Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun (British Library, Egerton MS. 3277)

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Introduction

In the context of medieval book illumination ‘embedded marginalia’ appears to be a contradiction in terms, yet the phrase may be used to refer to images on the manuscript page that are beyond the text block in both a physical and conceptual sense but integrated nevertheless in the form and meaning of the page as a whole. The concept of embedded marginalia can be illustrated by many images in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun (Eg. MS. 3277). Among them is one on a page containing the text of a prayer following the litany in the manuscript, ‘Deus qui corda fidelium […] docuisti’ (O God, who taught the hearts of the faithful) (fig. 1). The initial D is filled with a scene of the wicked and lascivious Old Testament queen Jezebel urging her husband King Ahab to rise to take the possessions of Naboth (III Kings 21.15), just one of a series of more than two hundred pictorial subjects illustrating the first three books of Kings in the manuscript, all following the biblical text almost word for word. What, it may be asked, apart from the bed does this image-complex have to do with the concept of ‘embedded marginalia’?

The answer is provided by the figure in the area immediately adjacent to the historiation in the field of the initial, a figure of the kind usually called marginal, that is, a woman whose every detail communicates a message of lewdness: long, tight robe, breasts lovingly shaded, extra long, dark – as opposed to virginal blond – unbound hair, dark and heavily shaded skin, and above all, her hand hidden under her raised skirt, her fingertips focusing the viewer’s attention on her private parts. In fact however this figure is not ‘marginal’ but is ‘embedded’ both physically and conceptually in the form and meaning of the page. In the present essay, by analysing such embedded marginalia as they occur in the Bohun Psalter and Hours I hope to reshape even a little the conventional view of marginalia as belonging entirely to the sphere of the ‘other’.1

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Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun
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Fig. 1. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 110v, detail. Litany collect. Initial D, Jezebel and Ahab, in the margin, lewd woman.
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Eg. MS. 3277

Eg. MS. 3277 is a psalter and hours of the Virgin begun in the 1360s for Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton, called Humphrey the seventh. After Humphrey’s death in 1373 the manuscript was completed, probably in the 1380s, for a subsequent Bohun owner. The manuscript belongs to a group of about ten books produced by scribes and artists serving the Bohun household, in the first instance working at the chief family residence, Pleshey Castle in Essex, and later perhaps at one or another of the Essex homes of Joan Fitzalan, the widow of Humphrey de Bohun, and dowager countess of Hereford, who did not die until 1419.2

The pictorial programme of Eg. MS. 3277 is exceptionally complex: first, the historiated initials consist of two cycles of narrative illustrations of subjects, drawn directly from the Holy Scriptures. For the psalms, canticles and litany of the psalter, the pictorial subjects are based on the first three Old Testament books of Kings; for the hours of the Virgin, the penitential psalms and the office of the dead, they are drawn from the New Testament Gospel of Luke, then from a few narrative passages in the Gospel of John, and then from the first twelve chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, after which the main text of the manuscript ends, leaving no more initials to illustrate. But this is not all. Physically tied to almost every historiated initial and embedded in the bar border of every text page is a figural image. These figures are not mere decoration, but important and meaningful components of the pictorial programme, although like many other images in the so-called category of marginalia, they offer considerable interpretative challenges to modern viewers. Indeed, in the most recent detailed description of the manuscript, accompanying the full digital reproduction on the British Library website, the problem was avoided by treating what I term embedded marginalia summarily: ‘Numerous partial bar borders in colours and gold, on nearly every folio, most inhabited by animals, hybrid, and/or people’.3 In my view however, the embedded marginalia of Eg. MS. 3277 are worthy of more detailed consideration than they have received until now.

Physically embedded marginalia

Eg. MS. 3277 is of course not the only fourteenth-century English manuscript in which thematic material that is ‘marginal’ is embedded, encapsulated, or framed in the border area beyond the text block. As we know, from close to the beginning of the thirteenth century, marginalia were closely related in a physical sense to the extended tails of initial letters. By the early fourteenth century initial finials and tails had been increasingly elaborated and extended into the left margin, or all margins, in the process providing bases, resting places, and nesting places for figural marginalia.4 But for the most part the only kind of immediate contact between figural

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3 See <www.bl.uk/manuscripts> identifying the subjects of the historiated initials but not the marginalia.

marginalia and initial letter per se, whether the field within the initial frame was historiated or not, is manipulative, in the sense that hybrids, animals, or humans ‘work’ on the initials in a variety of ways: they support, climb, hang, clutch, bite, twist, and sometimes they bite, chew and spit. In the Stowe Breviary of the earlier fourteenth century, for instance, a hybrid ‘gardener’ in a wide-brimmed hat chews the marginal foliage while grasping the organic frame of an initial letter D; in the well-known Luttrell Psalter, a youth seen from the rear hangs on the background panel of an initial V.5 Such physical actions are frequent in Eg. MS. 3277 too, as for example, in the bird-headed nude twisting and entangled in the frame of the initial C of Psalm 9 who spits out the foliate tip of its finial (fig. 2). 6 These images can be interpreted as metaphors for the creative acts of the artists who shaped the figures and letters, the scribes who wrote the text, and also for the viewer/reader whose eyes and mind grasp the contents of the book and so to speak ‘chew’ it over. 7

Eg. MS. 3277 however stands out because on every page the primary marginal motifs are figures whose physical ties to the initial letters are more than manipulative. The physical tie is indeed fundamental since the gold ground of the initial runs through behind the initial frame into the area of the page beyond the text block, where it becomes the ground behind the marginal figure. In the field of the initial to Psalm 25, for example, David, accompanied by women playing tambourines, parades the head of Goliath (I Kings 8,5), 8 and in the marginal area jongleurs play viols, all on a through-running tooled gold background (fig. 3). This feature differs from the vast majority of earlier manuscripts in which the ground colour of the initial field, the colour of the background panel or area behind the initial frame, and even the background of any adjacent or nearby marginal figures are all differentiated. 9 We have to conclude that from the outset the designer of Eg. MS. 3277 intended the reader/viewer to read and see the marginal figures, the letter value of the initial frames, and the historiations within them as a unit. And furthermore, since the golden background areas are extended to the top and bottom of the text block, bracketing it with figural nodules at upper and lower corners, and since the initials themselves are indented into the text block, the

5 Stowe Breviary, Stowe MS. 12, c. 1322-25, f. 71; Luttrell Psalter, Add. MS. 42130, c. 1325-40, f. 16v; both online at <www.bl.uk/manuscripts> See also the Macclesfield Psalter, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS. 1-20005, c. 1325-35, with many examples; see Sandler, ‘In and Around the Text’.
6 For further examples, see f. 43, nude marching away from an initial T and pulling along the foliate-tipped finials of its frame; f. 49v, villein ‘pruning’ the foliated finial of an initial D; f. 89, jongleur seen from the rear hanging on the foliated finial of an initial N.
7 On the medieval metaphor of mastication or rumination, see Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory, A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 164–9 et passim. In a case relevant to Eg. MS. 3277, John Ergom, the Augustinian friar who dedicated his exposition of the Prophecies of John of Bridlington to Humphrey de Bohun, explained in his prologue, paraphrasing the Apocalypse (10.8-10): ‘Me masticare iussit librumque vorare’ (he [the Holy Spirit] ordered me to chew and eat up the book), commenting ‘iussit me disponere setencias prophecie huius in mente mea, sicut homo disponit per masticacionem cibum quem post in alimentum recipiet, et vorare veras sentencias cognoscendo, et eas occultare ab hominibus, sicut vorata in ventre a visu occultantur corporali’ (he ordered me to incorporate the words of this prophecy in my mind, as a man incorporates food that he receives for nourishment by chewing, and to eat up the true words to gain understanding, and to hide them from mankind as corporally what has been devoured is hidden in sight from the stomach); for the Latin text see Thomas Wright (ed.), Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History, 2 vols, Rolls Series, 14 (London, 1859-61), vol. i, pp. 128, 129-30.
8 Biblical references follow the Vulgate numbering, and biblical quotations in English are from the Douay-Rheims version. Other translations from Latin are mine.
9 See, for example, among British Library manuscripts, the early fourteenth-century Howard Psalter (Arund. MS. 83), Psalm 97, f. 55v, David playing bells, with marginal musicians, on line at <www.bl.uk/digitized_manuscripts>, with recent bibliography. The field of the initial is tooled gold, the surrounding squared background panel is diapered in alternating segments of pink and blue, and the shaped background panel of the marginal bar alternates in blue and pink patterned in white with pointed gold projections.
Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun
(British Library, Egerton MS. 3277)

Fig. 2. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 9v, detail. Psalm 9. Initial C, Samuel anointing Saul, in the margin, bird-headed nude male.
Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun
(British Library, Egerton MS. 3277)

Fig. 3. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 20v, detail. Psalm 25. Initial I, David parading head of Goliath, in the margin, musicians.
entire mise-en-page can be seen as a unity, a pictorial mise-en-scène for actors and actions (fig. 4).

Within this mise-en-scène the physical relationships between the marginal figures of Eg. MS. 3277 and the images in the historiated initials may be examined more closely. To be precise the term ‘figures’ applies to the marginalia and ‘images’ to the historiations. Indeed it is striking that the marginalia are for the most part single figures and the historiations are composed of multiple figures that form pictorial narratives. The marginal figures are also usually much larger in scale than the figures within the initial frames (figs 1, 5). They are the ‘first thing’ noticed on any particular page, with the result that they seem comparable to the bouncers at the doors of nightclubs. Indeed, like the fashionably dressed young man adjacent to the initial to Psalm 56 (fig. 5), quite often they turn their backs on the scenes within the initial frames. He is not waving the viewer/reader away however; it is as if he is making sure that those admitted are aware of having been chosen for a special experience, in this case participation, along with the psalmist, in the fervent plea at the beginning of the psalm, ‘Miserere mei, Deus’ (Have mercy on me, O God). In other cases too the beckoning gestures of outward-facing figures invite the viewer/reader into picture as well as text. At the same time, even as they turn away, such figures often clamber on or grasp the initial frames, physical closeness to image and word modelling for the user of the book the valuable experience to be gained from ‘handling’, that is, absorbing its contents.10

Conceptually embedded marginalia: image-to-image

If all the marginal figures of Eg. MS. 3277 are physically tied to the historiated initials, many are also clearly embedded conceptually in the mise-en-page, particularly in relation to the pictorial subjects of the initials. The variety of such relationships is staggering, and only a limited number can be discussed. Simplest are those cases where the marginal figures expand on the themes of the historiations. For this kind of relationship there are precedents, for example, in the Beatus page of the early fourteenth-century Peterborough Psalter in Brussels, where the narrative of David and Goliath is placed in the marginal area next to the more emblematic David and his musicians in the initial field.11 Even more directly, in Eg. MS. 3277 marginal musicians expand upon musical themes within historiated initials, as for example in the already cited illustration for Psalm 25, where David’s triumph over Goliath is celebrated by the women of Israel, who, in the words of the Vulgate, greet him with ‘sistris’, that is, tambourines (1 Kings 18.5). The celebration is expanded in the margin with musicians, one in the dagged garment of a jongleur, playing a harp and the other a viol (fig. 3). Similarly, marginal musicians appear in the illustration for Psalm 110 showing the anointing of the kneeling Solomon by the priest Zadok (III Kings 1.39); the relationship between the two is even closer because Solomon’s feet extend beyond the initial frame into the nominally marginal area while the marginal musicians, leaning against the initial frame, in the words of the Douay-Rheims English version of the Vulgate, ‘sound the trumpet’ in celebration (fig. 4).

In another kind of close conceptual relationship between marginal and non-marginal, in Eg. MS. 3277, the marginal figures can be said to see or experience the subjects within the initial frames. This relationship also has its precedents and contemporary counterparts, for example, in the profile portrait of the Augustinian canon Stephen of Derby, the owner of the psalter that bears his name, kneeling in adoration outside the frame of the initial of Psalm 26, whose historiation shows the Lord blessing. Stephen is small in scale and the Lord is large, frontal, impassive, and

10 Among many further examples, the following are particularly striking: Psalm 8, f. 9, a naked bearded man clambering on the initial frame, turning away and ‘beckoning’ the viewer, a gesture echoed in the clothed male figure tugging the frame of the initial to Psalm 20, f. 17; Psalm 72, f. 50, a young hooded man girded with a sword gesturing outward (like the youth in fig. 5) as he rests his other arm casually on the initial frame.

11 Brussels, Bibliothèque royale MS. 9961-2, England, c. 1300, f. 14; online at <www.belgica.kbr.be/bibliothèquevirtuelle> For the manuscript, see Lucy Freeman Sandler, The Peterborough Psalter in Brussels and Other Fenland Manuscripts (London, 1974).
Fig. 4. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 78v. Psalm 110. Initial C, Zadok anointing Solomon, in the margin, trumpeters, above and below, hybrids.
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Fig. 5. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 39v; detail. Psalm 56. Initial M, Abner slays Asael, in the margin, young man.
distanced from the supplicant by the opaque frame and the patterned area of the background panel of the initial.\textsuperscript{12} In Eg. MS. 3277 however, the intimacy of the experience of the marginal figure, and by extension the viewer of the manuscript page, is intensified by the physical continuity of the through-running gold ground. For the most part such figures are associated with subjects that illustrate prayers in the portion of the manuscript that contains the Hours of the Virgin and related texts, for example, the prayer at Lauds of the Virgin that begins ‘Grant to us’ (f. 118). Within the initial frame is the enthroned Virgin nursing the Christ Child and adjacent, a married couple, ‘acting out’ the words of the prayer. Another example is the memoria of the Cross in the text of the Hours of the Virgin following Lauds (f. 118v) where a young man praying in the margin mimics the gestures of the Virgin and St John within the initial frame. And a third is the antiphon ‘Salve regina’ at the end of Compline, where another enthroned Virgin, this time embracing an extraordinary naked infant Christ, is adored from the margin by an Augustinian friar (fig. 6). I would suggest that all of these marginal figures are pictorial surrogates for individuals personally connected with the Bohun family, the owners themselves, and their spiritual advisers.

Comparable to these images are those that augment the subject within the initial not just with single marginal figures but with entire pictorial narratives. The page with the initials for three of the memoriae, prayers to St Catherine, St Margaret, and All Saints, provides examples (fig. 7). In the field of the upper initial Catherine is shown emblematically with her wheel. The marginal vignettes are drawn from her legend and show her beheading, and the angels transporting her body to Mount Sinai, the same place where in the uppermost vignette Moses receives the Ten Commandments. The initial of the memoria to Margaret, showing her emerging from the body of the dragon, also is associated with three marginal vignettes: Margaret watching her sheep, Margaret brought to the prefect Olibrius, and Margaret thrust into prison. And the third initial, for All Saints, has angels, martyrs with emblems of their martyrdom and saintly confessors – bishops and kings – around the initial field which shows the Virgin and Christ reigning in heaven.

Other pages of Eg. MS. 3277 show a more complex conceptual relationship between the marginal figures and the images within the historiated initials, relationships where the marginal adds a layer of pictorial explication, interpretation or commentary, augmenting the meaning of the whole complex. Some examples come from parts of the manuscripts not illustrated with biblical subjects, as for instance the initial to the text of Psalm 129 from the series of collects, prayers to be said after Compline of the Hours of the Virgin, invoking the mercy of the Lord for the souls of the living and the dead (fig. 8). As a text, Psalm 129 appears three more times in Eg. MS. 3277, once in its normal position in the psalter (fig. 15), a second time as one of the Penitential Psalms, and a third time in the Office of the Dead.\textsuperscript{13} In these three cases the psalm illustration is biblical, either drawn from III Kings in the Old Testament or from the Gospel of Luke. In the context of the collects after Compline however, the illustration of the psalm is personalized in a way relevant to the Bohun owner of the manuscript, in showing a woman in a heraldic garment with the arms of Bohun and England kneeling at a prie-dieu on which an open prayer book rests, with the head of the Lord, the object of her prayer, above. Her identity is made specific by the marginal pictorial rebus of a castle surmounting a lion, motifs that I believe refer to Castile and Leon, the royal family of Eleanor of Castile, wife of Edward I and mother of Elizabeth, who married Humphrey de Bohun, the fourth earl of Hereford, in 1302 and died in 1316. I conclude that the woman in prayer is this same Elizabeth de Bohun, the deceased royal ancestor of Humphrey the seventh Bohun earl of Hereford, her picture permanently voicing the words of the opening of the psalm ‘Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord’.


\textsuperscript{13} Psalm 129: f. 89v (psalter); f. 136v (Penitential Psalms); f. 143 (Office of the Dead).
Fig. 6. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 131, detail. Compline antiphon ‘Salve regina’. Initial S, Virgin and Child, in the margin, praying Augustinian friar.
Fig. 7. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 120. Memoriae in Lauds. Initial D, St Catherine, initial D, St Margaret, initial O, All Saints.
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Fig. 8. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 131v, detail. Compline collect, Psalm 129. Initial D, Bohun woman in prayer, in margin, castle surmounting a lion.
Another example of the same kind of relationship between marginal figure and image in the initial field is again the initial to a prayer, this one, a *memoria* of the Guardian Angel in a section of memorial prayers near the end of Eg. MS. 3277. The image is a wonderful representation of a nobleman, whom I take to be Humphrey de Bohun, the seventh earl, in the protective embrace of his guardian angel, as they both appeal to the Lord for mercy (fig. 9). ‘Piggy-backing’ on the scene within the initial is a marginal bear, hands raised in supplication, mouth open, perhaps voicing the words of the prayer, and his head ‘protected’ by wings like those of Humphrey’s guardian angel. As elsewhere in Eg. MS. 3277, the bear is a pictorial disguise for the scribe of the manuscript, who is shown for the first time writing at the end of the first text gathering, and subsequently in marginal situations where he can latch on to pictorial or textual invocations of the mercy of the Lord or the saints, as for instance, at the beginning of the Litany, where, in twisting the foliated strands of the border between his paws, he is so to speak forming the words ‘Lord have mercy’ that begin the text.\(^\text{14}\)

A number of the historiated initials with biblical subjects are also associated with marginalia that supplement their meaning. Among them is the initial cited at the beginning of this essay (fig. 1), where the lewd marginal woman raising her right hand calls attention to the character of Jezebel, the female protagonist in the initial field, called ‘painted’ and fornicating not only in the Old Testament, but castigated in the New Testament Apocalypse and threatened with the Lord’s retribution.\(^\text{15}\) Another example, the initial to Psalm 112 (fig. 10), shows David on his deathbed passing on the royal sceptre to his son Solomon and charging him to ‘walk in the ways of the Lord […] as it is written in the law of Moses […] that the Lord may confirm his words, which he hath spoken of me, saying: If thy children shall take heed to their ways, and shall walk before me in truth, with all their heart, and with all their soul, there shall not be taken away from thee a man on the throne of Israel’ (III Kings 2.1). This dynastic promise, in effect, to the seed of David’s descendants was repeated several times in the Old Testament using the words ‘semen tuum’, thy seed.\(^\text{16}\) In the Middle Ages the promise to David was understood as a prophecy of the eternal kingship of Christ and this idea is underscored in the marginal image of a peasant sowing seeds.\(^\text{17}\) Or rather, the marginal image asks the reader/viewer to think of the meaning of the image within the initial in more than literal terms, by weighing its Christian significance.

Elsewhere, the marginal scene again serves as a pictorial sermon on the broad Christian meaning of the contents of the initial frame, for example, the page with the Matins hymn, ‘Te deum’, where the initial shows the Circumcision of Christ, as recounted in the Gospel of Luke (fig. 11). The marginal scene is also ritual, in showing a bishop baptizing a layman. Medieval theologians interpreted the Circumcision as a prefiguration or type of Christian baptism, and the typology was incorporated into the liturgy of the feast of the Circumcision on 1 January.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^\text{15}\) See IV Kings 9.22, Apocalypse 2.20. The historiated initial of Ahab and Jezebel on f. 110v, based on III Kings 21.15, is the last surviving Old Testament subject. Perhaps six more Old Testament subjects, now lost, would have brought the cycle to the end of III Kings. Historiated initials based on IV Kings were evidently not included in the original pictorial programme of Eg. MS. 3277.

\(^\text{16}\) See II Kings 7.12, I Paralipomenon 17.11, Psalm 88.36. Biblical references to ‘semen tuum’ abound, starting in Genesis 13.16, with God’s promise to Abraham: ‘And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: if any man be able to number the dust of the earth, he shall be able to number thy seed also’.

\(^\text{17}\) Based, in the first instance, on Jesus’s parable in Matthew 13.37: ‘He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man’, and Galatians 3.16 regarding God’s promise to Abraham: ‘He saith not, “And to his seeds”, as of many: but as of one, “And to thy seed”, which is Christ’.

\(^\text{18}\) See the homily of the Venerable Bede on Luke 2.21 read as Lesson 1 at Matins of the feast of the Circumcision, printed in Francis Procter and Christopher Wordworth (eds), *Breviarium ad usum insignis ecclesiae Sarum*, 3 vols (London, 1882-6), vol. i, col. cclxxiv; also Sandler, *Illuminators and Patrons*, pp. 75-6.
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Fig. 9. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 165, detail. *Memoria* of the Guardian Angel. Initial C, Humphrey de Bohun in arms of his guardian angel, in the margin, bear.
Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun  
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*Fig. 10.* Eg. MS. 3277, f. 79v, detail. Psalm 112. Initial L, David and Solomon, in the margin, peasant sowing seeds.
Fig. 11. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 113, detail. Matin hymn ‘Te Deum’. Initial T, Circumcision of Christ, in the margin, bishop baptizing layman.
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The marginal baptism depicts a bishop performing one of the Christian sacraments, but many of the marginal figures in Eg. MS. 3277 are secular, or drawn from the world of secular experience, and they sometimes supplement the meaning of the initial subject by using parody. Among these is the initial to one of the collects following the Litany, with Christ crucified between thieves, from the Gospel of Luke (fig. 12). The marginal figure is a fool, with his bauble, who holds up a crown. Although the image is without the common placard inscribed with the letters INRI, ‘Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews’, neither the contemporary nor the medieval reader/viewer would need them to understand the marginal figure, the fool who said ‘There is no God’, as a mocker of Christ, the true king.

On the same page, the historiation of the initial to the collect that begins with the words ‘O Lord, bend thy ear to our prayers’ shows the Deposition, with Joseph of Arimathea embracing Christ, as Nicodemus removes the nails from his feet (fig. 12). In the margin is another embrace, a man reaching up to the head of a woman in a gesture that is the exact parallel of that of Joseph of Arimathea, underscoring the antithesis between carnal and spiritual love.

Another case where the marginal figures mimic the actions within the initial is the illustration of Psalm 88. In the initial field Thamar brings a bowl of food to her brother Amnon, who is feigning illness, an episode recounted in II Kings 13 (fig. 13). The largest marginal figure, a man in a fantastic feathered hat, similarly holds a silver bowl, and offers the food and drink to an open-mouthed, long red-tongued monster. Both the man and his surcoat are twisted, and he stands on an outré hybrid with a humanoid head. As a whole, the marginal group offers a negative parallel to the initial image, indeed, revealing the underlying evil of Amnon, who will shortly after rape his own sister, the event shown in the initial to Psalm 89, where, characterized as a wild-haired maniac, Amnon shoves Thamar down on the bed (fig. 14). This initial too is associated with a marginal figure that mimics the action of the Old Testament subject, although the ‘message’ elicits sympathy for the plight of Thamar by showing a parallel from the secular world, indeed, from the intimate world, of the Bohun household. The marginal figure is a scribe, and he is seated using the small crouching bear as a footstool, a conventional emblem of power, echoing images of Christ trampling the lion and the dragon. On his scroll the scribe has written in Anglo-French, ‘ie swii trop desconforteie’, I am very discomfitted, that is, made uncomfortable, or oppressed. These words could refer to the bear, who appears elsewhere in the manuscript as a disguise for a Bohun scribe, and certainly could be said to be put in an uncomfortable position. But of course the words are also relevant to the image within the initial, emphasizing for the reader/viewer the oppression of the biblical Thamar.

The primary texts of Eg. MS. 3277, that is, the psalms of the psalter, and the psalms, canticles, prayers and hymns of the Hours of the Virgin, Penitential Psalms, and Office of the Dead, are all metaphorical. How could such metaphorical texts be illustrated? As we know, the answer of the artist of Eg. MS. 3277 was to provide a series of initials that illustrate narrative rather than metaphorical texts, that is, passages drawn from the books of Kings of the Old Testament, the Gospels of Luke and John, and the Acts of the Apostles, texts absent from the manuscript at hand. What this choice offers is an ever-present pictorial reminder of the context in which the texts of the psalms, canticles and hymns are set, that is, the sweep of history, from David and his descendants to Jesus Christ. But the historiated initials with their pictorial narratives are only one part of a larger complex in which figural marginalia are embedded, and, as we have seen, the marginalia must be considered together with the images, within the initial frames.

Conceptually embedded marginalia: image-to-word

At least as often as the marginalia of Eg. MS. 3277 have a reciprocal relationship with the images within the historiated initials, they can be understood, and I believe were created, as pictorial equivalents to the words in the text block itself. For the most part words were taken out of context,
Fig. 12. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 141. Litany collects. Initial D, Crucifixion, in the margin, fool holding up crown; initial I, Deposition of Christ, in the margin, man embracing woman.
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Fig. 13. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 61, detail. Psalm 88. Initial M, Thamar feeding Amnon, in the margin, hybrid offering food to monster.
Fig. 14. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 62v, detail. Psalm 89. Initial D, Amnon raping Thamar, in the margin, bear ‘discomfited’ by scribe.
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and translated into figuration whose character ranges from the genre or parodic to the utterly grotesque, and from the familiar and recognizable to the completely fantastic. A few of many possible examples will be considered here.

In rare cases a marginal figure ‘acts out’ the sense of the text, for example, a standing laywoman who clasps her hands in prayer adjacent to the initial for the second lesson in Matins of the Hours of the Virgin, a prayer addressed to the Virgin, pleading for her intercession (f. 112v). The narrative pictorial subject in field of the initial itself is the Annunciation to the Shepherds (Luke 2.9). In another example, a male figure tilts his head and opens his mouth, mimicking the words of Psalm 129, ‘Out of the depths I have cried to thee O Lord’. Stripped to his underdrawers, he is wearing the fringed belt of a jester (fig. 15). It may be that the noble owner of Eg. MS. 3277 would have responded empathetically to such a cry from the depths on the part of an individual of lowly social position, and possibly even recognized him as one of those in the Bohun household who served the lord and provided his entertainment, like the previously mentioned bear.21

Sometimes words or phrases from the psalms elicited marginal images that are easily recognizable, leading the eye of the viewer/reader back and forth between marginal figure and the particular place in the text to which it corresponds. Three examples may serve to illustrate this point: first, a nodule at the lower corner of a text page (f. 11), which encloses the stock motif of the ape-doctor holding up a urine flask.22 This parodic figure corresponds to the words of Psalm 10.7, ‘He shall rain snares upon sinners: fire and brimstone and storms of winds shall be the portion of their cup’. The second is a figure embedded in the vertical bar border of the page with Psalm 36.25, a blind beggar with staff and bowl, again a stock marginal motif.23 He corresponds to words in the phrase ‘I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread’. The third is, again, embedded in the vertical bar of a text page, in this case with the words of Psalm 68.22 (fig. 16). The vignette is drawn from the familiar Aesopian fable of the tricky fox and the stork, where the stork with his long neck gets to the food in the tall vat, frustrating the fox.24 The words of the adjacent text, ‘and they gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink; Let their table become as a snare before them’, parallel the situation in which the fox was ‘snared’ and figuratively was left with nothing for food and drink but gall and vinegar. These were the words that elicited a familiar image from the artist’s imaginary. For the viewer/reader, the easy recognition of the marginal subject would send him or her back to the text to search for the verbal counterpart. As it happens, the spiritual reward would be considerable because the words ‘v vinegar’ and ‘gall’ would encourage meditation on the vinegar and gall given to Christ at the Crucifixion.25

Other genre or parodic marginal figures and vignettes demand a greater degree of text searching and demonstrate the sophistication of the artist’s play with the verbal and the pictorial. For example, in the Office of the Dead, a barefooted marginal woman lifts her skirt (fig. 17). Like

21 The artist represented the bear both as a scribe and as a jester; see the writing bear on f. 156v (above, n. 14). Cf. Alison K. McHardy, ‘Careers and Disappointments in the Late Medieval Church’, in W. Shiels and D. Woods (eds), The Ministry, Clerical and Lay: Papers Read at the 1988 Summer Meeting and the 1989 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, Studies in Church History, 26 (Oxford, 1989), p. 118, noting that in late fourteenth-century London clerks are recorded as working as ‘entertainers’, that is, musicians in a lord’s household

22 For examples, see Lilian M. C. Randall, Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts (Berkeley, 1966), s.v. ‘Ape as physician with urinal’, ‘Physician with urinal’.

23 Randall, Images in the Margins, s.v., ‘Beggar’.

24 See L. Hervieux, Les Fabulistes latins depuis le siècle d’Auguste jusqu’à la fin du Moyen-Age, 5 vols (Paris, 1893-9), vol. ii, ‘Vulpis et Ciconia’; see also the website of Laura Gibbs,<www.mythfolklore.net,> no. 156, ‘Fox and Stork’. Kenneth Varty, Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and other Foxes in Medieval England, The Iconographic Evidence (Amsterdam, 1999), p. 216, commented that representations of this fable were extremely rare in England; he did not know the image in Eg. MS. 3277; for further examples, both English and Continental, see Randall, Images in the Margins, s.v. ‘Fox and stork’.

25 Matthew 27.45, Mark 15.36, John 19.29-30. The psalm passage was cited in connection with the Crucifixion from the time of Tertullian in the second century; see Liber adversus Judaeos 10.13 (Patrologia latina, vol. ii, col. 634).
Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun
(British Library, Egerton MS. 3277)

Fig. 15. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 89v, detail. Psalm 129. Initial D, Elias and the widow of Sarepta, in the margin, open-mouthed half-naked jester.

Fig. 16. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 47v, detail. Psalm 68, text page. In marginal bar, fox and stork.

Fig. 17. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 154, detail. Office of the Dead, lesson 9. Initial Q, Ananias baptizes St Paul, in the margin, barefoot woman lifting skirt.
many of the other marginal figures, she gestures outward, inviting the viewer/reader to study the adjacent initial and the text. But why a woman with a lifted skirt? Her raised hand leads the viewer/reader to the text, a lesson from the book of Job 10.18, which begins, ‘Why didst thou bring me forth out of the womb?’, and continues in the next line, ‘I should have been as if I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave’. These words seem to have led the artist to compose a seductive female figure lifting her skirt to point attention to her womb, an example of pictorial inversion of textual meaning, in effect, using pictorial seduction to suggest that meditating on the text might bring equivalent spiritual satisfaction. In this case I might propose tentatively that in the artist’s imaginary it was the pre-arranged subject of the baptism of St Paul within the historiated initial (Acts 9.18) that contributed to the invention of the female figure in the margin, because of the association between women, who served as attendants in baths, and the barrel in which St Paul stands for his baptism with sacramental water. The support for this suggestion comes from a pair of contemporary images illustrating the entry for ‘bath’ in the English encyclopedia Omne bonum, both of which show a woman, in a pose very close to that of Eg. MS. 3277’s Ananias, who baptizes Paul, bathing a man whose naked body is half-submerged in a barrel of water. The common association of such female figures with carnal seduction is underscored by the Church’s prohibition: ‘Indeed, it is truly disgraceful to appoint women as custodians of clothing in bathhouses’.

Finally, among the numerous hybrids and grotesques embedded in the mise-en-page of Eg. MS. 3277 are also some that respond to words, phrases and even syllables with fantastic figures marked by particular features that command attention to the nearby words. As for what might be called syllable-images, one case, at the upper end of the vertical bar on a page beginning with the text of Psalm 13.3 is a nodule filled with a club-bearing hybrid with open mouth and projecting tongue (fig. 18). The very first word on the page is ‘orum’, meaning ‘of their months’, and that word is what seems to have inspired the particular features of this grotesque. But the word ‘orum’ is nowhere in Psalm 13. In actuality, ‘orum’ is the second syllable of the word ‘eorum’, ‘of their’, a word that begins with the letter ‘e’ at the end of the last line of the preceding recto (f. 12). This is a striking case of pictorial invention inspired by non-contextual reading of the text. It is noteworthy that the artist was not merely playing with syllables to show off his own cleverness; evidently he also intended his open-mouthed grotesque to call attention to the text, since the creature gestures to wave the eye of the viewer/reader on to the words in the rest of the top line (Psalm 13.4), ‘Nonne cognoscent omnes qui operantur iniquitatem’ (Shall not all they know that work iniquity).

The page layout of Eg. MS. 3277 called for figures to be embedded in the gold grounded extrusions at the top, bottom and mid-point, of the vertical bars that bounded the text block of pages without historiated initials. For example, a hybrid at the mid-point of a text page of Psalm 64 is placed next to one of the lines beginning precisely at the left edge of the text block with the word ‘Flumen’ (the river), ‘The river of God is filled with water, thou hast prepared their

26 A similar woman appears adjacent to the initial to Psalm 70, where the text includes ‘By thee have I been confirmed from the womb: from my mother’s womb art thou my protector’ (Psalm 70.6); see Sandler, Illuminators and Patrons, p. 81.
28 Gratian, Decretum, D. 81, c. 28, quoted in the entry on ‘bath’ in Omne bonum (Royal 6 E. VI, f. 179); see Sandler, Omne bonum, i, p. 99
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Fig. 18. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 12v, detail. Psalm 13, text page. In upper nodule, open-mouthed hybrid with club.
Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun  
(British Library, Egerton MS. 3277)

food’ (Psalm 64.10). I think that proximity to this line, and the phrase ‘prepared their food’ was the source of inspiration for the extraordinary ambi-sexual marginal figure, a woman’s head, an elongated serpentine neck, and a male body grinding food with pestle and mortar (fig. 19). I have no doubt that the more the marginal image revealed its sexual twists and turns the more it would encourage the viewer/reader to search in the text for meaningful analogues. Pictorial play culminated in serious meditation on the sacred words.

A last example of a complex hybrid responding to the words of the text appears adjacent to the initial for Psalm 141 (fig. 20). Within the initial is King Ahab sending a threatening message to the prophet Elias from III Kings 19. Projected against the through-running gold ground and entangled in the initial finial is a headless living creature with animal body, foliate tail – the finial of the initial V – wings and uplifted arms handcuffed together by a silver ring. The supplicatory gesture, the bound arms, and the wings all respond to words and phrases in the psalm: ‘I made supplication to the Lord’ (Psalm 141.2), ‘In his sight I pour out my prayer’ (Psalm 141.3), ‘before thee I declare my trouble’ (Psalm 141.3), and even ‘Flight hath failed me’ (Psalm 141.5). And as an entity, the marginal figure is consonant with the overall theme of the psalm, an anguished plea for deliverance, the message of the verbal reinforced by the very grotesqueness of the visual.

Conclusion

The earliest discussion of the phenomenon that we have come to call marginal illustration, by Arthur Haseloff shortly after 1900, was focused on the physical characteristics of the development in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: figural motifs resting on extensions unrolling into the margins from the finials of decorated initial letters and then forming drolleries and bas-de-page scenes.30 Once the phenomenon had been recognized however, attention shifted from the physical setting of marginalia in the ensemble of the page, to the conceptual. Marginalia were marginal conceptually: and every subtle connotation of the term, as the essence of ‘otherness’, has been considered in the substantial body of scholarly (and popular) literature that has grown up around the subject.31 In this essay however I have returned to the physical setting of marginalia in order to focus on their function in the mise-en-page, and on the meanings that emerge when marginalia are considered as integral components of page design. Marginalia that are physically ‘embedded’ in the area immediately adjacent to the frames of initial letters or in the extensions from them, as we have seen, cannot be, and were not, understood as mere ‘drolleries’, or merely ‘apotropaic’, or mere manifestations of the ‘low’ in antithesis to the ‘high’ of the sacred text, or the sacred subjects of its illustrations. Certainly the marginalia of Eg. MS. 3277 offer, in the famous words of Meyer Schapiro, ‘convincing evidence of the artist’s liberty’,32 but in my view the illuminator used this liberty to invent images that encouraged fervent attentiveness on the part of the viewer/reader to the wondrous inter-connection between image and word, giving assurance that study of visual and verbal together would yield rich spiritual benefits every time the book was opened.

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30 Haseloff, in Michel, Histoire de l’art, ii, 1, p. 349.
31 See above, n. 1.
Embedded Marginalia in the Psalter and Hours of Humphrey de Bohun
(British Library, Egerton MS. 3277)

Fig. 19. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 43v, detail. Psalm 64, text page. In marginal bar, ambi-sexual figure grinding with pestle and mortar.

Fig. 20. Eg. MS. 3277, f. 94, detail. Psalm 141. Initial V, Ahab and messenger, in the margin, praying hybrid.