Pride, Queen of the Sins; Pious Legends; and 'The Metamorphosed Monarch'

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Pride, as the primal cause of the Devil's fall from Heaven, an idea derived from Isaiah 14, was regarded in the Middle Ages as the first, or Queen, of the Sins. In theological and moral treatises, in exemplary anecdotes, satire and romance, the notion is explored again and again. Nebuchadnezzar was a major exemplar of the Sin, and pride features prominently in the tales of the Emperor Jovinian and King Robert of Sicily. The article traces the medieval history of the idea and its crystallization in metaphor, homily and anecdote, and examines the two exemplary tales, with their after-life in nineteenth-century redactions.[1]

'Ofer-hyȝd (*superbia*) sio is cwen eallra yfla' – so Homily XX in the *Vercelli Homilies*,[2] following Gregory, who calls Pride the Queen of the Sins.[3] In classical Latin the word *superbus* could be used in a good sense to mean 'excellent, superb', as in its modern English derivative. But Isidore, Archbishop of Seville and *doctor egregius* (*c*. 560–636), explains it only in a morally questionable sense: 'Superbus dictus quia super vult videri quam est; qui enim vult supergredi quod est, superbus est [a man is called proud because he wants to seem greater than he is; for if he wants to go beyond what he is, he is proud]'.[4] And pride, whether it derived from overweening ambition, a lust for power, or mere personal vanity, was always deplored in medieval Christian theology.

In this essay I wish to explore medieval attitudes to and illustrations of what was regarded as the fundamental sin of all, and to trace the literary history of two relevant anecdotes: the stories of the Emperor Jovinian and of King Robert of Sicily.

Theological and Moral References to Pride

Though the virtue opposite to pride is humility, in Virtues and Vices literature that arose in response to the call of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) for a more responsible and better educated clergy, pride has a far more wide-ranging sense than mere self-aggrandisement. It is the whole gamut of ungodliness in its misdirection from the true object of adoration. Even those Renaissance writers like Spenser who were imbued with the Aristotelian ideal of Magnanimity tempered their understanding of what constituted a magnificent Man with the Christian virtues, including of course meekness and humility, that had been inculcated over and over again during the preceding centuries.[5]

The orthodox Augustinian interpretation of pride stems from Ecclesiasticus 10: 15: 'initium peccati omnis superbia' (pride is the beginning of all sin). Augustine attributes the misery of the fallen angels to this fundamental vice, which caused them to prefer the inferior (themselves) to God, whom they refused to acknowledge as their superior and their highest good. And after the fallen angels, the same is true of unregenerate man: 'initium superbiae hominis apostatare a Deo [the origin of pride is for a man to forsake the Lord]' (Ecclesiasticus 10: 14). The wicked angels fell by an act of evil will, causeless in the sense that the evil arose from their proud act, not from any prior evil in their natures. They were created good by God, who is

[1] This essay is based on a paper entitled ' "Deposuit potentes": Nebuchadnezzar, the Emperor Jovinian and King Robert of Sicily – the Growth and Transformation of a Pious Legend', delivered at the 19th biennial SASMARS conference held at Stellenbosch in 2008.

[2] 'Pride which is queen of all evils', quoted by Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing, Mich., 1952), p. 110. 'Homily XX urges its audience to strive against seven-headed pride, queen of all sins', he adds, referring to *Die Vercelli-Homilien,* ed. Max Förster (Hamburg, 1932), p. 55.

[3] Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 77.

[4] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* X 248, in *Etymologiarum siue originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911).

[5] Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton, 1966), p. 141.

good and therefore not the source of anything evil.[6] But once they refused to acknowledge any superior, their fall from grace was inevitable.

This has a poetic sequel in the vivid narrative of *Cleanness,* where the fall of the angels, following Satan's unrepentant wilfulness, is graphically described (lines 205–34). The anonymous fourteenth-century poet points out that there are more sins than sloth that will cause a man to forfeit heaven; first among them is pride:

> As for bobaunce and bost and bolnande priyde
> Þroly into the deuelez þrote man þryngez bylyue.[7]

At the same time those charged with the exercise of power should not shirk it, even if they have a hard job avoiding the vice of pride and preserving a suitable semblance of humility. The problem besetting a ruler (a constant theme of medieval writers, as this essay will illustrate), who while in theory all men are equal, must necessarily exercise authority over inferiors, is dealt with by Pope Gregory the Great (*c.* 540–604) in his *Regula pastoralis,* II 6.[8] By nature men are equal and humility consists in acknowledging the fact, but vices make a person inferior to those in a position to punish him, who should in such an instance not shrink from exercising the authority vested in them.

Unfortunately many rulers consider that their position gives them a licence to contemn as inferiors those whose good they should rather promote. A case in point may have been **Anatolius, Bishop of Constantinople,** whom Pope Leo (d. 461) rebukes for wanting to subject the churches of Alexandria and Antioch to his jurisdiction.

[6] *De civitate Dei* XII, 6, in *The City of God*, trans. John Healey, ed. R. V. G. Tasker, 2 vols (1945; rpt. London, 1957), I, 348–50.

[7] 'For arrogance and boasting and swelling pride, violently into the Devil's throat (Hell-mouth) one hurtles rapidly': *Cleanness,* lines 179–80, in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (London, 1978), p. 119. The idea of the fall of Lucifer is based on Isaiah 14: 12–15. Chaucer describes Lucifer's fall 'for his synne', too well known to need specifying, in a single stanza, as the first of the Monk's collection of tragedies, *The Canterbury Tales,* VII, 1999–2006, in *The Riverside Chaucer,* ed. Larry Benson et al. (London, 1988), p. 241.

[8] Gregory the Great, *Liber Regula Pastoralis*, trans. Henry Davis (Westminster, Maryland, 1950), pp. 59–67.

'Many enticements of this world, many vanities must be resisted, that the perfection of true self-discipline may be attained, the first blemish of which is pride, the beginning of transgression and the origin of sin. For the mind greedy of power knows not either how to abstain from things forbidden nor to enjoy things permitted.'[9]

Aquinas found it necessary to rationalize an apparent contradiction between the reference in Ecclesiasticus and I Timothy 6: 10, where avarice is called the root of all sin. His answer, essentially, is that 'origin' and 'root' are different metaphors. As queen of the sins 'Pride is not, being a universal vice, numbered with the others.' It originates, as Augustine says, in evil will, whereas the sins are final causes attracting the evil will to wicked ends; while avarice, unlike virtue which arises from the love of God who is eternal and unchanging, springs from an inordinate desire for goods that are temporal and impermanent, in order to have the means to indulge in any or all of the other sins, of which it is therefore the root cause.[10] Nevertheless for social reasons Pride had pride of place earlier in the Middle Ages, and Avarice later. As Morton Bloomfield, in his magisterial survey of *The Seven Deadly Sins* explains, exaggerated individualism in a disciplined and corporate society meant rebellion, disobedience, the upsetting of a divinely appointed order, and, ultimately, heresy.[11] The economic advances and increasing democratisation of the later Middle Ages, however, led to a greater emphasis on the evils of materialistic desires, and a corresponding precedence of the proof text in I Timothy over that in Ecclesiasticus. This is of course not to say that Pride ever quite lost its appeal for moralists, as the tale of Robert of Sicily, for one, illustrates.

In his wide-ranging assemblage of moral and philosophical nuggets, largely from classical authors, the *Policraticus,* John of Salisbury (*c.*1115–1180) treats pride and avarice in tandem, describing the former as the root of all evil, and the latter as an all-corrupting leprosy:

[9] Pope Leo the Great, Letter 106, trans. C. L. Feltoe (1896), in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols (1890–1900; rpt. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1975–9), XII, 77–9.

[10] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* I–II 84.1.

[11] Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 75.

> Superbia uero radix omnium malorum est, mortisque fomentum. Arescunt riuuli, si fontis uena praeciditur; nec rami conualescunt radice succisa. Deficiunt uitia, si elatio iugulatur . . . . An nescis concupiscentiam lepram esse?[12]

Pride is self-love carried to excess, concupiscence exaggerated desire: both are endemic to mankind, 'non tam cognatus quam innatus' (not akin but innate), and both need to be curbed to prevent them burgeoning into wickedness.

Biblical Exemplars of Pride

The Middle Ages found a favourite illustration of pride in the Book of Daniel, which may be described as a tract for making the best of political adversity. Nebuchadnezzar, the proud King of Babylon who destroyed the kingdom of Judah and carried its chief citizens into captivity, was politically unassailable, but the Jewish slave Daniel gets the better of him by earning his favour, by avoiding the disasters with which in his vulnerable position Daniel is threatened, and by prophesying the ultimate destruction of the King's Babylonian empire. And Daniel 4: 29–37 describes the divine judgement visited upon him as a direct result of his pride. He is driven into the fields to eat grass like the ox, and is restored only when he comes to himself and acknowledges the superior majesty of God. Judah may be devastated, but Yahweh humbles Babylonia.

Conceivably the story of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, whose hair grew like feathers, and his nails like a bird's claws, preserves traces of a folkloric belief in the possibility that people might be transformed into birds or animals, though the Bible does not actually suggest this. But because the Septuagint says his hair grew like a lion's (the Vulgate says like eagles'), a tradition developed in the East that Nebuchadnezzar became part ox and part lion, and he is typically portrayed in eleventh-century art and sculpture as a man on

[12] 'Pride is the root of all evil and nourishment of death. Streams dry up if the duct of the fountain has been severed; and branches do not flourish if the root is cut. Vices wither if pride is destroyed . . . and do you not know that inordinate desire is a leprosy?' (Lib. III, Cap. 3), in *Policraticus*, ed. Clemens C. I. Webb, 2 vols (Oxford, 1909), I, 175–6.

all fours between a lion and an ox.[13] However, in their commentaries on the Book of Daniel, Jerome (fourth century) and Petrus Comestor (died *c.* 1180) stressed that he was not literally transformed, and Chaucer's Monk says only that 'lyk a beest hym semed for to bee'.[14] There is a particularly vigorous description of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in *Cleanness*, but the poet makes it clear that he only imagined himself to have become an animal: 'he hoped non oþer / Bot a best þat he be, a bol oþer an oxe' (lines 1681–2). Gower was less cautious. In the *Confessio Amantis,* in Book I of which there are several tales illustrating the various branches of Pride, Nebuchadnezzar, for his 'vanite of Pride', 'veine gloire' and 'Surquiderie', is changed 'Fro man into a bestes forme', to graze on cold grasses instead of eating hot spices, and endure bushes and hard ground instead of enjoying chambers well arrayed. After seven years he recognizes that he has become an animal with long claws, and since he cannot speak or properly bow, 'He kneleth in his wise and braieth' for God's mercy. Having thus abjured his pride, his human form is instantly restored.[15] The point of the story as it appears in the Book of

[13] Anat Tcherikover, 'The Fall of Nebuchadnezzar in Romanesque Sculpture (Airvault, Moissac, Bourg-Argental, Foussais)', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 49 (1986): 288–300 (p. 297), quotes Epiphanius (5th century AD): 'anteriora eius cum capite bovis erant similia, posteriora cum pedibus leonis [his front and head were like those of an ox, his hindquarters and feet resembled a lion's]' (*PG* XVIII, 403), with other examples.

[14] 'For offending God, Nebuchadnezzar went mad and lived on herbs and roots for seven years among brute beasts' (Jerome, *In Danielem*, *CC SL* 75: 809–11). Jerome rejects the contention that this was historically impossible and so the king must be an allegory of the Devil. Madmen do live like brutes, and Greeks and Romans tell far more incredible stories, so what wonder is it if God imposed this judgement to show his power and humiliate proud kings? In his *Historia Scholastica*, Comestor quotes and rejects Epiphanius's interpretation (*PL* 198: 1452). Chaucer, *Monk's Tale,* VII, 2171.

[15] Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* I, 2954–3042, ed. Russell A. Peck (1980; rpt. Toronto, 1997), pp. 89–91. Cf. Spenser, *Faerie Queene,* I v 47. 5: 'Into an Oxe he was transform'd'. On literary allusions to Nebuchadnezzar's madness see David Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1992), pp. 544–5. Unsurprisingly, none of the historical King's self-glorifying inscriptions that survive mentions either his dream or his punishment. A classical analogue might be the fate of the tyrannical King Lycaon, driven into the forest by Jupiter, and there transformed into a wolf (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 222 ff.). See further discussion of Lycaon below.

Daniel is not so much the King's condition as the sovereignty of God which manifests itself in the proof of the temporary nature at best of any person's hold on power.

Over and over again, in homilies and treatises on virtue and vice, medieval writers analysed, described and exemplified pride and its attendant vices. Honorius of Autun in a sermon (Domenica II in Quadragesima) in his *Speculum Ecclesiae* (early twelfth century), allegorizes Nebuchadnezzar as Pride attacking Jerusalem.[16] Alain de Lille, *doctor universalis* (*c*. 1128–1203), in his *Summa de Arte Praedicatoria,* chapter X, 'Contra Superbia', groups together Lucifer, Adam and Nebuchadnezzar, who were all brought down by pride: 'O quam humilitati dissimilis est superbia! Quae Luciferum de caelo ejecit, Adam paradiso privavit, Nabuchodonosorem in bestiam transformavit.'[17] Alain proceeds to illustrate pride by the example of the North wind (*aquilo*) because Jeremiah saw all evil coming out of the North ('omne malum panditur ab aquilone'; Jer. 1: 14): 'for as the wintry North wind destroys herbs and grass, so pride destroys a proud man's virtue'. Jeremiah had a vision of a boiling pot emanating from the North: in it, says Alain, the souls of the proud and unregenerate are being cooked, and the fire beneath it is kindled by Nebuchadnezzar, that is, the Devil. As heaven has four winds blowing about the world, so pride has four kinds, puffing up the people who live in the world: arrogance, that which claims what it does not have, insolence, that which appropriates what belongs to others, haughtiness, that which attributes to itself what is not true, and contumacy, that which elevates itself against superiors. In his *Sententiae,* Alain interprets the 'land of the North' (Zechariah 2: 6) as Babylon, and what is Babylon but that world in which, spiritually speaking, Nebuchadnezzar, that is pride, reigns?[18]

In the section 'De arrogantia' in the *Complaint of Nature,*[19] Alain itemizes the absurd lengths people go to in order to display their pride;

[16] *PL* 172: 885f; cf. Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 396 n. 94.

[17] 'Oh, how unlike humility is pride! Pride thrust Lucifer from Heaven, deprived Adam of Paradise, and turned Nebuchadnezzar into an animal' (*PL* 210: 132c). One wonders how literally Alain understood Nebuchadnezzar's transformation.

[18] 'Terra aquilonis, civitas est Babylonis; quid est Babylon, nisi mundus iste, in quo spiritualis Nabuchodonosor, id est superbia, regnat?' (*PL* 210: 248d).

[19] *PL* 210: 467–8.

he is particularly hard on shaving and hairdressing.[20] How foolish to be proud! he says in conclusion. James A. Sheridan translates: 'Alas! What is the basis for this haughtiness, this pride in man? His birth is attended by pain, the penalty of toil lays waste his life, the greater penalty of inevitable death rounds off his punishment. His existence is the matter of a moment, his life is a shipwreck, his world is a place of exile. His life is gone or giving assurances of its going, for death is exerting its pressure or threatening it.'[21]

Besides the obvious case of Nebuchadnezzar, Biblical exemplars of pride include the heathen generals Sisera and Holofernes. Since the virtue opposite to the sin of pride is humility, it should perhaps not be surprising to find their conquerors hailed as representatives of that virtue, ill though it may seem to characterize such determined and deceitful killers as Jael and Judith. However, a miniature in an early (twelfth century) copy of the *Speculum Virginum*, a moral treatise for young women possibly by Conrad von Hirsau, shows them standing over their victims 'to illustrate the triumph of humility (!) over pride'.[22] The fact that they were able to triumph in spite of their weaker sex is nothing other than a demonstration of the fact that humility always overcomes pride. With overwhelming eloquence, the author contrasts pride, death of the virtues, origin of the vices, and so on for a page and a half, with humility, queen of the virtues, death of

[20] James A. Sheridan notes, in his translation of *Alan of Lille, The Plaint of Nature* (Toronto, 1980), p. 74 n. 4, that in the *Timaeus* hair is regarded as necessary as an added protection for the skull that protects the brain. Therefore, presumably, Alan believes it should not be tampered with, and especially not in pursuit of admiration.

[21] Sheridan, *The Plaint of Nature*, p. 187, translating, 'Heu! Homini unde isti fastus, ista superbia? Cujus aerumnosa est nativitas, cujus poenalitatem poenalior mortis concludit necessitas; cujus omne esse, momentum, vita est naufragium, mundus exsilium: cujus vita aut abest, aut spondet absentiam, mors autem instat, aut minatur instantiam.'

[22] Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 83, who could not resist the exclamation mark. The miniature, in MS BL Arundel 44, f. 34v, illustrating the strife between *Humilitas* and *Superbia* in chapter IV of the *Speculum virginum,* is described by Arthur Watson, in 'The *Speculum virginum* with Special Reference to the Tree of Jesse', *Speculum* 3 (1928): 445–69: 'In the middle *Humilitas* with unconcern is driving a sword perpendicularly into the body of *Superbia*. To her right *Iahel* has *Sisara Dux Midianitarum* at her feet with a nail through his right temple. To the left of *Humilitas* is *Iudith* with *Olafernes* at her feet' (p. 450). The miniature is reproduced as colour plate 6 in the *Speculum Virginum,* ed. Jutta Seyfarth (*CC CM* 5).

the vices, and so on and on.[23] In chapter III the author links Nebuchadnezzar with those haughty daughters of Zion who 'walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes', as the Authorised Version was to render Isaiah 3: 16 in 1611. Nebuchadnezzar stretched forth both his arm and his neck, and was changed into a beast: humility reconciles the sinner to God, but pride turns a man into a beast. Extending the neck lifts the stupid head, which ascribes God's gifts to its own merits. Those who aim high in their own strength look down on everything else, but their achievement is actually a failure, their glory a stumble.[24]

A less obvious exemplar of pride is King Ahaziah (Ocozias) who fell through the lattice in his upper chamber, and then was foolish enough to enquire of Baal-zebub instead of the true God whether he would recover.[25] The illuminators of the *Somme le Roi* typified him as Pride because of his fall, a fall being the inevitable consequence of pride (Proverbs 16: 18), though his real fall was the proud apostasy associated with it.

Animal and Other Symbols

Friar Lorens's popular treatise the *Somme le Roi*, compiled in 1279 for King Philip le Hardi, is in the tradition of those *Summae* that culminated for most modern readers of Middle English in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*. 'The discussion of pride and its boughs brings in the almost inevitable reference to Lucifer. Pride is the devil's own (or eldest) daughter and fights against God himself. It is a lion, and the king of all vices.'[26] It 'was þe first synne and bigynnyng of al evele.'

[23] *Speculum Virginum*, pp. 101–03.

[24] 'Porro Nabuchodonosor extento bracchio et collo mutatus in bestiam est. Humilitas peccatorem deo reconciliat, superbia de homine bestiam creat. . . . [The foolish head is lifted] propriis ascribens meritis quod habet ex diuinis beneficiis. Querens enim suis uiribus altiora cuncta sibi credit inferiora, quodque statum estimat, casus est, quod gloriam, offensio' (*Speculum Virginum,* p. 69).

[25] Elijah angrily told him he wouldn't recover (II Kings 1). For Ocozias as an exemplar of pride see Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, p. 120.

[26] Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, pp. 125, 182–3. Bloomfield describes Dan Michel's inaccurate and sometimes unintelligible Kentish prose translation of the *Somme*, the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (or *Remorse of Conscience,*1340) as 'a model of how a translation should not be done' (p. 182). Other translations are *The Book of Vices and Virtues,* ed.

It's like the wine that the Devil gives a man to make him drunk, for it blinds a man 'þat he ne knowe not hymself, ne seeþ not hymself'.

Pilgrims in the wilderness of this life like the three anchoresses for whom the author of *Ancrene Wisse,* famous for his vivid imagery, was writing (*c.* 1220) were at risk from seven beasts and their offspring (the Deadly Sins). Among them 'Þe liun of prude sleaƌ alle þe prude. alle þe beoƌ hehe & ouerhohe iheortet [The lion of pride slays all the proud, all whose hearts are overweening and contemptuous]'. The proud are the Devil's trumpeters, gulping in the wind of worldly praise and puffing it loudly out again in idle boasting, without thought for the angelic trumpets that will one day blow for the dreadful Judgement.[27] The equally imaginative author of *Hali Meiðhad* ('Holy Virginity'), if not the same writer, warns that since Pride is the Devil's eldest daughter, a virgin symbolically espoused to Christ who gives birth to pride has committed adultery with the Devil himself. As soon as Pride was born in Heaven God cast her into Hell with the angel that had engendered her: 'The thus adun duste hire heovenliche feader, hwet wule he don bi hire eorthliche modres the temeth hire in horedom of then lathe unwiht, the hellene schucke?' [He who thus hurled down her heavenly father, what will he do to her earthly mothers who give birth to her in whoredom with the loathsome devil, the fiend of hell?].'[28] What indeed? That he might forgive them does not seem to occur to the uncompromising author of the treatise.

Pride is symbolized in the *Somme* not only as a lion, 'þat al swelweþ and biteþ',[29] but also as a unicorn – fiercest of beasts, when not (according to another tradition) laying his head meekly in a virgin's lap and so allowing the hunter to dispatch him.[30] The symbol

W. Nelson Francis, *EETS* 217 (London, 1942), and Caxton's *The Royal Book* (1484), as noted by N. F. Blake, *Caxton and his World* (London, 1969), p. 236.

[27] *Ancrene Wisse,* ed. J. R. R. Tolkien, *EETS* 249 (London, 1962), p. 109.

[28] 'Holy Virginity', lines 621–29, in Middle English Religious Prose, ed. N. F. Blake (London, 1972), pp. 56–7; see also Facsimile of MS. Bodley 34: St. Katherine, St. Margaret, St. Juliana, Hali Meidhad, Sawles Warde, ed. N. R. Ker, EETS 247 (London, 1960), f. 69, lines 2–11.

[29] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, pp. 11–12.

[30] For the cruel unicorn ('atrocissimus est monoceros'), see Solinus, *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium,* ed. Th. Mommsen (1895; rpt. Berlin, 1958), p. 190, 39–40; for the meek one, and subsequently a type of chastity and of Christ, Isidore, *Etymologiae* XII ii, 13. Isidore's description is followed on the Hereford *mappamundi*.

of the fierce unicorn is still current in the mid-fourteenth century, in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pélerinage de la vie humaine*, where Pride wears a unicorn horn in her forehead, and Guillaume describes its penetrating and chiselling properties with gusto.[31] Emblematic and weirdly unrealistic figures accost the Pilgrim on his journey. Flattery, the Nurse of Pride, carries Pride on her back, and holds a mirror, explaining to the Pilgrim that pride is like a unicorn that 'fforgeteth al hys cruelte' when he sees his own head in a mirror, for Pride too loses fierceness when praised,

> And ellys lyk an vnycorn
> He wold hurtle with his horn,
> That no thyng, on se nor londe,
> Sholde hys cruelte with-stonde.[32]

Human and animal hybrids feature among the monstrous races described by Pliny; these are catalogued and moralised in chapter 175 of the *Gesta Romanorum,* a Franciscan collection mostly of narratives with appended morals, of which more anon, dating from before 1342. Thus, 'Short-nosed, horned, goat-footed men are the proud, who raise the horn of pride everywhere and have little nose for their own salvation; their goat feet hurry them to lust.'[33]

To conclude the creatures associated with pride, one may notice a sermon in British Library MS. Royal 18 B xxiii, where 'þe egle of prude' is described.

> The prowde man is called an egle for he enforseþ hym to flie hier þan anny oþur man þat dwelliþ in is felishipp, like as þe egle surmownteth all oþur birdes. . . . But trewly, euer þe hier þat þis egle of pryde fliethe, þe lower he falleþ, fedynge hym vppon careyn of stynkyng flesly lustes, like as Lucifere thorow is pryde fell downe in-to the depe pitt of hell and now reyneth kynge vppon all prowde pepull. . . . A proude man also lokeþ farre from hym, as þe egle doythe . . . [being] desirous vn-to worldly worshippes [and not content with his own concerns].[34]

[31] Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, p. 184. The *Pélerinage* was translated about 1426, probably by Lydgate.

[32] *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man: Englisht by John Lydgate, A.D. 1426*, ed. F. J. Furnivall and Katharine B. Locock, 3 vols, *EETS* Extra series 77, 83, 92 (London, 1899–1904), II, 397–8 (lines 14722–26 and 14747–50).

[33] John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 125.

Anecdotes from *Exempla* Collections

In such treatises as *The Parson's Tale* and the texts that lie behind it the medieval love of system led to a careful analysis of the different forms, or 'branches', of pride, but there is no need here to follow Peraldus, Pennefort or Chaucer through all the subdivisions that they (not to mention Friar Lorens) identify,[35] since if pride is the Queen, the root, or origin (*initium*) of sin, it follows that the others will be manifestations of that bias in the evil will that turns it away from God to prefer one of his creatures. Of greater interest are the anecdotal illustrations offered either in separate collections like de Vitry's, or embedded in moral treatises, like Robert Mannyng's, that were compiled especially for use by preachers.

Thus Jacques de Vitry's collection of sermon *Exempla* (early thirteenth century) includes one about an angel's holding his nose not when helping to bury a stinking corpse, but when a proud, handsome youth, finely dressed, rides by.[36] The moral here relates to the frivolous assumption of superiority implied by an excessive interest in fashionable dress, a theme especially relevant in an age when class distinctions were often marked by extreme disparities of wealth. Another anecdote, which reached de Vitry via Italy from Greece (for it is found in Diogenes Laertius and many Italian analogues), was doubtless intended to illustrate the unwisdom of pride and ostentation, but is most likely to strike modern readers as proof that ancient Greeks

[34] *Middle English Sermons,* ed. Woodburn O. Ross, *EETS* 209 (London, 1940), pp. 263–4.

[35] For Raymund of Pennaforte (b. *c.* 1180), and Guilielmus Peraldus (Guillaume Perrault) whose *Summa vitiorum* was written in 1236, see Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, pp. 124–5. For Chaucer's indebtedness to Pennaforte and Peraldus in *The Parson's Tale*, see Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales,* Oxford Guides to Chaucer (Oxford, 1989), pp. 400–02.

[36] No. CIV in *The Exempla or illustrative stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. T. F. Crane (London, 1890), p. 48. The story is also No. LXVIII in *An Alphabet of Tales*, ed. Mary M. Banks, *EETS* 126–7 (1904–05; rpt. London, 1972). The author of *Ancrene Wisse* remembered it from 'vitas patrum' (i.e. *Vitae Patrum*, *PL* 73: 1014), but uses it to illustrate the stench of lechery because the offensive young man is a 'prude lecchur' (p. 112, lines 5–8).

and medieval Europeans had atrocious table manners. A rich King invited a wise man named Philip to a meal, during which Philip suddenly spat in the King's face. The attendants immediately seized him and were about to hale him off to prison, but the King wanted first to know why so wise a man should have risked so disrespectful an act. Philip explained that he was surrounded by so much gold and silver that when he needed to spit he could find no meaner target than the King's beard. So the King forgave him, but whether intrigued by the wise man's wit or morally chastened about his own proud extravagance depends perhaps on which raconteur we are listening to.[37]

Pride manifests itself primarily in disobedience to God's commandments. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* writes: 'Vnsteaðeluest bileaue aȝein godes lare. nis hit te spece of prude inobedience?' (Isn't inconstant belief, contrary to God's law, the species of pride called disobedience?)[38] A century later, in the long section on pride in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*,[39] the first sign of pride the moralist warns against is disobedience.[40] Anyone who shows disrespect to a superior, whether a child to his parents, a layman to a priest, or a subject to his sovereign, is guilty of the sin of pride. Mannyng articulates a culture according to which people are to observe their place in society, and not presume to disregard

[37] No. CXLIX in *The Exempla or illustrative stories from the Sermones Vulgares*, p. 66, with analogues listed at pp. 195–6. The story is also in Peraldus and John Bromyard (see below).

[38] *Ancrene Wisse*, p. 108.

[39] Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne,* ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton, New York, 1983), pp. 77–94 (lines 2990–3704). The work is a selective translation of the Anglo-French *Manuel des Pechiez,* begun, Mannyng tells us, in 1303. Brunne is Bourne in Lincolnshire; Mannyng spent fifteen years in the Gilbertine priory of Sempringham.

[40] This indeed was the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, as it had been in the case of Lucifer, as a result of his pride: 'Because he had before delighted in his own pride, now he tasted of God's justice; becoming not as he desired his own master, but falling even from himself, he became his slave that taught him sin . . . . And as the obedience of the second was the more rarely excellent, in that he kept it unto the death: so was that disobedience of the first man the more truly detestable, because he brake his obedience to incur death' (*De civitate Dei* XIV, 15, in *The City of God*, II, 45). Disobedience is also the first of the branches of 'pride the general roote of alle harmes,' in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* (*The Canterbury Tales*, X, 388–92).

established boundaries. 'Of pryde ys þe begynnyng / Of al maner wykkyd þyng', Mannyng concludes (lines 3701–02), echoing Ecclesiasticus 10: 15. He illustrates four such wicked results by sufficiently lurid tales which his readers or hearers, astonishingly gullible as they must seem to us, are invited to accept as true. In the first, a monk hypocritically acquires a reputation for greater holiness than any in his abbey, but has to confess on his deathbed that he gourmandized when pretending to fast, and now the Fiend has his tail wrapped round his knees and is dragging him off to Hell. We are to understand that it is not simply gluttony but hypocrisy springing from pride that is damning him. The second tale concerns the ghost of a woman who used to wear the most flamboyant headdress to outshine her peers: the terrified spectator to whom she reveals her present condition sees demons burning her to ashes over and over again with flaming crowns loaded on to her head. Men can also be subject to the same vice of overweening display, as the third tale illustrates. A knight affects an elaborate coat but is killed by robbers, God being displeased with his pride. His friends having buried him distribute his belongings among the poor, as is right, but when it comes to the coat that is too fine for men of their station, the poor rightly reject it. However, a greedy clerk, 'For pryde of the newe gyse' (line 3393), begs for the coat, and it proves a shirt of Nessus to him, for it promptly sets him on fire. He had no right to 'were a cloth aȝens hys state' (line 3396). Mannyng would have no truck with the upward mobility that was beginning to disturb the social hierarchies in the fourteenth century, and was to be so signally illustrated in the fifteenth by families like Thomas Chaucer's and the Pastons of Norfolk. The fourth tale concerns a monk who slandered his fellows in order to appear better than they. After his death his horrified fellow sees him sitting by the altar after matins chewing his tongue: sticking it out, lacerating it to pieces, sticking it out whole again, masticating it to shreds, and so on: an appropriate punishment for one who used his tongue in backbiting. And this occurred in England, in an abbey Mannyng is reluctant to name, so you can be sure the tale is true.

From *An Alphabet of Tales*, translated in the fifteenth century from the *Alphabetum narrationum*, compiled in 1308 by Arnold of Liège, come several brief anecdotes illustrating pride, indexed or collected under S for *Superbia.* Thus No. 737 mentions Alexander, who, when

poisoned by his sister, hastily made a will leaving his empire to twelve young men so that no successor might be as powerful as he had been. No. 739 attributes to Seuerus a tale of a saint who could cast out fiends, whether locally or even at a distance. However, he became so proud of this facility that he lost it. He then prayed that the Fiend might have power over him for five months, having endured which penance he regained his powers of exorcism, and was indeed cured of all his vanities.

Satire

Where neither religious instruction nor direct moral rebuke seemed likely to influence the incorrigibly proud, a medieval author might have recourse to satire. The satirical *Sir Pride the Emperor* mirrors the moral consequences of the instability of society in early fourteenth-century England: Pride, crowned emperor of all the world, writes to his supporters in all segments of society, and encourages them to ape their betters and disregard the principles of the estates to which God has assigned them. The victims he boasts of include Holofernes beheaded and Nebuchadnezzar transformed:

> De Holeferne jeo tolly sa teste;
> E de un rey jeo fesei un best.[41]
> [I cut off Holofernes' head / And of a king made a beast instead.]

The poem is a contemporary satire, contrasting the way judges, landowners, squires, servants, ladies, monks and so on behave now, with the way they used to and still ought to behave; not a historical survey, or moral *speculum* or theological *summa*.

John Bromyard, in his *Summa Predicantium* (early fourteenth century), is one of the homilists who allegorises the 'Devil's Castle' with its central tower of pride. Another speaks of the tower of Pride within which resides the Prince of Darkness with an army of transgressors: 'From that castle, the King of Pride sends forth from

[41] 'Sire Orguylle ly emperour', in *Reliquiæ antiquæ: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts, Illustrating Chiefly Early English Literature and the English Language*, ed. Thomas Wright and J. O. Halliwell, 2 vols (1843; rpt. New York, 1966), II, 248–54 (lines 47–8, p. 249). The poem is described by James I. Wimsatt, *Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature* (New York, 1970), p. 167.

day to day his infernal knights and also his mercenaries, namely, the false Christians of our country, who become his mercenaries and servants.'[42] Fifteenth-century Lollards identified these mercenaries particularly with vicious prelates:

> Pride thanne schal be ful hiȝ in prelatis. For hir pride schal passe alle temporalle lordes in alle thynges that longet to lordes astaat, as in stronge castellis and ryalle maneris, proudeli aparaylit withinne in halles, chaumbres and alle othure houses of office. Also in proude araye of here owne personnes, bothe in costlew cloth and pelure as fyn as emperour, kyng or quene. Also in gret multitudo of fatte horses and proude, with gai gult sadeles and schynyng brideles, with miche wast and proude meynye more niseli disgysid thanne any temporal lordes meynye; sittynge atte mete eche day schynyngeli, with precious vessel and rial cuppebord bothe of selver and of gold, and her meynye fallynge doun as to a god at every drauȝte that they schul drynke.[43]

A fifteenth-century carol offers a trenchant warning against pride, and a neat summary of the points so far made:

> Man, be war er thou be wo:
> Think on pride, and let hym goo.
>
> Pryde is out, and pride is inne,
> And pride is rot of euery synne, (*root*)
> And pride will neuer blynne (*cease*)
> Til he haght browt a man in woo.
>
> Lucyfer was aungyl bryght
> And conqwerour of meche myght;
> Throw his pride he les his lyght (*lost*)
> And fil doun into endeles woo.

[42] G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933), pp. 81–3. Pride, and the other sins, attack a castle in Bishop Grosseteste's *Chasteau d'Amour* (*c.* 1230); see Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 141, and in Langland's *Piers Plowman,* B XX, 69–70, where Pride carries the banner of the attacking army.

[43] Owst, *Literature and Pulpit,* pp. 282–3.

Wenyst thou, for thi gaye clothing (*do you think*)
And for thin grete othis sweryng,
To be a lord or a kyng?
Lytil it xal avayle the too.

Quan thou xalt to cherche glyde,
Wermys xuln ete throw thi syde,
And lytil xal avayle thi pride
Or ony synnys that thou hast doo.

Prey to Cryst, with blody syde
And othere woundes grile and wyde (*horrible*)
That he foryeue the thi pryde
And thi synnys that thou hast doo.[44]

The poem derives its force from the richness of the tradition to which the poet is able to allude: the initial proverb, going right back to the text in Ecclesiasticus, and repeated innumerable times thereafter, characterizes pride as the instigator of sin; Lucifer, its primary and pre-eminent exemplar, stands as a synecdoche for the many who might have been cited; brief illustrations of human ostentation, boasting and self-aggrandisement lead to a typically gruesome consummation in the metaphor of worms; and finally there is the familiar injunction to seek the forgiveness available through the sufferings of Christ.

Romance

It was not only in overtly religious texts that the Queen of the sins was castigated. In the moralising prologue to the *History of the Battles (Historia de preliis), c.* 1150, an expanded Latin translation of the third-century *Romance of Alexander* by pseudo-Callisthenes, we hear that 'this story warns that the sin of pride must be rejected. It shows

[44] *The Early English Carols,* ed. R. L. Greene, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1977), No. 355, pp. 212–13, from MS BL Sloane 2593, f. 9r. The initial refrain is to be repeated after each stanza. For 'rot' (stanza 1, line 2) MS Balliol 354, f. 249v substitutes the well-known alternative 'the begynyng'. Cf. Gregory, *Moralia, CC SL* CXLIIIB, p. 1610: 'Radix quippe cuncti mali superbia est, de qua, scriptura attestante, dicitur *Initium peccati omnis superbia* [of course, the root of all evil is pride, concerning which it is said, as scripture attests, "Pride is the beginning of all sin "]'.

this in the person of Darius who used to say that he was a god, by recounting his defeat at the hands of Alexander, who was his subject, because he responded with humility to Darius's arrogance. The same story teaches that earthly pomp must be utterly condemned, and it shows this through the example of Alexander, who mastered the entire world but was unable to protect himself from the power of death.'[45]

In secular romance, pride is the downfall of many an 'orgulous' knight. In Malory, for example, Sir Palomydes defeats and kills two treacherous knights who come against him 'wyth grete bobbaunce and pryde', one of whom 'for pryde and orgule' refrains from hurling his spear when he might have had the victory; and Lancelot blames himself for the deaths of Arthur and Gwenyvere, since it was 'by my defaute and myn orgule and my pryde' that they were laid low.[46] In John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* (dated 1448–9), an adventurous knight, colourfully decked out with the tokens of successes in many lands, arrives at a tournament in Persia, hoping to add Persian colours to his regalia. He challenges the local champion, Amoryus, but pride, 'highness of heart' and contempt for others, typically rewards its servants with disaster.

How Amoryus dyd slee the knyght auenterus

But schortly to conclude, Amoryus and this knyght
Her cours begunne, on courserys huge and mayn;
And at the fyrst metyng Amoryus this odyr gan smyght
Vp-on hys umbrere; that the spere-hed lefft in hys brayn,
And so schet hym ouer hys hors on the pleynne
Dede, – as he must nedys, hos seruaunts thus pride doth reward,
That for hynes off hert at none odyr hath regard.[47]

Metham's apparently random metrics seem in this instance to suggest the violence of the proud knight's fatal tumble.

[45] Naomi Reed Kline, 'Alexander Interpreted on the Hereford Mappamundi', in *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and their Context,* ed. P. D. A. Harvey (London, 2006), p. 172.

[46] *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. E. Vinaver, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Oxford, 1967), II, 717.20 –719.17, and III, 1256.33–4.

[47] *The Works of John Metham,* ed. Hardin Craig *EETS* 132 (London, 1916), p. 37 (stanza 145, lines 996–1002).

The orthodox, Augustinian position is that sin consists in a turning away from God, which is initiated by pride: 'There would have been no evil work, but there was an evil will before it: and what could begin this evil will but pride, that is "the beginning of all sin"?'[48] Accordingly Pride is repetitively depicted in various figures in the first book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (devoted to Holiness, not Humbleness) such as Duessa (falsity), Archimago (hypocrisy), Sansfoy (disloyalty), Orgoglio (vainglory) and Lucifera, whose coach issuing from the House of Pride is famously drawn by the other six deadly sins on appropriate beasts.[49] Redcrosse is not captivated by Lucifera, whom he regards as 'too exceeding prowd'; instead 'we see him the spoil of Untruth and Untroth, far more basic causes of Pride'.[50] Spenser, like most medieval allegorists before him, is less interested in a dramatic psychological struggle with temptation 'than in investigating through actions and images the nature and the definition of a virtue'.[51] Milton's depiction of the Fall of Adam and Eve is quite simply Augustinian: 'But while the Fall *consisted* in Disobedience it *resulted*, like Satan's, from Pride . . . . The Fall is simply and solely Disobedience – doing what you have been told not to do; and it results from Pride – from being too big for your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God.'[52] In Augustine's view, the fact that God's apparently gratuitous prohibition (since there could have been no inherent evil in the forbidden fruit or it would not have been allowed to grow in Paradise) was so easy to keep makes the couple's disobedience all the more, not the less, heinous.[53]

[48] *De civitate Dei* XIV, 13, in *The City of God*, II, 43.
[49] *Faerie Queene,* I iv; see Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery,* pp. 120–25.
[50] Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, p. 123.
[51] Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, p. 124. In the *Ordo Virtutum*, a twelfth-century play, or descriptive dialogue, by Hildegard of Bingen (available at <http://home.infionline.net/~ddisse/hildegar.html>). Pride is not dramatized, though Humility, Queen of the Virtues, and the Virtues remind the Devil how 'inflatus superbia' (puffed up by pride) he was flung into the abyss. For dramatic depictions of pride, see Shakespeare's Achilles and Coriolanus.
[52] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942; rpt. Oxford, 1960), pp. 69, 70–1 (italics original).
[53] *De civitate Dei* XIV, 12, in *The City of God*, II, 42.

Jovinian

Among medieval literary illustrations of the vice of pride, two possibly related anecdotes stand out: the stories of the Emperor Jovinian and of King Robert of Sicily. It is these, and the transformations they undergo in later redactions, that I wish to consider in the rest of this paper. Writers in the Middle Ages who felt it their duty to advise rulers were very conscious that the higher the rank and consequently the more power persons in authority enjoyed, the more susceptible they were to the temptation of the primary sin of pride, and the more likely their subjects were to suffer injustice and tyranny.

A literary genre that developed in order to promote virtue and discourage vice was the pious or moralised legend. The popular series of tales known as the *Gesta Romanorum* (many of them possibly brought to the West by returning Crusaders) generally had a moral attached, but even when as in some manuscripts the moral is omitted it was easily seen that a preacher might use them to illustrate his sermons. The allegorical interpretations given to the persons and events in the tales are often so far-fetched that they seem rather exercises in ingenuity than helpful guides to moral conduct. It is indicative of modern contempt for such allegorizing that K. P. Harrington in his anthology of *Medieval Latin* includes the tale of Jovinian but leaves out the *moralitas*.[54]

Historically there is of course no foundation for the story. If the Emperor Jovinian is to be identified with the Jovian who in A.D. 363 briefly succeeded Julian the Apostate, and died the following year, there seems no historical reason for attaching the story to his name. Gibbon calls him an 'obscure domestic, exalted to the throne by fortune, rather than by merit', who put personal ambition above statecraft. Jovian earns Gibbon's contempt for surrendering Nisibis to the Persians: 'the conclusion of so ignominious a treaty was facilitated by the private ambition of Jovian. The obscure domestic, exalted to the throne by fortune, rather than by merit, was impatient to escape from the hands of the Persians.'[55] Politics rather than religion

[54] K. P. Harrington (ed.), *Medieval Latin* (Chicago, 1925), pp. 433–40.
[55] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), 7 vols (London, 1903–06), III, 215–32 (chapters 24–5, esp. p. 220).

prompted him to show favour to Christian bishops anxious to see the pagan policies of his predecessor overturned.

As told in the *Gesta Romanorum*, that typically medieval collection of moralised fabrications, the story of the Emperor, who like Satan considered himself the equal of God, is briefly as follows: Heated by hunting, Jovinian goes swimming alone, his clothes are stolen, and in his nakedness none of his subjects recognize him. He receives only physical abuse instead of the expected help, comfort and adulation at the home first of a knight, then of an earl, and finally in his own palace where an angel has replaced him, and has him dragged at a horse's tail. Eventually he confesses to a hermit, and being thus absolved of his sin of pride, is recognized and reinstated. The lesson he learns is directly consequent on the fact that, like Satan, he had proudly claimed to be divine: 'cum semel in stratu suo iacuisset, exaltatum est cor eius ultra quam credi potest, et in corde suo dixit: "Estne aliquis alius deus quam ego?" – he thougt in a nygt, as he lay in his bed, whethir þere be any god withoute me?'[56] The 'moralitee' which the medieval author extracts from the tale is precisely that series of one-to-one correspondences that modern readers tend unthinkingly to expect even in the more elaborate forms of narrative allegory, such as Spenser's, where the relationship between tenor and vehicle is much more complex. Nevertheless, what Rosemond Tuve calls 'imposed allegory' (the title of her fourth chapter) enriches with new meanings even when it does not unearth original ones, and we may, but perhaps mistakenly (see below), infer that that is the best that can be said for the following astounding interpretation of the story of Jovinian. Not pride specifically, but sin in general, is laid at the Emperor's door. He stands for 'ech Cristen man þat is myghti and riche'; he goes hunting in the world for 'worldly vanytes', gets hot from 'dilectacion of synnyng', puts off his clothes (that is, his good virtues), and enters the water of 'flesshly affeccions'. Now contrite, he cannot find his clothes (his virtues), and so goes to the knight, who stands for reason, and is beaten. He then approaches the Earl (conscience), and finally his own palace (that is, his heart), but finds

[56] Latin text from Harrington (ed.), *Medieval Latin,* p. 433: 'Once when he had lain down on his bed his heart was puffed up more than can be believed, and he said in his heart, "Is there any other god but me?"' Middle English version from *Gesta Romanorum,* ed. S. J. Herrtage, *EETS*, e.s., 33 (1879; rpt. London, 1962), p. 75.

that 'god is put oute of herte by synne'. The angelic new Emperor (holy church) doesn't know him until he has been drawn at the horse's tail: that is, brought to an appreciation of his misspent life – a correspondence at first sight puzzling, but the moralist evidently expected that painful penance would have this salutary effect. On application to the hermit (confession), the sinner recovers his clothes, his virtues, and then returns to his palace, now that of Christ, where the 'porter, *scil*. prelat *scil*. god him self' opens the gate (of Heaven) to him.[57] All the correspondences work very neatly, but by imposition rather than extraction.

However, there is more to be said for such moralisations than this. For they turn the figures of the preceding narrative into emblems, and this is one of the ways in which medieval allegory works. As Pamela Gradon says, 'figural writing is not limited to biblical figures. Any character, drawn from a known context, can be used as a *figura*.'[58] But further, 'in effect anything could be moralised'. Static emblems and active exemplary figures whose allegorical meanings their actions display, whether designedly or by subsequently imposed interpretation, may be seen in combination in manuscript illustrations: Gradon instances those in illuminated manuscripts of the *Somme le Roi.* Thus, 'A . . . combination of the emblematic and the exemplary can be seen in the pictures of humility and pride in which Humility is represented in one square by the figure of a lady holding a lamb in a medallion, in another square by a sinner kneeling before another man; and that of Pride is represented, in one square, by a man shooting arrows from a tower and, in the other square, by a picture of a hypocrite kneeling before an altar'. She concludes her chapter on 'The Allegorical Picture' by pointing to 'the constantly shifting relationship between image and theme' as 'the strength of the allegorical manner of writing'.[59]

The analogous story of Lycaon in Raoul le Fevre's *Recueil* (mid-fifteenth century) demythologizes rather than allegorizes the fantastic theme of transformation. Le Fevre portrays the gods of mythology merely as human warriors. In Caxton's translation, Lycaon, fleeing

[57] *Gesta Romanorum*, pp. 85–7.
[58] Pamela Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (London, 1971), p. 40.
[59] Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature*, pp. 45, 91–2.

from the victorious general Jupiter 'durst not entre his palais . but yssued out of the Cyte and wente vnto a grete forest that was nyghe by . and from thens forth he was a brygant and a theef And for this cause the poetes faynen that he was torned in to a wolf That is to saye he lyued as a wolf of proies [plunder] and robberyes'.[60] But according to fable, he plunged himself into a lake which had the property of turning bathers into wolves, and after nine years of turning them back into men. One recalls that Nebuchadnezzar was given the heart, or mind, of an animal till 'seven times' had passed over him (Daniel 4: 16, 23). Jupiter consoles Lycaon's sorrowing daughter Callisto by assuring her that 'his synnes were to infamous . and who shal beplayne & sorow hym The goddes & fortune haue suffrid the rabaisshement & casting doun of his pride & of his tirannies'.[61] Caxton loves doubling synonyms! Jupiter courts Callisto, though being medieval he courts her more courteously than his classical counterpart would have done, and then rules the realm justly and is sweet and debonair to all kinds of people. So far the parallels with Jovinian, and to a lesser extent with Nebuchadnezzar, are clear. However, Lycaon is not reinstated: he recovers his human shape, but joins his father Titan in making war on Saturn; Jupiter meets him on the battlefield, and in Virgilian or Arthurian fashion splits his skull for him.

In the nineteenth century stories from the Middle Ages were romanticized and elaborated. Unsurprisingly, William Morris's reworking of the story of Jovinian in *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70) does not echo the *Gesta's* moral interpretation. The poem for April, which runs to over 800 lines, is 'The Proud King', an expansion in rhyme royal of the original story. Thus to Jovinian's initial proud claim is added the hope that he may even cheat death:

> Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride,
> Until at last he raised him up and cried,
> 'What need have I for temple or for priest?
> Am I not God, whiles that I live at least?'

[60] *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 2 vols (London, 1894), I, 47.

[61] *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, I, 49.

> And yet withal that dead his fathers were,
> He needs must think, that quick the years pass by;
> But he, who seldom yet had seen death near
> Or heard his name, said, 'Still I may not die
> Though underneath the earth my fathers lie . . .'[62]

Losing his clothes after his swim so diminishes his status that he even becomes an unlikely object of indifference to a little bird flitting over the lake beside which Jovinian is crying and carrying on:

> . . . away did fly
> The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,
> And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade,
> Of such a helpless man not much afraid.
> (lines 88–91)

The porter at the ranger's lodge is disgusted by his nakedness: with humour or bathos, he remarks, 'What dost thou friend, to show us all thine hide?' (line 126).[63]

Whereas in the *Gesta Romanorum* the Emperor goes first to the home of a knight and then of an earl and finally to his own palace, receiving physical abuse at each place, in Morris's modern version it is a ranger and a councillor who first fail to recognize him, but in accordance with Morris's more civilized nineteenth-century manners they treat him with relative compassion. On the way to the palace he is pitied and helped by a newly invented character, a waggoner named Christopher a-Green, who allows him to ride to the palace modestly hidden in his hayload, Morris being more scandalized than the medieval author by the display of all his hide. The porter kindly or of necessity clothes him before allowing him into the royal presence. The clothes do him little good, however, for even his formerly faithful dog attacks him. In the *Gesta Romanorum* the dog nearly kills him, but here its aggression merely adds to his depression.

In the medieval tale the angel who has taken his place looks exactly like him; in Morris the Emperor can see no likeness, but

[62] William Morris, 'April, "The Proud King"', in *The Earthly Paradise, A Poem* (London, 1890), pp. 87–96 (lines 25–33).

[63] That 'all' goes with 'hide' rather than with 'us' is suggested by the Latin in the *Gesta Romanorum*: 'Quis es tu et quare sic totaliter nudus advenisti?' (Harrington, *Medieval Latin*, p. 435, lines 9–10).

everyone including the Queen is convinced he is an impostor. Invited to declare which is the true King, she kisses the gold sandal of the substitute King – Morris, perhaps too optimistically for the age when he is writing, thus illustrating the devotion of a truly submissive wife. She asserts she's lain by the angel's side for many years.

In the *Gesta Romanorum* the angel punishes Jovinian by ordering him to be dragged at a horse's tail, instructing his men, however, not to kill him, which one feels would require some skill in the infliction, unless he was dragged on a hurdle like the Chief Justice Tresilian, who was executed for treason in 1388.[64] In Morris's poem Jovinian is politely conducted out of the city and told not to return.

He then finds a hermit, confesses to him, is recognised, and reinstated. Before the transfigured angel's acknowledgement and reinstating of Jovinian in Morris's poem, the Queen lapses into a divinely induced sleep, which helps to explain how it is that no one knows of the lesson Jovinian has been taught until, years later, he bids a scribe write it down for the instruction of future kings. Morris, however, doubts whether any of them take it much to heart.

Morris's purpose is chiefly decorative. He was indeed uneasily conscious of constructing in *The Earthly Paradise* a medieval dreamworld as an aesthetic escape from his socialist crusade against the grim realities of nineteenth-century England.[65] But though his poem may seem at first sight only a pleasant exercise in versification, it is, in spite of perhaps deliberately naïve touches, a serious tribute to the worth of the story it is retelling, and to the age that told it. As Hartley Spatt indicates, contemporary life, for Morris, is based not simply on the past as it actually happened, but rather on the 'avowed myths of imagined history'. He explains, 'the poem is a tale which willing readers must help to create and strive to maintain against a world of social history that asserts only its self-sufficient validity'. Whereas history assumes a one-way continuity between past and present, fables assume that the reader can 'transform the past into a

[64] Edith Rickert, *Chaucer's World*, ed. Clair C. Olson and Martin M. Crow (London, 1948), p. 162.
[65] See J. H. Buckley, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (1951; rpt. Cambridge, 1981), pp. 176–7.

source of images which will justify not merely himself but his own present desires'.[66]

A more thorough transformation of the fable of Jovinian is to be found in Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's humorous novel *The Mayor of Troy* (1906).[67] Quiller-Couch lampoons not the story but the human pretensions it illustrates.

Troy is the Cornish town of Fowey where Quiller-Couch lived; the action is set in the Napoleonic era to mask his indulgent amusement at the follies of his fellow citizens. The citizens of Troy regard their Mayor, all five feet two of him, as a great man, not only in his civic capacity as Mayor but also in his military capacity as Major, which he demonstrates by organizing, with ludicrous results, a mock attack on the citizen force of a neighbouring village, as practice for dealing with an expected invasion by Napoleon. It is not so much the Mayor's, or Major's, pride as that of the citizens who so revere him which takes a knock when he suddenly disappears.

He accidentally falls into a fishpond (Jovinian's lake as it were) where he loses the key to his lodging. In his bedraggled state he gets into a downtown theatre, where he is pressganged with the entire cast of the play that is being performed, and forced on board a ship called the *Vesuvius*, which is on its way with a secret explosive weapon to fight the French.

One of the Major's claims to greatness is his fancied resemblance to the Prince Regent, who comes to Portsmouth to inspect the secret weapon (a floating bomb set off by a clockwork mechanism). This resemblance is the closest the Major gets to being a King like Jovinian. In chapter 16 the novel's intertextual connection with the story of that Emperor is made explicit. Instead of coming graciously to his rescue, the Prince Regent merely remarks 'What a dam funny-looking little man!', and the Major is left to comment to his kidnappers and now fellow sailors on how much his situation resembles that of Jovinian, which he had heard described in one of the Vicar's sermons.

[66] Hartley S. Spatt, 'William Morris and the Uses of the Past', *Victorian Poetry* 13 (1975): 1–9; quotations from pp. 1 and 9.
[67] Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, *The Mayor of Troy* (1906; rpt. Gloucester, n.d.).

> 'But at the castle, sad to say, no one recognised the proud Jovinian. "Avaunt!" said the porter, and threatened to have him whipped for his impudence. This distressing experience caused the Emperor to reflect on the vanity of human pretensions, seeing that he, of whom the world stood in awe, had, with the loss of a few clothes, forfeited the respect of a slave.' [68]

The Major is eventually imprisoned by the French, and having lost a leg in one of his attempts to escape, at last returns to Cornwall. There, unrecognized, he is conducted round a museum dedicated entirely to his honour, and subjected to a fanciful commentary on his exploits, a few of them true and a lot of them fictitious. His sister and housekeeper has meanwhile married the good local doctor, who has been justly elevated to his own mayoral position. They play the roles of Queen and Angel in the original story. But while the Angel might return to heaven, it would have been ungenerous, and perhaps impossible, to unseat the doctor. Finding that no man, not even he, is indispensable, the Major rejoins his old friend Ben Jope, the pressganging boatswain, and leaves the good folk of Troy happily undisillusioned about the greatness of the hero whose memory they revere.

Robert of Sicily

The Major's account of Jovinian, the pivot on which the novel turns, comes, he says, from one of the Vicar's sermons. From a spiritual point of view the Vicar may have done better to tell the related story of King Robert of Sicily.

The original medieval poem, in couplets, survives in eight late fourteenth and fifteenth- century manuscripts, besides a fragment, and a very much shortened but still rhymed summary of the plot. The existence of this Trinity Dublin abridgement, less than a third the length of the other manuscript versions, suggests that the lesson rather than the narrative that taught it was its most valuable feature. Otherwise variants though numerous are minor.[69]

[68] Quiller-Couch, *The Mayor of Troy*, p. 152.

[69] Joan Baker, 'Editing the Middle English Romance *Robert of Sicily*: Theory, Text, Method', *Text* 10 (1997): 161–79 and 'Deposuit potentes: Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Middle English *Robert of Sicily*', *Medieval Perspectives* 12 (1997): 25–45. Vernon

It takes the poet two typically otiose lines to find rhymes for the Latin from the *Magnificat,* the translation of which the unlearned Robert scorns before falling asleep in church.

> The vers was this, I telle the:
> Deposuit potentes de sede,
> Et exaltavit humiles.
> This was the vers, withouten les.[70]

Nineteenth-century poetics cannot stomach this unconvincing striving for rhyme, so Longfellow, in his extremely popular verse rendering, makes no attempt to rhyme the Latin, which he includes extra-metrically, but he does rhyme the translation:

> 'What mean these words?' The clerk made answer meet,
> 'He has put down the mighty from their seat,
> And has exalted them of low degree.'
> Thereat King Robert muttered scornfully . . . [71]

Since what he scorns is sacred text King Robert is guilty not merely of pride but of blasphemy, and so his punishment is spiritual as well as moral. Like Satan, Robert acknowledges no superior, and considers his power absolute. His pride is, indeed, blasphemous, on a par with Jovinian's, who overtly considered himself equal to God. The medieval story is sufficiently reminiscent of that of Jovinian to make it conceivable that the poem is a religious reworking of the account in the *Gesta Romanorum*, as Brewer suggested in 1894.[72] Lilian

manuscript version from *Middle English Metrical Romances*, ed. Walter French and Charles Hale (New York, 1930), pp. 933–46, rpt. in the Pelican *Guide to English Literature*: *The Age of Chaucer,* ed. Boris Ford (1954, rpt. Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 290f. *Robert of Cisyle,* ed. E. E. Forster ('Teams', Kalamazoo, 1997), available URL: www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/cisylein.htm

[70] *Robert of Cisyle,* lines 39–42, ed. E. E. Forster.

[71] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Sicilian's Tale, King Robert of Sicily', in *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (Boston, 1863), rpt. in *The Poetical Works of Longfellow* (London, 1928), pp. 359–64.

[72] See the entry, *sub* 'Robert', in *Brewer's Phrase and Fable* (1894): '*King Robert of Sicily*. A metrical romance of the Trouveur, taken from the Story of the Emperor Jovinian in the *Gesta Romanorum*, and borrowed from the Talmud. It finds a place in the *Arabian Nights*, the Turkish *Tutinameh*, the Sanskrit *Pantschatantra*, and has been *réchauffé* by Longfellow under the same name.' In the centenary edition, rev. Ivor H. Evans (London, 1970), 'utilized' replaces 'réchauffé'.

Hornstein finds its ultimate origins in fourth-century A.D. Talmudic and Midrashic legends of King Solomon, according to which his wealth and wisdom had made him so arrogant that God demoted him to the status of fool and replaced him by an angel – in some versions by Asmodeus, the demon from the book of Tobit.[73] Like Solomon in this legend, King Robert is taught wisdom by being reduced to the status of a fool, a humiliation he has to learn to accept before he can be restored.

Unlike Jovinian, however, King Robert does not have several stopping places on his way back to the palace: the sexton throws him out of the church, and at the palace gate he has a fight with the porter: he bloodies the porter's mouth and chin and in turn is upset into a puddle (in some versions the porter also bloodies his mouth and chin, a narrative dittography avoided in other manuscripts).[74] The Angel who has replaced him reduces him to the status of fool, reminding us of the Psalmist's dictum, 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God' (Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1). His head is shorn like a friar's, and he is given an ape as his counsellor, an *alter ego* dressed like him. He is made to eat not grass, but the food given to dogs. However, he repents, recalling the fall through pride and merciful restoration of Nebuchadnezzar, and acknowledging his folly in the reiterated line 'Lord on þy fol haue pyte'.[75] The angel then reveals himself, reinstates Robert, and disappears. Like Jovinian, Robert in old age has his story written down for the moral enlightenment of his successors, and as a present warning on the poet's part against pride.

The tonsure is a sign of humility; for a proud King it is a double humiliation. Mannyng includes priestly reluctance to accept the

[73] Lilian Herlands Hornstein, 'King Robert of Sicily: Analogues and Origins', *PMLA* 75 (1964): 17–18.

[74] Lines 125–8 in Vernon are omitted in MSS. BL Harley 1701, CUL Ff. 2. 38 and CUL Ii. 4. 9.

[75] MS. Trinity Oxford 57 (*c.* 1380–1400), which Baker suggests may be the exemplar for both the Vernon and the Simeon (BL Addit. 22283) manuscripts, lines 348, 352, 356, 360, 364. John Simons, 'A Byzantine identity for Robert of Cisyle', in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance,* ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge, 2003), sees in this refrain an echo of Greek liturgical practice (p. 110), supporting his contention that the poem has a historical basis in eleventh-century Sicily, when Latin rule replaced Byzantine. Simons identifies King Robert and his brother Valemounde with Roger Borsa and Borsa's warlike brother Bohemund, and the Pope as Urban II.

tonsure among signs of pride,[76] and De Vitry has a story of a man who shaved his wife's head to shame her when he caught her with a priest, saying, 'That's how priestesses ought to look!'[77]

Robert's summary of the story of Nebuchadnezzar, conflating the Books of Judith and Daniel, is an apposite interpolation, not found for instance in MS. CUL Ii. 4. 9, which takes no notice of the distinction between the Babylonian king and his later namesake. But it is a noteworthy reminder that Robert identified himself with a proud King who claimed divinity and was forced through humiliation to recognize his folly.

> With him was Sire Olyferne,
> Prince of knihtes stout and steorne.
> Olyferne swor evermor
> Bi god Nabugodonosor,
> And seide ther nas no god in londe
> But Nabugodonosor, ich understonde.[78]
> Therfore Nabugodonosor was glad,
> That he the name of god had,
> And lovede Olofern the more;
> And seythe hit greved hem bothe sore.
> Olofern dyyede in dolour,
> He was slaye in hard schour.
> Nabugodonosor lyvede in desert;
> Dorst he noughwher ben apert;
> Fyftene yer he livede thare
> With rootes, gras, and evel fare.

[76] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, lines 3477–80. Tuve's Figure 75, in *Allegorical Imagery*, p. 208, reproduces a miniature of the tonsure being applied. A crowd of onlookers (perhaps awaiting their turn?) watch the Abbot, who has risen from his throne, apply shears to the head of a kneeling figure, in an outdoor scene with the church in the background.

[77] 'Tales debent esse sacerdotisse' (no. CCX in *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, p. 88).

[78] Judith 5: 29 and 6: 2; cf. Chaucer, *The Monk's Tale,* lines 2562–3. Ælfric's O.E. *Homily on 'Judith'*, lines 19–21, is careful to distinguish this Assyrian Nebuchadnezzar, otherwise Cyrus's son Cambises, from the Chaldean one in the Book of Daniel (*Ælfric's Homilies on 'Judith', 'Esther' and 'The Maccabees'*, ed. S. D. Lee, available URL http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm). Of course the author of *Robert of Cisyle* is not so meticulous.

> And al of mos his clothing was:
> Al com that bi Godes gras:
> He criyede merci with delful chere,
> God him restored, as he was ere.[79]

Nebudchadnezzar's transformation, 'A wyld best as it were' (a MS variant of the line 'With rootes, gras, and evel fare'), mirrors Robert's into a fool, which takes place appropriately at midsummer, St John's Eve, traditionally a time of miracle, revelry and transformation. In Robert's case the transformation is so complete that no one recognizes him, not even his brothers. Only when, humiliated, he accepts his role as a fool and identifies with the transformed and subsequently reinstated Emperor, is he in a fit state to be restored. If Pride is Queen of the Sins, not till its opposite virtue, Humility, is allowed free reign (*sic*!) is rehabilitation possible. As Rosemond Tuve, discussing Spenser's House of Holiness, comments, 'This radical virtue (for instance the prime virtue of Christ and of the Virgin Mary, and the root in many a diagram) is to be defined in its opposition to radical Pride and has very little to do with self-depreciation; it is what we watch slowly taking shape as we read Book I [of the *Faerie Queene*] – a virtue built of clear-sighted realization of man's dependence on and grateful faith in his divine Lord.'[80]

The appeal of *Robert of Cisyle*, according to Alexandra Olsen, is enhanced by its use of 'mythic elements to express its religious message about the fall of a prideful man'.[81] The myth is the eternal return of the archetypal exiled hero to save his suffering people. But in this case the myth hardly seems relevant, for the hero is neither exiled nor missed, and King Robert's people far from suffering actually benefit from his absence.

> The angel was kyng, him thoughte long;
> In his tyme was never wrong,
> Tricherie, ne falshede, ne no gyle
> Idon in the lond of Cisyle.
> Alle goode ther was gret plenté:

[79] *Robert of Cisyle,* lines 313–32, ed. E. E. Forster.
[80] Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, p. 125.
[81] Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, 'The Return of the King: A Reconsideration of "Robert of Sicily"', *Folklore* 93 (1982): 216–19 (p. 216).

> Among men, love and charité;
> In his tyme was never strif
> Bitwene mon and his wyf;
> Uche mon lovede wel other:
> Beter love nas nevere of brother.
> Thenne was that a joyful thing
> In londe to have such a kyng.[82]

The Angel's rule, promoting joy and harmony both at home and in the marketplace, shows up the shortcomings of the proud King's. Nevertheless, Olsen argues, Robert's return mirrors the triumphant return of a hero, and he emulates Christ's exile, suffering, and triumphant return to heaven, restoring cosmic order. It seems more likely, however, that the poem is so effective because of the author's direct and uncompromising handling of the deserved fall of the overbearing monarch, and the deft way in which sympathy is turned towards him as he makes his contrite submission in the end.

The poem was made available in excerpt and edition from the beginning of the nineteenth century. George Ellis, for example, refers to King Robert as 'the metamorphosed monarch', a phrase which I have adopted in the title for this essay.[83] The story was transformed and modernized by Leigh Hunt in *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* (1848) and most influentially by Longfellow in 1863. Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of Hunt's retelling is his patronising attitude to the 'Gothic' representative of the stories from Sicily that his jar of honey comprises. Thus:

> As an old ruin, therefore, standing in some spot surrounded by architecture of different orders, will sometimes be found to be the sole representative of a former age, we shall make the good old legend of King Robert, in this our Sicilian and Pastoral Sketch-Book, stand for the whole Norman portion of its chronology. It is not military, except in the *brusque* self-sufficiency with which the character of King Robert sets out; but it is emphatically what we understand by Gothic; which, in

[82] *Robert of Cisyle,* lines 207–18, ed. E. E. Forster.
[83] George Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* (1805), rev. J. O. Halliwell (London, 1848), pp. 444–79 (p. 475).

> modern parlance, implies the character of the interval between ancient and modern times.[84]

So the Middle Ages are dismissed as 'Gothic', an interval between more significant and presumably more civilized periods of history. Moreover Hunt reduces the moral intensity of the original poem to comicality.

A sort of tolerant humour characterizes Hunt's retelling: Robert would sit 'twirling his beard' impatiently during church services; in response to his scorn at the line from the *Magnificat*, 'the chaplain, doubtless out of pure astonishment and horror, made no reply'. A droning fly wakes the dozing monarch, an old woman turning up the cushions rushes out, crying, 'Thieves', as he stirs, the sexton trying to shut him in is flattened when his 'enormous foot' smashes the door down, and 'the sexton, who felt as if a house had given him a blow in the face, fainted away'. Nineteenth-century ethics elicit comment on one disturbing aspect of the angel's behaviour: on the way to Rome, 'The fool, bewildered, came after the court pages, by the side of his ape, exciting shouts of laughter; though some persons were a little astonished to think how a monarch so kind and considerate to all the rest of the world, should be so hard upon a sorry fool.' Hunt compassionates not only the fool but also the ape: the repentant Robert 'had the ape by the hand, who had long courted his good-will, and who, having now obtained it, clung to his human friend in a way that, to a Roman, might have seemed ridiculous, but to the Angel, was affecting'.[85] This may be edifying, but in Hunt's version the chastened fool who was once a proud king has become little better than a ridiculed buffoon.

Finally (for present purposes), there is the best known modern poetic version of the story, Longfellow's poem, in *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863), which seems to have prompted twentieth-century academic attention to the medieval source texts. Longfellow's verse irons out the otiose clichés, rhyming tags and repetitions characteristic of orally delivered or vestigially oral verse, mitigates the more brutal aspects of Robert's behaviour and punishments, and omits the

[84] Leigh Hunt, 'Norman Times – Legend of King Robert', in *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* (1848; rpt. London, 1897), pp. 107–22 (p. 108).
[85] Hunt, *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla*, pp. 110, 119 and 121.

humiliating tonsuring. Its tone of gentle admonition makes it still one of the best redactions both of the story and its moral intention. At the same time, Rosemary Woolf comments that a comparison of the two 'shows up the subtlety and sureness of religious feeling in the Middle English work'. The symbolic moral lesson that the King learns from being reduced to the status of court fool leads touchingly to the climax of his recognition of his standing before God. Woolf continues: 'The play upon the word fool gives the poem a very moving dramatic and religious pattern, and there is no straining for effect as there is in Longfellow's version. Unfortunately the very quietness of the Middle English has led to some critics not observing its merits.'[86]

Conclusion

The pious legend is sometimes regarded as a subgroup of the romance genre, in that it typically recounts an ahistorical adventure prompted by some miraculous event. Though the popularity of 'Robert of Sicily', attested by the number of manuscripts that survive, was doubtless enhanced by its chivalric setting and display of aristocratic pomp and wealth, it is the way Robert attains self-knowledge that satisfies a more probing curiosity. Self-knowledge is the goal for which the romance hero strives. 'At a profound level,' says Phillipa Hardman, 'the subject of identity is the matter of all romance.' In 'Robert of Sicily', the doubling of the hero by an angel is a supernatural incursion into the human world aimed at clarifying for Robert the question of who he is and what as a ruler he should be.[87] But here tournament, joust and battle, in which the hero of romance typically excels, are rigorously excluded. As a pious legend the scope of the tale is restricted to a narrative extension of the sermon *exemplum*, which is a brief anecdotal illustration of the moral point that the preacher is making.

In the case of Jovinian and in that of King Robert, the moral, that pride comes before a fall, stays the same through various narrative transformations. The theme is a familiar one in the hierarchical Middle

[86] Rosemary Woolf, 'Later Poetry: the Popular tradition', in *The Middle Ages*, ed. W.F. Bolton, in Sphere History of Literature in the English Language 1 (London, 1970), pp. 263–311 (p. 266).
[87] Phillipa Hardman (introd.), *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 1–2.

Ages, informing *topoi* like the Nine Worthy and the Wheel of Fortune,[88] reminding us that before God and at the moment of death we are all equal, even though in life we are nothing if not very unequal. If the story has lost some of the force it once had, it may be that public consciousness is aware nowadays of more interesting sins than pride. Fashions change, and so do attitudes to the Seven Deadly Sins. In a society that regarded hierarchies as divinely established, the pride that scorned those of higher rank seemed the most intolerable sin of all, and the humility of the Blessed Virgin the best example that penitents could follow.[89] In times of affluence avarice gets greatest prominence: as already, for example, in the fifteenth-century morality play *The Castle of Perseverance.*[90] Adultery and incest are prominent in Jacobean drama, and modern fascination with *Luxuria* has in turn demonized or excused a variety of sexual sins. It requires an effort of the historical, and perhaps theological, imagination to regain the once primary sense of *Superbia*, as Queen of the Sins. Pride is still placed first in such late medieval or medievalising treatments as Langland's, Chaucer's, Dunbar's and Spenser's. As the primal sin for which Satan, making himself equal to God, was cast out of heaven, *Superbia* represents, spiritually, the substitution of the self for God, the ultimate act of the fool: 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.'[91] His blasphemy is heartfelt, and so not simply a careless assertion of atheism, but rather one of deliberate rejection, implying 'no God for me!' The delusion of self-sufficiency results only in insufficiency.

[88] Cf. examples of the Worthies in 'The Parliament of the Three Ages' (*c.* 1350), in *Middle English Literature,* ed. Charles W. Dunn and Edward T. Byrnes (New York, 1973), pp. 249–260, and of the Wheel in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure,* ed. Valerie Krishna (New York, 1976), pp. 128–30 (lines 3260–3337).

[89] E.g. 'Holy Virginity', lines 664–74, in *Middle English Religious Prose,* p. 58; John Lydgate, *Life of Our Lady*, ed. Joseph A. Lauritis and Ralph A. Klinefelter (Pittsburgh, 1961), II, 498–518 and V, 337–427 (pp. 346–7, 611–17).

[90] *The Castle of Perseverance*, in *The Macro Plays,* ed. Mark Eccles, *EETS* 262 (London, 1969), pp. 1–111. On avarice superseding pride as, in effect, the chief sin, see Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, pp. 74–5, 95; and Lester K. Little, 'Pride Goes before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom', *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 16–41.

[91] Psalms 14: 1 and 53: 1 (KJV); 'insipiens' in the Vulgate. Paradoxically, however, the metaphor of the fool also describes the humble Christian, who is willing to suffer in the service of Christ: Paul and his fellow missionaries are 'stulti propter Christum [fools for Christ's sake]' (1 Corinthians 4: 10).

Fittingly, therefore, King Robert is reduced to the status of a fool, in which he persists until he is willing to acknowledge his folly, and the serious import of the pious legend is thereby underlined.

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