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Preface

Two genres, epic and romance, have largely formed the modern view of medieval literature. A companion volume, *Medieval Epic and Romance: An Anthology of English and French Narrative*, anthologizes representative masterworks of these two literary types. The purpose of the present volume is to trace a different tradition from the Middle Ages by offering a selection of principal works from what is, after epic and romance, the most important category of medieval fictional writing, what are here termed "legends." The meaning of this term, which is not self-evident, is defined at some length in the introduction that here follows. *Medieval English and French Legends* takes the interested reader into territory that has previously been well known only to specialists. And yet the works printed here are not only interesting in themselves and quite accessible to the general reader; they are deeply revealing of the relationship between much medieval writing and the cultural inheritance most revered and preserved in this period: the immense body of secular and religious texts, most in Latin, bequeathed to the Middle Ages by Classical and Christian writers. This volume addresses the continuing cultural value and relevance of these honored works to medieval readers.

In deciding what to include and how to present it, I have been guided by what I have come to know about the needs of both non-academic readers and university students. The aim has been to provide sufficient material for the medieval section of western literary surveys. This book can be used as a main text in upper division medieval literature courses. It is also intended for the proverbial general reader in search of a guide to one of the richest periods of the European literary past. Thus, along with English works that repay study, here included are a large number of important French texts. No German, Italian, or Provencal works have found a place here. Such exclusions reflect only judgments of relevance, neither those of value nor of interest. Medieval French literature, much of which was composed or read in the British

Isles, exerted the greatest influence on developing English traditions after the Norman Conquest. Studying the important and representative French texts thus has the greatest utility for students whose overall intellectual project is the mastery of literature in English, broadly speaking. A strong case has often been made that French literature is the dominant tradition of medieval Western Europe. It is certainly beyond dispute that prominent French works provided many of the models for the development of vernacular writing in every European country, even including distant Iceland.

A final point is that the English and French works included here have been chosen for their complementarity. While sharing much in common, formally and thematically, the selections in each category also reflect, in their substantial divergences, the flexibility and vitality of the body of conventions they draw on for inspiration and inevitably "make new." These conventions are broadly medieval, and they are easily recognizable as shaping influences on the development of the modern European literatures. And yet the texts anthologized here also trace the unfamiliar contours of an imaginative world that can only be resurrected through the labors of translation and literary scholarship.

The remoteness of medieval literature requires a somewhat elaborate apparatus to recount necessary facts and provide some discussion of critical issues. The volume begins with the literary issues that the legend form raises. These are mostly concerned with the medieval understandings of "authorship" and "authority," so different from our own. Also included are a brief historical introduction and a chronology that identifies events, political, cultural, and literary, useful to an understanding of the period. The selections in the two sections of texts, secular and religious, are preceded by headnotes that engage specific details of literary history and analysis. Each selection closes with some suggestions for further reading. My intention has been to guide the interested reader to fuller discussion in English of literary, cultural, and historical issues posed by the various selections. Students working on research papers, it is hoped, will find the listed works an important starting point for informed analysis and discussion.

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A Brief Historical Introduction

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, the territories that would become France and England were two of the most important provinces of the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar subdued Gaul in the first century B.C.E., and Britain, after an initial foray by Caesar, was decisively won for Rome by the legions of the Emperor Claudius about a hundred years later. The Romans seized both these lands from Celtic tribes, but brother Celts in both Ireland and Scotland were spared the blessings and discontents of Roman rule. Once conquered and occupied, Britain and Gaul were soon thoroughly Romanized, and, as the new religion spread throughout the empire, their inhabitants were converted to Christianity, though many rural areas undoubtedly remained pagan.

Roman control over both provinces weakened in the early fifth century, especially after Alaric's Visigoths captured and sacked Rome in 410 C.E. The withdrawal of garrisoned legions led, perhaps inevitably, to invasion by the various pagan (and sometimes Christian) Germanic tribes settled on the margins of the empire in the west. In southern Gaul, the Visigoths established a large domain that came to include Roman Spain. Northern Gaul fell prey to the Franks, who crossed the Rhine from their homeland in what is now western Germany. The Franks quickly assumed control of lands that had belonged to Rome for more than four centuries. Though it did result in the end of Roman government, this movement should perhaps be considered a migration rather than an invasion. In many areas, the number of Franks was relatively small. As a result, they quickly assimilated to their new cultural surroundings through intermarriage, surrendering their Germanic dialects in favor of the colloquial Latin (so-called Vulgar Latin) spoken by the Romano-Celtic inhabitants. As this settlement went forward, Clovis I emerged as a strong and successful leader. During his reign (c. 466-511), the Franks achieved political unity, and their empire came to include much of what are now western Germany, the low countries, and modern France. Wisely, Clovis continued Roman ad-

ministrative practices and converted his people to orthodox Christianity, aligning himself with those of the same faith throughout his realm. In 507, he decisively defeated the Visigoths (who were Arian Christians, a heresy in the eyes of the orthodox). Clovis was prevented only by the Ostrogoth Theoderic, whose people were firmly established in Italy, from seizing all Visigoth territory in the south. The kingdom Clovis established endured in one form or another until 843, when after the treaty of Verdun it was parceled out to the three sons of Louis the Pious (778-840). Similarly, Clovis bequeathed his people many years of bitter conflict when at his death he divided his holdings. His two sons became the rulers of rivals Neustria and Austrasia. This separation of Frankish society came to an end when the mayors of the palace, who served as administrators for the ineffectual Merovingian successors to Clovis, united the twin kingdoms toward the end of the seventh century.

Roman Britain also suffered an invasion from Germanic tribes, but with quite different results. After the legions departed, the Britons faced considerable danger from the Scots and Picts, Celtic peoples living to the north of the defensive wall completed by the emperor Hadrian. Yet it was sea-borne raiders, and then settlers, from what is now Holland and Belgium and, perhaps, western Denmark and Germany, that brought an end to the culture that had developed under centuries of Roman rule. According to an ancient tradition, three tribes—the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes—left their homes across the North Sea to serve the Britons as mercenaries whose task was to prevent attack from without. These erstwhile guardians, however, soon launched an invasion of their own. Little is certain about the precise course of events that followed this wholesale movement of Germanic tribes to the island. It is clear, however, that the conflict between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons led to no peaceful accommodation. The Anglo-Saxons were victorious, seizing most of the land previously held by the Romans and settling as far north as what are now the Scottish lowlands. The native Celts either fled the island, in a vast exodus that would establish the territory of Brittany in western Gaul, or they decamped to largely mountainous and inaccessible areas of western Britain, there to found settlements that would become known as Wales and Cornwall. Unlike the Franks, the Germanic tribes now in possession of Britain had little use for Roman institutions, which rapidly disappeared. The

island's once prosperous cities were either abandoned or shrunk drastically in population. Under Roman rule, the Britons had spoken both Latin and various Celtic dialects. The Anglo-Saxons adopted neither language, nor did they convert to Christianity. Instead, the society they constituted in Britain was pagan and Germanic, in a nearly complete break from the Roman past. Their England came to consist of seven kingdoms, an unstable heptarchy of Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumberland. Though strong leaders (most notably Alfred of Wessex in the ninth century) at times extended their authority over neighboring realms, lasting political unity would, ironically, come only much later, with the Norman conquest in 1066.

Though more decisively severed from Roman traditions than Gaul, Anglo-Saxon England did not long remain isolated from the international culture of Western Europe. Missionaries from Christian Ireland made their way to the north of the island in the seventh century. These monks established monasteries in places like Lindisfarne, Wearmouth, and Jarrow that not only aided in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Such sites also became important centers of literate culture, vital to the preservation of classical and Christian traditions as the continent descended into a dark age. The Irish were not the only Christians with an interest in converting the Anglo-Saxons. Some years before the monks' arrival, in 597, the pope dispatched his own mission. Pope Gregory the Great's delegate, Augustine (later St. Augustine of Canterbury), achieved great success with the southern tribes, making his base at Canterbury in Kent. King Æthelbert became the first Christian ruler of England. Like his Irish co-religionists, Augustine promoted learning and education, bringing a substantial library with him from the continent. This intellectual initiative continued under the leadership of the scholarly Theodore of Tarsus, who later became archbishop of Canterbury. At the synod of Whitby (663), churchmen from both the Irish north and Roman south reached agreement on contested issues of practice, such as determining the date of Easter.

Especially in the northern monasteries, Christian culture flourished, aiding in the survival of classical Latin literary culture through the preservation and copying of texts, as well as the composition of new works. The most important international scholar this culture produced was Bede, a Benedictine monk who spent his entire life at the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Bede's writings are extensive

and various, including works of theology, history, and science. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, his most important book, offers an account of the triumph of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon society. The Viking raids and then full-scale invasions that began about 787 ravaged monastic foundations, which were often the repositories of considerable wealth. The damage was so great that by the late ninth century literate culture had declined precipitously.

Bede and his fellow clerics wrote in Latin, the language of the church and of international intellectual life. The blending of Germanic and Christian cultures in Britain, however, also produced a rich literature in the Anglo-Saxon language (also called Old English by modern scholars). Not long after the Christian conversion, the Roman alphabet began to be used for the writing of Old English. At first, written Old English was used for strictly utilitarian purposes (e.g., wills and deeds). Such was the status of their native language, however, that the Anglo-Saxons quickly set about creating a literature that drew on both pagan Germanic and Christian traditions. An important feature of Germanic life had been an oral poetic composition and performance in which the genre of heroic epic had held an honored place. The Old English *Beowulf* reveals much about such pre-literate traditions. *Beowulf* offers several accounts of the extemporaneously composed and performed heroic verse meant to entertain and memorialize important occasions in the life of the tribe. Though *Beowulf* was composed in writing, the poem's style reflects pre-literate traditions. The oldest surviving Germanic epic, the poem preserves saga materials from a pagan golden age that were undoubtedly transmitted orally for a number of generations, perhaps for several hundred years.

Bede's history recounts how a different but complementary tradition took shape sometime in the later decades of the seventh century. It seems that a certain brother in the monastery of Whitby named Caedmon was one day "singled out by the grace of God" to compose poetry in the native Anglo-Saxon oral style on religious themes. A short hymn of praise is recorded in Bede's Latin text (a version in Old English survives as well), but Bede says that Caedmon's *oeuvre* was even more extensive, including poems that "interpreted" the Holy Scripture that was read to the illiterate monk. Caedmon's other works are probably not to be found among the considerable number of Old English poems on religious themes that survive, indicating that his

example was followed by a number of others. One of these was Cynewulf, whose name is worked into the end of his poems. The Old English religious narratives treat Biblical subjects (such as the deeds of Judith from the Old Testament) as well as holy biography (such as the lives of Sts. Helen and Juliana).

Old English religious verse also includes several Biblical paraphrases (e.g., *Exodus*), lyrical and allegorical works (e.g., *Phoenix*), and sacred biographies, the most notable of which is *Andreas*, a stirring account of the apostle Andrew's conversion of pagan cannibals. Old English religious literature has an even broader reach. A significant body of original religious prose and translations from the Latin survives as well. Alarmed by an educational crisis that meant many priests were barely literate, King Alfred of Wessex (871-99) commissioned Old English renderings of important Latin works, such as Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, with a view to making them widely available. In the late 10th century, Aelfric, abbot of Eynsham, and Wulfstan, archbishop of York, set a high standard for sermon writing, as the church attempted to better address the religious needs of the common people by providing them with instruction in their native language.

No such literary efflorescence, in either Latin or the vernacular, took place in Merovingian Gaul, where social conditions were less favorable to intellectual developments of any kind. By the middle of the seventh century, in fact, Merovingian society was in severe decline, its cities in ruins, its once profitable commerce disrupted. Education and learning had sunk to very low levels. Unlike those in seventh and early eighth century Anglo-Saxon England, the monastic foundations in the empire Clovis had established, though extensive, had never come to function as cultural centers. Perhaps this was because spreading a new faith was not their task. Unfortunately, seventh century Merovingian society was not fortunate enough to have religious leaders of great learning and intellectual energy, such as Augustine of Canterbury and Theodore of Tarsus, nor did it possess the wealth of books these two had brought with them to Britain. While Bede chronicles the triumph of English Christianity and its fruitful amalgamation with pagan traditions, Gregory, bishop of Tours, writes in his *History of the Franks* about the degeneration of learning, law, and religion, as well as the decay of the social order, in seventh century France. Gregory spent a distinguished career as a bishop, had the benefit of much education,

and composed other important works, most notably a life of St. Martin of Tours. In comparison to Bede, however, he seems a minor figure, reflecting the substantial differences between the two cultures. Even Gregory's Latin lacks the stylistic polish and grammatical correctness of his English counterpart. Severely unsettled social conditions made it difficult for him and his contemporaries to serve as more than barely effective caretakers and transmitters of classical and Christian culture. As in England, but beginning at an even earlier period, Merovingian monasteries suffered grievously from attack. Saracens in the south, Vikings in the north, and Magyars to the east continually threatened Frankish culture with annihilation.

With the coming of the Carolingians in the eighth century, monasticism enjoyed something of a renaissance as social conditions became more settled. Especially during the reign of Charlemagne (742-814), initiatives of reform turned many foundations into educational centers. This development continued, in spite of unceasing threats from within and without, even as Carolingian rule became less effective following the death of Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious. In the closing years of the eleventh century, a new and vital form of monasticism took shape at Cîteaux that would soon come to dominate European society. The reformist zeal of this Cistercian movement produced notable leaders, especially St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Cistercian devotionalism even spawned a literary tradition of spiritualized romance, epitomized by the visionary *Quest of the Holy Grail*.

Monasticism in Merovingian and Carolingian France, however, did not provide an environment in which Christian and Germanic traditions could profitably mix and generate a vernacular literature. The linguistic situation in the kingdom simply did not favor such a development. Literature in Old English emerged at a startlingly early stage in Anglo-Saxon England because those who had displaced Roman culture from Britain had not abandoned their Germanic language, which was obviously quite distinct from the Latin re-introduced by Christian missionaries. Anglo-Saxon was associated with cultural traditions that continued to be embraced with pride even after the conversion. *Beowulf* is suffused with a nostalgic admiration for the unredeemable pagan past that is inseparable from the language with which it continued to be evoked. In contrast, because spoken by a minority who were soon assimilated, Frankish never achieved cultural prominence. Providing

the language of the Franks with a written form was never at issue during the Merovingian period.

Moreover, the Vulgar Latin soon adopted by the Franks was not until the eighth century generally perceived as anything but an inferior variety of the written language of ancient tradition, which was of such central importance in both religious life and government administration. Consequently, literary texts in what came to be known as French were apparently not composed until the eleventh century. Medieval French literature begins with the sudden appearance of two masterpieces, the first religious and the second secular: *The Life of Saint Alexis* (c. 1050) and *The Song of Roland* (c. 1095), which, much like *Beowulf*, memorializes the heroic accomplishments of an earlier generation. Not much Latin poetry was composed during the Merovingian period. While more of note survives from Carolingian times, only in the twelfth century would a substantial body of literature in that language begin to be produced in France.

During the eighth century, Anglo-Saxon society remained an unstable mix of kingdoms. Political conditions at the end of the Merovingian era were more conducive to political unity as a strong dynasty came to power. In 732, Charles Martel, the progenitor of the Carolingian dynasty, defeated the Saracens near Poitiers and Tours. His grandson Charlemagne expanded the lands under his control and made substantial progress toward establishing a centralized administration that could better insure social order. In recognition of his political pre-eminence and strong support of the Christian church, Charlemagne was crowned emperor of the west by the pope in 800. There is no doubt that for the space of several generations he was the most powerful ruler in Christendom. Swollen by his many conquests, Charlemagne's kingdom became even more extensive than that of Clovis.

Relative security from internal and external attack made possible a renaissance in learning and education, for whose encouragement and direction Charlemagne displayed substantial enthusiasm. This initiative was led, among others, by a well-educated and talented Englishman, Alcuin of York, whom Charlemagne engaged to oversee educational reform. Louis the Pious continued his father's work in all these areas, but with his death in 840 central authority declined quickly. By the end of the ninth century, France, like Anglo-Saxon England, had come to suffer constant attacks from Viking invaders, who settled sub-

stantial areas of both countries. In the north of England, a large tract of land, the Danelaw, was ceded by treaty to the Scandinavians. Similarly, the later Carolingians came to terms with the Norsemen who settled in the Cotentin peninsula during the early decades of the tenth century after terrorizing the kingdom for many years. This area was recognized as a new duchy of Normandy when their leader Rollo became its first duke and, in theory at least, accepted the overlordship of the French throne.

Though its Latin culture had declined significantly since the age of Bede, Anglo-Saxon literary culture was still strong when William of Normandy conquered the kingdom in 1066, first defeating the Anglo-Saxon King Harold at Hastings and then prosecuting a successful campaign that ended with his coronation in London on Christmas day of that same year. William quickly forced the native aristocracy from his new possession, installing Normans or other Frenchmen of his choosing into all important church positions as vacancies fell open. The territories of the kingdom were parceled out to a French-speaking nobility, which introduced feudal practices. England thus became trilingual, with Latin, French, and English all in use (and, of course, various Celtic dialects as well in Wales and Scotland). Intellectual and religious life continued to be conducted largely in Latin.

As a spoken language, French did not much extend its influence beyond the ruling class William brought with him. There was no attempt, because there was no need in a rigidly hierarchical feudal society, to challenge the linguistic allegiance of the common people. However, the well-established tradition of using written English for legal, literary, and devotional purposes largely came to an end as French became the privileged vernacular alongside Latin. There were notable exceptions to this general rule, however. At the monastery in Peterborough, for example, a continuation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written in English until 1154. *The Owl and the Nightingale*, a twelfth century debate poem that draws on learned traditions, shows that English was chosen by some writers of the period who addressed educated, perhaps even aristocratic, readers.

There is no doubt, however, that native literary traditions were strained or declined because of rivalry with French, which remained the language of aristocratic patrons in the country until the fourteenth century. Under William and his successors, especially the Plantagenet

line that came to the throne in the middle of the twelfth century with the powerful Henry II, the English royal court became one of Europe's most notable centers of textual production, even giving rise to a new literary form of French: Anglo-Norman. Poets like Marie de France were attracted to Henry's court, which was often presided over by his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, perhaps the greatest literary patroness of the Middle Ages.

Henry's court was intrigued by its own place within the development of western culture, as the romances of antiquity that were composed for its edification and entertainment bear witness. In works like the *Romance of Eneas*, Henry and his courtiers found mirrors of their drive toward dynastic expansion and the value they placed on an inner life of refined feelings. Such courtiers were especially entertained by disquisitions about love, which became the great subject of literature in this period. One of the most tantalizingly ambiguous works in this genre seems to have been penned for the court of Eleanor's daughter, Countess Marie of Champagne. The Latin treatise *On the Art of Loving Correctly*, written by Andrew the Chaplain, addresses, with perhaps no little irony, the "rules" that should govern the conduct of love affairs, which are, it is argued, necessarily extramarital. In one section of Andreas's book, Eleanor of Aquitaine and other noble ladies appear a kind of supreme court whose task is to render judgments in difficult "cases," determining what is right and what impractical or dishonorable in the game of love.

The aristocratic class that wielded power in England and France discovered a perfect mythology to express such ideals in the Arthurian stories whose ultimate source was Celtic mythology and saga. Both Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France make reference to "Breton" poets and an apparently itinerant, oral tradition, but French writers at the time also drew on Latin sources, especially Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*, which was soon translated into French by the Norman writer Wace. Even as it saw a widespread deepening of Latin culture, the twelfth century witnessed the emergence and flourishing of a number of vernacular forms in addition to the Arthurian romance. An extended narrative in verse, the romance was used to treat widely varied subjects. The Anglo-Norman poet Wace, for example, in addition to treating English history and Arthur in his *Brut*, also composed a romance tracing the history of the Normans. Though Chrétien's romances focus

on love as the knight's most important formative experience, Anglo-Norman romancers, catering to the different taste of their audience, told tales of disinheritance, exile, struggle, and eventual vindication.

Middle English writers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries often followed this fashion, as *Havelok* and other romances with English subjects attest. As it had in Anglo-Saxon England, the saint's life enjoyed great popularity, with masterpieces like the *Life of St. Alexis* in France and *The Life of St. Katherine* in England. Comic forms such as the beast epic and the fabliau (a short bawdy tale) also emerged and found an audience, first in France and then in England. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is, among other things, an anthology of medieval genres, giving some idea of their impressive range and variety. Among the tales are several fabliaux, an extended romance, a beast epic tale (with barnyard animals functioning as human characters), a saint's life, and a sermon. All these genres had achieved prominence by the middle of the thirteenth century in France.

Alongside the romance, however, the most enduring literary genre that emerged on the continent was the *chanson de geste* or "song of history." These long narrative poems celebrated the exploits of national heroes (especially those associated with the reign of Charlemagne) and, in addition to being read, were sung or chanted in public, at least in the early decades of their popularity. Though often associated with the twelfth century and conceived as precursors of the romance, the *chansons de geste*, in one form or another, enjoyed a substantial popularity until the end of the French Middle Ages. The chronicle poems of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which are often biographical in the manner of Guillaume de Machaut's *The Taking of Alexandria*, draw on and expand this epic tradition. Unlike the romance, this literary tradition never found a reflex in English. Chaucer includes no example in the *Canterbury Tales*. However, Anglo-Norman literature saw the emergence of works that resemble the epic in their subject matter and treatment. The popular thirteenth century romance *Gui de Warewic*, which was soon adapted into Middle English, treats issues of dynastic succession, love, and even Christian devotionalism as it relates the accomplishments of a local English hero. *Havelok*, though more of a romance, also shows affinities with epic tradition.

The literary richness of the later Middle Ages in France and England (roughly 1100-1500) was made possible by the relative security

of feudal society, its comparative wealth, and its investment in learned traditions—these were for the most part the intellectual inheritance of Greece and Rome. Poets were often educated at cathedral and monastic schools, or even took degrees at the universities that emerged and flourished during the thirteenth century. Undoubtedly, there were widespread popular traditions of storytelling that have often left little trace. For example, the Breton tellers of tales mentioned by Chrétien and Marie de France were likely professional entertainers who traveled from court to court or marketplace to marketplace. However, the vernacular poets of the time whose texts have been recorded generally addressed a more restricted audience, one associated with some court or patron even though their works also circulated more widely in written form. Their poetry largely reflects the tastes and interests of the ruling classes. The reading and literary public of France and England expanded considerably in the last two centuries of the Middle Ages as literacy was extended to an increasingly powerful bourgeois and professional class (to which poets such as Guillaume de Machaut and Geoffrey Chaucer often belonged). Such readers became increasingly interested in devotional works as a concern with the inner spiritual life deepened, encouraged by changes such as the institution of private confession by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1204.

By the early fourteenth century, England and France saw the emergence of powerful rulers, who exploited the development of a kind of national sentiment. The successors to Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious (d. 840) had presided over something like a second Merovingian age in which royal authority grew so weak that the last of this line, Louis V (986-7) was not as powerful as most of the dukes and counts who were nominally his vassals. The kings of the new royal house, the Capetians, ruled France until 1328 and, through their descendants, until the death of Louis XVI during the French Revolution. At first, they were much less powerful than the great nobles, over whom they were sovereign, at least in theory. The accession of Philip II Augustus (reigned 1180-1223), however, led not only to more effective and centralized administration; Philip was also successful in the outmaneuvering of France's chief rival, England. At the battle of Bouvines, Philip and his allies defeated the forces of King John I of England and his allies. John was forced by this defeat to cede the French possessions he had inherited from his father, Henry II of England. During the thir-

teenth century, French royal power increased with charismatic and successful rulers such as Louis IX (reigned 1226-70), who was later sanctified, and Philip IV the Fair (reigned 1285-1314). In England, the decline of the vast Angevin empire under John's luckless and incompetent leadership eventually led to conflict between his son Henry III (reigned 1216-72) and the king's own barons, even as England endured a series of further humiliations at French hands.

All this changed with the accession of Henry's son Edward I (1272-1307) and his successors, especially Henry V (reigned 1413-1422), who established a strong central authority, defended the northern border against the Scots, and challenged for possession of French territories, and even for the French kingdom itself in a series of wars beginning in 1337 and ending, with English defeat, in 1453. This Hundred Years War is the defining event of the political history of the two kingdoms in the High Middle Ages. Socially and culturally, however, it is the Black Death that, reaching Europe in 1347, most affected the life of its two peoples, killing perhaps as much as a quarter of the population of England and France and leading to unrest and revolt among the lower orders: the Jacquerie in France, followed by the Peasants' Revolt in England. In neither instance, however, was the feudal order decisively challenged. The rule of king and nobles persisted until the end of the period in both kingdoms, with Charles VIII (reigned 1483-98) in France adding both Brittany and Burgundy to areas under royal control and Henry VII (reigned 1485-1509) restoring authority after a dynastic crisis, the Wars of the Roses.

During the High Middle Ages, the feudal kingdoms of England and France shared not only a political system, centered on the aristocratic court, that survived and flourished despite the changing fortunes of kings and dynasties alike. The two countries also shared connections that were the twin legacies of William's conquest and of Henry II's establishment of a huge kingdom that included England, Normandy, and other vast areas of France. The enduring presence of the French language at the upper levels of society in England, as well as the international prestige of French literature, brought it about that when literature in English began to grow in popularity during the fourteenth century it developed largely through French models. The most notable English poets of the age, Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, were influenced not only by French romances of the twelfth century,

but by the love allegory dream vision that had taken shape in the thirteenth century after the appearance of the *Romance of the Rose*, a sprawling text composed by two authors that, among other things, addresses the linked experiences of love and seduction. As not in the classic romances, where narrators report the actions of fictional characters, the *Rose* features an "I" narrator who relates his own.

This shift toward a literature of subjective experience is to be seen not only in Chaucer's early poetry, such as *The Legend of Good Women*, where the narrator recounts a dream in which he is asked by divine authorities to tell the stories of virtuous women, or in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, likewise a collection of stories framed by an elaborate allegory in the manner of the *Rose*. Much of the late medieval literature of this kind belongs to the genre of the *dit* or "tale," whose concern with subjective experience, however fictionalized, provides the ideal form for authors eager to write about their own experiences of writing. Even when Chaucer and Gower follow another literary fashion, the collection of short narratives with dramatized tellers, they are concerned to represent themselves within their works. In *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, Chaucer includes "himself" as one of the pilgrims journeying toward the holy shrine and has no little fun with this self-portrait as the hapless poet finds disfavor with his initial effort at reciting a poem and is required instead to relate a tale in prose. Such literary games illustrate the growing importance of the author, who is now identified more closely with the works s/he produces. The last two centuries of the Middle Ages in France witness the emergence of a number of notable authors, including Christine de Pizan (1364-1430). Her career exemplifies the reach and variety of literary production in the time. Christine's works range from a collection of lyric poems, to short narrative *dits*, to the longer prose works on intellectual and moral themes for which she has justly been praised in modern times; these include her *Book of the City of Ladies*, which argues against antifeminist male authorities for a just assessment of the accomplishments of women.

Chronology

Abbreviations: c.= about; d. = died, fl. = flourished, ME = Middle English, OE = Old English

Date	English History	French/European History	Literary History
350		Martin, Bishop of Tours, (fl. 340–c. 400).	
			St. Augustine of Hippo (fl. 390–425).
400	Roman legions leave Britain (409).	Rome sacked by Visigoths (410).	St. Jerome completes translation of Bible into Latin (c. 405).
		Salian Franks living west of Rhine, with centers at Tournai and Cambrai.	Ausonius, Gallo–Roman poet, (fl. 330–90).
425	St. Patrick's mission to convert Irish (c. 435).		
	Last appeal of Romano–Britons to Rome (c. 446).		
450	Conquest of Britain by Angles, Saxons, and Jutes and perhaps other Germanic tribes begins.	Merovech, founder of Merovingian line (d. 456).	
		Visigoths extend rule over Southern Gaul.	
	Hengest and Horsa settle in		

Date	English History	French/European History	Literary History
	Kent (c. 450).	Vandals sack Rome (455).	
475	Saxons settle in Wessex and Sussex (c. 470–500).	Clovis I (r. 482–511) takes over administration of Roman Gaul in the north and unifies Franks there.	
500	St. David in Wales.	Clovis defeats Visigoths (507) and adds southern Gaul to empire.	
	Romano–Britons defeated at battle of Mt. Badon (c. 510).	Benedictine order founded (529).	
525		Merovingian dynasty rules over Clovis's empire until 737, but power resides with mayors of the palace after 639.	Boethius writes *The Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 525).
			Venantius Fortunatus, Latin poet in Northern France (fl. 560–600).
550	St. Columba founds mission at Iona off northern coast.		Gregory of Tours (fl. 570–94), bishop and author of *History of the Franks*, also writes life of St. Martin of Tours.
	Battle of Dyrham (577). Britons left only with Wales and Dunnonia.		Gildas writes *Conquest of Britain* (c. 547).
575	Establishment of principal Anglo–Saxon kingdoms,		

known as the Heptarchy.

600 Pope Gregory the Great sends Augustine to convert the Angles and Saxons (597).

Æthelfrith of Bernicia defeats Britons near Chester (c. 615).

Edwin king of Northumbria (616–32) converted by Paulinus (627).

625 Irish missionary Aidan founds monastery at Lindisfarne (c. 635). Oswald of Northumbria defeats British Cadwallon at Heavenfield (635).

650 Mercia converted (656).

Synod of Whitby (663) confirms primacy of Roman over Irish practice.

675

Early OE heroic poetry such as *Widsith, Deor*, and *Waldere* (c. 650).

Caedmon's *Hymn* composed (c. 670). First literary work in Old English that survives in written record.

Caedmonian poems: *Genesis A*, *Daniel, Christ and Satan* (c. 700?).

Date	English History	French/European History	Literary History
	St. Wilfrid converts Sussex (682).	Charles Martel (c. 688–741), founder of Carolingian dynasty.	OE *Exodus* (c. 690?).
	Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury (669–90).		
700	English missions to continent.	Arabs land in Spain (711).	Flourishing of northern monastic literary culture at Lindisfarne, Wearmouth, Jarrow, and Whitby.
		St. Boniface in Germany (711).	
725		Charles Martel defeats Saracens at Poitiers (732).	Bede completes *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (731).
750	Offa king of Mercia (756–96).	Reign of Charlemagne (768–814).	*Beowulf* composed (750?).
775		Charles defeated by Basques (or Gascons) at Roncesvalles (778).	Cynewulf composes OE religious poetry: *Elene*, *Juliana*, *Christ II* (c. 800–50).
	Viking raids begin (c. 787).		Alcuin of York undertakes educational administration for Charlemagne (c. 782).
800	Vikings sack Lindisfarne (793).	Charles crowned emperor by Pope Leo III in Rome (800).	Rabanus Maurus, theologian and pupil of Alcuin (fl. 805–856).
		Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840).	
825			Einhard composes *Life of Charles* (c. 829), first biography of a western ruler since antiquity.

			Oaths of Strasbourg (842), first written text in early Old French.
850	Northumbria falls to Danes (867).		
875	Reign of King Alfred (871–899). Wessex only kingdom not conquered by Danes.		Alfredian translations of Latin texts begun (787).
			OE *Andreas* (c. 890?).
	Treaty between Alfred and Guthrum establishes Danelaw (886).	Vikings besiege Paris (885).	*Séquence de sainte Eulalie* (c. 880), first saint's life in Old French.
900	Mercia subject to Wessex (919).	Founding of monastery of Cluny (909). Under direction of abbot Odo (926–44), reforms of Cluny and daughter houses.	Anglo–Saxon chronicle begun (891).
	Athelstan of Wessex defeats Scots and others at Brunanburh (937).	Viking leader Rollo made first duke of Normandy by Charles III (911).	OE *Judith*, *Phoenix* (c. 915?).
			OE *Battle of Brunanburh*, poem in AS chronicle.
950	Scandinavian kingdom of York ends (954).		
	England united under Wessex (954).		
	St. Dunstan becomes archbishop of Canterbury.		

Date	English History	French/European History	Literary History
	Monastic revival (960–88).		
975			Major OE poetry manuscripts assembled (978–1016).
	Danegeld first levied (991).		OE *Battle of Maldon* composed.
	Battle of Maldon (991).	Reign of Hugh Capet (987–96), founder of Capetian line.	Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* (c. 992), *Lives of Saints* (c. 993–8).
	Canute becomes king of England, Norway, and Denmark (1015).	Peace of God movement begins (989).	Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (1014).
1025	Edward the Confessor becomes king (1042).	Reign of Henry I (1031–60).	
1050	Harold becomes king (1066).	William becomes duke of Normandy (1035).	*Life of Saint Alexis* composed (c.1050).
	Harold victorious at Stamford Bridge (1066).	Split between Rome and Constantinople (1054).	
	William, duke of Normandy, defeats Harold at Hastings (1066).		
1075	Reign of William I (1066–1087).		
	Domesday survey (1086).	Mother house of Cistercian order founded (1098) at Cîteaux.	Peter Abélard, theologian (fl. 1099–1142), writes autobiographical *History of*

			Calamities, account of affair with Héloïse.
		First Crusade (1096–99).	
		Council of Clermont (1095).	
1100	Reign of Henry I (1100–35).		*Song of Roland* composed (c. 1100).
		St. Bernard of Clairvaux (fl. 1110–1153).	
			Peter Lombard, theologian, (fl. 1135–1160).
1125		Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204).	Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* composed (c. 1136), translated into French by Wace in 1155.
		Second Crusade (1147–9).	
1150	Reign of Henry II (1154–89). Henry had married Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152, gaining control over vast French territories.		French romances of antiquity (including *Romance of Eneas*) composed (c. 1150–65).
		Norman barons invade Ireland (1169).	
	Becket murdered (1170).		Marie de France (fl.1160–1210).
1175	Conquest of Ireland begins (1171).		Chrétien de Troyes (fl. 1154–1191).
	Reign of Richard I (the Lionhearted) (1189–99).	Reign of Phillip II (Augustus) (1180–1223).	Andreas Capellanus, *De Honeste Amandi* (c. 1184).
		Saladin takes Jerusalem (1187).	Composition by some 20 authors of vast cycle of beast epic, the *Roman de Renart* (c. 1174–1250).
		Third Crusade begins (1190).	

DATE	ENGLISH HISTORY	FRENCH/EUROPEAN HISTORY	LITERARY HISTORY
1200	Reign of John I (Lackland) (1200–1216).	Foundation of University of Paris (c. 1200).	Geoffroi de Villehardouin composes *The Conquest of Jerusalem*, eyewitness account of Fourth Crusade (c. 1210).
	John defeated at Bouvines by French (1214).	Fourth Crusade begins (1201).	Troubador poetry in southern France (fl. 1100–1200).
	John forced to sign Magna Carta (1215).	Crusaders sack Constantinople (1204).	Vulgate cycle of Arthurian romances composed (c.1215–35).
	John loses most of Henry II's French possessions.	Fourth Lateran Council (1214). Yearly confession mandatory.	ME *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1200).
	Arrival of Franciscans and Dominicans (1221–4).	St. Francis founds Franciscan order (c.1209).	ME *Katherine* group (c. 1200).
			Romance of the Rose composed by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun (c. 1220–(1290?).
1225		Albigensian crusade (1209–1229).	Aristotle's *Metaphysics* translated into Latin (1225–30).
		Reign of Louis IX (1214–70).	
1250	University College founded at Oxford (1249).	Treaty of Paris with England (1259).	Rutebeuf, Parisian poet (fl. 1248–85).
	Barons' War (1263–7).	Death of St. Louis near Tunis (1270).	St. Bonaventure at University of Paris (fl. 1257–74).

	Reign of Edward I, also duke of Aquitaine (1272–1307).	St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* (1267–73).	
1275	Edward undertakes conquest of Wales and Scotland.	Reign of Philip IV (the Fair) (1285–1314).	ME Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1277–90).
			Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, composed in Franco–Italian (c. 1300).
	Peterhouse, Cambridge founded (1281).	Fall of Acre (1291).	
1300	Rebellion of Robert Bruce (1306).	Estates General first meet (1302).	Guillaume de Machaut, poet and musician (1300?–1377).
		Papacy at Avignon (1309–78).	
		Jews expelled from France (1306).	*Life of St. Louis*, composed by Jean de Joinville (1309).
	Battle of Bannockburn (1314).		
	Civil war (1321–2).		Death of Dante (1321).
1325	Reign of Edward III (1327–1377). Hundred Years War begins.	Reign of Philip VI (1328–50). Valois dynasty begins.	Jean Froissart, poet and chronicler (1337–c. 1404).
	Battle of Crécy (1346).	Black Death (1347–50).	Eustache Deschamps, poet, (c. 1346–c. 1406).
1350	Battle of Poitiers (1356).	Reign of John II (the Good) (1350–64).	Langland composes ME *Piers Plowman* (c. 1362).

DATE	ENGLISH HISTORY	FRENCH/EUROPEAN HISTORY	LITERARY HISTORY
		Jacquerie, peasant revolt (1358).	Oton de Granson, poet (fl. 1365–1397).
		Peter I of Cyprus conquers Alexandria (1365).	English used to open Parliament (1362).
		Reign of Charles V the Wise (1364–1380).	Wyclif translates Bible into English (c. 1380).
	Death of Black Prince (1376).	French recover Normandy and parts of Aquitaine (1369–77).	Geoffrey Chaucer, ME poet (fl. 1370–1400).
			Canterbury Tales (begun 1387).
			ME *Gawain* poet (fl. c. 1380).
			John Gower, ME poet (fl. 1370–1408) *Confessio Amantis* (1390).
			Philippe de Mézières, crusader, poet, and propagandist (fl. 1350–1405).
1375	Peasants' Revolt (1381).	Reign of Charles VI (1380–1422).	Christine de Pizan, woman of letters, (c. 1364–c. 1430).
	Repression of Lollardy begins (1399).		Alain Chartier, poet (c. 1385–c. 1430).
	Richard II deposed. Accession of	Urban revolts in Paris and elsewhere (1382).	Thomas Hoccleve, ME poet (fl. 1395–

	Henry IV (1399).		1450).
			Regiment of Princes (1411–2).
1400	Richard II murdered (1400).		
	Reign of Henry V (1413–22).	Great Schism (1378–1417).	Charles d'Orléans, poet, (1394–1465).
		Council of Constance ends Great Schism (1415–7).	
			John Lydgate, ME poet (fl. c. 1400–50). *The Fall of Princes* (1431–8).
	Battle of Agincourt (1415).	Revolt in Paris (1413).	Christine de Pizan initiates "Quarrel of the Rose" (1402).
	Treaty of Troyes (1420).		
		Joan of Arc (1412–1431).	.
1425		Reign of Charles VII (1422–61).	Chartier encourages "Quarrel of the Belle Dame Sans Merci" (c. 1430).
		Franco–Burgundian treaty (1435).	
			Paston family letters composed in England (1422–1529).
1450	Henry VI deposed (1461).		Gutenberg begins printing at Mainz (1450).
	Wars of the Roses (1455–85).	Expulsion of English from SW France, their last possessions (1453).	Thomas Malory pens ME *Le Mort d'Arthur* (1469–70).

DATE	ENGLISH HISTORY	FRENCH/EUROPEAN HISTORY	LITERARY HISTORY
		Constantinople falls to Turks (1453).	
		Reign of Louis XI (1461–83).	William Dunbar, Scottish poet, (fl. 1490–1520).
1475			William Caxton prints first book in English (1474).
	Henry Tudor defeats Richard III at Bosworth Field (1485). Henry VII becomes first of Tudor line.	Reign of Charles VIII (1483–98).	
		Columbus lands in West Indies (1492).	

Sources: Paul Szarmach, M. Teresa Tavormina, and Joel T. Rosenthal, eds., *Medieval England: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).
William W. Kibler and Graver A. Zinn, eds., *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

Legends: An Introduction

> In our culture—undoubtedly in others as well—discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values.[1]
>
> —Michel Foucault

> The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture…the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writing, to counter the ones with others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.[2]
>
> —Roland Barthes

Contemporary literary theorists have made familiar, perhaps even commonplace, the notion that all language belongs to the category of the already said. Words are property common to all, Mikhail Bakhtin observes. Because words belong to no one, what matters is how a speaker orients them in an utterance. Only through this orientation, through this creative re-use of the conventional, can any of us ever "mean" anything. What is true for words is also true for the texts they compose. Modern theory has taken great pains to establish that literature is made up of conventions (themes, generic structures, motifs, narrational strategies, and so forth) that do not find their unique origin in individual texts. Instead, these things are material all writers share. The educated in the Middle Ages would not have found such views of language and textuality surprising. Medieval writers are self-admitted translators in the broadest sense of the term. They are, in fact, unabashed purveyors

[1]Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in Donald F. Bouchard, ed. and trans., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 124. Further references to this essay are noted in the text.
[2]Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in Stephen Heath, ed. and trans., *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 146-7.

of what others have already written. Their task is not to "create" something that finds its origin within them, as the Romantics in the nineteenth century taught Western writers to think of their craft. Instead, the rhetorical traditions that defined his art taught the medieval writer to begin by "inventing" (that is, by finding) what might suit his purpose. Composition then meant the re-orientation, re-fashioning, or reshaping of what had been found in order to produce something "new." In the Middle Ages, writers often viewed such acts of remaking as not merely the scavenging of tradition for useful elements, but rather as the respectful transmission of revered authorities, with the present work finding its value, at least in part, from what it had come to replace or stand in for. Moreover, medieval writers depended upon their readers recognizing connections between the present work and its source(s). Readers were meant to conceive the writer as a mediator between an honored author from times past and themselves, who were in need of the edification and entertainment such an authority, now made properly available, might provide.

This book anthologizes important medieval works that came to be through transmission of this kind. Gathered here are renewed or adapted versions of respected ancient texts. Each played an important role in the development of French and English literary traditions during the period. The authorities "re-presented" in these medieval works were found in the considerable repertoire of Classical and Christian writings upon which poets in the Middle Ages customarily relied for material as well as intellectual inspiration. We lack a modern term to describe this particular kind of literary text, which, in terms of the protocols that govern our practice since the nineteenth century, exists in the problematic no man's land between translation, on the one hand, and plagiarism, on the other. I shall call such works "legends," following medieval practice. The works included here were in their own time translations in the modern sense; their reconfiguration for contemporary readers also involved a change of language. Thus this present book in a sense continues this passing down of ancient works in updated linguistic form. Once again, these honored works have been translated, into modern English and by me, acting, rather in the medieval fashion, as a kind of mediator.

The story materials, the themes, and the motifs recycled here yet again were in Latin when the medieval writers represented here en-

countered them. The most elemental and essential part of the adaptation process was thus translation into the relevant vernacular: Old or Middle English in some cases, Old French in the others. Yet the process of re-orientation ran deeper than translation because it was prompted by a desire to accommodate the material to different cultural circumstances.

These legends, in short, were not only translated, but reculturalized, as we would now say. Etymologically, the term "legend" (Medieval Latin *legendum*, plural *legenda*) means "something that should be read," and this sense of moral obligation is why legend became associated, at an early stage, with the written biographies of the sanctified and holy. So deep is this association, in fact, that this particular use of the term persists into modern English, though we no longer view the reading of holy biography as a moral imperative. In the Middle Ages, "legend," in both Latin and the various vernaculars, also means "story" generally, but the word is most especially used to designate revered texts from **written** tradition. With the proviso that "legend" has long since lost its original and exclusive connection with writing, the modern English meaning is not too different: "a story of some wonderful event, handed down for generations among a people and popularly believed to have a historical basis"[3]. Hence Chaucer's perhaps ironic use in his *Legend of Good Women*, one of the legends included here, since the work's "exemplary" females are ostensibly held up as secular saints—and are presumed to be historical figures. In fact, the Latin rubrics that divide Chaucer's poem into sections refer to the heroines by another religious term as well, calling them "martyrs" who have died in the service of God—in this case the God of Love. Such deaths are perhaps "wonderful events," worthy of being "handed down for generations," but this much is certain: that Chaucer invokes the association of the term "legend" with religious tradition, written transmission, and popular celebration in order to further his sly examination of the discontents of that service to ladies demanded of the medieval love poet. In other words, he not only passes down old stories, but reculturalizes them as well, transforming them into something his late medieval courtly readership would find amusing.

The *Legend of Good Women*, however, is not only interesting because

[3]*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged.* 2nd ed. (New York: William Collins, 1979), 1035.

it usefully exemplifies the kind of work here called "legends." Few other works from the Middle Ages speak so eloquently of themselves as new versions of old stories. No other medieval writer meditates so humorously and deeply on the considerable authorial difficulties that legend making can involve. And so before passing to the legends collected here, we could profit from some consideration of what Chaucer's work has to tell us about their form and its discontents.

As becomes clear in the *Prologue*, which introduces the collection of legends devoted to the individual women "saints," Chaucer's narrator is an intratextual, if comically inaccurate, version of the poet. He is a lover who has made a career of writing poetry in love's honor. Making his way to a garden where he honors the daisies growing there, the narrator seems an ardent devotee of the God of Love and a faithful servant of ladies (here metaphorized as flowers). Lost in the contemplation of this natural beauty, he falls asleep. In his dream, he witnesses an impressive assembly of virtuous ladies. But this beatific experience soon turns sour when he discovers indeed how what Foucault terms "discourse" is "a gesture charged with risks." To speak is to hazard giving offense, especially to those higher in the social order. Despite his reverence for books (whose "authorities," so he says, furnish him and his culture with the "key to remembrance") and despite his devotion to the daisy, the narrator finds himself accused of malfeasance in the theater of his own unconscious.

The God of Love accompanies the throng of women along with his queen, Alceste, a woman the narrator had honored in a hymn of praise before falling asleep. Expecting a polite acknowledgement, the narrator is instead reprimanded by the god. He is angrily told that his works defame ladies and that he dissuades men from the love service that they should embrace. Interestingly, the narrator's poems are not conceived as possessions somehow "caught in a circuit of property values." He does not "own" them. Instead, the god understands the narrator's writings as "actions" in a "bipolar field" defined by the terms "lawful and unlawful." The laws in this case are those of love service, with whose enforcement the god is rightly charged. The making of such poems, the god affirms, has done him a grave injury. In his view, such "translations" demonstrate the bad faith and conscience of their "renovator."

The singular violation that the God alleges is the narrator's English version of the widely influential French love allegory *The Ro-*

mance of the Rose. The god insists that this difficult, disputed, yet widely honored and imitated text has not, in its English version, been presented in such a way as to honor Love's servants. The god does not assume that the narrator "owns" his ostensibly offensive works, for, as soon becomes evident, the god knows his erstwhile servant is a court poet, one who writes to entertain and edify others. Yet he still holds the narrator responsible as an author, that is, as the immediate source of what is offensive. Source he may be, but he is hardly an authority. In other words, he is neither the origin of ideas nor the one who confers respectability upon them.

The *Prologue* exemplifies the instability of medieval textuality because it exists in two versions, conventionally known as **F** and **G**. After composing the work, Chaucer re-wrote its beginning to better suit the current situation at the royal court (the translation offered in this volume is based on the **F** version, the one generally preferred by scholars). That Chaucer wrote two prologues raises a question that has bedeviled modern editors: which version can be thought of as authoritative. What is interesting at present is that the **G** version of the *Prologue* develops the god's accusation at greater length and with more force. In this version, the god calls attention to the narrator's possession of many books, of what could be a huge repertoire of usable materials. Thus, so the divinity infers, the poet has recourse to a multitude of authorities that relate the stories of good women. A further implication is that he could also have easily avoided recycling a problematic text. Why then has the narrator not re-told stories that emphasize womanly virtue, instead of those that trace the misdeeds of an immoral few? In other words, why has he **chosen** so badly?

In Foucault's view, such a questioning of writerly activity marks out the historical moment when the modern "author" begins to emerge: Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive (124).

The point made in the *Prologue*, however, is that the poet, though subject to punishment, cannot yet be considered an author in the modern sense. Or, to put it another way, such authority that he disposes of is circumscribed by the field of the already said. The poet can be defended from the god's indictment by the fact that a translator can

hardly be assigned full responsibility for the text he renders. There are two reasons for this. If he is the servant of a patron, the patron may choose not only what is to be translated, but also to what end and with what meaning. Even more than other authors, the translator can only "imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original," as Roland Barthes says. What is at issue is whether he wields the power to "mix writing, to counter the ones with others." Can the narrator, as the god implies in the **G** version, pick from the books in his possession, choosing the authorities that either please him or further his loyalty to the dictates of the divinity he has elected to serve? And if the narrator can choose among authorities, can it be said, once again following Barthes, that he never has to "rest on any of them"? In short, what authority lies in the act of re-authoring?

Among other issues, such questions makes us think of intention, or the writer's capacity to "say what he wishes" even as he recycles the words that others have used. The god and the narrator disagree about what the latter has done, for the narrator argues that he has given no offense because his intention has been virtuous. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the narrator admits, he has presented the portrait of a faithless woman. And yet he suggests that his text exposes her to shame and therefore does not endorse her inconstancy. By showing a deviation from proper behavior, *Troilus and Criseyde* thus supports a cherished ideal. In other words, the poet endorses the virtues of good women by exposing the vices of those who fail to meet their standard. The god, in contrast, understands this text only through its powers of representation: it shows that a woman can be fickle and betray the true love of a man. The condemnation of vice may be, in some fashion, the praise of virtue, but the god sees only that the narrator's work has perpetuated what, in the language of today's identity politics, we should call a "negative image" of women. The god insists that the narrator has come to "rest" on these images. The accused insists he has not.

The two disputants, however, do agree upon what must be judged. As they see it, the question is: what has the poet done with the authorities to whom he has given renewed life in English? Here we see the essential difference between modern and medieval understandings of the poet's activity. He and the god debate the rhetoric, so to speak, of translation. It is not a question of **what** he has "authored" in the modern sense, of what bears his authority because it finds its origin in

him. For the texts he has re-produced in English find their origins in the works of others. On this point, the plaintiff and defendant agree completely. Their understanding of authorship, we might say, is thoroughly medieval, not modern.

Alceste, the God of Love's companion, offers a quite different brief in defense of the narrator, but then she too assumes that the poet is no authority, that textual meaning is not "original" with him. Alceste calls attention to a different aspect of the literary mode of production in which the narrator has staked out a practice. The modern writer is generally self-nominating and self-regulating, at least within the limits of contractual obligations and copyright law. The god assumes that, similarly, the narrator is free to choose what materials to recycle. Yet Alceste scolds him with this error, for poets are not always free to do as they will. Does not the god himself, she says, expect the narrator to honor the protocols he has established? Is the god, we might ask, following the argument, not yet another authority to whom the poet must remain faithful and whom he must praise? As Alceste describes his role, the god resembles the central figure in the medieval court poet's professional life, the patron. The god demands work of a certain kind, and he is not slow to show displeasure when what he has commissioned does not please. Alceste suggests two reasons for the narrator's failure. It may be, Alceste says with some sly humor, that the narrator was somewhat feckless. Perhaps he was not sharp enough to discern how his source material, once translated, might offend.

Even more likely, however, is the second possibility she advances. Some patron might have commanded him to translate not only the *Rose*, but also *Troilus and Criseyde*. In either case, as Alceste argues, his offense is less than if he had truly been the author. Furthermore, she says, a full examination of his *oeuvre* reveals a number of works that beyond question praise the virtues of proper women, including *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The Book of the Duchess*, and *The House of Fame*. It seems that her implicit argument is that this reverence of the woman is more likely to characterize the narrator's activity. And this view is supported by what the god knows of the poet's behavior (including his respectful service of the daisy and the hymn he composes to famous ladies of virtue, including Alceste herself).

The patron, however, is not to be challenged by the writer dedicated to his service. Though the narrator wishes to defend all his works

against any charge of incorrect doctrine, Alceste will not allow him to dispute the god's judgment. The patron's word is final. Even though he is to be held responsible for what he has written, the poet cannot argue his opinion as to its correctness. It is only a question of what penance he should be assigned for his "errors." Humorously, though he is condemned for his inadequate translations, the narrator is assigned to do others. As Chaucer's contemporaries would have understood, penance should be both punitive and reformative, and the task that Alceste and the god assign him qualifies on both accounts, for he is to re-tell the "legends" of good women, ones he has not chosen before or been asked to relate. The god who has spared him worse treatment will determine the ones he is to translate into English. Certainly Cleopatra, the "history" where he is to start, poses challenge enough. How is he to "translate" her life, so full of scandalous romantic intrigue, in such a way as to make her acknowledged as a "good" woman?

A purveyor of the already said who strives to make what he writes suit his purposes, the narrator is an emblematic figure for the medieval genre of the "legend." Chaucer's joke, or one of them at least, is that the narrator, having been faulted for choosing the wrong authorities or following the commands of others to his own peril, must follow yet another commission, one that likewise gives him no option about what authority to adapt. He has been condemned for not making his translated material mean what would serve the purposes of the God of Love. And so this time the poet must make sure that texts inherited from tradition can be translated in such a fashion that they manifest unambiguously *his* adherence to correct doctrine. He must transform the words of others into words that do no violation, even though he cannot own them. In this way, he enacts the reformative, transmissive gestures of all writers in the Middle Ages who trade in legends. In brief, the legends that Alceste commissions must conform to what his erstwhile patrons require.

Can there be any question of the narrator's domination of such discourse? The legends belong, before the narrator is commissioned to translate them, to a written authority (in Chaucer's case directly and/or indirectly to the Latin poet Ovid). And the new form they assume will result from the patrons' command. Of course, the narrator will be no more the legitimate judge of these new efforts than he was of what

he had written earlier. Then he earned the god's condemnation, which he hardly anticipated and to which he cannot reconcile himself. Can he be certain that this will not be a repeat performance? Perhaps Chaucer's point is even more subversive. Has the narrator simply been confirmed in his powerlessness to make meaning because it is his authorities who propose and his patrons who dispose?

In any event, the character named Chaucer contrasts humorously with his creator of the same name. It is quite certain that Chaucer followed no command from an existential counterpart of Alceste as he too occupied himself with confecting a text that is, in Barthes's terms, "a tissue of quotations." Ironically, the narrator figure is himself a translation, as many of the poet's readers would likely have recognized to their pleasure. What passes for his "experience" is in fact quoted, translated, or adapted from the works of others. In composing his work, Chaucer re-traced and re-arranged two literary models that he **does not** recycle as honored authorities. From Guillaume de Machaut's *The Judgment of the King of Navarre*, he borrowed the story of the author beset by critical patrons, who is found guilty of purveying misogynistic views and then forced to undergo a literary penance. As in Chaucer's adaptation, this new commission is to show the erring narrator (whose name is Guillaume de Machaut) undergoing "reformation" because he now exalts feminine virtue. And from Ovid (and, perhaps, also from medieval adaptations of Ovid, including those "quoted" in Machaut's own poem), Chaucer drew the narratives of the individual "good" women that constitute the bulk of his poem.

Yet the important point is that the stories involving these women are not oriented in the Ovidian text toward a collective exemplification of feminine virtue. The Roman poet, in fact, might find it surprising, and a fine joke, that some of them should be included in such a virtuous grouping. In any event, neither the basic structure of his poem nor the material it contains is original with Chaucer. What is new is the English poet's reformulation and re-orientation of his sources. In the event, the rewriting of the "legends" has no certain or perhaps even predictable result for its first audience, that is, for those at the English court. Chaucer must be judged by those for whom he writes, just like his intratextual alter ego.

Thus the fictional world of the poem reflects (in a gesture we now term metafictional) the situation of the author who has created it. This

reflexivity underlines the similarities and differences between the two selves of the poet, who, of course, share the same name and, to some degree, the same professional résumé. Alceste charges the narrator with "authoring" correct versions of traditional material. If she thought that the sources more or less properly express the required meaning in some straightforward fashion, then what is intended to be a penance would hardly be much of a labor. To put it differently, if translating were not authoring in some sense, not a **transformative** gesture with some risk of giving offense or earning reward, then it could not hold out the possibility of reformation for the narrator. Nor, if translating were not authoring, could Chaucer's recycling of these old legends manifest his artistry and sophistication. For, unlike his beleaguered fictional reflex, Chaucer does choose the work upon which he would be judged. The metafictional joke Chaucer passes here is the disjunction between himself and his fictional alter ego. The narrator must slavishly follow the commands of his betters (a worst case scenario of composition, we might say). At the same time, however, the poet freely puts himself at the mercy of those whom he would please, choosing (but also, in a sense, not choosing) which writings he will rest on. For if the legends do not entertain those at court, then the fault can always be presumed to be that of Chaucer's somewhat feckless alter ego. In short, his failure can be rationalized as a fictional effect, as the result of Alceste's selection and the narrator's performance. Some modern readers have indeed thought that Chaucer intended this ad hoc collaboration not to succeed in demonstrating the narrator's sincere conversion to a proper appreciation of feminine virtue.

Thus the *Legend of Good Women*, both within the world of the story and metafictionally, meditates on the dialectic of authorship and authority that defines the making of legends. The *Legend* is written by a translator who experiences the discontents of translation. Such a structure permits the cautious poet the safe haven of irony should he need it. For he is able to plead the excuse that, intending virtue, he offers an example of its opposite. Thus he can disavow all responsibility for any gesture that might offend, mixing writings but "resting" in the last analysis on none. The medieval author, in short, can avoid the hazards of authority, and Chaucer shows how, as a purveyor of legends, this can be done.

Foucault reminds us that the more modern notion of authorship

is: "not formed spontaneously through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. It results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author" (127). And this "operation" involves "projections" in the "comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice." In thinking through these questions, Foucault states that we must remember that "all these operations vary according to period and the form of discourse concerned" (127).

The modern idea of authorship involves not only the extension of property rights to a work now considered to be a thing rather than a "point" of discourse. The neo-romantic concept of creativity justifies such property rights by conceiving the work as the expressive reflex of whatever is innate within the artist—either his "genius" or those experiences properly and uniquely his. The characteristic modern literary form is not the legend but the novel, so aptly named in English because it is "newness," the utter detachment from the preceding series of texts, that bestows value and legitimacy upon it. The modern writer who mixes writings in an unlawful sense puts himself in jeopardy of legal action for plagiarism, for the "unauthorized" use of what belongs to someone else. Until the structuralist interrogation of authorship, modern literary theory found difficulty in establishing the status of translations and adaptations such as *The Legend of Good Women*. Are such works not present absences constituted by an order of language that stands in for what cannot be said? To whom do such words belong? To the author or to the one who transplants and re-orients them in an alien linguistic order? Can we consider the poem a translation of Ovid? Chaucer's God of Love would not raise such questions of ownership. The divinity is, instead, concerned with what words do, with what effects they can achieve. What counts as service (or disservice) to him is primarily verbal. As an authority figure who demands that the texts that bear his authority do him proper reverence, the god is nothing less than a commissioner of legends.

The main sources of textual authority in the Middle Ages were the classics (what Roman texts had been preserved and valued, including those ultimately of Greek origin) and the body of sacred or holy writings (including not just the Bible, but the works of the Church Fathers, narratives such as the lives of saints, and so on). Medieval legends that draw on both kinds of texts are here included. The *Romance*

of Eneas is a translation, if we use the term very broadly, of Virgil's *Aeneid*. As part of its attempt to reculturalize ancient materials, the poem also incorporates considerable additions, the most important of which have been drawn—once again—more or less directly from the pages of Ovid in order to satisfy the tastes of the 12th century French courtly audience. Another version, much briefer, of the same material is found in the 14th century compendium of classical legend called *Ovid Moralized*, while the story of Dido and Aeneas (its sources being Virgil, Ovid, and *Ovid Moralized*) figures as one of the tales of virtuous femininity in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*. These three separate texts demonstrate that what the God of Love affirms is indeed true: the same source material, ultimately drawn from Virgil's *Aeneid*, for medieval intellectuals perhaps the most important of secular authorities, can be "oriented" in different ways. From these examples an important point emerges. A single text can be the source of innumerable "legends."

Two of the texts included here from Christian tradition exemplify the expansive genre of spiritual biography. The Old English *Andreas* adapts the apocryphal history of the missionary work performed by the apostles Andrew and Matthew (by the time it reached England, this material had passed through several linguistic incarnations, its final version being a Latin redaction now lost). Similarly, the *Life of Saint Alexis* offers a French version of Syriac, Greek, and ultimately Latin traditions that treat the life of a holy man who abjures marriage and life with his parents in order to devote himself to self-denial. The book closes with a selection of a different kind, the first part of the Old French *Quest of the Holy Grail*, a lengthy work that belongs to the so-called Vulgate cycle of Arthurian prose romance. Here is a work that, in Barthes's terms, mixes several different forms of writing: the romance (in its quest form, as invented by Chrétien de Troyes), the saint's life, and the Bible, principal parts of which the *Quest* re-orients with an elaborate, if easily understood, allegory.

A Note on the Translations

The translations in this volume are based on the standard editions detailed below. The aim throughout has been to provide readable, modern English versions that remain as faithful as possible to the original. Sometimes stylistic considerations have taken precedence over strict fidelity. This is most evident in the translation of *Andreas*, which is "freer" in the sense that the reliance of Old English poetry on nominal constructions, with the verbal action often only vaguely expressed, has often been substantially altered to make the action clearer. Similarly, it has sometimes not proven useful for the sake of ease of understanding to follow the modern editor's sentence division. In general, the punctuation of standard editions has not been followed exactly. In this matter, as in all else, I have been guided by the needs of the non-specialist reader for whom this book is primarily intended.

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Religious Legends

The Life of St. Alexis

Introduction

The legend of an (at first) anonymous holy man, who abandons family and fiancée to live as a beggar in the city of Edessa, came to the Latin West by means of an intricate series of textual renderings and translations. An early version in Syriac dates from the middle of the 5th century. At some later stage, this legend became popular in the Greek-speaking East and was conflated with that of a certain Johannes Calybita, who renounced his rich family and a fine marriage in order to enter a monastery, from which, unable to resist the desire to see his family again, he eventually emerged so that he might live, unrecognized, near the family home. Only when death was near did he reveal himself to them. Syriac versions from the 9th century, and Greek texts from a somewhat later time, name the ascetic Alexis. In 868, the bishop who would become Pope Formosus, a man with great interest in Greek culture and Byzantine politics, ordered a translation of one of these Greek texts because he observed that the church of Rome had so few saints to celebrate. Though *The Life of Saint Alexis* locates the story in "the city of Rome," it is Constantinople, second capital of the empire, that is meant. The cult of Saint Alexis was brought west at about the same time by the bishop of Damascus, who fled the Arab invasion of the area. It became firmly established at the Benedictine foundation at Monte Cassino in Italy, spreading rapidly to all parts of Europe, including north to France. The tale of the saint who gives up a life of riches to embrace poverty and denial was no doubt well known when it was translated from Latin into French by an anonymous poet during the middle of the 11th century—or about fifty years or so before the *Song of Roland* as we now know it was written. *Alexis* shares with that epic text the same poetic form: a division into verse paragraphs or *laisses* unified by assonance and likely intended to be chanted or sung, perhaps with musical accompaniment. The readership for this poem, then, was likely often an audience, and as in the case of the *chanson de geste* the values it celebrated were communal.

The 11th century witnessed the growth of religious sentiment and devotionalism among the laity in France and elsewhere, just as the church as an institution rededicated itself to reform, thereby claiming an ever-increasing role in the ordering of social life. Texts such as *The Life of Saint Alexis* were translated from Latin so that the laity could be instructed in the history, doctrine, and mysteries of their faith, and the clergy, through their near-monopoly of learning and writing, played an indispensable role in this deepening of religious culture. Saints' lives were crucial in these developments, providing an important point of contact between popular forms of religious observance (in which the cult of saints had been central since late antiquity) and the increasingly strident claims of the church for independence from secular values and lay governance. It is no accident that a holy man from the early Christian era became widely venerated in the Latin West after his legend, and the texts in which it was recounted, were "translated" there. The 11th century witnessed a concerted effort on the part of the Western Church to establish and make evident its roots in an unbroken tradition that reached from the time of Jesus to the present.

The saint's life is among the most conventional of literary genres. Each narrative follows with little variation the same pattern, which is the *imitatio Christi* or imitation of Christ's life. Like the Savior, the saint is born into the world of everyday relations and values, but then rejects (that is, dies to) such a life, only to be reborn at the moment of his physical death, when, with the endorsement of God and his community, he attains the semi-divine status of saint. Through this rebirth, he becomes an intercessor for those of his "family" (considered in the most expansive sense) and a source of numinous power. Thus, saints become the object of veneration and prayerful entreaty, even as their earthly remains or possessions—their "relics," what they left behind—are thought to take on miraculous powers of healing or spiritual regeneration. In effect, the saint became a patron (often associated with a particular region), and (s)he was thought to distribute benefits to associates. The saint's life thus traces the process by which such a holy patron came to achieve a position of importance and power. Biographies of saints played a liturgical role as well. They were often read during the mass on the saint's feast day. Such venerative celebration could be even more elaborate, including a procession. Compos-

ing and then reading the life were thus acts of veneration and remembrance, important elements within a wider and elaborate set of devotional practices that defined religious life in the age.

Contemporary practices can be readily glimpsed in the most significant changes the vernacular cleric has made in adapting his Latin source: the more prominent role played by Alexis's family and, related to this, a discernible sharpening of the contrast between secular and religious values. In the Latin life of Alexis, the young man comes from a prominent and wealthy family. His mother and father also have a strong devotion to the Christian faith. Childless for years, they pray fervently to God in hopes that He will cure their infertility. After Alexis is born, the couple takes a vow of chastity as a sign, perhaps, of their gratitude for His favor. The Old French version, in contrast, emphasizes the desire of Alexis's father for an heir. Alexis remains their only child because after his birth they prove infertile again. His status as the only son gives great force to the expectation of the family (especially of the father, Euphemian) that Alexis will carry forward the family line. Such a desire would have been endorsed and valued by the poet's lay hearers. It is beyond moral reproach, especially since the father takes great pains to marry the young man well and thereby insure happiness and moral probity. The family's hope for its future (at least in the only terms it can imagine its future) is painfully dashed by the young man's decision to dedicate his life to God. For Alexis determines to follow the injunction of Jesus in the New Testament that men prominent in society should give what they own to the poor, abandon their positions of power, and turn their backs on father, mother, and wife.

In the Latin version, Alexis's decision to reject the world, especially the sexual commitment required by marriage, is realistic and plausible, the result, perhaps in large part, of his lineage. For it is after his birth that Alexis's mother and father decide themselves to live chastely; the young man's desire to devote himself to God can be seen as simply an extension of the family's puritanism in sexual matters. In the French text, however, Alexis's sudden realization of his true vocation involves not only a break with his family and fiancée, but also a rejection of the values by which their life has been conducted and by which they hope he will live his own. In short, the transformation that comes over him (the recognition that a life lived in sexual union

is not pleasing to God) is sudden and unprepared. Once he experiences this inner conversion, Alexis never wavers. His flight, as well as his way of life in the several places where he puts this ascetic commitment into practice, reveals an unquestioning obedience to God's will. And this must be so. For only in this fashion can the saint gain the extraordinary merit that will be recognized at his death, that is, at the moment when his existence in this new identity begins. Paradoxically, it is only then that his absence in society becomes an overwhelming and bountiful presence.

In *The Life of Saint Alexis*, the concern is with the effects of this absence. Alexis's sudden and barely explained departure leaves them with overwhelming grief, and the different reactions of father, mother, and fiancée are carefully detailed. Their sadness and anger are emotions with which the poet's lay audience could easily identify. The costs of his decision, so the poet shows, are borne not only by Alexis himself, who is compensated by a certain knowledge that God looks with favor upon his sacrifice, but by those whose sense of loss is only alleviated definitively in heaven, where they will be re-united in a perfected state that is beyond the corrupting taint of sexuality. Their re-unification and perfection come not simply through the working of divine purpose. It results directly from the blessedness of their son, whose denial of the claims they make on him gives rise to the extraordinary virtue he afterward acquires. His life of denial thus has an effect that Alexis in no way foresees. What is forsaken is in fact embraced. What is left behind is gained forever. The specific truth of Alexis's experience reveals a more general pattern. It is through adherence to the teachings of Christ, however difficult to imitate, that salvation comes. It is through abjuring life that life, in an eternal fullness that does not replace but perfects the earthly self, can be delivered to itself.

By focusing on the father, mother, and fiancée, the poet emphasizes the all too human sense of loss that Alexis's surrender to God's will entails. For Euphemian, the flight of his son means that the family can no longer continue. The passing down of wealth and position must end. The father is denied the pleasure of seeing his son, brought up properly to assume the responsibilities of what his birth has entitled him to, take his rightful place in the world and replace his father when the time comes. Alexis's mother reacts with great emo-

tion, destroying the wedding decorations hung in what should have been a bridal chamber. The fiancée contemplates a life of barrenness, and she assumes the place of a child in what would have been the house of her mother and father in law. But then Alexis returns to live the last seventeen years of his life on the literal margins of the family to which he belongs. Alexis is indifferent to their continued suffering, unconcerned about the life they live without him. His death, preceded by the voice of God that is full of threat (for if the saint is unacknowledged, then the community will suffer), makes them suffer even more. For they come to know that the man they loved and longed for was present, if only in his absence, at their very side.

The saint's rebirth in his death takes place through the text that his writes, for it is this testimony (a kind of last testament as well) that establishes his identity and the story of his life. Only he can relate his life of private self-deprivation. This document makes it possible for the emperor and pope (who, in a significant gesture, charge a cleric with the task) to have his story read out. It is in this way that the community, warned by God, embraces him as their own. Like his holy body, which is prepared richly for burial, this text becomes a precious relic, finding its reflex in the "translated" poem that re-embodies it and is the source, for a new public, of the revelation of his sanctity. As the pope maintains when confronted by his sorrowing family, the saint takes the place of God in their community. The people rejoice in the expectation that this sanctified presence will show itself in miraculous healing, and this in fact occurs. The text of Alexis's life, so the implication goes, carries something of the same power. It offers a moral lesson of great significance that is as devotional as didactic. The writing and reading of the poem are acts of veneration that enroll poet and readers alike in the greater "family" of Saint Alexis. There they too find a share in his spiritual patronage.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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The Life of St. Alexis

In ancient times the world was a good place,
For there was faith, justice, and love.
So too there was loyalty, not valued in our age.
The world is all changed and has lost its freshness,
Never again to be what our ancestors enjoyed.

In the days of Noah, those too of Abraham,
Also of David, whom God greatly loved,
The world was a good place, never so worthy again.
It is old now and frail, moves toward its end.
It has grown much worse; its virtue has all fled.

Ever since the time God came to deliver us,
Our ancestors had the Christian faith.
There was then a lord in the city of Rome.
He was a powerful man of the highest estate.
This is why I tell you. I will speak of his son.

Euphemian was his name, so was the father called,
A Roman count, among the best then living.
Best of his own peers the emperor loved him.
This count married a woman of virtue and honor,
Among the noblest born in all that country.

For long afterward they lived together.
They had no children—a deep grief for them.
Just as they should, they appealed to God:
"Oh, King of heaven, let it be Your command
That a child be given us, let it be Your will."

So humbly and often did they pray Him
To make the wife fruitful that He gave them

A son, and they offered Him great thanks.
With holy baptism they renewed the child's virtue.
They gave him a good name, as is the Christian way.

He was then baptized, with Alexis his name.
The woman who bore him raised him with kindness.
Afterward his good father sent him to school.
The youth learned so much he became lettered.
Henceforth this young man went into the emperor's service.

The father sees well he will have no more children,
Just this one alone, whom he loves very much.
So he thought deeply of the world that will come,
Wished his son to take a wife while he still lived.
So he finds him a highborn man's daughter.

This girl was born to a family of great rank,
Daughter of a count in the city of Rome.
The man had no other child, wished to honor her greatly.
The two fathers came together to speak of the matter.
Their two children to be wed is what they wish.

They fix the term of days for the marriage to take place.
The time comes to pass—it is nobly done.
Lord Alexis weds her in a fitting fashion.
But he does not want this contract at all.
In all things his will is completely turned to God.

Now the day passes, and the night comes on.
The father says: "Son, now you should go to bed,
And with your wife, as God in heaven ordains."
The son has no wish to anger his father.
With the bride, he makes his way to the room.

He sees the bed, then looks at the maiden.
Into his mind come thoughts of his heavenly Lord,
Whom he holds dearer than all things of this world.
"Oh God," said he, "How heavy sin weighs on me!

If I do not now flee, I fear I shall lose You."

After they were left alone in that chamber,
Lord Alexis began to speak to the young woman.
The sinfulness of earthly life—this he began to lament.
The truth of the heavenly—this he made plain to her.
Yet he already thinks it late—he should turn and go.

"Do you hear me, young woman? Take to spouse Him
Who ransomed us with His precious blood.
In this world here is no perfect love.
Life is a brittle thing with no honor that lasts.
This kind of pleasure turns to great sorrow."

After he told her all his thoughts
He gave her the rings from his sword hilt,
And from his finger. To God he commended her.
Then he went from the house of his father.
Covered by the night, he fled that country.

Then on his journey he goes straight to the ocean.
The ship is ready he is destined to board.
He pays his passage, his place is assigned.
They raised their sail, let the sea bear them off.
They found land, where God thought to lead them.

Straight to Laodicea (a quite handsome city),
The vessel comes sailing safe and sound.
With no delay, Lord Alexis disembarks.
How long he stayed—this I know not.
Wherever he goes, he does not stop serving God.

From there he went further, to the city of Edessa,
For the sake of a statue he had heard of.
Angels had made it by God's command
In the name of the Virgin who brought forth salvation,
Holy Mary, who gave birth to the Lord God.

All his goods, those he brought with him,
All these he shares out through the city of Edessa,
Generous alms, and nothing remains to him.
He gave to the poor, wherever he found them.
He will be weighed down by no possession.

After he gave all his goods to them,
To all the poor, holy Alexis found a place to live.
He received alms whenever God sent them.
He kept enough to sustain his body.
If any remains, he gives it to the poor.

Now I shall return to the father and the mother,
And to the bride, joined to him in marriage.
When they discovered how he had departed,
Great was the sorrow that made them lament,
And great the mourning throughout the whole city.

The father says: "Dear son, how did I lose you?"
Says the mother: "Alas, how did this happen?"
The bride says this: "Sin has taken him from me.
Oh, dear friend, how little of you I had!
I am now so full of sorrow it could be no more."

Then the father summoned the best of his servants,
Sent them through many lands to seek out his child.
As far as Edessa come the two on their travels.
There they find Lord Alexis sitting,
But they knew him not, not his face, not his look.

God! What the boy has done to his tender flesh!
The father's servants did not recognize him.
They gave alms to him, to the boy himself.
He took them, as did the other brothers.
They did not know him, left then to make their return.

They did not recognize him, asked him no questions.
Lord Alexis offers praise to God, there in the heavens

For his own servants, those who have provided for him.
He was their lord, and now they give him alms.
How happy it made him I cannot tell you.

These men make their way to the city of Rome.
They tell the father they could not find him.
If he felt much grief—this need not be asked.
The virtuous mother begins to lament,
And grieves, never ceasing, for her own dear son.

"Alexis my son, why did your mother give you birth?
You took flight from me. In sorrow I stayed behind.
I know not the place, I know not the country
Where to go seek you. Grief overwhelms me.
Never will I be happy, dear son, nor will your father."

Into the room she goes, weighed down by affliction.
Then she empties the place so nothing remains.
No tapestry is left, no decoration at all.
All her happiness has turned to sadness.
And so never from that day did she show joy.

"Room," said she, "never again to be adorned.
Never again will joy show here, not at all."
She ruined the place, like an enemy taking spoils.
She hung sacks on the walls, curtains full of holes.
Her high honor has fled and become great suffering.

From pain, the mother sits down on the ground.
So too does the bride of Alexis, that holy man.
"Lady," she said, "So great is my loss!
Henceforth I shall live just like the turtle dove.
Since I don't have your son, I will stay with you."

Says the mother: "If you wish to remain by my side,
Out of love for Alexis I will take care of you.
You will suffer no trouble I can save you from.
Together let us mourn the loss of our beloved,

You mourn your lord—I mourn my son."

It cannot be otherwise; they turn toward comfort.
But they cannot forget the pain.
Lord Alexis, there in the city of Edessa,
Serves his Lord through his own good will.
His enemy cannot deceive him, not at all.

For seventeen years there is nothing to say.
He makes the body suffer so to serve the Lord God.
Not for love of a man or a woman he holds dear,
Not for honors he might have had bestowed upon him
Will he change this course as long as he lives.

After his heart had grown strong, firm in its resolve
That henceforth he would never leave that city,
God had the statue speak out of love for the man
To one of the servants, then serving at this altar.
And the statue commanded: "Summon the man of God."

The statue said: "Have the man of God come,
For he has served God well and to His pleasure,
And he is worthy to cross into paradise."
The man leaves to search, but cannot find
The holy man, the one the statue spoke of.

The sacristan went back to the statue in the church.
"To be sure," he said, "I know not what man to ask."
Answered the statue: "It is the one who sits by the door.
He is close to God and the kingdom of heaven.
He will never move far from this spot."

He goes to look for the man, has him come to the church.
Behold now! The tale travels through the land
That this statue spoke for the sake of Alexis.
All did him honor—those of high, those of low estate,
And all made one request: that he show them his favor.

When he sees that they wish to do him honor,
"To be sure," said he, "I can stay here no longer;
I will assume no such burden as this honor."
With night his cover, he flees from the city.
Straight to Laodicea he speeds his path.

Lord Alexis embarks on a ship;
They have the wind, let the vessel run the waves.
Their hope was to come soon to Tarsus.
But it could not be; his destiny was elsewhere.
Straight to Rome a storm bears them before it.

At one of the ports quite close to Rome
Came the ship carrying this holy man.
When the man sees his kingdom, he feels great fear
Because of his family, for they might recognize him
And make him bear the burden of worldly honor.

"Oh God," said he, "Good Lord, Ruler of all,
Should it please you, I do not want to be here.
If my family recognize me in this place,
They will lay hold of me, either asking or with force.
If I lend them credence, they will drag me to ruin.

And yet my father does long for me,
As does my mother, more than any woman alive,
So too my spouse, whom I abandoned among them.
I'll not submit myself to their rule.
They will not know me, have not seen me for so long."

He leaves the ship behind, goes straight to Rome,
Walks along the streets he knows so well,
One after the other, then meets his father there,
And with him a great throng of men.
Alexis recognized him, called him by name.

"Euphemian, fair lord, man of power,
Please for God's sake let me lodge in your house.

Have a pallet for me put by the stairs
For the sake of the son who causes you such pain.
I am quite ill; care for me out of love for him."

When the father heard the pleading of his son,
The tears came from his eyes, and he could not stop.
"For the love of God and the man so dear to me,
I grant you everything, good man, all that you ask:
Bed and shelter and bread and meat and wine."

"Oh God," said he, "But if I had a servant
To watch over me, freedom would be his reward."
One among them moved quickly forward:
"Here am I," he said, "I will keep him as you command.
I'll endure this misery out of love for you."

Then straight to the staircase he led him,
Made a bed where he might take his rest.
Whatever Alexis needed he provided.
The man will do his lord no wrong.
No blame could fall upon him.

Often they saw him, the father and the mother,
And the maiden too, the one he had wed.
They never recognized him at all,
And he did not say, nor did they ask him
What kind of man he was, nor from what land.

Many times he saw what great pain they suffered,
Weeping quite piteously from their eyes,
And all for his sake, never for another.
Lord Alexis gives this some thought,
But it is nothing to him. What will be, will be.

Under the stairs he lies on his pallet.
He is fed there with table scraps.
He has made his high station the deepest poverty.
That his mother should know is not his wish.

He loves God more than all those of his line.

Of the food that comes to him from his household,
He keeps only what is needed to sustain his body.
If anything is left him, he gives it to the poor.
He amasses no hoard to make his body fat.
Instead he gives it to the poor. It is for them to eat.

In holy church he gladly passes time.
On every feast day he takes communion.
Holy Scripture is his counselor.
In serving God he thinks to spend his strength.
He will never go far from that place.

Beneath the stairs, where he lies and lives,
There he takes joy and pleasure in his deprivation.
The servants of his father, who keep the household,
Throw their wash water on his head.
He does not anger, nor does he cry out.

All there mock him, think him worthless.
They throw water at him; it soaks his pallet.
He does not anger, this most holy man.
Instead for them he asks God's pardon
And His mercy, for they know not what they do.

Seventeen years he lives there in this fashion,
But not a one of his family recognizes him.
None of them knows his suffering.
But on the bed where he has lain so long,
That is the one thing he makes evident.

Thirty-four years he gives his body pain.
God then wishes to reward this service.
His illness grieves him mightily.
Now he knows he is destined to go hence.
The servant he has he calls to his side.

"Dear brother, find me ink and parchment,
And a pen too, this I beg, if you will be so kind."
The man brings him these things; Alexis takes them.
He pens a letter, and it tells his story,
How he went away, and how he then returned.

On his person he keeps it, will not show it
And be recognized—that is, till he passes on.
He commends himself properly to God.
His end approaches. The body weighs him down.
This time for good, he makes an end of speech.

During the week when he was to pass away,
Three times in that city a voice was heard,
Outside the sanctuary, by God's command.
It said that all the faithful should assemble there.
Close now is the glory He will bestow upon the man.

The second time, the voice gives other commands.
They should seek the man of God, there in Rome,
Pray him that the city should not fall to ruins,
Nor the people, crowded within, all perish.
The ones who hear this voice feel great fear.

St. Innocent was then God's apostle there.
To him the people, rich and poor, made their way.
They ask him to counsel them about all
They have heard, for it has greatly anguished them.
The hour is close, they think, when the earth will swallow them.

The apostle and the emperors
(The one called Arcadius, the other Honorius)
Along with all the people offer prayer together,
Ask God to give them His counsel
About the holy man, who is to deliver them.

To have pity on them is what they ask Him,
And to point out where they might find the man.

Then a voice was heard, offering them instruction:
"In the house of Euphemian—seek him there,
For there he is, and there you will find him."

All make their way to Lord Euphemian.
Some begin to rail against the man, and bitterly:
"You should have made this known to us,
To all the people, who were unadvised.
You have hidden this—your sin is great!"

He makes excuses, like a man who does not know.
Yet they do not believe him and go to his household.
He walks ahead to make things ready for them.
He questions all his servants fiercely.
This is their answer: they know nothing.

The apostle and both the emperors,
Take seats on their benches, worried and weeping.
All the other lords attend them there,
And pray God to give them His counsel
About the holy man, who is to deliver them.

Just then, while they were sitting there,
The soul leaves the body of St. Alexis.
Straight from that place it goes to paradise,
To its Lord, having served Him so long.
Oh, Heaven's King, have us come there!

The good servant, who had gladly attended him,
Gave the news to his father, Euphemian.
Softly he summoned him, then gave him this advice.
"Lord," he said, "Dead is the man you provided for,
And I can tell you he was a good Christian.

I have been a long time with him.
Surely, I can find no fault in the man,
And this is my view: he was a man of God."
All alone Euphemian made his way to him,

Comes to his son, lying there beneath the staircase.

He lifts up the cloth covering his body.
He sees the saint's face, shining and beautiful
In his hand God's servant held the letter.
There he recounted all his life.
Euphemian wished to learn its meaning.

He wished to take it; but the man will not let it go.
Troubled by this, he returns to the apostle.
"I have found the man we have sought so eagerly.
Under my staircase a pilgrim lies dead.
He holds a letter, yet I cannot take it from him"

The apostle and the emperors
Come forward, throw themselves down in prayer,
Assume a posture of great suffering.
"Mercy, mercy, mercy, most holy man!
We knew you not—even now we do not know you.

Here before you stand two sinners.
By God's grace, they are called emperors.
In His mercy, He agreed to grant us this honor.
We are the judges of all this world.
Your counsel is what we now need.

The apostle here must provide for souls.
This is his duty—what he must carry out.
Give him this letter in Your mercy.
Then he will tell us what he finds written there.
And may God grant we find deliverance thereby!"

With his hand the apostle reaches for the letter.
St. Alexis unfolds it for him.
Then he gives it to the pope of Rome.
He did not read it, nor did he look inside.
He hands it to a good and learned clerk.

It was the chancellor whose duty this was.
He read the letter; the others listened.
It told the names of the mother and the father,
Revealed to them the parentage of the man,
Who was, I mean, the treasure they had there discovered.

And then the letter told of his flight across the ocean,
How he had lived in the city of Edessa,
How God had made the statue speak for his sake,
And how, fleeing honors whose weight he did not want,
He had come back to the city of Rome.

When the father heard what the letter said,
With both his hands he tore at his white beard.
"Oh, my son!" he said, "What a message full of pain!
I waited for you to make your way back to me,
So, by God's mercy, you could afford me comfort."

In a loud voice, the father began to cry out:
"Alexis, my son, what pain this gives me now!
But I afforded you poor comfort beneath my stairs.
Alas, how filled am I with sin! How blind I was!
I saw him so often, but never knew him.

Alexis, my son, what sorrow for your mother!
She has felt so much misery for your sake,
So much fasting and so much want as well.
So many tears she has shed for you!
This pain should have pierced her heart.

O son, who will inherit my great estate,
The vastness of my lands—so much is mine
—My great palace in the city of Rome?
For your sake I struggled hard to have these things.
Then, me dead, this honor should have been yours.

White is the hair on my head, gray my beard.
I held to the great honor that is mine,

And yet you took no interest in it.
The sorrow now plain to me is so great!
Son, may your soul be absolved in heaven!

You should have worn helmet and mailshirt,
Girded a sword at your side, like others of your kin.
A great household should have been yours to rule.
You should have borne the banner of the emperor,
As did your father, and the other men of your clan.

With such pain and in such great want,
Son, you have lived in foreign lands.
And these goods that should have been yours,
Had you only taken some into your poor shelter!
You should have used them had it pleased God."

Because of the sorrow the father showed,
The suffering was great. News came to the mother.
Like a madwoman she came running,
Beat her hands together, wailing, her hair tumbling down.
She looked at her dead son, fell fainting to the ground.

What man then saw her showing such great sorrow,
Beating her breast, throwing herself to the earth,
Ripping out her hair and tearing at her face,
Clasping her dead son to her and embracing his neck
—Hard-hearted would that man have been if not forced to tears.

She rips out her hair and beats her breast,
Subjects her own flesh to such suffering.
"Oh, son," said she, "How you despised me!
Wretched me, how blind I was!
I knew him no better than if I had never seen him."

Her eyes weep, a great lament comes from her.
Never stopping, she cries: "Ill-fortuned I gave you birth, fair son.
Alas, if you'd ever shown mercy on your mother!
Wretched me, how blind I was!

A great wonder that pity never seized you!

Alas, wretched mother, what cruel destiny I hear!
The child I bore I now see lying dead.
My long wait has come only to great sorrow.
Wretch that I am, why did I give you birth?
A great wonder that my heart endures so long!

Alexis, my son, your heart was pitiless indeed
When you dishonored all your noble line.
Had you spoken to me but once,
You'd have consoled your miserable mother so full of pain.
Dear son, your coming would have done good!

Alexis my son, what sorrow for your tender flesh!
You spent all your youth with such pain!
Why did you flee me? I carried you in my belly.
Alas, God knows my misery is complete.
I'll never feel joy for any man or woman!

Before I saw you, I was eager to have you.
Before you were born, I was filled with worry.
When I saw you born, joy and happiness were mine.
Now I see you dead, and wretchedness is what I feel.
It weighs on me that my end is so long coming.

Lords of Rome, mercy, for the love of God!
Help me raise up a lament for my dear one.
I cannot do enough to satisfy my heart.
Great is the sorrow that now spills over me.
It is no wonder: I now have no son or daughter."

To the father and mother as they lamented
Came the maiden whom he had wed.
"Lord," said she, "How long a time
I have waited in the house of your father,
Where you left me miserable and in pain!

My lord Alexis, so many days I've longed for you.
So many tears I've cried for you,
So often in the distance I looked for you,
Not because of crime or sin, but to see
If you returned to bring your wife consolation.

My dear friend, what a pity for your handsome youth!
It will now decay, a heavy burden in the earth!
Alas, man of noble birth, how wretched I am!
I waited to hear good news of you.
It is hard and miserable to see this now!

Alas for your pretty mouth, fine face, fair form!
How changed is the beauty that once was yours.
I loved you more than anyone alive.
What I now see makes me suffer greatly.
It would have been better had I died.

Had I known you were there beneath the staircase,
Where a long time you lay, weak with illness,
Then all the world could not have turned me away
From making my home there with you.
Had it been permitted, I would have cared well for you."

"Now I am a widow, lord," said the maiden,
"No happiness will ever be mine—and cannot be.
Nor will I ever have any other man.
I will serve God, the King who governs all things.
He will not fail me if He sees how I serve Him."

The mother and the father wept so much,
As did the maiden too, that all grew weary.
Meanwhile, they prepared the body of the saint,
All these lords dressed it in fine garments.
How happy were those who in their faith honored him!

"Lords, what are you doing?" This is what the apostle said.
"What is this outcry, this wretchedness, this clamor?

Though we do grieve, he brings us joy in our need.
In him we will have a powerful source of help.
So let us pray he delivers us from every ill."

All who could assemble took hold of him.
Singing, they carried off the body of St. Alexis,
Praying he would show his mercy to them.
No need to summon those who heard the news.
All came running, of both high and low estate.

So moved were all the people of Rome
That the fastest runner came there first.
Through the streets such great crowds thronged to the spot
That no king or count could force his way through.
Nor could the others proceed with the holy body.

The lords begin to talk among themselves:
"The crowd is huge; through it we cannot carry
This holy body, God's gift to us.
The people rejoice in their desire for him.
One and all hasten to the spot, no one turns aside."

Those who hold sway over the empire give this answer:
"Mercy, lords! We shall look for some way to solve this.
We shall share out generously our possessions
To those of low estate who look for alms.
If they crowd us out, we shall still be free of them."

From their treasure hoards, they take gold and silver.
They have it thrown down before the poor.
They think in this way to be rid of them.
But it cannot be. The poor do not want such things.
All their desire is fixed on this holy man.

With a single voice, the lowborn men cry out:
"To be sure, we take no interest in these goods.
In our midst, great happiness has appeared
With this holy body, the one we are carrying.

Should it please God, it will give us good help."

Never in Rome had their been such joy
As on this day for rich and poor alike
Because of the holy body, which they now possess.
This is their view: that they are holding God himself.
All the people praise God and give Him thanks.

Saint Alexis was a man of good will.
That is why today we do honor to his day.
In the city of Rome, that is where his body lies.
And his soul is in God's paradise.
That man can feel joy who lives there.

He who has committed sin can easily recall it.
Through penance, he can very well find salvation.
Transitory is this world. Pay mind to the one that lasts longer!
Let us offer our prayers to God, to the Holy Trinity,
That along with God we might reign in heaven.

Not the deaf, the blind, the convulsive, the lepers,
Not the mute, the one-eyed, the paralytic,
Not, above all, those who lie sick and never rise
—Not one among those who go about afflicted,
Not any of them comes back ill from the saint's shrine.

No sick man goes there, no matter his sickness,
Who, calling upon him, is not healthy once again.
Some walk there; some have themselves carried.
Such true miracles has God revealed to them
That those who come weeping, He makes leave in song.

Those two lords who govern the empire,
When they see the power so evident in that place,
Take him for themselves, weep for and serve him.
Somewhat through prayer, but mainly by force
They move to the very front, breaking up the crowd.

Saint Boniface, who is called "the martyr,"
Had a very handsome church in Rome.
There, for sure, is where they bear Lord Alexis
And with care they lay him on the earth.
Blessed is the place where a holy body finds shelter.

The people of Rome, who feel such desire for him,
Wield the power to keep him seven days above ground.
Huge is the multitude—this you need not ask.
They so surround him on all sides
That no one man, it seems, could ever stand close.

On the seventh day a resting place is made
For this holy body, this gem from heaven.
From the body they move aside, the crowding eases.
Their wish or not, they let him be put into the earth.
This thing weighs heavy on them, but cannot be otherwise.

With censers, with golden candelabras,
Clerks dressed in albs and capes
Place the body within a sarcophagus of marble.
Some sing there, most cry tears.
Never, had they their wish, would they part from him.

With gold and gems the sarcophagus has been adorned,
For the sake of the holy body to be placed within.
Into the ground they put it, using all their strength.
The people of Rome are weeping.
No man under heaven can hold back.

There is no need to speak of the mother and the father,
Or of the spouse—how they grieved for him!
For all of their voices did blend together,
As everyone lamented and mourned for him.
That day a hundred thousand tears were shed.

They could no longer keep him above ground.
Their wish or not, they let him be put in the earth.

They take leave of the body of St. Alexis
And pray him to have mercy on them.
They would have him plead well for them before the Lord.

The people depart. The father and the mother
And the maiden never leave each other's side.
They stayed together until they traveled back to God.
The time they shared was virtuous and full of honor.
Their souls found salvation through the holy body.

St. Alexis, beyond doubt, is in heaven,
With God and in the company of angels,
With the maiden, from whom he long estranged himself.
Now he has her by his side; their souls are together.
Their happiness is so great I cannot describe it.

What worthy suffering, God, and what good service
Did the holy man accomplish in this mortal life!
And so his soul is now filled again with glory.
What he wants he now has; there is nothing more to say.
Above all things, he now looks upon God Himself.

Wretched! Unfortunate! How blind we are!
But let us understand how misguided.
And weighed down by our sins we are.
We are compelled to neglect the proper way to live.
Through this holy man we will find new light!

Lords, let us hold fast to the memory of this holy man
And pray he deliver us from all evil.
In this world, he buys us peace and joy,
And in the next the glory that lasts the longest
In the Word Itself. So let us say: Our Father.

Amen.

Andreas

Introduction

With the Resurrection ending their careers as disciples, the followers of Jesus took up their Lord's command to become Apostles and travel "unto the uttermost parts of the earth," there to preach the gospel that had been revealed to them and convert the "peoples" to the faith of Jesus. The tradition was that they had been assigned regions to evangelize. What often became extensive accounts of their proselytizing missions never found a place in the orthodox canon of New Testament writings, though they did become important documents associated with the history of the early church.

Evidence of several kinds establishes that a "life of St. Andrew" had taken some kind of written form by the 4th century of our era. An important part of this story detailed Andrew's voyage to a land near the Black Sea, where, commanded by God, he rescues his fellow apostle Matthew, cruelly imprisoned there by a race of cannibals, whom he subsequently converts to Christian worship. Originally written in Greek, the life of Andrew was subsequently translated into Latin. Abridgements of this Latin text survive, though the precise version that the Old English poet followed in composing *Andreas* has been lost. It seems clear, however, that his translation followed the main outlines of the Latin text as these can be established. His major innovation was that he accommodated the story materials to the traditions of Old English heroic poetry, as we can see these most fully in *Beowulf*. As in the case of *Beowulf*, nothing is known of this anonymous poet, and only an educated guess can be made not only about when he composed the poem (the end of the eighth through the first half of the ninth century seems most likely) but also where (probably the north of England). With his evident knowledge of Latin, the *Andreas* poet must have been a churchman who probably wrote for other religious (though the possibility of a secular readership cannot be discounted because of the poet's epic treatment).

The *Andreas* poet, however, was neither the first nor the last of his

countrymen to adapt the language, style, and themes of heroic poetry to religious subjects. A considerable number of surviving texts, including saints' lives, Biblical paraphrases, and even lyrics, shows that this kind of poetry enjoyed substantial popularity among the Anglo-Saxons. Like these other works, *Andreas* makes available in the vernacular language the stories and themes that would be of great instructional value to a people growing in their depth and devotion to the faith they had collectively adopted during the course of the 7th century. Though it is not, technically speaking, a saint's life, since Andrew is one of the apostles, *Andreas* adheres to many hagiographic conventions. It portrays the courageous and self-sacrificing acts of an exceptionally holy man who, dear to God, is called upon to live up to (and in some senses imitate) the life of his Master.

Andrew's mission to convert bloodthirsty heathens might well have struck a very responsive chord, for his original readers/hearers were well aware of their countrymen's involvement in the dangerous work of conversion. Most famous among these missionaries were two eighth century figures: St. Willibord, the Yorkshire cleric who converted the Frisians and founded a renowned monastery as well as an ecclesiastical see on the continent, and St. Boniface, who undertook the Christianization of the continental Saxons. *Andreas* tells a story from the distant Christian past, but the kind of events it depicts (a dangerous sea voyage undertaken on God's behalf, the preaching of the gospel to hostile tribes) were known to the poet and his readers not only as matters of legend. In addition to offering an exciting narrative that attests to the power of God and his servants, however, *Andreas* also engages with key doctrinal issues, particularly the nature of atonement and the sacramental power of baptism. For the poem's main character is not only called upon to live up to the standard of the *imitatio Christi* (the imitation of Christ) in the sufferings he endures; Andreas also re-enacts key events in Scriptural history that reveal the mysteries of the faith.

Like Beowulf, a secular hero whose adventures somewhat parallel his own, Andreas undertakes a mission, after a sea voyage, to rescue someone threatened with terrible destruction by monstrous creatures. Like Grendel, Beowulf's opponent, in fact, the Mermedonians who have imprisoned Andreas's companion Matthew are cannibals, eager to consume human flesh and blood. The Mermedonians, however, do

not raid nearby mead halls. Instead, they violate universal laws of hospitality by feasting upon all strangers who happen into their land, sustaining themselves in what seems a cruel parody of the Eucharist. If Beowulf sails to save Hrothgar, king of the Danes, from the depredations of Grendel because he is eager to obtain glory, Andreas leaves Greece only reluctantly, on God's command, which he briefly resists. God dismisses his claims of inability (I do not know this land, I could not arrive in time to save Matthew) with assurances of His blessing. But He makes clear to the apostle that this mission will involve terrible suffering and pain.

Making his way to the shore, Andreas and his companions (a kind of religious band of retainers) find a ship awaiting them, guided by a captain who, after some debate, agrees to take them to Mermedonia. The captain, in actuality, is Jesus Himself, the crew his angels, and the encounter is meant to elicit (with an emphasis different from the Latin text) Andreas's firmness and resolve. The captain asks for payment to make the passage and, when Andreas tells him that he has no treasure to offer, he is met with a patronizing response. Andreas does not hesitate to counter with a stern rebuke, reminding the captain that those blessed by God with worldly goods should treat other voyagers with kindness. In the storm that arises on the ocean (recalling a similar passage from the New Testament), Andreas proves his courage; and, while his companions show great fear, they refuse to be put ashore, dreading the shame they should suffer for deserting their lord. The apostle also recognizes the exceptional virtue and skill of the captain, divine gifts he says—with unconscious irony, of course, since this is God Himself.

It is fitting that the "captain" then questions Andreas about the Jews' failure to acknowledge Jesus's lordship, an event that will be imitated in the Mermedonians' refusal to recognize Andreas as the emissary of God, even when a miracle is appropriately performed in their midst. In response to the captain's questions about Jesus (a test that shows His apostle's resolve), Andreas relates an elaborate miracle, one not contained in Holy Scripture. In the temple, Jesus orders statues of angels to come down from the wall and address the unbelievers, afterward, when met by continuing obstinacy, having the statues resurrect the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But even this attempt at conversion fails. Where Jesus failed with the Jews, however, Andreas

(much aided by God with yet another miracle where stone comes to life) will succeed with the Mermedonians. He falls asleep with the praise of God on his lips and awakens in the city of the cannibals, to which, it is revealed, he and his companions were delivered on the wings of angels.

Andreas awakes, praises God for fulfilling His promise of protection and aid, and acknowledges that the captain of the ship was the Savior Himself. God answers from the sky and reveals the difficulties of his mission; he will succeed only at the cost of terrible suffering, but the "evildoers" will not be allowed to kill him. To make his mission easier, God renders the apostle invisible. Like Jesus, who delivered the souls of the blessed from Hell, Andreas then enters into the dark prison and releases his brother, and the multitude with him, from the prospect of imminent death. The Mermedonians return to find the building empty of those upon whom they had intended to feed. Frustrated, they determine by lots to kill one of the older warriors. But the man (once again in a parody of Christian revelation that recalls the story of Abraham and Isaac) designates his young son as a sacrifice. The apostle quickly intervenes, and God works a miracle. The swords, ready to slaughter the young man, melt like wax, and the boy is delivered.

Andreas could make available to them the "nourishment" of eternal life they truly need, but he is first prevented by the Devil, who warns the people of the unseen but harmful presence among them. Andreas and the Devil engage in a battle of words, but the result is that Andreas is seized and bound—now made ready for his ordeal. The action that follows is energized by two central Christian doctrines. On the one hand, Andreas must do penance for his initial failure to obey the Lord's command and rescue Matthew. The pain, humiliation, and abuse he suffers willingly shall be the demonstration that he has understood and renounced his lack of trust in God's power. For now he must believe firmly in God's promise that he will not be killed, even though he will suffer grievously (and these terrible wounds, in a potent image of bodily resurrection, will be healed). If the miracles that God performs cannot give the Jews faith, they can confirm Andreas in his. In turn, and also with the aid of miracles, he finds the power to rescue the Mermedonians from the sin and murder of their corrupt existence. But Andreas must follow the example set by Christ. It is his suffering that will atone for the crimes the cannibals have committed.

Like Jesus, Andreas must be successful in his confrontation with Satan if the atonement is to release those who are held captive by the devil's power.

Tormented and tortured for three days (the Biblical number), Andreas endures cold, loneliness, and temptation as well—though the tempters are put to flight by the appearance of the cross on the apostle's face. All of Satan's attempts to make him doubt the power and justice of God fail. That power, instead, becomes manifest in Andreas himself. For just as Jesus commanded the statues in the temple to come down from the wall and speak, so Andreas commands a stone pillar to let forth a deluge. The flood that results recalls, in its destructive and punitive aspect, the one released by God on the Egyptians after a safe passage was granted to Moses and the tribes of Israel across the Red Sea (also echoed is the flood of Noah and Joshua's crossing of the Jordan). Morally, Christians of the time would have seen in this flood a potent image of the sacrament of baptism as well—the water that is both destructive (of original sin, of the devil's hold on human nature) and salvational (for the good are thereby delivered to God's favor, their lives preserved from evil). Of course, the flood Andreas releases is also important as an element in the narrative. It is the final miracle, the most potent demonstration of God's strength, and it convinces the Mermedonians that Andreas speaks the truth. The rushing torrent kills the fourteen men of that people who are most criminally minded. The others are saved by Andreas's diversion of the water, except for some young men who are drowned. These last, through Andreas's ministrations, rise up from death to receive the sacrament of baptism at his hands. The Mermedonians agree to serve God, and a church is built at the very spot where the young men have been baptized. Appointing a bishop to look over them, Andreas must depart, for at God's command he is to return to Greece, there to resume his evangelizing and, eventually, to receive martyrdom. He is remembered by the now Christianized Mermedonians in proper Germanic terms as their heroic deliverer.

Andreas succeeds not only as a vigorously told story of suffering and triumph. It draws its power as well from an effective use of the rich traditional vocabulary of heroic poetry and from its re-fashioning of the hero, who, though a somewhat timid and unwarlike man of God in the Latin original, becomes a Christian version of the epic hero.

Scholars long thought, in fact, that the poet must have known and drawn upon *Beowulf* as he adapted his Latin source, but today that theory no longer seems viable because the conventions of heroic poetry have been recognized as part and parcel of a larger and more encompassing tradition. The artistry of verbal style and structure in *Andreas* must be the clerk author's own. In any case, the source provided a narrative dependent on actions that are the public reflex of spiritual zeal and firmness of faith. Strengthened by God's admonition, Andreas is willing to endure the hardships and dangers of travel over the seas. He does not prove weak or cowardly when confronted by hosts of armed and murderous enemies. He emerges victorious from verbal confrontation with his tormenters (as does Beowulf from his dispute with the Danish Unferth). Most important, Andreas shows his strength by destroying his enemies (the fourteen hardened evildoers) and rescuing thereby those who come to acknowledge his bravery and virtue. As God's messenger, the apostle is called up to repeat the intrepid public deeds of Jesus—enduring with only a brief (and eminently human) moment of doubt the most tormenting and shameful of tortures, as he is dragged over rough stone roads. Andreas lives a life of personal denial, in the encounter with the ship's "captain" proudly proclaiming the poverty in which he lives at his Lord's command. More important, however, Andreas is a man of action, and it is this quality that most obviously inspired the Old English poet. Like the Anglo-Saxon missionaries to the Germans, Andreas belongs to an age when the success of Christianity depended upon the demonstration of God's power, wielded by the heroic and unflinching emissaries who brought the good news of salvation to those living in spiritual hunger and moral darkness.

The manuscript of *Andreas* lacks several passages, as indicated. In places the text is now impossible to read, and these are marked by ellipses.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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