

Essays in Medieval Studies 15

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page 57**The Sweet Song of Satan:
Music and Resistance in the Vercelli Book****Christina M. Heckman**

In the poetry and prose homilies of the Vercelli Book, a collection of Anglo-Saxon texts dating from the second half of the tenth century, music exercises a constitutive as well as metaphorical force.¹ Music not only symbolizes the harmony of communal consensus but also provides a means through which the Christian Church can identify itself with the divine order of the universe and position itself against evil forces. By using music to construct and intensify the fundamental conflict between God and Satan, the Vercelli texts function to restrict and control the Church's internal struggles. But even as music contributes to the reinforcement of ecclesiastical power, it works against that consolidation. Whether music comes from heaven or from hell, the operation of music in human experience always provides space for resistance. That resistance, both in texts and in communal practices, can only be minimized by disciplining music into orderly patterns and restraining it to structured environments such as those of liturgical practice.

Liturgical music provides one example of music's apparent operation as a simple metaphor, a commonplace that remains in the background. We often see liturgical music as representing the harmony of the Church community, accompanying the activity taking place on the altar, establishing a mood, facilitating prayer, or filling in periods of silence. Music is sometimes relegated to a place below language in a hierarchy of sound: it is better than silence, but not as important as speech. The fact that we often take music for granted, however, ought to motivate us immediately to investigate its operation more carefully. Music is not limited to metaphorical representation nor to a place in the background of other activities. It performs a certain kind of work with social and ideological consequences, as music theorists John Shepherd and Peter Wicke emphasize in their recent book, *Music and Cultural Theory*. Their work, to which I will return later, asserts the previously overlooked complexity of musical forms, as well as their constitutive and communicative possibilities.²

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The recognition of the musical complexity to which Shepherd and Wicke refer, I argue, can make a difference in the way we read texts. References to music in the texts of the Vercelli Book range from the deceptively simple to the perplexing. Most often, music appears to operate as a metaphor that associates harmony with holiness and disharmony with evil. For example, in *Elene*, a poetic hagiographical account of the search for the True Cross, Helen's Christians sing to honor the three newly-discovered crosses, as they await a miracle to distinguish Christ's cross from those of the two thieves:

Gesæton sigerofo, sang ahofon,
rædþeahtende, ymb þa roda þreo
oð þa nigodan tid, hæfdon neowne gefean
mærdum gemeted.

(Lines 867-70a)³

[The victorious ones, taking counsel, sat [and] raised up a song around the three crosses until the ninth hour; they had found new joy in glories.]

This song appears to be a straightforward hymn of praise, a way to occupy time in an appropriately worshipful manner until the miracle arrives. In *Andreas*, another poem in the Vercelli Book that relates the ministry of St. Andrew, music also serves an apparently simple function. Andrew's followers describe their divine vision in which eagles pluck their souls from their sleeping bodies and fly with them to heaven:

Lissum lufodon ond in lofe wunedon,
þær wæs singal sang ond swegles gong,

wlitig weoroda heap ond wuldres þreat.
Utan ymbe æðelne englas stodon,
þegnas ymb þeoden, þusendmælum,
heredon on hehðo halgan stefne
dryhtna dryhten.

(Lines 868-74a)

[They lived in grace and dwelled in glory; there was perpetual song and the course of the heavens, a fair troop of hosts and a throng of glory. On the outside around the glorious [one] angels stood, thanes around their chief, in thousands. The Lord of Lords heard the voices of saints in the heavens.]

In this passage, music serves as the characteristic mode of expression for the harmonious and divinely ordered population of heaven.

As a direct contrast to the music of holy men and angels, Vercelli Homily XXIII represents the cacophonous voices of the demons who attack St. Guthlac as directly related to the disorder and chaos of evil:

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... [ond] hie wæron ondrysenlice on stefne ... [ond] hashrymedon on heora cleopunge, [ond] hie swa ungemetlice hrymdon [ond] foran mid forhtlicum egesum [ond] ungeþwærnessum þæt hit þuhte þæt hit eall betweoh heofone [ond] eorðan hleoðrode þam egeslicum stefnum.

(Lines 96, 98-101)⁴

[. . . and they were terrible in voice . . . and sounded harshly in their crying, and they raved so violently and with dreadful horror and discord before them that it seemed that all between heaven and earth resounded with their awful voices.]

Like the sounds of demons, the cries of carrion beasts in *Elene*, as well as in many other Old English poems,⁵ signify disorder and destruction. In *Elene*, the songs of the carrion beasts frame Constantine's vision of the cross before the battle between the Romans and the Huns, heralding the death and devastation of the battlefield:

... Fyrdleoð agol
wulf on wealde, wælrune ne mað.
Urigfeðera earn sang ahof,
laðum on laste ...
... Byman sungon
hlude for hergum. Hrefn weorces gefeah,
urigfeðra, earn sið beheold,
wælhreowra wig. Wulf sang ahof,
holtes gehleða.

(Lines 27b-30a, 109b-113a)

[The war-song sounded forth; the wolf in the forest did not conceal the murderous song. The dewy-winged eagle raised up a song, in pursuit of misfortune . . . Trumpets sang loudly for plunder. The raven rejoiced in its work; dewy-winged, the eagle beheld the undertaking, the savage battle. The wolf, inhabitant of the woods, lifted up a song.]

The apparently simple musical patterns followed in *Elene*, *Andreas*, and Homily XXIII—harmony characterizes good, and discord symbolizes evil—are problematized, however, by references to dirges and mourning songs in other Vercelli texts. This sorrowful music, often signaled by the use of the verb "galan," intervenes in the heretofore direct correlation between good and evil groups and the type of sounds they produce. Both *The Dream of the Rood* and *Andreas* include references to songs that mourn losses within lord-thane relationships. In *The Dream of the Rood* the Cross describes for the Dreamer the lamentation of Christ's thanes after his death:

Ongunnon him þa sorhleoð galan
earme on þa æfentide, þa hie woldon eft siðian,
meðe fram þam mæran þeodne.

(Lines 67b-69a)

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[They began then to chant a dirge, wretched in the evening-time; then afterward they would depart, dejected, from the glorious prince.]

In the passage from *Andreas*, in contrast, the singer is the devil, who laments in song his thanes' inability to conquer Andrew:

Ongan eft swa ær ealdgeniðla,
helle hæftling, hearmleoð galan:
"Hwæt wearð eow swa rofum, rincas mine,
lindgesteallan, þæt eow swa lyt gespeow?"

(Lines 1341-44)

[The enemy of all, captive of hell, began afterward, as before, to sing a lamentation: "What became of you, my warriors, battle-companions so vigorous, that you succeeded so little?"]

Again, as in *The Dream of the Rood*, the verb "galan" is used, establishing a verbal link between the musical activity of Christ's thanes and the devil. In other Anglo-Saxon texts "galan" typically refers to mournful or martial music and implies the action of crying out or wailing in song.⁶ *Andreas* and *The Dream of the Rood* assign the same form—lamentation—to the music of good and evil groups, representing their activity with the same term.

In the first group of passages from *Elene*, *Andreas*, and Homily XXIII music is used in an effort to clarify the universe through binary opposition. While music often facilitates that process, in dirges and mourning songs the potential of music to disrupt that binary universe emerges more clearly, making music visible as a space for resistance. The complexity of music's function in the Vercelli texts, however, as well as its capacity for subversion, emerges most strikingly in Homily X. It begins with an emphasis on the Incarnation and Christ's birth and earthly life, swiftly moving to admonish listeners and readers about the need for penitence and vigilance against sin. The reference to music comes from the devil, who arrives at the Last Judgment to demand boldly that God deal with him justly and deliver to him the wicked souls that are his due, since they served him rather than God in earthly life. Satan directly opposes the preaching of Scripture to the sound of his own evil, but sweet-sounding, music:

Ðonn[e] hie gehyrdon þine bec rædan [ond] þin godspel secgan [ond] hira lif rihtan [ond] him ecne weg cyðan,
hy symle hiera earan dytton [ond] hit gehyran noldon. Ac ðonne ic mine hearpan genam [ond] mine strengas
styrian ongan, hie ðæt lustlice gehyrdon, [ond] fram þe cyrdon [ond] to me urnon. (Lines 81-85)

When they heard your books read and your gospel spoken and their life rebuked and the eternal way proclaimed to them, they always closed their ears and did not wish to hear it. But when I took my harp and

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began to stir my strings, they heard that gladly, and turned from you and hastened to me.]

In this passage Satan assails human souls through their ears, using music to charm them as Scripture and the Church's preaching could not. The souls are not drawn to evil itself, but to the sweetness of musical sound, when the sound of the spoken Word drove them away.

In the binary universe of good and evil turning away from God necessarily sends human souls to the devil. The presence of music in the exchange, however, opens up a problematic space between good and evil. Homily X does not oppose harmonious music to discordant sound, as earlier examples do. Rather, it juxtaposes speech and song. Though the devil claims that human souls turn away from God and toward him, the passage makes clear that they rather turn away from authorized speech and toward the sounds of music. While the devil describes the incident as though the binary oppositions between good and evil remain intact, his words in Homily X signal the dangerous potential of music as an unstable space that cannot be reduced to such oppositions.

The homily asserts the complexity of music as a medium in sound and demands a reconceptualization of music's social and cultural force. For a theoretical framework through which to examine music's function in this and other texts, I return to Shepherd and Wicke's study of the role of music in the constitution and maintenance of societies. Shepherd and Wicke assert a place for music alongside language rather than subject to it, emphasizing the equal

importance of both music and language in the formation of human subjects and in human communication. As fundamental communicative systems, however, language and music function in very different ways, according to Shepherd and Wicke. Language can produce arbitrary meanings, denoting as well as connoting the material world.⁷ In contrast, music, which cannot denote the external world or ascribe arbitrary meaning to it, must call forth meaning from its listeners. In this way, individual interpretation constitutes a fundamental aspect of interacting with music.

Because music connotes rather than denotes, it participates in the material world without referring directly to phenomena outside itself.⁸ Placing priority on music as a link between the material and social worlds, Shepherd and Wicke focus on the "sounds of music themselves": the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and timbral configurations that lead us to recognize music as 'music.'⁹ The material aspect of music's sounds both connects human bodies with the social environment in which they participate and provides a link to the individual consciousness and to the affective responses and meanings produced by that consciousness.

For Shepherd and Wicke, the material aspect of music and its link with individual consciousness give it fundamental ideological significance.¹⁰ Music is especially important in the interpellation of subjects into ideology, a theoretical process formulated by Althusser, because its asemantic and affective aspects, rather than being prior or subject to the linguistic and cognitive aspects of consciousness, operate alongside language and cognition. While language identifies the

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material world mainly through vision and communicates through vision and sound, music can communicate only through sound, which is "evanescent" and continually in motion. According to Shepherd and Wicke, because sound is less easily controlled than vision, it "encourages a sense of the world as received ... revelatory rather than incarnate." The naturalizing function of music's sounds and its resonance within the material body ensure its crucial role in interpellating the subject into ideology. In contrast to the arbitrary nature of language's sounds, Shepherd and Wicke claim, "the experience of sound in music is based upon a dialectical interaction between sound's material characteristics and the human body as itself a material site for the mediation of cultural and subjective processes."¹¹

According to Shepherd and Wicke, music positions subjects within social and ideological processes, but subjects also choose to be positioned according to their experience of musical sound. The dialectic between the sounds of music and the body requires the participation of the individual subject in the negotiation of meaning.¹² Individual subjects, therefore, can manipulate music to serve particular ideologies and to discipline the musical meaning-making processes of individuals. Particularly in Western Europe, Shepherd and Wicke claim, discourses that produce music as a category have often served the interests of the socially and culturally powerful and participated in "attempts at social control."¹³

We can see the perception of music's influence on human action in Boethius's *De Institutione Musica*, perhaps the most influential musical treatise in early medieval Europe. Boethius claims that music exerts a power that can reshape the mind for good or evil. For this reason, he prioritizes the regulation and ordering of sound to preserve harmony and similitude in music and therefore within human minds and groups.¹⁴ Boethius, however, seems to propose a direct relation between the harmony of music and that of the minds who hear it. For Boethius, the creation of musical meaning can be effectively controlled by the discipline of its transmission and reception.

In the Christian Middle Ages the liturgical and monastic contexts of musical expression themselves perform a disciplinary function, conditioning subjects to interpret music in certain ways. The stringent regulation of the body that is required for singing in unison and producing harmonious sound combinations also disciplines the bodies of participants in religious ritual. Even though monks singing their Office might produce harmony like that of the angels, however, our reading of Shepherd and Wicke has shown that the music's meaning need not be inherent. The interpretation of musical sound, Shepherd and Wicke insist, ultimately lies with the individual subject, who can potentially resist dominant interpretations. This individual capacity for producing meaning must be disciplined, as we can see through the Benedictine Rule and its relentless regulation of musical worship in the Office.

The psalms that constitute the monastic Office contain their own internal discipline in that they consist of song mediated by the authoritative language of the Scriptures. The words of David, the "sealmscop," are directly cited in

Elene and in several Vercelli homilies, which often note the interaction between music

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and language in the psalms. For example, Homily XVI reads: "Dauid se witiga in þam sealme sang [ond]...sægde" (line 58; "David the wise man in the psalms sang and said"). David's music, his "singing," is always accompanied by prophetic words, his "saying." The pairing of verbs that occurs in this passage is common enough in Anglo-Saxon texts, but here it also emphasizes the necessity of the linguistic discipline of song through the words of Scripture.¹⁵ In the Office, music mediated through the psalms' divinely inspired language serves as the structuring and defining principle for thousands of religious communities.¹⁶

While we can perceive the discipline exerted by liturgical forms in texts such as the *Regularis Concordia* and other documents relating to the religious practice of the Church, Bede's story of Cædmon also serves as an example of the ideological constraint exercised by an ecclesiastical institution to restrict and incorporate the music of the secular world outside the monastery's walls. Cædmon's story has been described as the "birth" of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry by Allen J. Frantzen,¹⁷ but it also represents a transformation in Anglo-Saxon musical practice. The communal harp music of Anglo-Saxon secular culture and Cædmon's inability to compose or perform it drives him from the hall:

Siquidem in habitu saeculari usque ad tempora prouectioris aetatis constitutus, nil carminum aliquando didicerat. Vnde nonnumquam in conuiuio, cum esset laetitiae causa decretum ut omnes per ordinem cantare deberent, ille, ubi adpropinquare sibi citharam cernebat, surgebat a media caena et egressus ad suam domum repedabat.¹⁸ [Indeed, having always been fixed in the secular way of life until the time of advanced age, he had learned nothing of songs at any time. Then sometimes at a feast, when it had been decided for the cause of joy that all ought to sing in turn, when he saw the harp approach him, he rose up from the middle of the feast and, having started forth, retreated to his home.]

In leaving the hall Cædmon rejects not only his own inadequacy as a performer, but also the secular communal context, cultural process, and musical idiom of his people.

When Cædmon receives his gift and first sings his *Hymn*, Bede orchestrates the episode to highlight the "naturalness" of the incident. Cædmon sleeps in a stable surrounded by beasts, a humble setting reminiscent of the Nativity. In this deceptively natural, simple, and common environment, Cædmon's visitor arrives in a dream. The dialogue that ensues between them emphasizes the visitation's status as a pure beginning, achieved without deliberation or effort on Cædmon's part:

. . . adstitit ei quidam per somnium, eumque salutans ac suo appellans nomine "Caedmon," inquit, "canta mihi aliquid." At ille respondens "Nescio" inquit "cantare; nam et ideo de conuiuio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram." Rursum ille qui cum eo loquebatur "At tamen" ait "mihi cantare habes." "Quid" inquit "debeo cantare?" Et

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ille "Canta" inquit "principium creaturarum." Quo accepto responso, statim ipse coepit cantare in laudem Dei Conditoris uersus quos numquam audierat¹⁹ [... through a dream a certain man stood by him and, greeting him and calling him name, said "Cædmon, sing something to me." But that man, responding, said "I don't know how to sing; for that reason, having left the feast, I withdrew then to this place, because I was not able to sing." That man who was with him spoke to the contrary. "But nevertheless," he said, "you must sing to me." "What," he said, "should I sing?" And that man said, "Sing the beginning of created things." Having received this answer, he himself began to sing at once verses that he had never heard, in praise of God the Creator.]

In the "natural space" of the barn, Cædmon spontaneously institutes a new musical idiom through the grace of God.

Earlier in the chapter, Bede emphasizes the unmediated nature of Cædmon's poetry: "Namque ipse non ab hominibus neque per hominem institutus canendi artem didicit, sed diuinitus adiutus gratis canendi donum accepit" ("For he himself did not learn the art of singing from men nor through the instruction of a man, but he received the gift of singing helped by divine grace").²⁰ While the secular music of the hall required such skill that it sent Cædmon into flight, the distinctively Christian song that he recites in his dream springs entirely from the grace of God. Through this

episode, Bede cloaks the artistry, deliberation, and ideological force of Christian poetic songs in a story of divine origins: secular music requires human effort and skill, while Christian music proceeds from God through the "religiosam linguam," "pious tongue," of a "natural" man. According to Frantzen, the story, as well as its traditional presentation, "fulfill[s] a fantasy ... in which the hostile proposition (pre-Christian verse) is not simply reconciled to the new proposition (Christian doctrine in verse form), but is obliterated in the process." [21](#) When Cædmon receives his gift, secular cultural production is effectively replaced through divine inspiration.

That Cædmon's gift comes to him in a dream introduces an element of danger into the story. The dream-state places Cædmon's gift and vision in a realm inaccessible to ecclesiastical authority. For an uneducated, common man to have unmediated access to divine visitations, songs, and gifts introduces a fundamental instability into the situation, particularly considering Shepherd and Wicke's claims about the affective responses and meanings produced by the individual consciousness through the materiality of music's sounds. Bede solves this problem by placing Cædmon within the institutional hierarchy of the monastery. In the morning Cædmon, having discovered that he has retained his gift and added verses to the song he composed in his dream, reports dutifully to his master the reeve, who brings him to the abess. Cædmon is then required to give his account of the dream and recite his song:

. . . iussus est, multis doctioribus uiris praesentibus, indicare somnium et

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dicere carmen, ut uniuersorum iudicio quid uel unde esset quod referebat probaretur. Visumque est omnibus caelestem ei a Domino concessam esse gratiam, exponebantque illi quendam sacrae historiae siue doctrinae sermonem, praecipientes eum, si posset, hunc in modulationem carminis transferre. [22](#)

[... he was ordered, with many more learned men present, to reveal his dream and sing his song, so that what he was relating and whence [it came] was approved by the judgment of every single one. And it seemed to all that the heavenly grace was granted to him by the Lord, and they set forth a discourse of sacred history or doctrine to that man, instructing him to translate it into the form of a song, if he was able.]

Clare Lees and Gillian Overing claim that the Abbess Hild, unnamed in this chapter, "acts as the ultimate arbiter for the veracity of Cædmon's miracle," [23](#) but as Bede constructs the story, the learned men appear to exert the primary authority in approving Cædmon's experience and song.

In Vercelli Homily X the devil uses the sweet sound of music against the spoken Word; Bede's story of Cædmon, however, suppresses the subversive potential of Cædmon's music by mediating it through the Word of "sacrae historiae," sacred history. Cædmon makes the music, but the learned men provide his material. Even after he joins the monastery at the abess's instruction, Cædmon is still an illiterate and "natural" man. Bede describes Cædmon's composition process as rumination on the sacred teachings that the learned men feed him:

At ipse cuncta, quae audiendo discere poterat, rememorando secum et quasi mundum animal ruminando, in carmen dulcissimum conuertebat, suauiusque resonando doctores suos uicissim auditores sui faciebat. [24](#)

[But that man himself, remembering all of that which he could learn by listening and like a clean animal chewing the cud, turned it around into the sweetest song, and by resounding so sweetly he made his teachers into his listeners.]

Though this passage begins by metaphorically associating Cædmon's composition with the natural processes of animals, it swiftly shifts with the verb "conuertere," to turn around, translate, or convert. [25](#) Even though the learned men control the material, the sweetness of Cædmon's song causes a role reversal. Now they learn from him. Cædmon's musical gift also serves as a tool of conversion: "Cuius carminibus multorum saepe animi ad contemptum saeculi et appetitum sunt uitae caelestis accensi" ("Through his songs, the souls of many were often inflamed to a disdain for this life and a passion for heavenly life"). [26](#)

The appetite or passion that Cædmon inspires in others also characterizes his own religious fervor:

Erat enim uir multum religiosus et regularibus disciplinis humiliter subditus; aduersum uero illos, qui aliter facere uolebant, zelo magni feruoris accensus, unde et pulchro uitam suam fine conclusit. [27](#)

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[For the man was extremely pious and humbly subject to the discipline of the rule; truly against those who wished to act otherwise, inflamed by the zeal of a great raging fervor, then he brought his life to a beautiful end.]

Bede's vocabulary in this passage emphasizes the intensity of Cædmon's religious passion. Rather than using the more sedate and common "studium" to refer to Cædmon's zeal,²⁸ Bede chooses the construction "zelo magni feruoris," implying a violent heat, a surging madness of religious enthusiasm.²⁹ Cædmon's passion, far from the "studium" of learned men, characterizes him as one who responds affectively rather than rationally to the divine.

Bede's portrayal of Cædmon testifies to the ideological effects that Shepherd and Wicke claim result from the naturalizing function of music's sounds, its appeal to the emotions, and its resonance within the body. Cædmon's gift and music can only exist within controlled limits. He, his gift, and his song are all swiftly incorporated into the monastic institution,³⁰ moving from the instability of one uneducated man's dream to the discipline of communal musical practice and pedagogy. On one level, this movement emphasizes Cædmon's divine gift and his dutiful reverence for the hierarchy in which he is placed. On another level, however, it tacitly acknowledges the dangerous instability of his musical gift, unaccompanied by linguistic privilege or scriptural knowledge. Bede's story moves from the communal hall, in which everyone, including Cædmon, is expected to sing, to the monastic setting, in which selected people sing with careful direction and instruction under the auspices of an ecclesiastical institution.

The story of Cædmon, like the song of the devil in Vercelli Homily X, testifies to the dangerous power of music to surpass and subvert spoken sacred texts, and therefore the preaching authority of the Church. As Shepherd and Wicke emphasize, music serves a naturalizing function and resonates within the body, the material site through which social and cultural processes are mediated. Because of these capacities, music exercises a crucial force in the interpellation of subjects into ideology. It draws its listeners in when spoken words cannot. The souls wooed by the devil in Vercelli Homily X respond not to content but to sound: they "close their ears" to the discipline of the spoken Word, turning instead to the sweet music of the devil.

As music draws individual subjects in, Shepherd and Wicke claim, it also invites them to participate in the negotiation of meaning. Bede had to describe Cædmon's composition process as "natural," because an uneducated man is not authorized to formulate meanings of his own. Cædmon's music, however, in spite of Bede's efforts to efface its subversive potential, still offers the opportunity for listeners to negotiate their own meanings, according to Shepherd and Wicke's formulation. Music can never be entirely regulated; its meaning can never be positively determined by institutional authority.

It is music's capacity to withstand absolute control that provides opportunities for resistance within musical forms. The devil manages to disrupt the preaching of Scripture because of this profound instability, which inspired a great deal of uneasiness within the institutional Church, as Boethius emphasizes when he

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claims that music can shape the mind. Within an ecclesiastical institution, meaning cannot be negotiable. It must be ordered, clarified and made obvious by authorized representatives. Homilies exist for this very purpose: they explain doctrine to those who cannot (or should not) interpret for themselves. The devil's song in Vercelli Homily X, far from operating as a mere metaphor, strikes a blow at textual authority and the ministry of preaching. As my reading of Bede and Homily X through Shepherd and Wicke's work has shown, the question of music's function in this and other texts extends beyond dichotomies of good vs. evil, God vs. Satan, music vs. speech, and body vs. soul. It becomes a question of the individual negotiation of meaning within an ecclesiastical institution that requires obedient acceptance of its official meanings, mediated through learned authority.

As the Vercelli texts and Bede's story of Cædmon emphasize, the Church treads a fine line in relation to music. In Homily X Scripture loses a competition with music over human souls. The Church faces a choice: depend on the more rational appeal of the spoken Word and yield to the devil when he uses musical forms for his own designs, or capitalize on music's power for the purposes of conversion and strengthening faith. Through the discipline of music and the textual mediation of song within communal contexts, the Church can choose the latter option with relative safety. Constrained by privileged language and ecclesiastical authority, music can be adjusted to serve the ideological

purposes of the Church. No level of regulation, however, can completely suppress the subversive potential of a sweet song.

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Notes

1. This paper is an expansion of a study begun in a 1996 Newberry Library Anglo-Saxon Seminar on the Vercelli Book with Dr. Thomas Hall of the University of Illinois at Chicago. It was later presented at a session of the 1997 annual meeting of the Illinois Medieval Association as "Songs of the Damned: Music as Metaphor in the Vercelli Book." I would like to thank Allen J. Frantzen of Loyola University Chicago for his continual assistance and for his advice on this paper as it has moved through its various stages.

2. John Shepherd and Peter Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997). The authors ground their study in a search for an alternative to semiotic, psychoanalytic, and other structuralist and poststructuralist notions of music that relegate it to a dependence on language and to secondary status in relation to linguistic systems. Shepherd and Wicke engage in extended and thorough discussions of the work of Althusser, Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, and a number of musicological theorists such as Leonard B. Meyer.

3. All citations from the Vercelli poetic texts are taken from George Philip Krapp's ASPR edition of *The Vercelli Book* (New York, 1932).

4. Citations from the Vercelli homilies are taken from D. G. Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS OS 300 (London, 1992).

5. The Germanic motif of carrion beasts, which John M. Hill associates with Woden, the "terrifying presence on the field of slaughter" in Germanic mythology and legend, also appears in the battlefield scenes in *Judith* (see lines 200-12), *The Battle of Brunanburh* (lines 56-65), and *The Battle of Maldon* (lines 103-8). For Hill's discussion of the motif in Germanic mythology, see *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto, 1995), p. 64.

6. T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary based on the manuscript collection of the late Joseph Bosworth* (London, 1898), p. 359. Bosworth-Toller defines "galan" as "to sing, enchant, call." It generally refers to martial or mourning songs, but *Elene* 248 contains an exception, using "galan" to refer to a song of triumph. Bosworth-Toller relates the Old English word to several cognates, including the Scottish "gale" ("to cry"), the Danish "gale" ("to crow"), the Swedish "gala" ("to crow"), and the Icelandic "gala" ("to crow, sing"). Given these associations, the use of "galan" in Anglo-Saxon texts may imply the action of keening or wailing in grief.

7. Shepherd and Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory*, p. 197. In "The Photographic Message" (*Image--Music--Text* 15-31), Roland Barthes describes the difference between denotation and connotation as follows. While denotation seems to be limited to perception, connotation involves an act of reading, associating, and interpreting. Denotation involves what Barthes calls a "first-order message ... a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence" (p. 18). He locates this type of message, one limited by its relation to material reality, in the photograph alone. Within Barthes's configuration, language seems to proceed according to the joining of denotation and connotation. "[T]o describe," he claims, "consists precisely in joining to the denoted message a relay or second-order message derived from a code which is ... a connotation: to describe is thus not

simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change structures, to signify something different to what is shown" (pp. 18-19). Connotation, Barthes continues, "is not necessarily immediately graspable at the level of the message itself ... but it can ... be inferred" (p. 19).

8. Shepherd and Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory*, p. 15; here they refer particularly to the work of Leonard B. Meyer.

9. Shepherd and Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory*, p. 10.

10. Shepherd and Wicke address music in terms of Althusser's theory of ideology, in which he argues for the materiality of the ideas of the subject's beliefs because "*his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*" (p. 51; emphasis in original). Shepherd and Wicke also place music in a parallel to Lévi-Strauss's concept of myth, or the "systems of cultural knowledge through which societies make sense of the worlds in which they exist" (p. 42). Lévi-Strauss claims that myth, while it depends on language and its parts, exists on a

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higher plane than language. He conceives of music as a "myth coded in sounds instead of words," noting that music can transcend articulate expression and make time stand still (p. 45).

11. Shepherd and Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory*, pp. 126, 127, 147.

12. Shepherd and Wicke distinguish this idea from many poststructuralist models of subjectivity, in which "discourses unilaterally speak subjects" (*Music and Cultural Theory*, p. 177).

13. Shepherd and Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory*, p. 212.

14. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, trans. Calvin M. Bower, ed. Claude V. Palisca (New Haven, 1989), Book I, Part 1. For Carolingian treatises that might have influenced Anglo-Saxon ideas about music during the Benedictine Reform, see Palisca's edition of *Musica Enchiridis and Scolica Enchiridis*, trans. Raymond Erickson (New Haven, 1995).

15. On the joining of song and word as a link to the divine, see John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350* (Cambridge, Eng., 1986). For studies of the use of music in liturgy, particularly in Advent and Christmas celebrations, see Susan Rankin, "The Liturgical Background of the Old English Advent Lyrics: A Reappraisal," in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), pp. 317-40. See also Jackson J. Campbell, ed., *The Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book* (Princeton, 1959).

16. See Dom Thomas Symons's edition and modern English facing translation of the *Regularis Concordia Anglica Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque* (London, 1953). The Anglo-Saxon interlinear text is available in Lucia Kornexl's *Die Regularis Concordia und ihre altenglische Interlinearversion*, ed. Helmut Gneuss and Wolfgang Weiss (München, 1993). For a more specific study of psalmic performance in the Office, see Joseph Dyer, "The Singing of Psalms in the Early-Medieval Office," *Speculum* 64 (1989), 535-78. For a broader study of worship in monasteries, see Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York, 1982).

17. Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1990), p. 142. My approach owes a great deal to Frantzen's deconstructive reading of the story of Cædmon; see especially pp. 141-44.

18. Citations are taken from R. A. B. Mynors's Latin text of *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969); see pp. 414-16. I would like to thank Mark Farmer of Loyola University Chicago for his help in translating the Latin text.

19. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 416.

20. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 414.

21. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, p. 143.

22. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 416-18.

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23. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, "Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production," *Exemplaria* 6 (1994), 35-65; here, p. 43. Lees and Overing offer a feminist reading of cultural production in the story of Cædmon, noting that Bede institutes a paradigm in which men produce and women reproduce and insisting that "Hild deserves to be rescued from Bede and afforded her own place in history" (p. 47).

24. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 418.

25. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1968) offers a number of definitions for "convertere," including "to turn upside down ... invert; convulse, shake"; "to turn backwards, reverse the natural direction of"; "to reconcile to oneself, win over"; "to change ... alter, transform ... to convert"; "to render from one language to another, translate"; and "to bring into a specified (new or altered) state of mind." The resonances of conversion, inversion, and reversal that the word carries highlight the overturning of the typical relation between learned and unlearned men, here authorized by divine intervention.

26. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 414.

27. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 418.

28. The *OLD* defines "studium" as "earnest application of one's attention or energies to some specified or implied object, zeal, ardour"; "enthusiasm, eagerness"; "an activity to which one devotes one's attention, a pursuit, pastime, etc."; "devotion to a particular person, party, cause"; "intellectual activity, esp. of a literary kind, or an instance of it, study." It carries the implication of learning, and is often used to denote the zeal or enthusiasm of scholarly men, a group in which Cædmon is certainly not included.

29. According to the *OLD*, "feruor" often refers to physical heat, such as that of the weather or the body, a "burning sensation, fever." It can also be used to denote a "disturbance, unrest (of the mind)"; "exuberance, hot blood, ardour, enthusiasm; vehemence, heat, passion; an intense stage of any passion, paroxysm." The noun "zelus" in turn signifies an ardent love or a "spirit of rivalry or emulation; jealousy." The description of Cædmon's zeal associates it with physicality, bodiliness, and a passion approaching instability and excessiveness.

30. Frantzen emphasizes the haste of Cædmon's incorporation, stating that he is "whisked into the monastery by the abbess" (*Desire for Origins*, p. 142).