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INTRODUCTION: LISTENING TO OUR MONSTERS

Welcome, courageous reader, to this special edition of Listening, devoted to “listening to our monsters.” Since the mid-1990s, the multidisciplinary field of scholarship known as Monster Studies has emerged and proliferated on the academic scene. The issues, figures, and topics interrogated in this volume offer a contribution to this burgeoning field of study. As guest editor, I invited eleven authors to attune their critical senses to “listening” to their respective monster. What is it that the monster has to say? And to whom? Why is their message delivered in that particular way?

Each of our essayists was posed three questions to frame their remarks. First, “Identify, and provide appropriate background for, your selected monster. Why and how is this particular monster culturally and/or historically significant?” The essays that follow contextualize and historicize their objects of inquiry, adding helpful perspective and relevant folklore regarding the monster under consideration. Second, “Etymologically understood as a specific, foreboding form of communication—a warning sign, an omen, a portent—what is your selected monster saying? To whom? And how is this particular message being communicated?” Among scholars of Monster Studies, we are well aware of the etymology of the term “monster.” Understood in its etymological context, a monster is a “warning sign,” an “omen” or “portent.” What is each monster warning its victim or community about? The next question to ask, of course, is this: since a monster is an ominous form of communication, what exactly or approximately are monsters saying? To whom? How are their messages being conveyed? The third question was, “How have ‘listeners’ (readers, viewers, survivors, etc.) responded to your selected monster? How should or could we respond to this monstrous message or prophecy?” A message is pointless—and the communicative event is rendered fruitless—unless it makes some sort of impact on, or elicits a specific response from, its intended recipient. The essays that follow address these three questions in their own ways.

The first four essays treat what may be considered traditional or well-known monsters. Brantley L. Bryant and Asa Simon Mittman, scholars of medieval literature and art history, respectively, lead off this volume with an
imaginative essay regarding the Blemmye, a medieval monster reported to have its head located within its chest. Bryant and Mittman imagine and wonder what it would be like to listen to this particular monster from its own unique point of view. What sort of creature does the Blemmye see itself as? And how does it experience the world? John Edgar Browning’s contribution deftly canvasses the historical trajectory of European vampires, before and after Bram Stoker’s seminal 1897 novel, Dracula. Browning argues that various iterations of vampires respond to very human concerns, including but not limited to sexuality, disease and contagion, fears of death and the deceased, religious terror, evil, and so on. Sarah Juliet Lauro’s essay about zombies may surprise some readers. In addition to listening to the apocalyptic, cannibalistic, viral zombies of Hollywood, television, videogame, and graphic novel lore—which she dubs the zombie cinematicus—Lauro traces the zombie figure to the transatlantic slave trade and the Afro-Haitian religion, vodoun. David McNally critically examines Mary Shelley’s seminal 1818 text Frankenstein through historical, economic, social and political lenses. Adding to the general consensus that Shelley’s novel warns its audiences about the possible overreach of modern science, McNally suggests that Victor Frankenstein and his monstrous, yet unnamed Creature warn us about the evils of modern capitalism.

The remaining five essays address some monsters that may be unfamiliar or previously unconsidered. In an investigation of late sixteenth century Chinese Buddhist text Journey to the West, Andrew Hock-Soon Ng argues that the monster named Monkey holds an “ethical mirror” to its audiences, showing us elements of ourselves that we often fail to admit and encounter. Complementing and extending Ng’s analysis, Jeffrey M. Courtright’s insightful essay offers readers a psychoanalytical investigation into the character Mystery Man in director David Lynch’s Lost Highway (1997). In particular, Courtright elucidates and employs Sigmund Freud’s secund concept of “the uncanny” (Das Unheimlich) to understand the monstrous and unsettling elements in Lynch’s film. Jane Anna Gordon considers the primary monster in patriarchal and misogynist cultures: women, especially those who dare to think for themselves, and act upon those ideas. Rather than reject or shy away from the moniker “monstrous,” Gordon suggests that women political thinkers—in particular, Mary Wollstonecraft, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Rosa Luxemburg—embrace the appellation to continue our struggles against sexism, racism, and violence. Continuing Gordon’s line of thinking, Persephone Braham investigates one specific female monster, the Amazon. Braham elucidates the history of this fantastic creature from ancient Greece and early Christendom to and throughout the “New World.” Our final essayist Giselle Liza Anatol considers one more modern female monster, the Afro-Caribbean soucouyant. Anatol traces and probes the libatory potential of the lore surrounding this female vampire.

Rounding out this volume is an Afterword by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, himself no stranger to Monster Studies. Here he offers a critical and apprecia-
tive overview on the essays featured herein, as well as something new for our contributors and readers to consider. Together, these essays endeavor to actually *listen to* their respective monsters, and what is revealed is at once shocking and oddly hopeful. To be able to listen to someone else, especially if that someone else is considered monstrous, requires that one open oneself to otherness, strangeness, and even danger. Many of the monsters considered here are indeed frightening, and not only to their possible victims—they are also dangerous to various sectors of society, or to the economic, gendered, sexual, and political structures that undergird human societies themselves. Monsters thus serve a double function—to unsettle and to prophesy. They are thus repulsive and attractive.

Subscribers and occasional readers of *Listening* may detect a difference in the number of essays in this volume, and the page length of each contribution. This decision was intentional. Instead of including a small number of longer or traditional-length essays, I thought to conduct a literary experiment, as it were, inviting more contributors to submit shorter, punchy essays. I requested that the assembled scholars compose “position papers” rather than full-length articles. Gathered together here are art historians; medieval literary scholars; political scientists; philosophers; and scholars of literature, language, media, music, and culture. In what follows, you will encounter a veritable smorgasbord of monstrous ideas, histories, provocations, and perspectives. Enjoy ... if you dare.

Michael Paradiso-Michau
Guest Editor

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‘TRAVELS OF THE BLEMMYE-FOLKE:
A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN MIDDLE ENGLISH POEM IN THE
COLLECTION OF MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY

B. L. Bryant and A. S. Mittman

In this article, we bring to light a text that foregrounds listening to the monster, in this case the Blemmyes, by making available to scholarly readers a previously unknown Middle English poem of great historical and literary significance. Our discovery was made possible through the generous funding of the NEPS (National Endowment for the Preternatural Studies), which allowed us to spend the summer of 2016 cataloging previously unstudied collections in the famously capacious library of Miskatonic University, in Arkham, MA. As is well known, several collections in the library were assembled and acquired in order to bolster the founders’ problematic stances on race, miscegenation, and eugenics, and since the radical restructuring of the administration, mission, and student body in the 1990s, are consequently now being mined by researchers in critical race theory and sociology as a trove of sources, some unique survivals, on individual and structural racism. We wish to express our grateful appreciation to Dr. Rachel Goldstein, Curator of Special Collections, for her assistance. In the evenings, we retired to the King George’s Head to enjoy a local stout and look over the day’s notes. Dr. Goldstein proved a font of knowledge about local history, and regaled us with tales of her great-grandmother Fanny, a librarian remembered for her pioneering work in diversity.

We worked closely with Dr. Goldstein to identify those collections previously overlooked, and settled for our first project on a curious donation made in the late eighteenth century by an English clergyman who wished to remain anonymous. This collection, known under that general heading Arkham, Miskatonic Library, Spec. Col. An. Don. 4593, is housed in four oak trunks, numbered in the donor’s hand and with their contents arranged as they were when he delivered them to the library. However, after inspecting and cataloging
each volume, we also cut custom-fit acid free sleeves for it, using the industry standard Gaylord Archival Adjustable 2-Piece Rare Book Box to preserve these works for the use of future scholars.

The collection is largely composed of well-attested incunabula and eighteenth-century religious tracts from either side of the Atlantic, such as Jonathan Edwards’ A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton (London, 1737) and an undated broadsheet of Charles Wesley’s “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” as well as several bibles of various then-new Protestant denominations. The most notable of these is, of course, The Holy Bible, Containing the Old Testament and the New published in Cambridge by John Baskerville (1763), in red morocco with gilt spine and covers. There are also three printings of The Book of Common Prayer (1559, 1604, and 1662).

In addition to these customary works, there are a number of more unusual volumes housed in the fourth trunk. There are a few alchemical treatises, such as a small folio edition of Robert Fludd’s Mosaical Philosophy Grounded upon the Essential Truth or Eternal Sapience (London: 1659), and a few that evince an interest in the monstrous: the 1585 Oeuvres of Ambroise Paré, chief surgeon to Charles IX and Henri III, for example, contains an abbreviated version of his Des monstres et prodiges; and the popular 1727 Woodman and Lyon printing of Voiage and Travaile of Sir J. Maundevile, which treateth of the way to Hierusalem; and of marvayles of Inde, with other ilands and countryes, which contains a lively and charming series of woodcut illustrations.

Far and away the most remarkable volume in Spec. Col. An. Don. 4593, though, is IV:2, the only manuscript predating the collector’s period. We have not yet been able to decipher the small note pasted onto the reverse of the upper cover of the manuscript, which appears to be in a code unfamiliar to any cryptographer whom we have consulted, though analyses of the paper, ink, and hand suggest it is from the collector’s lifetime. Spec. Col. An. Don. 4593, IV:2 is a Middle English manuscript of somewhat unusual proportions, being rather taller and narrower than is common (ca. 28 x 15cm). Paleographical and art historical analysis conducted in consultation with several authorities suggests a date of ca. 1425. The closest known comparandum is London, British Library, MS. Harley 3954, a prose volume containing the “Defective” Version of the Middle English prose Travels of Mandeville, heavily—if loosely—illustrated. Harley 3954 is quite close in both format and style, and the texts are related, as is discussed below. The manuscript is a fragment, rebound in the eighteenth century and missing several leaves at the end. It contains an otherwise unattested poem, “Travels of the Blemmye-Folke,” with a prose introduction. The text contains several imbrications with and allusions to well-known characters and narratives. The brief prose introduction identifies the narrator as the otherwise unknown sister of John Mandeville. Indeed, there is something parodic about her opening lines that indicates familiarity with the opening of the Book of Mandeville:

Travels of the Blemmye-Folke/118
I, Judith Mandeville, Lady, was born in England, in the town of St. Albans, and crossed the sea in the year of our Lord Jesu Christ, 1322, in the day of St. Michael; I left with my brother, but when he returned to England, I chose to remain a wayfarer, scholar, and collector of strange and wonderful tales from many diverse lands. I chose to listen to the stories of the world. (Text updated to Present Day English by the authors.)

She explains that she carried out her studies in Spain, and there learned to read several languages, including what she refers to as “the Lettres that the Jewes usen” and the “sarazineis tongue.” She claims to have found and translated the poem that follows from the language of the Blemmyes. This is a surprising claim, in that it merges the popular ancient and medieval motif of the headless people, said in the Wonders of the East to live on an island in the Brixontem River, apparently a tributary of the Nile, and the historical Blemmyes, a people that actually lived on an island in the Nile, just south of Luxor, and left behind a trove of Blemmyean documents. It seems highly unlikely that an actual Blemmyean stele could have been available for the author’s consultation in fifteenth-century Spain, nor that it would have been intelligible if it were. Rather more likely is that this narrator—like her purported brother John—is a fictional trope provided to lend auctoritas to the text in a manner widely practiced in the period. An illustration of her appears on folio 2r of the manuscript, where she stands in the right margin in a copse of trees (Figure 1). She wears an unusual tunic with a short, lobed skirt and very long sleeves. She gestures inward to the text block that contains her introduction, as if to invite the reader to pay close attention thereto.

‘Travels of the Blemmye-Folke’ resonates closely with a fascinating passage in the Cursor Mundi, a massive work of some 30,000 lines of Middle English verse in a northern dialect, written ca. 1300, telling the history of the world. In this passage, lines 8071-8132, a group of Blemmyes approaches King David. The text declares these beings to be hideous monsters, and indeed some of the king’s warriors even laugh at them:

Four sarweis wit þe king can mete,            Four Saracens met with the king
Blac and bla als led þai war,                black and blue as lead they were
Mikel riches þai wit þam bar,                Great riches they bore with them,
þat sagh man neuer for-wit þat hore,       Men had never seen before that hour
Sua fraward scapen creature, such horribly shaped creatures
O þair blac heu it was selcuth, their black hue was marvelous
And in þair breistes bar þair moth, they bore their mouth in their breast.
Lang and side þair brues wern, and their hair hung all about them.
And hinged all a-bout þair hern. Their mouths were wide, their eyes
þair muthes wide, þair eien brade, broad.

Vn-freli was þair face made! Un-nobly was their face made!
In þair forhed stod þair sight, In their forehead stood their sight,
Bot lok mought þai not vp-right, but they could not look up-right.
þair armes hari wit herpild hid Their arms were hairy with wrinkled
War sette til elbous in þair side, hide
Crumped knees and boce on bak. were set to the elbows in their sides
[They have] crumpled knees and a [and] could scarcely keep from laugh-
hump on back ing.
þe king on þam wonder and spack,
The king wondered at them and
On þam be-heild þe kinges her, spoke,
Moght noght an laighter for-ber.1 the king’s warriors looked on them,

The King, who has a set of wonder-working rods, uses them to “heal” the
Blemmyes, transforming them into pale-skinned, normate beings who matched
the Cursor-writer’s assumptions about human appearance:

þai knelt and þam kyest, als tite, They knelt and kissed them, as quickly,
Als milk þair hide be-com sa quit, as milk their skin became so white,
And o fre blod þai had þe heu, and of high blood they had the hue,
And al þair scapp was turnd neu. and all their shape was turned new.
On nan-kyn lim ne had þai lett, All their limbs were perfect,
For in þair sted ilkan war sette, for each one was set in its place.

Our text departs sharply from this apparent precedent, transforming the tale in
substantive ways, as will be clear to the reader. Most notably, the ‘Travels of the
Blemmye-Folke’ departs from John Mandeville’s practice of outsider-looking-

in description, thereby changing the focus and details of the Cursor account
considerably. Instead, the text we discovered relates a similar encounter from
the Blemmyean point of view, without any editorial commenting or framing by
Judith Mandeville, who presents herself as mere translator, though the illustra-
tion of Judith seems to present her more as observer and traveler than as scribe
or author (Figure 1).

There is a second illustration accompanying the ‘Travels of the Blemmye-
Folke,’ which appears as a bas-de-page on folio 4v (Figure 2). It appears just
below the phrase “Wyth metal and rokke from erthe y-ripp’d” (line 63). The
lively illustration, quite close to Harley 3954 in style, presents the meeting of
“The Blemmye-band[e] callid Eyne of Thondre” with the unnamed human king. The humans are clothed and armed in typical English fashion, and the king and one of his knights carry axes, thereby clarifying their direct role in the cutting of the trees, the stumps of which stand between the humans and the highly agitated Blemmyes. The Blemmyes are unclothed, as is common, and vigorously sexed, as we also see in Harley 3954. They are presented in the familiar slate blue-grey used in English and Continental manuscripts to convey African origin. Curiously, the male Blemmye is presented in a darker shade than the female, indicating retention of common tropes of public and private roles divided by sex. Still, the poem makes no reference to the sex of any of the Blemmyes, and it seems that the female is one of the “noble crewe of knightes, / [who] knewe the lore of battale right” (line 42).

The authorial introduction suggests that there were originally several such texts in the manuscripts, but the fragment breaks off somewhat abruptly at what might or might not be the end of the ‘Travels of the Blemmye-Folke.’ What follows is the text, in full, as it appears in Spec. Col. An. Don. 4593, IV:2:

‘Travels of the Blemmye-Folke’

Praye unto the erthe and ayre,
And wyndes wylde and watirs fayre,
And yn my chest make loose my tongue
That Ich may bresten out yn songe.
Yn maner of a laye Ich syng
A meeting wyth a monster-kyng.
What made ower folk to wordes eschaunge
With monstres fierce, and proud, and straunge?
Trewelye yt was obligacioun
That made folk of ower nacioun
Encounter swich a foule wight
That we dyd shaken at hys sight.
Listeth, and heare of perils olde,
The which were facid by Blemmyes bolde!
Yn distaunt yeares, yn elder dayes,
Whanne ower folk wakid yn secret wayes
Yn forest thike or frostye place
The veynes of thys good worlde to trace,
Wel-knowne yt ys to al, that we
Protectid everich roote and tre.
Thogh nowe we have thys devoir stoppid,
Yn elder dayes no tre was croppid,
No cypress swete nor no palm² tall
But we of yt knewe the tidinges alle.
Thos elder folk their eares were keen
(The which were nigh their shoulderes seen); Their eye-ventes yn their breste were bright
To see a growinge trees lyle-light.
And al knewe the moost noble treen
That koude crye yn voyces keen
And hearde be from far away
Yif thei were grim, yf thei were gay.
Ther was a mightye auncient tre
Compoundid of thike shaftes thre
That coyled had togedir fast
So that no storm or wyndes blast
Koude make the thre treen come asondre.

The³ Blemmye-bande callid Eyne of Thondre,
That was a noble crewe of knightes,
And knewe the lore of battle right,
And eke the craft of gentilesse,
Thei knewe, for all of their goodnesse.⁴
Upon a daye thys comli bande
Of Blemmye-folke, yn ferrene lande,
Dyd heare that tree to crye and shrike
And save, ‘Wyth axes men me strike!
Thogh woven strong wyth shaftes thre
The men wyth metal teare at me!’
Thys crye thogh yt came from afar,
The Blemmyes heard for thei were war,
And wanderers and tree-lore knewe,
The Eyne of Thondre, Blemmyes trewe.
Thei journeyed long the tre to lynde,
Across the lande thei went lyke wynde.
Yn wysdams and thurgh knightli lore
Thei sent out secret scouts bifor,
Which scouts dyd maken thys report:

Travels of the Blemmye-Folke/122
Ther was a kynge and al hys court,\textsuperscript{5}  
A monstir wyth no face yn cheste,  
Thogh clothid he was atte beste
Wyth metal and rokke from erthe y-ripped
To showe hys gretnesse and kingshippe:
A gold and cristal diadem.
Hys eyes and mouth were on a stem
That rose bitwene hys shouldres tall,
And endid yn a fist or ball.
The Blemmyes knewe ful soothly then
Thys was a fearsome kynge of Men,
Men, the monsteres, that lyved yn touns
And often brought the trees adoun.
The shaftes of treen bicam the walles,
And ribbes of treen bicam the halles,
And everich toun of Men ther was
Did seem a forestes buryinge place.
Thys kynge that thre-fold mightye tre
Had cutte, and ther-from roddes thre
He made, that he dyd caruye so
While that he wente the countrye through
As he wyth them to heal was able
For hooly thei were, seyde he, sanz fable.
Debat ther was then Blemmyes among
Whethir with swerde\textsuperscript{6} or els wyth tong
To tell the kyng of their grievance,
But atte laste, yt fel by chaunce
That thos who favourid pees and talk
Wolde soon unto that kyng go walk
And meet hym-wyth and tell hym fre
How folk sholde treate a nobel tre,
“For thogh he bear nat mouth yn chest,
Ther ys yet herte wythinne hys brest,
And thogh he semeth a grisli thing,
Yet wyse might be swich a mightye king.”
But then a master ther at hande,
Who travelid wyth that nobel bande,
An olde soul whos browes thikke
Dyd al moost to hys navel stikke,\textsuperscript{7}
He seyde thes noble wordes then
A warninge of the wayes of Men:
“Als the erthe yn noble wyse
Hath rihts and ventes for the office
Of lettinge forth or drawinge yn;
So ower herte-ventes upon the skyn
Are nigh the longes and herte yfound,
As yf ower visage ys the ground,
And ower soule set yn a litel land
Wher good and honest thoughtes may stande.
Thogh stout and sturne thes straunge Men walke,
Their ventes are sette upon a stalke,
So distaunt from the herte and lungs
That no treuthe may move to thair tongues.
No blood of herte or breathe ys founde:
Their eyes and mouth are fully bounde
Wyth brawn and brayne and sinewe rough
As yn a fort wyth walles ynoough.
Among us who wolde leade desiren
He beareth noble chaynes of yren
Upon the shouldeir, as to saye:
Bow to all folk, do good todaye.
Yet thair bea roie or thair folke-kinge
Weareth a brighte and golden ringe
About the tippe of the stalkes head
To signifie that he wol leade
Wyouth regard for thinges below,
Trust nat these stalked fooles, I trowe."
Yet the Eyne of Thondre wyth ful corage
Dyd fear no threat nor no outrage,
And thei walkeid along the mikle strete,
For thei wolde wyth that man-kynge mete.
The kynge wyth his eyen upon his stalke
Dyd stare as Blemmyes forth dyd walke,
And the kynge and al the rest
Dyd wondir at their noble chestes.
The Men dyd move their nekkes lyke wormes
To wondir at the Blemmyes formes.
And sum rascal, nat of the best,
Dyd jape and laugh and mock and jest:
“Be careful kynge, how that ye treade,
For thes folk neede to get: a heade!”
And al the host and al the men
Dyd laughen at thys low jest then.
“O king,” began an Eye of Thondre,
“Lord of monsteres, men, and wondres,
By yower regard and changinge hewe,
We see that we be straunge and newe.
Yet outward forme ys but a shape,
No creature kan deth escape,
And therfor honor lyfe yn al:
Namaore let treen be cut and fal.
Ye beare wyth yow thre roddes brighte
That once were yn a tre of mighte.
Gyve vs them, for we knowe art,
The which kan heale a treés hearte.”
“Thou sekest,” quod the monster-kyrne,
“Thes roddes, ywis, thi are a thynge
Moost hooly and puissant to heale,
And no folk kan their sin conceale,
Whanne Ich these hooly roddes wave.
Headless man, wolde you be saw?  
Do ye obey the god of al?"

The Blemmyes on their knees gan fal,  
And seyde, “We do the power respect
That thing to thing doth al connect.”
“Then be ye convertid?” askid the man.
Yn confusioun the Blemmyes than
Dyd looke arounde, for he but bablid,
As yf of straunge tales and of fablis.
Thei lookid up, thei looked doun,
Movinge their eye-ventes al arounde.

The kyne dyd nat knowe what thys meant
And wronglye thoughte thei dyd assent.
“Bihold,” the kyng wyth voys ful loud
As one that was foolhardi proud,

“The kynges now are made ful cleane,
Now nys no blemish on hem seen.
Al blessinge be nat myne but Goddes
That hath transformid wyth holy roddes!”
Al men ther wondred, and lyke foles,
Seyde: “Headles monstres nowe made whole!”
Yet thys was al ful wondir straunge

By cause: ther had nat been no chaunge.

The Blemmyes were as thei had been,
No miracle had ther ben seen.
(Nor miracle swich thinge wolde be
But rather sum necromancye
To chaunge the trewe and gentil shape
Of creature by nature shaped.)
Yet kyng, and court, and men ther al,
Dyd clayme a wondir dyd bifal.
The Blemmyes left, and ther and then,
Dyd learne how false be the claymes of men,
And how men so kan be deceived
To see a thinge, and yet believe
That trouthe ys other than that thinge
By cause tolde so by lord or kinge.
But no power on erthe, nor no fals art
Kan tricke Blemmye cyne so near the hearte.

The text ends thusly, without further framing by the putative author, “Judith Mandeville.” It is worth noting, as we conclude, the layers of authorship embed-
ded in this poem. The text gives voice to the perspective of “The Blemmye-bande callid Eyne of Thondre,” which the prose introduction in turn claims to have been composed in the heretofore completely unknown language of supposedly mythical acephalous beings and translated by “Judith.” She is presented as the sister of the much more well-known, but nonetheless fictional author, “John Mandeville.” There is therefore certainly another author—or perhaps more than one—responsible for the drafting of this poem. Since there is no way that a Blemmyean text—even one composed by the actual, historical group that has left a trove of documents, rather than the headless folk of myth—could have been translated by the anonymous poet posing as “Judith,” the poem must therefore have been composed from whole cloth, and without a doubt well after the period claimed. Surely the existence of a translation of a text in an unknown language by the adventurous sister of a fictional knight must give us pause, since it presents us with an improbability too fantastic even for the well-noted collections of Miskatonic University.

LIST OF FIGURES

NOTES
2 The cypress and palm are well attested in English sources, where they are generally associated with Biblical and other eastern narratives. Here, though, they are presented as local species.
3 The manuscript has an empty line and before line 40, and a larger, two-line red initial capital beginning line 40.
4 Here, the English author or translator casts the monstrous people in the role of European knights, even evoking Arthurian legends.
5 In the *Cursor* narrative, this figure is identified as King David, though this Jewish king is rewritten, as is common in the period, as a model of medieval Christian kingship. In the ‘Travels of the Blemmye-Folke,’ the king remains anonymous. This is perhaps owing to the more mocking treatment of the king, here, which would not have been acceptable for the great biblical patriarch.
6 This is a curious feature of the poem. Blemmys are a very frequent subject of illustration in medieval manuscripts and other media, and are often shown armed with clubs (a weapon redolent of barbarism) or bows (associated in some cases with cowardice). We know of no surviving image of a Blemmye wielding a sword, a weapon associated in several traditions with martial prowess and aristocratic self-sufficiency, but this suits well the poem’s elevated presentation of the Blemmys. Indeed, the manuscript’s own illustration shows the Blemmys unarmed.
7 A point of particular correspondence with the *Cursor*, which notes of the Blemmys, “Lang and side jair brues wern.”