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This thesis primarily investigates nonhumans in the writings of 12th century historians. Where these writings may typically be seen as having little room for nonhuman agency, this thesis investigates how divinity, as an important part of medieval life, creates a space for nonhuman agency that is otherwise overlooked. In chapter one, this thesis discusses the writing of that agency in the form of *natura naturans*, a medieval idea that brings nature and god together in the writing of the *Itinerarium Cambriae*. The result is direct political agency of the nonhuman – powerful enough to threaten a king. In chapter two, this thesis discusses how celestial bodies and their motions shape the writing of Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*. By influencing and shaping how Henry comprehends and writes time, these celestial events act as a heuristic or a 'teaching pattern' which ultimately shape an eschatological form of time in the chronicle.

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Decentering the Human in 12th Century Histories and Chronicles: Divine Nonhumans at the Center of the *Itinerarium Cambriae* and the *Historia Anglorum*

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Nathan Phelps, Author

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INTRODUCTION

In what I believe was his first monograph, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen wrote a passage that impacted me as a scholar. In *On Giants*, Cohen writes about the "ruins of identity" – using the literal ruins of the English landscape to capture their impact on English myth-making and revealing a great deal about how the English experience of England was structured through the ruins of those who came before. Cohen talks about how the early English saw these ruins as "*enta geweorc*," or "the work of Giants" (5).

This passage was helpful to me in beginning to understand the influence of matter, material, and nonhuman forces in the medieval. Cohen writes: "They encountered towering structures of ancient stone that made them feel like small children as they stood beside them" (5). While their creators are absent, the early English do not feel the human-ness of the stones. The stones become something alien – something giant. In a sense, the stones structured an English experience of smallness through their own size and affect.

Although made by humans, a kind of material discourse, some might argue, it is important to recognize that the architecture of these stones do not merely act as a medium for discourse. Long after the humans who built them are gone, the stones still stand, still shape human experiences. And yet, the early English did not recognize these stones as human in source. The structures were alien to them, and the early English "contrasted wood's modernity with the ancient, elemental harshness of stone. Men built with wood. Giants, the vanquished race who had ruled the earth in its larger-than-life, paleolithic days, were architects of stone" (5). How then is this experience the stones cultivated in these people something brought about by their creators – people, not giants, who could work with stone? As a medium of structuring England according to the will of those ancient peoples, the stones appear to have failed. Yet, as

stones, as nonhumans with a weight and agency all their own, they cast, in a new narrative, the shadows of Giants.

This idea, that nonhumans can structure and shape our experiences and influence or participate in what would be "human" discourse is the central point of this thesis. In the medieval context specifically, I investigate how "divine nature," a collapse of divine and nonhuman categories, allows medieval writers to represent nonhumans as participatory, agential, or powerful – rather than inert or merely acting as a medium for discourse. I propose to go about demonstrating this in two main ways.

In chapter 1, I argue that Gerald of Wales's writing is influenced by the idea of *natura naturans*: a divine nature which is active and agential and results in omens, portents, and God's hand in creation. The result of *natura naturans* in the *Itinerarium Cambriae* is the recognition of nonhuman agents – a political acceptance of the power that these divine nonhumans can wield in discourse. This chapter ultimately reflects on the way that the divine and nature as entangled categories shape medieval ways of "reading" or understanding natural phenomena. Nonhumans become divine, powerful agents capable of threatening even kings.

In chapter 2, I argue that the repeated inclusion of celestial bodies and their motion in the Historia Anglorum is evidence of patterns of celestial motion defining, teaching, and shaping Henry of Huntingdon's experiences of both time and the cosmos. Of course, the medieval cosmos already viewed the motions of objects like the sun, moon, and planets as divine – in some ways a part of heaven itself. These celestial patterns mark, perhaps, a different kind of influence from the *natura naturans* of Gerald of Wales. As a pattern which gives structure and narrative to Henry of Huntingdon's eschatological chronicle, the motion of celestial bodies act less as direct political interventions in discourse but more subtly as heuristics, teaching patterns,

which ultimately undergird much of Henry's thought and writing and reveal a different, but equally important, form of entanglement with divine nonhumans in the medieval.

Throughout this thesis, indeed already in this introduction, I am going to talk extensively about "nonhumans." Before you become exhausted with trying to understand what I mean, I will elaborate here. There are a few words almost suitable for the work I intend "nonhuman" to do. Among these are "thing," "nature" and "matter." Each of these is attempting to convey similar yet particular distinctions about the material pressures of the physical world and ecologies we live in. Both "thing" and "matter" I have elected to avoid because they tend to specify "stuff" which is conventionally understood to be inert. I did not want to appear to exclude such animate parts of the world as animals, for instance, from my research. Especially in chapter 1, where animacy hierarchies will come up, it was important to me not to appear to reinforce a distinction between what is "animate" or "inert." Part of the point of this thesis is to emphasize the force and power of what may at first seem "inert" or "inactive" around us. Nature would seem perfect for the job then. Like the human/nonhuman distinction, it appears to work in a binary with our own world, and describes conventionally inert or animate forces equally. Indeed, in chapter 1, where *natura naturans* uses the word explicitly, you will find that I do use nature. At times, it appears interchangeable with "nonhuman." However, I have ultimately elected not to use nature throughout for a couple reason. First is the history of the word. Nature in the medieval is a complex idea, summoning a wide variety of meanings and contexts I don't intend. That is why it is used in chapter 1 where the medieval context for its use is made explicit in the idea of *natura naturans*. Second, nature tends, in our conventional, contemporary understanding of the word, to oppose culture. While any ecocritic will quickly dismantle such a binary, it is still important to me to use a more neutral word which would allow me to talk of stones, like those of the Giants

that Cohen discusses, as “not-human” rather than as some sort of “cultural medium” – subsumed into humanness merely because of the artifice that shaped them. What “nonhuman” thus offers as a word is a quick, easily understandable category which can easily be applied without too much confusion or baggage, while adequately encapsulating the entirety of a world of being incomprehensible to us – simultaneously animate and inert, which is nevertheless incorporated thoroughly into our culture and discourses and which we are, ultimately, entangled with.

Before I let you go on to read my first chapter, I want to apply some of the ideas of this thesis to our present moment. As a scholar, it is a fundamental belief of mine that the medieval past offers us insights through its resonances with the current moment. Today we have a number of issues of which these “nonhumans” I focus on are at the center. The most obvious is the Global Climate Crisis. My concern with nonhuman agency and its role in shaping discourse essentially stems from watching decades of disagreement about the existence of a crisis that was changing the world I lived in before my eyes. As I write this, the United States is considering reopening during a pandemic that will continue to spread and kill people and will only do so at faster rates if we do not respect what a virus can do and take precautions accordingly. Of course, COVID-19 does not only kill – it has in the past two months completely restructured our society in response to its pressures. This very thesis, this introduction, this sentence, this clause – they are all impacted, at some level, by some mark of that nonhuman force. I could not even begin to tell you how the social-distancing and lock-down measures have altered my relationships, behaviors, thinking, and overall wellbeing. It was a profound and sudden shift that changed the minutiae of my working habits. I am a different person, and this is therefore a different thesis, than if the virus had never happened.

In this thesis, I will describe nonhumans who, through divinity, are written and understood by medieval writers to be agential and powerful. Many of these nonhumans look nothing like COVID-19, and their influences are certainly not as concerning to us today. However, what I ultimately hope this research does is bring to the forefront old ways of understanding and seeing the world. I fervently believe that we need a new understanding of, a new relationship to, the nonhuman. We live in a society today that is more connected in some ways than ever before. Why can it be so difficult for many of our societies to comprehend or accept our own entanglement in the ecologies and material pressures of the world? How do we frame the nonhuman, talk about it, relate to it in ways that assume its value, agency and power in our lives? How can we become, as a society, calibrated to the nonhuman? It is my earnest belief that these medieval texts can help us find answers to these questions, among others.

Chapter 1: God's Hard-to-Understand Decisions: The *Itinerarium Cambriae* and Writing Divine Agency in the Nonhuman World

In one of Gerald of Wales's anecdotes in the *Itinerarium Cambriae*, he (an archdeacon with strong connections to Welsh and Norman aristocracy) gives an example of how he and some of his peers in the church thought of agency. King William Rufus of England, looking at Ireland from across the sea, makes a threat: "'I will collect a fleet together… and with it make a bridge, so that I can conquer that country'" (II.1, 169). When the Prince of Leinster hears this, he asks "'did he add if God so wills?'" (ibid). Finding out that William Rufus had not, the Prince replies, "'Since this man puts all his trust in human agencies and none in the power of God Almighty, I have no reason to fear his coming'" (ibid). This didactic moment emphasizes the mediation of divine will between three agents: William Rufus, the Prince of Leinster, and the sea itself as a material agency, a relationship with which William Rufus has to navigate and bridge before getting to Leinster. The Latin is explicit here, where the English translation is ambiguous. Using "*potentia,*" for both "agencies" and "the power of God Almighty," Gerald describes agency as a relational force and medieval concept that both "*humana*" (the human) and "*divina*" (the divine) can modify.[1] Agency in this sense shapes "human perceptions and knowledges," as Gerald demonstrates by having the consideration of divine agency change the Prince of Leinster's reaction to William's declaration (Robertson, 1075).[2] This moment gives the reader a

[1] Gerald's discussion of what in English Thorpe translated as agency (trust in human agency vs. divine power) likewise brings into focus the relationship between agency and power, and God's omnipotence for Gerald. In the Latin, Gerald says "*Quoniam, inquit, homo iste de humana tantum confidit potentia, non divina, ejus adventum non formido*" (Giraldi, 105). Note that *divina* and *humana* both agree with *potentia*, which is used as the noun for both clauses. Thorpe thus translates *potentia* once as "agencies" and then as "power." Thorpe's translation is attempting to preserve the complex meaning of *potentia* for the English reader, as it means both power and authority as well as the capacity and ability for an action. As this instance of interchangeability shows, *potentia* might be useful to medieval scholars as a term for studying agency because of its capacity to talk about power, authority, agency, and capacity as entangled and interconnected ideas.

[2] Kellie Robertson's essay, "Medieval Things: Materiality, Historicism, and the Premodern Object" is an essential precursor to the arguments I pursue here. Robertson argues that "premodern objects were endowed with an autonomy and agency that was largely misrecognized in the wake of Enlightenment empiricism" (1060). Roberston

strong impression that 'human agency' and control over the future is meaningless without the backing of divine agency. By devaluing human agency, that agency is decentered, making the presence of God's agency – the "if God so wills" – the most important factor in what will happen. [3] The moment also, more subtly, elides the nonhuman agency of the sea William Rufus must navigate to Ireland into that same divine agency.

Gerald's own combination of divine and nonhuman agency in the *Itinerarium Cambriae* reveals that the centering of the divine allows for more than just reinforcing the normative views about divine omnipotence, omniscience, and human will and agency. The decentering of the human opens the door for structures of agency which challenge simplistic notions of the human, the divine, and nonhuman agency. A new center, even one which can be used to uphold normative structures of agency, is also a space from which other structures of agency can be mapped. The centering of the divine allows one to define the divine with proximity to the nonhuman in a way that gives nonhuman agents the force of the divine and therefore a privileged political position. This acts to complicate nonhuman agency with divine agency, making the nonhuman world a space in which nonhuman events influence perceptions of political and spiritual relationships, and, as a result of its divine association, a space in which the divine nonhuman can pass judgement on the quality of rulers or the morality of political figures. In the *Itinerarium Cambriae*, Gerald reveals a theology grounded in the divine 'occupying' or animating the world he is recording. Gerald's view of God as present in nature and the nonhuman fundamentally impacts the language in that record, ultimately giving us a text which

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ends her essay by emphasizing that scholars can now ask about, "the kinds of object networks that these things gather to themselves and maintain, and the myriad ways that objects shape human perceptions and knowledges rather than being merely shaped by them" (1075). These points contextualize my ideas about agency as a relational force between humans, nonhumans, and the divine.

[3] From the Latin: "*si Deo placuerit adjecit*?" (Giraldi, 105). Literal translation: "[did] he add 'if it will have pleased God?' Lewis Thorpe's translation is telling: if God wills it, it is pleasing to him; if it is pleasing to him, he wills it. The actions and desires of God are not necessarily distinct things for Gerald.

not only presumes and actively participates in the recognition of nonhuman animacy and agency through the divine, but also demonstrates the divine political force those nonhuman agents can wield societally.

The *Itinerarium Cambriae* is valuable to the exploration of the divine in nature in particular. It is a text not only aware of nonhuman, natural agency, but is itself generatively complex and layered with the interactions of divine, nonhuman, and human agencies. Michael Staunton, in his article about Gerald of Wales role as a writer, "Polymath as Historian," notes the great difficulty of defining the genre of a text like the *Itinerarium.* [4] He writes that, "Towards the end of [Gerald's] life he looked back at his long literary career, and noted that other writers, including Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, had not only expounded the scriptures but had also written histories of their times. As well as writing a gospel, Luke wrote his Acts of the Apostles, 'like an itinerary'" (Staunton, 3). Likewise, Gerald, an archdeacon from Wales, wrote the *Itinerarium* to record the journey he and Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury took while raising Welshmen to the cross for the Third Crusade (Thorpe, 24). On the surface, the structure of the text mimics the itinerary kind of history from the Acts of the Apostles – it follows Gerald and Baldwin, disciples of God, on their holy mission, and records their journey and things that befall them. However, the text also wanders from this comparison by detailing prophecies, strange regional stories, and nonhuman agencies in such quantities as to broaden the focus of the text. The nonhuman agents vary greatly, and include such examples as a dog standing (and winning) trial by combat, a weasel mother defending her children by attempting and rescinding a poisoning of a castle's milk, hounds freeing a Welsh nobleman taken prisoner, a talking stone, pools bursting their banks, vicious fish-wars, self-castrating beavers, pools that turn green, turn

[4] "the Itinerarium Kambriae contains what we would call natural history, ethnography, and theology as much as history" (Staunton, 4).

scarlet as with blood, pools that groan when frozen, incubi fathering soothsayers, gospels that banish demons, histories that summon them, man-eating toads, a river that changes the position of its fords, a greyhound that defends its master's body, monsters born from bestiality, and legions of demons that lay siege to every church to resist the rebellion of the righteous.

These examples nevertheless are blended with social and political commentary, history, theology, as well as the details of the journey through Wales itself. Gerald, for instance, frequently criticizes Henry II: "By the grace of God, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live, the King received many other warnings and reproofs… He was impervious to advice and he took no notice whatsoever" (Gerald I.6 125). The effect is ultimately one which enriches the *Itinerarium* with the complexity that results from compounding the divine in nature and the way that centers nonhuman agents by merit of their divinity. Indeed, socio-political, theological, and historical commentary are generatively impacted by the politics of the nonhuman, down to the very grammar of Gerald's writing.

Divine Agency Entangled in Nature: *Natura Naturans,* Animacy, and Prophecy

The bizarre hodge-podge of anecdotes, prophecies and histories that Gerald brings together are synthesized in part by the framework of thinking that Gerald reveals through a much-repeated phrase that centers the divine's agency in Gerald's world: "God's decisions are sometimes hard to understand, but they are never unjust."[5] Behind it all, God is working a just plan through his creation. That claim is laden with presupposition; for instance, it assumes a world entirely controlled by his God. Events are reframed as things allowed or disallowed by the divine. These decisions of God are the whole of the world in its current state for Gerald. Ethical concerns such

[5] *The Journey Through Wales,* 74, 170, 207; "*occulto Dei judicio, sed numquam injusto*" (Giraldi 3) God's decisions may also be "secret," as "*occulto*" suggests. Either way, Gerald is defending the being behind the curtain.

as Evil become a part of God's plan and will that are mysterious or ineffable, rather than distinct forces with which God is at war with in nature. The condition, "but they are never unjust" emphasizes God's inherent goodness and thus didactically conditions one to accept these decisions as part of that divine judgment. This acceptance works to establish apathy: one ought to accept God's justice, rather than try to change the verdict. In this apathy, acceptance, and consideration of justice, political concerns are essentially tied to material ones – universalized in God and comfortably packaged together as the sum of the universe dancing always to the tune of divine agency. Indeed, in this phrase, there a presupposition of the primacy of divine agency in all things, even over human agency. The world this phrase assumes is one in which human agents are essentially constrained and limited by the singular agency of the divine creator, the understanding of which humans do not comfortably possess.

The world that Gerald assumes in his use of this adage is consistent with some medieval, scholarly conceptualizations of God, and specifically describes a world identifiable as *natura naturans,* which Rebecca Davis discusses in her book, *Piers Plowman and the Books of Nature*.[6] These concepts ultimately distinguish between two conceptions of nature. *Natura naturans* conceptualizes God as nature, or as the term describes it, 'nature naturing.' The active Latin participle describes Nature's active divinity and resulting divine agency. Conversely, *natura naturata* uses the passive to emphasize a nature administered by God, emphasizing the objectification and lack of agency in the material through the separation of God from nature.

[6] While *Piers Plowman*, the text to which Davis applies these terms, is temporally and spatially removed from the Welsh, twelfth century *Itinerarium*, Davis not only notes that these scholarly concepts are discussed by famous thirteenth century scholars like Thomas Aquinas, but actually cites an Anglo-Norman writer, Robert Grosseteste, who was already using and engaging with these ideas as a contemporary of Gerald's. While in the twelfth century it may not be that Gerald's theological views have been concretized into the form they later take in the early to mid-thirteenth century, it is entirely possible, indeed even likely, that the Paris-educated Gerald would have been exposed to the same scholarly discussion that results in the formalization of these concepts into *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

Davis uses essentially the same language to explain these concepts: "Indeed, thirteenth-century scholasticism devised a terminology precisely to firm up this vital distinction while still observing the connection between God and his creation: God, the uncreated creator, is *natura naturans*, the active nature who "natures," while creation is *natura naturata*, the passive nature that is "natured" by God" (8). This demonstrates a conceptual difference around nature centered on the characterization of nature in active and in passive voices of verbs. This difference is a crucial framework for understanding and describing how a medieval author imparts agency to material, because even though the *Itinerarium* is pre-scholastic and thus predates the formalization of these terms, the hierarchies and concepts they convey are clearly alive and influencing the *Itinerarium* in the late 12th century.

Indeed, in the *Itinerarium*, "behind it all, God is working" expresses *natura naturans* by presupposing the material world's profound, divine agency. As Davis suggests, "God makes himself manifest in the material world, not only when he appears incarnate as Christ, but in the act of creation itself" (1). Gerald's journey illustrates the agency that the material world has in the discourses he engages with through the framing of divine agency in the material world, or 'God's creation.' Specifically, Gerald, like many chroniclers, records how the objects and things in his discourses exist with the same mysterious agency as the divine. Entering Gerald's medieval imagination means seeing a material world acting and animated with the life and will of the creator, where "intimacy between God and nature" is a vital part of Gerald's text (Davis, 119). In the *Itinerarium Cambriae*, the material world is full of mysterious action, and an essential extension of God, the creator. It is a world that is *natura naturans*.

At the heart of *natura naturans* is the question of who gets to act, what it means when nature and the nonhuman are the actors. As previously discussed, agency is a relative force

which shapes knowledge and perceptions. Structures of agency which center the human focus on human action, and thus human ability to change what we know and see. Structures which center the divine and the divine nonhuman, on the other hand, focus on the impact of those agential nonhumans on human awareness. Mel Y. Chen, in their book *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, notes how, "matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways" (2). The political distinction of what is moving versus what is put into motion mirrors, grammatically, the construction of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata.* Both distinctions essentially call to the active quality of one, that which is active in form, "nature naturing," and that which is passively "natured." In this distinction, animacy is the aspect of agency which shapes our perceptions of what has the capacity for action and change. Animacy in this sense is demonstrated linguistically and grammatically. Chen notices this specifically in the context of the subject-object hierarchy of their example: "consider the phrase 'the hikers that rocks crush': what does this mean? The difficulty frequently experienced by English speakers in processing this phrase has much to do with the inanimacy of the rock (which plays an agent role in relation to the verb crush) as compared to the animacy of the hikers, who in this scenario play an object role" (ibid). Chen's focus for discussing animacy in this example falls on the agent subject and object relationships defined by a hierarchized connection to the action of the phrase. As subject-object cases are hierarchized relationships to verbs, so are active-passive voices. The active and passive voices applied to *natura* in the modifying participles demonstrate one way a medieval scholar like Gerald constructs and distinguishes the animacies in their world, and thus *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* give scholars animacy hierarchies with which to examine the agential relationships in medieval writing, and in this case, Gerald's writing especially.

Because the conversation around *natura naturans* explicitly discusses the way that the nonhuman relates to other agents (both through relation to God, as well as through the way God relates to agents and agency as the politically centered divine), a focus on the way verbs themselves reveal those relationships in the text becomes key to seeing how the agency and animacy of the nonhuman agents are constructed in the *Itinerarium*. By specifically looking at the passive or active voices of verbs, for instance, we can find the same passive/active distinction that medieval scholars themselves noticed and described by separating the active *natura naturans* from the passive *natura naturata.* As a result of *natura naturans* rendering animate and agential the natural world through entanglement and intimacy with a complex and ambiguous divine hierarchy, prophecies, portents, and omens specifically generate many instances describing animate and forceful material. Aside from animacy, these omens and prophecies can also demonstrate a forceful affect, at times rendering the humans in the story meek observers. From this, it becomes clear that omen and prophecy are ways to access and describe the relationships resulting from the active natura naturans by dovetailing the animate nature and its powerful affects into texts which can then adopt the power and agency of nature as an expression and reminder of God's active presence in the world.

Omens which describe God's active divinity in nature for their readers is where we can start examining passive and active voices of verbs that relate action to nonhuman objects and therefore animate them. Gerald describes an omen of Henry I's death that relies on the animacy of pools:

> On the night when Henry I, King of the English, it happened in the Elfael district, which is separated from Hay by the River Wye, that two large pools suddenly burst their banks, one of them natural and the other artificial. The artificial pool rushed precipitously down

> the valleys, as one would expect, and was soon empty; but, remarkably enough, the natural lake reformed itself, with all its fish and whatever else lived in it, in a certain valley not more than two miles away. (I.1,79)[7]

The English translation describes the action as both something the pools are responsible for as animate actors in their environment. The Latin agrees, and uses the active infinitive "*erupisse*" to describe the bursting of the pools (Giraldi, 7).[8] Gerald does not give much in the way of indication as to how this might have happened, preferring to describe the event as if the pools themselves were actively announcing Henry I's death with their actions – there is no hint, for instance, of the banks having been weakened at some point. Indeed, the way that Gerald finds the bursting, active, agential action of the stagnant (in the Latin: "*stagna*") pools so noteworthy as to connect it ominously to Henry I's death when he renders those same pools as passive after the prophetic event itself, such as when the natural pool reforms a distance away 'by chance,' indicates a connection between the vital agency and the prophetic and remarkable nature of the event.[9] In other words, seeing the event as having God's hand behind it renders the material in that event active and agential.

Directly following the omen for Henry I's death, Gerald discusses the death of Henry II, which was likewise ominously connected to a pool of water. In this example, the prophetic event

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[7] The English translation of this passage says "which is separated from Hay by the River Wye" when talking about the Elfael district in which this happened, but the Latin does not use the passive. The Latin says, "*Contigit autem in Elveniae provincia, quam solum ab Haya flumen Vagense disterminat*" (Giraldi, 7). A translation for my purposes would then take the active sense of "*disterminat*" into account and say, "which the River Wye separates from Hay." While the sense is preserved in former translation for most English speakers, passive and active voice have an impact on how agency is read and written, and it is necessary for the purposes of this analysis to emphasize the way Gerald talks about the rivers and ponds here being active agents and active forces in the world he writes for us.

[8] On top of this, Gerald modifies the action of that *erupisse* twice, first with "*non modica*" and then with the adverb "*subito*." This has the effect of further drawing attention to and emphasizing the active quality of this verb in very clear, direct ways.

[9] Where the English translation says "reformed," which is active, the Latin "*statum*" is passive, eliding the "*est*," and is specifically modified by the adverb "*sortito*" which the translator of the English edition renders "remarkably enough" but which specifically carries a sense of random chance, as if sorted into lots.

again demonstrates the same active verb forms for the natural world while rendering passive the humans who see it. Gerald records, "In Normandy, a few days before the death of Henry II, all the fish, and they were very numerous, in a certain pool some five miles distant from Séez, near the castle of Exmes, fought together [*congrederentur*] so violently in the night, some in the water and some even leaping in the air [*exilientes*], that the noise which they made attracted [*evocarent*] to the spot a vast crowd of local people" (I.2, 80). [10] The display of violent fish is shocking, strange, and fascinating; the presence of intensifiers emphasizes this ("so violently," "some even leaping," "a vast crowd"). Gerald repeatedly invokes the fish with active verbs and participles, including the deponent verb "*congrederentur*," and "they fought" and "*exilientes*," or "leaping out" (Giraldi, 7). Indeed, the mention of local people as a part of the event, looking on as spectators, concentrates agency in the violent bloodshed of the fish-wars. Crucially, Gerald himself in the Latin makes the fish the active agents summoning the people to the pool. Minding the active voice of "*evocarent*," a translation more literal to how Gerald wrote this clause would say "[the fish] summoned to the spectacle a vast crowd of people with their noise" (Giraldi, 7). In other words, this event is one in which the fish have an immense amount of agential force over a vast crowd of people.

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[10] In the Latin: "*Contigit et hac tempestate in Normanniae partibus, paucis ante obitum Henrici Secundi dievus, ut in stagno quondam non procul a Sagio quasi per quinque miliaria distante apud Oximense castrum, pisces omnes (quibus abundabat) tanto conflictu tam in aqua ipsa, quam extra exilientes nocte quadam congrederentur, ut vicinorum hominum multitudinem ipso collisionis strepitu ad spectaculum evocarent*" (Giraldi, 7). "*Evocarent*" is an imperfect plural active subjunctive verb with the many fish as its subject. This correlative subordinate clause indicates that the fighting in the water was so intense (with special emphasis from the inclusion of both "*tanto"* and "*tam"*) that the fish summon (in an active, forceful sense) a multitude of people. Moreover "*extra exilientes"* an active participle meaning "leaping out" with the "out" given double emphasis with the modification by *extra* refers to the fish, further emphasizing their activity. While "*conflictu*" looks like it could be (and in another context would be) a passive past tense participle, it is an ablative noun modified by *tanto*. Furthermore, "*congrederentur*," which on the surface looks like a passive imperfect plural subjunctive verb form, is a deponent, and only looks passive in form. It has active meaning: "to strive/struggle." It is at this point that I want to emphasize the deliberate way Gerald writes these passages. The framing of "*conflictu*" with "*tanto*" and "*tam,*" for instance, is a rhetorical structure that creates repetitive emphasis while also framing an emphatic ablative clause. The prose is structured to make "*pisces omnes*" the clear subject for no fewer than three verbs and one participle in a single thought without sacrificing any clarity.

The literal, evocative nature of that agential force wielded by the fish in the omen of Henry II's death is significant not only because it grammatically demonstrates the way that Gerald assigns agency in his writing, but also because it is so demonstrably and intentionally affective. The actions and reactions of the humans in this story are outside of their own control – the spectacle shatters and disrupts the ordinary affective structures of their lives so that they do not sleep, they do not pass by, but instead they are mesmerized – passive thralls to the evocation wrought through natural agency and affect. Gerald must have been conscious of this affective influence to some extent because as Christine Rose notes, "It was part of a chronicler's duty to provide a record of history that included the supernatural and unexplained phenomena. These marvels on the page, unseen except in the mind's eye – while also adding to the work's affective value – act as a prompt for memory and an aid to salvation" (31). Connecting affect to the readers of the text and the role that Gerald plays as the writer is an important observation. Is it an accident that the affect of an ominous event such as the enthralling spectacle of fish-frenzy is not only included but carefully written in such a way that makes that affect clear and powerful for the reader? That agency is assigned down to the grammar? Gerald was directly invoking this powerful agency of nature as a part of divine agency in his world. These natural affects and agential forces that hold his readers and held the people in his story under the spell of the event were part of how prophecy demonstrates for Gerald the intimacy between God and nature: *natura naturans*.

This intimacy between God and nature creates a curious entanglement, wherein God's creation is an extension of divine being – not separate from or beneath God. The result of viewing the world this way, then, is a reverence for nature and the religious necessity of a sustainable relationship with it. This can be seen most clearly in Gerald's description of Llanthony, a religious site in Wales that Gerald frames as initially part of a sustainable cultural

practice of eremitic solitude that is interrupted by extravagant English modes of relating to the space. When Gerald considers the state of the church in Llanthony, he first describes it as, "most suited to the practice of religion… than any of the other monasteries in the whole Island of Britain" (I.3, 97). He entangles its natural beauty and solitude as qualities of its suitability for spiritual practice by giving as evidence for this claim the church's location on the banks of the Honddu "in a deep recess where that river flows along the vale," as well as by citing its origins as a place of eremitic life: "in solitude and far removed from the bustle of everyday existence" (I.3, 97). [11] Gerald puts quite a bit of emphasis on this description of Llanthony when he describes it as the single place most suited for religion. This description which emphasizes two qualities – nature and solitude – cannot then be taken lightly. The English translation divides the qualities of nature and solitude by making them separate thoughts. The Latin, however, puts them in the same sentence and illustrates how deeply interrelated "being alone in nature" is with "being alone with God" for this eremitic way of looking at nature. Gerald focuses immediately on the way the Welsh monastery used to be grounded in a relationship with nature through its isolation, location, and through the ideals of its founding, and didactically frames these qualities for the reader as admirable and desirable by contrasting this 'pure origin' with the issues to come.

Gerald explicitly blames "English extravagance [*opulentiam*]" for the state of things in Llanthony during his time (I.3, 98).[12] This quality, extravagance, becomes the topic of an

[11] In the Latin "*Vere religioni locus idoneus, et disciplinae canonicae prae cunctis insulae Britannicae coenobiis competentissimus, a duobus eremitis in honorem eremiticae vitae primo fundatus*, *ab omni populari strepitu in solitudine quadam longe remotus, super fluvium Hodeni per vallis ima labentis situs: unde ab Hodeni Lanhodeni dictus*" (Giraldi 27).

[12] In the Latin: "*nisi ob Anglicam luxus opulentiam et lautae mensae gloriam ambitiosa quadam intemperantia, vitio quoque ingratitudinis invalescente, in serviutem quae libera fuerat*" (Giraldi 28). Gerald is connecting "*Anglicam opulentiam*" (English extravagance) with a chain of other vices (*vitia*): "*ambitiosa*," "*intemperantia*," and "*ingratitudinis*" (or ambition, intemperance, and ingratitude). While these other vices do not grammatically agree with "English extravagance," Gerald incorporates them all as part of one thought with the effect of implying that the

extensive tirade against ambition and greed. Gerald then uses greed and ambition as sinful qualities to highlight what he sees as a particularly damaging relationship with nature. Specifically, Gerald describes ambition and greed for wealth as the source of sin itself, and of Gloucester says, "There let wealth grow ever greater, wealth [*opulentia*] the prime cause and creator of vice and of all the care which follow in its train; but here in Llanthony let the golden mean continue to flourish, and moderation, the mother of all virtues[13]" (1.3, 101). Gerald contrasts wealth, or "*opulentia*," twice condemned for its relationship to vice as both the cause and creator, to moderation. Gerald's condemnation of wealth is linked by "*opulentia*" to his condemnation of English extravagance by the use of the same word for both, emphasizing that the quality of the English which Gerald despises and which so corrupts their relationship to nature and God is this "*opulentia*." For Gerald, the eremitic origins of the church, the golden mean and moderation, as well as the abundant natural beauty of Llanthony are all co-constitutive parts of a relationship with a God who is in nature.

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problems in Llanthony as interrelated and co-constitutive. It is also significant that English extravagance is the first of these listed after the "*nisi*" that marks out the where things started to go wrong, as it indicates that Gerald views it as the central issue, from whence the other issues mentioned have leaked. In addition, Gerald is linking these vices to the English explicitly so that he does not need to criticize the English directly in later passages to express his ire at them. He need only condemn extravagance, ambition, ingratitude, or intemperance and this link he has made will remind the reader that these are English vices.

[13] In the Latin: "*ibi vitiorum nutrix atque creatrix cum curis crescat et opulentia, hic virtutis alumna mediocritas aurea suppetat et moderantia*" (Giraldi 30). This one thought is one of many comparisons linked by a colon in the Latin edition of the text. The verbs in these comparisons, as in this comparison, are in the jussive subjunctive, which is a kind of soft imperative used here to add force to the rhetorical effect of these repeated contrasts. These comparisons serve to establish the contrast between the place of Llanthony and the place of Gloucester, and thus also the contrast between the Welsh and the English in each location. The repetition of "*ibi*" and "*hic*" to create the emphasis of separation from England and its vices (it is not *here*, it is over *there*) likewise aids this contrast. In addition, note the use of "*opulentia*" in relation to Gloucester, recall its previous explicit relationship to the English (*Anglicam opulentiam*), and then note how "*opulentia*" here is, as Thorpe translated, "the prime cause and creator of all vice" (Gerald 101). Gerald is simultaneously attempting to extricate Llanthony from vices and from the English way of life, and construing vices and the English as interrelated. This indicates that Gerald sees eremitic service to God, which he clearly favors, as part of Welsh culture and religiosity. *Natura naturans*, in so far as it encourages worship in or of nature (as Gerald has described the eremitic way of life), thus seems in Gerald's account of things particularly in line with Welsh and eremitic ways of interacting with God.

Gerald's emphasis of the golden mean as a virtue stems in part from his support for a sustainable relationship to nature, which he sets in opposition to an ever-expanding consumption of nature through human desire. For Gerald, it is a human responsibility to check ambition and greed, rather than nature's responsibility to supply all our want. Gerald explicitly argues this in his description of the region around Llanthony in terms of its great natural abundance, both in wildlife and in its arable land:

> Those mountain-heights abound in horses and wild game, those woods are richly stocked [*largissima*] with pigs, the shady groves with goats, the pasture-lands with sheep, the meadows with cattle, the farms with ploughs. [*Revera*]All the things and creatures which I have mentioned are there in great abundance, and yet we are so insatiable in our wicked desires that each in its turn seems [*videntur*] insufficient for our needs. (I.3, 102-103) [14]

Nature in this passage is "richly stocked," "in great abundance," and all desirable things "abound." The redundant emphasis articulates beyond all question that Gerald views nature as having supplied all that is necessary, all that is its part. While in the English translation nature appears to be the passive *natura naturata,* due to passive phrasings like "are richly stocked", the Latin uses a far more complex construction. Using "*largissima*," ("most abundant") a superlative adjective and not a verb form at all, Gerald's Latin clauses describing nature have no explicit verb: instead, "*largissima*" is implied to have an elided, active "*sunt*" ("they are"). The elision of "to be" here emphasizes the active sense in which "*largissima*" links to the nature it describes:

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[14] In the Latin: "*Armentis quippe et equiciis montana, porcis silvestria, capris nemorosa, ovibus pascua, pecudibus plana, aratris rura, quanquam revera in se largissima, singula tamen vitio mentis insatiabili videntur angusta*" (Giraldis 31). Gerald lists off all the animals in their places first, using asyndeton to overwhelm the reader with the abundance of these animals and places before even declaring it explicitly. However, Gerald then invokes the passive voice of "videntur" ("they seem"). This instance of the passive *natura naturata* comes into the text exactly when Gerald is describing a specific type of relationship with nature wherein all these abundant things 'seem' insufficient. The passivity of the voice then simultaneously recalls *natura naturata* as much as it casts doubt on and proceeds to criticize it.

they connect so well that you cannot their joiner. Gerald also uses "*revera"* ("actually") in the Latin to modify this connection with a sense of explicit certainty that he immediately contrasts with the "wicked desires" that are the part of the human. Because the following clause, "each seems in its turn insufficient" uses the passive verb "*videntur*," ("they seem") and the "*sunt*" is implicit, the reader might argue that there is no elided "*sunt*" whatsoever, and that "*videntur*" is the verb for both. However, the contrasting certainty of "*revera*" is incompatible with the intentional uncertainty of "*videntur*." Gerald is clearly saying that those things *seem* insufficient because of vice, but in reality they *are* abundant. The inherent righteousness and abundance of nature comes across as plentiful and as provident as God himself. Nature already abounds. The desire for material things is not bad because material things are not themselves evil; the evil Gerald emphasizes is the impetus to take more than what is the absolute, minimum necessary. To take more than what is necessary essentially says that God and nature in their abundance do not fulfill– a projected spiritual dissatisfaction that is the result of a sinful human soul. For Gerald, the material limits and pressures of natural abundance are not as much a sign of the Earth's fallen status so much as they are God's justice against greed. Gerald's virtuous Golden Mean, therefore, is a relationship to the abundance of God. This bond finds in both God and nature enough for one's fulfillment. Put another way, Gerald sees his world as defined by God and nature's co-constitutive abundance. Lack is seen as an artifact of human greed and extravagance.

Gerald invokes the prophet Isaiah's own invective against material ambition. The placement of this invective is not an accident, but a demonstration of the importance prophecy has in framing the relationship between the human, socio-political and the divine-in-nature:

> We occupy each other's territory, we move boundary-fences, we invade each other's plots of land. Our market-places are piled high with goods for sale, and yet our courts are

> kept busy with legal cases, the palaces of our kings re-echo with complaints. This is what we read in Isaiah: 'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.' If the prophet inveighs in this way against those who occupy their lands right up to the boundary, what would he say about the men who trespass far beyond? (I.3, 103) [15]

For Gerald, the passage from Isaiah prescribes values not only for spiritual wellbeing, but also has a valence of seeking to redefine how society should interact with nature and the nonhuman. We know from the description of Llanthony that Gerald clearly values, as Isaiah does, an opportunity to "be placed alone in the midst of the earth." It is not just because that solitude is a sign of a lack of greed, a lack of ambition. Rather, being alone in the midst of the earth is a precious part of spiritual culture and life for Gerald: it is being alone with a God who is *natura naturans*. Gerald specifically draws attention to the way that society's current conception of this relationship, centered around wealth and ambition, results in dissatisfaction by emphasizing the contrast between the massive abundances of the marketplaces ("piled high with goods") and the complaints and unhappiness of the people (" the palaces of our kings re-echo with complaints"). This unhappiness immediately becomes the woe in the passage from Isaiah that Gerald cites directly afterwards: "woe unto them… that lay field to field, till there be no place that they may

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[15] In the Latin: "*Ideoque terrae occupantur, termini transponuntur, fines invaduntur, unde et nundinae mercimoniis, et fora litigiis, et curiae replentur querimoniis. De talibus autem in Isaia legitur: Vae vobis qui conjungitis domum ad domum, et agrum agro copulatis usque ad terminum loci, Nunquid habitabitis soli vos in medio terrae? Si ergo sic invehitur propheta in eos qui usque ad terminum, quid in illos dicetur, qui longe ultra terminus?*" Notice that when Gerald is talking about the relationship with the world in which one is insatiable, the constant presence of passive verbs: "*occupantur*," "*transponuntur*," "*invaduntur*," and so on all reframe the nonhuman into passive subjects of their verbs. In the Latin, the lands are occupied, borders are moved, borders are invaded; there is no "we occupy, we move boundaries, we invade." *Natura naturata* shows up as an animacy hierarchy exactly because Gerald is putting on display exactly the kind of relationship with the nonhuman in which it is construed passively and the divine is made separate from it, in order to criticize that mode of thinking about the world. As Thorpe's translation indicates through the presence of the active we in the English versions of these sentences, as does the use of "inveighs" through "*invehitur*" there is a sense of culpability and accusation in this passage as Gerald blames this mode of thinking about the world for the vices, sins, and insatiability he observes.

be placed alone." Prophecy and Isaiah are thus used to invite a reflection and reconsideration of the relationship of the people to the land, and particularly critiques relationships that refuse to be satisfied with the abundance under their nose.

Ultimately, this entanglement of God with nature resulting from *natura naturans* has implications for Gerald's writing that resonate strongly with posthumanism thought today. For Gerald, moments of *natura naturans* reveal that, because of God's entanglement with nature, God is the ontology Gerald and the *Itinerarium Cambriae* inhabit. Karen Barad's posthuman terminology is suitable for this medieval practice because she pushes for a shift from interaction to intra-action (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 139). This shift makes similar assumptions about the world that Gerald does. By assuming entanglement – that is, that we are ontologically inter-dependent on one another and on our environment – Barad and other posthumanists demonstrate how unsustainable, wasteful, or 'extravagant' practices which harm the environment are thus ultimately destructive to the whole ecology, including humans. *Natura naturans*, likewise, draws attention to an entanglement which results in similar arguments. When a relationship with nature is at some level a relationship with the divine agency, as it is for Gerald, then a similar set of practices of sustainability, care, and moderation emerge. It makes sense – by assigning nature an active, divine agency, the *Itinerarium Cambriae* also views it as important – as a crucial aspect of being.

THE INEFFABILITY OF NATURE: DEMONS, DIVINITY, AND DISCOURSE

At one point in the *Itinerarium Cambriae*, Gerald records a fairy tale which was told to him as a firsthand account by a priest named Elidyr.[16] In this story, Elidyr remembers being a little boy,

[16] I, 133-136

hiding under a hollow bank, and discovering tiny people. These fairy, childlike creatures show him their land of pleasure and plenty. The tiny people prize honesty and despise the deceitful, inconstant world of humans. After spending some time with these creatures, enough to learn their language, the boy must go home, but tries to steal a ball as a memento. He is chased, and he loses the ball and the trust of his tiny friends. This magical story may not seem to deal much with the agency of the nonhuman – after all, whatever the tiny people were, they were still recognized as people. Indeed, Gerald spends some time comparing what Elidyr remembered from their language to Greek and Welsh. However, Gerald uses this story as a point of reflection on how he responds to supernatural tales: "If, careful reader, you should ask of me if I think that this story of the little folk is really true, I can only answer with Augustine that, 'Miracles sent by Heaven are there to be wondered at, not argued about or discussed." This response does something crucial to understanding the agency that nature has in this entanglement – it removes that agency from being a subject of discourse. Instances where the power of the natural world would be questioned or limited by discourses of credibility are, but this claim, ended. The divinity of nature hierarchically places it above human discourse. Gerald proceeds to take a superposition: he refuses to acknowledge one way or another if it is true. This acknowledgement of how the act of argumentation one way or another would either limit God's power in the world or have himself making claims outside what is rational to make ultimately acts to acknowledge the ineffability that the divinity in nature imparts the world itself. The world becomes larger, more capable of possibility than even human discourse can feasibly comprehend. God's plans and powers in the world are ultimately "hard to understand."

Undergirding the acknowledgement of the ineffability of the world is this assertion quoted from Saint Augustine: "You will find many things quite incredible and beyond the

bounds of possibility which are true for all that. Nature never exceeds the limits set by God who created it." This assertion emphasizes God's power over all things – even those things which do not make sense or appear to be contrary to his will. After all, this point reminds the reader of the absolute power and authority of the divine – and by extension, that this same absolute power is *natura naturans*. The statement that nature doesn't exceed God cleverly reminds the reader how much power nature has in God's plan – so much of what is possible, indeed, all of it, is shaped by God's hand in it. Essentially, nature is defined by and thus further entangled with its creator's power and plan.

Knowing nature's essential part in God's plan is essential to reading situations which appear to talk about natural agency as arising from sources which are hierarchically distinct from the divine: supernatural beings like those little folk in their magical realm, or more to the point, demons and monsters. The subjugation of all things to God's "hard to understand" plan is an essential part of the divine hierarchy entangled with nature. Gerald asks us to remember the superposition that our perception puts us in when observing something ineffable – we don't get to decide or interpret nature's agency.

In one clear example of an instance where human discourse attempts to shape the meaning of something natural (to construct it as either evil or good), a group of monks and a knight, already in a land dispute, argue about whether a storm was sent by God or by demons. Gerald describes how, "there was an interminable dispute between a group of Cistercian monks in France and a certain knight, concerning the boundaries which divided their fields… One night a violent storm completely destroyed the crops in the fields belonging to the monks, while those of the knight remained untouched[17]" (I.12, 153). The storm's action here does not merely act to

[17] In the Latin: "*inter monachos Cisterciensis ordinis et militem quendam super metis argrorum et terrarum suarum terminis contentio saepe fuisset, et acciderit aliquando vi tempestatis ingruentis culturam monachorum damno*

damage the monk's harvest; the storm enters the argument itself, providing evidence for one side or the other to use in the 'interminable argument.' The very act of entering the interminable argument makes the storm's 'intentions' as ambiguous in Gerald's retelling as its agential source. While it might look like the storm becomes a political question that must be solved (as it seems to be for the knight and for the monks), Gerald instead emphasizes a lack of end to the argument. He never takes a side: the interminable quality of the dispute remains. Gerald notes that the knight, "had some unkind things to say about the monks, for, according to him, God in His wisdom had made it clear that the fields in question really belonged to him" (I.12, 154). [18] Recalling Augustine's words here, however, would emphasize to the reader that the knight's interpretation of this event was problematic – the knight was deciding what God's will was by interpreting it. Meanwhile monks do not let this argument of the knight's go unanswered, and reply, "that the opposite was true. When the devils came riding they were naturally enough friendly towards the knight, but they did all they could to show their hostility towards the monks" (Ibid). Like the knight, the monks are assuming that they can presume to understand where God's power is or is not – limiting it by assuming it was not behind the storm. Because of this, Gerald moves on from this story immediately, and by leaving this story on this note, does not interject his own voice into the dispute or frame it toward one party or the other. The result is that the argument is left with the discourse in a hanging superposition with emphasis placed on

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eorundem non modico, nocte quadam funditus destructam et demolitam fuisse, cultura militis ei contermina et quasi continua indemni penitus" (Giraldi 89). "*tempestatis ingruentis*" has the storm paired with the active participle 'attacking;' maintaining the active animacy and agency of the nonhuman actor. While not the subject of the sentence, it is interesting that the genitive, actively attacking storm is possessing the ablative of means "*vi*" or force. That is, the action of the sentence is being made contingent on the force possessed by the animate, agential storm.

[18] In the Latin: "*illaesa manente, miles ea occasione in monachos insolenter invectus, monachorum injuriam in agri illius possessione divinitus declaratam publice proclamavit*" (ibid). "*declaratam*" is a passive participle, where "*proclamavit*" is active. However, neither the storm nor the divine is actually a subject or really an object here – "*divinitus*" is an adverb modifying the action to make it divine. This certainly changes how the reader views the knight's story – if this had been written more assertively, with a more direct, active presence from God, it would be easier to see the knight's suggestion as being taken seriously by Gerald. As it stands, the passive language in the knight's words casts doubt over them.

the ambiguity of the storm's source and intent. Gerald does not 'let the reader decide' so much as he refuses to consider the folly of making similar assumptions as the knight and the monks.

To contextualize this choice to leave natural agency in a superposition, it is important to point out how, for instance, female mystics could be subjected to a discernment process where their own agency was in question. Essentially, they were put in a position where religious discourses worked to decide if they were, in fact, mystics or instead possessed by demons. Where Gerald refuses to pass judgement, actual medieval processes of the "discernment of spirits" were applied to women.[19] The implication is that these men believed they had the power to decide what it was these women intended or where their agency was sourced, when, for instance, they did not necessarily believe they could do the same for nature itself. Of course, this practice was extremely problematic and prone to being confounded by the complexity of such untenable discourse. Still, the contrast is astounding. What was an acceptable presumption to make about a women was recognized as making claims outside the bounds of credibility or transgressing God's authority when it came to nature – something which unfortunately may resonate with those environmentalisms today which are frequently white and patriarchal. This special kind of hypocrisy, however, ultimately emphasizes the way that *natura naturans* renders the natural world something which cannot be determined by human discourse. The divinity and ineffability of God's plan and hand in the natural world was how Gerald recognized that nature could exceed human abilities to know it.

[19] Nancy Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe" (272).

NATURE'S CRITIQUE: POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF NONHUMAN DIVINITY

The unique position of power that nature has when it is *natura naturans* – unable to be denied, manipulated, or entirely known by human discourses, ultimately powerful and agential even over human agents – means that agential nonhumans are ultimately recognized as shaping human political structures. That is, the most crucial takeaway from instances of *natura naturans* is how these agencies change how we see our own political hierarchies – and each other. For instance, take Brecknock Mere's ability to speak truth to power. [20] At a time when the lake itself was part of the territory in southern Wales ruled by Henry I and his fellow Normans, the lake (and God) unmistakably proclaims a Welsh prince the rightful heir instead, demonstrating how the divinity of nature can actively provide a critique of human structures of authority, and cause an invading king to acknowledge the injustice of his own rule.

This story is told as an anecdote about Gerald's own great-uncle, Gruffydd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr who received divine portent that he was the rightful heir to the land of Wales. In the story, Gruffydd is travelling home from the court of the King while accompanied by some fellow noblemen. [21] They stop at Brecknock Mere, where they see a large group of waterfowl. One nobleman, Earl Milo FitzWalter, was teasing Gruffydd about his claims to noble blood, and as a joke said that "There is an old saying in Wales… if the rightful ruler of the land comes to this lake and orders the birds there to sing, they all burst into song[22]," (I.2, 94). Gruffydd allows each of his fellow noblemen to try to get the birds to sing, and then, after they all fail, takes his turn: "Then he raised his eyes and hands to heaven and prayed devoutly to God…'Almighty and

[20] Brecknock Mere is noted by Gerald to also be called Clamosus. The editor of my edition of the text also notes its name as Llangors Lake, a lake identifiable today, and still the site of many of these same stories and folklore (but now with more jet skis).
[21] *The Journey Through Wales*, I.2, 93-95
[22] In the Latin: "*Antiquum, inquit, verbum et ab antique in Wallia retentum est, quod si naturalis Walliae princeps ad hunc lacum veniens avibus ejusdem praeceperit ut canant, statim omnes canent*" (Giraldi 19). Active voice describing the birds singing all at once.

omnipotent God… If You have ordained that I should descend in direct line from the five princes of Wales, make these birds declare it in Your name.' Immediately all the birds, each according to his kind, beat the water with their wings and began to sing with one accord and to proclaim him master[23]" (I.2, 95). By directly addressing God in the presence of the birds, Gruffydd essentially identifies the birds as part of the divine, clearly demonstrating and recognizing divine entanglement with nature. The birds do not act as separate beings from God, but rather their agency in making the choice to sing at this moment is seen as directly resulting from God's 'miraculous power' and 'omnipotence.' The birds are an extension of God's hand in nature – and thus act with the authority of God. Moreover, Gruffydd's prayer constitutes another sort of decentering of the human, where he must supplicate God through birds in order to be recognized as having his own heritage.

The shift in recognition as a result of what birds proclaimed is evidence of the political influence *natura naturans* weilds. The authority of the birds changes how Gruffydd's fellow noblemen view him: "everyone present was dumbfounded and astonished… They were greatly impressed by what had happened and gave the King a detailed account of it" (ibid). Gerald emphasizes the astonishment of the Norman nobles in order to underscore how little respect his Welsh family had been afforded at that time. Indeed, the structure of the anecdote itself focuses on this aspect. The Normans petition the birds, at first, as a joke. Nature was not supposed to talk

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[23] In the Latin: "*nunc oculis ac manibus in coelum intentus, devotas ad Dominum fudit orations; tandem itaque se ab orationibus erigens et crucis signaculo frontem ac faciem signans, palam ac publice proclamavit: Deus omnipotens et omnia sciens Domine Jesu Christe, tuam hic hodie declara virtutem. Quoniam si ex naturalibus Wallia principibus me linealiter descendere fecisti, avibus istis ut hoc denuncient, in nominee tuo praecipio. Et continuo aviculae cunctae, quaelibet in suo genere alis expansis aquam verberando, canere una et proclamare coeperunt*" (Giraldi 20). The verbs here are nearly all active. It is a passage full of explicit, divine agency. Each actor is clarifying their alignment with the divine in their proclamations, and the birds themselves are written with that same divine active voice to show that God is indeed acting through them. "*Intendus,"* is a passive participle, but it describes Gruffydd raising his hands and his eyes to God – in other words, decentering his human self in favor of the divine connection in the prayer and worship to follow.

back, it was not supposed to recognize a belonging that they themselves refused to see. The proclamation of these birds acts on that lack of acknowledgement – suddenly what had been conveniently ignored about Gruffydd's rights and heritage in Wales is made visible.

Thus, when the Normans tell their king, Henry I responds without surprise, in a manner that reveals a real unwillingness to defy God-given recognition of Gruffydd's relationship with southern Wales: "It is we who hold the power, and so we are free to commit acts of violence and injustice against these people, and yet we know full well that it is they who are the rightful heirs to the land" (I.2, 95).[24] [25] This bizarre denial of his own right to rule except through his own power further emphasizes the influence these divine birds have on human perception and knowledge. The King must recognize God's own declaration of Gruffydd's right to rule Wales. This centrality means that the birds and land itself can provide a narrative of rightful rulership outside and contrary to the narratives Henry I might invoke with his power. By pointing to his ability to commit violence and injustice to the Welsh people, Henry I frames his relationship to power and over the land as one which is limited because it can only effect change with the human. That is, Henry I cannot convince the land itself he is right; he cannot change the relationship that the Welsh have to the land; instead, that relationship can persist beyond Welsh sovereignty or suzerainty on the land, as all Henry can do is hurt and kill the Welsh and physically drive them from the land. The land, through its connection to a divine agency that is always just, remains a space for the Welsh, or at least Gruffydd, to imagine a different political future than one in which Henry I is ruler over their lands.

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[24] "We" here refers to the Normans who have seized power in Wales. The King is Henry I. Gruffydd's sister, Nest, married a Norman, Gerald of Windsor, Gerald's maternal grandfather.

[25] In the Latin: "*quia licet gentibus illis per vires nostras magnas injuriam et violentiam irrogemus, nihilominus tamen in terris eisdem jus haereditarium habere noscuntur."* Notice how "*irrogemus*" is active and "*noscuntur*" is passive. As Gerald has written this, Henry I, even as he recognizes Welsh connections to their own land, hierarchizes English agency over Welsh.

This same lake on which Gruffydd spoke to the birds is the subject of a great deal of folklore, and in Gerald's time reminds people of a particular kind of disaster: the devastation wrought by Hywel ap Maredudd. In a more subtle, but no less effective form of critique, Gerald talks about Brecknock Mere's portent – the waters turning green – in terms of how it acts as a comment on current political events. It is even possible that these waters – which absolutely do inspire political reflection – are positioned in the text as they are because Gerald wants the 'voice' of this lake, summoning in onlookers the memory of previous political disasters, to be juxtaposed with his own critique of Henry II, thereby insinuating a further condemnation of the Norman king.

Gerald's depiction of the lake itself is particularly wondrous and agential but also politically so. He notes how "it sometimes turns bright green, and in our days it has been known to become scarlet, not all over, but as if blood were flowing along certain currents and eddies… those who live there sometimes observe it to be completely covered with buildings or rich pasture-lands, or adorned with gardens and orchards… [in winter] it emits a horrible groaning sound" (I.2, 95). [26] The lake is associated with miraculous, strange, and ominous events and

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[26] In the Latin: "*Plurimus quoque (ut accolae testantur) lacus iste miraculis pollet. Quemadmodum enim viridis aliquoties (sicut praescripsimus) coloris, sic sanguineus aliquando nostris diebus repertus est, non universaliter tamen sed quasi per venas quasdam et rivulos sanguinem manare compertus est. Ad haec etiam totus aedificiis consertus, culturis egregiis, hortis ornatus et pomeriis ab accolis quandoque conspicitur. Sub bruma quoque glacie constrictus et aquarum superficie in lubricam testam frigore conjecta, sonum horribilem tanquam multorum animantium in unum collectorum mugitum emittit*" (Giraldi 20). "*Pollet*," the verb for which "*lacus*" or "lake" is the subject, is both active and used as a stronger form of "habet," ("has") meaning here "to be rich in" and as a verb entangles ideas of power, importance, and wealth as it also can mean "to be potent," or "to have importance" depending on context. Moreover, "*emittit*" is likewise active, as is "*animantium*," a genitive particple that agrees with both "*multorum*" and "*collectorum*." However, there are a slew of passives here as well – for instance, "*collectorum*" is a passive particple and in its pairing with "*animantium*" demonstrates an animacy hierarchy at work. The simile Gerald uses here translates literally to "the lake emits a horrible sound like the lowing of so many animating [active voice] [cattle- implied noun] collected [passive voice] into one." The participle for collecting the cattle is passive, indicating their relative lack of agency in that moment, where the participle for the active quality of the cattle's behavior translates into the clearest English as "animated" or "excited" as emphasis for their agency in that aspect. Moreover, the verbs which are passive are all verbs of being seen, collected, or restricted, situations in which any subject would generally have less agency: "*compertus est*" or "was ascertained," "*repertus est*," or "was found," "*conspicitur*," or "was noticed," and finally "*constrictus*" or "bound." It is significant that these situations where the lake generally wouldn't have agency are placed directly between two situations where the lake's power

visions. In a general sense, the propensity for water to change color, especially scarlet as blood, works within divine and prophetic frameworks that Gerald would be well aware of, as Whittock notes: "springs flowing with blood coloured water would have reminded [Biblically-aware medieval writers] of the first plague of Egypt, when the river Nile turned to blood (Exodus, chapter 7, verses 14-24). Pools bubbling with 'blood' would suggest God's judgement on human sins" (26). The lake radiates an entanglement with a divine political condemnation. Consider the politics of the waters turning to blood before Pharaoh. It is a moment in which God, through Moses and the waters themselves, demonstrates power to Pharaoh and acts as a critique and a warning against Pharaoh's enslavement of God's people.

It is thus no surprise when Gerald's sources connect the omen of the lake's changing color to the devastation wrought by Hywel ap Maredudd years prior: "the extensive lake from which the River Llunfi flows, pouring its waters into the River Wye… was found to be bright green. Certain elderly folk who lived in the area were asked what this signified. They replied that the water had become discolored in the same way a short while before the devastation by Hywel ap Maredudd" (I.2, 81). [27] The elderly folk, by remembering the previous omen of the lake

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and animacy are emphasized with "*pollet*" and "*emittit*." Especially in the case of "*pollet*," which clearly articulates a connection to prophecy, omen, and wonder through "*miraculis*:" "rich in miracles." In other words, moments of connection to prophecy, omen, and wonder are moments when the nonhuman is most demonstrably divine, animate, and agential.

[27] In the Latin: "*Ut lacus ille magnus qui fluvium Leveni ex se transmittit, simul cum ipso fluvio in vagae flumen contra Glesbyriam ab ipso descendente, viridissimi coloris inveniretur. Consulti autem super hoc terrae illius seniors quidnam portendere potuisset, responderunt parum ante magnam illam desolationem per Hoelum filium Meredythi factam, similis coloris aquam inventam fuisse*" (Giraldi 10) Again, verbs where the lake itself is acting are active ("*transmittit*," "*descendente*") but verbs where people find the lake are passive: "*inveniretur*," "*inventam fuisse*." However, in situations where the lake is being found with its color changed, it is noteworthy that the color is superlative "*viridissimi*" or "greenest," which ties back to the extremes noted in the passage with the omen of Henry II's death, as well as the way that superlative quality is tied to "*magnam illam desolationem*" "that great devastation" as extreme in its own right, as well as itself passive through "*factam.*" The focus of this passage is on the act of creating portent itself, meaning that the active, animate components are the elderly who forge the link between these two, equally passive parts of the story. Note how "*portendere potuisset*" or "what it could have been fortelling" refers back to the lake using the relative pronoun and is active (as it is directly portentous and prophetic, and thus discussed in terms of divinity and active agency) as is "*responderunt*" or the verb through which the elderly actively tie the color of the lake to the devastation. In the process of synthesizing prophecy, the lake is as active as

changing color and putting that event in conversation with the current moment, also put into conversation the political troubles of that omen with contemporary events. The political event and material one entangle in their memory, allowing the current discoloration of the lake to act as a space through which contemporary events are examined for culpability: is this the disaster which the pool warns us of? It is through that entanglement that the lake *invites* cultural reflection on what is happening concurrently that would cause the same change.

It is that invitation that opens the door for critique, and which Gerald may take advantage of. Directly after this note about the lake's connection to devastation, Gerald pivots into a different anecdote that is apparently nevertheless *somehow* connected. Using the Latin phrase "*Contigit quoque eadem*," or approximately "It also came to pass at the same time…" (translated by Thorpe as "About the same time…") to transition to the new anecdote, Gerald appears to indicate that this next story is related.[28] Gerald's Latin is usually careful and intentionally written, and there isn't much use for "*eadem*" in this instance other than as a way to relate these anecdotes together. The following anecdote, about a priest who receives a dream-vision warning against failing to pay the church its dues, leads directly into Gerald's critique of Henry II as a monarch wasting resources stolen from the church on mercenary soldiers.[29] Not only is Gerald the Archdeacon to whom the priest goes for the interpretation of his dream, but Gerald's use of this anecdote (wherein the dream never mentions the Norman king) to portray Henry II as a wasteful monarch and contemptuous of the church reveals a degree of intentionality in how this is interpreted and read. It is clear that Gerald is already bringing something of his disdain for the

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the people telling the story, while simultaneously being in their recollection as passive as the events which they relate to the change in color.

[28] Giraldi 10; *The Journey Through Wales*, I.2 81-82.

[29] "We have undoubtedly seen in our own lifetime and proved it to be true that the great leaders ho seize the possessions of the Church squander all the treasure…. And hand over to mercenary soldiers what they should have left in the hands of their priests. This is particularly true of Henry II, King of the English… who has indulged in this malpractice more than most people…" (I.2 82)

Norman king to the writing of these anecdotes. By placing this blunt critique of Henry II directly after the portent in Brecknock Mere, Gerald is recognizing and using the lake's capacity to invite critique as a way to further his own criticism of Henry II by associating the Norman king with the same level of political disruption as Hywel ap Maredudd. The lake in this open-ended invitation to associate with disaster, has a persuasive power: a kind of portentous rhetoric.

While an invitation to critique certainly can shape and change how people think about the world, and works as an example of how *natura naturans* can be agential and powerful, it is ultimately a bit dissatisfying. As a kind of rhetorical tool, *natura naturans* appears to be somewhat more vulnerable to manipulation by discourse, even if it shapes discourse in the process. However, in this final example about the Llech Lafar stone, *natura naturans* demonstrates a capacity to actively challenge conventional political authority in more direct ways. Indeed, the stone is itself a kind of respected authority in its own community – one which can be petitioned to challenge the authority of a king.

Hints of the stone's politicization and agency are given from its name, which in Welsh means "the talking stone." Gerald tells us "There is an age-old legend about this stone that once, when a corpse was being carried across it, it burst into speech and in the effort split down the middle, the crack still being visible today. Because of this heathen superstition, attributed to the stone in bygone days, they have given up carrying corpses across it[30]" (II.1, 168). The stone itself speaking as an act that required clearly marked, still-visible physical effort (it literally breaks and

[30] In the Latin: "*Erat enim de lapide hoc ab antique vulgate relation quod cum hominis cadaver super illum aliquando deferretur, eadem hora in sermonem prorumpens ipso conatu crepuit medius, fissuram per medium adhuc praetendens; unde et de barbarica superstition illi antiquitus exhibita usque in hodiernum quoque per ipsum mortuorum corpora non efferuntur*" (Giraldi 104). The passive voice for the corpses is cut and dry use of an animacy hierarchy: both "*efferuntur*" and "*deferretur*" hierarchize the corpses as inanimate, non agential, objects. However, the stone is "prorumpens" (my favorite word in Latin, an active participle which means "bursting forth;" It is almost an onomatopoeia). Gerald uses a double entendre: "crepuit," an active verb, can mean both that the stone cracked, and that it spoke noisily. Gerald is entangling the stone's agency both in the animacy hierarchy of the verb's active voice and its meaning. Indeed, it seems a verb made for Llech Lafar.

cries out in strain) is itself evidence of material agency – its protests, in a way, its use as a bridge, which then gets interpreted as a protest against being used as a bridge for corpses. Even though Gerald dismisses the stories around the stone as heathen superstition, and thus distances the stone from the divine, the stone itself is not necessarily viewed that way by the Welsh who live in the area. In fact, considering the way that the stone is 'listened to,' with the locals refusing to carry corpses across it to the graveyard, the stone comes across early on as, if not an agent outright, a respected presence near the church. Indeed, its proximity to St. David's as a part of the daily life and habits of the church makes the respect given to it by the locals contrast with Gerald's dismissal of the stone's status and respectability.

The Llech Lafar demonstrates how the cultural significance placed on an object, especially through prophecy, in *natura naturans,* becomes a path through which an object can itself become an agential force in human politics. Part of Gerald's history of the stone describes an event wherein a prophecy of Merlin connected to the rock is wielded as a political commentary on Henry II: "that a king of England, who had just conquered Ireland, would be wounded in that country by a man with a red hand, and then, on his return to St David's would die as he walked over Llech Lafar" (II.1, 167). The political nature of this prophecy is clearly the focus of this story: a woman does not get what she wants from the king and as a result outright hopes for the King's death at the hands of the prophecy: "A Welsh woman threw herself at the King's feet and made a complaint about the Bishop of St David's. This was explained to the King by an interpreter. Nothing could be done there and then about her petition so she gestured violently with her hands and, with everyone listening, had the impudence to shout in a loud

voice: 'revenge us today Llech Lafar! Revenge the whole Welsh people on this man![31]'" (II.1, 167). As a result of its attendant prophecy, the stone is now a political actor of a sort. As the woman petitioned the King, she petitions the stone for revenge. Moreover, Henry II himself takes action as a result of this challenge: "It so happened that the King knew all about the prophecy. When he reached the stone he stopped and eyed it closely. Then, without further hesitation he walked boldly over it. As soon as he was across he turned round and glared at the stone and with no small indignation made this trenchant remark about the soothsayer: 'Merlin is a liar, Who will trust him now?[32]'" (II.1, 168). He treats it like a challenge, for one – he faces it head on and directly dares the stone itself to kill him. Walking across it boldly, he turns around and glares – not at the woman, but *at the stone*. Then he clearly dismisses the prophecy and verbally asserts his view that it is, as Gerald described it, fiction. Yet the fiction-status of Merlin's prophecy surrounding the stone is not so easily dismissed, and it seems there is a real reluctance to diminish the significance surrounding the stone, because a wit responds with a final quip which casts a final doubt on the interpretation of this event: "A wit, who was there among the crowd, heard the King's remark, and pretended to take umbrage at the insult offered to the prophet. 'You are not the king who is to conquer Ireland,' he said. 'Merlin was not talking about you at all'" (II.1, 168). Essentially, the prophecies formed around the stone have so connected the stone to the divine agency prophecies and omens frequently reinforce, *natura naturans,* that the stone is now seen as an agent and an actor by the people and the king himself. The socially constructed nature of authority finds itself beholden to its own narratives and prophecies that

[31] "*Vindica nos hodie Lechlavar, vindica genus et gentem de homine hoc.*" Note the imperative "*vindica*" and direct address of "*Lechlavar.*" Using the vocative case for the Llech Lafar is interesting – how often is the vocative used to address something that isn't a person or personified?

[32] Gerald notes very clearly that Henry II is also directly addressing the stone: "*verso itaque vultu ad lapidem respiciens*," or "looking back with his face turned to the stone." Thorpe uses the verb "glares" but "*respiciens*" also carries a valence of "respect" that I want to emphasize. Henry II is directly addressing the stone as a threat to his authority and life and is therefore treating it with a degree of respect.

have the power to comment on whether this or that king are “the right one.” That this prophecy does so in a way contingent on material agency, contingent on whether or not walking across the stone kills the king, contingent on, essentially, some mysterious action related to the stone’s curious, well known, and socially significant status as an omen, reveals just how much political power is lent to the material in a world that is believed to be *natura naturans* and hence does not inherently center human agency.

Ill-fated Stars: Celestial Phenomenon and Eschatological Time in the *Historia Anglorum*

In a recent tweet on April 4th, 2020, Neil deGrasse Tyson, a famous science communicator and astrophysicist, posted an image of the Bayeux Tapestry depicting a comet. In his tweet, he uses the image to criticize superstitions of astrological influence over the current COVID-19 pandemic. The comet (depicted with the tweet to the left) is embroidered above a tower, and under the spires a crowd of onlookers point upward under the Latin phrase "ISTI MIRANT STELLA." The phrase translates to "they marveled at the star."[33] Tyson's analysis alongside the image paint a picture of this medieval event. Etymologizing the word "disaster," he points out the link between the linguistic construction "dis+aster" (as he puts it, "bad star") and the events on the tapestry, portraying the marveling 'event' and the language arising from it as evidence of a "profound ignorance of nature."[34]

While Tyson is entirely correct to place the blame concerning COVID-19 on the shortsightedness of our own political and economic systems, he reveals a degree of his own ignorance in this tweet – an ignorance of medieval astronomy and ways of studying and

[33] The image fails to depict that "stella" is embroidered with a short dash (like a macron or tilde) just above the final "a," possibly to infer the absent "m." Stella here should likely be read "stellam," as no other cases except accusative make sense in context. Thank you to my acquaintance Danny Bate with the help on this one.

[34] One of the assumptions Tyson makes is that this profound ignorance arises from being "prescientific." Tyson's ideas of what can and cannot be science appears to hinge on Enlightenment assumptions of what is "scientific." Suffice it to say that these assumptions are easily dispelled by the acknowledgement that "science" did not spring into being from the thin air in the 18th century. Even today we have many fans of astrology, tarot, and religion; the coming of science did not dispel these so called "prescientific" notions. Nor did the so called "prescientific" world of 1066 depicted in the Bayeaux tapestry wholly rely on superstition for their reasoning. In fact, at this time Arabic astronomy (which happens to be a science) has made leaps and bounds, as I will later cite from Truitt. Indeed, there are a great many astronomers from the "prescientific" world that predate even the Bayeaux Tapestry, from Ptolemy to Aristotle, and even as far back to Thales of Miletus.

understanding the heavens. While it is true, as it is today, that medieval people had superstitions concerning celestial phenomena, the assumption that such superstitions arise because, as Tyson implies, medieval people (as well as other "prescientific communities") had a vast deficiency of both information and comprehension of the natural world plays into a wide array of dangerous narratives of the past. These narratives erase the contributions of the past to the present moment, and dangerously inflate the ego of the now.[35] One problem with dismissing superstitions as arising from an ignorant past is that it fails to deal with the complexities of how superstitions may arise in the first place. By connecting 'superstition' to 'ignorance,' the intellectual wealth of both medieval astronomy and eschatology is immediately rendered invisible.

By grappling with accounts of celestial bodies and "disaster" from the 12th century chronicle, Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, this chapter primarily addresses the power and influence celestial bodies had on the chronicle's formulation of eschatological time. In addition, by emphasizing celestial influence and observation in the chronicle, as well as the cataclysmic events superstition pairs them with, the complex and rich medieval understanding of both astronomical phenomena and catastrophe will be brought into focus.

One reason that Tyson's analysis falls short is through misapprehending the source of superstition (both medieval and contemporary) around disaster. Henry of Huntingdon, the author of the *Historia*, was a member of the clergy whose writings (as this chapter will later investigate) are powerfully concerned with the end of the world. Today, people are similarly concerned for a variety of reasons. A decades-long cataclysmic breakdown of the planet's climate, ecology, biosphere, flooding, in addition to a global pandemic, inform contemporary fears and obsessions with disaster. In this way, the modern reader may find a connection with Henry of Huntingdon's

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[35] For more about what I mean here, I recommend reading John Dagenais and Margaret Greer, "Decolonizing the Middle Ages."

own views of the world, in which his own stoic discussions of death and apocalypse are informed by the patterns of celestial phenomena even as they are used to interpret and understand them. By framing celestial phenomena like comets as solely being read or understood through superstition, as Tyson did in his tweet, we fail to understand the profound impact that the cosmos had on formulations of eschatological time, some of which serve as the interpretive framework for superstitions around comets, eclipses, meteors, and other cosmic events. Celestial phenomena were not merely co-opted by superstitious narratives; instead, repeated and intensely curious observation of celestial phenomena may actually have had a hand in the formulation of some of the very narratives dismissed as superstition and "prescientific." By understanding how the cosmos shaped and became co-constitutive with medieval understandings of eschatological time, we gain a better understanding of the role the cosmos takes in shaping how we act and react toward the eschaton of the present day.

What I mean by eschaton comes from Giorgio Agamben's *The Time that Remains*, in which the eschaton is the end of time itself. It is not a span of time – it is the point at which time itself ends and passes into eternity (62-63). Whereas time such as "messianic time" moves in a steady progression toward an end point (the apocalypse), what is written in the apocalypse views time as bearing witness to the fulfillment of the end. The demand of eschatological time, then, is that all progression, all forward movement toward and end is stopped. All motion curves around on itself, beginning and ending in witnessing apocalypse. This repetitive "ever-presence" of the end in eschatological time is a helpful transition for understanding eternity as well. Boethius, whose *Consolation of Philosophy* was well-read and influential in the middle ages, describes eternity itself as an ever-presence without time (132-134). Both Henry of Huntingdon and Boethius understand time as a mortal, human condition. At the end of time, then, there is only

what has been lost to the past, and the end of the world. Just as the present is an end (the apocalypse), the past has ended, and the future is not. Time itself loses futurity to eternity. All this will be important as I talk about how celestial motion configures Henry's understanding of time. You will need to understand that in this medieval, Christian context time is a mortal condition. In a sense, death and time are already fundamentally entangled.

The reason this chapter focuses on the *Historia Anglorum* is simple. Aside from engaging directly with the same subject matter of Tyson's tweet, the chronicle is overtly focused on human concerns, divine plans, death, and disaster. History, for Henry of Huntingdon, is an exercise in teaching a spiritual lesson about time. In other words, the chronicle is filled with the kinds of language and narratives some would dismiss as "superstitious" and "prescientific." For instance, Henry spends a great deal of time emphasizing the role of the divine in the shape of his history. By emphasizing early on that his epochal shifts in the history are drawn along the same lines as God's inflictions of divine wrath against Britain, for instance, Henry puts the reader's focus on God's agency over time. Cataclysmic events that mark a new era, are for Henry, divine phenomena.

Henry of Huntingdon's understanding of time structures the *Historia Anglorum*, in contrast to a text like the *Itinerarium*. Gerald's book is a meandering account structured by place, location, and distance. Each section is distinguished in response to Gerald's physical presence in various areas in Wales as he and Archbishop Baldwin move from town, church, and monastery to preach the cross. I have previously cited the comparison to Luke's Acts, and it is in this itinerary structure and form of the text that the comparison is resonant.[36] Meanwhile, Henry's chronicle is structured very differently. While Henry does open the chronicle up with a

[36] Michael Staunton's "Polymath as Historian," 3.

description of Britain itself as an introduction, most of the chronicle is structured, as one might expect, chronologically. Henry goes year by year, relying heavily on previous historians, especially Bede, for the beginning sections of the chronicle. Henry divided the *Historia Anglorum* into around 8 books, depending on the version of the chronicle.

The chronicle starts with the Romans and the Britons, ends with the raids from the Picts and Scots, and then at the beginning of book II moves to the tribes of Angles and Saxons invited over by Vortigern. Book III discusses the conversion of the English, and book IV discusses their continued conquest of the land. Book V discusses the invasion of the Danes, and then book VI discusses how, from Danish rule, the Normans came. Book VII describes the rule of the Normans, and ends with the death of Henry I. At this point book VIII begins and overlaps with Henry of Huntingdon's own lived experience of history during the reign of King Stephen and afterwards the reign of Henry II. The structure of the chronicle at this point varies depending on the manuscript, editor, and age of the text. Because the *Historia Anglorum* was written and then modified continually between 1135 and 1154, with further additions and alterations made in various versions of the text during this period, the chronicle doesn't exist in a singular, defined structure.[37] However, frequently included with, either as a part of or in addendum to the history, is the *Letter to Walter* (a letter to a sick friend which broaches the subject of theological contempt for the world). Because of this, I will be including the work as if it is a part of the History. In some editions, the "Letter to Walter" is included in the text between an 8th and 9th book (and some versions even have a 10th) depending how that version of the text arranged the final sections of the chronicle.

[37] For further reading about this complex composition process, see Diana Greenway's introduction to the Oxford Medieval Texts edition of *Henry of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum*. This understanding of the chronology is sourced from pages xlxviii-xlxix, as well as the notes from Thomas Forester in the 1853 translation of the text. Particularly on page 301, where the *Letter to Walter* (also known as the *De contemptu mundi)* begins.

Throughout this history, across the full breadth of time it covers, the *Historia Anglorum* includes, at times without context or further explanation, record of as many known celestial phenomena as it can muster.[38] Some of these records are incredibly precise, down to the day, or hour of an event's duration. They are listed alongside events that the chronicle appears to view as equally important – the transference of saint's bodies or large battles. The most common events are comets and solar eclipses, but lunar eclipses, meteor showers, and even events which the chronicle doesn't have terms for, including the presence of an extra moon and heavens on fire, all show up throughout the chronicle. While Henry may not explicitly justify the presence of these astronomical records in the chronicle itself, the extent to which cosmic observation is included among the accounts of the rise and fall of kingdoms and the deaths of so many kings demonstrates not just an interest in these celestial phenomena, but that the observation of the cosmos itself had some connection to the inner workings of Henry's chronicle-writing. In other words, the repetition of these phenomena creates or is part of a pattern that reveals some of how time itself is written in the *Historia Anglorum*. Henry's inclusion of these phenomena in the text, as well as celestial patterns, ultimately marks a process through which he learns about the cosmos – and through which the cosmos itself shapes, influences, and changes his thinking. In other words, where Tyson read ignorance of nature, Henry (as the medieval astronomy of his time) was deeply invested in *learning* from the cosmos, and aware of his own inability to predict or measure phenomena like the 1066 comet.

[38] A short appendix of comets and eclipses (the most common repeating celestial events) in the *Historia Anglorum*: Book II: 50, 62; Book III: 106, 107; Book IV: 122, 124, 129; Book V: 156, 165; Book VI: 212; Book VII: 237, 245, 259.

Cyclical Celestial Narratives of Time and Death

Celestial patterns and structures have a clear place in medieval literature, and scholars find discussion of these elements generative for their research. In a recent essay on the "Complaint of Mars," Kara Gaston emphasizes the role that narrative, as a structure or a pattern of events, plays in constructing and shaping the experience of events – and time itself. Gaston's argument focuses on the way that Troilus, looking at the conjunction of Mars and Venus, 'reads' this event with a narrative of two lovers coming together and separating. Gaston focuses on how the narrative that Troilus brings to the event changes how it happens for him. However, Gaston's argument can also be reversed: the repetition of events like conjunctions in night sky have the power, through observation of their repetition, to instill the patterns and structures of the natural world in human minds, which shape human experiences of events. In the *Historia Anglorum*, time and history are written in structures which have been shaped by a fundamental pattern of celestial motion: the rise and fall of bodies from horizon to zenith to horizon. This rise and fall establish a pattern which is incredibly influential and creates a pattern, a narrative, that simultaneously structures how humans comprehend time through the constant cyclical movement of celestial bodies and the mortality of their own lives.

The structure of celestial motion can be felt in Henry's description of the rise and fall of kingdoms, and the lives of the people he writes about. In one instance in the *Letter to Walter*, Henry says, "when [the Earl of Mellent] was at the zenith of his power, it happened that a certain [other] earl carried off the lady he had espoused… Thenceforth, even to his declining years, his mind was disturbed… nor did he, to the time of his death, regain composure and happiness"

(309).[39] The structure of these events follow the same pattern as the sun in the sky. Starting at noon, when the sun is at its highest point, the story marks this moment as the "zenith" of the earl's power, as if the earl himself is the sun. The metaphor is so obvious, yet so innocuous, it almost does not seem to be a metaphor. The "zenith" of power almost seems to immediately take on its own, contextual meaning. This story uses the word "zenith," an astronomical word, to describe something about this man's life because the structures of both events are experienced through a similar narrative. The descent from power for this earl, falling into despair at the loss of his fiancée is structurally identical to the fall of the sun into the western horizon. Even in the Latin, which uses "*summo statu*," or "at the highest position," the astronomical translation of "zenith" here works contextually because the motion described in the Latin verbs, especially in the clause "*in tenebras moeroris incidit,*" recalls the motion of the sun. In English, this can translate as "he fell into the shadows of lamentation," and makes explicit the arcing descent into night that in the English translation was implicit. This example reveals that we are already aware of how celestial structures can organize human experiences, and how they change Henry's writing specifically. However, it also opens the possibility of a connection between how Henry thinks of death and time and the celestial structure of rise and fall. After all, as events progress forward (as time moves) in this short narrative of Henry's, they fall in a curving arc, until the shadows of the world under his feet eclipse all of his previous power.

Henry uses the image of earth eclipsing human lives in the darkness of death as the sun falls below the horizon to talk about his own father's death. Henry notes in Book VII that "a comet made a very unusual appearance for rising in the east, when it had mounted in the sky it

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[39] In the Latin: "*Cum igitur in summo statu gloriae suae degeret, contigit quemdam alium consulem sponsam ei tam factione quam dolosis viribus arripuisse. Unde in senectute sua mente turbatus et angaria obnubilatus, in tenebras moeroris incidit; nec usque ad mortem se laetum vel hilarem sensit*." (*Epistole de Contemptu Mundi*, 307).

seemed to take a retrograde course" (244). Immediately, Henry bridges this moment with his own father's death, connecting this comet to a personal tragedy: "The same year, Nicholas, the father of the author of this Book, departed this life…" (ibid).[40] Henry's pairing of these events, and the emphasis in "the same year," as a framing clause for the introduction of the information concerning his father's passing, demonstrates the link Henry sees between these events. This link is deepened by the verse he cites about his father: "Star of the church/ that set in gloom, / Light of the clergy, to the tomb…" are the first two lines (244). Calling his father a setting star and a light being set in a tomb strengthens through metaphor the point that Henry views death in celestial terms. Just as the stars appear to turn through the sky as the firmament turns, his own father's life has dipped below a horizon Henry cannot cross. Henry remains behind; his father, on the other hand, is a star, who "seen through the dimming tear, / dawns in a brighter hemisphere" (ibid). In other words, the cosmic structure of solar rise and fall directly shape the language Henry uses to comprehend his father's passing.

More than that, however, this fundamental rise and fall are applied to understanding the comet as well. Note how Henry describes the course of the comet as "retrograde." Retrograde to what? The motion Henry notices here is being interpreted through the framework of the sun's motion, revealing how fundamental that motion is for Henry's comprehension of the comet's own motion. The motion of the comet rises, as the sun does, in the east toward a zenith. However, the retrograde course Henry observes isn't relative to the motion of the other planets in the solar system, as the term in English now tends to describe. Instead, the Latin "*regredi*

[40] The Latin of this whole passage: "*Hoc in anno apparuit quaedam cometa more insolito. Cum namque ab oriente insurgens in firmamentum ascendisset, regredi videbatur. Eodem anno Nicholaus, pater illius qui hanc scripsit historiam, mortis legibus concessit, et septultus est apud Lincoliam. De quo dictum est:*
'Stella cadit cleri, splendor marcet Nicholai;
Stella cadens cleri, splendeat arce Dei.'" (VII, 237).

videbatur," describes the comet "seeming to turn back." The comet rises, but then falls in the wrong direction. It falls backwards into dawn, instead of the west, as the sun does. A few things about this are crucial to notice. First, it is noteworthy how the motion of this comet is immediately analyzed and compared to solar motion. The fact that the comet does not follow the path of the sun is part of what makes it "*more insolito*" or "with an unusual manner" (*Historia Anglorum*, 237). It cannot be ignored that a cosmic "*mos*" already exists in Henry's mind. "*Mos, moris*," is a Latin word which means "habit, manner, behavior, custom" among other things. This broad meaning gives it a certain potency, as what it specifically describes in latin are concepts synonymous with both "*modus*" and "*habitus*." In other words, "*mos*" can invoke both a specific behavior or manner *and* the whole pattern of how a thing regularly acts. By acting "*more insolito*" the Latin applies emphasis to how the comet's specific behavior breaks the characteristic celestial pattern of movement. In other words, it is *explicit* that the solar pattern of motion changes how Henry experiences this comet's appearance. It seems, for him, unusual. By disrupting the pattern, the comet demonstrates how fundamentally that pattern structures Henry's experiences of the Heavens.

However, the comet still influences how Henry writes his father's epitaph. This influence indicates how these nonhuman, celestial patterns are adapted into and form human narratives. In the Latin, the language of the poem he quotes for his father's memory is far more succinct and has a structure which seems to take into account the comet's retrograde motion. Where the English edition has a poem of seven lines, the Latin includes a beautiful two-line poem. The first line emphasizes the fall and the death: "*Stella cadit cleri, splendor marcet Nicholai*;" ("The star of the church falls, the brilliance of Nicholas droops;"). The second line reverses that fall into a rising action: "*Stella cadens cleri, splendeat arce Dei*" ("Falling Star of the church, let him

gleam on God's summit"). This structure initially follows the pattern of the sun, falling below the horizon as the English describes. However, where the English describes the star falling below the horizon to dawn on another horizon, which would indicate westerly motion, this is absent from the Latin. Instead, the metaphor is more vague – Nicholas falls, withered and dying, and then in the second line there is a reversal – a retrograde course, if you will – in which his course is no longer falling into the eclipse of death, but instead falls, weirdly, toward the "summit" or "refuge" of God. "*Arce*" or "fortress" has connotations of a high place (fortresses and citadels were often placed on hilltops or "summits") and here the context emphasizes that Nicholas's death is also his ascent into Heaven. Thus, the translator's elegant solution: that a sun setting on someone's west is a sun rising on another's east. However, taking into account the retrograde comet and Henry's connection of it to his father's death, a more complicated and stranger picture becomes more likely: his father, like the comet, falls backwards into dawn, instead of forwards into night. The retrograde course of the poem is there, that poetic flip of the second line from the first, and from that even the translator must include something of dawn; however, it is the course of the comet, and its influence on how Henry thinks about death, which brings insight to the course that Nicholas's soul takes. Both the pattern of the sun, and the attention to the comet, influence this story about death – in part, one must assume, because death is being comprehended through a similar narrative structure as these celestial objects.

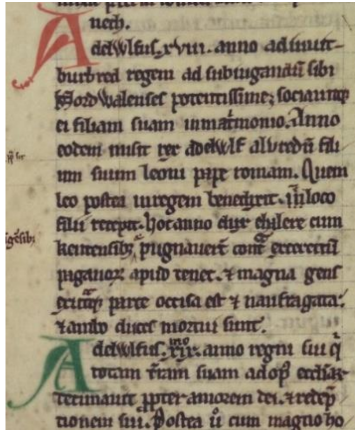
The celestial patterns of motion which Henry uses to talk about death, including now both solar motion and at times the motion of specific comets he views as connected to a death are crucial to notice precisely because of the way that death in the *Historia Anglorum* is cyclical, the end falling back in on every living moment. Going back to the *Letter to Walter,* in what is perhaps the most depressing episode in the text, Henry writes about the experience of mortality

to his dying friend: "Almighty God! How truly are we called mortals! For death clings to us while we live; but our dissolution, which we call death, puts an end to death" (318). This curious statement is profoundly helpful in understanding how Henry understands the structure of a mortal life. For Henry, the end of human life is such a component of being mortal that living is an existence of repetitiously, cyclically, experiencing death. Henry describes the end of mortal life, not as death, but as a "dissolution," complicating how Henry understands death in the first place. For Henry, mortal life itself, defined as it is by its end, is defined by patterns and structures of repeating, cyclical death. Each of these cycles make alive in every living moment the truth of the dissolution to come. In other words, death is not the moment at which life ends, but rather all of mortal life exists in a cyclical, temporal structure of death.

The cyclical structure of death incorporates the same celestial rise and fall through which the comets and Henry's father's death were interpreted. The celestial pattern resonates in how Henry defines and understand the lifespan, the time that constitutes mortal life. By intersecting how human lives happen, and end, with celestial patterns, the cyclicality of celestial motion is shown to shape Henry's conceptions of life, death, and dying as temporal events. Henry talks about how human life is defined by this narrative structure of falling into shadow – not just at the end, but throughout. Describing the futility of mortal life, Henry says, "Whatever we do, whatever we say perishes from the moment it is said or done… Where is now what I did yesterday? Where what I said? They are swallowed up in the death of endless oblivion" (318). The cyclical, repetitive structure of death flexes and breathes in the way even day-to-day actions fall to the finitude of mortal life. Just as a circle has endless points in its circumference, the structure of death is an "endless oblivion." So circular is this motion that despite the moment of death itself supposedly being the final dissolution of this mortal cycle, the cycle itself is *already*

endlessly dissolving. Because beginning and ending have no meaning on the course of a circle, every point in the circle is equally defined by death. Henry's way of pointing this out is through references to the cycles of the day – "Where is what I did yesterday" – and the way that he places emphasis on the passing of those cycles. Note that he doesn't talk about future or present time in this moment – instead, by talking about "yesterday" alone, and emphasizing the past tense, he emphasizes how mortal experiences of time are ultimately defined cycles of oblivion and of constantly fading into the past. Even what happened yesterday is lost to the present moment, constantly and repetitively eclipsed into night. In this context, then, the previous day (which invariably falls into night-time as the sun is eclipsed by the sphere of earth, the mortal world) is as much consumed by the cycle of death as the human memory and experience of it. The cycle, a *celestial* structure, is directly incorporated into how Henry understands the cyclical structure of death. More than that, though, this cyclical structure and its influence on how Henry understands death – or the place of dying in a temporal narrative structure of the cosmos – is ultimately forming a construct of mortality and time that relies on time looping back, constantly, to ideas of death.

Ultimately the impact of these overlapping, similar narrative structures on the chronicle is in the structures that Henry uses to mark time's motion and to delineate motion from one time to another. The *Historia Anglorum* records the cycles of the seasons and years through the cycles of succession and the lives and deaths of kings. At the end of books, long successions of the kings are listed, after which Henry reminds us how even these great men lost everything except that which was heavenly. The years are counted on the solar calendar, and the edition of the text in



English marks the year by use of Anno Domini as a point of reference. However, Latin editions of the text, and the pictures of manuscripts such as the one to the left, reveal that the AD system isn't the one that Henry uses for his chronicle. Instead, time is kept based on the year of the reign of the king. This image depicts an early 13th century version of the *Historia Anglorum*.[41] It depicts two paragraphs of text in one of the columns on the page, taken from Book V of the chronicle. The first sentence of each paragraph describes the year not in reference to the Year of the Lord (*Anno Domini*) but instead in reference to how many years the king has reigned. The English translation for each of these opening lines says: "In the eighteenth year of his reign, Ethelwulf [in the image written as Adelwlfus] gave powerful assistance to King Burhred…" and "In the nineteenth year of his reign Ethelwulf gave the tenth of all his land to ecclesiastical uses…" (150). Henry uses kings and their lives to give context to time and its passing. The effect is that with each new reign of a king, the count resets. When Ethelwulf dies, and Ethelbald takes the throne, Henry counts from the start of his reign. Death, therefore, fundamentally changes the shape of time in the chronicle. Rather than time being seen as a consistent progression from a consistent point of reference, time in the chronicle is fragmentary, multifaceted, and defined in equal parts by the cyclical deaths of kings and the motion of celestial bodies. The deaths of previous kings become the many loci around which a multiplicitous time wheels, and the passing of their lives become yet another kind of celestial motion of time that defines the chronicle. This emphasis on the death of kings, for Henry, illustrates the eschatological truth of the world's impermanence; and because time does not progress from a messiah to an apocalypse, but instead

[41] Sourced from: (Book V of the Historia Anglorum, Walters Ms. W.793 First half of the 13th century CE, Accessed via http://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W793/description.html)

constantly circles back upon the death of kings, time in the chronicle is profoundly eschatological. However, the way that the chronicle writes eschatological time – structured around the same cyclical motion of the heavens that so defined Henry's discussion of his own father's death – reveals how Henry's eschatology is formed, shaped, and structured from a nonhuman, narrative. In other words, just as eschatology is shaping the chronicle's record of time, the celestial motion which is used to narrativize that time has also fundamentally altered and shaped the writing of the chronicle.

THE CELESTIAL ESCHATON: COMETS, SIGNS, AND GOD'S PLAN

Henry's inclusion of comets goes far beyond ones which inform personal tragedies such as the comet of his father. Henry includes comets, eclipses, and other, similar phenomena even when they appear to have little direct significance or connection to the events or years in which they are recorded. In some instances, they appear intrusive, such as when a comet appears in Book VII of the *Historia* during Henry I's reign: "This year the king led an army into Wales… A bright comet appeared towards the end of May. The king crossed over to Normandy, and the next year caused all the chief men of the duchy to take the oath of allegiance to his son William…" (245). This mention of a comet interrupts the logical narrative about Henry I's actions, appearing to add little insight or context to this situation, and no predictive connection is made to the events in which it appears. It is a chronological intrusion, appearing only because the King's crossing into Normandy leads to the events of the year after which the comet's appearance happened, and the comet must be mentioned in its temporal context. It doesn't matter that forcing the comet into the narrative disrupts it – it *must* be recorded.

Of course, this intrusion also emphasizes the importance of the comet's observation: it must be able to break up what to us might seem like a more important set of events because Henry values what it brings, regardless of its connection to those events. This is a common prioritization made by Henry of Huntingdon, and its constancy throughout the text lends support to the idea that these comets were so valued because they were, in the *Historia Anglorum,* accomplishing some of the work of synthesizing eschatological and celestial time. They are first valued, and included, for their eschatological significance, as well as their inherent temporality. Just as Henry interrupts Henry I's actions with a report of very specific temporal information about a comet (at the end of May), the text is always describing the 'when' of comets and other celestial phenomena in intense detail.

The inclusion of Pope Gregory the Great's letter to King Ethelbert in the *Historia* demonstrates how the eschatological synthesis of comets is possible. A sixth century religious leader, the eschaton was a primary focus of Pope Gregory's life. To include his work was to include some of the best-known authorship on the subject.[42] In some of his other writings about the eschaton, not cited in the *Historia,* Pope Gregory said, "There will be signs in the sun and the moon" (Bjork, IX). Gregory the Great's famous eschatological thinking was influenced by and attentive to the circular, eternal patterns of the heavens. Indeed, Pope Gregory's own temporal thinking emphasized the repeating, almost cyclical patterns of calamities as tokens of the ultimate end. In other words, cyclical patterns of death *and* the cyclical patterns of celestial bodies that signify them are connected by this formulation of time.

In his letter, Gregory invokes a way of 'reading' the experience of time. It is, of course, an eschatological methodology. In Gregory's letter, he says that, "as this end of the world draws

[42] Robert E. Bjork, *Castastrophes and the Apocalyptic in the Middle Ages,* IX

near, many things are at hand which have not before happened, as changes in the air, terrible signs in the heavens, tempests out of the common order of the seasons, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes in various places" (III, 75).[43] Note Gregory's emphasis on "what has happened before." This reference to the role of history in contextualizing these disasters emphasizes the attention history, the record of time, must pay to these events. Among this list are "signs in the heavens," and while no special emphasis is given to them here, it is noteworthy that the *Historia* itself records every single one of the items on that list. Henry records many, but I will briefly cover an example from each, excepting the signs of the heavens which have already been listed. Of changes in the air, a contrary wind kills many Danes in the last days of King Alfred the Great; tempests and war strike as early as Caesar's invasion of the isle, when his ships are sunk and men killed; famines, a common event, are also mentioned early and drive the Britons to theft and plunder in their desperation; at this same time, pestilences fell the very walls of Constantinople; and in Book VII there is an earthquake.[44] This list characterizes Henry of Huntingdon's writing as eschatological – as concerned, in content and structure, in reading these disasters in the greater temporal context of the end of the world.

Each of these disasters is described by Gregory the Great as "tokens of the end of the world," distributing that end throughout time. This distribution and repetitive narrative work to make a history like the *Historia Anglorum* a text which, from the very beginning of time is constantly connecting to the end. This is what defines eschatological time: constantly folding

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[43] The full passage, including passages cited on page 2, in the Latin edition: "*Appropinquante autem eodem mundi termino, multa imminent, quae ante non fuerunt: videlicet immutationes aeris, terroresque de caelo, et contra ordinationem temporum, tempestates, bella, fames, pestilentiae, terrae-motus per loca; quae tamen non omnia nostris diebus ventura sunt, sed post nostros dies omnia subsequentur. … haec signa de fine saeculi praemittuntur, ut de animabus nostris debeamus esse solliciti, de mortis hora suspecti, ut venturo judicio in bonis actibus inveniamur esse praeparati*."

[44] In the order that I mention them: Book V, 161; Book I, 12; Book I, 34; Book I, 18; Book VII 223

back into a single moment in which time itself is ending.[45] The Pope emphasizes that each of these cataclysms are part of a repeating pattern of apocalypse, and each smaller iteration of disaster signifies and connects to the much larger catastrophe of global annihilation, saying "these tokens of the end of the world are sent before in order that we may be careful for our souls looking for the hour of our death, and that we may be prepared by good works to meet the impending judgment" (III, 76). By describing each catastrophe as a "token of the end of the world," meant to by read and understood as part of God's plan to end the world, Gregory constructs a narrative of eschatological temporality from the repetition and pattern of destruction. By pointing to each of these disasters as tokens, not just for the end of the world, but also as a reminder to prepare for one's own death, the Pope reveals that understanding death as a temporal inevitability gives his comprehension of time the qualities we call eschatological.

The significance of comets become twofold: they are eschatological "signs in the heavens," and also temporal markers – a part of the construction of time itself. Celestial structures don't only influence the structure of how Henry writes death. Just as how the celestial motion of the comet associated with Henry's father is incorporated into the cycle of death, celestial patterns are also incorporated into temporal structures. Indeed, the Historia's description and inclusion of celestial phenomena exclusively serves the purposes of marking temporal patterns. By constant observation of the motion of comets and (especially solar) eclipses, which unlike the sun are much harder to predict in their comings and goings, the constant interjection of these temporal objects into often unrelated events becomes a record through which a pattern of a more complex temporal motion could emerge.

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[45] For more reading about how eschatological time is different from chronological time, (as well as messianic time) read Agamben's *The Time That Remains*, pp. 62-65.

The emergence of a more complex temporal motion, celestial motion, through specifically eschatological "signs in the heavens" is hugely significant because it indicates that the inclusion of these events into their respective places in the chronicle are there, not to prescribe the meaning of these events through an eschatological lens, but rather, to learn from these celestial events and their temporal context in order to form or create meaning.

What I mean by a more complex temporal motion is that Henry is paying extremely careful attention to the way in which a prescriptive pattern, the (broadly speaking) solar pattern of rise and fall he uses to describe the comet of his father's death, is complicated by other events. One such event is a solar eclipse – such an event is disruptive of a typical solar day, and so casts a shadow on a simplistic understanding of celestial motion, and therefore simplistic understanding of time as well. For example, in book II of the Historia, two eclipses are recorded, and one of them in particular is marked by a totality: "it was eclipsed from the third to almost the ninth hour… so that the stars were visible." Assuming that these are hours are marked after dawn, (a solar measure of time, demonstrating even here the connection between celestial motion and time) the sun is at least partially eclipsed by the moon from about 9am to 3pm. At some point in this time, there was a total eclipse, as the sun's light is reduced enough that the stars can be made out. In other words, this solar eclipse creates a kind of night during the day – disrupting the temporal structure of what a day is.

This disruption is marked through constant temporal measurement: even the hour of the day is remembered and recorded, when such details about Henry I's crossing to Normandy, for instance, are left entirely absent. Such is the inherent temporality of the comet or eclipse. Because they can be a disruption to the "common order" of celestial motion, and yet entirely familiar and known phenomena, the focus on being able to predict them – to learn from the

comets and eclipses about their own motion and its patterns – is the other half of their eschatological concern. Just as disaster cannot be so easily predicted or known, these events and the very real disruption they present, like disaster, become essentially temporal – woven into the fabric of the project to understand "what will be." As such, keen observation is applied to both of these eclipses, so that specific details are known: "In the fifth year of Kenric, the sun was eclipsed from daylight to the third hour, in the Month of March; in the seventh year of his reign, it was eclipsed from the third to almost the ninth hour, on the xii kal. July [20th June]…" (50). Nearly all the language surrounding these events is temporal in nature; only a short clause is dedicated to describing the eclipse itself. This short passage describes in specific detail as much as was known about *when* these eclipses happened as possible. Considering these eclipses happened around 538 CE, the fact that Henry can report *down to the hour of the day* concerning an event which happened about half a millennium before he was born in the late 11th century is crucial to recognize. Conversely, when describing battles, such as in the next passage, Henry does not care about months or specific days – only the year. On the same page, he reports that, "Kenric, in the eighteenth year of his reign, fought against the Britons…" (50). After briefly describing Kenric's victory, he jumps on to the twenty-second year. Henry does not care about the duration of the battle, the specifics of when it started or ended, or any of the same details provided around the eclipse. This absolutely demonstrates that the question of *when*, the issue of temporality, was applied far more rigorously to the eclipse than to other events. These events are understood, recorded, and recognized *temporally*. What makes one eclipse recognizable from others, as this passage demonstrates, is *when it occurred*. This emphasis on when indicates exactly how much these events are being carefully observed. Moreover, it indicates the importance to their observers they held for understanding the structure of time itself.

The temporality of eclipses being their most important characteristic, then, helps us to understand how to untangle examples where eclipses become "superstitious" omens. That is, the obsession with synthesizing these events with disaster is a similar motivation to understand and predict both sets of events. They become comparable in their apparent disruption of "time" itself. the comet or eclipse upends the common medieval understanding of motion of the ecliptic. The steady rise and fall of various objects in the solar system, and their very consistent patterns, disrupted by those events which are well known but whose patterns were, for them, hidden. Likewise, for the medieval reader, was disaster – to their eyes seemingly unpredictable. Thus to tie these events together and compound them as the *Historia* does is to seek an answer to the same eschatological question about the end of time. By end I here mean both "purpose" or "entirety of" and the literal end of time. One example of a solar eclipse is connected directly to a plague, an example which wonderfully ties back to Tyson's tweet in the beginning of this chapter. In this example, we once again see the temporality of the eclipse being recorded down to the hour of a specific day: "there was an eclipse of the sun, on the 3rd of May, about the tenth hour of the day," (III, 106). However, the eclipse is also codified by what followed: "It was followed by a grievous pestilence which depopulated Britain and Ireland with its ravages" (ibid). The interjection of night into day here is synthesized with a cataclysmic event. However, this can't be dismissed as mere superstition, precisely because we know death also has a cyclical, temporal structure. Instead, there are deeper implications: that the connection between eclipses and cataclysm in the *Historia Anglorum* is that both are constituted of the same temporal structure. In other words, it is very possible that despite being unable to predict solar eclipses, medieval astronomers at this time already recognized their complex cyclicality and were trying to apply it to their own understandings of cataclysm. It is entirely possible that what Tyson

dismissed as superstition instead reveals a great deal of depth and understanding of eclipses. Even before solar eclipses could accurately be predicted, medieval astronomers knew, not only that it might eventually be possible to predict eclipses, but that they emerged from structures of motion in the cosmos that they could possibly learn through close attention, precision, and careful, detailed observation.[46]

LEARNING FROM PATTERNS OF CELESTIAL MOTION: HEURISTICS,

Let us return to Tyson's reading of the 1066 comet. Using the etymology of "Disaster" as a way to frame the reading, Tyson emphasizes the negative implications of celestial bodies for "prescientific" peoples. This adjective, "prescientific," must include medieval people, because Tyson uses a medieval tapestry and depiction of a medieval event to illustrate his point. Tyson's central claim, that these people blamed their misfortunes on these events, is especially crucial to notice, because it implies that medieval people saw comets, eclipses, and other "signs in the heavens" as causally linked to the destruction they signified. Tyson's reading infers that medieval people fabricated a linguistic, causal link between celestial events and misfortune. That is, this reading essentially describes people who construct and impose causal narratives and patterns onto celestial phenomena. However, if we consider the context provided by the *Historia*'s eschatological chronicling, and the influence of celestial bodies in the text, we find new ways to analyze these phenomena, and ones that actually place the blame of disasters on humans, ultimately supporting Tyson's larger point that disasters like COVID-19 can't be externalized onto comets when there is human responsibility to contend with. Instead of talking

[46] For instance, Thales of Miletus has long been rumored to have once predicted an eclipse in 585 BCE. While this prediction is absolutely suspect (according to Miguel Querejeta, "On the Eclipse of Thales, Cycles and Probabilities" in *Culture And Cosmos,* 2011) the *idea* that it *could* be done – that these events had a cyclical structure that was possible to comprehend if they paid enough attention – is very old.

about how medieval people imposed eschatology onto celestial objects, we can have discussions about how medieval understandings of the cosmos were understood by these people to be informed and shaped by celestial bodies and their patterns.

Where in my discussion of the *Itinerarium Cambriae* I talk about the active agency of nonhumans in Gerald's writing, it does not make sense to do that here. To talk about these comets as active agents in the same sense as the Llech Lafar stone – that is, actively shaping the views of the people around them and acting upon and challenging even a king's political authority – would be to configure them as known and personable. The Llech Lafar stone was a familiar entity – very old and storied. The stone, in many ways, operated within and through a kind of hermeneutics. While nature in the *Itinerarium* is clearly full of divine agency in ways that compare well to the divinity of celestial bodies, their motion, and the influence that motion has on time itself in the astronomy of the *Historia*, celestial motion operates heuristically, not hermeneutically. By this I mean that Henry is fundamentally concerned with learning from patterns and structures. His own lack of familiarity with the cycles of comets and eclipses emphasize that the process of constant observation of these phenomena, putting them in context, and connecting them to events that appear to correlate with them is a process through which Henry is learning from these patterns. Thinking of celestial motion as nonhuman heuristics, then, the power of comets and eclipses is in their ability to *defamiliarize.* Their actions reveal to Henry his own ignorance and push him to make connections, to find a structure through which these events can be made more readily comprehensible. By including calamity in this process, disaster and calamity become associated with celestial and temporal structures that can make such horror comprehensible as part of a wider causality. By complicating Henry's knowledge comets and eclipses both *teach* Henry and shape his understanding of the cosmos. To understand, Henry

must pay close attention to the patterns of celestial motion. Being a part of a much larger structure of the cosmos, the comets and their defamiliarizing power ultimately remind Henry of ineffable, divine mechanisms through which both time and catastrophe – united in the eschaton – are made to happen.[47]

The simple causal link Tyson implies does not exist in medieval accounts of calamities related to comets. Instead, the appearance of comets is taken, much as Pope Gregory describes his "tokens of the end of the world," as *signs* of the thing. Correlation, then, is the medieval framing of this relationship. In one instance, the *Historia* records how, "two portentous comets appeared near the sun, one preceding its rising, the other following its setting, presaging, as it were, dreadful calamities both to the east and west; or assuredly one was the precursor of day, the other of night, to signify that misfortunes threatened mankind at both times" (IV, 122).[48] Notice the verb "presaging." The comets themselves do not inflict the misfortune, nor are they responsible for them. Instead, they have a temporal relationship the event – they predict it.[49] The comets are profoundly temporal: even their positions in relation to one another and to the sun are gauged through this lens, to the conclusion that each predicted different events according to their spatial relationship either before or after the sun, a relationship instantly connected to the rise and

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[47] The sense I have of Henry's way of comprehending the cosmos and causality indicates at least some influence of Boethius. Boethius (whose writing was very popular, and very likely accessible to Henry of Huntingdon) describes in Book V of the *Consolation* how God might see the cosmos – all at once, in an ever-presence of eternity, without past or future (134). Hence causality is the architecture – the structure – of time and being itself, rather than a series of events and consequences.

[48] In the Latin: "*Aedelhardi regis anno tertio apparuerunt duae cometae circa solem terribiles; una quippe solem praecedebat . . . orientem, alia sequebatur occidentem, quasi Orienti simul et Occidenti dirae cladis praesagae; vel certe una diei, altera noctis praecurrebat exortum, ut utroque tempore mala mortalibus imminere signarent*" (114).

[49] "just as you see certain things in this your present time, so God sees all things in His eternal present. So that this divine foreknowledge does not change the nature and property of things; it simply sees things present to it exactly as they will happen at some time as future events" (Boethius 134). Boethius understood divine foreknowledge and agency to not be deterministic or causal in the sense of one action happening and then causing another. I find this applies to the *Historia Anglorum* as well. Henry is trying to learn something of a greater divine sense of the cosmos from the pieces and patterns he has access to, which is celestial and eschatological. Celestial, because of cosmic, divine patterns of the planets, stars, and sun; eschatological because of his own mortal, limited perspective from a place that, unlike eternity, does not have access to an ever-presence but constantly passes away in every moment.

fall of the sun itself. By connecting the interpretation of the comets to the solar pattern, the temporality of the solar pattern itself – how it constructs days, seasons, years – becomes essential to how these two comets are being understood. Instead of a causal relationship with misfortune, this example reveals that the chronicle is actively processing a much more complicated causality. Just as Henry arranges the mysteries of death into more familiar cycles that follow the same rise and fall of celestial motion, Henry attempts to use a pattern he knows to understand events which he cannot yet predict or draw the structure of. Just as the comets defamiliarize Henry from what he thinks he knows, the familiarity of solar, lunar, and planetary motion explicitly shape Henry's approach to further his own understanding.

Thus, the connection of the sun to the motion of these comets emphasizes the way that solar patterns precede and inform Henry's understanding of the temporality of the comets. In other words, because the comets must be related to the sun for sense to be made of their relationship, interpretation or "reading" of the comets themselves relies on the pattern of the sun for meaning. This reliance in turn clearly reveals how the patterns of the sun itself give partial definition and form to the medieval sense of time. Notice the grammatical construction of these sentences: in both the English and the Latin, the relationship to the sun is repeatedly emphasized several times. First, the clause in which they are "*circa solem*" or "around the sun," again in the next clause when they are describe in their specific relationship before and after the sun, spatially, and then finally their spatial presence before and after the sun is interpreted temporally. By reading into the relationship of these comets with the sun, the passage reveals how the sun influences medieval thinking. Namely, the sun is a source of definition for the directions of east and west, much in the same way that the way the sun influences night and day provide the comets a sense of temporal clarity. Not only is the influence of solar patterns clear, it is also clear

that these patterns – which are inherently nonhuman in origin – are being applied to the less familiar comets to get sense out of them.

The idea that familiar celestial patterns might be applied to an event in order to understand it, and the notion that these nonhuman patterns have the capacity to predict calamities is a completely unsurprising notion in the 12th century. At this time in medieval English astronomy, access to Arabic astronomical research and data had resulted in looking to the heavens for the future. The notion of working to precisely map out the movements of complex celestial phenomena based off precise, skilled observation in order to predict the future was one circulating in the same genres as Henry's own work. Primarily, the account of Gerbert's head, by twelfth century chronicler, William of Malmesbury, whose work, the *Gesta regum anglorum,* is grouped with both Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* as well as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae* by Jaakko Tahkokallio as part of the "Anglo-Norman Historical Canon" of the 12th century. [50] In addition to being in the same family of texts as Henry's chronicle, William's work predates Geoffrey's by only a decade, being dated to 1125 CE (Truitt 201). This view of the heavens (and medieval views of the heavens in general) understood celestial bodies to be divine. Hence, the appearance of a celestial phenomenon like a comet meant that God was working some change on the earth, which only the divine heavens, which construct a divine pattern, can reveal before it came to pass. The nature of this kind of foreshadowing is thus not hermeneutically prophetic – that is, something to be read and

[50] "Gerbert was part of a group of Latin scholars interested in translations of Arabic texts on celestial science, including different kinds of prognostication. These texts affirmed a different kind of prophecy, one that was predicated on understanding celestial bodies, their movements, and their effect on earthly bodies, and using precise astronomical calculations to ascertain the outcomes of planetary influences on earth. These new practices enriched and reconfigured existing Christian concerns about divination and foreknowledge." (E.R. Truitt, "Celestial Divination and Arabic Science in Twelfth-Century England: The History of Gerbert of Aurillac's Talking Head," 204)
The Anglo-Norman Historical Canon, 2019

interpreted through human formations of knowledge for a glimpse of the future – but is instead *heuristically predictive*. Through observing the pattern of the heavens as they work, one can hope to *learn* what it is God's plan has in store for the future.

Acknowledging this as a heuristic means acknowledging that the shape of medieval astronomy, as religious and specifically as eschatological as it was, was still shaped by the non-human patterns which provide the basis for and precede eschatological interpretation of the heavens in the first place. This pattern's essential mark on the way even non-solar phenomena, like comets, are interpreted is a part of this. Because comets and eclipses act as eschatological bridges – that is, their presence in the heavens works to weave eschatological time with celestial motion by connecting eschatological calamity to a temporality which has a complex structure of causality and motion as apparently ineffable and divine God's plan, eschatological time is then at least partially influenced by celestial patterns – including the cyclical oblivion that Henry describes, which constantly unwrites, and thus is always in relation to the solar pattern of time – the days, years, and seasons of our lives. In other words, we have to understand the solar cycle in order to comprehend its cyclical fading and constant annihilation – the eschatological cycles of oblivion and tokens of the end of the world.

The twin comets in Book IV of the *Historia Anglorum* demonstrate how the eschatological reading of comets is dependent on celestial heuristics. As I have already pointed out, the portentous-ness of the comets follows the relation of the comets to the sun. However, what the comets portend specifically is eschatological in nature. Following the description of the comets and their motions relative to the sun, the text describes the misfortunes which the comets portend: "the Saracens fell like a pest… but not long afterwards they met in the same country the fate which their impiety deserved" (123). This moment describes the battle of Tours, but Henry

focuses and places emphasis on the point of judgement after death. By turning the battle of Tours into a "Judgement Day" for the Saracens, as a day that is "about" their "impiety," it becomes a kind of eschatological moment in history – one of the many cycles of death and calamity throughout all of time, through which all things pass and are obliterated, save those who join God in eternity. Henry understands the comet as bridging this eschatological judgment of the Saracens, as ultimately connecting this event to the overall heuristic structures of divine time and the patterns which he views as shaping and controlling his world. For Henry, these celestial patterns are a heuristic which not only teach him about celestial motion or how to predict the motion of a cosmic body, but ultimately shape and direct his comprehension of his own mortality.

CONCLUSION

The effect of celestial patterns on Henry's chronicle are clear. Eschatological configurations of time in the *Historia Anglorum* are very similar in structure to those patterns of celestial motion most familiar to Henry: the rise and fall of the solar, lunar, and planetary cycles. The result is that Henry writes time in cycles of death and dying – frequently circling back to that ever-present dying which, for him, defines the mortal perspective on Earth. Moreover, Henry bridges his eschatological thinking to celestial patterns directly through the temporality he experiences. The "when" of comets and eclipses as eschatological signs – the ability to know when they have happened – is linked inextricably to being able to predict them, just as they predict calamity. In this way, understanding celestial patterns becomes a practice of being able to comprehend the fabric of the world's causality – which, as a mortal, Henry experiences through moments of time constantly dying as each second is lost to the past. This is due to the powerful influence celestial

phenomena have in shaping, arranging, and structuring the world as humans understand it. The pattern which celestial motion created is not only used or repeated, but becomes the path through which further learning can happen. In other words, this celestial heuristic ultimately reveals a relationship through which the nonhuman constantly shapes and influences thinking. It is perhaps more than a relationship – this influence can gesture to a more fundamental entanglement with the cosmos and with nonhumans. This entanglement of human affairs, lives, and mortality with the structure of a complex cosmic causality is one benefit that this chapter's discussion of the nonhuman adds to a conversation about nonhuman activity, agency, or power. The idea of nonhuman heuristics and patterns that affect and change us is not so much an idea of nonhuman action, power or influence over the human as it is a fundamental connection that shapes comprehension. It offers a kind of alternative way of thinking about relating to the nonhuman, and challenges conventional distinctions between agents, agency, action, and power. Where the *Itinerarium* offered nonhuman agents like the Llech Lafar stone, which wielded political power and could defy kings, which was divine and agential in clear, direct ways, these celestial bodies wield a more subtle structuring of human experiences and minds through an entanglement that is no less important.

Let us now return to Tyson's tweet. Henry's chronicle covers the year 1066, and mentions the same comet Tyson responds to in his tweet. Armed with a deeper understanding of celestial motion, patterns of temporality, death, and the eschaton, we now get to choose more carefully how we approach interpretation of this event in the chronicle, as well as on the Bayeux Tapestry. Henry of Huntingdon writes: "Thus the hand of the Lord brought to pass the change which a remarkable comet had foreshadowed in the beginning of the same year; as it was said 'In the year 1066, all England was alarmed by a flaming comet" (212). If we immediately dismiss

this moment as shallow, superstitious, we ignore a valuable realization about the religious medieval perspective that records this event. Once again, this example emphasizes the "hand of the Lord," the divine agency's action and will. The comet bridges for these observers an eschatological reminder with the immense, fundamental celestial structures that have so much agency and power over their daily lives that they are considered divine – part of the fabric of God's being. Dismissing this moment as profound ignorance of nature erases what is very much part of a medieval astronomical system – a whole system of coming to understand nature and the universe.

Final Thoughts

Dismissing medieval thought would be a loss. The medieval conflation of religious and scientific systems of "knowing" nature in this chronicle, as well as in the *Itinerarium Cambriae,* provides insights into relationships with the nonhuman that do not necessarily center human thought and action. With the divine integrated into nature and celestial motion, these medieval writers allow themselves and their texts to be "calibrated" by those nonhuman elements – which resonates with the posthuman moment we find ourselves in. I say calibrated because Karen Barad's definition of Posthumanism notes that Posthumanism is "not calibrated to the human; on the contrary, it is about taking issue with human exceptionalism while being accountable for the role [humans] play in the differential constitution and differential position of the human among other creatures" (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 136). There are therefore a number of ways that Barad's Posthumanism, when defined as the decentering of the human to the effect that the human (including here the social) is also kept in check by relationships to and with other things. In essence, what Barad is fundamentally concerned with in discussing Posthumanism that is

relevant here is the capacity of texts and people to think ecologically, to put the human in relationship with nonhumans and to feel the effects, affects, and connections of those relationships as a responsibility. Thus, when Canute, in what seems by far the *Historia*'s most famous anecdote, tells us that the power of human kings is held to account by the power of someone greater, whose power is clearly felt in an absolute rule of the tides, the waves, and the sea – which are, for Canute, the alien and nonhuman forces of the world – It is hard *not* to feel resonance with Barad's description of Posthumanism.

It is not surprising but is nevertheless heartbreaking to realize that this resonance is almost entirely born out of the sudden, slow, cascading ruin of the world due to anthropogenic Climate Change, as well as the more sudden and thesis-altering events of COVID-19. As a response to climate change and pandemic, Posthumanism shows that the human is always accountable to ecology. We are always, in other words, held in account to the relationships we cultivate – as not epistemologically, but ontologically connected to vast networks of things, as well as people which shape our world, and our knowledge of our world. To separate culture from nature or concerns of economy from concerns of sustainability and environmental care would, in other words, destroy (for us) whole parts of being. It would limit our capacity to know our own world, and the parts of ourselves that could grow from a relationship with it.

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