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RELATIVE IDENTITIES: FATHER-DAUGHTER INCEST IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

by

Erin Irene Mann

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in English
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

July 2011

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Jonathan Wilcox
Associate Professor Kathy Lavezzo

ABSTRACT

Medieval tales of father-daughter incest depict more than offensively dominant fathers and voiceless, victimized young women: these stories often contain moments of surprising counternarrative. My analysis of incest narratives foregrounds striking instances of feminine resistance, where daughters act independently, speak unrestrainedly, adopt masculine behaviors, and invert masculine gazes. I argue that daughters of incestuous fathers participate in a complex back-and-forth of attraction and rejection that thrusts the fraught nature of the incest into sharp relief, revealing the ways in which medieval families—as well as the medieval church and state—constructed and deconstructed identities and sexualities. Extending Judith Butler's insights on how incest tales interrogate state and kinship networks, I show how the liminal position of daughters in the family destabilizes the sex/gender system as it functioned in both the family and the larger world, secular and sacred. My dissertation thus relocates daughters from the periphery to the center of the medieval family. Christian thematics likewise provide a key framework for both my argument and medieval audiences: biblical translations and retellings, saints' lives, and moral exempla offered familiar points of reference. By revealing how authors and artists employed well-known religious stories to impart political readings of sexuality and of the family, the four chapters of my dissertation assert daughters' key role in medieval Christian culture. I examine both Anglo-Saxon texts—the biblical epic *Genesis A* and the prose *Life of Euphrosyne*—as well as the late medieval poem *Cursor mundi* and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*. My readings are enhanced by recourse to the medieval visual record offered by three manuscripts that illustrate the Lot story—British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, the Old English Hexateuch, and Oxford Bodleian Library MSS Junius 11(the *Genesis A* manuscript) and Bodley 270b, a *Biblé moralisée*. Artistic renderings of father-daughter incest are no less unsettled than their literary counterparts, and demonstrate that the position of daughters was so

fundamentally unstable that it often varied not only within an era, but also within a single manuscript. I argue that authors and artists radically reimagined the fundamental texts of the Middle Ages, including the Old Testament, to establish new narratives of sin and salvation, self and other, and power and submission.

Abstract Approved: _____
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
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Kathleen Kamerick

For
Katherine Hathaway Crain
(1920-2003)
and
Janice Frost Kennedy
(1936-2009)

Hast thou daughters? Have a care of their body, and shew not thy countenance gay towards them. Marry thy daughter well, and thou shalt do a great work, and give her to a wise man.

Sirach 7:27

Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear:
and forget thy people and thy father's house.

Psalms 44:11

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DOE	Dictionary of Old English, Web Corpus
EETS	Early English Text Society
e.s.	Extra series
MED	Middle English Dictionary, Web Corpus
o.s.	Original series
PL	Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina, ed. J.P. Migne

INTRODUCTION

Wer sæt æt wine mid his wifum twam
ond his twegen suno ond his twa dohtor
swase gesweostor ond hyre suno twegen,
freolico frumbearn; fæder wæs þær inne
þara æþelinga æghwæðres mid
eam ond nefa. Ealra wæron fife
eorla ond idesa insittendra.[1]

[A man sat at table with his two wives and his two sons and his two daughters, dear sisters, and their two sons, noble firstborn children; the father of each of those princes was therein with them, uncle and nephews. In all there were five men and women of those sitting within.]

Exeter Book Riddle 46 offers at first blush a quiet scene of domestic tranquility: a man sits at dinner—literally, "at wine,"—with his family. The entirety of the riddle pertains in an intimate tableau; nothing else happens and there is no narrative development beyond this moment of familial conviviality. Moments of communal dining are not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon poetry, as *The Wanderer* and numerous other poems obsessed with *seledreamum* have demonstrated; a longing for the joys of the hall is one of the identifying characteristics of Anglo-Saxon elegiac poetry. The family in this riddle appears to be quite extended, with sons and sisters and nephews and fathers and uncles all at hand, but complicated familial relationships and the fellowship of feasting seem to go hand-in-hand, as repeated scenes in *Beowulf* demonstrate. But where *Beowulf* willingly reveals to its audience the end result of its characters' political and interpersonal maneuverings (as when Freawaru's drink distribution presages the wedding-feast feud between the Heathobards and the Danes[2]), this riddle depends on confusion engendered by a numerical sleight-of-hand that obscures, rather than resolves, the familial

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[1] George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936): 205. Translation my own.

[2] *Beowulf: An Edition*, ed. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): ll. 2020-2069.

relationships at play. Despite all of the family members listed, only five men and woman are at the table.

Of course, the riddle's solution is fairly obvious to any reader familiar with the events of the Old Testament book of Genesis, and it is that familiarity that provides narrative motion and energy to an otherwise frozen tableau. The man at wine is Lot, his two wives are also his two daughters, and their sons are also his sons; he is likewise their maternal uncle (*eam*) and, though it goes unstated in this brief portrait, their grandfather. The riddle turns on the incestuous encounter between Lot and his daughters after the destruction of Sodom, reported in Genesis 19:30-38. Indeed, even modern critics have included Riddle 46 in their count of "obscene" Anglo-Saxon riddles, based presumably on its subject matter, given that the riddle itself offers no action, let alone sexual action, as Melanie Heyworth argues.[3] However, this version of the story, which is significantly less conservative than the more straightforward reports offered by both *Genesis A* and Ælfric's translation of Genesis in BL Ms. Cotton Claudius B.iv., pushes the reader to imagine the confusion that must have reigned in Lot's household after the birth of his sons—a titillating scene normally foreclosed by the source text's abrupt abandonment of Lot and his family at the end of Genesis 19. Despite its rather flippant tone and underlying humor—the mention of *wine* in the first line winks at Lot's drunkenness, which engendered the tableau in the first place—the riddle's frank presentation of this excessively insular family points to the very ways that incest obscures identity and uncomfortably multiplies and complicates relationships. The implicit question at the heart of the riddle is this: how could a household possibly function with such a confusion of roles?

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[3] Melanie Heyworth, "Perceptions of Marriage in Exeter Book Riddles 20 and 61," *Studia Neophilologica* 79:2 (2007): 171-84, at 171.

The riddle concludes by stating that there are only five men and women—*eorla ond idesa*—at table. The simplicity of this final statement reinforces the problem at hand; the most that can possibly be said about these people is that they are men and women. They are gendered, but their familial positions are impossible to pin down with any certainty. Setting aside the solution for a moment and taking the riddle at face value only, it becomes apparent that the relationships presented are grounded firmly in the uncertain identity of that first *wer*. Lot is constructed as a patriarch from whom a familial line descends. The riddle repeats the possessive pronoun *his* three times in rapid succession when describing the other diners: *his wifum*, *his suno*, and *his dohter*. In fact, these are the most critical relationships for understanding the riddle, despite the attempt to distract with other descriptions of them. Throughout their appearance in Genesis, and often in subsequent literary revisions of the story, Lot's daughters have no identity separate from him and their function as the mother of his sons. Certainly the Genesis narrative offers few details—the daughters are never named or described. We know that they are virgins before they escape the city because Lot attempts to offer them to satiate the Sodomites by advertising it (Genesis 19:8). We know that they have fiancés (Genesis 19:14) who ultimately do not avoid a fiery death in Sodom. Beyond that there is nothing of them except the incestuous encounter with their father. The sons, at least, are given names—Moab and Ammon, progenitors of the Moabites and Ammonites. And of course Lot himself has a clear identity; his biography is interwoven with that of the ultimate patriarch, Abraham. But the daughters are, at least on the surface, mere ciphers in the perpetuation of a system of sexual behavior and mores that remain troubling to this day.

What Riddle 46 points to most fervently is the confusion and anxiety that incest engenders. The multiplicity of relationships that centers this riddle creates an anxiety about familial roles and power structures that recurs in other treatments of the tale, and in fact throughout medieval thought on incest. Chaucer's Parson, for example, goes so far as to remark of incest that "This synne maketh hem lyk to houndes, that taken no kep to

kynrede."[4] Incest is somehow dehumanizing, perhaps because of its inherent disorienting effect. Not only did incest impair its perpetrators' ability to follow the dictates of kinship, it posed a dangerous challenge to the recognized hierarchy of a proper family: "Father-daughter incest is the negation of the social and public act of marriage, even the negation of society itself. It is, therefore, the worst sin against the foundations of patriarchal society and its system of exchange. Father-daughter incest is also subversive in another sense: it recognizes the father's desire for the daughter and thus the possibility that the father could be seduced by the daughter," Maria Bullon-Fernandez argues.[5] Both of these prospects—loss of social order and loss of patriarchal authority—suggest that incest, and in particular father-daughter incest, is a subject of immense delicacy in the Middle Ages, despite Riddle 46's tone and the general frequency of incest as a plot device in medieval literature. Incest disrupts the apparently stable systems of kinship that organize society, or perhaps expose the native instabilities that are dangerous to acknowledge.

This confusion, however, opens up space for characters constrained by the strict hierarchies of medieval family life. Daughters, in particular, are able to offer resistance, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, to acts of sexual exploitation that seem otherwise to prevent the formation of an identity independent of their father's. In Riddle 46, the audience is given very little sense of character in the poem's brief lines, and yet the repetition and revision of identities around which the riddle is posed suggest that daughters can—indeed, in some senses must—be independent of their fathers. The riddle implies that the daughters have sons and husbands of their own, and that these relationships make them persons independent of their father, to be counted on their own.

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[4] *Parson's Tale* l. 906. In *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

[5] *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's Confessio Amantis: Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004): 18.

What ultimately turns out to be repetition is in fact a means of revealing the ways in which family members construct identities with or without patriarchal approval. This subversive impulse, in addition to providing room for feminine agency, also exposes masculine weakness. Throughout this project I investigate the way that father-daughter incest in religious literature is used to examine and critique medieval family life, and more specifically to construct the gendered and sexual identity of not only daughters, but also fathers and families as a whole. I appeal both to the literary record and to the perspective offered by contemporary manuscript illustration, which at various points both reinforces and undermines the primary texts at hand. Text and image often work together to suggest incest's ultimately polysemous and unsettled meaning. Their interaction provides a subsequently more nuanced look not only at prevailing wisdom on incest and gender identity, but also a better understanding of how a text's physical presence affected its emotional, moral, and artistic impact.

I have chosen to focus this project on religious literature because of the rich nexus of historical, cultural, and personal meaning upon which its authors could and did draw when attempting to understand and explicate the difficult subject of incest. As Malcolm Godden asserts, "The Old Testament took for granted attitudes and emphases that seemed strange to a different society; in their responses and retellings, we can find the English registering their own anxieties and obsessions, sometimes by introducing sexual issues where they were not evident before."[6] In other words, the common vocabulary and canon of literature and instruction provided by the medieval church on the subject of incest (and morality in general) gave authors a frame within which they could negotiate and attempt to resolve problems of gender and sexuality as it functioned first within the family and

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[6] Malcolm R. Godden, "The Trouble with Sodom: Literary Responses to Biblical Sexuality," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 77 (1995): 97-119, at 97.

then within Christian society as a whole. While the same sort of frame exists in the conventions of the romance genre, where incest tales are also prevalent, romance does not, to my mind, offer the same nearly all-encompassing cultural pertinence of religious literature, nor does it have the productive historical breadth.

Theories of Incest, Medieval and Modern

Previous studies of medieval incest in literature have, by and large, either centered around romance literature or subsumed incest in a larger study of sexuality and transgression in penitentials and works of religious instruction. Of the former, the most prominent work is that of Elizabeth Archibald in her book *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. In it, Archibald traces the understanding of incest in the Middle Ages from its biblical and classical origins, and then investigates the many instances of incest or near-incest in medieval romance.[7] Elizabeth Scala, working along slightly more theoretical lines, reads incest a narrative absence, particularly in the work of Chaucer, in *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England*, and notes the suppression of speech inherent to incest narratives.[8] Although biblical narratives of incest are occasionally invoked as underpinning medieval concerns about endogamy, the most prominent study of the Lot narrative, Robert Polhemus's *Lot's Daughters*, offers only a glancing treatment of the medieval period.[9]

Grounded as it is in literature of a religious bent—revisions of the Old Testament, exemplars, and biblical illustrations—I have buttressed my project both by a historical

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[7] Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).

[8] Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[9] Robert Polhemus, *Lot's Daughters: Sex, Redemption, and Women's Quest for Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

understanding of sexuality in the Middle Ages and by a postmodern theoretical comprehension of incest's functions and effects on identity formation within the family. Incest is, to borrow a phrase, an utterly confused category, particularly in the medieval era and barely less so in our own. Modern theoretical comprehension of incest does not begin with Claude Lévi-Strauss, but he marks an important anthropological touchpoint for subsequent critics. Lévi-Strauss argues that "The multiple rules prohibiting or prescribing certain types of spouse, and the prohibition of incest, which embodies them all, become clear as soon as one grants that society must exist."[10] To put it another way, he posits that the incest taboo is constitutive of society in the way that it allows exogamous connections to be made between family groups—no taboo, no connections, no society. The unstated consequence of this construction is a "natural" sexuality, which exists before the taboo and is inherently incestuous. Interestingly, Lévi-Strauss offers a means of accessing medieval thought on incest: Augustine had adopted the incest taboo as constructive of societal bonds in *City of God* some 1500 years before Lévi-Strauss.

> For affection is now given its proper place, so that men, for whom it is beneficial to live together in honourable concord, may be joined to one another by the bonds of diverse relationships: not that one man should combine many relationships in his sole person, but that those relationships should be distributed among individuals, and should thereby bind social life more effectively by involving a greater number of persons in them.[11]

The idea that the incest taboo was a human law instituted by the Church for the good of its members persisted throughout the Middle Ages. The Church had long acknowledged

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[10] *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, ed. Rodney Needham, trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969): 490.

[11] Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R.W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 665. Augustine also notes the instinctive revulsion incest generates: "In addition, there is present in man a certain sense of honour, which is both natural and laudable, which prompts him not to direct towards a woman whom he is bound to respect and hounour as a kinswoman that lust—and lust it is, even though necessary for procreation—which, as we see, occasions shame even within the chastity of marriage" (667).

that incest was a (perhaps problematic) feature of its proto-history as evidenced by, in particular, the events of the Genesis narrative. Throughout the Middle Ages, Augustine's explication of biblical incest held sway over interpretations of the Creation narrative (Adam and Eve's children had no one else with whom to procreate), the Flood story (Noah's son Cham sees his father's nakedness and his offspring are cursed), and even explained the marriage of Abraham and Sarah (Sarah is Abraham's half-sister, a relationship that Abraham twice uses to protect her from advances by other men).[12] Augustine argued that incest was a necessary evil for the population of the world before the time of Abraham. After Abraham—that is, after the third age of the world—the population was large enough to make exogamous marriage more expedient, and thus the incest taboo was instituted to encourage the building of exogamous connections that promoted healthy society.

The word "incest" itself doesn't enter the English vernacular until the *Ancrene Wisse*, a conduct manual for anchoresses written around 1225, although clearly the concept was well entrenched in exegetical thought before then. In its discussion of "the Scorpion of Lechery," the *Ancrene Wisse* makes it clear that sexual sins, including incest, were not merely sins of deed, but also of spirit:

> Theo thah me mei nempnin wel, hwas nomen me i-cnaweth wel, ant beoth—mare hearm is—to monie al to cuthe: horedom, eaw-bruche, meith-lure, ant incest—thet is bituhe sibbe fleschliche other gasteliche. Thet is o feole i-dealet: ful wil to thet fulthe with skiles yettunge, helpen othre thider-ward, beo weote ant witnesse th'rof, hunti th'refter with wohunge, with toggunge, other with eni tollunge, with gigge lahtre, hore ehe, eanie lihte lates, with yeove, with tollinde word, other with luve-speche, cos, unhende grapunge, thet mei beon heaved sunne, luvie tide other stude for-te cumen i swuch keast, ant othre foreridles the me mot nede forbuhen, the i the muchele fulthe nule fenniliche fallen. [13]

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[12] Genesis chs. 3, 9, and 12 and 20, respectively.

[13] *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2000): Book 4, ll. 327-32.

> [These, then, one may name easily, by well-known names, and are—so much the worse—to many all too familiar: whoredom, adultery, loss of virginity, and incest—that is lechery between kin, fleshly or spiritual. That is divided in many parts: foul desire to that filth with consent of reason, helping others thitherward, to know and witness it, to hunt thereafter with wooing, with touching, or with any allurement, with flirtatious laughter, whorish eye, any light behavior, with giving, with wooing words, or with love speech, a kiss, ignoble groping, that may be capital sin, love-tide or other hour used to come in such a state, and other forerunners that must be avoided, if one does not wish to fall vilely into great filth.]

In fact, it seems that sexual transgression was accomplished not *primarily* by action, but by desire, by witness, by thought, and by temptation in as many forms as the author can name. This construction of sexual sin, as much internal as external, persisted throughout the Middle Ages, as the fourteenth-century conduct manual *The Book of Vices and Virtues* confirms in its own explanation of incest.[14]

Incest was, first and foremost in medieval thought, a sin. Conduct manuals like *The Book of Vices and Virtues* commonly include it as a branch of Lechery or Luxuria, and virulently condemn it along with such transgressive acts as sodomy, masturbation, and bestiality. Incest is often punished with relative severity in the penitentials—the ninth-century Penitential of Pseudo-Theodore assigns father-daughter incest a 15-year penance. Sodomy only gets ten years. Murder of a priest? Seven.[15] When incest appears in ecclesiastical court records, it is most often in a case for the dissolution of a noble marriage. Such marriages were sometimes deliberately contracted between relatives with the underlying assumption that the Church would be forced to grant annulment should the

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[14] "Þis synne [lechery] is departed first in two maneres, for þer is lechereie in herte and lecherie in body. Lecherie of herte haþ foure degres, for þer is a spirit þat is cleped a spirit of fornicacioun, þ[at] serueþ for þe synne of lecherie. First he makeþ þou□tes come and þe figures and likeness of þat synne in a mannes or a wommannes herte, an d makeþ hym þenke þer-on. And after þe hirte abideþ and dwelleþ stille and deliteþ, & naþeles þe ne wolde no do þe dede for no þing. Þat ilke dwellyne and þe delyt þat is þe secunde degre may be dedly synne, □e, so gret may be the delit…." *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS o.s. 217 (London: EETS, 1942): 43.

[15] Megan McLaughlin, "Abominable Mingling: Father-Daughter Incest and the Law," *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 24 (1997): 26-30, at 27.

marriage prove unsatisfactory to its participants. This manipulation was made possible by the extreme confusion caused by canon law on incestuous affinity. Before the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the Church prohibited marriage between couples related by blood within the seventh degree and by affinity in the fourth. As these statutes suggest, the Church was far more concerned with incest as a question of endogamy than incest as a question of abuse and victimization. The vast majority of references to incest in the legal and historical documents of the Middle Ages are concerned with incest as a sin and a violation of the structures of exogamy that allowed society to function. Megan McLaughlin notes that in spite of this concern about endogamous marriage—certainly a matter with an enormous impact on women—both canon and secular law have little to say on the matter of father-daughter incest specifically.[16] What this absence of regulation might mean isn't entirely clear—Kathryn Gravdal reads it as an erasure, McLaughlin as an oversight in the law's form that was not present in its practice[17]—but what seems certain is that father-daughter incest was a particularly complicated issue in the Middle Ages, given the father's ostensibly complete control over his daughter's sexual interactions.

The *Ancrene Wisse* clarifies that incest is between those related either "fleshly" or "ghostly," that is, by blood or by affinity, and indeed, these were the two primary categories into which incestuous relationships were divided. Relationships of affinity were created by sacraments of the Church—the relationship of godparents to their godchild, for example, or a brother to his brother's wife. Monks, nuns, and priests were technically related by affinity to all Christians. The practical effect of the rules of affinity

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[16] Ibid., 29.

[17] Kathryn Gravdal, "Confessing Incests: Legal Erasures and Literary Celebrations in Medieval France," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32:2 (1995): 280-95, at 290; McLaughlin, "Abominable Mingling," 29.

and consanguinity was to forbid relationships not only between blood relatives—a third cousin, a great-grandchild—but also between godparents, godsiblings, and even more arcane "relatives." This system was so confusing that books on canon law such as Gratian's decretals often published carefully detailed charts clarifying available potential spouses. Needless to say, those living in small villages were prohibited from marrying virtually anybody they knew, and it meant that in practice, incest laws were flouted constantly. Recognizing the problem, the Church relaxed the incest prohibitions in 1215, allowing marriages beyond the fourth degree of consanguinity. Interestingly, the Church explicitly acknowledges the constructedness of the incest taboo at the beginning of Fourth Lateran's canon 50, stating, "It must not be deemed reprehensible if human statutes change sometimes with the change of time, especially when urgent necessity or common interest demands it, since God himself has changed in the New Testament some things that He had decreed in the Old."[18]

Incest is almost equally confusing in the modern era. Although canon law holds less overt sway, anthropological and other scientific explorations of the topic have proven problematic in other ways. Numerous theorists have critiqued Lévi-Strauss's positions, but none so relevantly for my interests as Judith Butler, who contends the incest taboo regulates desire and thereby produces in the subject a performance of compulsory exogamous heterosexuality. She argues that because the incest taboo is predicated on the exchange of women between men, it establishes gender roles and sexualities that must then be continued in order to prevent transgression of the "taboo." She also argues, most crucially, that the reiterative nature of the law—its extreme and persistent repetition *as* a

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[18] H.J. Schroeder, trans. and ed., *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937): 279.

law—allows space for subversion.[19] Throughout medieval religious texts dealing with incest, daughters subversively resist the totalizing construction of patriarchy that requires their silence and their submission. As Robert Polhemus suggests of the Lot story, "In the Lot myth, the objects of libidinous desire, the objects that power seems able to dispose of at will, themselves become empowered….the daughters take power over the father; the powerlessness of progeny becomes the power of progeny to determine the future."[20] They speak, as when Lot's daughters plan to save the human race, and they define themselves in the face of overwhelming opposition, as when Euphrosyne renames herself Smaragdus. Such repetition and constant potential subversion of enforced gender roles is the crux on which my readings turn.

Butler has also demonstrated that incest specifically can be a productive means of revealing the inner functions (and dysfunctions) of the kinship system. The confusion of kinship that incest creates, like that depicted in Riddle 46, offers women—usually marginalized, provoking, uncategorizable women—an opportunity to speak, audibly and effectively, to the very systems of power (and kinship) that marginalized them.

> Opposing Antigone to Creon as the encounter between the forces of kinship and those of state power fails to take into account the ways in which Antigone has already departed from kinship, herself the daughter of an incestuous bond…how her actions compel others to regard her as 'manly' and thus cast doubt on the way that kinship might underwrite gender, how her language, paradoxically, most closely approximates Creon's, the language of sovereign authority and action….[21]

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[19] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999): especially 52-55 and 83-85. She writes that the "repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as a negative or exclusionary code, but as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable (delimiting and constructing the domain of the unspeakable): the legitimate from the illegitimate" (83-84).

[20] Polhemus, *Lot's Daughters*, 11.

[21] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): 5-6.

Although Butler exposes the queering effect of incest on kinship and society with Antigone, who is herself a product, rather than a victim of incest, the same effect can be seen in tales of incest victims such as Euphrosyne and the daughter in the *Clerk's Tale*, as well as the ostensible perpetrators like Lot's daughters. However, Butler's approach in *Antigone's Claim* remains entirely secular—she does not examine the complicated moral and hierarchical struggles that attach when the Church is added to the negotiation between the family and the State. In the English Middle Ages, of course, these three entities were inextricably intertwined and must be considered together.

But these big-picture theories, essential as they are, generally describe how incest works on society and how society in turn creates the individual's subjectivity. They largely ignore the internal effects of incest and the incest taboo—internal to the family and to the individual herself. Although medieval authors mostly did not conceptualize incest as a form of abuse, they nevertheless recognized its problematic effects on the individual and the family. Authors grappled with incest as a challenge to authority, as a sin, and as an impediment to marriage. All of these aspects of incest necessarily reveal the structure and instabilities of the medieval family. Incest, regardless of the author's approach, seems to leave detectable traces on the family. The behaviors incest prompts are reflected in the actions of characters who both commit and suffer incest, and make modern theories of incest psychology immensely useful for my work.

Incest is most easily identified when sexual contact, whether forcible, coercive, or consensual, occurs between family members. This relatively simple definition is already complicated in the medieval era by canon law's broad definition of "relatives." It is further complicated by modern clinical theory, which has significantly expanded the definition of "contact," as well. "Covert incest," a phenomenon identified by psychiatrist Kenneth Adams, is comprised of a relationship in which the emotional needs of the

parent supersede the needs of the child, so much so that the child can come to take on the role of "spouse" to the parent.[22] While the Lot story does depict literal sexual contact between father and daughters, such contact is not a prerequisite of incest, in either modern or medieval thought, as the *Ancrene Wisse*'s precaution against sins of thought has demonstrated. Multiple medieval narratives depict incest as an excessive attachment or immoral attraction, actual but unconsummated, as in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* or the anonymous *Emaré* (both retellings of the popular Custance romance), in which fathers attempt but fail to make their daughters their literal brides. Identifying incest narratives requires a careful attention to the shape of relationships between family members, rather than a mere answer to a simple yes/no question of sexual contact.

Father-daughter interaction seems particularly prone to departure from an ostensibly asexual norm, and that deviation is often damningly reflected in the behavior of the family as a whole. Juan-Eduardo Tesone has identified a rough pattern of behavior that constitutes an incest family's symptomology. Although Tesone is a psychiatrist working with twenty-first century patients, I have nevertheless found that his theories can provide helpful insights to the behavior of characters in medieval literature, indicating a certain universality of incest's effects that is both revelatory and troubling. In incest families with a father-perpetrator, he contends, the identity of the entire family, and particularly of the daughter-victim, comes to revolve around keeping the father's secret and presenting the image of a perfect family—she becomes for him an extension of the self who exists at his whim and to do his will. "When an incestuous father uses his daughter's body to obtain a certain type of sexual pleasure, he negates her as a person, as a self distinct from him. In a relationship I would define as narcissistic-omnipotent, this is

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[22] Kenneth M. Adams, *Silently Seduced: When Parents Make Children Their Partners — Understanding Covert Incest* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: HCI, 1991).

the sense in which the father (or mother) abuses the child: the child's status as a separate self is denied," Tesone explains.[23] All of the texts considered in my project engage with questions of agency and identity, investigating the construction or repression of the female self within the incestuous family and the incest narrative.

The Case Studies

The first chapter of this project, "Harms and a Man: Lot's Failed Masculinity in *Genesis A*," investigates how father-daughter incest shaped tropes of medieval masculinity. I argue that Lot's incestuous encounter with his daughters inverts traditional Anglo-Saxon gender roles. The daughters' aggressive sexuality emphasizes Lot's repeated and failed attempts to assert a heroic masculinity, which in turn valorizes Abraham's successful turn as a warrior. Lot and Abraham were often contrasted in exegesis, but *Genesis A* takes that comparison to its logical extreme and thereby establishes a set of criteria for masculinity that integrates Old Testament morality with an Anglo-Saxon worldview, entirely at Lot's expense. The poem repeatedly feminizes Lot, questioning his status as patriarch and potential masculine exemplar. Lot follows rather than leads, stumbling repeatedly into situations from which Abraham must rescue him: kidnapping by the kings of the North and the destruction of Sodom both show Lot at his helpless worst. Even the illustrations of the poem's manuscript, Oxford Bodleian Library MS Junius 11, emasculate him: Lot cowers behind Sarah's skirts in one image and in another stands spearless among a band of armed warriors who reclaim him after his kidnapping. Lot's tale culminates with his sexual objectification at the hands of his daughters, who, like Sarah in the manuscript images, demonstrate power over Lot and solidify the poem's suspicions of Lot's weakness and fallibility. Lot's biography in

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[23] Juan Eduardo Tesone, "Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness," *On Incest: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Giovanna Ambrosio (London: Karnac, 2005): 51-64, at 58.

Genesis A affirms that incest often works against, rather than for, father-perpetrators by undermining, not reinforcing, their power. It also suggests an inventive poet who ably controls the biblical and patristic sources of his narrative, effectively translating his cultural context onto a larger biblical framework.

Shifting focus from the interrogation of masculinity to the investigation of feminine agency, Chapter Two, "Conflicting Voices, Conflicting Selves: Incest in the Old English *Life of Euphrosyne*," contends that although no literal incest takes place in Euphrosyne's vita, that text nevertheless sheds light on the gendered power dynamic that theorists and historians have located in father-daughter incest. When Euphrosyne rejects her father's oppressive construction of her sexuality by escaping his house disguised as a eunuch, she enacts a repression of the reciprocal desire between father and daughter, creating a new identity that resists external construction by men. In adopting the disguise of a eunuch and joining a male monastery, Euphrosyne in fact creates a new self, Smaragdus, a pious monk who is integrated (although not without difficulty) into the monastic community. Her sexual and psychological independence, although ostensibly exemplary, threaten masculine strategies of control over both community and family. Therefore she must be reintegrated into the patriarchal system of exchange: reconstruction of her identity in the father's image becomes itself an incarnation of incest, pointing to the essential danger of literary family life for daughters who refuse to be completely ruled by their fathers. I juxtapose Euphrosyne's negotiation of gender identity with the story of Lot depicted in the illustrations of the Old English Hexateuch, where Lot's daughters are enclosed and entrapped by their father's lust. The claustrophobic environment that provides visual resistance to the accompanying text's narrative of suppression and patriarchal validation and echoes the space of Euphrosyne's grave, where feminine identity is similarly shaped and assigned by a dominant masculine presence. While these narratives both ultimately disallow the fulfillment of feminine self-construction, their anxiety suggests that such a phenomenon was a distinct and

threatening possibility and offers some hope for the recognition of female agency in even the most aggressively masculine of narratives.

In Chapter Three, "'So faste hit draweþ to doun helde': Assigning Blame for Incest in *Cursor mundi*," I consider the instability of incest texts themselves. My examination centers on *Cursor mundi*, a popular fourteenth-century biblical epic that remains under-appreciated by scholars. This biblical epic offers telling evidence of exegetical uncertainty when it came to the treatment of incest in the Lot narrative. Although the poet's conservative impulse is to minimize female sexual power and to reinsert women into a familiar system where fathers control their daughters' sexuality and social importance, he is ultimately unable to firmly assign the blame for incest to Lot's daughters and thereby reinforce a traditional patriarchal hierarchy. His radical reading of human sexuality as flawed, along with his willingness to mitigate the incestuous actions of Lot's daughters, suggests a highly nuanced work that is willing to consider the value of women in the cycle of human genealogy that is the poet's ultimate interest. The uncertainty of blame in the Lot narrative becomes particularly apparent in comparison to contemporary treatments of the tale in the Middle English *Genesis* and BL MS Bodley 270b, a *Bible moralisée* whose allegorical reading of Lot's daughters is considerably less favorable than even the uncertain *Genesis*. Both texts reinforce the notion that medieval thought on incest, even in relation to a biblical narrative, was ultimately multifaceted and variable. The open question of blame throughout the Middle Ages interrogates the masculinist fantasy of blameless intrafamilial victimization offered by the biblical version of the story and suggests that medieval readers were not willing to accept even biblical narratives as infallible or stable.

The final chapter of my project returns to the genre of the exemplar to examine a more overt but equally unstable construction of feminine agency. Chapter Four, "Walter's Wives: Incest in the Public Eye in the *Clerk's Tale*," examines the effect that incestuous desires had on society as a whole. When Walter orders his exiled daughter

home in an extravagant procession, the spectacle that establishes her as Walter's bride likewise recreates her as the silent object of incestuous fantasy for her father, for his subjects, and for the Clerk's audience. If Sarah Stanbury suggests that the collective male gaze iconizes and abstracts feminine bodies, I demonstrate how that abstraction proves much more dangerous for unmarried women still under their fathers' control. Walter and his community use his iconized and silenced daughter to test Griselda's feminine submission, thereby erasing the daughter as an independent entity. Freed from the people's oppressive attention, Griselda can demand better treatment for her daughter, inverting the communal gaze and with it, the empathy of the audiences. By comparing the tale's two weddings and contextualizing them with contemporary church doctrine on marriage, I reveal the daughter's profound—and profoundly overlooked—disempowerment at the hands of her father, and foreground the power of Griselda's speech in contrast.

These chapters focus on texts from a wide swath of English literary history, offering a reminder of the multiplicity of treatments, tones, and techniques inherent to medieval authors and artists looking to address the sticky issues of family hierarchy, feminine agency, and biblical authority. It also, in several cases, a project of recovery for texts that have been under-attended by scholars, often because of their ostensibly conservative subject matter and mode of presentation. Both *Genesis A* and *Cursor mundi* suffer from overshadowing by more overtly radical or popular contemporaries (*Genesis B* and *Pricke of Conscience*, respectively), as well as a general reputation for workaday artistry, but nevertheless offer their own startling interventions for those willing to look. Likewise, the *Life of Euphrosyne* has been overlooked as a secondary, non-Ælfrician translation, and the daughter in the *Clerk's Tale*, like many daughters in Chaucer, goes entirely unmentioned in modern scholarship. Yet all of these texts offer important perspectives on feminine agency, as well as the function and form of the medieval family.

Recentering the scholarly gaze on daughters, and in particular on daughters of incestuous fathers, this project offers a provocative new assessment of medieval family dynamics and their effect on the identity and sexuality of not only daughters themselves, but of fathers, mothers, and the community at large. Accessing not only the literary but also the artistic record of incestuous relationships in religious narratives exposes the unsettled and unsettling dynamics of gendered power at work in these tales. I argue that authors and artists radically reimagined the fundamental texts of the Middle Ages, including the Old Testament, to establish new narratives of sin and salvation, self and other, and power and submission.

CHAPTER ONE

HARMS AND A MAN:

LOT'S FAILED MASCULINITY IN GENESIS A

"Onfoð þæm fæmnan," Lot says at the climax of the Sodom episode of *Genesis A*. As the men of Sodom pound on Lot's doors demanding a carnal introduction to his angelic guests, Lot proposes a disturbing solution: he proffers his daughters to the howling mob as substitute satisfaction for their rapacious appetites.[24] The offer is pointedly concise; although not as hypermetric and artistically complex as *Genesis B*, *Genesis A* is also not, generally speaking, given to complete thoughts that can be contained in a mere half-line. The brevity of the offer, "take the virgins," gives it immense weight, forcing the reader to pause and contemplate Lot's actions and their potential consequences. The daughters, as chattel, are not allowed to speak and are not spoken to. At this moment, all a reader knows of them is what Lot tells the Sodomites: there are two of them, and they are *unwemme*, pure (2466), and "ne can þara idesa owðer gieta / þurh gebedscipe beorna neawest" (2469-70) [neither of the women yet knows a man's nearness through bed-fellowship]. Perhaps the audience is to assume by *idesa* that they are of age, although it hardly seems to matter. Their worth to their father rests entirely in his right to bestow their virginity on men. They are, in this retelling, the objects of his proposal and nothing more.

Lot's offer is rejected and his attempt to mediate fails, as Lot fails at everything he attempts over the course of the poem: he cannot establish his independence from Abraham and is instead captured by hostile kings, he cannot survive in Sodom without

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[24] Line 2474a. All quotes from *Genesis A* are taken from A.N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Subsequent quotes will be cited parenthetically by line number in the text of the chapter. All translations from Old English are, unless otherwise noted, my own. For purposes of analysis, I have in most cases chosen to privilege literal meaning over poetic elegance.

divine intervention, and, most of all, he cannot control his daughters. I contend that the poet uses Lot to explore the tenets of masculinity in Anglo-Saxon society, particularly as they apply to issues of domestic power and masculine dominance. Indeed, it is Lot's familial relationships, or lack thereof, that establish his masculinity (or lack thereof). He is feminized in Abraham's household, no less a woman of the household than Sarah, and though he attempts to recoup his masculinity by establishing his own household in Sodom, he never reaches the same status of Anglo-Saxon warrior as the poet's Abraham does. Lot's masculinity and sexuality are constantly in question, and these questions are revealed through the poet's depiction of his relative power within the households of which Lot is a member.

The consequences of such an unsettled masculine identity are most interesting for the women of the poem, especially Lot's daughters. In the wake of his attempts to recover his masculine power in Sodom, Lot is driven from the city by the angels. Holed up in a cave on a mountain above Segor, his daughters intoxicate him with wine and beget children with him. Interestingly, instead of condemning this behavior, the poem seems almost to condone it, implying that a weak man deserves no more than to be ruled by women. This surprisingly progressive notion makes a clever stratagem for dealing with an otherwise awkward and disconcerting yet nevertheless important biblical episode with which most audience members would have been quite familiar. Although Hugh Magennis claims that "biblical poets are doubly uncomfortable with such sexual themes," and Clare Lees suggests that sexuality "is hardly a subject that matters" in *Genesis A*, the Lot episode demonstrates otherwise.[25] The poet adeptly employs this digression in the

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[25] Hugh Magennis, "'No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons'?: Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry" *Leeds Studies in English* XXVI (1995): 1-29, at 12; Clare A. Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:1 (1997): 17-46, at 25.

larger Abraham narrative to reinforce Anglo-Saxon masculine mores, making the poem more accessible and memorable all the while. Prurient interest in the story's sexual details is put to its best use.

I argue that this poem should also be memorable for modern scholars, dealing as it does with the intersection of masculinity and sexuality in Anglo-Saxon culture. The poem's persistent awareness of and discomfort with sexual deviance among the patriarchs is an essential characteristic of the Lot episode. William Burgwinkle argues that medieval texts dealing with transgressive or non-standard sexualities were highly marked:

> mere acknowledgement that there is the possibility of another way, a perversion of dogma that might escape detection, is enough to overturn and subvert the reading process; and this, in turn, calls attention to the text itself, to its own defensiveness and constructedness. Once sexuality is shown to exceed so effortlessly its framework (i.e., how it has been constructed as an attribute of gender within legal and theological documents), it becomes that much more difficult to contain the text itself within its own purported linguistic, thematic, and rhetorical boundaries. Identities, plots, and arguments in general begin to look constructed, pieced together around an absence.[26]

Incest, sodomy, and uncertain gender identity certainly "overturn and subvert" the retelling process in *Genesis A*, undermining well-established and seemingly unshakeable sexual and familial identities, pointing uncomfortably to the highly constructed nature of those identities. Indeed, the *Genesis A* narrative points out the ways in which Lot's character must be constantly *re*constructed in order to correct persistent resistance of the framework at hand.

While acknowledging the constructedness of Lot's gender in the poem, the reading I propose depends on, rather than rails against, the conservative impulses of the

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[26] William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 4.

Genesis A poet. Genesis *A* is not a particularly allegorical poem, as scholars observe repeatedly, and that assessment is perfectly in line with the poem's no-nonsense beginning that dives immediately into the events of Lucifer's Fall. The poem is, above all, a historical recitation of biblical events; the poet is primarily concerned with character and narrative development, not four-fold interpretation. Bennett Brockman writes that readers should not ignore "the poet's concrete, human interest in legendary material as we explore a much less pronounced abstract, intellectual interest in theological allegory."[27] Despite his status as only a minor patriarch, present in Genesis for only eight chapters and the focus of only one, Lot is one of the most well-developed characters in the poem. Because the poem is noted for its faithfulness to the biblical source material, the divergences in his story that help develop his character are especially worth exploring. Paul Remley notes that there are "only a few conspicuous poetical enhancements of the matter of the biblical Genesis, which are better regarded as natural features of an Anglo-Saxon versification: the amplified, perhaps characteristically Germanic treatments of the capture of Lot, Abraham's victory against the four kings and the destruction of Sodom."[28] Using a literal approach to the historical events of the source material, the poet attempts to massage the tale to fit an Anglo-Saxon worldview.

The poet's primarily literal and historical approach, however, does not in any way preclude influence from patristic exegetes, especially at their most literal and anagogical. The poem's probable close contemporary, Bede, takes a literal, explanatory approach to the events of the Lot episode in his commentary on Genesis, which makes it clear that Lot baffled some Anglo-Saxon audiences. Obviously aware of the moral quandaries

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[27] Bennett A. Brockman, "'Heroic' and 'Christian' in *Genesis A*: The Evidence of the Cain and Abel Episode," *Modern Language Quarterly* 35 (1974): 115-28, at 117.

[28] Paul G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in Genesis, Exodus, and Daniel*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 113-14.

posed by Lot's actions, Bede goes to some lengths to deny, explain, and whitewash him to preserve his status as an upstanding patriarch and relative of Abraham. He remarks of Lot's move to Sodom, for example, "It is thereby tacitly added to the merits of the blessed Lot that, living in that land among those native peoples, he could not be corrupted in any respect either by the fruitfulness of the rich soil, or by the example of his fellow inhabitants, from the integrity of his purity."[29] As an answer to the obvious question posed by his move—*why* does Lot choose to live in Sodom at all?—Bede's explanation is none at all. He simply rushes to assure his audience of Lot's faithfulness and purity, as he does repeatedly throughout his explication of the episode. He takes reassurance to such an extreme that it is defensive instead of convincing. Bede's anxiety seems to be taken up by the *Genesis A* poet, who intervenes to defend Lot's righteousness in the moment when he chooses to live in Sodom:

> þær folcstede fægre wæron,
> men arlease, metode laðe.
> wæron sodomisc cynn synnum þriste,
> dædum gedwolene, drugon heora selfra
> ecne unræd. æfre ne wolde
> þam leodþeawum loth onfon,
> Ac he þære mægðe monwisan fleah,
> þeah þe he on þam lande lifian sceolde,
> facen and fyrene, and hine fægre heold,
> þeawfæst and geþyldig, on þam þeodscipe,
> emne þon gelicost, lara gemyndig,
> þe he ne cuðe hwæt þa cynn dydon. (1933-44)
>
> [There the folk-dwellings were fair, the men honorless, hateful to the Creator. The kin of Sodom were bold in sin, erring in deeds; they suffered their own perpetual bad counsel. Lot would never adopt the customs of that people, but he fled the evil ways of those kinsmen, although he should live in that land, treacherous and sinful, and held himself fair, faithful to custom and patient among that people, even most as if he, mindful of teachings, did not know what that people did.]

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[29] Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. Calvin B. Kendall, *Translated Texts for Historians* 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008): 256.

Doane notes that the tradition of Lot's "singular goodness…among a wicked people" goes back to Jewish exegesis, and likewise acknowledges the influence of Bede.[30] However, Bede claims Lot's purity in spite of the recognized wickedness around him. The poem implies his ignorance by saying that he lived among them "even most as if he…did not know what the people did." This phrase is as ambiguous in Old English as it is awkward in modern. Is Lot genuinely ignorant, or merely *behaving* as if he were? The poet's intent is almost irrelevant here; the shadow of doubt haunts his phrasing, and any doubt is further complicated by his attempt to emphasize the extreme wickedness of the Sodomites who surround him, which poses a quandary: *how* can Lot be ignorant of such shameless behavior? And if he isn't really ignorant, can he really be innocent? These questions form the central, but perpetually unarticulated, conflict of the Lot narrative. At the same time, the questions are made moot by the mention of the Sodomites suffering their own perpetual bad counsel. Lot, regardless of whether his ignorance is real or feigned, is the very definition of *unræd*. He alone makes the decision to move to Sodom; Abraham offers no advice and Lot asks no questions. His ignorance makes him a poor leader and hence an inferior man.

Such conflicted readings of Lot may have been influenced by exegetes who would have been familiar to Anglo-Saxon religious thinkers, particularly those of Augustine, Jerome, and Origen. Augustine's interest in Lot as a character is relatively minimal, although the Sodom narrative is discussed in Book 16 of *City of God* as part of Augustine's larger analysis of Abraham. In these pages, it is clear that Lot is, if not inferior, then clearly secondary to Abraham in both power and importance. Of Lot's capture by the kings of the north, Augustine says merely, "Sodom was overcome, and Lot was led away captive; but Abraham restored him to liberty, bringing with him to the

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[30] Doane, *Genesis A*, 293, note to lines 1931a-44.

battle 318 of his trained servants, born in his own house, and winning a victory for the kings of Sodom. He did not, however, wish to bear away any of the spoils when the king on whose behalf he had won victory offered them."[31] In some respect, Augustine's very disinterest is a condemnation of Lot; he is beneath exegesis. He later commends Lot for recognizing the angels when they come to Sodom,[32] and offers an analysis of the fate of Lot's wife, but for the man himself he has little use.[33]

Origen, conversely, is neither obtuse nor coy in his condemnation of Lot. Of Lot's decision to live in Sodom in Genesis 13, he says:

> For Lot was far inferior to Abraham. For if he had not been inferior, he would not have been separate from Abraham nor would Abraham have said to him, "If you go to the right, I will go to the left; if you go to the left, I will go to the right." And if he had not been inferior, the land and habitation of Sodom would not have pleased him.[34]

Origen clearly has no doubts about Lot's questionable decision to live in Sodom which, as Origen sees it, undermines entirely Lot's status as an exemplary patriarch, especially as compared to Abraham. Lot could be used as "cipher for the salvation of the soul from eternal damnation," and an exemplar of the righteous among the wicked, but not without choosing a side in a long-standing debate.[35]

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[31] Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R.W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 729.

[32] Ibid, 742.

[33] "Again, Lot's wife remained, turned to salt, in the place where she had looked back, and thereby supplied the faithful with a seasoning of wisdom, as it were, so that they might beware of her example." Ibid, 743.

[34] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. and ed. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981): 103.

[35] Hans Martin von Effra, *Ikonologie der Genesis: die christlichen Bildtheme aus dem Alten Testament und ihre Quellen* (München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1989): 109. "Lots Errettung vor den Sodomitern und aus dem Untergang seiner Stadt ist schon im frühen Christentum als Gleichnis für die Errettung der Seele vor der ewigen Verdammnis verstanden worden."

Jerome, like Augustine, is central to Bede's interpretation of Genesis, both as an exegete and as the translator of the Vulgate from which Bede and the *Genesis* poet were likely working. Jerome's critique of Lot in his work *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* arises largely out of the incestuous interlude between Lot and his daughters at the end of Genesis 19, in which he accuses Lot of faithlessness which leads to the opportunity for a drunken sexual encounter, and comments that "the Hebrews put dots above what follows, *And he did not know when he slept with her and when she rose up from him*, as if it were unbelievable, and because nature does not allow any man to have sexual intercourse without knowing it."[36] Even though Lot is the acted-upon rather than the acting in the biblical narrative, his drunkenness and the biological facts of sex seem to make him, in Jerome's eyes, at least partially responsible for the incest. Even more potentially perturbing to Lot-redemptionist readers is an earlier and somewhat cryptic comment by Jerome on Genesis 13:13, the very verse where Bede and *Genesis A* begin their rigorous defense of Lot: "Here *in the sight of God* has been added unnecessarily by the Septuagint, since in fact the inhabitants of Sodom were evil and sinners amongst men. Rather, that man is said to be a sinner in God's sight who can appear as righteous amongst men."[37] Jerome does not clarify whether the latter sentence refers to Lot, but certainly Lot is often singled out, in literature as in the biblical narrative, as the "one righteous man" among sinners. Jerome's coyness here is frustrating but suggestive.

Feminized in Mambre

The unsettled understanding of Lot as a character in exegesis is reflected in the poet's apparent anxiety about the section's leading man. Even more problematic for Lot's

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[36] Jerome, *Hebrew Questions in Genesis*, trans. C.T.R. Hayward (Oxford: Clarendon 1995): 52. Emphasis in original.

[37] Ibid., 45.

character is the construction of warrior-masculinity as an ideal in Anglo-Saxon poetry. These principles are commonplace for scholars of *Beowulf*: boasting descriptions of heroic deeds, overt displays of strength and bravery, wise rulership of both self and others. Although this nostalgic ideal can never be fulfilled, even by Beowulf himself, it nevertheless structures Anglo-Saxon perceptions of dominant masculinity throughout the literary and artistic corpus.[38] The poet is quick to praise Lot, and yet the character is constantly undermined by events. The poetic phrases used to describe Lot are frequent and invariably positive: he is called "leoflic on life" (dear in life, 1713), "snytra gemyndig" (mindful of wisdom, 2465), and "fægre, þeawfæst and geþyldig" (fair, faithful to custom, and patient, 1941b-42). Even as the poem transitions to the incestuous encounter with his daughter, Lot is called "eadgra," that is, blessed (2597). Yet from the very first Lot is compared unfavorably to Abraham, not in word but in narrative deed. This comparison is somewhat natural, as the Lot episode is plopped in the middle of Abraham's story, intertwined with the latter's fathering of Ishmael and Isaac, but the poet takes the opportunity, as several scholars have noted, to enhance Abraham's status as Old English warrior-patriarch.[39] This enhancement is achieved at the expense of Lot's masculinity: Abraham's power, leadership, and performative masculinity outshine every other man in the narrative, but Lot, as a fully developed character, provides the best foil of all.

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[38] On Anglo-Saxon masculinity, see especially Clare Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Ann McNamera, eds., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[39] See, e.g., David Clark, *Between Medieval Men:Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009):109ff.; Heide Estes, "Abraham and the Northmen in *Genesis A*: Alfredian Translations and Ninth-Century Politics," *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns. 33 (2007): 1-13; Andy Orchard, "Conspicuous Heroism: Abraham, Prudentius, and the Old English Verse *Genesis*," *The Poems of MS Junius 11*, ed. R.M. Liuzza (New York: Routledge, 2002): 119-136; Allen Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 71ff.

Daniel Anlezark, among others, has noted that Abraham himself provided no end of complications for exegetes, given his often-questionable behavior. "Modifications of the biblical narrative in *Genesis A* also reveal a systematic attempt to gloss over…the 'sin' of the pre-Mosaic patriarch by carefully modifying any perception of misconduct on his part," Anlezark suggests.[40] The sin being suppressed at the beginning of the Lot episode is incest: Abraham and Sarah are half-siblings through their father, but the poem makes no mention of this. In the biblical version of the story, Abraham twice disguises Sarah as his sister when travelling in foreign lands, once immediately after the introduction of Lot, in Genesis chapter 11, and once again in Genesis chapter 20, where he justifies the practice: "Howbeit, otherwise also she is truly my sister, the daughter of my father, and not the daughter of my mother, and I took her to wife."[41] Although she is only his half-sister and this episode occurs before the establishment of the incest laws in Leviticus 18 and 20, which specifically prohibit marriage between siblings who share a father, the poem nevertheless omits mention of what an Anglo-Saxon audience would clearly have understood as an incestuous relationship.[42]

Abraham is largely defined throughout the poem by his longing for a son, which shapes his relationship to his wife, to Hagar, and to God himself. His narrative is fulfilled with Isaac's birth and sacrifice. In the meantime, though, a reader might expect that because of his overwhelming desire for an heir, Abraham's relationship to Lot would take

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[40] Daniel Anlezark, "An Ideal Marriage: Abraham and Sarah in Old English Literature," *Medium Aevum* 69:2 (2000): 187-210, at 195.

[41] Genesis 20:12. Biblical quotations taken from *The Vulgate Bible: The Pentateuch: Douay-RheimsTranslation*, ed. Edgar Swift, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[42] Abraham's marriage to his half-sister was a problem for exegetes, who were generally left to repeat Augustine's defense that the small population of the world in the first three ages justified endogamous marriage (*City of God* 15.16, 665-667).

on dimensions of the father-son aspect, or, at the very least, king-geoguð, a relationship of reciprocal protection and gift-giving central to the Anglo-Saxon warrior-masculinity ethos. It would seem logical, particularly for an Anglo-Saxon audience, that the relationship center on the relative masculinities of Abraham and Lot, especially the development of the younger's in relation to the elder's. In fact, it does center on that development, except the poem marks the *lack* of Lot's growth in relation to his uncle.

However, Lot's entrance in the genealogy translated from Genesis chapter 11 gives him quite a positive introduction:

> Ða wearð aarone eafora feded,
> leoflic on life. Ðam wæs loth noma.
> Ða magorincas metode geþungon,
> abraham and loth, unforcuðlice
> swa him from yldrum æðelu wæron
> on woruldrice. Forðon hie wide nu
> dugeðum demað drihta bearnum. (1712-18)
>
> [Then a son was brought forth from Aran, lovely in life. His name was Lot. Those youths, Abraham and Lot, grew before the Creator, excellently, as they had received noble natures from their elders in the kingdom of the world. Therefore they now judge the children of the multitudes among the hosts.]

Besides being quite flattering, this introduction is highly associative: Lot and Abraham are presented as the especially beloved of God. The poem assures its audience that in the poetic present, both men are judging in heaven, as Doane asserts.[43] The image is pleasing and entirely the poet's invention—the birth of Lot is not nearly so marked in Genesis, where it is merely a step in a genealogy: "And these are the generations of Thare: Thare begot Abram, Nachor, and Aran. And Aran begot Lot. And Aran died before Thare his father, in the land of his nativity in Ur of the Chaldees," the source narrative supplies, making no mention of Lot's qualities or of the eventual eternal fate of either man.[44]

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[43] Doane, *Genesis A*, 286, note to line 1718.

[44] Genesis 11:27-28.

While the poet's embroidery might comprise an attempt to decorate an otherwise dry recitation of generations and to foreshadow upcoming plot developments, the heavy emphasis on the eternally unblemished virtue of this lineage suggests an already-developing anxiety about imminent events. Certainly there existed throughout medieval biblical literature a concern to make Abraham's lineage as spotless as possible, as a direct forbearer of Christ. Lot's lineage is perhaps less important, but he is also in more need of whitewashing.

The men seem initially to be on more or less equal footing; their first appearance and their near-immediate departure for Canaan are both opportunities for the poem to foreground their similarities. Indeed, before they set out for Canaan, the text says,

> hine cneowmægas
> metode gecorene mid siðedon
> of þære eþeltyrf, abraham and loth.
> Him þa cynegode on carran,
> æðelinge bearn, eard genamon,
> weras mid wifum. (1733b-1738a)
>
> [Abraham and Lot, kinsmen chosen by the creator, traveled with him {Thare} from that homeland. Then the noble children of princes, the men with their wives, took for themselves a dwelling in Haran.]

Lot and Abraham seem largely equal in this short passage; they are both *metode gecoren* and clearly masculine: *weras mid wifum* establishes them both as men of reproductive age, as does their search for a land to inhabit independent of their progenitors. Yet immediately after this passage, God descends to speak to Abraham, and Lot is abruptly relegated to a new, inferior position, which he retains until his move to Sodom. Instead of a warrior, Lot becomes a dependent in Abraham's household, with no more power or agency than a child or a woman. His feminized position is made clear by the poet's phrasing and the manuscript's illustrations, both of which demonstrate a certain lack of masculine valor in Lot.

Upon Abraham's departure from his father at the beginning of his narrative, the poem recounts the members of the group rather oddly:

> þa com leof gode
> on þa eðelturf idesa lædan,
> swæse gebeddan and his suhtrian
> wif on willan. (1773b-1776a)
>
> [Then came the one dear to god leading the women into the native land, his own dear bed-companion, and the wife of his nephew with good will.]

The phrasing here is problematic, in that it initially seems to exclude Lot entirely. Doane believes that Lot's name has been lost and the reference to his wife brought forward in its place, which seems as likely an explanation as any; certainly we are not meant to assume that Lot has wandered off and will catch up later. More interesting is the question of *why* Lot's name is obscured here—why is he not leading the women with Abraham? The verb and the subject—*com leof*—are unambiguously singular, and they have an expressed referent in Abraham at line 1767a. "The one dear to God" is a significant change from Lot's introduction because it apparently refers only to Abraham, as opposed to earlier, when it was both Lot and Abraham judging in heaven. Here only Abraham is dear, and Lot is nowhere. Even if accidental, the omission points to Lot's obscurity and lack of importance in the narrative, and it does nothing for Lot's masculine position. He is included with the women instead of with Abraham as the group's leader, and in fact is left to take his identity and his presence from his wife's inclusion in the group. Sarah and Lot's wife, even though they are unnamed here, have a higher profile in the group, and Lot is implicitly included with them. Although this list of travelers led by Abraham may be an incidence of scribal error, the slippage is telling of Lot's character in the poem. Abraham is the head of their band, the one dear to God, and Lot is less than an afterthought.

The manuscript illustrations, in which Lot is no afterthought but a deliberate presence, reinforce the secondary and feminine nature of Lot's character. Although the manuscript's planned program of illustrations was never completed—it ends on page 88 (with the exception of one partially completed image on page 96) and leaves gaping blank spots in the manuscript—there is nevertheless ample evidence to extrapolate the artist's understanding of Lot's masculinity. Catherine Karkov asserts that it is rare for Anglo-Saxon manuscript illustrations merely to mimic visually the verbal content of the text, and that principle is readily apparent in Junius 11's depictions of Abraham and Lot.[45] It is clear that the artist valorizes Abraham and views him as the leader of the small band that moves to Haran. The main depiction of Abraham and Lot is the drawing on page 84 (fig. 1), in which the artist appears to subtly reinforce and question the relationship between the men. The illustration is divided into three parts that follow the narrative chronologically from top to bottom. The topmost image shows God commanding Abraham to depart from Harran; in the center image he does so, leading his household; and at the bottom of the page God speaks again to Abraham, reflecting the events of page 85. The top two sections are the most interesting for my purposes, given that they depict not only Abraham, but Lot. This is the first glimpse of either,[46] and as such, sets the tone for their characterization throughout the illustrated cycle.

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[45] Catherine E. Karkov, *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript* Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 7.

[46] A figure that looks quite like Abraham leads a group away from the Tower of Babel in the illustration on page 82, but narratively this is nonsensical and therefore unlikely, given the artists' general propensity for following the events with chronological (if not always thematic) faithfulness. More likely this is an instance of what Mary Olson calls "schematization," in which similar or identical figures are used to suggest a social position, in this case one of male leadership. Mary C. Olson, *Fair and Varied Forms: Visual Textuality in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts* Studies in Medieval History and Culture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2003): 41.

While in the top image Abraham stands outside his house, speaking with God on the left side of the illustration, a woman and a young, unbearded man stand inside the house, watching Abraham and God from the doorway. The narrative leads us to believe that these figures are Sarah and Lot, respectively, which poses some interesting interpretive questions. Lot stands slightly behind Sarah, his right hand obscured by her, perhaps meant to be resting on her back in a pose of kinship and affection. Karkov notes the prominence of Sarah's hands as a theme, joined to Abraham's, indicating their marriage and serving as a possible reference to God's covenant with Israel.[47] In this image, meanwhile, Sarah's hands are open and pointed toward Abraham, indicating, perhaps, her active listening or that she welcomes what she hears—while her fingers are not in the "speaking" gesture performed by Abraham (index finger extended) or the benediction gesture of God (index and middle finger extended), she is actively involved with the conversation.[48] This is a contrast to Lot, who seems to do nothing but watch. These relative characteristics demonstrate that Lot is simply accorded lower status than Sarah. Although he is indubitably a member of Abraham's household, he is not a man of equal status to Abraham here. Like a woman, he is left in the house to wait and watch passively. He is led not by Abraham but by Sarah, an important distinction for readers and viewers seeking to take a lesson from the pages of the manuscript. Karkov suggests that for

> both men and women, the genealogical material and the images of creation and procreation in Junius 11 provided lessons in proper conduct. Leaders who were faithful to the Lord prospered in lineage, wealth and kingdom. Women had the added responsibility of being loyal to their lords, and their prosperity was guaranteed

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[47] Karkov, *Text and Picture*, 98.

[48] Karkov notes, "More than anything else, the pointing finger and gesturing hand are used to provide the figures in Junius 11 with a sense of action and interaction, and the drawings with a sense of both life and the progress of the narrative" (Ibid., 42).

> through their obedient bodies, as the examples of Eve, Sarah and Mary make clear. If a king's role was to lead his people through adversity into plenty, a queen's role was to bear sons and ensure the continuation of both people and dynasty.[49]

Lot's loyalty to Abraham, combined with his deference to Sarah, strongly suggests that he takes the distaff in both the poem and the artist's interpretation of it. His later incestuous encounter with his daughters, of which most of the poem's audience would have been aware, demonstrates Lot's "obedient body" in the "continuation of both people and dynasty." Lot is, in depiction and deed, a woman.

Lot's status is no higher in the second image, wherein Abraham discovers a new dwelling in Canaan. Again Lot stands behind Sarah, and again his hand is obscured by her back. More interesting, however, is the fact that Lot stands between the two women of the group, and slightly behind him is a man with a spear who appears to have his hand on Lot's back. This man is a direct contrast to Lot—although he is young and unbearded, like Lot, he carries a spear like Abraham. His right hand is visible, and altogether he is to be taken as a figure of the *geoguð*, the young retainers who fight for a senior lord (here, Abraham) throughout heroic Anglo-Saxon literature. Lot, however, is unarmed, more associated with the women of the group than the men, although his dark clothes makes his familial relationship to Abraham clear. Abraham, meanwhile, appears to clasp hands with Sarah, clarifying their affective relationship and complicating the position of Lot's arms. His hands, obscured again by Sarah's skirts, cannot hold a spear, as Abraham and the other fully drawn man behind Lot do. He cannot defend the group or even himself and thus his handlessness hints at cowardice and femininity. Comparing Abraham's hands to Lot's is instructive—throughout the cycle of illustrations, Abraham is either depicted speaking, signaled by his open hands, or holding something. Twice he carries a spear, on pages 84 and 88. When he builds an altar on page 87, he is shown wielding an

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[49] Ibid., 157.

axe and then, lower on the page, offering a vessel. He is active, whether in defense of his family or worship of his god. Lot's hands are hidden and, presumably, empty. He is inactive, ineffectual. Unmanned.

Lot's position in the group is, again, secondary to Sarah; his importance as a patriarch is obscured by the importance of Sarah's marriage to Abraham. Lot's marriage, like his spear, is nowhere to be found, despite his wife's relative prominence in the text. A woman's head floats behind Lot and Sarah, and might be intended to represent Lot's wife, but could as easily be the wife of another man in the group—like them, she is drawn in red; Sarah is singled out by her green dress, which remains consistent between the two panels, and Abraham and Lot wear black. Nothing indicates the relationship of the woman's head to Lot, and his hidden hands render him incapable of forming a connection like the one between Sarah and Abraham. He is left an inert and inept member of Abraham's household. The positioning of Lot with Sarah not once but twice in this illustration suggests his position in the family as below not only Abraham, but also the family's matriarch, Sarah. The program of feminization established by the poem is reflected in the illustrations. Lot is a woman—and consequently a dependent and child—in Abraham's household.

We might contrast the powerless Lot of the Junius 11 manuscript with a roughly contemporary depiction in B.L. MS Cotton Cleopatra C. VIII, a Latin version of the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius with Anglo-Saxon glosses, a well-known and popular text in the Anglo-Saxon era.[50] Although the image of Lot on fol. 4v shows him bound and carried off by the kings of the north, Lot reappears in the image on fol. 5r, rescued and

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[50] Three full copies and a fragment survive from Anglo-Saxon England alone; the continental tradition is even richer. See Gernot Wieland, "The Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987): 213-31. Cited images from the *Psychomachia* may be found in Thomas Ohlgren, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration: Photographs of Sixteen Manuscripts with Descriptions and Index* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992): 474-75.

carrying a spear, at the front of Abraham's band of warriors. While he's clearly not more powerful than Abraham, he is not, by any means, power*less*. He seems to be an active participant in his own rescue, as is particularly suggested by his upright and forward-facing position in the second image. Also notable is that in both illustrations Lot is placed protectively in front of a woman, likely his wife. This Lot is powerful, active, masculine in spite of his captivity. Although the glosses in the manuscript focus largely on Abraham's triumph, its visual depiction of Lot seems to take his masculinity for granted in a way the Junius 11 manuscript illustrator cannot.

Indeed, Abraham remains the unquestionable hero in the poem's take on the events of Genesis 14, the attack on the Five Kings by the four Elamite kings of the north. The episode embodies a theme of divine right observed by John Gardner:

> The motif of God's military and more-than-military power appears in each major episode—in his establishment of the kingdom of heaven, Eden, Canaan, etc., in his placing at Eden's gates an armed angelic sentry whom no man's might can overcome, and in his victories over the disloyal angels, the evildoers of Noah's generation, the Sodomites who misuse his messengers, and so forth. In each case, God founds a kingdom and gives laws ("Go multiply; slay no kinsmen"), and those who obey his laws prosper, whereas those who do not are exiled into darkness or death. [51]

Certainly God's military prowess is on display as Abraham easily defeats the massed armies of the north with only 318 kinsmen behind him. Doane complicates the reading of this episode, seeing it as a highly significant marriage of heroic and biblical themes: "there is the added complexity and interest arising from the fact that the audience has certain well-established expectations regarding the text-based subject matter, and the pleasure is in seeing the interplay and resolution of the two contrasting sets of expectations."[52] The poem recounts, using traditional poetic, heroic descriptions of

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[51] John Gardner, *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975): 22.

[52] Doane, *Genesis A*, 297, note to lines1973b-2000.

battle— "Sang se wanna fugel / under deoreðsceaftum, deawigfeðera, / hræs on wenan" [The dark bird sang amid the dart-shafts, dewy-feathered, in expectation of the attack][53]— the successful attack of the northern kings on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities are defeated, and, as heroic convention demands, their women and gold are taken as spoils. It is in this episode, Andy Orchard contends, that the poem's Teutonic roots are most apparent, an "altered focus" from "a sonorous list of names and places, which are barely represented in Old English," allowing the poet to "expand dramatically what in the Latin are the barest hints of actual combat."[54] The revision of the battle may have served as a significant access point for readers unfamiliar with the source material, especially without the filter of a sermon or gloss. Abraham becomes an identifiable poetic convention, similar to Beowulf; the battle reenacts Anglo-Saxon conventions. There "should be no doubt that the nature of vernacular narrative was an even greater shaping force" on Old English poetry, T.A. Shippey observes, "a force not necessarily palpable or even irresistible, but powerfully insidious, causing Anglo-Saxons and Continental Saxons not only to write their poems, but also, we may feel, to read their Bibles, within the framework of their own, familiar cultural references."[55] Such cultural impositions are natural for readers of all periods; the distance of time and our own cultural practices simply serve to make the Anglo-Saxon frame of this poem more apparent. Readers from a primarily non-military society will find Abraham's characterization as a war-leader rather jarringly noticeable.

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[53] Cf., e.g., Exodus 162-64a: "Hreopon herefugolas, hilde grædig, / deawigfeðere ofer drihtneum, / wonn wælceasega" [the battlebirds screamed, dewy-feathered over the lords, darke slaughter-choosers], and numerous other examples of birds as omens of battles in Anglo-Saxon poetry. George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript* ASPR 1 (New York: Columbia, 1931): 95.

[54] Orchard, "Conspicuous Heroism," 127.

[55] T.A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1972): 153.

It is the treatment of Lot during these events, however, that is even more singular and noticeable. As a young, presumably vital, and, the poem repeatedly promises, virtuous man, the audience might expect Lot to vigorously defend of his home city or, at least, his person. That expectation goes unfulfilled: Lot is carried away without his slightest protest.

> Mægð siðedon,
> fæmnan and wuduwan, freondum beslægene,
> from hleowstole. Hettend læddon
> ut mid æhtum Abrahames mæg
> of Sodoma byrig. We þæt soð magon
> secgan furður, hwelc siððan wearð
> æfter þæm gehnæste herewulfa sið,
> þara þe læddon Loth and leoda god,
> suðmonna sinc, sigore gulpon. (2009b-17)
>
> [The kinswomen traveled, virgins and widows, cut off from friends, from the sheltering home. The enemies led out from the city of Sodom the kin of Abraham with their possessions. We may say further as a truth what became of the journey of the war-wolves after that battle, of those who led Lot and the goods of the people, the treasure of the southmen: they boasted their victory.]

In fact, Lot barely makes an appearance here; instead there is an overt emphasis on the femininity of the hostages—*mægð*, *fæmnan*, and *wuduwan* are all markedly female. The narrative places Lot among this group, yet he disappears from this initial list of captives, just as he was omitted from the list of women Abraham led into Mambre. By classing him with the women and possessions of Sodom, the poem obscures Lot's masculinity and his individual identity. Notably, the women are specifically designated as those without proper reproductive relationships. Although *fæmne* can signify merely "woman," its primary use is to suggest virginity.[56] However, this subtle suggestion of barrenness—fitting, given Sarah and Abraham's failure to produce a legitimate heir thus far—is far outweighed by the weakness and femininity imparted to Lot by his inclusion with the captured and powerless women. The use of *widuwan* similarly emasculates Lot. Widows,

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[56] DOE, *s.v.* "f□mne."

even more than virgins, suggest women unprotected: out of their fathers' houses yet without husbands, they were subject to special protection under Anglo-Saxon law.[57] Lot's inclusion with these women does not speak well of his masculinity, agency, or power. The poem simultaneously emphasizes his status as a feminine chattel and as Abraham's *mæg*—the latter word reinvoking the *mægð* at the beginning of the passage and reminding readers that Lot is more kinswoman than kinsman. At the same time, a heightened sense of powerlessness results from the description of the group as *freondum beslægene*, captive in the power of *herewulfa* who, like good Anglo-Saxon warriors, boast of their victory: these images of power highlight Lot's silent impotence by contrast.

Abraham, meanwhile, has no fear whatsoever of his own impotence; before the battle begins he offers the Christian version of a battle boast, confirming his position of commander and his certainty of victory:

> þa he his frumgaran,
> wishydig wer, wordum sægde,
> þares afera, him wæs þearf micel
> þæt hie on twa healfe
> grimme guðgemot gystum eowdon
> heardne handplegan; cwæð þæt him se halga,
> ece drihten, eaðe mihte
> æt þam sperenīðe spede lænan. (2052b-59)
>
> [Then to his leaders the wise-minded man, Terah's son, said with words that he had great need that on both sides they might show the grim battle-meeting and hard hand-play to the strangers; he said that the holy eternal lord might blessedly reward them with success at the spear-strife.]

Abraham's eagerness for the violence of battle marks another departure from his biblical model, bringing him closer to the Anglo-Saxon ideal. While the biblical Genesis covers the entire battle in one verse, during which Abraham never speaks: "And dividing his company, he rushed upon them in the night: and defeated them, and pursued them as far

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[57] Carol Hough, "The Widow's *Mund* in Æthelberht 75 and 76," *JEGP* (1999:1): 1-16.

as Hoba, which is on the left hand of Damascus."[58] The poetic Abraham, however, marries the best of the Anglo-Saxon warrior and the Christian character. He is fearless yet acknowledges the blessing of the Lord in battle. His success is pre-ordained, effecting Doane's moment of "interplay and resolution" between two conflicting narrative expectations, biblical and heroic.

The reward for Abraham's victory is the rescue of what is again shown to be a highly feminine and feminized group:

> gewat him abraham ða
> on þa wigrode wiðertrod seon
> laðra monna. loth wæs ahreded,
> eorl mid æhtum, idesa hwurfon,
> wif on willan. (2083b-2087a)
>
> [Then Abraham departed with them on the battle road to see the retreat of the hateful men. Lot was rescued, the man with possessions, the women returned, the wives willingly.]

Lot is rescued, along with his possessions, and both the *idesa* and the *wif*. Lumped in again with the women and the booty, Lot's presence is minimized once more. *Wif on willan* at l. 2087 invokes the women whom Abraham led into Haran some 300 lines earlier and reminds the reader once again of Lot's prior narrative impotence, no more important than any woman or bit of gold taken from Sodom. As if to reiterate that, the poem continues:

> abraham ferede
> suðmonna eft sinc and bryda,
> æþelinga bearn, oðle nior
> mægeð heora magum. (2087b-2090)
>
> [Abraham carried back the treasure and women of the southmen, the children of princes, nearer the homeland, the kinswomen to their kin.]

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[58] Genesis 14:15.

Abraham manfully leads the women back to their homeland, where their relatives eagerly await them. Lot, undifferentiated from the women, is also returned to his home in Sodom. Here again the poet implicitly collapses *mægð* and *mæg*, as when Lot was led away from Sodom, and again Lot suffers from the comparison. He is the received, not the receiver, the led, not the leader. The beginning of Lot's story is not promising. His appearances repeatedly demonstrate that, in spite of the poet's faithfulness to the source material, Lot's character remains problematic, as manifested in his questionable gender identity in the household and his general dependence on Abraham's good will, rather than his own strength, to survive.

Hypermasculine in Sodom

Throughout the beginning of his narrative, Lot is a mere prop to emphasize Abraham's majestic masculinity; the necessity of contrast, combined with Lot's problematic piety, makes him an ideally feminine foil. The success of this characterization poses a thematic problem for the poet, however, because Lot cannot be both a patriarch and a sexually ambiguous character, not if he's to serve as an exemplar against the Sodomites in the upcoming events of the poem. As we've seen already, Lot's decision to live in Sodom occasions anxiety from the poet and his patristic predecessors. The best way to prevent Lot's association with the Sodomites while preserving his virtue and the faithfulness to the source text was to emphasize his masculinity and heterosexuality as the head of the household.

More than mere opportunity to redeem Lot, the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah was one of the chief morality tales of the Middle Ages, used to importune against whatever moral failing the author or homilist most despised. For the *Genesis A* poet, that offense is sexual impropriety in general and homosexuality in specific. Some evidence suggests that it was a lesson thought particularly necessary for eighth-century Anglo-Saxons. Margaret Clunies Ross suggests that the English were reputed to have flexible sexual morals: "The

legatine commission which visited England in 786 during Offa's reign and reported on the standard of Christian observance among the Anglo-Saxons complained of their persisting offences in sexual matters."[59] Ross refers to the Anglo-Saxons' rather loose interpretations of marital propriety rather than homosexuality, but certainly the flexible moral code indicated by the former could have led to concerns about the latter. Homosexuality was a persistent and dangerous threat throughout the Middle Ages. Allen Frantzen regards *Genesis A* as a lesson in sexual propriety tailored specifically for its Anglo-Saxon audience:

> [The poet's] account of the destruction of Sodom, which includes a summary of the city's history, skillfully expresses disapproval of the Sodomites and their sins. The poem adheres to a military ethos expressed in familiar Anglo-Saxon tropes of battle poetry, a manly atmosphere in which kinship obligations and the communal bond are defended at all costs. Thus *Genesis A* provides a sober background of discipline and obedience against which to contrast the excesses of Sodom and the weaknesses of her people.[60]

Whether Lot is a part of the "sober background" or the "excesses of Sodom" is a problem that the poet seems unable to solve, despite repeated attempts. It is only while Lot is actually in Sodom that he benefits from comparison. Perhaps because the poet is no longer implicitly comparing him to Abraham, Lot is able to flex some metaphorical muscle and rise above his otherwise ambiguous gender construction and power position.

The *Genesis A* poet is relatively unambiguous about the sins that occasion the destruction of Sodom. When the Sodomites discover that Lot has two attractive young guests, the angels sent from God in Genesis 18 to discover the truth of the Sodomites' sins, they riot before Lot's house, demanding sexual access to the strangers.

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[59] Margaret Clunies Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," *Past & Present* 108 (Aug. 1985): 3-34, at 27.

[60] Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 216.

comon sodomware
geonge and ealde, gode unleofe
corðrum miclum cuman acsian
þæt hie behæfdon herges mægne
loth mid giestum. heton lædon ut
of þam hean hofe halige aras,
weras to gewealde. wordum cwædon
þæt mid þam hælðum hæman wolden
unscomlice, arna ne gymden. (2453b-2461)

[The people of Sodom, young and old, undear to God, came in a great throng, came to demand, so that those of the horde surrounded the kinsman, Lot with his guests. They commanded him to lead the holy messengers out from the high house, the men into their control. They said with words that they wished to fornicate with the men, shamelessly, not mindful of honor.]

The word *unsceomlice* bears the heaviest stress in this passage; by alliterating the negating syllable "un" with *arna* in the second half-line, the poet creates a striking contrast that emphasizes the Sodomites' complete disregard for God's law. Notably, they ask *with words*: their shamelessness allows them to articulate a sin that was widely held to be literally unspeakable. The poem is extremely frank in its judgment, as it is frank in describing the sin; *hæman* leaves little room for doubt. Although not necessarily pejorative—*hæman* was also used to describe intercourse between man and wife[61]—the sense here is unmistakable, given the poet's description of the Sodomites' disregard for honor and the general aura of mob mentality that surrounds the demanding horde. The last sentence allows no room for equivocation: the Sodomites are shameless, vocal, intent on satisfying their lusts, and perhaps most importantly, unmindful of honor. They are the anti-Abrahams—not only do they reject the customs of religious obedience, they reject the customs of the Anglo-Saxons. The breadth of the sin is also impressive: the throng encompasses, apparently, all the people of Sodom, young and old. *Sodomware* suggests

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[61] Indeed, my use of "fornicate" here captures the *Genesis A* poet's tone rather than the literal sense of the word. Bosworth-Toller defines *hæman* as "to lie with, to have intercourse with, to marry." Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth ... Edited and Enlarged by T. Northcote Toller* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1882-98): *s.v.* "hæman."

both men and women, an orgiastic thronging mob that the poem cannot help but condemn.

The sin of the Sodomites is not specified in the Bible, where the text says only that "they called to Lot, and said to him: Where are the men that came in to thee at night? Bring them out that we may know them."[62] Although plenty of later interpreters laid massive stress on "know," biblical scholars have long suggested that the sin at the heart of Sodom's redemption may have been any number of non-sexual offenses, including poor hospitality, greed, or excessive wealth.[63] By the time of the *Genesis A* poet, however, extra-biblical tradition had long solidified the crime. Bede makes this apparent in his commentary on the episode, which is unequivocal: "Indeed, they proclaimed abroad their sin as Sodomites, and did not hide it, when all males from childhood to old age"— an echo of *Genesis A*'s "sodomware geonge and ealde"—"used to engage shamelessly in indecent practices with males, so much so that they did not try to hide their crimes even from strangers and foreigners, but rather by using force they strove to make them like themselves in their wicked deeds and to involve them in their crimes."[64] Bede is very firm on the nature of the Sodomites' crime and even more disparaging of their apparent shamelessness, which *Genesis A* also condemns. The basis of Bede's remarks seems to be an unspoken fear of conversion to these degenerate pleasures; the Sodomites' worst crime is their attempt to make others "like themselves."

Of course, the clarity of the poem's accusations makes the conundrum of Lot's presence among these sinners all the more apparent. In order to be believable, Lot's

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[62] Genesis 19:5.

[63] See especially Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[64] Bede, *On Genesis*, 300.

salvation demands his differentiation. Yet the question persists: how much "like themselves" have the Sodomites made Lot? In the Vulgate, it is Abraham who clarifies Lot's difference, asking God to spare Sodom for the sake of its just men—namely, for Lot. Unfortunately, we can only speculate what that role might have been in the poem itself, as a manuscript leaf that presumably described the events of Genesis 18:22-33 is missing. The Vulgate, however, is striking; the dialogue between Abraham and God is extended and animated. The audacity of Abraham's questioning highlights Lot's importance and rarity:

> And they turned themselves from thence, and went their way to Sodom: but Abraham as yet stood before the Lord. And drawing nigh he said: Wilt thou destroy the just with the wicked? If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish withal? and wilt thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just, if they be therein? Far be it from thee to do this thing, and to slay the just with the wicked, and for the just to be in like case as the wicked, this is not beseeming thee: thou who judgest all the earth, wilt not make this judgment. And the Lord said to him: If I find in Sodom fifty just within the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake. And Abraham answered, and said: Seeing I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes. What if there be five less than fifty just persons? wilt thou for five and forty destroy the whole city? And he said: I will not destroy it, if I find five and forty. And again he said to him: But if forty be found there, what wilt thou do? He said: I will not destroy it for the sake of forty. Lord, saith he, be not angry, I beseech thee, if I speak: What if thirty shall be found there? He answered: I will not do it, if I find thirty there. Seeing, saith he, I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord. What if twenty be found there? He said: I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty. I beseech thee, saith he, be not angry, Lord, if I speak yet once more: What if ten should be found there? And he said: I will not destroy it for the sake of ten. And the Lord departed, after he had left speaking to Abraham: and Abraham returned to his place.

Abraham is aware throughout this dialogue that he tests God's patience; it is apparent in his repeated anxiety: "be not angry, Lord." The danger implied by his uncertainty, when combined with his willingness to press the point suggests that Lot must be both virtuous and important, even though Abraham never mentions his nephew by name. Lot is, however, mentioned immediately at the beginning of Genesis 19: "And the two angels

came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of the city. And seeing them, he rose up and went to meet them: and worshipped prostrate to the ground." It seems in the biblical narrative that Lot, like his uncle Abraham directly before him, has recognized the angels for who they are and offered them obeisance, identifying him instantly as the just man to whom Abraham referred and making his rescue from Sodom inevitable. The poet relies on the source material to establish Lot's virtue in several cases—perhaps an indication of his conservative impulses, perhaps a suggestion that he himself remains unconvinced.

The poem begins the events of Genesis 19 not with Lot's recognition of and greeting to the angels, but with an ominous description of Sodom's looming fate:

> Weras basnedon witeloccas,
> wean under weallum and heora wif somed.
> duguðum wlance drihtne guldon
> god mid gnyrne oð þæt gasta helm,
> lifes leohtfruma, leng ne wolde
> torn þrowigean ac him to sende
> stiðmod cyning strange twegen
> aras sine. Þa æt æfentid
> siðe gesohton sodoma ceastre. (2419-2426)
>
> [The men awaited punishments, woes within the walls and their wives as well. The proud ones in the multitude repaid good to the Lord with evil until that commander of spirits, life's author of light, would no longer suffer his rage but the king strong of mind sent to them two of his strong messengers. Then at eventide they sought by journey the city of Sodom.]

The grim reminder of Sodom's fate serves as another opportunity for the poet to stress the city's evil, in which both men and women are implicated: "weras…and heora wif somed." No one in Sodom is exempt, it seems—both men and women are condemned, just as at line 2454 the poet condemns the young and the old. At neither occasion is Lot excused or noted as an exception, despite the poem's well-documented anxiety about his virtue.

Interestingly, here part of the city's sin is unequal payment—they requite with evil God's favor in creating Sodom as beautiful, Edenic, and fruitful. Presumably the

audience is meant to imagine for themselves the sexual nature of the Sodomites' ingratitude, but the poet will eventually make it perfectly clear for those who cannot quite remember the details. It is only after all these reminders, however, that Lot is introduced, and even then he is not called by name:

> Hie þa æt burhgeate beorn gemitton
> sylfne sittan sunu arones
> þæt þam gleawan were geonge þuhton
> men for his eagum. aras þa metodes þeow
> gastum togeanes, gretan eode
> cuman cuðlice, cynne gemunde,
> riht and gerisno and þam rincum bead
> nihtfeormunge. (2428-2435a)
>
> [Then they met a man at the city gates, the son of Aron sitting by himself, so that to the wise man they seemed young ones before his eyes. Then the servant of the lord arose and went toward the guests, went to greet and to come certainly mindful of what is fitting, right, and proper, and offered those men hospitality for the night.]

The rhetorical dance surrounding the angels' approach to Sodom is complex and filled with conflicting signals. The phrasing lays heavy stress on Lot's inability to recognize the angels for what they are—they *seem* to be young ones before his eyes. The audience, of course, knows better. Nevertheless, Lot offers these unknown strangers welcome, and is mindful of what is custom. The propriety of Lot's behavior is apparently a matter of some importance in this moment; the poet wishes to assure his audience of Lot's outstanding hospitality. Alban Gautier has recently suggested that customs of hospitality were deeply complicated and highly important in pre-viking Anglo-Saxon England, and that in fact those customs could influence the host's masculinity.

> Anglo-Saxon society seems to have been the kind of society where, whenever an inferior 'honoured' his lord, the lord used that opportunity to re-affirm his rights. On the other hand, we can say that whenever the lord demanded what was rightly his by custom, his host would use the same opportunity to improve his own *Köningsnähe*, and draw some kind of prestige through the fiction

> of spontaneous invitation and freely given hospitality, a practice seen as more honourable than a tribute or a tax.[65]

Certainly Lot's actions here may be hospitality toward royalty or, at least someone of a higher rank than his own. He offers the angels not just a place to sleep but *nihtfeormung*, which, according to the Dictionary of Old English, encompasses not just a shelter for the night, but also entertainment.[66] Hrothgar's host behavior in *Beowulf* offers a convenient parallel, wherein drinking, feasting, and storytelling (boasting) are all a part of the honors accorded to Beowulf and his party on successive evenings, even before he's solved the hall's pesky monster problem. Hospitality is clearly the duty of the head of the household, an honor arranged by men for men. Although women (like *Beowulf*'s Wealtheow, among others) were involved in the execution of the host's hospitality, it was a process steeped in masculinity. Lot's offer of hospitality here establishes him as the head of a household of consequence.

Lot's hospitality did not go unremarked by contemporary biblical scholars. Bede notes that:

> blessed Lot, from the way of life which he led, deserved to be spared. For since he proved to be hospitable, the result was that he was saved from destruction after he took in the good strangers. And there is no doubt but that after his death he was received by the same strangers into the eternal tents, so that he, who brought the citizens of heaven into his guest-chamber and refreshed them with his feast, was himself brought by them into the heavenly dwelling-place, where he would be refreshed forever with the

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[65] Alban Gautier, "Hospitality in pre-viking Anglo-Saxon England," *Early Medieval Europe* 17:1 (2009): 23-44, at 43.

[66] DOE, *s.v.* "feormung." Nihtfeormung, situated as it is in the Ns, is well beyond the dictionary's current scope, but Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* defines it merely as "entertainment for the night." Both Bosworth-Toller and the Dictionary of Old English Corpus record *nihtfeormung* as a hapax legomenon, although *feormung* is more common. The front part of the compound, then, must carry extra stress, especially as it sets the alliteration for the line. Perhaps this is a subtle means of pointing out the extreme necessity of nightly shelter and protection in Sodom; it seems that night is when the worst of the city's depravities are committed. *Feormung* was also used, the DOE notes, to describe the harboring of fugitives, which seems apt, given what the Sodomites will eventually demand to do with the angels.

> bread of the angels, that is, with the striking glory of the divine light.[67]

Lot's hospitality is his chief virtue, according to Bede, and the *Genesis A* poet takes advantage of that virtue to further fit the poem to an Anglo-Saxon worldview. Bede also invokes the reciprocal nature of hospitality: because Lot welcomed the angels into his home and offers them a "feast," he was welcomed into heaven where he could be feasted himself. Origen remarks that "When the angels who were sent to destroy Sodom desired to expedite the task with which they were charged, they first had concern for their host, Lot, that, in consideration of his hospitality, they might deliver him from the destruction of the imminent fire."[68] Origen has no particular love for Lot, whom he later condemns for drunkenness, which leads to the incestuous encounter with his daughters. However, both Bede and Origen regard Lot as the head of his household, responsible for the comfort of his guests, and the *Genesis A* poet follows suit. This Lot is markedly changed from the Lot of Mambre, who was constantly following in the footsteps of Abraham and making no decisions of his own. In fact, Lot overrides the angels' intentions to stay in the streets:

> þa to fotum loth
> þam giestum hnah and him georne bead
> reste and gereorda and his recedes hleow
> and þegnunge. Hie on þanc curon
> æþelinges est. eodon sona
> swa him se ebrisca eorl wisade
> in undor edoras þær him se æþela geaf,
> gleawferhð hæle, giestliðnysse
> fægre on flette oð þæt forð gewat
> æfenscima. (2441-2450a)
>
> [Then Lot prostrated himself to the feet of the guests and eagerly offered them a resting place and refreshment and shelter of his hall and his ministration. They chose the nobleman's gifts with thanks.

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[67] Bede, *On Genesis*, 305.

[68] Origen, "Homily V: On Lot and His Daughters," *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981): 112.

> They went immediately as the Hebrew man guided them into the house where the noble, the man wise of mind, gave them fair entertainment in the hall until that evening light departed forth.]

Here, then, is power—the ideal of power, according to *Genesis A*. Through his humility, the prostrate Lot asserts his will and provides the service of hospitality to angels in disguise. He anticipates Paul's words in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "And hospitality do not forget; for by this some, being not aware of it, have entertained angels."[69] Lot becomes the guide and host, incurring the angels' good will and protection. The depiction of Lot's hospitality upon the angels' entrance to Sodom is remarkably extensive—in combination with the earlier passage, it takes some 24 lines to establish the breadth of Lot's welcome. The poet repeatedly mentions Lot's dwelling, using words that more often equate to "hall" than "house"—*reced* is used three times and *hof* once—and further shoring up Lot's characterization as a man of consequence, particularly economic. He insists repeatedly on the honor of the angels' company, and their initial refusal, in addition to faithfully reflecting the source text, allows the poet to emphasize again Lot's generosity. Likewise, it prompts an implicit and preemptive comparison to the more horrifying welcome the other Sodomites will offer. The list of his offerings—*reste* and *gereorde* and his *recedes hleow* and *þegnunge*—is relatively long, broad and generous, and most importantly, it is fulfilled. Lot keeps his promises and feasts the angels handsomely all evening.

In addition to the extended description of Lot's hospitality, the poet takes some care in this section to emphasize the evening setting; this is Sodom's extended twilight. In the transitional time between day and night, Sodom too is transitioning from a place favored by God to a place that will be destroyed by God's wrath. When the evening light departs, so does the city's civility. The poet's use of the rare word *æfenscima*, which is,

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[69] Hebrews 13:2.

according to the Dictionary of Old English, a *hapax legomena*,[70] to describe this moment of virtuous camaraderie indicates its rarity and fragility. The implication is that the hospitality lasts only as long as the light. The looming danger of the Sodomites' attack, the subsequent destruction of the cities, and even Lot's own fall from grace are anticipated in the slow darkening of the day.

Ultimately, Lot's hospitality is what sets him apart from the Sodomites, a necessary distinction for purely narrative purposes: the poem's audience must understand why Lot deserves to be saved in order to take away the poem's moral about proper sexual behavior. The problem of Lot's choice to live in Sodom is not entirely resolved until he refuses the Sodomites access to the angels. He is, in that moment, completely isolated from the Sodomites, not by his actions, but by their words.

> "þis þinceð gerisne and riht micel
> þæt þu ðe aferige of þisse folcsceare.
> þu þas werðode wræccan laste,
> freonde feasceaft, feorran gesohtest
> þine þearfende. wilt ðu gif þu most
> wesen user her aldordema,
> leodum lareow?" (2478-2484)
>
> ["We think this fit and very proper that you remove yourself from this nation. You sought this people from afar in the track of the exile, destitute of friends in your need. Will you, if you may, become to us here the supreme judge, teacher to the people?"]

The Sodomites remind Lot of his outsider status: he is not native to Sodom, and he arrived in Sodom a poor man. Their sarcastic closing question suggests that he is arrogantly overreaching his humble beginnings, despite the fact that Lot has apparently made his fortune in the interceding years, given his ability to provide *nihtfeormung*. Sodom itself was commonly condemned for *luxuria*, the sin of excessive wealth, in

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[70] DOE, *s.v.* "æfenscima."

critical exegesis.[71] Although Lot may be enjoying economic prosperity by the time the angels arrive to seal the city's fate, he parted from Abraham with nothing but his wife and a small herd of sheep (l. 1920), and the Sodomites' disparagement of his poverty-stricken past may bear typological implications—certainly humble origins define the best of men in both the Old and New Testaments, up to and including Christ.

The economic implications of the Sodomites' condemnation, however, are not nearly as important as the sin of poor hospitality that they commit. The Sodomites reject Lot's teaching and judgment, which the audience of the poem knows to be wise and just in this instance. Not only are the Sodomites unchristian here, they are un-Anglo-Saxon—the hospitality they offer their guests is fit neither for strangers nor for those of superior rank. Speaking with *gemæne word* (common voice, l. 2476), they also withdraw their welcome from Lot, stating flatly that they have collectively decided that it would be better for Lot to remove himself from the company of Sodom—deliciously ironic advice that foreshadows Lot's escape and the Sodomites' destruction. This speech is a metaphorical repeat of their attempted rape of the angels. In their inhospitality, they become blind to what is good among them—the angels and Lot's wise counsel.

Lot's expulsion from the camaraderie of the Sodomites in this section of the poem might also exonerate him from accusations of sodomy. Because he rejects the Sodomites' propositions so emphatically, the audience might logically assume that Lot disapproves of them and is unwilling to participate in them, which aids the case of his masculinity. Homosexual acts were widely considered to be feminizing in the Middle Ages, based on the condemnation in the laws of Leviticus.[72] Lot, in fact, suggests a much more

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[71] Jordan offers a helpful review of the patristic and medieval views of Sodom's sins, in particular *luxuria*. *Invention of Sodomy*, e.g. 29ff.

[72] Leviticus 20:13: "If any one lie with a man as with a woman, both have committed an abomination, let them be put to death: their blood be upon them."

heteronormative solution for the Sodomites' overwhelming lust, which cements his role as masculine head of the household and arbiter of sexual propriety: he offers the Sodomites sexual access to his virgin daughters. It is this speech, too, that prompts the Sodomites to eject him from their company and constitutes his only real attempt to observe medieval notions of patriarchal power. He says:

> "Her syndon inne unwemme twa
> dohtor mine. doð swa ic eow bidde
> —ne can þara idesa owðer gieta
> þurh gebedscipe beorna neawest—
> and geswicað þære synne. ic eow sylla þa
> ær ge sceonde wið gesceapu fremmen,
> ungifre yfel ylda bearnum.
> Onfoð þæm fæmnum. lætað frið agon
> gistas mine þa ic for gode wille
> gemund byrdan gif ic mot for eow." (2466-2475)
>
> [Here within are my two pure daughters. Do as I bid you—neither of the women yet knows the nearness of a man through bed-companionship—and desist from that sin. I will give you them before you shamefully perform deeds against creation, gratuitous evil to the children of men. Take the virgins. Let my guests have peace because I will protect them from you if I may on account of God.]

Lot clearly places himself on the side of angels here, promising to protect them from the Sodomites if at all possible. He also creates a clear delineation between the women of his household and himself, a marked change from his earlier relationships. He creates the division by clarifying that his daughters are his possessions, and hence his to dispose of—he holds their fate in his hands as head of the household. Such a position is a drastic change from the captive, handless, powerless Lot of earlier in the poem and the manuscript. Instead of needing rescue, he attempts to rescue the Sodomites from their own captivity by improper lust. His daughters are offered in a way that places them in the traditional role of the peaceweaver, a woman offered in marriage to promote amity between warring groups. Unfortunately, Lot's strategy succeeds as well as such strategies usually seem to in poetry, which is to say not at all. But that does not affect the essentially masculine overtones of the offer. His speech is surprisingly firm and

unequivocal; the imperative tone is emphasized by the brevity of his commands, such as "doð swa ic eow bidde." The offer of his daughters is a similarly brief and unmistakable command. I have already noted the shocking frankness of his offer to "onfoð þæm fæmnan," but it is worth noting that this is not so much an offer as a direct order. The Sodomites are given only one alternative to their perverse desires, and it is to rape Lot's daughters. He is completely unconcerned for their safety or emotional investment or pleasure. The offer is shocking, even to an audience familiar with the story, as most Anglo-Saxon audiences probably would have been.[73]

Lot's single-minded focus on his daughters' virginity in this scene creates a religious economy of sexuality. Sacrificing his daughters to save the angels has the added benefit of making the Sodomites' souls a slightly lighter shade of black, if they would accept, and by that means Lot buys his own virtue. Lot is aware of this, as he makes clear when he says, "ic eow sylla þa ær ge sceonde wið gesceapu fremmen." In addition to meaning "creation," the word *gesceapu* can also mean, according to Bosworth-Toller, "the privy members."[74] The pun is particularly teasing here, giving as it does both the nature and the means of their sin: they will sin against creation using their penises. The wordplay also suggests exactly who is most at fault: the Sodomites who engage in penetrative same-sex intercourse. The terms of the exchange Lot proposes and the

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[73] Genesis 19:5-8 reads:

> And they called Lot, and said to him: Where are the men that came in to thee at night? bring them out hither that we may know them: Lot went out to them, and shut the door after him, and said: Do not so, I beseech you, my brethren, do not commit this evil. I have two daughters who as yet have not known man: I will bring them out to you, and abuse you them as it shall please you, so that you do no evil to these men, because they are come in under the shadow of my roof.

While the language here is no less appalling than that of the *Genesis A* poet, the longer sentences of the Vulgate formulation de-emphasizes Lot's commanding, masculine presence in this moment.

[74] *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, *s.v.* "ge-sceap."

benefits to both sides could hardly be more frankly delineated. Lot offers what would be a spectacular deal to anybody but the sexual deviants of Sodom.

The sacrifice of his daughters is Lot's most unequivocally masculine moment. He exercises his patriarchal right to dispose of his daughters in the most socially advantageous way possible, attempting to save his own life and secure his place in God's good graces. Georges Duby has suggested that the advantageous exogamous marriage of daughters was a chief duty of fathers in the Middle Ages: "this head of the household, advised by his male relatives, came to pursue increasingly restrictive matrimonial strategies. Briefly stated, these amounted to a continuation of the policy of marrying off all the daughters of the house in order to create a widespread network of alliances." [75] Although he is not offering up his daughters for marriage here, there is an alliance at stake. Lot seeks to appease the Sodomites and preserve his position, or at least his safety, in the community, for which he is willing to trade his daughters. Lot's offer of his daughters for the Sodomites' sexual amusement is simply a variation on Rubin's theme of the traffic in women.[76] Lot exercises total control over his daughters, so much so that they are given no voice in their own disposal. They cannot even be commended for virtuous compliance.

Their silence, though, prompts a key question: who are these daughters, and where did they come from? In both the poem and its biblical source, the daughters appear in the narrative from nowhere, called into being by their father's need. They seem created

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[75] Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978): 10. Although he is focused on the power of upperclass laymen in twelfth-century France, there is no reason to suppose that the same factors were not in play for eighth-century Anglo-Saxon fathers. Numerous texts, in particular hagiographies of female saints like Euphrosyne, suggest that the Anglo-Saxons were perfectly familiar with the principles of advantageous marriage and would have recognized the fatherly duty to dispose of daughters to shore up familial alliances.

[76] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975): 157-210.

solely to prove Lot's masculinity and virtue; they have no identity apart from his. Or rather, apart from the identity that he creates for them, which consists of one thing only: their sexual purity. When they are introduced in Genesis, Lot says of his daughters, "I have two daughters who as yet have not known man."[77] That is the entire extent of their description; all readers know is that they are virgins. In the *Genesis A* description, by contrast, readers get the sense that their virginity is all there *is* to know. In his four-line introduction of them, Lot manages to reference their purity three times, by calling them *fæmnan*, describing them as *unwemme*, and, finally, simply announcing that they've never known male bed-companions.

The extreme emphasis on his daughters' purity reveals Lot's anxiety about his offer and his control over them. In fact, immediately thereafter the emptiness of Lot's authority is made manifest. Although he has total power of disposal over his daughters, and although he has the status and wealth to offer hospitality to the angels, his actual authority is completely contingent on the non-interference of the Sodomites. He cannot stand against them with any effectiveness.

> Þa ic on lothe gefrægn
> hæðne heremæcgas handum gripan
> faum folmum. Him fylston wel
> gystas sine and hine of gromra þa
> cuman arfæste, clommum abrugdon
> in under edoras and þa ofstlice
> anra gehwilcum ymbstandendra
> folces sodoma fæste forsæton
> heafodsiena. (2484b-2491a)
>
> [Then I heard tell that the heathen men of war gripped Lot with their hands, with criminal palms. His guests helped him well and then came steadfast and withdrew him from the bonds of the furious ones into the dwelling and then rapidly the vision of each one of the bystanders of the folk of Sodom they firmly obstructed.]

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[77] Genesis 19:8.

The angels must drag Lot bodily back into the house because the Sodomites have laid hands on him and he cannot escape under his own power. Completely impotent before the wrath of his fellow citizens, Lot must rely on the help of his guests. He thereby undermines any power and prestige he gained as their host. He is stripped of agency; he is in the Sodomites' *clommas*, or bonds, a word used most frequently to describe the sort of iron chains that bind prisoners (notably, Satan in *Genesis B*[78]). His ineffectiveness contrasts dramatically with the angels' immense power. They break the bonds, draw Lot into the house, and then blind the Sodomites. Their actions give lie to Lot's promise to protect them. The poem emphasizes his ineffectiveness in the lines immediately following his rescue:

> abrecan ne meahton
> reðemode reced æfter gistum
> swa hie fundedon ac þær frome wæron
> godes spellbodan. hæfde gistmægen
> stiðe strengeo, styrde swiðe
> werode mid wite. (2493-2498)
>
> [The angry-minded ones could not breach the house after the guests as they desired, for the messengers of god were firm. The guest-troop had unyielding strength, firmly restrained the mob with torment.]

The stress on the angels' strength is heavily reinforced by the metrical stresses, which fall unerringly on the words *streng* and *frome* to highlight their power. Lot disappears entirely from the action, not unlike his disappearance when abducted by the kings of the north. He simply awaits rescue. The angels, enacting said rescue, invoke images of Abraham and the Anglo-Saxon warriors, with their unyielding strength and ability to overcome daunting odds—Abraham's 318 men against the entire forces of four kings; two angels against a throbbing mob of lust-crazed degenerates. They are described as *gistmægen*, another *hapax legomenon* that seems designed to emphasize both the angels' guest status

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[78] See, e.g., ll. 374, 409.

and their impressive strength: the two of them alone combine to form a troop, a multitude, a force.[79] Despite the rules of hospitality demanding that Lot protect his guests, the guest-troop protects him.[80] Lot is, both here and in the earlier struggle with the kings of the north, no warrior eager for battle and glory. He is simply an object to be moved or chattel to be rescued.

This initial angelic rescue is the beginning of Lot's downfall, when the poet decides finally that Lot is, despite his own best efforts, no kind of man in the Anglo-Saxon or any other sense. The rescue is juxtaposed with his salvation from Sodom—as the angels rescue him from an ugly death by fire and brimstone, he is nevertheless condemned to incest and infamy. Here, rescued from the attack of the Sodomites, he is consigned to impotence and femininity. The first sign of this downfall is that Lot no longer has the power of disposal over his daughters—his control of them disappears almost instantly. It does not wait until Lot has climbed the mountains to Segor and beyond, although certainly his powerlessness reaches its zenith there. No, the angels admonish Lot to gather up his family and get out, and he responds with a protest: "ne mæg ic mid idesum aldornere mine / swa feor heonon feðegange / siðe gesecan…." (2514-2516a) [I may not with women seek the safety of my life so far hence by foot-travel.] The biblical version of this speech, in which Lot goes on to request safe haven in Segor, halfway up the mountain above Sodom, contains no mention of the *idesa* about

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[79] DOE, *s.v.* "gyst-mægen": "troop of guests; here referring to the angels who visited Lot in Sodom; 'powerful visitant(s)' has also been suggested formed, as is *cyningwuldor* 'glorious king', by having the concrete sense as first element and the characterizing abstract as the second element."

[80] We might analogize the guest's actions with those of Beowulf's in protecting Heorot, which similarly places Hrothgar's masculinity in question. See, e.g., Patricia Clair Ingham, "From Kinship to Kingship: Mourning, Gender, and Anglo-Saxon Community," *Grief and Gender, 700-1700*, eds. Jennifer C. Vaught and Lynne Dickson Bruckner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 17-32, at 22.

whom Lot is so concerned here.[81] Lot's daughters (and wife) are suddenly inconvenient when they constitute a hindrance to his safety—it is because of them that he cannot seek his *aldornere*. I have given this word its most literal translation, "life-safety," because it highlights the danger Lot perceives himself to be in. Lot is clearly vastly more concerned with his own safety than that of the women under his protection. Perhaps he fears that the women will slow the necessarily rapid journey to Segor and perhaps they are to be included in his concern for *aldornere*, but the possessive *mine* before *aldornere* makes the interest seem self-centered. Lot, who should be able to see to the safety and protection of his entire household, and especially that of the women, cannot conceive how they will all make it to safety. Of course this line is suggestively prescient. Not only does Lot's wife perish in the escape from the city, but Lot indeed cannot have *aldornere* with the women who will follow him out of Sodom. These women represent a tangible danger to his life-safety; Lot's story after the escape from Sodom is dominated by the danger of the incestuous encounter with his daughters.

Ambiguity in Segor

That incestuous encounter, which concluded Lot's narrative, posed a rather delicate exegetical quandary for patristic and medieval readers. How could a patriarch, a supposedly upstanding and exemplary pre-Christian figure, be excused from a rather glaring sexual transgression? Or was it a transgression at all? Certainly the biblical story leaves some room for debate: after they have left Sodom for the supposedly safer shelter of a cave above the city, Lot's daughters intoxicate him with wine and, believing that

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[81] Genesis 19:18-20. Interestingly, in the *Genesis A* version of Lot's escape from Sodom, a page has been excised which presumably dealt with the events described in Genesis 19:14-17, wherein Lot begs his daughters and sons-in-law (usually interpreted as the daughters' fiancés) to arise and leave Sodom with him, and "he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest." It seems almost inevitable that the poet would have used these verses to further delineate Lot's failure to control his household and exert his masculine power to command them.

they are the last of the human race, sleep with him in order to conceive children and repopulate the earth.[82] They bear sons who are the founding fathers of races inimical to the Israelites.[83] It is difficult even to describe the story without attempting to assign blame—are the daughters guilty of rape? Is Lot somehow cognizant of these events and therefore culpable? These quandaries inherent in the story demanded clarification from exegetes like Bede, who offers an unequivocal and extended interpretation:

> And indeed the deed narrated here seems to have happened contrary to the natural law of human conception, but the fact cannot be doubted, because so great an authority declares that it did happen. Lot can seem to be excusable, because he knowingly endured, rather than committed, so great a crime of incest. But he is not exempt from blame, in that, having forgotten the still recent destruction of the wicked, he indulged so far in wine that he was unable to know what was done to him. His daughters also seem to be excusable because they thought that no man remained on earth, but rather that they had all been destroyed in the same flaming punishment. And they supposed that, just as after the flood the human race was restored by the three sons of Noah and a like number of daughters-in-law, so now it was to be renewed a second time by themselves and their father, who alone had survived the fires. And therefore they believed that this ought rather to be done in sleep, lest their father, knowing of it, despise and reject such a marriage in disgust. They can seem to be excusable, therefore, because they believed that they were displaying obedience to the divine order in a deed of this kind. But they are not exempt from blame, in that they did not seek either the will or the counsel of their father in such a difficulty nor did they delay for a time, until they might know more certainly what had happened to the human race throughout the world.[84]

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[82] This defense is one adopted by, among others, Alcuin in his *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesin*; he follows Bede and Augustine in attempting to exonerate the family somewhat. As Malcolm Godden points out, however, there are major logical gaps in this justification—namely, before they arrive at the cave, Lot's family takes shelter briefly in Segor, a small city that is undestroyed and thus presumably still populated. "The Trouble with Sodom: Literary Responses to Biblical Sexuality," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 77:3 (1995): 97-119.

[83] Genesis 19:21-38.

[84] Bede, *On Genesis*, 307-08.

Nobody in this scenario, according to Bede, is entirely innocent: Lot is improvidently drunk, and his daughters are guilty of following their own advice rather than their father's. In his explanation of the daughters' motivation, Bede refers to the events of the Flood, a connection that was relatively common in medieval exegesis. The apocalyptic elements in both were viewed as the just punishments of an angry god.[85] Alcuin likewise connects the two punishments. In his *Interrogationes*, he suggests that the sin of lechery with women that caused the Flood deserved the milder punishment of water, while the unnatural sin of men's lechery with men requires the more severe solution of fire.[86] Interestingly, both stories also contain incestuous overtones; the fate of Noah's family requires endogamy in the succeeding generations. A more explicit parallel occurs in Genesis 9, in which Noah, having established a vineyard, drinks wine to excess and falls asleep naked, whereupon one of his sons, Ham, sees his nudity and laughs, for which his descendants are cursed. That story, too, was used to explain the founding of certain races—as Lot's daughters conceived the founders of the Ammonites and the Moabites, so in medieval exegesis did Ham, Shem, and Japheth father the African, Semitic, and European races, respectively.[87]

Clearly for Bede, Lot's drunkenness is his chief failing, excusing or at least mitigating to some degree his participation in incest. Origen, too, is unwilling to fully convict Lot of incest:

> For I do not find him to have plotted against or to have violently snatched away the chastity of his daughters, but rather to have been the victim of a plot and cunningly ensnared. But on the other hand, neither would he have been ensnared by the girls, unless he could

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[85] Karkov, *Text and Picture*, 165.

[86] Godden, "The Trouble with Sodom," 100.

[87] See Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identity in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54:1 (Jan. 1997): 103-42.

> have been inebriated. Whence he seems to me to be found partly culpable and partly excusable.[88]

The question of Lot's intent is central for both exegetes. Because Lot did not actively desire his daughters, he is less culpable in the sexual sin, but his drunkenness is problematic. And, as Origen points out, "he is at fault because he could be trapped, because he indulged in wine too much, and this not once, but he did it a second time."[89] Conviction for incest as a sexual sin clearly did not entirely apply in Lot's case, and yet the incident was problematic and required explanation.

The idea of drunkenness, however, was one that held a particular cultural relevance in Anglo-Saxon culture, centered as it was around the idea of the hall and fellowship, which usually included drinking. Drinking to excess, though, could be shameful. That shame resulted, Magennis asserts, not from the transgression of Christian propriety, but from the threat it posed to the social order.[90] The *Genesis A* poet, with his dual interest in both Christian and heroic cultures, likely considered both in his depiction of Lot's intoxication. The most famous example of shameful drunkenness in Anglo-Saxon literature is probably Unferth's drunken attempt to embarrass Beowulf by accusing him of losing a swimming contest, to which Beowulf replies,

> "Hwæt! þu worn fela, wine min Unferð,
> beore druncen ymb Brecan spræce,
> sægdest from his siðe."[91]
>
> [Well! my friend Unferth, drunken with beer, you've said rather a lot about Breca, you have told about his journey.]

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[88] Origen, Homily V, 115.

[89] Ibid. See also John Chrysostom's homily on Sodom and Gomorrah, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, trans. Robert C. Hill, Fathers of the Church 82 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001): 455-468.

[90] Hugh Magennis, "The *Beowulf* Poet and His *druncene dryhtguman*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86:2 (1985): 159-64.

[91] Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson, eds., *Beowulf: An Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998): ll. 530-32.

Beowulf essentially implies that Unferth's drunkenness makes him speak nonsense and a lot of it. This humiliating implication established, Beowulf goes on to tell the fascinating tale of his survival at sea, and then reminds Unferth, by way of contrast, of the fratricide that shapes his own reputation. The boasting contest is handily decided, and Unferth goes down in history as a drunken lout. Lot fares little better.

Unfortunately the story of the family's escape to the mountain cave is interrupted by a leaf that has been cut out of the manuscript, obscuring events that presumably would have corresponded to Genesis 19:31-32, including the daughters' decision to intoxicate their fathers. Whether the poet ascribes blame to the daughters for the deliberate drugging of their father must remain unknown. We might, however, speculate on its likelihood based on later Anglo-Saxon attitudes toward compelled drunkenness. At the very end of his *Libellus de veteri testament et novo*, which serves as the preface to his prose translation of Genesis, Ælfric condemns drunkenness, particularly as it relates to religious interpretation:

> Ðu woldest me laðian, þa þa ic wæs mid þe, þæt ic swiðor drunce swilce for blisse ofer minum gewunan. Ac wite þu, leof man, þæt se þe oðerne neadað ofer his mihte to drincenne, þæt se mot aberan heora begra gil[t] gif him ænig hearm of þam drence becymð. Ure Hælend Crist on his halgan godspelle forbead þone oferdrenc eallum gelyfedum mannum; healde se ðe wille his gesetnysse. And þa halgan lareowas æfter þam Hælende aledon þone unðeaw þurh heora lareowdom and tæhton þæt man drince swa swa hi ne derede, for ðan þe se oferdrenc fordeð untwilice þæs mannes sawle and his gesundfullnysse. And unhæl becymð of þam drence.[92]
>
> [You also wished to encourage me, when I was with you, that I might drink more than my custom on account of joy. But you know, dear one, that he who compels another to drink beyond his ability must bear the guilt of them both if any harm come to him from that drinking. Christ our Savior in his holy gospel forbade drunkenness to all people who believe; let he who will keep his law. And the holy teachers after the Savior condemned that bad

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[92] Richard Marsden, ed., *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de veteri testament et novo*, EETS o.s. 330 (London: Oxford University Press, 2008): 229-30.

> practice through their teachings and taught that one may drink such that it does not injure him, because drunkenness undoubtedly destroys a person's soul and his health. And misfortune comes from drink.]

The fatal consequences of drink seem very clear to Ælfric, and more importantly, the consequences of external pressure to drink, which is interesting in light of the Anglo-Saxon culture of hospitality that encouraged exactly that. A reader might also wonder whether Ælfric had the story of Lot's daughters in mind when he penned these words—T.A. Shippey reads this admonishment as a metaphor for over-indulgence in biblical analysis, a warning against overreading and misinterpretation, which was one of Ælfric's great fears.[93] That interpretation would be particularly fitting when applied to Lot's daughters; the biblical narrative ascribes their motivations to the belief that they were the last people left in the world and thus responsible for its repopulation. It is this naïve reading that leads them into incest, as Origin comments.

So Ælfric's reasoning suggests that because they encouraged their father to overindulge, the daughters would bear the guilt for the entire encounter, as well as for the foundation of Israel's enemy tribes in the conception of Moab and Ammon. Lot, on the other hand, would be exculpated entirely. What this schema implies for the gendered balance of power the poem is attempting to trace is unclear—by a certain reasoning, Lot's daughters are given a remarkable amount of power and agency. Implicitly, they control their father's actions when they compel him to drink too much. Lot himself is correspondingly emasculated, with no power to escape the drunkenness or the harm that results. However, the blame thereby assigned to the daughters serves to reinscribe old strategies of power by highlighting the disastrous consequences of allowing women power. Although Ælfric offers no express connection to the Lot narrative, extrapolation may indicate the importance of the Lot story in reflecting cultural attitudes about the

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[93] Shippey, *Old English Verse*, 134ff.

uncertain relationship of fathers and daughters and, on a grander scale, all men and women, related or no.

Unfortunately none of these motivations are made readily apparent in the poem, thanks to the missing page that immediately precedes the incestuous encounter. The poet's view of the daughters' culpability is ultimately unknowable, although the brief description of the encounter that closes Lot's narrative—the deed and its consequences are summed up in only 20 lines—gives some clues about the final judgment of Lot's character. The narrative resumes immediately (presumably) after the daughters have made their plan:

> Hie dydon swa. druncnum eode
> seo yldre to ær on reste
> heora bega fæder ne wiste blondenfeax
> hwonne him fæmnan to bryde him bu wæron
> on ferhðcofan fæste genearwot
> mode and gemynde þæt he mægðe sið,
> wine gedruncen gewitan ne meahte.
> Idesa wurdon eacen. (2600-2607a)
>
> [They did so. The elder went in first to the drunk one at rest, the father of them both. The gray-haired one did not know when the maids were both with him as brides. He was confined fast in the spirit-coffer by mind and memory so that he, drunken with wine, might not know the movements of his kinswomen. The women became pregnant.]

The simple statement "Hie dydon swa" is, despite the narrative lacuna, a powerful beginning to the description of these events. Doane contends that the capitalization of *Hie* indicates the beginning of a new paragraph, and the sentence itself is a summary reference to events described on the missing page. While this is true, the sentence also harkens back to Lot's earlier brief command, "Onfoð þæm fæmnan"—a brief, seemingly simple action that actually spells doom for its participants. The short sentence also sets the tone for the encounter; the poet's description is matter-of-fact, concluding with another half-line sentence, "Idesa wurdon eacen," another curt statement that parallels the opening. These declarations form a sort of envelope-pattern for the actual squeamish

details of the incest, containing its inexplicability, its transgression and boundary-crossing, inside the bounds of simple facts: they did so, and they became pregnant.

This envelope also seems to contain—and even restrain—Lot. Between these two flat sentences the audience witnesses the death of Lot's masculinity. Throughout the encounter, Lot is "on ferhðcofan fæste genearwot." His existence is extremely confined, both literally by the cave that surrounds him and metaphorically by the loss of power he suffered with the destruction of Sodom. Lot's influence has declined so drastically that he seems entrapped in his own body with a barely functioning mind and memory, no longer able to control so much as his own sexual response, let alone the chastity and destiny of his daughters. In addition to this humiliation, Lot seems to age before the audience's eyes. Lot is identified here as *druncnum*, the drunken one, and *blondenfeax*, the white-haired one. A solely poetic term, according to the DOE, *blondenfeax* occurs only one other time in *Genesis A*: as a description of Sarah's hair:[94]

> he þæs mældæges
> self ne wende þæt him sarra,
> bryd blondenfeax, bringan meahte
> on woruld sunu. (2341b-2344a)
>
> [He {Abraham} himself did not expect a day when Sarah, his gray-haired bride, might bring a son into the world.]

Sarah is Abraham's gray-haired bride—her entire identity is encapsulated in her age and marital status. Because she is by this point in the narrative an old woman, Abraham believes his wife will never be able to give him the son he so desperately desires. Miraculously, of course, she does have a son, a mere 150 lines after Lot fathers his two. Reading *blondenfeax* as a sign of unexpected fertility may be slightly unfair, given its infrequent appearances in the *Genesis A* narrative. It is fair to point out, however, that this is the first mention of Lot's advanced age. Although he is presumably the same age he

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[94] DOE, *s.v.* "blanden-feax."

was when he escaped the destruction of Sodom, it is only when he becomes drunk and fathers two children through incest that Lot's possible senility becomes a matter of concern.[95] In addition to calling him *blondenfeax*, a few lines later the poet remarks that "eaforan brohtan / willgesweostor on woruld, sunu, / heora ealden fæder" (2607b-2609a) [the gracious sisters brought forth the heirs of their elderly father into the world, sons]. Lot's age at birth of his sons is noted even more frankly with the word *ealden*.

Old age is a problematic time for Anglo-Saxon poetic figures, particularly men. Hrothgar's masculinity is challenged in *Beowulf* because he is too old to successfully defend his hall; Beowulf himself dies in his old age defending his own hall and masculinity from a dragon. Lot, too, is impugned. Unlike Beowulf, though, Lot has no hall and is a figure of religious, rather than secular, consequence; the only things left for him to defend are his sobriety and his chastity. He can do neither while incapacitated by age and drink. Although it is the wine that puts him in a narrow spirit-coffer, his advanced age keeps him there. The narrowness of this existence is suggested by the effect of the wine on him. His mind and memory, the two powers often attributed to the elderly in Anglo-Saxon society, are as entrapped as his body. The effect of this paralysis is to make the scene little more than a rape; Lot is so powerless that he cannot even avoid the sexual advances of the women over whom he is supposed to have the greatest power. *Blondenfeax* removes Lot to the beginning of his narrative, hiding behind the skirts and identity of Sarah, a mere woman, and the wine has a similar effect on his relationship to his daughters. The poet's emphasis on his age and powerlessness make this scene uncomfortable, and perhaps that was intentional: a charged moment of improper

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[95] Before the lacuna and description of the incest, the poem says that Lot and his daughters lived "dægrimes worn," or a large number of days, in their cave, it is unclear whether that means the days intervening between the destruction of Sodom and the incest, or whether the total number of days was large. Traditional depictions generally considered the incest to have occurred immediately upon the family's arrival at the cave.

dominance by women, brought about by improvident drinking on the part of a man, would have been a powerful object lesson for an Anglo-Saxon audience.

Locked in a body and mind made impotent by drink and age, subject to the unwise impulses of his virgin daughters, this seems an odd moment for Lot to father sons and assert his reproductive capability. Yet it is not the first example of such behavior in the poem. The stress on Lot's age, particularly the second use of *blondenfeax*, illuminates how carefully the poet turns Lot's reproductive power into a dark mirror of Abraham's. Instead of waiting for the power of the Lord to bring them sons, Lot's daughters take matters into their own hands. Abraham, conversely, is promised a son even in his old age, and because he is faithful and patient, his wish is granted: Sarah bears him a legitimate son who becomes a forebearer of Christ. Abraham's faithfulness is rewarded, as is his control of his wife. The Ishmael story proves the danger of allowing women to control the reproductive future of a family: Sarah demands that Abraham father a child on her maid Hagar, and then is immensely unhappy with the results. The son who resulted from their coupling, Ishmael, was taken to be a figure of the Muslim people throughout the Middle Ages, and an exemplum of the consequences of feminine control.[96]

Certainly it is Lot's daughters who are in control of the sexual encounter with their father. Lot, who has surrendered his power to drink, becomes nothing but the receptive vessel. Although the details of the interaction are not graphically recounted, it is apparent that the tables of medieval normative sexuality are completely turned—the daughters, as the aggressive actors, assume the masculine role, and Lot, in his passive receptivity, is finally and completely reenvisioned as a woman. Indeed, he is so passive

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[96] Genesis chs. 16 and 21. See Ruth Melinkoff, "Sarah and Hagar: Laughter and Tears," *Illuminating the Book: Makers and Interpreters*, ed. Michelle P. Brown and Scot McKendrick (London: British Library, 1998): 35-51, and Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, eds., *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2006).

that he passes out of the narrative entirely—the last glimpse the reader has of him is the image of an old man, so drunk that he does not recognize even something as dire as incest.[97] His daughters seem to be the sole parents of their sons—in some ways true for a family tree that does not branch properly. Nevertheless, Lot's pointed absence in the final lines of his narrative begins the moment his daughters become pregnant:

> Idesa wurdon eacne. eaforan brohtan
> willgesweostor on woruld, sunu
> heora ealden fæder. þara æþelinga
> modor oðerne moab nemde,
> lothes dohtor. seo on life wæs
> wintrum yldre. us gewritu secgeað,
> godcunde bec, þæt seo ginger
> hire agen bearn ammon hete.
> Of þam frumgarum folc' unrim,
> þrymfæste twa þeode awocon.
> Oðre þara mægða moabitare
> eorðbuende ealle hatað,
> widmære cynn. Oðre wæs nemnað,
> æþelinga bearn, ammonitare. (2607-2620)
>
> [The women became pregnant. The gracious sisters brought forth the heirs of their elderly father into the world, sons. The mother of one of those princes, the daughter of Lot, named him Moab. She was the older in life by winters. The holy writ tells us, the book given by God, that the younger called her own child Ammon. From those patriarchs a countless people; the glorious two gave rise to nations. One of these tribes was called the Moabites by all the earthdwellers, a notorious kin. The others, sons of princes, were named the Ammonites.]

These fourteen lines establish the genealogy of the Moabites and the Ammonites, two of the chief enemy tribes to Israel throughout the Bible. Lot, it seems, has little to do with their *þrymfæste* legacy—it is their mothers who bring them forth and who name them. The women seem to suffer no ill will from the poet, who calls them *willgesweostor*, gracious sisters. That designation may well be ironic, given the havoc that the Moabites

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[97] The ignorance caused by Lot's physical incapacitation may recall his peculiar blindness to the sexual sins of the Sodomites in the poem's earlier events, although this is not expressly stated. Either way, Lot's awareness of sexual nuance is not his most prominent characteristic in *Genesis A*.

and Ammonites wreak throughout the Old Testament.[98] Lot reaps the benefit of no such ambiguity in his absence, which is a comparative judgment of his fathering capabilities when set against Abraham's treatment of his son shortly afterwards:

> abrahame woc
> bearn of bryde þone brego engla
> ær ðy magotudre modor wære
> eacen be eorle isaac nemde.
> hine Abraham on his agene hand
> beacen sette swa him bebead metod,
> wuldortorht, ymb wucan þæs þe hine on woruld
> to moncynne modor brohte. (2764b-2771)
>
> [To Abraham from his bride was born a son, him who the ruler of angels had named Isaac even before his mother became pregnant with the child by the nobleman. Abraham set on him by his own hand a glory-bright sign as the Creator had bade him, around a week after his mother brought him into the world to mankind.]

The fathers could not be more drastically different. Both Abraham and Sara are mentioned at the moment of Isaac's birth; he is pointedly the product of two parents. Perhaps Abraham's involvement may be partially ascribed to his long-standing desire for a son, but the contrast to Lot's total non-involvement is nevertheless dramatic. The text reminds us that God named Isaac well before he was conceived, and that God asked Abraham to lay a sign of holy favor—probably circumcision[99]—on his son shortly after his birth, which Abraham does. Isaac's birth is a type of Christ's; he is the favored son

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[98] The Dictionary of the Old English Corpus suggests that *willgesweostor* is technically a *hapax*, but the poet actually seems relatively fond of *willge-* compounds; there are five in the poem. *Willgebroðer* appears earlier in the poem as a description of Cain and Abel (971); other uses are less ironic, including a description of the messengers who inform Abraham of Lot's capture by the kings of the north: they are called *wilgeþoftan*, "pleasant associates" (2026). On the destructive nature of the Moabites and Ammonites, see particularly Numbers 21-22 and Judges 3. Saul fights both the Moabites and the Ammonites in Kings. The two tribes are expressly condemned in Deuteronomy 23:3-4: "The Ammonite and the Moabite, even after the tenth generation shall not enter into the church of the Lord forever: Because they would not meet you with bread and water in the way, when you came out of Egypt: and because they hired against thee Balaam, the son of Beer, from Mesopotamia in Syria, to curse thee."

[99] Genesis 21:3-4 says, "And Abraham called the name of his son, whom Sara bore him, Isaac. And he circumcised him the eighth day, as God had commanded him."Assuming the poet is adhering to his source here, and given the *ymb wocen* timeline, the *wuldortorht beacen* is circumcision.

long known to the Lord and long awaited by mankind, and the blessing of God signifies that typology.[100] That Abraham lays that blessing on Isaac with his *agene hand*, however, makes Lot's paternal absence all the more glaring. Lot's sons are unanticipated, unblessed, and unacknowledged by their father, despite being his heirs. Because Lot is no longer a man (and no longer in the narrative), he cannot be a father. Just as Lot's reproductive tale is the darker echo of Sarah's, so his sons are the dark echo of Abraham's son. Isaac is blessed with the circumcision that includes him in the genealogy of Christ, while Moab and Ammon are merely regarded as *widmære*, notorious, and are expressly opposed to Christ's genealogy. Their birth is an unembroidered near-repetition of the source material, while Isaac's is embellished with the poet's prefiguring of Christ.

Conclusion

The question surrounding Lot's sons, then, is *why* their brief appearance in the narrative is so completely unadorned. Such slavish faithfulness to the source material after the extended modifications and flourishes of the Lot narrative is startling. The conclusion's brevity leaves the audience with a feeling of censure, and in most retellings of the Lot story that censure would be directed at the incest inherent in the births of Moab and Ammon.[101] But that hardly seems the case in *Genesis A*. Although Moab and Ammon and their descendants are not exactly praised (although *widmære* could have ambiguously positive overtones, meaning also "far-famed"), their evil is not overtly expressed. True, neither is it detailed in the narrative of the biblical Genesis, but that certainly did not stop

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[100] In fact, the poem implies that Sarah conceives in the same way Mary does in the Gospels. "Þa com feran frea ælmihtig / to sarrai swa he self gecwæð" (2760-2761) [Then the Lord almighty came traveling to Sarah as he himself had said." Compare that to Gabriel's Annunciation from the Gospel of Luke: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

[101] See my discussion of *Cursor mundi*'s treatment of Moab and Ammon in Chapter 3, pp. 166-68.

the poet from enlarging upon the sins of Sodom or the obedient masculinity of Abraham. In fact, he picks up this latter theme again immediately after the expulsion of Lot and his family from the poem. This moment of narrative faithfulness stands out all the more because of the textual deviations that surround it.

The poet's censure does not seem to be directed at Lot's daughters, either. One of his few interventions in these 13 lines is the insertion of the word *willgesweostor*, as discussed above. The daughters are not condemned for their incest, nor for their impulsiveness in deciding to drug and sleep with their father before obtaining counsel, nor for the implied eventual deeds of their sons. All the audience is given is their graciousness, and their depiction concludes with the maternal act of naming their offspring. Because of the missing leaf before this section, it is impossible to know whether the daughters were ever given voice in the course of the poem, or whether their actions were explicitly condemned or exonerated in those lines, but the poet raises no objection to them in the conclusion of their story. Despite their apparent agency in the commission of incest, the daughters are, as is so often the case in Lot-retellings, mere ciphers, their identities obscured by the father before them and the sons after them.

Incest, rape, and sodomy are not, however, at the forefront of the poet's concerns. Their sensationalism only contributes to the overriding problem of Lot's, and by extension, all patriarchs' and all Anglo-Saxons', masculinity. The Abraham and Lot story becomes a vehicle through which the poet can explore the question of what it means to be a Christian hero, a literal *man* of God. Lot is the pivotal figure on whom the exploration turns: although a patriarch, a figure of faith and founder of dynasties, should be a stable signifier from whom example can be taken, Lot is fundamentally unstable. He does not lead, he is not chaste, and he cannot be an example. Every attempt to make him one fails, until the ultimate solution must be to obscure him entirely, removing him not only from the narrative, as Genesis does, but from masculinity entirely. Although he fathers sons, he cannot parent them; the failure of his masculinity, both as a Christian (or proto-Christian

patriarch) and a hero, makes that impossible. In his failure to define Lot's masculinity, the poet defines acceptable masculinity for an entire society. To be a good Christian man is to defend the household, to assert authority, and to control oneself and one's family. Although Lot makes gestures at all of these things, his continual code-switching from female to male and back finally condemns him to disgrace, obscurity, and femininity, an ignoble footnote in the poet's grand vision of Christian manhood.

Figure 1. Oxford Bodleian Library MS Junius 11, page 84. Abraham leads his family into Haran.

CHAPTER TWO

CONFLICTING VOICES, CONFLICTING SELVES: INCEST IN THE OLD ENGLISH HEXATEUCH AND *LIFE OF EUPHROSYNE*

And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household.

—Matthew 10:36

In literature in general and medieval literature in particular, daughters often seem to be nothing more than warm bodies to be molded as the text requires. Their position within the family and within the narrative is not so much a subject-position as an object-position: the object of desire, whether it is the father's desire for a beneficial and lucrative alliance through his daughter's marriage, or a husband's desire to get the heir that changes daughter to wife to mother. As Lynda Boose, Gail Ashton, and numerous other feminist scholars have suggested, "daughter" equals "absence."[102] The daughter's position within the family and within the society is eternally unstable and constantly under threat. That threat may be external, but alarmingly often, it is not: the daughter is as much in danger from her own family members, and in particular from her father, as she is from exogamous males marauding the margins of the text. In the Middle Ages, incest was

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[102] Lynda Boose, "The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structure of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship," *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989): 19-74. Boose comments: "Daughterhood is, in fact, inseparable from absence in the psychoanalytic definition of social development, for it is the daughter's recognition of her 'castration,' her renunciation of the active, phallic state, and her acquiescence to passivity that, in Freud's assessment, constitutes the perquisite step backward that sets her on the pathway to 'normal femininity'" (21). Ashton's comments are even more pointed: "Western culture's model of kinship has ensured that the patriarchal structures are reinforced through the female. Valorized only as the 'mother' of (male) heirs, she mediates that privileged reproductive link between father and son. In contrast, 'daughter' is signified only as 'absence' or else as a specifically sexual property," in "Her Father's Daughter: The Realignment of Father-Daughter Kinship in Three Romance Tales," *The Chaucer Review* 34:4 (2000): 416-427, at 417.

regarded as a genuine peril—perhaps the preeminent peril—of family life. I propose to explore the understanding of this intrafamilial danger presented in two key Anglo-Saxon texts—first the Old English Illustrated Hexateuch, which includes Ælfric's translation of Genesis, and then *Life of Euphrosyne*. I will examine in particular the ramifications of incest for female identity and agency. Anglo-Saxon family life, a complex issue not yet fully explored by literary (or historical) critics, offers us insight into our own patterns of relation and development as daughters, parents, and individuals.

The relationship of fathers and daughters is not well explicated in Anglo-Saxon literature. When mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or other historical documents, daughters *qua* daughters are mere extensions of their fathers, offered in marriage to effect alliances. Historical women are not noticeable—not noted—until they abandon their role of "daughter" and becomes wives, mothers, queens, or widows. While those positions are still predicated on their masculine counterparts, they nevertheless entail genuine agency. In literature, and particularly in religious literature, however, the father/daughter relationship suddenly becomes one of the most significant of the familial relationships, possibly because the issue of a daughter's marriage (or lack thereof) is so often a central plot point. The Old English Hexateuch makes this point ably: in Genesis, of the eleven occurrences of the word *dohtor*, eight of them have to do with that daughter's sexual exchange.[103] Two of those references are to the daughters in the Lot narrative as they prepare to intoxicate and sleep with their father, a narrative that has not received significant attention in Hexateuch scholarship, likely due to Ælfric's reputation as a conservative translator. However, I will argue that the Lot narrative, when combined with its images from the illustrated Hexateuch, represents a deeply uncertain translation of the Vulgate text, betraying an extreme anxiety about the power of the sexually liberated

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[103] DOE, *s.v.* "dohtor."

daughter. As Ælfric struggles with questions of blame and agency in the seduction of Lot, the story's illustrator attempts an aggressive resolution of an ultimately unsolvable question: how can the danger of incest be mitigated while still preserving the patriarchy?

That question is likewise at the heart of a second Anglo-Saxon text that addresses the dangers of the father-daughter relationship in a unique and productive manner. In the Old English *Life of Euphrosyne*, a little-regarded tale haphazardly patched into Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, the title character escapes from her father's house by dressing as a monk and living as a man in a monastery for 38 years. This assertion of an independent sexual identity, like the sexual agency of Lot's daughters, poses serious problems for the vita's translator, who must negotiate her aggressively independent self-definition while maintaining her sanctity as a holy figure. His solution, I argue, is to pursue the incestuous reacquisition of Euphrosyne's femininity—and feminine identity—by her father. Her body becomes a battle ground for control of the narrative.

The thousand-year gap between Old English narrative and modern critical explanation is surprisingly inconsequential to the behaviors involved—identity construction, however unconscious, remains consistent. However, medieval incest was considered, at its core, a sin, one of the most deadly and pervasive. Elizabeth Archibald notes that "In cautionary tales of the period, incest seems to have become the sin of choice….It is the worst form of lust, distorting family and social relationships; in some texts it is even understood to represent original sin."[104] Although concern about incest and its consequences was pervasive throughout the Middle Ages, and particularly before the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council, the anticipated consequences were not psychological but social in nature. Incest would, medieval people feared, break down the

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[104] Elizabeth Archibald, "'Worse Than Bogery': Incest Stories in Middle English Literature," *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Elizabeth Barnes (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 17-38, at 22.

established hierarchy and make it unclear where power lay within the family unit.[105] As Kathryn Gravdal notes, however, what is most prevalent in modern studies of medieval incest is not incest itself, that is, sexual interaction between consanguineous family members, but endogamy—marriage within a family unit, closely related but not identical concepts.[106] The practice of exogamy was a matter of practical concern that had much to do with familial power structures and the exchange of women between men, and less to do with sexual predation and victimization of those women in the way that we consider modern incestuous child abuse to do. The phenomena are similar, however, in their manifestation of the father's complete control over the daughter's sexual behavior and identity.

The issue of women's power in Anglo-Saxon incest stories is complex, especially when those women are daughters. My approach to understanding the father-daughter incest trauma in these narratives is two-pronged: clinical and theoretical. The clinical aspect of incest—our modern understanding of its pathology, forms, and treatment—is helpful in recognizing incest in these texts, both overt and covert. Such an approach covers incest's precipitating factors and its ultimate effects on both victim and perpetrator. These real-world details, the elements that are otherwise obscured by the spotty written record of the Middle Ages, make the reality of the victim's experience accessible in, if not an emotional and empathetic, at least an intellectual sense. The theoretical approach examines the broader cultural effects of father-daughter incest, including the conspiracy of silence and shame surrounding it that was first recognized by feminist scholars examining the underlying reasons for the incest taboo. Although none

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[105] Maria Bullon-Fernandez, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004): 18.

[106] Kathryn Gravdal, "Confessing Incests: Legal Erasures and Literary Celebrations in Medieval France," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32:2 (1995): 280-95, at 280.

of these concepts were recognized until centuries after the last medieval incest story was written, the trends and behaviors that prompted their recognition in the twentieth century are nevertheless apparent in the literature of the eleventh.

Hortense Spillers elegantly encapsulates the structure of literary reactions to incest when she writes,

> On one level of imagination incest simply *cannot* occur and never does. Under the auspices of denial, incest becomes the measure of an absolute negativity, the paradigm of the outright assertion *against*—the resounding "no!" But on the level of the symbolic, at which point the "metaevent" is sovereign, incest translates into the unsayable, which is all the more sayable by the very virtue of one's muteness before it. The fictions of incest therefore repose in the involuted interfaces between ephemeral event and interpretive context, but more than that, these fictions materialize that "other" and alien life that we *cannot* recognize or acknowledge … as being for consciousness. In that regard, fictions about incest provide an enclosure, a sort of confessional space for and between postures of the absolute, and in a very real sense it is only in fiction—from the psychoanalytic session to the fictive rendering—that incest as a dramatic enactment and sexual economy can take place at all. Whether or not father-daughter incest actually happens, and with what frequency, is not a problem for *literary* interpretation.[107]

Spillers points to the very aspect of literary depictions of incest that makes their study feasible in medieval literature. To the medieval mind, father-daughter incest as we understand it in the post-modern era—that is, incest as an abuse of power, as a victimization of the weak by the strong—never occurred, or if it did, the abuse was a vastly secondary concern to the sin against God's law. This makes using modern psychological theory to talk about medieval literary incest something of a dangerous path to go down. But Spillers suggests that literary incest is an essentially figurative event dependent upon the interpretations of its readers; in essence, modern readers can see its effects even if they cannot see the act itself. To put it another way, the effects of incest

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[107] Hortense J. Spillers, "'The Permanent Obliquity of an In[pha]llibly Straight': In the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers," *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989): 157-176, at 159.

are not obviated by a contemporary lack of recognition. In fact, Spillers contends that the act itself is beyond the realm of literary analysis—the realities of abuse and its frequency in "real" life are (especially in the Middle Ages) ultimately unknowable. The figurative nature of incest in literature, however, makes analysis not only feasible but actually indicated, especially in medieval literature, where incest is either literally unspeakable or unspeakably fantastic, its very extremity providing the protective distance from reality suitable for instruction and entertainment.

Clinical understanding of incestuous family dynamics in the modern era is, of course, complicated. Some clinicians claim that society is embroiled in an epidemic of incest; others are certain that incest remains a relatively rare phenomenon. With its frequency and social impact unclear in our own era, how much harder must it be to pin down an idea of incest's prevalence in the medieval era. However, statistical prevalence is not the only useful information offered by modern psychological data: symptoms and signs, the psychological effects of incest on the individual, and clarification of how an incestuous family functions (or does not function) are all invaluable for explaining the behavioral patterns revealed by the narrative arc in both the story of Lot's daughters and in Euphrosyne's hagiography. What is now clear is that incest has a powerful impact on the psychology of its victim: "The long-term effects that survivors most commonly attribute to incest are injuries to the self in relation to others: distrust and fear of men, lowered self-esteem, and fear of sex."[108] These symptoms, while valid and discernable in modern victims of incest, are nigh impossible to detect in the medieval texts at hand because of a more prevalent effect of incest: identity consumption. Incest is, many psychologists agree, a failure to acknowledge the boundaries that exist among family

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[108] Judith Lewis Herman, "Father-Daughter Incest," *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, ed. John P. Wilson and Beverly Raphael (New York: Plenum Press, 1993): 593-600, at 597.

members. As Juan Eduardo Tesone explains, "When an incestuous father uses his daughter's body to obtain a certain type of sexual pleasure, he negates her as a person, as a self distinct from him. In a relationship that I would define as omnipotent, this is the sense in which the father (or mother) abuses the child: the child's status as a separate self is denied."[109] An incestuous father and his daughter-victim become functionally the same person. Their selves are inextricably intertwined, and the daughter ceases to exist. This, then, is the central concept around which I propose to build a reading of Lot's daughters in the Illustrated Hexateuch and Euphrosyne's life in Cotton MS Julius E. VII. Beginning with Ælfric's subtle departures from the Vulgate treatment of Lot's daughters, I will investigate the ways in which these literary daughters undergo the same erasure of self as modern victims of incest, and I will reveal how they resist that erasure.

Envisioning Lot's Daughters in the Hexateuch

The Vulgate version of Lot's incestuous encounter with his daughters is relatively unadorned. After fleeing the destruction of Sodom, Lot and his daughters settle in a cave above Segor. The elder daughter, believing that they are the only people left in the world, proposes to her sister that they intoxicate their father and sleep with him. They do so and become pregnant. Biblical scholars have long been at odds over how best to interpret this episode—the question of where to assign the blame for the incest alone has prompted volumes of ink-stained pages.[110] Clearly, the narrative leaves unanswered some probing questions, not least of which is, as J. Cheryl Exum puts it, why the daughters believe that

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[109]Juan Eduardo Tesone"Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness," *On Incest: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Giovanna Ambrosio (London: Karnac, 2005): 51-64, at 58.

[110] For a review of the pertinent literature in contemporary biblical criticism, see J. Cheryl Exum, "Desire Distorted and Exhibited: Lot and His Daughters in Psychoanalysis, Painting, and Film," *"A Wise and Discerning Mind": Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley, Brown Judaic Studies 325 (Providence: Brown University Press, 2000): 83-108. Refer to Chapter 1 of this dissertation for an overview of relevant early exegesis.

Lot is the only man in the world and why Lot continues to allow them to believe this.[111] The problematic details of the narrative are not mitigated in Ælfric's rendering of the incestuous encounter, which deviates relatively little from the Vulgate account. Most of the changes he makes are typically Ælfrician—he condenses the speeches of the older daughter from two to one, and generally eliminates repetition and extraneous phrasing. The daughter says

> "Ure fæder is eald mann and nan oþer wer ne belaf on ealre eorþan þe unc mage habban. [32]Uton fordrencean urne fæder færlice mid wine and uton licgan mid him þæt sum laf beo hys cynnes." [112]
>
> [Our father is an old man, and no other man has remained in all the earth who may have us. Let us intoxicate our father unexpectedly with wine and let us lie with him so that there may be some remnant of his kin.]

Two words in particular present an interesting if subtle shift in the narrative tone that bears some examination. Those words are verse 32's *færlice* and the use of *befeng* in verses 33 and 35. I contend that these two words reveal Ælfric's deeply conflicted attitudes toward this particular narrative event. The Vulgate narrative provides no adverbs in verse 32: "veni inebriemus vino dormiamusque cum eo ut servare possimus ex patre nostro semen," [Come, let us intoxicate him with wine and sleep with him so that we may preserve the seed of our father] the oldest daughter suggests. [113] The question of where the blame rests for this incest is, apparently, not one for which Ælfric has a certain answer. *Færlice*, meaning "suddenly, unexpectedly" betrays the daughters' culpability, a move that is fairly well expected: Jen Shelton writes that "Culture, symptomatized by

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[111] Ibid., 85.

[112] Richard Marsden, ed., *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de veteri testament et novo*, EETS o.s. 330 (London: Oxford University Press, 2008): Genesis 19:31-32. Subsequent quotations will by cited parenthetically by verse. Translations are my own.

[113] Biblical quotations taken from *The Vulgate Bible: The Pentateuch: Douay-RheimsTranslation*, ed. Edgar Swift, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Freud, reinforces secrecy by teaching daughters that stories of incest reveal not the father's crime but the daughter's pathology."[114] Feminist biblical critics have established a fairly strong tradition of seeing this assignment of culpability as a displacement that fulfills a masculine fantasy of incestuous access to daughters without the accompanying condemnation.[115] Ælfric reveals his suspicion of that pathology (even if he would never have thought of it in precisely that way) in his suggestion that they formulate and execute a plan to seduce their father without his guidance and approval. The problem of why they do not consult their father about their plans was one that confounded exegetes including Origen and Augustine; Ælfric's use of *faerlice* conveys the wrongdoing inherent in their independence. It is a particularly nuanced choice*: færlice* also suggests, according to the Dictionary of Old English, an urgency under its secondary meaning, "immediately." To divorce their actions from their father's approval, that is, to display independence and strategic planning, is the sin here, not the incest.[116] In the same sentence the daughters reveal their motives to be relatively benign—they seek to preserve the family line as quickly as possible. This motive is a slight revision of the Vulgate, in which the daughters wish to preserve *ex patre nostro semen*, the seed of our father. Here, Ælfric's revision stresses that the daughters serve not just their father but the entire family, placing

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[114] Jen Shelton, "'Don't Say Such Foolish Things, Dear': Speaking Incest in *The Voyage Out*," *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Elizabeth Barnes (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 224-48, at 227.

[115] See, e.g., Suzanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010): 169-73; Elke Seifert, *Tochter und Vater im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1997); Ilona N. Rashkow, "Daddy-Dearest and the 'Invisible Spirit of Wine,'" *Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 82-107. For a counterperspective, see Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament ss 310 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 65-69. Fuchs sees the narrative as displacing the father's desire for a male heir, rather than legitimating his desire for sexual congress.

[116] Indeed, this is the very critique of the daughters offered by Bede. See my discussion in Chapter 1, page 61-62.

family members on a more equal plane of value than might be expected. It is the daughters' means, not their motives, that are suspect.

Although Ælfric seemingly disapproves of the daughters' actions, Lot himself does not escape unscathed. Ælfric reports that he "nyste hu he befeng on hig for þære druncennysse, ne hu heo dearnunga aras" (Gen. 19: 35) [did not know how he seized on her on account of the drunkenness, nor how she secretly arose]. *Befeng*, from the infinitive *befon*, is the word of critical interest here. For a man impaired to the point of stupor by wine, *befeng* is a remarkably aggressive verb. Although the DOE suggests that the construction *befon on* translates to "to have dealings with (someone *acc.*),"[117] specifically quoting this instance of its use, it is difficult to escape from the word's more common—and more active—meaning: to catch, to seize, to take hold of. Either way, the word points to Lot's active participation in the deflowering of his daughters, despite his intoxication. More even than the inclusion of *færlice*, the use of *befeng* is an enormous departure from the Vulgate in terms of Lot's character. The same verse in Latin says only that Lot "non sensit nec quando accubuit filia nec quando surrexit" [knew neither when his daughter lay down nor when she stole away]. The Latin phrasing delicately mitigates the sexual act with Lot's senselessness; the agency and the blame belong entirely to the daughter. Not so in Ælfric's version, where Lot seizes on his daughter. Even though he apparently does not realize his own actions, he nevertheless commits them, and the reader is consequentially less able to overlook the sex at the center of the episode. By taking hold of his daughters, Lot places their bodies in the reader's consciousness and reinvokes the immediacy of the sexuality suggested by the earlier *færlice*. *Befeng* is not only active, it is interactive: it requires the participation of Lot's body with his daughters'. Although

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[117] DOE, *s.v.* "befon," 12a.

he is *unwæran* and very, very drunk (given the repeated pairing of *fordrencton* with *for druncenysse*), he is active, aroused, and engaged. He is no passive sexual victim.

Indeed, immediately after he sleeps with the younger daughter in verse 35, verse 36 comments simply, "Hig wæron þa eacnigende" [They were then increasing], that is, the daughters are pregnant. This phrasing constitutes a significant simplification from the Latin, which reads "conceperunt ergo duae filiae Loth de patre suo" [Therefore the two daughters of Lot conceived by their father]. It thereby lays immense stress on Lot's role in the conception. Ælfric simplifies the conception, removing the dual references to Lot and simply focusing on the daughters: *hig*. Yet the words that compose that short sentence complicate its overtones immensely. The question of who the *hig* encompasses is merely the start: obviously it is the daughters who were impregnated, who are increasing, but the actual, larger increase is to all of them—Ælfric's *hig* hearkens back to the entire line of *hys cynnes* that the daughters seek to preserve. In the sentence the *hig eacnigende* collapses the identity of Lot and his daughters. The daughters become the vehicle for Lot's increase, to the point that the repeated mention of his name as in the Vulgate is patently unnecessary.

What this sentence means for the issue of culpability for incest is interesting, not to mention the way it blurs gender roles and boundaries. Ælfric's position certainly is not clarified one way or the other by his willingness to elide the daughters' actions and their inevitable consequences. While he acknowledges the daughters' agency in planning to seduce their father, he does not simply ascribe the driving force of the narrative to the trope of the seductive daughter. Some culpability, in Ælfric's translation, must be assigned to Lot, who seizes on his daughter and falls prey to their machinations. His drunkenness is not allowed to exonerate him. However, with that culpability comes power—agency instead of passive victimhood. Lot's seizing participation ultimately allows the logical resolution of the story: the daughters becomes pregnant and bear sons

who carry on Lot's line, who are identified with names and lineal destinies in a way that the daughters themselves are not.

The images that accompany Ælfric's text in the illustrated version of Genesis in Cotton Claudius B.iv adopt a similarly conflicted attitude toward the daughters' agency. The work of an artist credited with originality and unusual faithfulness to the text, the images provide the most detailed visual depiction of the Lot narrative in Anglo-Saxon art.[118] Four illustrations deal directly with the story of Lot and his daughters. The first shows them approaching, and then inhabiting the cave (fol. 33r), then there is an image for each of his encounters with his daughters (fol. 33v), and finally an image of the daughters with their sons (fol. 34r). Before the daughters become their father's sexual partners, however, the mother must disappear from the narrative—a critical factor, according to modern psychological theories, in eventuating father-daughter incest. Judith Herman notes that "the theme of maternal absence, in one form or another, is always found in the background of the incest romance," which, in medieval literature, often translates to the mother's untimely death.[119] The story of Lot's wife is perhaps the most famous and famously literal example of this phenomenon: only because she becomes a pillar of salt are her daughters able to take her place in the marriage bed. To establish her absence, however, the artist first had to establish her presence. The image on the top of fol. 32r (fig. 2) shows Lot and his family being led out of Sodom by the angels; one angel holds Lot by the wrist and points away from the city; another, behind Lot, grasps the wrist of the first woman in a group of three. This is, presumably, Lot's wife. She is more or less indistinguishable from her daughters, except for the angel's grasp on her. The

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[118] Benjamin Withers, *The Illustrated Old English Hexateuch, Cotton Claudius B.iv: The Frontier of Seeing and Reading in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007): 89.

[119] Judith Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest*, with Lisa Hirschman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981): 44.

second image on the folio shows Lot's prayer to be led to Segor. As he raises his hands in supplication to the hand of God that descends from the top frame of the image, three women still stand behind him, all looking at the hand. One woman grasps Lot's cloak and touches his shoulder; again, presumably his wife, intact and as yet unsalted. In front of the family at the far right of the image stands a building, helpfully labeled "Segor" in a later hand, the city where Lot seeks refuge. In this image the three women are distinguishable by their garments, which are various combinations of blue, green, and red, the folds and drapes carefully outlined but not filled in. Lot, on the other hand, wears a knee-length red garment and blue cloak, both fully filled in. Johnson contends that this "mixed color technique" is significant in that it "uses color-outline for the majority of elements in any given miniature, but employs full-color painting to effect an emphasis of a particularly important figure or figures."[120] Lot's garments are fully colored in only three images: those between his departure from Sodom and his arrival at the cave. Whether this indicates some manner of artistic judgment of Lot's character is unclear, but it clearly establishes Lot as the most prominent figure in those illustrations.

Except, perhaps, in the image at the top of fol. 33r (fig. 4), where the composition is dominated by a grey shape isolated in the left half of the image. The pillar of salt is vaguely human-shaped, and the long column of its legs indicates the skirts of a woman. Although it is impossible to tell which direction the column is facing—all of the blob's features are obscured—it teeters precariously toward the gutter of the opening, leaning toward the depiction of the burning Sodom on f. 32v (fig. 3).[121] Lot, in the center of the

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[120] David F. Johnson, "A Program of Illumination in the Old English Illustrated Hexateuch: 'Visual Typology'?" *The Old English Hexateuch: Aspects and Approaches*, ed. Rebecca Barnhouse and Benjamin Withers (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000): 165-200, at 174.

[121] Although a Latin inscription around the image helpfully identifies the salt pillar, the inscription itself was likely added in the twelfth century and therefore would have been unknown to the manuscript's Anglo-Saxon audience. Ibid., 167.

image, still fully colored in, has raised his hands in a gesture of surprise and perhaps distress as he looks at his wife, and behind him, safe within the walls of the now-unlabeled Segor, his daughters look on, one of them with her hand raised to her face in a gesture of grief.[122] Somehow the direction of their gazes does not render them subject to the same judgment as Lot's wife—the artist chooses to emphasize their emotional distress over their slavish obedience to God's command. Perhaps the gesture of their grief also shields their eyes and protects them from their mother's fate.

This moment, however, also encapsulates the family's transition from functional to deadly for Lot's daughters. The text of the Hexateuch remarks that "þa beseah lothes wif unwislice underbæc and wearð sona awend to anu sealt stane, na for wiglunge ac for gewisre getacnunge" (19:26) [then Lot's wife unwisely looked back and was immediately turned into a salt stone, not on account of sorcery but as a certain sign]. Ælfric here expands the Vulgate text, which says only, "And his wife looking behind her, was turned into a statue of salt."[123] Ælfric emphasizes the salt pillar's function as a signifier—the woman's change from wife to stone is not sorcery, but a *gewisre getacnunge*. The practical effect of this emphasis is to demonstrate that Lot's wife has meaning only in her absence. In the images, too, she is distinct and meaningful only as the pillar of salt. As a sign, she is certain, specific. Madeline Caviness suggests that the metamorphosis serves largely to create meaning for Lot's character:

> He is additionally rendered blameless in the picture cycles by their [the daughters'] nameless (m)other's appropriation of a patriarchal gaze and recasting in phallic form. The myth continues to be relived in the charge of complicity that is usually made against the mother in cases of father-daughter incest. Mothers, it seems, can err in absenting themselves through illness, or even death, and

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[122] C.R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Gestures and the Roman Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 112.

[123] Genesis 19:26.

> must know that they may immediately be replaced by their daughters.[124]

Whether her depiction in the Hexateuch qualifies as an appropriation of the patriarchal gaze is unclear—the artist renders her effectively gazeless by obscuring her features so completely. However, her form is unquestionably phallic, static, and productive of the incest that follows. Additionally, her absence allows her daughters to appropriate the patriarchal gaze—to look upon their father with an eye to founding new dynasties. Most obviously, Lot's wife's transformation into a pillar of salt distinguishes her from her daughters—in becoming a non-woman, she becomes, oddly, her own woman. Yet the woman she becomes is always already negated. Lot's wife never functions as a woman *per se*, leaving the reader to conclude that the Lot narrative participates in an overt rejection of women *qua* women: they signify only as they relate to men and to religious instruction (as given by men).[125]

Conversely, this reading means the daughters also have meaning only because of their mother's disappearance—a troubling warning sign for incest in the medieval literary tradition. Before her transformation into a pillar of salt, Lot's wife and daughters are simply grouped under the heading "female relatives," and they seem to exist largely as a burden on Lot's ability to find safety after the destruction of Sodom. The pictorial narrative concurs. The daughters are particularly anonymous in Ælfric's translation

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[124] Madeline Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001): 80.

[125] Clare Lees contends that women signify primarily through their sex throughout Anglo-Saxon literature: "The regulation of sexual behavior…is one expression of the often conflicting social practices centered on the family in both secular and spiritual domains, as is witnessed by the fairly extensive Old English vocabulary for cohabitation, marriage, concubinage, polygamy, and spiritual marriage. In such binary, heterosexual examples, it is hard to escape the suggestion that sexuality is identified with women. Anglo-Saxon women have sex and rank; men have rank and weapons, as the common terms for male and female indicate: *wæpned* and *wif*." "Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:1 (1997): 17-46, at 21. This is clearly the case here; the women signify as women, as sexed, while Lot signifies as Lot, patriarch, as rescued, as head of the family, and only incidentally as male.

because the events of the first half of Genesis 19 are so aggressively abbreviated. The most notable change is that the moment when Lot offers his virgin daughters to the Sodomites as a replacement for the angels is entirely absent; the daughters make no appearance until the angels lead them out of Sodom. It strips the narrative of any complicating recognition of the daughters' sexuality before they assert it themselves. That is, they are entirely undistinguished, just members of Lot's family. That the daughters only become noticeable upon the death/absence of their mother is a clear indicator of their incestuous destiny in the minds of both Ælfric the translator and the artist-interpreter illustrating their story.

Indeed, in addition to the grieving daughters at the top of fol. 33r, the very next frame at the bottom of fol. 33r, shows one of the daughters in fully colored clothing, a long purple garment with a reddish headscarf. Her hands are completely obscured by her sleeves, which creates a (possibly unintentional) negation of her agency, but most interesting about the composition of this group on the left side of the image is the relative size of the figures—the daughter is clearly the largest of the three, taller than Lot and, by dint of her colored gown, weightier and more imposing. She is, most likely, the eldest daughter who instigates the incestuous encounter that plays out over the course of the next few folios. Her sudden prominence, combined with the artist's general insistence on the new importance of the daughters, might be read as at least partially empowering. That the daughter out-sizes Lot indicates her position as controller of the narrative. This is likely the same daughter who, in the image at the top of fol. 33v (fig. 5), stands in the center of the frame and hands Lot the cup of wine that will intoxicate him and allow her to execute her plan, as happens in a small cut-away view on the far right of the image. In both views she is positioned in front of Lot, emphasizing her control and his lack thereof. The daughters gain a certain amount of agency by virtue of their gestures, which serve to humanize and characterize the daughters' actions, to make them interactive with Lot rather than simple objects of his actions. Particularly compelling is the conspiratorial

whispering in the image at the bottom of fol. 33r, heads together and hands gesturing. The daughters here are at their most human. As they plot, Lot stares aimlessly back in the direction from which they came, perhaps contemplating the loss of his wife. Despite their extremely close proximity, he is apparently oblivious to his daughters' plans, but the direction of his gaze back toward Sodom perhaps anticipates the pull of sexual sin on him. They are momentarily freed from the overbearing paternal presence. In their plotting, and in the giving of the wine to their father, Lot's daughters make themselves active instigators.

However, their agency is still problematic from a feminist standpoint, in that it clearly places the blame for the subsequent incest on the shoulders of the daughters, rather than on Lot. And yet the matter is not nearly so simple as that. At the top of fol. 33v, the image of the first night's seduction, Lot's daughter proffers the cup of wine. Lot is clearly shown reaching for it, his hand extended and hovering under the cup to accept it. Can this be read as a moment of conscious complicity? If the daughters' illustrated gestures comprise their agency, then certainly so must Lot's comprise his: to reach for the cup is to signal active participation. In the subsequent image Lot is shown holding the cup and, interestingly, he is positioned between and slightly in front of his daughters. Why this change in position from the first night? Has he come to accept his daughters' scheme? Is he the incestuous father restored to control and dominance within the family? His eyes cant toward the daughter behind him, whose body curves toward his, uncomfortably coy; their eyes appear to meet. Their positions, with Lot slightly in front of this daughter, his body overlapping hers, essentially transforms two figures into one—Lot repossesses the daughter's body as a subordinate part of his own. Their cocooned forms reinforce this implication in the second half of the image—although Lot lies behind his daughter, her head appears to rest on his shoulder, cradled. The daughter's

unbound, uncovered hair makes the image overtly sexual; they are clearly post-coital.[126] The image completes the transformation of father and daughter into a single entity, just as the completion of the sexual act transforms them from discrete people into, essentially, a married couple, two beings who become one, in biblical terms.[127] The daughters are literally bound to their father; in the lower image in particular the folds of the cloth lying over Lot and his younger daughter appear to mimic the lines of a rope, tying father and daughter together. Disturbingly, it also resembles the swaddling of an infant, a reminder of the parent-child relationship that exists between these sexual partners. Again, the artist achieves an effective visual rendering of a psychological phenomenon: "From the outside, the family group looks as though it consists of several members. But from the point of view of its mental functioning, there are no limits or boundaries to separate them. Such families operate as if the group was Hydra-like, with only one body but many heads. Expressed as an equation, its functioning would take the form: 1 + 1 + 1 = 1 and not 3."[128] The artist does not quail, in this illustration or the one above it, from confirming the incestuous interaction of father and daughter, nor does he acquit Lot on account of drunkenness.

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[126] Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989): 48-51. Miles suggests that unbound hair was a troubled signifier in the Early Christian era: "A closely woven set of religious meanings of loosened hair—as associated with penitence and impurity—was held in tension with secular meanings of loosened hair—as wantonness, insubordination, subversiveness, and sexual availability" (51). Certainly the Anglo-Saxon community would have been familiar with Paul's directive that women were to pray with covered hair (1 Corinthians 2:11-16); uncovered hair was too tempting and too distracting.

[127] Cf. Genesis 2:24: "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh." This formulation of marriage is found repeatedly in the New Testament, perhaps most notably in 1 Corinthians 6:16: "Or know you not, that he who is joined to a harlot, is made one body? For they shall be, saith he, two in one flesh." In this construction it is the sex, not the marriage vow, that consecrates and binds.

[128] Tesone , "Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness," 58.

Although the illustrator is willing to grant the daughters some agency and thereby some identity, they ultimately cannot escape the oppressive effects of incest. The overwhelming sense of enclosure and entrapment that pervades the images indicates how little control the daughters—and, to some degree, Lot—have over the course of the narrative. The confines of the cave press closely around the figures, scant millimeters of space between the tops of their heads and the encroaching green of the mountainside. The landscape itself forms an imposing weight in all three cave images, a heavily colored presence that takes up more than three quarters of the frame. The cave has no apparent entrance or exit; the viewer achieves access to Lot and his daughters via cut-away peepholes. This monolithic enclosure invokes the incest occurring within the windows; the family tree becomes, in these panes, enormously endogamous. Ultimately the minimal space the artist uses to draw the family, in comparison to the actual amount of space available, draws attention to the progressive collapse of the space *between* the father and his daughters over the course of the illustrations and the narrative, until they are shown in a tiny porthole, less than four square inches on a page that is almost 380 square inches.[129] As a visual depiction of the psychological consequences of incest, it is a powerfully effective technique: a literal depiction of how metaphorical boundaries function within and around incestuous families. As Wendy Greenspun explains, "In the incestuous family a rigid, impermeable boundary between the family and the outside world has been cited, resulting in a high degree of isolation from outsiders. At the same time, boundaries within the family may be poorly defined."[130] The imposing shape of the mountainside forms a thick wall around the family, an imposing barrier shielding them

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[129] For a more detailed description of the physical manuscript, see Withers, *Illustrated Old English Hexateuch*, 18ff.

[130] Wendy S. Greenspun, "Internal and Interpersonal: The Family Transmission of Father-Daughter Incest," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 3:2 (1994): 1-14, at 3.

entirely from the outside world. Within the tiny confines of the cave, they are unassailable by outside influences. Endogamy—incest—is the only option.

Most baffling, then, to this reading of incestuous entrapment, is the final image of the Lot narrative, at the top of fol. 34r (fig. 6). The daughters have escaped their cave dwellings and given birth to sons; the split panel shows both women reclining on birthing beds and gazing fondly on their sons, who are being bathed by serving women.[131] Their change in circumstance is startling, given their status as unmarried women who have borne incestuous heirs. The architectural details behind them are reminiscent of those in the image of Sodom's destruction on fol. 32v, with scrolled pillars, detailed roofs, and arched doorways abounding. The upscale surroundings suggest that the women suffer relatively little judgment for their deeds—perhaps they are even tacitly congratulated for their ingenuity. Lot, by contrast, makes no appearance, despite finally having fathered sons—or perhaps because of it. Boose notes sardonically, "Up until Lot, no father has begotten a first-born daughter, and none of the really important patriarchs (Adam, Noah, Abraham) are recorded as having begotten any daughters at all. Having detached himself from the nomadic family and settled into the city of Sodom, Lot destroys this impressive record by becoming the first father to produce no sons."[132] Of course Lot *does* produce sons; they just happen to be illegitimate on a number of levels. Lot's disappearance from both the written and visual narrative at this point suggests how completely kinship has been disrupted by incest, as Judith Butler argues.[133] It reveals Lot's superfluity and the

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[131] Catherine E. Karkov, *Text and Picture in Anglo-Saxon England: Narrative Strategies in the Junius 11 Manuscript*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 86.

[132] Boose, "The Father's House," 58.

[133] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): especially chapter 3.

daughters' ability to survive—and thrive—without him. Indeed, their sons will leave a lasting track through the pages of the Old Testament: the Moabites and the Ammonites appear repeatedly as the sworn enemies of the Israelites.[134]

If Lot's purpose is fulfilled, then, his daughters remain at the top of fol. 34r as a bridge between Lot and his sons, as caretakers of their father's legacy. Although they outlive him and define his legacy, they cannot be entirely free of him. Because they were bound to their father, both literally and metaphorically, in the earlier images of the cycle, Lot's depiction here is in some sense manifestly unnecessary. His presence lingers in the shape of the room itself. The mothers remain enclosed—the lines of the birthing beds surround their bodies tightly, and the beds' shapes recall nearly identically, if somewhat more sizably, the small peephole in the cave that revealed Lot and his eldest daughter reclining together. Even though they have left the cave behind them, the daughters cannot escape enclosure and entrapment by their incestuous father and his narrative. Boose reads the Lot narrative as a manifest attempt to recover and control the exogamous daughter:

> Whether they marry or not, the answer to what one does with daughters is clear: keep them. As formal legal codes begin to emerge into the Old Testament narration, what the culture has sanctioned is obviously not the daughter's rights; but neither has it privileged the exogamous needs of the group as a whole. What has been privileged at the expense of all else is the paternal prerogative to retain daughters.[135]

Although the Hexateuch and its illustrations fail to lay responsibility for the incestuous debacle at the feet of Lot's daughters, they are nevertheless punished by their permanent enclosure, at least metaphorically, within the space of the cave and the lineage of their father. Their identities are eternally fixed within the patriarchal narrative and defined by their incestuous father.

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[134] See, e.g., Numbers 21-23, Judges 3, and 1 Kings 11.

[135] Boose, "The Father's House," 62.

Erasing Euphrosyne

The Old English Life of St. Euphrosyne demonstrates even more clearly the lengths to which the incestuous father will go in recovering and retaining his daughter for his personal use. Questions of incestuous entrapment and subsequent feminine agency raised by the Old English translation and illustration of the Lot narrative are also addressed in the Old English *Life of Euphrosyne*. Despite its title, the central character in the *Life of Euphrosyne* is not Euphrosyne. Certainly the action revolves around her: when her father arranges her engagement, she dons men's clothes, runs away to devote herself to God, and lives out her days at the local monastery disguised as a male monk named Smaragdus. However, it is her father, Pafnuntius, who dominates the tale's emotional and narrative energy, whereas Euphrosyne's rebellion merely serves as a catalyst for her father's conversion. The dimensions of Euphrosyne's relationship with her father have never been convincingly clarified in scholarship—readers have been more concerned with the consequences of the cross-dressing through which she effects her escape than with her reasons for it.[136] Yet I contend that understanding her motives is critical to understanding the narrative: Euphrosyne must escape from a father whose desires become so obsessive as to constitute incest. For Pafnuntius's interest in Euphrosyne indeed goes beyond the paternal—he grieves his daughter's absence for decades after her escape, and upon finally discovering her masculine identity, he immediately moves to reclaim her body as female and as his possession, while disregarding entirely her wish to

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[136] For a thorough bibliographical review of the rather scanty scholarship on the vita, see Gopa Roy, "Female Saints in Male Disguises: The Old English Lives of St. Eugenia and St. Euphrosyne: A Bibliographical Guide," *Medieval Sermon Studies Newsletter* 31 (1993): 47-53; 50ff. For more recent and productively divergent readings of Euphrosyne's cross-dressing, see Andrew Scheil, "Somatic Ambiguity and Masculine Desire in the Old English Life of Euphrosyne," *Exemplaria* 11:2 (1999): 345-61; Paul Szarmach, "St. Euphrosyne: Holy Transvestite," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 353-365; and Allen Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," *Speculum* 68.2 (1993) 445-471.

maintain her eunuch identity even after death. His betrayal, and his subsequent occupation of her monastic cell and identity, reveal his cathected desire: a longing for his daughter so desperate and oppressive that it constitutes incest. I argue that the total re-creation of self effected by Euphrosyne's complete adoption of a masculine-eunuch persona, including the prolonged resistance to her father's desire to find her, reveals the profound renegotiation of identity necessitated by the pressure of paternal lust. It also provides a surprisingly insightful portrait of feminine independence as laudable, if not ultimately sustainable.

Euphrosyne's vita is an anonymous translation from the Latin *Vitae Patrum* included in the late tenth-century British Library MS Cotton Julius E.vii, which is primarily comprised of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*.[137] Although we have no other evidence of Euphrosyne's cult in England, and although the western Church eventually mustered her out of the corps in the twentieth century for being somewhat too similar to St. Pelagia,[138] her Anglo-Saxon vita was nevertheless deemed important enough by at least one translator to warrant an addition to Ælfric's text. Euphrosyne's veneration by that translator and his larger community as a specifically female saint indicates incest's power to reify patriarchal masculine identity for both secular and religious figures. The *Life of Euphrosyne* makes a particularly compelling case study because the identity negotiation prompted by the incestuous behavior of the protagonist's father is so markedly transparent, while the incest itself takes a more subtle form. Before the audience's eyes Euphrosyne constructs an entirely new self, one that precludes not only the possibility of repeated incest, but also of any sexual relationships whatsoever. Integrating Lacan's

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[137] Szarmach, "St. Euphrosyne," 118; Hugh Magennis,"Contrasting Features in the Non-Ælfrician Lives in the Old English Lives of Saints," *Anglia* 104 (1986): 316-48, at 342.

[138] Peter Doyle, *Butler's Lives of Saints: October*, ed. Peter Burns (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997): 49.

explication of the Name-of-the-Father with modern clinical understandings of incest, makes it clear that although the tale uses incest to explore the possibilities of feminine independence, it ultimately rejects the self-defined daughter and upholds the ideal of paternal control.

Lacan's concept of the "Name of the Father" clarifies the nature of patriarchal control of daughterly identity, and highlights the stakes of Euphrosyne's defiance. The "Name-of-the-Father," Jane Gallop explains, "is the fact of the attribution of paternity by law, by language,"[139] an issue which is, in fact, highly fraught for Euphrosyne. Euphrosyne's parents have trouble conceiving, and it is not until her father goes to pray with the abbot of the local monastery that he is granted a daughter. The narrative thereby supplies Euphrosyne something of a surplus of fathers: the biological, in Pafnuntius; the spiritual, in the abbot; and the heavenly, in God.[140] This profusion of paternal figures may be cause for some textual anxiety, as suggested by Euphrosyne's first visit to the monastery with her father:

> Þa æfter micelre tide þa heo eahtatyne wyntre wæs þa genam se feder hi mid him to þære stowe þe he gewunelice to sohte and mycelne dæl feo þider insealde and cwæð to þam abbode, Ic hæbbe broht hider þone wæstm þinra gebeda mine dohtor þæt þu hire sylle þine bletsunge forþam ic wille hi were syllan.[141]
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> [Then after a long time, when she was eighteen years old, her father took her with him to the place that he usually sought and gave a great portion of riches therein, and said to the abbot, "I have

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[139] Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982): 47.

[140] David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 196.Clark's brief reading of the *Life of Euphrosyne* begins by noting Euphrosyne's profusion of fathers as a theme "of physical and spiritual fatherhood," but does not fully examine the effect of the fathers on Euphrosyne's identity formation or resolve the later repetition of multiple fathers at the monastery.

[141] Walter W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. III, EETS o.s. 94 (London: EETS 1900): 334-55, ll. 36-40. References throughout are to the line numbers provided by the Skeat. All translations are my own.

> brought hither the fruit of your prayers, my daughter, that you may give her your blessing because I wish to give her to a man."]

In order to give Euphrosyne to another man, Pafnuntius pays the abbot to bless her because she is "the fruit of [his] prayer." Pafnuntius asserts ownership by demanding the blessing and by paying for his daughter to receive it. The abbot reifies the exchange by offering his fatherly blessing where Pafnuntius's would normally be sufficient. This curious revision of the traditional system by which women are exchanged points to the patriarchal and normative functions of the father's name. By including the abbot in Euphrosyne's exchange, the text foregrounds the multiple patriarchal authorities to which Euphrosyne is—and perhaps should be—subject. Although she is present in the scene, she does not speak and is not spoken to. The focus on the interaction between the men emphasizes her father's right and ability to exchange her by explicitly mentioning the exchange of *feo* for a blessing, while the abbot's blessing verifies his right by sealing the exchange. The thematically equivalent scene in the Lot narrative, in which Lot attempts to exchange his daughters to the Sodomites for the safety of his guests, demonstrates a similar concern for paternal control of the daughters' sexuality. However, the excessive stress that this scene between Pafnuntius and the abbot lays on exchange and patriarchal control may reflect an anxiety about the validity of Pafnuntius's paternity, and about the system of exchange and thus the daughter's identity, an anxiety that, Lacan contends, is the ultimate basis for the Name-of-the-Father.

Of course in a saint's life, the audience must at least suspect that the true father and the true bestower of identity is God, so Euphrosyne's rejection of her father's name and identity upon escape must seem at least initially to be the right course. However, it poses the danger of feminine independence and infiltration of masculine institutions, which must be resolved through the other vital function of the Name-of-the-Father: the incest prohibition inherent in the bestowing of the name. To invert that prohibition—that is, to enact incest—is Pafnuntius's means of reasserting the father's name and rejecting Euphrosyne's independence, however well-intentioned and pious she may be. Incest

cannot exist without a familial relationship—if the name is not bestowed, the relationship does not exist; incest actually reinforces, rather than undermines, the Name-of-the-Father. Gallop suggests that if the father's desire would prevent him from possessing his daughter, so "the father must not desire the daughter for that threatens to remove him from the homosexual commerce in which women are exchanged between men."[142] However, after her escape Pafnuntius wishes to repossess his daughter rather than exchange her, and the narrative does not wish to see her married and thereby laicized. By inverting the incest taboo and trading on Pafnuntius's incestuous desires, the narrative instead accomplishes two goals: it regains control of the wayward, willful, self-identifying daughter, and it converts the father (and his wealth) to exemplary monkhood. Whereas the incest taboo and exogamy buy a husband for the price of a daughter, incest buys the church two saints and a fortune for the price of one daughter's identity. The vita's employments of the incest taboo thereby differs rather dramatically from the explicit breach of the taboo in the Genesis Lot narrative, yet both deployments necessitate similar arcs of expulsion, longing, and self-determined agency that they must negotiate in such a way as to shore up the patriarchal control that is inherent in—reproduced by—but exposed as unstable in the incest taboo.

Euphrosyne's flight is, in my reading, spurred by the need to escape the collapse of identity brought on by her father's incestuous desires. The threat of his incestuous interest and the possibility of her own reciprocal interest—the danger that she will succumb to the seduction of his love—necessitate her escape. Which is not to say, however, that these desires were ever physically enacted. Clinical psychologists recognize the phenomenon of "covert incest," and literary scholars have likewise found Kenneth Adams's description useful: "covert incest" occurs when a parent crosses "the

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[142] Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 76.

boundary between caring and incestuous love," and when "*the relationship with the child exists to meet the needs of the parent rather than those of the child*."[143] This description is broad and could be applied to any number of problematic but non-sexual parent-child relationships, but one of the hallmarks of covert incest, according to Adams, is the formation of a de facto emotional marriage between parent and child, in which the parent forms the child into a surrogate spouse. The characteristics of covert incest are present in Euphrosyne's narrative, made possible by her mother's death when Euphrosyne is twelve years old, on the cusp of puberty. The legal age for girls to marry in the Middle Ages was, in an uncomfortable non-coincidence, twelve.[144] Like Lot's daughters, Euphrosyne's vulnerability to incest is eventuated by an absent mother.

Covert incest is the most predominant form of incest in literature. As Nancy Fischer notes, the incest taboo is a taboo against *speaking* about incest, not against the act itself, and therefore narratively, incest is always as much or more about what remains unspoken as what is spoken or even enacted.[145] The difficulty of describing explicit sexual encounters (as in the Lot narrative) was easily avoided by describing the threat of incestuously close but unconsummated relationships that were just as effective, narratively. That is to say, the essence of incest is completely contained within the *threat* of incest, regardless of whether sexual contact ever occurs. Elizabeth Scala makes this

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[143] Kenneth M. Adams, *Silently Seduced: When Parents Make Children Their Partners — Understanding Covert Incest* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: HCI, 1991): 9, emphasis mine.

[144] Elizabeth Archibald, "Incest Between Adults and Children in the Medieval World," *Children and Sexuality: From the Greeks to the Great War*, ed. George Rousseau (New York: Palgrave, 2007): 85-108, at 93. Boys could marry at age 14, although noble children of both genders were often betrothed at much younger ages, sometimes in the cradle. See Archibald's article for an extended discussion of child-consent issues.

[145] Nancy Fischer, "Oedipus Wrecked? The Moral Boundaries of Incest," *Gender and Society* 17.1 (2003): 92-110, at 96. Fischer reviews feminist reactions to the incest taboo in depth in her article, building in particular on the work of Judith Herman, Louise Armstrong, and Emily Driver.

principle clear in her work on the *Squire's Tale*. She argues that incest prompts a "repressed, absent narrative that structures the function of the narrative itself" in the *Man of Law's Tale*,[146] and such is also the case in the *Life of Euphrosyne*, despite its much earlier date and its different genre. Incest, despite never being mentioned, even as an *occupatio*, drives the narrative.

Incest prompts Euphrosyne, through her construction of a new identity, to assert a sexual independence that the tale works to contain. Euphrosyne, then, makes a particularly compelling case study because the identity negotiation prompted by the incestuous behavior of her father, Pafnuntius, is so markedly transparent, while the incest itself takes a more subtle form. The audience watches her build a new self before their eyes, one that precludes not only the possibility of repeated incest, but of any sexual relationships whatsoever—a move that would be, studies show, not unfamiliar to modern victims of incest seeking to protect a fragmented core identity.[147] The redactor's solution to the problematic independence of his protagonist is to emphasize her father's quest to reacquire control of Euphrosyne's sexuality and feminine identity. The incest at the narrative's heart achieves this control: when the father co-opts his daughter's sexuality, her identity is completely reintegrated into the patriarchal system—that is, erased. In these encounters, as Tesone suggests of modern-day incestuous families, "Sexuality operates…not as a source of life and creator of links, but as a persecutory object that

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[146] Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[147] See, e.g., Michelle Price, "The Impact of Incest on Identity Formation in Women," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 21:2 (1993): 213-228. She notes that, "In an incestuous family, the child is caught in a developmental paradox of maintaining a relationship with the abusing parent while processing and enduring severe trauma. In order to accomplish this the child relies on a variety of defenses, including disassociation, repression, denial, idealization, and splitting. These defenses may become entwined into the person's developing character structure" (218). There is no question that Euphrosyne's coping mechanisms become integral to her character later in her vita, as she develops an entirely new persona.

unbinds and has implications of death."[148] Although the assertion of an independent sexual identity by Euphrosyne is quite radical, it is ultimately futile, twisted into a means of reinscribing patriarchal control of female sexuality. If, as Christine Froula suggests of such narratives, "literary violence against women works to privilege the cultural father's voice and story over these women, the cultural daughters, and indeed to silence women's voices,"[149] then to examine these stories and expose the daughter's silencing is an important act of recovery and recognition: a recuperation of daughterly and feminine identity in the face of incestuous trauma.

The idea of parents preying on children sexually was not foreign in the Middle Ages; classical literature is littered with examples of incestuous parents that medieval authors and their audiences knew well. Enduring interest in tales like *Apollonius of Tyre*, retold throughout the Middle Ages in translations such as the Old English in MS C.C.C.C. 201 and Gower's Middle English version in *Confessio Amantis*, signals an awareness of the parent-as-predator motif. In fact, incest itself is commonly employed as a plot device in medieval literature, particularly in romance, where, as John Fyler observes, it serves to define the boundaries of Self and Other. The incest taboo, Fyler asserts, "forbids us to treat the same as if it were other, and insists on the need for deciding which is which."[150] But can this be its purpose in Euphrosyne's narrative? Her world is minimally described: its spaces and details are only lightly sketched out, the distinctions between home and monastery, minster and cell easily observed. In fact, though, the narrative uses incest to draw a more subtle distinction between feminine piety

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[148] Tesone, "Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness," 55.

[149] Christine Froula, "The Daughter's Seduction: Sexual Violence and Literary History," *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University 1989): 111-135, at 122.

[150] John Fyler, "Domesticating the Exotic in the *Squire's Tale*," *ELH* 55:1 (1988): 1-26, at 2.

and masculine religious life suggesting that the two identities must *remain* distinct. Euphrosyne's identity is confused from the very beginning of her life, as the narration of her conception demonstrates.

Pafnuntius never remarries after his wife's death, and the text makes no effort even to suggest the possibility of a suitable candidate for him. Instead, the tale emphasizes his devotion to his daughter:

> And mid þy heo wæs twelf winter þa gewat hire modor se fæder gelærde þæt mæden mid halgum gewritum and godcundum rædingum and mid eallum woruldlicum wisdom and hio þa lare to þam deoplice under-nam þæt fæder þæs micclum wundrode (25-29)
>
> [And when she was 12 years old, her mother died. The father taught that maiden with holy writings and readings pertaining to God and all worldly wisdom. And she then undertook the learning so deeply that her father greatly wondered at it.]

Most notable here is the casual reference to the death of Euphrosyne's mother, which goes completely unmarked by Pafnuntius as the text rushes to depict the relationship of father and daughter. Once Pafnuntius's wife has disappeared from the narrative, she stays gone, never mentioned again and apparently unmissed by either father or daughter. Just as tellingly, the mother dies one sentence after Euphrosyne is noted as "wlytig on ansyne," beautiful of countenance. Euphrosyne's sexual maturity, marked by her beauty, eliminates her mother as an object of desire for her father, and therefore her death is conveniently timed in the narrative to make way for the new object of desire. This pattern recurs throughout medieval incest narratives, including the stories of Custance, Canacee, Emaré, and Antiochus's daughter in *Apollonius of Tyre*, as well as in religious narratives such as the Lot story. The extremity of the daughters' beauty seems to be a marker of their blameworthiness: the temptation they pose to their otherwise virtuous fathers is often narrative reason enough for incest. This temptation makes the beginning of Euphrosyne's narrative resemble what Archibald terms "flight from incest" narratives, such as the *Man of Law's Tale*: a missing mother, an overly invested father, a virtuous

and beautiful daughter, and the father's repeated refusals of marriage on his daughter's behalf.[151] Upon fleeing the father's implied or explicit advances, the saintly daughter wanders the wilds or the seas. Eventually she finds a suitable mate, and is often reunited with the father in time for his pre-death repentance.

Euphrosyne's father indeed refuses multiple offers for his beautiful daughter, before finally demonstrating his control over her sexuality by accepting a suitor who serves only his interest in exchange: the man is more noble and richer than all of her other suitors. Pafnuntius wishes not to see his daughter happily married, but as he tells the abbot, "hi were syllan," to give her to a man, that is, to dispose of her as he would any possession. Andrew Scheil suggests that as her father's possession, "masculine economies dominate Euphrosyne's life. She is an asset of Paphnuntius's estate, and, as he takes personal charge of her education and upbringing, he develops his 'investment' for the eventual exchange of marriage,"[152] fitting her within the system of possession and exchange. Pafnuntius has fixed her sexual identity as an extension of his own masculinity, and initially tries to exchange his daughter with a wealthy nobleman in the expected manner of fathers. The threat of this exchange prompts Euphrosyne's escape.

It is here, under the threat of either marrying or remaining subject to her father's control and name, that Euphrosyne asserts an independent identity. She finally speaks—eighteen years into a narrative that is ostensibly her own. Her first words are a plea to the abbot of the monastery where she will eventually seek refuge: "Fæder gebide for me þæt god mine sawle him sylfum gestreone" (51-52) [Father, pray for me that god will acquire my soul for himself]. In addition to demonstrating how much Euphrosyne has adopted her father's understanding of her as his possession, her desperate request points to the

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[151] Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 147ff.

[152] Scheil, "Somatic Ambiguity," 357.

danger at the heart of the narrative: that her father, by forcing her into marriage against her will, will destroy her soul. God must acquire it in order to save it. Her decision, however, is not made without difficulty, as she reveals to a visiting monk:

> þa cwæð heo Ic wolde gecyrran to þyllicre drohtnunga ac ic onsitte þæt ic beo minum fæder ungehyrsum se for his idlum welum me wile to were geþeodan. Se broþor cwæð Eala swustor ne geþafa ðu þæt ænig man þinne lichaman besmite ne ne syle þu þinne wlite to ænigum hospe ac bewedde þe sylfe criste (73-79)
>
> [Then she said, "I wish to turn to such a way of life, but I fear that I will be disobedient to my father. He, for the sake of his idle riches, wishes to join me to a man." The brother said, "Lo, sister, do not allow any man to defile your body, and do not give your face to any insult, but wed yourself to Christ."]

The near-simultaneous mention of disobedience to her father and defilement of her body reveals the incestuous circumstances in which Euphrosyne finds herself and from which she must escape. As Pafnuntius's daughter, she is absolutely subject to her father's whims for the disposal of her sexuality—a disposal that is, the monk suggests, a defilement. Her entire identity as daughter is bound up in the question of sexual use, and thus the solution is simple: form a new identity divorced from that question. Eunuchhood is the answer. Euphrosyne's decision in this moment comprises what Gravdal contends is the chief function of incest narrative: when female characters are "ubiquitous but carefully confined to the private space of the home, the heinous incest story is one medieval narrative that projects the heroine out from the setting of the patriarchal home."[153] Euphrosyne, characterized up to this point as nothing more than the dutiful, silent, and remarkably pious daughter, must have some reason to leave her home and to assert herself so boldly, and resisting the pull of her father's whims and desires to follow her own religious devotion seems a good one.

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[153] Gravdal, "Confessing Incests," 289.

It is no accident that Euphrosyne's new eunuch identity completely eradicates her sexuality. In constructing a new self, she becomes as asexual as is possible for a woman of her era. Her desire to erase her own femininity serves as an attempt to mediate the disruption of identity brought about by her father's excessive and overwhelming interest and to mitigate the danger of future incestuous attentions. It is a total abnegation of the Name-of-the-Father. Caroline Bynum notes that women "could not take off all their clothes and walk away from their fathers or husbands"[154]—their positions required a more complete rupture, one that was often only partially successful. Euphrosyne's break is twofold: the assumption of a new (and newly asexual) identity and her departure from her father's house: "Heo þa þone wiflican gegyrlan hire of-dyde and hi gescrydde mid werlicum and on æfentid gewat of hire healle" (130-132) [She then removed her feminine clothes and dressed herself with masculine ones, and at even-tide departed from their hall]. The text acknowledges her new identity in the moment she presents herself to the abbot as a eunuch escaped from the king's household and is accepted as a son of the monastery. The abbot accepts the story, inviting the stranger to stay, and inquiring as to his name: "þa axode he *hine* hwæt *his* nama wære" (148, emphasis mine) [then he asked *him* what *his* name was]. The instantaneous switch to masculine pronouns is striking, marking a complete break between the old identity as Euphrosyne, daughter of Pafnuntius, and the new, created when the nascent monk names himself: "þa cwæð he Smaragdus ic eom geciged" (149) [then he said, "I am called Smaragdus."] This moment of self-creation is critical—Euphrosyne becomes Smaragdus, and henceforth in the text is referred to by that name and by male pronouns.[155]

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[154] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991): 43.

[155]Paul Szarmach notes the importance of the name she chooses: "In this name-poor work, the choice of a name is significant. *Smaragdus* means 'emerald,' signifying in the biblical commentaries those whose faith is solid and whose doctrine is worthy" ("St. Euphrosyne," 357). See also Bynum, 34-51.

Although Euphrosyne's reinvention of self is remarkable for the independence it reveals, it also constitutes a violent erasure, provoked by the father, but enacted by the daughter on her own body and identity. While the text generally treats Smaragdus as male, which for all intents and purposes he is, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that he is a particular *kind* of male—a eunuch. Medieval convention suggested that women threw off their femininity when they dedicated themselves to God,[156] but Euphrosyne takes that impulse a step farther when she recreates herself as a eunuch, rejecting even a neutrally sexed (i.e., masculine) identity for an unsexed one. Mariam Alizade suggests that "reparation, sublimation, [and] protective a-sexuality" comprise frequent coping mechanisms for victims of incest, and it is tempting to read those motives under Euphrosyne's dramatic rejection not only of her femininity, but even of the appearance of a potent masculinity.[157] For Euphrosyne, androgyny is independence: by removing sexuality, she creates a body that cannot be collapsed with another's, and therefore, a new self that can never be consumed by another's desires. Her new identity also forecloses the possibility of her own desire; an unsexed body cannot succumb to seduction. Euphrosyne's reciprocal desire is apparent in her stated reluctance to disobey her father (74); that it takes her nearly forty lines to decide to commit to a monastic life also speaks to her internal conflict. She is subject to the seductive quality of the incest taboo as outlined by Gallop:

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[156] This convention was based on Paul's command in Galatians 3:27-28: "For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female" Biblical quotes taken from the Douai-Rheims translation.

[157]Miriam Alizande, "Incest: The Damaged Psychic Flesh," *On Incest: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Geovanna Ambrosio (London: Karnac, 2005): 101-14, at 111. Alizande likewise suggests that "The situation of violence and confusion demands that the mind set up inflexible defense mechanisms such as disavowal and splitting" (110): which aptly describes Euphrosyne's persistent thirty-eight-year adherence to her changed identity.

> But the 'lasting seduction' of the law is never consummated and as such maintains the power of the prohibited analyst. The seduction which the daughter desires would give her contact with the father as masculine sexed body. The seduction which the father psychoanalysis exercises refuses her his body, his penis, and asks her to embrace his law, his indifference, his phallic uprightness.[158]

The "lasting seduction" of the law can only be resisted by a dramatic break with the former existence, obviating both father's and daughter's desires. John Anson, relying on Marie Delacourt, recognizes the eunuch disguise as "a violent rupture with a former mode of existence made in the service of an ideal androgynous perfection."[159] Most readings of Euphrosyne's tale—and indeed, of all transvestite saints' lives—center around the attempted assumption of a masculine identity in order to obtain religious perfection, a rejection of feminine holiness that Allen Frantzen calls "an article of faith."[160]

Certainly Ælfric's *Life of Eugenia*, the other Anglo-Saxon transvestite vita, has a more explicit statement of religious motivation for Eugenia's rejection of a feminine identity: after discovering Paul's command, Eugenia has her two serving eunuchs tonsure her because she wishes to approach the Christians in *wærlicum hiwe* (masculine guise) so that she will not be discovered. However, the bishop sees through her disguise, so Eugenia, unlike Euphrosyne, never becomes fully male:

> Þa bebead se biscop þam gebogenan mædene þæt heo swa þurh-wunade on þam wærlican hiwe oþþæt hi on fante gefullode wurdon and mynsterlicre drohtnunge dearnung geþeodde. Eugenia þa

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[158] Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 75.

[159] Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism," 5.

[160] Allen J. Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," *Speculum* 68:2 (1993): 445-71, at 464. Andrew Scheil's discussion of the one-sex theory in this vita, although employed to demonstrate the "fearsome" plasticity of the masculine form, also speaks to the subordination of feminine holiness ("Somatic Ambiguity," 353-54).

> wunode on þam mynstre mid wærlicum mode þeah þe heo mæden wære.[161]
>
> [Then the bishop bade the bowing maiden that she continue to dwell thus in masculine guise until they were baptized at the font and secretly join the monastic way of life. Eugenia then dwelt in the minster with a masculine mind, although she was a maiden.]

Ælfric's text is vastly more specific than Euphrosyne's anonymous vita in the clear distinction it draws between Eugenia's way of life and her gender identity. Eugenia has a *masculine mind*, but her body and essential self remain female. She *is* a woman, despite the anomaly of her man's mind and dress. Euphrosyne, on the other hand, actually *becomes male* in the text—her name and pronouns change and her female self ceases, at least temporarily, to exist. This deliberate shift in identity is a reflection and consequence of the character's desire for a true change of self via the transformation brought about by faith. Nowhere in Euphrosyne's vita does the translator reference the Pauline motive that Eugenia cites; Euphrosyne is not granted Eugenia's special masculine perspicuity—perhaps because Smaragdus, being male, has the usual masculine perspicuity. Euphrosyne wishes to become male not only so she can be closer to her heavenly father, but also so she can be divorced from her earthly one. Smaragdus's creation is Euphrosyne's attempt to regain control of not only her body, but also her own narrative. Jen Shelton explains that "the incest structure reveals that women do speak, even when positioned as…profoundly disempowered speakers. The force expended on containing daughters' stories discloses that these stories are present, intelligible, powerful, and threatening."[162] The speech-act of naming himself Smaragdus is the daughter's suppressed voice revealing the underlying narrative of sexualized daughterhood by rejecting both sexuality and daughterhood. It is a powerful negation—Euphrosyne asserts

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[161] Walter W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. I, EETS o.s. 76 (London: Trübner, 1881): 24-50, ll. 88-93. Translation my own.

[162] Shelton, "Don't Say Such Foolish Things," 225.

a new identity in which she names herself and in so doing refuses the name and identity bestowed upon her by her overbearing father. Where Eugenia merely disguises her gender, Euphrosyne actually changes hers. The threat of the incestuous father alters everything.

Fortunately, Euphrosyne's new identity comes with new fathers who are free of incestuous desire: the abbot gives Smaragdus into the care of an elder monk, Agapitus, who is specifically called "haliges lifes man and wurð-ful on þeawum" (156-57) [one of holy life and honorable in customs] when the abbot informs him that "Heonon-forð þes sceal beon þin sunu and þin leorning-cniht" (157-58) ["Henceforth this shall be your son and your learning-boy"]. The text stages a revision of Euphrosyne's earlier parent-child relationship. As Fyler notes, repetition and revision of themes are typical in incest narratives,[163] and Smaragdus's new fathers give him the opportunity to safely reenact the child's role, subverting any reciprocal desire to the safety of chaste androgyny. The abbot's description of Agapitus recalls the introduction of Pafnuntius in the first lines of the vita: "Se was eallum mannum leof and wurð and godes beboda geornlice healdende" (2-3) [He was dear to all men and honored, and eagerly kept the commandments of God]. Both men are lauded as holy and honorable—the descriptions are similar enough that they both invoke the men's *wurð*. Both men become Euphrosyne's teachers: her father after the death of her mother; Agapitus when he takes Smaragdus as his *leorning-cniht*. The relationships are nigh identical, except for the gender of the child—once Euphrosyne becomes Smaragdus and the daughter becomes the son, the potential for sinful attraction is resolved.[164] Smaragdus's identity as a male, and moreover as a eunuch, protects his

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[163] Fyler, "Domesticating the Exotic," 2.

[164] It seems that while incest was quite familiar in medieval literature and, more concretely, law, the idea of same-sex incest was largely beyond the ken. I have found almost no mention of same-sex incest in the Old English or even the medieval corpus, and that the church did not consider incest a "sin against kind" suggests that it was considered purely a matter of opposite-sex interaction. The question of whether sex

new "parent." Agapitus's appearance as a new father marks Euphrosyne's rebirth as Smaragdus. The old roles of father and child are extensively revised, and Smaragdus is able to—desires to—be obedient to his new fathers: Agapitus, the abbot, and God. The daughter's reciprocal desire is safely obscured (obviated) in Smaragdus's identity. The problematic Pafnuntius is removed from the equation, as is Euphrosyne's own sexuality, so that Agapitus and the abbot, as Smaragdus's new parents, can provide the moral "home" that allows the monk to blossom fully in his self-created identity.

Through his genuine devotion to monastic life and Christian principles, Smaragdus is made male. Helene Scheck has, however, recently argued that Euphrosyne's gender switch is "merely performative" because when she is with her father, female pronouns are used. Scheck's position does not, however, explain the text's insistence on male pronouns and male identity in the presence of *other* men, including the abbot. It suggests that sexuality is externally determined, that because the audience "knows" that Euphrosyne's body is genetically female, it is impossible for her to be truly male, and Euphrosyne is disallowed from determining her own gender.[165] Although Smaragdus's gender is determined by his performance of masculinity—as, more specifically, his performance of eunuchhood, this performance does in fact constitute a non-female gender identity that is acknowledged by both Smaragdus's community and by the text itself. Scheck dangerously conflates sex and gender. Scheck's reading is also narratively problematic because it means that women can never truly be Christian—they cannot fulfill St. Paul's directive. Because Euphrosyne is a character, her sexuality is of

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between monks would have constituted a type of sibling incest remains open—certainly canon law forbade marriage between spiritual kin within the fourth degree, and monks were spiritual brothers, second-degree relatives (Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, 38). In all likelihood, the sodomy aspect of sex between monks would have taken prescedence.

[165] Helene Scheck, *Reform and Resistance: Formations of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008): 86-90.

course externally determined by the narrative, and it is only in the presence of her father that the text determines Smaragdus to be a woman. The pronouns and attitudes of the other characters give no indication that Smaragdus is not, in fact, male. In the end, however, neither understanding of Smaragdus's identity—true self or disguise—alters the tale's conservative bent, because Euphrosyne is externally determined to be female at her death, regardless of her own wishes.

Soon after he joins the monastery, Smaragdus's self-construction is reinforced by his fellow monks when he poses a sodomitical threat to the community. The monks are afflicted by lust, "þearle gecostnode þurh his fægernysse" (162-63) [sorely tempted by his fairness] because "Smaragdus wæs wlitig on ansyne" (160) [Smaragdus was beautiful of countenance]. Frantzen has recognized their temptation as "a direct referent to homosexuality in the monastery, which was a serious problem" but says that "the narrative curbs the risk, since the source of the temptation to the homosexually vulnerable men (all of them, apparently) is a beautiful woman."[166] Scheck agrees that Euphrosyne's "feminine nature does show through,"[167] but in fact at no point does the narrator suggest that the monks are somehow attracted to the "woman underneath" or that their affliction in any way threatens Euphrosyne's secret. Monkish libidos are no smarter than monks themselves; both are simply afflicted with "mænigfealde geþohtas" from the "awyrgeda gast" (161-62) [manifold thoughts from the evil spirit]. This incident of improper lust suggests that even the truly pious must guard against improper temptation.

The text is addressing the problem of homosexual attraction in monasteries, as the explicit retention of masculine pronouns—the monks are "gecostnode þurh *his*

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[166] Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough," 466.

[167] Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, 87.

fægernysse"—suggests. The abbot accepts this problem without suspicion, and his solution likewise raises no doubts about Smaragdus's sex:

> Min bearn þu ansyne is wlitig and þissum broþrum cymð micel hryre for heore tyddernyssum nu wille ic þæt þu sitte þe sylf on þire cytan and singe þær þine tide. And þe þær-inne gereorde nelle ich þeh þæt þu ahwider elles ga (165-168)
>
> ["My child, your countenance is beautiful and great destruction comes to these brothers on account of their frailty. I wish now that you sit yourself in your cell and sing your Hours there and eat therein. Nevertheless, I do not wish that you go anywhere else."]

The abbot believes that Smaragdus belongs at the monastery, if not among his fellow monks. Attraction and temptation, not gender, are in question. Clearly Euphrosyne has, by the force of her own desires, become Smaragdus as fully as she possibly can. However, the revelation of Smaragdus's fairness and his subsequent removal to the periphery of the community by the abbot—his surrogate father—also suggest that Smaragdus does not fully belong *to* the monastery, as in fact he does not—he is in defiance of his (biological) father's wishes. Euphrosyne's transformation into Smaragdus is a remarkable act of self-definition and independent will, but its very completeness makes it impossible for the text to endorse it comfortably. By rejecting the monks' improper desire for Smaragdus, the text also rejects Euphrosyne's reciprocal desire to be part of their community.

Pafnuntius's extreme and enduring grief at his daughter's loss cements that textual rejection, and Smaragdus's subsequent reaction to Pafnuntius includes one of the most marked departures from the Latin source text, as well as one of the text's most ambiguous moments.[168] Pafnuntius's reaction to his daughter's disappearance allows the text to stress heavily the importance of his paternal wishes:

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[168] Magennis notes that the Old English version omits a speech that reveals Smaragdus's reaction to the reunion. After their meeting, Magennis explains that "the Old English writer leaves out her sorrowful reaction to the state of her father. In the Latin she gives vent to her feelings in uninhibited fashion….There is none of this in the Old English." "Contrasting Features," 344.

> se fæder his dohtor beweop and cwæð wa me mine sweteste bearn wa me minra eagena leoht and mines lifes frofor hwa be-reafode me minra speda oððe tostencte mine æhta hwa forcearf mine wingeard oððe hwa adwæscte min leoht-fæt. Hwa bescirede me mines hihtes oþþe hwa gewemde þone wlite minre dohtor. Hwilc wulf gelæhte min lamb oþþe hwlyc stow on sæ oððe on lande hæfð behyd swa cynelice ansyne heo was geomrigendra frofor and geswencendra rest. (192-200)
>
> [The father wept for his daughter and said, "Woe to me, my sweetest child, woe to me, the light of my eyes and the comfort of my life. Who robbed me of my wealth or scattered my possessions, who has cut down my vineyard or who has extinguished my lantern? Who has deprived me of my hope and who has defiled the beauty of my daughter? Which wolf took my lamb or which place in the sea or on land has hidden such a becoming countenance? She was the comfort of the despairing and the rest of the working."]

Euphrosyne is figured here as a series of her father's belongings: wealth, possession, a vineyard, a lantern, a lamb. At the same time, her prototypically feminine virtues are reiterated: beauty, comfort, sweetness, and even lamb-like innocence. The good deeds with which he credits her are typically feminine, and, in fact, are the very deeds her mother performs before Euphroysne's birth—almsgiving and aid to the poor. Euphrosyne becomes both daughter-possession and replacement spouse, performing those wifely duties of comfort and compassion. Pafnuntius assumes his daughter has been kidnapped, seemingly unable to grant the possibility of her leaving voluntarily—or to grant Euphrosyne the agency inherent in escape. Although Euphrosyne has essentially disappeared from the narrative at this point, replaced by Smaragdus and her own independence, Pafnuntius refuses to allow that development. His desperate search constitutes an incestuous father's typical behavior: there are no cases in which incest is "spontaneously ended by the perpetrator's initiative and choice," Judith Herman notes. She observes that the incestuous father will pursue the relationship "until external controls are placed on his behavior."[169] The external controls placed on his behavior by

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[169] Judith Lewis Herman, "Father-Daughter Incest," *International Handbook of Traumatic Stress Syndromes*, ed. John P. Wilson and Beverly Raphael (New York: Plenum Press, 1993): 593-600, at 595.

Euphrosyne's disappearance are initially effective, in that Pafnuntius has no direct access to his daughter. But his desire persists unabated, as evidenced by the way that his reaction is taken up by the rest of the community: "Gehyredum þysum wordum hi ongunnon ealle weopan and mycel heof wæs geond ealle þa ceastre" (201-203) [Hearing these words, they all began to weep and there was great lamentation throughout the city]. So immense is her transgression that the entire city assumes the identity of the mourning father, revealing how dangerously disruptive Euphrosyne's control of her own sexual destiny must be. The mass mimicry is patriarchal desire normalized and writ large; Euphrosyne's disappearance destabilizes not only her father's life but also the life of the entire community.

Smaragdus's identity is, in turn, destabilized by Pafnuntius's grief. It is only in the presence of Pafnuntius that Smaragdus again becomes Euphrosyne, that the father's incestuous hold wins out over the daughter's independence. In mourning, Pafnuntius visits the abbot, who advises him to speak with Smaragdus. As soon as Pafnuntius sees Smaragdus, the text says,

> Þa heo þa on hire fæder beseah þa wearð heo eall mid tearum geond-goten and he wende þæt it wære of onbryrdnysse and ne oncneow hi na forþam heo wæs swiðe geþynod for þære micclan and stiðan drohtnunge and heo hire heafod behylede mid hire culan þæt he hi gecnawen ne sceolde (234-238)
>
> [When she then looked on her father, then she was overcome with the pouring out of tears and he believed that it was from inspiration and he did not recognize her at all because she was greatly diminished on account of the great and difficult way of life and she covered her head with her cowl, so that he should not recognize her.]

The reintroduction of feminine pronouns for Smaragdus is glaring, given that the narrative has so carefully preserved Smaragdus's grammatical masculinity up to this point. The reason for the change can be nothing other than encountering her father. Even if this is a mere convenience, a return to the feminine to distinguish the daughter from the father, it nevertheless represents a breakdown of the child's narrative in the face of the

parent's. As Shelton suggests is inevitable in cases of incest, for "most readers, narrative power maps onto the adult's position, not the abused child's."[170] The new identity cannot stand in the face of the incestuous father; the daughter comes rushing back. As though rebaptized by his own tears, Smaragdus once again becomes Euphrosyne, who makes every effort to hide her true identity, pulling her cowl up over her head. In fact, the character has no name whatsoever until Pafnuntius departs again at line 260; she is merely his daughter, a function of his desire despite her separate life. The breakdown is also a consequence of the daughter's conflicting desires—her tears are not, the text implies, solely because of inspiration. The child has missed her father, wishes to interact with him and empathizes with him. The emotional ambiguity of this scene, which mixes grief and joy and desire, reflects the ambiguity of Smaragdus's position and identity. Although Smaragdus does not betray his former identity, the text cannot reconcile the eunuch and the father, and of course, it is the daughter's already-precarious independence that gives way. In fact, Anson reads the loss of his daughter as the impetus for Pafnuntius's conversion: "Paphnuntius's loss of the daughter he treated as property leads him to rediscover her as his spiritual father, so that through his loss the parent becomes a child, just as Christ commanded of those who would enter his kingdom."[171] Pafnuntius's incestuous desires keep him locked in a relationship with Smaragdus in which his own needs are paramount. Even when she is unrecognizable, the narrative positions Euphrosyne as the object of his covertly incestuous desires, a relationship in which her own wishes are completely disregarded. The inversion of the child-parent roles merely continues the distorted relationship established by the death of Pafnuntius's wife.

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[170] Shelton, "Don't Say Such Foolish Things," 225.

[171] Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism," 16.

The humor inherent in the interactions between the unrecognized daughter and Pafnuntius becomes sharply edged in the context of the ongoing covert incest that dominates the tale. Smaragdus's words of advice betray the prototypically conflicted attitudes of a victim of incest, evincing both repulsion and desire:

> Þa ongan heo him to spræcan be heofona rices eadignysse and hu se ingange begiten bið mid ælmes-dædum and oþrum unrim godum and þæt man ne sceolde fæder and modor and oþre woruldlice þing lufian to-foran gode and him þone apostolican cwyde sæde þæt seo gedrefednys wyrcað geþyld and he bið swa afandod and heo cwæð þa git Ge-lyf me ne forsihð þe na god and gif þin dohtor on ænigum lyre feallen wære þonne gecyðde þe þæt god þæt heo ne losode ac getryw on god þæt heo sumne gode ræd hire geceas. Læt nu þine micclan cwylminge. (239-248)
>
> [Then she began to speak to him about the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven and how entrance is achieved with almsgiving and other countless good deeds and that one must not love father and mother and other worldly things before God. And she told him the apostolic saying that tribulation worketh patience, and that he is thus tried and she said then yet, "believe me, do not at all forsake God, and if your daughter were fallen into any destruction, then God would show you that so that she would not be lost. But trust in God that she has chosen some good counsel for herself. Abandon now your great torture."]

Smaragdus, despite his new identity and secure position in the monastery, exhibits all the intense and contradictory feelings typical for incest victims in his speech to Pafnuntius.[172] Because both Smaragdus and the vita's audience are aware of his true relationship to Pafnuntius, his reply is difficult to parse. When Smaragdus advises him that a person should not love mother and father before God, it is possible to read a pointed joke at Pafnuntius's expense, a defensive and guilty rejection of a former beloved parent, and an empathetic attempt to protect that same parent. Smaragdus truncates the quote from the

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[172] See, e.g., Mark Erickson's exploration of the emotional relationship of incest victims to their father-abusers from a clinical perspective in "Evolutionary Thought and the Current Clinical Understanding of Incest," *Inbreeding, Incest, and the Incest Taboo: The State of Knowledge at the Turn of the Century*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf and William H. Durham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 161-189, and Rosaria Champagne's feminist perspective in *Politics of Survivorship*, 99ff.

Matthew 10:37: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." Ambiguity arises from absence; Euphrosyne's assumed identity destabilizes even basic tenets of Christianity, which require that Euphrosyne love Christ and her father, throw off her gender and honor her parents. For the vita to be truly exemplary, these conflicts must be resolved.

It is, however, the events of Smaragdus's death that reveal the extremes of correction required by Pafnuntius's incestuous desire and Euphrosyne's escape from it. It is only on his deathbed that Smaragdus reveals his former identity to Pafnuntius, in what is by far his longest speech in the narrative:

> God ælmihtig hæfð wel gedihtod min earme lif and gefylled mine willan þæt ic moste þone ryne mines lifes werlice geendian næs þurh mine mihta ac þurh þæs fultum þe me geheold fram þæs feondes searwum and nu geendodum ryne me is gehealden rihtwisnysse weg wuldor-beah. Nell þu leng beon hoh-ful be þinre dehter eufrosian soðlice ic earme eom sio sylfe and þu eart Pafnuntius min fæder. Efne nu þu me hæfst gesewen and þin gewilnung is gefylled ac ne læt þu þis ænig witan ne ne geþafa ðu þæt ænig man mine lichaman þwea and gyrwa butan þe sylf (286-295)
>
> ["God almighty has well appointed my poor life and fulfilled my will that I might end the course of my life manfully. It was not through my power but through the aid of that one that held me from the treachery of the fiend and now, my course is ended, the glory-crown of the righteous way is held for me. I do not wish that you may be anxious about your daughter Euphrosyne any longer. Truly I, the poor one, am she myself and you are Pafnuntius my father. Even now you have seen me and your desire is fulfilled, but do not let anybody know this, and neither should you allow any person to tend and dress my corpse except you yourself."]

Smaragdus's overriding goal is to preserve his chosen identity after death. He rejoices that God allows him to end his life as a man—*werlice*, as the text says, a word that bears enormous weight in the face of Smaragdus's confession to his father. By using it, he rejects the identity that Pafnuntius attempts to reassign him, while at the same time reminding him that *God ælmihtig* has arranged his life. Smaragdus specifically requests that Pafnuntius keep his secret, that he not allow anyone else to handle his body and thereby discover his secret and out him. A common motif in women's vitas, the desire to

die a virgin, untouched in spite of aggressive suitors, is particularly prominent among the female saints of late antiquity, including Cecilia, the saint whose vita directly follows Euphrosyne's in the manuscripts. Smaragdus expands that desire to include not only the integrity of his body, but also the integrity of his identity.

However, Smaragdus's desire to preserve his masculine identity conflicts with the daughter's continuing affection for her father, manifested as a desire to fulfill his wishes and comfort him, as revealed by the feminine pronoun: "soðlice ic earme eom *sio* sylfe." Beneath his fierce desire to end his life *werlice*, Smaragdus retains the daughter-self, whose function is to see that Pafnuntius's *gewilnung is gefylled*, a phrase that both echoes and negates the beginning of his speech, where he suggests that God has fulfilled Smaragdus's will. The specifics of his ensuing demand, that Pafnuntius tend and dress the corpse himself, with full knowledge of its gender and identity, bespeaks an enormously charged intimacy, wherein the father touches the daughter's naked body—another facet of the ambiguity that surrounds Smaragdus's identity. Although he insists on the integrity of his masculine identity, Smaragdus cannot entirely suppress the desiring daughter. However, as Rosaria Champagne cautions, the "desiring daughter is not the consenting daughter."[173] Smaragdus's filial affection struggles against his own will and even his service to God.

The conflict within Smaragdus points to the conflict between the father and the daughter. Powerless after his death to prevent it, Smaragdus is almost immediately revealed to be Euphrosyne:

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[173]Champagne, *Politics of Survivorship*, 145. She notes also that "Parents have power and authority; children may acquiesce and even desire, but they cannot choose freely. Free choice exists only in the company of people who share the same relationship to cultural and political power and material goods" (100). Clearly Euphrosyne shares no such choice, as the patriarchal power structure at work in her vita assigns all narrative power to her father.

> agapitus… smaragdum forðferendne geseah and pafnuntium sam-cwicne on eorðan licgan þa wearp him wæter on and hine up ahof and cwæð hwæt is min hlaford. Ða cwæð he forlæt me her sweltan soðlice ic geseah godes wundor to-dæg and he þa aras and onufan hi gefeol wepende and þus cweþende. Wa me min sweteste bearn for hwam noldest þu ðe sylfe me gecyðan þæt ic mihte mid þe sylf-willes drohtian (304-308)
>
> [Agapitus … saw Smaragdus departed and Pafnuntius lying half-alive on the earth. Then he threw water on him and heaved him up and said, "What is it, my lord?" Then he said, "Let me die here! Truly I saw the wonder of God today." And he then arose and fell over her, weeping and thus saying, "Woe is me, my sweetest child! Why would you not make yourself known to me so that I might live with you by my own will?]

Pafnuntius's grief is once again extreme and dramatically physical. His emotional being is so deeply intertwined with his daughter's that her death nearly kills him, and his grief seems to prompt a last-ditch effort to recover Smaragdus as his daughter: he immediately reveals Smaragdus's secret. This speech encapsulates Pafnuntius's deliberate disregard for the wishes of his daughter. It is no coincidental discovery of Smaragdus's secret. Pafnuntius answers a direct question—this is not an anguished wail to the heavens, oblivious of eavesdroppers. Even more tellingly, his reclamation is physically enacted: he drapes himself over her body and asks: "why would you not make yourself known that I might live with you by my own will?" The question answers itself. In accordance with the medieval patriarchy, it is his will that prevails, always, when Euphrosyne acts as daughter. Euphrosyne in this moment becomes what Boose calls the "imprisoned signifier,"[174] trapped by her own death in her father's reconfiguration of her identity and sexuality. The tale resolves the uncomfortable ambiguity of her presence by highlighting her femininity as the core of her virtue, thereby eliminating the problematic assertion of her will over her father's.

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[174] Boose, "The Father's House," 62.

Pafnuntius's exclamation revises history as much as it revises Smaragdus's identity. Pafnuntius made no previous mention of wishing to join a monastery, let alone allow his daughter to do so. His mercenary motives were what finally catalyzed Euphrosyne's escape from his house and allowed her to determine her own identity separate from his. Pafnuntius's statement to the contrary is an attempt to revise his *own* identity in order to reassert control over Euphrosyne. According to Paul Szarmach, Pafnuntius's tearful exclamation indicates that he would have joined Euphrosyne in the monastery, making him a "good but flawed man" and Euphrosyne "a strong, self-willed woman who acts independently within the framework of her own society."[175] Szarmach's take ascribes to Pafnuntius an essentially benign nature and overlooks completely the question of whether Euphrosyne *wanted* her father to join her at the monastery—clearly she did not. She makes provisions with the abbot to send for her father's wealth after her death, but never does she try to convince Pafnuntius to become a monk. That he eventually does is entirely in spite of Euphrosyne's wishes, instead of because of them. Her independence, then, seems questionable at best—it is not the framework of her *own* culture within which Euphrosyne is able to assert independence. It is within the framework of the monastic society, which is pointedly *not* her own. When she is pulled back into the society where she is Pafnuntius's daughter, the minimal independence offered by the monastery is dissolved.

Indeed, as with his father's transition to monkhood, after Pafnuntius defies Smaragdus's death-bed request, his identity is fixed forever as daughter and not monk; Euphrosyne's (virgin) body is made available to the other monks to touch and adorn as they bury her. The reactions of her profusion of fathers are telling: Agapitus is *micclum wafian* (greatly amazed, 311), and the abbot is even more dramatic:

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[175] Szarmach, "St. Euphrosyne," 359-60.

> he þa þyder com and ufan þone halgan lichoman feoll and cwæð
> Eufrosina cristes bryd and haligra manna tuddor ne beo þou
> forgitende þinra efenþeowa and þyses mystres ac gebide to drihtne
> for us þæt he gedo us werlice becuman to hælo hyðe (312-316)
>
> [He then came thither and fell over the holy body and said,
> "Euphrosyne, Christ's bride and offspring of holy men! Do not
> forget your fellow servants and this minster but pray to god for us
> so that he might make us come manfully to the holy harbor."]

Doubled and redoubled, paternal control returns to roost, almost literally, on Euphrosyne's corpse. Each of her fathers lays claim to her narrative, retelling it as befits his own agenda. Agapitus brings the story to the abbot, who immediately prostrates himself on the body and defines its gender and origins, calling her "Christ's bride and offspring of holy men." These epithets comprise the very aspects of her identity that Euphrosyne rejected—a role as bride and her own parentage. Although she lives a chaste life, she is not like virgin martyrs such as Katherine who actively wed themselves to Christ—in fact, Euphrosyne's relationship to religion is taken largely for granted throughout her vita. She knows her gospels, and she is an apparently successful monk, but her actual relationship to Christ is never directly addressed. Even worse is calling her the "offspring of holy men." Her identity is once again subsumed by her fathers'. That the statement is made while one of those (possibly figurative) fathers is draped over her body makes it all the more possessive. Dead, the passive body cannot counter or reject the patriarchal assertions; it has no identity beyond the one assigned to it.

The abbot does not forget to correct earlier misrepresentations of "proper" gender roles. He asks that Euphrosyne pray to God that the monks may be delivered *werlice*—manfully—to the holy harbor. The similarity to Euphrosyne's earlier request, that she also be allowed to end her life *werlice*, emphasizes the failure of Smaragdus's masculinity. Readers are led to expect that the abbot's request will be granted as Euphrosyne's was not, because it arises from an aggressively masculine act: the reclamation of a woman's body and reestablishment of patriarchal control over an errant daughter. The text ensures that like all good daughters, Euphrosyne is *assigned*, and does

not make, identity and meaning. As complicit with Pafnuntius in Euphrosyne's death as he was in her birth, the abbot's act of mourning is rhetorically polysemic, serving the narrative's goal of reinforcing the marriage of patriarchal and monastic power.

Like Pafnuntius's two earlier collapses in the face of his daughter's absence, the abbot offers an example of masculine mourning that becomes exemplary—once again the community adopts the father's subject position. "þa hi ða onfundon þæt heo wæs wif-hades man þa wuldrodan hi on god se þe on þam wiflican and tydren hade swilce wundra wyrcað" (318-20) [When they then discovered that she was female, then they glorified in God, he who in the womanly and tender sex works such wonders]. Paternal control of the daughter's body is fully reestablished here. Smaragdus's death cedes control and allows the father to reclaim and redistribute his child's body, which he does at the earliest possible moment. The community as a whole, including the audience, "take a stand with male storytellers," to borrow a phrase from Bynum, accepting Euphrosyne's sanctity and sainthood as a function of her sex rather than a repudiation of it.[176] The storyteller here is Pafnuntius, who uses the corpse as any medieval father might traditionally have used his daughter's body: to make connections with other men, in this case monks. Euphrosyne again becomes an object of masculine desire.

The narrative closes with a final act of incestuous repetition: Pafnuntius adopts the same identity his daughter adopted. He, too, becomes a monk, giving his possessions to the monastery and moving into the very cell where she lived for thirty-eight years. By occupying the cell, Pafnuntius occupies—and overwrites—Euphrosyne's independence, demonstrating the narrative's ideal of monkhood: unambiguous masculinity as well as

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[176] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 39. She contends that taking such a masculine perspective on women-saints' lives gives rise to an over-dependence on social drama, "with liminal moments expressed in images of gender reversal." This perspective seems an excellent encapsulation of the coercive powers of Pafnuntius's subject-position throughout what is ostensibly his daughter's vita.

quiet adherence to the community's principles. In some sense the space of the cell defined Smaragdus's identity: a proto-anchorite monk, secluded from the rest of the community but nevertheless part of it. Pafnuntius becomes a more perfect Smaragdus, meaning that Smaragdus again becomes Euphrosyne, an idealized daughter who has brought about her father's conversion. By asserting his paternal right of possession, Pafnuntius corrects his daughter's ambiguity, but they become figuratively bound together in an inescapable bedchamber, where incest, in its guise as identity consumption, is constantly enacted. What should be a space of chaste safety becomes a re-enclosure within the confines of the pseudo-marriage established at the beginning of the narrative. It is both consumption and consummation. Pafnuntius's own conversion comes to supersede that of his daughter, and the tale ends with him, not with her. The final sentences of the narrative proper demonstrate this amply:

> Hire fæder þa gesealde into mystrum and into godes cyrcym micelne dæl his æhte and gebeah into þam mynstre mid þam mæstan dæle his speda and wunode tyn ger on þære cyten þe his dohtor ær on drohtnode and hine beeode [on] godre liflade. And þa to drihtne gewat. Se abbod þa and his gesamnung hine bebyrigdon wið his dohtor and se dæg heora forðfore is mærsod on þam mynstre oð þisne andweardan dæg (325-331)
>
> [Her father then gave into the minster and into God's church a great portion of his possessions and moved into the minster with the most part of his possessions and dwelt ten years in the cell that his daughter had lived in before, and committed himself to a good way of life, and then departed to God. The abbot and his assembly then buried him with his daughter, and the day of their death is celebrated in the minster unto this present day.]

Euphrosyne is eternally sealed within her father's house. Even her extreme religious devotion is not enough to free her from the powerful bonds of incest. Although Pafnuntius carries out his daughter's wishes in donating the majority of his wealth to the monastery, his assumption of her identity, achieved by moving into her cell and becoming a monk, is unquestionably a fulfillment of his own wishes, a final commission of covert incest that conclusively demonstrates how all-consuming the phenomenon could be even in an era where it went unrecognized. The *micelne dæl* of his possessions

he gave the monastery was not his wealth, but his daughter—by repossessing her body, her cell, and her grave, Pafnuntius reclaims every bit of her narrative for himself, permanently confirming her role as his possession and extension of his own identity. He thereby becomes the true exemplar of the narrative, both an ideal father in control of his house and a dedicated Christian and monk. The vita is ultimately the hagiography of Pafnuntius, not of Euphrosyne, and the final sentence both reminds the reader that Euphrosyne is a daughter, a woman, and reinvokes Pafnuntius's parental control and incestuous love, which persists even after death. His entire life becomes an assumption of his daughter's identity, one that is implicitly more successful because it is not hidden behind an assumed gender. Pafnuntius can be a "true" monk because he is a "true" man. Father and daughter are buried together, his body covering and superseding hers, completing the correction of Euphrosyne's rebellion, and the narrative closes with the note of *their* feast day and a formulaic benediction.

Incest in this saint's life is a function of identity consumption. The text is desperate to reassert sexual control of Euphrosyne, to correct the dangerous example she provides of a woman set loose by her assumption of masculine identity. The solution for this problem is to grant Pafnuntius the power to dispose of her sexuality—and her identity—to concretize his own most ideal self. The assumption of her identity that that death allows is also, therefore, simultaneously incestuous and masturbatory: he bestows her sexuality upon himself. In the process, he once again assumes patriarchal control of the narrative. Pafnuntius subsumes his daughter entirely, and subtly enough that it goes largely unnoticed both in the tale and in modern scholarship. The resultant implications for incest narratives—and victims—are troubling: permanent escape from the desiring father (and the desiring self?) is impossible, and the cultural narrative works to reinforce the father's desires and control. The threat of incest never disappears, no matter how drastic the proposed solution. The ambiguity of a new identity is uncomfortable and must be resolved; incest is the purest rejection of narrative entropy.

Conclusion

While my reading of the *Life of Euphrosyne* tends toward the grim—it is difficult to read incest narratives lightheartedly—it is important to acknowledge the hopefulness of the mere fact that Euphrosyne *survives*, both within the texts and within a larger literary tradition. As Ashton suggests in her reading of the later Custance narrative, "incidences of active, autonomous independence" in tales of incest undermine "surface depiction of the female protagonist as helpless, passive victim."[177] Euphrosyne unquestionably exhibits moments of autonomy, including her creation of an entirely new self, that, while eventually obscured by the weight of the incest and its effects, nevertheless demonstrate unexpected power. That her story was told at all, that it existed as part of the cultural consciousness, indicates that the Anglo-Saxons found it impossible to permanently and completely silence the abused daughter. Euphrosyne triumphs by endurance. As long as she remains alive, she maintains control over her body after her escape from her father's house. It is, in the end, her name on the vita, and her story whose details stick in the minds of its readers. Although the narrative credits her with healing a man's eye, it is not the miracle for which she is revered. Instead, it is the simple act of divorcing herself from her threatened femininity and living successfully as a man, free of the lustful trials that afflict her brother monks. Anson, in fact, suggests that her disguised life assumes "the aspects of ritual sacrifice" because she has "taken upon herself the sins of her brothers."[178] All these things undeniably indicate female agency and independence that, while eventually shut down by the text's resolution, cannot be entirely erased.

Portrayals of father-daughter incest require the audience to hold two contradictory ideas in suspension: both that the father and the daughter are two separate entities capable

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[177] Ashton, "Her Father's Daughter," 416-17.

[178] Anson, "St. Euphrosyne," 17.

of engaging in interactive intercourse, subject and object (i.e. that this is not, in some sense, masturbation) *and* that the father and daughter are somehow the same (i.e., familial; that this is incest). The act of incest was reviled in the Middle Ages neither because of the genetic difficulties it posed, nor because of the instinctive revulsion that we now recognize as part of the incest taboo. The essential danger of incest was in its power to break down boundaries. What the portrayals of incest in the Old English Hexateuch and the *Life of Euphrosyne* reveal are the ways in which incest breaks down not only intrafamilial boundaries, but also the boundaries between family and community. Incest co-opts the community viewpoint, forcing it to align with the father-perpetrator's, just as incest requires the daughter's desires to align with the father's. Increased by his incestuous consumption of the daughter's identity, that father is further empowered by the agency provided by the adoption of his narrative, and "daughter" becomes an empty designation for a self that cannot be separated from its progenitor.

Figure 2. British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, fol. 32r. Angels lead Lot and his family from Sodom; Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt.

Figure 3. British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, f1ol. 32v. The destruction of Sodom.

Figure 4. British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, fol. 33r. Lot's grieving daughters; the escape from Segor to the cave.

Figure 5. British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, fol. 33v. Lot's intoxication and the incestuous encounter with each daughter.

Figure 6. British Library MS Cotton Claudius B.iv, fol. 34r. Lot's daughters with their sons, Moab and Ammon.

CHAPTER THREE

"SO FASTE HIT DRAWEÞ TO DOUN HELDE": BLAME, AGENCY, AND REVISION IN THE LOT NARRATIVE

At the end of the Sodom and Gomorrah story, the *Cursor mundi* poet offers his condemnation of the presumed sin for which God destroyed the cities with fire:

> Fuyr & brimstone was þe wrake
> Out of kynde her synne was done
> Þerfore her kynde lost was soone
> Fleeþ þat synne al þis werde
> For þis wreche þat □e haue herde
> God forbade □e do þat synne
> Þat □ee in helle þerfore brynne.[179]
>
> [Fire and brimstone was the revenge
> Against nature their sin was done
> Therefore their kind was lost
> Flee that sin, all this fate
> On account of this vengeance that you have heard
> God forbade you to do this sin
> Lest you burn for it in hell.]

Although this is one of the poet's few homiletic interventions, it is not revolutionary—the poet here employs the common perception of the sin of Sodom, commanding his audience to avoid sins done "out of kynde"—against nature—because God has forbidden them on pain of hellfire. Namely, the poet offers a stern imprecation against sexual sins that were considered unnatural: sodomy, bestiality, and masturbation. Since this is the story of Sodom, the warning is likely directed most pointedly against sodomy. Although the Sodomites' exact sin is never specified in the Bible, medieval exegesis had long since

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[179] Lines 2888-94. All quotes from *Cursor mundi* taken from Sarah Horrall, *The Southern Version of* Cursor mundi, vol. 1 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1978): except where otherwise noted. Although Horrall's concentration on the southern manuscripts reflects the poem's late, rather than early, fourteenth-century influence, her editing practices are generally less intrusive than those of Morris in the EETS edition of 1893. Manuscript differences that affect meaning will be noted over the course of this chapter. Translations throughout are my own.

settled on homosexual fornication.[180] He echoes Paul's command to "flee fornication" in his formulation "Fleeþ þat synne," and offers a conventional warning about the fate of sinners.[181] The homiletic position of the poem is clear and uncontroversial: sins against kind, against nature, will provoke God's vengeance. But then the poet makes an abrupt shift into an entirely revolutionary understanding of sexual sin:

> But if □e nede synne shal do
> Þe synne of kynde hold □ou to
> Þe kyndely synne wiþ wommon
> But sib ne spoused take □e noon
> So fer □oure synne folweþ nou□t
> To forget him þat □ow wrou□t. (2895-2901)
>
> [But if you need to sin
> Keep to the sin of kind
> The natural sin with women
> And do not take relatives or married
> Do not follow your sin so far
> That you forget him who made you.]

The poet offers a surprising, if limited, endorsement of extramarital sex, suggesting that it is a lesser evil than sodomy—as long as the presumably male audience keeps to kind and sins *wiþ wommon*. But as a marked caveat, the poet forbids sex with *sib ne spoused*—those who are related or who are married. This understanding and partial deregulation of human sexuality is surprising from such a conservative poet. Although the Church established a clear hierarchy of sexual sins in the penitentials (incest and sodomy often being the most severely punished) and decretals, permission of fornication to prevent

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[180] Although the term sodomy is not coined until Peter Damien pens *Liber Gommorhianus* in 1054, exegetes as early as Origen and Augustine had raised the issue of same-sex intercourse in the story of Sodom. Augustine notes, "For it was a place where sexual intercourse between males had become so commonplace that it received the license usually extended by the law to other practices." *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R.W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 743-44, 16.30.

[181] 2 Corinthians 6:18. Biblical quotations taken from the Douay-Rheims translation.

more serious transgressions was a necessary evil not often mentioned in literature.[182] Ruth Mazo Karras notes that it was common for medieval cities across Europe to establish municipal brothels in order to discourage sodomy, but a "necessary evil was a necessary evil, and official recognition did not imply respectability."[183] Fornication itself was a mortal sin that should have invoked hellfire if not confessed, yet a practical, realistic understanding of (masculine) sexuality that diverged from strict Christian values of chastity was not unheard of, and it makes its way into the poet's work here. Some men will be unable to resist temptation, and in that case, guidelines must exist. Sexual sin is, it seems, more or less inevitable. Mitigation is the best hope.

However, the poet acknowledges that there are problematic categories of "kyndely sin," as well—namely, incest and adultery. These two sins are typical branches of lechery in various works of religious instruction, but that is not why the *Cursor mundi* poet mentions them explicitly here, following immediately on the destruction of Sodom. Instead, their mention serves as direct foreshadowing of the next two stories in the Genesis narrative: Lot's daughters' seduction of their intoxicated father (incest) and Abraham's disguise of Sarah as his sister to protect her from Abimalech (incest and adultery). For modern readers, this homiletic insertion, rare as it is for the *Cursor mundi* poet, suggests a writer who thinks broadly, practically, and, on occasion, progressively. He contemplates his narrative on multiple levels, and works from but is not a slave to a wide base of exegetical and apocryphal source material. He is, if not a master artist, still a thinker worth regarding.

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[182]For a thorough review of the place of sex in the penitentials, see Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

[183] Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 33.

I have several aims in this chapter, all of which stem from the assumption that *Cursor mundi* is an under-regarded poem that can helpfully shed light on the patterns of exegetical thought at the critical moment of the early fourteenth century, as a harbinger of the vernacular groundswell that was to come. I look first at *Cursor mundi*'s treatment of the Lot story in the context of the poem's genealogical preoccupation to demonstrate that the traditional Christian teleology required an endorsement of reproduction that was also a tacit approval of incest in the history of the Church as depicted in Genesis. The poet's negotiation of the subsequent cognitive dissonance foregrounds an unsettled question of feminine agency in the tale. Comparing the poet's treatment of that question to the treatments in the near-contemporary works of the Middle English *Genesis* and the Oxford-Paris-London *Bible moralisée*, however, reveals not only that the question of feminine agency was perpetually unsettled in the Lot story, but also that *Cursor mundi*'s solution indicates a relative openness to feminine initiative, or at least, a genuine belief in their blamelessness, that is difficult to locate in the other texts.

Cursor mundi is a biblical paraphrase poem of epic proportions, running to over 27,000 lines in some extant manuscripts. Its octosyllabic rhyming couplets were likely composed around 1300 and generally adhere tightly to the biblical source material, making modern scholars content to largely ignore *Cursor mundi* except when its manuscript history makes it a convenient checkpoint for the development of late medieval dialects.[184] However, the manuscript record for *Cursor mundi* suggests that the poem was, in fact, quite popular in its day; nine extant manuscripts and fragments from locations as disparate as Lancaster, Litchfield, and London suggest that the poem had

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[184] See, e.g., Nicholas Watson, "Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:2 (1997): 145-187; John Thompson, "The *Cursor mundi*, the 'Inglis Tong,' and Romance," *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994): 99-120.

broad appeal, second only to *Pricke of Conscience* in popularity for its genre. The manuscripts likewise vary in date, from as early as 1340 to as late as mid-fifteenth century, revealing the poem's longevity.[185] Sarah Horrall's careful explication of the poem's possible sources places it in conversation with not only Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, but also numerous French and Latin sources; the breadth of sources suggests a well-educated monk or priest, which is confirmed by the poet's own admission late in the work.[186] All these factors—broad location and longevity, access to sources and awareness of popular trends—suggest that *Cursor mundi* is positioned to provide unique insight into its era. As John Thompson notes, "The *Cursor*-poet's strongly defined narrative presence in the prologue and elsewhere effectively anchors this Middle English retelling of past and future biblical and apocryphal events in the present time."[187] Although the poet's interventions are relatively rare, he presents a distinct viewpoint on, in particular, complicated issues of sexuality and gender.

The *Cursor mundi* poet explicitly states that he intends to place his vernacular biblical epic in opposition to the romance popular in his day—from the first line of his epic, where he claims: "Men □ernen iestes for to here /And romaunce rede in dyuerse manere" [Men yearn to hear gestes /And to read diverse sorts of romance]. He specifically mentions Alexander, Arthur, and Roland as popular figures, and notes that "englisshe frensshe & latyne" (24) are the languages of choice. The popularity of both Latin and vernacular tales may indicate both the broad audiences of such romances and

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[185] John J. Thompson, *The* Cursor mundi*: Poem, Texts and Contexts*, Medium Ævum Monographs, NS XIX (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1998): 23-46.

[186] Sarah M. Horrall, "'Man Yhernes Rimes for to Here': A Biblical History from the Middle Ages," *Art Into Life: Collected Papers from the Kresge Art Museum Medieval Symposia*, ed. Carol Garrett Fisher and Kathleen L. Scott (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995): 73-94, at 74.

[187] Thompson, *Poem, Texts and Contexts*, 3.

the poet's own aspirations to reach both secular and clerical populations, as well as a variety of ranks and professions with his own work. The poet makes it clear that his purpose is to provide a more spiritually edifying alternative to romance for his readers who seek such improvement: good subject matter makes good Christian readers. It is in the course of establishing this principle that the poet also establishes his overarching interest in reproduction:

> Þe wise mon wol of wisdom here
> Þe fool him draweþ to foly nere
> Þe wronge to here ri□t is looþ
> And pride wiþ buxomness is wrooþ
> Of chastite þe lecchoure haþ lite
> Charite a□eyn wraþþe wol flite
> But bi þe fruyte may men ofte se
> Of what vertu is vche a tre
> And vche fruyt þat men may fynde
> He haþ from þe rote his kynde
> Of good pire com gode perus
> Werse tre wers fruyt berus (29-38)
>
> [The wise man wishes to hear of wisdom
> The fool draws himself near to folly
> Those in the wrong are loathe to hear right
> And pride is angry with humility
> The lecher will have little of chastity
> And charity will quarrel with wrath
> But by the fruit men may often see
> What qualities each tree has
> And each fruit that men may find
> Has from its root its kind {nature}
> From good pear trees come good pears
> The worse tree the worse fruit bears.]

Romance, the "wers tre" in this metaphor, leads men to folly and, interestingly, lechery. The fruit-tree metaphor introduces a theme that will persist throughout the work: the intertwining of sexual and moral corruption. Lechery impedes chastity just as wrath wars with charity and pride is angry with humility—these conflicts are, apparently, exacerbated by the immoral lessons offered by romances. Here the poet suggests that good roots beget good fruit and likewise worse trees worse fruit, a metaphor of arboreal reproduction that speaks to the poem's interest in sex and reproduction in general. The metaphor, ostensibly related to the value of biblical and exemplary literature over

romance, also foreshadows the work's ultimate concern: the purity of Christ's human lineage.

The *Cursor mundi* poet has set himself a nigh impossible task: he seeks to establish a perfectly noble human lineage for Christ, tracing his family line to demonstrate its worthiness. Part of that worthiness adheres to the line's heteronormativity—the continuous repetition of the familial grouping established by God for Adam, Eve, and their children. However, the poet's determination to remain faithful to the biblical narrative means that he must work within the confines of a text that resists heteronormativity at every turn. Adam and Eve's children have no one with whom to breed but each other; the Flood is caused by miscegenation and sodomy and creates another situation where intrafamilial breeding—in every species—is inevitable. Abraham marries his half-sister Sarah; Lot begets heirs on his daughters. All of these issues are anxiety-inducing, as evidence by their repeated appearance in exegesis.[188] And of course, the entirety of the poet's work is in service of a (holy) family that could not be less heteronormative. *Cursor mundi* glorifies that family by a supreme concern throughout for the question of heritage. The poet aims to trace the lineage of Christ throughout biblical history, emphasizing the virtue and worthiness of his forefathers in an effort to glorify the Virgin Mary.

> Þerfore blesse we þat paramoure
> Þat in oure nede doþ us socoure
> Þat saueþ vs in erþe fro synne
> And heuen blisse helpeþ to wynne
> For þou□e I sumtyme be vntrewe
> Hir loue is euer I liche newe
> Hir loue is euer trewe and lele
> Ful swete hit is to monnes hele
> Suche oþere in erþe is founden none
> For she is modir & mayden alone
> Modir & mayden neuer þe les

[188] See my discussion of various exegetical takes on Lot and Abraham in chapter 1, pp. 49-50.

Þerfore of hir toke ihesu flesshe
Wo þat loueþ trewely þis lemmon
He shal haue loue þat neuer is woon
For in þis life she faileþ neuer
And in þat oþer lasteþ euer
Of suchon shulde □e matere take
□e crafty þat con rymes make (69-86)

[Therefore we bless that beloved
Who succors us in our need
Who saves us on earth from sin
And heaven's bliss helps us to win
For though I may sometimes be untrue
Her love is ever to me like new
It is full sweet to man's salvation
Such another is not found on earth
For she alone is mother and maiden
Mother, but maiden nevertheless
Therefore from her Jesus took flesh
Whoever truly loves this paramour
Shall have a love that is never lacking
For in this life she never fails
And in the other lasts forever
From such a one should you take your matter
You crafty ones who can make rhymes.]

In an extended metaphor that clearly plays on romance themes, particularly those of *fin amour*, the poet imagines Mary as an ideal *paramoure*, and himself as a devout if occasionally unworthy and straying lover. Mary herself is eternally faithful: her love is "euer trewe" and she "faileþ neuer." She is, the poet suggests, the primary means of salvation for Christian men, an ideal object of adoration and devotion for poets. He twice emphasizes her hybrid status as both mother and maiden in successive lines, citing it as the reason that "of hir ihesu toke flesshe." Her sexuality anchors her salvific romantic appeal.

But this marriage of religion and romance produces an interesting and problematic child: the lineage of Christ arises out of the transgressive sexualities, particularly incest, that pervade the Old Testament. The Virgin herself represents a nexus of incestuous relationships idealized by Christianity: the mother of God is also his daughter and his bride, a unique hybrid status that the poet emphasizes repeatedly as he

highlights her role in the birth of Christ.[189] The Virgin is the culmination of a series of births that the poet sees as the center of the poem:

> Nedeful me þinke hit were to man
> To knowe himself how he bigan
> How he bigan in world to brede
> How his osprynge bigan to sprede (225-28)
>
> [It seems to me necessary for man
> To know for himself how he began
> How he began in the world to breed
> How his offspring began to spread.]

The encounter between Lot and his daughters certainly plays a crucial part in understanding the spread of tribes on the earth, and it underscores the poet's surprisingly forward–thinking notions about the sanctity of women from which he takes his praise of Mary. Although the poet must explain away incest and endogamy, he never sinks to condemning Lot's daughters; he exerts his poetic authority in one of his rare moments of homiletic intervention and invention to exonerate them from wrongdoing in spite of the source narrative's clear desire to exonerate Lot by allowing him the excuse of drunken ignorance. Although comparison to other contemporary revisions of the Lot story such as those found in Middle English *Genesis & Exodus* and the illustrated picture Bible in BL MS Bodley 270b shows that the *Cursor mundi* poet was working within a confused and confusing exegetical tradition, it also demonstrates that his control over the biblical source material as well as the spaces and motivations of his own poem allow him to offer a more convincing exoneration of Lot's daughters than earlier exegesis and a more pointed, if understated, critique of Lot himself.

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[189] See Marc Shell, "The Want of Incest in the Human Family: Or, Kin and Kind in Christian Thought," *Journal o f the American Academy of Religion*, 62:3 (Autumn 1994): 625-650.

Imagining Incest in the Early Fourteenth Century

Before tackling the Lot story, it will be useful to examine the prevailing thought on incest within which the poem was working. The question of incest was of particular interest around the time of *Cursor mundi*'s composition because the Church had made major changes to the incest prohibitions at Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In reducing the forbidden degrees of consanguinity from seven to four, the church had not only eased the ability of Christians to marry, but had simultaneously recognized the constructedness of the incest taboo in with a biblical analogy:

> It must not be deemed reprehensible if human statutes change sometimes with the change of time, especially when urgent necessity or common interest demands it, since God himself has changed in the New Testament some things that He had decreed in the Old. Since, therefore, the prohibition against the contracting of marriage *in secundo et tertio genere affinitatis* and that against the union of the offspring from second marriages to a relative of the first husband, frequently constitute a source of difficulty and sometimes are a cause of danger to souls, that by a cessation of the prohibition the effect may cease also, we, with the approval of the holy council, revoking previous enactments in this matter, decree in the recent statute that such persons may in the future contract marriage without hindrance.[190]

The institution of the "new law" in the gospels provided the Church a ready explanation for the revision of its own long-standing marriage prohibitions, although it is interesting that the law's writers felt it necessary to make an explicit acknowledgement and defense of change in the case of incest and not, for example, for the revisions of reform of clerical morals (including sexual continence) in canons 14-22.[191] The Church clearly perceived an ongoing and sensitive negotiation of sexuality within the confines of the family.

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[190] H.J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937): 279.

[191] Ibid, 255-64.

The *Cursor mundi* poet does not explicitly address the issue of incest in the poem proper, and the original poet may never have defined it. But the C manuscript—the earliest of the still-extant versions, dating from c. 1340 and offering the closest version to the original—offers a brief précis in its additional material:[192]

> Incest, þat es for to lij
> Bi þat þi sibman has line bi,
> Or if þat has don þat sin
> Wit ani of þin aun kin (27942-45).[193]
>
> [Incest, that is to lie
> By that one whom your relative has lain
> Or if you have done that sin
> With any of your own kin.]

This simple and straightforward description of incest obscures the complicated understanding of the sin that carries through the earlier sections of the poem. The poet simply states that incest is lying with someone whom a relative has lain with (e.g., a man sleeping with his wife's sister; incest of affinity) or doing the same with any of one's own kin. This description occurs amidst a larger explication of the branches of lechery, and the poet makes no comment on the relative gravity of the sin or on appropriate repercussions. He betrays no particular interest in incest, especially when compared to the subsequent discussion of sodomy.[194] Most interesting, however, is the fact that the C manuscript's construction of incest does not specify or even imply a male actor. A later manuscript, BL Cotton Galba E ix, which dates to the mid-fifteenth century and preserves only the treatise on the seven deadly sins from C, makes a small but crucial addition to the formulation of incest:

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[192]Horrall, "Introduction," 18.

[193] Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor mundi*, EETS o.s. 99 (London: Oxford University Press, 1878): 1548.

[194] Whereas he spends only four lines on incest, the poet fulminates against sodomy for an initial eight lines and then brings it up again a few lines later when discussing Augustine's explication of the topic.

> Incest, þat es *by hir* to ly
> Þat þi sibman has liggen by,
> Or els if þou haue done þat sin
> With any of þine awin kyn (27942-45, emphasis mine)

The scribe or redactor here clearly contemplates a male audience, and thus a male actor in matters of incest. By adding the small phrase "by hir," the revised verse suggests that women are largely passive in cases of incest, a reflection of the general medieval tendency to see only men as actors. Because the additional material in this manuscript is divorced from the original poem, this suggestion is less problematic—the redactor did not have to formulate incest to jibe with the early events of the book of Genesis, in particular the Lot story, in which the incestuous actors are female.

Handlyng Synne, a poem almost exactly contemporary with *Cursor mundi*, is even more specific and homiletic in its description of incest. It is also significantly more concrete in conceiving of incest's instigators as male. Its treatment provides a helpful outline of how the *Cursor mundi* poet and his audience may have heard incest discussed. Composed by Robert Mannyng of Brunne, a Gilbertine canon, in 1303, the poem is primarily a translation of an Anglo-French work entitled *Manuel des Pechiez*. Like the *Cursor mundi* poet, Mannyng has an explicitly educational mission, writing in the vernacular for the edification of those who could not read Latin or French, although editor Idelle Sullens adds that "His emphasis is somewhat more narrative than homiletic, with about half the total lines devoted to *exempla* and the remainder to commentary."[195] Mannyng's interest in narrative moves his work even closer to *Cursor mundi* in genre, giving perhaps a heightened likelihood of audience overlap between them. In his treatment of the seventh deadly sin, lechery, Mannyng withholds a specific exemplum on incest and instead approaches the topic directly when addressing the sin's third branch:

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[195] Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 14 (Binghamton: Center for Med. & Early Renaissance Studies, 1983): xiii.

> Þe þred synne ys þe werste,
> Þe clerk calleþ hyt ynceste:
> Whan men take kyn yn felaghrede
> And wyþ hem doun flesshely dede.
> Þe ner syb she ys hys kynde,
> Þe more plyght shal he þere fynde. (7369-74)
>
> [The third sin is the worst,
> The clerk calls it incest:
> When men take kin in intercourse
> And with them do fleshly deeds.
> The nearer the relative is to his kind
> The more plight shall he there find.]

Mannyng condemns incest as the worst form of lechery, and he doesn't shy away from outlining the shape of the sin: taking kin in *felaghrede* and doing *flesshely dede*. The MED defines *felaurede* as "association with others," "spiritual companionship," or "sexual intercourse."[196] Mannyng's use of the word here might point to the troublesome blurring of relational categories that occurs in incestuous relationships—the confusion of spiritual, consanguinial, and marital relationships. Although Mannyng goes on to describe incest of affinity—fleshly deeds between those related spiritually (godmother to godson, for example), what's notable here is his focus on the bodily nature of incest. In the subsequent discussion of lechery, Mannyng suggests, along with other contemporary texts, that the sin is as much a function of the desire as the deed,[197] but the primary construction of incest is sexual contact between related people—because they are "kynde," the plight is the greater, Mannyng suggests in lines 7373 and 7374.

In the final two lines of the quote, Mannyng clarifies the peril that his presumably male audience may find in incest: the nearer *she* is to his kind, the more danger there is. In other words, men who sleep with very close relations commit worse sin than those who marry distant cousins. But more pertinently, Mannyng imagines a male perpetrator

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[196] MED, *s.v.* "felaurede" (1).

[197] See ll. 7569ff. For an example of desire and deed being equated, see, e.g., *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000): IV.329-38.

with a passive female partner. In his formulation, incest is a danger only for men, an impression the poem reinforces as Mannyng proceeds to elucidate affinal incest:

> Or □yf he wyþ a woman synne
> Þat sum of hys kyn haþ ended ynne,
> Þat ys to seye, haþ leye here by,
> Þe more plyght is þat lechery.
> Þus hyt seyþ yn þe decre:
> He calleþ hyt an affynyte.
> Affynyte hyt makþ al an ende:
> Hys blod þar to no more may wende. (7375-82)
>
> [Or if he sins with a woman
> That certain of his kin have ended in
> That is to say, have lain by her
> The more harm is that lechery
> Thus it says in the decree
> Which calls it an affinity
> Affinity it makes all an end
> His blood thereto no more may wend.]

There's no doubt of active masculinity and passive femininity in this construction of incest, which maintains Mannyng's frank tone. Mannyng invokes the exchange of women between men as a situation leading to incest, because, in the Church's formulation, intercourse created a bond of affinity that made sexual relations by either party with the relatives of the other incest, as Canon 51 demonstrates. But this formulation does not contemplate that a woman may choose to sleep with her spouse's brother or cousin, only that "*hys* blod" may no longer turn thereto. The Church of course forbade incest equally to both genders, but Mannyng's treatment makes it clear that his concern is for the men in his audience who may be choosing future wives. Even the suggestion of sexual pleasure focuses entirely on the masculine. A man may not sin with a woman that "sum of hys kyn haþ ended ynne"—a clever turn of phrase, where "ende" implies both orgasm and the eternal bond created by sex. It anticipates the second use of "ende" several lines later: "Affynyte hyt makþ al an ende: / Hys blod þar to no more may wende." The couplet forecloses the sexual pleasure that opened the discussion of affinal incest in lines 7375-76, with no concern wasted on feminine pleasure or participation.

While Mannyng's construction of incest reflects the general perception of incest in the early fourteenth century, the *Cursor mundi*'s treatment of incest in its narrative incidences is probably most influenced by Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, on which the text is at least partially based.[198] The *Historia scholastica*, probably completed around 1170, was Comestor's gloss on the events of the Bible for the benefit of theology students at the cathedral school of Notre Dame, but it was subsequently translated into every major vernacular language in Europe. As James Morey points out, "Prior to and even after full-scale Reformation translations, biblical material was disseminated in the vernaculars through sermons, homilies, commentaries, universal histories, picture Bibles, the drama, and a large corpus of biblical paraphrases. Each of these literary forms is indebted to the others."[199] Comestor's gloss on the incestuous encounter between Lot and his daughters is no less influential than the rest of his work, and it sets the tone for the interpretation of that event in both *Cursor mundi* and the Middle English *Genesis*. He specifies clearly that the daughters are not motivated by lust or transgressive desire of any sort, but that they act out of ignorance. At the beginning of his commentary on Lot's incest with his daughters (entitled *De incestu Lot*, pointedly enough), Comestor comments, "Didicerant autem filiae Lot consummationem mundi futuram, per ignem. et suspicatae sunt tale aliquid factum, quale fuit in diebus Noe, scilicet ad reparandum genus humanum, servatas se esse superstites cum patre."[200] [But the daughters of Lot had learned that the end of the world would come by fire, and suspected that if it came to pass

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[198] Horrall is quick to note, however, that *Cursor mundi* does not rely primarily on *Historia scholastica* for source material, as other vernacular poetic Bibles did, but it was nevertheless an important influence. "Introduction," 11.

[199] James Morey, "Peter Comestor, the *Historia scholastica*, and the Medieval Popular Bible," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 6-35, at 6.

[200] PL 198. Translation my own.

as it had in the days of Noah, namely to renew the human race, and they themselves would preserve its establishment with their father]. Comestor suggests with *didicerant* that the daughters' understanding is external, that they are analogizing their situation with the events of Noah's flood based on what they have been taught. Such historical extrapolation shores up the impression of the daughters' innocence, as well as invoking another tale of necessary incest (between the descendants of Noah's sons), even if that incest is not explicitly mentioned.

Brian Murdoch has suggested that the rise of a "notional Bible" was the result of texts like *Cursor mundi*, which may have served as access points to biblical stories for people who either could not read or did not have ready access to a Bible;[201] they were often heavily influenced by the *Historia scholastica*. Such texts tended to include apocryphal details, or even entire stories, that were not part of the Vulgate, details that were often added in an attempt to fill in logical gaps in the narrative or answer pressing questions prompted by the tale. However, these additions are usually unmarked and thus pass into popular perception as an "official" part of the biblical record, especially when they satisfied a need for practical detail—explaining character motivations or the logistics of a particularly strange event. This seems particularly to be the case in such stories as the Flood and the destruction of Sodom, where the precise sin being punished is left unspecified in the Bible. Authors and homilists often seized the opportunity to fulminate against whatever sin most displeased them.

Cursor mundi in particular is an apt example of a close biblical paraphrase; authorial self-insertion is relatively rare and biblical events, particularly in the Old Testament section of the poem, are recited in order and without excessive embroidery.

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[201] Brian Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible: Expansions of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003).

Insertions are most often borrowed directly from other sources, as when the poet recites the story of Seth's search for the Oil of Mercy.[202] But the poet nevertheless offers his own viewpoint from time to time, most often when the story deals with sticky issues of sexual propriety.[203]And as in the case of *Genesis A*, it is precisely *because* of the poem's heavy use of paraphrase that it becomes useful—moments of interpolation and author insertion are heavily marked and highly coded. Murdoch has amply demonstrated the importance of these moments of interpolation as a means of understanding religious instruction when he comments, "what is abundantly clear is the functional universality of biblical material in vernacular writings of all sorts."[204]

Reading Incest in Cursor mundi

The "functional universality of biblical material" in *Cursor mundi* makes itself apparent in the contextual setting of the Lot story: the poet uses the preceding incidents, part of the larger Abraham story of which Lot is a subsection, to emphasize his agenda of tracing genealogy. He opens Abraham's story (and thus Lot's) with another invocation of the lineal progression, but it is a reference that puts an interesting twist on the generative process:

> Of Abraham no wol we drawe
> Þat roote is of þe christen lawe
> I say þerfor he is þe roote
> For of hym sprong oure alþer boote
> Þat boote þat broug□te vs into myrþe
> Þour□e þe hooly maydenes birþe

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[202] Ll. 1237-1430. Horrall believes the poet's version to have been borrowed from the popular Latin text *Vita Adae et Evae* (*Cursor Mundi*, 362n).

[203] Although, as Horrall gleefully notes, the poet is simultaneously charmed by quotidian details: he takes a moment to explain at the end of Noah's story that the drunken exposure of his genitals proves that underwear had not yet been invented: "Herby may we vndirstond / Was no breech foundide þo in lond" (2047-48): Horrall, "Biblical History from the Middle Ages," 79.

[204] Murdoch, *Medieval Popular Bible*, 8.

> Of hym & his kyn shul we rede
> Þat wondirly bigan to brede
> Oure lady wex out of his sede. (2315-23)
>
> [From Abraham now will we draw
> Who is the root of Christian law
> I say therefore he is the root
> Because from him sprang our greatest aid
> That aid that brought us into mirth
> Through the holy maiden's birth
> Of him and his kin shall we read
> That wondrously began to breed
> Our lady grew out of his seed.]

Abraham is figured here as the "root" or source of both Christian law and the Christian people entire—and most importantly of the Virgin, who "wex out of his sede." This phrase is startling. It creates Mary as the culmination of history, rather than Christ, a continuation of the poet's established interest in the Virgin as an ideal subject for poetic adoration. It also queerly collapses time, eliminating the generations between Abraham and Mary, pushing the teleology of Christian history to the foreground. It makes Mary into Abraham's daughter—his motherless child, springing from his root like a pear blossoms from a branch, or like Eve from Adam's rib.[205] In his introduction of Abraham, the poet undoes traditional nuclear family life, highlighting only the two most important figures: the father (the Father) and the daughter (the Virgin). Presumably, however, breeding is kept within the family—it is Abraham and his kin that "wondirly bigan to brede." The poet's formulation forecloses the integration of exogamous—non-Christian—bloodstock and ensures a "pure" lineage for the Virgin. Though the introduction may be metaphorical, poetic, and hyperbolic, it nevertheless foreshadows the incest and endogamy that underpins Abraham's narrative and thus the entire Christian heritage. In a sense, the "boote" that the poet valorizes is the result of incest, which in

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[205] Medieval associations between Mary and Eve were plentiful, beginning with the Eva/Ave wordplay taken to indicate that Mary was the remedy for human fallenness instigated by Eve. See, e.g., Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 139.

turn suggests that incest itself is a help—it is the perpetuation of the pure line, unsullied by uncertain intruders, be they non-Israelite, non-English, or non-male.

This contradictory understanding of incest is apparent at the beginning of the Abraham story, which encapsulates the poet's pains to whitewash incest from Christ's family tree, and simultaneously demonstrates the impossibility of doing so. Exploring Abraham's family, the poet notes:

> Two dou□teres had aram his broþer
> He spoused þat oon nachor þat oþer
> For bi þe lawe þat þei lyued ynne
> Men shude not spouse but in her kynne
> He was boþe meke and hende
> Oure lorde hi made his pryue frende
> He loued soþfasteness & ri□te
> Þerfore oure lord to him hi□te
> A child to brede of his ospringe
> Þat al of þraldam shulde bringe
> And þer shulde also of his seede
> So myche puple aftir breede
> Þat no man my□te þe somme neuen (2333-45)
>
> [Two daughters had Aram his brother
> He {Abraham} married one, Nachor the other
> For by the law that they lived in
> Men should not marry but within their kin
> He was both meek and noble
> Our lord he made his close friend
> He loved honesty and right
> Therefore our lord to him promised
> A child to breed from his offspring
> That should deliver all from slavery
> And there should also from his seed
> So many people after breed
> That no man might know the sum.]

The poet clearly associates incest, which here is both lawful and inevitable, with the profusion of descendants that God brings from Abraham. The daughters of Aran mentioned here are Sarah and Melcha.[206] Sarah is, of course, the wife with whom

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[206] Genesis 11:29. "And Abram and Nachor married wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai: and the name of Nachor's wife Melcha, the daughter of Aran, father of Melcha, and father of Jescha."

Abraham will "so myche puple aftir breede," a fact with which most readers would have been well familiar. Apparently anticipating an objection to the incestuous marriage, the poet notes that "For bi þe lawe þat þei lyued ynne / Men shude not spouse but in her kynne." But in attempting to explain away the incest committed by a hugely prominent patriarch, the poet codifies it as the law of the era—not only was Abraham guilty of it (though not guilty by virtue of his obedience to law), but so too was every patriarch who preceded him, including Noah. Fortunately, medieval exegetes, relying on Augustine, had found a convenient work-around for this uncomfortable reality. In *City of God*, Augustine defends sibling marriage among the patriarchs based on lack of population—the children of Adam and Eve, he says, were left with no choice but to marry one another. Even after the population had increased, the "ancient fathers, fearing that near relationship might gradually in the course of generations diverge, and become distant relationship, or cease to be relationship at all, religiously endeavored to limit it by the bond of marriage before it became distant," explaining the Israelite drive to endogamy (which the *Cursor mundi* poet reiterates).[207] In fact, Abraham's obedience to this law seems to be a vital part of his "soþfastness & ri□te" that makes him so beloved of God.

So well before Lot's family flees Sodom, the poem has established incest as acceptable, even laudable, in the context of Genesis's genealogical progression. However, incest up to this point suggests, almost without exception, a male actor—Aran espouses his daughter to Abraham and Nachor. So what does the poet make of female-instigated incest in the Lot story? The *Cursor mundi* poet's characterization of Lot's daughters adheres closely to the biblical details, where they are thinly sketched:

> And the elder said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man left on the earth, to come in unto us after the manner of the whole earth. Come, let us make him drunk with wine, and let us lie

[207] *City of God*, 15.16, 666.

> with him, that we may preserve seed of our father." And they made their father drink wine that night: and the elder went in and lay with her father: but he perceived not neither when his daughter lay down, nor when she rose up. And the next day the elder said to the younger: Behold I lay last night with my father, let us make him drink wine also to night, and thou shalt lie with him, that we may save seed of our father. They made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in, and lay with him: and neither then did he perceive when she lay down, nor when she rose up.[208]

The elder daughter outlines her plan, which is motivated by the brief explanation in verse 31: their father is elderly and the only man left alive in the entire world. Having witnessed the violent destruction of her former home, she apparently has no doubt that the people of earth have been annihilated entirely, and that, like Noah's family, hers is responsible for earth's repopulation. The exegetical response to this verse is widely varied in both patristic and modern analysis. Bede's remarks are extensive and worth considering here, given that the *Cursor mundi* poet seems to have been familiar with, at the very least, his Hexameron commentary, and probably the *Ecclesiastical History* as well.[209] Bede notes:

> Lot can seem to be excusable, because he knowingly endured, rather than committed, so great a crime of incest. But he is not exempt from blame, in that, having forgotten the still recent destruction of the wicked, he indulged so far in wine that he was unable to know what was done to him. His daughters also seem to be excusable because they thought that no man remained on earth, but rather that they had all been destroyed in the same flaming punishment. And they supposed that, just as after the flood the human race was restored by the three sons of Noah and a like number of daughters-in-law, so now it was to be renewed a second time by themselves and their father, who alone had survived the fires. And therefore they believed that this ought rather to be done in sleep, lest their father, knowing of it, despise and reject such a marriage in disgust. They can seem to be excusable, therefore, because they believed that they were displaying obedience to the divine order in a deed of this kind. But they are not exempt from blame, in that they did not seek either the will or the counsel of

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[208] Genesis 19:31-36.

[209] Horrall, *Cursor Mundi*, 370n.

> their father in such a difficulty nor did they delay for a time, until they might know more certainly what had happened to the human race throughout the world.[210]

Bede is unwilling to completely absolve either Lot or his daughters, but he suggests that their intentions were essentially good. However, his assertions that the daughters should have sought "either the will or the counsel of their father" betrays an anxiety about the consequences of independent female action. The inversion of the familial hierarchy at the center of this incest tale is clearly discomfiting. Interestingly, however, Bede's interpretation imbues the daughters with a significant amount of character—he believes that the daughters analogized their situation to that of Noah's family after the flood, just as Comestor asserts some 400 years later, and acted in the best interests of the race as a whole, while still attempting to protect their father from the "disgust" of the deed by doing it while he was asleep. Bede spends an entire paragraph rationalizing and condemning the daughters' actions, whereas he writes off Lot's blameworthiness with a brief sentence: "in that, having forgotten the still-recent destruction of the wicked, he indulged so far in wine that he was unable to know what was done to him." The question of Lot's behavior is apparently much clearer—he should not have become intoxicated, particularly given the rather extreme object lesson in the punishment of sinners that he has just survived. Bede is much more anxious to defend the daughters, an attitude that seems to be echoed in the *Cursor mundi* poet's treatment of the incident, as well.

Modern feminist scholars are likewise anxious about the tale's inversion of normative family dynamics, although their reasons for anxiety differ entirely. Elke Seifert argues that the Genesis 19 narrative serves as a justification of masculine fantasies of incest, in that it exhibits the characteristics of the abusive father: "In so far as the narrator in Genesis 19:31 draws an image from reality, where the father's subsequent sexual

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[210] Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. Calvin B. Kendall, *Translated Texts for Historians* 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008): 307-08.

contact clearly follows from the desire of the two daughters, he behaves just as those many fathers today who justify their sexual violence against their daughters with the claim that their children had sought the sexual contact with them."[211] The displacement of desire from father to daughter, she argues, is pure narrative invention put forward to justify abuse. J. Cheryl Exum, working in a more explicitly psychoanalytic vein, agrees that the tale "allows the collective male narrative unconscious to engage in its forbidden fantasies"—fantasies that culminate in the father's desire to have sex with his daughters.[212] Removing agency from Lot and relocating it in his daughters, Exum argues, justifies incest, but it goes further by fulfilling the narrator's masculinist fantasy of self-perpetuation by means that are otherwise taboo. She also suggests that perhaps "there is some part of the collective male unconscious in Genesis 19 that takes pleasure in imagining being the object of sexual abuse, as well as the abuser."[213] Whether we can apply these motives to the narrators of *Cursor mundi* and the Middle English *Genesis* is debatable, but certainly both narratives express an anxiety about desire that indicates their awareness of the source narrative's problematic motivation. Both Seifert and Exum,

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[211] Elke Seifert, *Tochter und Vater im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997): 84. "Indem der Erzähler ein Bild von Wirklichkeit zeichnet, dem folgend der sexuelle Kontakt des Vaters eindeutig auf den Wunsch der beiden Töchter zurückgeht, handelt er ebenso wie jene zahlreichen Väter, die heute ihre sexuelle Gewalt gegen ihre Töchter mit der Behauptung rechtfertigen, ihre Kinder hätten den sexuellen Kontakt zu ihnen gesucht." Translation my own. Feminist scholars seem largely in agreement on this point. Ilona N. Rashkow sums up the tale neatly: "The Lot story exemplifies the commonest type of incest and has many similarities to clinical reports of father-daughter incestuous relationships: the disintegrated family, the father who has lost his patriarchal role, the abuse of alcohol, the mother who looks away and the involvement of more than one daughter. The usually unconscious desire of the father towards the daughter is, in this instance, consciously acted out." "Daddy-Dearest and the 'Invisible Spirit of Wine,'" *Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 82-107, at 82.

[212] J. Cheryl Exum, "Desire Distorted and Exhibited: Lot and His Daughters in Psychoanalysis, Painting, and Film," *"A Wise and Discerning Mind": Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley, Brown Judaic Studies 325 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000): 83-108, at 88.

[213] Ibid, 94.

however, focus on the function of male fantasy in the narrative, without suggesting the concomitant anxiety that inevitably accompanied it. Displacing masculine responsibility requires a simultaneous sacrifice of masculine authority and agency, a troubling proposition that left male authors with a nearly unsolvable quandary when retelling the Lot story.

Regardless of theoretical positioning, however, readers of Genesis 19:30-38 agree that the question of female agency in cases of incest makes these verses problematic and puzzling. Doubly so in *Cursor mundi*, where the poet constantly negotiates the forward march of history in service of a female figure of public virtue that comes in large part because she *surrenders* her agency. Mary is valorized in medieval Christian worship because of her willing submission: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word."[214] Her abdication of agency makes her an ideal vessel to carry Christ, and it is her own choice to do so—she exemplifies voluntary powerlessness. This ideal of extreme submission is repeated throughout the Middle Ages in such popular tales as the story of patient Griselda.[215] If the Marian narrative of chosen obedience and feminine submission drives the *Cursor mundi* poet's work, then the story of Lot's daughters presents a particular conundrum. How best to present this moment of unintentionally transgressive sexuality without undermining the unity of the genealogical narrative mission? The answer seems to lie in a distinct emphasis on motive, as well as a minimization of Lot's role. The ultimate effect of the poet's version is to cloak feminine agency in the daughters' motives—the salvation of humanity—which also negates or at least minimizes feminine blameworthiness.

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[214] Luke 1:38.

[215] See Chapter 4.

From the beginning of the episode, the poet implicitly contradicts Bede's suggestion that the daughters should have waited for their father's guidance. In fact, the daughters *are* taking their cues from their father. He begins with Lot, but moves quickly to the daughters' viewpoint:

> Loth hym helde þe caue wiþynne
> Himself & his dou□teres twynne
> But her fadir þat þei þere sawe
> Þei wende alle men were don of dawe
> Þour□e þat ilke woful wrake (2929-33)
>
> [Lot held himself within the cave
> Himself and his two daughters
> Except for their father who they there saw
> They believed that all men were deprived of life
> Through that same woeful revenge.]

The shift in perspective moves Lot to the background of this episode, a secondary player at best. The escape from Sodom accomplished, Lot seems no longer of central concern for the narrative's advance. Instead, the daughters' perceptions define the world of the cave in which Lot "helde" them. The poet clearly emphasizes that the daughters, seeing no man but their father, believed that all men had been "don of dawe"—deprived of life[216] by the "woful wrake" that God had visited on Sodom. However mistaken the daughters may be in that perception, the poet does not seem to blame them. Indeed, he hints that their limited understanding is Lot's fault. In opposition to Bede's implication that the daughters should have sought Lot's counsel, the poet seems to suggest that Lot should have prevented his fear from defining their perceptions. The opening lines of the episode emphasize that it was Lot's decision to hold himself and his daughters in the cave, making him a quasi-jailor because of his fear. These lines are not the poem's first interrogation of Lot's post-Sodom behavior, either. Immediately after the poet's

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[216] MED, *s.v.* "dai" (5b).

homiletic condemnation of the Sodomites, he provides an image of Lot that seems almost scornful in its critique:

> Loth □e herde telle of eer
> Into þe felde he drou□e for feer
> In a caue he hidde him þo
> He and his dou□teres & no mo (2913-16)
>
> [Lot you heard tell of before
> Into the field he withdrew for fear
> In a cave he hid himself there
> He and his daughters and no more]

The poet pushes Lot's panic to the foreground—because of his fear, he hides himself in a cave. Although *drou□e* by itself is largely unmarked, the *feer* that accompanies it suggests a nervous scramble, which ends with Lot hiding himself in a cave with his daughters "& no mo." It seems to be Lot's choice that forecloses others from the cave; in his rabbit-like panic, he misleads his daughters into thinking that not only are they alone in the cave, they're alone on the *earth*. As Seifert notes, Lot's actions create an "atmosphere of fear and isolation of the virgin daughters by the father" that "creates the context for the subsequent tale of incest."[217] As if to underline their mistakenness, the poem immediately contradicts their false impression; in the next lines, the poet says that "Abraham went on the morne / To þat stide þere he was biforne" (2917-18) [Abraham went in the morning / To that place that he was in before], proving that in fact there are people (men) left in the world—better men than Lot, in fact. And after Abraham completes his inspection of the cities' destruction, the poem confirms that Lot "hym helde þe caue wiþinne / Himself & his dou□teres twynne." So before the daughters begin their scheme, Lot is unquestionably established as the person in control of their location and the daughters' understanding of it as their world entire.

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[217] Seifert, *Tochter und Vater im Alten Testament*, 82. "Diese Geschichte beim Untergang von Sodom und Gomorra schaffen die Ausgangssituation für eine sich nun anschließende Inzestgeschichte, die eine Atmosphäre der Angst und die Isolation der jungfräulichen Töchter durch den Vater voraussetzt."

The poem continues its emphasis on the daughters' innocent motives by revising and expanding the elder daughter's speech. She says to her younger sister:

> Sister in pryuete to þe I say
> Þou seest þis folk is al away
> But loth oure fadir & we two
> Alyue is now left no mo
> I leue monkynde fordone be
> But hit be stored by me & þe
> Þis world is brou□te to ende me þink (2935-41)
>
> [Sister in secret I say to you
> You see this folk is all away
> Except for Lot our father and we two
> There are left alive no others
> I believe that mankind is ruined
> Unless it may be restored by you and me
> This world is brought to an end, I think]

After having confirmed once already that the daughters believe humanity to be on the brink of extinction, the poet has the elder daughter reiterate that belief four times in six lines—the folk are "al away" and "alyue is now left no mo," mankind is "fordone," and she believes this "world is brou□te to ende." In the text of Genesis itself, by contrast, the elder daughter says simply, "there is no man left on earth"—one short and simple comment on the presumed destruction of mankind, rather than *Cursor mundi*'s repeated and intensely concentrated insistence on the same. Such insistence suggests that the poet is at pains to exonerate the daughters from the sin of lust—although they have intercourse with their father, there is no lustful desire. Their belief in humanity's extinction is genuine. Only the need to restore mankind motivates them, he assures his readers.

We might wonder whether the poet's obvious anxiety points to an underlying suspicion that the daughters did desire their father—or perhaps that Lot, having lost his wife and entrapped his daughters in a cave away from the prying eyes of the world, desired them. In any case, the overwhelming drive to convince the audience of the absence of desire can only point to its near-certain presence. The Lot narrative makes it apparent, both in Genesis and in *Cursor mundi*, that Lot views his daughters as potential objects of desire when he attempts to trade them to the Sodomites for the angels' safety.

For soþe þei seide knowe hem we shale
Her sory synne on hem þei sou□te
To haue done hit if þei my□t
But loth er þey were warre
Fast þe dores con he barre
□erne on hem he cryed mercy
Þat þei shulde leue her foly
He seide I haue here dou□teres two
Take and do youre wille wiþ þo
My gestis lete □e lye in pees
For goddis loue wiþoute males (2784-94).

[As a truth they said "Know them we shall,"
They sought to enact their sorry sin on them
To have done it if they might
But Lot, before they were aware,
Was able to bar the doors fast
Vehemently he cried mercy on them
That they should abandon their folly
He said, "I have here two daughters
Take and do your will with them
Let my guests lie in peace
For God's love without malice.]

The poet clarifies that the Sodomites want to *knowe* the angels and assures his audience that that "knowing" is not platonic with the line "Her sory synne on hem þei sou□te." So when Lot offers his daughters as an alternative in line 2791, the sexual context is already established. Although Lot does not note in the poem, as he does in Genesis, that his daughters have never "known man" (Gen. 19:8), he nevertheless trades on their sexuality in such a way as to indicate his own awareness of it. The tale contains, as ever, the traces of the desire it constantly seeks to repress. As Rashkow suggests, "although the daughter is clearly regarded as legal property inside the family, she is not a commodity to be bartered in the same way as an ox or an ass. She is explicitly *sexual* property acquired from the father's sexual expenditure and his own family bloodline, not by economic transaction."[218] This moment flirts not with the question of desire, but with the truth of

[218] Ilona N. Rashkow, "Daughters and Fathers in Genesis…Or, What Is Wrong with This Picture?" *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J.A. Clines (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993): 250-65, at 254.

knowing: just as the Sodomites want to know the angels, Lot wants them to know his daughters instead. He offers a knowledge he already possesses by his awareness of their virginity and use of it for his own purposes. Although modern audiences perceive his offer as reprehensible, it nevertheless demonstrates Lot's sexual superiority to the Sodomites, encapsulated in his barring of the door "er þey were warre." He knows that heterosexual fornication is a lesser offense than sodomy, and he knows that his daughters' virginity is a valuable commodity for achieving his ends. In shutting out the Sodomites before they are aware and then offering them a replacement for their desires, the poet confirms Lot's superior sexual cognizance, but problematizes his paternal affection for his daughters.

Notably, this initial instance of daughterly sexuality also occurs in an enclosed and private space controlled by Lot. The mechanics of inside and outside in Genesis 19 are complex and underrepresented in theoretical explication of the tale. The *Cursor mundi* poet diverges from the Genesis narrative somewhat by keeping Lot constantly and safely inside his house throughout the negotiation with the Sodomites. Whereas Genesis 19:6 notes that "Lot went out to them, and shut the door after him," the *Cursor mundi* poet says only that Lot "Fast þe dores con he barre." There's no mention of Lot leaving the confines of his home, nor are the angels required to pull Lot back inside before blinding the thronging crowd as they do in Genesis 19:10. Instead, Lot remains enclosed in his house with his daughters, the men of Sodom excluded. Lot's negotiations with the Sodomites seem to take place through the barred door. Whether Lot remains indoors due to cowardice, narrative expedience, or a desire to keep his daughters for himself in spite of his offer to the Sodomites, it is nevertheless clever foreshadowing of Lot's later entrapment in the cave. The poet's thematic invocation of Lot's later actions asserts a less innocent Lot than the Genesis narrative suggests.

This sort of subtle foreshadowing—brief, humorous formulations that point to later events—comprises the *Cursor mundi* poet's most elegant literary technique. As the

city of Sodom sinks into hell, the poet remarks of the Sodomites that "Siche as þei breu þo þei drunke" (2847) [Such as they brew, so they drank]. The MED suggests that the phrase was a familiar aphorism, but its placement here makes it a pointed one, given the upcoming tale of drunken indiscretion.[219] Its use implicates both father and daughters as responsible for the incest in the cave. Although the daughters do the "brewing"—inventing a scheme to seduce their father—there's no question but that Lot does the literal drinking. But the phrase likewise suggests a level of cognizance and forethought from the daughters that contrasts to Lot's powerlessness in the face of their schemes, whether brought about by his poor judgment, fear, or drunkenness. All three of them share in the consequent judgment offered by exegesis, given the perpetually unsettled questions the tale prompts, but the poet's clever deployment of a common phrase suggests that his sympathies might not lie with Lot.

The poem's critique of Lot is likewise never entirely settled, even in the final lines of his appearance. As the daughters enact their scheme, the poem returns the focus to its primary concern: reproduction and genealogy. Rather than emphasize the question of blame or volition, the poet closes the tale of Lot and his daughters with a brutal description of their offspring that expands on the depiction provided in Genesis. But before he condemns the sons, there are hints at a commentary on the actions of the parents:

> □yue we oure fadir ynou□e of drynk
> Whenne he is drunken witturly
> In bed we shul go lye hym by
> For my□te we any barnes brede
> Me þinke þe world þerof had need
> As þei had spoke so þei wrou□t
> Þe fadir his owne dede wiste nou□t
> He wist not whenne he bi hem lay
> But boþe wiþ childe soone were þay (2942-50)

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[219] MED, *s.v.* "breuen," (3).

> [We will give our father enough of drink
> That when he is drunk in his wits
> We shall go lie by him in bed
> Because any children we might breed
> I think the world of them had need
> As they spoke, so they wrought
> The father of his own deed knew naught
> He knew not when they by him lay
> But they were both soon with child.]

The poet again (for the fifth time) emphasizes the daughters' belief that they are acting to repopulate the world, rather than from transgressive desire when the daughter concludes her speech with "Me þinke þe world þerof had need." That the eldest daughter expresses her intentions through direct speech creates her somewhat limited character as one that echoes the primary concern of the poem—the perpetuation of humanity (implied: in fulfillment of God's commandment to be fruitful and multiply), and in particular the progression of history toward the birth of Christ. The entirety of the daughters' characters, such as they are, revolves around this mission in what is perhaps an inverted precursor to the poet's characterization of Mary. Just as Lot serves as a lesser foil to Abraham, Lot's daughters are reshaped into Mary's foils. While the limited perspective of the daughters makes it difficult to call their characterization positive, it does seem to offer them (or the eldest daughter, at least, in the poet's condensed version of the cave scene) some volition and independence, however curtailed it might be. Although the repeated insistence on the daughters' pure motives clearly indicates a certain anxiety about the potential for transgressive intrafamilial desire, it also pushes the daughters away from that desire and offers them a perception of the world independent of their father's. The poet confirms their relative innocence, if not their intelligence.

So the question of blame comes around again to Lot. But the poet seems, in the end, equally reluctant to fully condemn him. He twice reiterates Lot's lack of awareness in successive lines (2948-49). The description of the daughter's impregnation is, by contrast, extremely roundabout. Lot lays *bi* his daughters rather than with them, and the moment of their impregnation is passively denoted. The daughters "boþe wiþ childe

soone were þay," which elides the delicate issue of fatherhood, suggesting that the *act* of impregnation was as passive as the depiction of it. This careful treatment of incestuous intercourse is at odds with the poet's earlier blunt condemnation of the Sodomites' transgressive sexuality, as well as his frank ban on sex between relatives in line 2898. His attitude toward sodomy is unequivocal:

> Alle cristen men I rede ye take
> Ensaumple bi þis wooful wrake
> Þat al for lecchery done was
> Þe foulest þat euer coom on plas
> Þat hit was wicked was wel sene
> Bi þat wreche þat was so kene (2881-86)
>
> [All Christian men, I advise you to take
> Example from this woeful revenge
> That was all done on account of lechery
> The foulest that ever came in a place
> That it was wicked was easily seen
> By the vengeance that was so keen.]

Harsh condemnation without mitigation for the Sodomites, but Lot and his daughters are not nearly as easy to judge, it seems. The poem is reluctant to censure a patriarch, no matter how minor, and equally unwilling to sanction women who are simply fulfilling their reproductive mission as laid out by the poem's ongoing obsession with genealogy and perpetuation of Christ's family line. Ultimately the poet condenses the actual intercourse as much as he possibly can, completely eliminating the repetition that occurs in Genesis when the younger daughter's actions are reported independently of her sister's. The poem's audience is given only the elder daughter's speech and the confirmation that the plan was enacted, as opposed to the biblical narrative, which seems to revel by the salacious repetition in Lot's intoxication and the daughters' sexual conquest. The *Cursor mundi* poet's reticence, then, seems to offer room for a very slightly more woman-positive perspective on the events of Genesis 19:30-38 than might be expected from an otherwise relatively conservative poem.

Of course the poem cannot condone incest entirely. The narrative expresses its disapproval in the extended and gruesome description of the sons who result from the

encounter in the cave. Ammon and Moab are not extensively described in Genesis, and what description there is seems uninflected:

> And the elder bore a son, and she called his name Moab: he is the father of the Moabites unto this day. The younger also bore a son, and she called his name Ammon, that is, the son of my people: he is the father of the Ammonites unto this day.[220]

Astute readers would have recognized the Moabites and Ammonites as two enemy tribes to the Israelites.[221] However, Genesis simply announces the boys' births and the etymology of Ammon's name: son of my people—fitting, given the daughters' stated motives for conceiving.[222] But none of this narrative indifference appears in *Cursor mundi*, where the sons are excoriated for their apparently truly evil natures:

> Amon & moab were geten so
> Bitwixe loth & his dou□teris two
> Of hem coom so wickede lede
> Þat nouþer drou□e to worþi dede
> To a stide þat het damas
> Þiderwarde her wonynge was
> Of mony men þat were gode
> Þei refte catel & shedde blode (2951-58)
>
> [Ammon and Moab were thus conceived
> Between Lot and his two daughters
> From them came such wicked peoples
> That neither turned to worthy deeds
> To a place called Damascus
> Thitherward their dwelling was
> From many men that were good
> They stole cattle and shed blood.]

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[220] Genesis 19:37-38.

[221] An ongoing debate in Genesis exegesis concerns the assertion that the incestuous origins of Moab and Ammon served as Israelite propaganda against their enemies—Gerhard von Rad suggests that it was "popular political wit" among the Israelites. *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961): 218. Claus Westermann, however, rejects this hypothesis out of hand. *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1985): 315.

[222] The etymology of Moab's name is not provided, perhaps because it had a slightly more pointed meaning: son of the father. J.A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish, and Early Christian Traditions* (Kampen: J.H. Kok Publishing House, 1990): 45-46.

This reading of Ammon and Moab, which finds its source in the *Traduction anonyme de la Biblé entière*,[223] is one of the few external embellishments of the Lot narrative that the poet employs—clearly he found value in the French characterization of Ammon and Moab. Here they disrupt the progression of the poem's developing genealogy and highlight the problematic outcome of incest. From them come *wicked lede* rather than followers of God—their lineage moves away from, rather than toward, the fulfillment of history in Christ.[224] The poet grounds his borrowed description in the concept of lineage by prefacing it with a reminder that Moab and Ammon "were geten so" by "loth & his dou□teris two." This final reminder of their incestuous origins preserves the poet's reluctance to assign responsibility for the incestuous encounter to either Lot or his daughters, but at the same time manages to foreground the problematic heritage of the two hostile tribes. That heritage is so hostile, in fact, that not one good deed can be attributed to either people. Instead they are condemned as cattle thieves and killers of good men.

The poet also, in these brief lines, manages to project the consequences of incest out from the enclosed cave into a broader—and simultaneously more specific—locale. He places them in a "stide þat het damas"—that is, in Damascus in Canaan, a territory some distance from the site of Sodom (understood in the Middle Ages to have been located near the Dead Sea).[225] Although Lot attempts to control and protect his daughters

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[223] Horrall, "Introduction," 381n.

[224] Although technically Christ claimed Moabite ancestry through David, who was a descendant of Ruth the Moabite.

[225] See, e.g., *Cleanness*,a poem that counts *Cursor mundi* as one of its source texts:

> Þer the fyue citees wern set nov is a see called
> Þat ay is drouy and dym, and ded in hit kynde,
> Blo, blubrande, and blak, vnblyþe to ne□e;
> As a stynkande stanc þat stryed synne,
> Þat euer of smelle and of smach smart is to fele.

after the destruction of Sodom, or to alleviate his own fear, in the end he fails. While the poem is careful to place no explicit blame, the final hint of Lot's culpability is the rejection of the cave and the enforced naiveté it imposes on its inhabitants. Instead Lot's sons move out into the world and into conscious and deliberate mayhem. If, as everything in the Lot episode suggests, control of space falls under the masculine domain, then failure of that control, or control misapplied, will be revisited on the lineage manifold. Bloodshed is the final inheritance of Lot's line, and, moral imparted, the *Cursor mundi* poet drops the tale as abruptly as his source narrative.

Guilt in a Contemporary Biblical Text

The poet's reluctance to lay blame becomes even more pointed by comparison to another contemporary retelling of the Lot narrative—that found in MS CCCC 444, the Middle English *Genesis and Exodus*. Like *Cursor mundi*, the Middle English *Genesis* poet claims the education of laymen as his primary motive for composing:

> Man og to luuen þat rimes-ren
> Đe wisseð wel ðe logede men
> Hu man may him wel loken
> Đog he ne be lered on no boken,
> …
> Ut of latin ðis song is dragen
> On engleis speche on soðe-sagen.[226]
>
> [Man ought to love that rhyme's course
> That the lay man knows well
> How one may teach himself well
> Though he is not learned in any books
> …
> Out of Latin this song is taken
> Into English speech in truth to say.]

Forþy þe derk Dede See hit is demed euermore (ll. 1015-20)
The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007).

[226]Olof Arngart, ed., *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus*, Lund Studies in English 36 (Lund: Gleerup 1968): ll. 1-5, 13-14. Subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically by line number.

Both poems exhibit a clear educational mission that seems to compensate for an anxiety about vernacular composition. And as with most poems of this genre, that educational mission is sometimes subsumed by an interest in relating the more exciting events of the biblical books. Arngart suggests that the author was, like the *Cursor mundi* poet, a "monk or cleric versed in Latin and Norman French" but, unlike the *Cursor mundi* poet, "with no wide reading apart from common books of religious instruction."[227] He takes Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica* as his principal source for the poem, which he composed likely around 1250. The poem's dialect suggests an East Midlands origin, giving the text a rural provenance not unlike that of *Cursor mundi*. It survives only in the CCCC 444 manuscript, which Arngart dates to the first quarter of the fourteenth century—around the time of *Cursor mundi*'s composition.[228] All in all, the poem's similarities to *Cursor mundi* in genre, intent, and circumstances of composition make it ripe for comparison of theme and treatment of plot. And, like *Cursor mundi*, it has been relatively little attended by modern medieval scholars.

The specificity of the *Cursor mundi* poet in retelling his version of the Lot story is a sharp contrast to the Middle English *Genesis*, where the poet's persistent unwillingness to provide specific details suggests an alternate means of allaying anxiety about the placement of blame and the story's allegorical and anagogical implications. Although both poets are working from Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, their approaches to this incident of transgressive sexuality are markedly different. The Middle English *Genesis*, drawing upon the *Historia*, foregrounds the question of the daughters' motives. Comestor stresses that the daughters' belief that they are alone in the world is external (*didicerant*) and that their actions stem solely from a desire to save the human race. The

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[227] Ibid., 8.

[228] Ibid., 11.

Genesis poet picks up on and highlights Peter's reading with the lines "Đo meidenes herden quilum seien, / Đat fier sulde al ðis werld for-sweðen" (1139-40), in which the daughters' beliefs come explicitly from an external source, adding to their blamelessness. At some point in the past (*quilum*—sometime[229]), the daughters heard, that is, learned and did not independently imagine, that the world would end in fire. One wonders from whom, exactly, the daughters heard this—their doomed Sodomite fiancés seem unlikely candidates, as do the Sodomites generally. The likely source would logically be Lot, head of their household and presumably in charge of their religious instruction. The poet, however, makes no mention of any previous apocalypse, including the Noah story, but simply condenses Comestor (and the Genesis source text) to emphasize the daughters' belief in the apocalyptic nature of their circumstances:

> And wenden wel ðat it were cumen,
> And fieres wreche on werld numen,
> And ðat man-kinde wore al for-loren,
> But of hem ðre wore man boren. (1141-44)
>
> [And they believed wholly that it was come
> And the revenge of fire taken on the world
> And that mankind was completely doomed
> Except from the three of them would man be born.]

Like the *Cursor mundi* poet, the *Genesis* poet expends considerable energy on reiterating the daughters' firm belief that 1) the end of the world would come in fire, 2) that the fiery destruction of Sodom was that end, 3) that mankind was nearly extinct, and 4) that the daughters were responsible for preserving the human race. Instead of placing these words in the mouth of the elder daughter, the poet allows them the authority of the narrator's explication. The final line, 1144, sounds interestingly salvific, an echo of the events leading to Christ's birth, when all mankind would have been lost but for the intervention of a trinity or two: the Holy Trinity, and the God-Mary-Jesus trinity that brings about

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[229] MED *s.v.* "whilom," (1).

salvation. Whether this association is intended on the poet's part is difficult to say; if it is, it would explain his need to suppress, insofar as is possible, all traces of incest from this clearly incestuous narrative. If Lot's family is to be taken as a type of Christ's, with a primary emphasis on the salvation of man and the propagation of the species, then the narrative must be presented as efficiently as possible with heavy emphasis on the players' good motives rather than their ultimately problematic execution of events. The elder daughter, in fact, is not allowed (or not required) to speak; the daughters' plan is hatched and reported entirely from the presumably objective narrator's viewpoint, and ends with another forceful reminder of their innocence:

> Þis maidens redden son[e] on-on
> Quat hem two wore best to don,
> Hu he migten vnder-gon
> Here fader, ðat he ne wore ðor-gon.
> Wið wines drinc he wenten is ðhogt
> So ðat he haueð ðe dede wrogt,
> And on eiðer here a knaue bi-geten.
> Þis ne mai nogt ben for-geten:
> Þis maidens deden it in god ðhogt,
> Þe fader oc, drunken, ne wiste he it nogt. (1145-54)
>
> [These maidens spoke soon one-on-one
> What were best for them to do
> How they might deceive
> Their father, so that he was not there-against
> With drink of wine they turned his thought
> So that he had the deed wrought
> And on either here a knave begotten
> This may not be forgotten
> These maidens did it in good thought
> And the father, drunk, he knew it not.]

The *Genesis* poet condenses the elder daughter's plan to intoxicate their father, emphasizing instead their intent to dull his senses—a plan that is successful, as "he wenten is ðhogt" indicates. By eliminating the repetition found in the biblical text, the poet refuses to linger on the potential image of transgressive desire. Foreclosing the daughters' speech seems to act here as protective gesture. The poet is similarly protective when he takes care to suggest that Lot would never have "ðe dede wrogt" were his senses intact. The word *so* at the beginning of the line makes the euphemistic deed a

consequence of his absent cognition. The poet's description of the interaction between Lot and his daughters is as vague as possible; he does not repeat that they are enclosed in the cave, nor does he suggest that they are lying down. Lot simply loses his faculties and begets a *knaue* on either daughter by means that are left to—or rather, foreclosed from—the audience's imagination.

But it is the final deviation from the source material, in ll. 1152-54, that baldly *forbids* the reader once again from forgetting that both Lot and his daughters are innocent of incestuous desire. The poet's insistence that "Þis ne mai nogt ben for-geten, abruptly interrupts his narrative flow to offer a strident and direct warning to his audience. The daughters, who are repeatedly called "maidens," emphasizing their innocence and (former) virginity, acted from "god ðhogt," which endows them both with benign intention. They are entirely exonerated by this final, somewhat overwrought, imprecation, whereas Lot, the poem reminds, was drunk and therefore unknowing. His exoneration is less complete, but nevertheless stringent. The poem concludes the Lot interlude by presenting the names of the sons without judgment, further reinforcing the interdict against suspecting transgressive desire between Lot and his daughters.

> Þe firste him bar moab ðat sune,
> Of him beð folc moabit wune.
> Þe lesse him bar a sune amon,
> Amonit folces fader on. (1155-58)
>
> [The first bore him that son Moab
> From him is the existence of the Moabite folk.
> The younger bore him a son, Ammon,
> The father of the Ammonite folk.]

We learn here only that the daughters bore sons, Moab and Ammon, who fathered the Moabites and Ammonites, respectively. Unlike *Cursor mundi*, these tribes do not shed blood and reeve cattle, nor is the etymology of Ammon's name given as it is in the Bible. Instead the poet simply concludes by noting their birth. But there is one minor change that undermines entirely the ostensible lack of desire between Lot and the daughters: the addition of the word *him* in lines 1155 and 1157. The daughters bear *him* sons, rather than

simply bearing sons as they do in the biblical Genesis, where Lot disappears immediately after impregnating the women. In the Middle English *Genesis*, though, the relationship between father and daughters (and father-grandfather and son-grandsons) remains visible with the inclusion of those two pronouns that enshrine the daughters' actions as undertaken on their father's behalf and for his benefit. This problematic addition points to the poem's fraught understanding of the incident as it attempts to whitewash but not condone its participants' behavior.

While both poems grapple with the propriety of incest and its lasting impact on a family line, their ultimate decisions about how to handle the incident are quite different. While the *Genesis* poet suggests that the effects of incest are felt mainly by its actors—the daughters, no longer called maidens in the final lines of their story, instead bear sons specifically for their father. Those sons are not condemned and, in this moment of the narrative at least, they seem unmarked by their parents' transgression. The *Cursor mundi* poet, unlike the Middle English *Genesis*, suggests that the consequences of incest persist into the next generation, and, in fact, are primarily to be seen there, as might be expected from a poet so interested in the genealogical progression of Christian history. Despite his anxious maneuvering to avoid implicating the daughters in transgressive desire, there seems nevertheless to be an opposing concern that will not allow the poem to whitewash incest—or perhaps, more specifically, to condone incest between fathers and daughters, or to condone incest where the daughters are the primary actors. Because while the poet virulently condemns Moab and Ammon, he has nothing but praise for Isaac, the child of half-siblings Sarah and Abraham. Just before introducing the sacrifice of Isaac, the poet digresses briefly on the state of the world in the age of Abraham versus his own:

> In þat tyme þat I of mene
> Þe folk was good þe world was clene
> So good beþ hit neuer I wis
> So myche of welþe so myche of blis
> Þou□e man my□te neuer so myche welde
> So faste hit draweþ to doun helde. (3107-12)

> [In that time of which I speak
> The folk was good, the world was clean
> So good it will never be, I know
> So much of wealth, so much of bliss.
> Man might never possess so much of those,
> So quickly it goes downhill.]

Horrall notes that this passage is borrowed from Hermann de Valenciennes's *Bible de sapience*, and the poet employs it to establish a contrast between the time of Abraham, when the world was *clene*, and later eras. Abraham's entire epoch is held up as ideal, presumably in spite and in the face of the sexual depravity that surrounded them. Isaac "loued was wiþ god of heuen" (3118). Yet when he marries, the poem reports:

> Abraham willed in his lyue
> Þat ysaac had wedded a wyue
> And wolde she were if hit my□t be
> Of his kynde & his cuntre (3215-18)
>
> [Abraham wished during his life
> That Isaac had wedded a wife
> And wished that she were, if it might be,
> Of his kind and his country.]

By emphasizing Abraham's desire—his dying wish, apparently—that Isaac marry within "kynde & cuntre," the poet reminds us of the early Israelite tendency toward endogamy, which in some wise retroactively justifies the actions of Lot's daughters. The poem's contrary impulses—to condemn the incest of Lot while glorifying the endogamous genealogy of Abraham and thus Christ—indicates the extreme confusion that incest provoked in even seemingly casual treatments of the topic.

Images of Blame in Bibles moralisées

Bibles moralisées provide an interesting counterpart to poems such as *Cursor mundi* and the Middle English *Genesis* because they share a similar purpose: education of the lay population. Whereas *Cursor mundi* provided a biblical alternative to popular romances as a means of introducing its audience to church history by focusing on the literal meaning of biblical texts, *Bibles moralisées* juxtaposed images of biblical stories with images elucidating the stories' allegorical meanings. Text was relatively minimal.

Most of these Bibles were produced in Paris in the mid-thirteenth century, which does not, on first blush, make them a ready fit for comparison with *Cursor mundi* or other fourteenth-century English texts. However, John Lowden's work on *Bibles moralisées* manuscripts includes a chapter on the little-known BL MS Add. 18719, which was produced in either London or Westminster in the last quarter of the thirteenth century (shortly before the composition of *Cursor mundi* and around the time of the Middle English *Genesis*'s composition) and is an image-by-image copy of the *Oxford-Paris-London Bible moralisée*.[230] Although Add. 18719 is unfinished—its images were never colored—it preserves the *Bible moralisée* as an influence on and reflection of not only French but also English exegetical thought. Unfortunately, Add. 18719 has never been published in its entirety, and in fact, Lowden notes, the British Library has displayed it only once, in 1932 alongside MS Harley 1527 (the "London" of the *Oxford-Paris London Bible moralisée*) in an exhibit of French manuscript illumination.[231] However, the *Oxford-Paris-London* Bible upon which the English Add. 18719 is based is readily available in Auguste de Laborde's *La Bible moralisée illustrée conservée a Oxford, Paris et Londres*, a black-and-white facsimile edition produced 1911-1927,[232] as well as a more recent color digitization of the images by the Bodleian Library. Using *Oxford-Paris-London* is an acceptable (if not ideal) means of accessing a visual counterpart for *Cursor*

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[230]John Lowden, *The Making of the* Bibles Moralisées*: I. The Manuscripts* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). *Oxford-Paris-London* is a *Bible moralisée* produced in Paris and probably completed, per Lowden, around 1245 (140). It is now divided into three volumes, stored at separate libraries: volume one is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 270b, volume two is in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS latin 11560, and volume three is in London, British Library, MSS Harley 1526 and 1527. As I will be dealing with images from Genesis, found in volume one, I will generally refer to the manuscript as Bodley 270b.

[231] Ibid., 189.

[232] A. de Laborde, *La Bible moralisée illustrée conservée à Oxford, Paris et Londres: Reproduction intégrale du manuscrit du XIIIe siècle accompagnée de planches tirées de Bibles similaires et d'une notice* (Paris, 1911-27).

mundi's treatment of Lot's daughters in order to situate the poem's attitudes in a larger cultural context.

The images of Bodley 270b, although Parisian in origin, provide a glimpse into the era's defining thought on the major biblical stories, and this is no less the case for the story of Lot, illustrated over the course of seven roundels on fols. 14r and 15v. The artist is remarkably efficient—the seduction of Lot is contained entirely within a single roundel, which, as usual throughout the *Bible moralisée* genre, is followed by a second roundel that allegorizes and interprets the moral significance of the events in the first. The first, "literal" roundel is to be read clockwise from the top, where Lot anchors the frame slightly to the right of center (fig. 7). He leans away from his daughters (and sons) in the left half of the roundel, and his body effectively bifurcates the circle and creates the division that indicates the passage of time between the incestuous encounter and the birth of Moab and Ammon. Lot's right hand, placed high on his right hip, pushes the images of the daughters cradling their swaddled sons away from him, while his open legs cradle two women, his daughters before the birth of their sons, one naked from the waist up and the other reclining, presumably also naked, under a blue sheet whose curves and drapes are lovingly and beautifully detailed.[233]

The question here, of course, is what moral judgments, if any, the artist makes about the Lot story—how does he interpret what was obviously an enigmatic and oft-treated story? He has condensed and distilled the story to its very essence, leaving out the panicked escape from Segor to the mountain cave that is reported in both Genesis and *Cursor mundi*; he eliminates the daughters' discussion of their plan as well. Perhaps most significant of all, the image does not suggest Lot's intoxication in any way. The text

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[233] Exum argues that the incest encounter became the most frequently painted scene from Genesis 19 because it "provided artists with an opportunity to paint naked women" ("Desire Distorted," 97). Certainly this artist has paid close attention to the female forms in his image, even if they are not entirely naked.

accompanying the roundel is equally efficient: "[D]ormiuitque cum duabus filiabus suis loth et conceperunt ambe de eo et pepererunt moab et amon" [And Lot slept with his two daughters and both of them conceived by him and they bore Moab and Ammon].[234] These are the bare bones indeed. Yet even so, it is reasonable to assume that most audiences of the *Bible moralisée* would have been familiar with the Lot narrative's broad strokes and that this brief caption would have served more as a reminder, a sort of narrative mile-marker that made rapid identification of the events possible. But with only that brief marker in place, it is also reasonable to imagine that the delicate details of the narrative—the daughters' belief that they are the last people alive in the world, Lot's intoxication—might slip through the cracks.

I argue that the initial, "literal" roundel image lays heavy suspicion on Lot's behavior, suggesting the underlying narrative's mitigation of the daughters' guilt without explicitly stating it. As in the *Cursor mundi* poet's description of Lot's move from the field above Segor to the cave, the artist uses space and composition, rather than direct statement or depiction, to make his implication. At the same time, however, the artist sexualizes the daughters and suggests their desirability and their blameworthiness through their clothes. The placement of the naked daughters between Lot's spraddled legs make Lot the 'father' of this transgression; the draping of his robe and the position of his right hand high on his hip, fingers pointed toward his groin, both lead the eye toward the sexualized image of his daughters in the foreground of the roundel. The image as a whole is anchored by a woman's body, its shape clearly and cleverly outlined by the painstaking details of the sheet—her open left hand is clearly visible on her thigh, framing her womb; her legs are spread. And the picture is made even more erotic by the woman behind her, more obviously naked, hair loose down her back and open right hand covering her bare

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[234] Translations my own.

breast. These are Lot's daughters, obviously imagined as sexual objects. Perhaps their proximity to one another suggests the conspiracy between them that the artist could not depict, but there is nothing to suggest that they have intoxicated their father—the roundel is devoid of wineskins or insensate sleeping men. Instead, Lot and his daughters all direct their gazes toward the left half of the roundel, where the daughters, now clothed, are shown cradling their young sons, identified in the caption as Moab and Ammon. The naked daughters' looks at their sons rather than their father suggest their relatively pure motives in sleeping with Lot—they desire children, not intercourse. Lot's body position makes his motives appear much more ambivalent. The fact that his eyes are clearly open—that he even has a gaze to direct—belies the insistence of *Cursor mundi* and the Middle English *Genesis* on his senselessness. This is not a man made witless by wine. The direction of his gaze away from his naked daughters and toward his future descendants points to his relative lack of desire, but the position of his body contradicts that assertion.

The mothers on the left are also focused entirely on their sons. Both look only at the children, right hands positioned over their hearts in a gesture of maternal devotion which echoes the naked daughter's hand covering her bare breast on the right side of the roundel. The women's dresses are demure, with the elder—identifiable by her slightly more mature child, who is unswaddled and making a speaking gesture as he looks at his mother—wearing a head covering that matches her perfectly white dress. The younger, standing behind her again, wears a blue gown of the exact shade of the sheet covering her sister in the foreground of the roundel. Like Lot's body position, the daughters' clothes send conflicting messages of purity and sinfulness. That the elder daughter's white dress breaks the edge of the frame and trails into the margin further implies a contradiction—innocent transgression. Combined with their sexualized depiction in the left half of the roundel, it is clear that the artist has not fully absolved the daughters. Despite the bare-bones storytelling that the *Bible moralisée* form necessitates, the artist is able to

encapsulate the contradictory impulses of this incestuous encounter within the tight confines of a small image. While Lot and his daughters are not definitively convicted of incestuous desire, many of the story's mitigating elements are removed or suppressed. Although the gazes of everyone within the roundel seem focused on the children, the same cannot, of course, be said for the audience of the image. The specifically erotic elements of the image implicate the audience in the incest at hand, warning against and acknowledging the salacious titillation it offers.

The gaze is revised entirely by the allegorical roundel that immediately follows, which provides a homiletic interpretation of the literal story. The text accompanying it reads: "Loth qui deceptus est per filias suas significat bonos heremitas qui multotieus per mundum per diabolum per carnem sunt decepti" [Lot, who is deceived by his own daughters, signifies the good hermits who many times in the world are deceived by devils in the flesh.] The roundel itself depicts a man, clothed in a black hooded robe and bearing a remarkable resemblance to Lot in the above image, sitting in a cave-like hollow and being embraced by a devil while he opens his hands to a woman in white and an unbearded young man in blue, who holds an indeterminate cask-like object. The scene speaks of temptation, and it manifestly plays on visual cues from the literal image preceding it, and, ultimately, lays more definitive blame—and, implicitly, more independent agency—on Lot's daughters than either *Cursor mundi* or the Middle English *Genesis* are willing to.

The figures of temptation, a woman and a young man, are dressed in the same colors as Lot's daughters in the image above. It is difficult to see a tight connection between the man in blue and Lot's elder daughter, although for those familiar with the biblical narrative, the fact that the man offers the hermit/Lot a cask must surely invoke the elder daughter's plan to intoxicate her father with wine, and the man's blue over-cloak echoes the sheet that covers the daughter above. But the white dress of the tempting woman is unquestionably an invocation of the daughters. While a look at the page as a

whole (fig. 8) indicates that the artist regularly chooses to clothe his figures in blue—Lot in the first (top left) roundel, the gamblers in the second, Christ in the eighth (bottom right)—or red or black, white appears on this folio as clothing only in the top right roundel and the one immediately following: the dress of Lot's daughter and the hermit's temptress.[235] These are the only white dresses on the page. The temptress's dress, in particular, is visually arresting because she stands between two blue figures who provide dramatic contrast. The hermit's primary interaction in the image seems to be with this woman. Despite the fact that the blue devil figure embraces him, perhaps even offers a kiss, the hermit has eyes only for the woman in white, who stretches out her right hand to him. Her left hand brackets the demon's back, enclosing him between her and the hermit and creating a closed circuit of desire and temptation, facilitated by the devil. The hermit's hands reach toward temptation, opening to welcome either the cask in the hands of the young man or the sexual temptation offered by the woman. The devil, however, enacts what the woman offers, fulfilling the promise of the caption: *per diabolem per carnem sunt decepti*. Yet even this is curious—the devil seems to enact here a temptation or seduction, rather than a deception. That being so, *decepti* becomes an invocation of Lot's daughters' actions, tricking him into lying with them.

The various physical relationships depicted in this small illustration also work to cast an entirely different light on Lot's daughters, revising the understanding of their initial appearance in the top roundel, which is at the very least ambiguous, and perhaps even exonerating. In the allegorical roundel, however, it is patently clear that the genesis of sexual desire resides in the woman, especially when she is tempting men glossed as

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[235] Technically Lot's wife's headscarf is white in roundel 3, but as she's otherwise naked, that fact does little to undermine the significance of the white dresses in these two roundels. Whether there is a thematic resonance between Lot's wife's headscarf and that of his daughter in the top right roundel is a separate but interesting question.

bonos heremitas. The second roundel offers Lot, in the guise of the hermit, the narrative details that exonerate him. Despite being the "allegorical" roundel, the second image actually concretizes many of the details missing from the reductionist depiction of Lot's family in the first. The background of the images makes this difference readily apparent—in the first image, Lot and his daughters are given no location but the roundel itself; the motion of the events create the circle that encloses them and precludes the need for a cave or a reminder of Sodom's destruction. The same is not the case in the second roundel, where the audience is given both a cave *and* a hint of cityscape in an equally small space. The hermit-Lot sits in a sheltering hollow that conforms exactly to the shape of his seated body. The hollow is defined as a natural space, excluded from the city, by the flowers that grow out of its apex. Nature is contrasted to the city that lurks behind the tempting woman and man, a wall and peaked roof hovering over their forms. This composition—sinners under the shelter of city buildings—is repeated in two other allegorical roundels on the page (the second and fourth in the left column) depicting gamblers on the left side of the roundels under similar roofs and walls. Likewise, the city of Sodom is shown falling to its destruction on the left side of the third roundel, as Lot's naked wife looks back. The opposition of the city and the cave recalls the common medieval perception of the desert as a safe environment, cleansed from the filth and infection inherent to the city.[236]

Ultimately, the commentary on the encounter between Lot and his daughters offered by Bodley 270b is significantly more critical of Lot's daughters than either *Cursor mundi* or the Middle English *Genesis*. Through the auspices of allegorical

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[236] Jacques LeGoff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 169.

interpretation, the story condemns women as the source of sexual temptation, specifically for men who attempt to remove themselves from temptation entirely. It offers Lot the excuse of intoxication offered by the unscrupulous to the unwary, and places the daughters in the problematic context of the sinful city. Yet the rendering of the actual encounter could not be more ambiguous—the daughters are aggressively sexualized; Lot is both attracted and repulsed by them. He is not allowed the convenient excuse of drunkenness; they are not provided their usual agency in plotting to continue the race. It is this ambiguity that provides a connection to the poems examined in this chapter, which are similarly baffled by the incest that concludes the Lot narrative. Like these narratives, the visual retelling of Lot's incest does everything it can to avoid talking about the incest itself while constantly invoking it nevertheless. Lot and his daughters seem largely focused on the sons that are the product of their encounter, rather than on any potential transgressive desire. Like *Cursor mundi* in particular, the tale is focused on the forward march of genealogy. Furthermore, the repetition of the tale offered in the first roundel is heavily allegorized in the second as a warning against worldly temptations, rather than familial dangers.

Conclusion

The three texts at hand here—*Cursor mundi*, the Middle English *Genesis*, and the *Bible moralisée*—all point to the extremely confused nature of exegesis on the Lot narrative in the high and late Middle Ages. Seifert argues that the Lot story "in and of itself holds no moral worth,"[237] suggesting that it was therefore incumbent upon exegetes and interpreters to supply the anagogical significance of the tale. It was, as we've seen, no easy task, and even the fixed guiding star of the *Historia scholastica* did not lead poets

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[237] Seifert, *Tochter und Vater im Alten Testament*, 83. "Die Erzählung selbst enthält keine moralischen Wertungen."

down the same path in every version of the story. What we can say with certainty is that these medieval narratives preserve an uncertainty about the question of blame. They all seek to suppress the realities of incest and thereby circumvent the necessity of moral culpability. This mission is particularly difficult in *Cursor mundi*, where the poet's genealogical motivation requires that he both valorize feminine reproductive capacity *and* accurately depict the origin of the Moabite line in order to keep the succession of the Christological genealogy intact.

Under the auspices of advancing a genealogical mission, however, the *Cursor mundi* poet, despite his own relatively conservative impulses, finds room to comment and critique a morally ambiguous patriarch and to provide his daughters some absolution from their *prima facie* guilt of incest. Whether he is motivated by a desire to suppress the awkward realities of early Christian history or by an impulse to validate that most venerable of roles for Christian women, motherhood, his construction of the incestuous encounter that concludes the Lot narrative creates a more conspicuously complicated moral landscape than other texts of his day, and indicates that the vagaries of human sexuality were anything but clear-cut, even in literature composed by the religious for the education of the lay populace.

Figure 7. Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodley 270b, fol. 15v, detail. Lot's incestuous encounter with his daughters and allegorical commentary.

Figure 8. Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodley 270b, fol. 15v. The story of Lot, illustrated literally and allegorically.

CHAPTER FOUR

WALTER'S WIVES:

INCEST IN THE PUBLIC EYE IN THE *CLERK'S TALE*

For Jhesus Syrak seith that 'if the wyf have maistrie, she is contrarious to hir housbonde.' / And Salomon seith: 'Nevere in thy lyf to thy wyf, ne to thy child, ne to thy freend ne yeve no power over thyself, for better it were that thy children aske of thy persone thynges that hem nedeth than thou see thyself in the hands of thy children.'

—*The Tale of Melibee, VII.2253-54*

Qui tacet, consentire videtur. (Whoever is silent is seen to consent.)

—Pope Boniface VIII,
Decretals V, 12:43 (1298)

Narratives of incest are more than usually vulnerable to the gaze. Because they violate a powerful taboo—a taboo against speaking, against exposing familial secrets and shames, incest narratives rest uneasily on a fault line on which the attraction of total control wars with the rejection of the hegemonic patriarchy's failures. Visions of the Lot narrative often make that fault line visible: Lot's incestuous encounter with his daughters takes place within a cave, a secret space hidden on a mountain, high away from prying eyes, and yet it is simultaneously an oft-repeated and embroidered story in the medieval canon, never mind that it involves a biblical patriarch. Visual depictions of the story like the one in the Old English Hexateuch make the conflict even more apparent by framing the encounter tightly in three different illustrations: incest must not be seen, yet authors, artists, and audiences cannot look away.

But what happens when incest is deliberately and strategically revealed by one of its perpetrators? When incest moves out of the cave and off that fault line, when it is used as a tool, shamelessly, it actually becomes more invisible than ever. Instead of subjecting the perpetrator to public scorn, punishment, or exile from the community, exposure of incest by the father-perpetrator implicates the entire community in the commission of the

act. To expose incest is to hide it more effectively than ever, as Walter in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* so efficiently demonstrates. The critical final test to which Walter submits not only his wife but also his community and his daughter is the public celebration of what is revealed to be a bigamous, incestuous union to a child Walter had supposedly murdered years earlier. Although no one knows the girl's true identity when she is presented as Walter's bride, no protest is heard after her relationship to him is finally revealed, not from the Saluzzesi, from Griselda, or from the Clerk himself. And least of all from the tale's audiences, neither the pilgrims whom Chaucer depicts nor the cadre of modern critical scholars who still struggle to explain the tale. Why does the incest in this tale go so entirely unremarked? Why does no one speak for Walter and Griselda's daughter?

The silence extends not only to Walter's subjects and the Clerk's audience of pilgrims, but also to scholars and critics of the tale. The corpus of scholarship on the *Clerk's Tale* is among the most extensive of any of the *Canterbury Tales*, largely because it seems to pose a number of dilemmas for scholars, not least of which is, what is it supposed to *mean*? Of course nobody is satisfied with the Clerk's suggestion that it is a mere exemplum, meant to demonstrate the ideal of Christian suffering and forbearance before God, an allegorical retelling of the Job story.[238] Numerous attempts to explain Walter and Griselda using every type of critical and theoretical approach have yielded fruit of various ripeness and palatability. Griselda, in particular, is an enigmatic figure. The rise of feminist criticism has failed to quiet the general sense of Griselda remains mysterious, with extremes of obedience not satisfactorily explained as either submission

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[238] See, e.g., Elizabeth Salter, *Chaucer: The Knight's Tale and the Clerk's Tale*, Studies in English Literature 5 (London: Arnold, 1962); Patricia Cramer, "Lordship, Bondage, and the Erotic: The Psychological Basis of the Clerk's Tale," *JEPG* 98 (1990): 491-511. Cramer rejects earlier reading of the tale as an allegorical exemplum and instead sees, "primarily, a love story" dealing with themes of dominance and submission (492).

or resistance. Griselda's children have, by contrast, gone almost entirely unnoticed by critics. Although scholars occasionally allude to the daughter—Thomas Van, for example, suggests, "that Walter's pretended bride is his own daughter at least grazes the taboo against incest between parent and offspring," a rather dire understatement[239]—her relationship to and employment as ersatz bride by her father is barely acknowledged, and never, as far as I am aware, in terms of what the incident means for daughters in Chaucer specifically and medieval England more generally.

There are, of course, reasons why this acknowledgement has never taken place, even if they seem somewhat inadequate, considering the importance of understanding incest as a historical, cultural, and literary phenomenon. However, this work is not easy or simple. As Brenda Daly suggests, considerable danger attaches to the act of telling the daughter-victim's story: "the reception of the daughter's incest narrative always has an ideological component: each listener (or reader) must decide whether to affirm or attack, to support or exploit, to bear witness to the trauma survivor's suffering or to challenge her credibility."[240] Because incest is so deeply threatening—and how much more so when committed by a head of state—it requires work on the part of its audience. Hearing a tale of incest precludes neutrality, as Daly suggests: audiences must take a side. The only means of remaining neutral is to refuse to hear. Although Daly goes on to suggest that the danger belongs mostly to the daughter, the victim who risks being taken for a malicious liar and further victimized on those grounds, society too puts itself at some peril for destabilization when recognizing incest within its bounds. However, society stands to

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[239] Thomas Van, "Walter at the Stake: A Reading of Chaucer's 'Clerk's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 22:3 (Winter 1988): 214-224, at 220.

[240] Brenda Daly, "When the Daughter Tells Her Story: The Rhetorical Challenges of Disclosing Father-Daughter Incest," *Survivor Rhetoric: Negotiations and Narrativity in Abused Women's Language*, ed. Christine Shearer-Cremean and Carol L. Winkelman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 139-165.

suffer *more* when incest stories remain unrecognized and unacknowledged, allowing their continued perpetration. Silence is, after all, consent. Throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, feminine silence is tied to issues of incest, even when the narratives refuse to address either silence *or* incest directly.

It is true that Chaucer only "grazes" the incest taboo in his narration, both in the *Clerk's Tale* and throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. The brother-sister incest invoked by the Squire's recitation of the Canacee legend is precluded by the tale's interruption. The Man of Law explicitly disparages the tales of Canacee and Apollonius of Tyre because they contain incest, a disparagement he couches in a critique of Gower for telling those very stories.[241] Likewise, the mention of incest whatsoever, in fact. Yet in the near-marriage of Walter to his daughter, incest is invoked, and careful examination of the tale reveals incest's effects everywhere. While Chaucer may have been too skittish to address incest and its problematic authoritarian elements directly, he nevertheless permeated the *Clerk's Tale* with them, which becomes apparent by reading carefully around and with Walter's daughter and Walter's people, the two entities over whom he seems to have the most profound control.

To some degree it is the Clerk's silence on the issue of Walter's daughter that allows a matching silence on the part of contemporary scholars. When Griselda is reunited with her daughter, the incest or near-incest that Walter has perpetrated is obscured by her dramatic and emotional reaction, and by Walter's gracious restoration of his wife to her former position. The fate of his daughter and son is left to the reader's imagination; we are surely meant to presume their happy upbringing. Their presumed murder at the hands of their father is ignored, as is their exile in their aunt's home while

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[241] See the discussion in Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 77-84.

they were inexpedient to Walter's tests of Griselda. The Clerk eventually reveals that Walter arranged their successful marriages to high-born spouses. And even if we aren't, it hardly matters. The children aren't fully drawn characters, or characters at all—they are more in the way of cardboard stand-ins, tools in Walter's test of his wife. Even when Griselda's children are torn from her arms to be murdered, our pathos is for her grief and not their victimization. Their lack of definition is another check against them, another reason for scholars to overlook the incest in which the daughter is involved—it is difficult to care about the victimization of someone with no name, no agency, no voice.

These are the very reasons, however, that we *should* care. The daughter's complete occlusion by her father's obsessive desires is just as deadly and offensive, if not more so, than his dictatorial whims and compulsive testing of his wife's will. Actually examining the fate of Walter and Griselda's daughter in the *Clerk's Tale* reframes almost every critical debate on the Tale and its characters. Incest and the near occasion of incest, despite the critical determination to ignore them, change everything. Walter's marriage to his daughter creates her as the perfect wife, one who reaches a level of silent compliance that Griselda could never hope to attain. It marries the identity categories of "daughter" and "wife," feeding Walter's need for dominance and control. As it always does, incest occludes the daughter's identity and remakes her in the image of her father. But the *Clerk's Tale* varies from the other instances of incest mentioned in this dissertation because it is incest invoked in public. Thereby the tale demonstrates, first and foremost, that communities collude in, and thereby legitimize and erase, incest. Even though Walter's subjects are initially ignorant of the incestuous connection, they are vital to the tale's interrogation of power; even when their ignorance is alleviated, they acquiesce to Walter's schemes without protest. As Anne Savage suggests, the narrative illustrates "*social* responses to paternal incest, reinforcing fundamental contradictions which

involve knowing and not knowing about it, representing and not representing it, and speaking or being silent about it."[242] Walter's use of his daughter, and the Saluzzesi community's reaction to it, is an excellent demonstration of the power of an incestuous father's construction of his family. Likewise, the tale's use and then erasure of the daughter, the unremarked incest that haunts the "happy ending," massively complicates the already-difficult position of women in the narrative, ultimately suggesting that wives, even ones as self-subjugated as Griselda, have more power than women still under their fathers' domain. Despite his scorn for Walter's behavior, the Clerk suggests with his tale that there is—or at least, should be—a certain safety in marriage for women. Father-daughter incest destroys any vestige of that safety, perpetuating the father's power over the daughter as the husband's complete domination over the wife. If the community accedes to such an incestuous union, all hope of feminine virtue is lost, because women like Griselda can no longer exist—they can no longer suffer willingly and virtuously, but only silently and pointlessly. The Clerk seems to suggest ultimately that an immoral family begets an immoral community, especially if that family holds prominent political power. The barometer of familial immorality is the relationship of the head of household to its weakest members—that is, the father to his wife and daughters.

Walter's relationships to both his wife and his daughter in the tale are defined by marriage and his own exploration of power within that bond. Of course Walter doesn't actually marry his daughter. Except. It seems that the execution of weddings in the *Clerk's Tale* is a muddy issue, and Walter takes advantage of that not once, but twice, first to acquire the wife he wants (Griselda), and then to test her. I propose to examine the shape of marriage in the tale, looking first at Griselda's wedding and marriage, with an

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[242] Anne Savage, "Clothing Paternal Incest in *The Clerk's Tale*, *Émaré* and the *Life of St. Dympna*," *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000): 345-62, at 347.

examination of Walter's fatherhood, and then coming around to Walter's second marriage, which is in every way a parodic echo of his first, highlighting the "corrections" Walter proposes to the institution of marriage for the benefit of the husband (and the patriarchy as a whole). Marriage is throughout shaped by the participation of the public in the union, not only as witnesses, but as actors in the construction of the wife as object of desire and fantasy.

Understanding the function of marriage in the tale means understanding the tale's teller. The *Clerk's Tale* serves as a response to the liberal construction of women in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*, as Carolyn Dinshaw argues. Dinshaw suggests that "Chaucer, through the Clerk, suggests a revision of the model of patriarchal hermeneutics more radical than the one he has developed through the Wife of Bath: the Clerk…has the woman speak…and has her point out that the patriarchal model occludes feminine desire, feminine experience."[243] The Clerk's effective presentation of feminine suffering arises in part from the complexity of his own character. Namely, the Clerk is persistently feminized, which foreshadows his depiction of women. The ambiguity of the Clerk's sexual identity has been noted by multiple critics, although perhaps most cogently by Tison Pugh: "By depicting him as a hermaphroditic figure, a 'sire' who is also a 'mayde,' Harry subverts the Clerk's genital masculinity and feminizes him as a new bride, which ironically metamorphoses him into a foreshadowing of his protagonist Griselda."[244] Pugh characterizes the Clerk's sexuality as a function of his relationship with Harry, and a queer, competitive adherence to the "game" of storytelling proposed by the host. What Pugh does not draw out, however, is the extent to which the Clerk's feminization is a function of his silence:

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[243]Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 137.

[244] Tison Pugh, *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 83.

> "Sire Clerk of Oxenford," oure Hoost sayde
> Ye ryde as coy and stille as dooth a mayde
> Were new espoused, sytting at the bord;
> This day ne herde I of youre tonge a word. (IV.1-4)

The specter of the silenced woman haunts the Clerk's text from the very beginning, with the invocation of the storyteller as virginal bride whose chief characteristic (and attraction) is silence, making the Clerk, at least as figured by Harry's desire, more akin to the daughter than to Griselda, who speaks. The Clerk is "coy and stille," a near-tautology: although "coy" in modern English connotes a sense of teasing, the mere performance of demureness, in Middle English it was much more straightforward, meaning literally, "quiet, modest, demure; reserved, reticent, discreet."[245] The word is derived directly from the Latin *quietum*, but Harry follows it with a *stille* and an observation that he hasn't heard the Clerk speak all day. The Clerk is very, very quiet and therefore very, very feminized, transformed from the celibate and studious young cleric of the General Prologue into a bride at the bord. The mention of the bord, or table, moves the bride from the bedchamber into the public realm of the banquet, as does the Host's reminder that the Clerk is riding—namely, that he is surrounded by the cadre of pilgrims headed for Canterbury. Whether silence is natural behavior for the Clerk is doubtful. While the General Prologue claims that "Noght o word spak he moor that was neede" (I.304), it seems that *neede* is rather pressing: in the brief 23-line sketch of the character, the narrator spends the six lines on his speech habits, five of which close the sketch and leave the impression that the Clerk is something of a moral chatterbox, despite his lack of a benefice and therefore lack of a congregation to chatter at.

> Noght o word spak he moore than was neede,
> And that was seyd in form and reverence,
> And short and quyk and ful of hy sentence;
> Sownyng in moral vertu was his speche,
> And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche. (I.304-8)

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[245] MED, *s.v.* "coi," (a).

The Clerk's rhetorical style is highly developed; he speaks concisely with sentences "short and quyk," but nevertheless "ful of hy sentence." The Middle English Dictionary provides a number of definitions of *sentence*, including "a personal opinion," but the adjective *hy* implies something more grandiose than mere personal opinion. The relevant definitions seem to be "doctrine, authoritative teaching," and even more so definition 4, which reads: "Understanding, intelligence; knowledge, wisdom ... (b) belief, faith; trust; (c) moral seriousness; also, edifying subject matter; heigh (best, gret)."[246] The Clerk doesn't merely speak; he speaks with force and meaning, that is, he preaches. Women are, as Margery Kempe so forcefully demonstrates with her repeated references to St. Paul's famous injunction "suffer not a woman to teach," strongly discouraged, often with imprisonment, from preaching throughout the Middle Ages.[247] The emphasis on the Clerk's joy in study and in teaching, then, is a move to masculinize him, as his educated tone and, Anne Middleton suggests, his adroit manipulation of the tale's sources to his own ends.[248] Although he is not rich, powerful, or even married, the Clerk is clearly male by simple dint of the fact that he *speaks*.

So when Harry Bailey notes (and notes, and notes again) the Clerk's silence as immediate preface to a narrative about the ideal of feminine silence, the Clerk is feminized and thereby separated from the accompanying masculine ideal of learned speech. Carolyn Dinshaw suggests that this silence is, in fact, vital to the Clerk's success

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[246] MED, *s.v.* "sentence" 2, 4.

[247] 1 Timothy 12: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over a man: but to be in silence." Margery is questioned about her preaching in Chapter 52 of her *Book*, where a cleric specifically challenges her with Paul's injunction. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996): 126. For more on her arrest and defense, see Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), esp. ch. 3.

[248] Anne Middleton, "The Clerk and His Tale: Some Literary Contexts," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 2 (1980): 121-150. "The supreme wit of the Clerk's performance lies in its superimposition of these divergent traditions of interpretation, praise, and use of the Griselda story" (147).

as a storyteller, adding a layer of subtlety and opposition to his apparent hermeneutics of ideal femininity: "The Clerk's identification or sympathy with the female—one who is fundamentally left out of patriarchal society—allows him to … read with an eye to what is left out of the very reading he is performing—allows him to read, that is, like a woman."[249] Harry's initial characterization of the Clerk as silent and feminine permits the Clerk to access the suppressed voice of the female (the victim). On the other hand, of course, when the Host points out the Clerk's silence, it is a prelude to requesting his speech; Harry encourages the Clerk to speak. However, he forbids preaching: "But precheth nat, as freres doon in Lente, / To make us for oure olde synnes wepe" (IV.12-13). Harry's observations and directives send distinctly mixed messages; although the Clerk is allowed voice, he is limited to a style that is stripped of its religious and political power: "Youre terms, youre colours, and youre figures, / Keepe hem in stoor til so be ye endite / Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write," Harry instructs (IV.16-18). Like a woman, he is forbidden to preach, and like the bride at the board, the Clerk's purpose is to serve as an object of the community's attention. It is little surprise that the tale he tells revolves around a specific community's response to a bride.

The effect of Harry's commands is to characterize a narrator of uncertain authority, a mixed signifier who presents a tale that is often inscrutable. J. Allen Mitchell characterizes the *Clerk's Tale* as forming "a dynamic force field that resists all static positions—including ironical or skeptical ones," and perhaps part of that effect stems from the dynamic characterization of the tale's narrator.[250] When the Host commands him to tell some "myrie thyng of aventures" (IV.15) in a "pleyn" (IV.20) style, the

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[249] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 154.

[250] J. Allan Mitchell, "Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and the Question of Ethical Monstrosity," *Studies in Philology* 102:1 (Winter 2005): 1-26, at 17.

Clerk's response is everything that is compliant and obedient: "'Hooste," quod he, 'I am under youre yerde; / Ye han of us as now the governance, / And therefore wol I do yow obeisance" (IV.22-24). His answer, of course, anticipates Griselda's obedience to Walter's dictates, but it likewise anticipates her very ability to speak: her obedience is at least partially characterized by her speech acts: she repeatedly *vows* her obedience, which, in the *Clerk's Tale*, is as much a performative act as handing over a child to be murdered. As Pugh suggests, his adherence to the Host's wishes also becomes a type of resistance: "the moments when characters submit to domination can also be understood as moments when they convert submission to domination through a mastery of the masochistic dynamic at play in gender."[251] Numerous critics have noted that Griselda's power in the tale derives in large part from her ability to speak, employed at strategic moments.[252] Likewise, although the Clerk ostensibly assents to Harry's demand, his tale is obviously a moral exemplum the likes of which would have been common to any preacher's sermon, and furthermore it is told in rime royal, a high and sophisticated style if ever there was one. The Clerk's narration, like Griselda's orations, thus becomes itself a speech-act of resistance. Pugh concludes, "In many ways, the narrative force of the Clerk's Tale is predicated upon both the Clerk's and Griselda's stubborn refusal to refuse desires antithetical to their own."[253] The Clerk's speech and Harry's attempt to constrain it contrasts sharply with Walter's apparently effortless suppression of his daughter's identity.

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[251] Pugh, *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents*, 79.

[252] See, e.g. Gail Ashton, "Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the *Clerk's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 32:3 (1998): 232-38; Natalie Grinnell, "Griselda Speaks: The Scriptural Challenge to Patriarchal Authority in 'The Clerk's Tale,'" *Critical Matrix* 9:1 (1995): 79-94; Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 144. Katherine McKinley, among others, resists this reading in "'The Clerk's Tale': Hagiography and the Problematics of Lay Sanctity," *The Chaucer Review*, 33:1 (1998): 90-111.

[253] Pugh, *Sexuality and Its Discontent* , 75. See also Stephen Manning, "The Paradox of the Narrative Styles in Chaucer's 'Clerk's Tale,'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 15:1 (Winter 1985): 29-41.

Walter's First Marriage and Its Historical Contexts

It is important to recognize, however, that the Clerk is figured not merely as a woman, but as a blushing bride, which can be no coincidence in a tale that centers around marriage and the correct acquisition and comportment of brides and wives; the thematic resonance introduces the narrative's moral direction. It also introduces the question of what, exactly, marriage required of its participants in the late fourteenth century, and to explore the way those requirements shaped—and were reshaped—in the *Clerk's Tale*, particularly by the description of Walter's marriage to Griselda. The *Clerk's Tale* proper begins with the appeal of Walter's people to their marquess that he find a wife:

> For certes, lord, so wel us liketh yow
> And al youre werk, and evere han doon, that we
> Ne koude nat us self devysen how
> We myghte lyven in moore felicitee,
> Save o thyng, lord, if it youre wille be,
> That for to been a wedded man yow leste;
> Thanne were youre peple in sovereyn hertes reste. (IV.106-112)

Walter has been stolidly resistant to the "yok" of marriage up to this point, more interested in hawking and hunting than in furthering his royal lineage. His people beseech him to marry and provide them an heir, and consequently a sense of public security. From the outset marriage is established as an essentially *public* good, an institution that is as much for the benefit of society as for religious or personal gain. Although Walter's people are essentially happy, they will live "in moore felicitee" when Walter marries, because it guarantees, or at least increases the chances for, the peaceful succession and continuation of the government with which they're otherwise satisfied. In fact, the people's speaker, in his extended speech (some 42 lines) makes no mention of marriage as a source of happiness or love for Walter himself; it is merely a means to a socially selfish end.

In fact, marriage in Chaucer's day was perhaps more conspicuously public than at any point previously. Although "both Roman and barbarian legislation had recognized the public nature of the marital bond," according to Michael Goodrich, the Church moved

to make marriage a more aggressively public act as part of the reforms of Lateran IV in 1215.[254] In addition to abolishing prohibitions against marriage between relatives beyond the fourth degree, the Church disallowed clandestine marriage entirely, requiring marriage to be contracted publicly, before a priest, and, in most cases, to be preceded by published banns announcing the couple's intentions. Canon 51 reads in part,

> "Whence, following in the footsteps of our predecessors, we absolutely forbid clandestine marriages; and we forbid also that a priest presume to witness such. Wherefore, extending to other localities generally the particular custom that prevails in some, we decree that when marriages are to be contracted they must be announced publicly in the churches by the priests during a suitable and fixed time, so that if legitimate impediments exist, they may be made known. Let the priests nevertheless investigate whether any impediments exist."[255]

Before this decree, marriage technically required no more than a declaration by both parties that they were married. Twelfth-century canonists debated the exact requirements of marriage, namely whether it was consent alone, or consent and confirmation that comprised a marriage. David Herlihy notes that Gratian's *Decretals* advocated the requirement of consummation as a means of perfecting the marriage, but ultimately, Peter Lombard rejected the requirement of sexual intercourse in his *Sentences*, asserting that a couple need only declare consent in *verba de presenti*, "words of the present tense." The Church adopted Lombard's position, perhaps because, as Herlihy suggests, "Christian writers found the issue especially delicate, as they were loath to affirm that the marriage of Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary, which was never sexually consummated, was in any

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[254] Michael Goodrich, "Sexuality, Family, and the Supernatural in the Fourteenth Century," *Medieval Families: Perspectives on Marriage, Household, and Children*, ed. Carol Neel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 302-328, at 305.

[255] H.J. Schroeder, trans. and ed., *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937): 280.

respect imperfect."[256] Regardless, a marriage could be contracted entirely in secret, without parental permission, a review of the couple's degrees of affinity, or even a church blessing. Canon 51 changed that completely. It disallowed priests from witnessing clandestine marriages, and placed the onus for preventing incestuous marriages on the clergy and the community, instead of on the couple themselves. Potential marriages were required to be announced in advance "so that if legitimate impediments exist, they may be made known," namely, so the community could register their objections on any of a number of grounds, including incestuously close affinity. The responsibility for assuring the validity of a marriage was moved from the couple or the couple's family to the community as a whole—marriage becomes a significantly more social institution with the advent of Fourth Lateran's Canon 51.

This change in doctrine was still a matter of concern in the fourteenth century: it was the subject of a number of decretals, and Chaucer would likely have heard sermons about marriage that specified the requirements for public announcement. Model sermons on the wedding at Cana proliferated in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, preserved in mendicant homily books for the convenience of travelling preachers. Such homilies emphasized that weddings were to be conducted in public before a congregation.[257] H.A. Kelly notes that the English clergy were conscientious in making sure that their congregations knew the requirements. Archbishop Simon Mepham of Canterbury issued the decretal *Cum inhibitio* in 1329, which specified the requirements for marriage and the

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[256] David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985): 80. For further explorations of the rejection of consummation as a requirement for marriage, see Conor McCarthy, "Love, Marriage, and Law: Three Canterbury Tales," *English Studies* 6 (2002): 504-18.

[257] David d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 65. "As it was, from the mid-thirteenth century at least it would have been hard for a layman or woman living in a town and attending mendicant sermons to avoid hearing every year or so sermons explaining the religious value of marriage, literally understood."

penances for transgression, and Archbishop John Stanford of Canterbury issued *Humana concupiscentia* in 1342, which imposed a penalty of "*ipso facto* excommunication upon those who forced priests to solemnize…clandestine marriages, and ordered these and other excommunicates to be regularly denounced and to receive the other penalties set for those who celebrated a marriage clandestinely."[258] Weddings were to be conducted under the public eye, without exception, and clandestine marriages, although not invalid, incurred severe penalties.[259] That Walter's marriage is contracted under such public circumstances reflects the degree to which the community was expected to be involved in a marriage in Chaucer's time.

Little could be more public than the people's request for and Walter's acquiescence to a bride. Every aspect of the marriage is conducted publicly, and the match is *aggressively* exogamous. His people counsel him to take a wife of "the gentilleste and of the meeste / Of al this land," (IV.131-32), suggesting that the people value an "aristocratic endogamy." They imagine an ideal aristocratic marriage as one contracted between nobles of similar birth and social standing. But Walter insists that he will choose his own wife:

> But ther as ye han proffered me to-day
> To chese me a wyf, I yow relesse
> That choys and prey yow of that profre cesse. (IV.151-53)

Walter agrees to the people's demand that he marry, but he refuses to allow them to "proof" the marriage—he rejects Canon 51's requirement that the marriage banns be published so that impediments could be brought to light. Even though Walter *must* marry, he refuses to limit himself to the publicly (and ecclesiastically) sanctioned pool of

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[258] H.A. Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004): 167-68.

[259] Clandestine marriages were not declared invalid by the Catholic Church until the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, although this only applied in areas where Tridentine decrees held sway, not in Protestant or schismatic countries, Kelly notes (Ibid., 178). See also d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, 105.

potential brides. His assumption of all authority in the matter of his choice of bride is a precursor to his totalitarian rule of his bride and children, and perhaps a suggestion of his general governing tactics, despite the fact that he appears to be acquiescing to popular demand in this moment. He emphasizes his control by repeating his demand:

> Lat me alone in chesynge of my wyf—
> That charge upon my bak I wole endure.
> But I yow preye, and charge upon youre lyf,
> What wyf that I take, ye me assure
> To worshipe hire, whil that hir lyf may dure,
> In word and werk, bothe heere and everywheere
> As she an emperoures doghter weere. (IV.162-67)

In fact, Walter compels public acceptance of his choice of bride, and in a rather extreme fashion. As Andrew Sprung notes, Walter phrases his demands as both request and threat.[260] He both asks—"I yow preye"—and demands—"charge upon youre lyf." Ultimately the demand is more forceful, and it is the demand that endures in Walter's treatment of his people. Not only will Walter alone choose his wife—a task that is apparently something of a burden—he constrains his people to approve the match, sight unseen, and more than that, to celebrate it. Walter's canny negotiation actually allows him more freedom in his choice of bride than he might have had if he had come to marriage willingly. Oddly, Walter's phrasing foreshadows his future marriage to his daughter, as it allows the choice of any bride, even one as wildly inappropriate as his own daughter. His subjects are foreclosed from offering any objection whatsoever. At the same time, however, Walter requires that his people worship his bride—his first bride—"whil that hir lyf may dure." Interestingly, the duration of their adoration is to be divorced from her status as Walter's wife. He requires her to remain an object of the people's affection even if she ceases to become an object of his own. This requirement seems to foreclose the possibility of Walter's remarriage as long as Griselda lives.

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[260] Andrew Sprung, "'If It Youre Wille Be': Coercion and Compliance in Chaucer's Clerk's Tale," *Exemplaria* 7:2 (1995): 345-69, at 356.

The central question in Walter's first marriage is the question of consent. As Patricia Cramer points out, "Not only Griselda but Walter, Janicula, and the townspeople are each required to consent formally to Walter's marriage conditions."[261] The first assent is Walter's, in agreeing to marry at all. The second, more critical assent, is the public assent of Walter's subjects to refrain both from recognizing impediments and from "grucching" and "stryving" against his choice. I have labeled this the more critical assent because it is the assent that suffices to grant Walter power for the rest of the narrative. Griselda's assent, the complete self-effacement she commits, is never as clear as the people's in the moment when they kneel to Walter and agree to follow his every romantic whim:

> He graunted hem a day, swich as hym leste
> On which he wolde be wedded sikerly,
> And seyde he dide al this at hir requeste.
> And they, with humble entente, buxomly,
> Knelynge upon hir knees ful reverently,
> Hym thonken alle; and thus they han an ende
> Of hire entente, and hoom agayn they wende. (IV.183-89)

The people seal their obedient assent to Walter's wishes with a gesture: they kneel "ful reverently," making the gesture a genuflection, and thank him. Walter reminds them that he is acting "at hir request," which both highlights the people's agency in the agreement and creates their debt to Walter, which he ruthlessly manipulates. The people voluntarily agree to their own subjugation, just as Griselda eventually will. Contrasted with their active assent is the passive assumption of the bride's consent. Walter assigns a day for his marriage well before he identifies a bride, and simply assumes that she, whoever she might be, will make the fulfillment of his promise to his people possible by agreeing to marry him on that day. Private, personal assent is nowhere near as crucial as public approbation.

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[261] Cramer, "Lordship, Bondage, and the Erotic," 493.

Although the partial purpose of public assent was (and remains) to assure that the marriage has no impediments of affinity, Walter's marriage to Griselda is almost aggressively exogamous, perhaps even dangerously so. In ignoring the advice of his people to take a high-born wife, Walter ignores the advice of contemporary homilists, including John Mirk. Mirk's *Festial*, which is an almost exact contemporary of *The Canterbury Tales*, having been composed likely between 1382 and 1390, comprises a series of homilies in Middle English on a variety of subjects, including marriage, and was one of the most prominently referenced vernacular sermon cycles in the fourteenth century.[262] In his *Sermo de Nupciis*, Mirk outlines the ideal shape of a late-medieval marriage, reviewing the creation of Eve for Adam's companionship, and advising potential grooms how best to choose a bride:

> Wherefore, os by Goddys ordynaunce, a man schal takon a wyf lyke of age, lyk of condicions, and lyk of burth; for þereos þese ben acordyne, it is lyk to fare wel, and ellys not. In mynd hereof þe preste schal makon a quere be hure oth wether þei ben cosynnes wythinne degre of marriage or no, wheþur eyther of other haue any bettur right to any other, wethur þei ben in ful wylle eythur to othur to lyvon togydur and kepe þe scharge þe whyche he wyl leyne on hem.[263]
>
> [For this reason, as by God's ordinance, a man shall take a wife similar of age, similar of conditions, and similar of birth; for when these are in accordance, it is likely to fare well, and otherwise not. With that in mind, the priest shall make an inquiry of them of whether they are cousins within the forbidden degree of marriage or not, whether either of them have any better claim to any other, whether they are in full will each to the other to live together and keep the charge that he will lay on them.]

Because Adam and Eve were made for one another, made one *from* the other, Mirk advises men to choose brides as similar to themselves as possible in age, rank, and socio-

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[262] Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy, and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006): 9.

[263] John Mirk, "Sermo de Nupciis," *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS e.s. 96 (London: EETS, 1905): 289-293, at 290. Translation my own.

economic standing. Mirk explicitly clarifies that those who marry within their rank and age group are "lyk to fare wel, and ellys not." Most notable in Mirk's advice is its construction and endorsement of a class-based endogamy, encouraging men to take wives as similar to themselves in age, birth, and conditions as possible. He claims that this strategy is authorized "by Goddes ordynaunce," which endows such quasi-endogamous matches with an extra sanctity. The valorization of like-to-like marriage is made to seem even more endogamous when Mirk goes on to require that priests enquire if the couple might be "cosynnes wythinne degre of marriage or no," which precludes truly incestuous marriage but leaves open the possibility of unions between more distant relatives—or "relatives" created by similarity of circumstance. Walter's marriage to Griselda is excessively exogamous, and as such, not "lyk to fare well."

Although Chaucer would not likely have been aware of Mirk's ideas, it is probable that they were not unique to Mirk. Chaucer certainly takes up the issue of unequal marriage repeatedly throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, with the *Merchant's Tale* serving perhaps as his most scathing take on the issue. January's foolish union to May might be taken as a more lighthearted version of Walter's to Griselda; January seeks to exert the same level of oversight on his wife as Walter, and is simply painted as a vastly more ridiculous and therefore less threatening figure. Griselda is, of course, a young girl: "But thogh this mayde tendre were of age / Yet in the brest of hire virginitee / Ther was enclosed rype and sad corage" (IV.218-20); Walter's age is not specifically given. He is described as "yong of age" (IV.3), but given that he's been resisting marriage long enough to make his people nervous about the continuation of his lineage, readers can presume he is a good few years older than Griselda. Herlihy suggests that a large age

difference between husband and wife was actually fairly typical in the later Middle Ages, and that the gap had been increasing since the twelfth century.[264]

More disturbing than any possible age gap, however, is the disparity in power between husband and wife. Of course a difference in age contributes to that disparity, but it is largely effected by the difference in their social stations. Numerous critics have explicated the consequences of Griselda's poverty; E. Pearlman sums up the situation succinctly: "Griselde is raised up from poverty and married. Once in this way saved, she becomes a possession of Walter's, and he can manipulate her in any way that pleases him. Like Robinson Crusoe, he is even privileged to put his 'thing' to death."[265] Walter assumes a disturbing level of control, and it points at the central critical conundrum of the tale: the nature of power, corruption, and obedience. Dinshaw takes her assessment of Walter's power further, asserting that he "translates" Griselda: "he sees her and recognizes her natural beauty and virtues even in her impoverished condition, under her ragged clothes; he chooses her for his bride, takes her from her father, orders her to be stripped and reclothed in finery, and makes her wife and mistress of his household."[266] Walter in essence *re-creates* Griselda, erasing her previous self and remaking her in his image. Whether this re-creation qualifies as following Mirk's directive seems dubious: Walter's repeated allusions to Griselda's low birth during the course of the tests suggests that she cannot be completely remade. Such reshaping, however, was not entirely without cultural basis: Kathleen Kennedy notes that under English common law, "when a wife married her husband, she ceased to exist as a civil person, a *femme sole*, and became the

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[264] Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 129.

[265] E. Pearlman, "The Psychological Basis of the 'Clerk's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 11:3 (1977): 248-57, at 256.

[266] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 133.

legal fiction, *femme couvert*."[267] Although this was a legal fiction—women could still be tried independently for murder, for example—it nevertheless reflects the problematic status of female identity in relation to a husband. Walter's heavy-handed attempts to further diminish Griselda's selfhood indicate his desperate desire for total control over his wife, and perhaps, his life as a whole.[268]

The problem with Walter's reclothing and remaking of Griselda is that it obscures the question of her assent. I am not suggesting that Griselda does not wish to marry Walter or that her obedience is compelled by anything other than her own force of will. What I am suggesting is that Walter merely *assumes* her assent to the marriage. While she agrees to his demands for strict obedience, she never explicitly agrees to marry him. That is neither here nor there for Walter, however. When he comes to her house on the day he has arbitrarily ordained for their wedding, he simply takes her compliance for granted:

> "Griselde," he seyde, "ye shal wel understonde
> It liketh to youre fader and to me
> That I yow wedde, and eek it may so stonde,
> As I suppose, ye wol that it so be." (IV.344-47)

In fact, Walter here seems entirely unconcerned by Griselda's opinion of the matter. He has secured her father's permission (perhaps unfairly dazzling him with punctilio, Norman Lavers suggests[269]) and is acting after his own desires. His tone here might even

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[267] Kathleen Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed, and Marriage in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2009): 3.

[268] For more on the debate about Walter's monstrous control, see James Sledd, "The Clerk's Tale: The Monsters and the Critics," *Modern Philology* 51:2 (Nov. 1953): 73-82, in which Sledd examines the "moral question" of the tale and argues against the monstrousness of both Walter and Griselda. The question is taken up again by Delores Warwick Flores, who reads a significantly more ambiguous Walter in the textual additions specific to Chaucer. "Chaucer's 'Clerk's Tale': The Monsters and the Critics Reconsidered," *The Chaucer Review* 8:2 (Fall 1973): 133-46.

[269] Norman Lavers, "Freud, the Clerkes Tale, and Literary Criticism," *College English* 26:3 (Dec. 1964): 180-87, at 185.

be taken as mildly threatening when he says "ye shal wel understonde": Griselda is given no option to misunderstand what is going to happen, nor that it is motivated by Walter's and her father's desires. His dictatorial tone is infantilizing; the reference to her father's wishes reinforces that impression. The infantilization further diminishes any chance of Griselda exerting any will contrary to Walter's. From the beginning of his address to her Walter obviates any chance of Griselda exerting her own will in the matter. He sees no reason she should object to a marriage, and therefore assumes her consent. Walter's refusal to entertain potential objection here presages his continual testing of Griselda; it reveals the anxiety about rebellion that compels his totalitarian behavior.

Walter confirms his lack of interest in Griselda's assent to marriage in his method of completing their union before the public eye. Kelly notes the problematic shape that Walter's marriage takes:

> Only in the case of Walter and Griselda, among Chaucer's Christian marriages, can any deviation from the canonical norm be noticed. True, Walter does request Griselda from her father, in accord with the canon *Atelier*. Then, however, after she agrees to his condition that she obey him in all things, he takes her outside and announces to the people, "This is my wyf." By this declaration and by Griselda's tacit consent they are married. Nothing further is added to the bond when, after Griselda is adorned in the clothes and jewelry prepared for the wedding, Walter espouses her with a ring. Or, if he had said nothing before, and simply put the ring on her finger in silence, they would still be considered married.[270]

It is Walter's declaration that makes the marriage; the phrase "This is my wyf" is a speech act that requires nothing else to create a valid and binding union. That this is the only such marriage in the *Canterbury Tales* is surely significant; Walter's abuse of assent may go unremarked by the Clerk, but it is not unimportant. When he announces his wife, it not only assumes Griselda's consent, but it also reminds the audience that the Saluzzesi are barred by their own assent to Walter's demands from objecting to his marriage on any

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[270] Kelly, *Love and Marriage*, 179.

grounds whatsoever. In fact, Walter explicitly reminds them of that when he announces his wedding:

> And to the peple he seyde in this manere:
> "This is my wyf," quod he, "that standeth heere.
> Honoureth hire and loveth hire, I preye,
> Whoso me loveth; there is namoore to seye." (IV.368-71)

Although Walter ostensibly beseeches the people with the phrase "I preye," he follows up his wedding declaration with a pointed reminder that the people are to honor and love his wife, and above all that there is "namoore to seye." He does not truly want their consent; he merely assumes it. Silent obedience is the ideal.

The rest of the second section of the *Clerk's Tale* pushes Griselda and the people toward that ideal as it describes Griselda's complete transformation from poorest subject to perfect marchioness. Chaucer follows both Petrarch and *Le Livre de Griseldis* rather closely in his description of the marriage, but it is nevertheless notable that there is no description of a church blessing or ceremony. Griselda is simply reclothed. It is an extended process, some 76 lines of reclothing, grooming, and display of Griselda to the people. The display, in fact, forms the center of the marriage celebrations—it seems that Griselda is transformed not on behalf of her new husband, but on behalf of his people. This is reinforced by the extended description of her transformation and the consequent public reaction:

> And shortly forth this tale for to chace,
> I seye that to this newe markysesse
> God hath swich favour sent hire of his grace,
> That it ne semed nat by liklynesse
> That she was born and fed in rudenesse,
> As in a cote or in an oxe-stalle,
> But norissed in an emperoures halle.
>
> To every wight she woxen is so deere
> And worshipful that folk there she was bore,
> And from hire birth knew hire yeer by yeere,
> Unnethe trowed they—but dorste han swore—
> That to Janicle, of which I spak bifore,
> She doghter were, for, as by conjecture,
> Hem thought she was another creature. (IV.393-406)

Griselda's transformation rests entirely on the perception of Walter's people, and it is a remarkably complete change, as the Clerk reiterates (in spite of his stated desire to move the story along). Its completeness is, in fact, rather unlikely, he acknowledges when he says "it semed nat by liklynesse" that she goes from birth in an ox-stall—a clear allusion to the birth of Christ—to seeming to have been raised in an emperor's household. Most critically, however, she sheds her association with her father, losing any possibility of dangerous influence by another man. Janicula, in assenting to her marriage, has literally given away his daughter; she, for all intents and purposes, ceases to exist and is remade as "another creature." She then grows into a marchioness with the phrase "woxen is so deere"—in effect, Griselda repeats the process of becoming a woman in these two stanzas, leaving behind her old father so that she can be raised in the image of a new one. The audience is given in these stanzas a preview of how Walter will react to his own daughter, a foretaste of his obsessive need to raise her with as little outside interference as possible in order to make her a perfect mate.

Griselda is given a figurative rebirth, moved from the ox stall to the emperor's palace, and she becomes a new creature, one capable of miraculous acts of obedience to her creator, as well as a Solomon-like wisdom, the Clerk suggests:

> So wise and rype words hadde she,
> And juggementz of so greet equitee,
> That she from hevene sent was, as men wende
> Peple to save and every wrong t'amend. (IV.438-41)

When Walter is away, Griselda adopts his role of judge and advisor to the people, and in fact, is somewhat better at it than he is, given the Clerk's initial description of Walter as a man largely uninterested in the duties of governance. Interestingly, Griselda's wisdom is predicated at least in part on her willingness to speak, a contradiction of the idealized silence she offered at the moment of her wedding. However, because Griselda is Walter's creature—is, in fact, an aspect of Walter's very self—her speech is his speech and therefore apparently safe and admirable. In fact, the Clerk repeatedly ties public affection

to her speech, as when he notes that she was " so discreet and fair of eloquence," and "koude so the peoples herte embrace," that "ech hire lovede that looked on hir face" (IV. 410, 411-12). A woman without her own identity, functioning solely as an extension of a man, can be allowed to teach. This permission is bizarrely paradoxical, as it both grants and undermines Griselda's power.

It is worth pausing here to note the complexities of Griselda's relationship to her own father, given the eventual fraught relationship between her own husband and daughter. Her close relationship to her father and the lack of a mother figure has led critics to speculate that there are incestuous overtones in Griselda's life even before Walter appears on the scene. Pearlman's straight Freudian reading of the tale suggests that "Griselde's attachment to her father is incestuous and masochistic. Her severe emotional disability is intensified when the repressed attraction is translated into a sexual relationship with Walter, who is for her a father substitute."[271] This is an expansion of Norman Lavers's concise assessment that "It is not difficult, I think to judge Griselda's actions throughout the story as those of an ideal masochist, nor to see this masochism as the correlative of an incestuous quality in her relationship with her old father," which ultimately results in a relationship in which "her repressed incestuous attraction for her father can quite properly become an open sexual relation with her father-substitute."[272] Given Walter's impulse to recreate Griselda, and the Clerk's extended description of that process, the perception of Walter as a father substitute is barely a stretch. These descriptions ultimately fail to identify the reason for Griselda's "ideal masochism," but they nevertheless point to a pattern of behavior idealized for women in the tale: extreme submission to the love object, particularly when that object is paternal.

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[271] Pearlman, "Psychological Basis," 249.

[272] Lavers, "Freud, the Clerkes Tale, and Literary Criticism," 182.

Fatherhood and Its Discontents

If Walter makes a mockery of traditional marriage customs, his attempts at fatherhood are risible. When his marriage to Griselda moves out of the public eye and behind the walls of the bedchamber, Walter's mania for testing Griselda's will manifests and its first victim is the daughter who will also be its last. It seems quite obvious that Walter is an execrable father, willing as he is to even pretend to murder his children. Although infanticide was "treated as 'something less than homicide,' and, in the other direction, as something worse than negligence leading to death" in medieval legal attitudes, clearly Walter's lack of fatherly affection for his children is distressing.[273] That he doesn't actually allow the children to be murdered is scant consolation. His attitude toward them, however, poses the question of what shape fatherhood actually took in the Middle Ages, and more specifically, in the *Canterbury Tales*. Although Walter's behavior is certainly extreme, it is nevertheless very much within the spectrum of troubling fatherly behavior in the *Tales*. Walter's extremity, however, springs out of his desire for absolute control, and is foreshadowed by the shape of his marriage. Barrie Ruth Straus characterizes the psychological implications, suggesting that his marriage sets up a mythology of power whereby the actual father becomes the symbolic father (God, in the case of the *Clerk's Tale*) and the "best interests" of the female family members are served under the father's guidance. Thus this "mythology establishes ideologically the positionality of the father qua symbolic father, qua phallus, by providing a subjugated/subordinate "other" that confirms his positionality, at the expense and repression of any noncongruent needs the women and children might have."[274] This

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[273] Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987): 204.

[274] Barrie Ruth Straus, "Reframing the Violence of the Father: Reverse Oedipal Fantasies in Chaucer's Clerk's, Man of Law's, and Prioress's Tales," *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, eds. Eve Salisbury,

agenda necessarily complicates the father-child relationship, particularly with reference to daughters, who are by far the most ideologically powerless members of any medieval family.

Fatherhood, as Neil Cartlidge has demonstrated, is a matter of immense anxiety in the *Canterbury Tales*. While motherhood is not un-fraught (as in the *Prioress's Tale*, the *Reeve's Tale*, the *Man of Law's Tale*, and, obviously, the *Clerk's Tale*), it is more affectionate and less imbued with moral responsibility than fatherhood, Cartlidge argues.[275] Perhaps the most salient demonstration of the heavy responsibilities of fatherhood occurs in *The Physician's Tale*. The remarkable brevity of the tale of Virginius and the sacrifice of his daughter concentrates the story around the relationship between the father and the daughter, rather than the corrupt government of the original.[276] The tale makes painfully clear how dangerous children, and daughters in particular, are to their fathers' peace of mind. Virginia, Virginius's fourteen-year-old daughter, is a girl of uncommon virtue and beauty. Her description at the beginning of the tale, excluding the digression of Nature's hymn of self-praise from lines 8-29, extends some 40 lines and heavily emphasizes her chastity and wisdom, as well as her overwhelming beauty. In some sense the description reads like that of a virgin saint, except that in the *Physician's Tale*, the description of the virgin's chastity flows immediately into a sermon on the dangers posed to a young woman:

And of hir owene vertu, unconstreyned,

Georgiana Donovin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 122-138; at 126.

[275] Neil Cartlidge, "Marriage, Sexuality, and the Family," *A Concise Companion to Chaucer* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006): 218-40, at 236.

[276] Benson points out that other medieval versions of this story were almost always used as exempla of evil government, and that the *Tale's* "artistic failure" has been attributed to "Chaucer's inability to deal with the political themes, especially popular revolt, implicit in the story" (*The Canterbury Tales*, 428).

> She hath ful ofte tyme syk hire feyned,
> For that she wolde fleen the compaignye
> Where likly was to treten of folye,
> As is at feestes, revels, and at daunces,
> That been occasions of daliaunces.
> Swich thynges maken children for to be
> To soone rype and boold, as men may se,
> Which is ful perilous and hath been yore.
> For al to soone may she lerne loore
> Of booldnesse, whan she woxen is a wyf. (VI.62-71)[277]

The sudden shift to moralizing about the dangers posed to young women by "feestes, revels" and "daunces" is slightly jarring after such an extended description of Virginia's virtue. The didactic tone of the last two lines gives them a sense of inevitability: when daughters become wives, they learn about *booldness*. That transformation is best prevented, or at least delayed as long as possible. Given the ending of the *Physician's Tale*—Virginius cuts off his daughter's head rather than give her into the sexual service of a corrupt judge—a reader might understand that the transformation is sometimes best prevented entirely. Better to maintain the daughter in her virginal state, that is, maintain her as the father's possession, than give her to an ill-chosen man—or worse, have her give herself before she's married. This control rises to the level of incestuous interest as Virginius kills his daughter to prevent defilement by another man. The extremes of his possessiveness reveal a more-than-fatherly affection for Virginia.

Also notable in this passage is the way it valorizes Virginia's separation from the community. The best place for daughters, it implies is well away from the public, where there are opportunities for *daliaunces*, which is an interestingly polysemous word in this context. Given the focus on Virigina's virginity, the ostensible meaning must be sexual. Loss of virginity was a prominent threat to unmarried women, particularly in the eyes of their father. But the MED suggests that "sexual union" is not the primary meaning of

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[277] Compare this with the description of Euphrosyne's beauty, wisdom, and virtue at the beginning of her *vita*. See Chapter 2, p. 105.

daliaunce. Its primary meaning "Polite, leisurely, intimate conversation or entertainment; exchange of pleasantries; chatting; small talk; gossip."[278] Daughters should be separated, it seems, not only from the near occasion of sex, but also from the any opportunity for *speech*. Like the portrayal of Walter's daughter and Griselda's patience, like the characterization of the Clerk in the prologue to his tale, the Physician's depiction of Virginia valorizes female silence. Speech, apparently, makes children "To soone rype and boold," and here a reader might rely more securely on the sexual implications of these words: mature and shameless. Perilous indeed.

Making the situation even more perilous for the hapless father of a virgin daughter are the consequences of failure, laid out in specific detail by the Physician:

> Ye fadres and ye moodres eek also,
> Though ye han children, be it oon or mo,
> Youre is the charge of all hir surveiaunce,
> Whil that they been under youre governaunce.
> Beth war, if by ensample of youre lyvynge,
> Or by youre necligence in chastisynge,
> That they ne perisse; for I dar wel seye
> If that they doon, ye shul it deer abeye.
> Under a shepherde softe and necligent
> The wolf hath many a sheep and lamb torent. (VI.93-102)

Spare the rod and spoil the child, the Physician warns, although his phrasing is significantly less pithy. But why is it necessary? In a tale that's only 286 lines long, spending over 35 of them on a didactic digression seems a little wasteful, especially when that digression often fails to pertain to the subject matter of the story: in reality, Virginia's peril is not brought about by her own misbehavior or by her father's failure to govern her. She has no governess who abdicates responsibility for her. She is merely the unlucky object of a sexual predator. The digression speaks primarily to the tale's concern about parental, specifically paternal, control over daughters. The anxious instruction

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[278] MED *s.v.* "daliaunce" (1).

recommends surveillance and domination, which the tale chooses to emphasize with the moral imperative of feminine silence.

The Tale of Melibee presents a slightly less monstrous, although no less homicidal, father in Melibee, who wishes to go to war, against his wife's wise advice, to avenge his daughter's attack at the hands of his old foes. *Melibee*, like the *Clerk's Tale*, arises partially out of French sources, and is similarly an exploration of marriage, power, and fatherhood.[279] In Melibee, however, Chaucer gives us a father who loves his daughter beyond her value as a possession. Although his fatherhood is essentially tangential to the tale (Prudence lists it as one of her "causes" at VII.1398), Melibee's attitude toward his daughter nevertheless provides a useful contrast to Walter and *his* daughter. First, and perhaps most basically, Melibee's daughter has a name: Sophie, one of the few changes Chaucer made to his source text in *Melibee*. Unlike Virginia, Sophie is even allowed a name apparently distinct from both her father and her chastity. Even more significantly, while Virginia isn't identified by name until line 213 of her tale, when her father tells her she must choose shame or death, Sophie is named in the *first* line of her tale: "A yong man called Melibeus, myghty and riche, bigat upon his wyf, that called was Prudence, a doghter that called was Sophie" (VII.967). The Latin and French source texts for the tale, Robertson notes, never name the Melibeus's daughter—her name, and her early prominence in the tale are entirely Chaucer's doing. [280] The phrasing of this line makes Sophie's begetting and existence seem the driving force for the action of the tale, and Melibee's emotional reaction upon her wounding reinforces his paternal affection for his daughter:

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[279] The *Tale of Melibee* is a close translation of the *Livre de Melibee et de Dame Prudence* by Renaud de Louens from the mid-fourteenth century, which was a translation from Albertanus of Brescia's *Liber consolationis et consilii* (1246). Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamels, eds., *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005): 482.

[280] Benson, *The Canterbury Tales*, 447 n.967.

> Whan Melibeus returned was into his hous, and saugh al this mischief, he, lyk a mad man rentynge his clothes, gan to wepe and crie. / Prudence, his wyf, as ferforth as she dorste, bisoghte hym of his wepyng for to stynte, / but nat forthy he gan to crie and wepen evere lenger the moore. / This noble wyf Prudence remembred hire upon the sentence of Ovide, in his book that cleped is the Remedie of Love, where as he seith, / "He is a fool that destourbeth the mooder to wepen in the deeth of hire child this she have wept hir fille as for a certain tyme,/ and thanne shal man doon his diligence with amyable wordes hire to reconforte, and preyen hire of hir wepyng for to stynte." / For which resound this noble wyf Prudence suffred hir housbonde for to wepe and crie as for a certain space. (VII.974-79)

There are two significant elements to Melibee's outburst here. The first is their extremity. Not only is Melibee angry at his daughter's suffering, he weeps and rends his clothes. He grieves, so much so that beseeching him to stop crying only makes him cry all the more. Variations on the words "weep" and "cry" are used ten times in these five lines, emphasizing the intensity and duration of Melibee's tears.

The second element of Melibee's outburst is the way in which it is not-so-subtly gendered. Clearly Melibee's tears are feminizing, as Prudence's citation of Ovid suggests: it is *mothers* who are meant to weep so grievously and uncontrollably for their dead children. Melibee's lack of control in his weeping, when compared to Prudence's level-headed reserve, clearly marks him as the more feminine in this moment. Prudence, by contrast maintains a certain masculine control when she allows Melibee his extreme grief. Although their respective reactions clearly have implications for the larger debate about women's advice around which the tale is centered, it is important in an entirely different way for my purposes of exploring the relationship between fathers and daughters in the *Canterbury Tales*.[281] Characterizing Melibee as feminine in his grief has

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[281] For more on gendered speech in *The Tale of Melibee*, see, e.g., Amanda Walling, "'In Hir Tellyng Difference': Gender, Authority, and Interpretation in the *Tale of Melibee*," *The Chaucer Review* 40:2 (2005): 163-181; and Holly Adryan Crocker, *Chaucer's Visions of Manhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 48.

the (possibly unintentional) consequence of precluding an incestuous relationship between father and daughter. Unlike Virginius and Walter, Melibee's love for his daughter never even skirts the edges of incest; it seems simply to be the genuine affection of a father for a beloved child. That Prudence is a present and vocal figure in her husband and daughter's life is likely not coincidental; that Sophie herself is never sexualized—that is, never offered as bride or potential object of sexual interest—also protects her. While Spearing contends that "If we look more widely, over the whole range of Chaucer's poetry, we shall find more cases in which the 'father-figure', the figure of 'protective authority', is disturbingly absent; and other cases again in which the father-figure is present, but presented in a most unfavourable light. What is rare indeed in Chaucer is the father who is present and good, possessor of the wisdom and benevolence that a patriarchal age might have expected."[282] Spearing goes on to suggest that the *Squire's Tale* offers the only exception to this rule, but I would contend that *The Tale of Melibee* offers proof that fathers in Chaucer *can* feel affection for their children that is untainted by inappropriate sexual interest or excessive possessiveness masquerading as anxiety about the child's potential misbehavior. This affection does not necessarily make him a good man—Melibee has his flaws, as his stubborn, bordering-on-misogynistic interactions with Prudence demonstrate—but his affection makes him a better father than most.

Comparing Melibee to Walter suggests a startling disparity in fatherly behavior. If Melibee has an excess of fatherly affection, so much that it must on occasion be manifested externally, Walter displays a complete lack of fatherly interiority. He has,

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[282] A.C. Spearing, "Chaucerian Authority and Inheritance," *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1983): 185-202, at 185.

apparently, no personal feelings about his children whatsoever when they are born. His reaction to his daughter's birth is telling:

> Nat longe tyme after that this Grisild
> Was wedded, she a doghter hath ybore,
> Al had hire levere have born a knave child;
> Glad was this markys and the folk therfore,
> For though a mayde child coome al bifore,
> She may unto a knave child atteyne
> By liklihede, syn she nys nat bareyne. (IV.442-48)

Walter would rather have had a boy, but since it proves that Griselda is not barren, he will accept a girl. More notable is the fact that his acceptance is lumped in with that of his people's, which, as the audience knows, is compelled acceptance. Walter has demanded that they worship and honor his wife, regardless of their personal desires. The birth of his daughter inspires in him no fatherly feelings, and inspires in his people nothing beyond relief that their marchioness is fertile. The daughter herself seems to be a mere placeholder, a signifier of impending and salvific masculinity. As such, the daughter goes unnamed. The public and external reaction supplants any potential fatherly affection. Indeed, Walter seems to have had very little to do with his daughter's conception: there is no mention of him in the moment of the daughter's birth. The passive construction of "Grisild / was wedded" removes Walter from act of marriage, and Griselda alone begets a child.

To Walter, then, his daughter represents nothing more than an opportunity to indulge his desire to test her mother. The girl herself is without independent identity. While babies tend to be somewhat amorphously formed in Chaucer (e.g., the baby in *The Reeve's Tale* who serves as little more than a prop in the bed trick), Walter's children are particularly underdeveloped. The test itself does nothing to develop the daughter as a person; like the baby in *The Reeve's Tale*, she becomes a mere prop for masculine trickery. Once again, however, that trickery is bound up with public performance. Although the action of the tale has shifted from the streets of Saluzzo to Griselda and Walter's bedchamber, Walter brings the Saluzzesi into bed when he attempts to justify

his decision to kill their daughter. He suggests that his citizens resent her low birth and adds,

> "And namely sith thy doghter was ybore
> Thise wordes han they spoken, doutelees.
> But I desire, as I have doon bifore,
> To lyve my lyf with hem in reste and pees.
> I may nat in this caas be recchelees;
> I moot doon with thy doghter or the beste,
> Nat as I wolde, but as my peple leste." (IV.484-90)

His subjects become a convenient means for him to fulfill and disguise his own obsessive need to test his wife, but more importantly, Walter's invocation of his people in this moment when he employs his daughter to test his wife makes that daughter, in a certain sense, public property. She is to be maintained or discarded at the public whim. This moment of private testing, wherein Walter seeks to retrace once again the boundaries of his marriage and Griselda's obedience, is recast by him as a moment of public service, despite the fact that Walter is apparently lying about the people's will—no evidence suggests that they are dissatisfied with anything other than the baby's gender. Her low birth likely never occurred to them, given the strictures under which Walter has placed them, and their willingness to believe in the total transformation of Griselda from stable girl to queen. But Walter's move to shift responsibility for the ostensible execution of his daughter from himself to his people indicates the continued importance of public participation in the marriage of a ruler.

The wording of Walter's excuse is likewise telling: he establishes an opposition between "thy doghter" and "my peple." Suggesting that Walter's pronouns betray a rejection of "his own role in his daughter's conception and blame Griselda for the lack of a male heir," Allyson Newton suggests that Walter uses his people to occlude any maternal influence on a future heir.

> Walter's language claims … proprietary interest in the community at large—'my peple'—that is absent from the seemingly parallel previous utterance, full of distancing, ambiguous 'they's,' about his daughter. The process of consolidation enacted in Walter's language actively requires the elimination of Griselda, and thus the

> occlusion of the maternal, to restore the relationship between the King and his "people" that had seemed on the verge of dissolution at the very beginning of the *Clerk's Tale*.[283]

What is painfully clear is how little the daughter matters in the grand scheme of the kingdom. Walter views his daughter only as a means of reinforcing relationships, and most critically, his position of power within those relationships. The rejection of his daughter appears to him to be the most expedient means of accomplishing that reinforcement, and his language presages that by placing responsibility for the daughter's existence solely on Griselda while Walter aligns himself with *his* people against them. Griselda and her daughter are excluded not only from power, but from the community in general.

Throughout this first test of Griselda's obedience, Walter refuses to touch or acknowledge his daughter directly. He blames his decision to kill the child on his people, and delegates the job to a sergeant. Throughout the third part of the tale (ll. 449-609), the daughter is a material presence only for Griselda, and then only in the moment when she kisses the child goodbye. Walter's only moment of care toward his daughter occurs in the moment when he sends her away from him. The sergeant "hym presenteth with his doghter deere" after leaving Griselda, and Walter arranges for her transport:

> And bad this sergeant that he pryvely
> Shold this child softe wynde and wrappe,
> With alle circumstances tenderly,
> And carie it in a cofre or in a lappe. (IV.582-585)

Walter seeks to shield and hide his daughter, and the language here is notably kinder than in his earlier references to the child—he commands her to be wrapped "softe" and "tenderly," and to be protectively carried in a coffer or a lappe.[284] This concern for her

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[283] Allyson Newton, "The Occlusion of Maternity in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*," *Medieval Mothering*, John Cami Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, eds. (New York: Garlands, 1996): 63-75, at 66-67.

[284] A lappe is either a person's lap, or, more commonly, a part of a garment such as the sleeve of a shirt or placket of a shirt that can be folded into a pocket. MED *s.v.* "lappe" (a,b).

safety, however, seems to be at least partially motivated by Walter's desire for secrecy: he warns the sergeant that "no man sholde knowe of his entente, / Ne whenne he cam, ne whider that he wente" (IV.587-88). For Walter's current and future tests to succeed, Griselda and his people must all believe that the child is dead. So while the reader might give Walter some small credit for not actually committing infanticide, the question of how "deere" his daughter really is to him persists. Certainly we do not see Walter holding the child in this moment, and despite knowing that they will be parted, he does not kiss and bless her as Griselda does. His verbal tenderness is undermined by the lack of physical affection.

Walter's emotional distance is enacted in this moment as literal, physical distance, as he sends his daughter to live with his sister. Her removal keeps her where she belongs, within her father's sphere of influence to be raised as he wishes, and it allows the continued testing of her mother. The circumstances of the daughter's upbringing are ideal for Walter:

> But at Boloigne to his suster deere,
> That thilke tyme of Panik was countesse,
> He sholde it take and shewe hire this mateere,
> Bisekynge hire to doon hire bisynesse
> This child to foster in alle gentillesse;
> And whos child that it was he bad hire hyde
> From every wight, for oght that may bityde. (IV.589-595)

The description of Walter's sister lays heavily emphasizes her nobility and discretion. The need for secrecy—the necessity of disguising the girl's identity, or, really, preventing the development of an independent self—trumps every other concern, as the closing couplet of the verse makes clear. The language is of absolutes: the sister is to hide the daughter from *every* wight, *whatever* ("for oght") may happen.

The secondary concern is the sister's noble rank: she can raise the daughter without the potential interference of low-born behavior and customs that was a constant danger with Griselda. This agenda, then, is the beginning of Walter's overtly incestuous behavior. The object of his incestuous desire is, not, however, his sister. Pearlman

proposed a potential reading of the sibling relationship as incestuous, saying, "When Walter sends his children to his sister he expresses his feelings about both death and incest. Banishing one's offspring is clearly a denial of life, and is at bottom a demonstration that he wishes to produce children incestuously (that is, by his sister)," but then abrogates such a reading almost immediately: "The notion that Walter sends his children to his sister because of covert longings for her is an ingenious speculation, but it answers a question that heretofore no one had thought it necessary to ask."[285] I agree that Walter cannot easily be accused of inappropriate sexual interest in his sister. He seems to see her more in the vein of convenient governess and foster-mother; there is nothing to suggest that she is a sexual object. The Clerk calls her Walter's "suster deere," but the emptiness of that designation has already been demonstrated by the earlier use of "deere" to describe Walter's daughter whom he never touches. But in sending his daughter to be raised by his sister, Walter seeks to recreate in his daughter the similarities of circumstance and birth that Mirk sees as necessary for a good marriage. He wants her raised within a tradition of nobility that will mitigate Griselda's influence and allow him, even from a distance, the control he craves.

Walter's strategy works—he is able, as Newton suggests, to obscure the maternal influence on his daughter. His wife essentially disavows their child, leaving her with no parents but her aunt and uncle.

> Ne of hir doghter noght a word spak she
> Noon accident, for noon adversitee,
> Was seyn in hire, ne nevere hir doghter name
> Ne nempned she, in ernest nor in game. (IV.606-09)

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[285] Pearlman, "The Psychological Basis of the 'Clerk's Tale,'" 249-50. Pearlman here takes Norman Lavers to task for contending that "Walter does not have his children put to death, as he leads Griselda to believe, but has them sent, one by one, "to his suster deere" (589). In having his sister raise his children as though they were hers he is fulfilling his unconscious wish that she were actually having children by him" (186).

Griselda's obedience to her husband is extreme, even to the point of monstrousness.[286] The daughter's name becomes anathema (and the audience is reminded once again that her name is obscured). The Clerk, however, makes the daughter a lasting presence with these four lines at the end of the tale's third part, emphasizing the *occultatio* of Griselda's silence by persistently mentioning the ways in which she does *not* mention her daughter. The mention of *game* is particularly jarring—it is beyond difficult to imagine Griselda and Walter joyous or jesting with one another, or Griselda jesting at all, particularly about the child she presumes is dead. Instead the Clerk details a character who is *always* earnest, always silent, and thereby demonstrates conclusively that her silence is the very phenomenon that connects her to her daughter. Walter can never entirely purge the maternal from his daughter because, as the tale demonstrates, mother and daughter share the same idealized characteristic: silence. Likewise, because Walter's test of his wife is prolonged—a continual assay of her silence on the subject of his infanticide—Walter, too, must continually remember his daughter despite her literal distance and his otherwise low level of paternal interest.

Walter repeats the pattern of testing six years later, when Griselda bears him a son. The son's birth occasions rejoicing from the people—at last the long awaited heir. Walter seems to partake in their celebration:

> A knave child she bar by this Walter,
> Ful gracious and fair for to biholde.
> And whan that folk it to his fader tolde,
> Nat only he but al his contree merye
> Was for this child, and God they thank and herye. (IV.612-16)

Although not an enthusiastic endorsement of fatherhood, Walter is included in the communal reaction to his son's birth by the phrase "nat only he but al his contree." It is a

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[286]For a more thorough review of scholarship on Griselda's monstrosity, see John Allen Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004): 116-140.

notable change from his reaction or lack thereof to his daughter's birth. It seems Walter, though he will never qualify as a doting papa, has a significantly stronger affection for his son than he did for his daughter, so much so that he allows the child to remain with his mother for two years; Walter's desire to test Griselda recurs "Whan that it was two yeer old, and fro the brest / Departed of his norice" (IV.617-18). This observation challenges the scheme of Walter's rejection of Griselda's influence; he apparently allows his son to breastfeed until he is naturally weaned. His daughter was removed from her mother when "this childe had souked but a throwe" (IV.450); she is ripped from her mother's breast, but her brother is not. This delay might be in part a means of escalating Griselda's test: her attachment to the child can only have deepened over the two years of his nursing and motherly attention. The Clerk is also more lavish in his praise of the son than the daughter; whereas no description of the daughter was offered at her birth, the son is "ful gracious and fair." The narration does everything it can to suggest that this is the ideal outcome of a marriage, an heir who is lovely and noble-looking. Both Griselda and the audience are given a more fully developed child to mourn in the second test.

Walter's pronoun usage likewise changes in regard to his son. Where he distanced himself from his daughter by telling Griselda she was "thy doghter," he claims possession of his son:

> "Wyf," quod this markys, "ye han herd er this
> My peple sikly berth oure mariage;
> And namely sith my sone yboren is,
> Now is it worse than evere in al oure age.
> The murmur sleeth myn herte and my courage,
> For to myne eres comth the voys so smerte
> That it wel ny destroyed hath myn herte." (IV.624-630)

This verse is remarkable for the prevalence of its possessive pronouns. In six lines Walter uses the word "my" six times, delineating possession of his people, his body, his emotions, and most notably, his son. Griselda is allowed participation only in "oure age" and "oure mariage," the latter of which stands in direct contrast to Walter's use of "my son" in the next line—her specific inclusion in the marriage highlights her immediate

exclusion from parenthood. Walter possesses her by dint of their marriage, but she is not allowed reciprocal possession. Walter attempts to foreclose entirely her involvement in the creation and parenting of his son. He likewise forecloses her rulership of Saluzzo; it is "my peple" who comment on "oure marriage." Just as the "oure" contrasts to "my son," it is even more jarring when placed against "my peple." Griselda, who was so much an object of the people's affection before the birth of her daughter, to the point that they came to her for authoritative resolutions of their quarrels, is now excluded from that community entirely by Walter's anxieties.

Walter employs the same scheme as in his first test: he puts his criticism of Griselda in the mouth of his people.

> "Now sey they thus: 'Whan Walter is agon,
> Thanne shal the blood of Janicle succeed
> And been oure lord, for oother have we noon.'
> Swich wordes seith my peple, out of drede.
> Wel oughte I of swich murmur taken heede,
> For certainly I drede swich sentence,
> Though they nat pleyn speke in myn audience." (IV.631-37)

This verse marks the second mention of the people's "murmur" about his son, a word that implied especially "an indistinct expression of popular dissent or discontent."[287] Walter once again places the blame for his own anxiety on his people, and ties his own happiness to theirs. Whether they are actually anxious about the bloodline of Walter's heir is unclear. The audience is given no word but Walter's on the subject. But their characterization as a malleable and compliant people, willing to indulge Walter's whims as long as they have a guarantee of future security suggests that these are Walter's concerns, not those of his people. Walter's phrasing in fact subtly suggests the people's innocence; his reference to the murmur in line 628 and the "voys" that has reached his ears in line 629 is prefaced by simple definite articles—not by the possessive pronoun

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[287] MED *s.v.* "murmur(e)" (b).

"their" that would attribute the grumbling more directly to his people. In the next verse he refers to "swich" murmur, which once again distances the grumbling from what his people might actually be saying. Clearly these are Walter's anxieties. Angela Florschuetz suggests that in fact, this second test is once again a function of Walter's general horror of maternal influence, arguing that Walter goes so far as to imply an incestuous connection between Griselda and Janicula:

> Walter's son, the product of his blood transmitted through Griselda's body, becomes instead Janicula's child, suggesting not only a violation of class systems, but also a hint of sexual perversity, as the idea of Griselda's having borne her own father's son smacks less of genealogical influence and more of father-daughter incest. Walter thus simultaneously foregrounds the nightmare of maternal influence by recasting it as paternal in the specter of Janicula and his debased influence.[288]

Certainly Florschuetz is not the only reader to see the suggestion of incest between Griselda and Janicula as a danger—Pearlman's Freudian reading above frankly asserts it. Certainly readers might assume that father-daughter incest is on Walter's mind, given his eventual employment of his daughter as marital replacement. That it is the birth of his *son* that suggests such a relationship to Walter demonstrates how thoroughly Walter's daughter haunts this text; what should be the fulfillment of his marriage, that is, the birth of an heir, merely leads Walter once again to a suggestion of incestuous reproduction: it is apparent here that incest between a father and daughter produces a child who is most completely the product of the father. The logical extension of such reproductive reasoning, then, is that Walter's ideal partner in producing a noble heir is his own daughter, especially when that daughter has been raised by his sister and possesses similar nobility and conditions as her father/potential spouse. The matter of what characteristics a father could pass to his son was one of immense concern in Chaucer. As

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[288] Angela Florschuetz, "'A Mooder He Hath, but Fader Hath He Noon': Constructions of Genealogy in the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Man of Law's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 44:1 (2009): 25-60, at 41.

Spearing suggests, the birth of a son is on this basis, in Chaucer's world, cause for more anxiety rather than less. "Chaucer's questioning of the role of the father should be associated with his questioning of the father's power to bequeath virtue to the son and the son's power to inherit virtue from the father."[289] If this is the case, the birth of a son is not, in fact, a cause for rejoicing.

Walter in fact puts an end to the joy produced by his son's birth when he decides to test Griselda once more:

> "I wolde lyve in pees, if that I myghte;
> Wherefore I am disposed outrely,
> As I his suster served by nyghte,
> Right so thence I to serve hym pryvely." (IV.638-41)

Even in disposing of his son Walter is unable to escape the haunting presence of his daughter. He acknowledges that his treatment of the boy is a repetition of the girl's fate. His phrasing, however, notably distances both children from himself. "As I *his suster* served," he says. Although Walter seemed earlier to claim his son as his own, the specter of the daughter prevents that relationship once and for all. The daughter, Griselda's creation, becomes the primary delineation of the son: namely, because she is his sister, and because they will share an identical fate, Walter must attempt to destroy his own relationship to them. He reinforces this by reminding Griselda once again, that he wishes to "lyve in pees" with his subjects, just as he wished to "lyve my lyf with hem in reste and pees" after the birth of the daughter. Every repetition reinvokes the daughter, who is surprisingly present for a person of whom no one speaks. When the sergeant appears to take the boy away, the Clerk notes, "This ugly sergeant, in the same wyse / That he hire doghter caughte…Hath hent hire sone, that ful was of beautee." (IV.673-76). Here the

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[289] Spearing, "Chaucerian Authority and Inheritance," 191.

children are both solely Griselda's, and their doubling is reinforced by the mention of the son's "beautee," a feminine trait.

Return and Revision in the Second Marriage

It is when the daughter turns twelve that Walter and the community are most united in their patriarchal idealism, in the moment when Griselda's daughter becomes Walter's wife. Walter's third test demonstrates most aptly his strong desire to reshape an ideal wife in the form of his silent, compliant, high-born daughter. Although Linda Georgianna asserts that the "reverence, obedience, and humility that characterize Griselda's virtue seem to coincide neatly with the feudal values of Saluzzo, although we should note that the source of Griselda's virtue is ambiguously described," she fails to delineate the gendered difference in their behavior.[290] The Saluzzesi participate in an exchange with Walter, promising their obedience in return for an heir and ensured social and governmental stability. They grumble when Walter seems not to have held up his end of the bargain:

> The sclaundre of Walter ofte and wyde spradde,
> That of a crueel herte he wickedly,
> For he a povre womman wedded hadde,
> Hath mordred bothe his children prively.
> Swich murmur was among hem comunly.
> No wonder is, for to the peoples ere
> There cam no word but that they mordred were. (IV.722-728)

This stanza perhaps more than any other reveals the way that the people's future is dependent on Walter's willingness and ability to produce heirs. It reveals how reliant they are on the bargain they have struck with him. The people object to Walter's private behavior—murdering his children—because it does not accord with his public behavior, that is, agreeing to marry in return for obedience. The Clerk makes it quite clear that the

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[290] Linda Georgianna, "The *Clerk's Tale* and the Grammar of Assent," *Speculum* 70:4 (1995): 793-821, at 797.

people here are not to blame: "no wonder is," he says, because they know nothing but Walter's public face. Most striking is the emphasis on the divide between Walter and his people: "sclaundre" spreads "ofte and wyde," and the murmur is "among hem comunly." There are no individuals in this community except for Walter, who "hath mordred bothe his children *prively*." Griselda's poverty is not an acceptable excuse for his behavior because *he* wedded her after his own preference. The moment Walter appears ready to accede again to the accord, however, the people become once more compliant to his will. The exchange of woman for obedience is the paramount organizing principle of Saluzzesi society.

Griselda receives no such return on her investment; her obedience is obtained at no cost to Walter whatsoever. Likewise, Griselda and the Saluzzesi have very different motives for their "reverence, obedience, and humility." While the community is "too easily swayed by appearance and self-interest," as Lynn Staley suggests, Griselda's motives for obedience and self-subjugation have long been a matter for scholarly debate and confusion.[291] Because her motives are inscrutable, though, the audience may find it difficult to sympathize, or, more importantly, identify with her. The natural options for audience identification, then, are either the community or Walter himself, which, of course, are the positions Chaucer's pilgrims adopt. Or at least, that Harry Bailey, the group's host and apparent spokesman, does:

> This worthy Clerk, whan ended was his tale,
> Oure Hooste seyde, and swoor, "By Goddes bones,
> Me were lever than a barel ale
> My wyf at hoom had herd this legend ones!
> This is a gentil tale for the nones,
> As to my purpose, wiste ye my wille;
> But thyng that wol nat be, lat it be stille." (IV.1212A-1212G)

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[291] Lynn Staley, "Chaucer and the Postures of Sanctity," in David Aers and Lynn Staley, *Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval England* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996): 246.

The idealization of Griselda's submission, the belief in her exemplarity, are readily apparent in Harry's speech. Also readily apparent is the economization of women: Harry would rather have his wife hear the Clerk's tale than to have a barrel of ale, which is a relatively steep price for a man who makes his livelihood as an innkeeper.

The community of Saluzzo does not merely accede to Walter's choice of wife (wives). They adopt his understanding of Griselda and of his daughter after her. As Van suggests, Walter's subjects "do not, indeed cannot, reflect intricately" on Walter's method of securing a bride and an heir.[292] Indeed, scholars who have turned their eye onto the community have observed that it seems lacking in identity entirely; Sprung argues that "the people of Saluce cannot tell Walter who he is because they cannot tell him who *they* are—cannot assert unequivocally that they have interests, wills, and a power of action independent of his own."[293] What they can do is follow Walter's gaze. When that gaze falls on Griselda, she becomes an object of desire for the entire community in spite of her low birth and social status. In fact, the community reaction to Griselda is quite delayed in the Clerk's telling: when Walter introduces Griselda to the people, he does not wait for their response, but merely orders the women to change her clothes. When they do, the audience learns that "Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire fairnesse / Whan she translated was in swich richesse" (IV.384-85)—it is not until Walter has her remade in his preferred image that the people are allowed to express their approval. The community reaction is further hinted at two stanzas later, when the Clerk reports that

> And to his paleys, er he lenger lette,
> With joyful peple that hir ladde and mette,
> Conveyed hire; and thus the day they spende

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[292] Van, "Walter at the Stake," 216.

[293] Sprung, "Coercion and Compliance," 352.

In revel, til the sonne gan descende. (IV.389-92)

Just as Walter's wedding to Griselda is assumed rather than shown, his people's acceptance is likewise subsumed in Walter's own pleasure in the match. Eventually, of course, Griselda is beloved of her people in a way that she is apparently not of Walter because they cannot adopt his private position, that is, his relationship to his wife inside the bedchamber. Although the community possesses Griselda as their marquess, she is an representation of their abstract desires. Sarah Stanbury suggests that "When Chaucer locates a female body at the center of male public spectacle, the binarisms of male gaze/female body invert or even collapse: male gazes look back on the self; potent female looks return masculine ones, and bodies disembody or iconize into abstraction before a collective stare."[294] Stanbury reads Griselda as the object of just such a collective gaze, contending that the result of being gazed upon is the strange absence her body, a stress on her interiority that is a result of being transformed into a relic by the gazing public. Her status as a relic makes her silent and inactive, an object rather than a person, and the communal gaze will repeat and amplify that effect when it encounters Griselda's daughter.

The community gaze, like that of the ruler it imitates, is fickle; Griselda's transformation is impermanent. However, the application of the gaze is consistent—the community is as eager to adopt Walter's gaze on his daughter as they were to accept Griselda. The promise of a new bride who is young and fertile is enough to appease them. The consequences of the new gaze are somewhat more drastic, however. Griselda was not allowed to become bigamous or polygamous; she was protected from the communal gaze by the walls of the bedchamber. Walter's daughter, however, is *confirmed* as an object of incestuous desire by her exposure to the communal gaze and the community's

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[294] Sarah Stanbury, "Regimes of the Visual in Pre-Modern England: Gaze, the Body, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*," *New Literary History* 28:2 (Spring 1997): 261-289, at 280.

speculation on her ideal wifely qualities. By valorizing the daughter, the community validates and participates in incest. The spectacle of marriage necessitated by the bargain between Walter and his people at the beginning of the tale is reinvoked and perverted by the introduction of Walter's daughter as bride: Walter uses the gaze to justify and legitimize the new dimension of his relationship to his daughter.

The daughter's individual identity is never in question: she has none. Although her importance as a plot device in the last third of the tale cannot be overstated, as a character she is never developed beyond the Clerk's assertion of her age and beauty. Even more than Griselda, the communal gaze turns her into Stanbury's collapsed, iconized, abstracted body. This lack of identity is specifically engineered by Walter, as the Clerk's narration makes patently apparent.

> To the Erl of Panyk, which that hadde tho
> Wedded his suster, preyed he specially
> To bryngen hoom agayne his children two
> In honurable estaat al openly.
> But o thyng he hym preyed outrely,
> That he to no wight, though men wolde enquire,
> Sholde nat telle whos children that they were
> But seye the mayden sholde ywedded be
> Unto the Markys of Saluce anon.
> And as this erl was preyed, so dide he. (IV.764-773)

Walter specifies to his brother-in-law, perhaps as a consequence of the fact that he "wedded his suster," that he bring the children home in "honurable estaat al openly," but without revealing whose children they are. Walter explicitly designs a spectacle to be gazed upon but not truly understood. His daughter is iconized as a bride; might the audience also understand her young brother accompanying her as a promise of her fertility? Certainly a familial resemblance between them might reinforce such an idea, and because the Earl of Panyk is forbidden to reveal whose children they are or, we assume, the relationship between them, nothing exists to undermine any inappropriate assumptions the people might make. In fact, the earl is instructed to encourage the inappropriate assumptions of those who "wolde enquire"—their curiosity is inevitable—

by confirming that the girl is the affianced bride of the Marquess of Saluzzo. The spectacle, like the rumors of his children's deaths that preceded it, reveals the depths of Walter's manipulation of public image.

The Clerk reinforces the impression of the children as objects of the gaze when he reiterates in the next stanza both the girl's fate and her function:

> Arrayed was toward hir marriage
> This fresshe mayde, ful of gemmes cleere;
> Hir brother, which that seven yeer was of age,
> Arrayed eek ful fresh in his manere.
> And thus in greet noblesse and with glad cheere,
> Toward Saluces shapynge hir journey,
> Fro day to day they ryden in hir wey. (IV.778-84)

This stanza, although it seems almost understated in its tone, is crucial in the creation of daughter-as-bride. If, as John Fyler suggests, incest and doubling/repetition go hand-in hand, this is the reinvocation of Griselda's wedding procession, and it functions almost identically: a woman, clad in expensive clothing and with noble bearing, travels in state toward her new household as the people look on.[295] The public spectacle of the first marriage makes the procession of the second all the more effective: because the people expect to see a noble bride, they do. The daughter is erased in favor of fulfilling the people's expectations as Walter fulfills his own desire for a perfectly malleable bride. It is unclear how the children are traveling, except that it is "al openly," but an audience might easily imagine that that girl is seated "upon an hors, snow-whit and wel amblyng," as Griselda was for her marriage procession (IV.388). The essential similarity is the ways in which both women are constructed by Walter: he remakes Griselda by stripping and reclothing her. His daughter he creates on two levels, the literal by fathering her and the metaphorical by specifying her presentation to the people as his bride.

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[295] John M. Fyler, "Domesticating the Exotic in the Squire's Tale," *ELH* 55:1 (Spring 1988): 1-26, at 2.

She's gem-bedecked and, most importantly, riding "in greet noblesse and with glad cheere." "Cheer" is an immensely loaded term throughout the tale. For Walter, Griselda's *chiere*, or mood, is the chief means by which he can gauge the success or failure of his tests; he monitors her mood constantly to assure himself of her loyalty. In essence, she is required to restrain not only her speech but her affect; as she promises she will no disobey "in werk ne thought" (IV.363). Walter is obsessed with Griselda's *chiere* even before he extracts this promise, however. His first sighting of her mentions the word twice:

> His eyen caste on hire, but in sad wyse
> Upon hir chiere he wolde hym ofte avyse,
> Commendynge in his herte hir wommanhede,
> And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight
> Of so yong age, as wel in chiere as dede. (IV.237-41)

Walter values above all Griselda's virtue, which is revealed "as wel in chiere as dede." What her face betrays is as important as what her hands do in proving her worthiness to be his wife; Walter's obsession with the *appearance* of goodness dominates his search for a bride. As Linda Georgianna asserts, "Walter presumes Griselda's compliance can be verified externally by deeds, looks, and words. Thus what Walter wants is the freedom to be wanton, and his contract with Griselda is meant to insure that he need not read in her appearance any signs of his will as erratic."[296] Walter reenacts his need for external validation of his desire with the procession of his daughter-bride. Her public "glad cheere" indicates her suitability to be Walter's wife, especially when combined with her noble birth.

Chiere, however, is unstable and problematic as a means of understanding Griselda. Walter is constantly suspicious that the cheer she affects is just that—an affectation. Multiple critics have suspected the same; as Stanbury remarks, "When we

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[296] Georgianna, "The Clerk's Tale and the Grammar of Assent," 801.

give our willing consent to fidelity in marriage, who is to know if we mean what we say and if we will remain true to our word?"[297] Walter constantly looks for signs of Griselda's mendacity in her *chiere* because he knows such perfect obedience is inhuman. At her most critical moment, when Griselda implores Walter to treat his new wife more kindly than he has treated her, her words are in conflict with her affect. As a serving woman in his hall,

> With so glad chiere his gestes she receyveth
> And so konnyngly, everich in his degree,
> That no defaute no man aperceyveth,
> But ay they wondren what she myghte bee (IV.1016-20)

The Clerk's description here overtly pairs *chiere* with perception; Griselda serves so well, so *konnyngly* no one can perceive any default in her mien. Yet the audience must be aware of the that genuine pain and humiliation that a normal human being would feel here. Their perception of Griselda necessarily differs from that of the wedding guests because they know the truth of her identity and circumstances. The Clerk thus subtly suggests that "chiere" is an unreliable means of judging obedience even before Griselda makes her request of Walter:

> "O thyng biseke I yow, and warne also,
> That ye ne prikke with no tormentynge
> This tendre mayden, as ye han doon mo;
> For she is fostred in hire norissynge
> Moore tenderly, and to my supposynge,
> She koude nat adversitee endure
> As koude a povre fostred creature." (IV.1037-43)

The directness of this speech is shocking after Griselda's insistence throughout the tale that she is in perfect accord with Walter's will. By speaking, Griselda asserts her will over Walter's by speaking out of turn, and ironically, it is this resistant speech that ultimately convinces him of her sincerity. Savage suggests that it is in this moment that

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[297] Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 126.

Walter changes his mind about marrying his daughter, won over by the power of Griselda's speech. That is, Griselda does not merely pass Walter's test of obedience, she actively changes his plans.[298] Her words are powerful: she begins her request with two strong verbs, "biseke" and "warne." The first, plaintive and submissive, is in accord with her lowly status, but it is superseded—rewritten (translated, Dinshaw might suggest)—by the second, "warne." It is likely too much to read an implicit threat in that word, but certainly Griselda foresees disaster if Walter continues his willful testing of wives. Her sharply critical speech is the culmination of the "tormentynge" she has endured and ultimately suggests that Griselda's inner life is divorced entirely from her external "chiere."

The reason for this emotional divide, Griselda implies, is her poor upbringing. Surely a noble, "tendre mayden" like Walter's new bride will not be able to endure Walter's "prikkes," the sexual imagery of which cannot be coincidental. However, by emphasizing the new bride's nobility and delicacy, Griselda inadvertently suggests that the girl's outer and inner selves are identical; her chiere and true beliefs are in accord. The critical difference between Griselda and her daughter in terms of marital appropriateness is their nobility. Griselda is exotic in her poverty; the tale is highly skeptical throughout that her lowly origins can be erased or even corrected. Walter constantly invokes them as the basis for his people's discontent, although the narrative clearly demonstrates that the people are largely indifferent to her birth once they realize her wisdom and, most importantly, fertility. Although Walter suggests that they resent being "in servage" to someone of Griselda's station (IV.482), there is no other evidence of their discontent, and in fact the Clerk emphasizes their satisfaction with Griselda upon the birth of her daughter, as noted above. Their reaction to the son is even more positive

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[298] Savage, "Clothing Paternal Incest," 351.

"And whan that folk it to his fader tolde, / Nat oonly he but al his contree merye / Was for this child, and God they thanke and herye" (IV.614-16). Walter is an unreliable narrator throughout the tale; his people's willingness to accept a bride depends entirely on her fertility, actual or potential. Nobility is a vastly secondary concern. However, it is the visible presentation of the daughter's noble birth that makes Walter's second marriage possible. The juxtaposition of Griselda's low birth and her daughter's high birth is apparent throughout the fifth and sixth parts of the tale. Griselda herself is often the instrument of the comparison, as when Walter orders her out of his house. She has a 75-line speech (IV.814-889) in which she repeatedly emphasizes her humble origins. She begins by noting that, "bitwixen youre magnificence / And my poverte no wight kan ne may / Maken comparison; it is no nay" (IV.815-17).

It is in the course of this speech that Griselda compares herself most poignantly to Job, as multiple scholars have noted.[299] Her quote from Job is "'Naked out of my fadres house,' quod she, / 'I cam, and naked moot I turne agayn" (IV.870-71), which a fitting quote in the context of her plea for a smock to cover her as she returns to her father's house (in yet another inversion of her wedding procession), but is even more notable in the context of her long speech's heavy emphasis on parenthood. She invokes her father and her children multiple times over the course of her monologue, constantly reminding Walter and the audience of the children who constitute an absent presence in the narrative and for whom, in fact, Griselda is being driven out of Walter's house. However, in her quote from Job as in the rest of her speech, the family member she most invokes is the father. Even setting aside all references to God, Griselda invokes fathers four times: twice by mentioning her own, once in the quote, and once more when she reminds Walter that

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[299] See, e.g., Ann W. Astell, "Translating Job as Female," *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997): 59-69; Pugh, *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents*, 75-100.

it was "thilke wombe in which youre children leye" (IV.879), a reference to the mechanics of motherhood that nevertheless assigns possession of the children to the father. The Clerk echoes the relentless reminders by carefully detailing Griselda's reception at her father's house:

> For out of doute this olde poure man
> Was ever in suspect of hir mariage;
> For evere he demed, sith that it bigan,
> That whan the lord fulfild hadde his corage,
> Hym wolde think it were a disparage
> To his estaat so lowe for t'alighte,
> And voyden hire as soone as ever he myghte.
> Agayns his doghter hastily goth he,
> For he by noyse of folk knew hire comynge,
> And with hire olde coote, as it myghte be
> He covered hire, ful sorwefully wepynge.
> But on hire body myghte he it nat brynge,
> For rude was the clooth, and moore of age
> By days fele than at hir marriage.
> Thus with hire fader for a certeyn space
> Dwelleth this flour of wyfly pacience. (IV.904-919)

After Griselda repeatedly invokes fatherhood in her speech, reminding the audience of Walter's failures in that role, the Clerk provides a public performance of fatherly affection and care-taking that cannot help but sharply contrast with Walter's cruelty. Janicula reveals his doubts about the wisdom of Griselda's marriage; he has been certain that Griselda would be returned to him when she had served Walter's purpose. His certainty arises out of the "estaat so lowe" that Janicula has bequeathed to his daughter, another assertion of her low class status. The performance of fatherhood is intriguing—Janicula "hastily" goes to his daughter to cover her inadequate clothing because, the Clerk notes explicitly, the noise of the crowd tells him of her approach. Janicula's actions toward his daughter are in direct contrast to Walter's toward his. While Walter parades his daughter, making her an object of the public gaze, Janicula seeks to protect his daughter from the gaze, mitigating her shame and preserving her chastity. Although he cannot bear to put the rough cloth on her body because it is, he believes, below her newly gentle status, he demonstrates at every turn his concern for his daughter. While he is

aware of her femininity and her sexuality, as evidenced by his impulse to cover her, he does not exploit them for his own gain. Nor has he exploited them—although he agrees at the beginning of the tale to give Griselda to Walter, he has apparently received no benefits of his own from the match—Walter has not improved Janicula's station or added to his wealth since he married Griselda

Janicula's emotional reaction to Griselda's return constitutes his public performance of fatherhood and sets it in juxtaposition with Walter's. The passage opens with his suspicion of Walter's motives, a protective impulse, and closes with him "sorwefuly wepynge" as he attempts to cover Griselda. These displays of fatherly affection that would be completely foreign to Walter, who displays no emotion whatsoever toward his children. Despite the possibly problematic elements of Griselda's initial relationship to her father, his fatherly concern in the moment of her banishment is a revision of Walter's daughter's homeward procession. While Janicula awaits Griselda with a coat and deep sympathy, Walter awaits his daughter with a scheme and a sociopathic lack of interest in her welfare. Chaucer demonstrates repeatedly that fathers are strongly affected by their affection for their children, often as much as mothers; Melibee, Virginius, and Janicula all demonstrate an abiding (if not uncomplicated) love for not just any child, but specifically for their daughters. Walter, by contrast, seems to feel nothing.

The people, although present at both processions, adopt Walter's rather than Janicula's subject position, as they have throughout the narrative. They participate in—even, in some sense, create—Walter's incestuous union with his daughter through the power of their imagination:

> For she is fairer, as the deemen alle,
> Than is Griselde, and moore tendre of age,
> And fairer fruyt bitwene hem sholde falle,
> And moore plesant, for hire heigh linage.
> Hir brother eek so fair was of visage
> That hem to seen the pepl hath caught plesaunce,
> Commendynge now the markys governaunce. (IV.988-94)

Upon seeing Walter's daughter, the people immediately compare her to Griselda, effectively replacing Griselda with the daughter as Walter's wife. Walter's display is completely successful; her nobility is recognized and highly sexualized. The daughter is externally constructed as an ideal mate for her father. The people note that she is fairer than Griselda, and "moore tendre of age," positive characteristics that will no doubt allow her to produce "fairer fruyt." The only characteristics the daughter is allowed by her viewers relate to her fertility; in essence she is imagined as a mere conduit to the ideal heir. Even her chief characteristic, nobility, is "hers" only insofar as she can pass it along to a potential son, who is easily imagined with the visual aid of her brother on hand. The son's presence as a proto-heir of Walter and his daughter cements the public fantasy of fertility in which the daughter is a powerless participant. The daughter has no actual identity of her own, and exists only as an extension of her future spouse, or in comparison to her mother. Although the citizens of Saluzzo do not know that Walter's new bride is actually his daughter, the audience of the tale, both internal (the pilgrims) and external (Chaucer's readers) are fully cognizant of her parentage. Walter's display, in concert with the people's sexualizing visualization, creates the incestuous connection between Walter and his daughter for those audiences, even if it is never consummated in the text.

The Clerk explicitly condemns the townsfolk as fickle and "undiscreet and chaungynge as a fane,"(IV.996), but their desires are, like Walter's, completely consistent over the course of the tale. While they are fickle toward women as individuals, they consistently wish for Walter to take a wife who can provide a surviving heir to be their next marquise. When the Clerk suggests that they are fickle, however, he participates in their construction of the daughter as Walter's new wife:

> Thus seyden sadde folk in that cite,
> Whan that the peple gazed up and doun,
> For they were glad, right for the noveltee,
> To han a newe lady of hir toun. (IV.1002-05)

The explicit linkage of the gaze with public perceptions of the daughter—the people 'gazed up and doun" and then revel in the "newe lady of hir toun" suggests the perfect efficacy of Walter's carefully staged procession. Marriage is, in the *Clerk's Tale*, more a matter of perception than affection. If the people, via the constructing device of the gaze, perceive the daughter to be their "newe lady," and if Walter announces her as his wife, then these perceptions suggest that Walter is, in fact, married to his daughter. Even if the marriage was never consummated (and the tale gives no suggestion that it was—or that it wasn't), the incestuous relationship is reified by the pattern of perception and acceptance established by the process of Walter's first marriage.

In fact, Walter's incestuous revision of his daughter into a bride may be more successful than previously recognized—their relationship may actually have constituted a marriage under the rules of the church in effect at the time, if we set aside the question of his first marriage to Griselda, which Walter conveniently annuls with counterfeit bulls from Rome (736-49). The second marriage is contracted in much the same way as the first—Walter announces its existence. The process is somewhat simplified by the fact that he needs make no show of requesting the bride's father's consent, nor the consent of his people, which he gains by means of the public spectacle that inculcates them in imagined incest. Walter's language is remarkably ambiguous about his daughter's status: "'Griselde,' quod he, as it were in his pley, / 'How liketh thee my wyf and hire beautee?'" (IV.1030-31). Although this statement is "in his pley," that is a part of the test he has crafted, it nevertheless asserts the daughter not as his betrothed or even as bride, but as his *wife*.[300] The tale's otherwise vague descriptions of the marriage process, in both this case and Griselda's, cloud the issue. The rules of the day do little to help: the

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[300] The MED makes no mention of "betrothed" or "bride-to-be" as alternate definitions for the word "wif," It could be more generally taken to mean "woman," but that is clearly not Walter's meaning here, or if it is, does nothing to lessen the possessive sexual implications of the question.

marriage is contracted in public by dint of the procession, and furthermore, canon law obviated banns in the case of royal marriages when the bride was summoned from afar.[301] The public procession of a high-born bride was sufficient notification to all who saw her that her marriage was imminent. Therefore, the only act required to cement the marriage is the public declaration of their union—which Walter makes when he asks Griselda how she likes his wife. Walter and his daughter are, for the purposes of the tale, married.

Walter reinforces the impression of his de facto marriage to his daughter after the trick is revealed, when he says to Griselda,

> "This is thy doghter, which though has supposed
> To be my wyf; that oother feithfully
> Shal be myn heir, as I have ay disposed;
> Thou bare hym in thy body trewely
> At Boloigne have I kept hem prively;
> Taak hem agayn, for now maystow nat seye
> That thou hast lorn noon of thy children tweye. (IV.1065-71)

This speech is revelatory of Walter's character and beliefs throughout the tale. Walter rejects all emotional investment in his daughter, using pronouns that distance him from her as his child: "*thy* doghter" is juxtaposed with "*my* wyf" and, notably, "*myn* heir." Walter is willing to claim his son, who serves a future purpose, but the daughter he has already exploited remains entirely Griselda's. Neither child is recognized as a person with individual identity; they are relegated to the status of possessions for Walter, who "ay disposed" his plans and "kept hem prively" until they served his purpose and could once again be Griselda's children. Walter's manipulations and possessive tendencies take precedence over any parental feeling, whether his or anyone else's. He closes by encouraging Griselda to "taak hem agayn," a verbal gesture of rejection. Walter appears to be internally pulled between his disinterest in his children and his possessive nature;

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[301] Kelly, *Love and Marriage,* 175. Kelly notes that both Hostiensis in 1271 and Giles Bellemère, Bishop of Avignon in 1398, confirmed the church's position on royal marriages and banns.

assigning the children to Griselda's care solves his problem neatly. He is spared any requirement to care for them, but because Griselda is entirely his possession, they remain within his control, available to service his needs at whim. He reinforces this point when he explains his motives to Griselda:

> I warne hem wel that I have doon this deede
> For no malice, ne for no crueltee,
> But for t'assaye in thee thy wommanheede,
> And nat to sleen my children—God forbeede!—
> But for to kepe hem pryvely and stille,
> Til I thy purpose knewe and al thy wille. (IV.1072-78)

Walter's explanation is hardly sufficient, especially as regards his treatment of his children. He has acted, he claims, to test Griselda in her womanhood, and in order to keep his children privately and quietly until he knew her purpose and will. He repeats the phrase "kepe hem pryvely" from the previous verse, but gives it the weight of motive. Again the children are made possessions to be kept or shared at Walter's whim, but this verse continues the process of conflating the children. Now that Griselda has been established as a worthy spouse, the tale moves to erase the second wife—to reintegrate the daughter into the family in her proper pre-sexualized role. The daughter is mentioned as a single person for the last time at line 1065, where Walter corrects Griselda's (essentially accurate) impression that the daughter is his wife. Then for the next eight stanzas, the daughter is referred to only as a part of "the children," who are referenced by that term seven times in the Clerk's description of the reunion.

The excessive emphasis on the daughter as child—no longer the fantasy mother of a new heir, no longer nubile visual object of collective desire—should increase the audience's scorn for Walter's behavior. Yet by reabsorbing her into the family, emphasizing her as Walter's possession and deemphasizing her individuality, the tale maintains its focus on *Griselda's* reintegration as Walter's spouse. And yet there are subtle moments of critique. Her emotional reaction—"And in hire armes, pitously wepynge, / Embraceth hem, and tendrely kissynge / Ful lyk a mooder" (IV.1082-84)—to

regaining her children echoes Janicula's weeping when Griselda returns to his house and once again highlights Walter's remove. Like Janicula's, her reaction takes place in public:

> And in hire swough so sadly holdeth she
> Hire children two, whan she gan hem t'embrace,
> That with greet sleighte and greet difficultee
> The children from hire arm they gonne arace.
> O many a teere on many a pitous face
> Doon ran of hem that stooden hire bisyde;
> Unnethe abouten hire myghte they abyde (IV.1100-06)

Here the public mirrors Griselda's, rather than Walter's, subject position, partaking in the maternal emotion of the moment by crying with her. Clearly the Clerk validates and valorizes parental investment in children. What he remains less certain of is the power of parental investment to protect children from the dangers of society and the desires of men, indicated here by the strange and disturbing line "the children from hire arm they gonne arace." Although Griselda's love for her children is revered, it is also ultimately disallowed—when she appears to be holding on too tightly to her children, they are removed from her and returned to the arms of the state—returned, essentially, to Walter, who is the face and force of the state throughout the tale.

In fact, the last we hear of the children is of their beneficial marriages and eventual service to the state. Having been reintegrated into the family and into the state, effectively erased as an individual, Walter's daughter undergoes a revision of her first marriage in her final appearance:

> Ful many a yeer in heigh prosperitee
> Lyven thise two in concord and in este,
> And richely his doghter maryed he
> Unto a lord, oon of the worthieste
> Of al Ytaille; and thanne in pees and reste
> His wyves fader in his court he kepeth,
> Til that soule out of his body crepeth. (IV.1128-34)

The ambiguity of this verse indicates, consciously or subconsciously, the lingering awareness of Walter's inappropriate relationship to his daughter. In particular the line "And richely his doghter maryed he," which isolates the action from the object in the next

line ("Unto a lord") suggests that Walter in fact takes his daughter as a bride once again. Nothing in the lines of the verse name Griselda as his spouse, and the name and identity of the daughter's eventual groom are likewise obscured.

Angela Florschuetz has suggested that Walter's concerns about maternal influence on his heir dominate his motives in the second marriage:

> "Chaucer's unique addition of a discussion of the potential product of this marriage, the 'fairer fruyt' (IV 990) that should fall between Walter and his new bride, ensures that genealogical concerns come back into focus regarding this proposed marriage. By marrying his daughter…Walter would create a situation in which he could be absolutely certain that any new heirs would be his and his alone. Totally defined by her father/husband, Walter's daughter/wife would operate, like Griselda, as a double of Walter. In this way, the narcissism inherent in the desire to replicate the self identically becomes linked by Chaucer not only to incest but to narcissistic self-impregnation."[302]

Of course any children by his daughter would nevertheless be Griselda's grandchildren (and Janicula's great-grandchildren), but the narcissism inherent in the incestuous marriage is paramount. Walter's impulse toward "narcissistic self-impregnation" is not only exercised on his daughter, but on the larger community of Saluzzo, who are continuously "impregnated" with Walter's ideals. Walter's incestuous erasure of his daughter is echoed in the behavior of his people, who like the daughter, disappear from the narrative at the end, subsumed in "his court." They are presumably satisfied by his re-acceptance of Griselda and by the heir that has been recalled from Bologna; their will and desires are no longer relevant to the narrative and are therefore dismissed.

Conclusion

Walter's daughter-bride is not present for her marriage, nor is she much present in the tale at all. What, then, is the tale's purpose in creating a marriage between her and her

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[302] Florschuetz, "Construction of Genealogy," 47.

father? What can be gained by the daughter's absent presence in the marriage and the tale, beyond the confirmation of her mother's fidelity and obedience? Norman Lavers suggests a psychological motive, arguing that "with the mock wedding ceremony, Walter is abrogating his own conflicts, for in staging what is really a repetition of his marriage to Griselda (may we suspect that Griselda was approximately twelve years old at the time of her wedding?) he is, this time, literally marrying his twelve-year-old daughter."[303] Other scholars have suggested that the second marriage is the truly "idealized" union to which the tale's ostensible moral points—if a fanatically obedient wife is good, a silent wife is better. Griselda's resistance is always potential; although she chooses submission at every turn, she nevertheless *chooses*. The daughter has no such option, cannot decide between loyalty to her father or her husband, let alone loyalty to herself. The potential for choice does not exist. In fact, the daughter's lack of resistance highlights the resistance available to Griselda, even creates it. As Lois Bueler argues of the essence of the "tested woman" plot evident in the *Clerk's Tale*: "Without the opportunity to be unchaste, a woman's chastity is merely potential; only a test that forces a choice can make it actual."[304] The daughter's extreme submission is at every point juxtaposed with Griselda's choice.

Chaucer's Envoy, which closes the tale and is comprised of the Clerk's ironic call for women to "stondeth at defense" (IV.1195) and rule their husbands, becomes significantly less ironic when considering the fate of Walter's daughter, who cannot speak and thereby becomes an object of incest. Although the envoy, and the tale's rhetorical position as a response to the Wife of Bath, seem to call for feminine submission, what it actually endorses is feminine *choice*. While still idealizing feminine

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[303] Lavers, "Freud, the Clerkes Tale, and Literary Criticism," 187.

[304] Lois E. Bueler, *The Tested Woman Plot: Women's Choices, Men's Judgments, and the Shaping of Stories* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001): 12.

submission, the tale recognizes such obedience means nothing if it is compelled. The tale is rooted in the essential medieval definition of marriage, which required the unforced consent of both parties to occur, in the ideal if not the reality. The emphasis on the public nature of marriage, the community's responsibility to assure the couple's willingness and fitness to marry, suggests a defense of women's rights and safety in marriage that was, while implicit and perhaps poorly executed, nevertheless very real. In fact, perhaps more than any other Canterbury Tale, the *Clerk's Tale* recognizes marriage as a partnership, and that the manipulation of one partner by the other is a fundamental failure to understand the purpose and pleasures of marriage. While it is difficult to call the Clerk (or Chaucer) a feminist, there is an essential recognition of the humanity of women, exercised through the contrast of Griselda with her daughter, that may revise our understanding of Griselda's power to speak and men's power to hear.

EPILOGUE

If this project demonstrates anything conclusively, it is that incest was a monumentally slippery phenomenon in the Middle Ages, integrally interwoven with family and religious life, yet impossible to fully define and therefore impossible to repress or control. Looking specifically at instances of father-daughter incest in literature reveals that medieval authors were fundamentally uncertain of the daughter's role within the family—even though it was ostensibly clearly defined by the expectation of obedience and beneficial marriage. Instead, we see daughters who resist and rebel, who define their own identities and, as a result, redefine fatherhood and family life. Although incest is never less than exploitative and destructive, it is also, in these narratives, a means of examining and even challenging widely accepted structures of patriarchy and kinship. Understanding incest, particularly father-daughter incest, with its extreme power differential between perpetrator and victim, gives us greater insight into both the literature and society of a distant culture.

In fact, examining father-daughter incest reveals that the Middle Ages are less distant than might be expected—or, in this instance, desired. Unfortunately, incest cases seem to pop up in the news with some regularity, and coverage often reveals that incest poses questions that leave us as baffled as they left medieval authors. Among them is the question "what's the harm?" In December 2010, a Columbia University professor, David Epstein, was arrested and charged with third-degree incest for having a consensual affair with his 24-year-old daughter. The case made national headlines, and the collective reaction was somewhat difficult to parse. Although the usual instinctive revulsion attached to this case, there was no clear-cut way to condemn it as abuse: the affair began after Epstein's daughter had reached the age of majority and was, by all reports, completely consensual. In a secular era, we were left without even the cold comfort of calling it a sin and assigning 15 years' bread-and-water penance.

In the wake of David Epstein's arrest, several colleagues aware of my project sent me the link to an article in *Slate* by William Saletan called "Incest Is Cancer."[305] The article is subtitled "The David Epstein Case: If Homosexuality Is Okay, Why Is Incest Wrong?" and this is the question with which Saletan grapples throughout, ultimately offering a clear distinction between the effects of gay marriage and the effects of incest on society. As I read, I was pleased to find his argument adroit and convincing—and shockingly medieval. Saletan contextualizes the problem of incest in the liberal/conservative divide over gay marriage:

> At this point, liberals tend to throw up their hands. If both parties are consenting adults and the genetic rationale is bogus, why should the law get involved? Incest may seem icky, but that's what people said about homosexuality, too. It's all private conduct. To which conservatives reply: We told you so. We warned you that if laws against homosexuality were struck down, laws against polygamy and incest would follow. And now you're proving us right.[306]

But despite the comparison to a particularly modern social issue, Saletan's rationale for rejecting incest resonates with certain medieval justifications, as does the strawman argument he sets up. The genetic rationale for rejecting incest is bogus because, of course, effective birth control makes it moot. In the Middle Ages, genetic problems were only vaguely on the radar—think Laban's sheep in Genesis[307]—and never connected to incest. So in fact, this is rather how medieval people might have viewed sexual

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[305] William Saletan, "Incest Is Cancer," *Slate*, http://www.slate.com/id/2277787/, n.p., accessed March 31, 2011.

[306] Ibid.

[307] Genesis 30. Jacob and Laban reach an agreement that Jacob will be given all the striped and spotted lambs from Laban's flock. Laban then removes all his spotted and speckled stock and sends them to his son's flocks, three days away. Jacob, unfazed, takes tree branches and peels the bark so that they are striped, and places them at the flock's watering places. Because the sheep see the striped branches as they breed, the lambs are born spotted and speckled. The belief that what a woman saw as she was pregnant could affect the appearance of the child persisted through the Middle Ages.

transgression: allow one, and pretty soon they're all allowed. The temptation of a look turns into the pleasure of a caress turns into the fulfillment of more dangerous desires, and soon enough both souls are lost.[308] The "slippery slope" objection was common and fervent in the Middle Ages.

But in refuting this medieval objection, Saletan appeals to medieval logic, arguing that incest erodes the family from within, and not only that, but it prevents family members from creating the new families—the new community connections—that shore up a society.

> When a young man falls in love with another man, no family is destroyed. Homosexuality is largely immutable, as the chronic failure of "ex-gay" ministries attests. So if you forbid sex between these two men, neither of them is likely to form a happy, faithful heterosexual family. The best way to help them form a stable family is to encourage them to marry each other. Incest spectacularly flunks this test. By definition, it occurs within an already existing family. So it offers no benefit in terms of family formation. On the contrary, it injects a notoriously incendiary dynamic—sexual tension—into the mix.[309]

The argument here perfectly echoes Augustine. Of course, Augustine would never have been an advocate for gay marriage. But the argument against incest rings true, returning us again to the Lévi-Straussian argument: "For affection is now given its proper place, so that men, for whom it is beneficial to live together in honourable concord, may be joined to one another by the bonds of diverse relationships."[310] Augustine offers a completely

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[308]See, e.g., Robert Hasenfratz, ed., *Ancrene Wisse* (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2000): Book IV, ll. 327ff.

[309] Saletan, "Incest Is Cancer," n.p.

[310] Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R.W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 665. Augustine also notes the instinctive revulsion incest generates: "In addition, there is present in man a certain sense of honour, which is both natural and laudable, which prompts him not to direct towards a woman whom he is bound to respect and honour as a kinswoman that lust…which, as we see, occasions shame even within the chastity of marriage" (667).

reasonable justification for exogamous marriage: the Christian duty to spread affection beyond the nuclear family and thus promote social harmony.

This argument was adopted and reiterated in various ways throughout the Middle Ages. Exogamous marriage was the foremost means of building connections in society. Gayle Rubin, of course, has demonstrated that these connections were forged on the bodies of women who were exchanged to create them,[311] but there is nevertheless a strong communal impulse *away* from incest. However, it is apparently an impulse that must be continually rearticulated, as the *Clerk's Tale* reveals in its characterization of Walter. The uncertainty of his excessively exogamous marriage to Griselda drives Walter to contract a second marriage to his nameless and disguised daughter. The marriage is presented as practically perfect in every respect, if its incestuous nature can be ignored—which, of course, it can, as Walter's people demonstrate. Chaucer emphasizes throughout the *Clerk's Tale* how incest obscures terrible abuses of authority, for which the abuse of Walter's perpetually silenced daughter becomes an important cipher.

What we learn every time we encounter incest, whether in an obscure medieval poem or a contemporary news article, is that it is never solely a family problem. Incest is always a social problem that captures the attention of the community and requires a communal solution. The social nature of incest becomes particularly apparent in the ways that medieval people talked about marriage, as in the mid-fourteenth-century instructive work *Jacob's Well*:

> We schewyn acursyd alle þo þat makyn ony contract of matrimonye, or are weddyd to-gydere in ony degre of kynrede, or of affinyte, or of ony gossyb-rede forfendyd be lawe, or in ony degre þat hath a lawfull lettyng, □if þei þise degrees knowyn; And

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[311]" Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975): 157-210.

> alle þat helpin or procuryn þer-to wyttyngly. And alle preestys þat wyttyngly & wylfully solemnyzen swych unleeful matrimonye, or weddyn ony oþere but here own parysschenys wyth-oute leve, or weddyn wyth-oute þe banys askyd; And all þat, be strengthe, manace, or dreed, don swych weddynges be solemnysed, & wyth-oute syb-redes, in cherchys, in chapellys, or in oratoriis; & alle þat ben þere present at swyche weddynges, gylty þer-of, & wyttynge, & wel payed þer-wyth.[312]
>
> [We show accursed all those who make any contract of matrimony, or are wedded together in any degree of kinship, or affinity, or of any godsiblinghood forbidden by law, or in any degree that has a lawful hindrance, if they know these degrees; and all who knowingly help or procure thereto. And all priests that knowingly and willfully solemnize such illegal matrimony, or marry any but their own parishioners without leave, or marry without asking the banns; and all those who, by strength, menace, or dread, force such marriages to be solemnized, and without consanguinity, in churches, in chapels, or in oratories, and all who are present there at such weddings, guilty thereof, and knowing, and they will be well repaid.]

Not only are those who contract unlawfully incestuous marriages *shewyn acursyd*, but so too are all those who knowingly help them do so, and any priests that solemnize incestuous marriages, and, most tellingly, anybody who is even present at such a wedding. All that are present and aware of the incestuous relationship are *gylty þer-of*. Knowing the sin and keeping silent is the same as committing it. The language of this imprecation is unequivocal and seems to account for every possible circumstance that might be offered to mitigate the severity of participating in an incestuous marriage. The regulation of incest is a responsibility for the entire community. Yet the perpetration of incest is repeatedly depicted in literature as a secret carefully kept—Lot and his daughters are sheltered alone within a cave high on a mountain; Euphrosyne and her father share a cell and then a grave that both isolates and binds them. However, even though incest is intended to be kept silent—even though, as numerous feminist critics have demonstrated,

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[312] Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*, EETS o.s. 115 (London: Oxford University Press, 1900): 21.

the incest taboo is not in the deed but in the speaking of it[313]—incest outs. The sheer frequency of incest as a plot device in literature, regardless of the era, demonstrates our enduring fascination with it as an unsolved problem that touches and violates values we hold fundamental to the definition of society. While this fascination is disturbing in its voyeuristic aspects, which become apparent in my examination of incest images such as those in the Illustrated Old English Hexateuch, it is also necessary for reclaiming the speech that the incest taboo seeks to preclude. That speech is vital not only for telling the story of the victimized daughter—although that alone is more than sufficient for its recovery—but also for recognizing the continuity of thought about incest over the course of more than a millennium of English literary history. Knowing of the crime and keeping silent is the same as committing it.

This project was prompted in part by media coverage of the Josef Fritzl incest and imprisonment case. Fritzl was an Austrian pensioner, living in the small village of Amstatten in Niederösterreich in 2008 when it was discovered that he was holding his adult daughter Elisabeth captive in the basement of his house. He imprisoned her there for 24 years, raping her repeatedly and fathering her seven children, one of whom died when Fritzl refused to allow necessary medical treatment. Fritzl's wife and neighbors all pleaded ignorance and shock when his crimes were uncovered. The case received international media attention, and Fritzl continues to be a reference point for subsequent incest cases—perpetrators in Colombia and Italy were compared to Fritzl. In March 2011,

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[313] See, e.g., Jen Shelton, "'Don't Say Such Foolish Things, Dear': Speaking Incest in *The Voyage Out*," *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Elizabeth Barnes (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002): 224-48; Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Rosaria Champagne, *The Politics of Survivorship: Incest, Women's Literature, and Feminist Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Josephine Rijnaarts, *Lots Töchter: Über den Vater-Tochter-Inzest* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993), and many others.

a German man convicted of 162 counts of sexual crimes and sentenced to 15 years in prison became known as "the German Josef Fritzl" by multiple news outlets.

That continuity became apparent when Josef Fritzl was sentenced to life in prison for his crimes in March of 2009. The Austrian daily newspaper *Heute* ran the news of the sentence alongside an image of the central panel of Hieronymous Bosch's 1504 triptych *The Last Judgement*. In it, Christ, radiant and enthroned, sends sinners left and right, while in the foreground monstrous creatures—dragon, demon, and human alike—torment sinners and each other as the world falls to pieces. It is an unabashedly religious image, yet it was juxtaposed with the unquestionably secular legal proceedings. The image suggested both the fundamental immorality of Fritzl's crimes as well as a looming cosmic judgment that exceeded his earthly sentence. Perhaps it also hinted at our longing for an explanation, for repentance, from Fritzl on behalf of Elisabeth and her six surviving children, all of whom were forced to adopt new names and new identities in a new location—or perhaps, to forge identities for the first time in their lives, freed from the basement in Amstatten but never entirely free of the effects of their father-jailor-abuser's deeds. It is likely that that repentance will never come, as Antiochus never repents for his abuse in *Apollonius of Tyre*. Nevertheless, willingness to face narratives of incest from the Middle Ages, and to take them seriously despite their distant origins, offers us a means of facing our own narratives—and understanding our own unwillingness to do so.

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