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Cultural Belief in the Supernatural from 500 to 1500: Change over Time, Significance, and Dispersion of Ideas from Augustine to Shakespeare

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**CULTURAL BELIEF IN THE SUPERNATURAL FROM 500 TO 1500:
CHANGE OVER TIME, SIGNIFICANCE, AND DISPERSION OF IDEAS
FROM AUGUSTINE TO SHAKESPEARE**

BY

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**B.A., HONOURS IN HISTORY, ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY,
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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This project is an amalgamation of case studies, arguing that not only did the supernatural permeate every level of medieval society, but that its potential for analysis and interpretation is largely unexplored. These case studies include: an analysis of the Church Fathers works, including Tertullian's *De testimonio animae*, Augustine of Hippo's *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, and Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, addressing the variation in these works' theological ideas about the soul; an analysis of the works of Gregory of Tours (his *Liber vitae Patrum* and *Historia Francorum*), which reflect popular beliefs as opposed to those of the educated elite; an exploration of the genre of *exempla* during the high middle ages utilizing five ghost stories found in the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*; a move into the late middle ages and beyond, examining some fifteenth-century *exempla* found in the margins of a manuscript from Byland Abbey, Yorkshire, their connection to the Danish ghost in *Hamlet*, and the oral and folkloric traditions that tie all of these sources together.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Specters, Spirits, and the *longue durée* of the History of Ghosts

‘Now al my gladship is gone, I grue and am agast
Of þre gostis ful grym þat gare me be gryst,
For oft haue I walkon be wodys and be wast,
Bot was me neuer so wo in þis word þat Y wyst.’

[“Now all my happiness is gone; I shudder and am aghast
at three very grim ghosts that terrify me,
for often have I walked in wood and wilderness,
but I have never known so much woe in this world until now.”]¹

- “*De tribus regibus mortuis*”
John Audelay, d. c.1426

Death is an integral part of the human experience; it has remained constant across time and space, punctuating writings of all kinds with surges of existential dread, fear of the unknown, and speculation as to what follows. It is not surprising, then, that stories of the departed appear throughout the historical record. Jean-Claude Schmitt, in his 1994 publication *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, describes ghost stories in particular as a means of dealing with this inevitable experience of grief, to speculate upon and to share stories about those who, though deceased, have allegedly returned to prove in some fashion that existence does not end with death, and that the unseen world is just as diverse as the seen one.² Such tales provide invaluable insight into the culture and personal world of medieval people. John Audelay’s poem renders into prose a commonly illustrated motif, in which the dead meet the living. Not only is it an embodiment of the “Three Living and the Three Dead”—or “Three Dead Kings”—motif of medieval art and culture, but it is

¹ Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 248; originally from John Audelay, “Three Dead Kings,” in *John the Blind Audelay Poems and Carols* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302), ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), 220.

² Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 225-7.

just one example that brings to light the emotional intensity integral to such experiences. Not only can ghost stories be emotionally moving; they can also be found in almost every shadowy recess of premodern life.

The proliferation of such apparitions of the dead originated long before the establishment of Christianity, and extends well into the modern age. In the Old Testament, ostensibly a millennium or more before the Common Era, King Saul consorted with a witch and summoned the departed soul of the prophet Samuel for guidance and prophecy from beyond the grave; later critics, such as fifth-century Augustine of Hippo, denounced such activities, but did not question their efficacy.³ Classical texts, as well, were replete with such stories: Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells of a man, Aristeas, who dies and is seen after his death, appearing and disappearing at will, as *phasma*; he is even credited with writing the poem *Arimaspeia*.⁴ Even Plato entertained the idea of *daimones* (amoral spirits) as intermediaries, lesser supernatural beings with “the power to interpret and convey things, to gods from humans ... tying everything in the universe together,” and so common were tales of these specters that by the Latin period they were satirised, as in Plautus’s comedy *Mostellaria* (literally: *The Haunted House*).⁵

The instances recorded in every genre from hagiography to court records throughout the middle ages are too numerous to recount here, and this study is only able

³ Brian P. Copenhaver, ed., “The Witch of Endor,” in *Magic in Western Culture: from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23; *ibid.*, 215.

⁴ Herodotus describes Aristeas as a φάσμα (*phasma*); Daniel Ogden, ed., “Aristeas of Proconnesus: Soul-projection, Metempsychosis, and Bilocation,” in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

⁵ Copenhaver, “Haunted House: Plautus, *Mostellaria*,” 117-19; *ibid.*, “Love, Divination and Incantations: Plato, Symposium,” 110-12.

to expand on a handful of them.⁶ Nor did these incidents, or the recording of them, dissipate after the Protestant Reformation or the supposed Age of Enlightenment, with exorcisms of all forms practiced right through this period, and with reports of real or fabricated hauntings, such as the 1649 account of the haunting of the palace of Woodstock, in which great unexplained noises resounded, ephemeral animal shapes prowled the hallways, objects moved on their own, and “the Bedsteads [shook] so violently that themselves [the witnesses] confessed their Bodies were sore with it.”⁷

Such tales permeate the same sources historians and other scholars have pored over for centuries. From the sagas of Iceland and Scandinavia, to the morality tales of the Cistercians, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans, to the ever-developing theologies of the Church, and all of the saints’ *vitae* and popular (sometimes downright heretical) folklore in between, the supernatural manifests in a multiplicity of forms. Tales of the supernatural can even be found where they are least expected: in chronicles and histories alleging ostensible fact. During the first decades of the twentieth century, historians dismissed written accounts of the supernatural as religious propaganda, or the product of gullible or mischievous scribes. There is even evidence that medieval people themselves sometimes omitted what they thought to be superfluous in certain manuscripts.⁸ Keith Thomas, in his seminal work *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, reveals in his preface

⁶ In Yorkshire in 1424, there was a court case amending defamation of a ghost, in which a man claimed his father appeared to him from Purgatory; R. N. Swanson, “Defaming the Dead: A Contested Ghost Story from Fifteenth-Century Yorkshire,” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 82, no. 1 (2013): 265.

⁷ Claude Lecouteux, *The Secret History of Poltergeists and Haunted Houses: From Pagan Folklore to Modern Manifestations*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2012), 185-9; this fantastic story, is, according to Lecouteux, an elaborate hoax, but nonetheless it stuck fast in the minds of the populace, to the extent that in 1826 Sir Walter Scott wrote a novel (called *Woodstock*) about the incident.

⁸ Timothy Reuter, ed., *The Annals of Fulda*, trans. and anno. Timothy Reuter (New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), 44 n. 21.

that he feels there is merit in these fanciful stories, because they “were taken seriously by equally intelligent persons in the past.”⁹ This thesis goes further; these stories, long considered only a footnote by empirically-minded historians, more than triviality, are crucial to understanding the cultural history of the medieval world, and their potential for analysis and interpretation has been, as of yet, largely unexplored. Often, in this thesis, I use the phrase “cultural belief” to describe the concepts, ideas, and values these primary sources can reflect about the medieval experience; although the term may sound redundant, it signifies both the influence that the branches of cultural and religious history have had on this methodology and my interpretation of these sources, and the debt I owe to them.

The Problem of Ambiguity

From just the handful of examples presented above, the ambiguity of the topic is clear. How related are the *daimones* Plato mentions to the *phasma* of Aristeas, or the entity purported to haunt Woodstock? There seems to be little consensus. Throughout the middle ages, too, there was a wide variety of such experiences. The dead appear in visions or dreams and affect the world of the living, devils pretend to be angels or loved ones, and all of the above predict the future.¹⁰ There are many tales, indeed, of the departed predicting a death or appearing as omens, or of ghosts demanding prayers, alms and masses in their honor so that they might leave Purgatory;¹¹ other times, still, they are

⁹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1.

¹⁰ Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 8, 17.

¹¹ Claude Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead: Ghosts, Ancestors, and the Transparent Veil of the Pagan Mind*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2009), 119; Andrew Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels, and Prodigies* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2001), 34; Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 302.

saints acting as intercessors in order to help the living.¹² They appear in baths and emerge from graves, they are sometimes corporeal and able to cause harm to and murder the living, and other times they are all but invisible and intangible in dreams.¹³ There are descriptions of wild hunts, great armies of the dead roaming the medieval landscape, simple tales of souls departing to Heaven, and among the beings populating this world, there are guardian angels, avenging spirits, ghosts bearing warnings, and demon companions.¹⁴ Sometimes these entities are demons or angels in disguise, and other times they are truly departed spirits of kinsmen; often, it is unclear.

Ambiguity abounds within these primary sources. In a tale recorded by Caesarius of Heisterbach in the thirteenth century, for example, a woman accosts a knight, who accidentally snags a bit of her hair, only to find that she is buried in the next town over.¹⁵ In this tale, it is unclear if medieval people would have considered her a ghost or a corporeal undead. Likewise, it is unclear if the common layperson would have considered the archetypal tale of the ghost woman foretelling the death of the living a demonic or a natural occurrence. The same stereotype of the witch who summons ghosts in some instances, just as readily summons demons in others. In fact, in his study on demonic necromancy, the preeminent scholar of the history of magic, Richard Kieckhefer, notes

¹² Stefano Mula, "Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Cistercian *Exempla* Collections: Role, Diffusion, and Evolution," *History Compass* 8, no. 8 (2010): 907.

¹³ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 207.

¹⁴ Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 48; Hans Peter Broedel, "Gratuitous Examples and the Grateful Dead: Appropriations and Negotiation of Traditional Narratives in Medieval Exemplary Ghost Stories," in *Translatio or the Transmission of Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Modes and Messages*, ed. Laura Holden Hollengreen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 104; William J. Purkis, "Crusading and Crusade Memory in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*," *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 1 (2013): 109, 123; R. N. Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul: Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Peter D. Clarke and Tony Claydon (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009), 158, 160; Mula, "Cistercian *Exempla* Collections," 109.

¹⁵ Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 37.

an example of a ghost-summoning ritual almost identical to those used to summon demons.¹⁶ The term angel (or demon) seems interchangeable with spirit (or ghost) in many of these accounts, with only certain elite writers, such as Augustine, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas even bothering to dissect these distinctions; whereas the difference in etymology or ontology mattered little to the beleaguered peasants of a haunted village, or the hapless clergyman having shoes thrown at him.

There was a widespread rejection of all entities as anything but demonic by Protestants during the Reformation,¹⁷ and the great thinkers of the Enlightenment, too, weighed in on the subject. There was never any consensus, however. In the late fourteenth century, a bishop in France, Nicole Oresme, rejected the idea that demons caused mysterious events, and stressed belief in natural causes.¹⁸ Marsilio Ficino, of fifteenth-century Italy, steeped in classical thought, took interest in the soul, astral projection, and ‘indwelling spirits’ (redolent of guardian angels or Plato’s conception of *daimones* as mediators), and attempted to explain these concepts rationally: “Every person is born with his own particular demon, determined by his very own star, to watch over his life and help him.”¹⁹ Others, such as the sixteenth-century French Symphorien Champier and the English Reginald Scot, aggressively dismiss supernatural accounts as superstitious delusions, “like as when a juggler hath discovered the slight and illusion of his principall feats, one would fondlie continue to thinke that his other petie juggling knacks ... are done by the helpe of a familiar.”²⁰ Even later, in seventeenth-century

¹⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 130, 170.

¹⁷ Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters,” 144.

¹⁸ Copenhaver, “No Need for Demons: Nicole Oresme, *On the Causes of Wonders*,” 327.

¹⁹ Ibid., “A Demon in Charge of Each Person: Ficino, *On Life*,” 367.

²⁰ Ibid., “The Demon Makes Fools of Them All: Champier, *Dialogue against the Destructive Arts of Magic*,” 387; Ibid., “Abominable and Devilish Inventions: Scot, *Discoverie*,” 443.

England, Joseph Glanvill used an account of a haunted house in Tedworth in 1661 to bolster his claims against “Sadducism ... that cold and desperate disease, the disbelief of spirits and apparitions,”²¹ and the inherent positivist threat of outright atheism. The list of such thinkers goes on, and their positions reflect the constant fluctuation of this belief.

Such debates rage today, as many modern historians, too, have fixated on making such distinctions, despite the clear non-consensus of past thinkers. The lines of discernment between different forms of the supernatural have been discussed at length by scholars such as the aforementioned Schmitt and Thomas, as well as by others such as the preeminent Peter Brown, Thomas Head, and Aaron Gurevich, and more recently by scholars such as Nancy Caciola, Hans Peter Broedel, and P. G. Maxwell-Stuart.²² Such scholarship is invaluable, as it establishes a basis for further exploration of primary sources that defy categorization. However, it can be reductive to even attempt to make definite arguments or generalizations about this or any other cultural belief, just as trying to determine with complete certainty any of the mentalities of the middle ages is arguably impossible.²³

It is for all of these reasons—the universality of death, the ubiquitousness and ambiguity of primary sources, the traditional positivist neglect, and more recent compulsive categorization of such medieval mentalities—that this thesis has come to

²¹ Ibid., “A Demon Witnessed by Multitudes: Joseph Glanvill to Lord Brereton,” 558.

²² Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, introduction to *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1995); Aron Jakovlevich Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 14 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*; Broedel, “The Grateful Dead”; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts: A History of Phantoms, Ghouls, and Other Spirits of the Dead* (Stroud, UK: Tempus, 2006).

²³ Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 45.

fruition.²⁴ Countless sources remain unacknowledged as important to the field, and even more have yet to be adequately analyzed. Even the best scholars working on the topic of ghosts have not utilized such a range of disciplines, analyzed specifically this array of sources, made these interpretations or connections across various genres, nor have they allowed for such a degree of flexibility concerning the definition of ghosts and the supernatural.²⁵ This thesis, thus, helps to shed light on certain more obscure sources while revisiting others in new ways, both broadening the definition of cultural belief in ghosts and elaborating upon the available interpretive methods concerning this topic. Tracing the outlines of the phenomenon of belief in ghosts and related supernatural entities throughout the middle ages and their cultural purpose, across time, region, and even genre, this thesis argues that these stories pervade every level of medieval culture and society, and remain integral over time. Ghost stories, more than trivialities, are crucial to understanding both the medieval world and the human experience as a whole.

It would be impossible in a single work to cover in detail every historical mention of the various types of aforementioned supernatural happenings mentioned above. Instead, each chapter functions as a discrete unit, each illustrating a different region, century, or genre, by using one or more primary sources to illuminate the significance of the account within the broader culture. These case studies work in unison, sharing only the common theme of the supernatural, to compare and ultimately reveal different facets of this topic: such as the shift in locus (or evolutionary trajectory) of supernatural phenomena from hagiography to didactic *exempla* and then to genres of fiction over time,

²⁴ For an in-depth examination of positivist influence on history, and the trajectory of the historical narrative in the modern period, see Chapters Two and Five.

²⁵ See Chapter Two for an overview of the secondary literature.

the constant tension between elite and popular conceptions of these beliefs and the struggle for control of them, or the underlying, ever-present elements of pre-Christian cultural beliefs through folklore and oral tradition, which persisted even into the early modern period. Altogether, these case studies provide glimpses into the myriad functions these accounts had within medieval society—as social control, coping mechanism, didactic tool, cultural vehicle, etc.—and how even though the contexts differed, their importance remained the same, although not without a requisite degree of nuance.

Chapter Organization

Chapter Two is the exception to this rule. It is a historiography of the supernatural over the course of the twentieth century, laying the groundwork for the following chapters by presenting an analysis of the state of the field. This field, encompassing ‘bottom-up’ cultural history,²⁶ as well as religious studies and other culturally-related perspectives, has been burgeoning for the past half a century, before which many supernatural elements of primary sources received little attention.²⁷ Concerning the early middle ages, much of the research thus far has been tangential, with the period being treated as part of a broader work. When research has been more specific, scholars have not properly considered the context. As for later periods, the tendency emerges among scholars—especially of the *Annaliste* school—to categorize differing types of sources in a variety of ways, and this is not always conducive to a holistic view of cultural history. What emerges is a state of the field that is fragmented, but not stagnant, and these scholars, as well as future scholars, should work towards a more concerted, cohesive

²⁶ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Education Ltd., 2010), 292-3.

²⁷ Paul Edward Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 3.

picture of what this cultural world looked like, by acknowledging lesser-known sources, and using more qualitative and interpretative methods.

The analysis of the supernatural in late antiquity, in the first section of Chapter Three, has three focal points in the form of three primary sources all drawn from the works of the intellectual Church Fathers: Tertullian's *De testimonio animae* (c. 203), Augustine of Hippo's *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* (c. 422), and Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogorum libri quattuor* (c. 593). Each is examined for its conceptualization of the supernatural on its own and then also in comparison with each other. Certainly, these are not the only works written by these authors on the topic of the supernatural or the soul and its agency, nor the only extant sources from this period on the topic. However, when compared and contrasted, they offer a fair and nuanced representative sample of elite, late antique views of the soul and its limits after death. By analysis of how these influential scholars conceptualized the nature of dead and disembodied souls, it becomes clear how certain of their attempts to impose reason, order and structure onto the chaotic beliefs of the Christian world were ultimately unsuccessful—such as Augustine's emphatic rejection of the “ordinary ghost”—while others—such as Gregory the Great's conception of the living aiding the dead—endured for centuries thereafter.

The second half of the Chapter Three runs somewhat concurrently with the first half. This section focuses on two of the works of Gregory, Bishop of Tours (a near-contemporary of Gregory the Great): his hagiography collection the *Vita Patrum*, as well as his *Historia Francorum* (or *Decem Libri Historiarum*). In comparing these works to those of the elite writers of the previous chapter, the cracks in the elite conception of reality begin to show through to reveal the popular belief systems that simultaneously

contradicted the beliefs of the Church Fathers, and also worked with them in tandem. His work is also a point of transition into the early middle ages, a period in which hagiography comprises most of the extant literature. Gregory, disconnected from the classical intellectuals of late antiquity, draws his knowledge from local founts, illustrating an intriguing and convoluted view of supernatural specters and their relationship to both saints and ordinary people, as well as instances both Augustine and later theologians might have denounced as popular superstition. Although from an elite Roman family, Gregory of Tours's writing more often reflected popular interests than those of the Church Fathers, and his organic contrast with those of the previous chapter necessitates his place in this section. However, the genres he (as well as Gregory the Great) champions lay the foundation for the next chapter.

The following chapter, Chapter Four, introduces a new genre called *exempla*, and the first half of this chapter moves into a discussion of the high middle ages, widely attested as marking a cultural shift from the early middle ages. Just like in earlier periods, these accounts of the supernatural permeate the historical record, but in newfound ways and for varying purposes. This chapter looks at *exempla* (morality tales) as a burgeoning new form of conveying knowledge in this period, looking more closely still at the *exempla* of the thirteenth-century Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach in his *Dialogus miraculorum* to show just how inextricable from the culture of medieval people these beliefs were. Focusing on just five of his over seven hundred anecdotes, this analysis reveals just how many facets of medieval life these beliefs truly influenced, as well as how such a wealth of interpretation can emerge from just a handful of tales. Intentionally, these accounts highlight morals relating to contrition, confession, the church hierarchy,

virtue, vanity, and the afterlife, and unintentionally, they also provide insight concerning the realities of sexuality, gender, travel, the marginal “others,” oral traditions, rivalry between monastic orders, and more.

The second half of Chapter Four also cleaves to the genre of *exempla*. However, for this section the analysis travels all the way back to northern England at Byland Abbey (near Yorkshire), where, in the fifteenth century, a monk wrote down what appear to be twelve local *exempla*, most of them involving ghosts, into the blank end pages of a thirteenth-century manuscript on Cicero and folklore. These appeared in catalogue descriptions, but were otherwise neglected until 1922, when British manuscript scholar and ghost story author M. R. James took the trouble to transcribe and publish them. The *exempla* of this chapter are far removed from the *exempla* of the previous, and yet the parallels—such as ghosts requiring the aid of the living, which is evident as far back as Gregory the Great—remain striking, speaking to the dispersion of such ideas across time and space. However, these collections also sport telling differences, pointing to the diversity of accounts even within the same genre, stemming from the oral traditions of each particular region. Analyzing these marginal “ghost stories,” as James rightly called them, it becomes abundantly clear that from ancient legend and unexplained experience to monastery scriptorium, these stories take on qualities of both worlds, becoming an amalgamation of both clerical and popular attempts to understand death and the great beyond.

The conclusion, Chapter Five, has two purposes: to provide a glimpse beyond the middle ages, and to show how even the fundamental fragmentation in the dominant belief systems of medieval and early modern people did not bring the necessity of supernatural

cultural beliefs to an end. Protestants denounced ghosts as Catholic superstition, but the stories by no means disappeared, even within firmly Protestant regions, such as Denmark. This chapter is also interdisciplinary, and brings to the fore the importance of looking not only at historical or religious sources, but also at fiction and folklore. From the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to the diligently collected folktales of Evald Kristensen in the nineteenth century—which link conspicuously back to M. R. James's Byland Abbey ghost stories—it becomes abundantly clear that even as cultural circumstances shifted drastically over time, cultural belief in ghosts never disappeared, but merely changed form.

Although the arguments from chapter to chapter differ slightly, and the time period and region can shift drastically, this study's goal is clear. Through these case studies and the analysis of the many regions, it becomes evident that although these ideas about the supernatural change significantly over time—a fact which is not to be downplayed—these beliefs are, in a sense, universal; death is universal, as is the human desire to understand it. The theme of the supernatural is always present in the human psyche, and should not be dismissed as superstitious fancy. Whether in the dramas of ancient Rome or Shakespearean England, the theology of Augustine or of Protestant preachers, the hagiography or the histories of the early middle ages, or the morality tales of the Cistercians, the Dominicans or the Franciscans, in Europe or the Americas—the spectral haunts all of these milieus. Most importantly, all of the case studies presented here only touch upon the potential that these sources have to give insight into medieval culture, and to provide a greater understanding of the human experience.

CHAPTER 2
HISTORIOGRAPHY

Beyond the Veil from Late Antiquity

For the past several decades, cultural history has grown in correlation with subaltern studies and bottom-up history; that is, the French school of *Annalistes*, along with postmodern philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century have changed the academic landscape, and have moved decisively away from objective and positivist—rational—thought towards a more subjective, interpretive, and ultimately pluralistic mode of analysis.²⁸ Religious studies, like history, disregarded the majority of religious primary sources, such as hagiography, unless they pertained to verifiable historical fact, until the second half of the twentieth century. Since then, however, scholars have taken into consideration that the beliefs of the people of the past are just as important to the field as the consequences of their actions.²⁹ How scholars research afterlives, ghosts, and other such entities have navigated the early middle ages is pertinent to anyone interested in medieval cultural beliefs. Although many monographs and studies have covered these topics tangentially, the bulk of these works are either very specific—covering only a very small selection of sources—or very broad—covering prehistory to the present—resulting in a fragmented and at times dissonant state of a field; these works exist, but taken together do not seem to have a coherent direction or cohesive narrative, as though scholars are, as yet, not adequately interacting with each other and the larger discourse. Quantitative and qualitative categorization methods, further, have emerged that divide both scholars and the sources they are studying into potentially anachronistic groups, rendering the larger picture difficult to see. These trends are simultaneously necessary and problematic. More attention must focus on the sources available to scholars

²⁸ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 66, 269, 292-3.

²⁹ Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 3.

concerning the early middle ages, whereas efforts to add nuance and to reassess—and potentially deconstruct—sources from the later middle ages are needed in order for the field to keep up with recent historiographical trends.

Taking the Supernatural Seriously

The study of medieval belief in ghosts is one that has a relatively short historiography. In the early years of the twentieth century, historians did not consider anything resembling superstition a valid topic of inquiry. The empirical world rejected any notion of such studies as unprovable pseudoscience, and so the vast majority of sources detailing accounts of visions or ghost sightings were dismissed as the pre-modern superstitions of a gullible medieval populace, or, more likely, some sort of mental illness, accidental intoxication, or some other such farce.³⁰ Even as the subject of cultural beliefs began to be discussed in the 1970s, such as in Keith Thomas's seminal work, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, the remnants of this way of thinking are obvious, as Thomas only cared about this topic because his historical academic peers did so.³¹ It is because of this suspicion of fantastical accounts of the supernatural that J. Moorhead, as recently as 2003, felt obliged to publish "Taking Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* Seriously," in defense of the early medieval text.³² An even more recent monograph on the topic of ghosts reveals how this rigid dismissal of the supernatural has shifted: "Science, as the West has developed it, is a highly aggressive 'ism' which sees other systems of knowledge or ways of knowing as rivals which need to be eliminated...Westerners

³⁰ A good recent example of the persistence of this is M. L. Cameron's assessment of the visions of St. Guthlac, in which he credits them as hallucinations as a result of a fungus; M. L. Cameron, "The Visions of Saints Anthony and Guthlac," in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 152.

³¹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, ix.

³² J. Moorhead, "Taking Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* Seriously," *Downside Review* 121, no. 424 (2003): 197.

[must] break free of this intellectual constraint and allow themselves to see the living and the dead through differently focused eyes.”³³

Nevertheless, such judgements continue even into the twenty-first century, as, for instance, in M. L. Cameron’s assessment of the saints’ lives of Anthony (d. 356) and Guthlac (d. 714), where Cameron concludes that they are suffering from the hallucinogenic properties of “bread containing the fungus *Claviceps* (ergot).”³⁴ Although Cameron dissects a historical topic, he is more interested in the biological effects of certain fungi than in the cultural meaning of visions. Another well-known work, Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters*, focuses on the psychological meaning of ghosts, and borrows from Freud and other psychologists.³⁵ Likewise, on the topic of a certain late antique ghost story, Michael Potts and Amy Devanno draw on modern conceptions of parapsychology to illustrate their points.³⁶ Although there is a shift towards the subjective as opposed to the objective in historical thought, there continues to be a need to diagnose and categorize the past. Claude Lecouteux, publishing in the 1980s, perhaps captured the opposing subjective sentiment best:

It may seem odd to study the reality of such phenomena when they are so disparaged today, [but] I shall not turn to the resources of psychoanalysis to advance a modern explanation for the phenomenon. This would be a violation of the spirit of the texts and a misunderstanding of the people of the Middle Ages through whose eyes I have chosen to look at ghosts and revenants.³⁷

³³ Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, 13-14.

³⁴ Cameron, “Visions of Saints,” 152.

³⁵ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), x.

³⁶ Michael Potts and Amy Devanno, “Tertullian’s Theory of the Soul and Contemporary Psychical Research,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 913 (2013): 209.

³⁷ Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead*, 9.

This sentiment is in line with early medieval historians such as Giselle de Nie, Ian Wood and Kathleen Mitchell, and de Nie in particular has written extensively on the topic of medieval conceptions of the world.³⁸

Thus, in looking at the beliefs of medieval people firmly through “their own” eyes, the next issue is to choose parameters of study not overwrought with modern conceptions and definitions. The study of afterlives, ghosts and other entities has been approached by many, all of whom arguably categorize with too much enthusiasm. Some, such as Catherine Rider and Hans Peter Broedel, have categorized ghost stories of the high middle ages thematically—Rider has done work on ghost stories in which a pact was made to return after death, and Broedel focuses on ghosts who require the intercession of the living—whereas others, such as Tom Licence and Coree Newman, focus on demons,³⁹ placing them in a separate category from ghosts, even though it is clear through their work that ghosts and demons in primary sources are often inextricably linked despite having different theological origins, and they performed similar functions. In another example, G. David Keyworth has produced a detailed analysis of the categorization of vampires and different sorts of undead, hyper-focused on the differences between regions and across time.⁴⁰ While useful and fascinating, such

³⁸ Kathleen Mitchell and I. N. Wood, eds., *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Boston: Brill, 2002); Giselle de Nie, “Images as ‘Mysteries’: The Shape of the Invisible,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 9 (2000): 78; see section analysis of Gregory of Tours for more of de Nie’s scholarship.

³⁹ Catherine Rider, “Agreements to Return from the Afterlife in Late Medieval *Exempla*,” in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul: Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Peter D. Clarke and Tony Claydon (Rochester, NY: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2009), 181; Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 104; Tom Licence, “The Gift of Seeing Demons in Early Cistercian Spirituality,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2004): 52; Coree Newman, “The Quest for Redemption: Penitent Demons Leading Christians to Salvation in Medieval Christian *Exempla* Literature,” *Mediaevalia* 33, no. 1 (2012): 48.

⁴⁰ G. David Keyworth, “Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead-Corpse?” *Folklore* 117, no. 3 (2006): 241.

categorization does not often successfully pursue deeper questions of significance; too distracted by the modern obsession of defining concepts and drawing hard lines between them, scholars who do this risk missing larger significances, projecting modern predispositions onto the past, or being blind to subtle or more unconventional connections.

The greatest culprit by far in this regard is the renowned *Annaliste* Jean-Claude Schmitt, who, in his introduction to *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, categorizes almost every conceivable supernatural phenomenon, separating them out into groups of what he will and will not be discussing: “the goal of [hereafter] revelations ... differ[s] greatly [from ghost tales] ... nor was the manifestation of a dead person completely comparable to the apparitions of other supernatural beings.”⁴¹ Likewise, British scholar R. N. Swanson avoids mention of dreams of the dead, poltergeists and shapeshifters in his discussion of ghosts.⁴² Claude Lecouteux, writing at around the same time, as we have already seen, is a champion for cultural history, but even he categorizes his studies. He has published multiple monographs on an array of similar topics, as though in a series. Thus, he categorizes, but unlike Schmitt, he attempts to not neglect or omit. He himself laments that a full understanding of the topic cannot be ascertained by people “who restrict their search to the writings of the Roman [Christian] world,”⁴³ and describes categorization as limiting in his response to Schmitt’s work: “alas, [Schmitt] reflects only the clerical point of view and does not attempt to bridge to the witness of paganism.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Schmitt goes on to also separate out “haunted castles, dragons, phantoms, and even vampires”; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 2.

⁴² Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters,” 146.

⁴³ Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead*, ix.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vii. On the other hand, individual historians can only stretch their minds and resources so thin, resulting in the eternal struggle for balance.

The harm in over-categorization is evident in several ways. The writers of the time did not themselves categorize stories of the supernatural, and often, they themselves were uncertain about the events which reportedly took place, even if they were present.⁴⁵ These sources resist categorization, for often even the terms that the authors used are ambiguous or interchangeable throughout the period.⁴⁶ In an analysis of Anglo-Saxon hagiography, Patricia Davis concedes that even “the contemporary distinction between dreams and visions is not that used by the hagiographers,”⁴⁷ while Gwenfair Walters Adams attempts to make just those distinctions in her own work.⁴⁸ For example, in Bede’s account of the vision of Drythelm, a man who dies and has a vision of the afterlife, finds that the line between dream and vision is irrevocably blurred.⁴⁹ Further, considering the relative dearth of sources that survive from the early middle ages (many scholars note this as a reason for their neglect of the period),⁵⁰ omission of sources based on arbitrary and anachronistic conceptions of cultural beliefs seems, frankly, ahistorical. Thus, one must cast the net far to encompass all of the sources that illuminate this topic:

⁴⁵ Jacqueline Simpson, “Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England,” *Folklore* 114, no. 3 (2003): 389.

⁴⁶ For instance, in the *Annals of Fulda*, the ambiguous words “*malignus spiritus*” denote the entity when describing a supernatural incident in 858, but this entity sets fire to houses and crops, torments villagers by “throwing stones and banging on the walls as if with a hammer,” and even mocks a priest—overall acting much more like a demon, or *daemonium*, than a ghost; Reuter, *The Annals of Fulda*, 44-5.

⁴⁷ Patricia M. Davis, “Dreams and Visions in the Anglo-Saxon Conversion to Christianity,” *Dreaming* 15, no. 2 (2005): 87.

⁴⁸ Gwenfair Walters Adams, *Visions in Late Medieval England: Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses of the Hidden Worlds of Faith*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 130 (Boston: Brill, 2007).

⁴⁹ In spite of being called the “Vision of Drythelm,” such vocabulary being something modern thinkers might associate with a waking dream, Drythelm, in the tale, is clearly dead, and so is at the very least unconscious. Bede makes none of these distinctions; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People with Bede’s Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert’s Letter on the Death of Bede*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, ed. R. E. Latham (New York: Penguin, 1990), 284-9.

⁵⁰ Lecouteux, *Poltergeists and Haunted Houses*, 4.

spectral and corporeal, visionary and oneiric, angelic and demonic, and Christian and pagan.

The earliest monographs about the history of ghosts are, for the most part, those aforementioned. According to Kathryn Edwards' survey,⁵¹ Keith Thomas was the first to devote a chapter to "ghosts" proper, defining them as "dead men ... return[ing] to haunt the living ... the souls of those trapped in Purgatory."⁵² He is followed by other, as has been said, less dismissive parties, such as Claude Lecouteux and Jean-Claude Schmitt; however, they also have their failings. Schmitt's *Annaliste* tendencies render his work frustratingly empirical,⁵³ whereas Lecouteux's well-researched and thought-out studies are left without an academic stamp of approval,⁵⁴ in spite of his long career as a "professor of medieval literature and civilization at the Sorbonne," in Paris.⁵⁵ Although all three make early attempts to illuminate the study of the supernatural, all clearly leave something to be desired. More quantitative acknowledgements and classification of sources as opposed to deeper qualitative analysis of sources, their contexts, and their greater significance, these studies beg the question of cultural identity and affective emotion,⁵⁶ not categorization: not just the how, but the why.

⁵¹ Kathryn A. Edwards, "The History of Ghosts in Early Modern Europe: Recent Research and Future Trajectories," *History Compass* 10, no. 4 (2012): 353.

⁵² In truth, he only devotes half a chapter to this topic, the other half of the chapter being devoted to "fairies"; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 588.

⁵³ Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 66-7.

⁵⁴ In English translation, Claude Lecouteux has only been published by Inner Traditions, a relatively unknown publishing house.

⁵⁵ Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead; Poltergeists and Haunted Houses*, [back cover].

⁵⁶ Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Identity and Emotions in the Early Middle Ages," in *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, ed. Walter Pohl, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 322 (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 129.

Incorporating Hagiography

The number of authors and sources grows if one incorporates not only the appearances of “the ordinary ... everyday ghosts” as Schmitt does, but also the “very special dead,” or the souls of saints, such as the Peter Brown does in his work.⁵⁷ Hagiography and the miracles therein were also, for the first decades of the twentieth century, dismissed as unhistorical, but such thinking has been questioned and revised by various historians, from Benedicta Ward and Robert Bartlett to Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head, and the further study of hagiography has been taken on more recently by scholars such as Gabor Klaniczay and John Kitchen.⁵⁸ A saint’s life, although formulaic, can still give insight into what medieval people believed, and to all of the consequences of such beliefs. Hagiography as a genre became relatively popular in the early middle ages,⁵⁹ thus adding substantially to the pool of potential sources for this period.

Expanding the available monographs to those focusing on saints broadens the historiography of the topic substantially. It also pushes the historiography back farther. As early as 1965, E. R. Dodds published his work, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, in which he enters the realm of cultural history by exploring “ideas” and “mental outlooks.”⁶⁰ He discusses the significance of positive and negative religious experiences

⁵⁷ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 2; Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 55.

⁵⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Benedicta Ward, “Miracles and History: A Reconsideration of the Miracle Stories Used by Bede,” in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London: S.P.C.K., 1976); Noble and Head, intro. *Soldiers of Christ*; Gabor Klaniczay, “Dream Healing and Visions in Medieval Latin Miracle Accounts,” in *The “Vision Thing:” Studying Divine Intervention*, ed. William A. Christian, and Gabor Klaniczay, Collegium Budapest Workshop Series 18 (Budapest: Collegium Budapest, 2009); John Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ Noble and Head, intro. *Soldiers of Christ*, xxxvii.

⁶⁰ E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 1-2.

during the period preceding the early middle ages, mostly those of early foundational members of the Church.⁶¹ Dodds, however, discusses mostly secretive and gnostic spirituality, whereas Peter Brown, who partially responds to Dodds,⁶² emphasizes the proliferation of saints during this period and into the early middle ages.⁶³ He is not wrong to suggest that hagiography contains the bulk of supernatural accounts during this period, and authors investigating the supernatural have little problem focusing on the early middle ages if they include hagiography, as this was a period of burgeoning activity in terms of saints, their stories, and their cults.

The Problem of Categorization

There have been several scholarly trends stemming from these factors of over-categorization and a dearth of primary source material. A common combination of both of these elements results in monographs that have extremely narrow subjects, as they use a specific type of source, focusing so intently on them that the fact that there are so few sources is less problematic. Two of the best examples of this are Paul Edward Dutton's *The Politics of Dreaming in Carolingian Empire*, and Isabel Moreira's *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul*.⁶⁴ Dutton's work calls itself an intellectual history, and focuses on the surviving records of no more than thirty politically relevant dream visions.⁶⁵ Much like hagiography, scholars long ignored these dream visions

⁶¹ Men "like Plotinus, Porphyry and the Hermetists [pagans], [and Christians like] Irenaeus and Clement, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa"; *ibid.*, 74.

⁶² Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 2.

⁶³ Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 55.

⁶⁴ Interestingly, it is easy to see just from the title the similarities in the themes of dreams, politics and region, the largest difference being the dynasty and time-period of focus. No doubt, Moreira's publication in 2000 was influenced by Dutton's work in 1994.

⁶⁵ Of course, Dutton laments the fact that there are so few sources, and notes that there are more than 415 extant records of dreams of sixteenth century Spanish women; however, the practical benefit of

because they had political leanings, and therefore seemed biased and ahistorical. Dutton overcomes this in the way all cultural historians tend to, by reinterpreting the dominant narrative and arguing that the “imagined” worlds of intellectuals hold as much validity as the events of wars or kings.⁶⁶ Moreira’s period of study is slightly earlier than Dutton’s, but follows a similar trajectory; she seems more interested in how the Merovingian period established the foundation for the cultural workings of the high middle ages, and looks to only “visionary narratives” and clerical responses them.⁶⁷ Moreira incorporates a little more variety than Dutton, but not much, and her chronological focus is relatively narrow, as well, stretching only from the fifth to the eighth century.⁶⁸ In this case, however, Dutton’s work opened the way for Moreira’s similar, but unique, work; their particular focus on the politics of dreams as opposed to solely their cultural significance, is a step into a realm far more about the elite secular world than of the clergy, or the masses. These monographs are ultimately inspiring models for similar research, but are less useful in terms of general research on cultural topics.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the very specialized and limited foci of Dutton and Moreira are monographs that try to cover far more than just the topic or time period of this study. The best example of this, of course, is yet again Keith Thomas’s *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. At over 700 pages, it devotes under twenty (approximately half a chapter) to the subject of ghosts, whilst covering in other chapters

having only a few dozen texts to study is that the resulting study 330 page study is inevitable deeply qualitative; Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Note that Moreira, like Patricia Davis, respects the ambiguity between vision and dream; Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 5.

⁶⁸ These monographs illustrate a trend Lecouteux laments—that a limiting of sources risks only ascertaining a fraction of the story—and over the years, he has made an attempt to flesh out all possible aspects of the topic over the course of various monographs.

every other superstitious topic imaginable: “Astrology, witchcraft, magical healing, divination, ancient prophecies ... and fairies.”⁶⁹ While a very popular work due to its range of topics, this is a useful—some would argue a necessary—source to consult, as it covers so many topics that Thomas treats them with only cursory detail, and can provide only introductions to any of these topics.

Other studies are broad in a different fashion; instead of covering a multitude of topics, they range across time. Take, for instance, R. C. Finucane’s *Appearances of the Dead*. He presents a cultural history of ghosts over millennia.⁷⁰ In a remarkably similar fashion, P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, over twenty years later, published a similarly categorized monograph, covering most of the same ground in six chapters instead of Finucane’s eight. For reasons unknown, Finucane’s monograph lacks a chapter on the high middle ages, skipping from the early straight onto the late middle ages.⁷¹ Maxwell-Stuart, on the other hand, covers the entire middle ages in a single chapter,⁷² and so he goes into less detail than Finucane’s original attempt. Unlike Schmitt, both of these studies involve a wide range of what might be considered ghosts, broadening their topics even further.⁷³

The approach of these studies, covering a broad range of topics, sources, and eras, is not uncommon in the larger historiography. Predominantly, broad sweeping studies are part of a trend from the French *Annalistes* of the *longue durée*, and the attempt to produce a “total history.”⁷⁴ This trend is prominent throughout the twentieth century, but closer to the topic at hand, *Annaliste* Philippe Ariès’s *The Hour of Our Death* explicitly uses the

⁶⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, ix.

⁷⁰ R. C. Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead: A Cultural History of Ghosts* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1984), 4, 217.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29, 49.

⁷² Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, 39.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 39, 117; Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 49, 90.

⁷⁴ Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 82-3.

longue durée in his study of the development of conceptions of the afterlife, noting that “if the modern observer wishes to arrive at an understanding that eluded contemporaries, he must widen his field of vision ... [or else] run the risk of attributing originality to phenomena that are really much older.”⁷⁵ However, it is also a relatively outdated methodology, for in the past few decades the ways of the *Annalistes* have been increasingly superseded by more relativist and post-modernist ways of thinking.⁷⁶ All in all, while useful, these monographs cannot realistically be as “total” as they claim to be, as they tend to sacrifice detail for breadth.

A Dearth of Sources

The most frustrating trend of the current historiography is a distinct lack of secondary sources that are focused on the earlier periods of the middle ages, broader than the monographs of Dutton and Moreira; many monographs exist dealing with conceptions of ghosts, entities and afterlives, but not pertaining to the early medieval period. This lack is obvious, for example, in Kathryn Edwards’s survey, “The History of Ghosts in Early Modern Europe,” wherein she asserts that the early modern period is far more awash with usable sources than earlier periods.⁷⁷ Indeed, many high and late medieval scholars claim the same problem of the early middle ages, but as some of the more narrowly-focused monographs have proved,⁷⁸ it should not warrant a wholesale neglect of the field.

⁷⁵ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1981), xvi-xvii.

⁷⁶ Tosh, *Pursuit of History*, 195.

⁷⁷ Edwards, “History of Ghosts,” 355.

⁷⁸ Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, 2; Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 2.

Alas, some very good work has been done on ghosts, but as Edwards outlines thoroughly, it is, for the most part, focused on the period following the middle ages. In the new tradition of post-modernism, following philosophical thinkers and relativists like Foucault, are scholars such as Avery Gordon;⁷⁹ such a methodology is a useful addition to the field, but her work is solidly cemented in the much later modern period. Another similar example is *The Place of the Dead*, an anthology of essays compiled by Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, which sees historians and anthropologists analyzing a multitude of topics, such as spirits, corpses, religion, and material and written artifacts;⁸⁰ however, the fifteen sections focus only on the late medieval and early modern periods, and any mention of earlier periods is cursory and incidental.⁸¹ These sources ultimately do not add much to research on the first half of the middle ages, but they do inspire, by hinting at what gaps medievalists must fill, and by providing ready-made models as to how such a group effort might be structured. A more pertinent—although still sweeping—anthology, put together by the Ecclesiastical History Society of the UK, whose mandate is “to deal with a major theme in Christian and ecclesiastical history” with each publication,⁸² sought to pursue the very question of Christian conceptions of ghosts. In fact, the society president during that time, R. N. Swanson, put together his own detailed historiography of the subject, acknowledging Jean-Claude Schmitt, Aron Gurevich, Jacques Le Goff, and even then-newer scholars such as Nancy Caciola in an excellent theological and historiographical starting point for research in the realm of

⁷⁹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

⁸⁰ Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds., *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66, 131, 149, 170, 224, 288.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 114, 230, 235.

⁸² Clarke, and Claydon, eds., *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, xxiii.

medieval ghost stories.⁸³ This essay series structure, with dozens of contributing scholars, is useful and welcome model no matter the topic.

That is not to say that the middle ages has not been the topic of research for preeminent scholars, only that there is not an abundance of work on this particular topic. Other scholars have worked on cultural and religious beliefs during this period, but their scholarship has been more tangential, mentioning ghosts and other entities almost as by-products of their topic of focus, and not worthy subjects in and of themselves. Philippe Ariès does turn his gaze onto the middle ages,⁸⁴ as does his fellow *Annaliste* Jacques Le Goff in *The Birth of Purgatory*; neither, however, lingers for any meaningful length of time, on ghosts. Purgatory is important to the historiography of these entities because they are the very realms purported to contain the souls of the dead,⁸⁵ as Keith Thomas rightly notes: “such apparitions were the souls of those trapped in Purgatory, unable to rest until they had expiated their sins”⁸⁶ As such, Le Goff discusses the medieval developments of these conceptions at length in his work.⁸⁷

Two authors who discuss the topic tangentially, but do not devote as much actual thought to the history of these entities or afterlives, are Aron Jakovlevich Gurevich and Frederick S. Paxton. Gurevich, much like Peter Brown, argues that saints function as the main means of supernatural phenomena in the early middle ages,⁸⁸ and that the

⁸³ Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters,” 158, 160; Nancy Caciola, “Breath, Heart, Guts: The Body and Spirits in the Middle Ages,” In *Communicating with the Spirits*, Gábor Klaniczay, Éva Pócs, and Eszter Csonka-Takács (Budapest: New York Central European University Press, 2005), 21.

⁸⁴ Ariès, *Hour of Death*, 5.

⁸⁵ Other relevant secondary literature on Purgatory includes Marilyn Dunn, “Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey, and the Origins of Purgatory,” *Peritia* 14 (2000): 238, and C. S. Watkins, “Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm: The Evidence of Visions and Ghost Stories,” *Past and Present* 175, no. 1 (2002): 3.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Religion and the Deline of Magic*, 587.

⁸⁷ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 127.

⁸⁸ Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 39.

dissemination of these beliefs as popular phenomena only follows in later centuries;⁸⁹ this is probably not entirely true, but as historians have only the extant sources to work with, and none of the oral history, such a conclusion is reasonable. Paxton, on the other hand, is looking not at popular culture, but at religious rituals surrounding death;⁹⁰ these rituals do not explicitly concern ghosts, but often work as preventative measures to hinder deceased human souls from ever having a reason to return to the living realm. As Schmitt points out: “the dead generally returned when the funeral and mourning rituals could not be performed in a prescribed way,”⁹¹ and thus, Paxton’s work too is important to the context of the field.⁹² As recently as this year, in addition, headway in this area comes in the form of *Death in Medieval Europe*, edited by Joëlle Rollo-Koster; a collection of essays mainly concerning death rituals, which delves into cultural belief in ghosts, revenants, and other the supernatural entities as well as into rituals surrounding death, treating them, rightly, as interrelated concepts.⁹³

Contemporary with the works of both Jean-Claude Schmitt and Claude Lecouteux, the studies of Gurevich and Paxton, while refusing to shed light on entities or afterlives proper, still mention them. Gurevich references ghosts on occasion, although his focus is solidly on the actions of living people. When discussing the relationship between saints and kings, for instance, he notes, “King Pepin encroached on the possessions of Rheims, and in a dream St. Remi appeared ... [and] beat the king

⁸⁹ Ibid., 153.

⁹⁰ Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 47.

⁹¹ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 2.

⁹² Another very important scholar in this vein is J. N. Hillgarth; J. N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

⁹³ Joëlle Rollo-Koster, ed., *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

soundly.”⁹⁴ Paxton, similarly, discusses angels, demons, and the soul, and when discussing funerary rituals, describes them as a way of “protecting the living from the wrath of the dead and the dead from demons that might hinder their ascent to the upper regions.”⁹⁵ Also in the same vein is Carlos Eire’s work; although his focus is the later medieval and early modern periods, *From Madrid to Purgatory* and *War against the Idols* both cover rituals of the living concerning death, belief, and tangentially, ghosts.⁹⁶ Ultimately, they provide a suitable historical context in popular and religious culture, both of which are crucial to understanding the narrower field of ghosts, entities and afterlives, a topic that easily reaches into both of these realms.

Over-categorization, a relatively late-found interest in the subject, and a dearth of medieval sources have resulted in these trends. However, the field is capable of further development, as these assessments are not as limiting as scholars suggest. It is true that later periods have more extant sources; logically, the farther a historian is in time from their subject, the less information survives the test of time, and because of the boom of literacy in the early modern period, historians interested in that period have much more to work with. However, there is not quite the lack of medieval sources that scholars claim, as evidenced by sourcebooks like Andrew Joynes’s *Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels, and Prodigies*.

Joynes has compiled an entire anthology of primary source material in translation, looking at both pagan and Christian sources, as well as literary, legal, and later vernacular

⁹⁴ Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 47.

⁹⁵ Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, 20.

⁹⁶ Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

folkloric sources.⁹⁷ About half of these sources come from the early middle ages, and even more of them, such as the later Scandinavian sagas, look back to this period.⁹⁸ While it is true that Joynes casts his net wider than most—going as far as to include *Beowulf*'s Grendel as a “ghost”—⁹⁹he still proves without a doubt that ghost stories are not lacking in this period, and that the major reasons for this misconception stem from a lack of imagination, as well as the weak argument that other periods have more extant sources from which to choose. Some, such as Jean-Claude Schmitt, may not consider the flesh and blood monster of the moors a ghost in any manner of the word, but as a liminal entity, living in the wilds of early medieval Britain, scholars such as Nancy Caciola have argued that, because of this region's close ties to Scandinavian folklore, ghosts and other entities regularly had corporeal form.¹⁰⁰ Armann Jakobsson agrees with Caciola, and argues for “focusing on the similarities ... [and] the somewhat similar function of these supernatural beings, their fundamentally equivalent *raison d'être* and the analogous danger posed by them.”¹⁰¹ Thus, Grendel fits into looser conceptions of the term, and no one argues his supernatural nature.

There may be a finite number of sources, but they are not so few as to be counted on a single hand, and it is unlikely that they can all be read by a single scholar in a single lifetime. Even if they could, a finite number of primary sources can nevertheless be interpreted in an infinite number of manners. Other popular and academic primary source anthologies related to this topic exist, such as Brian Copenhaver's *Book of Magic*, Daniel

⁹⁷ Lecouteux would be proud; Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, xiii.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁰ Caciola, “Breath, Heart, Guts,” 21.

¹⁰¹ Armann Jakobsson, “The Fearless Vampire Killers: A Note about the Icelandic *Draugr* and Demonic Contamination in *Grettis Saga*,” *Folklore* 120, no. 3 (2009): 309.

Ogden's *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts* (both of which featured in Chapter One), and Scott Bruce's *The Penguin Book of the Undead*,¹⁰² each having their own specific foci and parameters. These, too, provide a wealth of sources, and if used in combination with each other, present almost unlimited avenues for further research.

The Interdisciplinary Turn

The most common way in which historians have broadened their interpretations of sources has been by turning to other disciplines; some authors, previously mentioned for their focuses or methods, have also reached far and beyond the traditional lines denoting the discipline. Le Goff's research is accompanied by an explicit call to the sub-discipline of "geography history," as almost always in medieval literature, descriptions of otherworldly realms for the dead refer to concrete locations, as though the supposed geography of the otherworld influenced—and was influenced by—the spatial conceptions of the living world: "Christendom gave itself over to a wholesale revision of the maps of both this world and the other."¹⁰³ Ariès has no qualms about borrowing methods, and even primary sources, from the discipline of literature; among such works, he analyzes the *Chanson de Roland*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Don Quixote*, Arthurian literature, and those from modern authors like Tolstoy.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Le Goff uses the methods of archaeology to discuss the significance of the placement of cemeteries in and around various cities.¹⁰⁵ Both *Annalists* of the second half of the twentieth century, these scholars made great efforts to popularize the use of interdisciplinary methods, but

¹⁰² Copenhagen, *Magic in Western Culture*; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*; Scott G. Bruce, *The Penguin Book of the Undead: Fifteen Hundred Years of Supernatural Encounters* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016).

¹⁰³ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ None of these date to the Early Middle Ages, but Ariès's neglect of the period has already been mentioned; Ariès, *Hour of Death*, 1-20.

¹⁰⁵ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, xv.

borrowing from other disciplines is inherently messy, inextricable from its context, and open to criticism. Every endeavor into a fusion of disciplines is inevitably different from the last, but that is where its strength lies. It is impossible, thus, to use such work as an exact model for future work, but nothing prevents future scholars from drawing upon these past works for inspiration and ideas, as conceptual ancestors of interdisciplinary cultural history.

In more recent years, other historians have also taken this route. Although Nancy Caciola starts her research just beyond the early middle ages (she begins her discussion with Hildegard of Bingen, d. 1179), she brings a feminist lens and a focus on the history of women to a field that has, for the most part until her contribution, ignored questions of gender all but entirely. Her focus is on the divine or demonic possession of women in the high middle Ages, lending them a voice they did not otherwise have,¹⁰⁶ and further aims to lessen the traditional portrayal of women as negative or wicked.¹⁰⁷ Her methodology functions as a model that present historians can built upon, and she herself is also a part of the diversification of the discipline of history. Her new monograph, *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* addresses this very question of ghosts in the middle Ages, yet with more interdisciplinary tact and attention to detail than perhaps any other scholar has yet managed.¹⁰⁸

Other disciplines that historians have borrowed from most recently include sociology, and medieval cultural historians could draw inspiration from these works;

¹⁰⁶ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 14.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Caciola, *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 1.

Avery Gordon, as mentioned earlier, exemplifies this,¹⁰⁹ and the recent monograph by Owen Davies also uses a sociological framework, mostly interested in how belief in ghosts affects living people, and how this is conceptualized in the early modern and modern periods. Although Davies works on periods later than medieval period, and his region of focus is England,¹¹⁰ it is interdisciplinary, in that it examines the social uses and consequences of stories about entities, the dead and the afterlife, using methodologies from sociology and psychology, as well as literature, linguistics and geography.¹¹¹

The history of afterlives, departed souls and other entities remains a fragmented topic of study. Many have contributed, making either sweeping statements or focusing on a single sliver of the available materials. Others, focusing their efforts elsewhere, either choose a tangentially related topic, or migrate to time-periods more bountiful. Some have over-categorized the field, while others have attempted to break down these limitations. Because more work has been done on the history of the high and late middle ages, with *Annalists* in particular having worked to quantitatively catalogue and categorize instances of the supernatural, the historiography of the early middle ages lags behind that of later centuries slightly, and efforts should be made to remedy this. Quantitative analysis is necessary, but categorization has its own problems, and the step beyond that is to move on to qualitative analysis; now that the sources are known and acknowledged, they must be analyzed, contextualized, and explored at length, which is the purpose of this study. Ultimately, the versatility of primary sources and the wide range of disciplines from which the thesis borrows may prove to be its strength, now and in the future.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, vii.

¹¹⁰ Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45, 133.

CHAPTER 3
CHRISTIANIZATION OF APPARITIONS,
ELITE AND POPULAR TRENDS

The Influence of the Church Fathers on Popular Belief

Although cultural belief in the supernatural predates Christianity by millennia, Christianity was undoubtedly the dominant religious force in Europe in the middle ages, and, as such, the trajectories of opinions and beliefs found in the works of early Christian writers from late antiquity are of paramount importance to understanding the centuries of belief that followed. Often, the religious writings of elite individuals are (due to the dearth of sources), the earliest and only surviving sources that provide any hint as to the cultural beliefs of the elites or the laypeople of this period of time. In examining selected works of great Christian writers such as Tertullian (d. 240), Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), and Gregory the Great (d. 604), and in considering how each author conceptualizes the nature of dead and disembodied souls (often considered ghosts by laypeople), it becomes clear how certain intellectual attempts to impose reason, order, and structure onto the chaotic beliefs of the Christian world were ultimately unsuccessful, while others endured for centuries thereafter.

Tertullian

Countless scholars, such as Peter Brown, hold Augustine of Hippo in high regard as the first great Christian to write at length concerning the theories about disembodied souls and their place in the universe, he was not the first to write about the nature of the soul and many of his ideas stem from the earliest Latin Church Father: Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, or, more commonly, Tertullian.¹¹² Tertullian lived during the late

¹¹² Claude-Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 17; Candida R. Moss, "Heavenly Healing: Eschatological Cleansing and the Resurrection of the Dead in the Early Church," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 1009.

second and early third centuries, and like Augustine after him, he was from Northern Africa.¹¹³ Pagan-born, he became Christian around 185 CE, and although his writings are sympathetic toward the heresy of Montanism (indeed he became a Montanist),¹¹⁴ he is recognized by Jerome in his *Catalogus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum* (c. 420), and it is unquestioned that he laid the foundation for later Church Fathers, if only for his use of the Latin language in his work.¹¹⁵

Tertullian, living at a time before even the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), had little Christian theology as precedent to reference in terms of Christian theology. The Roman Empire was not yet the religiously tolerant milieu that Constantine's Edict of Milan would eventually render it—¹¹⁶the deaths of the martyrs Felicity and Perpetua were solidly within his lifetime (203 CE)—but this did not stop Tertullian from producing his foundational writings.¹¹⁷ The timing of his life and work, indeed, gives his writing certain key characteristics, notably the Hellenistic philosophy of Stoicism, as well as a certain literalism, which can prove difficult to collate with later writers.¹¹⁸ Tertullian's support of the pagan Stoicism was not incompatible with Christianity; he was one of various early

¹¹³ Tertullian was Bishop of Carthage, and although he knew Greek well enough to have written in it (these writings are not extant), he quoted the Latin Bible, as it was “current and best known among [his] readers”; A. Cleveland Coxe, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian: I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers 3 (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 7.

¹¹⁴ Montanism is a mystical, apocalyptic, and ascetic second-century heresy.

¹¹⁵ Coxe, *Latin Christianity*, 4-5.

¹¹⁶ And even after Constantine, as Peter Brown has deftly argued, “the conversion of Constantine in 312 did not automatically lead to the enrichment of the Christian Church. This came later, in the last quarter of the fourth century;” Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), xxii.

¹¹⁷ Eliezer Gonzalez, “Anthropologies of Continuity: The Body and Soul in Tertullian, Perpetua, and Early Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 480.

¹¹⁸ Potts and Devanno, “Tertullian's Theory of the Soul,” 209; François Bovon, “The Soul's Comeback: Immortality and Resurrection in Early Christianity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 393.

Christians who in one breath would denounce the atrocities of pagan culture and belief, and in the next would present Stoics and great pagan thinkers as markedly separate from their pagan culture, and as having an *anima naturaliter christiana*, or “naturally Christian soul.”¹¹⁹ Tertullian’s was the first attempt to order the belief system of the nascent religion of Christianity, as he himself was “apprehensive of any efforts to assimilate humankind and angels, theological or eschatological,”¹²⁰ and unsurprisingly, he also contributed to the early tradition attempting to solidify conceptions of Church authority, reaffirming the gap between the learned and the lay.¹²¹

Modern scholars have considered Tertullian’s theology of the soul from a variety of perspectives. Of the most pertinent to the nature of the disembodied soul and of apparitions, Jean-Claude Schmitt, Claude Lecouteux, and Ronald Finucane all make note of Tertullian’s writing as being significant. In his discussion of Purgatory, Schmitt notes that the idea of Purgatory in the minds of those of the high middle ages owed a debt to the theology of Tertullian.¹²² Lecouteux, in a work contemporary with Schmitt, addresses in his discussion of revenants, or the corporeal supernatural, that Tertullian’s position that corpses could be animated by demons as easily as by a soul established a distrust in the supernatural that would linger for centuries.¹²³ Finucane also notes Tertullian’s early

¹¹⁹ Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stocism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-3.

¹²⁰ Dyan Elliott, “Tertullian, the Angelic Life, and the Bride of Christ,” in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 18.

¹²¹ Isabel Moreira, “Dreams and Divination in Early Medieval Canonical and Narrative Sources: The Question of Clerical Control,” *Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 623.

¹²² Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 179.

¹²³ Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead*, 45-6.

conception of purgatorial states, as well as an unspecified “place of comfort” for martyrs.¹²⁴

Other scholars are more focused on Tertullian’s influence upon the beliefs of his own time. Of the Christianization of the afterlife, Éric Rebillard claims that Tertullian defends early Christians by arguing that they did not associate with the pagan cults commemorating the dead (although later Augustine is quite adamant that they do),¹²⁵ and Giles Constable claims that early church authorities such as Tertullian allowed such rituals, as long as they were not carried out in churches.¹²⁶ Eliezer Gonzalez, in his comparison of Tertullian’s work to the *vita* of Felicity and Perpetua, argues that during this period, the continuation of the soul was more important than the continuation of the body, and Candida Moss regards Tertullian’s Christianization of late antique conceptions of the soul, claiming that, in Tertullian’s view, the soul of a saint appears with the marks of their martyrdom, but the ‘general dead’ return unmarked by the grace of God.¹²⁷

Of Tertullian’s thirty-one extant works, with dates ranging from 190 to 220 CE,¹²⁸ only a few focus on the conception of the soul, disembodied or otherwise; these are “On the Resurrection of the Flesh” (*De resurrectione carnis*), “On the Soul” (*De anima*), and “A Treatise on the Soul” (*De testimonio animae*). The last of these provides the most fully conceptualized iteration of Tertullian’s ideas; its translator, A. Cleveland Coxe,

¹²⁴ Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 35, 38.

¹²⁵ Éric Rebillard, “*Nec deserere memorias suorum*: Augustine and the Family-based Commemoration of the Dead,” *Augustinian Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 101.

¹²⁶ Giles Constable, “The Commemoration of the Dead in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. Julia M. H. Smith, *Medieval Mediterranean Studies* 28 (Boston: Brill, 2000), 172-3.

¹²⁷ Moss, “Heavenly Healing,” 1009, 1011.

¹²⁸ There is much debate among scholars on specific dates.

notes that the work was probably written around 203 CE, and that it fits best into Tertullian's apologetic works.¹²⁹

De testimonio animae

In this lengthy work, Tertullian spends much of his time denouncing the Greek philosophies of Plato and, to a much lesser degree, Aristotle;¹³⁰ he points to God and Scripture for answers concerning the nature of the soul. He also calls on the knowledge of the Stoics, agreeing that souls have corporeal natures: "That substance which by its departure causes the living being to die is a corporeal one ... if it were not corporeal, it would not desert the body."¹³¹ He supports his opinion with passages from the Bible, referencing Luke 16:23-4, in which a disembodied soul feels the heat of Hell as well as thirst, and discounts Platonists. From there, Tertullian goes into a much deeper reading of human existence, defining the spirit or the "breath" as a part of the soul and not separate, as well as describing the soul as "sprung from the breath of God, immortal, possessing body, having form, simple in its substance, intelligent ... free in its determinations ... [and] in its faculties mutable, [and] rational," before going on to discuss how and from where the soul originates.¹³²

For the purposes of this thesis, Tertullian's discussion of the nature of the soul is sufficient, although after his comments on the soul he goes into a detailed treatment of the nature of dreams, pertinent to the understanding of cultural belief in apparitions, as

¹²⁹ Coxe, *Latin Christianity*, 5-6; it is unclear whether Coxe consciously or unconsciously places Tertullian's treatise as exactly contemporary with the martyrdoms of Felicity and Perpetua.

¹³⁰ Tertullian only mentions Aristotle in his discussion of the "Difference between the mind and the soul, and the relation between them"; in this, Tertullian claims that Aristotle notes Plato's philosophical inconsistencies in this regard, but goes on to say that Aristotle is wrong in his separation of the mind and soul; Tertullian, "A Treatise on the Soul," in Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe, *Latin Christianity*, 191-2.

¹³¹ Ibid., 185.

¹³² Ibid., 202.

very often—as this analysis of the writings of the other early church writers shows—the appearance of the disembodied dead occurs in visions or accounts of dreams.¹³³ Of dreams, Tertullian has much to say: sleep is the “mirror of death,” and dreams “proof and evidence of its [the soul’s] divine quality and immortality,” although regrettably most dreams are “the diabolical contrivances of those spirits who ... counterfeit a divine power ... deceiving men by their very boons of remedies, warnings, and forecasts.”¹³⁴ However, some dreams, he assures, such as those given to the prophets by God, are, in fact, divine, and others still, are simply natural, “which the soul itself apparently creates for itself from an intense application to special circumstances.”¹³⁵ Tertullian goes on to detail the separation of the soul after death, how and where it might go, finally ending after a note about the evils of necromancy (which he calls “magic and sorcery”) by concluding that these methods are but ineffective illusions, and that only God can truly command the souls of the dead.¹³⁶ These make Tertullian’s treatise a veritable goldmine regarding as to late antique Christian thought on all things related to the afterlife and the supernatural.

There is, however, yet another revelation Tertullian discloses: more than formulating a structure that later would follow, he imparts in his treatise an account of an apparition. Interestingly, the monographs concerning ghosts by Schmitt, Lecouteux, and Finucane make no mention of this tale; the only source to make any mention of it belongs not to the realm of cultural history, but of psychical research.¹³⁷ Near the beginning of his discussion about the nature of the soul, he describes a “sister” capable of communicating

¹³³ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*; Moreira, “Dreams and Divination,” 623.

¹³⁴ Tertullian, “A Treatise on the Soul,” 221, 223, 225.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹³⁷ Potts and Devanno, “Tertullian’s Theory of the Soul,” 209; in this context, “psychical” means the supernatural, or what is beyond the physical.

with angels, “sometimes even with the Lord,” and who can furthermore see visions. She describes having seen a disembodied soul: “soft and transparent and of an ethereal color, and in form resembling that of a human being in every respect.”¹³⁸ Though the soul is said to be transparent, this anecdote does not contradict Tertullian’s assertion that souls are material, as following the Stoic tradition, “everything that ‘exists’ is corporeal”;¹³⁹ thus, what Tertullian means by corporeal is simply that souls are “real,” and not imagined.

The corporeality Tertullian claims that souls, and by association apparitions, have is clear in his “Treatise on the Soul,” but grows ambiguous and debated in the writing of the Christian writers who follow him in later centuries. As Stoicism faded from the minds of the learned, corporeality came to be understood as meaning tangible, physical corpses; more than corporeal souls awaiting the cleanse of purgatorial fire, these were corpses more akin to zombies, wandering and destructive. Tales involving such reanimated bodies in fact took on diabolical overtones; by the high middle ages, reanimated, physical bodies (*draugar* in Scandinavian legend), became corpses possessed by demons in the Christian belief, not loved ones.¹⁴⁰ In the orthodox Christian perception of the afterlife of the middle ages, reanimated corpses had no place,¹⁴¹ as the writings of Augustine will show. Ultimately, Tertullian found a more lasting legacy in that he influenced the later writings of Augustine of Hippo than in his support of Stoicism, and, according to some

¹³⁸ Tertullian, “A Treatise on the Soul,” 188.

¹³⁹ Gonzalez, “Anthropologies of Continuity,” 482.

¹⁴⁰ Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead*, 46.

¹⁴¹ Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 108.

sources, he helped to create the Christian conception of Purgatory, although the actual conceptualization of this supernatural realm is a much later development.¹⁴²

Augustine of Hippo

Approximately two centuries after Tertullian, Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) covered the same ground as his predecessor, but went far above and beyond the works of Tertullian. He wrote over a hundred works, and many of them influenced the early middle ages, in the works of later fathers such as the Venerable Bede.¹⁴³ Augustine converted to orthodox Christianity in 387, after a life of ostensible hedonism, and there is evidence that he intended to live out his life quietly in North Africa; his writings against the heresies of the Manicheans (c. 389), with whom he had previously held sympathies, caught the attention of others,¹⁴⁴ and he relatively begrudgingly accepted the position of Bishop of Hippo in 396,¹⁴⁵ ultimately connecting to the larger Church networks that were developing in the fifth century.¹⁴⁶

The context within which Augustine found himself was different from that of Tertullian. By his lifetime, Christianity was becoming the dominant religion across Europe; Theodosius had made Nicene Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire between 389 and 392, and as such, Augustine had nothing to fear from holding a position of power within the Church,¹⁴⁷ but it was nevertheless a period of flux; many

¹⁴² Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 46-7.

¹⁴³ Rosalind Love, "The World of Latin Learning," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, Cambridge Companions to Literature (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43-6.

¹⁴⁴ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 29.

¹⁴⁵ He became co-bishop in 395, and then sole bishop in 396.

¹⁴⁶ For more on the larger, gradual shift towards Christianity during this period, see Peter Brown's work; Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Felix Baffour Asare Asiedu, "Caritas, Amicitia, and the Ideal Reader: Paulinus of Nola's Reception of Augustine's Early Works," *Augustiniana* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 107-8.

new Christians, the once-Manichean Augustine himself included, were prone to falling into the error of paganism and heresy.¹⁴⁸ He was obligated, therefore—even more so than Tertullian had been—to establish the theology of the growing institution he was a part of, and so he did. Much like Tertullian’s theological positions, however, laypeople and scholars alike did not always consistently understand or agree with Augustine’s ideas; for instance, Gregory the Great (as we shall see) departed from Augustine on multiple counts, and others, like Gregory of Tours, had no access to Augustine at all.¹⁴⁹

Most modern historians who mention Tertullian also mention Augustine, and seem divided on Augustine’s true opinions on the matter of the dead. Those studying medieval belief in ghosts proper, such as Isabel Moreira and Claude Lecouteux, find Augustine’s writings contradictory. In some instances, he supports the idea that deceased saints can exist in the world of the living, but at other times, he seems to suggest that all intercession is the work of angels or demons.¹⁵⁰ Schmitt seems to think Augustine’s theology on disembodied spirits is very restrictive, and Nancy Caciola holds Augustine’s thoughts on the matter to be completely allegorical; whereas, Finucane reaches the opposite conclusion.¹⁵¹ Moreover (and perhaps paradoxically), at the heart of Augustine’s theology was the idea that, even as he tried to explain the mysteries of the unknown in his works, God was ultimately unknowable, and so “divine mysteries were unsuitable for intellectual analysis.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Constable, “Commemoration of the Dead,” 172; Rebillard, “*Nec deserere memorias suorum*,” 101.

¹⁴⁹ Giselle de Nie, “Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours: Two Sixth-century Gallic Bishops and ‘Christian magic,’” in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Doris Edel (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 1995), 186.

¹⁵⁰ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 30-1; Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead*, 42.

¹⁵¹ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 15, 17; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 5; Finucane, *Appearance of the Dead*, 40.

¹⁵² Licence, “The Gift of Seeing Demons,” 52.

Of all of Augustine's writings, a few are particularly relevant when discussing disembodied souls and their place, if indeed they have any, on earth. These are the latter chapters of *The City of God* (*De civitate Dei*, c. 426 CE), the twelfth book of *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (*De genesi ad litteram*, c. 415 CE), *Treatise on the Soul and Its Origin* (*De anima et eius origine*, c. 419 CE), *Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen* (*De fide rerum invisibilium*, c. 400 CE), *On the Divination of Demons* (*De divinatione daemonum*, c. 406 CE), and *On the Care to Be Had for the Dead* (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, c. 422 CE). Although "The Treatise on the Soul and Its Origin" may seem to be most in line with Tertullian's earlier work, "A Treatise on the Soul," of all of these, the work offering the most concise distillation of Augustine's ideas, as well as the one most often mentioned in the secondary literature, is "On the Care to Be Had for the Dead."

De cura pro mortuis gerenda

"On the Care to Be Had for the Dead" is actually a letter, one of Augustine's items of correspondence with his friend Paulinus, the bishop of Nola. The letter is of great importance, not only to Augustine's perceptions on the topic of the dead, but also in relation to his greater significance to the Christian world of the fifth century. According to Felix Baffour Asare Asiedu and Joseph Thomas Lienhard, Paulinus's relationship with Augustine, which Paulinus himself initiated, was crucial to the spread of Augustine's works outside of North Africa, and ultimately to Augustine's eventual recognition as a Church Father.¹⁵³ In the previous letter, Paulinus had asked Augustine about a religious woman named Flora; her son had recently died, and she had asked him if it would be possible, or of benefit to the boy's soul, to bury his body near the shrine of St. Felix, the

¹⁵³ Asiedu, "The Ideal Reader," 135, 138; Joseph Thomas Lienhard, "Friendship in Paulinus of Nola and Augustine," *Augustiniana* 40 (1990): 289.

holy protector of Nola.¹⁵⁴ In response, Augustine gives his opinion, and provides various details of his theology that, in some respects, resonated for centuries to come.

Augustine begins the letter by saying that, although he can tell by the letter that Paulinus would have good intentions if he allowed such a thing to occur, he would be in error for doing so: what matters most to Augustine is what the individual has done in life, not after death. He is relatively noncommittal in his support of prayers, masses, and alms for the dead, saying, “There are those [who are evil] whom these works aid in no way, [as well as] those whose merits are so good that they have no need of them,” and further that “whatever is done piously in behalf of a person is of advantage or is not of advantage when he has left the body.”¹⁵⁵ In this way, Augustine dismisses the entire concept of funerary practice; using Luke 21:18 as his evidence, he claims “not even ferocious wild beasts would hinder those bodies at the time of resurrection. ‘For not a hair of their heads shall perish.’”¹⁵⁶ Augustine thus makes clear that funerals, while pleasing to God and proper in moderation, are more for the benefit of the living than the dead: “he who has left the body can be aware of no injury to the lifeless body, nor can He who created it lose anything.”¹⁵⁷

In spite of this stance, there is a clear desire throughout the middle ages to preserve the body well, and later stories—such as the high medieval tale in William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum* (c. 1198) of revenants that burn the body of a monk alive so that he might not be able to arise upon the Last Judgement—clearly

¹⁵⁴ John A. Lacy, intro. “The Care to be Taken of the Dead,” in *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, trans. John A. Lacy, ed. Roy J. Deferrari and Charles T. Wilcox, The Fathers of the Church 27 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955; repr., 1999), 349.

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, “The Care to be Taken of the Dead,” in Lacy, Deferrari, and Wilcox, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, 352.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 354.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 365.

illustrate these medieval anxieties.¹⁵⁸ Augustine's stance becomes clear upon further examination of his context. In the late antique period in which he wrote, Augustine made a conscious effort to define the lines that separated the orthodox Christian veneration of saints from the unorthodox practices still carried out by newly Christianized laypeople, who tended toward the veneration of all dead ancestors. Éric Rebillard claims that while Augustine's work clearly makes distinctions between the ordinary dead and saints, he did allow for the commemoration of non-Christian relatives, in the hopes of the practice gradually diminishing, as Christianity inevitably grew more established.¹⁵⁹ Giles Constable and Peter Brown, as well, also concur in some fashion that Augustine was attempting to discourage pagan funerary rites, without outright denouncing them.¹⁶⁰

From here, after his initial answering of Paulinus's question, Augustine goes on to discuss the belief in dream visits of the dead: a decision that Paula Rose asserts is not a digression but "an essential argument in the discussion about the necessity of burial."¹⁶¹ In this latter part of his letter, Augustine's opinions concerning the disembodied soul become the most explicit. After having made clear that the soul knows nothing of its body after death, he notes, as Tertullian does, that "some dead persons are reported to have appeared either in a dream or in some such fashion to the living."¹⁶² He claims that it is foolish to think that the dead have any more knowledge of their appearance in dreams than the living do, saying that he himself had appeared in the dreams of Eulogius,

¹⁵⁸ Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 124.

¹⁵⁹ Rebillard, "*Nec deserere memorias suorum*," 110.

¹⁶⁰ Constable, "Commemoration of the Dead," 813; Peter Brown, "Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity," *Early Medieval Europe* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 13.

¹⁶¹ Paula Rose, "Textual Cohesion in Augustine's *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*," *Studia Patristica* 49 (2010): 343.

¹⁶² Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 366.

and yet had no knowledge of it.¹⁶³ Augustine's ultimate opinion, similar to Tertullian's, is that good or truly helpful dreams are "done by the workings of angels," but in a move distancing himself from Tertullian, he refuses to partake in the discernment of spirits, saying, "I should prefer, rather, to seek out these things from those who know."¹⁶⁴

Augustine, in his letter to Paulinus of Nola, makes efforts to differentiate between what Schmitt calls the "ordinary dead" and the saints, for Augustine does not make any attempt to deny that St. Felix appeared to defend Nola "when [it] was being besieged by the barbarians."¹⁶⁵ According to Isabel Moreira, this is an attempt, in the same way as before, to urge people away from the worship of the general dead, while maintaining the orthodox veneration of the cult of saints.¹⁶⁶ Thus, he discounts a tale from Milan of a son whose dead father appeared to him to uncover the location of a missing receipt of payment ("sleeping, his father told him where he might find the receipt which would acknowledge full payment of his original note"), as either false, or the intercession of an angel on behalf of the dead father, but allows tales of saints to go unchallenged.¹⁶⁷

Ultimately, most scholars conclude, Augustine's theory that angels are the predominant intercessors in the world of the living did not satisfy the emotional needs of the laypeople, who coped with their grief in part by believing their loved ones had such agency.¹⁶⁸ In truth, the popularity of Augustine's writings only truly took hold in earnest with the Reformation, in which Protestants began attributing almost all notion of the

¹⁶³ Ibid., 369.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 367; Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 18; Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 380.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 378.

¹⁶⁶ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 369.

¹⁶⁸ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 34; Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 18.

supernatural to the demonic.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, a glance into the works and context of Augustine provides a greater understanding of the developments that were to follow.

Gregory the Great

Over a century after Augustine, another Christian thinker assumed the role of organizing and elaborating upon the theology earlier Church fathers had already established; this was Pope Gregory I, Gregory the Great. On some accounts, he was even more influential than his predecessors, but he could not have been so without their efforts. Gregory the Great began as a civil servant turned monk, but like Augustine and Tertullian before him, he assumed power within the Church. Of Roman lineage, and born in the mid-sixth century, Gregory was obliged to take the papal throne in 590, and became known for his writings attempting to make sense of the religion to which he had dedicated his life,¹⁷⁰ notably some commentaries on books of the Bible, his *Book of Pastoral Rule* (*Liber regulae pastoralis*, c. 590 CE), and—most pertinent to the topic of medieval belief in apparitions—*The Dialogues* (*Dialogi*, c. 593 CE).

By this time, Rome had, by all accounts, fallen; Romulus Augustulus had been deposed in 476 by the barbarian Odoacer, and the transition into the early middle ages had begun.¹⁷¹ Monasteries were becoming a mainstay of the landscape; Gregory himself founded six before becoming Pope, and he also made efforts to spread the missionizing efforts of Christianity north, into Britain, while also, as the second book of the *Dialogues* attests, spreading the idea of St. Benedict as an exemplar of monastic life.¹⁷² His

¹⁶⁹ Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages,” 144.

¹⁷⁰ Odo John Zimmerman, intro. to *Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman, The Fathers of the Church 39 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press in association with Consortium Books, 1959; repr. 1977), v.

¹⁷¹ Brown, “Enjoying the Saints,” 1.

¹⁷² Zimmerman, *Dialogues*, v.

aforementioned writings contributed to the development of the Christian Church as an institution in the early middle ages, although they were of a distinctly different style than Tertullian's or Augustine's.

A large section of the literature surrounding Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* concerns itself with the origin, purpose, and, indeed, the authenticity of the work. The general consensus is that Gregory the Great's writings did not become markedly popular or referenced by others until the late seventh century.¹⁷³ Some scholars assume the writings were only attributed to Gregory, and were written centuries later, perhaps not even in Rome.¹⁷⁴ Other scholars argue that the idea of the *Dialogues* (or the *Book of Pastoral Rule*) being a forgery is a fiction of twentieth-century historians, the result of modern historians either fabricating misled topics of argument,¹⁷⁵ or having too modern a mindset: both J. Moorhead and Ian Wood suggest that Gregory, as a product of his time, is unfairly judged as either disingenuous or somehow intellectually inadequate based on the preponderance of miracle stories in his writing.¹⁷⁶ Matthew Santo, accepting the miraculous beliefs of late antiquity, holds up Gregory's *Dialogues* as an apology for the cult of the saints, which he asserts was inevitably doubted by certain skeptical groups during Gregory's lifetime.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Constant Mews is of the view that it is authentically Gregory's, but does not deny that "the tension between monks and established clergy in Early medieval Rome helps explain the relative slowness with which Gregory emerged as a 'great' pope"; Constant J. Mews, "Gregory the Great, the Rule of Benedict and Roman Liturgy: The Evolution of a Legend," *Journal of Medieval History* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 142.

¹⁷⁴ Dunn suggests it was produced in Britain due to the idealization of Gregory in the region; Dunn, "Origins of Purgatory," 238.

¹⁷⁵ Paul Meyvaert, "The Authentic *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great," *Sacris Erudiri* 43 (2004): 70.

¹⁷⁶ Moorhead, "Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*," 197, 206; Ian Wood, "How Popular was Early Medieval Devotion?" *Essays in Medieval Studies* 14 (1998): 1.

¹⁷⁷ Matthew Dal Santo, "Gregory the Great and Eustratius of Constantinople: The *Dialogues* on the Miracles of the Italian Fathers as an Apology for the Cult of Saints," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 421.

Those interested in the supernatural content of the work laud Gregory's *Dialogues* as a fundamental development in the trajectory not only of intellectual theology on the matter, but also of its influence upon the laity. There are various types of miracles in *The Dialogues*, only one of which concerns apparitions,¹⁷⁸ but all of which, according to Isabel Moreira, legitimize the work and thereby solidify the importance of clerical authority.¹⁷⁹ Unlike his predecessors, however, Gregory seemed to have no qualms writing down tales about the dead as having some sort of influence on the living, though this influence is not usually portrayed as physical.¹⁸⁰ Unlike past writers on the matter—this is in large part why his *Dialogues* were considered suspect—who convey ideas using predominantly abstraction and theory, Gregory aims “to illustrate theoretical assertions of ghosts” using anecdotes and stories,¹⁸¹ leading by example which, in some ways, resulted in much more staying power in the medieval mind than was the case for the theological discussions of his predecessors.

Dialogorum libri quattuor

Of all four of the books within *The Dialogues*, the last book is most relevant to the development of medieval perceptions of apparitions; granted, all of the books are useful in various ways to the topic, but the first three fall more into the category of hagiography. The first three books, all of which are structured as a dialogue between Gregory himself and his less learned companion, Peter the Deacon, discuss a variety of topics. These include men with spiritual powers, St. Benedict, and dozens of saints, in

¹⁷⁸ Joan M. Petersen names eight different types of miracle; Joan M. Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in their Late Antique Cultural Background*, Studies and Texts 69 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 134.

¹⁷⁹ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 167.

¹⁸⁰ Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead*, 49.

¹⁸¹ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 31.

turn, whereas the last one “focuses on the single theme of a person’s final hours and of the destiny of the soul after death”;¹⁸² all discuss the miraculous, but only the last discusses those who are not explicitly divinely inspired in some fashion. In its twentieth-century English translation,¹⁸³ the fourth book of *The Dialogues* has sixty-two chapters, far too many to reasonably discuss in detail. As such, a few illustrative examples will have to suffice.

Throughout the book, faith is a key component of Gregory’s emphasis; he states, “anyone who is not yet solidly grounded in his faith ought to accept what his elders say.”¹⁸⁴ After setting out the basic principles of his theology—that the immortal soul exists within the body, and that even though it is usually invisible when it departs the body, its existence is evident by the fact that a soulless body is dead—he attempts to prove that the soul exists after death with the use of illustrative anecdotes, saying to Peter: “I see a real need, therefore, of telling you how souls were observed at their departure from this world.”¹⁸⁵ From there, he narrates many accounts both of souls departing to Heaven, as well as of dying men seeing visions of ghostly entities, both divine and diabolical; there are also many tales of ghostly voices, as opposed to apparitions.

Gregory’s *Dialogues* touch upon many of the same points both Augustine and Tertullian had covered in earlier centuries. Divination occurs frequently; Gregory says, “sometimes it is through a subtle power of their own that souls can foresee the future,”

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Gregory [the Great], “Book Four,” in Zimmerman, *Dialogues*, 189-275.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 200.

usually shortly before death.¹⁸⁶ This is very different from both previous views, as Tertullian warns against false temptations of evil spirits in dreams,¹⁸⁷ and Augustine clearly feels any prophecy within dreams is the work of angels.¹⁸⁸ A tale recounted by Gregory in which an evil man's corpse is burned by "tongues of fire ... issuing from his grave ... causing the mound of earth over the burial place to cave in,"¹⁸⁹ brings to the fore again a medieval anxiety to preserve the body, in spite of Augustine's ambivalence on the subject.¹⁹⁰ What is most interesting, however, is Gregory's discussion about the corporeality of the soul. Unlike Tertullian, who holds the soul to be corporeal in the Stoic sense of the word,¹⁹¹ Gregory clearly states that the spirit is "an incorporeal substance," but also that "the incorporeal spirit can be held in the [corporeal] body" in the same way that it can be held in the corporeal fire of punishment;¹⁹² in this way, he remains only somewhat in line with Tertullian, hinting at a trajectory of belief in which Stoic thought has little lasting resonance.

Of particular note amongst these tales, and often mentioned by scholars concerned with the supernatural, are the contributions of Gregory's *Dialogues* to the development of the notion of Purgatory, as well as the lasting influence of his anecdotes into the high middle ages. Many, including Jacques Le Goff, credit Gregory the Great for putting forth ideas that would later contribute to the development of Purgatory;¹⁹³ Gregory explicitly

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 219.

¹⁸⁷ Tertullian, "A Treatise on the Soul," 221, 223, 225.

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 367.

¹⁸⁹ Gregory, "Book Four," 230.

¹⁹⁰ Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 354, 365.

¹⁹¹ Gonzalez, "Anthropologies of Continuity," 482.

¹⁹² Gregory, "Book Four," 225-6; also note that in this translation of the *Dialogues*, there is no distinction between "spirit" and "soul" and they appear to be used interchangeably throughout.

¹⁹³ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 91-3.

states, “there are just souls who are delayed somewhere outside heaven,”¹⁹⁴ and many of his stories suggest a temporary place in which souls may be tormented that is not exactly Hell. Two examples of this are the tales of the deacon Paschasius and the man of Tauriana, whose souls are confined to the liminal space of the public baths in death, until a cleric prays for them in order for them to move onward to Heaven.¹⁹⁵ Yet another is the tale of the monk Justus, in which his body is neglected for thirty days while his soul endures “the torments of fire” for hoarding three gold coins, after which time his soul is cleansed and freed by “Mass being celebrated for his release.”¹⁹⁶

According to most scholars, not only did these writings contribute to the development of the concept of Purgatory, but such anecdotes were also passed on throughout the centuries, eventually developing into the genre of *miracula*, and later *exempla*, genres utilizing the miraculous in order to convey spiritual morals. These would come to fruition in the work of Caesarius of Heisterbach in the thirteenth century, and would continue with the Dominicans and the Franciscans in the late middle ages.¹⁹⁷ The work of Tertullian and Augustine, although many of their core assertions—such as the preponderance of angelic intercession, the disregard of burial, and the corporeality of the soul—have faded into obscurity over the centuries, many remained pertinent to the development of cultural beliefs into the middle ages. Their influence on ideas, such as the sentient nature of the soul, the ability to benefit certain deceased souls through prayer,

¹⁹⁴ Gregory, “Book Four,” 217.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 249, 266.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 269; this is also the origin of the concept of Gregory’s Trental masses for the dead; Penny J. Cole, “Purgatory and Crusade in St. Gregory’s Trental,” *International History Review* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 713.

¹⁹⁷ Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 44; Mula, “Cistercian *Exempla* Collections,” 903.

and the importance of dreams and visions, lived on in Gregory the Great, and other later scholars' works.

These analyses are but an introduction to the many works of these Church Fathers, and a direction for further research would be to analyze all of the texts that have pertinence to the subject (such as Augustine's *City of God*, Tertullian's *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, or the other books in Gregory's *Dialogues*) and not just a few sources in isolation. Pre-Christian authors like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics certainly influenced Tertullian, but they also have an effect on the writings of later Christian writers as well; such analyses could prove to be beneficial. More than anything, it is the anecdotes these writers tell, of the nun who can perceive souls, of the son visited by his dead father in a dream, that have the most staying power in the medieval mind. Perhaps due to their emotive and affective qualities,¹⁹⁸ or their narrative and pedagogical qualities, these were what passed through the cultural milieus of late antiquity into the middle ages, and with them (to varying degrees) the undertones of the theologies of the Church Fathers.

¹⁹⁸ Rosenwein, "Identity and Emotions," 136.

Gregory of Tours's 'Grassroots' Perspective and the Beginnings of the Popular Ghost

In spite of Augustine's theological arguments positing a strictly saint-centred supernatural worldview,¹⁹⁹ it is clear in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* that there were popular manifestations of the supernatural beyond that of the saint, and in the work of Gregory of Tours, a near-contemporary of Gregory the Great, the cracks in the elite conception of reality also begin to show through. It is true that most supernatural occurrences, be it miracles of healing, visions, exorcism or control of the elements, manifest in the early middle ages through the power of saints, and are thus often relegated to hagiography; indeed, hagiography comprises most of what survives from this period, but Gregory often hints at more in the way he deals with the supernatural in his writing. Gregory of Tours was a bishop, and was thus inextricable from the influence of the Church, but in many ways he was disconnected from the intellectual Church Fathers that punctuated late antiquity. His *Vita Patrum* is a hagiography full of almost candid local color, illustrating an intriguing (sometimes convoluted) view of supernatural specters and their relationship to both saints and ordinary people. Even more illuminating is Gregory's relatively more secular work, the *Decem libri historiarum* or *Historia Francorum*, which offhandedly mentions instances that both Augustine and later theologians might have denounced as popular superstition.

There were times in the early middle ages when the living, waking world seemed full of supernatural splendor, and the works of Gregory of Tours demonstrate this admirably; however, without the diligent efforts of past historians, it is unlikely that

¹⁹⁹ De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 170.

Gregory's work would be considered a reputable source for study. Even scholars such as John Kitchen, at the turn of the twenty-first century, lament the lack of attention given to some of Gregory's more obscure works;²⁰⁰ his *Vita Patrum* was only translated into English in 1985.²⁰¹ However, this is still a grand leap from the beginning of the century, when scholars like Ernest Brehaut (in 1916) were only concerned with the political aspects of Gregory's work, dismissing any mention of the supernatural as "primitive" and "superstitious."²⁰² Early attempts by religious scholars such as Herbert J. Albert to address the supernatural in these works fell short of the necessary academic rigor, his analysis clouded due to his unchecked religious biases,²⁰³ but nonetheless, much work has been done by scholars since the early twentieth century to rehabilitate and to understand the early middle ages and its primary sources on its own terms, notably by preeminent historians such as Peter Brown, whose *The Making of Late Antiquity* remains unparalleled,²⁰⁴ and Thomas Head's and Thomas F. X. Noble's influential work rehabilitated the importance of late antique and early medieval hagiography, *Soldiers of Christ*.²⁰⁵

There is, however, no real consensus on how to proceed, and in spite of recent interdisciplinary turns, not all scholars agree. Classicist Danuta Shanzer, recently went so far as to claim that most classicists are uninterested in late antiquity: "paradigms of decadence, degeneration, and decline still reign in the minds of many ... while many

²⁰⁰ Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 60.

²⁰¹ Gregory of Tours, *Life of the Fathers*, ed. and trans. Edward James (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Distributed in the U.S.A. by Humanities Press, 1985).

²⁰² Ernest Brehaut, intro. *History of the Franks*, ed. and trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916; repr. 1969), xviii, xi.

²⁰³ Albert J. Herbert, *Saints Who Raised the Dead: True Stories of 400 Resurrection Miracles* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 2012), xi.

²⁰⁴ Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 1.

²⁰⁵ Noble and Head, intro. *Soldiers of Christ*, i.

historians ... may not have the chance to acquire the linguistic formation to study late antique texts closely.”²⁰⁶ She is not alone. John Kitchen, both a classicist and a historian, is also displeased with the state of the field. He dislikes the historian “indiscriminately incorporating a variety of scholarly trends and disciplines, none of which ... is specifically suited” to the analysis of hagiography.²⁰⁷ Alas, he does not, despite his critique of historians interested in hagiography, provide a clear solution. Others scholars, such as Raymond Van Dam, see no problem with such borrowing, and in fact encourage it: “the study of the period ought to form links with the best interdisciplinary methodologies available.”²⁰⁸ Ultimately, medieval historians often—although not always—only have hagiographic and religious sources to engage with, and the branch of cultural history is by its very nature amorphous, necessitating an interdisciplinary approach.

Some scholars of this period have produced formidable work, even considering that many modern historians still shy away from the strange, alien world of early medieval belief, which is full of miracles and the unexplained.²⁰⁹ Jamie Kreiner uses hagiography to attempt to identify a shift in cultural beliefs around and after the time of Gregory of Tours, who, after all, lived on the cusp between late antiquity and the early middle ages.²¹⁰ Persuasively, he argues, using the saints’ lives and *passios* of holy people such as Radegund, Segolena, Gertrude, Balthild, and other saints, that there was a shift

²⁰⁶ Danuta Shanzer, “Literature, History, Periodization, and the Pleasures of the Latin Literary History of Late Antiquity,” *History Compass* 7, no. 3 (May 2009): 917.

²⁰⁷ Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives*, 7.

²⁰⁸ Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 151.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

²¹⁰ Jamie Kreiner, “Autopsies and Philosophies of a Merovingian Life: Death, Responsibility, Salvation,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2014): 115.

during this period towards having a good death, as opposed to simply living a good life.²¹¹ With this focus on the deaths and afterlives of saints growing, it is no surprise that Gábor Klaniczay has been able to analyze the incubation miracles—miracles in which a dead saint appears and heals ailing pilgrims at their shrine in a dream—in hagiography.²¹² He does not use the *Vita Patrum*, but interprets Gregory's other works: *De gloria martyrum* and *De gloria confessorum* (c. 580s CE).²¹³ Likewise, scholars like Isabel Moreira begun to properly analyze the more eclectic aspects of Gregory of Tours's writings, such as the perplexing accounts of (often drunk) laity or unworthy clergy seeing supernatural visions.²¹⁴ John Kitchen may assert that historians continue to make the same mistakes today that they did at the beginning of the twentieth century,²¹⁵ but these studies suggest much more contentious historians than those of the early twentieth century, who without compunction called Gregory "almost as superstitious as a savage" for holding relics in high regard, and for ostensibly believing in miracles.²¹⁶

Before continuing, a point of distinction should be made about the supernatural apparitions in Gregory's writings. Unlike in later accounts, which resemble modern ghost stories of the dead, and sometimes specify that the deceased is returning "in broad daylight,"²¹⁷ most (although not all) of Gregory's accounts of apparitions manifest in the

²¹¹ Ibid., 130.

²¹² Klaniczay, "Dream Healing," 40.

²¹³ Ibid., 41. According to Edward James, "Gregory clearly worked on most of his books simultaneously during his episcopate, bringing them up-to-date, incorporating cross-references and so on," and so "precise dating of any part of Gregory's works is hardly possible." He suggests these works were all in progress throughout the 580s, and that the *Vita Patrum* was probably compiled as late as 592; James, intro. *Life of the Fathers*, xii.

²¹⁴ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual*, 3, 15, 137.

²¹⁵ Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 10-11.

²¹⁶ Brehaut, intro. *History of the Franks*, xi.

²¹⁷ Caesarius sometimes specifies "in broad daylight"; Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. H. Von Scott and C. C. Swinson Bland, intro. G. G. Coulton, 2 vols. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1929), 1:159.

form of dream visions, or else are left ambiguous.²¹⁸ This is a trend within the late antique writings of Augustine as well, as in his *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* (c. 422 CE), all of his examples of the dead returning are through dreams.²¹⁹ Gregory the Great, a contemporary of Gregory of Tours, seems to discuss waking visions in his *Dialogi*, which only problematizes the discourse further by highlighting the inconsistency across authors and regions.²²⁰ Scholars like Gwenfair Walters Adams have made the convincing argument that whether the living party is asleep or awake does little to change the cultural function or significance of the apparition, categorizing visions as any event “believed to involve direct encounters with or communications from the supernatural world.”²²¹ Using this boarder definition of ghosts, even some of Klaniczay’s discussion of incubation miracles falls under this distinction, such as when he writes of a sick woman, who “while she was sleeping ... it seemed to her that the most venerable blessed Radegund [appeared, and] when she awakened from her sleep, all trace of the disease had disappeared.”²²² Certainly, these categorizations are always subject to change and emendation, but for the purposes of comparing Gregory of Tours’s writings to earlier and later periods, Adams’s definition of vision as functionally similar whether awake or asleep benefits the discussion.

The World of Gregory of Tours

Much like the ambiguous nature of both the vision accounts as well as the conception of belief and religion among the laity in the early middle ages, this period is

²¹⁸ Klaniczay, “Dream Healing,” 55.

²¹⁹ Augustine, “The Care to be Taken of the Dead,” 347.

²²⁰ Gregory the Great, “Book Four,” 249, 266.

²²¹ Adams, *Visions in Late Medieval England*, 3.

²²² Although sometimes the pilgrim awakes healed after dreaming of only a reliquary; Klaniczay, “Dream Healing,” 46, [quote] 43.

widely known as a time of transition and instability for most.²²³ This was a world struggling with newfound barbarian kingdoms and the loss of centralized Roman authority. Cities all over Western Europe had impressive walls and fortifications from the Roman period, and were often used as strongholds against invading enemies, but they were unable to even come close to matching the populations and prominence they had had during earlier centuries.²²⁴ Cities were fortified shells of their former glory, and the rural population was in many ways disconnected from any form of centralized authority.²²⁵ The Christian Church was on its way to becoming a burgeoning institution, as Gregory of Tours himself is a testament, but it is also clear from his writing that this a confused world that is replete with inherited pre-Christian ideas of the supernatural.²²⁶ Ralph W. Mathisen notes that there was a pseudo-class tension between the poor laity and the aristocratic clergy, in which the lay relied on folk magic, whereas the richer urban elite cemented their authority through the legitimization of their magic as Christian dogma.²²⁷

However, it is clear that the lines were much more blurred than that.²²⁸ Even Gregory, a man mired in Christian doctrine as the Bishop of Tours, in his own writing

²²³ Peter Brown, "Gregory of Tours: Introduction," in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Boston: Brill, 2002), 18.

²²⁴ Of Poitiers, for instance, Barnard Bachrach says that during this time "[the city] suffered a decline in its population and importance through the Early Middle Ages that left substantial areas within the *urbs* [cities] either deserted or in agricultural use, [but] the 2,600-meter perimeter wall was kept in good repair and withstood numerous sieges." For more on the structure and or decline of cities and other fortifications during this period, see Bernard S. Bachrach, "Early Medieval Fortifications in the 'West' of France: A Revised Technical Vocabulary," *Technology and Culture* 16, no. 4 (1975): 540.

²²⁵ Brown, "Gregory of Tours," 11; Duard Grounds, *Miracles of Punishment and the Religion of Gregory of Tours and Bede*, Theologie 110 (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), 11.

²²⁶ Klaniczay, "Dream Healing," 37.

²²⁷ Ralph W. Mathisen, "Crossing the Supernatural Frontier in Western Late Antiquity," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity: Papers from the First Interdisciplinary Conference on Late Antiquity, the University of Kansas, 1995*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Hagith S. Sivan (Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1996), 317, 320.

²²⁸ De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 176.

recounts tales that seem to be more based in pre-Christian magic than in the orthodoxy of his religion. In one instance, he makes a healing potion from the dust collected from St. Martin's tomb, and in another he has no problem touting a talisman contrived from words of the Bible.²²⁹ As Edward James, the scholar who translated the *Vita Patrum* attests, Gregory had no problem experimenting, within reason.²³⁰ He drew the line, perhaps arbitrarily, at the efficacy and legitimacy of soothsayers and other sources more explicitly separate from his Church.²³¹ Nonetheless, his worldview was always at least an attempt at syncretism, a fusion of magic and Christianity.²³²

Just as there were not always lines between magic and religion, there was also not always a line between lower orders of the clergy and the laity. The circumstances in which one serving the church were considered a layperson or a member of the church was not clearly defined; there are tales of laypeople controlling relics, at least temporarily, and tales of countless informal ascetics.²³³ Gregory himself, in the *Vita Patrum*, writes of a woman (notably the only woman in his collection of *vitae*), Monegund, who, after the death of her children, "had a small room arranged for her ... There, despising the vanities of the world and having nothing more to do with her husband, she devoted herself entirely to God."²³⁴ Gregory put her in his book of saints, even though she had no formal connection to the Church, as at this time the criteria and

²²⁹ Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750*, 20; Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 187.

²³⁰ Edward James, "A Sense of Wonder: Gregory of Tours, Medicine and Science," in *The Culture of Christendom: Essays in Medieval History in Commemoration of Denis L.T. Bethell*, ed. Marc Anthony Meyer (Rio Grande, OH: Hambledon Press, 1993), 58.

²³¹ Mathisen, "Crossing the Supernatural Frontier," 319.

²³² De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 186.

²³³ Lisa Bailey, "Within and Without: Lay People and the Church in Gregory of Tours' Miracle Stories," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5, no. 1 (2012): 122, 131.

²³⁴ Gregory of Tours, *Life of the Fathers*, 125.

process of canonization were not yet clearly defined. Mathisen himself points out that the fifth-century *vita* of St. Genovefa—who could summon sea monsters, control the weather, heal or curse, and predict the future—under slightly different circumstances, would have been a warning against heresy and magic, not a call to venerate a saint’s life.²³⁵

Church councils attempted to define this process of canonization and other such church doctrine, but during Gregory’s lifetime, nothing was certain. A bishop was still nominally in charge of caring for all the people, clergy and laity, in his diocese, but rarely could a bishop control what was outside his own city, any more than a monastery controlled the surrounding countryside.²³⁶ By Gregory’s own account, liturgy was not even yet standardized, and varied by region.²³⁷ Not even Purgatory had clear-cut parameters yet; earlier accounts seem to suggest the laity had no place in the otherworld’s limbo, but a place in cultural perceptions seemed to grow for such beliefs over the centuries.²³⁸ Tension between the laity and the clergy was not uncommon, as there were at times disagreements as to correct belief, and a lack of respect clerical authority.²³⁹ Furthermore, it was a violent world of murderous kings and invading barbarians, so much so that Gregory of Tours wrote about and popularized the miracles of the long-dead warrior St. Martin of Tours, for in doing so he wrapped himself in a cloak of saintly protection;²⁴⁰ if someone threatened the bishop of Tours, they risked potentially

²³⁵ Mathisen, “Crossing the Supernatural Frontier,” 318.

²³⁶ Kriener, “Autopsies and Philosophies,” 125, 142-3; Brown, “Gregory of Tours,” 10.

²³⁷ Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 12.

²³⁸ Watkins, “Sin, Penance and Purgatory,” 6, 9, 16.

²³⁹ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 216; Grounds, *Miracles of Punishment*, 11, 14.

²⁴⁰ Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 82; Brown, “Gregory of Tours,” 12; De Nie, “Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours,” 182; Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism*, 20.

provoking St. Martin's divine wrath, which, as these stories show, was a very real threat to many in the sixth century.

Gregory's Writings

This is the point at which scholars begin to feel uneasy, and wonder if Gregory truly believed in the superstitious and supernatural elements so prominently featured in his writings. Certainly, he differed in many ways from the Patristic writers of late antiquity and even from his contemporaries. Not trained in classical or pre-Christian literature, Gregory was cut off from much of the literature many of his contemporaries and predecessors pored over;²⁴¹ indeed, it is unlikely he even had access to the works of Augustine.²⁴² Isabel Moreira explains it best: "In Gaul, without knowledge of the theoretical literature on dreams available to Pope Gregory [or other church fathers], Gregory of Tours found himself trying to explain, not always very convincingly, how it was that sinners and 'ordinary Christians' had important visions."²⁴³ Fully aware of this, Gregory was often self-deprecating in his writings ("I have indeed not made any study of grammar, and I have not been polished by the cultivated reading of secular [classical] writers"),²⁴⁴ and so it is unsurprising that in Gregory's work is not the high intellectual discourse of the Church Fathers, but a much more popular, grassroots representation of early medieval cultural beliefs.²⁴⁵

Thus, on several notable points he diverges from other writers. Augustine of Hippo, Paulinus of Nola, and Caesarius of Arles all fought against the syncretism of late

²⁴¹ De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 175.

²⁴² Grounds, *Miracles of Punishment*, 183; De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 186.

²⁴³ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 167.

²⁴⁴ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 35-6.

²⁴⁵ Grounds, *Miracles of Punishment*, 227.

antiquity, and desired to phase out the pre-Christian remnants of magic, miracles and dream visions.²⁴⁶ Gregory manifests the exact opposite in his writing; using these same supernatural elements to entice his audience, he relies on descriptions of real miracles to help visualize spiritual reality,²⁴⁷ thereby making the reader privy to otherwise secret knowledge. Ultimately, he tapped into the oral culture of his region and appealed to popular culture in a straightforward and concrete way that is unique from any other writer.²⁴⁸ The question remains as to whether he believed his own assertions, and Giselle de Nie, who has written extensively on Gregory and his writings, suggests that there was no real separation between his religious and physical worlds in his mind.²⁴⁹ Brown agrees with this assertion, suggesting himself that Gregory's God was an omniscient one, directly intervening in and ordering the real and physical world.²⁵⁰

This does not mean, however, that his writings are simple or deficient. Brown and Kitchen agree wholeheartedly that Gregory's writing is "unexpectedly diverse," and has "extraordinary versatility."²⁵¹ In the *Vita Patrum*, before each saint's life, there is an introduction situating the saint within biblical typology.²⁵² In acknowledging this Kitchen, in particular, stresses Gregory's exegetical capabilities, and in doing so comes closer than any other scholar to likening him to the Church Fathers, concluding that

²⁴⁶ De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 175, 170; Giselle de Nie, "'Divinos Concipi Sensus': Envisioning Divine Wonders in Paulinus of Nola and Gregory of Tours," in *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Papers from "Verbal and Pictorial Imaging: Representing and Accessing Experience of the Invisible, 400-1000" (Utrecht, 11-13 December 2003)*, ed. Giselle de Nie, Karl Frederick Morrison, and Marco Mostert, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 69.

²⁴⁷ Giselle de Nie, "History and Miracle: Gregory's Use of Metaphor," in *The World of Gregory of Tours, Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions* 8, ed. Kathleen Mitchell and I. N. Wood (Boston: Brill, 2002), 271.

²⁴⁸ De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 188.

²⁴⁹ De Nie, "Images as 'Mysteries,'" 85.

²⁵⁰ Brown, "Gregory of Tours," 6.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 4; Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 58.

²⁵² Ibid., 98; "Gregory's awareness of this patristic trend in interpretation," *ibid.*, 91.

“there does not seem to be anything in Merovingian hagiography that compares to the [Vita Patrum], with its comprehensive vision that spans the biblical world and the author’s contemporary society in a way that gives an elaborate coherence to both.”²⁵³ Giselle de Nie agrees with this assessment in her assertion that Gregory compares the events of the physical world with biblical events, and so expects to see biblical patterns.²⁵⁴ Van Dam notes that he has reservations about the use of Gregory’s writing to try to represent all of Gaul—for surely not everyone thought as Gregory did—but he concedes that his work is still the “most important evidence for our evaluation of early Merovingian Gaul.”²⁵⁵ Generally, there is confidence among scholars in his reflection of the uncertain world of the sixth century.²⁵⁶

Gregory’s writings are useful as long as he and his context are understood. Although he was a bishop, his goals were often as political as they were religious.²⁵⁷ His attempts to repopularize St. Martin and his holy protection of Tours were not only a self-aggrandizing and legitimizing method, but also an effort to unify his community.²⁵⁸ The best example of this is in his history, wherein he disregards verifiable historical fact in the *Decem libri historiarum* (c. 594) to portray Clovis and Reccared as fitting the traditional heroic conversion narrative of Constantine the Great.²⁵⁹ He completely disregards the

²⁵³ Ibid., 160.

²⁵⁴ De Nie, ““Divinos Concipe Sensus,”” 80, 85.

²⁵⁵ Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 7, 50.

²⁵⁶ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 110.

²⁵⁷ James, “A Sense of Wonder,” 48.

²⁵⁸ “The championing of the bishop as an instrument of social unity and community reconciliation”; Avril Keely, “Arians and Jews in the Histories of Gregory of Tours,” *Journal of Medieval History* 23, no. 2 (1997): 113, 103; Santiago Castellanos, “Creating New Constantines at the End of the Sixth Century,” *Historical Research* 85, no. 230 (2012): 561.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 567; Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism*, 75. And yet James assures us Gregory does not lament Rome; Edward James, introduction to *Life of the Fathers*, ed. and trans. Edward James (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Distributed in the U.S.A. by Humanities Press, 1985), 13.

nuance between the royal brothers, Reccared and Hermegild, twisting it into a dynamically opposed conflict of orthodoxy and Arian heresy, into what is, at its core, an exercise in Christian identity creation.²⁶⁰ Thus, in spite of Brown's assertion that Gregory was indebted to truth,²⁶¹ and Van Dam's conclusion that the "immediacy and the unpretentious candor of his [Gregory's] writings do allow glimpses into his personality,"²⁶² it is also crucial to consider that Gregory was never wholly without ulterior motive.

Vita Patrum

With Kitchen's earlier discussion of exegesis, it is already clear that the *Vita Patrum* is more focused on religious matters than Gregory's more popular *Historia Francorum*. The obstacle historians must overcome in navigating a text so full of impossibility and wonder, is how to interpret the "historically unreliable" and impossible (or at least the improbable).²⁶³ Hagiography long preceded Gregory's *Vita Patrum*, both of single saints, such as Sulpicius Severus's *Life of St. Martin*, and also of collections of saints' lives, generally known as *vitae patrum* collections;²⁶⁴ a ready example of this genre is the first and third books of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, in which he recounts the tales of twelve holy people who were his contemporaries, and then the miracles of various saints.²⁶⁵ Knowing this, it is possible to define how and where this text differs, and what it might mean.

²⁶⁰ Castellanos, "Creating New Constantines," 574-5.

²⁶¹ Brown, "Gregory of Tours," 24.

²⁶² Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 51.

²⁶³ Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 60.

²⁶⁴ Gregory of Tours' notes in his own introduction that he has decided to use the singular *vita*, as opposed to the plural *vitae*, because of "the one life of the body [that] sustains them all in this world," but the genre is the same; Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 28.

²⁶⁵ Dal Santo, "Eustratius of Constantinople," 424.

What stands out about Gregory's *Vita Patrum* is, as with Gregory the Great's first book, the regional, contemporary flavor of the tales. These were stories he undoubtedly heard during the course of his own life, from people not necessarily functioning within the church hierarchy. Some of his accounts are even first hand. In his account of St Nicetius, a bishop of Lyons, to whom he was related, Gregory casually mentions encountering him throughout his life: For example, "He [Nicetius] was at that moment reclining at the dinner-table, and I was reclining next to him on the left, exercising then the office of deacon."²⁶⁶ This is common throughout his writings, but it reconfirms the very personal, literal nature of his texts.

In his writing, Gregory seems to support every possible kind of holy life,²⁶⁷ sanctioned and unsanctioned—from the bishop, to the abbot, to the recluse—but he also leaves no question as to the hierarchy embedded in any given situation; as Moreira notes, there are missteps and imperfect people featured in his saints' lives,²⁶⁸ and Edward James in his introduction to the *Vita Patrum* is also aware that, perhaps due to personal bias, Gregory's bishops generally tend to weather temptation and strive with more sanctity than either abbots or hermits do. Most telling, however, is the clear hierarchy of saints Gregory seems to have conceptualized. As Klaniczay notes, saints in these tales can work together;²⁶⁹ however, as is clear in Gregory's account of Monegund's life, often this is because not all saints are equally close to God. In the tale, Monegund visits a blind man in a dream, saying, "You will recover here the right of one eye. Go then to the feet of the

²⁶⁶ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 68.

²⁶⁷ Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 87.

²⁶⁸ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 79; for instance, as Kitchen notes, the abbot Senoch, featured in Gregory's fifteenth life, has the notable (although not irredeemable) character flaws of vanity and pride; Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 66; Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 105.

²⁶⁹ Klaniczay, "Dream Healing," 44.

blessed Martin and prostrate yourself in front of him ... he will give you back the use of your other eye.”²⁷⁰ Thus, to Gregory the distinction is clear: Monegund certainly has divine abilities, but (his favorite saint) St. Martin has to finish the job.

For Gregory, the *Vita Patrum* is a way to stabilize and bring order to his world.²⁷¹ In his writing, he uses persuasive descriptions both to produce mental images for, as Edward James and others claim, an audience that was not necessarily gullible and willing to believe anything,²⁷² and to describe the interventions of a God who acts directly on the world in supernatural ways.²⁷³ Through his writing, he necessarily controls and shapes to an uncertain degree the lives of these saints,²⁷⁴ whom, based on some of their not-so-holy behavior (to be discussed below), he could just as easily have demonized, as Mathisen suggests St. Genovefa’s biographer could have.²⁷⁵ By his own admission, he is not a learned individual,²⁷⁶ but he does not need to be a Church Father to be historically noteworthy. In his sincere attempt to record the divine in the world in his *Vita Patrum*, there are a number of problematic instances, which ultimately raise more questions than they answer, but nonetheless shed light on his world.

Auditory Specters

In his thirteenth chapter on St. Lupicinus, a recluse and ascetic, Gregory notes that “trustworthy people ... stealthily approached his cell at night ... [and] could hear the

²⁷⁰ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 129.

²⁷¹ Giselle de Nie, “Seeing and Believing in the Early Middle Ages: A Preliminary Investigation,” in *The Pictured Word*, ed. Martin Heusser, Textet 12; Word and Image Interactions 2 (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 67.

²⁷² Joaquin Martinez Pizarro, “Images in Texts: The Shape of the Visible in Gregory of Tours,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 9 (2000): 91-2, 97; James, “A Sense of Wonder,” 52.

²⁷³ Kitchen, *Saints’ Lives*, 82.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 62.

²⁷⁵ Mathisen, “Crossing the Supernatural Frontier,” 318.

²⁷⁶ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 36.

voices of many people singing psalms.”²⁷⁷ This miracle stands out for several reasons. It goes against many of the common tropes of hagiography. Auditory visions or hallucinations are uncommon in early medieval miracles, which are usually accompanied at the very least by white light.²⁷⁸ In spite of all the discussions of dream visions, the witnesses seem to be explicitly awake, at least in this instance; Lupicinus too is assumed to be awake, as he had “fixed on the end of his staff two thorns,” which he propped himself up with under the chin to stay awake.²⁷⁹ No healing is involved in this part of the tale, and as it is before Lupicinus’s death, it is a mystery as to whom these voices belong to, although Augustine would no doubt suggest that the voices belonged to angels.²⁸⁰ However, if we look instead to Gregory the Great’s *Dialogi*, there are indeed comparable examples of purely auditory experiences,²⁸¹ which only attest to the lack of consensus and coherency across sources.

Furthermore, although perhaps experienced by the saint, it was clearly also witnessed by people who were trustworthy, but not saints themselves. It remains ambiguous who these witnesses were, or how holy they needed to be to hear what might have been angels with Lupicinus in his cell. Ultimately, this appears to be an unexplained event (potentially even a bit of dramatic flair) that Gregory uses to amplify the hermit’s sanctity. Whether it derives from the oral tales circulating at the time, links in any way to pre-Christian traditions, or is something Gregory fabricated for effect is relatively

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 62.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 95.

²⁸⁰ Augustine, “The Care to be Taken of the Dead,” 347.

²⁸¹ See the previous section.

unknowable without further study, but nonetheless, it shows the peculiarity to be found in Gregory's writing.

Shapeshifting

These particularities continue with gusto as Gregory discusses in his seventeenth tale, the life of St. Nicetius, bishop of the Treveri (no relation to the aforementioned bishop of Lyons).²⁸² One day, while on a journey,²⁸³ "There appeared to him a frightful shade, of great height, of huge size, black in colour, with an immense number of sparkling eyes, like those of a furious bull, and a large mouth."²⁸⁴ Gregory confirms that this is a demonic entity ("There is no doubt that the prince of crime had shown himself to him"),²⁸⁵ but the event is unusual, as it is the only one quite like it in the entire *Vita Patrum*. Demons are certainly not uncommon in Gregory's hagiography, but in all other instances, Gregory has no description for them, as though they have no visible form. More commonly, demons are mentioned only casually in instances wherein a saint simply banishes them: For example, "these demons, hearing his command, set free the bodies which their malice had enhanced."²⁸⁶

A description of a visible, potentially tangible, entity is rare, and this one resembles nothing human. The indication that it is a shade, who consequently "vanished like ascending smoke" when banished,²⁸⁷ adds to its incorporeal nature. The inhuman description of many bull's eyes is reminiscent of many later tales, especially ones pulling

²⁸² He is more commonly known as St. Nicetius of Trier, but "bishop of the Treveri" is his appellation in James's translation.

²⁸³ Gregory says, not without a comedic tone, when answering "a call of nature among thick bushes"; Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 117.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 117-18.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 118.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 61.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 118.

from pre-Christian folklore of *daimones*, sprites, and other supernatural entities with shapeshifting abilities.²⁸⁸ As early as the sixth century, then, the syncretism of demon and pagan entity is evident.²⁸⁹ Curiously, this mix of corporeal and incorporeal nature is currently of great interest in the study of supernatural accounts, and some of the most recent scholarship argues decisively that folkloric elements of shapeshifting and the like stem from Northern European sources, whereas the incorporeal elements of this tale probably have more southern European origin.²⁹⁰ That Gregory is able to, no doubt unintentionally, tap into the mythos of both the barbarian and Mediterranean cultures influencing Gaul during his lifetime, is admirable. Gregory does not tell us where his description is drawn from, and so whence he received such a demonic vision can only be speculated upon, but the idea that it was drawn from the oral traditions of the region is not entirely unfounded.

The Righteous Wrath of Saints

Wrath is considered in Christian doctrine to be one of the seven deadly sins, potentially unforgivable if left unremedied, unless it is divine wrath. In two instances in the *Vita Patrum*, the saints Gregory is honoring are either the victim of a saintly attack, or perpetrate such an attack themselves. The first instance is in the tale of the bishop Quintianus, in which the deceased bishop St. Amantius appears to him in a dream, as he is displeased that his relics have been moved to Quintianus's cathedral, in Rodez. He says: "Since you have rashly taken my bones from where they rested in peace, I shall

²⁸⁸ Simpson, "Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse?" 397. For more on shapeshifting ghosts, see the second half of Chapter 4, concerning Byland Abbey.

²⁸⁹ Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 963.

²⁹⁰ Caciola, *Afterlives*, 56.

force you from this town and you will go into exile in another land.”²⁹¹ In the second instance, the aforementioned St. Nicetius of Lyons returns shortly after his death to attack a priest who was publicly outraged “that the saint had left nothing to that church in which he was buried.”²⁹² Nicetius promptly visited the man in his sleep, “accompanied by two bishops, Justus and Eucherius,” who were also previous bishops of Lyons (but were not saints). After berating the priest, Nicetius “turned to the priest and hit him on the throat with his fists and hands, saying ‘Sinner, you ought to be crushed underfoot; cease your stupid utterings!’” and the priest was then bedridden with a painful throat swelling for forty days.²⁹³

This is not entirely atypical behavior for early medieval saints; as most scholars would agree, early saints were commonly accustomed to violence and war: St. Martin himself was a soldier. As Brown attests, this was a violent period.²⁹⁴ This is not even the only account of saints attacking the living for their missteps. In a British version of the *vita* of Gregory the Great, from the monastery of Whitby, the saint-pope returns from the dead to beat his successor, who was admittedly envious of Gregory (another deadly sin): “Gregory is said to have appeared to him,” and after chastising the man “he [Gregory] kicked him in the head. From the pain of that kick the man died in a few days.”²⁹⁵ Nonetheless, it is jarring to modern sensibilities that a saint so revered by early Christians could be so vengeful; even the anonymous author of Gregory the Great’s *vita* calls this

²⁹¹ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 43.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁹⁴ Brown, “Gregory of Tours,” 12.

²⁹⁵ Anonymous, “The Oldest Life of Pope St. Gregory the Great,” in *Saints’ Lives and Chronicles in Early England: Together with First English Translations of The Oldest Life of Pope St. Gregory the Great by a Monk of Whitby, and the Life of St. Guthlac of Crowland by Felix*, ed. and trans. Charles Williams Jones (New York: Archon Books, 1968), 116.

tale “dreadful,”²⁹⁶ although curiously, Gregory of Tours does not similarly editorialize his account of St. Nicetius; vengeance, for Gregory, is common both in his stories about the living and the dead.

The reasons for such saintly behavior are not entirely unexplored. Duard Grounds describes the *Strafwunder* or “punishment miracle,” in which saints punish threats to society as a way of imposing order onto chaos, in much the same way that pagan gods were believed to before the advent of Christianity.²⁹⁷ These attacks also resemble the traditional folkloric ghost story, in which a departed individual is somehow aware of an affront against them, and returns to take vengeance, or to set things right.²⁹⁸ Analyzed this way, these attacks are unsettling, but righteous and justified *Strafwunder*, as is clear in the case of both the priest and Gregory’s successor. The first is called a blasphemer, and the second falls to envy. Nicetius is also not without mercy, for the priest recovers after “having called on the name of the confessor.”²⁹⁹ The story of Amantius and Quintianus, however, more closely resembles the oral tradition, and is perhaps more reminiscent of a petty quarrel than a matter of divine justice. Gregory does not reveal why Amantius is unhappy with the translation of his bones, but as both are considered saints in Gregory’s mind, such an altercation is deemed merited and, ultimately, Amantius deals Quintianus no physical harm; he even says, “you will not be deprived of the honour which you enjoy” even in exile.³⁰⁰ Considering the “divine patterns” that

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Grounds, *Miracles of Punishment*, 2, 4, 6.

²⁹⁸ Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 97-8.

²⁹⁹ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 70.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 44.

Gregory so diligently embeds in his writings,³⁰¹ nothing is without meaning, and so degree of injury, holiness and sin all require due consideration.

Demon Alliances

What is perhaps even more concerning than vengeful saints is a tale that directly follows the attack of Nicetius on the priest. In this episode, Nicetius punishes a deacon, who obtains through a certain Bishop Priscus the cape of the deceased saint. The deacon does not appreciate the garment, which Gregory notes “could have brought health to the sick,” and goes about oblivious to his error until he decides to make socks out of the hood of the cape (which he felt was overly large for his head), at which point his fate is sealed:

As soon as he had cut the hood, made the socks and put them on his feet, the devil seized him and threw him to the ground. He was then alone in the house, and there was no-one to help the wretched man. A bloody foam came from his mouth, and his feet were stretched towards the hearth; the fire devoured his feet, and the socks as well.³⁰²

Whether the deacon dies is left ambiguous, but regardless, he is unquestionably maimed, and Gregory makes no mention of a healing or recovery.

This is a clear divine punishment for what is, in effect, the desecration of a relic, and the scene unfolds with an immediacy and descriptiveness for which Gregory is notorious;³⁰³ this is also fitting, as he had a particular fondness for relics.³⁰⁴ In essence, this tale is a *Strafwunder* with a demonic intercessor. Gregory does not explicitly say Nicetius invoked the demonic to do his bidding, but the vengeance was certainly owed to him. Nor is it the only time demons are surprisingly willing to perform for saints—exorcisms notwithstanding. In Gregory’s account of the life of Nicetius of Treveri,

³⁰¹ De Nie, “History and Metaphor,” 265.

³⁰² Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 70.

³⁰³ Pizarro, “Images in Texts,” 92; it is also vaguely reminiscent of a scene in a horror film.

³⁰⁴ James, “A Sense of Wonder,” 49-50.

Nicetius is defended during an altercation with the king by a demon: “suddenly a young man in the congregation, seized by a demon, cries out and begins to confess in a loud voice, in the midst of the pains of his torment, both the virtues of the saint and the crimes of the king.”³⁰⁵

From a narrative perspective, the anecdote is a direct way for Gregory to showcase the church’s holiness and the secular authority’s shortfalls, but the fact that a demon, and not an angel intercedes is noteworthy, and although these accounts do not portray the saints actively commanding the demons, it is clear that they have some innate control over these evil entities. For more insight into this phenomenon, Richard Kieckhefer notes in his work distinguishing the holy and the unholy, that there are various medieval accounts which liken the illicit magic of necromancy, or the invocation of demons, and the clerical practice of exorcism; in effect, these are two sides of the same coin, and can even involve the same rituals.³⁰⁶ That the “special friends of God,” namely saints, could have the ability to influence and control demons, when they could easily banish and exorcise them, then, is not so unreasonable, although the result is jarring. This conception of reality only reaffirms the omniscient, albeit questionably orthodox, hold God had on Gregory’s perception of the world,³⁰⁷ for demons, too, fall directly under His authority—and evidently also under the saint in terms of the supernatural hierarchy.

St. Nicetius of Lyons

As has already perhaps become evident, St Nicetius of Lyons is without a doubt the most prominently featured saint in Gregory’s *Vita Patrum*. In Edward James’s

³⁰⁵ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 116.

³⁰⁶ Richard Kieckhefer, “The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft, and Magic in Late Medieval Europe,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1994): 325.

³⁰⁷ Brown, “Gregory of Tours,” 6.

translation, his *vita* is thirteen pages long, about twice as long as any of the others;³⁰⁸ it is also replete with many miracles, and as aforementioned, some of the more noteworthy incidents. Whether this is due to a personal bias, as Gregory was related to the saint and knew him personally, or is simply a result of Gregory having firsthand experiences to contribute is unclear, but either way, it is no surprise that his *vita* also includes several instances of dream visions of the dead.

In the first instance of this, Nicetius is in fact not the visitor, but the visited. As a child, bedridden by an infected wound, he recovers and recounts that “The blessed Martin made over me the sign of the cross and ordered me to rise, since I am no longer ill.”³⁰⁹ His appearance to the priest has already been discussed, and in the next instance after that he appears to a prisoner who had called upon him: “as he slept, the blessed man appeared to him,” and after a conversation discussing the prisoner’s humility, “He woke up, and was full of astonishment at seeing his chains shattered.”³¹⁰ The fourth instance is of a blind man, “to whom appeared in a dream one night a man who said to him ‘If you want to be cured, go and prostrate yourself in prayer in front of the altar of the basilica of St. Nicetius.’”³¹¹ In the last instance, the saint appears to a peasant soldier who had called on St. Nicetius’s protection and had promised to donate a silver chalice to his church: “the blessed man appeared to him in a dream, and said to him ... ‘Go and give to the church the second chalice which you promised, lest both you and your family perish.’”³¹²

³⁰⁸ James, ed., *Life of the Fathers*, index.

³⁰⁹ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 66.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 72.

³¹¹ Ibid., 73.

³¹² Ibid., 76.

With his *vita* of St. Nicetius, Gregory provides to us a great range of dream visions, apparitions, and their functions. These are by far the most common sort of apparition in the early middle ages. In Gregory's accounts, there are the healing miracles of the sort analyzed by Klaniczay, also known as incubation miracles.³¹³ Even the tale of the prisoner, it could be argued, is such a miracle, as although not languishing from illness, the prisoner was immobilized and was not in a place of safety. He is rewarded for his appeal to the saint just as blaspheming the saint in other circumstances brings divine punishment, which Gregory explicitly calls "vengeance,"³¹⁴ As de Nie mentioned, this is a method of divinely ordering the world, and maintaining the status quo.³¹⁵ No doubt Gregory himself saw a divine ordering in the fact that Nicetius himself was healed by a dead saint Martin (Gregory's favorite) in a dream so that he could go on to one day heal others in the same manner.

We see again here, also, however, the balancing of the scales in the opposite way. The third dream (already discussed) and the fifth are testaments to the potential for divine wrath through saints. In the third case, it is nearly fatal, but in the fifth, it is ultimately more of a warning; for good measure, Nicetius even warns that if the peasant does not change his ways the man's family will also suffer, guilty by association. This warning is not only to the peasant soldier, but also to anyone reading it, and it is in this way that these dream visions to a degree precede the later development of *exempla*, or the moral anecdotes produced by the Cistercians,³¹⁶ and by extension also are the foundation of

³¹³ Klaniczay, "Dream Healing," 37.

³¹⁴ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 70. After the attacks by St Nicetius on the living, Gregory says abruptly "That is all I have to say concerning vengeance."

³¹⁵ De Nie "Seeing is Believing," 67.

³¹⁶ W. A. Davenport, *Medieval Narrative: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55-8.

what will become the medieval ghost story. Many of the same elements are at play in both contexts, although they are sometimes inverted. For instance, in the medieval ghost story involving an ordinary dead person there is the trope of the grateful dead,³¹⁷ in which it is not the dead that benefit the living, but the living that must help the dead to better their lot in the afterlife. Likewise, it is a common trope in later ghost stories for the ordinary dead to share pestilence with the living,³¹⁸ as a departed loved one returning is necessarily dwelling in Purgatory or Hell, and more closely resembles a corrupting demon than they do a healing saint. The very real fear of physical dead bodies spreading contagion must also be taken into consideration.³¹⁹

These supernatural instances, even taken in context, do not always fully make sense no matter how they are stretched and twisted. Often this is because Gregory leaves out information he either does not know or does not feel is important. In the fourth dream vision in the tale of St. Nicetius of Lyons, who is the man in the dream of the blind man, and why is it not Nicetius? Why is St. Amantius mad enough at St. Quintianus to appear in a dream? How are the bishops accompanying St. Nicetius when he attacks the blasphemer able to return if they are not saints? Why does the devil appear to St. Nicetius of Trier in the form that he does and from where does Gregory draw such information? The list continues. Augustine discusses the dead in dreams extensively, but dismisses them as the likenesses of angels (or demons);³²⁰ these tales are not what he had in mind. Augustine made a determined attempt to stamp out the use of such dramatic, physical,

³¹⁷ Rider, "Agreements to Return," 174.

³¹⁸ Keyworth, "The Vampire of the Eighteenth Century," 244.

³¹⁹ For more on contagion and ghosts, see the second half of Chapter Four, concerning Byland Abbey.

³²⁰ Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 347.

and admittedly pagan lip-service in his writings,³²¹ but Gregory shows a clear disregard (although more accurately an innocent obliviousness) for these efforts.

Historia Francorum

Gregory of Tours's other work, the *Historia Francorum* (or *Decem libri historiarum*, c. 594 CE), is in many ways even more problematic when compared to the writings of the Church Fathers than the *Vita Patrum*. As a history and not a hagiography, supernatural events found in this work, perhaps made up of tales heard from farther afield, often involve individuals who are not saints at all, for histories are entirely a different genre than hagiography. Far more popular than any of his other works,³²² the *Historia Francorum* is in many ways even more representative of the state of his world than his *Vita Patrum*, which is more indicative of his personal beliefs. According to Peter Brown, for Gregory of Tours the narrative of history is a succession of crises and resolutions, usually driven forward by God's divine intervention;³²³ unlike his hagiography, the supernatural is something consistently present in the background, instead of a focal point. He believed his job as a historian was to "report rumor,"³²⁴ not to profess the holiness of his kin or region of Frankia.

In spite of this apparent attempt at impartiality, the *Historia Francorum* is by no means an impartial text. Most obvious is Gregory's twisting of narratives to profess orthodox views, as mentioned in regard to his portrayal of Clovis as Christian champion of the faith and Reccared as villainous Arian heretic, in spite of there being evidence of a

³²¹ De Nie, "Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours," 170.

³²² Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 50.

³²³ Brown, "Gregory of Tours," 26.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

much more secular reason for this divide.³²⁵ This is, in many ways, an anti-Arian text, and this is also not at all surprising, as these views had been declared heresy at the Council of Nicaea in 325; Avril Keely also notes other instances of Arian demonization, as with the account of the Visigothic queen Ingund's violent refusal to convert to the heresy, as well as stories in which Arian miracles fail to produce results, whereas orthodox holy men can do wonders unabated.³²⁶ Keely also notes distinctive anti-Jewish tendencies.³²⁷ Another point of bias is inevitably Gregory of Tours's affinity to the Church's authority over the assumed authority of secular powers and monarchs. Time and again, Gregory portrays secular authorities in opposition to the church as brutish, deceitful and selfish,³²⁸ and religious authorities as the true and benevolent leaders of the Franks.³²⁹ Religious authorities, for Gregory, held knowledge and power, and because of this it is not surprising that in his accounts involving the supernatural and the lay, religious authorities always act as proper intermediaries.³³⁰

However, Gregory's bias towards the Church and its orthodoxy is not the only element of his writing that requires consideration: As with his *Vita Patrum*, his *Historia Francorum* reveals the influence of regional and oral tradition, as opposed to an elite, written tradition. One of the best examples is laid out by Andrew Cain, in his tracing of different versions of the *vitae* of St. Eugenius (one of these accounts is found in book two of the *Historia Francorum*). Cain argues that although written versions of the narrative

³²⁵ Castellanos, "Creating New Constantines," 561.

³²⁶ Particularly in Gregory's account of St. Eugenius of Carthage; Keely, "Arians and Jews," 106, 109.

³²⁷ Ibid., 110.

³²⁸ Brehaut, intro. *History of the Franks*, xviii.

³²⁹ Keely, "Arians and Jews," 113.

³³⁰ For instance, it was proper for clergy to interpret the dream visions of laypeople; Moreira, "Dreams and Divination," 641.

existed for Gregory to have copied, his version was more likely composed using the oral stories in the region, and is unrelated to the most popular written version of that time, that of Victor Vitensis (b. c. 430).³³¹ Gregory also, as Moreira discusses in depth, recounts the dream-visions and supernatural encounters of many lay people;³³² indeed, Gregory even records his own supernatural experiences from time to time, as examined below.

Ultimately, in spite of Brown's claim that Gregory tries to be objective, his own influences and intentions are clear; John Kitchen suggests that even his *Historia Francorum* "must be treated more as a source for the study of *mentalités* than as a factual record of events recorded by an unassuming or, as some claim, naive reporter."³³³

A last thing to consider when reading Gregory's history is that he (like the chroniclers who came before him) "interwove the wars of kings and the miracles of the martyrs ... to perceive in their entirety the order of the centuries and the system of the years down to our day."³³⁴ Kitchen and Collins acknowledge this reality, but it was not always so.³³⁵ Even though at the end of his work Gregory explicitly commands its readers to "never cause these books to be destroyed or rewritten, selecting some passages and omitting others," or else to be "condemned with the devil and depart in confusion from the judgement,"³³⁶ that is nevertheless the main sin committed by later historians. Ernest Brehaut (d. 1953), a prominent historian of the early twentieth century, produced the most well-known and widely-circulated English translation of the *Historia Francorum*,

³³¹ Andrew Cain, "Miracles, Martyrs, and Arians: Gregory of Tours' Sources for His Account of the Vandal Kingdom," *Vigiliae Christianae* 59, no. 4 (2005): 425, 432.

³³² Moreira, "Dreams and Divination," 622, 624.

³³³ Kitchen, *Saints' Lives*, 59.

³³⁴ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 21.

³³⁵ Sam Collins, "The Written World of Gregory Tours," in *The Middle Ages in Texts and Texture: Reflections on Medieval Sources*, ed. Jason Glenn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 54; Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, 61.

³³⁶ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 247.

but in abridged form. In his introduction he, too, acknowledges that “the *History of the Franks* must not be looked upon as a secular history,”³³⁷ and yet he omits many chapters mainly concerning prodigies, portents and signs that he personally finds frivolous.³³⁸ That said, Brehaut does translate many supernatural occurrences, as it would be admittedly difficult to erase them all. These are all important aspects to consider when discussing instances of the *Historia Francorum* that illuminate Gregory’s problematic, grassroots theology.

The Unworthy Bishop

In book five of his *Historia*, Gregory tells a story that will at this point seem very familiar after an examination of his *Vita Patrum*. It concerns the bishopric of Langres, (the incident even supposedly occurs while St. Nicetius is bishop of Lyons), and one of its bishops, Pappolus, former archdeacon of Autun. He takes over the see after the two previous bishops of Langres, Tetricus and then Silvester (both of whom were related to Gregory), both die. According to Gregory, Pappolus committed many “wicked deeds, which are omitted by us that we may not seem to be disparagers of our brethren.” These deeds, whatever they were, caused Tetricus to appear to Pappolus eight years after he had become bishop in a dream, and after harsh chastisement, he commanded, “Yield your place, leave the see, go far away from this territory.” Then:

so speaking he [Tetricus] struck the rod he had in his hand sharply against Pappolus’s breast ... [who] woke up and ... a sharp pang darted in that place and he was tortured with the keenest pain. He loathed food and drink and awaited death. Why more? He died on the third day with a rush of blood from the mouth.³³⁹

³³⁷ Brehaut, intro. *History of the Franks*, xvii.

³³⁸ For example Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 103, 143.

³³⁹ Ibid., 109-11.

What new can be taken away from such a formulaic and convoluted story?

Gregory does not provide much detail or clarification. Neither of these bishops are saints, and so they should not be wielding such power according to the theology of the Church Fathers, and further, it is unclear why Tetricus, not Silvester, returned to mete out divine justice, or to form such a *Strafwunder*;³⁴⁰ Tetricus does have more of a part in Gregory's narrative, with Silvester only becoming bishop and then dying of epilepsy (there is speculation that this is a curse), but to skip over the bishop makes no narrative sense, unless it was simply the story Gregory had been told. Other mysteries, too, go unanswered, such as why Tetricus waited eight years to harass Pappolus, or why he commands Pappolus to leave the territory, but then renders him too bedridden to resign and vacate the see even if he had wanted to follow these supernatural commands.

Upon this scrutiny, one must ask if this was a case of familial power and allegiance, more than of moral or divine order. In describing Silvester, Gregory explicitly calls him "a kinsman of ours [that is, of Gregory himself] and of the blessed Tetricus,"³⁴¹ and his omission of Pappolus's crimes on grounds of impartiality could have also been to mask the fact that he knew of no specific wrongdoing. However, it is also worth noting that the next bishop of Langres, Mummolus (or Bonus), was not related, but clearly was aligned with Gregory's family.³⁴² Peter Brown reminds us that Gregory used the supernatural to order the world,³⁴³ and if this is the case, then Tetricus's part in Pappolus's death may have just been part of that. Ultimately, Gregory of Tours does not

³⁴⁰ Grounds, *Miracles of Punishment*, 2-6.

³⁴¹ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 110; according to Brehaut's note here, Tetricus is Gregory's great-uncle on his mother's side.

³⁴² Mummolus exiled and despoiled the deacon Lampadius, who had also been an enemy of Tetricus; Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 111.

³⁴³ Brown, "Gregory of Tours," 6.

give the reader enough information to discern whether this was a tactical move on his part to influence his readers and to build up the renown of his family, or if this was truly just the ‘rumor’ of the region.

The Priest and the Doves

In another story from book three, we see supernatural occurrences even farther removed from bishops. Attalus, the nephew of bishop Gregory of Langres (father of the aforementioned Tetricus), is enslaved as a stable boy under Theoderic. Gregory’s kitchen servant, Leo, offers to infiltrate Theoderic’s estate and to rescue the hapless nephew. After a year he succeeds, with a bit of “divine help” (the front gates were open even though “at nightfall he [Attalus] had barred [them] ... to keep the horses safe”), and later, they also find “by God's will” a plum tree when lost in the wilderness.³⁴⁴ Finally, they reach safety with the priest Paulellus, who when he meets them, says, “Last night I saw two doves fly toward me and settle on my hand, and one of them was white, and the other black.”³⁴⁵ The priest was a friend of Gregory of Langres, and helped them home, and Leo became a freeman.

This account reads like a saint’s *vita*, although without the saint. The key participants are the two slave boys and a parish priest, who are clearly helped by the supernatural will of God, with no saint explicitly present. These smaller miracles culminate in the priest’s vision of two doves, which no doubt represent and signal to him the inevitable approach of the boys, who as fugitives require his protection. True, there is no actual human apparition, and the doves represent two living individuals, but the incident is supernatural all the same, for as with the shapeshifter of the *Vita Patrum*, and

³⁴⁴ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 61-2.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 63.

Augustine's ruminations upon angels,³⁴⁶ this model fits, although not perfectly, within Gregory's ever ambiguous worldview.³⁴⁷ Lastly, again, we have the link to Gregory of Tours's family, through Gregory of Langres, as though God's supernatural will was at Leo's disposal as long as he was doing Gregory's bidding. Clearly, Gregory was not shy about portraying the supernatural as benefiting his kin, and perhaps it is unsurprising that his autobiographical accounts also often involve such wonder.

Gregory's Own Visions

While making record of royal intrigue, Gregory recounts a dream he had while harboring a fugitive of Austrasia's court, the chamberlain Eberulf. Wrongfully accused (Gregory assures the reader) of the murder of Sigebert I by the queen, Eberulf claims sanctuary at St. Martin's church, even though there was a history of conflict between the two clergymen "In former times he had laid many traps for me [Gregory] in order to get St. Martin's property."³⁴⁸ Eberulf remained a troublesome lodger, often drunk and angry as though "he was so to speak possessed by a demon." One night, Gregory has a vision of Gunthram, Sigebert's brother, entering the church and demanding Eberulf; Eberulf holds the altar-cloth with one hand, although loosely, and Gregory says "do not cast this man out of the holy church lest you incur danger to your life ... if you do this you will lose the present life and the eternal one."³⁴⁹ He awakes terrified, and when he tells Eberulf this story, the fugitive says bluntly (and without fear of God) that if such circumstances arose

³⁴⁶ Augustine, "The Care to be Taken of the Dead," 347.

³⁴⁷ Giselle de Nie is of the opinion that "the boundaries between inner and outer events are blurred"; De Nie, "History and Miracle," 275.

³⁴⁸ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 178-9.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

he would hold the cloth with one hand, as in the dream, and kill Gregory—his protector—with his other hand.³⁵⁰

In another instance with Gunthram, while discussing the death of King Chilperic I of Neustria, Gunthram's other dead brother, Gregory tells the king that he saw Chilperic in a dream foretelling his death: Chilperic was "being ordained bishop, apparently, and then I saw him placed on a plain chair hung only with black and carried along with shining lamps and torches going before him."³⁵¹ Gunthram retorts that he had also had a dream in which bishop Tetricus (yet again), Agricola and Nicetius of Lyons brought Chilperic to him in chains. The ghostly bishops quarreled over whether or not to kill him, until Gunthram "wept and they [the bishops] seized unhappy Chilperic and broke his limbs and threw him in the [boiling] caldron." Not knowing what to think of this, Gregory and Gunthram simply "wondered at it."³⁵²

These stories have clear benefit to Gregory's self-styled image. As Sam Collins notes, Gregory often inserts himself into his narrative as a character, and this is often the historian's only real glimpse into his personal life.³⁵³ In the first instance above, he is warned through a dream of the danger Eberulf poses to him, but he selflessly defends the man anyway. In the second, both he and King Gunthram have apparent powers of divination, but what is more is that the visions are conflicted—one with Chilperic saved, and the other with him decidedly dissolved in a boiling cauldron—and yet there is no altercation between Gunthram and Gregory: they are equals. These are by no means the

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 272; Brehaut leaves this out, but summarizes that Eberulf is killed eventually by Claudius, a Frankish mercenary hired by Grunthram, who tricked him to come outside the church walls to be slaughtered.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 192.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Collins, "Written World of Gregory," 48; Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 50.

only instances of Gregory having visions; Moreira notes that as a child an angel appeared to Gregory in a vision, and had him write “Joshua” on a piece of wood, which healed his father’s affliction, and in another instance, after he was bishop, he saw a vision of his dead mother as he napped in the church of St. Martin’s.³⁵⁴ One could say, after all of this, that Gregory uses the supernatural to simply aggrandize the importance of himself and his family as close to God; this might be partially true, but there are also occasions that speak to other realities as well: instances that do not involve himself or his family.

A Woman’s Vision of Fire

In book eight, Gregory recounts a fire in Paris.³⁵⁵ Three days beforehand, a woman tried to tell people she had seen a vision. Those she told did not believe her, and claimed her delusion was “at the urging of a mid-day demon.” She insisted: “For I say truly that I saw in a vision a man all illumined coming from the church of St. Vincent, holding a torch in his hand and setting fire to the houses of the merchants one after another.” Three days passed, and her premonition came to fruition. No one saw this man coming from St Vincent’s, but a cask of oil did catch fire in a storehouse, and the rest of the building went up in flames.³⁵⁶ This is not the end of Gregory’s tale, however; when the flames “threatened the prisoners ... the blessed Germanus [a sixth-century bishop of Paris] appeared to them and broke the posts and chains,” and they took sanctuary in the church of St. Vincent. When the flames reached an oratory, St. Martin himself protected the building (and incidentally the houses surrounding it), as the man who had built it was devoted to him.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 84, 120.

³⁵⁵ Mathisen also comments on this incident; Mathisen, “Crossing the Supernatural Frontier,” 320.

³⁵⁶ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 197.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

In this instance, Gregory is no longer using the supernatural to build up himself or his family, or to praise. It involved not himself, nor his family. This seems much more like the common stories or ‘rumors’ Brown once mentioned, and thus gives us more of a glimpse at the world Gregory lived in,³⁵⁸ more than the world he was trying to create. He mentions saints, of course, and in some ways Germanus resembles Nicetius, from the *Vita Patrum*, who also has a fondness for repentant prisoners.³⁵⁹ However, his depiction of St. Martin is interesting, as the saint, in specifically defending the oratory dedicated to him, takes on the role of what in pre-Christian times would have without question have been a deity defending their place of worship. To add to this sentiment, just afterward, Gregory notes that Paris had once been protected in ancient times from fires, mice and snakes, but that after talismans had been found and destroyed beneath the bridge, these protections faded away.³⁶⁰ One cannot but think that this is just the sort of thinly-veiled paganism Augustine had been attempting to stamp out just over a century earlier.³⁶¹

The Magic of the Huns

Certainly, Gregory could not be everywhere at once, and neither could his noble family, in spite of how far-reaching they appeared to be in church positions. The fire of Paris is one example, but another comes from much farther afield. In a conflict between the Gauls and the Huns, King Sigebert of Austrasia (for he is still alive at this stage in book four) encounters foreign invaders “who were versed in magic arts.” They “caused false appearances of various sorts to come before them and defeated them decisively.”³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Brown, “Gregory of Tours,” 26.

³⁵⁹ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 72.

³⁶⁰ Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 198.

³⁶¹ De Nie, “Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours,” 175, 170.

³⁶² Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 91-2.

This is a very short account, for Gregory can provide no more detail than that; there are no descriptions of what these “appearances” might look like, or the type of magic they used. What is clear is that Gregory seems to have no problem believing in a world full of pagan, as well as Christian, supernatural phenomena,³⁶³ and to further support that, he makes no comment about the Huns being in league with demons, even though, especially considering his description of the “prince of crime” in the *Vita Patrum*,³⁶⁴ such an accusation would not have seemed out of place. On the contrary, he explains how Sigebert exchanged gifts with the Huns to avoid being taken prisoner and to solidify a peace. The Huns, still pagan, clearly have access to a manner of magic far removed from the types of divine supernatural events Gregory made so ubiquitous throughout both his *Historia Francorum* and his *Vita Patrum*.

It is clear from all of these instances that in the sixth century, a time of relative instability, such questions of faith were understandably far from being answered and settled. Gregory’s saints, if they can all be called saints at all, along with their demonic and angelic foils, are certainly supernatural intercessors and bastions of God’s power on earth, but at times their methods and behaviors strike even those familiar with hagiography as questionable. Certainly, at times, he seems to use the trappings of hagiography to imbue himself and his family with special, divine importance, but at other times, his accounts of the supernatural seem to have no other purpose than to tell the rumor of the land, and those in particular give insight into the world in which he lived. He succeeded, perhaps without fully meaning to, in providing glimpses into the popular

³⁶³ Mathisen, “Crossing the Supernatural Frontier,” 311.

³⁶⁴ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 118.

beliefs that Augustine and his intellectual brethren rejected.³⁶⁵ Even in instances where he is probably manipulating the narrative to benefit his own image, those instances, too, reflect the cultural beliefs of the early middle ages, and cannot be dismissed as pure vainglory.

These questions are never entirely settled, but they do not have to be. This uncertainty is only evidence to support fluctuating and organic belief systems of the middle ages. As Giselle de Nie states, borrowing from the psychologist Silvan S. Tompkins: “The world we perceive is a dream we learn to have from a script we have not written.”³⁶⁶ In a sense, Gregory of Tours, as he stumbled through life, in his position of authority as a bishop, was attempting to write this script for the benefit of others. He clashed in many ways with those great thinkers who came before him, and many who would come after, but he believed in the divine powers of God, and in a magical world within which one could have a personal connection to the supernatural power of the divine.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 39.

³⁶⁶ De Nie, “The Shape of the Invisible,” 85.

³⁶⁷ De Nie, “History and Miracle,” 265; Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 121.

CHAPTER 4
***EXEMPLA* AND DIDACTIC BORROWING**
FROM ORAL TRADITION

**The Restless and the Restful Dead: Spirituality, Morality,
and Cultural Belief in the *Exempla* of Caesarius of Heisterbach**

Compared to accounts of wars and regicides that decided the fate of kingdoms for centuries to come, or economic and census records that provide a unique glimpse into the past, impossible stories of saints appearing to the faithful, or of a loved one returning briefly from Hell or Purgatory, seem of questionably little importance to the modern historian, but such a story's significance to the realm of cultural history is boundless. The influence of belief in ghosts is measured by their appearance and function in the historical record throughout the middle ages, but the neglect of empirically-minded historians, as well as the quantity and variety of the extant sources, makes the tracing of such a subject difficult—but not impossible—as various cultural historians have found. In looking at just a few anecdotes from a single source of the thirteenth century, the Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*, the diversity and unwieldiness of the genre becomes clear. The *Dialogus miraculorum* is often a prime example of not only the potential effect that such beliefs produced within the culture, but also the Cistercian efforts to use them to instill morality into both the clergy as well as the common people, and to solidify their own identity; several of the *exempla* excerpted from Caesarius's opus use the supernatural element of apparition to instruct by example or emphasize the importance of topics such as contrition, confession, church hierarchy, virtue, vanity, and the afterlife and unintentionally highlight realities concerning sexuality, gender, travel, the marginal "Other," oral traditions, order rivalry, and more; thus, these anecdotes illustrate just how integral to all levels of culture these beliefs truly were.

Definition and Categorization

Caesarius's work is (with over 700 tales) a massive, complex, and unbelievably rich source; each anecdote presents its own significance, and it would be a nearly impossible undertaking for any one historian to produce a qualitative analysis of each *exemplum*. Not surprisingly, scholars of the history of ghosts gravitate to these anecdotes, or *exempla*, of Caesarius of Heisterbach, because in spite of the fact that his standing as a monk set him apart from the general population, in many ways he still provides a window into medieval cultural belief systems. However, before a deep analysis of his work can occur, one must remember that the Church Fathers did not have a consensus on what a ghost was, and in spite of the adamant stance of Augustine of Hippo against "ordinary ghosts" returning to visit the living, the cultural desire to maintain a relationship with the dead proved too strong.³⁶⁸ As such, later Christian writers such as Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours have no qualms about the appearance of "ordinary" ghosts in the tales that they record, by the high middle ages, and in the work of Caesarius, Augustine's opinion about the supernatural had been all but forgotten.³⁶⁹

The reality of what exactly laypeople of the high middle ages thought is in large part unknowable, and although most scholars warn against taking sources, especially sources involving the impossible, the miraculous, or the paranormal, at face value,³⁷⁰ others have dared to speculate. Aron Gurevich is one of those who put forth such an argument; he claims that medieval people took metaphor literally, for the idea "that sins have a physical weight could not seem strange to people who believed in the weighing of

³⁶⁸ See the chapter on the Church Fathers for more.

³⁶⁹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 92; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 34.

³⁷⁰ Mula, "Cistercian *Exempla* Collections," 908.

good and evil deeds on the scales at the Last Judgement.”³⁷¹ Gurevich even suggests that while many clerics most likely would have used the supernatural in their sermons metaphorically, or disingenuously, the truly sincere preacher would not endanger their own souls by using tales they did not themselves believe,³⁷² hinting at the possibility of widespread belief. In the same vein, Giselle de Nie, in discussing the miracles in Gregory of Tours’s *Historia Francorum*, claims Gregory had faith in the miraculous events he records as proof of “objective existence of his [God’s] images and divine patterns,”³⁷³ and even suggest that the imagination and written word have the potential to “create reality,” as illustrated in the posthumous healing miracles of so many saints.³⁷⁴

Proving whether this is true is ultimately not the duty of the historian of cultural belief. One cannot prove the minds of individuals any more than one can prove the existence of the supernatural. Accounts of unexplained or impossible happenings are not intended to prove the unprovable; instead, these supernatural elements highlight trends in medieval beliefs that have been generally neglected by scholarly endeavor in the past. Because of the infinite imaginative possibilities of such supernatural tales, and because of the ambiguity present in a large portion of medieval primary sources, the question of how to categorize such sources is a necessary concern. For the purposes of this analysis, as described in Chapter Two, a deep qualitative examination of key representative *exempla* will prove a boon to the understanding of this topic, as in many cases, these tales have never been considered as single entities within the *Dialogus miraculorum*. Before this

³⁷¹ Aron Jakovlevich Gurevich, “Spirit and Matter: The Ambivalence of Medieval Everyday Religiosity,” *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 57 (2008): 7.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁷³ De Nie, “History and Miracle,” 265.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 279, 276.

sort of analysis, however, it is crucial that efforts be made to contextualize Caesarius and his *exempla* in a greater Cistercian context.

Caesarius's Context and Purpose

Caesarius of Heisterbach was a Cistercian monk of the thirteenth century (1180-1240), and probably hailed from Cologne, now in modern Germany. By his own account, he became a monk around 1199, when he heard the tale of a holy man of Clairvaux, who, while tending the fields, saw an apparition of “the Virgin Mary, the holy mother of God, and her mother, S. Anne, and S. Mary Magdalene, [who] wiped the sweat from the brows of the monks and fanned them with the flaps of their sleeves.”³⁷⁵ Certainly, this is a supernatural event, unique in and of itself, as Mary is neither angel, nor demon, nor ghost, as she ascended to Heaven without having died. Thus, if one is to begin categorizing the multitudes of the divine and supernatural, she belongs in an entirely different category. Nonetheless, she and the other two saints are apparitions in a general sense of the word, and visions of her are so important that Caesarius's work has an entire section—no. VII—dedicated to tales “Of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” and furthermore she appears at various other points in the work; the aforementioned tale is from “Book I: Of Conversion.” On the one hand, the tale of Caesarius's own conversion links him to the wild growth in popularity of veneration of the Virgin Mary occurring during his lifetime;³⁷⁶ it shows his deftness at writing down the oral traditions of the past, and perhaps, too, his close connection to the work, and the desire to recount what he believes to be the truth.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Caesarius, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 1:25.

³⁷⁶ In fact, a key characteristic of the Cistercian order is the dedication of their churches to the Virgin Mary.

³⁷⁷ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 127; Mula, “Cistercian *Exempla* Collections,” 908.

Soon after Caesarius took his vows in 1199, he was put in charge of teaching the novices in the Cistercian monastery, and this explains his dedication to the writing of anecdotes, or *exempla*. *Exempla* are more than just short stories for the sake of entertainment (although entertain they certainly did);³⁷⁸ nor were they simply for the recording of history for posterity. On the contrary, *exempla* are short stories with some sort of religious or spiritual significance—hence the title *Dialogus miraculorum* (or *The Dialogue on Miracles*)—meant to teach morals through example and with the emphasis on the miraculous. More than a form of entertainment, the miraculous was meant to lend legitimacy and divine authority to Caesarius's morals; in a tale in which a lay carpenter sees an apparition in a dream, it is up to the cleric as a learned individual of authority, to explain its significance.³⁷⁹ *Exempla*, like saints' lives, are meant to instill faith, morals, and obedience into the audience. The beginnings of this genre find their roots in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, whose fourth section as noted in Chapter Three has many stories reminiscent of later *exempla*, such as the ghost at a bath who is freed after being prayed for, and likewise the monk whose body is severely mistreated due to his hoarding of three gold coins in life, but who is freed from Purgatory by the diligent prayers of his brethren.³⁸⁰ These short stories also appear in the tradition of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, from which Gregory of Tours' *Vita Patrum* draws influence.³⁸¹

Exempla such as Caesarius's were common all over Europe at this time, and in later centuries, more secular iterations of the genre include the tales of Chaucer and

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 906.

³⁷⁹ Gurevich, "Spirit and Matter," 8.

³⁸⁰ Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 44; Le Goff also notes the importance of the location of baths in relation to the development of Purgatory, in that they are "a mixture of the supernatural and the quotidian in which bath attendants are ghosts and the vapors of the bath are effluvia of the other world;" Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 93.

³⁸¹ Mula, "Cistercian *Exempla* Collections," 904.

Robert Mannyng.³⁸² Caesarius's own time was overflowing with compilations of *exempla*, and works such as the *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicatorum* (c. 1275), the *Alphabetum narrationum* (c. 1294), the *Collectaneum exemplorum et visionum Clarevallense* (c. 1170), the *Liber miraculorum et visionum* (c. 1175), and the *Exordium magnum* (1186-1221) were also coming to fruition.³⁸³ Most, as the titles suggest, are anonymous compilations, and this is because of the original oral and folkloric nature of the majority of the tales. Written *exempla*, as W. A. Davenport suggests, inevitably record the "tribal memory" the author or compiler has experienced, not only within the monastic culture the author is most likely from, but also within the lay community with which the monastery necessarily interacted.³⁸⁴ That is why there is a tendency towards realism; *exempla* are often anecdotal and local, adding to their teachable nature.³⁸⁵

Even though it is prescriptive literature, carefully molded into moral Christian tales from often folkloric, pre-Christian tradition, because the narratives often pull from the culture of the region, they can reveal much about medieval customs and beliefs.³⁸⁶ More often than not, the everyday lives of both the clergy and the laity shine through in the details of the moral narrative.³⁸⁷ This is because of the difference that Jean-Claude Schmitt points out between *exempla* and the earlier *miracula*. *Miracula*, such as the works of Peter the Venerable, were abstract, and universal, meant for spiritual

³⁸² Davenport, *Narrative*, 66.

³⁸³ Broedel, "The Grateful Dead," 97; Mula, "Cistercian *Exempla* Collections," 905.

³⁸⁴ Davenport, *Narrative*, 4.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁸⁶ James A. Grabowska, "Let the Text Speak for Itself: What Medieval *Exempla* Can Teach Us about the Middle Ages," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 5, no. 2 (1997): 33; Broedel, "The Grateful Dead," 105.

³⁸⁷ Mula, "Cistercian *Exempla* Collections," 906.

contemplation, whereas the *exempla* of the high middle ages were specific, imaginative and relatable, to enhance the efficacy of their didactic purpose.³⁸⁸

Caesarius's work, as well as other *exempla* collections, therefore renders the flexible, organic, but ultimately unknowable oral histories of these medieval pasts fixed, moralized, and rewritten through a Christian lens, but nonetheless, intact.³⁸⁹ Hans Peter Broedel illustrates this in his discussion of the compromise between the learned and the popular, in which *exempla* represent an ideal that is recognizable and acceptable to the lay, but is also orthodox. His most telling anecdote, from *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium*, is of a woman who is murdered over rumors that she had a hoard of gold; she returns to tell her sister that she is in Purgatory for leaving church early, and to request prayers so that her time there might be lessened.³⁹⁰ The narrative flow is broken, with the assumption being that in the original folklore, the woman certainly returned from the dead to avenge her own death, or to tell her sister where the gold was. Instead of this, she says of the murderer that a "good fighter [Christ himself]" will avenge her in good time.³⁹¹ The original avenging narrative trajectory would have run counter to the morals of the Church, and so it was changed, haphazardly, when it was written down, to better conform to ecclesiastical views.

In the same way, Le Goff calls Caesarius "a well-placed observer," ready to record the events he hears and sees in his *Dialogus miraculorum*, at least in modified form.³⁹² For instance, he collects tales that were no doubt circulating among the lay and

³⁸⁸ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 124, 129.

³⁸⁹ Grabowska, "Let the Text Speak for Itself," 33.

³⁹⁰ Broedel, "The Grateful Dead," 97; this is also another example of the authority of the clergy, as in the tale the dead woman's sister is forced to ask a priest to explain the garbled words of the apparition she had witnessed; see Gurevich, "Spirit and Matter," 8.

³⁹¹ Broedel, "The Grateful Dead," 100.

³⁹² Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 308.

the learned in his region, and writes them down for perhaps the first time. According to Lecouteux, until the writings of Caesarius, there had been no written mention of corporeal undead in the German lands.³⁹³ The booming popularity of the genre of *exempla* as written compilation ended, in a sense, with Caesarius's work.³⁹⁴ *Exempla* collections like the aforementioned quickly spread east of Cologne, remaining within Cistercian monasteries, but after Caesarius's *Dialogus miraculorum* of the thirteenth century, none followed exactly his example, perhaps because it was around this time that the Franciscans and Dominicans were quickly gaining in popularity, and appropriated the genre to use in their own sermons.³⁹⁵ Caesarius, however, made *exempla* into more than just moral anecdotes. In keeping with his Cistercian identity, Caesarius solidified the collective memory of the Cistercians into written form and perfected the use of *exempla* as a teaching tool.

The Cistercians originated at the turn of the twelfth century in 1098 as a reforming branch of the Benedictine order. As part of the Gregorian reform, their goal was to pursue, in a similar fashion to the Cluniacs, the basic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in a way that most Benedictine monasteries had grown lax on over the centuries. Although the Benedictines had begun the most humbly of any order, over the centuries they had grown rich in donations of land and portable wealth; the Cistercians fashioned themselves as better than their monastic forebears, emphasizing both asceticism and austerity.³⁹⁶ Caesarius, a monk almost exactly a century following this

³⁹³ Lecouteux, *The Return of the Dead*, 8.

³⁹⁴ Grabowska, "Let the Text Speak for Itself," 34.

³⁹⁵ Stefano Mula claims the use of *exempla* is a later development of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, although the genre began with the Cistercians; Mula, "Cistercian *Exempla* Collections," 903.

³⁹⁶ William Chester Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 94; of course, by the later medieval period these reforming orders, too, would grow in wealth just as surely

development, took it upon himself to not only teach the moral lessons as was his duty, but also to preserve in the process the history of the order: “For they said that it would be an irrevocable loss if those accounts should fall into oblivion, which might serve for the edification of posterity.”³⁹⁷ Many of the *exempla*, especially earlier on in the collection, reach back into the history of the order, with some even pertaining to its founder, Robert of Molesme, thus building up the identity of the order via a construction and idealization of its history: as William J. Purkis notes, Caesarius’s work was a “Cistercian memory palace.”³⁹⁸ This is not unlike Gregory of Tours’s use of his own accounts of the supernatural to build up the identity of the Church.

Dialogus miraculorum

Caesarius’s *Dialogus miraculorum* not only develops the genre of *exempla* based on Gregory the Great’s model; he adopts, as well, the framing dialog of the work. From the beginning, there are two main characters, the novice and the monk, who often demonstrate a rapport. Throughout the narrative, in which they are both sitting in a room, the novice asks questions: his first being, conveniently, “where, and by whom, and under what pressure [was] our Order ... founded[?]”³⁹⁹ Deftly, the stories the monk tells the novice are not only didactic tools for real world monks, but also the initial framing of monk and novice is likewise an edification of the master-student relationship.⁴⁰⁰ The *Dialogus miraculorum* has, according to both Jean-Claude Schmitt and William J. Purkis, 746 chapters, and approximately fifty of these (or about 6.6% of the work, depending on

as the Benedictines had, only to be replaced by the next wave of reforming clergy in the Franciscans and Dominicans.

³⁹⁷ Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 1:1.

³⁹⁸ William J. Purkis, “Memories of the Preaching for the Fifth Crusade in Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogus miraculorum*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 40, no. 3 (2014): 331.

³⁹⁹ Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 1:5.

⁴⁰⁰ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 124.

how the miracles are categorized) involve apparitions that are human, and that are additionally not of saints, Christ, or the Virgin Mary.⁴⁰¹ In his research, Purkis states: “the frequency with which crusading related material appeared, and the evident importance that was attached to its positioning within the text, suggests that the crusades were a subject that Caesarius regarded as having an especial importance.”⁴⁰² If this is true, and frequency corresponds with importance, then apparitions, too, meant a great deal to Caesarius. They appear throughout the *Dialogus miraculorum*, but he also dedicates his final section to “The Punishment and the Glory of the Dead.”

The Planned Return

One of these tales touches upon many of the aforementioned tropes of apparition tales. It is part of Caesarius’s second book, “Of Contrition,” or remorse.⁴⁰³ He speaks of brother Bernard, a man who appears several times throughout the *Dialogus miraculorum*, but who is most likely not St. Bernard of Clairvaux. A bailiff named Hildebrand kills a man “at the instigation of the devil” in the town of Holchoim, in the diocese of Utrecht, and is eventually caught. “He denied the charge but his very look betrayed him ... and he was condemned to be broken on the wheel.” Bernard attempts to get the man to make confession, but he will not, so then Bernard proposes “that within the next 30 days you [Hildebrand] appear to me without endangering my life and tell me of your state.” The murderer agrees, “If he is allowed.” This is an important detail, as if a soul returned without God’s permission, Bernard would be considered a necromancer.⁴⁰⁴ The bailiff did return (albeit to the wrong cleric, named Bertolf), “enveloped in a glowing fire” to

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 127-8; Purkis, “Crusading and Crusade Memory,” 101.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 108.

⁴⁰³ Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 1:73-5.

⁴⁰⁴ Rider, “Agreements to Return,” 181.

explain that he was in Hell, not because of the murder, but because he had been in despair before his death, and had not confessed his sins.

Innumerable lines of inquiry and implications are present here. The most obvious revelation, and this is done purposefully, is the moral of the tale—to make confession before death and not to despair—although like the tale of the murdered woman, in its written form it has become a bit garbled. The question of why the ghost returned to Bertolf, and not Bernard, requires consideration; the ghost clearly addresses Bertolf as though he were Bernard.⁴⁰⁵ The similarity of their names lends credence to the possibility that the disembodied soul is simply confused; indeed, perhaps this was the original trajectory of the tale. In the written version of the tale, however, Bertolf commits himself to a monastery after the events. Considering that ghosts are allowed, in orthodox theology, to return only if God has a purpose for them,⁴⁰⁶ the more spiritually relevant implication suggests that the apparition had the ultimate purpose of frightening him into a holy life. What becomes of Bernard, and whether he ever hears of the tale, is unfortunately not explicitly stated, and apparently not important to Caesarius.

Another question in the minds of the audience might be why Hildebrand was damned to Hell not for murder, but for refusing to confess. The story's moral offers insight. Framed by the conversations of the monk and the novice, this particular *exemplum* is preceded by the monk attempting to explain that “sometimes God forgives mortal sins without forgiving some that are venial” because God must deign to forgive mortal sins, such as murder, but one must feel great contrition and confess for venial sins

⁴⁰⁵ The ghostly Hildebrand says to Bertolf, “If I had followed your advice and shown penitence, I should have escaped eternal punishment...”; Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 1:75.

⁴⁰⁶ Rider, “Agreements to Return,” 179.

such as those to which the bailiff had not confessed. Had he confessed, “temporal death” would have cleansed him of the sin of murder. Thus, more deftly than in many of the other tales, Caesarius’s framing structure creates a nuanced, realistic, and believable narrative mix of religious and lay belief systems. This tale also breaks some of the molds laid out by previous scholars. Catherine Rider, in her research on planned returns of the dead, suggests that only good friends, or kinsmen, make such agreements in these tales; Bernard and the baliff were neither, further illustrating the multifarious and potentially uncategorizable nature of the medieval ghost story.

The Widow and the Warning

Another tale in Caesarius’s collection of *exempla* is not one of a planned return, but it is a return all the same. This is found in the last section of Caesarius’s work: “Of the Punishment and the Glory of the Dead.” Years after the death of her husband, a woman is woken by a shaking so great “that they thought there had been an earthquake.”⁴⁰⁷ It was in fact her husband, who had been a “very rich official of the duke of Bavaria,” accompanied by “a gigantic black man pushing him [the husband] by the shoulders,” whom he later calls his “devil conductor.” He has come to her to tell her that he is in Hell because the alms he gave and the deeds he had done had been “done in vain glory and not out of charity.” She wants him to stay, but of course he was only “allowed” to return to warn her of his missteps and condemnation, and he is forced to leave by his demonic companion.

The moral of this story is just as explicit as Hildebrand’s was: wealth alone cannot buy salvation; intention matters. Such a moral is not surprising, coming from a reformist

⁴⁰⁷ Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 2:305-6.

Cistercian context. In his moralizing, clearly illustrated is Caesarius's attempt to solidify Cistercian identity through acceptable social behavior.⁴⁰⁸ Another element potentially relating to the Cistercian context is the use of color in the *exemplum*, particularly of the demon apparition accompanying the dead husband. Although the decision to make the demon black could relate to cultural perceptions of dark-skinned foreigners,⁴⁰⁹ or to beliefs concerning demons in the region at the time,⁴¹⁰ there is a third possibility relating more directly to the Cistercian order. The Cistercians' own monastic vestments were white, in purposeful contrast to the black robes of the Benedictines, whom they considered to be corrupt; indeed, even though the black robes of the Benedictine order had traditionally symbolized temperance and humility, the Cistercians, desiring to return strictly to the original word of Benedict, vowed only to use "common, inexpensive cloth made of undyed wool, spun and woven by the monks themselves within the monastery."⁴¹¹ In any case, color and correlating connotations obviously resonated in the minds of medieval people, as scholars such as Michel Pastoureau have lately argued.

One might also note, after the discussion of the *exempla*'s tendency to borrow from regional folklore, that this *exemplum* differs significantly. The returning husband has no name, and neither does his widow. The key to this difference, however, is that the tale explicitly originates from Bavaria, not the region surrounding Heisterbach. In the

⁴⁰⁸ Purkis, "Memories of the Preaching for the Fifth Crusade," 331.

⁴⁰⁹ Dark skin held negative connotations during this time, and was mentioned more often in sources than hair or eye color; Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 79, 82.

⁴¹⁰ Indeed, often dark skin denoted an association with the demonic, and black as well as red were colors worn proudly by hell-spawn; *ibid.*, 52.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 65; the whiteness of Cistercian robes also reflects their self-identification as "apostles of the light," and, in fact, after their formation, *exempla* began circulating which asserted that the Virgin Mary had commanded in a vision to St. Alberic that the new order should have white habits to symbolize their purity and dedication to her, the embodiment of virginity, *ibid.*, 62, 66.

tale, the monk states, in an intriguing appeal to authority, “This vision was much talked of and still is in Bavaria, as Gerard, our monk was witness, at one time Canon of Ratisbon [Regensburg], who related it to us.” Very likely, the monk named Gerard actually existed, and did convey some version of the tale to Caesarius. Thus, Caesarius maintains, even in second-hand accounts, the specific nature common in *exempla*, in which names of people and places are purposefully retained to give the accounts realism and familiarity.

The appearance of a woman in these tales also raises some questions. Of all of the historians who have delved into this topic, only Jean-Claude Schmitt makes claims about the appearance of women in the *Dialogus miraculorum*;⁴¹² for instance, of *exempla* he says a common trope is of wives being visited by dead husbands (and not vice versa), and in a second instance, of Caesarius’s work, he says that women are more active in his *exempla* on the whole, with there being one female for every four male central characters.⁴¹³ Unfortunately, this *exemplum* is representative of the latter, not the former, for at first the wife seems an active participant in the tale, but then she seems to become unimportant to the narrative, and drops out of the story entirely; she does not even have an emotional response as her husband is banished to Hell a second time. The female character, in this instance, exists only as a stock individual for the dead husband— intriguingly the true actor of the anecdote is a ghost—to sermonize to. Although this could be a reflection of the marginalization of women, James Grabowska presents an alternative possibility; *exempla* are meant to be as short as possible, and the moral is

⁴¹² Nancy Caciola does touch upon various possession tales involving women, which is in line with her argument, but she does not make generalizations about the entire *Dialogus miraculorum*.

⁴¹³ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 130, 187.

given primacy above all else.⁴¹⁴ Thus, as the vehicle of the moral in this case, the fact that the dead husband has a more central place in the tale is not surprising.

Also of note in this *exemplum* is the peculiar state of the dead husband upon his return. Hildebrand, from the first tale, appears only briefly, and one assumes that he was more of a specter than a tangible being; this is not so for the dead husband. Several times throughout the short tale, his corporeality is obvious. The house shakes upon his coming and going, demonstrating his effect on the living world. His wife makes him “sit on a seat by the bed ... and because it was cold she threw a part of the bed coverlet over his shoulder.” This is not an orthodox interpretation of a ghost, and although the incident occurs at night, it is not a dream. The corporeal nature of ghosts is often explicitly demonized in Christian culture, and although a condemned man, her husband is no fallen angel.⁴¹⁵ Perhaps his corporeal nature is a remnant of the traditional folkloric origin of the tale, or perhaps he is able to be tangible because of his damned nature or his demon companion, but this is only speculation. A last point is also that Caesarius states that the man returns years after his death. Jean-Claude Schmitt states clearly in his survey of ghost stories that ghosts are very unlikely to appear more than a year after their death in these tales.⁴¹⁶ All of these particularities, of course, relate back to the diverse and uncategorizable nature of these apparitions.

The Good Monk

Not all of Caesarius’s anecdotes that feature supernatural apparitions are of punishment and sin. In his section “Concerning the Dying,” he makes clear that

⁴¹⁴ Grabowska, “Let the Text Speak for Itself,” 36.

⁴¹⁵ Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 108.

⁴¹⁶ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 172.

sinlessness can be rewarded just as sinfulness can be punished. He tells the tale of an old and dying monk (also coincidentally named Hildebrand). To those gathered around him to comfort him in death, “God deigned to reveal the following vision” of ghostly men dressed in white. These apparitions escort the man’s soul, which left in the form “of a very beautiful youth,” away to Heaven.⁴¹⁷

This tale is very short, even for an *exemplum*, and does not have as much detail as a consequence, but its significance is no less profound. The moral is clear; good men go to Heaven, and the soul’s age reflects the pureness of the person. There is also the unmissable detail of the color of the robes. Not angels, the heavenly beings are clearly Cistercians, signifying the assertion that Cistercians have a place in Heaven. The symbolic importance of white robes to the reformist Cistercians is clearly evident in this tale, as Caesarius makes much of the fact that the monk is buried in his robes and was accompanied by two bands of “white-clad beings.”⁴¹⁸ Schmitt’s research corroborates this evidence, as he says of monk’s robes that “It was in fact important that the monk die in his *cuculla* [habit], for it would protect him from the traps of demons,” and in some tales the clothing gave one superhuman abilities.⁴¹⁹ Ultimately, the *exemplum* supports Purkis’s assertion that Caesarius was solidifying Cistercian identity, and also that *exempla* can be illustrative of everyday life,⁴²⁰ as the tale gives details about funerary practices, such as the mentioning of last rites, as well as the practice of “beating the board” to alert all the monks to congregate.

⁴¹⁷ Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 2:242.

⁴¹⁸ See Pastoureau, *Black*, 79.

⁴¹⁹ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 203.

⁴²⁰ Purkis, “Crusading and Crusade Memory,” 103; Mula, “Cistercian *Exempla* Collections,” 903.

The Vision of a Loved One

Exempla have a tendency to be repetitive,⁴²¹ but the subtle variation of details from one version of a tale to another are what presents so many possibilities of exploration. In another *exemplum* about the death of an individual, Gregory, a priest and the son of “a certain woman of religion in Armenia [who] came to Cologne,” was on his deathbed. Before his death, he sees and hears his mother, who died the year before, and she escorts him to Heaven. His sister, who is with him upon his death, however, sees nothing.⁴²²

This *exemplum* is even shorter than the one involving the monk Hildebrand, taking up only about half a page in the modern translation. Of all the research surveyed here, only Broedel makes explicit mention of the tale of the dying Armenian, noting that visions of ghosts at the hour of death are attempts to incorporate the dying into the community of the dead.⁴²³ Nonetheless, it can reveal many details about medieval cultural practices and beliefs. Again, because of the *exemplum*’s attention to specifics and detail, one has no trouble believing there was really a family from Armenia who settled in Cologne, and that Gregory, at the very least, told his sister that he saw their mother as he lay dying. It also illustrates travel in the middle ages, as Armenia is so far east as to be on the modern Asian continent; that Caesarius makes no judgement at all about the fact that the family is from Armenia (although they are most assuredly Christian; Armenia had a longstanding Christian tradition) reveals a degree of tolerance towards immigration, at least if the foreigners are Christian. As for the characters themselves, again, we see the

⁴²¹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 12.

⁴²² Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 2:266.

⁴²³ Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 104.

appearance of female characters, but again, in a supporting role. Schmitt's claim that Caesarius's work often highlights the role of women, while it might be true when considering the entire *Dialogus miraculorum*, does not appear to be true in these particular cases.⁴²⁴

What is truly culturally significant concerning this *exemplum*, however, are the elements of the vision itself. Unlike the tale of the monk Hildebrand's journey to Heaven, in which everyone present is able to witness the event, in this case, Gregory's sister is present, but unable to see the apparition: "'Where is she?'" she asks. "'See, she stands before me,'" he replies. The reason for this is unclear. Although, as a point of speculation, the events could signify that Gregory's sister is not pious enough to see the vision, Caesarius makes no mention of this. Another mystery stems from the assertion the young novice then makes that they are holy enough to "ascend at once to their rest [in Heaven]." The monk does not disagree; in fact, he says: "You are right."⁴²⁵ This implies, unexpectedly, that the priest and his mother are allowed into Heaven without being saints, and with no explicit connection to the Cistercian order. The diversity of thought within these tales grows more and more obvious as a more flexible interpretation of the criteria for entrance into Heaven than is evident in sources from the early middle ages appears.

The Unmentionable Sin

The last *exemplum* of this selection is perhaps the most complex, and it also holds the biggest cultural insights. This *exemplum*, within Caesarius's section "Of Confession,"

⁴²⁴ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 130, 187.

⁴²⁵ Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 2:266.

revolves around two monks, one young and one old: both are unnamed.⁴²⁶ “At the instigation of the devil,” one of Caesarius’s rote phrases, “and with the consent of human frailty, [they] sinned once, but only once.” Very troubled by their own actions, they confessed to each other, and “received a much severer penance than would have been imposed by the abbot or any other confessor.” Not long afterward, as the older monk is on the point of dying, he confesses a second time to the abbot, but does not give the name of the other monk.

Upon his death, he appeared to the young monk “in broad daylight,” first with comforting words, but then imploring the man to confess properly to the abbot, for he “[the old monk] should have been eternally damned if [he] had not made [his] fault known at the last.” Confessing would also, the old monk claims, lessen the torment he was still suffering. Nevertheless, the young monk delays this task, as the abbot is away, and he fears worldly repercussions. It is only when the abbot calls everyone to him, with the benevolent intention of saving the anonymous monk from Hell, that he confesses, is given penance, and “the wound of the foolish sick man was healed.”

There is more nuance and vagueness in this *exemplum* than in any of the previous ones. The most important thing for the young monk of the dialog to remember, the monk claims, is that “so great a benefit is confession that even the spirits of the dead make use of it,” but to say that that is the only significance of the *exemplum* would be wildly inaccurate. Take, for instance, the implication in the tale that the dead monk could be aided from what is clearly a reference to some sort of purgatorial state not by prayers, alms or masses, as most tales suggest, but by the confession of another: what Finucane

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 1:157-9.

calls “post-mortem absolution”;⁴²⁷ this relates all the way back to Broedel’s work on the grateful dead and the preponderance of stories in which ghosts demand the help of the living with varying degrees of success,⁴²⁸ as well as to Gregory the Great’s assurance that the actions of the living can indeed aid the dead. Caesarius never mentions how effective the young monk is in helping his dead friend, but considering the moral of the tale, his confession probably did have a positive effect.

However, there is even more nuance than that, for the assertion that even though they gave each other harsh penances, “that confession that we made to each other profited me nothing,” the ghost monk explains. “If you will [not] confess your sin simply and fully ... eternal punishment is reserved for you.” This, much like the interchange between the visionary carpenter and the clergy that Gurevich mentions,⁴²⁹ is an appeal to the authority of the abbot, the implication being that only a superior might act as a proper intermediary between the sinner and God. In this way, there is a mixing of two of the tropes common in *exempla* ghost stories: the dead warning the living and the living aiding the dead. This is a good example of Le Goff’s assertion that the misled could go to Heaven (or at least Purgatory) through friendship.⁴³⁰

It is clear in comparing this *exemplum* to the other four that its nonspecific nature is uncharacteristic of the genre. One might think this suggests that it was fabricated—or at least more so than the others—but there is another possibility, as well. Nothing in the *exemplum* has a name: not the town, the monastery, the abbot, or the names of the two monks. Namelessness is a theme of the *exemplum* itself, however: the dying monk,

⁴²⁷ Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead*, 61.

⁴²⁸ Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 100.

⁴²⁹ Gurevich, “Spirit and Matter,” 8.

⁴³⁰ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 305.

wishing to preserve the anonymity of his friend, does not name him in his own confession. The key element to consider is the sin itself, for there are very few that two monks might do together “once,” and the sin often left purposely ambiguous in the middle ages was, as Ruth Mazo Karras explains, sodomy; often, there was a fear to name or explain the term, as it was thought that even giving a general description could give people (men and women alike) sinful ideas.⁴³¹

John Boswell, in his foundational work on medieval sexuality, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, sheds light on this aspect of the *exemplum*. He is the only author in this study to mention this particular *exemplum* explicitly, although his focus is not at all on the appearance of a ghost. He further elucidates the problem of vagueness, as he claims that this very translation (from 1929, as there is no newer one) censors the tale for reasons of early-twentieth-century conservatism, and that the Latin version includes “various details of the punishment inflicted on a dead priest for homosexual acts.”⁴³² He also adds credence to the original basis of the *exemplum*, saying that there is substantial evidence that clergy in fact did have a tendency of “confessing to each other to avoid detection and obtain milder sentences”⁴³³ when the circumstance of the unmentionable sin became a reality. Benedictine monk Peter Damian (d. 1072), in particular, considered this to be a serious threat to the sanctity of the Church—whether real or imagined—and writes of it extensively in *Liber Gomorrhianus* (c. 1051), going so far as to suggest that sodomy is one of the biggest threats to the clergy, as monks are

⁴³¹ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 138, 177.

⁴³² John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19 n. 33.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 182.

particularly susceptible to its temptation, and evidence of the act after the fact is almost imperceptible.⁴³⁴

Boswell concludes, noncommittally, that there was little evidence or means of enforcing punishments against such a sin until the later middle ages,⁴³⁵ but he does not consider the *exemplum* itself in this context. Caesarius's *exemplum* may act as a means not of enforcement, but of social control, the importance of the moral emphasized all the more by the appearance of a repentant committer of the unnamed sin from beyond the grave. The only other mystery is the contradiction between Boswell's assertions that clergy who confessed to each other did so to receive artificially lighter penances, and the *exemplum*'s clear assertion of the opposite; perhaps Caesarius was trying to illustrate that the monks felt true contrition, or perhaps he was trying to emphasize further the authority of the abbot, as their penance, no matter how severe, allegedly meant nothing without the abbot having issued it to them. Further analysis utilizing an uncensored version of the *exemplum* might yield even further possibilities.⁴³⁶ In any case, it is clear that even the reformist Cistercians could not maintain the absolute chastity and purity that they desired, and suffered as any other order no doubt did from "the consent of human frailty."

Such analyses as those above, though brief, certainly provide an idea about what these sources can reveal, and what remains, as of yet, untouched for the historian to explore. Although cultural history has been tackling these themes of cultural belief in the

⁴³⁴ Mark D. Jordan, friend and academic equal to Boswell, dedicates a chapter of his work to Damian's ideas; Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 50.

⁴³⁵ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 206.

⁴³⁶ This would be the next step for anyone pursuing this topic. If Boswell is correct in his assertion, this *exemplum* might directly parallel Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, in which the body of Justus, the gold-hoarding monk, is mistreated so that his time in Purgatory might be lessened; an account of the tale appear in Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 92.

supernatural and apparitions for decades, there is much work still to be done, and it need not always involve categorization; indeed, categorization begins to seem useless (or at least problematic) when there are so many exceptions to the rule. Through Caesarius of Heisterbach, the Cistercian monk who solidified the identity of his order as well as perfected the didactic genre of *exempla*, cultural realities are ripe for further interpretation. No matter the particularities of the *exemplum*, be it about a murderer, a widow, saintly monks or sinful ones, each of these tales opens new windows into the culture and beliefs of the medieval mind. This is not a hindrance, but a benefit to historians, as a unwieldy amount of variety is not only a testament to the voracious diversity of human experience, but also presents countless circumstances for which the historian to explore.

Paranormal Fusion, Synthesis of Folklore and Orthodoxy in the Margins at Byland Abbey

The high middle ages were punctuated with ghost stories. As the previous section attests, religious authorities, mainly literate Cistercian monks, took stories from the oral and local tradition, and wrote them down, embellishing them with morals to help spread and teach the doctrine of the Church. These *exempla*, examples of how to live well, are typified by collections such as Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*. The centuries following Caesarius of Heisterbach's lifetime, and the many anonymous *exempla* compilations of the high middle ages, were by no means, however, static. As time progressed, what began as a Cistercian teaching practice was, in the later middle ages, appropriated by mendicant orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans as a means of teaching and sermonizing to the wider laity.⁴³⁷ *Exempla* remained, therefore, an integral part of the cultural landscape, though they were not always given the honor of being in mammoth compilations; one example, from the relatively remote Cistercian Byland Abbey in northern England, includes only twelve tales (most of which about ghosts), scribbled into the margins of a manuscript containing classical Cicero.⁴³⁸ In examining this source, it becomes abundantly clear that at some point during the process of being written down, these stories took on qualities of both worlds, becoming an amalgamation of both clerical and popular attempts to understand death and the great beyond.

⁴³⁷ Mula, "Cistercian Exempla Collections," 903.

⁴³⁸ Royal MS 15 A. xx (twelfth- and thirteenth- century) at the British Library. First published in M. R. James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories," *The English Historical Review* 37, no. 147 (1922); translation from M. R. James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories," in *Book of the Supernatural* (New York: W. Foulsham, 1979).

How to Read a Ghost Story

Richard Kieckhefer is much more renowned for his rehabilitation of the study of the history of magic than of ghosts. Nonetheless, in his monograph on a late medieval book of necromantic magic, *Forbidden Rites*, he mentions the ghosts of Byland Abbey offhandedly. One tale in particular (commonly known as Tale II) stands out to him. In this tale a tailor, who has done the bidding of a ghost who had earlier attacked him, conjures him much like a necromancer might a demon,⁴³⁹ so that they may converse:

The tailor went to the agreed meeting place and made a great circle with a cross, which had over it the four gospels and other sacred words. Then he stood in the middle of the circle, placing four reliquaries in the form of a cross on the edges of the same circle, and on the reliquaries were written healing words such as Jesus of Nazareth, etc., and he awaited the arrival of the same ghost. And at last the ghost came in the form of a goat [etc.]...⁴⁴⁰

The ghost acts much like a demon might; beyond needing to be conjured, he comes in the form of a goat, and earlier in the story, he takes on the shape of first a crow, and then a dog with a chain around its neck.⁴⁴¹ Furthermore, the encounter with the ghost renders the tailor physically ill, and during the encounter the ghost threatens that if the man does not help him, “your [the tailor’s] flesh will putrefy and your skin will weaken and fall away from you completely in a short time.”⁴⁴²

However, it is a ghost and not a demon. This is assured as the tailor earlier learned that this ghost is an excommunicate from Purgatory, desiring absolution and requiring the tailor to perform an assortment of orthodox tasks such as having masses performed in commemoration of his soul and asking for absolution from a priest.⁴⁴³ Ultimately, the

⁴³⁹ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 130, 170.

⁴⁴⁰ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 40.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

narrator-scribe leaves much unexplained. It is unclear why the tailor needs to conjure the ghost and why his actions so resembles necromancy, which Kieckhefer himself says usually pertains to demons,⁴⁴⁴ and the fact that a tailor, and not a cleric, is able to wield such powerful magic, is almost paradoxical, as traditionally, churchmen used this mastery over the supernatural to establish their clerical authority, positioning themselves as essential intermediaries between lay people and the beyond.⁴⁴⁵ Further, why a ghost feels the need to attack and threaten his living savior is not explicit. The threat of death is common enough—we see it even in Gregory of Tours⁴⁴⁶—but in this account, the tailor “was seriously ill for several days” after *both* of his encounters with the specter.⁴⁴⁷ This trend points not to church doctrine but to oral traditions, as in various tales contagion, for reasons both natural and unnatural, springs inevitably from the dead.⁴⁴⁸ This is the unique fusion of folklore and Christian theology,⁴⁴⁹ which circulated amongst both the lay and the clergy in the later middle ages.

Transitioning through the Ages

The centuries of the high and late middle ages saw a wide variety of social and cultural changes that would eventually lead to the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, spreading from the Holy Roman Empire and Italy respectively, but it also saw a plethora of ghost stories with various characteristics. Folklore had been perpetuated

⁴⁴⁴ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 130.

⁴⁴⁵ Adams, *Visions*, 114.

⁴⁴⁶ Gregory, *Life of the Fathers*, 76.

⁴⁴⁷ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 42.

⁴⁴⁸ In particular, folklore from this and other northern regions (particularly Denmark) often mention the idea that if one looks into a candle after encountering a ghost, the living party will fall ill; it is no coincidence, then, that the ghost at one point says to the tailor: “do not fear the sight of wood fire in the meantime.” It is a bit nonsensical, then, that the tailor nevertheless falls ill; Jacqueline Simpson, “Ghosts in Medieval Yorkshire,” *Ghosts and Scholars* 27 (1998): n.p. [<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~pardos/ArticleThree.html>]; James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 38.

⁴⁴⁹ Theology not quite yet further convoluted by Protestant dogma.

orally since time immemorial, but with the rise of the mendicants in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, a Christianized version of these tales appeared with more ubiquity than ever and, most importantly for the historian, they were written down for posterity. Before the advent of monastic *exempla*, stories such as the one above were scarcely written down as there seemed to be no reason to do it. In the classical period, discussion of ghosts and the soul appeared in writings of the elite and in drama, but their mention as specters in ostensibly truthful accounts was uncommon.⁴⁵⁰ Tertullian divided the types of human spirit on earth into three types, those who died before their time, those who died violently, and those who were left unburied,⁴⁵¹ but their existence just seemed a natural, if unfortunate, event, requiring no self-reflection or further explanation.

The early middle ages, too, were a tumultuous time, especially in England, whence this obscure *exempla* collection originates. After the Fall of Rome, the western half of the empire fell into resolute decline:⁴⁵² political authorities were decentralized, invaders such as the Goths, and later the Vikings were a constant threat, and the general population remained (officially and unofficially) dedicated to the pre-Christian traditions of their ancestors, and so the process of the Church reordering itself and the rest of society was slow indeed. On the one hand, England produced accounts of the supernatural via the hagiography of saints, but this is (by the account of ancient and modern scholars alike) divergent in context and form from the ghost stories of later tales. Furthermore, often during this early period, information was irrevocably lost. Sarah Foot describes the destruction of monasteries by Viking raids, and refers to the unknowable

⁴⁵⁰ D. Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome: Ghost Stories from Classical Antiquity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), xvi.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁵² Brown, "Late Antiquity," 11.

number of communities that were ultimately unable to preserve either themselves or the memories their writings might have preserved,⁴⁵³ and that now can only await the possibility of being discovered through archeology. Lay as well as clerical culture and community inevitably continued to exist in this part of the world in the centuries following the Viking invasions, but unfortunately, we only have access to a small extant sliver of it.

Ultimately, by the tenth and eleventh centuries, heathen and barbarian enemies eventually conquered, settled and assimilated into Christian society, converting in order to be able to trade with previously existing populations,⁴⁵⁴ and until the climate and population events that precipitated the Black Death, the period saw increasing stability and population growth.⁴⁵⁵ The Church grew steadily in complexity and power, to the point which, with the Pope at the helm, it could wage wars (on both foreign lands and dissenters within its own borders) like the crusades, and the Church as an authoritative entity was able to solidify doctrine, and at least make attempts to have the general population comply.⁴⁵⁶ One of its biggest changes was a shift from a martial, missionizing effort, to a worldview of pastoral care, a sentiment which began as early as the lifetime of Gregory the Great in the sixth century, but which did not come to fruition until the high middle ages.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ Sarah Foot, "Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9, no. 6 (1999): 190-4.

⁴⁵⁴ Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages*, 44-8.

⁴⁵⁵ Irene Barbiera and Gianpiero Dalla-Zuanna, "Population Dynamics in Italy in the Middle Ages: New Insights from Archaeological Findings," *Population and Development Review* 35, no. 2 (2009): 375, 381.

⁴⁵⁶ Of course, there was always tension between the papacy and secular authorities (such as the Investiture Controversy), but it was during the High Middle Ages that papal power was at its strongest; Jordan, *Europe in the High Middle Ages*, 97-9, 194.

⁴⁵⁷ Mews, "Gregory the Great," 142.

The change is most obvious through church councils, and the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, called by Innocent III, was the pinnacle of such change. These councils began to show more concern for the laity: heresies began to be rooted out, indulgences and absolutions became a commoditized form of penance,⁴⁵⁸ confession and communion became mandatory once a year for the lay,⁴⁵⁹ and Purgatory (over the course of several councils) became enshrined in Church doctrine.⁴⁶⁰ Purgatory had been a vague limbo in both Christian and non-Christian cultures for a millennium, but this process of formalizing and codifying the concept into Church doctrine made it impossible for clergy to dismiss or ignore. Purgatory, through these councils, not only became a real part of Church doctrine, but also became a place for more than just imperfect monks and eccentric holy men; penance, contrition and confession became a means by which the laity, too, could better their chances to getting into Heaven.⁴⁶¹ Suddenly, with Lateran IV, salvation officially became possible for everyone who made the effort.⁴⁶² Further, the Franciscans and Dominicans were confirmed as official orders, and most importantly for the development of the history of ghosts, the Cistercian practice of compiling *exempla*, which had been taking place for centuries, was officially sanctioned,⁴⁶³ and begun to be more widespread.

⁴⁵⁸ Jo Bath, "Dark Shadows: The English Ghost, 1100-1530," *Medieval History Magazine: Lives and Afterlives* 9 (2004): 40.

⁴⁵⁹ Adams, *Visions*, 32.

⁴⁶⁰ Bath, "Dark Shadows," 38.

⁴⁶¹ Watkins, "Sin, Penance and Purgatory," 3.

⁴⁶² Brian Patrick McGuire, "Religion and Mentality in the High Middle Ages: An Essay on Denmark and Europe," in *Medieval Spirituality in Scandinavia and Europe: A Collection of Essays in Honour of Tore Nyberg*, ed. Lars Bisgaard, Odense University Studies in History and Social Sciences 234 (Odense: Odense University Press, 2001), 95.

⁴⁶³ Amy Amendt-Raduege, "The Mysterious Case of the Ghost Who Wasn't There," *Medievalists.net* (2015): n.p. [<http://www.medievalists.net/2015/11/29/the-mysterious-case-of-the-ghost-who-wasnt-there/>].

Preceding, but nearly contemporary to all of these changes, and important to their development was Anselm's Theory of Satisfaction, first put forward by the theologian and Benedictine monk Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109). In the twelfth century, in his *Cur deus homo* (*Why God Became a Man*, c. 1095), Anselm speculated that fallen man needed to satisfy, or earn his way into Heaven. Christ had provided this satisfaction with the crucifixion,⁴⁶⁴ but even so, the belief in Hell, and then Purgatory necessitated the belief that not everyone was yet in Heaven. Stories of the dead returning, which had been told since prehistory, reinforced the narrative that Purgatory was a place of limbo, and Satisfaction Theory helped to Christianize and normalize these beliefs.⁴⁶⁵ Suddenly, with the aforementioned shifts in Church priorities, stories involving lay piety and experience of the divine became of more interest to the clergy, as it was a way for the clergy to teach the laity how to prepare for death, and, if need be, how to better the circumstances of their already departed loved ones.⁴⁶⁶ These preparations usually involved orthodox means, such as prayer, alms-giving, indulgence-buying or mass commemorations,⁴⁶⁷ all of which strengthened and benefited the image and power of the Church. This desire to be prepared for death was the mindset behind the majority of medieval *exempla* involving ghosts.

By drawing details and concepts from the folklore of the very people that monks were trying to teach, they created familiar, recognizable stories with Christian morals superimposed, which they could readily use in sermons.⁴⁶⁸ This is useful to the historian,

⁴⁶⁴ Adams, *Visions*, 17.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁶⁶ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 129.

⁴⁶⁷ Watkins, "Sin, Penance and Purgatory," 15.

⁴⁶⁸ Simpson, "Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse?" 395.

for in a sense it preserves elements of the folklore, or “tribal memory,”⁴⁶⁹ that most European cultures did not bother to collect in earnest unadulterated until the nineteenth century.⁴⁷⁰ The historian is left with a version of the originally flexible and organic oral culture: moralized and rewritten, but at least preserved. The unavoidable problem in this, however, is that often, Christian modification of the original folkloric source is inextricable from it. At certain times, the Christian morality obscures the original (usually unorthodox) meaning of the tale, while at others the moral seems lost altogether, and the true colors of the often pre-Christian tale show through.⁴⁷¹ For example, while most *exempla* highlight the necessity of ghosts needing the living to intervene by way of attaining absolution from a priest, paying for masses, or righting a wrong—like returning silver spoons the ghost had stolen in life or returning sequestered lands—sometimes the resolutions and morals to these stories are considerably less moral.⁴⁷² In *exempla* more closely in line with pre-Christian worldviews, either ghosts or their interred bodies are often burned, decapitated, or otherwise physically immobilized.⁴⁷³

The later middle ages were rife with stories exemplifying this sort of fusion. In the aforementioned story of the tailor, for instance, shapeshifting is a most prominent aspect of the *exemplum* (crow, dog, goat, etc.), but its roots are by no means Christian. Truly, this element of the tale is much more related to folklore; pre-Christian English folklore also includes many shapeshifting creatures, such as the gytrash, padfoot, and

⁴⁶⁹ Davenport, *Narrative*, 4.

⁴⁷⁰ Timothy R. Tangherlini, “And the Wagon Came Rolling In ...: Legend and the Politics of (Self-) Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Denmark,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 45, no. 3 (2008): 241.

⁴⁷¹ Broedel, “The Grateful Dead,” 97.

⁴⁷² James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 41-3.

⁴⁷³ Amendt-Raduege, “The Ghost Who Wasn’t There,” n.p.; Simpson, “Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse,” 393.

bargest (sprites, hobgoblins, and fairies also have such abilities).⁴⁷⁴ If anything, such beings are generally associated with the demonic; indeed, Gregory of Tours assigns shapeshifting abilities to the devil,⁴⁷⁵ and the way that the tailor conjures the demon also resembles illicit necromancy.⁴⁷⁶ However, because of the denouement of the tale, it is clear that this is truly a ghost from Purgatory. After the man performs all of the tasks and conjures the ghost, the ghost says:

“I was standing behind you at the ninth hour when you buried my absolution in my tomb and were afraid [this was one of the tasks]. And no wonder, for three devils were also present, who were punishing me with all kinds of torments after you had summoned me for the first time, expecting that they would shortly have me in their keeping to torment [the demons presumed, we must assume, that the tailor would fail in his tasks]. You shall know therefore that next Monday I, with thirty other ghosts, will go into everlasting joy.”⁴⁷⁷

Thus, even if the original source for the tale might have involved pre-Christian and necromantic elements, the narrator-scribe clearly imposed upon the tale his (or her) Christian moral lens. Even this short passage is problematic, for the ghost says he was summoned the first time, but in the narrative he, in the form of a crow, attacked the tailor unprovoked; after hearing “the sound of ducks washing themselves in a stream,” a crow emanating sparks “flew towards him and struck him in the side, knocking him off his horse, and flat on the ground.”⁴⁷⁸ This is more representative of a haunting, with the main difference between a haunting and a summoning being the addition of a human agent,⁴⁷⁹ and in reading the entire *exemplum*, it is clear that the tailor summons the ghost only the second time. Different still, and apparent in many of these Byland *exempla*, is

⁴⁷⁴ Simpson, “Ghosts in Medieval Yorkshire,” n.p.; Bath, “Dark Shadows,” 44; Simpson, “Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse,” 397.

⁴⁷⁵ See Chapter Three and the section concerning shapeshifting in the *Vita Patrum*.

⁴⁷⁶ Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 170.

⁴⁷⁷ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 40.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁷⁹ Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome*, xi.

“conjuring,” which is apparently the acknowledgement of the dead apparition’s presence, and giving them permission to speak.⁴⁸⁰ Conjuring and summoning, thus, are different from the original haunting, as in the first two cases the living person is ostensibly in control or the situation, whereas in a haunting, the ghost has power and attempts to initiate contact. Trying to categorize these elements, however, quickly proves fruitless; because of their piecemeal nature and inconsistencies, these *exempla*, in many ways, defy categorization.

There is also the question of physicality. In the aforementioned story, the crow-ghost and the tailor have a physical altercation: “with firm faith he [the tailor] fought the crow with his sword until he was weary,”⁴⁸¹ but later, when the ghost is conjured, it is ostensibly from nothing. His tangibility is ambiguous. Kieckhefer dismisses the corporeality of ghosts as irrelevant in his work,⁴⁸² but the most recent theory put forth by Nancy Caciola suggests that it is in fact of interest; physical, malignant spirits are a result of Northern European and Scandinavian traditions,⁴⁸³ whereas dream visions and disembodied spirits are more the purview of southern Europe and the Mediterranean.⁴⁸⁴ David Keyworth also notes a link between northern accounts of ghosts and the Scandinavian *draugr*, an undead corporeal revenant that seeks vengeance.⁴⁸⁵ There are, of course, always exceptions. Another very short *exemplum* from the same collection (Tale V) reads as follows: “A certain woman seized a ghost and carried it into her home on her

⁴⁸⁰ To examine Tale II more closely, the tailor “conjures” the dead man after saying, “I will beg him in the name of the Holy Trinity, and by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ of the five wounds, to speak to me and not to harm me in any way, but to stand still and answer my questions and tell me his name and the cause of his trouble and a suitable remedy,” James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 38.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁸² Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 159.

⁴⁸³ Caciola, *Afterlives*, 221-2.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁴⁸⁵ Keyworth, “The Eighteenth Century Vampire,” 245.

back in the presence of some men, one of whom related that he saw the woman's hand sink deeply into the ghost's flesh, as if the flesh of the said ghost was rotten, and not solid, but [phantasmagoric]."⁴⁸⁶

Ghosts appear all throughout the historical record in the middle ages, to the point where some scholars consider ghosts an identifying feature of the period.⁴⁸⁷ Caesarius of Heisterbach, Walter Map, William of Newburgh, the *Chronicle of Lanercost*, Scandinavian sagas, just to name a few, are evidence of cultural belief in the spectral. Specific to time and place, all of these different sources reveal much about their context.

Royal MS 15 A. xx

The *exempla* that these excerpts come from are unique to the Byland Abbey monastery in Yorkshire, northern England. They are part of a collection of twelve ghost stories from Royal MS 15 A. xx in the British Library in London; technically, this is a thirteenth-century manuscript containing Cicero and the *Elucidarium* (which is, perhaps not coincidentally, an encyclopedic work concerned with theology and folklore), but over two hundred years later, sometime after the death of Richard II who died in 1400, the *exempla* were scribbled into the margins and blank pages of the manuscript by a different scribe. Eventually, M. R. James, a renowned manuscript scholar who also had a penchant for writing his own ghost stories, stumbled upon a description of them in a manuscript catalogue.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories," 43.

⁴⁸⁷ Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," 144.

⁴⁸⁸ M. R. James taught and then was provost at King's College in Cambridge until his death in 1936; Peter Haining, ed., intro. *Book of the Supernatural*, 13. In 1922, M. R. James took the time to transcribe the cramped marginalia of this manuscript into *The English Historical Review*; of it, he wrote, "I took an early opportunity of transcribing them, and I did not find them disappointing: I hope others will agree that they deserve to be published." Without his whimsy, therefore, these tales might have remained at the mercy of their obscurity; James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories," 43.

These *exempla*, arguably compiled for the purpose of sermons or posterity, present a local microcosm of the beliefs present at Byland. Several of the stories are repetitive and involve a ghost appearing to someone and obtaining absolution through them; others, M. R. James notes, are found in *exempla* compilations elsewhere in Europe, but one of the tales (Tale IV) is slightly different from the rest. It seems to have almost no Christian moral at all, and certainly no absolution; it begins:

Old men relate that a certain Jacob Tankerlay, formerly Rector of Kirby, was buried ... and one night he put out the eye of his concubine. And it is said that the abbot had his body removed from its grave complete with its coffin, and ordered Roger Wayneman to convey it to Gormyre. While this man was throwing the coffin into the river the oxen almost sank into the water in fear.⁴⁸⁹

“May I not be in any danger for writing this,” the narrator-scribe writes to protect himself from all possible repercussion, as though he is fully aware that this story is different from the rest; “I have written it just as I heard it from the elders.”⁴⁹⁰ Hence, this is the closest one might get to a view of the late medieval ghost story of the laity, unadulterated by Christian moralizing. There is still a grim warning against corruption to the clergy itself, not to test the boundaries of their own morality,⁴⁹¹ but like Daedalus’s warning to Icarus not to fly too close to the sun, such morals have been a part of didactic narratives since long before the Common Era.

Unlike in the previously discussed tales, it is also clear that there is less concern in this more ancient tale about the corporeality of the undead. Tales IV and V both contain specters that are ambiguous, at once material and immaterial, but not so here. There is no

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 42-3

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁹¹ Tale IV ends “May the Almighty have mercy on Jacob Tankerlay, if indeed he was one of those predestined to salvation,” *ibid.*, 43. Is this M. R. James’s Protestant leaning showing through? The original Latin says only “si tamen fuerit de numero salvandorum,” which I translate as “If, however, he was of the number of those to be saved.” James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories,” *The English Historical Review*, 418.

anxiety conveyed in the tale that throwing the physical corpse into the river Gormyre will not solve the problem of the haunting. Gormyre, or filthy mire, which M. R. James interprets as a river, is really more of a bog or swamp than running water, and Catherine Belsey and Jacqueline Simpson both note that bogs have a key place in Scandinavian and regional folklore, as one of many landscapes (along with crossroads, for instance) in which banished dead might stay banished, as both archeological sites and sagas attest.⁴⁹² Further, in another work Simpson perceives the shock experienced by the narrator-scribe that the soul had not been immediately saved (“May the Almighty have mercy on Jacob Tankerlay”),⁴⁹³ compared to earlier tales preceding the popularization of Purgatory, where salvation was a rarer occasion.⁴⁹⁴ In this tale, thus, the reader can clearly trace how these legends, although influenced by regional details, still shifted along with the development of Church doctrine over time.

Throughout this chapter, some of the Byland *exempla* (II, IV and V in particular) have already been analyzed, and their various influences and purposes are a bit more illuminated than before. To conclude similarly as previous chapters, three more of James’s transcribed *exempla* (IX, XI and XII) have much to offer this analysis, in terms of both the development of Church doctrine as well as the incessant hold of folklore on the minds of the medieval populace. Tale IX pulls deeply from the folklore of this region as well as from surrounding regions, Tale XI confronts the difficult reality of infant mortality so often encountered in the premodern world, and Tale XII simultaneously

⁴⁹² Catherine Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter: Hamlet and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 15; Simpson, “Ghosts in Medieval Yorkshire,” n.p.

⁴⁹³ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 43.

⁴⁹⁴ Simpson, “Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse,” 396.

attempts to uphold the doctrine of the church while at the same time seeking to make sense of a complex situation of blame, sin and punishment.

Fun and Fear in Folklore

One of the more outlandish *exempla* in this collection is Tale IX. In this tale, a ghost, who desires to be conjured and aided, pursues a man for a full eighty miles. Eventually, the man obliges, and as happens in most of these tales, the ghost ultimately finds absolution. What is interesting about this tale is an addendum added by the scribe, in which it is revealed that “Before he was helped, [the ghost] threw the man over the hedge and caught him coming down on the other side.” When later questioned about this, as these spirits cannot speak until conjured, the ghost explains: “If you had helped me at the start, I should not have harmed you. But you were terrified, and so I did this.”⁴⁹⁵

That a ghost could throw a grown man so high into the air and catch him a distance away is astonishing on its own, but that the entity is also able to follow the man for a great distance, as well as physically torment the man, raises questions and suspicions. Like the ghost from Tale II, however, there is no question that he is the suffering soul of a departed human and not some demon or more powerful entity: “He had been excommunicated for a certain matter of six *denarii*, but after he was absolved and had made amends he rested in peace.”⁴⁹⁶ Despite that conjuring, or permission and inquiry from the living party, seems necessary for the ghost to speak and answer questions, there is apparently no such permission necessary for the ghost to attack and potentially harm the living, as with the incidents in Tale II. Gwenfair Walters Adams notes that conjuring a ghost by demanding they state their name and purpose technically

⁴⁹⁵ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 45.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

gives power to the living,⁴⁹⁷ but as Jo Bath rightly notes, these ghosts are generally unruly,⁴⁹⁸ and in fact coerce the living to acknowledge them using violence and threat of violence. In such a northern region, where pre-Christian tales of revenants and *draugrs* capable of murder were certainly part of the culture,⁴⁹⁹ the threat of death by spirit was no doubt taken seriously.

Part of the reason for this ambiguity might have been the origin of the narrative. M. R. James himself notes in his translation the tale's resemblance to folklore concerning not demons, but trolls. He notes a tale from folklore in which "the troll, whose (supposed) daughter married the blacksmith, when he heard that all the villagers shunned her, came to the church on Sunday before service," and tossed everyone there over the roof of the church for his daughter to catch them on the other side, apparently as a warning for them to treat her better.⁵⁰⁰ It is unclear if the narrative-scribe knew of this legend, or of a similar one, beforehand and modified it himself, or if others had done so before him, but the removal of the church from the *exemplum* is a mysterious omission indeed.⁵⁰¹ In either case, Tale IX demonstrates a fusion of Christian didactic narrative and popular folklore, both with the ultimate function of using fear as a way of controlling the laity.

The Nameless Child

The next *exemplum*, Tale XI, touches upon some very human anxieties of medieval life. In it, a man named Richard Rountree goes on pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Jacob while his wife is pregnant at home. He is keeping guard one night while he and

⁴⁹⁷ Adams, *Visions*, 115; Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter," 21.

⁴⁹⁸ Bath, "Dark Shadows," 44.

⁴⁹⁹ Keyworth, "The Eighteenth Century Vampire," 243, 246.

⁵⁰⁰ James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories," 45. Jacqueline Simpson also notes this link; Simpson, "Ghosts in Medieval Yorkshire," n.p.

⁵⁰¹ Adams, *Visions*, 29.

other pilgrims have camped for the night when he witnesses something truly haunting. First, he hears “a great sound of passing travellers along the highway, and some were riding on horses ... and all of them were on the creatures which provided their mortuaries when they died.”⁵⁰² Such processions of the dead, often called Wild Hunts, are very common in folklore, and work has been done on this type of story by scholars such as Ronald Hutton, Michael Bailey, Andrew Joynes and others,⁵⁰³ but it is what follows in this *exemplum* which is its climax.

As the procession passes him by, the pilgrim Richard sees “a baby rolling along in a sort of shoe over the ground.” He questions—conjures—the creature, who replies: “You should not ask me [my name], for you are my father and I am your son born prematurely, buried without baptism and without name.”⁵⁰⁴ Richard hastily collects the entity in his arms, christens him, and the specter “rejoiced greatly and even stood upright on his feet.” It is later revealed that the shoe was Richard’s own, and that the midwife had buried the dead infant in it unceremoniously while he had been away. The tale ends with the husband divorcing his wife for not having properly sponsored their child, and with the ever-present moralizing of the narrator-scribe, saying “I believe that this divorce greatly displeased God.”⁵⁰⁵

On a purely human level, the reader inevitably is struck by the pilgrim’s concern for his child. After realizing what has happened, “the traveller took off his shirt and put it on his son, and christened him in the name of the holy Trinity.”⁵⁰⁶ Resolution is

⁵⁰² Ibid., 46-7.

⁵⁰³ Ronald Hutton, “The Wild Hunt and the Witches’ Sabbath,” *Folklore* 125, no. 2 (2014): 161; Michael David Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 70; Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories*, 48.

⁵⁰⁴ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 48.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

immediate, and there is no hesitation on the part of the pilgrim. Infant death was relatively commonplace in the premodern period,⁵⁰⁷ and yet the emphasis on providing proper rites for the deceased is not diminished because of its frequency. The reality that premature death was more common in the fifteenth century does not suggest the grief was at all lessened, in line with what Jean-Claude Schmitt argues in his seminal work.⁵⁰⁸ Inevitably, also, clear in this *exemplum* is medieval anxiety over the souls of unbaptized children. Purgatory had been established for centuries in church doctrine, but this infant was found residing within a decidedly pre-Christian form of afterlife in a rendition of the Wild Hunt,⁵⁰⁹ which contrasts drastically with the pilgrim's intentions of visiting the tomb of St. Jacob. Here, we see not even the narrator-scribe having any comment on or explanation for this.

As in many of the other *exempla* of Byland—and indeed, as in the *exempla* of Caesarius as well—this account in particular highlights the power of names. Like the invocation of divine authority, names give some ostensible degree of control over the supernatural entity; this is often true with demons as well as ghosts.⁵¹⁰ In this *exemplum* this concept is embodied entirely, as the infant is unwilling (or perhaps unable) to cooperate with the man until he is given a name, and in this case, the christening is also the innocent infant's path to absolution. One last point, which also comes up in many of the Byland *exempla*, is the necessity of proof and witnesses. Richard, after naming the infant, “took with him the old shoe as a testimony of the incident,” and when he returned,

⁵⁰⁷ Barbiera and Dalla-Zuanna, “Population Dynamics in Italy,” 367.

⁵⁰⁸ Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 225-7.

⁵⁰⁹ Hutton, “The Wild Hunt,” 161.

⁵¹⁰ Adams, *Visions*, 115.

he purposefully “called together his neighbours” before confronting his wife.⁵¹¹ In a pragmatic sense, witnessing an event is necessary for it to be believed and recorded, but it is also an integral part of Anselm’s Satisfaction Theory. These accounts are, in effect, themselves a further proof of such events for posterity; not only useful in sermons or as moral warnings, they are a record of sins, and debts owed and paid.

Deferred Punishment

Tale XII is the last *exemplum* that the scribe of Byland recorded in the back pages of the Ciceronian manuscript, and also the last in this analysis. The account is about a man named William Trower, who questioned a wandering ghost about her behavior (without fear, apparently). She replied that she “walked the earth at night because of certain documents which she handed over wrongly to her brother,” to punish her husband with whom she was quarreling, so that he would not get what he was owed. Because of this, after her death, “her brother violently drove her husband out of his home” and he was despoiled of all of his land.⁵¹² From there the story continues in a typical manner, as she asks for William’s help to return the documents to her husband. William actually manages to bring the brother to see his wandering dead sister, so that her plight might be believed; however, it does not go as planned. Despite seeing her, her brother does not aid her, saying, “If you were to walk for ever I would still not give back those documents.” Obviously displeased, she claims she will only be able to rest in peace after his death, as she declares with certainty, “After your death you will walk instead of me.”⁵¹³

⁵¹¹ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 48.

⁵¹² A point of interest here is the ambiguity of agency, for the narrator-scribe does not reveal whether she has returned due to her own remorse (having ‘unfinished business’), or because she is being tormented in Purgatory, and has been granted God’s permission to beg for the intercession of the living, two possibilities which are often conflated in modern ghost stories. Perhaps the narrator-scribe simply assumed that these were one in the same, or that the audience would know the answer.

⁵¹³ James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” 48-9.

In this tale, unlike most of the others, there is no immediate resolution, and it is not the fault of the human conjurer, who seems to do his best to aid the specter by “following her order” and ultimately bringing the brother and sister together. Indeed, after this encounter ends so poorly, the ghost woman ultimately has to be “constrained [physically?] to lie at peace.” Her physicality and corporeality is perceived as a real threat to the living, and it is not surprising that the narrator-scribe notes that this is, like Tale IV, another “account of the ancients,” thus putting it into a timeframe sometime before his own lifetime. Like the corpse that needed to be physically dumped into Gormyre, so too did the restless ghost of a woman, who was explicitly asking for absolution, need to be physically restrained when her demands were not met. There is more nuance in this account than Tale IV concerning the desires and fate of the ghost, who is apparently able to rest once her brother dies, and his son “partly satisfied [her] heirs after the death of Adam the elder [her brother] by making restitution,”⁵¹⁴ but it is unclear if that is because the narrator-scribe simply had more information about the ghost woman, or if he added details for his own purposes.

Ultimately, the narrator-scribe seems at a loss, hardly moralizing except to call the greedy brother “hard-hearted”; he also notes, without further comment, that “after that [the encounter with his sister] his right hand hung down and was quite black, and when asked the reason he replied that he strained it when fighting, which was a lie.”⁵¹⁵ Although not explicitly stated, the injury seems to be some sort of punishment for his defiance of the ghost’s demands. Returning to the concept of undead corporeality once more, as well as to the contagion that notably affected the tailor in Tale II despite his

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

doing all that he could for his departed acquaintance, these *exempla* tell of a clearly unresolved fear of dead bodies harboring disease (perhaps especially in the centuries following the Black Death),⁵¹⁶ and warn of the devastating power of these supernatural entities, no matter their intent or origin. Why William Trower was not similarly afflicted is a mystery.

Exempla do not always provide historians all the answers they seek. One can speculate, for instance, based on the commonplace appearance of ghosts in these stories, that there was widespread acceptance of the belief in ghosts in the fifteenth century. Other sources, of course, problematize this assertion,⁵¹⁷ for just as in the modern day cultural beliefs are not monolithic, so too was there room for variety of belief in the middle ages. In some ways, the Byland Abbey *exempla* resemble Caesarius's of centuries earlier, in moral, formula, and recurring themes; they are, without a doubt, linked to the *exempla* tradition begun by the Cistercians in the twelfth century. They are also overwhelmingly indicative of their own time and place, and of much of the folklore of Yorkshire and surrounding regions. The Byland Abbey ghost stories, as M. R. James affectionately called them, are a fusion of Christian didactic practice and regional folklore, and a fascinating lens through which to view the cultural belief systems of fifteenth-century Yorkshire.

⁵¹⁶ Byland Abbey did not escape the ravages of The Black Death; Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter," 19.

⁵¹⁷ Swanson, "Defaming the Dead," 267.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

From Folklore to Fiction and Scribe to Stage

Like saints' lives, and histories of the preceding centuries, the *exempla* tradition of the high and then later middle ages left an indelible mark on the cultural world of people who experienced them. However, the end of the middle ages did not bring an end to tales of the supernatural. These sources continued to permeate the culture, in spite of, and perhaps because of, seismic shifts in the cultural landscape, notably various conflicts with invaders, wars between kingdoms, and epidemics like the Black Death. More such shifts occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—the encounter with the Americas, the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment—and these, according to most historians, brought an end to the middle ages, and many traditional historians of the early modern period, too, would argue, an end to the magical, superstitious world supported during the “Dark Ages” by the indomitable oppression of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵¹⁸ This was, in many ways, the biased and wishful thinking of Humanist scholars like Petrarch and nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians such as Leopold von Ranke. The upheavals of the Protestant Reformation caused a great shift and division along religious lines in the cultural perception of ghosts; for Protestants in particular, Purgatory became viewed as a Catholic façade and ghosts became demons, echoing the writings of Augustine over a millennium later. This did not stop popular belief in ghosts even in Protestant regions, where the candid belief of past ages often entered into the coded

⁵¹⁸ Keith Thomas, as mentioned in the Introduction, was one such scholar to mark the early modern period as somehow less embroiled in cultural belief than previous centuries, and in many ways, Eamon Duffy's defence of Protestant spirituality in *The Stripping of the Altars*, was one of the first efforts to correct this traditional stance of downplaying and dismissing cultural belief, or relegating it to the “Dark Ages;” Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

world of fiction, as evident in plays such as *Hamlet*, all the while continuing to exist in the oral realm of Danish folklore. In comparing these pre- and post-Reformation sources, it becomes abundantly clear that even as cultural circumstances shifted drastically over time, cultural belief in ghosts never disappeared, but merely changed its form.

From Medieval to Early Modern

As touched upon in the first two chapters, history throughout the modern period has gone through its own shifts and transformations. As such, until the second half of the twentieth century, the topic of ghosts was dismissed as frivolous. This intellectual push forward began as early as Petrarch's lament over medieval bastardization of Latin,⁵¹⁹ and was for the most part due to the progressive and secular narrative established by Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Hume, and Adam Smith,⁵²⁰ as well as the attempts of humanists to distance themselves from what they saw as a backward and ignorant age (hence, the proverbial Dark Ages).⁵²¹ The middle ages were not a period that early modern people looked upon with pride or nostalgia. Janet L. Nelson says it best in her critique of periodization when she says that:

Period labels are neither inert nor innocent. They attract value-loadings. 'Classic(al)' is good, in modern parlance ... and 'modern' is very good, while 'medieval' is bad ... [humanists] took up the idea of the regrettable, and forgettable, Middle Ages in the fifteenth century [and] were obsessed by periodization ... among the favorite metaphors of humanists and [Protestant] reformers alike was that of darkness yielding to light.⁵²²

After this system was established, it was perpetuated throughout later centuries, from Edward Gibbon to Leopold von Ranke, and, in line with this, the nineteenth-century push

⁵¹⁹ Janet L. Nelson, "The Dark Ages," *History Workshop Journal* 63 (Spring 2007): 193.

⁵²⁰ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 19-20; Edwards, "The History of Ghosts," 357.

⁵²¹ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 24-5.

⁵²² Nelson, "The Dark Ages," 192-3.

for objectivity and positivism of academic disciplines only worsened perceptions of the backward superstitions of the middle ages further;⁵²³ it was not until the *Annaliste* school of history grew that such periodizations were questioned, which of course was also when the turn toward cultural history truly began.⁵²⁴

Even those who did discuss the supernatural during this stretch of centuries were either spiritualists, had a benign curiosity on the subject, such as the aforementioned M. R. James (who was staunchly Protestant),⁵²⁵ or were those such as Joseph Glanvill as mentioned in the first chapter, who saw the Enlightenment as a threat to Christian beliefs, and saw the supernatural as a means of naturalizing belief and combatting what he identified as Sadducism.⁵²⁶ As the culture of empiricism grew, so did this tension, and the need among most early scientists to relegate the supernatural into the imaginations of the impotent or insane.⁵²⁷ The Roman Catholic Church certainly also moved to preserve its history during this time as well, through the Counter Reformation and beyond, but as it had been steadily losing secular power and spiritual authority in various regions of Europe in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, the history of the Church necessarily has a bias just as surely as the objectivism and structuralism of the nineteenth century.⁵²⁸

⁵²³ Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1; Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 7-8.

⁵²⁴ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 268; also see Jacques Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?* trans. M. B. DeBevoise (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

⁵²⁵ Ironically enough, in spite of James's fascination with the Byland Abbey ghost stories, his own creations were full of demonic, irrevocably evil spirits, much more in line with his Protestant upbringing: "In the Protestant world of MRJ [M. R. James], this concept of the Purgatorial soul is not an option"; Simpson, "Ghosts in Medieval Yorkshire," n.p.

⁵²⁶ "That cold and desperate disease, the disbelief of spirits and apparitions"; Copenhaver, "A Demon Witnessed by Multitudes," 558; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart also notes that John Welsey claimed "to deny demons is to deny God"; Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, 116.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵²⁸ For instance, the Ecclesiastical History Society of the UK mentioned in chapter two has a mandate "to deal with a major theme in Christian and ecclesiastical history" with each publication, and to consider such a publication without bias would be irresponsible; Clarke, and Claydon, *The Church, the*

Thus, as noted in the introduction, until relatively recently in the late twentieth century, these influences have colored the lenses for studying the middle ages, and so any interested scholar must not only consider these factors as a reason why this topic is unappreciated and important, but must also be suspicious of any notion that the early modern period was less “superstitious” than the centuries that preceded it.

R. N. Swanson’s narrative as to how perceptions of ghosts changed during and after the Protestant Reformation certainly makes sense when one considers the enmity that so quickly developed between Catholics and Protestants in the generations following Martin Luther’s break from Rome, culminating in, among other things, the Thirty Years’ War. Swanson suggests that ghosts as well as saints, both key elements of hagiography and *exempla*—thus inextricable from Roman Catholicism—were rejected by Protestant movements.⁵²⁹ Ironically, this rejection found vindication in the works of Augustine, who, as discussed in Chapter Three, had at the very least denounced the appearance of the ordinary dead as either angels or, more likely, demons.⁵³⁰ Perhaps it is not so surprising that words of a Church Father that had gone more or less unheeded for a millennium found purchase in the minds of revolutionaries; as Johannes van Oort rightly points out, both Martin Luther and John Calvin in particular drew from Augustine’s work with relative abandon, on issues of predestination, liturgy, and Scriptural interpretation, even going so far as to call him *Augustinus totus noster*, or “Augustine, totally our own.”⁵³¹

Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul, xxiii. Religious historians must always consider their own religious biases, as all historians have a bias, Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 45.

⁵²⁹ Swanson, “Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages,” 172-3.

⁵³⁰ Augustine, “The Care to be Taken of the Dead,” 369.

⁵³¹ Johannes van Oort, “Augustine, his Sermons, and their Significance,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 370-1.

At first glance, this looks like a complete break between the cultural beliefs of Catholics and Protestants, but just as it proved impossible for Augustine to fully divorce newly Christianized people from their veneration of their ancestors,⁵³² in the newly-rent religious landscape of Europe, both sides cleaved to their beliefs. Of course, in Protestant regions, authorities established rules which prevented Catholic interpretation of texts of the kind practiced at Byland Abbey, but in most cases these stories seemed to persist, again in modified form.⁵³³ Many Protestants, it seemed, believed in the supernatural to the point that clerics complained about their superstitious flocks.⁵³⁴ Protestant sermons often began to highlight the divine authority of the minister against the superstitious notions of Catholics and witches,⁵³⁵ in much the same way that Gregory of Tours's used a similar rhetoric to demonize the heretical Arians and Jews in his *Historia Francorum*;⁵³⁶ in the case of Protestant sermons, however, their detractors and enemies were very literally demonized (described as either demons on in league with demons) and dehumanized in an attempt to mark them as other and lesser.⁵³⁷

There was not much consensus, either between what was preached to the laity and what was studied in intellectual circles. As much as humanists and early modern thinkers rejected their history as oppressive and dark, many of them were clearly still interested in all things supernatural, if only to try to explain them.⁵³⁸ Kathryn Edwards notes, in

⁵³² Rebillard, "*Nec deserere memorias suorum*," 110.

⁵³³ Simpson, "Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse?" 398-400.

⁵³⁴ Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter," 9-10; we will see Protestant belief in ghosts recorded in Danish folklore; Timothy R. Tangherlini, "'Who Ya Gonna Call?': Ministers and the Mediation of Ghostly Threat in Danish Legend Tradition," *Western Folklore* 57, nos. 2-3 (1998): 157.

⁵³⁵ Peter M. Broadwell and Timothy R. Tangherlini, "WitchHunter: Tools for the Geo-Semantic Exploration of a Danish Folklore Corpus," *Journal of American Folklore* 129, no. 511 (2016): 22-3.

⁵³⁶ Keely, "Arians and Jews," 106, 109.

⁵³⁷ Broadwell and Tangherlini, "WitchHunter," 22.

⁵³⁸ See Chapter One.

particular, that Swiss theologian Ludwig Lavater (d. 1586) remained very interested in both ghosts and demons.⁵³⁹ Likewise, David Keyworth sees clear evidence of discussion of the supernatural into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the various works of Richard Baxter (d. 1691), Nathaniel Crouch (a.k.a. Richard Burton; b. c. 1632), Henry More (d. 1687), and Joseph Pitton (d. 1708).⁵⁴⁰ In some regions, as mentioned before, the demonization of Catholic beliefs, including belief in ghosts, was enforced, but in other regions, especially in rural areas of England and Germany, it is clear that the beliefs of the populace, although they may have certainly taken on Protestant characteristics, remained, as they always had, more influenced by oral tradition than they were wedded to any one Christian orthodoxy; ghosts were not necessarily evil, and many retained essential human characteristics.⁵⁴¹

A last, new, and emerging realm in which ghosts could and did dwell after the Protestant Reformation's rejection of Purgatory (their traditional dwelling space) as another invention of the Catholic imagination, was in secular and popular literature. The revolution of the printing press, and printing houses, especially in places like Antwerp and Amsterdam, as well as the growth of literacy throughout this period, enabled the dissemination of writings;⁵⁴² pamphlets, poetry, scripts, and narratives of all kinds were more accessible and more quickly produced by a growing literate middling class than ever before. Beyond the scholarly tracts and sermons of the traditional elite, this was also

⁵³⁹ Edwards, "The History of Ghosts," 355.

⁵⁴⁰ Keyworth presents the following examples: Richard Baxter's *Worlds of Spirits* (1691), Richard Burton's *Kingdom of Darkness* (1688), *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (1685), *Sad and Wonderful Newes from the Faulcon at the Bank Side* (1661), Henry More's *Antidote against Atheism* (1655), Leo Allatius's *De quorundam Graecorum opinionibus* (1645) and Joseph Pitton's *A Voyage into the Levant* (1718); Keyworth, "The Eighteenth-Century Vampire," 246-9.

⁵⁴¹ Edwards, "The History of Ghosts," 359-60.

⁵⁴² Ben Parsons, "Dutch Influences on English Literary Culture in the Early Renaissance, 1470-1650," *Literature Compass* 4, no. 6 (2007): 1580, 1589.

the new domain of the popular ghost.⁵⁴³ Just like the ballads of the troubadours, or the Arthurian romances of the medieval period,⁵⁴⁴ this is where early modern people could tease out, revise, and consider the ambiguous and tenuous conception of the ghost and the afterlife at its most authentic. Like the *exempla* of previous centuries, the oral tradition of the supernatural crept into this sphere and made it its home, and this is perhaps nowhere more perfectly illustrated than in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1600).

Hamlet: Origins and Resonances

Hamlet is, in many ways, revolutionary in its treatment of Danish folklore, its use of the ghost in theater, and its staying power as a cultural product reflecting the belief systems of both England and Denmark, and known and performed all across Europe. The core of the story, a tale of royal intrigue in which the prince of Denmark takes revenge against his treasonous uncle, is not drawn from thin air. A similar tale appears in the twelfth-century nationalist work of the clerk Saxo Grammaticus, the *Gesta Danorum*. In this, Saxo recorded in Latin the epic tale of a pagan prince Amleth (or Hamlet; meaning “the fool”), who enacts vengeance on his uncle Fengi, who has murdered his brother king Ørvendil and married the queen.⁵⁴⁵ This was not Saxo's original creation, however; just as Shakespeare drew from him, he drew from the vernacular oral histories of Denmark, Scandinavia, and, William Hansen even claims, from tales from as far away as Iceland.⁵⁴⁶ Slightly different from folklore, this is a legend more in the vein of *Beowulf*, in which the protagonist Amleth takes control of his own destiny;⁵⁴⁷ nevertheless, its root, just like so

⁵⁴³ Edwards, “The History of Ghosts,” 354.

⁵⁴⁴ Bath, “Dark Shadows,” 43-4.

⁵⁴⁵ For a much more detailed analysis of the Danish origins of Hamlet, see William F. Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 1-2.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 39.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

many others of the tales in this research, stems from the oral traditions often unknowable to medieval historians. There are a few key differences between the legend and the play: the regicide is not a secret poisoning, Amleth manages to kill his uncle without meeting death himself, and Shakespeare adds many complex subplots, characters, and development to what was originally a focused, somewhat simplistic, linear narrative.⁵⁴⁸ Lastly, and most importantly, even in spite of having such strong links to Scandinavian oral traditions, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* does not contain *Hamlet's* ghost.

There is some debate as to why Shakespeare decided to use the legend, and of course, concerning the origin of the dynamic and active character of the ghost. It is even unclear how Shakespeare even first heard the tale, as Saxo's *Gesta* was not translated into English until 1608, and *Hamlet* was supposedly finished by 1600. There was, however, a French translation of Saxo published by François de Belleforest in 1570,⁵⁴⁹ and it is this version, according to Arthur P. Stabler, which first mentions a "ghost."⁵⁵⁰ Belleforest embellished the original Latin work, almost doubling its original length with florid language and detail in *Histoires tragiques*;⁵⁵¹ on two occasions, when Amleth confronts his mother concerning his father's death, and when he kills his uncle, Belleforest uses the word *ombre*:

C'est un désir effrené qui a conduit la fille de Rorique à embrasser le tyran Fengon, sans respecter les ombres de Horvvendille ... son ombre s'apaise parmy les esprits bien heureux, & me quitte de celle obligation qui m'astraignoit à poursuivre ceste vengeance.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 46-53, 76. This simple oral narrative is not unlike the streamlined, to-the-point, *exempla* as discussed by Grabowska; Grabowska, "Let the Text Speak for Itself," 36.

⁵⁴⁹ Amanda Mabillard, "Shakespeare's Sources for Hamlet," *Shakespeare Online* (2000): n.p. [<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sources/hamletsources.html>].

⁵⁵⁰ Arthur P. Stabler, "King Hamlet's Ghost in Belleforest?" *PMLA* 77, no. 1 (1962): 18.

⁵⁵¹ Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 66.

[it is unbridled lust which has led the daughter of Roric to embrace the tyrant Feng, without respect for the shade of Horwendil ... his shade may rest peacefully among the blessed spirits, and hold me quit of the obligation which forced me to pursue this vengeance.]⁵⁵²

There is no actual appearance of a ghost here, but Horwendil (Ørvendil) is invoked as an ancestor or a saint might have been in earlier ages; his *ombre* could refer to his memory, but as Stabler notes, the parallels seem too particular to have been mere coincidence.⁵⁵³

At the same point in Saxo's narrative, as translated by Hansen, Amleth does not even confront his mother, and instead, "fear[ing] that he might make his uncle suspicious if he behaved intelligently ... [he] feigned madness and pretended that his mind had been damaged."⁵⁵⁴ After killing his uncle, further, there is no mention of a ghost: only "A brave man and deserving to be remembered forever! ... Because of his [Amleth's] skillful defense of himself and his vigorous vengeance of his father, it is hard to say which was the greater, his courage or his cleverness."⁵⁵⁵ Whether any Scandinavian oral version of the narrative ever had a ghost cannot be known, but considering the strong featuring of the undead in works such as the sagas, it was certainly a possibility. Based on the available sources, Shakespeare probably at least was inspired by Belleforest's ambiguous additions.

The *Gesta Danorum*'s various forms were not the only source from which Shakespeare drew inspiration. He also drew from the world around him. For instance, *Hamlet*'s Denmark is firmly Christian, and Shakespeare strives to produce an "authentic

⁵⁵² From fols. 159-160 and fol. 174; both the excerpts and translations of these excerpts appear in Stabler, "King Hamlet's Ghost," 18.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁵⁴ Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 98.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 106.

Danish atmosphere” which would have been familiar to his contemporary audience,⁵⁵⁶ as by that time the region, due to trade, cultural exchange, and the aforementioned boom of the printing industry, was thoroughly intertwined with the rest of Western Europe; as Parsons notes, Antwerp’s printers served England, France, Denmark, and even Spain, and the flow of ideas was as unstoppable as the flow of goods.⁵⁵⁷ Further, by incorporating a ghost in his work while the Elizabethan Settlement was still a recent phenomenon (although it was not yet the more harshly Protestant Jacobean England),⁵⁵⁸ he tapped into the current uneasy religious atmosphere, and played with ideas of Purgatory and belief, so much so that he incurred some suspicion from Anglicans and other Protestants, to the point of being accused of closet Catholicism.⁵⁵⁹

Shakespeare’s ghost in *Hamlet* is one who seeks revenge through his son, and although this is very unlike the ghosts of earlier *exempla*, it is also unlike the Scandinavian *draugr* who would have sought vengeance without the aid of the living. According to Catherine Belsey, Shakespeare was very much aware of the stories of the supernatural circulating within early modern England, and used them, too, to his advantage; indeed, many of the stories he had heard were probably similar to (or perhaps even were) those of Byland Abbey.⁵⁶⁰ Key to Belsey’s argument is the framing of the

⁵⁵⁶ Some of the names and characters that are Shakespeare’s creations (e.g. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) are evidence of this, but he also adds the traditional Romanizing elements of theater, such as Claudius and the elements of tragedy, to create a fascinating hybrid; Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 85-8.

⁵⁵⁷ Parsons, “Dutch Influences,” 1577, 1582-4.

⁵⁵⁸ This was a time when neither Catholics nor Protestants were being burned at the stake, but there was still religious tension.

⁵⁵⁹ Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 3, 8; Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 76. In a similar vein, some have also made links between Hamlet and Martin Luther—Taylor notes both studied in Wittenberg—and the play as a complex analysis of confession, a sacrament of contention during the Reformation; Jane Taylor, “‘Confession and Profession’: Vouching for the Truth in Hamlet and Sherlock Holmes,” *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 16 (2004): 5-8.

⁵⁶⁰ Belsey does reference the Byland Abbey *exempla* specifically; Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 14. Simpson notes that Shakespeare often uses folklore of region in his plays (e.g. *A Midsummernight’s Dream*); Simpson, “Ghosts in Medieval Yorkshire,” n.p.

first scene, which she claims is set up like oral telling of the proverbial ghost story around a campfire:

Barnardo: Sit down awhile; / And let us once again assail your ears, / That are so fortified against our story / What we have two nights seen.

Horatio: Well, sit we down / and let us hear Barnardo speak of this.⁵⁶¹

Felton, too, recognizes this as a common trope of the campfire tradition, which is relatively universal in its conception.⁵⁶²

Hamlet's ghost is not like the traditional ghosts of classical theater that later playwrights indiscriminately borrowed from, which were little more than Senecan wooden-faced plot devices that elicited no real emotion, except sometimes humor.⁵⁶³ Hamlet's ghost, conversely, does terrify. When Horatio encounters the ghost in the very first scene, he claims it "harrows me with fear and wonder," and he later describes the soldiers Marcellus and Barnardo, who first witnessed the ghost, as having been "By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes ... distilled almost to jelly with the act of fear."⁵⁶⁴ Any good performed rendition of the scene, indeed, has Horatio act just as terrified as any modern person might be upon encountering a dead man;⁵⁶⁵ this resembles strikingly, either consciously or unconsciously, so many of the tales in which the living take on the characteristics of the dead they encounter, like the spreading of a contagion, the likes of

⁵⁶¹ Belsey claims these lines are often cut from the play, but they do appear in Bloom's version of the script; Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter," 4; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Burton Raffel and Harold Bloom (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 5 [Act 1, sc. 1, ll. 30-5].

⁵⁶² Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome*, 3.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., xiv-xv; Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter," 6-7; also see the reference to Plautus's ghost in Chapter One; Copenhaver, "4.8 A Haunted House: Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 447-531," 117-19.

⁵⁶⁴ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 6, 24 [Act 1, sc. 1, l. 44 and Act 1, sc. 2, ll. 203-205].

⁵⁶⁵ Sarah Outterson-Murphy, "'Remember Me:' The Ghost and Its Spectators in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship* 34, no. 2 (2016): 256.

which affected so many hapless laity in the aforementioned *exempla*.⁵⁶⁶ One could even liken Hamlet's perceived insanity at seeing a ghost and his potential mental illness to a contraction of some mental imbalance shared by the disoriented specter.⁵⁶⁷

This is the new, post-Reformation specter, having all of the power of its folklore behind it, while also stripped of most of its Catholic moralism. A dangerous entity, to be sure, yet, as Belsey rightly notes, this is not fully a Protestant vision of a demon (indeed Horatio is certain it is the dead king: "The apparitions comes. I knew your father: / These hands are not more like"),⁵⁶⁸ but one of an ancestor calling for aid. Like the dead of Yorkshire as described by the monk at Byland Abbey, the ghost requires conjuring—by the target of the haunting: Hamlet, not Horatio—before being able to speak.⁵⁶⁹ There is also always the possibility in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but not in Saxo, that Hamlet has simply gone mad.⁵⁷⁰ This is exemplified in the scene in which, when Hamlet is confronting his mother Gertrude about her marriage to his uncle, the ghost enters, but she cannot see him: "how is't with you [Hamlet], / That you do bend your eye on vacancy / And with th'incorporal air do hold discourse?"⁵⁷¹ As he speaks to the ghost, she even cries "Alas, he's mad!" and when Hamlet questions her, she has not seen nor heard anything supernatural.⁵⁷² Possible insanity, which Amleth explicitly feigns in Saxo's

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 258. Not only does this fear affect the living character, but the emotions of the actor infect the audience as well; *ibid.*, 260.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 268.

⁵⁶⁸ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 25 [Act 1, sc. 2, ll. 211-2].

⁵⁶⁹ Horatio does attempt to command the specter to speak, but it flees; Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome*, 7.

⁵⁷⁰ Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 77.

⁵⁷¹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 141 [Act 3, sc. 4, ll. 116-18].

⁵⁷² Ibid., 140 [Act 3, sc. 4, l. 105]; "H: Do you see nothing there? / G: Nothing at all. Yet all that is I see. / H: Nor did you nothing hear? / G: No, nothing but ourselves"; *ibid.*, 142 [Act 3, sc. 4, ll. 132-5].

version, was perhaps a suitable alternative narrative to be overanalyzed by Protestant empiricists for centuries to follow.

Shakespeare's ghost is a melange from various places and appeals to many different audiences, but ultimately, the theater is perhaps the perfect home for a ghost. Sarah Outterson-Murphy, in her literary and theatrical analysis of the ghost in *Hamlet*, relates how similar ghosts are to the theater itself, in that fiction is a specter of reality, and how performances, as they change over time, remember the ghost as he himself demanded ("Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me");⁵⁷³ further, the act of performance, much like the retelling of an oral tradition, is always something slightly different from the time before:⁵⁷⁴ a unique memory, as opposed to an idea set in writing.⁵⁷⁵ Conceptually, these genres and media run in parallel, changing over time, and thus evolving in tune with the culture within which it resides.

As a conduit for increasing defunct beliefs, theater thus created a channel facilitating the spread of these ideas in a manner less threatening than church doctrine or sermon. This spread can be traced near and far, in the popularization of stories: for instance, *Hamlet* made its way to the German stage in the eighteenth century, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe used the play as a plot device in his novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796).⁵⁷⁶ Perhaps ironically, a rendition of the tragedy of Denmark was only first performed in Denmark in 1813, but legends still surfaced about the location of

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 46 [Act 1, sc. 5, ll. 91].

⁵⁷⁴ Outterson-Murphy, "'Remember Me,'" 267-9.

⁵⁷⁵ Of course, theater (also like a ghost) is a hybrid, as though it constantly changes, the play is yet written down somewhere.

⁵⁷⁶ Ophelia's song and Hamlet's 'to-be-or-not-to-be' soliloquy even eventually found their way into the domestic folksong collections of Johann Gottfried Herder (d. 1803); Alexander Honold, "The German Hamlet: Ghostly Encounters in the Space of the Stage and the Novel," in *Shakespeare and Space: Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm*, ed. Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 165.

Hamlet's grave in the region,⁵⁷⁷ as though the narrative gave credence to reality. For the empirically-minded, the ghost in this play served as the catalyst for Hamlet's attempt to force his uncle's confession through a rendition of his own play, an early attempt to solve a crime through novel means, as Jane Taylor links the methods of the Danish prince and Sherlock Holmes.⁵⁷⁸ In all of these ways, *Hamlet* (and its ghost) "provides a theatrical mode which allows the powers of the Beyond, via the stage, to seep into this life."⁵⁷⁹ *Hamlet's* ghost, and others like it, flit in and out of existence in the narrative as readily as they do in the imaginations and cultural world of the people.

Folklore as a Bastion of Knowledge

One last place has provided a milieu in which the concept of the supernatural and the ghost was able to reside and grow: the very oral histories that all of these written genres—from hagiography, to *exempla*, to theater—drew from to some extent. It seems clear that for the most part, oral histories, ever-changing and amorphous, are mostly lost to the medieval historian. Oral histories are as elusive—ghosts in their own right—and that is the whole purpose of looking for these cultural perceptions in written form; one cannot simply ask a medieval person for their oral history as some modern historian can do, and so an untainted "tribal memory," as W. A. Davenport calls it, is unattainable.⁵⁸⁰ However, throughout the whole of the middle ages, and into the modern period in Europe, the channels of communication, even during tumultuous periods such as the era of the Black Death, remained remarkably unbroken, and such communication is common

⁵⁷⁷ Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 89-90.

⁵⁷⁸ Taylor, "Confession and Profession," 2-3, 6. *Hamlet* even made its way to the Arab world in the twentieth century; Margaret Litvin, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 52.

⁵⁷⁹ Honold, "The German Hamlet," 169.

⁵⁸⁰ Davenport, *Narrative*, 66.

in every part of the world;⁵⁸¹ that is how the *exempla* of Caesarius of Heisterbach can resemble those from Byland Abbey,⁵⁸² how the *draugar* and kings of Icelandic lore can appear in Danish literature,⁵⁸³ how the hagiographic formulae seen in the earliest *Lives of the Desert Fathers* can appear in *vitae* across Europe, and how parallels can even be drawn between the *vita* of St. Antony and that of the obscure Mercian St Guthlac,⁵⁸⁴ or how similar depictions of saints can be found both in Gregory of Tours's work as well as in a *vita* of Gregory the Great produced at the relatively northern abbey of Whitby.⁵⁸⁵

Historians have known the mysterious power of such oral histories for centuries, but they have, for the most part, left the study of such tales to folklorists. M. R. James knew this, for in his own introduction to the Byland *exempla* he notes: "To me they are redolent of [the folktales of] Denmark. And one who is lucky enough to possess E. T. Kristensen's delightful collections of *Sagn fra Jylland* will be reminded again and again of traits which occur there."⁵⁸⁶ As with so many other disciplines, however, in the early twentieth-century the borders of history and folklore were clearly demarcated, as James goes on to say: "Little as I can claim the quality of 'folklorist' I am fairly confident that the Scandinavian element is really prominent in these tales."⁵⁸⁷ In 1922, thus, M. R. James provided a hint to the inquisitive and interdisciplinary cultural historian of the present; unlike traditional historians who, as discussed in the historiographical Chapter

⁵⁸¹ Bath, "Dark Shadows," 43; Amy Amendt-Raduege, "Better Off Dead: The Lesson of the Ringwraiths," *Fastitocalon* 1, no. 1 (2010): 69.

⁵⁸² James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories," 34-5.

⁵⁸³ Keyworth, "The Vampire of the Eighteenth Century," 244.

⁵⁸⁴ Charles Williams Jones, ed., *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England: Together with First English Translations of The Oldest Life of Pope St. Gregory the Great by a Monk of Whitby, and the Life of St. Guthlac of Crowland by Felix*, trans. and ed. Charles Williams Jones (New York: Archon Books, 1968), 85.

⁵⁸⁵ See the chapter on Gregory of Tours for comparison.

⁵⁸⁶ James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories," 34-5.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Two, have only relatively recently begun taking an interest in the cultural world of the medieval period, folklorists have been doing such work since at least the nineteenth century.

Evald Tang Kristensen (d. 1929) was a Danish folklorist, and a contemporary of M. R. James. His work, *Sagn fra Jylland* (*Legends from Jutland*), was published in 1881, and is over 1000 pages long. In collecting all of these stories over the course of almost fifty years,⁵⁸⁸ he scoured the countryside for living people to tell him their stories, in order to preserve them.⁵⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the work has not, as yet, been translated into English. This presents difficulties for those not fluent in Danish, but these are not insurmountable, as scholars like Timothy R. Tangherlini, a leader in folk and cultural studies, have translated small portions of the work into English to make their research more accessible.⁵⁹⁰ Certainly, more work on the accessibility of folklore sources, often first recorded in the vernacular due to the nationalist intentions of their collectors,⁵⁹¹ would benefit the aims of cultural historians.

Like any source, one must approach even these collections of oral tales with an air of skepticism. Just as Cistercians embedded their beliefs and ideologies into their *exempla*,⁵⁹² so too did those attempting to preserve and create nationalist identities. Kristensen received high praise in his day for his diligence and thoroughness,⁵⁹³ but in recent years Tangherlini has highlighted that, just like any nationalist-driven endeavor,

⁵⁸⁸ From 1876 to 1925; Broadwell and Tangherlini, "WitchHunter," 17.

⁵⁸⁹ Tangherlini, "And the Wagon Came Rolling In," 241.

⁵⁹⁰ Tangherlini, "'Who Ya Gonna Call,'" 154, 156, 158-9, 162, 165-6, 167-71, 173-4; Tangherlini's translations of Kristensen's folklore in this article include approximately fifteen tales involving ghosts or other entities.

⁵⁹¹ Tangherlini, "And the Wagon Came Rolling In," 243.

⁵⁹² Purkis, "Memories of the Fifth Crusade," 331.

⁵⁹³ W. A. Craigie, "Evald Tang Kristensen, a Danish Folk-Lorist," *Folklore* 9, no. 3 (1898): 194.

historians then (as now) had certain biases and pushed agendas. Kristensen, for instance, modified some of the tales that he recorded, in order to alienate foreigners, such as Jews, from the narrative he was attempting to mold;⁵⁹⁴ this is not so unlike Gregory of Tours's attempts to demonize Arians,⁵⁹⁵ or the Protestant vocal disdain of purported Catholic superstition.

Regardless, folklorists have much to offer the cultural historian: for instance, the Aarne–Thompson classification systems,⁵⁹⁶ which catalogued and classified folktales into thematically linked groups, and more recently, the new digital humanities project WitchHunter, which tries to map folkloric themes geographically.⁵⁹⁷ Much like the *Annalistes* in the twentieth century, folklorists have put much work into the classification and categorization of types of folklore; for instance, Tangherlini categorizes large quantities of tales statistically and examines them in thematic chunks.⁵⁹⁸ Databases and classification systems are fundamental to understanding the quantity of the sources available to any scholar, but perhaps now it is the work of the cultural historian to progress further with qualitative analysis. That is not to say that Tangherlini (and no doubt others) does not dabble with such qualitative analysis; indeed, he argues very convincingly that through the folklore of Denmark, themes of corrupt Lutheran clergy, the tension between the clergy and the laity, and the fusion of Lutheran and folk belief

⁵⁹⁴ Tangherlini, “And the Wagon Came Rolling In,” 248-51.

⁵⁹⁵ Keely, “Arians and Jews,” 106, 109.

⁵⁹⁶ Edwards, “The History of Ghosts,” 357; Tangherlini, “And the Wagon Came Rolling In,” 245. These include the Aarne–Thompson Motif-Index, the Aarne–Thompson Tale Type Index, and the Aarne–Thompson–Uther classification system.

⁵⁹⁷ Broadwell and Tangherlini, “WitchHunter,” 18.

⁵⁹⁸ For instance, in his research, Tangherlini groups the folktales in terms of positive or negative outcomes: 21% ambiguous, 61% positive, 18% negative, etc.; Tangherlini, “Who Ya Gonna Call,” 166, 168. WitchHunter also categorizes by terminology (e.g. *spøgelse* and *genganger*); Broadwell and Tangherlini, “WitchHunter,” 26.

permeated the cultural world clear into the twentieth century.⁵⁹⁹ The Reformation, Counter Reformation, and Wars of Religion ultimately did not put any of these questions to rest; Cistercian monks and Lutheran ministers alike recorded remarkably similar cultural anxieties.

Ancestor or saint, demon or angel, murdered king or talking goat—whether they were written down by a monk in Yorkshire, Gregory of Tours, or St. Augustine himself—these accounts have much to reveal about their authors, as well as their historical contexts. Ghosts existed in folklore, side by side with saints in *vitae*, although due to trends of literacy, changes in societal stability, and cultural movements over the course of this large swath of time, the extant sources and genres in which these stories were recorded shifted drastically from theological tract, to hagiography, to *exempla*, to even the stage. This study could not hope to analyze qualitatively more than a handful of examples. What is more, the ambiguity of these supernatural accounts only compounds their versatility. Both the ancestors and angels could pass on important information; both ghosts and demons could come back to upbraid or adjure the living.⁶⁰⁰ Saints and demons were sometimes at odds, but at other times they seemed to work in concert. In a similar vein, exorcists and necromancers were two sides of the same coin, practicing many similar learned rituals;⁶⁰¹ a saint could lie inanimate and incorrupt just as surely as a vampire could.⁶⁰² What was divine, demonic, magical, or natural has always been in flux,

⁵⁹⁹ Tangherlini, “And the Wagon Came Rolling In,” 156-7, 173.

⁶⁰⁰ Newman, “The Quest for Redemption,” 47.

⁶⁰¹ Kieckhefer, “The Holy and the Unholy,” 325.

⁶⁰² Keyworth, “The Vampire of the Eighteenth Century,” 252.

having no consensus and often multiple interpretations at once, depending on the bias of those encountering the story.

The folklore and legends of Demark have taken center stage in this chapter, but this has only been to highlight the various genres where these accounts appear. The Danish had their hagiography right along with their *Gesta Danorum*; in fact, Saxo Grammaticus was a clerk of Absalom (d. 1201), the militant Bishop of Roskilde and later Archbishop of Lund, who shifted the Christian culture towards pastoral care, as opposed to conversion through conquest.⁶⁰³ Hansen, in fact, describes Saxo as a cultural counterpoint to the missionizing efforts of Christianity in the area, for in spite of his connection to the Church, he focused on pre-Christian tales like those involving Amleth. Denmark, just as other regions, had its own assortment of saints,⁶⁰⁴ who performed many of the same social functions as saints in other regions; King Knud is just one example, canonized by Absalom in his efforts to Christianize the region.⁶⁰⁵ Thus, irrespective of time and place, these two facets of supernatural belief—the religious and the folkloric (or the elite and the popular)—are present.

Ultimately, these accounts of the supernatural, no matter their form or genre, reflect the structures which produced them, and serve to highlight the anxieties and important issues that hung heavily in the minds of the clergy and the laity alike: fear of death, coping with grief, hope for salvation, and an obsession with the perpetuation of both memory and identity—two characteristics that arguably make us human. Ghosts and

⁶⁰³ McGuire, “Religion and Mentality in the High Middle Ages,” 96-7.

⁶⁰⁴ Thelma Jexlev, “The Cult of Saints in Early Medieval Scandinavia,” in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney’s Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 184.

⁶⁰⁵ Thomas A. DuBois and Niels Ingwersen, “St Knud Lavard: A Saint for Denmark,” in *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas A. DuBois (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 154-6.

other entities provide explanations for these questions just as surely as religion, clearly intertwined.⁶⁰⁶ Today, we see the same such anxieties manifest in the Ringwraiths of *Lord of the Rings*, or the Dementors of *Harry Potter*, in just as in centuries past they appeared in the classics of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and Edgar Allen Poe.⁶⁰⁷ There are still stories of vampires and specters in Romania and Peru, and tourists in the U.S. flock to Gettysburg for civil war ghost tours, while the U.K. has popular tours of haunted historical inns, taverns, and castles;⁶⁰⁸ these tours, half-history, half-theater, are themselves a form of oral history. From long before and after the temporal perimeters of this study,⁶⁰⁹ these beliefs—real, dismissed or performed—have been a core component of how humanity understands its own existence as mortal beings. Previously shunned by the progressive ideologies of modernity,⁶¹⁰ it is time for the cultural historian to reassess, to delve deeper into these oft-neglected stories, and to bring to light all of the tensions, memories, identities, and realities that they represent. This thesis is a contribution to this effort alongside the work of others who have already taken up the study of ghosts in years past, but there is still much work to be done.

⁶⁰⁶ Belsey, “Shakespeare’s Sad Tale for Winter,” 25.

⁶⁰⁷ Amendt-Raduege, “Better Off Dead,” 69; Jakobsson, “Fearless Vampire Killers,” 309.

⁶⁰⁸ Keyworth, “The Vampire of the Eighteenth Century,” 257; Robert C. Thompson, ““Am I Going to See a Ghost Tonight?”: Gettysburg Ghost Tours and the Performance of Belief,” *Journal of American Culture* 33, no. 2 (2010): 79.

⁶⁰⁹ Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome*, 97.

⁶¹⁰ Maxwell-Stuart, *Ghosts*, 14.

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