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Teaching monastic masculinity with the *Colloquy* of Ælfric of Eynsham

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I focus on the Colloquy *of Ælfric of Eynsham to show how it contributed to gender formation by teaching boys not only Latin, but also what it meant to be a man of the monastery. I discuss how the professions the boys role-played encouraged them to think of the monk as the most masculine option, and how verbal experimentation allowed their violent impulses to be redirected from physical towards intellectual outlets. In doing so, I reveal the rhetorical strategies used to construct collective gendered identities, which separated different types of men and the role of animals in this process.*

Introduction

At the turn of the millennium, education was for English monks a defining characteristic that set them apart not only from the laity but also from the secular clergy.[1] While clerics could receive training in monastic schools alongside oblates and novices, monks acquired a special association with Latin (as opposed to the vernacular), and especially with the so-called hermeneutic Latin, which was

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1 On education in this period, see P. Lendinara, 'The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', in M. Godden and M. Lapidge (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 295–312; entry for 'Schools' in M. Lapidge *et al.* (eds), *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2013), pp. 421–3; S. Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 226–57; H. Gittos, 'Is There any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches in Late Anglo-Saxon England? The Red Book of Darley and the Status of Old English', in F. Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 63–82; D.A. Bullough, 'The Educational Tradition in England from Alfred to Ælfric: Teaching Utriusque Linguae', *Settimane* 19 (Spoleto, 1972), pp. 453–94, which emphasizes the importance of the vernacular in teaching.

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characterized by an interest in exotic vocabulary, complex syntax, and variations at the level of both word and phrase.[2] As Rebecca Stephenson has skilfully shown through the example of Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, (1011), a bilingual school manual which addressed a mixed classroom, the Latinity of the monks was often exaggerated and used as a unifying feature.[3] Notably, although the vernacular parts of this manual would have been useful to all students, Byrhtferth claimed to have been compelled to write them for the benefit of the 'lazy clerics'. Yet many of his attacks against the secular clergy were written in hermeneutic Latin that should have been inaccessible to them, while his comments in the Old English parts of the manual were much more varied in tone. It is more likely that the Latin comments against the secular clergy were aimed in fact at monks, who were meant to be flattered by the comparison and encouraged to continue to study.[4]

Such strategies helped monks create and foster their collective identity. They could also help monks boost their own sense of masculinity, which greatly depended on their status as educated males. Consider, for example, the following passage referring to *computus*:

> These matters are perfectly well understood by monks, who from the initiation of their manhood (*ab ipso pubertatis tyrocinio*) have sucked the milk (*lac sugxerunt*) of the catholic church at the same time as their mother's milk. These monks attempt with the support of the high trinity and the undivided unity to carry to the Lord, King of the saints, not only two or three measures, but to bring even the thirty-fold and the sixty-fold fruits as a pleasing sacrifice, and still to offer the sacrifice of one hundred-fold fruits with their milk-white hearts (*lacteis cordibus*) adorned with a thousand garlands.[5]

The boys in question are oblates, who have been offered by their parents to the monastery at a young age. For them, education, and in this case

2 Such group distinctions did not always hold at the level of the individual. For an example of a secular cleric with an ambitious Latin writing style, see B. in R.C. Love, 'St Eadburh of Lyminge and her Hagiographer', *Analecta Bollandiana* 137 (2019), pp. 313–408. Ælfric of Eynsham had not been an oblate but had received the rudiments of education at the hands of a secular cleric. See C.A. Jones, 'Ælfric and the Limits "Benedictine Reform"', in H. Magennis and M. Swan (eds), *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 67–109, at pp. 104–5. On hermeneutic Latin more broadly, see M. Winterbottom, 'The Style of Æthelweard', *Medium Ævum* 36.2 (1967), p. 110; M. Lapidge, 'Poeticism in Pre-Conquest Anglo-Latin Prose', in T. Rienhardt, M. Lapidge and J.N. Adams (eds), *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 321–37; M. Lapidge, 'The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature', in his *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900–1066* (London, 1993), pp. 105–49.

3 *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. P.S. Baker and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 1995).

4 R. Stephenson, 'Scapegoating the Secular Clergy: The Hermeneutic Style as a Form of Monastic Self-definition', *ASE* 38 (2009), pp. 101–35.

5 *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, ed. Baker and Lapidge, p. 232.

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knowledge of *computus*, is described as the milk, the nutrient, that helps them grow into men. The expression *ab ipso pubertatis tyrocinio* is particularly interesting. Taken from the seventh-century scholar Aldhelm (d. 709), it not only elevates the register of the text, but also adds some masculine connotations.[6] The word *tyrocinium* reminds the reader of the military, as its primary meaning is that of a young recruit in his first campaign as soldier. Here it is perhaps a reference to the spiritual warfare that the boys will be called to wage as monks, or to the corporal discipline of the monastic classroom.[7] Either way, it brings to monastic education the masculine connotations of violence. At the same time, the later reference to the boys' 'milk-white hearts' suggests that the effects that this learning had on their identity were lasting. What they studied from a very young age would stay with them throughout their lives and would make them into pure and wise men.

Such passages invite us to think about the effects that educational texts had on the masculinity of young boys, a task I will take up in this article, focusing on a different school text, the *Colloquy* of Ælfric of Eynsham. More specifically, I will examine how this educational dialogue contributed to the formation of monastic masculine identity, by teaching young monks not only Latin, but also how to be men of the monastery. In this discussion, animals, violence, and learning will feature prominently as constitutive parts of the boys' monastic masculinity, while women and sex will be mostly conspicuous through their absence. Through this focus, I aim to contribute to a wider discussion on religious masculinities which has previously centred on the Gregorian reforms and the impact of the imposition of celibacy on the manliness of secular clerics.[8] Instead of examining the attempts of

6 Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate*, in *Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. R. Ehwald (Berlin, 1919), p. 311: 'sub ipso pubertatis tirocinio'.

7 Rebecca Stephenson has returned to the *Postcript* of the *Enchiridion* to suggest a reinterpretation of the study of *computus* as a manly spiritual battle. See R. Stephenson, 'Judith as Spiritual Warrior: Female Models of Monastic Masculinity in Ælfric's *Judith* and Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*', *English Studies* 101.1 (2020), pp. 79–95.

8 For example, see J.A. McNamara, 'The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150', in C.A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 3–29; J. Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in L.M. Bitel and F. Lifshitz (eds), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 34–51; J. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity and Reform in England and Normandy 1066–1300* (Philadelphia, 2015). For the need to move away from clerical celibacy as the main criterion of religious manhood, see J. D. Thibodeaux, 'Introduction: Rethinking the Medieval Clergy and Masculinity', in her *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 6. Other criteria, and especially violence, have featured more in discussions of monastic masculinity. See for example, K. Allen Smith, 'Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith: Martial Rhetoric and Monastic Masculinity in the Long Twelfth Century', in J.D. Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2010), pp. 86–110.

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the church to keep in check the impulses of adult religious men who had already internalized, and often enacted, forms of masculinity that were increasingly prohibited to them, I focus on a different stage of the lifecycle, one that was full of possibilities and characterized more by experimentation than by prescribed models.[9]

Using the focus of Ælfric's *Colloquy* also allows me to contribute to our understanding of religious masculinity within the Ælfrician corpus, a topic that has attracted mostly indirect attention.[10] In emphasizing Ælfric's preference for chastity, previous scholars have pointed towards a definition of manhood characterized not by the impregnation of women but through asexual reproduction.[11] By examining how female biblical figures and saints acted as models of spiritual warfare and chastity for male monks, earlier studies have revealed the representational role of women in the construction of monastic identity.[12] These discussions have not always been theorized or framed in terms of masculinity.[13] Indeed, Rhonda McDaniel, who provides the most comprehensive discussion of gender in Ælfric's *Lives*, mostly eschews masculinity and argues for a third gender. Pairing St Eugenia/us with St Alban, she concentrates on their 'desire for Christ', 'perfected mind', 'virginity', 'hospitality', 'self-sacrifice', 'faith', and 'courage', characteristics which she considers neither feminine nor masculine.[14] By changing the focus and choosing a source whose gender implications remain unexplored, this article offers a different

[9] This was done, for example, through the rewriting of episcopal hagiographies. See M.C. Miller, 'Masculinity, Reform, and Clerical Culture: Narrative of Episcopal Holiness in the Gregorian Era', *Church History* 72 (2003), pp. 25–52.

[10] For a more direct engagement with masculinity, see A. Jorgensen, 'Shame, Disgust and Ælfric's Masculine Performance', in R. Norris, R. Stephenson and R.R. Trilling (ed.), *Feminist Approaches to Early Medieval English Studies* (Amsterdam, 2023), pp. 143–70, which discusses Ælfric's construction of his masculine authority as a preacher.

[11] M. Pareles, 'Jewish Heterosexuality, Queer Celibacy? Ælfric Translates the Old Testament Priesthood', *postmedieval* 8.3 (2017), pp. 292–306, where they argue that, through his translation choices, Ælfric creates the Jew as the heterosexual Other to the Christian chaste male. See also Jorgensen, 'Ælfric's Masculine Performance', p. 153: 'Medieval Christianity placed a high value on virginity, to the extent that one might argue Bullough is wrong to regard sexual activity as consistently central to masculinity.'

[12] One example is Ælfric's *Judith*. See S.S. Klein, 'Ælfric's Sources and His Gendered Audiences', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 13 (1996), pp. 111–19; Stephenson, 'Judith as Spiritual Warrior', pp. 79–95. Another example is Eugenia/us, who is most often discussed as a woman among scholars of early medieval England. See P.E. Szarmach, 'Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia', in H. Damico and A.H. Olsen (eds), *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington, 1990), pp. 146–57; G. Roy, 'A Virgin Acts Manfully: Ælfric's Life of St Eugenia and the Latin Versions', *Leeds Studies in English*, ns 23 (1992), pp. 1–27.

[13] David Clark, for example, has focused on Eugenia/us in his discussion of homosocial desire and revealed Ælfric's sodomitical allusions in the saint's encounter with Melantia, but has not brought out the implications for the masculinity of the *Life*'s monastic audience. See D. Clark, *Between Medieval Men* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 184–94.

[14] R.L. McDaniel, *The Third Gender and Ælfric's Lives of Saints* (Michigan, 2018), pp. 105–33.

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perspective on Ælfric's construction of masculinity. If Ælfric's *Lives* centred on questions of divine love and faith, the *Colloquy* centres on the tension between religious and secular males, and repeatedly masculinizes the monk. As we will see, this is achieved through the effeminization of some secular males, who are presented as subservient to earthly masters and animals; the monastic appropriation of other positive secular characteristics, such as courage and bravery; as well as through an emphasis on the monk's unique intellectual prowess and learning.

Ælfric's *Colloquy*

Ælfric of Eynsham's *Colloquy* was part of a series of educational works, including his *Grammar* and *Glossary*, which he produced probably between 992 and 1002, when he was monk and mass priest at Cerne Abbas.[15] While Ælfric's *Grammar* and *Glossary* presented grammatical and lexical elements of Latin in a systematic way, the *Colloquy* is an example of the next stage in language-learning, when the systematically acquired linguistic structures were put into practice.[16] In terms of its content, Ælfric's *Colloquy* is a dialogue between a teacher and his students on the topic of work and workmen. The teacher plays the role of a professed monk, while the students pretend to be men engaged in different professions: there is a ploughman, a shepherd, an oxherd, a hunter, a fisherman, a fowler, a merchant, a leather-worker, a salter, a baker, a cook, and a wise counsellor.[17] This great range of professions would have allowed the students to build their vocabulary, complementing much of what they would have already learnt through

[15] J. Hill, 'Ælfric: His Life and Works', in H. Magennis and M. Swan (eds), *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 35–65. Ælfric's *Colloquy* has three manuscript witnesses: London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fols 60v–64v (middle of the 11th c.), which is the only one with an Old English gloss and is edited in *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. G.N. Garmonsway, rev. edn (Exeter, 1991); Oxford, St John's College, MS 154, fols 204r–215r (early 11th c.), which also includes Bata's colloquies and is edited with additions from Cotton Tiberius A. iii in *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. W.H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1929), pp. 75–102; Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, M. 16.2, fols 18r–19v and London, British Library, Additional MS 32246, fols 16v–17v (early 11th c.), which have been edited in J. Hill, 'Ælfric's Colloquy: The Antwerp/London Version', in A. Orchard (ed.), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* (Toronto, 2005), pp. 331–48.

[16] In addition to its Latin form, the *Colloquy* has become famous through an interlinear Old English gloss-translation. According to Hill, this gloss-translation was not Ælfric's: J. Hill, 'Learning Latin in Anglo-Saxon England: Traditions, Texts and Techniques', in S. Rees Jones (ed.), *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad* (Turnhout, 2003), p. 16. By contrast, according to Lendinara's more detailed study, it was. See P. Lendinara, 'The *Colloquy* of Ælfric and the *Colloquy* of Ælfric Bata', in her *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries* (Aldershot, 1999), p. 31.

[17] On the professions in the *Colloquy*, see also E.R. Anderson, 'Social Idealism in Ælfric's "Colloquy"', *ASE* 3 (1974), pp. 153–62.

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the *Glossary* and *Grammar*. Besides being an aid to language-learning, the *Colloquy* was an opportunity for the boys to experiment with different gender roles within the spectrum of intelligible masculinities. Given its content, this dialogue ultimately reinforced a male gender identity that was deeply connected to the boys' monastic status as well as their educational achievements.

Professions and gender

The first of the professions to be mentioned in the dialogue is that of the ploughman, who is presented as very hard-working: he must drive the oxen to the field at the crack of dawn, and even in the bitter winter weather, he must plough a field or more for the whole day. Willingness to do hard work is not an unmanly characteristic, but the ploughman's motivation for doing it puts him in a negative light. We are told that he would not dare to stay at home 'for fear of his master' and that his labour is so great because he is not a free man.[18] A fellow field-worker, the shepherd, also expresses servile obligation, though not as centrally as the ploughman, simply stating 'and I am faithful to my lord' as the last item in his list of activities.[19] What is more, when emphasizing their hard lives, both shepherd and ploughman address the interrogating master as *domine*, an honorific title commonly used to address ecclesiastics, which further highlights the distance between farm labourers and monks. Thus, the ploughman and shepherd present us with the first unmanly characteristic that several of the *Colloquy*'s professions share: the men doing them are depicted as subservient and bound to do their back-breaking labour out of obligation to another man. More examples come from the end of the dialogue, where the position of subordination is already implicit in the questions that the teacher-monk asks the students. In the case of the leather-worker, the question is 'what do you do that is useful to us?'.[20] The answer maintains the same dynamic and the leather-worker addresses the monk as his master, with *domine*. The questions and answers for the salter, cook, and baker follow a similar pattern.[21] The implication is

[18] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 20–1; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 340: 'pro timore domini mei', 'quia non sum liber'; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 77–8: 'quia ego miser non sum liber'.

[19] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 22; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 340; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 78: 'et fidelis sum domino meo'.

[20] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 34; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 343; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 88: 'quid operaris nobis utilitatis?'.

[21] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 35–7; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 343–4; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 89–90.

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that they work for the monks and need to justify their function vis-à-vis the monks. Their professions are important only in relation to what they can provide for the monastery.

Even workmen who do not have a master are described in the *Colloquy* as constrained by external obligations that do not allow them the independence and self-control which was associated with masculinity. The prime example is that of the merchant, who is depicted as unhappy with his job, which he does out of family obligation.[22] When asked about how moving around to ply his goods makes him feel, he answers: 'Certainly, I do not want to. How then can I make a profit from my work? I want to sell at a dearer price than the purchase price so that I can make some gain from which to feed both my wife and my children.'[23] Here it is not a master but an earthly family that limits the man's independence. While reciting these lines, the oblates would be able to feel happy with their future lot, which did not involve worrying and caring about wives and children or being bound to any earthly and oppressive master. Their main allegiance would be to the heavenly Lord, a much more noble obligation.[24] Indeed, as has been shown by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, the oblates would have learned to understand their service to God as true freedom. They cultivated this belief through the learning of epigrams, such as Prosper's Epigram 85, which stated that 'There is no better freedom, or no greater power than to serve God.'[25] This understanding of their own independence would have been strengthened through a comparison to the subservience of the other men presented in the *Colloquy*.

Going back to the field workers, a second unmanly characteristic associated with their professions comes from their close relationship with animals. We are told that the shepherd drives the ewes to the pastures and guards them with dogs. The oxherd does the same with his oxen,

[22] See also Anderson, 'Social Idealism', pp. 155–6; G.R. Owen-Crocker, 'Brides, Donors, Traders: Imports into Anglo-Saxon England', in A. Ling Huang and C. Jahnke (eds), *Textiles and the Medieval Economy: Production, Trade, and Consumption of Textiles, 8th–16th Centuries* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 64–77.

[23] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 34; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 88: 'Nolo certe. Quid tunc mihi proficit labor meus? Sed volo vendere hic carius quam emi illic, ut aliquod lucrum mihi adquiram, unde me pascam et uxorem meam et filios meos.' This section is missing in Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 343.

[24] For the difference between obedience to an earthly master as opposed to obedience to God in Ælfric's *Lives* of the martyr-kings Edmund and Oswald, see E. Christie, 'Self-Mastery and Submission: Holiness and Masculinity in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon Martyr-Kings', in P.H. Cullum and K.J. Lewis (eds), *Holiness and Masculinity* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 143–57, at pp. 149–54, where she shows that self-imposed passivity and surrender of one's will to God is depicted as self-mastery and 'as a choice, not a lack of power'.

[25] K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2012), pp. 94–150, at p. 141.

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which he also makes sure are well fed and watered.[26] The ploughman's job is arguably even worse, as he must fill the stable with hay for the oxen, water them, and take their dung, *fimum* (*scearn*), outside.[27] What we have here is men who, in addition to being subservient to their master, were also subservient to animals. By contrast, the monks not only did not engage with animals on a day-to-day basis, but also explicitly separated themselves from the animal world through their studies. The very act of learning and reciting the *Colloquy* moved them away from the animalistic and towards the rational. This is explicitly stated in the dialogue, when the boys are asked why they are so keen to learn. They answer: 'We do not want to be like the wild beasts who know of nothing but eating grass and drinking water.'[28]

The importance for masculinity of the contrast between learned rationality and beastly irrationality has also been noted by Elizabeth Eva Leach and Ruth Mazo Karras in their studies. Leach found that learning to understand music's masculine rationality as expressed, for example, in numerical rations, allowed monks to maintain their masculine identity when they sang or heard others sing, despite the fact that music was generally associated with feminine emotions and could feminize or bestialize those who listened to it passively.[29] Similarly, Ruth Mazo Karras has noted that in the context of the medieval university, the unlearned man was compared to a human beast:

> Like knights, students could compete in (intellectual) combat, through disputations. Unlike knights, the 'Other' being rejected by students was as much animal as feminine; masculinity, for these men, was based upon the idea of rationality and moderation that distinguished the man both from the woman and from the beast.[30]

This is typical of male-only environments, where, in the absence of women, men know they are men primarily through comparisons to other men or animals. In a similar way, in the *Colloquy* animals are

[26] For the shepherd and the oxherd, see *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 22; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 78; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 340.

[27] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 21; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 77; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 340.

[28] *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 94; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 345; *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 42: 'Quia nolumus esse sicut bruta animalia quae nihil sciunt, nisi herbam comedere et aquam bibere.'

[29] E.E. Leach, 'Music and Masculinity in the Middle Ages', in K. Gibson (ed.), *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice* (London, 2009), pp. 21–40.

[30] R. Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2003), p. 108.

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used to masculinize the monastic profession through an emphasis on the monk's intellectual prowess and dominance over beastly irrationality, as well as to effeminize the other professions through associations with subservience and lack of independence. In fact, the two manly characteristics at stake here – rationality and freedom – are often intimately linked in medieval thought. As Karl Steel has argued using the example of Jewish–Christian relations, dominant human groups tend to present subordinated groups as lacking reason and to claim freedom as one of their own main advantages. In the process, they animalize these groups, imagining others to be 'merely instinctual', living like cows or beasts of burden.[31] It is not surprising then to see the combination of this gender rhetoric in the *Colloquy*, working to present the monk as the most desirable profession.

This desirability is paradoxically reinforced when we examine the professions that were portrayed in more positive ways. A prime example is that of the royal hunter, whose service can be said to add to his masculine associations. Although he is dependent on a master, the king is the most noble earthly lord that one could have, and the benefits that the hunter receives from this relationship increase his manliness. The hunter speaks of his own position as follows:

> I hold first place in the king's court. He bestowed upon me enough clothing and food, and sometimes he gives me a gold ring, and he feeds me well and clothes me, and sometimes gives me a horse or armour, so that I can exercise my skill more willingly (*libentius*).[32]

Horses and armour have associations with heroic masculinity, and the word *libentius*, 'willingly', contrasts with the descriptions of subservience that we have previously seen.[33] It also creates an association between the hunter and the monk, the only other person in the dialogue to say that they do their work willingly, *libenter*.[34]

[31] K. Steel, 'Book Review Essay: Posthumanism and the Claim to Rational Action', *postmedieval* 11.1 (2020), p. 138.

[32] *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 82: 'Primum locum teneo in sua aula. Vestitum autem et victum satis mihi tribuit, et aliquando vero anulum mihi aureum reddit, et vestit me bene et pascit, et aliquando dat mihi equum aut armillam, ut libentius artem meam exerceam.' The other two versions are slightly different, but both maintain the last part of the passage that expresses the hunter's free will. See *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 25–6; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 341.

[33] On how this type of lord–retainer relationship and the related aspect of gift-giving can increase one's masculine associations, see K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Values and Ethics in Heroic Literature', in M. Godden and M. Lapidge (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 101–19.

[34] *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 95: 'Et ego libenter faciam sicut rogatis.' The word *libenter* is omitted in the other two versions. See *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 43; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 346.

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What is more, although the hunter is involved with animals, he does not serve them. When hunting, we are told that he sets his hounds to pursue other beasts. It is the dogs that do his bidding, not the other way around. His role is to deal the final death blow after the animals have been captured, and the violence of the act is emphasized in the *Colloquy*, as the hunter is asked how 'he dared' (*fuisti ausus*) to cut a boar's throat and is called 'brave' (*audax*).[35] He goes on to explain that 'a hunter must not be timorous, since all kinds of beasts lurk in the woods'.[36] This bravery presents a direct contrast to the ploughman's fear, while at the same time mirroring the monk's prowess. Although monks were not allowed to participate in physical hunts, they were involved in metaphorical hunting. Through their teaching and preaching, they could hunt for the souls of sinners and lead them to salvation, just like the apostles. We can see this, for example, in Ælfric's homily on the Apostle Andrew where he quotes Jeremiah XVI.16: 'I will send my fishermen, and they will fish for them; my hunters (*huntan*), and they will hunt (*huntiað*) them from every mountain and from every hill.'[37] Bede (d. 735) had also drawn similar connections, affirming that 'holy preachers are indeed hunters when they constrain the wayward and erring minds of the wicked with the nets of faith in order to subject them to Christ'. He contrasts the Old Testamentary figure of Nimrod, who 'places the snares of his deceits in the forest of this world, and by deception he hunts to the death men who, like stags and roes, are innocent of his nature and cleverness', with the apostles, 'those hunters, who seek with their teaching to seize the souls of men to lure them to eternal life'.[38] Such connections formed in the minds of the young boys as they recited the dialogue would have helped to transfer the positive masculine associations of the royal hunter to their own monastic experience.

A comparison with the fisherman, the profession that follows, would also have produced a similar effect. The fisherman of the *Colloquy* is very different from the brave hunter; he is too scared to catch a whale

[35] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 25; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 81; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 341.

[36] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 25: 'Non debet venator formidolosus esse, quia varie bestie morantur in silvis'; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 341. The Oxford manuscript has a slightly expanded version found in *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 81: 'Non debet enim venator formidolosus esse, quia variae bestiae atque animalia, bona ac mala, munda et immunda, morantur in silvis.'

[37] *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series Text*, ed. P. Clemoes (Oxford, 1997), pp. 507–8.

[38] S. DeGregorio, *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah* (Liverpool, 2006), p. 58; C.B. Kendall, *On Genesis: Bede* (Liverpool, 2008), p. 220.

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and calls whale-hunting 'a dangerous business'.[39] Although at a basic level this provides another example of a profession which is presented as unmanly through associations with fear, we can also take the argument a step further if we think of the *Colloquy*'s fisherman in the context of *The Whal*e, one of the three poems of the Old English *Physiologus*.[40] In this poem, the whale is compared to the devil, who tempts men with comforts. More specifically, the whale is said to take the appearance of a rough boulder so that sailors who see it imagine that they are gazing upon an island and moor their ships to this false land, hoping to find rest. Once they are upon the beast and start to get comfortable, they are washed away and drowned, realizing that it was all a facade. In this, the whale is depicted as wilfully trapping and drowning the sailors, in the same way that the devil leads weak men to perdition through seductive illusions.[41] With this context in mind, the *Colloquy*'s contrast between a timid fisherman and a brave whale-hunter could have reinforced the young monks' sense of masculinity by reminding them of how they, too, were expected to bravely defeat the devil by not succumbing to temptation and sin.

This monastic association becomes particularly obvious in the *Colloquy*'s last exchange between monk and fisherman. The monk argues for the benefits of whale-hunting and states: 'But many men catch whales and escape danger, as well as obtaining a large price for their catch.' The fisherman replies: 'You speak the truth, but I do not dare to do this because of the laziness of my mind (*propter mentis meae ignavia*).'[42] The expression *propter mentis meae ignaviam* clearly refers to the intellect and, through its associations with ignorance, emphasizes what is really needed for someone to engage in the dangerous and

39 *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 29; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 84; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 342: 'periculosa res est capere cetum'. This part of the dialogue is particularly interesting because the character of the fisherman is an anomaly in this genre. See H. Momma, 'Ælfric's Fisherman and the Hronrad: A Colloquy on the Occupation', in S.S. Klein, W. Schipper and S. Lewis-Simpson (eds), *The Maritime World of the Anglo-Saxons* (Tempe, 2014), pp. 303–21, at p. 309.

40 The *Physiologus* survives in *c.*24 manuscripts, two of English origin: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 448 and Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3501. The latter codex, also known as the Exeter Book, contains a verse *Physiologus* (fols 95v–98r) in Old English. It was written in the format of three booklets by a single scribe between 950 and 990. *The Whale* is found in Booklet II, the first of the three booklets to be copied (950–75). The Book remained at Exeter from at least the end of the eleventh century. The Cambridge manuscript dates from the tenth century and contains a Latin prose *Physiologus* (fols 88r–89r), but with three different animals. See M. Salvador-Bello and M. Gutiérrez-Ortiz, 'The Cambridge and the Exeter Book *Physiologi*: Associative Imagery, Allegorical Circularity, and Isidorean Organization', *Anglia* 136.4 (2018), pp. 643–86, at pp. 643, 654–7.

41 B.J. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, vol. 1 (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 272–5.

42 *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 30; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 84–5; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 342: 'Et tamen multi capiunt cetos et evadunt pericula, et magnum pretium inde adquirunt', 'Vero dicis, sed ego non audeo propter mentis meae ignaviam.'

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brave activity of whale-hunting: learning and a quick-witted mind like that of a monk.

The last example of a profession that is positively portrayed in the *Colloquy* is that of the fowler, whose hunting using hawks attracts the monk's attention.[43] Again questions of dominance and freedom come up in relation to these birds. On the one hand, the fowler tames hawks and uses them to catch other birds, resembling in this way the hunter, who instrumentalizes animals rather than serving them. On the other hand, his taming of these hunting birds seems to come with an expectation of care and points towards a more symbiotic relationship involving responsibilities as well as rights. This possibility is, however, quickly refuted, as the fowler asserts his independence by stating that in winter he does not feed the hawks, the hawks feed him, and in spring he lets them go so as not to have to look after them. The boys reciting this dialogue were expected to find the birds of prey attractive, despite the fact that hawking could not have been part of their social world. Indeed, part of the exchange involves the fowler's interlocutor asking him for his biggest and best hawk.[44] What were the boys meant to learn from this? Given the positive description of the fowler's activities, we can read this part of the *Colloquy* as an example where monks bought into secular ideals of masculinity, desiring what they could not have. We can also, however, find points of convergence between the fowler and the monk that again transfer some of this profession's positive associations onto the monastic state. Notably, we can read the scene allegorically, considering contemporary associations between hawk-taming and child-rearing.

A prime example of associating hawks and children in Old English literature comes from *The Fates of Mortals*.[45] This poem opens with a moving image of parenting, performed by a husband and a wife, which is later echoed by a description of a hawk being tamed through feeding and adornment, suggesting the kind of skill that was involved in the upbringing of children.[46] This association is not surprising, as both hawks and children were thought to occupy a space between the natural and the social, the wild and the tamed. In the case of hawks, their ability to move easily across these borders was neatly captured in a

[43] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 30–2; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 85–7; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', pp. 342–3.

[44] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 32; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 86; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 343.

[45] Like the Old English *Physiologus*, this poem was also included in the Exeter Book. See Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, pp. 247–50.

[46] S.S. Klein, 'Parenting and Childhood', in S. Irvine and W. Rudolf (eds), *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Toronto, 2018), pp. 95–119, at pp. 107–10.

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line of gnomic poetry: 'The hawk, a wild creature, shall dwell on a glove.'[47] It was also indicated in the *Colloquy* by the fact that in spring the fowler released his tamed hawks back into the wild. That children were like hawks in this respect is suggested in the *Colloquy* through a reference to eating habits. Hawks are said to have a naturally voracious appetite, and the same is also implied about the oblates. Towards the end of the dialogue one of them is assumed to have eaten 'all that was put before him', but the boy in question, having been well trained, answered that he had eaten 'with sobriety as becomes a novice and not ravenously'.[48] The teacher could tame the oblates by restraining their gluttony, feeding them 'little morsels' (*lytlum giefIum*) like the fowler from *The Fates of Mortals*.[49]

The association of the two professions is particularly interesting from a gender perspective. We have already seen how metaphorical links between the activities of the monks, the hunter, and the whale-hunter could masculinize the monastic state through references to its transcendence of the animal, or its fighting off temptation. Similarly, here the association with the fowler could masculinize the 'parenting' role that a monastic teacher would play vis-à-vis oblates, especially within the context of the monastic classroom. Unlike the merchant's financial obligation towards his family, which we have read as a form of unwelcome subservience, the monastic teacher's association with his pupils can be understood in the context of exercising a creative craft, like that of the fowler. It can come under what Stacy Klein has called 'masculine parenting', which results in the moulding of wild beings and raw materials into products that positively contribute to the social world.[50] This takes child-rearing away from the domain of women and brings it more firmly within the domain of skilled craftsmen.

Be what you are

The last point I would like to make about Ælfric's *Colloquy* involves a passage that has been analysed in detail by Katherine O'Brian O'Keefe, and reads as follows:

[47] *The Anglo Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. van Kirk Dobbie (London, 1942), pp. 55–6, Maxims II lines 17b–18a: 'Hafuc sceal on glofe / wilde gewunian'. See also Klein, 'Parenting and Childhood'.

[48] *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 46–7: 'Valde edax es cum omnia manducas que tibi apponuntur'; 'cum sobrietate, sicut decet monachum, non cum voracitate, quia non sum gluto.' *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 97. This part is missing from the Antwerp/London version.

[49] Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, p. 250.

[50] Klein, 'Parenting and Childhood', p. 114.

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> And this advice I give to all workers so that each one may practise (*exerceat*) his craft more diligently, since he who neglects his craft will himself be separate from it. Whether you are priest, cleric, scribe, lector, illuminator, stonecutter, monk, layman, or soldier, train (*exerce*) yourself in this, and be what you are (*esto quod es*); because it is very damaging and shameful for a person to not want to be what he is and what he ought to be (*quod est et quod esse debet*).[51]

O'Brian O'Keeffe used this passage to show how monastic identity was formed. In a very interesting argument, she contrasted the idea of monastic identity as something conferred at a specific moment through the act of oblation and something that was acquired in the performance of the monastic habitus and the labour of the monastic schoolroom.[52] Using Judith Butler's idea of performativity, we can emphasize that this performance, at the same time as creating monastic identity, helps create the boys' masculinity, as gender is constructed through 'a stylized repetition of acts' that imitate the dominant conventions.[53] In our case, the focus is on the repetitive performance of gendered acts associated with one's profession, and the passage highlights the close association between doing one's job and becoming who one *is*, through the use of the same word, *exercere*, for both. For the monks this repetitive performance would involve activities such as reading, writing, singing, and praying. For the hunter, it would involve riding a horse, wielding a spear, and slaughtering animals. Such acts would influence the way these men understood themselves and how others saw them, as well as having a gendered impact on their body, evidenced perhaps in a hunter's developed muscles or an older monk's poor eyesight.

In the *Colloquy* the association between profession and identity is taken to the extreme in the case of the baker, who explains how he improves the life of the monks: 'I strengthen the heart of man, I am

[51] *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 93–4: 'Et hoc consilium do omnibus operariis, ut unusquisque artem suam diligenter exerceat, quia qui artem suam dimiserit, ipse dimittatur ab arte. Sed sive sis sacerdos sue clericus aut scriptor uel lector ceu pictor siue sculptor siue monachus seu laicus seu miles, exerce te met ipsum in hoc, et esto quod es, quia magnum dampnum et uerecundia est homini nolle esse quod est et quod esse debet.' *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 41–2; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 345.

[52] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, pp. 126–8, 150. For these dialogues in the context of theatrical performance and its disciplinary effects in the process of identity formation, see I. Dumitrescu, *The Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 76–89; I.A. Dumitrescu, 'Violence, Performance, and Pedagogy in Ælfric Bata's Colloquies', *Exemplaria* 23.1 (2011), pp. 67–91, at pp. 77–88.

[53] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), pp. 191–2.

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the force of men.'[54] The baker has basically become his bread, and although he is not presented himself as masculine, he is important for invigorating others. A similar emphasis on how acts shape one's gender identity can be seen in the case of the cook. When the monks claim that they do not need the cook's services because they can cook for themselves, the cook answers that by refusing his services they will all turn into cooks, and 'none among [them] will be lord'.[55] This implies that a certain loss of independence, and potential emasculation, is involved in the repetitive act of cooking. The threat again is that if a man does not exercise *his own* craft, he can lose his identity.

Given this close association between profession and identity, we can see that the *Colloquy* itself is a subversive text, as it allows the students to become momentarily what they are not. This is why this reminder, added at the end of the dialogue, presents an important safeguard. Along with the unmanly representation of most other professions and the appropriation of the manly characteristics of those who were positively described, it helps the oblates in their process of becoming monks. And as we have seen through the *Colloquy*'s representation of the different professions, in this process it is not only monastic identity that is at stake, but also scholarly status and gender. Had we focused only on monastic identity, we could have missed the wider societal expectations, norms, and taboos that defined more generally how a man ought to be, not only within but also without the monastery. Indeed, it is exactly by focusing on the other non-monastic professions, which the boys temporarily perform, that we can get a glimpse of the negotiation involved between culturally dominant and subordinated patterns of gender and how it contributes to the construction of the monastic male.

A wider context: the colloquies of Ælfric Bata

One of the manuscripts containing the *Colloquy*, Oxford, St John's College 154, preserves another, bigger, corpus of similar education dialogues composed around the turn of the eleventh century by Ælfric's student, Ælfric Bata.[56] Bata's colloquies are centred around the

54 *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, pp. 36–7; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 344; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 90: 'Ego quidem cor hominis confirmo, ego robur virorum sum.'

55 *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 37; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 344; *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 91: 'tunc eritis omnes coci et nullus vestrum erit dominus'.

56 These were probably meant for a Canterbury community, thought by some scholars to be that at Christ Church. See also the Introduction in *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: The Colloquies of Ælfric Bata*, ed. S. Gwara and D.W. Porter (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 1–70.

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monastery and portray masters and oblates engaging in everyday activities. Although they bear many similarities to Ælfric's *Colloquy*, Bata's dialogues have been put in the spotlight for being quite unorthodox. He has been called a rogue teacher and it has been argued that his students were operating in an unreformed environment.[57] More recently, Irina Dumitrescu showed how Bata adapted passages from an older set of Latin dialogues known as the *Colloquia e libro De raris fabulis retractata*. These adaptations allowed him to make his colloquies deliberately provocative, and as such more entertaining and easier to memorize, and helped him teach the students how to assume greater responsibility for policing their own behaviour and the behaviour of older monks.[58] Although Bata's colloquies deserve a dedicated study, two examples from them will suffice to show that, despite their unorthodox nature, they complemented the ideas about violence, learning, and masculinity that we have seen in Ælfric's *Colloquy*.[59]

The first example (Colloquy 14) involves a dialogue between two students, where one is asking the other for a present:

> Give me a knife (*cultellum*), so every day I can eat my food with it while I sit in my place with my benchmates in the refectory.
>
> But then when you're drunk, right away you'll want to stab your benchmate with it, I think!
>
> Not at all – I'm not so ill-tempered that I'd dare do a thing like that. Give me a knife (*artauum*), or a razor, or a stylus, or a tablet, or a whetstone, or an awl so I can prick my quires whenever I need to . . . or give me a dish, or a towel or a spoon, or a blanket, or a cushion, or a pair of shoes or slippers, or a purse to keep my coins. Or give me a sling so I can shoot birds in the field with it![60]

This passage reflects the instability of the young boys' gender identity and its potential at moments of tension. It starts and ends with violence: first, in the refectory and then in the context of hunting. In the first case, the violence is directed from one student to another, while in the second it is directed against the natural world, birds. The weapons involved are

[57] See for example C. Jones, 'The Irregular Life in Ælfric Bata's Colloquies', *Leeds Studies in English*, ns 37 (2006), pp. 241–60.
[58] Dumitrescu, *The Experience of Education*, pp. 60–89.
[59] Both examples analysed here deal with student-on-student violence and as such can be considered unorthodox. A more comprehensive study would also consider the sexual aspects of Bata's colloquies, adding a perspective that is missing from Ælfric's *Colloquy*.
[60] *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, pp. 114–15.

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interesting, and particularly the knife, which is first mentioned as an instrument of stabbing, but is quickly placed within a list of items that we would find in a monastic classroom: a razor, a stylus, a tablet, a whetstone, an awl. This emphasizes the knife's proper use for a young boy, who was meant to show his prowess through his intellectual rather than physical strength. They should be using a knife not to inflict violence but to cut parchment, mark lines, control the shape of letters, sharpen the pen tips, or erase their mistakes.

The importance of the penknife for encouraging the right type of masculine expression is emphasized already at the beginning of this colloquy, shortly before the above quotation. A boy complains that they cannot sing, write, learn, or teach – activities that we have already seen were intimately associated with being a monk – because, as he says, he does not have a wax tablet, a stylus, an awl, a razor, a whetstone, or a penknife (*neque artauum nec cultellum*). We are given here again the whole list of writing instruments, as well as both words for knife that feature in the previous passage: *cultellus* and *artauus*. The boy goes on to exclaim: 'No craftsman can work well without tools!'[61] This would have reminded the oblates who had already learned Ælfric's *Colloquy* of the importance of practising their craft, and the dangers of failing to do so: they could become who they were not.

Going back to our quotation, we can see that by putting the penknife in its proper place, the tension between secular and monastic has been momentarily resolved. Indeed, the boy continues with a series of other harmless items that students would have used in their everyday lives: towels, spoons, blankets, and so on. But in the last line, we are back again to instability and uncertainty. The boy asks for another weapon, a sling that he wants to use for hunting birds, another inappropriate activity that strongly reminds us of Ælfric's dialogue and the fascination with the hawk. The text continues to ask: 'Are you a fowler? Until now I thought you were a monk or cleric.'[62] This makes explicit what is at stake here: the kind of man that the boy will grow up to be. Although this is not a dialogue between different workmen, we can see that characteristics of different professions could find their way into the everyday lives of the students, and that this was a temptation that needed to be resisted. After all, if you hunted birds, you could end up being a fowler, in the same way that if you cooked too often you might end up being a cook. And it is important to note that both of the

[61] *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, pp. 112–13: 'Nullus artifex sine instrumentis bene potest operari.'

[62] Porter saw this as a parody of Ælfric's letter to Wulfstan, but in fact we can just see it as a continuation of the fascination with hawks that we have already seen in Ælfric's work. See *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, p. 115 n. 100.

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inappropriate activities mentioned in this passage involved physical violence. The choice here is between physical and intellectual dominance: would the students prefer the knife and the sling or the penknife? As in the case of Ælfric's workmen, this text is subversive because it seemingly at least allows the students the choice between different types of manhood, while encouraging them to choose the penknife, the scholarly choice.

At the same time, we should not forget that choosing the penknife was not without its own physical violence. Within the context of the monastic classroom the students would have come to see violent acts, such as whipping, as an integral part of learning.[63] Taking their teacher as their ultimate model, they would learn that some forms of violence were acceptable and even a constitutive part of the male authority to which they aspired. But violence was deemed acceptable in that case because it combined the physical with the intellectual: it was an instrument of learning. It was not simply the physicality of the violence that was a problem but the motivation behind it.

Indeed, verbal violence could be equally bad when directed towards the wrong target for the wrong reasons. The second example I want to discuss (Colloquy 25) deals with exactly that, as two oblates engage in a very immature disputation that descends to the level of name-calling. The boys use insults as a way of negotiating the power differential which results from their ages and levels of education. The older one calls the younger one 'a deceitful little fox' (*versipellis vulpiculus*), who flatters and seduces his fellows and leads them into bad behaviour. Notoriously, he also calls his interlocutor a whole range of types of excrement:

> You idiot! You goat shit (*scibalum*)! Sheep shit! Horse shit! You cow dung (*fimus*)! You pig turd (*stercus*)! You human turd! You dog shit! Fox shit! Cat turd! Chicken shit! You donkey turd! You fox cub of all fox cubs! You fox tail! You fox beard! You skin of a fox cub! You idiot and half wit! You buffoon![64]

The older boy uses these insults to dehumanize and emasculate his opponent by comparing him to animals or their faeces. To do so, he uses three different words to describe excrement. *Stercus* and *fimus* were not unusual words; both came up in Ælfric's *Grammar*.[65] *Fimus* is also

[63] See also Dumitrescu, *The Experience of Education*, pp. 67–75; I.A. Dumitrescu, 'The Grammar of Pain in Ælfric Bata's Colloquies', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 5.3 (2009), pp. 239–53.

[64] *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, pp. 138–9.

[65] *Stercus* is glossed as *meox* and *fimus* as *scern*. See J. Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar* (Berlin, 1880), pp. 59, 83. *Meox* is used in Ælfric's homilies to refer to animal excrement. See *Catholic Homilies*, ed. Clemoes, p. 239. For a different interpretation of this passage, see Dumitrescu, 'The Grammar of Pain', pp. 245–7.

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the word that was used in the case of the ploughman in Ælfric's *Colloquy*, who had to take the dung of the oxen out of the stable.[66] The boys who studied both colloquies might have made the connection. In this case, the insult could have expanded its meaning to imply that the boy in question was not fit to become a monk but had greater affinities with the ploughman's world. But the word *scibalum* is the most interesting of the three. It comes from the Greek word *skybalon* and would have fallen under the category of hermeneutic Latin, elevating in a sense the style of the passage.[67] Indeed, one could argue that the older boy was showing off his learning in the most unlikely fashion, and we could see this as part of his strategy to dominate his opponent with words.[68]

The second boy also uses scatological language, repeating the terms used by the older oblate, and accusing him also of being an idiot:

> May you always have shit (*scibalum*) in your beard, and shit (*scibalum*) and turds (*stercus*) in your mouth, three and two times and eight and one, and I none at all ever! Now your words reveal the truth, that you are a buffoon and a fool and a silly blabbermouth.[69]

Both interlocutors presuppose that for a religious man, wisdom, intelligence, and learning are very important parts of his identity, but clearly neither speaker offers a proper model for putting their linguistic education to good use. The boys seem to have weaponized their language in a similar way to the young monk in the previous example who weaponized his penknife. They swear at each other instead of using their Latin in a religious context. The consequences of this misguided linguistic use are already obvious, as the main thing that the younger boy seems to have learned from this exchange is not any part of scripture, but a fancy word for faeces, *scibalum*, which he repeats in his answer.

Although all this name-calling seems highly irregular, what we are dealing with is not very different from what we find in Ælfric's *Colloquy* in more polite language. Towards the end of that dialogue,

66 *Fimus* is also here glossed as *scearn*. See *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 21.

67 On this word, see also J.-L. Perpillou, 'Du manger de chien', *Revue des Études Anciennes* 100.1–2 (1998), pp. 329–36.

68 On the use of violent language in the classroom, see also M. Otter, 'Dissing the Teacher: Classroom Polemics in the Early and High Middle Ages', in A. Suerbaum, G. Southcombe and B. Thompson (eds), *Polemic: Language as Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Discourse* (London, 2016), pp. 107–24. Note that Pierre Riché assumed that this passage was read by the teacher. See P. Riché, 'Les moines bénédictins, maîtres d'école (VIIIe–XIe siècles)', in W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (eds), *Benedictine Culture 750–1050* (Leuven, 1983), p. 110. In fact, with Bata's colloquies there are no clear speech divisions or any markings that can help us separate the different speakers.

69 *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, pp. 138–9.

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and right after the boys are told to be who they are, they are asked to expand upon their understanding of wisdom. The teacher asks:

> How do you want to be wise? Do you want to be deceitful or skilled in many types of lying, clever in speaking, wily, speaking well and thinking badly, given to sweet words, but nursing trickery in your heart, just like a sepulchre in an ornate mausoleum which is full of bad odours within.[70]

The boys reply: 'We want to be simple men without hypocrisy.'[71] Bata's foul-mouthed dialogue is in fact an example of Ælfric's 'speaking well and thinking badly'. It shows how intellectual prowess can go wrong – instead of turning into rational and moral monks, once more the boys risk animalization. Their learning may have helped them to avoid turning into dumb animals who only know how to graze and drink, but through lies, deceit, and verbal assaults couched in clever language, they could still turn into a fox.[72] Yet all is not lost. This section of Colloquy 25 finishes with the teacher taking control and putting an end to the students' verbal combat, overpowering them with verses from the Book of Proverbs. The students are made to admit defeat and to promise to be wise and not foolish: 'Good teacher, we always will. But following your old custom you speak such a profound Latin that we almost cannot understand it. For the sake of Christ, stop a while now and tell us something different, speaking with us more simply.'[73] The teacher has countered the students' foolishness with wisdom and has shown the boys the proper way to use the weapons at their disposal, their Latin and their intellect.

Conclusions

Colloquies provided space for the young boys to experiment. Instead of giving them more prescriptions, which they could get from the Rule of St Benedict or canon law, they nudged them towards the performance of intelligible gender roles in a more complex way, through examples to imitate and others to avoid. In Ælfric's *Colloquy*, secular professions

[70] *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 94–5; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 345; *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 43: 'Qua sapientia? Vultis esse versipelles aut milleformes in mendaciis, astuti in loquelis, astuti, versuti, bene loquentes et male cogitantes, dulcibus verbis dediti, dolum intus alentes, sicut sepulchrum depicto mausoleo intus plenus foetore?'

[71] *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. Stevenson, p. 95; Hill, 'The Antwerp/London Version', p. 345; *Colloquy*, ed. Garmonsway, p. 43: 'Volumus esse simplices sine hypochrisi.'

[72] The fox is also associated with lying, deceit, and an argument between students in Bata's Colloquy 4. See *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, pp. 84–5.

[73] *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, ed. Gwara and Porter, pp. 154–5.

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such as the ploughman and the merchant were effeminized through their associations with fear, subservience, and animality. By comparison, the monk emerged as a more attractive, more masculine option. Other professions, like that of the hunter, which were presented more positively, carried metaphoric associations with the monastic state which worked to reinforce the boys' desire to become monks. The Latinity of the colloquies and the element of recitation emphasized the distance between the boys and the roles they were playing. At the same time, however, role-playing itself had a subversive quality, and both Ælfric's and Bata's colloquies exhibited a fear of a person becoming what they were not, either because they neglected their craft (like a student who did not practise reading and writing) or because they misused it (by lying and verbally assaulting each other in clever language). Overall, the normative perception of monastic masculinity which emerges from these dialogues is characterized by freedom from servile obligation towards other men and animals; bravery and dominance over (human) nature; the avoidance of physical violence; rationality, learning, and an intellectual prowess that served morality. This is not to say that memorizing and performing Ælfric's *Colloquy* was bound to produce monks of identical masculinity – some oblates may have dwelt on different passages and/or interpreted them in idiosyncratic ways. Rather, it is the mechanisms involved in the construction of gender that we can hear in the boys' recitation, the cultural forces that they needed to negotiate to become the right kind of men.

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