Social monsters and the walking dead in William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*

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William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum* (*c*.1198) is one of the foremost literary artefacts of the late twelfth century. Contained within Book V are four narratives that detail encounters with the walking dead ('revenants'). This article contends that the specific codiciological placement of these narratives within the *Historia* encourages the reader to make a metaphysical connection between the activities of the revenant and the conduct of social malcontents. The paper analyses the medieval concept of monstrousness and the cultural context of the *Historia*'s creation, and argues that learned theories of disease causation underscored the base narratology of the four revenant encounters. Following an appraisal of the unrest caused by Williams FitzOsbert and Longchamp, as well as the kings of England and France, the paper concludes by evaluating the ways in which their social monstrosity was encapsulated by the destabilising and destructive tendencies of the walking corpse.

Keywords: ghosts; Anglo-Norman England; wonders; William of Newburgh; disease

Introduction

William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum* ('History of English Affairs', *c*. 1198) is one of the foremost literary artefacts of the late twelfth century.[1] Although biographical information on William is scarce,[2] much scholarship has been conducted on the origins, content and construction of his *Historia*, with particular emphasis on the sober nature of his commentaries and purported lack of bias.[3] And yet, while William is quick to denounce the 'traditional fictions' of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia rerum Britanniae* (*c*.1136) and advocate Bede as the model to which all writers of history should aspire,[4] attention is nonetheless given to events which, to modern sensibilities, are just as fictitious and inauthentic as the tales of King Arthur. Indeed, descriptions of animals born from rock, otherworldly banquets and green-coloured children test the twenty-first-century definition of what does, and does not, constitute 'history'.[5] But rather than seeing 'wonder' stories as mere

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[1] The following abbreviations are used in this paper: BL: London, the British Library; GW, *TH*: Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, ed. and trans. John J. O' Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), with Latin text printed in Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 5, ed. James F. Dimock. Rolls Series 21 (London: Longman, 1867); PL: Patrologiae cursus completes, series Latina.

William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett. Rolls Series 82. 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1884−5), 1: 1–408; 2: 409–500. For an English translation, see Joseph Stevenson, *The Church Historians of England*, vol. IV, pt. 2 (London: Seeley, 1861). Online edition, ed. Scott McLetchie, 2009, available from http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/williamofnewburgh-intro.asp (Accessed 12 Feburary 2014). All references hereafter are cited as 'Newburgh', followed by the book number and chapter, and are taken from the Howlett Edition.

[2] H.E. Salter attempted to construct a biography based on the 'William of Newburgh' mentioned in the cartulary of Osney Abbey, Oxfordshire: see 'William of Newburgh', *English Historical Review* 22 (1907), 510−14. According to Salter, William was born in Bridlington in 1135/6 and moved to Newburgh at a young age to receive his education. He married a local heiress, Emma de Peri, when he was around 25 to 30 years old, before retiring to the Augustinian priory of Newburgh in the 1180s. This interpretation has been refuted by Antionia Gransden, amongst others: it is much more likely that William spent his entire life in the cloister: see Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550– c.1307* (London: Routledge, 1974), 264.

[3] Works that have been attributed to William's authorship include the *Historia* (*c*.1198) a commentary on the Song of Songs (*c*.1196), and three exegetical sermons on Luke 11:27, the Trinity, and the Martyrdom of St. Alban. See R. Sharpe, *A Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland Before 1540*. Publications of the *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 1. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 794. For key recent works on the *Historia*, see Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: the Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 51−113; Anne Lawrence-Mathers, 'William of Newburgh and the Northumbrian Construction of English History', *Journal of Medieval History* 33 (2007): 339–57; Peter Biller, 'William of Newburgh and the Cathars', in *Life and Thought in the Northern Church c.1100–c.1700*, ed. Diana Wood (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), 11–30; Monika Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 93−128.

[4] Newburgh, Preface.

[5] Newburgh, I. 27−8.

digressions from the main body of the text, William notes that 'I call things of this nature wonderful (*mira*), not merely on account of their rarity, but because some latent meaning is attached to them.'[6] That is to say, the manifest or literal form of the marvel had the potential to reveal hidden − perhaps spiritually sensitive − truths to the active reader, and served just as important a moral function as authorial glosses on the historical narratives.

Book V of the *Historia* details a type of wonder that has been sorely under-studied in medieval scholarship: the walking corpse.[7] Violent and pestilential, ambulatory corpses ('revenants') posed a very real threat to the cohesion of the local community. William himself declines to give an explanation for the phenomenon, content to state merely that he 'knew not by what agency' the dead wandered from their graves. Despite the lack of overt moralisation, this article contends that the specific placement of these narratives within the *Historia* encourages the reader to make a metaphysical connection between the activities of the revenant and the conduct of William FitzOsbert, instigator of the London riots of 1196,[8] warmongering kings,[9] and William Longchamp (d. 1197), chancellor, justiciar and bishop of Ely.[10] The first half of this paper analyses the medieval concept of monstrousness and the cultural context of the *Historia*'s creation, and argues that learned theories of disease causation underscored the base narratology of the four revenant encounters. Following an appraisal of the unrest caused by FitzOsbert, Longchamp, and the kings of England and France, the paper concludes by evaluating the ways in which their 'social monstrosity' was encapsulated by the destabilising and destructive tendencies of the walking corpse. Ultimately, the contagious nature of sin and the dangers of social transgression were the themes that bound the revenant narratives to the wider historical project.

[6] 'Mira vero hujusmodi dicimus non tantum propter raritatem, sed etiam quia occultam habent rationem': Newburgh, I. 28.
[7] Newburgh, V. 22−4.
[8] Newburgh, V. 20−1.
[9] Newburgh, V. 25–6.
[10] Newburgh, V. 29.

Portents and monsters

According to Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), 'the name "monster", we are told, evidently comes from *monstrando* ("showing"), because they show by signifying something. *Ostenta* ("sign/show") comes from *ostendendo* ("pointing out"), *portent* from *portendendo* ('portending', that is, 'showing beforehand'), and "prodigy" from *porro dicant* ("foretelling the future").'[11] Isidore of Seville (d. 636) concurs, noting that 'a portent seems to have been born contrary to nature – but they are not contrary to nature, because they are created by divine will, since the nature of everything is the will of the Creator. A portent is therefore not created contrary to nature, but contrary to what is known nature. [They] are seen to indicate and predict future events.'[12] By the late twelfth century a clear terminological distinction had been made between *mirabilia* (events that were contrary to the *expected* course of nature) and *miracula* (events that had been instigated through the non-natural intervention of God). Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia* (*c.*1202) offers the following definition:

> Now we generally call those things miracles (*miracula*) which, being preternatural, we ascribe to divine power, as when a virgin gives birth, when Lazarus is raised from the dead, or when diseased limbs are made whole again; while we call those things marvels which are beyond our comprehension, even though they are natural: in fact the inability to explain why a thing is so constitutes a marvel (*mirabilia*). [13]

[11] 'Monstra sane dicta perhibent a monstrando, quod aliquid significando demonstrent, et ostenta ab ostendendo, et portent portendendo, id est praeostendendo, et prodigia, quod porro dicant, id est future praedicant.' Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 982−3 (XXI. 8); Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate Dei, Libri XI–XXII*, ed. A. Kalb, *Aurelii Augustini Opera* 14.2. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), 773.

[12] 'Portentum ergo fit non contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura. Portenta autem et ostenta, monstra atque prodigia ideo nuncupantur, quod portendere atque ostendere, monstrare ac praedicare aliqua futura videntur.' See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243−4 (XI.iii.2).

[13] 'Porro miracula dicimus usitatius que preter naturam divine virtuti ascribimus, ut cum virgo parit, cum Lazarus resurgit, cum lapsa membra reintegrantur. Mirabilia vero dicimus que nostra cognicioni non subiacent, etiam cum sunt naturalia; sed et mirabiliaconstituit ignorantia reddende rationis quare sic sit.' Gervase of

Gervase also stresses that wonders were relativistic and perspectival; that is, what was marvellous to one person may have been common knowledge and unremarkable to another. Writing in his *Topographica Hibernica* (*c.*1188), Gerald of Wales notes that the rising and setting of the sun did not prompt feelings of awe due to the regularity of its occurrence, 'for human nature is so made that only what is unusual and infrequent excites wonder or is regarded of value'.[14] To marvel was to engage with the unknown. In sum, monstrous bodies and wondrous happenings were 'natural', albeit rare and inexplicable to the beholder, and signified something other than their own physical forms.

Deciphering the meaning of wonders was a paramount concern in the Middle Ages; however, despite the ultimate goal of *admiratio* (the act of wondering) being the attainment of *scientia* (knowledge), it was also understood that a marvel might sometimes be so unusual, so incomprehensible, as to defy any attempt at categorisation.[15] Ever equivocal, William of Newburgh advised caution when discussing the events surrounding the Green Children of Woolpit: 'the nature of those green children, who sprang from the earth, is too abstruse for the weakness of our abilities to fathom.'[16] And yet, given that medieval theories about the workings of the universe stressed the relationship between the macro- and microcosm, the physical and the moral, and if natural order was a manifestation of the oneness and wholeness of God, then disordered beings such as walking corpses had the potential to signify social and/or spiritual uncertainty – deviations from the divine norm. Medieval writers often utilised wonders to allegorise and criticise instabilities in the wider body politic.[17] Given that the four

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Tilbury, *Otia imperialia. Recreation for an Emperor*, eds. and trans. S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 558−9 (III. Preface).

[14] 'Sic enim composita est humana natura, ut nihil preter invisitatum, et raro contingens, vel pretiosum ducat vel admirandum'. GW, *TH*, 42; Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, Vol. V, ed. by James F. Dimock, Rolls Series 21 (London: Longman, 1867), 49.

[15] Caroline W. Bynum, 'Wonder', *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1–26; Carl Watkins, 'Memories of the Marvelous in the Anglo-Norman Realm', in *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past*, ed. Elizabeth Van Houts (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2001), 92–112.

[16] 'Porro puerorum illorum viridium, qui de terra emersisse dicuntur, abstrusior ratio est, quam utique nostri sensus tenuitas non sufficit indagare.' Newburgh, I. 28.

[17] Otter, *Inventiones*, 102–3.

revenant narratives contained within the *Historia* were purported to have occurred in the spring of 1196, any investigation into William's use of wonders must take into account his (or his patron's) reading of the political/economic uncertainties that gripped England in the last decade of the twelfth century. While scholars such as Monika Otter and Catherine Clarke have noted that the *Historia*'s 'vampire' stories may have been used as metaphorical retellings of contemporary events, the specific reasons why William chose the walking corpse as a vehicle for historical criticism have yet to be fully explored.[18]

The *Historia rerum Anglicarum* in context

England at the turn of the thirteenth century was a country beset by instability and strife. Not only had the unseasonal rains of 1196 reduced the land to famine and given rise to pestilence – pointedly, William refers to the survivors as 'going about with pallid and cadaverous countenances, as if on the point of death' – but the resumption of warfare between Richard I England and Philip II of France only added to the apocalyptic mood.[19] Dramatic price surges and an increase in taxation − the former due to the mismanagement of the currency; the latter a function of the need to fund Richard's war efforts and, in 1192, his ransom − put a strain on the local economy and fermented resentment among the lower classes. Londoners came very close to instigating a revolt.[20] Tensions were also forming at the head of the body politic: the enmity between Count John and the office of the justiciar almost led to civil war in 1191 and 1194. Richard, meanwhile, was more concerned with his martial activities on the Continent than taking administrative control of his realm.[21] This, then, was the uncertain political

[18] Otter, *Inventiones*, 103; Catherine A.M. Clarke, 'Signs and Wonders: Writing Trauma in Twelfth-Century England', *Reading Medieval Studies* 35 (2009): 69.
[19] '... et vultu pallebant, et moribundis similes incedebant, tanquam continuo mortui': Newburgh, V. 26.
[20] Paul Latimer, 'The English Inflation of 1180–1220 Reconsidered', *Past and Present* 171 (2001): 14; Christopher N.L. Brooke, *London 800−1216: the Shaping of a City* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 48.
[21] Ralph V. Turner, *The Reign of Richard Lionheart: Ruler of the Angevin Empire, 1189–1199* (London: Longman, 2000), 225−40.

climate in which Ernald, the sixth abbot of Rievaulx (1192−9), asked William to write 'a history of memorable events which have so abundantly occurred in our times'.[22]

Founded in 1132 as a daughter house of the abbey of Clairvaux, Rievaulx, along with fellow northern Cistercian houses, Fountains (1132) and Byland (*c.*1147), was described by William in supremely glowing terms: 'like the triple light of our province, they blaze forth by the pre-eminence of their holy religion.'[23] Rievaulx's reputation as a financial, educational and spiritual powerhouse can be traced to the enduring influence of its fourth abbot, Aelred (1147−67). Born in Hexham to a father, grandfather and great-grandfather who all enjoyed close ties with the Northumbrian Church, Aelred was educated first at the cathedral school in Durham – where his uncle was a monk – and then at the royal court of David I of Scotland.[24] It has been argued that David's influence was vital in securing Aelred's entry into Rievaulx.[25] By the time he was elected to lead the community, Aelred was at the centre of a vast filial network that extended from Scotland to France, underpinned by a cultural heritage that included Bede, the hallowed library of Durham Cathedral, and a definite geographical connection to the Anglo-Saxon past. Indeed, among Aelred's many historical and spiritual tracts, his *vitae* of St Edward and St Ninian reveal a preoccupation with his English (Edward) and specifically Northumbrian (Ninian) lineage. The same, perhaps, can be said of his treatise, *On the Miracle of the Holy Fathers Who Rest in Hexham Church* (*Miracula sanctorum patrum qui in ecclesia Hagustaldensi requiescunt*), written in 1155.[26] He died in 1167, having overseen Rievaulx's emergence as one of the most prosperous monasteries in the kingdom. Aelred's literary legacy provides the context through which the desire for a new history of England, based on Bedan precedents, grew. With the statues of the *Carta caritatis* (the

[22] "quae nostris temporibus copiosius provenerunt": Newburgh, Prefatory Epistle.
[23] 'Et tanquam tria nostrae provincae lumina, sacrae religionis prærogativa refulgent.' Newburgh, I. 15.
[24] Marsha Dutton, 'The Conversion and Vocation of Aelred of Rievaulx: a Historical Hypothesis', in *England in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990), 31–49 (34–5).
[25] For a biography of Aelred, see Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx* (London: S.P.C.K., 1969).
[26] Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx*, 112–15.

Cistercian constitution) making it difficult for Ernald or his brethren to pursue a literary career without first securing permission from the General Chapter,[27] and considering that Newburgh Priory shared a patron (the de Mowbray family) with Rievaulx's sister abbey, Byland, William, who had written his commentary of the Song of Songs at the behest of Roger of Byland, proved an ideal candidate for the task.[28]

Of the nine copies of the *Historia* to have survived to the present day, the version contained in BL Stowe MS 62 is of particular importance, being the presentation copy intended for Newburgh itself and containing corrections in William's own hand.[29] Two further manuscripts, BL MS Cotton Vespasian B VI (belonging to Osney Priory, Oxford) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 192 (belonging to Rufford Abbey, a daughter house of Rievaulx), are believed to be contemporaneous with the Stowe version, all three deriving from the same (hypothetical) working copy. Lambeth MS 73 (a copy of Stowe MS 62 belonging to Buildwas Abbey, a daughter of Furness) completes the list of extant *Historiae* for which a production/circulation context can be established.[30] As discussed by Anne Lawrence-Mathers, the design of Stowe MS 62 accords to the 'Northumbrian style' developed amongst the Cistercian, Augustinian and Durham scriptoria of the era. Despite being intended for an Augustinian community, the presentation copy of the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* displays some notably Cistercian qualities, such as the lack of miniatures, the use of the 'three-lobed bud motif' for the initials, and the predominantly red, dark green, and pale blue colour scheme. Along with William's declaration that the *Historia* was commissioned by Ernald − perhaps at the behest of the wider community at Rievaulx − these stylistic traits

[27] See the statute that 'no abbot, monk, or novice is permitted to compose books, except by permission of the general chapter', in Elizabeth Freeman, *Narratives of a New Order: Cistercian Historical Writing in England, 1150–1220* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 91.
[28] Freeman, *Narratives of a New Order,* 91–7.
[29] The MS contains a Newburgh 'ex libris'.
[30] Newburgh, xlii−xliii. Other versions include Dublin, Trinity College, MS E. 4. 21 (*c.*1300); BL Add. MS 24981 (fourteenth century); Cambridge, Corpus Christi Collge, MS 262 (thirteenth century); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 101 (fourteenth century), and BL MS Royal 13 B IX (fifteenth century).

highlight the formal and informal connections that existed between the various monastic communities of Northern England, a process that extended to the circulation of the manuscripts themselves.[31] While the lack of a library list for Newburgh Priory prohibits a discussion of the works at William's immediate disposal, the evidence suggests that he made extensive use of the collections of both Durham and Rievaulx,[32] with manuscripts from the former perhaps being made available through the library of the latter.[33] Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* was one of the main sources consulted by William during his research, evidence from which was used to refute the existence of Arthur and Merlin and to advertise the northern traditions of history writing.[34] And yet, the fact that copies of the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* were distributed among southern Cistercian and Augustinian houses suggests that this nominally provincial project was designed to appeal to the literary interests of the wider monastic network. In an era dominated by political unrest and social upheaval, it was a history written with the conservative moral outlook of the cloister in mind. The preservation of the 'natural' order of things and the dangers of transgressing divinely-wrought boundaries were two of the main moral threads that underpinned the entire project.

Detailing events from the Norman Conquest of 1066 to the construction of Château Gaillard, Rouen, in 1198 (the abruptness of the ending suggests that this date corresponded roughly with William's death), the *Historia* is most notable for its vehement condemnation of the *Historia rerum Britanniae* and as one of two extant sources – the other is Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicum Anglicanum* (*c.*1220) – for the story of the Green Children of

[31] Anne Lawrence, 'A Northern English School? Patterns of Production and Collection of Manuscripts in the Augustinian Houses of Yorkshire in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *Yorkshire Monasticism*, ed. Lawrence Hoey (Leeds: Maney, 1995), 145−53; Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *Manuscripts in Northumbria in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2003), 207−8.
[32] Fortuitously, two twelfth-century library catalogues from Rievaulx (*c.*1190–1200) survive in Cambridge Jesus College MS 34 fols. 1–5r and 5v–6. For the manuscripts attributed to Durham, see Neil R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: a List of Surviving Books*. 2nd edn. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1984), 60−76.
[33] Anne Mathers-Lawrence, 'The Augustinian Canons in Northumbria: Region, Tradition and Textuality in a Colonizing Order', in *The Regular Canons in the Medieval British Isles*, eds. Janet Burton and Karen Stöber (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 59−78 (72−5).
[34] Lawrence-Mathers, 'William of Newburgh', 344.

Woolpit.[35] And yet, despite their relative unfamiliarity to modern audiences, the revenant stories contained in Book V, Chapters 22 to 24, are by far the most detailed accounts of the walking dead in Anglo-Norman literature, surpassing those found in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum* (*c.*1125), Geoffrey of Burton's *Vita et miracula sanctae Modwennae* (*c.*1144), and Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* (*c.*1182).[36] Known by their sobriquets the 'Buckingham Ghost' (V. 22), the 'Berwick Ghost' (V. 23), the 'Hounds' Priest' (V. 24) and the 'Ghost of Anantis' (V. 24), William's revenants display similar attributes and agencies to the Northern European *draugr*, the Greek *vrykolakas* and the Eastern European *vampyre*.[37] Indeed, while it must be acknowledged that encounters with the undead reflect the authorial and experiential biases of the culture in which the attack took place − in some Norse narratives, for example, the *draugr* is quite benign – the written sources nonetheless follow a similar narratological pattern:[38] the revenant lived or died contrary to the habits and beliefs of the community (a 'bad' death); they had a propensity to terrorise those they knew in life, either through disease, night-time chokings or physical assault;[39] the attacks became more violent and frequent over time; the offending corpse was exhumed, bound and/or cremated to prevent the disorder from spreading further. A revenant, then, was mostly violent and uncontrollable, a threat to the very cohesion of society. It was

[35] 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: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 75–94.
[36] Key works on the Western European revenant include Nancy Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture', *Past and Present* 152 (1996): 3–45; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa L. Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); John Blair, 'The Dangerous Dead in Early Medieval England', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter and others (London: Ashgate, 2009), 539–59; Jacqueline Simpson, 'Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England', *Folklore* 114 (2003) : 389–402.
[37] Scholarship on each of these iterations of the walking corpse is vast. See, in the first instance, Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); William Sayers, 'The Alien and the Alienated as Unquiet Dead in the Sagas of the Icelanders', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 242–63; Julie Du Boulay, 'The Greek Vampire: a Study of Cyclic Symbolism in Marriage and Death', *Man*, new series, 17 (1982): 219–38; Michael E. Bell, 'Vampires and Death in New England, 1784 to 1892', *Anthropology and Humanism* 31 (2006): 124–40.
[38] For the benign undead corpse, see N.K. Chadwick, 'Norse Ghosts (a Study in the Draugr and the Haugbui)', *Folklore* 57 (1946): 61.
[39] For the relationship between the nightmare and the revenant, see Nicholas Kiessling, *The Incubus in English Literature: Provenance and Progeny* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1977), 16−20; Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* (London: Hogarth, 1949), 98–130.

these very attributes, the ontological instability of an entity that straddled the boundary line between life and death that prompted William to include similar stories in his *Historia* 'as a warning to posterity'.[40]

Wondrous events were often employed as framing devices, their insertion into the ongoing historical narrative used to justify events which had previously occurred or else foretell events which had yet to pass.[41] While William's audience may have appreciated his tales of the undead as entertainments in and of themselves – self-referential enclosed narratives – they can also be viewed as integral components of the *Historia*'s overall framework.[42] To this end, Gabrielle Spiegel has suggested that to make sense of a chronicle, one must employ a reading technique similar to that used in the decoding of images, specifically the process whereby meanings can be generated by treading a correct mental pathway through a (seemingly) disordered textual field.[43] Just as the correct mental movement through the structure of an illumination or fresco-cycle yielded deeper layers of meaning, so the chronicle also possessed mnemonic cues and discursive patterns which, if acknowledged by the percipient, could be used to generate a more subtle understanding of the material as a whole. Stories of deviant behaviour in the context of the walking dead can add an extra moral significance to commentaries on the conduct of the living. Even if William declines to offer an overt explanation as to what his prodigies might signify, the reader, directed by their placement within the chronicle and aware of their historical context, is invited to make the connection. The active agency (or 'wandering viewpoint') of the percipient makes manifest what the written word leaves unsaid. However, before comment

[40] 'ad posterorum cautelam': Newburgh, V. 24.
[41] See Elizabeth Freeman, 'Wonders, Prodigies and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresy in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum*', *Journal of Medieval History* 26 (2000): 127–43.
[42] Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: the Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon, 2004), 22; Otter, *Inventiones*, 128.
[43] Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 99–110. For the reading of images, see Michael Camille, 'Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy', *Art History* 8 (1985): 26–49.

can be made on the meaning(s) that can be extrapolated from these wonder stories, their content and narratological elements must first be analysed.

The *Historia* and the walking dead

'Were I to write down all the instances of this kind which I have ascertained to have befallen in our times', notes William, 'the undertaking would be beyond measure laborious and troublesome.'[44] Not only is this quote suggestive of the pervading fear of the undead in twelfth-century England, a belief that may have been more common than the extant literature suggests,[45] it also forces the reader to question *why* William chose to transcribe these particular tales. The authority of his informants may well have been a factor, adding a guarantor of 'truth' to events that would seem incredulous coming from the mouths of lesser men.[46] The first such account, that of a corpse which terrorised an unnamed Buckinghamshire village, was relayed to William by the 'venerable archdeacon' (*venerabili archidiacono*) of Buckingham, Stephen de Swafeld (*c*.1194–*c*.1203). The story details the death of a man who, on the very night after his funeral (29 May 1196), returned to the marital bed and 'not only terrified [his wife] on awaking, but nearly crushed her by the insupportable weight of his body'.[47] With the revenant's attacks increasing in both frequency and intensity, the townspeople decided to take the matter to the archdeacon Stephen, who in turn consulted St Hugh of Avalon, the bishop of Lincoln (1186–1200). The bishop was told by his advisors that 'such things had often befallen in England', and that the usual remedy was to dig up the suspect corpse and cremate it. The bishop was unwilling to desecrate the body in such a

[44] 'Porro si velim omnia hujusmodi scibere quae nostris contigisse temporibus comperi, nimis operosum simul et onerosum erit.' Newburgh V. 24.
[45] For archaeological 'texts' concerning the need to bind the undead corpse to the grave, see Stephen Gordon, 'Disease, Sin and the Walking Dead in Medieval England: a Note on the Documentary and Archaeological Evidence', in *Medicine, Healing and Performance,* ed. Stephen Gordon and others (Oxford: Oxbow, 2014), 55–70.
[46] Watkins, 'Memories of the Marvellous', 97.
[47] 'excitatem non solum terruit verum etiam paene obruit importabili sui pondere superjacto': Newburgh V. 22.

manner; instead he ordered a scroll of absolution to be placed on the dead man's chest – an act which stopped the corpse from walking.[48]

William declines to name his source for the tale of the 'Berwick Ghost'; however, this 'noble town'(*vicus nobilis*) does rest on a main communication link to Melrose Abbey, itself the setting of a third narrative, the tale of the 'Hounds' Priest' *(Hundeprest),* which William declares was related to him by the 'religious men' (*viris religiosis*) of that place.[49] It is possible, perhaps, that William heard an account of the Berwick ghost whilst visiting his Cistercian informants to the north, or else as second-hand information from a Rievaulx monk who once resided at Melrose. This story, then, records the fate of a wealthy man who died suddenly after leading an irreligious life. 'By the contrivance, as it is believed, of Satan', the dead man emerged from his tomb at night and began terrorising the town, spreading chaos and discontent as the corpse was 'borne hither and thither', pursued by a pack of loudly barking dogs. Fearing that the 'corrupted air' exuded from the 'pestiferous corpse' would overtake the town if no action was taken, the residents tasked 'ten young men renowned for boldness'to exhume, dismember, and cremate the offending cadaver. Once this action was taken, the nightly perturbations ceased.[50]

A similar set of motifs can be discerned in the story of the 'Hounds' Priest' (*Hundeprest*). An irreligious chaplain, whose love of hunting and aristocratic pursuits earned him his unflattering nickname, died and was interred in the grounds of Melrose Abbey. However, the holy earth did not keep the corpse at rest. 'With loud groans and horrible

[48] 'fuere qui dicerent talia saepius in Anglia contigisse … corpore effosso et concremato'. Newburgh, V. 22. Although, as Carl Watkins states, the use of absolution scrolls to quell the undead may have been an innovation born out of the increasing acceptance of the Purgatory – that is, the walking corpse was seen more a purgatorial spirit than a demon-in-disguise – archaeological evidence for the absolution of morally-suspect corpses can be traced back to at least the eleventh century. See, for example, the lead cross placed in the coffin of Godfrey, Bishop of Chichester (d. 1088), which was inscribed with a papal absolution for Geoffrey's (unnamed) sins.Hugh's decision to contain the revenant with a written prayer thus built upon an already established practice. Elisabeth Okasha, 'The Lead Cross of Bishop Godfrey of Chichester', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 134 (1996): 63–9; Carl S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 180–92.
[49] Newburgh, V. 24.
[50] 'operatione, ut creditur, Sathanae … hic illucque ferebatur … corruptusque aer … pestiferi cadaveris ... decem juvenes audacia insignes': Newburgh, V. 23.

murmurs' he rose from the grave each night and began making a nuisance of himself outside the bedchamber of his former mistress. Seeking help from the abbey, the mistress was assured by a priest that a vigil comprising himself, a second monk and two 'powerful young men' would be kept around the chaplain's grave the following night. Midnight passed and there was still no sign of the monster. Having bided his time until three of the party returned indoors, the Devil then proceeded to raise up 'his chosen vessel' and attack the remaining priest. Unperturbed and resolute in his faith, the priest cleaved a hole in the chaplain's body, whereupon he sank back down into the earth. The next morning the corpse was exhumed and found to carry a fresh, bloody wound on its torso, after which it was carried beyond the walls of the monastery and cremated.[51]

The setting of the final story, 'a castle called Anantis' (*castellum quod Anantis dicitur*) is much more difficult to place. Alnwick in Northumbria is a possible candidate, suggesting that William's informant – an 'aged monk who lived in honour and authority in those parts' – may have belonged to the nearby abbey of Newminster in Morpeth (*c*.1137), a daughter house of Fountains.[52] Although the term *religioso* suggests that the testimony came from a Cistercian, further evidence, such as William's remark that 'the man from whose mouth I heard these things sorrow[ed] over the desolation of *his* parish', alludes to a pastoral connection to the local community.[53] The possibility that the use of *religioso* was a semantic error, and that the informant was a canon from the Premonstratensian priory of St Mary's (*c*.1151), near Alnwick, cannot be discounted. Whatever its ultimate provenance, the 'Ghost of Anantis' tells of a man of ill-repute who, having fled the justices of York, insinuated himself within the retinue of the lord of the castle of Anantis. Marrying within the household, it was not long before he began to suspect his new wife of being unfaithful. Under the

[51] 'ingenti fremitu et horrendo murmure … duos juvenes validos … illico vas proprium': Newburgh, V. 24.
[52] 'sene religioso, qui clarus et potens in partibus illis exstiterat': Newburgh V. 24
[53] 'hanc nimirum suae desolationem parrochiae dolens vir ille, ex cujus haec ore accepi:' Newburgh, V. 24. My italics.

pretence of 'going on a journey from which he would not return for some days' (*finxit se longius iturum, nec rediturum nisi post dies aliquot)*, he hid in the beams of the marriage chamber where, sure enough, her adulterous activities were confirmed. Enraged, the man fell from the rafters 'and was dashed heavily on the ground' (*ad terram elisit*). So angry was he at his wife's indiscretion he failed to make confession before succumbing to his injuries. Despite being afforded a 'Christian burial' (*Christianam quidem sepulturam),* the man's corpse nonetheless emerged from the grave each night, wandering through the streets and exuding a terrible, pestilential stench. Many townspeople succumbed to the plague (*nam tetri corporis circumactu infectus aer, hausta pestilenti universas morbis et mortibus domos replevit*). Finally, two young brothers decided to exhume the errant corpse. They found it swollen to an enormous size (*enormi corpulentia distentum*), its face suffused with blood (*facie rubenti turgentique*) and the burial shroud ripped to pieces. Realising that the corpse must be a 'blood-sucker' (*sanguisuga*), they removed the heart before burning the body on a pyre.[54] William concludes by noting that '[when] the infernal monster (*infernali illa belua*) had thus been destroyed, the pestilence (*pestilentia*) which was rife among the people ceased, as if the air, which had been corrupted by the contagious motions (*pestilenti motu*) of the dreadful corpse, were already purified (*purgatus*) by the fire which had consumed it'.[55]

Themes of deviance, pollution, and the dangers of social unrest underscore each of William's wonders. Three out of the four narratives make explicit the belief that poor Christian conduct − including dying unshriven − was the determining factor in causing the dead to rise. However, while it is true that William credits the Hounds' Priest and the Ghost of Anantis' reappearance to the work of the Devil, and although fire was a common symbol

[54] 'finxit se longius iturum, nec rediturum nisi post dies aliquot ... ad terram elisit ... Christianam quidem sepulturam ... nam tetri corporis circumactu infectus aer, hausta pestilenti universas morbis et mortibus domos replevit … enormi corpulentia distentum … facie rubenti turgentique … sanguisuga …': Newburgh, V. 24

[55] 'Porro infernali illa belua sic deleta, pestilentia quoque quae grassabatur in populo conquievit, tanquam igne illo, qui dirum cadaver absumpserat, aer jam esset purgatus, qui ejus fuerat pestilenti motu corruptus': Newburgh V. 24

for the purgation of sin, the pestilence is described in purely natural terms. Indeed, the dissolution of the body was a pragmatic means of assuaging the physical dangers presented by the revenant and seemed to have been an entrenched local practice. Not only do the Berwick townspeople cite 'frequent examples in similar cases' whereby cremation was the only viable means of stopping the perfidious corpse,[56] similar methods of containment can also be discerned in Geoffrey of Burton's *Vita et miracula sanctae Modwennae*, the Icelandic family sagas, and early modern vampire narratives.[57] It should be reiterated, however, that twelfth-century cosmography allowed for no true distinction between the physical and metaphysical worlds, between the agency and intentions of man and the workings of the universe. An understanding of the holistic nature of disease causation was part of the habitual knowledge of educated churchmen.[58] While there is not enough evidence to construct an exact list of the medico-theological manuscripts used by William, practical medical manuals (catalogue no. 225) and a copy of Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia* (no. 127, *c*.1145) were indeed available for consultation in the library at Rievaulx.[59] Haimo of Auxerre's commentary on the Pauline Epistles (no. 4, *c*.850s) – specifically, the explication of Paul's metaphor for the spread of spiritual corruption in 1 Cor. 5 – could also have functioned as a

[56] '*consimili clarebat exemplis*': Newburgh V. 23.
[57] For the decapitation of the suspected revenants and the burning of their hearts, see Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, ed. and trans. Robert Bartlett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 196−7. For the cremation of the troublesome *draugr*, see the story of Hrapp's ghost in *Laxdæla Saga*, ed. and trans. by A.C. Press (London: Dent, 1906), 78. See also Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 6−7, 11−13.
[58] Susan R. Kramer, 'Understanding Contagion', in *History in the Comic Mode*, eds. Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 145–157 (151).
[59] For a modern translation of the *Cosmographia*, see the version by Winthrop Wetherbee (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1973). The catalogue numbers have been taken from the first, longer version of the Rievaulx catalogue, see David N. Bell, *The Libraries of the Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians* (London: British Library, 1992), 109 (no. 127), 121 (no. 225).

research tool.[60] Whether William was aware of more recent treatises on the contagiousness of sin, such as Peter Cantor's *Verbum abbreviatium* (*c.*1187), is open to speculation.[61]

With these potential sources in mind, it is telling that the residents who did not succumb to illness prior to the Ghost of Anantis' cremation included William's primary source and a group of esteemed local clergymen.[62] The 'passions of the mind' were one of the 'non-natural things' which, according to medieval medical theory, affected the body's humoral balance: a deviant mental/social outlook could well have had a detrimental effect on an individual's physical well-being.[63] Diseased bodies were a manifestation of a person or community's deviation from the divine equilibrium and had the potential to transmit their moral/physical degradation to others. Sin, therefore, was a deciding factor in the source of (and susceptibility to) a revenant's contagion. Imbalanced humours were a manifestation of sin, just as a person or revenant's sin was made manifest through a monstrous, corrupted body.[64] *Pestilentia*, *pestiferi cadaveris* and *corruptusque aer* are among the terms William uses to describe how the revenant transmitted its (manifest) sin to others, its putrid stench able to destabilise the vital spirits of those already morally, and thus physically, compromised. 'Bad' death had terrible – sometimes deadly – consequences for the living. However, whilst

[60] 'Only a tiny amount of yeast corrupts the whole mass of flour' (Sicut modicum fermentum omnem massam farina conspersam corrumpit), in Haymonis Halberstatensis Episcopi, *Opera*, ed. J.-P. Migne. PL 117 (Paris: Migne, 1881), col. 536B; Bell, *Libraries*, 90 (no. 4).

[61] As Peter states, 'the sins of the community reside in individuals, and the sins of an individual can affect everyone' (et peccatum universalitatis spargitur in singulos, et peccatum unius redundat in plures). Petri Cantoris, *Verbum abbreviatum*, ed. J.-P. Migne. PL 205 (Paris: Migne, 1855), col. 535D.

[62] Newburgh, V. 24: '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 [so] that they might impart healthful (*salubre*) counsel in so great a dilemma, and refresh the spirits of the miserable remnant of the people.' (hanc nimirum suae desolationem parrochiae dolens vir ille, ex cujus haec ore accepi , in sacra dominica, quae Palmarum dicitur, viros sapientes et religiosos accersire studuit, qui in tanto discrimine salubre darent concilium, et consolatione vel modica miseras plebis reliquias recrearent).

[63] The six 'non-natural things' were defined as the moral, social and environmental properties that existed outside of the body, the qualities of which affected the balance of the humours. Air and environment, food and drink, sleep and wakefulness, motion and rest, evacuation and repletion, and the passions of the mind, needed to be carefully monitored to maintain a patient's health. For an overview of the mid- to late-twelfth century understanding of contagion, see Kramer, 'Understanding Contagion', 148.

[64] For the relationship between sin and disease, see R.I. Moore, 'Heresy as Disease', in *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages (11th–13th c.): Proceedings of the International Conference, Louvain, May 13–16, 1973*, eds. W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (Leuven: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 1–11; Richard Palmer 'In Bad Odour: Smell and its Significance in Medicine from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century', in *Medicine and the Five Senses*, eds. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 61–8.

the ‘Berwick Ghost’ and the ‘Ghost of Anantis’ are primarily concerned with the spread of pestilence, the ‘Buckingham Ghost’ and the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ focus on the differences between correct and incorrect pastoral practice; the irreligious chaplain caused unrest, whereas St Hugh of Avalon contained it.[65] William’s statement in the prologue to the ‘Hounds’ Priest’ tale, that ‘we can find no evidence of [revenants] in the works of ancient authors’,[66] implies that the dead may have risen in response to (or anticipation of) more recent historical developments. Thus, although the accounts can be read as literal – that is, as entertaining or terrifying diversions from the main body of the text – there were also potent symbolic meanings behind the corpses’ reappearance, as testified by the reference to ‘prodigies’ and ‘similar entities’ in the narratives’ chapter titles.[67] If one of the primary goals of *admiratio* (wonder) was *scientia* (knowledge), then knowledge of a marvel’s meaning could be utilised by the historian in his role as arbiter of moral truth, the symbol becoming allegory.[68] The spread of physical and metaphysical disorder was the structuring principle that forced the monastic reader to associate the agency of the undead monster (the revenant) with the agency of the social monster (William FitzOsbert, warmongering kings and William Longchamp).

The social revenant: William FitzOsbert, warmongering kings and William Longchamp

[65] A discussion of how the theological innovations emerging from Paris influenced Hugh’s decision to absolve rather than cremate the corpse is beyond the remit of this study. For an overview of this argument see Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, 186−8.
[66] ‘Cum nihil tale in libris veterum reperiatur’: Newburgh, V. 24. Indeed, William had access to a vast array of ‘ancient’ histories in the Rievaulx library, including the *Chronicon* of Eusebius of Caeserea (catalogue no. 112, *c*. 325) and the *Historia* of Hegesippus (no. 113 *c*.180). See Bell, *Libraries*,106.
[67] ‘De prodigio mortui’ (Newburgh, V. 22), ‘de re consimili quae accidit apud Berewic’ (V. 23), ‘De quibusdam prodigiosis’ (V. 24).
[68] Freeman, ‘Wonders’, 142.

William FitzOsbert

Information about the popular London uprising of April 1196 can be discerned in four near-contemporary manuscripts: William's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, the *Chronicae* of Gervase of Canterbury (*c*.1199) and Roger of Hoveden (*c*.1201), and Ralph de Diceto's *Imagines historiarum* (*c*.1202).[69] A version of the events was later included in the *Chronica majora* of Matthew Paris (*c*.1253).[70] Although attempts to create a prosopographic narrative for the instigator of the revolt, William FitzOsbert, are hindered by a lack of evidence about his early life, [71] a rough chronology can nonetheless be constructed using the historiographical sources, specifically William of Newburgh's *Historia*, as a template.

The youngest son of a wealthy London landowner, FitzOsbert, a veteran of the Third Crusade, [72] was said to possess a rare gift for public speaking. FitzOsbert derived his sobriquet 'longbeard' (*barba prolixa*) from an impressive beard worn, so the *Historia* tells us, as a way of 'appearing conspicuous in meetings and public assemblies' *(in coetu et concione magis conspicuus appararet)*.[73] In all other respects he was contemptible and dissolute; a law student who, despite his eloquence and sharp mind, was envious, vain and quick to hold a grudge. Indeed, having been denied an increase to his living expenses, FitzOsbert even accused his brother – the head of the family's estate – of high treason, going so far as to take the matter to the king. FitzOsbert's scorn for his social (and fiscal) betters may have prompted his decision to take up the cause of the oppressed citizens of London, proclaiming himself 'king' (*rex*) and 'saviour' (*salvator*) of the poor. Indeed, the levying of extra taxes by

[69] Modern translations of all four accounts can be found in R. C. Van Caenegem, *English Lawsuits from William I to Richard II*, vol. 2, *Henry II and Richard I* (London: Selden Society107, 1991), 687−94.
[70] Matthæi Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 2I, ed. Henry R. Luard. Rolls Series 57 (London: Longman, 1874), 418−9.
[71] G. W. S. Barrow, 'The Bearded Revolutionary': the Story of a Twelfth-Century London Student in Revolt', *History Today*, 19 (1969): 769–87; John McEwen, 'William FitzOsbert and the Crisis of 1196 in London', *Florilegium*, 21 (2004): 18–42; Alan Cooper, '1190, William Longbeard, and the Crisis of Angevin England', in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England*, eds. Sarah Rees Jones and Sethina Watson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 91–105.
[72] Benedict of Peterborough [Roger of Hovedon], *Gesta regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti abbatis*, vol. 2, ed. William Stubbs. Rolls Series 51 (London: Longman, 1867), 116.
[73] Newburgh, V. 20.

the city's elders had caused much consternation and anger among the lower strata of London society.[74] Despite winning up to 52,000 converts through his impassioned and eloquent public speeches, FitzOsbert's sedition did not last for long. Taking refuge in the church of St Mary le Bow after a riot in which a member of the archbishop of Canterbury's militia was killed, FitzOsbert and his followers – including his mistress – watched as Hubert Walter, the archbishop, ordered the church to be set alight. FitzOsbert surrendered and was executed at Tyburn gallows along with nine of his most ardent followers, a fitting end 'for a pestilence and a killer'(*pestilentis et homicidae*).[75] However, much to the dismay of the city authorities, the anger that resulted from FitzOsbert's death soon coalesced into a cult. 'Fools' (*stultorum*) came from far and wide to keep vigil over the spot where he died. Seeking to denounce the beliefs of the 'idiot rabble' (*insulsa multitudo*), the authorities arrested the priest who attested to FitzOsbert's martyrdom and posted a sentry on the site of his execution. In a further indictment of the cult, the *Historia* describes how, in the moments before his death, FitzOsbert confessed to having had sex with his mistress on the altar of St Mary le Bow and even of invoking the name of the Devil as Hubert Walter's guard closed in. Soon enough, 'the entire fabric of superstition was utterly prostrated, and popular feeling subsided.'[76] Although Gervase of Canterbury, Roger of Hoveden and Ralph de Diceto subscribe to William's version of the events, Roger is rather more sympathetic to the townsfolk's plight than the others.[77] As dean of St Paul's, Ralph de Diceto was certainly affected by the civil

[74] Barrow, 'Bearded Revolutionary', 679.
[75] Newburgh V. 20. Indeed, FitzOsbert's execution was the first such recorded at Tyburn. See R. E. Zachrisson, 'Marylebone: Tyburn: Holborn', *Modern Language Review* 12 (1917), 146−56.
[76]'tota illa concinnatae superstitionis machina funditus concidit, et popularis opino conquievit': Newburgh, V. 21.
[77] Roger notes the following: 'In the same year strife originated amongst the citizens of London, for not inconsiderable aids were imposed because of the King's imprisonment[... and in order to spare their own purses the rich wanted the poor to pay for everything', in Van Caenegem, *English Lawsuits*, 693. If Roger's personal enmity against Hubert Walter can account for his less than severe tone, then Gervase's loyalties to his archbishop may well explain his own vehemence against FitzOsbert, and, indeed, his reluctance to name the person who ordered the destruction of St Mary le Bow. For an overview of this argument, see John Gillingham, 'The Historian as Judge: William of Newburgh and Hubert Walter', *English Historical Review* 119 (2004): 1275–87 (1282).

unrest and, along with Philip of Poitiers, bishop of Durham (1196−1208), a close confidant of Hubert Walter and Richard I's clerk, may have provided the testimony for the *Historia*'s more piquant descriptions of FitzOsbert's behaviour.[78] John Gillingham notes that if Philip had indeed been used an informant, then this may account for the lack of condemnation of Hubert Walter's encroachment into secular affairs, a boundary that William otherwise deemed inviolate.[79]

Despite this, the chaos/division caused by the breaching of natural order forms the basis for William's moralisation of the 1196 rebellion. An attentive reader, one who is able to navigate the non-linear structures of the text, can make a connection between the actions of FitzOsbert and the terrors inflicted by the walking dead. Deviant behaviour – be it in the form of public disobedience, living an irreligious life or, in the case of the revenant, dying 'badly' – was considered a great threat to social and religious order. The worshippers of FitzOsbert's cult and the townsfolk who were infected by the revenants' pestilence occupy a similar role in either story, illustrative of how 'error' has the potential to spread to others. The likening of heresy to disease was a commonly-used motif in twelfth-century moralising literature, and is something that William had used previously to great effect in the *Historia*.[80] Nowhere is this more apparent than in his descriptions of the Cathar – or *Publicani* – heresy in Book II, Chapter 13.

> These [people] spread the poison (*virus*) of their heresy, which had originated from an unknown author in Gascony, in many regions; for such numbers are said to be infected (*infecti*) with this pestilence (*peste*) throughout the extensive provinces of France, Spain, Italy, and Germany ... By the assistance of God, such

[78] Gillingham, 'Historian as Judge', 1285.
[79] Gillingham, 'Historian as Judge', 1286
[80] Moore, 'Heresy and Disease', 2, 10. For the likening of rebellion to madness and rabies, see Daniel Power, '"La rage méchante des traîtres prit feu": le discours sur la révolte sous les rois Plantagenêt (1144–1224)', in *La trahison au moyen âge*, eds. Maïté Billoré and Myriam Soria (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 53–65.

> means were adopted to counteract the disease (*pesti*) that it must tremble at the idea of again entering the island.[81]

Metaphors of infection are also used to describe the spread of the teachings of the 'False Prophet, Mohammad' (*Macometo, pseudo-propheta*):

> That pestiferous sect (*pestifera secta illa*), which took its beginning through the spirit of error, and of that son of perdition, as I have said, after it had infected (*infecisset*) many provinces through the art and arms of its author, after his death, by the operations of Satan (*operatione sathanæ*), grew yet stronger, and occupied the greater part of the world. [82]

Indeed, it is noticeable that William uses a similar phrase, 'operatione, ut creditur, Sathanae', to describe the agency of the Berwick Ghost. The use of the walking dead – that is, pestilence/sin incarnate – to allegorise FitzOsbert's insurgency highlights the extent of his transgression. Not only did the incitement of the peasantry constitute a destabilisation of the social (and thus natural) order, but FitzOsbert himself was a member of the ruling class, violating the boundary that existed between 'those who work and those who fight'. His monstrousness is compounded by his eloquence. To be schooled in law meant that FitzOsbert possessed at least some knowledge of the local tax system.[83] The use of the phrase 'poisoned whispers' (*venenatis susurriis*) to describe the incitement of the *plebs* suggests, perhaps, that the information 'fed' to the citizens of London had been twisted to suit FitzOsbert's own

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[81]'Hi nimirum olim ex Gasconia incerto auctore habentes originem, regionibus plurimis virus suae perfidiae infuderunt. Quippe in latissimis Galliae, Hispaniae, Italiae, Germaniaeque provinciis tam multi hac peste infecti esse dicuntur ... Deo propitio, pesti, quae jam irrepserat, ita est obviatum, ut de cetero hanc insulam ingredi vereretur': Newburgh II. 13.

[82]'Sane pestifera secta illa, quae nimirum per spiritum erroris et filium illum perditionis, ut dictum est, initium sumpsit, cum plurimas arte et armis auctoris sui provincias infecisset, post mortem tamen ejus, operatione sathanæ, fortius invaluit, orbisque partem plurimam occupavit': Newburgh, V. 14.

[83] It can be theorised that FitzOsbert derived his ideas about proportional (and just) taxation of the poor from his experiences on the Third Crusade, specifically the tax levy imposed in Jerusalem in response to the threat posed by Saladin. William of Tyre late twelfth-century chronicle notes that one should give 'one besant for every hundred besants which they own, or its equivalent either on things in their possession or on credits owning to them. From revenues also they shall give two besants for every hundred besants.' See William of Tyre, *A History of the Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, eds. and trans. E.A. Babcock and A.C. Frey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), XXII. 23, at 487.

agenda.[84] In Augustinian terms, it was an abuse of language; the semiotic system distorted to unnatural and devilish ends.[85] Social disorder was thus bound to – and exacerbated by – the contaminating effects of the monstrous tongue.[86] Such contaminations also extended to (mis)use of physical signs; the *Chronica majora*'s version of the uprising states that FitzOsbert's beard was an outward expression of his moral disdain for the clean-shaven Anglo-Norman elites.[87] William of Newburgh's own description of the beard – *prolixa* – contains similar (if not as explicit) connotations of unruliness, unkemptness and a break from social order. Further rhetorical flourishes such as he 'had horns like a lamb and tongue like a dragon' stress the combined verbal and visual distortions of the heretical body and compound FitzOsbert's monstrousness.[88]

The contagiousness of entities that did not obey the constraints of social structure, either through physical appearance, action or speech, is the principle used by William to link the peasant uprising to the tales of the undead. The actions of the revenant mirror the strife caused by the London riots. Assuaging the source of the 'error' through the use of fire ('Berwick Ghost', 'Ghost of Anantis') and submission to the authority of the Church ('Buckingham Ghost', the 'Hounds' Priest') can be read as a metaphorical retelling of the burning of St Mary le Bow, and the strategies put forward by Hubert Walter to contain FitzOsbert's pestilence. Read in this way, it is no coincidence that the concluding remarks of the revenant narratives echo those of Chapter 20 ('the contriver and fomenter of so much evil

[84] Newburgh, V. 20.
[85] Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 96–7.
[86] Tim W. Machan, 'Language and Society in Twelfth-Century England', in *Placing Middle English in Context*, ed. I. Taavitsainen and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 49; Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 42−4.
[87] Matthæi Parisiensis, *Chronica majora*, vol. 2, 418; Pauline Stafford, 'The Meaning of Hair in the Anglo-Norman World: Masculinity, Reform and National Identity', in *Saints, Scholars and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies*, eds. Mathilde van Dijk and Renée Nip (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 159.
[88] 'habensque cornua similia agni loqueretur ut draco': Newburgh, V. 20.

[FitzOsbert] perished at the command of justice') and William reassuring his audience that the natural order had been restored.[89]

Tyrannical kings

The moral truths that underscore the revenant narratives would be fresh in the mind of the active reader as William 'return[ed] to the regular thread of history'.[90] Chapter 25 notes a portent of a double sun that occurred on 16 June 1196, an event which seemed to ignite the 'bloodthirsty rages' of the English and French courts. Indeed, William notes with some dismay how the antagonism between Richard I and Philip II caused much hardship for the inhabitants of these countries, for 'whenever kings rage, innocent people suffer for it.'[91] Chapter 26 continues on the theme of chaos and unrest, describing how famine, 'pestilence' and 'poisoned air' began to spread over French and English lands. So many people died that even the healthy were affected, going about 'with pallid and cadaverous countenances' as if preparing for their own demise. William concludes this chapter with the dry observation that despite the rages of disease, the aristocratic lust for war was still all the greater.[92]

Although the physical descriptions of the walking dead can be seen as portending the 'pallid and cadaverous countenances' of those that succumbed to the 1196 famine, their agency may also provide the reader with a framework through which to interpret the devastation caused by aristocratic feuds. Perhaps again using Philip of Poitou as his primary informant, William comments that the pestilence which blighted the land was exacerbated by the conduct of warring kings. 'Famine', he notes, 'produced by unseasonable rains, had for some years vehemently afflicted the people of France and England; but by the disputes of the

[89] 'tantorum incentor artifexque malorum dictante justitia periit': Newburgh, V. 20
[90] 'historiae ordinem redeamus': Newburgh, V. 24
[91] 'cruentus ... furor ... quicquid enim delirant reges, innoxiae plectuntur plebes': Newburgh, V. 25
[92] 'pestis … aere corrupto … et vultu pallebant, et moribundis': Newburgh, V. 26.

kings among themselves, it now increased more than ever.'[93] According to John of Salisbury's influential political theory, set out in the *Policraticus* (*c.*1159), tyrants disturbed the harmony of the wider body politic. The state-as-organism metaphor of medieval political theory is an extension of the wider belief in the unity of the macro- and microcosm: the universe reflected in the structure of the human body (I Cor. 12:12).[94] Book V of the *Policraticus*, especially, uses the metaphor of a healthy, well-maintained body to demonstrate the philosophy of good secular and ecclesiastical governance.[95] An entity whose head (the ruling elite) pursued a course of action that was detrimental to the wellbeing of the rest of the organism (society) was contrary to the workings of nature and, therefore, monstrous.[96] Being based within the common milieu of cosmological theory, the conception of the body politic as read in the *Policraticus* may not have been unknown to a scholar of William's standing, despite the fact that the work itself was not widely circulated in the decades following its completion.[97] Indeed, William's use of the walking dead is a pointed application of the John of Salisbury model, illustrating the misery that could arise from a diseased and disordered body. Read in this way, the bloodshed caused by the 'raging kings' finds a perfect analogue in the Ghosts of Berwick and Anantis, whose path of destruction was just as indiscriminate.[98] The macrocosm (monstrous kingship) and the microcosm (monstrous corpses) were inextricably linked. If, then, tyrants are like revenants who go 'hither and thither' (*hic illucque*) in their aimless pursuit of blood,[99] spreading pestilence and death in their wake, then on whose authority does it fall to try and put an end to their wanderings? Although

[93] 'et quidam fames intempestivis edita imbribus, per annos jam aliquot Galliae Angliaeque populos vehementer attriverat, sed regibus inter se debacchantibus plus solito invaluit:' Newburgh, V. 26
[94] Tilman Struve, 'The Importance of the Organism in the Political Theory of John of Salisbury', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 303–17.
[95] John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. C.J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 65–127.
[96] Cary Nederman and Catherine Campbell, 'Priests, Kings, and Tyrants: Spiritual and Temporal Power in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*', *Speculum* 66 (1991): 572–590.
[97] Ilya Danes, 'The Earliest Use of John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*: Third Family Bestiaries', *Viator* 44 (2013): 107−118 (107).
[98] Newburgh, V. 25.
[99] Newburgh V. 23.

William remains equivocal on this point, a closer reading of the 'Buckingham Ghost' and 'Hounds' Priest' narratives suggests that salvation, the restoration of the body politic, could come in the form of correct pastoral practice.

William Longchamp

If the need to maintain socio-spiritual order was one of the main moralistic undertones of the *Historia*, then it is unsurprising that William displays such a deep enmity for secular-minded churchmen, specifically bishops who cared more about power and prestige than tending their flocks.[100] In a manner similar to the passages relating to FitzOsbert and the warring kings, the scorn reserved for William Longchamp, the erstwhile bishop of Ely who all but ruled England in Richard I's absence on the Third Crusade, is given further emphasis by the close manuscript connection between the entry on his death (V.29) and the revenant *exempla* (V.22−4). Chancellor from the king's coronation in 1189, Longchamp was consecrated bishop of Ely, became papal legate and, finally, was appointed co-justiciar with Bishop Hugh du Puiset of Durham. Following a fierce political battle with du Puiset, Longchamp was named the chief justiciar of England in the spring of 1190.[101] Longchamp's arrogance was such that he routinely ignored orders from the king, going so far as to arrest Richard's half-brother, Geoffrey, the incoming archbishop of York, following the latter's arrival at Dover in September 1191. This proved to be Longchamp's undoing. Stripped of his justiciarship, he fled to the Continent where, despite remaining in favour with Richard, he never regained the full extent of his powers. Longchamp died at Poitiers in 1197, and was buried in the abbey of Le Pin. William's opinion of the bishop's demise is blunt: 'England rejoiced at his death, for the fear of him had lain like an incubus upon her ... it was evident that he would frequently

[100] Gillingham, 'Historian as Judge', 1276.
[101] For Longchamp's political career, see Turner, *Reign of Richard Lionheart*, 110–30.

plot evil against the land which had vomited him forth as some pestilential humour'.[102] The *Historia* is not the only twelfth-century source that expresses its disdain for Longchamp and the sin of embracing secular as well as ecclesiastical lifestyles. Richard of Devizes, a monk of St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, was particularly keen with his criticisms, describing in his *Chronicon* (*c.*1192) how 'William, bishop of Ely and the king's chancellor [...] made up for the shortness of his stature by his arrogance' (*corporis brevitatem animo recompensans*).[103] Longchamp's chimera-like status is also acknowledged by Richard, who notes that, having been appointed chief justiciar, chancellor and bishop of Ely, he had become 'a man with three titles and three heads' (*trinominis ille et triceps*).[104] Hugh Nonant (d. 1198), bishop of Coventry, was a close friend of Prince John and one of Longchamp's more strident critics. Along with Gerald of Wales, Hugh was responsible for popularising the rumour that Longchamp's grandfather had been a runaway Beauvais serf. The 'vileness'(*nequitiam*) exhibited by the grandfather as he rose through the ranks to become chief forester of Lyons, Normandy, prefigured the equally unnatural career of the grandson.[105] Thus, as a low-born foreigner who had insinuated himself within the government *and* the Church, and through whose actions the realm was falling into ruin, Longchamp was the very definition of monstrousness, error and sin.

William's decision to include the account of Longchamp's death at the end of Book V and his comments that the bishop was 'vomited forth as some pestilent humour' (*quæ illum evomueret tanquam humorem pestiferum*)[106] makes the latter's likeness with the walking dead – that is, a diseased sinful body – explicit. As secular-minded churchmen, Longchamp

[102] 'Laetata est Anglia in morte ejus, quia incubuerat timor est super illiam ... manifestum erat, quod terrae, quae illum evomuerat tanquam humorem pestiferum erebro machinaretur malum': Newburgh, V. 29.
[103] 'Willelmus Eliensis episcopus et regis cancellarius ... corporis brevitatem animo recompensans': Richard of Devizes, *The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First*, trans. J.T. Phillips (London: Nelson, 1963), 9
[104] Devizes, *Chronicle*, 13.
[105] Quote concerning Longchamp's grandfather taken from Gerald of Wales's *de vita Galfridi* and cited in David Balfour, 'The Origins of the Longchamp Family', *Medieval Prospopography* 18 (1997): 80
[106] Newburgh V. 29.

and the Hounds' Priest are supremely disordered beings, neither one thing nor the other and all the more dangerous for it. Longchamp's role as justiciar-bishop almost led the country into civil war, just as the aristocratic pursuits and sexual misconduct of the Hounds' Priest had dire consequences for the inhabitants of Melrose. As intimated in the 'Buckingham Ghost' narrative, recourse to good, uncorrupted churchmen was the only way to make these epidemics cease. St Hugh of Avalon is the model used by William to illustrate how a true – that is, ideal – member of the clergy should behave.[107] With Hugh mindful not to overstep his authority in the secular/political sphere, he is one of the few churchmen in the *Historia* to escape William's wrath.[108] His 'venerability' (*venerabili*) and attention to the spiritual wellbeing of his people are qualities which make him the exact opposite of the chimera Longchamp. Gerald of Wales' *Vita sancti Hugonis* (*c.*1210), written to advertise Hugh's saintliness and the burgeoning cult that had begun to form around his tomb, highlights the bishop's pious nature, his dedication towards caring for the dead and, pointedly, his scorn for ecclesiastics who neglected their offices for the sake of worldly business.[109] Similarly, the *Magna vita sancti Hugonis* of Adam of Eynsham (*c.*1212) records that Hugh did not countenance the appointment of courtiers to high ecclesiastical offices and was unafraid to scold Henry II for interfering in church matters.[110] The intrigues of the court were a spiritual detriment to the churchman, just as secular appointees were unsuitable for the task of serving the will of God. To overstep either boundary was unacceptable. As an exemplar of good

[107] Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 2–3.
[108] See William's criticisms of Hubert, the Archbishop of Canterbury (IV. 35), Hugh Nonant, Bishop of Coventry (IV. 36) and the abbot of Caen (V. 19). Given that Philip of Poitiers was one of William's main sources for contemporary political events (including, perhaps, the death of Longchamp), it is perhaps not surprising that this most worldly of churchman escapes rebuke.
[109] Specifically, Hugh upbraids Hugh Nonant for reciting rather than singing the mass after being summoned by the king. See Chapter 6 of Gerald of Wales, *The Life of Saint Hugh of Avalon: Bishop of Lincoln 1186-1200*, ed. and trans. R.M. Loomis (New York: Garland, 1985), 19−25.
[110] 'Lectis vero episcopus petitoris sibi destinatis, "non", inquit "aulicis, sed potius ecclesiasticis, ecclesiastica oportet beneficia conferri personis: quarum possessores non palatio, aut fisco, sive scaccario, sed ut docet scriptura, altario convenit deservire."' See Adam of Eynsham, *Magna vita sancti Hugonis: The Life of Saint Hugh of Lincoln*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Decina L. Douie and Dom Hugh Farmer (London: Nelson, 1961−62), vol. 1., III. 9, at 115.

conduct, it is not surprising that Hugh plays such a prominent role in assuaging the Buckingham Ghost; the revenant (the proxy chancellor) taking the opposite role, as an epitome of bad conduct.[111] References to the 'crushing' of the Buckingham widow and the incubus-like qualities of Longchamp merely solidify the connection between the two types of monster.[112] The use of a feminine pronoun (*illam*) to personify the 'smothered' English nation allows for Longchamp's agency to be read against the widow's violent, undead husband − underscoring the trauma of being subject to a social monster's thrall.[113]

Conclusion: William of Newburgh and the uses of the undead

Encounters with the walking dead were rare, inexplicable and contrary to expected course of nature − the very definition of a 'wonder'. However, the insertion of the revenant stories within Book V of the *Historia* was not simply a means of diverting the audience's attention away from the main historical narrative. When considered in the context of the chronicle as a whole, they could be read as allegorical commentaries on other deviant and destructive events in recent history. William was not unique among contemporary historians in using *mirabilia* to provide a subtextual reading of current, rather than abstractly moralistic, concerns. The Cistercian monk Ralph of Coggeshall, in his continuation of the *Chronicon Anglicanum* (*c*.1220), appropriates six wonders – all disfigured or 'unnatural' bodies − as part of a wider historical discussion on the threat that Catharism posed to the cohesion of the Church.[114] Non-monastic works, such as Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* (*c*.1188), were more

[111] Although it is true that the contents of *vitae* accord to certain rules of the genre, and that the activities of Hugh of Avalon may be based on authoritative models, it should be reiterated that William of Newburgh was writing a history of England, not advertising the glory and virtue of a saint. Hugh was still alive during the *Histora*'s composition. The accurate representation of the facts was one of the main principles of historical truthfulness. If Stephen de Swafeld was indeed William's main informant, it can be inferred that he was merely recounting his own experience of one of the more colourful petitions Hugh had to deal with over the course of his church career. It is doubtful that William interpolated Hugh's role in the narrative. The reverence shown to the corpse and the reluctance to get involved in secular affairs may not be entirely constructed devices. For the strategies involved in promoting a saint's cult, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biography in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
[112] Newburgh, V. 29.
[113] Newburgh, V. 22.
[114] See Freeman, 'Wonders, Prodigies and Marvels', 127−43.

overt in their use of wonders in socio-political discourse. Gerald specifically links the prevalence of monstrous births in Ireland to the sinfulness and marginality of its people.[115] Such physical and metaphysical disorders were also liable to infect outsiders with whom the native population came into contact: 'foreigners coming to this country almost inevitably are contaminated (*corrumpunt*) by this inborn vice of the country [treachery]; a vice that is most contagious.' (*contagiosissimo*).[116] According to Gerald, the monstrosity of the Irish made the conquest of their lands a perfectly just pursuit. The use of wonders in such a politicised manner could also be the basis for satire: Walter Map subverts the moralistic function of the revenant encounter in his *De nugis curialium* (*c*.1182). Distinction II, Chapter 27 operates as an ostensibly typical wonder story, whereby the audience is invited to associate the sickness (*infirmantur*) caused by the corpse of an irreligious Welshman with the book's earlier condemnations of Welsh morals.[117] And yet, the fact that the advice of the local bishop, Gilbert Foliot, failed to contain the errant corpse destabilises and subverts the historical/moral truth concerning the spiritual authority of the Church.[118] There was more literary substance to Map's revenant stories than has previously been given credit.[119]

Thus, William of Newburgh's assertion that he merely transcribed what was recounted to him may indeed hold true but, like his insular contemporaries, that did not stop him from utilising these stories in a pointed, critical manner. Revenants, as supremely disordered bodies, were co-opted to signify chaos and unrest in the wider body politic and

[115] GW, *TH*, III. 35.
[116] 'adeo, inquam, bonos mores corrumpunt colloquia parva, ut hoc vitio patriae tanquam innato et contagiosissimo etiam alienigenae huc advecti fere inevitabiliter involvantur': GW, *TH*, III. 24.
[117] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. M.R. James; revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 203 (dist. II. 27).
[118] For an investigation into the satirical use of all three of Map's revenant narratives, see Stephen Gordon, 'Monstrous Words, Monstrous Bodies: Irony and the Walking Dead in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*', *English Studies* 96 (2015), 379−402.
[119] Monika Otter and Robert R. Edwards, among other literary historians, have given only a cursory gloss to the *De nugis*' revenants. See Otter, *Inventiones*, 111−27; Robert R. Edwards, 'Notes Toward the Angevin Uncanny: Walter Map's Marvels and the Unwriting of National History', in *Other Nations: the Hybridization of Medieval Insular Mythology and Identity*, eds. W.H. Hoofnagle and W.R. Keller (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011), 87−107.

warn of the eschatological dangers of transgression.[120] By virtue of their textual placement, the 'heresy' of William Longbeard and the resumption of war between England and France are diagnosed as particularly destructive and sinful events. The disparities between bishops who tended their flock (St Hugh of Avalon) and those who promoted ruin (the Hounds' Priest; William Longchamp) are also signified through the prism of the undead corpse. For a provincial, nominally Cisterican audience, FitzOsbert's rebellion and Richard I's continental campaigns were events that contrasted sharply with their own beliefs regarding the 'natural' order of things. The disdain felt for William Longchamp – who in life epitomised the unnatural mix of the secular and spiritual – was the culmination of William of Newburgh's chronicle-wide attack on worldly churchmen. Who better, then, to recast as pestilential, destructive monsters?

As the revenant's manifest form revealed unsaid truths about the body politic, so the specific linguistic motifs used to describe the wonder also helped structure the reader's interpretation of historical events. Moral equivalences between the conduct of the walking corpse and the tumults of the late twelfth century were encouraged through the deliberate use of medico-theological terminologies to describe each type of disordered body. References to 'infection', 'pestilence' and 'poison' permeate the descriptions of the revenant, just as they describe the activities of William Longbeard and William Longchamp (and, indeed, the spread of Catharism and Islam). Utilising common literary *topoi* regarding sin/disease causation, William of Newburgh invites his monastic readership to meditate on the literary function of portents, forcing them to question his prefatory statement that history writing 'does not impose upon me any research into profound matters or mystical exposition.'[121] Correct reading practice – comprehension of the seemingly incomprehensible wonder – reveals the irony of William's claim. It would be wrong, then, to view the tales of the undead

[120] Freeman, *Narratives*, 211.
[121] 'non altis scrutandis, mysticisque rimandis insistere': Newburgh, Prefatory Epistle.

as mere folkloric residues. A closer investigation into form and function of the revenant narratives in the *Historia rerum Anglicarum* can allow for a more nuanced understanding of the themes of the wider historical text.

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