Converting Corpses: The Religious Other in the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald*

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This article investigates the concerns about the fate of non-Christians after death in the Middle High German Munich 'Oswald' by reading it alongside the Middle English 'St Erkenwald'. These texts ascribe to their protagonists, the Anglo-Saxon saints Erkenwald, Bishop of London, and Oswald, King of Northumbria, the power to raise, convert and baptize the dead. The article considers the possible impact on this tradition of the legend of the Emperor Trajan's post-death relief from Hell, as well as the different deployment of the posthumous conversion motif in each text: the religious other of the Munich 'Oswald' is contemporary, yet geographically distant, while the religious other of 'St Erkenwald' is temporally distant, but geographically proximate. This article considers how far the Munich 'Oswald' and 'St Erkenwald' share a formula for dealing with an exceptional solution to an eternal problem.

Keywords: St Oswald of Northumbria, St Erkenwald, hagiography, resurrection, conversion, baptism, Trajan, religious other, temporal other, miracles

Middle High German texts engage comprehensively with the religious other – and with questions about the fate of non-Christians after death.¹ This article will investigate the Munich *Oswald*'s particular treatment of these concerns. This text draws on a wider European tradition in which the deceased receive baptism after death, an idea that may be partially inspired by the legend of the Emperor Trajan's

¹ For an up-to-date review of medieval approaches to the salvation of non-Christians, both ancient and contemporary, see Peter von Moos, *Heiden im Himmel? Geschichte einer Aporie zwischen Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2014), pp. 1–10.

post-death salvation.² The deployment of this tradition in the Munich *Oswald* will be read against *St Erkenwald*, a Middle English text which also makes prominent use of the posthumous conversion motif, but in service of a different goal.³ In contrast to the Munich *Oswald*'s contemporary, yet geographically distant religious other, *St Erkenwald* presents a religious other which is temporally distant, yet geographically proximate. These works – accounts of how a saint resurrects and baptizes dead pagans – were both in circulation during the fifteenth century and, despite their different backgrounds, styles and plots, explore many of the same issues. Their subjects, the seventh-century English saints, King Oswald of Northumbria (c. 604-642), and Erkenwald, Bishop of London (c. 630-693), are prime examples of the imaginative embellishment of hagiography in order to increase a saint's cult. This embellishment required mining the legends of other saints for inspiration, and deviating from the historical saint's life, but was unproblematic, particularly if there was little evidence for that life. Although neither Oswald's nor Erkenwald's more orthodox cults ascribe to them the power to raise and convert the dead, certain legends of these saints have popularized this association. This paper considers how far the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald* share a formula for dealing with an exceptional solution to an eternal problem.

2 *Index Exemplorum* (henceforth *IE*), 2368. Frederic C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*, FF Communications, 204 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1969). For the development and transmission of aspects of the legend of Trajan's post-death salvation in England, particularly in the case of *St Erkenwald*, and with comparisons to the episode's use in *Piers Plowman*, see Gordon Whatley, 'Heathens and Saints: St. Erkenwald in Its Legendary Context', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), pp. 330–63. See also Eamon Duffy, 'St Erkenwald: London's Cathedral Saint', in *The Medieval English Cathedral*, ed. by Janet Backhouse (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), pp. 150–67. For a thorough treatment of the Trajan legend's circulation in a German context and its influence on the *Kaiserchronik*, see Friedrich Ohly, *Sage und Legende in der Kaiserchronik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 119–28. For an analysis which also considers visual representations, see Leopold Kretzenbacher, *Legendenbilder aus dem Feuerjenseits*, Sitzungsberichte, 370 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), pp. 9–33.

3 'St Erkenwald', in *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology*, ed. by Thorlac Turville-Petre (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 101–19; *Der Münchener Oswald*, ed. by Michael Curschmann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1974). Quotations refer to these editions. Translations from Middle English and Middle High German are my own.

The Munich *Oswald* is primarily a bridal-quest narrative – such narratives often include the theme of conversion – although its genre cannot be straightforwardly defined. The poem runs to over 3600 lines and, despite its name, was probably composed in Regensburg. Its date is uncertain, but it has been placed variously from the twelfth to the fifteenth century.⁴ This debate is not of concern here, beyond noting that there is no alternative to reading it in its surviving fifteenth-century form, and an acceptance of an early date of original composition does not rule out the possibility that many features were added later. The poem cannot be separated from the broader continental Oswald tradition, a series of mostly German texts with similar themes and plots.⁵ The resurrection miracle is present throughout much of this tradition, but is most fully developed in the so-called Munich version.

The plot, briefly summarized, is as follows. King Oswald embarks upon a divinely inspired search for the hand (and conversion) of the daughter of the pagan king Aron. He is aided in his mission by various miraculous events and a temperamental raven, eventually successfully carrying off the willing princess, but is pursued and forced to do battle. Having exterminated the opposing army, leaving only the king alive, he demands Aron's conversion, eventually offering the resurrection of his army as proof of the truth of Christianity. Once Oswald

4 Michael Curschmann, *Der Münchener Oswald und die deutsche spielmännische Epik* (Munich: Beck, 1964), pp. 188–96. Curschmann outlines the connections between the Oswald cult and Regensburg, the location of composition suggested by Josef Dünninger, who argues for a date in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. See Josef Dünninger, 'St. Oswald und Regensburg. Zur Datierung des Münchener Oswald', in *Gedächtnisschrift für Adalbert Hämel*, ed. by Heinrich Kuen (Würzburg: Tritsch, 1953), pp. 17–26 (p. 26). Curschmann argues for the Munich *Oswald* as an 'authentischer Vertreter des im 12. Jahrhundert entstandenen Versepos', but acknowledges that the text as it stands is the 'Endprodukt eines umfassenden Kontaminationsprozesses'. See Curschmann, *Der Münchener Oswald*, p. ix; p. xi. For a recent discussion of the debate over dating, see Sarah Bowden, *Bridal-Quest Epics in Medieval Germany: A Revisionary Approach* (London: MHRA, 2012), pp. 103–07.

5 For a detailed overview of the continental Oswald tradition, including the debate over dating caused by the absence of any pre-fifteenth-century manuscripts of the Munich version, see: Bowden, pp. 102–07.

performs the resurrection, however, his father-in-law attempts to resume the battle, proclaiming, ‘dein got ist ain junger tor!’ [‘your God is a young fool!’] (Munich *Oswald* (henceforth *MO*), 3007). His men, though, refuse to fight and request baptism, complaining of the torments of Hell. Aron demands a final miracle before he will convert: the production of water from a cliff for the purpose of baptism. Oswald is, naturally, successful. Three days later, baptisms are still ongoing, and 72 pagans, fearing that their turn will come too late, all dive in together. Immediately afterwards, the formerly pagan army requests death, fearing a return to sin, and at Oswald’s appeal, disintegrate into dust. Jesus subsequently appears at Oswald’s court, commands him to maintain a chaste marriage, and warns him of his impending death.

St Erkenwald is much shorter. It consists of around 350 lines describing a single episode in the saint’s life, and is usually dated to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.⁶ It has sometimes been attributed to the *Pearl*-poet, a view which, ‘while not demonstrably wrong, has nothing to support it’.⁷ The work is set shortly after Augustine’s conversion of the English, and the people of London are demolishing their pagan temple and constructing a cathedral. During the excavations, an elaborate coffin is discovered, which, when opened, is found to contain ‘a blisfull body’ (*St Erkenwald* (henceforth *SE*), 76). Unable to identify the incorrupt corpse, the townspeople send for their bishop, Erkenwald, who, after praying for guidance, commands the corpse to identify itself. The body obeys, explaining that in life he was a virtuous judge but that as he was also a pagan,

⁶ There is a detailed discussion of the poem’s date in *Saint Erkenwald*, ed. by Clifford Peterson (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), pp. 11–15. The late-fourteenth-century dating of the poem has remained standard: see, for example, Whatley, ‘Heathens and Saints’, p. 1, n. 1; Jacqueline Stodnick, ‘Emergent Englishness’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. by Elaine Treharne, Greg Walker, and William Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 496–511 (p. 503).

⁷ Turville-Petre, p. 102.

having lived before Christ, he must spend eternity alone in the dark. Erkenwald, weeping, wishes that he could fetch water and baptize the corpse:

in þe Fader nome and His fre Childes
And of þe gracious Holy Goste

[In the name of the Father and his generous Child,
and of the gracious Holy Ghost]
(*SE*, 318-19)

The body sighs and explains that he has been baptized in the water of Erkenwald's tears. His spirit ascends to Heaven, and his previously unblemished corpse decays into dust before the onlookers' eyes.

These two works approach their resurrection sequences differently – in the Munich *Oswald*, resurrection is marginal, while in *St Erkenwald*, it enables the narrative. Both poems engage with conversion, although it is not their sole focus. Their different approaches to their subject matter, and to their uses of the resurrection-baptism motif, should be seen in the context of similarly themed literature in their countries of origin.

Given the controversy surrounding the dating of the Munich *Oswald*, it is not possible to comment on definitively contemporary conversion literature, but Pfaffe Konrad's *Rolandslied* (1172) is roughly contemporary with the earliest suggested date of the Munich *Oswald*, and concerns foreign battles against non-Christians with the aim of converting their leader. This theme recurs in the early thirteenth century in Wolfram's *Willehalm*, and conversion is also a theme in *Parzival*. Perhaps the most relevant comparison is *Orendel*, which, although lacking the conversion motivation, shares many features and plot elements with the Munich *Oswald*.⁸ Both *Orendel* and the Munich *Oswald* are usually identified with the *Spielmannsepik* genre.⁹ Although dated to the twelfth century, *Orendel*

⁸ *Orendel*, ed. by Hans Steinger, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 36 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1935).

⁹ Bowden, p. 1.

also survived only in a later manuscript, which was destroyed in Strasbourg in 1870.¹⁰

Conversion is also a major theme of Anglo-Saxon writing, but later fades from prominence.¹¹ It is only a significant theme in two of the *Canterbury Tales*: the *Man of Law's Tale* and the *Second Nun's Tale*. British Library Harley MS 2250, which contains *St Erkenwald*, includes parts of the *South English Legendary* which make reference to conversion in the case of historical saints, including St Alban, himself a convert and resident of Britain.¹² It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the interest was more in the broader events of saints' lives than in narratives devoted primarily to conversion. Conversion, however, often arose as a theme in the lives of these saints, who could be both converters and converts.

Our information about the lives of both Oswald and Erkenwald comes primarily from Bede, and, on Oswald's kingship, from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.¹³ The *Vita Sancti Erkenwaldi* is significantly later than Bede, and adds few details, while his miracles (mostly acts of healing or revenge) are catalogued in the *Miracula Sancti Erkenwaldi*.¹⁴ Neither saint is elsewhere credited with the performance of resurrections. The absence of much evidence for the lives and miracles of Oswald and Erkenwald seems to have left a gap to be filled creatively.

¹⁰ Bowden, p. 139.

¹¹ Angela Abdou, 'Speech and Power in Old English Conversion Narratives', *Florilegium*, 17 (2000), 195–212.

¹² Carleton Brown, *A Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1916), I, 314–15.

¹³ Oswald's life and certain posthumous miracles: III:1-3, 5-7; death and more posthumous miracles: III:9-13, IV:14; succession: III:14; Erkenwald's life and miracles: IV:6. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Bertram Colgrave (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, repr. with corrections, 1991). Oswald crowned: 633-34; stood sponsor to Cynegils: 635; died and succeeded by brother: 641-42; noted in royal succession: 617, 826-27; relics translated, 906-09. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, ed. by Janet M. Bately and others (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983-2002).

¹⁴ *The Saint of London: The Life and Miracles of St. Erkenwald*, ed. by E. Gordon Whatley, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 58 (Binghampton: MRTS, 1989).

Despite the fictitious nature of their accounts, the authors of the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald* clearly wished to identify their work with the historical figures, and both saints are placed in a relatively recognisable context. Oswald is ‘aus Engellant’ (*MO*, 5), where he is a ‘kung’ (*MO*, 27). *St Erkenwald* is set ‘At London in Englonde’ (*SE*, 1). The identification of the saints of these legendary texts with the Saints Oswald and Erkenwald of tradition can be demonstrated by the circulation of both poems alongside other religious texts. The Munich *Oswald* is transmitted with a variety of other texts, both Latin and German, all of which are religious. These include Marian texts, a tract on the Passion and various prayers.¹⁵ While transmission together with non-religious texts would not necessarily imply that a work was not regarded seriously as a religious text, such frequent transmission with religious texts does seem to make a statement. Unlike the Munich *Oswald*, of which there are six manuscripts,¹⁶ *St. Erkenwald* survives only in a single copy, and, therefore, although the codex contains other religious texts, we cannot be certain that it was always circulated with such writings.

St Erkenwald is, however, more straightforward as hagiography than the Munich *Oswald*, as it represents a single episode which can be inserted into Erkenwald’s biography without disrupting any established traditions. The Munich *Oswald*, like much of the continental Oswald tradition, is completely different from the established English tradition of Oswald’s life, represented by Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It has comic elements, and rewrites the significant events of his life and reign.¹⁷ The historical Oswald died in battle, and left a son.

¹⁵ Curschmann, *Der Münchener Oswald*, pp. xiv–xxxii.

¹⁶ ‘Münchner Oswald’, *Handschriftencensus* <<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/2256>> [accessed 20 January 2015]. There is also one manuscript of a prose version: ‘Oswald / Münchner Oswald (Prosaauflösung)’, *Handschriftencensus* <<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/6815>> [accessed 20 January 2015].

¹⁷ For an account of the devotional and textual development of the cult of Oswald, see: Alan Thacker, ‘Membra Disjecta: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult’, in *Oswald*:

The chaste marriage and confessor's death of his literary counterpart are hagiographical inventions.¹⁸ The historical Oswald, however, unlike Erkenwald, is genuinely associated with conversion, being himself a convert, and the godfather of his previously pagan father-in-law.

Parallel Miracle Stories

In the Christian era until the Reformation, if not beyond, miracles were to be expected. As Simon Yarrow writes, in 'everyday life a miracle was always potentially a place of resort'.¹⁹ Beyond their practical effects, miracles function as signs, both to the faithful, and to those whose conversion was desired, and they already have this role in the Gospels.²⁰ Augustine's discussion of miracles is entitled, 'De miraculis, quae ut mundus in Christum crederet facta sunt' ['on miracles, which are performed so that the world might believe in Christ']. He therefore desired their publicization (*De civitate dei*, XXII, 8).²¹ On a more individual level, the performance of miracles was a particularly effective form of *imitatio Christi*. Klaus Herbers and his co-editors draw attention to the importance of biblical precedent in reports of miracles in their introduction to the topic.²² A saint's ability to perform miracles would call to mind Christ and his miracles, thus associating the saint with Christ. Miracles were therefore a powerful proof of

Northumbrian King to European Saint, ed. by Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Watkins, 1995), pp. 97–127.

18 Bowden, p. 107. Bowden notes that Reginald of Durham introduces the marital chastity theme, albeit after the birth of an heir, in his *Vita S. Oswaldi regis et martyris* (1162), adding, however, that any influence on the continental tradition cannot be proven.

19 Simon Yarrow, *Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 1.

20 Michael E. Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150-1350* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 9.

21 *Sancti Aurellii Augustini: De civitate dei*, ed. by Bernard Dombart and Alphonsus Kalb, Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, XLVII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955).

22 'Zur Einführung: Mitterlalterliche Mirakelberichte', in *Mirakelberichte des frühen und hohen Mittelalters*, ed. by Klaus Herbers and others (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), pp. 1–48 (p. 16).

sanctity.²³ The more miracles – and the more impressive those miracles – attached to a saint’s tradition, the more powerful that saint appeared, and the more attention their cult attracted. Resurrection in particular constituted the imitation and affirmation of Christ’s truth in a single act. This is the context in which the motifs of resurrection and miraculous conversion are found in the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald*.

The resurrection of the dead was not an uncommon miracle. This act, described by Benedicta Ward as ‘the ultimate “cure”’,²⁴ has a strong biblical precedent, both before and after Christ’s resurrection, from Elijah’s resurrection of the widow’s son (3 Kings 17:17-24), to Peter’s resurrection of Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42), and Paul’s of Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12), not to mention Jesus restoring Jairus’ daughter (Matt. (9:18-26); the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11-17); and, of course, Lazarus (John 11:1-48).²⁵ That it is Peter and Paul who raise the dead sets a precedent: resurrection is the preserve of the elite. These biblical resurrections act to convert, and to strengthen the faith of their witnesses. While this is true of both the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald*, these poems also use resurrection as a means of making possible the conversion and salvation of those who are resurrected.

The motif of post-death conversion, however, is less common. It appears in early Irish saints’ lives, where it is associated with Patrick and Brendan, maintaining the miracle as the gift of the select few,²⁶ but its most well-known

²³ Yarrow, p. 3.

²⁴ Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000-1215* (London: Scolar Press, 1982), p. 42.

²⁵ *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation*, ed. by Swift Edgar and Angela M. Kinney, 6 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010). All biblical references, quotations and translations refer to this edition.

²⁶ Both resurrect and baptize giants who then die, Patrick in Tírachán’s seventh-century *Collectanea* (IE, 475) and Brendan in the ninth-century *Vita Prima Sancti Brendani*. See: *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. & trans. by Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), pp. 41–43, 154; Clara Strijbosch, *The Seafaring Saint: Sources and*

manifestation is the legend of Pope Gregory the Great and the Emperor Trajan. The essential narrative of the Trajan legend, which appears in many forms and languages, is that Gregory, remembering the justness of Trajan several centuries earlier, and lamenting the fact that, as a pagan, he must be suffering in Hell, weeps so much over Trajan's fate that the emperor's soul is saved. This legend generated a great deal of theological controversy. Heathens were condemned to Hell, and the idea that a pope known for his sanctity could have asked God to make an exception led to the suggestion of various alternatives in the different versions of the legend which circulated throughout the Middle Ages. Additionally, Hell was supposed to be the final destination – unlike Purgatory, one could not pass out of it. Compilers of the legend were aware that the story was rather un-canonical; even the anonymous author of the first full Gregory *Vita*, produced at Whitby around 713, is careful to introduce the legend by stating: 'Quidam quoque de nostris dicunt narratum a Romanis' ['Some of our people also tell a story related by the Romans'].²⁷ As Friedrich Ohly writes of these compilers: 'Die Verantwortung für die ganze Trajansgeschichte suchen sie von sich abzulenken'.²⁸ The *Legenda aurea* even goes so far as to provide a list of the theological objections to the story, and the solutions posited.²⁹

Despite its disclaimer, the Whitby life is the earliest known version of the Trajan legend. The episode appeared sporadically over the next few centuries, first in a ninth-century version by John the Deacon and an eleventh-century version

Analogues of the Twelfth Century 'Voyage of Brendan', trans. by Thea Summerfield (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 164; *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. by Charles Plummer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), I, 135.

²⁷ *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. by Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1968, repr. Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 126–27.

²⁸ Ohly, p. 126.

²⁹ *Iacopo da Varazze: Legenda aurea*, ed. by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (Florence: SISMEL, 1998), I, 297–298.

attributed pseudonymously to Paul the Deacon. After this, the legend spread widely, both in the Greek Church and in the west, diverging into two strands: lives of St Gregory and sermons. Ohly suggests that the latter use of the episode led to its inclusion in the *Kaiserchronik*, noting in particular the close correlation between the episode's presentation in the *Kaiserchronik* and a sermon of Honorius Augustodunensis on Psalm 105:3.³⁰ Given the many forms taken by the Trajan legend, and its wide transmission, it is unsurprising that over time elements from other legends became associated with it. Most significantly, a legend described as ancient in the fifteenth century, ascribes to St George – for the purpose of converting onlookers – the resurrection and baptism of hundreds of long-dead pagans, who die and disintegrate immediately afterwards.³¹ This episode is only one in a series of extravagant miracles, and belongs to a dragon-less George tradition which first appeared in Greek, and was translated into Coptic, Armenian, Syriac and Latin. Wolfgang Haubrichs is unwilling to suggest a more precise time or place of origin than 'in einem griechisch-sprechenden Milieu vulgären Christentums'.³² Those resurrected are not marked out as having lived exemplary lives, nor are there preserved remains, and the resurrected bodies are reconstituted from dust. Despite St George's popularity, the resurrection episode does not appear in the most popular accounts of the saint, such as those in the *Legenda aurea* or the *South English Legendary*. These versions follow the so-called 'Family Z' of the George legend originally identified by John Matzke as 'the

³⁰ Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, p. 160 n. 120; Kretzenbacher, p. 14; Ohly, pp. 119–125; J.P. Migne, *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus*, Series Latina (Paris: Migne, 1854), CLXXII, 1067–1072.

³¹ The legend is briefly described in a fifteenth century pilgrimage account. The pilgrim, William Wey, claims that he found the tale while perusing ancient sources in Crete. *The Itineraries of William Wey*, ed. by Bulkeley Bandinel and George Williams (London: Roxburghe Club, 1857), p. 119.

³² Wolfgang Haubrichs, *Georgslied und Georgslegende im frühen Mittelalter* (Königstein i. T.: Scriptor, 1979), p. 216.

canonical version of the west'.³³ Nonetheless, the “haeretische” Georgslegende’ appears to have been fairly widely circulated in the west, and versions appear in a German verse text composed by Reinbot von Durne between 1231 and 1252, and in an early thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman text.³⁴ The resurrection sequence’s clear similarities to *St Erkenwald* and the *Oswald* tradition suggest that both were to some extent influenced by the episode. Given the uncertainty surrounding the date of the Munich *Oswald*, Reinbot’s *Heiliger Georg* represents transmission of the posthumous conversion motif, rather than any more concrete connection with the *Oswald* tradition – the poem may well post-date the Munich *Oswald*. Later hagiographical tales echo the idea of corporeal resurrection, combining it with the Trajan legend’s concern for the fate of just pagans. An Italian commentary on Dante by Jacopo della Lana dating from 1330 sees Gregory discover and resuscitate Trajan’s skull to enable its baptism.³⁵ The motif was also attached to other holy figures. A variant is found in a fifteenth-century Latin narrative related by the German Carthusian, Werner Rolevinck, although the story may be older. A Bishop of Vienna discovers the skull of a just pagan. It speaks to him with a preserved tongue which, after baptism, disintegrates into ash, and the soul ascends to Heaven. Rolevinck places this story in the year 1200.³⁶ In the sixteenth-century

33 John E. Matzke, ‘Contributions to the History of the Legend of Saint George, with Special Reference to the Sources of the French, German and Anglo-Saxon Metrical Versions’, *PMLA*, 17 (1902), 464–535 (pp. 508, 511).

34 Haubrichs, pp. 285, 301. Despite the fact that both texts portray similarly miraculous resurrections and baptisms, the execution of the resurrection in the Munich *Oswald* and Reinbot’s *Der Heilige Georg* is quite different (*Der Heilige Georg*, 5093–5235, *MO*, 2968–3194). Additionally, while George’s resurrected bodies die again, they do so inside a coffin, and thus no pulverization is reported. *Der Heilige Georg Reinbots von Durne*, ed. by Carl von Kraus (Heidelberg: Winter, 1907).

35 Whatley, ‘Heathens and Saints’, pp. 334–5; *Iacomo della Lana. Commento alla ‘Commedia’: Purgatorio*, ed. by Mirko Volpi and Arianna Terzi, Edizione Nazionale dei Commenti danteschi, 3 (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2009), II, 1134–1137.

36 Werner Rolevinck, *De laude antiquae Saxoniae, nunc Westphaliae dictae* (Cologne: Arnold Therhoernen, 1475). ISTC: ir00286500, GW: M38774. See also *Wernerus Rolevinck. De laude veteris Saxoniae*, ed. by Ludwig Troß (Cologne: Heberle, 1865), pp. 28–30.

Irish *Life of Colmcille*, Colmcille discovers the skull of King Cormac mac Airt, which tells him that God had intended Colmcille, Cormac's descendant, to save the latter's soul by baptising his skull.³⁷ These narratives clearly build on the legend of St Macarius and his conversation with the skull of a pagan high priest, although in that case no salvation was forthcoming, only some relief from torment (*IE*, 3111). The episodes bear more resemblance to *St Erkenwald* than the Munich *Oswald*, and while the written forms of the latter two post-date both poems, they all share features, and demonstrate the spread of elements of the Trajan legend, and perhaps the St George episode, given their strong focus on corporeal remains.

Resurrection for the purpose of salvation also appears in *Der Heiligen Leben* (Nuremberg, c. 1400): the legend of St Barbara includes the still-living decapitated head of a man who is absolved, then dies, while the legend of St Katherine includes a sinful woman who is crushed by an image of the saint while praying to her, but is temporarily resurrected and absolved. Both of these represent a different tradition, as they concern repentance, rather than conversion, but demonstrate the spread of the general concept of a second, essentially posthumous, chance for salvation. Again, these episodes do not appear in the relevant sections of the *Legenda aurea*. The version of Oswald's life in *Der Heiligen Leben*, while sharing many elements in common with the tradition to which the Munich *Oswald* belongs, does not include the army's resurrection.³⁸

The reasons for the resurrection motif being attached to Oswald and Erkenwald are not obvious, but recourse to the parallel stories demonstrates a precedent, if not a cause. The form of the Trajan legend found in the

³⁷ Joseph Szövérfy, 'Heroic Tales, Medieval Legends and an Irish Story', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 25 (1956), 183–210 (pp. 189–90).

³⁸ *Der Heiligen Leben. Der Winterteil*, ed. by Margit Brand, Bettina Jung, and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004), II, 280–281, 212, 363.

Kaiserchronik is particularly relevant to the Munich *Oswald* given their geographical and possible temporal proximity. The *Kaiserchronik* has generally been thought to have been composed in Regensburg, and dates from the mid-twelfth century – shortly before the earliest suggested date for the Munich *Oswald*.³⁹ It provides a plausible parallel for the particular focus of the resurrection section of that text. The *Kaiserchronik* attempts to address the theological problems caused by the idea that a soul could be taken straight from Hell to Heaven. Its solution is to suggest a brief intervening moment of life – a resurrection – so that Trajan’s soul may go to Heaven from his living body, and not directly from Hell:

duo entlouch sich daz grap:
diu sêle kom wider zu dem lîhnâmen

[The grave opened,
the soul returned to the body]
(*Kaiserchronik*, 6062-63)

Corporeal resurrection is perhaps a logical extension. These issues will be considered in more detail later.

Erkenwald’s association with the Trajan legend may be more simply explained than Oswald’s, for, as critics have demonstrated, it is a fairly direct descendant.⁴⁰ The legend has an insular stamp because ostensibly the first appearance of the salvation of Trajan through the intercession of Gregory is in the aforementioned Whitby Life.⁴¹ Eamon Duffy identifies a ‘striking

³⁹ Nigel F. Palmer, ‘The High and Later Middle Ages’, in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. by Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 40–91 (p. 45); *Die Kaiserchronik eines Regensburger Geistlichen*, ed. by Eduard Schröder (Hannover, 1892). All *Kaiserchronik* quotations refer to this edition.

⁴⁰ *St Erkenwald*, ed. by Israel Gollancz, *Select Early English Poems* (London: H. Milford, 1922), pp. 1–11; Annemarie Thijms, ‘The Sacrament of Baptism in “St Erkenwald”’, *Neophilologus*, 89 (2005), 323–24 (pp. 323–24). Thijms argues that *St Erkenwald* represents an answer to the theological difficulties with the Trajan legend raised in the *Legenda aurea*.

⁴¹ Duffy, p. 157.

correspondence' between this text and *St Erkenwald*, noting the transformation of pagan temples into churches and the Whitby Life's reference to a 'baptism [...] by tears', which does not explicitly appear in other medieval sources of the Trajan legend.⁴² As the legend grew more widely known, appearing not least in *Piers Plowman* and Dante's *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, Israel Gollancz proposes that its composite elements were mined until its basic structure became detached from its original subjects and could be attached to other saints and places, in England ultimately resulting in its recasting of Erkenwald in the Gregory-role.⁴³

It seems then, that the Trajan legend shares elements with the Munich *Oswald*, as well as, more obviously, with *St Erkenwald*. The legend evidently provided a degree of inspiration for the resurrection sequence in the Munich *Oswald*, particularly given its representation in the *Kaiserchronik*, while the repetition of key elements of the Trajan legend and the St Macarius and St George episodes in, for example, the legends of the Bishop of Vienna and Colmcille demonstrates the possibility of reassigning miracles between saints. In fact, Duffy notes that, although the evidence for circulation of the Whitby Life itself in the later Middle Ages is scant, it explicitly supports the idea that miracles attributed to one saint may be transferred to another.⁴⁴

Cause for Conversion

Conversion is arguably the true primary theme of the Munich *Oswald* and of *St Erkenwald*. Given its length, the Munich *Oswald* is able to include a variety of

⁴² Tears tend to become associated with Gregory's prayers; any reference to baptism becomes purely spiritual: Duffy, pp. 160–61. Whatley notes the scarcity of baptismal references of any kind in the Trajan tradition, and the unusual reference to baptism by tears in the Whitby Life, but discounts the idea that it was known to the *St Erkenwald* poet: Whatley, 'Heathens and Saints', pp. 358, 351, n. 64.

⁴³ Gollancz, pp. xlviii–l.

⁴⁴ Duffy, p. 161.

themes, but the mission of conversion immediately overtakes the primacy of the bridal quest, which is only a pretext for Oswald's real destiny: 'kristenleichen glauben meren' ['to increase the Christian faith'] (*MO*, 68). The focus of the conversion is geographical: Oswald is a historical figure, but, from the audience's perspective, he is also a foreigner, so the poem reaches into another nation's past and changes the historical Oswald, who fought against paganism in his own country, into a contemporary crusading king, who travels eastwards seeking converts. Nonetheless, while the heathens of the Munich *Oswald* are represented as followers (indeed, worshippers) of Mohammed,⁴⁵ their land in no way reflects any kind of real east. The east, in the Munich *Oswald*, is a step beyond Edward Said's characterization of the medieval Orient as a '*learned* (and not existential) tradition'.⁴⁶ Societal conventions in Aron's land are the same courtly conventions that exist in Oswald's kingdom. The reason for the eastern location is simply that, in Suzanne Conklin-Akbari's words, 'The East is where "they" are'.⁴⁷ In order to convert heathens, Oswald needs to travel to where "they" are. The narrative is a variation on the traditional battle for conversion, in which heathens face a choice between death and Christianity, but here the heathens experience both options: they are killed, resurrected, baptized and saved from Hell. Although each soldier is resurrected and converted, the army is presented as a single player throughout. This creates an us-them dichotomy, which is clearly expressed in lines 2923-26, which begin alternately with 'die cristen' and 'die haiden'. Although the pagan army displays a hitherto unseen agency after the resurrection, its members obtain

45 Aron, for example, says to the raven, 'ert unsern herren Machmet' (*MO*, 978): 'honour our Lord Mohammed'.

46 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, repr. Penguin Books, 1995), p. 211.

47 Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 19–34 (p. 20).

no more individuality. As a result, the scale of the miraculous resurrection of an entire army is somewhat diminished. They are one entity, and they react as one man, whilst the real objects of conversion are Aron and his daughter, both individuals, and very much alive.

Despite the length of the text, the resurrection sequence occupies only a small section of the Munich *Oswald*. This relative lack of emphasis demonstrates that, although resurrection is a tool for conversion, it is not the key, nor even the climactic miracle which triggers conversion. Following his daughter's free conversion, Aron, rather than the army, is the main object of the conversion narrative. Had he converted after his defeat, his men would not have been resurrected and converted – their salvation is incidental. The resurrection of the pagan army is not, therefore, allotted a place of importance within the text's structure – the narrative climax is reserved for the final section and Jesus' arrival in disguise at court. Resurrection is one in a series of extravagant miracles. That such a perfect imitation of Christ is not placed in the climactic final position, but is followed by Oswald's drawing of water from a rock – calling to mind Moses, rather than Christ – indicates that resurrection is not regarded with quite the awe the modern reader might expect.

St Erkenwald, meanwhile, is too short to have a broader scope, and in this text resurrection is central to the plot. It enables the resolution, and the conversion could not be achieved without it. This centrality is emphasized in the poem's structure: the resurrection sequence occurs precisely in the middle. The sequence alters the poem's direction: all that leads up to the resurrection builds up the mystery of the corpse, while all that follows solves it, eventually culminating in the corpse's baptism. *St Erkenwald*'s focus is insular, and it is set at a time when

Christianity was relatively new to England. Nonetheless, Christianity is presented as established. The text does not, therefore, focus on converting outsiders, but on converting the very fabric of England. In the absence of any contemporaries to convert, Erkenwald must reach back centuries into the nation's past to convert a local man. The local religious other must therefore also be a temporal other.

Maaïke Warnaar argues that, 'Temporal identities imply the possibility of development, transformation, or change through which a (radical) other preferably becomes like the self'.⁴⁸ In *St Erkenwald*, although only one man is converted, he is representative of something much greater: the conversion of England's past.

The England of the past thus ceases to be other.

Mechanics of Miracles

In order to analyse resurrection in both texts, it is necessary to consider the different functions of miracles. The Munich *Oswald* expresses an expectation of the miraculous. The structure of the text is formed by a series of practical miracles which occur when humans find themselves at a loss. One such occurrence is when the princess is locked in the city, but escapes through Mary's intervention:

daz schloß sich von der porten prach
in aller der getät
als ez ain grosser wind auf geworfen het

[The lock broke away from the gate,
just as though it had been tossed by a great wind]
(MO, 2566-68)

In the sombre world of *St Erkenwald*, however, the text is constructed around one central miracle with the miraculous baptism as its fulfilment. The singularity of the miracle increases its significance, despite the lack of drama in its

⁴⁸ Maaïke Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: Ideology and Actions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 25.

presentation. Miracles are neither a first resort, nor to be expected. It is only after hours of prayer that the idea of appealing for a miracle occurs to Erkenwald, and neither the resurrection nor the baptism is referred to in the text as a miracle (or any synonym thereof).

Despite its apparently frivolous use of miracles as a plot device, the Munich *Oswald* has a serious purpose in portraying them. Miracles demonstrate God's power, but rather than focusing on one miraculous event, the poet uses a series of deliberately ostentatious miracles to the same end: there is no problem so great that it cannot be solved by the intervention of the Almighty.

The poems are certainly distinguished by genre. The Munich *Oswald* is an exuberant celebration of its hero, while *St Erkenwald* is a sober attempt to increase reverence for its protagonist. Walter Haug suggests that the series of miracles which create the Munich *Oswald*'s structure leads inevitably to a perception of the poem as comic, and that the regularity of miraculous solutions renders them ridiculous.⁴⁹ In fact comedy is deliberately inherent in the text – one of its main characters is, after all, an easily-offended talking raven. Nonetheless, comedy does not automatically designate a text as irrereligious, and its presence in the Munich *Oswald* should not be taken to mean that the text had no pious purpose. Klaus Ridder, for example, points to the deliberate interplay between the comic and the religious in *Parzival*, noting the 'komische Inszenierung des Heiligen' in the text.⁵⁰ The *Oswald* poet too is careful about his use of comedy – the raven is an object of laughter, but holy figures like Oswald are not.⁵¹ Similarly, the context for

49 Walter Haug, 'Das Komische und das Heilige', *Wolfram-Studien*, VII (1982), 8–31 (p. 30).

50 Klaus Ridder, 'Narrheit und Heiligkeit. Komik im Parzival Wolframs von Eschenbach', *Wolfram-Studien*, XVII (2002), 136–56 (p. 137).

51 Stefan Seeber, 'Sanctity and Comedy and the "Munich Saint Oswald"', in *Intertextuality, Reception, and Performance: Interpretations and Texts of Medieval German Literature (Kalamazoo Papers 2007-2009)*, ed. by Sibylle Jefferis, Göppinger Arbeiten Zur Germanistik, 758 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2010), pp. 95–109 (p. 101).

the miracles may be humorous, but not the miracles themselves. They are immediate, even to a degree unconsidered before they are requested, but their function is always to demonstrate God's power – and they have far-reaching results. Oswald promises that in exchange for God's help in evading the heathens, that even if asked to give up his life or kingdom, 'ich gäb im ez durch den willen dein' ['I would give it to him, for your sake'] (*MO*, 2808). This sets up Jesus' climactic visit to Oswald's court, emphasising the consequences of miracles, and their use in structuring the poem.

The Resurrection of the Body

In the Munich *Oswald*, as in *St Erkenwald*, temporary resurrection leads to conversion, and there are noteworthy parallels between the two texts in its treatment. Both poems suggest that a complete body, even an immobile one, is necessary for resurrection, and that some kind of bodily preservation is a prerequisite. Oswald and Erkenwald bring about resurrection through invocation of Christ's cross, and neither text makes any reference to Christ's resurrection. This association of resurrection with the crucifixion may be related to Matt. 27:50-53, where the earthly resurrection of other humans – 'multa corpora sanctorum qui dormierant surrexerunt' ['many bodies of the saints that had slept arose'] – is specifically connected with Christ's crucifixion. Neither poem refers explicitly to the precedent of other, ordinary humans raised from the dead, although the associations could not have escaped a medieval audience, and it is likely that they would have been aware of at least the Trajan legend in some form. Resurrection, however, assumes a different importance in the two texts, despite some striking similarities in its treatment.

In the Munich *Oswald*, the resurrection scene necessitates a shift in roles from the battle sequence immediately preceding. An encounter between two kings and their armies becomes an encounter between a king and a saint, leading to a certain confusion – for the qualities needed to be a good king and those needed to be a good saint do not entirely overlap.⁵² The author is clear from the start that Oswald is to be considered a saint more than he is a king, introducing him as ‘sand Oswalt aus Engellant’ (*MO*, 5), and does not refer to Oswald as a king until line 27. He is, though, unable fully to reconcile Oswald’s twin duties: Oswald receives an ostensibly divine message explaining that, should he remain unmarried, ‘sturbstu, so wurd ez erblos’ [‘if you were to die, your kingdom would be without an heir’] (*MO*, 49), but later, he is divinely instructed not to consummate his marriage. A childless marriage could be interpreted as chaste, and thus a signifier of sanctity, as in the case of Henry II, who was canonized in 1146, and his wife Kunigunde.⁵³ The king completes the bridal quest and weds the princess, but the saint then lives in a chaste marriage. Contradictions throughout are reconciled by Oswald following kingly actions with explicitly saintly ones, as evidenced by the battle in which, as a king:

man ließ ir [the heathen army] chainen nicht genesen;
si verluren all den leib

[He spared none of them;
they all lost their lives]
(2940-41)

⁵² Nikolaus Miller argues that the text simply reconciles inconsistencies by ending with Oswald’s denial of the fruits of marriage, which he describes as being part of the ‘Negationsprinzip’ (p.226) of hagiography (Nikolaus Miller, ‘Brautwerbung und Heiligkeit: Die Kohärenz des “Münchner Oswald”’, *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 52 (1978), 226–40). Bowden outlines recent scholarship on the differences between kingly and saintly qualities (Bowden, pp. 107–111).

⁵³ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 119.

The saint then raises them from the dead and converts them, leaving the responsibility for their deaths with God. The repeated references to Oswald as ‘milter kunk Oswald’ (*MO*, 2963, 2973, 3041, 3109) emphasize that he is a different kind of king from the ‘reicher kunk Aron’ (*MO*, 2998), who was, after all, a renowned king before he encountered Oswald and his God.

The mechanics of resurrection in the Munich *Oswald* lack narrative complexity. Raising the dead is an immediate inspiration on Oswald’s part, and it is triggered by a request to God, rather than a regal command to the bodies. Invoking the Crucifixion, Oswald asks specifically for life for the dead:

hilf mir durch deiner marter eren,
daz die toten all wider lempfig werden

[Help me in honour of your Passion,
that these dead may all live again]
(*MO*, 2991-92)

His immediate aim is to resurrect the army, but his intention is more complex. He wishes to create a sign for Aron that cannot be ignored. Resurrection is a performance: the interaction is between saint and God, and the audience presence is vital. Oswald makes his motives plain:

sichs tu, reicher kunik Aron,
waz zaichens mein got hat getan?

[Do you see, rich King Aron,
what miracles my God has worked?]
(*MO*, 2998-99)

The word ‘zeichen’ is the standard word for ‘miracle’, and is particularly appropriate in this situation, for the resurrection miracle is a deliberate sign. It is significant that the word ‘zaichen’ is also used when the raven first speaks (*MO*, 404) – here too, the miracle is a sign, although this time to Oswald. For Aron,

however, this is not the final sign – he is shaken by the dissent of his resurrected men, but requires one final miracle before conversion.

Erkenwald, in contrast, does not perform for an audience, despite their presence. Having preached, he ‘turnes to þe toumbe and talkes to þe corce’ (*SE*, 177). The resurrection scene is thus personalized – the onlookers are as removed as the reader; the action that matters is between bishop and corpse. Erkenwald, unlike Oswald, asks not for resurrection, but for information. His intention is to explain the mystery. Conversion, equally, is not on his mind when he addresses the body:

Now, lykhame þat þus lies, layne þou no lenger!
 Sythen Jhesus has iuggit today his ioy to be schewyd,
 Be þou bone to his bode, I bydde in his behalue,
 As He was bende on a beme quen he his blode schadde

[Now, corpse lying thus, lie no longer!
 since Jesus has judged that his joy will be shown today,
 be beholden to his bidding, I command on his behalf,
 as he was bound on a beam when he shed his blood]
 (*SE*, 179-182)

Erkenwald is *in persona Christi*, just as he, an ordained priest, is during the Mass. Rather than making a request, he speaks explicitly on Christ’s ‘behalue’, but with the words, ‘Ansuare here to my sawe’ [‘answer my command’] (*SE*, 184), he makes clear that the command is his own.

The reactions of those resurrected determine the subsequent conversions, and those reactions are informed by the physical experience of death. Resurrection is not marked by surprise on the part of those who were dead, and upon waking, both Aron’s army and Erkenwald’s judge express a desire to obey the saint doing God’s will.

The army arise from death, ‘nür als si sus entschlafen wären’ [‘as though they had been asleep’] (*MO*, 2996). This reference to sleep, which also appears in

St Erkenwald, lends plausibility to the resurrection, creating an impression of awakening from slumber, rather than returning the dead to life. The original death is thus transformed into a temporary biological function. In contrast to an awakening sleeper, however, there is no gap in their physical or mental experience. This informs their desire to convert; as they have been punished, they know without doubt what awaits the unbaptized after death. Death is a learning experience, and it informs their response.

In terms of the mechanics of their resurrection, it appears that the army is fully restored to the life which they had before, and although the resurrection is ultimately temporary, its form suggests that it could have been permanent. Once Oswald has prayed, ‘si stuonden auf’ [‘they stood up’] (*MO*, 2995). The poet makes clear that the resurrection is full and complete by referring to the soldiers ‘die da lempchtig worden’ [‘who had become alive’] (*MO*, 3025), and Aron sees his army returned in their wholeness:

mein läut sind wider lempchtig worden:
hie an disen zeiten
wil ich erst mit dir streiten

[My host lives again:
here and now,
I want to fight you again]
(*MO*, 3022-24)

The army’s first comment, however, immediately expresses their change of heart.

It is not just a reference to Oswald’s God, but a concrete wish: ‘wir wellen an Jesum Christ gelauben han’ [‘we want to have faith in Jesus Christ’] (*MO*, 3036).

They then turn to their post-death suffering:

wir sein gewesen an dir stund
pei der haissen helle grunt
do ist uns also we geschehen

[We have just been crushed

in the hot pit of Hell,
where we were in pain]
(*MO*, 3029-31)

Their complaint is spontaneous and immediate. Their desire for conversion is based entirely upon who they believe has the ability to save them from the pains of Hell.⁵⁴ They reject Machmet, because ‘er mag niemant nicht pei bestan’ [‘he will not stand by anyone’] (*MO*, 3035), and accept Jesus because ‘der mag uns hilf erzaigen’ [‘he can help us’] (*MO*, 3038). In other words, they expect that something can be done for them. There is no sense that, having died as pagans, their chance for salvation has passed. This is reminiscent of the St George episode as represented by Reinbot.

Despite their newfound faith, the army is not willing to leave matters in God’s hands. They appear to have mistaken this resurrection for the final resurrection, exclaiming: ‘nu haben wir den tod uberwunden!’ [‘now we have overcome death’] (*MO*, 3144). On being told that: ‘ir sterpt in dem jar noch alle sant’ [‘you will all die within the year’] (*MO*, 3150), they realize with distress that they have been temporarily restored to their old lives, that it is possible for them to commit sin and lose their newfound salvation, and that they are therefore not safe from the pains of Hell. Terrified of the possibility of being condemned again, they ask:

Oswald hilf uns aus den sargen
und pitt den himlischen hailant
daz wir ietzund sterben alle sant

[Oswald, help us in our distress,
and beg the heavenly saviour
to let us all die now]
(*MO*, 3160-62)

⁵⁴ Conversion because of the pains of Hell: *IE*, 1464 f.

Oswald grants their request, praying for the immediate deaths of men he has recently raised from the dead, but there is no paradox in his actions. Death is a positive outcome for the faithful Christian, as both the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald* illustrate. Oswald's converts' escape from Hell merits comparison with the Trajan legend as presented in the *Kaiserchronik*, in which:

diu sêle kom wider zu dem lîhnâmen
die engel si dô nâmen

[The soul returned to the body.
The angels took possession of it]
(*Kaiserchronik*, 6063-64)

Here we read that:

got sand ein englische schar,
die namen do der selen war
si enpfingen si an der stund
iegleichem von seinem mund

[God sent an angelic host
which saw the souls,
and at that time took them
from the mouth of each man]
(*MO*, 3189-90)

The wording and concept are markedly similar. The heathen army needs angels to take their souls from their bodies and lead them to Heaven. Their deaths are then marked by silence and immediate decay:

die getauften haiden da geschwigen
und all fur tod da nider sigen
[...]
si wurden zuo aschen und zuo molt

[The baptized heathens fell silent
and fell down dead.
[...]
They became ashes and dust]
(*MO*, 3181-85)

This is precisely how prayers are answered in the Munich *Oswald* – obviously and dramatically. The army must not only die, but must die as a single unit, and return

immediately to dust. Even their death is a dramatic miracle – but in this text, the miraculous is ordinary.

In *St Erkenwald*, the judge is restored only to a temporary and insubstantial life, but ‘lyfe’ (SE, 192) it explicitly is. Its transience is clearest in Erkenwald’s wish: ‘þat þou lyfe hades [...] as longe as I myzt lacche water’ [‘that you had life [...] long enough for me to obtain water’] (SE, 315-16). The corpse’s primary function is to speak, which was Erkenwald’s purpose in awakening him: ‘Sithen we wot not qwo þou art, witere vs þiselwen’ [‘since we know not what you are, inform us yourself’] (SE, 185). Even so, it is not easy, for ‘he dryues owte words’ [‘drives out words’] (SE, 191), and despite his ‘lyfe’, he is described as ‘liche’ [‘corpse’] (SE, 314), ‘cors’ (SE, 317), and a ‘dede body’ which speaks (SE, 225, 309). He is reanimated only by a ‘lant goste of lyfe of hym þat lyfe redes’ [‘a spirit of life borrowed from him that controls life’] (SE, 192). His soul remains in the dark. He is not literally raised from the dead, for he does not physically rise up, and he only becomes a ‘freke’ [‘man’] (SE, 323) once more after his baptism. At this point, his soul is saved and his resurrection, like that of Aron’s army, becomes permanent, but not earthly.

St Erkenwald’s judge’s experience of death must, like that of the Munich *Oswald*’s heathen army, inform his reaction to his awakening. He has suffered an extended solitary period of sensory deprivation, in contrast to the army’s painful collective experience. While pain happens *to* the pagans of the Munich *Oswald*, the judge suffers because nothing happens to him. His soul, like his body, is left and forgotten. As his temporary second life has a sense of unreality, so the perfect preservation of his body suggests an unreal death. While the army can assume that

because they were actively punished, God has a certain interest in them and might therefore save their souls, the judge's experience has been one of abandonment:

pou laftes me þer,
 And þer sittes my soule þat se may no fyrre,
 Dwynande in þe derke deth

 [You left me there,
 and there sits my soul that may see no further,
 languishing in the dark death]
 (SE, 292-94)

In this context of centuries of neglect, it is logical that, unlike the army, the reanimated judge entirely lacks purpose or agency. Although much of the second half of the poem is a monologue by the corpse, his extensive speeches are obedient answers to questions. He recounts his life, but that life is now done, and he neither makes decisions nor expresses hope for the future, only wistful regret. In his first life, unlike the heathen army, the judge made no deliberate rejection of Christianity. In this life, again in contrast to the heathen army, he has no expectation that resurrection means a second chance of salvation. Despite knowing religious truth, he remains excluded, and refers to '3our Criste' ['your Christ'] (SE, 209). Indeed, confined both by obedience to Erkenwald and lack of hope, he waits until he is asked about his soul's fate. His suffering is clear: he 'gefe a gronyng ful grete' ['gave a great groan'] (SE, 282), but he expects nothing, explaining that 'I was non of þe nombre þat þou with noy boghtes' ['I was not of the number that you bought with [your] suffering'] (SE, 289).

He remains reactive, rather than proactive, even once his salvation is assured. He explains that 'my spirit with vnsparid murthe' ['my spirit with unrestrained joy'] (SE, 335) has entered Heaven, but we see no outward sign of this unrestrained exultation. The joy belongs to his spirit, not to his soon-to-disappear earthly remains. *St Erkenwald* lacks the Munich *Oswald*'s omniscient

narrator, and it is left to the judge to explain that his soul has already ascended to Heaven – alone, unlike those of the army. Following this explanation, the body is, again, just a ‘body’ (*SE*, 343) and:

blakke as þe moldes,
As roten as þe rottok þat rises in powdere

[Black as the soil,
and rotten as the decayed matter that rises like powder]
(*SE*, 343-44)

Until the moment of pulverization, remarkably similar in both texts, the resurrected bodies in both the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald* are freed from the usual associations of corpses. In the former, they are only briefly dead; in the latter, the judge’s miraculous preservation subverts audience expectations of saints and bodies, for a miraculously preserved body would normally identify the remains of a saint. There is no putrefaction, no stench, no further mention of the wounds which presumably killed the army. We read in Genesis that, as a result of Adam’s sin, man: ‘revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es, quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris’ [will ‘return to the earth out of which thou wast taken, for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return’] (Genesis 3:19), but despite the fact that the souls of the unbaptized heathens in both texts carry the effects of Original Sin, those effects appear – almost paradoxically – only after baptism.⁵⁵

The resurrection sequences in these poems generate entirely different atmospheres, but, because they are not the final *carnis resurrectio* at the end of the world, both sequences end in the same way: with their subjects converted, and, having been baptized, their earthly bodies decayed into dust. The complete dead body thus becomes associated with sinners. Once they are washed clean through baptism, their earthly bodies disappear. Both authors insert a brief period of life

⁵⁵ For sinners posthumously saved from excommunication who then crumble into dust, see *IE*, 1925

between what Caroline Walker Bynum labels: ‘the period between “first death” (the departure of breath or life) and “second death” or mineralization (the reduction of the cadaver to the hard remains)’.⁵⁶ In these texts, this sudden decay emphasizes that these converts are not themselves to be considered holy. The miracle performed upon them was the work of a saint, and it is saints, not converts, whose bodies are holy. The immediate decay emphasizes the finality of the second deaths in both texts – the converts will not rise again until Judgement Day – while suggesting either a lack of engagement with the complex arguments over the mechanics of bodily resurrection, or a wish to demonstrate that total decay is no barrier to God’s power.⁵⁷

Life Everlasting: Baptism

The Middle Ages did not necessarily rule out baptism by desire. Aquinas, following Augustine, argued that if a man dies before baptism, ‘Talis autem sine baptismo actuali salutem consequi potest, propter desiderium baptismi’ [‘Such a person can obtain salvation without actually being baptized because of his desire for baptism’].⁵⁸ Nonetheless in these texts, neither miraculous resurrection, nor internal conversion is sufficient. Mark 16:16 states that: ‘Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit, qui vero non crediderit condemnabitur’ [‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned’]. The straightforward – even naïve – theology of both poems sees belief without baptism as wholly insufficient. Without the visible and material

⁵⁶ Bynum refers to an anthropological assessment of cultural approaches to putrefaction; the terms are not to be interpreted as theological. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 295.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of medieval theology concerning bodily resurrection, see Bynum, pp. 239–297.

⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiæ: Baptism and Confirmation* (3a. 66-72), ed. by James J. Cunningham (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1975), LVII, 84–85.

delivery of baptism, there can be no salvation, and in both poems, its administration is achieved miraculously. Beyond these similarities, however, the poems treat baptism differently.

The situation in the Munich *Oswald* is relatively straightforward: the soldiers of the heathen army live after Christ, and have heard of, and rejected, Christianity. Although they have recanted their disbelief, the only means of salvation in this world is literal baptism. After ‘drei sumerlang tag’ [‘three long days’] (*MO*, 3136) of constant baptisms, we read:

dannoch waren ungetauft zwen und sibitzig haiden:
die vorchten, ez wolt in werden zuo spat
und begunden eilen also drat;
si vorchten, si müesten versaumet sein,
und sprungen mit einander darein

[There were still seventy-two unbaptized heathens
who thought it would come to them too late,
and began therefore to hurry.
They feared they would be overlooked,
and leapt in all together]
(*MO*, 3134-39)

The repetition of ‘vorchten’ near the start of alternate lines emphasizes the converts’ awareness of their fate should they die again without baptism. Their fear is increased by their previous experience. Oswald has always intended to baptize his converts, but ultimately the sacrament is both unconventionally and miraculously ministered. Unconventionally, because despite being seized, rather than received, it is effective:

iegleichem ward ein raine sel kund.
als getauft wurden die haiden,
nu was in nicht mer laide

[A pure soul was revealed to each of them
when the heathens were baptized.
Now they suffered no longer]
(*MO*, 3140-43)

Without explanation, the converts are aware of the change that has been worked in them. The change is also clear in their more Christian concern for their souls.⁵⁹

Rather than fearing Hell, they worry:

so möchten wir in den sunden verzagen
und nämen sein an der sel schaden

[In this way we might despair in our state of sin,
and thus suffer harm to our souls]
(*MO*, 3165-66)

The miraculous nature of the baptism is manifested in the dramatic appearance of the baptismal water itself – appropriately, for it reminds the audience that baptism is always a miracle. It is the appearance of the baptismal water that finally converts Aron – a rather unsubtle depiction of baptism’s importance for salvation.

St Erkenwald addresses the concern for non-Christians who had lived good lives despite, through no fault of their own, not having been Christians, and so the issues are rather more complex. Even Erkenwald is reluctant to believe that a righteous pagan is damned:

“3ea, bot sayes þou of þi saule,” þen sayd þe bisshop;
“Quere is ho stablid and stadde, if þou so streȝt wroghtes?
He þat rewardes vche a renke as he has riȝt seruyd
Myȝt eucl forgo the to gyfe of his grace summe brawnche”

[“Yes, but speak of your soul,” then said the bishop,
“Where is she housed and situated if you performed so justly?
He that rewards each man insofar as he has served righteously
would never fail to give you some share of his grace”]
(*SE*, 273-76)

As in the Munich *Oswald*, in *St Erkenwald* it is clear that a man can only be saved by a physical baptism, although the issue is somewhat complicated by the fact that, had the judge not lived so pure a life, God would not have preserved his

⁵⁹ There is no sense that any damage to the soul could be repaired in Purgatory, which may be indicative of a possible early date for the poem, as Purgatory only took name and shape ‘entre 1150 et 1250 environ’. Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 14.

corpse to enable its later baptism. Whereas Aron's army gain some advantage from their new faith in Christ, there is no particular virtue to the judge's belief, for being dead, he knows what to the living is doubtful: the truth of Christianity. Any claim to grace is dependent on his actions during life. None of this, however, diminishes the unavoidable necessity of baptism.

Unlike Oswald, Erkenwald does not intend to baptize, although he does desire it. As in the Munich *Oswald*, it is the saint's appeal to God which enables the production of the material needed for baptism. The appeal is unintentional – despite his fervent desire, he can see no way of achieving his desire, unless 'Oure Lorde lene' ['our Lord grant'] (*SE*, 315). He tearfully expresses his wish, and God miraculously provides a solution. In the Munich *Oswald*, it is the saint who provides the answers. Here it is the corpse who explains: 'Þe bryȝt bourne of þin eghen, my bapteme is worthyn' ['the bright stream of your eyes – my baptism is brought about'] (*SE*, 330).

In both texts, we see a baptism which is not consciously the work of the saint in unconventionally obtained baptismal water. *St Erkenwald* goes further than the Munich *Oswald*, for the baptismal water appears, not as a miraculous external product, but as a product of the saint's body. The poems agree that baptism's grace cannot be limited by its minister, but that it is administered ultimately by God. Neither poem allows for baptism of intent, but whereas *St Erkenwald* allows the miraculous salvation of a virtuous man who is a pagan by historical accident, the Munich *Oswald* gives a second chance to those who have fought Christianity. All, however, must be changed through a physical, but miraculous, baptism before their souls can ascend to Heaven.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The judge's baptism echoes Belekane's baptism by tears in *Parzival*, an episode which also calls to mind *Oswald*'s impatient pagans, who, like Belekane, take baptism, rather than receiving it from an external minister: 'ir kiusche was ein reiner touf, / und ouch der regen der si begôz, / der

A Pattern for Salvation

The concern expressed in the Munich *Oswald* for the fates of dead pagans is not dissimilar to that expressed in *St Erkenwald*. While the particular circumstances of the pagans whom the poems concern are rather different – the ordinary and frightened men who have fought Christianity versus the virtuous and regretful non-believer who had no chance to accept Christianity – the authors present similar solutions to the problem of dying as an unbeliever. The similarities are remarkable; the differences lie more in plot and style than in the mechanics of salvation. The theology of baptism is uncompromising in both poems: it is clearly stated that there is no possibility of salvation without baptism. Sophisticated arguments about intent have no place in these works – for all those who die unbaptized, only a major miracle, making possible a physical baptism, can save them. The poems share a focus on the sanctity of the saintly body, although they express it differently – Erkenwald's body is so holy that it provides the means of baptism, while Oswald must, through his chaste marriage, focus on the preservation of bodily sanctity by maintaining his virginity. But even the ordinary bodies of ordinary men, as the fate of Aron's army shows, can be the vehicles of salvation; indeed they must be for, in contrast to most iterations of the story of Trajan, but as in the legend of St George, there is no alternative to the physical baptism of a living body by real water – even if a resurrection is necessary to achieve it.

wâc der von ir ougen vlôz'(28, 14-16). [Her chastity was a pure baptism/ as was the rain which soaked her/ the flood flowing from her eyes]. *Wolfram von Eschenbach. Parzival*, ed. by Karl Lachmann and Eberhard Nellmann, trans. by Dieter Kühn, Bibliothek Des Mittelalters, 8/1-2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994). Tubach also notes the trope of a dead pagan saved by tears, albeit those of a hermit (*IE*, 4721).

Benedicta Ward's description of resurrection as 'the ultimate "cure"', then, is inconsistent with the world view of the Munich *Oswald* and *St Erkenwald*.⁶¹ In both poems, resurrection is simply the means to make possible the real ultimate cure: the sacrament of baptism, which provides salvation for the soul. The similarities in the treatment of the salvation of pagans in these two texts are all the more striking given the great differences in length, style, atmosphere, plot and construction of the poems, not to mention the Munich *Oswald*'s longer history and their different national origins. Despite the entirely different motives behind the resurrection of the dead, once those pagan dead are restored to life, the poems follow very much the same formula, perhaps established by the legend of St George, whereby the saint brings about a temporary state of resurrection. This formula takes ownership of the religious other across geographical and temporal boundaries. It is a formula shared by Christian poets who are themselves separated by time and space.

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⁶¹ Ward, p. 42.