2019

Moralizing the Mass in the Butler Hours

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Moralizing the Mass in the Butler Hours

Abstract
This essay analyzes a group of prefatory pictures and texts in the English Butler Hours (Baltimore, Walters Art Museum MS W. 105), a richly illuminated, now fragmentary manuscript originally made c. 1340-50 for the Butler family of Wem and Oversley, Shropshire. Focusing first on the Tree of Vices, this essay elucidates that picture's apparent breadth of pictorial reference and offers the first transcriptions and translations of some of the Anglo-Norman French moralizing couplets that enrich its visual program. The essay then widens its focus, examining the visual-verbal "operations" of the Tree of Vices, its semantic relationships with other pictures and texts in the preface, including miniatures of the Crucifixion, Holy Face, Tree of Life, and Butler family at Mass, as well as the remnants of the Office of the Holy Face. This group of pictures and texts are shown to function as an intricately interconnected, deftly personalized devotional tool and vehicle for penitent self-scrutiny.

Keywords
manuscript studies, book of hours, English Gothic illuminated manuscripts, Tree of Vices, diagrams, Anglo-Norman French, sacraments, the Mass, Office of the Holy Face, lay book-ownership
Manuscript Studies
A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies

Volume 4, Number 2
(Fall 2019)

Manuscript Studies (ISSN 2381-5329) is published semiannually by the University of Pennsylvania Press
MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2
(Fall 2019)

ISSN 2381-5329

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Published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, 3905 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

Printed in the U.S.A. on acid-free paper.

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Single issues: $30
Print and online subscriptions: Individuals: $40; Institutions: $92; Full-time Students: $30
International subscribers, please add $19 per year for shipping.
Online-only subscriptions: Individuals: $32; Institutions: $80

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One-year subscriptions are valid January 1 through December 31. Subscriptions received after October 31 in any year become effective the following January 1. Subscribers joining midyear receive immediately copies of all issues of Manuscript Studies already in print for that year.

Postmaster: send address changes to Penn Press Journals, 3905 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

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Moralizing the Mass in the Butler Hours

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The English Butler Hours (ca. 1340–45) is best known for an imposing full-page miniature depicting the Butler family attending Mass in a setting suggestive of a private chapel (fig. 1). A
kneeling, elegantly attired Baron William le Boteler or Botiller of Wem (or Wemme, in Shropshire) and two women, one only partly visible at the picture’s left edge, clasp their hands in prayer and train their gazes on the consecrated Host held aloft by the celebrant at a draped altar. In this idealized depiction of the Elevation of the Eucharist and privileged lay participation in the liturgical rite, the Butlers’ ability to see the Host is ensured by a kneeling deacon, who holds a tall green taper in one hand while lifting the hem of the priest’s chasuble with the other.

Typically the sole miniature in the manuscript reproduced and discussed at any length, the Butler family “portrait” is notable for its capacity to signify both as a particularized representation of specific Butler family members and, simultaneously, as a generalized evocation of the Butler baronial lineage through multiple generations. The manuscript is assigned to Butler ownership on the basis of the presence of the family’s coat-of-arms, *gules, a fess compony argent and sable between six crosses patees fichees or*, painted in the bottom border of the first page of Matins of the Virgin (fol. 17r).2 The devotees in the Mass picture have been tentatively identified as William, later third Lord Boteler (ca. 1331–69), his wife Elizabeth, and their daughter and

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heir Elizabeth, born in 1345. Yet these figures also may evoke, and more likely represent, William, de jure second Lord Boteler (1298–1361), and two of his female kin, probably his first wife Margaret, née Fitzalan, and perhaps Ela, née de Herdeburgh, second wife and widow of the first William Lord Boteler (d. 1334); Ela was still alive in July 1343. Subsequent generations of the family might even have read the image as a memorial “portrait” of the first Lord William and his two wives, Beatrice (d. before February 1315/16) and Ela. Equally pertinent to the present study, the Mass picture figures prominently in accounts of several interrelated developments in later medieval Christian art and spirituality, including changes in the understanding of the nature of vision and the perception of images; the expansion of book- and image-centered devotion among the affluent, aspirant laity; and the potential roles of the cult of the Eucharist and of depictions of this sacrament in the formation and affirmation of the Christian self and community.

The vividness of this picture belies the fact that the Butler Hours is now a fragment to which time has not been kind. The bulk of its surviving contents, sixty-one leaves, are in the Walters Art Museum, another two are in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, a single leaf is in an unknown


private collection, and many more are lost. In its original state, the volume is thought to have contained over 100 folios. The surviving leaves measure circa 5 \(11/16\)” \(\times\) \(8\frac{1}{2}\)” (ca. 14.5 cm \(\times\) 21 cm), trimmed, and a few historiated initials have been excised or retouched, with the last of these interventions apparently undertaken in order to mitigate extensive water damage that occurred in 1846, when the manuscript was owned by the collector John Boykett Jarman (ca. 1782–1864). While it may never be possible to reconstruct the Butler Hours in its original, mid-fourteenth-century form, the evidence supplied by a foliation of ca. 1800, written in ink at upper left on most rectos, a succinct description of the manuscript published in 1879, and the efforts of Walters curators and conservators, past and present, all help to suggest the book’s contents and their order as of the early nineteenth century.

The manuscript opened with a series of prefatory pictures and texts, now missing several folios (see the Appendix). This material introduced an unillustrated calendar based on Sarum Use and a group of standard Latin offices, some richly embellished with historiated initials. These texts included the mixed Hours of the Virgin with illustrated memoriae in Lauds and the Short Office of the Cross, both now incomplete; the Seven Penitential Psalms, now substantially missing; and the Litany and Fifteen Gradual Psalms, both missing in their entirety. The manuscript was illuminated by two artists who collaborated on the painting of another contemporary book of hours of uncertain ownership, apparently working with the same scribe, and on a single folio in the famous Luttrell Psalter, made on the

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6 For bibliography on the various parts of the manuscript, see n. 1.
8 For the contents of the book before it was broken up, probably in the early twentieth century, see Tāylor, through Micklethwaite, “Antiquities and Works of Art.”
order of the Lincolnshire baron Geoffrey Luttrell. It is uncertain where the Butler Hours was made, although both Oxford and Cambridge have been put forward tentatively as places of production.

As the foregoing description of the Butler Hours makes clear, the Mass picture is by no means a standalone element of the volume’s visual program. It is a key component of the series of prefatory leaves displaying a diverse selection of Christological, Marian, devotional, and moralizing themes, miniatures of standing saints, and illustrated suffrages and other texts. This material is now accessible thanks to the manuscript’s digitization, undertaken by the Walters Art Museum in the context of its Parchment to Pixel initiative (2008–14) with the support of Preservation and Access grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and additional funding from an anonymous donor. Among the most intriguing components of the prefatory series is a little-studied Tree of Vices (fig. 2). This picture, and the miniatures of the Crucifixion and the Holy Face (figs. 3 and 4),


10 Dennison, “‘Fitzwarin Psalter,’” 61–62.

11 For the manuscript, see http://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W105/, accessed 14 October 2018. A digital catalog entry is under way.
along with the Mass image (see fig. 1) and at least two pages containing text alone (see figs. 13 and 14), appear to form a thematically linked subset within the prefatory program.

Scholarly reticence concerning the Tree of Vices is likely due to its deteriorated condition. The water damage that the book suffered has muddied or obscured some of its visual details and several of the inscriptions that punctuate the image. These inscriptions are written in Anglo-Norman French, or “insular French,” England’s principal vernacular of learning, culture, law, record, devotion, and religious instruction from the Norman Conquest through the early fifteenth century. Yet the Tree of Vices was carefully designed, and its imagery and texts offer a pointed pendant to the Mass picture and its message. The Tree’s apparent breadth of pictorial reference, its complex, carefully calibrated visual and verbal rhetoric, and its semantic resonances and devotional functions in its larger manuscript context are principal subjects of this essay. The larger goal of this study is to demonstrate the ingenuity with which pictures, texts, and prayers in this group of prefatory leaves moralized the Mass for their Butler beholders.

**The Tree of Vices: Design, Imagery, Texts, Operations**

Like other types of medieval schemata, tree diagrams were valued not only for their capacity to structure and communicate information, but also for their power to activate memory, support instruction, and stimulate and shape thought, imagination, and religious experience. A component of

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monastic manuscripts of learning and pedagogy from the early Middle Ages, diagrams of all varieties appear in religious and devotional volumes made for affluent lay owners from the thirteenth century forward. Their inclusion in these artifacts registers expanding lay aspiration to clerical forms of literate and spiritual practice and knowledge, and the concomitant pastoral efforts of the mendicant orders and the institutional Church. They are vehicles for the explication of moral theology—human ethics and conduct—Trees of Virtues and Vices purport to present in systematic form the range of human qualities and behavior, positive and negative. The visual form and organization of Trees of Virtues and Vices are grounded in Christ’s statement that “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matt. 7:17), and in Gregory the Great’s (d. 604) assertion that pride is the “root of all evil” (Moralia in Job, Book of Job).14


XXXI.45). Paired Trees of Virtues and Vices flourished from the early twelfth century, appearing, for example, in copies of two well-known representatives of the “literature of spiritual formation,” the treatise *De fructibus carnis et spiritus* (ca. 1130), and the *Speculum virginum*, intended for the religious instruction of female monastics.

The author of *De fructibus carnis et spiritus* names and explicates the sources, parts, and fruits of the two trees. In addition, in his prologue, he extols the advantages of tree diagrams as teaching tools:

> It is good to represent the fruits of humility and pride as a kind of visual image so that anyone studying to improve himself can clearly see what things will result from them. Therefore, we show the novices and untutored men two little trees, differing in fruits and in size, each displaying the characteristics of virtues and vices, so that people may understand the products of each and choose which of the trees they would establish in themselves.

As his sentiments make clear, the author of *De fructibus carnis et spiritus* viewed the effectiveness of the “two little trees” (*duas arbusculas*) as residing in their status as pictorial images, and in their “power . . . to prompt moral

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and spiritual development by presenting choices and engaging the emotions,” as Miriam Gill put it. \(^{18}\) These comments also pertain to late medieval diagrams, and to compositions and images grounded in long-standing traditions of diagrammatic representation. In these works, including the Butler Hours miniature (see fig. 2), the diagrammatic scaffolding may be enriched or overlaid with motifs, details, and imagery drawn from the broader representational repertoire. \(^{19}\) In the Butler Hours Tree, as in many late medieval Virtue-Vice schemes, the Vices are figured in terms of “everyday” human protagonists and their actions. \(^{20}\)

A dense collage of color, form, and text, the Butler Hours Tree of Vices was designed with care, although this may not be immediately apparent to the modern eye (see fig. 2). To appreciate the subtlety of its pictorial construction, one may begin at the bottom of the framed miniature, at the Tree’s base. There, two weasel-like beasts—one with dark fur, the other, light—gnaw at the trunk, while immediately behind the darker animal sits a unicorn. As Francis Klingender recognized, the presence of these creatures reveals that the Tree of Vices in the Butler’s horae doubles as the Tree of Man’s Life of the so-called unicorn parable, an allegory on the themes of mortality and contemptus mundi whose origins lie in the ancient Barlaam and Josaphat legend. \(^{21}\) Of Buddhist origin, and circulating in Arabic, Georgian, and Greek by the early eleventh century, the Barlaam and Josaphat story was first translated into Latin in 1047/8. \(^{22}\) A focus of the legend in its

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18 Gill, “Role of Images,” 122.
19 For a lucid discussion of the “spectrum” of diagrammatic representation, see Adam S. Cohen, “Diagramming the Diagrammatic: Twelfth-Century Europe,” in Kupfer et al., Visualization of Knowledge.
22 For the legend in its broader literary and artistic contexts, see most recently Barlaam und Josaphat: Neue Perspektiven auf ein europäisches Phänomen, ed. Constanza Cordoni and Matthias
Christianized form is the efforts of the hermit Barlaam to convert the Indian prince Josaphat to Christianity and to teach him the fundamentals of the faith through the use of fables or parables. These twin emphases, conversion and education, and the legend’s considerable dramatic qualities, help to explain its appeal to later medieval authorities, including the compilers of collections of sermon *exempla* and the authors of religious literature and vernacular romance. The Dominicans Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264?) and Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298) incorporated the tale into their respective, widely circulating works, the *Speculum historiale* and the *Legenda aurea*.

As the version of the unicorn parable in the *Legenda aurea* relates, a young man is pursued by a fierce unicorn, and, while fleeing, falls into an abyss. Although the man succeeds in gaining a foothold by grabbing the branches of a nearby bush or “little tree” (*arbuscula*), he is still in grave danger: at the bottom of the abyss is a fire-breathing dragon bent on devouring him, while at the base of the tree are two mice or rats gnawing at its roots, intent on felling it. Yet despite these and other threats, the man becomes distracted from his peril by the sweet honey that he finds in the tree’s branches. As Jacobus de Voragine explains, the unicorn “is a figure of death that constantly pursues men and seeks to lay hold of them.” The abyss and the honey signify the world full of “evils” and “deceptive pleasures”: the bush or tree is human life, which is steadily “eaten away” by the rodents, and the dragon, the mouth of Hell, “yawning to devour all men.”

The broad appeal of the unicorn parable is affirmed by its depiction throughout the later medieval world in a range of mediums, from portal and tomb sculpture to stained glass, frescoes, and illuminated manuscripts.

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But as Kristin B. Aavitsland demonstrated, the most relevant analog of the Butler Hours Tree of Vices is the depiction of the parable in the late thirteenth-century north French Psalter-Hours “of Yolande of Soissons” (fig. 5). Here, as in numerous depictions of the story, a centrally placed tree dominates the composition, and the enticing succulence of its leaves and fruit are emphasized through their buoyant stylization. The young man in the tree smiles as he reaches to pluck a piece of fruit, oblivious to the threats on the ground below. The dragon in the abyss in the parable has been transformed in the Psalter-Hours into a ravening Hellmouth, as in Jacobus’s explication of the allegory—an apposite choice, as Karen Gould observed, in view of this picture’s role as a visual preface to the Office of the Dead. The maker(s) of the Butler Hours picture replaced the Hellmouth or dragon with a seated lion (see fig. 2); I will return to the lion and unicorn later in this study.

But of course, unlike the tree in the north French Psalter-Hours, the boughs of the Butler Hours Tree of Vices host not one man but seven, and it is the personification of Pride, portrayed as a nattily dressed youth admiring himself in a mirror and crowning himself with a chaplet, that occupies the uppermost branches (see fig. 2). In so deftly synthesizing the visual traditions of the Tree of Vices and the Tree of Man’s Life, the maker(s) of the Butler Hours inverted the traditional organization of Trees of Vices, in which Pride is located not at the tree’s top but at its “root,” to reprise Gregory the Great’s formulation. In the elegantly painted Tree of Vices in...
the now-fragmentary, early fourteenth-century English Psalter of Robert de Lisle—an image derived from the Franciscan collection known as the Speculum theologia—the admonition that Pride is the root of the vices (Radix vitiorum Superbia) is inscribed beneath the Tree’s trunk, where it serves as a stage on which Adam and Eve enact the Fall (fig. 6). In the De Lisle Psalter picture, as is typical of Trees of Vices, the branches and fruits bearing secondary vices droop downward toward Hell. In the Butler Hours miniature, by contrast, the branches and leaves of the Tree grow upward, as in Trees of Virtues, and as in the Tree of Man’s Life in the north French Psalter-Hours (see fig. 5). This astute design decision lends the Butler Hours Tree an enticing luxuriance, and the Vices it hosts a disconcerting allure.

Situating the Butler Hours Tree of Vices within a broader matrix of moralizing pictorial and diagrammatic traditions aids in illuminating the picture’s multiple resonances and visual operations. The Vices are all portrayed as laymen sporting knee-length gowns and boots or fashionably pointed shoes. Pride’s mirror, emblematic of self-absorption and immoderate concern with one’s appearance, is a frequent attribute of Pride and its closest relatives, Vainglory, Vanity, and Luxury: at the top of the Tree of Vices from the now-dismembered Burckhardt-Wildt Apocalypse, thought to have been made in late thirteenth-century Lorraine, a female mirror-gazer labeled Luxure raises her hand to touch her hair. While the chaplet with which Pride crowns himself is more unusual, the pairing of

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mirror and chaplet is not without precedent in a moralizing devotional context. At Terce of the Virgin in the *officiolum* designed circa 1304–9 by the lawyer and poet Francesco da Barberino (d. 1348), a personification of *Pueritia*, or Childhood, a stage of life characterized by self-absorption, gazes into a mirror and crowns herself with a garland or chaplet. 29

In the Butler Hours Tree, Pride’s empty attainments are the object of Envy or Covetousness, seated at upper left, who looks up and observes darkly as handsome Pride crowns himself. More typically in manuscript examples of the Tree of Vices, Envy surveils the Vice depicted directly across from him or her, on the other side of the tree trunk. The Trees of Vices in the Burckhardt-Wildt Apocalypse and the early fourteenth-century Kremsmünster *Speculum humanae salvationis*, the latter volume produced for the Premonstratensian abbey of Weissenau (Swabia), offer examples of this arrangement: in the Kremsmünster Tree, *Invidia* at lower left tries to lure to her own lap the pet dog of *Vana Gloria*, seated directly across from *Invidia* at lower right (fig. 7). 30 In the Butler Hours Tree, the twisted form and upward gaze of Covetousness constitute a parodic inversion of Hope’s graceful reach for the crown of spiritual reward in some Virtue-Vice schemes, such as the ones on the sculpted façade of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Amiens (ca. 1240), and in the illusionistic dado in Giotto’s Scrovegni Chapel (ca. 1305) (fig. 8). Directly beneath Covetousness, Wrath stabs himself; seated opposite Covetousness, Avarice locks away his wealth in a chest, while just below Avarice, Gluttony turns away from a richly laid table and vomits up his meal. All of these vignettes are conventional, with the latter two finding among their closest parallels in late thirteenth-century illuminated French manuscripts of Frère Lorens of Orléans’s *Somme le roi* (1279), the catechetical treatise intended to prepare penitents for


29 Private Collection, fol. 44v; Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, 66–68, 80, and 162–63, fig. 75; and for the manuscript, see Kay Sutton, “The Lost ‘Officiolum’ of Francesco da Barberino Rediscovered,” *Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1224 (2005): 152–64.

30 For the Kremsmünster manuscript, see Susanne Wittekind, “Visualizing Salvation: The Role of Arboreal Imagery in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Kremsmünster, Library of the Convent, Cod. 243),” in *The Tree* (as in n. 13), 117–42.
Figure 7. Tree of Vices, Speculum Humanae Salvationis, Swabia, ca. 1325–30. Austria, Stiftsbibliothek Kremsmünster, CC 243, fol. 3r. Photo: Stiftsbibliothek Kremsmünster, Austria.
confection.31 Lust at the center of the Tree is a couple entwined in an illicit embrace, a *topos* of sensuality that was a staple of Romanesque corbel sculpture and the Virtue–Vice schemes on Gothic cathedral façades.

Yet the Butler Hours Tree speaks not solely through images but also through texts (see fig. 2). The personifications perform the Vices to an audience of birds perched amid the leaves, and both the Vices themselves and their avian observers hold or view banderoles containing the Anglo-Norman French couplets noted earlier in this essay, verses that offer pithy comment on each Vice and its consequences. Although the nineteenth-century water damage has obscured the couplets associated with Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust (named *Lecherie* in the faded inscription), digitization of the manuscript has facilitated decipherment of the others.

The four birds holding scrolls at the top of the picture urge Pride, or *Orguyl*, to look beyond the self and the moral trap of the mirror: “When all the world matters to you, your pride will abate,” they sing.32 “I am named the covetous one; always I covet more and more,” announces an insatiable Covetousness (*li Cuveytous*).33 His sentiments are condemned by a nearby bird, which pipes, “On your death you will lose everything, you will languish forever in Hell.”34 Arrogant Wrath (*Ire Superbie*) states somewhat pedantically, “[This] prideful anger is [also] named ‘Superbie’: I kill myself and this is a sin,” while a bird at his shoulder explains, “Whoever kills himself out of wickedness will never have the joy of Heaven.”35

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32 *Quant tubt le mund tey caudra / tun orguyl abatra.*

33 *Nomé suy li cuveytous. Touz / jours cuveyte plus e plus.*

34 *A tun fin tubt perderas / En enferne en perdreras.*

35 *Ire superbie par noun nomé / Jeo me tue cee fet pecbé.*

36 *Ky ke se tue par félunie / la joy de cel ne avera mie.*
Even the birds themselves, insofar as they can be identified with any confidence, seem to have significance within the visual program. The four birds at the top of the picture appear to be goldfinches, frequent inhabitants of the borders of English Gothic manuscripts. According to legend, the bird earned its red face and markings and hence a connection to the Passion when, during Christ’s walk to Calvary carrying the Cross, the bird swooped down to pluck a thorn from the crown of thorns and Christ’s blood stained its plumage. The goldfinch’s link with the crown of thorns may have inspired its association with Pride in the Butler Hours Tree of Vices, in which Pride dons his own “crown” as he admires his reflection. Perched near Avarice is what is probably a night owl (noctua). Among its meanings in the bestiary, this bird signifies both the vigilant, righteous man and Christ himself. As does the night owl, which “shuns” the light, Christ in his humility “shuns the vanity of worldly glory.” Moreover, the nocturnal flights of the night owl in search of food were held to signify Christ’s quest to convert sinners by preaching—an apt allegory in respect to the Butler Hours Tree, in which this bird, like its fellows, proffers a (now illegible) admonitory couplet. “Attention-grabbing” rhymes or “jingles” in both Latin and vernacular languages were staples of late medieval preaching on the Virtues and Vices, as Kimberly Rivers has recently affirmed.

But it is the Vice at the bottom of the Butler Hours Tree—Peresce, or Sloth—that is most noteworthy, and that links the Tree of Vices most forcefully to the Butler family “portrait” (see fig. 1). Sloth is a frequent denizen of the bottom of the picture in another medieval diagrammatic tradition: the wheel diagram. Typically composed of concentric rings as well as radii and segments containing text and perhaps imagery, wheel diagrams operate via two types of motion and directionality: movement from the


outermost ring to the center (and back), and clockwise motion. In the wheel diagrams that were integral to Hugh of Fouilloy’s (d. ca. 1172) treatise on the monastic virtues and vices, *De rota verae et falsae religionis*, the false, hypocritical abbot, puffed up with pride, sits at the top of the *rota*, which is turned clockwise by the prior at left. Just below the Wheel is a monk in a literal and figurative slump, one in whom idleness and grief have bred indifference, negligence, and sloth, among other vices.40

More relevant to the Butler Hours Tree of Vices is the *rota* of apparent late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century origin known as the *Septenarium Pictum*, or Wheel of Sevens.41 In this wheel diagram, the Vices populate the outermost ring. By following the rings inward through meditation on a succession of “sevens,” including the Petitions of the Pater Noster, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Virtues, and the Beatitudes, the beholder approaches Christ, often portrayed at the Wheel’s center. Conversely, the beholder might work his or her way outward from Christ at the center, achieving the means to combat the Vices in the outer ring by taking up and mobilizing the Virtues, Gifts, and prayers in the inner rings.42 Several surviving examples of this *rota* are found in rolls or codices of Peter of Poitiers’s (d. 1205) “condensed version of biblical history,” the *Compendium historiae*


in genealogia Christi. The Wheel of Sevens in a late thirteenth-century English roll of the Compendium now in the Free Library of Philadelphia, its rich painting and gilding a likely marker of lay ownership, compares suggestively with the Tree of Vices in the Butlers’ horae (fig. 9). The Vices are arranged in the order conventional for this diagram. Moving clockwise from upper right: Vanity admires his reflection in a mirror; Envy gazes over a shoulder at the veiled woman in the center roundel, thought to represent Virtue; Anger stabs himself; Sloth sleeps at bottom; Avarice sits at a table laden with coins and holds up a bulging moneybag; Gluttony vomits into a bowl; and at upper left, Lust grabs a veiled woman by the wrist and delivers a lewd “chin-chuck.” Pride, given “pride of place” at the Wheel’s top, gestures as if preening or crowning himself, although no crown or chaplet appears ever to have been executed.

Sloth as portrayed in the Butler Hours Tree of Vices is neither a lazy lie-abled, asleep between soft sheets as in the Wheel of Sevens in the Peter of Poitiers roll (see fig. 9), nor a shiftless peasant, his plow and team sitting idle, as in French manuscripts of the Somme le roi. Nestled in the cradle of the Tree’s boughs, one arm serving as his pillow, slumbering Sloth shirks not labor but the Mass, celebrated by a priest on a neighboring branch (see fig. 2). As his sentiments in the banderole at his shoulder affirm, Sloth has no compunction about skipping the service at every opportunity: “I will sleep,’ so says Sloth, ‘When I am alone hearing Mass.’ A pert bird at left urges a different course of action: “God promises you much more than this: take and drink, in true faith.”

It is fruitful to compare the Butler Hours Tree of Vices to another moralizing image in which the tree and wheel forms appear to converge: the

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44 See the entry for this manuscript by Jennifer A. Thompson in Tanis and Thompson, Leaves of Gold, 196–98, no. 68.
46 Jeo [d]ormiray ceo diit peresce / Quant suy sul de oyer mese.
47 Dé ben for ceo te prometh / Pr[es]n se beis, in belle feht.
Mirror of Life and Death, a text-enriched (Latin and French) reformulation of the Old French moralizing poem *Le Miroir de Vie et de Mort* (1266) by Robert de l’Omme. The Mirror of Life and Death is extant in two lavishly illuminated manuscripts: a philosophical, moral, and scientific compendium made in 1277 in Thérouanne or Saint-Omer (figs. 10 and 11) and the *Vrigiet de Solas* (*Orchard of Solace*), a compilation possibly made circa 1290–1310 in Saint-Omer or Arras. In both versions of this image, within the circular frame of the mirror-picture, in the upper half of the composition, a crowned Life (*Vie*) seated in the boughs of a tree is serenaded by four birds and two human musicians (fig. 10). Their music distracts Life from the approach of Death (*Mors*), who, clad in white and carrying the lid of a tomb, ascends the tree via a ladder. The tree in the Mirror of Life and Death is also a Tree of Vices, as the details of its lower half make plain (fig. 11). Its roots are arranged radially, like the “spokes” of a wheel diagram, and they are figured as serpents whose heads (or tails?) morph into female personifications, their attributes and actions both vivid and familiar. Two devils crown Pride (*Superbie*) and hand her a scepter. The Queen of the Vices and Life’s virtual “mirror-image,” Pride terminates the deepest root and shares the vertical axis with Life. In the tree in the Mirror of Life and Death, Pride is the principal “root of all evil.” In the Butler Hours Tree of Vices it is Sloth, and specifically, the impulse to dodge the salvific service, that is the basest of the vices (see fig. 2).

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Terminating the second root from right in the Mirror of Life and Death is *Accidie*, or *Acedia*—apathy, negligence, or indifference, Sloth’s closest relative among the vices (fig. 11, and see below). In Robert de l’Ommé’s poem, this vice embraces a range of impious attitudes and acts, including skipping Mass by “sleeping in.” As reformulated pictorially in the Mirror of Life and Death miniature, *Accidie* is neither lazy nor apathetic: rather, an apparently despairing *Accidie*, hands clasped before her, turns away from an altar, on which sit a draped chalice and Host (see fig. 11).

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49 *Maeement or as cretiens / Destorne jou a faire biens, / Car quant devroient messe öir, / Dont les faic en lor lis gesir*; as transcribed in Långfors, *“Miroir de vie et de mort”* (1921), 523, lines 333–36.

50 In BnF fr. 9220, fol. 10r, the version of this picture in the *Vrigiet de solas*, the Latin inscription associated with *Accidie* is *Me Deus audi, vis, si non vis, nulla michi vis*; transcribed in Långfors, “Notice du manuscript français 9220,” 425, and reprinted here with minor alteration. For analysis of the vignette and the inscription, see Bouget, “Le *Miroir de vie et de mort*,” 118.
Closer examination reveals that the Butler Hours Tree of Vices is itself wheel-like not only in form but also in “movement” (see fig. 2). The placement of the figures, and the curving boughs terminating in clusters of leaves, lead the eye around the Wheel-Tree’s circumference, as well as centripetally and centrifugally, both toward and away from Lust at its center. The inscriptions seem calibrated to create a competing ductus, or “flow,” however, and their presence in the composition is crucial to its effectiveness as a signifying vehicle. Most of the inscriptions are read from lower left to upper right. Thus, they arrest the Wheel-Tree’s clockwise and pulsating momentums. Indeed, in contemplating the picture and reading the couplets, the beholder “puts a spoke in” the Wheel-Tree of Vices.

The Tree of Vices in Its Manuscript Context: Moralizing the Mass in the Butler Hours

In their complementary studies, Morton Bloomfield and Siegfried Wenzel explicated the early development and nature of the “monastic vice of the spirit” called Acedia, its twelfth-century elaboration as a mental or psychological condition of “torpor,” and its frequent articulation in the context of the thirteenth-century “laicization” of the vices as Sloth—negligence, or “laziness in performing one’s duties to God in such matters as church attendance.” For Chaucer and his contemporaries, as Stanford Lyman noted, Acedia and Sloth encompassed a broad range of cognitive, emotional, and physical states, including alienation, idleness, sluggishness,

and motionlessness as well as somnolence. Acedia thwarts “the labor of the sinful man, to which he is compelled in expiation of his sins; and the arduousness of the seeker after grace, who performs works of penitence.” Sloth “subverts the livelihood of the body,” “slows down the mind,” and “hinders man in his righteous undertakings,” thus becoming a “source of man’s undoing.”

All of these meanings appear to inform the depiction of Sloth—Peresce in the Butler Hours Tree of Vices (see fig. 2), and they animate that picture’s resonances with its closest relatives in the prefatory series. The Butlers at Mass, upright, alert, and ardent, present a devout inversion of Sloth’s slumped, slumbering form (see fig. 1). Their left-to-right orientation as they behold the Elevation reverses the action of the Sloth-Elevation vignette in the Tree of Vices. Moreover, if the tall green taper ensures the Butlers’ view of the Host and their access to God and salvation, and the green Cross of the Crucifixion miniature, the Tree of Life, guarantees them eternal life (see fig. 3), the green trunk of the Tree of Vices—interposed between Sloth and the Elevation, and a sign of Sloth’s blindness—forecloses Sloth’s access to the Eucharist and the blessings that attended its viewing.

On closer inspection, it appears that the unicorn and lion contemplate neither the Tree nor any of the Vices, but rather the priest elevating the consecrated wafer (see fig. 2). Although the unicorn parable and its visual tradition may have provided the initial impetus for these animals’ inclusion in the picture, their polyvalence may have informed this decision as well. The unicorn and lion were known for their ferocity, and the lion was a long-standing figure of evil and the devil. In Psalm 21:22, the psalmist cries, “Save me from the lion’s mouth; and my lowness from the horns of

54 Lyman, Seven Deadly Sins, 2–3.
55 Lyman, Seven Deadly Sins, 3.
the unicorns.”56 Yet both creatures also were held to stand for courage, strength, and Christ in Scripture and the bestiary, among other contexts. Thus, whether as harbingers of death or symbols of the Savior, the unicorn and lion may have functioned in the Tree of Vices as guides or pointers, their purpose being to direct the beholder’s gaze toward the vignette of the Eucharistic rite.

In the Crucifixion miniature (see fig. 3), the effects of the Vices are writ large on Christ’s body, which is stippled with wounds—a reminder of the ideas, current in sermons and religious literature, that the contemporary Christian re-wounded Jesus each day when he or she followed the vices, and that Christ Crucified was a remedy for all vice or sin.57 The Butlers’ finery in the Mass picture, so carefully limned, may have functioned as an “affirmation of the identity that indulgence in a luxury manuscript provides,” and as a declaration of the “excellence” of the Butlers’ devotion (see fig. 1).58 If read against Christ’s half-naked, wounded body, the Butlers’ rich attire also may have constituted a sartorial prompt to penitent self-scrutiny. This idea is supported by resonant details in the Tree of Vices and Mass pictures. The garb of some of the Vices echoes in simplified form both Lord William’s attire in the Butler family “portrait,” and the garments of the praying youth in the initial for a prayer in Lauds of the Virgin (fig. 12). Pride’s floral chaplet, dotted with red blossoms, is refigured in the jeweled circlet worn by Lord William’s principal female companion (compare figs. 2 and 1).

The miniature showing the Holy Face brings together a cluster of themes and motifs common in medieval art by the mid-fourteenth century, yet it arranges these elements in a striking manner (see fig. 4). The Lord is figured in three different forms: as the Holy Face in a quatrefoil frame, as the Word, signified by the Evangelist symbols, and in the three lush oak

56 Klingender, Animals in Art and Thought, 432.
branches that grow from the frame’s top, forming a Tree of Life. Images of the Holy Face have been read as the goal of devout vision, as mirrors of self-examination via *imitatio Christi*, as analogs of the Eucharist, and as reminders of the Lord’s omniscience—all interpretations of potential relevance to this image in the Butlers’ *horae*. Oak is connected to Christ in

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numerous contemporary English illuminated manuscripts. In the Tree of Life and Crucifixion miniatures in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle, for example, the Pelican in her Piety atop the green Cross feeds blood from her breast to her young from within a nest of oak leaves.\textsuperscript{61}

The oak tree in the Butler Hours miniature hosts seven birds (see fig. 4), the traditional number of both the principal Vices and the Virtues, among them a goldfinch in the upper right corner. The owl in this picture is not the night owl, however, but rather the \textit{bubo}. A “filthy,” “miserable” denizen of caves and tombs in Hugh of Fouilloy’s influential treatise on birds, \textit{De avibus}, as well as in the bestiary, this species “signifies wicked sinners” of all kinds. “Weighed down with its plumage, as the sinner is with an excess of carnal pleasure and with fickleness of mind,” the \textit{bubo} is “hindered by the weight of its idleness and sloth, as sinners are lazy and slothful in acting virtuously”\textsuperscript{62}—sentiments resonant with Sloth’s slumped portrayal in the Tree of Vices (see fig. 2).

Two skewbald magpies mob the owl, a trope of both bestiary and psalter illustration.\textsuperscript{63} As the bestiary account of the \textit{bubo} explains,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Bestiaries} See, for example, two early thirteenth-century bestiaries, London, BL MS Harley 4571, fol. 47r, and Oxford, Bodl. MS Bodley 764, fol. 73v; and the Ormesby and Queen Mary Psalters (Oxford, Bodl. MS Douce 366, fol. 38r, ca. 1300; and London, BL MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 128v; early fourteenth century).
\end{thebibliography}
When other birds see the owl, they signal its presence with loud cries and harass it with fierce assaults. In the same way, if a sinner comes into the light of understanding, he becomes an object of derision to the virtuous. And when he is caught openly in the act of sinning, his ears are filled with their reproaches. As the birds pull out the owl’s feathers and tear at it with their beaks, the virtuous censure the carnal acts of the sinner and condemn his excesses.64

At first blush, the magpie may seem an unlikely avatar of “the virtuous.” The bird is commonly associated with thievery, gluttony, vanity, laziness, and uncomprehending, imitative chatter. In *Mon in the mone stond ant strit* (The man in the moon stands and strides), a Middle English poem contained in the trilingual verse miscellany known as the Harley Lyrics, the man in the moon, imagined as a lazy, thieving peasant, is described as a “magpie in stockings” (hosede pye).65 For the poet Wolfram von Eschenbach, however, in the opening lines of his *Parzival* (ca. 1210), the magpie signifies the man, who, in his quest for perfection, contains the potential for both vice and virtue. “Blame and praise alike befall when a dauntless man’s spirit is black-and-white-mixed, like the magpie’s plumage. Yet he may see blessedness after all, for both colors have a share in him.”66 Perhaps, then, both the owl and the magpies in the Tree of Life signify frail humanity. The owl, weighed down by sin, is yet capable of “com[ing] to the light of understanding.” The magpie, apparently among the virtuous, is nonetheless sus-

64 Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen MS 24, fol. 50v (as in n. 59); Klingender, *Animals in Art and Thought*, 412, fig. 245, and 413.
ceptible to vice on account of its piebald nature, though it “may see blessedness after all.”

As this analysis demonstrates, the Butler Hours should be added to the diverse corpus of English religious and devotional manuscripts in which a deftly designed visual program and moralizing vernacular texts frame and enrich Latinate personal devotion. The various offices listed at the beginning of this essay are not the only Latin devotions that the Butlers’ manuscript once contained, however: the prefatory sequence includes the (now fragmentary) Office of the Holy Face. This office comprises several texts, including a cluster of psalm verses linked by their mutual reference to the light of God’s visage, important prayers or their *incipits*, and the prayer *Deus qui nobis signatus lumine vultus tui*, ascribed to Pope Innocent III, who allegedly composed it in honor of the Veronica, the cloth that preserved the miraculously imprinted image of Christ’s face.

Like several other prayer books produced from the late thirteenth century forward that contain this office, the Butler Hours includes an indulgence in the form of a rubric granting forty days’ pardon for recitation of the prayer. The Anglo-Norman French rubric reads, “Pope Innocent made this prayer to save and deliver sinners from punishment, and at the time he granted by mouth and confirmed to all who would say this prayer devoutly, forty days of pardon. And for the week this will amount to two hundred and eighty days, and this pardon will last for as long as the world exists” (fig. 13).

Following the rubric is Psalm 4:7, *Signatum est super nos lumen*

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69 Morgan, “Holy Face as Icon,” 150.

70 *Ly apoostole Inocent fist cest oresoun pur peccurs sauver et diliverer de p[e]ine, si ad graunte et de sa bouche confirmé a touz qe cest orison devotement diroun. xl jors de pardone. et cee amountra la simag[ne] C.C. jours et xxiii et cest pardoun durra taunt cum la secle dure; Baltimore, WAM MS W. 105, fol. 14v. This transcription differs slightly from the one by Nigel*.  

https://repository.upenn.edu/mss_sims/vol4/iss2/1
vultus tui domine dedisti leticiam in corde meo, “The light of thy countenance,

Morgan and Daron Burrows in Morgan, “Holy Face as Icon,” 153–54. Burrows maintains convincingly that simage should be simag[n]e, or simaine—“week”—in this and several other surviving rubrics. As Delbert Russell has observed, C.C. et xxiiii should be C.C. et .iiii. xx—that is, deux cent quatre vingts, or 280 (personal correspondence with author, 9 October 2018).
Lord, is signed upon us: thou hast given gladness in my heart”—a staple of this office, and a potent expression of the desire to be “signed’ with the light of Christ’s face.”71

Immediately following this psalm verse is the rubric Psalmus. The facing page may have contained not a psalm, but rather the miniature showing the Butlers at Mass (see fig. 1). Thus, the Mass picture constituted a pictorial rubric, one that directed its noble beholders to recite the indulgenced Office of the Holy Face at the Elevation of the Eucharist.72 One might even interpret the word Psalmus on the verso and the Mass picture on the recto as two parts of a single, rebus-like rubric—the first part verbal, and imbued with the timeless authority of Latin and Scripture, the second part pictorial, strongly personalized, and of the Butlers’ “moment.” More likely, the folios showing the Tree of Vices (see fig. 2) and the Crucifixion and Holy Face (see figs. 3 and 4) came between the indulgenced rubric and the Mass picture, in order to more effectively aid the book owner in preparing for the service. Taken together, richly painted miniatures and Latin and vernacular prayers and texts make plain the connection between devout contemplation of an image of the Holy Face and devout viewing of the consecrated Host. Indeed, if one viewed the Eucharist at the moment of consecration in the context of ocular communion, the divine grace that streamed into the eyes was held to “empty the soul of vice and refill it with virtue,” as Peter the Venerable (d. 1156) put it, a process both stimulated and given visual, material form by these prefatory leaves in the Butlers’ manuscript.73


72 For additional French and English manuscripts containing this indulgence in which the book owner is directed to recite the Office of the Holy Face during the Mass, see most recently Sand, Vision, Devotion and Self-Representation, 54–58; and Morgan, “Holy Face as Icon,” 153–55.

73 Peter the Venerable, Contra Petrobrusianos, 201; this translation from David F. Appleby, “The Priority of Sight According to Peter the Venerable,” Mediaeval Studies 60 (1998): 123–57 at 130. For ocular or spiritual communion, see Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 150; and Suzannah Biernoff, Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 133–64. For ocular or spiritual communion as supported by imagery and texts in illuminated religious and devotional manuscripts, see Kumler, Translating Truth, 122–46; Smith,
The *psalmus* announced by the verbal-visual rubric, and written on the verso of the Mass picture, is Psalm 66, *Deus misereatur* (fig. 14). In numerous manuscripts containing the Office of the Holy Face, including several English volumes, this psalm is included in *incipit* form.\textsuperscript{74} In the Butler Hours, by contrast, it is written out in its entirety. The page contains the text through the first two and a half words of verse 7; presumably the succeeding folio, now lost, contained the conclusion of this short psalm, as well as other texts or their *incipits* and the final prayer in the Office of the Holy Face, *Deus qui nobis signatus lumine vultus tui*. Psalm 66 reads as follows:

> May God have mercy on us, and bless us: may he cause the light of his countenance to shine upon us, and may he have mercy on us. That we may know thy way upon earth: thy salvation in all nations. Let people confess to thee, O God: let all people give praise to thee. Let the nations be glad and rejoice: for thou judgest the people with justice, and directest the nations upon earth. Let the people, O God, confess to thee: let all the people give praise to thee: the earth hath yielded [her fruit. May God, our God bless us, may God bless us: and all the ends of the earth fear him.]

*(Psalm 66:2–7)*

The central themes of Psalm 66—light, the sight of the Lord’s “shin[ing]” “countenance,” confession to and praise of God, and the Lord’s mercy toward his people—are echoed and complemented in the prefatory pictures and texts analyzed in this essay (see figs. 1–4). “Light” finds its most resonant pictorial analogs in the shimmering gilding that surrounds Christ’s visage in the Holy Face miniature, and in the tall lit taper that ensures the Butlers’ ability to see the elevated Eucharist in the Mass picture. The birds in the Tree of Vices ventriloquize both the sentiments of the Vices and the moral teachings of a chaplain or priest, addressing their audience in

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\textsuperscript{74} Morgan, “Veronica’ Images”; Morgan, “Holy Face as Icon.”
mid-fourteenth-century England’s principal vernacular of religious instruction and devotional reading, and in the rhyming verse of much homiletic and didactic literature. Indeed, it is the voice of the priest, portrayed in identical vestments in the Tree of Vices and the Mass picture, which the book artisans appear to have materialized through the vivid images and vernacular texts on these prefatory leaves in the Butler Hours.

These images and texts explicate the nature and consequences of the Vices and the means of their remedy. They urged their Butler beholders toward penitent self-scrutiny, and, simultaneously, presented them to themselves as exemplars of devout comportment and virtuous sacramental viewing. Whether the Butlers contemplated these pictures and recited the Office of the Holy Face during the Mass, or at home in the context of personal devotion, they were reminded of the spiritual perils of sleeping through the service, and of the spiritual rewards of prayerful attention during its celebration.\textsuperscript{75} If, as suggested at the beginning of this essay, it is William, second Lord Boteler, and Margaret Fitzalan who are represented in the Mass picture (see fig. 1), then the manuscript was likely originally designed in part to train the gaze, voice, conscience, and devout comportment and imagination of the praying youth portrayed in the initial in Lauds (see fig. 12), a figure probably intended to represent their son William, the future third baron.\textsuperscript{76} The use of birds and animals as “teachers” in the prefatory series and the male gendering of the Vices support this idea.

Finally, it is worth noting here that, perhaps a generation or two after the making of the Butlers’ manuscript, the message of these pictures found vivid, if less personalized expression in the monumental, public medium of wall painting. In the later fourteenth-century Wheel of the Seven Deadly Sins in the church of St. Mary and St. Edmund, Ingatestone (Essex), Sloth has slept through the service, as confirmed by the presence of a devil and a church window behind his bed; while in the contemporary Wheel at St. George, Trotton (Sussex), Sloth dozes on a couch and has dropped his prayer book and rosary.\textsuperscript{77}

These prefatory pages in their book of hours offered the Butlers the choice of several “little trees” that one might “establish in” oneself, to reprise the author of \textit{De fructibus carnis et spiritus}. Perhaps a Tree of Virtues was portrayed on one of the folios missing from the sequence. Whether or

\textsuperscript{75} For prayers at the Elevation and the varied contexts of their recitation by the laity, see Smith, \textit{Taymouth Hours}, 64–65 and n26, with additional bibliography.
\textsuperscript{76} These identifications of the figures accord with the style-generated dating of the manuscript to ca. 1340–43 proposed in Dennison, “‘Fitzwarin Psalter,’” 65.
not this was the case, it is clear that the program of the Butlers’ *horae* operated not solely via binaries of good and evil, but also by means of a more subtle rhetoric, one that concedes human frailty and encourages personal aspiration to virtue, as well as acknowledging both the vices’ perils and their perilous allure. Finally, as these deftly designed pictures and their allied texts affirm, the path to salvation is closed to the slothful.
Appendix: The Prefatory Series in the Butler Hours

The order of the surviving folios given here reflects their possible order as of the early fourteenth century, as suggested by examination of the leaves with Abigail Quandt, 10/3/19. The folio numbers in parentheses are the ones assigned to these leaves in the later twentieth-century foliation of the manuscript. I am indebted to Abigail Quandt and Will Noel for sharing their earlier collation of the prefatory leaves, produced in January 2013.

- Resurrected Christ flanked by two “towers” containing heads representing the religious and lay hierarchies and pairs of laypeople (r) / Annunciation (v) (fol. 7)
- Annunciation to the Shepherds (r) / Journey of the Magi (v) (fol. 8)
- [Folio missing]
- [Folio missing]
- Sts. Peter and Paul (r) / Latin suffrage to St. Thomas à Becket (v) (fol. 11)
- Martyrdom of St. Thomas à Becket (r) / Anglo-Norman French rubric with an indulgence of Pope Innocent and Psalm 4:7 (v) (fol. 14)
- Dormition of the Virgin (r) / Tree of Vices (v) (fol. 9)
- Crucifixion, with the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist (r) / Holy Face with Evangelist symbols and birds on three oak branches (v) (fol. 10)
- Butler family at Mass (r) / Psalm 66, part (v) (fol. 15)
- [Folio missing]
- Sts. John the Baptist and John the Evangelist (r) / Latin suffrage to Thomas, earl of Lancaster (d. 1322) (v) (fol. 13)
- [Folio missing]
- [Folio missing]
- Sts. Helena and Mary Magdalene (r) / Blank (v) (fol. 12)

Acknowledgments

This article developed out of a flash presentation delivered on 5 March 2016 at “Manuscript as Medium,” the 36th Annual Conference of Fordham University’s Center for Medieval Studies. I am most grateful to Will Noel and Lynley Herbert for giving me the opportunity to think more deeply about the Butler Hours in the context of my participation in the Walters Art Museum’s Parchment to Pixel initiative, and to Lynn Ransom for encouraging me to submit this material for publication consideration in Manuscript Studies. For their comments, advice, bibliographic generosity, assistance in obtaining images, or encouragement, I thank Anthony Bale, Giovanni Braico, Lynda Dennison, Thelma Fenster, Dorothy Glass, Cynthia Hahn, Michael A. Michael, Nigel Morgan, Elizabeth Morrison, Pamela Patton, Nina Rowe, Lucy Freeman Sandler, Petrus Schuster, Mary Seo, and the anonymous readers. For his advice and assistance in transcribing and translating the Anglo-Norman French texts in the Butler Hours, I heartily thank Delbert Russell. Missing text is enclosed in square brackets, abbreviations are silently expanded, the acute accent is added to final tonic –e, and “u” has been changed to “v” and “i” to “j” where appropriate.
I dedicate this article to the memory of three early supporters and teachers, Ruth J. Dean (d. 2003), Brian J. Levy (d. 2004) and Claire Donovan (d. 2019). I remain humbly grateful for their intellectual generosity and their interest in and encouragement of my work on the Anglo-Norman French texts and vernacular theology in English illuminated religious and devotional manuscripts.
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