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Performing (In)Attention:
Ælfric, Ælfric Bata, and the *Visitatio sepulchri*

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ABSTRACT: The central regulatory document of the English Benedictine Reform, Æthelwold of Winchester's *Regularis concordia*, contains an important performance piece: the *Visitatio sepulchri*, which standard theater histories understand as an anomalous originary text that marks the re-emergence of drama in the European Middle Ages. This article resituates it alongside the schoolroom colloquies of Æthelwold's student Ælfric of Eynsham and his student and editor Ælfric Bata to argue that these texts together cultivated monastic self-possession by means of self-conscious performances of its absence. By staging (in)attention, they thereby modeled extended engagement in moments and spaces that could otherwise seem too quiet or empty to hold concentration for long, from the classroom to the sepulcher to the page, while also exposing the limits of "distraction" and "attention" as analytical terms.

As a key component of the tenth-century correction movement that effectively created Benedictine monasticism and in the process reshaped monastic life across Europe, Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester appointed a new kind of monastic figure for all of the familiae of England: that of the *circa* or roundsman, so called because the role required making rounds.[1] First attested on the Continent in the eighth century and included in consuetudinaries from across Francia and Lotharingia, the office had initially been conceived of as a means of policing sins of the tongue and ensuring silence, but it quickly became a deterrent to sexual misconduct and the temptations of sleep among other increasingly psychological threats to ascetic life.[2] Æthelwold's *Regularis concordia* (ca. 970), the central

regulatory document that tailored the *Rule of Saint Benedict* for all English monks and nuns, sanctioned by King Edgar (r. 959–975) and ratified at the Synod of Winchester, dedicated one of its twelve chapters to the figure.[3] Here, Æthelwold specifies that when the *circa* noticed aberrant behavior on his rounds, he silently swept by, but "in Chapter the next day" [*in capitulo uenturi diei*], he would publicly chastise wayward monks and nuns for their faults unless they immediately begged forgiveness "for some trifling offense" [*pro leui qualibet culpa*] (118.1381–2). The coercive surveillance was meant to feel absolute. As Ulrich of Zell (1029–1093) enjoined a half-century after the office was introduced in England, "Let them patrol the whole monastery not just once but many times a day, so that there may be neither a place nor an hour in which any brother, if he should be up to anything, is able to be untroubled about being caught and shamed" [*Totum claustrum non semel set multoties in die circumeant, ut nec locus sit nec hora in qua frater ullus securus esse possit, si tale quid commiserit, non deprehendi et non publicari*].[4]

Tenth-century reformers added a lantern to the *circa*'s arsenal, "so that in the night hours, when he ought to do so, he might position himself to look around" [*qua nocturnis horis, quibus oportet hec agere, uidendo consideret*] (119.1390–91). Thus equipped, the figure was meant to keep an especially close watch during Matins, the long office occurring nightly between midnight and dawn, when he would patrol the ranks with his lantern

in order to spotlight anyone who dozed instead of standing at attention. Æthelwold provides a vivid portrait:

> And while the lections are being read at Nocturns, during the third or fourth lection, just as it seems to be expedient, let him circulate through the choir; and, if he should discover a brother overwhelmed by sleep, he should place the lantern before him and go back [to his own spot]. That one, soon, with sleep shaken off, should beg pardon with bent knees and, with that same lantern snatched back up, let him circle around the choir himself; and if he should manage to find another compromised by the vice of sleep, he should do to him just as it was done to himself and go back to his own place.
> (*Quique dum lectiones leguntur ad nocturnos, in tertia uel quarta lectione, prout uiderit expedire, circumeat chorum; et si fratrem inuenerit somno oppressum, anteponat illi laternam et reuertatur. Qui mox, excusso somno, petat ueniam genuflexo et, arrepta eadem laterna, pergyret et ipse chorum; et si quem huiusmodi morbo somni affectum inuenerit, agat illi sicut et ipsi factum est reuertaturque in locum suum*.) (119–20.1392–1401)

As this passage beautifully epitomizes, the *circa*'s central function was thus to guard against lapses in self-possession. What at first seems like an effort to enforce attentive reading and prayer—by waking the monks sleeping through the lections—instead becomes an exercise in inculcating a broader kind of mental vigilance amid the early morning inducements of bodily

lethargy. This explains why the disciplined monks are not watched for further signs of distraction as they continue to attend to the reading but are instead asked to take up the lantern themselves and patrol the choir. Discipline itself is at stake along with how bodies in motion can not only reanimate hands and knees, lips and eyes, but also re-choreograph the mental gymnastics of monks and nuns before their texts. Rather than regulating distraction and attention *per se*, or even cultivating the broader obedience Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has deftly located at the heart of the correction movement, the *circa* fosters a related, yet distinct, kind of monastic custody [*custodia*], or unceasing communal and personal supervision meant to cultivate habituated self-possession and discretion, especially in scenes of reading, learning, and performing the liturgy.[5]

Although his public proclamations and nightly rounds might seem to take this to an unnecessarily theatrical extreme, the *Concordia* and related schoolroom texts from Æthelwold's circle—namely, the *Colloquy* by Æthelwold's prolific student Ælfric, who is now responsible for roughly one-sixth of surviving Old English literature, and the *Colloquies* by Ælfric's own student and editor, Ælfric Bata—can thus help us to recover some of the complexities obscured by "attention" and "distraction" as analytical terms with a growing hold on literary studies.[6] Indeed, as Caleb Smith observes, "To call our work *reading* is to cast it as a discipline of attention"—a framing that, he argues, is particularly prevalent in postcritical methods, which are calibrated "not only against distraction but also, especially, against malign

forms of hypervigilance like paranoia and suspicion."[7] "Passive" textual attention thus becomes an ethical goal, which frees the would-be critic from any charges of violence. But attention and related modalities are neither passive nor impersonal.

Moreover, although distraction and numbness are now too often and easily diagnosed as decidedly modern maladies—particularly as theorized by Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, Jonathan Crary, and Paul North, concerned tenth-century schoolmasters were well aware of the temptations of diversions and digressions both in the classroom and beyond it.[8] (After all, digression was a fundamental feature of Old English poems like *Beowulf*, and monastic thinkers had long grappled with the dangers of distraction.[9]) Somewhat paradoxically, however, even as they worked to develop pointed pedagogic strategies to counter these threats, their texts inculcated self-possession and related self-regulatory goals like *continentia* [self-restraint] by literally spotlighting its opposite—the dispersal or disintegration of the self—with an impressive flair for the dramatic possibilities of dozing monks and darkened choirs. Confronted with slackened self-regard as an incessant threat to devotional life, monastic writers thus reflected on the problem by composing sometimes-sensational scripts of distraction and mischief, which their students were then required to memorize and perform, much as Bata, as Irina Dumitrescu has noted, strategically incorporates violence into his grammar lessons in order to cultivate proper behavior by contrast.[10] They thereby strove to cultivate classroom and liturgical spaces in which students

were "distracted from distraction by distraction," or, at least, by means of scripted lapses in monastic custody, on the side of both the teachers and the students.[11]

In short, the *Colloquies* and the *Concordia* together cultivated mental discipline by means of self-conscious performances of its absence. They thus developed a broader model of self-regulation, which sometimes falls between the axes of attention and distraction but is distinct from both. And in the process, they developed a culture of participatory performance, in which the apprehension of knowledge was dramatized and worked through collectively and in which a kind of community theater made legible cognitive activities and self-fashioning processes that are otherwise difficult to conceptualize.[12] As a result, their schoolroom practices are intimately bound up with broader concerns about how to foster self-possession—or, with how to keep the mind and the body focused on things that elude them, whether in the form of a new and difficult language, an intractable text, or even of the disappearance of Christ at the heart of the Easter celebration and, by extension, monastic life.

It is thus no accident that Æthelwold's *Concordia* also contains another vivid portrait of a performance at Matins: the *Visitatio sepulchri* or "Visit to the Tomb" in which monks and nuns reenacted the scene of the "three Marys"—the Virgin Mary; Mary Magdalene; and Mary, the sister of Lazarus—coming to Christ's tomb and being informed of his resurrection. Indeed, this scene would also have taken place as dawn was breaking, when the *circa*

and others would busily scan the ranks for wandering minds, and it shares close affinities with pedagogical texts like Ælfric's and Ælfric Bata's.

The *Visitatio* is usually read as an anomalous originary text that marks the re-emergence of drama in the European Middle Ages, supposedly culminating with the Middle English cycle dramas and the "rude mechanicals" of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[13] But it survives in the earliest and fullest version in Æthelwold's *Concordia*, where it appears together with and reflects the same investments as the *circa* with his lantern—alongside a copy of Ælfric's *Colloquy* with corrections in Ælfric Bata's own hand.[14]

Although their critical histories no longer overlap, these texts were produced in the same communities in the same years and even survive together in a contemporary manuscript (now London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii), attesting that an early eleventh-century compiler likewise understood that the *Visitatio* and contemporaneous schoolroom texts were animated by shared investments in fostering mental discipline by means of performances of its absence.[15] Like the *Rule of St. Benedict* Tiberius A.iii also contains—with the magisterial opening injunction, "Heed, oh son, the lessons of a teacher" [*Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri*]—this manuscript frames the monastic life as a whole as one for which schoolroom attention is paramount.[16]

In its pages, the schoolroom itself becomes a theater for thinking through the larger functions of roleplaying in constituting disciplined, self-

possessed identities. Indeed, Æthelwold's opening preface explicitly frames the *Concordia* and, by extension, the manuscript it begins as a document of schoolroom supervision and instruction, noting that this is a rule for all of those who might walk "humbly" [*humiliter*] and "like milk-drinking ones" [*lactei*]—that is, for all of the monks and nuns of England, who would henceforth govern themselves as the chastened children of the schoolroom (6.70). Just as students play at being monks, then, so do older monks play at being students. In order for Æthelwold's schoolchild metaphor to work, the dramatic potential of the schoolroom itself must be self-evident. As Dumitrescu incisively observes, "Because they are educational texts, and deceptively realistic ones at that, school colloquies have contributed little to written histories of drama" yet are nonetheless "likely the closest thing to theatre in Anglo-Saxon England."[17] Consequently, I contend that Ælfric and Ælfric Bata's didactic "scripts of distraction" and their paradoxical attention-cultivating strategies provide an overlooked backdrop to a related phenomenon that is usually considered anomalous: the rise of what is traditionally known as "liturgical drama" in precisely the same decades and spaces, as I will explore in the final section of this essay.[18]

I. Scripts of Distraction: The Colloquies of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata

Ælfric's *Colloquy* is in essence a language textbook that takes the shape of a conversation between a teacher and his students, written in Latin and surviving in three copies, one of which is equipped with an interlinear

translation into English perhaps undertaken by Ælfric Bata (now preserved in the aforementioned *Visitatio* manuscript).[19] As the conversation unfolds, however, inquisitive students are not only tasked with imagining themselves as farmers, fisherman, bakers, and a host of other tradesmen answering questions about their daily lives, but are also interrogated as monks. To this end, the text abruptly switches from a vocabulary exercise, in which curious students beg their teacher to teach them to speak proper Latin [*Nos pueri rogamus te, magister, ut doceas nos loqui latialiter recte*], to a threatening cross-examination that asks them: "Do you want to be beaten into learning?" [*Vultis flagellari in discendo?*].[20]

In the transition from inhabiting other occupations to imagining their own, what emerges in Ælfric's *Colloquy* and correction pedagogy more broadly is thus an insistence on vigilant self-regard as the highest form of monastic good conduct.[21] The baker bakes his bread, the farmer tends his crops, and the monk pays attention to both his body and his mind. When the teacher switches from the monitory "Do you want to be beaten?" [*Vultis flagellari*] (18.7) to ask "*Were* you beaten today?" [*Fuisti hodie verberatus?*] (45.279), the student fittingly replies "I was not, because I conducted myself warily" [*Non fui, quia caute me tenui*] (45.280). He has, literally, held himself prudently, implying a carefully calibrated mental and physical self-constraint. In the *Colloquy*, attention is thus enabled not by marshaling forth one's faculty of concentration but by holding everything else in check—and by attending to attention as an overarching practice of custody.

The text's repeated threats of violence are consequently premised on the specter of personal dispossession or self-relinquishment, with the students insisting from the outset that they want to stay within the bounds of properly circumspect discourse instead of saying anything "old womanish or offensive" [*anilis aut turpis*] (18.6). Indeed, for "anilis aut turpis," the Old English gloss reads "frivolous or shameful" [*idel oþþe fracod*], broadening the Latin's misogynistic allusion to gendered gossip to a wider mandate for exclusive attention to relevant and decorous subjects. Moreover, it is the students who are tasked with beginning the *Colloquy*, not the instructor, so that, from the outset, the text models eager, voluntary participation rather than a tedious slog through declensions and case endings.

As Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe has observed of its larger mandate, "Be what you are" [*Esto quod es*] (42.242), Ælfric's *Colloquy* thus "shows us the nexus between language learning and naturalization into monastic life," ultimately demonstrating that "the monastic classroom taught at once both the fundamentals of text and language and the life in which they were lived."[22] Joyce Hill has shown that Ælfric self-consciously crafted his *Colloquy* as a "lively, attention-keeping drama," which varies not only the characters but also the register of the conversation and the level of difficulty of the Latin in order to retain his pupils' interest in what is, after all, still a vocabulary lesson.[23]

The matter at stake was not merely the absorption of vocabulary words and grammatical strictures, then, but the formation of an entire self

and an entire culture premised on maintaining an active, vigilant investment in spiritual and necessarily textual life. The text concludes with an appropriately pointed exhortation from the teacher to his students, perhaps added by Ælfric Bata and written in hermeneutic Latin:[24]

> Oh, you children and cheerful learners, your teacher reminds you to obey the sacred teachings and conduct yourselves appropriately in every place. Go obediently when you hear the church bells, and go into the church, and bow reverently to the holy altars, and stand studiously, and sing in harmony, and ask [forgiveness] for your sins, and go out without roughhousing to the cloister or the schoolroom.
> (*O, probi pueri et venusti mathites, vos hortatur vester eruditor ut pareatis divinis disciplinis et observetis vosmet eleganter ubique locorum. Inceditis morigerate cum auscultaveritis ecclesie campanas, et ingredimini in orationem, et inclinate suppliciter ad almas aras, et state disciplinabiliter, et concinite unanimiter, et intervenite pro vestris erratibus, et egredimini sine scurrilitate in claustrum vel in gimnasium*.) (48–9.308–15)

The Old English gloss (perhaps also Bata's work) helpfully highlights and intensifies the importance of attentive self-possession in this closing injunction, as the students are enjoined, "go out without recklessness" [*gaþ ut butan hygeleaste*] (49.314). Here, the injunction to go "butan hygeleaste," glossing the Latin "sine scurrilitate," explicitly frames monastic identity as

one of a controlled "hyge" ("mind, thought, intention, determination, purpose").[25] While the term *hyge-least* broadly connotes foolishness, sometimes serving as a gloss on Latin *effrenatus* [unrestrained], it here serves as a precise enjoinder to the oblates to proceed without losing track of their disciplined monastic selves.[26]

Of course, this requires paying attention, especially to the conventions of proper behavior, but it is ultimately about a broader unity or dispersal of the self. "Go out without recklessness" or even "thoughtlessness" [*Gaþ ut butan hygeleaste*] thus forms a correlative to the earlier imperatives to "go properly" [*gaþ þeawlice*] (48.310) and "stand properly" [*standaþ þeawlice*] (48.312–13). Together, the series of commands idealizes a state of tightly-controlled self-regulation and unceasing custody. Indeed, this passage echoes the *Rule of St. Benedict*, which similarly urges monks and nuns to hurry to chapel, "with great speed, yet with gravity, without kindling foolishness" [*summa cum festinatione … cum gravitate tamen, ut non scurilitas inveniat fomitem*] (43.1–2).[27] With its closing exhortation, the *Colloquy* thus specifies heightened self-monitoring for students both during the liturgy itself and on their way from the altar back to the classroom.

Including similar questions and appeals throughout, Ælfric's text transcends the schoolroom exercise that tests the vocabulary of different professions to pose an inquiry about *their* schoolroom in particular and, especially, about their roleplaying in the schoolroom as a crucial counterpart to their work in the Divine Office. From the start, the script conjoins the two,

with a student announcing, “I am a professed monk and sing the Psalms seven times every day with the brethren, and I am busy with readings and with chant, but I would nevertheless like to learn to speak the Latin language in between” [*professus sum monachus, et psallam omni die septem sinaxes cum fratribus, et occupatus sum lectionibus et cantu, sed tamen uellem interim discere sermocinari latina lingua*] (19.12–7). Instead of merely presenting an abstract grammatical drill, then, the lesson entails a pointed conversation about their personal conduct and, specifically, about their levels of attentive self-possession in both the liturgy and the classroom.

As O’Brien O’Keeffe has demonstrated, it is a model of pedagogic performance meant to impart monastic selfhood as well as language, and it is a method that, Dumitrescu argues, frequently relies on the specter of bodily pain not only to maintain apprehensive focus but also, paradoxically, to foster a sense of playfulness in the act of playing the parts.[28] Indeed, the scenarios become increasingly uncomfortable (and funny) when we consider that students were often called upon to chastise and threaten other students by themselves taking on the role of the *magister* with his whip or rod. As Jan Ziolkowski has noted, “Although upon initial inspection the standard grammars look rigidly and statically hierarchical, in fact they presume constant role reversal,” so that even if a teacher begins the lesson by playing himself, he would then redistribute the roles, frequently looking on as students took up the various parts, including his own.[29] By enacting vivid and sometimes threatening scenes, these expanded colloquies made the

oblates more attentive and responsive students while simultaneously constituting them as members of a rigorously corrected community, where they could also occasionally enjoy playing the part of the corrector.

Ælfric's student Ælfric Bata took this one step further, first altering and augmenting surviving copies of his teacher's *Colloquy* and then going on to write two series of his own dramatic dialogues. Ranging from one-off questions and answers to lengthy back-and-forth conversations and ceremonial orations, Bata's *Colloquies* were similarly meant to help students acquire proficiency in spoken Latin, beginning with short exchanges set in various parts of the monastery and culminating with thirteen speeches composed in dense hermeneutic Latin. Just as his own teacher transformed the traditional colloquy into a pointed tool of monastic identity-formation, Bata's choices come with a newly-explicit behavioral dimension, as Dumitrescu has revealed.[30] Drawing from traditional glossaries to model a functional grammar, for example, Bata's *Colloquies* require students to memorize and recite, "I'm not doing anything wrong, I didn't do anything, I haven't done anything, I don't want to do anything that could be wrong" [*Nihil mali facio, nihil feci, nihil habeo factum, nihil facere uolo, quod malum sit*].[31] His students are not simply conjugating verbs; they are also performing the kind of active engagement and rigorous self-possession they might aspire to.

Seemingly paradoxically, however, across several conversations, Bata's students are also tasked with performing not attention but *in*attention

and negligence, with distracted reading proving particularly widespread. One boy asks another to lend him a book and is read off instead: “Why did you want to misplace your book in such a way? All day you run off roaming here and there, doing no good, and not wanting to read with us … but where idiocy and laziness are, there you’re willing to hurry off to” [*Quare uoluisti sic perdere tuum librum? Tota die huc et illuc discurris uagando, nihi boni faciens, nec vis nobiscum legere … sed ubi stultitia et ebitudo est illuc vis discurrere*] (82–4). Unattended—and inattentive—students post a lookout so that they can pretend to be working when their teacher returns, and, on his arrival, they are disturbingly prompted to lie, maintaining that “we read and sang all day” [*nos legimus, et cantauimus tota die*] (88), again blurring the boundaries between the Latin lesson and the liturgy, as well as the false claim of disciplined attention and the overarching performance of its absence. In another exchange, when asked for the time, a boy prattles on about a hunting scene he observed and is upbraided, “You shouldn’t pay attention to that; it’s meaningless. Think about something else, which would be better, and think about doing well all of the days of your life” [*Non debes curare de hoc; hoc est vanum. Cogita aliud aliquid, quod melius sit, et cogita bene facere omnibus diebus vitę tuę*] (120). Whereas Ælfric’s students insist that they don’t want to discuss frivolous or illicit topics, Bata’s get distracted, linger over taboo subjects, and fight among themselves.

A provocative shouting match between a teacher and student even escalates into an exchange of insults and a series of threats, with the

careless student taunting, “Are you going to threaten me like this all day long, when I don’t care for your ‘instruction’ at all?” [*Quamdiu vis sic tota die minari me, cum nullatenus curo de tua edificatione?*] (142) and the teacher replying, echoing the African playwright Terence, “Shut up right now, because the whips are ready” [*Cessant modo verba, quia parata sunt verbera*] (142) and asking, “Or where were you taught that you’re such a great moron? I suspect you were neither trained nor even given your first lessons in this monastery” [*Aut ubi fuisti doctus, ut tam magnus ebes esses? Non fuisti, ut estimo, in hoc manasterio instructus neque imbutus*] (142). This heated exchange may seem shocking and inappropriate, but it encapsulates the tenth-century obsession with combatting the temptations of schoolroom distraction—and the broader problem of self-dissipation it entailed—by whatever means necessary.[32]

It also reveals the strategic, pedagogic use of *scripts* of distraction in repudiating distraction’s larger force. This is, in Dumitrescu’s terms, “the overarching contradiction of the *Colloquies*: by having his pupils memorise” violent or otherwise unsettling passages, “Bata indoctrinates them into a system of self- and mutual discipline meant to maintain monastic order and moral purity.”[33] As Bata’s furious *magister* suggests, when taken to an extreme, schoolroom inattention—or the breakdown of proper custody—is equivalent to erasure from the familia. Let your attention wander, behave badly, and you act as if you were never a member of the community at all; repeat the performance and risk permanent expulsion. In the *Colloquies*,

moral conduct thus derives from classroom discipline and punishment, or from the intersection of Bata's (via Terence's) *verba* [words] and *verbera* [beatings]. To behave badly or distractedly is to negate one's monastic education and thus one's entire sense of belonging in the community and thereby monastic selfhood writ large. The *Rule of St. Benedict* makes this explicit, noting that fasting and beatings are appropriate punishments for young boys, because "they are not quite able to understand how great a punishment excommunication would be" [*minus intelligere possunt quanta poena sit excommunicationis*] (30.2).

In these texts, inattention—to oneself, to custody—risks annihilation, for lapses in attention do not merely risk losing particular objects or passages but entire selves. Just as the *circa* sheds light on the dissolution of the self at Matins, so too do these schoolroom texts thus make visible and comprehensible the otherwise invisible and incomprehensible dangers that emerge when minds begin to wander and self-restraint begins to loosen. This is why the category of attention ultimately proves insufficient: These texts must habituate their readers to possess themselves entirely in body and mind, particularly in the face of threats that are difficult to perceive—or even impossible to attend to, as in the *Visitatio*.

II. How to Catch a Disappearing Christ: Attending to Absence in the *Visitatio sepulchri*

As Dumitrescu has proposed and as these scenes reveal, Ælfric's and Ælfric Bata's scripts should thus be read as performance pieces, which together constitute a broader archive of early English drama than has previously been recognized by theater scholars.[34] I contend that they should, more specifically, be read alongside the emergence of the "dramatic" in the *Visitatio sepulchri*, which likewise sought to focus attention on absence by means of scripted (in)attention. Just like the colloquies, the *Visitatio* features interlocutors responding to each other in formulaic ways. The exchange is both didactic and devotional. And it structures a life. Moreover, much as the colloquies of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata pair teachers and students who proclaim their ignorance and ask for instruction, the *Visitatio* pairs an angelic messenger and unenlightened observers seeking guidance—those with heavenly knowledge and those who remain to be informed.

As mentioned earlier, Æthelwold's text is the earliest and fullest surviving version, but what remains striking is his attention to detail and, for my own argument, a few crucial elements. The redoubtable bishop specifies particular gestures, props, and outfits along with cues and performance details—a rarity in surviving sources.[35] He begins with fanciful stage directions that give a sense of the atmosphere, which very much resembles that of Sunday school productions and which can today help us to envision the *Visitatio* as a schoolroom exercise even as it formed a central part of the Easter liturgy:

While the third lesson is being read, let four brothers get dressed, of whom let one enter, clothed in an alb, and inconspicuously approach the place of the tomb as if occupied with other things, and once there, holding a palm in his hand, let him sit still. While the third responsory is being proclaimed, let the remaining three follow, all of them dressed in copes, carrying thuribles with incense in their hands, and also feeling their way in imitation of looking for something, let them come before the place of the tomb… When therefore the one sitting down sees the three approach him, as if wandering around looking for something, let him start to sing with a moderately loud, sweet-sounding voice.

(*Dum tertia recitatur lectio, iiii*[ʹorʹ] *fratres induant se, quorum unus, alba indutus ac si ad aliud agendum, ingrediatur atque latenter sepulchri locum adeat ibique, manu tenens palmam, quietus sedeat. Dumque tertium percelebratur responsorium, residui tres succedant, omnes quidem cappis induti, turribula cum incensu manibus gestantes, ac, pedetemptim ad similitudinem quaerentium quid, veniant ante locum sepulchri… Cum ergo ille residens tres velut erraneos ac aliquid quaerentes uiderit sibi adproximare, incipiat mediocri uoce dulcisone cantare.*) (104–5.1223–38)

Here, the sweetness of the singing voice and the specification "mediocri," which I have taken as a note on volume, suggest something about the age of the performers: that these were the same children who had honed their imaginative, performance-based, and performative faculties on colloquies but still required careful supervision and instruction.[36] Moreover, just as the students must perform distraction and shattered self-possession in the Latin lessons, the liturgical performance begins with one approaching "as if occupied with other things." The classroom and the liturgy thus offer two ideal and intimately related test cases for the early medieval management of self-possession, particularly as a mode of attending that was simultaneously deeply individual and disturbingly communal.

From this perspective, the *Visitatio* begins as a play invested in teasing out the complicated modalities of attention and distraction, custody and self-possession. While approaching the tomb, the angel is visibly not attending to the office being performed around him, but he is also not distracted; he is, in fact, paying attention to the event that underpins the service. Yet, like the *Colloquies*, by presenting what at first seems like distraction, the *Visitatio* draws—and holds—attention instead. Indeed, it diverts attention from the mass to the point of the mass: the central absence that could otherwise be difficult to perceive and to constellate selves around.

Of course, the players are performing preoccupation, but this dramatized nonchalance also fools the rest of the congregation into a state of carefully calibrated distraction themselves. Crucially, the first player

enters “while the third lesson is being read,” and the others follow “while the third responsory is being proclaimed.” The audience is, quite literally, *not* supposed to be paying attention to them; rather, they themselves should be “occupied with other things”: namely, with listening to the lesson and, therefore, conducting themselves as good pupils and churchgoers.

The very offhandedness of the approach to the *Visitatio* thus sets up a kind of “flash mob,” with the four brothers seemingly milling about at random until suddenly everyone is in position, and the liturgy is interrupted not by distracted children but by the Resurrection. Part of the fun for the audience is in staying suspended in the anticipation of interruption and in wondering, even knowing the script and knowing that it repeats every year, how they will play it *this* time. The audience members are thereby implicated in the broader performance, as they themselves playfully pretend *not* to see what is really going on behind the fumbling children approaching “inconspicuously.”

While at first, the children are seemingly not paying attention to the mass, by the time they arrive at the tomb, they have shown that they are actually paying extremely close attention—not to lessons or scripts but to their own self-regard and its ultimate end. They are, in effect, holding themselves in check even as the lesson itself threatens to divert their focus, and they thereby remain vigilant not only to their own behavior but also to the death and resurrection of Christ. They thus stage (in)attention: neither distraction nor attention, *per se*, but a habituated self-possession or

supervision that mobilizes both to cultivate a kind of attention within inattention, or a simultaneous form of dispersing the self and holding it in check, watching and being watched.

Ever the teacher, between stage directions, Æthelwold provides a brief interpretive framework that heightens the didactic nature of the ritual and explains, “Indeed these things are done in imitation of the angel sitting on the tomb and of the women coming with sweet spices in order to anoint the body of Jesus” [*Aguntur enim hęc ad imitationem angeli sedentis in monumento atque mulierum cum aromatibus venientium, ut ungerent corpus Ihesu*] (105.1232–5). Instead of the angel seated on the tomb, however, we have a little boy holding a palm in his hand, sitting quietly. Here, too, the injunction to sit still [*quietus sedeat*] preserves a stage direction you would only need to specify for someone you worry will be easily distracted or inattentive—namely, a child. The Old English translation, “gedefe sitte,” heightens the instructive nature of the command, with the adverb *gedefe* [properly] exhorting the performer to behave rather than fidgeting.[37] And it is worth remembering, too, that the patrolling *circa* would have simultaneously disciplined the community as a whole in the drama of attention and distraction at Matins. We might even imagine him getting in on the fun, or perhaps, too, little angels one day growing up to take on the role of *circatores* instead.

Together, these texts and rituals dramatize distraction and ruptured self-regard in order to provoke self-possession by contrast. Because the

children could be instructed to play any role at any time, the playacting does not polarize individuals so much as it builds larger worlds for them to inhabit. Moreover, the very act of taking on roles—whether as bad students, teachers, or churchgoers—presents a model for holding dissolving selves in check. Just as the *circa*'s lantern sheds light on custody and its failures in the Office as a whole, the performance of preoccupation initiates the *Visitatio* for the players and the congregation alike.

In the Easter vigil and in the colloquies of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata, we can thus trace a form of monastic performance emerging around the turn of the millennium and coalescing not around the violent spectacle of Christ's Passion—what Erich Auerbach once termed "the great drama of Christianity"—but around the potentially boring revelation of his absence, which would have posed a particular conceptual difficulty for the very children who could apprehend beatings but not excommunication.[38]

Tellingly, this obsession with depicting the act of maintaining personal vigilance in the face of an overwhelming absence resonated in contemporary Winchester visual art as well, providing additional evidence for a wider obsession with (in)attention at the height of the movement traditionally known as the Benedictine Reform. In the "Winchester School" ca. 1000, the central question of Christ's ascension at the heart of the *Visitatio*—and the performances of the various modes of (in)attention bound up in contemporaneous regulatory and schoolroom texts—gave rise to a new and distinctively English iconographic motif now known as the "disappearing

Christ," in which Christ is depicted at the moment of his ascension, with a crowd of spectators gazing up as his feet disappear into the clouds.[39] In contemporary manuscripts as in liturgical and classroom scripts, readers were thus confronted not only with the presence and absence of Christ at Easter but also with the theatricality of attention and its limits. As Johanna Kramer underscores, these disappearing Christs in manuscript art offered a "complex means of expressing—and thus teaching—the central doctrines of this important Christological event," helping readers to conceptualize liminality while simultaneously "modelling behaviour for those reflecting on it."[40]

These manuscripts, together with the related impulses of the colloquies and the *Visitatio*, thus helped novitiates to constitute themselves as spectators and careful considerers of spaces and phenomena that could otherwise seem disturbingly empty, inaccessible, and incomprehensible—much as Kaylin O'Dell argues that the roughly contemporaneous Vercelli Book similarly offered "a creative space to construct a devotional self, producing a unique play space in which readers can … play out the future spectacle of Judgment Day" in what she terms "a theatre of the mind."[41] Indeed, as M. Bradford Bedingfield has underscored, the most important element of liturgical performances like the *Visitatio* is the notion that "anything happening 'onstage' is there not for its own sake but primarily to enhance the participatory role undertaken by the congregation. It is communal reenactment," and it is intended to be both educational and

experiential, further heightening its similarities to the likewise participatory and communal schoolroom exercises.[42]

Here, we might think, too, of the monastic sign language that was then coming into vogue and that required monks to visually perform their commitment to keeping silent—now preserved together with the *Concordia* and Ælfric's *Colloquy* in Tiberius A.iii.[43] Or we might remember that, as Benjamin A. Saltzman has noted, sin—a likewise invisible, abstract concept—had a decided heft in early medieval English theorizations of its "metaphorical physicality," with the Old English translation of Gregory I's *Pastoral Care* embodying the act of confession as "the washing of the mind's hands (*modes honda*) in the basin of the priest's mind (*sacerdes mod*)."[44] Whether imagining minds with hands, signing silence, or maintaining focus on empty pages and tombs, these performances of (in)attention—in the form both of a preoccupation that resembles distraction but proves to be attention instead and in the act of still attending when there is nothing to "fix" the attention to—reveal the limits of attention itself as an analytical term. These early medieval texts instead cultivate a habituated form of supervision capable of keeping the self intact when mere attention proves impossible to maintain.

Undeniably, the *Visitatio* lingers on the conceptualization of Christ's absence, making it visible first in the dialogue, which announces that "He is not here" [*Non est hic*] (106.1240), and then by means of Christ's empty shroud, which is unfolded and held up, "as if demonstrating that the Lord has

risen and was not even now wrapped up in it" [*ueluti ostendentes quod surrexerit Dominus etiam non sit illo inuolutus*] (106.1251–52). As Sarah Beckwith has observed, "In the earliest phenomenology of theater," in the Winchester *Visitatio*, "it is in the drama of appearances and disappearances, exits and entrances, absences and presences, signification and reference in theatrical forms of life that the question central to sacramentality itself is asked: How do we encounter the glorified God who has withdrawn himself from our sight?"[45] Whereas the colloquies trained oblates to attend by means of paradoxically absorbing scripts of distraction, the *Visitatio* thus models distraction that is then retrained as attention to another—and more consequential—kind of absence. Rather than the breakdown or withdrawal of personal vigilance, students were thereby trained to conceive of the withdrawal of Christ and, in particular, of the duality that, as Claire M. Waters notes, "plagued medieval theorists as they tried to work through the simultaneous presence and absence of Christ" at the heart of the Easter drama.[46]

When read together with the colloquies of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata, the *Visitatio* thus shares striking similarities in its approach to the ineffable. Each text experiments with different pedagogic techniques, but all ultimately present scenes of learning that comes from an experience of failed apprehension—and of children wandering about, unable to focus or behave. Indeed, the lone monk wandering through the choir might at first resemble the one whom the *circa* has woken from sleep and set on patrol, but in the

Visitatio he is reimagined not as one who has dozed off during the vigil but one who has, by wandering, roused everyone else.

These texts thus self-consciously dramatize distraction, absence, and the inability to focus or to understand, in order to demand self-possession by contrast. Together, they cultivate a learned identity premised on focusing carefully and, as Ælfric (or perhaps Ælfric Bata) would enjoin, "go[ing] into the church, and bow[ing] reverently to the holy altars, and stand[ing] studiously, and sing[ing] in harmony"—a set of injunctions that also, when read alongside the *Visitatio*, start to sound like stage directions. Although my argument has led from the colloquies to the *Visitatio*, then, it could also have gone in reverse. What I am arguing for is a broader investment in staging (in)attention in these circles—and that the *Visitatio* is really a part of that wider preoccupation with absented selves and disrupted vigilance, which continually threatened the very monastic subjectivity that unceasing custody and discipline were meant to cultivate.

These texts' affinities have been obscured by their generic categories: liturgical performances and sometimes-salacious grammatical colloquies have little in common when they are described as such. When they are reframed as brief exchanges between two parties in the interest of forming monastic subjects as children, teachers, bakers, angels, and women, however, they form a group of related texts emerging at much the same time in centers of Benedictine correction—the same movement that elsewhere produced Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim.[47] Read together, their

incumbent roleplaying conduces a much more flexible definition of both early English drama and liturgy as the learning of new roles in the setting of the Benedictine correction—and of thereby making monastic correction and custody both visible and intimately perceivable.

By performing (in)attention and abstraction, they thereby modeled extended engagement in moments and spaces that could otherwise seem too quiet or too empty to hold one's concentration for long, from the classroom to the sepulcher to the pages of their manuscripts. So, there is a practical pedagogy that comes from playing roles: Even as students tried on different parts in their schoolrooms, or fell into the drama of watching, they simultaneously prepared to participate in the Easter performance and complete their initiation into monastic life. The performances align the players and the scripts in response to perennial issues like distraction and temptation, or indeed all of the hazards that threatened to fracture and disperse the self.

These texts' resulting dramatics thus helpfully capture what is now missing in the category of "attention" as the critical term for the object sought by certain kinds of focus. Early medieval works like these engage another, fresher set of problematics in the cultural history of selfhoods, and they do so by dramatizing the almost-but-not-quite pertinence of attention in the self-conscious curation of monastic custody and self-possession. Indeed, whereas "attention" is usually thought of as an inner faculty that is always paradoxically outward-facing, both with individuals swept up in mass

cognition and with concentration “fixed” upon external objects of attention, these texts reveal that the reverse is true as well. Crowd dynamics and dispersed attention—even intentional distraction or (in)attention—can also help to constitute the thinking subject. The heart of mental discipline is discipline itself, and tenth-century mandates for self-governance orient students to their worlds by first re-focusing them on themselves.

To this end, Æthelwold and his compatriots introduced the *circa* and his lantern, but they also cultivated the showy and self-consciously difficult, attention-restraining style known as hermeneutic Latin along with a pedagogic practice tailored to mediate not only the necessary vocabulary but also the broader culture of mental discipline in which early medieval English literary and devotional culture was subsumed. These central regulatory and instructional texts thereby offered scripts for observant identity-formation, and, together, they now provide compelling evidence for a larger literature of (in)attention in the period. At the same time, they taught students a flexible method for taking up roles and playing them to their necessary ends, or, how to keep on script as well as how to play—and how to read—more broadly. Indeed, in these influential classroom texts, which taught them how to speak and read, the management of distraction and the cultivation of custody form a crucial part of the development of early medieval English reading practices.

Because it both affirms and negates the attending self, paying attention—to texts and to each other—thus becomes a contradictory act in

the formation of selfhoods. And it is in this dichotomy, as Smith surmises, that "we may begin to see why, in recent discussions of critical method, the ideal of attentiveness has become at once so pervasive and so underthought" (908). At its core, as the *Visitatio* and the colloquies demonstrate and as Smith reminds us, "Cultivating a 'willingness to attend' is a paradoxical business: an act of self-opening that is also an effect of self-mastery. Attending is surrendering—but willfully" (889). This paradox is at the heart of the *Colloquies* and the *Visitatio*, and it is precisely why they offer such useful frameworks to us now. By incorporating the performance of exactly that which is banned from monastic life into the process of classroom language acquisition or the reading of scripture at mass, the *Visitatio* and the colloquies of Ælfric and Ælfric Bata thereby grounded abstract mental exercises such as concentrating and maintaining focus in participatory, bodily performances of abstraction.[48]

As representatives of a broad monastic culture of performance in tenth- and eleventh-century circles, these texts thus allow us to retrace the creation of a particular kind of theater—one of and for the distracted and one that productively subsumes the related, contemporaneous emergence of liturgical performance, on the one hand, and performative monastic identity-formation on the other. In this, I contend that these performances are all performative, in both J. L. Austin's and Judith Butler's senses of the term, because their enactment constitutes their enactors as monks and nuns, women and angels, and they do so through repeated public acts.[49]

This performative aspect is literalized in the customary that introduces both the *circa* and the *Visitatio*, as a play is inscribed in the broader metaphorical script, and in the tenth-century Benedictine revival more broadly, when Latin language textbooks became scripts for living more attentively, for, as C. Clifford Flanigan observes, "in the case of monastic customaries, we are provided with scripts for living in a more literal sense, for here we actually have a written script which encodes practices by which individuals are constituted as members of a community."[50] By mobilizing (in)attention itself as a redemptive force, they created a system that recuperates disturbances of its larger order, while initiating a new mode for early medieval literary culture—and a paradoxical set of practices for making the self.

Whether observing as background cast members or participating as the pupils, angels, and women being questioned, or as the questioner or *circa* menacing the other children, the students are brought into the world of the play, which is, after all, the world of the monastery. To enter monastic life is to enter into the drama, and to learn how to stay on script is to learn to keep the self and, by extension, reading eyes and minds in check. Throughout, careful self-possession is highlighted as the necessary mental state for devotional life—the crucial stage direction that enables all others to unfold.

[1]I thank Chris Chism, Helen Cushman, and the *Representations* Editorial Board for many excellent questions and suggestions as well as Amanda Gerber and Caroline Streeter for terrific writing company; the British Library for trusting me with Tiberius A.iii, where this article began; and audiences at the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Harvard English Medieval Colloquium, International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England, and the International Congress on Medieval Studies for their generous attention to earlier drafts.

Æthelwold's *Regularis concordia* specifies that an officer must be appointed, "who is called 'circa' from his duty of going round" [*qui ab officio circuitus sui circa vocatur*]. The *Concordia* was also equipped with an Old English interlinear translation, which leaves the name of the office unglossed. Both the Latin and the Old English have been edited by Lucia Kornexl in her *Die "Regularis Concordia" und ihre altenglische Interlinearversion* (München, 1993), 118.1376–7, which I cite throughout by page and line numbers. Here and for all primary sources, translations are my own. On the sometimes-fractious nature of the broader movement and the appropriate tenth-century terminology, see Christopher A. Jones, "Ælfric and the Limits of 'Benedictine Reform,'" in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden, 2009), 67–108.

[2] The earliest surviving commentary on the *Rule of St. Benedict*—written by Paul the Deacon or Paul Warnefrid sometime before 774 for the monks of Civate, near Milan—mentions the office, but it does not appear in the *Rule* itself. For additional context, see Hugh Feiss, "Circatores: From Benedict of Nursia to Humbert of Romans," *American Benedictine Review* 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1989): 346–79; Scott G. Bruce, "Lurking with Spiritual Intent: A Note on the

Origin and Functions of the Monastic Roundsman (*Circator*)," *Revue bénédictine* 109, no. 1–2 (1999): 75–89; and, on their introduction in the *Concordia* specifically, Benjamin A. Saltzman, *Bonds of Secrecy: Law, Spirituality, and the Literature of Concealment in Early Medieval England* (Chicago, 2019), 78–80.

[3] The dating of the *Concordia* remains uncertain, though the outer limits are Edgar's marriage to Ælfthryth in 964 or 965 and his death on July 8, 975. Historians have typically dated the Synod of Winchester, where the *Concordia* was ratified, to 970–973. For further discussion, see Julia Barrow, "The Chronology of the Benedictine 'Reform,'" in *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975: New Interpretations*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), 211–23.

[4] Ulrich of Zell, *Consuetudines cluniacenses*, Book 3, chapter 7, in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed. PL 149 (Paris: 1882), col. 741c.

[5] Here, I am indebted to Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe's masterful account of the central importance of obedience—and the paradoxical development of personal agency—in the correction movement, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2009); as well as to Mayke de Jong's illuminating discussion of *custodia* [custody] and *disciplina* [discipline] as the central frameworks for early medieval Benedictine education, in "Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery: Magister Hildemar and his Oblates," *Journal of Medieval History* 9.2 (1983): 99–128, at 106–13 and 117–19. Although there is no evidence of Hildemar's commentary circulating in pre-Conquest England, the terms derive from the *Rule of St. Benedict* itself, which prescribes custody—or unceasing supervision—and discipline for all who have not yet reached the age of discretion, at 63.19, edited by Bruce L. Venarde (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 204. On the question of Æthelwold's

engagement with Hildemar, see Mechthild Gretsch, “Æthelwold’s Translation of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* and its Latin Exemplar,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974): 125–51, at 146. For more on the broader liturgical background, see also Helen Gittos and M. Bradford Bedingfield, eds., *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (London, 2005); Richard Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England, A History* (Cambridge, 2009); and Jesse D. Billett, *The Divine Office in Anglo-Saxon England, 597–c. 1000* (London, 2014).

[6] Two additional dialogues from Æthelwold's classroom, the *Altercatio magistri et discipuli* and the *Responsio discipuli*, are similarly revealing and may be found in Michael Lapidge, “Three Latin Poems from Æthelwold’s School at Winchester," *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972): 85–137. Ælfric self-identified as an “alumnus of Winchester” [*Wintoniensis alumnus*] and, in the first sentence of his *Grammar*, claims that his textbook is “just what we learned in Æthelwold’s school” [*sicut didicimus in schola Aðelwoldi*]. Ælfric, *Vita S. Æthelwoldi*, in Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom, eds., *Wulfstan of Winchester, The Life of St Æthelwold* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 71; and Ælfric, *Grammar*, ed. J. Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik Und Glossar: Text Und Varianten*, 2nd ed., revised by Helmut Gneuss (Berlin: Weidmann, 1966), 1. For further discussion, see David W. Porter, “Anglo-Saxon colloquies: Ælfric, Ælfric bata and *de raris fabulis retractata*,” *Neophilologus* 81, no. 3 (1997): 467–80; Joyce Hill, “Winchester Pedagogy and the Colloquy of Ælfric,” *Leeds Studies in English* 29 (1998): 137–52; and Michael Lapidge, “Ælfric’s Schooldays,” in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 301–9.

In the past decade, “attention” has emerged as a keyword in literary criticism, with a particular emphasis on seventeenth- through nineteenth-century literature. See, for instance, Margaret Koehler, *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 2012); Natalie M. Phillips, *Distraction: Problems of Attention in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore, 2016); Lily Gurton-Watcher, *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Palo Alto, CA, 2016); Theo Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman* (New York, 2016); and David Marno, *Death Be Not Proud: The Art of Holy Attention* (Chicago, 2016).

[7] Caleb Smith, “Disciplines of Attention in a Secular Age,” *Critical Inquiry* 45 (2019): 884–909, at 885–86.

[8] On “distraction” as a metonym for modern consciousness, see especially Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt. (New York, 2007), pp. 217–52; Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald Levine (Chicago, 1971), 324–39; Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); and Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction* (Palo Alto, CA, 2011). For an evocative meditation on the fusion of past and present distractions, however, see Irina Dumitrescu and Caleb Smith, "The Demon of Distraction," on the *Critical Inquiry* blog, *In the Moment* (22 April 2020), https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/04/22/the-demon-of-distraction/; and, on the complex emotions grappled with in early medieval classrooms, see Dumitrescu, *The Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge, 2018) as well as Pierre Riché’s foundational *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: From the Sixth Through the Eighth Century* (Columbia,

SC, 1976).

[9] Here, I have in mind the classic account of digression as a fundamental feature of *Beowulf* in Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf* (Oxford, 1950).

[10] In this, I am embracing the capacious understanding of what constitutes medieval performance advocated for by scholars such as Seeta Chaganti, Irina Dumitrescu, Jody Enders, Bruce Holsinger, and Carol Symes. Indeed, as Chaganti helpfully articulates, “medieval performance has always positioned itself as existing beyond the potentially limiting discourses of theater,” in “The Platea Pre- and Postmodern: A Landscape of Medieval Performance Studies,” *Exemplaria* 25, no. 3 (2013): 252–64, at 261. On the widespread presence of performance in medieval culture, see especially Chaganti, *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, 2018); Dumitrescu, “Violence, Performance and Pedagogy in Ælfric Bata’s Colloquies,” *Exemplaria* 23, no. 1 (2011): 67–91, esp. 77–81; and *Experience of Education*, 66–89, whose argument for Bata’s strategic use of performed violence informs my own argument about the uses of scripted distraction in these circles; Enders, “Medieval Stages,” *Theatre Survey* 50, no. 2 (2009): 317–25; Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, NY, 2007); and Holsinger, “Medieval Literature and the Cultures of Performance,” *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003): 271–311. On colloquies as performance pieces, see also Jan M. Ziolkowski, “Performing Grammar,” *New Medieval Literatures* 11 (2009): 159–76.

[11] T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York, 1943), 17.

[12] For a helpful theorization of the related intersections of performance and devotion, particularly via preaching, in these circles, see Clare A. Lees,

Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England (Minneapolis, MN, 1999); and, on the capacity of later medieval drama to both stage and shape the politics of knowledge production in a similar fashion, see Helen Cushman, "Handling Knowledge: Holy Bodies in the Middle English Mystery Plays," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47, no. 2 (2017): 279–304.

[13] As Leonard Goldstein summarizes, "The received view of the origin of the drama is that of E. K. Chambers (1904), Karl Young ([1933] 1967), or Hardin Craig (1953), which states that the drama had its origin in the liturgy of the Church in the tenth century. Additions to the Mass in the form of sung antiphonal tropes which had developed in the previous century, in particular the *Quem quaeritis* trope, proved capable of developing into a drama... This drama, initially a text from the Vulgate announcing the resurrection of Christ, once in existence developed in an evolutionary way ... to become in time a major current feeding into the secularized drama of the Renaissance," in his *The Origin of Medieval Drama* (Madison, WI, 2004), 15. The latest edition of David Bevington's influential *Medieval Drama* (Indianapolis, IN, 2012) likewise suggests an evolution from "Part One: Liturgical Beginnings" (1–72) to "Part Six: Humanist Drama" (965–1062).

[14] To be sure, the notion of a liturgical ritual along the lines of the *Visitatio* almost certainly predates Æthelwold's *Concordia*, which was itself drafted with the assistance of monks from Fleury and Ghent and incorporated customs from mainland Europe. While no equivalent sources survive from Francia or Lotharingia, I do not claim that the custom originated with Æthelwold so much as I argue that Æthelwold's Winchester offers an unusually well-attested archive for resituating the *Visitatio* within the broader monastic correction

movements that gave birth to it. For a helpful overview, see the still-relevant Joerg O. Fichte, “The ‘Visitatio Sepulchri’ as Actualization of Dramatic Impulses in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77, no. 2 (1976): 211–26; and David A. Bjork, “On the Dissemination of ‘*Quem quaeritis*’ and the ‘*Visitatio sepulchri*’ and the Chronology of Their Early Sources,” *Comparative Drama* 14, no. 1 (1980): 46–69.

[15] The London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.iii *Concordia* (fols. 3r–27v) comprises the most elaborate surviving early medieval *Visitatio* and is followed by a copy of Ælfric’s *Colloquy* (fols. 60v–64v) with corrections in Ælfric Bata’s own hand. N. R. Ker assessed that the same scribe wrote the Latin of the *Colloquy* and *Concordia*, while another—now thought to be Bata—wrote the Old English gloss to both, in his *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), 248. Further heightening their codicological similarity, the *Concordia* and the *Colloquy* were accorded the same number of lines per page. Moreover, the *Colloquy* begins mid-page, immediately following a Latin prayer and interlacing Ælfric’s schoolroom dialogue with the manuscript’s broader liturgical framework. This conjunction of *Visitatio* and *Colloquy* would have been apparent to Bata himself, as he edited Ælfric’s text and contemplated his own *Colloquies*, and Ælfric had certainly read the *Concordia* closely as well, since he also produced an abbreviated version now known as his *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*. While the *Visitatio* does not appear in this redaction, Christopher A. Jones has argued that this and other omissions likely reflect little more than the limited “size, resources or liturgical competence of the new community,” in *Ælfric’s Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* (Cambridge, 2004), 68. For a full codicological overview of Tiberius A.iii, see Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of*

Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100 (Toronto, 2014), 285–91; and, for wider context, Tracey-Anne Cooper, *Monk-Bishops and the English Benedictine Reform Movement: Reading London, BL, Cotton Tiberius A. iii in Its Manuscript Context* (Turnhout, 2015).

[16] *Rule of Saint Benedict* 1.1, ed. Venarde, 2. As Mayke De Jong observes, "the only school to which Benedict refers is the *schola dominici servitii*, the monastery itself," in *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, 1996), 146.

[17] Dumitrescu, *Experience of Education*, 77.

[18] On the limitations of "liturgical drama" as a critical term and the complicated relationship between text and performance in these sources, see Nils Holgar Petersen, "Biblical Reception, Representational Ritual, and the Question of 'Liturgical Drama,'" in *Sapientia et Eloquentia: Meaning and Function in Liturgical Poetry, Music, Drama, and Biblical Commentary in the Middle Ages*, ed. Gunilla Iverson and Nicolas Bell (Turnhout, 2009), 163–201; and Carol Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," in *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Helen Gittos and Sarah Hamilton (New York, 2016), 239–68. M. Bradford Bedingfield has instead proposed "dramatic ritual" as a fitting term for texts like the *Visitatio* in his *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), 9; see also pp. 156–70 for his fuller discussion of the *Visitatio* and its situation within the liturgy.

[19] These manuscripts are Tiberius A.iii; Oxford, St. John's MS 154; and the now-divided Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum, MS M. 16.2 and London, British Library, Add. MS 32246. All three versions have close links to Ælfric's student, Ælfric Bata, and likely contain his corrections. For a fuller discussion of Bata's changes, see David W. Porter, "Ælfric's *Colloquy* and Ælfric Bata,"

Neophilologus 80, no. 4 (1996): 639–60; and Patrizia Lendinara, “The *Colloquy* of Ælfric and the *Colloquy* of Ælfric Bata,” in her *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries* (Aldershot, 1999), 207–87.

[20] G. N. Garmonsway, ed., *Ælfric’s Colloquy* (Liverpool, 1978), p. 18, ll. 1–2 and 7, cited hereafter by page and line number in-text.

[21] This interest in attention shapes Ælfric’s larger corpus as well. On his wider investments in curtailing boredom, particularly in his “unlearned” audiences, see Kathleen Davis, “Boredom, Brevity and Last Things: Ælfric’s Style and the Politics of Time,” in *A Companion to Ælfric*, edited by Magennis and Swan, 321–46.

[22] O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, 95 and 96.

[23] Joyce Hill, “Winchester Pedagogy,” 140.

[24] Because my interest is in the broader cultivation of personal discipline via performance in Benedictine circles, the precise authorship is inconsequential for my argument, but for further analysis of the question of Bata’s amendment, see Hill, “Winchester Pedagogy,” 144–7; and “Learning Latin in Anglo-Saxon England: Traditions, Texts and Techniques,” in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout, 2003), 7–29, at 21–3. On hermeneutic Latin as an intentionally difficult style closely aligned with monastic identity-formation, see Rebecca Stephenson, *The Politics of Language: Byrhtferth, Aelfric, and the Multilingual Identity of the Benedictine Reform* (Toronto, 2015), 68–101; and, on its use in regulating attention and distraction, see Erica Weaver, “Premodern and Postcritical: Medieval *Enigmata* and the Hermeneutic Style,” *New Literary History* 50.1 (2019): 43–64, esp. 54–7.

[25] Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey, et al., eds., *Dictionary of Old English: A to I* online (Toronto, 2018), s.v. hyge, https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/.

[26] Cameron, Amos, Healey, et al., *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. hyge-least.

[27] Like Ælfric's *Colloquy*, Æthelwold's Old English translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict* renders "non scurilitas" as "no mid higeleaste," with the additional restriction "nor should he run, lest his wheezing stir up nausea and burning in his heart" [*ne yrne he, þelæs he mid þæs rynes eðgunge hwylcne wleattan and sogeðan on his heortan ne astyrige*], further suggesting that to go "no mid higeleaste" demands a subtler form of self-control, while physical restraint requires an additional, closing injunction. Arnold Schröer, ed., *Die angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benedictinerregel* (Kassel, 1885), 68.

[28] Dumitrescu develops her argument for Ælfric and Ælfric Bata's strategic representations of violence in "The Grammar of Pain in Ælfric Bata's *Colloquies*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45, no. 3 (2009): 239–53; "Violence, Performance and Pedagogy"; and *Experience of Education*, 60–89, which have helpfully informed my thinking throughout. See also Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca, NY, 1999), 129–52, on classroom violence; and Carissa M. Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain* (Ithaca, NY, 2018), on the pedagogic uses of graphic and sometimes violent sexual material.

[29] Ziolkowski, "Performing Grammar," 168.

[30] Dumitrescu, "Violence, Performance and Pedagogy," 71–3; and *Experience of Education*, 69–74.

[31] Scott Gwara and David W. Porter, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: The Colloquies of Ælfric Bata* (Woodbridge, 1997), 110, which I cite hereafter by page number in-text.

[32] On Bata's inappropriateness, see Christopher A. Jones, "The Irregular Life in Ælfric Bata's *Colloquies*," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 37 (2006): 241–60. As Christopher Cannon has argued, however, the direct influence of school texts' ethical (or, in Bata's case, unethical) content may have been "largely chimerical," as schoolroom proverbs and the like instead cultivated "a perceptual grid" capable of shaping students' later affective experiences, in *From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300–1400* (Oxford: 2016), 199.

[33] Dumitrescu, *Experience of Education*, 61.

[34] Dumitrescu, "Violence, Performance and Pedagogy," esp. 77–81 and *Experience of Education*, 62 and 76–8.

[35] For an overview of the accompanying musical traditions, which formed an important part of the ceremony, see Susan Rankin, "Musical and Ritual Aspects of *Quem queritis*," in *Liturgische Tropen, Referate zweier Colloquien des Corpus Troporum in München (1983) und Canterbury (1984)*, ed. Gabriel Silagi (Munich, 1985), 181–9; and "The Mary Magdalene Scene in *Visitatio Sepulchri* Ceremonies," *Early Music History* 1 (1981): 227–55.

[36] On the close connections between the schoolroom and the choir, see also Susan Boynton, "Training for the Liturgy as a Form of Monastic Education," in *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. Carolyn Muessig and George Ferzoco (Leicester, 2000), 7–20.

[37] Cameron, et al., eds., *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, s.v. ge·dēfe adv.

[38] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ, 1953), 158.

[39] The coinage is Meyer Schapiro's in "The Image of the Disappearing Christ: The Ascension in English Art around the Year 1000," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, XXIII (1943): 133–52; repr. in Schapiro, *Selected Papers: III. Late Antique, Early Christian, and Medieaeval Art* (New York, 1979), 267–87. See also Robert Deshman, "Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 3 (1997): 518–46; and Johanna Kramer, *Between Earth and Heaven: Liminality and the Ascension of Christ in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Manchester, 2014), especially Chapter 5, "The Liminal Christ in Anglo-Saxon Art."

[40] Kramer, *Between Earth and Heaven*, 211.

[41] Kaylin O'Dell, "Dramatizing Devotion in the Old English Vercelli Homily IV," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 117, no. 1 (2018): 27–55, at 33 and 54.

[42] Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, 9.

[43] For an edition of the Old English list of monastic signs, see Debby Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia: The Anglo-Saxon Sign Language* (Norfolk, 1991).

[44] Saltzman, *Bonds of Secrecy*, 73–4. On the difficulty of attending to mental sins and the related paradoxes of a confessional note from Tiberius A.iii, see Erica Weaver, "Confessing in Old English: The *Life of Saint Mary of Egypt* and the Problem with Penance," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 11, no. 2 (2020).

[45] Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago, 2001), 72–3.

[46] Claire M. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2004), 15.

[47] On Hrotsvitha's place in the broader Benedictine revival movement and the tenth-century investments in dramatic ritual, see James H. Forse, "Religious Drama and Ecclesiastical Reform in the Tenth Century," *Early Theatre* 5, no. 2 (2002), 47–70. On connections between early medieval England and the Ottonian empire, see also Elizabeth M. Tyler, "Writing Universal History in Eleventh-Century England: Cotton Tiberius B. i, German Imperial History-writing and Vernacular Lay Literacy," in *Universal Chronicles in the High Middle Ages*, edited by Michele Campopiano and Henry Bainton (York Medieval Press, 2017), 65–94.

[48] Eleanor Johnson has outlined a similar process at work in later medieval drama in *Staging Contemplation: Participatory Theology in Middle English Prose, Verse, and Drama* (Chicago, 2018).

[49] J. L. Austin defines "performatives" as statements, such as "I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)," for which "to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it," in the posthumous *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1975), 5–6, while Judith Butler defines performativity as the ongoing, iterative formation of a legible identity through public actions in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990). Although Austin specified that "a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy" (22), Andrew Parker, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others have shown the productive overlap of performance studies and performatives, which further coalesce in the monastic context at hand (Parker and Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York, 1995). Indeed, as V.A. Kolve

reminds us in his examination of queer desire in *The Son of Getron*, “the women’s roles in monastic drama were also played by monks or boys,” with the Fleury Playbook *Visitatio* explicitly “call[ing] for this in absolutely unembarrassed terms,” and the same cross-dressing suggested by Æthelwold’s commentary. Kolve, “Ganymede/Son of Getron: Medieval Monasticism and the Drama of Same-Sex Desire,” *Speculum* 73, no. 4 (1998): 1014–67, at 1055–6.

[50] C. Clifford Flanigan, “Localizing the *Visitatio Sepulchri*: Towards a New Orientation of Medieval Drama Studies,” *ROMARD: Research on Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 52-53, a special issue guest edited by Robert L.A. Clark (2014): 95–102, at 99.