

The Life of St Osith

A Critical Dossier, Edition and Translation

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The Life of St Osith: Introduction

JOCELYN WOGAN-BROWNE

The foundresses of Britain, as constructed by that country's post-Conquest inhabitants, are becoming better known than they used to be. The most important secular story for the Angevins and Plantagenets and their successors has long been acknowledged to be the eponymous foundation of Britain by Brutus. Variant versions of the Brutus story are extant in verse and prose in hundreds of manuscripts. The *Brut's* position as the framing narrative of post-Conquest Britain is well-illustrated in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Arthurian narrative is re-set within the Brutus story of Britain (to which Arthurian narratives in any case ultimately owe their own popularity). Recent scholarship, however, has begun elucidating a scandalous female prequel to Brutus in the story of Albina, first occupant of a country she names Albion after herself. This story first appears in Anglo-Norman before 1330 and becomes rapidly attached as a prelude to many of the French, Latin, and English versions of the *Brut* (Johnson 1995; Marvin 2001).

Alongside intensified recognition of the post-colonial Brutus and of Albina have come intensified perceptions of the importance of post-Conquest monastic lives and foundations. As Jane Zatta writes,

It could be said that Anglo-Norman lives of English saints trojanized Anglo-Saxon Christianity by portraying the Norman succession to the government of English religious houses as a kind of *translatio ecclesiae* in much the same way as the royal historians had portrayed the Norman Conquest of England as an ongoing project of political perfection progressing from pagan Troy to transitional Rome to Christian Europe. Norman lives of Anglo-Saxon saints highlight their role as the founders of English Christianity, the transition point between the Danish pagan past and the Christian future destined to culminate in the supercession of the Normans. (Zatta, 2003, 1)

The figure of the Anglo-Saxon virgin princess saint is an important template in this endeavour, used alike by monastic houses with and without well-founded historical claims to such patronesses. *The Life of St Osith*, extant in four Latin *vitae* and one Anglo-Norman version, is one of the most fascinating of such post-Conquest re-inventions of Anglo-Saxon sanctity. Uniting seventh, ninth, and eleventh century sources, Osith is a powerfully syncretic figure, one who metamorphoses yet again in the later Middle Ages to assimilate St Zita, a household servant saint, whose cult is a late medieval importation from Lucca (Bethell 1970a; Sutcliffe 1993). Osith's re-inventions most directly served the Bishops of London at St Paul's and the twelfth-century house of canons regular at Chich in Essex, but traces of her cult at Aylesbury, Bicester, and Hereford suggest her wider resonance (Hohler 1966; Bethell 1970b; Barrow 1987; Hagerty 1987; Bailey 1989). Her birthplace at Quarrendon in Buckinghamshire is said in the Anglo-Norman *Vie seinte Osith* to be marked by a bare mound (vv. 183-94) not fruitful in this world, but an important sign of the next. This is part of the prologue's extended play on giving up earth to gain territory in heaven. Since Anglo-Norman women could inherit in the absence of sons and since Anglo-Norman widows with some control of their dowers were major ecclesiastical and monastic patrons, the prologue's claim that not only men but women give up their land and lives to God is well-advised (vv. 47-8). The virgin intactness so often a homologue for land rights and property in post-Conquest sources has socio-economic resonances as well as other cultural powers: like Christina of Markyate, Osith's private vowing of her virginity to Christ sooner or later involves the interest of many other people and cannot remain hidden. But, as Zatta further points out, within the post-Conquest socio-saintly economy,

Anglo-Saxon virgin saints had a particular role because their divinely conceded exemption from a woman's normal social subordination provided another precedent for justifying the rebellion of a monastic house against political coercion. From a political point of view, these lives show that insubordina-

tion to lawful authority when directed by God constitutes obedience rather than rebellion and is not incompatible with respect for social hierarchy. (Zatta 2003, 3)

The Anglo-Norman life, longer and richer than the known Latin *vitae*, elaborates Osith's struggle, lasting for over three years, to preserve her virginity from her pagan husband, King Sighere of the East Saxons. At its climax, he is diverted by the sudden appearance of a compulsively huntable white stag, a motif whose occurrences in romance make it suggestive of courtly *Minnejagd*. But it is equally reminiscent of the deer often found in monastic foundation stories, where animals, guaranteed as vehicles of the numinous by their very incapacity for reason, frequently draw up the boundaries of land to be hallowed to God (Wogan-Browne, 2001, 95).

King Sighere returns angry and frustrated from his unsuccessful pursuit of the stag up the East Anglian coast to Dunwich, only to find that Osith has taken advantage of his absence to veil herself at the altar. Sighere's acceptance of this is relatively rapid and complete (and well explained from the perspective offered by Zatta's account of these lives as the complex figuration of a rebellion against patriarchy that does not subvert social hierarchy), and he endows Osith with lands and personnel for her monastic foundation. This is established and staffed without trouble, until Osith is one day surprised and decapitated by pagan Danish pirates as she bathes in a secret spring with her maidens. Osith's posthumous career is focused around her power to defend her rights and property: a series of vengeance miracles demonstrates Osith's refusal to tolerate infractions, as she paralyzes ships and people when crossed. The Bishop of London himself, attempting to re-appropriate Chich from the episcopal estate of Clacton (with its privilege of deer hunting) is vengefully paralyzed by Osith and never walks again.

Zatta provides a new approach to the composition and structure of the Anglo-Norman life in her argument that it is not, as thought by earlier scholars, a late twelfth-century life with a

thirteenth-century interpolation, but a single work composed as a whole in response to the crises involving the canons of Chich and the bishops of London in the later twelfth century. Zatta's 1999 study (reprinted below) illuminatingly reads the paralysis miracles in the specific context of episcopal versus monastic struggles over Chich's land and property rights. She also sees a more widely representative role for Osith as a figure through whom the legal, judicial, social and cultural aspects of lordship are explored in the changing post-Conquest context.

One consequence of this view is that the Life of Osith cannot be simply appropriated as a pro-feminist biography of a successful career virgin without careful and informed historical negotiation. As Zatta argues, "it is clear that the interests of the hagiographers did not center on providing biographies of holy women, nor even primarily on inspiring piety, but rather on using the ideological paradigms offered by virgin saints for local political interests" (2003, 5). Nevertheless, as Zatta recognized in her 1999 study and further developed in her work towards a volume of translated Anglo-Norman lives, the Anglo-Norman poet's setting of Osith in conflict with familial, political, and ecclesiastical authority transforms "a stylized tale of hagiographic renunciation into a psychologically complex and realistic portrayal of a clever, determined and manipulative woman" (2003, 7).

Osith's potential as a role model for Anglo-Norman women is emphasized by the manuscript context in which the life is extant. This manuscript, London, BL Additional 70513, is an important collection of Anglo-Norman saints' lives, largely put together in the late thirteenth century and belonging, certainly by the early fourteenth century, to the aristocratic canonesses of Campsey Ash, an Augustinian priory in Suffolk, some thirty miles (as the crow flies) to the north of Chich. Here, according to an inscription in the manuscript, it was used for mealtime reading. *La Vie sainte Osith* is one of three native British abbess' saints' lives included in the Campsey collection, which also contains all

the three known hagiographic lives composed by women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England, together with texts connected with Countess Isabella of Arundel (d. 1271). As virgin patroness of the canons at Chich, Osith here joins a pantheon of elite women, both in terms of her companion texts and the manuscript's users (Russell 2003; Wogan-Browne 2003).

Among other fresh emphases following from Zatta's argument for the unified character of *Osith*, an emphasis on monastic networks and transmissions emerges. The Anglo-Norman *Osith* includes an opening miracle in which Osith is schooled in the forest of Arden under the abbess Modwenna and, having fallen into a river while carrying a book between nunneries, is resurrected without harm to herself or the book after three days under water in a place subsequently known as Nunpool. This miracle is very similar to one in the lives of St Modwenna of Burton (herself a re-invention of an earlier Celtic and British figure: Bartlett, 2002). The Anglo-Norman life of Modwenna is generally agreed to be thirteenth century and hence a later text than the Anglo-Norman life of Osith, so that *Osith* is not borrowing from *Modwenna*. The loss of some of the Latin source material on Osith known to have existed in the twelfth century makes the textual links between the two abbess figures, Modwenna and Osith, difficult to determine.¹ But there is a text of *Modwenna* in the same Campsey manuscript in which the extant text of *Osith* is found, so that at least one female elite audience had the opportunity of hearing the miracle of resurrection from Nunpool as told to the glory of two different virgin abbess figures. The question of what they made of this story and of the many other comparisons and contrasts available in the Campsey manuscript, as of the origins

¹The Life by William de Vere, Bishop of Hereford (1186-1198), whose mother Alice (d. c. 1163) was a corrodian at Chich in her widowhood, can be reconstructed only through Leland's notes (Bethell 1970a, 75-76). *Osith*'s treatment of the drowning miracle in Arden is close to Geoffrey of Burton's *vita* of Modwenna at some points, to Conchubranus's eleventh-century *vita* in others and also different from both these in still other points: see Bethell 1970a, 83-85, and n. 13 to the translation below.

and purposes of the collection itself, remain crucial questions in the history of women and medieval literature in England. Jane Zatta's study of the Osith life is a paradigmatic example of the complexity with which these questions will require answering and of the ways in which they are questions for women's and for everyone's literary histories.

The *Vie Sainte Osith*: Hagiography and Politics in Anglo-Norman England

JANE DICK ZATTA

The *Vie Sainte Osith* is a little-known Anglo-Norman verse life of an early English virgin martyr. The saint commemorated in this life is a pseudo-historical composite made up of three Anglo-Saxon holy women connected to the seventh and tenth centuries.¹ Little is known about the pre-Conquest history of this saint's cult,² but a church dedicated to Osyth, dependent on the See of London and served by a small community of chaplains, existed at Chich in Essex at the time of the Conquest. The cult of St. Osyth rose to prominence under the Norman encouragement of Anglo-Saxon saints. In 1076, her relics were translated by Bishop Hugh, and again in 1186 by Maurice, but the real promotion of Osyth came under Bishop Richard Belmeis I of London, who

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I would like to thank Roy Harris for very helpful suggestions and comments.

¹The women are Osgytha, granddaughter of Penda and wife of Sighere, King of Essex, a seventh-century king mentioned by Bede; Edith, a composite figure, connected in the Anglo-Norman life to a sister of Athelstan of the late tenth century and to St. Monenna, foundress of Killeavy (d. 517); and Modwenna, of the mid-seventh century, who is said to have cured Prince Alfred of a sore disease. For the relationship of Osyth, Edith, and Modwenna, see Christopher Hohler, "St. Osyth and Aylesbury," *Records of Buckinghamshire* 18 (1966): 61-72; and A. I Baker, "An Anglo-French Life of St. Osith," *Modern Language Review* 6 (1911): 476-502 and 7 (1912): 74-93, 157-92.

²The Ramsey Abbey chronicler records that in 1144, Bishop Aelfward was struck with leprosy for having committed the sacrilege of robbing Osyth's tomb. See Denis Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis and the Foundation of St. Osyth's," *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 2 (1970): 301.

founded a house of black canons there whom he endowed with the manor of Chich and other churches. The canons who settled at Chich came from the house of the Holy Trinity Aldgate in London, which had been founded about 1107 by Queen Matilda on the advice of St. Anselm.³ The house, richly gifted by Bishop Richard, an intimate of Henry I, as well as by the king himself and the Archbishop of Canterbury, early achieved a reputation as a center of learning in the social and intellectual milieu of the Anglo-Norman royalty. William of Malmesbury mentions its reputation for letters in his *Gesta Pontificum*: “There were and there are there clerks distinguished in letters, so that it may be said that the countryside blossoms with their happy example.”⁴ At least four lives of Osyth were composed in the twelfth century. One of these, now lost, was written by William de Vere, who grew up in the court of Henry I and his second wife, Adelaide of Louvain, and who was the patron of Walter Map, Gerald of Wales, and Robert Grosseteste.⁵ In the reign of Henry II, John

³See Bethell, “Richard of Belmeis,” for an account of the early history of St. Osyth’s.

⁴From the *Gesta Pontificum*, cited by Bethell, “Richard of Belmeis,” 306.

⁵Both the textual and cultic tradition of this saint are complex. The extant medieval lives are the following: 1. MS. Bodley 285, a Latin life surviving in a manuscript of the mid- to late twelfth century, probably from Ramsey Abbey, written certainly after 1107 and probably after 1127. 2. MS. Landsdowne 436, a Latin life surviving in a fourteenth-century manuscript from the nunnery at Romsey in Hampshire; Bethell considers this an abbreviation of Bodley 285, as does A. I. Baker, but Morgan J. Desmond believes Landsdowne to be the earlier. 3. The Anglo-Norman life, surviving in a single manuscript, Welbeck Abbey MS. I C. 1, which in the fourteenth century belonged to the nunnery at Campsey in Suffolk, where it was used for readings at mealtimes. 4. A life embedded in a series of lessons for St. Osyth’s feast day, Oct. 7, surviving in a fourteenth-century compilation of saints’ lives made at Bury St. Edmund’s abbey in Suffolk, now MS. Bodley 240. 5. A series of notes composed by the sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland, taken from a lost life composed by William de Vere in the late twelfth century.

For one reconstruction of the relationships among the lives, see Denis Bethell, “The Lives of St. Osyth of Essex and St. Osyth of Aylesbury,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 88 (1970): 75-127. For a discussion of the relationship between the Aylesbury and Essex traditions, see Hohler, “St. Osyth and Aylesbury”; and R. P. Hagerty, “The Buckinghamshire Saints Reconsidered, 2: St. Osyth and St. Edith of Aylesbury,” *Records of Buckinghamshire* 29 (1987): 125-32.

of Salisbury was an ardent advocate of the house, defending its rights against the attempts to expropriate certain of its churches by Richard II of Belmeis, Bishop of London (1152-62). The prominence of the cult of St. Osyth at the heart of the intellectual circles close to the Norman and Angevin kings makes her Anglo-Norman life, by far the longest and most complete of the extant lives, especially important to a study of the development of vernacular literature in the twelfth century.

On both the secular and the ecclesiastical level, Anglo-Norman England was marked by a struggle between an institutional hierarchy and a subject population that was struggling for independence and self-determination, a struggle inscribed in secular and ecclesiastical writings alike. Political and ecclesiastical interests expressed through well-recognized genres such as history, law, and hagiography created expectations that could be manipulated by authors, sometimes transgressively. In the context of a complex network of colliding interests, authors with different institutional allegiances and social purposes exploited genre conventions to present their audiences with different constructions of the role institutional authority played in the realization of individuals' goals.⁶ Official histories written for Norman and Angevin monarchs in the first two generations after the Conquest promote the belief that submission and obedience to an idealized monarch result in a transfer of his qualities—noble origins, natural superiority, and divinely favored success—from the ruler to the subject almost in the same way that hereditary traits are passed from father to son.⁷ They offer obedient subjects

⁶In some cases institutional authority is portrayed as enabling that fulfillment; in others it is an obstacle that the individual must overcome.

⁷See, for example, Henry of Huntingdon in the prologue to the *Historia Anglorum*: "And we pray you, Bishop Alexander, father of the fatherland, prince second to the king, that anything we have written well may be brightened by your praise, and that you will better what is less good." Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum (History of the English People)*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 7.

a subsumed participation in the national authority from which they would otherwise be excluded.⁸ Likewise, from the twelfth century, but especially from the thirteenth, competition with an increasingly hegemonic and centralized monarchy led the church to encourage the reorientation of devotional practices away from the direct and personal spirituality advocated by an Anselm or a Bernard, and towards a piety contained within the liturgy. The religious didactic literature that promotes a sacramental program of salvation, in which the church plays an indispensable role in mediating the relationship between God and individual, views the relationship between institution and individual in much the same way as the official histories: these works teach patience and obedient submission to the institutional church, of which the submission and obedience the individual owes to secular authority is an analogue.⁹

At the same time, emerging classes sought literary forms that would legitimize their own aspirations. The Anglo-Norman

⁸Thus William of Malmesbury writes in his dedication to Robert, Earl of Gloucester:

The virtue of celebrated men holds forth as its greatest excellence, its tendency to excite the love of persons even far removed from it: hence the lower classes make the virtues of their superiors their own, by venerating those great actions, to the practice of which they cannot themselves aspire.

William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England, ed. and trans. J. A. Giles (London, 1847), 1.

⁹A characteristic example is Robert Grosseteste's *Chasteau d'Amour*, a sermon in the post-Lateran IV tradition of educational programs promoting essential church doctrine, which shows the advantages of the sacramental program of salvation by an extended comparison between the characteristics of feudal allegiance and those of Christian obedience. And in the *Myroure of Lewed Men*, a fourteenth-century translation of Grosseteste's *Chasteau d'Amour* adapted as part of the same program of basic doctrinal instruction, the Monk of Sawley explains the fifth commandment by telling his reader that just as he owes "buxumnes and hounour" to his father and mother, so too does he to his spiritual mother, Holy Church, and to his lord and king: "And who so is thi wardly lord or thy kyng / Is taken for thi fadir in this byddyng" (ll. 105-06). Cited from Kari Sajavaara, ed., *The Middle English Translations of Robert Grosseteste's "Chateau D'Amour"* (Helsinki: Societe Neophilologique, 1967), 36.

Brut translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's famous chronicle, in vogue during the twelfth century, translate down the social scale the authorizing value of the Latin histories, but in adapting Geoffrey's grandiose and imperializing vision of British destiny to promote the interests of the lesser nobility, they shift the emphasis from the obedience owed by subjects to the gratitude owed by rulers.¹⁰ Romances of English heroes, which began to appear towards the end of the twelfth century, appropriate the authorizing strategies of the histories, but they do so to subvert, not to legitimize, the absolute power of monarchy. As Susan Crane has shown, the romances of English heroes reflect the aspirations of the tenurial class for a social order in which access to land and power is based on justice, law, and merit rather than rank.¹¹ They challenge the devaluation of the individual that characterizes the court histories and promote an ideal of personal merit as the quality on which the legitimacy of lordship depends. A genre that is potentially remarkably similar to romance in its hostility to institutional authority and in the radical claims it makes for the legitimacy of individual actions—even when these threaten the hierarchical ordering of society—is the virgin martyr story.¹² It is not hard to see in these stories, which pit a spotless virgin against a comic-book tyrant, the subtext of an ecclesiastical polemic against secular government. But stories in which an obtuse, brutal, and ignorant secular ruler is successfully challenged by a young girl question not only the authority

¹⁰See Jane Zatta, "Translating the *Historia*: The Ideological Transformation of the *Historia regum Britannie* in Twelfth-Century Vernacular Chronicles," *Arthuriana* 8.4 (1998): 148-61.

¹¹See Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

¹²See Georges Duby, *The Knight, The Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), for his discussion of the role of literature in presenting the same models, and for his view that marriage is the perfect image of the hierarchical organization that allows both religious and political control of the individual.

of the secular ruler; potentially, they question all hierarchical social ordering, even that of the church.¹³ The *Vie Sainte Osith* is a particularly striking example of a saint's life that employs the authorizing conventions of the virgin martyr story to offer a strong criticism of the abuse of power by the episcopal hierarchy and give voice to the aspirations of the ecclesiastical *menus gents* for self-determination and autonomy.¹⁴

English religious houses faced a variety of threats to their lands and wealth after the Norman Conquest: despoliation of church treasures by the Conqueror, the imposition of punitive gels and taxes, the requirement of knight service, and lay magnates' seizure of the estates belonging to churches if they were strong enough to do so. An additional danger to the wealth and independence of monasteries came from episcopal encroachments, since bishops could significantly augment their own finances by annexing a wealthy monastic house. The establishment of an

¹³Thomas Heffernan notes the potentially provocative nature of the virgin martyr lives' exaltation of a young girl who successfully defies the authority structures of the secular state; he concludes that "the liturgical context supplied by the church makes it easier to see how these lives might also allow women and men to indulge in a type of ritualized emancipation from their rigidly appointed roles, free from the personal stigma of sin and guilt" (*Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 299).

¹⁴The little critical attention given to this poem has focused on its relationship to romance. M. D. Legge first called attention to the resemblance of the hoaxed husband episode to that in *Cliges* (*Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1963; reprint, 1971], 259-61). D. W. Russell ("The Secularization of Hagiography in the Anglo-Norman *Vie Ste. Osith*," *Allegorica* 12 [1991]: 3-16) has also discussed the "romance" features of the poem, a fact which he treats as symptomatic of the desire on the part of hagiographers to imitate romance in order to attract an audience: "Modern readers have historically been more attracted to the secular genres such as the epic or the romance. And indeed, the mediaeval writers of hagiography also seemed to feel that their audiences were more drawn to the secular genres than to hagiography" (3). For a different view, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, who argues that the romance features of *Osith* serve to unmask the strategies of containment of female volition which inscribe the values of family and inheritance ("Clerc u lai, muine u dame": Women and Anglo-Norman Hagiography in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, 2nd ed., ed. Carol M. Meale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 61-85).

episcopal see in an abbey threatened not only the wealth of the community, which had to be divided to provide for the bishop and his *familia*, but also the independence and the status of its head, and it is not surprising that communities so threatened resisted vigorously.¹⁵ Tension between religious houses and bishops is a dominant theme in post-Conquest ecclesiastical histories. By the early twelfth century, the number of monastic cathedrals had more than doubled, increasing from the pre-Conquest number of four to nine out of a total of seventeen.¹⁶ It is important to realize that the struggle for the survival of the English churches cannot be reduced to a Norman-English conflict or even to a church-state conflict. Norman abbots energetically fought off the encroachments from Norman lay and ecclesiastical lords alike on the wealth and patrimony of the houses on which the abbots' own fates depended.¹⁷

The first line of defense for an abbey whose wealth and independence were threatened by lay magnates or by episcopal usurpation lay in the production—often the forgery—of docu-

¹⁵Lanfranc's account of the complaints against Peter, Bishop of Lichfield, for his attempts to remove the See of Chester to Coventry details what the community endured at Peter's hands. He forced entry into their dormitory, broke into their strongboxes, robbed them of their horses and goods, pulled down their houses to have the building materials taken to his own residences, and remained in the monastery with his retinue for eight days, consuming all the monks' provisions. See Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 136.

¹⁶Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, 136.

¹⁷Thus when Theodwine, a monk of Jumieges, succeeded to Ely in 1072, he refused to take up his office until the king had restored the treasures which had previously been seized (Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, 140). See also Susan Ridyard ("Condigna Veneratio: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 9 [1987]: 180-206) for the role of the Norman adaptation of the life of St. Ethelthreda, inserted into the *Liber Eliensis*, in preserving the rights of Ely: "The Norman abbots, it seems, regarded themselves primarily as abbots of Ely, only secondarily as Norman conquerors. Their reputations depended upon their effectiveness in defending and enhancing the position of the church committed to their care, and in pursuit of that priority they were prepared to utilise any tool which came to hand" (184).

ments, especially royal charters, attesting to the ancient privileges and exemptions the house enjoyed. In seeking the king's protection on the basis of supposedly Anglo-Saxon royal charters, the Norman abbots were exploiting the Norman myth of continuity with the English past.¹⁸ In addition to forged charters, religious houses promoted their political interests by seeking to increase the prestige of the abbey's founding saint through elaborately staged ceremonies celebrating the translations of his or her relics and the production of written lives. Religious biographies of Anglo-Saxon saints not only continued, but increased under Norman rule.¹⁹ Saints' lives of English founding saints written to vindicate the independence of the houses on which their cults centered stressed the antiquity of the cults, the personal nature of the associations between the religious houses and the founding saints, and their establishment by royal or sometimes papal dispensation.

¹⁸From the time of William, all Norman rulers claimed to uphold the laws of Edward the Confessor (Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, 155-58). Thus the abbot of Battle appealed to Henry II to enforce the supposed indemnities and exemptions of Battle Abbey against the pretenses of Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, by presenting forged royal charters in the king's court. See Marjorie Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England: 1066-1166* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986; reprint, 1995), 203.

¹⁹For example, Osbert of Clare, Prior at Westminster under the abbacy of Gervase of Blois, helped to defend the independence of Westminster Abbey from the See of London by forging charters supposedly issued by the chancery of Edward I and by composing a *Vita Beati Eadwardi*, which prominently featured a legend that Westminster had first been consecrated by St. Peter himself in the days when Mellitus was Bishop of London. See Kathryn Young Wallace's introduction to Matthew Paris, *La Estoire de Seint Eadward le Rei*, ed. Kathryn Young Wallace (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1983), x-xii. In the same way, the independence of Bury St. Edmund from the grasp of the Bishop of Lincoln was also defended by updating the saint's legend, including the production of a collection of miracula, commissioned by Abbot Baldwin, that showed the saint's punitive assaults on a variety of invaders and pretenders, including Bishop Arfast. The church at Ely also attempted to defend its lands from Norman depredations by promoting the cult of its patron saint, Etheldreda, who appeared as a vindicator of the property rights of the monks of Ely by punishing with death the agent of a Norman sheriff who had attempted to expropriate their lands; and, in the hands of a later historian, as the defender of the monks against Bishop Nigel (1131-69) and his associates (Ridyard, "Condigna Veneratio," 183-85).

The *Vie Seinte Osith*, an Anglo-Norman re-writing of a Latin original, is one of these lives. Osyth was the patron saint of the house of Augustinian canons at Chich in Essex, and the life was written most probably in response to a series of crises in the mid-twelfth century when several of the churches belonging to St. Osyth's came under attack by the See of London. In the late eleventh century, Bishop Maurice of London split up the property of the small college of priests at St. Osyth's into prebends, constituting for each "the necessities of life, 60 acres of land, as well as tithes and altar offerings."²⁰ His successor, Richard I, who was Bishop of London from 1109 to 1127, seized the lands at Chich for inclusion in his hunting park at Clacton-on-Sea, but he repented after suffering a stroke in 1118 or 1119 and founded a house of canons regular at St. Osyth's in 1121. According to notes taken by the sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland from a now-lost late twelfth-century life of St. Osyth, Richard gave St. Osyth's the vill of Chich, twenty pounds a year from the farm at Clacton, the churches of Southminster and Althore, the churches of Clacton (St. James and St. Nicholas), and the churches of Pelham, Aldbury, and "the other Pelham" (i.e., Pelham Furneaux and Brent Pelham).²¹ But in the years between 1141 and 1151, Bishop Robert of London made a grant of the churches of Southminster, Aldbury, and both Pelhams to the treasureship of St. Paul's. In the years between 1154 and 1159, Bishop Richard II attempted to confirm the grant and distressed Abel, prior of St. Osyth's, for the disputed churches (all of which in Domesday were on the demesne lands of the bishop of London). John of Salisbury intervened in the dispute and wrote to Pope Adrian IV on behalf of the canons of St. Osyth's. The matter seems to have been resolved under Bishop Gilbert Foliot of London (1163-67) in a lost settlement by which

²⁰Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis," 301-02.

²¹See Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis," 304. For a reconstruction of the William de Vere life of St. Osyth, see Bethell, "The Lives of St. Osyth."

St. Osyth's got the churches of Clacton, Mayland, Southminster, and Althorne while St. Paul's retained the churches of the two Pelhams and Aldbury.²² Since the date of composition of the *Vie Sainte Osith* is probably the mid- to late twelfth century, it seems highly likely that this dispute provided the impetus for a new redaction of the life of the patron saint.²³

Most scholars believe that the earliest extant life of Osyth is the Latin *vita* found in MS. Bodley 285, written probably shortly after 1127.²⁴ This life begins by the genealogy of the virtuous pagan king Penda, who, although a pagan himself, allowed his family members to receive Christianity, thus connecting Osyth with the origins of English Christianity. Next come Osyth's marriage to Siher, king of the East Saxons, her avoidance of sexual relations, and her decision, made while her husband is absent pursuing a mysterious white deer, to receive the veil from the priests Ecca and Bedewin, a decision to which they gladly assent. On his return, her husband, though saddened, quickly accepts her decision and endows her with his vill of Chich for a monastery. After her martyrdom by pirates who try to convince her to renounce her faith, and the story of Osyth carrying her head into the church which had been dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul, the life records several historical events: the translation of her relics by Bishop Maurice and the founding of the monastery by Bishop Richard, several miracles that took place near her tomb, and one conventional miracle regarding the saint's revenge for the theft of a small piece of marble. The gist of this life, written not long after the founding of the house by Bishop Richard, is to stress the role of the See of London in the promotion and protection of the cult of Osyth, a symbol of

²²See Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis," 299-304.

²³It is interesting that a canon of St. Osyth's and prior of St. Bartholomew's, Smithfield London (1144-74), was described as having "the power of readily uttering metrically whatsoever he attempted" (Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis," 306-07).

²⁴See note 5 above.

the venerability of English Christianity, whose continuators the Normans claimed to be.

The Anglo-Norman *Vie Seinte Osith* survives in a single manuscript of the thirteenth century, Welbeck Abbey MS. I C. I. It was edited in 1911-12 by A. T. Baker, who theorized, on both linguistic and historical grounds, that the poem was a composite work by three different authors. Baker considered the Modwenna episode to be an interpolation dating from the mid-thirteenth century and the Bishop Richard episode to be a late twelfth-century or early thirteenth-century addition to the original poem, which, in Baker's view, consisted of the story of Osyth's marriage, martyrdom, and two miracles, and which he dated to the second half of the twelfth century.²⁵ M. Dominica Legge, Morgan J. Desmond, D. W. Russell, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne have accepted Baker's hypothesis without further consideration. Although a detailed examination of the linguistic arguments is not possible here, I suggest that Baker's theory of a composite work should be revised. It is evident from his own introduction that he was disturbed by the difference between the Anglo-Norman text and the earliest Latin text found in Bodley 285 and particularly by the Anglo-Norman conflation of several different hagiographic traditions in the Modwenna episode. Baker's theory of an original poem, roughly similar to that of the Bodley text, that was corrupted by later additions does remove these difficulties. However, his linguistic analysis is dated. Much new work on the Anglo-Norman dialect has been done since Baker's edition, including the completion of the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, and newer work on the use of linguistic criteria for the dating of Anglo-Norman works has invalidated some of the criteria that Baker used.²⁶ In addition, Baker's assumption that

²⁵See Baker, "An Anglo-French Life of St. Osith." All quotations from the *Vie Seinte Osith* will be taken from this edition. Translations are my own.

²⁶See Peter Damian Grint, "Redating the Royal Brut Fragment," *Medium Aevum* 65 (1996): 280-85. Among the criteria used by Baker to posit a thirteenth-century date for the Modwenna episode and which Grint argues are well attested in the twelfth

the Bishop Richard section must have been added after circa 1200 derives from his misidentification of the Bishop Richard in question, whom Baker took to be Richard FitzNeal (d. 1198). More recent work by Denis Bethell has shown conclusively that the bishop in question was Richard I Belmeis, intimate of Henry I, who died in 1127. Moreover, at least part of Baker's reason for considering the Modwenna episode to be an addition dating from the mid-thirteenth century derives from a misidentification of the "Albericus Verus" mentioned in Leland's notes, whom Baker took to be a canon at Chich in 1250 and whom Denis Bethell has identified as William de Vere.²⁷ Since the "objective" criteria that Baker claimed cannot stand, there is no reason not to conclude that the poem is the work of a single poet working in the second half of the twelfth century.

The changes made in the Anglo-Norman life are numerous, radical, and striking, and they clearly indicate the Latin *vita's* adaptation to a new purpose: to stress the independence of the house and its lands from the authority of the See of London. The poet achieves this aim by transforming the life into a comprehensive and complex examination of lordship. The *Vie Sainte Osith* portrays the relationship between Christian, saint, and God on the analogy of an ideal of lordship that makes the

century are rhyming between *ai* and *ie*, rhyming between *é* and *ie*, and the breakdown of the declensional system. Much of Baker's linguistic data for the dating of what he considers to be the three different divisions of the poem (and which provides the rationale for his extensive emendations) derives from his theory of the prosody of octosyllabic verse. In Baker's opinion, which he verifies in a circular and self-fulfilling fashion, early Anglo-Norman saints' lives observed the caesura strictly. Therefore Baker dates different sections of the poem on the basis of the presence or absence of the caesura (and emends lines that fail to fit this criterion).

²⁷See Baker, "An Anglo-French Life," 6: 478, and Bethell, "The Lives of St Osyth," 75-77. Bethell thinks that de Vere's life is the source of the Anglo-Norman life, but this is in part because he accepts Baker's dating of the poem. Leland's notes do not contain the Modwenna episode nor the miracle of the crippled woman. They do contain a detailed account of the expropriation of the lands at Chich by Richard I as well as the miracle of the German sailors whose ship was prevented from moving until one of them returned a small piece of marble.

free consent of the contracting parties the essential validating factor, and which also makes the rights of lord and vassal equal.²⁸ The poem offers a complex and comprehensive analysis of the rights, obligations, and limits of lordship by examining the relationship between Osyth (who is both an individual and an institutional representative) and God, between Osyth and her feudal superiors (including her father, husband, and king), between Osyth and the religious hierarchy, and between the saint and her Christian petitioners. From this scheme, which arrays Osyth against every important social, political, and religious institution of the time, emerges a strong affirmation of the principle of the individual's rights to self-determination, to just compensation for services faithfully tendered, and to freedom of person and property from abuse of power. This poem posits a theory of political, social, and religious institutions organized not according to a concept of hierocratic domination, but according to a principle of rights.²⁹

The first change the poet makes to the structure of the poem is the insertion of the Modwenna episode borrowed from one of the versions of that saint's life, which he alters to inscribe a different relationship between individual, the individual's property, the institutional church, and God. In the *Vie Seinte Osith*, the Modwenna episode emphasizes God's protection not only of the virtuous individual, but also of his or her property, and makes that protection the result of the individual's own merit

²⁸As R. W. Southern points out, "It was a characteristic of the higher forms of law, that those who submitted to them must do so by their own choice. There must be a personal act, an oath, a profession, a contract embodied in a public ceremony, renewed by each person in each generation, not descending in the blood like serfdom from some ancestral act" (*The Making of the Middle Ages* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953], 109).

²⁹P. R. Hyams has convincingly argued that although many jurists deny the existence of rights before there was a common law to enforce them, the concept did exist, and warranty language is one way of studying the concept of tenants' rights ("Warranty and Good Lordship in Twelfth-Century England," *Law and History Review* 439-503).

unmediated by the church.³⁰ Like St. Osyth, St. Modwenna is a composite made from different traditions. The earliest known life of St. Modwenna, written in the early eleventh century by an Irishman named Conchubranus, conflated Monnina, founder of Killeavy (d. 517), and the English Modwenna, founder of many churches in England and Scotland in the late seventh century.³¹ In the twelfth century Geoffrey of Burton rewrote Conchubranus, and the tale received vernacular treatment in an Anglo-Norman life based on Geoffrey and dated by its editor, Alexander Bell, at about 1230.³²

The basics of the story are the same in all three versions of the life of Modwenna and in the Modwenna episode of the *Vie Sainte Osith*. Osyth, sent by Edith to take a book to Modwenna, falls in a river and drowns along the way. After three or four days have passed and Osyth has not returned, Edith sets out to find her and encounters Modwenna. Feeling certain that Osyth has fallen into the water, Modwenna prays for her safe return, and on the completion of the prayer, Osyth issues safe and sound from the water. The similarity between the name of Modwenna's maid, Osid, and that of Osyth, together with the similarity of the name of Penda's daughter Edburga, Osyth's aunt, with that of St. Edith of Polesworth, who is connected to St. Modwenna, inspired the linking of the drowning episode to the life of Osyth. In the Anglo-Norman poem, Fredewald [N.B.: This name was given incorrectly as Siher when this essay first appeared. Ed.] entrusts Osyth to his sister and to St. Modwenna in order for her to receive a Christian education.

³⁰That saint Osyth was especially connected to the question of property rights can be seen by the fact that later in the Middle Ages, she was seen as the patron saint of lost property. See John Frankis, "St. Zita, St. Sythe, and Osyth," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 36 (1992): 148.

³¹See A. T. Baker and Alexander Bell, eds., *St. Modwenna* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint, 1967), xxiii.

³²Ibid.

In all three versions of this episode from the lives of Modwenna, the emphasis is on Modwenna's humility and her faith in the intervention of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, represented by the saints. In Conchubranus, Modwenna utters her prayer in the name of Mary, of the apostles Peter, Paul, and Andrew, and of the whole communion of saints. Geoffrey adds an appeal to the Holy Trinity as well. In both of these, Modwenna's humble appeal to the saints is rewarded with the resurrection of Osyth. All versions mediate access to God through the saints, and the Anglo-Norman life inserts an extra link in the hierarchical chain by emphasizing the role of Edith's humility and acquiescence to her ecclesiastical superior, Modwenna, in the miraculous restoration of Osyth.³³ In his comment on the significance of the episode, the poet tells us that Edith's obedience not just to God and the saints, but also to her immediate superior Modwenna, is responsible for the miracle:

En la vertu ad mult uvré
 La fei Edith e l'umbleté
 Ensemblement od la bunté
 De ceste dame dunt ai parlé
 En sa bunte rien ne se fie—
 Pur ceo est de melz oie—
 Mais a la dame requert aie,
 Ki l'aveit en sa baillie. (2729-36)

[In this miracle the faith and humility of Edith, together with the goodness of this woman of whom I have spoken, worked strongly. She did not trust in her own goodness at all—and because of that she was better heard—but she asked for help from her mistress, who had governance over her.]

In the Modwenna lives, Osyth's book plays no role other than offering the excuse for the journey that furnishes the occasion for Osyth's accidental drowning. In Conchubranus, no particular reason is given for Osyth's fall, while in Geoffrey, it is caused by Osyth's fear of the swirling waters. In the Anglo-

³³"Dame," fait ele, "la vostre [aie], / Ke la pucele ne seit perie" (2643-44).

Norman life, the violent wind causes her to fall, but the value of the book motivates every event in the plot. Its particular value is the reason Edith wishes to share it with Modwenna and also the reason she chooses Osyth for the journey: “[Edith] did not want to entrust it to a careless person who might easily damage it” (239-40). In fact, the special emphasis given to the value of the book causes the poet to feel obliged to specify that no amount of money would have caused Edith to send Osyth on such a mission if she had had any idea what would happen to her. In the greatly amplified and highly realistic account of Osyth’s fall given in the *Vie Sainte Osith*, Osyth is so upset by the accidental loss of the book that she loses her own life in an attempt to recover it. Just as she reaches the middle of the bridge, a gust of wind blows up the skirts of her cloak:

Et par lens gerrons a sei (le) prist
 Son mantel ke le livre obli,
 Ke de ses meins en l’ewe chai;
 De cele perte fu esbai,
 Al prendre s’abessa si le suivi;
 (Bien) cuida son livre aver receu,
 Mes amdeuz l’ewe had reteneu. (282-88)

[She pulled the skirts of her cloak around her, and in doing so, she forgot about her book, which fell out of her hands into the water. She was dismayed by that loss; she bent down to get it and followed it into the water. She thought she could rescue her book, but the water took them both.]

The book, which suffers the same fate as Osyth, serves as a metonym for Osyth herself, a highly prized object of great value that is lost and restored thanks to God’s grace.

Here, in contrast to the Modwenna lives in which Osyth plays no role herself in bringing about the miracle but depends for her salvation on Modwenna’s prayer and saintly intercession, the restoration of Osyth as well as the book result from Osyth’s purity, of which her miraculous salvation is a sign:

A peine out Modwen sa voiz fini
 Ke do l’ewe Osith ne issi

Neste e secke son livre aussi,
 Et dist: "dame veez mo ci."
 Si cum del tut fu virgine pure,
 Son livre e li sunt sanz muilliure. (351-56)

[Modwenna had barely finished her prayer when Osyth emerged from the water clean and dry, and her book also, and said, "Madame, see me here." Since she was in every way a pure virgin, she and her book were without any dampness.]

The changes the *Vie Sainte Osith* poet made from the account of Osith's drowning in the Modwenna lives both legitimize the individual's concern with property, treated as an extension of the self, and emphasize the independence of Osyth from her institutional superiors for the protection of her life and property. This protection comes instead from a direct relationship with God. Unlike the Modwenna lives, the *Vie Sainte Osith* shows divine aid to be a sign of God's grace bestowed on the deserving individual, unmediated by saintly intercession or institutional obedience.

The importance and dignity given to property in this poem reflect the church's increasing interest in secular matters in the twelfth century, as competition with the monarchy led theologians to modify somewhat the traditional view of secular life and worldly possessions as *vanitas*.³⁴ From the twelfth century, God became an interested party in such legal affairs as guaranteeing charters, protecting property rights, and punishing extortion. Deathbed confessions show that lords not only recognized in principle the rights of tenants and the limits of lordship, but also saw God in the role of justiciar in the redress of these wrongs.

³⁴The clergy always had a very close integration with secular power in Norman England. Bishops were among the barons, the tenants-in-chief of the king. The Normans preferred to use clerics in the royal administration because they could attain rank, wealth, and deference through the church at no cost to the king. According to Jean Scammell, "The clergy largely monopolized the royal financial administration and Chancery until the sixteenth century" ("The Formation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066-1300," *Speculum* 68 [1993]: 610).

As a result of God's concern in matters of worldly justice, God's forgiveness required, in addition to confession to him, confession and restitution to the offended parties.³⁵ Charter language frequently invokes spiritual penalties against any parties who should violate their provisions.³⁶ Andrew of St. Victor, Abbot of Wigmore, compares God's right to claim possession of persons from sin and death to the rights of property owners to protect their belongings from theft:

When our belongings have been taken from us by theft, or lost in any way, and we find them in the possession of others, we vindicate them as our own, and so to speak, put in our claim. But if those against whom we claim have bought or in some other way received the goods from others, these latter must stand for the possessors and warrant what they sold or granted. Lord, vindicate and reclaim me, your servant, whom sickness and death have almost abducted, guard and protect me as your own possession.³⁷

³⁵A charter from St. Paul's records the deathbed confession of Richard I Belmeis of London (d. 1127), who returned certain lands that he had unjustly taken from the canons of St. Paul's:

Lest, impenitent, of robbing the brethren and the mother church, I should rouse His not unjust anger against me, in His sight, with you my sons and brothers, canons of our beloved patron Paul the apostle, bearing witness, I return the wood of Eadulf's Naze (Walton-le-Soken, Essex) which I enclosed in my park at Clacton . . . and if I did anything which I ought not to have done, I confess myself penitent. I return it, I say, and curse whosoever by force or wicked violence attempts again to take it away. (qtd. in Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis," 309)

See also the confession of Maurice, Bishop of London (d. 1107), who confessed to the canons of St. Paul's for having violated their rights and felt that confession must be made to them and their rights restored: "I therefore beg you to forgive me the things I have unjustly committed, on condition that henceforward you shall have, as you used to possess them, the customs of your church, and statutes, and elections, and powers in giving prebends and allotting manors, just as you did on the day on which I was placed on the bishop's throne" (as quoted in Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis," 302). See also John Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship in Anglo-Norman England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 62, for the confession of William d'Aubigny in similar circumstances.

³⁶See Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, 162-63.

³⁷As quoted in Hyams, "Warranty and Good Lordship," 444.

The changes the poet makes in the Latin narrative of Osyth's marriage and martyrdom show that higher morality sometimes requires resistance to legitimate social and religious hierarchies. In most virgin martyr stories, the anti-authoritarian undertones are subdued by making the civil authority a pagan tyrant instead of a Christian king, by transferring the story to a time and place remote from current reality, and by making the moral intransigence of the saint incompatible not only with life in the world, but with life itself. It is all the more striking, then, that Osyth's defense of her virginity does not feature a Christian-pagan conflict, nor does it involve an ideological confrontation between secular, aristocratic values of land, lineage, and wealth (à la Alexis or Giles) and religious values of celibacy and asceticism. Instead, the *Vie Sainte Osith* rescripts the virgin martyr story as a contemporary tale of domestic conflict between a husband and his strong-minded wife. In so doing, it shifts the ideological focus away from a conflict between religious and secular values in order to examine the aspiration of the individual, represented here by a young girl, to the right to economic and social self-determination in opposition to the social authorities of father, husband, church, and king.

The poem presents Osyth's religious vocation as a power struggle from which Osyth emerges as the victor despite the fact that she stands alone against every social, familial, political, and religious authority. But instead of a saint who confronts an obvious tyrant in a temporally and geographically remote setting, this poem presents a recognizably contemporary situation in which the opponents to the saint's virginity are behaving according to custom and law. Osyth's father, like any responsible aristocrat, consults his barons and arranges a suitable marriage for his daughter in accordance with their advice. Unaware of her vow of virginity, he brushes aside her objections: "Whatever she might feel about it, either good or ill, there was no excuse. She had to do it, willingly or not" (390-91). Rather than condemning Osyth's

father, however, the poet slyly tells us that he acted “according to the custom that existed at that time in their country.”

Siher, likewise, is no stock tyrant. The poet is careful to point out that all of the claims against which Osyth rebels are normal and legitimate. Not only is the would-be despoiler of this maid’s virginity her own legitimate husband, but unlike a Cecilia or an Alexis or a real-life Christina of Markyate, Osyth does not try to convert him to a lifestyle of celibacy. Instead, she uses cajolery, deception, and sexual manipulation to trick him out of consummating the marriage. Siher behaves like any newly married man:

Si tost cum li rois l’ad veue
 Mut la coveite mut la desire
 Et seinte Osith li dist, “beau sire,
 Pur Deu merci, kar m’entendez,
 (Et) aukes de respit me donez;
 De ceste assemblé[e] entre nus
 Dunt vus estes tant desirus,
 Respit vus requer sire rey,
 Si ja voilliez joir de mey.” (444-52)

[As soon as the king saw her, he greatly lusted for her and desired her, and St. Osyth said to him: “Dear sir, for the love of God, listen to me and give me some respite. I ask you for a small delay from this union between us which you desire so much, sire King, if you ever wish to enjoy me.”]

Osyth implies that if he will just delay a little, she will eventually give in. She never tells him the true reason that she is avoiding sexual relations, but manipulates and teases him into granting what she wants for three and a half years:

Cele pur rien ke sace dire,
 Par boneirté plus ke pur ire,
 Ne vout faire ne consentir
 A son talent n’a son pleisir. (455-58)

[She, by anything that she could think of to say, but more in playfulness than in anger, would not consent to his desire or his pleasure.]

Her husband reacts with a very human mixture of anger and acquiescence:

Li reis comence a losenger,
 E tel oure est, a coroucer;
 Mes tant a purchasé et quis
 E tant feit entre giu e ris,
 De jur en jur est purloinié. (475-79)

[The king began first to flatter, and then to become angry. But so much she exerted herself, and pleaded, and did so much between game and laughter, that from day to day he was put off.]

Siher finally resolves to force himself on his wife after an elaborate birthday celebration during which he has drunk heavily. Once he has made that decision, the woman's resistance only inflames his desire and hardens his determination. The hunt of a mysterious white deer, whose sudden appearance deflects the king and gives Osyth the opportunity to take the veil, also gives the opportunity for further clarification of the king's psychology. What has incited the king's determination to rape his wife has been the realization that she is afraid of him. He is aroused at the idea of his own power:

Tant cum li reis vait demorant,
 E ou ses chiens le cerf siwant,
 Seinte Osith n'ad pas oblié
 En quel pour aveit esté.
 Ainz dist ke mes ne targerá
 De ceo k'out empense peç a. (627-32)

[The whole time that the king had been following the deer with his dogs, he had never forgotten St. Osyth, and how afraid she had been. In fact he said that he would not put off any longer what he had made up his mind to do a little while before.]

Contrary to his expectations, however, he returns home to find that his wife has taken the veil, a shock that is intensified by coming just after the unsuccessful hunt of the deer. Once again

the poet makes an acute observation on Siher's psychology as he confronts the limits of his power:

Le rei revient ja de chaser
U gueres ne put espleiter,
Corus e plein de maltalent;
A l'us de la sale descent
Car custume est, bien le savez,
Ke riche home coruce asez,
Kant sa beste aver a failli,
E il refist tut autresi. (679-86)

[The king returns from the hunt, where he had not been successful, angry and in a full bad humor. He goes to the door of the hall, because it is the custom—you know it well—for a powerful man to get very angry when he fails to capture his quarry, and just so did the king.]

The king's first reaction at the sight of his wife in her black veil is sheer horror:

Al rei en fremist chacun peil
L'alme del cors pur poi s'en ist. (689-90)

[Every hair of the king stood up. His soul nearly fled from his body from fear, so great was his dismay, so great was his fear.]

Then comes an angry confrontation. Siher shouts, insults, threatens, and finally begs his wife to change her mind. When he realizes that he can neither bully nor wheedle her into submission, he falls into despair. He shuts himself up in his room, stops eating and drinking, and refuses to speak to anyone. Finally grief also runs its course, and he resigns himself to his wife's decision:

Quant sa dolor a fet asez
Ke tut put estre alessez,
Purpense sey a chef de tur
Ke rien ne vaut sa dolor
Kant veit ne puet estre mueé
A seinte Osith a gr[a]antée,
Ke remaine tut autresi
En cel abit k'ele ad choisi. (719-26)

[When he had mourned enough, so that everything was relieved, he thought finally that his grief was useless. When he saw that nothing could be changed, he gave his permission to St. Osyth to remain as she was, in the habit which she had chosen.]

Siher ultimately does not merely accept his wife's decision; he endows her with land, buildings, and the second daughter of each of his counts and barons for her convent. Unlike St. Audrey, whose husband passively accepts his wife's career choice, Osyth's husband plays the dual role of opponent to her virginity and the founder of her house, which can claim ancient royal privileges as well as divine consecration.

The model for Osyth's relationship to God and her husband is the precedence that a vassal's obligation to the king would take over his loyalty to his immediate lord.³⁸ Osyth appeals to God to protect her virginity in the same way that an aggrieved tenant, claiming the king as his overlord, could appeal to the Crown to protect himself against unjust vexation for service.³⁹ She claims God's protection from the demands of her husband on the basis of her freely given vow to God, the terms of which she has faithfully fulfilled:

³⁸Since William the Conqueror, tenants were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the king as overlord. For an example of a priest who compares a woman to an estate which a tenant (husband) holds from a king (God) who grants the tenant usage rights but not ownership, see the advice given by the abbot Adam of the Abbey of Perseigne to the Comtesse du Perche at the end of the twelfth century in Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 27.

³⁹On the reasons why the king would have an interest in protecting those owing service, see Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, 41-43. He mentions the king's duty to protect the poor from tyranny, of which unjust exactions were a sign; the fact that the targets of distraint for services were often churches, the protection of which was the particular obligation of the king; and the desire to protect the peace, since distraint was often associated with violence. See also Scammell ("Formation of the English Social Structure," 602-03), who points out that Henry II's military needs made it expedient for him to promote the interests of a class of warriors who would thus owe particular allegiance to the Crown rather than to their immediate overlords.

A Dieu ceo dist: “la vostre ancele
 Pur vostre nun or defendez,
 Le vostre poer i mestez
 Si i mestrai trestut le mien
 Ke ne seie pur nule rien
 Hunye a nuit ne violée.
 E quant me sui a vous donée
 Defendez moy cum vostre amye
 ke ne seie a nuit honye.” (434-42)

[To God she said, “Now defend your handmaiden for the sake of your name. Show your power so that if I use all my power, grant that in no way shall I be shamed or violated this night. And since I have given myself to you, defend me as your lover, that I may not be shamed this night.”]

Osyth recognizes that her right to divine aid depends on her faithful fulfillment of her own obligations. On the occasion of Siher’s fateful birthday party, she promises that if God will help her just one more time, she will take action herself so that he will never have to come to her aid again. Osyth’s taking of the veil is part of the fulfillment of her vow to God: “Seinte Osith ad cest oure en pris / Ke sur son chief le veil ad mis” (“He took St. Osyth at that hour because she had placed the veil on her head,” 677-78).

Osyth rebels not only against the king, but also against the bishops Ecca and Bedewin. Although the church considered freely given consent essential to a valid marriage, and although coercion was sufficient cause for the annulment of marriages, obedience to parental wishes was the norm, and the degree of force required to invalidate a marriage was generally considerable—most often a threat to life.⁴⁰ Likewise, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has noted, Osyth’s religious vow would not have entitled her to repudiate the obligations of her marriage since it was not a publicly taken solemn vow, but only a *votum simplex*.⁴¹ When

⁴⁰See R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975; reprint, 1986), 90-94.

⁴¹Wogan-Browne, “Saints’ Lives and the Female Reader,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27 (1991): 326.

Osyth asks the bishops Ecca and Bedewin to grant her the veil and they refuse, they are behaving according to the dictates of canon law, which required that a married person obtain the consent of his or her spouse before taking holy orders.⁴² By having Osyth defy Ecca and Bedewin and place the veil on her own head, the poet has deliberately complicated Osyth's career choice from his Latin source (in which the bishops gladly give Osyth the veil) in such a way as to suggest that the individual is justified in disobeying both secular and religious authorities if these conflict with an inner conviction of moral right. The poet makes the validity of holy orders depend on a direct relationship between God and the individual, thus placing consecrated virginity under the control of the individual without any institutional mediation.

Osyth's martyrdom represents the consummation of her sworn obligation to God and entitles her to God's protection as a bride of Christ. Generally the virgin's martyrdom involves a test of faith, but that is not true in this case. Osyth's death, as Morgan J. Desmond has commented, is actually a murder rather than a martyrdom, no different from those of the four girls who are murdered with her.⁴³ In the Latin life, the Danish pirates try to force her to renounce her faith, as is usual in virgin martyr stories, but if the version of Osyth's life that was the source for this poet contained such an element, he has removed it. Instead, her martyrdom affirms her control and indeed her possession of her own sexuality: the act of picking up her severed head, carrying it into the church, marking the church doors with her bloodied hands, and triumphantly placing her head on the altar

⁴²The law is Gratian, C. XXXIII. qu. v., c iii: "Mulier, si sine licentia mariti sui velum in caput miserit, si viro placuerit, recipiat eam iterum ad coniugium" (as quoted in Bethell, "The Lives of St. Osyth," 100).

⁴³Morgan J. Desmond, "The Concept of Narrative among Twelfth-Century Vernacular Hagiographers: A Comparison of the *Vie de Sainte Marguerite*, the *Vie de Saint Gilles*, and the *Vie de Saint Osith* with Their Latin Sources" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978), 123.

establishes her severed head as a metonym for her maidenhead and represents both the consummation of the vow she made to God to die a virgin and the authoring of her own "life." As a text, Osyth's bloody hand-writing serves as a foundation charter that establishes the nature of the church's consecration, deriving from a direct relationship between the saint and God without the mediation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. By marking the door, Osyth writes the church's history on the church itself, which becomes in effect a document of its special privileges and exemptions.

The miracle of the paralytic woman, another addition by the Anglo-Norman poet, looks at the lordship relationship from the point of view of the obligations of service. In its treatment of repentant sinners, this poem reflects a Ciceronian concept of *iustitia*, defined by Cicero as "rendering each man his due deserts," in contrast to a later, sacramentalist view of justice that derives from Augustine and opposes the *quid pro quo* morality of human justice to divine justice, rooted in the divine nature itself and illustrated by Augustine through the parable of the workers in the vineyard.⁴⁴ The development of the sacramentalist view of penance, leading finally to the doctrine that the sacrament of penance was essential to the remittance of sin, without which no one could be saved, was a development of the thirteenth century, especially following the imposition of frequent penance by Lateran IV. It contrasted with an earlier, contritionist doctrine of penance according to which absolution was the result of a direct relationship between an individual and God, dependent on the quality of the individual's penitence, in which the intervention of the priest served merely as a confirmation of absolution that came from God. The sacramentalist conception of penance removed from individuals any role in their own salvation and made them

⁴⁴In the twelfth century the reconciliation between divine justice and divine mercy was a matter of debate. Myrc and others viewed the Augustinian doctrine of salvation by grace as a deception of the devil and a heresy. See Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 146.

dependent on the sacraments of the church and the intervention of the priest for their salvation. The vernacular didactic literature designed to teach the post-Lateran IV educational program, including miracles of the virgin and saints' lives, repetitively shows that the way to salvation lies through the sacraments of the church and not through the individual's own efforts. A constant feature is the unmerited forgiveness of the repentant sinner through the intervention of the church. This pattern places the individual on the lowest link of a chain of authority stretching from him or her, up through the church hierarchy, and all the way to God. Such a view, in which the individual has no claim by right or merit to salvation, contrasts strikingly with the miracles of St. Osyth, which reflect the twelfth-century distrust of the doctrine of salvation by grace and model the relationship between God and individual on the contractual model that was emerging throughout the twelfth century as the ideal of good lordship.

The story tells of a crippled woman who, after journeying all over England in search of a cure, is at last instructed in a dream by a vision of St. Edmund that she can receive a cure only from St. Osyth. After objecting that she has never heard of Osyth and does not know where to find her, the woman finally takes Edmund's advice and seeks her out. Just as Edmund promised, she is cured. In gratitude for her cure, she asks permission to be allowed to stay and serve St. Osyth, which she does faithfully for many years until she is seduced by a scullion named Godwin. In punishment for this offense, Osyth fixes her feet together in the form of a cross, returning her to the state of paralysis from which she had freed her. Despite the woman's repentance and pleas for forgiveness, and despite the prayers of her canons to show the woman mercy, Osyth refuses to relent until many years later when the scullion finally dies.⁴⁵ This episode makes it plain that

⁴⁵Russell has argued that the harshness of Osyth's behavior here in contrast to the sympathy with which Siher was treated suggests that this miracle was composed by an older and less courtly author. He is especially surprised by the fact that the scullion, who

the model for the relationship between Christian and saint is a contractual one in which the benefits depend on the scrupulous fulfillment of the obligations that have been freely accepted. The woman has, in effect, violated her oath of fealty and given faith to another master, which causes her to forfeit the rewards she had received from the relationship. Osyth's long-delayed release of the woman has nothing to do with the length of the woman's punishment, but rather with the death of the scullion, Osyth's rival for the woman's fealty. Osyth's canons protest her intransigence, but she is entitled to ignore them because she has suffered a default of service.⁴⁶

The disseisin of Chich represents the culminating episode in the career of a lone woman who has successfully defied the authority of the most important social, religious, and political institutions of the time. In its denunciation of unlawful disseisin and its mixture of fiction with historical figures and real events, this episode is reminiscent of *Fouke Le FitzWaryn*. The episode recounts an historical event: the expropriation of the lands, rents, and tithes of the canons at Chich by Richard I, followed by his stroke and change of heart. The poem names as Richard's emissaries William of Wokindon and Rad' Patin, both of whom are known from other documents. Charter evidence shows that William of Ockendon was Richard's steward and Ranulfus Patin was his clerk and a canon of St. Paul's, and Leland's notes confirm that they were sent by Richard to Chich to oust the canons from their lands. The poem splits the figure of the

was the instigator of this crime, is not punished, in contrast to the harsh punishment suffered by the woman he seduced ("The Secularization of Hagiography," 11-14).

⁴⁶This was in fact one of the conditions that justified the dissolution of tenurial relationship. Breaches of homage constituted felonies, and these could bring the tenurial relationship to an end. For example, in the time of King Stephen, when Robert of Meppershall stayed at Meppershall and left Biddlesden, for which he failed to render service to the earl of Leicester or send anyone else in his stead, the land escheated to the earl, who gave it to his steward, Ernald de Bosco, for his service. See Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, 20.

historical Richard into two persons. This is possibly because the poet confused Richard I with Richard II, but it is also possible that for literary, didactic purposes, he divided the character of Richard I into two: the “good” Richard, who endowed St. Osyth’s, and the later, “bad” Richard, who was punished for trying to expropriate its lands.⁴⁷

The episode treats two different aspects of the behavior characteristic of proper lordship: the obligation not to seize the lands of one’s tenants unlawfully and the obligation, as a donor, to protect the lands of one’s gift. This last, in fact, was one of the obligations of warranty which, as Paul Hyams has shown, approximates what could be called tenants’ rights and required lords to protect their gifts to vassals against third party claims, or if they were unable to do so, to grant in exchange an equal piece of land. In other words, not only must a lord take care that he himself had full rights to any gift he made, but he must also come to the aid of his vassal in the case of outside aggression. According to Hyams, a lord “committed himself in this way to aiding against all outside challenge a tenant with as full right against the world as he could guarantee.”⁴⁸

The poet tells how Bishop Richard, uncaring of the good example set by his predecessor who had established the canons at St. Osyth’s, sent his ministers to Chich in order to expel the canons from their lands and seize their emoluments for himself. The first part of this episode describes the reaction of Osyth’s canons to this aggression after the departure of Richard’s agents. In stark contrast to the humble supplication that characterizes the appeals to saintly protection against injustice in a poem like *La Vie de Sainte Modwenne*, Osyth’s canons rebel not against their

⁴⁷If the poem was written as a response to the attempts of Richard II to expropriate the churches of St. Osyth, splitting the figure of Richard would have served to admonish him that interfering with his predecessor’s gift might result in a similar fate for him.

⁴⁸Hyams, “Warranty and Good Lordship,” 453.

bishop but against Osyth! When she appears to have deserted her obligation to protect them and their property despite their long and faithful service, they do not hesitate to repudiate and revile her and remove her shrine from the church:

K'ele deust bien a lur avis
 Defendre les de lur enemis,
 A sa fiertre vienent errant
 L'ymage ostent tres estant
 Hors l'us l'eglise l'unt posé
 Cume pur prendre son cungré.
 Le fiertre covrent d'une here,
 Ceo signe ke de joie volent trere,
 Ne volent (seinte) Osith plus loer
 Kar par semblant la hu n'ad cher,
 Ou lermes e ou plaintes funt
 Asez saver ke il au quer unt,
 [E] seinte Osith vunt chalengant
 K'en cest surfet est si suffrant. (1489-1502)

[Because she should certainly, in their opinion, defend them from their enemies, they came quickly to her tomb, immediately picked up the shrine, and placed it outside the church as if to take her leave. They covered the shrine with a cloth. That signified that they wanted to withdraw from happiness. They didn't want to praise St. Osyth any more, because it seemed that she did not hold that place dear. With tears and weeping they made it plain what they had in their hearts, and they protested against St. Osyth, who was so tolerant of this outrage.]

Just when we might expect to hear “O ye of little faith” uttered in reproach of the materialistic concerns of these faithless ecclesiastics who are behaving as if their patron saint had sold them a fake Rolex, Osyth validates their protests by striking Bishop Richard with a paralysis. This poet justifies Osyth's canons in expecting the saint to fulfill her obligations to them in the same way that he justified Osyth for withdrawing the miraculous cure from the woman who failed to live up to her commitment to Osyth. The relationship between Osyth and her canons is based on a model of lordship in which the vassal can expect

maintenance and protection against his enemies in exchange for faithful service.

At the same time, lords, even ecclesiastical lords, who unjustly dispossess their vassals can expect punishment from a higher authority. From the twelfth century, the king's interest in having subjects more directly tied to him than to their immediate overlord led to a series of innovations, especially in the reign of Henry II, by which aggrieved tenants could appeal their lord to the Crown. The assize of novel disseisin gave anyone who had been dispossessed the chance to recover his lands just by proving that he had once held them; this established a class of landholders who held their lands thanks to royal intervention, even in spite of the lord from whom they held them.⁴⁹ Osyth's punishment of Bishop Richard for dispossessing the canons at Chich reflects the developments in England in the twelfth century, when lordship became increasingly a legal rather than a personal relationship whose terms were considered binding on both parties.⁵⁰ Upon returning to London and finding that his lord has been struck with paralysis, the bishop's steward explains the meaning of that event:

“Beau sire cher, tres bien savez
Vers Dampnedeu mespris avez.
Vers seinte Osith nomeement
Ke nus avum si folement
Ja desaisie de sa terre;
Empris avum mut fole guerre;
Quei k'en apres seit fet de nus
La peine chiet primes sur vus.” (1561-68)

[“My fine dear lord, you very well know that you have committed a wrong against God, and namely against St. Osyth whom we have so foolishly disseised

⁴⁹See Scammell, “Formation of the English Social Structure,” 606-09.

⁵⁰The *Leges Henrici* also note the possibility of bad lordship when they state that “if a lord deprives his man of his land or his fee by virtue of which he is his man, or he deserts him without cause in his hour of mortal need, he may forfeit his lordship over him” (Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, 62).

of her land. We have undertaken a very foolish quarrel: whatever should become of us afterwards, the consequences fall first on you.”]

As the poet tells us in the prologue and again in the epilogue, the superior value of saints’ lives in comparison to secular literature resides in the better advantages of the former. The appeal of this life lies in offering the *menus gents*, whether ecclesiastical or lay, an imaginative retaliation for a use of force that in practice was far from uncommon.⁵¹ As the poet tells us in the epilogue,

Bien resavurn la verité
 Sainte Osith ad grant pousté
 Ke Dampnedeu li ad doné,
 Asez veu et bien musté
 De sey venger e de ses enemis
 Ke li mesfunt en son pais.
 E pousté read ensement,
 De mut valer a tute gent,
 Ke Deu voudrunt e li servir,
 Mut bien purrat trestut merir
 Quanque hum frat pur li de bien,
 Ne puet estre perdu pur rien. (1664-75)

[We well know the truth. St. Osyth has great power that God has given her, as it has been seen and shown abundantly, to avenge herself on her enemies who wronged her in her country, and likewise the power to be of great value to all people, those who love God and serve her. Very well she can reward whatever good people do for her. It can’t be lost for anything.]

Like so many other works, this poem shows an awareness of literature as a means of imaginative self-determination. Osyth is a passionate and vengeful protectress who vehemently defends the material interests of herself and her faithful, holding out to the audience the prospect of celestial help in the redress of terrestrial wrongs. Osyth is the advocate of the weak against the powerful, and in order to make this point the more strongly, the poem draws the authority of Osyth exactly from the things that

⁵¹See Bethell, “Richard of Belmeis,” 92.

require her subjection. By insisting that God's saints are made up "not just of males only, but also of women in the same way, saints and true handmaidens of God and quite tender maids" (47-48), the text aligns Osyth's gendered identity, her Englishness, and her textual obscurity in order to inscribe a saintly democracy in which the authority of Osyth is equal to that of England's premier king-saint, St. Edmund himself. In so doing, however, this poem constructs and justifies a woman who vindicates her right to self-determination and freedom from the authority of king, father, husband, and priest not in the extreme and inimitable ways of a Catherine or a Cecilia, but by using strategies available to any stubbornly willful twelfth-century noblewoman: pretended acquiescence, deceit, cajolery, sexual manipulation, and disobedience. It may be that such a strong-willed and successful woman was a literary creation, the unintentional by-product of other purposes, long before she was ever a fact. But once created, the literary figure offers a model for real women.

La Vie seinte Osith, virge e martire
(MS BL Addit. 70513, ff. 134va-146vb)

EDITED BY D. W. RUSSELL

The Life of St Osith

TRANSLATED BY JANE ZATTA

REVISED AND ANNOTATED BY JOCELYN WOGAN-BROWNE

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TEXT: The text, written in two columns per page, begins, after the opening rubric in red, with an illuminated initial C, five lines high. Within the edited text, a large drop capital indicates a large majuscule letter in the manuscript, written over two line spaces. Scribal abbreviations have been silently expanded, following the scribe's practice for the same word found written in full. Editorial additions of words or letters judged to have been inadvertently omitted by the scribe are enclosed in square brackets; missing lines are indicated by ellipsis marks enclosed within square brackets. Rejected readings and scribal deletions or additions are indicated within the line, inside parentheses, preceded by ms.; e.g. (ms: deivre) 163, (ms: eras.—) 216; editorial interventions may similarly be indicated, e.g. (528-29 interverted by ed.). We have followed modern practice with respect to punctuation, the use of capital letters for proper names, the distinction between u/v, i/j, c/ç, the use of the acute accent on tonic final -e. Because of our uncertain knowledge of Anglo-Norman metrics, the *tréma* has not been used, nor is the text emended solely for metrical reasons. The scribal omission of final unaccented -e is noted by the use of an apostrophe, e.g. seint' Osith 103. Foliation and column number is indicated inside square brackets, in the right margin opposite the first line.

ON THE TRANSLATION: The text is translated into prose from the original's verse couplets as closely as is consistent with fluent modern English. The past tense is used, as is conventional in most English narrative, even where the text alternates past and historic present. Line numbers in the original are given in brackets at the end of each paragraph. Manuscript paragraphing has been followed where possible, but extra paragraphs have been introduced as necessary.

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Errata

The text as printed here remains that published in *PLL*, 41, nos. 3 & 4 (2005). A corrected version of the critical text can be found in the Campsey electronic text. Corrections include minor punctuation and emendations to a few words.

These are as follows:

Add a comma at line end for ll. 75, 76, 79, 134, 200, 227, 229, 309, 373, 460, 651, 653, 1086.

Change the comma to a full stop at ll. 198, 1375.

Add full stop at end of l. 800.

Add internal line comma after *preist* 228, *Chich* 1473.

l. 96 change *malgré* to *mal gré*

l. 252 change *al aler* to *a l'aler*

l. 367 change *neé* to *nee[e]*

l. 425 change *dreit* to *dreit'*

ll. 808, 1486 read *erraument*

l. 943 change *del* to *de l'*

l. 1652 emend to: *si cum [li] fu furmee*

ICI COMENCE LA VIE SEINTE OSITH, VIRGE ET MARTIRE

Ceo nus mustre seinte escripture,
 Bon fu ki met en Deu sa cure
 Et aime e creient son creatur
 4 Plus ke ne fet autre seigniu;

Ki l'aime e creient e bien le sert,
 Ne ci ne ailliurs ja ne pert;
 Ki guerpist terre pur son non
 8 Ciel li donne de guerdon;
 Ne change cil pas follement
 Ke terre lesse e le ciel prent;
 Ne folement ne change mie
 12 Ke lesse mort e receit vie; [Fol. 134vb]

Cil change bien, cil change a dreit
 Ki mort lesse e vie receit;
 Kar certes del mund la richesse
 16 N'est fors dolur e granz tristesse;
 Honor del mond est trespasable,
 Et a nus tuz mut poi estable.
 Ki ne volt creire ne saveir,
 20 Bien l'os dire, fols est pur veir.
 Veum par ceus ke sunt alé,
 Nos ancestres e trespasé:
 U sont nos aels e nos peres,
 24 U nos uncles, u nos meres,
 Ke tant furent riches e beaus,
 Assez orent dras e chivaus?
 Tuz i sont alez, sachez en fin,
 28 Si vous atendent en chemin;
 [.]
 Quel jur son eire ert apretez;
 Pur ceo vous di, si l'entendez,
 32 Ki aime Deu bonz fu neez.

HERE BEGINS THE LIFE OF ST OSITH, VIRGIN AND MARTYR.

Holy scriptures show us that he who puts his faith in God and loves and fears his creator more than he does any other lord does well: whoever loves and fears him and serves him well will never lose, either here or elsewhere. Whoever gives up land for his sake will receive heaven as a reward. He who gives up earth and receives heaven does not make a foolish bargain; nor he who gives up death and takes life. He makes a good exchange, he exchanges well who leaves death and receives life. For certainly the wealth of the world is nothing but pain and great sadness: the honor of the world is temporary and very unstable for us all. I can confidently say that whoever doesn't want to believe or know this is truly foolish. We can see by those who have died, our ancestors. Where are our grandfathers and fathers? Where are our uncles and our mothers who were so rich and so beautiful, who had so many robes and horses? They have all gone, you may be quite certain, and they are waiting for you on the way [...] on the day his journey will be ready.¹ For this reason I say to you, if you will listen, that whoever loves God was born fortunate. —

¹On the day his journey will be ready (*Quel jur son eire ert aprestez* 30): the rhyme and the sense suggest there is a missing line here; but it is possible occasionally to have 3 lines in rhyme, and it may be that this should read, with minor correction of “ton eire” (from “son eire” 30)—‘and they await you on the road [to heaven], on whatever day your journey [i.e. death] will be made.’

Kar tant cum il Deu amera,
 Et son servise meintendra,
 Pur veir vous di, n'estut doter
 36 Quel jur deive del siecle aler.
A Deu tant bonz fu finement
 Ke de seinz Deu exemple prent,
 40 **K**i gurplent terre e honor
 Et tut le mund pur Deu amur,
 Et soffrirent hunte e esclandre;
 Pur Deu firent lur sanc expandre;
 En bon entente e en bon espeir
 44 **M**ort donerent pur vie avoir;
 De tels a grant plenté trovum
 En seinz escriz ke nus lisum;
 Et nient de madles solement,
 48 **M**es de femmes tuit ensement;
 Seintes e veraies Deu aneles,
 Et de [al]quanz tendres puceles,
 Ke tut le mund unt refusé
 52 **P**ur prendre sei a Dampnedé,
 Et suffrirent pur son non
 Ou veraie conpunction.
 56 **D**e une tele volum parler
 Ke durement fet a loer,
 Ke Deu ama e Deu servi,
 Et tut le mund pur li guerpi;
 Et pur son verai creatur
 60 **G**uerpi son terrien seigniur.
 Li reis estoit fort e puissant,
 Pur Deu l'ad tut refusant,
 Pur li suffri peine e dolur,
 64 **E**t martyre a chef de tur.
 La virge dunt voil parler
 Sovent avez oy nomer,
 Sa vie n'estut guerres leue,

[Fol. 135ra]

For I tell you truly, as long as he loves God and keeps in his service, there is no need to fear the day he must depart from the world. (1-36)

Certainly dear to God in this way was one such who took example from God's saints, those who abandoned land and honor and all the world for God's love and suffered shame and slander and allowed their blood to be spilled for God. With good intentions and in good hope they gave their death in order to receive life. We find a great many such in holy writings that we read. And not only men but also women, saints and true handmaidens of God, and many tender girls who have rejected all the world to commit themselves to God and suffered for his name with true compunction. (37-54)

We want to speak about one of these who is greatly to be praised, and who loved and served God and left all the world for him, and abandoned her earthly lord for her true creator. It was a strong and powerful king whom she rejected for God's sake, for whom she suffered pain and sadness and finally martyrdom. You have often heard the name of the virgin about whom I want to speak to you —

68 Ne cum dreit fust partut seue;
 Ele est par non Osyd nomee,
 De Engleterre nurrie e nee;
 A Deu voua son pucelage,
 72 Et bien le tint tut son age;
 Sa vie est bele e gloriuse,
 Seinte e duce e precieuse;
 En cest romanz purrum oir
 76 Aprendre bien e retenir
 De seinte Osith e de sa vie,
 Cum Deu la choisi a amie;
 Cum Deu l'aveit amé e chere
 80 Mustré l'ad en meinte manere;
 Par miracles e par vertu
 Ke en plusurs lius sunt avenu,
 Et bien veu par Engleterre,
 84 Et en la peis e en la guerre;
 Ke Deus i ad fet aparer
 Et nuit e jur e matin e seir;
 Entendez i communaument,
 88 Kar ge le vus di seurement,
 Meuz vaut oir ci entur
 Ke de la geste paenur,
 De Gurcedin e de Saisons,
 92 Deu enemis e felons,
 Et d'autre teus pur verité,
 U l'em vus ment a grant plenté;
 Ky aime e ot la vanité,
 96 Deu li en set mut malgré.
 Des seinz Deu la veraie estoire
 Devum aver bien en memoire;
 Kar quant nus la folur oum,
 100 Essample sovent en pernum;

[Fol. 135rb]

but her life is not much read nor is it known by all as it should be. Her name is Osith, born and bred in England. She vowed her maidenhood to God and kept this vow all her life.² Her life is beautiful and glorious, holy, sweet, and precious. In this French story³ we can hear and learn about St Osith and commemorate her and her life; how God chose her for his lover; how God loved and cherished her and has shown it in many ways, by miracles and marvels that have happened in a number of places, and which have been clearly seen throughout England both in peace and in war, and which God has revealed both night and day, morning and evening. Listen all together, for I tell you certainly that it is better to listen to this than to the deeds of pagans, of Gurreddin and the Saxons,⁴ enemies of God and evil-doers,⁵ and to other such things, where you will be told many lies. Those who love and listen to vanity are not welcome to God. We must hold in our memories the true histories of God's saints because when we listen to folly, we very often take example from it —

²And kept this vow all her life (*Et bien le tint tut son age* 72): for the possibility that Osith was the mother of Offa, son of Sighere, see Hagerty 127-28. Bede mentions this Offa in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*: see Colgrave and Mynors v, 19, 516 (henceforth Bede, HE).

³French story (*romanz* 75): the term 'romanz' can indicate the narrative genre of romance, but also frequently means 'vernacular version.' See further Zatta 1998.

⁴Gurreddin and the Saxons (*de Guercedin e de Saisons* 91): perhaps Guerredin, a pagan king who appears in both the early and late twelfth century recensions of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, or Guithechin/Guitheclin who is the king of the Saxons in Jean Bodel of Arras's *Les Saisnes*, a *chanson de geste* of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century (see Moisan 520, *s.v.* Guenedon, and Brasseur). The rhetorical opposition of saints' lives and *chansons de geste* is conventional and works to underline similarities between the two genres, whose relationship such opposition 'almost inevitably invites the audience to reconsider' (Russell 1991, 4).

⁵Evil-doers (*felons* 92): another possible sense is 'traitor': the Saracens may be regarded as traitors to God who should be their lord as he is that of Christians. On the assimilation of Saxons and Saracens, see Speed.

- Ky sen escute e sen entent
 Il en amende mut sovent.
 104 **D**e saint' Osith ore vous dirum,
 Si cum en l'escrit le trovum;
 Certes mut fet a amer,
 Et a criendre e a duter;
 Mut par est bien de Deu lasus,
 108 Bien le direz kant orez plus;
 Mut est dutuse a curucer,
 Kar tantost pense sei venger;
 N'i ad mester coruz ne plait,
 112 Tost se venge ki se mesfait [Fol. 135va]
 Cum vus avant orez assez;
 En cest romanz si l'entendez,
 Ne serrez de fables peu,
 116 Mes de miracles e de verteu,
 Ke Deus en Engleterre fist
 Pur seint' Osith k'a li se prist;
 Si en crei ke volenters l'orast
 120 Ke seint' Osith gré le saverast;
 Kar ki voudra bien puet aider
 Ves Dampnedeu e avancier.
 Ore entendez bien dunc sa vie
 124 K'en puissez aver aie,
 Sucurs e son amendement
 Vers Dampnedeu omnipotent.
 128 **L**a virge Deu tant bonuree
 Ke seinte Osith est apellee,
 Gentil estoit de parenté,
 Fillie ert au rei mut renomé,
 En Engleterre estoit cil reis,
 132 Fredeyold l'apelent Engleis.
 Seinte Osith out cil rei a pere,
 Withborc reine fu sa mere
 Ke estoit fillie Pende le rey,

while he who listens to sensible things and understands them can very often improve himself. (55-102)

Now we will tell you about St Osith, as we have found it written down. She is well worthy of being loved and respected and feared. She is on very good terms with God on high, as you will certainly say when you hear more. It's very dangerous to anger her because she thinks immediately of avenging herself. Nor does she need her anger to develop into a formal offence or a legal action:⁶ she readily revenges herself on whoever wrongs her, as you will hear fully farther on. In this French story,⁷ if you listen, you will not be fed with fables but with miracles and marvels that God performed in England for St Osith who committed herself to him.⁸ And I believe that those of you who listen willingly will know St Osith's gratitude. For anyone who wishes it can certainly help himself to advance towards God. Now listen well to her life so that you can have help, aid, and advancement through her with God the all-powerful. (103-126)

The blessed virgin of God who is named St Osith came from a noble lineage. She was the daughter of a famous king. This king dwelt in England and was called Fredewald by the English.⁹ St Osith had this king for father and her mother was Withburga the queen, who was the daughter of Penda, a

⁶A formal offence or legal action (*coruz ne plait*, 111): here understood as anger leading to legal action: see J. H. Baker s.v. *corouce*.

⁷French story (*romanz* 114): see n. 3 to line 75 above.

⁸Committed herself to him (*k'a li se prist* 118): the masculine and feminine indirect pronoun are identical here, and the phrase may mean either that God takes Osith to himself or that Osith takes God to herself.

⁹Fredewald [also Frithuwold, Fredeswoldi] (*Fredeyold* 132): not mentioned in Bede, but seems from c. 655-c. 670 to have been a *sub-regulus* in South Mercia (Bailey 39, 41-2), probably connected with the family of St Frideswide of Oxford (Blair 1987, 87). For the debate over whether there were two St Osiths, one at Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire and one at Chich, Essex, see Hohler, who argues for two early sets of traditions combined in a lost life which was the source for three later lives (accepted by Bethell 1970a, 103; counterarguments in Bailey).

- 136 De grant puissance e de nobley,
 Et mut out en subjection;
 Seint Bede en fait grant mention
 En cele estorie des Engleis,
 140 Et dist tut fust cil paens reis
 Il out enfanz de bone fey,
 Verais en crestiene ley;
 Un fiz aveit mut renomé,
 144 Fillies e neces a grant plenté
 Ki se pristrent a Deu del tut, [Fol. 135vb]
 Amerent e servirent mut.
 Le reis Pende dunt ay parlé
 148 Les cheres enfanz out engendré
 Ke Dampnedeu a sei choisi;
 Lur non avez assez oy;
 L'une est nomé Keneburc,
 152 Et l'autre ad non Eadburc,
 Seinte Osith fu del parenté,
 Kar lur niece fu pur verité;
 Example prist de lur chasteté,
 156 Pur Dampnedeu servir a gré;
 Entains en sa primere enfance
 En fiz Deu out sa fiance;
 Entente e tut s'amur
 160 Aveit en Deu son creatur;
 Richesce aveit a grant noblei
 Si cume fillie a riche rei;
 Plenté de beivre (ms: deivre) e de manger,
 164 Et quanque l'em ad en mund cher;
 Mes trestut ce petit preisa,
 Pur Deu despit e tut lessa,
 La richesce ne tut le bien
 168 K'eu mund veit ne preise rien;
 Bien le sachez ke la pucele
 De face estoit e clere e bele,

king of great power and nobility who ruled over many. St Bede makes prominent mention of him in his history of the English and says that although this king was a pagan, he had children of true faith, Christians true to Christian law.¹⁰ He had a very famous son and many daughters and nieces who all took God as their own and loved and served him greatly. King Penda about whom I have spoken begot some dear children whom God chose for himself. You have heard their names often enough. One was named Kyneburga and another was named Eadburga.¹¹ St Osith was their relative, for she was their niece. She took example from their chastity to serve God willingly. Already during her early childhood she had chosen the son of God as her betrothed. All her love and desire was fixed on God her creator. Since she was the daughter of a rich king, she had wealth and nobility, plenty to eat and drink,¹² and whatever men hold dear in the world. But she did not value all this. She despised and abandoned everything for God's sake. She saw no value in all the wealth and goods of the world. You should know that this girl had a beautiful, bright face —

¹⁰Penda, a king ... (*Pende le rey* 135): Penda, king of Mercia (d. 654), Osith's maternal grandfather, is indeed prominent in Bede, though his daughters are not: for a table of Penda's children see Bailey 39-40, and on the daughters (who were all, except Withburga, abbesses or nuns) see Blair 2002 *s.v.* *Eadburh*, *Eadgyth*, *Cyneburh*, and *Cyneswith*.

¹¹Kyneburga ... Edburga (*Keneburc* ... *Eadburc* 151-52): Osith's aunts are Eadburh [Edburga] of Adderbury and Cyneburh [Kyneburga] of Castor (see n. 10 above).

¹²Drink (*beivre* 163) MS *deivre*. We take writing *de beivre* as an example of scribal eyeskip.

De cors bien fete e acemee,
 172 Mes plus dedenz fu esmeree;
 Riches e poveres refusa,
 Son pucelage a Deu voua,
 Et cil requist come seigniur
 176 Ke violee ne seit nul jur;
 Et Dampnedeu bien l'en oy,
 Par sa duçur e par sa merci
 Ne perdi sa virginité (ms: virginitée),
 180 Pur nul home de mere né (ms: nee);
 Unc nul hom de ce ne la conuit,
 Virge nasqui, virge morut.

184 **L**a vile u seinte Osith fu nee
 Querendone est apellee;
 Assez sevent li paisant
 K'en la cuntré sunt manant,
 Plusurs [del] luitain autresi,
 188 Le liu u seinte Osith nasqui;
 Enseignie i ad assez apert,
 Ke puet chescum fere cert,
 Unkes pus jekes a cest jur
 192 Au liu n'out herbe ne verdur;
 Par son nestre le liu est sacré,
 Et de tut humein us sequestré;
 Dementers k'en ceste vie fu,
 196 Deu fist pur lui mut grant vertu,
 Et pus k'est martir mut a fest,
 Dunt partie orrez si vus plest,
 Pur vus joir ge dirray
 200 Une partie ke apris ay
 Si cum avant vus disai
 Kant des parenz Osith tuchai;
 Seinte Osith out grant parenté
 204 De grant richesce e de grant seinteté,
 Aels e uncles de grant poesté,

[Fol. 136ra]

and a well-made and slender body, but she was even more refined within. She refused rich and poor suitors alike. She had vowed her virginity to God and she asked him, as her lord, to make sure that her virginity would never be violated at any time. And God heard her request. Because of his mildness and mercy, she never lost her virginity for any man of woman born. No man ever knew her in this way. She was born a virgin and she died a virgin. (127-182)

The town where Osith was born is named Quarrendon.¹³ Plenty of people who live in the area and many also from far away know the place where St Osith was born. It has been clearly revealed, so that anyone who cares to do so can see for himself, that never afterwards to this day has there been either grass or plant in that place. The place was sanctified by her birth and sequestered from all human use. During the time that she was alive, God performed many miracles through her and many more after she was martyred of which you will hear a part if it pleases you. To give you something to profit by, I will tell you some part of what I have learned about them. As I told you before when I touched on Osith's parents, St Osith came from a noble lineage of great wealth and great holiness: grandfathers and uncles of great power, —

¹³Quarrendon in Buckinghamshire was, as its name suggests, called after a hill above its river crossing (close to the confluence of Quarrendon stream with the Thames): the present site has a church opposite the hill at the end of a causeway. The area was important territory for Fredewald and his kin's ambitions in the seventh century. Its *villa regalis* was within sight of Aylesbury monastery, and its church of St Peter was probably connected with a seventh-century foundation associate with Osith (Everson 9-11, 37-38).

- Auntes e neces de grant chasteté;
 Li plus d'euz sunt assemblé,
 208 Au pere Osith sunt conseillié
 Ke a tel mestre seit Osith baillie[e]
 K'en nule manere seit afole[e];
 A Modwin baillier a plus plout, [Fol. 136rb]
 212 A cest consent le conseil finout.
 Kant la pucele parler saveit,
 A Modwen l'abesse baillie esteit;
 A merveillie ama e chere tint,
 216 A Rome fu, (ms eras.:—) ou li revint.
 Ceste Modwen dunt ay dist,
 Juste Ardene teus musters fist;
 L'on a Poleswurthe (ms polesuurche) ce dient la gent,
 220 L'autre en Straneshale vereiment.
 Modwen en l'en sujurna,
 A Edith l'autre otreia;

aunts and nieces of great chastity. A number of them got together and advised Osith's father that he should entrust her to a teacher who could be relied upon not to lead her astray. Most of them thought it a good idea to hand her over to Modwenna,¹⁴ and this was the advice that the council ended by giving. When the girl knew how to talk, she was given to the abbess Modwenna. Modwenna greatly loved and cherished her. She traveled to Rome and back with her. This Modwenna I have spoken about established two churches beside the forest of Arden, one at Polesworth, as people say, and the other at Straneshall.¹⁵ Modwenna lived in one and Edith in the other. —

¹⁴Hand her over to Modwenna... Modwenna was taken up to heaven (*A Modwin baillier*. ... *Modwen fu en cel mene[e]* 211....377): Osith's stay with Modwenna (and her subsequent drowning and resurrection in the river Anker) was thought by Baker to have been a later interpolation (Baker 1911, 480-81). Zatta has argued convincingly that Baker's linguistic, prosodic, and historical arguments for a composite poem by three writers are insufficient or circular, and that there is no barrier and every reason for the Anglo-Norman *Vie de sainte Osith* to have been composed as a single poem in the late twelfth century (pp. 316-17 above). It is not clear what source materials the Anglo-Norman *Osith* writer used for Osith's schooling in Arden: Modwenna's foundations there are already part of that saint's life by the time of Conchubranus's eleventh-century *vita* (Bartlett 2002, xviii). None of the extant Latin *Osith vitae* give the incident with as much detail as does Geoffrey of Burton in his late twelfth-century life of St Modwenna (though Geoffrey's source, Conchubranus, also shares several points with the Anglo-Norman *Osith*), yet the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Modwenne* and the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Osith* agree in some details against Geoffrey of Burton's *vita* (see Bethell 1970a, 84-85 for a tabulation of all versions and 124-27 for Conchubranus and Geoffrey's texts). In a further notable incident, the ritual humiliation of the patron saint by her monks, Osith and Modwenna again share motifs, but the Anglo-Norman *Osith* is closer to Geoffrey of Burton than to the Anglo-Norman *Modwenne* (see p. 429 and n. 44 below).

¹⁵Polesworth ... Straneshall (*Poleswurthe* ... *Straneshale* 219-20): both foundations are here ascribed to Modwenna, whereas in the Anglo-Norman *Modwenne*, Polesworth is founded for Edith by her brother Atulf ([Æthelwulf] Baker and Bell 67, v. 1887; 90, v. 2553) when she becomes Modwenna's disciple, and subsequently given into her charge by Modwenna when she leaves for a quieter contemplative life at 'Strenehale' (Baker and Bell 90-91, vv. 2571, 2587-88). Polesworth's foundation as a pre-Conquest house is attested only in post-Conquest sources (Foot 139-42): Matthew Paris, for instance (in an account somewhat reminiscent of Osith's own life), says that King Athelstan's sister Edith (d. 925) founded Polesworth as a virgin widow after the death of her pagan husband Sihtric of Northumbria who had repudiated

- Al rei Edfrid esteit seur,
 224 Modwen ver li out grant amur.
 Un jur issi aveneit
 K'en oreisons Modwen loinz aleit;
 A Edith Osith enveia
 228 Ke bien la preist kar mut l'ama;
 Sa compaigne out lung tens estee
 Mut fu de lui joius' e lee.
 Aukes tens ert trepassé,
 232 Modwene a muster est repairé.
 Un livre out trové Edithz,
 Plein de proverbes e de bonz diz,
 Exemples i trova a grant plenté
 236 De vertuz e de seinteté,
 Ne vot cel bien sule celer
 Mes ou Modwen commun[i]er.
 A volage ne vot baillier
 240 Ki l'empeireit de leger,
 Osith apella par grant duçur:
 "Plereit," dist ele, "bele seur,
 A nostre mere Modwen aler,
 244 A li cest livre par moi porter? [Fol. 136va]
 Dirrez ke granz bienz i puet trover,
 Dunt se memes puet amender,
 Et par doctrines k'ele trovera,
 248 Tuz les sens amender purra."
 Osith encline, lui otria,
 Dist ke volenters i (ms: il) irra;
 Le livre prent, rien ne resta,
 252 Mes al aler se presta.
 Ha, Deu! ke Edith ne seust l'aventure
 K'avendreit a Osith en cest' ure,
 Ne la lerreit aler si cum je crei
 256 Pur tut l'or Mide le rey.

Edith was sister to king Alfred,¹⁶ and Modwenna loved her greatly. One day it happened that Modwenna went far away to pray and because she loved her very much, sent Osith to Edith to take good care of her. She had been her companion for a long time and she was very pleased and happy about her. After a certain time had passed, Modwenna returned to her minster. Edith had found a book full of proverbs and good sayings. She found many examples there of miracles and holiness. She did not want to hide this good thing for herself alone, but rather to share it with Modwenna, but she did not want to entrust it to a careless person who might easily damage it. She called Osith sweetly: “My sister, would you please go to our mother Modwenna and take her this book for me? Tell her that great good can be found in it by which she can edify herself and that from the teachings she will find in it she can correct all her people.” Osith obeyed and said that she would go willingly. She took the book and didn’t delay at all, but hurried away. Thank God that Edith did not know the adventure which would befall Osith or she would not have let her go, I am sure, for all the gold of King Midas. —

her (*Chronica majora*, I, 447). *Straneshale* has never been satisfactorily identified: the name closely resembles the Anglo-Saxon name for Abbess Hild’s monastery at Whitby (*Streaneshalch*) but this is geographically impossible. The name is given as *Trensale* (*Trensall*) in a seventeenth-century account transcribed by Dugdale (366), but no community of this name is known.

¹⁶Sister to King Alfred (*Al rei Edfrid esteit seur* 223): in most versions Edith is sister to King Alfred (Bethell 1970a 84); in *La Vie sainte Modwenne* she is aunt to him and sister of King Æthelwulf (Baker and Bell 87, vv. 2463, 2476). For a lucid summary of all the Anglo-Saxon saints named Edith, see Blair 2002, *s.v.* Eadgyth, 527-28.

- Si Edith seust ke li avendreit,
 Ceste eire emprendre ne li suffreit
 Pur tut l'or ke seit en Espaine,
 260 Ne pur l'onur de Lovaine.
 Si Edith seu[s]t ke Osith est a venir,
 Cest message ne li freit furnir,
 Pur ce k'ot (ms eras.:—) Salamon le sage
 264 U Alisandre en tut son age.
 Mes Deu li cela cest conseil,
 Kar de Osith vot fere grant merveil.
 Ivern ert [freid, e] (ms eras.:—) mut out pleu,
 268 Pur ce la pucele n'est remansu;
 A l'aube del jur en la matinee,
 Errant se est acheminee;
 Le livre prist e s'en ala
 272 A Modwen u Edith l'enveia.
 En cest chemin une ewe curreit,
 U la damisele passer deveit;
 Le punt fu lung e d'un sul tref,
 276 Passer comensa pouruse e suef.
 La rivere fu large e parfund, [Fol. 136vb]
 Et ele ert ja en mi le punt;
 Le vent fu fort e mut bruant,
 280 Les pans de son mantel despant,
 Mes par les taches al col remist,
 Et par les gerrons a sei le prist
 Son mantel k'en le livre obli,
 284 Ke de ses meins en l'ewe chai;
 De cele perte fu esbai,
 Al prendre s'abessa si le suivi;
 Bien quida son livre aver receu,
 288 Mes amdeuz l'ewe ad reteneu.
 Loinz de cel liu les desaka
 Et en une krenke les jeta
 Bien treis arpenz loin del pont,

If Edith had known what would happen to her, she would not have allowed her to undertake this errand for all the gold in Spain nor for all the honor of Louvain.¹⁷ Edith would never have given her that message even for everything that king Solomon the wise possessed, or Alexander in all his life-time, if she had known what was going to happen to Osith. But God hid this knowledge from her because he wanted to perform a miracle through Osith. (183-266)

The winter was cold and it had rained a lot.¹⁸ For this reason the girl did not delay, but set out at dawn in the morning. She took the book and she set off for Modwenna to whom Edith had sent her. Along the way a river flowed which the girl had to cross. The bridge was long and only a single board in width. She began to pass it timidly and fearfully. The river was wide and deep. And when she had got to the middle of the bridge, the wind was strong and very turbulent, and blew up the skirts of her cloak, which remained attached at the neck by the fastenings. She pulled the skirts of her cloak around her and in doing so, she forgot about her book which fell out of her hands into the water. She was dismayed by that loss; she leaned over to get it and followed it into the water. She thought she could rescue her book, but the water took them both. It carried them far off from that place and cast them into a crevice a good three furlongs¹⁹ from the bridge; —

¹⁷Thank God that Edith did not know Alexander in all his life-time (*Ha, Deu! Ke Edith ne seust.... Alisandre en tut son age* 253-64): no other life of Osith or Modwenna includes comparable rhetorical flourishes. The repeated figures here refocus the incident to make it Osith's rather than Modwenna's. William de Vere, author of a lost life of Osith probably known at Chich, grew up in the court of Henry I and Adeliza of Louvain (Barrow 175-76): the other figures used here are more standard. For a comparable rhetorical topos see Shepherd.

¹⁸The winter was cold (*Ivern ert [freid e]* 267): there is an erasure in this line: the reading is an editorial reconstruction.

¹⁹Three furlongs (*treis arpenz* 291): a measure of land of about an acre. 'Furlong' is not strictly equivalent (OED *s.v.* arpent, furlong) but is a measure of a plowed strip of land.

- 292 Les graventa en un parfunt,
 La jurent amdeuz treis jurs
 Et treis nuiz sanz succurs;
 La jurent treis jurs e treis nuiz
- 296 Si enfundré en un puiz;
 Treis jurs e nuiz Osith i jut
 Iloec neé en cel duit.
 Issi Osith gesir larrum,
- 300 Et de sa dame nus cunterum.
 Del quart jur s'esclarzi la matinee,
 Edith s'est mut esmerveilliee
 Ke fest Osith tant targer;
- 304 Dist k'ele irra l'encheson saver.
 En son quer suffri grant batestal,
 Bien leva devant le chant de gal,
 Errant se mist a cheminal;
- 308 Modwen l'encuntre par esperital;
 Si cum Edith aveit veu
 Modwen silence ad derumpu; [Fol. 137ra]
 Bien par son semblant ad aparçu
- 312 Ke ele fu dolente e (ms eras.:u) irascu.
 "Edith, bele seur, ke estes dolente?"
 "Dame," dit Edith, "Ore oez quei me turmente:
 Damoisele Osith a vus enveiy,
- 316 Un livre portant ke mut amay,
 Hui est le quart jur trespasant
 Puis n'en oi mes ne cuntremant;
 Dame, ke est ele demoré tant?"
- 320 Dist Modwen: "De ço ne soi rien avant."
 Si l'un' e l'autre fu esbaye
 Ceo demander serreit folie.
 Pasturs furent leus delez,
- 324 Lur bestes pessanz par ces pres;
 Les dames a eus sunt alez,
 Après saluz unt demandez:

it hurled them into a deep hole. They both lay there for three days and three nights without any help, thrust into a pit. Three days and nights Osith lay there, drowned in this stream. (267-298)

We will let Osith lie there and tell of her mistress. From the dawn of the fourth day, Edith greatly wondered what made Osith so late. She said that she would go to find out the reason. She suffered a great turmoil in her heart. She got up well before the cock crowed and set out quickly. By divine guidance, Modwenna met her. When she had seen Edith, Modwenna broke the silence. She could clearly see from her appearance that she was upset and worried. "Edith, dear sister, what is the matter?" "Lady," said Edith, "now you will hear what is troubling me. I sent Mademoiselle Osith to you, bringing a book which I loved greatly. Today is the fourth day that has passed without either a messenger or an explanation. Lady, why has she delayed so long?" Modwenna replied, "I know nothing of this." Both of them were dismayed: it would be foolish to ask why! There were some shepherds nearby who were pasturing their animals in the meadows there. The women went to them and, after greeting them, asked: —

- “Amis, ke Deu vus doint sauueté,
 328 Ceo dunt vus prium diez verité,
 Veistes une damoisele al punt aler,
 A la matinee li tierz jur fu er,
 Afublé out un neir mauntel?”
 332 A ceo dient li pasturel:
 “Une tele pucele cum vus querez,
 Hui est quart jur veimes assez,
 Amunt sur la chausé passer,
 336 Jeske al punt veimes aler,
 Mes kar a nos bestes entendium,
 Plus n’en seumes, en fei vus dium.”
 Lors ke neé fust suscherent
 340 Les dames, e al punt repeirerent;
 Amedeuz se mistrent en oreison,
 Ou plurs, ou grant devotion,
 Ke Deu lur deignast le cors mustrer, [Fol. 137rb]
 344 Ke suveus le puissent enterrer.
 Primes sa preere Modwen fina,
 A pont Osith deuz feiz clama:
 “Damoisele Osith, venez hors
 348 Ke veer puissum vostre cors;
 A ceo vus doint force e vigur
 Ke Lazre suscita al tirz jur.”
 A peine out Modwen sa voiz fini
 352 Ke de l’euue Osith ne issi
 Neste e secke, son livre ausi,
 Et dist: “Dame, veez moi ci.”
 Si cum del tut fu virgine pure,
 356 Son livre e li sunt sanz muilliure.
 Ha Deu! ky pust esgarder
 Quel joie les dames vunt demener,
 Tut le mund dust refuser
 360 Ki ces treis pust bien aviser.

“Friends, may God give you health, please tell us the truth about this. Did you see a girl dressed in a black cloak cross the bridge in the morning three days ago?” The shepherds said, “We did see a girl like the one you’re asking about up on the road—this is now the fourth day since then. We saw her go as far as the bridge, but because we were busy with our animals we can’t tell you anything more.” (299-339)

Since the two women thought that she had drowned, they returned to the bridge. Both began to pray with tears and great devotion that God would consent to reveal to them the body so that they could at least bury it. Modwenna finished her prayer first. At the bridge she called Osith twice: “Mademoiselle Osith, come out so that we can see your body. May he who raised Lazarus on the third day give you strength and vigor for this.” Hardly had Modwenna finished when Osith came out of the water, neat and dry, and her book too, and said, “Lady, see me here.” Because she was a pure virgin, both she and her book were without any moisture.²⁰ I swear by God, anyone who had seen the joy these women showed would have rejected all the world if he had been able carefully to observe these three. —

²⁰Her book ... without any moisture (*Son livre ... sanz muilliure* 356): For a similar miracle concerning Margaret Queen of Scotland (d. 1093) and her Gospel book (still extant as Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Latin liturgical f5), see Forbes-Leith: for Margaret’s *vita* see the translation by Huneycutt ch. 25 (175).

- Modwen Osith ad a sei prise,
 Tant cum vesqui li est remise;
 Tant cum Modwen fu en vie
 364 De li Osith ne fu partie.
 Ke ja ne seit celee cest miracle,
 Cum Osith en l'euue out habitacle,
 L'euue ou Osith fu neé
 368 Tut dis puis en ad renumee;
 Ke jamés en secle ne seit celé (ms: celee),
 Le liu Nunnepol (ms: uinnepol) est apellé (ms: apelee);
 Ke dunc fust nunein ne di pas,
 372 Kar l'en le tendreit a folie e gas
 Si dunc fust nonein velee
 Ne fust après reine espusee.
 Assez a[y] dist de cest veage,
 376 Ore vus dirrai del mariage. [Fol. 137va]
 Kant Modwen fu en cel mene[e],
 Frethuuald sa fillie ad repelle[e].
 Lé sunt e joius tuit li parent
 380 De sa porture e enseignement;
 Tuit fu son purpos e desir
 Virgine vivre e morir,
 En quel change serra martir.
 384 De cest purpos n'est ensensé
 Son pere, pur ceo se est purpensé
 De Osith, k'il la volt marier (ms: marcer)
 A poestif homme le rei Syer.
 388 Seint' Osith en est anguisuse,
 Pensive en quer e doleruse.
 Mes al pere de ceo n'est rien,
 Que que li seit, [eu] mal eu bien,
 392 N'i ad rien d'escusatium,
 Faire l'estuet eu voillie eu nun.
 Li rei fet mander ses amis,
 Baruns e cuntes del pais,

Modwenna hugged Osith and she remained with her for the rest of Modwenna's life. As long as Modwenna was alive, Osith was never separated from her. May this miracle never be hidden, how Osith had a dwelling place in the water. The river where Osith was drowned has been famous ever since, so that it may never be hidden from the world. The place is called Nunpool.²¹ (I do not mean to say that she was a nun at that time: people would consider it folly and mockery if she were then a veiled nun and afterwards also became a married queen.) (340-374)

I have said enough about this journey. Now I will tell you about the marriage. When Modwenna was taken up to heaven, Fredewald called his daughter back to him. All her relatives were happy and pleased with her behavior and education. Her whole desire and intention were to live and die a virgin (in which exchange she will be a martyr.)²² Her father was not aware of this intention. Therefore he decided that he wanted to marry Osith to a powerful man, King Sighere.²³ St Osith was greatly anguished, full of care in her heart and sorrowful. But this was nothing to her father: however she might feel about it, whether happy or sad, there was no excuse. She had to do it, willingly or not. The king sent for his friends, for barons and counts from the

²¹Nunpool (*Nunnepol* 370): the site remains unidentified. The river is given as the Anker (Staffordshire) in most other versions of Osith's life.

²²In which exchange she will be a martyr (*En quel change serra martir* 383): this line is one of three lines on the same rhyme and may be an insertion or may lack the other half of the couplet.

²³King Sighere (*le rei Syer* 387): Sighere, seventh-century King of the East Saxons and apostate from Christianity to paganism according to Bede, HE iii, 30, 322).

- 396 Et chivalers e autre gent,
 Pur lur conseil communalment.
 Al rei Syer ad fet doner
 Osith sa filie, e espuser
- 400 Solunc l'agard ke fu asis
 En icel tens en lur pais.
Syer le rey sa femme ameine,
 Ele out au quer dolur e peine,
- 404 **D**E Deu requert omnipotent
 Ou lermes mut espesement,
 Ke ja ne li seit violé
 Ceo que peça li out voé,
- 408 Sun pucelage li purgart
 Ke ne perde ne tost ne tart; [Fol. 137vb]
 Mes si cum se est a lui donee,
 Bien li puisse estre gardee.
- 412 Le jur ke saint' Osith alat,
 Kant li rey Syer l'enmenat,
 Witburg sa mere al departir
 Deuz homes fist ou li venir,
- 416 Ke Dampnedeu aveient cher,
 Ententif mut a sun mester.
 Prestres esteient ordenez,
 Et seinz eveskes puis sacrez,
- 420 Bedewin out li un a nun,
 Ecça li autre compaignun.
 La reine ad a ceus liveree
 Osith [sa] fillie e comandee,
- 424 Pur li garder en dreite fey,
 En dreit amur e en sa ley.
Li reis Syer ses noces tint
 Si cum a rei plus bel covint;
- 428 **L**E les plus hauz de son regné
 Le jur i aveient ensemblé,
 Mut se penat de tuz heiter.

region, and knights and other people, for their agreement. He gave his daughter Osith to King Sighere in marriage according to the custom of their country at that time. (375-401)

King Sighere took his wife away with him. She had pain and suffering in her heart and prayed with abundant tears to God almighty that what she had vowed to him some time ago would never be broken, that he would safeguard her virginity for her so that she would never ever lose it, and that, since she had given herself to God, she would be saved for him. On the day that St Osith left, when king Sighere took her away, Withburga, her mother, on her departure, sent with her two men who loved God and were very devout in his service. They were ordained priests and later were consecrated as bishops. Bedwin was the name of one and his companion was called Acca.²⁴ The queen entrusted her daughter Osith to them and commanded them to preserve her in the true faith in righteous love and in God's law. (402-425)

King Sighere held his wedding as was fitting for an important king and he assembled the leading people of his kingdom and took care that all should enjoy themselves. —

²⁴Bedwin ... Acca (*Bedewin ... Ecca* 420-21): subsequently bishops of Dunwich and Elmham respectively (Bede, HE iv, 6, 354, n. 1).

- La nuit quant vunt puis a cocher,
 432 Sa femme ad fet tost demander
 Ke tant al quer puet desirer.
 Kant seint' Osith out la novele
 A Dieu ceo dist: "La vostre ancele
 436 Pur vostre nun ore defendez,
 Le vostre poer i mettez,
 Ge i mettrai trestut le mien
 Ke ne seie pur nule rien
 440 Hunye a nuit ne violee;
 E quant me sui a vous donee,
 Defendez moy cum vostre amyne [Fol. 138ra]
 Ke ne seie a nuit honye."
 444 **A** tant si est avant venue,
 Si tost cum li rois l'ad veue
Mut la coveite, mut la desire,
 Et seint' Osith li dist: "Beau sire,
 448 Pur Deu merci, kar m'entendez,
 Et aukes de respit me donez;
 De ceste assemblé entre nus
 Dunt vus estes tant desirus,
 452 Respit vus requer, sire rey,
 Si ja voilliez joir de mey."
 Cil la ne vout pur rien oir
 Mes tut dis tire a son desir.
 456 Cele pur rien ke sace dire,
 Par boneirté plus ke pur ire,
 Ne vout faire ne consentir
 A son talent n'a son pleisir.
 460 Mut requert termes e respiz
 Mes il le fait mut a envis;
 Et nequedent tant l'ad lutié (ms: lutiee),
 Requis mut et travaillié (ms: trauailliee)
 464 Par la vertu del Seint Esperit
 Ke l'ovre est mis en respit;

When night came and time to go to bed, he at once asked for his wife, whom he so much desired in his heart. When St Osith heard the news, she said to God: “Now defend your handmaiden for the sake of your name. Exert your power so that, as long as I do my best, I shall not be in any way shamed or violated this night. And since I have given myself to you, defend me as someone you love, so that I may not be shamed this night.” (426-443)

She came forward. As soon as the king saw her, he greatly desired and lusted for her. St Osith said to him: “Dear lord, for the love of God, listen to me and give me some respite from this union between us which you desire so much. I ask you for a small delay, lord King, if you ever wish to enjoy me.” He didn’t want to listen to her at all but continued to pursue his desire. She, using anything she could think of to say, but speaking pleasantly rather than in anger, would not consent to his desire or his pleasure. She urgently requested terms and a respite, but he accepted this very unwillingly, and she continued nevertheless to resist him so much, pressing her request, and pleading through the power of the Holy Spirit, that the time was put off.²⁵ —

²⁵She continued nevertheless to resist him, pressing her request and pleading (*Et nequedent tant l’ad lutié, Requis mut et travaillé* 462-63): the manuscript has feminine endings for the past participles (*lutiee... travaillée*), but retains the masculine for *requis* and elsewhere exhibits some confusion of *ee/é*. The emendations adopted here make the subject of the sentence Osith, giving readier sense than if it were Sighere.

Deus l'ad gardé omnipotent,
 Unc ne l'aprocha charnelement.
 468 E gueres plus ne demora
 Ke il autre feiz la resona
 K'a li se vout assembler,
 Respit ne vout mes doner.
 472 Mes seint' Osith cria merci
 A Dampnedeu tut autresi
 Cum aveit ele fet devant
 Ke par son nun l'ert defendant. [Fol. 138rb]
 476 Le reis comence a losenger,
 E tel ovre est, a coroucer;
 Mes tant a purchacé e quis
 E tant fait entre giu e ris,
 480 De jur en jur est purloinié,
 Charnelement ne ad aproché.
 Soventefeiz l'ad envaie,
 Mes Dampnedeu garda s'amie,
 484 Ke ou son barun maneit issi
 Virgine treis anz e demi.
Un jur après issi avint
 Li reis Syer sa feste tint
 488 Ke il fist de sa nativité;
 Grant poeple i out assemblé,
 Contes, barons e chivalers,
 Ses frankeleins e ses terrers.
 492 Le jur quant il aveit mangé,
 Et sunt partut joius e lé,
 Et il meimes bien enbeverez
 En la chambre est tut dreit alez,
 496 Et s'i couche sur son lit;
 Kant reposé se est un petit
 Sa femme fet a ly venir,
 Si la comence en lit gisir,

Almighty God protected her and Sighere never managed to approach her in a carnal way. And hardly any time passed before he began arguing with her again because he wanted to sleep with her. He didn't want to grant her any further reprieve. But St Osith cried to God for mercy just as she had done before, that he would defend her for his name's sake. The king began first to flatter, and then to become angry. But she exerted herself and pleaded so much and between game and laughter said enough so that from day to day he was put off. He never approached her carnally. He often wanted to, but God protected his beloved, so that she lived in this way as a virgin with her husband for three and a half years. (444-485)

One day after this it happened that King Sighere held his birthday feast. He had assembled many people: counts, barons, and knights, his franklins and his landholders. That day, when he had eaten and everybody was merry and glad and he himself had drunk well, he went straight to his chamber and lay down on his bed. When he had rested a bit he sent for his wife and began to lie with her in his bed. —

500 Bien entrussement li dist,
 Mes ne li durra respit.
 Kant seint' Osith icest entent,
 Plure des oilz mut tendrement

504 Et vers le ciel lasus garda,
 Et Dampnedeu mut reclama,
 Ke par la sue grant vertu,
 G[a]rant li seit en bon escu.

508 Li reis se peine mut forment
 De son bon fere e sun talent,
 E ele a trestut son poer

[Fol. 138va]

Se tint contre l'ardent voler,
 512 Me[s] come ele plus se defent
 Cil se deve e plus esprent,
 De son bon fere met pur veir
 Tute sa force e son poeir,

516 E jure assez e dist le bien
 Son cuntredit ne li vaut rien.

En ceste anguisse u ele esteit
 520 **E** la dolur ke ele a quer aveit
 Seint' Osith ententivement

Reclama Deu omnipotent,
 E dist: "Sire Deu, vostre aye,
 Ceste ancele n'obliez mye,
 524 Tantes feiz m'avez sucuru,
 E mun cors, Sire, defendu;
 A ceste feiz, Sire, me sucurez,
 Des maus a cestui me delivrez
 528 Sanz enfreindre la veray voé.

(528-29 *inverted by ed.*)

Si vus promet pur verité
 Si vus a ceste feiz aydez
 Pur mei succure e travailliez,
 532 Puis ceste hure mettrai pur veir
 Tute ma force e mun poeir
 Ke mes travail n'avez en pose
 De mei ayder pur cele chose."

He told her very firmly that he would never again grant her any delay. When St Osith heard that, she wept very piteously and looked up to heaven and called fervently to God to protect and shield her by his great power. The king tried with all his might to have his will of her and she, with all her might, defended herself against his ardent desire. But the more she defended herself, the more he became maddened and inflamed. He used all his force and strength to have his will of her and swore many times and said clearly that her resistance counted for nothing with him. (486-517)

In such straits as she was, and with pain in her heart, St Osith called on God almighty and said, “Lord God, give me your aid. Do not forget this maiden. Many times you have helped me and defended my body, lord. This time, lord, help me and free me from the evil of this man, so that I do not break my true oath.²⁶ I promise you truly that if you help me this time, from this hour onwards I will truly apply all my strength and my power so that you will never again have to trouble to help me in this matter.”(518-535)

²⁶So that I do not break my true oath ... I promise you truly (*Sanz enfreindre la veray voé / Si vus promet pur verité* 528-29): the lines make poor sense in their order in the manuscript and have been inverted by the editor.

536 **Q**ant seint' Osith aveit dit tant,
 Este vus une noyse mut grant,
 Ke en cele sale est ja levee;

La gent laenz se desree
 540 E haut e bas communament
 Crient e huchent durement,
 E vers la chambre vunt criant,
 Li un ariere, li autre avant.

[Fol. 138vb]

544 "A Deu," funt il, "li reis u est?
 Allas, ke il ne set cest
 Ke hui en cest jur est avenu!
 Mut se tenist a deceu

548 Si il sust ceste aventure,
 Kant venu n'i est a dreit' hure!"

Ly reis escute e entent
 La grant noyse ke funt sa gent,
 552 Coment le vunt tut demandant.

E il s'en turne maintenant,
 E vers l'uis de la sale vait
 Pur saver mun quele noise i ait;
 556 E puis ke il lur ad demandé
 Delivrement li unt cunté
 Cum faitement un poy devant
 Un cerfs tut blanc i vint current,

560 Ke de la mer tut dreit veneit
 Et si curut a grant espleit
 La hors u bien esteit veus
 Par les braches e les seus,
 564 U tut esturent a lur past,
 Si cum les chiens rien ne dotast.

E li brachet trestuz cuplé
 E li seuz entremedlé,
 568 Li autre chien petit e grant,
 A fort espleit le vunt suivant.

Just as St Osith had finished saying this, there arose a great noise in the hall. The people there were in great confusion: everyone, high and low together, called out and yelled loudly and ran shouting towards the bedchamber, some in front and others behind. “God!” they said, “Where is the king? Alas that he does not know what has happened today! He would hold himself cheated for not coming out at the right time if he knew about this adventure.” (536-549)

The king listened and heard the great clamor his people were making, and how they all asked for him, and he turned and went towards the door of the chamber to find out what the noise was about. And after he asked them, they quickly told him how, a little before, a white stag had come running directly from the sea, and how it ran very fast out in the open where it was seen by the hounds and hunting dogs where they were all at their meal, as if the stag did not fear the dogs at all. And all the leashed brachets and the other hunting dogs with them, and all the other dogs both large and small, went running after it at great speed. —

Ky ke pout unkes cheval aver,
 Après s'en est alé pur ver,
 572 E que cheval n'en aveit prest,
 Tut a pié alé s'en est.

576 **Q**uant li reis ad iceo oy, [Fol. 139ra]
 "Ostez," ceo dit, "trop ai dormi!
 Ça, mun cheval delivrement!"

E il ne s'est targié nient,
 Ainz comande trestuz munter
 E sei meimes fet aprester,
 580 Puis est munté maintenant
 E vait le cerf a plein suivant.

584 **L**i cerfs s'en (ms: cen) vait ou grant bandon,
 Li reis après e cist baron;
 Current li chien a grant espleit,

Deske li cerf est venu tut dreit
 Deske a un bras parfund de mer,
 U ne soleit nuls hom passer,
 588 Kar l'euue esteit redde e parfunde.
 Li cerf s'est mis tut dreit en l'unde.
 Cel bras de mer li paisant
 Cattewade vunt apellant.

592 Li cerf en l'euue noe amunt,
 Les chiens anguissus sunt,
 Crient e funt noise mut grant.

A nou le vunt a plein suivant,
 596 Li reis en est mut anguissus,
 Del cerf prendre mut desirus,
 Kar unkes ne vit nul jur
 Cerf ne bisse de sa blanchur.

600 Il vait puignant par cel sablon,
 Hurte chival des esporun,
 Coment chevache ne li chuet,
 En braz de mer parfund se met,

Indeed anyone there who could get a horse followed it, and those who didn't have a horse ready went running on foot. (550-573)

When the king heard this, he said, "Away! I've slept too much. My horse, quick!" He didn't wait at all. He commanded all to mount and got himself ready. Then he mounted immediately and went to follow the stag. (574-581)

The stag fled headlong with the king and his men chasing after it. The dogs were running rapidly and the stag came to a deep arm of the sea where no man was used to crossing because the water was rough and deep. The stag plunged straight into the sea. The inhabitants call this arm of the sea Cattawade. The stag swam in the current; the dogs were highly excited. Baying and making a great deal of noise, they followed it. The king was very anxious, very desirous of taking the stag, because he had never before that day seen a stag or hind of such whiteness. He went galloping along the beach, pricking his horse with his spurs. How he rode didn't matter to him. He plunged into the arm of the sea. —

- 604 Red e parfund esteit li guez,
 Devant ceo n'ert unc mes passez
 Par home a chival ne a pié,
 Trestut primes l'ad asaié. [Fol. 139rb]
- 608 L'ure quant sunt li chien passé
 Estoit li reis parfund en gué;
 Mes le cheval iert fort e bon,
 Tut sulement se met a port.
- 612 **L**y cerf a plein en chemin entre
LE vunt li chien currant sur ventre,
LE li reis vient après puignant,
 Ses chiens a plein esbaudissant.
- 616 Mes li cerf n'est unkes restuz,
 Dekes Donewiz est dreit venuz,
 Iluec s'est mis en cele mer.
 Li rei se peine del haster,
- 620 Mes n'i put unc si tost venir,
 Pur rien [ne] put le cerf choisir.
 Ne set coment s'en est partiz
 Kar de ses oilz est evaniz.
- 624 Les chiens esteient tut asoté,
 E sus e jus unt resgardé.
 Ore penst d'autre cerf li reis,
 Kar ne verra cesti del meis.
- 628 **T**ant cum li reis vait demorant,
TE ou ses chiens le cerf suivant,
TSaint' Osith n'ad pas oblié
 En quel pour aveit esté.
- 632 Ainz dist ke mes ne targera
 De ceo ke out enpensé peça.
 Coment ke li plai pust se prendre, (ms: pus se prenge)
 A Dampnedeu se voudra rendre.
- 636 Puis en après la Deu ancele
 Tuit en secrei a sei apelle
 Seint Ecça e seint Bedewin,

The crossing was deep and rough. Before that, it had never been crossed by a man either on foot or on horseback. He was the first to try. When the dogs had got across, the king found himself deep in the middle of the ford. But the horse was good and strong and reached the shore on its own. (582-611)

The stag went running along the path, and the hounds went running after it as fast as they could, flat to the ground. The king came riding behind, encouraging his dogs. But the stag never stopped until it came to Dunwich. There it plunged into the sea. The king tried hard to hurry, but he couldn't get there quickly enough. He could not see the stag at all. He didn't understand how it had gone, but it had vanished from his sight. The dogs were confused, looking this way and that. Now the king had better think about other stags, because he will never see this one again. (612-627)

While the king was delayed following the stag with his dogs, St Osith had not forgotten how frightened she had been, rather she told herself that she would not put off any longer what she had made up her mind to do a little while before. However their disagreement might resolve itself, she would want to give herself to God. Shortly after this, God's handmaiden called St Acca and St Bedwin to her, —

- E si lur dist, le chief enclin:
 640 “Seigniurs, ore m’escutez ici, [Fol. 139va]
 Pur amur Deu merci vus cri,
 Pensez de mei conseil doner:
 Eu mund ne voudray plus ester,
 644 Ne mes souffrir le grant ennui;
 En cel habit u ore sui,
 Jeo voil ke le veil me donez,
 Pur nule rien me ne targez;
 648 Jeo l’ay tut prest ci ou mei,
 Prendre le veil en bone fei.”
 Cil responent: “Dame, merci,
 Nus ne l’osum pas fere issi
 652 Kar vus estes joint a seigniur,
 Coment k’entre nus seit l’amur
 Par nostre asenz n’osum pas
 Muer a vus l’abit des dras;
 656 Mes si vus plest, dame, suffrez,
 A ceo purrez venir assez;
 N’osum tele chose uncore enprendre,
 Deske en avant bien est d’atendre.”
 660 E seint’ Osith requert assez
 Pur Deu amur les ordenez,
 Ke il fac[ent] ceo ke lur ad dist
 Mes il li unt tut escundist;
 664 E quant la dame bien entent
 Ke ne volent faire nient,
 “Seigniurs,” ceo dit, “quant est issi,
 Deu penst de mei par sa merci.”
 668 Plus en après leva sa main
 E treit le veil hors de son sein
 E sur le auter offrir le vait,
 Puis de sa main vers li le trait
 672 E sur son chief le veil ad mis
 E attaché e bien asis [Fol. 139vb]

and said to them, her head bowed:

“Sirs, listen to me here. For the love of God, I beg your mercy. I need your advice. I no longer wish to live in the world, or suffer its pains any longer in the clothing I currently wear. I want you to give me the veil. By no means put me off: I have it all ready here with me. I want to take it in good faith.”

They responded:

“Lady, mercy: we don’t dare to do it in this way, for you are joined to a husband. For all the affection that there is between us, we daren’t give our consent to changing your habit. But if you will be patient, lady, you can achieve what you desire. We do not yet dare to undertake such a thing since it is better to wait a little.”

And St Osith pleaded greatly with the priests for the love of God to do what she had asked them to, but they refused her everything. When the lady realized that they did not intend to do anything, she said:

“Sirs, since it is like this, may God think of me in his mercy.”

Then she lifted her hand, and took the veil out of her bosom and went to offer it on the altar. Then, with her own hand, she drew the veil towards herself and placed it on her head and attached it and fixed it well —

E dit: "Dampnedeu tut puissant,
 Cors e alme ci vus comant,
 676 Si me gardez pur vostre nun,
 Car n'ay d'autre guarisun."
 S einte Osith ad cest ovre enpris
 Ke sur son chief le veil ad mis.
 680 Li rei vient ja de chacer
 U gueres ne put espleiter.
 A l'us de la sale decent,
 Irus e plein de maltalent, (682-83 *inverted by ed.*)
 684 Car custume est, bien le savez,
 Ke riche home coruce assez
 Kant a sa beste avera failli,
 E il refist tut autresi.
 688 En la chambre est droit alé,
 La reine ad tost demandé.
 E ele vient en son neir veil:
 Al rei en fremist chescun peil,
 692 L'alme del cors pur poi s'en ist,
 Tant s'emaï, tant enpouerist.
 E quant regart la couele bise,
 A poy d'effrai le quer n'i brise.
 696 Del cerf li membre ke il tant suivi,
 Quide ke deable l'en a trai.
 Mes quant se parceit de la reine,
 De rampuner la ne fet traine:
 700 Mut la comence a leidenger
 Des paroles e a tencer;
 Corucé e devé a desmesure,
 Asez li dist, asez li jure,
 704 Dist par serment e manascer,
 Tut son engin n'avera mester,
 [.]
 Ne pura pas si enginnier. [Fol. 140ra]

and said: “Almighty and all powerful God, I commend my body and soul to you. Protect me in your name, for I have no other surety.” (628-677)

Just when St Osith had undertaken to place the veil on her own head, the king returned from the hunt, where he had not been successful, and dismounted at the hall door.²⁷ He was angry and full of bad temper, for it is usual, as you well know, for a rich man to become very angry when he fails to capture his quarry, and just so did the king. He went straight to his chamber and sent immediately for the queen. And she came in her black veil.²⁸ The hair on the king’s neck stood up. His soul nearly fled from his body out of fright, so great was his dismay and alarm, and when he looked at the brown cowl, his heart almost cracked for fear. He remembered the stag which he had pursued so hard and thought that the devil had taken it. But when he saw the queen, he did not delay in reviling her. He began vehemently to upbraid and reproach her. Angry and furious beyond measure, he said and swore enough at her, saying both as a threat and an oath that all her scheming would be of no use [...],²⁹ that she could not deceive him in this way.

²⁷Dismounted at the hall door ... angry and full of bad temper (*A l’us de la sale decent... Irus e plein de malalent* 682-83): these lines have been reversed in the manuscript and are re-ordered in the text and translation here.

²⁸In her black veil (*En son noir veil* 690): black was the standard colour of a nun’s veil, and the habits of undyed cloth first worn by the Benedictines created a general presumption for religious clothing to be of coarse brown, grey, or dark cloth. The Augustinian canons and canonesses of the twelfth century wore a white surplice along with their habit, though several sets of early thirteenth-century bishops’ injunctions to St Osith’s at Chich suggest the canons were not all wearing garments of uniform price and color (VCH Essex 158). In the extant (late thirteenth-century) manuscript of *La Vie sainte Osith*, BL Addit. 70513, the opening illustration on f. 134va shows Osith dressed in a brown tunic under a white-lined blue mantel with a white veil, while her companion saints, Audrée and Modwenna, both Benedictine abbesses, wear black and brown habits respectively (the latter with a white-lined overmantel): see Russell 2003, plates 5a and 6a for reproductions.

²⁹[706][...]: the rhyme suggests that a line has been omitted in the manuscript at the bottom of f. 139vb, following line 705, though it is also possible that this may be a triplet (cf vv. 381-83 and see notes 1 and 22 above).

- 708 Mais ele li dist pur nient le fet,
 Pur nul homme n'ert defet;
 Dekes a Deu s'est si rendue,
 Mes ne put li estre tollue;
- 712 Ainz voudra meuz la mort souffrir
 Ke cest abit jamés guerpier.
Ademesure grant dolur
 En fet li rei e nuit e jur;
- 716 **A**Lesse son beivre e son manger,
 Cum fu jadis custumer,
 Ne put nuls hom a ly parler,
 N'en la chambre gueres entrer.
- 720 Kant sa dolur ad fet asez
 Ke tut put estre alessez,
 Purpense sey a chef de tur
 Ke rien ne vaut sa dolur,
- 724 Kant veit ke ne put estre muee,
 A sainte Osith ad grantee,
 Ke remaine tut autresi
 En cel abit ke ele ad choisi;
- 728 S'il vei[s]t ke el estre peust,
 Ja le congé par lui n'eust.
 "Dame," ceo dit il, "quant issi est
 Ke jeo ne puis vus tollir icest,
- 732 Ceo peise mei estre mun gré,
 Ore seit a vostre volonté.
 Mes kant l'avét issi empris,
 Des ore n'i ad en, ceo m'est avis;
- 736 Mes a ceste religion
 Covent ke jeo mette mun don:
 La vile Chich vus doins issi,
 Kenelovedene tut autresi,
- 740 Tut ensement Hodefeld avez. [Fol. 140rb]
 De ceo faites vos volentez,
 Kar jeo vous bien frai estorer;

But she told him that his threats were of no account, that her action could not be undone for any man. Now that she had given herself up to God, she could not be taken away from him: on the contrary, she would rather suffer death than ever abandon her habit. (678-713).

The king grieved out of measure day and night. He stopped eating and drinking as he had been accustomed to do. Nor could any man speak to him or even enter his chamber. When he had mourned enough for everything to be somewhat relieved, he thought finally that nothing was worth all that grief. When he saw that nothing could be changed, he gave his permission to St Osith to remain as she was, in the habit she had chosen. If he had seen that it could have been otherwise, she would never have had his leave. (714-730)

“Lady,” he said, “although it grieves me that I can’t persuade you to remove the veil from yourself, let it now be as you wish. Since you have undertaken this, from now on there’s nothing left to do about it, in my opinion: but it is fitting that I should make my gift to this religion. So I give you the town of Chich and also Kelvedon as well, and you shall also have Hatfield.³⁰ Do what you will with these, because I will have them well endowed for you.

³⁰Kelvedon ... Hatfield (*Kenelovedene ... Hodefild* 739-740): Baker suggests Colchester, the Roman Camulodunum (Baker 1911, 491, n. to vv. 738-39); Bethell argues for Kelvedon or Kelvedon Hatch in Essex (Bethell 1970a, 87-88, n. 3). *Hodefild* is possibly Hatfield Broad Oak or Hatfield Peverel, which were sites of subsequent de Vere foundations in Essex (Bethell 1970a, 88).

E estre ceo vus voil doner
 744 De checun conte e de baron
 La secunde fillie par non,
 De tant cum ad en mun regné;
 E puis a vostre volenté
 748 Ensemble ou vus serrunt veleez,
 E en religiun doneez.”
 Si cum il dist issi l’ad fet,
 E seinte Osith mut tost s’en vet
 752 Pur sa meisun faire aturner
 U deit, pur Deu servir, rester.
 Aprester fait delivrement
 Des offices ceo ke apent;
 756 Les damiseles sunt mande[e]z
 E de par Deu mut tost veleez;
 Ou seinte Osith remises sunt
 E tut guerpi l’onur del mund,
 760 A Deu servunt devotement,
 E mut i vivent seintement.

A prés lung tens avint issi,
 Cum vus avez asez oi,
 764 Des ces paens Deus enemis
 Ke ja vindrent en cest pais
 De Danemarche lur dreit curs,
 Gent haye de pute murs,
 768 Ki sunt venu par dreit fuire,
 Pur crestiens partut destruire.
 Li deuz tyranz ki unt mené
 Ynguar e Ubba sunt nomé;
 772 Les crestiens vunt destruant,
 Chasteus e viles asegant,
 N’en pernent autre rançon
 De crestien for le chef nun.
 776 Cil deuz tyranz pur verité,
 Seint Edmund unt decolé,

[Fol. 140va]

And this done, I will give you the second daughter by name of every count and baron in my kingdom. And at your wish, they shall be veiled together with you and given to religion.” (731-749)

As he said, so did he do. And St Osith left promptly to make her house ready, where she would have to remain to serve God. She speedily prepared everything necessary for its various offices. The maidens were sent for and very soon veiled for God; they remained with St Osith, and she completely abandoned the honor of the world. They served God devotedly and lived very holy lives. (750-761)

After a long time it happened, as you have often heard, that God’s enemies, the pagans, who had already been to this country, took their way from Denmark. They were hateful people of terrible customs, who came here to flee justice and to destroy all the Christians. The two tyrants who led them were called Hubba and Yngvar. They destroyed Christians and besieged castles and towns; they took no other ransom for Christians except their heads. These two tyrants in fact beheaded St Edmund.³¹

³¹St Edmund (*Seint Edmund 777*): Edmund King of East Anglia (841-69), martyred in Suffolk by the invading Danish army led by Ingvar and Hubba and patron saint of the large Benedictine male monastery of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk.

E puis comencent a errer
 Par la costere de la mer,
 780 E en viles entrent partut
 E ocient le gent a but,
 Ardent les eglises a plein,
 Tuent les prestres de lur mein,
 784 Robent la gent, funt envayes
 Partut la u trouvent abeies;
 Le fu i metent de lur mains,
 Moines ocient e noneines,
 788 U k'il viengent, ceo saciez bien,
 A destruire ne lessent rien,
 E en lur nef entrent après.
 Par cele mer vunt adés,
 792 Tant unt nagé, tant unt siglé,
 Ke pres de Chich sunt araié,
 E puis sailliunt sur cel gravier,
 Le pais vunt tut enchercher,
 796 Pur quere cristiene gent,
 K'a quer heent trop cruelement.
Seinte Osith fu le jur alee
 Si cum esteit acostumee,
 800 **M**A une secree fontaine
 Quatre meschines ou sei meine,
 Pur sei laver sunt alees
 E li paen les unt trovees;
 804 N'entendirent pas lungement
 Ainz decolent communaument
 Seinte Osith ke unt trové ci
 E les autres ensemble ou li.
 808 Mes Seinte Osith tut erranment
 Son chief entre ses mains prent,
 Si cum n'eut anguisse eue,
 Tant veit k'al muster est venue;

[Fol. 140vb]

Then they began to travel along the sea coasts and they went into villages everywhere and killed the people without hesitation. They burned many churches and killed the priests with their own hands. They robbed the people and made attacks wherever they found abbeys. They fired them with their own hands and killed monks and nuns. Wherever they went, you may be sure, they left nothing to be destroyed. Then they went back to their ships and went elsewhere. Advancing down that coast, they sailed and navigated so far that they drew up near Chich. Then they leapt out onto the shingle and went searching through the countryside to look for Christian people, whom they cruelly hated in their hearts. (762-797)

That day, as was her custom, St Osith had gone to a secret spring, taking four young girls with her. They had gone there to bathe. And the pagans found them. They didn't wait long. On the contrary, they beheaded them all together, St Osith whom they found there, and the others with her. But St Osith immediately picked up her head in her hands, as if she had not suffered any harm, and went along until she came to her monastery.

- 812 La fontaine dunt ele est alee
 A deuz quarenteines de veiee
 E plus est loinz de cel muster,
 A dreite veie u a sentier,
- 816 U seinte Osith son chief porta.
 L'us del muster puis entra,
 De ses mains l'ad ensenglanté
 Dunt ele aveit son chef porté.
- 820 L'enseigne fu apert' e grant,
 E lung tens puis aparissant,
 E si raveit tut ensement
 En nostre tens asez [de] gent
- 824 Ke l'us virent ensenglanté (ms: ensenglantee)
 Par ki savum la verité (ms: veritee).
 Seinte Osith n'est unkes arestue,
 Dekes a l'auter est dreit venue,
- 828 E de son chef i fet present
 A Dampnedeu omnipotent,
 A ly del tut s'est comandee
 Pur ki amur fu decolee,
- 832 E puis repeire belement
 E entre pilers se estent
 En presbiterie del muster,
 E ses meins comence a dreicer
- 836 Vers Dampnedeu son creatur
 Pur ky suffri mort e dolur.
 Torne[e] dreit vers l'orient,
 A Dampnedeu l'esperit rent. [Fol. 141ra]
- 840 **S**eignurs, ore avez bien oy
 De la vie seinte Osith ci,
 Coment pur Deu guerpi le mund
 E les richesces ke ici sunt
- 844 Pur trover joie pardurable
 Ke a tut dis ert estable.
 Trové l'ad finablement.

Whether by the road or as the crow flies, the fountain she had gone to was two leagues and more away from the monastery where St Osith carried her head. She went in the door of the church. She bloodied it with her hands, which had blood from her head on them. The sign was large and clear,³² and visible for a long time afterwards, and just so in our time too, the bloody door has been seen by plenty of people through whom we know the truth. St Osith did not stop until she came to the altar and made a present of her head to Almighty God; she commended herself wholly to him, for whose love she had been beheaded. And then she went back, and, standing between some pillars in the presbytery of the church, she raised her hands to God her creator, for whom she suffered pain and death, and turned directly towards the east, and rendered up her soul to God. (798-839)

Lords, you have now heard about the life of St Osith here, how she abandoned the world for God and left the riches that exist here to find lasting joy that will endure forever. She found it in the end. —

³²The sign was large and clear (*L'enseigne fu apert' e grant* 820): compare Christina of Markyate who marks a cross on the church door of St Albans and next day offers an oblatory penny at the altar before dedicating herself to Christ (Talbot 40-41). Thomas Head argues that these actions (which have parallels both to Osith's bloody marking of her church and her self-veiling at lines 668-677 above) constitute betrothal to Christ (1990, 81; 2005, 120).

- Sachez ke n'en dotum nent,
 848 Kar Deu le rey de majesté
 Apertement l'ad ci mustre
 Par miracles gentils e granz
 Ke pur ly fet aparissanz.
 852 Fort serreit tut a [ra]cunter,
 Mes partie volum mustrier,
 U vus porrez tres bien oir
 Ke a Dampnedeu fet a servir,
 856 Ky leaument le servira
 Sanz guerdon ne s'en irra.
Ecum nus avum pur veir oy,
 860 Acune feiz avint issy
 Ke grant tempeste out en la mer,
 Horriblement la fist emfler,
 Jeter guages e verser undes
 Leides, horribles e parfundes.
 864 Ky dunc i furent, bien vus jur,
 N'esteient pas del tut seur.
 En grant houré de la tempeste
 K'en mer feseit si grant moleste,
 868 Par la tormente sunt chaciez
 Nefs estranges e travailliez;
 Une horé aval, un' autre amunt,
 Tant cum tut dreit venues sunt
 872 En cel havene, puis al drein [Fol. 141rb]
 A seinte Osith le plus prochein.
 Les mariners i unt ancré (ms: ancree),
 Sigle abatu e bien teoldé (ms: teoldee),
 876 Ilokes vunt cum est custume,
 De tens attendent suautume;
 En havene sunt bien lungement
 Pur atendre le prospre vent,
 880 E vunt tel hore est a la terre
 Pur vitaille e garison quere;

You should know that we have no doubt about any of this, because God, the king of majesty, has clearly shown it to us here by noble and great miracles that he openly manifested for her. It would be too much to tell them all, but we want to reveal a part to you in which you can very clearly hear that we ought to serve God and that whoever loyally serves him will never be without a reward. (840-857)

As we have heard in truth, at one time it happened that there was a great storm at sea that made the ocean swell terribly, hurling waves and pouring billows of water, threatening, horrible, and deep. Those who were out there, I can assure you, were not at all safe. At the height of the storm which was causing so much disturbance on the sea, foreign ships were driven along and belabored by the tempest, now down, now up, until finally they came directly to this harbor, the closest to St Osith. The sailors anchored there, lowered the sails and furled them. They went in there, as is the custom, to await milder weather. They were in the harbor a long time waiting for a favorable wind, and they went to shore from time to time to look for provisions and shelter. —

- A sainte Osith revunt suvent
 A oreisuns ou autre gent.
 884 **U**n jur i vunt les mariners,
 Ly envoieez, les juvencels,
 Si cum esteient customer
 E pur orer vunt al muster.
 888 A ceo ke aukes i unt esté
 E sus e jus partut alé,
 Li uns de eus cum esteit alant
 Trove un marbre gisant:
 892 Pres deuz espaunes de lungur
 E pleine paume out de laur.
 E cil la prist deliverement
 Si l'enporta tut belement,
 896 E si comence a purpenser
 K'en son pais la vout porter,
 E pense bien k'en son muster
 Al pais doner avera mester.
 900 Le marbre porte si s'en vait
 Vers la marine tut dreit,
 Entre sa nef de maintenant,
 E del marbre ne fet semblant,
 904 A compaignon mot ne sona,
 Kar plai n'en tint, bien le mustra. [Fol. 141va]
- 908 **A**tant es vus si unt vent
 Dreit e portant a talent:
 Drecent lur mast e cordes tendent
 E le wydas partut amendent
 E puis unt trait lur sigle amunt,
 Ancre saket, si s'en vunt.
 912 De cele nef oir porrez
 U li marbre fu enz portez:
 Kant li autre vunt herneschant
 E lur aferes adrescant,
 916 E s'atournent e la e ci,

They often returned to St Osith, to attend prayers along with other people. (858-883)

One day the sailors went there to amuse themselves with the young people, as was their custom, and to pray at the church. After they had been there a little while, and had gone up and down, one of them, as he was walking along, found lying on the floor a piece of marble almost two handbreadths long and one wide. And he quickly took it and carried it away and began to think that he wanted to take it to his country. He thought that he would give it to the church in his town. He took the marble and left and went directly to the seashore. He went on board his ship without letting anyone know about the marble. He didn't say one word to his companions or discuss it at all, as later was made clear. (884-905)

Just at that time a good wind arose, stiff and steady, exactly as they wished. They set their mast and stretched the ropes and set the windlass, and then they pulled up the sail, raised the anchor and departed. You will be able to hear about that ship into which the marble was carried: while those in the other ships were taking care of their equipment, tending to their affairs and making ready in one way and another, —

- E cil refunt tut autresi.
 Mes kant unt le mast bien fermé,
 Ancre saké et veil levé,
 920 E les autres partut s'en vunt
 Cum cil ky vent a talent unt,
 Unke cele nef ne fist semblant
 K'en euue fust ne tant ne quant,
 924 Ne pur force, ne pur saver,
 Ne la porrunt del liu mover.
 Les mariners levent lur main,
 Chescun de euz se seignie a plein,
 928 Dient entre eus: "Avez veu?
 Itel merveillie ne unkes fu!
 Dunc n'avum nus le vent portant
 Cum cil autre ki vunt devant,
 932 Le gouvernail bien ataché,
 Degurdé ris, ancre saké,
 E drecié mast, sigle amunt trait,
 Ke deit ke nostre nef ne vait?"
 936 **P**uis comandent les compaignons
 K'il augent tut a [a]vions
 De totes parz pur asaer [Fol. 141vb]
 Si rien lur vausist lur nager.
 940 Entelems pur mut estre grevé
 Ke del havene seient geté,
 Les juvenceus pruz e legiers
 Se peinent mut del efforcers,
 944 E chescun de euz i met sa main,
 Des avions ferent a plein.
 Mes plus semblant ne fist la nef
 Ke maison fet ke (ms: le) tuche tref;
 948 Bien la porunt conduire ariere,
 Mes avant en nule manere;
 Costeant veit e en belif,
 Dreit come cheval ke est restif.

those in that ship were doing likewise. But when they had set the mast well, attached the rudder, weighed the anchor, and raised the sail, and the others were departing like people who had a wind to their liking, that ship never seemed as if it were in water at all. They could not move it from the place in any way, either by force or by skill. The sailors raised their hands. Each one of them crossed himself many times. They said among themselves: “Did you see that? There never was such a marvel. Don’t we have a good wind just like the others who are sailing away in front of us? The rudder well attached, the anchor lifted, the mast raised, the sail pulled to the top of the mast? Shouldn’t our ship be moving?” (906-935)

Then the crew were ordered all to go to the oars on both sides to see if their seamanship could accomplish something. Surely, no matter how much trouble they were having, they should be able to leave the harbor. The youths, hardy and agile, tried as hard as they could and each one of them took his turn. They did plenty of rowing. But the ship did not respond at all, any more than a house being pushed by a pole.³³ They could go backwards but by no means forwards. The ship kept going sideways and obliquely, just like an unruly horse. —

³³A house being pushed by a pole (*Ke meson fet ke* [ms: *le*] *tuche tref* 947). Baker reads *cuhe tref* (1911 494, v. 946) but subsequently agreed that *tuche tref*, the reading adopted here, made better sense (Bell 51).

- 952 Kant cil veient ke n'ad mester
 Ne lur sigler ne lur nager,
 Parolent en estreitement
 Cum cil ki sunt mut dolent.
- 956 "Seignurs," fet l'un, "ça entendez,
 Nus sumes mal bailli assez
 E cil veum tut a estrus
 Ke le ire Deu vient sur nus,
- 960 Pur nos pechez bien le savum
 Cest encumbrier en mer avum;
 Criums merci, cher compaignons,
 Pur Deu le veir e pur ses nons
- 964 Ke cil ke se savera copable,
 Encumbré de peché del deable,
 Ke il put sei faire confés
 De penitence prendre après,
- 968 Ke Dampnedeu merci en ait
 De ceo dunt il ad mesfait.
 Pur Deu, seigniurs, ki ke ceo seit,
 Ke conisant seit ore endreit,
- 972 Ke pur un sul e sun peché
 Ne seum tut ci perilié;
 Kar s'il n'i ad amendement
 Ici demorum finablement."
- 976 **A** ceo ki l'unt lungement parlé
 E entre sei chescun pensé
 De ses mesfez e de ces pechez,
 Atant s'est drescé sur piez
- 980 Ky enporta le marbre issi.
 "Seigniurs," ceo dist, "pur Deu merci,
 Endreit de mei voil primes parler,
 Le men mesfet ne voil celer,
- 984 Si mesfet deit estre nommé.
 Ceo k'en mon quer ay recordé
 Poy de chose est, mé nekedent

[Fol. 142ra]

When they saw that their sailing and navigating were no use, they discussed it intently in the way of greatly distressed people. “Sirs,” said one, “Listen to this. We are in very bad straits here, and we can see very clearly that the anger of God is come upon us: we well know that it’s because of our sins that we are having this great trouble at sea. Let us ask for mercy, dear companions, for love of the true God and in his name, so that he who knows himself to be guilty, encumbered with the sins of the devil, may confess himself and take penitence afterwards, so that God may have mercy for what he has done. For God’s love, sirs, whoever it is, make yourself known here and now, so that we may not all be put in such danger here for the sake of one man and his sin alone. Because if there is no reparation, then we will be stuck here forever.” (936-975)

After they had spoken at length, and each one had thought to himself about his own misdeeds, finally the one who had taken the marble stood up. “Sirs,” he said, “may God be merciful to me, I want to speak first. I don’t want to hide my misdeed, if it can be called a misdeed. What I have recorded in my heart is only a small thing, but nevertheless ——

- Dirray le vus tut erraument.
 988 A seinte Osith estoie aléz
 Ou autre compaignons asez,
 En son muster u jeo entray,
 Un marbre petit i trovay
 992 Si l'enportay par aventure,
 Par geu le (ms: les) fis e enveisure,
 Ci l'ay porté, ici l'ay mys,
 N'enquer celer ceo k'en fis.
 996 Ore vus en ay le veir gey,
 Beaus compaignuns, pur veir vous di,
 Si de ceo ay vers vus mespris,
 Faire en voudray tut vostre avis."
 1000 **Q**uant l'unt oi, funt grant bruit,
 A une voiz s'escrient tuit:
 "A Dampnedeu graces rendum
 Kant tant enquis suvaus avum.
 1004 Ore n'i ad en for returner, [Fol. 142rb]
 Le marbre ou nus volum porter,
 A seinte Osith tut dreit alum
 E Deu e ly merci crium.
 1008 Rendum le marbre a son muster,
 Mut covient iluc Deu prier
 Ke il nus pardoint icel peché
 Ke mes ne seum travaillié
 1012 Cum nus avum esté devant,
 Kar ci sumes trop sujurnant."
 Si cum unt dist, issi le funt:
 Issent de nef si s'en vunt;
 1016 A seinte Osith sunt dreit alé;
 Kant en muster furent entré,
 Sachez ne sunt unques restu,
 Dekes a l'auter sunt dreit venu,
 1020 A genoilliuns iluec cuché,
 Crient merci de lur peché.

I will tell it to you right away. I went to St Osith with some other friends. In her church where I entered I found a small piece of marble and I happened to take it. I did it as a lark, for a joke. I brought it here. I have it here. I don't want to hide what I did. Now you have the true story. Dear companions, I tell you truly, if I have offended you in any way, I would like to do whatever you advise." (976-999)

When they heard this they made a great deal of noise. With one voice they all cried out, "We give thanks to God that we have found this out. Now there is nothing else to do but to go back and take the marble straight to St Osith and ask God and her for mercy. We will return the marble to her church. We must pray there to God and ask forgiveness for that sin so that we won't be afflicted anymore as we were before, for we have stayed here too long." They did just as they had said. They left the ship and went straight to St Osith. When they entered the church, you may be sure they did not delay, but went straight to the altar and knelt down there and asked for mercy for their sin. —

- Le marbre i unt offert e mis
 E Dampnedeu sovent requis,
 1024 E seinte Osith sa chere amie,
 Mes ne seient en tel baillie,
 Ne travaillié ne malmené
 En havene u tant unt demoré.
 1028 Communaument voé unt
 Ke checun, atant cum viverunt,
 Lour offrende frunt porter
 A seinte Osith e presenter,
 1032 Ke Dampnedeu omnipotent
 Aler lur doint sauvement.
 Al pople k'il unt iluec trové
 Cum lur avint unt cunté.
 1036 Pernunt congé si s'en vunt
 E en lur nef puis entré sunt,
 Levent sigle hastivement;
 Si tost cum i feri le vent,
 1040 La nef se torne a tel randon,
 Come colum devant faucon.
Deu fist iluec grant vertu
 E miracle tres bien seu,
 1044 Kar cil s'en vunt par cele mer
 E poesté unt de sigler.
 Les nefes ke peça sunt aleez
 E loin en mer avant passeez,
 1048 Cil ke tant esteient ariere,
 Ne sai coment n'en quele manere
 Fors cum Deu le vout en maesté,
 Lour compaigniuns unt ja passé;
 1052 Errent e vunt siglant (ms: siglent) a fort,
 Atant vienent plus tost a port,
 E les autres passent de tant
 Cum ariere esteient devant.

[Fol. 142va]

They placed the marble there and offered it, and repeatedly begged God and his dear friend, St Osith, to grant that they would no longer be under such restraint and so troubled and ill-treated in the harbor where they had remained for so long. They all swore that each one of them, for as long as he lived, would have offerings brought and presented to St Osith in order that almighty God would allow them to leave safely. They told the people they found there what had happened to them. They took their leave and departed. Then they boarded their ship, and hastily raised the sail. Just as soon as the wind struck it, the ship shot forward as swiftly as a dove before a hawk. (1000-1041)

God worked a great marvel there, a clear miracle, because they traveled over the sea and sailed so quickly that they, who had been so far behind, passed all their companions in the ships which had departed some time before them and had already sailed a far distance into the sea. I don't know how or in what way, other than the fact that God in his majesty wanted it, but they passed all their companions. They traveled and sailed so quickly that they reached port first and left the others as far behind as they themselves had been before. —

- 1056 N'at cil, saciez, k'il n'eit oy
 Coment la nef siglat issy,
 Ke mut ne seit esmerveillié.
 Kant enquis unt e cerché
- 1060 E entend[u] unt la verur,
 Mercient Deu le creatur,
 E seinte Osith la gloriuse,
 Martir e virgine precieuse,
- 1064 Pur ki Deu fist si grant vertu
 Ke apertement le unt veu.
- 1068 **A**utre miracle après orrez
 De seinte Osith si, l'entendez.
AUne femme contrainte esteit
 Vers Hereford de Wales dreit,
 Ke ne poeit avoir (ms: en nule) baillie [Fol. 142vb]
 De li mover sanz [nule] aie,
- 1072 Des membres ne se poeit ayder,
 Ne al lever ne al coucher;
 De ses membres tutdis estoit
 E[n] grant anguisse e grant desdroit.
- 1076 Asez ala par Engleterre,
 A oreisuns les seinz requere,
 Partut u ele oi aveit
 Ke Dampnedeu vertu feseit;
- 1080 Ne puet uncore estre oie
 Kar Dampnedeu ne voleit mie.
 Kant alé tant aveit partut
 Ke ses amis esteient mut
- 1084 De li porter (ms: partir) ja travaillié,
 E au derein mut ennuié,
 Ne saveit mes a [qui] requere
 Seint ne seinte en Engleterre,
- 1088 U ne aient ja fet venir,
 Fors seint Edmund le bon martir.
 La chaitive fu mut anguissuse,

There was no one, you may be sure, who heard how the ship sailed there who did not marvel greatly. When they had enquired and searched and heard the truth, they thanked God the creator and St Osith the glorious martyr and precious virgin for whom God did this great miracle that they had openly seen. (1042-1065)

You will hear another miracle of St Osith if you listen. There was a crippled woman from Wales living near Hereford who could not move at all without help. She could neither stand up nor lie down with her own limbs. She had great pain and discomfort from her limbs every day. She had traveled all over England to ask in prayer for help from the saints in every place where she had heard that God had worked a miracle. (She could not yet be heard because God did not want it.) When she had gone everywhere so that her friends were very tired of carrying her and had finally become fed up, she did not know any saint to ask in England, male or female, where they had not already taken her except St Edmund the good martyr. The poor wretch was in great anguish

- E de garrir mut desiruse;
 1092 Tant ad prié, tant ad requis,
 E ses parenz e ses amis
 A grant peine granté li unt
 De li porter a saint Edmund.
 1096 Sa suer par non ke mut l'ama
 E par terre tant la mena,
 Ore a derein tut ensemment
 Icest labur pur li enprent,
 1100 Si l'aturnast a meuz ke poeit,
 Vers saint Edmund s'en vunt tut dreit.
 Tant errunt petites jurnees,
 Cum furent bien acostumees, [Fol. 143ra]
 1104 Ke nequedent a chief de tur,
 Le seurveillie devant le jur
 Saint Michel venues i sunt
 E la contraite porté unt
 1108 A grant travail dekes al muster
 Pur faire la iluec veillier.
 Mes kant vint tut dreit al vesper
 Li secrestains la fet oster,
 1112 E estrussé li ad mut bien:
 Suffrir ne vout pur nule rien
 K'ele la nuit seit al muster,
 Ne pur orer ne pur veillier;
 1116 Oster la fit demaintenant
 E cele en fet doil mut grant.
 Quant de l'eglise esteit osee,
 1120 **Q**A ceus a dist ki l'unt portee:
 "Pur Deu amur, merci vus cri,
 Ne me portez loinz de ci,
 Metez mei ci dehors cest us,
 Lessez mei iluec, ne vus quer us!"
 1124 E cil refunt tut autretel
 E puis s'en vunt a lur ostel.

and very desirous of healing. She begged her family and friends and pleaded so much that, with great reluctance, they finally agreed to take her to St Edmund's. Her sister [...] ³⁴by name who loved her greatly and who had carried her all over the country now finally also undertook this labor for her. She made her ready as well as she could and they set off straight for St Edmund. They traveled for so many of the small daily distances they were well accustomed to that they managed finally to arrive before dawn on the eve of St Michael's day, and carried the crippled woman with great effort to the church so she could keep vigil there. But when she came in to vespers, the sacristan made her leave, and he made it very clear to her that he did not want to allow her to spend the night in the church, either to pray or to keep vigil. He had her removed at once and she was extremely upset about it. (1066-1117)

When she was removed from the church she said to those who had carried her, "For the love of God, I beg you, don't take me away from here. Put me here outside this door. Leave me here, I don't ask you for anything else." And they did exactly that and then they went to their inn.

³⁴Her sister [...] by name (*Sa suer par non* 1096): although the line is metrically complete, it is possible that the sister's name has been in some way omitted (unless the phrase 'par non' has here a purely asseverative or intensifying function: other examples of the phrase in the poem—at lines 745, 1237, and 1323—are not conclusive).

- Tute la nuit iluec remaint
 La contraite ke mut se pleint,
 1128 [E] crie Dampnedeu merci
 E seint Edmund tut autresi,
 Ke puisse aver amendement
 De mal ke la tient forment.
 1132 A meuz ke sout vers Deu orat,
 Tute la nuit iluec veilliat,
 E pres de l'us se est ajustee.
 Tut dreit cum vint en l'ajurnee
 1136 La cheitive ke tant i crie [Fol. 143rb]
 Un petitet se est endormie.
 De hors cel us u ele jut
 Un hom [en] blanc li aparut:
 1140 "Diva!" ceo dit, "Ki es tu ci
 Ke tute nuit me cries si?
 Ke demandez, ke vus aveir?"
 E cele li dit: "Sire (ms: Sere), pur veir,
 1144 A Dampnedeu vinc (ms: vint) ici
 A seint Edmund tut autresi,
 Ke jeo requer pur son non
 Ke il m'envoie guarison.
 1148 Mut ay par Engleterre erré
 E[n] oreisuns pur ma sancté,
 Mes ne oi pas dekes a cest jur,
 Ci sui venue a chief de tur."
 1152 Il li respunt demeintenant:
 "Uncore t'estuet aler avant;
 Kar Deu n'ad pas purveu issi
 Ke guarisun eies ici (ms: issi ici).
 1156 A seinte Osith tei estuet aller,
 Iluec veillier, iluec orer,
 Kar Dampnedeu t'ad destiné
 En icel liu aver sancté."

All night the crippled woman remained there, lamenting and begging God's mercy, and also St Edmund's, so that she could be cured from the illness that gripped her so strongly. She prayed to God as much as she was able. All night she watched there, and kept close to the door. Just as the day came, the poor thing, who had cried so much, fell asleep for a little while. (1118-1137)

Outside the door where she was lying a man in white appeared. "Now then," he said, "who are you, crying all night to me here? What do you ask for?"

She said to him:

"Sir, in truth I came here to seek God and St Edmund and also to request in his name that he send me a cure. I have journeyed all over England to pray for my health, but up to this day on which I have at last come here, he hasn't yet heard me."

He responded to her immediately:

"You must go still farther because God has not ordained for you to be healed here. You must go to St Osith and watch and pray there, because God has destined you to be cured in that place."

- 1160 “**S**yre, merci,” fet la contraite,
 “Icest respons trop mei desheite,
 Kar cher sire, ceo sachiez bien,
 De seinte Osith ne say jeo rien,
 1164 Ne sai u est ne en quele terre,
 Seinte Osith ne say u quere,
 Unkes mes de li n’oy parler,
 E si resui lasse de errer
 1168 E cil ke tant porté m’unt
 De mei porter ennuié sunt. [Fol. 143va]
 Avant de ci, bien sai en fin,
 Voie ne sevent ne chemin.”
 1172 Cil li respont: “Si demandez
 A gent ke ci demain verrez,
 Aucun troverez en cest entree
 Ke vus enseignera la veiee;
 1176 Iluec guarrez cum vus ay dit
 Puis en alez sanz respit.”
 E cele li dist: “Sire, merci,
 Ki estes vus que parlez ci?”
 1180 E il respunt mut humblement:
 “Seint Edmund me noment la gent.”
La contraite mut en pensa,
 Puis l’endemain quant gent trova
 1184 Ke esteient a cel us entrant,
 Si lur demande demeintenant
 Ver seinte Osith la dreite veie,
 Ke pur Deu seit asenseie;
 1188 Tant ad enquis e tant demandé,
 Le dreit chemin li unt mustré.
 Tant ad parlé a ses amys
 Ke il ja sunt en chemin mys;
 1192 Vers seinte Osith la funt porter,
 Uit jurs i mistrent a l’aler.

“Sir, thanks,” said the crippled woman, “This answer greatly discourages me, for, dear sir, you may know that I have never heard of St Osith nor do I know anything about her. I don’t know where she is, nor in what country, nor do I know where to seek St Osith. I have never heard of her and I am so tired of traveling and those who have carried me all over are tired of carrying me. And anyway I am certain that they don’t know any way or road there from here.”

He answered:

“If you ask the people you see here tomorrow, you will find someone at this entrance who will teach you the way. There you will be healed, as I told you. So go there without delay.”

And she said:

“Sir, thank you. Who are you who speak here?”

And he replied very meekly,

“The people call me St Edmund.” (1139-1181)

The crippled woman thought about it a lot. Then the next day when she found some people coming in at that entrance, she immediately asked them about the way to St Osith and that for God’s sake they would teach it to her. She begged so much that they showed her the right way. She talked so much to her friends that they set out immediately; they carried her to St Osith. It took them eight days³⁵ to get there, ——

³⁵Eight days (*uit jurs* 1193): Baker’s emendation to *vint* is unnecessary: eight days is in any case a more probable time for this journey of some forty miles (Bell 52).

- E travaillient se a merveillie,
 Venue i sunt dreit la veillie
 1196 De seinte Osith kant est la feire.
 Funt la contreite al muster trere,
 Dreit a hore porter la funt
 Kant li chanoines a vespres sunt;
 1200 A ceo ke esteient haut chantant
 Cil vierent ci demaintenant
 Ke la cheitive unt portee [Fol. 143vb]
 E einz al muster avalee.
 1204 Puis vunt a l'us del chancel,
 Acenent les seigniurs mut bel
 Ke il unt plus pres de l'us trové;
 Requis l'unt pur l'amur Dé
 1208 Ke la contraite ke unt porteie
 A seinte Osith si longe veie,
 Ke a sa fertre l'osent porter
 Ke tote nuit en puisse orer;
 1212 Ele est a seinte Osith par non
 Venue par avision.
Tant unt requis, tant unt parlé
 Ke li seigniur l'unt granté;
 1216 La contraite est remuee
 E a la fertre amunt portee.
 Sa suer ke l'ad portee tant
 En haut se crie maintenant:
 1220 "Ma dame seinte Osith, merci
 De ma suer ke vus porte ci,
 Pur ki me sui tant travaillie[e]
 E sufferte ay mainte hachie[e];
 1224 Porte[e] l'ai e sus e jus,
 Tant sui lasse ne puis plus,
 Ore la vus ay ci fet porter,
 Avant de ci ne say aler;
 1228 Si ici ne puet estre amendee

and they labored so marvellously hard that they arrived just on the eve of St Osith's feast when there is a fair.³⁶ They took the crippled woman to the church, carrying her there at the very hour that the canons were at vespers. Just when they were singing loudly, those who had brought the crippled woman came there and, having put her down in the church, went to the door of the chancel and nodded very politely to the canons³⁷ whom they found closest to the door. They asked them in God's name to allow them to bring in to St Osith's shrine the crippled woman that they had carried for such a long way to St Osith, so that she could pray to her all night. She had come to seek St Osith by name because of a vision. (1182-1213)

They talked so much and asked so many times that the canons granted their request. The crippled woman was brought to the shrine. Her sister who had carried her for so long now cried out loud, "My lady St Osith, have mercy on my sister that I bring to you here and for whom I have labored so much and suffered so many torments. I have carried her up and down until I am so weary that I can't go on. Now I have brought her to you. I can't go any farther. If she can't be healed here

³⁶The eve of St Osith's feast ... a fair (*la veillie ... De sainte Osith ... la feire* 1196): Osith's principal feast day is 7th October, its vigil October 6th.

³⁷The canons (*les seigniurs* 1205): the lords of the church, i.e. the canons.

- Ja n'iert pur mei avant portee."
 Sa suer l'ad iluec lessee
 Devant la fiertre dreit cuche.
 1232 E cele remaint la nuit issi
 E Dampnedeu crie merci,
 E seinte Osith par non,
 Ke li tramette garison. [Fol. 144ra]
- 1236 **P**uis unt a matines soné,
 Li chanoines sunt assemblé.
 Lur matines vunt començant
 E mut a trait les vunt chantant
- 1240 Cum a tele feste estoit raisun.
 Kant vint a la sime lesçun
 La contraite geta un cri,
 E pleint e gient e plure si
- 1244 K'enui estoit escuter.
 Um la comanda assez cesser
 Ke ne desturbast le servise,
 Mes ele ne pout en nule guise
- 1248 Al comandement garde prendre,
 Kar ailliurs aveit mut a entendre,
 Ne put sun cri amesurer.
 Le sime respons vunt chanter,
- 1252 *Regnum mundi*, li ordiné:
 Tut dreit cum sunt en vers entré,
 La contreite s'escrie tant,
 Les nerfs li vunt tut crussant,
- 1256 Deu reclaime omnipotent
 E seinte Osith tut ensement.
 Kant longes estoit travaillie[e],
 Sur piez se est a dreit drescie[e]
- 1260 E ver le auter veit tut dreit
 E loe Deu a grant espleit
 E seinte Osith sa chere amie
 Par ki sa preiere est oie.

she will never be taken anywhere else by me.” (1214-1229)

And her sister left her there, placed directly before the shrine, and she remained there all night. She begged God for mercy and cried to St Osith by name that she would cure her.

After matins had rung, the canons assembled. They began their matins and sang very loudly as was appropriate on such a feast. When they came to the sixth lesson, the crippled woman called out and wept and trembled and cried so that it was wearisome to hear her. They ordered her to stop so as not to disrupt the service but she could not in any way heed the command because she was listening to something else. She could not restrain her cry. They were singing the sixth response, the priests were chanting *Regnum mundi*.³⁸ Just as they began the verse, the crippled woman cried so much that she was shattering all their nerves. She called out to God and St Osith alike. When she had been afflicted like this for quite some time, she suddenly stood on her feet and walked straight to the altar. She praised God loudly and St Osith, her good friend, by whom her prayer had been heard. —

³⁸*Regnum mundi* (1252): for a reconstruction of possible liturgies at Chich, see Bethell 1970a, 95-96.

- 1264 A chanoines cuntat e dit
 La grant vertu ke Deu li fit;
 Tut par ordre lur ad cunté
 Coment par terre aveit erré,
- 1268 Coment aveit ailliurs failli, [Fol. 144rb]
 Com Deu l'ad drescie[e] ci.
- 1272 **K**ant li chanoine e li seigniur
 Entendu unt bien la verrur,
 Tut loent Deu omnipotent
 E comencent mut hautement
Te Deum laudamus; partut
 Par cel muster demandent mut
- 1276 Quele noise seit ke lamunt funt.
 Tut a un frus curru i sunt,
 Deu comencent mut a loer
 E funt les seins partut soner.
- 1280 Kant la contreite bien entent
 Ke guarie est finement
 E mes ne sent de ses dolurs,
 Venue est devant les seigniurs
- 1284 E si lur dit: "Seigniurs merci,
 Dampnedeu m'ad guarrie ci
 E seinte Osith la vostre avoee,
 La amie Deu verraie esprovee.
- 1288 Mut aim cest liu e mut l'ai cher
 U Deu m'ad si fet adrecer.
 Si pur Deu me voilliez tenir,
 Ja nul jur ne voudrai partir,
- 1292 En icest liu finablement
 A Deu e a seinte Osith me rent."
 E li seigniur pur l'amur Dé (ms eras.:u)
 Ke ele remaine unt granté.

She told the canons about the great miracle that God had worked. She recounted the story from beginning to end, how she had journeyed all over the country, how she had always failed, how God had directed her there. (1230-1269)

When the canons and lords had heard the truth, they all praised God and began very loudly to sing "*Te Deum laudamus*" everywhere. In the church the people were all asking what the noise was that so many were making. They all ran there together in a crowd and began to praise God and ring the bells when they heard how the crippled woman had finally been cured³⁹ and didn't feel any of her pains at all. She came before the canons and said to them, "Lords, I thank you. God has cured me here and St Osith, your patroness, God's true and proven friend. I very much love and hold dear this place where God directed me to go. If, for God's love, you want to keep me, I will never ever want to leave, but will stay in this place forever. I give myself to God and to St Osith." And the canons, for love of God, agreed that she should remain. (1270-1295)

³⁹The *Te Deum* finally been cured (*Te Deum* *Guarie est finement* 1274-1281): singing the *Te Deum* and ringing bells is a standard response to an accepted shrine cure. For further accounts see Finucane 1995, ch. 5.

1296 **C**ele est remise e mut se peine
 Trestuz les jurs de la semeine,
 A plus ke puet travaillier
 Entur l'uveraine del mustier.

1300 Penible est en mude manere,
 Nomeement de trere pierre,
 E l'el k'ele puet a cele eglise,
 Longes remaint en cel servise.

[Fol. 144va]

1304 Mes deables est mut enginius,
 E de tut biens trop envius,
 Kant Deu a fet ses granz vertuz,
 E ses miracles bien veuz,

1308 Pur sainte Eglise enluminer
 E ses amis reconforter.
 Peise deable estrangement
 E se efforce peniblement

1312 D'esteindre ceo pur verité
 Ke Deu ad si enluminé.
 Dieble n'ad unkes envie
 Ne de pechié ne de folie,

1316 De mesfet ne de traisun
 N'ad envie, si de bien nun.
 La vertu ke est par Deu venue
 Mut vot turner en fanfelue,

1320 Pur fere mescrere la gent
 E ci si fest tut ensement.
 Un lur vassal de la maisun,
 Godwine l'esquieler par nun,

1324 Tant ad forment dieble enticé,
 Empeint a fere malveisté,
 Ke a la femme s'est ajusté;
 Tant ad requis, tant parlé

1328 Ke il sunt tut a un voleir
 De fere la folur pur veir;
 Kar nature est, bien le savez,

She stayed and exerted herself every day of the week as much as she could to work for the needs of the church. She was attentive in all ways and especially in dragging stones and whatever else she could do for the church. She long remained in that service. (1296-1303)

But the devil is very tricky and too envious of all good, especially when God has worked his great miracles and his clearly seen marvels to enlighten holy church and comfort his friends. It disturbed the devil and he tried his best to extinguish that which God had truly made so illustrious. The devil has no envy of sin or folly, misdeeds or treason; he has no envy except of what is good. He wants to turn the virtue that comes from God to folly in order to make people believe wrongly, and here he did the same thing. One of the vassals of the house, Godwin was the scullion's name, was so strongly enticed by the devil and tempted to do dishonest acts that he approached the woman. He begged and argued so much that they came to one will between them, to do folly in truth. For it is natural, as you well know,

- Ke femme est frele chose assez:
 1332 Tost ad le quer asis en glu,
 Tost ad un mal conseil cru,
 Tost ad lessié dreite veie, [Fol. 144vb]
 Tost est en la folur entreie,
 1336 Tost ad lessé bien e honur,
 Tost se prent a la folur.
 Ceste tut ensement le fist,
 Lessa le bien e le mal prist.
 1340 A lur folie unt liu trové
 La nuit quant furent asemblé
 Eu lit trestut primerement
 E li fous out fet sun talent.
 1344 Seinte Osith pas ne vot souffrir
 Cest overaine endormir,
 Ne voleit pas pur verité
 Iceo mesfet estre celé;
 1348 L'un pié de la cheitive prent,
 Sur l'autre dreit en croiz l'estent,
 Si forment l'ad iloukes mis,
 Cuché e joint e ferm asis,
 1352 Ne puet de luec plus estre ostenz
 Ke s'il de clous i fust fermez.
Kant la chaitive iceo entent,
 Plure des oilz e gient forment,
 1356 **E** grant dolur comence a faire,
 Ne puet l'un pié de l'autre trere.
 Li pautener quant l'entendi,
 Mut s'esmaie tut autresi,
 1360 E par matin est tost levé
 E as seigniurs tut dreit alé,
 As piez lur chiet si lur ad dit:
 "Seigniurs, entendez un petit,
 1364 Pur nient le vus irrai celant,
 Assez le saverez en avant,

that woman is a frail enough thing. Too quickly her heart is ensnared, too quickly she has believed wicked advice, too quickly left the right way, too quickly entered into folly, too quickly abandoned honor and good, too quickly she gives way to lust. This woman did exactly this. She abandoned the good and took up the bad. They found a place for their wantonness. That night when they were first in bed together and the rogue had done his will, St Osith did not wish to allow this deed to be overlooked and she certainly did not want this misbehavior to be hidden. She placed one foot of the miserable woman across the other one in a cross. So firmly did she place it there, join and solidly set it, that it could no more be removed from there than if it had been held by nails. (1304-1353)

When the wretched woman understood this, she wept and trembled and began to make a great lament. She could not take one foot away from the other. When the scoundrel saw that, he was very dismayed, and in the morning he got up early and went straight to the canons and fell at their feet and said: "Lords, listen a little, there will be no point in my hiding this from you: you will soon know it clearly enough.

- Meuz le vus voil dire en secrei
 Ke autre le vus die de mei; [Fol. 145ra]
- 1368 Tut ay en tele manere overé,
 Contre raisun e contre Dé,
 E avenu est tut issi,
 Pur Deu amur, seigniurs merci;
- 1372 Trestut issi sui contenu
 Vers Dampnedeu e encorru.”
 E li seigniurs demeintenant
 La verité vunt enquerant,
- 1376 L'aventure ke est avenue
 Trestut issi est reconue,
 A rien ne muntast le celer,
 Semblant n'i veient demander.
- 1380 La cheitive ne puet pur veir
 Del lit pur nule rien moveir,
 Les piez li sunt si transversé
 Cum s'il fuissent des clous fermé.
- 1384 **L**es seigniurs en sunt anguissus
 Sur tute rien e dolerus.
Al muster vunt erraument,
 Requerent Deu communaument
- 1388 E seinte Osith lur dame chiere,
 Ke ele ne suffre en nule manere
 Ke sa ancele seit si baillie,
 Ne al siecle si forment hunie.
- 1392 Requis unt ententivement
 Mes tut icoe ne lur est nient.
 Kar ne amende en nule manere,
 Pur oreison ne pur priere;
- 1396 Contreite i vint premerement
 E contreite reest ensement.

I would rather tell it to you in private myself than have others tell it to you about me. I have acted completely against reason and against God, and so all this has come about. For the love of God, have mercy, lords. Here is the whole story of how I have behaved and acted towards God.” And the canons immediately enquired about the truth. The adventure which took place was completely known. It did no good to hide it. They made no more pretence. The wretched woman could not fail to see that she could by no means move from her bed. Her feet were crossed as if they had been nailed together. (1354-1383)

The canons were in great anxiety about all this and very sad. They all went quickly to the church, all of them together asking God and St Osith their dear lady that she not allow her handmaiden to be so stricken and shamed before all the world. They asked insisently, but all was for nothing because there was no remedy at all, either by prayer or petition. She came there paralyzed in the first place and thus paralyzed she remained. (1384-1397)

- 1400 **M**ut lungement remaint issi,
 Tote contreite cume vus di,
 Dekes le pauteniers morut [Fol. 145rb]
 Ke en tele manere la deçut.
 Deu fist iluec mut grant vertu,
 Miracle apert e bie[n] veu,
 1404 Le jur ke il fu deviez
 E par la mort del siecle alez:
 La nuit après erraument
 Vint seinte Osith verrayment
 1408 E la chaitive deliat.
 De tut en tut la deliverat,
 Les piez li ad desseelez,
 E quitement desencumbrez.
 1412 E cele est par matin levee
 E al muster tut dreit alee
 E loe Deu omnipotent
 E seinte Osith tut ensement.
 1416 Tut dis remaint en la maisun
 E sert ou grant devotiun.
Assez avum oy sovent
 Par reprover dire la gent
 1420 Ke d'estriver encontre aguilion
 N'avient a nuli si mal non.
 Prendre en poum exemple assez
 De un miracle ke ici orrez
 1424 Ke Deu pur seinte Osith mustra;
 Ki garde en prent, bor le verra,
 Kar bel se repent de sa folie
 Ke par autre se chastie,
 1428 E cil d'assez trop tart se repent
 Sur ky le flael Deu decent;
 Kar Dampnedeus est mut suffrant,
 E lungement vait deportant,
 1432 Mes puis quant il fert au derein

She remained in that state a very long time, all immobile as I tell you, until the scoundrel who had so deceived her died. God then worked a very great miracle, a marvel openly and clearly seen. On the night of the day he died and left this world, St Osith came immediately and loosed the wretched woman. She completely liberated her, unlocking her feet and wholly freeing her. And in the morning the woman got up and went straight to the church and praised God and likewise St Osith. She remained in the house always and served with great devotion. (1398-1417)

We have often heard people say as a proverb that to struggle against the goad accomplishes nothing except misfortune. We can take example from a miracle that God revealed for St Osith that you will now hear. Whoever takes warning from it will prosper. For he who can learn from others, well repents his folly. And he on whom the punishment of God has already fallen repents much too late. For God is very long-suffering and is tolerant for a long time, but when he finally strikes at last, you can be sure that he has a very hard hand.

Sachez ke il ad mut dure mein; [Fol. 145va]
 E il refist tut autresi,
 Seigniurs, cum vus orrez ci.

- 1436 **D**e le eveske Ricard essample dirum
 De ceo dunt vus tuché avum.
 Le tiers a Lundres sé aveit
 Puis cil ke l'abbie de Chic fundeit,
 1440 E a seinte Osith chanoines mist,
 Teres e rentes asét i conquist.
 A cist Ricard le ben ne plout
 Ke son ancestre a liu fet out.
 1444 Un jur avint ke il fist mander
 Ses menestraus e assembler
 Ke soleient ses plais tenir,
 E danz Williame avant venir,
 1448 Son seneschal i fist par non,
 De Wokindone aveit surnon,
 E en ki se feit mut enfin
 Ou un Nichole e Rad' Patin.
 1452 A Clakintone (ms: dakintone) comanda aler
 De luec oveskaus pur veer
 Ke a Chic deusent poseer,
 E a son eus tut apruer.

And this is just what he did, lords, as you will now hear. (1418-1435)

We will tell a story for you about Bishop Richard concerning what we have touched on. He was the third bishop of London⁴⁰ after the one who had founded the abbey at Chich, placing canons there for St Osith, and acquiring a great deal of land and rents. To this Richard, the good that his predecessor had done there was not pleasing. One day it happened that he had his servants who usually carried out his law suits summoned and assembled, and Sir William came forward, his seneschal, whom he called by name, and whose last name was de Wordekind, and in whom he trusted greatly, together with one Nicholas and with Randalf Patin.⁴¹ He ordered episcopal visitors to go to Clacton⁴² to see to it that the canons should not possess anything at Chich but should turn over everything to his usage.

⁴⁰The third bishop of London (*Le tieres a Lundres* 1438): although the most obvious assumption here is that Bishop Richard Belmeis II, Bishop of London 1152-1162 is meant and that the predecessor referred to is Richard Belmeis I (Bishop of London 1109-1127 and the founder, in 1121, of Chich as a priory of canons regular), the miracle story which the poem precedes to tell is historically attached to Richard I and 'corroborated at every point by charter evidence' (Bethell 1970b, 303). Zatta considers the possibility that the poem has confused Bishops Richard Belmeis I and II (a ready source of confusion is the fact that Richard II, like Richard I, was perceived as a predator of Chich properties, see Bethell 1970b, 304), but argues that the poem splits the historical Richard Belmeis I into two persons, a 'good' Richard who founds the priory of canons regular at Chich and a 'bad' Richard punished for expropriating its lands (pp. 333-34 above). The term 'ancestre' in line 1446, here translated as 'predecessor,' can also mean '[biological] ancestor' and arguably could apply to Richard Belmeis II, but the replacement of the priests of Osith's shrine by 'chanoines' (line 1440) presumably applies only to Richard Belmeis I's foundation, not to earlier translations of Osith by his eleventh-century predecessors (for which see Bethell 1970b, 301-302). The matter is complex and hard to resolve satisfactorily, though the thematics of Zatta's reading remain illuminating regardless of whether bishops have been confused or generalized in the Anglo-Norman poem. For an argument that the Belmeis dynasty were promoters of the regular monastic life rather than secularists, see Whatley 31-35.

⁴¹William of Ockendon and Ranulfus Patin are recorded respectively as Richard Belmeis's steward and clerk (Bethell, 1970b, 303). At line 1450, the manuscript reads "Rad' Patin": this abbreviation is commonly used for Randulfus.

⁴²It was from the episcopal estate of Clacton that Chich had been founded as a priory: the bishop of London held episcopal court there (Bethell 1970b). The misreading

- 1456 E cil s'en vunt (ms: vint) a grant espleit,
 A Clakintone vienent tut dreit,
 Iluec tienent a fort estur
 Les plez le eveske lur seigniur.
- 1460 **E**n icel tens ke cil veneient,
 A Chic chanoines mis esteient
 Ke Deu serveient humblement
 E seinte Osith tut ensement.
- 1464 De terre aveient environ
 Dunt pussunt vivre a fuison,
 Estre l'aport de lur autel [Fol. 145vb]
 Ke il aveient quei d'un quei de el.
- 1468 Deu serveient en leauté
 E furent de grant charité.
 Le seneschal a Clakintone (ms: dakintone) vint,
 Les pleiz l'eveske forment tint;
- 1472 D'iluec purveit queus enverreit
 A Chich kar ces fors mettreit
 Ki par les chanoines mis est[e]ient;
 Ouveskeseus mettreit ke dureient
- 1476 A li acuntes; l'esveske out voil
 Kanoines oster de cel soil;
 Ne voleient en nule manere
 Oir requeste ne preiere,
- 1480 N'entains suffrir hum parler,
 Ne terme ne respit doner;
 Mes si cum lur est comandé
 Issi en ad del tut overé.
- 1484 **Q**uant les chanoines l'unt entendu,
 Mut sunt dolent e irascu.
 A Deu s'en vunt pleindre erranment,
 E a lur dame tut ensement,
- 1488 Seinte Osith, ke unt serv[i]e tant,
 Ke del surfet seit eus vengant.

And they went with great haste and came immediately to Clacton. There, amidst great strife, they conducted the suits of their lord, the bishop. (1436-1459)

At the time they came, canons had been placed at Chich who humbly served both God and St Osith. They had land around about from which they could live in great plenty in addition to the income from their altars which they had some from one, some from another.⁴³ They served God with great loyalty and exercised great charity. The seneschal came to Clacton and vigorously conducted the bishop's suits there and considered whom he should send to Chich, for he wanted to drive out those who had been put there by the canons. He wanted to put episcopal agents there who would be accountable to him; the bishop intended to remove the canons from that seat. The bishop's men did not want on any account to hear any request or petition or intend to allow any man to speak, or concede any terms or give any respite. And just as they had been commanded, so they did. (1460-1483)

When the canons heard this, they were very troubled and displeased. They went immediately to appeal to God and to their lady, St Osith, whom they had served so well, that she should avenge them for this outrage. —

of "cl" as "d" is common, particularly in proper names.

⁴³Maurice, Bishop of London (1086-1107) had replaced the communal provisioning of the priests of St Osith's shrine at Chich by a prebendal system (Bethell 1970b, 301-302).

- Ke ele deust bien a lur avis
 Defendre les de lur enemis.
 1492 A sa fiertre vienent errant,
 L'ymage ostent tres estant,
 Hors l'us l'eglise l'unt posé
 Cum pur prendre son cungé.
 1496 Le fiertre covrent de une here,
 Ceo signe ke de joie volent trere,
 Ne volent seinte Osith plus loer,
 Kar par semblant le liu n'ad cher. [Fol. 146ra]
 1500 Ou lermes e ou plaintes funt
 Asez saver ke il au quer unt,
 Sainte Osith vunt chalengant
 K'en cest surfet est si suffrant.
 1504 Seinte Osith pas lunges n'endure,
 Bien li sovient de sa leidengure,
 Suffrir ne vout pur nule rien
 Ke venge[e] ne seit mut bien,
 1508 E de celui nomeement
 K'a achesun fu premerement,
 Fontaine e surse e chief par non
 De faire icele invasion.
 1512 Kar ceo fu le eveske Ricard:
 Venu i sunt cil de sa part
 Ke lur terres unt envasé
 E lur serganz unt hors buté.
 1516 **M**iracle avint ici mut grant:
 Cum les chanoines vunt plainant,
 L'ymage en fiertre unt envili
 Cum vus avez devant oi,
 1520 Meisme le hore fu notee
 Dé plus sages de la contree,
 Un mal par tut le cors susprent
 Ricard le eveske horriblement,
 1524 Sudain e leid, de grant baillie,

In their opinion, she certainly ought to defend them from their enemies. They came quickly to her shrine, immediately picked up her image and placed it outside the church as if she were taking her leave.⁴⁴ They covered the shrine with a cloth. That signified that they wanted to withdraw from happiness. They didn't want to praise St Osith any more because it seemed that she did not hold that place dear. With tears and weeping they made plain what they had in their hearts, and they protested against St Osith, who was so tolerant of this outrage. St Osith didn't bear it for very long. She well remembered the offence against her. She didn't want to endure it for anything unless she were to be very well avenged, and especially on him who was the original cause, the fountain and source and chief reason of this invasion, and that was Bishop Richard. Those who came there and who had invaded their lands and thrown their servants out came on his behalf. (1484-1515)

A great miracle occurred here. Just at the time when the canons were complaining, and had humiliated the image on the shrine, as you have heard before—the very hour was noted by the wisest in the country—an illness overtook Bishop Richard horribly in all his body, sudden and hideous, an illness of great power,

⁴⁴As if she were taking her leave (*Cum pur prendre son cuné* 1495): for this and associated rituals, see Geary, 123-40. Geoffrey of Burton's *Life of Modwenna* includes such a ritual against Roger the Poitevin (hitherto believed to be unique in insular sources: see Bartlett 1996, 33-34; text in Bartlett 2002, 192-94): the Anglo-Norman *Modwenne* retains a version of monastic lamentation and *clamor* from Geoffrey, but does not mention the deposition of her shrine from the altar (Baker and Bell 281, vv. 8169-8188).

- Ke nomé est paralisie.
 Ne peut ver, ne peut sentir,
 [Ne peut parler, ne peut oir,]
 1528 Ne peut conustre hum pur veir,
 Ne il ne se peut del liu mover;
 Saillient si hum, si sergant,
 Entre lur braz le vunt portant,
 1532 Plurent ou mut horrible cri:
 “Sire,” funt il, “pur Deu merci, [Fol. 146rb]
 Parlez a nus, cheles k’avez,
 Vus fustes sein oreinz asez!”
 1536 Asez le vunt aresonant,
 Mes ne respont ne tant ne quant,
 Ne saveit en quel siecle fu,
 Tut l’unt pur mort iluec tenu.
 1540 Tut issi jut deske le mardi,
 De ci ke vint al vendredi
 Ne treit a sei ne main ne pié.
 Les seens sunt mut desconseillié.
 1544 Par cele sale vunt pleinant,
 En la chambre funt doel grant,
 Kar al quer unt grant desconfort,
 Ne sevent s’il est vif u mort.
 1548 **A** tant este vus repairé sunt
 Ke seinte Osith deseisé unt.
A La novele mut esturmie
 De lur seigniur unt ja oie.
 1552 Li seneschals vienent au seigniur,
 K’il veient suspris de grant dolur.
 Williame ke ja est repairez
 De la u il fu enveiez,
 1556 “Sire,” fet il, “pur Deu merci,
 Un poy ver moy entendez ci.
 Si de memoire rien avez,
 U nul home entendre poez,

which is named paralysis. He couldn't see or feel, [or speak or hear].⁴⁵ He couldn't recognize anyone in truth, nor could he move at all. His men, his sergeants, went to him and picked him up. They carried him in their arms, weeping with many dreadful cries. "Lord," they said, "for God's sake, talk to us, tell us what is wrong with you. You were healthy enough till now." They continued to plead with him but he didn't answer at all. He didn't know what world he was in. They all thought him as good as dead. He remained like this from Tuesday until Friday without being able to move hand or foot. His men were very distraught. They went lamenting in the hall and made great sorrow in the chamber, for they had great discomfort in their hearts. They didn't know if he was dead or alive. (1516-1547)

In the meantime those who had dispossessed St Osith returned. They immediately heard the disturbing news about their lord. The seneschals came before their lord, whom they saw overtaken by great pain. William, who had already returned from where he had been sent, said: "Sire, for the love of God, listen to me a little here. If you have any memory or can understand any man here —"

⁴⁵[Or speak or hear] ([*Ne peut parler, ne peut oir,*] 1527): A line is missing in the manuscript here and has been supplied by the editor.

- 1560 E raison de clerc u de lay,
 Dunc entendez ke vus diray.
 Beau sire cher, tres bien savez,
 Vers Dampnedeu mespris avez,
- 1564 Vers seinte Osith nomeement
 Ke nus avum si folement
 Ja desaisé de sa terre. [Fol. 146va]
 Empris avum mut fole guerre:
- 1568 Quei k'en après seit fet de nus,
 La peine chiet primes sur vus.
 Kar par autre oy avum
 E par nos mesmes le savum,
- 1572 A seinte Osith ne puet hom rien
 Mesfaire, ja ceo sachez bien,
 K'ele ne enprengent tel vengeance
 Ke bien parra finalement.
- 1576 E ore l'avez pur verité
 Par vus mesmes eprové.
 Pur Deu, tant cum vus poez,
 Sovaus de quer vus repentez!
- 1580 Kant est issi ke n'avez mye
 Force de lange ne de baillie,
 De quer criez a Deu merci
 E a seinte Osith tut autresi.
- 1584 E voez li sa terre rendre
 Si ja vousist vers vus entendre,
 E Dampnedeu merci crier
 Pur vus de cest mal deslier.
- 1588 Pur Deu, sire, kar en pensez!
 Bien le veum, mester avez!
 Pensez de ceo ke vus ay dit,
 Pur sa duçur Deus i ait.”

and the speech of clerk or layman, then listen to what I will tell you. My fine dear lord, you know very well that you have committed a wrong against God, and namely against St Osith whom we have so foolishly disseised of her land.⁴⁶ We have undertaken a very foolish quarrel: whatever should become of us afterwards, the consequences fall first on you. For we have heard from others, and we have seen it in your own case, that no man may commit a wrong against St Osith, as you now well know, without her undertaking clear vengeance in the end. And now, in truth, you have proved this on yourself. For God's sake, as much as you can, repent often in your heart! Since it's the case that you no longer have any power of speech or control of your body, beg in your heart for God's mercy and for that of St Osith. And vow to give back her land if you ever want him to listen to you, and ask God in his mercy to release you from this illness. For God's sake, sire, think about this! We see clearly that you are in distress: think of what I have told you, so that God in his mildness may help here." (1548-1591)

⁴⁶Disseised of her land (*desaisé de sa terre* 1566): on disseisin and its counter, the assize of novel disseisin, in the twelfth century, see Zatta, 336 above.

- 1592 **A** ceo ke il ad parlé si,
 Li eveske puis s'esperî,
 K'aveit longement geu
 E sanz vigur e sanz verteu.
- 1596 Al seneschal k'ad si parlé
 E de son bien amonesté
 De la main destre vereiement
 Le dei ou tut l'anel li tent, [Fol. 146vb]
- 1600 Kar solunc ceo ke out en corage
 L'anel li tent e lui degage.
 E cil li tret le anel del dei
 E si li dit: "Beau sire, ore vei
- 1604 Ke cest gage enveer volez
 A Deu, vers ki mespris avez,
 A seinte Osith nomeement,
 Pur li requere acordement,
- 1608 E as seigniurs de son muster,
 Ke dessaisé avum l'autre ier.
 Ore n'i ad el (ms:eu), quant cest entent,
 Jeo m'en irray tut erranment."
- 1612 **L** i seneschal est ja muntez
 E a seinte Osith tut dreit alez.
 Veint a muster, fet apeller
 E les seigniurs trestuz mander.
- 1616 Sur l'autel ad en apert
 En li[u] de gage l'anel offert,
 Crie merci a tut entur
 De par le eveske son seigniur
- 1620 E lur terre tut quitement
 A chanoines tantost rent,
 E si requert tuz les assemblez
 Ke le maufait seit pardonez.
- 1624 Meisme l'oure qu'est venuz
 [E] a seinte Osith receuz

When he had spoken thus, the bishop, who had lain so long without vigor and strength, roused himself. He held out just the finger of his right hand with the ring to the seneschal who had spoken thus, and who had given him good advice. He held out his ring and offered it to him because of what he had in his heart. And the seneschal drew the ring from his finger and said: “Good sire, now I see that you want to send this pledge to God, whom you have offended, and namely to St Osith, to request an understanding with her and with the lords of her church whom we disseised the other day. Now that I understand this, there is no alternative: I will go at once.” (1592-1611)

The seneschal quickly mounted and went immediately to St Osith. He came to the church and had all the canons summoned. He offered the ring as a pledge openly on the altar, and on behalf of the bishop, his lord, asked everyone there for mercy. He completely and freely restored their land to the canons, and he also requested all those assembled that the misdeed might be pardoned. At the very same hour that he came and was received at St Osith’s —

- Pur le mesfait fere adrecer
 Dunt est venu tel encumbrer,
 1628 Bien unt noté, bien entendu,
 E de plusurs est retenu
 Ke a l'eveske demaintenant
 La u esteit mort gisant
 1632 Est l'oie e la v[e]ue [Fol. 147ra]
 E la parole ja rendue.
 Meismes en point e l'ure dreit
 Ke li gage offert esteit,
 1636 Gariz esteit si come si,
 Mes nequedent pur veir vus di,
 Unckes puis sur piez n'estoit alant,
 Ne pout estre pur rien estant.
 1640 Mes hum li fist une chaere
 Aturné en tele manere
 Ke iluekes sist quant fut errant,
 Tant cum en monde fu conversant.
 1644 Le merc tut dis bien li parut
 Ke il en tel mal issi reçut;
 Il puet v[e]er, il puet parler,
 Mes sur piez nul pas aler.
 1648 Dekes a sa fin verrement
 Ne li estuit nul autrement.
 La chaere, u fu portez
 E par la terre tant menez,
 1652 Esteit si cum fu furmee,
 A seint Pol de Londres portee.
 Iluec remis est a tut dis,
 Bien le sevent cil del pais
 1656 E cil ki iluec unt esté
 Si enquis unt la verité.

to right the wrong from which had come such a misfortune, it was well noted and heard and maintained by many that the bishop, where he was lying as if dead, immediately regained his sight, his hearing, and his speech, just at the exact moment the pledge was offered. He was cured just like that, but nevertheless I tell you truly that afterwards he could never walk or stand on his feet. But they made him a chair fixed in such a manner that he could sit in it to go about as long as he was living in the world. The mark he had received in his illness was always apparent. He could see, he could speak, but he could not walk. Until his death, truly, it could not be otherwise. The chair in which he was carried and taken all round the land was formed to fit him and was brought to St Paul's in London.⁴⁷ It has remained there till this day, as those in that part of the country well know, as do those who have been there and learned the truth in that way. (1612-1657)

⁴⁷Was brought to St Paul's in London (*A saint Pol de Londres portee* 1653): in the reign of Osith's husband Sighere, Erkenwald was consecrated bishop of the East Saxons in London in 675. After he died (in 693) and was buried in St Paul's London in 693, the horse-litter (*caballarium*) in which the infirm bishop had been carried about was preserved and miracles reported of it (Bede, HE iv, 6, 354).

- S**eigniurs, freres, pur ceo vus di,
 Ke ceste example avez oi;
 1660 **N**e fet a Deu pas tel juer
 Cum a veisin ne cum a per.
 Quant contre li pechent la gent,
 Il est mut suffrant longement,
 1664 Mes tut seez de ceo seur,
 Ke quant il fiert, il fiert dur! [Fol. 147rb]
 Bien resavum la verité.
 Seinte Osith ad grant pousté
 1668 Ke Dampnedeu li ad doné,
 Asez veu et bien mustré,
 De sey venger (ms: e) de ses enemis
 Ke li mesfunt en son pais,
 1672 E pousté read ensement
 De mut valer a tute gent
 Ke Deu voudrunt e li servir.
 Mut bien purrat trestut merir
 1676 **Q**uanque hum frat pur li de bien,
 Ne puet estre perdu pur rien.
 Ele est la sus en cel pais
 U Deu ad mis ses chers amis.
 1680 Ne puet buche de hume parler,
 Oreile oir, ne quer penser,
 Ne oil ver en nule manere
 Cum la joie est iluec pleniére
 1684 A tuz ceus qui Deu amerunt
 E de bon quer le servirunt.
Seinte Osith nus seit en aye
 1688 **T**ant cum sumes en ceste vie,
 Ke tant i puissum bien overer.
 E de peché nos cors garder
 Ke puissum au jur de la fin
 Vers Deu tenir le dreit chemein,

Lords, brothers, who have heard this example, I tell it to you for this reason: do not play with the Lord as if he were your equal or your neighbor. When people sin against him, he is tolerant for a long time. But be quite sure of this, that when he strikes, he strikes hard. We well know the truth. It has been seen and shown abundantly that St Osith has great power given her by God to avenge herself on her enemies who wronged her in her country, and that she likewise has the power to be of great value to all people who want to serve God and her. She can reward very well whatever good people do for her; it cannot ever be wasted. She dwells on high in that country where God has placed his dear friends. Nor may mouth of man tell, ear hear, heart think, or eye see in any way how full is the happiness there.

May St Osith come with help to all those who will love God and serve him with a good heart as long as we are in this life, so that we may do well and so save our bodies from sin that we may follow the straight road towards God on the final day —

1692 E meindre ou ses chers amys
 Ke unt la joie de parais,
 [E] vers nus doint sa majesté
 Ke maint uns Deus en Trinité. Amen.

LIST OF PROPER NAMES

- Alisandre** 264, Alexander the Great
Ardene 218, the forest of Arden
Bede, seint 138, Bede
Bedewin 420, **seint** ~ 638, Bedwin, priest, later bishop
Cattewade 591, Cattawade, Suffolk
Chic 1439, 1454, 1461, **Chich** 738, 793, 1473, Chich, Essex
Clakintone (ms: dakintone) 1451, 1457, 1470, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex
Dampnedé 52, **Dampnedeu** 122, 126, 149, 177 etc, **Dé** 1369, **Deu** 2, 32, 33, 37, 38 etc, **Deus** 85, 117, 764, 1591 etc, **Dieu** 435
Danemarche 766, Denmark
Deable 697, 965, 1310, **deables** 1304, **dieble** 1314, 1324, the devil
Deu *see* **Dampnedé**
Donewiz 617, Dunwich, Suffolk
Eadburc 152, Eadburga, daughter of Penda of Mercia
Ecce 421, **seint** 638, Acca, priest, later bishop
Edfrid 223, King Alfred
Edith 222, 227, 253, 257, 261, 272, 302, 309, 313, 314, **Edithz** 233, sister of King Alfred
Edmund, seint ~ 777, 1089, 1129, 1145, 1181 as place name 1095, 1101, St Edmund of East Anglia
Engleis 132, the English, **estorie des** ~ 139, [Bede's] history of the English
Engletere 70, 83, 117, 131, 1148, **Engleterre** 1076, 1087, England
Espaine 259, Spain
Fiz Deu 158, the son of God
Fredeyold 132, **Frethuuald** 378, King Fredewald of South Mercia
Godwine, l'esquieler 1323, Godwin the scullion
Gurcedin 91, Guerredin, pagan king
Hereford 1069, Hereford, Herefordshire
Hodefeld 740, Hatfield Peverel or Hatfield Broad Oak, Essex [?]
Keneburc 151, Kyneburga, daughter of Penda of Mercia
Kenelovedene 739, Kelvedon or Kelvedon Hatch, Essex [?]
Lazre 350, Lazarus
Lovaine 260, Louvain

and dwell with his dear friends who have the joy of paradise; and may he who remains one God in Trinity give us his eternal glory. Amen. (1657-1695)

Lundres 1438, **Londres** 1653, London

Michel, seint 1106, St Michael the archangel, **le jur de** ~ 1105-06 the feast of St Michael (29th September)

Mide, le rey 256, King Midas

Modwen 217, 221, 224, 226, 238, 243, 272, 308, 310, 320, 345, 351, 361, 377, **Modwen, l'abesse** 214, **Modwene** 232, **Modwin** 211, St Modwenna of Burton

Nichole 1451, Nicholas, servant of Richard Belmeis

Nunnepol [ms.: uinnepol] 370, Nunpool in Arden

Osith 202, 208, 209, 227, 241, 249, 254, 261, 266, 297, 299, 303, 346, 352, 361, 364, 366, 367, 386, 399, 423, **Osith, damoisele** 315, 347, **saint'** ~ 103, **seint'** ~ 118, 120, 388, 412, 434, 447, 472, 502, 520, 536, 660, **seinte** ~ 77, 128, 133, 153, 183, 188, 203, 678, 725, 751, 758, 798, 806, 808, 816, 826, 841, 1024, 1062, 1067, 1196, 1212, 1220, 1234, 1257, 1262, 1286, 1293, 1344, 1388, 1407, 1415, 1463, 1488, 1498, 1502, 1504, 1549, 1564, 1572, 1583, 1606, 1667, 1686, as place name 873, 882, 988, 1006, 1016, 1031, 1156, 1163, 1165, 1186, 1192, 1209, 1440, 1613, 1625, **Osyd** 69, St Osith

Pende, le rey 135, **le reis** ~ 147, Penda, king of Mercia

Pol, seint 1653, St Paul's, London

Poleswurthe [ms.: polesurche] 219, Polesworth in Arden

Querendone 184, Quarrendon, Buckinghamshire

Rad' patin 1451, Randulf [Ranulfus?] Patin, clerk of Richard Belmeis

Ricard le eveske 1436, 1442, 1512, 1523, Richard Belmeis, Bishop of London

Rome 216, Rome

Saisons 91, the Saxons

Salamon, le sage 263, King Solomon

Straneshale 220, unidentified nunnery in Arden

Syer, le rei 387, 398, 402, 413, **li reis** ~ 426, 487, King Sighere of the East Saxons

Ubba 771, Hubba, Danish raider

Wales 1069, Wales

William, de Wokindone 1447, 1554, William of Ockendon, steward of Richard Belmeis

Witburg 414, **Withborc, reine** 134, Withburga, daughter of Penda of Mercia

Ynguar 771, Yngvar, Danish raider

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