

BERNARD OF MORLAIX

ABSTRACT

Francis John Balnaves, *Bernard of Morlaix: the literature of complaint, the Latin tradition and the twelfth-century "renaissance."* PhD thesis, Australian National University, March 1997.

Bernard of Morlaix was a Cluniac monk who flourished around 1140. What little is known about him, including his visit to Rome, is examined in relation to the affairs of the Cluniac family in his day. A new conjecture is advanced that he was prior of Saint-Denis de Nogent-le-Rotrou. His poems are discussed as examples of the genre of complaint literature. His treatment of the end of the world, and of death, judgement, heaven and hell, is discussed in relation to twelfth-century monasticism. His castigation of the sins of his time includes some of the earliest estates satire. His anticlericalism and his misogyny are compared with those of his contemporaries, and discussed in the context of twelfth-century monastic culture. Bernard's classical learning is analysed and compared with that of his contemporaries, especially John of Salisbury and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. His use of metre and rhyme is examined in the context of the development of metre based on stress rather than quantity and of systematic and sustained rhyme in the Latin verse of the twelfth century. Bernard's use of interpretive and compositional allegory is explored. Bernard is seen as a man of his time, exemplifying a number of twelfth-century characteristics, religious, educational and cultural. Special attention is paid to the Latin literary tradition, and it is suggested that the culture of the twelfth-century was in many respects a culmination rather than a renaissance.

BERNARD OF MORLAIX

THE LITERATURE OF COMPLAINT, THE LATIN TRADITION AND THE
TWELFTH-CENTURY "RENAISSANCE"

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the
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by

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For Michael, who did the sums

Apart from quotations from other works, all of which are duly acknowledged in the text, this thesis is entirely my own work.

Francis John
Balnaves

Rogo autem et per viscera misericordie dei nostri obsecro ut, si qua corrigenda hic videritis, caritative corrigatis. Qui enim in verbo non offendit, hic perfectus est vir.

Bernard of Morlaix *De castitate servanda*

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INTRODUCTION

Bernard of Morlaix was a monk of the order of Cluny who flourished around 1140. Excerpts from one of his poems appear in some anthologies of medieval Latin verse¹ and he is briefly noticed in some works on the twelfth-century renaissance, but he has received little critical attention and only one of his poems has been translated from the Latin. He does not, like Ordericus Vitalis, write explicitly about the events of his time. His poems are satirical and homiletic. But, unlike his namesake of Clairvaux, who called himself a chimera of his age,² Bernard of Morlaix was a man of his time and a mirror of the society in which he lived.

He was not a man of enormous influence, like Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, but he was sufficiently reliable to be sent on a mission to Pope Eugenius III in Rome. He was not an urbane and wise administrator with a large monastic empire to control, like Peter the Venerable, but he was a conscientious monk and he may have been prior of Saint-Denis de Nogent-le-Rotrou. He could not match the immense classical scholarship of John of Salisbury, but he was far removed from the ignorant clerics that Gerald of Wales complained about. He was not a mystic and a visionary, like Hildegard of Bingen, but he contributed significantly to eschatological and devotional literature. He was not extreme in his devotion to Mary, like Eadmer of Canterbury, but he may have written one of the best known poems

¹For example, *The Oxford book of medieval Latin verse*, ed. F.J.E. Raby, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959; *The Penguin book of Latin verse*, ed. Frederick Brittain, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962 (The Penguin poets); *A primer of medieval Latin; an anthology of prose and poetry*, by Charles H. Beeson, Folkestone, Bailey Brothers and Swinfen, 1973.

²J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina*, Paris, 1844-1864, 221v, vol. 182, column 451. Subsequent citations of the *Patrologia Latina* use the abbreviation PL, followed by volume and column numbers.

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about her. He was not an active reformer, embroiled in secular affairs, like Arnold of Brescia, but he was forthright in his condemnation of the sins of popes, bishops and clergy. He was not a poet of the calibre of Peter Abelard or Hildebert of Lavardin, but he was a skilled versifier who contributed to the development of verse forms. He was not a satirist as clever as Walter of Chatillon, but he was among the first poets to work in the genre of estates satire. As an allegorist, he was not in the class of Bernardus Silvestris, but he contributed to the development of allegory through his imaginative interpretations of Scripture. People like Bernard, who occupy the middle ground, may, in some respects, be more representative of their times than their better known contemporaries.

This thesis attempts an examination of the reasons why Bernard wrote as he did, in the context especially of the genre of complaint. It looks at features of Bernard's time which shaped his writing, such as the troubles of the Cluniac order, the nature of monastic education and of higher education generally, classical learning in the twelfth century, the social structure of the three estates, and attitudes towards women and homosexuals.

Chapter 1 discusses what is known about Bernard of Morlaix and his works, both those that are certainly his and those attributed to him. It examines his possible Englishness; his association with Nogent-le-Rotrou; and his visit to Pope Eugenius III in Rome at about the time when Arnold of Brescia was there. The dispute between abbot Pons de Melgueil and Peter the Venerable is discussed as part of the background of the Cluniac order in Bernard's time.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal with some aspects of the literature of complaint. Bernard's treatment of the end of the world and heaven and hell is considered in relation to earlier treatments (especially the *Apocalypse of Peter*) and to the writings of his contemporaries, such as Otto of Freising and Joachim of Fiore.

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Contemptus mundi literature is discussed in relation to what it tells us about twelfth-century attitudes towards the natural and the supernatural, human life, suffering, sin and redemption, and in relation to what it reveals about monasticism and the contemplative life, especially differences between Cluniac and Cistercian perceptions. The absence of a personal Satan in Bernard's writings, as in those of Anselm and Abelard, and in contrast with the doctrines of the Cathars, is noted.

Another aspect of the literature of complaint is estates satire. Bernard's treatment of the three estates (the church, the nobles and the commons); of the interdependence of the three estates; and of the clergy (to whom Bernard pays most attention) is examined. Bernard's anticlericalism, his attitude towards Rome, bishops and priests, is compared with that of his contemporaries. Other subjects of complaint literature which are considered include homosexuals (especially in the context of the suggestion of a "renaissance of gay culture" in the twelfth century); Bernard's misogyny, in the context of monastic culture and in the context of twelfth-century society; and Bernard's treatment of Mary in the same contexts.

Chapter 5 explores Bernard's knowledge of classical Latin literature and his use of classical, patristic and medieval sources, compared with those of his contemporaries, especially John of Salisbury and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. It considers some aspects of twelfth-century monastic education, the essential Latinity of the twelfth-century literary tradition, and the absence of Greek scholarship.

Chapter 6 discusses Bernard's use of a wide variety of metrical forms (including classical prosody) and his use of sophisticated rhyme schemes, in the context of the development, in the Latin verse of the twelfth century, of metre based on stress rather than quantity and of systematic and sustained rhyme, and the assimilation of both into vernacular verse forms.

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Chapter 7 explores Bernard's use of interpretive and compositional allegory, compared with that of his contemporaries, especially Bernardus Silvestris, Hildegard of Bingen, Nigel Longchamps and Alan de Lille. It considers the blending of interpretive and compositional allegory and the debt of vernacular literatures to the twelfth-century's special achievements in development of allegory.

Except where otherwise indicated in the text or in footnotes, all translations throughout the thesis are those of the author of the thesis. Henry Preble's translation of *De contemptu mundi*, which appears in S. M. Jackson's *The source of "Jerusalem the golden"*,³ is inaccurate and incomplete. Ronald E. Pepin's translation of the poem also has errors and is too literal for the purpose of this thesis.⁴ There are no translations of any of the other works by or attributed to Bernard of Morlaix.

Evagrius of Antioch explains that "word for word translation from one language to another obscures the meaning and chokes it, as grass, growing wild, chokes crops."⁵ I have tried to translate in such a way that "although something may be wanting in the words, nothing is lacking in the sense. Let others go on wild goose chases after letters and syllables. Please look for the meaning."⁶

³Samuel Macaulay Jackson, *The source of "Jerusalem the golden," together with other pieces attributed to Bernard of Cluny, in English translation by Henry Preble*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1910, p. 10-53. Preble's translation had previously been published in three successive issues of the *American journal of theology* for 1906. It was based on the inadequate text published by Thomas Wright in 1872.

⁴Ronald E. Pepin, *Scorn of the world; Bernard of Cluny's "De contemptu mundi": the Latin text with English translation ...* East Lansing, Colleagues Press, 1991. See also Jill Mann, "[Review of] Ronald E. Pepin, *Scorn of the world: Bernard of Cluny's 'De contemptu mundi' ...*" *Journal of medieval Latin* 4(1994):163-169.

⁵Evagrius of Antioch, *Vita beati Antonii abbatis*, PL 73, 125-126.

⁶*ibid.*