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CHAPTER 8

LYDGATE, LOCATION, AND THE POETICS OF EXEMPTION

John M. Ganim

This chapter is part of an occasional project that tracks the discourses of urbanism, landscape, space, and place in medieval literature, and it admittedly takes Lydgate as an occasion to further that project.[1] Nevertheless, as I hope will be clear, Lydgate and Lydgate studies are central to such a project. In what Edward Casey famously called *The Fate of Place*, Lydgate plays an interesting role.[2] His most famous epics, the *Siege of Thebes* and *The Troy Book*, convert historical and memorial place into space, into readable moral landscapes, and much of their action occurs in liminal spaces outside of, beyond, or in between identifiable "places." His minor poems, and particularly his mummings, are so localized, so much part of an idea of place that they verge on the unreadable without that recognition. As several commentators have observed, the mummings, and some of the other poems edited by MacCracken as the *Minor Poems*, have been until recently overlooked, and are now at the center of some of the most interesting critical attention being paid to Lydgate.[3] This is at least partly because they position the poet in his most significant role for our post-New Historicist moment, that of the negotiator of power and patronage. Lydgate's sense of place is part of a discourse linking locales, institutions, holiness, and power that can be traced back at least to William FitzStephen's *Description of London*, attached to his biography of Becket, but Lydgate's particular framing of this discourse is related to the specific conditions of monastic cultural production and its translatability to other settings.[4] This chapter will outline this translation of power and place, beginning with the *Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund*, also known as

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The Life of Saint Edmund, and will conclude with an analysis of some of Lydgate's least-studied poems, the so-called *Miracles of St. Edmund*, specifically those that describe miracles occurring in London and in the vicinity of Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate's home monastery. Although the thesis of this chapter is straightforward, its unfolding is not, and at the risk of redundancy, it is worth predicting my argument at the outset. Lydgate's role as a poet and a monk at Bury St. Edmunds involves him in the larger defense of exemptions, privileges, and liberties associated with the monastery. As wealthy and powerful as monastic houses were in medieval England in particular and in Western Europe in general, they were obliged to defend their independence and their material holdings against claims by local episcopal hierarchies, by the crown and by the papacy, and often appealed to these various institutions for aid against the claims of the others. Many typically monastic literary productions, from hagiography to chronicles, often were composed with such defenses in mind, or were called up as evidence for such defenses. Lydgate is especially skilled in devising a rhetoric of negotiation among shared temporal, spiritual, and political claims. The poetic that results from such a monastic context is translatable to other, apparently more secular contexts, including commissions from the London elite. As a consequence, Lydgate's monastic and civic poetry often takes on the quality of document or archive, both performing and preserving the claims of his patrons in the physical and material body of his texts.

Lydgate is consistently interested in built landscapes, even describing his ancestral village as an intersection between place and time. He was, he writes in "L'Envoye" to *The Fall of Princes* addressed to his patron, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester:

> Born in a vyllage which callyd is Lydgate,
> Be olde tyme a famous castel toun;
> In Danys tyme it was bete doun.[5]

Where the family romance imagines one's heritage as far above one's present embarrassed state, Lydgate creates a romance of place centered upon a one-time "famous castle town" that is linked, through a battle, with Saint Edmund—king of East Anglia and the namesake of Lydgate's monastery, which was founded in the honor of Edmund's martyrdom at nearby Hoxne to hold his remains.[6] Interestingly, Bury originally claimed to be the site of the martyrdom, only later defining its importance as the resting place of the king's remains. Lydgate's monastic sense of history also informs his description of his birthplace. As with the martyred Edmund, the town of Lydgate was also destroyed by the Danes, but it survives in spirit, not in material form, or, more accurately, its material form exists

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virtually, in a somewhat shaky memory. In the *Life of St. Edmund*, Lydgate emphasizes Bury St. Edmunds' claims as a preconquest abbey and therefore its independence, in many ways, from episcopal oversight and revenue assessment.[7] In fact, it is entirely possible to read the poem in the context of a defense of monastic privilege and exemption. I will argue that Lydgate's commissions for other places in England, namely London, are informed by his rhetorical experience in representing his monastic home of Bury St. Edmunds. I will compare the institutionally driven narrative message of Lydgate's *Life of St. Edmund* with an analogous movement in the London poems, some of which also center on the records of miracles attributed to St. Edmund.

The Life of St. Edmund contains its own account of its writing as a token specifically meant to remind Henry VI of his visit to the monastery. Lydgate is charged by "Thabbot William, his humble chapeleyn" (Book I, l. 188), and he is explicit about why the commission is undertaken:

> Hopyng ageynward, the kyng shal for his sake
> Been to that church diffence and protectour
> And into his handis al her quarel take.[8]

The "church" in these lines is a general one, but it is metonymically linked with Bury itself. And Henry is linked to St. Edmund, and therefore to Bury, the place that holds Edmund's remains. Edmund is held up as a model for Henry. Indeed, the account of Edmund's early life that follows, with his inheritance of both "Estyngland" and his native "Saxonie," suggests Henry's own claims to both England and to France, repeating the Lancastrian litany of legitimate succession. Moreover, in the early years of his life, Edmund is surrounded by worthy knights and others who guide him into his majority—again like Henry. He departs for Suffolk to claim the crown passed on to him by his childless uncle, and, despite resistance from troublemakers who question his right to the throne, is crowned there in Bures, Suffolk, not far from what will later be Bury St. Edmunds. The description of Edmund's reign and comportment, from his administration of justice to his diet, suggests a narrative as much shaped by concern to educate the young king as to praise the martyred saint.

A considerable motivation behind what we look back on as monastic cultural production, including the displaying of relics, the writing of saints' lives, and the keeping of chronicles, was the defense of the autonomy and independence of the abbey, especially in regard to the defense of exceptions from episcopal interference, and sometimes even from the royal power to which Bury St. Edmunds claimed a special relationship.[9] Even more fundamental was the attempt by abbeys founded before the conquest

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to preserve their rights and privileges in relation to the new Norman administration. A number of the miracles associated with St. Edmund describe the punishment of invaders and violators of his resting place.[10] As with other sponsoring saints across England (and especially so directly after the Norman conquest), interference with the integrity of the monastic house is equated with the actions of marauders, doubters, and pagans. The Norman policy of syncretism in regard to older English saints allowed a rhetoric of autonomy and historical precedent to flourish in the writings of the inheritors of the older Anglo-Saxon houses, even when they were Norman appointments.[11] Here again St. Edmund held a special place, both defining a specific notion of pious resistance and a model of kingship translatable across the divide of the conquest.

In a visitation, a bishop or other high ranking episcopal figure might have the right to enter an abbey, call together the monks, and interrogate them about matters relating both to spiritual practice and to the administration of the house. Visitations could result in severe penalties, ranging from suspension to excommunication. By frequent pleas to the papacy, Bury was able to obtain the right of exemption in the twelfth century. In addition to defending the self-regulation of internal administration and spiritual practices according to its rule, large and wealthy monasteries such as Bury St. Edmunds also were constantly concerned with defending their feudal holdings against the claims of competing ecclesiastical institutions and other feudal lords. Bury St. Edmund's concern with its independent status could not end with the granting of exemption. By the middle of the twelfth century the archbishop of Canterbury had also acquired extraordinary papal powers; now classified as a legate, he was able to exercise the power of the papacy directly. The monastery had to resist efforts by some powerful church officials, including such figures as William de Longchamps, Bishop of Ely and Chancellor for Richard I, and Hubert Walter, the Archbishop of Canterbury and also Chancellor, to exert control. Not coincidentally, Bury was where the barons met to agree to confront John with the Magna Carta. The abbot himself, empowered after exemption to claim the trappings of the rank of a bishop, ran his own household and land holdings and rents independent from the chapter.

Bury St. Edmunds was not alone in claiming exemptions from visitations by bishops and other possible compromises of its independence, at the same time that it vigorously defended its own liberties regarding feudal sovereignty over town and region. Large Cistercian and Benedictine abbeys across Europe often held papal exemptions from any subservience to local dioceses. Bury's efforts in such areas are memorable at least partly because of its outsized abbots, from the administration of Abbot Samson, memorialized by Jocelyn of Brocelande, to Lydgate's own abbot William

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Curteys.[12] As with other major abbeys such as St. Albans (more often a political staging area, in contrast to Bury St. Edmunds' role as a spiritual retreat for royalty), the enormous wealth and influence attributable to their vast holdings lent the abbot a stature normally reserved for clergy at the rank of bishop or higher. For instance, the abbey records detail the visit of Archbishop Arundel in 1400 after his visitation to Norwich and Ely. The protocol of the visit was quite specific that despite the comfort and respect accorded Arundel, he was not to be regarded by the abbey as an official visitor with power to conduct inquiries into the abbey's affairs. Rather than being met at the grand entrance gate to the abbey (still standing today), he was met outside of Bury and personally conducted into the abbey by the abbot and some of the other monastic officers. No formal procession greeted him, and the church bells were not rung to announce his arrival. A reading of the records of Bury St. Edmunds might give the mistaken impression that such disputes and overlapping conflicts were the primary concerns of the monks and abbots. However that may be, the concern with traditional autonomy pervaded, sometimes covertly and sometimes overtly, many of the cultural productions of the great monastic houses of England. From the point of view of urban history, Bury's importance lay partly in its conflicts with the town that it governed.[13] A major uprising was directed against the monastery in 1327 by the townspeople, who, chafing under monastic control, rampaged through the abbey grounds and visited significant damage to the buildings. Even more symptomatic of its relations with the town was the fury with which the events of 1381 were visited upon the monastery, when the prior was beheaded by the rebels after an impromptu trial.[14]

Given Bury St. Edmunds' claim to a special relationship to the king and to the idea of English kingship, at the same time that it defended its uniquely autonomous status, it is somewhat surprising to find Henry V, in what would be one of the last years of his life, directly urging reform of what he suggested was a laxity in Benedictine practice. Negotiations with the crown were understandably a long tradition with a rich and powerful abbey, but Henry called the chief Benedictine officers to his court more as a command. Henry had founded a Carthusian house at Sheen, and had also launched the famous Bridgetine house at Sion, with its accommodations for both sexes and its strict discipline. It is possible that Henry, with his own severe piety, had been influenced by powerful Carthusians, or that he admired the successful reform of Benedictine practices in Germany. In a laundry list of demands, he urged the Benedictines to put their own houses in order. Henry's urging was more or less of a return to first principles, and he does not seem to have singled out Bury St. Edmunds any more than any other monastery. With a unified papacy and a new authority thus accorded to Rome, it is possible that Henry was attempting to preclude any

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interference from the new Pope, with whom he had been involved in extensive negotiations over the relative independence and unprecedented power, he, Henry, had been able to exert over the English church. At the same time, Henry's emphasis on purity, discipline, and orthodoxy is consistent with his other ecclesiastically related decisions during his reign, including his involvement in the suppression of the Lollards a few years before. Sophisticated at institutional defense, the Benedictines were able to replace Henry's demands with another set of goals of their own devising, and the King was in any case dead within a year. It is impossible to tell whether Lydgate and Bury St. Edmunds redoubled their efforts to cultivate Henry's successor as a result, but the special lay status of Henry VI, his long visits to Bury St. Edmunds, and the elaborate rhetorical association of the special link of saint, king, and monastery in the *Life of St. Edmund* does suggest a systematic intentionality beyond the earlier close associations of the monastery with Lancastrian interests.

Lydgate's role in defending the privileges and exemptions enjoyed by Bury St. Edmunds was not limited to the implicit ideology of his hagiographic poems. Lydgate also probably wrote a versified translation and description of the official charters of the abbey, published in *The Memorials of Bury St. Edmunds* as the "Cartae Versificatae." While not specifically ascribed to Lydgate, both the editor of the records of Bury St. Edmunds, Arnold, and the editor of the minor poems, MacCracken, defend Lydgate's authorship.[15] The poem summarizes or versifies grants and charters from King Cnut, from William I, from King Harthacnut, from Edward the Confessor, and from others. Lowe demonstrates how critical each of these charters, some of doubtful authenticity, were when called into play at various points in Bury's history of defending itself from challenges by local episcopal authorities and others. Lydgate thus lent his pen not only to metaphoric and cultural defenses of Bury's exceptionality, but also to its legal and documentary claims in the most literal sense.

That is, at least part of the appeal of Lydgate's commissioned work to his contemporaries lay in a particular rhetorical stance that allowed a claim for historical autonomy as well as a special relationship to the center of power, usually embodied in the king. St. Edmund, as both king and martyr, is the obvious key to this claim, but his contemporaries found what might be called Lydgate's aesthetic of exemption useful to other contexts, other institutions, and other places. Certainly this is true of Lydgate's handling of the genre of hagiography.[16] Writers such as the Augustinians Osbern Bokenham and John Capgrave, both the subject of some recent important work, obviously found much in Lydgate to model themselves on, and I believe that what I am trying to describe here was part of that appeal.[17] Even the abbot of St. Albans, the other most powerful monastery in

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England, calls on Lydgate to write *The Life of St. Albans* in 1439, and it is hard not to imagine that the success of the *Life of St. Edmund* was at least partly responsible for the commission.[18] The history of Bury, so foregrounded in Lydgate's work, reveals a history of negotiation, exertions of control, resistance to control, constant self-definition, and lobbying for the monastery, often expressed in stories, legends, and narrative asides. As with other great monastic houses, but with a clearer branding, as it were, the monks at Bury could lay claim to an intensely personal relationship to their patron St. Edmund, who, by virtue of his kingship, was also a personal link to the crown itself. History, place, and the bodies of the martyr and king (and kings) are thereby linked in a complex that is richly interdependent, but also possible to disaggregate for strategic purposes. I believe that this aspect of Lydgate's aesthetic and rhetoric had an even broader appeal, helping to explain his many civic commissions, especially in London.

Recently, C. David Benson has asked us to add a "civic" Lydgate, largely characterized by his poetry related to London, to the Lydgate of the court and the monastery.[19] Among such works are the satirical views of urban life in *A Ballade of Jak Hare* and *Against Millers and Bakers*, both of which may have led earlier readers such as John Stow to assume that Lydgate had also written *London Lickpenny*. *King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry Into London*, according to Benson, alludes both to Lydgate's Lancastrian court poetry and to his monastic background, adding biblical figures to the original pageants. The *Danse Macabre*, written as a legend for a cloister wall at St. Paul's, was also probably commissioned by London civic leaders such as John Wells, the mayor, and John Carpenter, common clerk of London from 1417–38. Benson also argues that such well-known works as Lydgate's *Troy Book*, especially in the scenes of Priam's improvements of his city, and *The Siege of Thebes*, in its Prologue dramatizing the return of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims to London, are thematically linked to London and its self-image. Lydgate's mummings, including *A Mumming at London*, the *Mumming at Bishopswood*, the *Mumming for the Mercers of London*, and *A Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London* celebrate their patrons and the city, but according to Benson they also, as with Lydgate's other civic works, offer a subliminal critique of their commercial values.

Although written for specific occasions and somewhat different audiences, Lydgate's mummings reveal an underlying message of the possible coexistence of potentially conflicting sources of authority. *The Mumming at Bishopswood*, in the middle of a Maying poem, reminds the sheriffs and others present of their calling, in such a way as to emphasize their jurisdiction on the one hand, and on the other to suggest that their office does not, or need not, conflict with the claims of the crown, represented by the Princess

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present. Spring will not only usher in refreshment, physical delight, and renewal, but it will also usher in a new coordination of estates:

> Wynter shal passe of hevynesse and trouble,
> F[l]owres shal springe of perfite charite,
> In hertes þere shal be no meninge double,
> Buddes shal [blosme] of trouþe and vnytee,
> Pleinly for to exyle duplicytee,
> Lordes to regne in þeire noble puissance,
> Þe people obeye with feythful obeyssaunce.
> Of alle estates þere shal beo oone ymage,
> And princes first shal ocupye þe hede,
> And prudent iuges, to correcte outrages,
> Shal trespassours const[r]eynen vnder drede,
> Þat innosentes in þeire lowlyhede
> As truwe comvnes may beo þeire socour,
> Truwly contune in þeire faithful labour.[20]

When urban patrician culture first articulated itself in the late thirteenth century across Europe, it did so by imitating the trappings and rituals of the nobility whose influence the new bourgeoisie sought to escape. What marks civic culture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is an awareness of a set of concerns and themes unique to urban identity, and at least one of them is a didactic emphasis on moral qualities, both religious and secular, that are inserted—sometimes uneasily—into festive forms. In this sense, what is unique about Lydgate is not so much the awkwardness of his juxtaposition in the previous passage of the homiletic and the festive, but his relative comfort in linking the two discourses. Shifting from festivity to homily almost seamlessly, Lydgate suggests that the coordination of time and season should also introduce a new harmony of classes and offices. This is somewhat different than the usual pleas to estates to work together, in that it emphasizes their separate spheres. Lydgate transforms time into social space, and he defines that social space as open to and even subject to negotiation.

When Lydgate turned to his projects sponsored by the London city powers, then, he already was prepared for a poetic that could simultaneously assert royal majesty and institutional independence. Among Lydgate's possible patrons or collaborators, one of the most interesting was John Carpenter.[21] He is remembered today for a bequest that led, in the nineteenth century, to the founding of the City of London School and was also associated with Richard Whittington, the famous mayor of London who died in 1423. Carpenter may have been responsible for one of the earliest guild libraries at Guildhall, but most relevant to our purposes, he put

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together the *Liber Albus*, a collection of items relating to the rights of the City of London.[22] Carpenter was heir to the upheavals of the late fourteenth century, including the Rising of 1381, the ravages of the plague, the Northampton and Brembre factionalizations, the Merciless Parliament, and Richard's seizure of London's liberties in 1392. The *Liber Albus* thus stresses both the need for stability and the need for independence in its collation of historical and legal records. In this sense, it is as much an argument as it an archive. The *Liber Albus* justifies itself as a memorial repository, in lieu of the collective memory of men who may, through such strokes of fortune as the plague, be lost to future generations: "Forasmuch as the fallibility of human memory and the shortness of life do not allow us to gain an accurate knowledge of everything that deserves remembrance, even though the same may have been committed to writing,—more especially, if it has been so committed without order or arrangement,—and still more so, when no such written account exists."[23] The book itself is meant to be a material repository of memory. The fifteenth century saw an explosion of London chronicles, but such chronicles were part of a tradition stretching back to the thirteenth century and even earlier. What is new about them in the fifteenth century, however, is that, like dramatic performances, they reflect an aspect of mercantile literary aesthetics that seeks to distinguish itself from aristocratic models.[24] Lydgate's commissions were in fact motivated by the same concern, to preserve for future generations an image of what happened, or what was supposed to happen, as in the *Liber Albus*.

Why Lydgate? Why, that is, should Carpenter turn to Lydgate to execute these commissions? One obvious reason is status. By hiring a poet with such strong connections to the court, Carpenter might be seen in some sense to ape the aristocracy. But Carpenter's motivation was probably more sophisticated, calling upon a poet the way one might call upon a lobbyist nowadays: to make a case for one's agenda. Moreover, by hiring a poet with royal connections and the aura of speaking to and from power, Carpenter could place London and its interests at the same level as that of the crown, to suggest both that the interests of the crown and the City are one in the same, and, at the same time, that the interests of the City must and should be respected as an entity distinct from the unilateral view of the king. From his earliest poetry Lydgate had in fact positioned himself as the poet of "Both/And," rather than "Either/Or," as one able to devise a form of panegyric who could hold in suspension simultaneous and competing claims. Such a rhetorical position was rooted in Lydgate's earlier defense of Bury, which linked the particular location of the monastery with its empowerment and protection by the body of the martyred king.

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But Edmund was a moveable saint in several different senses. One of the most intriguing images in Lydgate's *Life of St. Edmund* is that of the wolf watching over Edmund's severed head, moved to another place than his body:

> But blissid Ihesu which euery thyng may se
> His holy martir list nat so forsake
> Bvt of his grace and merciful pite
> Knowyng that he deied for his sake
> Suffred a wolf his holy hed to take
> And to conserue it ageyn assautis alle. . ..
> (Book II, ll. 840–47)

Once found, Edmund's head is reassembled so miraculously that it is difficult for all but the most discerning to notice the sutures:

> The folkys dide ther bysy dilligence
> This holy tresour this relik souereyne
> To take it upp with dew reuerence
> And bar it forth tyl they did atteyne
> Vnto the body and of thylke tweyne
> Togidre set God by myricale anoon
> Enyoyned hem that they were maad bothe oon
>
> Off ther departying ther was no thyng seene
> Atwen the body and this blissid hed
> For they togidre fastnyd were so clene
> Except only who sotylly took heed
> A space appered breede of a purpil threed. . ..
> (Book II, ll. 946–57)

It is not only Edward's literal body that can be moved and reassembled, but also the powers associated with that body. And here I turn from the sumptuous and lengthy *Life of St. Edmund* to the relatively unstudied *Miracles of St. Edmund*, which contain some of the most specific locations in Lydgate's poetry, depicting them with the immediacy of city tabloid journalism. The *Miracles of St. Edmund* have been rarely discussed, perhaps because of their uncertain canonical status, perhaps because they do not fit into most general theories of Lydgate's poetry.[25] But their relation to the transpositions of the rhetoric of place described above provides a new way of considering them as part of a Lydgatean project.

The *Miracles* describe three incidents that occurred in 1441 and 1444, one of them in London and the others occurring in the vicinity of Bury. A group of children are playing on a limestone bridge over the Thames on

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St. Edmund's day "at ffoure afftirnoon" (l. 26) when an ox from a passing team lifts up one of them on his horns and throws him into the rushing waters:

On that bregge, bylt of lym and stoon,
Chyldre to pleye assemblyd were in oon;
Among which sone of a ffleccheer,
Tendre of lymes so as he myght goon,
Was among hem, of age but thre yeer.
Which of custom ther pleyes did ordeyne,
Lyk ther conceyt, of verray Innocence.
Tyme of ther play to-gidre thre or tweyne
Kept ther dispoort, in whoom was no diffence.
A droof of oxes cam fforby ther presence
Passyng the bregge; the chyldre wer so neer:
Oon of the beestys by sodeyn violence
Cauht in his hornys the chyld of the ffleccheer,
Lefft hym vp-on heyghte toward the Oryent,
Ovir the wal caste hym in-to the fflood—
Sondry peple beeing ther present:
Off aventure somme on the bregge stood.
(ll. 28–44)[26]

The child—maybe a month short of three years old, notes Lydgate—is swept by the waves "toward Cooldherberwe passyng 'The Swan'" (l. 55) when a boatman, during an ebb in the flow, lifts him into his boat. Meanwhile, the child's mother, at home, and knowing nothing of this tragedy, is informed of what has happened by a neighbor. At this point the mother tears her clothes in grief and runs out toward Thames Street, where she meets "Lord Fanhoop" (probably John Cornwall, Lord Fanhope, a son-in-law of John of Gaunt). She desperately asks him what feast day this might be, and he answers that it is King Edmunds', upon which she kneels in prayer. Suddenly she hears her child crying out, "Wher is my moodir, my owene moodir dere?" (l. 129). She runs down to the Thames, and is miraculously reunited with her child. One might think that the miracle could use some sequence editing, in that the child is rescued before the mother knows he is gone, but that can easily be explained by regarding the mother's prayers as the agent of the miracle itself, the calm boatman scooping the child from the water as a wave ebbs. The miracle depends on a specific geography that captures the physical relationship of the city's buildings to its people precisely, and that contrasts the walls of stone to the forces of nature rushing through them, including the rushing oxen and the swirling waters. Anyone doubting Lydgate's narrative or descriptive ability

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should be directed to this tale, whose power depends on an investment in the physical landscape that is often obscured in his other works.

Like many saints, and particularly like many urban saints, Edmund specializes in child endangerment rescue scenarios. One afternoon, not far from Northgate, a female toddler slightly less than two years old falls off an embankment and into the river while gathering flowers. The said stream is seven feet deep—this is Lydgate's line—and she was buried head and breast deep in the mud. Her five-year-old sister cried out, and everyone on the street rushed to help and administer first aid, but by the time they arrived the child was "gruff" (l. 269). Again, a neighbor runs to tell the mother, who laments as the child's body is brought to shore, her feet cold to the touch. Suddenly, a highly competent women passing by picks up the child by the legs, turns her upside down, and shakes out the dreadful river fluids, while everyone prays to St. Edmund. Soon, the child's color comes back into her face. Abbot William happens to be nearby and orders the bells to be rung and a *te deum* to be sung. The child is brought to Bury in a procession to visit the body of the saint who has saved her life.

Bridges and banks were in reality an especially treacherous passage for children, but the frequency with which they comprise the settings of miracles suggest a literary or mythic motivation. They are also paths of social crossing, as are roads and crossroads. So they make an appropriate setting for an emphasis on community and on public apprehension and witness of the events in question. Along Rysbygate, another baby not two years of age is run over by a cartwheel, her body broken, bloody, and blackened. As the entire neighborhood comes out, a neighbor picks up the child to bring her to her father's house, and the wisest among them advises taking the child to Edmund's shrine, upon which she is brought back to life. Again, the formation of the people in a spontaneous procession, the emphasis on community and social cohesion, and the miraculous ordering of a chaotic and accidental world by the intercession of the saint are all emphasized by the physical layout of the town. That is, in the works that directly link Bury with London, the material and physical structure of place becomes centrally important, so that it is not so much transcendence that is emphasized as the special status accorded to place by Edmund's miracles. Edmund's "miracle," however, is not only the saving of the lives of these children; rather, it is his inspiration of a communal coherence, one similar to the ideal of the legal and physical topographies of London that we find from the writing of FitzStephen through that of Carpenter and Stowe.

Such an ideal could cut both ways. The fact that community is solidified by a crisis reveals a certain undercurrent to Lydgate's image of urban life in the *Miracles*. In Lydgate's youth, Bury St. Edmunds could hardly lay claim to the utopian Golden Age reputation it had had during the first centuries

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after its founding, nor had it yet begun to enjoy the relative renaissance it would experience during Lydgate's maturity. The model of community that we find in the *Miracles* is a utopian representation rather than a mimetic imitation of urban life, despite its realistic detail. There are no watchmen or other representatives of civic order in the city and towns of their settings. Rather, by eliminating such figures, Lydgate suggests that community can be achieved only by uniting the social and spiritual bodies. Civil society works best, the *Miracles* seem to say, when it follows the model of monastic utopianism, in which neighbors, guests, passersby, and others are united in a common goal, even while their specializations (some of the intercessors in the stories have near-professional skills) work separately toward that goal. The social background of Lydgate's miracles substitute the neighborhood or community for both the watchful eye of and for the support structure of either a nuclear or extended family (with the possible exception of the sister or brother reporting that their sibling has fallen into the silt of the river). In each case, it takes a village, or its equivalent, to raise the child from the dead or else rescue him or her from danger. The *Miracles* imagine ordinary life, heightened by crisis, as best fulfilled by the ideals of monastic life. In this regard, the framing of fortune and contingency in the Edward miracles is worth considering.[27] For the saint and his inspiration seems to magically inform the action and motivate the agency of various characters in the *Miracles*, impelling them to shift from a passive posture of grief to an active intervention. The saint is capable of redeeming the waywardness of fortune, channeling its chaotic and destructive potential into a providential path. Another aspect of the miracles is the response of parents, friends and neighbors, and bystanders. They do not kneel and pray as a first resort, but rather engage in vigorous attempts at first aid. In the narrative of these miracles, an enlightened or fortuitously placed individual intervenes at a propitious moment. Only when physical intervention proves futile do the participants and observers usually turn to prayer or appeals for a miracle. Significantly, except for the resuscitation of one of the children in the last miracle, the Saint enables action rather than acting himself.

The point of view in Lydgate's *Miracles* is significantly a communal or composite point of view. In the first reports of a miracle connected to a saint, an individual or a few people—often parents—might describe the occurrence, recounting the absence and subsequent recovery of a child. But in response to commissions investigating a cluster of miracles, as well as to legal investigations by bailiffs and coroners, a wider range of points of view, and a carefully articulated sequence of actions in time are woven together. It is such a sequence that we find in the *Miracles*, with their explicit recounting of who, what, when, where, and why. What also marks the result of legal or canonical investigation, as opposed to the tales of pious

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participants in the accident or miracle, is a very detailed picture of landscape, buildings, roads, natural features, as well as their relative location and the time in takes to traverse from one point to the other. Lydgate's miracles resemble such hagiographic legal documents in their eyewitness point of view, as much as they resemble more self-conscious literary genres. The complete description of the child being swept into the Thames could not be narrated from one point of view. It is composed of a series of perspectives provided by eyewitnesses to different parts of the rescue drama. But Lydgate's *Miracles* may also have been virtual miracles, calling upon the details and structures of child rescue narratives found in legal inquiries, local chronicles, and hagiographic investigations.[28] The documentary quality of Lydgate's miracles more nearly resembles the records of hagiographic investigations necessary to support canonization than they do the more literary or even romance qualities of saints' lives. While obvious to historians who study miracle stories, from the perspective of a literary scholar these features help to explain the artless spontaneity and directness of the *Miracles*, despite their stanzaic form and in contrast to much of Lydgate's other writing, which often depends on elaborate rhetoric to suggest that human actions are divinely influenced or inspired.

What I am calling Lydgate's poetic of exemption produces works that are performative, commemorative, and memorial. Lydgate's works are not reflective of but actually part of material culture. Their function is archival, even documentary, in that they offer a retrospective witness, one that is simultaneously declarative and petitionary. Lydgate's works take on the significance of objects as well as texts. Their existence is more important than their essence. If one imagines a Northrop Frye-like continuum from painting and sculpture on the one hand, to performance and drama on the other, Lydgate's London poems fall somewhere in the middle. That is, rather than exploiting the narrative temporality of language, they emphasize the ecphrastic, not only describing bodies and objects and props, but also becoming props themselves. *Bycorne and Chychevache* was commissioned by a "werthy citeseyn" of London as "the devise of a peynted or desteyned clothe for an halle a parlour or a chaumbre," according to John Shirley; the *Legend of St. George* was described as "the devyse of a steyned halle," made for the armourers of London, according to Stowe, who also claims that the "The Dance of Death" was part of a wall painting.[29] That is, Lydgate's mummings and other apparently performative works were imagined, at least by Stowe and Shirley, as part of the physical and material landscape of the city. The scholarship surrounding the "Entry of Henry VI into London" sometimes suggests that Lydgate devised the pageant. It is not impossible that Lydgate was consulted beforehand on the details of the procession, but as most authorities now agree, Lydgate basically translated

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and versified Carpenter's letter describing the pageant.[30] The poem was officially commissioned by the Lord Mayor of London, John Wells, and some of the description in the poem, such as the allegorical figures of Mercy, Grace, and Pity, may have been inserted by Lydgate to gesture toward Wells' patronage, and may not have been actually part of the pageant itself. Lydgate's poem, then, despite its gestures toward performativity, including giving some of the allegorical figures speaking parts (in the actual pageant these had legends affixed to them), has the status of record or archive, of object rather than event. To the artifacts of the material culture of late medieval London, then, can be added Lydgate's poetry itself. Commissioned to record a moment in history, Lydgate effectively removes the event from history, emphasizing its timeless and ritual quality. The "Entry of Henry VII into London" is Lydgate's *Ode to a Grecian Urn*.

The piety of Lydgate's poetics of exemption is in my account highly purposeful and instrumental, but part of its aesthetic power, especially in his hagiographic and miracle poems, is that the instrumental is integrated with the spiritual, so that the more one believes in the saint and his powers, the more pervasive and beneficial to all is the model of a monastic life originally designed to be separate from the active world. In these poems, we see a process of literal, linguistic translation, and a symbolic physical translation of power and grace from and between London and Bury. A poetic discourse that begins by celebrating the reassembled body of the martyred saint and king in the monastery is also employed to encourage a reassembly of the body politic in the secular city. Lydgate's poetry, encouraged by Abbot William and others to glorify and protect Bury St. Edmunds and its special place, also becomes enlisted in the effort of John Carpenter, and Richard Whittington, and Mayor Wells to stitch together a London that is simultaneously a legal and literary and material place.

Notes

1. See John M. Ganim, "Recent Studies on Literature, Architecture and Urbanism," *MLQ* 56 (1995): 363–79; "Cities of Words: Recent Studies on Urbanism and Literature," *MLQ* 63 (2002): 365–82; "The Experience of Modernity in Late Medieval Literature," in *The Performance of Middle English Culture: Essays on Chaucer and the Drama in Honor of Martin Stevens*, ed. James J. Paxson (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1998), pp. 77–96.
2. See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). A major rethinking of Casey in relation to medieval and early modern cultures is, of course, David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
3. *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, 2 vols., ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS e.s. 107 and o.s. 192 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911, 1934).

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See, for instance, Claire Sponsler, "Alien Nation: London's Aliens and Lydgate's Mummings for the Mercer's and Goldsmiths," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 229–42, and Robert Epstein, "Lydgate's *Mummings* and the Aristocratic Resistance to Drama," *Comparative Drama* 36 (2002): 337–58.

4. William FitzStephen, *Norman London*, trans. H.E. Butler (New York: Italica Press, 1990).
5. John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, 4 vols., ed. Henry Bergen, EETS e.s. 121–24 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924–27), IX, ll. 3431–51.
6. See Antonia Gransden, "The Legends and Traditions Concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds," *The English Historical Review* 394 (1985): 1–24.
7. Lydgate's emphasis on Bury St. Edmunds' exceptionality is noted by Walter F. Schirmer, *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, trans. Anne Keep (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 14–15: "Its first time of greatness was under Abbot Baldwin (1065–97), who in accordance with a papal breve placed the monks directly under the authority of Rome."
8. See *The Lives of St. Edmund and St. Fremund* in *Altenglische Legenden*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1881), pp. 376–440, Book I, ll. 165–67. A splendid facsimile is available as John Lydgate, *The Life of St. Edmund, King and Martyr John*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (London: British Library, 2004). The present chapter was inspired by a gift of the facsimile edition from Mr. Tony Luu, for which I am grateful. I am also grateful to Dr. Anthony Bale for sharing with me his own forthcoming study of *The Miracles of St Edmund* and for pointing out errors in Horstmann's text.
9. On exemptions, immunity and related issues, see the recent study by Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
10. *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Arnold, Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores 96 (London: Printed for H.M.S.O. by Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1890–96), offers a number of examples. Abbot Leofstan attempts to remove the head from St. Edmund's body, to which it had been reattached after its decapitation and loss, but his hand is paralyzed as a result (Arnold I:54); a knight and a steward who attempt to seize a manor belonging to the Abbey are driven insane (Arnold I:79–80); Prince Eustace dies horribly after attacking lands belonging to the Abbey in the mid-twelfth century (Arnold I:357–58). Right before William Bateman, Bishop of Norwich, is condemned for falsely challenging Bury St. Edmund's charters, a monk has a vision of the Saint punishing his enemies (Arnold III:324).
11. An excellent case study is Jane Zatta, "The *Vie Seinte Osith:* Hagiography and Politics in Anglo-Norman England," *Studies in Philology* 96.4 (1999): 367–93.
12. *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds*, ed. Rodney M. Thomson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press for Suffolk Records Society, 1980); *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, 3 vols., ed. Thomas Arnold, Rerum

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Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores 96 (London: Printed for H.M.S.O. by Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1890–96); Jocelyn of Brocelande, *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds*, trans. Jane E. Sayers (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

13. See Robert S. Gottfried, *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis, 1290–1539* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Bury was the site of an infamous slaughter of fifty-seven Jews in 1190, and the Jews, to whom the monastery had been deeply indebted at various times, were expelled shortly afterwards. In 1181, the Jews were accused of murdering a boy, and this event is recounted in Lydgate's poem, *To Robert of Bury*. Ruth Nisse, "'Was It not Routhe to Se?': Lydgate and the Styles of Martyrdom," in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, eds. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 279–98 relates this poem to the larger themes of virginity and martyrdom that runs through Lydgate's longer works, including *The Life of St. Edmund*, and associates the exclusion of the Jews with an attempt to define a community, an attempt that is writ large in Lydgate's concern with "the writing of founding narratives at the intersection of historical and sacred time—that is, with the textual tradition that defines Bury St. Edmund's in relation to both the English nation and the church" (p. 281).
14. See Gottfried, *Urban Crisis*, pp. 220–235.
15. In one of the first extended discussions of this poem, Kathryn A. Lowe relates the various sections of this poem to the privileges accorded to Bury and to Lydgate's working sources. See Kathryn A. Lowe, "The Poetry of Privilege: Lydgate's *Cartae Versificatae*," *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 50 (2007): 134–48. I am grateful to Dr. Lowe for providing me with a prepublication version of this helpful article. Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) also points to evidence linking Abbot Curteys and Lydgate, particularly the *Legend of Sent Gyles*, which she describes as containing "emphatic verse propaganda about the jealously guarded 'franchises' of the Liberty of St. Edmund" (p. 33).
16. Fiona Somerset, "'Hard is with Seyntis to Make Affray': Lydgate the 'Poet Propagandist' as Hagiographer," in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, pp. 258–78, has recently argued for a unified consideration of Lydgate's secular and religious poems, which have previously been approached separately. She finds an identical ideological structure underlying both, uncovering the elements of the Lancastrian propagandist even in the hagiographic writings, which are concerned with "regality, proper rule, and succession" (p. 261). In some of her observations, Somerset partly anticipates my argument here, noting that "Edmund's most important posthumous miracle, anticipated since the opening prologue (ll. 58–64), is his retributive defeat of the next Danish encroachment through his murder of Sweyn, who wishes to attack Christianity and encroach on Bury's franchise by imposing taxes" (p. 266); at the same time, St. Edmund seems

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to overlook arbitrary behavior from "anyone who upholds the franchise and liberty of Bury St. Edmund's and its surrounding region" (p. 271).

17. See Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), and Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
18. See Karen Winstead, "Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Alban: Martyrdom and *Prudent Policie," Mediaevalia* 17 (1994): 221–41.
19. See C. David Benson, "Civic Lydgate: The Poet and London," in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, pp. 141–68. Benson seeks to connect Lydgate's civic voice to the influential thesis of Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53 (1978): 94–114, but Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005) finds Lydgate's voice in another register. Nolan argues that Lydgate's poetry addresses an elite that results in a public viewed as "hierarchical and exclusive," a public culture of a power elite, though one that could be reconfigured according to the issue at hand (pp. 4–5). She notes that the resulting "paradox creates a very deep, very difficult cultural contradiction that we see Lydgate attempting to negotiate and articulate" (p. 6) as he moves from advising the prince in his early work to addressing the city in his later commissions.
20. *The Mumming at Bishopswood* in John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems*, II:669, ll. 44–56.
21. See Wendy Scase, "Reginald Pecock, John Carpenter and John Colop's 'Common-Profit' Books: Aspects of Book Ownership and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century London," *Medium Aevum* 61 (1992): 261–74.
22. The most widely available translation is still John Carpenter, *Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London*, trans. Henry Thomas Riley (London: Richard Griffin, 1861).
23. *Liber Albus*, p. 2.
24. On London writing at this time, see Sheila Lindenbaum, "London Texts and Literate Practice," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 284–309.
25. For a skeptical view, see M.C. Seymour, "Some Lydgate Manuscripts: *Lives of SS. Edmund and Fremund* and *Danse Macabre*," *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions* 5 (1985): 10–24.
26. *Altenglische Legenden*, pp. 441–45.
27. Lydgate's rhetoric of negotiating shared claims might be understood through the argument of Paul Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) that Lydgate contributes to something like a premature Machiavellianism in fifteenth-century British political discourse. From a somewhat different perspective, Maura Nolan, "The Art of History Writing: Lydgate's *Serpent of Division*," *Speculum* 78 (2003): 99–127, argues