## Contents

*List of Figures*  4  
*Abbreviations*  6  
*Abstract*  11  
*Declaration*  12  
*Copyright Statement*  12  
*Acknowledgements*  13

1. Introduction  14

   Ghost Belief: An Overview  15  
   Defining the Walking Dead  18  
   Chronological Boundaries  19  
   Chronological Boundaries: The Twelfth Century  24  
   Geographical Boundaries  27  
   Literature Review  29  
   Aims of Study  38  
   Methodology  39  
   Interdisciplinarity: the ‘Anti-Method’  41  
   Designing a Method: ‘Texts’ and the Illusory Divide  47  
   Designing a Method: Orality, Aurality, and Book  48  
   Theory of Practice  54  
   Sources  61  
   Chapter Overview  63  
   Conclusion  66

2. Pattern and Performance in Medieval Attitudes to Death  69

   Aim of Chapter  70  
   Labyrinths and Knots in Christian Exegesis  72  
   Christian Funerary Rite: Origins  77  
   Christian Funerary Rite: Late Medieval  80  
   Preaching and the Maintenance of the ‘Pattern’  89  
   Untangling the Knot: The Dance of Death  92  
   Conclusion  99

3. The Walking Dead and the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*  101

   The Northern Church: A Historical Review  103  
   Cultural Networks and the Truthfulness of Ghosts  105  
   Revenants and Wonders  109  
   The Revenant Stories in Context  112  
   The ‘Buckingham Ghost’ in Context  120  
   Conclusion  130
4. Disease, Nightmares and the Walking Dead

Contagion, Decay and the Body
Humours and Ill-Health
Sin and Ill-Health
Nightmares: An Introduction
Canonical Nightmares
Insular Tradition and the Nightmare
Nightmares and Revenants
Conclusion

5. The Archaeology of the Walking Dead: The Grave

Charcoal and Ash Burial
Pillow-Graves
Grave Goods
Positive Burial Innovations: A Synthesis
Archaeology and the Dangerous Dead
Liminal Burials
Staking/Weighing the Body/Prone Burial
Cremation and Decapitation
Apotropaic Grave Goods
Stones
Metal
Conclusion

6. Conclusion

Appendix
Bibliography
Figures

Word Count: 85, 510
List of Figures

1. Office for the Dead, c.1470s (Latin MS 21, fol. 147v, John Rylands Library, Manchester).

2. Temptation to Avarice and its remedy, Ars Moriendi, c.1490–1491 (Bibliothèque National de France, Paris).

3. Funerary Procession, c.1487 (Latin MS 39, fol. 249r, John Rylands Library, Manchester).

4. Bernt Notke, The Dance of Death, c.1463–1493 (Gertsman, ‘Revel (Tallinn)’, fig.1).

5. Location of the revenant encounters in the Historia Rerum Anglicarum (ArchGIS).

6. Ash-lined coffin burial, graveyard of St. Peter’s, Leicester, c.1300s (Gnanaratnam, fig. 92).

7. Lead wrapping found upon abdomen of adult female, graveyard of St. James’s Priory, Bristol, c.1200s–1300s (Jackson, fig. 82).


9. Crossroad burial from Broad Town, Wiltshire, c.600s (Clarke, figs. 2, 4).

10. The dead trapped in a barrow, c.1030 (MS Harley 603, fol. 72r, British Library, London).

11. Skeletons with boulders on torso, graveyard of St. Peter’s, Leicester, c.1250 (Gnanaratnam, figs. 89, 90).

12. Prone Burial, Hexham Abbey, Northumberland, c.1000 (Cambridge and Williams, figs. 7, 8).
13. Jet Pendant, graveyard of St. James’s Priory, Bristol, c.1300 (Jackson, fig. 85).
### Abbreviations: Primary Sources

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Edmund</em></td>
<td><em>Memorials of St. Edmund’s Abbey</em>, 3 Vols. ed. by T. Arnold (London: Eyre &amp; Spottiswoode, 1890).</td>
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<td><em>Eyrbyggia</em></td>
<td><em>The Story of the Ere-Dwellers (Eyrbyggia Saga, with the Story of the Heath-slayings (Heiðarvíga saga) as Appendix</em>, ed. and trans. by W. Morris and E. Magnusson (London: Quaritch, 1892).</td>
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**Otia Imperialia**

**Policraticus**

**Saxo Grammaticus**

**SL**

**St. Guthlac**

**St. Modwenna**

**Travels**
## Abbreviations: Secondary Sources

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<tr>
<td>AHR</td>
<td>American Historical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANS</td>
<td>Anglo-Norman Studies</td>
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<td>ASE</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon England</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td>British Archaeological Reports</td>
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<td>EETS OS</td>
<td>Early English Text Society, Original Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>EHR</td>
<td>English Historical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMLS</td>
<td>Forum for Modern Language Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBAA</td>
<td>Journal of the British Archaeological Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>JEGP</td>
<td>Journal of English and German Philology</td>
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<td>JMH</td>
<td>Journal of Medieval History</td>
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<td>JMEMS</td>
<td>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRH</td>
<td>Journal of Religious History</td>
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<td>JRAI</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>MJ</td>
<td>Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>Modern Language Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLH</td>
<td>New Literary History</td>
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<td>PMLA</td>
<td>Publications of the Modern Language Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSAS</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>RES</td>
<td>Review of English Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHM</td>
<td>Social History of Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIA</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFAJ</td>
<td>Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCWAAS</td>
<td>Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeological and Antiquarian Society</td>
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<td>TRHS</td>
<td>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</td>
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<td>WAM</td>
<td>Wiltshire Archaeological &amp; Natural History Magazine</td>
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the popular perception of the walking dead – ‘revenants’ – in medieval England, using both written and archaeological sources. The opening chapter defines the methodology for conducting an interdisciplinary investigation into literary and material ‘texts’. Chapter two investigates the strategies used by the Church to prescribe the rules for a ‘good’ death performance. This will include a brief overview of the evolution of the Western funerary rite from the Roman period to the fifteenth century. The third chapter examines the specific codicological placement of the revenant narratives in William of Newburgh’s Historia Rerum Anglicarum (c.1198), and explores the theological, political and cultural contexts which prompted their transcription and circulation. This examination of the ‘social logic’ of the walking dead will include a critical analysis of the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative. Motifs of pestilence and the spreading of social/physical disorder, so evident in the William’s Historia, are investigated in chapter four. The percipients’ negotiation of religious doctrine, humoural theory, and the traditions of ‘folk’ medicine will be used to explicate why some revenants were considered contagious. The relationship between the somatic experience of the revenant attack and the ‘nightmare’ is also given consideration in this chapter.

The final section of this study involves an exploration of the material strategies used to allay the walking dead. I contend that it is indeed possible to draw intertextual analogies between the written sources and unusual/deviant burial practices. The way in which medico-magical knowledge (discussed in chapter four) was utilised to protect the living from the pestilential dead is given special consideration. The aim of chapter five, then, is to analyse the evidence for the fear of the errant corpse in mortuary and landscape contexts. In short, I argue that smaller (unwritten) traditions could be improvised within the prevailing habitus of the local community to form idiosyncratic patterns, or ‘rhetorics’, of apotropaic response.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

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I am particularly indebted to Anke Bernau, Mel Giles and Robert Spencer, whose expertise, encouragement and advice helped bring this thesis to completion. I could not have asked for a better supervisory team. Further thanks must be given to David Matthews for giving me the opportunity to work as an editorial assistant on Studies in the Age of Chaucer.

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Above all, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Chris and Margaret. I really could not have come through these last four years without their love, help and support. Ever since I was a child they have encouraged me to do what I enjoy and enjoy what I do. I have taken this mantra to heart. Mere words cannot express how much I owe them.
1. Introduction

On Thursday 30th May 1196 a series of strange and terrifying events befell the inhabitants of an unnamed Buckinghamshire village. A local man, by all accounts a young and prosperous member of the community, died unexpectedly and was laid to rest in a tomb in the local churchyard. However, on the very next night, the dead man crawled out of his grave and returned to his village, where, after gaining entrance to his former abode, he attempted to ‘lie upon’ and suffocate his wife in the marital bed. This occurred for three straight nights, after which the dead man started accosting other people in the village, spreading further chaos and discontent. Alarmed by the increasing regularity of the dead man’s assaults, the villagers took to staying awake at night and, as a further precaution, gathered in groups in a bid to thwart his advances. Nevertheless, the dead man continued his rampage; wandering ‘hither and thither’ through the streets and attacking men and livestock alike. The matter was eventually taken to the local archdeacon, Stephen, who in turn consulted St. Hugh of Avalon, the bishop of Lincoln. Having listened to the archdeacon’s testimony, the bishop was just as amazed as everybody else (episcopo vero stupente super hoc), but was told by some of his advisors that ‘such things often happened in England’, and that the usual remedy was to dig up the body and cremate it. This solution seemed both undignified and indecent to the bishop, and so instead he prepared a scroll of absolution, written in his own hand, and told the archdeacon to place it on the dead man’s chest. The archdeacon followed the bishop’s advice, after which the dead man walked no more.

The above narrative, one of four such tales from William of Newburgh’s *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (c.1198),
epitomises the main objective of this study: to analyse the cultural, social and theological frameworks which made it possible for encounters with corporeal ghosts – either in the form of purgatorial spirits or demons-in-disguise – to become so widespread in the High and Late Middle Ages, with a specific emphasis on the local, material responses to so-called ‘bad’ death. It will be seen whether the events described in the written sources, such as William’s

\[1\] Newburgh, V. 22.
Historia, can be used to explain the meaning of ambiguous mortuary practices and unusual grave goods. To this end, an equal amount of attention will be given to the literary and archaeological evidence; to the ghost story and the grave. As the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative testifies, the division between the written word and material object is not as clear-cut as it may at first appear. A scroll of absolution is at once a literary product (a written prayer) and an archaeologically identifiable object (a parchment within a grave-fill); the tale itself is only communicable through the pages of a physical manuscript. The literary and material evidence, then, is inextricably linked; the written word can no more exist outside of its physical matrix than the object (the body; the grave good) can exist without a ‘narrative’ to explain the act of deposition. Thus, a parallel aim of this thesis is to bridge the interpretive gap that exists between literature and archaeology, and show how an interdisciplinary approach to the evidence can yield newfound information about local religious culture and ghost belief in this period.

With these objectives in mind, certain aspects of the thesis must first be clarified: the ‘type’ of ghost to be analysed in this study, the definition of the Middle Ages, the suitability of the aforesaid period for the study of ghost belief, and the problems and benefits of conducting an interdisciplinary project. These are all issues which demand further explication before the main body of the investigation can commence.

Ghost Belief: An Overview

Ghost belief, the fear that under certain circumstances the dead could return to haunt the living, is a phenomenon which can be seen across a wide geographical and chronological spectrum. From Pliny the Younger’s curious tale about a haunted house in Athens (c.100) to accounts of vampire belief in twenty-first century Russia, ghosts have fascinated and repulsed in equal measure. The appeal is universal: the actions of the shade of Philinnion transcribed in Phlegon of Tralles’s On Marvels

(c.200) are just as unsettling, and just as beguiling, as modern folkloric accounts of phantom hitchhikers and poltergeists. Likewise, horror movies, town centre ghost walks, fortean literature and the excesses of Halloween are testament to the continued, almost compulsive desire to be awed and frightened by forces beyond our ability to fathom or control.

Whether orally recited, committed to the page or enacted onscreen, tales of the restless dead have thus haunted the popular imagination for thousands of years. The modern Western stereotype of the ghost may well derive from the pervading notion of the ‘gothic’ and the sparse, unsettling tales popularised by Bram Stocker, J. S. Le Fanu and M. R. James but, as history has shown, such encounters were not always classed as allegory or fiction. Learned commentators from the Early Modern period, for example, were adamant that biblical precedents – such as the conjuring of the prophet Samuel by the Witch of Endor – could be used to verify the very real existence of ghosts and devils-in-disguise (1 Samuel 28. 3–25). Accounts of poltergeists and wayward demons, ostensibly from everyday sources, were invoked as evidence to denounce those who did not believe in the reality of the supernatural and, therefore, the divine. The fear of atheism was not the only reason why ghost narratives flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The burgeoning penny pamphlet industry catered to the popular demand for tales of ghostly portents, the vengeful dead, and devils intent on leading their victims into sin. The ghost-as-restless spirit and the ghost-as-demon were fused together in sensationalist stories wherein the identity of the apparition – the devil or the deceased? – was very much

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6 Ludwig Lavater, Of Ghostes and Spirites, Walking by Nighte (London: Creede, 1572).
7 For one of the earliest refutations of the reality of malign agents on Earth, see Reginald Scot, The Discovery of Witchcraft (London: Coates, 1654 [1584]). For the tensions between sabbataceism (atheism) and anti-sabuaaceism, see Jo Bath and John Newton, ‘Sensible Proof of Spirits: Ghost Belief during the Later Seventeenth Century’, Folklore, 117 (2006), 1–14.
open to question. The meaning and motivation of the apparition was something which only the reader, guided by his or her inherent belief systems, could decide.

Credulity and ambiguity structured the medieval literature on ghost belief just as it framed the work of the Early Modern authors. Preachers’ manuals, histories, personal correspondence and saints’ lives all betray a very real acceptance that the dead (or demons) could initiate contact with the living. Jean-Claude Schmitt’s *Ghosts in the Middle Ages* (1998) synthesises much of this material into a study which, to this day, remains the foremost critical source on the social history of ghost belief from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. Schmitt’s methodology focuses not on ethnographic analogy or attempts to trace pagan survivals, but on how ghost narratives were rethought and reworked in response to innovative social and religious demands. Schmitt also discusses the differences between *miracula* (suspension of the natural order through the will of God) and *mirabilia* (occurrences that may not have been divinely wrought, but which were ‘marvellous’ because they had a reason that could not yet be understood). Post-mortem appearances by the dead almost always belonged to the second category of supernatural event. By all accounts, the medieval dead enjoyed a certain degree of mobility and did not stay in their ‘rightful place’ for long.

Schmitt’s focus on the clerical and political appropriation of ghosts, however laudable, raises a number of unanswered questions: if *mirabilia* were enlisted as didactic aids to teach doctrine to the laity, what does this say about the everyday belief in the restless dead? If, as the clerical sources suggest, ghosts were an entrenched facet of the local worldview, does this not mean that the residues of *unwritten* belief may have left a trace in the archaeological record? What about the Northern European tradition of the fear of corporeal ghosts – fleshy, pestilent corpses that rose from their graves at night to feed on the life-force of the living? Schmitt makes only a tangential reference to the issue of ambulatory corpses and the benefits of archaeological analysis. Despite chapter five noting the corporeality of the ghosts in Orderic Vitalis’s account of ‘Hellequin’s Hunt’ (c.1135), and the

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11 Ibid., p. 223.
fleshiness of the Byland Abbey ghosts (c.1400) being given appraisal in chapter six, similar narratives are not given nearly as much attention. Encounters with walking dead may indeed be rare, but not as rare as their cursory appearance in Ghosts in the Middle Ages suggests. The ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative from William of Newburgh’s Historia, mentioned above, is reflective of a wider (though mostly unwritten) belief that the corpses of the dead had the potential to wreak havoc amongst the living.

**Defining the Walking Dead**

Since the appellation ‘ghost’ is capable of signifying a wide range of supernatural entities, the choice of terminology when describing or differentiating between categories of ghosts needs to be refined. The word itself may derive from the pre-Germanic word *ghoizdo-z*, meaning ‘fury’, and suggests something of the wild, untamed nature of entities which were neither living nor dead. Purgatorial spirits, angels and demons are all, to some extent, ‘ghosts’, but each is markedly different in terms of form, function, and the dialogue it shares with the living. The type of ghost which forms the basis of my study is almost wholly corporeal and, despite sharing attributes with some of the phenomena listed above, can be seen as a separate entity in its own right. Defined variously as a *draugr* (Iceland), *vrykolaka* (Greece) or *vampyr* (Eastern Europe), the walking corpse has maintained an almost universal

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16 Paul Barber, ‘Forensic Pathology and the European Vampire’ *Journal of Folklore Research*, 24 (1987), 1–32; *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); David Keyworth, ‘Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead Corpse?’
presence in European folklore since the times of ancient Greece. Learned medieval definitions, however, were a lot more imprecise: prodigium (prodigy), mirabilium (marvel) and phantasma (phantom; image) could apply to both the corporeal and incorporeal ghost. William of Newburgh’s use of the term sanguisuga (‘blood-sucker’) is the only extant Latin reference to the vampiric qualities of the restless corpse.\footnote{Newburgh, V. 24.} Vernacular English descriptions are equally wide-ranging. Gāst (ghost), nihtgengum (night-walker) and uncuþam fiðan (strange-visitor) are among the terms used in Old English to denote agents which had the potential to do physical harm. Euphemisms for the corporeal ghost, found in phrases such as ‘he walkyed’, and ‘the fende (fiend) gode into þat cors (corpse)’, are used in tandem with proper nouns, such as gost (ghost) and fantum (phantom), in Middle English sources.\footnote{Armburgh, p. 62; Festial, p. 295.} The latter two terms could also refer to ghosts which did not possess a physical body. As a consequence of the linguistic overlap between the substantial and insubstantial dead, English language scholarship appropriated the term ‘revenant’ – deriving from the French verb ‘to return’ (revenir) – to describe ghosts which were fleshy, attacked or fed upon the living, and whose agency was dependent on the physical status of the corpse. The ‘walking dead’ and ‘restless dead’ can also be used to differentiate between ambulatory corpses and apparitions. Like ‘revenant’, these terms will be used in this thesis in their appropriate contexts.

**Chronological Boundaries: The Conquest to the Reformation**

If the belief in corporeal (and incorporeal) ghosts was spread over such a vast geographical and chronological spectrum, a moment needs to be taken to explain why this study will focus specifically on the Middle Ages.\footnote{19 For the history of the terms ‘Middle Ages’ and ‘medieval’, and the way in which they were utilised in the Early Modern period to criticise the preceding generation, see David Matthews, ‘From Mediaeval to Mediaevalism: A New Semantic History’, *RES*, 62 (2011), 695–715.} For the purposes of clarity, I shall echo academic tradition and refer to the roughly thousand-year time-span from the fall of Rome (493) to the Reformation (c. sixteenth century) as being
‘medieval’. To periodise history in such a manner is to create a problematic but useful hermeneutic tool for the explication of cultural change over a specific period of time.

Indeed, it was with the educational reforms and the consolidation of the hegemony of the Church in the tenth and eleventh centuries that accounts of ghostly appearances and otherworldly encounters truly began to emerge. Written evidence for revenant belief in the Early Middle Ages is still somewhat circumstantial: the ‘British’ speaking demons which inhabited the eponymous saint’s barrow in The Life of Saint Guthlac (c.720) and the corpse-like characteristics of the ‘night-stalker’ Grendel in Beowulf are some of the more prominent examples of the literary appropriation of corporeal ghosts in this period. These sources belong to an oral tradition which has left only a small, tantalising trace in the written record, illustrating why recourse to the archaeological data has the potential to create a more nuanced understanding of local belief and practice. As Schmitt’s study intimates, it was with the growth of literacy in the political and ecclesiastical communities of Western Europe in the middle of the eleventh century that efforts were made to commit orally transmitted tales of the walking dead to parchment and put them to social and political use. This, then, is why the following investigation will focus on the High and Late Middle Ages, c.1050–c.1450, with especial recourse to material from North-West Europe, specifically the British Isles.

Aside from the resurgence in the use of the written word – and thus an increase in the amount of extant documentary evidence – the eleventh century provides a useful lower boundary for a number of other reasons. Firstly, it must be recognised that, in contrast to events occurring on the continent, where the use of Latin predominated, England had a long-established tradition of writing in the vernacular. The extant Anglo-Saxon material, including law codes, poems and

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20 For the emergence Medieval Studies as a discipline, see David Matthews, The Making of the Middle Ages (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
21 St. Guthlac, XXXI (pp. 102–103). For the link between Grendel and the walking dead, see Andrew Joynes, Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels and Prodigies (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 121–125.
23 For the promotion of the Wessex dialect as a national literary language, see Helmut Gneuss, ‘The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold’s School at Winchester’, ASE, 1 (1972), 63–83 (p.
medical miscellanies, can be used in tandem with the Latin sources to highlight the continuation of belief following the upheaval of the Conquest (1066) and the imposition of new social structures and literary forms onto the insular community. The division of Welsh and English land amongst the Norman nobles and the resurgence of monasticism were just two of the new social conditions which needed to be negotiated by the populace in their everyday lives. The extent to which these conditions impinged on prevailing beliefs and fears about ‘bad’ death may be reflected in written accounts of ghost belief and the changing layout of the grave-site. Awareness of the Anglo-Saxon conception of ‘bad’ death can be used to explicate material from later periods in history. Secondly, it must be reiterated that despite the output of local monastic scriptoria, Late Anglo-Saxon England was still a predominantly oral culture. The traditions of history writing imported from the monastic communities of mainland Europe – a genre which had been neglected in England since the Viking invasions – led to the transcription of orally-transmitted narratives and folk memories that would have otherwise been lost. Thus, the eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the fusion of oral and literary texts; the consequence of which was that expressions (or interpretations) of the everyday habitus became much more prevalent in the written record. For a study which aims to chart the everyday belief in the walking dead, such evidence will prove invaluable. Finally, as mentioned briefly above, written accounts of encounters with the walking dead only truly began to circulate when there was a social, political and theological need for them to do so. The creation of a new secular and ecclesiastical regime was an act which would certainly demand comment by contemporary historians (to extol or criticise the orders), sermon-writers (to redefine what was ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice) and the producers of saints’ lives (the patrons of which


were the clerical and political elites aiming to substantiate or advertise an existing cult). Mirabilia could be used as vehicles to articulate contentions which, for whatever reason, could not be expressed directly.

The Reformation will be used as the upper boundary for similarly historically-decided reasons. Although, as Brian Cummings and James Simpson state, the events of the sixteenth century should be viewed as a continuation, rather than a disruption, of the cultural history of Western Europe, this is not to deny that the popular dissatisfaction with the Church reached its crescendo with the publication of the Ninety-Five Theses of Martin Luther (1517). Luther’s condemnation of the corruption of the clergy and the perceived iniquities of Catholic doctrine led to the ratification of a new religious/political ‘text’ — a schism which had wide-reaching consequences for the practices of everyday life. The possibility for mass-production afforded by the printing press allowed Luther’s writings to gain influence, authority and notoriety as they circulated within the secular and ecclesiastical centres of Western Europe. As an ‘initiator of new discursive practice’, Protestantism has been seen as ‘the final triumph of reformed religion’.

The English Reformation (c.1534), however, was much more contingent. Henry VIII’s assertion of Royal Supremacy over Rome, his desire to quell opposition to his religious kingship, and his general distrust of the ‘foreign’ (monastic and papal) influences in his land, were just as important to the processes of reform as the dissatisfaction with superstition. And yet, Henry was a firm believer in the power of the Mass and, initially, did not agree with the more severe ideologies of the Ninety-Five Theses, such as the rejection of the reality of transubstantiation. Whatever the true causes of the establishment of the Church of

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England, the state’s appropriation of key (though not all) aspects of the Protestant ideology resulted in the transformation of the official status of the ghost. The rejection of the doctrine of Purgatory (1563) denied the possibility that the living could interact with the dead; the dissolution of the monasteries cut off a prime source for written accounts of supernatural events, and less emphasis was placed on the eschatological significance of the corpse. The perpetuation of the memory of the deceased and the social status of their kin became the deciding factors in the body’s treatment after death. Of course, this is not to suggest that popular practice mirrored official doctrine – entrenched habits of belief undoubtedly persisted, reflected in the content of later pamphlet literature – but that the written evidence for assuaging ghosts become a lot scarcer following the doctrinal rejection of the ability to walk after death. Saints’ lives, monastic histories and sermon stories were the genres which suffered most keenly from the closure of the *scriptoria*. From the point of view of the written word, if not the archaeological record, the belief in ghosts lost one its most powerful forms of expression.

If the advances of the eleventh century precipitated the emergence of written accounts of the undead and the traumas of the sixteenth century diminished their function as didactic aids, then the ‘twelfth-century renaissance’ was the period in which ghosts began to gain a more overt presence in the annals of literary culture. As will be discussed in more detail below, the rise of the ghost story can be seen as a function of the scholastic drive to codify the universe and the ongoing ecclesiastical strategy of reform. The book was both the agent and reflection of these social and theological advancements.

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33 Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead*, pp. 21–33.
Christianity is a religion of the book. To read religious texts was to read the very body of Christ; a ‘remedial’ technique for achieving wisdom and, ultimately, redressing the divide that opened up between man and God as a consequence of Adam’s Fall.\textsuperscript{35} A religious text was thus a powerful, if dangerous, object. If read correctly, it was a means of (and metaphor for) salvation; if read badly it could lead to deviation, error, and ruin.\textsuperscript{36} Prior to the mid-twelfth century, when the rigorous curricula of the cathedral schools demanded different techniques for interacting with the written word, reading was a predominantly oral and monastic affair. Indeed, the attributes of the Latin script demanded that the author (the originator of the work) dictate his words to either his own hand or a scribe’s (the latter defined as someone who wrote down the words of others without any conscious alterations or amendments).\textsuperscript{37} The reader, a term which can be extended to include copyists in a *scriptorium*, recited the text as he or she scanned across the page; hence, references to the mastication of words and the ‘taste’ of certain passages.\textsuperscript{38} The development of Scholasticism in the twelfth century brought about such innovations as the use of indexes, paragraphs, punctuation, the rediscovery of cursive script and, as a


\textsuperscript{36} Mary Carruthers, ‘Reading with Attitude, Remembering the Book’, in *The Book and the Body*, ed. by Dolores Fesce and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 1–33 (p. 11). As a physical incarnation of the Word, the object itself was considered powerful and could be used in all manner of affective, unofficial rites. As with the act of reading, the ‘incorrect’, or deviant, use of the physical object could also lead to spiritual ruin. For the powers associated with Biblical texts, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).


\textsuperscript{38} For a review of reading practices from the Late Antique period to the fifteenth century see Paul Saenger, ‘Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society’, *Viator*, 13 (1982), 367–414.
consequence of the latter, the (re)emergence of vernacular writing. Itinerant preachers needed a more efficient system of spreading the Word to the growing urban population; theologians realised the limitations of memory training for biblical exegesis and the teaching of students; secular clerks needed a new way to cope with the demands of court bureaucracy. With the advent of sophisticated referencing systems and the increasing use of visual notations on the page, the importance of vocalisation for the retention of the meaning of the text diminished. Mnemonic techniques increasingly began to rely on visual signifiers for the retention, compartmentalisation, and retrieval of knowledge. The practice of silent reading, writing and rumination thus began to spread among the ‘textual communities’ of Western Christendom. The ability to read a text in private, without the self-regulation necessitated by reciting a passage aloud, begat opportunities for individual expression and unconventional thought: irony, cynicism, criticism and, indeed, the spread of heresy, were functions of the book’s newfound ability to circulate in the private sphere.

However, as the use of the written word for preaching purposes suggests, this is not to say that the oral recitation of works vanished from the reader’s repertoire; silent reading was just one of many modes of literary engagement that was available to a so-called textual community. Brian Stock defines such a community as a group of people whose social activities were centred on a particular text. The ‘text’, then, can be conceived as a set of shared dispositions: a series of assumptions, beliefs and fears that was disseminated among a particular social grouping. In a similar vein, Roland Barthes describes the text as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’ – an embodiment, or expression, of specific cultural

41 Saenger, ‘Silent Reading’, pp. 407–408.
43 Stock, Listening for the Text, p. 34.
44 Ibid., pp. 20–21.
The ‘text’ of the person of Christ, for example, could be made manifest through an oral/performative experience (that is, the reception of the Eucharist; the use of the text as a rule for one’s own conduct), part of an devotional process (the silent reading of a Book of Hours), or else expressed through the medium of the visual arts (the text of Christ’s perfection as evidenced through cathedral architecture). To quote Stock, ‘we can think of a textual community as a group that arises somewhere in the interstices between the imposition of the written word and the articulation of a certain type of social organisation.’ The increasing number of authors, scribes and readers which emerged in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries meant that texts which had previously been transmitted orally were soon committed to vellum. Ghost stories were one such text which, having been transferred to the page, could be used to structure the dispositions of the communities in which they were written. The use of *mirabilia* (‘wonders’) in this manner could only have occurred if the belief in the walking dead was shared by the everyday population; if it was an all-pervading ‘text’. As mentioned above, saints’ lives, sermon stories and history writing constituted the three main genres in which such stories were circulated. It should be stressed, however, that ghost narratives did not emerge in a vacuum. William of Newburgh did not transcribe his accounts of the walking dead merely to titillate his readership, nor were they a fully-formed ‘ideal’. To understand why England in the late twelfth century, for example, witnessed some of history’s most fascinating accounts of the restless dead – and, indeed, to understand why they warrant further academic debate – attention needs to be drawn to the political, social and cultural contexts in which they occurred. With regard to archaeological texts concerning the undead, practical contingency (disease; mass death) and the possibilities offered by changes in doctrine (the belief in Purgatory) are just two of the ‘structures’ that had to be negotiated when performing acts of deposition. As will be discussed in more detail shortly, a successful analysis of cultural artefacts (whether a book or burial) cannot be undertaken without an understanding of the social/environmental conditions of the community that made them.

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47 Ibid., p. 150.
Although the belief in corporeal ghosts was a pan-European phenomenon, existing as an oral tradition in places as disparate as Silesia and the Balkans, written accounts from the medieval period are altogether restricted to Scandinavia, Germany and the British Isles.\(^\text{49}\) Insular sources such as William’s *Historia* provide some of the most detailed and dramatic accounts of attacks by the walking dead. However, despite a nascent ‘English’ identity emerging in the late twelfth century, the universality of Church teachings and the familial and social connections that existed between the English elite and their counterparts on the continent demand that the focus on insular ghost belief must remain an open and permeable framework.\(^\text{50}\) A similar caveat must be made for the beliefs and fears of the unlettered majority. The similarity between Norse ghosts and the stories transcribed by William of Newburgh is very much apparent and has already been noted by Antonia Gransden.\(^\text{51}\) William was writing only a few centuries after the Viking occupation of the eastern seaboard. The pervading influence of Danelaw on the habits of everyday belief in north-east England suggests a cultural link, however far removed, between William’s sources and the Icelandic victims of the *draugr*.\(^\text{52}\) Indeed, the way in which the rural Icelandic community dealt with ‘bad’ death can find numerous analogues in the former Danelaw territories. As such, the evidence from the family sagas cannot be so easily set aside. It is crucial, then, to take into account the traditions and theological innovations which emerged from mainland Europe and helped shape the insular conceptions of death, dying and the beyond.

The diachronic/chronological boundaries of this thesis must be similarly flexible. Although, as intimated above, the transcription of ghost stories emerged as a function of the increase in literacy in the political and religious communities of Western Europe, this is not to say that unwritten accounts cannot be ‘read’ in earlier (and later) periods through the medium of the grave-site. Furthermore, the number of

\(^{49}\) Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead*, p. 125.


\(^{51}\) Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 268.

extant ghost narratives is miniscule when compared to the overall written corpus; tales of corporeal ghosts are rarer still. The twelfth-century sources are unusual in the number of allusions to the walking dead they contain; a reflection, perhaps, of the resurgence in history writing during this period and the fact that the popular belief in the restless dead had yet to be fully clericalised.

This is not to suggest that the socio-political structures of twelfth-century England made it unique; references to ambulatory corpses can also be discerned in such disparate sources as Anglo-Saxon medical manuals and personal correspondence from the fifteenth century. Written testimony can capture only a fragment of oral tradition, and even then it is filtered through the purview and intentions of the author. Sources which betray less overt didacticism and more incidental evidence of the local belief system are valuable corollaries to the twelfth- and thirteenth-century chronicles and preachers’ manuals. The anecdotal account of the ‘walking’ of Richard Baynard in the Armburgh papers (c.1434), for instance, provides a valuable insight into the non-clerical formulation of ghosts in this period.53 Similarly, the manuscript context of the tales transcribed by the anonymous Byland Monk (c.1400) seem to be less a means of advancing church doctrine and more a reflection of the actual beliefs of the lay people who worked in and around the monastery.54 The reality of walking corpses in the mental schemas of the fifteenth-century populace is all the more striking when considered against the general doctrinal belief in the incorporeality, or ‘spiritual’, nature of ghosts. Allusions to the illnesses inflicted by ‘strange wanderers’ in Anglo-Saxon leechbook recipes also betray something of the habitual fear of malign corporeal agents.55 The analysis of texts from across a wide chronological spectrum is needed not only to chart variations in belief over time, but for the fact that the literary evidence is so scarce that recourse has to be made to all the available sources, whether clerical, art-historical or, indeed, archaeological.

53 Armburgh, p. 62.
54 The twelve Byland Abbey ghost stores were transcribed on blank leaves in a late twelfth-century manuscript (BL Royal 15 A. XX). The manuscript contained several works of Cicero and a collection of theological tracts. The context of the stories does not suggest that they were used for preaching purposes. Indeed, the lack of any overt didacticism and the fact that the majority of the encounters occur within the vicinity of Byland suggests that the monk was recording local gossip. As the monk himself states, ‘dictur, referent aliqui’. Schmitt, Ghosts, pp. 142–143.
55 Leechdoms 2, II. lxv. 5 (p. 297).
By using the Conquest and the Reformation as loose framing devices, we can attain a deeper understanding of how the fear of, and practical response to, the restless dead was influenced by social, religious and cultural changes over time. The imposition of a new Norman hierarchy onto the habits of Anglo-Saxon life, the cultural and theological innovations of the ‘twelfth-century renaissance,’ and the standardisation of Church practice following the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), are the key historical events which must be considered in an examination of how authoritative attempts to transform the mental/practical dispositions of the laity affected, if at all, the latter’s perception of the dead. That is to say, the reorganisation of political, social and ecclesiastical structures, the proliferation of history writing and new theories as to how the living interacted with the dead, and the Church’s appropriation of ghosts to advertise the efficacy of commemorative prayer, are factors which may have influenced the form and function of the literary and material evidence.\(^{36}\)

**Literature Review**

Taking into account the scarcity of the evidence, it is not surprising to find that medieval revenants – the Icelandic draugr apart – do not seem to have provoked much in the way of academic debate. Indeed, with accounts of the walking dead in medieval literature restricted to scant but tantalising passages in chronicles, satires and preachers’ manuals, their potential for study cannot be realised if focus is placed on the narrative and penitential sources alone. This, then, is why I believe a more holistic approach to revenant belief, one which includes an analysis of unusual burial practices and the general, medieval understanding of disease causation, can add an extra dimension to what has been a previously underdeveloped topic. A focus on ‘bad’ or ill-performed death demands an acknowledgement of the practical methods used to assuage the suspect, and potentially contagious, corpse. The materiality of revenant activity is an issue which has been touched upon briefly in previous historiographical and archaeological studies, but has yet to be fully explored. And yet, even if the state of research into the restless dead is scant when compared to the

\(^{36}\) For how the Fourth Lateran Council gave official acknowledgement to practices which were already widespread, see Alexander Murray, ‘Confession Before 1215’, *TRHS*, 6\(^{th}\) Ser., 3 (1993), 51–81.
wider annals of medieval scholarship, this is not to say that recent decades have not witnessed some significant developments in the field.

Although primarily concerned with Eastern European vampire belief, Paul Barber’s *Vampires, Death and Burial* (1988) remains one of the most influential publications on the corporeal undead. The crux of Barber’s argument is simple: vampire belief can be explained by the biological processes of decomposition and the issues arising from inadequate body disposal. One of the more interesting hypotheses concerns the idea that people who suffered bad death were buried carelessly and in shallow graves. They were later perceived as revenants due to the propensity of such bodies to rise to the surface.\(^{57}\) Furthermore, Barber argues that the act of staking the body to the ground was a practical way of containing the agency of the deceased; puncturing the flesh and/or weighing down the torso served the purpose of reducing the effects of bloating as well as of keeping the body in place. Post-mortem ruddiness (*livor mortis*) and extreme compulsion and violence (cadaveric spasm as the muscles and ligaments decay) are among other aspects of vampire behaviour which Barber attributes to the natural, if unusual, processes of decay.\(^{58}\) The implication that the physicality of the decaying corpse was an ‘external structure’ which could generate only a certain amount – and type – of apotropaic responses has bearings on the medieval techniques for allaying the dangerous dead, and will be discussed in more detail in a later part of this thesis.

Nancy Caciola’s article ‘Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture’ remains one of the most influential studies on the High and Late medieval belief in the undead.\(^{59}\) Exploring the alternate, non-canonical traditions concerning death and the apparent agency of the corpse in Western Europe, Caciola begins by elucidating her methodology for analysing cases of the undead and advocates the separation of overt, official discourse from the base ‘cultural facts’ described in each narrative.\(^{60}\) Citing the example of a demonically possessed corpse in Thomas de Cantimpré’s orthodox preacher’s manual, *Bonum Universale de Apibus* (c.1270), Caciola argues that de Cantimpré’s continued declaration of the non-vitality of the corpse implies a

\(^{57}\) Barber, *Vampires*, pp. 133–146.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., pp. 39–45.


\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 10.
pervading, popular belief that the dead did indeed walk of their own volition.\textsuperscript{61} It is later argued that the source of a corpse’s agency – its latent life-force – resides in the juxtaposition between vital flesh and sterile bone, and that a body is only truly rendered ‘safe’ when the process of decay, the rite of passage, is completed. In other words, the fresher the corpse, the greater danger it presents to the living; the flesh needed to be separated from the bones in order for the corpse to be truly defunct. The idea that the flesh needed to be defunct for the body to be considered ‘safe’ is a universal conceit based the universality of decay, and as such is not restricted to medieval scholarship.\textsuperscript{62} Thus it is no surprise that cremation, often the ultimate apotropaic response to revenant encounters, involved the complete destruction of a body’s incorruptible and dangerous flesh.\textsuperscript{63} Taking this argument to its logical conclusion, Caciola states that the bodies of saints, which retained residual energies that healed or cured the sick, may also be considered a class of the undead. Caciola’s article, then, intimates how, despite official condemnation of the ‘false resurrection’ of the corpse, entrenched belief in the walking dead continued to thrive in the habits and routines of daily life. This is an idea to which I also subscribe.

Carl Watkins maintains a similar approach to revenants in \textit{History and the Supernatural in Medieval England} (2007).\textsuperscript{64} Chapter five, especially, acts as an overview of how the theological innovation of the settlement of sins in the afterlife, and the shaping of the ‘third place’ of Purgatory, impacted on the common perception of the restless dead. According to Watkins, the idea that the corpse was but a puppet for demonic agency belonged to an older, more conservative mode of belief, and that, from the end of the twelfth century, revenants began to be seen not as demons-in-disguise, but as individuals permitted to return to earth for suffrage.\textsuperscript{65} Although chapter two dismisses the idea that pagan belief was widespread in Medieval Europe, Watkins nonetheless states that the fear of the walking dead may have belonged to an older, pre-Christian tradition so ingrained in the habits and

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{63} Caciola, ‘Revenants’, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 171.
practices of popular culture that no-one, not even the Church, could fail to acknowledge their existence.66

Robert Bartlett,67 P. G. Maxwell-Stuart,68 Darren Oldridge,69 R. C. Finucane70 and David Keyworth71 have each afforded the revenant an appraisal in recent years. Using William of Newburgh’s Historia Rerum Anglicarum as his main literary case study, Bartlett contextualises revenant encounters within the larger framework of twelfth-century attitudes toward death.72 In a similar vein, Maxwell-Stuart, Finucane and Keyworth locate the revenant within the general medieval concern about the post-mortem existence of the dead and, macrocosmically, within wider history of European ghost belief from Ancient Greece to the present day.73 Oldridge, meanwhile, takes a diachronic approach in his chapter on revenant belief, crossing the boundary between the medieval and Early Modern periods in order to explicate the mechanisms by which the dead were ‘revived’, the contrasting beliefs as to the agency of the corpse, and the political uses afforded by such encounters.74 The latter’s approach – that is, the reluctance to periodise the revenant – allows for more scope when charting how changes in religious belief may have affected the popular perception of ‘bad’ death. It is worth noting, however, that all five of these authors utilise a similar range of sources and review them in a similar fashion. Finucane and Maxwell-Stuart, for example, follow the same lines of enquiry as Caciola – the influence of Purgatory; the relationship between corporeal and incorporeal ghosts – but do not go into the same amount of depth or detail. And yet, the repetition of the same few narratives and explanatory material is entirely logical if viewed as a function of the context in which each scholar was writing. As review articles within larger investigations into the cultural history of European ghost belief,

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66 Ibid., pp. 80–87.
69 Darren Oldridge, Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds (London: Routledge, 2007).
71 David Keyworth, Troublesome Corpses: Vampires and Revenants from Antiquity to the Present (Southend-on-Sea: Desert Island Books, 2007).
72 Bartlett, Kings, pp. 612–615.
73 Maxwell-Stuart, Phantoms, pp. 39–78; Finucane, Ghosts, pp. 49–89; Keyworth, Troublesome Corpses, pp. 57–78.
74 Oldridge, Strange Histories, pp. 56–75.
these works by Finucane and Maxwell-Stuart make useful inroads into synthesising, and explicating, the available data.

Other scholars have attempted to analyse the interrelation between elite and popular ghost belief by focusing on a specific geographical area. Using East Yorkshire ghost lore as her case study, Jacqueline Simpson discusses how theological innovations could combine with popular beliefs to create local, non-uniform traditions about the meaning of the undead – meanings which could meander and evolve over time.75 Analysing the revenant encounters described in William of Newburgh’s Historia and the ghost stories transcribed by the anonymous Byland Abbey monk, Simpson provides an insight into the entrenched nature of local practices and beliefs in a small geographical area. Indeed, the interpretations generated in William’s time (revenant activity as a form of demonic possession) contrasted with the actions of the tailor Snowball in the second Byland narrative (the placement of a scroll of absolution on the corpse), illustrating how supernatural encounters may have been given meaning according to the idiosyncratic worldviews of the percipients.76 The doctrine of Purgatory was very much established by the beginning of the fifteenth century, as reflected by the number of ghosts in the Byland Abbey narratives which seek posthumous absolution. And yet, despite this apparent orthodoxy, the shape-shifting characteristics of the ghosts – as seen most explicitly in Story II – are suggestive of a older, pre-Christian conception of the supernatural. Indeed, Simpson makes a final, important point that it is hard to make a distinction between lay and clerical belief and that people did not speak with a single, unified voice.77 The artificial and problematic nature of the boundary between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ culture has been noted with increasing frequency in other areas of medieval scholarship, and is something which will be addressed more closely in forthcoming chapters.

John Blair, meanwhile, attempts to locate the eleventh- and twelfth-century conception of the restless dead within the wider context of draugr/vampyre encounters and the prevailing English traditions of judicial damnation. He considers both the psychological and physiological reasons for the fear of revenants (with

76 Ibid., pp. 391–392.
77 Ibid., p. 401.
reference to Freud’s theory of the uncanny and Paul Barber’s study of the biology of the cadaver, respectively) and tries to place the narratives in the context of wider European and world belief. Indeed, he notes that the belief in the embodied ghost did not exist in the indigenous Americas, and that the parallels between the English revenant and Eastern European vampire is suggestive of a deeper (non-Christian?) cultural link between the two geographical areas.78 Decapitation, cremation and bog disposal are mentioned as the techniques most commonly used to manage the dangerous dead. The final part of the article explains how revenants were recruited by the Anglo-Saxon Church as agents of discipline. That is, the fear of becoming a wandering, pestilent corpse and being re-buried in profane burial ground was co-opted by authority in order to manage those who did not follow accepted religious or secular teachings.79 Finally, by providing potential archaeological analogues to the literary material, Blair adds an extra nuance to his historicist methodology and takes an overt, though tentative, step toward an interdisciplinary investigation. An early Anglo-Saxon inhumation from Harwell, Berkshire (c.550), which was found with a spearhead protruding downwards into its ribcage, is used to illustrate the hypothesis that Eastern Europe and the British Isles may have shared base ‘cultural facts’ about the restless dead.80 However, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, Blair’s contention that the physical measures used to restrain the dead became less popular after the Norman incursion is contradicted by the archaeological evidence from the High and Late Middle Ages.81

Whereas folklorists and historians have maintained a long and fruitful dialogue with the documentary evidence for revenant encounters, ‘necrophobia’ and the related idea of ‘deviant burial’ remain fledgling topics in archaeological research. Eileen Murphy’s edited volume, Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record (2002), based on a conference session of the same name, is one of the most notable recent attempts to analyse ‘deviant’ – that is to say, local and unusual – burial practice.82 Chapter one discusses the phenomena of necrophobia, the fear of the dead, in the context of case studies from prehistoric and Classical Greece. Evidence

79 Ibid., p. 553.
80 Ibid., pp. 542–543.
82 Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record, ed. by Eileen Murphy (Oxford: Oxbow, 2008).
of tied body parts, proneness, the body being restrained by weights/stakes, decapitation and cremation are again listed as the main techniques to prevent the corpse from rising.\textsuperscript{83} Echoing Paul Barber, chapter four advocates the value of forensic pathology in analysing deviant burial practices and the reasons why some individuals were singled out for atypical treatment. Sufferers of disease or deformity were considered powerful and dangerous and needed to be allayed in death, lest they return to haunt the living.\textsuperscript{84} In an interesting reversal of the commonly held notion that deviant burials were conducted on a folk-level to contain the walking dead, chapter ten, by Estella Weiss-Krejci, examines the unusual burial practices of the royal dynasties of medieval Europe.\textsuperscript{85} Those who had died abroad – for example, Frederick I, who succumbed during the Third Crusade – were de-fleshed as a pragmatic way of transporting the body home.\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, in light of Weiss-Krejci’s paper, it must be recognised that the interpretation of deviant burial as a way of subduing the revenant depends very much on the context of the deposition.

Preceding this volume by half a decade, Roberta Gilchrist and Barney Sloane’s \textit{Requiem: The Monastic Medieval Burial in Britain} was one of the first archaeological studies to give the materiality of ghost belief serious academic thought.\textsuperscript{87} Although the main concern of \textit{Requiem} is to catalogue different types of monastic funerary practice, Gilchrist suggests that evidence of decapitation, or deposition with lead scrolls, may, in fact, reflect a fear of the dead.\textsuperscript{88} Gilchrist’s later article, ‘Magic for the Dead? The Archaeology of Magic in Later Medieval Burials’ (2008), takes this thesis further and analyses the deposition of unusual grave goods in an attempt to discover whether they were used as apotropaic devices, protective

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{charlier} Phillipe Charlier, ‘The Value of Palaeoteratology and Forensic Pathology for the Understanding of Atypical Burials: Two Mediterranean Examples from the field’, in \textit{Deviant Burial in the Archaeological Record}, pp. 57–70 (p. 68).
\bibitem{gilchrist2} Gilchrist and Sloane, \textit{Requiem}, pp. 199–201.
\end{thebibliography}
charms, or in learned rites of divination. According to Gilchrist, the technique of lining the coffin with ash and hearth rakings may account for the belief that the troubled corpse had a compulsion to return to ‘the warmth of the hearth’. Such a practice – as exemplified by the ash burials in the Black Death cemetery at East Smithfield, London – may be seen as a type of magic to contain the deceased within the grave. The suppositions about the dangerous, restless nature of the corpse in Gilchrist’s work are innovative, but remain tangential to wider arguments on monastic death culture and medieval magic.

The process of making the revenant the central focus of archaeological study has only recently begun to take shape. A recent article by Emilio Nuzzolese and Matteo Borrini on the pathology of the so-called ‘Venice-vampire’ is the one of the first pieces of archaeological research to make an explicit connection between an unusual burial process and revenant belief. In general, however, late medieval archaeologists have been content to designate burials as ‘deviant’ without ascribing to them any particular function or meaning. The problem of identifying the intentionality of unusual mortuary practices is one of the main reasons behind this scholarly hesitation. That is to say, when does a prone burial signify a fear of the corpse, and when does it allude to carelessness during the act of deposition? The sense of ambiguity is heightened by the variable quality of site reports, something which may be exacerbated if deviant burial does not form the main object of the study. If the brief is to chart a disused graveyard before the land is subject to commercial redevelopment, deviant or unusual mortuary practices are unlikely to receive the same amount of scholarly attention as the stratification of the site as a whole. Time restrictions and the adherence to a positivist desire to quantify and classify the data mean that commentaries on ‘deviance’ are often absent from site reports. The excavation of a disused medieval burial ground in Haverhill, Suffolk (c.1200–1400), for example, revealed an inhumation which had had a boulder placed on its chest, a practice which warranted no further discussion by the excavators.

92 Jon Murray, ‘Excavation of a Medieval Cemetery at Crowland Road, Haverhill’, *SIA*, 41 (2005), 5–42 (p. 16).
This is not to say that burial in such places prohibits the possibility that the dead could rise – see Gilchrist’s observations on use of lead scrolls, for example – but that investigating the local responses to suspect corpses was simply beyond the aims of the excavation and as such did not warrant anything more than a summary of the find. Taking into account the legal ramifications of excavating human remains from graveyards which have enjoyed a long period of use (especially since anonymous medieval graves are generally to be found in a lower stratum than ‘named’ burials), the sample bias is altogether understandable. There may be archaeological examples of the fear of the dead which, due to the aforesaid restrictions, we are simply unable to investigate.\textsuperscript{93}

Addressing these issues for the Anglo-Saxon period – and, indeed, providing an obverse to the summary of the written sources provided by Blair – Andrew Reynolds first began charting the relationship between the corpse, judicial authority and burial location in ‘The Definition and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites’, a body of research which culminated in the 2009 publication \textit{Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs}.\textsuperscript{94} Like Caciola and Gilchrist, Reynolds lists prone burial, decapitation, burial under stones, and amputation as among the main indicators that the deceased was considered abnormal and had the potential to rise.\textsuperscript{95} Reynolds maintains that such practices were widespread, and that ingrained belief dating from before the Christian conversion may have influenced later medieval habits of body disposal.\textsuperscript{96} Scholarship on the belief that the dead were active in their graves has also been conducted by Sarah Semple\textsuperscript{97} and Dawn Hadley,\textsuperscript{98} but, like their counterparts for the later medieval period, Anglo-Saxon archaeologists have yet to make the restless dead the central focus of study. Despite the chronicle and \textit{vita} sources noting that the noxious vapours exuded by the revenant were one of the main causes of a victim’s death, no modern scholar, archaeologist or otherwise, has put much

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Reynolds, \textit{Deviant Burial}, pp. 68–92.
\item Ibid., p. 92.
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\end{footnotesize}
emphasis on the concept of contagion (that is, the revenant as the epitome of disease) and how this may have affected the reaction to, and management of, the dead. Although much scholarship has been conducted on the belief in the contagiousness of sin, an explicit connection has yet to be made between disease, poor Christian conduct, and accounts of medieval revenant activity.  

Taking the literature as a whole, it can be seen how the multivalent nature of the revenant, the difficulty of maintaining a stable boundary between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ culture, and the dangerous nature of the fleshy corpse, are conclusions which have been reached by historians and archaeologists alike. And yet, it needs to be stressed that sample biases and the prohibitions on the excavation of human remains have restricted the discovery of ‘deviant’ burials from the high and late medieval periods. Moreover, the oral sources for revenants are subject to such modification by the medieval chronicler or sermon writer that it is often difficult to ascertain the ‘cultural facts’ of everyday belief from the political and religious discourses to which the revenant was put to use.  This is not to suggest that the authoritative use of the ghost is an irrelevant topic of study (see chapters three and four, for instance), but that since oral history is often filtered through the aims and intentions of the author, local belief can sometimes be obscured. The reluctance of the archaeologist to enlist the help of written sources to overcome the restrictions of fieldwork is mirrored by the historian’s reluctance to use the ‘syntax’ of the grave-site to structure the reading of the documentary evidence.

The Aim of this Study

With the methodologies and findings of these previous studies in mind, there are a number of key questions which my thesis will address. Firstly, I will examine the ways in which revenants were perceived by medieval communities in light of variations in religious beliefs and attitudes towards death. I propose that revenants

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100 Caciola, ‘Revenants’, p. 10.
embody the dialogical tensions that exist between the vestigial, sometimes violent, agency of the deceased and the mortuary/commemorative practices used to structure their passage into the next life. The bloated corporeality of the revenant is an index of what happens when death goes so awry as to bring disharmony and terror to the living – a performance gone ‘wrong’. Correct ritual performances, then, can be considered a powerful apotropaic: they protected the living by means of assuaging and benefiting the dead.\textsuperscript{101} Secondly, attention must also be paid to the specific placement of the revenant narratives within their manuscript context. Not only can a codicological reading of the material reveal the ways in which stories about the restless dead were created and transmitted – as didactic aids in preachers’ manuals, for example – but, in the case of chronicles such as the \textit{Historia Rerum Anglicarum}, it will also be shown how supernatural narratives could be utilised as signifiers for other deviant and destructive events in history; that is, as criticisms of unjust social action. As stated above, the third question concerns my belief that archaeological sources, combined with recent research into the anthropology of performance,\textsuperscript{102} can build upon the literary evidence and provide a more nuanced interpretation of the strategies for dealing with the environmental and cosmological problems caused by a person’s death. It is my contention that the methods of assuagement described in the written sources can indeed be discerned in the archaeological record. Such literary sources can be used to explain the meaning of hitherto ambiguous mortuary practices and grave goods. Conversely, the discovery of ‘unusual’ burials or artefacts can elucidate practices that were not codified in written texts.\textsuperscript{103} This thesis, then, will take an interdisciplinary and intertextual approach to the issue of revenant belief in the Middle Ages.

\textit{Methodology}

Having to negotiate between the literary and archaeological evidence may sound uncomplicated in principle, but it creates a number of methodological and historiographical problems. The marrying of the ghost story (a written source) to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Robert Swanson, ‘Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages’, in \textit{The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul}, ed. by Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon, Studies in Church History, 45 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), pp. 143–174.
\item John Moreland, \textit{Archaeology and Text} (London: Duckworth, 2001), p. 94.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
grave (a material residue) is an act which is fraught with uncertainty, not least due to
the stereotypes afforded to each type of evidence. Historical archaeology has long
been seen as ‘the handmaiden to history’, a reference to the pervading academic
belief that documentary evidence is much more important for the analysis of past
societies than the material residues of practice.\textsuperscript{104} Much work has been conducted in
recent years to deconstruct the belief that ‘archaeologists [only] study objects,
historians [only] study words’ and that the former is subservient to the latter.\textsuperscript{105} John
Moreland, especially, has shown that boundaries between ‘the Object, the Voice and
the Word’ do not stand up to scrutiny when studying the nuances of everyday
medieval life.\textsuperscript{106} Sermon stories may have been written by an educated elite, but the
contents of the narrative were often structured by the unwritten beliefs of the
audience and augmented by visual aids – the aural, visual and material fields
interwining to form a powerful and multi-sensory mode of instruction.\textsuperscript{107}
Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail below, no true distinction can be
made between the ‘literate’, ‘semi-literate’ and the ‘illiterate’\textsuperscript{108}. Liturgies,
transcribed into Latin and disseminated in the teachings of the Church, can be seen
an example of ‘official’ discourse (the abstraction of the pervading cultural text for
disciplinary purposes) whereas the grave, ‘transcribed’ by the agency and intentions
of the mourners, is an example of local discourse (the text given one of many
practical expressions). The practical responses to ‘bad’ death may have been
‘written’ by the everyday populace in burial grounds, but their grammar of action
was nonetheless structured by the conditions of the cultural text; the rule of doctrine
committed to memory instead of the page.

Thus, the grave-site retains traces of the written word just as historical
documents, as manifest products of human agency, are embedded in the material
domain. Although they may differ in form and content, the grave and the ghost story
embody, to varying degrees, the same cultural beliefs about the walking dead and

\textsuperscript{104} Ivor Noel Hume, ‘Archaeology: Handmaiden to History’, North Carolina Historical Review, 41
\textsuperscript{105} Moreland, Archaeology and Text, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 119.
\textsuperscript{107} Miriam Gill, ‘Preaching and Image: Sermons and Wall Paintings in Later Medieval Art’, in
Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages, ed. by Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002),
\textsuperscript{108} Moreland, Archaeology and Text, pp. 35–61.
draw from the same ‘tissue of quotations’. In this way, they are articulations of the same overarching text; residues of belief wrought from the same textual community. To chart the influence of a material object on a literary product or the content of a book on the layout of the grave-site can be seen as a form of intertextuality. Texts speak of other texts. Interdisciplinary research, therefore, aims to weave the various modes of textual expression together and ascertain whether written sources and artefacts, as indices of the socio-cultural conditions of a society at specific moments in space/time, can be read in similar ways. However, as the following section will demonstrate, interdisciplinarity is a term – and a methodological process – which raises numerous problems.

**Interdisciplinarity: the ‘Anti-Method’**

By its very nature, there is no such thing as a definitive interdisciplinarity method. Robert Frodeman describes interdisciplinary projects as the result of ‘the resurgence of interest in the larger view of things […] an antidiscipline, because it is crucial that such a study resists being once again drawn in by the gravitational pull of disciplinary approaches and standards’. However, before a discussion of the nature and aims of interdisciplinary research can take place, we first need to clarify Frodeman’s statement about what constitutes a discipline, and why their approaches, pulls and standards need to be ‘resisted’. Although the concept of arranging knowledge into discrete, bounded units can be traced back to the Classical period, the Enlightenment project of the systemisation of the universe witnessed an explosion in the amount of new knowledge being created and, as a result, precipitated the need for the demarcation of data into more manageable units. It was not long before the scientific method, which aimed to classify and differentiate between the different types of data being produced, began to percolate into the study

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110 Stock, *Listening for the Text*, p. 150.
of Humanities. Philology, for example, emerged as a way to ‘scientifically’ categorise languages and historic texts.\textsuperscript{114} Antiquarianism, for so long an amateur pursuit sponsored by wealthy landowners, enjoyed a gradual transformation into the nascent ‘scientific’ discipline of archaeology.\textsuperscript{115} As research universities began to thrive in the mid- to late nineteenth century, so disciplines became increasingly concretised and bounded.\textsuperscript{116} Each discipline possessed its own canon, habits and research structures – ‘standards’ – which, as Frodeman, Stanley Fish and Joe Moran intimate, limit the scope of Humanities research and breed accusations of insularity.\textsuperscript{117} As will be discussed in detail, below, adherence to (or immersion in) a social and cognitive structure prohibits certain modes of action and restricts ‘impossible’ patterns of thought.

For topics which cover the spectrum of human life experience, such as ghost belief, adherence to disciplinary boundaries is especially constraining: how can we study the literature of walking corpses and demons-in-disguise without discussing the historical context of such beliefs? How do we study medieval grave-sites without knowledge of Christian theology? Although it is true that the benefits of adhering to a discipline include the fact that different subjects can ask different questions about a source text, the evolution of magical practice (for instance) is nevertheless of interest to students of Theology, History, English, and Anthropology alike. The study of death and dying is as much a philosophical exercise as it is about the explication of written texts and material remains. Interdisciplinarity, as used in non-scientific fields, seeks to close these gaps and explain the holistic nature of human cultural practice. Rather than viewing interdisciplinarity as an ‘antidiscipline’, a type of methodological chaos, we should instead rely on the anthropological conception of ‘between space’ and see such research as a form of untapped, albeit unstructured, potential. The crossing of disciplinary boundaries allows for the shaping of new methodologies from the vast pool of habits, dispositions and structures at the scholar’s disposal. The integration of English and Philosophy, Archaeology and History, encourages the answering of questions which are not specific to one

\textsuperscript{116} Weingart, ‘Knowledge Formation’, p. 8.
discipline. As intimated in the literature review above, the nature of the relationship between the literature of ghost belief and deviant burial practices is one such issue that needs to be addressed.

To answer the demands of interdisciplinary research, the very concept of ‘discipline’ needs to be called into question. The emergence of practice theory – and critical theory in general – is a function of the dissatisfaction with the institutionalisation of knowledge and aims to subvert the traditions of authority, objectivity and canon. The tenets of this theory are well suited to meet the challenge of conducting an investigation into the subjective – that is, the local and non-canonical – conception of the undead. Ghosts occupy an ambiguous dividing line between life and death and defy any easy attempts at categorisation. Taken metaphorically, a marauding corpse can thus be seen as an expression of inter- or anti-discipline. Practice theory, especially the work of Michel de Certeau, emphasises the agency of the individual in the subversion of political, religious and social structures. If the traditional goal of the discipline was to create an objective, ideal model of society, then ‘interdisciplines’ (of which critical theory and post-structuralism are an extension) tend to focus on everyday practice; that is, individual deviations from the authoritatively-constructed norm. In short, interdisciplinarity, revenant belief and practice theory are all testaments to the fragile nature of the authoritative institution and express the need to question the artificial ideal. It is a rare and exciting occasion when the method (interdisciplinarity) mirrors both the means (practice theory) and the object of study (the materiality and literature of the ghost).

The influence of interdisciplinarity in the field of Medieval Studies cannot be underestimated. As its name suggests, ‘Medieval Studies’ is an anomalous, amorphous subject area, at once structured by its adherence to a particular period of western history and yet able to thrive in and across a number of university departments. Medievalists from different subject areas often utilise the same primary sources (e.g., manuscripts) and as such their purviews and ‘structures’ occasionally

119 Fish, ‘Being Interdisciplinary’, p. 231.
120 Wolfgang Krohn, ‘Interdisciplinary Cases and Disciplinary Knowledge’, in Handbook of Interdisciplinarity, pp. 31–49 (p. 34).
intertwine. Whether the ghettoisation of medieval literature or medieval history from their main disciplinary areas has allowed for the production of more innovative research is an issue of some debate. James Simpson, for example, suggests that the creation of Medieval Studies departments serves to perpetuate and reinforce the arbitrary boundaries that exist between the Medieval and Early Modern periods. According to Simpson, diachronic methodologies (that is, looking at how material and literary texts transform over time), are better able to chart religious and social development than methodologies which seek to analyse a cross-section of texts from one particular period.\textsuperscript{121}

Such arguments have ramifications for my own thesis. Literary criticism, for example, demands a different skill-set from that needed for the analysis of archaeological remains. Topics such as palaeography and manuscript culture are as alien to the archaeologist as the excavation and interpretation of material remains are to the historian or literary scholar. A ‘unifying’ investigation into corporeal ghosts demands immersion in, and not just scant acknowledgement of, all three disciplinary areas.\textsuperscript{122} And yet, despite such reservations, this is not to suggest synchronic (interdisciplinary) and diachronic (historicist) methodologies cannot be used in tandem. Recourse to different types of data from different periods of historic development is a strategy which medievalists have often used to acquire a more integrated interpretation of the past. The study of Beowulf, for example, has relied upon archaeology to ‘justify’ the tropes and actions contained within the poem’s pages since at least the middle of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{123} Indeed, the discovery of the seventh-century ship burial at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, in 1939, confirmed the tentative date assigned to Beowulf’s composition and revealed an overt material analogue for the funerary performance of Scyld Scefing (ll. 26–52).\textsuperscript{124} Although recent research has shown that a seventh or eighth century provenance for the extant Beowulf poem is unlikely (the eleventh century being the period in which it was


\textsuperscript{122} Moran, Interdisciplinarity, p. 184.


committed to text, perhaps by a monk who interpolated an entrenched oral tradition or an existing written source), the use of archaeological evidence to better comprehend the poem’s descriptions of dress, funerary performances, and supernatural encounters continues to this day.  

But how useful are interdisciplinary investigations for topics which are more wide ranging and have a greater reliance on a body of written texts? Brian Stock\textsuperscript{126} and Gabrielle Spiegel,\textsuperscript{127} to give but two examples, have made excellent use of historical/sociological methodologies in their analyses of late medieval literary output. Texts, they assert, are inextricably bound to the actions and dispositions of social agents. The meanings of literary productions – be it chronicles, preachers’ manuals, or liturgies – cannot be divorced from the social contexts in which they were used and, indeed, retain some of their ‘social sediments’ and meanings when deployed in new and innovative contexts.\textsuperscript{128} The discipline of codicology and its focus on the materiality of the writing process has received much interest in recent years, especially with regard to the work of Roger Chartier, and can be rightly referred to as the ‘archaeology of the book’.

In a similar vein, John Arnold\textsuperscript{131} and Carl Watkins\textsuperscript{132} have shown that the division between ‘folk’ and ‘elite’ culture is an arbitrary, modern-day construct; a typological boundary to aid in the categorisation and interpretation of source material. Indeed, it will be argued over the course of this thesis that belief did not exist as a dichotomy between the literate and illiterate, the rich and the poor.

\textsuperscript{125} For one of the first modern attempts to analyse the material culture in \textit{Beowulf} using archaeological analogues, see Rosemary Cramp, ‘Beowulf and Archaeology’, \textit{Medieval Archaeology}, 1 (1955), 57–77.
\textsuperscript{128} Spiegel, ‘Social Logic’, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{131} John Arnold, \textit{Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
\textsuperscript{132} Carl Watkins, “‘Folklore’ and ‘Popular Religion’ in Britain during the Middle Ages”, \textit{Folklore}, 115 (2004), 140–150.
Medieval culture existed as a series of branches or divergences within an organic, ever-changing whole; that is, as a melange of ‘little’ local traditions within the greater Christian worldview (or text), of which the fear of the revenant was a part. It is a small but logical step to advance the idea that the artificial divide between material culture (practice) and literature (the liturgy; the authoritative text) also needs to be reconciled if we are to comprehend the manifold ways in which the people of the Middle Ages perceived and interacted with the walking dead. John Moreland’s *Archaeology and Text* has already made inroads into trying to reveal the ‘silent histories’ of unlettered peoples, an attempt which involves listening to the dialogue between the Voice (the oral text), the Object (the artefactual text) and the Word (written text).

The establishment of a conversation between the oral, literary, and material evidence can reveal the tension, if any, between official doctrine and everyday popular practice. The very materiality of the revenant (and thus its potential archaeological attestation) demands a different way of approaching the data than if the investigation was focused solely on airy demons or incorporeal ghosts. Nonetheless, caveats, such as the danger of assigning a meaning to an artefact using information gleaned from a written text, while ignoring the different social/material fields in which, for example, a body was buried and a ghost story written, must be recognised before any true dialogue can begin. As the dating of *Beowulf* has shown, what may appear to be a straightforward material/literary analogue is sometimes anything but. Incorrect inferences, exacerbated by the tendency to analyse static material residues (the bones; the page) over the processes and context of an object’s creation, have also led to analytical mistakes. However, a combined diachronic, interdisciplinary approach, if mindful of the fact that scholars adept in one discipline may struggle with the ‘structures’ of another, may, in fact, be the best way to study

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such a topic as the restless dead. As Daniel Sarewitz states, ‘reality is not divided up along disciplinary lines’. Revenants are not the purview of literary critics, nor do they belong solely to the historian or archaeologist. They can be analysed on the page or in the grave, and this thesis will attempt to do both.

Designing a Method: ‘Texts’ and the Illusory Divide

The [townspeople] found [the revenants] intact [...]. They cut off the men’s heads and placed them in the grave between their legs, tore out the hearts from their corpses, and covered the bodies with earth again. Another means of stopping revenants [...] was to exhume the bodies and cut off their heads, placing them between the legs of the corpse. One occurrence dates from the 13th century, western cemetery of St. Mary Spital [London] where a juvenile was found with a skull and lower mandible placed between its legs.

The first passage, above, taken from Geoffrey of Burton’s *Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna* (c.1144), describes events which occurred in the village of Drakelow, near Burton-Upon-Trent, in the late eleventh century. The second derives from an archaeological investigation by Roberta Gilchrist into monastic burial practices in medieval England. At first glance the archaeological discovery from St. Mary Spital would seem to operate as a material analogue to the events which are recorded as having taken place in Drakelow. Problems arise, however, when we take into account the chronological, geographical and, more importantly, methodological divide which exists between these sources. Interdisciplinarity may be a term which has come to dominate scholarship in the Humanities in recent years, but to design a methodology which can be used to analyse both written and material residues of past experiences is no easy task. To reiterate the arguments made above, the very nature of inter- or anti-disciplinarity research dictates that the method is contingent on the types of disciplinary structure available to the researcher. If subjectivity is to

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141 St. Modwenna, p. 197.
143 Fish, ‘Being Interdisciplinary’, p. 242.
interdiscipline what objectivity is to discipline, then this would explain the reluctance of medievalists working between fields to define their ‘way of doing’; it varies from project to project. Thus, in studies where written records have been used in tandem with archaeological data, no definitive attempts have been made to explicate and explain an (if not the) interdisciplinary method. It is a silence that illustrates the difficulty in articulating a method for exploring the space between disciplinary boundaries. Part of this problem arises from the institutional pedagogic tradition; the treatment of ‘literature’ and ‘archaeology’ as separate, bounded entities, each with their own distinctive biases, attitudes, and areas of interest. In general, medieval archaeology has been reluctant to make use of the ideas and frameworks developed by critical theory, while the importance of the visual and material evidence – texts for and of the illiterate – has only really come to the attention of literary scholars within the last three decades. Although recent years have seen critical theory become much more prominent in archaeological scholarship (‘post-processualism’, for instance, which incorporates the idea that material culture is a subjective construction), and despite the study of materiality becoming integral to the analysis of textual production (codicology), the amalgam of archaeological and literary methodologies is still in its early stages. Nonetheless, such a fusion has potential to reveal much about the synergy that existed between the literary (written) and material (artefactual, bodily) responses to ‘bad’ death.

Designing a Method: Orality, Aurality, and the Interdisciplinary Nature of the Book

Aurality (the shared hearing of written texts) is a function of the manuscript which presents one of the more immediate problems when trying to construct an interdisciplinary method. As stated above, private, silent reading was not the only way to engage with the written word. Literacy – that is to say, the ability to read

146 Post-processual (interpretive) archaeology emerged in England in the latter decades of the twentieth century as a reaction to the scientific, objective approach to material culture. See Ian Hodder, Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
and write in Latin – was traditionally defined against the concept of illiteracy, the inability to comprehend the language of the political and religious elite.\(^{148}\) As the social status of vernacular literature increased and lay readership flourished in the twelfth century, so the concept of literacy was extended to include the ability to read and write in the common tongue.\(^{149}\) ‘Semi-literacy’ is a term which can be applied to a number of related practices. If, as Joyce Coleman states, ‘orality’ is the reception of spoken texts and ‘literacy’ is the private reception of a manuscript, then ‘aurality’, as an intermediate between the two, can be defined as the reception of written texts through means other than private reading.\(^{150}\) Similarly, Michael Camille conceives the intermediate mode of textual reception as including ‘the individual who must rely on the literacy of others for access to written transmission’.\(^{151}\) Thus, the reading of illuminations and stained-glass windows, the habit of reciting (but remaining ignorant as to the literal meaning of) Latin prayers, and being an audience member during the public recital of written works, are examples of how the everyday medieval populace – who were neither completely literate nor completely illiterate – came into contact with written texts.\(^{152}\) The tale of the Drakelow peasants from *The Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna*, transcribed in Latin, may have been used for private edification, read aloud for the benefit of an audience, or even committed to memory and given as an oral performance at a later date. The same may also have been true for the tale of the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ in the *Historia Rerum Anglica rum*.

Thus it is difficult, even impossible, to separate acts of orality and aurality from the manuscript context of tales of the undead. Although the secular or religious author may have been aware of other manuscript sources and may have had a welter of written precedents at their disposal, ‘true’ testimony could also include oral accounts from trustworthy or firsthand informants.\(^{153}\) William of Newburgh notes

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\(^{150}\) Coleman, ‘Aurality’, p. 72.

\(^{151}\) Camille, ‘Seeing as Reading’, p. 32.


that he first heard about the Buckingham Ghost from ‘certain friends’, while the anonymous Byland monk professed to be reporting public rumour. Once the story had been transcribed, the private reader’s comprehension of the text was achieved through his cognitive negotiation of the structure of the page, emphasising (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter two) the difficult, labyrinthine nature of the reading process. The *aural* reception of the text demanded a similar strategy of interpretation as that practised by the literate reader. For instance, the preacher – having committed a ghost story to memory and using the power of the spoken word to convey its meaning to the congregation – must structure his own, personal understanding of the text against the ability of his audience to comprehend its message. Tone of voice, metre, verbal dexterity, humour, and bodily gesticulation are techniques which structured how the narrative was able to be received by the audience. The *Summa De Arte Praedicatoria* of Alain of Lille (c.1200), for example, stresses the importance of moderation in the delivery of a sermon: ornate speech and excessive bodily movement should be avoided lest the message be misread and the Church descend into the realm of theatre. Guibert de Nogent (d.1124), Jacques de Vitry (d.1240) and Thomas Waleys (d.1349) are among other churchmen who note the importance of the preacher’s bodily performance for the interpretation of the text. The voice and body, then, become a figurative page; the preacher a living book. As will be discussed in more detail in the context of the anthropology of performance, below, movement through an oral and aural field can be likened to the process of attaining meaning through the agent’s cognitive movement through the syntax of the manuscript or grave-site.

Acts of orality and aurality were equally important to the management of the dead. By evoking the Word of God, the social agent – be it a priest enforcing

154 Newburgh, V. 22.
excommunication or a layman giving suffrage – possessed the ability to transform the post-mortem status of the deceased. Prayers for purgatorial spirits and the use of Latin charms to fortify oneself against evil were everyday, spoken practices which, in the form of medical miscellanies, Books of Hours and chantry chapels left a number of ‘written’ traces in the historical and archaeological records.\textsuperscript{159} The opening lines from St. John’s Gospel, which functioned as a charm against evil influence, exemplify the interrelation between the \textit{immaterial} word and the \textit{material} manifestation of its power. The Word is God, and it is through His oral delivery that the physical world came into being.\textsuperscript{160} To return to the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative, it can be seen how speech (the prayer), the written text (the inscribed decree) and the material trace of the oral delivery (the manipulated corpse; the scroll of absolution) are inextricably linked – in modern academic terms, the very expression of an interdiscipline.

With the holistic relationship between speech, the written word and the artefact in mind, it can be suggested that grave-sites can be read like a literary text and a literary text can be read like a grave-site. Building upon the sociological/codicological methodologies of Roger Chartier, Andrew Taylor and Albert Derolez, among others, I will argue that the book – as a material, socially-constructed entity imbued with all manner of purposes, ambiguities and contrary meanings – can indeed be read like an ‘object’.\textsuperscript{161} Conversely, the purposes and meanings that are ascribed to the material, everyday world allow it to operate as a kind of ‘spatial story’; a narrative text.\textsuperscript{162} Material context, of course, is a key issue

\textsuperscript{159} Eamon Duffy discusses how Books of Hours were often amended with charms to protect the reader from sudden death, illness, and devilish machinations, in ‘Elite and Popular Religion: The Book of Hours and Lay Piety in the Later Middle Ages’, in \textit{Elite and Popular Religion}, ed. by Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, Studies in Church History, 42 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), pp. 140–161.
\textsuperscript{160} ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.’ (John 1. 1–3). The ghost from the second Byland narrative states that he was able to appear to the tailor because ‘today you have not heard mass or the gospel of St. John’. See Byland, p. 366.
\textsuperscript{161} See the essays in \textit{A History of Reading in the West}, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (London: Polity, 1999); Albert Derolez, \textit{The Palaeography of Gothic Manuscript Books: From the Twelfth to the Early Sixteenth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 28–35; Andrew Taylor details the importance of analysing the materiality of manuscripts and how this influences the reading of texts, in \textit{Textual Situations} (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
\textsuperscript{162} For the landscape as a ‘spatial story’, see Chris Tilley, \textit{A Phenomenology of Landscape} (Oxford: Berg, 1994), pp. 30–34
for both types of resource. An analysis of the revenant narrative from *The Life of St. Modwenna* cannot be conducted without an understanding of its specific placement within the manuscript; indeed, it may be significant that the story of the post-mortem reappearance of the Drakelow peasants appears between two chapters which focus on the miraculous healing of penitents. Nor can the deviant burial from St. Mary Spital be interpreted as such if we ignore its position in the landscape and the manner in which it deviates from normative burial practices. The ‘text’ does not exist in itself and cannot be divorced from its matrix. In the words of Roger Chartier, the text – be it a liturgical command or the conception of the perfect burial – cannot be perceived ‘outside of the support that enables it to be read’. Although it is true that the material context of the narrative/artefact formed a significant part of its support network, other factors, some of which may not have left an archaeological residue, also influenced the ways in which a text could be read. The socio-religious or linguistic orientation of the author, the ‘local traditions’ or environmental issues surrounding the burial of a corpse, and the disposition of the reader/percipient, are all significant components of the literary and archaeological matrix. If the ‘ideal’ text exists solely as a philosophical or theological concept, then the material text, as a product of many levels of human activity, has multiple iterations, the number of which is potentially without limit.

Thus, it can be said that each literary and material text is possessed of its own internal and idiosyncratic syntax; these ‘grammars’ of action can speak to us in the form of a narrative of an event (the exhumation and assuagement of the Drakelow revenants), or as a synecdoche of an event (the static material remains which, being the end result of a process, can open up a hypothetical narrative of the body’s deposition). The placement of the story within the manuscript and the arrangement of the gravesite – i.e. the internal syntaxes – are then given meaning according to the interpretive/habitual schemas of the percipient. Materiality and presence form an inextricable part of literary studies just as processes – movements in time, agencies – are some of the main things archaeologists try to extrapolate when studying human and material remains. Whether the thing being analysed is a book or burial, the fluid

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165 Taylor, *Textual Situations*, p. 11.
relationship between the ‘fixedness’ of an object and the percipient’s engagement with it over time is central to the act of interpretation.

As will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, discrepancies in habit, behaviour and disposition can account for the various ways in which the walking dead were written about, managed and perceived. Geoffrey of Burton’s narrative and the burial at St. Mary Spital are both examples of disposition; that is, a habit, or a ‘way of doing’. Compelled, perhaps, by the context or genre in which he was writing, Geoffrey did not think it unusual to insert a story about the undead into his *vita* of St. Modwenna. The unknown denizens of St. Mary Spital, meanwhile, took a specific course of action to assuage the danger presented by the juvenile’s corpse. Interpretation – whether performed in the twelfth century or the twenty-first – is, by turn, a matter of perception. Different perceptual schemas compel the percipient to think and act in different ways. The perceptual schemas of Geoffrey, the Drakelow villagers and the churchmen at St. Mary Spital, however, all seem to have included the belief that the dead had the ability to rise.

The dialogical relationship between interpretation and disposition, action and habit, is a theme which has found particular resonance in the theories of practice discussed by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau. Structuration theory – pioneered by Anthony Giddens and built upon by Margaret Archer and Robert Stones, among others – also ascribes great importance to the ways in which circumstance influences particular modes of action. Wolfgang Iser articulated similar ideas with regard to a reader’s agency within a literary rather than practical/environmental structure.167

Bourdieu, de Certeau, Giddens and Iser may have been writing in different contexts and in response to different academic debates, but the similarities in their arguments are clear: it is the reader, the active agent ‘moving’ within external constraints and framed by internal disposition, who creates and re-creates meaning. Although the emergence of theories of structuration and reader response can be traced to the general intellectual dissatisfaction with the conception of objectivity and canon, as yet no attempt has been made to reconcile these two traditions of

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167 For references, see footnotes 171, 173 and 174 (Bourdieu); 176 and 177 (De Certeau); 181 (Giddens); 182 (Stones); 184 (Archer); 191 (Iser).
critical theory. Indeed, if structuration (used most widely by archaeology) and the concept of reader response (which emerged in literary studies) share certain basic assumptions about the interrelationship between subjectivity, interpretation and texts, then recourse to practice theory, the base method, would seem to be a productive way of conducting an interdisciplinary investigation. Case studies and terminologies may differ according to author and discipline, but certain concepts (such as ‘agency’ and ‘structure’) know no such boundary. Agencies and structures relate as much to the interpretation of the written word as they do for material remains. If the meaning of a narrative is structured by its material context and archaeological remains act as a synecdoche for the processes (or narratives) which went into their creation, then it is possible for two seemingly distinct sets of data—the grave and the ghost story—to be analysed using a shared, underlying theory, one which focuses on the agency of the ‘reader’ at a particular moment in space/time. In this way moving between the written word and physical object presents no discernible methodological problems. The relevance of the theory of practice to the interpretation of the literary, historical and archaeological evidence of the walking dead is something which will be discussed in more detail, below.

Theories of Practice

Central to Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice is the concept of the *habitus*. Bourdieu’s debt to medieval scholasticism in his appropriation and development of this term is something that cannot go unmentioned. Indeed, question Forty Nine of St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* (c.1265–1274), describes the *habitus* as a type of disposition, a quality which orders conduct, the correct maintenance of which is needed for the reception of virtue and the Holy Spirit (Ia. 49. art.1–4). It is no coincidence, therefore, that the term *habitus* was first used by Bourdieu in the epilogue of his translation of Erwin Panofsky’s *Gothic Architecture and

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168 Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, p. 84.
169 Ibid., p. 85.
Building upon Panofsky’s assertion that the scholastics and great church builders of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries employed similar outlooks in their work, Bourdieu redefines Aquinas’ *habitus* as ‘a system of internalised schemes that have the capacity to generate all the thought, perceptions and actions characteristic of a culture, and nothing else’. In other words, the *habitus* can be viewed as a body of dispositions which regulates perception and act. If agency can be described as ‘the potential for doing’, then habit can be described as ‘a way of doing’. In *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu explains how the learnt dispositions of the social agent are ‘structured structures’ that function as ‘structuring structures’; that is, agency within a field of action is governed by habitual residues of past experience. These new forms of practice then feed back into the *habitus* of the individual and, depending on the action’s success or failure, modify its schema accordingly. The rules of the game – the ‘way of doing,’ – are duly transformed. Bourdieu’s application of the theory of practice also extends to his anthropological research, and can provide an idea as to how such a methodology can be utilised for a material study of the dead. ‘The Berber House or the World Reversed’ investigates the relationship between the use of interior and exterior space in the Kabyle household. To paraphrase Bourdieu’s arguments, the ‘female’ space of the house’s interior can be seen as an inversion of the ‘male’ space of the outside world, the threshold providing the magical, liminal space where these universes collide and meanings are reversed. Practices and movements within the damp, dark ‘hidden’ female domain of the house and the light, fiery, public domain of man are prescribed and given meaning by the pervading Kabyle worldview; that is, its unwritten and practical structure, its *habitus*. ‘Ways of doing’ and the importance of correct bodily conduct have occupied thinkers since the time of Aristotle. Bourdieu’s approach to the problem redefines the *habitus* as a type of hidden discourse, a constantly evolving ‘sediment of past experience’ through which strategies of action and reaction are played out on the fields of everyday life.

And yet, the concept of the *improvisation* of practice, so vital to discussions of medieval responses to ‘bad’ death, is never truly explicated by Bourdieu. Michel de Certeau’s *The Practices of Everyday Life* builds upon the underexplored elements of Bourdieu’s thesis and presents a more nuanced interpretation of how different ‘ways of doing’ (innovations) can emerge in response to social or environmental constraints in a ‘field’. Using the metaphor of walking through a cityscape, de Certeau conceives his *habitus* as the specific movements and directions (processes, agencies) which people take whilst traversing a hypothetical urban grid. This field contains certain base constructions – patterns – which hinder free movement and structure the overarching beliefs of a community and their general understanding of a place (for example, the greater, universal tradition of Christianity in Europe and a base knowledge of how to conduct oneself in that world). Yet despite – perhaps even because of – these constraints, there are many ways for people to move through this field. Different types of experiential syntaxes and perceptual truths are able to be accessed by the walkers as they make their way through the grid. In other words, to diverge and improvise one’s route, to innovate within the schemas at one’s disposal, is to create the little local traditions, of which the belief in the walking dead may have been a part.

De Certeau’s focus on the subversive nature of such traditions and unwritten discourses – practical innovation – is given greater emphasis in the essay ‘On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life’. Strategies, according to de Certeau, are actions which derive their potency from being able to manipulate and gain mastery over space. Thus, they are the preserve of the universal traditions and are made manifest in ‘concretised’ written discourses such as the sacraments, liturgical aids and edicts of the royal court. Tactics can be employed at a local, ephemeral level to insinuate, subvert, and innovate within these secular and ecclesiastical fields. Thus, although free movement in the medieval world was precluded by the base architecture of the Christian worldview, the evidence seems to suggest that an ‘ambulatory rhetoric’ existed in which the belief in the walking dead could

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175 Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, p. 73.
flourish. The revenant narrative transcribed by Geoffrey of Burton and the curious archaeological finds at St. Mary Spital are certainly suggestive of local, fleeting innovations to the problem of restlessness after death.

Anthony Giddens’s work on structuration theory emerged in the same cultural climate as that of Bourdieu and de Certeau. Mirroring, if not directly influenced by, key aspects of Bourdieu and de Certeau’s method, Giddens explains how individual social actors have the ability to manoeuvre within the structure (i.e. architecture) of their habitus, the result of which is either to repeat or transform (that is, to innovate within) the social structures in which they dwell. That is, people, through experience, acquire an overarching, habitual knowledge of how to ‘be’ in their particular social world. Possessed of this schema – the overarching cultural tradition – social actors/grid-walkers can trace their own paths within its confines and create their own idiosyncratic worldviews. Rob Stones, who charts the evolution of structuration theory from Giddens’s first exploration of the topic to its usage in the present day, has developed a quadripartite formula to illustrate the various stages of this process, a model which I believe also applies to the work of Bourdieu and de Certeau. Stones’s formulation of the ‘external structure’ of society offers another way of articulating the urban grid, landscape, or the field of play. That is to say, these structures are the pervading environmental and cultural conditions of a place at a particular moment in space/time. ‘Agency’ can be divided into a person’s general disposition (their internal structure, habitus) and active agency, wherein the social actor draws upon and activates a possible course of action from their habitus so as to achieve a conscious – or, indeed, accidental – result. The outcome of this action, its success or failure, can lead to a reinforcement or interpolation of their habitus or a change in the structural condition of the world. This type of process shares similar characteristics with the ‘ambulatory rhetoric’ of de Certeau and,

184 Margaret Archer focuses on the ‘internal conversations’ of the social agent which precipitate a mode of action deemed to be beneficial to their habitus. A successful action must correlate to the main, overarching strategy of an agent’s modus vivendi (their personal pattern, or way of living). See Structure, Agency, and the Internal Conversation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
indeed, finds expression in recent work by John Arnold.\textsuperscript{185} The archaeological appropriation of Giddens’s theories is similarly focused on individual agency, with action (i.e. the residual archaeological remains) also thought to operate as a kind of ‘spoken’, unstable, or subversive discourse: the product of deviation or ambulation within the general habitual schema.\textsuperscript{186}

The idea that the traversal of habitual pathways was a tactical but risky endeavour, liable to result in the failure of the intended outcome, is explored in greater detail in anthropological extrapolations of the theory of practice. Leo Howe\textsuperscript{187} and Edward Schieffelin,\textsuperscript{188} especially, explore the liminal and dangerous nature of religious practices. Echoing the theories outlined above, they argue how action is neither fixed in form nor possessed of a single, fundamental meaning. Ritual performance can be viewed as an ongoing process of ‘inscription’, whereby the meaning of the rite is constantly being innovated – the \textit{habitus} reinforced or changed – according to the competitive and unique ways the performers move through their ritual fields.\textsuperscript{189} Thus, there is always a risk that the performance, the bodily techniques that are staged to achieve an end and control the liminal forces, will fail. Failure, in a funerary sense, means there is a danger that the rite of passage between life and death will remain incomplete, the deceased condemned to roam the earth as a ghost.\textsuperscript{190} Further innovation or an ‘ambulatory rhetoric’ is then needed to ensure the dead do not rise. Thus, it is best to view the individual ritual act as a kind of ‘deep play’, a tactic used to subvert and transform one’s place within the social structure, and not as a stable text.

Thus, it can be seen how Bourdieu, Lowe and Schieffelin formulated their theories through anthropological fieldwork and that de Certeau conceived his idea of practical innovation through the metaphor of traversing the hypothetical urban grid.

\textsuperscript{185} Arnold, \textit{Belief and Unbelief}, pp. 35, 60.
\textsuperscript{187} Howe, ‘Ritual’, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{189} Howe, ‘Ritual’, p. 65; Schieffelin, ‘Construction of Reality’, p. 720.
\textsuperscript{190} For the tripartite structure of the rite of passage, see Arnold Van Gennep, \textit{The Rites of Passage} (London: Routledge, 1960).
Iser’s own theory of practice may well be focused on the act of interpreting a literary text but, as stated briefly above, the language he employs and concepts he uses operate in the same way as those used by his anthropological and sociological counterparts. The Act of Reading states unequivocally that textual structures structure the act of comprehension just as acts of comprehension, shaped by sediments of past experience, give meaning to the textual structure. The ‘wandering viewpoint’, the term given by Iser to describe a reader’s potential movements within the textual grid, mirrors the metaphor of the cityscape used by de Certeau; in both cases, the agent – by choosing certain potential cognitive or practical pathways available to the reader – creates an idiosyncratic syntax, pattern, or meaning. With Iser’s concept of reader-response taken into account, we can reaffirm the idea that the interpretation of a literary, oral or material text is structured by the disposition of the social agent and the ways in which they are able to negotiate the external constraints of the book, oral performance, or object they are reading.

The page’s physical layout, the metre of speech, language and an unusual death performance are ‘grids’ which demand dialogue with, and resolution from, the active agency (that is, the wandering viewpoint) of the percipient.

As Michael Camille, Mary Carruthers and Ivan Illich have shown, medieval theories of reading practice worked with a similar conception of movement through a page. ‘Entanglement’, or the failure of the reader to extricate a clear meaning from the text can, therefore, be seen as a corollary to the failure of a rite of passage, leading in both cases to the ‘entrapment’ of the active agent within the field of

192 Ibid., p. 107. See also Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1982), pp. 3–45. Jauss acknowledges the debt that his concept of ‘aesthetic reception’ owes to social theories of practice (p. 40). His declaration that ‘the historicity of literature rests not on an organisation of “literary facts” that is established post festum, but rather on the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers’, is analogous to Bourdieu’s habitus (p. 20). Likewise, the idea that ‘a literary work [...] does not present itself in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions’ resembles the ‘grid’, the external structure, described by Giddens and De Certeau (p. 23).
193 Iser, Reading, pp. 115–118.
194 Inspired by the multi-disciplinarity Michel de Certeau’s theories, Roger Chartier is aware of the importance of materiality in the reading of a text, and understands that the reader’s disposition is the essential mediator for the generation of meaning. See ‘Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader’, in Readers and Reading, ed. by Andrew Bennett (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 132–149. For the ways in which bodily performance by a preacher could act as a structure, or grid, through which meaning was created for the percipient, see Kienzle, ‘Medieval Sermons’, pp. 97–99.
Confusion, chaos, and lack of resolution are all iterations of the indefinite liminal existence. To apply this theory in the context of the assuagement of the walking dead, it has been suggested that practices which were too complex for the deceased to ‘read’, such as an ambulatory funerary procession, were able to ‘trap’ its senses in kind of metaphysical bind. The concepts of liminality and the ‘entanglement’ of the dead are integral to my methodology, as will become apparent over the course of this thesis.

Although the terminologies used by sociologists, archaeologists and literary critics may differ, practice theory has been shown to be incredibly versatile. The individual subversion of authority, the agencies involved in manuscript production, and the impact of cultural change on the rhythms of everyday life, are among the many aspects of medieval culture open to analysis by this method. Indeed, The Writing of History, an early explication of Michel de Certeau’s theory of practice, makes explicit the correlation between the constraints of the writer’s social and somatic status and the possible textual ‘truths’ he or she is able to produce. The text, then, is defined both by the institutional and material conditions of its production and the ‘ambulatory rhetoric’ of the author/percipient. The rhetorical patterns used by chroniclers or clergymen to transcribe revenant encounters can, therefore, be best understood using the methodologies described above. With regards to the theory’s ability to analyse cultural change, the Christianisation of England during the sixth/seventh centuries can be said to have involved the alteration of the county’s overarching structural condition – its belief system – in a way which took care not to disrupt practice at the local, habitual level. Thus, we can see how the overt meanings ascribed to the walking dead may have changed in accordance to Christian doctrine, but that specific practices, or rhetorics, used to assuage dangerous bodies belonged to an underlying perceptual schema that had persevered for generations. Conversely, twelfth-century attempts to advertise the efficacy of suffrage were a conscious manipulation of the syntaxes of the lay habitus, a process which helped transform their understanding of death and, so doing, alter the ways in which they managed and perceived the corpse. And yet, despite a community’s

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196 Iser, Reading, p. 131; Carruthers, ‘Reading with Attitude’, p. 12.

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conception of death being made manifest in such overt, didactic forms as the funerary liturgy and preachers’ guidebooks, to truly understand the ways in which sediments of past experience influenced local perceptions of the dead, one must be willing to diverge from the mains paths and embrace different textual genres. Chronicles, saints’ lives and archaeological remains constitute different but equally pertinent texts.

Sources

Issues of clarity and structure dictate that I limit the scope of my investigation to the British Isles, with recourse to case studies from mainland Europe when the argument deems it necessary. Since the aim of thesis is to examine evidence of the fear of the undead, further restrictions need to be made with regard to the types of written source I will use. The corporeality of the ghost, reference to the agency of the corpse, and/or evidence that the victim was physically attacked by the deceased are the criteria which have determined the choice of case study – a full list and geographical distribution of which has been included in the appendix (Table 1).

The revenant narratives contained in William of Newburgh’s Historia Rerum Anglicarum (c.1198), the anonymous Chronicle of Lanercost (c.1346), the Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna (c.1144), and the twelve ghost stories written by the anonymous Byland Abbey Monk (c.1400), have all been the focus of study in recent years, although they have yet to be discussed in tandem with the material evidence of the unruly dead. Other texts to be consulted include William of Malmesbury’s Gesta Regum Anglorum (c.1127), Walter Map’s De Nugis Curialium (c.1182), and the Armburgh Papers (c.1420), from which accounts of the walking dead have been less closely scrutinised. Where a motif or action in these case studies require further explication, Eastern European vampyre and Icelandic draugr narratives, of which there is abundant material, will also be consulted. Indeed, the imposition of Danelaw following the Viking invasions of the ninth century means that a definite cultural connection can be made between the draugr narratives found in the Icelandic Grettir’s Saga (c.1300) and Eyrbyggia Saga (c.1250), and similar tales from the English literary record. Of course, the danger of transposing beliefs and fears from one context onto another without regard for the differences between the two cultures
is always present in ethnographic analogy. And yet, putrefaction is a universal process. An unusual mode of decay is a form of constraint, an external structure, which all social agents potentially have to negotiate.\(^{199}\) The presence of entrenched cultural connections between the British Isles and mainland Europe, and the influence of prevailing habits of belief on perception and practice, suggest that the percipients in each case study shared a similar understanding of the unquiet dead. With the percipients restricted by environment, context, and eschatological belief, ‘bad’ death and unruly corpses could engender only a limited range of potential responses.\(^{200}\) Thus, taking a diachronic as well as synchronic approach to the evidence, I contend that certain analogies can indeed be made between insular medieval reactions to ‘bad’ death and the responses of their Norse and Eastern European counterparts.\(^{201}\)

Monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles and specialist on-line databases will be used to access the primary and secondary archaeological material. Roberta Gilchrist and Barney Sloane’s *Requiem* is an example of the type of published sources available for consultation. Web-based resources include the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), a digital archive that operates as a storage facility for site reports, journals articles, and unpublished ‘grey’ literature.\(^{202}\) The body of ‘grey’ literature archived in the ADS provides an opportunity to search for new and hitherto unutilised case studies. The exactitude of modern recording techniques means that, despite the possibility of excavation bias, the site reports uploaded by county archaeological units and commercial organisations may contain references to unusual burial practices and, perhaps, evidence of the fear of the undead. The British and Irish Archaeological Bibliography (BIAB) is another online database that can help in the discovery of pertinent material.\(^{203}\) Keywords such as ‘grave’ and ‘deviant’ will help narrow the search parameters to a manageable level. Finally, the National Monuments Record (NMR) online database\(^ {204}\) and the COPAC national library catalogue\(^ {205}\) will also be consulted in the search for primary case studies and secondary literature. The criteria for archaeological examples of ‘bad’ death have

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202. <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk>
203. <http://www.biab.ac.uk>
205. <http://copac.ac.uk>
been determined by how far the evidence deviates from the pattern of the normative east-west supine burial. Cremation, decapitation, mutilation, the binding of the limbs, prone burial, multiple interments, the presence of grave goods, the inclusion of foreign material in the burial matrix and deposition in liminal areas of the landscape all indicate that the deceased may have been considered dangerous in some way. A full list of the archaeological sites consulted in this thesis will be included in the appendix (Table 2).

**Chapter Overview**

Although the main body of this investigation will focus on the subjective, local understanding of revenant encounters, this thesis begins with a chapter which focuses on the concept of ‘good’ death and the patterns of officially-sanctioned practice. That is to say, the structure of normative death performances must be acknowledged before attempts to analyse instances of deviation can be made. Utilising the metaphor of the knot/labyrinth to express the concept of difficult process,\(^\text{206}\) and taking advantage of anthropological studies into agency and rites of passage, chapter one will investigate the strategies used by the Church to preclude free movement by the laity and thwart potential deviations from the officially-prescribed ritual process. This will include a brief overview of the evolution of the Christian funerary rite from the Roman period to the fifteenth century and an analysis of the Dance of Death motif. For the former, I will focus my investigation on the Office for the Dead and *Ars Moriendi* texts, both of which provide invaluable information on the ‘ideal’ funereal performance in the later Middle Ages. The Dance of Death, I contend, is a prime example of the Church’s attempt to usurp the ‘rhetoric’ of the fear of the walking dead as part of its strategy to maintain control over lay attitudes to death.

The word ‘text’ is a derivation of the Latin *contextere*, meaning ‘to weave’ or ‘to connect’. However, before an analysis can be conducted on the relationship, or ‘weave’, between the material and literary evidence, the specific codicological placement of medieval revenant narratives and the context in which they circulated

must first be considered. Chapter three will thus examine how such stories were ‘woven’ into their manuscript setting and gauge the social logic of their transcription. But with tales of the walking dead spread thinly across vitae, confessors’ manuals and chronicles, almost submerged beneath the weight of written history, choosing an appropriate case study is a tricky task indeed. William of Newburgh’s Historia Rerum Anglicarum is the most detailed extant source for medieval revenants and will, therefore, provide the main vehicle for analysis. Although scholars have long been fascinated by the four revenant narratives contained in William’s history, their analyses often have been tangential to wider issues and hypotheses; the micro-logic of ‘The ‘Buckingham Ghost’, ‘The Berwick Ghost’, ‘The Hounds’ Priest’ and the ‘Ghost of Anant’ is altogether ignored. The Cistercian expansion in Yorkshire in the twelfth century, genre constraints, and the habitual knowledge of William of Newburgh’s information network are all factors which contributed to the transcription of these four narratives and their inclusion in the Historia. Variations in apotropaic strategy will be considered in light of changing attitudes to the dead in this period. Finally, this chapter will also examine the ways in which accounts of chaotic, pestilence-spreading revenants could be used to signify (and criticise) other deviant and destructive events in history. In short, by focusing on William’s disposition towards oral testimony, the actions and reactions of the actors within the narratives themselves, and the reader’s response to the stories’ manuscript location, we will be better able to understand how, and why, tales of the walking dead were transmitted.

The motif of pestilence and the spreading of social/physical disorder, mentioned briefly above, will form the basis of chapter four. The first part of this study will explore the relationship between classically-derived medical models, medieval theories concerning the physical repercussions of sin, and ‘folk’ techniques for disease containment. The chapter will conclude with an investigation into a specific medical complaint, the nightmare, which, due to the nature of its symptoms, was commonly attributed to an attack by evil agents. Two main questions need to be asked: firstly, did an author’s educational background, his conception of the sinful


body and knowledge of humours theory influence the ways in which he understood and used his informants’ ‘wonderful’ tales? Secondly, to what extent did the entrenched belief in the walking dead influence the local perception of contagions and night-time assaults? Using the narratives from the Historia and De Nugis as a framing device, I will illustrate how the assuagement of the errant corpse was not simply an isolated reaction to an unforeseen event; rather, it derived from the wider cultural repertoire of sin/disease containment.

Chapter five forms the crux of my investigation and explores the relationship (or dialogue) between the literary and material texts. Although extant written evidence for the belief in revenant activity is scarce, William of Newburgh gives a fascinating insight into the proliferation of the walking dead in chapter twenty-four of his Historia:

> Were I to write down all the instances of this kind which I have ascertained to have befallen in our times, the undertaking would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome.209

This, then, points to an interesting hypothesis: that the fear of the walking dead was a much bigger issue in the local traditions of the medieval world than has previously been realised. With this in mind, I believe that it is indeed possible to draw an analogy between the popular – perhaps oral – practices referred to in the written texts (such the decapitation of the Drakelaw peasants) and unusual or ambiguous burials found in the archaeological record (the decapitation of St. Mary Spital youth). To reiterate the theories of Stock and Moreland, the period between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries was a time when culture was simultaneously oral and written, with the gestures, rituals, and physical symbols which constituted religious and/or secular rules being increasingly consigned to vellum.210 However, the ‘invisible scriptures’, or dispositions, of the local populace did not enjoy the same level of codification and are altogether silent apart from a few choice and unique sources. The Decretum (c.1020s) of Burchard of Worms, for example, provides many tantalising clues to otherwise silent popular practices, including women who stake

209 Newburgh, V. 24. 1.
210 Stock, Listening for the Text, pp. 20–21.
their stillborn infants to the grave, lest ‘the infant would rise up and injure many’.  

Archaeology, then, is a field in which the gestures and physical symbols of an unlettered populace can enjoy a secondary chance to be read.

One of the main aims of chapter five will be to demonstrate how the habitual belief in the power of ‘binding’ magic and the fear of contagion, mentioned in chapters two and four, structured the ways in which revenants were contained in both mortuary and landscape contexts. To conduct this type of investigation, the theories of practice discussed above need to be explicitly deployed. John Barrett, in his analysis of the evolution of mortuary practices in Neolithic Europe, has already successfully argued how a person’s somatic orientation with regard to the changing material conditions of a landscape (in this case, the placement of funerary monuments) affected and limited the social agent’s *habitus* and the types of action he or she could perform. A performance which was forced to take into account the new external conditions of a place – for example, an outbreak of disease, the unusualness of an undecayed body – had the potential to subvert (or amble within) the structure of the original text and create a so-called ‘little tradition’. Thus it will be shown how different habitual, social and environmental conditions could provoke different material responses to the dead. However, it is my contention that ash and charcoal burial, apotropaic grave goods, prone burial, decapitation, and deposition in liminal areas of the landscape, are derivations of the same, base rhetoric: the need to ‘bind’ the agency of the deceased and prevent the spread of physical and metaphysical unrest.

**Conclusion**

Death, especially ‘bad’ death, can be constituted as a type of theatre – a form of dramatic action, or play, in which social agents had the potential to innovate and improvise their performances if a person’s decease did not conform to the habitual ideal. The possibilities for controlling death crises, however, were limited by the social and material conditions (the script; the stage) in which the individual dwelt.

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211 Caciola, ‘Revenants’, p. 29.
212 Moreland, *Archaeology and Text*, p. 94.
213 Barrett, *Fragments*, p. 75.
‘Bad’ death was sudden, violent and ill-prepared, leaving the living unable to satisfy the normative conditions for a successful rite of passage. ‘Otherness’, and the contravention of the prevailing worldview of the community (murder, suicide) were also ontologically disruptive and were further factors which caused the revenant – an expression of chaos, a path in ruins – to rise. Delving deep into their residues of past experience, the percipients may have chosen a course of action so divergent, so ambulatory to the prevailing patterns of belief, that their efforts to contain the undead were seen as outrageous, alien, or even heretical by the standards of the Church. Cremating the corpse, for example, may have been considered an excessively ambulatory and thus unseemly practice, but given that the maintenance of the integrity of the body was one of the primary features of the Christian worldview, the dissolution of the revenant was, at its core, an entirely rational pursuit. Indeed, it must be stressed that in no instance did these medieval writers believe they were encountering latent paganism; merely incredulity or puzzlement that revenants could exist. William of Newburgh’s reaction to the undead speaks less of someone who was fearful of non-Christian practice and more of a man who simply could not comprehend a Christian rhetoric in which ‘the corpses of the dead should sally forth’. In this respect, my thesis can be seen as a direct response to William’s apparent vexation.

Framing my study within the theory of practice outlined above, I will utilise the written material to analyse the cultural, theological, and political context of revenant encounters, and investigate how the interpretation of the walking dead changed according to the constraints of genre, author intention, and the dispositions of the ‘reader’. Recourse to the archaeological data will not only augment and add nuance to the investigation, but reveal the disparities, if any, between the authorial interpretations of practice and the actual local traditions which occurred at the gravesite. Landscape, artefact, and threshold analyses will have to be undertaken to discover if, as the written sources suggest, the manipulation of the body and the use of specific types of grave goods were indeed meant to produce an apotropaic effect. The marriage of words, actions and artefacts can only enrich our understanding of

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216 Newburgh, V. 24. I.
medieval attitudes to ‘bad’ death. As an index of the multivalency of supernatural belief at particular moments in space/time, the revenant, then, is peerless.
2. Pattern and Performance in Medieval Attitudes to Death

Introduction

A successful passage from life to death is one of the greatest challenges a human being can face. For the Christian communities of medieval Europe, whose very existence was thought to be under constant attack from all manner of vices, temptations and sin, the path to salvation was particularly fraught. Indeed, the onus of performing a ‘good’ death was not reserved solely for the dying; rather, the conduct of living social actors – for example, through adequate funerary provisions and subsequent intercessory prayer – was vital for ensuring the safe transition of the soul through the torments of death, Purgatory, and into the waiting splendour of heaven. Anthropological accounts of death rituals have long stressed the linearity and inherent dangers involved in the ideal rite of passage, the forward ‘flow’ of the deceased as he/she gestates into a new state of being.  

And yet, the ever-present threat of a poor performance (‘bad’ death, deviation from the norm) allows the rite of passage to be conceived not as a vector, a straight unimpeded line, but as a tangled, improvised path within a ‘labyrinth’ of potential (and not always ideal) outcomes.

The knot/labyrinth metaphors employed by the anthropologist Alfred Gell are a useful means of conceptualising the contingent nature of death performances and, indeed, the rite of passage in general. Gell’s investigations into difficult processes and apotropaic mazes are closely related to the theories of practice espoused by Anthony Giddens, Michel de Certau and Wolfgang Iser, and are particularly well-suited for the study of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ death in the medieval world. Gell contends that the power of an apotropaic object (or action) resides in the inability of the percipient to comprehend its form, function, or the processes which went into its creation. Abstract forms such as complex bodily performances and difficult

incantations are said to present ‘unfinished business’ to the subject’s mind. Since such patterns are difficult to process (that is, they are ambiguous and overly labyrinthine) they can never be truly understood by the percipient. According to Gell, entrapment occurs when agents try (and fail) to comprehend what is inherently incomprehensible. Gell uses Celtic knot-work, Kula prow-boards and South Indian ritual tattoos as case studies to exemplify how material techniques could be used to tame and bind external agents. The ‘dazzlement’ of the senses by the obliqueness of the path/pattern vanquishes the danger presented by the subject of the bind. In the context of medieval death rites, wherein the assuagement of the agency of the deceased was paramount, the act of binding involved the maintenance of forward ‘flow’ through the annulment of chaotic processes (sins, poor performances) as and when they occurred. Meticulous death-bed liturgies, a confusing funerary procession, and the specificities of post-mortem prayer, are all deviant and ‘dazzling’ amendments to the ideal death pattern laid down by Christ. No two death performances are ever truly identical, and, as such, the pattern – or ‘knot-form’ – for each rite of passage will be different. In providing a tangible expression for the difficulties involved in maintaining a ‘good’ death, whilst simultaneously ensuring the deceased did not trace a path back to the realm of the living, the knot/labyrinth is a more evocative metaphor for the rite of passage than the ‘line’. Knot-forms are expressive of individualised, contingent death, whereas the line-form is a more idealised articulation, more appropriate to discussions on the Harrowing of Hell and/or the resurrection of Christ. The use of knots and mazes to represent the concept of difficult process was a common conceit in medieval theology – something which will be discussed in more detail, shortly.

Aims of this Chapter

This investigation will begin with an analysis of the canonical understanding of labyrinths and difficult processes, before charting the evolution of the Christian

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Having established the base rite from which all subsequent funerary performances developed, the next part of the chapter will consider Books of Hours (specifically, the Office for the Dead illuminations) to elucidate how the combination of prayer, movement, and correct body technique disciplined the deceased and guided him or her down the path to salvation. With the lack of documentary evidence from the Anglo-Norman period making it difficult to construct a lay death liturgy for the High Middle Ages, the source material from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries will provide the platform through which to analyse the problems of managing the non-monastic dead. Indeed, the reform and codification of Church practice at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and the ratification of the doctrine of Purgatory at the Council of Lyon (1274), illustrate the increasing medieval concern about the fate of the individual soul. Concurrent with Innocent III’s drive to regulate modes of worship was the effort to purify the Church of the heretical, deviant sects which threatened its destruction. The Cathars and the Waldensian mendicants were seen to be especially corrupting. Lateran IV decrees such as the remodelling of lay devotion along clerical guidelines and the reception of the sacraments helped centralise and thus bring stability to the Church. The threat of deviation and contagion by heresy was never far away, with the botched papal election of 1378 precipitating the turbulences of the Great Schism. After much tension between the opposing administrations, the Council of Constance was convened (1414–1418) as a means of reforming the papacy and, accordingly, the religious practices of the lay population. The proliferation of Books of Hours and the formulation of guidebooks on the ‘Art of Dying Well (the Ars Moriendi)’ provide evidence for this revitalised pastoral fervour. Thus, patterns for ‘good’ death – and, conversely, the knot-forms of

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8 This issue has also been noted by Paul Everson and David Stocker, in ‘The Common Steeple? Church, Liturgy, and Settlement in Early Medieval Lincolnshire’, *ANS*, 38 (2005), 103–123 (p. 112).
11 The cardinals who elected Urban VI in 1378 became convinced they made an error and, declaring their original decision void, elected Clement VII six months later. Urban’s refusal to give up the Papal See resulted in a division of loyalties between Rome and Avignon (where Clement VII was based). The council of Pisa in 1409 succeeded only in electing a third pope, Alexander V, making the situation worse. See Phillip Stump, *The Reforms of the Council of Constance (1414–1418)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
sin and ‘bad’ death – can be better understood by focusing on the extant evidence from the later medieval period.

The final section of this chapter will discuss the ways in which the ‘knot’ of damnation could be untangled through the redemptive performances undertaken in one’s lifetime. Daily prayer, pilgrimage and annual confession were indeed valuable strategies to preserve the integrity of the soul, but nowhere is this fear given a more concrete realisation than in the Dance of Death motif. Indeed, it will be argued that the reading of a *danse macabre* fresco cycle (if not the sermon-dramas on which they were based) constitutes a dance in itself, a spiritual/physical movement in which the comprehension of one’s own mortality and the need to prepare oneself for death reveals to the peripient the pattern for salvation. Indeed, the fear of ‘bad’ death – of being lost in the labyrinth – is embodied in the pleas and protestations of the living as they are mocked by their skeletal counterparts who make it clear that no-one can escape their fate. Just as histories and *vitae* used the trope of the walking dead for didactic, moral purposes (to be discussed in more detail in later chapters), so the poem and fresco cycle that comprised the ‘Dance’ are manifestations of the same pedagogic strategy. The fear of walking (and dancing) corpses permeated all levels of society, providing churchmen with a resonant and identifiable motif through which to educate lay audiences on the importance of living and dying ‘well’. The now-lost *danse macabre* at Les Innocents cemetery in Paris (c.1424), reputed to be the earliest example of its kind in Europe and preserved for posterity in the woodcuts of Guyot Marchant (1485), and the sumptuous life-size example at Reval (Tallin) (c.1490), will be among the case studies under discussion.

*Labyrinths and Knots in Christian Exegesis*

For theologians acquainted with Neo-platonic philosophy and the works of Boethius and Augustine, the transformation of the self through the acquisition of new knowledge was often conceived in terms of traversing a difficult, labyrinthine path to

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comprehension. *The Consolation of Philosophy*, written by Boethius in 524 just prior to his execution, is suggested by Penelope Doob to have been especially influenced by the Platonic trope of the epistemic maze: ‘the repetitive retracing of the argument in Book Three [taking the correct path to happiness and the return to the good] has the desired effect – an escape from the labyrinth-as-mental prison, a successful journey through the epistemological labyrinth.’ As Boethius himself says in chapters eleven and twelve:

For either all things are inclined to no-one thing and will wander about aimlessly though destitute of any head or helmsman to guide them, or if there is something to which all things are inclined, it will be the sum of all good.

You [Philosophia] are playing with me, aren’t you, by weaving a *labyrinth* of arguments from which I can’t find a way out.\(^\text{17}\)

If God is good, then anyone without a ‘helmsmen’ to guide him or her to the good and affect spiritual change (i.e. faith, a Christ-figure to draw the map) will become lost in a mental labyrinth akin to damnation. Boethius’s *Consolation* may well have been underscored by Neo-platonic teachings, but its Christological use of the maze finds a precedent in the works of Augustine (d.430).\(^\text{18}\) *On Christian Teaching* (c.395), for instance, emphasises the wholeness of God and the perils of deviation – ‘we are on a road [...] and one blocked by thorny hedgerows, which flourish through the evil influences of our earlier sins’ (1.24) – and dedicates the entirety of Books Two and Three to the navigation of scriptural signs and the achievement of reading comprehension:

Logic is of paramount importance in resolving all kinds of problems in sacred texts. But one must be aware of indulging a passion for wrangling [...] there are many ‘sophisms’, as they are called, invalid deductions [...] designed to trap not just dull people but also clever ones who are less than constantly alert.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^\text{17}\) *Consolation*, III. 11–12 (pp. 77, 81). My italics.
\(^\text{19}\) *Christian Teaching*, II. 117 (p. 58).
The danger of pursuing incorrect deductive paths and arriving at incorrect (ungodly) conclusions is very much a hallmark of the labyrinthine reading process. Yet, as Augustine states, ‘it is much more pleasant […] and much more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty’ (2.13), illustrating the risky, though potentially fruitful nature of the rite of passage.

In a similar fashion, the medieval technique for storing and recalling information, the art of memoria, involved the creation and negotiation of metaphorical image-scape.20 The assignment of architectural forms to cognitive processes allowed the practitioner to know their place in a mental composition. Hugh of St. Victor’s De arca Noe mystica, a twelfth-century learning aid for students, uses the plan of Noah’s Ark as a metaphor for the storage and retrieval of devotional literature. Mary Carruthers draws attention to the use of active verbs in the ‘building’ of the Ark, suggesting that the correct mental movement through its labyrinth-like structure held the key to spiritual progress.21 The greatest danger was incorrect movement through the memory-scape. A mind that wandered from concept to concept, place to place, could find no true insight and was liable to forget things that had already been learnt. To achieve mastery over memory required discipline, the practitioner to deviate as little as possible from the map.22

Although these metaphors for cognitively difficult processes were not used explicitly with regard to the passage from life to death, the maze as symbolic of the Harrowing of Hell – order from apparent chaos; the correct path to salvation – was often used as a didactic prompt in church design. The labyrinth built into the floor of the nave in Chartres Cathedral (c.1194–1220) is one example. Traversing the circuitous path to the centre reveals to the maze-walker a six-petaled flower; a representation of Christ’s wounds that recall His sacrifice and thus our salvation. Further meanings may also be represented in the Chartres design: the universe as the ideal city; God as the supreme architect; difficult process (i.e. life) as a form of...

20 For the Classical origins of the art of memory, see Quintilian, The Orator’s Education: Vol. 5, ed. by David Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), XI. 2 (pp. 63–71); Cicero, On the Ideal Orator, trans. by James May and Jakob Wisse (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2001), II. ii. 350–360 (pp. 218–221).
21 Carruthers and Ziolkowski, Medieval Craft of Memory, pp. 41–70; Carruthers, The Book of Memory, pp. 221–257; ‘Reading with Attitude’, pp. 1–33.
22 Carruthers, ‘Reading with Attitude’, p. 11.
pilgrimage and, perhaps, its use as a statement by the church builders that they too, in creating such a monument, possessed the skill of their forebear, Daedalus.23

An examination of the architectural syntax at Chartres indicates that the Harrowing of Hell operated as the primary metaphor. Allusions to the efficacy of following Christ’s path can be read in the labyrinth’s relationship to the Last Judgement scene contained in the western wall’s rose window.24 The rose window, the name of which is a mistranslation of the French word *roue* (wheel), contains many levels of meaning.25 The most commonly accepted interpretation of the ‘wheel-window’ is as a reference to Ezekiel’s Wheel, the vision experienced by the eponymous prophet which prefigured and symbolised the writings of the four evangelists (Ezekiel 1. 1–28). The wheel, then, is an allusion to Scripture and the Word. A phenomenological relationship can be discerned between the pattern of the maze-form (the Harrowing), the pattern of the rose window (the Word), and the culmination of the pattern (Salvation) in the Last Judgement scene that binds the symbols together. Knowledge of the path to eternal life, achieved through the negotiation of Chartres’ labyrinth, forces the percipient to lift his or her gaze to magnificent rose window and, should they adhere to the teachings of Scripture, celebrate the Judgement that is foreshadowed within. As discussed above, the difficulty of reading, the effort of trying to piece together meaning from a maze-like field of chaos, is an ultimately rewarding experience.

It can be speculated that a population nourished on the efficacy of correct movement, labyrinth motifs, and sermons stories on the Passion conceived their own deaths accordingly. However, if one can subscribe to the view that Christ was the ‘mapmaker’, the ideal, then however arduous/circuitous the process of His descent to Hell, it would involve no deviation and, as seen in Chartres, could be symbolised diagrammatically as a uni-cursal labyrinth. Since humanity is fallen, prone to taking the wrong path and often ensnared by sin, the establishment of a ‘pattern’ to salvation based on the metaphor of a multi-cursal labyrinth is much more pointed

expression of the ambiguities of the average death performance. Augustine makes just such an assertion in *The City of God*:

> God created man aright [...] though he is certainly not responsible for their defects [...] Hence from the misuse of free will there started a chain of disasters: mankind is led from that original perversion, a kind of corruption at the root, right up to the disaster of the second death, *which has no end*. Only those who are set free through God’s grace escape from this calamitous sequence.

With the corruption of Adam and Eve and the inheritance of original sin, humankind is compelled to deviate from the pattern laid down by God. Extrication from the ‘calamitous sequence which has no end’ (death; Hell; the maze) can only occur through the acceptance of His teachings. Augustine’s conceptualisation of the misuse of free will (that is, ‘bad’ practice) was influential throughout the Middle Ages. *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas á Kempis (c.1380–1471), for example, maintains the argument that damnation emerges as a result of incorrect, deviant process. According to Thomas, original sin and frailties of the flesh are the two great evils that compel mankind to err. The desire to live and die in the manner of Christ is the only way to overcome Adam’s legacy and tread the correct path to salvation (3.18.2). Thomas makes powerful use of this imagery: ‘Go where thou wilt, seek what though wilt, and though shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the holy Cross’ (2.12.3) and ‘if thou couldst make a choice, thou oughtest to prefer to suffer adversities for Christ [...] because thou would more resemble Christ and be more likened to all the Saints’ (2.12.14). By choosing the way of the cross, the paths to temptation and/or damnation are avoided. Suffering in the manner of Christ is to re-enact His difficult, but ultimately rewarding, path to salvation.

It would seem that whatever the objective and however it is performed, the rite of passage – the transformation of the self – is fraught with potential deviance and obstruction. Indeed, it is the process of negotiating the maze, of overcoming obstacles and adhering to the map, which has found particular interest in the work of

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27 *City of God*, XIII. 15 (p. 523).
post-structural anthropologists and performance theorists. Edward Schieffelin, especially, has shown how the manner of performance is integral to the creation, transmission and interpolation of symbolic forms. Deciphering the dialogues, core structures and improvisations of each individual performance is essential to understanding the base pattern (and meaning) of a good medieval death. The fear of death, then, is for the deceased to become lost in the pattern; trapped in a knot of endless, directionless process. To be trapped forever in this ‘knotted’ liminal state can be construed as the fate of the ghost, the damned and, above all, the result of a failed rite of passage. The labyrinth-form is a pointed yet often ignored symbolisation of the potentials and dangers that exist within the performative – that is, liminal – field. A motif which is able to symbolise free (but structured) patterns of movement is the very articulation of practice theory, something which can be discerned in the context of the medieval funerary rite.

Christian Funerary Rite: Origins

The base structure of the Christian funerary rite emerged from Classical, pagan antecedents. Although it is not the remit of this chapter to provide a full analysis of the Roman funus, it suffices to detail some of the main components of the ritual process. The funus translaticum (the death ritual for common citizens) began with the gathering of close friends and relatives around the dying person’s bedside. Following death, the body was removed from the bed, washed and anointed. The epodion was then performed, which entailed the placement of a coin in the mouth of the deceased to pay Chiron, the boatman, for a safe passage to the land of the dead. After the body was re-placed on the deathbed – with care taken to position the deceased’s feet toward the bedroom door – a period of lying in state occurred before it was laid on a bier and taken to the designated place of inhumation or cremation. Following the act of deposition, the attending mourners underwent a purification rite known as suffitio. A similar cleansing ceremony took place at the house of the deceased. Later, on the same day as the burial, a funerary feast, the silicernium, was held at the graveside. The official mourning period concluded nine days later with a

second propitiatory feast, the *cena novendialis*, where a libation to the *manes* (spirits of the dead) was poured onto the gravesite.\(^{31}\)

Although the earliest known extant copy of the Romano-Christian death rite, the *ordo defunctorum*, dates from the eighth century, it has been argued that its contents derived from the consolidation of official Church doctrine some four hundred years earlier.\(^{32}\) Despite concerns about provenance and the obvious need to alter certain aspects of the Roman rite to express newfound Christian beliefs, the *ordo defunctorum* nonetheless managed to convey similar sentiments to its pagan counterpart. The central feature of the Romano-Christian deathbed rite was the presentation of the dying with the *viaticum* – the Eucharist – to protect the soul on its journey into a ‘between state’, the *refrigerium interim*, where it would reside until the Last Judgement.\(^{33}\) Once the final breath had been taken, the corpse was washed, dressed and/or sewn into a burial shroud. These actions were accompanied by readings from the Passion and the singing of Psalms 113 and 114.\(^{34}\) It is interesting to note that the *viaticum* and the *epodion* shared a similar apotropaic function. Indeed, the Christian practice is a direct development from (and translation of) the pagan.\(^{35}\) Analogues between the two rites are to be expected: syncretism and conversion strategies ensured that although the macrocosm, or worldview, may have changed, everyday practice, unless it explicitly contradicted the newfound beliefs, continued to circulate in the local *habitus*.\(^{36}\) The need to appease the hunger of the dead through funeral feasts and the pouring of libations on the grave are further aspects of the Classical funerary rite that can be discerned, however obliquely, in the post-conversion models.\(^{37}\) The use of prayer to ‘refresh’ the Christian souls in the *refrigerium interim* added a new layer of meaning to this propitiatory act. Authorisation for this belief is provided by Augustine, who advocated that suffrage

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32 Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, p. 15.

33 Ibid., p. 39.

34 Ibid., p. 40.


36 This process has been acknowledged by Karen Jolly in her investigations into early medieval magic. See *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2002), p. 16.

in the form of prayer could be beneficial to those who were worthy of being saved. Discussing the death of his mother, Monica, in Book Nine of the *Confessions*, Augustine argues:

> Now I pray to you for her sins [...] Forgive her, I beseech you; do not call her to account. Let your mercy give your judgement an honourable welcome, for your words are true and you have promised mercy to the merciful.\

Book Four of *The Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (c.593) further underlines the efficacy of this practice. Although Gregory makes it quite explicit that the Saved go straight to heaven and the Damned to the torments of Hell (4.28), small, inconsequential sins could indeed be purged in a third place (4.39). He illustrates this point through the *exemplum* of a priest who confronted a ghost in the public baths of the city of Centumcellis. Thinking the apparition was an attendant the priest made use of his services and, after completing his bath, offered him a piece of the Host as charitable payment. The ghost declined, explaining that he was the recently deceased owner of the baths who had been condemned to remain on earth as punishment for his sins. He implored the priest to offer the bread to God as a way of securing his absolution. Duly complying, the actions of the priest do indeed secure the bath owner’s release (4.55). Not only is the expiatory power of the Eucharist confirmed, but the idea that such sin could be purged in a ‘third place’ between heaven and hell builds upon earlier theories of the *refrigerium interim*, marking another point on Purgatory’s slow gestation into a definite, bounded place.

Further developments from the pagan rite can be discerned in the next stage of the *ordo defunctorum*. After the washing and dressing of the corpse, it was placed on a bier and transferred to the local church, where Psalms 41 and 114 were sung and a reading was taken from Job, the biblical paradigm of salvation through earthly suffering. Following a second funeral procession, the body was deposited in holy ground to the accompaniment of the antiphon *Aperite mihi portas iustitae* (Open the

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38 *Confessions*, IX. 13 (p. 203).
40 Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 52–95.
gates of justice and let me enter) and Psalm 117. The burial rite concluded on these evocations.  

The idea that ‘good’ death could be achieved through suffering in the manner of Christ is emphasised in the choice of readings and psalms said over the body at the deathbed, the church, and the graveside. The reading of the Passion narrative provided the dying with a prototype to which he must aspire; that is, the acceptance of death and the giving of oneself freely to God. Psalm 113 (he raises the poor from the dust heap) and 114 (when Israel came out of Egypt) provide metaphors of salvation and of embarking on the path to the Promised Land. The antiphon read at burial expresses joy at reaching the goal after a long and arduous journey. The message, then, is clear: one must tread in the footsteps of Christ in order to navigate the labyrinth of death. Correct process, comprising the deceased’s conduct in life, prayer, and careful post-mortem manipulations of the body, required a balanced dialogue between the guidance of the living and needs/agency of the dead. The reward for staying close to the pattern laid down by Christ in the Harrowing of Hell was entry into paradise. And yet, the optimism so pervasive of earlier Christianity soon gave way to a fear that, despite all one’s efforts, a safe passage was in no way guaranteed.

**Christian Funerary Rite: Late Medieval**

To achieve a full comprehension of the funerary rite following the consolidation of Church practice at the Fourth Lateran Council, it must be stressed that, prior to the Carolingian reforms (c.740–800) and the influence of the Benedictine order, there was no single, authoritative ordo to which all lay people and monastic orders subscribed. Frederick Paxton argues that it was the clerics at the Benedictine abbeys of St Amand and Lorsch, c.875 who were the first to succeed in fusing the disparate ritual practices of the past five centuries into a coherent, universally transmittable liturgy. The influence of the monastic orders with regard to the management and commemoration of the dead cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the
Office for the Dead and the increasing importance of the Requiem Mass seemed to have developed from the informal commemorative practices that occurred during the daily prayer cycle.\(^\text{45}\) St Benedict of Aniane (c.747–821), especially, has been credited with being the first monastic leader to advocate the recitation of Vespers, Matins and Lauds (the Office for the Dead) for the deceased members of his community.\(^\text{46}\) His influence at the Aachen reform council of 817 led to the decree that the daily recitation of the Office be made compulsory for all communities under the Benedictine rule. Knud Ottosen suggests that this was also the period when the Office began to be recited at the deathbed, perhaps as a substitute for the psalmody of such earlier liturgies as the *ordo defunctorum*.\(^\text{47}\) The creation of the *Regularis Concordia* in 971 ensured that all English monasteries followed the base structure of the Benedictine rite, including the recitation of the Office for dying brethren. Following the establishment of All Souls Day on November 2\(^\text{nd}\) (c.1024–1033) by Abbot Odilo of Cluny – a reflection, perhaps, of the increasing influence of the ‘third place’ of Purgatory in medieval theology – the Office became less about preparing the dying for the immediate pains of death and more a strategy for erasing accumulated sin.\(^\text{48}\) Accordingly, the Office was translated from the deathbed to the more efficacious surroundings of the church service. The performance of absolution over the body at the end of the Requiem Mass, a second monastic innovation (c.867), illustrates the increasing importance of suffrage and, moreover, reveals anxieties about the post-mortem fate of the soul. The responsary used in the twelfth-century version of the *absolutio*, ‘deliver me, Lord, from death’ (*libera me, domine, de morte*), makes this fear explicit.\(^\text{49}\) Regulated and codified, the Benedictine funeral liturgy was gradually appropriated by a lay populace eager to imitate the burial/commemorative practices of the religious. This process gained official

\(^{45}\) Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 3–17. The seven cycles of monastic prayer included Matins and Lauds (the night time and morning offices); Prime, Terce, Sext and Nones (the brief day offices), followed by Vespers and Compline (the evening and bedtime offices respectively).

\(^{46}\) Knud Ottosen, *The Responsories and Versicles of the Latin Office of the Dead* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992), p. 32. Ottosen notes that the first recorded mention of the Office for the Dead can be found in a letter by a monk from the monastery of Riehenau (c.817). Tasked by his abbot to observe the practices of the brothers at Inde, a nearby monastery founded by Benedict of Aniane, the monk writes: ‘As soon as the Vespers of the day are over, they immediately say vespers of the dead [...] and after compline, matins of the dead [and] next morning, after matins of the day, lauds of the dead.’ This passage suggests that the recitation of the Office for the Dead was standard practice by the time the visiting monks arrived.


\(^{48}\) Lecouteux, *Return of the Dead*, p. 51.

patronage in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and is reflected in the evolution of horae (Books of Hours).

Emerging as a consequence of the increasing individualisation and clericalisation of popular religion following Lateran IV, Books of Hours enabled a lay audience to replicate the Hours, the daily prayer cycles, of cloistered men and women.\(^{50}\) The pastoral policies of Innocent III and the newfound emphasis on inner contrition led to a desire to participate in less intensive forms of monastic religious observation.\(^{51}\) Although the recitation of the seven daily offices and their seasonal variations was virtually impossible for the lay believer, the shorter, ancillary devotions – the Little Hours of the Virgin; Penitential Psalms; Litany of Saints; Office for the Dead – could be more easily reproduced.\(^{52}\) Eamon Duffy has suggested that the earliest extant English horae was produced c.1240 by William De Brailes for a female patron connected to the Dominican order. While evidence for horae usage in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is scarce – only around a dozen English examples survive – the formal inconsistencies between the De Brailes horae and those produced in the fifteenth century suggests that, in the years following Lateran IV, the base structure of the Book of Hours had yet to be fully established.\(^{53}\)

Whatever their form, horae were deeply personal items, passed down from generation to generation and amended with extra, often instrumental prayers that best fit the owner’s immediate situation. In this way readers were able to reconfirm their place within the wider religious community while at the same time interiorising and, in some cases, interpolating the meaning of the liturgy to fit more closely within their idiosyncratic worldview. Indeed Duffy’s survey of fifteenth-century English horae notes the proliferation of apotropaic prayers as a means of protecting the reader against misfortune, sudden death, and the malign influences of the Devil. The deus propicius esto, for example, invokes the protection of the angels and may have been especially powerful when recited on the deathbed.\(^{54}\) The fears and anxieties of the layperson, made manifest in such additions, are clear: how could the soul, so


\(^{52}\) Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 3–17.


open and fragile, be protected against the threat of damnation? After the wholly devotional Hours of the Virgin, the most important *horae* text in this regard was the Office for the Dead. Books of Hours not only provided lay readers with their own copy of the Office, but certain high-status manuscripts also contained miniature representations of the entire ritual process, from the deathbed to the grave.

As noted above, the ideal death occurred at home, in bed, surrounded by friends and family. Ideally, a lit candle or a taper would be placed by the bedside to protect the dying person’s soul from demonic interference.55 The rite of separation commenced with the drawing up of the will, demonstrating the individual’s ‘good work’ of charity and acting as a sign of their renunciation of mortal life. The Last Rites of Confession, Communion and Extreme Unction were then performed by the priest, the administration of which fortified the soul and ensured a safe passage to the afterlife. Extreme Unction was considered a particularly powerful sacrament in lay belief, a mark of death that was impossible to eradicate even if the individual recovered.56 The *Commendatio Animae*, the dedication of the soul to God, was uttered by the priest at the exact moment of death. The onus of giving a good deathbed performance was not restricted to the attending clergy; indeed, the path to salvation required that the conduct of the dying person be equally efficacious. The slightest hesitation or despair at one’s plight tipped the battle for the soul in the Devil’s favour.57 Latin MS 21, a fifteenth-century Book of Hours from the John Ryland’s Library, Manchester, provides a wonderful illustration of this scene. Naked and alone save for the presence of a praying figure near the bottom of the page, the corpse lies reposed on an elegant deathbed. The soul in the form of a homunculus can be seen exiting the body from the mouth. In the air above, an angel armed with a sword and shield, perhaps St Michael in his guise as the courier of the dead, stands tall and resolute, ready to battle with a black, leonine demon for possession of the soul (fig. 1). It is interesting to note how the illuminator chose to depict the most ambiguous – and thus dangerous – point in the drama. The fine line between eternal life (consenting to God) and eternal death (consenting to despair), a fate that may

57 Ibid., p. 316.
have been decided on something so small as a tinge of deathbed fear, is a message that would have resonated powerfully with the reader.\textsuperscript{58}

The circumvention of the traps laid down by the Devil was the foremost concern of the deathbed performance. The \textit{Ars Moriendi} tract provides a suitable illustration of the strategies used to counteract these diabolic temptations and threats. Conceived during the Council of Constance (1414–1418), the ‘Art of Dying Well’ embodied the need to purify and consolidate Church practice following the deviances of the Great Schism.\textsuperscript{59} Scholars have long believed that a ‘\textit{De Arte Moriendi}’ composed by Jean Gerson as part of his \textit{Opus Tripartitum} (c.1408) formed the basis of the version approved at Constance.\textsuperscript{60} Gerson’s position as Chancellor of the University of Paris, his presence at the Council, and his desire to enact lay reform through the popularisation of the tract – brief, easily assimilable essays for a non-academic audience – lends credence this claim.\textsuperscript{61} Indeed, the reform of the priesthood and laity formed a substantial part of the Council’s aims: not only was the head of the Church (the Papacy) to be purified, but also its constituent parts.\textsuperscript{62}

Conceived as a guidebook to educate parish priests, the \textit{Ars Moriendi} gave practical instructions on correct deathbed etiquette through the experiences of Moriens, the tract’s everyman protagonist.\textsuperscript{63} With the advent of the printing press and the increasing availability of texts, the \textit{Ars Moriendi} was quickly disseminated among a lay populace concerned about suffering a premature or ill-performed death. The main body of the text operated as a series of vignettes, with examples of ‘bad’ deathbed performances (faithlessness; despair; impatience; vainglory; avarice) pitted against their ‘good’ counterparts (faith; hope; patience; humility; worldly detachment). Each temptation and remedy was accompanied by an illustration which showed readers how to conduct themselves in body as well as in spirit. Avarice, for example, is represented by a group of demons enticing a bedridden Moriens to

\begin{footnotes}
62 The Church-as-body metaphor, where corruption in one part affected the cohesion of the whole, derived its ultimate authority from the letters of St. Paul (1 Cor. 12, 12).
\end{footnotes}
ruminate on his wealth, property, and the friends and family he will leave behind. The inspiration of worldly detachment, meanwhile, instructs Moriens to meditate on the Passion and imitate Christ’s acceptance of death. To emphasise this point, a crucifix looms large over the deathbed, while an angel near the bottom of the page shields Moriens’ gaze from his (our?) loved ones (fig. 2). The pattern to which Moriens – and thus every Christian – urged to aspire was exemplified by the Dormition of the Virgin, whose sinless (yet entirely human) nature and total acquiescence to God’s will ensured a safe, unmolested passage to the afterlife. The word ‘dormition’ – sleep – implies a death that entailed none of the agonies and obstacles faced by the Christian everyman. Although no-one except the Virgin (and Christ) could be truly free of sin, the imitation of her death performance could nonetheless help lessen the ordeal and was something to be desired.  

Once the final breath had been taken and death confirmed, the bedroom door and windows were to be left ajar so as not to impede the passage of the soul. The body was subsequently placed on the floor and purified with water. Sewn into a shroud and placed in a coffin, the corpse was then taken to the church in a cortege that incorporated paid candle-bearers and bell-ringers. The ringing of the bells announced the individual’s death to the community (thus prompting commemorative prayer), provided an indication of the deceased’s social station, and drove away evil spirits that lay in wait for the funerary procession. A similar apotropaic effect was provided by the lit tapers. The coffin-bearers, meanwhile, were drawn from the same social grouping as the deceased. To be a pall-bearer for a person of repute was a prestigious honour. Although the exact makeup of the funerary procession was contingent on cost, the location of the church, and the deceased’s social status, a labyrinthine route was sometimes followed in order to confuse the deceased and prevent the reversal of ‘flow’; that is, to prevent the ghost from lingering in the

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64 John Ryland Library Latin MS 38 contains an illustration of this scene. The layout of fol. 72 in this horae is similar to the deathbed scene in Latin MS 21: The Virgin, dressed in blue, lies reposed on an elegant red/gold bedcover, her hands clasped in prayer. Her soul occupies a central space above the crowd of apostles, having already ascended to heaven. Jacob de Voragine’s Golden Legend (c.1260) provides a full account of the Dormition (II, pp. 77–97).


world of life. Fol. 249r in the John Rylands Latin MS 39 shows something of the maze-like qualities of the procession. Moving from left to right across the page, the coffin and torch bearers are preceded by a train of choristers, some of whom carry crosses and heraldic banners (fig. 3). The mourners, dressed in deep black cowls and moving in a right-left direction, bring up the rear. Although it is possible that the serpentine nature of this procession may have been the result of the illuminator making full use of the available space, the idea that prescribed, labyrinthine movements could ‘trap’ the deceased is something that been noted by Stephen Wilson, among others.®

Upon arrival at the church, the funeral bier was placed near the altar and the Office of the Dead recited. Ideally, Vespers would be performed by the priest on the evening before the Requiem Mass. A ‘nightwake’ was sometimes held, in which the chosen priest would recite prayers over the body as it rested in the church. Matins and Lauds were conducted the following morning. In an attitude similar to that seen in the ordo defunctorum, above, the Matins service incorporated nine lessons from the Book of Job, whose steadfastness in the face of hardship acted as a paradigm for the belief that suffering/purgation was necessary for salvation. Indeed, Job’s evocations of pity, mercy, and anxiety about whether or not he will be saved echo the concerns of the family members of the deceased. Following Mass which, as we have seen, possessed a powerful apotropaic effect in the form of the viaticum, the final blessing of Absolution was given to the corpse.® If the deceased’s secular or religious status did not allow for burial in the church building itself, a second funerary procession – again comprising bell-ringers, cross-carriers and torchbearers – carried the body to the graveyard. The corpse was then removed from the coffin, blessed by the priest and deposited in the ground. John Rylands Latin MS 162, fol. 131 depicts a cloistered churchyard, in which three mourners carry a pall-draped coffin westward towards an open grave. Four priests, the first and third of whom hold a cross and censor, are seen awaiting the deposition of the corpse. Above the

cloisters, the spirit of the deceased, again in the form of a homunculus, can be seen ascending to the outstretched arms of God.

For those of a sufficient temporal or spiritual standing, the ideal place of burial was within the church building itself. In accordance with Christopher Daniell’s theory that church topography comprised ‘concentric rings’ of holiness, the most popular place of interment was beneath the High Altar – the sepulchre of Christ and as such the most holy part of the church. The power that emanated from the Eucharist helped fortify the deceased and aid in the remission of sin. Burial in and around the chancel was usually reserved for parish priests and the highest secular authorities. As one moved west and entered the more earthly realm of the nave, beacons of holiness such as the Altar of the High Cross – which tradition dictated should occupy the centre of the church – were also earmarked as places for efficacious burial. The emergence of the chantry chapel in the late thirteenth century can be seen as the ultimate expression of the desire to secure salvation through the manipulation of spiritual geography. Regular, sometimes daily recitations of privatised ‘low’ masses developed from group intercessory rituals, an act of personalisation that was key to the chantry’s success. The orientation and placement of the chapel – a public yet private performance space which incorporated an altar, room for an audience, and perhaps the tomb of the patron – provoked the recollection of the deceased in the minds of the laity and turned them to prayer. With the northern aisles evoking the Wound of Christ in the overall body of the church (I Corinthians 12. 12–31), the erection of a chantry along this section of the building held further eschatological significance. The north chapel at Yatton parish church, Somerset, is a prime example of how disparate intercessory strategies worked towards a single goal. The tomb of the joint-patrons, Robert Newton and Emmota de Sherborne, occupies and disrupts the space between the percipient and the altar, forcing him or her to acknowledge the presence of the deceased in the performance

69 Daniell, Death and Burial, p. 101.
70 Ibid., p. 95.
71 Kornelia Imesch, ‘The Altar of the Holy Cross and the Ideal of Adam’s Progeny: ut paradysiace loca possideat regonis’, in Death and Dying in the Middle Ages, pp. 73–106. Imesch notes how the Altar of the Holy Cross symbolised the tomb of Adam beneath Golgotha. Mystical texts such as the Cave of Treasures (c.600) told how the holy blood that was spilt at the crucifixion trickled down onto Adam’s bones, ensuring a complete remission of his sin. The recreation of this narrative during the Eucharist may have exacted a similar effect on the deceased buried beneath the altar.
of the Mass. The presence of a ‘squint’ – an architectural device allowing for visual access to other parts of the church – provides the percipient with access to the High Altar, promoting mental associations between the death of Christ, the memory of the patrons, the performance of the Mass, and the percipient’s own role in facilitating salvation. The correct sensory and physical movement across this performance space helped provoke remembrance, prayer and, should the connections come together, the salvation of the deceased.

Although it has been argued that the rite of incorporation concluded at the onset of burial, commemorative acts, such as the recitation of the Office of the Dead at the graveside seven days, one month, and one year after death (i.e. the Week’s, Month’s and Year’s Mind), the prevalence of chantry chapels, and the recollection of the communal dead in the parish obit (the Bede Roll), suggest that the culmination of the mourning period occurred not with the act of deposition, but the full expiation of the deceased’s sin. The homunculus in Latin MS 21 may therefore possess a double meaning: not only can it be taken as a representation of an actual soul, but it can also be read as a sign, a subtle mnemonic cue that reveals to the reader the importance of performing the deathbed and mortuary scenes as they appear on the page. In other words, the correct movement across a performance space – be it the horae image or, macrocosmically, the funeral as a whole – was a means of achieving an efficacious outcome; that is, knowledge of the pattern to paradise.

The entire ritual process from the deathbed to burial and beyond can be seen as a vast, inexorable machine for purposes of intercession. As more sin was absolved and the danger of death annulled through correct liturgical performance, so more of the pattern, and thus the map to paradise, was revealed. However, as the model of the labyrinth suggests, the path to salvation could never be as linear as that experienced by the Virgin. To redress the individual and communal problems caused by death

74 Ibid., pp. 112–115.
76 There are clear analogues between the celebration of the Minds and the Germanic, pre-Christian practice of partaking in a series of funerary feasts three days, one week, one month, and one year after death. Although it would be unwise to assign a direct pagan provenance to the Minds, it is possible that the ritual did indeed derive from a long-lived experiential tradition. Lecouteux, Return of the Dead, p. 42; Daniell, Death and Burial, p. 64.
was a circuitous, exhausting affair. The endless cycles of prayer and the recitation of the Office for the Dead at specific times in the calendar year demonstrates that ‘good’ death was incredibly hard to achieve.

It should be reiterated, however, that propitiatory practices were not conducted solely for the benefit of the deceased.\textsuperscript{77} To reiterate Gell, the labyrinthine nature of the funerary performance – its abstraction, repetition, and apparent chaos – also served to annul the wild agency of the ghost and prevent it from doing harm to the living.\textsuperscript{78} Flame, in the form of candles and tapers, a confusing funeral procession, and the ringing of bells, each served the function of sensory entrapment, of keeping demons at bay and souls at particular ‘safe’ points in the maze.\textsuperscript{79} Such strategies ensured that malign influences were unable to interfere with the funerary procession while at the same time keeping the deceased on the prescribed path to salvation. The act of positioning the corpse’s feet toward the nearest threshold (Classical) and the leaving of the windows ajar (late medieval), are further iterations of the desire to maintain a disciplined rite of passage and prevent the impediment of the soul. Careful management of the deathbed performance prevented the reversal of the deceased’s ‘path’ and their catastrophic return to the household. Indeed, Claude Lecouteux’s study of funerary rituals in medieval Germany details how the ghost of the dead householder could be assuaged by sealing the doorways and removing the corpse from a chimney or hole in the wall.\textsuperscript{80} The crucifix and the sign of the cross – indeed, the act of crossing in general – can also be understood as strategies for protection and constraint.\textsuperscript{81} Even intercessory prayer can be read in these terms.\textsuperscript{82} The relationship between magical practice, liminality, and the containment of the dangerous dead will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

\textit{Preaching and the Maintenance of the ‘Pattern’}

Recent anthropological investigations by Edward Schieffelin and Leo Howe have reiterated the importance of body techniques for successful redressive (or

\textsuperscript{77} Swanson, ‘Ghostbusters’, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{78} Gell, \textit{Agency}, pp. 83–95.
\textsuperscript{79} Daniell, \textit{Death and Burial}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{80} Lecouteux, \textit{Return of the Dead}, pp. 32–34.
\textsuperscript{82} Swanson, ‘Ghostbusters’, p. 167.
redemptive) action. It must again be stressed that if ritual performances carry an inherent risk of failure, then success, however it is envisioned, can never be achieved through the exact copying of a pre-determined map or text. The act of ‘doing’, the agency of the social actors involved in the ritual process, is something that can never be fully prescribed. Indeed, the incorrect recitation of the Office for the Dead, the receptivity of the congregation, and the precise manner of death are mitigating factors that make each death performance wholly unique. Vagaries in the dialogue between the living and the dead ensure that despite knowledge of the pattern no two paths through the labyrinth can ever be exactly the same.  

The generation of meaning through practice, although regularised through the structured dispositions (habitus) of the competing social agents, is often innovative – that is, of the moment – and thus completely embodied. Failure to complete a rite of passage derives from the inability of the actor to innovate and thus compensate for deviations in the performance space – the stage; the script; the labyrinth – when they occur at a particular moment in space/time. Church luminaries from Augustine to Jacques de Vitry (c.1165–1240) and Jean Gerson (1363–1429), make just such an assertion with regards to the art of preaching. The need to structure one’s performance according to the erudition and mood of the audience required the preacher to alter his rhetorical devices (gesture; use of exempla) not only to suit each class of listener, but also when problems arose in the moment. A performance that was too flat or too theatrical, a tone that was too offensive or too weak, would struggle to engage the audience. To maintain the dialogue – and thus the forward flow of discourse – a delicate balance was needed.  

Balance, then, can be construed as the correct, disciplined, sometimes difficult path through the performative field, with the body acting as the locus for the creation, maintenance and transmission of meaning. Book Four of On Christian Teaching, taken to be the first preacher’s manual in Christendom, makes these associations explicit:

The fusion of obscurity with such eloquence in the salutary words of God was necessary in order that our minds could develop not just by making discoveries but also by undergoing exertion [difficult process].

Augustine goes on to mention the three main styles of oration: the restrained, unadorned style for factual evidence; a mixed, ornamented style for adding embellishment; and a grand style to elicit an emotion response (the desired action) in the audience:

> Our discourse should be varied by using all three [styles] as far as possible without impropriety. When a speech carries on in a single style it is less absorbing for the listener, but when there is transition from one style to another, it has a smoother [more balanced] flow.

That is to say, a performance should be gauged depending on the agency/attention of the second person (or people) in the performative dialogue – the audience. Indeed, Jacques de Vitry, who, like Jean Gerson two centuries later, put great emphasis on the education of the lay populace in matters of faith, makes mention in his *exempla* of the need to shape one’s sermon according to the idiosyncrasies and palpable realities of the beholder. The inability to navigate, innovate and generate meaning from interactions in social space is the very epitome of ‘entanglement’, or failure, both for the preacher (the ritual leader) and the audience member (who remains in sin).

Embodiment, and the use of body techniques and movement to coerce certain moods/actions from the subject, has so far been discussed with regard to preaching practices, church architecture, and the prescribed processes of the funerary ritual. These oral, material and liturgical texts for living and dying ‘well’, underscored by the consequences that could arise from not following the correct ritual action, find fusion in one of the most enduring motifs of the Middle Ages: the Dance of Death. As a manifest sermon story that engaged with the ‘palpable realities of the beholder’

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85 *Christian Teaching*, IV. 27 (p. 114).
86 *Christian Teaching*, IV. 134 (p. 137).
– that is, the pervasive belief in ambulatory corpses – the ‘Dance’ was a powerful image indeed.

Untangling the Knot: The Dance of Death

The meaning of the Dance of Death is clear: death does not respect social status and can strike anyone, anywhere, at any time. The fear of sudden death permeates the entire motif, as do the exhortations to beware the folly of earthly pursuits and to turn one’s mind to God. The earliest known description of the motif can be found in the manuscript of the so-called ‘Bourgeois of Paris’, whose contemporary account of the creation of the danse macabre fresco at Les Innocents cemetery, Paris, provides an approximate completion date of Easter 1425.88 Although the fresco cycle was destroyed in the seventeenth century as a result of the need to expand the cemetery’s bounds, the images and text from Guyot Marchant’s 1485 printed edition of the danse macabre are presumed to be accurate facsimiles of the lost Les Innocents cycle.89 While most scholars agree that the Dance of Death at Les Innocents was the earliest visual representation of the subject and, perhaps, the model on which all future examples were based, French poet Jean Le Fevre referred to his near-fatal illness as a danse macabre as early as 1376 in his poem Respit de la Mort:

Je fis tôt de Macabree la danse
Qui toutes gens mène à la tresse
E à la fosse les adresse
Qui est leur deraine maison

I made/did the dance of Macabree who leads all people to the dance and who addresses them at the grave that is their last abode.90

This is the earliest known usage of the word macabre in literature, yet a true etymology of the word is difficult to ascertain.91 One of the more plausible theories draws upon its similarity to the Old Testament Chorea Machabeorum, or Dance of the Maccabees. This seems to be an allusion to the martyrdom of a mother and her

88 Mâle, Religious Art, p. 331.
91 Clark, The Dance of Death, p. 91.
seven sons who, despite being forced to endure all manner of vile, physical tortures at the hands of King Antiochus IV, died steadfast in their commitment to God (II Maccabees 7. 1–42). Le Fevre’s use of this metaphor suggests that his readers would have been familiar with the reference to suffering gladly as a means of purgation, or dying well. John Lydgate, who was in Paris as part of the Duke of Bedford’s retinue when the Les Innocents danse macabre was being constructed, is credited with being the first person to translate the poem – and thus the word macabre – into English (c.1430).92

Furthermore, documentary evidence from the church of Caudebec, Normandy, suggests that the conception of death as a dance, a universal equaliser, was used in mendicant sermon-dramas since at least the end of the fourteenth century.93 Indeed, a certain Friar Richard was said to erect a scaffold beside the Les Innocents cycle, using the mocking skeletons and their terrified wards as exempla on the need to repent and beseech God’s mercy in preparation for death.94 As shall be discussed in more detail shortly, the Reval (Tallinn) dance went so far as to incorporate the image and words of the preacher into the cycle itself. In this way, the distinction between the fate of the painted dancers and that of their living counterparts becomes altogether blurred. The illumination for the Commendation of the Soul in the John Rylands Latin MS 39 horae dispenses with the procession entirely and instead shows a solitary skeletal figure standing before an open grave and looking out menacingly from the page. The change in perspective merely amplifies the message: it is the viewer, compelled by Death’s gaze, who participates in the dance.95

With these examples in mind, the Dance of Death, the exhortation to stay on the one, true path, would seem to fit precisely within model of social re-integration

93 Mâle, Religious Art, p. 331.
95 Art as a ‘stage’ for the recollection and generation of new meanings has been discussed by Elina Gertsman with regard to memory books and devotional images, but can easily be applied to meditations on the Dance of Death motif. The sensory movements of the viewer, structured by the ‘mnemonic cues’ on the page, are key to achieving comprehension. See ‘Loci of Performance’, pp. 119–135.
discussed by Schieffelin and Howe. The act of committing sin precipitates the crisis event that is (potential) damnation. The Dance of Death, then, is an expression of pure positive flow, the redressive action needed to return the wayward Christian to God. Success was in no way guaranteed; the conduct of the individual determined whether he or she travelled through – or remained trapped within – the ‘maze’. To understand how the audience engaged with this pattern for good conduct, a closer analysis of the ‘prototype’ cycle at Les Innocents must first be made.

The first edition of Guyot Marchant’s *danse macabre* depicts thirty couples, two on each page, with the dead (*le morts*) in the form of cavorting, skeletal corpses leading their living counterparts westward towards the stern and reproachful figure of the ‘author’. Verses from the Dance of Death poem, sometimes attributed to that great advocate of lay instruction, Jean Gerson, form the dialogue for each scene. The dead, often mocking the frivolity of earthly pursuits and the abuse of social status, beckon their charges to join them in the dance. The living figures, the procession of which alternates in a hierarchical order from layman to cleric, from Pope to peasant, respond with an air of inevitability, fear and regret. It is interesting to note how John Lydgate’s translation, and indeed Marchant’s expanded second edition (1486), replaces the word *le Mort* (the dead) with *la Mort* (Death). In other words, the idea that the skeletal figure acts as a mirror for its charge, a type of revenant, is displaced in favour of the more potent symbolisation of death as a timeless, inexorable force. The idea that the Dance of Death derived, in part, from an entrenched folk-belief in the walking dead is something that can be discerned in the literary evidence. Walter Map (c.1182) recounts the story of a knight who discovered his recently deceased wife cavorting in a circle-dance; that is, a ‘dance of the dead’. Thomas of Cantimpré’s *Bonum Universale De apibus* (c.1270) a Dominican preacher’s manual, contains a similar story, in which a circle-dance of ‘demons’ – the dead? – was reported to have taken place in a field near Cologne in

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96 Oosterwijk, ‘Of Corpses, Constables and Kings’ p. 175. Although the poem may have had an earlier Latin (perhaps Mendicant) antecedent, Gerson’s position as Chancellor of the University of Paris and his obsession with penance and the rejection of earthly pleasures, makes him a viable author of this particular text. Gerson, moreover, was a great advocate of maintaining the proper hierarchy in light of challenges to the body of the church. Such a hierarchy – wherein the ‘heads’ of society are following by their lower, but equally important parts – can be seen in the Dance of Death procession. See Dorothy Brown, *Pastor and the Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).


The former example is but one of many episodes in Map’s work that illustrates the centrality of the walking dead in the *habitus* of the everyday populace. The latter story, occurring some one hundred years later, is focused through a more disapproving, orthodox lens. Considering Cantimpré’s adamance that it was ‘demons’ who participated in the dance, it can be argued that the opposite was true in the minds of the people to whom his manual was directed, the *exemplum* betraying a need to correct the ‘error’ of the walking (and dancing) dead.\(^9\) Despite the efforts of the Church, it seems that such an entrenched belief was impossible to eradicate, and may have been appropriated by the creator of the *danse macabre* (Gerson?) to speak to the laity in their own language. For a sermon to be affective it had to engage with the expectations of the intended audience. The intended audience for the ‘Dance’ can be readily discerned in the figures that intersperse the skeletal dancers in the pictorial cycle. The Dance of Death can thus be read as an elite appropriation of a ‘rhetoric’ that was shared – to whatever extent – by the entire community.

Rather than trying to uncover a single antecedent for the motif, it is likely that the prototype cycle at Les Innocents emerged from a variety of different sources. The need to create an immediate and identifiable *exemplum* to educate lay audiences about the correct procedures for death, oral histories about graveyard dances, and prior poetic and visual traditions on the art of dying well all had their influence on the fresco’s design.\(^1\) And yet it was the manner of their fusion, the balance between the profundity of the text and the skill of the anonymous artist – the challenge of reading – which so arrested the audience and assured the motif’s fame. Indeed, versions of the *danse macabre* began to appear throughout France, for example at Kermaria (Côtes-du-Nord) c.1450 and La Chaise-Dieu (Haute-Loire) c.1460, as well as spreading to England (St. Paul’s; probably through the influence of Lydgate when he returned to England in 1430) and the rest of mainland Europe.

The challenge of reading – or, indeed, participating in – the Dance of Death is a concept that underlies the very function of the motif and, indeed the didactic arts

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100 Ibid., 39.
in general. Reading and participation are iterations of the same theme; movement through a mental, physical or cosmological field. As Gertsman and Carruthers have shown with regard to memory techniques, the mental movement across an image was a difficult and absorbing process, involving the use of one’s *habitus* to piece together a narrative or discourse from the apparent chaos of the perceptual grid. Michael Camille, in his ground-breaking article ‘Seeing and Reading’, makes a related comment on the image – be it a decorative rubric or devotional icon – being imbued with a range of mnemonic cues and notations; points of engagement (constraints) that needed to be overcome in order to generate the ‘correct’ reading performance from the fluid space on the page. Either comprehension (knowledge and re-interpretation of the pattern being presented) or confusion (entanglement within the visual syntax), awaited the viewer, something that emphasises the maze-like quality of cognition.

The idea that correct, albeit difficult mental/physical movements through a performative field created efficacious outcomes has been a recurring theme of this chapter, and may be used to explain how the *danse macabre* at Les Innocents and, perhaps, the motif as a whole, was read. While the dead drag their doppelgangers to the right, toward potential salvation, so the percipients, in moving eastwards along the fresco cycle until they too came to their social double, are taking part in a similar mode of movement. Furthermore, the exhortations to repent that can be read in the dialogue (below) drag the percipient’s gaze back toward the preacher/authority at the beginning of the dance. By participating in a similar circular – and thus generative – left-right movement, the viewer, lost in a knot of sin, comes to understand pattern and draws back to the true path of salvation. This mode of viewing is made particularly explicit in the Reval Dance. Painted by Bernt Noke for the Niguliste Church in Reval (Tallin), c.1490, this is one of the very few medieval Dances to be executed on canvas (fig. 4). The thirteen extant life-size figures represent but a small fraction of the original procession which, if one takes the layout of Notke’s now-lost Lübeck Dance into account, numbered in the fifties and depicted men and women of every age and social station. In a similar design to the Les Innocents

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103 Camille, ‘Seeing as Reading’, p. 43.
105 Gertsman, ‘Reval (Tallinn)’, pp. 143–144.
cycle, skeletal figures, cavorting and dressed in tattered rags, lead their charges, from Pope to peasant, toward the mendicant preacher in the far left corner. The Preacher who, judging by the inscription, seems to be giving a sermon on the need to prepare one’s soul for death, looks out authoritatively over the incoming procession from the elevated vantage point of his pulpit.\footnote{Ibid., p. 148.} It is interesting to note that as the percipient moves along the Reval cycle, participating in a similar left-right movement as his/her painted counterpart, Death’s words carry an overt message of salvation through the expiation of sin, a contrast to the overly scornful dialogue found at Les Innocents. For example:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The First Dead Man (le mort) at Les Innocents}

You, both good and bad, who by common decree live in such different stations, will all dance once in this dance. And your bodies will be eaten by worms. Alas! Look at us, dead, naked, rotten and stinking! As we are so you will be.\footnote{Guy Marchant, \textit{La Danse Macabre des Charniers des Saints Innocents à Paris}, ed. and trans. by E. F. Chaney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1945), p. 46.}

\textit{Death (la mort) at Reval}

I call all and everyone to this dance [...] remember though at all times to bring good deeds with you and to repent your sins, for you must dance to my pipe.\footnote{Gertsman, ‘Reval (Tallinn)’, p. 154.}
\end{quote}

In a further indication of how the Reval Dance was meant to be read, each person in the procession looks out imploringly from the canvas, compelling the percipients to stop and meet their gaze. As Camille and Jane Taylor note, the choreography of untrained, unconscious reading by a (perhaps) illiterate audience involved the absorption of image before the written word. In a work such as the Dance of Death cycle, attempts would have been made to assimilate the meaning of the life-size
painted figures first. Indeed, the full, dramatic impact of the suddenness and universality of death would have grabbed the percipients’ attention with much more urgency than the dialogue, below. The composition of the Reval dance thus adheres to the rules laid down by Augustine, de Vitry and Gerson, in that a successful sermon – be it oral or visual – must be balanced against the comprehensions, and fears, of the beholder. Such reading hierarchies dictate that the eye moves downwards from the main body of the canvas (the image of Death and the viewer’s double) to the bottom (the smaller field of writing which only the literate or semi-literate could decipher). After allowing his or her gaze to descend from the figures to the inscription, below, and perhaps recalling prior sermon-stories on the topic, the percipients would then turn their attention back to the preacher’s admonitions and the dance, the series of left-right/horizontal-vertical movements across the performative field, would begin anew. The repetition of bodily gesture and dialogue, the dance’s inherent circuitousness, give further notification that this is a pattern for good death. With the percipients’ attention thus engaged in a series of expanding, knotted circles as they moved along the canvas, the labyrinthine, non-linear and, above all, difficult path to salvation becomes clear.

Further evidence of this pattern can be found in the church of Meslay-le-Grenet in Eure-et-Loir, France. Dated to c.1500 and covering the south and west interior walls, the Dance of Death mural is but one section of a wider fresco cycle designed to elicit repentance. The Passion, the idealised death, begins over the altar and extends across the first third of the south wall. Following a left-right movement along this axis, the adjacent Dance of Death cycle – the earthly, debased pattern – continues around the interior of the church until the percipient’s attention comes to rest on one of the later characters in the procession; the baby in a crib. The child, deemed to be a representation of Christ due to the inclusion of the church’s consecration mark on the crib, occupies a position almost directly opposite the altar and the Passion motif. Thus the viewer is encouraged to ‘dance’ across the mural, from the paradigm of good death, along the parade of sinners, to the Christ Child

111 Gertsman, ‘Reval (Tallinn)’, p. 150; Camille, ‘Seeing and Reading’, p. 32.
which, in late medieval *exempla*, was a well-known symbol of His sacrifice and ultimately *our* redemption. Attention is thus drawn back to the Passion cycle and the Eucharist – the reception of which cleanses the believer of sin – and the dance begins anew. The theme of good conduct is given further emphasis by the depiction of the preacher above the Dance on the western wall. To the left, and in marked contrast to the preacher’s edifying words, is a depiction of the Parable of the Gossiping Women: the very paradigm of what not to do in church. The mural of the Three Living and Three Dead that appears above the Dance on the south wall provides a further stark reminder of the finite nature of mortal existence. In a manner similar to the Dances at Les Innocents and Reval, the series of left-right/horizontal-vertical movements as the percipient reads and re-reads the cycle marks an incredibly labyrinthine process to comprehension. Only by knowing God and employing the correct bodily and spiritual techniques – repentance, acceptance of death, and the proper reception of the Host – could the Christian viewer redress their failings, untangle the knot of sin and, so doing, tread the one, true path to salvation. The Dance of Death, then, ‘speaks’ to the audience as would a priest. It is truly a sermon in painted form.

**Conclusion**

To die well required a lifetime’s worth of redemptive/redressive actions to protect the soul from the daily onslaught of sin. These patterns for salvation could be conducted in life (engaging with didactic artworks such as the Dance of Death; the reception of the Eucharist; confession) or at the hour of death (Last Rites; the *Ars Moriendi*). As discussed previously with regards to Christ’s Harrowing of Hell and the Dormition of the Virgin, no-one but the pattern’s instigator (Christ) or the most holy (the saints) could achieve an unobstructed passage to heaven. To those who were waylaid by original sin and weaknesses of the flesh, the imitation of Christ could only have so much effect. After death, when the soul departed the body and became trapped in the purgatorial (that is, liminal) maze, it was left to the living, using the correct mortuary and commemorative practices, to erase the remaining sin and guide the soul to its final, eternal abode. Incorrect action – or, in fact, inaction –

114 Ibid., pp. 25–27.
was a dangerous thing indeed. The fear that the dead could return, either in the form of a ghost demanding prayer or as a marauding, pestilence-spreading revenant, was a deeply entrenched belief.\textsuperscript{115} The maintenance of forward flow via the positioning of the corpse’s feet toward the threshold and the sheer volume of intercessory prayer are but two practices that reflect a need to untangle, control and direct the wild agency of the deceased.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Exemplum Ten} from \textit{De rebus gestis in Majori Monasterio}, a twelfth-century Benedictine guidebook for administering to the dead and the dying, illustrates the dangers that an unappeased, angry ghost could bring. The tale records how Ulric, the newly installed steward of the Priory of Tavant, was visited one night by the spirits of two recently deceased brethren. However much they rebuked him for not enacting suffrages on their behalf, the steward, a worldly man not given to spiritual concerns, resolutely ignored their words. Finally, after the third, failed visitation, the dead monks beat Ulric to such an extent that he remained bedridden for half a year. Never again did he take the protestations of the dead so lightly.\textsuperscript{117} This \textit{exemplum}, though brief, provides a fitting conclusion to what has been the underlying theme of this chapter: correct ritual performance was a powerful apotropaic. It protected the living by means of benefiting the dead.

\textsuperscript{115} Caciola, ‘Revenants’, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{116} Lecouteux, \textit{Return of the Dead}, p. 33.
3. The Walking Dead and the Historia Rerum Anglicarum

Introduction

William of Newburgh’s Historia Rerum Anglicarum (c.1198) is the foremost written source for medieval revenant belief. Contained within this ‘History of English Affairs’ is a collection of twenty-five stories on the prodigious and supernatural.¹ Four of these tales are noted by William as being so incongruous, so inexplicable, as being completely devoid of precedent in the annals of written Christian history. As their sobriquets (the ‘Buckingham Ghost’, the ‘Berwick Ghost’, the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ and the ‘Ghost of Anant’) suggest, these narratives describe encounters with supernatural agents; specifically, the walking, pestilential dead. As an Augustinian canon of some learning, whose sober, yet critical commentary has led him to be labelled the first ‘modern’ historian, William was altogether hesitant to assign a single, definite meaning to such phenomena.² Indeed, he notes with some incredulity that ‘the corpses of the dead [...] leave their graves and wander around as the cause of danger and terror to the living [...] is not something that would easily be believed, were it not for the fact that there have been clear examples in our own time.’ Ever the detached party, he is content merely to ‘set down the facts as simply as [he] can.’³

The modern scholar may share in William’s hesitation. In order to untangle the contradictions of meaning and action encapsulated by the four exempla (and, indeed, tales of the undead in general), this chapter will analyse the material, pedagogical, and habitual structures that influenced the stories’ narratological form and function. Thus, the first part of the investigation will evaluate the social context of the Historia Rerum Anglicarum’s composition and the specific codicological placement of the four revenant narratives. As Elizabeth Freeman argues in her examination of the wonder stories in Ralph of Coggeshall’s Chronicon Anglicanum

² Partner, Serious Entertainments, p. 51.
³ Newburgh, V. 24.
(c.1200–1220), such tales do not exist in their own experiential vacuum.\textsuperscript{4} Portentous or otherwise wondrous events were often employed as framing devices, their insertion into the ongoing historical narrative used to justify events which had previously occurred or else foretell events which had yet to pass. Tales of the walking dead must therefore be understood not simply as deviations intended to horrify or titillate, but as integral to the meaning of the narrative as a whole.\textsuperscript{5} To this end, Gabrielle Spiegel has suggested that to make sense of a chronicle, one must employ a reading technique similar to that used in image-scapes, specifically the process whereby meanings can be generated by treading a correct mental pathway through a (seemingly) disordered textual field.\textsuperscript{6} Just as the correct mental movement through the structure of an illumination or fresco-cycle yielded deeper layers of meaning, so the chronicle also possesses mnemonic cues and discursive patterns which, if acknowledged by the percipient, can be used to generate a more subtle understanding of the material as a whole. It is my contention that stories of deviant behaviour in the context of the walking dead can add an extra moral significance to commentaries on the conduct of the living. I will show how the insertion of the four revenant narratives between an account of the heresy of William Longbeard (V. 21), and the social cost of warfare (V. 25), is in no way a random occurrence. Even if William declines to offer an overt explanation as to what his prodigies might signify, the reader, directed by their placement within the chronicle and aware of their historical context, is invited to make the connection.\textsuperscript{7} The active agency (or ‘wandering viewpoint’) of the percipient makes manifest what the written word leaves unsaid.\textsuperscript{8}

The final section of this chapter will involve a close critical analysis of the most ambiguous of William’s \textit{mirabilia}, the ‘Buckingham Ghost’, demonstrating the different (and sometimes contradictory) ways in which ‘bad’ death could be read. Although the ‘Berwick Ghost’, the ‘Hounds’ Priest’, and the ‘Ghost of Anant’ do

\textsuperscript{5} Given-Wilson, \textit{Chronicles}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, as Freeman states: ‘It is possible that the diversion holds clues as to the underlying themes of the history.’ See ‘Wonders’, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{8} Iser, \textit{Reading}, 107–134.
indeed offer evidence for the popular perception of walking corpses, the contradictory meanings assigned to the Buckingham Ghost – should it be absolved or destroyed? – are expressive of the wider religious uncertainties of the time. William’s ghost stories, then, will be considered in respect of their didactic function (the purpose of their transcription) and the extent to which they reflect the vagaries of popular practice (the ‘cultural facts’ within the narratives themselves). This investigation will begin with an overview of the theological and cultural context in which the *Historia Rerum Anglica rum* was created; as Spiegel suggests, historical contingency is a structuring principle that must be acknowledged in order to truly understand the social logic of the text.⁹

The Northern Church: A Historical Overview

Northern England witnessed a remarkable resurgence in formal monasticism at the end of the eleventh century. The flourishing spiritual and literary culture which so characterised the eighth and ninth centuries had, by the time of the Conquest, been almost entirely destroyed by years of Viking onslaught. It is ironic, then, that local resistance to another invading force, the Normans, may have unwittingly contributed to the region’s spiritual reform. The rebellious nature of the Northumbrians – which was tempered somewhat by the Harryng of the North – would seem to account for the royal patronage of the Benedictine abbey at Selby in 1069. Originally intended as a private hermitage, Selby seems to have instead been used by the Norman invaders as a symbol of their dominion over this fraught and untamed land. The royal patronage given to two more Benedictine foundations at Whitby (c.1077) and St. Mary’s in York (c.1088) may also have been a way for William I to assert his control over the apparently lawless and disloyal North.¹⁰

Royal and Episcopal patronage accounted for the proliferation of monasteries well into the next century, the Augustinians in particular gaining much land and favour during the reign of Henry I (1100–1135). The hermitage at Nostell, near

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Pontefract, was converted into a priory for Augustinian canons in 1117, an act which was noted by Thurstan, the Archbishop of York, as being ‘the best available means of introducing a new and vigorous purity into the religious life of the North.’ His predecessor, Thomas II, had already begun this process, overseeing the conversions of the parish churches at Hexham (c.1113) and Bridlington (c.1114), among others. Canons from Bridlington would eventually come to occupy Newburgh (c.1145), where William, the author of the *Historia Rerum Anglicaerum*, earned the priory its fame. And yet, it was with the arrival of the Cistercian monks on English soil in 1131 that the monastic landscape of Yorkshire truly changed. Obeying a more literal interpretation of the Benedictine rule – the main concern of which was to lead a life of seclusion and austerity away from the secular world – the Cistercians advocated a complete uniformity of conduct. According to the order’s repeatedly-updated constitution, the *Carta caritatis*, the liturgical books of each affiliated house should conform exactly to those found at the order’s original foundation, Cîteaux. Father Abbots, moreover, were expected to visit their daughter houses at least once a year. The *Carta* also bound the abbot of each house to strict attendance of the annual General Chapter, where issues of practice, the regulation of custom and changes to the constitution could be met. It is generally believed, however, that with the expansion of the Cistercian order reaching its peak in the 1150s, this was the time when the standardisation of practice truly came into effect. William of Newburgh describes the foundation of the three main abbeys of Fountains (c.1132), Rievaulx (c.1132), and Byland (c.1147), in supremely glowing terms: ‘like the triple light of our province, they blaze forth by the pre-eminence of their holy religion.’ And blaze forth they did, establishing daughter houses not only in England, but Scotland (Melrose c.1136, and Dundrennan c.1142, both from Rievaulx) and Norway (Lysa, c.1145, from Fountains). And yet, despite their connections to their parent house on the continent, Clairvaux, and the universality of the *Carta caritatis*, the Cistercian foundations of the North possessed their own specific cultural identity, ultimately based on the continued attraction to – and reverence of – the Bedan monastic

12 Ibid., pp. 69–75.
14 Ibid., 48–51.
15 Newburgh, I. 15. 2.
tradition. Nowhere is the syncretism of ancient practice and modern ideals seen more explicitly than in the figure of Aelred, the renowned abbot of Rievaulx (1147–1167).

Born in Hexham to a father, grandfather and great-grandfather who all enjoyed close ties with the Northumbrian Church, Aelred was educated first at the cathedral school in Durham – where his uncle was a monk – and then at the royal court of David I of Scotland. Indeed, it has been argued that David’s influence and benefaction was vital in securing Aelred’s entry into Rievaulx. For the Cistercians, the admittance of one of the king’s favourites provided them with a valuable ally to the North, as evidenced by founding of the abbeys of Melrose and Dundrennan. By the time he was elected to the abacy of Rievaulx in 1147, Aelred was at the centre of a vast filial network that extended from Scotland to France, underpinned by a cultural heritage that included Bede, the hallowed library of Durham Cathedral and a definite geographical connection to the Anglo-Saxon past. Indeed, among Aelred’s many historical and spiritual tracts, his *vitae* of Sts. Edward and Ninian reveal a preoccupation with his English (Edward) and specifically Northumbrian (Ninian) lineage. The same, perhaps, can be said of his treatise, *On the Miracle of the holy Fathers who rest in Hexham Church*, written in 1155. He died in 1167, having overseen Rievaulx’s emergence as one of the most prosperous monasteries in the kingdom. This, then, was the cultural climate in which the desire for a new history of England, based on Bedan precedents, grew. As will be discussed in more detail below, William’s connection to the Cistercian houses and their northern influences can give an indication as to where he may have acquired some of the oral testimonies and eye-witness accounts for his tales of the undead.

**Cultural Networks and the Truthfulness of Ghosts**

The prefatory letter to the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* states that William was commissioned by Ernald, the sixth abbot of Rievaulx (1189–1199), to write ‘a

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history of memorable events which have so abundantly occurred in our times’.\textsuperscript{21}

With the harmonization of Cistercian practice making it difficult for Ermald to pursue an individual literary career without first securing permission from the General Chapter,\textsuperscript{22} and considering that Newburgh Priory shared a patron (the de Mowbray family) with Rievaulx’s sister abbey, Byland, William proved to be an ideal candidate for the task.\textsuperscript{23} Information about William’s life and career is scarce. Although it is generally accepted that he spent the majority of his adult life at Newburgh, some scholars, such as H. E. Salter, have attempted to construct a more detailed biography based on the ‘William of Newburgh’ mentioned in contemporary written sources.\textsuperscript{24} According to Salter, William was born in Bridlington in 1135 and moved to Newburgh at a young age to receive his education. He married a local heiress, Emma de Peri, when he was around twenty-five to thirty years old. After an active and presumably successful secular career, William returned to Newburgh as a canon in 1185, where his reputation as a man of esteem and high learning led to Ermald’s commission.\textsuperscript{25} Out of the nine remaining copies of this ‘History of English Affairs’, the version contained in the British Library Manuscript Stowe 62 is of particular significance, being the presentation copy intended for Newburgh itself and containing corrections in William’s own hand.\textsuperscript{26} The preface begins with an attack on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s hugely popular \textit{Historia Rerum Britanniae} (c.1136), where William derides the latter’s attempts to ‘dignify [the exploits of Arthur] with the name of authentic history’, and advocates Bede as the model to which all writers of history should aspire. William is the only contemporary historian to have made such a stand (although it is interesting that Aelred, in his \textit{Speculum Caritatis}, does indeed decry the tales of Arthur as ‘fables and lies’).\textsuperscript{27} Having constructed his arguments against falseness – and, in a more overtly political invective, the

\textsuperscript{21} Newburgh, Prefatory Epistle.
\textsuperscript{22} See the statute that ‘no abbot, monk, or novice is permitted to compose books, except by permission of the general chapter’, in Freeman, \textit{Narratives}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{23} Freeman, \textit{Narratives}, pp. 91–97.
\textsuperscript{25} For Salter’s thesis, see Bruce Dickens, ‘A Yorkshire Chronicler (William of Newburgh)’, \textit{Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society}, 5 (1934), 15–26 (p. 16). William’s entry into Newburgh priory can be traced to the provenance it shared with the Augustinian house in Bridlington.
\textsuperscript{27} Cited in Lawrence-Mathers, ‘William of Newburgh’, p. 354.
‘traditional fictions’ of these ‘truly silly Britons’ – he proceeds with an overview of *English* history from the Norman Conquest of 1066 to the reconciliation of Richard I and the archbishop of Rouen in May 1198. The abrupt ending to the text suggests that William died sometime towards the end of that year, his chronicle incomplete.

Despite the almost forensic delight exhibited by William in his inversion of Geoffrey’s method, he dedicates considerable attention to marvels and prodigies which, by his very admission, are almost beyond his ability to comprehend. To best understand why he decries the follies of the British while maintaining the veracity of the walking dead, we must first establish the context in which such narratives were composed and circulated. As has been discussed above, affiliated houses in the Cistercian order kept in regular, yearly contact. Rievaulx, especially, was at the centre of a vast network of obligation that included five daughter houses (Melrose, Dundrennan, Rufford, Revesby and Warden). Taking this into account, and overlaying the geographical location of the four revenant narratives (Buckinghamshire, Berwick, Melrose Abbey and the Castle of Anant) onto Rievaulx’s map of affiliation, a clearer picture of the Cistercian information network emerges (fig. 5). Although the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ centres on an unnamed Buckinghamshire village, and despite William himself naming ‘Stephen, the venerable archdeacon of that province’ as his primary source, it is interesting to note that the abbey of Revesby enjoyed a close geographical connection to Lincoln. Lincoln’s bishop, St. Hugh of Avalon (c.1140–1200) was the person to whom Stephen entrusted the whole affair. The ‘certain friends’ from whom William first heard the story may well have had a connection to Revesby, or, alternatively, Warden, which was situated on the Buckinghamshire border. William declines to name his source for the ‘Berwick Ghost’; however, this ‘noble city’ does seem to rest on a main communication link to Melrose Abbey, itself the setting of a third narrative, the ‘Hounds’ Priest’, which William declares was related to him by the ‘religious men’ of that place. It is possible, perhaps, that William heard the story of the ‘Berwick Ghost’ whilst visiting his Cistercian informants to the north, or else as second-hand information from a monk who once resided at Melrose.

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28 Newburgh, V. 24. 1: ‘It would not be easy (*nescio*) to believe that the corpses of the dead should sally [...] did not frequent examples, occurring in our own times, suffice to establish this fact.’

29 Newburgh, V. 24. 3.
The location of the Castle of Anant is much more difficult to place. Alnwick in Northumbria is a possible candidate, suggesting that William’s informant – an ‘aged monk (sene religioso) who lived in honour and authority in those parts’ – may have belonged to the nearby abbey of Newminster in Morpeth (c.1137), a daughter house of Fountains. Although the term religioso suggests that the testimony came from a Cistercian, further evidence, such as William’s remark that ‘the man from whose mouth I heard these things sorrow[ed] over the desolation of his parish’, alludes to a pastoral connection to the local community.\(^{30}\) The possibility that the use of religioso was a semantic error, and that the informant was a canon from the Premonstratensian priory of St. Mary’s (c.1151), Alnwick, cannot be discounted.\(^{31}\) William’s investigations into the walking dead may therefore have encompassed an information network which spread beyond the bounds of Cistercian gossip to include other denominations and, in the form of the Archdeacon Stephen, a high ecclesiastical office. If, as seems likely, William’s duties at Newburgh meant that he could not journey outside Yorkshire for any significant amount of time, it is worth noting that the priory was situated on a busy communication link between York and the river Tees, a perfect location from which to acquire tales of the walking dead from those travelling on the highway.\(^{32}\) Why, then, if William declares that ‘to write down all the instances of this kind which I have ascertained to have befallen in our times, the undertaking would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome’, did he choose to insert these four specific narratives into his history? The answer, perhaps, can be found in what he may have perceived to be the ‘truthfulness’ of these accounts.

Historians, wrote Gervase of Canterbury (d.1210), had a duty to ‘seek the truth’.\(^{33}\) ‘Truthfulness’ was determined by a number of factors: exactitude (correct dates; chronology); universality (i.e. an ideal truth or model); and plausibility (to what extent the information correlated with the habitus or prevailing worldview of the community) were the main criteria by which the veracity of a report was evaluated.\(^{34}\) The degree to which truth could be differentiated from falsehood also depended on the reliability of the eyewitness. If the chronicler could not verify the

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\(^{30}\) Newburgh, V. 24. 4–6. My italics.
\(^{32}\) Taylor, Medieval Historical Writing, p. 11.
\(^{33}\) Gervase, pp. 87–88.
\(^{34}\) Given-Wilson, Chronicles, pp. 2–6.
report – that is, if he had not experienced the event himself – then criteria including age, office, personal relationship to the chronicler and historical precedent could be used to differentiate between good and bad testimony.\(^{35}\) The clergy, as emissaries of God on earth, were the most trustworthy people of all. Thus it is no surprise that William, who enjoyed close personal ties with the monks at Rievaulx, chose to record wonder tales which had a strong northern and Cistercian accent. Where Cistercian testimony is vague and conjectured, William makes a greater effort to acknowledge the reliability of his informants. The nameless *religiosus* from the Alnwick area who ‘lived in honour and authority among those parts’ was thus an ideal source for the ‘Ghost of Anant’. Likewise, the testimony of the ‘venerable’ Stephen de Swaefeld may have derived its worthiness from the archdeacon’s high ecclesiastical office. If not universal (‘it would be strange if such things should have happened formerly, since we can find no evidence of them in the works of ancient authors’),\(^{36}\) then these narratives are certainly exact and plausible according to the framework laid out above. They are, in many respects, ‘true’. And yet, their very uniqueness, the belief that the walking dead emerged only in William’s lifetime, prompts questions as to why these truths, these ‘wonders’, now appeared.

*Revenants and Wonders*

William uses the term *prodigiosum* (marvellous) to describe his ‘truthful’ accounts of the walking dead. *Prodigio* is a synonym of the noun *monstrum* (monster), which itself derives from the Latin verb *monstrare*, meaning ‘to show’. These stories, then, must be considered in light of the wider theological and philosophical debates surrounding entities that existed on the margins of the natural, harmonious world.\(^{37}\) If, according to cosmological theory, the order of the universe (God) could be detected in all its manifest forms, then *disordered* beings, such as monsters, may be reflective of social, environmental, and/or political uncertainties – deviance from the

\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 11–12.

\(^{36}\) Newburgh, V. 24. 1.

The veracity of the narratives confirms that they were no mere fables, but portents (‘warnings to posterity’) that had actually occurred and which had the potential to signify other deviant or destructive events. One of the main goals of admiratio (wonder) was to explicate the disorder embodied by the prodigio and arrive at a true, moral reading. Indeed, William himself states that he ‘calls things of this nature “wonderful” (prodigiosa), not merely on account of their rarity, but because some latent meaning is attached to them.’ The very instability of the monstrous ‘text’ meant that it could contain multiple layers of signification, whether historical (literal), symbolic (portentous) or allegorical (critical).

Before comment can be made on the meaning, or meanings, that can be read in William’s exempla, their content and manner of deployment must first be analysed.

As recounted in the opening chapter, the tale of the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ details the death of a man who, on the very night after his funeral, returns to the marital bed and tries to assault his wife. With the revenant’s attacks increasing in both frequency and intensity, it is decided to take the matter to St. Hugh of Avalon, the bishop of Lincoln. The bishop is told by his advisors that ‘such things had often befallen in England’ and that the usual remedy is to dig up the suspect corpse and cremate it. The desecration of the body seems sacrilegious to the archbishop and so, instead, he orders a scroll of absolution to be placed on the dead man’s chest – an act which proves to be successful. The ‘Berwick Ghost’, meanwhile, tells of a wealthy man who dies suddenly after leading an irreligious life. ‘By the contrivance of Satan’, the dead man emerges from his tomb at night and begins terrorising the town, spreading chaos and discontent as the corpse is ‘borne hither and thither’, pursued by a pack of loudly barking dogs. Fearing that disease will engulf the town if no action is taken, the residents task ‘ten young men renowned for boldness’ to exhume,

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38 Williams, Deformed Discourse, p. 59. The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris (c.1147) was one of the works which popularised the neoplatonic conception of the holistic universe. See the translation by Winthrop Wetherbee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).
39 Another aspect of admiratio was accepting that a ‘wonder’ may sometimes be beyond human comprehension. See Bynum, Metamorphosis, pp. 39, 71.
40 Newburgh, I. 28.
42 Newburgh, V. 22.
dismember and cremate the suspect corpse. Once this action has been taken, the nightly perturbations cease.\footnote{Ibid., V. 23.}

A similar set of motifs can be discerned in the story of the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ (\textit{Hundeprest}). An irreligious chaplain, whose love of hunting and aristocratic pursuits earns him his unflattering nickname, dies and is buried in the graveyard of Melrose Abbey. However, the holy earth does not keep the corpse at rest. ‘With loud groans and horrible murmurs’ he rises from the grave each night and begins making a nuisance of himself outside the bedchamber of his former mistress. Seeking help from the Abbey, the mistress is assured by a priest that a vigil comprising himself, a second monk, and two ‘powerful young men’ will be kept around the chaplain’s grave the following night. Midnight passes and there is still no sign of the monster. Having bided his time until three of the party return indoors, the Devil then proceeds to ‘raise up in his chosen vessel’ and attack the remaining priest. Unperturbed and resolute in his faith, the priest cleaves a hole in the chaplain’s body, whereupon it sinks back down into the earth. The next morning, the corpse is exhumed, carried beyond the walls of the monastery and cremated.\footnote{Ibid., V. 24. 1–3.}

Lastly, the ‘Ghost of Anant’ tells of a man of ill-repute who insinuates himself within the retinue of the Lord of the Castle Anant. Marrying within the household, it is not long before he begins to suspect his wife of having an affair. Under the pretence of ‘going on a journey from which he would not return for some days’, he hides in the beams of the marriage chamber where his suspicions are confirmed. Enraged, the man falls from the beams where he is hiding. He vows to exact revenge on his wife and, critically, fails to make confession before succumbing to his injuries. True to his word, the man’s ghost emerges from the tomb each night, accompanied by a pack of howling dogs and a terrible, pestilential stench. Many people die from the plague. Finally, two young brothers decide to exhume the errant corpse. They find it swollen, its face suffused with blood and the burial shroud torn to pieces. Realising that the corpse must be a ‘blood-sucker’ (\textit{sanguisuga}), they
remove the heart before burning the body on a pyre. Having taken these actions, the corrupted air seems to have been purified, ending the epidemic.\(^{45}\)

Themes of deviance, pollution, and the dangers of social unrest underscore each of William’s narratives. ‘Bad’ death has terrible – sometimes deadly – consequences for the living. However, whilst the ‘Berwick Ghost’ and the ‘Ghost of Anant’ are primarily concerned with the spread of pestilence, the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ and the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ focus on the differences between correct and incorrect pastoral practice; the irreligious priest spreads unrest, whereas Hugh of Avalon contains it. William’s statement in the prologue to the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ tale, that ‘we can find no evidence of [revenants] in the works of ancient authors’ implies that the dead may have risen in response to (or anticipation of) more recent historical developments. Thus, although the accounts can be read as literal – that is, as entertaining or terrifying diversions from the main body of the text – there were also potent symbolic meanings behind the corpses’ reappearance, as testified by the constant referral to ‘prodigies’.\(^{46}\) If one of the primary goals of *admiratio* was *scientia* (knowledge), then knowledge of a marvel’s meaning could be utilised by the historian in his role as arbiter of moral truth, the symbol becoming allegory.\(^{47}\) The significance of the encounters’ narratological variation and, indeed, William’s observations about the context of their occurrence, will now be discussed in light of their placement within the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*.

*The Revenant Stories in Context*

The insertion of the revenant narratives into Book V of the *Historia*, chapters twenty-two to twenty-four, suggests that they occurred (or else were made to seem to occur) in the spring of 1196, a period which William laments as being suffused with national and international strife. As mentioned above, the use of portents to parenthesise certain parts of the historical narrative allowed the chronicler to apply further layers of meaning onto otherwise purely literal events.\(^{48}\) Book V, Chapter twenty-one begins with a commentary on the London uprising instigated by William

\(^{45}\) Ibid., V. 24. 4–7.
\(^{46}\) ‘De prodigio mortui’ (V. 22), ‘prodigosum’ (V. 23), ‘De quibusdam prodigiosis’ (V. 24).
\(^{47}\) Freeman, ‘Wonders’, p. 142.
\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 139.
FitzOsbert (Longbeard) in April 1196 in protest at the increasing taxation of the poor. The youngest son of a wealthy London landowner, Longbeard was said to possess a rare gift for public speaking. In all other respects he was contemptible and dissolute; a law student who, despite his eloquence and ‘sharp mind’, was envious, vain, and quick to hold a grudge. Indeed, having been denied an increase to his living expenses, Longbeard even accused his brother – the head of the FitzOsbert estate – of high treason, going so far as to take the matter to the King. Longbeard’s scorn for his social (and fiscal) betters may have prompted his decision to take up the cause of oppressed citizens of London, proclaiming himself ‘Saviour of the Poor’. Despite winning many converts through his impassioned public speeches and ‘smooth words’, Longbeard’s sedition did not last for long. Taking refuge in the church of St. Mary le Bow after a riot in which a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s militia was killed, Longbeard and his followers – including his mistress – watched as Hubert Walter, the aforesaid archbishop, ordered the church to be set alight. Longbeard surrendered and was executed soon after, a fitting end for a ‘pestilence and a killer’ (pestilentis et homicidae). However, much to the dismay of the city authorities, the anger that resulted from Longbeard’s death soon coalesced into a cult. ‘Fools’ came from far and wide to keep vigil over the spot where he died. Seeking to denounce the beliefs of the ‘idiot rabble’, the authorities arrested the priest who attested to Longbeard’s martyrdom and posted a sentry on the site of his execution. In a further indictment of the cult, the Historia describes how, in the moments before his death, Longbeard confessed to having had sex with his mistress on the altar of St. Mary le Bow and even of invoking the name of the devil as Hubert Walter’s guard closed in. Soon enough, ‘the entire fabric of superstition was utterly prostrated, and popular feeling subsided.’ Contemporary accounts of Longbeard’s uprising by Gervase of Canterbury (c.1199), Roger of Hoveden (c.1201) and Ralph de Diceto (c.1202) subscribe to William’s version of the event, although Roger of

49 Newburgh, V. 20. 1.
Hovedon is rather more sympathetic to the townsfolk’s plight than the others. As dean of St. Paul’s, Ralph de Diceto was certainly affected by the civil unrest and, along with Phillip, Bishop of Durham (a close confidant of Hubert Walter), may have provided the oral testimony for the Historia.

The events following the revenant narratives also bear consideration. Book V, chapter twenty-five records that a portent of a double sun occurred on 16 June 1196; an event which seemed to ignite the ‘bloodthirsty rages’ of the royal courts. Indeed, William notes with some dismay how the antagonism between the kings of England and France caused much hardship for the inhabitants of these countries, for ‘whenever kings rage, innocent people suffer for it.’ Chapter twenty-six continues on this theme of chaos and unrest, describing how famine and pestilence began to spread over French and English lands. So many people die that even the healthy are affected, going about ‘with pallid and cadaverous countenances’ as if preparing for their own demise. William concludes this chapter with the dry observation that despite the rages of disease, the aristocratic lust for war was still all the greater.

An attentive reader, one who is able to navigate the non-linear structures of the text, can thus make a connection between the actions of William Longbeard and the terrors inflicted by the walking dead. Deviant behaviour – be it in the form of public disobedience, living an irreligious life or walking after death – was considered a great threat to social and religious order. The worshippers of Longbeard’s cult and the townsfolk who were infected by the revenants’ pestilence occupy a similar role in either story, illustrative of how ‘error’ has the potential to spread to others. The disorder-as-disease motif is something which William had used previously in the Historia. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his descriptions of the Cathar – or

52 ‘In the same year strife originated amongst the citizens of London, for not inconsiderable aids were imposed because of the King’s imprisonment [...] and in order to spare their own purses the rich wanted the poor to pay for everything’, in Van Caenegem, English Lawsuits, p. 693. If Roger’s personal enmity against Hubert Walter can account for his less than severe tone, then Gervase’s loyalties to his archbishop may well explain his own vehemence against Longbeard, and, indeed, his reluctance to name the person who ordered the destruction of St. Mary le Bow. See Gillingham, ‘Judge’, p. 1282.
54 Newburgh, V. 25. 3.
55 Ibid., V. 26. 2.
56 For the pestilence of heresy see Moore, ‘Heresy as Disease’, pp. 1–11.
Publicani – heresy in Book II, chapter thirteen. Metaphors of infection are also used to describe the rise and spread of Islam. The use of the walking dead – that is, pestilence incarnate – to allegorise Longbeard’s insurgency highlights the extent of his transgression. Not only did the incitement of the peasantry constitute a destabilisation of the social (and thus natural) order, but Longbeard himself was a member of the ruling class, violating the boundary that existed between ‘those who work and those who fight’. His monstrousness is compounded by his eloquence. To be schooled in law meant that Longbeard possessed at least some knowledge of the local tax system. The use of the phrase ‘poisoned whispers’ (venenatis susurriis) to describe the incitement of the plebem suggests, perhaps, that the information ‘fed’ to the citizens of London had been twisted to suit Longbeard’s own agenda. In Augustinian terms, it was an abuse of language; the semiotic system distorted to unnatural and devilish ends. Social disorder was thus bound to – and exacerbated by – the contaminating effects of the monstrous tongue. The contagiousness of entities that did not obey the constraints of social structure, either through physical action or speech, is the principle used by William to link the peasant uprising to the tales of the undead. The actions of the dead mirror the strife caused by the London riots. Assuaging the source of the ‘error’ through the use of fire (‘Berwick Ghost’, ‘Ghost of Anant’) and submission to the authority of the Church (‘Buckingham Ghost’, the ‘Hounds’ Priest’) can be seen as a metaphorical retelling of the burning of St. Mary le Bow, and the strategies put forward by Hubert Walter to contain Longbeard’s pestilentis. Read in this way, it is no coincidence that the revenant narratives conclude with the ‘contriver and fomenter of so much evil [perishing] at

57 ‘These [people] spread the poison of their heresy, which had originated from an unknown author in Gascony, in many regions; for such numbers are said to be infected with this pestilence throughout the extensive provinces of France, Spain, Italy, and Germany [...]. By the assistance of God, such means were adopted to counteract the poison that it must tremble at the idea of again entering the island.’ My italics.
58 ‘That pestiferous sect, which took its beginning through the spirit of error, and of that son of perdition, as I have said, after it had infected many provinces through the art and arms of its author, after his death, by the operations of Satan, grew yet stronger, and occupied the greater part of the world.’ (V. 14. 10).
59 Newburgh, V. 20. 3.
the command of justice’, and William reassuring his readers that order has been restored.62

Such a positive outcome cannot be read in the events of chapters twenty-five and twenty-six, however. Although the destruction wrought by the Anant and Berwick ghosts can be seen as portending the ‘pallid and cadaverous countenances’ that resulted from the 1196 famine, it may also provide the reader with a framework through which to allegorise the devastation caused by aristocratic feuds. William comments that the pestilence which blighted the land was exacerbated by the conduct of warring kings. ‘Famine’, he notes, ‘produced by unseasonable rains, had for some years vehemently afflicted the people of France and England; but by the disputes of the kings among themselves, it now increased more than ever.’63 According to John of Salisbury’s influential political theory, set out in the Policeraticus (c.1159), tyrants disturbed the harmony of the wider body-politic. The state-as-organism metaphor of medieval political theory is an extension of the wider belief in the unity of the macro- and microcosm: the universe reflected in the structure of the human body (I Corinthians 12. 12).64 Book V, especially, uses the metaphor of a healthy, well-maintained body to demonstrate the philosophy of good secular and ecclesiastical governance.65 An entity whose head (the ruling elite) pursued a courses of action that was detrimental to the wellbeing of the rest of the organism (society) was contrary to the workings of nature and, therefore, monstrous.66 The conception of the body-politic as read in the Policeraticus may not have been unknown to a scholar of William’s standing. Indeed, his use of the walking dead is a pointed application of John of Salisbury’s model, illustrating the misery that could arise from a diseased and disordered body. Read in this way, the bloodshed caused by the ‘raging kings’ finds a perfect analogue in the ghosts of Berwick and Anant, whose path of destruction is just as indiscriminate.67 The macrocosm (monstrous kingship) and the microcosm (monstrous corpses) were inextricably linked. If, then, tyrants are like revenants who go ‘hither and thither’ in

62 Newburgh, V. 24. 7.
63 Newburgh, V. 26. 1.
65 Policeraticus, pp. 65–127.
67 Newburgh, V. 25. 2.
their aimless pursuit of blood, spreading pestilence and death in their wake, then on
whose authority does it fall to try and put an end to their wanderings? Although
William remains equivocal on this point, a closer reading of the ‘Buckingham Ghost’
and ‘Hounds’ Priest’ narratives suggests that salvation, the restoration of the body-
 politic, could come in the form of correct Christian practice.

As Anne Lawrence-Mathers has argued, the patronage, creation and
circulation of the Historia Rerum Anglica rum was part of a wider concern by the
Northumbrian monasteries to advocate a retelling of history based on the sober
methodology of their great forefather, Bede.68 And yet, William’s commentaries,
although (mostly) neutral and pragmatic, contain the moralistic undercurrent
expected of a historiographer and provincial canon.69 He rails against the abuse of
secular and ecclesiastical offices, specifically by bishops who care more about power
and prestige than tending their flocks. Indeed, the post-mortem fate of the irreligious
Hounds’ Priest can be read against the particular scorn William reserved for the
Bishop of Ely, William Longchamp, who all but ruled England in Richard I’s
absence on the Third Crusade. Elected to the position of Royal Chancellor on the
king’s coronation in 1189, Longchamp was consecrated Bishop of Ely, became papal
legate and, finally, appointed co-justiciar with Bishop Hugh de Puiset of Durham.
Following a fierce political battle with de Puiset, Longchamp was named the chief
justiciar of England in the spring of 1190.70 Longchamp’s arrogance was such that he
routinely ignored orders from the king, going so far as to arrest Richard’s half-
brother, Geoffrey, the incoming Archbishop of York, following the latter’s arrival in
Dover in September 1191. This proved to be Longchamp’s undoing. Stripped of his
justiciarship, he fled to the continent, where, despite remaining in favour with
Richard, he never regained the full extent of his powers. Longchamp died in Poitiers
in 1197, and was buried in the abbey of Le Pin. William’s opinion of the bishop’s
demise is blunt: ‘England rejoiced at his death, for the fear of him had lain like an
incubus upon her [...] it was evident that he would frequently plot evil against the
land which had vomited him forth as some pestilential humour’.71 The Historia is
not the only twelfth-century source that expresses its disdain for Longchamp and the

69 Partner, Serious Entertainments, pp. 79–80.
70 For the rise and fall of Longchamp’s political career, see Ralph V. Turner, The Reign of Richard
71 Newburgh, V. 29. 3.
sin of embracing secular as well as ecclesiastical lifestyles. Richard of Devizes, a monk of St. Swithun’s Priory, Winchester, was particularly keen with his criticisms, describing how ‘William, bishop of Ely and the King’s Chancellor [...] made up for the shortness of his stature by his arrogance’. Longchamp’s chimera-like status is also acknowledged by Richard, who notes that, having been appointed chief justiciar, Chancellor and Bishop of Ely, he had become ‘a man with three titles and three heads’.72 Hugh Nonant (d.1198), Bishop of Coventry, was a close friend of Prince John and one of Longchamp’s more strident critics. Along with Gerard of Wales (d.1223), Hugh was responsible for popularising the rumour that Longchamp’s grandfather had been a runaway Beauvais serf. The ‘vileness’ exhibited by the grandfather as he rose through the ranks to become chief forester of Lyons, Normandy, prefigured the equally unnatural career of the grandson.73 Thus, as a low-born foreigner who had insinuated himself within the government and the Church, and through whose actions the realm was falling into ruin, Longchamp was the very definition of monstrousness and sin.

William’s decision to place the account of Longchamp’s death at the end of Book V and his comments that the bishop was ‘vomited forth as some pestilent humour’, makes the latter’s likeness with the walking dead – that is, sin incarnate – explicit. As secular-minded churchmen, Longchamp and the Hounds’ Priest are supremely disordered beings, neither one thing nor the other and all the more dangerous for it. Longchamp’s role as justiciar-bishop almost led the country into civil war, just as the aristocratic pursuits and sexual misconducts of the Hounds’ Priest had dire consequences for the inhabitants of Melrose. As intimated in the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative, recourse to good, uncorrupted churchmen was the only way to make these epidemics cease.74 St. Hugh of Avalon is the model used by William to illustrate how a true – that is, ideal – member of the clergy should

72 Devizes, pp. 9–13.
74 It is interesting to note that whilst William seemed to despise secular-minded clerics, he held a lot of esteem for the archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter, the man who set alight the church of St. Mary le Bow. John Gillingham believes that the answer to this quandary lies in the source William used for this anecdote. Phillip, Bishop of Durham, was a colleague of Hubert Walter when both accompanied Richard I on the Third Crusade. His opinions on Hubert’s actions that fateful night in April 1196 would have undoubtedly been skewed in his friend’s favour. See Gillingham, ‘Judge’, pp. 1285–1286.
behave. With Hugh never once overstepping his authority in the secular/political sphere, he is one of the few churchmen in the Historia to escape William’s wrath. His ‘venerability’ and attention to the spiritual wellbeing of his people are qualities which make him the exact opposite of Longchamp. As an exemplar of good conduct, it is no surprise that Hugh plays such a prominent role in the assuagement of the Buckingham Ghost; the revenant (the Chancellor) taking the opposite role, as an epitome of bad conduct. References to the ‘crushing’ of the widow (obruit) and the incubus-like qualities of Longchamp (qui incubuerat timor ejus super illam) solidify the connection between the two types of monster.

In sum, specific narratological formulae can be extracted from the revenant narratives to structure the criticism of historical figures whose actions destabilised the rest of the body-politic. Although William does not offer an overt explanation of his accounts of the walking dead, a subtextual reading of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice may have indeed been intentional, especially for an author who classed the ‘impartial’ moral histories of Gildas and Bede as his precedents. The concern for peace-making and the maintenance of order was a common trope in twelfth-century historical writing. In light of the evidence, it would seem that a close engagement with tales of the supernatural can, indeed, open up a wider range of meanings in the text.

Having established that revenant narratives could function as allegorical tools for criticising political and moral practices seen as deviant, the next part of this investigation will focus on the structure, the internal logic, of the stories themselves. William himself states that he can offer no explanation for revenant activity, and is content merely to set out the facts as they were presented by his sources. Thus, if we take William at his word, these narratives can provide a useful insight into the belief systems (the ‘texts’) of the laity. As such, the aim of the following section will be to perform a close, critical reading of the most equivocal and multi-faceted of

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75 Given-Wilson, Chronicles, pp. 2–3.
76 See William’s criticisms of Hubert, the Archbishop of Canterbury (IV. 35), Hugh Nonant, Bishop of Coventry (IV. 36. 2–3) and the abbot of Caen (V. 19. 1).
77 Newburgh, V. 29. 3.
80 Stock, Listening for the Text, p. 29.
William’s *exempla*: the tale of the ‘Buckingham Ghost’. St. Hugh of Avalon’s abhorrence at the local traditions of corpse management testifies to the different ways in which liminal bodies (unstable, contingent texts) could be read.

*The ‘Buckingham Ghost’ in Context*

‘Good’ death occurred at the right place at the right time under the correct social conditions. To live outside the prevailing *habitus* of the community, or to suffer a death that was violent, unexpected or ill-prepared, were the deciding factors that caused the dead to rise. As discussed in Chapter One, the *habitus* can be viewed as a body of dispositions which regulate perception and action. The learnt dispositions of the social agent(s) are ‘structured structures’ which function as ‘structuring structures’; that is, agency, perception and innovation within a field of action are governed by habitual residues of past experience – the personal ‘grid’ within which we construct and reconstruct reality. These new forms of practice then feed back into the *habitus* of the individual and, depending on the action’s success or failure, modify its schema – its grid – accordingly. How one perceives the dead, then, depends on the particular habitual schema or grid to which the perciipient(s) subscribe. Good death occurred when action – i.e., that of the dying and those who managed their passage into the next life – correlated with the overarching social and cultural schema. As a physical manifestation of ambiguity and ontological disorder, a structure in ruins, the revenant was the very model of ‘bad’ death. William of Newburgh’s puzzlement as to the exact nature of such entities was a topic of contention that had been troubling theologians since the time of Augustine. The process of deciphering the ambiguities of the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ thus takes on two dimensions. That is, we need to analyse the behaviours and dispositions of the villagers who confront and perceive the revenant, and try to understand why their solution to the problem differed from that put forward by St. Hugh, the novelty of which William takes great care to mention. To attempt this type of analysis we also

need to expand upon the ‘negative space’ of the narrative. Recourse to practice theory and similar stories from different cultural contexts can provide a framework through which the unsaid beliefs and actions of the Buckingham villagers can be analysed.\footnote{Nancy Caciola also advocates a separation of the unsaid ‘cultural facts’ of a situation from their ecclesiastical and sometimes propagandist context, in ‘Revenants’, pp. 14–15. For a similar discussion, see Gabrielle Spiegel’s investigation into the unsaid social structures that gave a sense of rationality to a text, in ‘Social Logic’, pp. 82–83.}

Although the narrative is not explicit, it is more than likely, considering the content of the other three exempla, that the Buckingham Ghost lived an irreligious life or died an ill-timed death. Having failed to complete the rite of passage into death – that is, the forward ‘flow’ prescribed by completing an expected life-cycle and the correct mortuary provisions – the deceased remained in his dangerously liminal state.\footnote{For the ontological chaos symbolised by the corpse, see Stutz, \textit{Embodied}, pp. 95–104; Bloch and Parry, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–45.} As will be discussed more closely in the next chapter, metaphors of disorder, pestilence and inversion are common indices of social unrest, something which is made even more evident by the return of the husband to the marital bed. Nancy Partner has argued how rape by a supernatural intruder (one of the many iterations of the night-time assault tradition) may have signified guilt on the part of the victim and their own role in the social transgression.\footnote{Nancy Partner, ‘The Hidden Self: Psychoanalysis and the Textual Unconscious’, in \textit{Writing Medieval History}, ed. by Nancy Partner (London: Hodder, 2006), pp. 42–66 (p. 50).} Similar motifs of unacknowledged (and thus unshriven) sin, and the susceptibility of sufferers to attack and ‘infection’, can be seen in the Hounds’ Priest’s post-mortem return to his mistress.\footnote{Accounts of evil entities returning to ‘press’, smother or otherwise harm their victims will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.} The escalation and sheer physicality of the Buckingham Ghost’s attacks and its propensity to roam the hinterland and ravage livestock have led Bruce Dickens and Antonia Gransden to suggest a connection between William’s revenant narratives and those found in the Icelandic family sagas.\footnote{Dickens, ‘A Yorkshire Chronicler’, p. 24; Gransden, \textit{Historical Writing}, pp. 267–268.}

Scandinavian influences were widespread in the lay and clerical cultures of Northern England at this time. The arrival of Viking settlers in the late-ninth century and the subsequent imposition of Danelaw had a significant impact on insular society, giving rise to innovations in social organisation, material culture and burial
custom. This is not to suggest that cultural diffusion was a one-way process, or that the territories under the jurisdiction of Danelaw were divided upon ethnic lines. The realities of tilling the same fields, paying homage to the same thegn and, ultimately, worshipping the same God, meant that it was not long before the dispositions of the migrant and native populations began to syncretise, creating a new pool of habits through which individual and/or communal identity could be expressed. Ideas about ‘bad’ death were just one aspect of the life cycle that was influenced by these new repertoires of action. The fear of the ambulatory corpse may have been a belief that, due to Nordic influence, became much more prominent – despite never being entirely absent – in the regional Anglo-Saxon habitus. Place-name analysis and an examination of the Domesday rolls suggest that immigration from Sweden and Denmark, whilst not reaching the peak of earlier centuries, continued up until the Norman Conquest. The mention of the York mystic ‘Ketell’ in William’s Historia provides evidence that Norse naming patterns (and thus cultural residues) were thriving well into the twelfth century. With this in mind, it is not surprising to find that tales of the Icelandic draugr contain numerous structural similarities to those transcribed by William. Grettir’s Saga, written in the fourteenth century but describing events which took place three hundred years earlier, at the dawn of the Christianisation of the island, recounts the slaying of the corpse of Glam, a local cowherd, by the saga’s eponymous hero. After decapitating Glam and putting his head between his thighs, Grettir enlists the help of Thorhall, the landowner on whose farm the draugr was running riot, and together they burn the corpse. Once these

89 Hadley, Danelaw, pp. 298–341.
94 Newburgh, II. 21. ‘Ketell’ is a ninth-century, uncontracted form of the eleventh-century Norse forename ‘-kil’. It has been suggested that those who bore the latter were recent immigrants, while those who possessed the archaic form belonged to a community which did not maintain contact with the continent after the initial period of settlement. See Fellows-Jensen, ‘Place Names’, p. 135.
actions had been taken, Glam’s trail of destruction ceased.\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Eyrbyggia Saga} (c.1250) and \textit{Laxdaela Saga} (c.1260) contain similar accounts.\textsuperscript{96}

The similarities between William’s \textit{mirabilia} and those found in the Sagas are suggestive of a shared northern ‘rhetoric’ for the assuagement of the troublesome dead. The antagonists of each – Glam, Thorolf, Hrapp, and the anonymous Buckingham villager – seem to have lived and/or died in a manner contrary to the belief systems of their communities. Death does not assuage their malign natures for long. Animated by whatever agency, they begin to terrorise their former neighbourhoods and wreak havoc across the land. Motifs of disease and the spread of disorder, so explicit in the Anant and Berwick narratives, make a less pronounced appearance in the indiscriminate killing of both men (Glam, Thorolf, Hrapp) and livestock (Glam and the Buckingham Ghost). The Scandinavian conception of personhood, which contended that the vital principle of life, the soul, remained in the corpse so long as it remained fleshy or had not been destroyed, can account for the cremation of the \textit{draugr} and the methods of assuagement suggested to St. Hugh of Avalon.\textsuperscript{97} Bodily division was a less radical iteration of this belief. Indeed, the decapitation of Glam and the immediate placement of his head between his legs can be viewed as an interim apotropaic measure before the final act of cremation. Although the Buckingham narrative makes no mention of decapitation, an analysis of other written sources suggests that this may have been a common (though mostly undocumented) practice for assuaging the walking dead in England. Geoffrey of Burton’s \textit{Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna} describes how, in c.1090, two indentured peasants flee from the lands of Stapenhill Abbey to enter the service of Roger de Poitevin in nearby Drakelow. With the peasants’ betrayal inciting conflict between the abbey and Roger, the abbot, Geoffrey Malaterra, petitions St. Modwenna for help. Divine justice is swift and immediate. The peasants are ‘struck down dead’ and duly buried in Stapenhill cemetery. However, that very evening – and for many nights thereafter – their corpses rise out of their graves and tread the same path to Drakelow as they had taken in life, carrying their coffins on their

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Grettir}, pp. 86–100.
\textsuperscript{96} The \textit{draugr} of Thorolf Halt-foot (\textit{Eyrbyggia Saga}) was said to have wreaked havoc on an entire village, while Hrapp (\textit{Laxdaela Saga}), so violent and ill-tempered in life, killed a great many people in death. Both were eventually cremated. See \textit{Eyrbyggia}, pp. 41–43, and \textit{Laxdaela}, pp. 74–78.
\textsuperscript{97} Lecouteux, \textit{Return of the Dead}, p. 180.
backs. Disease and death accompany their reappearance, engulfing Drakelow until only three villagers remain. To contain this epidemic, the peasants’ corpses are exhumed, decapitated and their heads placed between their legs. Following this, their hearts are removed and burnt on a pyre, whereupon an ‘an evil spirit in the form of a crow [flew] from the flames’. Only then, and with Roger healing the schism by issuing a humble apology to the abbot for meddling in church affairs, did the revenant sightings cease.

It can be contended that the fates of the draugr, the Drakelow peasants and the Buckingham Ghost are too similar for these narratives not to share a common cultural milieu. And yet, it would be a mistake to ascribe the disarticulation of the corpse to heretical or non-Christian beliefs. As Karen Jolly states, ‘during conversion the cosmology changes, but everyday life and practice go on, including medicinal and protective rituals that might in a later age be classified as magic but are here Christianised’. Although Jolly is discussing material from over four hundred years prior to the Buckingham and Burton narratives, the application of a new macrocosmic meaning onto a pervading habitual practice, the assuagement of a troublesome corpse, is something which must be considered for twelfth-century contexts. The crow-like ‘evil spirit’ that escapes from the hearts of the Drakelow peasants illustrates how a habitual belief in the transmutative aspect, or hamr, of a soul could be subsumed into the orthodox fear of demonic infiltration. Indeed, William’s comment that the Ghost of Anant ‘issued by the handiwork of Satan’ is an example of the influence that authoritative – that is to say, Augustinian – teachings had on the subject. According to Augustine, the spirit only returned to the flesh at the Last Judgement. Whilst saints (or angels taking the form of saints) were sometimes permitted by God to appear to the living, the apparent return of the recently deceased

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98 The belief that peasants who broke free of their bonds were harbingers of death and chaos can also be read in Hugh Nonant’s denunciation of William Longchamp’s grandfather. The revenant-like attributes of the Bishop of Ely are thus compounded.

99 St. Modwenna, pp. 193–199. Saxo Grammaticus (1150–1220) provides further evidence that the decapitation of the undead was a long-lived practice. Book Five of the History of the Danes recounts events which purportedly took place during the first century AD. One of the book’s most evocative episodes concerns the torment suffered by Asmund who, bound by oath, had been buried alive in the tomb of his friend, Asvith. Due, perhaps, to the ill-timed nature of Asvith’s death, it was not long before his corpse began to stir and violently attack his friend. Having been rescued from the mound, Asmund explained that he had managed to quell the revenant by ‘scythe[ing] off his head with my sword and thrust[ing] a stake through its wicked body’. See Saxo Grammaticus, pp. 150–151.

100 Jolly, Witchcraft and Magic, pp. 16–17.

was more likely due to the machinations of the devil. The extent to which orthodox teachings structured the beliefs of the laity and local clerics is difficult to determine, especially since William, like the majority of his informants, saw (and wrote) the world through the lens of an educated churchman. Equally, it is not surprising that Geoffrey, as the abbot of Burton, lent an orthodox interpretation to the events that occurred at Drakelow. And yet, William’s assurances as to the fidelity of his transcriptions betray the possibility that, even prior to Hugh’s pronouncement, demons may not have accounted for the wandering of the Buckingham Ghost. The absence of any mention of the devil following the corpse’s return to the marital bed suggests that a concurrent belief – that the deceased retained some sort of agency in the grave – was still in circulation, at least on a local level. Either way, the destruction of the integrity of corpse not only assuages the false resurrection of the deceased and/or the demon inhabiting their flesh, but prevented the reunification of the body and soul come the Last Judgement. The protection of the living necessitates the damnation of the dead.

If the dissolution of the corpse was the practice considered most in keeping with the appearances of the sinful dead (the reaction to the action) then how can we reconcile the decision by Hugh to place a scroll of absolution on the corpse’s chest? Why, moreover, did this innovative practice work? To decipher this problem we need to understand how Hugh’s perception of death differed from that of the villagers and his clerical contemporaries. His views on the nature of penance – whether it should be conducted in life or in a ‘third place’ between death and the Last Judgement – also need to be considered if we are to understand his treatment of the suspect dead.

Gerald of Wales’s Vita Sancti Hugonis (c.1210) provides a useful introduction to Hugh’s theological outlook. Conforming to the typical vita model of

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102 Newburgh, V. 24. 5; Care for the Dead, iv. 18 (p. 538); City of God, XVIII. 18 (p. 783). See also Malmesbury, GR, ii. 124. 1 (p. 197): ‘it is believed, for example, that the corpse of a criminal after death is possessed by a demon, and walks.’
104 For the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the corpse maintaining a sense of vitality, and agency, in the grave, see Victoria Thompson, Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004).
105 For the need to maintain the integrity of the body for resurrection, see Caroline Walker Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion (New York: Zone Books, 1991). For this theory in relation to revenants, see Oldridge, Strange Histories, pp. 56–75.
the early thirteenth century, wherein the paradigmatically virtuous life of the saint was juxtaposed with his or her post-mortem miracles, the *Vita Sancti Hugonis* was written with three main goals in mind: to justify Lincoln’s pre-eminence, Hugh’s saintliness, and the burgeoning cult that had begun to form around his tomb. Gerald was a close personal friend of Hugh, his biography containing the requisite amount of ‘truthful’ first-hand testimony to ensure Hugh passed the stringent canonization process. Although character traits such as the distaste for secular pursuits were universal tropes designed to evince the goodness of the saint and highlight poor conduct in others – see the criticisms of Longchamp, for instance – Gerard’s *vita* suggests more about Hugh’s personal attitudes than at first may be apparent. Born in c.1140 to a noble Burgundian family, Hugh spent his formative years in the Carthusian order and, following a brief stint as the prior of Witham monastery, became Bishop of Lincoln in 1186. Gerard notes on more than one occasion that Hugh had shown great reverence and care for the dead, even going so far as burying strangers he found lying in the road. Given that Hugh ‘was most commendable and tireless as to the seventh [natural hour], that is, burying the dead’, the declaration in the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ that to burn a corpse was ‘indecent and improper in the last degree to the reverend bishop’ is certainly in keeping with his character. But is this reflective of Hugh’s specific response to the revenant crisis, or is it a genre trope? It should be reiterated that William was writing a history of England, not advertising the glory and virtue of a saint. Hugh was still alive during the *Histora*’s composition. The accurate representation of the facts was one of the main principles of historical truthfulness. If the Archdeacon Stephen was indeed William’s main informant, it can be inferred that he was merely recounting his own experience of one of the more colourful petitions Hugh had to deal with over the course of his church career. It is doubtful that William interpolated Hugh’s role

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106 Gerald had also written a *vita* of St. Regimus, the first bishop of Lincoln in 1079. See Richard M. Loomis, ‘Introduction’, in GW, SH, p. xxiv.


108 Papal intervention in the canonisation process increased dramatically at the end of the twelfth century. Hugh was granted sainthood by Pope Honorius III in 1220 after years of deliberation, with most of the supporting evidence deriving from Gerald’s *vita*. Loomis, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxxiii–xxxv.


110 GW, SH, I. 6. 22–24; I. 7. 31 (pp. 19–21, 25).

111 GW, SH, I. 6. 22 (p. 19).

112 Newburgh, V. 22.
in the narrative. The reverence shown to the corpse, even in the context of the *vita*, may not, therefore, be an entirely constructed device.

This said, perhaps the most important influence on Hugh’s reaction to the restless dead was the increasing acceptance of purgatory as a definite, bounded place where sins could be accounted for after death. Jacques Le Goff’s seminal *The Birth of Purgatory* describes the fervent intellectual atmosphere of the Parisian schools of the mid- to late-twelfth century. According to Le Goff, the first extant mention of the noun *purgatorium* can be found in the *De Sacramentis* (c.1170) of Peter Comestor (d.1178). The *purgatorium*, Peter says, was a place of fire where venial sins were punished before the soul passed to eternal splendours of heaven.113 With two of Hugh’s closest advisors – Gerald of Wales himself and William de Montibus, Lincoln’s chancellor – known to have studied theology at Paris, the decision to forgo the conventional treatment of unruly corpses becomes clear: with the bounds between life and death now more permeable than ever before, the dead, by God’s grace, could return to earth and ask for suffrage from the living. The influence of William de Montibus (d.1213) on Hugh’s decision to absolve the Buckingham Ghost cannot be underestimated. As a contemporary of Peter Comestor at Paris, William was very much concerned with the practical applications of speculative theology. Indeed, William’s treatises on pastoral care (*Pastoralia*) and the elimination of doctrinal error (*Errorum Eliminati*) reflect his preoccupation with disseminating new – and ‘correct’ – modes of thought among the general populace.114 On becoming chancellor of Lincoln’s school in 1194, William was tasked by Hugh with educating the next generation of churchmen in the reforms emerging from Paris.115 As such, Hugh’s response to the news that a revenant was terrorising a Buckingham village can also be read as an expression of the intellectual climate of his inner circle: the absolution of an errant corpse was the application of theory (the reality of the *purgatorium*; the benefits of post-mortem prayer) in an everyday, practical context.

Although the *De Sacramentis*, Peter the Chanter’s *Summa de Sacramentis et Animae Consiliis* (c.1190) and Simon of Tournai’s *Disputations* (c.1190), among other Parisian works, do not dwell on the physical return of the dead before the Last Judgement, the belief that some part of the deceased’s aspect could reveal itself to the living has a provenance which dates back to Gregory the Great. Indeed, the *exempla* found in the *Dialogues* (discussed in the previous chapter) have been taken by Jean-Claude Schmitt and Le Goff to be the main, authoritative models on which future ghost stories were based. Rather than the deceased doing penance in a specific place on earth, such as the public baths in Centumcellis, or in the Wild Hunt, the slow, but inexorable formulation of the *purgatorium* reconfigured this model to advertise the emerging ideal. In this altered context, the dead walked the earth to ask for suffrage or else warn others about their fate. To walk after death ceased to be a punishment in itself. Although this model was used to great effect in such later preachers’ manuals as Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogus Miraculorum* (c.1220), and the anonymous Franciscan *Liber Exemplorum* (c.1250), it should be recognised that these *exempla* were written after the reform council of Lateran IV (1215). Newly ratified practices such as regular communion, confession, and the belief in a third place demanded a vehicle for their transmission. Ghosts, as Carl Watkins states, were part of the ‘language of the marketplace’ and as such were useful tools for advertising the efficacy and reality of the post-mortem amendment of sin. Thus, these *exempla* were accepted by the lay audience because, in many respects, they were ‘true’. The wonder stories recorded in William’s *Historia*, however, derived from a time when the papal effort to regulate the lay *habitus* was only just gathering momentum. The practicalities of the third place and the exact nature of the ghost were still being negotiated within the behaviours and practices of the wider Christian community. Revenants were an echo of the distant pagan past, the belief in which was accepted by laypeople and churchmen alike. This may explain Hugh’s acceptance of the corporeality of his purgatorial spirit despite the ‘contrivance of Satan’ being the most common factor behind the agency of the walking dead. Indeed, the monks at Melrose Abbey were in no doubt that they were

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120 Ibid., pp. 86–87.
confronting a devil-in-disguise and not the actual persona of the Hounds’ Priest: ‘as soon as this man was left alone in this place, the devil, imagining that he had found the right moment for breaking his courage, incontinently roused up his own chosen vessel.’

Thus, it appears that the last decades of the twelfth century were a period in which the formulation of the ghost as the incorporeal soul of the deceased had yet to be fully (and rigorously) clericalised. Conceptual boundaries were still being blurred; the ghost as yet untamed.

The belief in a third place, then, was the theological innovation which underpinned Hugh’s response. The placement of a written scroll of absolution on the corpse’s chest expiated whatever sins he had committed in life and, thus appeased, had no more reason to roam. William’s final gloss to the story (‘he was thenceforth never more seen to wander, nor permitted to inflict annoyance or terror upon any one’) reinforces the notion that the only way for a purgatorial soul to return was through the vehicle of divine assistance. This final flourish, and William’s pointed use of the word ‘permitted’, suggests that he too, or perhaps his source, the Archdeacon Stephen, may have been an advocate of this progressive line of thinking. From the vestigial agency of the deceased (Glam) to demons-in-disguise (Drakelow peasants) and purgatorial spirits (the Buckingham Ghost), the meaning of the walking dead was, it seems, entirely contingent on the perceptual schemas of the beholder.

In comparison to the three other revenant narratives in the Historia Rerum Anglicarum, the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ provides a useful platform for analysing the disparate textual communities of late twelfth-century England. Each group – perhaps to some degree each individual – subscribed to a different experiential and behavioural ‘text’. Monks, laymen and bishops all shared a base Christian understanding of the world and yet deviations in habit, no matter how slight, affected how the object, in this case the troubled corpse, was perceived. Indeed, if the system of ideas (the text; habitus) with which we experience and give meaning to the world limits the possibilities for thought and action, then the reality or, cultural facts, which

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121 Newburgh, V. 24. 3.
122 Swanson, ‘Ghostbusters’, p. 156.
123 Schmitt, Ghosts, p. 61.
125 Stock, Listening for the Text, pp. 25, 150.
emerge from a textual group using a different system of ideas will, of course, be different. The possibility of confronting a wild, rampaging corpse was something which both Hugh and the Buckinghamshire residents, as members of a wider Christian community, believed to be true. The dangerous ambiguity of the cadaver and the abject, sinful nature of decay were issues that were never in doubt. Divergence occurred in the specific type of reality, the type of sinful body, each textual group perceived. For a people untutored in the penitential ideals emerging from France, and perhaps still allied to a centuries-old practice, cremation was a perfectly reasonable technique for assuaging the walking dead. With ideas about Purgatory giving the dead a newfound freedom to walk the earth once more, no longer could a revenant be perceived solely as a demon-in-disguise. Sin, in the form of physical and/or spiritual corruption, was now able to signify redemption as well as damnation. New practices syncretised with the old. Absolution, suffrage and prayer could be as efficacious as flame.

Conclusion

To conclude, the revenant narratives in the Historia Rerum Anglicarum are possessed of multiple, parallel meanings. They are unstable texts, capable of accommodating a wide range of interpretations and habitual schemas. Their purpose was not simply to induce fear or wonder in a Cistercian readership, although that is not to say enjoyment was not derived from these stories. When considered in the context of the chronicle as a whole, they could be read as pointed commentaries on other ‘deviant’ events in recent history. William’s assertion that he merely transcribed what was recounted to him may indeed hold true, but that does not stop him from utilising these stories to criticise poor Christian conduct. Revenants, as supremely disordered bodies, were co-opted to signify chaos and unrest in the wider body-politic and warn of the eschatological dangers of transgression. By virtue of their textual placement, the heresy of William Longbeard and the resumption of war between England and France are diagnosed as

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126 Westerhoff, Death and the Noble Body, p. 15.
128 Bynum, Metamorphosis, p. 53.
129 Freeman, Narratives, p. 211.
being particularly destructive and sinful events. The disparities between bishops who
tended their flock (St. Hugh of Avalon) and those who promoted ruin (William
Longchamp) are also expressed through the prism of the revenant narrative. For an
author whose remit was to extol the virtues of English rather than British history,
accounts of the walking dead were exact and plausible, whereas the ‘mendacious
fictions’ of Merlin and Arthur were not.130

Microcosmically, each revenant narrative provides a wealth of information
on the regional conceptualisations of death, the body, and the beyond. Revenants, it
has been argued, are a vestige of past pagan beliefs. The agency of an uncorrupted
corpse – an entity which had not followed the correct passage into decomposition
and death – was a threat to cosmological order, Christian or otherwise. How the
threat was managed depended exclusively on the texts, habits and traditions which
structured/constrained the worldview of the percipient. Monks from an isolated
monastic outpost such as Melrose Abbey would undoubtedly share the same view of
the world as the lay population from which their number derived; the theology of the
purgatorium having yet to fully penetrate the Borders.131 By contrast, Hugh of
Avalon’s reaction to the walking dead was indicative of someone immersed in a
different experiential culture from the Buckingham villagers, and who, after having
searched through his own past experiences and theological beliefs, had to find a new,
innovative response to an event which, although possible, existed on the very
periphery of his worldview. Thus, despite William of Newburgh’s reservations, the
reality of the walking dead was never in doubt at all.

131 Partner, Serious Entertainments, p. 139.
4. Disease, Nightmares and the Walking Dead

Introduction

A Welshman of evil life died [...] unchristianly enough in my village, and [...] took to coming back every night to the village, and will not desist from summoning singly and by name his fellow villagers, who upon being called at once fall sick and die within three days, so that now there are very few of them left.¹

The story of the irreligious Welshman from Walter Map’s *De Nugis Curialium*, from which the above passage is taken, provides a useful entry point for the next part of this investigation. With the second chapter having established the patterns by which one could achieve a ‘good’ death, and the third illustrating the ‘social logic’ of revenant encounters and the ways in which such narratives were put to critical use, the following chapter will focus on the social, cosmological and environmental ramifications of a death which was sudden or ill-prepared. This chapter, therefore, will elaborate upon the inferences made about the revenant-like qualities of William Longbeard and William Longchamp and explore the idea of the walking dead as indices of sinfulness, pestilence and unrest. The first part of the investigation will analyse the ways in which the percipients’ social, educational and cultural background structured their responses to the cadaver and outbreaks of disease. Using the theories of practice discussed in the introductory chapter, it will be shown how local (practical) strategies could be improvised within the larger (textual) structures of society to form idiosyncratic patterns, or ‘rhetorics’, of apotropaic response. The influence of Galenic and Hippocratic theory cannot be underestimated, nor can the magical-medical traditions exemplified by the Anglo-Saxon leechbooks be ignored, if the local reactions to pestilence and ‘bad’ death are to be put into context. Given the holistic nature of the medieval universe and the close relationship that existed between the body and soul, the moral signification of disorder must also be taken into account. Thus, the role of humoral theory, sympathetic magic, and the healing properties of occult items will be discussed alongside theological discourses on the

¹ *De Nugis*, dist ii. 27 (pp. 203–205).
destabilising, contagious nature of sin. The extent to which the local populace negotiated and moved within these frameworks, all the while recognising their own entrenched beliefs regarding ‘bad’ death and sickness, can, I believe, be discerned through close reading of the extant revenant narratives.

Building on this material, the latter part of this chapter will focus on one of the most interesting if overlooked motifs to be found in medieval tales of the undead: the nocturnal bedroom assault, or nightmare. The nightmare – specifically, the experience characterised by sleep paralysis, terror, and a feeling of pressure on the chest – is a physiological disorder which medieval authors variously described as a disease, an attack by a malign agent, or both. Although imbalanced humours and the machinations of the incubus were the most common explanations as far as the medical and theological authorities were concerned, it is difficult to determine how far these beliefs were accepted by the local, unlettered populace. As William of Newburgh states, the fear of the restless dead was all-pervasive. In certain times and certain situations, this fear may have been so entrenched as to prevent a purely medical or doctrinal reading of the experience. The widow in the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative, for instance, displays all the signs of having suffered from the modern medical definition of a nightmare. Never once is it suggested that she was suffering from a mere delusion or tempted by an airy demon into sin. The widow and the Buckingham villagers, if not William, were in no doubt that sufferers of ‘bad’ death wandered from their graves and suffocated the living as they slept. The nightmare corresponded to this terrifying truth, just as the truth of the existence of revenants was used to structure the experience of the nightmare. An analysis of the textual traditions of the phenomenon, followed an examination of the ways in which these beliefs were replicated, interpolated or rejected by the communities in which an attack occurred, will thus conclude the chapter.

Death, Contagion and the Body: Secular and Religious Frameworks

Walter Map’s anecdote about the post-mortem activities of the Welshmen is a paradigmatic example of the disease-spreading nature of the undead. Some aspects

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2 Newburgh, V. 22. 2.
3 Newburgh, V. 24. 1.
of his story, such as the revenant’s initial resistance to holy water and decapitation, can only be assessed in light of Map’s contemporary (and modern day) reputation as a satirist and storyteller.\(^4\) A clerk by trade, Map enjoyed considerable fame for his loquaciousness and wit,\(^5\) his tenure at Henry II’s court giving him the perfect opportunity to write down his ‘trifles’.\(^6\) But whatever satire can be gained from the failure of the advice given by the Bishop of Hereford, Gilbert Foliot (d.1187), to contain the unquiet corpse, the revenant’s pestilence and its role as a harbinger of death were entrenched beliefs which Map, playing to the sensibilities and expectations of his audience, expertly used to his advantage.\(^7\) Map’s revenant narrative will therefore be considered as a case study to help explicate the (seemingly) causal relationship between disease, the manner of death, and the abject nature of decomposition.\(^8\)

Death may be universal, but the physiological processes of decay do not follow a uniform pattern. Indeed, it is possible for bodies placed in adjacent graves in

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\(^4\) Hugh of Rhuddlan’s Ipomedon (c.1190) remarks that Map was ‘a master of lying’. Cited in Neil Cartlidge ‘Masters in the Art of Lying? The Literary Relationship between Hugh of Rhuddlan and Walter Map’, *MLR*, 106 (2011), 1–16 (p. 1). For the parodic, almost Menippean nature of the *De Nugis Curialium*, see Siȃn Echard, ‘Map’s Metafiction: Narrative and Reader in De Nugis Curialium’, *Exemplaria*, 8 (1996), 287–314. According to Echard, Map manipulates the ‘genre markers [in order] to unsettle an audience and encourage it to question the literary codes by which it understands and creates literary meaning’ (p. 306). The inability of William Laudun to assuage the revenant using the advice given by the bishop was an inversion of the trope that ghosts were subject to the authority of the Church, something that would no doubt have confounded the expectations of the audience. Menippean satire can be distinguished from the ‘Roman’ type in that it rejects the notion of an ideal truth, or order, in things. See W. Scott Blanchard, *Scholars’ Bedlam: Menippean Satire in the Renaissance* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1998), pp. 14–41; Robert R. Edwards, ‘Walter Map: Authorship and the Space of Writing’, *NLH*, 38 (2007), 273–292.

\(^5\) Gerald of Wales devotes a chapter of his *Speculum Ecclesiae* to the ‘witticisms of Walter Map’ and talks about Map’s ‘eloquence’ in the dedicatory letter to the *Expugnatio Hibernica*. GW, SE, dist iii. 14 (p. 219); GW, *EH*, l. 154 (p. 264).

\(^6\) The *De Nugis Curialium* survives in a single fourteenth-century manuscript, the MS. Bodley 851. James Hinton’s hypothesis, that the manuscript is a composite of twenty fragments which were collated into their current form by a later authority, generally holds true to this day. See ‘Walter Map’s *De Nugis Curialium*: Its Plan and Composition’, *PMLA*, 32 (1917), 81–132 (p. 116).

\(^7\) Echard discusses Map’s inversion of the tropes of Romance, but this reading of the text can also be applied to revenant encounters (‘Map’s Metafiction’, p. 311); Blanchard, *Menippean Satire*, p. 36.

\(^8\) Julia Kristeva defines the ‘abject’ as something which disturbs cultural and environmental boundaries, a liminal, ambiguous entity which cannot be truly defined. As neither subject nor object, disgust, horror and danger are the most immediate feelings to be evoked from exposure to the corpse. See *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
identical conditions to follow different rates and modes of decay. Generally, however, the discoloration of the skin, the swelling of the face and abdomen, and the escape of blood-flecked fluid from the orifices — forced from the body by the pressure of methane gas produced by bacteria — are the most common signs of putrefaction. Subsequent processes include the liquefaction of the eyeballs, the shedding of nails and hair and the bursting of the torso, whereupon the bodily tissues begin to convert into a semi-liquid mass and, should the conditions allow, are removed from the skeleton completely. A combination of factors, including temperature, the location of the body, the amount of oxygen and moisture in the burial matrix, the presence of microorganisms and, surprisingly, the manner of death, all affect the rate at which the body succumbs — if at all — to these aforesaid symptoms of decay. Indeed, it has been noted in modern medical literature that sufferers of ‘bad’ or inopportune death decompose at a different rate from those who have died well. The sudden removal of oxygen from the body, for example, is said to prevent the coagulation of the blood, preserving the ruddiness of the corpse beyond what would be considered ‘natural’. Death through murder (stabbing; head trauma), misadventure (drowning; suffocation) or disease (bacterial; congenital) entails the unnaturally disruption of the body’s physiological system. In the context of the medieval belief system, it is no coincidence that people who died in such an ill-timed manner were considered a threat to the community’s ontological cohesion. A person who died badly and whose corpse remained fleshy and vital upon its exhumation was the final link in a series of causal events, being perceived as the source of the wider environmental unrest: a revenant. Moreover, as was discussed in chapter two, the ‘ideal’ death performance in the medieval period did not allow for prolonged exposure to the corpse, with deposition occurring no more than two or

9 Daniell, Death and Burial, p. 119.
10 For how the various stages of decay relate to the characteristics of the revenant, see Barber, ‘Forensic Pathology’, pp. 1–32.
12 Barber, Vampires, pp. 6–7, 114. The belief that uncoagulated blood was a sign of restlessness has been well documented in the New England ‘vampire’ epidemics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ‘wasting’ of tuberculosis victims was attributed to the malign agency of a deceased relative. Indeed, the presence of seemingly fresh blood in a suspect revenant’s heart was taken as proof that the corpse retained a vestige of life and was feeding on the living. The dissolution of the heart was the only way to stop the spread of infection. See Michael Bell, ‘Vampires and Death in New England, 1784–1892’, Anthropology and Humanism, 31 (2006), 124–140; Paul Sledzik and Nicholas Bellantoni, ‘Brief Communication: Bioarchaeological and Biocultural Evidence for the New England Vampire Folk Belief’, American Journal of Physical Anthropology, 94 (1994), 269–274.
three days after death. Thus, the most horrifying aspects of putrefaction, described above, would have been altogether absent from the mourners’ experiences of the cadaver. If the Welshman’s ‘unchristian’ death is suggestive of an accident or suicide, then not only did he die unshriven – thus increasing the possibility of his becoming a revenant – but it is feasible that, since he died in a manner opposite to the Christian norm, the body had been left exposed or unattended in some way.\footnote{A body exposed to air will decompose at a much quicker rate than a body which had been placed in the ground. Barber, \textit{Vampires}, pp. 117–118.}

Even before its deposition, the body may have begun to show some of the signs of ‘restlessness’, such as bloody fluid around the mouth, confirming the sense of ‘otherness’ and danger which must already have been suspected by the manner of the Welshman’s death. Thus, if there was a concurrent environmental or social disruption in the local community – an epidemic or, as shall be discuss below, a nocturnal assault – then the perpetrator could be identified and the danger dealt with accordingly. William Laudun, for one, was in no doubt that the epidemic which seized his village resulted from the ‘calls’ of his pestilent neighbour.

But how can we reconcile the relationship between the revenant ‘calling’ out to its victims and the sudden onset of disease? Are we to believe that the revenant retained the ability of speech, or is this just a metaphor, a rationalisation, for how the suspected source of the infection transmitted its taint? The presence of an ‘evil angel’, moreover, suggests a theological component to the sickness; the moral downfall of a community and its physical manifestation. Is this, then, another one of Map’s satirical swipes against the uncouth Welsh?\footnote{Lewis Thorpe, ‘Walter Map and Gerard of Wales’, \textit{Medium Aevum}, 47 (1978), 6–21 (p. 10).} It is difficult to answer these questions without an examination of similar narratives. Geoffrey of Burton’s \textit{Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna}, for example, describes the outbreak of disease that accompanied the defection and death of the two Stapenhill peasants:

\begin{quote}
Such a disease afflicted [Drakelow] that that all the peasants except three perished by sudden death in a remarkable way [...]. When [the revenants] had at last been burnt up [the crowd] saw an evil spirit in the form of a crow fly from the flames.\footnote{\textit{St. Modwenna}, pp. 196–197.}
\end{quote
As with Map’s narrative, social disorder and the crossing of inviolate boundaries precipitated an outbreak of disease, the ultimate cause of which was the devil. It is difficult to determine from Geoffrey’s narrative how, exactly, ‘disease’ was transmitted. The machinations of evil spirits may have underpinned Gilbert Foliot’s and Geoffrey of Burton’s explanation, but it is not inconceivable that the revenant’s infection, whether instigated by the devil or not, was transmitted through natural means. For a scholar immersed in the classical medical tradition, foul stench could be seen as a sign of sin and a vehicle for corrupted vapours. Neither Map nor Geoffrey makes an explicit connection between the suspect body, ‘bad’ air and sickness. It is left to a much more sober commentator, William of Newburgh, to weave these interrelated rhetorics together. Discussing the fate of the Ghost of Anant, William notes that ‘[When] the infernal hell-hound had thus been destroyed, the pestilence which was rife among the people ceased, as if the air, which had been corrupted by the contagious motions of the dreadful corpse, were already purified by the fire which had consumed it’.

To engage with the issue of polluted air and its ability to infect others, we need to analyse William and Walter’s understanding of aetiology and the influence of humoral theory on the medical vocabularies of late twelfth century England. It is to the tenets of this theory and its underlying concept of ‘balance’ that this investigation will now turn.

Humours and Ill-Health

The Nature of Man (c.410BC), a Hippocratic text commonly attributed to Hippocrates’s son-in-law, Polybius, contains the earliest extant formulation of the theory of the four humours. Galen (c.130–215) built upon and refined the Hippocratic framework, his treatises enjoying much commentary and wide dissemination in the Arabic world. The rediscovery of Galenism in the West was achieved primarily through the endeavours of Constantinus Africanus (c.1020–

17 Newburgh, V. 24. 7.
1087), a doctor at the medical School at Salerno, Italy, who translated Ali Habbas’s Pantegni and the Isagogue of Johannicus into Latin (c.1070). Thus, the Hippocratic conception of the humours came to dominate Western medical thought for over five centuries until William Harvey’s innovative thesis on the circulation of the blood (1621).

It is unknown whether Walter Map or William of Newburgh attained any sort of medical education during their years of study at Paris and Newburgh Priory. Having gained qualifications in theology and canon law, Map must have had at least some understanding of the nature of sin/disease causation. Similarly, William’s assured use of the metaphor of contagion in his critique of the Cathar heresy and, moreover, Newburgh’s role as a centre for manuscript production, suggests that he had an abundance of medico-religious textbooks at his disposal.

A full analysis of the medieval understanding of the humours would extend far beyond the remit of this investigation. For the purposes of this chapter, however, it suffices to provide an overview of the main aspects of the theory. The body was said to be composed of four constituent parts: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. Each humour corresponded to one of the four basic elements – air, water, fire, earth – which themselves were formed from a combination of two of the four primary qualities, the basic building blocks of the universe. Thus, blood (air) was considered hot and moist; phlegm (water) moist and cold; yellow bile (fire) dry and hot; black bile (earth) cold and dry. Health entailed a balance of these humours. This state of equilibrium allowed the body, or body parts, to function in a way which best suited their nature. It was ‘natural’ for the stomach to digest food and for the heart to pump the vital spirits around the body. Disease, then, was a form of imbalance and prevented the body completing its natural function.

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21 De Nugis, dist. ii. 7 (p. 143). Map intimates that he studied under Gerard la Pucelle, a noted scholar of canon law.
22 Biller, ‘Cathars’, p. 29.
25 Galen states that ‘If we wish to call health a constitution of all parts in accord with nature [...] then clearly disease is the opposite, i.e. some constitution contrary to nature [...] what is contrary to nature
cause of death was the ‘drying’ of the body’s inherent radical moisture, which explains why an excess of yellow bile (dry and hot) and black bile (dry and cold) were considered the most common causes of disease.\textsuperscript{26} The imbalance of the humours could be caused by a number of factors, specifically poor regimen and the mismanagement of the ‘six non-natural things’.\textsuperscript{27} A body’s ‘complexion’ – that is, the mixture of primary qualities which determined an individual’s predisposition to certain imbalances – could be invoked to explain why extreme environmental conditions affected some people more than others.\textsuperscript{28} Poor air quality was one of the six non-natural things which could lead to a fatal imbalance if the vapours were particularly pestilent and the subject’s complexion meant he or she was prone to certain types of illness.\textsuperscript{29}

Vapours were believed to possess the qualities of the object from which they emanated.\textsuperscript{30} ‘Good’ smells helped with the maintenance of the body, whereas pestilent smells had the potential to de-stabilise the equilibrium. The miasmas which emanated from decomposing corpses were particularly feared: these vapours produced an excess of black bile which could be inhaled or passed through the pores of the skin. The vital spirit, the material link between the functions of the body and the life-giving quality of the soul, was the vehicle through which these corrupted humours could spread and work their taint.\textsuperscript{31} Although there were numerous medieval interpretations regarding the nature and function of the \textit{spiritus}, it was generally believed that the animal spirits, which resided in the brain, regulated the nervous and sensory systems, while the natural spirits, housed in the liver, maintained the base physiological processes of the body. Both types of spirit ultimately derived from the vital spirit, which was produced in the heart and formed

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\textsuperscript{26} A pristinely ‘dry’ body was a pristinely imbalanced body. See S. Karger, \textit{Galen’s System of Physiology and Medicine} (Basel: Karger, 1968), pp. 241–321.

\textsuperscript{27} Medieval Galenism defined the ‘six non-natural things’ as the moral, social and environmental properties which existed outside of the body, the qualities of which affected the balance of the humours. Air and environment, food and drink, sleep and wakefulness, motion and rest, evacuation and repletion, and the passions of the mind, needed to be carefully monitored to maintain a patient’s health. See Luis García-Belletser, ‘Soul and Body, Disease of the Soul and Disease of the Body in Galen’s Medical Thought’, in \textit{Galen and Galenism}, III, pp. 127–150 (p. 134).


\textsuperscript{30} Palmer, ‘In Bad Odour’, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{31} Bono, ‘Medical Spirits’, pp. 91–130.
\end{flushleft}
from the qualities inhaled from the air and ingested from food.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, as may be extrapolated from William’s interpretation of the ‘Ghost of Anant’ narrative, the inhalation of pestilent smells from a revenant constituted a mismanagement of the ‘six non-natural things’. Dangerous cold-dry vapours emanated from the corpse’s decaying flesh as it wandered aimlessly through the streets of Anant.\textsuperscript{33} Thus, the complexions of the townspeople began to destabilise as the ‘bad’ air was inhaled and the pestilent humours were carried around the body’s sensory and physiological systems via the spirits. In the words of William, ‘the atmosphere, poisoned by the vagaries of this foul carcass, filled every house with disease and death’.\textsuperscript{34} In contrast to the actions of William Laudun, where it sufficed to merely decapitate the corpse, cremation was deemed the only truly efficacious way of stopping the source of the pestilence and purifying the miasma that engulfed the town.

William’s reluctance to ascribe an overt theological or moral interpretation to this revenant narrative is a function of the genre in which he was writing and reflects his purported lack of bias.\textsuperscript{35} While it is true that he accredits the revenant’s appearance to ‘the handiwork of Satan’, and although fire was a common symbol for the purgation of sin, the pestilence is described in purely natural terms. It should be reiterated, however, that the medieval worldview allowed for no true distinction between the physical and metaphysical world, between the agency and intentions of man and the workings of the universe, the ultimate architect of which was God.\textsuperscript{36} It is telling that the local residents who had yet to succumb to illness prior to the ghost’s cremation included William’s primary source and a group of esteemed local clergymen.\textsuperscript{37} If ‘passions of the mind’ and ‘motion’ were some of the six non-natural things which could affect the health of the body, then a deviant mental/social outlook could well have a detrimental effect on an individual’s physical well-being. Moreover, if the findings of the previous two chapters are taken into consideration, it

\textsuperscript{32} Caciola, ‘Revenants’, pp. 7–10.
\textsuperscript{33} Palmer, ‘In Bad Odour’, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{34} Newburgh, 24. 5. Moreover, in the ‘Berwick Ghost’ narrative, the townspeople, citing ‘similar cases’, are well aware of the need to purify the corrupted air caused by the ‘pestiferous corpse’ lest the town fall into ruin (V. 23).
\textsuperscript{35} Partner, \textit{Serious Entertainments}, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{37} Newburgh, V. 24. 6: ‘The man from whose mouth I heard these things, sorrowing over this desolation of his parish, applied himself to summon a meeting of wise and religious men [so] that they might impart healthful counsel in so great a dilemma, and refresh the spirits of the miserable remnant of the people.’
can be seen how ‘bad’ death was a significant source of social and eschatological disorder: a ‘disease’ which affected the workings of the entire community, both living and dead. Corrupt, unnatural bodies were a manifestation of a person’s or community’s deviation from the divine equilibrium of the cosmos and, should circumstances allow, had the potential to transmit their moral/physical degradation to others.\textsuperscript{38} Sin, therefore, was a deciding factor in the source of (and susceptibility to) a revenant’s contagion. Bad humours were a manifestation of sin, as a person or revenant’s sin was made manifest through a pestilent, corrupted body.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{Sin and Ill-Health}

The underlying Christian concept of the contagiousness of moral decay finds a perfect expression in St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: ‘A small amount of yeast spoils the whole batch’ (I Corinthians 5. 1–8). Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) spells out the implications of this metaphor, stating that ‘the sin of a community contaminates individuals just as the sins and offences of individuals affect the whole group’.\textsuperscript{40} Concurrent with this idea of sin as an invading, destabilising force was the metaphor of the body-as-fortress which must be protected from the temptations of the non-natural – that is, exterior – world. Alain of Lille (d.1202) stresses the protective role of the senses in his \textit{Liber De Planctu Naturae} (c.1165):

\begin{quote}
I [Nature] taught the senses to keep watch as guards on the city of the body, in order that as if on the lookout for enemies from the outside they should defend the body from the burden of being attacked from the exterior.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Caesarius of Heisterbach makes a similar allusion in the \textit{Dialogus Miraculorum} (\textit{c}.1220). Discussing the means by which demons could lead men into damnation, Caesarius maintains that, while evil agents are unable to force entry to the soul, sinful behaviour is tantamount to opening the doors to the ‘fortress’, allowing

\textsuperscript{38} Moore, ‘Heresy as Disease’, pp. 1–11.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{40} Kramer, ‘Contagion’, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{41} Vinge, \textit{The Five Senses}, pp. 65–66.
demons to enter through the ‘lower parts’ of the body and disrupt a person’s spiritual and material equilibrium. That is to say, misuse of the senses had the potential to wreak havoc on divinely-ordered balance between body and soul. Sin (which was made manifest in decay and the destabilising smells emanating from the revenant) could only overtake a body which was complicit in its own infection. Only those predisposed to corruption could be corrupted. A poor social regimen, one which included amoral behaviour and the neglect of proper ritual observance, could undermine the bodily defences and, through the working of demonic agents/bad humours, lead to physical and moral decay. Leprosy, for example, was often considered a reflection of the lascivious nature of the sufferer, the sexual proclivities of the infected spreading bad humours and sin in equal measure. This is not to suggest that all instances of leprosy were regarded as punishments for transgression – indeed, lepers were sometimes lauded for undergoing their post-mortem purgation on Earth – but to stress the fact that the inner (moral) and outer (physiological) qualities of man were inextricably linked.

These beliefs have ramifications for the analysis of disease-spreading revenants. To return to the narrative provided by Map, it can be supposed that the Welshman who died in an ‘unchristian’ manner lived an amoral life, succumbed to an ill-timed death and/or did not confess his sins. His unfortified body – its deviance and potential restlessness perhaps signified by an unusual mode of decay – was thus open to abuse and ambulation by the devil. If, as mentioned above, a moral causation can be ascribed to contagion, then Map’s suggestion that the village had been almost completely depleted by the ‘wandering pestilence’ is telling. As a renowned wit and satirist, an ironist who enjoyed playing with convention, Map may have intentionally ambiguuated the meaning of his ‘trifle’, the truth(s) of which had to be actively pieced

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42 *Dialogue*, II, pp. 334–335: ‘It is not possible for the devil to be within a human soul [...] when the devil is said to be within a man, this must not be understood of the soul, but of the body, because he is able to pass into its empty cavities such as the bowels.’
44 Moore, ‘Heresy as Disease’, p. 4.
together by his audience. Map, I believe, is intimating that the pestilence given off by the revenant could only affect those who were already predisposed to be affected, those who were already weak of faith, ‘open’, or corrupt in some way. With the depravity of the Welsh being a commonplace trope in twelfth-century chronicles, Map’s decision to augment the De Nugis with allusions to the barbarousness of his ‘compatriots’ invites an orthodox explication of his revenant narrative. And yet, given the sense of ambiguity and multiplicity that pervades the De Nugis, the Menippean urge to break down order, the narrative may also have been intended as a parody of such a reading: a satire on a satire.

The Welsh, considered by the Anglo-Norman elite as being a liminal race on the very bounds of the civilised world, were the source of much consternation to the Crown in the late twelfth century. A village which was located in the Marches was considered susceptible to all manner of deviant, indigenous influence. It is certainly no coincidence that William Laudun, a knight of ‘proven valour’ who ultimately answered to the Crown, was one of the few people who was able to resist the Welshman’s call. As a courtier to Henry II’s court during the latter’s more turbulent suppressions of the native Welsh, Map may have been making allusions to events he himself had witnessed or, perhaps, was mocking court fears about perfidious Welshmen in times of ostensible non-aggression. Either way, the failure of Gilbert Foliot’s advice subverts and ironises the belief that the Church could mediate between the two nations. The sickness and sinfulness of the Welsh – or, more precisely, those who conspired against the interests of the sovereign realm –

46 Echard, ‘Map’s Metafiction’, p. 313.
47 De Nugis, dist. ii. 20, 23, 26 (pp. 183, 195, 201).
48 Gerald of Wales alludes to the ‘bloodthirsty outrages’ that occurred between the ‘local inhabitants’ (the Welsh) and the English forces, in GW, JW, I. 4 (p. 109); Gillingham, Twelfth Century, pp. 59–68.
51 Although the narrative was set in 1145–1160 (during Gilbert Foliot’s tenure at Hereford), it was transcribed around 1179–1180, a time when Henry II enjoyed an uneasy peace with Rhys ap Gruffydd, the Lord of South Wales. See Hinton, ‘Walter Map’s De Nugis Curialium’, p. 106.
could only be stopped via the sword.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, the fear that the semi-autonomous Marcher Lords would make truces with the enemy and circumscribe royal authority shows how pervasive this sickness could be.\textsuperscript{53} True servants of the realm, like William Laudun, were able to resist the overtures of the Welsh. Not only was a revenant narrative the perfect vehicle for satirising the political and social tensions occurring in the borderlands at this time but, in the hands of a ‘master of the art of lying’, a purveyor of untruth, it could also be used to parody one of the main features of historiographic writing: the \textit{mirabilia}-as-portent. The fact that Map himself came from the Herefordshire Marches and was in the service of the crown lends another level of irony – a self-critical edge – to the ‘trifle’. Finally, it should be stated that the use of medical/theological language to describe the mode by which the revenant ‘called’ its victims was very much in keeping with the rhetorics of infection as understood by Map and his learned audience. References to ‘unchristian Welshmen’, ‘pestilence’ and ‘evil angels’ provided a vague schema for the passage’s interpretation. The ambiguity of the story – ‘the true facts of his death I know, but not the explanation’ – provided the motivation.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Nightmares: An Introduction}

The night-time assault motif has enjoyed a long-lasting presence in the religious and medical traditions of Western Europe. As the decay (or non-decay) of the flesh was the process through which a myriad ideas about sin and disease could flourish, so the various interpretations of the nightmare also derived from a physiological condition of the human body. Indeed, the cause of the nightmare may have differed according to the pervading cultural constraints of the percipient but, as the etymologies of the terms \textit{ephieltes} (Greek), \textit{incubus} (Latin), \textit{mara} (OE, Norse) and \textit{nyghtesmare} (Middle English) suggest,\textsuperscript{55} the experience of being crushed during sleep was a universal constant and occurred across a wide geographical and chronological spectrum.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{52} The authority of the Church in eschatological matters is satirised by Map in a second \textit{exemplum}, in which Roger, the Bishop of Worcester, places a cross in a grave without the revenant in it, prompting the corpse to run ‘in the opposite direction’. See \textit{De Nugis}, dist. ii. 28 (p. 114).

\textsuperscript{53} Davies, ‘Lords and Liberties’, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{54} Kramer, ‘Contagion’, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{55} Cognates of ‘mara’, which itself derives from the Indo-European word \textit{moros} (to drive out) or \textit{mar} (to crush) are found in many northern European languages and reflect the physiological sensations of
It must be stressed that the universality of the nightmare is based on more than just loose linguistic comparison. Recent developments in psychological and anthropological research have revealed how accounts of the nightmare correspond to the neurological and physiological symptoms of sleep paralysis combined with a hypnopompic or hypnagogic dream state. Although the exact science of the nightmare need not be an issue where the scope of this investigation is concerned, an explication of the base stages of the phenomenon will go some way toward highlighting the more unusual aspects of the night-time assault motif.

Nightmares, then, are said to occur when the REM stage of sleep – characterised by the suppression of muscle activity (sleep paralysis) and rapid eye movements (dreams) – intrudes onto the transitional periods between sleep (the hypnagogic stage) and wakefulness (the hypnopompic stage). Characteristic of this state is a ‘sense of presence’ and a feeling of dread. During REM sleep the body assumes a state of hyper-vigilance, a physiological necessity for the unconscious detection of external, physical threats. The sufferer of a nightmare is partially conscious of his or her surroundings, and is thus aware of the dream-visions and the feeling of danger. Since there is no true external source for the threat and considering that the sufferer is unable to move, the feeling of apprehension is extended to a prolonged feeling of fear, something which is then fleshed out and given substance (or coherence) according to the cultural and phenomenological schema of the percipient. Indeed, ambiguous, terrifying visions are not the only aspect of REM sleep to be experienced by the victim. Auditory hallucinations, often taking the form of insensible groaning, scratching and tapping sounds, are sometimes more prominent than the vague and often confusing imagery conjured up by the dream.

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58 Cheyne, ‘Nightmare’, p. 322.
59 Ibid., p. 330.
60 Cheyne, ‘Sleep Paralysis’, p. 316.
The feeling of being ‘crushed’, the defining characteristic as far as the etymology of the word ‘nightmare’ is concerned, also relates to the processes of sleep paralysis. Muscle relaxation is one of the most prominent physiological changes the body undertakes during REM sleep. The relaxation of the chest muscles forces the sleeper to breathe at a much shallower rate. The inability of the victim to take deep breaths may be interpreted as something – or someone – pressing down on the chest, adding to the already palpable sense of danger. These are the motifs which link Classical dream theories, the nightmare remedies in the Anglo-Saxon leechbooks and bedroom revenant encounters in a web of common physiological experience.

Of course, it bears reiteration that the ways in which the victim responded to the nightmare, reflected in the particular features which were accentuated and discarded, depended on the specific cultural beliefs of the percipient and the prevailing ideas about the origin/perpetrator of the attack. Recent sociological studies by David Hufford and Robert Ness,¹ for example, have mainly focused on the relation of the nightmare to contemporary cases of poltergeist activity and ‘witch-ridings’. Despite some fascinating and pertinent discoveries – such as the hypothesis that the overworked, tired and mentally fragile were the most susceptible to an attack, and that group hysteria can make the nightmare ‘contagious’ – never once do Hufford’s and Ness’s interviewees claim that their assailants were the actual, physical corpses of the dead. Only tangentially, and even then without providing a particular primary source, has the neuropsychological-experiential model been used to explain the encounter between the corporeal ghost and its initial, sleeping victim.² For all the recent research into the folklore of ‘riding-ghosts’,³ mara,⁴ incubi⁵ and hags,⁶ case studies which reveal the connection between

² Davies, ‘Nightmare Experience’, p. 194.
crushing, paralysis, and revenant activity have been given only marginal consideration.\textsuperscript{67} The relationship between the walking dead and the nocturnal assault may have been a lot more common in the rhythms of medieval life than we currently appreciate. References to \textit{uncuþam fídan} (‘strange-visitors’) and \textit{nihtgengum} (‘night-walkers’) in Anglo-Saxon medical textbooks are certainly suggestive of the corporeality of the evil agent.\textsuperscript{68} Accounts from Early Modern Europe make the connection between the nightmare and the angry ghost explicit.\textsuperscript{69} However, before a discussion can commence on the local understanding of the nightmare in the High Middle Ages, the learned conception of bad dreams must first be analysed.

\textit{Canonical Traditions of the Nightmare: Dreams, Humoural Theory, and Sin}

The interpretation of dreams was a popular and lucrative business in the Classical and Late Antique worlds. Aristotle (c.350BC), Artemidorus Daldianus (c.150), Calcidius (c.321) and Macrobius (c.410) were among many philosophers and polymaths who devised a framework for the explanation and interpretation of dreams. Calcidius’s \textit{Commentary on the Timaeus} and Macrobius’s \textit{Commentary on the Dream of Scipio} were widely disseminated in the Middle Ages, the popularity of the latter surpassing all other works and becoming especially renowned in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.\textsuperscript{70} In discussing the five main classes of dreams in Book I, Chapter Three, Macrobius provides a vivid description of the nightmare, one which is remarkably similar to the modern medical definition:

\begin{quote}
The Apparition comes upon one at the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so called ‘first-cloud’ of sleep. In this drowsy condition he thinks he is still fully awake and imagines he sees spectres rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{69} Henry More \textit{An Antidote against Atheism} (London: Flesher, 1655), pp. 210–212: ‘Those that were asleep, [the revenant] terrified with horrible visions, those that were awake it would strike, pull or press, lying heavily upon them like an Ephialtes. This terrible apparition would [...] lie close to them and miserably suffocate them.’

shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing. To this class belongs, the Ephialtes, which according to popular belief, rushes upon people in their sleep and presses them with a weight which they can feel.71

Macrobius classifies the nightmare as the lowest form of dream, an insignificant occurrence with no particular function or meaning.72 This, he suggests, is in stark contrast to the popular perception of the ephialtes, which was caused by a malign external agent. John of Salisbury concurs with Macrobius’s explanation in his Polycraticus (c.1159), explaining how ‘the ephialtes is a thing by which a person [...] imagining himself to be awake [...] feels himself crushed down by someone. [This] type is in need of a doctor. [It] is very real form of mental ill-health.’73 The physiological explanation for the nightmare, one which precluded the notion of supernatural agency, may only be given scant attention in the Polycraticus, but was given much greater emphasis in other contemporary interpolations of Macrobius’ work. William of Conches’ Glosae Super Macrobiurn (c.1140), for example, goes on to suggest that the symptoms of the nightmare are caused by noxious, undigested vapours migrating to the brain (thus causing particularly disturbing sense-impressions to be formed) and the pressure placed on the heart by the other internal organs when sleeping on the back or left side (which create the feeling of being pressed).74 A similar medical explanation for the nocturnal assault is espoused by Pascalis Romaus in the Liber Thesauri Occulti (c.1165).75 Likewise, Bernard of Gordon (d.1320), writing at the turn of the fourteenth century, rejects the theological and popular perception of the incubus and ‘old women’ as nonsense and supports the idea of corrupted humours or digestion problems being the cause of a night-time attack.76 John of Gaddesden (d.1360) agrees, arguing that a patient may ‘dream’ a

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71 Macrobius, I. 3. 7 (p. 89).
72 Macrobius’ classified dreams as being either significant or non-significant. There were three types of ‘significant’ dream. The oraculum, or oracular dream, occurred when a character in the dream-vision revealed what may or may not come to pass. The visio, or prophetic dream, occurred when the oracular dream was proven to be true. The somnium, or enigmatic dream, occurred when the true meaning of the vision was obscured by ambiguity and symbolism. Non-significant dreams, meanwhile, included the insomnium, an irrational dream caused by emotional excess and which Macrobius takes to be of no particular import, and the Visum, or Nightmare, described above.
76 Bernard of Gordon, Lilium medicinae, ii.24: ‘But the common people believe that the incubus is an old woman who tramples and presses down on the body.’ Cited in Van der Lught, ‘Incubus’, p. 176.
heavy weight is pressing on his or her chest, but that such a thing may not have actually occurred.\textsuperscript{77}

These explanations, then, derived from the common milieu of humoral theory and the Aristotelian teachings on sleep which, by the middle of the twelfth century, had begun to be much more widely disseminated in the schools of Western Europe.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, the only recognition of outside agency comes from the oblique, almost scornful references to ‘popular belief’.\textsuperscript{79} It is notable that while some of the medieval medical commentators preferred to use the neutral Greek ‘ephialtes’, others, like Bernard of Gordon, favoured the more loaded term ‘incubus’.\textsuperscript{80} Early medical writers such as Caelius Aurelianus (c.450) may well have used incubus as a straightforward literal translation of ephialtes – that is, in the context of a description of an acute head disease – but the consolidation of Christian practice in the Late Antique period meant that the theological conception of the nightmare began to gain more influence and take on a more overtly sexualised and demonic content.\textsuperscript{81} Isidore of Seville’s influential Etymologies (c.621) marks the point at which the meaning of the word incubus truly changed:

\begin{quote}

Hairy ones (Pilosus - a satyr) are called Panitae in Greek and incubus in Latin [...] from copulating indiscriminately with animals. Hence also incubi are so called from ‘lying upon’ (incumbere, ppl. Incubitus), that is, violating, for often they are shameless towards women, and manage to lie with them.\textsuperscript{82}

\end{quote}

Thus, for the churchman at least, the incubus became synonymous with sex or illicit sexual contact, as suggested by its cognates concumbere (to sleep with) and concubinus (concubine).\textsuperscript{83} If, as Isidore suggests, nightmares were caused by an external agent assaulting a victim in his or her sleep, and considering that all

\textsuperscript{78} Kruger, Dreaming, pp. 70–122; Peden, ‘Macrobius’, p. 60; Aristotle, On Sleep and Dreams, ed. and trans. by David Gallop (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1996). Indeed, the texts known in the Middle Ages as the Parva Naturalia – On Sleep, On Dreams and On Divination Through Sleep – are explicit on the mechanisms for the creation of dream imagery. According to Aristotle, the ‘turbulence’ from the heat created by digestion of food disturbed the sense-impressions present in the sensory organs, creating incoherent and terrifying dream-images (phantasmata). See On Dreams, 3. 37 (pp. 97–98).
\textsuperscript{79} Van der Lugt, “Incubus”, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 188–189.
\textsuperscript{82} Etymologies, VIII. xi. 103 (p. 190).
\textsuperscript{83} Stewart, ‘Erotic Dreams’, p. 286.
supernatural entities other than God and the good angels were subsumed under the mantle of ‘demon’, ‘fiend’ or ‘devil’, then the doctrinal understanding of the phenomenon becomes clear: the pressing on the chest and terrible night-time visions were the result of fallen angels intent on dragging the victim into sin.

And yet, the motif of the sexual nightmare did not begin with Isidore. Demonic lovers and bedroom fiends had been a part of the Christian habitus since the time of Augustine, and maybe even before. In The Literal Meaning of Genesis (c.415), Augustine states how the bodies of the fallen angels were formed from the coarse lower air, having lost the purer, ethereal bodies they possessed before the rebellion. Isidore states likewise:

Before the fall [demons] had celestial bodies. Now they have fallen they have turned to an aerial quality; and they are not allowed to occupy the purer expanses of air, but only the murky regions, which are like a prison for them, until the day of Judgement.

Later commentaries would speculate that these ‘airy’ bodies were only temporary, drawn from the immediate environment, and used only to interact with the natural world and corrupt humanity. Regardless, Augustine conceded that he did not know for certain whether ‘certain spirits, embodied in a kind of aerial substance, whose force is sensibly felt by the body, are capable of lust and can awake a similar passion in women’. However, when discussing the ability of demons to infiltrate and manipulate the senses during sleep, he does indeed suggest that if the dreamer ‘consented’ to the images of a sexual dream, they also consented to sin. Although the manipulation of the senses through the sleeper’s spiritual vision was

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84 For the sexualisation of the nightmare in Christian times, see Stewart, ‘Erotic Dreams’, p. 285. Artemidorus Daldianus, above, was one of the first people to conflate the nightmare, specifically the act of pressing, with sexual content. ‘Ephialtes is identified with Pan but he has a different meaning. If he oppresses or weighs down people without speaking, it signifies tribulations and distress [...] if he has sexual intercourse with someone it fortells great profit, especially if it does not weigh them down’, in Interpretation of Dreams, ed. and trans. by Robert White (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes, 1975), 2. 37 (pp. 118–119).
86 Etymologies, VIII. xi. 17 (p. 184).
87 Elliott, Pollution, p. 137.
88 City of God, XV. 23 (p. 638).
not technically a nightmare, and the ‘sensible force’ felt by the victim did not necessarily mean they were experiencing an erotic dream, the patristic writings had begun the steady process of merging these two phenomena together.\footnote{In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine located the visions one experienced during sleep within the bounds of Spiritual vision, the mid-point between Intellectual (divine) and Corporeal (gross) vision. The visions in a dream (and spiritual visions in general) are neither abstract nor corporeal, but the incorporeal likeness of things. External forces, such as angels or demons, could manipulate the content of dreams for good or ill. See *Genesis*, XII, 16–19 (pp. 471–473).}

The influence of religious dogma in documented cases of sleep paralysis is very much apparent. An anecdote from the *Autobiography* (c.1115) of the Benedictine monk Guibert of Nogent (d.1124) is a perfect example of how the Augustinian theological schema could be used to structure the interpretation of the feeling of pressure and hypnagogic hallucinations. Modelled on Augustine’s own *Confessions* – thus providing some clues as to the extent of Guibert’s immersion in the saint’s theology – the autobiography, or *De vita sua*, has been subject to much scholarly investigation, much of it concerning attempts to psychoanalyse the author.\footnote{M. D. Coupe, ‘The Personality of Guibert de Nogent Reconsidered’, *JMH*, 9 (1983), 317–329; J. Kantor, ‘A Psycho-Historical Source: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent’, *JMH*, 2 (1976), 281–303.} An examination of the incidental details, or ‘cultural facts’, of the narrative under question can reveal more about the experiential context of the nightmare, the habitual beliefs of a high-status monastic cleric, than if attention was focused on the specific, formal reasons for the *De vita sua*’s creation.\footnote{Caciola, ‘Revenants’, p. 10.}

In the first book of his *vita*, Guibert describes how his mother, a God-fearing and pious woman, succumbed to a ‘despairing anxiety’ over the ransom of his aristocrat father by Count William of Normandy, later the Conqueror. Lying in bed one night, unable to sleep, she was suddenly

Rushed upon by the Enemy [who] almost crushed the life out of her. As she choked in agony of spirit, and lost all the use of her limbs, being unable to make a single sound, having only her reason free, in utter silence she awaited aid from God alone. Then beyond, from the head of her bed, a spirit, no doubt a good one, began to cry out ‘Holy Mary, help her’ [...] Now when [the demon] had been driven out by the power of God, the good spirit [...] turned to her whom he had rescued and said, ‘Take care to be a godly woman.’\footnote{Autobiography, I, 13 (p. 47). Compare this incubus attack to an account of a nightmare suffered by a female victim in twentieth-century New York: ‘She would feel someone climbing onto her bed and...}
This, I would suggest, is a perfect example of how the conceptual lens of Augustinian demonology was able to give a sense of structure to a terrifying nighttime experience. Guibert’s mother was said to be anxious and grieving, a form of socio-psychological stress which research has shown increases the likelihood of an attack.\(^{94}\) The terror of being unable to breathe or move despite being conscious is also conveyed with remarkable clarity in this narrative. The ‘good spirit’ could well be a hypnagogic hallucination, one of the ‘delightful or ‘disturbing’ spectres which Macrobius states often accompany a nightmare.\(^{95}\) By claiming that she was ‘rushed upon (incubuit) by the Enemy’, Guibert is in no doubt that the attacker is a demon trying to persuade his mother to consent to sin. Indeed, in a separate section of his \textit{vita}, Guibert stresses how his mother was obsessed with divine punishment and the fate of her soul, and ‘conceived a fear of God’s name since the very beginning of her childhood’.\(^{96}\) The fact that the mercy of God turned out to be the one true remedy when all hope was lost, and that to avoid future molestation she had to remain ‘a godly woman’, provides further proof of the orthodox, Augustinian way in which the attack was understood. To a high ranking cleric and his God-fearing mother, there were only certain ways of ‘moving-though’ the various social, cultural and theological structures at their disposal. An admiration for orthodox teaching (including Augustinian demonology), the fear of damnation, and the avocation of harsh asceticism were at the very centre of their belief systems.\(^{97}\) The physical return of the dead was possible but, given the circumstances, highly unlikely. A violent, ethereal \textit{incubus} was the only feasible interpretation for the assault.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the influence of Aristotelian teachings on \textit{spiritus} and matter, combined with the increasing importance of the body for salvation, forced theologians to dismiss ideas about the aerial and corporeal on top of her. The pressure of this weight on her would be great, yet no one could be seen. As her eyes remained open she would hallucinate other figures in the room. She would attempt to shout, but at most she would be capable of moaning’, in Jerome Schneck, ‘Sleep Paralysis without Narcolepsy or Cataplexy: Report of a Case’, \textit{Journal of the American Medical Association}, 173 (1960), 1129–1130.

\(^{95}\) Macrobius, I. 3. 7 (p. 89).  
\(^{96}\) Coupe, ‘Guibert de Nogent’, p. 319.  
\(^{97}\) Ibid., p. 325.  

152
nature of demons. In academic circles this change in attitude put greater emphasis on the humoral interpretation for the feeling of pressure during sleep. However, this is not to say the attribution of demonic agency to sleep paralysis ceased to remain a possibility – a potential experiential route – in the clerical worldview. William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris, spends a considerable amount of time in his *De Universo* (c.1240) discussing the medical origins of the *ephiatres*, but then goes on to say: ‘Nevertheless, you ought not to doubt that sometimes the providence of the creator lets malignant spirits kill men with compressions, oppressions, suffocations, and other methods.’ The existence of a related demon, the *lamia*, an entity which appeared in the guise of an ‘old woman’ and murdered children in their sleep, was also never in doubt. The pervasiveness of Augustine’s teachings on malign spirits – and their impact on the interpretation of other unusual night-time events, such as out-of-body experiences and sudden infant death – can further be discerned in Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia Imperialia* (c.1215). Written some three decades before *De Universo*, Gervase’s ‘Recreation for an Emperor’ is a prime source for local, oral accounts of the nightmare. In trying to rationalise the phenomenon, Gervase comes across as somewhat of a traditionalist:

> Physicians maintain that lamias [...] are nocturnal hallucinations which, as a result of the thickening of the humours [...] cause heaviness [but] as Augustine points out [...] angels have appeared in bodies of such a kind that they could not only be seen, but also touched. And there is widespread belief in a phenomenon which many people have experienced themselves [...] these people claim to have seen Silvani and Pans, which are the creatures called incubi.

Like Augustine, Gervase is reluctant to make a definite statement on the exact nature of the *lamia* (his term for the physiological nightmare) and the Pan and *incubus* (the sexual demon). He seems dismissive of the medical explanation – ‘some people maintain that an anxious or melancholic temperament can make people think they

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98 The corporeality of angels and demons was rejected by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas suggests that people believe that angels are formed from matter because of the limitations of human perception, stating that we ‘cannot apprehend them as they are in themselves’. In reality, angels, and demons, are ‘intelligible forms’ and thus non-material. See *Summa Theologiae, Vol. 9: Angels* (1a: 50–64), ed. and trans. by Kenelm Foster (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968). Ia, 50, art. 2. (p. 9).
99 Kruger, *Dreaming*, p. 87.
101 Ibid., pp. 79–80.
102 *Otia Imperialia*, III. 86 (p. 723).
are seeing phantasms of this kind’ – but finds tales of women who, at night, travel ‘around the world in a swift flight with a band of lamias’ to be entirely feasible.\textsuperscript{103} Indeed, Gervase’s claim that he himself witnessed a woman from Arles fall into a lake mid-flight suggests that the corporeality of supernatural agents and the reality of night-time events were entrenched in the mental schemas of the literate and illiterate alike.\textsuperscript{104} Thus, in situations where a friend, loved one, or notorious sinner had died badly and social stress was at its highest, the ‘reality’ of the nocturnal agent may have sometimes coalesced into the form of the angry, vengeful dead.

It is clear from these sources that the interpretation of the nightmare was dependent on the social, cultural and educational situation of the author. Secular writers were in broad agreement that the nightmare was caused by imbalanced humours, while theological and moral treatises seemed to favour the agency of unclean agents, be they \textit{incubi}, \textit{satyrs}, \textit{lamias}, ‘silvani’, or ‘Pans’. The latter three appellations, ostensibly from popular sources, present something of a quandary. Did the \textit{vulgares} really use these terms, or were they merely clerical translations of alien vernacular concepts? The malign nature of the evil agent and its propensity to attack the unwary as they slept are ‘cultural facts’ that could easily transliterate into Classical typologies. Moreover, as will be discussed shortly, if Germanic ideas about the effect of outside agencies on the health of the body were able to syncretise with, and circulate within, imported Classical/Christian ideas about the macro- and microcosm, then even if the nightmare was caused by demonic interference, it could be cured – and the demon assuaged – by recourse to natural remedies as well as to God.\textsuperscript{105} Neither the classically-trained medical authors nor the patristic authorities seem willing to account for the relationship between the supernatural causation of the nightmare and the natural relief of its symptoms. Although evidence for such a relationship can be read in the \textit{Historia} and \textit{De Nugis} narratives, care must be taken

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[103]{Ibid., III. 93 (p. 743). The feeling of weightlessness, often conceived as an out-of-body experience, is another symptom of the nightmare. Cheyne’s studies on sleep paralysis illustrate how the feeling of ‘rising’ and bliss sometimes counterbalances the feeling of terror and heaviness. Perhaps the most famous account of the night-time flight – and one of the first extant accounts of witchcraft – can be found in the \textit{Canon Episcopi} (c.900s): ‘during the night, with Diana, the pagan goddess, in the company of a crowd of other women, [wicked women claim] they ride the backs of animals, traversing great distances during the silence of the deep night, obeying Diana’s orders as their mistress and putting themselves at her service during certain specified nights’, in Henry C. Lea, \textit{Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft}, Vol. 1 (New York: Yoseloff, 1957), pp. 178–180.}
\footnotetext[104]{\textit{Otia Imperialia}, III. 93 (p. 743).}
\footnotetext[105]{Jolly, \textit{Popular Religion}, p. 173.}
\end{footnotes}
to differentiate between village-wide environmental catastrophes (such as the tale of the irreligious Welshmen) and the single, night-time intrusions that are indicative of sleep paralysis. However this is not to suggest that these experiences could not and did not converge.\textsuperscript{106} Regardless of the aetiology of the encounter, it is telling that the stories themselves tend not to illustrate the precautionary measures taken before the revenant attack, only the contingency measures taken after the socio-physiological contagion had begun to spread.

The synonymy that exists between the nightmare, the revenant, and disease is, I believe, much more apparent in the late Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman medical textbooks. There are numerous remedies in the \textit{Leechbook}, \textit{Lacnunga} and the \textit{Old English Herbarium} that deal with nocturnal assaults and ‘bad dreams’. The causes of these illnesses range from the \textit{mare} and elf-shot, to the more ambiguous ‘night-visitor’ and ‘strange wanderer’. The latter two terms, especially, allude to the close, causal connection that seems to exist between nightmares and human-like agents. The relationship between the \textit{mare} and \textit{draugr} has been noted in Icelandic accounts of the walking dead but has yet to be fully explored in the English and Scottish sources.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{Insular Traditions and the Nightmare}

The two components of Bald’s \textit{Leechbook} (surviving in a single tenth-century manuscript [BL Royal 12, D xvii] but originally compiled in the reign of King Alfred), \textit{Leechbook} III (included in the same manuscript as \textit{Leechbooks I and II}), the \textit{Lacnunga} (found in the eleventh-century BL MS Harley 585), and the \textit{Herbarium} (a tenth-century vernacular interpolation of the Latin \textit{Herbarium of Apuleius}), provide a wealth of information about medical practices in the years pre- and postdating the Conquest.\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, it would be unwise to assume that as soon as the Norman

\textsuperscript{106} The conflation of the ‘pressed’, psychologically fragile victim and the outbreak of pestilence can be discerned in an account from Poland in 1693: ‘This revived being […] comes out of his grave, or a demon in his likeness, goes by night to embrace and hug violently his near relations and his friends […] and at last cause their death. This persecution does not stop at a single person; it extends to the last person of the family’. Cited in Keyworth, ‘Eighteenth-Century Vampire’, p. 251.


\textsuperscript{108} Harley MS 6258B, a medical miscellany that contains a copy of the \textit{Herbarium}, an OE \textit{Medicina de quadrupedibus} and the only extant vernacular translation of the Latin \textit{Peri Didaxeon}, dates to
regime arrived and, later, when newly translated works began to circulate in the British Isles, that a generation’s worth of practical knowledge – based partly on Latin texts – suddenly became redundant, or that prior beliefs were completely subsumed by advances in medical theory. Just because a remedy was dismissed as being theoretically dubious did not mean it ceased to be used in practice. Similarly, the level of vitriol aimed at non-Christian magic by Bartholomew Iscanus (d.1184), bishop of Exeter, suggests that theologically suspect practices remained an entrenched part of the local habitus. Remedies against unquiet corpses, whether ‘suspect’ and transmitted orally, or copied from earlier manuscript sources, may also have retained a presence in the rhythms of Anglo-Norman life. An evaluation of recipe lxv.5 from Leechbook II and the entry for betony in the Old English Herbarium suggests that there were numerous ways to assuage a nocturnal ‘visitor’:

Against an elf [ælf] and against a strange visitor [unceþam fijan] rub myrrh in wine and a mickle of white frankincense, and shave off a part of the stone called agate [jet] into the wine, let him drink this for three mornings after his night’s fast, or for nine, or for twelve.

This herb which men call betony grown in meadows [and] is good either for a man’s soul or his body, it shields him against monstrous night-visitors [unhyrum nihtgengum] and against fearful visions and dreams. This herb is very holy and thus you should gather it.

As noted above, the terminologies used to describe the nightmare in insular medical manuals are somewhat fluid. Scribal interpolations, the recognition that an illness could have had a variety of causes, and the possibility that the name given to the attacking agent varied according to the compilers’ (oral) source, can account for these

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110 And yet, it is difficult to determine whether the scorn for magic found in Bartholomew’s Penitential was a contemporary concern or merely a ‘type’ that derived from earlier penitential sources. See John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, Medieval Handbooks of Penance (New York: Octagon, 1965), pp. 346–350.

111 Leechdoms 2, II. lxv. 5 (p. 297).

112 Leechdoms 1, I (p. 70).
discrepancies. Mare/maran, the most common appellation, is sometimes used on its own,\textsuperscript{113} or else associated with a secondary or tertiary descriptor, including nihtgengan.\textsuperscript{114} Where references to the mare are absent, such as in the above extracts, the substitute terms betray a sense of physicality that the original – synonymous with haeg (hag) and transliterated into Latin as incubus – sometimes lacks.\textsuperscript{115} The phrase uncuþam fídan from the Leechbook II remedy certainly lends an anthropomorphic quality to the assailant. The distinction made between the ‘wanderer’ and the elf suggests that the former occupied a different ontological category from the latter. Indeed, the use of jet shavings provides a further, if oblique, indication that the ‘strange wanderer’ was perceived as a type of corporeal ghost.

Classically-derived lapidary traditions, of which the learned compiler of the Leechbook may have had at least some knowledge, have long been aware of jet’s apotropaic properties.\textsuperscript{116} Book XXXVII of Pliny’s Natural History ascribes many notable qualities to this black, coal-like mineral: it is noted to ‘drive off snakes and relieve suffocation of the uterus [...] moreover, when thoroughly boiled with wine it cures toothache and, if combined with wax, scrofulous tumours.’\textsuperscript{117} Medieval compilations made only the slightest revisions to this description, interpolating and building upon the classical material using concepts from their own experiential frameworks. Thus, as well as driving off serpents, Isidore of Seville claims that jet ‘reveals those who are possessed by demons’.\textsuperscript{118} The anonymous Peterborough

\textsuperscript{113} Leechdoms 2, I, lxiv (p. 141).
\textsuperscript{114} Leechdoms 2, III, i (p. 307). ‘Níht gengan’ appears separately in Leechdoms 2, III. lxii (p. 345).
\textsuperscript{115} The Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary (c.800) translates maera as incuba (p. 49).
\textsuperscript{116} Two of the first major extant works to note the magical properties of stones were Damigeron’s De Virtutibus Lapidum, and Dioscorides of Anazarba’s Materia Medica (c.50–70BC). Books XXXVI and XXXVII of Pliny’s Natural History built upon the previous work and became the paradigm for future compilations. An analysis of the lapidaries of Isidore of Seville, Marbode of Rennes (1035–1123) and Albertus Magnus, to name but three of the most well-known medieval examples, reveals the influence of their Classical forbearers. See Christopher Duffin, ‘The Western Lapidary Tradition in Early Geological Literature: Medicinal and Magical Minerals’, Geology Today, 21 (2005), 58–63; Peter Kitson, ‘Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: part I, the background; the Old English Lapidary’, ASE, 7 (1978), 9–60; ‘Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: part II, Bede’s Explanatio Apocolypsis and Related Works’, ASE, 12 (1983), 73–123.
\textsuperscript{117} Pliny, Natural History, ed. and trans. by D. E. Eichholz (London: Heinemann, 1962), XXXVI. 141 (pp. 114–115). The Natural History was known to have circulated in Anglo-Saxon England; indeed, Pliny is one of the only classical authorities mentioned in the Leechbook. The practice of boiling jet with wine to cure toothache certainly bears some relation to the Old English recipe, and suggests that the Leechbook’s compiler consciously improvised the base formula of the Classical recipe to suit the needs (and fears) of his local, perhaps royal, clientele. See Debby Banham, ‘Dun, Oxa and Pliny the Great Physician: Attribution and Authority in Old English Medical Texts’, SHM, 24 (2011), 57–73 (pp. 62–63).
\textsuperscript{118} Etymologies, XVI. iv. 3 (p. 319).
Lapidary (c.1400) makes a similar claim, adding that ‘also who bereþ þis ston abowte his nek, þer schall no serpent do him harme’.\(^{119}\) Jet, then, did not have to be consumed, but also could be used as an apotropaic ‘binding’ amulet. Albertus Magnus (c.1193–1280), the thirteenth-century Dominican theologian and renowned practical scientist, writes that ‘jet is reported to put serpents to flight; and is a remedy for disorders of the stomach and belly, and for phantasms due to melancholy, which some people call demons’.\(^{120}\) If Albertus himself was hesitant to ascribe demonic agency to ‘phantoms’, then his reference to ‘some people’ suggests that members of the wider community thought otherwise and used jet as a form of protection. A definite relationship between jet, demons, the nightmare, pain relief, and binding can thus be detected in the common medical repertoires of Western Europe.\(^{121}\) This is not to suggest that the compiler of the *Leechbook* was fully immersed in the work of Damigeron and Pliny, only that knowledge of the efficacy of stones was able to circulate within the various oral and written cultures of English society, and that the inherent properties of jet – especially its ability to emit heat and a distinct smell of sulphur when burned – structured both the local (Germano-Christian) and authoritative (Classical-Christian) attitudes to disease/nightmare prevention.

Albertus Magnus’s description of jet consolidates the various oral and learned traditions of the nightmare into one concise, detailed passage, something which, I believe, can be used to highlight the specific function of the jet shavings in the *Leechbook II* recipe.\(^{122}\) A remedy for the belly implies a need to fortify the body against poor digestion and imbalanced humours, the result of which can cause unreliable dream images, demons, or nightmare-revenants to appear.\(^{123}\) The ingestion of jet shaving in the *Leechbook II* remedy represents a similar need to calm the


\(^{120}\) *Book of Minerals*, II. ii. 7. 1 (p. 93).


\(^{122}\) Albertus Magnus’s claim that he derived some of his knowledge of stones from his own observations suggests that the ‘some people’ to which he alludes could in fact be *vulgares* whom he met and conversed with on his travels. See Dorothy Wyckoff, ‘Introduction’, in *Book of Minerals*, p. xiv.

\(^{123}\) According to the traditions of learned magic, the occult (hidden) properties of an object derived from its ‘specific form’. Such powers came from the ‘whole’ and transcended the primary qualities of the material. The specific form of jet allowed it to perform many of the tasks ascribed to it by the lapidary authors. See Nicolas Weill-Parot, ‘Astrology, Astral Influences and Occult Properties in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries’, *Traditio*, 65 (2010), 201–230 (p. 207). For the link between poor regimen and ‘unreliable’ dreams, see Kruger, *Dreaming*, pp. 72–87.
stomach, rebuild the body’s integrity and, in doing, assuage the ‘strange visitor’. Albertus’s diagnosis of ‘melancholy’ not only substantiates the idea that the hallucinations were caused by humoural imbalance, but also that a deviant moral outlook presented a very real danger to the sufferer’s physical and spiritual well-being. Melancholy – which, according to the metaphor used by Alain of Lille, entailed gaps in the body-fortress – allowed for the body to be assailed by demons, subjected the victim to despair and, in certain circumstances, led to self-murder. Suicide, of course, was the single greatest sin in Christendom.

The belief that nightmares were caused by supernatural agency – ‘phantoms’ in Albert’s parlance, ‘demons’ in Guibert’s, and ‘strange visitors’ in the Leechbook – by no means contradicts the purely physiological viewpoints. If we use the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ narrative as an example of local belief, then the nightmare (or agent) was seen to cause the complaint, whereas according to the medical and religious authorities the complaint (the imbalanced humours or sin) precipitated the nightmare or nocturnal demon. The compiler of the Leechbook recognised that he needed to negotiate between the various traditions of medical practice and shaped the recipe according to the needs and fears of his local clientele. Jet shavings, then, served the dual function of tempering the physiological distress and ‘binding’ the nocturnal assailant.

The extract from the Herbarium details the occult properties of betony and suggests that the herb was particularly effective against ‘fearful visions’ and ‘monstrous nocturnal visitors’. Unhyrum nihtgengum, a transliteration of the original Latin phrase nocturnas ambulationes (‘night walking’), is not as ambiguous as uncuþam fiðan as far as its relation to the walking dead is concerned. The verb gangan translates simply as ‘to go’, and suggests something about the corporeality and restless nature of this night-time agent. A related term, ganga, interpolates the

126 Banham, ‘Old English Medical Texts’, p. 64.
127 The archaeological evidence for the use of jet to assuage revenants and pre-empt the nocturnal attack will be discussed in more detail the following chapter.
128 For a Leechbook nightmare remedy that uses betony, see Leechdoms 2, I, lxiv (p. 141): ‘If a mare ride a man, take lupins and garlic and betony and frankincense, bind them on a faun’s skin, let a man have the worts on him, and let him go to his home.’
129 The phrase nocturnas ambulationes can be found in the earliest extant Latin copy of the Herbarium (c.650), MS Leiden Vossianus Latinus Q 9, fol.14v.
base meaning of ‘to go’ as ‘to haunt’, signifying an entity which wanders without any true meaning or purpose.\(^{130}\) It is interesting, then, that the term *sceaduganga*, or ‘shadow-walker’ (ll. 702–703) is used as a synonym for Grendel in *Beowulf*, especially since the only extant manuscript of the Old English poem is contemporaneous with the original translation of the *Herbarium*.\(^{131}\) It is possible that the terms *nihtgengum* and *sceaduganga* bear a conceptual as well as a linguistic similarity. Indeed, Grendel shares a significant number of attributes with the nightmare-revenant, including his propensity to attack at night (l.115), his being fated to wander the hinterlands (l.710), his malice (l1.149–154), and his fleshy, corporeal nature (l1.739–743). The post-mortem decapitation of his corpse (l. 1589) is entirely logical if read against the techniques used to quell the *draufr* Glam and the Drakelow peasants. Finally, the likening of Grendel to a *maera* (l.103, l.762) substantiates his status as a nocturnal ‘crushing’ demon.\(^{132}\)

Thus, it would be unwise to dismiss the possibility that the two entities, one a literary construct (Grendel), the other the cause of a medical condition (*nihtgengum*), belonged to the same experiential tradition of the dangerous night-time dead. The use of the term ‘monstrous nocturnal-visitor’ by the translator of the *Herbarium* suggests that, like the ‘strange visitor’ from the *Leechbook II* recipe, the nightmare was not always conceived of as an airy demon or *hueg*. It is possible that these latter terms were clerical reductions or synonyms for the actual threat: a Grendel-like fiend who physically attacked the unwary in their sleep.\(^{133}\) The bedroom assaults transcribed by William of Newburgh and the anonymous Byland Monk suggest that this was not some idle, half-remembered fear passed down through the local belief system. Indeed, the ghost from the second of the Byland Monk narratives warns the tailor, Snowball, the he should keep ‘his best writings’ (scripture) by his bed as

\(^{130}\) LeCouteux, *Return of the Dead*, pp. 132, 197.

\(^{131}\) The line *Cóm on wanre niht scriðan sceadugenga* translates as ‘the creature that prowls the shadows came stalking through the black night.’


\(^{133}\) H. Stuart also notes that the terms for supernatural entities in Anglo-Saxon textbooks betray a sense of clerical reductionism. See ‘The Anglo-Saxon Elf’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 48 (1976), 313–320. ‘Dwarfs’ were also seen to cause night terrors. The ‘Lay of the Night Goblin’ from the *Lacnunga* (remedy XCIIIb), details a remedy for being ridden by a *dweorh*. Although the first line of the charm, *her com ingangen in wriðen wiht* [Here came stalking a creature all swathed] uses the word *ganga* in its verb form, ‘Wiht’, meaning creature, is another common appellation for corporeal ghosts in Northern Europe. This dwarf, then, is a fleshy creature which stalks its prey at night, not unlike Grendel and/or the revenant. See J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 160–163.
protection against ‘night-fears’. A charm found in MS Bodleian. Rawlinson C 506, fol. 297, a fifteenth-century miscellany, is much more explicit with regards to the late medieval techniques for assuaging a nightmare.

[One should] take a flynt stone that hath an hole thorow it of hys owen growynge & hange it ouer the stabill dore, or ell ouer ye horse, and wrihte this charme: In nomine Patris &c. Seynt Iorge, our ladys knyght, he walked day, he walked nyght, till that he fownde that fowle wyght; & when he her fownde, he her beat and her bownde, till trewly ther her trowthe sche plyght that sche sholde not come be nyght withinne vij rode of londe space ther as Seynt Ieorge i-namyd was. In nomine Patri &c. And wryte this in a bille and hange it in the hors’mane.

Although it is true that this charm – the earliest extant source for the use of ‘mare stones’ – is over four hundred years removed from the eleventh-century context of the leechbook remedies, it has been suggested that the habit of hanging such devices in barns and bedrooms flourished for generations before being committed to the page. Fowle Wyghts were no less troublesome in the fifteenth century than Nihtgengum had been in the eleventh. The fear of corporeal, nocturnal agents persevered into the twelfth century and beyond.

Having examined the neuropsychological definition of the nightmare, the opinions of the medieval authorities, and the confluence of local and authoritative beliefs in the Otia Imperialia and the Anglo-Saxon medical manuals, attention will now turn a closer examination of the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ narrative from the Historia Rerum Anglicarum. This, I contend, is a stereotypical account of the causal relationship that exists between ‘bad’ death, the cultural construction of sleep paralysis, and the contagious nature of social unrest. The ways in which the experiential, authoritative and traditional aspects of the nightmare were interpolated and/or rejected by the actors in this story can tell us much about the everyday understanding of a particular type of disease. Other case studies, such as the

134 Byland, pp. 367–369. Story eleven, meanwhile, recalls how a group of pilgrims took turn to ‘keep watch for a part of the night against night-fears’ (p. 374).
136 Meaney, Curing Stones, p. 99.
'Buckingham Ghost’ narrative from William’s *Historia* and the anonymous ‘Travels of Three English Gentlemen’, will also be discussed.\(^{137}\) As will be seen, the association of the nightmare with the agency of the deceased was a phenomenon that occurred in both insular and continental contexts.

*Nightmare and Revenants*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the tale of the Hounds’ Priest records the post-mortem fate of an irreligious priest from Melrose, whose love of hunting and secular pursuits earned him his unflattering nickname. Following his death, the priest was buried in the grounds of local Cistercian abbey. However, it was not long before his corpse took to hovering around the bedchambers of his former mistress, emitting ‘load groans and horrible murmurs’. A vigil was organised in the graveyard, where it was confirmed that it was indeed the priest who was leaving his grave at night. The following morning his corpse was exhumed, burnt, and the ashes ‘scattered to the wind’.\(^{138}\)

In light of the material discussed above, certain motifs are immediately apparent. The possibility that the priest’s mistress was suffering from sleep paralysis and REM hallucinations can be presumed from the context of the revenant’s initial appearance. The Buckingham Ghost and the demon which attacked Guibert’s mother also appear at night to a distressed and/or drowsy victim. Indeed, it is significant that the victims in all three narratives were mourning the loss of a husband or illicit lover. With the priest having died in a state of sin, and his mistress fearing for the state of her soul for having instigated an affair with a man of God, it can be hypothesised that the victim was suffering from psychological distress and sleep deprivation which, in the medieval language of humoural/spiritual imbalance, increased the possibility of a night-time attack.\(^{139}\) The experience, then, was shaped according to prevailing cultural beliefs about ‘bad’ death, health, and damnation, the identity of the perpetrator structured by the traumatic personal experiences of the victim. In contrast to the ‘Buckingham Ghost’, where the crushing of the chest was the most

\(^{137}\) *Travels*, pp. 375–376.

\(^{138}\) Newburgh, V. 24. 1–3.

\(^{139}\) Cheyne, ‘Nightmare’, pp. 322, 333.
apparent symptom, the aspects of the nightmare which were given emphasis in this narrative were the auditory and visual hallucinations. Indeed, the description of the corpse hovering around the bed is strongly reminiscent of the type of non-significant dream described by Macrobius: ‘In this drowsy condition he thinks he is still fully awake and imagines he sees spectres rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing.’

The contagious aspect of the nightmare experience – and, indeed, ‘bad’ death in general – is not as apparent in the Hounds’ Priest’s story as in the other encounters transcribed by William. No-one aside from the priest’s mistress is described as being harassed by the revenant. Contrast this to the ‘Buckingham Ghost’, where

[The man] harassed [...] his own brothers [...] but they, following the example of the woman, passed the nights in wakefulness with their companions, ready to meet and repel the expected danger. He appeared, notwithstanding, as if with the hope of surprising them should they be overcome with drowsiness.

This observation about the time and place of the revenant’s attacks on his brothers is telling. The last line, especially, is an almost textbook description of a hypnagogic dream state. Stress, trauma and despair – all facets of the social disharmony caused by ‘bad’ death – were emotions which were undoubtedly shared by the immediate family of the deceased. With the family members becoming physiologically susceptible to a visum and unsure about the spiritual status of their kinsman, it is unsurprising that they too succumb to sleep paralysis/nocturnal attacks and attribute its symptoms to their dead, restless brother. As more villagers feel oppressed and crushed at night, so the revenant’s wanderings are perceived to have spread and, eventually, become an epidemic. St. Hugh’s intervention prevents the exhumation and dissolution of the offending corpse.

By contrast, the course of action provoked by the Hounds’ Priest’s visitations follow the ‘standard’ procedure for assuaging the pestilent dead. The suspect body is

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140 Macrobius, I. 3. 7 (p. 89).
141 Newburgh, V. 24. 1. My italics.
exhumed, found to display signs of restlessness, and summarily cremated. The Melrose locals interpret the nightmare as a threat to their physical health and sense of well-being, and act on the mistress’s distress accordingly. As discussed above, the disease-spreading revenant was one potential interpretation for the disharmony caused by ‘bad’ death. The nightmare – that is, the initial nocturnal attack – merely confirms what is already suspected, and thus the object of this disharmony, the corpse, has to be quickly and efficiently contained. The possibility that a social transgressor could walk after death was always present in the local worldview, waiting for the correct social and environmental circumstances to coalesce. A nocturnal attack provoked suspicion that a known sinner, in this case a priest who lived and died badly, may not have been following the correct path into death. If the deceased did indeed display signs of restlessness upon their exhumation – an excess of blood and a lack of purification, for example – then the relationship between the nightmare, contagion and the corpse was all but confirmed and the correct apotropaic action taken. This is the near-exact sequence of events described in an anonymous eighteenth-century travelogue found in the Harleian Miscellany (c. 1734). Discussing his experiences in Eastern Europe, the author recounts that

[Vampire victims] complain of suffocation, after which they soon expire. Some of them, being asked on the point of death, say they suffer from the spectres of those people lately dead. Upon which their bodies, being dug out of the graves, appear turgid and suffused with blood. Their countenances are fresh and ruddy [with no] mark of corruption upon them. To prevent the spreading evil, it is found requisite to drive a stake through the dead body. Sometimes the body is dug out from the grave and burnt to ashes; upon which all disturbances cease.

Although the nature of the medieval testimonies precludes anything as detailed and coherent as this Early Modern travelogue, it can be argued that the identification and containment of the Hounds’ Priest and the Buckingham Ghost occurred in a similar fashion. The initial attack (the nightmare, or initial ‘bad’ death) preceded a wider contagion (the spread of the nightmare and/or the pestilence) and culminated in the ‘binding’ of the suspect corpse (the redressive action, or final apotropaic response).

142 Westerhoff, *Death and the Noble Body*, p. 23.
143 Davies, ‘Nightmare Experience’, p. 188.
144 *Travels*, p. 376.
While it is unlikely that this pattern can be replicated across all instances of revenant activity – especially in cases where a nocturnal assault or high death count is absent – when nightmares, disease and ‘bad’ death did indeed combine the model is certainly persuasive.

This, then, has been a brief overview of the medieval conception of the nightmare. Sleep paralysis was, and is, a universal physiological disorder which had no definitive explanation. Imbalanced humours, mental anguish and demonic sexual contact were just some of the meanings ascribed to the phenomenon by the medical and theological authorities in the Middle Ages. Theory, however, very rarely conformed to everyday practice. Different ways of ‘moving through’ one’s immediate social field created different rhetorics, or patterns, of belief. It took only a small mental interpolation for the incubus/nightmare to be reconceived as a demonically-activated body, a rhetoric which could circulate within the ingrained local traditions of disease causation, ambulatory corpses and nocturnal agents. Vestiges of this belief can be discerned in the bedroom location of the initial encounters, the common interpretation of the revenant as a demon-in-disguise and, as shall be discussed in the following chapter, the use of jet beads as apotropaic grave goods. In consideration of the number of revenant encounters which begin with the perpetrator attacking a single victim at night, the link between the nightmare and the returning dead may have been a lot more common that the current scholarship suggests. Thus, the wonder stories transcribed by William of Newburgh et al. provide a tantalising glimpse into the local synthesis of ‘bad’ death, ghosts, and the night-time assault tradition.

**Conclusion**

Poor conduct and ‘decay’ signified a lack of social/physiological cohesion and had the potential to spread to others. The rotting, fleshy corpse of someone who had died a sudden or ill-performed death was the very epitome of physical and spiritual disease. Foul vapours, physiological imbalance, moral fallibility and actual physical attack were just some of the overlapping frameworks used to explain the epidemics

145 Riddle, ‘Medieval Medicine’, p. 175.
wrought by the undead.146 Although the use of precautionary measures was left unmentioned by William of Newburgh and the Byland monk, the *leechbook* recipes suggest that pre-emptive apotropaic techniques against corporeal ghosts were an entrenched component of local village life. ‘Binding’ the *nihtgengum* and *uncupam fīðan* using magical incantations and occult items may have been a parallel course of action to the desecration of the corpse, or used when restlessness was suspected but the identity of the attacker unconfirmed. But to what extent can these precautionary and reactionary measures be discerned in the archaeological record? Against the ever-changing ideals of the church and state, how pervasive were the local rhetorics for containment? And what, exactly, is the relationship between the written evidence and the actual residues of practice? The material evidence for the assuagement and binding of the disease-spreading dead will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

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146 Jolly (*Popular Religion*, p. 33) notes that ‘popular belief’ is a personal negotiation between ‘folklore’ (entrenched traditions) and ‘formal religion’ (the values of the Church institution). Pestilent smells, the sinful conduct of the victim, and actual, physical attack were all potential reasons why the revenant was able cause sickness. To define a single explanation and ignore the potential for the personal interpolation of belief is to deny any sense of individuality in the medieval populace.
5. The Archaeology of the Walking Dead: The Grave

Introduction

Having examined the medieval concept of ‘good’ death, the social logic of ghost narratives, and the use of the undead as indices of disease and social unrest, the next part of the investigation will focus on whether the belief in revenants can be discerned in the archaeological record. As discussed in chapter one, the structure of the ‘ideal’ death performance at a particular moment in space/time must be acknowledged before attempts to detect instances of deviation in the material record can be made. However, the patterns for ‘good’ death discussed so far in this thesis have focused mainly on didactic, written texts. The ordo defunctorum, Ars Moriendi and the Office for the Dead do not fully account for the local, practical improvisations which may have occurred when the percipient confronted a corpse (or death performance) which did not conform to the ideal. Indeed, as seen in the practice of positioning a corpse’s feet toward the bedroom door to facilitate the soul’s passage into the next life, differences in a social actor’s cultural, religious and experiential worldview – his or her habitual knowledge – often resulted in innovations to the base structure of the funerary rite.¹

Although written sources such as William of Newburgh’s Historia provide useful commentaries on everyday belief, an analysis of the syntax of the grave-site is, as discussed previously, the most viable means of explicating local attitudes to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ death. The rhetorics of normative Christian burial practice were just as varied and wide-ranging as those affected on the corpses of the troublesome dead.² It would be useful, then, to begin this analysis of the archaeology of revenant belief by building upon the findings from chapter two (especially the ‘ideal’ act of deposition as illustrated in Office for the Dead manuscripts) and explore the different methods by which the dead were actually interred in the grave. The base template for Christian burial – the interment of the corpse in an east/west position, with the

overarching aim of maintaining the deceased’s forward flow into death and his or her resurrection on the day of Judgement – could be subject to any number of innovations, including burial with ‘pillow stones’ around the skull,\(^3\) being lain on a bed of charcoal,\(^4\) and the use of grave goods.\(^5\) It is doubtful, however, that high status burial within a cathedral nave/chantry chapel can reveal much information about the beliefs and fears of the laity. Interment within the holy confines of a cathedral suggests that the corpse was considered spiritually ‘safe’. Perpetuating the memory of the deceased and glorifying his or her salvation were the prime motivators for this type of burial rhetoric. Parish churchyards, on the other hand, provide a much clearer indication of how the suspect bodies were perceived and managed by their kinsfolk.\(^6\) Furthermore, the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ narrative from William of Newburgh’s *Historia* and the Byland monk’s account of the ghost of James Tankerlay highlight how even regional monastic houses could be susceptible to beliefs about the walking dead.\(^7\) Burial patterns in local monastic cemeteries may, therefore, reflect the tensions that arose during periods of communal instability; from deciding whether the deceased should be considered ‘dangerous’ or ‘safe’. Documentary sources also refer to the burial of executed criminals in the grounds of hospitals and lazar houses, something which may have necessitated additional ritual responses to assuage the spiritual contagion of the deceased.\(^8\) The evidence from non-elite graveyards will thus form a central part of this study.

The primary chronological range for this survey will be c.1050–c.1450. Case studies from the early Anglo-Saxon period will be utilised to provide a schema for the interpretation of the later material. Following an examination of the techniques used to manage the ‘compliant’ dead, the chapter will culminate in a review of the practices that reflect a more fearful attitude towards the corpse. And yet, it should be stressed that the division between burial rhetorics which aimed to maintain the

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\(^7\) Newburgh, V. 24. 1–3; Byland, p. 370.

cohesion of the corpse and those which bound the potential revenant to the grave may not be as definitive as an initial reading suggests. Truly deviant practices such as crossroad burial, staking or cremation may indeed be indicative of the ‘entrapment’ of the deceased, but this does not preclude the possibility that burial on a bed of charcoal, for example, served a similar purpose. It is difficult to differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ death when deviancy is merely a case of extreme variation, or play, on an established practice. Further issues arise in deciding whether the practice was a proactive or reactive response to the perceived agency of the corpse. One thing, though, is clear: to analyse potential cases of revenancy in the archaeological record, one must first be acquainted with the ‘structured playfulness’ of the normative responses to death.

‘Good’ Death: Charcoal and Ash Burials

Despite the act of burying the dead in a supine east/west position remaining more or less consistent throughout the Middle Ages, local variations to the rite could be long-lasting. Indeed, some of the more overt Anglo-Saxon innovations, such as the burial of the deceased on a bed of charcoal and the inclusion of ‘pillow stones’ around the frame of the skull, were able to survive well into the Anglo-Norman period.\(^9\) With such practices given only a tangential reference in the written record, it is left to the archaeological evidence to determine whether they benefited or hindered the deceased.

Charcoal burial involved the lining of the grave or coffin with a mixture of burnt detritus, the thickness, constitution and placement of which varied between each interment. Although charcoal burial was a minority rite in the Middle Ages, evidence for this practice was nonetheless widespread, with examples being discerned in English, Scottish, French and Scandinavian contexts.\(^10\) Monastic cemeteries have thus far revealed the greatest number of burials of this type. The churchyard at the urban parish of St. Mark’s in Wigford, Lincoln, however, contains a striking number of examples from a lay context, suggesting that the discrepancy

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between sites may in fact be a result of excavation bias. Ten cases of charcoal burial were discovered at St. Mark’s, all of which were orientated on an east/west axis. Although eight of these burials occurred in the late Anglo-Saxon strata, two interments (graves 309 and 315) seem to have derived from the period after the first stone church was built; that is, in the late-eleventh to mid-twelfth century. Grave 457 also revealed evidence that a band of charcoal was sometimes deposited over the coffin before the grave was backfilled.\textsuperscript{11} It is interesting to note how the ‘deviant’ burials at St. Mark’s seem to have been orientated around a particular point of focus, with the Late Anglo-Saxon interments situated in a general group to the north-west of the original timber church, and the Anglo-Norman examples orientated to the north of this church’s original foundations (and south of the new stone structure).\textsuperscript{12} Other notable examples of charcoal burial can be found in the graveyards of St. Oswald’s Minster, Gloucestershire (c.900–1120), Winchester Cathedral (c.1000s), the rural churchyard at Addingham in Yorkshire (c.650–c.1000), and the old Trinitatis church in Lund, Sweden (c.1050).\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, a high percentage of the charcoal burials in St. Oswald’s Minster were situated in the north side of the graveyard and in close proximity to the church building, mirroring the pattern seen at St. Mark’s, Lincoln.

Despite the deposition of charcoal in the grave lining seeming to fall out of favour in the years following the twelfth century, a related rhetoric, ash burial, wherein the burnt material was deposited inside the coffin, continued on into the later Middle Ages. The recently excavated parish church and cemetery of St. Peter’s, Leicester (c.1200–c.1600), contained thirteen ash burials dating to the turn of the fourteenth century, most of which were excavated from the church building – a location which is suggestive of the high status of the deceased (fig. 6).\textsuperscript{14} Twelve charcoal burials dating to the late-Saxon/early Anglo-Norman period were also excavated from St. Peter’s, all of which were found in the immediate vicinity of the church building. The limits of the excavation prohibited a full analysis of the southern part of the cemetery, meaning that evidence of charcoal/ash burial in the

\textsuperscript{11} B. J. J. Gilmour, and D. A. Stocker, \textit{St. Mark’s Church and Cemetery} (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1986), p. 16.
\textsuperscript{12} Gilmour and Stocker, \textit{St. Mark’s}, pp. 16–21.
\textsuperscript{13} Holloway, ‘Charcoal Burial’, p. 137.
period between c.1150–c.1250 is obscure. Nevertheless, it is tempting to argue for a continuation of practice.\textsuperscript{15}

Ash burial was not confined to high status interments. The Black Death cemetery at East Smithfield (1349), London, is a case in point. Out of the thirty-four coffined burials in the mass-burial trench in the large west cemetery area, three examples (12813; 11449; 12617) contained significant deposits of ash.\textsuperscript{16} Scholars are still undecided as to the exact meaning of these rites. Aside from the possible use of burnt material as a means of soaking up bodily fluids (to be discussed below), Victoria Thompson argues that the inclusion of ash or charcoal in the syntax of the grave-site may have had a penitential significance. There may be some truth to this assertion. The \textit{ordo defunctorum} in the Laud 482 manuscript, a confessional miscellany copied in Worcester and dating to the mid-eleventh century, provides explicit instructions that ashes should be mixed with holy water and placed on the dying man’s chest.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, \textit{Ælfric} of Eynsham (d.1010) stresses that we ought to ‘strew ashes on our heads to signify that we ought to repent our sins’.\textsuperscript{18} The lining of the coffin or shrouded body with deposits of ash or charcoal can be seen as an extension of the penitential death-bed performance and a way for the mourners to ensure the deceased maintained his or her forward flow into the next life. As Thompson suggests, in a period in which the doctrine of Purgatory had yet to be fully formulated and the question of what happened to the deceased between death and the Last Judgement remained the cause of much debate, the interpolation of the mortuary rite using symbolic practices from the deathbed would seem to be an innovative method of providing assistance to the soul.\textsuperscript{19}

Although some scholars view the chronological divide between ash and charcoal burial as being so vast as to warrant separate investigations,\textsuperscript{20} a diachronic analysis of the base rhetoric – i.e. the deposition of burnt material into the grave – is, nonetheless, a useful means of charting how actions and meaning could diverge (or persevere) over a particular period of time. Viewed in this way, the ash burials from East Smithfield and St. Mary Spital, London, the latter dating to c.1200, can be

\textsuperscript{15} Gnanaratnam, ‘St. Peter’s’, p. 131.  
\textsuperscript{16} Grainger, \textit{East Smithfield}, p. 12.  
\textsuperscript{17} Thompson, \textit{Dying and Death}, pp. 92–131.  
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ælfric}, \textit{LS}, I. xii. 37–39 (pp. 264–265).  
\textsuperscript{19} Thompson, ‘Constructing Salvation’, p. 240; Holloway, ‘Charcoal Burial’, p. 144.  
\textsuperscript{20} Gilchrist and Sloane, \textit{Requiem}, pp. 120–121.
interpreted as derivations, or amendments, of the earlier charcoal-based rite.\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, writing some three hundred years after Ælfric, Durandus of Mende (d.1296) interprets the custom of placing the dead or dying man on a bed of ashes as a sign of penitence and humility, arguing, like Ælfric, that the body ‘is ashes, and it will return to ashes’.\textsuperscript{22} This tradition can find further mention in late medieval additions to the \textit{Vita} of St. Martin of Tours (d.397) by Sulpicius Severus (d.425). According to Jacob de Voragine’s influential \textit{Golden Legend} (c.1260), the saint proclaimed on his deathbed that: ‘the only way for a proper Christian to die is in sackcloth and ashes. If I leave you any other example, I shall have sinned.’\textsuperscript{23} This template was followed most famously by the ‘Young King’ Henry (d.1183), whose death performance included the wearing of a hair shirt and being lain on a bed of ashes.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, whatever the exact substance used, the \textit{action} of lying upon burnt, reduced material can be seen as a form of penitence or ritual cleansing prior to death. Only a small practical/cognitive innovation is needed to extend the concept of resting the dying man on a bed of ashes to lining the grave with the same substance.

However, it must also be remembered that the meanings applied to ambulatory practices were in no way uniform and may have varied according to the perceptual schema of the social actor. The seventh-century \textit{Penitential} of Theodore of Tarsus, for instance, takes care to warn its readers that ‘he who causes grains to be burned where a man has died, for the \textit{health} of the living and the house, shall do penance for five years’.\textsuperscript{25} The \textit{Confessional of Egbert} (c.1000) does likewise.\textsuperscript{26} Stephen Wilson’s contention that the north side of the church was designated for people who died a questionable or contentious death, and that the charcoal was a means of assuaging their need to rise and seek out the ‘warmth of the hearth’, may be one way of explaining the burial patterns in St. Mark’s and St. Oswald’s.\textsuperscript{27} The implication that charcoal (or ash) could be used as a prophylactic to bind the deceased to the grave can be seen in a burial which is almost contemporaneous with

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 122. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Translation of the \textit{Rationale Divinorum Officiorum} from Rowell, \textit{Christian Burial}, p. 65. \\
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Golden Legend}, II, p. 298. \\
\textsuperscript{25} Gilchrist, ‘Magic’, p. 145. \\
\textsuperscript{26} The \textit{Confessional} recommends a year of penance for ‘Anyone who burns corn in the place where a dead man lay, for the health of living men and of his house’, cited in Gilchrist, ‘Magic’, p. 145. \\
\textsuperscript{27} Wilson, \textit{The Magical Universe}, p. 298.
Theodore’s *Penitential*. Grave 25 from the Winnall II cemetery in Winchester (c.620–700) contained the body of an adolescent female. Not only had the corpse been weighted with heavy flint blocks (an apotropaic response which will be discussed in a later part of this chapter) but deposits of ash had been placed between the arms and legs. The presence of rocks lends negative connotations to the charcoal, suggesting that the body was considered dangerous and liable to walk. Suffice it to say that whatever the ultimate meaning of this rite, the deposition of ash/charcoal in the grave was a practice which was clearly linked to the perceived post-mortem existence of the individual and the correct management of the corpse. Indeed, even the more functional explanations for charcoal/ash depositions bear a relation to correct corpse management. Charcoal is known to be good at soaking up bodily fluids, eliminating odour, and is often used to reduce both internal and external swelling. Thus, if unstable fluids are a sign of abjection and sin, then the use of charcoal in this way can be seen as a medico-magical response to bodies which did not follow the ‘correct’ mode of decay. Bloating and swelling signified restlessness, a disrupted pattern, and needed to be managed accordingly. Lining a coffin or grave-fill with charcoal/ash not only dealt with the physiological problems of decay (odour, bloating) but also improved the spiritual health of the deceased. Both types of ‘disease’ were thus contained. The dividing line between functionality and symbolism, between the physical and metaphysical containment of disorder, was never truly defined. This is something which can also be discerned with regard to pillow graves and grave goods, below.

**Pillow-Graves**

‘Pillow’ burials form another ambulatory practice of which there is no overt literary analogue. The graveyard at Raunds, Northamptonshire (c.900s–1000s), for example, contains numerous earth-cut graves – aligned, again, in formal rows on the normative east/west axis – in which stone slabs were used to support the head of the deceased. Indeed, in eleven such burials the stones covered the skull in its entirety.

thus protecting it from backfill and damage from later intrusion. Although the archaeological data confirms this burial rhetoric (and its variations) to be a minority rite in the Middle Ages, it enjoyed a remarkable longevity and appears to have been conducted across a wide range of funerary contexts. Excavations from the manorial churchyard at Brighton Hill South, Hampshire (c.1200–1400), and the rural, Scottish cemeteries of Newhall Point (c.1150) and Skaill House (c.1200–1500) revealed a wealth of corpses with flint nodules placed strategically around their heads. Similar funerary provisions also seemed to have been used for the deceased inmates of lazarus houses. The cemetery of the leper hospital of St. James and St. Mary Magdalene, Chichester (c.1178), for example, contained a number of coffined burials in which stones had been carefully placed around the heads of the deceased. Ecclesiastics were also subject to such rites. Six pillow-burials dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were unearthed in the north cemetery of the Benedictine Abbey of Saints Peter and Grimwald, Winchester, one of the last examples of this practice in the archaeological record.

Thus, there seems to have been certain unwritten situations in which the inclusion of pillow-stones in a coffin or grave-cut grave was deemed the correct response to the social and/or environmental predicament of the corpse. The evidence suggests that the use of cranial support was unrestricted by age, sex, occupation, or status. Many interpretations for this practice have been put forward, including the theory that stones were sometimes used to restrain the revenant in the grave. Although this idea may be feasible in graves where the body itself was unusual, the stones covered the entirety of the skeleton, or if a weight had been placed on the chest, pillow-stones by themselves seem to have been beneficial for the deceased.

In an argument similar to that evinced for the practice of charcoal burial, Caroline Walker Bynum suggests that the maintenance of the integrity of the corpse in

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33 Gilchrist and Sloane, Requiem, p. 140.
34 Boddington, ‘Raunds’, p. 422.
35 Reynolds, Deviant Burial, pp. 81–82.
preparation for the Last Judgment was one of Christendom’s primary, practical concerns in the years preceding the official formulation of Purgatory and the ascendancy of post-mortem prayer. Indeed, Homily IX from the Vercelli Book (c.1000) provides a glimpse into the ambiguous and often vague nature of physical death in this period. According to the homilist, the deceased was thought to possess some kind of self-awareness in the grave. His reading of the five foretastes of Hell makes this view explicit:

> Then the fourth likeness of hell is called burial, for the roof of the house is bowed down over his breast, and he is given the worst part of all his wealth, that is, someone sews him into a garment. After that three bedfellows have him, and they are grit and soil and worms (II.101–106).  

The Last Judgement was the time when true life or true death was thought to occur. Until then, the body underwent a ‘mini-death’ in the Hell-like confines of the grave in preparation for the Judgement to come. Pillow-stones, then, protected the head, which theologians had long insisted was the seat of the intellect and the principal member of the body. Protecting the head in such a way maintained a sense of bodily/spiritual integrity, ensured that the deceased did not change position in the grave, and allowed him or her to rise facing east come the End of Days. Moreover, if ash/charcoal burial did indeed signify the ‘warmth of the hearth’ and persuaded the revenant against returning to the homestead, then it is feasible that pillow stones could be used for a similar purpose. Pillow stones may have been just that: a substitute for the soft furnishings the deceased had known in life, a way of ensuring that the corpse was content in its interim ‘place of rest’. As discussed in chapter four, post-mortem returns to the bedchamber were a rare but not unknown

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36 Bynum, Fragmentation, pp. 239–297.  
37 Thompson, Dying and Death, p. 52.  
38 Etymologies, XI. i. 25 (p. 232). See also Homily X on the Ephesians by St. John Chrysostom ‘the head is more a principal member than all the rest of the body, as containing within itself all the senses, and the governing principle of the soul. And to live without the head is impossible’, in Homilies, p. 99.  
39 Gilchrist and Sloane, Requiem, p. 139; Daniell, Death and Burial, pp. 160–161.  
41 Thompson, Dying and Death, p. 103.
occurrence. Furnishing the grave with symbols of the intimate, domestic world propitiated the desires of the troubled and troublesome dead.

As Roberta Gilchrist notes, a significant number of monastic pillow-burials from the late medieval period were found in the northern parts of the graveyard. With a similar pattern of deposition being noted for charcoal burials, and taking into account Stephen Wilson’s theories about suspect bodies, above, it might be suggested that, in some contexts at least, the souls of the dead interred in less than ideal parts of the graveyard needed further ritual manipulation to help them achieve a ‘good’ death and complete their rite of passage. The appropriation of lazar houses for the burial of executed criminals (and taking into account the conception of leprosy as an external manifestation of inner sin) may, therefore, account for the pillow burials in St. James and St. Mary Magdalene, Chichester; that is, as a way of combating the contagious nature of bodily/spiritual disintegration (to whatever degree) and maintaining the integrity of the deceased until the Day of Judgement. Of course, rhetorics evolve, practices gain or lose meaning, and actions which signify an idea or desire in one grave context may signify something entirely different in another. As the above case studies intimate, the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ death, between acts which benefitted the dead and those which protected the living, may have depended on how the body itself, as the key component of the burial rite, was conceived and orientated in the landscape.

Grave Goods

Grave goods are another phenomenon which maintained a prominent position in the burial rhetorics of medieval England. It must be stressed, however, that furnished burials were never officially prohibited by the Church and cannot be considered pagan or inherently ‘bad’. Indeed, the Rites of Durham (1593), an account of the customs of the local clergy before the Suppression, make mention of how chalices and patens were often interred in the graves and coffins of churchmen, perhaps as a

42 Daniell, Death and Burial, pp. 145–174.
43 Although The Ancient Monuments, Rites and Customs of the Monastical Church of Durham before the Suppression, to give the manuscript its full title, was transcribed at a time when traditional catholic practice had been suppressed, its documentation of the monastic rites, rituals and activities which took place in the Late Middle Ages ensures its value as a written resource. See the edition by J. T. Fowler, Surtees Society, 107 (Durham: Andrews & Co, 1903).
symbol of the eternal nature of their office. The archaeological evidence would seem to corroborate the literary sources. Pewter chalices have been discovered alongside bodies which, by virtue of their location and association with an obviously holy artefact, can be positively identified as priests. Numerous examples can also be cited of bishops, resplendent in their official robes, being laid to rest with chalices and patens made of high quality silver or gilt. This seems to have been an almost universal practice in the High and Late Middle Ages. Grave 0369 in the church at Brighton Hill South, Hampshire, for example, contained the body of an adult human male which had a lead chalice and paten balanced upright on the chest. With the body being interred in the central part of the nave, the evidence suggests that this was a particularly well-loved or well-respected priest. Grave 312 at St. Mark’s, Lincoln, makes the association between location (chancel), grave good (lead chalice) and status (priest) even more explicit. Thus, if the combination of evidence – a particular pattern – can allow us to decipher the status and ‘goodness’ of the body being interred, the same could also be said for the opposite: a crossroad burial (location) replete with a stake (grave good) and/or an unusual body deposition can allow us to form a supposition about the nature of the deceased (a suicide or potential revenant).

Grave goods could be enlisted for other functions. Curative measures, some verging on the magical, can account for the presence of particular metals, stones and alloys in the burial matrix. Lead was a powerful preservative and, according to popular tradition, helped protect the body from onslaughts by demons and unclean spirits. This may account for the prevalence of lead-lined coffins and lead crosses in graveyard contexts. Although Walter Map’s description of the Bishop of Worcester placing a cross in the grave of a wandering ‘wretch’ does not specify the material from which the device was made, lead mortuary crosses were undoubtedly

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44 The Rites of Durham states that priests were buried with a chalice of wax, and that bishops were buried with ‘little challice[s] of silver, other metall, or wax’. See Charles Oman, ‘Chalices and Patens’, in Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester: Part II, ed. by Martin Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 789–791 (p. 790).
45 Gilchrist and Sloane, Requiem, p. 160.
46 Fasham and Keevil, Brighton Hill South, pp. 78–81.
47 Gilmour and Stocker, St. Mark’s, p. 26.
50 Gilchrist and Sloane, Requiem, pp. 92–93, 117.
used in the twelfth century. Similarly, the archaeological evidence indicates that there existed a localised tradition of placing lead-wrapped absolution scrolls on the chest of the deceased. The lead parcel found in the burial matrix of a woman interred in the eastern cemetery of St. James’s Priory, Bristol (SK60), contained fragments of what appeared to be parchment (fig. 7). It is possible that a lead sheet discovered in a fourteenth-century grave in Croxton Road cemetery, Thetford, also contained an absolution scroll. Wrapping the Word of God in such a way may have been an attempt to magnify and preserve the scroll’s own affective properties. Although this act can be viewed as a way of delivering the deceased’s soul from its Purgatorial torments, the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ and ‘Haunting of Snowball’ narratives demonstrate how messages of absolution could also be used to allay restless spirits or ghosts, suggesting that in certain situations lead-wrapped scrolls may have been employed as apotropaic devices, or charms, to protect the living from the dead. Read in this way, the lead casing preserved the power of the prayer until the flesh decayed and the body was rendered inert. Thus, the meanings ascribed to the placement of lead crosses and absolution scrolls in seemingly ‘safe’ grave deposits may have to be reassessed.

Copper alloy is another material which is conspicuous by its repeated presence in medieval grave-sites. The Black Death cemetery at East Smithfield, for example, contained the body of an adult male (grave 7166) with a copper link wrapped around the base of the tibia. Excavations from St. Mark’s, Lincoln, revealed a skeleton of which the upper arm was wrapped in a spool of copper alloy wire. Similarly, a well-preserved skeleton found in the Carmelite friary in Aberdeen (c.1300–1500) had a distinctive copper band wrapped around the left wrist. Christopher Knüsel’s investigations into the Fishergate Gilbertine Monastery in York uncovered the remains of a monk whose leg, crippled by a right knee twist-

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51 De Nugis, dist. ii. 28 (p. 205); Gilchrist and Sloane, Requiem, p. 91.  
54 Gilchrist, Requiem, p. 92.  
55 Grainger, East Smithfield, p. 16.  
fracture and the subsequent onset of arthritis, was supported by a leather truss and copper plate.\textsuperscript{57}

There are many possible interpretations for this type of practice. Careless deposition is one option. However, given the overall rarity of body ornamentation in graveyard contexts, it is likely that some of the bracelets/trusses were intentionally laid to rest with the corpse. As mentioned briefly in chapter two, the use of ligatures was a long lived magical-medical rhetoric for the containment of spiritual and physical disease. The power of magic substances resides in the inability of the percipient to comprehend the ambiguous properties of an object or thing’s creation. Abstract forms such as ligatures, weaves and obscure incantations are said to present ‘unfinished business’ to the mind; since such patterns are difficult to process (that is, they bewilder the senses) they can never be fully inferred. Thus, the viewer or malign influence becomes ‘trapped’ or ‘stuck’ in the pattern. Verbal or manual weaving – to use the Latin term, \textit{defixio} – trapped and controlled the object of the bind. Curses, cures and effective magic could be produced and reproduced in this fashion.\textsuperscript{58} Considering the non-Christian origins of the practice, it is not surprising that the curative effects of binding did not always find favour with the Church. Indeed, the author of the anonymous \textit{De Sacrilegiis}, an eighth-century text, states that ‘whoever makes Solomanic writings and whoever writes on Papyrus or on parchment or on bronze, iron or lead and places it at the neck of men or dumb animals, is no Christian, but a pagan’.\textsuperscript{59} Homilies XIV, XV and XVIII by Caesarius of Arles (c.470–542), the \textit{Vita} of St. Eligius (c.669–742) and Augustine’s \textit{De Doctrina Christiana} (c.397–426) are similarly critical of ligature-based charms.\textsuperscript{60}

However, by the tenth and eleventh centuries the incorporation of this type of rhetoric into the structure of the Christian worldview was almost fully complete. Ælfric of Eynsham maintains the conservative stance against pagan ‘binding herbs’ in his St. Bartholomew’s Day homily, but suggests that enchanting the herb with an invocation to God would have a similarly powerful effect.\textsuperscript{61} The \textit{Lacnunga}, a medical miscellany dating to the beginning of the eleventh century, contains

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Knüsel, ‘Remedial Medical Treatment’, p. 376.
\item[59] Meaney, \textit{Curing Stones}, p. 12.
\end{footnotes}
numerous remedies which, at their root, depend on the efficacy of Christianised binding magic. A cure for dumbness, for example, advises the practitioner to ‘take pulegium and grind to dust and wrap up [my emphasis] in wool. Lay it under the woman. Soon she will be better’ (CLIIa). Sufferers of loose bowels were advised to hang a vellum sheet inscribed with scripture around their necks (CLXVIII). A charm to protect against miscarriage may have involved stepping thrice over the grave of a dead man – a bind which made use of actual, physical movement – but concludes with the mother invoking the name of Christ (CLXIXb). Gilbertus Anglicus (d.1250) and John of Gaddesden (d.1361), to name but two late-medieval medical practitioners, were well aware that binding charms could be used to ‘ensnare’ illnesses, especially acute conditions such as toothache, quinsy and gout. With this in mind, and considering the long-lived nature of defixio magic, the ligatures found at East Smithfield and St. Mark’s, Lincoln, may well have been used to fortify the deceased against ‘illness’, specifically excess swelling and unusual patterns of decay. Swelling and the arrest of bodily decay were two of the major signifiers of a dangerous, troubled body.

The spiritual/physical protection afforded by ligatures also extends to the material from which they were made. The curative, occult effects of copper were well known in the Middle Ages. Bald’s Leechbook contains numerous recipes of which copper is a source ingredient. Classical medical texts by Hippocrates, Galen and Celsus, which were imported into England and France during the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries, also exhorted copper’s use as a disinfectant. The copper spool excavated from St. Mark’s, Lincoln (c.950–1050) dates from a period in which the Leechbook remedies were undoubtedly known but, pointedly, a full generation before Islamic and Greek texts (and their associated medical corpus)

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63 Ibid., p. 189.
64 Ibid., pp. 190–191.
71 Knüsel, ‘Remedial Medical Treatment’, pp. 380–381.
began to circulate in the schools and monasteries of the West.\textsuperscript{72} Whatever its insular or Classical provenance, there appears to be a long-standing if localised belief in the effective use of copper ligatures on the bodies of the dead. A device which was protective and beneficial in life may have afforded a similar a level of protection in death. The curative effects of ligatures (through power of binding) and copper (through its inherent mechanical properties) were well known to medical practitioners in the Middle Ages. Dangerously swollen bodies needed to be contained lest fears about their spiritual and physical status arise. Thus, a copper bandage or truss was a type of improvised grave good – an amulet – which yielded much physical and metaphysical benefit to the deceased. If uncontrolled decay can be taken as a sign of sin, then the protection of the body using magical binds and metals was a way of curtailing signs of restlessness and maintaining the spiritual/physical integrity of the corpse. If the interpretation of the evidence is correct, then long-lived medical practices could be subverted, interpolated and reused to fit additional mortuary contexts. The idea that the abject flesh and spiritual disorder of the unquiet corpse was the epitome of disease and could be managed using medical-magical rhetorics has already been discussed with regard to ash/charcoal burial. The forthcoming discussion of ‘bad’ death will make the connection between suspect corpses and contagion explicit.

\textit{Positive Burial Innovations: A Synthesis}

The preceding analysis has acted as an overview of the various strategies used to ensure that the deceased died a ‘good’ death.\textsuperscript{73} It can be argued that these variations grew out of practical needs which could not be met by doctrinal teachings on burial practice, problems which were exacerbated by ambiguities about the fate of the body after death. Ideas developed in homilies, penitentials, and the \textit{ordo defunctorum} (such as the importance of penance, absolution and bodily resurrection) could be externalised and reused in new, practical contexts, charcoal burial being one such example. Entrenched pre-Christian habits may also have been utilised to articulate

\textsuperscript{72} Nutton, ‘Medicine’, pp. 139–205.
\textsuperscript{73} Limitations of space prohibit a full survey of coffin-types, variances in body position, and the diverse nature of grave goods See Gilchrist and Sloane, \textit{Requiem} (pp. 78–130), and Daniell, \textit{Death and Burial} (pp. 145–174), for more details.
certain unwritten truths or fears about the status of the dead (for example, pillow stones). If we take into account the disparities between the Office for the Dead and the extent to which its ‘ideal’ burial illuminations were imitated, interpolated or ignored, it can be discerned that even after the so-called codification of Church practice in 1215, acts of subversion regularly occurred. The use of grave goods to symbolise ecclesiastical status is given oblique reference in such regional texts as the *Rites of Durham*, but the use of ligatures, while a known medical treatment, can find no true analogues in liturgy or canon law. Habits and meanings which originated from outside the funerary context (medicine, penitence) were utilised in situations where the death liturgy was unable to account for problems associated with the corpse. The often vague and contradictory dialogue between what *should* happen (the liturgy) and what *did* happen (unwritten practice) can find at least some sort of illustration in the context of the grave-site.

This model can also be used to explicate cases of ‘bad’ death. As intimated above, there are occasions when the variations in the burial rite became so pronounced and so divergent from the original pattern that it is difficult to determine whether a corpse was being managed for its own sake (‘good’ death) or bound for community’s protection (‘bad’ death). Perhaps it was both. Acts of suffrage – and rituals for the dead in general – could be seen as a way of protecting the living by means of benefiting the dead. Some innovations to the burial rite, however, were not nearly as equivocal. The reversed decapitation burial in the priory of St. Andrew’s, York, and the single prone burial in the graveyard of Holyrood Abbey, Edinburgh (c.1500), are cases which can either be taken as ‘mistakes’ in the act of deposition or, if judging by the level of deviation on display, overt techniques for assuaging the dangerous dead.

Thus, the remaining section of this chapter will explore burial rhetorics which are so ‘deviant’, so ambulatory and unusual, as to be indicative of a fear of the suspect corpse. In consideration of the prevailing belief in ghosts and revenants in the medieval world, there may be more articulations of the fear of the undead in the archaeological record than we currently appreciate. The boundary between life and

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74 Boddington, ‘Raunds’, p. 422.
death may have been a lot more permeable, and a lot more dangerous, than even the
chronicles, liturgies and preachers’ manuals would have us believe.

Archaeology and the Dangerous Dead: Body, Grave and Environment

Archaeological investigations into the fear of revenant activity have undergone a
remarkable resurgence in recent years. The recent discovery of a late medieval
‘vampire’ in Lazzaretto Nuovo, Venice, has been determined by Emilio Nuzzolese
and Matteo Borrini as being the first burial of its type to be archaeologically attested
in the field.77 While their claims to have been the first to explore the archaeology of
vampirism may not be entirely true,78 Nuzzolese and Borrini nonetheless highlight the
problem of confronting evidence which seems to depend solely on folklore or
historiography for interpretation. The female skeleton now known as the Lazzaretto
Nuovo ‘vampire’ possessed no significant osteological or morphological defects and
was buried in the normative east-west supine position. Interred in a single grave
within a larger plague cemetery, the ‘vampire’ showed no particular anomalies for a
burial-rhetoric of its type, save for the insertion of a brick into the oral cavity (fig.
8).79 This has been seen as an intentional post-mortem act, conducted to prevent the
corpse from chewing on its burial shroud – a sign of restlessness confirmed by the
Eastern European sources and referenced in the ‘Ghost of Anant’ narrative from the
Historia Rerum Anglicarum.80 And yet, it is feasible that many archaeological
examples of revenant activity have been ignored because the material evidence did
not correlate exactly with the precedents set by the written texts. Grave goods found
in similar contexts but without overt written precedents (the copper ligatures in the
East Smithfield plague pit, for example) might also signify something dangerous
about the corpse. As detailed above with regard to the positive innovation of the
burial rite, the improvisation of the habitus in response to new and unusual situations

77 Nuzzolese and Borrini, ‘Vampire Remains’, p. 1637. For a rebuttal of this interpretation, see S.
Minozzi, M. A. Forniciari and G. Forniciari, ‘Commentary on E. Nuzzolese and M. Borrini Forensic
Approach to an Archaeological Casework of “Vampire” Skeletal Remains, in Venice: Odontological
78 Anastasia Tsaliki, ‘Vampires Beyond Legend: A Bioarchaeological Approach’, in Proceedings of
the XIII European Meeting of Paleopathology Association, ed. by M. La Verghetta and L. Capasso
80 Newburgh, V. 24. 7.
is a methodological standpoint which can be used to highlight hitherto unrealised evidence for revenant activity. Base ‘patterns’ of assuagement, such as staking, decapitation, prone burial, and deposition with grave goods and/or in liminal areas of the landscape, have already been noted by Andrew Reynolds and Anastasia Tsaliki. Innovations to – and deviations from – these already deviant practices may also be apparent.

This is not to suggest that the folkloric or historical evidence is redundant. While it is true that the use of ethnographic analogy is fraught with danger, this is due in part to the transposition of meanings over vast geographical and chronological distances without much care for cultural or environmental contexts of belief. When there are undeniable similarities between the two cultures under discussion, and if there are corollaries in everyday habit and base religious concerns about the body and soul, then the use of cross-cultural analysis as research tool is certainly valid. The vampire myths recorded in the 1920s by Agnes Murgoci and Edith Durham are similar in both context and content to those recorded in the eighteenth century by Augustin Calmet, the seventeenth by Henry More, and the twelfth by William of Newburgh. That is to say, the habitus of an Early Modern or near-contemporary village (and all the possible practices and beliefs held therein) possesses the same potential for the belief in the walking dead as it did in medieval times. This is not to suggest that they shared the exact same worldview, or that attitudes to the dead were uniform and static, but that there existed a base mental schema in which dying badly and the resistance of the body to decay led, in certain situations, to the belief that the dead could rise. There were only certain mechanical ways for a body to be restrained or exiled from view (dissolution; weighting; burial outside consecrated ground) and as such we can expect these practices to survive any inherent changes in meaning. Thus, the medieval peasantry’s perception of unquiet bodies may indeed be reflected in the grave goods and burial orientations used to quell revenants in modern

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82 Tsaliki, ‘Unusual Bodies’, pp. 2–3.
83 Agnes Murgoci, ‘The Vampire in Roumania’, *Folklore*, 37 (1926), 320–349.
and Early Modern contexts. If the external and internal structures of everyday life were such that vestigial habits could be sustained even if the meanings behind them did not, then the rhetorics of response to ‘bad’ death may have stayed more or less the same.\textsuperscript{88} This, then, is why folkloric texts and oral history remain important tools for the archaeological interpretation of the undead.

Above all, the following section will explore whether the binding of the disease-spreading dead, the restoration of order through containment, really was the template from which most apotropaic strategies were derived. If the ‘ideal’ death pattern was the most straightforward, culturally accepted way of completing the rite of passage, and positive innovation (suffrage, for example) served to counteract the spiritual and physical fallibility of the deceased, then extreme deviation can be seen as a form of liminalisation, or the intentional preclusion (‘knotting’) of the path. As discussed above, knots are symbols of power, ambiguity, and wayward movement; a form of disrupted process which itself has the power to be disrupting.\textsuperscript{89} In the funerary context extreme deviation, or ‘knotting’, may take the form of the body’s resistance to the natural processes of decay – and its signification as a powerful, marauding revenant – or a burial practice which is so ambulatory, so unusual, as to ensnare and damn the ghost. The latter practice is often used to prevent the former. The living social actors are able to comprehend the pattern of the funerary rite, but the dead – the object of the bind – cannot, and are thus trapped forever in a liminal, sometimes hellish existence. Binding can be both physical (staking) or metaphysical (apotropaic grave goods). Recourse to the archaeological material, in conjunction with the relevant written sources, can help prove the hypothesis that the fear of the corpse was a common concern in medieval England.

\textit{Liminal Burials}

The \textit{Homilies} of Ælfric of Eynsham contain one of the most well-known condemnations of deviant practice in the written Anglo-Saxon record. Arguing against the prevalence of witchcraft, he explains how

\textsuperscript{88}Arnold, \textit{Belief and Unbelief}, pp. 65–66.

\textsuperscript{89}Gell, \textit{Agency}, pp. 85–90.
Witches still go to crossroads and to heathen burials with their delusive magic and call to the devil; and he comes forth in the likeness of the man who is buried there, as if he arises from death (ll. 118–123).  

The penances in the near-contemporary Decretum by Burchard of Worms also warn against those who practice effective binding magic at crossroads, specifically:

The enchantments which evil men [...] make, when they say diabolical formulae over bread or grass or over certain nefarious bandages [ligatures; knots], and either hide them in a tree or throw them where two roads or three roads meet, that they may free their cattle or dogs from pestilence or destruction and destroy those of another.

In a similar vein, Burchard notes that

When any child has died without baptism they take the corpse of the little one and place it in some secret place and transfix it with a stake [...] lest it rise up and injure many.

The above extracts reveal a great deal about eleventh-century attitudes to deviant burial. Firstly, it can be seen how the two examples from the Decretum are variations on the type of medical binds discussed earlier in this chapter. Incanting ‘diabolical formulae’ (verbal knots) over ‘nefarious bandages’ (material knots) was a widely-used method for containing and/or redirecting social and physical disruption. The tying of a ligature and binding it to a larger ligature – that is, the crossroad – may have been a means of increasing the power of the invocation. Unbaptised infants, moreover, were considered among the most dangerous of dead. Staking a revenant was merely an additional, mechanical variation to the practice of binding the

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92 Ibid., XIX. v. 180 (p. 339).
94 Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy, Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 46.
dangerous body to a liminal place. Puncturing the flesh with nails, sickles, stakes, and wooden poles prevented excess swelling (that is, signs of restlessness), and allayed any possibility that the unshriven child might rise.95

For Ælfric, ambiguous areas of the landscape were especially dangerous and Hellish; ungodly wastelands where demons could rise in the likeness of men and undermine the Faith with their delusive, evil arts.96 Indeed, in deference to Augustine, who taught that the dead themselves could not return and that any corporeal and incorporeal ghost was most likely a demon-in-disguise, it is interesting to note Ælfric never once entertains the idea that the entities conjured at crossroads were, or ever could be, the ghosts of the pagan or sinful dead. Nonetheless, a close reading of Ælfric’s exemplum offers a fascinating – if oblique – insight into the local conception of dangerous bodies. If focus is placed on the ‘cultural facts’ rather than the specificities of Ælfric’s condemnation, a secondary narrative begins to emerge: unclean burials were often situated in ambiguous areas of the landscape, the dead buried therein were considered restless, magical invocations could be used to bind the will of the deceased. Corporeality was a primary feature of the pre-conversion belief system, with the dead enjoying a secondary physical existence in the barrow (good death), or else lamenting their entrapment at society’s bounds (bad death).97 Scandinavian and Germanic folklore contains numerous tales in which the dead were petitioned for help and advice at their grave-site.98 If the Vercelli Homily IX is any indication, the conversion of the Northern European lands maintained this view of death, something which may have been exacerbated by the lack of doctrine which explicitly stated the contrary. The Christianisation of practice necessarily demonised barrow and crossroad burial, with the former being reconfigured as a veritable Hell-on-Earth – a place outside the social sphere of the Church and thus an appropriate location for the execution of criminals and the burial of the dangerous dead. Manuscript sources, such as the illuminations from the MS Harley 603 Psalter and

95 See the exhumation of the eighteenth-century vampire Arnold Paole: ‘They drove a stake through his heart, according to their custom, whereupon he let out a noticeable groan and bled copiously’. Barber, Vampires, p. 16.
98 N. K. Chadwick. ‘Norse Ghosts (A Study in the Draugr and the Haugbui)’, Folklore, 57 (1946), 50–65.
the *Life of Saint Guthlac*, suggest that sufferers of sudden or ‘bad’ death were actively and physically punished by the demons which lived within the mound.\(^9\)

Entrapment without overt demonic torment is another way in which the Late Anglo-Saxons may have conceived the barrow-site. *The Wife’s Lament*, a short elegiac poem from the *Exeter Book* (c.960), is an important case study in this regard.\(^1\) It has been suggested that the *eordsele* (l. 29), or earth-hall, to which the Wife is exiled is, in fact, a round barrow. Read in this way, the Wife has not merely been banished to the outlands, but has been murdered and condemned to haunt the ‘bitre burgtunas, brerum beweaxne’ (bitter enclosure, overgrown with briars) as a restless, vengeful spirit (l. 31). Indeed, given her bitter, ironic tone and desire that her one-time love be ‘doomed’, one can presume that without the barrow to bind her, this ghost, too, had the potential to rise and ‘injure many’.\(^1\) Taken together, then, the Anglo-Saxon sources show how the perception of marginal land meandered, diverged and transformed as the Christianisation of the land took hold. Again, this is not to advocate that belief-systems were uniform or that everyone shared the same mental ‘pattern’. Ælfric may have worried about demonic conjuration, but the evidence suggests that his ‘witches’ retained vestigial, habitual traditions which were able to circulate within official ideas about the stasis-like qualities of death, something which can be discerned in *Homily IX* from the Vercelli Book. The charm found in the *Lacnunga*, above, which states that the sufferer of troublesome pregnancy should ‘step thrice over the grave of the dead man’, can be seen as another iteration of the act of petitioning the dead.\(^1\)

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\(^9\) *The Life of Saint Guthlac* (c.700s) describes how the eponymous saint constructed a hermitage in a burial mound in Crowland, Lincolnshire. He was subjected to attack by the ‘British-speaking’ demons that dwelt within, until eventually triumphing after invoking the help of God. See *St. Guthlac*, XXXI (pp. 101–107). For art-historical and archaeological investigations into the Hellish nature of burial mounds, see Sarah Semple, ‘Illustrations of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts’, *ASE*, 32 (2003), 231–245; ‘Fear of the Past’, p. 123.


\(^1\) As suggested in chapter four, the Grendelkin can also be seen as iterations of the Northern European belief in the walking dead. Their mere is likened to a ‘deaþwic’ (l.1275), a place of death. Indeed, *Beowulf* scholarship has often suggested that the mere represents a kind of hell-on-earth. Like the barrows in *The Wife’s Lament* and the *Life of Saint Guthlac*, the mere could represent a heathen burial ground and/or a place to deposit the troublesome dead. See Kemp Malone, ‘Grendel and his Abode’, in *Studia Philologica et Literaria in Honorem L. Spitzer*, ed. by. A. G. Hatcher and K. L. Selig (Bern: Satz and Druck, 1958), pp. 297–308.

The devilish and ‘sticky’ nature of liminal landscapes meant that the burial of polluted bodies at crossroads or barrows was an entirely legitimate response. Archaeologically, the evidence for such practices in the Anglo-Saxon period is considerable. The single inhumation discovered on hinterland outside Broad Town, Wiltshire, is potentially one of the earliest examples of crossroad burial thus far discovered in the British Isles (fig. 9).\(^{103}\) Dating to the seventh century, the burial lay between two Anglo-Saxon hollow ways and was located a mere hundred metres from the Hundred administrative boundary which separated Kingsbridge and Selkley. The poor condition and shallowness of the grave precluded the discovery of any grave goods which may have indicated revenant activity (stakes, ligatures), but the liminal, isolated nature of the landscape was perhaps sufficient to ensure the entrapment, and thus damnation, of the deceased.\(^{104}\)

Barrow burials are a much more recognisable practice and have generated an impressive amount of scholarship in recent years. Andrew Reynolds and Jo Buckberry, in particular, have noted the prevalence of barrow-sites used as execution cemeteries in the Mid/Late Anglo-Saxon period.\(^{105}\) Although it has been argued that the deposition of bodies in ‘heathen burial grounds’ emerged as a way of demarcating hundred boundaries and advertising the efficacy of law within a judicial area, the illustrations from MS Harley 603 suggests that the religious connotations of barrow burial did not go unrealised.\(^{106}\) The burial of outcasts in barrows was not purely about temporal punishment. Considering the influence of Archbishop Wulfstan (d.1023) in drawing up the law codes for both Æthelred II and Cnut – mutilation, for example, being conceived as an act of penitence as well as secular punishment – we can see how the secular and religious readings of the body tended to converge.\(^{107}\) Indeed, Vercelli Homily IX discusses how exile was considered one of the five earthly deaths.\(^{108}\) The exile of the deceased for earthly transgressions signified their exile from the heavenly community and, ultimately, their damnation.

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\(^{104}\) Ibid., pp. 89–90.


\(^{108}\) Thompson, \textit{Dying and Death}, p. 51.
Fol. 72r from MS Harley 603 appears to depict a demon, pitchfork in hand, presiding over a barrow-like Hellscape teeming with the executed, or exiled, dead (fig. 10). The use of the term _eordscraef_ (‘earth-hell’, l.28) as a synonym for the barrow in _The Wife’s Lament_ is similarly evocative of the late Anglo-Saxon fusion of exile, living-death and damnation.

Evidence for crossroad and/or barrow burial in the High and Late Middle Ages, however, is scarce. The few extant written sources from this period seem to derive from mainland Europe where, for example, the thirteenth-century _Landrecht_ (laws) from Silesia makes mention of suicides being buried at road junctions. Recent work by Lucas Meurkans has revealed how the burial of executed criminals at barrows continued in the Netherlands up to the Early Modern period. By contrast, recent investigations into ‘bad’ death in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England have revealed little written evidence that those found guilty of murder, heresy or general ‘otherness’ were buried in liminal areas of the landscape. John Mirk notes that suicides, the lecherous and unrepentant thieves should be buried ‘neyther in chyrch ne in chirch-ȝorde’, but does not specify the exact location. Likewise, the ghost stories transcribed by William of Newburgh, Walter Map and the anonymous Byland monk are altogether silent on the practice of liminal burial. The excommunicated ghost who commanded the tailor Snowball to bury an absolution scroll in his grave may have been buried in a field or crossroad, but the Byland Monk does not make this explicit. With regard to the most heinous of ‘bad’ deaths, suicide, Sara Butler has argued that the reaching of a guilty verdict was a complicated business in the Middle Ages, with families often covering up any signs that the deceased took their own life, lest their goods be forfeit to the crown. If the case did go to court, juries sometimes declared a verdict of insanity or misadventure. These verdicts did not carry the same social/religious stigma as suicide, and meant

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110 Thompson, _Dying and Death_, p. 105.
111 Murray, _Suicide_, pp. 46–47. This passage is especially interesting, given the prevalence of revenant encounters in Early Modern Silesia. See Barber, _Vampires_, pp. 10–13.
113 _Festial_, pp. 297–299.
114 Augustine’s vehemence against the sin of despair influenced the church condemnations of suicide for centuries to follow. To give up on life was to follow the example of the greatest of sinners, Judas, and betray God’s greatest gift to humankind. See _City of God_, I. 17 (pp. 26–27).
that the deceased’s body did not have to submit to deviant burial practices and, indeed, allowed the family to retain goods which would otherwise be rendered forfeit by the coroner. SK149 from St. Peter’s, Leicester, was the only body to be found outside the immediate bounds of the churchyard. Following the definition of Mirk’s schema, it is likely that he was convicted of *wilfully* taking his own life and denied a Christian burial. Given that the deceased’s family would undoubtedly want their relative to enjoy the reflected protection of the holy ground, this may account for the proximity of the grave to the churchyard.116

However, Roger Groot’s research on the evolution of the felonious nature of suicide in the late twelfth century has argued for the blanket condemnation of self-murder and the court’s removal of chattels regardless of the deceased’s mental state.117 If Groot is correct, then the punishments subjected to suicides were much more severe in the High Middle Ages, meaning that the locals may have been much less inclined to report instances of ‘bad’ death to the authorities and more eager to cover things up. In material terms, the *crime* of suicide was much more harmful to the deceased’s relatives than the *sin* of self-murder/despair. Destitution, it seems, was a much graver issue than the possibility of a loved one’s damnation.118 This may account for the paucity of liminal burials in this period and, as a consequence, an increase in the amount of unusual grave goods and body manipulations in normative graveyard contexts. That is to say, the burial of the secretly unshriven in holy ground may have prompted the need for extra funerary provisions to ensure that potential revenants did not wander. Stillborn infants, meanwhile, were often ‘baptised’ by midwives,119 miraculously revived just long enough to receive the blessing, or else secretly buried in churchyards in the hope that they would receive protection from the hallowed earth. Indeed, in 1398 the churchyard of Hereford Cathedral was

118 This fear can be discerned in the Bedfordshire coroners’ rolls of April 1278, where it was alleged that the chattels of a man who was convicted of suicide by the crown were hidden from royal officials by the original jury, who had returned a verdict of misadventure, in R. F. Hunnisett, *Bedfordshire Coroners’ Rolls*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, 41 (Streatley: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, 1961), no. 197 (p. 86).
119 This practice was ratified in Lateran IV, where it was determined that anyone could administer the sacrament of baptism should the need arise. See Canon One, in Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Vol. I, Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 230–231.
enclosed partly as a way of stopping such burials. The local subversion of official dogma as seen in these examples may explain the lack of material analogues to Burchard’s penitential, illustrating how popular methods of assuagement were renegotiated and reconfigured when the deceased’s family were confronted by a new external constraint.

However, this is not to suggest liminal burial was unknown in the high and late Middle Ages. An isolated beachhead at Tangleha’ in Kincardineshire, for example, was the location for an east-west supine inhumation which dates to the thirteenth century. The body itself was free from any discernible injury or disease, although the cranium and feet were missing, suggestive of someone who had died at sea and was washed ashore. Numerous loose, small pebbles were found within the burial matrix. Although it is tempting to suggest that these may have possessed some kind of apotropaic effect, the evidence is tenuous at best. Nonetheless, the isolated nature of the grave-site and conscious decision by the local townspeople to preclude the stranger’s burial in consecrated ground suggests that, as a potential drowning victim, a stranger who had died unshriven, he presented too much of a threat to the local community and needed to be dealt with accordingly.

Across the sea in Ireland, the ancient pagan practice of bog disposal flourished well into the Middle Ages. The belief that peat bogs were a suitable place to bind the dangerous dead derives from the ambiguous, supernatural qualities of the landscape itself. Bogs are formed by the incomplete decomposition of plant matter in water-logged soils. The anaerobic conditions ensure that the dead plant tissue builds up to such an extent that peat layers are produced. The only plants which can grow in this type of environment are those that do not rely on groundwater to survive, such as spaghnum moss. The preservation of the flesh results from the effects of sphagnan, a polysaccharide released by the sphagnum which tans the skin a reddish-brown and renders the certain parts of the body resistant to decay. Thus, with the corpse being unable to rot and prevented from

120 Daniell, Death and Burial, pp. 198–200.
122 Ibid., p. 43.
following the correct rite of passage, the deceased is trapped in a limbo-like existence between life and death. The bog body, then, is stuck in a similar type of bind to those mentioned in the case studies, above.\textsuperscript{126} The Tumbeagh bog body from County Offaly, for example, dated to the turn of the sixteenth century and was around eighteen years of age when he/she died. Although it is difficult to adduce whether the poles found in the burial matrix signify a desire to keep the body in the grave, the apotropaic use of stakes has already been discussed with regards to the death of unbaptised infants and, given that Iron Age bog bodies such as Yde Girl and Gallagh man were also pinned down, a practical and symbolic function to the devices can be considered. Brammer Man (Denmark)\textsuperscript{127} and the Moanflugh Body (Ireland)\textsuperscript{128} are further examples of late Medieval bodies which, by virtue of their graves goods (stones; poles), also seemed to have been deliberately interred in the bog. English examples of bog burial are a lot more tangential and rely solely on the literary evidence. William of Malmesbury, for example, describes how the corpse of Brihtwold (c.1000), a former abbot of Malmesbury, began harassing the abbey’s watchmen. Only when the corpse ‘was dug up […] and sunk into a deep marsh far away from the monastery’ did the attacks finally cease.\textsuperscript{129} The Life and Miracles of St. Kenelm (c.1070) records, somewhat cryptically, that Cweonthryth, the saint’s dissolute sister, ‘could not stay buried […] in the cemetery’ and had to be thrown into a ‘gully’.\textsuperscript{130} Likewise, the Memorials of St. Edmund’s Abbey (c.1090) records how the possessed corpse of the local sheriff, Leofstan, was ‘sunk into a swamp’.\textsuperscript{131} The belief in the protective power of liminal landscapes permeates all three narrative sources.

Thus, the location of the grave-site is able to reveal a great deal of information about the social status of the deceased. Deposition at crossroads, barrows, beaches, and bogs are practices which deviate quite significantly from the pattern of the normative funerary rite, reflecting the desire to protect the holy ground from suicides, murderers, and the unshriven. Binding the potential revenant to liminal areas of the landscape made sure that that the churchyard remained free from

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{128} Bermingham and Delaney, \textit{Tumbeagh}, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{129} Malmesbury, \textit{GP}, 258 (p. 281).
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{SL}, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Edmund}, I, p. 32.
\end{flushleft}
the taint of the social ‘other’. And yet, the narratives from the Historia Rerum Anglicarum and De Nugis Curialium suggest that sufferers of ‘bad’ death were not always buried outside the cemetery and that hauntings could also occur in graveyard contexts. The Ghost of Anant, for example, was said by William to have been given a Christian burial.\footnote{Newburgh, V. 24. 5.} Could his wanderings have been prevented by additional mortuary rites, or had such rites been performed but found to be hopelessly ineffective? Variations in how the corpse was orientated and deposited in the grave can reveal yet more information about the fear of the undead. The different rhetorics on display in the burial matrix, especially if considered against the geographical location of the grave, reflect the degree of innovation which had to be made, often on a case by case basis, to make a suspect body ‘safe’. Some of these practices will be discussed in more detail below.

\textit{Staking, Weighting the Body and Prone Burial}

The first letter of the Armburgh Papers, a collection of personal correspondence detailing the turbulent affairs of the Armburgh family from c.1417–1453, contains a rather unusual digression:

\begin{quote}
Sodenly [Richard Baynard] felle downe and dyed with owte howsill and shrifie and anon after he walkyd and yit doth and hath don moche harme as it is openly noysed and knowen in the contre there a boute.\footnote{Armburgh, p. 62.}
\end{quote}

The demise of the lawyer and parliamentarian Richard Baynard in 1434 was not a particularly tragic event for Joan and Robert Armburgh. Indeed, his sudden – and, by all accounts, horrible – death must have been a boon for the Armburghs, whose litigation for the sole inheritance of the Brokhole family estates had been the cause of much ill-will and strife. This anonymous letter, which Christine Carpenter believes may have been written by Joan herself,\footnote{Ibid., p. 61.} is remarkable in its almost offhand description of Baynard’s errant corpse. According to the letter, his
wanderings were ‘openly voiced and known in the county thereabouts’, indicative, maybe, of a series of events which were so commonplace, so mundane, that they warranted only the briefest of description. Of course, Joan’s enmity against Baynard may have led to a wry retelling of his post-mortem fate, but the evidence suggests that even in the fifteenth century, in a relatively high-status environment, the fear of the walking dead played a prominent role in the beliefs of the local community. Clearly, churchyard burial was not enough to allay Richard Baynard. The Ghost of Anant and Walter Map’s sacrilegious Welshmen were similarly unchecked by consecrated ground. What else, then, might have prevented these corpses from rising?

As Barber suggests, one of the most effective methods of preventing the dead from rising was to bind their bodies to the grave using definite mechanical means. Stakes punctured and transfixed the flesh, while heavy boulders, either placed on the chest or inserted into the mouth, could also be used to restrain the corpse. As previously discussed, the insertion of material into the corpse’s mouth has been interpreted as a way of preventing the deceased from chewing on their burial shroud or, perhaps, from ‘feeding’ on anything in general. Although the most well-known case study of this type, the Lazzaretto Nuovo ‘vampire’, is Italian and thus exists outside the geographical bounds covered by this thesis, the literary sources, specifically the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, attest to the pan-continental and long-lived responses to a *sanguisuga* (‘blood sucker’). The fear that the dead could feed on the blood of the living is well represented in the Early Modern literature. Liquid blood was often seen as a principal sign of life. For a corpse to possess a bloated complexion was to suggest that it was not truly inert and had been taking the life-force of others. The ‘Ghost of Anant’ narrative reveals how aspects of this belief may also have been true for late twelfth-century England. The corpse, it was said, had:

> Swollen to an enormous corpulence, with its countenance [...] turgid and suffused with blood. The young men [...] inflicted a wound upon the senseless carcass, out of which

135 Barber, ‘Forensic Pathology’, p. 17.
137 See the aetiology of the nineteenth-century American ‘vampire’ epidemics in Bell, ‘Vampires in New England’, pp. 130–133.
flowed such a stream of blood, that it might have been taken for a leech (*sanguisuga*) filled with the blood of many persons.\\(^{138}\)

By this stage of the narrative the townspeople were well aware that the ghost left its grave at night. Most of the residents had been taken ill and some had already succumbed to its terrible, ‘pestiferous breath’.\\(^{139}\) Disease, then, is seen by William as being the main cause of death. Blood-sucking seems to have been a secondary fear, a confirmation of restlessness, something that can be conjectured from the narrative’s focus on the torn burial shroud and the likening of the corpse to a leech. Regardless of its mode of attack – the revenant was also said to beat its victims ‘back and blue’ – this was the most destructive of all of William’s ghosts. Cremation, the total dissolution of the corpse, was therefore the most appropriate (and, incidentally, the most archaeologically difficult to substantiate) apotropaic response.\\(^{140}\) Read in this way, the insertion of bricks into the oral cavity can be viewed as an anticipation of, rather than the reaction to, the undead.

A skeleton with a brick placed in the mandible, a potential English corollary to the Lazzaretto Nuovo ‘vampire’, was discovered in the parish cemetery of St. Margaret Fybriggate in Norwich (c.1240–1468), a known burial ground for criminals.\\(^{141}\) The early eleventh-century parish graveyard at Fillingham, Lincolnshire, contains another example of this practice.\\(^{142}\) Trench 5 revealed six east-west supine inhumations, four of which had pillow stones framing their skulls. Like the Lazzaretto Nuovo ‘vampire’ and the body at St. Margaret Fybriggate, the oral cavity of Skeleton 004 had been prised open and a large brick placed within. Two small, flat stones had also been placed over the eye sockets.\\(^{143}\) Jo Buckberry and Dawn Hadley have suggested that the placement of the stones in the skull was ‘to act as a weight to prevent the person from “rising up”’.\\(^{144}\) As feasible as this interpretation might be, the very act of putting cobbles in the mouth suggests that there were other

\\(^{138}\) Newburgh, V. 24. 7. See also the Drakelow revenants, whose faces were also stained with blood, in *St. Modwenna*, p. 197.
\\(^{139}\) Newburgh, V. 24. 6.
\\(^{140}\) Newburgh, V. 24. 7.
\\(^{142}\) Jo Buckberry and Dawn Hadley, ‘Fieldwork at Chapel Road, Fillingham’, *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 36 (2001), 11–18.
\\(^{143}\) Ibid., pp. 15–16.
\\(^{144}\) Ibid., p. 16.
aspects of the corpse (its ‘hunger’?) which gave the townsfolk cause for concern. Placing a boulder on the chest would have been much a more effective technique for keeping the corpse in the grave. Indeed, grave F1245 from the cemetery at Haverhill, Suffolk (c.1200–1400) reveals that the practice of using heavy bricks to weigh down the corpse was not unknown in this era. The cemetery of St. Peter’s in Leicester, moreover, contained two bodies SK673 (a juvenile, c.1300) and SK655 (a young adult, c.1300) which were also weighed down by boulders (fig. 11). Nor was the act of weighing down a corpse confined to England. Graves 21 and 34 from a recently discovered the cemetery at Newhall in Ross & Cromarty, Scotland (c.1100), contained infant skeletons which had been overlain with large sandstone blocks. If, according to Burchard, the binding of unbaptised infants to the grave was against the will of the Church, then the use of heavy stone blocks may have been seen as an acceptable local compromise – a less gruesome iteration of staking.

An exact written analogue for the weighting (as opposed to the staking) of the dangerous body is difficult to ascertain. William of Malmesbury’s account of the post-mortem fate of the Witch of Berkeley contains motifs which, at a remove, seem to suggest a popular belief in this practice. Having learnt of the death of her son and already resigned to the fate which awaited her soul, the witch entreated her remaining children to protect her body against her ‘strongest foes’ [demons] when she herself succumbed to death. She implored them to ‘sew up [her] corpse in the skin of a stag; lay it on its back in a stone coffin; fasten down the lid with lead and iron; on this lay a stone, bound round with three irons of enormous weight [...] if [she lies] secure for three nights, on the fourth day bury [her] in the ground’. Despite these provisions, on the third and final day the devil ripped her corpse from the coffin and vanished. Her cries for assistance were so loud, so pitiable, that they were heard from almost four miles away.

A number of issues are immediately apparent: a body which was in danger of being accosted and moved by demons needed to be restrained in the coffin, weights were the most obvious method of accomplishing this task and, if judging by the

145 The act of giving the corpse something to ‘chew’ may have been a variation on the practice of binding the deceased’s senses so they did not harm the living. See Barber, Vampires, p. 47.
146 Murray, ‘Haverhill’, p. 16.
148 Reed, ‘Newhall Point’, p. 786.
149 Malmesbury, GR, ii. 204 (pp. 377–379). My italics.
witch’s screams, the corpse itself seemed to retain some sort of *vestigum vitae* in the grave. Echoes of these beliefs can be discerned in the revenant narratives as well as the archaeological record. William of Newburgh’s statement that it ‘was believed’ bodies moved due ‘to the contrivance [...] of Satan’,\(^{150}\) is agonisingly ambiguous: did demons move within the dead, as per traditional Augustinian teachings or, as suggested by the Witch of Berkeley narrative, does ‘contrivance’ allude to external demonic movement of bodies which retained a residue of personhood? Who, in fact, believed that bodies could be moved in this way? Whatever the answer, staking/weighting was a practice which suited every potential outcome.

Another iteration of ‘staking’, one which bound to body to the grave but did not puncture the flesh, can also be detected in the graves of the parish church of St. Peter’s in Barton-Upon-Humber.\(^{151}\) The remarkable record of preservation at this site revealed a number of twelfth- to thirteenth-century inhumations in which clay and lime solutions had been poured into the coffin-fill just prior to deposition. Not only was this an excellent method of sealing the bodies and preventing unwarranted spasming or movement, but lime was often used to prevent the spread of contagion. Bodies which had been subject to this practice must have been considered unduly pestilent, a danger to the living.\(^{152}\) If the dead had the potential to bring further death to the community, then this fear may have extended to the belief that the deceased was *actively* seeking out its victims. The contagiousness of the corpse is a major feature of revenant encounters. Thus, like the use of copper bracelets, it can be seen how habitual beliefs concerning disease and the efficacy of medical magic inspired the ambulatory practices which occurred at the grave-site.

Aside from the use of stakes, weights and lime, prone burial seems to have been another way of keeping the dangerous body in the grave. Skeletons two and three from the monastic graveyard of Hexham Abbey, Northumberland, were found in a prone position to the south of the current choir and date to the late-tenth or early-eleventh century (fig. 12).\(^{153}\) It has been suggested, above, that the *intentional*

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\(^{150}\) Newburgh V. 23.  
inversion of a burial pattern was a widely used – and effective – method of nullifying the agency of a suspect body. The interment of the corpse face-down in the grave can be seen as another iteration of this belief. Mechanically, prone burial prevented the body from spasming in the grave-fill and ensured that it did not rise to the surface. On a metaphysical level, a burial practice which inverted the supine, east-west norm was another way of ‘knotting’ the path and confusing the deceased. Numerous references to this belief are found in the folkloric literature. Burial in a monastic graveyard may be indicative of ‘good’ death but, as the post-mortem activities of the Hounds’ Priest indicate, this does not preclude the threat of restlessness if the deceased’s conduct or body were seen as ‘deviant’ in some way. If the act of deposition was intentional and the grave displayed no signs of secondary disturbance, then prone burial, like weights, should be seen as a preventative and as not an ultimate apotropaic response. The final response, cremation, was reserved for when these initial devices failed and the danger became much more explicit. A late seventh-century inhumation from the Bay of Skaill, Orkney would seem to corroborate this hypothesis. Not only was the skeleton of the young male buried face down, but the hands were bound in front of its chest and the grave was located on the very edge of a cliff-face. Prone burial, the tying of the extremities and deposition in a liminal area of the landscape are powerful apotropaic practices in themselves. Taken together, this ‘triple-bind’ was a highly ambulatory burial pattern, reflecting the degree of danger that the corpse represented to the living. It can be surmised, then, that these protective measures were sufficient to keep the anonymous outcast in the grave and precluded the need for cremation.

As with barrow and crossroad deposition, evidence for prone burial in the High and Late Middle Ages is scarce. This is not to suggest that this practice did not occur, only that the discovery of new case studies is restricted by the limits of the archaeological evidence. The evidence we do possess, however, is tantalising. A

155 Supine, coffined corpses can sometimes spasm and turn over in the grave. See Moreno Tiziani, ‘Vampires and Vampirism: Pathological Roots of a Myth’, Antrcom, 5 (2009), 133–137 (p. 135).
156 Newburgh, V. 23–24. A corollary can be seen in Augustine Calmet’s account of Eastern European vampire myths, where he describes how ‘the bodies dug up are inspected, to see if they have the common marks of vampirism, a pliancy and flexibility of limbs, fluidity of blood and unputrified flesh. If the symptoms are discovered, the bodies are delivered to the executioner to be burnt’, in Apparitions, p. 198.
single prone burial (SK 1023) was discovered in the cemetery of St. Peter’s Leicester. Due to condition of the body, the excavators were unable to determine whether this was an intentional act or a mistake during the act of deposition.\footnote{Gnanaratnam, ‘St. Peter’s’, p. 134.} If carelessness was indeed the cause, then similar mistakes should be recognisable among the one thousand, six-hundred bodies which were recorded during excavation.\footnote{Harriet Jacklin, ‘The Excavation of St. Peter’s Church and Graveyard, Vaughan Way, Leicester 2004–2006, Vol. 3: Skeletal Analysis’ (Unpublished Archive Report: ULAS Report No 2009–047), p. 104.} The uniqueness of this burial suggests that the deceased, a middle aged man, was considered suspicious or dangerous in some way. Similarly, the cemetery at Holyrood Abbey, Edinburgh, contained a single prone burial which dated to the fourteenth century.\footnote{Bain, ‘Holyrood Abbey’, p. 1054.} Unlike the individual at the Bay of Skaill, the Holyrood and Leicester inhumations were interred among normative supine burials and displayed no other signs of deviance. Given the long-lived nature of the practice, it is likely that prone burials were not as rare as the extant evidence suggests. Excavation biases, taphonomic ambiguities, and the inability to conduct investigations in ‘active’ graveyards are issues that have impacted on the archaeological attestation of such burials. Such constraints may also explain the relative scarcity of cremated and decapitated remains.

Cremation and Decapitation

The popular belief that ‘tranquillity could not be restored to the people until the body of [the revenant] was dug up and burnt’ was noted with some dismay by St. Hugh of Avalon.\footnote{Newburgh, V. 22. 2.} Indeed, three of the narratives from the Historia Rerum Anglicarum culminated with the total destruction of the offending corpse, the Buckingham Ghost being saved from the pyre due to Hugh’s timely intervention. The habitual schemas and doctrinal innovations which led to the absolution of the individual over dissolution of the corpse have been discussed in a previous chapter. Suffice it to say that grave goods such as absolution scrolls are easier to detect in the archaeological record than burnt human remains. Indeed, if the ashes were ‘scattered to the winds’ as the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ tale suggests, then the archaeological attestation of the
burning of revenants is almost impossible. Conspicuously empty coffins, such as the single example found in the graveyard of St. Peter’s Church in Barton-Upon-Humber, provoke tantalising albeit unprovable suppositions that their previous occupants were exhumed and put to the flame. However, as the anthropological literature testifies and Howard Williams notes in his investigation of Early Anglo-Saxon death rites, the total dissolution of the body was a difficult process. The resources needed to burn the corpse down to its constituent parts were immense, taking up to ten hours and the pyre reaching a temperature of 1200°C. In local contexts, where the reactions to the walking dead were spontaneous and the danger required an immediate response, building a pyre was, in most cases, unfeasible. Decapitation, dismemberment, and the removal of the heart are acts of dissolution which are just as effective as cremation but much easier to perform. The documentary evidence agrees. Although the revenant in the ‘Ghost of Anant’ narrative was subject to full bodily cremation, the removal of the heart was the means by which it lost its uncanny resistance to flame. The Life of St. Modwenna, meanwhile, describes how the Drakelow residents ‘cut off the [the revenants’] heads and placed them in the grave between their legs, tore out the hearts from their corpses, and covered the bodies with earth again.’ The method used to quell the irreligious Welshman from the De Nugis ‘trifle’ is similarly focused on the decapitation of the corpse: the knight, William Laudun, chased the revenant back to its grave and ‘clave [its] head to the neck.’

The archaeology lends credence to the practices mentioned in the written sources. It was discussed in the first chapter how the skull of a juvenile skeleton (C8) from the western cemetery of St. Mary Spital, London, dating to the thirteenth century, had been removed and placed between its legs. A similar type of inhumation was discovered in a roadside burial ground in Brandon, Suffolk. Not only was the skull of Skeleton 0002 found between its tibia bones, but the body was interred in a north-south position. Radiocarbon dating has estimated that the cemetery

162 Ibid., 24. 3.
166 St. Modwenna, p. 197.
167 De Nugis, dist. ii. 27 (p. 203).
168 Gilchrist and Sloane, Requiem, p. 201.
was in use from between the late eleventh to early thirteenth centuries, a period which is analogous in date to Geoffrey of Burton’s text. The cloister garth in the Gilbertine Priory of St. Andrew, York contained an unusual burial (no. 7053) in which cuts to the fifth and sixth vertebrae suggest that the individual had been decapitated. Moreover, the head had been encased in stone cobbles and the body orientated on a west-east axis. Although it is more likely that the decapitation was the result of battle trauma, the inversion – or ‘knotting’ – of the normative burial alignment and the presence of weights attests to the restless nature of the corpse and the need to bind it to the grave. In this light, it is tempting to view the St. Andrew’s case study as a material analogue to Gilbert Foliot’s proposal that the revenant’s neck should be ‘cut through with a spade’.

Staking, the inversion of the burial position and the dissolution of the corpse (and all the variations thereof) are well attested in the both the written and archaeological records. This is not to suggest that evidence of revenant activity can be found everywhere, or that the belief in this particular phenomenon was all-pervasive. While the social and eschatological condemnations of deviant behaviour were often encoded in law, the evidence has shown how the local reactions to ‘bad’ death were in no way uniform. The possibility that someone who had died badly or unshriven could return and haunt the living was always there, enmeshed within the general habitual schema of medieval life, even if this possibility was not always realised. Special circumstances, such as an outbreak of disease, an abnormal corpse or severe social disruption were constraints – spontaneous external structures – through which an abstract, potential belief in the undead was sometimes made manifest.

Having discussed the location of the grave in the landscape and the physical methods by which the body was bound, attention will now turn to a closer examination of apotropaic grave goods. The earlier analysis of ash and charcoal burial, copper ligatures and lead objects has already highlighted how grave goods

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170 Hadley, Death, p. 118.
172 Archer, The Internal Conversation, pp. 130–150.
could possess both positive and negative connotations; that is, they provided protection for the living as well as being beneficial to the dead. However, if the evidence for physical binding is any indication, then there must also have been occasions when the fear of the body took precedence over an individual’s salvation. Iron pyrite, precious stone and deposits of flax are just some of the magical-medical devices which the documentary evidence suggests were used to bind and hinder the dead. Indeed, if the containment of physical/spiritual taint was the primary response to ‘bad’ death, then derivations of previously discussed practices can be expected to make an appearance in the specific choice and placement of grave goods. A variation of staking, for example, may be discerned in the presence of sharp objects in the grave-fill.\textsuperscript{173} Finally, it must be reiterated that medieval archaeology has long been dismissive of deposits which have no immediate, apparent meaning, with unusual and rare finds often being interpreted as detritus.\textsuperscript{174} The following argument will show that this may not have always been the case.

\textit{Apotropaic Grave Goods}

The popular and clerical traditions of medieval magic shared an understanding that occult (hidden) powers resided in stones, plants and words.\textsuperscript{175} The recipes in the \textit{Lacnunga} and John of Gaddesden’s \textit{Rosa Medicinae}, for example, have already shown how incantations, herbs and minerals, if ‘woven’ and applied correctly, could bind afflictions and prevent the spread of illness. It has been suggested that the strategies for dealing with disorders which occurred in life – be they physical or spiritual – were interpolated and reused in the mortuary rite to contain the ultimate form of disorder: death. This has already been discussed with regard to charcoal, copper and lime, but may also be true for other types of grave good. And yet, from an archaeological perspective, examples of orality (i.e. material manifestations of affective speech acts) are difficult to ascertain. Incantations, prayers and charms are almost impossible to detect in funerary contexts, save for when they retain traces in other materials. The presence of lead sheets in the grave presupposes the use of

\textsuperscript{173} Barber, \textit{Vampires}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{174} Gilchrist, ‘Magic’, p. 124.
scrolls of absolution. An illegible inscription from a copper ring found on a skeleton in the Carmelite friary at Linlithgow, Scotland, may be evidence of a protective charm. The recitation of incantations at the grave-side (and, indeed, the manipulation of the corpse) can perhaps be read in Bartholomew Iscanus’s condemnation of those who ‘practice divinations from the funeral of any dead person or from his body [...] lest the dead take vengeance’. An analysis of plant matter is similarly problematic. Organic material is susceptible to decay and can only be discerned when it has been reduced to ash/charcoal or subjected to special environmental conditions, such as anaerobic soil or a sealed coffin. Thus, the popular Early Modern practice of binding/dazzling the senses of the dead using depositions of seeds is difficult to analyse in an archaeological context. It is left to imperishable items such as stones, minerals and metals to provide the bulk of the extant evidence for the apotropaic use of grave goods. For the sake of clarity and structure, this discussion will focus on five main case studies: the urban cemetery at St. Peter’s, Leicester, St. James’s Priory, Bristol; the rural burial at Hilton, Cambridgeshire, the early Anglo-Saxon graveyard at Winnall II, Winchester, and the East Smithfield Black Death cemetery in London.

Stones

Jet (gagate) is one of the most striking materials found in medieval grave-sites and has long been seen to possess magical, efficacious powers. As discussed in the previous chapter, Bald’s Leechbook notes that gagate was particularly effective against ‘strange wanderers’. Lapidary traditions, ostensibly deriving from Pliny’s Natural History, are also quick to mention jet’s apotropaic properties. The entry for gagate in Albertus Magnus’s Book on Minerals (c.1257–1263) explains that as well as emitting heat:

177 Stones, Carmelite Abbeys, p. 159.
179 Barber, Vampires, p. 49.
Chrysolite, a pale-green iron silicate, possesses properties which are remarkably similar to jet. Albertus Magnus makes mention of its power to ‘drive away terrors and melancholy’ and, quoting an unnamed book of physical ligatures, suggests that ‘if it is worn in a gold setting, it drives away phantoms’.  

The previous chapter’s analysis of the medieval concepts of contagion discussed how *incubi* and *mara* traditions bore a structural similarity to bedroom revenant encounters. It was also argued that the base structure of the nightmare – the feeling of fear, the presence of an intruder and suffocation – derived from abnormal neurological activity and can be seen as a universal phenomenon. The victim’s interpretation of the attack was thus shaped by their own individual experiences, expectations and beliefs. With the fear of the devil a defining aspect of the pre-modern worldview, it is not surprising to find authors such as Macrobius (c.410) and Isidore of Seville (d.636) making reference to the popular belief that *incubi* accosted the unwary in their sleep. This is not to suggest that all nightmares were ‘airy’ demons, or that the unlettered populace shared the same understanding of the phenomenon as those with access to medical and religious texts. Indeed, William of Newburgh’s *Historia* provides evidence for the belief that nocturnal assaults could be perpetrated by demonically-activated corpses. This fear was widespread. Thus, if jet and crysolite were able to protect the body against ‘demons’ *in life*, then these rhetorics of belief could also be employed to protect the body from demonic infiltration/attack *in the grave*.

The archaeological evidence reveals more instances of jet in the grave-fill than crysolite. One of the more evocative examples of the apotropaic use of *gagate* can be discerned in the cemetery of St. James’s Priory, Bristol (fig. 13). A pentagonal jet pendant, upon which had been inscribed a Maltese cross and pi-like symbols, was recovered from the coffin of an adult female (SK64). The presence of folded silver

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181 *Book of Minerals*, II. ii. 7. 1 (p. 93).
182 Ibid., II. ii. 3. 7 (pp. 82–83).
183 Macrobius, I. 3. 7 (p. 89).
184 *Etymologies*, VIII. 11. 103 (p. 190).
coins (c.1190) on the woman’s shoulder blades reinforces the notion that these goods formed part of an overarching strategy to protect the corpse from evil. The unusual placements make them less likely to be personal ornaments or clothing attachments. Similarly, the cemetery of St. Peter’s, Leicester, contained the body of an adolescent male (SK 270) which had been buried with a single jet bead. It is conceivable that these individuals lived or died badly, and that jet objects were placed in the grave as a precaution in case the normative burial rite failed and the corpse, powered by whatever agency, made its way back to its homestead. The placement of a glazed pebble (left shoulder) and lead object (abdomen) in the grave of a middle-aged female from St. Peter’s (SK1066) may be indicative of a similar fear. The protective powers of jet and lead have already been discussed; however, the meaning of the glazed pebble is much more ambiguous. A biblical precedent can be found in Revelations 2. 17. Christ’s promise that ‘to him that overcometh death [...] will I give a white stone’ has led some scholars to believe that the presence of such material in the grave-fill is a positive innovation signifying the piety of the deceased. Speculating on the white quartz pebbles found among the graves at the Late Anglo-Saxon chapel of St. Patrick, Pembrokeshire, A. B. Badger takes the opposite view and states that they symbolised the dwelling place of the deceased and persuaded their spirits to remain in the grave. The ‘heat’ emitted by quartz, jet and iron pyrite substituted the life-giving heat of the house. Folkloric accounts of the dead needing to be propitiated lest they returned home to ‘seek the warmth of the hearth’ invite the possibility that these stones did indeed function as apotropaics.

St. Peter’s, Leicester, was an urban graveyard, one of the largest yet discovered in England, and as such it is feasible that the jet bead associated with SK270 was deposited by a mourner with at least some knowledge of lapidary traditions. But what of communities which had only a passing acquaintance with the works of Pliny, Isidore, and Albertus Magnus? Rural settlements, the inhabitants of which were mostly illiterate, did not enjoy the same level of immersion in manuscript culture as urban centres and monastic precincts. Thus, some of the more exotic

186 Jacklin, ‘St. Peter’s’, p. 90.
apotropaic items listed in the lapidaries would have altogether absent in the local worldview. In general, however, the illiterate or semi-illiterate understanding of stones may have borne some similarity to the Classical canon in that the properties of certain substances lent themselves to only a certain number of interpretations.\textsuperscript{190} It is likely that habits of use, availability, and practical experimentation determined which minerals were seen as the most effective against the undead. Jet, for example, is native to the coast of England; its heat and ability to quell supernatural attacks noted by both insular and continental sources. Its presence in rural as well as urban and monastic burial grounds suggests that its use as an apotropaic material was not bound by such arbitrary distinctions as ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ practice.\textsuperscript{191} Circumstance and the broad knowledge of its physical/metaphysical properties determined its use. Christian exegesis, delivered through sermon stories, was one of the ways in which this knowledge could be transmitted (see, for example, the discussion on stones in Bede’s \textit{Explanatio Apocalypsis} and the Christological interpretation of the glazed pebble mentioned above).\textsuperscript{192} Folklore – that is, divergent, unwritten practice – is rarely committed to the page and it is only through such writers as William of Newburgh that accounts of local belief survive.\textsuperscript{193} Evidence of unusual burial practice provides further access to this silent world. Archaeology, then, can reveal the extent to which the innovation of the rural mortuary rite was influenced by the synthesis of literary and oral/habitual traditions.

The grave goods from the disarticulated burial at Hilton, Cambridgeshire, are a useful case study in this regard.\textsuperscript{194} Skeleton L2246 (c.690) was recovered from a sub-square pit located at the left-most edge of the excavation area, a pasture located to the north of the medieval village. The level of disarticulation and the presence of tenth- to twelfth-century pot fragments in the seventh-century burial-matrix suggest that the original grave had been disturbed and the corpse given a secondary burial sometime in the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{195} As noted in the excavation report, the fact that the

\textsuperscript{190} Indeed, some of the materials discussed in Albert Magnus’ lapidary came from his own observations of everyday practice. See \textit{Book of Minerals}, III. i. 1 (p. 153).
\textsuperscript{191} Gilchrist and Sloane, \textit{Requiem}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{192} Kitson, ‘Lapidary Traditions Part II’, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{193} Watkins, ‘Folklore’, pp. 140–150.
skeleton was not reburied in the nearby churchyard of St. Mary’s implies that the deceased may have been considered ‘pagan’ and unfit for Christian burial.\textsuperscript{196} Indeed, the care taken to rebury the Anglo-Saxon grave goods – an assemblage that comprised a spindle whorl, glass bead, copper weight and cowry shell – lends credence to the idea that the objects were in some way responsible for the containment of this dangerous individual. It is impossible to gauge whether the people who conducted the secondary burial understood the original meaning behind the grave goods, but a vestige of understanding may well have circulated in their collective or individual \textit{habitus}. If not, and the finds were just as curious to the Anglo-Norman excavators as they were to their twenty-first century counterparts, then the context of their discovery should have been sufficient to explicate their significance. What, then, did they signify? Cowrie shells are a common occurrence in female Conversion-era graves and were used to protect the wearer from infertility and the evil-eye.\textsuperscript{197} Spindle whorls are noted by the \textit{Leechbook} as being effective against illness, especially ‘cheek disease’, and association with hidden power which is perhaps to be expected considering the magical connotations of knotting and weaving.\textsuperscript{198} The apotropaic effects of copper have been discussed in detail, above. The meaning behind the glass bead is much more ambiguous; however, Audrey Meaney is probably correct in stating that such items were used to dazzle and divert the evil-eye.\textsuperscript{199} Taken together, then, the items formed a ‘net’ to protect the body from evil influence and, so doing, bound it to the grave. Having unearthed the corpse and noting its deviation from the Christian norm, the medieval excavators, perhaps worried that they had disturbed an assemblage which kept an ancient, dangerous body in check, took great care to rebury the grave goods and erect markers to warn others about the grave-site.\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{196} Woolhouse, ‘Saxon and Medieval Activity’, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{197} Gell, \textit{Agency}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{199} Margaret Guido’s survey of Anglo-Saxon glass beads notes how specimens of the type found at Hilton (8.xvi) were extremely rare in grave contexts. This rarity, combined with its abstract design of a single, wavy line, may have determined its ‘stickiness’ or power. See \textit{The Glass Beads of Anglo-Saxon England} c.400–700 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 64, 312–313; Audrey Meaney, ‘Women, Witchcraft and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England’, in \textit{Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England}, ed. by Donald Scragg (Manchester: MANCASS, 1989) pp. 9–40 (p. 10).
\textsuperscript{200} The post holes were erected on an E/W alignment and so can be seen to possess religious connotations. See Crank, ‘Scotts Close’, p. 38.
Metal

As previously mentioned, copper was known throughout Western Europe as a powerful disinfectant. An extract from the *De Sacrilegiis* (c.800) describes a similarly medical function for iron:

All who place a ring and iron bracelets to be worn on his body […] and iron nails beneath the bed of a demoniac and thinks to expel the demon from a man by means of this magic, are not Christian, but pagan.\(^{201}\)

The *Leechbook* describes a remedy for ‘elf-shot’ which involves taking:

The knife, the haft of which is horn of a fallow ox, and on which has three brass nails, then write upon the horse’s forehead the Christmark […] then take the left ear, prick a hole in it in silence.\(^{202}\)

Although the condemnations in *De Sacrilegiis* are filtered through the lens of the orthodox Christian teachings, and despite the *Leechbook* recipe detailing animal rather than human illness, the use of metal – specifically nails and knives – as a means of assuaging supernatural attacks is nevertheless worth considering in the context of the local funerary rite. Early Modern literature contains numerous examples of sickles, scythes and nails being laid on the corpse in order to puncture the swollen stomach and remedy signs of restlessness.\(^{203}\) In attempting to curtail the processes of decay in this manner, these devices possess a similar magical-medicinal function to copper ligatures, charcoal and jet. Furthermore, the deposition of sharp metal objects in the grave can be viewed as a reduced (or metaphorical) act of staking.\(^{204}\) Grave 25 from the Early Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Winnall II, Winchester, is notable for containing a complex array of apotropaic grave goods. Not only had the grave-cut been lined with charcoal (see above), but heavy flints had been placed on the chest, iron pyrite by the leg and a single iron knife by the

\(^{201}\) Meaney, *Curing Stones*, p. 12.

\(^{202}\) *Leechdoms 2*, II. lxv (p. 291).

\(^{203}\) Barber, *Vampires*, pp. 50–55.

\(^{204}\) Ibid., p. 50
abdomen. Weighting the chest, puncturing the stomach, regulating decay, and protecting the body from demonic infiltration may seem overly excessive but, by twisting and knotting the burial rite in this fashion, the deceased was sufficiently entangled and prevented from leaving the grave.

The Winnall II deposits can provide a pattern for interpreting the function of metal artefacts from the later medieval period. If there did indeed exist a habitual belief in the effectiveness of iron against illness/demons, and if sharp instruments served a dual purpose of assuaging decay and binding the corpse, then the presence of nails in a burial-matrix may refer to more than just the residue of a coffin. Admittedly, an incorrect application of this theory can lead to a misrepresentation of the archaeological material. In general, a cluster of nails is more likely to refer to a coffin and its structural fittings than an apotropaic grave good. However this is not to suggest that analogues to the folkloric evidence did not and could not exist. Burial 8426 from the East Smithfield Black Death cemetery, for example, was found in close proximity to a single iron nail, suggesting that the body was unduly bloated, dangerous, and needed to be allayed in some way. Five nails were recovered from the grave of a possible excommunicate located outside the boundary of St. Peter’s (SK70149). Although it is likely that the body was buried in a coffin, the level of pollution associated with such graves and the propensity for the damned to walk after death may have necessitated an additional form of protection. Just because an object was functional did not mean it was devoid of other, more intangible qualities. The terror caused by the ‘hideous and tangible’ ghost of an excommunicated monk from Clydesdale, West Scotland, as described in the Chronicle of Lanercost (c.1346), is illustrative of the danger such individuals presented to the local community. In any case, nailing the coffin shut offered a practical solution to the threat of an errant corpse.

205 Meaney and Hawkes, Winnall, p. 15.
206 Grainger, East Smithfield, p. 41.
207 Gnanaratnam, ‘St. Peter’s’, p. 144.
208 ‘Now there was a certain fellow wearing the garments of holy religion who lived wickedly and died most wretchedly, being bound by the sentence of excommunication [...]. Long after his body had been buried, it vexed many in the same monastery by appearing plainly in the shade of night [...]. He savagely felled and battered those who attempted to struggle with him as well-nigh to shatter all their joints.’ See Lanercost, pp. 118–119.
Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed some of the more archaeologically-apparent methods for assuaging the dangerous dead. Binding, the act of disease management, is the schema which underlies most, if not all of the practices discussed in this chapter. Gell’s formulation of the stickiness (and thus power) of ambiguous objects lends itself well to the local tradition that ‘knots’ attracted and bound malignant forces. Knots could take the form of difficult incantations, a confusing funerary procession, ligatures, ‘abstract’ material which placated the revenant’s senses (white quartz) and an inverted mode of burial (crossroad; prone). Working in tandem with the magical-medical beliefs were practices which physically bound the body to the earth (staking) or destroyed it completely (cremation). As the condemnations of Burchard of Worms and Theodore of Tarsus suggest, local variations to the burial rite were sometimes frowned upon by the religious elites. However, it should be reiterated that the practices described in this chapter were precisely thought out innovations of the frameworks laid down in liturgy and canon law, structured by beliefs and habits which existed outside the immediate funerary context. It was by operating within the ever-changing conceptions of damnation and salvation – centred, perhaps, on the baser, more ingrained ideas about contagion – that new traditions were formed, burial rhetorics evolved, and old habits found new avenues of acceptance. Thus, if the response to the dead was based on the material and mental possibilities available to the percipient at a particular moment in space/time, possibilities which could be accessed by both the literate and illiterate population, then the illusory divide between ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ culture can finally be put to rest.

Of course, this is just one interpretation of the material, and it would be remiss not to acknowledge that some of case studies discussed in this chapter may have been the result of accidental deposition. Prone burial and the presence of copper bracelets on the corpse can be attributed to carelessness on the part of the ritual performers. By contrast, burial in unconsecrated ground was an act which had the conscious goal of separating the deceased from the wider Christian community and, ultimately, ensuring their damnation. The beachhead burial at Tangleha’ is

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209 Barber, Vampires, pp. 54–55.
210 Archer, The Internal Conversation, p. 140.
211 Blair, ‘The Dangerous Dead’, p. 553.
certainly suggestive of a reluctance to pollute the holy earth with the body of an unshriven stranger, while the grave unearthed from the boundary of St. Peter’s, Leicester, can be read as a practical application of the belief that suicides, excommunicates and the unrepentant should be buried ‘neyther in chyrch ne in chirch-ȝorde’. Issues of interpretation aside, it cannot be denied that different types of ‘bad’ death demanded different methods of apotropaic response. No two funerary performances were ever truly the same and no two individuals accumulated the same amount of sin. The specific location of grave-site, the orientation of the corpse and use of grave apparel – in other words, the burial rhetoric – denoted a specific strategy for containment. Some bodies, perhaps buoyed by post-mortem prayer, needed only a small amount of binding, or placation, to be kept in the grave (jet; prone burial; charcoal). Others were so deviant that they were either denied the protection of holy ground to begin with, or their sins were such that they were soon expelled from the churchyard and forced by whatever agency to roam. Once the body’s true spiritual/physical status had been revealed and its infection began to spread, a more urgent action was needed. Dissolution (cremation; decapitation) or re-admittance (absolution) were the two main strategies for allaying the errant, pestilent corpse.

Deciphering the meaning of the archaeological evidence is just one part of the wider historical question: how pervasive was the belief in the walking dead? William of Newburgh’s comment that should he ‘write down all instances of the kind, [the work] would be laborious and troublesome’ suggests that the fear of revenants was widespread. Likewise, St. Hugh’s advisors came to the conclusion that ‘such things often happened in England’. It is difficult to deny these sentiments.

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6. Conclusion

On the evening of Thursday 30th May, 1196, in a village that bordered the lands of Warden Abbey, Bedfordshire, a farmer tripped and wounded himself with a knife whilst tending to the cattle in his byre. The severity of his accident meant that he succumbed to his injuries before he could partake in the appropriate death-bed rituals. The local priest tried to mitigate the problem; the corpse being anointed, washed and wrapped in a burial shroud in the usual manner. Although the custom for dealing with cases of suspected suicide involved the removal of the body from a hole dug beneath the main threshold, the family of the deceased managed the convince the authorities that his death had indeed been accidental. Thus, the farmer was afforded a funeral that befitted his station. However, mindful that he had lived an unchristian life, and wary that his corpse could be infiltrated by demons and rise from the grave, his widow surreptitiously placed a jet bead in his coffin, having learnt from a local cunning woman that such stones worked well against the machinations of the devil. As a further contingency, she hung ‘mare’ stones in the rafters of her longhouse. These precautions proved to be in vain; for the very next night the farmer’s corpse retraced a path back to the marital bed. Unable to move or cry out, the widow prayed to the Virgin for assistance as she was crushed by the ‘night-walker’ that had once been her husband. The farmer’s wrath was not confined to his immediate family. As the days progressed the entire town became victim to his terrifying night-time assaults: not even the cattle and horses were spared.

When the frequency and severity of the farmer’s attacks made daily life almost impossible, the villagers decided to seek the counsel of the diocese’s archdeacon, Stephen de Swafeld. Tales of the demonically-activated dead were not unknown to the archdeacon, who had heard many such complaints by the rustici over the course of his career. However, learning that none of the usual methods for dealing with ghosts had been effective, Stephen promised to take the matter to his friend, Hugh of Avalon, the bishop of Lincoln, whose wisdom and venerability would certainly be of help in this matter. The circumstances of the farmer’s death and the nature of his post-mortem appearances were made apparent to the bishop in the form of a letter, delivered to his residence in London. A Burgundian by birth and
upbringing, Hugh did not know what to make of the archdeacon’s testimony. Yes, Augustine taught that the workings of the devil were an everyday, tangible threat and, yes, Gregory the Great discussed how the souls of the dead had the potential to linger on earth, but, as far as Hugh could tell, there was no patristic or biblical precedent for walking corpses, possessed or otherwise. Hugh shared the matter with his closest advisors. William de Montibus, the chancellor of Lincoln’s cathedral school, was a native of the Buckinghamshire/Lincolnshire region and told the bishop that the belief in roaming, violent corpses was by no means a rare phenomenon. Citing medical theory, William recalled that the traditional way of overcoming the ‘pestilence’ of the walking dead was to exhume the body and cremate it. Only then could the demon be expelled from the corpse and its victims’ humoral balance restored.

However, as proponents of pastoral reform, Hugh and William were horrified by the ramifications of this practice: the destruction of the body may have been an expedient way of preventing an outbreak of disease, but it implied the damnation of the deceased’s soul. A new, more humane response was needed. Following much discussion, it was decided that a scroll of absolution be placed on the farmer’s chest. The efficacy of post-mortem prayer was an aspect of speculative theology which Hugh and William were keen to propagate. Although sermon stories were a useful tool for disseminating ideas about suffrage, a practical demonstration of its benefits could elicit a more immediate response from the laity. If the active agent within the corpse was not, in fact, a demon, then the prayer would grant the farmer respite from his purgatorial torments – a ‘truth’ that had previously been documented in the Dialogues of Gregory the Great. If a demon did indeed inhabit the body, then the power of the Word could bind the fiend to the grave and preclude the need to burn the corpse. More importantly, the power of scripture was a concept that was not unknown to the rustici. Hugh was certain that the use of an absolution scroll in this manner would not be rejected as folly. All things considered, it was an acceptable alternative to cremation.

The scroll – written in Hugh’s own hand and wrapped in a protective lead parcel – was taken to Stephen de Swafeld, with the instructions that he allay the ghost as soon as possible. Arriving at the village, the archdeacon ordered the local priest to show him where the offending corpse was buried. The farmer’s grave-plot
was situated in the northern part of the cemetery, which, according to tradition, was the appropriate resting place for ‘suspect’ bodies. A large crowd gathered to witness the removal of the coffin. Prying open the lid, they were startled to find that the corpse was bloody and swollen, the burial shroud torn to pieces. Further inspection revealed that its limbs were soft and pliable, still warm to the touch. The smell of decay was present but, thankfully, not overpowering. With the ruddiness of the corpse confirming its status as a ‘blood-sucker’ and the source of the unrest, the archdeacon placed the parcel on its chest, resealed the coffin, and returned it to the earth. The effects of the absolution scroll were immediate: the nightmares ceased, the livestock recovered, and the farmer seemed content to rest in his grave. Hugh’s remedy garnered a lot of local attention. The ability to assuage a corpse without having to desecrate its flesh was a welcome addition to the repertoire of apotropaic techniques. It was a response that would be kept in mind the next time the dead brought terror to the village.

Revenant Belief: An Overview

It is fitting to end this investigation in the place where it began. The above narrative has been an attempt to build upon the unwritten aspects of William of Newburgh’s most equivocal exemplum, using ‘cultural facts’ extrapolated from the documentary and archaeological sources discussed in previous chapters. It is an exercise that encapsulates one of the main aims of this thesis: to construct an intertextual, interdisciplinary method for analysing the multivalent nature of revenant belief in medieval England. Recurring metaphors of patterns, pathways and ‘wandering viewpoints’ have been used to explain the processes by which the agent negotiated the internal (habitual) and external (environmental) structures of everyday life. ‘Rhetoric’ is a term that has been employed to denote a specific pattern of meaning/practice; a particular way of ‘moving through the field’. Efficacious patterns of practice were able to reside in the individual’s habitus until such time as the action, whether mental or physical, could be repeated or redeployed in new and innovative contexts. Following Gell, it was shown how excessively ambulatory rhetorics (cognitive and/or practical ‘knots’) could be used to bind the agent to which the action was directed (the demon, the ghost).
Chapter one noted how practice/structuration theory was an appropriately ‘medieval’ (that is, holistic) way of evaluating the archaeological, art historical, literary, and ephemeral products of human agency: the very embodiment of the interdisciplinary method. Its versatility was used to great effect in chapter two, which explored the processes involved in the maintenance of ‘good’ death. A successful rite of passage from the deathbed to the grave was a difficult, labyrinthine, affair. Only Christ, the map-maker, could tread the ideal path into death. Elaborate ritual performances, such as the recitation of the Office for the Dead, acted as metaphorical signposts to ensure that the deceased did not get lost in a knot of damnation.

Ritual practices structured and brought resolution to the chaos of death, just as historical context and the physicality of the book gave meaning to (that is, structured) the revenant narratives in the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*. Indeed, chapter three noted how *prodigiosa* – liminal, indefinite beings – could be inscribed with multiple layers of signification. The narratives’ codicological placement encouraged the monastic reader to associate the pestilence of the walking dead with the destabilisation of the wider body-politic and the sin of social transgression. Allusions to the chaotic, pestilential nature of the revenant were made much more explicit in chapter four. It was argued that somatic experiences of decay, epidemics and sleep paralysis were constrained by the percipients’ understanding of religious doctrine and the traditions of folk medicine. This, in turn, structured the identity of the revenant as an agent of disease and accounted for the medico-magical nature of corpse management.

The thesis culminated with an analysis of the extant material evidence for the defence against the walking dead. Chapter five demonstrated that it was indeed possible to draw intertextual analogies between the written and archaeological sources. By acknowledging the usefulness of practice theory for interdisciplinary research (ch.1), the ‘stickiness’ of knot-forms (ch.2), the prevalence of revenants (ch.3), and the entrenched belief that evil agents were pestilent (ch.4), a schema for interpreting unusual burials was established. The ultimate concern of cremation, decapitation, ‘magical’ grave goods, and burial in ambiguous part of the landscape was to bind the chaotic entity, the revenant, to the grave. It was through such proactive and reactive measures that the cosmological disharmony caused by ‘bad’ death was assuaged.
The methods used to assuage the walking dead were neither irrational nor superstitious. The cultural constraints that determined the identity of the ghost provided a repertoire of possible – and *logical* – techniques for a body’s disposal. Fears that the corpse was polluted and/or inhabited by the devil necessitated its expulsion from holy ground (cremation, burial in liminal areas of the landscape). The pestilential nature of revenants ensured that the habits and beliefs associated with the assuagement of ‘disorder’ in life (e.g. copper bracelets) influenced the assuagement of ‘disorder’ in death (amuletic grave goods). With the acceptance of the reality of Purgatory, a more humane method of assuagement (absolution) could also be considered. It must be stressed that these practices were not static: just as the identity of the assailant was non-uniform, so the processes of corpse management were equally as contingent. As illustrated by the actions of St. Hugh of Avalon, above, the worldview of the percipient and the specificities of the encounter determined the extent to which these rhetorics were replicated, rejected, or syncretised into new practical traditions. The dialogue between the object and the subject determined the appropriate course of action. This is the very definition of reader response.

In sum, this thesis has shown how interdisciplinary research methodologies can provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which death, ghosts, and the human body were conceptualised in the medieval world. Academic holism, the weaving together of the various strands of the cultural text, is a necessary approach to take when the object of study is underrepresented in, yet finds expression across, many different disciplines. By extending the interdisciplinary method to include subject areas that have hitherto only exchanged cursory dialogues, such as literary studies and archaeology, this thesis has highlighted the diverse and entrenched nature of medieval attitudes towards the walking dead. Some people feared that demons could reanimate the corpses of inveterate sinners. Others were adamant that the deceased’s spirit remained bound to the flesh. Scholastics taught that night-time assaults were the result of humoural instability. For a local populace, revenants were as common a threat in everyday life as a witch’s curse or temptation by the devil. Joan Armburgh’s nonchalance when recalling how Richard Baynard walked after death is testament to the ingrained ‘truth’ of such entities, whatever that ‘truth’ may be. The semiotic unstableness of the revenant rules out any definitive attempt to answer how or why they reappeared. One thing, however, is for certain: encounters
with the walking dead were not to be taken lightly. They often came at a terrible cost to the living.
Appendix

The following extracts detail the corpus of insular revenant narratives from the High and Late Middle Ages.


[The sheriff Leofstan] who was detested by heaven and earth to the end of his life, [was] in life possessed by a demon, then in the same way his corpse was possessed in death, [which was] restrained in the grave by being sunk into a swamp, the flesh sealed in a leather bag, thus having such a monument, ‘he would not rise again in judgement’ with the wicked; now that the vengeance of the Lord secured him to the root of the tree.


Chapter 16

At that moment Cweonthryth was standing in an upper room of the western church of St. Peter, which is separated from the forecourt of the monastery [of Winchcombe] by a road. When she saw the multitude running down the hill with the triumphal procession of her brother’s glory, she began to be consumed with anger, indignation, and bitterness. Snatching up her Psalter, by some kind of witchcraft she set about singing not for him, but rather, chanting against him the one hundred and eighth psalm so that, in perversely saying it back to front – from end to beginning, from the last verse to the first – she might make it harmful to her brother’s happy state, But her curse turned back on her. For, working upwards from the bottom, as this verse rolled off her venomous lips: ‘This is the work of them who detract me from the Lord: and who speaks evil against my soul’, straightaway both her eyes, rooted out from their sockets, dropped upon the very page she was reading. That same Psalter, adorned with silver, still shows the proof of this chastisement, stained on the same sentence with the blood of the fallen eyeballs. That wretched woman died shortly afterwards, and they say she could not stay buried in either the church or the forecourt nor in the cemetery, but that a brilliantly shining child appeared before a certain man, and gave instructions that she should be thrown into some remote gully.


Book II.124. 1

They say that Alfred was buried first in the cathedral, because his own monastery [Winchester] was still unfinished; but that not long after, the deluded canons maintained that the king’s ghost returned to his dead body and wandered at night through their lodgings, and so his son and successor took up his father’s remains and laid them in peace in the new monastery. This nonsense and the like (it is believed, for example, that the corpse of a criminal after death is possessed by a demon, and walks) wins credit among the English from a sort of inborn credulity; they borrow it, no doubt, from the pagans, as in Virgil’s line: ‘Such shapes are said to wander after death’.
Chapter 258.

Ancient tradition has it that Brihtwold, being slow to do good but quick to do evil, came to a pitiful end, dying in the town surrounded by the materials for a drinking bout, and was buried among his predecessors [as abbot of Malmesbury] in the church of St Andrew, which is right next to the big church. It is generally believed that the watchmen at the church were disturbed by dreamlike shadowy shapes, until they dug up Brihtwold’s body and sunk it in a deep marsh far away from the monastery. At intervals a noxious smell rose from the marsh and spread its noisome stench over the surrounding countryside.


Chapter 47

Again, and injury was committed against the church which the Lord, on account of the virgin’s merits, avenged in a terrifying way. There were two villagers living in Stapenhill under the jurisdiction of the abbot of Burton who ran away to a neighbouring village of Drakelow, wrongfully leaving their lords, the monks, and wishing to live under the authority of count Roger the Poitevin. The father of the monastery ordered that their crops, which had not yet been taken out of the barns, should be seized and taken to his own barns, hoping in this way to induce them to return to their own dwellings. But these men went off to count Roger and brought a false charge before him, stirring him up and speaking wickedly. The count’s anger was roused against the abbot, so much that he threatened to kill him wherever he might find him. Violently angry, he gathered a great troop of knights and peasants with weapons and carts and sent them in a great company to the monks’ barns at Stapenhill and had them seize by force all the crops stored there, those belonging to the abbey which should supply the monks’ food as well as those of the wicked fugitives. Not content with this, count Roger sent many men and knight to the abbey’s fields near Blackpool, commanding them to lay waste to the church’s crops with all their might and encouraging them to lure into battle the ten knights of the abbot’s own family whom he had in his company. The abbot heard about this and forbade his knights from going out. He and his monks entered the church barefoot and groaning and, in tears, set down on the ground the shrine of the blessed virgin containing her most holy bones. In unison they addressed a desperate appeal to the Lord, beseeching His boundless power with all their hearts that He should deign to help His servants in His goodness, if it were His will, and that He should make known with a manifest miracle His aid to those who were struggling in such difficulty.

Meanwhile, as those inside were praying with one voice, the ten knights deciding to ignore the prohibition and, arming themselves with one accord, without the knowledge of the abbot or the monks, mounted their horses boldly and set out to do battle in the field, few against many. One of the abbot’s knight immediately spurred his horse into a gallop, struck the count’s steward and hurled him to the ground so forcefully that the power of the blow broke his leg. Such a display of strength in the first attack terrified the enemy. Now another of the abbot’s knights likewise spurred his horse to a gallop and struck a knight who was a relative of the count, knocking him into a nearby stream, hurling him with tremendous force into the mud far from his horse. The rest of the monk’s knights each acted so bravely in this fight that ten men put more than sixty to flight and a few drove very many from the field, to their great shame, through the merit of the virgin and the power of God.

The very next day, at the third hour, the two runaway peasants who were the cause of this evil were sitting down to eat, when they were both suddenly struck down dead. Next morning they were placed in wooden coffins and buried in the churchyard at Stapenhill, the village from whence they had fled. What followed was amazing and truly remarkable. That very same say on which they were interred they appeared at evening, while the sun was still up, at Drakelow, carrying on their shoulders the wooden coffins in which they had been buried. The whole following knight they walked through the paths and fields of the village, now in the shape of men carrying wooden coffins on their shoulders, now in the likeness of bears and dogs or other animals. They spoke to the other peasants,
hanging on the walls of their houses and shouting, ‘Move, quickly, move! Get going! Come!’ When these astonishing events had taken place every evening and every night for some time, such a disease afflicted the village that all the peasants fell into desperate straits and within a few days all expect three (whom we shall discuss later) perished by sudden death in a remarkable way.

The count, seeing these terrible occurrences, was stunned and terrified. He repented and came with his knight to the monastery, where he begged humble pardon, made a firm concord with the abbot and monks, and entreated them with prayers that they should placate God and the virgin whom he had offended. Before them all, with faithful devotion, he gave a command to Drogo the reeve of the village that there should be a double restitution for all the damages he had inflicted, and so, in peace of mind, he left the monastery and hastened without delay to his other lands. Drogo then quickly returned and restored double to the abbey as he had been ordered and, after seeking pardon yet again, left for other parts with all haste, desiring to escape that lethal scourge. The two peasants who still remained in the village (Drogo was the third) fell sick and languished for a long time. Men were living in terror of the phantom dead men who carried their wooden coffins on their shoulders every evening and knight, as has been described, and they received permission from the abbot to go to their graves and dig them up. They found them intact, but the linen cloths over their faces were stained with blood. They cut off the men’s heads and placed them in the grave between their legs, tore out their hearts from their corpses, and covered the bodies with earth again. They brought the hearts to the place called Dodecrossefora/Dodefreseford and there burned them from morning until evening. When they had been burnt up, they cracked with a great sound and everyone there saw an evil spirit in the form of a crow fly from the flames. Soon after this was done both the disease and the phantoms ceased. The two peasants sick in their beds recovered their health as soon as they saw the smoke rising from the fires where the hearts were burned. They got up, gathered together their sons and wives and all their possessions, and, giving thanks to God and to the holy virgin that they had escaped, they departed to the next village, which was called Gresley, and settled there. Drakelow was thus abandoned and for long thereafter no one dared to live there, fearing the vengeance of the Lord that struck there and wondering at the prodigies that God omnipotent had worked through the holy virgin.


‘Of Magic’, fol. 32r, col. 1.

He who practices divinations from the funeral of any dead person or from his body or his clothing, lest the dead take vengeance or in order than another not in the same house shall die, or to gain by this something toward his advantage or health shall do penance for forty days.


‘Of a Prodigy’ (dist. ii. 27).

I know of a strange portent that occurred in Wales. William Laudin, an English Knight, strong of body and of proved valour came to Gilbert Foliot, then bishop of Hereford, now of London, and said: ‘My Lord, I come to you for advice. A Welshman of evil life died of late unchristianly enough in my village, and straightaway after four nights took to coming back every night to the village, and will not desist from summoning singly and by name his fellow villagers, who upon being called at once fall sick and die within three days, so that now there are very few of them left’. The bishop, marvelling, said: ‘Peradventure the Lord has given power to the evil angel of that lost soul to move about in the dead corpse. However, let the body be exhumed, cut the next through with a spade, and sprinkle the body and the grave well with holy water, and replace it.’ When this was done, the survivors were none the less plagued by the former illusion. So, one night when the summoner had now left but few alive, he called William himself, citing him thrice. He, however, bold and quick as he was, and awake
to the situation, darted out with his sword drawn, and chases the demon, who fled, up to the grave, and there, as he fell into it, clave his head to the neck. From that hour the ravages of the wandering pestilence ceased, and did no more hurt either to William himself or to anyone else. The true facts of his death I know, but not the explanation (cause).

‘Another Prodigy’ (dist. ii. 28).

I know too that in the time of Roger, Bishop of Worcester, a man, reported to have died Unchristianly, for a month or more wandered about in his shroud both at night and also in open day, till the whole population of the neighbourhood laid siege to him in an orchard, and there he remained exposed to view, it is said, for three days. I know further that this Roger ordered a cross to be laid upon the grave of the wretch, and the man himself to be let go. When, followed by the people, he came to the grave, he started back, apparently at sight of the cross, and ran in another direction. Whereupon they wisely removed the cross: he sank into the grave, the earth closed over him, the cross was laid upon it and he remained quiet.

‘Another Prodigy’ (dist. ii. 30).

A knight of Northumberland was seated alone in his house after dinner in summer about the tenth hour, and lo, his father, who had died long before, approached him clad in a foul burial shroud. He though the appearance was the devil and drove it back from the threshold, but his father said: ‘Dearest son, fear not. I am your father and I bring you no ill; but call the priest and you shall learn the reason for my coming.’ He was summoned, and a crowd ran to the spot; when falling at his feet the ghost said: ‘I am that wretch whom long since you excommunicated unnamed, with many more, for unrighteous withholding of tithes; but the common prayers of the church and the alms of the faithful by God’s grace so helped me that I was permitted to ask for absolution.’ So being absolved he went, with a great train of people following, to his grave and sank into it, and closed it over him of his own accord. This new case has introduced a new subject of discussion into the book of divinity


‘The Buckingham Ghost’ (V. 22)

A wonderful event befell in the county of Buckingham, which I, in the first instance, partially heard from certain friends, and was afterwards more fully informed of by Stephen [de Swafeld], the venerable archdeacon of that province. A certain man died, and, according to custom, by the honourable exertion of his wife arid kindred, was laid in the tomb on the eve of the Lord's Ascension. On the following night, however, having entered the bed where his wife was reposing, he not only terrified her on awaking, but nearly crushed her by the insupportable weight of his body. The next night, also, he afflicted the astonished woman in the same manner, who, frightened at the danger, as the struggle of the third night drew near, took care to remain awake herself, and surround herself with watchful companions. Still he came; but being repulsed by the shouts of the watchers, and seeing that he was prevented from doing mischief, he departed. Thus driven off from his wife, he harassed in a similar manner his own brothers, who were dwelling in the same street; but they, following the cautious example of the woman, passed the nights in wakefulness with their companions, ready to meet and repel the expected danger. He appeared, notwithstanding, as if with the hope of surprising them should they be overcome with drowsiness; but being repelled by the carefulness and valour of the watchers, he rioted among the animals, both indoors and outdoors, as their wildness and unwonted movements testified.
Having thus become a like serious nuisance to his friends and neighbours, he imposed upon all the same necessity for nocturnal watchfulness; and in that very street a general watch was kept in every house, each being fearful of his approach unawares. After having for some time rioted in this manner during the night-time alone, he began to wander abroad in daylight, formidable indeed to all, but visible only to a few; for oftentimes, on his encountering a number of persons, he would appear to one or two only though at the same time his presence was not concealed from the rest. At length the inhabitants, alarmed beyond measure, thought it advisable to seek counsel of the church; and they detailed the whole affair, with tearful lamentation, to the above-mentioned archdeacon, at a meeting of the clergy over which he was solemnly presiding. Whereupon he immediately intimated in writing the whole circumstances of the case to the venerable bishop of Lincoln, who was then resident in London, whose opinion and judgment on so unwonted a matter he was very properly of opinion should be waited for: but the bishop, being amazed at his account, held a searching investigation with his companions; and there were some who said that such things had often befallen in England, and cited frequent examples to show that tranquillity could not be restored to the people until the body of this most wretched man were dug up and burnt. This proceeding, however, appeared indecent and improper in the last degree to the reverend bishop, who shortly after addressed a letter of absolution, written with his own hand, to the archdeacon, in order that it might be demonstrated by inspection in what state the body of that man really was; and he commanded his tomb to be opened, and the letter having been laid upon his breast, to be again closed: so the sepulchre having been opened, the corpse was found as it had been placed there, and the charter of absolution having been deposited upon its breast, and the tomb once more closed, he was thenceforth never more seen to wander, nor permitted to inflict annoyance or terror upon any one.

‘The Berwick Ghost’ (V. 23)

In the northern parts of England, also, we know that another event, not unlike this and equally wonderful, happened about the same time. At the mouth of the river Tweed, and in the jurisdiction of the king of Scotland, there stands a noble city which is called Berwick. In this town a certain man, very wealthy, but as it afterwards appeared a great rogue, having been buried, after his death sallied forth (by the contrivance, as it is believed, of Satan) out of his grave by night, and was borne hither and thither, pursued by a pack of dogs with loud barkings; thus striking great terror into the neighbours, and returning to his tomb before daylight. After this had continued for several days, and no one dared to be found out of doors after dusk -- for each dreaded an encounter with this deadly monster -- the higher and middle classes of the people held a necessary investigation into what was requisite to be done; the more simple among them fearing, in the event of negligence, to be soundly beaten by this prodigy of the grave; but the wiser shrewdly concluding that were a remedy further delayed, the atmosphere, infected and corrupted by the constant whirlings through it of the pestiferous corpse, would engender disease and death to a great extent; the necessity of providing against which was shown by frequent examples in similar cases.

They, therefore, procured ten young men renowned for boldness, who were to dig up the horrible carcass, and, having cut it limb from limb, reduce it into food and fuel for the flames. When this was done, the commotion ceased. Moreover, it is stated that the monster, while it was being borne about (as it is said) by Satan, had told certain persons whom it had by chance encountered, that as long as it remained unburnt the people should have no peace. Being burnt, tranquillity appeared to be restored to them; but a pestilence, which arose in consequence, carried off the greater portion of them: for never did it so furiously rage elsewhere, though it was at that time general throughout all the borders of England, as shall be more fully explained in its proper place.

‘The Hounds’ Priest (V. 24)

It would not be easy to believe that the corpses of the dead should sally (I know not by what agency) from their graves, and should wander about to the terror or destruction of the living, and again return to the tomb, which of its own accord spontaneously opened to receive them, did not frequent examples, occurring in our own times, suffice to establish this fact, to the truth of which there is abundant testimony. It would be strange if such things should have happened formerly, since we can
find no evidence of them in the works of ancient authors, whose vast labour it was to commit to writing every occurrence worthy of memory; for if they never neglected to register even events of moderate interest, how could they have suppressed a fact at once so amazing and horrible, supposing it to have happened in their day? Moreover, were I to write down all the instances of this kind which I have ascertained to have befallen in our times, the undertaking would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome; so I will fain add two more only (and these of recent occurrence) to those I have already narrated, and insert them in our history, as occasion offers, as a warning to posterity.

A few years ago the chaplain of a certain illustrious lady, casting off mortality, was consigned to the tomb in that noble monastery which is called Melrose. This man, having little respect for the sacred order to which he belonged, was excessively secular in his pursuits, and – what especially blackens his reputation as a minister of the holy sacrament – so addicted to the vanity of the chase as to be designated by many by the infamous title of ‘Hundeprest,’ or the dog-priest; and this occupation, during his lifetime, was either laughed at by men, or considered in a worldly view; but after his death – as the event showed – the guiltiness of it was brought to light: for, issuing from the grave at night-time, he was prevented by the meritorious resistance of its holy inmates from injuring or terrifying anyone within the monastery itself; whereupon he wandered beyond the walls, and hovered chiefly, with loud groans and horrible murmurs, round the bedchamber of his former mistress. She, after this had frequently occurred, becoming exceedingly terrified, revealed her fears or danger to one of the friars [monks] who visited her about the business of the monastery; demanding with tears that prayers more earnest than usual should be poured out to the Lord in her behalf as for one in agony. With whose anxiety the friar – for she appeared deserving of the best endeavours, on the part of the holy convent of that place, by her frequent donations to it – piously and justly sympathized, and promised a speedy remedy through the mercy of the Most High Provider for all.

Thereupon, returning to the monastery, he obtained the companionship of another friar, of equally determined spirit, and two powerful young men, with whom he intended with constant vigilance to keep guard over the cemetery where that miserable priest lay buried. These four, therefore, furnished with arms and animated with courage, passed the night in that place, safe in the assistance which each afforded to the other. Midnight had now passed by, and no monster appeared; upon which it came to pass that three of the party, leaving him only who had sought their company on the spot, departed into the nearest house, for the purpose, as they averred, of warming themselves, for the night was cold. As soon as this man was left alone in this place, the devil, imagining that he had found the right moment for breaking his courage, incontrovertibly roused up his own chosen vessel, who appeared to have reposed longer than usual. Having beheld this from afar, he grew stiff with terror by reason of his being alone; but soon recovering his courage, and no place of refuge being at hand, he valiantly withstood the onset of the fiend, who came rushing upon him with a terrible noise, and he struck the axe which he wielded in his hand deep into his body. On receiving this wound, the monster groaned aloud, and turning his back, fled with a rapidity not at all interior to that with which he had advanced, while the admirable man urged his flying foe from behind, and compelled him to seek his own tomb again; which opening of its own accord, and receiving its guest from the advance of the pursuer, immediately appeared to close again with the same facility. In the meantime, they who, impatient of the coldness of the night, had retreated to the fire ran up, though somewhat too late, and, having heard what had happened, rendered needful assistance in digging up and removing from the midst of the tomb the accursed corpse at the earliest dawn. When they had divested it of the clay cast forth with it, they found the huge wound it had received, and a great quantity of gore which had flowed from it in the sepulchre; and so having carried it away beyond the walls of the monastery and burnt it, they scattered the ashes to the winds. These things I have explained in a simple narration, as I myself heard them recounted by religious men.

The Ghost of Anant (V. 24)

Another event, also, not unlike this, but more pernicious in its effects, happened at the castle which is called Anantis, as I have heard from an aged monk who lived in honour and authority in those parts, and who related this event as having occurred in his own presence. A certain man of evil conduct flying, through fear of his enemies or the law, out of the province of York, to the lord of the before-named castle, took up his abode there, and having cast upon a service befitting his humour, laboured hard to increase rather than correct his own evil propensities. He married a wife, to his own ruin indeed, as it afterwards appeared; for, hearing certain rumours respecting her, he was vexed with the
spirit of Jealousy. Anxious to ascertain the truth of these reports, he pretended to be going on a
journey from which he would not return for some days; but coming back in the evening, he was
privily introduced into his bedroom by a maid-servant, who was in the secret, and lay hidden on a
beam overhanging, his wife's chamber, that he might prove with his own eyes if anything were done
to the dishonour of his marriage-bed. Thereupon beholding his wife in the act of fornication with
a young man of the neighbourhood, and in his indignation forgetful of his purpose, he fell, and was
dashed heavily to the ground, near where they were lying.

The adulterer himself leaped up and escaped; but the wife, cunningly dissembling the fact,
busied herself in gently raising her fallen husband from the earth. As soon as he had partially
recovered, he upbraided her with her adultery, and threatened punishment; but she answering,
‘Explain yourself, my lord,’ said she; ‘you are speaking unbecomingly which must be imputed not to
you, but to the sickness with which you are troubled.’ Being much shaken by the fall, and his whole
body stupefied, he was attacked with a disease, insomuch that the man whom I have mentioned as
having related these facts to me visiting him in the pious discharge of his duties, admonished him to
make confession of his sins, and receive the Christian Eucharist in proper form: but as he was
occupied in thinking about what had happened to him, and what his wife had said, put off the
wholesome advice until the morrow— that morrow which in this world he was fated never to behold!
— for the next night, destitute of Christian grace, and a prey to his well-earned misfortunes, he shared
the deep slumber of death. A Christian burial, indeed, he received, though unworthy of it; but it did
not much benefit him: for issuing, by the handiwork of Satan, from his grave at night-time, and
pursued by a pack of dogs with horrible barkings, he wandered through the courts and around the
houses while all men made fast their doors, and did not dare to go abroad on any errand whatever
from the beginning of the night until the sunrise, for fear of meeting and being beaten black and blue
by this vagrant monster. But those precautions were of no avail; for the atmosphere, poisoned by the
vagaries of this foul carcass, filled every house with disease and death by its pestiferous breath.

Already did the town, which but a short time ago was populous, appear almost deserted;
while those of its inhabitants who had escaped destruction migrated to other parts of the country, lest
they too should die. The man from whose mouth I heard these things, sorrowing over this desolation
of his parish, applied himself to summon a meeting of wise and religious men on that sacred day
which is called Palm Sunday, in order that they might impart healthful counsel in so great a dilemma,
and refresh the spirits of the miserable remnant of the people with consolation, however imperfect.
Having delivered a discourse to the inhabitants, after the solemn ceremonies of the holy day had been
properly performed, he invited his clerical guests, together with the other persons of honour who were
present, to his table. While they were thus banqueting, two young men (brothers), who had lost their
father by this plague, mutually encouraging one another, said, ‘This monster has already destroyed
our father, and will speedily destroy us also, unless we take steps to prevent it. Let us, therefore, do
some bold action which will at once ensure our own safety and revenge our father's death. There is no
one to hinder us; for in the priest’s house a feast is in progress, and the whole town is as silent as if
deserted. Let us dig up this baneful pest, and burn it with fire.’

Thereupon snatching up a spade of but indifferent sharpness of edge, and hastening to the
cemetery, they began to dig; and whilst they were thinking that they would have to dig to a greater
depth, they suddenly, before much of the earth had been removed, laid bare the corpse, swollen to an
enormous corpulence, with its countenance beyond measure turgid and suffused with blood; while the
napkin in which it had been wrapped appeared nearly torn to pieces. The young men, however,
spurred on by wrath, feared not, and inflicted a wound upon the senseless carcass, out of which
incontinently flowed such a stream of blood, that it might have been taken for a leech filled with the
blood of many persons. Then, dragging it beyo

Something equally horrible and marvellous happened in the West of Scotland, in Clydesdale, about four miles from Paisley, in the house of a certain knight, Sir Duncan de Insula [Lisle], which may serve to strike terror into sinners and foreshow the appearance of the damned in the day of the last resurrection. Now there was a certain fellow wearing the garments of holy religion who lived wickedly and died most wretchedly, being bound by the sentence of excommunication on account of certain acts of sacrilege committed in his own monastery. Long after his body had been buried, it vexed many in the same monastery by appearing plainly in the shade of night. This child of darkness proceeded to the house of the said knight in order to disturb the faith of simple persons and terrify them by molesting them in broad daylight, or, most probably, by a secret decree of God, that he might indicate by such token those who were implicated in his misdoing. Having then assumed a bodily shape (whether natural or aerial it is uncertain, but it was hideous, gross and tangible) he used to appear at noon-day in the dress of a black monk and settle on the highest parts of the dwellings or store houses.

And when men either shot at him with arrows or thrust him through with forks, straightaway whatever was driven into that damned substance was burnt to ashes in less time than it takes to tell it. Also he savagely felled and battered those who attempted to struggle with him as well-nigh to shatter all their joints.

Now the knight’s eldest son, an esquire of full age, was especially troublesome to him in this kind of fighting; and one evening, when the father was sitting with the household round the hearth, this malignant creature came in their midst, throwing them into confusion with missiles and blows. All the rest having taken to their heels, the esquire attacked him single-handed; but, most sad to say, he was found on the morrow slain by the creature. Wherefore, if it be true that a demon has no power over anybody except one who leads the life of a hog, it is easy to understand why that young man came to such an end.


Chapter 71

I fynde þat þer wer þre bretheren at debate in a toune and weron slayne all þre; but þe too haddon all þer rythus, and þe þrydde was not hosullud, and so weron beried togudir in þe church. Dan com a fend and toke þis cors þat was not anoylud, and ðode into itte and so forth into þe toune, and makud many cyes þe which men weron sore agaste; and dured þus a long tym. Dan was þer an ankur in þat toune in þe chruch, þat was in hys preyers before mydnythe, and seyed þe fend come be lythe of þe mone leke an ape; and whan he com to þe graue, anone, þe cors arose, and ðe ðode into hytte, and so forth in hys iurney, as he was wonte. Dan, whan he come aȝeayne, þis ankur coniured þis fend, in þe vertu of hym þat dyod on þe cros for mankynde, þat he schulde tellyn hym, why he hadde such power in þat cors rather þan in any oþur. Dan sade he: ‘For þis was not anoylud, þerfore I haue power in þis cors; bot þe soule is safe. Wherefore I go not þus for harme of hys soule, but to maken þopur to synnon on hym and to demon hym þopur þan he is, so þat I may putton þat aȝeynus hym in þe day of dome, and say how þei demod here neyghburres oþur þan þe schulde done, aȝeynus Goddis commaundement.

Story I: Concerning the ghost of a certain labourer at Rievaulx who helped a man to carry beans.

A certain man was riding on his horse carrying on its back a peck of beans. The horse stumbled on the road and broke its shin bone; which when the man saw he took the beans on his own back. And while he was walking on the road he saw as it were a horse standing on its hind feet and holding up its fore feet. In alarm he forbade the horse in the name of Jesus Christ to do him any harm. Upon this it went with him in the shape of a horse, and in a little while appeared to him in the likeness of a revolving haycock with a light in the middle; to which the man said, ‘God forbid that you bring evil upon me’. At these words it appeared in the shape of a man and the traveler conjured him. Then the spirit told him his name and the reason (of his walking) and the remedy, and he added, ‘Permit me to carry your beans and to help you.’ And thus he did as far as the beck but he was not willing to pass over it; and the living man knew not how the bag of beans was placed again on his own back. And afterwards he caused the ghost to be absolved and masses to be sung for him and he was eased.

Story II: Concerning a wonderful encounter between a ghost and a living man in the time of King Richard II.

It is said that a certain tailor of the name of Snowball was returning on horseback one night from Gilling to his home in Ampleforth, and on his way he heard as it were the sound of ducks washing themselves in the beck, and soon after he saw as it were a raven that flew round his face and came down to the earth, and struck the ground with its wings as though it were on the point of death. And the tailor got off his horse to take the raven, and as he did so he saw sparks of fire shooting from the sides of the raven. Whereupon he crossed himself and forbade him in the name of God to bring at that time any harm upon him. Then it flew off with a great screaming for about the space of a stone’s throw. Then again he mounted his horse and very soon the same raven met him as it flew, and struck him on the side and threw the tailor to the ground from the horse upon which he was riding; and he lay stretched upon the ground as it were in a swoon and lifeless, and he was very frightened. Then, rising and strong in faith, he fought with him with his sword until he was weary; and it seemed to him that he was striking a peat-sack; and he forbade him and conjured him in the name of God, saying ‘God forbid that you have power to hurt me on this occasion, but begone’. And again it flew off with a horrible screaming as it were the space of the flight of an arrow. And the third time it appeared to the tailor as he was carrying the cross of his sword upon his breast for fear, and it met him in the likeness of a dog with a chain around its neck. And when he saw it the tailor strong in faith, thought within himself, ‘What will become of me? I will adjure him in the name of the Trinity and by virtue of the blood of Christ from His five wounds that he speak with me, and do me no wrong, but stand fast and answer my questions and tell me his name and the cause of his punishment and the remedy that belongs to it’. And he did so. And the spirit, panting terrible and groaning, said, ‘Thus and thus did I, and for thus doing I have been excommunicated. Go therefore to a certain priest and ask him to absolve me. And it behooves me to have the full number of nine times twenty masses celebrated for me. And now of two things you must choose one. Either you shall come back to me on a certain night alone bringing to me the answer of those whose names I have given you; and I will tell you how you may be made whole, and in the meantime you need not fear the sight of a wood fire. Or otherwise your flesh shall rot and your skin shall dry up and shall fall from you utterly in a short time. Know moreover that I have met you now because today you have not heard the mass nor read the gospel of John [namely, the *in principio*] and have not seen the consecration of our Lord’s body and blood, for otherwise I should not have had full power of appearing to you’. And as he spoke with the tailor he was as it were on fire and his inner parts could be seen through his mouth and he formed his words in his entrails and did not speak with his tongue. Then the tailor asked permission from the ghost that he might have with him on his return some companion. But the ghost said, ‘No; but have upon you the four gospels and the name of victory, namely Jesus of Nazareth, on account of two other ghosts that abide here of whom one cannot speak when he is conjured and abides in the likeness of a fire or of a bush and the other is in the form a hunter and they are very dangerous to meet. Pledge me further on this stone that you will defame my bones to no-one except to the priests who celebrate on my behalf, and the others to whom you are sent on my behalf, who may be of use to me’. And he gave his word.
upon the stone that he would not reveal the secret, as has been already explained. Then he conjured
the ghost to go to Hodgebeck and to await his return. And the ghost said, ‘No, no,’ and screamed.
And the tailor said, ‘Go then to Byland Bank’, whereat he was glad.

The man of whom we speak was ill for some days, but then got well and went to York to
meet the priest who had been mentioned, who had excommunicated the dead man, and asked him for
absolution. But he refused to absolve him, and called to him another chaplain to take council with
him. And that chaplain called in another, and that other a third, to advise secretly the absolution of
this man. And the tailor asked of him, ‘Sir, you know the mutual token that I hinted in your ear’. And
he answered, ‘Yes, my son’. Then after many negotiations the tailor made satisfaction and paid five
shillings and received the absolution written on a piece of parchment, and was sworn not to defame
the dead man but to bury the absolution in the grave near his head, and secretly! And when he had got
it he went to a certain brother Richard of Pickering, a confessor of repute, and asked him whether the
absolution were sufficient and lawful. And he answered that it was. Then the tailor went to all the
orders of the friars of York and he had almost all the required masses celebrated during two or three
days, and coming home he buried the absolution in the grave as he had been ordered. And when all
these things had been duly carried out he came home, and a certain officious neighbor of his, hearing
that he had to report to the ghost on a certain night all that he had done at York, adjured him, saying,
‘God forbid that you go to this ghost without telling me of your going and of the day and the hour’.
And being so constrained, for fear of displeasing God, he told him, waking him up from his sleep
saying, I am going now. If you wish to come with me let us set off and I will give you a part of the
writings that I carry on me because of night fears’. Then the other said, ‘Do you want me to go with
you’, and the tailor said, ‘You must see to that; I will give no advice to you’. Then at last the other
said, ‘Get you gone in the name of the Lord and may God prosper you in all things’.

After these words he came to the appointed place and made a great circle with a cross and he
had upon him the four gospels and other holy words, and he stood in the middle of the circle and he
placed four reliquaries in the form of a cross on the edge of the circle; and on the reliquaries were
written words of salvation, namely Jesus of Nazareth, etc., and he waiting for the coming of the ghost.
He came at length in the form of a she-goat and went thrice round the circle saying, ‘Ah! Ah! Ah!’
And when he conjured the she-goat she fell prone upon the ground and rose up again in the likeness
of a man of great stature, horrible and thin, and like one of the dead kings in the pictures. And when
he asked whether the tailor’s labour had been of service to him, he answered, ‘Yes, praised be God.
And I stood at your back when you buried my absolution scroll in my grave and the ninth hour and
were afraid. No wonder you were afraid, for three devils were present there who have tormented me
in every way from the time when you first conjured me to the time of my absolution, suspecting that
they would have me but very little time in their custody to torment me. Know therefore that on
Monday next I shall pass into everlasting joy with thirty other
spirits. Go now to a certain beck and
you will find a broad stone; life it up and under it you will find a sand stone. Wash your whole body
in the stone until he fell asleep. ‘And say neither more nor less than I advise you and keep your eyes on the
ground and look not on a wood fire for this night at least’. And when he came home he was seriously ill for several days.

Story III: Concerning the ghost of Robert the son of Robert de Boltby of Kilburn, which was caught in a churchyard.

I must tell you that this Robert the younger died and was buried in a churchyard, but he had a habit of leaving his grave by night and disturbing and frightening the villagers. And the dogs of the village used to follow him and bark loudly. Then some young men of the village talked together and determined to catch him if they possibly could, and they came together to the cemetery. But when they saw the ghost they all fled with the exception of two. Of these one, called Robert Foxton, seized him and the entrance to the cemetery and placed him on the kirkstile while the other cried manfully, ‘Keep him fast until I come to you.’ The first one answered, ‘Go quickly to the parish priest that the ghost may be conjured, for with God’s help I will hold firmly what I have got until the arrival of the priest’. The parish priest made all haste to come, and conjured him in the name of the Holy Trinity and in the virtue of Jesus Christ that he should give him an answer to his questions. And when he had been conjured he spoke in the inside of his bowels, and not with his tongue, but as it were within an empty cask and he confessed his different offences. And when these were made known the priest absolved him but charged those who had seized him not to reveal his confession in any way; and henceforth as God willed he rested in peace.

It is said, moreover, that before his absolution he would stand at the doors of houses and at windows and walls as it were listening. Perhaps he was waiting to see if anyone would come out and conjure him and give help to him in his necessity. Some people say that he has been assisting and consenting to the murder of a certain man, and that he had done other evil things of which I must not speak in detail at present.

Story IV: Concerning the ghost of James Tankerlay.

Moreover the old men tell us that a certain man called James Tankerlay, formally a rector of Kirby, was buried in front of the chapter house at Byland, and used to walk at night as far a Kirby; and one night he blew out the eye of his concubine there. And it is said that the abbot and the convent caused his body to be dug up from the tomb along with the coffin, and the compelled Roger Wayneman to carry it as far as Gormyre. And while he was throwing the coffin into the water the oxen were almost drowned with fear. God forbid that I be in any danger for even as I have heard from my elders so have I written. May the Almighty have mercy upon him if indeed he were of the number of those destined to salvation.

Story V

What I write is a great marvel. It is said that a certain woman laid hold of a ghost and carried him on her back into a certain house in the presence of some men, one of whom reported that he saw the hands of the woman sink deeply into the flesh of the ghost as though the flesh were rotten and not solid nut phantom flesh.

Story VI: Concerning a certain canon of Newburgh who was seized after his death.

It happened that this man was talking with the master of the ploughmen and was walking with him in the field. And suddenly the master fled in great terror and the other man was left struggling with a ghost who foully tore his garments. And he being conjured confessed that he had been a certain canon of Newburgh, and that he had been excommunicated for certain silver spoons which he had hidden in a certain place. He therefore begged the living man that he would go to the place he mentioned and take them away and carry them to the prior and ask for absolution. And he did so and he found the
silver spoons in the place mentioned. And after absolution the ghost henceforth rested in peace. But the man was ill and languished for many days, and he affirmed that the ghost appeared to him in the habit of a canon.

Story VII

Concerning a certain ghost in another place who, being conjured, confessed that he was severely punished because being the hired servant of a certain landowner he stole his master’s corn and gave it to his oxen that they might look fat; and there was another thing which troubled him even more, namely that he ploughed the land not deeply but on the surface, wishing his oxen to keep fat; and he said there were fifteen spirits in one place severely punished for sins like his own which they had committed. He begged his conjurer therefore to ask his master for pardon and absolution so that he might obtain the suitable remedy.

Story VIII

Concerning another ghost that followed William of Bradeforth and cried ‘How, how, how’ thrice on three occasions. It happened that on the fourth night about midnight he went back to the New Place from the village of Ampleforth, and as he was returning by the road he heard a terrible voice shouting far behind him, and as it were on the hill side; and a little after it cried again in like manner but nearer, and the third time it screamed at the cross-roads ahead of him; and at last he saw a pale horse and his dog barked a little, but then hid itself in great fear between the legs of the said William. Whereupon he commanded the spirit in the name of the Lord and in virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ to depart and not block his path. And when he heard this he withdrew like a revolving piece of canvas with four corners and kept on turning. So that it seems that he was a ghost that mightily desired to be conjured and to receive effective help.

Story IX: Concerning the ghost of a man of Ayton in Cleveland.

It is reported that this ghost followed a man for four times twenty miles, that he should conjure and help him. And when he had been conjured he confessed that he had been excommunicated for a certain matter of sixpence; but after absolution and satisfaction he rested in peace. In all these things—as nothing evil was left unpunished nor contrariwise anything good unrewarded, God showed himself to be a just rewarder.

...It is said, too, that the ghost before he was conjured threw a living man over a hedge and caught him on the other side as he fell. When he was conjured he replied, ‘If you had done so first I would not have hurt you.... but here and there you were frightened and I did it’.

Story XI: Concerning a wonderful work of God, who calls things which are not though they were things which are, and who can act when and how he wills; and concerning a certain miracle.

It has been handed down to memory that a certain man of Cleveland, called Richard Rowntree, left his wife great with child and went with many others to the tomb of Saint James. And one night they passed the night in a wood near to the King’s highway. Wherefore one of the party kept watch for a part of the night against night-fears, and others slept in safety. And it happened that in that part of the night, in which the man we speak of was guardian and night watchman, he heard a great sound of people passing along the King’s highway. And some rode sitting on horses and sheep and oxen, and some on other animals; and all the animals were those that had been given to the church when they died. And at last he saw what seemed a small child wriggling along on the ground wrapped in a stocking. And he conjured him and asked him who he was, and why he thus wriggled along. And he made answer, ‘You ought not to conjure me for you were my father and I was your abortive son,
buried without baptism and without name’. And when he heard this the pilgrim took off his shirt and put it on his small child and gave him a name in the name of the Holy Trinity, and he took with him the old stocking in witness of the matter. And the child when he had thus received a name jumped with joy and henceforth walked erect upon his feet though previously he had wiggled. And when the pilgrimage was over he gave a banquet to his neighbours and asked his wife for his hose. She showed him one stocking but could not find the other. Then the husband showed her the stocking in which the child was wrapped and she was astonished. And as the midwives confessed the truth concerning the death and burial of the boy in the stocking a divorce took place between the husband and the wife in as much as he was the godfather of the abortive child. But I believe that this divorce was highly displeasing to God.

Story XII: Concerning the Sister of old Adam of Lond and how she was seized after her death according to the account given by old men.

It must be understood that this woman was buried in the churchyard of Ampleforth, and shortly after her death she was seized by William Trower the elder, and being conjured she confessed that she wandered in his road at night on account of certain charters which she had wrongfully given to Adam her brother. This was because a quarrel had arisen between her husband and herself, and therefore she had given the papers to her brother to the injury of her husband and her own children. So that after her death her brother expelled her husband from his house, namely from a toft and croft in Ampleforth with their appurtenances and from an oxgang of land in Heslarton and its appurtenances, and all this by violence. She begged therefore this William to suggest to her brother that he should restore these charters to her husband and her children and give back to them their land; for that otherwise she could by no means rest in peace until the day of judgement. So William, according to her commands, made this suggestion to Adam, but he refused to restore the charters, saying, ‘I don’t believe what you say’. And he answered, ‘My words were true in everything; wherefore if God will you shall hear your sister talking to you of this matter ere long’. And on another night he seized her again and carried her to the chamber of Adam and she spoke with him. And her hardened brother said, as some report, ‘If you walk forever I won’t give back the charters’. Then she groaned and answered, ‘My God judge between you and me. Know then that until your death I shall have no rest; wherefore after your death you will walk in my place’. It is said, moreover, that her right hand hung down, and that it was very black. And she was asked why this was, and she answered that it was because often in her disputes she had held it out and sworn falsely. At length she was conjured to go to another place on account of the night-fear and terror which she caused to the folk of that village. I ask pardon if by chance I have offended in writing what is not true. It is said, however, that Adam de Lond, the younger, made partial satisfaction to the true heir after the death of the elder Adam.


And with inne a while after as he went a huntyng with my lady of Bergeveney sodenly [Richard Baynard] felle downe and dyed with owte howsill and shrifte and anon after he walkyd and yit doth and hath don moche harme as it is openly noysed and knownen in the contre there a boute.
Table 1: Location of revenant encounters in extant documentary sources (where known).

Note: The first date refers to the composition of the manuscript source. The bracketed date refers to the year in which the encounter occurred. Where this is not mentioned in the text or implied by the narrative’s codicological context, the date has been omitted. All locations calculated using ArchGIS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parsley (Clydesdale)</td>
<td>c.1140 [1296]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melrose, c.1198 [1196]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunwich, c.1198 [1196]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Northumberland”, c.1182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, c.1400 [1400]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easby, c.1357 [1357]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byland church, Cleveland [1378]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bury St. Edmunds, c.1599 [1000s]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hereford, c.1162 [1145-1160]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester, c.1182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windcombe, c.1079 [c.950]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmsbury, c.1127 [1010]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchester, c.1125 [901]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Chapter Five Case Studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Burial Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winnall II</td>
<td>Winchester</td>
<td>c.620–700</td>
<td>Boulder on chest; charcoal; ‘stakes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skaill House</td>
<td>Orkney</td>
<td>c.650s</td>
<td>Prone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton</td>
<td>Cambridgeshire</td>
<td>c.690s</td>
<td>Liminal landscape; ritual assemblage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rounds</td>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>c.1000s</td>
<td>Charcoal; pillow stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fillingham</td>
<td>Lincolnshire</td>
<td>c.1020s</td>
<td>Stone in oral cavity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hexham Abbey</td>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>c.1050–1100</td>
<td>Prone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mark’s</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>c.1050–1150</td>
<td>Charcoal; copper bracelet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Peter’s</td>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>c.1050–1450</td>
<td>Charcoal; ash; boulder; prone; jet bead; liminal landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td>c.1080–1220</td>
<td>Head between legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newhall Point</td>
<td>Ross and Cromarty</td>
<td>c.1100</td>
<td>Boulder on chest; pillow stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Peter’s</td>
<td>Barton-upon-Humber</td>
<td>c.1100–1200</td>
<td>Sealed in lime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangleha’</td>
<td>Kincardinshire</td>
<td>c.1180–1320</td>
<td>Liminal landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary Spital</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>c.1200s</td>
<td>Head between legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haverhill</td>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td>c.1200–1400</td>
<td>Stone in oral cavity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Margaret Fybrigate</td>
<td>Norwich</td>
<td>c.1240</td>
<td>Stone in oral cavity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton Hill South</td>
<td>Basingstoke</td>
<td>c.1200–1400</td>
<td>Pillow Stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew’s Fishergate</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>c.1280s</td>
<td>Copper leg truss; decapitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James’s Priory</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>c.1300</td>
<td>Absolution scroll; jet pendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thetford</td>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>c.1300</td>
<td>Absolution Scroll?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holyrood Abbey</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>c.1300</td>
<td>Prone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Smithfield</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>c.1349</td>
<td>Ash; copper bracelet; ‘stakes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmelite Abbey</td>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>c.1400</td>
<td>Copper bracelet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumbeagh</td>
<td>County Offally</td>
<td>c.1500</td>
<td>Liminal Landscape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Fig. 1. An angel and demon do battle over a dying man’s soul. Latin MS 21, fol. 147v, John Rylands Library, Manchester, c.1470s (Reproduced by courtesy of the University Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester).
Fig. 2. Temptation to Avarice (left) and its remedy (right). *Ars Moriendi*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, c.1490–1491. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
Fig. 3. Funerary procession. Latin MS 39, fol. 249r, John Rylands Library, Manchester, c.1487 (Reproduced by courtesy of the University Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester).
Fig. 4. Excerpt from the Revel Dance of Death, c.1463–1493 (Gertsman, ‘Revel (Tallinn)’, fig. 1).
©Art Museum of Estonia.
Fig. 5. Location of the revenant encounters in the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* in relation to monasteries and major towns (calculated using ArchGIS).
Fig. 6. Ash-lined coffin burial of an adult (SK1547) from the graveyard of St. Peter’s, Leicester, c.1290–c.1370 (Gnanaratnam, fig. 92). Reproduced by courtesy of University of Leicester Archaeological Services.
Fig. 7. Lead wrapping found upon abdomen of adult female, graveyard of St. James’s Priory, Bristol, c.1200s–1300s (Jackson, fig. 82). Reproduced by courtesy of Bristol and Region Archaeological Services.
Fig. 8. Vampire’s skull from a Lazzaretto Nuovo plague pit, Venice, c. 1500 (Nuzzolese and Borrini, ‘Vampire Remains’, fig. 2a).
Fig. 9. Crossroad burial from Broad Town, Wiltshire, c.600s (Clarke, figs. 2, 4). Courtesy of Bob Clarke and the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.
Fig. 10. Sinners imprisoned in barrows and tormented by demons. MS Harley 603, fol. 72r, British Library, London, c.1030. © The British Library Board (Shelfmark: Harley 603 ff.71v-72).
Fig. 11. SK673 (left) and SK665 (right) with boulders placed on torso, graveyard of St. Peter’s, Leicester, c.1250 (Gnanaratnam, figs. 89, 90). Reproduced by courtesy of University of Leicester Archaeological Services.
Fig. 13. Jet Pendant from SK64, graveyard of St. James’s Priory, Bristol, c.1300 (Jackson, fig. 85). Reproduced by courtesy of Bristol and Region Archaeological Services.