

Berhtgyth's Letters to Balthard

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Berhtgyth's Letters to Balthard

In the late-eighth century, the nun Berhtgyth, a member of the Anglo-Saxon mission to Germany, wrote three letters to her brother Balthard; these were preserved as part of the so-called Boniface correspondence and collected in a mid-ninth century manuscript along with the extended correspondence of Archbishops Boniface and Lull.¹ These three letters have not been edited since Michael Tangl's 1916 edition, and this is the first edition with an introduction and notes in English.² This is also the first complete English translation of Berhtgyth's letters, although portions have been translated in the past by Jane Stevenson and Peter Dronke, among others.³ As these letters have not previously been translated into English, they are also not available in the *Epistolae* database of letters to and from women.⁴ Scholars have focused on the Berhtgyth letters primarily as evidence for intimate sibling relationships in the early medieval period, as well as an expression of women's literacy and poetic talent.

In the first letter, Berhtgyth asks her brother why he has failed to visit, asking if he has forgotten that she is alone *in hac terra* (on this earth). She declares that she loves him more than anyone else alive, but that she can't make

¹ Berhtgyth's letters must have been written before Balthard's death in 798. Most scholars date these letters to the 770s, assuming that the death of Berhtgyth's mother Cynehild referred to in the third letter occurred before this, as Cynehild arrived in Germany with Lull in the late 730s. However, Christine Fell argues that Berhtgyth would not have written such desolate letters when her cousin Lull was alive. She therefore dates the letters sometime after Lull's death in 786. See Christine Fell, 'Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 29-43 (p. 40).

² Michael Tangl, ed., *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Epistolae Selectae I* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1916).

³ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (+203) to Marguerite Porete (+1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 30-33, and Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 94-96.

⁴ Joan M. Ferrante, ed., *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters* (revised 2014) <<https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/>> [accessed 17 August 2017]. Ferrante discusses how the letters in *Epistolae* reveal women as actors in medieval culture in her article 'What Really Matters in Medieval Women's Correspondence?', in *Medieval Letters Between Fiction and Document*, ed. by Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 179-99.

all this known to him in writing and she is sure that he has no care for her. Berhtgyth's second letter again states that she is *sola* (alone) and has no kin, and that the distance between herself and her brother is great. She asks that Balthard might visit her or that she might be able to visit him, and then prays for his health. This letter finishes with a poem asking for eternal health. Berhtgyth's final letter thanks Balthard for his letter and his gift (which is not specified). She then asks Balthard again to visit her, even if it is only for one day. If he does not want to visit, she asks whether she might be able to visit him in the place where their parents are buried so that she can finish her life there. She finishes by sending him a ribbon as a gift, and writing a poem bidding him farewell in Christ.⁵

The Manuscript and its Editions

The only manuscript containing Berhtgyth's letters can be found in the National Austrian Library at Vienna. Manuscript 751, or the Vienna Codex, is made up of four unrelated parts bound together sometime before 1554, when Kaspar von Niedbruck found the codex and took it into the collection of the imperial library in Vienna.⁶ The Berhtgyth letters form part of a collection of letters to and from Boniface and Lull that make up ff. 1-77 of the manuscript. The script is a mid-ninth century Carolingian minuscule written by one scribe throughout, with the exception of the final two pages, which were written by a different scribe, also in a ninth century hand.⁷

Letters to, from, or about Boniface make up slightly more than half of the collection known as the Bonifatian correspondence; the bulk of the remainder consists of letters to and from Lull. The Vienna Codex is one of three manuscripts that include some or all of this correspondence, and it contains 53 letters not

⁵ For more on gift-giving in the Boniface letters, see: John-Henry Wilson Clay, 'Gift-giving and Books in the Letters of Boniface and Lull', *Journal of Medieval History*, 35.4 (2009), 313-25.

⁶ Franz Unterkircher, ed., *Sancti Bonifacii Epistolae: Codex Vindobonensis 751 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Codices Selecti*, 24 (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1971), p. 9.

⁷ Unterkircher, p. 17.

found in either of the other manuscripts.⁸ These letters are predominantly to and from Lull, Boniface's successor in Mainz, but also include the three letters from Berhtgyth that are edited here.⁹ These additional letters seem to have been copied directly from originals at Mainz, as they do not appear in the other two Bonifatian manuscripts.¹⁰ Another unique feature of the Vienna Codex is its inclusion, on ff. 40-48r, of a poem by Aldhelm and four poems by Æthelwald in a similar style, as well as a selection from Isidore of Seville's *De ecclesiasticis officiis* and a selection of prayers. The incorporation of Aldhelm's and Æthelwald's poetry here is interesting in the light of connections various scholars have made between Berhtgyth's and Aldhelm's poetic styles.¹¹

The letter collection preserved in the Vienna Codex was probably compiled by Lull and therefore serves to memorialize Boniface and his connections,¹² as well as functioning as a collection of model letters for different scenarios. In fact, D. Patricia Wallace suggests that Berhtgyth's letters were included in the collection "not as documentation of alliances with Boniface or Lullus, but simply because they appealed to the letter-collector as a model."¹³ Fell makes a similar point with a slightly different emphasis when she argues that Berhtgyth's letters survive because of their status as literary compositions, calling them a "formalization" of personal anguish.¹⁴ Berhtgyth's letters do closely reproduce many of the formal features of early medieval letters, although she was writing before the *ars dictaminis* (art of letter-writing) began as a

⁸ The Vienna Codex contains only the so-called *collectio communis* (letters written to and from non-papal correspondents). The other two manuscripts, the eighth century Codex lat. Monacensis 81112, and the ninth century Codex Carlsruhensis Rastatt 22, also contain the *collectio pontificia* (the letters between Boniface and the popes). See Tangl, p. 23.

⁹ Aside from Berhtgyth's letters, there are other letters that do not concern Boniface or Lull in the Vienna Codex. See, for example, the letter from Abbess Ælflæd to Abbess Adola about the pilgrimage of an English abbess to Rome (Tangl, p. 3).

¹⁰ Barbara Yorke, 'The Bonifatian Mission and Female Religious in Wessex', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7.2 (1998), 145-72 (p. 169).

¹¹ Christine Fell, for example, suggests that Berhtgyth and Lull's style 'appears to owe more to Aldhelm than to Boniface'. See Fell, 'Some Implications', p. 40.

¹² Diane Watt, 'A Fragmentary Archive: Migratory Feelings in Early Anglo-Saxon Women's Letters', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64.3 (2017), 415-29 (p. 416).

¹³ D. Patricia Wallace, 'Feminine Rhetoric and the Epistolary Tradition: the Boniface Correspondence', *Women's Studies*, 24.3 (1995), 229-46 (p. 231).

¹⁴ Fell, 'Some Implications', p. 41.

separate branch of rhetoric.¹⁵ The first medieval treatise on letter-writing was written by Alberic of Monte Cassino c. 1087,¹⁶ and James Murphy suggests that the precepts of letter writing shown in the early twelfth-century works of Bologna did not spread into Germany and England until the end of the twelfth century.¹⁷ However, the structure of the medieval letter appears to have been established before the formal analysis of it. Martin Camargo identifies the five main parts of the standard medieval letter, fixed by 1140 but in use before that date, as the “*salutatio, exordium* (also called *captatio benevolentiae* and *proverbium*), *narratio, petitio* and *conclusio*.”¹⁸ Berhtgyth's letters follow this broad pattern, with slight inconsistencies (for example, her first letter lacks a *conclusio*, ending instead with a lament about her brother's obliviousness to her needs).

Edition and Translation History

Although all of the letters from the Vienna Codex have been edited on numerous occasions, the previous editions focus primarily on the letters written by Boniface and letters immediately relevant to his missionary work. Michael Tangl's 1916 edition superseded the earlier editions produced in England and Germany.¹⁹ Tangl's edition preserves the letters in the same order as the earlier

¹⁵ For a summary of current research on letter writing, see Walter Ysebaert, 'Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources: Methodological Questions, Reflections and Research Perspectives (Sixth–Fifteenth Centuries)', in *Medieval Letters*, ed. by Høgel and Bartoli, pp. 33–62. See also: Ronald G. Witt, 'The Arts of Letter-writing', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Middle Ages*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 68-83, and Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976).

¹⁶ James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 203.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁸ Martin Camargo, *Ars Dictaminis: Ars Dictandi* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), p. 22. We could translate this as the greeting or salutation, the praising of the addressee (also called the capturing of goodwill or proverb), the narration of events, the petition or request and the conclusion.

¹⁹ The first edition was Nicolaus Serarius, ed., *Epistolae S. Bonifaci Martyris* (Mainz: Balthasar Lipp, 1605). This edition was followed by Würdtwein's, which attempted to put the letters into chronological order: Stephan Alexander Würdtwein, ed., *Epistolae S. Bonifacii Archiepiscopi Magontini et Martyris* (Mainz: Crass, 1789). The first edition with an introduction and notes in English was: J. A. Giles, ed., *Sancti Bonifacii Archiepiscopi et Martyris Opera Quae Extant Omnia: Vol. 1* (London: Veneunt Apud D Nutt, 1844). There were then two more with German apparatus. Philipp Jaffé's was the first to mention Lull

Monumenta Germaniae Historiae edition but returns to the original manuscripts, as well as including much more extensive notes and critical apparatus. All of these editions focus on Boniface, and later Boniface and Lull, thus obscuring the broad range of actors in the missionary circle (although this imbalance has been addressed in more recent scholarship).²⁰

The focus on Boniface has also affected the selection of letters translated into English. In the introduction to his translation of Boniface's letters, Ephraim Emerton states he has translated Tangl's edition but omitted some letters "since they have no reference to the great bishop."²¹ Thomas Noble wrote a new introduction to Emerton's edition in 2000, but makes no further reference to the letters that Emerton omitted.²² Edward Kylie's translation of Boniface's letters in 1911 similarly omits any letters that do not directly pertain to Boniface himself.²³ Christine Fell planned to translate Berhtgyth's letters as part of her *Letters and Letter-Writers in Anglo-Saxon England*, but sadly this project was left unfinished on her death.²⁴ This edition and translation therefore make Berhtgyth's letters to Balthard available in English for the first time.

in the title: Philipp Jaffé, ed., *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1866). Ernst Dümmler produced an edition for *Monumenta Germaniae historica*, which was also entitled *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae*: Ernst Dümmler, ed., *S. Bonifatii et Lulli epistolae, Monumenta Germaniae historica: Epistolae 3* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892).

²⁰ See, for example, Barbara Yorke's 'The Bonifacian Mission and Female Religious in Wessex' (especially pp. 148-57), in which she discusses the women in Boniface's circle, mentioning Eangyth, Bugga, Leoba, Eadburg, Ecgburg and Cyneburg. For more on women in the Anglo-Saxon church, see Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992).

²¹ Ephraim Emerton, ed., *The Letters of Saint Boniface, The Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies*, ed. Austin P. Evans (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 19.

²² Ephraim Emerton, ed., *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, with a new introduction and bibliography by Thomas F. X. Noble (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

²³ Edward Kylie, trans., *The English Correspondence of Saint Boniface* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1911).

²⁴ Fell leaves a note at the end of her article 'Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence' stating 'Texts and translations of some of these letters, especially Berhtgyth's, will be published with commentary in my forthcoming *Letters and Letter-writers in Anglo-Saxon England*'. The introduction to this proposed volume can be found in the posthumously published Christine Fell, 'Introduction to Anglo-Saxon Letters and Letter Writers', in *Lastworda betst: Essays in Memory of Christine E. Fell, with her Unpublished Writings*, ed. by Carole Hough and Kathryn A. Lowe (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2002), pp. 278-98.

Berhtgyth, Balthard and their Letters

Berhtgyth and Balthard were part of the vibrant Anglo-Saxon missionary circle in late-eighth century Germany.²⁵ Although there is no contemporary account that links the siblings with the missionary circle directly, Otloh's much later *Life of St Boniface* (c. 1062-66) states that their mother was Cynehild, Lull's maternal aunt. Otloh also notes that Cynehild and Berhtgyth were *valde eruditae in liberali scientia* (very learned in the liberal arts) and on their arrival in Germany they *in Turingorum regione constituebantur* (were appointed as teachers in the region of Thuringia).²⁶ Christine Fell suggests that Cynehild and Berhtgyth could have been among the group of kin with whom Lull crossed the sea from England, and that Berhtgyth may have been a child when she arrived in Thuringia.²⁷ However, it is possible that Berhtgyth arrived in Germany as an adult and a professed nun; she would then have been able to begin teaching immediately, as Otloh's *Life* suggests.

At the time of receiving these letters, Balthard may have been the abbot of Lull's re-founded Hersfeld Abbey in Bad Hersfeld in central Germany.²⁸ Although Berhtgyth complains in her letters about being *sola* (alone), as Hailey J. LaVoy points out it is "more likely that she was living in a religious community such as Leoba's."²⁹ Her solitude, therefore, may be primarily rhetorical and focussed on her lack of family ties. Balthard's letters do not survive, but we know from

²⁵ For more information on the Bonifatian mission, see James Palmer's historiographical overview in *History Compass*: James Palmer, 'Saxon or European? Interpreting and Reinterpreting St Boniface', *History Compass*, 4.5 (2006), 852-69, Rosamond McKitterick, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany: Personal Connections and Local Influences* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991) and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'A Background to St Boniface's Mission', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. by Peter Clemons and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), pp. 35-48.

²⁶ Otloh of St Emmeram, 'Vitae Bonifatii Auctore Otloho', in *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini*, ed. by Wilhelm Levison, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, 57 (Hanover: Hahn, 1905), pp. 111-217 (p. 138). The translation here is from Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, p. 94.

²⁷ Fell, 'Some Implications', p. 37, p. 40.

²⁸ Janice Racine Norris, 'Anglo-Saxon Religious Women who went to the Continent: A Group Study', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Binghamton University, 2003), p. 247.

²⁹ Hailey J. LaVoy, "'Why have you been silent for so long?': Women and Letter-Writing in the Early Middle Ages, 700-900' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2015), p. 110.

Berhtgyth's third letter that this was a two-way correspondence, as she thanks Balthard for a present that he had sent.

Berhtgyth's first letter (Tangl 143) is not attributed to her in the manuscript but it uses very similar expressions to the other two letters attributed to her authorship. The letter addresses *Fratri unico atque amantissimo N. H.* (only and most beloved brother N. H.) without mentioning Balthard's name. The use of *N. H.* here demonstrates that the letter was preserved as a model, leaving space for the writer to insert a different recipient's name; it probably stands for *Nomen Hac* (this name).³⁰ This omission therefore bolsters Fell and Wallace's claim that Berhtgyth's letters were included in the Vienna Codex as model letters for different occasions - a forerunner of the epistolary pattern book.³¹ The phrasing of the salutation is repeated in Berhtgyth's second letter (Tangl 147) in which she describes herself to Balthard as *soror tua unica* (your only sister) and calls him her *dilectissimo fratri* (most beloved brother). Similarly, in her third letter (Tangl 148) she addresses him as *dilectissimo fratri unico Baldhardo* (only and most beloved brother Balthard). All three letters, therefore, are written from a sister to her only and much-loved brother and are found close to each other in the manuscript (letter 1 on f. 33v, letter 2 on f. 34v, and letter 3 on f. 35r). Given these similarities, I do not hesitate to follow Tangl in attributing the letter on f. 33v of the Vienna Codex to Berhtgyth.

Crucially, Berhtgyth's letters deviate from the traditions of letter writing between monastic friends by desiring the physical presence of her brother.³² An established tradition of Christian friendship literature suggested that writing and shared faith could bring absent friends together, but Berhtgyth seems to be resisting that tradition as she articulates her desire for actual rather than

³⁰ The omission of a name is paralleled in Abbess Bugga's earlier letter to Boniface; she asks him to say masses for the soul of her relative *qui mihi prae ceteris carus erat, cui nomen erat N.* (who was dearest of all to me and whose name was N.) (Tangl 15).

³¹ See footnotes 11 and 12.

³² For a discussion of the importance of friendship to the Anglo-Saxons on the Continent, and what calling someone 'friend' entailed, see Hans-Werner Goetz, "'Beatus homo qui invenit amicum': The Concept of Friendship in Early Medieval Letters of the Anglo-Saxon Tradition on the Continent", in *Friendship in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1990), pp. 124-36 (especially pp. 125-29).

spiritual togetherness.³³ As Carolinne White notes when discussing Late Antique letter-writing between friends, "it was clear that there was a belief, among Christians as among many pagans, that friends could overcome (physical) separation if they continued to hold one another in their thoughts and affection."³⁴ White also references Seneca, who wrote that letters make "an absent friend appear to be present."³⁵ The Boniface circle as a whole was, as Lisa Weston puts it, "defined precisely by the written word's ability to enable emotional and intellectual presence despite physical absence."³⁶ However, Berhtgyth states repeatedly that the textual intermediary is insufficient. In her first letter she asks Balthard why he has delayed in coming to visit her, making reference to some discord between them,³⁷ and she makes it clear in all three letters that she wants to see him in person. Although she admits in her second letter that *vera caritas numquam locorum limite frangitur* (true love is never divided by the borders between places), she follows this truism with an immediate request to see her brother.

To a modern reader, one of the attractions of Berhtgyth's letters is this repeated and frank expression of longing for the physical presence of her brother in her life. The form of the letter, she makes clear, is insufficient to express her great desire - *Ecce non possum omnia per litteras tibi indicare* (Behold, I cannot make this all known to you in writing). Weston argues that the letter functions here as a "failed intermediary (. . .) it continually excites a desire for more, and more physical, connection."³⁸ Berhtgyth knows that she should be

³³ For a discussion of this monastic friendship tradition, albeit in a slightly later form, see Julian Haseldine, 'The Monastic Culture of Friendship', in *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 177–202, and Julian Haseldine, 'Friendship and Rivalry: The Role of Amicitia in Twelfth-Century Monastic Relations', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44.3 (1993), 390–414.

³⁴ Carolinne White, 'Friendship in Absence: Some Patristic Views', in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 70–75 (p. 72).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁶ Lisa M. C. Weston, 'Reading the Textual Shadows of Anglo-Saxon Monastic Women's Friendships', *Magistra*, 14.1 (2008), 68–78 (p. 70).

³⁷ Berhtgyth states that if Balthard is not visiting because she has failed *aliquid beneficium impendere* 'to grant a certain favour', then he must have forgotten all of the bonds that tie them together. There is no further reference to what this 'favour' might have been.

³⁸ Lisa M. C. Weston, 'Where Textual Bodies Meet: Anglo-Saxon Women's Epistolary Friendships', in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 231–46 (p. 242).

soothed by the Lord's love, but the only way to assuage her weeping is to see her brother again before she dies. If Berhtgyth arrived in Thuringia as a child with Lull and her letters were written in the 770s, she would have been in her thirties and therefore this phrase might appear a rhetorical overstatement. However, if Berhtgyth arrived in Thuringia as an adult, or was writing these letters after Lull's death in 786 as Fell suggests, she could indeed have been an old woman.³⁹ Given the exaggerated and highly rhetorical tone of the letters throughout, either suggestion is plausible.

The love expressed for her brother in Berhtgyth's letters demonstrates how important the sibling relationship was to these missionary figures. As Stevenson notes, women "who relinquished husbands, actual or potential, without apparent regret, went to considerable lengths to maintain relationships with their brothers."⁴⁰ The importance of the fraternal relationship to Berhtgyth is underlined by the repeated use of *frater* (brother) and *fraternitas* (brotherhood) throughout. Across three letters, totalling 703 words, Berhtgyth hails Balthard as brother eleven times. Every time it is specifically in relation to their blood kinship rather than their monastic bonds; he is her *only* brother, and she refers to him as her brother in the context of their relatives (*propinqui*). This repetition is particularly notable in her first letter, which addresses him as *frater* no less than five times within 137 words. Repeatedly addressing Balthard as brother functions to remind him of his kinship obligations towards her, and claims that sibling relationship as one of primary importance.

The inconsolable sister, who cannot stop weeping because of the loss of her brother, who desperately needs his physical presence in her life, is challenging to incorporate into modern narratives of desire and separation. Drawing on Ann Cvetkovich's work on queer feeling and Heather Love's work on queer history and loss, Diane Watt suggests that to a modern reader there is "often something queer about the longings expressed" in the women's letters of the Boniface circle.⁴¹ The love of Berhtgyth for Balthard, expressed in terms of

³⁹ Fell, 'Some Implications', p. 40.

⁴⁰ Jane Stevenson, 'Brothers and Sisters: Women and Monastic Life in Eighth Century England and Frankia', *Dutch Review of Church History*, 82.3 (1995), 1-34 (p. 7).

⁴¹ Watt, p. 423.

desperate longing, is an intense relationship that is "not based solely on narrow modern normative heterosexual definitions of desire."⁴² Parallels between Berhtgyth's letters and the Old English "women's poems" also demonstrate the indeterminate boundaries between the rhetorics of sexual and fraternal love in the early medieval period. Peter Dronke suggests that Berhtgyth's language "comes close to that of the vernacular women's 'songs for a lover' (*winileodas*)", calling attention to parallels with *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*.⁴³ Watt follows Dronke in noting that *O frater, o frater mi* (O brother, o my brother) parallels *Wulf, min Wulf* (Wulf, my Wulf) in *Wulf and Eadwacer*.⁴⁴ The links between these texts outside the broad expressions of longing are not immediately obvious, however, as *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* were copied into a manuscript in Old English in England 200 years after Berhtgyth's letters were written in Latin on the Continent. Comparisons between the texts assume that the Old English poems were circulating orally long before they were recorded in the Exeter Book. The link between the female-voiced Old English poems and Berhtgyth's letters may speak to a modern desire to find a viable context for these mysterious Old English texts, as well as to connect Berhtgyth with a long oral tradition of women's laments in the vernacular.

⁴² Ibid., p. 423.

⁴³ Dronke, p. 31. Fell argues that the letters are 'more evocative of the isolation, age, and exile tones in *The Wanderer*'. See Fell, 'Some Implications', p. 40. Another link between Berhtgyth's letters and Anglo-Saxon poetry is her use of alliteration in the poetry of letters two and three. As Stevenson points out, 'alliteration is a central structural principle in Old English poetry, and is, understandably, often used by Anglo-Saxon authors writing in Latin'. Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, p. 95.

⁴⁴ Watt, p. 419. The parallel with *Wulf and Eadwacer* could be even more interesting than Watt and Dronke suggest, however, as it is far from clear that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is a poem spoken by a woman to her absent lover. Critics have variously suggested that the speaker is a mother lamenting the death of her son, a mother whose son has been sent away as a hostage, an adulterous wife or daughter, or a woman who has been taken hostage lamenting the loss of her husband. A comparison between Berhtgyth's letters and *Wulf and Eadwacer* therefore shows the range of relationships that could be invoked by this rhetoric of love and loss. See: Dorothy Warwick Frese, "'Wulf and Eadwacer": The Adulterous Woman Reconsidered', *Notre Dame English Journal*, 15.1 (1983), 1-22; J. A. Tasioulas, 'The Mother's Lament: *Wulf and Eadwacer* Reconsidered', *Medium Ævum*, 65.1 (1996), 1-18; Marijane Osborn, 'The text and context of *Wulf and Eadwacer*', in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. by Martin Green (Toronto and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), pp. 174-89; and Pat Belanoff, '*Ides...geomrode giddum*: The Old English Female Lament', in *Medieval Women's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. by Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 29-46.

Berhtgyth's letters do not only witness the relationship between her and her brother but potentially gesture towards her relationship with women in her monastery. In her translation of the poem that ends Berhtgyth's second letter, Jane Stevenson points out that the feminine plural noun *victrices* (victresses) is used to describe Berhtgyth and her brother rather than the grammatically correct masculine plural *victores* (victors).⁴⁵ Watt suggests that this "may indicate that the poem was first written for another woman".⁴⁶ It seems unlikely that this grammatical inconsistency is a scribal error here, as it is more likely that the scribe would correct the grammar than accidentally amend it incorrectly. In publishing these three letters alone, without the other letters of the Boniface circle, syntactical choices such as these can be studied more closely, and I hope that this edition will promote more investigation of Berhtgyth's grammar, style and syntax.

⁴⁵ Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, p. 95.

⁴⁶ Watt, p. 421.

The Edition

The edition is based on the facsimile edition of the sole extant manuscript described above.

Orthography: I have kept the orthography of the manuscript, apart from changing u to v where appropriate. This decision means that there are some spelling inconsistencies in the edition (for example, we find both *secula* and *saecula* within letter two). Abbreviations have been expanded without comment.

Punctuation and Capitalization: For convenience, the edition utilises modern punctuation and spacing, including laying out the poetry with line divisions. I have capitalized proper names (Aldraed, Balthard), as well as names for the individual personages of the Trinity (*Dominus, Deus*).

Text Symbols: Editorial additions in text are indicated by square brackets.

Critical Apparatus: For ease of reading, I have emended scribal errors in the edition text and the original manuscript reading is in the lettered footnotes. I have pointed out Biblical allusions in starred footnotes. The original letter number from Tangl's 1916 edition is also provided for ease of reference.

The Translation

The translation is primarily concerned with allowing students access to the original Latin text. I have therefore translated as closely as possible throughout. I have chosen to translate the poetic text in prose for ease of reading.

ITEM EPISTOLA

Fratri unico atque amantissimo . N . H . ultima ancillarum Dei in Christo salutem.

Quid est, frater mi, quod tam longum tempus intermisisti, quod venire tardasti? Quare non vis cogitare quod ego sola in hac terra et nullus alius frater visitet me, neque propinquorum aliquis ad me veniet? Etsi ideo facis quia adhuc^a nihil potui, secundum quod mens mea diligenter voluisset, aliquid beneficii^b inpendere, tamen caritatis atque adfinitatis iura, nullo alio suadente aut mente^c tua mutante^d, debes obliviscere. O frater, o frater mi, cur potes mentem parvitatatis meae adsiduae merore fletu atque tristitia die noctuque caritatis tuae absentia adfligere? Nonne pro certo scies quia viventium omnium nullum alium propono tuae caritati? Ecce non possum omnia per litteras tibi indicare. Iam ego certum teneo quod tibi cura non est de mea parvitate.

^a *quiadhuc*

^b *beficii*

^c *mens*

^d *mutando*

* Tangl 143.

ANOTHER LETTER*

Only and most beloved brother N. H., the last of the handmaids of God salutes you in Christ.

Why is it, my brother, that you have let so long a time pass, that you have delayed to come? Why do you not want to remember that I am alone on this earth* and no other brother visits me, nor any family members will come to me? Even if you do not visit because I have not been able to grant a certain favour, even one my mind most diligently wanted, then you must be forgetful of the bonds of love and kinship if nothing else persuades you or changes your mind. O brother, o my brother, for what reason can you afflict my mind with grief, tears and sadness about my constant insignificance by day and night through the absence of your love? Do you not know for certain that I place no other of all those living ahead of your love? Behold, I cannot make all this known to you in writing. Already I feel certain that you have no care for me in my insignificance.

* I have translated 'in hac terra' as 'on this earth' here to fit with the exaggerated tone of the letter overall. However, it could also be translated as 'in this country', or 'in this land', which would suggest that Balthard is no longer in the same country as Berhtgyth.

ITEM EPISTOLA

Dilectissimo fratri in Domino et in carne carissimo, Balthardo Berhtgyth in Christi nomine salutem.

Tedet animam meam vitae meae* propter amorem fraternitatis nostrae, ego enim sola, derelicta et destituta auxilio propinquorum. Pater enim meus et mater mea dereliquerunt me, Dominus autem adsumpsit me.* Multae sunt aquarum congregationes* inter me et te, tamen caritate iungamur quia vera caritas numquam locorum limite frangitur. Sed tamen dico quod umquam non recessit tristitia ab anima mea, neque per somnium mente quiesco, quia fortis est ut mors dilectio.* Nunc ergo rogo te, dilectissime frater mi, ut venias ad me aut me facias venire, ut te conspiciam antequam moriar, quia numquam discedit dilectio tua ab anima mea. Salutatur te in Christo, frater, soror tua unica. Oro pro te sicut pro me, diebus ac noctibus, horis atque momentis, ut sanitatem semper habeas cum Christo.

* Job, 10.1.

* Psalms 27.10.

* Genesis, 1.10.

ANOTHER LETTER*

Most beloved brother in God and dearest in the flesh, Berhtgyth salutes Balthard in the name of Christ.

My soul is weary of my life because of our fraternal love, for I am alone, left behind and without help of kin. For my father and my mother abandoned me, but the Lord has taken me up. Many are the congregations of water between me and you, yet let us be joined in love because true love is never divided by the borders between places. But still I say that sadness never recedes from my soul, nor can I rest my mind in sleep, because love is as strong as death. I therefore ask you now, most beloved brother, to come to me or have me come to you, so that I might see you before I die, because your love never leaves my soul. Brother, your only sister salutes you in Christ. I pray for you as for myself, in days and nights, in hours and moments, that you might always have health with Christ.

* Song of Songs, 8.6.

* Tangl 147.

Vale, vivens feliciter, ut sis sanctus simpliciter.
Tibi salus per saecula tribuatur per culmina
Vivamus soli domino vitam semper in seculo.
Profecto ipsum precibus peto profusis fletibus^a
Solo^b tenus sepissima subrogare auxilia
Ut simus digni gloria ubi resonant carmina
Angellorum laetissima, aethralea laetitia,^c
Clara Christi clementia, celse laudis in secula.
Valeamus angelicis victrices iungi^d milibus
Paradisi perpetuis perdurantes in gaudiis

Elonqueel et Michael, Acaddai, Adonai, alleuatia, alleluia.

^a *flectibus*

^b *sola*

^c *laetititia*

^d *iunge*

* In my translation of *victrices* as 'victresses' here, I follow Jane Stevenson in her monograph *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender and Authority, from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 95. This translation calls attention to the feminine collective noun, suggesting the poem could first have been written for a female companion.

Farewell, living happily, so that you might be holy in simplicity.
May eternal health be granted to you by the heights. Let us live life
only for God, always forever more. Indeed, I seek this very thing in
my prayers, to ask for His aid most frequently with tears pouring
down to the ground, so that we might be worthy of glory where the
most joyful songs of the angels resound, the joy of heaven, the clear
compassion of Christ, He of high praise forever. May we thrive,
victresses* joined with the angelic thousands, living forever in the
perpetual joys of paradise.

Elonqueel and Michael, Acaddai, Adonai, alleuatia, alleluia.^{e*}

* These names appear to be 'names for God in garbled Hebrew', and it's possible that she thought they would function as a guarantee that her prayer for salvation would be heeded. This list of magical names 'is not a usual aspect of Anglo-Saxon Christian writing, and is not paralleled elsewhere in the mission's letter collection'. See Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, p. 95. However, a parallel could be found in the obscure codes used elsewhere in the Vienna Codex, including a coded alphabet used in some of the letters and a palindrome on f. 39v. See Unterkircher, pp. 27-9.

ITEM EPISTOLA

In nomine Domini nostri Iesu Christi et in sancta Trinitate,
dilectissimo fratri unico Baldhardo, perennem in Christo salutem.

Notum sit tibi quo venerunt ad me verba legationis tuae per
fidelem nuntium nomine Aldraed, similiter et munera quae cum
intima caritate amplexi. Et nunc fateor tibi quod implere desidero
auxiliante domino* omnia quae praecepisti mihi, si dignetur
voluntas tua venire ad me, quia ullomodo fontem lacrimarum*
adquiescere non possum. Quando video et audio alias ituras^a ad
amicos suos, tunc recolo quod a parentibus in iuventute^b derelicta
fui et sola hic permansi. Et tamen domino derelicta non fui, sed
gratias ago deo de immensa eius pietate, quam sepe non
merentibus per misericordie suae viscera* donare consuevit, et sic
nos incolumes servavit.

* The manuscript has an interpunct here and capitalizes *omnia* as the start of a new sentence. However, as I can't find a way to translate this with the interpunct, I have removed it in my edition.

* Jeremiah, 9.1.

ANOTHER LETTER*

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the holy Trinity, only and
most beloved brother Balthard, I salute you forever in Christ.

It may be known to you that your missionary words came to me
through a faithful messenger named Aldraed, together with gifts
that are embraced with intimate love. And now I confess to you
that with the help of God I long to fulfill all that you instructed me,
if your will might deem it worthy to come to me, because I cannot
in any other way suppress my fountain of tears. When I see and
hear other women going to travel to their friends, then I recall that
I was abandoned by my parents in my youth and I remain here
alone. And yet I was not abandoned by the Lord, but I give thanks
to God for the greatness of his tenderness, which He has often been
accustomed to give those who are not worthy through the vital
organs of his compassion, and so He preserves us unharmed.

^a *ituros*. I have chosen to change *ituros* to *ituras* here, but *alias* could also be changed to *alios* if Berhtgyth is discussing male and female travelers.

^b *iuventute*.

* Luke, 1.78.

* Tangl 148.

Et nunc, frater mi, adiuro te atque deprecor ut auferas tristitiam ab anima mea, quia valde nocet mihi. Dico enim, quamvis unius diei spatium sit et iterum perrexeris iubante domino in voluntate tua, tamen recedit tristitia ab anima mea^c et dolor^d de corde meo. Sin autem displicet tibi implere^e petitionem meam, tunc deum testem invoco quod in me numquam fit derelicta dilectio nostra. Et nunc vere dico tibi quod meliora nescio, si venire vis illuc quam hic maneam sin autem aluit aliter tibi melius^f placet. Tunc indicare possum quod mens mea desiderat, ut eveniam illuc ubi requiescunt corpora parentum nostrorum et temporalem vitam ibi finire, et pervenire ubi perfecta mansio esset cernitur, et regio vivorum et gaudia angelorum sine fine laetantium. Vale in Christo.

^c *ame*. This could also be read as *a me*, in apposition to *anima*, giving 'from my soul, from me'.

^d *dolo*

And now, my brother, I entreat you and I pray that you might take away the sadness from my soul, because it injures me greatly. For I say, even though your visit might be the space of a single day and you might leave again with the lord commanding your will, still the sadness would recede from my soul and the pain from my heart. But if it displeases you to fulfil my petition, then I call upon God as a witness that our love might never become destitute within me. And now I say truly to you that I don't know what would be better, whether you want to come here to the place where I wait, or on the other hand if it would please you better if it happened differently. Then I can reveal what my mind longs for, that I come there where the bodies of our parents rest and finish this temporary life there, and arrive where the perfect home, the country of the living, and the joy of angels rejoicing without end might be distinguished. Farewell in Christ.

^e *implere*

^f *melior*

Munuscula, quamvis parva, tamen cum maxima caritate honerata,
quod tibi direximus per fidelem nuntium nomine Aldraed; id est
vittam unam.

Pro me, quaero oramina precum pendent precipua,
Tua formosa famina, tuae sophe [sci]entia^h.
Uti nova ac vetera, uti dira discrimina,
Christus abolet criminaⁱ cum inmensa clementia
Ut armata angelicis vallata legionibus
Dextro ac levo latere, dialique maiestate.
Have care crucicola^j salutata a sorore^k.
Fine tenus feliciter famam serva^l simpliciter.

^h *entiae*. The first section of the word is missing in the manuscript; I have proposed *scientia* here.

ⁱ *cremina*

A little present, although small, still loaded with great love, which
we send to you by the faithful messenger named Aldraed; that is a
ribbon.

May the most important requests of your prayers expand for me, I
ask, your beautiful words, O wise man in your wisdom. Christ with
His great mercy armed by angels and surrounded by armies on the
right and left sides abolishes sins, cruel hazards, both new and old,
with heavenly majesty. Farewell O most beloved servant of the
cross saluted by your sister. Preserve your reputation simply and
happily until the end.

^j *cruciola*

^k *sorere*

^l *serve*

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