Rhesis International Journal of Linguistics, Philology and Literature

Osbern Bokenham's *Life of Seynt Poule the First Heremyte*: Authority, Community and Location

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Abstract

The present paper will represent the first extended study of the verse *Life of St. Paul the First Hermit* included in the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*. The Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea* is an as yet unpublished manuscript containing the only surviving copy of the translation of the *Legenda Aurea* by the fifteenth-century East Anglian Austin friar, Osbern Bokenham. The *Life of Saint Paul the First Hermit* is of particular interest since it is one of only three extant verse lives of male saints by Bokenham, who, prior to the discovery of the Abbotsford MS, was considered primarily as an author of lives of female saints. Rather than basing his text of Paul's life on that in Voragine's Legenda, Bokenham translates directly from Voragine's source, the significantly longer *vita* by Jerome. The descriptions of Paul's cave, of the monsters who Anthony meets in the desert and of the warm relationship which develops between Anthony and Paul had all been significantly cut back in Voragine's text and Bokenham's choice of source is indicative of the crucial thematic importance of these episodes to his retelling, which has a Preface in Chaucerian rime royal and is replete with stylistic and verbal echoes of his more secular vernacular forebears. In emphasising the familial ties binding the monastic brotherhood through his depiction of Paul, Anthony and Anthony's disciples, Bokenham affiliates his own hagiographic output to an ancient transhistorical community (Sanok 2007) which legitimizes his poetic voice without severing it outright from the secular vernacular traditions in which his style is rooted.

Key Words – Osbern Bokenham; hagiography; Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*; St. Paul of Thebes; Augustinianism

1. The Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*

The present paper will represent the first extended study of the verse *Life of St. Paul the First Hermit* included in the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*. The Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea* is an as yet unpublished manuscript containing the only surviving copy of the translation of the *Legenda Aurea* by the fifteenth-century East Anglian Austin friar, Osbern Bokenham. Bokenham mentioned this text in the first chapter of his *Mappula Angliae*, where he cited

> the englische boke the whiche y haue compiled of legenda aurea and of oþer famos legends. (Horstmann 1887: 6)

The manuscript in question, which had been purchased by Sir Walter Scott at Sotheby's in 1809, remained unstudied and unattributed until it was brought to the attention of Simon Horobin by the Faculty of Advocates in 2004 (Horobin 2008: 135).

2. Versifying Male Saints: Augustinian Lineage and Fraternity

The *Life of Saint Paul the First Hermit* is one of only three extant verse lives of male saints by Bokenham. Bokenham's interest in female sanctity has been much documented. Indeed, until the discovery of the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*, he was considered above all as an author of lives of female saints (Delany 1997). Nine of the verse lives of female saints collected in Arundel 327 and published by the EETS as the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* in 1938 are also included in the Abbotsford MS, and Horobin puts forward a credible argument that all thirteen of the Arundel texts were probably originally present:

> Katherine, Cecilia and Elizabeth all have their feast days late in the liturgical year, appearing as numbers 168, 169 and 172 in the *Legenda Aurea*. The final item from the *Legenda* found in the Abbotsford manuscript in All Souls (163), so it is likely that all three of these lives originally appeared in the Abbotsford MS in the quires that are now missing. The feast day for St. Anne is 26 July, between those of St Christopher and the Seven Sleepers (numbers 100 and 101). There is a quire missing at precisely this point in the Abbotsford manuscript, causing the omission of the end of the life of St. Christina and probably the whole lives of James the Greater, Christopher and the Seven Sleepers. It is therefore probable that the life of Saint Anne originally appeared in the collection in the quire that is now missing. (Horobin 2008: 140)

In addition, the Abbotsford MS also contains verse lives of Saints Audrey, Apollonia, Faith and Winefred, making for a total of seventeen verse lives of female saints. The large number of female saints' lives appearing in verse form can be seen to reflect Bokenham's particular focus on female spirituality and the interests of the network of powerful and pious female lay patrons by whom many of his works were commissioned. We know from Bokenham's own 'Prologues' that Dame Isabel Bourchier, sister of Richard Duke of York, commissioned the life of Saint Mary Magdalen and that Elizabeth Vere, wife of the twelfth earl of Oxford requested that of Elizabeth of Hungary. The legend of Saint Anne was written for Katherine Denstone, who was also the dedicatee of the legend of Saint Katherine together with Katherine Howard. The life of Saint Agatha was dedicated to Agatha Flegge, wife of an Essex landowner (Horobin 2007: 941-942; Delany 1997: 15-22). Horobin has argued that the Abbotsford manuscript may have been presented to Cecily Neville, wife of Richard, Duke of York (Horobin 2008: 142-145)[1].

[1] Horobin refers to Cecily Neville's will of 1495, wherein she bequeathes «the boke of Legenda Aurea in velem» to her granddaughter, Bridget (Horobin 2008: 150-151).

The verse lives of male saints, instead – the lives of Vincent, Paul the Hermit and Ambrose – all treat of figures who were of particular importance to Bokenham's own monastery and order. Their function can be defined as one of legitimization and authorization. A chapel to Saint Vincent stood at Clare, which had been founded by the monastery's patron, Joan of Acre, as mentioned in the *Dialogue at the Grave*:

> Wherefore in honoure, O Vincent! of the,
> To whom she had singular affection
> This chapel she made of pure devocion.
> (Scarfe 1962: 65)

Bokenham probably had this chapel in mind at the end of his *Life of Saint Vincent*, where he added a verse, for which there is no precedent in the *Legenda Aurea*, on Vincent's intercession on behalf of those who build churches in his honour:

> And this privilege god of his grace
> Grauntid hath to this martir fre
> That wherso evir in ony place
> In his honour ony church made be
> As though it were the place where he
> Lieth hym self of his grete mercy
> His benefettis he shewith plenteously.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 47v)

This insertion implicitly translates the authority of the continental saint's cult onto the local chapel at Clare. The chapel is endowed with the sanctity of the saint's relics – of his bodily presence – «As though it were the place where he / lieth hym self». The performative iteration of this transference at the conclusion of Bokenham's translation of the *vita* serves at the same time to elevate Bokenham's poem, foregrounding the parallels between saintly corpse and hagiographical corpus (cf. for example Ashton 2000: 2; Spencer 2013: 56), between text and reliquary and between the architecture of the church and artifice of the literary work.

The lives of Paul and Ambrose serve a similar legitimizing function in asserting the spiritual pedigree of Augustine and of the Augustinian monastic order. In the *Confessions*, Ambrose is very much the spiritual father of Augustine and, in celebrating Ambrose, Bokenham's verse life might be seen to celebrate the prestigious ancestry of Augustine and his followers. One of the Augustinian Order's core claims to authority over its Franciscan and Dominican counterparts rested on its antiquity – on the fact that its founding father belonged to the fourth and fifth centuries, not the twelfth and thirteenth[2], and there had been various significant attempts in the fourteenth century to trace the origins of the order back even further: to the desert fathers. The justification for such assertions can be located in part in Book Eight of the *Confessions* themselves, where Ponticianus reads the life of Saint Anthony to Augustine and Alypius. Augustine is greatly inspired by the story and it is a direct catalyst for his ecstatic conversion in the garden. Between 1330 and 1334 the Anonymous Florentine's *Initium sive processus ordinis heremitarum sancti augustini*, Nicholas of Alessandria's *Sermo de Beato Augustino* and Henry of Friemar's *Tractatus de originu et progressu ordinis fratrum eremitarum sancti augustini* sought to attribute the foundations of the Austin line to Paul the Hermit and Anthony of Thebes (Saak 2006: 193-194). This project was carried forward in the hugely influential work of Jordanus of Quedlinburg: specifically in the *Collectanea Sancti Augustini* (an autograph miscellanea of Augustiniana donated to the order's Paris house in 1343) and his 1358 *Liber Vitasfratrum*. The former of these works,

[2] To quote Laferrière (2017: 10): «Unlike the Domincans and Franciscans, the Austin Friars looked to an ancient figure, Augustine of Hippo, in order to formulate their religious platform».

which included many of the pseudo-Augustinian *Sermones ad fratres in eremo*, also contained Jordanus' *Vita S. Augustini* which, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Spencer 2019), was a partial source for Bokenham's own *Lyf of Seynt Austin the Doctour*, as well as for Capgrave's life of Augustine.

3. Bokenham's Source

Rather than basing his text of Paul's life on that in Voragine's *Legenda*, Bokenham translates directly from Voragine's source, the significantly longer *vita* by Jerome. The descriptions of Paul's cave, of the monsters who Anthony meets in the desert and of the warm relationship which develops between Anthony and Paul had all been significantly cut back in Voragine's text and Bokenham's choice of source is indicative of the crucial thematic importance of these episodes to his retelling.

4. The Cave and the Garden: Locating the Vernacular Hagiographer

I would argue that the first two of these aspects – Paul's cave and the depiction of the monsters – help Bokenham to locate and lend authority to his own voice within the secular vernacular literary tradition he has inherited. In his description of Paul's cave in the desert, Jerome draws on the *motif* of the Edenic garden blooming in the desert which can be traced back as far as Isaiah (Rapp 2006: 101):

> For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord. (Isaiah 51, 3)
>
> The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. (Isaiah 35.1-2)
>
> I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together, so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it. (Isaiah 41, 19-20)

Rapp (2006: 101) provides an interesting analysis and outline of how early monastic depictions of the desert appropriated and transformed the traditionally separate *topoi* of city and countryside, with monks' desert communities representing alternative "cities of God" and the desert garden emerging as a Christian counterpart to the classical bucolic retreats enjoyed, for example, by Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. Jerome's *vita* establishes a specific dichotomy between sacred and profane gardens. At the beginning of the *vita* we are told how, during the persecutions of Decius and Valerian, a young Christian is taken to an idyllic garden pleasure garden and tempted by a beautiful young woman. He overcomes his physical urges by biting off his tongue and spitting it into his temptress' face. Curiously, the cave of Paul is also presented as a kind of *hortus conclusus*, with a clear fountain and an abundance of fruit. The Edenic garden in the desert is the true, sacred counterpart of the corrupt mundane version which appears at the beginning of the narrative.

In Bokenham's retelling this dichotomy can also be read as reflecting an implicit comment by the fifteenth-century hagiographer on the secular vernacular literary canon within which he finds himself. As Delany (1997) has highlighted, Bokenham's works, and especially the 'Prologues' to the *vitae* collected in the Arundel manuscript, contain numerous expressions of a Bloomian "anxiety of influence" with regard to the writer's immediate poetic forerunners: the Chaucer-Gower-Lydgate triumvirate. Generally speaking, these passages are characterized by a profession of modesty and of an "anxiety of influence" stemming from poetic belatedness accompanied by a rather slippery implied critique of the aureate style

and ethos which Bokenham attributes to these writers (cf. also Spencer 2013: 30-32). In his deployments of the modesty *topos*, Bokenham makes repeated recourse to the Ciceronian "flowers of rhetoric" trope. There is nothing unusual *per se* in this, but I will now briefly suggest that Bokenham's treatment of this motif tends to imply a criticism of the disparity between linguistic surface and inner meaning which he sees in these texts. In his "Prologue" to the Arundel life of St. Margaret, Bokenham writes:

> The form of procedyng artificyal
> Is in no wyse ner poetycal
> After the scole of the crafty clerk
> Galfryd of ynglond, in his newe werk,
> Entytlyd thus, as I can aspye,
> Galfridus anglicus, in hys newe poetrye,
> Enbelshyd with colours of rethoryk
> So plenteuously, that fully it lyk
> In May was neuere no medewe sene
> Motleyd with flours on hys verdure grene;
> For neythyr Tullius, prynce of oure eloquence
> Ner Demostenes of Grece, more affluence
> Neuere had in rethoryk, as it semyth me,
> Than had this Galfryd in hys degree.
> But for-as-meche as I neuere dede muse
> In thylk crafty werk, I it now refuse,
> And wil declaryn euene by and by
> Of seynt Margrete, aftyr the story,
> The byrthe, the fostrynge, and how she cam
> Fyrst to the feyth and sythe to martyrdam,
> As ny as my wyt it kan deuyse
> Aftyr the legende.
> (Serjeantson 1938: 83-104)

Bokenham's overt praise for Geoffrey of Vinsauf here focuses on its superabundance («plenteuously», «affluence») and superficiality («enbelyshyd», «motleyd with flours *on* hys verdure grene»). This superfluous and superficial linguistic proliferation is opposed to the poet's own professed directness and economy, together with his faithfulness to the true spiritual sense of his source text. Bokenham's abrupt statement that he will now «refuse» Geoffrey's «crafty» style is surprising and seems to belie his overt profession of humility.

In the Arundel 'Prolocutorye in-to Marye Mawdelyns Lyf', the same trope is immediately preceded by a direct attack on the superficial rhetoric of "courtly classicizers" (Delany 1997: 45) and immediately followed by a reference to his own mortality:

> Not desyryng to haue swych eloquence
> As sum curyals han, new swych asperence
> In vttryng of here subtly conceytys,
> In wych oft tyme ual greth dysceyt it,
> And specially for þeyr ladyis sake
> They baladys or amalettys lyst to make,
> In wych to sorwyn & wepyn þey feyn
> As þou þe mprongys of deth dede streyn
> Here hert-root, al-be þei fer þens;
> Yet not-for-þan is here centens
> So craftyd up, & with langwage so gay

Uttryd, þat I trowe þe moneth of may
Neuere fresshere enbelyshyd þe soyl with flours
Than is her wrytyng with colours
Of rethorycal speche both to & fro;
Was neuere þe tayl gayere of a po,
Wych þan enherytyd alle Argus eyne
Whan Mercuryis whystyl hym dede streyne
To hys deed slepe; of wych language
The craft to coueyte where grete dotage
In myn oold dayis & in þat degree
That I am in; wher-fore, lord, to þe
Wyt humble entent & hert entere
In þis conclude I my long preyere.
(Serjeantson 1938: 5225-5248)

Bokenham attacks courtly lyricists because they «feyn» – because the surface appearance of their linguistic output does not correspond to what is really going on at their «hert-root», their «centens» is «craftyd up» beyond recognition. Bokenham, instead, speaks clearly, directly from his own «hert» and with unambiguous «entent». In the context of his argument, the rhetorical «flours» which «enbelyshyd þe soyl» in the works of Bokennham's predecessors assume rather negative connotations. They obscure and hide what lies beneath, rather than giving it any truthful expression. It is perhaps not over-speculative to read in this reference to the soil some intimation of the mortality of the aging author of the poem («in myn oold dayis»), who has chosen to give humble voice to eternal truths rather than cover over the dust to which he will soon return with ephemeral rhetorical flowers.

Some support for this reading is to be found in Bokenham's other deployment of the trope, in the 'Prologue' to the Life of St. Agnes which appears in the Arundel and the Abbotsford manuscripts. Here, Bokenham ostensibly laments his own belatedness, telling us how, when he presented himself at the Ciceronian garden of rhetoric, he was rebuffed by a rather haughty Pallas who told him that Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate had already gathered «the most fresh flourys». Intriguingly, Pallas immediately follows up this praise by telling Bokenham that Chaucer and Gower are dead and buried and referring to Lydgate's mortality:

"Thou commyst to late, for gadyrd up be
The most fresh flourys by personys thre
Of wych tweyne han fynysshyud here fate,
but þe trydde hath datropos yet in cherte,
As gower, chauncer & ioon lytgate"
(Serjeantson 1938: 4054-4058; Abbotsford, fol. 43r)

This stress on the mortality of Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate emerges again during the *vita* of St. Margaret, in which Bokenham again couples praise for the courtly triumvirate with a reference to their mortality. The passage in the Arundel manuscript is as follows:

But sekyr I lakke bothe eloquens
And kunnyng swych maters to dilate,
For I dwelyd neuere wyth the fresh rethoryens,
Gower, Chauncers, ner wyth lytgate,
Wych lyuyth yet, lest he deyed late,
Wherfore I preye eche an hertly
Haue me excusyd thow I do rudly.
(Serjeantson 1938: 414-420)

In the Abbotsford MS the stanza is updated to mention Lydgate's death:

> But siker I lacke bothe eloquence
> And kunnyng such matiers to dilate
> Ffor I nevir duellid with the fresh rethorience
> Gower Chauncers ner with Lydgate
> Which al be runnen to her fate
> Wherfore I prey eche man hertely
> Haue me excused though I speke rudely.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 130v)

Some explanation for this repeated linking of superficial courtly rhetoric with the death of the poet can perhaps be found in the famous Pauline edict: «littera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivicat» ('the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life', *Corinthians* 2:3). If words are divorced from their spiritual sense, they belong to the mutable world of decay and death, and herein lies Bokenham's implicit criticism of aureate poetics. Yet unlike Paul, Bokenham would not cast off the letter altogether. He rather seeks to reunite letter and spirit in an authentically Christian poetics.

No direct reference to Bokenham's literary forebears is made in the life of Saint Paul the First Hermit, but Chaucer's influence is nonetheless clearly evident throughout the poem, which opens with a deployment of the modesty *topos* in Chaucerian Rime Royal[3]. There is a clear verbal echo of Chaucer in the opening lines of the poem where Bokenham writes:

> To which doute as writeris doon devise
> Diuers men answer on diuers wise.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 34r)

This doubling of the adjective "diverse" to stress plurality of points of view has multiple precedents in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tale*s:

> Diverse folk diversely they demed;
> As many heddes, as manye wittes ther been;
> ('The Squire's Tale', 202-203)

> Diverse men diverse thynges seyden
> ('The Man of Law's Tale', 211)

> Diverse men diversely hym tolde
> ('The Merchant's Tale', 255)

> Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes,
> And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes
> ('The Wife of Bath's Tale', 47-48)[4]

The *vita*'s two gardens inevitably placed Bokenham in dialogue with a long and complex literary tradition. The literary garden was a multivalent *locus*, with connotations of chastity and eroticism, Christianity and paganism, the sacred and the profane. In vernacular medieval literature the biblical

[3] The main body of the *vita* is written in a mixture of octo- and decasyllabic couplets.
[4] These passages are quoted and analysed by Thompson (1996), who comments on their analogy to Emilia's description of the *brigata*'s activity at IV, 7, 5 of Boccaccio's *Decamerone*: «diverse cose diversamente parlando».

gardens of Eden and Gethsemane, together with the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs, combine with the Ciceronian garden as philosophical retreat, the poetic garden of the *Hesperides* and the often erotic floral and garden motifs of Ovid. Medieval courtly love literature in the tradition of the French troubadour lyrics and both sections of *Le Roman de la rose* exploited this ambiguity and semantic richness, as did the garden settings of Chaucer's dream visions. I would argue that Bokenham's description of the pleasure garden at the beginning of the *vita* is particularly redolent of the garden in Chaucer's *Parlement of Fowls.* The passage in Bokenham is as follows:

> Ffor into a faire gardyn thei hym ledde
> Where in a fresh herber was made a bedde
> Of softe downe ful delicately
> And yit clothis araied right fresshly
> And rounde aboute it was beset
> With roses lilies primerole and violette
> And with many a nothir diuers floure
> Fressh of hue and swete of odoure
> Environed was eke this herber shene
> With many a tree ful of leevis grene
> In which smale byrdis ful sweetly
> As nature hem taught maden melody
> And beside these trees ran a rivere
> Whereof as cristal the water shoone clere
> Cold and fresh the thirsty with to glade
> Which in his cours a little noise made
> As it ran amonge the stones smale.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 34r)

This description contains various elements for which there is no precedent in Jerome but which echo Chaucer's *Parlement*. For example, in his emphasis on the greenness of the leaves, Bokenham recalls the following passage:

> For overall where I myne eyen caste
> Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste,
> Ech in his kynde, of colour fresh and greene
> As emeraude, that joye was to seens.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 171-175)

Again, the harmonious singing of the birds, a detail absent in Jerome, is similarly redolent of Chaucer's poem:

> On every bow the bryddes herde I synge,
> With voys of aungel in here armonye.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 190-191)

The polyphonic skills of Bokenham's birds are attributed to the teachings of «Nature» – the allegorical figure who presides over Chaucer's *Parlement.* The four flower species listed by Bokenham (Bokenham refers to «roses lilies primerole and violette» whereas Jerome only mentions lilies and roses) recall the four flower colours listed in Chaucer's text: «With floures white, blew, yelwe and rede» (Abbotsford, fol. 186). The likening of a water to a crystal, for which, once more, there is no source in Jerome, has multiple analogues in courtly love dream visions, including, perhaps most famously, the two crystals («ii. pierres de cristal», 1535-1536) in Narcissus' fountain in *Le Roman de la rose*.

This paradisiac landscape is abruptly rejected (or "refused" in the language of the Arundel 'Prologue' to the Life of Saint Margaret) when the young Christian bites off his tongue, an episode which might be seen as metaphorically equating this sensual landscape with a certain form of verbal expression – as a renunciation which is literary as well as moral. Yet Paul's desert cave is in itself a kind of *hortus conclusus:* a fruit-bearing tree shading a clear fountain, walled off from the outside world:

> Undir a crag casuelly fonde he
> A cave shett with a stoon which to see
> The stoon remevid he in went
> Where undir the open firmament
> A vestible nat large unturnid he fonde
> In the myddis wherof a palme did stonde
> Which with his braunchis large and wide
> Shadowid the cave on every side
> This palme was a ful olde tree
> And had of frute ful gret plentee
> Which dates men calle and even therby
> Sprang up a wel ful plesauntly
> The water wherof was faire and clere
> And copious ynow to make a rivere
> Nevirtheles all that over ran the brynke
> A little withoute the cave did synke
> Marveilously into the erth ageyn.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 34r)

The fecund poetic landscape and language of the literary garden is not rejected outright: it is rather reclaimed and carried back to its sacred roots.

If Bokenham presents himself as a historical and aesthetic outsider from the secular and vernacular poetic canons, he lays claim to an alternative form of belonging by locating himself within a more ancient monastic brotherhood. The life of St. Paul of Thebes focuses above all on the meeting between Paul and Anthony the Great shortly before the former's death. It was often invoked in order to assert the lineage and antiquity of the Augustinian monastic order. Bokenham follows and extends upon Jerome's life in order to emphasise the warm fraternity and respect which developed between these two monks during their brief meeting:

> And eche grete othir by his owne name
> As though of olde antiquyte
> Eche had with othir acqueyntid be
> And knowen hem ful familiarly.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 35v)

He also stresses the love which Anthony's monastic brothers had for their abbot and their anxiety at his absence:

> […] ful hastely
> He hym hyed to his monastery
> Whither whan he cam withoute lette
> His two disciples with hym mette
> Which longe tyme in his seruise
> Endurid had seyeng this wise
> Fadir where hasthou so long be?

> Grete hevenesse we han had for the.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 36r)

In his answer Anthony claims an authority for Paul, and therefore for his own order, which stretches back even further – to John the Baptist and Elijah:

> for certeynly
> Iohn in desert and eke Elie
> I haue seyen but abouen hie
> Poule I haue seyn in paradise.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 36r)

Bokenham can be seen to foreground his ties to his monastic forefather by a shift into the first person during the description of Paul's lifestyle in the cave:

> And for his necessaries he did conclude
> That nevir hym nedid to han solicitude
> Ffor mete and cloth aftir thappostles entent
> Who so hath owith to be content
> Yf he list quoth he God to plese and serue
> And for defaute of mete shal I not sterue
> While al these dates growen on this tree
> With the leevis wherof I clad shal be
> And for my bed han sufficiently
> My drynke shal yiue me the welle therby
> And this shal I mown withoute labout
> As for my living seruen my creator
> And nevir by no tyraunt thurgh ydolatrye
> Be compellis hym to denye
> As many oon han ben where I was bore
> Wherfore there wil I nevir come more
> While in this worlde to liven oo day haue y
> Now lorde Ihu for thy moche mercy
> Which me hast brought unto this place
> Graunte me quoth he thurgh thy grace
> Here the to serven to thy plesaunce
> And in thi servise yive me perseveraunce
> Withouten which may no man sure
> Ben of the ioye which evir shan dure
> In every temptacion also lorde be
> Myn helpe for othir truly than the
> Hane I noon ner noon othir wil haue.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 34v)

The equivalent passages in Jerome and Voragine remain in the third person and I would argue that Bokenham's translation strategy here can be read as a deliberate attempt to appropriate and lay claim to the voice of the saint. As I have already observed elsewhere, Bokenham adopts a similar technique at a crucial passage from his life of Saint Monica when, during his description of Augustine's mother's final illness, he makes a surprising and unprecedented shift into direct discourse:

> Aftir whiche tyme five dayes she langired in the accesse so grevously labored that she sempt to ben alienat som what from her wittis. But sone aftir whan she came ageyn to hir self and bihelde

> me and my brethren stondyng abouten hir astonyed with morning and hevynesse she seyd thus to me and to my brother. Putteth here to sepulture your modir the which sone shal deyen. And at that worde quoth Austyn whan I gan mornen and wepyn my brother seid that he wolde nat that she shuld deyen there in her pilgrimage but rather goon hoom and be buryed in hir owen cuntre. Which worde she heryng turned hir eyen with an hevy chier to hymward first and afterward to me and seid see what he seith. And aftir that she spake to us both to gider and seid puttyth this body where so evir you list. Lattith no body be troubled with busynesse therefore but this oonly I prey you that where so evir ye ben whan ye stoned at goddis awtier than hath mynde upon me. (Abbotsford, fol. 102r)

In both of these cases, I would argue that Bokenham chooses to ventriloquise his saintly subjects in order to foreground the familial ties which bind the contemporary monastic author to the forefathers (Paul and Augustine) and mother (Monica) of his order.

Bokenham, then, borrows the language and imagery of his courtly, classicizing poetic ancestry, yet carefully re-locates his own poetic voice and authority within the spiritual fraternity of his own monastic order. His position, then, is somewhat more complex than the blunt "refusal" of the Arundel Margaret 'Prologue'. Bokenham's debt to Chaucer is evident throughout his verse works and, as I have shown, his life of St. Paul is no exception.

5. The Mixed Life

I would suggest that this hovering between "refusal" and reluctant acceptance can to some extent be understood in relation to the espousal of the "mixed life" which characterises Bokenham's hagiography. Arguably, although the figure of Paul is upheld as demonstrating the antiquity of the monastic eremitism, more attention is paid throughout the text to the more community-minded Anthony, who cannot follow Paul in death and utter *contemptus mundi* but must rather return to see to the spiritual well-being of his flock:

> Quoth Poule ageyn that may nat be
> Ffor al be it that it were expedient
> Ffor thi self aftir thyn entent
> This same iourney with me to make
> Yit Antonye for many othirs sake
> To whom thy presence is necessarie
> It behovith in this life the lenger to tarie
> And to confermyn in parfite lyving
> Thi brethren by gode example yivyng
> And moche thing to amendyn that is amys
> Wherfore goo fast whider the lothe ys.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 36r)

Interestingly, in lines which have no precedent in Jerome or in Voragine, Bokenham describes Anthony as having led an exemplary life inasmuch as it «actife was bothen and contemplatife» (fol. 34r) – inasmuch as it was a mixed life, as defined, for example, by Walter Hilton at the end of the *Scale of Perfection*. Such a stance is consistent with the ethical values espoused throughout the Abbotsford *Legenda Aurea*, as Horobin has illustrated (Horobin 2007: 947). In another passage for which there is no source in Jerome or Jacobus, Bokenham underlines Anthony's renown as a spiritual leader. Whereas Paul praises God in the wilderness alone and in silence, «No man it knowynge but God and he» (fol. 34v), Bokenham stresses Anthony's «famous life and hye renoun»:

> In a monastery not fer beside
> Ffrom Poule that blissid and holy man
> Which first the ordre of munkis began
> Antonye duellid both wise and sage
> Aboute seventy winter of ago
> Whos famous life and hye renoun
> Dyvulged was ful fer in vysoun
> Bothen in egipt and elsewhere
> Ffor the maner of rule that he led there.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 34v)

Although the contemplative Paul is presented as the higher spiritual authority, he would have remained anonymous and unknown in this world were it not for the mixed life of his descendant Anthony. Anthony's pedagogical evangelical role is in some sense implicitly mirrored in that of Bokenham as a vernacular hagiographical writer. The mundane role of the guide and teacher is assumed with reluctant humility. In Augustinian terms, worldly prestige and poetic renown (and language) are harnessed to be used («uti») not enjoyed («frui»).

Yet at the same time human verbal expression and human evangelism are not without their divinity, since the Incarnation means that, despite its distance, the human word is never altogether removed from the divine Word and the human evangelist typologically comes to participate in the greater community of the saints, which stretches back to Christ himself. From this point of view, Bloch's analysis of Augustine's theory of history and signs, which brings together the themes of language and genealogy which have been central to the present article, is particularly pertinent:

> The drama of return to the Father through the Son is crucial for Augustine's theology of history, which is indissociable from a theology of sacramental signs. Augustine thus distinguishes between the undifferentiated, immaterial, divine Word which, "engendered by the Father, is coeternal with Him," and corporeally articulated human speech. In some extended sense, however, words always refer to the Word. All language thus harks back to an origin synonymous with the Father who remains present in the objects of his Creation. (Bloch 1983: 60)

It is for this reason that, in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine seeks to redeem and Christianise classical rhetoric, rather than dismissing it altogether:

> Porro qui non solum sapienter, verum etiam eloquenter vult dicere, quoniam profecto plus proderit, si utrumque potuerit; ad legendos vel audiendos et exercitatione imitandos eloquentes eum mitto libentius, quam magistris artis rhetoricae vacare praecipio (Augustine 1886a: IV.v. I).
>
> As for the person who wants to speak eloquently as well as wisely – it will certainly be more beneficial if he can do both – I would be happier to refer him to eloquent speakers so that he can read their works, listen to their words, and practice imitating them, than to recommend that his time be spent on teachers of rhetoric. (Green 1997: 105)

6. The Beasts and Tradition

I would argue that this complex and fluid dialectic is in some ways reflected in the mythological beasts – a centaur and a satyr – who Anthony encounters as he searches for Paul in the desert. Both of these figures originate in classical mythology, both are animal-human hybrids and both were traditionally associated with a hyper-masculine erotic threat. Having said this, portrayals of both were somewhat

ambivalent. For example, as Bartra has argued, the centaur-teacher Chiron forges «an odd link between wild nature and a prophetic knowledge», representing «wisdom and culture» in part due to the «superhuman qualities of nature itself» (Bartra 1994: 11). The God Pan is associated with music and fertility and, in Virgil, presides over a pre-lapsarian Arcadia. In the vita, both of these animals assist Anthony on his quest. The centaur is the more mysterious of the two:

> And whan it was aboute midday
> And the sunne right fervently shoon
> Nat fer him fro he perceived oon
> Comyng hym toward a grete paas
> Which half man and half hors was
> Man biforne hors in the aftir partye
> Which monster as poetis discrye
> Is a centaure clepid who whan he sey
> He hym blissid and this did sey
> O creature of god what evir thou be
> For reuerence of hym which made the
> I the biseche yf thou kan me telle
> Where the seruent of God doth dwelle
> Here in this wide waste wildernesse
> To whom this monster aftir his rudenesse
> As he coude and might nat spak ageyn
> But what he seid Antonye nyst certeyn
> Ffor articuled language was it noon
> And forthwith this monster anoon
> His right hand lifted up ful hey
> And thider he desired hym shewid the wey
> Which doon no lenger he there abode
> But as swiftely as wynde awey he glode
> In the eyre but whider he did pace
> Antonye ne wist ner to what place.
> Moreover quoth Jerome whethir the devil it were
> Which thider came Antonye to fere
> Or wildernesse such monstris doth forth bring
> No surenesse we han by writyng.
> (Abbotsford, fol. 35r)

The centaur is entirely ambiguous. The narrator comments that he could easily be «the devil» and yet Anthony greets him in more positive terms as a «creature of god» and the monster does eventually help him to find his way. His polyvalent monstrosity is ultimately associated with the wilderness of the desert itself «wildernesse such monstris doth forth bring».

The satyr, instead, clearly articulates his own meaning and place in the story. He introduces himself as «mortal» and «goddis creature», but as having been wrongly worshipped as a God in «paynymerie» (Abbotsford, fol. 35r):

> Mortal I am and goddis creature
> Albeit that outward is my figure
> Of mankynde the common liknesse
> And oon of the dwellers of wildernesse
> I am whom that paynymerie
> Illudid with errour and with folie
> Worshippethy for goddis to her grete shame

> And faunis and satires us doth name
> And incubus as her writeris descrie,
> (Abbotsford, fol. 35r)

Anthony apostrophises the city of Alexandria, rebuking its denizens for their continued idolatry and bewailing the fact that «Bestis spekyn crist and men hym denye» (Abbotsford, fol. 35r). This is partly a distinction between the primordial innocence of nature and a corrupt, fallen civilization. However, it is also a way of re-appropriating the poetic imagination and literary tradition to which these mythical figures belong. The centaur and satyr and «natural» beasts, but hardly in a Romantic, Wordsworthian sense. They are, first and foremost, literary creations. The fact that the centaur and satyr are mythological beasts who would not naturally be found in the desert foregrounds their textuality, as does the manner in which the satyr introduces himself through a reference to literary texts – «as her writers descrie» (Abbotsford, fol. 35r).

7. Conclusion: Authority and Community

In emphasising the familial ties binding the monastic brotherhood through his depiction of Paul, Anthony and Anthony's disciples, Bokenham affiliates his own hagiographic output to an ancient transhistorical community (Sanok 2007) which legitimizes his poetic voice without severing it outright from the secular vernacular traditions in which his style is rooted. The diachronic and synchronic binaries which Bokenham's *Life of Seynt Poule the first Heremyte* apparently establishes between spiritual and secular traditions and between the city and the desert, then, are ultimately more correctional than oppositional. The *hortus conclusus* in the desert is not so much the opposite of the pleasure garden in the city as its true realization – what it should have been. Similarly, Bokenham's hagiographical verse does not so much reject the secular literary tradition of Chaucer as harness its expressive power and unveil its true, divine essence.

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