by the Greek Archbishop Theodore and the African Abbot Hadrian who accompanied him, both of whom were learned men. The *Life of Cuthbert* is one example of the transmission of such theories into more popular texts.

Alongside natural etiologies, the Devil was also presented as causing impairment (as in chapter XV)—a view which not only imagined a malignant agent at work, but also transferred impairment into the field of religion, and healing into the hands of religious men (and, to a lesser extent, women). A second perceived cause which had a similar effect was sin. Although not as common as sometimes believed by modern scholars (as has been pointed out by Irina Metzler), sin was nonetheless seen by early English writers, at times, to be the cause of impairment. In his book *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability*, Edward Wheatley puts forward the “religion model” as a more period-appropriate way to understand the role of religion in constructions of disability in the Middle Ages. Comparing the medical model with the authority of the church over the care and cure of impaired people, Wheatley portrays the church as controlling the lives of impaired people through alms-giving and confession, and utilizing their bodies for the benefit (financial and cultural) of the church. As a result, he writes, impaired bod-
ies became “docile bodies” in the Christian community. It was through this model that impairment was most often transformed into disability in the Middle Ages.

The *Life of Cuthbert* is especially interesting on the issue of moral culpability. It both attests to such views’ existence—for example in chapter II, wherein Cuthbert explains his own impairment by saying: “were I not, for my sins, held bound by this infirmity,” or in chapter XXIII, which includes a reference to impaired people being denied cure due to their unworthiness—and at the same time resists it—as in chapter XV, in which Cuthbert explains: “for not only the wicked but the innocent are sometimes permitted by God to be afflicted in body.”

Morals and spirituality and their relation to impairment are relatively common subjects in Bede’s *Life of Cuthbert*, especially in the context of the moral character of impaired people and of purifying pain. The question of the relationship between impairment, sin, and sainthood appears in almost all chapters of the *Life* dealing with impairment, and it is difficult to draw one coherent conclusion. At times we seem to hear the voice of Cuthbert, at others those of his brethren; sometimes popular attitudes are preserved in the text, and sometimes Bede’s own views are presented.

As mentioned, sin could be considered a cause of impairment, but not all impaired people were believed to have sinned. This is articulated by Cuthbert in chapter XV (see above), and can be seen throughout the *Life*, as most people miraculously healed by the saint are said to have been religious or good Christians. Further positing impairment, not only as morally neutral but even beneficial, are stories such as that of Herebert (chapter XXVIII), who in order to join Cuthbert in the rewards of the afterlife on an equal footing had to first undergo a period of impairment—not as punishment for sins, but as a kind of purifying pain, almost martyrdom.

A third issue appearing often in the text is that of caregiving. It is possible to identify a variety of caregivers—parents, servants, spouses, friends and neighbors—and the emphasis is on the community at large as the provider of care and support. In a society which did not have hospitals (or, as some have suggested, had very few), care was provided amongst the community and by the community. This does not appear didactically in the *Life*, but rather as off-handed details, which suggests care by the community was an established norm. The beneficial influences of the integration of impaired people in normative life are evident in the text.

Also evident is the struggle between physicians and miracle workers: often Bede mentions a failed attempt by physicians to heal an impairment, followed by a triumph of the healing power of God and the saints. Even in such cases as in chapter XLV, when the physicians in question were part of the community at Lindisfarne (an evidence to the concentration of medical professionals and knowledge in monasteries), God was the only reliable source of healing. This was doubtless a result of the role of the *Life* in advertising Cuthbert’s tomb as a pilgrimage site, in the ever-growing competition for pilgrims and donations so common in medieval hagiographies.

Finally, a fourth important point arising from the *Life* is that of the agency of people with impairments and their control over the healing process. In some cases, miracle seekers display high levels of agency, including the ability to explain their own condition, to decide on a course of action, and to command others. In other cases, the agency of individuals was curbed, and at times they are completely silent in the narrative. When considering the subject of agency, it is important to remember the conventions of the genre, which often treated all miracle seekers as objects to be acted upon; additionally, Bede’s preoccupation with status and authority could have also influenced his presentation of agency in the narrative.

In order to better understand the complexity of this important issue, a short comparison of one episode from the two prose
versions of the Life of Cuthbert will be illuminating. In the anonymous version, on which Bede had based his own, appears the story of a paralyzed youth brought to Lindisfarne for treatment. When the physicians at the monastery were unable to help him, the youth took matters into his own hands.

When the boy saw himself deserted by human doctors, he said to his servant with lamentations and tears: ‘This powerlessness and mortification first began from my feet and so spread through all my members. So I ask the abbot for the shoes which were on the feet of the holy and incorruptible martyr of God.’ According to his counsel, the servant brought the shoes and he put them on his feet that night and rested.4

This version of events ascribes very high levels of agency to the youth. In contrast, in Bede’s version (chapter XLV below) the level of the youth’s agency is very different.

Being thus given over by all worldly physicians, he had recourse to Him who is in heaven, who, when He is sought out in truth, is kind towards all our iniquities, and heals all our sicknesses. The poor man begged of his attendant to bring him something which had come from the incorruptible body of the holy man; for he believed that by means thereof he might, with the blessing of God, return to health. The attendant, having first consulted the abbot, brought the shoes which the man of God had worn in the tomb, and having stripped the poor man’s feet naked, put them upon him; for it was in his feet that the palsy had first attacked him.

This version eliminates almost all signs of the youth’s control over his condition, his care, and his cure. This is not to say that Bede’s version of the Life stripped people with impairments of their agency completely and always. Rather, it shows how other factors—in this case the youth’s subordination to a monastic hierarchy—could alter the narrative in ways which might distort our view.

To summarize, Bede’s Life of Cuthbert offers a unique window into the complex nexus of perceptions of disability in early medieval England, and which could be found in even only one source. It also allows us a (filtered) view of the lived realities and experiences of people with impairments, and their thoughts and feelings as well as those of their loved ones.

Bibliography


Chapter II

How He Became Lame with a Swelling in His Knee, and Was Cured by an Angel

But because to everyone who hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; that is, to everyone who hath the determination and the love of virtue, shall be given, by Divine Providence, an abundance of these things: since Cuthbert, the child of God, carefully retained in his mind what he had received from the admonition of man, he was thought worthy also of being comforted by the company and conversation of angels. For his knee was seized with a sudden pain, and began to swell into a large tumor; the nerves of his thigh became contracted, and he was obliged to walk lamely, dragging after him his diseased leg, until at length the pain increased, and he was unable to walk at all. One day he had been carried out of doors by the attendants, and was reclining in the open air, when he suddenly saw at a distance a man on horseback approaching, clothed in white garments, and honorable to be looked upon, and the horse, too, on which he sat, was of incomparable beauty. He drew near to Cuthbert, and saluted him mildly, and asked him as in jest, whether he had no civilities to show to such a guest. “Yes,” said the other, “I should be most ready to jump up and offer you all the attention in my power, were I not, for my sins, held bound by this infirmity: for I have long had this painful swelling in my knee, and no physician, with all his care, has yet been able to heal me.” The man, leaping from his horse, began to look earnestly at the diseased knee. Presently he said, “Boil some wheaten flour in milk, and apply the poultice warm to the swelling, and you will be well.” Having said this, he again mounted his horse and departed. Cuthbert did as he was told, and after a few days was well. He at once perceived that it was an angel who had given him the advice, and sent by Him who formerly deigned to send his archangel Raphael to restore the eyesight of Tobit. If anyone think it incredible that an angel should appear on horseback, let him read the history of the Maccabees, in which angels are said to have come on horseback to the assistance of Judas Maccabaeus, and to defend God’s own temple.

Chapter VIII

How Cuthbert Was Recovered from Sickness, and Boisil, on His Death-Bed, Foretold to Him His Future Fortunes

Meanwhile, as everything in this world is frail and fluctuating, like the sea when a storm comes on, the above-named Abbot Eata, with Cuthbert and the other brethren were expelled from their residence, and the monastery given to others. But our worthy champion of Christ did not by reason of his change of place relax his zeal in carrying on the spiritual conflict which he had undertaken; but he attended, as he had ever done, to the precepts and example of the blessed Boisil. About this time, according to his friend Herefrid the priest, who was formerly abbot of the monastery of Lindisfarne, he was seized with a pestilential disease, of which many inhabitants of Britain were at that time sick. The brethren of the monastery passed the whole night in prayer for his life and health; for they thought it essential to them that so pious a man should be present with them in the flesh. They did this without his knowing it; and when they told him of it in the morning, he exclaimed, “Then why am I lying here? I did not think it possible that God should have neglected your prayers: give me my stick and shoes.” Accordingly, he got out of bed, and tried to walk, leaning on his stick; and finding his strength gradually return, he was speedily restored to health: but because the swelling on his thigh, though it died away to all outward appearances, struck into his inwards, he felt a little pain in his inside all his life afterwards; so that, as we find it expressed in the Apostles, “his strength was perfected in weakness.”

When that servant of the Lord, Boisil, saw that Cuthbert was restored, he said, “You see, my brother, how you have recovered from your disease, and I assure you it will give you no further trouble, nor are you likely to die
But, as we have above related how this venerable man prevailed against the false stratagems of the devil, now let us show in what way he displayed his power against his open and undisguised enmity. There was a certain prefect of King Egfrid, Hildemer by name, a man devoted with all his house to good works, and therefore especially beloved by Saint Cuthbert, and often visited by him whenever he was journeying that way. This man’s wife, who was devoted to almsgiving and other fruits of virtue, was suddenly so afflicted by a devil, that she gnashed her teeth, uttered the most pitiable cries, and, throwing about her arms and limbs, caused great terror to all who saw or heard her. Whilst she was lying in this state, and expected to die, her husband mounted his horse, and, coming to the man of God, besought his help, saying, “My wife is ill, and at the point of death: I entreat you to send a priest to visit her before she dies, and minister to her the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; and, also, that when she is dead, she may be buried in this holy place.” He was ashamed to say that she was out of her senses, because the man of God had always seen her in her right mind. Whilst the holy man was going to find out a priest to send to her, he reflected in his mind that it was no ordinary infirmity, but a visitation of the devil; and so, returning to the man who had come to entreat him in his wife’s behalf, he said, “I will not send any one, but I will go myself to visit her.”

Whilst they were going, the man began to cry, and the tears ran down his cheeks, for he was afraid lest Cuthbert, finding her afflicted with a devil, should think that she had been a false servant of the Lord, and that her faith was not real. The man of God consoled him: “Do not weep because I am likely to find your wife otherwise than I could wish; for I know that she is vexed with a devil, though you are afraid to name it: and I know, moreover, that, before we arrive, she will be freed, and come to meet us, and will herself take the reins, as sound in mind as ever, and will invite us in and minister to us as before; for not only the wicked but the innocent are sometimes permitted by God to be afflicted in body, and

Chapter XV
How He Cast Out a Devil from the Prefect’s Wife, Even before His Arrival

But, as we have above related how this venerable man prevailed against the false
are even taken captive in spirit by the devil.” Whilst he thus consoled the man, they approached the house, and the evil spirit fled, not able to meet the coming of the holy man. The woman, freed from her suffering, rose up immediately, as if from sleep, and, meeting the man of God with joy, held the bridle of his horse, and, having entirely recovered her strength, both of mind and body, begged him to dismount and to bestow his blessing upon her house; and ministering sedulously to him, testified openly that, at the first touch of the rein, she had felt herself relieved from all the pain of her former suffering.

Chapter XXIII
How Elfled the Abbess and One of Her Nuns Were Cured

But though our man of God was thus secluded from mankind, yet he did not cease from working miracles and curing those who were sick. For a venerable handmaid of Christ, Elfled by name, who, amid the joys of virginity, devoted her motherly care and piety to several companies of Christ’s handmaids, and added to the luster of her princely birth the brighter excellence of exalted virtue, was inspired with much love towards the holy man of God. About this time, as she afterwards told the reverend Herefrid, presbyter of the church of Lindisfarne, who related it to me, she was afflicted with a severe illness and suffered long, insomuch that she seemed almost at the gates of death. The physicians could do her no good, when, on a sudden, the Divine grace worked within her, and she by degrees was saved from death, though not fully cured. The pain in her inside left her, the strength of her limbs returned, but the power of standing and walking was still denied her; for she could not support herself on her feet, nor move from place to place, save on all fours. Her sorrow was, therefore, great; and she never expected to recover from her weakness, for she had long abandoned all hope from the physicians. One day, as she was indulging her bitter thoughts, she turned her mind to the holy and tranquil life of the reverend father Cuthbert; and expressed a wish that she had in her possession some article that had belonged to him; “for I know, and am confident,” said she, “that I should soon be well.” Not long after this, there came a person who brought with him a linen girdle from Saint Cuthbert: she was overjoyed at the gift, and perceiving that Heaven had revealed to the saint her wish, she put it on, and the next morning found herself able to stand upon her feet. On the third day she was restored to perfect health.

A few days after, one of the virgins of the same monastery was taken ill with a violent pain in the head; and whilst the complaint became so much worse that she thought she should die, the venerable abbess went in to see her. Seeing her sorely afflicted, she brought the girdle of the man of God to her, and bound it round her head. The same day the pain in the head left her, and she laid up the girdle in her chest. The abbess wanted it again a few days after, but it could not be found either in the chest or anywhere else. It was at once perceived that Divine Providence had so ordered it, that the sanctity of the man of God might be established by these two miracles, and all occasion of doubting thereof be removed from the incredulous. For if the girdle had remained, all those who were sick would have gone to it, and whilst some of them would be unworthy of being cured, its efficacy to cure might have been denied, whereas their own unworthiness would have been to blame. Whereof, as I said before, Heaven so dealt forth its benevolence from on high, that when the faith of believers had been strengthened, all matter for detraction was forthwith removed from the malice of the unrighteous.

Chapter XXVIII
How He Foretold His Own Death to Herebert, the Hermit, and by Prayers to God Obtained His Attendance

Not very long afterwards, the same servant of God, Cuthbert, was summoned to the same city of [Carlisle], not only to consecrate
priests, but also to bless the queen herself with his holy conversation. Now there was a venerable priest of the name of Herebert, who had long been united to the man of God, Cuthbert, in the bond of spiritual friendship, and who, leading a solitary life, in an island in the large marsh from which the Derwent rises, used to come to him every year, and receive from him admonitions in the way of eternal life. When this man heard that he was stopping in that city, he came according to his custom, desiring to be kindled up more and more by his wholesome exhortations in aspiring after heavenly things. When these two had drunk deeply of the cup of celestial wisdom, Cuthbert said, among other things, “Remember, brother Herebert, that you ask me now concerning whatever undertaking you may have in hand, and that you speak to me about it now, because, after we shall have separated, we shall see each other no more in this life. I am certain that the time of my death approaches, and the time of leaving my earthly tenement is at hand.” Upon hearing these words, he threw himself at his feet with tears and lamentations, saying, “I beseech you by the Lord not to leave me, but be mindful of your companion, and pray the Almighty Goodness that, as we have served Him together on earth, we may at the same time pass to heaven to see his light. For I have always sought to live according to the command of your mouth; and what I have left undone through ignorance or frailty, I have equally taken care to correct, according to your pleasure.” The bishop yielded to his prayers, and immediately learnt in spirit, that he had obtained that which he had sought from the Lord. “Arise, my brother,” says he, “and do not lament, but rejoice in gladness, for his great mercy has granted us that which we asked of Him.” The event confirmed his promise and the truth of the prophecy; for they never met again, but their souls departed from their bodies at one and the same moment of time, and were joined together in a heavenly vision, and translated at the same time by angels to the heavenly kingdom. But Herebert was first afflicted with a long infirmity, perhaps by a dispensation of holy piety, in order that the continual pain of a long sickness might supply what merit he had less than the blessed Cuthbert, so that being by grace made equal to his intercessor, he might be rendered worthy to depart this life at one and the same hour with him, and to be received into one and the same seat of everlasting happiness.

Chapter XXIX
How, Through His Priest, He Cured the Wife of an Earl with Holy Water

When he was one day going round his parish to give spiritual admonitions throughout the rural districts, cottages, and villages, and to lay his hand on all the lately baptized, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, he came to the mansion of a certain earl, whose wife lay sick almost unto death. The earl himself, meeting him as he entered, thanked the Lord on his knees for his arrival, and received him with kind hospitality. When his feet and hands were washed, according to the custom of hospitality, and the bishop had sat down, the man began to tell him about the sickness of his wife, who was despaired of, and besought him to consecrate some water to sprinkle on her. “I believe,” said he, “that by-and-by she will either, by the grace of God, be restored to health, or else she will pass by death to life eternal, and soon receive a recompense for so heavy and long-continued trouble.” The man of God assented to his prayers, and having blessed the water which was brought to him, gave it to the priest, directing him to sprinkle it on the patient. He entered the bedroom in which she lay, as if dead, and sprinkled her and the bed, and poured some of the healing draught down her throat. Oh, wonderful and extraordinary circumstance! the holy water had scarcely touched the patient, who was wholly ignorant what was brought her, than she was so restored to health, both of mind and body, that being come to her senses she blessed the Lord and returned thanks to Him, that He thought her worthy to be visited and healed
by such exalted guests. She got up without delay, and being now well, ministered to those who had been instrumental in curing her; and it was extraordinary to see her, who had escaped the bitter cup of death by the bishop’s benediction, now the first of the nobleman’s family to offer him refreshment, following the example of the mother-in-law of the Apostle Peter, who, being cured of a fever by the Lord, arose forthwith and ministered unto Him and his disciples.

Chapter XXX
How He Cured a Girl of a Pain in the Head and Side by Anointing Her with Oil

But the venerable Bishop Cuthbert effected a cure similar to this, of which there were many eye-witnesses, one of whom is the religious priest, Ethelwald, at that time attendant on the man of God, but now abbot of the monastery of Melrose. Whilst, according to his custom, he was travelling and teaching all, he arrived at a certain village, in which were a few holy women, who had fled from their monastery through fear of the barbarian army, and had there obtained a habitation from the man of God a short time before: one of whom, a sister of the above-mentioned priest, Ethelwald, was confined with a most grievous sickness; for during a whole year she had been troubled with an intolerable pain in the head and side, which the physicians utterly despaired of curing. But when they told the man of God about her, and entreated him to cure her, he in pity anointed the wretched woman with holy oil. From that time she began to get better, and was well in a few days.

Chapter XXXI
How He Cured an Infirm Man by Consecrated Bread

I must not here pass over a miracle which was told to me as having been worked by his holiness, though he himself was absent. We mentioned a prefect of the name of Hildemær, whose wife the man of God freed from an unclean spirit. The same prefect afterwards fell seriously ill, so that his malady daily increased, and he was confined to his bed, apparently near death. Many of his friends were present who had come to console him in his sickness. Whilst they were sitting by the bedside, one of them mentioned that he had with him some consecrated bread which Cuthbert had given him: “And I think,” said he, “that if we were in faith to give him this to eat, nothing doubting, he would be well.” All present were laymen, but at the same time very pious men, and turning to one another, they professed their faith, without doubting, that by partaking of that same consecrated bread he might be well. They therefore filled a cup with water, and putting a little of the bread into it, gave it him to drink: the water thus hallowed by the bread no sooner touched his stomach than all his inward pain left him, and the wasting of his outward members ceased. A perfect recovery speedily ensued, and both himself and the others who saw or heard the rapidity of this wonderful cure were thereby stirred up to praise the holiness of Christ’s servant, and to admire the virtues of his true faith.

Chapter XXXII
How, by Prayer, He Restored to Life a Young Man Whom He Found at the Point of Death on a Journey

As this holy shepherd of Christ’s flock was going round visiting his flocks, he came to a mountainous and wild place, where many people had got together from all the adjoining villages, that he might lay his hands upon them. But among the mountains no fit church or place could be found to receive the bishop and his attendants. They therefore pitched tents for him in the road, and each cut branches from the trees in the neighboring wood to make for himself the best sort of covering that he was able. Two days did the man of God preach to the assembled crowds; and minister the grace of the Holy Spirit by imposition of hands upon those that were regenerate in Christ; when, on a sudden, there appeared some women bearing on a bed a young man, wasted by severe illness,
and having placed him down at the outlet of the wood, sent to the bishop, requesting permission to bring him, that he might receive a blessing from the holy man. When he was brought near, the bishop perceived that his sufferings were great, and ordered all to retire to a distance. He then betook himself to his usual weapon, prayer, and bestowing his blessing, expelled the fever, which all the care and medicines of the physicians had not been able to cure. In short, he rose up the same hour, and having refreshed himself with food, and given thanks to God, walked back to the women who had brought him. And so it came to pass, that whereas they had in sorrow brought the sick man thither, he now returned home with them, safe and well, and all rejoicing, both he and they alike.

Chapter XXXIII
How, at a Time of Sickness, He Restored a Dying Boy in Health to His Mother

At the same time the plague made great ravages in those parts, so that there were scarcely any inhabitants left in villages and places which had been thickly populated, and some towns were wholly deserted. The holy father Cuthbert, therefore, went round his parish, most assiduously ministering the word of God, and comforting those few who were left. But being arrived at a certain village, and having there exhorted all whom he found there, he said to his attendant priest, “Do you think that any one remains who has need that we should visit and converse with him? Or have we now seen all here, and shall we go elsewhere?” The priest looked about, and saw a woman standing afar off, one of whose sons had died but a little time before, and she was now supporting another at the point of death, whilst the tears trickling down her cheek bore witness to her past and present affliction. He pointed her out to the man of God, who immediately went to her, and, blessing the boy, kissed him, and said to his mother, “Do not fear nor be sorrowful; for your child shall be healed and live, and no one else of your household shall die of this pestilence.” To the truth of which prophecy the mother and son, who lived a long time after that, bore witness.

Chapter XXXVII
Of the Temptations which He Underwent in His Sickness, and His Orders concerning His Burial

The solemn day of the nativity of our Lord was scarcely over, when the man of God, Cuthbert, returned to his dwelling on the island. A crowd of monks were standing by as he entered into the ship; and one of them, an old and venerable monk, strong in faith but weak in body, in consequence of a dysentery, said to him, “Tell us, my lord bishop, when we may hope for your return.” To this plain question, he replied as plainly, “When you shall bring my body back here.” When he had passed about two months in the enjoyment of his rest, and had as usual subdued both his body and mind with his accustomed severity, he was suddenly seized with illness, and began to prepare for the joy of everlasting happiness, through pain and temporal affliction. I will describe his death in the words of him who related it to me, namely, his attendant priest Herefrid, a most religious man, who also at that time presided over the monastery of Lindisfarne, in the capacity of abbot.

“He was brought to the point of death,” said he, “after having been weakened by three weeks of continued suffering. For he was taken ill on the fourth day of the week; and again on the fourth day of the week his pains were over, and he departed to the Lord. But when I came to him on the first morning after his illness began—(for I had also arrived at the island with the brethren three days before)—in my desire to obtain his blessing and advice as usual, I gave the customary signal of my coming, and he came to the window, and replied to my salutation with a sigh. ‘My lord bishop,’ said I, ‘what is the matter with you? Has your indisposition come upon you this last night?’ ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘indisposition has come upon me.’ I thought that he was speaking of an old complaint, which vexed him almost every day, and not of a new malady; so,
without making any more inquiries, I said to
him, ‘Give us your blessing, for it is time to
put to sea and return home.’ ‘Do so,’ replied
he; ‘go on board, and return home in safety.
But, when the Lord shall have taken my spir-
it, bury me in this house, near my oratory, to-
wards the south, over against the eastern side
of the holy cross, which I have erected there.
Towards the north side of that same oratory
is a sarcophagus under the turf, which the
venerable Abbot Cudda formerly gave me.
You will place my body therein, wrapping it
in linen, which you will find in it. I would not
wear it whilst I was alive, but for the love of
that highly favored woman, who sent it to me,
the Abbess Verca, I have preserved it to wrap
my corpse in.’ On hearing these words, I re-
plied, ‘I beseech you, father, as you are weak,
and talk of the probability of your dying, to
let some of the brethren remain here to wait
on you.’ ‘Go home now,’ said he ‘but return at
the proper time.’ So I was unable to prevail
upon him, notwithstanding the urgency of
my entreaties; and at last I asked him when
we should return to him. ‘When God so wills
it,’ said he, ‘and when He Himself shall direct
you.’ We did as he commanded us; and hav-
ing assembled the brethren immediately in
the church, I had prayers offered up for him
without intermission; ‘for,’ said I, ‘it seems to
me, from some words which he spoke, that
the day is approaching on which he will de-
part to the Lord.’

“I was anxious about returning to him on
account of his illness, but the weather pre-
vented us for five days; and it was ordered
so by God, as the event showed. For God Al-
mighty, wishing to cleanse his servant from
every stain of earthly weakness, and to show
his adversaries how weak they were against
the strength of his faith, kept him aloof from
men, and put him to the proof by pains of
the flesh, and still more violent encounters
with the ancient enemy. At length there was
a calm, and we went to the island, and found
him away from his cell in the house where we
were accustomed to reside. The brethren who
came with me had some occasion to go back
to the neighboring shore, so that I was left
alone on the island to minister to the holy
father. I warmed some water and washed his
feet, which had an ulcer from a long swelling,
and, from the quantity of blood that came
from it, required to be attended to. I also
warmed some wine which I had brought, and
begged him to taste it; for I saw by his face
that he was worn out with pain and want of
food. When I had finished my service, he sat
down quietly on the couch, and I sat down
by his side.

“Seeing that he kept silence, I said, ‘I see,
my lord bishop, that you have suffered much
from your complaint since we left you, and
I marvel that you were so unwilling for us,
when we departed, to send you some of our
number to wait upon you.’ He replied, ‘It was
done by the providence and the will of God,
that I might be left without any society or aid
of man, and suffer somewhat of affliction. For
when you were gone, my languor began to in-
crease, so that I left my cell and came hither
to meet anyone who might be on his way to
see me, that he might not have the trouble
of going further. Now, from the moment of
my coming until the present time, during a
space of five days and five nights, I have sat
here without moving.’—‘And how have you
supported life, my lord bishop?’ asked I; ‘have
you remained so long without taking food?’
Upon which, turning up the couch on which
he was sitting, he showed me five onions
concealed therein, saying, ‘This has been my
food for five days; for, whenever my mouth
became dry and parched with thirst, I cooled
and refreshed myself by tasting these;’—now
one of the onions appeared to have been a
little gnawed, but certainly not more than
half of it was eaten; ‘and,’ continued he, ‘my
enemies have never persecuted me so much
during my whole stay in the island, as they
have done during these last five days.’ I was
not bold enough to ask what kinds of perse-
cutions he had suffered: I only asked him to
have someone to wait upon him. He consent-
ed, and kept some of us with him; amongst
whom was the priest Bede the elder, who had
always been used to familiar attendance upon him. This man was consequently a most faithful witness of everything which he gave or received, whom Cuthbert wished to keep with him, to remind him if he did not make proper compensation for any presents which he might receive, that before he died he might render to everyone his own. He kept also another of the brethren with him, who had long suffered from a violent diarrhea, and could not be cured by the physicians; but, for his religious merit, and prudent conduct, and grave demeanor, was thought worthy to hear the last words of the man of God, and to witness his departure to the Lord.

“Meanwhile I returned home, and told the brethren that the holy father wished to be buried in his own island; and I added my opinion, that it would be more proper and becoming to obtain his consent for his body to be transported from the island, and buried in the monastery with the usual honors. My words pleased them, and we went to the bishop, and asked him, saying, ‘We have not dared, my lord bishop, to despise your injunction to be buried here, and yet we have thought proper to request of you permission to transport your body over to the monastery, and so have you amongst us.’ To which he replied, ‘It was also my wish to repose here, where I have fought my humble battles for the Lord, where I wish to finish my course, and whence I hope to be lifted up by a righteous Judge to obtain the crown of righteousness. But I think it better for you, also, that I should repose here on account of the fugitives and criminals who may flee to my corpse for refuge; and when they have thus obtained an asylum, inasmuch as I have enjoyed the fame, humble though I am, of being a servant of Christ, you may think it necessary to intercede for such before the secular rulers, and so you may have trouble on my account.’ When, however, we urged him with many entreaties, and asserted that such labor would be agreeable and easy to us, the man of God at length, after some deliberation, spoke thus: ‘Since you wish to overcome my scruples, and to carry my body amongst you, it seems to me to be the best plan to bury it in the inmost parts of the church, that you may be able to visit my tomb yourselves, and to control the visits of all other persons.’ We thanked him on our bended knees for this permission, and for his advice; and returning home, did not cease to pay him frequent visits.

Chapter XXXVIII
How, During His Illness, He Cured One of His Attendants of a Diarrhea

“His malady now began to grow upon him, and we thought that the time of his dissolution was at hand. He bade his attendants carry him to his cell and oratory. It was the third hour of the day. We therefore carried him thither, for he was too feeble to walk himself. When we reached the door, we asked him to let one of us go in with him, to wait upon him; for no one had ever entered therein but himself. He cast his eyes round on all, and, fixing them on the sick brother above mentioned, said, ‘Walstod shall go in with me.’ Now Walstod was the man’s name. He went in accordingly, and stayed till the ninth hour: when he came out, and said to me, ‘The bishop wishes you to go in unto him; but I have a most wonderful thing to tell you: from the moment of my touching the bishop, when I supported him into the oratory, I have been entirely free from my old complaint.’ No doubt this was brought about by the effect of his heavenly piety, that, whereas in his time of health and strength he had healed many, he should now heal this man, when he was himself at the point of death, that so there might be a standing proof how strong the holy man was in spirit, though his body was at the lowest degree of weakness. In this cure he followed the example of the holy and reverend father and bishop, Aurelius Augustine, who, when weighed down by the illness of which he died, and lying on his couch, was entreated by a man to lay his hand on a sick person whom he had brought to him, that so he might be made well. To which Augustine
replied, ‘If I had such power, I should first have practiced it towards myself.’ The sick man answered, ‘I have been commanded to come to you: for someone said to me in a dream, Go to Bishop Augustine, and let him place his hand upon you, and you shall be well.’ On hearing this, Augustine placed his hand upon him, gave him his blessing, and sent him home perfectly recovered.

Chapter XLIV
How a Sick Man Was Cured at His Tomb by Prayer

Lastly, there came from foreign parts a certain priest of the reverend and holy Wiliborcl Clement, bishop of the Fresons, who, whilst he was stopping at the monastery, fell into a severe illness, which lasted so long, that his life was despaired of. Overcome with pain, he seemed unable either to live or die, until, thinking on a happy plan, he said to his attendant, “Lead me, I beg of you, to-day after mass,” (for it was Sunday,) “to the body of the holy man of God, to pray: I hope his intercession may save me from these torments, so that I may either return whole to this life, or die, and go to that which is everlasting.” His attendant did as he had asked him, and with much trouble led him, leaning on a staff, into the church. He there bent his knees at the tomb of the holy father, and, with his head stooping towards the ground, prayed for his recovery; when, suddenly, he felt in all his limbs such an accession of strength from the incorruptible body of the saint, that he rose up from prayer without trouble, and returned to the guests’ chamber without the assistance of the conductor who had led him, or the staff on which he had leaned. A few days afterwards he proceeded in perfect health upon his intended journey.

Chapter XLV
How a Paralytic Was Healed by Means of His Shoes

There was a young man in a monastery not far off, who had lost the use of all his limbs by a weakness which the Greeks call paralysis. His abbot, knowing that there were skillful physicians in the monastery of Lindisfarne, sent him thither with a request that, if possible, he might be healed. The brethren, at the instance of their own abbot and bishop also, attended to him with the utmost care, and used all their skill in medicine, but without effect, for the malady increased daily, insomuch that, save his mouth, he could hardly move a single limb. Being thus given over by all worldly physicians, he had recourse to Him who is in heaven, who, when He is sought out in truth, is kind towards all our iniquities, and heals all our sicknesses. The poor man begged of his attendant to bring him something which had come from the incorruptible body of the holy man; for he believed that by means thereof he might, with the blessing of God, return to health. The attendant, having first consulted the abbot, brought the shoes which the man of God had worn in the tomb, and having stripped the poor man’s feet naked, put them upon him; for it was in his feet that the palsy had first attacked him. This he did at the beginning of the night, when bedtime was drawing near. A deep sleep immediately came over him; and as the stillness of night advanced, the man felt a palpitation in his feet alternately, so that the attendants, who were awake and looking on, perceived that the virtue of the holy man’s relics was beginning to exert its power, and that the desired restoration of health would ascend upwards from the feet. As soon as the monastery bell struck the hour of midnight prayer, the invalid himself was awakened by the sound and sat up. He found his nerves and the joints of his limbs suddenly endowed with inward strength: his pains were gone; and perceiving that he was cured, he arose, and in a standing posture spent the whole time of the midnight or matins song in thanksgiving to God. In the morning he went to the cathedral, and in the sight of all the congratulating brethren he went round all the sacred places, offering up prayers and the sacrifice of praise to his Savior. Thus it came to pass, that, by a most wonderful vicissitude
of things, he, who had been carried thither weak and borne upon a cart, returned home sound in his own strength, and with all his limbs strengthened and confirmed. Wherefore it is profitable to bear in mind that this change was the work of the right hand of the Most High, whose mighty miracles never cease from the beginning of the world to show themselves forth to mankind.

Chapter XLVI

How the Hermit Felgeld Was Cured of Swelling in the Face by Means of the Covering of the Wall of the Man of God's House

Nor do I think I ought to omit the heavenly miracle which the Divine mercy showed by means of the ruins of the holy oratory, in which the venerable father went through his solitary warfare in the service of the Lord. Whether it was effected by the merits of the same blessed father Cuthbert, or his successor Ethelwald, a man equally devoted to the Lord, the Searcher of the heart knows best. There is no reason why it may not be attributed to either of the two, in conjunction with the faith of the most holy father Felgeld; through whom and in whom the miraculous cure, which I mention, was effected. He was the third person who became tenant of the same place and its spiritual warfare, and, at present more than seventy years old, is awaiting the end of this life, in expectation of the heavenly one.

When, therefore, God's servant Cuthbert had been translated to the heavenly kingdom, and Ethelwald had commenced his occupation of the same island and monastery, after many years spent in conversation with the monks, he gradually aspired to the rank of anchoritic perfection. The walls of the aforesaid oratory, being composed of planks somewhat carelessly put together, had become loose and tottering by age, and, as the planks separated from one another, an opening was afforded to the weather. The venerable man, whose aim was rather the splendor of the heavenly than of an earthly mansion, having taken hay, or clay, or whatever he could get, had filled up the crevices, that he might not be disturbed from the earnestness of his prayers by the daily violence of the winds and storms. When Ethelwald entered and saw these contrivances, he begged the brethren who came thither to give him a calf's skin, and fastened it with nails in the corner, where himself and his predecessor used to kneel or stand when they prayed, as a protection against the storm.

Twelve years after, he also ascended to the joys of the heavenly kingdom, and Felgeld became the third inhabitant of the place. It then seemed good to the right reverend Eadfrid, bishop of the church of Lindisfarne, to restore from its foundation the time-worn oratory. This being done, many devout persons begged of Christ's holy servant Felgeld to give them a small portion of the relics of God's servant Cuthbert, or of Ethelwald his successor. He accordingly determined to cut up the above-named calf's skin to pieces, and give a portion to each. But he first experienced its influence in his own person: for his face was much deformed by a swelling and a red patch. The symptoms of this deformity had become manifest long before to the monks, whilst he was dwelling among them. But now that he was living alone, and bestowed less care on his person, whilst he practiced still greater rigidities, and, like a prisoner, rarely enjoyed the sun or air, the malady increased, and his face became one large red swelling. Fearing, therefore, lest he should be obliged to abandon the solitary life and return to the monastery; presuming in his faith, he trusted to heal himself by the aid of those holy men whose house he dwelt in, and whose holy life he sought to imitate. For he steeped a piece of the skin above mentioned in water, and washed his face therewith; whereupon the swelling was immediately healed, and the [scab] disappeared. This I was told, in the first instance, by a religious priest of the monastery of Jarrow, who said that he well knew Felgeld's face to have been in the deformed and diseased state which I have described, and that he saw it and felt it with his hand
through the window after it was cured. Fel-
geld afterwards told me the same thing, con-
firming the report of the priest, and asserting
that his face was ever afterwards free from
the blemish during the many years that he
passed in that place. This he ascribed to the
agency of the Almighty Grace, which both in
this world heals many, and in the world to
come will heal all the maladies of our minds
and bodies, and, satisfying our desires after
good things, crown us forever with its mercy
and compassion, AMEN.
Endnotes


5 Matthew 25:29.

6 Boisil (d. 661) was a monk of Melrose Abbey, and Cuthbert’s teacher and mentor.

7 2 Corinthians 12:9.
The Miracles of King Oswald from *Ecclesiastical History*¹ (late 9th c.²)

*Bede*

*Contributed by Heide Estes*

**Introduction**

The Old English *Ecclesiastical History* contains several passages describing saintly miracles in curing illness or impairment. The miracles of Oswald depict the cures of a horse and a young woman followed by a story of a great fire, in which dust from Oswald’s place of death, stored in the pocket of a cloak, keeps flames from consuming a single pillar of a house destroyed by fire. What is interesting in these narratives of saintly cures, and comes across particularly clearly here, is that the identity or any details of afflicted person or animal are unimportant. The narratives serve to demonstrate the curative powers of the individual saint. The miracles of St. Oswald provided here are not unique in the conflation of sick humans and sick animals; several other saints are demonstrated as miraculous in curing humans and animals alike. The quick succession of miracles in the passage translated below, from horse to woman to house, foregrounds the way in which the sick person serves as a prop in the narrative, indistinguishable from an animal or even an object. Mitchell and Snyder’s formulation of disability as functioning metaphorically is also already visible in the miracle-narrative’s elision of any differences between horse, human, and house-beam.³ The passages narrating saintly miracles suggest that those with illness and/or impairment, whether humans, animals or objects, are interchangeable in their utilitarian purpose to demonstrate the power of saintly intervention.

**Bibliography**


“The Miracles of King Oswald” (Book III, from Chapters 7, 8)

Chapter 7

Oswald the most Christian king of Northumbria ruled the kingdom for nine years, counting the year of the wild faithlessness of the king of the Britons and the hateful turning away from faith in Christ of the English kings, as we said before. When the course of these years was fulfilled, Oswald was killed. A great and heavy battle was advanced by the same heathen king and the heathen people of Mercia, by whom his predecessor Eadwin had also been killed, in the places that is called Maserfield. Oswald had lived thirty-seven winters of fleshly life when he was slain on the fifth day of the month of August.

What the king’s faith and the devotion of his mind to God had been made known after his death through mighty wonders. For in the place where he fought for his land with his people and was slain by the heathens, until this present day, there are famous healings of diseased men and beasts. Then it happened that many men were taking the dirt from where his body fell and putting it in water and giving it to their diseased men and beasts to drink; and they immediately became well. And men so frequently took the dirt, little by little, until a pit had been dug so deep that a man could stand in it up to his neck. It is not a great wonder, that the place of his death gave health to the sick, since in life, he was always quick to give alms to the needy and the infirm, and was their helper in their afflictions. And it was said in days of yore that many great wonders occurred in that place as a result of that dirt, and also from the dirt that had been taken away from that place. But it will suffice us now to hear of two or three.

It happened, not much time after his death, that a man rode by that place. And then suddenly his horse began to grow weary and stand still, and laid his head on the ground, and foam came out of his mouth, and unmeasured pains grew and became bigger, until it fell on the ground. Then the rider alighted and took off the bridle, and waited there for a while, until his horse became better or he had to leave it there, dead. Then for a long time it suffered with heavy pain and it rolled and writhed in various places, until suddenly it came to that place, where the aforementioned king had been killed. Then there was no delay, until that pain was relieved, and it stopped its unhealthy agitation of its body, and as horses usually do after exhaustion began to roll around, and throw itself onto one side and the other, and soon it got up all healthy and sound, and began greedily to eat the grass. When the man saw that, then he understood with clear wisdom that there was something wondrously holy in that place, where his horse had been so quickly healed. And there, he set a token and marked the spot, and leapt on his horse and rode thither where he had previously intended. When he came there to the men whom he had previously sought, he met there a woman who was a niece [granddaughter] of the head of household: she had for a long time been badly afflicted, lying in bed [afflicted] with infirmity. When the household began to sigh before him about the grim sickness of the woman, then he started to tell them about the place where his horse was healed. Now they immediately readied a wagon and put the woman in it and carried her to that place, and set her there. When she had been set in that place, she became weary, and slept for a little while. As soon as she woke up, she perceived that she had been healed from her bodily infirmity, and asked for water, and washed herself and fixed her hair and wrapped herself in clothing, and with the men that had led her there, turned and walked home, healthy and sound.

Chapter 8

Similarly, in that same time another man came of whom men said he was of the Britons. He was traveling past that same place where the aforementioned fight had occurred. Then he saw part of one place that was greener and fairer than the other fields. Then with wise
mind, he began to think and consider, that there could be no other cause for the green-ness and fairness of that place, except that there some man had been killed there, holier than anyone else in the army. He took some of the dirt from that place, wrapped in his clothing, because he thought that same dirt might be medicine and cure to sick men, and afterward he went forth on his way. Then in the evening he came to a house and went inside, where the household was all assembled to feast. He was received by the lord of that house, and they showed him a seat and he sat with them at that feast. He hung his garment with the dirt that he had carried on a pillar of the wall. There was a great fire in the middle of the house. When they had long been eating and drinking, sparks flew up on the roof of the house, and it was interwoven with twigs and covered over with thatch, and it happened that that house was all on fire and began suddenly to burn. When the guests saw that, then they fled out in fear, and there was no help that could be given to the burning house, but it burned completely down, except for the one pillar that the dirt was hanging on: that one stood sound and remained untouched by the fire. Then they wondered greatly at that, and carefully searched what that depended on. Then it was told to them that the dirt hung there, that had been taken from that place where the blood of Oswald the king had been shed. That wonder was celebrated and related far and wide, and many men since then sought that place every day, and began to take that gift of healing for themselves and their friends.
Endnotes

1 The Old English Version of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, edited by Thomas Miller, Early English Text Society O. S. 95, 96 (Trübner, 1890). Translated by Heide Estes.

2 This date represents the date of the Old English translation of the Latin text. The Latin manuscripts date to the eighth century.

Introduction

According to Christian hagiographic tradition, Margaret of Antioch was a young Christian woman living in late third- or early fourth-century Antioch (near modern-day Antakya in Turkey). In accounts of her martyrdom, Margaret is determined to protect her chastity from the pagan prefect who wishes to marry her and is therefore tortured, imprisoned, and eventually killed. While this is a common narrative structure for hagiography about virgin martyrs, Margaret’s legend is unusual in two ways. First, while imprisoned, Margaret defeats not just a devil but also a dragon; in many versions, including this one, she is swallowed by the dragon and bursts out of its belly when she makes the sign of the cross. Second, before ultimately being beheaded, Margaret prays to secure privileges and comforts for those who would venerate her, including that wherever there is kept a copy of her saint’s life, “Let there not be born a child that is blind, nor halt [with a mobility impairment], nor dumb, nor deaf, nor vexed by an unclean spirit.” Margaret’s narrative thus brings virginity and childbirth into dialogue with monstrosity and disability. Because of this, Margaret is still to this day considered by many Catholics a patron saint of childbirth, though she was removed from the Roman Catholic Church’s calendar of saints’ feast days in 1969, due to an absence of evidence for her historical existence. Legends of St. Margaret survive from as early as the eighth century. The Old English version of the Life of St. Margaret translated here draws upon Latin sources, and was most likely composed at Canterbury in southern England in the middle of the eleventh century.

Margaret’s prayer before her execution that invoking her name or the book of her martyrdom might prevent children from being born with various disabilities draws upon a moralization of disability that is evident throughout the narrative. Repeatedly, the idols said to be worshipped by pagans such as Margaret’s father Theodosius or the prefect Olibrius are described as “dumb and deaf.” The Old English uses medieval forebears of the modern words: *dumbe* and *deafe*. In religious terms, these labels frame the false gods of pagans as neither able to hear the prayers of their followers, nor able to make any reply. They are thus cast not just as blasphemous, but also as disabled.

The association between sin and disability, and conversely between salvation and health, is embedded in the vocabulary of Christian texts such as this. The trope of Christ the Physician (*Christus medicus*) highlights Christ’s biblical miracles of physical healing as parallels for his metaphorical healing of the soul through salvation. In Germanic languages, this evolved into epithets such as *Hælend*, which in Old English means “Healer,” but is typically translated in its metaphorical usage as “Savior.” In contrast to Latin *medicus*, OE *Hælend* contains within it the word for health or wholeness: *hælu*. Its opposite, *unhælu* or “unwholeness,” served as a widespread descriptor of a variety of impairments in early medieval England, including physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments, violent injuries, chronic illness, and bodily forms considered monstrous, such as that of Grendel in *Beowulf*. In order to emphasize the connection between Christ and
healing in this text, this translation retains the OE Hælend, encompassing both the physical implications of “Healer” and the spiritual implications of “Savior.”

The correlation between healing and salvation is crucial context for Margaret’s prayer that the veneration of her cult as a saint might prevent children from being born with impairments, as well as the divine response that those who already have impairments will be healed by touching her bodily remains. The text distinguishes between the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the body, but nonetheless parallels them as desirable outcomes in a Christian moral framework; as is often the case in medieval Christian texts, people with disabilities are expected to want to be healed. If any affirming construction of disability is to be found in this model, it is in the collection of a wide range of disabilities under the realm of those that might be healed, including blindness, mobility impairment, deafness, being non-verbal, being “vexed by an unclean spirit” (likely describing many forms of mental illness), those with physical “impairment” (OE untrumnesse, literally, “disorder”), and those “in poor health” (i.e., with chronic illness or disease). No single word in Old English encompasses all of these experiences of the body, but their collection together here suggests that they were recognized as all having something in common. There is a nascent sense of community in this grouping, hinting at the possibility of solidarity across forms of impairment and disability that is difficult to locate elsewhere in the Middle Ages. And that community is not as isolated from the general population as we might expect. The impaired body may be stigmatized, but it is embedded in a stigma associated with all bodies, not just those with disability; as Margaret says: “We are flesh and blood, always sinning and never ceasing.”

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Bruce Wallace, Karen. “Hælu and Unhælu: The Anglo-Saxons’ Concept of the Nor-


After the Crucifixion and the Resurrection and the glorious Ascension of our Lord, Hælend Christ, to God the Father Almighty, a great many martyrs suffered, and through that suffering attained eternal rest with the holy Thecla and Susanna. And a great many also were seduced by the devil’s teaching, that they worshipped dumb and deaf idols, the handiwork of men, which could provide advantages neither to themselves nor to anyone.

Now I, Theotimus, have learned through the grace of God from a certain number of books and eagerly meditated and inquired about the Christian faith, and have never found in books that any man might come to eternal rest, unless he truly believes in the Holy Trinity, that is Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, and that the Son took the form of man and suffered death for all mankind, just as is said here above. He illuminated the blind, gave hearing to the deaf, and awakened the dead to life, and he hears all those who truly believe in him. Thereupon I, Theotimus, eagerly wished to know how the blessed Margaret fought against the devil and overpowered him and then received that eternal crown of glory from God. Hear now all and witness how the blessed Margaret suffered in the name of God and through that toil came to eternal rest with the holy Thecla and Susanna.

The blessed Margaret was Theodosius’ daughter. He was a patriarch of the heathens; he worshipped idols and provided for his daughter. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and through baptism she was renewed. She was given to her foster mother to be raised, near the city of Antioch, and after her own mother had departed from this life, her foster mother loved her much more than she had before. She was greatly loathed by her father and greatly loved by God.

And when she was fifteen years old, she rejoiced to be in her foster mother’s house. She heard of the strife of the martyrs, because at that time the blood of many was poured out onto the earth for our Lord’s name, Hælend Christ, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit and entrusted her virginity to God.

One day, when she was watching her foster mother’s sheep with other women, who were much like her, Olibrius the prefect was traveling from Asia to the city of Antioch. When he saw the blessed Margaret sitting by the road, he immediately desired her and said to his thane: “Go hastily and seize that woman and ask her if she is free, so that I might take her to wife, and if she is a slave, I will render payment for her, and she will be as a concubine to me and there will be riches for her in my house.”

Then the soldiers went and seized her. The blessed Margaret began to call to Christ and said this: “Have mercy on me, Lord, and do not let my soul be undone by dishonorable men, but permit me to rejoice and praise you eternally and never let my soul nor my body become defiled. But send to my right side and to my left angels of peace to open my heart and to respond with boldness to this dishonorable man and these unjust executioners. I am now, Lord, just as cattle in the middle of a field and just as a sparrow in a net and just as a fish on a hook. Help me, my Lord, and hold me and do not forsake me into the hands of dishonorable men.”

The soldiers then came to the prefect and said, “Lord, you cannot take her, because she prays to the God who was executed by the Jews.” Olibrius the prefect commanded them to lead her to him, and said to her: “Of what kin are you? Tell me, are you free or a slave?” The blessed Margaret said to him: “I am free.” The prefect said to her: “Of what faith are you or what is your name?” She answered and said: “In the Lord I am called.” The prefect said to her: “Which god do you worship?” The holy Margaret said to him: “I pray to the

Hælend Healer/Savior  Antioch modern-day Antakya in Turkey
Almighty God and his Son, Hælend Christ, who holds my virginity undefiled to this present day.” The prefect said to her: “Do you call upon that Christ whom my fathers executed?” The holy Margaret said to him: “Your fathers executed Christ and thus they all perished, but he endures in eternity and his reign is forever without end.” The prefect was very angry and commanded the holy Margaret to be enclosed in prison until he thought of how he might destroy her virginity.

The prefect said to her: “If you do not pray to my god, my sword will become acquainted with your body and I will crush all your bones. If you listen to me and believe in my god, before all these people I say to you that I will take you as my wife and for you it will be as well as it is for me.” Margaret said to him: “For this reason I give up my body to torment, that my soul might rest with righteous souls.”

The prefect then commanded her hung up and with small switches violently flogged. The holy Margaret looked up to heaven and said: “In you, Lord, I trust, that I will not be harmed. Watch over me and have mercy on me from dishonorable hands and from the hands of these killers, lest my heart here be terrified. Send me wholeness that I might be illuminated that I might come to gladden me.”

And when she had prayed thus, the killers beat her pure body so that her blood flowed on the earth like water does from the cleanest wellspring. The prefect said to her: “Alas, Margaret, submit to me and it will be well for you above other women.” And all the women who stood there wept bitterly for that blood and said: “Alas, you evil counsellors, go you wives to your houses and you men to your work! God is an ally to me. Therefore I do not wish to hear you, nor will I ever pray to your god, who is dumb and deaf. But believe in my God, who is mighty in power, and he immediately hears those who believe in him.”

And then she said to the prefect: “Alas, you vile dog, my God is an ally to me and, though you have power over my body, Christ protects my soul from your terrible hands.” The holy Margaret looked up to heaven and said: “Give me strength, Spirit of life, that my prayer might travel through heaven and that it might ascend before your sight. And send me your Holy Spirit from heaven, which comes to me as an ally, that I might hold unstained in my virginity and so that I might confront my adversary, which fights with me face-to-face, and so that this will be an exemplar and inspiration forever for all women who believe in you, because your name is blessed in all things.” Then the soldiers went and tortured her body, and the dishonorable prefect wrapped his face with his cloak, so that he might not look at her because of that blood and he said to the woman: “Why do you not obey my word and be merciful to yourself? Behold: your body is tortured at my terrible judgment. Consent to me and pray to my god, lest you be devastated unto death. If you do not listen to me, my sword shall have power over your body. If you do listen to me, before all these people I say to you that I will take you as my wife.” The holy Margaret said to him: “Alas, you are a fool! I thus give up my body to torment, so that my soul will be triumphant in heaven.”

The prefect commanded that she be enclosed in a dark prison, and when she had gone therein, she blessed all her body with the sign of Christ’s cross and began to bless herself with her hands and thus said: “Look upon me and have mercy on me, Lord, because I am alone in here, and my father has forsaken me. Do not forsake me, my Lord, but have mercy on me, because I understand that you are Judge of the living and the dead. Judge now between me and this devil. Behold, I suffer in my torments. Do not be angry with me, my Lord, because you know that
I give up my soul for you. You are blessed in all things."

Then I, Theotimus, was providing her with bread and with water, and I saw through an eye-hole all her strife that she had with that dishonorable devil; and I wrote down all of her prayers.

Out of a corner of that prison there came very terrible dragon of many colors. His hair and his beard seemed golden, and his teeth were like wrought steel, and his eyes shined like precious gems, and out of his nose went great smoke, and his tongue breathed out, and a great foulness he made in that prison. And he reared up and he hissed an immense noise. Then a great light came into that dark prison from the fire that burst from the dragon's mouth. The holy woman became very afraid and bent her knees to the ground and extended her hands in prayer and said thus: "God Almighty, quench the strength of this great dragon and have mercy on me in my need and hardship and never let me perish, but shield me against this wild beast."

And when she prayed thus to Christ, the dragon set his mouth over the holy woman's head and swallowed her. But when the holy Margaret made the sign of Christ's cross inside the dragon's belly, it tore him in two, and the holy woman went out from the dragon's belly unharmed. And at the same time she saw on her left side a devil sitting like a dark man, his hands bound upon his knees. And when she saw him, she prayed to Christ and said thus: "I praise and glorify you, resurrected Christ the King. You are the support of faith and the source of all wisdom and the foundation of all strength. Now I see my faith flourishing and my soul illumined and this dragon fallen in mortal defeat. I thank you, holy and resurrected God. You are Hælend of all healers."

May your name be blessed in all things."

And when she had said this, there shone a very great light in that dark room and the cross of Christ was seen from earth up to heaven, and a white dove perched on that cross, and it spoke and said: "Speak to me, Margaret, you who through virginity have yearned for the eternal kingdom, which is therefore granted for you along with Abraham and with Isaac and Jacob." Blessed are you that overpowered the fiend." The holy Margaret then said: "You are glorious, Christ, you alone who make many wonders. I glorify and praise you, because you are holy and great in all things, who do desire to reveal to your handmaid that you alone are the sole hope of all who believe in you."

The dove then spoke and said: "Margaret, ask him who you have under your foot about his deeds so that he will reveal all his work, and when you have overpowered him, you will come to me." The holy Margaret then said to that devil: "What is your name, you unclean spirit?" The devil said to her: "You servant of Christ, lift your foot from my neck, so that I might rest my bones a little and I will tell you all of my deeds." The holy woman then lifted her foot from his neck. And the devil then said: "I have seized many honest men and I fought against them and they could not overpower me. But you thrust out my eye and crushed all my bones and killed my brother. Now I see Christ dwells in you and you perform all work in righteousness. I blinded them to faith and I overthrew them from the heavenly happiness, and
when they were asleep, I came over them and when I might not take them from their bed, I caused them to sin in their sleep. And now by a serving woman I am overpowered. What shall I do now, when all my weapons are broken? And it troubles me most of all that your father and your mother were mine."

The holy woman said to him: “Tell me now your kind and from whence you come.” The devil said to her: “Tell me, Margaret, from whence is your life and your body and from whence is your soul and your faith, or else how has Christ been dwelling in you? Tell me this, then I will tell you all of my deeds.”

The holy woman answered him and said: “It is not fitting for me that I say anything to you, because you are not worthy of hearing the sound of my voice. The commands of God I desire to hear and proclaim. And you, devil, be silent now, because I will not listen to a word out of your mouth.” And immediately the earth grimly swallowed up that bloodthirsty devil.

Then the next day, the prefect commanded that the holy woman be led to him, and when she was going out, she blessed all her body with the sign of Christ’s cross. The prefect said to her: “Alas, Margaret, submit to me and pray to my god.” The holy Margaret said to him: “Truly, it would be more fitting for you to pray to my God.” The prefect then became very angry and commanded that she be hung up and burned with candles and it was done as he commanded. The holy Margaret then called out and said: “I will never pray to your god, who is dumb and deaf. Nor may you overpower a pure woman. Christ himself has blessed my body, and to my soul he will deliver a crown of glory.”

The dishonorable prefect commanded there to be brought a great vat made of lead and commanded it be filled with water and made very hot and commanded that holy woman to be bound by the feet and hands and put therein. The executioners did as they were commanded. The blessed Margaret looked to heaven and said: “Lord, God Almighty, you who dwell in heaven, grant me that this water might be health to me and a bath of illumination and baptism, that it might cleanse me for the eternal life and strip from me all my sins and heal me in your glory, because you are blessed in all things.”

And when this prayer was fulfilled, then there came a great earthquake, and at that same time a dove came from heaven bearing a crown in its mouth and immediately the holy woman’s feet and hands were released and she went up from that water, praising and glorifying God, and she said thus: “Glory I say to you, Lord God, Hælend Christ, because you have enlightened and glorified me and you have been merciful to me, your servant. You are blessed in all things.” And when she said “Amen,” a voice came from heaven saying: “Come, Margaret, to heaven. You are blessed, you who have yearned for virginity. For this you are blessed in eternity.” And at that moment, fifteen thousand people among the populace believed, not counting women and children.

Olibrius the prefect commanded the death of all who believed in Christ, and they were killed in the field of Lim, outside the city of Armenia. And after that he commanded the killing of the blessed Margaret and that she be slain with a sword. The soldiers then led her outside the city walls and then one of them said (who was called by the name Malchus): “Extend your neck now and yield to my sword and have mercy on me, because I see here Christ standing among his angels with you.” Margaret then said: “I bid you, brother, if you see Christ here, honor me until I pray to him and entrust my spirit to him.” The soldier said to her: “Pray however you wish.”

The blessed Margaret then began praying and thus said: “God, you who made heaven by hand and who measure the earth in your grasp, hear my prayer that any person who writes of my suffering or hears it read, at that time let their sins be blotted out; or if anyone puts a light in my church from their labor, let whatever guilt for which they ask forgiveness not be tallied among their sins. I
ask you, Lord, that if any person might meet your terrible judgment and they might recall my name and yours, deliver them, Lord, out of torment. Furthermore I ask you, Lord, that anyone who makes a book of my martyrdom or has one in their house have all their sins remitted, because we are flesh and blood, always sinning and never ceasing. And furthermore I ask you, Lord, that one who builds a church in my name and there writes my martyrdom or purchases it through their labor, send to them, Lord, the Holy Spirit. And where there is the book of my martyrdom, let there not be born a child that is blind, nor halt, nor dumb, nor deaf, nor vexed by an unclean spirit, but let peace and love and truth be there. And any who prays there for the forgiveness of their sins, respond, Lord, to their prayer.

Then a voice came from heaven accompanied by thunder, and a dove came bearing a cross and said: “Arise, Margaret, blessed was the womb that bore you, because you have been mindful of all things in your prayer. Through the strength of angels I promise you that it will be as you ask, it will all be heard before the sight of God, and everything you were mindful of, that God grants you. God will set on your church three hundred angels for the purpose of receiving each of those people’s prayers, those who call in your name to the Lord that their sins be blotted out. Now furthermore, I proclaim to you that angels will come to you and take your head and lead it into paradise; and your body will be venerated among mankind, that whosoever touches your relics, at that time will be healed from any impairment that he has. And where your relics are or the book of your martyrdom, neither evil nor unclean spirit will draw near there. But there will be peace and love and truth and joy and gladness. And those who invoke your name with all their heart and the shedding of tears, they will be delivered from all their sins. Blessed you are and those who trust in you and in the place where you are going. Come immediately to the place that is prepared for you and sit on the right side of the blessed Thecla and Susanna. Blessed are you who maintained your virginity. Come now, lamb of God, I await you.”

The holy Margaret looked at those who circled around her and said: “I ask on your behalf in the name of our Lord, Hælend Christ, that he forgive you of your sins and bring you to empowerment in the kingdom of heaven. I thank him who glorifies and honors me in the name of righteousness. I praise him and bless him who rules in all things.”

And after that prayer she raised herself up and said to that soldier: “Brother, take now your sword and slay me, because I will now overcome this earth.” He said: “I do not deem that just, nor will I kill a woman of holy God. God was speaking to you in front of me. I do not dare to do this.” The holy Margaret said to him: “If you do not do this, you will not have your part of paradise with me.” The soldier then with apprehension took his sword and struck off her head and turned and said: “Lord, do not count this as a sin for me,” and impaled himself with his sword and fell on the blessed woman’s right side. Thereafter a thousand angels came above the holy Margaret’s body and blessed him.

Then twelve angels came and took her head to their Father, and they sang and said: “You are holy, you are holy, you are holy, Lord God, Glory-king of hosts, the heavens and earth are filled with your glory.” And thus singing, they placed it in paradise. And all those who were in poor health, halt and blind, dumb and deaf, if they would touch the holy woman’s body, they were entirely healed. And the voice of angels was heard over her body, saying thus: “Blessed are you and those who believe through you, because you dwell in rest

halt having an impairment that affects the ability to walk
until the end with holy women. And be not sorrowful for your holy body, because it is granted on earth that whichever person thus touches your relics or your bones, they at that time will have their sins blotted out and their name written in the Book of Life.°°°

I, Theotimus, took the relics of that holy woman and I set them in a new shrine which I myself had previously made of stone and perfumed with sweet herbs, and I protected her in a certain good woman’s house. Her name was Sincletica. I, Theotimus, had ministered to her with bread and with water, and I saw all her strife that she had against those dishonorable devils, and I wrote down her prayer and sent it to all Christian people. And the holy Margaret fulfilled her martyrdom in the month of July, on the third and twentieth day. All that hear this be happy in heart, and those who pray in Lord Christ and believe in him, and think on the holy Margaret that she with her prayers might entrust us to the sight of Helend Christ. To him may there be glory and love and honor and majesty and power and greatness in the world of all worlds, truly eternal without any end. Amen.
Endnotes

1 The text below was compiled and translated by Leah Pope Parker, from the manuscript, London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii, in consultation with the Old English text available in *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, ed. and trans. Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 112–48. Cotton Tiberius A.iii is available online at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Tiberius_A_III. Glosses and endnotes are also by Leah Pope Parker.

2 The “Healer” epithet is also present in other Germanic languages; for example, a ninth-century account of the life of Christ in Old Saxon is known as the *Heliand*.


4 Thecla and Susanna were Christian saints who in the Middle Ages were believed to have lived in the first and third centuries, respectively. Both women were ardent defenders of their virginity: Susanna became a martyr for refusing to marry a pagan, while Thecla engaged in combat and performed miracles to protect her virginity from repeated threats.

5 OE *dumbe* and *deafe*. In translating terms for impairments from the Old English, I use Present-Day English cognates where possible. Many of these terms carry stigma today—such as the more frequent use of “dumb” to mean “of low intelligence,” rather than “non-verbal”—which is not necessarily the same stigma they may have borne in the early Middle Ages. In retaining modern forms of the Old English words, even when the meaning has shifted, I aim to highlight the moral stigma associated with the language of disability in the Old English text and invite discussion of the etymological backgrounds of present uses of the language of disability.

6 E.g., John 9.

7 E.g., Mark 7:32–37.


9 The manuscript omits any name for Margaret here, perhaps in error, but it may also be a play on the sense of “being called” to the faith in contrast to “being called” a name.

10 OE *hælo*, meaning both physical health and spiritual wholeness; cf. *Hælend*, meaning both “Healer” and “Savior.”

11 OE *onlehte*, a form of the same word used earlier to describe Christ’s giving sight to the blind.

12 OE *adiligian*, which can also mean “destroy” or “obliterate,” potentially puns here on the similar OE word *adlian*, “to ail” or “to be sick.”

13 OE *weorulde* literally means “world,” but could refer to the temporal world, all of existence, or the eternal world of the Christian afterlife. In all instances, I translate as “all things” in order to encompass this ambiguity.

14 OE *swilcne anne sweartne man.* This could be a reference to skin color, but could also be a metaphorical reference to the devil’s moral “darkness,” especially given that the binding of the devil’s hands evokes the criminal punishment of fettering hands and feet in early medieval England. Either or both interpretations are possible because “dark” skin tones were both known about and present in early medieval England, as was a metaphorical association between literal darkness and moral iniquity in the Old English language.


16 OE *Du cært cæfæ ttæle Hælend.*

17 The stories of Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac’s son Jacob are recounted in the Old Testament; see Genesis 11–35.

18 OE *adumbe*, the imperative form of *adumbian* “become unable to speak.”

19 OE *lihtnesse*, related to *onlehte*; see note 11.
While in literal terms, to be “vexed by an unclean spirit” evokes demonic possession, descriptions of possession and exorcism in other texts in Old English (and other medieval languages) suggest that this was not an uncommon interpretation of some symptoms of mental illness. For example, Bede’s *Prose Life of St Cuthbert* recounts the saint casting a devil from a woman who was afflicted such that she thrashed, wept, and cried out.

OE *innœh*, meaning “inner parts,” “womb,” or “belly”; this same word is used for the belly of the dragon from which Margaret burst.

OE *untrumnesse*, literally, “disorder,” and frequently used in OE saints’ lives to describe individuals who seek healing from a saint.
Introduction

St. Mary (or Marie) of Oegines, a Beguine, was born in 1177 in Nivelles, which is now Belgium. Although born into wealth, she preferred the pious life, and, even after marriage, she lived a celibate life. Following a life of asceticism and active charity, she died in 1213. Her Life was written by James of Vitry around 1215. She was later beatified, and her feast day is June 23rd.

In her Life, St. Mary of Oegines is described as self-harming, especially through fasts to the point of destroying her body, cutting, and suffering of excessive weeping and mood shifts. These actions all seem to indicate mental disability and illness—indeed, a layering of mental illnesses—experiences described certainly in graphic, violent terms but also balanced against their benefits.

Mary herself perceived her conditions as a positive and a spiritual benefit. She declares in her own words, “Whan I am sicke, thanne am I stronge and mighty [When I am sick, then am I strong and mighty]” (149, l. 34). Her relationship with God is defined according to her illness: “oure lorde hadde proved his chosen childe with this infirmyte [our Lorde had proved his chosen child with this infirmity]” (149, l. 35). We also read:

And whanne she prayed specially for any-body, as with a wonderful experience oure lorde shewyd to hir 7 answerid hire spir-ite. Soothly, she perceyued othere-while by elevacyone of hir spirite or depressyone whether she were herde or noon. (141, ll. 44–45; 142, ll. 1–2)

For Mary, it is through “elevacyone of hir spirite or depressyone” that she determines the success of her communication with God. The word used here is “depressyone,” different than the “wod [mad]” used in many other hagiographies—for instance, in St. Julian, but also in the South English Legendary Lives of St. Frideswide, in John Mirk’s sermon on Saint Katherine, and in the Stanzaic Life of Margaret, among others. “Wod” as a catch-all for mental illness is quite common in Middle English hagiography. The deliberate use of “depressyone” in St. Mary is perhaps a more definitive and specific indication of a shift in mental state. Interestingly enough, the Middle English Dictionary only references the Life of Mary of Oegines in the use of this word in this fashion as a “lowering of spirits, dejection.” The Oxford English Dictionary cites “depression” in terms of “the condition of being depressed in spirits; dejection” as first being used in 1665 by E. Phillips in Baker’s Chronicle Kings of England.

Unlike other saints, St. Mary is unique in the variety of mental illness indicators that she exhibits. For instance, Mary uses food to define her relationship with God: “For whether she eet or fasted, she didde alle to the worshyp of god [For whether she eat or fasted, she did all to the worship of God]” (140, ll. 35–36). While she truly believes that
fasting will bring her closer to God, this could be considered anorexia and/or a sign of depression. While it was common in the Middle Ages for Christians to fast before receiving communion, Mary takes this further as she decides to fast after seeing an old enemy who says to her: “lo thou gloten, thou fillit the overe-mykelle [Look, thou glutton, thou fill thee over much]” (140, ll. 28–29). She proceeds to fast because “she hadde disease often-tyme in etynge [she had disease often time in eating]” (140, l. 29). She only eats bread and drinks water. Sometimes the bread is so dry and hard that it cuts her throat while she eats. Other times her fasting includes only consuming communion:

And certaynly, oure lorde rewardid hir bodily delites insoule, that she hadde forsaken for the love of Criste, as hit is writen: ‘Man lyueth not in brede allon’. Othere-while thburgh conforte of this mete she fastid, neith etynge ne drynkynge eyghte dayes, sumtyme ellevne. (141, ll. 3–7)

[And certainly, our Lord rewarded her bodily delights in soul, that she had forsaken for the love of Christ, as it is written: “Man lives not on bread alone.” Meanwhile through comfort of this meat she fasted, neither eating nor drinking for eight days, sometimes eleven.]

Moreover, Mary is filled with the spirit of Christ. When receiving communion and while at Mass, Mary has a sweet sensation in her mouth. However, if the host is unconsecrated, Mary vomits and cleanses her mouth. It is possible that this is another sign of her eating disorder, not wanting to consume anything and purging when doing so.

Sometimes Mary also fasts to help others; she once fasts for forty days to drive a demon out of a nun. Yet, often times, Mary fasts because she feels guilty for eating. Guilt is common when it comes to anorexia. Mary’s guilt stems from not suffering like Christ, and her eating is something she can control. By controlling her intake of food, she is able to replicate a diet similar to Christ’s, allowing her to consider herself closer to God:

Ever the more that she made hir body lean with fastynges, the more freer was hir spirite and replete with praigynges; the body with abstynens was febled, 7 the soule more in oure lorde was strengthed. (141. ll. 34–36)

[Ever the more that she made her body lean with fastings, the more free was her spirit and replete with prayers, the body with abstinence was feeble, and the soul more in our Lord was strengthened.]

By weakening her body through fasting, Mary finds spiritual strength.

Rudolph M. Bell describes anorexia as a disease in which individuals voluntarily starve themselves, often risking their lives. Mary fits this definition, and in this particular case her anorexia is deemed holy. Mary sees the Devil, who claims that she did not have faith in God. When this happens, she becomes depressed, believing that this devilry might not be cast out by fasting or prayer. However, she does fast anyway, for forty days. When she foresees her death, she stops eating, ultimately starving herself to death:

For soth, whan hir holy body shulde be washen in her oby, she was founden so smalle and lene thburgh infirmite 7 fastynges, that the rigge-bone of hir bak was clungen to hir wombe, and as undir a thynne lynnen clothe the bones of hir bak semyd undir ththe litil skynne of bely. (183, ll. 42–46).

[For truth, when her holy body should be washed in her burial, she was found so small lean through infirmity and fastings that the spine of her back clung to her womb, and as under a thin linen cloth the bones of her back seemed under the little skin of her belly.]
Caroline Walker Bynum in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* agrees with Bell in his definition of anorexia. She also describes anorexia as a form of depression, which is applicable to several medieval women including Mary of Oegines. While Mary truly believes that fasting will bring her closer to God spiritually, it alters her everyday life. She self-harms out of guilt when she eats, which is a sign of depression. In fasting, her diet is affected and her health is compromised. This aversion to food, particularly when it includes fasting for religious reasons, has often been ignored by scholars, which is, as Bynum points out, due to the fact that it occurred often in the lives of saints and medieval women.

Another indicator of mental illness is Mary’s excessive weeping, a characteristic she shares with other figures, including Margery Kempe:

But whereas she enforced her to restrain her weeping, there increased marvelously more and more tears. For when she took heed how great he was that suffered for us so much despite, her sorrow was often renewed, and her soul with new tears was refreshed by a sweet compunction. (138, ll. 39–43)

The priest “leeryd with shame by experiens” what he did not at first treat with “meeknesse and compassyone.”

Another potential indicator of mental illness is Mary’s penchant for cutting. In a dramatic instance of this, Mary, after walking through a town which filled her mind...
with sin, cuts herself: “askynge a knyfe of hir mayden, whan she was with-oute the toune, wolde have kitte the skynne fro hir feet [asking for a knife from her maid, when she was outside the town, would have cut the skin from her feet]” (163, ll. 21–22). After this action, she is described as having, albeit with difficulty, “reste” (163, l. 27), indicating that the act of cutting and the subsequent act of beating her feet together is a relief. It is to a certain extent an individual mimicking of Christ’s wounds, and, if so, then Mary’s cutting is presented as a holy act of cleansing.

The *Life of St. Mary of Oegines* is a useful example of how disability manifests in hagiography as it incorporates so many different indicators and it is clear in its discussion of the benefits of mental disability, particularly to saints. The following excerpts from the *Life* were chosen because they represent extended episodes of Mary’s various disabilities.

**Bibliography**


Book 1, Prologue

Worshipful James, bishop of Accone,° wrote to the bishop of Tholose° a long prologue into the life that here follows: in which prologue he writes concisely many different commendations and marvels of many devout and holy women in the diocese of Leody° and in that country.

And among his writing, as learning and rhetoric asks, he put authorities and figurative speakings that are not easy to turn into English language without more explanation; and if a man would take some of the same prologue, the meaning would not well accord: and therefore I leave all that prologue, except this overly short mention.

Here begins the chapters of the first book the life of Saint Mary of Oegines: the which life Master James, confessor and intimate of the same Mary, afterwards bishop of Accone, and after that Cardinal of the court of Rome, written in Latin, in the year of grace 1215.

Book 1, Chapter V

Of Her Compunction and Tears

Lord, you are full good to them that trust in you, you are true to them that abide by you. Your maiden has despised the sickness of the world and all the worship thereof for your love: truly, you have given her again the hundredfold in this world and ever-lasting life in that which is to come.

Then look we with how great stones of virtues, as a strong and whole vessel of gold honored with every precious stone, you have arrayed and attired your full dear friend, with how great miracles you have worshipped her, that rejected and scorned of lay people. The beginning of her conversion to you, first fruits of her life, was your cross and your passion; your glory she heard and dread, she beheld your works and was afraid.

For why upon a day when she, sanctioned and inspired by you, considered the benefits that you merciful showed in flesh to mankind, she found so much grace of compunction, so great plenty of tears, thrust out in your passion with the pressure of your cross, that her tears copiously rained down on the church pavement showed where she went.

Wherefore a long time after this visitation of her she might not behold an image of the cross, nor speak nor hear other folk speaking of the passion, but if she fell into a swooning for high desire of heart.

And therefore meanwhile, to temper her sorrow and to withhold abundance of tears, she left the human form of Christ and held up her mind to the godhead and majesty, that she might find comfort in his invulnerability.

But whereas she enforced her to restrain her weeping, there increased marvelously more and more tears.

For when she took heed how great he was that suffered for us so much despite, her sorrow was often renewed, and her soul with new tears was refreshed by a sweet compunction.

It was upon a day before Good Friday near Christ’s passion, when she had offered herself to our Lord with much water of tears, sobs and sighings, a priest of the church as with (God’s) wish blaming her, bade that she should pray softly and let be her weeping. She, truly, as she ever was shamefast and in all things simple as a young dove, did her best to obey.

Then she, knowing her weakness, went privately out of the church and hid her in a private place far from all folk: and asked our lord with tears that he would show to the same priest that it is not in man’s power to withhold the strong stream of tears, when a great blast blows and the water flows. Wherefore that priest, while he sang mass that same day, was so overcome with abundance of tears, that his spirit was well-nigh strangled; and the more that he busied him to refrain

James...Accone James of Vitry, author of the Life modern-day Liege in Belgium

bishops of Tholose Fulk of Toulouse  Leody in

modern-day Liege in Belgium
his tears, the more not only he but also the skin and the outer clothes were wet with water of weeping: so he that ill-advised, he that put blame on Christ’s maiden, learned with shame by experience what he should do that he would not first know by meekness and compassion.

For after many sobbings, pronouncing many words inordinately now and now, at last with difficulty he escaped from peril; and he bore witness, that both saw and knew, and we know that his witness is true.

Truly, then a long time after mass had ended, Christ’s maiden, returning again and puzzling as if she had been present told with reproach what fell unto the priest. “Now,” she said, “you have learned by experience that it is not in a man to withhold the forces of the wind when the truth blows.”

And while both day and night continually water left by her eyes, and not only her tears in her cheeks but also, lest they should be perceived in the pavement, she kept them in kerchiefs with which she covered her head; and such linen cloths she used full many, that which she needed often to change, that, as one wet, another might dry.

And then, certainly, when men of compassion with desire after so long fasting, after so many wakings, and after so many weepings asked her whether she felt any sore or aching, as it is want to be of a light head: “These tears,” she said, “are my refreshing, these are my sustenance night and day; that disease not the head, but feed the mind; they torment with no aching, but they lighten the soul with a shining; they void not the brain, but they fill the will of the soul with a fullness, and soften it with an easy anointing, when they are not wrung out with labour and violence, but held out graciously and given of our Lord.”

**Book 1, Chapter VIII**

**Of Fasting**

Christ’s maiden passed and was excellent by so great grace of fasting, that those days in which she was required to have recreation of body, she went to meat as to medicine. She ate only a little in the day, in summer at evening, in winter at the first hour of the night. Wine drank she none; she used no flesh, and fish ate she never, but seldom small fishes; and she was sustained with fruits of trees, herbs, and soup. And long time she ate full black, sharp bread, that dogs with difficulty might eat of; so that for overmuch sharpness and hardness her jowls were flayed within and blood came out of the wounds. But thinking of Christ’s blood made it sweet to her, and with wounds of Christ her wounds were linked, and the sharpness of bread was sweetened with softness of heavenly bread.

Upon a day, while she ate, she saw the old enemy all pained with envy; and when he had no more that he might do, he scorned her and said: “Look, thou glutton, thou fill thee over much.”

Truly, she had disease often time in eating, for much fasting and long; more over her stomach ached and wrought, as loathing meat for coldness and boiling.

But she knew the slights and wiles of the enemy, that gladly would strangle her whom he knew fearful, after she was weak with over much abstinence.

Therefore ever the more that the venomous spirit was tormented with her eating, in so much she enforced her to eat the more and scorned him.

For whether she eat or fasted, she did all to the worship of God.

Truly, she fasted three years together in bread and water, from Christmas until Passover; yet nevertheless she suffered no harm of body nor of her handy work. And when she refreshed her body with a little bread and...
water in her cell within the church at evening or in the night, for the beginning of grace until after grace some of holy angels stood before her at that sober supper, and they come up and down as through a bright window: of whose presence she had so great comfort and so great joy of spirit, that the spiritual sweetness passed all delight of savour.

Also Saint John Evangelist, whom she loved with entire affection, came meanwhile to her board, while she ate; and in his presence her sensible appetite was so voided for devout desire, that she might with difficulty take any meat. And certainly, our Lord rewarded her bodily delights in soul, that she had forsaken for the love of Christ, as it is written: “Man lives not on bread alone.”

Meanwhile through comfort of this meat she fasted, neither eating nor drinking for eight days, sometimes eleven, that is from the Ascension of our Lord until Whitsunday: and wondrously, her head ached no time, nor she left not for that labour of her hands, as strong the last day of her fasting as the first.

And if she would have eaten those days, she might not, unto the sensuality that was as slackened with the spirit, come again to herself; for as long as the soul, abundant so copiously, was so full of spiritual feeding, (it) would not suffer her receive any refreshment of bodily meat.

Also meanwhile she rested easily with our Lord thirty-five days in a sweet and blessed silence, used no bodily meat, and some days she might bring forth no word but this alone: “I will the body of our Lord Jesus Christ”; and when she had received the sacrament, she dwelled with our Lord every day in silence.

Truly, she felt in those days her spirit as departed from the body, so being in the body as if it were hidden in a vessel of clay, and her body as a cloth of clay overlaying and covering her spirit—in this manner she was removed from worldly things and transported above herself in a rapture.

And after five weeks she returned again to herself, opened her mouth and spoke and received bodily food; and they that stood about, marveled. Long time after it happened to her that she might in no manner suffer the savours of flesh or of any cooking or of wine, but when she took wine in the rinsing after the sacrament; and then she might suffer the smell without any grievance.

Also when she went by many towns to a bishop to have the sacrament of confirmation, the savours that she might not suffer before, feared her not a bit.

Book 1, Chapter IX
Of Her Prayer

Ever the more that she made her body lean with fastings, the more free was her spirit and replete with prayers; the body with abstinence was feebled, and the soul more in our Lord was strengthened.

She got of our Lord so great grace and so special of praying, that nights and days never or seldom her spirit was overcome nor released for prayer.

She prayed without stopping, except crying to God with still heart, or else with her mouth expressing the heart’s desire.

So that, while she wrought with her hands and spun, she had a psalter set before her and sweeterly said psalms there to our Lord, with the which as with nails she coupled her heart to God, lest it wandered in vain. And when she prayed specially for anybody, as with a wonderful experience our Lord showed to her and answered her spirit.

Truly, she perceived meanwhile by elation of her spirit or depression whether she were heard or not.

“Man lives not on bread alone” Matthew 4:4
Book 1, Chapter XIII
Of Her Bearing and Composition of Appearance and Other Members of Her Body

Composition of bearing of her outward and further parts showed the inward making of her mind, and the seemliness of her features would not let the joy of her heart be hid.

Truly, in a marvelous measure she tempered the sadness of her heart with gladness of appearance, and somewhat covered the mirth of her mind with the humility of shame of face. And for the apostle says: “Women shall pray with covered head,” the white veil that hid her head, hung before her eyes.

She went meekly with a slow and easy pace, her head bowed and her face looking to the earth. In so much, truly, the grace of her soul shined in her face of the plenty of her heart, that may of those looking at her were spiritually refreshed and stirred to devotion and weeping; and reading in her appearance the unction of the holy ghost as in a book, knew that from her came virtue.

And so it fell on a day that a goodly man, intimate and friend of religious persons, Guy, sometimes chanter of the church Cameracense, turned out of his way to visit her. Then one of his fellows, who which happily until then knew not by experience how much visitation and friendliness of good folk may do to meek minds, as in scorning the good labour of the before said devout man, said: “For God's love, sir chanter, what do you seek? Why do you leave your way? Wherefore will you follow and take flies and flying butterflies with children?” He, truly, that was meek, mild, and suffering, left not his way that he proposed for such words, but devoutly went to Christ’s maiden of whose presence another time he had not a little comfort.

And while he spoke to her, his fellow, as lay manner is, set little by such words and on another side was occupied with many and idle words. Then when he was full and tired of abiding, he came to the chanter to bid him that he should go in haste. And it happened as he looked rudely in the face of Christ’s maiden, suddenly and marvelously he fell into such great weeping of tears that with difficulty he might be brought a long time after from that place and her presence.

Then the chanter, though he would for shame have held counsel, taking heed and knowing the circumstance, was glad and scorned his fellow again and said: “Go we hence, what stops us? Perhaps we will drive and chance butterflies.” And he, after many sighings and tears, with difficulty at last he might be pulled hence, saying: “Forgive me, Father, for I knew not what I said before; now, truly, I have perceived by experience God’s virtue in this woman.”

Also upon a time, when her body might no more bear the fury of spirit, she fell into a great sickness; so much, truly, the meek father disciplined his daughter, that he loved, about what the limbs and members of her body wondrously wrought; for meanwhile her arms were writhing as a garment of sorrow, and she was constrained to beat her breast with her hands.

And when the strength of the sickness a little while slacked and rested, then she thanked our Lord with so much joy, that chastely like a child that he received, as the apostle’s word is only fulfilled in her, saying thus: “When I am sick, then am I strong and mighty.” Then after our Lord had proved his chosen child with this infirmity as gold in a furnace, she, pure and polished at the full, from thence forth got so great strength of God in wakings, fastings, and other labours, that with difficulty strong men might suffer the third part of her labour.

Nevertheless, meanwhile, when any of her friends were grieved with any disease or cast

Cameracense city in northern France
down with any temptation, then she was sick with the sick and was burned with the shame with a huge sorrow: and then sometime she felt somewhat the same sickness in some of her members.

Then anon in a new manner of miracle, she called her priest, that should make a cross with his finger on the sore place of sickness: and the evil fled to another place, as it feared the virtue of the holy cross.

And so again and again he made a cross: and the wavering evil and the fugitive dare no longer abide the burden of the cross, but at last went all away from the body of Christ’s maiden, with a marvelous and unheard manner of worshipping the Crucifix.

Truly, she, looking the eyes of faith into the brazen serpent, and delivered from the bitings of the snake’s evil, thanked God and the holy cross many times.

Book 2, Chapter IV
Of the Spirit of Knowledge

She, truly, hearing that strangers were coming, lest it happened she should slander any man, compelled her spirit with so great sorrow from her joy of contemplation and spiritually embracing of her spouse, that sometimes she vomited pure blood in great quantity as if her bowels had burst; having rather to be tormented with that martyrdom than to disturb or disease her fellow Christians, and principally peace of pilgrims.

... Wherefore it fell on a time that, in order to visit some of her gentle friends, while she dwelled at Oegines, she went to Willambroc, and in her returning as she went through Nivelle, filled to her mind sins and abominations that the people did often in that town. And she conceived and took in her heart so great offense and loathing that she began to cry for sorrow, and, asking for a knife from her maid, when she was outside the town, would have cut the skin from her feet for that she had passed by places in which wretched men provoked her person with so many wrongs and provoked God with so many misdeeds and sins. And since she sorrowed not only in soul, but also, what is more marvelous, felt sore in her feet with which she trod, nevertheless at last with difficult she might have rest, after she had often times beaten her feet together.

Book 2, Chapter XIII
Of her Death

For truth, when her time came near, our Lord showed to his daughter a portion of her heritage among her brethren, and she saw a place in heavenly things ordained to her from our Lord; she saw and was joyful. The height of which place, the greatness of which joy we might in some way suppose if we might hold in the heart the precious stones and virtues of pearls and gems that she wondrously described, and the names of stones that she named through showing of our Lord; but, for it is written: “Eyes have not seen, God, except that you have ordained to them that love you.” We may not comprehend, but we may know how great joy she is worth that served God so devoutly, that loved Christ so fervently, and whom our Lord honored on earth with so many singular privileges. The Thursday before the day of her passing, while we were present and stood by her in the evening, she would not speak to us nor turned her eyes towards us, but she lay unmoving with her eyes ever looking into heaven—for she lay without her cell under the sky—and her appearance began to turn clear as with a brightness.

Then she for joy full long was smiling began to sing with a low voice, I know not what: for then might she not sing high. And when I moved nearer and listened intently, I might
not understand but a little of her song and
that was this: *Quam pulcher rex noster domine.*

That is to say in English: Full fair king,
our Lord. When she had long abided in such
great joy, singing, laughing, and otherwise
clapping her hands, then she returned to her-
self with a renewed feeling of infirmity that
she had not felt before, and began a little to
be grieved. And when we asked of her what
she had seen: since she was not able to speak
to us but a little. “Nevertheless,” she said, “I
would say to you if I could.”

Truly, the same Saturday at evening when
the day of joy and mirth was near, the day
that our Lord made, the day that our Lord
showed to his maiden, our Lord’s day, the day
of resurrection, the day of the vigil of Saint
John the Baptist, in which also, as men say,
Saint John Evangelist passed from this world,
although his feast is held another time: then
Christ’s maiden, that had eaten no manner of
meat for fifty-two days, began with a sweet
voice to sing halleluiah, and almost all that
night as bidden to a feast she was in joy and
mirth.

Truly, the fiend appeared on the Sunday
and vexed her greatly: for she began some-
what to fear and also to ask help of them that
stood about. But then she, taking again trust
of our Lord and strongly breaking the drag-
on’s head and shielding herself with the sign
of the cross. “Go back,” she said, “you filth
and foulness.” For she called him not foul,
but foulness.

Then the fiend flying away, she began to
sing and thanked God of his great grace.

And then, certainly, when the evening
came near, before the feast of Saint John the
Baptist, about that hour that our Lord held
the ghost in the cross, that is the hour of
noon, she truly passed to God, never chang-
ing for any sorrow of death the gladness of
features or face of enjoyment; nor I have
mind that altogether she had more gladness
of appearance and more likeness of life; nor,
as is custom after death, did she seem dull or
discolored in face, but with an angel’s counte-
nance and gentle simpleness, white and clear
in face, in her dying and after her death she
stirred many to devotion.

Also many were wet sweetly at her funeral
with plenteous flood of tears, and they per-
ceived themselves visited by God through
her prayers, as a holy woman saw before of
the holy ghost and said before that they that
come together at her passing should receive
much comfort of our Lord.

For truth, when her holy body should be
washed in her funeral, she was found so small
lean through infirmity and fastings that the
spine of her back clung to her womb, and as
under a thin linen cloth the bones of her back
seemed under the little skin of her belly.

*Quam pulcher rex noster domine* How fair a king, our Lord [Latin]
Endnotes

1 The excerpts are translated by Kisha G. Tracy and Alicia Protze from the *Life of Mary of Oegines (or Oignies)* taken from the edition by Carl Horstmann: “Prosalegenden: die Legenden des MS Douce 114,” *Anglia*, vol. 8 (1885), pp. 134–84. The paragraph breaks reflect the breaks marked in the edition with some edits for clarity.
POETRY
Introduction

Known only from what she reveals about herself in her writings, Marie de France is a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman author, perhaps the first female French author. She is known for her collection of *Lais*, twelve short poems that follow a Breton romance style.

Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* can be read through the lens of disability studies, specifically in the text’s depictions of shape-shifting or lycanthropy, disfigurement, and the psychological issues resulting from domestic abuse. The physical appearance of the first and second are quite clear within the text in the titular character and his wife, respectively, while the third requires more interpretation in terms of the relationship between the two.

Marie de France, as the narrator, gives the reader specific information at the beginning of the text about werewolves:

> Garualf, deo est beste salvage:  
> Tant cum il est en cele rage,  
> Hummes devure, grant mal fait,  
> Es granz forez converse e vait. (ll. 9–12)

*The Were-Wolf is a fearsome beast. He lurks within the thick forest, mad and horrible to see. All the evil that he may, he does. He goeth to and fro, about the solitary place, seeking man, in order to devour him.*

We learn later that the titular character is himself one of these figures, although this description is the antithesis of Bisclavret. He is indeed, even in his werewolf form, noble and good, described in the Eugene Mason translation, which is provided in full below, as a “christened man.” The narrator is setting us up, only to play with our preconceptions about werewolves.

Bisclavret’s lycanthropy only becomes disabling once his wife traps him in his wolf form by having his clothes stolen; clothing is both the literal mechanism that allows his transformation and the metaphorical difference between human and beast. The impairing features of his lycanthropy are an initial separation from his previous position in society and an inability to communicate as a human, both of which are resolved by the end of the text. Indeed, in every other way, he acts the same as before, particularly in terms of his demonstration of fealty and behavior towards his king. The king and the people of the court are able to perceive in him the same characteristics that they find in Bisclavret in his human form. In Mason’s translation, the king says that Bisclavret in werewolf form is “a beast who has the sense of man. He abases himself before his foe, and cries for mercy, although he cannot speak.” It is these characteristics that lead them to install the wolf, thereby reinstalling Bisclavret, in the court. At the end of the text, when he returns to his human form, when as Mason notes “the ravening beast may indeed return to human shape,” he also regains “man’s speech.” His wife then is the only character who disables Bisclavret due to his condition.

When reading *Bisclavret*, the moment the wife decides to turn against her husband, after learning he is a werewolf, is often a point
of confusion and discussion. Are we meant to blame the wife? Given she later finds herself disfigured and tortured for her actions, it seems like a simple question; she is punished for her betrayal of her husband. Nonetheless, as with everything medieval and everything Marie de France, the question is far more complex than it seems.

First, to address the disfigurement, the wife’s nose is torn off by Bisclavret:

Le neis li esracha del vis.
Quet li peüst il faire pis? (ll. 235–36)

[Breaking from his bonds he sprang at the lady’s face, and bit the nose from her visage.]

In Judith Shoaf’s translation, she provides the commentary in the original text missing from the Mason translation:

He tore her nose right off her face.
Could anything be worse than this is?

In the original and Shoaf’s translation, it is indicated by the question that disfigurement is considered by the narrator as a tragic circumstance. The emphasis does not seem to be on the pain of the physical experience, but rather what it has done to her appearance. Given that women’s beauty in romances is often a defining trait, such a reaction is understandable. Mason’s translation also does not provide the further commentary about the wife’s succeeding daughters; Shoaf, however, does:

Enfanz en ad asés éuz,
Puis unt esté bien cuneüz
[E] del semblant e del visage:
Plusurs [des] femmes del lignage,
C’est verité, sen nes sunt nees
E si vivenent esnasees. (ll. 309–14)

[She had plenty of children; grown,
They were, all of them, quite well-known,
By their looks, their facial assembly:

More than one woman of that family
Was born without a nose to blow,
And lived denosed. It’s true! It’s so!]

With this statement, we find a clear use of the moral model of disability: the mother’s actions are represented by the public disability of the children.

And yet the question persists: are we meant to blame the wife? If we consider romances in terms of their role as fantasy fulfillment for noble readers, we might look at the wife’s actions in Bisclavret from another angle, not one of blame or of defense, but of the psychology of abuse. Imagine, for a moment, a woman who grew up in the nobility, a woman who was aware from an early age that she would be married to someone her family selected and approved. Fortunately for her, she married, according to Mason, “a stout knight,” who is “comely.” Their relationship builds to what they both believe is love, and all is well—with one exception, that he disappears periodically.

When the wife confronts him, her phrasing is that of fear:

Mes jeo creim tant vostre curuz,
Que nule rien tant ne redut. (ll. 35–36)

[Right willingly would I receive this gift, but I fear to anger you in the asking. It is better for me to have an empty hand, than to gain hard words.]

She fears his anger. We have no indication of why. This phrasing could be dismissed as courteous language between husband and wife, that she does not desire to anger him with her questioning. But what if we look at it from the perspective of a wife who knows very little about her husband although she has to this point been comforted that he does not seem to possess the qualities she feared in a husband? Could her statement indicate the lingering fear of how her husband will treat her? Has she heard stories of men who were kind to their wives until a moment
when they seemed to turn against them? We certainly have examples in romances of abusive knights—for instance, Erec in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec and Enide*, the knight-rapist in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, and, elsewhere in Marie de France’s *Lais*, the lord in Yonec.

When Bisclavret assures her with physical caresses that he will answer her questions, she replies:

Par fei, fet ele, ore sui guarie!
Sire, jeo sui en tel effrei
Les jurs quant vus partez de mei,
El quor en ai mut grant dolur
E de vus perdre tel poir,
Si jeo n’en ai hastif cunfort,
Bien tost en puis aver la mort. (ll. 42–48)

[“By my faith,” said the lady, “soon shall I be whole. Husband, right long and wearisome are the days that you spend away from your home. I rise from my bed in the morning, sick at heart, I know not why. So fearful am I, lest you do aught to your loss, that I may not find any comfort. Very quickly shall I die for reason of my dread.”]

This response is phrased in the language of illness. His treatment of her, his seeming tender care, makes her “whole.” She talks about living in terror, about fearing to lose him. She indicates she will die from what she is experiencing, that she is “sick at heart,” which is at odds with her desire to be “whole.” On one hand, this certainly could be hyperbole and her attempt to push him into telling about his disappearances, even using the language of illness to elicit guilt on his part. On the other hand, if we read it in the same context as the previous statement, other implications arise. Perhaps her fears have indeed reasserted themselves, to the point that she feels desperately insecure. She has read his disappearances into her fears and cannot “recover” until she knows the truth.

What follows is back and forth between the couple, the wife pressing and Bisclavret denying to answer her questions. Often, this scene is perceived as nagging on the wife’s part, an insatiable need to know, even though Bisclavret is blameless, but what if this fear of abuse is driving her? Finally, he relents and tells her about his shape-shifting. This revelation is certainly not what the wife expected, but it comes on top of a period of renewed psychological—if imagined—trauma related to her pre-marital fears of the kind of man she would wed. And then comes her reaction:

La dame oï cele merveille,
De poiir fu tute vermeille;
De l’aventure se esfrea.
E[n] maint endreit se purpensa
Cum ele s’en puïst partir;
Ne voleit mes lez lui gisir. (ll. 97–102)

[On hearing this marvel the lady became sanguine of visage, because of her exceeding fear. She dared no longer to lie at his side, and turned over in her mind, this way and that, how best she could get her from him.]

Her fear starts to multiply. She dwells upon it. In addition, she likely is aware of the information about werewolves Marie de France gave us at the beginning of the text, that they are subject to rage, acting like savage beasts. If this is a metaphor for evil men, it’s certainly an even better one for abusers who present well until, as Mason states, “the fury is on them.” Edward J. Gallagher translates this passage as, “A werewolf is a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men, causes great damage, and dwells in vast forests.” Gallagher’s translation of “cele rage” as “by this madness” trades on the idea of rage and anger as a mental illness, especially a type of temporary insanity. If we follow this metaphor, the wife may not fear her husband simply as a werewolf, but her husband in a rage, which she has already stated scares her more than anything. Given this interpretation, her actions may indicate the trauma of prolonged fear.

235
In *Bisclavret*, Marie de France presents disability from a variety of angles. She explores the ramifications of a werewolf who lacks the negative qualities of his kind, thereby representing what might be a disability—in this case, lycanthropy—as disabling only to those who perceive and treat it so—here, to the character’s wife, but not to his king. She then demonstrates how those who disable others are themselves disabled—the wife, who disabled her husband, is herself disfigured. At the same time, Marie does not depict the disabling character with simplistic motivations; rather, she introduces questions about fear and imagined trauma. The issues of disability in this text are complex and intertwined.

**Bibliography**


Amongst the tales I tell you once again, I would not forget the Lay of the Were-Wolf. Such beasts as he are known in every land. Bisclavaret he is named in Brittany; whilst the Norman calls him Garwal.

It is a certain thing, and within the knowledge of all, that many a christened man has suffered this change, and ran wild in woods, as a Were-Wolf. The Were-Wolf is a fearsome beast. He lurks within the thick forest, mad and horrible to see. All the evil that he may, he does. He goeth to and fro, about the solitary place, seeking man, in order to devour him. Hearken, now, to the adventure of the Were-Wolf, that I have to tell.

In Brittany there dwelt a baron who was marvellously esteemed of all his fellows. He was a stout knight, and a comely, and a man of office and repute. Right private was he to the mind of his lord, and dear to the counsel of his neighbours. This baron was wedded to a very worthy dame, right fair to see, and sweet of semblance. All his love was set on her, and all her love was given again to him. One only grief had this lady. For three whole days in every week her lord was absent from her side. She knew not where he went, nor on what errand. Neither did any of his house know the business which called him forth.

On a day when this lord was come again to his house, altogether joyous and content, the lady took him to task, right sweetly, in this fashion, “Husband,” said she, “and fair, sweet friend, I have a certain thing to pray of you. Right willingly would I receive this gift, but I fear to anger you in the asking. It is better for me to have an empty hand, than to gain hard words.”

When the lord heard this matter, he took the lady in his arms, very tenderly, and kissed her.

“Wife,” he answered, “ask what you will. What would you have, for it is yours already?”

“By my faith,” said the lady, “soon shall I be whole. Husband, right long and wearisome are the days that you spend away from your home. I rise from my bed in the morning, sick at heart, I know not why. So fearful am I, lest you do aught to your loss, that I may not find any comfort. Very quickly shall I die for reason of my dread. Tell me now, where you go, and on what business! How may the knowledge of one who loves so closely, bring you to harm?”

“Wife,” made answer the lord, “nothing but evil can come if I tell you this secret. For the mercy of God do not require it of me. If you but knew, you would withdraw yourself from my love, and I should be lost indeed.”

When the lady heard this, she was persuaded that her baron sought to put her by with jesting words. Therefore she prayed and required him the more urgently, with tender looks and speech, till he was overborne, and told her all the story, hiding naught.

“Wife, I become Bisclavaret. I enter in the forest, and live on prey and roots, within the thickest of the wood.”

After she had learned his secret, she prayed and entreated the more as to whether he ran in his raiment, or went spoiled of vesture.

“Wife,” said he, “I go naked as a beast.”

“Tell me, for hope of grace, what you do with your clothing?”

“Fair wife, that will I never. If I should lose my raiment, or even be marked as I quit my vesture, then a Were-Wolf I must go for all the days of my life. Never again should I become man, save in that hour my clothing were given back to me. For this reason never will I show my lair.”

“Husband,” replied the lady to him, “I love you better than all the world. The less cause have you for doubting my faith, or hiding any tittle from me. What savour is here of friendship? How have I made forfeit of your love; for what sin do you mistrust my honour? Open now your heart, and tell what is good to be known.”

So at the end, outwearied and overborne by her importunity, he could no longer refrain, but told her all.

“Wife,” said he, “within this wood, a little from the path, there is a hidden way, and at the end thereof an ancient chapel, where of-
tentimes I have bewailed my lot. Near by is a
great hollow stone, concealed by a bush, and
there is the secret place where I hide my rai-
ment, till I would return to my own home.”

On hearing this marvel the lady became
sanguine of visage, because of her exceeding
fear. She dared no longer to lie at his side,
and turned over in her mind, this way and
that, how best she could get her from him.
Now there was a certain knight of those
parts, who, for a great while, had sought and
required this lady for her love. This knight
had spent long years in her service, but lit-
tle enough had he got thereby, not even fair
words, or a promise. To him the dame wrote a
letter, and meeting, made her purpose plain.

“Fair friend,” said she, “be happy. That
which you have coveted so long a time, I will
grant without delay. Never again will I deny
your suit. My heart, and all I have to give, are
yours, so take me now as love and dame.”

Right sweetly the knight thanked her for
her grace, and pledged her faith and fealty.
When she had confirmed him by an oath,
then she told him all this business of her
lord—why he went, and what he became,
and of his ravening within the wood. So she
showed him of the chapel, and of the hollow
stone, and of how to spoil the Were-Wolf of
his vesture. Thus, by the kiss of his wife, was
Bisclavaret betrayed. Often enough had he
ravished his prey in desolate places, but from
this journey he never returned. His kinsfolk
and acquaintance came together to ask of
his tidings, when this absence was noised
abroad. Many a man, on many a day, searched
the woodland, but none might find him, nor
learn where Bisclavaret was gone.

The lady was wedded to the knight who
had cherished her for so long a space. More
than a year had passed since Bisclavaret
disappeared. Then it chanced that the King
would hunt in that self-same wood where the
Were-Wolf lurked. When the hounds
were unleashed they ran this way and that,
and swiftly came upon his scent. At the view
the huntsman winded on his horn, and the
whole pack were at his heels. They followed
him from morn to eve, till he was torn and
bleeding, and was all adread lest they should
pull him down. Now the King was very close
to the quarry, and when Bisclavaret looked
upon his master, he ran to him for pity and
for grace. He took the stirrup within his
paws, and fawned upon the prince’s foot. The
King was very fearful at this sight, but pres-
ently he called his courtiers to his aid.

“Lords,” cried he, “hasten hither, and see
this marvellous thing. Here is a beast who
has the sense of man. He abases himself be-
fore his foe, and cries for mercy, although he
cannot speak. Beat off the hounds, and let no
man do him harm. We will hunt no more to-
day, but return to our own place, with the
wonderful quarry we have taken.”

The King turned him about, and rode
to his hall, Bisclavaret following at his side.
Very near to his master the Were-Wolf went,
like any dog, and had no care to seek again
the wood. When the King had brought him
safely to his own castle, he rejoiced greatly,
for the beast was fair and strong, no might-
tier had any man seen. Much pride had the
King in his marvellous beast. He held him so
dear, that he bade all those who wished for
his love, to cross the Wolf in naught, neither
to strike him with a rod, but ever to see that
he was richly fed and kennelled warm. This
commandment the Court observed willing-
ly. So all the day the Wolf sported with the
lords, and at night he lay within the chamber
of the King. There was not a man who did not
make much of the beast, so frank was he and
debonair. None had reason to do him wrong,
for ever was he about his master, and for his
part did evil to none. Every day were these
two companions together, and all perceived
that the King loved him as his friend.

Hearken now to that which chanced.
The King held a high Court, and bade his
great vassals and barons, and all the lords
of his venery to the feast. Never was there a
goodlier feast, nor one set forth with sweeter
show and pomp. Amongst those who were
bidden, came that same knight who had the
wife of Bisclavaret for dame. He came to the
castle, richly gowned, with a fair company, but little he deemed whom he would find so near. Bisclavaret marked his foe the moment he stood within the hall. He ran towards him, and seized him with his fangs, in the King's very presence, and to the view of all. Doubtless he would have done him much mischief, had not the King called and chidden him, and threatened him with a rod. Once, and twice, again, the Wolf set upon the knight in the very light of day. All men marvelled at his malice, for sweet and serviceable was the beast, and to that hour had shown hatred of none. With one consent the household deemed that this deed was done with full reason, and that the Wolf had suffered at the knight's hand some bitter wrong. Right wary of his foe was the knight until the feast had ended, and all the barons had taken farewell of their lord, and departed, each to his own house. With these, amongst the very first, went that lord whom Bisclavaret so fiercely had assailed. Small was the wonder that he was glad to go.

No long while after this adventure it came to pass that the courteous King would hunt in that forest where Bisclavaret was found. With the prince came his wolf, and a fair company. Now at nightfall the King abode within a certain lodge of that country, and this was known of that dame who before was the wife of Bisclavaret. In the morning the lady clothed her in her most dainty apparel, and hastened to the lodge, since she desired to speak with the King, and to offer him a rich present. When the lady entered in the chamber, neither man nor leash might restrain the fury of the Wolf. He became as a mad dog in his hatred and malice. Breaking from his bonds he sprang at the lady's face, and bit the nose from her visage. From every side men ran to the succour of the dame. They beat off the wolf from his prey, and for a little would have cut him in pieces with their swords. But a certain wise counsellor said to the King,

"Sire, hearken now to me. This beast is always with you, and there is not one of us all who has not known him for long. He goes in and out amongst us, nor has molested any man, neither done wrong or felony to any, save only to this dame, one only time as we have seen. He has done evil to this lady, and to that knight, who is now the husband of the dame. Sire, she was once the wife of that lord who was so close and private to your heart, but who went, and none might find where he had gone. Now, therefore, put the dame in a sure place, and question her straitly, so that she may tell—if perchance she knows thereof—for what reason this Beast holds her in such mortal hate. For many a strange deed has chanced, as well we know, in this marvelous land of Brittany."

The King listened to these words, and deemed the counsel good. He laid hands upon the knight, and put the dame in surety in another place. He caused them to be questioned right straitly, so that their torment was very grievous. At the end, partly because of her distress, and partly by reason of her exceeding fear, the lady's lips were loosed, and she told her tale. She showed them of the betrayal of her lord, and how his raiment was stolen from the hollow stone. Since then she knew not where he went, nor what had befallen him, for he had never come again to his own land. Only, in her heart, well she deemed and was persuaded, that Bisclavaret was he.

Straightway the King demanded the vesture of his baron, whether this were to the wish of the lady, or whether it were against her wish. When the raiment was brought him, he caused it to be spread before Bisclavaret, but the Wolf made as though he had not seen. Then that cunning and crafty counsellor took the King apart, that he might give him a fresh rede.

"Sire," said he, "you do not wisely, nor well, to set this raiment before Bisclavaret, in the sight of all. In shame and much tribulation must he lay aside the beast, and again become man. Carry your wolf within your most secret chamber, and put his vestment therein. Then close the door upon him, and leave him alone for a space. So we shall see
presently whether the ravening beast may indeed return to human shape.”

The King carried the Wolf to his chamber, and shut the doors upon him fast. He delayed for a brief while, and taking two lords of his fellowship with him, came again to the room. Entering therein, all three, softly together, they found the knight sleeping in the King’s bed, like a little child. The King ran swiftly to the bed and taking his friend in his arms, embraced and kissed him fondly, above a hundred times. When man’s speech returned once more, he told him of his adventure. Then the King restored to his friend the fief that was stolen from him, and gave such rich gifts, moreover, as I cannot tell. As for the wife who had betrayed Biselavaret, he bade her avoid his country, and chased her from the realm. So she went forth, she and her second lord together, to seek a more abiding city, and were no more seen.

The adventure that you have heard is no vain fable. Verily and indeed it chanced as I have said. The Lay of the Were-Wolf, truly, was written that it should ever be borne in mind.
Endnotes

1 The text is taken from *French Mediaeval Romances: From the Lays of Marie de France*, translated by Eugene Mason, 2011 as found in The Project Gutenberg. This text is in the public domain.


Introduction

Alain Chartier was a Norman, probably born in Bayeux between 1385 and 1395. He is twice mentioned as an officer in the household of Yolande d’Anjou in account books covering the period from 1409 to 1414. It is to these years that Chartier’s earliest surviving lyrics date: these are mostly occasional ballades (fixed-form poems with a refrain), verse dialogues, and the Lay de plaisance (a longer and more complex fixed-form poem). Chartier entered the service of the dauphin, the future Charles VII, by 1418. He served primarily as a secretary, writing letters and royal acts, and accompanying ambassadors on several diplomatic missions. He first gained prominence with his courtly poetry, mostly composed from about 1414 to 1425. This period of his work culminates in 1424’s Belle Dame sans merci (a verse dialogue between an ardent suitor and an uninterested woman, culminating in the lover’s reported death, which became a succès de scandale) and the literary quarrel that followed. He is also known for his long political poems, mostly composed during the 1420s, and for his Latin speeches and epistles. Chartier died in 1430, leaving his final work, the Livre de l’Espérance (Book of Hope), incomplete.

The Book of Hope begins with an unusual portrayal of what we would now identify as mental illness. This unfinished prosimetrum consists of sixteen poems alternating with sixteen prose passages. In the prose sections, the suicidal Acteur (first-person author–narrator), beset by Lady Melancholy and her helpers (Defiance, Indignation, and Despair), becomes separated from his lethargic personified Entendement (Intellect). Entendement finally finds the wherewithal to open the rusted-shut door of the Acteur’s memory, whence the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity) come forth. The divided Acteur’s impaired faculties, both sensory and intellectual, are then repaired by Faith and Hope (and, presumably, Charity, though the unfinished book neither provides her dialogue nor reveals the identity of a young lady who accompanies the three theological virtues). The metric sections are less straightforward, as the speaker of the verses, that is, the voice through which they are expressed, is not typically specified. Whereas the prose expresses the melancholic sufferer’s point of view, poetry appears to be the chosen vehicle of expression for the already healed voice, the one that, as Sylvia Huot puts it, “speaks from a point beyond that of the mental breakdown that he chronicles in prose.” The healing unrolls in suitably Boethian fashion—indeed, this rewriting of the Consolation of Philosophy is identified in several manuscripts as the Consolation des trois vertus.

The significance of this text for the history of literary discourses of disability lies in its merging of courtly literary traditions with medicalized notions of mental illness and an unusually frank and vivid account of suicidal ideation: Chartier uses the conventional devices of first-person narration, a frame narrative, and personification in order both to describe and to illustrate the plight of a seriously depressed melancholic. The Book’s vision of mental illness as stemming from impediments to normal brain function is
consistent with late medieval scientific writings; in the excerpt below he explicitly cites “Aristotle,” referring to the pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata XXX.1 which contains the famous declaration that gifted artists typically have a melancholic complexion. Throughout the text, Chartier insists on the physiological origins of mental illness as a disease of the brain: the internal senses are “corporeal and organic,” and the Acteur’s suicidal thoughts come about as a direct result of Melancholy’s disruption of one particular part of the brain, “the part that sits in the middle of the head in the region of the imaginative, which some call the fantasy.” Moreover, the entire narrative appears to take place within an organic mental space, as Entendement releases the Theological Virtues by moving to the far end of the room in which the action unfolds and opening a door situated “back toward [the Acteur’s] memory.” While the personifications struggling over the Acteur’s soul inscribe the Book of Hope firmly within a well-established medieval psychomachic tradition, the situation of this discourse on mental health within a mental space is extraordinary. The Acteur’s overt identification of the personifications as “simulacra in feminine form” lends the prose sections a two-dimensional, surreal flavor, which is only enhanced by the uncertain point(s) of view expressed in disembodied metric sections. The text’s prosimetric form offers a means of simultaneously illustrating the same character in states of sickness and of health, and its startling juxtaposition of allegorical personification and medicalized language situates it at the intersection of courtly, scientific, and devotional discourses.

As a healing narrative, the book offers today’s scholars of medieval disability an important opportunity to interrogate medical and religious models of disability.

While it is not widely read today, the Book of Hope enjoyed considerable success in the fifteenth century: it survives in more than thirty-five manuscripts, in numerous printed editions, and in two Middle English translations. This is the first translation of an excerpt into modern English.

**Bibliography**


[This excerpt follows the verse prologue, in which his reflections on the contrast between France’s illustrious chivalric past and its piteous present state plunge the Acteur (first person author-narrator) into a profound melancholy.]

Prose I.

The Author/Narrator

In this doleful and sad train of thought, which always presents itself to my heart and accompanies me as I wake and as I fall asleep, which causes my nights to be long and my life disagreeable, I long overworked and crushed my little understanding; it is so overcome and surrounded by unpleasant frenzies that I cannot use it for anything that might bring me happiness or comfort. Not long ago the memory of things past, the frightfulness of present circumstances and the horror of the dangers to come had awakened all of my sad regrets, my pained fantasies and my insecure fear, and so I remained like a man lost, my face pale, my sense troubled, and my blood roiled.

And at this point there came toward me an old lady, all disarrayed and as if indifferent to her dress, skinny, dry and withered, with a pale, dull and colorless complexion, downcast gaze, an afflicted voice, and a drooping lip. Her head was capped with a dirty kerchief filthy with ashes, her body wrapped in a brown mantle. Upon her approach, without saying a word, she suddenly enveloped me in her arms and covered my face and body with that woeful mantle; but she squeezed me so tightly in her arms that I felt my heart crushed inside me as if in a press; and with her hands she held my head and my eyes covered and blocked, so that I was not at liberty to see or to hear. And thus like a faint swooning man she brought me to the infirmary, and threw me on the bed of anguish and malady. She brewed such strange and marvelous beverages prepared in madness and in ignorance, that even Understanding, the young and discerning bachelor who had followed me, sometimes from afar, sometimes up close, as God gave me his company—even this good and wise one, who had conducted me as far as the bed in my hour of need, remained next to me dazed, stunned, as if in a lethargy.

Later I found out that this old woman is named Melancholy, who troubles thoughts, dries the body, corrupts the humors, weakens the sensitive spirits, and leads man to lassitude and death. According to Aristotle’s doctrine, the high intellect and elevated understanding of profound and excellent men have often been troubled and darkened by her, when they have dwelt on overly deep and varied thoughts. For the four internal senses of man, which we call the sensitive, imaginative, estimative, and memory, are corporeal and organic, and they can be damaged with excessively frequent or rough use, just as among the five bodily senses the eye is perturbed by looking at overly bright light, or by reading too often, or by fixing one’s gaze on tiny, delicate, distinct things.

Poem II.

Puny human nature,
Born to travail and to pain,
Clothed in a fragile body,
You are so feeble, you are so vain,
Tender, vulnerable, uncertain,
And easily struck down!

You are of such poor extraction
That if you are not sustained by the heavens,
You cannot live in good health.

Prose II.

The Author/Narrator

And then, so intensely unsound of body and mind, I was lain out on that disagreeable bed, where for many days I remained with a listless mouth and no appetite. And after great weakness, long fasting, bitter pain and shock in my brain, which Lady Melancholy tormented with her hard hands, I felt her open, shake, and remove the part that sits in the middle of the head in the region of the
imaginative, which some call the fantasy. And at that time three terrible simulacra in feminine form, frightening to see, presented themselves to the forefront of my thought, toward the darker left-hand side of my bed.

[The three “simulacra in feminine form” are Defiance, Indignation and Despair. Each, in turn, chastises the Acteur and exhorts him to take his own life. When the Acteur seems ready to succumb, Nature intervenes to save her creature, awakening Entendement (Intellect), who then admits the Theological Virtues to the bedchamber. The remainder of the book consists of Faith’s and Hope’s remedial speeches to the Acteur.]
Endnotes

1 The translation is based on the Middle French text from *Le Livre de l’Espérance*, ed. François Rouy (Champion, 1989). Translation, footnotes, and endnotes have been provided by Julie Singer.


3 Certain metric sections are attributable to various characters in the prose narrative: meter 1 is composed in a voice that suggests the Acteur, though it is not explicitly attributed to him; proses 5 and 6 both suggest that meter 6 is voiced by Entendement; and meter 11 seems to be in Espérance’s voice. The other meters, on the other hand, remain more troubling; if we accept Sylvia Huot’s convincing argument that the poetic passages are spoken through the voice of the authorial persona, then we can see that they represent the end result of the pedagogical process that the three virtues undertake from Prose 5 onward. Sylvia Huot, “Re-Fashioning Boethius: Prose and Poetry in Chartier’s *Livre de l’Espérance*,” *Medium Aevum*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2007, pp. 268–84.

The Merchant’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales
(ca. 1387–1400)
Geoffrey Chaucer
Contributed by Moira Fitzgibbons

Introduction

The Merchant’s Tale revolves around non-normative bodies and minds. An aging knight, Januarie, perceives his impending mortality, marries a much younger woman, doses himself with performance-enhancing spiced wine, and, shortly thereafter, finds himself blind. Meanwhile, a young squire of the household, Damian, takes to his bed in response to lovesickness and despair. The object of his desire, Januarie’s wife May, soon declares herself pregnant; in this putative condition she climbs a tree, engages in adulterous sex, alters her husband’s view of reality, and hops back down to the ground, all apparently within a few minutes’ time.

Disability studies serves as a useful focal point for considering these forms of “embodied variance” and perceiving survivorship strategies depicted in the poem. Even as the tale’s main characters disregard ethical, artistic, and religious values, they provide intriguing case studies in resiliency and flexibility.

Critical responses to the Merchant’s Tale often refer to what Derek Pearsall has succinctly called the tale’s “nastiness” (l. 165). A combination of factors create this impression, including the Merchant’s extended, negative descriptions of Januarie’s body and behavior, the decidedly unromantic sexual encounter between the young lovers, and the absence of any moral compass among the tale’s main characters. Moreover, the tale’s awkward combination of genres and echoes of other pilgrims’ tales make it difficult to connect with the Merchant himself or to revel in Chaucer’s literary artistry. In fact, the tale explicitly mocks this kind of aesthetic pleasure: as seen below, no sooner has Januarie evoked the Song of Songs in a (incongruously) lyrical invitation to May than the Merchant curtly derides the “olde, lewde wordes” of the speech (l. 757).

It is precisely this rejection of idealism, however, that establishes common ground between the Merchant’s Tale and disability studies. Many disability theorists have emphasized the potential for visions of human perfection to erase, dehumanize, or patronize individuals perceived as falling short of these standards. As Lennard Davis writes, Western culture has tended to privilege “a notion of wholeness, order, clean boundaries, as opposed to fragmentations, disordered bodies, [and] messy boundaries” (143). What we define as beautiful often relies upon strictly regulated modes of representation and choices of subject matter. Davis points out, for example, that sculptural depictions of nude bodies exclude “normal biological processes...there are no pregnant Venuses, there are no paintings of Venuses who are menstruating, micturating, defecating...there are no old Venuses” (l. 132). The Merchant’s Tale, by contrast, graphically depicts aging, copulation, and other “unmentionable” human experiences. Equally important, these moments emerge not as monstrous aberrations, but as part and parcel of everyday life. When May reads Damian’s note in the privy, the Mer-
chant describes the site as the place where “ye woot that every wight hath nede” (l. 557). Everyone’s body takes part in undignified processes, and everyone knows it. Crucially, this part of the tale highlights the possibilities inherent in the unseemly aspects of human experience. The privy provides May with a space to consider alternatives to her legally binding and repressive marriage.

We should acknowledge, of course, that May does not seem to engage in profound moral reflection as she reads Damian’s note. Minds and hearts in the Merchant’s Tale are no more reliable or transcendent than bodies. For example, the Merchant notes early on that “love is blind al day” (l. 206), an assertion that foreshadows Januarie’s physical loss of eyesight later in the tale. In most contexts, this saying associates visual impairment with powerful emotions that override social conventions or rational self-interest. It is difficult, however, to attribute any kind of emotional or spiritual authenticity to Januarie’s infatuation with May, or to May’s relationship with Damian. Instead of expressing inner truths, these characters’ decisions emerge via the interplay between internal urges and external stimuli. Far from a thunderbolt of desire, Januarie’s choice of May results from a gradual (“day to day”) activity of “heigh fantasey and curious bisinesse” that impresses itself upon his soul (ll. 185–87). Similarly, the Merchant makes clear that he does not know whether May’s feelings for Damian result from “destinee,” “aventure,” or some other cause (ll. 575–84), but he does explain that her heart has “taken swiche impression” of Damian that she resolves to take action (l. 586). In both instances, the protagonists’ choices reflect haphazard “impressions” rather than conscious thought or emotional connection. Their minds are as susceptible as the “warm wex” that is invoked by Januarie’s expectations of a pliable wife (l. 38) and used in May’s adulterous stratagem with the garden key (l. 725).

Cognitive vulnerability plays a crucial role in the tale’s final scene. Although May takes advantage of her husband’s blindness in order to consummate her relationship with Damian, it is Januarie’s suggestible mind that determines the tale’s eventual outcome. May’s deception exploits not just Januarie’s abrupt transition back into the sighted world, but also his anxiety about age-related cognitive impairment (“Ye maze, maze,” l. 995) and his strong desire to preserve his marriage and produce an heir. Without overstating May’s degree of liberty at the end of the tale, her actions should be connected to other Chaucerian speakers—male as well as female—in vulnerable situations who become extremely quick thinkers and adept fabricators. Drawn from her own experiences being misrepresented and manhandled within Januarie’s conjugal fantasies, May successfully manipulates her husband’s thought processes.

This is not to say that we should all ascend our own pyries—neither May nor any other character in the tale serves as a viable role model of ethical agency. But we would be equally mistaken to ignore May’s striking combination of elasticity and toughness; her ability to perceive the arbitrary meanings mapped onto bodies and minds; and her active reshaping of the story she has been forced to inhabit. Read through the lens of disability studies, the Merchant’s Tale’s value resides in its privileging of intervention over inspiration.

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[After lamenting the “sorwe” he has experienced in his own recent marriage, the Merchant introduces Januarie, a “worthy knyght” in Lombardy who has begun to contemplate wedlock after sixty years of bachelorhood. Having noted the praise of marriage found in many textual sources, the Merchant depicts a lengthy debate among Januarie and two friends about the institution’s costs and benefits. Januarie eventually chooses to marry and settles on a young bride named May—not by directly courting her, but by means of an odd combination of internal reflection (“heigh fantasie”) and legal maneuvering. The wedding includes all the usual formalities and festivities; but Damian, a young squire in Januarie’s household, is painfully overcome with desire for May. Unaware of this complication and fortified with wine and spices, Januarie prepares to consummate the union.]

The bryde was broght a-bedde as stille as stoon;
And whan the bed was with the preest y-blessed,
Out of the chambre hath every wight him dressed.°
And Januarie hath faste in armes take
His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.°
He lulleth° hir, he kisseth hir ful ofte
With thikke bristles of his berd unsofte,
Lyk to the skin of houndfish, sharp as brere,°
For he was shave al newe in his manere.
He rubbeth hir aboute hir tendre face,
And seyde thus, “allas! I moot° trespase
To yow, my spouse, and yow gretly of-fende,
Er° tyme come that I wil doun de-scende.

But nathelees, considereth this,” quod he,
This wol be doon at leyser° parfitly.°
It is no fors° how longe that we pleye;
In trewe wedlok wedded be we tweye;°
And blessed be the yok that we been inne.°
For in our actes we mowe° do no sinne.
A man may do no sinne with his wyf,
Ne hurte him-selven with his owene knyf;
For we han leve to pleye us by the lawe.°
Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe;°
And than he taketh a sop in fyn clar-ree,°
And upright in his bed than° sitteth he,
And after that he sang ful loudе and clere,
And kiste his wyf, and made wantoun chere.°
He was al coltish, ful of ragerye,°
And ful of largon° as a flekked pye.°
The slakke skin aboute his nekke sha
- keth,
Whyl that he sang; so chaunteth he and craketh.°
But God wot° what that May thoughte in hir herte,
Whan she him saugh up sittinge in his sherte,°
In his night-cappe, and with his nekke lene;
She preyseth nat his pleying worth a bene.
Than seide he thus, “my reste wol I take;
Now day is come, I may no lenger wake.”
And doun he leyde his heed, and sleep til pryme.°
And afterward, when he saugh his tyme,
Up ryseth Ianuarie; but fresshe May
Holderth° hir chambr un-to the fourthe day,
As usage is of wyves for the beste.
For every labour som-tyme moot han reste,
Or elles° longe may he nat endure;

This is to seyn, no lyves creature,
Be it of fish, or brid;° or beest, or man.
Now wol I speke of woful Damian,
That languissheth for love, as ye shul here;
Therfore I speke to him in this manere:
I seye, “O sely° Damian, allas!
Answere to my demaunde, as in this cas,
How shaltow° to thy lady fresshe May
Telle thy wo? She wole alwey seye ‘nay’;
Eek° if thou speke, she wol thy wo biwreye;°

God be thy help, I can no bettre seye.”
This syke° Damian in Venus fyr
So brenneth,° that he dyeth for desyr;
For which he putte his lyf in aventure,°
No lenger mighte he in this wyse endure;
But prively a penner° gan he borwe,°
And in a lettre wroot he al his sorwe,
In manere of a compleynt or a lay,°
Un-to his faire fresshe lady May.
And in a purs of silk, heng on his sherte,

He hath it put, and leyde it at his herte.
The mone° that, at noon, was, thilike° day
That Ianuarie hath wedded fresshe May,

In two of Taur, was in-to Cancre
glidên;°
So longe hath Maius in hir chambr biden,°
As custume is un-to thise nobles alle.
A bryde shal nat eten in the halle,
Til dayes foure or three dayes atte leste
Y-passed been;° than lat hir go to feste.°
The fourthe day compleet fro noon to noon,

Whan that the heighe masse was y-doon,
In halle sit this Ianuarie, and May
As fresh as is the brighte someres day.
And so bifie, how that this gode man
Remembred him upon this Damian,
And seyde, “Seinte Marie! how may this be,
That Damian entendeath° nat to me?
Is he ay° syk, or how may this bityde?”°
His squerers, whiche that° stoden ther bisyde,
Excused him by-cause of his siknesse,

Which letted° him to doon his bisiness;
Noon other cause mighte make him tarie.

“That me forthinketh,”° quod this Ianuarie,
“He is a gentil° squyer, by my trouthe!
If that he deyde, it were harm and routhe;°
He is as wys, discreet, and as secree°
As any man I woot° of his degree;
And ther-to manly and eek° servisable,°
And for to been a thrifty° man right able.
But after mete,”° as sone as ever I may,

I wol my-self visyte him and eek May,
To doon him al the confort that I can.”
And for that word him blessed every
man,
That, of his bontee and his gentillesse,
He wolde so conforten in sikenesse
His squyer, for it was a gentil dede.
“Dame,” quod this Ianuarie, “tak good
hede,
At-after mete ye, with your wommen
alle,
When ye han been in chambr out of
this halle,
That alle ye go see this Damian;

Doth him disport,” he is a gentil man;
And telleth him that I wol him visyte,
Have I no-thing but rested me a lyte;”
And spede yow faste, for I wole abyde
Til that ye slepe faste by my syde.”
And with that word he gan to him to
calle
A squyer, that was marchal of his halle,
And tolde him certeyn thinges, what he
wolde.
This fresshe May hath streight hir wey
y-holde, with alle hir wommen, un-to Damian.

Doun by his beddes syde sit she than,
Confortinge him as goodly as she may.
This Damian, when that his tyme he
say, In secreu wise his purs, and eek his
bille, In which that he y-witen hadde his
wille, Hath put in-to hir hand, with-ourent
more, Save that he syketh wonder depe and
sore,
And softlye to hir right thus seyde he:
“Mercy! and that ye nat discouere me;

For I am deed,” if that this thing be
kid.”

This purs hath she inwith hir bosom
hid,
And wente hir wey; ye gete namore of
me.
But un-to Ianuarie y-comen is she,
That on his beddes syde sit ful softe.
He taketh hir, and kisseth hir ful ofte,
And leyde him doun to slepe, and that
anon.
She feyned hir as that she moste gon
Ther-as ye woot that every wight mot
nede.°
And when she of this bille hath taken
hede,
She rente° it al to cloutes atte laste,
And in the privee softlye it caste.
Who studieth now but faire fresshe
May?
Adoun by olde Ianuarie she lay,
That sleep, til that the coughe hath him
awaked;
Anon he preythe hir strepen hir al
naked;
He wolde of hir, he seyde, han som
plesaunce,
And seyde, hir clothes dide him encom-
braunce,
And she obeyeth, be hir lief or looth.
But lest that precious folk be with me
wrooth,
How that he wroghte, I dar nat to yow
telle;

Or whether hir thoughte it paradys or
helle;
But here I lete hem werken in hir wyse
Til evensong rong, and that they moste
aryse.

bountee kindness Doth him disport amuse him lyte little spede yow faste hurry up marchal chief steward y-holde taken say saw his...bille his purse, and also his note wille desire more any other action syketh sighs discovere expose deed dead kid known inwith within gon go Ther-as where mot nede must need rente ripped cloutes shreds privey priesy studieth ponders lief or looth eager or unwilling precious prudish wrooth angry wroghte proceeded even-song evening prayer bell
[Having learned of Damian’s passion for her, May takes pity on Damian and lets him know by letter that, when the occasion allows, she will fulfill his desires. Damian immediately feels better and waits humbly upon Januarie. In the meantime, Januarie decides to augment his pleasures by creating a walled garden. It is so lovely that the married gods Pluto and Proserpina take their pleasure there, along with their retinue of fairies. Januarie keeps the key to the garden on his person at all times and regularly takes advantage of its privacy to have sex with May there. As the Merchant laments below, however, Fortune presents Januarie with an unexpected challenge.]

665 O sodeyn hap,° o thou fortune instable,  
Lyk to the scorpionioun so deceivable,  
That flaterest with thyng heed when  
thyng wast stinge;°  
Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyng enveniminge.°  
O brotil° Ioye! o swete venim queynte!°

670 O monstre, that so subtilly canst peynte  
Thy yiftes,° under hewe° of stedfastnesse,  
That thou decevyest bothe more and lesse!  
Why hastow° Ianuarie thus deceyved,  
That haddest him for thy ful frend receyved?  
And now thou hast biraft° him bothe  
hise yen,°  
For sorwe of which desyreth he to dyen.°  
Allas! this noble Ianuarie free,  
Amidde his lust and his prosperitee,  
Is woxen° blind, and that al sodeynly.

680 He wepeth and he wayleth pitously;  
And ther-with-ail° the fyr of Ialousye,°  
Lest that his wyf sholde falle in som folye,  
So brente° his herre, that he wolde fayn°  
That som man bothe him and hir had slayn.  
For neither after his deeth, nor in his lyf,  
Ne wolde he that she were love ne wyf,°  
But ever live as widwe in clothes blake,  
Soul° as the turtle that lost hath hir make.°  
But atte laste, after a monthe or tweye,  
His sorwe gan aswage,° sooth° to seye;  
For whan he wiste° it may noon other be,°  
He paciently took his adversitee;  
Save,” out of doute, he may nat forgoon°  
That he nas Ialous evermore in oon;°  
Which Ialousye it was so outrageous,  
That in halle, nin° noon other hous,  
Ne in noon other place, never-the-mo,  
He nolde suffre° hir for to ryde or go,  
But-if that he had hand on hir alway;  
For which ful ofte° wepeth fresshe May,  
That loveth Damian so benignely,°  
That she mot outher dyen sodeynly,°  
Or elles she mot han° as hir leste;°  
She wayteth whan hir herte wolde breste.°  
Up-on that other syde Damian  
Bicomen is° the sorwefulleste man  
That ever was; for neither night ne day  
Ne mighte he speke a word to fresshe May,

sodeyn hap sudden chance  when…stinge when you want to sting  enveniminge poisoning  bro- 
til uncertain  queynte deceptive  yiftes gifts  heve demeanor  hastow have you  biraft taken  
away  yen eyes  dyen die  woxen grown  ther-with-al along with that  Ialousye jealousy  brente  
burned  fayn rather  were…wyf would be a lover or wife  Soul solitary  make mate  gan aswage  
began to diminish  sooth the truth  wiste knew  noon other be not be any other way  Save ex- 
cept  forgoon refrain  nas...oon was always jealous in one respect  nin nor  nolde suffre would not  
allow  ofte often  benignely graciously  mot...sodeynly must either die very soon  han have  as hir  
leste as she wants  breste burst  Bicomen is has become
As to his purpos, of no swich\textsuperscript{o} matere, 710
But-if that Ianuarie moste it here,\textsuperscript{o} That hadde an hand up-on hir evermo.\textsuperscript{o}
But nathelees, by wrytynge to and fro
And privee\textsuperscript{o} signes, wiste he what she
mente;
And she knew eek the fyn\textsuperscript{o} of his
entente.
O Ianuarie, what mighte it thee availlle,\textsuperscript{o} Thou mightest see as fer\textsuperscript{o} as shippes
saille?
For also\textsuperscript{o} good is blind decieveyd be,
As he decieveyd whan a man may se.
Lo, Argus,\textsuperscript{7} which that hadde an hon-
dred yen,\textsuperscript{o}
For al that ever he coude poure or
pyren.\textsuperscript{o}
Yet was he blent;\textsuperscript{o} and, God wot,\textsuperscript{o} so
ben mo,\textsuperscript{o}
That wenen\textsuperscript{o} wisly that it be nat so.
Passe over is an ese, I sey na-more.
This fresshe May, that I spak of so yore,\textsuperscript{o}
In warne wex hath emprented the
cliket,\textsuperscript{o}
That Ianuarie bar\textsuperscript{o} of the smale wiket,\textsuperscript{o}
By which in-to his gardin ofte he wente.
And Damian, that knew al hir entente,
The cliket countrefeted prively;
720 Ther nis na-more to seye, but hastily
Som wonder by this cliket shal bityde,\textsuperscript{o}
Which ye shul heren, if ye wole abyde.\textsuperscript{o}

[The Merchant briefly meditates upon trick-
ery in love as found in Ovid and other sourc-
es.]

740 But now to purpos; er\textsuperscript{e} that dayes eighte
Were passed, er the monthe of Iuil,\textsuperscript{o}
swich such moste it here must hear it evermo always privee secret eek the fyn also the
goal availle help fer far also as yen eyes poure or pyren look closely or investigate blent
decieed wot knows ben mo are many wenen think so yore before cliket key bar car-
rried wiket entrance bityde happen wole abyde will stay er before luil July bifil [it] hap-
pened egging urging wight person vois voice douve douve reynes were wt rains columbym
dove-like been are disport pleasure chees choose lewed ignorant, crude On to biforen
ahead cliket key stirte leaped anoon right away
With Maius in his hand, and no wight mo,°
In to his fresshe gardin is ago,°
And clapte° to the wiket sodeynly
“Now, wyf,” quod he, “heer nis but thou
and I,
That art the creature that I best love.
For, by that lord that sit in heven above,
Lever ich hadde dyen° on a knyf,
Than thee offende, trewe dere wyf!
For goddes sake, thank how I thee
chees,
Nght for no covйтиye, doutelees,°
But only for the love I had to thee.
And though that I be old, and may nat see,
Beth° to me trewe, and Ishal telle yow why.
Three thinges, certes,” shul yew inne ther-by;°
First, love of Crist, and to your-self honour,
And al myn heritage," toun and tour;°
I yeve it yow," maketh chartres" as yow leste;
This shal be doon to-morwe er sonne reste."°
So wisly god my soule bringe in blisse,
I prey yow first, in covenant ye me kisse.
And thogh that I be Ialous, wyte° me nght.
Ye been so depe enprented in my thoght,
That, whan that I considere your bea-
tee,
And ther-with-al the unlykly elde° of me,
I may nat, certes, thogh I sholde dye,

790 Forbere to been out of your companye
For verray love; this is with-outen doute.
Now kis me, wyf, and lat us rome aboure.”
This fresshe May, when she thise wordes herde,
Benignely to Ianuarie answere,
But first and forward she began to wepe,
“I have,” quod she, “a soule for to kepe
As wel as ye, and also myn honour,
And of my wyfhod thilke tendre flour,"°
Which that I have assured in your hond,

800 Whan that the preest to yow my body bond;°
Wherfore° I wole answere in this manere
By the leve of yow, my lord so dere:
I prey to god, that never dawe° the day
That I ne sterve," as foule as womman may,
If ever I do un-to my kin that shame,
Or elles I empeyre° so my name,
That I be fals; and if I do that lakke,"°
Do strepe me and put me in a sakke,
And in the nexte river do me drenche."°

810 I am a gentil womman and no wenche."°
Why speke ye thus? but men ben ever untrewes,
And wommen have reprove of yow ay newe."°
Ye han non other contenance," I leve," But speke to us of untrust and reprove.”
And with that word she saugh wher Damian
Sat in the bush, and coughen she bigan,
And with hir finger signes made she,
That Damian sholde clime up-on a tree,
That charged was with fruit, and up he went;

820 For verraily° he knew al hir entente,

And every signe that she coude make

Wel bet° than Ianuarie, hir owene make.°

For in a lettre she had told him al

Of this matere, how he werchen shal."°

And thus I lete him sitte up-on the pyrie,°

And Ianuarie and May rominge myrie.

[The Merchant turns his attention to a far corner of the garden, where Pluto and Proserpyna are discussing the events unfolding among Januarie, May, and Damian. Pluto deplores the disrespect shown to “this olde, blynde, worthy knyght” and describes May as a case study in women’s untrustworthiness. He vows that Januarie will regain his sight and learn about Damian and May’s treachery. Proserpyna, for her part, defends women against Pluto’s accusations and asserts that she will provide May with a sufficient answer once Januarie learns the truth. She notes that she herself is a woman; if she does not speak out, she will “swelle til myn herte breke.” The couple mutually decides to stop arguing with one another.]

928 Now lat us turne agayn to Ianuarie,

That in the gardin with his faire May

930 Singeth, ful merier than the papeiay°

“Yow love I best, and shal, and other noon.”

So longe aboute the aleyes° is he goon,

Til he was come agaynes thilke pyrie,

Wher-as this Damian sitteth fill myrie

An heigh,° among the fresshe leves grene.

934 And thus I lete him sitte up-on the pyrie,°

And Januarie and May rominge myrie.

This fresshe May, that is so bright and shene,"°

Gan for to syke," and seyde, “allas, my syde!

Now sir,” quod she, “for aught that may

bityde,"°

I moste han of the peres that I see,

Or I mot° dye, so sore longeth me°

To eten of° the smale peres grene.

Help, for hir love that is of hevene quene!

I telle yow wel, a woman in my plyt°

May han to fruit° so greet an appetyt

That she may dyen, but° she of it have.”

“Allas!” quod he, “that I ne had heer a knave°

That coude clime; allas! allas!” quod he,

“That I am blind.” “Ye, sir, no fors,”°

quod she:

“But wolde ye vouche-sauf,” for goddes sake,

950 The pyrie° inwith° your armes for to take,

(For wel I woot that ye mistruste me)

Thanne sholde I climbe wel y-nogh,”°

quod she,

“So I my foot mighte sette upon your bak.”

“Certes,” quod he, “ther-on shal be no lak,

Mighte I yow helpen with myn herte blood.”

He stoupeth doun, and on his bak she stood,

And caughte hir by a twiste,° and up she gooth.

Ladies, I prey yow that ye be nat wrooth;

I can nat glose,° I am a rude man.

960 And sodeynly anon this Damian

verraily truly bet better make mate how...shall what he will do pyrie pear tree papeiay parrot aleyes walkways An heigh on high shene fair Gan...syke began to sigh for...bityde anything that might happen mot must sore longeth me sorely do I long eten of to eat plyt situation [i.e. pregnancy] to fruit for fruit but unless knave servant boy no fors no matter vouche-sauf consent pyrie pear tree inwith within y-nogh enough shal...lak will be no limitation by a twiste by a branch
Gan pullen up the smok," and in he throng.
And whan that Pluto saugh this grete wrong.
To Januarie he gaf° agayn his sighte,
And made him see, as wel as ever he mighte.
And whan that he hadde caught his sighte agayn,
Ne was ther never man of thing so fayn.°
But on his wyf his thought was evermo;
Up to the tree he caste his eyen two,
And saugh that Damian his wyf had dressed°
970 In swich manere, it may nat ben expressed
But if I wolde speke uncurteisly:
And up he yaf° a roring and a cry
As doth the moder whan the child shal dye:
“Out! help! allas! hardow!” he gan to crye,
“O stronge lady store,° what dostow?”°
And she answerde, “sir, what eyleth° yow?
Have pacience, and resoun in your minde,
I have yow holpe° on bothe your eyen blinde.
Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lyen,
980 As me was taught, to hele with your yen,°
Was no-thing bet° to make yow to see
Than strugle with a man up-on a tree.
God woor, I dide it in ful good entente.”
“Strugle!” quod he, “ye, algate° in it wente!
God yeve yow bothe on shames deeth
to dyen!
He swyved° thee, I saugh it with myne yen,
And elles be I hanged by the hals!”°
“Thanne is,” quod she, “my medicyne al fals;
For certeinly, if that ye mighte see,
990 Ye wolde nat seyn thise wordes un-to me
Ye han som glimsging° and no parfit° sighte.”
“I see,” quod he, “as wel as ever I mighte,
Thonked be God! with bothe myne eyen two,
And by my trouthe, me thoughte he dide thee so.”
“Ye maze,” maze, gode sire,” quod she,
“This thank have I for I have maad yow see;
Allas!” quod she, “that ever I was so kinde!”
“Now, dame,” quod he, “lat al passe out of minde.
Com doun, my lief," and if I have mis-sayd,°
1000God help me so, as I am yvel apayd.”°
But, by my fader soule, I wende han seyn,”°
How that this Damian had by thee leyn,°
And that thy smok had leyn up-on his brest.”
“Ye, sire,” quod she, “ye may wene as yow lest;°
But, sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep,
He may nat sodeynly wel taken keep
Up-on a thing, ne seen it parfitly,
Right so a man, that longe hath blind y-be,”°

glose speak deceptively
smok undergarmen
throng pushed
gaf gave
fayn pleased
dressed
positioned
yalf gave
stronge lady store
bold, shameless woman
dostow are you doing
eyleth
ails
holpe helped
yen eyes
bet better
algate altogether
swyved had sex with
hals neck
glimsing
glimsing
parfit perfect
maze are bewildered
dief dear
missayd missspoken
yvel apayd badly
displease
wende han seyn thought to have seen
leyn lain
wene...lest think as you want
Til that he be adawedº verraily;
1010 Ne may nat sodeynly so wel y-see,
First whan his sighte is newe come ageyn,
As he that hath a day or two y-seyn.
Til that your sighte y-satled beº a whyle,
Ther may ful many a sighte yow bigyle."º
Beth war,"º I prey yow; for, by hevene king,
Ful many a man wenethº to seen a thing,
And it is al another than it semeth.
He that misconceyveth,"º he misdemeth."º
And with that word she leep doun fro the tree.
1020 This Ianuarie, who is glad but he?
He kisseth hir, and clippethº hir ful ofte,
And on hir wombe he stroketh hir ful softe,
And to his palaysº hoom he hath hir lad."º
Now, gode men, I pray yow to be glad.
Thus endeth heer my tale of Ianuarie;
God blesse us and his moder Seinte Marie!
Endnotes


3 We might compare May, for example, to Chauntecleer the rooster in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, who escapes the fox’s jaws by conjuring up a triumphant speech the fox might make. Although less directly threatened, Jankin the squire in the *Summoner’s Tale* shows a quickness similar to May’s when he devises the clever interpretation of the lord’s mighty fart.

4 While Proserpina presumably helps her at this moment, May has already demonstrated through her plotting and use of multiple forms of communication that she is resourceful and clever in her own right.

5 Januarie and Damian also demonstrate this ability, albeit to a less striking extent: Januarie learns to live with his blindness (ll. 691–92), and Damian eventually picks up a penner in an attempt to do something about his lovesickness (l. 485).

6 For a seminal critique of the connection between disability and inspiration, see Stella Young, “I’m not your inspiration, thank you very much,” TEDxSydney (2014), http://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much/.

7 In Greek mythology, Argus is a giant with a hundred eyes.

8 These lines evoke the biblical Song of Solomon (e.g., *Song of Solomon* 7:11).
**The Man of Law’s Tale from *The Canterbury Tales*¹**

(ca. 1387–1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer

Contributed by Paul A. Broyles

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**Introduction**

The *Man of Law’s Tale*, with its border-crossing heroine Custaunce, explores many forms of difference and their roles in creating communal identity. Custaunce, daughter of the emperor of Rome, is married to the Sultan of Syria. Exiled upon his murder, she drifts to Northumberland, participates in multiple miracles, and marries the king and gives birth to his son before being exiled yet again with her child; they eventually reunite in Rome and their son becomes emperor. While the early portion of the tale set in Syria explores cultural identity through the interplay of race and religion, its Northumbrian episode (beginning at l. 505) turns to disability to define spiritual and social boundaries.

The tale places blindness at the root of the Christian history of Northumberland—a part of England—which is pagan when Custaunce arrives. Custaunce has privately taught Christian doctrine to Hermengild, the wife of her benefactor, and the two women have been practicing their religion together in secret. But Christianity does not pass beyond this female domestic sphere until they encounter a “blynde Britoun” (l. 561) on the beach, who begs Hermengild to restore his sight. He is a member of the Briton Christian population that formerly governed the island, connecting Custaunce’s religion with an insular history that predates the coming of the English. Later, a knight who tries to frame Custaunce for murder is miraculously blinded, which leads King Alla to convert to Christianity.

The tale’s use of blindness follows what Edward Wheatley has termed the “religious model” of disability: both the Briton’s blindness and the false knight’s blinding are understood exclusively in spiritual terms. The Briton’s blindness is significant to the scene’s religious message, yet the tale is so uninterested in the man himself that, unlike his sources, Chaucer does not even report that his sight is restored. The blind man exists to demonstrate the sanctity of Hermengild and Custaunce and to impel public recognition of their Christianity; his blindness serves narratively only to demand a miraculous cure. He thus exemplifies what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call “narrative prosthesis”: the tale depends upon disability to disrupt the social order only to eliminate and erase its deviance.

Yet within the cultural system of the tale, his blindness carries great—and double-edged—significance. Since under the religious model disabilities, including blindness, could be understood as signs of sin, the Briton’s blindness might be taken to indicate a spiritual failure on the part of the Britons, earlier inhabitants of the island who (according to Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*) failed to evangelize their Germanic conquerors. Elsewhere, however, the tale reports that the purpose of miracles, even those rooted in hardship, may simply be to demonstrate God’s power: “God lyste to shewe his wonderfull miracle / In hire, for we shulde seen his myghti werkys” (ll. 477–78). This lan-
Poetry

language recalls John 9, in which Jesus heals a man born blind and explains that his condition exists not as a punishment for sin, “but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3). Disability under the religious model is not limited to being a sign or metaphor for sin; people with disabilities also play a privileged role in revealing God’s truths. And the Briton, despite his physical blindness, shows unique spiritual sight in recognizing Hermengild’s holiness. Indeed, Chaucer goes beyond his sources in noting that blind people can access other forms of vision than the physical through the “yen [eyes] of [the] mynde” (l. 552).

The power of this Christianity out of Britain’s past manifests itself not just as spiritual sight, but by shaping Northumbrian jurisprudence and marking a criminal’s body with the sign of his sin. A Northumbrian knight frames Custaunce for murder and swears to her guilt on “a Briton Book written with evangiles” (l. 666)—presumably an ancient gospel-book produced by the Britons. Although this artifact carries no religious meaning for the pagan court, the knight suffers an immediate, gory punishment: a hand strikes him on the neck so that both his eyes burst out. This punitive miracle showcases the power of the Christian God so dramatically that King Alla and his court promptly convert. Once again, the Briton past is instrumental to the conversion of the realm. By associating blindness specifically with the Britons, the tale not only shows God’s power but emphasizes the role of Briton Christianity in carrying Custaunce’s Roman Christianity into the English future.

Custaunce herself is a figure consistently marked by her body’s deviations from the norms that surround her. Set apart by her sex, her race, her religion, she fits uneasily wherever she goes. Donegild, King Alla’s mother, is dismayed that her son would marry “so straunge a creature” (l. 700), emphasizing Custaunce’s foreignness; Donegild pushes this language to an almost inhuman extreme when she falsely describes Custaunce’s newborn son Maurice as “so horrible a fendlyche creature” (l. 751). In making this accusation, Donegild attacks Custaunce through her maternal body, seeking to use the idea of a non-normative or “monstrous” birth to redefine Custaunce and her son not just as culturally foreign but outside the category of the human entirely.

Medieval accounts of so-called monstrous births may in part represent a framework for thinking about children born with congenital disabilities. While the Man of Law’s Tale does not actually represent a “monstrous” child—it takes pains to stress the beauty of Custaunce’s son, Maurice—Custaunce is rumored to have given birth to such a baby, a charge that sheds light on the role of women’s bodies and on social attitudes toward people with disabilities. In the story of Custaunce and others like it, rumors of a non-normative birth are intended to lead to the queen’s banishment or execution. Monstrous births frequently carried the suggestion of moral and especially sexual deviance: nonhuman offspring might be said to result from sex with an animal or other nonhuman creature. But in Custaunce’s story, the child’s supposed abnormality speaks directly to his mother’s body. Custaunce, Donegild asserts, is herself inhuman: “the moder was an elfe” (l. 754). While this accusation is meant to render Custaunce inhuman and perhaps monstrous, it points to the dangerous power of women’s reproductive bodies that Tory Vandeven-ter Pearman has analyzed in the Merchant’s Tale. Custaunce’s body and that of her son, Donegild reminds us, are linked: Maurice’s body, in its supposed deviance, reflects upon Custaunce’s; Custaunce’s body has power over her son’s. Even if accusations of monstrous births often prove false in stories like Custaunce’s, they suggest that the intimate biological connection between mothers and children was dangerous to both: if mothers might be to blame for their children’s deviations from bodily norms, both could be excluded from human society.
But Alla, who does not take the bait, offers an alternative model for understanding non-normative births. On hearing that his son is monstrous, the king is dismayed, weeping privately. But he explicitly instructs that both child (“al be it foule or faire,” l. 764) and wife should be kept until he returns; other comments indicate that he understands accepting the child as a religious duty. His attitude falls well short of embracing his “monstrous” child, but his response shows that he understands the birth to accord with God’s will, and does not believe himself empowered to reject such a child—a markedly different response than Donegild anticipates. While Alla’s reaction marks the birth of a non-normative child as an occasion for grief, it also asserts a Christian duty to care for such children, and dramatizes a layered human reaction.

That the tale’s two major representations of disability cluster in the English section is telling. The Syrian and Northumbrian episodes parallel each other in many ways, but Northumberland is converted while Syria is destroyed because (as Geraldine Heng has argued) Syria is imagined as irreconcilably racially and religiously different from a “normative” European Christianity, while England’s pagan past is not. In Northumberland, which the tale does not imagine as racially separate from Custaunce or from Chaucer’s English audiences, physical impairment becomes a key category for representing difference. Spiritually charged blindness allows the tale to showcase a long tradition of Christianity in Britain and circumscribe the new community of Northumbrian Christianity; Custaunce’s maternal body shows how disability might be leveraged to exclude people from the category of humanity altogether. Where distinctions of race and religion break down, the tale turns to bodily norms and disability to create and police its boundaries.

Bibliography


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The Man of Law introduces his tale by complaining that there are hardly any tales, except those concerning incest, that Chaucer has not already told. This is followed by a prologue in which he describes the misery that is caused by poverty.

Here bigynneth the Tale of the Man of Lawe

134 In Surrye\(^{\text{e}}\) whilom\(^{\text{e}}\) dwelte a companye Of chapmen\(^{\text{e}}\) riche, and therto\(^{\text{o}}\) sadde\(^{\text{o}}\) and trewe, That wide-where\(^{\text{o}}\) senten here spicerye,\(^{\text{o}}\) Clothis of golde and satyns riche of hewe. Here\(^{\text{e}}\) chaffare\(^{\text{e}}\) was so thrifty\(^{\text{o}}\) and so newe That every wight\(^{\text{o}}\) hath deynte\(^{\text{e}}\) to chaffare\(^{\text{e}}\)

140 With hem, and eke to sellen hem hire ware. Now fille it that the maistres of that sorte\(^{\text{e}}\) Han shapen hem\(^{\text{e}}\) to Rome for to wende.\(^{\text{e}}\) Were it for chapmanhode\(^{\text{e}}\) or for disporte,\(^{\text{e}}\) Noon other message wolde they theder sende, But comen hymselfe to Rome—this is th'ende, And in swiche place as thoughte hem avauntrage, For hire eace,\(^{\text{e}}\) they taken here herbergage.\(^{\text{e}}\) Sojourned han these merchauntz in that toune A certeyn tyme, as fel to hire plesaunce, And so byfel\(^{\text{e}}\) the excellent renown

Of th'Emperoures doughter, dame Custaunce, Reported was with every circumstaunce Unto thise Surreyn merchauntz in swiche wise\(^{\text{e}}\) From day to day, as I shall yow devyse.\(^{\text{o}}\) This was the commune voys of every man: "Oure Emperoure of Rome (God hym see) A daughter hath that, sith\(^{\text{o}}\) the world bygan, To rekne as wele hire goodnesse as beaute, Nas nevere swiche another as is she. I preye to god in honour hir sustene, And wolde she were of alle Europe the quene!"

[They see Custaunce themselves and return home to Syria.]

176 Now fille it that these merchauntz stode in grace Of hym that was the Sowdon of Surrye,\(^{\text{e}}\) For whan they come fro any straunge\(^{\text{e}}\) place, He wolde, of his benyngne curtesye,\(^{\text{e}}\) Make hem good chere, and bysily espie Tidynges of sundry regnes,\(^{\text{o}}\) for to lere\(^{\text{e}}\) The wondres that they myght sen or here. Amonges other thynges, specially, These merchauntz han hym tolde of dame Custaunce So grete noblesse,\(^{\text{e}}\) in ernest seriously, That this Sowdon hath caught so grete plesaunce\(^{\text{o}}\)

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Surrye: Syria
whilom: once
chapmen: merchants
therto: moreover
sadde: steadfast
wide-where: far and wide
spicerye: goods
Here: their
chaffare: merchandise
thrifty: high-quality
wight: person
deynte: pleasure
chaffare: trade
sorte: company
shapen: made arrangements
wende: go
chapmanhode: business
disporte: pleasure
eace: benefit, comfort
herbergage: lodging
byfel: it happened that
in swiche wise: in such a manner
devyse: relate
sith: since
Sowdon of Surrye: Sultan of Syria
straunge: foreign
benynge curtesye: generous hospitality
sundry regnes: various kingdoms
ler: learn about
noblesse: renown, noble character
plesaunce: desire
To han hire figure° in hise remembrance,  
And alle his luste,° and alle his busy cure°  
Was for to love hire while his lyfe may dure.°

[The Sowdon assembles his privy council,  
who entertain many a number of options to satisfy his desire for Custaunce, but ultimately, they conclude that the two must marry.]

218 Thanne saugh therinne swiche difficulte  
Be way of resoun, for to speke al playn,  
220 Bycause that ther was swiche dyversite°  
Bitwene hire bothe° lawes, that thay sayn  
They trewe that no Cristen prince wolde fayn°  
Wedden his childe underoure lawes sweete,°  
That us was yeven° be Mahoun° oure prophete.  
And he answered, “Rather than I lese Custaunce, I wole be cristened,° douteles.  
I moot ben hires;° I may non other chese.  
I pray yow, holdeth youre argumentz in pees.  
Saveth my lyfe, and beth nat recchelees°  
230 To geten hire that hath my lyfe in cure,  
For in thys woo I may not longe endure.”

[An agreement is reached that Custaunce will marry the Sowdon, bringing with her a dowry; in exchange, he and all his men will be baptized. Custaunce bewails the fact that she must leave home and family to travel to a foreign land, but she sets sail.]

323 The moder of the Sowdan (welle of vices)  
Espied hath hire sones pleyyn entente,  
How he wole lete° his olde sacrifices,  
And right anoon° she for hire counseile sente,  
And they ben come to knowe what she mente,  
And when assembled was this folke in fere,”  
She sette hire doun and seide as ye shal here:

330 “Lordes,” she seide, “ye knowen everychone  
How that my sone in poyn is for to lete°  
The holy lawes ofoure Alkaron,”°  
Yeven by goddes massage° Macomete.”°  
But oon avow to grete God I hete:°  
The lyfe shall rather oute of my body sterre°  
Than Macometes lawe oute of myn herte.  
What sholde us tyden of° this newe lawe  
But° thraldom° to oure bodies and penaunce°  
And afterwarde in hell to be drawe°

340 For we reneyed° Mahoun oure creunce?°  
But lordynges, wyl ye make assuance  
As I shall seyn, assentyng to my lore,”°  
And I shal maken us sauf for evermore.”
[Her council agrees to stand with her. She explains her plan:]

351  “We shulle firste feyne° us Cristendome to take.
      Coolde water° shall nat greve° us but a lite!
      And I shall swiche a feste and revel make
      That, as I trowe, I shall the Sowdan quyte.°
      For thogh his wyfe be cristened never so white,
      She shall have nede to waisshe away the rede,"°
      Though she a fonte-ful water° with hire lede!°
      O Sawdanesse, roote of iniquite,
      Virago,° thow Semyrame° the secunde;
      O serpent under femynynytee,
      Lyke to the serpent depe in helle y-bounde;
      O feyned° woman, al that may confounde
      Vertue and innocence, thurgh thy malice
      Is bred in the, as neste of every vice!

[She approaches her son, pledges to convert to Christianity, and asks his blessing to throw a feast for the Christians. Custaunce and her entourage arrive with great pomp, and all go to the feast.]}

428  For shortly for to tellen at a worde,
      The Soudan and the Cristen everichon
530  Ben al tohewe° and stiked° at the borde,"°
      But if it were oonly Dame Custaunce allone.
      This olde Soudanesse—kursed krone—
      Hath with hire frendes doon this cursed dede.
      For she hirselfe wolde al the cuntre lede."°
      Ne was Surrien noon that was converted,
      That of the counseile of the Soudan woor,"°
      That he nas al tohewe or he asterted."°
      And Custaunce han they take anoon foot-hoot°
      And in a shoppe al stereles," God woot,
      They han hire sette, and biddeth hire lerne saile
      Oute of Surrye agaynward° to Itaille."°

463  Yeris and daies fleet this creature
      Thurghoute the see of Grece," unto the stryate
      Of Marrok," as it was hir aventure."°
      On many a sory mele° now may she baite.°
      Aftir hire deeth ful ofte may she wayte,
      Or that° the wilde wawes° wole hire dryve
      Unto the place ther she shalle arryve.
570  Men myghten asken why she was nat slayn,
      Eke° at the feste, who myght hire body save?
      And I answere to that demaunde agayn;
      Who saved Daniel in the horrible cave,
      Ther every wight° save he, maister or knave,"°

feyne pretend  Coolde water i.e., baptism  greve harm  quyte take revenge on  rede red (of blood)  fonte-ful water enough water to fill a baptismal font  lede bring  Virago man-like woman  Semyrame Semiramis, an Assyrian queen said to have behaved like a man  feyned false  tohewe cut to pieces  stiked stabbed  borde table  lede rule  woor knew or he asterted before he got up  foot-hoot hastily  stereles rudderless  agaynward back  Itaille Italy  see of Grece the Mediterranean Sea  stryate / Of Marrok Strait of Gibraltar  aventure fortune  mele meal  baite feed  Or that until  wawes waves  Eke also
Was with the leuon° frete° er he
asterte?°
No wight° but God, that he bare in his
herte.
God lyste° to shewe his wonderfull
miracle
In hire, for we shulde seen his myghti
werkys.
Criste, whiche that is to every harme
triale,°

By certeyn menes ofte (as known
clerkys)
Dooth thynge for certeyn ende that ful
derke° is
To mannys witte, that for oure igno-
raunce
Ye kunne nat° knowe his prudent pur-
veaunce.°

She dryveth forth into oure occian,°
Thurghoute oure wilde see, til at the
laste,
Under an holde° that nempnyn I ne
kan,°
Fer in Northumberland, the wavyn° hir
caste,
And in the sande hire shippe stiked so
faste

That thennes wolde it nat of alle a
tyde.°
The wille of Criste was that she sholde
abyde.
The Constable of the castel doun is
fare°
To sen his wrak,° and alle the shippe he
sought,

And fonde this very woman full of
care.
He fonde also the tresour that she
brought.
In hire langage mercy she besought,
The lyfe outhe of hire body to twynne,°
Hire to delyver of woo that she was
ynne.
A maner Latyn corrupt was hire
speche,

But algate° therby was she understonde.
This Constable, whan hym lyste° no
lenger seche.°
This wofull woman broughthe he to the
londe.
She kneleth doun and thanketh goddis
sonde.°
But what she was she wolde no man
seye,
For foule ne faire," thow° that she
sholde deye.
She saide she was so mased° in the
see
That she forgate hir mynde, by hire
trouthe.
The Constable hath of hire so grete
pitee,
And eke his wife, that they wepen for
routhe,°

She was so diligent, withowten
sloughthe,°
To serve and please everiche in that
place,
That alle hir loven that loken in hire
face.
This Constable and Dame Hermen-
gild his wyf
Were paiens,° and that cuntre every-
where,
But Hermengild loved hire right as hire lyfe,
And Custance hath so longe sojourned there
In orisons,° with many a bitter tere,
Til Jhesu hath converted thurgh his grace
Dame Hermengilde, Constablesse of that place.

540 In al that londe no Cristen dorste route.°
Alle Cristene folke ben fledde fro that cuntre
Thurgh° payens° that conquereden al aboute
The plages° of the North, by land and se.
To Walys° fledde the Cristianyte°
Of olde Britons dwellyng in this ile:
Ther was hire refute for the mene-while.
But yet nere° Cristen Britons so exiled
That there nere somme that, in hire privetee,°
Honoured Criste and hethen folke bigiled,°

550 And neigh° the castel swiche there dwelten three,°
That oon of hem was blynde;? and myght nat see,
But° it were of thilke yen° of his mynde°
With whiche men see whan that they be blynde.
Bright was the sonne as in that som-eris day,
For whiche the Constable, and his wife also,
And Custance han take the right way Toward the see a furlong wey or two,
To pleyen and to romen too and fro."°
And in hire walke this blynde man they mette,

560 Croked and old, with eyen faste yshette.°
"In name of Criste," cride the blynde Britoun,
"Dame Hermengilde, yef me my sight agayn!"
This lady waxe afraied° of the soun,°
Leste that hire housbonde, shortly for to sayn,
Wolde hire for Jhesu Cristes love han slayn,°
Til Custaunce made hire bolde and bade hire werche°
The wille of Criste, a daughter of his chirche.
The Constable waxe abasshed° of that sight,
And seide, "What amounteth° al this fare?°"

570 Custaunce answered, "Sire, it is Cristes myght,
That helpeth folke oute of the fendes° snare,"
And so ferforth° she gan oure lay° declare
That she the Constable, er it was eve,"
Converteth, and on Crist maketh hym byleve.
This Constable was nothyng lord of thys place
Of whiche I speke, ther° he Custaunce fonde,
But kepte it strongely many wyntres space,
Under Alla, kyng of all Northumber-lond,
That was ful wis and worthy of his honde°
580 Agayn the Scottes, as men may wele here—
But turne I wole agayn to my matere.

[Satan seeks to undermine Custaunce by making a young knight lust after her.]

589 He wowith° hire, but it availleth noght;°
590 She wolde do no synne by no weye,"°
And for despite° he compaseth° in his thought
To maken hire on shameful deth to deye.
He waiteth whan° the Constable was aweye,
And prively on a nyght he crepte
In Hermengildes chambre while she slepte.
Wery, forwaked° in hire orisons,"°
Slepeth Custaunce and Hermengille also.
This knyght thorow° Sathans temptacouns
Al softly is to bedde y-goo,
600 And kitte° the throte of Hermengild arwo,°
And leyde the blody knyfe by Dame Custaunce
And wente his weye—ther God yef hym myschaunce!°
Sone aftir cometh this Constable hoom agayn,
And eke Alla, that kyng was of that londe,
And saugh his wyfe disputously° yslayn,
For whiche full ofte he wepe and wronge his honde,
And in the bedde the blody knyfe he fonde
By Dame Custaunce. Allas, what myght she seye?
For verrey woo hir wirte was al awey.
610 To kynge Alla was tolde alle this meschaunce,
And eke the tyme, and where, and in what wise°
That in a shippe was founden this Custaunce,
As here-byforn that ye han herde devyse.
The kynges herte of pite gan agrise°
Whan he sey° so benyngne a creature Falle in disese° and in mysaventure.°

[Everyone but Custaunce’s accuser speaks to her good character and cannot imagine that she has done such a thing. Custaunce, fright-
ened, prays for divine aid.]

659 This Alla kyng hath swiche compassion
660 (As gentil herte is fulilde of pite°)
That from his eyen ranne the water doun.
“Now hastely doo fecche a book,” quod he,
“And if this knyght wol sweren how that she
This womman slowe, yet wol we us avyse°
Whom that we wole that shal be° oure justise.°
A Briton Book writen with evaungiles°
Was fette,° and on this booke he swore anoon
She giltif was. And in the mene-whiles, 
An honde hym smote upon the nekke bon, 
That doune he fel at ones as a stoon, 
And bothe his eyen broste oute of his face 
In sighte of everybody in that place. 
A voys was herde in general audience, 
And seide, “Thow hast disclaundred gilteles” 
The daughter of Holy Chirche in heigh presence.” 
Thus hast thow doon, and yet holde I my pes.” 
Of this mervaille agaste was alle the pres; 
As mazed folke they stonden everych-one 
For drede of wreche, save Custaunce alone. 
Grete was the drede and eke the repentance 
Of hem that hadde wronge suspeccion 
Upoun this sely innocent Custaunce, 
And for this miracle, in conclucion, 
The kynges moder, full of tyrannye, 
Hir thought hire cursed herte barste atwo. 
She wolde nought hire sone hadde do so. 
Hire thought a despite that he sholde take 
So straunge a creature unto his make.” 
On hire he gate a knave-childe anoon, 
And to a bisshope, and his Constable eke, 
He toke his wife to kepe whan he is gon 
To Scotland-warde his foomen for to seke. 
Now faire Custaunce, that is so humble and meke, 
So longe is goon with childe, til that stille 
She halte hire chamber, abydyng Cristis wille. 
The tyme is come a knave-childe she beer: Mauricius at the fonte-stoone they hym calle. 
This Constable doth com forth a messynger 
And wroot unto his kyng, that cleped was Alle,
How that this blysful tydyng is befalle,
And other tydynges spedfull° forto seye.
He tath° the lettre and forth he goth his weye.

[The messenger, hoping to be rewarded for his good news, carries these tidings to the king's mother Donegild, who invites him to lodge with her for the night.]

743 This messager dranke sadly° ale and wyn,
And stolen were his lettres prively
Oute of his boxe, while he sleep as a swyn,"°
And countrefeted was full sotilly°
Another lettre, wrought full synfully,
Unto the kynge directe of this matere
Fro his Constable, as ye shulle after here.

750 The lettre spake the quene delivered was
Of so horrible a fendlyche° creature°
That in the Castel noon so hardy° was
That any while° durste° there endure.°
The moder was an elfe, by aventure,"°
Icomen° by charms or by sorcerie,
And everyche hatieth° hir companye.
Woo was this kyng whan he this lettre hadde seyn,"°
But to no wight° he tolde his sorwes sore.
But of his owene hoond he wroot agayn:"°

760 "Welcome the sonde° of Criste for ever-more
To me that am now lerned in his lore.
Lorde, welcome be thy luste° and thy plesaunce;°
My luste I putte al in thyn ordenaunce.°
Kepe this childe, al be it foule° or faire,
And eke° my wyfe, unto my home com-mynge.
Criste, whan hym luste,"° may sende me an eir°
Moore agreable than this to my lykyngye.°
This lettre he seleth prively, wepynge,
Whiche to the messenger was take sone,

770 And forth he gooth; ther is nomore to done.

778 O Donegild, I ne have non Englyssh digno°
Unto thy malice and thy tirannye,
780 And therfore to the fende° I the re-signo;°
Lete hym enditen° of thi traitorye."°
Fy, mannyssh,° fy!—o nay, by God, I lye—
Fy, fendelich spirit! for I dare wele telle,
Thogh thow here walke, thi spirit is in helle!

[The messenger returns by way of Donegild's court, where he once again gets drunk.]

792 Eft° were his lettres stolen everychone
And countrefeted lettres in this wyse:°
The kyng commaundeth his Constable anone,
Up° peyne of hangyng on on heigh jewyse,°
That he ne shulde suffren in no wyse

spedfull appropriate  tath takes  sadly deeply  swyn  swine  sotilly  skillfully  fendlyche  devillish  hardy  bold  any while  for any time  durste  dared  would have it  Icomen  arrived  hatieth  hates  seyn  seen  reply  sonde  ordenaunce  luste  will  plesaunce  wishes  also  hym  luste  it  pleases  him  eir  heir  digno  sufficient  write  traitorye  treachery  mannyssh  man-like (woman)  eke  fende  devil  resigne  consign  enditen  Eft  once more  wyse  way  Up upon  on  heigh  jewyse  a high cross or gallows
Custaunce inwith° his reigne° for to abide°
Thre dayes and a quarter of a tyde,
But in the same shippe as he hir fonde,
Hire and hire yonge sone and al hire gere°
He sholde putte, and crowde° hir fro the londe,
And charge hire that she never efte come there.
O my Custaunce, wele may thy goost° have fere,"
And, slepyng in thy dreem, ben in penaunce,
Whan Donegild caste° all this ordenaunce!

[The messenger carries the counterfeit letter to the Constable, who laments that he must cause pain to someone as good as Custuance.]

Wepen bothe yonge and olde in al that place
When that the kynge this cursed lettre sente,
And Custaunce, with a dedly pale face,
The ferthe° day toward hir shippe she wente.
But natheles she taketh° in good entente°
The wille of Criste, and knelynge on the stronde
She seide, “Lorde, ay° welcome be thy sonde!”°
[The messenger carries the counterfeit letter to the Constable, who laments that he must cause pain to someone as good as Custuance.]

Now late us stynte of° Custaunce butt a throwe,°
And speke we of the Romayn Empe-roure,
That oute of Surrue hath by lettre knows
The slaughter of Cristen folke, and dishonour
Doon to his daughter by a fals trai-tour—
I mene the cursed, wikked Soudanesse
That at the feest leet slee° both more and lesse,°
For whiche this Emperour hath sente anon
His Senatour with roial ordenaunce,°
And oother lordes, God woot,° many oon,
On Surriens to take heigh vengeaunce.
They brennen,° sleen,° and brynge hem to meschaunce°
Full many a day—but shortly, this is th’ende,
Homward to Rome they shapen hem to wende,°
This Senatour repaireth° with victo-rie,
To Roome-warde seillyng° full roially,
And mette the shippe dryvynge, as seith the storie,
In whiche Custaunce sit ful pitously.
Nothynge knewe he what she was, ne why
She was in swiche array, ne she nel° seye
Of hire estate,° though she sholde deye.

[The Senator brings Custoane back to Rome, where she dwells as a member of his household; the Senator’s wife is Custoane’s aunt, but does not recognize her. King Alla makes a pilgrimage to Rome to do penance for the slaying of his mother. The Senator joins Alla for a feast, taking Custoane’s son, Maurice, with him.]

1009 Som men wolde seyne at requeste of Custoane
1010 This Senatour hath ladde this childe to feste;
I may nat tellen every circumstaunce.
Be as be may, ther was he at the leste,
But sooth° is this, that at his moder heste
Biforn Alla, duryng the metys space,°
The childe stood lokyng in the kynges face.
This Alla kyng hath of this childe grete wonder,
And to the Senatour he sayde anoon:
“Whos is that faire childe that stondeth yonder?”

1020 A moder he hath, but fader hath he noon
That I of woot.”° But shortly in a stounde,°
He tolde Alla how that this childe was founde.

1030 Now was this childe as lyke unto Custoane
As possible is a creature to be.
This Alla hath the face in remembraunce
Of Dame Custoane, and ther-on mused he,
If that the childes moder were aught° she,
That is his wife, and pryvely he sight,°
And sped hym fro the table that° he myght.

[Alla tries to remind himself that his wife is dead at sea (as he believes), but he returns home with the Senator and asks to see Custoane. He recognizes her immediately, and after he convinces her that he had no part in her banishment, they are joyfully reunited. They then invite her father, the Emperor, to dinner and reveal her identity for another joyful family reunion. Their son, Maurice, later becomes emperor.]

1128 This kyng Alla, whan he his tyme° say,°
With his Custoane, his holy wyfe so swete,°
1130 To Engelond ben they come the right wey,
Whereas° they lyve in joye and in quyete,°
But litel while° it lasteth, I yow hete.°
Joye of this world for tyme wol not abyde;°
Fro day to nyght it chaungeth as the ryde.

For deeth, that taketh of heigh and lowe his rente,
Whan passed was a yere, evene as I
gesse,
Oute of this worlde this kyng Alla he
hent,°
For whom Custaunce hath full greet
hevynesse.°
Now late us pray God his soule blesse!
And Dame Custaunce (finally to seye)
Toward the toun of Rome gooth hir
weye.
To Rome is come this holy creature
1150 And fyndeth here frenedes hole and
sounde.°
Now is she scaped° al hir aventure.
And whan that she hir fader hath
yfounde,
Doun on hire knees falleth she to
grounde,
Weppyne for tendernesse° in herte
blithe;°
She herieth° god an hundred thowsand
sithe.°
In vertue and holy almesdede°
They leven alle, and never asonder
wend.°
Til dethe departed hem, this lyfe they
lede.
And fareth now wele! My tale is at an
ende.
1160 Now Jhesu Criste that of hys myght
may sende
Joye aftir woo, governe us in his grace,
And kepe us alle that ben in this place!
Amen.

Here endeth the Tale of the Man of Lawe.
Endnotes

1 The text below was compiled by Paul A. Broyles from the digital facsimile of Oxford, Christ Church College, MS 152, available online at http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p7de321d-3d0e-4863-b402-3037e0963f27. Errors and omissions have been corrected with reference to the digital facsimile of the Ellesmere manuscript, available online at http://hdl.huntington.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15150coll7/id/2463. Further references to manuscript variants, along with minor emendations, are taken from John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, eds., The Text of the Canterbury Tales, vol. 5 (University of Chicago Press, 1940). Chaucer’s sources, Nicholas Trevet’s Anglo-French Chronicles and John Gower’s Confessio Amantis, are referenced in the notes; Gower’s text is available in this volume, and Trevet’s may be found with accompanying English translation in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, eds., Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales, vol. 2 (D.S. Brewer, 2009), 296–329. Footnotes and endnotes are also provided by Paul A. Broyles.

2 David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse (University of Michigan Press, 2000); see especially ch. 2.


5 The eyes of the mind were a commonplace in classical and medieval thought. St. Augustine distinguishes three categories of vision: corporeal, spiritual (memory, imagination; experienced by blind people when they see images while asleep or recall dreams), and intellectual (inerrant and concerned with divine truth); see St. Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, trans. John Hammond Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers 42, vol. 2 (Newman Press, 1982), book 12. It is difficult to be certain what level of insight Chaucer associates with the “eyes of the mind,” but in any case, the phrase specifically assigns to blind people a capacity for vision beyond the physical.

6 Susan Schoon Eberly has shown how many traditional descriptions of changelings and other fairy creatures resemble specific identifiable medical conditions, even suggesting that such figures could lie behind stories like Beowulf. See also Keagan Brewer, “Wonder, Fear, Orality and Community,” Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages (Routledge, 2016), pp. 46–78: “Genetic diversity and consequent physical ‘deformity’, a natural and inevitable part of human and animal evolution alike, was understood through the cultural construct of the monstrous birth” (53).

7 New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya MS 32 (formerly the Delamere MS) tells us that “some were” blind, making the blindness a widespread condition of the Britons rather than a characteristic of a particular Briton, perhaps suggesting that their blindness is understood as spiritual. In the previous line, the number of Britons living near the castle is not specified. The manuscript continues to pluralize the Britons’ blindness until the appeal to Hermingild, which is still in the singular.

8 Some manuscripts read “thick” eyes—an obvious copying error, but one that changes the meaning significantly. By the time of Shakespeare, “thick-eyed” or “thick-sighted” meant “having obscure vision” (see OED, s.v. thick, adj. and n.), and that seems the most likely interpretation here; the reading suggests that the “eyes of the mind” are a poor substitute for physical sight. Yet another manuscript replaces the phrase “thilke yen” with “thynkyng,” removing the idea that blind people might have a different way of seeing and ascribing the Briton’s insight strictly to thought alone.

9 A few manuscripts describe the child as “foule” or “fouly” instead of “fendlyche,” emphasizing physical and behavioral hideousness over diabolical associations. While in this case the description is false, a non-normative birth does actually occur in another work closely connected
with the Constance stories, the fourteenth-century Middle English romance known as The King of Tars. In that work, a Christian princess marries the Sultan of Damascus and feigns conversion to Islam. She subsequently gives birth to a shapeless lump of flesh, which acquires human form only after the child is baptized. The Sultan subsequently converts, and his skin color changes from black to white. Geraldine Heng has shown how The King of Tars helps to expose the underlying racial logic of the Man of Law’s Tale and its sources. It is striking that here the allegation of monstrous birth appears in the Northumbrian section, attempting to isolate Custaunce and her son from the Northumbrians, from whom they are not racially distinguished.

In Trever, Custaunce is described as a “malveis espirit” (evil spirit); for Gower, she is “of faierie” (l. 370). Elves, like fairies (the terms were virtually interchangeable, and Chaucer uses them as such in Sir Thopas), were supernatural creatures who among other things might mate with humans or harm or abduct their babies. Chaucer’s choice of “elfe” indexes Donegild’s accusation against a series of other uses in the Canterbury Tales. In the Wife of Bath’s Tale and Sir Thopas, elves are part of a romance landscape which, in the Wife of Bath’s Tale, belongs to an idealized British past. Moreover, in the prologue to Sir Thopas, the Host describes Chaucer himself as seeming “elyssh by his contenaunce”—an adjective used to mean “strange” in the Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale. Donegild is claiming that Custaunce is a dangerous, otherworldly creature (and one manuscript emphasizes that point by branding her an elf by “nature”).

Some authoritative manuscripts, including Ellesmere, read “and on heigh juyse”—that is, “on pain of hanging and on high judgment.” Here, juyse must instead be the instrument of hanging; it can refer in Middle English to a cross, but the gallows, offered as a gloss in Henry Cockeram’s 1623 dictionary, seems equally likely. See OED, s.v. juise.
The Wife of Bath’s Portrait, Prologue, and Tale from The Canterbury Tales¹ (ca. 1387–1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer
Contributed by Tory V. Pearman

Introduction

Though the General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales mentions a handful of atypical physical features on the pilgrims such as the Friar’s lisp, the Miller’s wart, the Summoner’s scarred face, and the Cook’s ulcer, only Alisoun of Bath’s partial deafness appears beyond the Prologue, where its cause, a strike from her fifth husband Jankyn, becomes an integral plot point in her Prologue. Introduced in the second line of her portrait, Alisoun’s deafness becomes a primary physical marker of her identity, one in a line of physical anomalies that include her aging (and perhaps infertile), yet sexually voracious body, wide hips, gap-teeth, and visible birthmarks. The narrator deems her deafness “scathe,” which the MED explains could indicate both “a matter of regret, a pity” and “harm resulting from war” or “punishment.” And, as we see in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue, Jankyn’s blow is obviously punitive, done in retaliation after Alisoun damages his Book of Wicked Wives, a compilation of biblical, patriarchal, and medical texts outlining the defiant and disobedient nature of womankind and rooting stereotypical feminine attributes to the supposed physical deficiency of the female body itself. Alisoun’s violent ripping out of three of the book’s leaves foreshadows the violent injury that Jankyn will soon dole out. Her deafness is thus the punishment for her sexual voracity, a condition with its own disabling qualities, as her Prologue effectively demonstrates. Tellingly, in her Tale, Alisoun aligns herself not only with the “loathly lady” and Midas’ prattling wife, but also Midas himself, whose ears have been transformed into those of an ass as penance for his own insubordination.

The condition of deafness carried many meanings in the late Middle Ages. Medical authorities distinguished between congenital and acquired deafness, noting the incurability of the condition in most cases despite the existence of some medical treatments. Though not generally doled out as a punishment, deafness was in some cases viewed as a divine punishment for sinfulness, whether committed by a deaf child’s parents or committed by an individual acquiring deafness later in life. Because the ears and eyes were considered bodily portals to the soul, medieval interpretations of deafness were similar to those of blindness. As a result, deafness, like blindness, could be viewed as evidence of a limited ability to fully comprehend Christian religious truths. Upon first glance, the defiance Alisoun exhibits in response to male-authored religious and medical texts throughout her Prologue seems to demonstrate what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call the materiality of metaphor, or the metaphorical uses of disability in written texts to give tangibility to abstract concepts such as ignorance or sinfulness; however, it becomes clear that Alisoun’s deliberate and skillful manipulation of such misogynist texts to support her permissive stance on multiple marriages reveals a deep understanding of the “auctoritee” that she purports to oppose. Scholars
remain divided on whether Alisoun’s use of male authority allows her to break free from it or merely reiterate it, but it is clear that she exposes the sexism, ageism, and ableism institutionalized by such discourse.

A question central to understanding the literary function(s) of deafness in Alisoun’s Portrait and Prologue is whether the condition truly disables her. Although it is clearly a punishment for her subversive behavior, her deafness does not seem to impede her life in any substantial ways. She remains a successful cloth-maker and manages to establish herself as a seasoned pilgrim. In fact, her impairment gives her a reason to take part in pilgrimage, as pilgrims often journeyed to shrines like Saint Thomas Beckett’s in search of miraculous cure for physical ailments. Moreover, the fight that causes her deafness ends in what could be interpreted as a “victory” for Alisoun: the destruction of the book and dominion over Jankyn and his estate (ll. 813–22). Her admitted deference to him, however, calls her newfound power into question. Her Tale presents a similar dilemma. In it, an old hag, who is most certainly Alisoun’s fantastical counterpart, transforms into a beautiful woman who remains deferential to her new husband, a convicted rapist. Both the Prologue and Tale thus feature women with imperfect bodies whose contested power is consistently undercut by male authority.

Bibliography


The Portrait of the Wife of Bath

A good Wyf was ther of bisyde Bathe,
But she was som-del° deef, and that was
scarhe.°

Of clooth-making she hadde swiche an
haunt,°
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.°
In al the parisshe wyf ne was ther noon
That to the offring° before hir sholde
goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn, so wrooth
was she,
That she was out of alle charitee.
Hir coverchiefs° ful fyne were of
ground;

I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
That on a Sondre were upon hir heed.
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
Ful streite y-teyd, and shoos ful moiste°
and newe.
Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of
hewe.
She was a worthy womman al hir lyve,
Housbondes at chirche-dore she hadde
fyve,
Withouten other companye in youthe;
But therof nedeth nat to speke as
nouth°
And thryes hadde she been at Ierusalem;

She hadde passed many a straunge
stream;
At Rome she hadde been, and at Bo-
loigne,
In Galice at seint Iame,° and at Co-
loigne.
She coude° muche of wandring by the
weye.
Gat-tothed° was she, soothly for to seye.

The Wife of Bath’s Prologue

Experience, though noon auctoritee°
Were in this world, were right y-nough
to me
To speke of wo that is in mariage;
For, lordinges, sith I twelf yeer was of
age,
Thonked be god that is eterne on lyve,°
Housbondes at chirche-dore I have had
fyve;
For I so ofte have y-wedded be;
And alle were worthy men in hir
degree.
But me was told certeyn, nat longe agon
is,

That sith° that Crist ne wente never but
onis
To wedding in the Cane° of Galilee,
That by the same ensample taughte he
me
That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.
Herke eek, lo! which a sharp word for
the nones°
Besyde a welle Iesus, god and man,
Spak in repreve of the Samaritan:°
“Thou hast y-had fyve housbondes,”
quod he,
“And thilke° man, the which that hath
now thee,
Is noght thyn housbond;” thus seyde he
certeyn;
What that he mente ther-by, I can nat
seyn;
But that I axe, why that the fifthe man
Was noon housbond to the Samaritan?
How manye mighte she have in mar-
iage?
Yet herde I never tellen in myn ag
Upon this nombre difficicioun;°
Men may devyne° and glosen° up and
doun.
But wel I woot expres, with-oute lye,
God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;
That gentil text can I wel understonde.
Eek wel I woot he seyde, myn hous-
bonde
Sholde lete fader and moder, and take
me;
But of no nombre mencion made he,
Of bigamye or of octogamye;
Why sholde men speke of it vileinye?°

[Alisoun provides examples of bigamists]

Whan saugh ye ever, in any maner age,
That hye god defended° marriag
By expres word? I pray you, telleth me;
Or wher comanded he virginitee?
I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,"°
Theapostel,"° whan he speketh of
maydenhede;°
He seyde, that precept ther-of hadde he
noon.
Men may conseille a womman to been
oon,"°
But conseilling is no comandement;
He putte it in our owene lugement.
For hadde god comanded maydenhede,

Thanne hadde he dampned° wedding
with the dede;
And certes, if ther were no seed y-
sowe;°
Virginitee, wher-of than sholde it
growe?

[Alisoun discusses virginity]

Virginitee is greet perfeccioun,
And continence eek with devocioun.
But Crist, that of perfeccioun is welle,°
Bad nat every wight he shold go selle
All that he hadde, and give it to the
pore,
And in swich wyse folwe hym and his
fore,"°
He spak to hem that wolde live parfitly;
And lordinges, by your leve, that am
nat I.
I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
In the actes and in fruit of mariage.
Telle me also, to what conclusioun°
Were membres maad of generacioun,
And for what profit was a wight y-
wroght?
Trusteth right wel, they wer nat maad
for nocht.
Glose° who-so wole, and seye bothe up
and doun,
That they were maked for purgacioun
Of urine, and our bothe thinges smale
Were eek to knowe a femele from a
male,
And for noone other cause: sey ye no?
The experience woot wel it is noght so;
So that the clerkes° be nat with me
wrothe,
I sey this, that they maked been for
bothe,
This is to seye, for office, and for ese°
Of engendrure, ther we nat god displese.
Why sholde men elles in hir bokes sette,  
That man shal yelde to his wyf hir dette?
Now wher-with sholde he make his payement,  
If he ne used his sely instrument?
Than were they mad on a creature,  
To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.
But I seye nought that every wight is holde,
That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,
To goon and usen hem in engendrure;
That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,
To goon and usen hem in engendrure;
Crist was a mayde, and shapen as a man,
And many a seint, sith that the world bigan,
Yet lived they ever in parfit chastitee.
I nil envye no virginitee;
Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
And let us wyves hoten barly-breed;
Our lord Iesu refresed many a man.
In swich estaat as god hath cleped us I wol persevere, I nam nat precious.
In wyfhode I wol use myn instrument as frely as my maker hath it sent.
If I be daungeoerous, god yeve me sorrow!
Myn housbond shal it have bothe eve and morwe,
Whan that him list com forth and paye his dette.
An housbonde I wol have, I nil nat lette,
Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
And have his tribulacioun with-al
Up-on his flessh, whyl that I am his wyf.
I have the power duriinge al my lyf
Up-on his propre body, and nothe he.
Right thus the apostel tolde it un-to me;
And bad our housbondes for to love us weel.
Al this sentence me lyketh every-deel—

[The Pardoner interrupts]

Now sires, now wol I telle forth my tale.—
As ever mote I drinken wyn or ale,
I shal seye sooth, tho housbondes that I hadde,
As three of hem were gode and two were badde.
The three men were gode, and riche, and olde;
Unnethe mighte they the statut holde
In which that they were bounden un-to me.
Ye woot wel what I mene of this, par-dee!
As help me god, I laughe whan I thinke
How pitously a-night I made hem swinke;
And by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.

[Alisoun speaks about her first three husbands]

Now wol I spoken of my fourthe housbonde.
My fourthe housbonde was a revelour,
This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour;
And I was yong and ful of ragerye,
Striborn and strong, and Ioly as a pye.
Wel coude I daunce to an harpe smale,  
And singe, y-wis,° as any nightingale,  
When I had dronke a draughte of sweete wyn.

460 Metellius,"° the foule cherl, the swyn,  
That with a staf birafte his wyf hir lyf,  
For she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,  
He sholde nat han daunted me fro drinke;  
And, after wyn, on Venus moste I thinke:

For al so siker as cold engendreheth hayl,  
A likerous mouth° moste han a likerous tayl.°

In womman vinolent° is no defence,  
This knowen lechours by experience.  
But, lord Crist! when that it remem-br eth me

470 Up-on my yowthe, and on my Iolitee,"°  
It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote.°

Unto this day it dooth myn herte bote°  
That I have had my world as in my tyme.  
But age, alwas! that al wol envenyme,°

480 Now wol I tiffen of my fourthe hous-bonde.  
I seye, I hadde in herte greet despyt  
That he of any other had deylt.  
But he was quit, by god and by seint loce!°

I made him of the same wode a croce;  
Nat of my body in no foul manere,  
But certelyn, I made folk swich chere,  
That in his owene grece I made him frye

490 For which I hope his soule be in glorie.  
For god it woot, he sat ful ofte and song  
When that his shoo ful bitterly him wrong."°

Ther was no wight, save god and he,  
that wiste,"°

In many wyse, how sore I him twiste.  
He deyde when I cam fro Jerusalem,

And lyth y-grave under the rode-beem,"°  
Al is his tombe noght so curious  
As was the sepulcre of him, Darius,"°

Which that Appelles° wroghte subtrilly;

500 It nis but wast to burie him preciously.  
Lat him fare-wel, god yeve his soule reste,

He is now in the grave and in his cheste.  
Now of my fiftene housbond wol I telle.  
God lete his soule never come in helle!

And yet was he to me the moste shrewe;°

That fele I on my ribbes al by rewe,"°

And ever shal, un-to myn ending-day.  
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,

510 Whan that he wolde han my bele chose,  
That thogh he hadde me bet on every boon,"°

He coude winne agayn my love anoon.  
I trowe I loved him beste, for that he Was of his love daungerous° to me.  
We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,  
In this matere a queynte fantasye;  
Wayte what thing we may nat lightly have,
Ther-after wol we crye al-day and crave. Forbede us thing, and that desyren we; Prees on usaste, and thanne wol we flee. With daunger oute we al our chaffare;° Greet prees at market maketh dere ware, And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys; This knoweth every womman that is wys. My fiftie housbonde, god his soule blesse! Which that I took for love and no richesse, He som-tyme was a clerk of Oxenford,° And had left scole, and wente at hoom to bord With my gossib, dwellinge in oure toun, God have hir soule! hir name was Alisoun. She knew myn herte and eek my privete° Bet° than our parisshe-preest, so moot I thee! [While her fourth husband is out of town, Alisoun, her gossip, and Jankin go on walk]

563 Now wol I tellen forth what happed me. I seye, that in the feeldes walked we, Til trewely we hadde swich daliance, This clerk and I, that of my purveyance° I spak to him, and seyde him, how that he, If I were widwe, sholde wedde me. [Alisoun describes a dream]

586 A! ha! by god, I have my tale ageyn. Whan that my fourthe housbond was on bere, I weep algate," and made sory chere, As wyves moten, for it is usage, And with my coverchief covered my visage; But for that I was purveyed of a make, I weep but smal, and that I undertake." To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe With neighebores, that for him maden sorwe; And Iankin our clerk was oon of tho. As help me god, whan that I saugh him go After the bere, me thoughte he hadde a paire Of legges and of feet so clene and faire, That al myn herte I yaf un-to his hold."° He was, I trowe," a twenty winter old, And I was fouthy, if shal seye sooth; But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth. Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel; I hadde the prente of seynt Venus seel." As help me god, I was a lusty oon, And faire and riche, and yong, and wel bigoon; And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me, I had the beste quoniam° mighte be. For certes, I am al Venerien° In felinge, and myn herte is Marcien."° Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse, And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse. Myn ascendent was Taur," and Mars ther-inne. Allas! allas! that ever love was sinne! I folwed ay myn inclinacioun By vertu of my constellacioun; That made me I coude noght withdrawe My chambre of Venus from a good felawe. Yet have I Martes mark° up-on my face, And also in another privee place.

chaffare difficulty; merchandise clerk of Oxenford a scholar of Oxford privete secrets Bet purveyance foresight algate continuously believe seynt Venus seel Venus’ mark, a birthmark undertake promise hold keeping trowe I quoniam vagina Venerien under Venus’ influence Marcien under Mars’ influence Taur Taurus Martes mark Mars’ mark, a red birthmark
For, god so wis° be my savacioun,
I ne loved never by no discrecioun,
But ever folwedc myn appetyt,
Al were° he short or long, or blak or whyt;
I took no kepe, so that he lyked me,
How pore he was, ne eek of what degree.
What sholde I seye, but, at the monthes ende,
This loly clerk Iankin, that was so hende,"
Hath wedded me with greet solemp-nitee,
630 And to him yaf I al the lond and fee
That ever was me yeven ther-bifore;
But afterward repented me ful sore.
He nolde suffre nothing of my list.°
By god, he smoot me ones on the list,"°
For that I rente out of his book a leef,
That of the strook myn ear wex al deef.°
Stiborn I was as is a leonesse,
And of my tonge a verray iangleresse,°
And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,
640 From hous to hous, al-though he had it sworn.
For which he often tymes wolde preche,
And me of olde Romayn gestes° teche,
How he, Simplicius Gallus," lefte his wyf;
And hir forsook for terme of al his lyf,
Noght but for open-heeded° he hir say°
Lokinge out at his dore upon a day.
Another Romayn tolde he me by name,
That, for his wyf was at a someres game
With-outen his wiring, he forsook hir eke.
650 And than wolde he up-on his Bible seke
That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste,
Wheer he comandereth and forbedeth faste,
Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute;
Than wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute,
"Who-so that buildeth his hous al of salwes,"°
And priketh his blinde hors over the falwes,"°
And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,"°
Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!°
But al for noight, I sette noight an hawe°
660 Of his proverbes nof his olde sawe,
Ne I wolde nat of him corrected be.
I hate him that my vices telleth me,
And so do mo, god woot! of us than I.
This made him with me wood al out-rely;
I nolde noght forbere° him in no cas.
Now wol I seye yow sooth, by seint Thomas,
Why that I rente out of his book a leef,
For which he smoot me so that I was deef.
He hadde a book that gladly, night and day,
670 For his desport he wolde rede alway.
He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,"°
At whiche book he lough alwey ful faste.
And eek ther was som-tyme a clerk at Rome,
A cardinal, that highte Seint Ierome,
That made a book agayn Iovinian;"°
In whiche book eek ther was Tertulan,"°
Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,
That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys;
And eek the Parables of Salomon,

wiscertainly AlwereWhetherhendecourteouslistpleasurelistcarlangleressesh blabber-mouthgestestoriesSimpliciusGallasshistoryistoldbyValeriusopen-heededbare-headedsay sawsalweswillowsfalwesopenfieldssekenhalwesgon piligrimagessette...havecarednothing forforbereendureValerieandTheofrasteauthorsofanti-marriagetextTertulaneetal.misogynistexts
Ovydes Art, and bokes many on,
And alle thise wer bounden in o°
volume.
And every night and day was his cus-
tume.
When he had leyser and vacacioun
From other worldly occupacioun,
To reden on this book of wikked wyves.
He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves
Than been of gode wyves in the Bible.
For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
But-if it be of holy seintes lyves,
Ne of noon other womman never the
mo.
Who peyntede the leoun, tel me who?
By god, if wommen hadde writen
stories,
As clerkes han with-inne hir oratories,
They wolde han writen of men more
wikkednesse
Than all the mark of Adam° may
redresse.
The children of Mercurie and of Venus°
Been in hir wirkung ful contrarious;
Mercurie loveth wisdom and science,
And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.°
And, for hir diverse disposicioun,
Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun;°
And thus, god woot! Mercurie is desolat
In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat;
And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is
reysed;
Therfore no womman of no clerk is
preysed.
The clerk, whan he is old, and may
noght do
Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,
Than sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
That wommen can nat kepe hir mar-
riage!
But now to purpos, why I tolde thee
That I was beten for a book, pardee.
Up-on a night Jankin, that was our
syre,°
Redde on his book, as he sat by the fyre,
Of Eva° first, that, for hir wikkednesse,
Was al mankinde broght to wrecched-
nesse,
For which that Iesu Crist him-self was
slayn,
That boghte us with his herte-blood
agayn.
Lo, here expres of womman may ye
finde,
That womman was the los of al man-
kinde.
[Jankin reads about women who have be-
trayed or murdered their husbands]
He spak more harm than herte may
bithinke.
And ther-with-al, he knew of mo
proverbes
Than in this world ther growen gras or
herbes.
“Bet is,” quod he, “thyn habitacioun
Be with a leoun or a foul dragoun,
Than with a womman usinge for to
chye.
Bet is,” quod he, “hye in the roof abyde
Than with an angry wyf doun in the
hous;
They been so wikked and contrarious;
They haten that hir housbondes loveth
ay.”
He seyde, “a womman cast hir shame
away,
When she cast of hir smok;” and
forther-mo,
“A fair womman, but she be chaast also,
Is lyk a gold ring in a sowes nose.”
Who wolde wenen,° or who wolde sup-
pose

° one
all... Adam all men children... Venus scholars and lovers, respectively  
dispence extravagance  
exaltacioun when planet is at its most powerful in the zodiac  
syre master of the house  
Eva  
Eve  
wenen think
The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?
And whan I saugh he wolde never fyne°
To reden on this cursed book al night,
790 Al sodeynly three leves have I plight°
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke,
I with my fist so took him on the cheke,
That in our fyr he fil bakward adoun.
And he up-stirte as dooth a wood leoun,"°
And with his fist he smoot me on the heed,
That in the floor I lay as I were deed.
And when he saugh how stille that I lay,
He was agast, and wolde han fled his way,
Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde.”°
800 “O! hastow slayn me, false theef?” I seyde,
“And for my land thus hastow mordred me?
Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.”
And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,
And seyde, “dere suster Alisoun,
As help me god, I shal thee never smyte;
That I have doon, it is thy-self to wyte.”°
Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke”—°
And yet eft-sones° I hitte him on the cheke,
And seyde, “theef, thus muchel am I wreke;°
810 Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke.”
But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
We fille acorded, by us selven two.
He yaf me al the brydel in myn hond
To han the governance of hous and lond,
And of his tonge and of his hond also,
And made him brene his book anon right tho.”°

And when that I hadde geten un-to me,
By maistrie,” al the soveraynetee,
And that he seyde, “myn owene trewe wyf,
820 Do as thee lust” the terme of al thy lyf,
Keep thy honour, and keep eek myn estaat”—
After that day we hadden never debaat.
God help me so, I was to him as kinde
As any wyf from Denmark un-to Inde,”
And also trewe, and so was he to me.
I prey to god that sit in magestee,
So blesse his soule, for his mercy dere!
Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol here.’

[The Friar and Summoner converse]

The Wife of Bath’s Tale

857 In tholde dayes of the king Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
All was this land fulfild of fayerye.”°
860 The elf-queen, with hir Ioly companye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede;
This was the olde opinion, as I rede,
I speke of manye hundred yeres ago;
But now can no man see none elves mo.
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of limitours° and othere holy freres,
That serchen every lond and every streem,
As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
Blessinge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
870 Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
Thropes,” bernes, shipnes,” dayeryes,”
This maketh that ther been no fayeryes.
For ther” as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the limitour him-self
In undermeles” and in morweninges;°

fyne finish plight plucked wood leoun mad lion breyde woke wyte blame biscke beseech eft-sones quickly wreke avenged tho then maistrie mastery as thee lust as you please Inde India fayereye fairies limitours begging friars Thropes villages shipnes cattle’s sheds dayeryes stables ther where undermeles evenings morweninges mornings
And seyth his matins and his holy things
As he goth in his limitacioun.°
Wommen may go saufly up and doun,
In every bush, or under every tree;
880 Ther is noon other incubus° but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.
And so bifel it, that this king Arthour
Hadde in his houz a lusty bacheler,
That on a day cam rydinge fro river;
And happed that, allone as she was born,
He saugh a mayde walkinge him biforn,
Of whiche mayde anon, maugree hir heed,°
By verray force he rafte hir maydenheed;
For which oppressioun was swich clamour
890 And swich pursute un-to the king Arthour,
That dampned° was this knight for to be deed
By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed
Paraventure," swich was the statut tho;
But that the quene and othere ladies mo
So longe preyeden the king of grace,
Til he his lyf him graunted in the place,
And yaf him to the quene al at hir wille,
To chese, whether she wolde him save or spille.°
The quene thanketh the king with al hir might,
900 And after this thus spak she to the knight,
Whan that she saugh hir tyme, up-on a day:
‘Thou standest yet,’ quod she, ‘in swich array,’
That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.

I grante thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me
What thing is it that wommen most desyren?
Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from yren.°
And if thou canst nat tellen it anon,
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
A twelf-month and a day, to seche and lere°
910 An answere suffisant in this mater.

[The knight searches for answers]

951 Witnesse on Myda;° wol ye here the tale?
Ovyde, amonges othere thinges smale,
Seyde, Myda hadde, under his longe heres,
Growinge up-on his heed two asses eres,
The which vyce he hidde, as he best mighte,
Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte,
That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo.
He loved hir most, and trusted hir also;
He preyede hir, that to no creature
960 She sholde tellen of his disfigure.
She swoor him ‘nay, for al this world to winne,
She nolde do that vileinye or sinne,
To make hir housbond han so foul a name;
She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.’
But nathelees, hir thoughte that she dyde,
That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde;
Hir thoughte it swal so sore aboute hir herte,
That nedely som word hir moste asterte;
And sith she dorste telle it to no man,
970 Doun to a mareys° faste by she ran;
Til she came there, hir herre was a-fyre,
And, as a bitore bombleth° in the myre,
She leyde hir mouth un-to the water
doun:
Biwreye° me nat, thou water, with thy
soun,’
Quod she, ‘to thee I telle it, and namo;
Myn housbond hath longe asses eres
two!
Now is myn herre all hool, now is it
ouте;
I mighte no lenger kepe it, out of
doute,’
Heer may ye se, thogh we a tyme abyde,
Yet out it moot, we can no conseil hyde;
The remenant of the tale if ye wol here,
Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it lere.°
This knight, of which my tale is spe-
cially,
Whan that he saugh he mighte nat
come therby,
This is to seye, what wommen loven
moost,
With-inne his brest ful sorweful was the
goost;
But hoom he gooth, he mighte nat
soiourne.
The day was come, that hoomward
moste he tourne,
And in his wey it happed him to ryde,
In al this care, under a forest-syde,
Wher-as he saugh up-on a daunce go
Of ladies foure and twenty, and yet mo;
Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful
yerne,°
In hope that som wisdom sholde he
lerne.
But certeinly, er he came fully there,
Vanisshed was this daunce, he niste
where.
No creature saugh he that bar lyf,
Save on the grene he saugh sittinge a
wyf;
A fouler wight ther may no man
devyse.’
1000Agayn° the knight this olde wyf gan
ryse,
And seyde, ‘sir knight, heer-forth° ne
lyth no wey.
Tel me, what that ye seken, by your
fey?’°
Paraventure it may the bettre be;
‘This olde folk can muchel thing,’ quod
she.
‘My leve mooder,’ quod this knight
certeyn,
I nam but deed, but-if that I can seyn
What thing it is that wommen most
desyre;
Coude ye me wisse,”° I wolde wel quyte°
your hyre.’
‘Plighte me thy trouthe, heer in myn
hand,’ quod she,
1010‘The nexte thing that I requere thee,
Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy might;
And I wol telle it you er it be night.’
‘Have heer my trouthe,’ quod the
knight, ‘I grante.’
‘Thanne,’ quod she, ‘I dar me wel
avante,’
Thy lyf is sauf, for I wol stonde therby,
Up-on my lyf, the queen wol seye as I.
Lat see which is the proudeste of hem
alle,
That wereth on a coverchief or a calle,’°
That dar seye nay, of that I shal thee
techte;
1020Lat us go forth with-outen lenger spe-
che.’
Tho rouned she a pistel° in his ere,
And bad him to be glad, and have no
fere.
Whan they be comen to the court, this
knight
Seyde, ‘he had holde his day, as he
hadde hight,’°

bombleth makes a humming noise  Biwreye Betray  lere teach, learn  yerne eagerly  devyse imagine, tell  Agayn To meet  heer-forth from here  fey faith  wisse instruct  quyte reward you  wel avanté boast, affirm  calle hairnet  Thou..pistel she whispered a secret  hight promised
And redy was his answere, as he sayde. Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde, And many a widwe, for that they ben wyse. The quene hir-self sinttinge as a lustyse,° Assembled been, his answere for to here; And afterward this knight was bode appere.

To every wight comanded was silence, And that the knight sholde telle in audience, What thing that worldly wommen loven best. This knight ne stood nat stille as doth a best, But to his questioun anon answerde With manly voy, that al the court it herde: ‘My lige lady, generally,’ quod he, ‘Wommen desyren to have sovereyntee As wel over hir housbond as hir love, This is your moste desyr, thogh ye me kille, Doth as yow list, I am heer at your wille.’

In al the court ne was ther wyf ne mayde, Ne widwe, that contraried that he sayde, But seyden, ‘he was worthy han his lyf.’ And with that word up stirte the olde wyf, Which that the knight saugh sinttinge in the grene: ‘Mercy,’ quod she, ‘my sovereyn lady quene! Er that your court departe, do me right.

I taughte this answere un-to the knight; For which he plighte me his trouthe there. The firste thing I wolde of him requere,

He wolde it do, if it lay in his might. Bifore the court than preye I thee, sir knight,’ Quod she, ‘that thou me take un-to thy wyf; For wel thou wost that I have kept° thy lyf. If I sey fals, sey nay, up-on thy fey!’° This knight answerde, ‘allas! and weylawey! I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.’°

For goddes love, as chees a newe requeste; Tak al my good, and lat my body go.’ ‘Nay than,’ quod she, ‘I shrewe us bothe two! For thogh that I be foul, and old, and pore, I nolde° for al the metal, ne for ore, That under erthe is grave, or lyth above, But-if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love.’ ‘My love?’ quod he; ‘nay, my dampna-cion! Allas! that any of my nacioun° Sholde ever so foule disparaged be!’

[The knight agrees to marry her]

For prively he wedded hir on a morwe, And al day after hidde him as an oule;° So wo was him, his wyf looked so foule. Greet was the wo the knight hadde in his thoght, Whan he was with his wyf a-bedde y-broght; He walweth, and he turneth to and fro. His olde wyf lay smylinge evermo, And seyde, ‘o dere housbond, benedic-ite! Fareth every knight thus with his wyf as ye? Is this the lawe of king Arthures hous? Is every knight of his so dangerous?”
I am your owene love and eek your wyf;  
I am she, which that saved hath your lyf;  
And certes, yet dide I yow never unright;  
Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?  
Ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit;  
What is my gilt? for goddes love, tel me it,  
And it shal been amended, if I may.  
‘Amended?’ quod this knight, ‘allas! nay, nay!’  
It wol nat been amended never mo!  
1100 Thou art so loothly, and so old also,  
And ther-to comen of so lowe a kinde,”  
That litel wonder is, thogh I walwe and winde.  
So wolde god myn herte wolde breste!”  
‘Is this,’ quod she, ‘the cause of your unreste?’  
‘Ye, certainly,’ quod he, ‘no wonder is.’  
‘Now, sire,’ quod she, ‘I coude amende al this,  
If that me liste, er it were dayes three,  
So wel ye mighte here yow un-to me.”  
But for ye speken of swich gentillesse°  
1110 As is descended out of old richesse,  
That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,  
Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.  

[The lady provides commentary on gentillesse]

1207 Now, sire, of elde° ye repreve me;  
And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee°  
Were in no book, ye gentils of honour  
1210 Seyn that men sholde an old wight doon favour,  
And clepe him fader, for your gentilisses;  
And auctours shal I finden, as I gesse.  
Now ther ye seye, that I am foul and old,  
Than drede you noght to been a cokewold;°  
For filthe and elde, al-so moost I thee,”  
Been grete wardeyns up-on chastitee.  
But nathelesse, sin I knowe your deylt,  
I shal fulfille your worldly appertyt.  
Chese now,’ quod she, ‘oon of thise thinges tweye,  
1220 To han me foul and old til that I deye,  
And be to yow a trewe humble wyf,  
And never yow displese in al my lyf,  
Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,  
And take your aventure of the repair  
That shal be to your hous, by-cause of me,  
Or in som other place, may wel be.  
Now chese your-selven, whether that yow ‘lyketh.’  
This knight ayvyseth° him and sore syketh,  
But atte laste he seyde in this manere,  
1230 ‘My lady and my love, and wyf so dere,  
I put me in your wyse governance;  
Cheseth your-self, which may be most plesance,  
And most honour to yow and me also.  
I do no fors” the whether of the two;  
For as yow ‘lyketh, it suffiseth me.”°  
‘Thanne have I gete of yow maistrye,’  
quod she,  
‘Sin I may chese, and governe as me lest?’  
‘Ye, certes, wyf,’ quod he, ‘I holde it best.’  
‘Kis me,’ quod she, ‘we be no lenger wrothe;°  
1240 For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe,  
This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.  
I prey to god that I mot sterven wood,°  
But I to yow be al-so good and trewe

lowe a kinde: low-born ancestry  
bрест: burst  
yow un-to me: behave towards me  
gentillesse: nobility  
elde: age  
auctoritee: written authority  
cokewold: cuckold  
thee: thrive  
ayvyseth: considered  
do: do  
care not: suffiseth me: is sufficient for me  
wrothe: in disagreement  
sterven wood: die mad
As ever was wyf, sin that the world was newe.
And, but I be to-morn as fair to sene
As any lady, emperyce, or quene,
That is bitwix the est and eke the west,
Doth with my lyf and deeth right as yow lest.
Cast up the curtin, loke how that it is.’
1250 And whan the knight saugh verrailly al this,
That she so fair was, and so yong ther-to,
For Ioye he hente° hir in his armes two,
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse;
A thousand tyme a-rewe° he gan° hir kisse.
And she obeyed him in every thing
That mighte’ doon him plesance or lyking.
And thus they live, un-to hir lyves ende,
In parfit Ioye; and Iesu Crist us sende Housbondes meke, yonge, and fresshe a-bedde,
1260 And grace toverbyde° hem that we wedde.
And eek I preye Iesu shorte hir lyves That wol nat be governed by hir wyves;
And olde and angry nigardes° of dispence,
God sende hem sone verray pestilence.

hente took a-rewe in succession gan began to toverbyde to survive nigardes misers
Endnotes


3 The Wife of Bath’s disability is first described here, as “som-del deef” and “scathe,” with “but” serving to contrast these with her description as “good” in the line above. The manuscript variants for *The General Prologue* show one variant for this line. The Trinity College (Cambridge) R.3.15 reads “and” instead of “but,” suggesting a correlation between her goodness and her disability rather than a contrast.


5 In this line, the Alisoun describes how Jankyn hit her on her ear, presumably causing her partial deafness. The manuscript variants show an important variant on this line. Cambridge University Dd.4.24, Cambridge University Gg.4.27, Harley 7334, and Helmingham read “with his fist” instead of “on the lyst,” emphasizing his role in the attack rather than her consequences.

6 Alisoun explicitly mentions her own disability here, observing that one of her ears is deaf because of Jankyn’s blow. The manuscript variants show an important variant on this line. Corpus Christi 198, Lansdowne 851, and Petworth read “eren wexen” instead of “ere wex,” indicating both ears went deaf instead of one.
Dame Sirith\(^1\) (ca. 1272–82)

Contributed by Danielle Allor

Introduction

The late thirteenth-century Middle English poem *Dame Sirith* is the first *fabliau* written in English.\(^2\) While the plot begins ordinarily enough for its genre, with the young man Wilekin desperate to sleep with the married woman Margery, the signature trickery of this *fabliau* circulates around narratives of disability and animality through the figure of a crying dog. Dame Sirith’s fictional explanation of the weeping dog is the clearest portrayal of the promises, threats, and strange joys of disability that characterize *Dame Sirith*, but each of the human characters experiences mental or physical difference. The titular character, the go-between Dame Sirith, complains that she is “old and sek [sick] and lame” (l. 199). Wilekin’s lovesickness makes him “wod [mad]” and causes him to contemplate suicide, and his inability to win Margery for himself results in his use of Dame Sirith’s services (l. 182). Margery, as a woman, is disabled according to the medical models of the Middle Ages, which characterize women’s bodies as defective versions of men’s. The final character, the dog, is forced eat mustard and pepper to make her weep. When Dame Sirith tells Margery that the dog is actually her own daughter, transformed into canine shape due to her refusal to sleep with a cleric, the animal becomes the centerpiece of Dame Sirith’s scheme to persuade Margery to sleep with Wilekin. To convince Margery of the horror of this permanent transformation, Dame Sirith argues for the proximity of her own disabled body to that of her dog-turned-fictional-kin.

*Dame Sirith* (the text) and Dame Sirith (the character) emphasize the social aspects of disability. As Tory Vandeventer Pearman argues, Dame Sirith’s actual physical status is indeterminate. Her disabilities are entirely self-described, first to Wilekin and then to Margery, and she understands her role as a disabled woman in the spiritual life of her ecclesiastical community. As a poor, disabled woman who receives alms from “gode [good] men” (l. 207), Dame Sirith serves as many aged, disabled, and poor people did in medieval communities: as recipients of acts of charity that furthered the spiritual welfare of the givers. But Dame Sirith’s representation of her own disabled body also invokes the specter of the malingerer who pretends to be disabled in order to receive goods and services—a figure created from cultural anxieties that question the efficacy of this material and spiritual exchange. Dame Sirith then extends her manipulation of the tropes of medieval disability to harness animal transformation as a kind of impairment with which to threaten Margery into compliance with Wilekin’s desires. To Margery, the weeping dog is a disabled human woman, deprived of her humanity and her ability to speak. This transformation represents not only a physical change, but also a potentially damning spiritual mutation: animals, as beings without rational souls, could not be saved. Margery’s concession to Wilekin’s desires becomes a way to save both her body and her soul.

As such, disability in *Dame Sirith* is not only embodied in the characters but also circulates as a narrative Dame Sirith gleefully deploys for her own ends. Dame Sirith emphasizes her infirmities to Wilekin to establish her innocence from the services
he solicits her for, and in turn to prevent involvement with the ecclesiastical courts. Dame Sirith also emphasizes her disability, age, and poverty to Margery. These categories build upon one another so that Dame Sirith can unleash her carefully calibrated narrative about her daughter-turned-dog: Margery, faced with the aged woman she will definitely one day become, is also forced to contemplate Dame Sirith’s disability and poverty before her attention is directed to the weeping dog. When Margery worries that Wilekin “wolle me forsape [will deform me]” (l. 369), she does so within the framework that Dame Sirith has constructed for her: age, disability, and poverty are unavoidable. Now so too is Margery’s transformation into a dog rendered inevitable through Dame Sirith’s narrative. The trick at the center of this fabliau depends on Dame Sirith framing animal existence as a disability. But while Dame Sirith draws lines of affinity between her own body, Margery’s body, and the crying dog’s, these affinities are limited both by Dame Sirith’s trick—the threat of dog transformation is, of course, fictional—and by their different levels of immediacy. In Dame Sirith’s narrative, the suffering dog represents an instantaneous deformation that Margery rejects in horror, ultimately preferring adultery to animal existence. While Margery avoids becoming a dog, rejecting an animal transformation and the disabilities that come with it, she cannot similarly refuse the disabilities that come with aging. When the tale concludes with the successful completion of Dame Sirith’s plot, any thought of Margery’s aging body is deferred, relegated beyond the borders of the fabliau.

Bibliography


Ci comence le fabl et la cointise de dame siriz

1  As I com bi an waie,
   Hof on° Ich° herde saie
   Ful modi° mon and proud;
   Wis he wes of lore,°
   And gouthlich under gore,°
   And clothed in fair sroud.°
       To lovien° he bigon°
       On° wedded wimmon –
       Therof he hevede wrong;
   His herte hire wes alon,°
   That reste nevede° he non,
   'The love wes so strong.
   Wel yrne° he him bethoute°
   Hou° he hire gete moute,°
   In ani cunnes wise.°
That befel on an day
The louerd° wend away
Hon° his marchaundise.°
   He wente him to then inne°
   Ther hoe wonede° inne,
   That wes riche won;°
   And com in to then halle,
   There hoe° wes srud with palle,°
       And thus he bigon:
   "His hit thi wille," com and site,"
   And what is thi wille let me wite,"

30  Mi leve lif.°
    Bi houre Louerd," hevene King,
    If I mai don ani thing
    That thee is lef,°
    Thou mightt finden me ful fre,"°
    Fol bletheli° will I don° for thee,
    Withhouten gref."°

[MILEKIN] “Dame, God thee foryelde!”°
    Bote° on that thou me nout bimelde,"°
    Ne make thee wroth,

40  Min hernde° will I to thee bede;°
    Bote wratthen° thee for ani dede°
    Were me loth.”°

[MARGERY] “Nai, iwis, Wilekin!
    For nothing that ever is min,
    Thau° thou hit yirne,"°
    Houncurteis° ne will I be;
    Ne con° I nout on vilte,°
    Ne nout I nelle lerne."°
    Thou mait saien al thine will

50  And I shall herknen” and sitten stille,
    That thou have told.
    And if that thou me tellest skil,"°
    I shal don after thi wil—
    That be thou bold.°
        And thau thou saie me ani same,°
        Ne shal I thee nouight blame
        For thi sawe.”°

[MILEKIN] “Nou Ich” have wonne leve,"°
    Yif° that I thee shulde greve,

60  Hit were hounlawe."°
Certes,° dame, thou seest as hende,°
And I shal setten spel° on ende,
And tellen thee al –
Wat Ich wolde,° and wi° Ich com;
Ne con Ich saien non falsdom,°
Ne non I ne shal.°
Ich habbe iloved° thee moni yer,
Thau Ich nabbe nout ben her°
Mi love to schowe.°
70  Wile thi louerd° is in toune,
Ne mai no mon with thee holden
roune°
With no thewe.°
Yurstendai° Ich herde saie,
As Ich wende° bi the waie,
Of oure sire°;
Me° tolde me that he was gon
To the feire of Botolfston°
In Lincolneschire.
And for Ich weste° that he wes
houte°
80  Tharfo re Ich am igon aboute
To spaken with thee.
Him burth° to liken wel his lif,
That mightte welde secc a wif°
In privite.°
Dame, if hit is thi wille,
Both dernelike and stille°
Ich wille love.°
[MARGERY] “That wold I don for non
thing
Bi houre Louerd,° hevene King,
90  That ous is bove!”°

[MOY] “Therfore Ich am igon aboute
To speken with thee.
Him burth° to liken wel his lif,
That mightte welde secc a wif°
In privite.°
Dame, if hit is thi wille,
Both dernelike and stille°
Ich wille love.°
[MARGERY] “That wold I don for non
thing
Bi houre Louerd,° hevene King,
90  That ous is bove!”°

Certes Certainly seist as hende speak as a courteous person spel talk Wat Ich wolde What I would [do] wi why non falsdom no falsehood Ne...shal Nor shall I [say] any Ich habbe iloved I have loved Thau...her Though I have not been [able] here schowe show louerd lord [husband] holden rounce have secret conversation thewe proper conduct Yurstendai Yesterday wende went oure sire your husband Me Someone Botolfston Boston weste knew houte out Him burth He is obligated welde...wif possess such a wife In privite Privately dernelike and stille secretly and covertly Bi houre Louerd By our Lord ous is bove above us louerd lord [husband] maiden [as a] virgin Mid menske inou With sufficient honor wou grief Thau Though hernde errand ourselfi wicked ben on hore be a whore selk falsete such falseness flore floor lifwile lifetime Biyende Beyond make mate At Before hom-com homecoming torn thi mod change your mind curteisi courtesy god good ous us wrouit made Amend thi mod Change your mind torn thi thouit turn your thought rew on me take pity on me We alas Oldest...fol? Do you take me for a fool? So...Yol So as I ever must wait for Christmas ounwis unwise Mi...wende You will never change my mind
Mi louerd is curteis mon° and hende,°
And mon of pris;°
And Ich am wif° bothe god and trewe;
Trewer womon ne mai no mon cnowe°
Then Ich am.
Thilke° time ne shal never bitide°
That mon, for wouing° ne thoru prude,°
Shal do me scham.”

[WILEKIN] “Swete leumon,° merci°!°
Same ne vilani°
Ne bede I thee non;°
Bote derne love I thee bede,°
As mon that wolde of love spede,"°
And finde won.”°

[MARGERY] “So bide Ich evere mete other drinke,"°
Her° thou lestest° al thi swinke,"°
Thou might gon hom,"° leve" brother,
For ne wille Ich° thee love, ne non other
Bote mi wede houssebonde;
To tellen hit thee ne wille Ich wonde.”°

[WILEKIN] “Certes," dame, that me forthinketh;°
And wo is the mon that muchel
swinketh",°
And at the laste leseth his sped!°
To maken menis his him ned;°
Bi me I saie ful iwis,°
That love the love that I shal mis."°
And, dame, have now godnedai!°

And thilke Louerd° that al welde°
mai
Leve° that thi thoue so tourne°
That Ich for thee no leng ne
mourne.”°

Drerimod° he wente awai,

And thoute bothe night and dai
Hire al for to wende."°
A frend him radde° for to fare –
And leven° al his muchele kare° –
To Dame Sirith the hende."°

Thider he wente him anon,"°
So suithe so° he mighte gon,
No mon he ni mette."°
Ful he wes of tene° and treie;°
Mid° wordes milde and eke sleie°

Faire° he hire grette.

[WILEKIN] “God thee iblessi,° Dame Sirith!
Ich am icom° to spoken thee with,
For muchele° nede;
And° Ich mai have help of thee,
Thou shalt have, that thou shalt se,
Ful riche mede.”°

[SIRITH] “Welcomen art thou, leve° sone;
And if Ich mai other cone°
In eni wise for thee do,
I shal strengthen me therto;°
Forthi," leve° sone, tel thou me
What thou woldest I dude° for thee.”
[WILEKIN] “Bote,° leve nelde,” ful evele° I fare;
I lede mi lif with tene° and care;
With muchel hounsele° Ich lede mi lif,
And that is for on suete° wif
That heightte° Margeri.
Ich have iloved° hire moni dai,°
And of hire love hoe seiz me nai;°
Hider° Ich com forthi.°
Bote-if hoe wende hire mod,°
For serewe° mon° Ich wakese wod,°
Other miselve quelle.°
Ich hevede ithout° miself to slo;°
Forthen radde° a frend me go
To thee, mi sereue telle.”°
He saide me, withouten faille°
That thou me couthest helpe and vaile,°
And bringen me of wo,°
Thoru thine crafftes and thine dedes;
And Ich wilge thee riche medes,°
With that° hit be so.”°
SIRITH “Benedicite be herinne!”°
Her° havest thou, sone, mikel sinne.°
Louerd° for his suete° name,
Lete thee therfore haven no shame!
Thou servest affter Godes grame,°
Wen° thou seist on me silk° blame;
For Ich am old and sek° and lame;
Bote Help° leve nelde° dear grandmother° ful evele° very badly° tene° sorrow° muchel hounsele° much misfortune° suete° sweet° That heightte° Who is named° iloved° loved° mon° dai° for many days° hoe...nai° she tells° me° nay° Hider° Hither° forthi° therefore° Bote-if...mod° Unless she changes her mind° serewe° sorrow° mon° must° wakese° wod° go° crazy° Other° miselve° quelle° or° kill° myself° he-vede° ithout° have° thought° slo° say° Forthen° radde° Therefore° advised° mi° serewe° telle° to° tell° my sorrow° withouten° faille° without° a° doubt° vaile° assist° of° wo° out° of° woe° medes° rewards° With° that° Provided° that° Benedicite° be° herinne° Bless° me!° Her° Here° mikel° sinne° great° sin° Louerd° Lord° suete° sweet° servest°...grame° deserve° God’s° anger° Wen° when° silk° such° sek° sick° Seknesse° sickness° tame° subshed° leve° knave° dear° boy° mesaventer° misadventure° leising° lie° Oppon° Upon° that°...ibouden° who° is° bitterly° oppressed° on° holi° wimon° a° holy° woman° nout° I° ne° con° I° know° nothing° Bote° with° Only° through° almesdende° almesdeeds° Ilke...fede° I° support° my° life° each° day° bid- de° pray° hem° them° hore° their° That° Who° leve° trust° hem°...spede° they° will° prosper° well° His°...ishend° [May]° his° life° and° his° soul° be° disgraced° That° Who° herende° errand° iwireken° avenged° shome° shame° spoken° spoken° Leve° nelde° Dear° grandmother° biflef° leave° onwis° mistaken° mon° that° man° who° taute° directed° weste° thought° hous° couhest° saute° could° reconcile° us° [i.e.,° Wilekin° and° Margery°]° maut° can° sueting° saut° reconcile° with° the° sweetheart° stark° great°
Moni a pound and moni a marke,°
Warm pilche° and warme shon,°
With that min hernde° be wel don.
Of muchel godlec° might thou
yelpe,°
If hit be so that thou me helpe.”

[SIRITH] “Ligh me nout,° Wilekin, bi
thi leute.°
Is hit thin hernest° thou tekest° me?
Lovest thou wel Dame Margeri?”

[WILEKIN] “Ye, nelde, witerli,"°
Ich hire love! Hit mot me spille°
Bote° Ich gete hire to mi wille.”

[SIRITH] “Wat, god° Wilekin, me
reweth thi scathe;°
Houre Louerd° sende thee help rathe!”°
Weste hic hit mightte ben forholen,"°
Me wolde thunche wel solen°
Thi wille for to fullen.°

Make me siker° with word on
honde°
That thou wolt helen,° and I wilke
fonde°
If Ich mai hire telle.
For al the world ne wold I nout°
That Ich were to chapitre ibrout°
For none selke° werkes.
Mi jugement were sone igiven –
To ben with shome somer-driven°
With° prestes and with clarkes.°

[SIRITH] “Sich, nelde,° ne wold I
That thou hevedest vilani°
Ne shame, for mi goed.°
Her° I thee mi trouthe plightte,”°
Ich shal helen bi mi mightte,”°
Bi the holi roed!”°

[SIRITH] “Welcome, Wilekin, hider-
ward!”°
Her° havest I maked a foreward°
That thee mai ful wel like.
Thou maight blesse thilke sith,°
For thou maight make thee ful blith;°

250  Dar thou namore sike.°
To goderhele° ever come thou hider,”°
For sone will I gange thider°
And maken hire hounderstonde°
I shal kenne hire sulke a lore°
That hoe° shal lovien thee mikel°
more
Then ani mon in londe.”

[WILEKIN] “Al so hav I Godes
grith,°
Wel havest thou said, Dame Sirith,
And goderhele° shal ben thin.
260  Have her° twenti shiling:°
This Ich geve thee to meding,°
To buggen° thee sep° and swin.”°

[SIRITH] “So Ich evere brouke hous
other flet,°
Neren never penes beter biset°
Then thes shulen° ben.
For I shal don a juperti°
Godes grith,°
Wel havest thou said, Dame Sirith,
And goderhele° shal ben thin.

270  Have her° twenti shiling:°
This Ich geve thee to meding,°
To buggen° thee sep° and swin.”°

[SIRITH] “So Ich evere brouke hous
other flet,°
Neren never penes beter biset°
Then thes shulen° ben.
For I shal don a juperti°
Godes grith,°
Wel havest thou said, Dame Sirith,
And goderhele° shal ben thin.
And a ferli maistri;°
That thou shalt ful wel sen. –
[To her dog] Pepir nou° shalt thou eten,°
280 This mustart° shal ben thi mete,°
And gar thin eien to renne;°
I shal make a lesing°
Of thin heie-renning,°
Ich wot wel wer and wenne.”°

[WILEKIN] “Wat! Nou const thou no
Me thinketh that thou art wod.°
Gevest thou the welpe° mustard?”

[SIRITH] “Be stille, boinard!°
I shal mit° this ilke gin°
Gar° hire love to ben al thin.
Ne shal Ich never have reste ne ro°
Til Ich have told hou thou shalt do.
Abid° me her til min hom-come.”

[WILEKIN] “Yus, bi the somer
Hethen null I ben binomen,°
Til thou be agein comen.”

Dame Sirith bigon to go
As a wrecche that is wo,
That hoe° come hire to then inne°
300 Ther° this gode wif wes inne.
Tho hoe° to the dore com,
Swithe reuliche hoe° bigon.

[SIRITH] “Louerd,° hoe° seith, “wo is
That in povertre ledeth ay lives;°
Not no mon° so muchel of pine°
As poure wif that falleth in ansine;°

Pepir nou Pepper now eten eat mustard mustard mete food gar...renne make your eyes run lessing deception heie-renning eye-running wommen know well where and when Nou...god? Can you do no good? wod mad welpe welpe boinard fool mit with ilke gin same contriv-ance Gar Make to quiet Abid Await somer blome summer bloom Hethen...binomen I will not be taken away from here That hoe Until she then inne that dwelling Ther Where Tho hoe When she Swithe reuliche hoe Very piteously she Louerd Lord hoe she holde old ay lives all [their] lives Not no mon No man knows pine pain falleth in ansine declines in appearance ilke each bi me wite know from me nouter...site neither walk nor sit ful fain very gladly nei nearly limes onwold limbs control mikel great Warto Why selke such Wi nul Goed Why will God not Sel Good hounbinde pardon mete food reuthe pity evele iclothed poorly clothed evele ishoed poorly shed do thee mede give you reward Louerd Lord on rode idon hung on the cross faste...non fasted forty days to 3 o'clock welde rule As...foryelde So [may] that same Lord reward you her fles here meat eke also red advice her here coppe cup Goed...mede God reward you swinke troubles spac spoke holde old
Crist awarie° hire lif! –

[SIRITH] “Alas! Alas! That ever I live!
Al the sunne° Ich wolde forgive
The mon that smite of min heved!”°
Ich wolde mi lif me were bireved!”°

[MARGERY] “Seli° wif, what eilleth°
thee?”

[SIRITH] “Seli° wif, what eilleth°
thee?”

[SIRITH] “Bote ethe° mai I sori be:
Ich hevede a douter feir° and fre°
Feiror° ne mightte no mon se.
Hoe° hevede a curteis hossebonde,
Freour° mon mightte no mon fonde.
Mi douter° lovede him al to wel;
Forthi mak I sori del°
Oppon a dai he was out wend,°
And tharthoru° wes mi douter shend.°
He hede on erdne° out of toune;
And com a modi clarc° with croune,°
To mi douter his love beed;
And hoe nolde nout° folewe his red.
He ne mightte his wille have,
For no thing he mightte crave;
Thenne bigon the clerc to wiche,°
And shop° mi douter til a biche.
This is mi douter° that Ich of speke;
For del° of hire min herte breketh.
Loke hou hire heien greten,°
On hire cheken° the teres meten.
Forthi,° dame, were hit no wonder,
Thau° min herte burste assunder.
And wose ever° is yong houssewif,
Ha° loveth ful luitel° hire lif,
And eni clere° of love hire bede,”°
Bote hoe° grante, and lete him spede.”°

[MARGERY] “A, Louerd° Crist! Wat
mai I thenne do?
This enderdai° com a clarc° me to,
And bed° me love on his manere,°
And Ich him nolde nout ihere.°
Ich trouue° he wolle me forsape.”°

[SIRITH] “God almightten be thin help
That thou ne be nouther bicche ne
welp!”°
Leve° dame, if eni clere°
Bedeth° thee that love-werc,°
Ich rede° that thou grante his bone,°
And bicom his lefmon sone.°
And if that thou so ne dost,
A worse red° thou ounderfost.”°

[MARGERY] “Louerd° Crist, that me
is wo,”°
That the clarc° me hede fro°
Ar° he me hevede biwonne!°
Me were levere then ani fe°
That he hevede enes leien° bi me,
And efftsones bigunne.”°
Evermore, nelde,” Ich wille be thin,
With° that thou feche° me Willekin,
The clarke of whom I telle;
Giftes will I geve thee
That thou might ever the betere be,
Bi Godes houne belle!°

[SIRITH] “Sothliche,” mi swete dame,
And if I mai withhoute blame,
Fain° Ich wille ffonde;°
And if Ich mai with him mete
Bi eni wei other bi strete,°
Nout ne will I wonde.°

Have goddai, dame! Forth will I go.”

[MARGERY] “Allegate loke° that thou
do so
As Ich thee bad;°

Bote that° thou me Wilekin bringe,
Ne mai I never lawe° ne singe,
Ne be glad.”

[SIRITH] “Iwis,” dame, if I mai,
Ich wille bringen him yet to-dai,
Bi mine mightte.

Hoe° wente hire to hire inne,°
Her hoe° founde Wilekinne,
Bi houre Drightte!°

[SIRITH] “Swete Wilekin, be thou nout
dred,°
For of thin hernde° Ich have wel sped.°
Swithe° come forth thider with me,
For hoe° haveth send after thee;
Iwis° nou maigth thou ben above,°
For thou havest grantise° of hire love.”

[WILEKIN] “God thee foryelde,° leve
That hevene and erthe haveth to
welde!”°

This modi mon° bigon to gon
With Sirith to his levemon°
In thilke stounde.°

Dame Sirith bigon to telle,
And swor° bi Godes ouene belle,°

[SIRITH] “Dame, so have Ich Wilekin
sout,°
For nou° have Ich him ibrout.”°

[MARGERY] “Welcome, Wilekin, swete
thing,
Thou art welcomore° then the king.
Wilekin the swete,
Mi love I thee bihete,”

[244x590]410

Turnd° Ich have mi thout,°
For I ne wolde nout°
That thou thee shuldest spille.”°

[WILEKIN] “Goddot° so I wille:
And loke that thou hire tille,°
And strek out hir thes.°
God geve thee muchel kare,°
Yeif° that thou hire spare,°
The wile° thou mid here bes.”

301
And wose° is onwis,°
And for non pris°
Ne con geten his levemon,°
I shal, for mi mede,°
Garen° him to spede,°
450 For ful wel I con.°

wose whoever onwis unwise non pris no price Ne...levemon Can get his lover mede re-
ward Garen Cause spede succeed con can
Endnotes

1. This edition is based on *A Literary Middle English Reader*, ed. Albert Stanburrough Cook (Ginn and Company, 1913) and *Middle English Humorous Tales in Verse*, ed. George H. McKnight (D.C. Heath & Co., 1913), both in the public domain. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Danielle Allor.

2. A *fabliau* is a short, humorous (typically bawdy) tale in verse. The genre thrived in France in the middle of the twelfth century and became popular in England during the fourteenth.
Tale of Constance \(^1\) (1380–90)

John Gower
Contributed by Will Rogers

Introduction

John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* has long been a subject for scholars interested in impairment, disability, and age. A long poem, framed by the relationship between confessor and penitent, *Confessio Amantis* deals ultimately with cure and sickness, spiritual and physical. Amans, the old lover, is given exemplum after exemplum which are meant to guide him toward healing. *The Tale of Constance*, from Book II, fits this frame very well: a dramatization of the traffic in woman, the tale narrates the journey of Roman princess Constance from Rome to Barbarie (somewhere in the Middle East) to Northumberland and back to Rome, a trip that highlights the duplicity of figures she encounters on her forced journey. Book II concentrates on envy and its dangers, and Constance’s voyages make clear that envy, at least for Gower’s poem, concentrates on sight, and how others see Constance. While she remains constant, the sight of her causes fear, suspicion, and hatred. And tellingly, Chaucer’s own version of this tale—*The Man of Law’s Tale*—again foregrounds Constance as a constant in his narrative, one which remains immovable in the face of geographic and religious adversity.

For Gower (and perhaps Chaucer as well), the tale, then, is ultimately about sight and perception. The tale dramatizes the complex interplay between the senses, highlighting the slipperiness between truth and falsity. In fact, Gower describes eyes numerous times, using verbs depicting sight numerable times, and there is a simultaneous emphasis on hearing—yet one is never consistently associated with truth or its absence. Throughout the tale, listening and reading, hearing and seeing convey how difficult it can be to discern the truth, a lesson which fits nicely into the tale’s moralizations about envy. Here, one might examine the letters which Constance’s mother-in-law deliberately overwrites, creating a false message about Constance and her son, Moris. Even with the ability to see, it is possible to be blind to the truth. Because envy is based on sight—seeing and wanting what others have—Gower’s poem suggests that sight is an ability that is possibly always impaired. In fact, no one truly sees Constance, besides those who attempt to destroy her, those who are physically blind, or those who die or are separated from her as a result of her friendship and love.

By tying envy to sight and blindness, Gower’s tale frequently evokes sight, eyes, and perception. These repeated descriptions of sightedness and blindness are most important for readers interested in impairment and disability. The tale, of course, uses these metaphors of sight and blindness conventionally: to be physically blind is to be spiritually so, a kind of link between the condition of the body and soul. This kind of blindness literally is a condition cured in the beginning of the tale by Constance and her faith, and the Knight who defames her is literally blinded by divine agency when he attempts to pin Hermengild’s murder on her. Yet, even as the treatment of blindness here is rather conventional, it also tellingly is deployed beyond the expected. The blind man cured of his blindness can, nevertheless, see Constance and her faith initially for what
they are: a woman with true faith which has alluded others, who are sighted, in the poem. To be clear, the tale does not seem to view blindness, however, as a condition that does not require intervention. Whether as spiritual or physical, it exists as a condition to be cured or a punishment for immoral behavior, and thus this treatment of blindness appears close to a modern medicalization of impairment and cure, reflecting the religious model of blindness, which Edward Wheatley traces in his book, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability*.

Finally, because the tale emphasizes diverse locations and laws, it is a tale that speaks to the nearly impossible task of fixing norms, in terms of faith, law, and bodies. While Constance is a constant in the poem, she seems to be the only one: she is seen and rarely sees: the poem is mainly interested in reporting how the world sees her. But these diverse, and largely negative, reactions to Constance imply that perhaps, in terms of bodies and laws, there may only be diversity, even in other diverse treatments of Constance’s constancy. For Gower’s text, as for Chaucer’s, the fiction of the normal body is just that.

**Bibliography**


A worthi kniht in Cristes lawe
Of grete rome, as is the sawe,
The Sceptre hadde forto rihte;
Whos wif was cleped Ytalie;
No children hadde bot a Maide;
That al the wide worlds fame
Spak worschipe of hire goode name.
Constance, as the Cronique seith,
Of hem whiche usen marchandie,
To hire upon a time in Rome,
To schewen such a thing as thei
Whiche worthili of hem sche boghte;
And over that in such a wise
Sche hath hem with hire wordes wise
Of Cristes feith so full enformed,
That thei thereto ben all conformed,
And alle here false goddes weyven.
When thei ben of the feith certein,
Thei gon to Barbarie ayein,
And axeth hem to what entente
Thei have here ferste feith forsake.

[The Sultan hears reports of Constance’s beauty from the converts and plans to marry her]

And furthermor with good corage
He seith, be so he mai hire have,
That Crist, which cam this world to save,
He woll believe: and this recorded,
Thei ben on either side acorded,
And therupon to make an ende
The Souldan hise hostages sende
To Rome, of Princes Sones twelve:
Wherof the fader in himselfe
Was glad, and with the Pope avied

Tuo Cardinals he hath assisseed
With othre lordes many mo,
That with his doghter scholden go,
To se the Souldan be converted.
Bot that which nevere was wel herted,
Envie, tho began travaile
In destourbance of this spousaile
So prively that non was war.
The Moder which this Souldan bar
Was thanne alyve, and thoghthe this

Unto hirsell: ‘If it so is
Mi Sone him wedde in this manere,
Than have I lost my joies hiere,
For myn astat schal so be lassed.’
Thenkende thus sche hath compassed
Be sleihte how that sche may beguile
Hire Sone; and fell withinne a while,
Betwen hem two whan that thei were,
Sche feigneth wordes in his Ere,
And in this wise gan to seie:

‘Mi Sone, I am be double weie
With al myn herte glad and blithe,
Desired thou wolt, as men seith,
Received and take a newe feith,
Which schal be forthtringe of thi lif:
And ek so worschipful a wif,
The daughter of an Empyreor,
To wedde it schal be gret honour.
Forthi, mi Sone, I you beseche
That I mai thanne in special,
So as me thenth it is honeste,
Be thilke which the ferste feste
Schal make unto hire welcominge.’
The Souldan granteth hire axinge,
And sche was glad ynnowh;°
For under that anon she drowh°
With false wordes that sche spak
Covine° of deth behind his bak.

[The Sultan’s mother secretly plans the murder of all who attend the wedding, including her son, who is slain. Only Constance remains.]

107   This worthi Maiden which was there
Stood thanne, as who seith, ded for feere,
To se the feste how that it stod,
Which al was torned into blod:
The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al Bebled° thei weren overall;
Sche sih hem deie on every side;
No wonder thogh sche wept and cride
Makende many a wofull mone.
When al was slain bot sche al one,
This olde fend, this Sarazine,°
Let take anon this Constantine
With al the good and hire in fiere,
Vitaile° full for yeres fyve,
Wher that the wynd it wolde dryve,
Sche putte upon the wawes wilde.
Bot he which alle thing maai schilde,
Under a Castel with the flod,
Which upon Humber banke stod
And was the kynges oghne also,
The which Allee was cleped° tho,
A Saxon and a worthi knyght,
Bot he believeth noght ariht.
Of this Castell was Chastellein°
Elda the kinges Chamberlein,°
A knyghtly man after his lawe;
And when he sih° upon the wawe°
The Schip drivende al one so,
He bad anon men scholden go
To se what it betoken mai.
This was upon a Somer dai,
The Schip was loked and sche founde;
Elda withinne a litel stounde°
It wiste," and with his wif anon
Toward this yonge ladi gon,
Wher that thei founden gret richesse;
Bot sche hire wolde noght confesse,
Whan thei hire axen what sche was.

[Constance is welcomed in Northumberland and meets Hermyngheld, the wife of Elda.]

116   Constance loveth; and fell so
Spekende alday betwen hem two,
Thurgh grace of goddes pourveance°
This maiden tawhte the creance°
Unto this wif so parfitly,
Upon a dai that faste by
In the presence of hire housbonde,
A blind man, which cam there lad,
Unto this wif criende he bad,
To hire, and in this wise he seide:
O Hermyngheld, which Cristes feith,
Enformed as Constance seith,
Received hast, yif me my sihte.’
Upon his word hire herte afflihte
Thenkende what was best to done,
And seide, In trust of Cristes lawe,
Which don was on the crois and slawe,°
Thou bysne man, behold and se.’
With that to god upon his kne
Thonkende he tok his sihte anon,
Wherof thei merveile° everychon,
Bot Elda wondreth most of alle:
The open thing which is befalle
Concludeth him be such a weie,
That he the feith mot nede obeie.
Now lest what fell upon this thing.
This Elda forth unto the king
A morwe tok his weie and rod,

And Hermyngeld at home abod
Forth with Constance wel at ese.
Elda, which thoghte his king to plese,
As he that thanne unwedded was,
Of Constance al the pleine cas°
Als goodliche as he cowthe° tolde.
The king was glad and seide he wolde
Come thider upon such a wise
That he him mihte of hire avise,
The time apointed forth withal.

This Elda triste° in special
Upon a knyght, whom fro childhode
He hadde updrawe° into manhode:
To him tolde al that he thoghte,
Wherof that after hi forthgotte;
And natheles at thilke tide
Unto his wif he had him ride
To make redi alle thing
And seith that he himself tofore
Thenkth forto come, and bad therfore
That he him kepe, and told him
whanne.
This knyght rod forth his weie thanne;
And soth was that of time passed
He hadde al in his wit compassed°
How he Constance myhte winne;
Bot he sih tho no sped therinne,
Wherof his lust began tabate,°
And that was love is thanne hate;
Of hire honour he hadde Envie,
So that upon his tricherie°

A lesinge° in his herte he caste.
Til he cam home he hieth faste,
And doth his ladi understonde
The Message of hire husbonde:
And therupon the longe dai
Thei setten thinges in arrai,°
That al was as it scholde be
Of every thing in his degree;°
And when it cam into the nyht,
This wif hire hath to bedde dyht,°

Wher that this Maiden with hire lay.
This false knyght upon delay
Hath taried til thei were aslepe,
As he that wolde his time kepe
His dedly werkes to fulfille;
And to the bed he stalketh stille,
Wher that he wiste was the wif,
And in his hond a rasour knif
He bar, with which hire throte he cutte,
And privel° the knif he putte

Under that other beddes side,
Wher that Constance lai beside.
And stille with a prive lyht,
As he that wolde noght awake
His wif, he hath thus weie take
Into the chambre, and ther liggende°
He fond his dede wif bledende,°
Wher that Constance faste by
Was falle aslepe; and sodeinly
He cride alowd, and sche awok,

And forth withal sche caste a lok
And sih this ladi blede there,
Wherof swounende° ded for fere
Sche was, and stille as eny Ston
She lay, and Elda therupon
Into the Castell cleped° oute,
And up sterre every man aboute,
Into the chambre and forth thei wente.
Bot he, which alle untrouthe mente,
This false knyght, among hem alle

Upon this thing which is befalle
Seith that Constance hath don this
dede;
And to the bed with that he yede°
After the falshed° of his speche,
And made him there forto seche,
And fond the knif, wher he it leide,
And thanne he cride and thanne he
seide,
'Lo, seth the knif al blody hiere!
What nedeth more in this matiere°
To axe?' And thus her innocence
He sclaundreth° there in audience
With false wordes whiche he feigneth.
Bot yit for al that evere he pleigneth,
Elda no full credence tok:
And happeth that ther lay a bok,
Upon which, whan he it sih,
This knyht hath swore and seid on hih,
That alle men it mihte wite,°
'Now be this bok, which hier is write,
Constance is gultif,° wel I wot.'
With that the hond of hevene him smot
In tokne° of that he was forswore.
That he hath bothe hise yhen° lore,
Out of his hed the same stounde
Thei sterte, and so their weren founde.
A vois was herd, when that they felle,
Which seide, 'O dampned man to helle,
Lo, thus hath god the sclaundre° wroke°
That thou ayein Constance hast spoke:
Beknow the sothe er that thou dye.'
And he told out his felonie,°
And starf° forth with his tale anon.
Into the ground, wher alle gon,
This dede lady was begrave:°
Elda, which thoghte his honour save,
Al that he mai restreigneth sorwe.
For the second day a morwe°
The king cam, as thei were acorded;

[The King, seeing her virtue and beauty, marries Constance and she becomes pregnant.]

Wherof that sche was joiefull,
Sche was delivered sauf° and sone.
The bishop, as it was to done,
Yaf him baptesme and Moris calleth;
And therupon, as it befalleth,
With lettres writen of record

Thei sende unto here liege lord,
That kepers weren of the qweene:
And he that scholde go betwene,
The Messager, to Knaresburgh,

Which toun he scholde passe thurgh,
Ridende cam the ferste day.
The kings Moder there lay,
Whos rihte name was Domilde,
Which after al the cause spilde:"°
For he, which thonk deserve wolde,
Unto this ladi goth and tolde
Of his Message al how it ferde.°
And sche with feigned joie it herde
And yaf him yiftes° largely,

Bot in the nyht al prively
Sche tok the lettres whiche he hadde,
Fro point to point and overradde,"°
As sche that was thurghout untrewe,"°
And let do wryten othre newe
In stede of hem, and thus thei spieke:
'Oure liege lord, we thee beseke
That thou with ous ne be noght wroth,
Though we such thing as is thee loth°
Upon oure trowthe certefie.

Thi wif, which is of faierie,"°
Of such a child delivered is
Fro kinde° which stant all amis:
Bot for it scholde noght be seie,
We have it kept out of the weie
For drede of pure worldes schame,
A povere child and in the name
Of thilke which is so misbore
We toke, and therto we be swore,
That non bot only thou and we

Schal knownen of this privete:
Moris it hatte, and thus men wene
That it was boren of the qweene
And of thin oghne bodi gete.
Bot this thing mai noght be foryete,"°
That thou ne sende ous word anon
What is thi wille therupon.'
This lettre, as thou hast herd devise,
Was contrefet in such a wise
That noman scholde it aperceive:
And sche, which thoughte to deceive,
It leth when sche that other tok.
This Messager, whan he awok,
And wiste nothing how it was,
Aros and rod the grete pas
And tok this lettre to the king.
And whan he sith this wonder thing.
He makth the Messager no chiere,
Bot natheles in wys manere
He wrote ayein, and yaf hem charge
That thei ne soffre noght at large
His wif to go, but kepe hire stille,
Til thei have herd mor of his wille.
This Messager was yifeles.
Bot with this lettre natheles,
Or be him lief or be him loth,
In alle haste ayien he goth
Be Knaresburgh, and as he wente
Unto the Moder his entente
Of that he fond toward the king
He tolde; and sche upon this thing
Seith that he scholde abide at nyht
And made him feste and chiere ariht,
Feignende as thogh sche cowthe him thonk.
Bot he with strong wyn which he dronk
Forth with the travail of the day
Was drunke, aslepe and while he lay,
Sche hath his lettre overseie
And formed in an other weie.
Ther was a newe lettre write,
Which seith: 'I do you forto wite
That thurgh the conseil of you tuo
I stonde in point to ben undo,
As he which is a king deposed.
For every man it hath supposed,
How that my wif Constance is faie;
And if that I, thei sein, delaie
To put hire out of compaignie,
The worschipe of my Regalie
Is lore; and over this thei telle,
430 Hire child schal noght among hem
duelle,
To cleymen eny heritage.
So can I se non avantage,
Bot al is lost, if sche abide:
Forthi to loke on every side
Toward the meschief as it is,
I charge you and bidde this,
That ye the same Schip vitaile,
In which that sche tok arivaile,
Therinne and puttheth bothe tuo,
Hireself forthwith hire child also,
And so forth brought unto the depe
Betake thy the See to kepe.
Of fourte daies time I sette,
That ye this thing no longer lette,
So that your lif be noght forset.'
And thus the lettre contrefet
The Messager, which was unwar.
Upon the kinges halve bar,
And where he scholde it hath betaken.
460 Bot whan that thei have hiede take,
And rad that writen is withinne,
So gret a sorwe thei beginne.
As thei here oghne Moder sithen
Brent in a fyr before hire yhen:
Ther was wepinge and ther was wo,
And where he scholde it hath betaken.

[Because of the treachery of Allee’s mother, Constance and her child are set out to sea, in an echo of her escape from the Sultan’s mother. She manages to sail back to Rome. In the meantime, Allee discovers his mother’s treason and executes her. In order to gain absolution, Allee too travels to Rome where he is reunited with his wife and son Moris.]
Was come, and Couste upon his tale
With herte clos and colour pale
Aswoune fell," and he merveileth
750 So sodeinly what thing hire eyleth,"
And cawhte hire up, and whan sche wok,
Sche syketh with a pitous lok
And feigneth seknesse of the See;
Bot it was for the king Allee,
For joie which fell in hire thoghte
That god him hath to toune broght.
This king hath spoke with the Pope
And told al that he cowthe agrope,"
What grieveneth in his conscience;
760 And thanne he thoghte in reverence
Of his astat, er that he wente,
To make a feste, and thus he sente
Unto the Senatour to come
Upon the morwe and othre some,
To sitte with him at the mete."
This tale hath Couste noghte foryte,
Bot to Moris hire Sone tolde
That he upon the morwe scholde
In al that evere he cowthe" and mihte
770 Be present in the kinges sihte,
So that the king him ofte sihe.
Moris tofore the kinges yhe"
Upon the morwe, wher he sat,
Fulofte stod, and upon that
The king his chiere upon him caste,
And in his face him thoghte als faste
He sih his oghne" wif Constance;

[After more than a decade apart, King Allee is reunited with both his son and wife, and Constance with the Emperor. Constance and Allee return to England, where Allee dies, and Constance returns to her father and Rome, where her son Moris eventually becomes emperor.]
Endnotes

1 The text below is taken from Confessio Amantis, ed. G.C. Macaulay, The Complete Works of John Gower (Clarendon Press, 1899). The Tale of Constance appears in lines 587–1613 of The Series. This text is in the public domain. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Will Rogers.
Introduction

Thomas Hoccleve’s Series is a text that is difficult to define. It is a collection of poems, ranging from a complaint about Hoccleve’s mental illness, to a dialogue with a friend, and finally, a copy of Lerne to Die and translations from the Gesta Romanorum. The selections from the latter include Jereslaus’ Wife—an analogue of the Constance story, similar to The Man of Law’s Tale and Gower’s Tale of Constance—and the Tale of Jonathas, which echoes The Squire’s Tale and focuses on a son who squanders three magical gifts. These various works, discrete in nature, nevertheless form a larger, unified whole, as each text suggests something of Hoccleve’s life to which he often alludes. Indeed, often nakedly autobiographical, the Series nevertheless blurs the line between fact and fiction, as Hoccleve’s fictional moralizations are introduced by his own struggles with a mental illness, which, according to Hoccleve, have been all too real. In his beginning exposition of his illness and subsequent dialogue with a nameless “Friend,” Hoccleve makes clear the severity of his mental break and the resulting alienation from London society. The dialogue with the friend which follows makes clear that Hoccleve’s recovery is presumably not complete, and he needs help and encouragement—even prodding—to continue writing. The dialogue then turns to matters of patronage, and the Duke of Gloucester, before returning to harm and pain.

One of the focal points of this pain is the damage done to Hoccleve’s own reputation through rumor and gossip about his extended mental illness, and these rumors introduce that Hoccleve, like his former friends, has allowed rumor and reputation to harm those who don’t deserve it, namely, women. Indeed, as Hoccleve is aware and as the dialogue with the friend suggests, Hoccleve acknowledges that his writings have hurt women, by voicing false narratives like the ones he hears about his own recovery from mental illness. This writing, centered on women, becomes a reflection of the gossip, which centers on him, and spreads the story of his mental breakdown. Then by taking his own alienation into account, Hoccleve seems to internalize his own malady as reason to repent and make amends. Indeed, this malady or sickness is inseparable from the work’s larger focus on the instability of the world, and the need to act moral and with virtue in spite of inhospitable circumstances, themes which the tales from the Gesta Romanorum and Lerne to Die make manifest. In a world where mental stability and health is no more secure than the seasons which change regularly, it is important to live as though each day is one’s last.

But we should keep in mind that Hoccleve’s poem gestures to a complex view of impairment and disability in fifteenth-century England. The difference between impairments and disability is a topic handled well by the Series. Impairment might simply signal some kind of bodily or mental difference from an imagined norm, as his own self-reported illness certainly does (at least in his telling). But his dialogue with his friend and complaint about the instability of social ties and friendship highlight that disabilities are often those impairments which elicit a social
response or hinder some kind of communal relationship. Like a modern disability, Hoccleve’s mental illness affects his employment and the quality of his life. Part of Hoccleve’s Complaint is that, long after his illness has ended, gossip about the illness remains, and this cloud of suspicion makes recovery practically impossible. The expectation, Hoccleve tells us, is that he would relapse, due to his age and health. Here is a place we might see how impairment becomes disability, as the mental illness affects Hoccleve’s employment and his status in London. His dialogue with his friend makes clear just how an impairment—according to Hoccleve, a mental breakdown caused by a variety of factors—might become disability once it affects one’s social status or access to employment. Indeed, the opening Complaint—printed in full here—voices the fears Hoccleve’s contemporaries have for his possible relapse. But the poems actually suggest that the disability is not the issue, but the quality of relationships and brokenness of the world, which make any deviation from the temporary fiction of the able body and mind fatal to one’s standing in the personal and professional world of fifteenth-century London. According to Hoccleve, the fiction of the able body is a temporary one. Given enough time or age, one will encounter deviations from a bodily or mental norm (however fictional that norm may be). So, Hoccleve’s words—that nothing stops change and can protect one from illness—reflect something similar: wealth, youth, all fail in the face of outside circumstances. Finally, Hoccleve’s Series is a wonderful example of the developing role of medical figures and late medieval attempts to reconcile science and medicine with religion, as Hoccleve ends the Complaint with a revaluation of corporeal trials become a way to rid oneself of spiritual malady tying the brokenness of Hoccleve’s mind and body to the healing of his spirit, a connection suggested by the image of Christ as surgeon. The Complaint, therefore, in particular, offers a rich vocabulary for the medicalization of impairments, speaking of Hoccleve’s diseas, maladye, or wyld infirmite. Healing, of course, comes, but through less than scientific or strictly medical means. Hoccleve finds a book with a dialogue featuring an allegorical Reason and internalizes the words as medicine. The Complaint ends, and the Dialogue begins, appropriately with Hoccleve viewing Christ as the physician, a connection made in other works of the period, as the growing power of medical figures became a symbol of God’s grace.

Bibliography

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After that harvest Inned° has his sheves," and that the broune season of Myhelmesse° was come, and gan the trees robbe of their leves, That grene had bene and in lusty freshness and them in-to colowre of yelownesse had dyen and doune throwne under foote, that chaunge sank into myne herte roote." For freshely brought it to my remembraunce," that stablenes° in this world there is none. 

There is no thinge but chaunge and variaunce: how welthye a man be or well be-gone, endure it shall not he shall it for-gon," deathe under fote shall hym thrist adowne," that is every wites° conclusyon.

Whiche for to weyve is in no mannes myght, how riche he be stronge, lusty, freshe, and gay. and in the end of Novembar, upon a nyght, syghenge° sore as I in my bed lay, for this and othar thoughtes whiche many a day before I toke sleape cam none in myne eye, so vexyd me the thoughtfull maladye." I see well, sythen I with sycknes last was scourged, clowdy° hath bene the favoure that shone me. Full bright in tymes past, the sonne abatid, and the derke showre hildyd° downe right on me, and in langour he made swyme so that my wite to lyve no lust hadd, ne deylte. The grefe abowte my herte so swal° and bolned° evar to and to so sore, that nedes oute I must there with all. I thought I nolde° it kepe cloos no more, ne lett it in me, for to olde and hore," and for to preve I cam of a woman, I brast° oute on the morowe and thus began. Allmyghty god, as lyketh his goodnes, visyrethe folks alday, as men may se, with lose of good and bodily sikenese, and among othar, he forgot nat me.

Witness upon the wyld infirmytie," which that I had, as many a man well knewe, and whiche me owt of my selfe cast and threw. It was so knowne to the people and kouthe° that cownsell was it none ne none be myght;° how it with me stode was in every mans mowthe, and that full sore my fryndes affright. They for myne helthe pilgrimages hight and sowght them, some on hors and some on foote, God yelde it them—to get me bote." But althowghe the substaunce of my memory went to pley, as for a certayne space,
yet the lord of vertew,° the kyng of
glory,
of his highe myght and benynge grace,
made it to returne in-to the place
whence it cam, whiche at all hallwe
messe,°
was five yere nether more ne lesse.
And evere sythen—thanked be God our
Lord,
of his good reconciliacion—
my wyt and I have been of suche ac-
corde
60  as we were or the alteracion°
of it was, but by my savacion,
that tyme have I be sore sett on fire
and lyved in great torment and mart-
tire.°
For thoughgh that my wit were home
came agayne,
men wolde it not so understand or take
with me to deale, hadden they dys-
dayne.
A ryotows° person I was and forsake,
myn olde frindshipe was ovarshake,°
no wyte° withe me lyst° make daliance,
70  the worlde me made a straunge con-
tinuance,°
whiche that myne herte sore gan tor-
ment.
For ofte whan I, in Westmynster Hall,
and eke in London, among the prese°
gent,
I se the chere abaten and apalle°
of them that weren wonte me for to
calle
to companye; her° heed they caste
a-wry,
when I them mette as they not me sye.
As seide is in the sauter° might I say,
they that me sye fledden awey fro me,
80  forgeten I was all owte of mynde away,
as he that dede was from herres cherte;°
to a loste vessell lickened myght I be;
for many a wyght abowte me dwellynge,
herd I me blame and putte in dispreis-
inge.°
Thus spake many one and seyde by me:
‘Althowghe from hym his siknesse
savage
withdrawne and passyd, as for a tyme
be,
resorte it wole, namely in suche age
as he is of; and thanne my visage
bygan to glowe for the woo° and fere
Tho wordis, them unwar,° cam to myn
ere:
‘Whane passinge hete is,’ quod they,
‘trustyth this,
assaile° hym wole agayne that maladie.’
And yet, parde,° they token them amise:
none effect at all toke there prophecie.
Manie someres ben past sithen remedye
of that, god of his grace me purveide:°
Thanked be God—it shope° nought as
they seide!
What fall shall what men so deme° or
gesse,
100  to hym that wott° every mans secre
reservyd is. It is a lewdnesse°
men wyser them pretende then they be,
and no wight° knoweth be it he or she,
whom, how ne when God wolde hym
visete.
It happeneth ofte whan men wene° it
lite.
Some tyme I wend as lite as any man,
for to have fall into that wildenesse
but God, whan hym list may, wole and
can,
helthe withdrawe and send a wyght
sycknesse.
Though the man be well this day, no
sykernesse
to hym bihight° is that it shall endure:
God hurte now can and nowe hele and
cure.
He suffrith longe at the laste he smit;
whane that a man is in prosperite,
To drede a fall comynge it is a wit.
Who so that takethe hede ofte may se
This worldis change and mutabilite°
in sondry wyse, howe nedeth not
expresse:
To my mater streight wole I me dresse

Men seyden I loked as a wilde steer,
and so my loke abowt I gan to throwe;
myne heed to hie° another side I beer,°
ful bukkyshe° is his brayne, well may I
trowe,
and seyde the thirde and apt is in the
rowe
to siete of them that a resounles° reed°
Can geve no sadnesse is in his heede.
Chaungid had I my pas some seiden
ekte,
for here and there forthe stirte I as a
Roo°—
none abode, none arrest, but all brain-
seke.

Another spake and of me seide also,
my feete weren aye wavynge to and fro
whane that I stonde shulde and withe
men talke
and that myne eyne sowghten every
halke."°
I leide an ere aye to as I by wente,
and herde all, and thus in myne herte
I cast:
of longe abdyngne here I may repent;
leste, of hastinesse I at the last
answere amyse best is hens° hye fast.
For yf I in this preace amyssse me gye,
to harme will it me turne and to folly.
And this I demyd wel and knew well
 eke,"°
whatsoever I shuld answere or sey,
they wold not have holde it wortha
a leke."°
For why, as I hadd lost my tonges key,
kepte I me cloos, and trussyd° me my
wey,
drowpynge° and hevye° and all woo
bystad:
small cawse had I, me thowght, to be
glad.
My spirits laboryd bysyly
to peinte countiunauce chere and loke,
for that men spake of me so wonder-
ingly,
and for the very shame and fere I
qwoke,"°
thowghte myne herte had been dypped
in the broke.
It wete and moyste I now was of my
swot,"°
whiche was nowe frostye colde and now
firy hoot.
And in my chamber at home when I
was
my selfe alone, I in this wyse wrowght."°
I streit unto my myrrowr° and my glas,
to loke how that me of my chere thow-
ght
yf any were it than it owght,
for fayne wolde I, yf it had not be right,
amendyd it to my kunynge° and
myght."°
Many a sawte° made I to this myrrowre,
thinkynge, 'Yf that I loke in this manere
amonge folke as I now do, none errowr
of suspecte loke may in my face appere,
this continuance, I am surem and this
chere,

bibhight promised mutabilite variance bukkyshe haughty hie quickly beer raise resounles worthless reed counsel Roo roc deer halke recess or nook hens hence eke also leke leek, i.e. worthless trussyd departed drowpynge physically weak, sad hevye grievous qwoke shudder swot sweat wrowght act myrrowre looking glass kunynge cunning myght physical ability sawte saunter, trip
If I forthe use is no thinge reprevable
to them that have conseytes° resonceable.
And therewithall I thought thus anon:

170 ‘Men in theyr owne case bene blynd
alday,
as I haue hard say many a day agen,
and in that plyght° I stonde may.
How shall I doo, which is the best way,
my troubled spirit, for to bringe ar
rest?
Yf I wist howe, fayne° wolde I do the
best.’
Sythen I recoveryd was have I full ofte
cawse had of angre and ympacience,"where I borne have it esely and softe,
sufferynge wronge be done to me, and
offence,
180 and nowght answeryd ageyn, but kept
slyence,
lest that men of me deme would, and
seyne,
‘Se how this man is fallen in agayne!’
As that I ones° fro Westmynster cam,
vexid full grevously withe thowghtfull
hete,
thus thought I: ‘a great fole I am,
this pavyment a dayes thus to bete,
and in and out, labour fast and swete,
wonderinge and hevynes to purchace,
sythen I stand out of all favor and
grace.’
190 And then thought I on that othar syde:
‘If that I not be sene amonge the prees,"men deme wele that I myne heade hyde,
and am worse than I am—it is no lees.’
O lorde, so my spirite was restles,
I sowght reste and I not it found,
but aye was trouble, redy at myn hond.
I may not lett a man to ymagine
ferre above the mone° yf that hym lyst:
thereby the sowthe he may not deter-
myn.

200 But by the prefe° bene things knowne
and wiste,
many a dome° is wrappyd in the myst;
man by his dedes, and not by his lokes,
shall knowne be, as it is writen in bokes.
By taste of frewte,"men may well wete
and knowe
what that it is—othar prefe is there
none;
every man wott wel that, as that I
trowe,
right so they that demen my Witt is
gone,
as yet this day there demythe many a
one
I am not well: may, as I by them goo,
taste and assay yf it be so or noo.

210 Upon a looke is hard, men them to
grownde
what a man is, thereby the sothe is hid;
whither his wittes seke bene or sounde,
by cowynynce it is not wist ne kyd."Thowgh a man harde have ones bene
biryde,
God shilde° it shuld on hym contynue
alway:
by comunynge is the best assay.
I mean to comon of things mene,
for I am but right lewde dowtles°
220 and ygnoraunte, my cunninge is full
lene,
yet homly reason know I nevartheles;
not hope I founden be so resonles
as men demen—Marie, Christ forbede!
I can no more preve may the dede.
If a man ones fall in dronkenesse,
shall he contynewe therein evar mo?
Nay, thowghe a man doo in drinkynge
excesse
so ferforthe° that not speake he ne can,
ne goo,
and his wittes wely° ben refte° hym
froo,

conseytes mental faculties plyght trouble fayne happily ympacience impatience ones once prees crowd mone moon prefe proof dome judgment frewte fruit wist ne kyd known shilde shield dowltes doubtless ferforthe far
and buried in the Cuppe,° he afterward
comythe to hym selfe agayne, ellis were
it hard.
Right so, thoughge my witt were a
pilgrime,
and went fer fro home, he cam agayne.
God me voydyd° of this grevous venyme
that had enfectyd and wildyd° my
brayne.
Se how the curtese leche° most sov-
ereyne,
unot the scykce, gevythe medisyne
in nede and hym relevythe of his peyne.
Now let this passe, God wott, many a
man
semythe full wyse by cowntenauence and
chere,
whiche, and he tastyd were what he can,
men myghten licken hym to a fooles
pere.
And some man lokerthe in foltyshe°
maner,
as to the outward dome and judgemen,
that as the prese descrete is and pru-
dent.
But algates,° howe so be my coun-
tyneauence,
debate is now none bytryxt and my
wit,
althowgh there were a dysseveraunce,°
as for a tyme, betwyxt me and it.
The greater harme is myne, that never
yet
was I well lettered, prudent and dis-
crete;
there nevar stode yet wyse man on my
fete.
The sothe is this: suche conceit as I had,
and undarstondynge, all were it but
small,
byfore that my wyttys wearen unsad—
thanked be Owr Lord Ihesu Crist of
all!—
suche have I now, but blowe is ny ovari
the reverse, where thorwghge is the
mornynge
whiche cawsethe me thus syghe in com-
playnynge.
Sythen my good fortune hathe changed
his chere,
hye time is me to crepe into my grace,
to lyve loyles,° what do I here?
I, in my herte, can no gladnes have;
I may but small sey, but yf men deme I
rave,
sythen othar thinge the woo may I none
grype.
unto my sepulture° ame I nowe ripe.
My well, adwe farwell, my good for-
tune!
Out of your tables, me playned have ye;
sythen well ny eny wight for to comune
with me lothe is, farwell prosperitie!
I am no lenger of your lyverye!°
Ye have me put out of your remem-
braunce;
adewe° my good adventure and good
chaunce!
And as swithe after thus bythowght I
me:
yf that I in this wyse me despeyre,
it is purchase of more adversytye.
What nederthe it, my feble wit appeire;
sythe god hathe made myne helthe
home repayre°
blessed be he, and what men deme or
speke
suffre it—thinke I and me not on me
wreke.°
But some dele had I reioysynge°
amonge,
and gladnese also in my spirite,
that thowghe the people toke them mis and wronge
me demyng of my sycknesse not quite, yet for they compleyned the hevy plite that they had sene me in with tender-nesse
of hertes cherte, my grefe was the lesse. In them put I no defawlte but one: that I was hole," they not ne deme kowldc,
and day and day, they se me by them gon
in heate and colde, and neythar still nor lowde,
and for all that were they in suche a dowt.
Axed have they full ofte sythe, and freined
of my fellaws of the prive seale°
and preyed them to tell them with hert unfeynyd,
how it stode wyth me, whither yll or well.
And they the sothe told them every dell,
but they helden ther words not but les: they myghten as well have holden ther pes.
This troublly lyfe hathe all to longe enduryd,
not have I wyst how in my skynne to turne.
But now my selfe to my selfe have ensured,
for no suche wondrynge after this to morne:
as longe as my lyfe shall in me soiorne,"° of suche ymaginyngye, I not ne reche."°
Lat them drem as them lyst and speke and dreche.°
This othar day, a lamentacion
of a wofull man in a bok I sye,
to whome words of consolation Reason gave, spekynge effectually, and well easyd my herte was therby.
For when I had a while, in the bok red, with the speche of Reason was I well fed.
This hevy man, wofull and angwyssh- iows° compleyned in this wyse and seyd he:
‘my lyfe is unto me full encomberows;° for whithar or unto what place I flye,
my wyckednesses evar followe me,
as men may se the shadow of a body swe,"°
and in no maner I may them eschwe."°
Vexation of spirite and torment lake I right none I have them plente.
Wondarly byttar is my taast and sent;° wo be the tyme of my natyvyte,
unhappy man that evar shuld it be!
O deathe, they strooke, a salve is of sweetnes
to them that lyven in suche wrechednes.
Gretar plesaunce were it to dye,
by many folde, than for to lyve soo.
Sorows so many in me multiplye,
that my lyfe is to me a wery foo;
comfortyd may I not be of my woo;
of my distrese se none end I can,
no force how sone I stinte° to be a man.
Than spake Reason: ‘What menythe all this fare?
Thowghe welthe be not frindly to the yet,
out of thyn hert voyde wo and care!’
‘By what skyll how, and by what rede and wit,’
seyd this wofull man, ‘myght I done it?’
'Wrastle,' qwode Reason, 'agayne hevy-
nesses
of the worlde, troubles, suffring and
duressesses.
Behold how many a man sufferethe des-
seas°
as great as thow and all a way greatar;
and thowgh he it pinche, sharply
and ses,
yet, paciently, they it suffar and bere:
thyne here on and the lesse it shall the
deres,
suche sufferraunce is of mans gylt°
clesynge,
and them inablethe° to loye evar-
lastinge.
Woo, hevynes and tribulation
comon are to men all and profitable.
Thowgh he grevows° be manns tempta-
cion,
it slythe man not. To them that ben
sufferable,
and to whom gods stroke is acceptable,
purveyed loye is, for God woundyrthe
tho
that he ordeyned hathe to blysse to goo.
Gold purgyd is, thou seyst, in the
furneis,
for the fyner and clenner it shall be;
350
of thy disease, the weyght and the peis°
bere lyghtly, for God to preve the,
sordwyrd the hathe with sharp adversitie;
not gruche° and say, "Why susteyn I
this?"
for yf thow do, thow the takest amis.
But thus thow shuldest thinke in thy
herte,
and say, "to the, Lord God, I have agylyte
so sore: I moot for myn offensis smerte
as I am worthy. O Lorde, I am split,
but thow to me, thy mercy graunt wilt.
360
I am full swre," thow maist it not denye:
Lord, I me repent and I the mercy crye.'
Lenger I thowght red haue in this boke
bot so it shope that I ne myght nowght.
He that it owght agayne it to hym toke,
me of his haste unware, yet have I
cawght
some of the doctryne° by Reason
tauhght
to the man as above have I sayde.
whereof I hold me full well apayde.
For evyr sythen° set haue I the lesse
by the peoples ymagination,
talkynge this and that of my sycknesse,
wichhe came of gods visytacion.
Myyght I have be found in probation,
not gruchyne° but have take it in sof-
fraunce,
holsome and wyse had be my gov-
ernaunce.
Farwell my sorow—I caste it to the
cok.°
With pacience, I hens forthe thinke
unpike°
of suche thoughtfull dissease and woo,
the lok,°
and let them out that have me made to
sike.
380
Hereaftar Owr Lord God may, yf hym
lyke,
make myn olde affection resorte,
and in the hope of that woll I me com-
forte.
Thrwgh gods iust dome and his iudge-
ment,
and for my best, now I take and deme,
gave that Good Lorde me my punishe-
ment:
in welthe I toke of Hym none hede or
yeme,°
Hym for to please and Hym honoure
and queme,°
and He me gave a bone on for to knaw,
me to correcte and of Hym to have awe. He gave me wit and He toke it away when that He se that I it mys dyspent, and gave agayne when it was to His pay, He grauntyd me my giltes to repent, and hens forwarde to set myne entent, unto His deitie, to do plesaunce, and to amend my synfull governaunce. Lawde and honore and thanke unto The be, Lord God, that salve art to all hevynes! Thanke of my welthe and myne adver-
syte, thanke of myne elde and of my seknese, and thanke be to Thyne infinite goodnese for Thy gyftes and benefices all, and unto They mercye and grace I call.
Endnotes

1 The text below is taken from *The Series*, ed. Frederick Furnivall, *Hoccleve’s Works: The Minor Poems* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., 1892). The *Complaint* appears in lines 1–413 of *The Series*. This text is in the public domain. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Will Rogers.
PROSE
Introduction

Chapter seventy-four of the Book of Margery Kempe contains a scene in which God reframes her vision of disability and the Imago Dei. Beginning in prayer, Margery begs God to allow her, a creature of diverse eccentric traits and madness, into the center of His presence. God answers her prayer in an unexpected way. The Book says that Christ “drew His creature unto His love, and to mind of His Passion, so that she could not endure to behold a leper or other sick man, especially if he had any wounds appearing on him. So she cried, and so she wept, as if she had seen Our Lord Jesus Christ with His wounds bleeding.” This is not the Imago Dei Margery would have anticipated. But when she asks to see the Image of God, she is shown the infirmed and disabled. It is the “love” of Christ that brings Margery into His “mind” and inspires a new understanding and ministry for the disabled, especially those lepers who not only will suffer in body but also emotionally from social exclusion. As a result, the Lazar House transforms in Margery’s world from a place of brokenness into the place of the very presence of God.

After the transmission of Aristotle’s texts during the twelfth century, there was renewed interest in Europe for classical philosophy. Evident in the work of scholastic theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, Faith had to make room, as Reason became the measure of all things; including what it meant to be made in the image of God. These philosophical changes occur at the same time that Middle English is developing as a language, affecting how certain words would be weighted and understood. By the writing of the Book in the fifteenth century, the word “mad” had evolved to contain two distinct meanings. “Mad” could mean “made,” a created thing, and a condition highlighted throughout the Book by referring to Margery almost exclusively as “the creature.” “Mad” could also mean “mad” or “insane,” a person with a non-normative form of cognition, “uncontrolled by reason” or “filled with enthusiasm or desire.” Suggesting multiple meanings, whether as a pun or poetic device, the use of the word “mad” would unlock the potential for statements to read with multiple different significances. For instance, madness could signify that a creature is both made an Imago Dei in God’s Creation and also a mad person who is isolated from human society, set apart.

The doubled vision of Margery and the doubled significance of the word “mad” used throughout the Book in both senses creates a tension between the way that God might see disability and the way that society might see disability. In the medieval Church, where bodily signs of difference and disease could be read as moral differences and diseases, disability and especially leprosy were time and again condemned as a sign of punishment in the world that prefigures the punishments in Hell. Thus, the self-conscious work of madness in the Book not only challenges the rationality of the world but the cosmological order. The implication that the “mad” were Imago Dei, made in the image of God, and that to go to a Lazar House was to enter into the presence of Christ turns the value system of rational society inside out. Subsequently, Margery breaks open madness as being “mad,” i.e., both “made” and “unreasonable,”
in the Imago Dei through the making of a spiritual treatise and comforting the poor and marginalized by entering into community, constituting an early form of liberation theology.

If the Imago Dei makes and makes without reason, it is most reflected by co-creative “madness” and not self-governing reason. The Book acts as such a self-conscious Imago Dei, opening and closing with descriptions of its making, proudly proclaiming, “this book was mad.” This recursion deepens in the only two instants in the Book where “madness” explicitly means unreason. The Book quotes the Pryke of Life’s author confessing to being “overcome by desire, begin to madden, for love governed me, and not reason...they say—‘Lo! yon madman crieth in the streets,’ but how much is the desire of my heart they perceive not.” This language is echoed in the Book’s other use of the word “mad” to describe Margery. In this second case, the Book frames her “crying and roaring” for God as a sign that she is a “mad woman.” The meaning of “madness” here is evidently suggestive of insanity, “uncontrolled by reason” or “filled with enthusiasm or desire.” Yet in the Book’s use of the word, this madness is made by God, inspired by the Imago Dei and the love Christ places in the heart of the mad creature.

Turning again to Margery’s prayer for God’s presence, readers stand witness to how the Imago Dei in the “mad” bodies of the Lazar House inspires acts of liberation. Receiving her revelation, Margery “went to a place where sick women dwelt who were right full of the sickness, and fell down to her knees before them.” Margery challenges the exclusionary logic of the Lazar House by crossing its threshold with a gesture of community. Seeing madness from the inside, Margery offers no rational answer to the woman’s ills, but remains with her, “to comfort her.”

The encounter with the madness of the Imago Dei breaks a barrier for Margery that prevented her, like the walls of the Lazar House, from finding comfort. “In those years of worldly prosperity,” Margery regarded “nothing more loathsome or more abominable...than to see or behold a leper.” The Book uses “abominable,” like the Book of Leviticus, to mark things excluded from the community. It aligns the logic of exclusion with “worldly prosperity,” suggesting that the Imago Dei could not be present until she accepts her own madness. Only then could she find and give comfort.

Margery finds herself most drawn to a woman “laboured with many foul and horrible thoughts.” Subject to visions of her own, the woman Margery ministers to mirrors herself, “a mad woman, crying and roaring.” Entering the Lazar House, Margery not only finds comfort for the leper, but for herself. The drive to comfort does not excuse the violence and isolation governing madness but seeks co-creation and co-liberation by a communal sharing of strength (physical, social, spiritual). As things are formed as disabled, they get pushed to the margins, but the Imago Dei of the Book of Margery Kempe gives a call to seek each other and make a co-creative community. Instead of being mad in isolation, we become mad for each other.

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The Proem

Here beginneth a short treatise and a comfortable for sinful wretches, wherein they may have a great solace and comfort to themselves and understand the high and unspeakable mercy of our Sovereign Saviour Christ Jesus, Whose Name be worshipped and magnified without end. Who now in our days to us unworthy, deigneth to exercise His nobility and goodness. All the works of Our Saviour be for our example and instruction, and what grace that He worketh in any creature is our profit, if lack of charity be not our hindrance.

And therefore, by the leave of our merciful Lord Christ Jesus, to the magnifying of His holy Name, Jesus Christ, this little treatise shall treat somewhat in part of His wonderful works, how mercifully, how benignly and how charitably He moved and stirred a sinful caitiff unto His love, which sinful caitiff many years was in will and purpose, through stirring of the Holy Ghost, to follow the Saviour, making great promises of fasting with many other deeds of penance. And ever she was turned aback in time of temptation, like unto the reed-spear which boweth with every wind, and never is stable unless no wind bloweth, unto the time that our merciful Lord Christ Jesus, having pity and compassion on His handiwork and His creature, turned health into sickness, prosperity into adversity, worship into reproof, and love into hatred.

Thus everything turning upside down, this creature who for many years had gone astray and ever been unstable, was perfectly drawn and stirred to enter the way of high perfection, which perfect way Christ Our Saviour, in His proper Person, exampled. Earnestly He trod it and duly He went it aforetime.

Then this creature, of whom this treatise through the mercy of Jesus shall shew in part the life, was touched by the hand of Our Lord with great bodily sickness, wherethrough she lost reason and her wits a long time, till Our Lord by grace restored her again, as it shall more openly be shewn afterwards. Her worldly goods which were plenteous and abundant at that date, a little while afterwards were full barren and bare. Then was pomp and pride cast down and laid aside. They that before had worshipped her, afterwards full sharply reproved her, her kindred and they that had been friends were now most her enemies. Then she, considering this wonderful changing, seeking succour under the wings of her Ghostly Mother Holy Church, went and offered obedience to her ghostly father, accusing herself of her misdeeds, and afterwards did great bodily penance, and in a short time Our Merciful Lord visited this creature with plenteous tears of contrition day by day, in-somuch that some said she might weep when she would, and slandered the work of God.

She was so used to being slandered and reproved, to being chidden and rebuked by the world for grace and virtue with which she was endued through the strength of the Holy Ghost, that it was to her, in a manner, solace and comfort when she suffered any disease for the love of God and for the grace that God wrought in her. For ever the more slander and reproof that she suffered, the more she increased in grace, and in devotion of holy meditation, of high contemplation, and of wonderful speeches and dalliance which Our Lord spake and conveyed to her soul, teaching her how she should be despised for His love, how she should have patience, setting all her trust, all her love and all her affection in Him only.

She knew and understood many secret and privy things which should befall afterwards, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. And oftentimes while she kept by such holy speeches and dalliance, she would so weep and sob that many men were greatly awondered, for they little knew how homely Our Lord was in her soul. She herself could never tell the grace that she felt. It was so heavenly, so high above her reason and her bodily wits, and her body so feeble in time of the presence of grace that she might never express it with her word as she felt it in her soul.
Then had this creature much dread, because of illusions and deceits of her ghostly enemies. Then went she, by the bidding of the Holy Ghost, to many worshipful clerks, both archbishops and bishops, doctors of divinity and bachelors also. She spoke also with many anchorites and showed them her manner of living and such grace as the Holy Ghost, of His goodness, wrought in her mind and in her soul, as her wit would serve her to express it. And all those that she shewed her secrets unto, said she was much bound to love Our Lord for the grace that He shewed unto her, and counselled her to follow her movings and her stirrings and trustingly believe they were of the Holy Ghost, and of no evil spirit.

Some of these worthy and worshipful clerks averred, at the peril of their souls and as they would answer to God, that this creature was inspired with the Holy Ghost, and bade her that she should have them written down and make a book of her feelings and revelations. Some proffered to write her feelings with their own hands, and she would not consent in any way, for she was commanded in her soul that she should not write so soon. And so it was twenty years and more from the time this creature had her first feelings and revelations, ere she did any writing. Afterwards, when it pleased Our Lord, He commanded her and charged her that she should get written her feelings and revelations and the form of her living, that His goodness might be known to all the world.

Chapter I
Her marriage and illness after child-birth. She recovers.

When this creature was twenty years of age, or some deal more, she was married to a worshipful burgess° (of Lynne) and was with child within a short time, as nature would. And after she had conceived, she was belaboured with great accesses till the child was born and then, what with the labour she had in childing, and the sickness going before, she despaired of her life, weening she might not live. And then she sent for her ghostly father, for she had a thing on her conscience which she had never shewn before that time in all her life. For she was ever hindered by her enemy, the devil, evermore saying to her that whilst she was in good health she needed no confession, but to do penance by herself alone and all should be forgiven, for God is merciful enough. And therefore this creature oftentimes did great penance in fasting on bread and water, and other deeds of alms with devout prayers, save she would not shew that in confession.

And when she was at any time sick or diseased, the devil said in her mind that she should be damned because she was not shriven of that default. Wherefore after her child was born, she, not trusting to live, sent for her ghostly father, as is said before, in full will to be shriven of all her lifetime, as near as she could. And when she came to the point for to say that thing which she had so long concealed, her confessor was a little too hasty and began sharply to reprove her, before she had fully said her intent, and so she would no more say for aught he might do. Anon, for the dread she had of damnation on the one side, and his sharp reproving of her on the other side, this creature went out of her mind and was wondrously vexed and laboured with spirits for half a year, eight weeks and odd days.

And in this time, she saw, as she thought, devils opening their mouths all inflamed with burning waves of fire, as if they would have swallowed her in, sometimes ramping at her, sometimes threatening her, pulling her and hauling her, night and day during the aforesaid time. Also the devils cried upon her with great threatenings, and bade her that

burgess citizen
she should forsake Christendom, her faith, and deny her God, His Mother and all the Saints in Heaven, her good works, and all good virtues, her father, her mother and all her friends. And so she did. She slandered her husband, her friends and her own self. She said many a wicked word, and many a cruel word, she knew no virtue nor goodness, she desired all wickedness, like as the spirits tempted her to say and do, so she said and did. She would have destroyed herself many a time at their stirrings and have been damned with them in Hell, and in witness thereof, she bit her own hand so violently, that the mark was seen all her life after.

And also she rived the skin on her body against her heart with her nails spitefully, for she had no other instruments, and worse she would have done, but that she was bound and kept with strength day and night so that she might not have her will. And when she had long been laboured in these and many other temptations, so that men weened she should never have escaped or lived, then on a time as she lay alone and her keepers were from her, Our Merciful Lord Jesus Christ, ever to be trusted, worshipped be His Name, never forsaking His servant in time of need, appeared to His creature who had forsaken Him, in the likeness of a man, most seemly, most beauteous and most amiable that ever might be seen with man's eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk, sitting upon her bedside, looking upon her with so blessed a face that she was strengthened in all her spirit, and said to her these words—

‘Daughter, why hast thou forsaken Me, and I forsook never thee?’

And anon, as He said these words, she saw verily how the air opened as bright as any lightning. And He rose up into the air, not right hastily and quickly, but fair and easily, so that she might well behold Him in the air till it was closed again.

And anon this creature became calmed in her wits and reason, as well as ever she was before, and prayed her husband as soon as he came to her, that she might have the keys of the buttery to take her meat and drink as she had done before Her maidens and her keepers counselled him that he should deliver her no keys, as they said she would but give away such goods as there were, for she knew not what she said, as they weened.

Nevertheless, her husband ever having tenderness and compassion for her, commanded that they should deliver to her the keys, and she took her meat and drink as her bodily strength would serve her, and knew her friends and her household and all others that came to see how Our Lord Jesus Christ had wrought His grace in her, so blessed may He be, Who ever is near in tribulation. When men think He is far from them, He is full near by His grace. Afterwards, this creature did all other occupations as fell to her to do, wisely and soberly enough, save she knew not verily the call of Our Lord.

Chapter 30

She visits the Jordan, Mount Quarentyne, Bethania and Rafnys. Starts for Rome, and at Venice meets Richard, the broken-backed man, and goes on in his company.

Another time, this creature’s fellowship would go to the Flood of Jordan and would not let her go with them. Then this creature prayed Our Lord that she might go with them, and He bade that she should go with them whether they would or not. Then she went forth by the grace of God and asked no leave of them.

When she came to the Flood of Jordan, the weather was so hot that she thought her feet would have burnt for the heat that she felt.

Afterwards she went with her fellowship to Mount Quarentyne. There Our Lord fasted forty days, and there she prayed her fellowship to help her up on to the Mount. And they said, ‘Nay,’ for they could not well help themselves. Then had she great sorrow, because she might not come on to the hill. And anon, happed a Saracen, a well-favoured man, to come by her, and she put a groat into his hand, making him a sign to bring her on
to the Mount. And quickly the Saracen took her under his arm and led her up on to the high Mount, where Our Lord fasted forty days.

Then was she sore athirst, and had no comfort in her fellowship. Then God of His great goodness, moved the Grey Friars with compassion, and they comforted her, when her countrymen would not know her.

And so she was ever more strengthened in the love of Our Lord and the more bold to suffer shame and reproof for His sake in every place where she came, for the grace that God wrought in her of weeping, sobbing, and crying, which grace she might not withstand when God would send it. And ever she proved her feelings true, and those promises that God had made her while she was in England and other places also. They befell her in effect just as she had felt before, and therefore she durst the better receive such speeches and dalliance, and the more boldly work thereafter.

Afterwards, when this creature came down from the Mount, as God willed, she went forth to the place where Saint John the Baptist was born. And later she went to Bethania, where Mary and Martha dwelt, and to the grave where Lazarus was buried and raised from death into life. And she prayed in the chapel where Our Blessed Lord appeared to His blissful Mother on Easter Day at morn, first of all others. And she stood in the same place where Mary Magdalene stood when Christ said to her—

‘Mary, why weepest thou?’

And so she was in many more places than be written, for she was three weeks in Jerusalem and the country thereabout, and she had ever great devotion as long as she was in that country.

The friars of the Temple made her great cheer and gave her many great relics, desiring that she should have dwelt still amongst them if she would, for the faith they had in her. Also the Saracens made much of her, and conveyed her, and led her about the country wherever she would go, and she found all people good to her and gentle, save only her own countrymen.

And as she came from Jerusalem unto Rafnys, then would she have turned again to Jerusalem for the great grace and ghostly comfort that she felt when she was there, and to purchase herself more pardon.

Then Our Lord commanded her to go to Rome and, so, forth home into England, and said to her—

‘Daughter, as oftentimes as thou sayest or thinkest “Worshipped be those Holy Places in Jerusalem that Christ suffered bitter pain and Passion in,” thou shalt have the same pardon as if thou wert there with thy bodily presence, both to thyself and to all that thou wilt give it to.’

And as she went forth to Venice, many of her fellowship were right sick, and Our Lord said to her—

‘Dread thee not, daughter, no man shall die in the ship that thou art in.’

And she found her feelings right true. When Our Lord had brought them again to Venice in safety, her countrymen forsook her and went away from her, leaving her alone. And some of them said that they would not go with her for a hundred pound.

When they had gone away from her, then Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who ever helpeth at need, and never forsaketh His servants who truly trust in His mercy, said to this creature—

‘Dread thee not, daughter, for I will provide for thee right well, and bring thee in safety to Rome and home again into England without any villainy to thy body, if thou wilt be clad in white clothes, and wear them as I said to thee whilst thou wert in England.’

Then this creature, being in great grief and distress, answered Him in her mind—

‘If Thou be the spirit of God that speakest in my soul, and I may prove Thee for a true spirit with the counsel of the Church, I shall obey Thy will, and if Thou bringest me to Rome in safety, I shall wear white clothes, though all the world should wonder at me, for Thy love.’
‘Go forth, daughter, in the Name of Jesus, for I am the spirit of God, which shall help thee in all thy need, go with thee, and support thee in every place, and therefore mistrust Me not. Thou foundest Me never deceptive, and I bid thee nothing do, but that which is worship to God, and profit to thy soul. If thou will do thereafter, then I shall flow on thee great plenty of grace.’

Then anon, as she looked on one side, she saw a poor man sitting, who had a great hump on his back. His clothes were all clouted and he seemed a man of fifty winters’ age. Then she went to him and said—

‘Good man, what aileth your back?’

He said—‘Damsel, it was broken in a sickness.’

She asked, what was his name, and what countryman he was. He said his name was Richard, and he was of Ireland. Then thought she of her confessor’s words, who was a holy anchorite, as is written before, who spoke to her whilst she was in England in this manner—

‘Daughter, when your fellowship hath forsaken you, God will provide a broken-backed man to lead you forth, wherever you will go.’

Then she, with a glad spirit, said to him—

‘Good Richard, lead me to Rome, and you shall be rewarded for your labour.’

‘Nay, damsel,’ said he, ‘I wot well thy countrymen have forsaken thee, and therefore it was hard on me to lead thee. Thy countrymen have both bows and arrows with which they might defend both thee and themselves, and I have no weapon save a cloak full of clouts, and yet I dread me that mine enemies will rob me, and peradventure take thee away from me and defile thy body, and therefore I dare not lead thee, for I would not, for a hundred pounds, that thou hadst a villainy in my company.’

And she said again—

‘Richard, dread you not, God shall keep us both right well and I shall give you two nobles for your labour.’

Then he consented and went forth with her. Soon after, there came two Grey Friars and a woman that came with them from Jerusalem, and she had with her an ass, which bore a chest and an image therein, made after Our Lord.

Then said Richard to the aforesaid creature—

‘Thou shalt go forth with these two men and the woman and I will meet thee morning and evening, for I must get on with my job and beg my living.’

So she did after his counsel and went forth with the two friars and the woman. And none of them could understand her language, and yet they provided for her every day, meat, drink, and harbourage as well as they did for themselves and rather better, so that she was ever bounden to pray for them.

Every evening and morning, Richard with the broken back came and comforted her as he had promised.

The woman who had the image in the chest, when they came into good cities, took the image out of her chest, and set it in worshipful wives’ laps, and they would put shirts thereon, and kiss it as if it had been God Himself.

When the creature saw the worship and reverence that they gave to the image, she was taken with sweet devotion and sweet meditations, so that she wept with great sobbing and loud crying, and she was moved so much the more, because while she was in England, she had high meditations on the birth and the childhood of Christ, and she thanked God forasmuch, as she saw these creatures having as great faith in what she saw with her bodily eye, as she had had before with her ghostly eye.

When these good women saw this creature weeping, sobbing and crying so wonderfully and mightily that she was nearly overcome therewith, then they arranged a good soft bed and laid her thereon, and comforted her as much as they could for Our Lord’s sake, blessed may He be.
Chapter 62
The preaching friar preaches against her, without naming her. She loses many friends in consequence, but others come to her help.

Afterwards, on Saint James’ Day, the good friar preached in Saint James’ Chapel-yard at Lynne—he was at that time neither bachelor nor doctor of divinity—where were many people and a great audience, for he had a holy name and great favour with the people, insomuch that some men, if they thought he would preach in the country, they would go with him or else follow him from town to town, such great delight had they to hear him, and so, blessed may God be, he preached fully holily and full devoutly.

Nevertheless, on this day he preached much against the said creature, not expressing her name but so exploiting his conceits that men understood well that he meant her. Then there was much discussion amongst the people, for many men and many women trusted her, and loved her right well, and were right grieved and sorrowful because he spoke as much against her as he did, desiring that they had not heard him that day.

When he heard the murmuring and grutching of the people, supposing to be gainsaid another day by them that were her friends, he, smiting his hand on the pulpit, said—‘If I hear these matters repeated any more, I shall so smite the nail on the head,’ he said, ‘that it shall shame all her maintainers.’

And then many of them that pretended friendship to her, turned aback, for a little vain dread that they had of his words, and durst not well speak with her. Of whom the same priest was one, that afterwards wrote this book, and who was in purpose never to have believed in her feelings afterwards.

And yet Our Lord drew him back in a short time, blessed may He be, so that he loved her more and trusted more to her weeping and her crying than ever he did before. For afterwards he read of a woman called Maria de Oegines, and of her manner of living, of the wonderful compassion that she had in thinking of His Passion, and of the plenteous tears that she wept, which made her so feeble and so weak that she could not endure to behold the Cross, or hear Our Lord’s Passion rehearsed, without being dissolved in tears of pity and compassion.

Of the plenteous grace of her tears, he treateth specially in the book before written, the 18th Chapter that begins, ‘Bonus est domine, sperantibus in te,’ and also in the 19th Chapter where he telleth how she, at the request of a priest that he should not be troubled or distraught in his Mass with her weeping and her sobbing, went out of the church door, with a loud voice crying that she could not restrain herself therefrom.

And Our Lord also visited the priest, when at Mass, with such grace and such devotion when he would read the Holy Gospel, that he wept wonderfully, so that he wetted his vestment and the ornaments of the altar, and might not measure his weeping and his sobbing, it was so abundant, nor might he restrain it, or well stand therewith at the Altar.

Then he believed well that the good woman, whom he before had little affection for, could not restrain her weeping, her sobbing or her crying, and who felt more plenty of grace than ever did he, without any comparison. Then he knew well that God gave His grace to whom He would.

Then the priest who wrote this treatise, through stirring of a worshipful clerk, a bachelor of divinity, had seen and read the matter before written much more seriously and expressly than it is written in this treatise, for here is but a little of the effect thereof, for he had not right clear mind of the said matter when he wrote this treatise, and therefore he wrote the less thereof.

Bonus est...te “Good is the one, Lord, whose hope is in you” [Latin]
Then he drew toward and inclined more seriously to the said creature, whom he had fled and eschewed through the friar’s preaching, as is before written.

Also the same priest read afterwards in a treatise that is called the ‘Prick of Love,’ the 2nd Chapter, that Bonaventure wrote of himself, these words following—

‘Ah, Lord, why shall I more call and cry! Thou delayest, and Thou comest not, and I, weary and overcome by desire, begin to madden, for love governeth me, and not reason. I run with hasty course wherever Thou wilt. I submit, Lord. They that see me, trouble and rue not, knowing me drunken with Thy love Lord, they say—“Lo! yon madman crieth in the streets,” but how much is the desire of my heart they perceive not.’

He read also of Richard Hampol, hermit, in Incendio Amoris, like matter that moved him to give credence to the said creature.

Also Elizabeth of Hungary cried with a loud voice, as is written in her treatise.

And many others, who had forsaken her through the friar’s preaching, repented and turned again to her in process of time, notwithstanding that the friar kept his opinion, and would always in his sermon, have a part against her, whether she were there or not, and caused many people to deem full evil of her, many a day and long.

For some said that she had a devil within her, and some said to her own mouth that the friar should have driven those devils out of her. Thus was she slandered, eaten and gnawed by the people, for the grace that God wrought in her, of contrition, devotion, and compassion, through the gift of which graces she wept, sobbed and cried full sore against her will. She might not choose, for she would rather have wept softly and privily, than openly, if it had been in her power.

Chapter 74
Her desire for death. Her desire to kiss the lepers. Visits to sick women, and consolation of one in temptation.

The said creature one day, hearing her Mass and revolving in her mind the time of her death, sore sighing and sorrowing because it was so long delayed, said in this manner—

‘Alas ’ Lord, how long shall I thus weep and mourn for Thy love, and for desire of Thy presence?’

Our Lord answered in her soul and said—

‘All these fifteen years.’

Then said she—

‘Ah! Lord, I shall think it many thousand years.’

Our Lord answered to her—

‘Daughter, thou must bethink thyself of My blessed Mother, who lived after Me on earth fifteen years, also Saint John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene, who loved Me right highly.’

‘Ah Blissful Lord,’ said she, ‘I would I were as worthy to be secure of Thy love, as Mary Magdalene was.’

Then said Our Lord—‘Truly, daughter, I love thee as well, and the same peace that I gave to her, the same peace I give to thee. For, daughter, there is no saint in Heaven displeased, though I love a creature on earth as much as I do them. Therefore they will not otherwise than I will.’

Thus Our Merciful Lord Christ Jesus drew His creature unto His love, and to mind of His Passion, so that she could not endure to behold a leper or other sick man, especially if he had any wounds appearing on him.

So she cried, and so she wept, as if she had seen Our Lord Jesus Christ with His wounds bleeding. And so she did, in the sight of her soul, for, through the beholding of the sick man, her mind was all taken over to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then had she great mourning and sorrowing because she might not kiss the lepers when she saw them, or met with them, in the streets, for the love of Jesus.
Now began she to love what she had most hated beforetime, for there was nothing more loathsome or more abominable to her, while she was in those years of worldly prosperity, than to see or behold a leper, whom now, through Our Lord’s mercy, she desired to embrace and kiss for the love of Jesus, when she had time and place convenient.

Then she told her confessor what great desire she had to kiss lepers, and he warned her that she should kiss no men, but if she would anyhow kiss, she should kiss women. Then was she glad, because she had leave to kiss the sick women, and went to a place where sick women dwelt who were right full of the sickness, and fell down to her knees before them, praying them that she might kiss their mouths for the love of Jesus. So she kissed there two sick women with many a holy thought and many a devout tear, and when she had kissed them, she told them full many good words and stirred them to meekness and patience, so that they would not grutch at their sickness, but highly thank God therefor, and they should have great bliss in Heaven through the mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then one woman had so many temptations that she knew not how she might best be governed. She was so laboured with her ghostly enemy that she durst not bless herself, or do any worship to God, for dread that the devil should slay her, and she was laboured with many foul and horrible thoughts, many more than she could tell. And, as she said, she was a maid.

Therefore the said creature went to her many times to comfort her, and prayed for her also full specially, that God should strengthen her against her enemy. And it is to be believed that He did so, blessed may He be.

Chapter 75
The man whose wife experiences mental illness after child-birth. Margery visits her and she recovers with her but still experiences mental illness with others. She recovers.

As the said creature was in a church of Saint Margaret to say her devotions, there came a man kneeling at her back, wringing his hands and shewing tokens of great grief. She, perceiving his grief, asked him what ailed him. He said it stood right hard with him, for his wife was newly delivered of a child, and she was out of her mind.

‘And, dame,’ he said, ‘she knoweth not me or any of her neighbours. She roareth and crieth so that she maketh folk evil afeared. She will both smite and bite, and therefore is she manacled on her wrists.’

‘Then asked she the man if he would that she went with him and saw her, and he said—

‘Yea, dame, for God’s love.’

So she went forth with him to see the woman, and when she came into the house, as soon as the sick woman, who was alienated from her wits, saw her, she spake to her soberly and kindly and said she was right welcome to her, and she was right glad of her coming, and greatly comforted by her presence, ‘For ye are,’ she said, ‘a right good woman, and I behold many fair angels about you, and therefore, I pray you, go not from me, for I am greatly comforted by you.’

And when other folk came to her, she cried and gaped as if she would have eaten them, and said that she saw many devils about them. She would not suffer them to touch her, by her own good will. She roared and cried so, both night and day, for the most part, that men would not suffer her to dwell amongst them, she was so tedious to them.

Then was she taken to the furthest end of the town, into a chamber, so that the people should not hear her crying, and there was she bound, hand and foot, with chains of iron, so that she should smite nobody. And the said creature went to her each day, once or twice at least, and whilst she was with her, she was meek enough, and heard her speak and chat.
with good will, without any roaring or crying.

And the said creature prayed for this woman every day, that God should, if it were His will, restore her to her wits again, and Our Lord answered in her soul and said she should fare right well.

Then she was more bold to pray for her curing than she was before, and each day, weeping and sorrowing, prayed for her recovery, till God gave her her wits and her mind again. And then was she brought to church and purified as other women are, blessed may God be.

It was, as they thought that knew it, a right great miracle, for he that wrote this book had never, before that time, seen man or woman, as he thought, so far out of herself as this woman was, nor so evil to rule or to manage.

And later, he saw her sad and sober enough, worship and praise be to Our Lord without end, for His high mercy and His goodness, Who ever helpeth at need.

Chapter 76

*Her husband’s death.*

It happened, on a time, that the husband of the said creature, a man in great age, passing three score years, as he would have come down from his chamber bare-foot and bare-legged, he slithered, or else failed of his footing, and fell down to the ground from the stairs, his head under him grievously broken and bruised, insomuch that he had in his head five linen plugs for many days, whilst his head was healing.

And, as God willed, it was known to some of his neighbours how he had fallen down from the stairs, peradventure through the din and the rush of his fall. So they came to him and found him lying with his head under him, half alive, all streaked with blood, and never likely to have spoken with priest or clerk, but through high grace and a miracle.

Then the said creature, his wife, was sent for and so she came to him. Then was he taken up and his head sewn, and he was sick a long time after, so that men thought he should have been dead.

Then the people said, if he died, his wife was worthy to be hanged for his death, forasmuch as she might have kept him and did not. They dwelt not together nor lay together, for, as is written before, they both with one assent and with the free will of each, had vowed to live chaste. Therefore, to avoid all perils, they dwelt and sojourned in diverse places where no suspicion could be had of their incontinence. For, at first, they dwelt together after they had made their vow, and then people slandered them, and said they used their lust and their pleasure, as they did before making their vow. And when they went out on pilgrimage, or to see and speak with other ghostly creatures, many evil folk, whose tongues were then own, failing the dread and love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, deemed and said they went rather to woods, groves, and valleys, to use the lust of their bodies, so that people would not espy it or know it.

Having knowledge how prone people were to deem ill of them, and desiring to avoid all occasion for it as much as they rightly might, they, of their own free will and common consent, parted asunder, as touching their board and their chambers, and went to board in divers places. And this was the cause that she was not with him, and also that she should not be hindered from her contemplation.

And therefore when he had fallen, and grievously was hurt, as is said before, the people said, if he died, it was worthy that she should answer for his death. Then she prayed to Our Lord that her husband might live a year, and she be delivered out of slander, if it were His pleasure.

Our Lord said to her mind—

‘Daughter, thou shalt have thy boon, for he shall live, and I have wrought a great miracle for thee in that he was not dead, and I bid thee take him home and keep him for My love.’

She said—

‘Nay, good Lord, for I shall then not attend to Thee as I do now.’
‘Yes, daughter,’ said Our Lord, ‘thou shalt have as much reward for keeping him and helping him in his need at home, as if thou wert in church, making thy prayers. Thou hast said many times thou wouldst fain keep Me. I pray thee now keep him for the love of Me, for he hath some time fulfilled thy will and My will, both. And he hath made thy body free to Me, so that thou shouldst serve Me, and live chaste and clean, and I will that thou be free to help him at his need in My name.’

‘Ah! Lord,’ said she, ‘for Thy mercy grant me grace to obey and fulfil Thy will, and let never my ghostly enemies have any power to hinder me from fulfilling Thy will.’

Then she took home her husband with her and kept him years after, as long as he lived, and had full much labour with him, for in his last days he turned childish again, and lacked reason, so that he could not do his own ease-ment by going to a seat, or else he would not, but, as a child, voided his natural digestion in his linen clothes, where he sat by the fire or at the table, whichever it were, he would spare no place.

And therefore was her labour much the more in washing and wringing, and her cos-tage in firing, and it hindered her full much from her contemplation, so that many times she would have loathed her labour, save she bethought herself how she, in her young age, had full many delectable thoughts, fleshly lusts, and inordinate loves to his person.

And therefore she was glad to be punished with the same person, and took it much the more easily, and served him, and helped him, as she thought, as she would have done Christ Himself.
Endnotes

1 The text below is taken from *The Book of Margery Kempe: A Modern Version* by W. Butler Bowdon (Oxford University Press, 1936). The text is in the public domain. The introduction has been provided by Gabrielle M.C. Bychowski. The bibliography, glosses, and notes have been provided by Cameron Hunt McNabb.

2 *OED Online*, s.v. “mad,” adj.

3 In the original Middle English, *made* is spelled *mad*.

4 Chapter 80, not included in this volume.

5 The Proem has been excerpted to focus on issues of disability. The remainder of the proem pertains to how *The Book* was written.

6 Bowden’s translation uses the words “is insane” here and “insane” in the second sentence as well. They have been replaced with the preferred term “mental illness.”

7 Bowden’s translation uses the words “becomes normal” here. They have been replaced with “recovers.”
Menstruation, Infirmit, and Religious Observance from Ecclesiastical History¹ (late 9th c.²)

Bede
Contributed by Heide Estes

Introduction

The monk of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria known as the Venerable Bede wrote, about 731 in Latin, an Ecclesiastical History of the English People providing an account of the migration of Angles and Saxons to what would become England and a narration of their conversion to Christianity. The Ecclesiastical History (hereafter EH) was translated into Old English in the late ninth century.

It is difficult enough within modern discourse to define “disability” within the context of illness and impairment, though it is clear it is defined by social constraints as much as by the nature or extent of illness or impairment: that is, whether or not a particular embodiment counts as disabling is constructed by social norms and is not something essential or inherent about the way a given body exists in the world. For the medieval period, distinguishing disabled bodies from others is even more complicated. Joshua Eyler and Julie Singer point out that contemporary social, medical, and cultural models of disability do not well account for the representations and framings of illness and impairment in medieval narratives, and this is certainly the case for the Old English EH, where the vocabularies of illness and impairment overlap so that the terminology is difficult to define specifically. In the first of the passages translated here, menstruation is described as either untrymness, defined by dictionaries of Old English as “weakness, sickness, illness, infirmity,” or monadadle, “a disease that occurs at intervals of a month.”³ Susan Wendell has argued that gender itself is constructed by modern societies as a disability, because of the ways that physical constructions of the world we live in assume an average-sized healthy man's height and strength are available to everyone: lifting a suitcase into an overhead luggage rack on a train or plane, or opening a heavy door, may be problematic for small women, thus effectively disabling them by virtue of choices about how to construct human environments. Tory Vandeven-ter Pearman follows Wendell in investigating intersections of gender and disability in medieval literature and demonstrating that, particularly late in the medieval period, gender was considered by medical science and religious discourse alike to be disabling.

The Old English EH contains passages that identify illness or impairment as punishment for sin, as when St. Albans’ executioner is punished with blindness (I.7) or when St. Æthelthryth tells her companions that she suffers from a tumor because she wore a gold necklace in her youth (IV.21). A selection from a passage about women and religious observance asks, can pregnant women be baptized? How long should a woman wait after childbirth to go to church? (The answers: yes, and immediately.) The selection provided here contemplates whether menstruating women should enter church. The Old English EH states that hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and weariness are all kinds of human “untrymness” associated with original sin, similar to menstrual flow, so that menstruating women
are linked with non-gendered bodily conditions of hunger and weariness. The text states, “it is the custom of good minds and men, that they sometimes see sin, where there is none, and often something is done without sin that came of sin.” 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 “untrymnness” creates a special category of infirmity particular to women, beyond the more 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.

Bibliography

“Menstruation, Infirmit, Religious Observance” (Book I, from Chapter 27, Question 8)

...If a woman is taken with the accustomed monthly disease [monaðaðle], should she be allowed to go into church or receive the sacrament of holy communion?...

Well, we know and learn from Christ’s books, that the woman who was suffering from the flow of blood came meekly to the Lord’s back and touched the hem of his garment, and immediately her infirmity [untrymnes] went away and she was made whole. Therefore if the woman in the time of flowing blood might laudably touch the Lord’s clothing, then why should she who suffers the bloody flow of monthly disease not be allowed to go into the Lord’s church? But now you say, she needed to touch Christ’s clothing because of her illness [untrymnes]; the women of whom we speak now are under the sway of repeated habit. But consider, dear brother, that all that we suffer in this mortal body is arranged by the authority of the Lord’s judgment on account of the suffering of our kind. It followed upon the sin of the first man, for hunger, thirst, heat, cold, weariness—all that is because of the sickness [untrymnes] of our kind. And what else can be sought [as a remedy] against hunger except food; against thirst, drink; against heat, coolness; against cold, clothing; against fatigue, rest; and against infirmity, to seek medicine? Now, for women, the monthly infirmity of flowing blood is sickness. Therefore now if that woman presumed appropriately to touch the Lord’s clothing in the period of illness, so that the sickness of one individual was forgiven, why then should all women not be forgiven, when they are made infirm by the fault of their own nature? Likewise, in those same days it shall not be forbidden to them to take the sacrament of the holy communion. Now, if out of great reverence some one does not presume to receive, he is to be praised; but if he takes it, he is not to be condemned. For it is the custom of good minds and men, that they sometimes see sin, where there is none, and often something is done without sin that came of sin, just as it is, when we are hungry, we eat without sin, and it came to pass out of the sin of the first man that we might be hungry. For as in the old law the outer works were observed, so in the new law, the external is not at all as highly esteemed as the inward thoughts are carefully observed. Though the law forbids eating many things as unclean, however in the Gospel the Lord says, not at all that which goes into the mouth of man is degrading, but that which comes out of the mouth, those are the things that defile the man. And now after that, that was explained, and he said, Evil thoughts go out of the heart. There, it is abundantly explained that deeds which are revealed by the almighty God to be unclean and defiled, are born from the origin of polluted and unclean thoughts. About that likewise the Apostle Paul said, all is clean to those who are clean; to the polluted and the unbelievers nothing is clean. And immediately after the apostle explained the cause of this same pollution, and said, therefore they are polluted in both mind and in conscience. But if the meat is not clean for those whose mind is not clean, then why should the woman of clean mind who suffers by her nature be counted as unclean?

origin literally “rootstock”
Endnotes


2 This date represents the date of the Old English translation of the Latin text. The Latin manuscripts date to the eighth century.

Physical Disability, Muteness, Pregnancy, Possession, and Alcoholism from *Ecclesiastical History*¹ (ca. 731²)

_Bede_

_Contributed by Maura Bailey, Autumn Battista, Ashley Corliss, Eammon Gosselin, Rebecca Laughlin, Sara Moller, Shayne Simahk, Taylor Specker, Alyssa Stanton, Kellyn Welch, and Kisha G. Tracy_

Introduction

Bede, otherwise known as the Venerable Bede, was born ca. 672/3 in Sunderland on lands of the Monkwearmouth Benedictine monastery. He was sent to Monkwearmouth when he was seven, and then later joined the Jarrow monastery in Northumbria. Bede wrote the *Ecclesiastical History of England* (hereafter *EH*) in Latin around 721, which gained him the title “The Father of English History.” He died in 735 in Jarrow. The following excerpts on disability are from the Latin text, while an Old English translation was made in the ninth century.

In the *EH*, Bede provides multiple examples of healings that collectively construct parameters about disability and healing. Each healing example provided does include a sick or injured person being cured in order to attest to the power of God. The depth of the cure and the speed of its relief are dependent upon certain factors: the person’s dedication and faithfulness to God along with the care or carelessness of a person’s injury. A person who is not previously faithful and dedicated to God must testify to the bishop or healer that they will become a believer. In Book I, Chapter XXI, Elafius and his countrymen must be blessed and preached to by the bishops before Elafius is able to earn help for his son. A person that is honestly devout can either have the healer miraculously appear and instantly cure them, as in the instance of Germanus in Book I, Chapter XIX, or they can rise from kneeling while praying and be healed, such as the blind woman in Book IV, Chapter X.

Moreover, he would suffer no medicines to be applied to his infirmity; but one night he saw one clad in garments as white as snow, standing by him, who reaching out his hand, seemed to raise him up, and ordered him to stand firm upon his feet; from which time his pain ceased, and he
was so perfectly restored, that when the
day came, with good courage he set forth
upon his journey.

Another example is in Book V, Chapter III,
wherein a young woman is cured of a seri-
ous medical malady, not by any medical
means, but by faith after a lengthy suffering
prolonged by religious devotion. Yet another
example comes from Book IV, Chapter IX, in
which a young woman suffers at death’s door
for days, perhaps hallucinating and speak-
ing in an erratic manner, and all of this is
attributed not to illness, but to holiness and
her approaching eternal life. It seems clear,
at least, that volition and awareness are es-
sential when it comes to determining mental
illness and suffering willingly for God: if the
person in question willed their own suffer-
ing, or was able to recall their illness (spasms,
sickness, pain, ravings, etc.) with some cog-
nizance, then the condition was determined
not to be mental illness or disability—and
this is not, of course, how either mental ill-
ness or a disability are determined and diag-
nosed today.

In many medieval texts, there seems to
be a fine line when distinguishing between
“the fool”—a derogatory term in modern
rhetoric—and “the holy fool,” a term for an
eccentric, a person with a disability, or one
suffering from disease, so long as that indi-
vidual is religiously inclined. In Bede’s text,
we see several examples of miraculous cures
due to religious zeal, but a reader might ask
whether there is a point at which a line can
be more clearly drawn between what might
now be called mental illness and what was
then described as religious fervor to be emu-
lated and admired.

The following are discussions of selected
categories of disability within Bede’s text.

Physical Disability
The physical disabilities in Bede’s text may
be variously identified as paralysis, palsy, and
missing or partially missing limbs or digits.
Bede’s approach to documentation is sig-
nificant, as seen in the story of Germanus,
wherein lameness is seen as punishment for
heresy.

When the heresy was recanted, so too was
the disability removed. Other examples in-
clude Book I, Chapter XIX, wherein a man’s
paralysis seems to have no cause, although
“his [personal, spiritual] merits would be but
increased by bodily affliction.” This man’s
disability is later cured via a miracle and a
vision, after the man himself is able to per-
form miracles for others afflicted by similar
maladies. Physical disabilities have a strong
presence in Bede’s historical accounts and are
given various causes, explanations, and rem-
edies.

Muteness
Of the disabilities discussed in Bede, the
idea of “muteness” is officially mentioned in
only one story. In Book V, Chapter II, Bishop
John’s holiness is proven through his mirac-
ulous cure of a poor man’s “dumbness.” The
rather unofficial diagnosis of muteness refers
to any sort of speech limitation, in this case
a complete inability to speak. Bishop John
knew that the youth was mute because “he
had never been able to speak one word.” In
Christ-like fashion, the bishop cures him
simply by making the sign of the cross on his
tongue, then directing the youth to speak.
Every letter, syllable, or word the youth is
bidden to speak, he is able to do so. The end
of this section recalls the aforementioned “ill-
favoured, miserable, and dumb” young man
he had once been, but was now completely
cured of his ailment. This is an example of
disability as a reference to how well a person
is able to function in his society. And, as is
typical for those who healed any maladies,
Bishop John is considered more holy and
trustworthy for having cured another indi-
vidual.

Pregnancy
Most of what is said in the EH about pregnant
women is reinforced by sections in the Bible.
In Book One, Chapter XXVII, a pregnant
woman is allowed into the church to worship and have communion. After the birth, however, it states that a woman could not have her new born baby be baptized by the church until thirty-three days after for a male child and sixty-six for a female child, following the rules stated in Leviticus 12:1–8. Additionally Bede states that a man could not have sex with a woman following the birth of a child until the child is weaned as the woman is perceived as unclean during this period.

In response to a question about whether a woman “with child ought to be baptized,” Bede presents contradictory insights around the “purpose” of childbearing. A woman’s body is clearly acknowledged as the mechanism for the propagation of the human race, but every element of that reality—from menstruation to copulation to labor and delivery—is negatively presented. He acknowledges that women should not be banned from church because they cannot opt out of this natural course. At the same time, however, Bede shares that the Old Testament forbids women to enter the church, but Bede contradicts himself as he then proceeds to acknowledge that:

Now you must know that this is to be received in a mystery; for if she enters the church the very hour that she is delivered, to return thanks, she is not guilty of any sin; because the pleasure of the flesh is a fault, and not the pain; but the pleasure is in the copulation of the flesh, whereas there is pain in bringing forth the child.

The sexism which is apparent in these writings must have been disempowering to the women who constantly were told that “in sins my mother conceived me” (Psalms 51:5), and yet, it is only through copulation and childbirth that God’s will is perpetuated. The irony in this chapter is heavy: we have the writer, a man who was entered into the monastic life at the age of seven, writing about the natural phenomenon of a woman’s body. This belief that the only purpose of intercourse was procreation and, as Bede notes, “not to satisfy vices” suggests an abnormality—even an inherent disability—in women.

Possession
The healing powers of King Oswald’s bones in Book III, Chapter XI help alleviate the fear of those possessed by the Devil. The bones of King Oswald are characterized as a gift from heaven with their healing qualities. As stated in Chapter XI, “the very earth which received that holy water, had the power of saving grace in casting out the devils from the bodies of persons possessed.” One man was “suddenly seized by the Devil, and began to cry out, to gnash his teeth, to foam at the mouth, and to writhe and distort his limbs.” With this man suffering from the Devil’s grasp, many sought to help release his spirit and direct him to God. A priest “used exorcisms, and did all he could to assuage the madness of the unfortunate man,” but nothing worked until a woman brought in the casket containing King Oswald’s bones. As the woman entered the room, the man began display changes in his behavior. After he awoke he stated, “all the evil spirits that vexed me departed and left me,” indicating that he was healed by the holy bones of the king.

Alcoholism
In Book V, Chapter XIV, the topic of alcoholism is set within a monastery in which a monk drinks to excess. Bede presents alcoholism as a sin, as giving into the weakness of personal desires. When the alcoholic monk finds himself on his deathbed, he says: “There is no time for me now to change my course of life, when I have myself seen my judgement passed.” The body of the monk is buried in an isolated part of the monastery cemetery because the other brothers are ashamed of the monk who died because he gave into his vices. In modern times, alcoholism is categorized as a mental illness, whereas Bede’s narrative clearly casts it as a sin. In this case, however, the monk is damned, and there is a sense of bodily exile.
Bede, in the *EH*, links the social world of early England to disease and disability. The material that Bede gives the reader on how disabled and diseased individuals were treated by their communities exemplifies a social model that focuses on how such concepts were viewed both by the author and, by extension, the social sphere that the world the people he writes about inhabited. Some examples include analyzing the dependency of disabled and diseased people upon the behavior of other, healthy individuals and the ways in which disabled and diseased people were treated by the communities of which they were a part—for instance, the first few chapters of Book V, in which Bede describes healings done by the Bishop John and how his patients are treated by their communities. The first one of these is the curing of a dumb man who is brought to the Bishop by other members of his community. This contrasts with the next two entries, which record two diseased individuals, and how the Bishop attends to them, instead of receiving them. Such difference in the external circumstances of disabled and diseased individuals exists throughout the text. Particular diseases and disabilities are treated differently, depending upon type, the class of the individual, and the care available.

**Bibliography**

Book I

Chapter XIX
How the same holy man, being detained there by sickness, by his prayers quenched a fire that had broken out among the houses, and was himself cured of his infirmity by a vision.

As they were returning thence, the treacherous enemy, having, as it chanced, prepared a snare, caused Germanus to bruise his foot by a fall, not knowing that, as it was with the blessed Job, his merits would be but increased by bodily affliction. Whilst he was thus detained some time in the same place by his infirmity, a fire broke out in a cottage neighbour to that in which he was; and having burned down the other houses which were thatched with reed, fanned by the wind, was carried on to the dwelling in which he lay. The people all flocked to the prelate, entreating that they might lift him in their arms, and save him from the impending danger. But he rebuked them, and in the assurance of his faith, would not suffer himself to be removed. The whole multitude, in terror and despair, ran to oppose the conflagration; but, for the greater manifestation of the Divine power, whatsoever the crowd endeavoured to save, was destroyed; and what the sick and helpless man defended, the flame avoided and passed by, though the house that sheltered the holy man lay open to it, and while the fire raged on every side, the place in which he lay appeared untouched, amid the general conflagration. The multitude rejoiced at the miracle, and was gladly vanquished by the power of God. A great crowd of people watched day and night before the humble cottage; some to have their souls healed, and some their bodies. All that Christ wrought in the person of his servant, all the wonders the sick man performed cannot be told. Moreover, he would suffer no medicines to be applied to his infirmity; but one night he saw one clad in garments as white as snow, standing by him, who reaching out his hand, seemed to raise him up, and ordered him to stand firm upon his feet; from which time his pain ceased, and he was so perfectly restored, that when the day came, with good courage he set forth upon his journey.

Chapter XXI
How, when the Pelagian heresy began to spring up afresh, Germanus, returning to Britain with Severus, first restored bodily strength to a lame youth, then spiritual health to the people of God, having condemned or converted the Heretics.

Not long after, news was brought from the same island, that certain persons were again attempting to teach and spread abroad the Pelagian heresy, and again the holy Germanus was entreated by all the priests, that he would defend the cause of God, which he had before maintained. He speedily complied with their request; and taking with him Severus, a man of singular sanctity, who was disciple to the blessed father, Lupus, bishop of Troyes, and at that time, having been ordained bishop of the Treveri, was preaching the Word of God to the tribes of Upper Germany, put to sea, and with favouring winds and calm waters sailed to Britain.

In the meantime, the evil spirits, speeding through the whole island, were constrained against their will to foretell that Germanus was coming, insomuch, that one Elafius, a chief of that region, without tidings from any visible messenger, hastened to meet the holy men, carrying with him his son, who in the very flower of his youth laboured under a grievous infirmity; for the sinews of the knee were wasted and shrunk, so that the withered limb was denied the power to walk. All the country followed this Elafius. The bishops arrived, and were met by the ignorant mult-
titude, whom they blessed, and preached the Word of God to them. They found the people constant in the faith as they had left them; and learning that but few had gone astray, they sought out the authors of the evil and condemned them. Then suddenly Elafius cast himself at the feet of the bishops, presenting his son, whose distress was visible and needed no words to express it. All were grieved, but especially the bishops, who, filled with pity, invoked the mercy of God; and straightway the blessed Germanus, causing the youth to sit down, touched the bent and feeble knee and passed his healing hand over all the diseased part. At once health was restored by the power of his touch, the withered limb regained its vigour, the sinews resumed their task, and the youth was, in the presence of all the people, delivered whole to his father. The multitude was amazed at the miracle, and the Catholic faith was firmly established in the hearts of all; after which, they were, in a sermon, exhorted to amend their error. By the judgement of all, the exponents of the heresy, who had been banished from the island, were brought before the bishops, to be conveyed into the continent, that the country might be rid of them, and they corrected of their errors. So it came to pass that the faith in those parts continued long after pure and untainted. Thus when they had settled all things, the blessed prelates returned home as prosperously as they had come.

But Germanus, after this, went to Ravenna to intercede for the tranquility of the Armoricans, where, after being very honourably received by Valentinian and his mother, Placidia, he departed hence to Christ; his body was conveyed to his own city with a splendid retinue, and mighty works attended his passage to the grave. Not long after, Valentinian was murdered by the followers of Aetius, the patrician, whom he had put to death, in the sixth year of the reign of Marcian, and with him ended the empire of the West.

Chapter XXVII
How St. Augustine, being made a bishop, sent to acquaint Pope Gregory with what had been done in Britain, and asked and received replies, of which he stood in need.

In the meantime, Augustine, the man of God, went to Arles, and, according to the orders received from the holy Father Gregory, was ordained archbishop of the English nation, by Aetherius, archbishop of that city. Then returning into Britain, he sent Laurentius the priest and Peter the monk to Rome, to acquaint Pope Gregory, that the English nation had received the faith of Christ, and that he was himself made their bishop. At the same time, he desired his solution of some doubts which seemed urgent to him. He soon received fitting answers to his questions, which we have also thought meet to insert in this our history:

The First Question of the blessed Augustine, Bishop of the Church of Canterbury.—Concerning bishops, what should be their manner of conversation towards their clergy? or into how many portions the offerings of the faith at the altar are to be divided? and how the bishop is to act in the Church?

Gregory, Pope of the City of Rome, answers.—Holy Scripture, in which we doubt not you are well versed, testifies to this, and in particular the Epistles of the Blessed Paul to Timothy, wherein he endeavours to show him what should be his manner of conversation in the house of God; but it is the custom of the Apostolic see to prescribe these rules to bishops when they are ordained: that all emoluments which accrue, are to be divided into four portions;—one for the bishop and his household, for hospitality and entertainment of guests; another for the clergy; a third for the poor; and the fourth for the repair of

Armoricans a region of northwestern France  Arles a city in southern France  Apostolic see seat of authority in the Roman church
churches. But in that you, my brother, having been instructed in monastic rules, must not live apart from your clergy in the Church of the English, which has been lately, by the will of God, converted to the faith, you must establish the manner of conversation of our fathers in the primitive Church, among whom, none said that aught of the things which they possessed was his own, but they had all things common.

But if there are any clerks not received into holy orders, who cannot live continent, they are to take wives, and receive their stipends outside of the community; because we know that it is written concerning the same fathers of whom we have spoken that a distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. Care is also to be taken of their stipends, and provision to be made, and they are to be kept under ecclesiastical rule, that they may live orderly, and attend to singing of psalms, and, by the help of God, preserve their hearts and tongues and bodies from all that is unlawful. But as for those that live in common, there is no need to say anything of assigning portions, or dispensing hospitality and showing mercy; inasmuch as all that they have over is to be spent in pious and religious works, according to the teaching of Him who is the Lord and Master of all, “Give alms of such things as ye have over, and behold all things are clean unto you.”

... Augustine’s Third Question.—I beseech you, what punishment must be inflicted on one who steals anything from a church?

Gregory answers.—You may judge, my brother, by the condition of the thief, in what manner he is to be corrected. For there are some, who, having substance, commit theft; and there are others, who transgress in this matter through want. Wherefore it is requisite, that some be punished with fines, others with stripes; some with more severity, and some more mildly. And when the severity is greater, it is to proceed from charity, not from anger; because this is done for the sake of him who is corrected, that he may not be delivered up to the fires of Hell. For it behoves us to maintain discipline among the faithful, as good parents do with their children according to the flesh, whom they punish with stripes for their faults, and yet they design to make those whom they chastise their heirs, and preserve their possessions for those whom they seem to visit in wrath. This charity is, therefore, to be kept in mind, and it dictates the measure of the punishment, so that the mind may do nothing beyond the rule prescribed by reason. You will add to this, how men are to restore those things which they have stolen from the church. But let not the Church take more than it has lost of its worldly possessions, or seek gain from vanities.

... Augustine’s Fifth Question.—To what degree may the faithful marry with their kindred? and is it lawful to marry a stepmother or a brother’s wife?

Gregory answers.—A certain secular law in the Roman commonwealth allows, that the son and daughter of a brother and sister, or of two full brothers, or two sisters, may be joined in matrimony; but we have found, by experience, that the offspring of such wedlock cannot grow up; and the Divine law forbids a man to “uncover the nakedness of his kindred.” Hence of necessity it must be the third or fourth generation of the faithful, that can be lawfully joined in matrimony; for the second, which we have mentioned, must altogether abstain from one another. To marry with one’s stepmother is a heinous crime, because it is written in the Law, “Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father;” now the son, indeed, cannot uncover his father’s nakedness; but in regard that it is written, “They twain shall be one flesh,” he that presumes to uncover the nakedness of his stepmother, who was one flesh with his father, certainly uncovers the nakedness of his father. It is also prohibited to marry with a sister-in-law, because by the former union she is become the brother’s flesh. For which thing also John the Baptist was beheaded,
and obtained the crown of holy martyrdom. For, though he was not ordered to deny Christ, and it was not for confessing Christ that he was killed, yet inasmuch as the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, said, “I am the Truth,” because John was killed for the truth, he also shed his blood for Christ.

... Augustine’s Eighth Question.—Whether a woman with child ought to be baptized? Or when she has brought forth, after what time she may come into the church? As also, after how many days the infant born may be baptized, lest he be prevented by death? Or how long after her husband may have carnal knowledge of her? Or whether it is lawful for her to come into the church when she has her courses, or to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion? Or whether a man, under certain circumstances, may come into the church before he has washed with water? Or approach to receive the Mystery of the Holy Communion? All which things are requisite to be known by the ignorant nation of the English.

Gregory answers.—I do not doubt but that these questions have been put to you, my brother, and I think I have already answered you therein. But I believe you would wish the opinion which you yourself might give and hold to be confirmed by my reply also. Why should not a woman with child be baptized, since the fruitfulness of the flesh is no offence in the eyes of Almighty God? For when our first parents sinned in Paradise, they forfeited the immortality which they had received, by the just judgement of God. Because, therefore, Almighty God would not for their fault wholly destroy the human race, he both deprived man of immortality for his sin, and, at the same time, of his great goodness and loving-kindness, reserved to him the power of propagating his race after him. On what ground, then, can that which is preserved to human nature by the free gift of Almighty God, be excluded from the privilege of Holy Baptism? For it is very foolish to imagine that the gift can be opposed to grace in that Mystery in which all sin is blotted out. When a woman is delivered, after how many days she may come into the church, you have learnt from the teaching of the Old Testament, to wit, that she is to abstain for a male child thirty-three days, and sixty-six for a female. Now you must know that this is to be received in a mystery; for if she enters the church the very hour that she is delivered, to return thanks, she is not guilty of any sin; because the pleasure of the flesh is a fault, and not the pain; but the pleasure is in the copulation of the flesh, whereas there is pain in bringing forth the child. Wherefore it is said to the first mother of all, “In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” If, therefore, we forbid a woman that has brought forth, to enter the church, we make a crime of her very punishment. To baptize either a woman who has brought forth, if there be danger of death, even the very hour that she brings forth, or that which she has brought forth the very hour it is born, is in no way prohibited, because, as the grace of the Holy Mystery is to be with much discretion provided for those who are in full life and capable of understanding, so is it to be without any delay administered to the dying; lest, while a further time is sought to confer the Mystery of redemption, if a small delay intervene, the person that is to be redeemed be dead and gone.

Her husband is not to approach her, till the infant born be weaned. An evil custom is sprung up in the lives of married people, in that women disdain to suckle the children whom they bring forth, and give them to other women to suckle; which seems to have been invented on no other account but incontinency; because, as they will not be continent, they will not suckle the children whom they bear. Those women, therefore, who, from evil custom, give their children to others to bring up, must not approach their husbands till the time of purification is past. For even when there has been no child-birth, women are forbidden to do so, whilst they have their courses, insomuch that the Law condemns to death
any man that shall approach unto a woman during her uncleanness. Yet the woman, nevertheless, must not be forbidden to come into the church whilst she has her courses; because the superfluity of nature cannot be imputed to her as a crime; and it is not just that she should be refused admittance into the church, for that which she suffers against her will. For we know, that the woman who had the issue of blood, humbly approaching behind our Lord's back, touched the hem of his garment, and her infirmity immediately departed from her. If, therefore, she that had an issue of blood might commendably touch the garment of our Lord, why may not she, who has her courses, lawfully enter into the church of God? But you may say, Her infirmity compelled her, whereas we speak of are bound by custom. Consider, then, most dear brother, that all we suffer in this mortal flesh, through the infirmity of our nature, is ordained by the just judgement of God after the fall; for to hunger, to thirst, to be hot, to be cold, to be weary, is from the infirmity of our nature; and what else is it to seek food against hunger, drink against thirst, air against heat, clothes against cold, rest against weariness, than to procure a remedy against distempers? Thus to a woman her courses are a distemper. If, therefore, it was a commendable boldness in her, who in her disease touched our Lord's garment, why may not that which is allowed to one infirm person, be granted to all women, who, through the fault of their nature, are rendered infirm?

She must not, therefore, be forbidden to receive the Mystery of the Holy Communion during those days. But if any one out of profound respect does not presume to do it, she is to be commended; yet if she receives it, she is not to be judged. For it is the part of noble minds in some manner to acknowledge their faults, even when there is no fault; because very often that is done without a fault, which, nevertheless, proceeded from a fault. Thus, when we are hungry, it is no sin to eat; yet our being hungry proceeds from the sin of the first man. The courses are no
should be washed with water, and not enter into the church before the setting of the sun. Which, nevertheless, may be understood spiritually, because a man acts so when the mind is led by the imagination to unlawful concupiscence; for unless the fire of concupiscence be first driven from his mind, he is not to think himself worthy of the congrega
tion of the brethren, while he sees himself burdened by the iniquity of a perverted will. For though divers nations have divers opinions concerning this affair, and seem to observe different rules, it was always the custom of the Romans, from ancient times, for such an one to seek to be cleansed by washing, and for some time reverently to forbear entering the church. Nor do we, in so saying, assign matrimony to be a fault; but forasmuch as lawful intercourse cannot be had without the pleasure of the flesh, it is proper to forbear entering the holy place, because the pleasure itself cannot be without a fault. For he was not born of adultery or fornication, but of lawful marriage, who said, “Behold I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother brought me forth.”

For he who knew himself to have been conceived in iniquity, lamented that he was born from sin, because he bears the defect, as a tree bears in its bough the sap it drew from the root. In which words, however, he does not call the union of the married couple iniquity, but the will itself. For there are many things which are lawful and permitted, and yet we are somewhat defiled in doing them. As very often by being angry we correct faults, and at the same time disturb our own peace of mind; and though that which we do is right, yet it is not to be approved that our mind should be disturbed. For he who said, “My eye was disturbed with anger,” had been angry at the vices of sinners. Now, seeing that only a calm mind can rest in the light of contemplation, he grieved that his eye was disturbed with anger; because, whilst he was correcting evil actions below, he was obliged to be confused and disturbed with regard to the contemplation of the highest things. Anger against vice is, therefore, commendable, and yet painful to a man, because he thinks that by his mind being agitated, he has incurred some guilt. Lawful commerce, therefore, must be for the sake of children, not of pleasure; and must be to procure offspring, not to satisfy vices. But if any man is led not by the desire of pleasure, but only for the sake of getting children, such a man is certainly to be left to his own judgement, either as to entering the church, or as to receiving the Mystery of the Body and Blood of our Lord, which he, who being placed in the fire cannot burn, is not to be forbidden by us to receive. But when, not the love of getting children, but of pleasure prevails, the pair have cause to lament their deed. For this the holy preaching concedes to them, and yet fills the mind with dread of the very concession. For when Paul the Apostle said, “Let him that cannot contain have his own wife;” he presently took care to subjoin, “But this I say by way of permission, not of commandment.” For that is not granted by way of permission which is lawful, because it is just; and, therefore, that which he said he permitted, he showed to be an offence.

It is seriously to be considered, that when God was about to speak to the people on Mount Sinai, He first commanded them to abstain from women. And if purity of body was there so carefully required, where God spoke to the people by the means of a creature as His representative, that those who were to hear the words of God should abstain; how much more ought women, who receive the Body of Almighty God, to preserve themselves in purity of flesh, lest they be burdened with the very greatness of that inestimable Mystery? For this reason also, it was said to David, concerning his men, by the priest, that if they were clean in this particular, they should receive the shewbread, which they would not have received at all, had not David first declared them to be clean. Then the man, who, afterwards, has been washed with water, is also capable of receiving the Mystery of the Holy Communion, when it is
lawful for him, according to what has been before declared, to enter the church.

Augustine's Ninth Question.—Whether after an illusion, such as is wont to happen in a dream, any man may receive the Body of our Lord, or if he be a priest, celebrate the Divine Mysteries?

Gregory answers.—The Testament of the Old Law, as has been said already in the article above, calls such a man polluted, and allows him not to enter into the church till the evening, after being washed with water. Which, nevertheless, a spiritual people, taking in another sense, will understand in the same manner as above; because he is imposed upon as it were in a dream, who, being tempted with uncleanness, is defiled by real representations in thought, and he is to be washed with water, that he may cleanse away the sins of thought with tears; and unless the fire of temptation depart before, may know himself to be in a manner guilty until the evening. But a distinction is very necessary in that illusion, and one must carefully consider what causes it to arise in the mind of the person sleeping; for sometimes it proceeds from excess of eating or drinking; sometimes from the superfluity or infirmity of nature, and sometimes from the thoughts. And when it happens either through superfluity or infirmity of nature, such an illusion is not to be feared at all, because it is to be lamented, that the mind of the person, who knew nothing of it, suffers the same, rather than that he occasioned it. But when the appetite of gluttony commits excess in food, and thereupon the receptacles of the humours are oppressed, the mind thence contracts some guilt; yet not so much as to hinder the receiving of the Holy Mystery, or celebrating Mass, when a holy day requires it, or necessity obliges the Mystery to be shown forth, because there is no other priest in the place; for if there be others who can perform the ministry, the illusion proceeding from over-eating ought not to exclude a man from receiving the sacred Mystery; but I am of opinion he ought humbly to abstain from offering the sacrifice of the Mystery, but not from receiving it, unless the mind of the person sleeping has been disturbed with some foul imagination. For there are some, who for the most part so suffer the illusion, that their mind, even during the sleep of the body, is not defiled with filthy thoughts. In which case, one thing is evident, that the mind is guilty, not being acquitted even in its own judgement; for though it does not remember to have seen anything whilst the body was sleeping, yet it calls to mind that, when the body was awake, it fell into gluttony. But if the illusion of the sleeper proceeds from evil thoughts when he was awake, then its guilt is manifest to the mind; for the man perceives from what root that defilement sprang, because what he had consciously thought of, that he afterwards unconsciously endured. But it is to be considered, whether that thought was no more than a suggestion, or proceeded to delight, or, what is worse, consented to sin. For all sin is committed in three ways, viz., by suggestion, by delight, and by consent. Suggestion comes from the Devil, delight from the flesh, and consent from the spirit. For the serpent suggested the first offence, and Eve, as flesh, took delight in it, but Adam, as the spirit, consented. And when the mind sits in judgement on itself, it must clearly distinguish between suggestion and delight, and between delight and consent. For when the evil spirit suggests a sin to the mind, if there ensue no delight in the sin, the sin is in no way committed; but when the flesh begins to take delight in it, then sin begins to arise. But if it deliberately consents, then the sin is known to be full-grown. The seed, therefore, of sin is in the suggestion, the nourishment of it in delight, its maturity in the consent. And it often happens that what the evil spirit sows in the thought, in that the flesh begins to find delight, and yet the soul does not consent to that delight. And whereas the flesh cannot be delighted without the mind, yet the mind struggling against the pleasures of the flesh, is after a manner unwillingly bound by the carnal delight, so that through reason it
opposes it, and does not consent, yet being bound by delight, it grievously laments being so bound. Wherefore that great soldier of our Lord’s host, groaned and said, “I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.”

Now if he was a captive, he did not fight; but he did fight; wherefore he was a captive and at the same time therefore fought against the law of the mind, which the law that is in the members opposed; but if he fought, he was no captive. Thus, then, man is, as I may say, a captive and yet free. Free on account of justice, which he loves, a captive by the delight which he unwillingly bears within him.

Book III

Chapter VIII

*How Earconbert, King of Kent, ordered the idols to be destroyed; and of his daughter Earcongota, and his kinswoman Ethelberg, virgins consecrated to God.*

In the year of our Lord 640, Eadbald, king of Kent, departed this life, and left his kingdom to his son Earconbert, who governed it most nobly twenty-four years and some months. He was the first of the English kings that of his supreme authority commanded the idols throughout his whole kingdom to be forsaken and destroyed, and the fast of forty days to be observed; and that the same might not be lightly neglected, he appointed fitting and condign punishments for the offenders. His daughter Earcongota, as became the offspring of such a parent, was a most virtuous virgin, serving God in a monastery in the country of the Franks, built by a most noble abbess, named Fara, at a place called In Brige; for at that time but few monasteries had been built in the country of the Angles, and many were wont, for the sake of monastic life, to repair to the monasteries of the Franks or Gauls; and they also sent their daughters there to be instructed, and united to their Heavenly Bridegroom, especially in the monasteries of Brige, of Cale, and Andilegum. Among whom was also Saethryth, daughter of the wife of Anna, king of the East Angles, above mentioned; and Ethelberg, the king’s own daughter; both of whom, though strangers, were for their virtue made abbesses of the monastery of Brige. Sexburg, that king’s elder daughter, wife to Earconbert, king of Kent, had a daughter called Earcongota, of whom we are about to speak.

Many wonderful works and miracles of this virgin, dedicated to God, are to this day related by the inhabitants of that place; but for us it shall suffice to say something briefly of her departure out of this world to the heavenly kingdom. The day of her summoning drawing near, she began to visit in the monastery the cells of the infirm handmaidens of Christ, and particularly those that were of a great age, or most noted for their virtuous life, and humbly commending herself to their prayers, she let them know that her death was at hand, as she had learnt by revelation, which she said she had received in this manner. She had seen a band of men, clothed in white, come into the monastery, and being asked by her what they wanted, and what they did there, they answered, “They had been sent thither to carry away with them the gold coin that had been brought thither from Kent.” Towards the close of that same night, as morning began to dawn, leaving the darkness of this world, she departed to the light of heaven. Many of the brethren of that monastery who were in other houses, declared they had then plainly heard choirs of singing angels, and, as it were, the sound of a multitude entering the monastery. Whereupon going out immediately to see what it might be, they beheld a great light coming down from heaven, which bore that holy soul, set loose from the bonds of the flesh, to the eternal joys of the celestial country. They also tell of other miracles that were wrought that night in the same monastery by the power of God; but as we must proceed to other matters, we leave them to be related by those whose concern they are. The body of
this venerable virgin and bride of Christ was buried in the church of the blessed protomartyr, Stephen. It was thought fit, three days after, to take up the stone that covered the tomb, and to raise it higher in the same place, and whilst they were doing this, so sweet a fragrance rose from below, that it seemed to all the brethren and sisters there present, as if a store of balsam had been opened.

Her aunt also, Ethelberg, of whom we have spoken, preserved the glory, acceptable to God, of perpetual virginity, in a life of great self-denial, but the extent of her virtue became more conspicuous after her death. Whilst she was abbess, she began to build in her monastery a church, in honour of all the Apostles, wherein she desired that her body should be buried; but when that work was advanced half way, she was prevented by death from finishing it, and was buried in the place in the church which she had chosen. After her death, the brothers occupied themselves with other things, and this structure was left untouched for seven years, at the expiration whereof they resolved, by reason of the greatness of the work, wholly to abandon the building of the church, and to remove the abbess's bones thence to some other church that was finished and consecrated. On opening her tomb, they found the body as untouched by decay as it had been free from the corruption of carnal concupiscence, and having washed it again and clothed it in other garments, they removed it to the church of the blessed Stephen, the Martyr. And her festival is wont to be celebrated there with much honour on the 7th of July.

Chapter XI
How a light from Heaven stood all night over his relics, and how those possessed with devils were healed by them.

Among the rest, I think we ought not to pass over in silence the miracles and signs from Heaven that were shown when King Oswald's bones were found, and translated into the church where they are now preserved. This was done by the zealous care of Ethryth, queen of the Mercians, the daughter of his brother Oswy, who reigned after him, as shall be said hereafter.

There is a famous monastery in the province of Lindsey, called Beadaneu, which that queen and her husband Ethelred greatly loved and venerated, conferring upon it many honours. It was here that she was desirous to lay the revered bones of her uncle. When the wagon in which those bones were carried arrived towards evening at the aforesaid monastery, they that were in it were unwilling to admit them, because, though they knew him to be a holy man, yet, as he was a native of another province, and had obtained the sovereignty over them, they retained their ancient aversion to him even after his death. Thus it came to pass that the relics were left in the open air all that night, with only a large tent spread over the wagon which contained them. But it was revealed by a sign from Heaven with how much reverence they ought to be received by all the faithful; for all that night, a pillar of light, reaching from the wagon up to heaven, was visible in almost every part of the province of Lindsey. Hereupon, in the morning, the brethren of that monastery who had refused it the day before, began themselves earnestly to pray that those holy relics, beloved of God, might be laid among them. Accordingly, the bones, being washed, were put into a shrine which they had made for that purpose, and placed in the church, with due honour; and that there might be a perpetual memorial of the royal character of this holy man, they hung up over the monument his banner of gold and purple. Then they poured out the water in which they had washed the bones, in a corner of the cemetery. From that time, the very earth which received that holy water,
had the power of saving grace in casting out
devils from the bodies of persons possessed.

Lastly, when the aforesaid queen afterwards abode some time in that monastery, there came to visit her a certain venerable abbess, who is still living, called Ethelhild, the sister of the holy men Ethelwin and Aldwin, the first of whom was bishop in the province of Lindsey, the other abbot of the monastery of Peartaneu; not far from which was the monastery of Ethelhild. When this lady was come, in a conversation between her and the queen, the discourse, among other things, turning upon Oswald, she said, that she also had that night seen the light over his relics reaching up to heaven. The queen thereupon added, that the very dust of the pavement on which the water that washed the bones had been poured out, had already healed many sick persons. The abbess thereupon desired that some of that health-bringing dust might be given her, and, receiving it, she tied it up in a cloth, and, putting it into a casket, returned home. Some time after, when she was in her monastery, there came to it a guest, who was wont often in the night to be on a sudden grievously tormented with an unclean spirit; he being hospitably entertained, when he had gone to bed after supper, was suddenly seized by the Devil, and began to cry out, to gnash his teeth, to foam at the mouth, and to writhe and distort his limbs. None being able to hold or bind him, the servant ran, and knocking at the door, told the abbess. She, opening the monastery door, went out herself with one of the nuns to the men’s apartment, and calling a priest, desired that he would go with her to the sufferer. Being come thither, and seeing many present, who had not been able, by their efforts, to hold the tormented person and restrain his convulsive movements, the priest used exorcisms, and did all that he could to assuage the madness of the unfortunate man, but, though he took much pains, he could not prevail. When no hope appeared of easing him in his ravings, the abbess bethought herself of the dust, and immediately bade her hand-

maidens go and fetch her the casket in which it was. As soon as she came with it, as she had been bidden, and was entering the hall of the house, in the inner part whereof the possessed person was writhing in torment, he suddenly became silent, and laid down his head, as if he had been falling asleep, stretching out all his limbs to rest. “Silence fell upon all and intent they gazed,” anxiously waiting to see the end of the matter. And after about the space of an hour the man that had been tormented sat up, and fetching a deep sigh, said, “Now I am whole, for I am restored to my senses.” They earnestly inquired how that came to pass, and he answered, “As soon as that maiden drew near the hall of this house, with the casket she brought, all the evil spirits that vexed me departed and left me, and were no more to be seen.” Then the abbess gave him a little of that dust, and the priest having prayed, he passed that night in great peace; nor was he, from that time forward, alarmed by night, or in any way troubled by his old enemy.

Book IV

Chapter IX

Of the signs which were shown from Heaven when the mother of that community departed this life.

Now when Ethelburg herself, the pious mother of that community devoted to God, was about to be taken out of this world, a wonderful vision appeared to one of the sisters, called Tortgyth; who, having lived many years in that monastery, always endeavoured, in all humility and sincerity, to serve God herself, and to help the mother to maintain regular discipline, by instructing and reproving the younger ones. Now, in order that her virtue might, according to the Apostle, be made perfect in weakness, she was suddenly seized with a most grievous bodily disease, under which, through the merciful providence of our Redeemer, she was sorely tried for the space of nine years; to the end,
that whatever stain of evil remained amidst her virtues, either through ignorance or neglect, might all be purified in the furnace of long tribulation. This woman, going out of the chamber where she abode one night, at dusk, plainly saw as it were a human body, which was brighter than the sun, wrapped in fine linen, and lifted up on high, being taken out of the house in which the sisters used to sleep. Then looking earnestly to see what it was that drew up that appearance of the glorious body which she beheld, she perceived that it was raised on high as it were by cords brighter than gold, until, entering into the open heavens, it could no longer be seen by her. Reflecting on this vision, she made no doubt that some one of the community would soon die, and her soul be lifted up to heaven by the good works which she had wrought, as it were by golden cords. And so in truth it befell; for a few days after, the beloved of God, Ethelburg, mother of that community, was delivered out of the prison of the flesh; and her life is proved to have been such that no one who knew her ought to doubt that an entrance into the heavenly country was open to her, when she departed from this life.

There was also, in the same monastery, a certain nun, of noble origin in this world, and still nobler in the love of the world to come; who had, for many years, been so disabled in all her body, that she could not move a single limb. When she heard that the body of the venerable abbess had been carried into the church, till it should be buried, she desired to be carried thither, and to be placed bending towards it, after the manner of one praying; which being done, she spoke to her as if she had been living, and entreated her that she would obtain of the mercy of our pitiful Creator, that she might be delivered from such great and long-continued pains; nor was it long before her prayer was heard: for being delivered from the flesh twelve days after, she exchanged her temporal afflictions for an eternal reward.

For three years after the death of her Superior, the aforesaid handmaid of Christ, Tortgyth, was detained in this life and was so far spent with the sickness before mentioned, that her bones scarce held together. At last, when the time of her release was at hand, she not only lost the use of her other limbs, but also of her tongue; in which state having continued three days and as many nights, she was, on a sudden, restored by a spiritual vision, and opened her lips and eyes, and looking up to heaven, began thus to speak to the vision which she saw: “Very acceptable to me is thy coming, and thou art welcome!” Having so said, she was silent awhile, as it were, waiting for the answer of him whom she saw and to whom she spoke; then, as if somewhat displeased, she said, “I can in no wise gladly suffer this;” then pausing awhile, she said again, “If it can by no means be to-day, I beg that the delay may not be long;” and again holding her peace a short while, she concluded thus; “If it is certainly so determined, and the decree cannot be altered, I beg that it may be no longer deferred than this next night.” Having so said, and being asked by those about her with whom she talked, she said, “With my most dear mother, Ethelburg;” by which they understood, that she was come to acquaint her that the time of her departure was at hand; for, as she had desired, after one day and night, she was delivered alike from the bonds of the flesh and of her infirmity and entered into the joys of eternal salvation.

Chapter X

How a blind woman, praying in the burial-place of that monastery, was restored to her sight.

Hildilid, a devout handmaid of God, succeeded Ethelburg in the office of abbess and presided over that monastery with great vigour many years, till she was of an extreme old age, in the observance of regular discipline, and carefully providing all things for the common use. The narrowness of the space where the monastery is built, led her to determine that the bones of the servants and handmaidens of Christ, who had been there buried, should be taken up, and should all
be translated into the church of the Blessed Mother of God, and interred in one place. How often a brightness of heavenly light was seen there, when this was done, and a fragrance of wonderful sweetness arose, and what other signs were revealed, whosoever reads will find in the book from which we have taken these tales.

But in truth, I think it by no means fit to pass over the miracle of healing, which the same book informs us was wrought in the cemetery of that community dedicated to God. There lived in that neighbourhood a certain thegn, whose wife was seized with a sudden dimness in her eyes, and as the malady increased daily, it became so burdensome to her, that she could not see the least glimpse of light. Having continued some time wrapped in the night of this blindness, on a sudden she bethought herself that she might recover her lost sight, if she were carried to the monastery of the nuns, and there prayed at the relics of the saints. Nor did she lose any time in fulfilling that which she had conceived in her mind: for being conducted by her maids to the monastery, which was very near, and professing that she had perfect faith that she should be there healed, she was led into the cemetery, and having long prayed there on her knees, she did not fail to be heard, for as she rose from prayer, before she went out of the place, she received the gift of sight which she had desired; and whereas she had been led thither by the hands of her maids, she now returned home joyfully without help. As if she had lost the light of this world to no other end than that she might show by her recovery how great a light is vouchsafed to the saints of Christ in Heaven, and how great a grace of healing power.

Chapter II
How Bishop John cured a dumb man by his blessing.

In the beginning of Aldfrid’s reign, Bishop Eata died, and was succeeded in the bishopric of the church of Hagustald by the holy man John, of whom those that knew him well are wont to tell many miracles, and more particularly Berthun, a man worthy of all reverence and of undoubted truthfulness, and once his deacon, now abbot of the monastery called Inderauuda, that is, “In the wood of the Deiri”: some of which miracles we have thought fit to hand on to posterity. There is a certain remote dwelling enclosed by a mound, among scattered trees, not far from the church of Hagustald, being about a mile and a half distant and separated from it by the river Tyne, having an oratory dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, where the man of God used frequently, as occasion offered, and specially in Lent, to abide with a few companions and in quiet give himself to prayer and study. Having come hither once at the beginning of Lent to stay, he bade his followers find out some poor man labouring under any grievous infirmity, or want, whom they might keep with them during those days, to receive alms, for so he was always used to do.

There was in a township not far off, a certain youth who was dumb, known to the bishop, for he often used to come into his presence to receive alms. He had never been able to speak one word; besides, he had so much scurf and scab on his head, that no hair could ever grow on the top of it, but only some rough hairs stood on end round about it. The bishop caused this young man to be brought, and a little hut to be made for him within the enclosure of the dwelling, in which he might abide, and receive alms from him.

Book V

the Deiri inhabitants in a region of northern England thegn a man in service to a king or lord
every day. When one week of Lent was over, the next Sunday he bade the poor man come to him, and when he had come, he bade him put his tongue out of his mouth and show it him; then taking him by the chin, he made the sign of the Holy Cross on his tongue, directing him to draw it back so signed into his mouth and to speak. “Pronounce some word,” said he; “say ‘gae,’” which, in the language of the English, is the word of affirming and consenting, that is, yes. The youth's tongue was immediately loosed, and he spoke as he was bidden. The bishop then added the names of the letters: “Say A.” He said A. “Say B,” he said B also. When he had repeated all the letters after the bishop, the latter proceeded to put syllables and words to him, and when he had repeated them all rightly he bade him utter whole sentences, and he did it. Nor did he cease all that day and the next night, as long as he could keep awake, as those who were present relate, to say something, and to express his private thoughts and wishes to others, which he could never do before; after the manner of the man long lame, who, when he was healed by the Apostles Peter and John, leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising the Lord, rejoicing to have the use of his feet, which he had so long lacked. The bishop, rejoicing with him at his cure, caused the physician to take in hand the healing of the sores of his head. He did as he was bidden, and with the help of the bishop's blessing and prayers, a goodly head of hair grew as the skin was healed. Thus the youth became fair of countenance, ready of speech, with hair curling in comely fashion, whereas before he had been ill-favoured, miserable, and dumb. Thus filled with joy at his recovered health, notwithstanding that the bishop offered to keep him in his own household, he chose rather to return home.

Chapter III
How he healed a sick maiden by his prayers.

The same Berthun told another miracle concerning the said bishop. When the most reverend Wilfrid, after a long banishment, was admitted to the bishopric of the church of Hagustald, and the aforesaid John, upon the death of Bosa, a man of great sanctity and humility, was, in his place, appointed bishop of York, he himself came, once upon a time, to the monastery of nuns, at the place called Wetadun, where the Abbess Heriburg then presided. “When we were come thither,” said he, “and had been received with great and universal joy, the abbess told us, that one of the nuns, who was her own daughter after the flesh, laboured under a grievous sickness, for she had been lately let blood in the arm, and whilst she was under treatment, was seized with an attack of sudden pain, which speedily increased, while the wounded arm became worse, and so much swollen, that it could scarce be compassed with both hands; and she lay in bed like to die through excess of pain. Wherefore the abbess entreated the bishop that he would vouchsafe to go in and give her his blessing; for she believed that she would soon be better if he blessed her or laid his hands upon her. He asked when the maiden had been let blood, and being told that it was on the fourth day of the moon, said, ‘You did very indiscreetly and unskilfully to let blood on the fourth day of the moon; for I remember that Archbishop Theodore, of blessed memory, said, that blood-letting at that time was very dangerous, when the light of the moon is waxing and the tide of the ocean is rising. And what can I do for the maiden if she is like to die?’

“But the abbess still earnestly entreated for her daughter, whom she dearly loved, and designed to make abbess in her stead, and at last prevailed with him to go in and visit the sick maiden. Wherefore he went in, taking me with him to the maid, who lay, as I said, in sore anguish, and her arm swelling so greatly that it could not be bent at all at the elbow; and he stood and said a prayer over her, and having given his blessing, went out. Afterwards, as we were sitting at table, at the usual hour, someone came in and called me out, saying, ‘Quoenburg’ (that was the maid's
name) ‘desires that you should immediately go back to her.’ This I did, and entering the chamber, I found her of more cheerful countenance, and like one in good health. And while I was sitting beside her, she said, ‘Shall we call for something to drink?’—‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and right glad am I, if you can.’ When the cup was brought, and we had both drunk, she said, ‘As soon as the bishop had said the prayer for me and given me his blessing and had gone out, I immediately began to mend; and though I have not yet recovered my former strength, yet the pain is quite gone both from my arm, where it was most burning, and from all my body, as if the bishop had carried it away with him; notwithstanding the swelling of the arm still seems to remain.’ But when we departed thence, the cure of the pain in her limbs was followed by the assuaging of the grievous swelling; and the maiden being thus delivered from pains and death, returned praise to our Lord and Saviour, in company with His other servants who were there.”

Chapter XIV

*How another in like manner, being at the point of death, saw the place of punishment appointed for him in Hell.*

I myself knew a brother, would to God I had not known him, whose name I could mention if it were of any avail, dwelling in a famous monastery, but himself living infamous. He was oftentimes rebuked by the brethren and elders of the place, and admonished to be converted to a more chastened life; and though he would not give ear to them, they bore with him long and patiently, on account of their need of his outward service, for he was a cunning artificer. But he was much given to drunkenness, and other pleasures of a careless life, and more used to stop in his workshop day and night, than to go to church to sing and pray and hear the Word of life with the brethren. For which reason it befell him according to the saying, that he who will not willingly humble himself and enter the gate of the church must needs be led against his will into the gate of Hell, being damned. For he falling sick, and being brought to extremity, called the brethren, and with much lamentation, like one damned, began to tell them, that he saw Hell opened, and Satan sunk in the depths thereof; and Caiaphas, with the others that slew our Lord, hard by him, delivered up to avenging flames. “In whose neighbourhood,” said he, “I see a place of eternal perdition prepared for me, miserable wretch that I am.” The brethren, hearing these words, began diligently to exhort him, that he should repent even then, whilst he was still in the flesh. He answered in despair, “There is no time for me now to change my course of life, when I have myself seen my judgement passed.”

Whilst uttering these words, he died without having received the saving Viaticum, and his body was buried in the farthest parts of the monastery, nor did any one dare either to say Masses or sing psalms, or even to pray for him. Oh how far asunder hath God put light from darkness! The blessed Stephen, the first martyr, being about to suffer death for the truth, saw the heavens opened, and the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; and where he was to be after death, there he fixed the eyes of his mind, that he might die the more joyfully. But this workman, of darkened mind and life, when death was at hand, saw Hell opened, and witnessed the damnation of the Devil and his followers; he saw also, unhappy wretch! his own prison among them, to the end that, despairing of salvation, he might himself die the more miserably, but might by his perdition afford cause of salvation to the living who should hear of it. This befell of late in the province of the Bernicians, and being noise abroad

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**Viaticum** *Eucharist for the dying*  
**Bernicians** *inhabitants in a region of northern England*
far and near, inclined many to do penance for their sins without delay. Would to God that this also might come to pass through the reading of our words!
Endnotes

1 The text is taken from Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of England*, translated by A.M. Sellar, 1907 as found in The Project Gutenberg. This text is in the public domain.

2 This date represents the earliest manuscripts of Bede’s Latin version of the *EH*. A subsequent Old English translation was made in the ninth century.

3 Quotations from the Bible taken from the Douay-Rheims translation in the Unbound Bible.

4 Matthew 15:11.

5 Matthew 15:19.

6 Titus 1:15.

7 Psalm 51:5.

8 Psalm 67.

9 1 Corinthians 7:9.

10 1 Corinthians 7:6.

11 Romans 7:23.

12 Note from edition: “Aen. II, 1. Quotations from Vergil are frequent in Bede.”
Evadeam, The Dwarf Knight from the Lancelot-Grail Cycle¹ (ca. 1220–30)

Contributed by Kara Larson Maloney

Introduction

Dwarfism is a medical or genetic condition that results in short physical stature, usually under the designated height of four foot ten inches. This condition does not have one singular cause, and the conditions that are most often associated with dwarfism—large head, disproportionate limb size to trunk size—are not universal affects. Though it is an acknowledged medical condition in modern times, those who manifested such traits in the Middle Ages occupied a different, liminal space in medieval European texts. Their short stature and other visible differences could be considered a physical ailment or impairment, or they could be considered part of a race of monsters and not entirely human. Celtic folk tradition, for instance, mentions dwarfs as a magical race. And while medical conditions such as achondroplasia (a genetic disorder that results in dwarfism—shortened arms and legs, reduced height, and usually a normal length torso) would have little debilitating impact on a person’s function within their community, people with such conditions were still Othered and seen as being outside the norm during the medieval period.

The Middle Ages produced hundreds of texts regaling the stories of King Arthur, and peppered throughout these stories are a handful of dwarves who serve as devices to move the plot forward. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder compare disability to the “master trope of human disqualification.” This human disqualification can be seen in the “accessorizing” of dwarves within the Arthurian canon, such as in the dwarf who drives Lancelot’s cart in Chretien de Troyes’ La Charette, or Gareth’s dwarf in Malory’s Morte Darthur. Some have even argued that the dwarf himself serves to enhance Gareth’s masculinity and prowess as a knight, a veritable prosthesis. Mitchell and Snyder also look at disability’s role in narratives to see how disability becomes coded as inferiority. Historically, dwarves in the Celtic tradition, especially that of the Welsh, are defined as a separate race, “small and handsome” who are “noted for their noble character and complete community harmony,” per Vernon J. Harward.¹ Dwarves in the Arthurian tradition follow Mitchell and Snyder’s idea of inferior because these dwarves are not magical fairy-folk who impart gold and wisdom, but “disfigured” people who are ridiculed and demonized. When looking at the story of Evadeam, one must consider Mitchell and Snyder’s question: “can one possess a physical or cognitive anomaly that does not translate into a belief in one’s social inferiority?” I have chosen to focus on the story of Evadeam, the “nain chevalier,” or “dwarf knight,” because his disability serves as the “narrative prosthesis” that Mitchell and Snyder speak of: his condition is a “curse” that he must overcome in order to gain full membership into the Round Table. What makes his tale unique from a medieval standpoint is that Evadeam serves as the focus character of the story. The author’s use of realistic detail also helps set this text apart, not quite subverting the “narrative prosthesis” trope, but at least recognizing the reality of living life with
dwarfism. One other notable dwarf knight wins his lady's love in the midst of Malory's recounting of Pelleas and Etard, but no one really remarks that the lady herself chooses the dwarf of her own free will, and that the other knight goes his way, visibly disturbed, and their story ends. Evadeam, however, embodies the liminality that little people (those who manifest the physical condition of dwarfism, as they wish to be called today) could have faced in the Middle Ages.

Part of the Old French Lestoire de Merlin from the Lancelot-Grail saga, Evadeam's story tells of the knight's encounters with Gawain and others in the early days of King Arthur's court. The Lancelot-Grail, or Vulgate, Cycle is the longest Old French Arthurian romance cycle. Written sometime between 1215 and 1235, the Cycle tends to layer its adventures with heavy-handed moralizing. As such, when readers encounter Evadeam, we are quickly introduced to him as the “the most deformed and ugliest dwarf,” companion of a damsel who is “the greatest beauty” and whose parallel cannot be found for four realms. The court, including Guinevere, cannot believe that such a beautiful, innocent damsel could be in love with such an ugly creature. None of them consider Evadeam, who is simply known as the dwarf knight, and what his feelings can be. They cannot see beyond his “coarse black hair,” “his shoulders high and crooked,” and the hump on his back. (One should note that Evadeam's shortened limbs in proportion to his torso, as well as his broad hands and soft fingers, are marks of anachondroplasia.) Even when they know his name, Evadeam, and that he is of royal birth, the main concern is whether it was the sin of his mother or father responsible for his condition. As Edward Wheatley shows in Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability, the Church's attempt to dominate the field of medicine and other fields of learning in pre-modern times meant that the causes of disability were thought to be rooted in the moral and amoral deeds of his parents. Impairment such as blindness, or disability such as Evadeam's dwarfism, could be seen as a spiritual test of character, which makes for an interesting choice in a narrative like the Lancelot-Grail. Though the narrative states that Evadeam’s state “is not the fault of his father, or of his mother, or anything that [Evadeam] deserved,” the question of what Evadeam or his parents had done to invoke such a “punishment” would have occurred to a medieval Western European audience in ways that modern readers might not consider.

The bulk of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle questions the values of chivalry. The inclusion of the dwarf knight, who despite his physical “disfigurements” and slight impairment (he must cut holes in the leather fenders of his saddle so that his Spurs can actually touch the horse’s flanks), makes an interesting counterpoint to the likes of Gawain, who suffers from questionable moral values, and yet is physically pleasing to the eye. Evadeam, though physically ugly by the other knights’ standards, is a true gentleman and manages to fight five physically able knights to near-death, all for the sake of his love. Later in the cycle, Gawain falls victim to the same curse, disfiguring dwarfism, and must also learn a lesson in courtesy. For Evadeam, it took Gawain wishing him that God grant him joy. For Gawain, it was his very remembering to greet a lady when he met her in the forest without passing her by first. Both, in the end, regain their physical beauty, which will match their spiritual purity and courtesy as a knight. It isn’t quite as satisfying as a modern ending might have been, wherein the court would have recognized Evadeam’s prowess as a knight did not depend on his physical stature, but one must note Evadeam’s treatment as a character. He is granted a name, a full genealogy, and a backstory, complete with conflict. He has a lady love who can see beyond his physical features to the beauty within. And that, in the end, humanizes Evadeam in ways that few other dwarfs are within the medieval Arthurian canon. He is
not a member of a fairy race, but a flesh and blood human being.

Bibliography
Lestoire de Merlin: The Dwarf Knight

After Merlin had told his master all the stories of the things as they happened, one after another, he took leave of Blaise and went right to the city of Logres, where King Arthur and his wife were, and they had great joy at the sight of him. And just as Merlin got there, a maiden came to the front of the room riding a dun-colored mule, and in front of her, on the saddlebow of the mule, she carried the most deformed and ugliest dwarf that anyone had ever seen. He was snub-nosed and skinny and had red curly eyebrows, and a red beard that was so long that it fell to his feet, and his coarse and black hair an ugly combination, his shoulders high and crooked, and a big hump on his back and one in front on his breast, his fat hands and short fingers, and short legs, and a long and sharp spine. The maiden was the greatest beauty. And they all looked at one, and the other.

When she climbed down from her mule, she took her dwarf in her arms and put him down very softly and led him into the room before the king, who sat eating. And when she saw the king she greeted him genteelly, for she was full of great courtesy, and the king returned her greeting most debonairly.

The maiden said in front of them, “Sire, I have come to you from very far, because of your court’s great renown throughout the world, to ask you a gift, because no maiden—as the renown witness of you—does not receive that which she asks you. And because you are the greatest gentleman in the world, I have worked to come to your court for one single request. Guard you well that you do not grant me what you do not want to do or give.”

“Lady,” said the king, “Ask that which you would like because you would not fail; I will give what I can by my honor and my royal authority.”

“That which I would ask you,” she said, “does not risk your honor.”

“Lady,” said the king, “Speak your wish because I will do it outright.”

“Sire,” said the lady, “I have come to ask that you knight this young man that I hold by the hand and who is my friend. He deserves it well by right, because he is worthy and hardy and of noble lineage. He should have been a knight before, and he could have been knighted by the hand of King Pelles of Listnois, who is a most loyal gentleman. But my friend did not want to do that, and he made an oath to only be knighted by your hand. And for this I ask that you make him a knight.”

And then everyone began to laugh in the room, and Kay the Seneschal, who had a most slanderous tongue full of dangerous words, said to her while sneering, “Watch him well and keep him close to you so that the maids of the queen will not take him. He is a great beauty, so they may try to take him from you!”

“Sire,” said the damsel, “the king is such a worthy man that he would not allow anyone to do wrong against me, as it pleases God and himself.”

“Certainly not, lady,” said the king, “you can be completely sure and I swear it to you.”

“Sire,” said the lady, “I thank you. Pray do as I ask you.”

“Lady,” said the king, “I will do what you ask.”

At these words, two squires entered the court on two strong and quick horses. One carried on his neck a shield with three leopards with crowns of blue, the field of the shield was black as mulberries, and the strap was of the gold work of a goldsmith, with an inlay of little crosses, and a sword hanging from the bow of the saddle. And the other brought a little war horse in his right hand which was of a good size, and the bridle of gold and the halter of silk. Both squires had driven out a packhorse with two very beautiful saddlebags. Then they dismounted at a pine tree and tied up their horses. Then they opened the saddlebags and drew out from one a double-mail hauberk which was as white as new snow because it was of fine silver, leg armor of the same, and one helm of
silver gilding. Then they went into the room where the king and the barons were dining and they came before the lady.

When the lady saw them coming, she said to the king, “Sire, please grant my request, for it is I who have delayed too long. Here is all the apparatus that a knight needs, for I have brought the armor with which my friend will be dubbed.”

“Fair, sweet friend,” said the King, “I will do your bidding and your greatest wish of my free will after you come and eat.”

And she said that she would not eat before her friend was made a knight.

So the lady stood in the hall before the king, and she always held her friend by the right hand, and when the king had eaten and the tablecloths were cleared, the lady drew from her purse two spurs which were wrapped in a swath of silk. Then she said to the king, “Sire, do what I ask because I have delayed too long.”

Then Kay jumped in front and started to put on the right spur. And the lady seized him by the hand and she said, “What is it that you wish to do, sir knight?”

“I want to put the right spur on your friend to make him a knight at my hand.”

The lady said, “With your hand is not what the Lord wants. It will only be the hand of King Arthur because he gave me a promise that he would do as I ask. Or else, he would have what the Lord wants because no hand by the hand of King Arthur because he gave me the promise that he would only do as I wish. Else he would have hurt me to the death. No one but a king will touch one as high status as my friend.”

“So God help me,” said the king, “Lady, you are right, and I will do that which you desire.” Then the king took the spur from the lady and he put it on the right foot. And the lady put on the other. And the king put the sword on him after he had dressed in the hauberk, because the lady did not want anyone but the king to touch him. And when he was dressed in a proper way with everything a knight would need, the king took him by the neck and said that God would make him a worthy knight.

And then the lady asked if he could do anything else.

“Lady,” the king said, “I have done that which you wanted.”

“Sire,” she said, “please ask that he will be my knight.”

And the King asked him, and he said that he would do what the king wanted.

Then they left the hall and went to the pine tree. And the young lady lifted her new knight on the warhorse, which was more beautiful than any other, all covered with weapons. And then she hung his shield about his neck herself, which was as the story had said it was. Then she mounted her mule and called to the squires and sent them away to her country. Then she went the other way with her knight and they entered a great and marvelous forest.

And King Arthur had remained at his castle with her and Merlin and their company, all of whom had laughed at the lady who was in love with the dwarf.5

“Certainly,” said Queen Guinevere, “I wonder how such a thought had come to her for I have never in my life seen such an ugly or despiteful thing. And the damsel is full of such great beauty that no one can find her equal in four realms. I believe that devils or phantoms have blinded or enchanted her.”

“Lady,” said Merlin, “she is not blinded to anything except the great ugliness of the dwarf. In your life you have not seen as loathsome a piece of flesh as the dwarf is, and yet, he is the son of a king and queen.”

“Dear sir,” said the queen, “the damsel appears to come from a great line, for she is beautiful beyond all others, and her friend is so horribly ugly.”

“Lady,” said Merlin, “his great bounty and his bravery will get rid of a great part of the ugliness which is so very much in him, as you have seen, and you will learn about this soon.”

“Noble, sweet friends,” said King Arthur to Merlin, “How is the lady known to you?”
“Sire,” said Merlin, “I tell you truly. I have never seen her before, but I do rightly know who she is and what her name is, but she will tell you herself in a short time, and she will be better believed than I, and you will find out who he is sooner than you think in his own words, and you will have both sorrow and joy for it.”

“How will I have sorrow and joy?” said King Arthur.

[Word comes from Lucius, the emperor of Rome, and the story is not concerned with the dwarf knight.

Merlin becomes imprisoned. Arthur sends out knights to find him, and Gawain and others search, but return without success after one year. As they return to Arthur, they meet up with the damsel and the dwarf knight.

Now continues the story, after King Arthur had knighted the dwarf at the damsel's request, that she took him away cheerfully, and they returned to their country. And they traveled that first day until just before vespers. And they left the forest and entered into a most beautiful land, which was very grand and large. And the lady saw before her an armed knight coming, riding on a black-and-white spotted charger, and she pointed the knight out to her dwarf. And he said, “Lady, don't you worry, but ride without fear, for you are safe from him.”

“By God,” said the lady, “he will want to take me away with him. That is the only reason for him to come this way.”

And the dwarf said to the damsel, “Ride on surely.”

The knight called out to them as soon as he saw her, in a voice that she could hear, “It is well that you have come, my dear lady, and now I have found that which I have loved forever.”

And the dwarf who had heard him quite well, said, “Sir, do not be so hasty, for you might be discouraged before you can start so that you can take joy in her.”

“I should take joy in her,” the knight answered, “because I love her as if I held her as my own. And I will hold her soon enough.”

And the knight kept coming closer as quickly as he was able to ride.

When the dwarf saw the knight approaching, he put his lance in its holder and hid behind his shield until only his eye could be seen. He kicked his horse with his spurs through two small openings cut through his saddle's fenders, because his legs were so short that they could not reach the stirrups of the saddle. And the horse carried him so fast that one would think he was flying. He shouted to the knight to watch himself.

The knight, who was most proud and haughty, thought it was shameful to joust with such a despicable creature. He raised his lance til it was upright and said that it was God's will that he would not joust with him. He still put his shield up against the blow. And the dwarf hit him so hard that he pierced through the shield and the knight's hauberk, and the iron tip of the lance grazed his side. And he hit the knight so hard with his body and his shield, and the horse ran so fast, that the dwarf knocked the man and the horse to the ground. As he fell, he hit his shoulder, and swooned from the pain he felt.

When the dwarf saw this, he called to the damsel and asked her to help him dismount. She took him in her arms and put him down. Then he drew his sword from its sheath and, running to the knight, cut the knight's helmet from his head. He threatened to cut the knight if he didn't acknowledge defeat. And the knight, who was very wounded, saw the sword the dwarf held about his head and was afraid of dying. He cried for mercy and said that he would trust his life to the dwarf.

The dwarf said, “Then you will go to King Arthur to be held prisoner. And tell him that the little knight that he dubbed sent you to him, and that you put yourself at his mercy.”

And the knight swore it to him.

The dwarf told the knight to mount his horse, but the knight said that he didn't have the strength, because his shoulder was
wounded. “So I will stay here until I can find someone to carry me. But if you mount your horse and go to the head of this valley, you will find a house of mine. It is time for you to find a place to stay. You will stay there and send some of my men to carry me back. You have nothing to fear.”

And the dwarf agreed. He went back to the damsel, who held his horse. She bowed low over the neck of her palfrey, took him by the arms, and lifted him up until, with great strain, she put him in his saddle. Then they went back to the king’s lodge.

Six squires who lived there ran out to greet them and help them dismount. They disarmed the dwarf and put a rich mantle on him, and the dwarf told them that their lord was wounded. They took a litter, fastened to two palfreys, and went to their lord. They put him in the litter and carried him back to the lodge. They disrobed him and then sent for the physicians, and they gave him what they could. Then the squires asked him who had done this, and he responded that it was a knight that he did not know, and he dared not say that it had been the dwarf. Then he welcomed his guests as joyfully as a wounded knight was able to do. He had them well served and made comfortable. After eating, they were given two rich beds to sleep in in a very beautiful chamber, and they slept until the next morning, when they got up and dressed. And the damsel armed the dwarf, for she loved him dearly, and only wanted to do it with her hand. And when she had armed him and readied him except for his helm, she took him by the hand and took him to where the wounded knight lay. They both said that God grant him a good day, and he returned their greeting quite meekly. They commended him to God and thanked him for the honor that he granted them.

Then they left the room, and the damsel laced his helm and helped him mount his horse, then armed him with shield and lance. Then the squires came up and brought the lady her palfrey and helped her mount. Then they left the knight’s lodge and took the road toward Estrangorre.

And the knight who had been wounded started to think of fulfilling his oath, so he had a horse-drawn litter most lavishly fit out; it had a most fair and comfortable bed, and the litter was covered with expensive silk cloth. The knight was laid on the bed and the litter hitched to two sweet-natured palfreys. And they left sorrowfully, and took the road into Carduel in Wales, where King Arthur and his queen were spending time. That day, they were with many people. When they got there, King Arthur was sitting to eat his meal, so the knight had himself carried into the hall before the king.

And the knight said, “Sire, in faith and to keep my oath, I come, full of shame, to throw myself at your mercy at the order of the most despiteful creature in the world who defeated me in combat.”

When he said this, he ordered his squires to carry him away, but King Arthur said to him, “What is this, sir knight? You say that you come to be my prisoner and to beg for my mercy?”

“You see, sire,” said the knight, “I know well that I must tell you about my shame and my disgrace, and I will, since I have come to that. I must do your will and fulfill my oath. In truth, I fell in love with a damsel who is so beautiful and kind that she has no equal in the world. She is a noble woman, the daughter of a king, and if you desire to know her name, it is the beautiful Byanne, daughter of King Clamadon, who is very wealthy and powerful. But never by bidding, loving, or knightly service done on her behalf, could I bring her to give me her love. And I would gladly take her to be my wife, and her father would be most willing and happy about it, for I am of noble stock, son of a king and queen. But the damsel would not agree to it, because of the most despicable thing a mother ever gave birth to. The other evening, I was out riding alone through a land, all armed, when I met my damsel who had been coming back from your court and with that false dwarf
knight, whose friend she is. And when I saw her coming with so little an escort, I felt great joy, and I said that God should be blessed for bringing her to that place, because I thought I could take her without a fight. But the dwarf who was with her told me that I came too soon, and it would do me no good, for things would not go as I hoped, that it was crazy for me to be carried away thus. I thought I could get what I wanted without resistance, so I told him I would certainly get what I wanted. So I let my horse gallop toward the lady, because I wanted to pick her up and carry her away on my horse’s neck to my lodge that was not very far from there. But when the dwarf saw that I had started, he spurred his horse toward me and put his lance into its holder. It still seemed a shame and a disgrace to me, so I didn’t want to strike him. But he struck me so hard that he dropped me to the ground and when I fell I injured my left shoulder, and I fainted in agony. He unlaced my helm and would have cut off my head if I didn’t swear to make myself your prisoner at his bequest, so I am doing all of this.”

“Certainly, dear friend,” said the king, “the one who sent you here puts you in a good prison. Can you tell me whose son the dwarf is?”

“Sire,” he answered, “he is the son of King Brandegorre of the land of Estrangorre, who is most wealthy and powerful in land and loyal subjects. He is also faithful to God.”

“Certainly,” said the king, “he is a true nobleman; I wonder how Our Lord could bear it that he has such offspring.”

“Sire,” said the knight, “Our Lord bears many things. It is not the fault of his father, or of his mother, or anything that he deserved. At one time there was no one in all the world as beautiful as he was. It was on Trinity Sunday nine years ago that it happened to him, and he will only be twenty-two years old.”

And King Arthur said that he could not be only twenty-two years old, for by his looks he seems much more than sixty.

“Certainly,” said the knight, “he will be just twenty-two because my father, King Evadeam, whose name he bears, has told me many times that he is no older than that.”

“And how did it happen to him?” asked King Arthur.

“Sire,” he said, “it was a damsels who did this to him, for he was not willing to love her. And there is a time limit to it, as I have been told many times. Now I have told you that which I was bound to say, so I make myself your prisoner and throw myself at your mercy, for I have been defeated.”

“Dear friend,” the king said, “you put yourself in a good prison, for I relieve you of your oath. But first tell me your name.”

“Sire,” he said, “What I am called is Tradelmant, and I am the godson of the king of North Wales, who by great charity gave me his name. So I will go, by your leave and to my shame.”

“Go with God,” said the king, “who guides you.”

Then the squires took the knight and carried him out of the hall and they put him on the litter between the two palfreys, and they went back to their countries. And King Arthur and his barons spoke quite a bit about the dwarf and the maiden, and said between themselves that it would be very joyful to see the dwarf regain his beauty, and they held the damsels in great esteem that she never hated her friend for his ugliness.

[And now the story turns to Sagremor, the quest for Merlin, and how none of the knights found any word of Merlin.]

The story says that Yvain made his way, after leaving Gawain, until he and his companions rode out of a forest. And as they were riding out of the forest, they met a damsels on a mule, and she was consumed with grief. She pulled out her hair by great handfuls and cried out in a loud voice, “I am so wretched! What will become of me? I have lost the one I loved so much, and he loved me so much that he lost the great beauty that he had to win my love.”

And when Yvain heard this, he felt great pity, so he went to her and asked her why she was grieving so. And she answered, “Noble
knight, have mercy on me and my lover. Five knights are killing him in the valley behind that hill!

"And who is your friend, Lady?" asked Yvain.

"Sir, he is Evadecam the dwarf, son of King Brandegorre."

"Lady, stop sorrowing now," said Yvain, "for by the faith that I give you, he will not be harmed if I can help it, if I get to him in time."

"Sir, God's mercy on you," said the damsel, "but you will have to hurry."

So Yvain set off as fast as he could get his horse to run to the place that the lady had pointed out, and his companions followed him. And the lady followed behind as best she could, because her mule went very slowly. And Yvain rode until he saw the dwarf, who was fighting hard with two knights, and Yvain also saw three others lying in the middle of the field who did not have the strength to get up, because one had been wounded by a glaive in the upper thigh, another had been hit on the shoulder, which was severed from his body, and the other was split open by a sword down to his teeth. And the other two were exhausted, and both were near death, for the dwarf kept attacking with vigor.

And when Yvain saw him behaving like this, he said to his companions that "it's a shame the dwarf is built as he is, for he is one worthy and brave and has a great heart."

"Truly, sir," said one of the companions, "no one has ever fought with such skill with such a build. For God's sake, let us separate them so that nothing bad will happen to him, for there would be great shame if he were hurt."

"You speak the truth," said Yvain.

Then he spurred his horse to where they were, but before he could get there, the dwarf sent one of the knights to the ground and rode over him three or four times with his horse until he had nearly killed him. And when the fifth knight saw that he was all alone, he became deathly afraid for himself, and started to turn away, as if to turn in flight, for he had deep wounds all over his body. But the dwarf, on a very expensive horse, kept on his heels, and went so fast that he would have certainly killed the knight if Yvain hadn't ridden that way at once.

"So he said to the dwarf, "Dear sir, don't do that anymore. Let him go, for courtesy's sake, because we can easily see how he is, because you have fought long and hard with him."

When the dwarf heard Yvain ask that so mildly, he answered like a man more noble and courteous than any other: "Sir, is it your desire that I give up?"

"Yes," said Yvain, "with my thanks, for we can see how he is."

"Then I will do as you ask," said the dwarf, "for you seem to be a most noble gentleman."

Thus the knight whom the dwarf was fighting came to Yvain and said, "Sir, your mercy has saved me from death by coming here, and blessed be God for bringing you here." Then he surrendered his sword to the dwarf and the dwarf took it, and the others who still lived did the same. And he sent the four of them to be King Arthur's prisoners. And they went there and gave themselves over on behalf of the dwarf knight. And Yvain and his companions left the dwarf and the damsel and crossed through various countries. They quested for Merlin here and there, but they could not find him anywhere, and they were filled with great sorrow and displeasure. And then they returned to the court of King Arthur after one year, and each one told the story of their quests, and King Arthur had them written down. Thus we leave the story of King Arthur here and return to speak of Gawain.

When Sir Gawain had left his companions at the fork in the road, he made his way with ten others until they left the forest. And then, Gawain said to his companions that they should depart, and each should go on his own, for he wanted to go on alone. So they departed in this manner, and each went his own way. And Gawain rode on all alone, and he made his way over a great part of the land of Logres until one day, riding
while pensive and sad, because he could not hear any news of Merlin, and while thinking on this Gawain came into a forest. And after he had ridden two Welsh leagues into it, there came a damsel riding toward him on the most beautiful palfrey in the world. Her saddle was of ivory and her stirrups of gold, and a blanket of scarlet that had bands that fell to the earth and reins of gold thread with gold studs. She wore clothing of white samite with linen fastenings, and her head was enveloped in silk. And all enveloped as she was, she passed in front of Gawain, who was deep in thought so that he did not greet her. And after she had passed him, the damsel pulled her reins and turned her palfrey and said, “Gawain, Gawain. It is not true, that which they speak of you and our renown in courts throughout the kingdom of Logres. They say, and they swear to it, that you are the best knight in the world. And they say also that you are the most courteous and the most noble in the world. But in this, your renown disagrees with the truth, for you are the rudest knight in the world that I have seen in my lifetime. You meet me in this forest all by myself, far from others, and the great crime that is in you would not allow you to show such kindness or humility so that it would stoop or dare or bear to greet me or even speak to me. So you can know well that much ill will come to you as you have done to me, and you would have to give the city of Logres and half of the realm of King Arthur to not have this.”

And when Gawain heard the damsel he felt great shame and he turned his horse’s head toward her and he said with heavy heart the words that you will hear:

“Lady,” said Gawain, “God help me, I was thinking on a thing that I am questing for, and I ask for your mercy so that you will pardon me.”

“God help me,” said the damsel, “you will first pay dearly for this, and you will be very ashamed and ugly for it, so that the next time you will remember to greet young ladies when you see them, but I tell you that this will not endure the rest of your days. But you will find that no one in the kingdom of Logres can tell you about what you are looking for. Instead in Little Brittany you will hear something about it. Now I will go about my affairs, and you will seek out that thing you wish to find. And may you look as you did the first time when you see me again.”

Then Gawain left the damsel, and he had not ridden more than a Welsh league when he met the dwarf knight and the damsel, who had left Yvain the night before and sent four knights to be prisoners of King Arthur. And this happened on the day of the Trinity at the hour of noon. And as soon as Gawain saw the damsel, he thought about the damsel he met before, and he stopped thinking about it and said to the damsel, God grant you joy to her and her companion, and the damsel and the dwarf responded that God grant him good adventure. Thus they passed by, Gawain on one side and they on the other, and as they had gone a little way passed, the dwarf knight recovered his beauty as he previously was, and his right age of 22 years, and he was once again grand and well-built in the shoulder, and he had to take off the armor he was wearing, because it was no longer of use to him.

When the damsel saw her friend restored to his beauty, she had joy greater than anyone could say. So she reached up and put her arms around his neck and kissed him more than one hundred times without stopping, and then they went away, rejoicing and happy, one by the other, in great joy. So they thanked Our Lord for the honor that He had given them and wished joy and good adventure to Gawain who had said that God grant them joy, and so He had. Then they went on their way. But by right the story falls silent about these two and speaks of Gawain.

When Gawain had left the dwarf knight and the damsel, he rode through three good arrow shots before he began to feel that the sleeves of his hauberk hung over his hands and that the bottom of his hauberk hung past his two feet, for his legs had grown so short that they did not stretch below the fenders of his saddle, and he looked up and saw that
his mail leggings had fallen over the top of his stirrups, and his shield hung close to the ground. He could well see that he was now a dwarf. So he said to himself that this was what the damsel had promised. So he was so angry that he almost killed himself. So he rode so full of grief and agony until he reached the edge of the forest. And there he found a cross and a block where he dismounted, and then he began to shorten his stirrups, his mail leggings, and the belt of his sword, and the straps of his shield, and the sleeves of his hauberk. And he attached straps to his shoulders and dressed the best that he could. Then filled with anger and with sorrow, he would have preferred to die rather than live.

Then he mounted his horse and went back on his way, and he cursed the day and hour that he started out on the quest, for he had been ashamed and dishonored by it. And he went on in this manner and did not pass by castle or lodge, woods or plains without seeking news of Merlin from everyone and all that he encountered. Thus he encountered those men and women who said such mocking and loathsome things to him, but he did many feats of prowess, because even though he was a dwarf, he had not lost his power to do such, nor his heart or his strength. Instead, he was hardy and enterprising and conquered many knights.

And after he had searched up and down through the realm of Logres, he knew that he would find nothing there, so it is known that he crossed the ocean and went into Little Brittany, and he searched near and far, but he was not able to find Merlin. And he rode until he approached the time when he had to return. And he said to himself, “Alas, what will I do? The time has come when I must return, when I swore an oath to my lord my uncle that I would return. And I must return because otherwise I would be a liar. No, I will not, because the oath assumes I can act on my own, but I cannot act of my own will, because I am ugly and disfigured and have no power over myself. And that is why I cannot be bound to go to court. By faith, now I have misspoken. Under no circumstances, whatever shape I have, I would not perjure myself, and because I am not locked in a prison, thus not being able to go where I want, I would only perjure myself if I didn’t go to court. And for that I must go to court to not prove me faithless. And so I pray to God to grant me faithless, because the body is treated shamelessly in this age.”

[Gawain rides through the forest of Broceliande and hears Merlin’s voice. Merlin tells Gawain of his imprisonment and how no one from Arthur’s court will ever see or hear from Merlin again. Merlin does tell Gawain that:]

“You will find the lady who did this to you in the forest where you met her previously, but do not forget to greet her, for that would be a foolish thing to do.”

“Sir,” said Gawain, “I will not, if it pleases God.”

“Then farewell and go with God,” said Merlin, “who guards King Arthur and the realm of Logres and you and all the barons who are the best men in the world.”

[And Gawain rides with much to think about until he comes to the forest again.]

And when he went into the forest where he had found the damsel that he had passed without greeting her, he thought of Merlin and what he had said to not forget to greet her when he met her. And he was so full of great doubt and dread that he might pass her without greeting her that he took his helm off his head to see better. He began to look in front and behind and at all sides, everywhere, until he came to the same spot where he had encountered the lady and passed her without greeting her. Then he looked up between two areas of trees where the forest was thick and deep and he saw two knights who were still armed but for their shields and helms which they had taken off, and their horses tied to their lances. And they were holding a lady in between, and they seemed as if they were forcing her. They did not desire it, but the damsel was making them do it to try Gawain’s will and heart, and she thrashed about as if they were trying to rape her in truth.
And when Gawain saw the two knights holding the damsel, one by the hands and the other by the legs as if they were going to lie with her by force, he shook with anger. And with his lance in his hand, he spurred his horse to where they were. And he said to the knights that they were as if already dead because they were forcing a lady in the land of King Arthur. Because you know well that ladies are guaranteed their safety.

And the damsel saw him and cried, “Gawain, now I will see if you are honorable enough to save me from this shame.”

“Lady,” Gawain said, “God help me that you will not be dishonored if I am there to defend you. I will die if I do not save you.”

And when the knights heard him it came to them as a great disdain and they sprung to their feet and tied on their helms, because they were already afraid of him. And even though the damsel had reassured them that he would not harm them, and she had enchanted them by the arts so that no one would be harmed by anyone at that time, so they felt better. And when they had laced their helms and hung their shields about their necks, they said to Gawain, “God help me, you crazy dwarf, you appear already dead. And it is a shame to us to attack an ugly thing like yourself.”

And when Gawain heard that they were calling him dwarf and ugly thing, he had great grief in his heart. Then he said to them, “Ugly thing that I am, I have come here at a bad time for you, so mount your horses, for it seems to me like villainy to attack you on horseback while you are on foot.”

[Gawain and the knights fight, and both fall to the ground until the damsel cries at Gawain to stop hurting her two supposed attackers.]

“Lady,” he said, “is that what you wish?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Then I will agree to stop at once for your love, and God grant you good adventure, to you and all the ladies of the world. You may know that if not for your plea, I would have killed him, or he would have killed me, because they shamed and wronged you, and they dishonored me when they called me an ill-made dwarf. And they also spoke the truth, for I am the most loathsome thing in the world, and it is in this forest that it happened to me six months ago.”

And the damsel and the knights began to laugh. “So then,” said the damsel, “what would you give to the one who could cure you of this?”

“Certainly, lady,” he said, “if I could be saved from this, I would give myself first and then as much wealth as I could gather in the whole world.”

“You will not have to give me so much,” said the damsel, “but swear me an oath such as I tell you.”

“Lady,” he said, “I will do whatever you wish. Just tell me what to do and I am ready to do it.”

“You will swear to me on the oath you gave King Arthur, your uncle, that you will never fail to help any lady or damsel and that you will never meet a lady without greeting her, if you can, before she greets you.”

“Lady,” he said, “I swear this to you as faithful knight.”

“And I accept this oath,” she said, “but in the same manner if you break it you will be as you are now.”

“Lady,” he said, “I agree, but only if the lady’s quarrel that she asks me to help in is just, for I will have nothing to do with disloyalty, even for life or death.”

“I grant this to you,” said the lady. And all at once the straps that he had tied on his mail leggings broke because his legs were growing out again, and soon he was back to his likeness. And when he found himself returned to his previous state, he got to the ground and knelt before the lady and said that he would be her own knight for all her days. And the damsel thanked him and took him by the hand and it was the same lady who had sent him this mischance.

[Gawain returns to Arthur’s court and tells the story of what he found, and as he’s
As they celebrated, Evadeam came into the hall. He was twenty-two years old and so beautiful and fair that no man in two kingdoms was more beautiful. And he had the damsel by the hand and they came before the king and greeted him most courteously.

And the king greeted them, and the knight said, “Sire, you do not know who I am, and it is no marvel, because when you saw me only once before, and then I was wearing clothing that no one would have seen me in before, and no one would recognize me now who hadn’t seen me as a child.”

“Certainly, good friend,” said King Arthur, “I don’t remember having seen you before, but you are a most handsome knight.”

“Sire,” said Evadeam, “do you remember that a damsel brought you a dwarf for you to dub a knight?”

“Yes,” said the king, “I do remember, for he had sent me five knights as prisoners whom he had conquered with his prowess.”

“Sire,” said Evadeam, “I am the dwarf whom you dubbed, and this is the lady who requested that you do it.”

[Evadeam recounts his story to King Arthur, finishing with] “Because then I was a dwarf, ugly and hideous. For I well believe that his words and his prayers helped me so that God freed me from my shame, and for this, I thank the Lord.”

And then the king asked who he was and of what family, and he told the story as I have told it to you before. And when the king and Gawain and the others heard about what happened they had much gladness and joy. And the king named him a companion with the others of the round table and the damsel stayed with the queen willingly and with much joy.

Here ends the story of Evadeam, no longer the dwarf knight.
Endnotes


5 In Old French, naín or neim simply glosses as “dwarf.” The Anglo-Norman dictionary links neim to neimcel/neincel, a pejorative that means “little dwarf, insignificant wretch.” The FEW gives the etymology of neim as related to Latin nanus, meaning simply “one who is of a size smaller than normal” or “of a size very inferior to the average.”

6 The word in Old French is “cose” or “chose,” which the Anglo-Norman Dictionary defines as “thing (generalized term applied to all manner of objects, matters, items, business, property, goods etc.).” The second definition is “(living) thing, person,” but one should note that “thing” is the more common usage. Based on Guinevere’s revulsion of Evadeam and how the text treats him, I would say a gloss of “thing” is more apropos.
Introduction

King Sigurðr Magnusson (1090–1130) ruled Norway from 1103, first jointly with his brothers but from 1123 on his own. Originally a popular and respected ruler, the medieval sources agree that the later years of his reign were clouded by his erratic behavior, such as foul moods, fits of anger, and inconsistency in behavior. As shown in the text below, often the episode will begin with the king becoming fámaligr ok ókátr (taciturn and gloomy). The text also mentions the anxiety of the courtiers, finding themselves impotent in the face of the king’s condition. The subtext of many of the narratives is that the king’s ailment was only the first calamity to befall Norway in the late twelfth century, followed by decades of civil wars and strife.

There is a reluctance in this narrative to refer to the king’s illness in specific terms, possibly because nobody is quite sure how to characterize it, thus often it is only called konungs mein (the disorder of the king), as in Ch. 74 below. The sole person to refer to the king as “mad” is indeed King Sigurðr himself (in Ch. 79) when he says: Illa eru þér at staddir, Nóregsmenn, at hafa œran konung yfir yðr (Yours is a bad situation, men of Norway, to have a mad king). As he is the king, he is the only one allowed to mention the unmentionable, but this adds poignancy to the narrative.

The longest depiction of King Sigurðr’s mental illness can be found in Morkinskinna, composed c. 1220. For a while regarded as an unoriginal and uncritical compendium, Morkinskinna is now regarded as an important kings’ saga that influenced later works such as Heimskringla. The text, in addition to containing the longest version of the king’s illness, also includes a short anecdote about Ivar Ingimundarson, a court poet who is cured of his melancholy by King Eysteinn, King Sigurðr’s brother, who uses conversation as therapy with great success. King Eysteinn is also called in once to his brother when a dream has caused him melancholy. Sadly, he is dead when King Sigurðr’s illness intensifies and is thus powerless to prevent it. So are the king’s retainers whose anxiety when faced with an erratic king is well portrayed in Morkinskinna. Collectively, the saga’s tales of a mentally ill king essentially concern human vulnerability and fragility as this popular and good king now causes pain and suffering around him.

Bibliography

Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157). Translated by Theodore M. Andersson
Þat er sagt at hvítsunnudag sat Sigurðr konungr í hásæti sínu með vinum sínum ok miklu fjölmenni, ok þá sá menn at konungr var með miklu vanmegni ok þungu bragði. Váru þá margir hræddir um hversu af myndi reiða. Konungr leit yfir lýðinn ok arðgaði auðgunum ok sá umhverfis sík um pallana. Þá mælt konungr ok tök bókin þá ína dýru er hann hafði haft í land ok òll var gullstǫfum ritin, ok eigi hafði meiri gerð særðum í land í einni bók. Dróttingin sat hjá honum. Þá mælt konungr: „Márt kann skipask á manns ávinni. Ek átta tvá hluti þá er mér þóttu bættir er ek kom í land. Þat var bók sjá hérna ok dróttingin, er nú þýkkir mér hvárr öðrum verri, ok þat á ek svá í eigunní er mér þýkkir verst allra hluta. Drótting finnr eigi hvernug hon er, því at svá sýndisk sem gota horn stœði ór höfði henni, ok því betri sem mér þótti drótting,“ sagði konungr, „því óllu verri þýkkir mér hon nú.“ Þá bastaði konungr bókinni fram á eldinn er gǫrr var, en laust dróttinginun kinnhest. Hon greit konungs mein meirr en sinn harm. Sá maðr stóð fyri konungrum en hét Óttarr birtingr, búandason ok kertisveinni, ok skyldi þá þjóna, svart á harslit, litill ok vaskligr ok kurtess, døkklaðr ok þó vel um sik. Því var hann kallaðr birtingr at hann var døkkr ok svart. Hann hleypr til ok tekr bókina er konungr hafði haft í land ok hét Ottarr birtingr, búaandason ok kertisveinni, ok skyldi þá þjóna, svart á harslit, litill ok vaskligr ok kurtess, døkklaðr ok þó vel um sik. Því var hann kallaðr birtingr at hann var døkkr ok svart. Hann hleypr til ok tekr bókina er konungr hafði haft í land ok hét Ottarr birtingr, búaandason ok kertisveinni, ok skyldi þá þjóna, svart á harslit, litill ok vaskligr ok kurtess, døkklaðr ok þó vel um sik. Því var hann kallaðr birtingr at hann var døkkr ok svart. Hann hleypr til ok tekr bókina er konungr hafði haft í land ok hét Ottarr birtingr, búaandason ok kertisveinni, ok skyldi þá þjóna, svart á harslit, litill ok vaskligr ok kurtess, døkklaðr ok þó vel um sik. Því var hann kallaðr birtingr at hann var døkkr ok svart. Hann hleypr til ok tekr bókina er konungr hafði haft í land ok hét Ottarr birtingr, búaandason ok kertisveinni, ok skyldi þá þjóna, svart á harslit, litill ok vaskligr ok kurtess, døkklaðr ok þó vel um sik. Því var hann kallaðr birtingr at hann var døkkr ok svart.
øngan veg við, en konungr brá flǫtu sverðinu er ofan kom at hǫfðinu. En fyrst reiddi hann báðum hǫndum, en slettir nú flǫtu á síðu honum. Þá þagnaði konungr ok settisk niðr í sætit, ok þóguðu ok allir aðrir. Þá leizk konungur um, hógligar en it fyrra sinn, ok mælti síðan: „Seint má reyna mennina, hvílíkir eru. Hér sátu inir œztu vinir mínir, lendir menn ok stállarar, skutilsveinar ok allir inir beztu menn í landinu, ok varð òngum manni jafn vel til mín sem þessum er yðr mun þykka litils verðr hjá yðr. Hann unni mér nú mest, ok var þar Óttarr birtingr, af því at ek kom hér ðerr inn, ok vildak spilla gørsimi minni. Hann bætti með þat annarri hendi, en hraeddisk eigi banann. Taldí síðan fagrt ørendi, stillti svá ordunum at mér yrði at virðing, en eigi talði hann þá hlutina er mism harmr aukaðisk við. Pat felldi hann allt niðr er þó mätti at sönnu reða, en svá var þó skoruligt hans mál at engi maðr var svá vítr hjá at snjál-lara myndi mæla mega. En síðan hljóp ek upp ór víti, ok lékt sem ek mynda höggva hann, en hann var svá mikill fullhugi sem engi ötti væri um at vera. En þá er ek sá þat lékt ek þetta verk fyrir farask, svá ómákligl sem hann var. Nú skulu þér, vinir mínir, víta hverju ek mun launa honum. Hann er áðr kertisveinn; nú skal hann vera lendr maðr minn, ok nun þat þó fylgia er meira er, at hann mun merkilagis-tr maðr vera af stundu lendra manna minna. Gakk nú í sæti hjá lendum mǫnnum ok þjóna eigi lengr.” Hann gerðisk síðan virðiligr maðr af morgum göðum hlutum ok dyrligum.

are you to advise me, a lowly cottager’s son of no lineage? He jumped up and drew his sword, as if he were about to cut him down. Óttarr stood erect and did not so much as wince. The king grasped his sword with both hands but turned it flat as it came down toward Óttarr’s head, then let it veer off to the side. Then the king was silent, and took his seat. Everyone else was silent, too. But the king looked more amenable than before and said: ‘It takes a long time to test the true nature of men. Here sat my most distinguished friends, district chieftains, marshals, court officials, and all the best men in the land. But none was so well disposed toward me as this man, who will seem of little account to you. It was Óttarr birtingr who was most devoted to me, for I entered in a rage and wished to ruin my greatest treasure. He saved me from that with one hand and did not fear death. Then he made a fair speech, and he couched his words so as to honor me, without touching on matters that would depress my spirits. He omitted those things that could indeed have been mentioned. But his words were so well chosen that no man present was so wise that he could have spoken better. Then I leapt up in anger as if I were about to strike him down, but he showed such courage as to suggest that there was no danger. When I saw that, I averted the deed, which he did not deserve. And now my friends should be informed of the reward that I will give him. Before he was my chamberlain, but now he will be a district chieftain. What is more important is that from now on he will be the most distinguished of my district chieftains. Now go and sit among the district chieftains and cease to be in my service.’ Óttarr subsequently became an honorable man and outstanding in many ways.

75. King Sigurðr Jórsalafari established his residence and capital in Konungahella. It prospered so greatly as a trade center that none was richer in Norway. The king had a fortress built there of stone and turf with a
þeim [kastala] var konungs garðr, ok þar var krossins kirka, ok þar lét Sigurðr konungr vera krossinn helga, ok fyrir altarinu var tabulum, gört af gulli ok silfri, er hann hafði haft í land. Svá bar at eitt sinn at Sigurðr konungr fyrir land fram með lóði sínu. Ok er þeir lágu í einhverri höfn fóru menn á sund af konungsskipinu. Jóan hét sá er bezt var syndr, ok hæðdu margir hans förlötk. Konungr la í lyptingu ok var heldr skapþungt. Þeir menn váru hjónum er annarr hét Erlendr gápamunnr, en annarr var Einarr Skálason. Ok er þá varir minnst fleygir konungrinn út á sundit ok leggsk at honum Jóani ok færir hann niðr. Ok er hann kömr upp færir konungr hann niðr göru sinni, ok eru þeir þá miklu lengr niðr. Pá kömð konungr upp, ok it þröðja sinn færir konungr hann niðr. Ok nú sjá þeir á konungsskipinu ok reðdu með sér at nú horfðið til ofær. Einarr mælti: ‘Þat væri nú drengiligt at hjálpa manninum ok firra konungr óhappi.’ Erlendr svarar: ‘Þat er vant við konunginn, en at visu liggj líf mannsins við.’ Erlendr var mánna mestr ok sterkast; hlevyr af skipinu ok á sundit at konungnum ok þrífr til hans ok keyrir hann niðr ok lét hann upp ok keyrir hann niðr annat sinn ok it þröðja sinn ok lét hann upp er hann hafði lengi niðr verit, ok fóru til lands. Menn fluttu Jóan til lands, ok var hann kominn at bana, ok var þærð lengi, ok sáru menn yfir honum unz hann raknaði [við].

SÁ MÁÐR VAR ÞÁ KOMINN TIL SÍGURÐAR KO-NUNGS ER HÉT HARALDR GILLIKRIST OK SAGDÍSK VERA SON MAGNÚSS KONUNGS BERFÆTTIS. HALLKELL HÚKR HAFÐI FARIT VESTR UM HAF OK ALL TIL SUÐREYJA, OK ÞAR KOM SJÁ MÁÐR Á FUND HANS, OK MÓÐIR HANS FYLGJI HRONUM. HARALDR VAR ÞÁ Í FÖR MEÐ SÍGURÐI KONUNGI OK EKKI MEÐ MIKLUM SÓMA. HANN BAÐ ERLENDR FÖRÐA SÉR, [SAGDÍ AT KONUNGR] HAFÐI REÍÐÍ Á HRONUM. HANN

great moat around it. In that fortress was the king's residence and the Church of the Cross as well, where King Sigurðr placed the holy cross. Before the altar was an altarpiece of gold and silver that he had brought to Norway. It happened once when King Sigurðr was sailing along the coast with his crew and was anchored in a certain harbor that men went swimming from the king's ship. The best swimmer was a man named Jón, and many praised his skill. The king was lying on deck and was not in a good mood. There were two men with him, Erlendr gápmunnr (Gaping-Mouth) and Einarr Skálason. When they were least expecting it, the king plunged into the water. He made for Jón and ducked him. When he came to the surface again, the king ducked him a second time, and they were under water for much longer than the first time. Then the king surfaced and ducked him a third time. They saw this from the king's ship and said that things were taking a dangerous turn. Einarr said: 'It would be a brave deed to help that man and save the king from a misfortune.' Erlendr said: 'It is hard to contend with the king, but it is true that the man's life is at stake.' Erlendr was a very big and powerful man. He dove off the ship, swam to the king, grabbed him, and plunged him down, then let him up. He plunged him down a second and a third time, letting him up only when he had been down for a long time. Then they swam to shore. People got Jón to shore as well, and he was close to death. He was thumped [on the back] for a long time, and people sat by him until he came to his senses.

A MAN HAD COME TO KING SIGURÐR WHOSE NAME WAS HARALDR GILLICRIST. HE CLAIMED TO BE THE SON OF MAGNÚS BERFÆTTIR (BAREFOOT). HALLKELL HÚKR (HOOK) HAD SAILED WEST ALL THE WAY TO THE HEBRIDES, AND THAT MAN HAD JOINED HIM THERE WITH HIS MOTHER. HARALDR WAS THEN IN KING SIGURÐR’S RETINUE BUT NOT HELD IN MUCH ESTEEM. HE TOLD ERLENDR TO FLEE, SAYING THAT HE WAS AN OBJECT OF THE KING’S WRATH. HE
said that he would not flee but would spend
the nights on shore. There was a man of small
lineage on board, closer to Haraldr than any-
one. His name was Loðinn, but he was quite a
vain man. He often said cutting things about
Haraldr. He said it was unclear who he was
and was always nagging at his page. Now it
happened this same evening that Haraldr
told the boy to share Loðinn’s sleeping bag
at night. But when Loðinn realized what had
happened, he said that he would not endure
pages occupying his space, and he asked who
had told him to make his bed with men of
note. He said that he was doing what Haraldr
told him. Loðinn chased him out of
his sleeping bag. The page went to inform
Haraldr. He was angered and rushed out on
the ship, not caring whether he trampled
Loðinn’s property or not. Loðinn said that
he was often in the habit of dishonoring him.
Haraldr said that he got less dishonor than he
deserved and struck a blow on his shoulder
and chest. It was a flesh wound and people
ran to separate them. Haraldr spent the night
on shore. In the morning the king threw off
his covers and asked where Erlendr gapamu-
nnr (Gaping-Mouth) was. Einarr Skúlason
replied: ‘We don’t know exactly, but how
good is the treatment he can expect from
you?’ ‘I make no promises about that,’ said
the king. Then Einarr recited a stanza:

Erlendr has fled the king’s good grace:
leader of men, you must not fault “gapamun-
nr” for that. Necessity must have forced the
fair tender of the chant of the kings of the
heath’s slope [giants, gold, generous man]; I
shall tell people about that.

The king said: ‘Bring him here.’ This was
done, and when he arrived, the king said:
‘How do you feel about your contest with
your king yesterday?’ ‘Sire,’ he said, ‘it was
very much in accord with your actions.’ ‘That
is true,’ said the king, ‘and I approve it. You
showed both affection for me and courage. I
make you a gift of a sword and cloak and will
always esteem you even more highly than be-
fore. But what was the racket that I heard on
our ship last night?’ He was told. Then he said:
“Kalli Harald hingat ok svá Loðin,”—ok spurði hann ef þeir vildi leggja á hans vald, ok þeir játtu því. Pá mælt konungr: „Tess vettir mik at þit verðið ekki jarðnæmani, en þó vil ek gora söma til handa Loðni, fyr því at hann hefðir með mér verit. En hitt væri makligra at hann væri rættlaus ok dirfðisk eigi optarr slíkt at meða við dagandi menn, því at berask má svá að að vér virðið þenna mann meira en eintiðinn mann fyr sér.” Loðinn varð svá búti at hafa. en konungr skipar Haraldar í sina sveit með skutsilveinum sinum.

84.

Svá bar at eitt sinn at Sigurðr konungr sat með mórgum mónnum gofigum í stirðum hug. Var þat frjákveld eitt at dróttsetinn spurði hvat til matar skyldi búa. Konungr svaraði: „Hvat nema slár?” Svá var mikil ógnt at honum at engi þorði í mótt a mat. Váru nú allir oækätir, ok bjöggusk menn til bordanna. Kómu inn sendingar ok heitt slátr á, ok váru allir menn hljóðir ok hǫrmuðu ko-konungs mein. En áðr matrinn væri signdr þá þók sá maðr til orða er hét Áslákr hani, hafði verit út með konungi. Ekki va hann áttstórr maðr, hvart ok lítil vexti. Ok er hann só at engi maðr myndi í móti mæla konunginum þá mælti hann: „Herra, hvat rykr á diskinum fyrir þér?” Konungr svaraði: „Hvat vildir þú, Áslákr hani, eða hvað sýnisk þér?” „Pat sýnisk mér, sem ek vildið eigi at væri, at slárir sér” konungr mælti: „En þótt svá só, Áslákr hani?” „Hörmuligt er slíkt at víta,” segir Áslákr, „er svá mjök skal missýnask þeim konungi er svá mikinn söma hefðir fengi af verðlindinni af ferð sinni, ok þóru hétu þa er þú stétt upp ór Jordán ok hafðir laugazk í því vatni sem Guð sjálfr, hafðir pálmi í hendi en kross á bringu, at þú myndir slátr eta frjádagaðinn. Ok ef smæri menn gerði slíkt væri stórrefnings fyri vert, ok eigi er svá vel skipuð sveitin sem gliktlegt er, er engi verðið til nema ek, eintil lítil maðr, um slíkt at ræða.” Konungr þagnaði ok tók eigi til, ok er á leid matmálaî lét hann braut bera slátrdiskana. Kom þá fram só maðr

77.

It happened once that King Sigurðr was sitting with many distinguished men in a gloomy frame of mind. One Friday evening the steward asked what food should be prepared. The king replied: ‘Why not meat?’ People were so afraid of him that no one dared to contradict him, but everyone was downcast. The tables were set up, and the platters came in with cooked meat. Everyone was taciturn and grieved because of the king’s disorder. But before the food was blessed, a man named Áslákr hani (Rooster) spoke up. He had been abroad with the king. He was not a man of great lineage, small in stature, but bold. When he saw that no one else would contradict the king, he decided to speak up: ‘Sire, what is steaming on the platters before you?’ The king answered: ‘What would you like it to be, Áslákr hani, and what does it look like?’ ‘It looks to me as though I would like it not to be meat.’ The king said: ‘And if it is, Áslákr hani?’ ‘It is grievous to think,’ said Áslákr, ‘that a king who has earned such great honor in the world because of his expedition should have such poor judgment. This is not what you vowed when you came out of the waters of Jordan after bathing in the same water as God Himself. You had a palm sprig in your hand and a cross on your breast, and you did not undertake to eat meat on Friday. If lesser men did this, severe penalties would be in order. Your retinue is not as well manned as it should be if there is no
er honum hefði vel, ok tók konungr heldr at kætask er á leð matmálit, ok drakk.


85.

Svá barsk at eitt jólakveld at Sigurðr konungr sat í hölünsti ok borð váru fram sett. Pá málti konungr: „Fái mér slátr.” Peir svörðu: „Eigi er þat síðr, herra, í Nóregi at eta slátr jólakveld.” Konungr svaraði: „Þann síð vil ek hafa.” Peir kömu inn ok höfðu hnisu í send. Konungr stangaði í knífinum ok tók eigi til. Pá málti konungr: „Fái mér konu.” Peir kömu inn í höllina ok höfðu konu með sér. Sú hafði sitt faldit. Konungr tók hendinni til höfuðsins ok leit á ok málti: „Ósellið kona eru ok ekki svá at eigi megi söma við slíkt.” Síðan leit hann á hóndina ok málti: „Ofægr hónd ok illa vaxin, en þo verðr söma við slíkt.” Pá þáð hann hana rétt frám fótrinn, ok hann leit á ok málti: „Ferligr fótr ok mikill one other than an insignificant man like me to make this point.’ The king was silent but did not serve himself, and when some time had passed, he had the meat platters removed and appropriate food brought in. As the meal progressed, the king began to recover his spirits and to drink. People advised Áslákr to make good his escape, but he said he would not: ‘I do not know how that would help. The fact is that it is a good time to die when I have succeeded in what I wished to do, that is, to save the king from a crime. He has it in his discretion to kill me.’ In the evening the king summoned him and asked: ‘Who incited you, Áslákr, to speak so openly to me in public? ’Sire,’ he said, ‘none other than myself.’ The king said: ‘You probably wish to know what you will get in return for your boldness and what it is that you think you have earned.’ He answered: ‘If you wish to reward me, sire, I will be happy, but if it turns out otherwise, it is up to you.’ The king said: ‘You will receive less of a reward than you deserve. I will give you three farms, though that may seem an unlikely outcome, because you saved me from a great misfortune, a task that should have fallen to my district chieftains, who have much to thank me for.’ The episode concluded with the king’s arriving at the very best resolution.

78.

It happened one evening during Christmas that King Sigurðr was sitting in the hall, where the tables were set up. The king said: ‘Bring me meat.’ They answered: ‘It is not customary in Norway, sire, to eat meat at Christmas.’ The king said: ‘That is the custom I desire.’ They came in with porpoise on the platters. The king stuck his knife in but did not eat. Then the king said: ‘Bring me a woman.’ They brought a woman into the hall. She had her face covered. The king put a hand to her head and said: ‘You are an unlikely woman, but not beyond endurance.’ Then he looked at her hand and said: ‘Not a handsome hand and missshapen, but not intolerable.’ Then he told her to stretch out
mjǫk, en ekki má þó gaum at því gefa; sœma verði við slíkt.” Þá bað hann þá leggja upp kyrtliminn, ok sá hann þá legginn ok mælti: „Veit verði þínnum legg er þæði er blár ok digr, ok munnu vera trúta ein,”—ok mælti at þeir myndi hafa hana útr,—„ok ekki vil ek hafa hana.” Ófarla evi Sigurðar konungs varð sá atburðr at hann var á veizlu at búi sínu. Ok einn morgun er hann var klæddr var hann fámálugr ok ókátr, ok hræddusk vinir hans at þá myndi enn koma at honum vanstilli. En ármaðrinn var vitr ok djarfr. Hann krafði konung máls ok spurði ef hann hefði nókkut tíðenda frétt er svá mikil veri at honum steði fyr gleði, eða hvart honum hugnædi eigi veizlan, eða nokkrvarit hlutir veri þeir er menn mætti beðr á råða. Konungr sagði ekki þat vera er hann roedi um;—„þat heldr til at ek hugsa draum þann er fyrir mik bar í nótt.” „Herra,” segir ármaðrinn, „göðr draumr skylldi þat vera, en heyra vildin vör gjarna.” Konungr svarar: „Ek þóttumk staddr hér á Jáðri ok þóttumk sjá út í haf sorta mikinn, ok var fóru í sortanum. Ok er nálgaðisk hingat sýndisk mér sem væri tré mikit, ok óðu limarr uppi en rœtrnar í sænum. En er tréit kom at landinu þá braut þat við landit, ok rak þat viða um strandir. þat þóttumk ek sjá um allan Nóreg it ýtra með se, ok sá ek at í hverja vík var rekit af trénu brot, ok váru sum stór en sum smá.” Þá svaraði ármaðrinn: „Herra, þat er glikhægast um þenna draum at þér munuð best skipa, ok vildin vör gjarna heyra at þér reðið.” Konungr svarar: „Þat þykki mér líkli- 

gast um draum þenna at vera mun fyr kvam- manns nakkvars í landit, ok mun þann hér staðfestask, ok hans afkvæmi mun víða dreif- fask um land þetta ok vera mjǫk misstórt.”

En litlu síðarr urðu þau tíðendi at Hallkell húkr kom í land ok hafði með sér Harald gil- la ok móður hans, sem fyrir var sagt, ok har Haraldr fram sitt orðni fyr konung. En Sigurðr konungr roætti þetta við hoflingja, en menn logðu til þessa máls [misfjærir] mjǫk ok hverr eptir sínu skaplyndi, en þádu konung fyrir råða. En fleiri risu í mótu, ok reð konun- gr meitr með sínu ein[æði en vilja] liðsins. Þá lét Sigurðr konungr kalla Harald til sin ok her foot. He looked at it and said: ‘A big and monstrous foot, but let it pass.’ Then he told her to lift her tunic, and he looked at her legs. ‘What legs! They are both thick and black. You must be some kind of a whore.’ He said that he wanted nothing to do with her and told them to take her out. Toward the end of King Sigurðr’s life it happened that he was at a feast in his residence. One morning when he had risen and was dressed, he was so taciturn and gloomy that his friends were fearful that he would have another episode. But the estate steward was wise and resourceful. He addressed the king and asked whether he had learned something that was so serious that it had spoiled his mood, or whether he was dissatisfied with the feast, or whether there was something that could be remedied. The king said that it was none of these things—but rather that I am musing on a dream I had last night. ‘Sire,’ said the steward, ‘perhaps it was a good dream, and we would like to hear it.’ The king said: ‘I dreamt I was here in Jáðarr and saw a great, rapidly moving black cloud out at sea. As it approached, it looked like an enormous tree with limbs above and roots in the sea. When it reached the coast, it was stranded and strewn about the shore. Then I seemed to see all of coastal Norway, and in each bay a piece of the tree had washed up. Some pieces were large, others small.’ The steward answered: ‘Sire, it is likely that you will have the best understanding of this dream, and we would like to have you interpret it.’ The king said: ‘The likeliest interpretation seems to be that the dream signifies the arrival of a man in Norway who will settle here, and his progeny will be spread widely but will be of greater or lesser importance.’ A little later it was learned that Hallkell húkr had come to Norway bringing Haraldr gilli and his mother with him, as has already been alluded to. Haraldr told his story to the king, and King Sigurðr discussed it with his chief- tains. Opinions varied greatly, each chieftain speaking for himself, but they deferred to the king. Several were opposed, but the king decided more according to his own lights than

86.

[Þat var vanði at Haraldr fylgði Sigurði konungi til svefns á kveldum. Ók eitt sinn] gáru þeir hann eptir dvalit, ok sátu þeir [lengi ok druku]. Magnúsi hafði sendr verit hestr einn gauzkur, gersimi mikil ok skjótr ágetliga. Reedu [þeir um er við váru at engi myndi hestr vera jafn skjótr, ok] víku til Haralds málinu ok spordu ef hann vissi nokkvarn jafn skjótan hest. [Haraldr svaraði, kvad ekki svá] einna ágett at eigi mætti verða annat slíkt. Þeir kvádu hann aldregi mundu sét hafa jafn göðan hest. Hann svaraði, kvadk marga göða sét hafa ok skjóta. Þeir spordu: „Hefir þú sét skjótrari hesting?” Hann kvadk eigi svá hafa at kveðit. „Svá sagðir þú, ok svá skaltu mælt hafa,” sogðu þeir. Hann svaraði: „Með miklum ákaða takid ér þetta. Nú má vera at ek hafa in conforming with the views of his retainers. Then King Sigurðr had Haraldr summoned to him and told him that he would not oppose an ordeal to prove his paternity, with the stipulation that he commit himself to an oath that, should his paternity be confirmed, he would not lay claim to the throne as long as King Sigurðr and King Magnús lived. That agreement was made. Haraldr then prepared for the ordeal, and people say that this was the greatest such ordeal in Norway. Seven glowing plowshares were laid out and Haraldr walked over them with bare feet and led by two bishops. As he did so, he called on Saint Columba. His bed was made by the plowshares. Then King Sigurðr’s son Magnús said: ‘He does not tread the plowshares bravely.’ The king replied: ‘That is cruel and unseemly talk, because he has borne the test well.’ Then Haraldr collapsed on his bed, and after three days the test was made. His feet were found to be clear of burns. After that King Sigurðr accepted his kinship, but his son Magnús took a great dislike to Haraldr, and many chieftains followed his example. Haraldr was not fluent in Norse and he stumb-led over many words, so that many people ridiculed him. But King Sigurðr would allow no hint of that when he was present.

79.

It was Haraldr’s custom to escort King Sigurðr to bed in the evening. One time they were able to detain him, and they sat for a long time drinking. Magnús had been sent a horse from Gautland, a great treasure and very swift. Those who were present surmised that no horse would be as swift, and they sought Haraldr’s opinion, asking if he knew of any horse as swift. Haraldr answered, saying that nothing was so remarkable that it could not be matched. They doubted that he had ever seen such a good horse. He answered by saying that he had seen many good and swift horses. They asked: ‘Have you seen swifter horses?’ He replied that this was not what he had said. ‘That’s what you said, and we will hold you to it,’ they insisted. He re-
þær skjótari hesta at þönnu, ok svá sem þær
þreyttir þetta þá hefi ek sét menn eigi seinni.
Þeir svǫruðu: "Er eigi þat at þú munir vera
eigi seinni en hestrinna?" Hann svaraði: 
"Eigi segi ek þat." Þá mælti Magnús konungur: 
"Pat sagðir þu, ok nú skulu vit reyna ok veðja um,
ok legg ek við gullhring en þu annan í móti.
Hann svaraði: "Eigi em ek ráðandi orðinn þess
þjársins í Nóregi at vert megir vera eins gull-
hrings." Þá mælti Magnús konungur: "Legg við
hǫfuð þitt." Hann svaraði: "Þat mun ek eigi
gera." "Þat skal þó vera," segir Magnús. Þeir
skilðu hjalit. Um morguninn var sagt Sigurðr
konungi. Hann mælti: "Þess var ván at þann
veg myndi fara. Fái mér veðféit í hǫnd. Illa
eru þær at staddir, Nóregsmenn, at hafa euran
konung yfir yðr. En svá segir mér hugr um at
þær mynduð rauðu gulli kaupa af stundu at
ek væra heldr konungr en þeir Haraldr ok
Magnús; annarr er grimmr en annarr óvitr."
Nú ganga þeir í skíðgarð nakkvarn, ok er
ætlat at þeir reyna. Haraldr var í
línbrókum næsfræktum ok lét knéit leika
laust í brókinni. Hann var í stuttri skyrtu
ok hafði mǫttul á herðum ok kefli í hendi.
Magnús var þá ok búinn. Sigurðr konungur
var hjá staddr sjálfr ok mikit fjǫlmenni. Ok
er þeir váru búnir keyrir Magnús konungr
hest sinn ór sporum ok á skeið, en Haraldr
var hóta mun skjótari ok fylgði fram leiðinni,
ok var slíkr munr. Koma at skeiðsendanum.
Þá mælti Sigurðr konungur: "Fullreynt er nú,
ok er Haraldr eigi seinni." Þá mælti Magnús
konungur: "Reyna skulu vit meirr." Taka annat
skieð, ok er Haraldr jafn sitt fram gagn-
þaknu. Koma af skeiðinu. Þá mælti Magnús
konungur: "Hvat heldr þú í gagnat várí?
Gef þík upp ef þu mátt eigi." Siðan bjøggusk þeir
at þrída skieði, ok sá þat allir menn at hlið
var á milli, ok Magnús hafði viðbragðit. En
Haraldr hjóp upp ok gali við ok á skieðit, ok
varla þottusk menn sjá at færtnir kvæmi við
jörðina, ok at skeiðsendanum ok út yfir skíð-
gardinn ok siðan inn á skieðit í móti Magnúsi
er hann var kominn at skeiðsendanum, ok
mælti: "Heill, Magnús frensdi," segir hann. Ok
skilðu nú at þessu, ok fekk Sigurðr konungr
Haraldi veðféit.
plied: ‘You are very keen on this, and it may
be that I have truly seen swifter horses. And
since you make so much of it, I have seen men
who are no slower.’ They responded: ‘Could
it be that you are no slower than the horse?’
‘That’s not what I’m saying,’ he replied. Then
King Magnús said: ‘That was your claim, and
we will make a test and lay a wager. I will
stake a gold ring, and you should stake an-
other.’ He replied: ‘I have not become so rich
in Norway that it amounts to a gold ring.’
Then King Magnús said: ‘Then bet your life
on it.’ ‘That I will not do,’ he said. ‘It will
come to the same thing,’ said Magnús, and
with that they concluded their exchange. In
the morning King Sigurðr was told. ‘It was
bound to turn out this way,’ he said. ‘Give
me the wagered money. You Norwegians are
in a sorry state with a mad king ruling you,
but I surmise that you would soon give pure
gold to have me as king rather than Haraldr
and Magnús. One is cruel and the other is a
fool.’ Now they entered an enclosure to make
the test. Haraldr was in stirrup trousers that
were baggy around the knees. He wore a short
shirt, with a cloak about his shoulders and a
stick in his hand. Magnús was also dressed for
the occasion. King Sigurðr himself was pre-
sent together with a great crowd. When they
were ready, King Magnús spurred his horse
forward and onto the track. But Haraldr was
just a bit quicker and kept up the pace. That
was the difference when they got to the end
of the course. Then King Sigurðr spoke: ‘That
is a valid test, and Haraldr was not slower.’
Then King Magnús said: ‘Let us make another
test.’ They ran a second race, and Haraldr was
ahead by a girth-strap at the end of the race.
King Magnús asked: ‘Are you holding onto
my girth-strap? Concede if you are not up
to the race.’ Then they readied themselves for
a third trial, and everyone could see that there
was a space between them and that Mag-
nús had jumped into the lead. But Haraldr
leapt onto the track with a shout, and you
could hardly see his feet touch the ground.
At the end of the course he ran out over the
enclosure, then turned back to meet Magnús
87.

Towards the end of King Sigurðr’s life his domestic situation changed, with the result that he wanted to abandon the queen and marry a woman named Cecilia, the daughter of a powerful man. He intended to celebrate the wedding in Bjǫrgvin and prepared a great and splendid feast. When Bishop Magni learned of this, he became downcast. One day the bishop went to the hall and together with him a priest named Sigurðr, who was later bishop in Bjǫrgvin. They came to the hall, and the bishop asked the king to come out. He did so, with a drawn sword. The king welcomed the bishop and invited him to drink. He said that he had other business: ‘Is it true, sire, that you intend to marry and abandon the queen?’ ‘That is true, bishop.’ The king began to swell with anger. The bishop said: ‘Why have you decided to do this in our bishopric, sire, and thus disgrace God’s law and Holy Church and our bishopric? Now I shall do what I am obligated to do and forbid you to commit this sin, in the name of God, Saint Peter the Apostle, and all the saints.’ While he said those words he stood erect with his neck extended as if he were prepared for the king to strike him with his sword. Sigurðr, who later became bishop, related that he seemed to see no more of the heavens than a piece of parchment because the king was so monstrous in his rage. Then the king entered the hall, while the bishop went home and was in such good spirits that he greeted every child laughingly and played with his fingers. Sigurðr said: ‘You are as cheerful, lord, as if it did not occur to you that the king might visit his anger on you, but it would be better to flee.’ Then the bishop said: ‘It seems to me unlikely that he will do that, but what death would be better than to die for God’s holy Christendom and forbid what cannot be sanctioned. I am of good cheer because I have
þat, sá er þar fyrir, hittir hann konung ok spyrð ef þat væri satt at hann vill kváŋask at lifandi drótning. Konungr svaraði: „Þat er satt.” Byskup mælti: „Ef svá er, herra, þá megud er sjá hvé mjók þat er bannat inum smerum mýnnum. Nú er eigi ok ólíkt at þér ætlid yðr heimilla, er meira hafð valdit, at látu yðr síla hluti söma, en þat er þó mjók í móti réttu, ok eigi veit ek hví þér vilduð þat gera í váru byskupriki at vanvirða svá Guðs boð ok helga kirkju ok várn byskupðóm. Nú munu þér vilja til leggja nokkur stóra hluti til þessa staðar í fjærhlutum ok bæta svá við Guð ok við oss.” Pá mælt konungr: „Tak þar fé upp. Furðu ólíkir urðu þér Magni byskup.”

Gekk konungr í brot ok líkaði eigi við hann betr en við þann er forboðit lagði á. Síðan fekk konungr þessar konu ok unni mikit.

88.

Ok þá er Sigurðr konungr var staddr í Vík austr tekr hann sótt. Báðu þá vinir hans at hann léti konuna lausa, ok hon sjálf vildi þá í brot fara ok bað konunginn í söttinni at hon færi frá honum ok kvazk vildu við hann skiljask, at þat mætti honum bezt gegna ok báðum þeim. Konungr svaraði: „Eigi kom mér þar í hug at þú myndir fyltáta mik sem aðrir.”—ok snirisk frá þenni ok gø Dimitre dreyrauðan. Þegn gekk í brot. En nú sökkir hann sóttin, ok í þeirri sótt fær hann bana. Ok var lík hans flutt til Oslo ok jarðat í Hallvarðskirkju. Liggr hann nú í steinveggnum útar frá kórnun syðra [megin].

81.

While King Sigurðr was in residence east in Vik, he fell ill. His friends urged him to relinquish his new wife, and she herself wished to depart. As he lay ill, she asked to be released because that would serve them both best. The king said: „It never occurred to me that you would abandon me like the others.” He turned from her and flushed red as blood. She departed, and his illness advanced until it became the cause of his death. His body was brought to Osló and was buried in Saint Hallvardr’s Church. He now lies in the stone wall out from the south choir.
Endnotes

1 The Icelandic text below is from the Íslenzk fornrit edition, Íslenzk fornrit 23–24, eds. Ármann Jakobsen and Pórhur Íngi Guðjónsson (Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2011), used with permission from the publisher. The translation is from Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1070–1157), trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Cornell University Press, 2000). It is used with permission from the translators. Names have been replicated as they are found in the source text.

2 The different chapter numbers are due to the fact that the translation is older than the Íslenzk fornrit edition and does not divide the chapters in precisely the same way.

3 The king is envisioning his wife as a demon, presumably as proof of her adultery, though in this case it is proof mainly of his insanity.

4 There are several instances in Old Norse texts of ordeals that involve treading hot iron, often to “prove” paternity as in this instance.
Introduction

“King Hrœrek the blind” may never have existed, indeed he only appears in Heimskringla, a kings’ saga most probably composed in the early thirteenth century, two hundred years after his supposed reign in the early eleventh century, but the dubious authenticity does not make his portrayal in this source any less compelling. Wherever he originally came from, the character portrayal of King Hrœrek in the saga is a testament to a gifted historian, whether it was the Icelandic magnate, poet, and mythographer Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), to whom Heimskringla has been attributed since the late sixteenth century, or someone else. It is also a testament to medieval Icelandic thought about disability.

In Heimskringla, King Óláfr the Saint (d. 1030) is credited with unifying Norway in 1015–20 by deposing various petty kings previously autonomous in their own small kingdoms. As his supposed ancestor King Haraldr Finehair (d. 930) had already accomplished this a century before, according to the legendary history of Norway presented to us by late twelfth and early thirteenth century historiographers, the need for re-unification is explained by his many sons having, after the first unification, divided the kingdom again, which makes King Óláfr and King Hrœrek relatives according to this narrative. This blood relationship, however, detracts little from the savageness of their competition.

The narrative of King Hrœrek begins with a planned rebellion by five petty kings, thwarted by an agent of King Óláfr. After its suppression, King Óláfr has King Hrœrek blinded precisely since he fears him the most. Thus, King Hrœrek’s blindness is from the outset not only meant to impede him in opposing King Óláfr but it is also, paradoxically, a sign of greatness: King Hrœrek has become blind because he was more dangerous than his fellow petty kings. This is further exemplified by King Óláfr’s treatment of his rival: he keeps him with him and treats him well.

King Hrœrek is sullen and taciturn in public but transforms himself completely when he is awarded a guard, a young and impressionable man that he then seduces into making an attack on King Óláfr. This first attempt is foiled, but the blind and deposed king still manages to escape and assemble an army. When this second uprising is foiled as well, King Hrœrek retains his pokerface and soon after attempts a third attack on the life of the king, this time wielding the weapon himself. This causes the king, much as he respects the spirit of his adversary, to exile him permanently, using another disabled courtier, Þórarinn Nefjólfsson, whose own disability is more or less invisible (a missing toe), to ship him to Iceland.

Notwithstanding his disability, King Hrœrek is very active and aggressive, not to mention cunning and seductive, and though hampered in swordplay by blindness, he is very much in control of his environment, sometimes using his disability to lull his opponents into a false sense of security. It takes a powerful king such as Óláfr to repel his aggression successfully and the narrative is characterized by much respect for the blind man. Though King Hrœrek in the end can-
not triumph over St Óláfr, he is a formidable adversary who should never be underestimated. His portrayal in Heimskringla is a good example of an undefeated man whose lack of sight does not render him any less dangerous.

Bibliography

Ok er þat spurdí konungr, sá er þar réð fyrir Raumaríki, þá þótt honum gerast mikit vandmæli; því at hvern dag kómu til hans margir menn, er slykt kvæðu fyrir honum, sumir ríkir, sumir úríkir. Konungrinn tók þat ræð, at hann fór upp á Heiðmörk á fund Hrœreks konungs; því at hann var þeirra konunga vitrastr, er þar váru þá. En er konungar tóku tal sínum í milli, þá kom þat ásamt með þeim, at senda ord Guðröði konungi norðr í Dala ok svá á Haðaland, til þess konungs er þar var, ok þótt þá þar koma á Heiðmörk til fundar við þá Hrœrek konung. Þeir lögðust eigi ferð undir höfuð, ok hittust þeir 5 konungar á Heiðmörk, þar sem heitir á Hringsakri. Hringer var þar hinn fimti konungr, bróðir Hrœreks konungs. Þeir konungarnir ganga fyrst einir saman á tal. Tók så fyrst til orða, er koninn var af Raumaríki, ok: sagði frá ferð Ólafs konungs digra ok þeim úfriði, er hann gerði því í manna aftökum ok manna meizlum; suma rak hann or landi, ok tök upp því fyrir öllum honum, en þótt þeir seltu mæltu móti honum, en fyrir þeir horfðu menns um landit, en ekki með því fjölmenni, er lög váru til. Hann segir ok, at fyrir þeim úfriði kvezt hann hafa þangat flyt, kvað ok marga aðra ríkismenn hafa flyt því óduluð sin af Raumaríki. En þó at oss sé nú þetta vandræði næst, þá munut fyrir slíku eiga at sitja, og er fyrir því betra, at vör ráðum um allir saman, hvort råð upp skal taka. Ok er hann lauk sinni ræðu, þá viku konungar þar til svara sem Hrœrekr var. Hann mælti: Nú er framkomit þat, er mik grendi at vera mundi, þá er vör átum stefnu á Haðalandi, ok þeir váru allir ákafir, at vör skyldum hefjaf Ólaf upp yfir höfuð oss, at hann mundi verða oss hardr í horn at taka, þegar er hann hefði einvald yfir landi. Nú eru þeim kostir fyrir hendi, sá annarr, at vör farið úf fund hans allir ok látim hann skera ok skapa alt vár í milli, ok ætla ek oss þann beztan at taka; en sá annarr, at résa nú í món, meðan hann hefri eigi viðara yfir landit fárit. En þótt hann hafi 300 manna eða 400, þá er oss þat ekki ofresli liðs, ef vör verðum at einu ráði allir; en optast sigrast þeim verr, er 74.

And when the king who was ruling over Raumaríki there heard about this, then he thought there was going to be great difficulty for him, because every day many people came to him complaining about these things to him, some powerful, some humble. The king adopted this plan, that he went up into Heiðmörk to see King Hrœrekr, for he was the most sensible of those kings who were there then. And when the kings had their discussion, then they reached agreement that they should send word to King Guðröðr north in Dalar and also to Haðaland to the king who was there, and ask them to come to see King Hrœrekr and him. They did not put off this journey, and these five kings met in Heiðmörk at a place called at Hringsakr. King Hrœrekr's brother Hringer was the fifth king there. These kings at first started making speeches one at a time. The one who was come from Raumaríki began talking first, and speaks about Óláfr digri (the Stout)'s travels and the disturbance he was causing in both killing people and maiming people, driving some out of the country and seizing property from all those who opposed him at all, and travelling around the country with a host of men, and not with the numbers that the law provided for. He also says that he declares it is because of this disturbance he has fled to this place, also declaring that many other men of rank have fled their ancestral lands in Raumaríki. 'And though these difficulties have now affected us most, yet it will not be long before you will have to face the same, and so it is better that we all discuss together what plan should be adopted.' And when he had finished his speech, then the kings turned to Hrœrekr for a response. He said: 'Now there has come to pass what I suspected would happen when we held a meeting in Haðaland and you were all eager to raise up Óláfr above our heads, that he was going to be hard to hold by the horns as soon as he had sole power over the land. Now there are two choices available, the one that we all go to see him and let him arrange and settle
everything between us, and I think that is the
best one to take, and the other to rise now
against him while he has not travelled any
further through the country. And although
he has three or four hundred (360-480) men,
still that is not an overwhelming force for
us, if we are all of one mind. But most often
those that are many of equal authority are
less successful than the one that is sole leader
over his troop, and it is my advice instead not
to risk trying to match our luck with Óláf
Haraldsson’s. And after that each of the kings
spoke that which he thought fit. Some spoke
against, and some spoke in favour, and there
was no solution decided on, they pointed out
the obvious disadvantages of both courses.
Then Guðröðr, king in Dalar, began to speak
and said as follows: ‘It seems amazing to me
that you are getting in such a tangle about a
solution to this business, and you are totally
afraid of Óláf. There are five of us kings here,
and none of us is of any worse descent than
Óláf. Now we have given him support in his
fight with Jarl Sveinn, and he has with us be-
hind him gained possession of this land. But
if he wants now to begrudge each of us that
little power that we held before, and treat us
with oppression and tyranny, then I can say
this of myself, that I shall get myself out of
thraldom to the king, and I declare any one
of you to be no man who flinches from this,
that we should deprive him of life if we get
him into our power up here in Heiðmǫrk, for
I can tell you this, that we shall never hold up
a free head while Óláf is alive.’ And after this
goading they all adopted this counsel. Then
Hrœrekr spoke: ‘It seems to me about this
decision, that we shall need to make our alli-
cance firm, so that no one may fail in loyalty
to anyone else. Now you are planning, when
Óláf comes here to Heiðmǫrk, for I
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Óláf comes here to Heiðmǫrk, for I
can tell you this, that we shall never hold up
a free head while Óláf is alive.’ And after this

Á þeirri stefnu var Ketill af Ringunesi. En er hann kom heim um kveldit, þá mataðist hann at náttverði, en síðan klæddist hann, ok húskarlar hans, ok för ofan til vatns, ok tóku karfann, er Ketill átrí, er Ólafr konungr hafði gefit honum, settu fram skipit; var þar í naustinu allr reiðinum; taka þá ok skipast til ára ok róa út eptir vatnini. Ketill hafði 40 manna, alla vel vápnada; þeir kömu um daginn snemma út til vatnsenda. För þá Ketill med 20 menn, en lét aðra 20 eptir at geta skips. Ólafr konungr var þá á Eiði á ofánverðu Rau-

397

PROSE
maríki. Ketill kom þar, þá er konungr gökk frá óttusöng; fagnaði hann Katli vel. Ketill segir, at hann vill tala við konung skjótt. Deir ganga á tal tveir saman. Pá segir Ketill konungi, hver ráð konungarnir hafa með höndum ok alla tilætlan, þá er hann var viss ordinn. En er konungr varð þess varr, þá kallar hann menn til sín, sendir suma í bygðina, bað þá stefna til sín reiðskjótrn, suma sendi hann til vatnsins at taka róðrar skip, þau er þeir féngi, ok hafa í möti sér; en hann þá sjálf þá til kirkju ok lét syngja sér messu; gökk síðan þegar til borða. En þá er hann haði matazt, bjóst hann sem skyndiligast ok fór upp til vatnsins; kóma þar skip í móti honum; steig hann þá sjálfr á kar–
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Lýrandi hefir ljótu
landsráðunda branda
umstillingar allar
ifla fólds um goldit.
Hafa léztu heiðska jöftra,
herskorðandi! forðum
mundangs laun, þá er meinum,
mætr gramr! við þik sættu.
Brant hafit, böðvar þreytir!
branda rjóðr! or landi,
meir fannsk þinn en þeirra
þrekr, þóglinga rekna.
Stökk, sem þjóð um þekkir,
þér hverr konungr ferri,
heptut ér en eptir
ordreyr þess er sat nordast.
Nú ræðr þá fyrir þeirri,
þik remmir guð miklu,
fold, er forðum héldu
fimm bragningar, gagni.
Breið eru austr til Eiða
ætrlend und þér, göndlar
engr sat elda þrögngir
þá at sílu láði.

Ólafr konungr lagði þá undir sik þat ríki,
er þessir konungar höfðu átt; tók þá gislar
af lendum mönnum ok bóndum. Hann tók
veizlugjöld norðan or Dólum ok viða um
Heiðmörk, ok sneri þá út aprí á Raumaríki
ok þá vestr á Haðaland. Þann vetr andaðist
Sigurðr sýr mágr hans. Þá sneri Ólafr konungr
á Hringaríki, ok gerði Ásta móðir hans
mikla veizlu í móti honum. Bar þá Ólafr einn
konungsnaði í Noregi.

...
sem vegligast, er hann fór í mót festarkonu sinni. Veizla sú skyldi vera um haustit austr við Elfi við landamæri. Ólaf konunger hafði med sér Hrœrek konung blinda. En er hann var gróinn sára sinna, þa fékk Ólaf honum tvá menn til þjónostu við hann, ok lét hann sitja í háseti hjá sér, ok helt hann at drykk ok at klæðum engum mun verr, en hann hafði áðr haldit sik sjálfr. Hrœrek var fámalugr, ok svaraði stirt ok stutt, þa er menn ortu orða á hann. Þat var sú veðlað af þeim sem uð því hafið við því þrátt í þjóð konungi. Ólaf konunger lét þeim sér underflygja.
prose

vera jarl minn. Svá kómu fortölur hans, at Sveinn játaði at fylgja þessu úráði. Svá var ætlat ráðit, at þá er konungr bjóst at gagna til aptansöngs, stoð Sveinn úti í svölunum, ok hafði brugdit sax undir yfirhöfninni. En er konungr gëkk út or stofunni, þá bar hann skjótara at en Svein varði, ok sá hann í andlit konunginum; þá bliknæði hann ok varð fólör sem nár, ok fëllust honum hendi. Konungr fann á honum hraeðlu ok mælti: Hvæt er nú, Sveinn? viltu svíkja mik? Sveinn kastaði yfirhöfninni frá sér ok saxin ok fell til fótta konung ok mælti: Alt á guðs valdi ok yðru, konungr! Konungr bað menn sín taka Svein, ok var hann í járn settir. Dá lét konungr fjöra sæti Hrœreks á annan pall; en hann gaf grið Sveini, ok för hann af landi í brott. Konungr fékk þá Hrœreki annat herbergi at sofða í, en þat er hann svaf sjálfr í; svaf í því herbergi mart hirdmanna; hann fékk til tvá hirdmenn at fylgja Hrœreki dag ok natt; þeir menn höðu lengi verit með Ółafi konungi, ok hafði hann þá reynt at truleik við sik; eigi er þess getit, at þeir veri ættstórir menn. Hrœrekr konungr gerði ýmist, at hann þagði marga daga, svá at engi maðr fékk orð af honum; en stundum var hann svá kátr ok glæðr, at þeim þótt at hverju orði gaman, því er hann mælti; en stundum mælti hann fátt ok ítt einu; svá var ok, at stundum drakk hann hvern af stokki, ok gerði alla úfær, er nær honum váru; en optast drakk hann lítit. Ólafir konungr fékk honum vel skotslífr. Ópt gerði hann þat, þá er hann kom til herbergis, áðr hann lagðist til svefn, at hann lét taka inn mjóð, nökkurar byttur, ok gaf at drekka öllum herbergismönnum; af því varð hann þókkasæll.

I in my blindness might overcome them who overcame me in my sleep? My goodness, let us kill Óláfr digri. He has now no fears for himself. I shall make the plans, and I would not hold back my hands if I was able to use them, but I cannot do that because of my blindness, and you must therefore make the attack on him. And when Óláfr is slain, then I can foresee that the kingdom will pass to his enemies. Now it may be that I might become king; then you shall be my jarl.' His persuasion was so successful that Sveinn agreed to follow this infamous plan. The plan was that when the king set out for evensong, Sveinn would be standing out on the balcony before he got there and have a drawn cutlass under his coat. But when the king came out of the sitting room, then he got out sooner than Sveinn expected, and he looked at the king full in the face. Then he went pale and grew as white as a corpse and his hands failed him. The king noticed his terror and said: ‘What is it now, Sveinn? Are you going to betray me?’ Sveinn threw down his coat and his cutlass and fell at the king’s feet and said: ‘Everything in God’s hands and yours, Lord.’ The king told his men to seize Sveinn and he was put in irons. Then the king had Hrœrekr’s seat moved to the other bench, and he pardoned Sveinn, and he left the country. The king then assigned Hrœrekr different quarters to sleep in from those that he slept in himself. There was a lot of his men that slept in those quarters. He got two of his men to be with Hrœrekr day and night. These men had long been with King Óláfr, and he had tried their loyalty to him. It is not told that they were men of high lineage. King Hrœrekr was changeable, he was silent on many days, so that no one could get a word from him, but sometimes he was so cheerful and merry that they found every word he spoke amusing, but sometimes he spoke a lot, but only what was unpleasant. It also happened sometimes that he drank everyone under the table, and made all those that were near him incapable, but generally he drank little. King Óláfr gave him plenty of pocket money. Often what he did
Maðr er nefndr Finnr litli, upplenzkr maðr, en sumir segja, at hann væri finskr at ætt; hann var allra manna minstr ok allra manna føthvatastr, svá at engi hestr tók hann á rás; hann kunni manna bezt við skíð ok boga; hann hafði lengi verit þjónostumár Hrœreks konungs, ok farið opt erenda hans, þeirra er trúnaðar þurfti við, hann kunni veða um öll Upplǫnd; hann var ok málkunnigr þar öllu stórmenni. En er Hrœrek konungur var tekinn í fangelsi, þá slóst Finnr í för þeirra, ok for hann optæst í sveit með knöpum ok þjónostumönnum; en hvert sinn er hann mátti, kom hann til þjónostu við Hrœrek konung, ok opt í tal, ok vildi konungr skömmum samfast með við hann, ok vildi ekki gruna láta tal þeirra. En er á leið várit, ok þeir sóttu út í Vikina, þá hvarf Finnr í broll frá liðinu nokkura daga; þá kom hann enn aprt ok dvaldist um hríð. Svá fór opt fram, ok var at því engi gaumr gefinn, því at margir váru umrenningar með liðinu.

82.

There is a man called Fiðr litli (the Small), a man from Upplönd, but some say that he was a Lapp by descent. He was the smallest of all men and the fastest runner of all men, so that no horse could catch him up when running. He was the most skilled of men with skis and the bow. He had long been a servant of King Hrœrek and often gone on errands for him that needed to be confidential. He knew the routes over the whole of Upplönd. He also knew many important men there to speak to. And when King Hrœrek was put under the charge of a small number of men, then Finnr joined the group, and he generally kept company with boys and servants, but whenever he could, he got into the service of King Hrœrek and often went on errands with him, and the king was willing to talk with him for just short periods at a time and wanted to avoid any suspicion about their talks. And when spring drew to a close and they made their way out into the Vik, then Fiðr disappeared from the troop for a few days. Then he came back again and stayed for a while. Thus it happened often, and no notice was taken of it, for there were many vagabonds with the troop.

83.

King Óláfr came to Tünsberg before Easter and stayed there for a long time in the spring. Then many ships came there to the town, both Saxons and Danes and those from Vik in the east and from the north of the country. There was a very large number of people. It was a good year and there was much drinking. It happened one evening that King Hrœrek had come to his quarters and rather late and had drunk a lot and was now very merry. Then Finnr litli came in with a cask of mead, and it was mead with herbs in when he came into his quarters, before he lay down to sleep, was have mead brought in, several casks, and gave all the men in those quarters something to drink. As a result he was popular.
hverr sofnæði í sinu rúmi. Finnr var þá í brott genginn; ljós brann í herberginu. Þá vakti hann upp menn þá, er vanir væru at fylgja honum, og segir, at hann vill ganga til garðs.

Þeir höfðu skrðljós með sér, en niðamykrt var útti; mikit salerni var í garðinum ok stóð á stófmum, en rið upp at ganga til dyranna. En er þeir Hrœrekr sátu í garðinum, þá heyðu þeir at maðr mælti: Högg þú fjaðann. Þá heyðu þeir brest ok dett, sem nökkt félli. Hrœrekr konung mælti: Fulldrukkat munu þeir hafa, er þar eigust við; farit til skjótt ok skilit þá. Þeir höfðu skriðljós með sér, en niðamyrkr var úti; mikit salerni var í garðinum ok stóð á stöfum, en rið upp at ganga til dyranna. En er þeir Hrœrekr sátu í garðinum, þá heyrðu þeir at maðr mælti: Högg þú fjárn. Þá heyrðu þeir brest ok dett, sem nökkt félli. Hrœrekr konung mælti: Fulldrukkat munu þeir hafa, er þar eigust við; farit til skjótt ok skilit þá.

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It and of the strongest. Then Hrœrekt had everyone that was in there given drink, going on until they all went to sleep in their seats. Finnr had then gone away. There was a light burning in the room. Then Hrœrekt woke up the men who were accustomed to attend him, saying that he wanted to go into the yard. They had a lantern with them, but it was pitch dark outside. There was a large latrine in the yard and it stood on posts, and there were steps to get up to the doorway. And while Hrœrekt and the men were sitting in the yard, then they heard a man say: ‘Strike down that fiend!’ Then they heard a crash and a thump, as if something had fallen. King Hrœrekt said: ‘They must have drunk plenty, the ones who are fighting there. Go up quickly and separate them.’ They got ready quickly and ran out, but when they got to the steps, then the one that was in the rear was struck first, though they were both killed. It was King Hrœrekt’s men that had come there, Sigurðr hit (the Sack), who had been his standard-bearer, in a party of twelve. Finnr litli was now there. They dragged the bodies up between the buildings, but grabbed the king and took him with them, then leapt onto a boat that they had and rowed away. The poet Sigvatr was asleep in King Ólaf’s quarters. He got up in the night and his servant with him, and they went out to the great latrine. And when they were going to go back and down the steps, then Sigvatr slipped and fell on his knee and stuck his hands down and it was wet underneath. He said: ‘I think that this evening the king must have taken away the sea legs from many of us.’ And he laughed about it. But when they got into their quarters, where there was a light burning, then his servant asked: ‘Have you scratched yourself, or why are you all covered in nothing but blood?’ He replied: ‘I am not scratched, but this must mean something has happened.’ He then woke up his bedfellow, the standard-bearer Bóðr Ólafsson, and they went out, taking a lantern with them, and both of them found the blood. Then they searched and soon found the bodies and recognized them. They
En þó at nauðsyn þætti til, at konungr vissi sem fyrst þessi tíðindi, þá þorði engi at vekja hann. Pá mælti Sigvatr til Þórðar: Hvárt viltu heldr, lagsmaðr, vekja konunginn, eða segja honum tíðindi? Þórðr svarar: Fyrir engan mun þori ek at vekja hann, en segja mun ek honum tíðindi. Pá mælti Sigvatr: Mikit er enn eptir nætrinnar, ok kann vera áðr dagr sé, at Hrœrekr hafi fengit sér þat fylskni, at hann verði síðan eigi auðfundið, en þeir munu enn skamur brott konunnar, þvi at líkin várú vörn; skal oss aldregi henda síðu skömm, at vár látim eigi konungrinn vita þessi svik; gakk þú, Þórðr, upp í herbergit, ok bíð mín þar. Pá gékk Sigvatr til kirkju ok vakti klukkarann, ok bað hann hringja fyrir sál hirðmanna konungs, ok nefndi mennina, þá er vegnir váru. Klukkarinn gerir, sem hann bað. En við hringingina vaknaði konungr ok settist upp; hann spúrdi, hvárt þá væri óttusöngs máli. Þórðr svarar: Verri efni eru í, tíðindi mikil eru orðin; Hrœrekr konungr er á brott hórfinn, en dreipir hirðmenn ýðir tveir. Pá spúði konungr eptir athurðum, þeim er þar höðdu orðit. Þórðr segir honum slíkt, er hann vissi. Pá stóð konungr upp ok lét blása til hírdstefnu. En er líðir kom saman, þá nefndi konungr menn til at fara alla vega frá þeim leita Hrœreks á sæ og landi. Þórir langi tók skútu ok fór með 30 manna, ok er lýsti, sjá þeir skútur tvær litlar fara fyrir þeim. En er þeir sást, reru hvárir sem mest máttu. Þar var Hrœrekr konungr ok hafði 30 manna. En er saman dröð með þeim, þá snuer þeir Hrœrekr at landi, ok hljópu þar upp á land allir, nema konungr settist upp í lypteríina. Hann mælti, bað þá vel fara ok heila hittast. Ívi næst reru þeir Þórir at landi. Pá skaut Finnr lítið öru, ok kom nú á Þóri miðjan, ok fěkk hann hana. En þeir Sigurðr hljópu allir í skógin. En menn Þóris tóku líki hans, ok svá Hrœreks konung, ok fluttu ut til Túnsbergs. Olafí konungr tók þá við haldi Hrœreks konungs; hann lét þá vandliga geta hans, ok galt mikinn varhuga við svikum hans, fěkk til menn nött ok dag at geta hans. Hrœrekr konungr var þá hinn kálasti, ok fěnn engi maðr á honum, at eigi líkaði honum alt sem bezt.

also saw that there was a great tree stump lying there with a great gash in it, and it was discovered later that this had been done as a trick to entice out those that were slain. Sigvatr and the others told each other that it was essential for the king to know what had happened as soon as possible. They sent the lad straight away to the quarters where King Hrœrek had been. There everyone was asleep, but the king was gone. He woke the men who were inside and said what had happened. Some men got up and went straight away to the place in the yard where the bodies were. But though they thought it essential for the king to know as soon as possible what had happened, no one dared to wake him. Then Sigvatr spoke to Þórðr: ‘Which would you rather do, comrade, wake up the king or tell him what has happened?’ Þórðr replied: ‘No way do I dare to wake him, but I can tell him what has happened.’ Then Sigvatr said: ‘There is still much of the night to go, and it may be that before it is day, Hrœrek will have got himself a hiding place where he will not easily be found, and they will still not have got far, for the bodies were warm. We must never fall into the disgrace of failing to let the king know of this treason. You, Þórðr, go up into the quarters and wait for me there.’ Then Sigvatr went to the church and woke up the bell-ringer and told him to toll the bell for the souls of the king’s men, and he gave the names of the men that had been killed. The bell-ringer did as he asked. And at the ringing the king awoke and sat up. He asked whether it was time for matins. Þórðr replied: ‘The reason for it is worse than that. Something important has happened. King Hrœrek has disappeared and two of your men are killed.’ Then the king asked about these events that had taken place there. Þórðr told him as much as he knew. Then the king got up and had a horn blown to summon a meeting of his followers. And when the troop assembled, then the king named men who were to go out in all directions from the town to search for Hrœrek by sea and land. Þórir langi took a light ship and took thir-
It happened on Ascension Day that King Óláf was going to High Mass. Then the bishop walked in procession round the church leading the king, and when they came back into the church, then the bishop led the king to his throne on the north side of the entrance to the choir. And there next to him King Hrörekr was sitting, as he usually did. He had his coat pulled over his face. And when King Óláf had sat down, then King Hrörekr felt his shoulder with his hand and squeezed. Then he said: ‘You are wearing fine cloth now, kinsman,’ he says. King Óláf replies: ‘Now a great festival is being kept today in memory of when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven from earth.’ King Hrörekr replies: ‘I do not understand, so that it is fixed in my mind, what you say about Christ. Much of what you say seems to me rather incredible. Yet many things have happened in ancient times.’ And when Mass had begun, then King Óláf stood up and held his arms up above his head and bowed towards the altar, and his coat hung back off his shoulders. King Hrörekr sprang
hann hafði lotit undan; skárust mjök klaðin, en konungr varð eigi sárr. En er Ólafr konungr fann þetta tilsæti, þá hjóp hann fram við á golffit. Hrœrekr konungr lagði til hans annat sinni saxinn, ok misti hans, ok mælti: Flyr þú nú, Ólafr digri, fyrir mér blindum? Konungr bað sina menn taka hann ok leiða hann út or kirkjunni, ok svá var gert. Eptir þessa atburði eggjóu menn Ólaf konung at láta drepa Hrœrekr konung, ok er þat, sögðu þeir, hin mesta gefuraun yðr, konungr, at hafa hann með yðr, ok þyrma honum, hvergar úhæfur er hann tekr til; en hann liggr um þat nót og dag at veita yðr líflát. En þegar er þér sendit hann á brott frá yðr, þá sjám vör eigi man til þess, at svá fái gett hans, at örvænt sé, at hann komist í brott. En ef hann verðr lauss, þá mun hann þegar flokk uppi hafa ok gera mart ít. Konungr svarar: Rétt er þat mælt, at margr hefir dauða tekit fyrir minni tilgerðir en Hrœrekr; en trauðr em ek at týna þeim sigri, er ek ekk á Uppplendinga konungum, er ek tók þá þá einaum morni, ok náða ek svá öllu ríki þeirra, at ek þurftu en skis þeirra banamaðr at verða, þvi at þeir væru allir frendr minir; en þó far ek nú varla sér, hvárt Hrœrekr mun fá mik nauðgaðan til eða eigi at láta drepa hann. Hrœrekr hafði fyrir þá sok tekít hendinni á óxld Ólaf konungi, at hann vildi vita, hvárt hann var í brynju.

Maðr er nefndr Þórarinn Nefjólfsson; hann var íslenzkr maðr, hann var kynjað norðan or landi; ekki var hann ættstórr, ok allra manna vitrastr ok orðspakastr; hann var djarfmæltr við tíga menn; hann var farmaðr mikill ok var lögnum utanlendis. Þórarinn var manna ljótarstr, ok bar þat mest frá, hversu illa hann var límaðr; hann hafði hendi up quickly and forcefully. He then stabbed at King Óláfr with a dagger of the kind known as rytningr. The thrust landed on the coat by his shoulder as he bent forward away from it. His clothes were much damaged, but the king was not wounded. And when King Óláfr felt this assault, then he leapt forward onto the floor. King Hrœrekr stabbed at him a second time with the dagger and missed him and said: ‘You are running away now, Óláfr digri, from me, a blind man.’ The king told his men to take him and lead him out of the church, and they did so. After this incident people urged King Óláfr to have Hrœrekr killed. ‘And it is,’ they say, ‘a very great tempting of your luck, king, to keep him with you and spare him, such wickedness as he keeps committing, for he lies in wait day and night to bring about your death. But if you send him away from you, we do not know of anyone who would be able to guard him so that he had no hope of getting away. But if he goes free, then he will immediately raise a band and cause a lot of trouble.’ The king replies: ‘What you say is right enough, that many have suffered death for doing less than Hrœrekr, but I am reluctant to spoil the victory that I gained over the kings of the Upplendingar, when I captured five of them in one morning, and so got control of all their realms without needing to become the slayer of any one of them, for they were all kinsmen of mine. But yet I can hardly see now whether Hrœrekr will force me to it or not, to have him slain.’ The reason Hrœrekr had felt King Óláfr’s shoulder with his hand was that he wanted to know whether he was wearing a coat of mail.

85. There was a man called Þórarinn Nefjólfs-son. He was an Icelandic man, his family were from the north of the country. He was not of high lineage and he was the most sensible of men and most intelligent of speakers. He was bold in speech with people of rank. He was a great trader and was abroad for long periods. Þórarinn was the ugliest of men, and the
miklar ok ljótar, en færtnir váru þó miklu ljótar. Þórarinn var stæðr í Túnsbergi, en þessi tíðindi urðu, er áður var frásagt; hann var málkunnigr Ólafi konungi. Þórarinn bjó þá kaupskip, er hann átti, ok ætlaði til Íslands um sumarit. Ólafi konungr hafði Þórarín í bóði sínu nókkura daga ok taladí mart við hann; svað Þórarinn í konungs herbergi. Þat var einn morgin snimma, at konungrinn vakti, en aðrir menn sváfú í herberginu; þá var söl farin þát, ok var ljóst mjök inni. Konungr sá, at Þórarinn hafði rétt fót for annan undan klaðum; hann sá á börinn um hríð; þá vöknudu menn í herberginu. Konungr mælti til Þórarins: Vakat hefi ek um hríð, ok hefi ek sét þá sýn, er mér þykkir mikils um vert, en þat er mannsfótr sá, er ek hygg, at engi skal hér í kaupstaðinum ljótar vera; ok þeir aðrir menn svái í herberginum; þá var sól farin lítt þat, og var ljóst mjök inni. Konungr sá, at Þórarinn hafði rétt fót annan undan klaðum; hann sá á börinn um hríð; þá vöknuðu menn í herberginu. Konungr mælti til Þórarins: Heldr vil ek því at fulltingja, at eigi muni fást jafnþjöfð fótr, ok svá þótt ek sky-
dla veðja um. Þá mælti Þórarinn: Búinn em ek at veðja um þat við yðr, at ek mun finna í kaupstaðinum ljótar fót. Konungr segir: Þat skal sókkarr kjósað bæn af óðrum, er sannara heftr. Svá skal vera, segir Þórarinn. Hann brá þá undan klaðnumm óðrum fætinnum, ok var sá engum mun fægri, ok þar var af hin minsta tæin. Það mælti Þórarinn: Só er nú, konungr, annan fót, ok er sjá því ljótarí, at hér er af ein tæin; ok á ek veðköt. Konungr segir: Er hinn fötrinn því úfægri, at þar eru 5 tær fer-
lígar á þeim, en hér eru 4, ok á ek at kjósa bæn at þer. Þórarinn segir: Dýrt er dróttins orð, eða hverja bæn vilu af mér þiggja? Hann svarar: Pá, at þá flytir Hrœrek konung til Grœnlands, ok ferir hann Leifi Eiríkssyni. Þórarinn svarar: Eigi hefi ek komit til Grœn-
lands. Konungr segir: Farmaðr slík sem þú eftir, þá er þér nú mál at fara til Grœnlands, el þá hefi eigir fyrir komit. Þórarinn svarar fá um þetta mál fyrst. En er konungr helt fram þessarri málaletitan, þá veikst Þórarinn eigi með öllu af hendi, ok mælti svá: Heyra skal most extraordinary thing was how horrible his limbs were. He had large and ugly hands, but yet his feet were much uglier. Þórarinn was now located in Tünsberg when these events were taking place that have just been narrated. He and King Óláf knew each other so well that they could speak to each other. Þórarinn now got a trading ship ready that he owned, and was intending to go to Iceland in the summer. King Óláf had Þórarinn as a guest for a few days and had conversations with him. Þórarinn slept in the king's quarters. It was early one morning that the king was awake while other men in the quarters were asleep. Just then the sun had come up a little, and it was very light indoors. The king noticed that Þórarinn had stretched out one foot from under the bedclothes. He looked at the foot for a while. Then the men in the quarters began to wake up. The king said to Þórarinn: 'I have been awake for a while, and I have seen a sight that has impressed me greatly, and that is a man's foot than which I think there cannot in this market town be one uglier.' And he told other men to consider whether this did not seem to be true. And everyone who saw it agreed that it was so. Þórarinn realized what they were talking about and replied: 'There are few things so special that it cannot be expected that another such will be found, and it is very likely to be so in this case too.' The king said: 'I am still prepared to assert that another foot as ugly as this will not be found, and even if I had to lay a wager on it.' Then Þórarinn said: 'I am prepared to lay a wager with you on that, that I shall find an uglier foot in the town.' The king says: 'Then whichever of us turns out to be right shall choose a favour from the other.' 'So it shall be,' says Þórarinn. He then put his other foot out from under the bedclothes, and this was in no way more beautiful, and it lacked the big toe. Then said Þórarinn: 'See here now, king, another foot, and this is the uglier in that on this one a toe is missing, and I have won the wager.' The king says: 'The other foot is the uglier, in that there are five hideous toes on that one, but on this there are four, and it is for me
ek yðr láta, konungr, bæn þá, er ek hafða hu-
gat at biðja, ef mér hærist veðféit; en þat er, at ek vilda biðja yðr híðvistar; en ef þér vei-
tit mér þat, þá verð ek skyldi til at leggjast
eigi undir höfuð, þat er þér vilit kvart hafa.
Konungr járði þessu, ok gerðist Þórarinn
híðmóaðr hans. Pá þjó Þórarinn skip sitt, ok
er hann var búinn, þá tók hann við Hrœreki
konungi. En er þér skildust Ólafr konungr
ok Þórarinn, þá mælti Þórarinn: Nú berr svá
til, konungr, sem eigi er örvænt ok opt kann
verða, at vör komim eigi fram Grœnlandsfer-
dinni, berr oss at Íslandi eða öðrum lóndum,
hvernum skal ek skilja við konung þenna þess,
at þýr megi líka? Konungr segir: Ef þú kemr
til Islands, þá skaltu selja hann í hendr Guð-
mundi Eyjólfsfynn eða Skapta lógsögumanni,
eða öðrum nokkurum húfingjum, þeim er
taka ylja við vinátu minni ok jartegnum.
En ef þik berr at öðrum lóndum, þeim er hér
eru nærr, þá haga þá svá til, at þá viðir víst, at
Hrœrekr komi aldri síðan til Noregs; en ger
þat því at einu, ef þú sér engi önnur fóng á.
En er Þórarinn var búinn ok byr gaf, þá siglði
hann alt útleið frá eyjum og norðr frá
Líðandisnesi, stefndi hann í haf út. Honum
byrjaði eigi skjótt, en hann varaðist þat mest
at koma við landit. Hann siglði fyrir sun-
nan Island, ok hafði vita af, ok svá vestr um
landit í Grœnlandsfjall; þá fékk hann þeirra
stóra ok vall mikit, en er á leið sumarit, tók
hann Island í Breiðafjörði. Þorgils Arason kom
þá fyrst til þeirra viðtöku Hrœreks konungs. Þorgils varð við vel, ok
bauð til sin Hrœreki konungi, ok var hann
med Dorgils Arasyni um vetrinn. Hann undi
þar eigi, ok beiddi, at Þorgils léti fylgja hon-
um til Guðmundar, ok seigr, at hann þottist
þat spurt hafa, at með Guðmundi var raun
mest á Islandi, ok varri hann honum til handa
sendr. Dorgils gerði sem hann beiddi, fékk
menn til ök lét fylgja honum til handa Guð-
mundi á Möðruvöllum. Tók Guðmundr vel við
Hrœreki fyrir sakir konungs orðsendingar, ok
var hann með Guðmundi vetr annan; þá undi
hann þar eigi lengr. Þá fékk Guðmundr ho-
to choose a favour from you.” Þórarinn says:
‘One’s lord’s word outweighs others, so what
favour do you wish to have from me?’ He says:
‘This, that you carry Hrœrek to Greenland
and take him to Leifr Eiríksson.’ Þórarinn re-
plies: ‘I have not been to Greenland.’ The king
says: ‘A voyager like you, it is time you went
to Greenland if you have never been there.’
Þórarinn made little response to this to be-
gin with, but when the king persisted with
this request, then Þórarinn did not entirely
reject it, and said as follows: ‘I shall let you
hear, king, the favour that I had intended to
ask if I had won the wager, and that is, that I
was going to ask you if I might become one of
your men. And if you will grant me that, then
I shall be the more obliged not to put aside
what you desire to have commissioned.’ The
king agreed to this, and Þórarinn became a
member of his following. Then Þórarinn pre-
pared his ship, and when he was ready, then
he took charge of King Hrœrek. And when
they parted, King Óláfr and Þórarinn, then
Þórarinn said: ‘Now should it turn out, king,
as is not unlikely and may often happen, that
we are unable to complete the journey to
Greenland, and we are carried to Iceland or
to other countries, how shall I dispose of this
king so that you may be pleased?’ The king
says: ‘If you come to Iceland, then you shall
hand him over to Guðmundr Eyjólfssson or
Lawspeaker Skapti or any other leading men
who are willing to accept my friendship and
tokens. But if you are carried to other coun-
tries that are nearer to here, then you must
arrange it in such a way that you know for
certain that Hrœrek will never come back
to Norway alive, and you are only to do this
if you find there is no other alternative.’ Now
when Þórarinn was ready and there was a
favourable wind, then he sailed all along the
outer route beyond the islands, and north of
Líðandisnes he set his course out to sea. The
winds were not very favourable, but he took
care most of all to keep away from the shore.
He sailed to the south of Iceland and could
see signs of its closeness, and so west round
the coast into the Greenland Sea. Then he
encountered strong currents and much tossing about, and towards the end of summer he came to land in Iceland in Breiðafjörður. Þorgils Arason then came up to them first of any men of rank. Þórarinn tells him about King Óláfr’s message and the friendship and tokens that would accompany his taking charge of King Hrœrekr. Þorgils responded well and invited King Hrœrekr to stay with him, and he stayed with Þorgils Arason for the winter. He was not happy there and asked Þorgils to have him taken to Guðmundr’s, saying that he had heard that Guðmundr kept the highest state in Iceland, and that he had been sent into his keeping. Þorgils did as he asked, providing him with an escort and had him taken to the keeping of Guðmundr at Mǫðruvellir. Guðmundr welcomed him for the sake of the king’s messages and he stayed the second winter with Guðmundr. Then he could not bear it there any longer. Then Guðmundr provided him with lodging on a small farm called at Kálfskinn, and there were few servants there. Hrœrekr stayed there the third winter, and he said this, that since he had given up his kingdom, that was the place where he had stayed, that he had been most content, because there he had been most highly respected by everyone. The following summer Hrœrekr took a sickness that brought about his death. So it is said that this is the only king who lies buried in Iceland. Þórarinn Nefjólsson spent a long time in trading voyages, but sometimes stayed with King Óláfr.
Endnotes

1  The Icelandic text below is from Finnur Jónson’s edition of Heimskringla, published 1893–1900 by Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur and is in the public domain. The translation is from Heimskringla II: Óláfr Haraldsson (the Saint), translated by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes, Viking Society for Northern Research, 2014 and is used with permission from the translators. Minor edits to the translation have been made, including Americanized spelling and occasional glossing.

2  In this narrative, maiming is clearly a mark of distinction, since the king’s two biggest adversaries are maimed whereas the others are banished. The maiming might be symbolic: King Guðrøðr loses his tongue since he had been the most vocal of the king’s opponents. King Hrœrekr is blinded because of his great wisdom, with sight and wisdom being closely connected in Old Norse culture.

3  King Hrœrekr’s valiant attempt to strike King Óláfr himself, in spite of his blindness, is possibly meant as a sign of royal steadfastness and spirit, but another message of the narrative is that a blind man can also be dangerous.

4  The introduction of this secondary character, a maimed warrior who lacks a toe, to rid the king of his maimed adversary may be a pure coincidence and yet it seems significant.
The Prose Edda\(^1\) (ca. 1220–40)

Snorri Sturluson
Contributed by Kolfínna Jónatansdóttir

Introduction

The Prose Edda is commonly attributed to the chieftain Snorri Sturluson and consists of four main parts: The Prologue, Gylfaginning, Skáldskaparmál, and Háttatal. A big part of the work is meant to be a handbook for poets on form and allegories, and since many of the allegories have their roots in myths, Christian poets needed to familiarize themselves with Old Norse myths in order to be able to continue the tradition. One of the narratives in Gylfaginning is about the death of Baldr and how Loki tricks the blind Höðr into killing him. Höðr is named as Baldr’s killer in various poems as well as in Saxo Grammaticus’s History of the Danes, but it is only in The Prose Edda that Höðr is explicitly said to be blind and tricked by Loki. It has to be taken into account that many of the poems just refer briefly to Baldr’s death, but don’t describe the situation in detail, so there is a possibility that what may have been considered common knowledge has been left out.

Höðr’s blindness is important in The Prose Edda, and in Skáldskaparmál, which explains poetic diction, one way to refer to Höðr is to call him hinn blindi ás (the blind god). When he's introduced for the first time in Gylfaginning he is said to be blind and “of sufficient strength, but the gods would desire that no occasion should rise of naming this god, for the work of his hands shall long be held in memory among gods and men.” When Loki approaches him with the fatal wand, Höðr is standing outside of the circle of gods who are having fun testing Baldr’s invulnerability. Due to his blindness he can’t participate in the game and is not part of the actions of the other gods, but with Loki’s help he is briefly included in the game, with dire consequences. The other gods leave Höðr out of the game due to his impairment, and that isolation leads him to be willing to throw the wand Loki hands him, causing great misfortune, both to himself and ultimately the other gods, since the loss of Baldr can be seen as a retribution for not including Höðr.

Many theories have been presented to explain why Höðr is blind in The Prose Edda’s version of the myth of Baldr’s death. Scholars have wondered whether Höðr’s blindness may be symbolic, have an ethical dimension, or be influenced by biblical or contemporary European narratives. Höðr isn’t the only god who is impaired in the Old Norse pantheon, but his impairment is the only one that has negative connotations. Týr sacrificed one of his hands so the wolf Fenrisúlfur could be fettered and Óðinn gave one of his eyes to gain more wisdom. Those impairments do not seem to hinder those gods at all, but reflect injuries that those who fought in battle could have suffered. It has been suggested that missing body parts on gods and heroes are a sign of how their strength or abilities have been enhanced or that they may have supernatural powers, such as Óðinn’s eye being an indicator of his second sight, and Týr being one handed being a symbol of his strength as a god of battle. It is unclear whether Höðr is born blind or blinded later on, and his blindness is not explained with any kind of sacrifice or special powers he could have acquired instead.
Bibliography

Þá mælti Gangleri: “Hafa nökkur meiri tókendur orðir med ásunum? Allmikir þrekvirki vann Þórr í þessi ferð.”

Hárr svarar: “Vera mun at segja frá þeim þóttirvert ásunum. En þat er upphaf þeirar sögu, at Baldr inn góða dreymði drauma stóra ok hætliga um líf sitt. En er hann sagði ásunum draumana, þá báru þeir saman ræð sin, ok var þat gert at beidhóða Baldri fyrir allskonar háska, ok Frigg tók svardagil þess, at eira skyldu Baldri eldr ok vagn, járn ok alls konar málum, steinar, jörðin, viðirnir, sóttirnar, dýrin, fuglarnir, eitrit, ormarinnir.

En er þetta var gert ok vitat, þá var þat skemmtun Baldrs ok ásanna, at hann skyldi standa upp á þingum, en allir aðrir skyldu sumir skjóta á hann, sumir höggeva til, sumir berja grjóti, en hvat sem at var gert, sakaði hann ekki, ok þótti þetta öllum mikill frami.

En er þetta sá Loki Laufeyjarson, þá likaði honum illa, er Baldr sakaði ekki. Hann gekk til Fensalar til Friggjar ok brá sér í konu líki. Þá spyr Frigg, ef sú kona vissi, hvat æsir höfðust at á þinginu. Hon sagði, at allir skutu at Baldri ok þat, at hann sakaði ekki.


En Höðr stóð útarliga í mannhringnum, því at hann var blindr. Þá mælti Loki við hann: “Hví skytr þú ekki at Baldri?” Hann svarar: “Því, at ek sé eigi, hvat Baldr er, ok þat annat, at ek em vápnlauss.” Þá mælti Loki: “Gerðu þó i liking annarra manna ok þennar, at þat bíet eða viðir granda Baldri.”

Then spake Gangleri: “Have any more matters of note befallen among the Æsir? A very great deed of valor did Thor achieve on that journey.”

Hárr made answer: “Now shall be told of those tidings which seemed of more consequence to the Æsir. The beginning of the story is this, that Baldr° the Good dreamed great and perilous dreams touching his life. When he told these dreams to the Æsir, then they took counsel together: and this was their decision: to ask safety for Baldr from all kinds of dangers. And Frigg took oaths to this purpose, that fire and water should spare Baldr, likewise iron and metal of all kinds, stones, earth, trees, sicknesses, beasts, birds, venom, serpents. And when that was done and made known, then it was a diversion of Baldr’s and the Æsir, that he should stand up in the Thing,” and all the others should some shoot at him, some hew at him, some beat him with stones; but whatsoever was done hurt him not at all, and that seemed to them all a very worshipful thing.

“But when Loki Laufeyarson saw this, it pleased him ill that Baldr took no hurt. He went to Fensalir to Frigg, and made himself into the likeness of a woman. Then Frigg asked if that woman knew what the Æsir did at the Thing. She said that all were shooting at Baldr, and moreover, that he took no hurt.

“Then said Frigg: ‘Neither weapons nor trees may hurt Baldr: I have taken oaths of them all.’ Then the woman asked: ‘Have all things taken oaths to spare Baldr?’ and Frigg answered: ‘There grows a tree-sprout alone westward of Valhall: it is called Mistletoe; I thought it too young to ask the oath of.’ Then straightway the woman turned away; but Loki took Mistletoe and pulled it up and went to the Thing.

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**Baldr The son of Óðinn and Frigg.**  **Thing [Þing] An assembly.**
Hödr tók mistiltein ok skaut at Baldri at tilvisun Loka. Flaug skotit í gegnum Baldr, ok fell hann dauðr til jardar, ok hefir þat mest óhapp verit unnit með goðum ok mönnum.

Pá er Baldr var fallinn, þá fállust öllum ásum orðtök ok svá hendr at taka til hans, ok sá hverr til annars, ok våru allir með einum hug til þess, er unnit hafði verkit, en engi maðri hefn. Þar var svá mikill griðastaðr. En þá er æsirnir freistuðu at mæla, þá var hitt þó fyr, at grátrinn kom upp, svá at engi mátti öðrum segja med orðunum frá sinum harmi. En Óðinn bar þeim mun verst þenna skaða sem hann kunni mesta skyn, hversu mikil af-taka ok missa ásumum var í fráfalli Baldrs.

“Hödr stood outside the ring of men, because he was blind. Then spake Loki to him: ‘Why dost thou not shoot at Baldr?’ He answered: ‘Because I see not where Baldr is; and for this also, that I am weaponless.’ Then said Loki: ‘Do thou also after the manner of other men, and show Baldr honor as the other men do. I will direct thee where he stands; shoot at him with this wand.’

“Hödr took Mistletoe and shot at Baldr, being guided by Loki: the shaft flew through Baldr, and he fell dead to the earth; and that was the greatest mischance that has ever be-fallen among gods and men.

“Then, when Baldr was fallen, words failed all the Æsir, and their hands likewise to lay hold of him; each looked at the other, and all were of one mind as to him who had wrought the work, but none might take vengeance, so great a sanctuary was in that place. But when the Æsir tried to speak, then it befell first that weeping broke out, so that none might speak to the others with words concerning his grief. But Odin bore that misfortune by so much the worst, as he had most perception of how great harm and loss for the Æsir were in the death of Baldr.
Endnotes

1 The texts below are taken from Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur’s 1916 edition *The Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson, Scandinavian Classics 5, The American-Scandinavian Foundation. Brodeur’s edition was a facing text translation. The direct translation in the introduction is also taken from this edition. Notes and glosses have been provided by Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir.

2 In Old Norse myths the gods are divided into two groups, Vanir and Æsir (sg. Áss). The majority of the gods are Æsir and therefore that word is often used to refer to all the gods.

3 This refers to the previous chapter where Þórr visits Útgarða-Loki.

4 Thing [Þing] were held regularly in Iceland, both locally and on a national scale on Þingvellir. Chieftains and farmers met at such assemblies and settled their differences and court cases were held.
DRAMA
The Cure of the Blind Man from the Chester Cycle
(ca. 1531–75)
Contributed by Kurt Schreyer

Introduction

The Cure of the Blind Man takes place during the first part of Play 13 of the Chester Cycle, which was performed by the Glovers’ Guild and which also stages the raising of Lazarus. Declaring, “Ego sum lux mundi [I am the light of the world; Latin],” Jesus opens the play with a self-introduction that echoes Deus’ first lines at the very beginning of the cycle: “Ego sum alpha et omegae [I am the alpha and omega; Latin].” By declaring himself “the light of this world” (l. 1) in this way, Jesus foregrounds both the importance of being in communion with the Father and the play’s use of the metaphors of light and darkness, seeing and blindness as powerful ways of understanding that relationship. Before he can “goe to Bethenye” (l. 16) and cure Lazarus, a boy enters leading a man who is “blynd and never did see” (l. 41) and whom the play identifies only as “Caecus,” or “Blind Man.” David Mills’s suggestion that the pair would very likely have approached the pageant wagon through the crowd cannot be understated if we consider the remarkable immediacy of the play’s meditation on the community’s responsibility toward the blind. The Blind Man is as much a contemporary citizen of Chester as he is a figure from the biblical past. Jesus thus cautions both his followers and the audience against equating physical blindness with sin: “Hit was neither for his offence, / neither the synne of his parentes, / or other fault or negligence / that hee was blynd borne” (ll. 51–54). We would do well, therefore, to follow Joshua Eyler’s suggestion that—rather than imposing our own models of disability, whether religious, cultural, or medical—we allow them to emerge organically from medieval texts themselves. Though he is promptly healed by Jesus, Caecus must still endure the cross-examination of his fellow citizens and the Pharisees. The Glovers’ play is carefully attentive to the biblical account in John 9:1–41, yet it has a poignancy which Chester audiences must have felt, as when Jesus stands side by side with the Blind Man under the scornful gaze of the Pharisees, enacting the promise that “My light to them shall well appeare / which eleeve to mee alwaye” (ll. 65–66).

Bridging familiar Nativity and Passion episodes, The Cure of the Blind Man and Christ and the Leper (discussed below) must perform the crucial task of succinctly encapsulating Jesus’ public ministry. And both pageants do so brilliantly—emphasizing again and again that the Christian community must reach out to and include all people, not only those who rank high and low, but especially those who are spiritually and physically in need of “almes” and “charitie” (l. 40). Indeed, there is a very real sense in which Jesus’ encounter with the Blind Man suggests that membership in the community—that is to say spiritual health—is conditioned precisely by a person’s ability to treat those with disabilities as “your owne neighbour and of your owne kynd” (l. 39). As Jesus explains, his “Fathers workes” is “to heale the sicke and restore the blynd to sight” in order “that there may be one flocke and one sheppard” (ll. 23–24, 28).

If this sounds rather romantic, the Glovers’ play dramatizes a community that is in
fact as friable as it is fractious, quite prone to indifference if not the sneering rejection of its disadvantaged members, and we witness several characters—not only religious authorities but ordinary citizens—who willfully denigrate the Blind Man and Jesus. But they do so, the play further suggests, at the peril of alienating themselves. Most conspicuously, when Primus and Secundus Judeus (First and Second Jew) attempt to stone Jesus, they—and we, the audience—undergo a kind of blindness as he “suddenly disappears from sight” (‘et statim evanescit Jesus,” l. 284 stage direction). Whether or not this remarkable theatrical vanishing (the play itself says that it is “Quyntly” or cleverly done) serves as a warning against spiritual blindness and loss of communion with Jesus and the Father, the play rather disturbingly impels us to share the same loss of vision which the callous Primus and Secundus Judeus undergo. As a community, therefore, we are all in danger, the Glovers’ play suggests, of failing to recognize the Blind Man as “your owne neighbour and of your owne kynd” (l. 39).

Bibliography


## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Puer°</td>
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<td>Caecus°</td>
<td>Blind Man</td>
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<td>Petrus°</td>
<td>Peter</td>
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<td>John</td>
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<td>Primus Vicinus°</td>
<td>First Neighbor</td>
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<td>Secundus Vicinus°</td>
<td>Second Neighbor</td>
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<td>Primus Pharaseus°</td>
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<td>Secundus Pharaseus°</td>
<td>Second Pharisee</td>
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<td>Nuntius°</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Pater°</td>
<td>Father</td>
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<td>Primus Judeus°</td>
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<td>Secundus Judeus°</td>
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**JESUS** “Ego sum lux mundi. Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris sed habebit lumen vitae.”

Brethren, I am Filius Dei, the light of this world.

Hee that followeth me walketh not in dearknes but hath the light of life; the scriptures so recorde; as patriarches and prophets of me bearen wytnes,° both Abraham, Isaack, and Jacob in there sundrye testimonies, unto whom I was promised before the world beganne to paye there° ransome and to become man.

Ego et Pater unum sumus° my Father and I are all on,° which hath me sent from the throne sempiternall° to preach and declare his will unto man because hee loveth him above his creatures all as his treasure and dearlinge most principall—man, I say agayne, which is his owne elect, above all creatures peculiarlye select.

Wherfore, deare brethren, yt is my mynd and will to goe to Bethenye that standeth herebye, my Fathers hestes° and command mentes to fulfill.

For I am the good sheppard that putther his life in jeoperdye to save his flocke, which I love so tenderlye;

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*Puer Boy  Caecus Blind Man  Petrus Peter  Primus Vicinus First Neighbor  Secundus Vicinus Second Neighbor  Primus Pharaseus First Pharisee  Secundus Pharaseus Second Pharisee  Nuntius Messenger  Mater Mother  Pater Father  Primus Judeus First Jew  Secundus Judeus Second Jew  Ego sum...vitae “I am the light of the world. Whoever who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” [Latin; John 8:12]  wytnes witness  there their  Ego et Pater unum sumus “I and the Father are one” [Latin; John 10:30]  on one  sempiternall everlasting  hestes wishes
20 as yt is written of mee—the scripture beareth wytnes—
“bonus pastor ponit animam suam pro [ovibus] suis.”
Goe we therfore, brethren, while the day is light,
to do my Fathers workes, as I am fully mynded;
to heale the sicke and restore the blynd to sight,
that the prophecye of mee may be fulfilled.
For other sheepe I have which are to me commyttred.
They be not of this flocke, yet will I them regard,
that there may be one flocke and one sheppard.
But or° we goe hence, printe these sayinges in your mynd and harte;
30 recorde them and keepe them in memorye.
Contynue in my worde; from yt doe not departe.
Therby shall all men knowe most perfectelye
that you are my disciples and of my familie.
Goe not before me, but let my word be your guide;
then in your doinges you shall alwayse well speede:°
“Si vos manseritis in sermone meo, veri discipuli mei eritis, et cognosceris veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos.”°

 bonus pastor...suis “A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” [Latin; John 10:11] or before well speede prosper
Si vos manseritis...vos “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” [Latin; John 8:31–32] ducens Caecum leading a blind man [Latin] jentyll gentle in thrall slavery, bondage

 JESUS Hit° was neither for his offence, neither the synne of his parentes, or other fault or negligence that hee was blynd borne; but for this cause spetiallye:° to sett forth Goddes great glorye, his power to shewe manifestlye, this mans sight to reforme.°
While the daye is fayre and bright,
my Fathers workes I must worke right untyll the comminge [of] the night that light be gonne awaye.
In this world when I am heare, I am the light that shyneth cleare. My light to them shall well appeare which cleeve to mee alwaye.

 Tunc Jesus super terram spuit et lu-tum faciat, et oculos Caeci manibus fricabit; postea dicat.°

 Doe, man, as I say to thee. Goe to the water of Siloe, there washe thy eyes, and thou shalt see;
70 and give to God the prayse.

Tunc Caecus quaerit aquam et abut Jesus.

CAECUS Leade me, good child, right hastily unto the water of Siloe.

Tunc lavat, et postea dicit:

Prayed be God omnipotent which nowe to me my sight hath sent. I see all thinges nowe here present. Blessed be God alwaye. When I had donne as God me badde,° mye perfect sight forthwith I hadde; wherfore my hart is now full gladde that I doubt where I am.

PRIMUS VICINUS Neighbour, if I the trueth should saye, this is the blynd man which yestredaye asked our almes as we came this waye. Yt is the verye same.

SECUNDUS VICINUS No, no, neighbour, yt is not hee, but yt is the likest to him that ever I see. One man to another like may bee, and so is hee to him.

CAECUS Good men, truely I am hee that was blynd, and nowe I see. I am no other verelye; enquire of all my kynne.°

PRIMUS VICINUS Then tell the trueth, we thee praye, how this his° happened to us saye—thou that even yestredaye couldst see no yeartly thine, and nowe seest so perfectly. No want of sight in thee we see. Declare therfore to us truelye without more reasoninge.

CAECUS The man which we call Jesus, that worketh miracles daylye with us and whom we finde so gratiouse, anoynted my eyes with claye. And to the water of Siloe he bade me goe immediatelye and wash my eyes, and I should see; and thyder° I tooke my waye. When the water on my eyes light, immediately I had my sight. Was there never yeartly wight° so joyfull in his thought.

SECUNDUS VICINUS Where is hee nowe, we thee praye?

CAECUS I knowe not where he is, by this daye.

SECUNDUS VICINUS Thou shalt with us come on this waye and to the Pharaesies these wordes saye. But yf thou would these thinges denye, yt shall helpe thee right nought. Looke up, lordinges and judges of right!

We have brought you a man that had no sight and one the sabaoth day° through on mans might was healed and restored forsooth.°

PRIMUS VICINUS Declare to them, thou wicked wight, who did restore thee to thy sight, that we may knowe anonright° of this matter the trueth.

CAECUS Jesus annoynted my eyes with claye and bade mee washe in Siloe, and before I come awaye

my perfect sight I hadd.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS This man, the trueth if I should saye, is not of God—my head I laye°—which doth violate the saboath daye. I judge him to be madd.
SECUNDUS PHARASEUS I cannot enter into my thought that he which hath this marvel wrought should be a sinner—I leave° yt nought; hit is not in my creede." Saye what is hee that did thee heal.

CAECUS A prophet hee ys, without flame.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS Surely thou arte a knave of kynde° that faynest° thyselfe for to be blynde; wherfore nowe this is my mynde, the trueth to trye indeede. His father and mother, both in feere," shall come declare the matter heere, and then the trueth shall soone appeare and we put out of doubt. Goë forth, messinger, anon in hye," and fetch his parentes by and by." This knave can nought but prate and lye;° I would his eyes were out.

NUNTIUS Your byddinge, maister, I shall fulfill and doe my dutye as is good skill," for this daye hither I knowe the will, and I shall spie them out.

Tunc circumspectat, et adloquitur eos." Syr and dame, both in feare, you must afore° the Pharasyes appeare. What there° will is, there shall you heare.

MATER Alas, man, what doe we heere? Must we afore the Pharasyes appeare? A vengeance on them farre and neare; they never did poore men good!

PATER Dame, here is no other waye but there commandment wee must obeye, or elles they would without delaye course" us and take our good." NUNTIUS Here I have brought as you bade me these two persons that aged bee. They be the parentes of him truely which sayd that he was blynde.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS Come neare to us both too," and tell us truely or ere we goe whether this be your sonne or noe looke noe descent° we fynde.

PATER Maysters, we knowe certaynlye our sonne hee is—we cannot denye—and blynd was borne, undoubtedly, and that we will depose." But whoe restored him to his sight we be unceraynle, by God almight. Wherfore of him, as is right, the trueth you must enquyre.

MATER For he hath age° his tale to tell, and his mother-tonge to utter hit° well; although hee could never bye nor sell, lett him speake, we desyre.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS Give prayse to God, thou craftie knave, and looke hereafter thou do not rave° nor saye that Jesus did thee save and restored thee to thy sight.

SECUNDUS PHARASEUS Hee is a sinner and that wee knowe, deceaving° the people to and froe. This is most true that wee thee showe. Beleeve us as is right.

CAECUS If he bee sinfull I doe not knowe, but this is trueth that I doe showe.

leve believe hit is not in my creede I cannot credit it
knave of kynde natural-born rogue faynest
feignest, pretend in feere together anon in hye at once and lie as...skill as is quite right
Tunc...eos He then looks about and speaks to them [Latin] afore before course curse, excommunicate good goods, belongings too two descent deceit depose testify under oath hath age is old enough hit is rave stray morally deceavinge deceiving, misleading
When I was blynd and in great woe,
hee cured me, as yee see.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS What did hee,
thou lither swayne°?  

CAECUS I tould you once; will you
here hit° agayne?
Or his disciples will [you] become,
of all your sinnes to have remission°?

SECUNDUS PHARASEUS O cursed
caytyffe,° yll moote thow thee°!
Would thou have us his disciples to bee?
No, no! Moysest disciples binne wee,°
for God with him did speake.
But whence this is, I never knewe.

CAECUS I marvayle° of that, as I am
trewe—
that you knowe not from whence hee
should bee
that me cured that never did see—
knowinge this most certaynlye:
God wyll not sinners here.
But hee that honoreth God truely,
him will hee here° by and by°
and grant his askinge° gratiously,
for that man is to him deare.
And to this I dare be bould,
there is noe man that ever could
restore a creature to his sight
that was blynd borne and never sawe
light.
If he of God were not, iwis,°
hee could never worke such thinges as
this.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS What, sinfull
knave! Wilt thou teach us
which all the scriptures can discusse,
and of our livinge be so vertuous?
We curse° thee owt of this place.

JESUS Beleeves thou in God Sonne
trulye?

CAECUS Yea, gratious lord. Whoe is
hee?

JESUS Thou hast him seene with thy
eyee.
Hee is the same that talketh with thee.

CAECUS Then I here, I honour him
with hart free,°
and ever shall serve him untill I dye.

PRIMUS JUDEUS Saye, man that mak-
est such maistrye,°
or thow our sowles doe anoye,°
tell us here appertly°
Christ yf that thou be.

JESUS That I spake to you openlye
and workes that I doe verelye°
in my Fathers name almightie
beareth wytnes of mee.
But you beleve not as you seene,
for of my sheepe yee ne beene;
but my flocke, withowten weene,°
here my voyce alwaye.
And I knowe them well eychon,°
for with me alwaye the gonne;°
and for them I ordayne in my owne°
everlastinge life for aye.°
No man shall reave° my sheepe from
me,
for my Father in majestie
ys greater then binne all yee,
or any that ever was.

SECUNDUS JUDEUS. Thou shalt
abye,° by my bone,°
or thou heathen passe.°
Helpe, fellowe, and gather stones
and beate him well, for cockes bones.°
He scornes us quiantlye° for the nones°

lither swayne wicked slave
here hit hear it
remission forgiveness cursed caytyffe miserable
wretch yll moote thow thee may evil befall the binne wee are we
marvayle marzel here
hear by and by soon askinge request iwis truly curse excommunicate free open makest such
maistrye displays such power or thow...anoye before you afflict our souls appertly clearly vere-
lye truly withouten weene without doubt eychon every single one the gonne they go owne
house for aye forever reave snatch abye abide by my bone by my bones, upon my life or thou
heathen passe before you go hence for cockes bones by God's bones quiantlye cunningly for the
nones for the moment
and doth us great anoye.

Tunc lapides colligunt.°

Yea, stones nowe here I have
for this rybauld° that thus can rave.
One stroke, as God me save,
he shall have soone in hyc.°

JESUS Wretches, manye a good deede
I have done, yea in great neede;
nowe quitar you fowle my meede°
to stone me on° this manere.

PRIMUS JUDEUS For thy good deede
that thou hast wrought°
at this tyne stone we thee nought.
Both in word and thought
there thou lyes falselye.

JESUS But I doe well and truely
my Fathers biddinge by and by,°
elles may you hope well I ly
and then leeyes° you me nought.
But sythen° you will not leeve me,
nor my deedes that you may see,
to them beleevinge takes yee,

for nothinge may be soothe.°

Sooke may you knowe well and Verey°
in my Father that I ame aye,°
and hee in mee, sooth to saye,°
and eyther of us in other.

Tunc colligunt lapides et statim
Tunc lapides...Jesus.°

SECUNDUS JUDEUS Owt, owt, alas
where is our fonne°?
Quyntly° that hee is heathen° gone.
I would have taken him, and that
anone,°
and fowle° him all to-frapped.°

Yea, make we never so much mone,"

nowe there is noe other wonne,"
for hee and his men everychone°

are from us clearly scaped.°

PRIMUS JUDEUS Nowe by the death I
shall one° dye,
may I° see him with my eye,
to syr Cayphas I shall him wrye°
and tell that° shall him deare.°

See I never none, by my faye,°
when I had stones, soe soone awaye.
But yet no force°! Another daye
his tabret° we shall feare.°
Endnotes

1 The text for this scene from Play 13 performed by the Chester Glovers is based on Hermann Deimling and G.W. Matthews, eds., The Chester Plays, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 62 and 115 (Oxford University Press, 1892 and 1916), in consultation with the work of Robert M. Lumiansky and David Mills, The Chester Mystery Cycle, Early English Text Society Supplementary Series 3 (Oxford University Press, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 230–42, and Robert M. Lumiansky, ed., The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents (University of North Carolina Press, 1983). The author (or authors) of the Glovers’ play, as well as the exact date of the play text is unknown, though it was very likely added as a supplement to the guild’s older Raising of Lazarus play when the cycle expanded to a three-day production during Whitsun week sometime around 1531. In any case, the terminus ad quem is certainly the final performance of the cycle during Midsummer 1575. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Kurt Schreyer. Stanza breaks have been removed for ease of publication.


3 Joshua R. Eyler, Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverbations (Ashgate, 2010), pp. 6–7.
Christ and the Leper from the Chester Cycle
(ca. 1531–75)

Contributed by Kurt Schreyer

Introduction

In the 1979 film *Life of Brian*, a Monty Python satire about a mistaken messiah, the eponymous Brian meets an ex-leper who, though a skilled haggler, is not only miffed about the fact that Jesus cured him but also begrudges acts of generosity in general. The scene’s punchline—“There’s no pleasing some people.”—goes beyond comedy to raise provocative questions about the public ministry of Jesus, above all whether those people he cured became grateful followers and what kind of lives they led following their miraculous healing.

The Chester craft guild of Cordwainers, or Shoemakers, explore these challenging issues in Play 14 as Jesus, who is on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and to undergo betrayal, torture, and crucifixion, dines at the house of Simon the Leper—or rather ex-leper whom he “healed hase / over all for to showe” who once “that fowle and mesell was” (ll. 19–20, 18). According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, “mesell” was one of the English words (besides “lazar” and “leper”) commonly used from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century to describe persons “afflicted with any of various disfiguring skin diseases, such as leucoderma, psoriasis, vitiligo, etc.” though of course the term carried moral implications as well, being applied to “lowly wretched” people or “sinners,” or even of “diseased or infected” swine. Though potentially debilitating, medical practitioners and laypeople alike knew that incipient lepra or other disfiguring skin conditions might be cured, whether through the temporary remission of the disease, successful treatments, or perhaps by some miraculous means. It was by no means uncommon to know someone “that fowle and mesell was” (l. 18) but who, like Simon, was restored to society after their physical suffering and, perhaps, the public ignominy of segregation.

The Scriptures do not record the healing of Simon per se, and the play draws from scenes in all four Gospels whose details are vexingly interchanged but which are similar in one respect: Simon the Leper never speaks. In the Chester play, however, after initially expressing his warm gratitude to Jesus for curing him, he subsequently begrudges Maria Magdalena’s anointing of Jesus’ head and feet. Worse, he wishes to segregate her from society as if she were a leper: “hee should...suffer her not to come him nere” (ll. 62–63). Simon confides these thoughts to a likeminded Judas, whose greed and duplicity will become apparent later in the play. Before addressing the penitent Magdalen, Jesus reprimands both men. In this way, the play clearly examines the intimate connections between bodily disease and moral depravity, but it does not oversimplify what would have been considered to be a complex relationship. For one thing, Simon was not merely leprous but, as he explicitly states, Jesus cured him of a great many physical and spiritual perils: “Well is me that I may see thy face / here in my house, this poore place.”
Thou comfortes me in manye a case / and that I full well knowe” (ll. 21–24).

Simon’s spiritual recovery is still a work in progress, and Jesus commends his reply to the parable of the two debtors (ll. 80–112). Humble and gracious as he speaks to Jesus, he is nonetheless self-regarding and judgmental toward the unhappy woman: “Methinke that hee should lett her goe, / tis woman full of synne and woe, / for feare of worldes shame” (ll. 58–60). What Simon has forgotten (or wishes to forget) but which would have been plain to a late-medieval audience, is that leprosy, prostitution, and sexual incontinence were culturally perceived to be related and mutually sustaining. Pointing his finger at Magdalen’s disreputable past, he unwittingly raises the specter of his own former life. We would be accurate in saying that the play associates Simon’s leprosy with Maria’s promiscuity as well as Judas’ treachery, but such observations need to be carefully circumscribed, for it does not do so from any sense of moral superiority or a desire to condemn lepers. Quite the opposite is true: the Cordwainer’s play seems to find more danger in being an ex-leper than in suffering from leprosy itself. Like the preceding Cure of the Blind Man, this play is much more interested in social wholeness and the integration of those who have been physically and morally excluded than in division and separation.

For whatever his expressed gratitude toward Jesus, Simon’s lack of hospitality resembles the social ostracizing which lepers often (though not quite so often as we may think, as Carole Rawcliffe demonstrates) experienced. Keeping his distance from his guest, he treats Jesus as if he too suffered from leprosy: “Kisse syth I came thou gave non,… / With oyle thou hast not me anoynt” (ll. 105, 109). The play does not give Simon a chance to reply to Jesus’ reproach, and we’re left to wonder if he is cured of his spiritual pride. What we can say is that he is present to hear Maria Magdalena use the same word—“fowle” (i.e., foul)—to portray her former sinful life which Simon had used to describe his leprosy. In her final words to Jesus she says: “thou hast… from fowle life unto great lee [tranquility] / releve me, lord, for love” (ll. 134–36). Hearing these words, Jesus immediately leaves Simon’s house and enters Jerusalem to begin his Passion—“for love.”

**Bibliography**


DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Jesus
Petrus
Philippus
Simon the Leper
Lazarus
Martha
Maria Magdalena
Judas Iscarioth

JESUS Brethren, goe we to Bethenye to Lazarre, Martha, and Marye; for I love mych that companye, thidder° now I wend.° Symon the lepper hath prayed° me in his house to take charitie.° With them nowe yt liketh mee a while for to lend.°

PETRUS Lord, all readye shall we be in life and death to goe with thee. Great joye they may have to see thy comminge into there° place.

PHILIPPUS Lazarre thou raysed through thy pittye, and Simou also—mesell° was hee—thou clensed,° lord, that wotten° we, and holpe° them through thy grace.

Tunc ibunt versus domum Simonis leprosi.°

SIMON Welcome, Jesu, full of grace, that mee that fowle° and mesell was all whole, lord, thou healed hase,°

Well is me that I may see thy face here in my house, this poore place. Thou comfortes me in manye a case° and that I full well knowe.

LAZARUS Welcome, lord, sweete Jesu. Blessed be the tyme that I thee knewe. From death to life through thy vertue° thou raysted me not yore.°

Fowre dayes in yearth° when I had layne thou grantest me life, lord, agayne. Thee I honour with all my mayne° nowe and evermore.

MARTHA Welcome, my lovely lord and leere;° welcome, my deareworth° darlinge deare. Fayne° may thy freindes be in feere°
to see thy freelye° face.
Syttes downe, if your will weare," and I shall helpe to serve you here
before in other place.

Tunc Jesus sedebat, et omnes cum eo, et veniet Maria Magdalena cum alabas-
tro unguenti, et lamentando dicat."°

MARIA MAGDALENA Welcome, my
lovely lord of leale;°
welcome, my harte; welcome, my heale;°
welcome, all my worldes weale,°
my boote° and all my blys.
From thee, lord, may I not conseale
my fylth and my faultes fayle."°
Forgive mee that my flesh so freyle
to thee hath donne amysse."°
Oyntment I have here readye
to anoynte thy sweete bodye.
Though I be wretched and unworthye,
wayne° me not from thy wonne."°

Tunc aperiet pixidem, et faciet signum
unctionis, et rigabit pedes Jesu lach-
rymis et tergebit capillis suis."°

SIMON A, Judas, why doth Jesus soe?
Methinke that hee should lett her goe,
this woman full of synne and woe,
for feare of worldes shame."°
And if hee very prophet were,
hee should knowe hir life here
and suffer her not to come him nere,
for payringe° of his fame."°

JUDAS ISCARIOTH Naye, Simon,
brother, sooth to saye,
hit is nothinge to my paye,"°
this oyntment goeth to° fast awaye
that is so much of pryce.
This ylke boyst° might have binne sould
for three hundreth penyes tould°
and dealt to poore men, whosoever
would,
and whosoever had binne wise.

JESUS Simon, take good heed to mee.
I have an errand° to saye to thee.
SIMON Maister, what you° will maye
bee,
saye on, I you beseech.

JESUS By an example I shall thee showe
and to this companye on a rowe,"°
whereby I say thou maye

to answere° to my speache.
Two deters somtyme° there were
oughten° money to a userer."°
The on° was in his dangere°
five hundreth penyes tould;°
They° other fiftie, as I saye here.
For they were poore, at there° prayer
he forgave them both in feare,"°
and nought take of them he would.

Whether° of these two, read° if thou
can,
was more behoulden° to that man?

SIMON Lord, as much as I can thereon
I shall saye or I passe."°
Five hundreth is more then fiftie;
therfore methinke skylfullye°

freelye noble if..weare if you wish wonte accustomed Tunc Jesus...dicat Jesus then sits down and the others with him. Mary Magdalen enters with a jar of ointment and, weeping mournfully, she says [Latin] leale faithful people heale health worldes weale world’s prosperity boote redeemer faultes payre many faults amysse amiss wayve send away wonne dwelling monne moan Tunc aperiet...suis Opening the box, she makes as if to anoint him, and her tears wet Jesus' feet, which she wipes dry with her hair [Latin] worldes shame public disgrace payringe of injury to fame reputation hit...paye it's not at all to my liking to too ylke boyst same jar toould counted, reckoned errand message you your on a rowe altogether to answere how to reply somtyme once oughten owed usurer moneylender on one dangere debt They the toould in sum, total there their in feare together Whether Which read discern, advise, judge behoulde indebted or I passe before I go methinke skylfullye it seems reasonable to me
that hee that hee forgave more partie, to him he was.

JESUS Simon, thou deemes soothlie, iwyssse. 

Sees thou this woman that here is? 
Sycker she hath not donee anysse to worke on this manere. 
Into thy house here thou me geete; no water thou gave me to my feete. Shee washed them with her teares weete and wyped them with her heare. 
Kisse syth I came thou gave non, but syth shee came into this wonne shee hath kyssed my feete eychon; of weeping shee never ceased. With oyle thou hast not me anoynt, but shee hat donne both foot and joynt. Therfore I tell thee on poynct, mych synne is her released. 

Ad Judam Iscarioth: And Judas, also to thee I saye: wherto wouldest thee mispaye with this woman by any waye that eased me this hasse? A good deed she hath donne todaye, for poore men you have with you aye, and me yee may not have, in faye, but a little space. 

Therfore, woman, witterlye, for thou hast loved so renderly, all thy synnes nowe forgive I; beleeffe hath saved thee. And all that preach the evangelye through the world by and by of thy deed shall make memorye that thou hasse donne to mee.

MARIA MAGDALENA My Christ, my comfort and my kinge, I worshippe thee in all thinge, for nowe my hart is in likinge, and I at myne above. Seaven devils nowe, as I well see, thou hast dryven nowe owt of mee, and from fowle life unto great lee releved me, lord, for love.

that hee that hee forgave more partie, to him he was. 

JESUS Simon, thou deemes soothlie, iwyssse. 

Sees thou this woman that here is? 
Sycker she hath not donee anysse to worke on this manere. 
Into thy house here thou me geete; no water thou gave me to my feete. Shee washed them with her teares weete and wyped them with her heare. 
Kisse syth I came thou gave non, but syth shee came into this wonne shee hath kyssed my feete eychon; of weeping shee never ceased. With oyle thou hast not me anoynt, but shee hat Donne both foot and joynt. Therfore I tell thee on poynct, mych synne is her released. 

Ad Judam Iscarioth: And Judas, also to thee I saye: wherto wouldest thee mispaye with this woman by any waye that eased me this hasse? A good deed she hath Donne todaye, for poore men you have with you aye, and me yee may not have, in faye, but a little space. 

Therfore, woman, witterlye, for thou hast loved so renderly, all thy synnes nowe forgive I; beleeffe hath saved thee. And all that preach the evangelye through the world by and by of thy deed shall make memorye that thou hasse Donne to mee.
Endnotes

1 The text for this scene from Play 14 performed by the Chester Cordwainers, or Shoemakers, is based on Hermann Deimling and G.W. Matthews, eds., The Chester Plays, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 62 and 115 (Oxford University Press, 1892 and 1916), in consultation with the work of Robert M. Lumiansky and David Mills, The Chester Mystery Cycle, Early English Text Society Supplementary Series 3 (Oxford University Press, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 230–42, and Robert M. Lumiansky, ed., The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents (University of North Carolina Press, 1983). While the author(s) of the Cordwainers’ play and the date of its origin are not known, this particular scene at the house of Simon the Leper was probably an embellishment of an older pageant depicting Christ’s entry into Jerusalem and confrontation with the moneylenders in the Temple. And while surviving records demonstrate the Cordwainers’ expenditures for a similar version of the play in 1550, it is reasonable to suppose that this episode was added much earlier when the cycle expanded to a three-day production during Whitsun week sometime around 1531 and then underwent several changes and evolutions in the ensuing decades before the final performance of the cycle during Midsummer 1575. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Kurt Schreyer. Stanza breaks have been removed for ease of publication.

2 Yet in Luke’s account of the anointing by the sinful woman, Simon the Pharisee, who has not apparently been healed by Jesus, does (see Lk 7:36–50).
The Entry into Jerusalem from the York Cycle
(ca. 1377)

Contributed by Frank M. Napolitano

Introduction

For nearly two hundred years (1377–1569), the York Plays rolled on pageant wagons throughout the city of York on the feast of Corpus Christi, depicting biblical and pseudo-biblical stories from Judeo-Christian salvation history. Celebrating their Christian faith and artisanal pride, the town’s craft guilds each presented specific scenes from Jesus’ life or episodes in the Hebrew Scriptures believed to refer typologically to Christ. The “Entry,” produced by the Skinners (suppliers of animal skins), depicts the account, from all four Gospels, of Jesus’ arrival at Jerusalem and the beginning of the chain of events leading to his death. Politics and devotion co-mingle seamlessly in the play’s medieval context: the crowd’s welcoming of Jesus emulates the spectacle with which medieval cities greeted visiting royalty. York and Jerusalem thus become interchangeable, and the audience members become witnesses to—and participants in—the story of their own redemption.1

The play’s treatment of disability contributes to its devotional and social significance by expanding considerably the single verse in Matthew 21:14, where Jesus heals a blind man and a lame man. The text supports, to some extent, this metaphorical representation of Christ the Physician can be found in Luke 5:31–32, and numerous medieval texts support the idea that physical ailments in general are the byproducts of humanity’s fallen state.7

The medieval predilection to associate disability with personal, moral shortcomings is significant. For example, “poor blind beggars” were often associated with “stereotypes of idleness, avarice and wantonness” in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Paris.6 Despite this cultural association, the “Entry” provides scarce linkage between sin and literal disability. In fact, the play seems to subvert any relationship between disability and sin in a series of interactions between Jesus and three marginalized individuals. No evidence exists for the sinfulness of Ceus or Claudus, the first two characters to whom, besides his disciples, Jesus speaks. Neither character associates his disability with sin, nor does Jesus...
ask either one to account for any moral faults. The absence of sin in the characters with disabilities may be the result of the play’s ultimate source. Associations between sin and disability are, in the Christian Scriptures at least, the exception, rather than the rule. The only character in the York “Entry” presented overtly as a sinner is Zacheus, the able-bodied (albeit short) publican whose eagerness to see Jesus draws him away from the social margins and into the center of the narrative. In a display of faith, Zacheus climbs a tree to see Jesus, renounces his sinful ways, and praises him. Faith, rather than sin, remains the thread uniting these three characters, for it is not only the sine qua non for the healing of disabilities, but it is also the motivating factor leading characters and audience alike to their savior.

Bibliography


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JESUS To me takis tent° and giffis gud hede,°
My dere discipulis that ben here,
I schalle you telle that° shalbe in dede,°
My tyme to passe hense,° it drawith nere,
And by this skill,"
Mannys sowle to save fro sorowes sere°
That loste was ill.°
From heven to erth whan I dyssende
Rawsnom to make I made promys,

10 The prophicie nowe drawes to ende,
My fadirs wille forsoth° it is,
That sent me hedyr."°
Petir, Phelippe, I schall you blisse,"°
& go to-gedir
Un-to yone castell° that is you agayne,"°
Gois with gud harte,"° and tarie" noght,
My comaundement to do be ye bayne."°
Also I you charge loke it be wrought,"°
That schal ye fynde

20 An asse, this feste° als ye had soght,
Ye hir un-bynde
With hir foole," and to me hem° bring,
That I on hir may sitte a space,"°
So the prophicy clere menying
May be fulfilled here in this place,
‘Doghtyr Syon,’°
Loo! thi lorde comys rydand on an asse
The to opon."°
Yf° any man will you gayne-saye,"°

30 Say that youre lorde has nede of tham,"°
And schall restore° thame this same day,
Un-to what man will tham clayne.
Do thus this thyng,
Go furthe ye both, and be ay bayne\(^o\)
In my blissyng.

**PETRUS** Jesu, maistir, evyn at thy
wille.\(^o\)
And at thi liste\(^o\) us likis to doo,
Yone\(^e\) beste whilke thou desires the
tille,
Even at thi will schall come the too,

**PETRUS** Sir, with thi leve hartely we
pray
This beste that we myght have.

**JANITOR** To what in-tente, firste shall
ye saye?
And than I graunte what ye will crave,
Be gode resoune.

**PHILIPPUS** Oure maistir, Sir, that all
may save,
Aske by chesoune.\(^o\)

**JANITOR** What man is that ye maistir
call?
Swilke\(^e\) privelege dare to hym clayme.

**PETRUS** Jesus of Jewes kyng, and ay\(^e\)
be schall,
Of Nazareth prophete the same,
This same is he,
Both God and man, with-outen blame,\(^o\)
This trist\(^e\) wele we.

**JANITOR** Sirs, of that prophette herde
I have,
But telle me firste playnly, wher is hee?

**PHILIPPUS** He comes at hande, so
God me save,
That lorde we lefte at Bephage,\(^o\)
He bidis us there.

**JANITOR** Sir, take this beste, with
herte full free,
And forthe ye fare.
And if you thynke it be to done,
I schall declare playnly his comyng
To the chiffe\(^o\) of the Jewes, that thei
may sone
Assemble same\(^o\) to his metyng,
What is your rede?°

PETRUS Thou sayest full° well in thy menyng,
Do forth the thie dede.
And sone this beste we schall the bring,
And it restore as resoune will."°

JANITOR This tydungis schall have no laynyng."°
But to the Citezens declare it till
of this cyte,
I suppose fully that thei wolle come mete that free."°
And sen° I will thei warned be,
Both yonge & olde, in ilke a state,"°
For his conyng I will hym mete
To late tham witte,"° with-oute debate.

Lo! wher thei stande,
That citezens cheff, withoute debate,
Of all this lande.
He that is rewler of all right,
And freely schoppe° both sande and see,
He save you, lordyngis," gayly dight,"°
And kepe you in youre semelyte°
And all honoure.

I BURGENSIS Welcome, Porter! what novelte°
Telle us this owre?°

JANITOR Sirs, novelte I can you tell,
And triste° therein as for trewe;
Her comes of kynde of Israell°
Art hande the prophete called Jesu,
Rydand on an asse; this tydandis° newe
That we schall see.

Off hym I have herde grete ferlis° tolde,
He dois grete wounderes in contrees seere,"°

130 He helys the seke, both yonge and olde,
And the blynde giffis tham ther sight.
Both dome and defe, as hym selffe wolde,"°
He cures tham right.

III BURGENSIS Ya v. thowsand° men
with loves° fyve
He fedde, and ilkone hadde i-nowe;°
Watir to wyne he turned ryve,"°
He garte corne° growe with-outen
plogh,
Wher are° was none;
To dede men als° he gaffe liffe,

140 Lazar was one.°

IV BURGENSIS In oure tempill if he prechid
Agaynste the pepull that leved° wrong,
And also new lawes if he teched
Agaynste oure lawis we used so long,
And saide pleynlye,
The olde schall waste,"° the new schall
That we schall see.

V BURGENSIS Ya, Moyses lawe he
cowed ilke dele,"°
And all the prophettis on a rowe,

150 He telles tham so that ilke aman may
fele,"°
And what thei may interly° knowe
Yf thei were dyme,"°
What the prophettis saide in ther sawe,"°
All longis° to hym.

VI BURGENSIS Emanuell also by right
Thai calle that prophette, by this skill,°
He is the same that are was hyght°
By Ysaye be-for us till,
Thus saide full clere.

160 VII BURGENSIS Loo! a maydýn that
knew nevere ille°
A childe schuld here.
David spake of him I wene,°
And lefte witnesse ye knowe ilkone,°
He saide the frute of his corse° clene
Shulde royally regne upon his
trone,°
And therfore he
Of David kyn, and othir none,
Oure kyng schal be.

VIII BURGENSIS Sirs, me thynketh ye
saie right wele,
And gud ensampelys° furth ye bryng,
And sen we thus this mater fele,"
Go we hym mete as oure owne kyng,
And kyng hym call.
What is youre counsaill in this thyng?
Now say ye all.

I BURGENSIS Agaynste resoune I will
noght plete,°
For wele I wote° oure kyng he is,
Whoso agaynst his kyng liste threte,°
He is noght wise, he dose amys.°

Porter, come nere,
What knowlage hast thou of his co-
myng?
Tels us all here.
And than° we will go mete that free,°
And hym honnoure as we wele awe°
Worthely tyll° oure Citee,
And for oure soverayne° lord hym
knawe,"
In whome we triste.

by this skill appropriately are was hyght before was anticipated ille sin wene believe ilkone each one corse body trone throne gud ensampelys good examples fele examined plete argue wote know liste threte wishes to disobey dose amys does amiss than then free noble man awe ought tyll into soverayne all-powerful knawe know on rowe accordingly lyste listen of... ij two of his disciples ther...praye began to ask on their master's behalf softe comfortably haly completely rowe trust be-heste request redy bowne fully ready ressayve receive worthy appropriate thoff though lowte show honor bayne eager fayne gladly
And hym honnoure as his awne\textsuperscript{a} manne, Sen\textsuperscript{b} the soth\textsuperscript{c} I see. Kyng of Juuys\textsuperscript{d} we call hym than, Oure kyng is he. IV BURGENSIS Oure kyng is he, that is no lesse, Oure awne lawe to it cordis\textsuperscript{e} well, The prophettis all bare full witnesse, Qwilke\textsuperscript{f} full of hym secrete\textsuperscript{g} gone felle;\textsuperscript{h} And thus wolde say, 230 ‘Emang youre selff schall come grete seele\textsuperscript{i} Thurgh God verray.\textsuperscript{j}

V BURGENSIS This same is he, ther is non othir, Was us be-heest\textsuperscript{k} full lange before, For Moyses saide, als oure owne brothir, A newe prophette God schulde restore. Therfore loke ye What ye will do, with-outen more; Oure kyng is he. VI BURGENSIS Of Juda come owre kyng so gent,\textsuperscript{l} Of Jesse, David, Salamon, Also by his modir kynne\textsuperscript{m} take tente,\textsuperscript{n} The Genolagye beres witnesse on; This is right playne. Hym to honnoure right as I canne I am full bayne.\textsuperscript{o}

VII BURGENSIS Of youre clene witte and youre consayte\textsuperscript{p} I am full gladde in harte and thought, And hym to mete with-outen latt\textsuperscript{q} I am redy, and feyne\textsuperscript{r} will noght, 250 Bot with you same\textsuperscript{s} To hym agayne us blisse hath brought, With myrth & game. VIII BURGENSIS Youre argumentis thai are so clere I can noght saie but graunte thou till, For whanne I of that counsaille here,\textsuperscript{t} I coveyte hym with fervent wille Onys\textsuperscript{u} for to see, I trowe fro thens I schall Bettir man be. 260 I BURGENSIS Go we than with pro- cessioune To mete that comely\textsuperscript{v} as us awe, With braunches, floures, and uny- soune," With myghtfull\textsuperscript{w} songs her on a rawe,\textsuperscript{x} Our childir schall Go synge before, that men may knaw To this graunte we all. PETRUS Jhesu! lord and maistir free, Als thou comaunde so have we done, 270 This ass here we have brought to the, What is thi wille thou schewe us sone, And tarie\textsuperscript{y} noght. And than schall we, with-outen hune,\textsuperscript{z} Fulfill thi thought. JESUS I thanke you brethere, mylde of mode," Do on this ass youre clothys ye laye, And lifte me uppe with hertis gud, That I on hir may sitte this daye, In my blessing. PHILIPPUS Lord thi will to do all-way 280 We graunte thing.\textsuperscript{\textregistered} JESUS Now my brethere with gud chere, Gyves gode entente, for ryde I will Un-to yone cyte ye se\textsuperscript{\textregistered} so nere, Ye shall me folowe, sam & still\textsuperscript{\textregistered} Als I are\textsuperscript{\textregistered} sayde.
PHILIPPUS Lord! as the lyfe we graunte the till,
And halde us payde.
CECUS A lorde! that all this world has made,12
Bothe sonne and mone, nyght & day,

290 What noyse is this that makis me gladde?
Fro whens it schulde come I can noght saye,
Or what it mene.
Yf any man walke in this way,
Telle hym me be-dene.⁹
PAUPER Man! what ayles⁹ the to crye?
Where wolde thou be? thou say me here.
CECUS A! sir, a blynde man am I,⁹
And ay has bene of tendyr yere Sen I was borne,

300 I harde a voyce with nobill chere
Here me be-forne.
PAUPER Man, will thou oght that I can do?
CECUS Ya, sir, gladly wolde I witte,⁹
Yf thou couthe oght declare me to,
This myrthe I herde, what mene may it,
Or undirstande?
PAUPER Jesu, the prophite full of grace,
Comys here at hande,
And all the cetezens thay are bowne°

310 Gose hym to mete with melodye,
With the fayrest processioune
That evere was sene in this Jury.°
He is right nere.
CECUS Sir, helpe me to the strete hastily,
That I may here

That noyse, and also that I myght thurgh grace
My syght of hym, to crave° I wolde.
PAUPER Loo! he is here at this same place,
Crye faste° on hym, loke thou be bolde,

320 With voyce right[†] high.
CECUS Jesu! the son of David calde.°
Thou have mercy!
Allas! I crye, he heris me noght,
He has no ruthe° of my mysfare,°
He turnes his herre," where is his thought?
PAUPER Cry som-what lowdar, loke thou noght spare,°
So may thou spye.
CECUS Jesu, the salver of all sare,"
To me giffis gode hye.°

330 PHILIPPUS Cesse man, and crye noght soo,
The voyce of the pepill gose the by,
The ag[†h]le° sette still and tente giffe° to,
Here passez the prophite of mercye.
Thou doys amys.°
CECUS A! David sone; to the I crye,
The kyng of blisse.
PETRUS Lorde! have mercy and late hym goo,
He can noght cesse of his crying,
He folows us both to and froo,

340 Graunte hym his Boone° and his askyng.
And late hym wende." We gette no reste or that° this thing Be broght to ende.
JESUS What wolde thou man I to the dede
In this present, telle oppynly.
CECUS Lorde my syght¹⁴ is fro me hydde,
Thou graunte me it, I crye mercy,
This wolde I have.

JESUS Loke uppe nowe with chere
blythely.°

350 Thi faith shall the save.
CECUS Wirschippe and honnoure ay°
to the,
With all the service that can be done,°
The kyng of blisse loued mote° he be,
That thus my sight hathe sente so sone,
And by grete skil.
I was are° blynde as any stone;
I se at wille.

CLAUDUS A! wele wer tham that
evere had liffe,
Old or yonge whedir it were,
Might welde ther lymmes° withouten
striffe,
Go with this mirth the that I see here,
And contynewe,
For I am sette in sorowes sere°
That ay ar newe.°
For I am lame,° as men may se,
And has ben lang.
For wele I wote,° as knowyn is ryffe,°
Bothe dome and deffe thou graunte
tham grace,
And also the dede that thou havyst
geven liff,
Therfore graunte me lord, in this place,
My lymbis to welde.

JESUS My man, ryse and caste the
cruchys° gode space°
Her in the felde.
And loke in trouthe thou stedfast be,
And folow me furth with gode me-
nyng.°

380 CLAUDUS Lorde! lo, my crouchis
where thei flee,°
Als ferre° as I may late tham flenge
With bothe my hende;°
That evere we have metynge
Now I defende.°
For I was halte° both lyne and
lame,
And I suffered tene° and sorowes i-
owe,°
Ay lastand° lord, loved be thi name,
I am als light as birde on bowe.
Ay be thou blist,

390 Such grace hast thou schewed to
me,
Lorde, as the list.°
ZACHEUS° Sen first this worlde was
made of noght,°
And all thyng sette in equite,°
Such ferly° thyng was nevere non
wroght,°
As men this tyme may see with eye.
What it may mene?
I can noght say what it may be,
Comfort or tene.°
And cheffely of a prophete new,

400 That mekill is profite,° and that of
latte,
Both day and nyght thai hym assewe,°
Oure pepill same thurgh strete & gatte
[new laws to lare,°]
Oure olde lawes as nowe thei hatte,°
And his kepis yare.°
Men fro deth to liffe he rayse,
The blynde and dome geve speche and
sight,
Gretely therfore oure folke hym prayse,
And folowis hym both day and nyght;
Fro towne to towne;
Thay calle hym prophite be right,
As of renoune.
And yit I mervayle of that thyng,
Of puplicans sen prince am I°
Of hym I cowthe have no knowyng;°
Yf all° I wolde° have comen hym nere,
Arly and late,
For I am lawe,° and of myne hight
Full is the gate.°
Bot sen° no bettir may be-falle,
I thynke what beste is for to doo,
I am schorte, ye knawe wele all,22
Therfore yone tre I will go too,
And in it clyme;
Whedir he come or passe me fro,
I schall se hym.
A nobill tree thou secomoure,°
I blisse hym that the on the erthe
brought.
Now may I see both here and thore,
That undir me it may be noght.°
Therfore in the°
Wille I bidde in herte & thought
Till I hym se
Un-to° the prophete come to towne
Her° will I bide what so befalle
JESUS Do Zache, do fast come downe.
ZACHEUS Lorde even at thi wille
hastely I schall,
And tarie° noght.
To the on knes lord here I shall,
For sinne I wroght.°
And welcome prophete, trast° and
trew,°
With all the pepull that to the langis.°
JESUS Zache, thi service new
Schall make the clene of all the wrong,
That thou haste done.
ZACHEUS Lorde, I lette° noght for
this thrang°
Her to say sone,°
Me schamys with sinne, but noght to
mende,°
I synne for-sake, threfore I will
Have° my gud° I have unspendid
Poure folke to geve it till;
This will I fayne,°
Whom I begylyd° to him I will
Make a-sith° agayne.
JESUS Thy clere confessionn schall the
clene,
Thou may be sure of lastand° lyffe,
Un-to thi house, with-outen offense,
Is graunted pees withouten striffe.
Fare-wele, Zache!°
ZACHEUS Lord, the lowte ay man and
wiffe,°
Blist myght thou be.°
JESUS My dere discipulis, beholde and
see,
Un-to Jerusalem we schall assende,
Man sone° schall ther be-trayed be,
And gevyn in-to his enmys° hande,
With grete dispitte,°
Ther spitting on hym ther schall thei
spende°
And smerty smyte.
Petir, take this asse me fro,
And led thee where thou arte° it toke.
I murne,° I sigh, I wepe also,
Jerusalem on the to loke!
And so may thou,
That evere thou thi kyng for-suke,°
And was un-trew.°
Of…since I am foremost of publicans [tax collectors]
Of…knowyng of him I could have no understand-
ing
Yf all however wolde would lawe short gate road sen since secomoure sycamore noght not the you un-to until Her here tarie tarry For...wroght for sin I committed trast trusty langis long lette delay thrang throng sone quickly Me...mende I'm ashamed of my sin, but not to atone for it Have half gud goods fayne gladly beglyd tricked a-sith amends last-
and (ever)lasting the...wife may men and women praise you always Man sone the Son of Man en-
mys enemies’ dispite maltic spende let loose are before murne mourn for-suke forsok un-
trew disloyal
For stone on stone schall none be lefte,  
But doune to the grounde all schalbe caste,  
Thy game, thi gle," al fro the refte,"  
And all for synne that thou done hast.

Thou arte unkynde!  
Agayne thi kyng thou hast trespast,  
Have this in mynde.

PETRUS Porter, take her thy thyn ass agayne,  
At hande my lorde comys on his fette.

I BURGENSIS Hayll! prophette, preved" withouten pere,  
Hayll! prince of pees schall evere endure,  
Hayll! kyng comely, curteyse and clere,  
Hayll! soverayne semely° to synfull sure,"  
To the all bowes."  
Hayll! lord lovely, oure cares may cure,  
Halyll! kyng of Jewes.

II BURGENSIS Hayll! florisshand° floure that nevere shall fade,  
Hayll! vyolettern vernand° with swete odoure,  
Hayll! marke of myrthe, oure medecyne° made,  
Hayll! blossom brigh[t], hayll! oure socoure."  
Hayll! kyng comely.  
Hayll! menskfull° man, with the honoure  
With herte frely.

III BURGENSIS Hayll! David sone, doughty° in dede,  
Hayll! rose ruddy, hayll birrall° clere,  
Hayll! welle of welthe may make us mede."  
Hayll! salver of oure sores sere,"  
We wirschippe the.

IV BURGENSIS Hayll! blissfull babe, in Bedleme° borne,  
Hayll! boote° of all oure bittir balis,"  
Hayll! sege° that schoppe° bothe even and morne,  
Hayll! talker trystefull of trew tales.  
Hayll! comely knyght, Hayll! of mode° that most prevayles  
To save the tyght."  
V BURGENSIS Hayll! dyamaunde° with drewry dight,"  
Hayll! jasper gentill° of Jewry,  
Hayll! lyly lusome° lemyd° with lyght,  
Hayll! balme of boote," moyste and drye,  
To all has nede.  
Hayll! barne° most blist of mylde Marie,  
Hayll! all oure mede."  
VI BURGENSIS Hayll! conquerour, hayll, most of myght,  
Hayll! rawsoner° of synfull all,  
Hayll! pytefull," hayll! lovely light,  
Hayll! to us welcome be schall.  
Hayll! kyng of Jues;  
Hayll! blyshe out of the call  
With mirthe that newes."  
VII BURGENSIS Hayll! sonne ay schynand° with bright bemes,
Hayll! lampe of liff schall nevere waste,
Hayll! lykand° lanterne luffely lemes,°
Hayll! texte of trewthe the trew to taste.
Hayll! kyng & sire,
Hayll! maydens chylde that menskid°
hir most,
We the desire.

**VIII BURGENSIS** Hayll! domysman°
dredful, that all schall deme,°

540 Hayll! quyk° and dede that all schall
lowte,°
Hayll! whom worschippe moste will
seme,°
Hayll! whom all thyng schall drede and
dowte."°
We welcome the.
Hayll! and welcome of all abowte,
To owre cete."°

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lykand pleasant luffely lemes beloved beams of light menskid honored domysman judge (n.) deme judge (v.) quyk living lowte knedl whom...same for whom worship is most appropriate dowte fear cete city
Endnotes

1 The sole copy of the “Entry” is found in ff. 106v-112v of British Library Additional MS 35290, also known as the York Register (hereafter MS), compiled between 1463 and 1477 (Beadle xii). The base text for this edition is taken from “The Entry into Jerusalem upon the Ass,” York Plays: The Plays Performed by the Crafts or Mysteries of York on the Day of Corpus Christi in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (The Clarendon Press, 1885, pp. 201–18). The text is in the public domain. I have followed Smith’s lineation, though in the MS the play’s short lines follow continuously from the previous ones. Instead of adhering to Smith’s practice of numbering every third and seventh line, I have marked line numbers into divisions of ten. Since neither stage directions nor stanza numbers appear in the MS, I have not incorporated Smith’s. I have, however, retained Smith’s list of dramatis personae, along with her parenthetical descriptions of the characters, despite their absence from the MS. While Smith’s glosses and notes are eminently useful, my glosses and end notes replace them. Smith’s emendations to the MS remain [in brackets]. I have regularized the MS’s use of u/v, capitalized silently the first letters of all proper names, including God, and substituted th for ð, and gh, y, and z for þ, as appropriate. In addition to Smith’s and Beadle’s editions, I also am indebted to the following texts: Clifford Davidson, ed., The York Corpus Christi Plays (Western Michigan University, 2011); and York Mystery Plays, British Library Additional MS 35290. Digitized Manuscripts, British Library, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_35290&index=0.


6 Ibid., p. 208.

7 Irina Metzler, Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400 (Routledge, 2006), p. 47.


9 Metzler, Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, pp. 42–43.

10 M.E. def can refer literally to an inability to hear, or metaphorically to an unwillingness to do so (MED def, adj. 2b, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED10774). Though the literal meaning seems more likely here, the figurative one could apply to people like Zacheus (ll. 392–461).

11 The Burgess recalls Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 12:17–18.

12 In a note to this line, Smith cites Jesus’ healing of two blind men as he leaves Jericho (Matthew 20:30–34), as well as his healing of Bartimeus, son of Timeus (Mark 10:46–52).

14 MS syght

15 Gusick contends that Cecus’ promise of service highlights the transactional nature of his healing, for he now must use his newly restored body to contribute productively to society (Gusick, “Groping in Darkness,” pp. 54–55).

16 A line is missing from the MS after 367.

17 The OED cites one of the earliest uses of “lame” as “disabled or impaired in any way; weak, infirm; paralyzed; unable to move,” in Bede’s Ecclesiastical History (ca. 900), 5.5: “He wæs loma & ealra his lioma þegnunga benumen” (lame adj. 1.a., http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/105263?rskey=38DhvZ&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid). See The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 2 vols., ed. Thomas Miller, EETS (Trübner, 1890).

18 Davidson notes that this line is written on the bottom of the previous page, crossed out, and reentered to the right of 381 by John Clerke (Davidson, The York Corpus Christi Plays, 519). Clerke (1510–80) was the assistant to the Common Clerk of York (Beadle xxvii). Clerke erroneously entered my for myn (Davidson, The York Corpus Christi Plays, 519).

19 Gusick discusses how the play presents an “interpretive challenge” regarding the integration of the newly healed Claudus into the community’s social structure (Gusick, “Christ’s Healing of the Lame Man in the York Cycle’s ‘Entry into Jerusalem,’” p. 87).


21 This line is Smith’s suggestion for a line missing from the MS. Beadle and Davidson use ellipses.

22 Though being short would not have been considered a disability, per se, it would have marked Zaccheus as “marginalized” member of the community (Gusick, “Christ’s Transformation,” p. 72).

23 Zaccheus’ climbing a sycamore tree in order to get a better vantage point “emphasizes how instrumental the event of seeing (and being seen) is to this play in particular” (Barbara Gusick, “Christ’s Transformation of Zaccheus in the York Cycle’s ‘Entry into Jerusalem,’” Fifteenth-Century Studies, vol. 30, 2004, p. 68; emphasis in original).

24 Gusick examines Zaccheus’ similarities with the physically disabled, and she questions whether he can become a redeemed member of the faithful community (ibid., esp. pp. 77–78).

Introduction

The N-Town Nativity dramatizes the events leading up to and directly after the birth of Christ based on the apocryphal material found in Pseudo-Matthew. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the birth of Christ itself (alluded to only in a stage direction) is almost an afterthought to the action surrounding the birth. Some of the typical fabliaux elements of the story also appear in this version of the pageant, playing on the common cuckold trope of an older man with a younger wife, but they are not nearly as pronounced as in other biblical plays. The midwives appear in this pageant to function as witnesses to the newborn Christ and, of especial interest for this collection, to stage one of the two miracles that this pageant stages—the newborn Christ’s healing of midwife Salome’s hand that had withered because of her doubt only lines earlier. As Irina Metzler has demonstrated, miracles in the Middle Ages were often linked with disability, particularly because, unlike illness, disability was a static state. In this pageant, then, we see two distinct impairments: Joseph’s age and Salome’s withered hand. Both impairments lead to staged conversions via miracle. Joseph cannot pick cherries for Mary because such labor would be difficult for a man of his age, and after the cherry tree bends down to Mary and allows her to pluck cherries from it, he is convinced that Mary indeed carries the Christ child. Similarly, the newborn Christ’s healing of Salome’s impairment—her withered hand—leads to her conversion.

Pageants involving Mary and Joseph across all medieval biblical plays use Joseph’s age to comic effects, and Joseph’s age is also presented as an impairment in the N-Town Nativity. At the beginning of the pageant, Mary and Joseph are traveling to Bethlehem to find a place in which Mary may give birth to her child. En route, Mary notices a cherry tree and asks Joseph to pick her some cherries from it: “For to haue therof ryght fayn I wold, / And it plesyd yow to labore se mech for me” (ll. 34–35). Mary qualifies this request as labor for Joseph, and even though this word simply could refer to work, it usually connotes difficult work. Joseph’s response affirms the difficult nature of this work, and his final retort seems to fall into the cuckold vein of age jokes when he retorts “...lete hym pluk yow cheryes begatt yow with childe!” (l. 39). Despite the potential latent humor in this scene, the pageant presents Joseph’s age as an impairment to fulfill his duties as Mary’s spouse. His age will not allow him to retrieve cherries for Mary, and so Mary prays to God and the tree bends down to her (ll. 40–43). Joseph’s response demonstrates conversion to full belief: “For now I beleve wel it may non other be / But that my spowse beryght the Kyngys Son of Blys” (ll. 46–47). The pageant uses Joseph’s impairment to stage a miracle that assures his doubt of Mary and then leads him to testify his true belief that Mary’s child is indeed Christ.

The second staged impairment that leads to a miracle in the N-Town Nativity is Salome’s withered hand that results from her doubt of the virgin birth. Unlike Joseph’s age, however, Salome’s hand ably functions
when she enters the pageant as one of two midwives. It is only after Zelomy, the other midwife, affirms the virgin birth that Salome, incredulous, claims, “It is not trewe, it may nevyr be! / that bothe be clene I cannot beleve!” (ll. 242–43). After Mary invites Salome to examine her, Salome’s hand then withers (the Latin literally translates “dries up”), which she attributes to her “grett dowth and fals beleve” (l. 255). However, her impairment is short-lived, and the second miracle of the pageant both heals Salome’s hand and converts her to belief. After she touches the Christ child’s clothing, she exclaims, “A, now blyssyd be this chylde eurymore! / the Sone of God, forsothe he is” (ll. 294–95). Like Joseph, Salome testifies that Mary’s child is Christ; furthermore, she becomes a messenger of the good news of the coming savior. She announces, “Of this grett meracle more knowlge to make, / I xal go telle it in iche place, iwys.” (ll. 308–9). In the space of slightly over sixty lines, Salome has moved from doubt into belief.

For both Joseph and Salome, physical impairment is linked to spiritual doubt, which fits Edward Wheatley’s religious model of disability. For the N-Town Nativity, then, doubt is perhaps the impairment it hopes to cure via the miracles staged during this pageant. However, spiritual impairments and physical impairments are of two distinct natures, and one cannot help but to wonder whether this pageant exploits the real physical impairments of persons in service to its faith-driven message. Then again, perhaps if the audience also testifies true belief, such faith, so the pageant reasons, makes physical impairment inconsequential.

Bibliography


JOSEPH Lord, what travayl° to man is wrought?°
Rest in this werd° behovyth° hym non.
Octauyan, oure emperour, sadly° hath besought;
Oure trybute hym to bere folk must forth ichon;°
It is cryed in every bourgh and cety be name.
I that am a pore tymbre-wryth°
Born of the blood of Dauyd,
the emperors comawndement I must holde with,
And° elys I were to blame.

Now, my wyff, Mary, what sey ye to this?
For sekyr," nedys I must forth wende°
Onto the cyte of Bedleem° fer hens,
iwys.°
thus to labore I muste my body bende.

MARIA Myn husband and my spowse,
with yow wyl I wende;
A syght of that cyte fayn° wolde I se.
If I myght of myn alye° ony ther fynde,
It wold be grett joyd onto me.

JOSEPH My spowse, ye be with childe,
I fere° yow to kary,
For mesemyth° it were werkys wylde.°

But yow to plese ryght fayn° wold I.
yitt women ben ethe° to greve° whan thei be with childe.
Now latt us forth wende as fast as we may,
And almyghty God spede us in oure jurnay.

MARIA A, my swete husbond, wolde ye telle to me
What tre is yon° standynge vpon yon hylle?

JOSEPH Forsothe, Mary, it is clepyd° a chery tre;
In tyme of yere ye myght fede yow theron youre fylle.

Turne ageyn, husbond, and beholde yon tre,
How that it blomyght now so swetly.

JOSEPH Cum on, Mary, that we worn at yon cyte,
Or ellys we may be blamyd, I telle yow lythly.

MARIA Now, my spowse, I pray yow to behold
How the cheryes growyn vpon yon tre.
For to haue therof ryght fayn I wold,
And it plesyd yow to labore so mech for me.

JOSEPH youre desyre to fulfylle I xal sekyrly.
Ow! To plucke yow of these cheries, it is a werk wylde!
For the tre is so hygh it wol not be lyghtly—
therfore lete hym pluk yow cheryes begatt yow with childe!

Now, good Lord, I pray the, graunt me this boun,
To haue of these cheries and it be youre wylle.
Now I thank it God, this tre bowyth to me down!
I may now gaderyn anowe and etyn my fyle.

JOSEPH Ow! I know weyl I haue offendyd my God in Trinyté
Spekyng to my spowse these vnkynde wurdys.
For now I beleve wel it may non other be
But that my spowse beryght the Kyn-gys Son of Blys;
He help us now at oure nede.

Of the kynrede of Jesse worthely were ye bore,

Kynys and patryarkys yow beffore.
All these wurthy of youre kynred wore,
As clerkys in story rede.

MARIA Now gramercy,husbond, for
youre report.
In oure weys wysely late us forth wende.

the Fadyr allmyghty, he be oure com-fort,
the Holy Gost gloryous, he be oure frende.

JOSEPH Heyl, wurchepful sere, and
good day!
A ceteceyn of this cyte ye seme to be.
Of herborwe for spowse and me I yow pray;

For trewly this woman is ful weré,
And fayn at reste, sere, wold she be.
We wolde fulfylle the byddynge of oure emperour
For to pay trybute as ryght is oure.
And to kepe ourseselfe from dolowre,
We are come to this cyté

CITIZEN Sere, ostage in this town know I non thin wyff and thu in for to slepe;
This ceté is besett with pepyl every won,
And yett thei ly withowte debate.

JOSEPH Nay, sere, debate, that wyl I nowth—

yere year blomyght blooms lythly gently And If xal shall sekyrly surely Ow! Oh! lyghtly with little effort boun gift and if bowyth bows gaderyn gather anowe enough weyl well beryght bears kynrede family gramercy many thanks wende go ceteceyn citizen her-borwe inn, lodgings were weary fayn gladly dolowre suffering ostage lodging house besett full every won every dwelling li withowte lie outside nowth not onys once Onethys not read-ily sowth found
All such thyngys passyn my powere.
But yitt my care and all my thought
Is for Mary, my derlynge° dere.
A, swete wyff, what xal° we do?
Wher xal we logge° this nght?

80 Onto the Fadyr of Heffne pray we so,
Vs to kepe from every wykkyd whyt.°
CITIZEN Good man, o° word I wyl the
sey,
If thu wylt do by the counsel of me:
Yondyr is an hous of haras° that stant
be the wey;
Amonge the bestys° herboryd° may ye
be.

MARTIA Now the Fadyr of Hesen, he
mut° yow yelde.
His sone in my wombe, forsothe,° he is.
He kepe the and thi good be fryth° and
felde.°
Go we hens, husbond, for now tyme it
is.

90 But herk now, good husbond, a newe
relacyon,°
Which in myself I know ryght well:
Cryst, in me hath take incarnacyon,
Sone wele° be borne, the trowth I fele.
In this pore logge° my chawmere° I
take,
Here for to abyde the blyssyd byrth
Of hym that all this werd° dude° make.
Betzyn myn sydys I fele he styrth.°

JOSEPH God be thin help, spowse, it
swemyth° me sore,
thus febyly loggyd and in so pore degré.

100 Goddam sone amonge bestys° for to be
bore—
His woundyr werkys fullyllyd must
be—

In an hous that is desolat,° withowty[n]
any wall;
Fyer nor wood non here is.
MARTIA Joseph, myn husband, abydyn°
here I xal,°
For here wyl be born the Kyngys Sone
of Blys.

110 MARTIA For mete and drynk lust I
ryght nowth)—
Allmyghty God my fode° xal be.
Now that I am in chawmere brought,
I hope ryght well my chilke to se.
Therfore, husbond, of youre Honesté,
Avoyd° yow hens out of this place,
And I alone with humylité
Here xal abyde Goddys hygh grace.

JOSEPH All redy, wyff, yow for to plese
I wyl go hens out of youre way,
And seke sum mydwyuys° yow for to
ese
Whan that ye° trauayle of childe° this
day.
Farewell, trewe wyff and also clene
may,°

120 God be youre comforte in Trinyté.
MARTIA To God in hevyn for yow I
pray,
He yow preserve wherso° ye be.

hic dum joseph est Absens parit Ma-
ria filium vnigenitum.°

The glossary includes words such as:
- derlynge: darling
- xal: shall
- logge: stay
- whyt: person
- o: one
- person
- haras: a place where horses are kept
- bestys: beasts
- herboryd: lodged
- mut: might
- forsothe: truly
- fryth: forest
- felde: field
- relacyon: relationship
- sone wele: soon will
- logge: rude shelter
- chawmere: chamber
- werd: world
- dude: did
- styrth: stir
- swemyth: grieves
- bestys: beasts
- desolat: ruined
- abydyn: wait
- xal: shall
- jen-tyll: gracious, kind
- owght: anything
- schepp: nor
den: abundance or scarcity
- lust: desire
- nowth: growth
- fode: food
- Avoyd: clear (as in “clear out”)
- mydwyuys: midwives
- trauayle: give birth
- elene may: virgin
- wherso: wherever
- hic...vnigenitum: Here while Joseph is absent, Mary gives birth to the Begotten Son [of God] [Latin].
JOSEPH Now God, of whom comyth
all releffe,
And as all grace in the is grownde,
So saue my wyff from hurt and greffe
Tyl I sum mydwyuys° for here haue
fownde.

130 Travelynge° women in care be bownde
With grete throwys° whan thei do
grone;
God helpe my wyff that sche not
swonnde."°
I am ful sory sche is alone!
It is not conuenyent° a man to be
ther women gon in travalyne.³
Werfore sum mydwyff fayn° wold I se,
My wyff to helpe that is so yenge."°

ZELOMYE Why makyst thu, man, suche
mornyng?
Tell me sum dele of° youre grete mone."°

140 JOSEPH My wyf is now in gre
longyng,
Trauelyng of chylde, and is alone.
For Godys loue, that sytt in trone,"°
As ye mydwyuys that kan° youre good,"°
Help my yonge spowse in hast anone."°
I drede me sore of that fayr food!

SALOME Be of good chere and of glad
mood,
We iij° mydwyuys with the wyll go.
they was nevyr woman in such plyght
stood
But we were redy here help to do.

150 My name is Salomee, all men me knowe
For a mydwyff of wurthy fame.
When women travayl,"° grace doth
growe;
theras"° I come I had nevyr shame.

ZELOMYE And I am Zelomeye, men
knowe my name,
We tweyn with the wyl go togedyr
And help thi wyff fro hurt and grame."°
Com forth, Joseph, go we streyth
thedyr."°

JOSEPH I thank yow, damys, ye com-
forte my lyff.
Streyte to my spowse walke we the way.

160 In this pore logge° lyght"° Mary my wyff.
Hyre° for to conforte, gode fremdyss,
assy."°

SALOME We dare not entre this logge,
in fay"—
ther is therin so grete bryghtnes!
Mone be nyght nor sunne be day
Shone nevyr so clere in ther lyghtnesse!

ZELOMYE Into this hous dare I not
gon;
the woundyrifull lyght doth me affray."°

JOSEPH Than wyl myself gon in alon
And chere my wyff if that I may.

170 All heyl, maydon and wyff, I say!
How dost thu fare? Telle me thi chere."°
The for to conforte in gesyn" this day,
Tweyn gode mydwyuys I haue brought
here.
The for to helpe, that art in harde
bonde,"°
Zelomye and Salomee be com with me.
For dowte of° drede withowte thei do
stond,
And dare not come in for lyght that
they se.

Hic Maria subridendo dicat:"°

MARIA The myght off the Godhede in
his magesté
Wyl not be hyd now at this whyle."°

180 The chylde that is born wyl preue his
modyr fre,"°
A very clene mayde," and therfore I smyle.

JOSEPH Why do ye lawghe, wyff? Ye be to blame!
I pray yow, spowse, do no more so!
In happ” the mydwyuys" wyl take it to
grame," And at youre nede helpe wele non do." Iff ye haue neede of mydwyuys, lo,
Perauenture° thei wyl gon hens.
therfor be sad," and° ye may so,
And wynnyth all the mydwyuys good
diligens.

200 MARIA Husbond, I pray yow dysplese
yow nowth," thow that I lawghe and gret joye haue.
Here is the chylde this werde° hath
wrought," Born now of me, that althynge xl" saue.

JOSEPH I aske yow grace, for I dyde
raue!° O gracyous childe, I aske mercy.
As thu art Lord and I but knaue," Foryue me now my gret foly.
Alas, mydwyuis, what haue I seyd?
I pray yow com to us more nere,
For here I fynde my wyff a mayd
And in here arme a chylde hath here—
Bothe mayd and modyr sche is in fere°
that God wole haue may nevyrmore
fayle.
Modyr on erth was nevyr non clere
Withowth sche had in byrth travayle."°

210 ZELOMY In byrth travayle muste sche
nedys haue,
Or ellys no chylde of here is born.
JOSEPH I pray yow dame, and° ye
vowchsaue," Com se the chylde my wyff beforne."°

210 SALOME Grete God be in this place.
Swete sysyr, how fare ye?
MARIA I thank the Fadyr of his hygh
grace;
His owyn son and my chylde here ye
may se.
ZELOMY All heyl, Mary, and ryght
good morn.
Who was mydwyfe of this fayr chylde?
MARIA He that nothynge wyl haue
forlorn" Sent me this babe, and I mayd mylde."°
ZELOMYE With honde leté me now
towch and fele
Yf ye haue neede of medycyn.

220 I xal" yow conforte and helpe ryght
wele
As other women yf ye haue pyn."°
MARIA Of this fayr byrth that here is
myn
Peyne nere° grevynge fele I ryght non.
I am clene mayde and pure virgyn;
Tast° with youre hand youreself alon.

Hic palpat Zelomy Beatam
Virginem dicens:"°

ZELOMY O myghtfull God, haue
mercy on me!
A merveyle that nevyr was herd beforn°
Here opynly I fele and se:
A fayr chylde of a maydon is born,
And nedyth no waschynge as other
don:"° Ful clene and pure forsoth° is he,
Withoutyn sporrt or ony polucyon,
His modyr nott hurte of virgynité!
Coom nere, gode systyr Salomé.
Behobde the brestys of this clene rnnayd,
Ful of fayr mylke how that thei be,
And hyre° chylde clene, as I fyrst sayd. As other ben nowth° fowle arayd,° But clene and pure bothe modyr and chylde.

Of this matyr° I am dysmayd, To se them both thus vndefyled!

SALOME It is not trewe, it may nevyr be! that bothe be clene I cannot beleve! A mayd mylke haue nevyr man dyde se, Ne woman bere chylde withowte grett greve.° I xal° nevyr trowe° it but I it preve!° With hand towchynge but I assay, In my conscience it may nevyr cleue° that sche hath chylde and is a may.°

MARIA Yow for to putt clene out of dowth, Towch with youre hand and wele asay." Wysely ransake° and trye the trewthe owth° Whethyr I be fowlyd or a clene may.°

Hic tangit Salomee Mari[am] et cum arescerit manus eius vlu-lando et quasi flendo dicjt:"°

SALOME Alas, alas, and weleawaye!° For my grett dowth and fals beleve Myne hand is ded and drye as claye— My fals vntrost° hath wrought° mysch-eve!

Alas the tyme that I was born, Thus to offende ayens° Goddys myght!

Myn handys power is now all lorn," Styff as a stykke, and may nowth° plyght." For I dede tempte this mayde so bryght And helde ayens here pure clennes, In grett myscheff now am I pyght." Alas, alas for my lewdnes!° O Lord of Myght, thu knowyst be trowth, that I haue evyr had dreed of the. On every power whyght° evyr I haue rowthe," And yove hem almes for loue of the.

Bothe wyff and wedowe that askyght," for the, And frendles chylderyn that haddyng grett redes, I dude° them cure, and all for the, And toke no rewarde of them, nor mede." Now as a wrecch for fals beleve that I shewyd in temptynge this mayde, My hand is ded and doth me greve." Alas, that evyr I here assayde!

ANGELUS Woman, thi sorwe to haue delayde, Wurchep° that childe that ther is born; Towch the clothis ther he is leyde, For he xal saue all that is lorn." SALOME O glorious ychyle and Kynge of Blysse, I ask yeow mercy for my trespass. I knowlege my synne, I demyd amys."° O blyssyd babbe, grawnt me sum grace! Of yow, mayde, also here in this place I aske mercy knelynge on kne. Moste holy mayde, grawnt me solace, Sum wurde of comforte sey now to me.

MARIA As Goddys aungel to yow dede telle, My chylde is medycyn for every sor." Towch his clothis be my cowncelle, yowre hand ful sone he wyl restor.
Hic Salomee tangit fimbriam Christi dicens:

SALOME A, now blyssyd be this chylde euyrmore!
the Sone of God, forsothe" he is,
Hath helyd myn hand that was forlore°
Thorwe fals beleve and demyng amys!
In every place I xal telle this:
Of a clene mayde that God is born,

And in oure lyknes God now clad is,
Mankend to saue that was forlorn;
His modyr a mayde as sche was beforn,"
Natt fowle polutyd as other women be,
But fayr and fresch as rose on thorn,
Lely-wyte," clene with pure virginyté.
Of this blyssyd babe my leve now do I take,
And also of yow, hygh Modyr of Blysse.
Of this grett meracle more knowlege to make,
I xal° go telle it in iche° place, iwys.°

MARIA Farewel, good dame, and God youre wey wysse.°
In all youre jurnay God be youre spede!
And of his hygh mercy that Lord so yow blysse
that ye nevyr offende more in word,
thought, nore dede.

ZELOMY And I also do take my leve here
Of all this blyssyd good company,
Praynge youre grace bothe fere and nere
On us to spede youre endles mercy.
JOSEPH The blyssyng of that Lord that is most myghty
Mote sprede on yow in every place;

Of all youre enmyes to haue the victory,
God that best may, grawnt yow his grace.

AMEN

Hic...dicens Here Salome touches the fringe of Christ's clothes, saying: [Latin] forsothe truly forlore lost beforne before Lely-wyte lily-white xal shall iche each iwys indeed wyssse guide
Endnotes

1 The text below was compiled by Gerard Necastro using *Ludus Coventriae or The Plaie called Corpus Christi, Cotton MS. Vespian D. VIII.*, ed. K.S. Block, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, No. CXX, 1922, pp. 135–45 and *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Medieval Institute Publications, 2007). Glosses and endnotes have been provided by Jeffery G. Stoyanoff.


3 Joseph exclaims here that it is inappropriate for a man to be in the same room with a woman as she is in labor.
Introduction

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* stages the story of a Jewish merchant Jonathas and his companions as they purchase the Host, put it through a series of trials to test the Real Presence, and ultimately convert to Christianity. It is also a spectacle of theater, with bleeding cauldrons and exploding ovens. But an overlooked source of the play’s theatricality is its representation of disability. The play explores both physical and mental disability primarily through its Jewish protagonists’ grappling with doubt over the transubstantiation of the Host. Such disabling doubt manifests in two metaphors: Jonathas’ dismembered hand and the Jews’ descriptions of their “woode”-ness (or “madness”).

In the first case, during one of the trials Jonathas and the other Jews put the Host through, the Host adheres to Jonathas’ hand, and in Jonathas’ attempt to nail it to a post (mimicking the Crucifixion in the Host’s “new passyoun” (l. 38)), his own hand is dismembered. When the figure of Jesus appears at the play’s end, he moralizes to Jonathas, “on thyn hand thow art but lame, / And ys thorow thyn own cruelnesse, / For thyn hurt thu mayest thiselfe blame” (770-72). Then Jonathas’ physical healing occurs as a direct result of his repentence: “Thow wasshest thyn hart with grete contrycion. / Go to the cawdron—thi care shall be the lesse— / And towche thyn hand to thy salvacion” (ll. 775-77). The cause-and-effect relationship between doubt and disability, belief and healing in the play supports Edward Wheatley’s religious model, as the Church—through the forgiveness of Jesus and the Bishop in the play—controls the means of physical and spiritual restoration. However, Jonathas’ experience of disability can also be seen as redemptive. The play aligns him, not the Christian figures, with Christ through their shared “passyoun” (l. 38), and Jonathas’ doubt, symbolized by his dismembered hand, is nailed to the symbolic cross, too. The play considers Jonathas and the other Jews culpable for their doubt but also participatory in the work of their redemption.

While Jonathas’ dis- and re-memberment spectacularly displays difference (to adapt David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s description of disability as “the difference [that] demands display”), the play’s most sustained engagement with disability is actually its deployment of “woode”ness as a metaphor for doubt. Throughout the various trials of the Host, the Jewish protagonists use the word “woode” to describe their disbelief at the Host’s miraculous powers. Intriguingly, though, the word “woode” is first employed to describe the Host itself, which “bledyth as yt were woode” (l. 483), drawing yet another parallel between the doubting Jewish figures and the redeeming Christ. Here, Jonathas and the Host are linguistically linked early in the play, just as they are physically linked later in his dismemberment. Moreover, Jonathas’ initial description of the sacred, holy Host as “woode” before his own confession of disbelief as “woodnesse” (l. 502) highlights madness, and disability generally, as a subjective category. “Woode”ness may be in the eye of the beholder. By the play’s end, though, the Jews’ conversions appear to heal their madness, as the figure of Jesus instructs them to “kepe my commandementes in yowr thow-
ght. / And unto my Godhed to take credence [belief, trust]” (ll. 729–30), and Jonathas’ mental restoration parallels his the physical healing of his hand.

The play’s exploration of disability demonstrates the category’s complexity and ambivalence in late medieval England. The Christian merchant Aristorius initially frames the play’s construct of doubt as disability and Christ as cure, much in the Christus medicus tradition. Two announcers open the play with the prayer that “Jhesu yow sawe from treyn [suffering] and tene [pain]” (l. 76; omitted below) and Aristorius opens the play with the line, “Now Cryst that ys our Creature from shame He cure us” (l. 81). Moreover, the play aligns the Host specifically with healing, as the Clerk remarks that bread and wine “ys holesom, as sayeth the fesycyon” (l. 343). However, in Aristorius’ selling of the Host to Jonathas, he becomes one who “from shame He [will] cure,” and the play questions many of the rigid categories initially invoked. The Croxton Play of the Sacrament does align doubt with disability and posits orthodox faith as the only cure; however, in the process, it also evokes striking similarities between doubter and believer and casts both as essential in the work of redemption.

Bibliography
The Namys and Numbere of the Players

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jhesus</td>
<td>Episcopus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristorius</td>
<td>Christianus Mercator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isoder</td>
<td>presbyter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Paul</td>
<td>clericus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathas</td>
<td>Judeus primus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Judeus secundus</td>
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<td>Jasdon</td>
<td>Judeus tertius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masphat</td>
<td>Judeus quartus</td>
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<td>Coll</td>
<td>servus</td>
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Nine may play yt at ease.

[Two announcers give a summary of the play to advertise its performance]

Explicit.° Here after foloweth the Play of
the Conversyon of Ser Jonathas the Jewe
by Myracle of the Blyssed Sacrament.

81 ARISTORIUS Now Cryst that ys our
Creatour from shame He cure us.
He maynteyn us with myrth that meve°
on the molde,°
Unto Hys endelesse joye myghtly He
restore us.
All tho that in Hys name in peas well
them hold,
For of a merchante most myght therof
my tale ys told:
In Eraclea ys non suche whoso wyll
understand,
For of all Aragon I am most myghty of
sylver and of gold,
For and yt wer a countré to by now
wold I nat wond.°
Syr Arystory ys my name,

90 A merchaunte myghty of a royall araye.
Ful wyde in this worlde spryngyth my
fame,
Fere kend° and knowen—the sothe° for
to saye—
In all maner of londys without ony
naye.

[Aristorius boasts of his riches]

125 PRESBYTER No man shall you tary°
ne trowble thys tyde,°
But every man delygently shall do yow
plesance.°
And I unto my connyng to the best
shall hem guyde
Unto Godes plesyng to serve yow to
attrueaunce.°
For ye be worthy and notable in sub-
stance of good—
130 Of merchauntes of Aragon ye have no
pere—
And therof thank God that dyed on the
Rooode,°
That was your makere and hath yow
dere!°
ARISTORIUS Forsoth, syr pryst,
yower talkyng ys good,
And therfor after your talkyng, I wyll
atteyn°
To wourshyppe my God that dyed on the
Rooode.
Never whyll that I lyve ageyn° that wyll
I seyn.°
But Petyr Powle, my clark, I praye thee
goo weepleyn°
Thorowght all Eraclea that thow ne
wonde°
And wytte° yf ony merchaunte be come
to this reyn,°
140 Of Surrey or of Sabé or of Shelysdown.°
CLERICUS At your wyll for to walke, I
wyl not say nay
Smertly° to go serche at the wateres
syde.
Yf ony plesaunt bargyn be to your paye,
As swyftly as I can, I shall hym to yow
guyde.
Now wyll I walke by thes pathes wyde,
And seke the haven both up and down,
To werte° yf ony onknowth shyppes
therin do ryde,
Of Surrey or of Saby or of Shelysdown.
Now shall the merchants man with-
drawe hym and the Jewe Jon-
athas shall make hys bost.

149 JONATHAS Now almyghty Machom-
et,° marke in thi magesté,
150 Whose lawes tendrely I have to fulfyll
After my dethe, bryng me to thy hyh
see°
My sowle for to save—yf yt be thy
wyll—
For myn entent ys for to fulfyll.
As my gloryus God, thee to honer,
To do agen thy entent, yt shall grue°
me yll,
Or agen thyn lawe for to reporte.

[Jonathas boasts of his riches]

189 Jew Jonathas ys my name.
190 Jazon and Jazdon, thei waytyn on my
wyl;
Masfat and Malchus, they do the same.
As ye may knowe, yt ys bothe rycht and
skyll,°
I tell yow all, bi dal and by hylle.°
In Eraclea ys noon so moche of myght,
Werfor ye owe tenderli to tende me
tyll.°
For I am chefe merchaunte of Jewes—I
tell yow be ryght!
But Jazon and Jazdon, a mater wollde I
mene.
Mervelously yt ys ment in mynde:
The beleve of thes Cristen men ys false,
as I wene.°
200 For they beleve on a cake—me thynk yt
ys onkynd° —
And all they seye how the prest dothe
yt bynd,°
And be° the myght of hys dorthe
flessh and blode,
And thus be a conceyte° they wolde
make us blynd,
And how that yt shuld be He that
deyd upon the Rode."
JASON Yea, yea, master, a strawe for
talis." Tha ma not fale," in my beleve.
But myt we yt gete onys within our
pales," I trowe we shuld sone afte putt yt in a
priyve." JASDON Now be Machomete so
myghty that ye doon of meve," 210
I wold I wyste° how that we myght yt
gete.
I swer be my grete god and ellys mote I
nat cheve," But wyghtly° theron wold I be wreke."
MASPHAT Yea, I dare sey feythfulli
that ther feyth ys false—
That was never He that on Calvery was
kyld
Or in bred for to be blode—yt ys on-
trewe° als,
But yet with ther wyles° thei wold we
were wyld.° MALCHUS Yea, I am myghty Malchus,
that boldly am byld.°
That brede for to bete," byggly° am I
bent," Onys out of ther handes and yt myght
be exyled.
220 To helpe castyn° yt in care° wold I
counsent.
JONATHAS Well, syrse, than kype
cunsel, I cummande yow all,
And no word of all thys be wyst.°
But let us walke to see Arystories hall
And afterwode more counsell among
us shall caste.°

With hym to bey and to sel, I am of
powere prest." A bargyn with hym to make, I wyll
assaye.
For gold and sylver, I am nothyng
agast," But that we shal get that cake to ower
paye." [Jonathas purchases the Host from Aristorius
for one hundred pounds; Aristorius steals
it from the Church and delivers it to him]
385 JONATHAS Now Jason and Jasdon, ye
be Jewys jentyl°,
Masfatt and Malchus, that myghty arn°
in mynd.
Thys merchant from the Crysten temple
Hathe gett us thys bred that make us
thus blynd.
Now Jason, as jentyl as ever was the
lynde.°
390 Into the forsayd° parlour prevely take
thy pase.° Sprede a clothe on the tabyll that ye
shall ther fynd,
And we shall folowe after to carpe° of
thys case.
Here the Jewys goon and lay the
Ost on the tabyll, sayng:
JONATHAS Syres, I praye yow all
harkyn to my sawe:°
Thes Crysten men carpyn of a
merelows case!
They say that this ys Jhesu that was attayntyd° in owr lawe,
And that thys ys He that cowcysfyed
was.
On thes wordys ther law growndyd
hath He,
That He sayd on Shere Thursday° at
Hys sopere:
He brake the brede and sayd, “Accipite,”°
And gave Hys dyscyplys them for to
dhere.
And more He sayd to them there,
Whyle they were all togethere and sum,
Syttyng at the table soo clere.°
“Comedite corpus meum,”°
And thys powre He gave Peter to
proclaime,
And how the same shuld be suffycyent°
to all prechors—
The bysshoppys and curates saye the
same—
And soo as I understond do all Hys
progenytors.

JASON Yea, sum men in that law re-
herse another:
They say of a maydyn borne was Hee,
And how Joachyms dowghter° shuld be
Hys mothere,
And how Gabrell apperyd and sayd,
“Ave”°
And with that worde she shuld conchy-
yvd be,”
And that in hyr shuld lyght° the Holy
Gost.
Ageyns owr law thys ys false heresy!
And yett they saye He ys of myghtes
most.

JASDON They saye that Jhesu to be
owr kyng,
But I wene He bowght° that full dere.
But they make a royall aray of Hys
uprysyng,°

420 And that in every place ys prechyd,
farre and nere.
And how He to Hys dyscyples agayn
dyd appere—
To Thomas and to Mary Mawdelen—
And syth° how He styed° by Hys own
powre.
And thys ye know well ys heresy full
playnt!

MASPHAT Yea, and also they say He
sent them wytt and wisdom
For to understand every langwage.
When the Holy Gost to them came,
They faryd° as dronk men of pymentes
or vernage.°
And sythen how that He lykenyd Hym-
sel a Lord of Parage.°

430 On Hys Fatherys ryght hond He Hym
sett.
They hold Hym wyser than ever was
Syble° sage
And strenger than Alexander that all
the worlde ded gett.

MALCHUS Yea, yet they saye as fals—I
dare lay° my hedde—
How they that be ded shall com agayn
to Judgement,
And owr dredfull Judge shal be thys
same brede.
And how lyfe everlastyng them shuld
be lent,
And thus they hold all at on consent.°
Because that Phylyppe° sayd for a lytyll
flutter ys ther
entent,

440 For that he sayd, “Judecare vivos et mor-
tuos.”°

463

Shere Thursday Shrove Thursday Accipite “Take” [Latin; Matt. 26.26] clere excellent Comedite corpus meum “Eat, [this is] my body” [Latin; Matt. 26.26] suffycyent sufficient, enough Joachyms dowghter Joachim’s daughter (Mary) Ave “Hail” [Latin; Luke 1.28] conchyvyd be conceive lyght descend [also], pun on shine bowght paid for uprysyng resurrection styth at that time styed rose faryd appeared, acted like pymentes...vernage sweet wines Parage noble rank Syble Sybil (oracle and prophetess) laye bet, wager on consent one agreement Phylyppe Philip glosse comment Judecare vivos et mortuos “To judge the living and the dead” [Latin; 1 Peter 4.5]
JONATHAS Now serys, ye have rehearsed the substance of ther lawe, But thys brede I wold myght be put in a prefe:° Whether this be He that in Bosra of us had awe, Ther staynd were Hys clothys, this may we believe. Thys may we know ther had He grefe.° For owr old bookys veryfy thus, Theron He was jugeot° to be hangyd as a thefe: °Tinctis Bosra vestibus."°

JASON Yf that thys be He that on Calvary was mad red,° Onto my mynd I shall kenne° yow a conceyt good. Surely with owr daggars we shall ses on° thys brede, And so with clowtes° we shall know yf He have eny blood.

JASDON Now, by Machomyth so myghty that mevyth in my mode,° Thys ys masterly ment thys matter thus to meve.° And with owr strokys, we shall fray° Hym as He was on the Rood.° That He was ondon with grett repreve.°

MASPHAT Yea, I pray yow, smyte ye in the myddys° of the cake, And so shall we smyte theron woundys fyve. We wyll not spare to wyrke yt wrake,° To prove in thys brede yf ther be eny lyfe.

MALCHUS Loo, here ys fowr galouns of oyle clere. Have doon fast, blowe up the fere.° Syr, bryng that ylke° cake nere, Manly, with all yowre mygthe. And when eche man a stroke smytte hase, In the myddyll part therof owr master shall bene.

JONATHAS When ye have all Smytyn, my stroke shal be sene, With this same dagger that ys so styf and strong. In the myddys of thys prynt, I thynke for to prene,° On lashe I shall Hym lende° or yt be long.

Here shall the fowr Jewys pryk ther daggeres in four quarters [...] Here the Ost must blede.

Ah, owt, owt, harrow!° What devyll ys thys? Of thys wyrk, I am in were!° Yt bledyth as yt were woode,° iwys," But yf ye helpe I shall dyspayre. JASON A fyre! A fyre! And that in hast, Anoon a cawdron full of oyle. JASDON And I shalle helpe yt were in cast, All the three howres for to boyle. MASPHAT Yea here is a furneys,° stowte and strong, And a cawdron therin dothe hong. Malcus, wher art thow so long? To helpe thys dede were dyght.°

MALCHUS Loo, here ys fowr galouns of oyle clere. Have doon fast, blowe up the fere.° Syr, bryng that ylke° cake nere, Manly, with all yowre mygthe. And I shall bryng the ylke cak, And throwe yt in I undertake.

prefe test grefe grief jugett judged Tinctis Bosra vestibus “With dyed garments from Bozrah” [Latin; Isaiah 63.1] mad red made red (killed) kenne tell ses on seize on (pun on season) clowtes strokes mevyth...mode moves my mind meve carry out fray attack Rood Cross repreve shame myddys midst, middle wyre harm prene stab lende deliver afeye terrify plyght promise punche dagger augus an iron-working tool buffet blow bleyke make pale with fear harrow help were confusion woode mad iwys indeed furneys furnace dyght arranged, done fere fire ylke same
Out, out! Yt werketh me wrake!°
I may not awoyd° yt owt of my hond!
I renne, I lepe over this lond!

Her he renneth wood with
the Ost in his hond.

JASON Renne, felawes, renne for Cokkes peyn!°
Fast we had owr mayster agene.
Hold prestly on thys pleyn,
And faste bynd hyme to a poste.

JASDON Here is an hamer and naylys three, I seye.
Lyffte up hys armys, felawe, on hey,°

Whyll I dryve thes nayles, I yow praye,
With strong strokys fast.

MASPHAT Now, set on, felouse, with
mayne° and myght
And pluke hys armes awey in fyght.
 Wat yfe he twycche,° felouse, aryght.°
Alas, balys° breweth° ryght bade.

Here shall thay pluke the arme
and the hond shall hang styll
with the Sacrament.

MALCHUS Alas, alas, what devyll ys
thys?
Now hat he but oon hand, iwyse!°
For sothe,° mayster, ryght wooi me is
That ye this harme hawe° hadde.

JONATHAS Ther ys no more I must
enduer,
Tyll I may get me sum recuer.°
Now hastely to owr chamber, lete us
gon,
And therfor charge yow, everychoon,"
That yt be counsell that we have doon.

[An interlude with a quack doctor and his assistant follows]

JONATHAS Now have don, felawys,
and that anon,
For dowte of drede what after befall.
I am nere masyd," my wytte ys gon,
Therfor of helpe I pray yow all.
And take yowre pynsonys° that ar so
sure,
And pluck owt the naylys won° and
won.
Also in a clothe, ye yt cure,°

And throw yt in the cawdron, and that
anon.

Here shall Jason pluck out the naylys and
shake the hond into the cawdron.

JASON And I shall rape° me redely°
anon,
To pluke owt the naylys that stond so
fast.
And beare thys bred and also thys bone,
And into the cawdron I wyll yt cast.

JASDON And I shall with thys dagger
so stowte,
Putt yt down that yt myght plawe.°
And steare° the clothe rounde abowte,
That no thyng therof shal be rawe.°

MASPHAT And I shall manly, with all
my myght,

Make the fyre to blasé and brenne.°
And sett therunder suche a lyght
That yt shall make yt ryght thynne.°

Here shall the cawdron byle,° app-
peryng to be as blood.

MALCHUS Owt and harow! What
devyll ys herein?
All thys oyl grows° redde as blood,
And owt of the cawdron yt begynneth
to run.
I am so aferd, I am nere woode!°

Here shall Jason and hys compeny
go to Ser Jonathas, sayng:

wrake harm  awoyd remove woodnesse madness gynne begin wake quake, awaken Cokkes peyn God’s suffering hey high mayne strength twyche twitch aryght properly balys misdeeds breweth are causing harm, brewing iwyse indeed sothe truth hawe hate recuer relief everychoon everyone masyd astonished, distraught pynsonys pincers won one cure restore rape hasten, hurry redely quickly plawe boil steare stir rawe uncooked brenne burn thynne thin byle boil waxyth grows woode mad
JASON Ah, master, master! What chere ys° with yow?
I can nott see owr werke wyll avayle.
I beseche yow, avance° yow now.

680 Sumwhat with yowr counsayle.

JONATHAS The best counsayle that I
now wott,°
That I can deme, farre and nere,
Ys to make an owyn as redd hott
As ever yt can be made with fere.
And when ye see yt soo hott appere,
Then throw yt into the owyn fast!
Sone shall he stanche° hys bledyng chere.'°
When ye have donne stoppe° yt, be not agast.

[They kindle a fire and cast the Host into a
hot oven.]

Here the owyn must ryve asunder and
blede out at the cranys° and an image
appere out with woundys bledyng.

MASPHAT Owt, owt! Here ys a grete wondere!
Thys owyn bledyth ownt on every syde.
MALCHUS Yea, the owyn on peacys
gynnyth to ryve asundre:
Thys ys a mervelows case, thys tyde!

JESUS O mirabiles Judei attendite et videte
Si est dolor sicut dolor meus."°
Oh, ye merveylows Jewys!
Why ar ye to yowr Kyng onkynd?
And I, so bytterly bowt yow to my blysse.

713 Why fare ye thus fule° with yowre frende?

JONATHAS "Tu es protector vite mee a
quo trepidabo."
O Thu, Lord, whyche art my defendowr,
For dred of Thee I trymble and quake.
Of Thy gret mercy, lett us receyve the showre,
And mekely I aske mercy amendys to make.

Here shall they knele down all
on ther knyes, sayng:

JASON Ah, Lord, with sorow and care
and grete wepyng,
All we felawys lett us saye thus:
With condolent harte and grete sorow-yng,
“Lacrimis nostris conscienciam nostram baptizemus.”

JASDON Oh Thow, blyssyd lord of
mykyll° myght,
Of Thy gret mercy, Thow hast shewyd us the path.
Lord, owt of grevous slepe, and owt of
dyrknes to lyght,
Ne gravis somnus irruat.

MASPHTH Oh Lord, I was very cursyd,
for I wold know Thi crede
I can no mennys° make but crye to Thee
thus:
O gracyows Lorde, forgfyfe me my
mysdede,
With lamentable hart, “Miserere mei
Deus.”°

MALCHUS Lord I have offendyd Thee
in many a sundry vyse,"°
That styckyth at my hart as hard as a
core.

JESUS All ye that desyryn my servaunt-
es for to be,
And to fulffyl the preceptes of my
lawys,
The intent of my commandement
knowe ye:
“Ite et ostendite vos sacerdotibus meis.”°
To all yow that desyrye in eny wyse
To ask mercy, to graunt yt redy I am.
Remember and lett yowr wyttres suf-
fyce,
“Et tunc non avertam a vobis faciem
meam.”°

JONATHAS Oh Thow, my Lord, God,
and Savyowr osanna!°
Thow, Kyng of Jewys and of Jerusalem!
O Thow, myghty strong Lyon of Juda!
Blyssyd be the tyme that Thu were in
Bedlem.°
Oh Thu, myghty, strong, gloryows, and
gracyows oyle streme,
Thow, myghty conquerrowr of infernall
tene,"°
I am quyt° of moche combrance°
thorowgh Thy meane,"°
That ever blyssyd mott Thou bene.
Alas, that ever I dyd agaynst Thy wyll,
In my wytt to be soo wood."°
That I so ongoodly wyrk shuld soo
gryll,"°
Agens my mysgovernaunce,"° Thow
gladdyst me with good.

I was soo prowde to preve Thee on the
Rooode—°
And Thow haste sent me lyghtyng° that
late was lame—
To bete Thee and boyle Thee, I was
myghty in moode,"°
And now Thu hast put me from duresse
and dysfame."°
But Lord, I take my leve at Thy hygh
presens
And put me in Thy myghty mercy.
The byshopp wyll I goo fetche to se
owr offens,
And onto hym shew owr lyfe how that we be gyty.  

Here shall the master Jew goo to the byshop and hys men knele styll.

[The Bishop blesses Jonathas and his companions. He then raises the Host.]

Here shall the image change agayn into brede.

826 EPISCOPUS Oh, Thu largyfluent°  Lord, most of lyghtnesse,  
Onto owr prayers Thow hast applied."  
Thu hast receyvyd them with grett sweetnesse,  
For all owr dreedfull dedys," Thu hast not us denied.

830 Full mykyll° owte° Thy name for to be magnyfied,  
With mansuete° myrth and gret sweetnes.  
And as our gracysow God for to be gloryfyed,  
For Thu shewyst us gret gladnes.  
Now wyll I take thys Holy Sacrament,  
With humble hart and gret devocion,  
And all we wyll gon with on consent°  
And beare yt to chyrche with solempne processyon.  
Now folow me, all and summe,  
And all tho that bene here, both more and lesse.

840 Thys holy song, O sacrum convivium,"  
Lett us syng all with grett sweetnesse.

[The Bishop blesses the audience entreats them to repent]

900 ARISTORIUS Holy father, I knele to yow under benedycuté,"  
I have offendyd in the syn of covytyys:  
I sold owr Lordys body for lucre° of mony,  
And delyveryd to the wyckyd with cursyd advyce,  
And for that presumpcion gretly I agryse."  
That I presumed to go to the autere,  
There to handyll the Holy Sacryfyce,  
I were worthy to be putt in brennyng fyre.  
But gracysow lord, I can no more,  
But put me to Goddys mercy and to yowr grace.

910 My cursyd werkys for to restore,  
I aske penaunce now in thys place.  
EPISCOPUS Now for thys offence that thu hast done,  
Agens the Kyng of Hevyn and Emper-owr of Hell,  
Ever whyll thou lyvest, good dedys for to done  
And nevermore for to bye nore sell.  
Chastys° thy body, as I shall thee tell,  
With fastyng and prayng and other good wyrk,  
To withstond the temtacyon of fendes of Hell  
And to call to God for grace, looke thu never be irke."  

[The bishop rebukes the priest]

928 JONATHAS And I aske Crystendom,  
with great devocion,  
With repentant hart in all degrees,  
I aske for us all a generall absolucion.  
Here the Juys must knele al down.  
For that we knele all upon owr knees,  
For we have grevyd° owr Lord on ground,  
And put Hym to a new paynfull passion:

largyfluent bounteous  applied complid dedys deeds mykyll much owte ought mansuete gentle  on consent agreement O sacrum convivium O sacred feast [Latin] benedycuté blessing lucre profy agryse shudder with fear Chastys chastize irke weary neclygens negligence pyxys pynxes (containers for the Host) grevyd grieved
With daggars styckyd Hym with grevos wounds
New naylyd Hym to a post, and with pynsonys° pluckyd Hym down.

[Jason, Jasdon, Masphat, and Malchus repent]

Here shall the bysshoppe crysten the Jewys with gret solempnyté.

952 EPISCOPUS Now the Holy Gost at thys tyme mot yow blysse,
As ye knele all now in Hys name.
And with the water of baptyme° I shall yow blysse,
To save yow all from the fendes blame.
Now that fendys powre for to make lame—
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Gost—
To save yow from the devyllys flame,
I crysten yow all, both lest and most.

[Jonathas and Aristorius express their repentence again]

988 EPISCOPUS God omnypotent evermore looke ye serve,
With devocion and prayre° whyll that ye may.
990 Dowt yt not He wyll yow preserve,
For eche good prayer that ye sey to Hys pay.°
And therfor in every dew° tyme loke ye nat delay,
For to serve the Holy Trynyté—
And also Mary that swete may° —
And kepe yow in perfyte love and charyté.
Crystes commandementes ten there bee,
Kepe well them doo, as I yow tell.
Almyght God shall yow please in every degré,

And so shall ye save yowr sollys° from Hell.
1000For there ys payn and sorow cruell,
And in Hevyn ther ys both joy and blysse,
More then eny towng can tell.
There angellys syng with grett sweetnesse,
To the whych blysse He bryng us,
Whoys name ys callyd Jhesus.
And in wyrshyppe of thys name glory-ows,
To syng to Hys honore, Te Deum lauda-mus.°

Finis.°

Thus endyth the Play of the Blyssyd Sacrament whyche myracle was don in the forest of Aragon, in the famous cité Eraclea, the yere of owr Lord God 1461, to whom be honowr. Amen.

pynsonys pincers baptyme baptism prayre prayer pay benefit dew due may maid sollys souls Te Deum laudamus To God, we give praise [Latin] Finis the end
Endnotes

1 The text below was compiled by Cameron Hunt McNabb, in consultation with the play’s manuscript Trinity College MS F.4.20, the facsimile edition of the play in Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 39, edited by Norman Davis, Medieval Drama Facsimiles 5 University of Leeds, School of English, 1979, pp. 95–131, and The Croxton Play of the Sacrament, ed. John Sebastian, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Medieval Institute Publications, 2012). Glosses and endnotes have been provided by Cameron Hunt McNabb as well.

2 My analysis here draws on McNabb, “Staging Disability in Medieval Drama,” Ashgate Research Companion to Medieval Disability Studies, Routledge, forthcoming, where the Croxton Play of the Sacrament is used as a case study.

3 A letter has been canceled between “woo” and “me,” leaving space that the word might have originally been “wood.” Indeed “wood” makes more sense than “woo” in this context.
IMAGES
The Smithfield Decretals (ca. 1300–1340)

Contributed by Rachael Gillibrand

Introduction

The Smithfield Decretals is a fourteenth-century, southern French manuscript, consisting of 314 folios containing 1,971 papal letters and other documents relating to ecclesiastical law. However, despite being one of approx. 700 surviving manuscripts to contain copies of these documents, The Smithfield Decretals is unique in that it includes over 600 bas-de-page narrative scenes (i.e., any unframed images within a manuscript, often located at the bottom of the page, but not always). These images were likely commissioned by John Batayle, a canon of St. Bartholomew’s at Smithfield, and added to the manuscript forty years after its initial construction. Interestingly, these marginal images do not illustrate the text, but instead pertain to biblical stories, animal fables, tales of folly and the topsy-turvy, the miracles of the Virgin, and daily life more broadly.

Each of these images comes from a long tradition of visual tropes, layered with social, cultural, and political understandings; and they are affected as much by the relationship between the patron, artist, and intended audience as they are by the subject matter itself. Consequently, marginalia should not be read as a “true” depiction of medieval life, but rather as a conduit for conveying humor, satire, and social meaning. By asking questions of marginalia (such as who commissioned/created it? What/how are the subjects depicted? And how do they compare to similar images?) the scholar can not only access the daily life of people with disabilities, but also unravel the broader response to disability by the ways in which impairment was represented.

Despite the growing corpus of scholarship on medieval disability, and the already extensive research conducted into medieval visual culture, very little work has been done to bring these two spheres of enquiry together. Manuscript marginalia allows a fascinating and multifaceted insight into medieval disability politics and should therefore be used more extensively in our attempts to access understandings impairment in the Middle Ages.

Bibliography


Below are three examples taken from *The Smithfield Decretals*. One should note that the initial titles attributed to each of these images are those that appear in the British Library catalogue. However, I have added alternative descriptions of these images in brackets, which I believe more closely align with current debates surrounding the use of language in medieval disability studies. For example, although “impairment” was not a linguistic category used to describe disability in the Middle Ages, it is currently accepted as the preferred term for discussing disability, rather than the culturally specific terms seen in medieval texts such as “cripple” or “lame.”

British Library Royal 10 E IV, fol. 110
*Blind Beggar and his Dog.*
Depicted with closed eyes and grasping the leash of a guide dog, this illustration offers a rare medieval example of a physically impaired person using an assistance animal. Furthermore, he is depicted as alone in the outdoors with only a staff and his dog for support, discrediting the modern assumption that disability automatically negated independence in the Middle Ages. However, the ascribed title needs to be questioned. While closed, downcast eyes are a common visual representation of blindness, the man lacks the visual signifiers associated with begging (such as an alms bowl or extended hands). His tall staff, satchel, and broad brimmed hat are images frequently associated with pilgrimage. Therefore, by deconstructing the visual symbols contained within this image, it is possible to argue that the man is a blind pilgrim, rather than a beggar.
Again, the title here needs to be questioned. Whilst it is true that a pair of double amputees request a young boy’s attention (extending their hands in a begging motion), it appears that the ‘other men’ are in fact blind men, also appealing to the child for assistance. Not only do the men to the left of the image have the aforementioned closed, downwards facing eyes, but the man sitting on the bench holds a t-bar style crutch (used similarly to a modern guide cane), which appears to have been accidentally excluded by the addition of colour to the image.

This image of this selection appears to be a continuation of the second. It portrays the same young boy leading two figures towards a building (most likely a shrine where individuals with impairments can receive treatment). The first of the figures is a blind person, holding a shoulder-height staff in their left hand, whilst their right hand is placed on the boy’s shoulder for support; the second is a male amputee (also depicted on the right-hand side of figure 2) who, missing his feet, relies on the use of a hand-trestle to drag himself along the floor. Not only does this image offer an insight into the various mobility aids available to people with disabilities, but it also demonstrates the willingness of the able-bodied to assist the members of their community who had bodily impairments.
Visible and Invisible Impairments in Images of Medieval Musicians

Contributed by Karen M. Cook

Introduction

In modern Western society, blindness is considered a disability—that is, a physical ailment that prohibits the afflicted person from fully participating in “normal,” sighted society without special accommodations. Medieval societies, however, did not have such a word or concept. An issue such as blindness, for example, could be discussed from a medical perspective, especially with regard to treatment or cure; from a theological or philosophical perspective, as a sign of sin; or as a divine gift, such as prophecy or, especially relevant here, music. Moreover, if a person with such a condition was able to engage with their broader societal contexts in productive ways, especially if said condition acted as “a diminution of one sense that redirects the body toward another ability,” then that condition might not have been perceived as a disability at all.

Quite a number of the most renowned medieval musicians had what modern society might consider to be disabilities. Yet descriptions of many of these musicians, by themselves and by others, in print and in image, reveal that their individual ailments were typically presented not as something that they needed to overcome but as something that might have enhanced, or at the very least did not disrupt, their abilities as composers, teachers, and scribes.

Such musicians include Francesco “Il Cieco” da Firenze (c. 1325–Sept. 2, 1397; better known today as Francesco Landini) and Conrad Paumann (c. 1410–Jan. 24, 1473), who were both blind. Antonio “Zachara” da Teramo (c. 1350/60–after May 19, 1413) had several physical ailments, including the loss of several fingers and toes, stunted height, a possible club foot, and a self-described itchy skin condition. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–Sept. 17, 1179) explained her lifelong spells of illness as holy visions, which some have later interpreted to be chronic migraines. And the monk Notker (ca. 840–April 6, 912) was called “Balbulus,” or “the Stammerer,” due to his difficulties speaking.

Bibliography


Francesco “Il Cieco” da Firenze, alias Landini

Illustration from the Squarcialupi Codex (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Mediceo Palatino 97).

Tomb in the interior of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence; photograph taken by Sailko.

Francesco was born in Florence, the son of a well-known painter. He became blind in his early childhood due to smallpox, and as a result turned to music while quite young. Not only did he become well known as an exceptional organ player, improviser, and composer, he also built and tuned organs, sang, and invented other new instruments. He was also renowned for his expertise in other humanities, in particular poetry, and wrote a lengthy poem in praise of the logic of William of Ockham. Two images of Francesco remain. One is his tombstone, surviving in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence; the other is one of the numerous detailed illuminations from the Squarcialupi Codex (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Palatino 87). In both images, Francesco is depicted with the most obvious symbol of his musical career: his portative organ. In the Squarcialupi illumination, he is also wearing a laurel wreath, signifying his prestige as a poet (Cuthbert, 518). Francesco is also clearly depicted as blind in both images. His is the only illumination in the Squarcialupi codex in which the face is turned to one side, leaving only one (closed) eye visible. On his tombstone, Francesco is shown face-on, but his eyes have been hollowed out, creating the impression of a cavernous, unfocused gaze.
Unlike Francesco, later musician Conrad Paumann was born blind. We know little about his early years, but by the time he was a teenager he was already being sponsored as a talented musician; by his mid-thirties, Paumann was considered to be the best organist in all of Germany. He visited many nobles and dignitaries throughout Western Europe, reports of which describe his abilities as worthy of marvel. His epitaph in the Frauenkirche in Munich shows him surrounded by a lute, harp, recorder, and fiddle, but like Francesco, he too is playing the portative organ, and his eyes are closed. As Julie Singer points out, Francesco is thus captured as his contemporaries understood him: a person who was blind, and whose blindness allowed him to excel in matters both intellectual and musical; the same could also be said of the virtuoso organist Conrad Paumann.
Antonio “Zachara” da Teramo

Illustration from the Squarcialupi Codex.

Antonio da Teramo was often designated “Zachara” (Zacchara, Zacar, Zacara, Çacherras) in late medieval documents. The nickname, as Michael Scott Cuthbert points out, derives from the biblical Zacchaeus, who was too short to see Jesus and thus needed to climb a sycamore tree. Antonio was also short, perhaps due to illness or a congenital issue; in a fifteenth-century necrology, he is described as being short-statured, with only ten total fingers and toes. He too is depicted in an illumination in the Squarcialupi Codex, and while it is impossible to determine from it whether he was short, he is clearly missing some of his fingers, and his left arm is in a sling. Moreover, it appears that his left foot is turned inward toward his body, and that leg might be shorter than the other. Lastly, his face is unusually shaded, which Cuthbert suggests might be indicative of a condition such as lupus, which could also explain his loss of fingers and toes. Yet despite his missing fingers, Antonio was a papal secretary, and extant examples of his handwriting show no discernible flaws. He was also a singer and composer for the Roman and Pisan popes and was held in highest regard by his contemporaries, being one of the most widely copied composers of his day. His illumination depicts him holding an open book, which, though blank, likely refers to his abilities as either a scribe or theorist/composer. While it cannot necessarily be said that, like Francesco or perhaps Paumann, his physical ailments caused him to excel in other complementary ways, they certainly did not impede him from his successes, nor does it seem that he was shunned in any way for them.
With Hildegard of Bingen, the questions of disability, impairment, and representation are more blurred. In her various writings, Hildegard shares that even from her youth, she suffered periods of illness and interpreted them as divine punishment; at other times, she experienced moments of physical, mental, and emotional change or ecstasy as visions sent from God, which she was later encouraged to document in writing. Her current reputation as a migraine sufferer is due to early twentieth-century attempts to diagnose her retrospectively, but as Katherine Foxhall points out, modern scientific ideas of migraine have changed considerably in the last century. More importantly, though, a “purely” medical evaluation of Hildegard’s descriptions does not take into account her own interpretations of her lived experiences, which were much less medical than they were theological. Still, if one were to propose Hildegard’s visions *qua* visions, without any retrospective medical diagnosis, one might suggest that they, like Francesco’s blindness, were a characteristic that diminished Hildegard’s physical health while simultaneously strengthening her intellectual, musical, and theological prowess. As Hildegard’s contemporary reputation was built in large part on the acceptance of the authenticity of her visions, they were certainly no detriment but instead one of her greatest assets. As such, they are depicted as gifts of the Holy Spirit, as in her portrait in the Rupertsberg Manuscript, where Hildegard’s head is surrounded by tongues of flame reaching down from the heavens.
The last example is the least like the others, for while it is a portrait of a person with a known disability (in the modern sense), that disability is not shown. There were several monks named Notker in and around the abbey of St. Gall, and in order to differentiate them, each had some sort of nickname. Notker the musician was called “Balbulus,” or “the Stammerer,” and in his own writings he described himself as “stammering and toothless.” He worked as a scribe in the abbey but is best known to modern music scholars as a composer of sequences or hymns, setting new texts to longer existing melodies which quickly found themselves part of the local chant repertory. Due to his facility with language, he and his works were widely admired, and he won the favor, and the commission, of numerous noblemen, including the Emperor Charles the Bald. It was Notker’s written texts, not his verbal prowess, that earned such esteem; his stammering was in no way prohibitive of his successes either within the monastic structure or secular interactions. But unlike the other images discussed thus far, Notker’s portrait does not show any indication of his speech impediment. Far from this being an indication that his stammer was a source of shame or something that could be idealized via erasure upon his death (as many did upon Stephen Hawking’s death by portraying him as physically whole, walking away from his wheelchair), a much more likely interpretation is that a stammer is an invisible disability, difficult to portray through a visual medium. Notker is shown slumped at his writing desk, holding what might be a scroll in his right hand; he is thus strongly associated with the written word, his personal forte, in a manner similar to Francesco or Paumann being shown playing their portative organs, Hildegard dictating her visions, or Antonio holding an open book.
Conclusion

These images show us, quite clearly, that the various ailments that these musicians had were considered to be fundamental to their identities; they were neither erased nor corrected, but were deliberately included, whether in “lifelike” or stylized fashion. Moreover, some of these images suggest that these musicians reached the pinnacle of their expertise precisely because of their disability. Francesco and Conrad Paumann focused their attentions on music and the liberal arts due to their lack of sight; Hildegard’s visions were considered authentic revelations from God by the Pope, thus cementing her reputation as a scholar, theologian, and musician; and Notker’s stammer might have focused his attention on the written, rather than the spoken word. Antonio might likely have already been highly trained as a scribe before he lost some of his fingers, but he maintained positions of prestige in papal circles for years despite his other physical ailments. Such images thus reinforce that, to the contemporaries of these medieval musicians, none of them had disabilities by modern standards, but rather their physical characteristics might instead have redirected them toward something in which they could excel.
Endnotes

3 Ibid.
5 Michael Scott Cuthbert, “Difference, Disability, and Composition in the Late Middle Ages: Of Antonio ‘Zachara’ da Teramo and Francesco ‘Il Ciocco’ da Firenze,” The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies, eds. Blake Howe et al. (Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 523. This retrospective diagnosis is not widely known or accepted, and is mentioned here as one scholar’s suggestion only in order to bring attention to the painter’s rendition of Antonio’s complexion.
# Thematic Table of Contents

## Aging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>292</td>
<td>Dame Sirith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, <em>The Merchant’s Tale</em> from <em>The Canterbury Tales</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Blindness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Ælfric of Eynsham, <em>Catholic Homilies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Njáls Saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Thomas of Monmouth, <em>The Life and Passion of William of Norwich</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td><em>The Life of St. Margaret of Antioch</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, <em>The Merchant’s Tale</em> from <em>The Canterbury Tales</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, <em>The Man of Law’s Tale</em> from <em>The Canterbury Tales</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>304</td>
<td>John Gower, <em>Tale of Constance</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>393</td>
<td>Snorri Sturluson, <em>Ólafs saga helga</em> from <em>Heimskringla</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>411</td>
<td>Snorri Sturluson, <em>The Prose Edda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>419</td>
<td><em>The Cure of the Blind Man</em> from the <em>Chester Cycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>434</td>
<td><em>The Entry into Jerusalem</em> from the <em>York Cycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td>Croxton <em>Play of the Sacrament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>473</td>
<td>The Smithfield Decretals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>Visible and Invisible Impairments in Images of Medieval Musicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Bodily Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Augustine of Hippo, <em>The City of God against the Pagans</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Thomas of Monmouth, <em>The Life and Passion of William of Norwich</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>233</td>
<td>Marie de France, <em>Bisclavret</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365</td>
<td>Evadeam, The Dwarf Knight from the <em>Lancelot-Grail Cycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>428</td>
<td><em>Christ and the Leper</em> from the <em>Chester Cycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>448</td>
<td>The <em>Nativity</em> from the <em>N-Town Plays</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td>Croxton <em>Play of the Sacrament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>Visible and Invisible Impairments in Images of Medieval Musicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Deafness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td><em>The Life of St. Margaret of Antioch</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276</td>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer, <em>The Wife of Bath’s Portrait, Prologue, and Tale</em> from <em>The Canterbury Tales</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Disease and Chronic Illness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Nuremberg Town Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Examining for Leprosy in the Fifteenth Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Ortolf of Baierland, <em>Arzneibuch</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
162 William of Canterbury, A Miracle of Thomas Becket
173 Thomas of Monmouth, The Life and Passion of William of Norwich
186 Bernard Gui, On a Miracle of Saint Thomas Aquinas
190 Bede, The Prose Life of Cuthbert
206 Bede, The Miracles of King Oswald from Ecclesiastical History
292 Dame Sirith
327 The Book of Margery Kempe
428 Christ and the Leper from the Chester Cycle
434 The Entry into Jerusalem from the York Cycle
448 The Nativity from the N-Town Plays
458 Croxton Play of the Sacrament
476 Visible and Invisible Impairments in Images of Medieval Musicians

(In)Fertility and Reproduction

113 Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible
138 Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives
247 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Merchant’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales
260 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Man of Law’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales
276 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Wife of Bath’s Portrait, Prologue, and Tale from The Canterbury Tales
327 The Book of Margery Kempe
341 Bede, Menstruation, Infirmity, and Religious Observance from Ecclesiastical History
345 Bede, Physical Disability, Muteness, Pregnancy, Possession, and Alcoholism from Ecclesiastical History

Leprosy

85 Examining for Leprosy in the Fifteenth Century
113 Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible
327 The Book of Margery Kempe
428 Christ and the Leper from the Chester Cycle

Mental Illness

56 Mental Competency Inquisitions from Medieval England
69 Nuremberg Town Records
77 Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon
103 Ortolf of Baierland, Arzneibuch
173 Thomas of Monmouth, The Life and Passion of William of Norwich
181 Testimony from the Canonization Proceedings of Charles of Blois
186 Bernard Gui, On a Miracle of Saint Thomas Aquinas
210 The Life of St. Margaret of Antioch
220 Life of Mary of Oegines (Oignies)
233 Marie de France, Blasivert
242 Alain Chartier, The Book of Hope
247 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Merchant’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales
313 Thomas Hoccleve, Complaint
327 The Book of Margery Kempe
345 Bede, Physical Disability, Muteness, Pregnancy, Possession, and Alcoholism from Ecclesiastical History
379 Morkinskinna
458 Croxton Play of the Sacrament

Mental Competency and Intellectual Disability

25 York Cause Paper E.92
56 Mental Competency Inquisitions from Medieval England
69 Nuremberg Town Records
181 Testimony from the Canonization Proceedings of Charles of Blois
186 Bernard Gui, On a Miracle of Saint Thomas Aquinas
210 The Life of St. Margaret of Antioch
247 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Merchant’s Tale from The Canterbury Tales
313 Thomas Hoccleve, Complaint
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>327</th>
<th>The Book of Margery Kempe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Mobility-Impairment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>77</th>
<th>Tax Relief Requests from Medieval Dijon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Miracles in Apocryphal Infancy Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Thomas of Monmouth, <em>The Life and Passion of William of Norwich</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>Bede, The Prose <em>Life of Cuthbert</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td>The <em>Life of St. Margaret of Antioch</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>345</td>
<td>Bede, Physical Disability, Muteness, Pregnancy, Possession, and Alcoholism from <em>Ecclesiastical History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>428</td>
<td><em>Christ and the Leper</em> from the <em>Chester Cycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>434</td>
<td><em>The Entry into Jerusalem</em> from the <em>York Cycle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>473</td>
<td>The Smithfield Decretals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>Visible and Invisible Impairments in Images of Medieval Musicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Muteness and Speech-Impediments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>113</th>
<th>Selected Episodes on Healing and Disability from the Vulgate Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Thomas of Monmouth, <em>The Life and Passion of William of Norwich</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210</td>
<td>The <em>Life of St. Margaret of Antioch</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>345</td>
<td>Bede, Physical Disability, Muteness, Pregnancy, Possession, and Alcoholism from <em>Ecclesiastical History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>Visible and Invisible Impairments in Images of Medieval Musicians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Danielle Allor is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her work focuses on vegetal life and late medieval literature, arguing that late medieval authors imported knowledge-organizing and classifying strategies from natural philosophy to bolster claims to religious authenticity and literary authority. Her dissertation, “Trees of Thought: Arboreal Matter and Metaphor in Late Medieval England,” examines trees as material and figurual classification systems in the work of William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, and John Skelton.

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Skin in the Age of Chaucer, 2018), and “Mad for Margery: Disability and the Imago Dei in the Book of Margery Kempe” (The Ashgate Research Companion to Medieval Disability Studies, Routledge, forthcoming). She remains an ardent advocate for the Digital Humanities and public scholarship, maintaining an online center for the study of transgender and disability, medieval and post-medieval, www.ThingsTransform.com. Additionally, she serves on the executive board of the Mental Health Network, an advising think-tank for the national UCC church, as well as consults for local businesses, schools, and political groups on diversity and social justice. This work led her to serve at “the White House Forum on LGBTQ and Disability Issues” in 2016.

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Leigh Ann Craig is an associate professor of History and the Director of Undergraduate Studies in History at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her recent research has focused on loss of mind (including both physical illness and demonic affliction), disability, and community in Latin Christendom, especially as it appears in later medieval miracle stories. Her publications include Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages (Brill, 2009); “The Spirit of Madness: Doubt and the Miraculous Restoration of Sanity in the Miracles of Henry VI,” Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures (2013); “The History of Madness and Mental Illness in the Middle Ages: Directions and Questions,” History Compass (2014); and “Describing Death and Resurrection: Medicine and the Humors in Two Late Medieval Miracles,” in The Sacred and the Secular in Medieval Healing: Sites, Objects, and Texts (Routledge, 2016).

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Anne Galanaud graduated at Paris 4–Sorbonne University and earned her PhD in history at Franche-Comté University on the population of late medieval Dijon. She established a database that includes tax records from about 20,000 persons living between the mid-fourteenth century and the early sixteenth century, managed by an original program developed, with her contribution, by Henri Labesse (Paris–Sorbonne University). Her studies include an analysis of the socioeconomic and topographic characteristics of medieval Dijon winegrowers and an analysis of the fate of widows and orphans survivors to the Black Death in Dijon, deciphered from a so far untapped mid-fourteenth century source document. She studied, in collaboration with Pierre Galanaud, the cartography of medieval plagues and now focuses on their impact on fragile populations.

Pierre Galanaud is emeritus professor of immunology at Paris–Sud University. He graduated at Paris–Descartes University Medical School and performed post-doctoral studies at Tufts University, Boston. At Paris–Sud University, he was head of the Internal Medicine and clinical Immunology unit of Antoine Béclère hospital (Assistance Publique Hôpitaux de Paris) and director of the INSERM affiliated research laboratory *Cytokines and Immunoregulation*. His combined interests in the functional cartography of gene expression in the immune system and in the history of medicine led him to analyze, in collaboration with Anne Galanaud, medieval plagues by applying spatial analysis to the GIS based cartography of deaths (P. Galanaud, A. Galanaud, and P. Giraudoux, *Historical Epidemics Cartography Generated by Spatial Analysis: Mapping the Heterogeneity of Three Medieval “Plagues” in Dijon, 2015*). This collaboration is pursued for the impact of medieval epidemics on fragile populations.

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