

Religious masculinities in William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum**

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ABSTRACT

William's revenant stories, far from being oddities, fit well within the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* and can be read as reformist models of masculine behaviour. They present the reader with negative examples, such as clerics who acted in inappropriate ways and got their rightful punishment, as well as positive examples of men who not only stayed faithful to the precepts of the church but bolstered their masculinity by doing so. Reading the revenant stories within this framework allows us to see how religious men adopted and adapted secular masculine ideals, shows us the value of focusing on the intersection of gender and religious status, reveals the different means through which gendered messages spread, and acts as a reminder that although one group may have been the target of regulations, all men were affected by them.

In the introduction to his *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, William of Newburgh criticizes another twelfth-century historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth, for the fictitiousness of his King Arthur and sides with what he considered to be more serious scholars of the genre, such as Gildas and Bede.¹ Yet, as has often been noted, William himself does not shy away from claiming trustworthy witnesses to the existence of wonders ranging from green children to the walking dead.² These extraordinary stories have proved a fertile topic of discussion among modern historians, with Nancy Caciola and Jacqueline Simpson using them as a springboard to explore the relationship between elite traditions and popular culture.³ Carl Watkins has discussed them within the context of developing ideas on the *purgatorium*, and John Blair has emphasized how the fear they induced could help reinforce the power of the

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¹ 'William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*', in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett (2 vols., London, 1884–5), i. 1–408; ii. 409–500. For a more recent edition and translation of the first two books, see *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy (2 vols., Warminster, 1988–2007). For an English translation of the other three books, see J. Stevenson, *The Church Historians of England*, iv, part ii (London, 1861), which has been edited online by S. McLetchie (1999) <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-intro.asp>> [accessed 27 March 2023]. All references hereafter are taken from the Howlett edition and cited as *Historia*, followed by book number and chapter. All translations below are based on Stevenson with minor changes. For his attack against Geoffrey of Monmouth, see *Historia*, bk. 1, Preface. More generally on the wondrous in this period, see C. W. Bynum, 'Wonder', *American Historical Review*, cii (1997), 1–26; C. Watkins, 'Memories of the marvellous in the Anglo-Norman realm', in *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past*, ed. E. Van Houts (Pearson, 2001), pp. 92–112; C. A. M. Clarke, 'Signs and wonders: writing trauma in twelfth-century England', *Reading Medieval Studies*, xxxv (2009), 55–77; and E. Freeman, 'Wonders, prodigies and marvels: unusual bodies and the fear of heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxvi (2000), 127–43. William of Newburgh has long attracted attention as a historian, with a monograph dedicated to him in the early twentieth century. See R. Jahncke, *Guilelmus Neubrigensis. Ein pragmatischer Geschichtsschreiber des zwölften Jahrhunderts* (Bonn, 1912).

² On the green children, see J. J. Cohen, 'Green children from another world, or the archipelago of England', in *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages*, ed. J. J. Cohen (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 75–94.

³ N. Caciola, 'Wraiths, revenants and ritual in medieval culture', *Past & Present*, clii (1996), 3–45; and J. Simpson, 'Repentant soul or walking corpse? Debatable apparitions in medieval England', *Folklore*, cxiv (2003), 389–402.

law.⁴ More recently, Stephen Gordon has understood the revenant stories in a secular context, as a social commentary on the unrest caused by William FitzOsbert and Longchamp, as well as Richard I's continental campaigns.⁵ This article seeks to complement these studies by seeing the sensational stories of William's revenants as vehicles for contemporary reformist ideas that sought to keep religious men more strictly separated from secular affairs and, by doing so, to help construct and promote a new type of clerical masculinity.⁶

The category of 'clerical masculinity' has been an important one for understanding Western clerics, especially in post-Gregorian-reform contexts. The Gregorian reform was instigated by Pope Gregory VII in the eleventh century and included prohibitions against clerical marriage and clerical activities such as hunting and fighting. Now seen as more firmly 'secular', this produced gender issues that were clearly reflected in contemporary sources. The efforts of eleventh- and twelfth-century religious men to justify to themselves and society their avoidance of violent physical activities that aimed to dominate the 'other' often involved a reinterpretation of this 'domination', how it was achieved and how it related to secular models of masculinity. These efforts have been duly noted in modern historiography. Notably, Jacqueline Murray has argued that the Gregorian reforms and the ensuing monasticization of the clergy led the church to put forward a model of masculinity in which the struggle against temptation was depicted as a manly battle. This involved a presentation of monks as soldiers who fought with the strength of their faith, rather than physical weapons, and was a concept that ultimately bought into a secular model of manhood.⁷ By contrast, Ruth Mazo Karras has emphasized the use of military metaphors as a means not so much to live up to the secular model, but to transcend it. It was clear that the military metaphors were metaphors, but for their writers they stood for something more powerful than the physical warfare to which they were compared.⁸ Similarly, Katherine Smith has highlighted that although when it came to actual warfare regular and secular clergy were classified along with women, children and the poor as groups who could not defend themselves, the concept of spiritual warfare allowed them to promote 'masculine' qualities, such as fortitude and bravery, without the pollution associated with the shedding of blood.⁹ Much of this change came about through the manipulation of clerical narratives. For example, Maureen Miller, in her study of reform hagiography, has demonstrated how clerical masculinity was deliberately presented as superior to elite lay masculinity, by putting forward the image of weak and morally corrupt secular men, while elevating the manly and powerful clergymen. In hagiographies, such as the early eleventh-century *vita* of St. Ulrich by Beruo of Reichenau and the twelfth-century *vita* of St. Ubaldo by Tebaldo of Gubbio, evil and violent laymen are used as foils to the manly clerics who defend the church and its people.¹⁰

Studying such narratives and the subtle messages that they communicated to their religious and secular audiences can tell us much about the new expectations of clerical manhood that emerged, while illuminating the processes of their transmission. In this article, I will focus on one set of sources to do exactly that. I will analyse the four revenant stories that circulated within William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum* to argue that they acted as models, showing religious men how to perform an

⁴ C. S. Watkins, 'Sin, penance and purgatory in the Anglo-Norman realm: the evidence of visions and ghost stories', *Past & Present*, clxxv (2002), 3–33; and J. Blair, 'The dangerous dead in medieval England', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. S. Baxter (London, 2009), pp. 539–59.

⁵ S. Gordon, 'Social monsters and the walking dead in William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*', *Journal of Medieval History*, xli (2015), 446–65. For a similar argument, see also L. M. Ruch, 'Digression or discourse? William of Newburgh's ghost stories as urban legends', in *The Medieval Chronicle VIII*, ed. E. Kooper and S. Levelt (Amsterdam, 2013), pp. 261–71.

⁶ Much has been written on the Gregorian reforms and their impact on the twelfth century, especially in relation to clerical celibacy. See, e.g., H. Thomas, 'Clerical marriage and clerical celibacy', in *The Secular Clergy in England, 1066–1216* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 154–85; J. Barrow, 'Clergy as family men: uncles and nephews, fathers and sons among the clergy', in *The Clergy in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 115–57; C. N. L. Brooke, 'Gregorian reform in action: clerical marriage in England, 1050–1200', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, xii (1956), 1–21; and K. G. Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and Social Change* (Manchester, 2005).

⁷ J. Murray, 'Masculinizing religious life: sexual prowess, the battle for chastity, and monastic identity', in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and K. J. Lewis (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 24–42, at p. 37.

⁸ R. Mazo Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's chastity belt: clerical masculinity in medieval Europe', in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, ed. L. M. Bitel and F. Lifshitz (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 52–67.

⁹ Monastic identification with the *milites Christi* had a long existence that predated chivalric culture and helped not only to shape monastic masculinity but also to reinforce the importance of community and to increase obedience to one's superior. See K. Allen Smith, 'Spiritual warriors in citadels of faith: martial rhetoric and monastic masculinity in the long twelfth century', in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. D. Thibodeaux (New York, 2010), pp. 86–110.

¹⁰ M. C. Miller, 'Masculinity, reform, and clerical culture: narrative of episcopal holiness in the Gregorian era', *Church History*, lxxii (2003), 25–52.

acceptable type of masculinity, and they did so through, as it were, both sticks and carrots. On the one hand, they presented the reader or listener with examples to avoid, clerics who acted in inappropriate ways and got their rightful punishment; on the other, they offered encouragement through positive examples of men who not only stayed faithful to the precepts of the church but by doing so bolstered their masculinity. More specifically, in what follows, I will start with a brief introduction to William of Newburgh and his history, before I proceed to analyse the four revenant stories, reading them in conjunction with other passages in the *Historia* and exploring what they can tell us about learning and religious authority, hunting and warfare, and opulent living, all of which are linked to ascetic understandings of clerical masculinity. I will argue that the four revenant stories, far from being oddities, fit very well within the general message of the *Historia* and can be read as an important part of William's reform dossier. They therefore offer a window into the ways in which religious men in the West negotiated their identity and relationship with secular males in the post-Gregorian world.

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Few details of William's life survive.¹¹ Based on his own writings, we can deduce that he was born in 1136, probably near Bridlington, spent most of his time with the canons regular of Newburgh Priory and died around 1198.¹² Despite this seeming provinciality, the narrative of his *Historia* has a cosmopolitan character, not only presenting the major political events that took place in England but extending over much of Christendom. In addition to the *Historia*, William is believed to have composed several religious works, including a number of sermons and a commentary on the Song of Songs, which further testify to his range and breadth as a writer.¹³

The *Historia* was written between 1196 and 1198.¹⁴ It was divided into five books, each of which was further subdivided into a number of chapters. As a whole it covers the period between 1066 and 1198, but the revenant stories are contained in book five, which deals with the short period from 1194 to May 1198. In writing his history, William is believed to have relied heavily on the chronicle of Roger of Howden for the essential skeleton of his information, while other identifiable sources include William of Tyre, Richard of Devizes, Gerald de Barri, Jordan Fantosme, and possibly Robert of Torigni, Aelred of Rievaulx, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon.¹⁵ Aside from these works, much of William's information seems to have come from his contemporaries, who are occasionally named and often identified as eyewitnesses to a particular event. It is likely that William found many of his sources through his religious networks, either from within the Augustinian order or from the neighbouring Cistercian houses, both of which had close links with the Anglo-Norman aristocracy through their founders and patrons. The audience of his work is also most likely to have been religious, as of the nine copies of the *Historia* that have survived, the earliest, which may date from William's own lifetime (British Library, Stowe MS. 62), belonged to Newburgh Priory, while other early copies are thought to have been in the possession of the Augustinian abbey of Osney in Oxfordshire (Brit. Libr., Cotton MS. Vespasian B. VI) and the Cistercian houses of Rufford (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS.

¹¹ Salter attempted to identify the author of the *Historia* with a 'William of Newburgh' mentioned in the cartulary of Osney Abbey in Oxfordshire, a man who had been married before becoming a canon late in life. See H. E. Salter, 'William of Newburgh', *English Historical Review*, xxii (1907), 510–14. Her interpretation has been challenged in view of the chronicler's erudition and excellent Latin. See A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c.550–c.1307* (London, 1974), p. 264.

¹² In *Historia*, bk. 1, Preface, he states that he was born within the first year of King Stephen's reign, and the editor of the history, Richard Howlett, has fixed the date to 1136 rather than 1135. See Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns*, p. xviii. For the location of his birth, see *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 28. On William as an Augustinian, see A. Mathers-Lawrence, 'The Augustinian canons in Northumbria: region, tradition and textuality in a colonizing order', in *The Regular Canons in the Medieval British Isles*, ed. J. Burton and K. Stöber (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 59–78.

¹³ William of Newburgh's 'Explanatio sacri Epithalamii in matrem sponsi', ed. J. C. Gorman (Fribourg, 1960). See also A. B. Kraebel, 'Of the making of little books: the minor works of William of Newburgh', in *Medieval Cantors and Their Craft: Music, Liturgy, and the Shaping of History, 800–1500*, ed. K. A.-M. Bugyis, A. B. Kraebel and M. E. Fassler (Woodbridge, 2017), pp. 255–76.

¹⁴ On the *Historia*, see M. Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill, 1996), pp. 93–128; A. Lawrence-Mathers, 'William of Newburgh and the Northumbrian construction of English history', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxiii (2007), 339–57; and P. Biller, 'William of Newburgh and the Cathars', in *Life and Thought in the Northern Church, c.1100–c.1700*, ed. D. Wood (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 11–30.

¹⁵ J. Gillingham, 'Two Yorkshire historians compared: Roger of Howden and William of Newburgh', *Haskins Society Journal*, xii (2002), 15–38, at pp. 23–4.

B. 192) and Buildwas (Lambeth Palace Library, MS. 73).¹⁶ Although no surviving manuscript can be assigned to the abbey of Rievaulx, it is most likely that a copy of the *Historia* would have existed there, as William was asked to compose it by Ernald, the abbey's sixth abbot (1192–9).

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In the first two revenant stories found in William of Newburgh's history, 'De prodigio mortui post sepulturam ob errantis' ('Of the prodigy of the dead man, who wandered about after burial') and 'De re consimilique accidit apud Berewic' ('Of a similar occurrence at Berwick'), one could read a contest between brains and brawn.¹⁷ According to the first account, a dead man from Buckingham came back to life to crush his wife with his weight during the night.¹⁸ To escape this fate, the woman surrounded herself with watchful companions, a strategy that seems to have worked, as the revenant moved on to harass his brothers. They too, however, followed the wife's remedy and stayed awake. The dead man persisted, hoping to take advantage of drowsiness, but was repelled by 'the carefulness and masculine valour of the watchers' ('sollicitudine et virtute vigilum'). Soon enough, the whole street kept vigil through the night. But when the dead man started to appear in broad daylight, the exasperated inhabitants of the haunted street thought it was time to seek ecclesiastical help. The 'terrified men' ('pavefacti homines') addressed themselves to the archdeacon and detailed the whole affair 'with tearful lamentation' ('cum questu lacrimabili') at a meeting of the clergy. The archdeacon sent a letter to the bishop of Lincoln, who was amazed by the occurrence and held an investigation.¹⁹ The initial suggestion was that the body should be dug up and burnt. But this seemed indecent to the bishop, who decided instead to use a letter of absolution, 'written in his own hand' ('manu sua conscriptam'), and to lay it inside the tomb on the breast of the revenant. This ecclesiastical intervention, with the quill mightier than the sword, brought the whole incident to a successful end, and the dead man was no longer allowed to disturb the living.

This story has been noted primarily for its reference to new ideas about sin, penance and purgation.²⁰ If absolution rather than dismembering and burning was preferred, it was because the corpse of the dead man was not simply animated by the devil or a bad angel, but it was the actual body of a sinner who could not find rest until he was absolved. I would like to place the emphasis on a different point. This story also highlights the potency of the holy word and gives primacy to the literate churchmen as guardians of the laity. Indeed, letters are key for the resolution of this revenant problem and are used both to offer absolution and to communicate the situation to the bishop in the first place. The written word thus emerges as part of the organization of the church as an institution, and religious sentences are shown to be as effective as axes and other physical weapons. If we think about this passage within the wider context of the *Historia*, it is easy to see that this efficacy must have been important for the clerics' morale, as the main weapon in their armoury was a holy word complementary to that of absolution: excommunication. As William reminds us elsewhere in his history, according to canon

¹⁶ For British Library, Stowe MS. 62, see A. Lawrence-Mathers, *Manuscripts in Northumbria in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 187. For Lambeth Palace Library, MS. 73, see Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns*, p. xli; and J. M. Sheppard, *The Buildwas Books: Book Production, Acquisition and Use at an English Cistercian Monastery, 1165–c.1400* (Oxford, 1997), p. 114. For Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS. B. 192, see Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns*, pp. xliii–xliv. Other copies are in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 262; Trinity College Dublin, MS. E. 4. 21 (c.1300); Brit. Libr., Add. MS. 24981; and Bodl. Libr., Digby MS. 101, and Brit. Libr., Royal MS. 13. B. IX.

¹⁷ A notable example of a cleric who masculinized himself through reference to his learning is Peter Abelard, who begins his *Historia calamitatum* (c.1132) by describing his willing abandonment of military masculinity for the scholarly masculinity that came with the clerical life: 'I chose the conflicts of disputes instead of the trophies of war'. See *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, ed. and trans. D. Luscombe (Oxford, 2013), pp. 2–121, at pp. 4–5. As Julia Barrow put it, 'Peter Abelard describes his decision to renounce his right as first-born to train as a knight in favour of becoming a cleric as giving up the court of Mars to be brought up in the lap of Minerva: for him, it was education that defined the clergy, and he nowhere mentions clerical grades' (J. Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 65). For more on learning as part of Abelard's strategy to remasculinize himself after his castration, see M. Irvine, 'Abelard and (re)writing the male body: castration, identity, and remasculinization', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. J. Cohen and B. Wheeler (New York, 1997), pp. 87–107.

¹⁸ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 22.

¹⁹ As events in the *Historia* are recounted in a chronological fashion, the story is assumed to have taken place in 1196, in which case the bishop in question would have been Hugh of Avalon, who presided over the diocese of Lincoln from 1186 to 1200. See D. H. Farmer, 'The cult and canonization of St Hugh', in *Saint Hugh of Lincoln: Lectures Delivered at Oxford and Lincoln to Celebrate the Eighth Centenary of St Hugh's Consecration as Bishop of Lincoln*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting (Oxford, 1987), pp. 75–87.

²⁰ See, e.g., C. S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 185–91.

law the punishment for whoever 'laid violent hands on an ecclesiastic or a monk' was to 'be solemnly excommunicated and sent to the Roman pontiff for absolution'.²¹

An example where this power is put into practical use involves the 'horrible death' of the duke of Austria, who, after capturing King Richard of England and extracting a hefty ransom for his release, demands still more in exchange for other hostages.²² The clergy get the opportunity to act after a riding accident befalls the duke, forces him to have his leg amputated with a pickaxe (*dolabrum*) and brings him to his deathbed. Desperate in his knowledge of impending death, he asks to be absolved of a prior papal anathema, but the clergy refuse to comply, unless he releases the hostages and makes reparations. The clergy proved successful both against the dying man and then against his son, who tries to backtrack on the deal, only to find himself faced with the decaying body of his father, deliberately kept unburied. This is how the story is told in both William of Newburgh and Roger of Howden, but with slightly different emphases.²³ Notably, William attributes the success of the plan to leave the body of the duke unburied until the agreed demands have been met to the 'laudable and invincible zeal of the clergy' ('per laudabilem atque invictum cleri zelum'), while Roger of Howden places more emphasis on God's intervention ('all these things were done by God'), even warning the reader that we must not 'boastfully ascribe to ourselves what has been wrought solely by the mercy of the Lord'.²⁴ In both versions, but in William's in particular, religious men are depicted in a position of power through their control over the body after death. As in the case of the revenants, it is only through their intervention that life can take its course again. They succeed with their words and rituals where secular men and their wars have failed. In the story of the duke's death, as in his story of the Buckingham revenant, the full effect of ecclesiastical power becomes obvious, emphasizing the ability of religious men to fight the same battles with different weapons. Ecclesiastics, too, could act as defenders of the laity, even in situations that would at first sight seem to require physical strength.

Given this protective potential of the ecclesiastical word, the learning of religious men combined with their power to bind and loose can be construed as a marker of their masculine identity.²⁵ In the Buckingham revenant story, references to the tearful and fearful laymen, and to the masculine valour ('virtus') that one had to exhibit in the face of such a monster, all reinforce the image of the religious man as a brave protector of the flock.²⁶ This is not surprising, as both education and religious authority were highly gendered in the medieval period, when the ability to offer a letter of absolution was an exclusively male preserve, not only because Latin learning was more readily available to men, but primarily because it presupposed an ordination to the sacred orders, from which women were strictly excluded.²⁷

²¹ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 10: 'in eodem concilio statutum est, ut quicumque in clericum vel in monachum violentas manus injicere, excommunicatus sollempniter denuntiaretur, et ad Romanum pontificem absolvendus mitteretur'.

²² *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 8. For the wider context, see J. Gillingham, 'The kidnapped king: Richard I in Germany, 1192–1194', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, xxx (2008), 5–34; and J. Gillingham, 'William of Newburgh and Emperor Henry VI', in *Auxilia Historica. Festschrift für Peter Acht zum 90. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Koch, A. Schmid and W. Volkert (Munich, 2001), pp. 51–71.

²³ *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, iii, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1868), pp. 276–8; and *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden: Comprising the History of England and of Other Countries of Europe From A.D. 732 to A.D. 1201*, trans. H. T. Riley (London, 1853), pp. 346–7. The story is told again with quite a different focus in the contemporary continental account of the *Historia de Expeditione*. See *The Crusade of Frederick Barbarossa: the History of the Expedition of the Emperor Frederick and Related Texts*, trans. G. A. Loud (Farnham, 2016), pp. 129–30.

²⁴ Stubbs, *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, pp. 277–8: 'Haec omnia fecit Dominus, ut superbos contereret, et ut potentiam suam mortalibus manifestaret; et cum injurias sibi et suis illatas digna prosequitur ultione, illud non propter nos tantum, sed etiam propter se credamus advenisse; nec nobis jactanter ascribamus, quod ex sola benignitate sua operatus est Dominus'. See also Riley, *Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, p. 347; and *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 8.

²⁵ One of the most fascinating examples of excommunication used as a manly weapon appears in the *De rebus a se gestis* of Gerald of Wales (began c. 1203), where Gerald becomes involved in a stand-off with a bishop concerning their rights over the church of Kerry. Both threaten to excommunicate each other, while a letter from the archbishop, an ancient book and a charter are all mentioned as potential weapons in their armoury. Gerald entitles this episode 'How he resisted the Bishop of Llanelyw at Kerry and manfully [viriliter] kept possession of the churches of that land'. See *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*, ed. and trans. H. E. Butler (2nd edn., Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 49–56; and *Giraldi Cambrensis: De rebus a se gestis, Libri III, Invectionum libellus, Symbolum electorum*, ed. J. S. Brewer (London, 1861), pp. 32–9.

²⁶ For the masculine connotations of the term *virtus* in this period, see K. A. Fenton, 'Ideas and ideals of secular masculinity in William of Malmesbury', *Women's History Review*, xvi (2007), 755–72, at pp. 758–60.

²⁷ The highest ecclesiastical rank women could hold in the early medieval church was that of the deaconess, but that never came with the ability to bind and loose. Abbesses, by contrast, could hear their nuns' confessions and offer penance and absolution, but their rights too were curtailed in the early thirteenth century. See G. Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 99–103.

The fact that masculinity was at stake is further reinforced by the Berwick revenant.²⁸ In this second story William tells us of a wealthy evil man who comes back from the dead to harass his neighbours, 'having struck great terror' ('multo cunctis accolis terrore incusso') among them, as 'they all dreaded an encounter with the deadly monster' ('omnes exitialis monstri formidarent occursum'). To solve this problem, they employed 'ten young men renowned for boldness' ('decem iuvenes audacia insignes') to dig up the corpse, cut it limb from limb and burn it. Although it is the laity that is in charge this time, the message about religious masculinity is reinforced rather than diluted: fighting against revenants is a manly affair, and the work that one bishop can accomplish with a single letter is equivalent to the labours of ten brave laymen with physical weapons. In fact, the laymen ended up not being that effective after all, as we are told that, although tranquillity was restored and the dead man stayed in his grave, a pestilence arose that was said to have carried off the majority of the revenants' neighbours. The ten brave laymen could stop the dead from roaming, but they could not stop the disease from spreading. The message that comes out of these two battles against the revenants resonates with eleventh- and twelfth-century reformist discourses that aimed to elevate the clergy above the laity by emphasizing their purity. In these discourses, as in William's Buckingham story, the close connection of the clerics to the sacraments both supports their claims to superiority and shapes their masculine identity.²⁹

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This picture is further complicated in William's next two stories, which both come under the subheading 'De quibusdam prodigiis' ('Of certain prodigies'). In these stories, it becomes obvious that what is at stake is not simply a division between laymen and clerics, but religious masculinity more generally, as further nuance is introduced between different types of religious men. If in the first two stories secular and religious were rather neatly contrasted, in the third one it becomes clear that not all ecclesiastical men are equally good or effective. Yet, as we will see, the same message comes across: there was a manly and appropriate way for the religious to do their duty and maintain their masculinity. The story of the *Hundeprest* starts with an example to avoid and continues with one to imitate.³⁰ A particularly secular chaplain with a great passion for hunting, which won him the moniker 'dog-priest', dies and comes back to life to harass the woman he used to serve. The lady in question, terrified by these visits, seeks the aid of the monks of Melrose Abbey, a monastery that she had patronized lavishly. One of the monks agrees to help and to this end obtains the assistance of one of his fellow brothers ('fratrem') and 'two powerful young men' ('duos iuvenes validos'). They are all 'furnished with arms and animated with courage' ('animis armisque instructi'), but as time goes by the three of them get cold and leave the first monk on his own. The opportunity is then seized by the devil to rouse up his chosen vessel and attack, 'imagining that he had found the right moment for breaking the man's conviction' ('fiduciam'). While we are told the monk initially 'grew stiff with terror' ('diriguit'), he soon recovered his 'courage' ('fiduciam') and 'valiantly withstood the onset of the fiend' ('impetum pestis ... fortiter excipiens'). 'He stuck the axe [*bipennem*] which he wielded in his hand deep into his body', and was successful, as the corpse retreated to the grave.³¹ The other three men come back just in time to witness the results of this battle.

²⁸ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 23.

²⁹ A striking example of how celebrating the Eucharist could be seen as a manly fight can be found in Honorius Augustodunensis' (c.1080–c.1140) *Gemma animae*, where we read: 'Therefore when the subdeacon and other ministers begin the sacrifice, it is like David being armed by Saul and the people (1 Kings 17). When the oblations are placed on the altar, it is as if David's weapons are laid there. Then when the priest comes to the altar, it is as if David moves against the Philistines. The chalice is his milk bucket, the corporal his sling, the oblation his rock.... The elevation of the bread is the casting of the stone. When he bows again, he signifies that the enemy has been struck down'. See *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (221 vols., Paris, 1844–1903), clxxii, col. 566: 'Cum ergo a subdiacono, et aliis sacrificium instituitur, quasi David a Saul et populo armis induitur (I Reg. XVII). Cum oblationes super altare ponuntur, quasi arma David deponuntur. Porro cum pontifex ad altare venit, quasi David adversus Philistaeum procedit. Per calicem mulctrale accipitur, per corporale funda, per oblatam petra intelligitur.... Panis elevatio est lapidis iactatio. Ubi denuo inclinatur, significat quod hostis prosternitur'. On sacramental purity and reform, see J. Laudage, *Priesterbild und Reformpapsttum im 11. Jahrhunderte* (Cologne, 1984), pp. 90–122.

³⁰ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24.

³¹ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'bipennem, quam manu gestabat, alte corpori eius infixit'.

Both the positive and the negative examples of religious men in this story tie in with contemporary reformist ideals.³² The first layer of the message is that religious men should not be devoted to hunting. Doing so had consequences both in life and after death. William's dog-priest was either 'laughed at by men' or 'considered in a worldly way' and, when he died, came back as a revenant.³³ Western conciliar legislation had repeatedly prohibited clerical hunting since the sixth century through councils, synods and penitentials.³⁴ William quotes one such reiteration in his *Historia*, when he presents the reader with a report of the Third Lateran Council (1179), one of whose canons decreed that archbishops, cardinals or archdeacons 'shall not go on their visitations with dogs or birds for hunting; but let them proceed as if they never seem to seek the things which pertain to themselves, but those which are of Jesus Christ.'³⁵ Although this prohibition can be seen as part of the attempts to assert the clergy's superiority, it is noteworthy that in the twelfth century, in some canonical quarters, the disapproval of hunting was so intense that even laymen were not spared. For one, Master Honorius, an Anglo-Norman canon lawyer and teacher who wrote a commentary on Gratian's *Decretum*, expressed the opinion that clerics were never allowed to hunt, while laymen could do so only if they were motivated by the necessity of finding sustenance, but not when they pursued hunting for the sake of pleasure.³⁶

In William's *Historia* too we can find negative views expressed about hunting, not only in the case of ecclesiastics but even in the case of laymen. For one, William seems particularly critical of King Henry I's (r. 1100–35) immoderate attachment to 'wild beasts' ('feras') and his 'ardent love of hunting' ('venationis delicias'), which led him to fail at his duty as a judge, using 'little discrimination in his public punishments between deer killers and murderers'.³⁷ This is something that upset William so much that he mentioned it twice, once when reporting Henry I's death and another when reporting the death of his grandson Henry II.³⁸ Interestingly, this criticism of hunting is again associated with a dead corpse, as it is directly followed by a description of the king's body (the removal of the brains and intestines, its embalming and its sewing up with skins) and a further death that it brings about, in a manner reminiscent of the revenant stories:

The man, indeed, who had been hired, at great expense, to extract the brain, became infected, as it is said, from the intolerable stench, and died; and thus, as the body of the departed Elisha reanimated the dead, so Henry's dead body gave death to the living.³⁹

In the Berwick revenant story the wisest part of the population had attributed the cause of disease to the 'atmosphere' that could become 'infected and corrupted by the constant whirlings through it of the pestiferous corpse'.⁴⁰ Similarly here, William blames the stench ('foetor') for the death of

³² Staunton argued that William did not use recent history to teach moral lessons but used moral lessons and exempla from the past to explain and judge recent events. However, the revenant stories show that William's text did teach moral lessons based on recent history, whether this was done purposefully or because William himself had internalized these lessons. See M. Staunton, 'William of Newburgh: history and interpretation', in *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 82–94.

³³ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'vel ridebatur ab hominibus vel humanius pensabatur'.

³⁴ S. Dusil, 'Lawmaking between Burchard and Raymond. The example of the prohibition of hunting by clerics in the twelfth century', in *Proceedings of the Fourteenth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law, Toronto, 5–11 August 2012*, ed. J. Goering, S. Dusil and A. Thier (Vatican City, 2016), pp. 817–36, pp. 818–19.

³⁵ *Historia*, bk. 3, ch. 3: 'Nec cum canibus venatoriis aut avibus proficiscantur, sed ita procedant ut nunquam quae sua sunt sed quae Jesu Christi quaerere videantur'. For the transmission of the canons of the Third Lateran with a special interest in this canon, see D. Summerlin, 'The reception and authority of conciliar canons in the later-twelfth century: Alexander III's 1179 Lateran canons and their manuscript context', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, kanonistische Abteilung*, c (2014), 112–31.

³⁶ *Magistri Honorii Summa 'De iure canonico tractatus'*, i, ed. R. Weigand, P. Landau and W. Kozur (Vatican City, 2004), p. 24: D.6 p.c.3: 'quandoque in saltibus, hec non est in laico criminosa, si causa necessitatis et extra tempus abstinence fiat, arg. xvi. Qvii. Quicumque, in clerico autem criminosa, ut di. xxxiii. Quorundam, et in laico si causa uoluptatis uel temporibus abstinence fiat, ut di. lxxxvi. Quid prodest, An putatis' (When it comes to forests, hunting is not reprehensible for laymen if it is done out of necessity and outside the times of abstinence, as is argued in C.16 q.7 c.4. In the case of clerics, however, it is reprehensible, as stated in D.34 c.1, as it is also for laymen if it is done for the sake of pleasure or during the times of abstinence, as it is stated in D.86 cc.12, 13). See also A. Thompson, 'Misreading and rereading patristic texts: the prohibition of hunting by the decretists', in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law (Munich, 13–17 July 1992)*, ed. P. Landau and J. Mueller (Rome, 1997), pp. 135–48; and A. Thompson, 'The afterlife of an error: hunting in the decretalists (1190–1348)', *Studia Canonica*, xxxiii (1999), 151–68.

³⁷ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 3: 'in publicis animadversionibus cervicidas ab homicidis parum discernebat'.

³⁸ *Historia*, bk. 3, ch. 26.

³⁹ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 3: 'Porro homo ille qui, pretio magno conductus, cerebrum eius extraxerat, intolerantia foetoris, ut dicitur, infertus atque exstinctus est: sicque cum Elisei mortui corpus vivificaverit mortuum, illius iam mortui corpus mortificavit vivum'.

⁴⁰ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 23.

the embalmer. The mention of reanimation brought about by Elisha – a reference to the prophet's resurrection of the Shunammite's son – intensifies the link between the criticism of Henry I and the revenant stories, reminding the reader of the potential that dead bodies had to come to life.⁴¹ Hunting appears as universally dangerous, a symbol of secular living that should not be sought after by religious men because it proved to be nothing but bad news even in the case of laymen. This message is further reinforced through its repetition within an epistle of Pope Gregory VIII (1187), which, as in the case of the Lateran Council, William presents verbatim. The last line of this letter offers advice on the appropriate behaviour of those setting off for the crusades: 'Nor let them go in precious raiment, and with dogs or birds, or other things which may appear to serve rather for ostentation and pleasure than for necessary uses; but let them go with moderate preparations and apparel, that they may seem to observe penitence rather than to affect vainglory'.⁴² William's attack against this type of masculine display was persistent throughout the *Historia* and, as we can see, came within different embedded forms, from letters to laws to revenant stories.⁴³

In this criticism of hunting, dogs play an important role, in particular as symbols of the chase.⁴⁴ They are mentioned both by the canons and in the pope's epistle, they formed an integral characteristic of the *Hundeprest's* identity, and they appear barking and escorting the undead in two of William's revenant stories.⁴⁵ They also feature in another strange event recounted by William in book one of his *Historia*, following the account of the green children:

While in a certain quarry a huge rock was being split with iron tools, there appeared two dogs [*canes*], filling up a cavity in the same rock which was their size and lacked any breathing-hole. They seemed to belong to the species of dog which people call greyhounds [*leporarios*], but had a fierce face, a bad smell, and no hair. One of them, apparently, died quickly; but the other, which was stupendously ravenous, as they say, Henry bishop of Winchester kept amongst his favourites [*in deliciis habuit*] for many days.⁴⁶

The breed of the dogs points clearly to hunting, as the term '*leporarios*' is a reference to their coursing the hare (*lepus*). Henry of Winchester was famous for his wealth as well as his involvement in military activities.⁴⁷ Here we can see William's subtle criticism of this powerful man who chose to use his wealth for the wrong reasons, spending it on ravenous dogs whose disagreeable smell and monstrous nature are signs of the danger they posed.⁴⁸

With this context in mind, William's third revenant story seems to attempt to dissuade religious men from following the *Hundeprest's* example, from showing their prowess through hunting, and from falling into the traps of secular masculine ideals. But it also provides a positive example in the person of the monk who finally does away with the dead priest. In a rather surprising turn of events this monk does not hesitate to arm himself with weapons and ends up attacking the walking corpse with

⁴¹ 2 Kings 4:18–37.

⁴² *Historia*, bk. 3, ch. 21: 'Nec eant in vestibus pretiosis et cum canibus sive avibus aut aliis quae ostentationi potius et lasciviae quam necessariis videantur usibus deservire, sed modeston apparatu et habitu, in quo poenitentiam potius agere quam inanem affectare gloriam videantur'.

⁴³ This suggests a more coherent structure than has been acknowledged by Partner: 'Like all twelfth-century narrative writers, William did not attempt to cast his materials into anything like a unified structure, but the inherent order and clarity of his mind dominate the plotless, serial, digressive course taken by all contemporary history writing, and he was able to put down one thing after another with an effortless coherence quite sufficient for historical writing as then practiced'. See N. F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: the Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 59–60.

⁴⁴ On dogs in supernatural stories, see also R. Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 91–6.

⁴⁵ See the Berwick revenant story in *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 23: 'canum cum ingenti latratu prosequente turba'. Similarly, see the Anantis revenant story in *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'prosequente eum cum latratu horribili canum turba'.

⁴⁶ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 28: 'Dum in lapidicina quadam petra ingens ferramentis funderetur, apparuere duo canes, capacem sui in eadem petra concavitatem replentes absque omni spiraculo. Videbantur autem esse ex eo canum genere quos leporarios vocant, sed vultu truces, odore graves, pilorum expertes. Et unus quidem eorum, ut dicitur, cito defecit: alterum vero stupendae, ut aiunt, edacitatis Henricus Wintoniensis episcopus diebus plurimis in deliciis habuit'.

⁴⁷ Henry of Huntingdon had also commented on Henry of Winchester's secular ways, calling him 'a new kind of monster, composed part pure and part corrupt, I mean part monk and part knight' ('quoddam monstrum ex integro et corrupto compositum, scilicet monachus et miles'). See Henry, *Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), pp. 610–11.

⁴⁸ For a reading of this story with a focus on the dogs' prodigious nature, see Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, pp. 63–6.

a battleaxe. Although this is an unusual solution for a monk, it is not the only time a religious figure wields an axe in William's *Historia*.⁴⁹ We hear of another such instance in the story of the holy man Ketell, who had the gift of seeing visions and devils, but required some help in fighting against them, as can be seen from the description of one of their attacks.⁵⁰

While they appeared to triumph over him, and anticipated the mischief which they meditated perpetrating against him with threatening and abusive language, behold, a dazzling youth suddenly entered, with a battle-axe [*bipennem*] in his hand, and took his station between them. The battle-axe [*bipenni*], on being gently touched with his finger, emitted a mighty sound. The devils, startled at the noise, left the man over whom they had begun to triumph, and fled.⁵¹

William continues to say that he believed ('credo') the youth in question to have been 'the angel of this man' ('angelum eiusdem hominis'). Although the fight against the revenant was clearly more corporeal than the fight of this angel against the demons, in both cases we find ourselves in an intermediary state between natural and supernatural, where normal rules do not apply. Indeed, according to canon law, religious men were not allowed to fight, shed blood or even bear arms. The origins of this prohibition went all the way back to the Bible, which contrasted physical with spiritual fighting.⁵² William of Newburgh would have been well aware of these restrictions, which were renewed starting in the eleventh century, with councils in England in 1070, 1138 and 1175, and prohibited among other things not just the use but even the bearing of secular arms.⁵³ These rules posed a problem for religious masculinity, as they deprived clerics and monks from yet another way of competing with secular males.

But the revenant stories did not oppose these prohibitions. They could be categorized as spiritual warfare, while at the same time taking the usual spiritual battle a step further. They offered a unique opportunity to go beyond the metaphors and to present religious men fighting flesh-and-blood enemies with weapons, opening up a domain that was closed off for most ecclesiastics.⁵⁴ The killing of these revenants could not possibly count in the same way as that of living human beings; their already dead bodies could not be grieved a second time. As a result, although there was shedding of blood, it does not seem to have caused pollution, and William does not shy away in his description in the story of the *Hundeprest*. The corporeality of the enemy becomes explicit as the body of the undead man gets dug up in the presence of witnesses, who see 'the huge wound' ('ingens in eo vulnus') it had received and 'the great quantity of gore which flowed from it' ('cruoris plurimum, qui ex vulnere fluxerat') in the sepulchre. The monk who inflicted these wounds is described by William as 'wonderful' ('mirabilis').⁵⁵ What is more, the weapon itself seems to have been important. Both the revenant-fighting monk and the demon-fighting angel use a 'bipennis', a two-edged axe associated with warfare. The only other 'bipennis' that appears in the *Historia* is in a secular context, in the story of the riot of William FitzOsbert, who uses it to kill one of his enemies. Two other mentions of axes, referring to metaphorical situations in a religious context, use the term 'securis' instead. By choosing the word 'bipennis' rather than 'securis' for the revenants and the angel, William was firmly placing these two instances of religious battle in direct comparison with secular fighting.

As a result, the story of the axe-wielding monk offers a different way for religious men to achieve manliness and beat laymen at their own game. This was particularly important given that the use of

⁴⁹ Cf. Dunstan's much less gory attack against the devil in the form of a 'cheerful and entirely human' man with the use of smith's tongs. See *William of Malmesbury Saints' Lives*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002), pp. 188–9.

⁵⁰ On the story of Ketell, see also Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, pp. 59–60.

⁵¹ *Historia*, bk. 2, ch. 21, par. 5: 'Cumque ita de illo triumphare viderentur, et malum, quod ei facere cogitabant, verbis minacibus atque insulatoriis praevenirent, repente juvenis splendidus bipennem manu ferens introiit, stansque in medio, bipenni molliter digito tacta sonitum ingentem dedit. Quo sonitu exterriti daemones, relicto de quo triumphare coeperant homine, diffugerunt'.

⁵² 2 Timothy 2:3–5; and Ephesians 6:12.

⁵³ *Councils and Synods: With Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, i, part 2: 1066–1204, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford, 1981), pp. 581, 777, 988.

⁵⁴ For another example where the metaphorical bleeds into the literal, see K. Allen Smith, 'Saints in shining armor: martial asceticism and masculine models of sanctity, ca. 1050–1250', *Speculum*, lxxxiii (2008), 572–602.

⁵⁵ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24.

excommunication and absolution was not available to all religious men. Many monks would not have received holy orders and would therefore not have been endowed with the power to bind and loose. What is more, in the twelfth century excommunication was developing towards the form of a more official judicial sanction, imposed normally by the bishop or his deputy, after proper citation, confession and conviction.⁵⁶ In a sense, the axe-wielding monk and angel provide a more universalizing model of religious masculinity. This alternative straddles secular and religious gender ideals, rejecting one and embracing another. It does not simply vilify laymen and exalt religious men, but focuses on the latter, offering examples both to imitate and to avoid. This third revenant story places the emphasis not on a struggle between laymen and ecclesiastics, but on competing models of religious masculinity.

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The fourth revenant story builds on the other three by reintroducing laymen into the picture and seemingly tipping the balance towards them. It takes place at 'the castle which is called Anantis' and starts with an evil man who has tried to escape the law, married a wife 'to his own ruin' ('in propriam sane perniciem') and turned into a jealous husband.⁵⁷ In an effort to ascertain whether his wife was cheating on him, he pretended to be on a journey and hid in the bedroom on an overhanging beam. His stratagem was successful, as he caught his wife and her lover in the act, but accidentally fell from his hiding place and subsequently died. He later came back from the dead to harass the inhabitants of his town, many of whom died while others migrated. This time it was not a religious man that offered the solution to this revenant problem, but 'two young brothers who had lost their father by this plague'.⁵⁸

As we saw with the story of the Berwick revenant, lay involvement did not necessarily mean lay superiority, but in this case there are several pointers in that direction. First of all, churchmen are not this time absent, but present and inefficient. The ecclesiastic from whose mouth William heard this story had clearly survived the disaster but had failed to help his flock do the same. He is said to have 'applied himself to summon a meeting of wise and religious men so that they might impart healthful advice in this crisis and refresh the spirits of the miserable remnant of the people with consolation, however small'.⁵⁹ Immediately, then, William tempers our expectation by characterizing this consolation as 'modica'. We are further told that after the sermon had been delivered, and the solemn ceremonies of the holy day had been performed, he invited his religious guests ('religiosos hospites'), together with other persons of honour ('cum ceteris honoratis') who were present, to his table ('ad mensam'). This dining, however, did not amount to much, as it did nothing to alleviate the revenant problem. Although William was not directly critical of this religious man or his guests, there is a suggestion that this was not the most appropriate use of their time. We are told that while the religious men 'were banqueting' ('quibus epulantibus'), the young men took action and killed the monster. The brothers encouraged each other to act, while the clerics are shown more as a potential impediment than a help. This is echoed in the brothers' words: 'There is no one to hinder us, since in the priest's house a feast is celebrated'.⁶⁰ They further go on to describe their own actions with a direct reference to their manhood: 'Let us do something manly'.⁶¹ By contrast, the priest and his religious guests were notified of what was happening only once the deed had already been accomplished.

This last revenant story, then, presents laymen as more effective than the clerical establishment, who, instead of taking action, deliberate and express their views while banqueting. Indeed, this is not the first time in the *Historia* that religious men banqueting have proved to be ineffective with dire consequences. Another story from book five tells of two Cistercian monks who, having been captured by Saladin, had their faith tested by being given first meat and water to eat and then fish and wine, both times served to them by beautiful women. The latter combination, although allowed by the rule

⁵⁶ R. Helmholz, 'Excommunication in twelfth-century England', *Journal of Law and Religion*, xi (1994), 235–53, at pp. 235, 245; and R. Hill, 'The theory and practice of excommunication in medieval England', *History*, xlii (1957), 1–11.

⁵⁷ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24.

⁵⁸ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'duo fratres iuvenes, qui patrem clade illa amiserant'.

⁵⁹ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'viro sapientes et religiosos accersire studuit, qui in tanto discrimine salubre darent consilium, et consolatione vel modica miseris plebis reliquias recrearent'.

⁶⁰ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'Non est qui impediatur, cum et in domo sacerdotis convivium celebratur'.

⁶¹ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'Agamus ergo aliquid virile'.

of St. Benedict, led to their downfall, as 'they fell into the arms of the women who were planning for that very thing to happen' ('inciderunt in feminas id ipsum molientes').⁶² Saladin took this as an opportunity to point out that Benedict was not very wise and that the rule followed by the Muslims was the superior one. William of Newburgh, commenting on this story, defended Benedict:

For, in truth, it was a proof of excellent discretion, that for those who were engaged upon a sacred warfare [*sacram militiam*], he took care to restrain the delights of the table, which soften [*molliant*] and relax the mind; and, according to the apostolic form of words, he wished to permit the moderate use of wine, by which the feeble flesh is revived, and the mind is not burdened.⁶³

The use of the expression 'sacram militiam' alongside its juxtaposition with 'molliant' is interesting here. In the last revenant story the clergy were supposed to be engaged in sacred warfare. Instead, they spent their time dining. Although their behaviour is not explicitly described as sinful, the implication is that it can lead to a loss of reputation for the church, while the association with luxury and softness takes us back to questions of masculinity and effeminacy.

Another example of dining gone bad comes from William's account of Hugh, bishop of Durham (1154–95).⁶⁴ This bishop, whose life is described at length as one of greediness and love for earthly affairs and titles, began to gradually grow weaker after indulging in an extravagant meal, which ultimately led to his death. Interestingly, it was on an occasion when a banquet would not have been inappropriate. As William informs us, it took place on 'that Sunday when it is custom of priests to anticipate Ash Wednesday in Lent by a feast'.⁶⁵ However, it was Hugh's overindulgence that made this a fitting ending:

and there he gorged himself beyond the strength of his aged body, while his miserable stomach, which could enjoy nothing, was compelled, by the enticement of savours from the number of dishes, to take them in until it was overloaded. When he wished to be relieved of the excess of surfeit by an emetic, he was made much worse by it.⁶⁶

Not only did Hugh die but, as William took care to tell us, all of the gains that he had painstakingly gathered during his life were brought into the king's treasury. This was a very overt example of the type of warning that one could read in the last revenant story: banquets and opulent life could become a distraction and lead to death, either one's own or that of one's parishioners.⁶⁷

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A characteristic of William's narrative technique in these passages is to repeat the same messages through different means, different levels of subtlety and different combinations. An example that combines most of the themes we have so far discussed comes from William's account of the heretic Eudo de Stella.

Eudo used food to acquire more followers: he projected an attractive lifestyle by appearing to live a life free from anxiety and full of splendid banquets ('splendide epulari'), seemingly providing 'bread, and flesh, and fish, and every other sumptuous food' for his devotees, who were in fact fed not with 'true and solid' food but with air.⁶⁸ These banquets misled and distracted Eudo's followers, causing

⁶² *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 14.

⁶³ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 14: 'Nam revera praecipuae discretionis fuit, quod ad sacram militiam transeuntibus ciborum delicias, quae animum molliunt et resolvunt, curavit restringere, et, juxta formam Apostolicam, modicum vini usum, quo et caro infirma refocillatur et animus non gravatur, voluit relaxare.'

⁶⁴ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 10.

⁶⁵ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 10: 'dominica qua mos est sacerdotibus caput quadragesimalis ieiunii sollemni esu carniū praevenire.'

⁶⁶ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 10: 'ibidem supra virtutem corporis senilis ingurgitavit se epulis, dum miser, cui nil sapit venter, per saporum illecebram de numerositate ferculorum usque ad gravamen proprium suscipere cogeretur. Cumque per vomitum vitio crapulae mederi voluisset, eo ipso afflictus est magis.'

⁶⁷ On clerics and feasts, see also Thomas, *Secular Clergy in England*, pp. 29–30, 51, 139–40.

⁶⁸ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 19: 'panes, carnes, et pisces, et quique cibi lautiores,' non veris et solidis, sed aeriis potius cibis in locis desertis alebatur.'

them to lose their faith. Although this is a more extreme example than the one in William's fourth revenant story, ultimately both banquets led to death: one to the spiritual death of Eudo's followers, the other to the physical death of the cleric's parishioners.

This story reminds us also of the Buckingham revenant through a reference to education and its particular use in the context of ecclesiastical rites. We are told that Eudo was

so illiterate and uninformed, and so bewitched by the wiles of the devil, that, because he was called 'Eun' in the French language, he imagined that the form used in ecclesiastical exorcisms, namely, 'by Him [*eum*] who shall come to judge the quick and the dead, and the world by fire', pertained to himself.⁶⁹

Unlike the bishop of the first revenant story, Eudo misunderstands Latin and is derided for claiming to have power over life and death. Similarly, a link can be established with the *Hundeprest*. Eudo, who is tellingly called a 'pestilential man' ('vir pestifer') ensnared the attendant of a knight through 'a hawk of singular beauty' ('mirae pulchritudinis accipitrem'). His master warned him that what he was carrying was 'not a bird', 'but a devil so metamorphosed'.⁷⁰ This hawk eventually led to his downfall, as it gripped his fist with his talons, lifted the man into the air and vanished with him altogether. The hawk here can be seen as a parallel to the *Hundeprest's* dogs, both standing for the attractions of the chase.

As Eudo's example shows, the revenant stories, despite their seemingly unusual nature, in many ways reflect the central messages both of contemporary reform movements and of William's *Historia* itself. All four accounts, whether they are presenting us with positive examples to imitate or with negative ones to avoid, ultimately come back to a coherent set of messages. The revenant stories employ different types of exempla and warnings, from openly praising ecclesiastics for their ability to act as protectors of the laity through their learning and physical power, to castigating them for trying to lead a secular life of hunting and banqueting. The criticisms are, however, tempered. In the case of hunting, the negative image of the priest is counterbalanced by the positive image of the monk. In the case of banqueting, the suggestion that time and energy have been wasted is only hinted. This, I believe, is indicative and symptomatic of the audience and purpose of these stories. They were addressed to ecclesiastics and meant not to attack them, but to contribute towards their reform and the cultivation of a proper type of clerical masculinity.

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The four revenant stories included in William's *Historia* feature a variety of laymen as well as ecclesiastics. Yet, even in the cases where laymen take centre stage, the stories can be read as a praise or criticism of religious figures.⁷¹ We have already mentioned the example of the dining clerics and the active youths, but it is worth adding one more instance, this time involving marriage, where such a religious focus can be read between the lines.⁷² Although the only two marriages found in the revenant stories refer to lay couples, both unions have in some way broken down and could be read as a way of reassuring a celibate audience that they were not missing out. This is expressed most clearly in the Anantis story, where the breakdown takes place during the couple's lifetime and the cheating wife becomes the very reason for her husband's bad death. Surprisingly perhaps, although adultery takes place, William's emphasis is not on the adulteress and her lover, who go unpunished, but on the husband's reaction and the consequences that marriage had for him. Not only does he die trying to spy on his wife, but we are told that his preoccupation with what she had said and done made him neglect the sacraments,

⁶⁹ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 19: 'homo illiteratus et idiota, ludificatione daemonum ita dementatus, ut quoniam sermone Gallico Eun diceretur, ad suam personam pertinere crederet, quod in ecclesiasticis exorcismis dicitur, scilicet, "per Eum qui venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos, et seculum per ignem".'

⁷⁰ *Historia*, bk. 1, ch. 19: 'quod portas, non enim est avis, ut videtur, sed daemon sic transformatus'.

⁷¹ Gillingham also identified sharp criticism of prelates involved in secular affairs as a recurring theme in the *Historia* more broadly, but also noted William's more forgiving attitude towards Hubert Walter, bishop of Salisbury and archbishop of Canterbury. See J. Gillingham, 'The historian as judge: William of Newburgh and Hubert Walter', *English Historical Review*, cxix (2004), 1275–86.

⁷² The closest we get to clerical marriage is the instance of the *Hundeprest* visiting his former lady in her chamber; she is not, however, said to be his love interest, but his *domina*. See *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24.

preventing him from making confession and receiving the Eucharist before death.⁷³ But even in the Buckingham story, where husband and wife appear to have had a better relationship in life – we are told that the husband was buried thanks to his wife's 'honourable care' ('honesta ... cura') – their relationship is still presented as a burden after death. The wife is the first person the husband comes to harass, and he is said to crush her 'by the insupportable weight of his body' on the very bed that they had shared as a couple.⁷⁴ By contrast, celibate religious men could be pleased with themselves for not having made the choice to marry and for following instead a life of sexual abstinence. This would be yet another reformist message that one could take from the revenant stories. So, although different audiences could favour different readings, the rather negative depiction of marriage and the lack of punishment for the laity, combined with the location of the manuscripts of the *Historia* and, as we will see, the social status of the oral informants, make it plausible to expect a primarily religious audience.

This religious audience is likely to have been wider than the audience of the history in which the revenant stories were transmitted. Indeed, William tells us that there were many more stories of this kind that he did not write down, as 'the undertaking would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome'.⁷⁵ It seems, therefore, that the natural context of such sensational stories was an oral one. After all, this is how William claims to have come across them in the first place. In the Buckingham story we get both the name and the rank of his informant, 'Stephen, the venerable archdeacon of that province'; in the *Hundepest* we are told that William '[has] explained these things in a simple narration, exactly as [he himself] heard them from religious men'; for the Anantis story, his source was 'an aged monk who lived in honour and authority in those parts, and who related this event as having occurred in his own presence'.⁷⁶ These stories seem to have had a life before William's *Historia* and surely continued to do so after it.

If the revenant stories were retold in roughly the form that William gives us, their oral dissemination could have accelerated and enhanced their reforming message in ways in which the *Historia* could not.⁷⁷ In this journey, they could have utilized the friendship circles and dense interpersonal webs, which time and again proved crucial in church politics for the dissemination of religious reform.⁷⁸ Their promulgation in the form of rumour or gossip from one trusted friend to another could have facilitated the acceptance of the more bizarre elements within them.⁷⁹ Their message could have bypassed one's persuasion defences more easily than in the case of reading or hearing about an ecclesiastical canon or a more traditional moralizing story, both of which by their very nature invited further reflection. By contrast, rumours are characterized by a relaxation of conventional norms governing sources of information and verification procedures; they exist in the world of 'it is said'.⁸⁰ When William included them in the *Historia*, he had to assume responsibility for the contents that were being transmitted, both personally as the historian recounting them and in the persons of his trustworthy informants. Indeed, it is perhaps this more extended process of verification and attestation that William thought to be 'laborious and troublesome', and which led him to abstain from including more.

⁷³ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24.

⁷⁴ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 22.

⁷⁵ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24: 'Porro si velim omnia huiusmodi scribere quae nostris contigisse temporibus, nimis operosum simul et onerosum erit.'

⁷⁶ Buckingham: 'a venerabili archidiacono illius provinciae Stephano plenius didici'; *Hundepest*: 'Haec nimirum prout a viris religiosiis accepi, simplici narratione digessi'; Anantis: 'prout accepi a sene religioso, qui clarus et potens in partibus illis exstiterat, et in sua hoc ipsum praesentia factum memorabat'. For the Berwick revenant we are not given the source of information, but it is presented as 'another event, not unlike' the Buckingham one. See *Historia*, bk. 5, chs. 22–4.

⁷⁷ For a very useful introduction to research on rumour and gossip, see G. Guastella, *Word of Mouth: Fama and Its Personifications in Art and Literature From Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 91–100. See also C. J. Wickham, 'Gossip and resistance among the medieval peasantry', *Past & Present*, clx (1998), 3–24.

⁷⁸ See I. S. Robinson, 'The friendship circle of Bernold of Constance and the dissemination of Gregorian ideas in late eleventh-century Germany', in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Haseldine (Sutton, 1999), pp. 185–98; and J. Haseldine, 'Friends, friendship and networks in the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux', *Cîteaux*, lvii (2006), 243–80.

⁷⁹ Guastella, *Word of Mouth*, p. 135: 'Information put into circulation by hearsay, rumours, and gossip is usually transmitted during conversations between people who are unconcerned with rigorously examining what they hear (and who often repeat it themselves later). As in any type of informal conversation, the communicative exchange is founded on a relationship between the giver of information and a receiver who is inclined towards trust, or it occurs in conditions where it is unnecessary to subject what is said to a judgement of credibility – unless there are clear causes for doubt or particular reasons that make verifications and checks appropriate.'

⁸⁰ Guastella, *Word of Mouth*, p. 95.

At the same time, we need to point out a caveat: an autonomous circulation of these accounts brings with it interpretative difficulties. In the above analysis, I have followed a rather linear reading. I was invited to do so by the structure of William's text, as the Buckingham and Berwick stories fall under different subheadings ('De prodigio mortui post sepulturam ob errantis' and 'De re consimilique accidit apud Berewic') but are separated more firmly from the other two revenants, both of whom come under the same subheading, 'De quibusdam prodigiosis' ('Of certain prodigies').⁸¹ By contrast, if we were to hear, for example, the third and fourth revenant accounts together, without the other two, we would perhaps end up with greater emphasis on the more traditionally secular ideal of fighting with physical weapons than has been assumed here. As a result, the revenant stories could produce potentially different results if recounted individually or in a different order. This also does not take into account the possible variations that could be introduced by the different storytellers to enhance their self-images as well as their standing in the community. It is William's account that presents us with the strongest witness for how they contributed to the transmission of a reform-friendly ideal of clerical masculinity.

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William's revenant stories have been read primarily within the context of medieval ideas on the miraculous and the supernatural. Scholars have rightly noted an increase in the twelfth century in the writing of such strange accounts, investigating what they can tell us about popular beliefs or the emergence of new theological doctrines.⁸² Such a contemporary context for the interpretation of the revenant stories is suggested by William himself, who in his preface to the Melrose revenant argued for the novelty of the events he was describing, claiming that 'it would be strange if such things should have happened formerly, since we can find no evidence of them in the works of ancient authors'.⁸³ Yet, through the Rievaulx library, William would have had access to a variety of ancient sources that made mention of similar occurrences, including Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and the *History of Hegesippus*.⁸⁴ Perhaps he was simply trying to direct the reader's attention to recent events, pointing to the present, rather than the past as a way of interpreting these narratives. In this study I have chosen to focus my attention on such a recent affair, namely the ecclesiastical reforms that began in the eleventh century and whose consequences for masculinity were still negotiated and evolving in the twelfth.

More specifically, I have proposed that we read these accounts as a sensational means of propagating contemporary reformist ideas both orally, with William being only one stop in a chain of storytellers, and in a written form in the *Historia*, where instead of standing out as oddities, they amplify messages that reverberate throughout William's pages. Indeed, as we have seen, the revenant stories fit well with other passages of the *Historia*, some of which are equally strange, like the curious incident with the dogs in the rock; others more hagiographical, like Ketell and the axe-wielding angel, while others again present us with more traditional moralizing stories, like the one about the death of Bishop Hugh of Durham. The same messages also appear in documents that William of Newburgh quotes in full inside his history, such as his account of the Third Lateran Council or his epistle of Pope Gregory VIII. It is possible then to see the four revenant stories as part of a reform dossier included in the *Historia*, to be understood both as symptomatic of existing attitudes and as their carrier to new audiences. This reinforcement of the same message through a variety of genres (here conveniently brought together

⁸¹ These divisions are found in Brit. Libr., Stowe MS. 62, fols. 150r, 150v, 151r <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Stowe_MS_62> [accessed 28 March 2023]. This is the earliest copy of the *Historia*, which belonged to Newburgh Priory and may date from William's own lifetime.

⁸² For similar twelfth-century accounts, see *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998), p. 197; *Geoffrey of Burton, Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, ed. and trans. R. Bartlett (Oxford, 2002), pp. 192–8; and *Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium, The Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, R. A. B. Mynors and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford, 1983), pp. 202–7. On *De Nugis*, see also S. Gordon, 'Monstrous words, monstrous bodies: irony and the walking dead in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*', *English Studies*, xcvi (2015), 379–402, which reads these revenant stories as the perfect vehicle to critique life at the royal court.

⁸³ *Historia*, bk. 5, ch. 24. Indeed, it is a common characteristic of monsters to return 'in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social movements or a specific, determining event: *la decadence* and its new possibilities'. See J. J. Cohen, 'Monster culture (seven theses)', in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. J. A. Weinstock (Minneapolis, 2020), pp. 37–58, at p. 39.

⁸⁴ This point has already been made in Gordon, 'Social monsters', n. 66.

under a history) is important for the successful promulgation of gender ideals and points towards a strong and coherent conception of what clerical masculinity should look like.

This conception of clerical masculinity puts much emphasis on hunting and fighting, rather than focusing on sex and the avoidance of women. In doing so, the revenant stories reveal the transformative power that violent activities could have on religious men, reorienting them towards the secular and the animalistic and away from God and church.⁸⁵ It is telling that William's dog-priest appears to us as a dog-human hybrid, identified as he is not through his name but through his hunting partner.⁸⁶ The fact that the word is given in Old English, despite the Latinity of the history as a text, is important. It further distances this priest from the educated clerical community, for whom Latin played a constitutive role, and suggests something visceral about the connection between man and dog, reminding us of another vernacular word that defined the man based on the animal: *chevalier*.⁸⁷ At the same time, the focus on men – laymen, monks and clerics of various types – makes the revenant stories an example of reformist narrative that is not couched in misogyny.⁸⁸ William did not juxtapose the construct of masculinity with the vilification of women.⁸⁹ Good women are present in the stories, such as the wife who buried her husband or the patroness of Melrose Abbey, but even in the case of the adulterous wife the emphasis remained very much on the husband's own choices and reactions. William focused on the struggle of men against men and avoided simplifications. Contrary to what Miller has found in the case of Berno's *vita* of St. Ulrich, William's world remained complex: laymen were not absent; nor were they unambiguously evil.⁹⁰ William's laymen tried to do the manly thing but often failed where clerics succeeded. In the case of the *Historia*, we cannot speak of 'good' and 'bad' masculinity that corresponds neatly to lay and clerical groups.

William's ideas are of course to some extent innovative, and I am thinking in particular of his keen rejection of hunting as a masculine ideal even in the case of laymen, as well as his acceptance of some fighting for religious men, which extends the more traditional image of the soldier of Christ to include axe-wielding monks that cause the undead to bleed. Although these views may not have been met with universal approval, they would have reinforced for William's readers the church's new ideals of religious masculinity: being a monk or a cleric was still a manly state of being, even if they were not allowed to have sex, fight or even hunt. This reinforcement took place through positive and negative exemplars that implicated clergy and laity, as well as different types of religious men. Although William of Newburgh was himself an Augustinian canon and many of the ecclesiastics involved in the revenant stories were monks, they were not unaffected by the propaganda that was being targeted towards the secular clergy. No one was, and this is to be expected from such a restructuring given the relational nature of gender and the importance of violence for the formation of masculinity.

⁸⁵ Most studies on clerical masculinity have focused on sexuality as has been noted in J. D. Thibodeaux, 'Introduction: rethinking the medieval clergy and masculinity', in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. D. Thibodeaux (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 1–15, which aimed to emphasize that celibacy 'was not the only criterion for clerical manhood' (p. 6).

⁸⁶ In the revenant stories, the association of man and dog is more broadly sinister. It is only the revenants who led a sinful life who are presented in the company of dogs, either during their life or after their death. The first revenant who is not associated with dogs lived a decent life and was not violently put down after death.

⁸⁷ J. J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, 2003), pp. 35–77. On vocabulary associated with knighthood, see M. Lieberman, 'Knighting in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. S. D. Church (Woodbridge, 2020), pp. 151–76, esp. at p. 160.

⁸⁸ Clerical reform has often been associated with misogyny. Jo Ann McNamara located misogyny at the heart of clerical masculinity, as it was formed after the Gregorian reforms, which 'aimed at a church virtually free of women at every level but the lowest stratum of the married laity'. See J. A. McNamara, 'The Herrenfrage: the restructuring of the gender system, 1050–1150', in *Medieval Masculinities, Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. A. Lees (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 3–29, at p. 7. For other examples, see F. J. Griffiths, 'The cross and the *Cura monialium*: Robert of Arbrissel, John the Evangelist, and the pastoral care of women in the Age of Reform', *Speculum*, lxxxiii (2008), 303–30, at n. 16, which explores sources in which misogyny was not inherent to reform and emphasizes that reform itself and the clerical masculinity that emerged from it were far from univocal.

⁸⁹ By contrast, in the *Life* of St Ubalduus by Tebalduus of Gubbio women are much more absent and the saint makes reference to the polluting nature of women when he defends his virginity. See Miller, 'Masculinity, reform, and clerical culture', p. 49.

⁹⁰ Cf. Miller, 'Masculinity, reform, and clerical culture', p. 37: 'Instead of a complex world ... in which there are good and bad laymen along with good and bad clerics, the world of Berno's Saint Ulrich is radically simplified. The good men are clerics.'