

WEEKEND READING I:
GOSCELINI DE SANCTO BERTINO LIBER CONFORTATORIVS
(late eleventh century, ca. 1182/83)

IN ABOUT 1180, a young English nun Eva, the daughter of a Dane and a Lotharingian woman, decided to step up her religious commitment and become a recluse. Apparently without discussing her move with anyone, she secretly left her convent, the prestigious royal abbey of Wilton, and crossed to Angers, where she joined what appears to have been an established community of anchoresses at Saint-Laurent du Tertre. Her former teacher and mentor, the monk, hagiographer, and musician Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, learned of her departure after some delay. His *Liber confortatorius*, datable to about 1182/83, is by far the most personal and most original text in his considerable oeuvre, expressing deep personal grief about Eva's departure. It is a book of spiritual advice, in the tradition of Jerome and Ambrose, or more recent masters like John of Fécamp and Anselm, and anticipates later and more familiar anchoritic texts like Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum* and the *Ancrene Wisse*. It is an anthology of texts and excerpts that Goscelin and Eva both valued. It is a guide to meditation. It is also a personal letter, a lament, a consolation, and self-consolation (Monika Otter, 'Entrances and Exits', *Speculum* 83 (2008): 283 [with some modifications]).

In or shortly after 1058, Goscelin had come to England as a companion of Bishop Hermann of Wiltshire, who was returning to England to assume the bishopric of Sherborne and Ramsbury after a three-year voluntary exile in St. Bertin's monastery at Saint-Omer in Flanders; Goscelin spent the rest of his long and productive career in England, writing primarily about English saints. After Hermann's death in 1078, Goscelin worked in various East Anglian houses before finding a secure and lasting abode at St. Augustine's, Canterbury, where he composed many *vitae* of Canterbury saints.

Frank Barlow's portrait of Goscelin, vivid if sometimes disconcertingly intimate and naïvely familiar, is worth quoting (*The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, 2nd edn., [Oxford, 1992], Appendix C, pp. 143-145): 'He was a very learned man and an excellent scholar, a competent versifier, rising occasionally to poetry, and a skillful, if somewhat emphatic, exponent of the art of rhymed prose. He appears in all his writings to have carried out soundly and honestly what he was employed to do. He was usually given old saints' lives or historical accounts to refashion in style, but not in substance. He seems to have treated his material with respect, and to have understood it well. He did not reject circumstantial detail. He combined with simple faith an intelligent knowledge of the world, and gives the impression of integrity and sobriety in a genre which encouraged neither. Similarly, when he was engaged to record recent happenings, he appears to have recorded accurately.'

'Goscelin was also usually a reticent man. He seldom intruded himself into the narrative. Only in the *Liber confortatorius*, an extremely personal work, is there direct biographical material, and even here it is scanty. The effacement of himself went with a restrained attitude towards other men. Goscelin was not lavish with praise. He has an air of detachment. Yet he was not a cold man. He was aware of beauty in nature and in young girls. In his love for Eve he toppled on the brink of spiritual disaster. He was a musician and an artist, in old age mellow and agreeable but, perhaps, always a little apart and self-contained.' We are reading from the only edition, C.H. Talbot's 'The *Liber confortatorius* of Goscelin of Saint Bertin', *Studia Anselmiana*, fasc. 37 (*Analectia monastica*, 3rd ser.; 1955): 1-117.

〈 P R O L O G U S 〉

Primus agit questus et consolamina thomus.
 Pella cum demonibus mouet euincitque secundus.
 Tertius ignitis pellit fastidia uotis.
 Edictis sumptis quartus petit astra quadrigis.

Incluse exclusus, solitarie a mundo solitarius in mundo, quem Christus et caritas nouerit, unice anime scribit.

Eua ea est Christi pupilla, Deo soli relicta solitaria in tecto, ni(c)ticorax in domicilio facta¹, procul a patria ueram patriam querens, immo de mundi turbine ad Dominum pacis refugiens, ac de doloribus mortalitatis eternum gaudium quod Deus est appetens. Suscipiat eam qui suscepit Mariam, qui inexhausto sinu benignitatis omnem ad se uenientem colligit et complectitur animam. Suscipiat pupillam suam et aduenam, quoniam exaudiuit pauperes Dominus, et uinctos suos non despexit². Si forte in alienas manus oberrauerit hec peregrina epistola incertis uentis dimissa, sed Deo commendata, precamur ut ei reddatur cui soli constat destinata, nec preriipiat quisquam non sibi parata. Archanum duorum est Christo medio signatum, virginee simplicitatis et candide dilectionis prelibans officium. Absint a puro susurrio sibilantes insidie, nequam oculus, uaser digitus, uentilator et cachinnator
 15 impurus. Longa est fabula, uerba insulsa et eneruia, non diligens non legat, non sibi scripta propriis relinquat. Quicquid tamen euenerit, malumus alieno supercilio infatuari, quam non satis facere caritati. Sed hec ex(h)ortatoria epistola modum excrescens, in quattuor libellos ubi cursitans respiret stadiatur.

EXPLICIT PROLOGVS

INCIPIT CONFORTA(TO)RIVS LIBER

GOSCELINI MONACHI

AB ANGLIA AD EVAM APVD SANCTVM LAVRENTIVM

PRO CHRISTI NOMINE INCLVSAM

MISSVS ANDEGAUIS³

13 absint: abint *Ms.*, *corr. man. sec.*

¹ *Ps.*, 101, 8.

² *Ps.*, 68, 34.

³ ST. LAURENT DU TERTRE, Angers: cf. A. WILMART, *Revue Bénédictine*, L (1938) p. 56, n. 1.

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O luce dilectior anima, adest tibi Goscelinus tuus, inseparabili anime presentia; adest meliori parte, ea qua te diligere potuit, individua, qua nulla excludant terrarum interstitia; salutat te in Christo salute sempiterna. Ecce tetigit nos manu sua, illa omnia discernens et dispensans sapientia, et ad tempus separans docuit altiora consilia, ut scilicet in illa patria anhelemus et festinemus coniungi, ubi nunquam perpetuo possimus seiungi. Quo autem longius corpore remouit, eo inseparabilius unicam aliquando duorum animam resolidabit. Sic quondam ipse fons dilectionis discipulorum affectus corporali absentia quo acrius uulnerauit, eo sublimius in spiritali caritate conflagrauit. Vnde, quia nec potuit nec meruit unanimes tuus te accessibus uisitare corporeis, querit nunc anxiiis litteris et longis querelis. Parauit nobis hanc consolationem prouida miseratio Domini, ut, locis elongati, fide et scriptis possimus representari. Et que meis debebantur sceleribus, hec separationis tormenta, alligare et refouere nos poterit intercurrentes epistola. Loquetur etiam edificatius tenax pagina quam fluxa lingua; poterit et tua dilectio uidere lectione quem reliquit facie, et uocem et uerba nostra suspiriosa oculis pro auribus haurire. Ne ergo me putes abscisum a te, quotiens, in Christo nostri memor, dignaberis hec nostra monimenta respicere, estimato me tecum Wiltonie coram sancta domina nostra Eadgyda aut etiam in hac pudica serie residere, te alloqui, te exhortari, te consolari, anhelantibus uulnerose caritatis affectibus Christum tuo infundere pectori.

Sed ecce, dum scribo, grassans dolor non potuit dissimulari; cecidere manus et usus scriptorii; rugitus et eiulatus inuasit me; corruui coram altari tui Laurentii, ut sedebam in eius ecclesia remotiori, clamabam frequens in diluuiio lacrimarum quasi inter ictus et uerbera Domini: *Domine miserere, Domine miserere*. Rapui psalmum, *Miserere mei Deus*⁴, et cum eiulatu illum intonui, *et cor contritum et humiliatum*, atque in alio psalmo tibi competentes uersiculos: *Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis*⁵, et, *Dominus de celo in terram aspexit, ut audiret gemitum compeditorum*⁶. Magnis clamoribus infremui: *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris, iuuua pusillanimes*⁷. Repetens ergo interruptam interrumpente luctu loquelam, quotiens, inquam, hic dignaberis nostram deuotionem recolere, consolationem quasi presentis, si qua pietas diligentis mouet, accipe.

Liceat me nunc in mutuum refrigerium ac memoriam perhennem nostre dilectionis recapitulare ordinem ac perpetuam confirmare caritatem; nec te absterreat hic liber pro epistola, qui uel maximus tanta non capiet desideria. Ni fallor, etiam insatiabilis feruor et caritas anxia, longissima colloquia tibi facient breuissima. Quasi de lectulo doloris affantem attende.

3 terrarum *add. in marg.* 14 poterit *add. s. lin.* 36 absterreat *corr. ex abstergeat.*

⁴ Ps., 50, 1.

⁵ Ps., 101, 7.

⁶ Ps., 101, 21.

⁷ Ant. commemor. B. V. M.

PARTVS DILECTIONIS

MEMINISTI, anima mi dulcissima, ut primo tuam irritauerim infantiam, securus me facile correcturum tam piam animam. Sic apes a malo sapore gratius mellificant. Ego te alloquii, tu me uicisti beneficiis. Libros optatos
 5 dediti, Bertinum nostrum affectuosissime extulisti, omnia caritatis officia excurristi. Adhuc tamen te tolerabiliter forinsecus tantum in spe bona Christi dilexi. Vbi uero inter quattuordecim uirgines, coruscantibus cereis tanquam syderibus et lampadibus supernis, ad dominicas nuptias trepida et penultima accessisti ac, populosa caterua sollemniter expectante, pignus fidei diuine
 10 cum sacrata ueste induisti, ille humilis habitus, ille tremebundus accessus, ille suffusus uultus, tanquam ab igneo throno Dei sedentis super cherubim, sapienter metuentis, altius uiscera me percussere cum hoc epithalamico carmine admirabilis gratie: *Ipsi sum desponsata, cui angeli seruiunt, et an(n)ulo suo subarrauit me*⁸. Tactus sum rore celesti et feruore irriguo fleui. Continuata
 15 quoque silentia tua, sollicita continentia, frequens psalmodia, pia magistre testimonia, magis accenderunt uota mea. Feci ut ipsa dicata interesset proxime dedicationi ecclesie⁹, cupiens te tantis sacramentis proficere. Modo exerce attentissime, quod tunc ut parturiens instillabam auri tue: « Plora coram Domino », utque unam tantum petitionem peteres a domino id est, ut solum
 20 Christum uulnerata caritate concupisceres, ipsumque solum in directione cordis et in tota anima tua in dotem expeteres; « Sic », inquam, « anima mi carissima, sic Dominum tuum eterne caritatis priuilegio implora: *Da te mihi*. Ecce locus unice petitionis. Vt solum accipias, sola huc intrasti. Clama, eiula, pulsa, ut aperiatur tibi. Luctare cum Domino donec superes: uim fac
 25 regno celorum ut intres. Vltro se tibi offert Domini gratia, cura ne sit in te uacua ». Deinde cum pontifex noster fumigans thimiamaterium inferret sic cantando: *Dirigatur oratio me sicut incensum in conspectu tuo*¹⁰, quid tunc infudi pectori tuo? « Tali » inquam, « exemplo debes intrare coram Domino, non sensu frigido, non pectore uacuo, sed cum incensu amoris flagrantissimo,
 30 cum ignito uirtutum odoramento. Hinc angelo habenti thuribulum aureum data sunt incensa multa, id est innumera piarum mentium uota et suspiria, que angelica manu oblata ascendunt ad Dominum ut fumus aromatum, ab estu et ebullitione lacrimarum ». Cumque ex affectu patris interesset epulis cum matre, mittens pisces tibi, tali elogio carnis mortificationem mandauit:
 35 « Piscis assus, Christus passus ». Transitum est ad alterius dedicationis sollemniam¹¹; iterum te merui triduanam Mariam ex domini gratia; non purpurata,

9 pignus expectante *corr. sec. m.* 12 uiscera *add. in marg. sec. m.*
 22 priuilegio *add. in marg. sec. m.* 25 tibi *add. sup. lin.* 35 passus *add. in marg. sec. m.*

⁸ Ant. officii S. Agnetis ad Vesp.

⁹ Dedicatio ecclesiae Wiltonensis, 3 Oct., 1065.

¹⁰ Ps., 140, 2.

¹¹ Dedicatio ecclesiae S. Petri Westmonasteriensis, 28 Dec. 1065.

non gemmat:
 te, ea specie
 habitu nigras

Solutus
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HINC M
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6 adhib:
 17 conficere
 27 uiam *add*

¹² Herr

¹³ Obiit

¹⁴ S. Os

non gemmata, non auro texta, non facie prestantia puellarum agmina, sed te, ea specie quam concupiuit rex castitatis, attendebam, ut filiam ierusalem habitu nigram, sed fide formosam.

Solutus est conuentus festiuitatis. Hesperunt altius infixata spicula, caritatis languiebant uulnerata precordia. Afferebant tibi Christum frequentes 5 membrane et scedule nostre, nec tue uacabant castissime littere. Adibam creberrimus tua colloquia, tam tue quam proprie dilectionis impatientia. Scit tuum plenum sagittis Domini pectus, quos gemitus, quos defectus, quam egras expectationes, quam uacuos dies et noctes, quam inaccessible desiderantissime anime caritatem planxerim, ut nonnunquam aduolitans saluti. 10 fero diuine legationis colloquio, frustratus redierim. In allocutione mutua, tu quod facundissima, pia monita bibebas muta. Quicquid suasi, non responsis tuis, sed rebus, effectum inueni. Recolisne quod te a me cibata pane candidissimo ante nostrum spiritum somniaueras, tibi que inter edendum massas aureas in ore repertas, quas sensim in gremium colligebas? Respice panem 15 uite et uerbum Domini super aurum desiderabile, ac de hoc auro eternum monile tibi labore confice, omnia uerba hec Domini cum Maria conseruando et conferendo in corde tuo. Quotiens te pontifex noster¹² paterno sinu et uoce tali excipiebat: « Eua mater uiuentium », ego alludens ad nomen: « illa », inquam, « mater uiuentium, hec erit filia uiuentium ». Omnis uia tua et 20 loca et studia ex Domini gratia nectar mihi redolebat et balsama. Longum est exequi cuncta, nec amittit longinqua terra, nec tua indiget memoria. Post decessum patris nostri¹³, consolabar tecum frequentior communem orbitatem, donec surgente rege qui ignorabat Ioseph¹⁴; uiperina inuidia et uitricali barbarie deuotus tuus coactus est longius peregrinari. 25

EXEMPLAR DILECTIONIS

HINC MUTARI cogitur oratio, quia uirtutis quidem uiam comprobatur ratio, sed altrix uirtutum proposita leditur dilectio. Illa mater anima que te anhelis uisceribus peperit, que desideratam patriam pro te ut exilium timuit, exilium ut patriam coluit, que tanta spe mutue representationis pertulit uel 30 fecit, queritur nunc quod a te tam dure quam insulte deseri potuit, quod tuam caritatem posse impossibile credidit. Dum tenetur captiua Domini, dum totis angustiis te adire properat cum munere tibi specialius optabili, tu irreuocabilis di(s)cessisti. Quid dico discessisti? Immo omnia consilia tua tam unice anime quasi hosti obserasti, nec unquam cogitantem tantos dolores 35 precipitata et ignorata fuga percussisti, uidelicet ne non interniciosius ferirent

marg. sec. m.
35 passus *add.*

6 adhibam. *Ms.* 10 planxerim *add. in marg. sec. m.* 13 te *add. s. l.*
17 conficere *Ms.* 17 hec *add. sup. lin. sec. man.* 25 est *add. s. l.*
27 uiam *add. in marg. sec. m.*

¹² Hermannus, Episcopus Sherbornensis.

¹³ Obiit Hermannus 20 Feb. 1078.

¹⁴ S. Osmundus, consecratus a Lanfranco, 1078, ob. 3 Dec. 1099.