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Three images of the Vernacular in the Taymouth Hours

Jessica Brantley

Scholars immersed in the textual culture of the western Middle Ages generally think of 'the vernacular' as a linguistic category; the late medieval centuries, after all, were the first great age of literary production in the national languages of Europe. But the concept of the vernacular offers particular value for the study of interactions between word and image, for the term has a common visual application, as well. 'Vernacular architecture', for example, describes indigenous, practical buildings whose local purposes are more important than any classical ancestry or monumental aspirations. I am interested here in both senses of the word as they intersect in one medieval manuscript, for the copious picture cycles that fill the margins of the early fourteenth-century Taymouth Hours (London, British Library MS Yates Thompson 13) are neither monumental nor Latinate. These are 'images of the vernacular' in every imaginable sense. To begin with, they are simply 'vernacular' images, in spite of their rather high quality; they treat subjects more homely, in a style less formal, than the traditional devotional cycles around which a book of hours is typically structured. More importantly, some of the cycles also represent in an unusually forthright pictorial way the 'vernacularity' inherent in French and English romances: in particular, illustrated episodes from Bevis of Hampton and Gap of Warwick decorate f. 8r–17r. The vernacular is not only one of the textual modes employed by the Taymouth Hours, I will argue, but is also in an important sense its pictorial subject.

In order to make this argument, I will investigate the images from Bevis of Hampton as the center of vernacular practice in the Taymouth Hours. What is most striking about them, in contrast to the other more loosely 'vernacular' imagery with which the manuscript is teeming, is their explicit relation to an identifiable contemporary poem, which of course does not appear in its textual form in this devotional book. These images clearly stand in for the secular romance in some sense, precisely...
because their literary analogue is lacking; instead of pictures that illustrate a poem, they are a pictorial manifestation of an object that is only elsewhere manifest verbally. It is therefore important to ask what the images alone can tell us, in addition to asking what relation they bear to the poems from which they are physically dissociated. Linda Brownrigg has usefully read the Taymouth pictures against absent texts. I read them here in their manuscript context, as well, to investigate the story that these images independently tell.

What local effects are produced by setting a visual text next to an unrelated verbal one, these images from romance-narrative alongside the Anglo-Norman prayers that they accompany? Though the images apparently have nothing to do with the devotional material that proximity argues they illustrate, their common vernacular form provides, nonetheless, for important connections.

**The Vernacular Book of Hours**

The idea of the vernacular, both visual and verbal, is at issue almost everywhere in the Taymouth Hours. Although I will be most concerned with the images that represent Bevis of Hampton, the wide range of vernacular expression in the manuscript creates an important context for reading and understanding them. Before turning to the Bevis-series, it will be useful to give a brief survey of the complex pictorial and verbal contents of the book.

The Taymouth Hours, thought to have been produced c. 1330, contains highly diverse pictorial cycles: not only the traditional miniatures accompanying the hours and offices, but also an unusual number of lengthy picture-narratives in the lower picture-space. Although I will follow convention in referring to these lower illustrations as *bas de page*, they are not strictly 'marginal'—they reside within the frame of the text-block and were clearly provided for in the planning of the book (see PLATE I, e.g.). These cycles display varying degrees of thematic relevance to the texts and images above them. Mostly devotional, they relate in strongly associative, if not explicit, ways to the religious content of the book: cycles depicting the lives and martyrdoms of saints illustrate the *Memoriae*, Christ's Passion illustrates the *Short Office of the Cross*, and the *Infancy and Public Life of Christ* illustrate the *Hours of the Virgin*. But the manuscript also presents a great number of chivalric scenes that bear less obvious relevance to its devotional texts. This romance material ranges widely. In an emblematic 'ieu de dames', women hunt various animals along the borders, but without a clear sense of a particular or even a continuous plot (ff. 68r-83v).

In an intriguing narrative of woman's inconstancy, an old knight is repudiated by his lady (but appreciated by his dog) after he rescues her from the embraces of a wild man, *a wodewose* (ff. 60v-67v). A few contemporary manuscripts contain comparable picture-cycles based on similar, and sometimes identical, romance narratives; the Smithfield *Decretals* (BL, ms Royal io.E.IV; c. 1330-40) is the most notable analogue, comparable both in date and in subject matter. But even though the Taymouth Hours is not the only fourteenth-century devotional manuscript—or even the only book of hours—to incorporate secular imagery, the amount and scope of such imagery here is remarkable.

The assorted 'vernacular' imagery in the Taymouth Hours can be loosely unified, though, in its strong relation to verbal narrative. Not every image bears the same relation to actual texts, but all of these pictorial cycles gesture towards literary experience in one way or another. Although no folk-narrative of the *a wodewose* is known to exist elsewhere...
in a literary form, in this manuscript the pictures are accompanied by brief explanatory Anglo-Norman captions: 'ci vient le Wodewose et ravi un des damoysoles coillant des fleurs', 'ci port il la damoyselle en ses bras', etc. (see, e.g., PLATE 3). Such captions are significant in the complex of verbal and visual relations this book presents; for, in the Latin context of the hours (in this case the Matins of the Hours of the Virgin), they represent one way in which vernacular images are explicitly linked with vernacular text. The invention of captions to accompany the pictures here—when other versions represent the story in images alone—suggests that the creator of the Taymouth Hours followed an impulse to combine image with text whenever possible. And the abundant Anglo-Norman captions in the Taymouth Hours are not limited to this folk-story, or even to the secular realm. The bais de page cycle depicting the Last Judgement and Pains of Hell, for example, expresses itself similarly in both visual and vernacular language; a caption on f. 144r informs viewers 'en tel menere sunt les eretikes penes'. Vernacular captions are thus not allied necessarily here with the secular over the sacred, but with marginal imagery over Latin words; the vernacular language gives voice to the various pictures that run through this book, image and text both ancillary to the Latin hours that are its center.

Further, Anglo-Norman is not the only non-Latin language 'imaged' in the margins of the Taymouth Hours: the book also contains a scrap of English poetry appended to a picture. At the end of the Office of the Dead (ff. 179v–180r; PLATE 1), the Taymouth Hours presents in captions one English version of the poem known as the Three Living and Three Dead, joined with the familiar picture of the surprising encounter: 'Ich am agast, me thinketh ise. that 30nder stonde deuelen thre. Y was wel am agast, me thinketh ise. that 30nder stonde deuelen thre. Y was wel'.

There is a difference, of course, between the kinds of captions we have already seen, expressions itself similarly in both visual and vernacular language; a caption on f. 144r informs viewers 'en tel menere sunt les eretikes penes'. Vernacular captions are thus not allied necessarily here with the secular over the sacred, but with marginal imagery over Latin words; the vernacular language gives voice to the various pictures that run through this book, image and text both ancillary to the Latin hours that are its center.

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However, these speeches interpret the pictures they accompany in language more practical and less monumental even than the Anglo-Norman captions, and their inclusion extends the vernacular impulses visible already in the text and image combination that makes up the folk-narrative.

Finally, however, vernacular language is not confined in the Taymouth Hours to captions alone. The book deploys non-Latin text not only in margins, but sometimes within the text-block itself, where vernacular texts bear a more complex relationship to vernacular imagery. The codex opens with a standard Latin calendar, including its familiar iconography of the signs of the zodiac and labors of the months, but the prayerbook proper begins with Anglo-Norman devotions to be said before and during the mass: prayers at the turning of the priest towards the people, prayers at the elevation of the host, prayers for all the dead, prayers to Christ, to the Virgin, and to St Katherine. Most intriguingly, these are also the folios that present the pictorial quotations from Bevis of Hampton and Guy of Warwick. More clearly even than the fabliau of the rodeos, these images exemplify non-Latinate language, for they are drawn from identifiable romance-texts, and romance itself is a quintessentially vernacular genre. The devotional matter of the book thus begins at the moment of the Taymouth Hours' strongest— if also most disparate—alignment with the vernacular mode. Literal vernacular texts occupy the center of these pages, and imagined ones occupy the margin. The miscellaneous manuscript page is unified, both devotional text and secular picture, by its exploration of larger issues of vernacularity.

Placing the Taymouth Hours' striking use of vernacular expression in the context of other books of this type remains surprisingly difficult. Although art historians have long admired and studied their often elaborate illuminations, books of hours remain one of the most under-investigated aspects of late medieval reading. Even L.M.J. Delaist's foundational treatment of the subject is ultimately oriented more towards localizing and dating these books than towards thinking about what their enormous popularity meant for the late-medieval reading public. Many unexamined axioms surround these volumes: the evidence of late-medieval wills implies that they were more often owned by individuals than any other type of book, and the sheer number still remaining—in the tens of thousands—argues that they must represent the most common kind of late-medieval reading. But it is precisely their vast number (in addition to their textual conservatism) that has prevented literary medievalists from taking them fully into consideration. Even such intriguing features as their strong connection with female readers remains more often affirmed than truly investigated. And certainly we remain in a state of near-total ignorance about the distribution and deployment of Latin and vernacular languages in these books.

Notwithstanding these many uncertainties, it is not an enormous surprise to find vernacular interests in a fourteenth-century book of hours. Evens though it is almost always built around the Latin Hours of the Virgin, the book of hours, as a lay prayerbook, frequently makes use of vernacular representation, as well. Paul Saenger, one of the few after Delaist to consider the book of hours from a literary standpoint, speaks casually of the 'intricate and often bilingual structure' of these books.
Time Sanctified, the large exhibition organized by Roger Wieck primarily from the collection of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, can serve as an intriguing (if perhaps not entirely unbiased) sample through which to investigate quantitatively the distribution of languages in books of hours: one discovers there that of the 119 volumes surveyed, ranging from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, only 43 (36%) were produced entirely in Latin.24 And the entire Latinate book of hours might seem to be a humanist phenomenon more clearly than a churchly one: of those 43, 31 (72%) were made after 1450.21 A survey of the manuscript collection of the Huntington Library reinforces these impressions: only twenty-three of its seventy-seven books of hours (30%) include Latin alone. Of these, 16 (70%) were made after 1450.22 A much more extensive study would clearly be necessary to describe conclusively the varieties of languages in books of hours—it is the sort of information that hasn’t always interested cataloguers of manuscripts;23— but in this admittedly small sample it appears that the presence of French (including Anglo-Norman) is almost normative. It seems clear that vernacular devotion played a measurably important part in the rise, if not always in the later life, of these prayerbooks.

Since cataloguers infrequently report such linguistic data, the evidence is not currently available that would allow one to say how surprising it is to find three languages represented in one of these manuscripts. Of course, bi- and even trilingualism is a significant feature of late-medieval English linguistic culture; many languages coexisted, dividing or sometimes sharing generic duties.24 Given this, one might reasonably expect to find many examples of trilingualism in this most common genre of medieval book. But the physical conjunction of all three languages in an English book of hours seems at least uncommon, if not entirely unique to BL Ms Yates Thompson 13.25 One should not be surprised to find vernacular captions or prayers in a book of hours, but the range of vernacular representation in the Taymouth Hours is particularly broad. For one codex of this devotional kind to incorporate all three languages so thoroughly indicates a more than common interest in the possibilities and implications of such combinations.

Part of the difficulty in organizing information about the distribution of languages in books of hours is the large variety of ways in which vernacular language can appear in these manuscripts. The sort of formal ‘corison’ we find at the start of the Taymouth Hours is the most likely type to be remarked in catalogue descriptions, but, as we have seen, it is only one example of the kind of vernacular text such a book can contain. Vernacular prayers added to the Latin Hours are different in kind from the vernacular captions that identify images, and one suspects that many more examples of texts in French or English appear in marginal positions than cataloguers necessarily choose to notice.26 Some celebrated captions have been noted: the Carew-Poyntz Hours, a descendant of the Taymouth Hours, includes vernacular rubrics accompanying its sequence of Miracles of the Virgin,27 and the Rohan Hours, an early fifteenth-century book, provides French captions for each of its pictures.28 Perhaps more important than these later examples, even very early English books of hours often incorporate vernacular rubrics; the thirteenth-century de Brailes Hours, for example, includes next to each picture Anglo-Norman captions probably written by the illustrator (William de Brailes). More than mere instructions for the artist, these rubrics were meant to assist the reader in meditation on the images.29 Even without exhaustive study, it is clear that in these few examples a strong and intriguing connection is suggested between vernacular captions and visual experience.

Indeed, some of the most interesting implications of the vernacular languages in the Taymouth Hours are played out in the manuscript’s illustrations. Michael Camille has argued for a widespread connection between vernacular language and gothic imagery in the late-medieval period, claiming ‘that the language in which manuscripts are written affect their mode of illustration and that a crucial component in the development of the style and imagery in English gothic art is its focus in vernacular words rather than the Latin Word’.30 This is a large claim, but one can see the force of it in this particular example. Camille does not include books of hours in his study (which primarily concerns a gothic bible), but consideration of the genre would lend support to his general thesis. The Taymouth Hours, especially, attests in both pictorial and verbal languages to the vernacular interests visible broadly in books of hours, and in late-medieval culture.

This manuscript is certainly not alone among books of hours to display an interest in vernacular texts and vernacular pictures. Books of hours enable lay piety, and they also clearly exist to promote the imagery of devotion. But the Taymouth Hours is remarkable among them because of the way it combines these facts, because of the unusual prominence this codex gives to its deep vernacular interest. The Taymouth Hours examines ‘images of the vernacular’ at the intersection of text and picture, through the sheer abundance of its visual offerings combined with the complexity of its textual presentation. In particular, the Book of Hours picture-cycle—vernacular images of vernacular texts—exists for practical purposes close to the heart of this book, and it is those purposes, and those pictures, that the balance of this essay will explore.
Bevis of Hampton in the Taymouth Hours

Of all Middle English romances, *Bevis of Hampton* is perhaps the most deeply vernacular, if by that term we mean indigenous, practical, and popular. The romance had a remarkably active life in image and legend even outside of its widespread and unstable textual tradition. It was used in many different settings in the centuries after the Taymouth Hours was created, transformed to speak usefully to local needs, rather than upholding any abstracted or immaterial idea of the text. The hero's connection with the city of Southampton, for example, was celebrated there through images in civic spaces: the city's Arundel Gate takes its name from the romance, and Bevis and Ascopart were once pictured on the Bar Gate. Popular romances in general also formed subjects for tapestries, and *Bevis of Hampton* is recorded as the subject of a tapestry belonging to Henry V. The fact that these stories had a visual life quite apart from their textual manifestations shows how popular they were, in both the specialized and the more colloquial sense. The well-known stories were standard enough to be recognizable through pictures alone, often without the aid of any identifying text. And yet, the stories were also capacious enough to be appropriated and changed repeatedly by the proximate culture—although Bevis is always recognizably himself, the near influences are telling. The occurrence of this story in the Taymouth Hours, then, is only one example among many of the ways in which this particular narrative can be made to serve purposes other than those determined by the romance-text alone.

In the Taymouth Hours, the *Bevis of Hampton* picture-cycle begins on f. 8v and proceeds over four openings, ending with the image on f. 12r. The episode narrated occurs near the middle of the lengthy romance (ll. 3070-91), when Bevis has successfully stolen his lady-love, Josiane, away from her would-be husband King Ivor. They take refuge in a cave with their retainer Boneface, but as soon as Bevis goes out to hunt for food, lions appear to threaten the remaining two.

Here the pictorial text begins. The first opening (PLATE 2) sets up the contrast between male and female that will structure the series that follows: on the left, Josiane is seated on a rock or small mound, her hands clasped together in prayer. She is approached by both a male and a female lion, but remains untouched by either of them. Josiane is a 'kings doyghter, queen and maide both' (3102), and therefore the lions cannot harm her; instead, the female licks her, as a sign of gentleness.

On the right, in contrast, Boneface has already been attacked by both lions and killed. He lies dead, his sword broken, lions gnawing at his body. The next pair of images presents a similar division (PLATE 3), but the unfortunate Boneface has been replaced by a courageous Bevis. Josiane, on the left, seems to be restraining both lions, at least one of whom notices the arrival of the hero, on the right. The female, no longer tame, snarls and raises her paw in a hostile gesture that is perhaps derived from heraldic symbols: a lioness rampant. Bevis' answering gesture is best read as simply demonstrative, rather than aggressive. He stands, holding his spear and shield, the space produced by his action rather awkwardly filled by a tree. This pair of images offers a moment of stasis, a prelude to the fight, which is duly represented in the next opening.

Here (PLATE 4), in a dynamic image filled with sharp claws, fluid tails, and swirling skirts, Josiane holds the male lion back. Opposite her, Bevis appears engaged in a still strangely static combat; the lioness, having broken from one text-block into the other, has taken the hero's shield in her mouth. The repetition of Bevis' gesture and of the placement of the tree behind him make one wonder if this image is perhaps based upon...
that of the previous page. For the hero here is scarcely more active than he was there; Josiane battles her lion far more vigorously than he. In the final pair of pictures (Plate 5), however, the balance of action shifts. Josiane kneels on the left, lifting her hands in prayer, the picture-space left empty by her lack of action now occupied by a tree. All suggestion of movement has been transferred to the right, where Bevis, having successfully dispatched the lion with his sword, attacks the lioness with his spear.

These eight images are not highly accomplished in an aesthetic sense, but they do succeed in communicating a story. They constitute a general and impressionistic narrative that can be understood by a reader of the Taymouth Hours, even without any knowledge of their connection to Bevis of Hampton. It is words, in fact, that make our identification certain—tituli, situated just underneath the text- and picture-block, signal the connection of these pictures to particular verbal constructs outside the bounds of this codex. But the quotation is coherent, and the structure of the picture-narrative remains intelligible on its own. The series is planned as a set of pendant images, each opening presenting a picture of Josiane, Bevis' lady, on the left, and one of the two knights on the right. To begin with, her success contrasts starkly with their failure: her nobility and virtue vanquish the lions easily while Boneface is killed outright and Bevis is seriously threatened. But the balance shifts in the course of the story: Josiane's ethical control over the lions lessens as Bevis' physical control increases. Her active restraint of them gives way to his decisive intervention in the final scene.

Such a progression reflects faithfully the interests of the romance as it exists in textual versions, for of course the romance of Bevis of Hampton survives in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English, as well as in this pictorial form. In a particularly fortuitous coincidence, Bevis seems to have been 'Englished' at precisely the same time that the Taymouth Hours was produced—the well-known Auchinleck MS (National Library of Scotland, Advocates MS 19.2.1) is roughly contemporary. The episode
And Josiane takes the lesson to heart:

Tho he ne moste him n01l3t helpe fi3te, 
His scheld she brou3te him anon ri3te;
&
rede hire sitte adoun, saunfaile, 
And let him worthe in that bataile. (3

This, however, is where the pictures depart from the Middle English text. The textual Josiane simply brings the hero his shield and sits herself down, but her pictorial equivalent also kneels in prayer. Turning from active participation to the intercessory power of prayer, the lady continues to help her knight, but now in a more appropriate way. Physical help is the last thing Bevis wants or will tolerate—spiritual help, then, is what the pictorial Josiane must ultimately offer.

Josiane's prayer has been a site for speculation about which vernacular text furnished the Taymouth artist with his source. Brownrigg cautiously finds the evidence inconclusive.

Certain details of the pictorial episode—the clear distinction between lion and lioness, the implication that Josiane intervenes twice in the fight, and the lioness' taking Bevis' shield in her mouth—seem to derive from the Middle English version. Other details seem to derive from the Anglo-Norman—notably the 'rocher' upon which Josiane sits in the early pictures, and the vague suggestion that she prays. As her knight battles for her, the French princess hopes 'Jhesu Crist vus garde, ke de mere fu ne', which is certainly a stronger indication of prayer than the Middle English hero's oath 'be God in Trinite'. But the importance of prayer in the picture-cycle is more pronounced than even the Anglo-Norman text would indicate, and its more likely inspiration nearer to hand. The vagueness with which these pictures are related to either the Anglo-Norman or the Middle English accounts of Bevis of Hampton better points to another conclusion: that the meaning of the series derives only in part from either textual version. I would like to suggest a more obvious, though oblique, inspiration for the preponderance of prayer in this narrative picture-cycle—the very Anglo-Norman prayer that the cycle accompanies. Although Josiane cannot be imagined to be speaking these particular prayers—they are to be said during the mass, not during an encounter with hostile lions—her acts of prayer are parallel, not only to Bevis' prowess, but to the devotional activity of the owner of the book.

While representing the Bevis-story, the pictures also in a real sense illustrate the Taymouth Hours' Anglo-Norman 'orisons'.

We do in fact know something, though less than we might like, about the person who might have been saying these prayers. Like so many books of hours, this manuscript contains anonymous images of a layperson...
assumed to have been its original owner, in this case a royal woman. A crowned woman appears four times in the course of the prayerbook: kneeling before the spectacle of the elevation of the host (f. 7r; PLATE 6), kneeling with a bearded man (f. 18r; PLATE 7), kneeling with a crowned and bearded man (f. 18v; PLATE 8), and kneeling alone as she is presented by the Virgin to Christ (f. 19r). It is significant that all of these owner portraits (if we are to accept the images as such) show their subject at prayer; the pious attitudes expected of the book’s reader are clarified by the repetition of the devotional postures in which she appears. Although she sometimes appears alongside a praying man, the particular emphasis on feminine prayer in these images is plain. Perhaps the most compelling visual statement of the power of women’s piety is made by the praying king and queen pictured in the bas de page on f. 168v, who mimic the image of the Agony in the Garden, shown above. The queen’s prayerful attitude repeats Christ’s exactly, suggesting that she participates in the clearest kind of imitatio Christi. If one looks closely, one sees the importance of feminine prayer emphasized, not only in the revised Bevis of Hampton and in the portraits of the royal woman who first owned the book, but throughout the images that fill the Taymouth Hours. The folk-narrative of the wode-wesse, too, ends with its unhappy protagonist kneeling in prayer (f. 67v; PLATE 9); again, not a denouement suggested anywhere by the caption-text: ‘Cy sen ua li iel chinader od sun leurer et guerpist la damoysele sone pur sa denaturesce.’ These Anglo-Norman words do not indicate any kind of repentance on the part of the misbehaving lady, but the images offer her a redemptive option. The vernacular pictures in this book of hours, more than any of the texts with which they are associated, suggest that their disparate narratives can be understood to form a coherent exploration of appropriate feminine roles, a topic of undoubted interest to their feminine readership. Identifying such general preoccupations in the manuscript helps to make sense of the Bevis cycle’s concern with Josiane—much greater than that of the story in its textual form. She takes by design fully half of the available visual space, though only 28 of 125 lines are devoted to her role in the Middle English version of the lion-taming episode. One might even imagine that the relatively great ferocity of the female lion—she is shown twice fighting with Bevis, whereas his fight with the male is completely elided—acts as a kind of negative exemplum. Josiane’s bad behavior is united with the lioness’, after all, in Bevis’ threat that he would eagerly kill either one. And the identification of women with lions is made pictorially, as well as textually, if one considers the contents of the Taymouth Hours as a whole, for the
PLATE 7. Crowned woman kneeling with bearded man; Creation-scene. London, BL MS Yates Thompson 13 (Taymouth Hours), f. 18r.

images of the vernacular in the Taymouth Hours

But although this evidence seems to argue that some roles are inappropriate for women, neither the pictorial series narrating Josiane's adventures nor the association of women with lions makes a purely misogynist point. If lions can represent evil forces, women are sometimes the ones doing battle with them—and not only via the spiritual mechanism of prayer. The question of appropriate feminine roles is taken up most profoundly in the Taymouth Hours by its varied representations of the Virgin. In the narrative of her life, Mary is shown in some characteristically pious attitudes, such as the coronation-scene in which she bends over her prayerbook (f. 59v); the Mother of God does, of course, model devotional practice. But in a series celebrating Miracles of the Virgin, she is repeatedly shown wrestling devils in a way that can only approve of more literal struggles: some striking instances are the Virgin's rescue of a soul from the devil ("Cy ure dame tent le deable un alme", f. 155v), and an episode in the Theophilus-story ("Cy tent ure dame la chartre du diable", f. 160r; Plate 10). In this second image, remarkably similar to Josiane's initial intervention with the lions (see Plate 4), the Virgin's corporeal battle with the devil works to elide the difference between physical and spiritual efforts. Moreover, the logic of the visual structure establishes provocative parallels here between fighting lions bodily and praying for their defeat, between Bevis' sorts of combat and Josiane's options. The trajectory of the Bevis of Hampton picture-cycle finally prefers Josiane's prayer to her physical intervention, but the symmetry of each picture-pair makes a kind of equation between wrestling lions physically and asking God for deliverance from them. Although images of prayer itself outweigh other kinds of positive female activity, the manuscript's pictures as a whole argue more for links than for contrasts between the two. From the "ieu de dames" to the folktale of the wodwose, from Josiane's prayer to the Virgin's scourge, the kinds of agency represented by feminine prayer are equated with feminine activity of other kinds. The reader of
The Virgin binds the devil. London, BL MS Yates Thompson 13 (Taymouth Hours), f. 160v.

Images of the Vernacular in the Taymouth Hours

The Taymouth Hours must have imagined as she sat in mass that she was Josiane battling lions: she asks to be rescued from 'toutz perils'—perils of a romance heroine as well as the more spiritual variety. Through an imaginative leap in which she transforms herself from a misbehaving lion into the Virgin performing a miracle, the woman reading the Taymouth Hours might see the efficacy of her prayer enacted in the illustrative sequences before her.

These sorts of parallels can help us to read the Bevis of Hampton picture-story in a different light. Whereas the text of the romance offers only warnings against undue female activity, the eight pictures that tell the story here more helpfully also suggest alternatives. This episode from romance, inserted visually into a prayerbook, advocates prayer as an acceptable and effective response of women to trouble, finally indistinguishable from a knight's physical victory over threatening lions.

Although Bevis of Hampton itself does not necessarily make this argument, in the hands of this artist and in this context it does.

The picture-narrative based on Bevis of Hampton uses images of the vernacular to advocate feminine prayer as appropriate action, but it thereby advocates the power of vernacular language in a very decided way. Josiane is certainly not saying the prayer that stands above her on the page, but as a romance-heroine she is even more certainly not speaking Latin. As the prayers on ff. 71v-75r insert the lay supplicant and her Anglo-Norman vernacular into the Latin mass, so do the images of Josiane and Bevis insert the vernacular world of romance into the Latin hours. But the affiliations of sacred and secular that result are complex and mutual, for the image of Josiane praying also brings an unexpected emphasis on devotion into the textual story of Bevis of Hampton. Vernacular language (in the form of secular romance) intrudes into this book of prayer, and in turn Josiane's prayer makes a sacred addition to Bevis' secular world.

This book begins its Anglo-Norman devotions with a picture of them, the royal woman with her prayerbook participating in the mass (see Plate 7). This first owner-portrait offers a remarkable visual anticipation of and model for Josiane's posture before the tableau of Bevis' final fight with the lions, even to mirroring feminine prayer on the left with masculine activity on the right. Like Josiane's prayer itself, the productive combination of Latinity and the vernacular figured in the Bevis of Hampton picture-cycle is reflected in this image. The mass is Latin, but the lady's part in it is vernacular; the combination of the two linguistic modes occupies the visual center of this manuscript page. Here images of the vernacular are not subordinated to the text, but join with Latinity in a place one might expect to find Latin images alone. And it appears,
at first glance, that an image of Latinity is pushed in this instance to the margins. A figure labeled (erroneously) as St. Jerome writes in the position of these prayers. Scholarship we might expect; it is in fact the very vernacular prayer that appears above him: ‘douz sire [al] commencement . . .’. The label turns out to be a scribal error; the Latinization powerfully into the margins, further mingling—in this case by using—Latin and vernacular. At the start of its devotional program, as somewhat differently in the picture-cycle from Bevis of Hampton, the Taymouth Hours represents the subject of vernacular texts through the medium of the image. 48

The Bevis-pictures in the Taymouth Hours present an intriguing case-study in the interaction of picture and text, a necessarily preliminary case foray into the fruitful questions of vernacular text and image raised by the manuscript as a whole, and by books of hours more generally. This series of images poses a peculiar—but rich—kind of text-image problem. This is text embodied as an image, as well as image to be read as text; a picture-cycle that never appears with its textual version instead seems to stand in for, modify, and even replace it. Paired with text of quite another sort, this serial image changes its meaning significantly. The messiness—and inadequacy—of the usual categories in this case is apparent: the distinctions between text and image themselves are almost broken down, just as the distinctions between sacred and secular surely are. Although it is the radical dissociation of picture from word that one first notices in the inclusion of the Bevis of Hampton series in this prayerbook, the series of images finally works to confuse the two media. This pictorial narrative in its manuscript context argues for strong connections between the categories of the vernacular and the visual, connections that should modify our understanding of late-medieval reading practices at large.

This may seem a strange claim to make in relation to fourteenth-century England, for Middle English books in the period rarely contain the treasures of manuscript painting we associate with more sumptuous Latinate manuscripts—or, indeed, any pictures at all.49 The best-known examples of the illustration of English literary texts are celebrated for their rarity, rather than for their beauty or for their representational ambitions: the illustrations of Piers Plowman preserved in Oxford, Bodleian ms Douce 104; the devotional images that fill London, BL MS Additional 595; the Ellesmere Canterbury pilgrims (San Marino, Library, ms EL 26 G 9).50 Moreover, these manuscripts illustrations offer primarily emblematic portraits of characters; the Gawain-manuscript (London, BL, ms Cotton Nero A.x) is very unusual in its attempt to represent pictorially the narrative contents of the vernacular poetry it contains.51 In connection with Bevis of Hampton, it is perhaps significant that Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a romance, but few other romance manuscripts include significant narrative illustration.52 The Auchinleck ms, for example, a celebrated romance-collection, illustrates most of its texts with very small emblematic images, such as the one depicting the hero at the start of Bevis of Hampton.53 The contrast between this perfunctory picture and the complex series of eight images in the Taymouth Hours illustrates quite pointedly the ways in which context can influence illustrative decisions. Not much of a visual tradition surrounds late-medieval English literary texts.54

This absence of vernacular illustration might itself be found surprising (if it were not for the familiar lamentations of literary scholars with an interest in images) because English medieval art in general has a decidedly narrative character. At least since Otto Pächt’s important work we have acknowledged the prevalence of pictorial narrative in England, above all places.55 But narrative picture-cycles appear primarily in books with little or no narrative content—books of hours and psalters—and they often have little to do with the texts they accompany.56 Such picture-cycles also, as they are found in Latinate devotional books, tend not to mirror particular texts, instead reworking the stuff of legend. Miracles of the Virgin, and even the passion of Christ, are stories with no one definitive textual source, and so can be thought ‘vernacular’ in the largest sense. Narrative picture-cycles in English manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries seem to stand for vernacular texts, but do not often coexist with them.

But these facts should not obscure the importance of such illustrated devotional books for our understanding of late-medieval reading in the vernacular.57 The popularity of books of hours, with their emphasis on texts-and-image combinations, implies that most medieval reading was of this double kind. This fact alone should influence our reading of unillustrated Middle English texts, and challenge our assumption that vernacular manuscripts are to be understood in a wholly different bibliographic culture from that of their more luxurious Latinate cousins. Illustrated books draw on vernacular culture, and vernacular texts operate in a world of illuminated books, even if they do not often occupy a physical place in them.58 The Taymouth Hours offers perhaps the earliest ‘images of the vernacular’ to be found in England, allowing us to see clearly this unlikely connection between vernacular text and vernacular image. Even if few other examples are quite as pointed as this one, the
pictorial use of Bevis of Hampton in a prayerbook demonstrates that the
experiences of the vernacular and the visual are far from separate.

The notion of a medieval 'theory of the vernacular' is vexed. One
recent anthology takes up the question by assembling a number of
prologues to vernacular works, texts that often do, indeed, comment
explicitly on the choice of Middle English as a literary language. 2 But
the editors are keenly aware, even in their efforts to theorize late-
medieval use of vernacular language, of the necessity of considering
each of these instances in its own particular context. They write:

"These discussions are so heavily situated—not only in the text in which
they occur but also in the social and ideological issues evoked by those
texts and their use of the vernacular—that they require to be read in
quantity, in careful relation to their cultural situation and, above all, with
a sense of their strategic function, if their theoretical implications are to
be teased out of them. 3"

The pictorial quotation of Bevis of Hampton in the Taymouth Hours
might be considered another kind of particular contribution to this
theoretical discussion. It must be considered in its own complicated
physical and social situation to be understood properly, but it, though
perhaps less explicitly than Middle English translators' prologues, com-
ments on the idea of the vernacular. These extraordinary images draw
a pictorial connection between books of hours and vernacular reading,
as they urge for the value of vernacular devotion.

The chivalric picture-sequences in the trilingual Taymouth Hours imply
not only a fluid relationship between images and words, male and
female, and the sacred and the secular—but also between Latin and
romance languages. None of these categories is ever distinct in
medieval practice, and the relations here prove especially provocative.
In particular, the manuscript's deployment of visual languages illum-
inates its use of differing verbal modes: the chivalric images in the
Taymouth Hours reinforce and comment on a kind of 'vernacularity'
in its use of differing verbal modes: the chivalric images in the
medieval practice, and the relations here prove especially provocative.
In particular, the manuscript's deployment of visual languages illum-
inates its use of differing verbal modes: the chivalric images in the
Taymouth Hours reinforce and comment on a kind of 'vernacularity'
in the sense that is the sequence from the latter romance is missing several of its images.
For conjectures about missing leaves, see M. R. James, A Descriptive Catalogue of the
Second Series of Fifty Manuscripts (No. 31 to 100) in the Collection of Henry Tate Thompson
(Cambridge, 1909), No. 53, pp. 59-74; at 59.

The only study to date of the Bevis of Hampton images in the Taymouth Hours is Linda
Browning, 'The Taymouth Hours and the Romance of Bevis of Hampton', English Manuscript
Studies 110-1700, No. 107). Browning speculates briefly about the purposes served by these pictures in this place, but she comes to conclu-
sions rather different from mine.

For full descriptions of the manuscript, see James and Sandler. See also John

These scenes are so far removed from subject matter from their proximate texts that
Sandra Pennick, in a survey of women's connections with books of hours, cites them
as an example of pictures with 'no connection to the textual context whatsoever'.
See 'Women and Books of Hours', in Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence,

Cf. the Peterborough Psalter (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale ms 9599, fol. r, 1370)
before 1538, with marginalia 'possibly based on illustrations of French poems and
romances' (Sandler, No. 40). Cf. also the Gough Psalter (London, BL Add. 4990, fol. r, 1370-80), with chivalric vignettes in the borders Sandler, No. 40. Other
manuscripts that include comparable marginal imagery include the Douai Psalter
(Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale ms 172) (Sandler, No. 105), Oxford, Bodleian ms
Donor 232 (Sandler, No. 106), and the Luttrell Psalter (London, BL Add. 41799)
(Sandler, No. 107). Browning also mentions the Tractatus de Walter Milner (Oxford,
Christ Church ms 992, 1368-71) and the Queen Mary Psalter (London, BL Royal
ms 10 E IV, 1320-25) as imagistic analogues to the Taymouth Hours (223).

Sandler describes the colored drawings that decorate this lawbook as . . . executed
in the 'unstylized' vernacular that also characterizes the marginal cycles of the
Taymouth Hours. . . . The marginal iconography tends towards the vernacular, as
well. Fantasies, grotesques, hybrids, and the like are comparatively rare. Many of
the subjects can be identified as illustrations of literary works, or legends about sacred

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or secular, and many reflect an acute observation of daily life on several social lev-
els. Again the choice of marginal themes shows parallels to the Taymouth Hours
(e.g., the Three Living and the Three Dead, the wildman, the sports of ladies, the
Miracles of the Virgin) although not all the individual subjects are identical (11). 10
Outside of the Taymouth Hours, this story is exclusively pictorial. For other rep-
resentations of it in the visual arts, see R. S. Loomis, 'A Phantom Tale of Female
Ingratitude,' Modern Philology, 14 (1917), 727–73.

10 Latin words do appear as a component of the feu de page images of saints and apsa-
tures that fill f. 34v–f, each apostate carries a scroll containing a phrase from the
creed, and each prophet carries a scroll with a corresponding Biblical prophecy.
These words are a part of the visual and conceptual substance of the images, how-
ever, fulfilling a slightly different function from the vernacular captions that exter-

11 IMEP 1279. An almost exact analogue is found in the De Lisle Psalter (BL, ar
Arsenal 85). The text there included is only slightly different: 'Ich am alter. Le what
ich se. Me thinketh it both desuetude (ler). Iche was wel fair. Such scheineth be. For godes
love be ser be se'. In the psalter, the picture and the English caption illustrate a
more literary Anglo-Norman poem on the same theme. Le dit die two vens al moi, qui
which follows. For further lucency of the motif in manuscript and wall-painting, see
Lucy Freeman Sandler, The Psalter of Robert de Lisle in the British Library (London, 1981),
p. 44–49.

12 Some of the Anglo-Norman captions in the book function in this way, as well sta-
ners on f. 170rv cry 'Alas alas maitre dolet altas alas' as they are dragged to their
infernal punishment, and a devil on f. 141v rides a woman as if on horseback, shau-
ning 'Auant lecheure aston.'

13 The word itself means 'a work written in French or a related vernacular language'
long before it denoted any generic specificity (v.s. MEED 'romance'). For a thorough
exploration of this semantic shift, see Paul Strachan, 'The Origin and Meaning
of Middle English Romances', Geneva, 10 (1977), 1–48. In the words of Derek Prouse,
'popular romance . . . may be seen as the primary extant literary manifestation of
the newly enfranchised vernacular' (The Development of Middle English
Approaches (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 11–32 at 121.

14 General treatments of books of hours are numerous, ranging from relatively popu-
lar treatments, such as Janet Backhouse, Books of Hours (London, 1965), to the
monumental catalogue of V. Leroquais, Les livres d'heures manuscrits de la Bibliothèque
Nationale, 3 vols. (Paris, 1978) and also Christopher de Hamel, 'Books for
Everybody,' in A History of Illustrated Manuscripts (London, 1994), pp. 168–79; and
Roger S. Wieck, Painted Pages: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art (New
York, 1997). Studies and facsimiles of particular books of hours are also quite com-
mon. To cite just one example, the many beautiful hours of Jean, Duke of Berry
are widely known through facsimiles; see, e.g., Les Trés Riches Hours de De Berry,
pref. Millard Meiss (London, 1969). But scholarly discussions of books of hours are not
much advanced beyond the field as Leroquais observed it in 1977: 'Certes littéra-

ture est à la fois très riche et très pauvre: très riche en ce qui concerne la par-

15 L.M. DeLainé, 'The Importance of Books of Hours for the History of the Medieval
Book', in Galbens: Henge of Dorothy E. Miner, ed. Ursula E. McCracken, Lilian

16 Christopher de Hamel guesses at this number, and goes on to describe books of
hours as immensely important: 'There was probably a Book of Hours in almost
every substantial fifteenth-century household, especially in France, the Netherlands
(north and south), and England. For many medieval families it was probably the
daily book they ever owned, and for countless of our ancestors it was probably
the only book they had ever seen'; 'See: Books of Hours: "Imagining the Word", in The
Bible as Art: Book: The Manuscript Tradition, ed. John L. Sharpe III and Kimberly Van
Kampen (London, 1998), pp. 337–45; at 34.

17 The editors of Women and the Book: Learning and Visual Evidence face up squarely to this
problem: 'More than sixty such "books of hours were made for female owners",
would be hard to substantiate, if one needed quantitative evidence' ('Introduction', 17).

18 See, for example, Delainé's observation: 'There is yet another important character-
istic in the detailed content of Books of Hours, namely the numerous minute vari-
ants that we are as present unable to assimilate and understand, but which those
who handle Books of Hours cannot help observing. For instance, the language—cal-
pederies or rubrics may be in Latin or in the vernacular' (1977). Twenty-five years later,
we have still done little more than notice these variants.

19 See 'Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages', Writings e

20 Roger S. Wieck, Time Satisfied: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life (New
York, 1988).

21 Papal attempts in the sixteenth-century to mandate an all-Latin book of hours were
not entirely successful (Saenger 267), but such pressures might have produced more
Latinic books than had previously existed.

22 These numbers were derived from information provided in C. W. Dutschke, et al.,
(San Marino, CA, 1989).

23 For statistics concerning books of hours to have much meaning, one would have to
consult the thousands of such manuscripts in European collections. Unfortunately,
early catalogues of the British Library collections are unhelpful on these questions,
and even Leroquais, in his substantive work on books of hours in the Bibliothèque
Nationale, does not seem to provide this sort of information consistently.

24 For the frequent use of a variety of languages in other kinds of writing—scientific,
medical, legal—we, e.g., W. Rodwell, 'The Trilingual English of Geoffrey Chaucer',
Studies in the Age of Chaucer, 16 (1994), 43–67; and Linda E. Solomon, 'What's the

25 The limited testimony of Time Satisfied suggests that this aspect of the Taymouth
Hours is extremely rare, for none of the books of hours surveyed is trilingual; none,
in fact, contains any English at all. And, again, the manuscripts of the Huntington
Library show similar patterns: none of its seventy-seven books of hours is trilingual.
Forty-five contain both French and Latin, and four contain both English and Latin,
but none contains all three languages. The De Lisle Psalter, as previously noted,
contains Latin, French, and English.

26 Leroquais provides a revealing explanation of his handling of evidence of the formal
prayers added to the texts of books of hours: 'Ces prières sont nombreuses. Dans les
mots de marmure, je les plus souvent néglige celles qui proviennent des livres
littéraires proprement dits. Et cependant, malgré cette elimination, le nombre des
formules en langue latine dépasse cinq cents. Les prières en langue vulgaire sont
moins fréquentes, on m'a souvent compté plus de deux cents' (n.s). In addition,
eleven of Leroquais' books of hours are entirely in French.
See Albert, p. 219.


The existence of this tapestry is reported in an inventory in the library in the manuscript in the British Library, BL MS Lansdowne 179, p. 176a.


If one writes: "as an extension of the story, it represents a complete disconnection of image from text. For a thorough discussion of connections between Bevis and St. George, see also Jennifer Fellows, "St. George as a Romance Hero," Burlington Magazine, 19 (1995), 37-50.

If we assume exact correspondences with the Middle English versions of the romance, in which it is the lions who grapple with Bevis' shield, we are led to the uncomfortable conclusion—contemporary modern ideas of lionine gender difference—that it is the male lion who wears the male mane. Wherever the case, it is clear that this artist means to differentiate the lions by sex.

The novice of wild animals converted to domesticity by huntsmen is familiar from saints' lives. Cf. the vision of St. Thecla, who was protected by the lions that was supposed to eat her. Illustrations of Thecla in Vincent of Beauvais' Menor lectionaire (BN, 1965), f. 172v, shows a hedgehog between two lions—see, e.g., BN ms 6, f. 317v. See also BI, ms Lansdowne 179, f. 6iv. St. Christina, similarly, was licked by serpents sent to attack her. My thanks to Catherine Sucko for calling my attention to these homographic parallels.

It is unfortunate, given this careful balance across each opening, that Browning reproduces the recto images as verso images, and vice versa.


Alberti, p. 45.

booksmaking. But her rough count tallies only one decorated book in forty, and she
includes in her survey English books in all languages. See 'Design, decoration, and
Illustration', in Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1275-1475, ed. Jeremy Griffiths

55 These manuscripts contain the Middle English poetry of greatest interest to modern
readers: the works of Gower and, especially, Lydgate were more commonly illus­
trated. See Lesley Lawson, 'The Illustration of Late Medieval Secular Texts, with
Special Reference to Lydgate's Troy-Book', in Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-
Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study, ed. Derek Pearsall

56 The pictures were most likely inserted after the manuscript was planned and the
poetry written, which makes their attempt to represent narrative all the more inter­
esting. For a recent discussion of the manuscripts, see A.S.G. Edwards, 'The
Manuscript British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x', in A Companion to the Gawain-Poet,
ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 197-219. For a com­
prehensive—but short—list of English works illustrated by narrative scenes, see
Scott, 'Design, decoration, and Illustration', p. 46.

57 See, however, the so-called 'Alexander and Beowulf fragment' in Bodleian Library
R Bodley 214, Part II ff. 209v-215r; Kathleen Scott, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in
Carol Meale adds New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M 876
(Generides); and
London, BL, ms Harley 536 (The Three Kings' Tale) to this list; see Carol Meale, '“ gode
men/Wiurs traythes and alle men” Romance and its Audiences', in Readings in

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men/Wiurs traythes and alle men” Romance and its Audiences', in Readings in

59 The Manchester M. National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS. 15.2.2, Intro. Derek

60 The situation is somewhat different, of course, concerning the illustration of French
and Anglo-Norman texts. The Taymouth Hours contains Anglo-Norman, of
course, but also demonstrates enough interest in Middle English to warrant consid­
eration in the company of English books. (See above, n. 42.)

Lucy Sandell claims that the fourteenth-century saw the high point of pictorial
narration in English art. Of Egerton 3777, for example, the writer 'The manuscript
represents the culmination of the pictorial narrative in English 14th-century illum­
ination; in the illustration of standard texts, the 15th century saw a retreat from such
pictorial abundance in favour of representation of individual rather than serial nar­
rative themes' (p. 40).

62 De Hamel points to this 'odd observation' as his most important point
about the genre: 'The miniatures in a Book of Hours do not illustrate the text at all'
('Imaging the Word' 139).

63 Delaisse makes the very intriguing suggestion that some literary manuscripts resem­
ble books of hours in their visual presentation. He cites Waddesdon Manor MS 12 as
a book of hours, f. 71 as the inspiration for ms Waddesdon Manor MS 11 (La
Bouquetadure, Jean de Cousy), f. 153. Both manuscripts were made in Rouen,
1475-77.

64 The general resistance of vernacular texts in English to narrative illustration has
generally been explained along economic lines. Books in English were not highly
valued, the reasoning goes, and so little effort or money was expended in beautify­
ing or decorating them. But the beautiful 'illustration' of vernacular texts in devotional
books implies that the answer is not so simple.