Female Devotion and the Vercelli Book

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The reception theories of Hans Robert Jauss provide a vocabulary with which to explore Vercelli, Archivio Capitolare manuscript 117, the Anglo-Saxon religious manuscript usually referred to as the Vercelli Book.¹ Jauss's concept of literature's "horizons of expectation" places the audience in the forefront of literary and historical criticism.² While differentiated from I. A. Richards' and other theorists' advocacy of reader-response criticism, Jauss's theories similarly privilege the interaction between reader and text over an iconic, fixed text.³ In Jauss's terms, a literary work is not a fact but an event—the event of the audience's reception of the text. While Jauss focuses on individual literary texts, his work is informative when investigating a manuscript like Vercelli 117, which compiles a diverse group of Christian religious texts, both poetry and prose. When the Vercelli Book is examined within the horizon of contemporary women's studies and feminist theory, it can be described as a manuscript intended for a specifically female reader to be read as part of her private religious practice.

Allen Frantzen introduced Anglo-Saxon studies to Jauss's reception theory in his 1990 _Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition._⁴ Frantzen uses Jauss's diction of reception and horizon to argue that the "reception of the Anglo-Saxon past records the invention of Anglo-Saxon studies to serve the ideological ends of leaders in English culture and education."⁵ While Frantzen's subject is the history of Anglo-Saxon studies, his introduction of Jauss into the discipline is useful in other inquiries as well. Jauss's theory of horizon argues that interpretation is a process "mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject,"⁶ since the "historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees."⁷ In his privileging of audience, Jauss explicitly rejects traditional notions of a literary

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text’s meaning as “timelessly true,” notions that now seem critically quaint but that wielded more cultural power in 1967 (Jauss’s German publication date; this essay appeared in English in 1982).8

Feminist critics have engaged with reader-response and reception theories, usually from the perspective of feminist readings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century canonical, male-authored texts. Most prominently, Judith Fetterley argued in 1978 for the “immasculation” of women readers of such texts, since a female reader is “asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her.”9 While reception theory and reader-response analysis make regular appearances now in medieval studies, a number of those readings tend not to be gender-based.10 Feminist analyses of medieval women readers tend to be focused in the later medieval period; for example, C. Annette Grise argues that late medieval devotional texts directed at women “acted to secure the submission of their female readers.”11 If its original horizon of reception was explicitly female, should our critical views about the Vercelli Book change? What would it mean if those texts were collected and copied with a specifically female reader in mind, rather than a male reader, or a supposedly gender-neutral, universal reader?

Anglo-Saxon scholarship has always assumed a masculine horizon of expectations for the Vercelli Book, created about the year 1000 in southeast England. Most scholars connect the manuscript to the Benedictine Reform of the second half of the tenth century, and assume that the maker and initial user(s) of the manuscript were men.12 Although we tend to see the Benedictine Reform as a primarily masculine endeavor, spearheaded by Sts. Dunstan, Ædelwold, and Oswald and supported by King Edgar,13 the devotional and theological forces driving the Benedictine Reform affected and were affected by women as well as men. Rather than simply to assume a masculine audience for the manuscript, scholars need to interrogate the possible uses and users of it, and the possible places for that use. Our own twenty-first century horizon of reception of the Vercelli Book will be altered substantially if we revise our perception of its eleventh-century reception to include women explicitly. Some reflections about that alteration will close this essay.

Throughout the twentieth century, the most common reception of the Vercelli Book was simply as a container for a number of texts, more or less canonical. The texts of the Vercelli Book, like most Anglo-Saxon texts, have been investigated as individual textual entities rather than as parts of a whole. Krapp’s edition of The Vercelli Book
includes only the six poems: Elene, Andreas, the Dream of the Rood, Soul and Body, Homiletic Fragment I, and The Fates of the Apostles, most of which have also been edited individually. A number of the prose texts, although not all, were available before Scrann’s complete edition appeared in 1992. Critics have tended to focus on the three longer poems (Andreas, The Dream of the Rood, and Elene) in their analyses; each of these individual poems has an extensive critical bibliography. While Eamonn O’Carragain has connected the themes and images of The Dream of the Rood to the contents and purpose of the whole Vercelli Book, he is an exception; most critics use the editorial apparatus the profession has provided to investigate one text in isolation rather than in its manuscript context.

I borrow the term “manuscript context” from Fred Robinson, of course, who first argued extensively that Anglo-Saxon texts do not exist in an editorial or critical vacuum but in relation to the other texts in the manuscript. Robinson argues that critics need to keep the “most immediate context” (the manuscript) in the forefront of their criticism; he refers specifically to the 10-line “Metrical Epilogue to MS. 41, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge” (included in ASPR 6, the “minor poems”), which makes little sense in editorial isolation but is clearly an integral part of an Old English prose manuscript of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History. Robinson’s work applies neatly to the texts of the Vercelli Book, despite the usual critical tendency to focus only on one or two of the Vercelli texts, usually poems. O’Carragain even notes the “unfortunate custom of considering Old English poetic manuscripts, not in their own right as compilations, but as vehicles merely of the texts they contain.” Although he focuses on The Dream of the Rood, O’Carragain examines the poem’s place in the manuscript as a whole. He argues that the manuscript provides a “rudimentary critical context” for The Dream of the Rood, a “primarily devotional text” like the others; he sees the entire Vercelli Book as an extended meditation on asceticism and the Last Judgment. Gunnhild Zimmermann is more specific in her argument that the Vercelli poems (she discusses only the poems) “present a history of the Church in the world” in that Andreas is about conversion, Elene about the merger of politics with religion, and Dream about eschatology. In a similar vein, Szarmach presents the manuscript as a “monastic reader” that demonstrates the scope of Anglo-Saxon religious writing of the generation before Ælfric and Wulfstan.
To see Vercelli MS 117 as a woman’s book contradicts none of these theories but simply focuses them on a specific readership. Literate and learned women were not a rarity in Anglo-Saxon England; one hundred years ago Mary Bateson called the scholarly community’s attention to the erudition, prestige, and power of the women in the double monasteries, or ministers, of the early Anglo-Saxon period. It has become something of a cliché in our discipline to invoke Aldhelm’s gift to the nuns of Barking Abbey of his notoriously difficult text, *De Virginitate*, as an example of the elevated state of the nuns’ education during the seventh and eighth centuries. The monastic learning of both women and men in the period before the Viking invasions is not in any dispute. Following those invasions, the tenth century Reform movement spawned many more monasteries than nunneries. However, a substantial number of women did enter the reformed religious life throughout the tenth century, albeit in much smaller numbers than did men. Marc Meyer and others have investigated the status of the tenth and eleventh century nunneries, concluding that their sustained existence, on a scale much smaller than that of the all-male houses, was related to the nunneries’ connections with the extended Anglo-Saxon royal family. Houses like Shaftesbury, the Nunnaminster, and Barking were vibrant parts of the religious and political landscape in the reform period and beyond. The women who lived in these houses engaged in devotional practices like those described by O’Carragain, Zimmermann, and Szarmach in their discussions of the Vercelli Book—and those practices would have included devotional reading.

To speak of medieval “women’s devotional reading” has tended to mean the reading of women in the High Middle Ages, and an enormous amount of work has been done on the woman as reader in the later part of the medieval period. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture* illustrates the essential relationship between the reading of saints’ lives and women’s devotional practice in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Her work with Bella Millet on the *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group *Lives* also indicates the necessity of reading to a woman’s devotional life. Mary Erler discusses the use of devotional reading as a nexus in female networks and communities; Anne Clark Bartlett has investigated the gender and power implications of women’s reading of male authored (but female-directed) texts. Susan Irvine has examined marginalia of the twelfth-century homiletic manuscript London, BL, Cotton Vespasian...
D.xiv to suggest that the manuscript was used as private reading material by an English-speaking nun. The investigation of the woman as religious reader in the High Middle Ages—and of the political, social, and cultural implications of that textual relationship—is thus well under way.

That focus on later medieval women’s devotional practice has begun to inform analyses of the Anglo-Saxon period as well, however. Sara Foot’s *Veiled Women* has redefined the ways in which we need to think about women and religious practice in late Anglo-Saxon England; Foot argues that the seeming paucity of religious women during and after the Benedictine Reform (she terms it “the disappearance of nuns from Anglo-Saxon England” in her subtitle) is simply a paucity of women in official cloistered institutions. Many more women were *deo devoteae*—devout women who lived in their widows’ estates or on their kin group’s lands, practicing a religious life in a manner that was almost always undocumented in the extant sources. Foot uses Domesday Book as evidence throughout her study, thus implicitly linking pre- and post-Conquest religious practices. She argues that these uncloistered women were “[d]ynamic, flexible, inventive, [and] independent” and states that “hortatory literature was directed towards them as well as to their cloistered sisters.” Foot remarks on the need for further investigation into “the questions of the education of religious women, and that of female book-ownership in this period.” Following a line of inquiry similar to Foot’s, Patricia Halpin makes explicit a continuum between the anchoresses of the later period and the *religiosae feminae* that lived near the Anglo-Saxon men’s religious houses but were not officially affiliated with them. Similarly, Rohini Jayatilaka has raised questions about the use of the Old English versions of the Benedictine Rule by religious women who were not officially enclosed in Benedictine houses. Those women would have read texts like the *Ancrene Wisse*, women associated more explicitly with the men’s institutions and great cathedral libraries would presumably have had at least some access to their book collections.

There are three main indicators throughout the Vercelli Book that it should be considered a woman’s devotional book, providing a feminine horizon of reception for the manuscript’s original audience. This horizon thus places the manuscript on a continuum of medieval women’s religious reading that stretches from the anchoritic and hagiographic texts discussed by Wogan-Browne back to
the ninth-century Mercian prayer books that Michelle Brown argues to have been made for women’s use.\textsuperscript{29} The first of these indicators is the content of the textual selections; second, the specific address to a female reader in homily seven; and third, the erasure of a woman’s name on folio 41 verso.

As a whole, the Vercelli Book’s contents do not specifically indicate a female or male ideal reader, although certain individual texts have been discussed in relationship to specifically gendered audiences. \textit{Elene} has been suggested as appropriate reading for women, with its focus on the mother of Constantine,\textsuperscript{30} while \textit{The Dream of the Rood} has occasioned discussions of a male monastic milieu because of its presumably monkish narrator.\textsuperscript{31} I have argued previously in this journal, however, that \textit{The Dream of the Rood} postulates a female ideal reader, despite the narrator, because of the heterosexual synergy between the heroic Christ and the feminized cross with which the reader identifies.\textsuperscript{32} The four saints’ \textit{Lives}—the prose \textit{Lives} of Martin and Guthlac and the poetic \textit{Lives} of Andrew and Elene—fall neatly into the rubrics for later women’s devotional reading described by Wogan-Browne, Erler, and others. The Vercelli homilies tend toward theologically gender-neutral topics like Rogationtide (six homilies, numbers 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, and 20) and penance (eight homilies, numbers 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 21, and 22). It is possible but certainly not necessary to see a female orientation towards Marian devotion in the homilies on Christmas (5 and 6) and the Purification (17).

The book’s contents as a whole, then, could be circumstantially and tenuously viewed as female-friendly if not specifically female-directed. More importantly, there are no texts directed specifically at men—for example, directions to priests or kings or warriors. Although 14 of the 23 prose texts begin with the traditional \textit{men pa leofestan}, there is no reason to identify these texts to be directly addressed only to men. One of Christine Fell’s achievements in her 1984 \textit{Women in Anglo-Saxon England} was to document the gender-neutral use of the word \textit{man} in Old English to mean simply “person” rather than “man,” and this traditional Old English beginning to a sermon, addressed to a lay congregation of men and women, is today often translated as the fully gender neutral “dearly beloved.”\textsuperscript{33}

Similarly, the addresses to “broðor \textit{þa leofestan}” and “broðor mine” in homilies 3, 16, and 17 can be read as a reference to “brethren” generally rather than as an address exclusively to men. The \textit{Dictionary of Old English}’s first definition of \textit{broðor} is “brother by blood relation-
ship" (obviously not applicable in this context); the second definition is “fellow-man, fellow-being, associate,” with definition 2.f as “referring to a co-religionist; fellow Christian.” It is not until the third definition that brōðor means “fellow member of a religious order; brother in Christ.”34 In general homiletic literature like the Vercelli texts, the second definition, with its implications of including both men and women, seems most applicable. Indeed, these three homilies (on penance in Lent, on the Epiphany, and on the Purification, respectively) focus on topics related to all Christians, not to men exclusively, and the published translations of the texts uniformly use “brethren” rather than “brother” throughout.35

Although there are then no specific addresses to men in the manuscript, one Vercelli text does contain a specific address to women—homily seven. Samantha Zacher has recently traced the Latin source of the homily to Mutianus Scholasticus’ translation of John Chrysostom’s “Homily XXIX on the Epistle to the Hebrews.”36 The homily as a whole is a warning against a variety of sins of the body, especially idleness and gluttony. The text explicitly conflates women with sins of bodily idleness and luxury, asking For hwon wene ge āet wif swa stiece syn of hyra gecynye? (Why do you suppose that women by nature are so [morally] sick?)37 This homilist is fond of rhetorical questions, beginning the next section with another association of women with soft living: Eawula, wif, to hwæten weonest du þines lichoman hacel [geican] mid smyringe ond sypweale ond æðrum licnessum? (Alas, woman, why do you fancy the healing of your body with ointment and frequent washing and other softnesses?) While “man” can be read as a gender-neutral word, “wif” certainly cannot be, and this homily’s focus on women and women’s sins shows that women were an explicit part of the text’s assumed audience.

Especially in a book of many texts, all meant to be read privately rather than heard, this specific address to a female audience in only one text cannot be generalized to define a woman as the primary user of the entire book. However, the eawula wif sections of Homily Seven certainly indicate the possibility of a primary female audience for the manuscript. These references show that the masculine horizon of reception assumed for the early eleventh century needs revision. They show that women definitely need to be specifically included rather than silently assumed, elided, or excluded in discussions of the first user(s) of the Vercelli Book.
Finally, one of the erasures in the manuscript points as well to a female reader. On the last line of folio 41 verso, an erased *eadgb* follows the end of line 949 of *Andreas*. It is the only erased name in the manuscript—all of the other erasures, in the margins or in the text, are corrections, pen-trials, or doodles.\(^{38}\) I have suggested elsewhere that this erasure is a direct reference to St. Edith of Wilton; St. Edith’s posthumous miracles included storm-calming, and line 949 ends the section of *Andreas* where Christ calms a storm for Andrew.\(^{39}\)

Much has been written recently on St. Edith, a late-tenth century princess and nun. The main source for her life is Goscelin’s *Vita Edithi*, he states that he relies on oral traditions at Wilton, and scholars also postulate that there was an extant *Life* as well, probably in Old English.\(^{40}\) Edith was born to King Edgar in the early 960s; her mother Wulfthryth used to be described as a mistress or concubine of Edgar’s but Susan Ridyard has suggested, convincingly, that she was his first wife who retired to Wilton as its abbess shortly after the birth of their daughter.\(^{41}\) Goscelin’s *Life* describes a princess/nun whose active life in the world belies the enclosure encouraged by the Benedictine Rule. She had frequent interactions with the courts of King Edgar (her father) and King Æðelred (her half-brother) as well as with religious leaders Dunstan and Æðelwold. Goscelin states that Edith was even offered the crown after the death of Edward the Martyr; Barbara Yorke has analyzed the political implications of Edith’s powerful royal and religious associations to suggest that this offer was actually a proposal of marriage from one of the nobles opposing Æðelred.\(^{42}\) Whatever its possible attractions, Edith turned down the offer to stay at Wilton. She built a church of St. Denis at Wilton shortly before her death in 984 at the age of 23. The *Life* details a series of posthumous miracles, performed for the benefit of both her community and the English royal house; at her translation 13 years later, her body was found partially uncorrupted.

Susan Ridyard discusses most thoroughly the relationship between the cult of Edith and the reigning dynasty; she argues that “the royal cult becomes an infinitely flexible instrument of royal propaganda.”\(^{43}\) By promoting the saintliness of his sister Edith and his brother Edward (the Martyr), Æðelred was able to solidify his own position as legitimate and powerful king, “surrounded . . . with saintly siblings,” to use Ridyard’s phrase.\(^{44}\) In addition to the Goscelin text, another version of Edith’s *Life* exists in the 15th century Middle English poetic text sometimes called the *Wilton Chronicle*, which was composed at
Wilton Abbey. As late as the 16th century, the church in the village of Kemsing blessed seed corn before an image of St. Edith, as William Lambarde scornfully relates in his pro-reformation Perambulation of Kent. This series of textual productions and assertions of oral transmission make evident the popularity of Edith and the strength of the devotion of the Wilton community to her memory, even five hundred years after her death.

The eadgyþ erasure seems to have been entered as a gloss by a reader of the Vercelli Book soon after its making, a reader who knew the traditions and narratives of the cult of St. Edith of Wilton. Because the cult of eadgyþ was that of a female saint maintained at an all-female abbey, it stands to reason that the reader who entered the eadgyþ gloss was then more likely a woman than a man. Rosamund Kitterick has argued that female saints' cults were maintained—textually and in other ways—at their female houses; nuns at Wilton and its sister houses would have been the most informed about, and also had the most invested in, the cult of St. Edith.

Combined with homily seven's direct address to women and the book's general purpose of private devotional reading, the erasure points even more strongly to an understanding of the Vercelli Book as a book for a woman reader. Interestingly enough, Celia Sisam suggested a woman reader for the manuscript in the introduction to the facsimile; in her discussion of the provenance of the manuscript, she suggests that "we should look to some small house, perhaps a nunnery, where an English book was needed for private reading." Her footnote to this statement suggests Barking Abbey:

No piece in the Vercelli Book appears to have been composed for those in religious orders, rather than for the laity... English sermons for the laity and religious poetry may have been the only available reading matter for nuns at this period. A place such as Barking Abbey, restored by King Edgar after its destruction by Vikings in 869, would have needed new books in the late tenth century.

In addition to its need for books in the late tenth century, Barking Abbey had a number of links with St. Edith as well. Barking endured a scandal at King Edgar's death in 975, when Æðelþryð, second wife of King Edgar, turned out the abbess Wulfhild in favor of her own candidate. The presence and power of Wulfhild, who had been the object of unwanted sexual interest from Edgar in her youth, may have offended the dowager queen. Wulfhild resumed the abbacy after Æðelþryð's death.

This Wulfhild was probably St. Edith's aunt. Goscelin calls Wulfhild the propinquam of Wulþryð, Edith's mother, and if Wulfhild
and Wulfpryð were not sisters, they were certainly close relatives. Wulfhild must have known the narratives circulating about her saintly relation—Edith was translated one year after Wulfhild’s death—and shared that information with her nuns.

In addition, one tradition even names Edith as abbess of Barking for a short time. Goscelin states that she was named abbess of three abbeys—Barking among them—but that she preferred to stay at Wilton with her mother. It is not clear whether she then was not actually abbess or if she governed from afar, in name only. It is clear, however, that the nuns of Barking would have known the narratives of St. Edith’s life, if only to celebrate the saintly relatives of their own holy abbess, Wulfhild, whose life was written by Goscelin soon after Edith’s. Sisam suggested twenty five years ago that Barking was a likely candidate in the search for the Vercelli Book’s original home; the eadgyp erasure gives more weight to that suggestion because of all the ties Barking had to St. Edith—ties of gender, ties of family, and maybe even ties of abbacy. While O’Carragain ultimately argues that the Vercelli Book was made for (and perhaps by) a canon, he acknowledges that “though for convenience I have referred to the Vercelli Collector as ‘he’, it is not impossible that she may have been a nun.” These analyses, suggestions, and indicators all show that an initial female horizon of reception is a viable hypothesis about the original use of the Vercelli Book.

An intended female audience for the Vercelli Book in the early eleventh century sheds no light on the question of how the manuscript made its way to the Cathedral Archive in Vercelli, although it widens the already large list of possible carriers. While A. S. Cook argued that Cardinal Guala had brought the manuscript to Vercelli from England in the thirteenth century, Kenneth Sisam demonstrated in 1953 that the marginalia on folio 24 verso indicates that the manuscript was in Italy by the late eleventh century. Sisam remarks that every bishop had to go to Rome to receive his Pallium, so “there were so many possible carriers in the first half of the eleventh century that there is no justification for choosing one or the other.” Vercelli was a common stop on the busy pilgrimage route to Rome; Nicholas Howe even argues that Rome was the intellectual and spiritual capital of Anglo-Saxon England, and discusses the extensive exchanges that took place between the two locales. O’Carragain has noted that the texts of the Vercelli Book would have “provided a wealth of material suitable for private reading or for reading (or perhaps, in the case of
the poems, chanting) to a group of pilgrims.\textsuperscript{57} The traffic between Anglo-Saxon England and Rome was substantial enough that a small English-oriented community sprung up in Vercelli as a way station to recuperate from or prepare for the Alpine crossing.\textsuperscript{58} Kenneth Sisam and others assume that a man left the book in Vercelli; an initial female horizon of reception, however, opens up the possibility that the book was left in Vercelli by a woman.

Noble women, consecrated or not, certainly traveled the pilgrim road from Anglo-Saxon England to Rome. In the early eighth century, Boniface wrote to the Abbess Bugga about her troubles in planning her pilgrimage, urging her to contact a fellow English nun already in Rome if she did decide to make the trip. About ten years later, Boniface wrote a long letter to Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury that included (among other items) warnings and laments about the number of English women who turned out of necessity to a life of prostitution while enduring the hardship of travel to Rome.\textsuperscript{59} In 888, Æðelsweða of Mercia, wife to the deposed Mercian King Burgred and sister to King Alfred, died in Pavia en route to Rome.\textsuperscript{60} Among the numerous travelers to Rome (and directly to Vercelli for the Pope’s synod in 1047) throughout the eleventh century, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle explicitly notes only one woman: Judith of Flanders, who is identified only as “Earl Tostig’s wife” in the entry for 1061.\textsuperscript{61} Judith, daughter of Baldwin IV, Count of Flanders, was obviously accustomed to extensive continental travel throughout her life.\textsuperscript{62} We know that Judith was a pious patron of the arts; she owned at least four elaborate gospel books which were produced in England while she was married to Tostig (two of these are now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York; one is in the Archivio della Badia in Monte Cassino, Italy; one is in the Hessische Landesbibliothek in Fulda).\textsuperscript{63} It is curious that the only woman known definitively to have traveled from England to Rome in the eleventh century is also known definitively to have owned books. It also interesting to note that Judith’s sister-in-law, Queen Edith (wife to Edward the Confessor) was educated at Wilton Abbey, St. Edith’s home. While it is thus possible to add Judith of Flanders to Sisam’s list of (male) potential carriers of the Vercelli Book from England to Italy, the presence of Judith in Tostig’s retinue more surely indicates that women could and did make the journey.

Other travelers specified in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle include bishops, archbishops, nobles, and King Cnut himself (in 1022). Italian scholars link the Cathedral’s possession of the manuscript to the rela-
tionship between the English guest house and the cathedral library; Rossella LaStella suggests that the cathedral may have inherited the English library after an earthquake in 1117. Just as a man could have left the book—intentionally or not—at the Ospedale di S. Brigida degli Scoti, so could a woman have done so. The manuscript’s placement in Italy thus does not confirm or deny the suggestion of an intended female audience.

To see Vercelli 117 as a woman’s devotional book must change the way we think about English cultural production and reproduction in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. A change in the manuscript’s eleventh-century horizon of reception will necessarily change our own horizon of reception as well. Jauς refers to “the reader’s horizon of expectations, formed by a convention of genre, style, or form.” To that list we should add gender, for twentieth-century feminism has revealed the pitfalls of universalizing a supposedly gender-neutral “mankind” just as surely as Jauς and his early postmodern colleagues revealed the inadequacies of positivist or essentialist schools of literary criticism. Within this feminine horizon of reception in the eleventh century, Vercelli 117 can take its place next to BL Harley 7653, BL Harley 2965, and BL Royal 2.A.xx, the ninth-century prayer books made for women; the late tenth-century Salisbury Psalter (Salisbury Cathedral Library MS. 150), in which feminine inflections indicate that it was used by women readers; the badly damaged eleventh-century prayer book that glosses masculine inflections with feminine ones (and vice versa), implying use by both male and female readers; and the varied versions and Old English translations of the Regularis Concordia and Benedictine Rule made expressly for women readers. The world of women’s books in Anglo-Saxon England is suddenly a busy and important place, containing major texts and manuscripts. All Anglo-Saxonists, not just those who are members of the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship, need to acknowledge and account for the active presence of women in the discourse about the receptions of Anglo-Saxon religious manuscripts. We will need to use the more cumbersome but accurate “he or she” when describing a manuscript’s reader, instead of the supposedly gender-neutral masculine pronoun “he,” a word that has contributed more to the metaphorical erasure of women from cultural history than the literal erasure of eadgęp from the margins of the Vercelli Book.

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NOTES

1 For a description of the manuscript, see N. R. Ker, Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); G. F. Krapp, ed., The Vercelli Book, ASPR, vol. 2 (Columbia U. Press, 1932); Celia Sisam, ed., The Vercelli Book: A Late Tenth-Century Manuscript Containing Prose and Verse, Vercelli Bibliotheca Capitoliare Cxvii EEMF, vol.19 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1976); Donald Scragg, ed., The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts, EETS, o.s. vol. 300 (Oxford U. Press, 1992). I would like to thank Chanda McCreary, former interlibrary loan librarian at Lesley University, and Lora MacLaughlin, my undergraduate research assistant from 2001-2004, for their assistance throughout this project. I am most indebted to Prof. Stephen Harris of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for intrastate encouragement and Anglo-Saxon collegiality.


3 See Paul de Man’s discussion of Jauss and reader-response criticism in his introduction to the English edition of Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, 2-3.


5 Ibid, 124.

6 Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, 15.

7 Ibid, 19.

8 Ibid, 29.


12 See, for instance, cited works by Eamonn O’Carragain, Donald Scragg, and Paul Szarmach, all of whom use masculine pronouns and refer to men’s monastic houses when discussing the milieu of Vercelli MS 117.


36 Samantha Zacher, “The Source for Vercelli VII: An Address to Women,” in *New Readings on the Vercelli Book*, eds. Andy Orchard and Samantha Zacher (U. of Toronto Press, forthcoming). Dr. Zacher first presented her work as “Re-reading the Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Homilies” at the 39th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, on 9 May 2004. I am grateful to Dr. Zacher for sharing information with me prior to publication.


41 Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, 43.


44 Ibid., 165.


48 Sisam, *The Vercelli Book*, 44. The following quotation appears in note 2.


51 Goscelin, *Vita Edithe*, 76-77.


Ibid., 117.


For a searchable electronic version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, see [http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Anglo/](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Anglo/).

For an account of Judith’s marriage to Tostig in the volatile years leading to the Norman Conquest, see Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud* (Oxford U. Press, 2003), 149-162. See [http://sbaldw.home.mindspring.com/hproject/prov/judit000.htm](http://sbaldw.home.mindspring.com/hproject/prov/judit000.htm) for an account of Judith’s family tree with a focus on the continent rather than on England.


Brown, "Female Book Ownership."
