Monstrous Words, Monstrous Bodies: Irony and the Walking Dead in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*

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Abstract:

This article analyses the function of the tales of the walking dead found in Distinction Two of Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* (*c.* 1182). Map's sole surviving work, the 'Courtiers' Trifles' is a collection of historical narratives, wonder stories, witty asides, and anecdotes collated during his employment at Henry II's court. The satirical nature of the *De Nugis's* has been noted by previous scholars; however, this has yet to be discussed specifically with regard to the tales of the undead. Following a discussion of the twelfth-century traditions of satirical literature and the ways in which medieval authors approached the trope of irony, the second part of the article will examine how Map, a master of the "art of lying", deconstructed the conventions of wonder stories. It will be argued that as well as using these tales to satirise the historiographical function of *mirabilia*, they were also used to critique the reality of court life and, on a deeper level, the literary function of ambiguity itself. The inherent irony of the walking dead, the dissonance between physical form and metaphysical intent, meant that they could be inscribed with multiple, parallel meanings.

Introduction

The *de Nugis Curialium*, the only surviving work of the courtier Walter Map (*c.* 1140–*c.* 1210), is a testament to its author's contemporary reputation as a raconteur, parodist and wit.[1]

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Indeed, Gerald of Wales (*c.* 1146–*c.* 1223), a close friend and acquaintance of Map, remarks that his fellow Welshman was a man "famous for his eloquence".[2] Hugh of Rhuddlan (*c.* 1190) insists that Map, much like himself, was a proponent of "the art of lying".[3] Eloquence and ambiguity are certainly terms that can be applied to the contents of the *De Nugis*. Contained within this seemingly ramshackle collection of anecdotes, asides and invectives is a selection of 'wonder' stories that remain as puzzling to the modern reader as they must have been to Map's own audience. It is surprising, therefore, that the prodigies described in Distinction II, chapters, twenty-seven, twenty-eight and thirty (corpses that rose from the grave to cause consternation among the living) have not generated much in the way of academic debate, especially given the current interest in the subversive and satirical nature of Map's 'trifles'.[4] Likewise, studies into corporeal ghosts ('revenants') have given Map's contributions to the topic only a marginal consideration.[5]

The aims of this article, then, are twofold: to analyse the ironical and satirical function of Map's prodigies and discuss their relationship to the wider textual tradition of medieval revenant encounters. It should be stressed that the belief in walking corpses was not an alien concept to the local populaces of twelfth-century England. William of Newburgh, Augustinian canon and author of the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (*c.* 1198), grudgingly admitted that "it would not be easy to believe that the corpses of the dead should sally (I know not by what agency) from their graves [...] did not frequent examples, occurring in our own

[1] All references to the text will be taken from the revised M. R. James translation of the *De Nugis Curialium* [henceforth *De Nugis*].

[2] Gerald of Wales, 'Dedicatory Letter to King John', *Expugnatio Hibernica,* 264 (ll.154–55) [henceforth GW, *EH*].

[3] Cited in Cartlidge, 1.

[4] See *inter alios* Levine; Echard; Otter; Hanna and Smith; Edwards; and Cooper.

[5] Caciola, 19−20; Simpson, 390; Blair, 542.

times, suffice to establish this fact, to the truth of which there is abundant testimony."[6] Four such tales are included in the *Historia* as a "warning to posterity".[7] William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*c.* 1125) and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (*c.* 1118),[8] and Geoffrey of Burton's *Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna* (*c.* 1144) are among other works that provide a tantalising glimpse into the everyday, habitual belief in restless corpses.[9]

Thus, the first part of this article will provide a brief overview of the traditions of satire which influenced Map's own contributions to the genre, before analysing the cultural and historical circumstances in which tales of the walking, pestilent-spreading dead emerged. The crux of the investigation will explicate the ways in which Map deconstructed the genre tropes inherent in such stories, inverting the expectations of the audience and opening up new, hitherto unrealised meanings in the text. Above all, by highlighting the conceptual link that exists between 'disordered', monstrous entities (the revenant) and disordered, monstrous literature (satire, irony),[10] it will be demonstrated that the walking dead were the perfect vehicle through which to critique, mock, and disassemble the 'truths' of life in the royal court.

Satire in Twelfth Century England: Some Considerations

[6] William of Newburgh, book V, chapter 24 [henceforth in the form of 'Newburgh, V. 24']

[7] Ibid.

[8] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum,* 195 (ii.124.1); *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum,* 281 (chap. 258) [henceforth WM, *GR* and WM, *GP*].

[9] Geoffrey of Burton, 193−99 (chap. 47) [henceforth *St. Modwenna*].

[10] Parsons, 116.

According to Quintilian (d. 100AD) satire was a specifically Roman invention (*satura quidem tota nostra est*),[11] the ultimate aim of which was the correction of society through the mockery of vice and the ridicule of folly.[12] Isidore of Seville (d. 636) classified satire as a sub-section of comedy, noting in his *Etymologie*s that "they [the satirists] do not hold back from rebuking anybody's sins and habits, whence they are also depicted nude, because through them all vices are laid bare".[13] Irony was one of the sharpest weapons in the satirists' arsenal. Quintilian defined the meaning of ironic statements as being "the opposite of what is said."[14] Cicero (d. 43BC) takes a more nuanced reading of the trope, suggesting instead that "irony too gives pleasure, when your words differ from your thoughts [...] what you think differing contentiously from what you say."[15]That is, irony is said to occur when the meaning of the written or spoken text is *other than*, rather than *opposite of*, its literal form. The sense of multiplicity, the potential for many different interpretations (or 'truths') to be read into the ironic statement, makes it the perfect vehicle for subtle satirical invective.

The works of the foremost Roman satirists, Horace (d. 8AD), Persius (d. 62AD) and Juvenal (d. 150AD), were widely circulated in the educational establishments of twelfth-century Europe.[16] School curricula took advantage of the literal (to use Isidorian terminology, the 'nude') aspects of the genre, teaching base moral lessons to grammarians who had yet to master an understanding of the more spiritually-inclined poets.[17] Indeed, one of the two

[11]Quintilian, 10. 1. 93.

[12] Pepin, *Literature of Satire in the Twelfth Century*, 2.

[13] Isidore of Seville, VIII.vii. 7–8.

[14] Quintilian, 9. 2. 44.

[15] Cicero, II. lxvii.269.

[16] For an overview of the (re)emergence of satire in the twelfth-century, see Thompson, "The Origins of Latin Satire", 73–83.

[17] Gillespie, 223–34.

surviving manuscripts of William of Conches's *Glosae in Iuvenalem* (*c.*1150), an evaluation of the moral and literary implications of the *Satires*, seems to have been based on a lecture given by William at Chatres.[18] The *accessus* of the second extant copy of William's *Glosae*—written, it has been suggested, by one of William's own students—revisits the popular tradition that satire and *satyr* were etymologically connected. However, whereas Isidore notes that the term could have derived from either saturitas (fullness), satura (diversity), *or* the satyrs—"who consider the things said during wine drinking safe from vengeance"—William's student gives only one possible explanation:

> It is possible 'satire' is derived from 'satiri', that is, from peasants [who, when feasting, would] pour out abuse, chiming together in ungainly fashion, as harsh and rough as befits the peasantry, And these types of outburst anticipated satire, because the craftiest of farmers, those with most skill and artistry, later fashioned verse intended to reprehend.[19]

Satire, then, was seen as coarse and playful, diverse and multiple in its usage. Its primary function was to attack moral/social wrongdoings, often under the cloak of irony. A skilled satirist with a sophisticated sense of the ironic could use his words to incisive comic effect.

Twelfth century attempts at satire, based on the precedents set by Horace (gentle, witty) and Juvenal (harsh, abrasive), continued the Classical tradition of criticising the iniquities of everyday life. Rodney M. Thompson detects a distinct satirical edge to William

[18] Wilson, 28.

[19] Parsons, 110.

of Malmesbury's denouncements of avaricious bishops and papal intrigue in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum.*[20] Likewise, the pervading theme of the virtue of secularity evident in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*c.* 1136) has been read as a subtle, satirical swipe at the increasing power base of the celibate clergy.[21] The anonymous 'Archpoet' (*c.* 1130–*c.* 1165), Hugh of Orléans (*c.* 1090–1160), John de Hautville (d. 1200s) Walter of Châtillon (d. 1190s), and Nigel Wireker (d. 1190) are among other twelfth-century authors whose criticisms took the form of satire.[22] Indeed, Wireker's *Speculum Stultorum*, which charts the escapades of the ass, Brunellus, is an especially well-realised example of the genre. From the flattery of merchants and the vainglorious pursuit of knowledge, to the pomposity of Church edicts and the hypocrisy of the monastic orders, no secular or ecclesiastical profession is spared. The humour and whimsy of Wireker's 'Mirror of Fools' ensured its popularity for many centuries to come.[23] John de Hautville's *Architrenius* (*c.* 1184) which details the pilgrimage of the eponymous 'Archweeper' to consult the wisdom of Nature, was another satire which enjoyed circulation in the late twelfth century. Like Nigel Wireker, John de Hautville was especially critical of the Parisian schools and the vanity and wretchedness of the 'new men' who studied therein—a theme which will be discussed in more detail in a later part of this paper.[24]

And yet, this is not to suggest that all medieval attempts at satire had a corrective function. Ben Parsons has noted the negative connotations that could be attached to the genre.

[20] Thompson, "Satire, Irony, and Humour in William of Malmesbury", 117.

[21] Flint, 467.

[22] Thompson, "The Origins of Latin Satire", 82.

[23] Pepin, *Literature of Satire in the Twelfth Century*, 117–57.

[24] For Nigel Wireker and John de Hautville's satires, see Wright; Turner, "Toward a Definition of the Curialis", 3–35.

The resemblance of satire and satyr (a disruptive monster, a beast), as mentioned above, betrays something of the dangers associated with excessive 'playfulness'.[25] Defamatory or insulting remarks may have been used for no other purpose than the art of criticism itself.[26] Irony was just as much a tool for ambiguating and obscuring meaning, playing with convention, as it was for the revelation of truth.[27] Menippean satire, deriving its name from the philosopher Mennipius of Gadara (*c.* 200BC) is a satiric genre that, in contrast to the moralistic worldviews espoused by Juvenal and Horace, rejects the notion of an ideal truth or order in things.[28] A mixture of literary styles, 'high' and 'low' language, exaggeration, mockery and the deconstruction of established tropes characterise the Mennippean satirist.[29] The verse-prose structure of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (*c.* 524) has been noted to possess a mixed Mennipiean style.[30] Although it has been suggested that the High Middle Ages did not produce any notable examples of —in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin— 'carnivalesque' satire, Richard of Devizes *Chronicon* (*c.* 1192) demonstrates some explicitly Mennipean qualities, especially with regard to its parodic description of Winchester's Jews.[31] Similarly, the manipulation of linguistic and literary forms in order to negate comprehension and subvert the expectations of the audience is something that has been seen as a defining

[25] Parsons, 115.

[26] Ibid., p. 124.

[27] For irony as an 'unstable', contingent text, see Hutchinson, 33.

[28] See Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of carnivalesque/menippean literature in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 112–123.

[29] Scott Blanchard, 14–41.

[30] Ibid., 15.

[31] Blurton, 265–84.

characteristic of the *De Nugis Curialum*.[32] As Hugh of Rhuddlan notes with none-too-disguised admiration, Walter Map was one of the greatest proponents of this "art of lying".[33]

Walter Map and the *De Nugis Curialium*

Biographical details on Walter Map's life and career are scarce. Much of the information that survives to the present day is taken directly from the *De Nugis Curialium*. According to Map, he was born in the Welsh Marches, just south of Hereford, (*c.* 1135) and claimed Welsh descent ("*Compatriote nostri Walenses*").[34] It is probable that he received his initial education at the Abbey of St. Peter's in Gloucester, before continuing his studies in Paris.[35] Map also intimates that whist in Paris he was instructed by Gerard la Pucelle, the future Bishop of Coventry.[36] After completing his studies in Theology and Canon Law, he entered the service of the bishop of London, Gilbert Foliot *(c.* 1160s), and was made a canon of St. Paul's.[37] By the early 1170s Map had taken up a position as a clerk in Henry II's court, where he remained until accepting the chancellorship of Lincoln (*c.* 1186) and, later, the archdeaconship of Oxford (*c.* 1197). Map died on 1st April 1209 or 1210, having enjoyed a varied and not unsuccessful career.

[32] Frye, 34; Echard, 306; Edwards, 278.

[33] Cartlidge, 5, 16.

[34] *De Nugis*, dist. ii. 20, 23.

[35] Rigg, 88.

[36] *De Nugis*, dist. ii. 7.

[37] Ibid, dist. v.7.

As intimated in the opening paragraph, references to Map's reputation and literary output can be discerned in the writings of his contemporaries, Gerald of Wales and Hugh of Rhuddlan. Gerald, it seems, enjoyed a close relationship with Map, devoting an entire chapter of his *Speculum Ecclesiae* (*c.* 1216) to his friend's witticisms (*facetis*) against the religious orders.[38] Map's disdain for the hypocrisy of the Cistercians was widely known, and can be readily discerned in Distinction I of the *De Nugis*.[39] An *Invective* (*c.* 1197–1210) by the subprior of St. Frideswide, Oxford, criticises Map for his lifelong vendetta against the White Monks:

> [This is] an invective of Master Bothewald, canon and subprior of the Church of St. Frideswide, against Walter Map Archdeacon of Oxford, who, both in youth and in old age, says derisory things, in verse and prose, about the spread of the White Monks.[40]

A quote attributed to the 'eloquent Walter Map' (*eloquio clarus, W. Mapus*) can also be found in the dedicatory letter to King John in Gerald of Wales's *Expugnatio Hibernica* (*c.* 1210)*:*

> You [Gerald] have written and are still writing much, and I have spoken (*diximus*) many things. You have uttered writings and I words (*verba*). Your writings are far more praiseworthy and lasting that my words (*dicta*); yet because mine are easy to follow and in the vernacular, while yours are in Latin which is understood by

[38] Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesiae*, 219−23 (dist iii. 14) [Henceforth GW, *SE*].

[39] *De Nugis* dist. i. 24–25.

[40] Thorpe, 8; my translation. One of the "derisory" tales may include a version of anecdote given about Bernard of Clairvoux in *De Nugis*, dist. i. 24. Whilst in the company of his friend and patron, Gilbert Foliot, Map overhears a Cistercian talking about Bernard's failed attempt to heal a dead child by throwing himself on the body. Ever quick-witted, Map retorts that "I have heard before now of a monk throwing himself upon a boy, but when the monk got up, the boy promptly got up too", much to the White Monk's annoyance.

> fewer folk, I have carried off reasonably reward while you and your distinguished writings have not been adequately rewarded.[41]

It has been argued that the *verba* to which Map is referring are vernacular—perhaps orally-composed—romances.[42] The aside about Map's skill in the art of lying made by Hugh of Rhuddlan in the *Ipomedon* (*c.* 1180) provides further evidence of his fame as a storyteller and a weaver of fiction.[43] And yet, despite suggestions that Map composed a prose cycle of Lancelot, the only work that can be accurately attributed to his authorship is the *De Nugis Curialium* which, ironically, finds no mention in the historical record.[44] It is generally believed, however, that some of Map's 'trifles', including the diatribe against the religious orders,[45] the story of *Sadius and Galo*[46] and the anti-marriage tract, *Dissuasio Valerii*,[47] may have circulated separately before being collated together by a later copyist, or even Map himself. The fact that the only extant copy of the *De Nugis Curialium* survives in a single fourteenth century miscellany, the MS. Bodley 851, hinders any attempt to ascertain how Map intended his 'trifles' to be structured.

Although, as James Hinton indicates, the copy of the *De Nugis* in MS. Bodley 851 was collated from a series of fragments and does not represent a finished work,[48] the collection of 'trifles' can be read as more than just "an untidy legacy of an untidy mind", the haphazard

[41] GW, *EH*, ll.154–163. Translation from *De Nugis,* xxii.

[42] *De Nugis,* xxii.

[43] Cartlidge, 5.

[44] Pepin, "Walter Map and Yale MS 229", 15−17.

[45] *De Nugis,* dist. i. 25.

[46] Ibid., dist. iii. 2

[47] Ibid., dist. iv. 3.

[48] Hinton, 125.

jottings of witty asides and anecdotes.[49] Most of the fragments of the *De Nugis* were composed between 1180 and 1183, during Map's employment at the royal court. They are at once a testament to his skills as an orator and a pointed expression of his chaotic and often vexing life as a *curialis.* An exact definition of *curialis* ('courtier') as it was used by twelfth-century authors is difficult to ascertain. Ralph V. Turner notes that such men, ostensibly learned administrators, could fulfil a variety of roles for the crown: royal advisors, copyists, witnesses to charters, attachés to foreign dignitaries, justices of the peace.[50] Educated in the secular Parisian schools that Nigel Wireker and John de Hautville found so distasteful, courtiers came from a range of social-economic backgrounds. These "men raised from the dust", chosen for their ability and ambition rather than their birthright, are paradigmatic examples of the increase in social mobility that was occurring in this period.[51] Flattery and obsequiousness were as valuable as administrative competency in the acquisition of social status, with royal favourites expected to gain large benefices for their service. A skilful courtier was "all things to all men", hiding their true intentions behind a mask of affability.[52] Thus, the fluid, uncertain status of the *curialis* and the creation of a social grouping that did not correspond to the known patterns of those who worked (peasants), prayed (clergy) and fought (nobles), threatened to overhaul the established structures of secular and religious life. Nigel Wireker's tract *Contra Curiales et Officiales Clericos,* dedicated to William

[49] *De Nugis*, xxx.

[50] Turner, *Men raised from the Dust*, 14.

[51] Turner, *Men Raised from the Dust*, 21. The social and religious innovations which occurred during this period include increased urbanisation, the rise of the mendicant orders, the development of stable nation-states, the formalisation of the school-system, new approaches to biblical exegesis (and the need to 'order' the universe in general), the reception and circulation of Greek and Arabic texts, and the rise of the art of preaching. For an overview, see Swanson.

[52] Jaeger, 54–66.

Longchamp on the latter's elevation to the chancellorship (1190), is demonstrative of the concern shared by conservative churchmen: that the destabilisation of social order was also a destabilisation divine order.[53] Secular commentators, such as John of Salisbury (d. 1180), tended to focus on the ways in which the behaviour of courtiers effected good and bad governance. Salisbury's influential political treatise, the *Politcratius* (*c.* 1159) uses the metaphor of the body-politic to rebuke those whose pride, vanity and hypocrisy inhibited the workings of the court.[54] Herbert of Bosham's *Vita* of Thomas Becket (*c.* 1184) meanwhile, notes that Becket engaged in "courtiers trifles (*nugis curialibus*), empty and vain pursuits" so that "he would stand out amongst the others", with the implication that vanity and moral lassitude were the means by which courtiers advanced their social status.[55] Peter of Blois (d. 1211), whose career included employment in the courts of William II of Sicily and Henry II of England, knew from experience the deceitful ways of the *curialis*: treachery and corruption lurked at every turn, the envy of others could lead to one's own downfall. In an allegory similar to that which Map uses to describe his own situation,[56] Peter likens the "miseries of courtiers" (*miseriae curialium*) to damnation: "if you want to be swallowed up in the lasting torment of death and the marshes of hell, then put your trust in princes and their sons."[57]

Just as the movements and ambiguous status of the 'new men' threatened the established structures of feudal society, so the ironic, Menippean use of words subverted the semiotic structures of language. Map's dexterity with words and the inherent ironies of

[53] Wright, 153; Turner, 'Toward a Definition of the Curialis', 10.

[54] See especially John of Salisbury, 17–22 (III. 3−9).

[55] Herbert of Bosham, 165.

[56] *De Nugis*, dist. i. 1.

[57] See Peter of Blois, Epistle 14, in Wahlgren, 140–65. A translation of extracts from the letter can be found in Jaeger, 58−9.

courtly and worldly life (that is, the dissonances between appearance and intention; the lack of stability), were each forms of ambiguation. The *De Nugis Curialium* expertly connects these two manifestations of monstrousness together.[58] Divided into five Distinctions of unequal length, the content of the *De Nugis* is appropriately mixed: wonder stories, historical narratives and observations of court life intermingle with prose romances, invectives against religious orders, and autobiographical anecdotes. Map himself acknowledges the unrefined, unstructured nature of his work, stating that "I set before you a whole forest and timberyard... every reader must cut into shape the rough material that is here."[59] It stands at the opposite end of the spectrum to the divine order demonstrated by the 'ideal' courtiers' manual, the *Politcraticus*; a manifestation of the untruthful, contingent world that the *curialis*, and humankind in general, actually inhabited.[60]

The playfulness displayed with regard to the mixture of genre styles extends to the makeup of the individual 'trifles' themselves. Siân Echard, for example, has noted that the romance narrative, *Sadius and Galo,* manipulates the "genre markers [in order] to unsettle an audience and encourage it to question the literary codes by which it understands and creates literary meaning".[61] In other words, the expected tropes of chivalric literature are inverted. While the tale seems to be an ostensible riff on the 'Gawain and Bran de Lis' digression in *Perceval* (*c.* 1181),[62] given Map's reputation, the reader is unsure whether the events depicted—the lusting of the queen after Galo, the use of a frame story, the identity swap—are

[58] Otter, 117.

[59] *De Nugis,* dist. ii. 32.

[60] It has been suggested the Map was explicitly parodying John of Salisbury's work. See Grandsen, 243; Otter, 117.

[61] Echard, 306.

[62] For a comparison between the two stories, see Bennett, 34–56.

to be read as parodies of known literary formulas.[63] The difficult cognitive processes involved in the explication of this 'trifle' are made even more taxing by its curious narrative details. For example, Sadius's intimation of Galo's impotence ("my Galo, who though he could extort every favour from women, confesses, to me alone, that he cannot") provokes uncertainly in readers more accustomed to the ideal of a chivalric lover.[64] These structural 'disruptions' force the creation of new, unstable discourses. From the distorted text an array of possible new meanings is created in the mind of the reader.[65] Such is the contingent nature of irony and the function of Menippean-style satire.[66]

Despite frequent attempts to categorise the *Dissuasio Valerii* as a reflection of Map's misogynistic attitudes towards women,[67] a critical reading of the text reveals that it too operates in a way that undermines its literal form. Ralph Hanna and Warren Smith speculate that Map's highly rhetorical language and refusal to authorise the text—hence leading it to be

[63] In brief, the episode records how Galo, a knight in the Asian court, was lusted after by the queen. His comrade, Sadius, nephew of the King, tries to negate these unwanted advances and confesses to the queen that Galo is impotent. The queen, however, sends a maidservant to test Galo's condition; upon returning from his bedchamber (Galo having rejected her advances), the maidservant is beaten by the queen in a jealous rage. Later, at a banquet for the king, the queen demands that Galo confess his innermost thoughts, hoping to expose his love for the maidservant. Instead, Galo recounts how, the year before, he journeyed into an unknown land and entered into a contract to fight the giant, Rivius. However, he confesses that he finds Rivius too formidable and will shirk his responsibility. Sadius, wishing to help his friend, dresses up in Galo's armour while, at the same time, Galo dresses up in Sadius' armour and goes on to face Rivius before Sadius can intervene. The queen abuses Sadius (dressed as Galo), while praising Galo (dressed as Sadius). Eventually the giant is defeated, the correct identities are revealed, and the queen's shame is complete. See *De Nugis*, dist. iii. 2.

[64] Echard, 309.

[65] Edwards, 282.

[66] Hutchinson, 64.

[67] See, for example, Levine, 98.

ascribed a Classical provenance—was a satire on the contemporary preoccupation with the 'authority' of the ancients.[68] Map tacitly admits his intentions in Dist. iv. 5: "I changed our names for those of dead men in the title, for I knew that it would be popular: had I not done so, my book, like myself, would have been thrown aside".[69] The 'hoax' proved successful; the *Dissuasio* (*c.* 1177) was "greedily seized upon, eagerly copied, and read with vast amusement", as the 131 surviving manuscript copies testify.[70] By removing key textual markers such as the name of the author—one of the main trees in the 'timberyard'—what may ostensibly seem like an attack on women can also be read as an attack on the tastes (or lack thereof) of Map's audience and a commentary on the precarious nature of 'active' reading. Its antifeminism is a cipher that should not be taken at face value.

Likewise, the mistakes in the *De Nugis's* historical narratives can be seen less as the work of an unskilled scholar and more another attempt at textual disruption. For someone whose learning and competency led to him being a royal representative at the Third Lateran Council,[71] Map's versions of the histories of Byzantium, France, and Britain are conspicuous by their inaccuracy.[72] The account of 'Andronius, Emperor of Constantinople', for example, rewrites the Byzantine family dynasty, [73] while the creation of the New Forest is erroneously credited to William II ("which he had himself taken away from God and men to devote it to beasts and sport with hounds").[74] Further dissonances can be discerned in the inclusion of

[68] Hanna and Smith, 218.

[69] *De Nugis*, dist. iv. 5

[70] Ibid.

[71] *De Nugis*, dist. i. 31.

[72] Rigg, , 91.

[73] *De Nugis*, dist. ii.18

[74] Ibid., dist. v. 6

historically-incorrect information from a *chanson de geste* in the life of Louis the Pius.[75] The boundary between fact and fiction, truth and untruth, are altogether blurred, making the task of reading these 'trifles' an incredibly—and intentionally—difficult process.

As *Sadius and Galo* and the *Dissuasio* force a re-evaluation of the known 'truths' about romances and the concept of authorship, and the historical narratives subvert the formulas of chronicle writing, so the revenant narratives in Distinction Two can be read as a play on the conventions of 'wonder' stories. 'Wonders' form an integral part of the *de Nugis Curialium*. The most famous narrative concerns the ancient British king Herla, who was fated to roam the earth until such time a dog, a gift from a pygmy king, alighted from his horse. Map wryly suggests that the lack of recent sightings of Herla is due to Henry II taking on his predecessor's mantle as a wandering, restless king.[76] Other notable 'trifles' include a talking severed head,[77] the capture of fairy women,[78] dances of the dead,[79] and an encounter with a centaur.[80] It is notable, however, that the rubric *prodigio* ('monster', 'portent') is used only with regard to the tales of ambulatory corpses, with 'apparitions' (*aparicionibus*) and 'wonder' (*mirabile*) being used to describe the other types of unusual entity. Map, then, has highlighted the monstrous and *meaningful* nature of the walking dead by making them semantically − and codicologically − distinct from the wider collection of marvels. Before an examination of the revenant stories in the *De Nugis* can commence, it would be prudent to first explore the literary tradition of wonders as understood by a twelfth-century audience.

[75] Ibid., dist. v. 5.

[76] *De Nugis*, dist. i. 11.

[77] Ibid., dist. i. 19

[78] Ibid., dist. ii. 11–12.

[79] Ibid., dist. ii. 13.

[80] Ibid., dist. ii. 16.

Wonders and the Walking Dead in Twelfth-Century Literature

A 'wonder' is a general term for an event which was beyond the ability of the human mind to truly comprehend. *Miracula* (the suspension of the natural order through the will of God) can be differentiated from *mirabilia* (occurrences that may not have been divinely wrought, but which were 'marvellous' because they had a *reason* that could not yet be understood. One of the main goals of *admiratio* (wonder) was to explicate the ambiguity of the marvel and arrive at a true, moral reading. However, it was also accepted that a 'wonder' may be so strange and horrifying that its true meaning may never be discovered.[81] Nonetheless, if, according to cosmological theory, the order of the universe (God) could be detected in all its manifest forms, then disordered beings, such as monsters, may be reflective of social, environmental, and/or political uncertainties—deviance from the divine norm.[82] As such, medieval historiographers and hagiographers often stressed the truthfulness of such narratives, intimating that they were no mere fables, but portents, warnings to posterity, that had actually occurred and which had the potential to signify other deviations in the body-politic. Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* (*c.* 1188), for example, invites its readers to make a connection between the proliferation of monsters in Ireland and the godlessness and marginality of the island's inhabitants.[83] The marvellous events described in Gervase of Tillbury's *Otia Imperialia* (*c.* 1210) were not only collated for entertainment purposes, but

[81] Bynum, 39, 71.

[82] Williams, 59. For the base tenants of twelfth-century cosmological theory, that the micro- and macrocosm were inextricably linked, see the *Cosmographia* (*c.* 1147) of Bernardus Silvestris.

[83] Mittman, 101.

provided moral edification for the book's patron, the Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV. Where the didactic quality of the *exampla* is obscure, Gervase furnishes Otto with his own interpretation.[84] Thus, it was the role of the reader to evaluate the moral and/or spiritual truths that underlay the supposed literal (historical) event. The meaning of the text was sometimes other than its literal form. In some respects, monsters were inherently ironic.

Examples of a particular type of prodigy, the ambulatory corpse, may not be as representative in the extant literary corpus as fairy wives or monstrous births, but the evidence reveals quite a lot of 'cultural facts' about the pervasive belief in the walking dead in Angevin England.[85] The *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey* (*c.* 1090) by Hermann of Bury notes how the corpse of a local sheriff named Leofstan, who in life had violated the sanctuary of a church, was "sunk into a swamp [so that] he would not rise again in judgement".[86] Likewise, the *Vita et Miracula S. Kenelmi* (c. 1070s) reveals the sinfulness of the saint's sister, Cweonthryth, through the revelation that her body "could not stay buried in either the church or the forecourt nor in the cemetery, but that a brilliantly shining child appeared before a certain man, and gave instructions that she should be thrown into some remote gully".[87] William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*c.* 1127) and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (*c.* 1125), the foremost historical works of the early twelfth-century, each contain digressions the troublesome dead. The former relates the story of how ghost of Alfred the Great used to "return to his dead body and wander at night through its lodgings". William dismisses such beliefs as the "nonsense" of the native English, reserving extra criticism for those who

[84] See, for example, Gervase's lengthy discourse on the meaning of the ghost encounter in *Otia Imperialia* , 759−89 (III. 103).

[85] Caciola, 10.

[86] Arnold, 32.

[87] Love, 71–2.

claimed that "the corpse of a criminal after death is possessed by a demon and walks".[88] However, this does not prevent him from regaling his readership with a similar story in the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum.* Describing the death of former bishop of Malmesbury, Brihtwold, in a "drinking bout" (d. 1010s), William notes that "dreamlike shadowy shapes" began tormenting the wardens of the churchyard where he was buried, "until they dug up Brihtwold's body and sunk it in a deep marsh far away from the monastery. At intervals a noxious smell rose from the marsh and spread its noisome stench over the surrounding countryside."[89]

The traditional function of wonders in hagiographical writing was to extol the miraculous nature of the saint and provide a warning for the fate of those who sinned against the patron Church. The revenant story in Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna* (*c.* 1140s) is no exception. Following the decision made by two peasants to renounce their fealty to Stapenhill Abbey, Burton, and enter the service of Roger de Poitevin in nearby Drakelow, the abbot, Geoffrey Malaterra, petitions St. Modwenna for help. Divine justice was immediate. The peasants were 'struck down dead' and duly buried in Stapenhill cemetery. However, that very evening their corpses rose out of their graves and trod the same path to Drakelow as they had taken in life, spreading pestilence in their wake and calling out their victims. To contain this epidemic, the peasants' corpses were exhumed, decapitated, and their heads placed between their legs, after which their hearts were removed and burnt to ash. Indeed, "when [their hearts] had been burnt up, they cracked with a great sound and everyone there saw an evil spirit in the form of a crow fly from the flames." Only then, and with Roger

[88] WM, *GR* ii.124.1.

[89] WM, *GP*, chap. 258.

healing the schism by issuing a humble apology to the abbot for meddling in church affairs, did the revenant sightings cease.[90]

William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (*c.* 1198) is the most detailed extant source where the twelfth-century belief in the walking dead is concerned.[91] The four prodigies, known by their sobriquets the 'Buckingham Ghost' (V. 22), the 'Berwick Ghost' the 'Hounds' Priest' (V.23) and the 'Ghost of Anant' (V. 24) terrorised their friends and neighbours until such time they were given absolution (V. 22) or cremated (V. 23–24). Two of these revenants—the Hounds' Priest and the Ghost of Anant—are noted to have lived an irreligious life and died an unexpected death. Although William says that he "calls things of this nature 'wonderful' [*prodigiosa*], not merely on account of their rarity, but because some latent meaning is attached to them",[92] he declines to speculate on the meaning behind the reappearance of the dead, content merely to state that*:*

> It would not be easy to believe that the corpses of the dead should sally (I know not by what agency) from their graves, and should wander about to the terror or destruction of the living, and again return to the tomb, which of its own accord spontaneously opened to receive them, did not frequent examples, occurring in our own times, suffice to establish this fact, to the truth of which there is abundant testimony.[93]

However, the fact that each of William's narratives focus on the disease and destruction wrought by the violent, pestilential dead, and considering that they were pointedly inserted

[90] *St. Modwenna,* 199.

[91] For prior research on William of Newburgh's revenants, see Caciola, 20−3; Simpson, 390−94; Watkins, 185−93; Gordon, 58.

[92] Newburgh, I. 28.

[93] Ibid., V. 23.

between an account of the London rebellion of William FitzOsbert ('Longbeard') (V.21) and the resumption of warfare between England and France (V.25), it can be suggested that were employed as inverted framing devices, structural markers, to criticise warmongers and social malcontents. FitzOsbert and the royal courts were acting like revenants in that they too were destabilising the body-politic through their "wildness and unwonted movements".[94] Indeed, by calling FitzOsbert a "pestilence and killer" (*pestilentis et homicidae*),[95] William is forcing the audience to make an implicit connection between the rebellious Londoners and the "contagious motions of the dreadful corpse[s]".[96] The codicological placement of *mirabilia* was just as critical for the formation of a 'correct' moral reading as the structure of the narratives themselves.[97]

Despite the sources' stress on the "wildness and unwonted movements" of the dead, their agency was nonetheless constrained by literary convention. Living and dying 'badly' condemned the sinner's corpse to walk after death;[98] its monstrous and destabilising nature was made manifest through corrupted air and pestilential vapours;[99] only a dramatic method of assuagement could contain the corpse and bring order to the world once more;[100] the gross physicality of the revenant signified something about its own metaphysical state or the metaphysical state of others. As suggested above, the moralisation of *mirabilia* invited the

[94] Ibid., V.22.

[95] Ibid., V. 20−21.

[96] Ibid., V. 24. For William Longbeard's London uprising, see McEwen, 18. For the connection between the revenant and the 'social revenant', see Gordon, 60.

[97] For a similar argument with regard to the placement of wonder stories in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum* (*c. 1220*), see Freeman, 142.

[98] WM, *GP*, chap. 258; Newburgh, V. 24.

[99] *St. Modwenna*, 197; Newburgh, V. 23.

[100] Arnold, 32; Newburgh, V. 23.

reader to look beyond the narrative's literal form and, having been directed by their own habitual knowledge and the story's manuscript context, arrive at the 'true', intended reading. For a master of the art of lying, revenant stories provided an ideal platform through which to ambiguate meanings (create falsehood; 'lie') and parody the tropes of historiographic writing. If an analogy can indeed be made between monstrous, ambiguous words (irony) and monstrous, ambiguous bodies (*prodigium*, the *curialis*) then the revenant, as a signifier of *something other* and an entity trapped between life and death, is the perfect tool for satire. It is the very manifestation of the breakdown of socio-linguistic order.[101]

'Amoral' Revenants: An Ironic Subversion of Genre

The *De Nugis Curialium* records three encounters with the walking dead. Located at the end of Distinction II, following an appraisal of the manners, folklore and history of the Welsh,[102] the first 'trifle' details, somewhat appropriately, the problems caused by the corpse of an irreligious Welshman:

> I know of a strange portent [*prodigium*] that occurred in Wales. William Laudin, an English Knight, strong of body and of proved valour came to Gilbert Foliot, then bishop of Hereford [1148–63], now of London, and said: "My Lord, I come to you for advice. A Welshman of evil life died of late unchristianly enough in my village, and straightaway after four nights took to coming back every night to the village, and will not desist from summoning singly and by name his fellow villagers, who upon being called at once fall sick and die within three days, so that

[101] Parsons, 116.

[102] *De Nugis*, dist. ii. 20–26.

> now there are very few of them left". The bishop, marvelling, said: "Peradventure the Lord has given power to the evil angel of that lost soul to move about in the dead corpse. However, let the body be exhumed, cut the next through with a spade, and sprinkle the body and the grave well with holy water, and replace it." When this was done, the survivors were none the less plagued by the former illusion. So, one night when the summoner had now left but few alive, he called William himself, citing him thrice. He, however, bold and quick as he was, and awake to the situation, darted out with his sword drawn, and chases the demon, who fled, up to the grave, and there, as he fell into it, clave his head to the neck. From that hour the ravages of the wandering pestilence ceased, and did no more hurt either to William himself or to anyone else. The true facts of his death I know, but not the explanation (cause).[103]

Map does not dwell on the implications of the Welshmen's return, for he immediately recounts the story of the Bishop of Worcester's inability to quell a revenant that had been trapped in an orchard:

> I know too that in the time of Roger, Bishop of Worcester [1164–79], a man, reported to have died unchristianly, for a month or more wandered about in his shroud both at night and also in open day, till the whole population of the neighbourhood laid siege to him in an orchard, and there he remained exposed to view, it is said, for three days. I know further that this Roger ordered a cross to be laid upon the grave of the wretch, and the man himself to be let go. When, followed by the people, he came to the grave, he started back, apparently at sight of the cross, and ran in another direction. Whereupon they wisely removed the

[103] Ibid., dist. ii. 27

> cross: he sank into the grave, the earth closed over him, the cross was laid upon it and he remained quiet.[104]

Map punctuates the second and third revenant narratives with an extract from the 'Gesta of Charlemagne' concerning the ghost of a knight from Charlemagne's army who warns his friend, a cleric, that he will be taken by demons unless he distributes all of the knight's worldly goods to the poor.[105] Following this, chapter thirty details the plight of a northern nobleman who confronted the corpse of his late father:

> A knight of Northumberland was seated alone in his house after dinner in summer about the tenth hour, and lo, his father, who had died long before, approached him clad in a foul burial shroud. He thought the appearance was the devil and drove it back from the threshold, but his father said: "Dearest son, fear not. I am your father and I bring you no ill; but call the priest and you shall learn the reason for my coming." He was summoned, and a crowd ran to the spot; when falling at his feet the ghost said: "I am that wretch whom long since you excommunicated unnamed, with many more, for unrighteous withholding of tithes; but the common prayers of the church and the alms of the faithful by God's grace so helped me that I was permitted to ask for absolution." So being absolved he went, with a great train of people following, to his grave and sank into it, and closed it over him of his own accord. This new case has introduced a new subject of discussion into the book of divinity.[106]

[104] Ibid.,, dist. ii. 28

[105] Ibid., dist. ii. 29

[106] Ibid., dist. ii. 30

Distinction II culminates with a selection of proverbs,[107] and a warning by Map that it is up to the reader to provide meaning to "what has gone before".[108] Although a cursory reading would suggest that the revenant narratives contain the same tropes and conventions as other *exempla* of this type, a closer examination reveals quite a few 'disruptions' in the text.

With regards to the first tale, the descriptions of the revenant's "evil life" and method of assuagement are remarkably orthodox, recalling the fate of the Drakelow peasants in the *Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna* and the 'Ghost of Anant' in the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*. It does not surprise the reader that the Welshman's sinful, unfortified body was open to abuse and ambulation by the devil. If, as mentioned above, a moral causation could be ascribed to contagion, then Map's suggestion that the village had been almost completely depleted by the "wandering pestilence" is telling. Map may be intimating that the pestilence given off by the revenant could only affect those who were already predisposed to be affected, those who were already weak of faith, 'open', or corrupt in some way.[109] With the depravity of the Welsh being a commonplace trope in twelfth-century chronicles and *vitae*, Map's decision to augment chapters twenty, twenty-three, and twenty-six with allusions to the barbarousness of his 'compatriots' invites an orthodox explication of this narrative.[110] John of Salisbury,[111] Theobald of Bec (d. 1161), William of Newburgh (d. 1198),[112] and Hubert

[107] Ibid., dist. ii. 31.

[108] Ibid., dist. ii. 32.

[109] This is a trope that also finds expression in the 'Ghost of Anant' narrative in William of Newburgh's *Historia*: "The man from whose mouth I heard these things, sorrowing over this desolation of his parish, applied himself to summon a meeting of wise and religious men on that sacred day which is called Palm Sunday, in order that they might impart *healthful* counsel in so great a dilemma, and refresh the spirits of the miserable remnant of the people with consolation, however imperfect." See Newburgh V. 23.

[110] *De Nugis,* dist. ii. 20, 23, 26.

[111] John of Salisbury, 113 (IV. 6).

Walter (d. 1205),[113] are among the twelfth-century churchmen whose literary outputs included criticisms of the mores of the Welsh. Bec's observation that "the people of the country are rude and untamed; they live like beasts and despise the word of life, and though they nominally profess Christ, they deny him in their life and ways" is an example of a *topos* that also permeates the *De Nugis*.[114] "See how foolish and unreasonable is the wrath of these Welsh and how swift they are to shed blood", Map pointedly tells his audience in the final sentence of dist. ii. 26.

As suggested above, the codicological placement of 'wonder' stories played an important role in the explication of their moral truth. As the tale of King Herla was intended to illuminate the hellish nature of Henry II's court in *De Nugis* Distinction I,[115] so the damned, pestilential status of the Welsh revenant structured the readers' interpretation of its kinsmen in dist. ii. 20−26. In both cases *mirabilia* are being enlisted for the criticism of vice. And yet, as intimated in dist. ii.32 ("I set before you a whole forest and timberyard"), Map may have intentionally obscured the meaning of this 'trifle', the truth(s) of which had to be actively pieced together by his audience.[116] Given the sense of ambiguity and multiplicity that pervades the *de Nugis*, the Menippean urge to break down order, the narrative may also have been intended as a parody of such a conventional reading: a satire on a satire.

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[112] Newburgh II. 5: "[Wales] produces men of savage manners, bold and faithless, greedy of the blood of others, and prodigal of their own; ever on the watch for rapine, and hostile to the English, as if by a natural instinct." See also the Preface and II. 8.

[113] Hubert Walter's letter to the incumbent pope, describing how the Welsh claim dominion over England due to their ancient bloodline, is included in Gerald of Wales, *De Invectionibus*, 15 (I. 1) [Hereafter GW, *I*].

[114] See Theobald's letter to the pope in Miller and Butler, 135−136.

[115] *De Nugis*, dist. i. 11.

[116] Echard, 313.

The Welsh, considered by the Anglo-Norman elite as being a liminal race on the very bounds of the civilised world, were the source of much consternation to the Crown in the late twelfth century.[117] A village that was located in the Marches was considered susceptible to all manner of deviant, indigenous influence.[118] It is certainly no coincidence that William Laudin, a knight of 'proven valour' who ultimately answered to the Crown, was one of the few people who was able to resist the Welshman's call.[119] As a courtier in Henry II's court during the king's more turbulent suppressions of the native Britons, Map may have been allegorising events he himself had witnessed or, perhaps, was parodying court fears about perfidious Welshmen in times of ostensible non-aggression.[120] Either way, the failure of Gilbert Foliot's advice subverts and ironises the belief that the Church could mediate between the two nations. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter (r. 1193−1205), made just such a claim in his declaration that the authority of his See was the only thing keeping the Welsh hordes in check.[121] Map's manipulation of genre tropes forces the reader to accept the (untruthful?) possibility that the sickness and sinfulness of the Welsh—or, more widely, those who conspired against the interests of the sovereign realm—could only be stopped via the sword. Indeed, courts fear that the semi-autonomous Marcher Lords would make truces with the enemy and circumscribe royal authority shows how pervasive this sickness could be.[122] Loyal

[117] Gillingham, 59–68.

[118] A March is defined as a frontier between two countries. The allusion to English jurisdiction in Map's village suggests that the revenant attack occurred in a Marcher settlement. See *inter alios* Lieberman; Holden; Davies.

[119] Davies, 53–5.

[120] Although the narrative takes place during Gilbert Foliot's tenure at Hereford (1148−63) and may have been related to Map by bishop himself, it was transcribed around 1180, a time when Henry II enjoyed an uneasy peace with Rhys ap Gruffydd, the Lord of South Wales. See Hinton, 106.

[121] GW, *I*, 15.

[122] Davies, 56.

servants of the realm, like William Laudin, were able to resist the overtures of the Welsh. The fact that Map himself came from the Herefordshire Marches and was in the service of the crown lends another level of irony—a self-critical edge—to the 'trifle'. Vexed by the hellish nature of the court and the monstrosity of those who worked there (including, perhaps, himself), Map may be making a grim joke in describing how 'Laudin' cleaved the head of the revenant, the proxy *curialis*, in two. Read in this way, the rubric's referral to the revenant as a 'prodigy' (*De quodam prodigio*), an entity with a single moral or spiritual meaning, can ultimately be rejected as a lie, a truth deconstructed. Guided by the careful rearrangement of genre codes, the audience is given the opportunity to disassociate themselves from a conventional reading of the narrative (that is, as an attack on the depravity of the Welsh). Not only was a revenant encounter the perfect vehicle for satirising the political and social tensions occurring in the borderlands and the royal court at this time but, in the hands of a master of the art of lying, a purveyor of untruth, it could also be used to parody one of the main features of historiographic writing: the *mirabilia*-as-portent.

Criticisms of poor practice, the conventions of history writing, court paranoia, and the author's own cultural identity are all equally valid readings. References to "unchristian Welshmen", "pestilence" and "evil angels" provide a vague schema for the passage's interpretation. The ambiguities of the story—"the true facts of his death I know, but not the explanation"—encourages the reader to find his or her own explanation. As Map himself states, "I bring you the game, it is for you to make dainty dishes of it".[123]

The inability of William Laudin to assuage the revenant using the advice given by the Bishop of Hereford would have undoubtedly confounded the expectations of the reader. Spiritual matters were, after all, the purview of the Church. The second 'trifle' maintains a

[123] *De Nugis*, dist. ii. 32.

connection to the first through a similar vein of anti-authoritarian satire. As Gilbert Foliot's advice did nothing to prevent the Welshman's corpse from spreading its pestilence, so the initial actions of the Bishop of Worcester also resulted in failure. Repelled by the cross that was placed in the empty grave, the corpse, seemingly inhabited by an 'evil angel', ran off in a different direction.[124] Roger's loyalty to Thomas Becket during the latter's quarrel with Henry II may account for the bishop's struggle to quell the revenant: a gentle rebuke of his role in the schism between church and state.[125] Further disruptions can be discerned in the agency of the revenant itself. Instead of causing terror and consternation to the townsfolk, it is treated as nothing more than a figure of curiosity. A playful, comic mood pervades this 'trifle': whereas literary convention dictates that the revenant be 'bound', decapitated, or put to flame, the Worcester prodigy is merely trapped in an orchard before being chased back to its grave. As the *exempla* from the *Life and Miracles of St. Modwenna* and the *Historia Rerum Anglicarm* attest, this is the opposite of how 'conventional' revenants should behave. Indeed, Geoffrey of Burton describes how "men were living in terror of the phantom dead men" and their "lethal scourge".[126] William of Newburgh's 'Ghost of Anant' narrative is even more explicit on the threat presented by the undead: "the atmosphere, poisoned by the vagaries of this foul carcass, filled every house with disease and death by its pestiferous breath [...] those of its inhabitants who had escaped destruction migrated to other parts of the country, lest they too should die."[127] Death, disease and destruction do not seem to follow Map's prodigy, nor do the

[124] Ibid., dist. ii. 28.

[125] It is difficult to ascertain the nature of Walter's relationship with Roger, and whether he gleaned the base details of the story from the bishop himself. While records indicate that on 19 March 1177 Roger oversaw a property dispute in which a certain 'Waltero Mapp' was a witness, it is unknown whether this remains the sum of their personal interaction. See Cheney, 260−61.

[126] *St. Modwenna,* 197.

[127] Newburgh V. 24.

townsfolk show much fear about having a corpse in their midst. Whereas the 'Berwick Ghost' is "cut limb from limb, reduce[d] into food and fuel for the flames",[128] Sheriff Leofstan and Bishop Brihtwold are thrown into unconsecrated ground, and the irreligious Welshmen from dist. ii. 27 has its head cleaved in two, no such action is taken against the Worcester revenant. The narrative codes have been disrupted.

The structure and content of the third 'trifle', however, seems to take its thematic cues from the preceding story, dist. ii. 29. Both concern the return of the named dead (the former incorporeal, the latter corporeal), who plead with the percipient to undertake a task on their behalf. The unorthodoxy of the Northumberland knight discovering that his father's corpse was "permitted [by God] to ask for absolution" would have been very much apparent to Map's audience. The conception of Purgatory, a 'third place' between life and death was, at the end of the twelfth-century, only just gaining wider theological acceptance. According to Jacques le Goff, Peter Comestor's *De Sacramentis* (*c.* 1170) contains the first extant mention of the noun *purgatorium*, a place of fire where venial sins were punished before the soul ascended to heaven.[129] Although belief in a 'third place' and the possibility that the dead could ask for suffrage had been a part of the Christian worldview since the time of Gregory the Great (d. 604),[130] the doctrine only began to formalise during the twelfth-century reform of the Church. This new 'subject of discussion' further ambiguated the nature of the walking

[128] Newburgh V. 23.

[129] For the consolidation of the reality of the 'third place' of purgatory in the late twelfth century, see Le Goff, 157.

[130] See, for example, the narrative in Gregory's *Dialogues* concerning the ghost condemned to haunt the public baths in Centumcellis, in Gardner, 248–252 (4.55). For an overview of the Patristic discussions on the fate of the soul between death and the Last Judgement, see Atwell, 173–86.

corpse which, for educated churchmen at least, had been hitherto read as a demon-in-disguise.[131]

Furthermore, the revelation that the deceased was "excommunicated... for unrighteous withholding of tithes" invites the reader to associate the corpse's damned state with the activities of Map's most prominent adversaries, the Cistercians. Among the main criticisms aimed at the White Monks was their hypocrisy.[132] "They have their hands open to the poor, but very little open", proclaims Map, who also admonishes their compulsion to "seize and declare [lands] to be their own property" and "take away tithes".[133] The razing of villages and the condemnation of their former inhabitants to a life of suffering and destitution is an ironic reflection of the Cistercians' own desire to live in 'exile'.[134] Their socially-disruptive tendencies were a particularly sore subject for Map who, if judging by the subprior of St. Frideswide's *Invective*, maintained his enmity for the White Monks well into his old age.[135] A non-linear reading of *the De Nugis* enjoins the audience to make connections between the invectives of Dist. i. 25 and the subtle slandering of Dist. ii. 30. On one level of irony, then,

[131] See Newburgh, V.22, wherein St. Hugh of Lincoln used this new way of thinking to grant the Buckingham Ghost absolution rather than consign it to the flame.

[132] *De Nugis*, dist. i. 25. Map was particularly critical of Bernard of Clairvoux, questioning his sanctity and ability to perform miracles. One memorable anecdote, ostensibly from Map's fellow clerk, John Platena, concerns the abbot's supposed exorcism of a madman in Montpellier. However, following the ritual, the madman began throwing stones at Bernard and chased him through the city streets. The madman, it seemed, "was mostly gentle and kind to everyone and only vicious toward *ypocrite* (hypocrites)". Bernard's failure on two occasions to bring the dead back to life is also cited as evidence of his hypocrisy and presumptuousness. These failures of grace, deadpans Map, "did not add to his reputation" (dist. i. 24).

[133] For further scholarship on Map's disdain for the Cistercians, see *inter alios* Sinex; Coleman; and Aberth.

[134] *De Nugis*, dist. i. 25: "Those upon whom comes an invasion of Cistercians may be sure that they are doomed to a lasting exile."

[135] Thorpe, 8.

this final ‘trifle’ would seem to operate as a part of Map’s satire on the Cistercians, a wry appropriation of the language of theological innovation for the continuation of his lifelong feud. Monstrousness and ontological instability permeate the figures of the White Monk and the revenant.[136] The overt orthodox reading, the efficacy of post-mortem prayer for the salvation of the soul, has again been disrupted.

In a manner similar to how Map structured *Sadius* and *Galo,* the *Dissuasio,* and the above-mentioned historical narratives, these prodigies are conventional enough to ‘seduce’ the expectations of the reader. Unchristian activity led to the reanimation of the sinner’s corpse; apotropaic strategies were needed to assuage the troublesome dead. However, mindful of the admonition that these tales are mere ‘timber’ to be cultivated how the reader saw fit,[137] a closer analysis of the texts reveals the ways in which Map, toying with his audience, adds extra ‘trees’ to the expected narrative formulae. The unchristian Welshman from chapter twenty-eight can be inscribed with multiple—and not always moral—meanings. Excesses of ambiguity and irony can also be read in the following chapter, which inverts the base conventions of revenant narratives. The revelation that the corpse of the knight’s father in chapter thirty was, in fact, permitted to ask for suffrage, is a narratological element that completely destabilises how dangerous corpses were meant to be read, something which would have impacted on future readings of the previous two portents. The preceding story from the ‘Gesta of Charlemagne’—that is, the *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi* by Pseudo-Turpin (*c.* 1120s)—is used to structure this interpretation of the revenant, just as the reference to the “withholding of tithes” provokes an association, however subtle, between the damned state of the corpse and the activities of the Cistercians. Above all, the metaphysical connection between the monstrous corpse and the monstrous ‘new man’ is the theme that

[136] Sinex, p. 277.

[137] *De Nugis,* dist. ii. 32.

binds the three 'trifles' to the rest of Map's volume, especially Distinction I. The audience, then, is lost in a maze of possible moral (corrective) and amoral (Menippean, relativist) readings. 'Mixedness' is a theme that permeates the *De Nugis Curialium* as a whole.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to examine the relationship between the medieval conception of irony and the tales of the walking dead in the *De Nugis Curialium*. As a clerk educated in the secular Parisian schools, Map was well-versed in the conventions of Classical satire, whether it be the corrective, 'nude' writings of Horace and Juvenal or the more destabilising elements of the Mennipean School. According to Map, the court was Hell incarnate, its wanderings mirroring that of the phantom king, Herla. A courtier's life could never correspond to the ideals taught by the *Policraticus.* The intrigues of court were as vexing and chaotic as the movements of a walking corpse. Map, I contend, uses the trope of the revenant encounter to satirise the reality of court life and, on a deeper level, the literary function of ambiguity itself.[138] Walking corpses (and monsters in general) are the ultimate irony: their potential to signify anything meant that they could also signify nothing.[139] The reversals and double-meanings present in Map's 'trifles' parody the idea of sinfulness/disorder that the corpse's literal form—its rotten, diseased body—symbolised in the historiographic tradition. A singular, moral reading becomes unattainable; multiple, contingent readings are instead taken from the text. Indeed, the overarching themes of fluidity, mixture, and the dissonance

[138] Otter, 127.

[139] Parsons, 116.

between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ can be readily discerned in Map’s descriptions of the *prodigium*: the revenant was at once a ‘demon-in-disguise’ (dist. ii. 27), a pitiable figure of mockery (dist. ii. 28), and a vessel for a purgatorial spirit (dist. ii. 30). The unstable, disruptive identity of the walking corpse made it conceptually similar to the hypocritical Cistercians and the monstrous ‘new men’. These, then, are the focus of Map’s (if not the active reader’s) ironical concern.[140]

Although unfinished at the time of Walter Map’s death, the *De Nugis Curialium* represents an insight into one of the most idiosyncratic minds of the late twelfth century. His appropriation of the trope of the walking dead shows that he was adept at deconstructing the conventions of ‘wonder’ stories as he was romance (*Sadius and Galo*), misogyny (the *Dissuasio*), and even the book-form itself. Whether to amuse or critique, slander or praise, the *De Nugis* can be read as more than just an “untidy legacy of an untidy mind”.[141] The ‘artfully-unstructured legacy of an incisive mind’ would be much more exact.

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[140] Echard, 312.

[141] *De Nugis*, xxx

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