

“Seue yere in swineis dritte”:
a penance in a Middle English satirical poem,
The Land of Cokaygne, in London, British Library, MS Harley 913

Yoko WADA

和田 葉子

14世紀に英語で書かれた諷刺詩、*The Land of Cokaygne* には、修道士でありながら食欲と性欲を満たす放蕩三昧の生活を送り、本来の義務をまったく果たそうとしない聖職者たちが幸せに暮らす地上の楽園が描かれている。作者は、作品の最後で、男性の聴衆に、7年間、豚の糞に顎まで浸かって歩いてゆけば、必ず楽園にたどり着ける、だから、この楽園を見ないであの世に行く手はないと、この過酷な苦行を強く勧める。本論文では、この苦行が何に由来し、作品においてどのような意味を持つのかを考察する。

キーワード：MS Harley 913, *The Land of Cokaygne*, penance, satire, Ireland, dritte, immersion

The Land of Cokaygne,¹⁾ the best-known Middle English poem in London, British Library, MS Harley 913 (written in the 1330s)²⁾ is a biting satire about corrupt monks, probably Cistercians. The poet explains that this land is “fur in see bi west Spayngne” (far in the sea to the west of Spain), (l. 1) which points to Ireland because that was a common way of describing the location of that island in the Middle Ages.³⁾ It is a land of joy and happiness where immortality is guaranteed to everyone; and it provides every one with all manner of comforts which never fail to satisfy their appetites and carnal desires. The present poem also relates that certain monks and nuns are enjoying these pleasures in the Land of Cokaygne.

Since three activities defined the daily life of the medieval monk, labor, prayer and study,⁴⁾ it is curious that the first two are also conducted by the denizens of Cokaygne, though here transformed into sexual activity. Even the abbot is corrupted: when his monks refuse to return to the abbey for evensong after their rendezvous with the nuns, the abbot snatches a girl and pats her buttocks like a drum. Only then do the monks fly down, surrounding the girl and patting her white buttocks. Having, as it were, completed their monastic “swinke”⁵⁾ (labor) (l.143), they obediently go back to the abbey. At other times, on hot summer days, the monks fly off to catch nuns swimming naked in the river and take them back to the abbey to teach them “an oreisun”⁶⁾ wip iambleue vp and dun” (a prayer with raised legs up and down” (ll.165–166). In this way they fulfil their obligation of prayer while also furthering their chances of becoming abbot, since that office is awarded to whoever best acts like a stallion (ll.169–177).

1) W. Heuser, *Die Kildare Gedichte. Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik* 14 (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1904), pp.141–50; J. A. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp.136–144; Angela M. Lucas (ed.), *Anglo-Irish Poems of the Middle Ages* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1995), pp.46–55 and 174–80; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *Poems from BL MS Harley 913: “The Kildare Manuscript”*, EETS o.s. 345 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.3–9 and 95–9.

2) Alan Fletcher, “The date of London, British Library, Harley MS 913 (“The Kildare Poems”), *Medium Ævum* 79 (2010), 306–10.

3) Gerald of Wales (c. 1145–1223), for example, recorded that “Ireland is the most remote of the western islands, having Spain parallel to it on the south, at the distance of three ordinary days’ sail, Great Britain on the east, and the ocean alone on the west” (*The History and Topography of Ireland* translated by John O’Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p.33).

4) C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: forms of religious life in western Europe in the middle ages* (Essex: Pearson Education, 3rd edn, 2001), p.29.

5) *MED swink* (n) 2. (d) “toil in a sexual context, copulation”

6) *MED orisōn* (n.) 1. (h) “a burlesque prayer”

At the end of the poem, the author turns from description to exhortation, addressing his male audience as follows:

Whose wl com þat lond to,
 Ful grete penance he mot do:
 Seue ȝere in swineis dritte
 He mote wade, wol ȝe iwitte,
 Al anon vp to þe chynne,
 So he schal þe lond winne.
 Lordings gode and hend,
 Mot ȝe neuer of world wend,
 Fort ȝe stond to ȝure cheance
 And fulfille þat penance,
 þat ȝe mote þat lond ise
 And neuermore turne aȝe.
 Prey we God, so mote hit be,
 Amen, par seint charite. (3) Finit.

(ll. 177–190)

(Whoever wishes to come to that land must do a very great penance. For seven years, you know well, he must wade in pig’s dung all the way up to the chin, in order that he shall attain the land. Gentlemen, virtuous and noble, may you never depart from this world until you risk your luck and perform that penance, so that you can see that land and nevermore return. Let us pray to God that it may be so! Amen, for blessed charity. The end.)

Apart from the author’s evident striving for comic effect, what should we make of his specific stipulation about wading in swine’s dung up to the chin for seven years? That period of penance is well attested in medieval penitential literature. One of the earliest such references occurs in “The Penitential of Cummean”, a work authored by a seventh-century Irish abbot, which decrees that “a presbyter or a deacon who commits natural fornication, having previously taken the vow of a

monk, shall do penance for seven years.”⁷⁾ Cummean’s handbook for confessors, one of the most comprehensive of the Irish penitentials, had a major influence on the making of other penitentials. Among these latter was “The Penitential of Theodore of Canterbury” (668–690), a work widely known on the Continent, which stipulates that “a monk or a holy virgin who commits fornication shall do penance for seven years.”⁸⁾ In both of these examples, the penance of seven years addresses the very sin which the monks in the Land of Cokaygne are guilty of.

Of course, the penitentials make no mention of wading through swine’s excrement, so the question of what inspired our poet to incorporate that particular form of punishment remains to answer. It is a commonplace of Christian thought that all worldly goods are to be treated as worthless, a notion which, in Middle English, often finds concrete expression in the equating of such possessions with “dritte”⁹⁾ (dung). Another poem in the Harley manuscript, *Sarmun* or sermon,¹⁰⁾ uses the word “dritte” three times in connection with vile human flesh and worldly wealth (italics are mine):

Wormis of þi fleisse schul spring,
 Þi felle wiþoute nis bot a sakke
 Ipudrid ful wiþ *drit* and ding
 Þat stinkiþ lolich and is blakke.

(ll. 29–32)

7) Ludwig Bieler and D. A. Binchy, *The Irish Penitentials*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 5 (Dublin, 1963), p. 113. It is very interesting that a detailed description about how the sinner must fast follows: “He shall ask pardon every hour; he shall perform a special fast during every week except in the fifty days (between Easter and Pentecost). After the special fast he shall use bread without limitation and a titbit spread with some butter ... and he shall live in this way on Sunday; on other days on a ration of dry bread ... and a dish enriched with a little fat, garden vegetables, a few eggs, British cheese, a Roman half-pint of milk on account of the weakness of bodies in this age; a Roman pint ... of whey or buttermilk ... for his thirst, and some water, if he is a worker;” (Bieler and Binchy, *The Irish Penitentials*, p. 113). This austere diet makes a strong contrast with what the monks eat in the Land of Cokaygne. The (Pseudo-) Bede Penitential also assigns a penance of seven years for a man who defiled a virgin (Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland* 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), p. 328).

8) Patrick J. Geary (ed.), *Readings in Medieval History* (Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 252.

9) *MED drit* 3. *Fig.* (a) “Something worthless or degrading; worldly possessions, filthy lucre; (b) something vile or sinful”.

10) Turville-Petre, *Poems*, p. 22–9 and 107–11.

(Worms shall spring out of your flesh, your outer skin is only a sack, sprinkled full of excrement and dung, which stinks disgustingly and is black.)

Whate prude saltou se þar
Bot stench and wormis icrop in *dritte*?

(ll. 41–2)

(What pride will you see there, but stench and worms crawling in excrement?)

If man is prute of worldis welle,
Ihc hold a fole þat he be;
Hit commiþ, hit goþ, hit nis bot dwelle,
Bot *dritte*, gile and wanite.

(ll. 53–6)

(If a man is proud of the world’s wealth, I consider that he is a fool. It comes, it goes, it is only a delusion, only excrement, deceit and vanity.)

Since the Land of Cokaygne is a luxurious and materialistic place full of expensive and exotic food, clothes, jewels and such, the author of the poem evidently finds it appropriate that those who seek this dissipated life should have to endure being covered with excrement. Correspondingly, perhaps, the poem explicitly excludes excrement from the Land of Cokaygne; it is a paradise where there are no swine or other animals associated with the production of dung:

Þer nis serpent, wolf no fox,
Hors no capil, kowe no ox,
Þer nis schepe, no swine, no gote
No non horwǝ, la, God it wote!

(ll. 31–34)

(There is not a serpent not a wolf nor a fox, horse nor hunter, cow nor ox. There is not a sheep nor a pig nor a goat, nor any filth, lo! God knows it!)

Thus, the Land of Cokaigne is thoroughly free of “horwʒ”¹¹⁾ (animal dung) (l. 34). In this way the poet is drawing a sharp contrast between it and the real world of medieval Ireland which had its fair share of the animals mentioned above and whose inhabitants would have had to endure the incommodious presence of their dung.¹²⁾ Incidentally, it is surely significant that the very first animal mentioned in the list is the serpent. This may be another reminder that the Land of Cokaygne represents Ireland, since according to a longstanding legend that island contains no snakes because St Patrick drove them out of the country.¹³⁾

But why did the poet choose the dung of swine in particular? Again, it might be to exploit the symbolic association of this animal with the inappropriate behavior of the monks in the Land of Cokaygne. Swine were well known as a symbol of greed, laziness, and lust, as well as uncleanness. They eat dung and are thought to love wallowing in filth.¹⁴⁾

Moreover, the sea or river of dung envisaged by the poem could be a parody of “the clear sea” through which the characters in the Old Irish tale, *the Voyage of Bran*¹⁵⁾ must venture in their search for the Irish Otherworld, a place where there is no sorrow, darkness, or death—much the same as in the Land of Cokaigne. Interestingly, one of the names for this Otherworld is *Tír na*

11) *MED hōr* (e (n.(1))) (a) “Physical filth; dirt, mud, slime, etc.; (b) moral foulness, corruption, sin”

12) Cf. A Dutch prose text on Luilekkerland or “Lazy, luscious-land”, very similar to the Land of Cokaygne, is known to have been composed probably in 1546 (Herman Pleij (translated by Diane Webb into English), *Dreaming of Cokaigne: medieval fantasies of the perfect life* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press 1990), p.77 and 392). In this tale, “the donkeys shit nothing but sweet figs, the dogs nutmeg, and the cows and oxen green pancakes” (Pleij, *Dreaming*, p.41).

13) Gerald of Wales records that “some people suppose, in a rather popular myth, Saint Patrick and other saints of the land purged the land of harmful creatures” (“History and Topography of Ireland”, 1.28). At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Jocelin of Furness says in his *Life of Saint Patrick* (*Acta Sanctorum*, March ii, p. 54, §148), “The most outstanding pastor raised his staff with the hand of the Lord Jesus, and by raising it in a threatening fashion he assembled in one place all the venomous creatures from every part of Ireland, with the help of an angel, and then he compelled them all to flee onto the highest promontory (which at that point was called Croagh, but is now called Croagh Patrick). And there he cast down the whole pestilential host from the sheer precipice of the mountain. At his command they slid from the edge and were swallowed up by the ocean (Daniel Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents, and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: a sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.248).

14) Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans and Leiden: Brill, 2008), p.263; Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas (edd.), *The Cambridge World History of Food* 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 539.

15) Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt (ed. and transl.), *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, to the land of the living* 2 vols (London: David Nutt in the Strand, 1895–1897).

mBan, or “the Land of Women”, so called because it has many beautiful women who are generous with their sexual favours. In the *Voyage*, the eponymous protagonist, Bran, is lured to make his journey through “the clear sea” by a beautiful woman who promises him in full the Otherworld’s pleasures.

Two other analogues that might help to explain the river of excrement in *the Land of Cokaygne* are found in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*¹⁶⁾ and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The first is a story recounting the experiences of an Irish knight, Owein, who in punishment for his sins witnesses, and suffers, the torments of Purgatory. Just before he is guided to paradise, he sees souls immersed in pits of molten metal which, although burning hot, is as slimy as excrement. After that, a strong wind from the mountains blows Owein and the devils away into a “stinking” icy river. The second work, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Canto 6 of the *Inferno*,¹⁷⁾ which focuses on excessive love, describes the third circle of gluttony where the practitioners of that vice wallow in a vile, putrid slush produced by a ceaseless, foul, icy rain in a state of almost pure putrefaction. Likewise, in the eighth circle, flatterers who exploit others (though not guilty of fornication, like the monks in *the Land of Cokaygne*) are doomed to fight in a pile of excrement forever. Whether the author of *the Land of Cokaygne* knew *the Divine Comedy*, which Dante composed probably around 1320, only ten years or so before MS Harley 913 was written, is possible though hardly provable.

The last challenge proposed by the poet for those who wish to gain entry to Cokaigne is that they must wade in swine’s excrement “al anon vp to the chynne”. Where does this detail come from? The poet might have got the idea from the apocryphal *Vita Adami et Evae*,¹⁸⁾ which is a narrative of Adam and Eve’s penance after their expulsion from Paradise (Gen 3: 24) until their death. In the Latin *Vita*, Adam and Eve have nothing to eat and in order to secure sustenance, they decide to do penance; Adam wades into the river Jordan for forty days and Eve into the Tigris for thirty-seven days. When Adam instructs Eve how to do penance, he explains to her as follows

16) Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Saeculum XII. Eugenii III, Romani pontificis, epistolæ et privilegia*, Patrologia Latina 180 (Paris, 1855), pp.973–1004.

17) Charles S. Singleton (transl.), Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno: 1 Text* (Bollingen series 53) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

18) W. Meyer, *Vita Adae et Evae* (Abhandlungen der königlich bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophische-philologische Klasse, Munich, 1878), 185–250; R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English 2* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

(italics are mine):

You cannot do as much as I, but do only so much as you have strength for. For I will spend forty days fasting, but do you arise and go to the river Tigris and lift up a stone and stand on it in the water *up to your neck* in the deep of the river. And let no speech proceed out of your mouth, since we are unworthy to address the Lord. For our lips are unclean from the unlawful and forbidden tree. And do you stand in the water of the river for thirty-seven days. But I will spend forty days in the water of Jordan, perchance the Lord God will take pity upon us.

Clearly, the immersion in water “up to the neck” signifies a severe form of penance. Much the same story about Adam and Eve is found in the tenth-century Irish text of *Saltair na Rann* (The Psalter of Quatrains), where Adam commands Eve: “immerse yourself upon it [the stone]...until the water reaches your neck.”¹⁹⁾ However, if any direct influence was involved, it seems more likely that the author of *the Land of Cokaygne* had access to the *Vita* in its Latin form rather than the Irish representation in *Saltair na Rann*, since he was an Anglo-Norman, and therefore probably was not well acquainted with native Irish works.

But he could also have known about penitential immersion from a much more accessible source. Irish monasticism in its golden age tended towards extreme austerity, with severe physical penances (some of which survive in the form of pilgrimages), including immersion in cold water. The latter practice was introduced to Northumbria by Irish missionaries in the seventh century, to which Bede attests in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Bk V, ch.12) with the edifying story of the Northumbrian hermit Drythelm who was a dedicated practitioner of immersion:²⁰⁾

When in winter time the broken pieces of ice were floating round him, which he himself had had to break in order to find a place to stand in the river or immerse himself, those who saw him would say, “Brother Drythelm,”—for that was his name—“however can

19) B. Murdoch (ed. and trans.), *The Irish Adam and Eve Story from Saltair na Rann*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1976), I, pp. 64–65; see also vol. 2, pp. 106–07 for other vernacular analogues.

20) Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 496–499.

you bear such bitter cold?” He answered them simply, for he was a man of simple wit and few words, “I have known it colder.” And when they said, “It is marvelous that you are willing to endure such a hard and austere life,” he replied, “I have seen it harder.” And so until the day he was called away, in his unwearied longing for heavenly bliss, he subdued his aged body with daily fasts and led many to salvation by his words and life.

As we have seen, the penance of “seven years in swine’s excrement” recommended at the end of *the Land of Cokaigne* seems to be a parody of the kind of penance meted out in earlier times to Insular ecclesiastics who had committed grave sins. Our poet, in the role of satirist, seems to have regarded it as a suitable punishment for contemporary monks and nuns whose sin was to aspire to the sexual pleasures promised in the Land of Cokaygne. The extra punishment of immersion in swine’s excrement suggests an emphasis on vices such as greed and laziness, perhaps even a veiled reference to *accidia*, the besetting sin of the monastic life. At the same time the poet may have been casting ridicule on the excessive asceticism of the Irish Church, as exemplified by the practice of immersion in cold water. This would accord with the suggestion at the beginning of the poem that the setting of *the Land of Cokaygne* is Ireland.

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