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# BEASTS THAT STIR THE EMOTIONS

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A Study into Animal and Monster Illustrations in Fourteenth-century English  
Psalters.



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## Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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## Abstract.

This dissertation explores the possible emotions that animal and monster illustrations within fourteenth-century English psalters evoked in the medieval reader, focussing on the marginal illustrations within *The Luttrell Psalter*, *The Gorleston Psalter* and *The Macclesfield Psalter*. Furthermore, it explores how these emotions aid the psalters in its functionality as a spiritual and teaching aid.

## Introduction.

This is a study into the possible emotional responses evoked by the marginal illustrations within fourteenth-century English psalters, focussing particularly on the illustrations of animals and monsters. Monsters, sometimes referred to as grotesques, were a popular addition to medieval manuscripts. Personal devotional texts from the medieval period often contain an abundance of illustrations of animals and monstrous creatures. The illustrations of monsters within these texts vary; from hybrid creatures, such as centaurs and sirens that were passed down from Classical and Biblical traditions to spectacular creations that demonstrate the artists creativity and imagination. They also contain animals that are familiar yet are performing unexpected roles. Alixe Bovey writes that ‘for medieval people these humorous and hideous creatures were a tantalizing suggestion of unknown worlds and unthinkable dangers, at once entertaining and electrifying, funny and frightening.’<sup>1</sup> These images function in various ways and represent several traditions. They often represent physical and spiritual dangers which emphasise the Christian teachings contained within the text; the physical distortion in the human and animal hybrids were often a reflection of those who accept evil. Other illustrations reflect conflict between the body and soul, different forms of the devil and his punishments for sinners, and the creativity of the artists. Jeremy Lowe explores the idea of spiritual symbolism and textual association. He states that the images ‘bring the reader into immediate personal contact with the text’<sup>2</sup> which means that it is possible for every individual to perceive their own truth regardless of prior knowledge or wisdom. Therefore, the use of illustrations ensures that the message being spread can reach a much larger audience and becomes accessible even to those who cannot read.

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<sup>1</sup> Alixe Bovey, *Monsters and Grotesques in Medieval Manuscripts*, (London: The British Library, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Jeremy Lowe, *Desiring Truth: The Process of Judgement in Fourteenth Century Art and Literature*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 55.

Much of the scholarly discussion into the illustrations in medieval illuminated manuscripts focusses on the origin, meaning and the function of these images. Studies into marginalia generally use literature or non-marginal illustrations to establish the origins of the marginal images or draw parallels to these illustrations in other literary or artistic forms. Lucy Freedman Sandler explored a different approach that explored the internal structure of a group of illustrations. She writes, ‘the formal inter-relationships- from the overall composition to the smallest detail of gesture- are the means which make manifest the iconographical content.’<sup>3</sup> Freedman Sandler’s research into marginalia focussed on the role of the illuminator in creating marginalia. Examples of this approach can be seen in her earliest study, ‘A series of Marginal Illustrations in the Rutland Psalter’.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, she produced later works that explored the reception and contextual meanings of marginal illustrations, and a focus on the relationships between the images and the accompanying text. Another notable scholar is Lilian Randall who explored the meaning of specific motifs found in the marginalia of Gothic manuscripts. She claims that ‘some of the marginalia which today fall into the category of pure drôlerie or grotesquerie in all likelihood conveyed a specific meaning.’<sup>5</sup> One example that Randall explored was the motif of man combatting snails. In her article, ‘The snail in Gothic Marginal Warfare,’<sup>6</sup> Randall explains the possible meaning of this popular motif. She writes, ‘the principal connotation of this motif appears to be the derision, or the exemplification, of human cowardice.’<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, she discusses the ‘Lombard-snail connection’ which was popularised in French literature with allusions to ‘anti-Lombard sentiment.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lucy Freeman Sandler, ‘A Series of Marginal Illustrations in the Rutland Psalter’ in *Studies in Manuscript Illumination 1200-1400*, ed. by Lucy Freeman Sandler, (London: The Pindar Press, 2008), pp. 1-11 (p.2).

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Freeman Sandler, ‘A Series of Marginal Illustrations in the Rutland Psalter’, pp. 1-11.

<sup>5</sup> Lilian M.C. Randall, ‘Exempla as a Source of Gothic Illumination’, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (June 1957), pp. 97-107 (p.102) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3047694> [accessed 27/09/2021].

<sup>6</sup> Lilian M.C. Randall, ‘The Snail in Gothic Marginal Warfare’, *Speculum*, Vol. 37, No.3, (July 1962), pp. 358-367 < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2852357> > [accessed 27/09/2021].

<sup>7</sup> Randall, ‘The Snail in Gothic Marginal Warfare’, p. 360.

<sup>8</sup> Randall, ‘The Snail in Gothic Marginal Warfare’, p. 362.

Michael Camille extends the debate further by discussing how the images function as part of the text or the whole page, instead of, often isolated details explored by Randall. In his book *Image on the Edge*, Camille explains that marginalia supplement the text in that it ‘is able to gloss, parody, modernise, and problematise the texts authority while never undermining it.’<sup>9</sup> Camille identified a comparison between the borders of the manuscript and the margins of medieval society, and notes that the images affirmed the conventions they seemed to subvert. Devotional texts contain many illustrations that depict the monstrous races, that many documents from antiquity, documented as living at the edge of the known world. One account that was influential during the Middle Ages was that of Pliny the Elder written in the First Century CE. Repeating an ancient authority, he described extraordinary races of people living in Ethiopia and India, such as, the Arimaspi people who were noted for having one eye in the middle of their forehead and the Astomi who are covered in hair and have no mouth. Monster lore became part of the Christian framework and tested Christian’s ethics and credulity. Believing in the existence of these monstrous races is unlikely to have caused the people of the Middle Ages as much concern as another common monster in manuscripts: Demons. This is due to proximity: the monstrous races lived at the edge of the known world, yet Demons were believed to be lurking everywhere. The inclusion of demonic images within manuscripts often acted as a warning of the spiritual and physical dangers likely to inflict those who sin. Other images that are thought to have emphasised the potential consequences of giving into sin are those that are believed to be a reflection of the physical distortion in humans who accept evil. These are thought to be a visual representation of the conflicts between the body and soul, and the damage done if the body wins. It is commonly believed that the main function of monstrous images was to teach

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2019), p. 8.

the reader of the importance of following the word of God, and the repercussions for those who sinned. Michael Camille states that the ‘systematic incoherence of marginal art is placed within, perhaps even against, another discourse- the word of God.’<sup>10</sup>

However, there is scope for further discussion into the animals and monsters found in medieval illuminated manuscripts which is by exploring these images in relation to emotion. This study focuses on the possible emotions the images evoked and the impact these emotional responses potentially had on the medieval reader. For instance, whether emotion aided the functionality of the psalter as a spiritual and teaching aid. The most notable objection to the use of such images within a religious setting, came from Bernard of Clairvaux. His *Apology* contains a lengthy and uncompromising letter condemning such art deeming it as an extravagance and a distraction. He writes,

What is the point of those unclean apes, fierce lions, monstrous centaurs, half-men, striped tigers, fighting soldiers and hunters blowing their horns? ...In short, so many and so marvellous are the various shapes surrounding us that it is more pleasant to read the marble than the books, and to spend the whole day marvelling over these things rather than meditating on the law of God. Good Lord! If we weren't embarrassed by the silliness of it all, shouldn't we at least be disgusted by the expense?<sup>11</sup>

The use of emotive language in his letter highlights the ability of monstrous images to evoke an emotional response. Despite his strong objections to the existence of these images in the cloisters, they grew in popularity as an addition to personal devotional texts.

Prayer was an integral part of Christian life and devotional texts such as breviaries, psalters and books of hours encouraged private devotion. Psalters are ideal for this study because they fulfilled specific spiritual and intellectual

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<sup>10</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, p.14.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apology*, c. 1125, trans. by David Burr. [Internet History Sourcebooks Project \(fordham.edu\)](http://Internet.History.Sourcebooks.Project(fordham.edu)) [accessed 17/1/21]

needs of religious people. They functioned as a personal meditation tool as well as a teaching tool. Psalters were multipurpose texts; they had a liturgical purpose, were used for personal devotion, and were also a forward-facing text used to show off the wealth and status of the owner.

To ensure a more focussed study, the primary sources discussed in this dissertation will be limited to a selection of psalters from the Fourteenth Century: *The Luttrell Psalter*, *The Macclesfield Psalter* and *The Gorleston Psalter*. The reason for choosing these psalters is because *The Luttrell Psalter* differs in artistic style from the other two examples. *The Macclesfield Psalter* and *The Gorleston Psalter* were both products of the East Anglian School of Illumination and, therefore, both contain certain similar illustrations. However, *The Macclesfield Psalter* is much smaller than both the other examples and, therefore, provides fewer illustrations to examine.

*The Luttrell Psalter*<sup>12</sup> was commissioned by a wealthy landowner from Irnham in Lincolnshire called Sir Geoffrey Luttrell. The psalter is believed to have been created between 1325 and 1340 by one scribe and at least five artists who are all unknown. As well as containing one hundred and fifty psalms, the psalter contains a calendar (fols. 1-12), the Canticles and Quicumque vult (fols. 259-83), Litany and Collects (fols. 283-95) and the Office of the Dead (fols. 296- 309). It is an unusually large example of a psalter (measuring 14 x 9 5/8 inches) which suggests it was intended for public display as well as private edification. Its size and its richly coloured and embellished illustrations suggest it served another possible purpose as a status symbol. The margins are dense with human activity showing vignettes of fourteenth-century rural life, biblical scenes, portraits of saints, as well as a huge variety of monsters and hybrid illustrations.

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<sup>12</sup> The British Library, *The Luttrell Psalter*, C. 1325-1340, Add MS 42130.

*The Macclesfield Psalter*<sup>13</sup> was created in the East of England, probably Norwich, between c.1330 and 1340. It is a tiny book measuring 170 x 108mm, but is nonetheless an impressive example of East Anglian medieval art. The psalter is believed to have been commissioned for the young man who is depicted at the beginning of the confession prayer (fol. 246r) and the wording of the prayer suggests that he was being trained for a career in the church. It is thought that he was a likely associate the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Surrey and Sussex John de Warenne (1286-1347). The Book of Psalms (ff. 9r-207v) contained within the manuscript are prefaced by a Calendar (ff. 2r-7v), a Prayer (ff. 8r-8v), and followed by the standard set of ten Canticles, the *Te Deum* hymn, the Athanasian Creed (ff. 207v-227r), the Litany with Collects (ff. 227v-235r), the Office of the Dead (ff. 235v-246r), a Confession Prayer (ff. 246r-248v), and Six Prayers to Christ (ff. 249r-252r). It is believed that there were two main artists responsible for the illustrations known as The Macclesfield Master and The Anointing Master, along with at least one assistant. The psalter is richly decorated with exemplifying courtly art, humorous scenes and creative creatures including hybrids. Furthermore, it contains traditional devotional imagery, depictions of everyday life and closely observed nature.

*The Gorleston Psalter*<sup>14</sup> originates from Suffolk in the East of England and it dates to between 1310 and 1324. It is thought to have been created for a person associated with St Andrew's Church, Gorleston in Suffolk. It is possible that the elderly, bearded layman pictured in fols.10r, 67r, 73r and 119v was the commissioner of the psalter. His identity has been disputed, however, Cockerell identifies him as Roger Bigod, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Norfolk and Marshal of England. The psalter measures 325x 235mm. It contains a Calendar (ff. 1r- 6v), prayer before the psalter, 'Suscipere dignare domine dues omnipotens hos psalmos quos ego

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<sup>13</sup> The Fitzwilliam Museum, *The Macclesfield Psalter*, c.1330-1340, Illuminated Manuscripts in the Making MS 1-2005.

<sup>14</sup> The British Library, *The Gorleston Psalter*, c. 1310-1324, Add MS 49622.

indignus peccator' (f. 7v), Psalter (ff. 8r-190v), Canticles (ff. 190v-206r), Athanasian Creed (ff. 206r-208v), Litany (ff. 208v-214r), Collects (ff. 214r-214v, Office of the Dead (ff. 215r-223r), Prayers (ff. 223v-225v), Hymn (ff. 225v-226r), and Litany (ff. 226v-228r). The psalter contains traditional devotional imagery, closely observed nature, depictions of everyday life, and various monsters and hybrid creations. The Gothic script is believed to be produced by one scribe except for the added litany (ff. 226v-228r) and the prayer that precedes the psalms (f.7v).

It is useful to examine grotesque and monster illustrations from the emotion angle because emotions were everywhere in the Middle Ages; 'emotions went to the heart of man's social and symbolic bonds.'<sup>15</sup> There was nothing incidental about emotions in the Middle Ages and so it can be questioned that one of the illustrations' purposes was to evoke an emotional response. Did the artist deliberately produce emotion inducing art to impress upon the reader the teachings of God? The history of emotions is a field of historical research concerned with human emotion. Notable pioneers in the history of emotions are Johan Huizinga, Lucien Febvre, Robert Mandrou, George Duby, and Jacques Le Goff. Huizinga's opening chapter in *The Waning of the Middle Ages* shows that he considered emotional life in the Middle Ages to be child-like,

To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us ... All experience had yet to the minds of men the directness and absoluteness of the pleasure and pain of child-life ... All things in life were of a proud or cruel publicity...All things presenting themselves to the mind in violent contrasts and impressive forms, lent a tone of excitement and of passion to everyday life and tended to produce that perpetual oscillation between despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness which characterize life in the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Damien Boquet and Pirooska Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities: A History of Emotions in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Robert Shaw, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc, 1954), pp. 9-10.

However, over time this opinion has been disputed and it is thought that ‘the emotions of the Middle Ages were no less codified and rational than our own.’<sup>17</sup>

There are two main arguments in the field of historical research into emotions. Firstly, some scholars argue that emotions remain stable across time. The second view is that emotions are historically variable. Variations in experience and expression of human emotion in different historical periods and among different cultures is an expanding field of historical research; ‘integrating emotion into how we understand society- as it is today and as it was in days gone by- has consequently become essential.’<sup>18</sup> There are various methodological approaches to the study of emotions. These include performative, constructive, emotionology and practice theory approaches. Emotionology is a term created by two modernists, Peter and Carol Stearns that refers to ‘the attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within society, maintains towards basic emotions and their appropriate expression [and] ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human contact.’<sup>19</sup> The emphasis was on what people thought about emotions, rather than felt. Rosenwein writes ‘It assumes that what people *think* about feelings they will eventually feel.’<sup>20</sup> Methodological concepts include emotive, emotional habitus and emotional practice.

Today, scholarly discussion on emotion is dominated by psychology and the neurosciences. However, from antiquity until around 1860 philosophy, theology, rhetoric, literature, and medicine were the primary disciplines that defined thinking about emotions. After 1860 experimental psychology

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<sup>17</sup> Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, p.4.

<sup>18</sup> Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (June 2002), pp. 821- 845 (p. 824), Doi: 10.1086/523498.

<sup>20</sup> Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions’, p. 824.

dominated and was overtaken in dominance by neuroscience in the late twentieth century. Furthermore, Barbara Rosenwein has explored the concept of emotional communities which is a useful model for discussing emotion during the Middle Ages. She argued that,

These are precisely the same as social communities- families, neighbourhoods, parliaments, guilds monasteries, parish church members- but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations they make about other's emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people they recognise; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate and deplore.<sup>21</sup>

Rosenwein's model is useful for this study because it is applicable to all times and cultures. The animal and marginal illustrations within the psalters examined in this essay can evoke a variety of emotions. This study focusses on the emotions fear, hope, joy, and amusement. The conclusions reached in this essay are a result of a combination of research and interpretation of the illustrations discussed in this essay.

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<sup>21</sup>Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107/3 (2002), pp 821-45 (p.842). Doi: 10.1086/532498

## Chapter 1.

### Fear.

Fear is a vital response to physical and emotional danger. Without fear, people would be unable to protect themselves from legitimate threat. This was certainly the case in the past, and has strong roots in human evolution, when people were often faced with life and death situations. The fear that is relevant to this study centres around spiritual fear, the fear of not dying well, and the possibility of spending time in purgatory or hell. Death was a central part of life during the medieval period. Most people experienced death on a regular basis due to famine, disease, war, and high infant mortality. As a result, certainly in Christian tradition, the purpose of life was to prepare for the afterlife. Fundamental to this preparation was avoiding sin, following the teachings of the Church, performing good and charitable deeds, and taking part in the sacraments. Sudden death was feared because this allowed no time to prepare the soul for the afterlife and, it was feared that this lack of preparation would result in the deceased soul going to hell. Therefore, the ideal death for Christian people during the Middle Ages was a prepared one, where they had time to confess their sins, repent and make amends for any sins they had committed. John Casey states that ‘the immortal soul is what is essential to human beings and therefore what harms the soul-sin- is the worst evil that can befall it.’<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it was important to cleanse the soul of sin to avoid eternal damnation in hell. Also, it was important for those taking part in the deathbed rituals to pray for the dying and for religious rites to be performed by a priest. Moreover, priests had handbooks that instructed them on how to console the dying person and their loved ones. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth-century, there were an outpouring of texts with death and the deathbed as their subject. Notably, in c. 1415 and 1450 two Latin texts

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<sup>22</sup> John Casey, *Afterlives: A Guide to Heaven, Hell and Purgatory*, (Oxford scholarship online, 2010), p.13.

were produced called *Ars Moriendi* ( the ‘Art of Dying’) which give advice on how to die well according to Christian precept that death is inevitable. However, whether a person spends an eternity in heaven or in hell, is ultimately in God’s hands. The *Ars Moriendi* contained the admonitions that encourage the sick to see the context of God’s plan instead of focussing on their illness:

- Consider how we are all in God’s hands, with every class and category of person fated to die, after living on earth to merit glory in paradise or be condemned to suffer in hell.
- Consider it a grace of God that you did not die suddenly but have a time of preparation in which gratefully to have recourse to His mercy and pardon.
- Admit your sins deserving of punishment, praying that God let your present patient suffering be your purgatory to bring remission of guilt and punishment.
- Set aside worldly concerns, to concentrate on your salvation. ‘Entrust all to God, almighty, all-wise, and good, who governs all things without your help, that he deigns to take you to Himself; considering everything of yours before Him alone, asking those staying with you only that they pray to God for you’.<sup>23</sup>

The production of these texts shows that the fear of dying unprepared grew throughout the medieval period. Furthermore, the *Office of the Dead*, a prayer cycle recited by a priest to repose the soul of the deceased, was included in many personal devotional texts including psalters. The reciting of it by the lay person as part of their personal devotion was a key strategy in the hope of dying well. In *Le Chanson de Roland*, a twelfth-century epic poem, there are two death scenes that illustrate the Christian ideal of a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ death. The ‘good’ death involves Roland who is a Christian man that confesses his sins when he knows that death is near and prays to God,

True Father, who has never lied,  
You who brought back Lazarus from the dead

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<sup>23</sup> Jared Wicks “Applied Theology at the Deathbed: Luther and the Late-Medieval Tradition of the *Ars Moriendi*.” *Gregorianum*, vol.79, no. 2 (1998):pp. 345–68 (p.348) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23580121> [accessed 22/09/21]

And rescued Daniel from the lions,  
 Protect my soul from every peril  
 And from the sins which I have committed in my life. (Lines 2384-2388)<sup>24</sup>

As a result of Roland's prayer and confession, God sends Saint Michael of the Peril, Saint Gabriel, and his angel Cherubin to take Roland's soul to heaven.

In contrast, Marsile, the pagan king of Saragossa stands against Christianity. He loses his hand to Roland and later dies from the wound and grief after hearing of Baligant's defeat. On his deathbed,

When Marsile hears her, he turns towards the wall;  
 He weeps and bows his head low.  
 He died of grief, oppressed by misfortune;  
 He gives up his soul to the living devils. (Lines 3544-3647)<sup>25</sup>

The act of facing the wall was, more than likely, influenced by Semitic prayer postures. However, by associating this prayer posture with Marsile, 'the author presaged the pagan king's death and intensified its religious overtones.'<sup>26</sup> This act shows despair and denial of God's power which is the ultimate sin. Fredric Leeds writes, 'when he despairs in his final moments and turns to the wall, Marsile is showing that the loss of hope and faith is the theological equivalent of the heretical act of giving over one's soul to the demonic.'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Glyn Burgess, (London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1990), p.105.

<sup>25</sup> *The Song of Roland*, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> Fredric M. Leeds, 'The Significance of Marsile's Deathbed Posture in La Chanson de Roland', *Olifant*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 191-196 (p. 194). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45297843> [accessed 29/09/21].

<sup>27</sup> Leeds, 'Significance of Marsile's Deathbed Posture', p. 195.

In *The Macclesfield Psalter*, there is an illustration of a deathbed scene (Figure 1). The image shows the dying person being speared by death. The figure of death is dark and skeletal with a grinning face as he spears the man in his chest. The figure of death looks fearsome, and the scene is added to by the presence of the man's wife looking on in grief. The scene evokes fear because it is a visual representation of the real fear Christian people had during this time, of dying a 'bad' death. However, the presence of Jesus looking on from the top left corner,



gives the reader a sense of hope that their soul can be saved. Hope will be discussed in detail within the next chapter.

Figure 1. Death Strikes, *The Macclesfield Psalter*, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 1-2005, f. 235v.

One illustration that provides no hope, only evokes fear, can also be found in *The Macclesfield Psalter* (figure 2). This image shows a man being roasted on a spit by a demon which shows the reader the consequences of sinning, which is being tortured by demons in hell.



Figure 2. A demon roasting a man on a spit, *The Macclesfield Psalter*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 1-2005, f. 126r.

Dominican Humbert of Romans (d.1277) produced a preaching manual: *On the Gift of Fear* which encouraged priests to remind their congregations of the torture demons would inflict on the damned. Boquet and Nagy explain that the message that was spread was that ‘the faithful were to fear the torturers of hell on account of their ceaseless cruelty’ and ‘they were to tremble before the anger of God.’<sup>28</sup> The Bible contains various verses describing the consequences of sinning and highlight that God is to be feared as much as He is loved. Two examples are: ‘They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.’ (2 Thessalonians 1:9), and ‘Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.’ (Matthew 10:28). Thus, it is appropriate that illustrations depicting demons, torture and suffering were included in psalters. They evoke fear which is a powerful emotion particularly when spreading a message. In this case the message is the word of God, and the images show the consequences of disobeying

<sup>28</sup> Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, p. 2.

His message. Similarly, hell acts as a deterrent of immoral behaviour as its main purpose is as a place to perform the punishments for sins committed on earth.

The Hellmouth was commonly depicted as a terrifying beast with sharp teeth whose mouth was the entrance to hell. David Williams writes,

The moralizing, allegorical use of this figure in the Middle Ages represents the loss of the sinners' souls, metaphorically eaten up by hell or the devil, but the figure goes beyond this didactic message. It conveys the relentlessness of change and dissolution, the devastating power of time, the inevitability of death.<sup>29</sup>

Many illuminators included depictions of it in their manuscripts during the Medieval period. Two out of the three psalters explored in this study contain illustrations of Hellmouth. Figure 3 shows the Hellmouth illustration in the *Luttrell Psalter*. This illustration shows a naked man, which is the standard representation of a remorseful soul, standing above the mouth of hell. The Hellmouth, itself, is by a formidable beast with sharp teeth whose jaw is gaped open in preparation to devour the soul of the naked man above. The image is unsettling and would have been likely to evoke fear in the medieval viewer because they would have understood that it represented the entrance to hell. However, if there was any doubt, the image was accompanied by text that translates to 'for my soul is filled with evil; and my life hath drawn nigh to hell...' <sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 143- 144.

<sup>30</sup> Lucy Freeman Sandler, 'The Word in the Text and the Image in the Margin: The Case of the Luttrell Psalter.' *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, vol. 54, 1996, pp. 87–99 (p. 88) [www.jstor.org/stable/20169111](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20169111) [Accessed 05/06/21].



Figure 3. Hellmouth, *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 157v.



Figure 4. Hellmouth, *The Gorleston Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 49622, f. 181v.

The Hellmouth illustration in the *Gorleston Psalter* (figure 4) consists of the popular representation of the Hellmouth as a beast whose gaping jaws is the entrance to hell. However, it differs from the *Luttrell Psalter* illustration in that the mouth contains mournful looking souls and there is a demon perched on top of the head of the beast as if overseeing the souls' descent to hell. Again, this is a fearsome illustration because it represents hell and eternal damnation for sinners.

Mythical creatures were also popular in medieval psalters. Adopted into Christian ideology, their meanings changed, and they often evoked fear because they became an instrument for Christian teaching. For example, the centaur (figure 5) 'represented the sin of hypocrisy in the Christian tradition.'<sup>31</sup> A centaur is formed of half man and half beast expressing the tension between intellect and instinct.



Figure 5. A centaur, *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 164r.

<sup>31</sup> The J. Paul Getty Museum, *A Siren and a Centaur*, <  
<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/4802/unknown-maker-a-siren-and-a-centaur-franco-flemish-about-1270/>> [accessed 05/06/21].

The siren is another mythical creature that were demonised in Christian iconography. There are two kinds of sirens, the winged-siren, and the fish-siren. The fish-siren features in *The Luttrell Psalter* (figure 6). A strong emphasis was made regarding the contradiction of the beauty of the upper half and the abominable lower half. The following is a description from *Book of the Monsters*,

Sirens are girls of the sea, who, with their most beautiful form and the sweetness of their song, deceive sailors, and from the head down to the navel they have a maiden's body and are most like the human species; nevertheless, they have the scaly tails of fish which they always hide in the sea.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 6. A Siren, *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130 , f. 70v.

In Christian tradition, the siren became a symbol of vanity and a warning of the consequences of succumbing to vain urges.

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<sup>32</sup> A quote from *Book of the Monsters* found in Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p. 188.

The mythological creature that features the most in the psalters, featured in this study, is the dragon. The dragon is a popular motif in medieval illuminated manuscripts and all three of the psalters examined in this study contain dragon illustrations. In medieval culture, the dragon is likened to the devil who ‘lies in wait for those treading the path towards heaven, entangles them in insidious deceit, knots them up in sin and dispatches them to hell.’<sup>33</sup>In the *Macclesfield Psalter*, a dragon is depicted with a lion (figure 7). The significance of this is that the lion can be used to symbolise Jesus, the spiritual lion, and as previously mentioned, the dragon was likened to the devil. Therefore, the two illustrated together may have been a representation of good and evil. An allegory was attached to each of the three natures attributed to the lion,

Christ, the spiritual lion, covered his tracks against the Devil when he came down to earth, Though Christ’s body was put to sleep on the cross, his divinity remained ever vigilant. He was restored to life after three days by the breath of God the Father.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 7. A dragon and a lion. *The Macclesfield Psalter*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 1-2005, f. 43v.

<sup>33</sup> Ann Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, (London: The British Library, 1990), p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, p.19.

In figure 6, the dragon looks to be prevailing over the lion, with the lion looking despondent. It is possible that this image is showing the reader the consequences of giving into sin. The devil would take the soul of the damned and Christ would no longer be able to help. It's a striking representation of the consequences of letting evil win and, therefore, is fear evoking. *The Luttrell Psalter* contains another representation of good vs evil (figure 8). This image shows a man and dragon hybrid. The human part of the figure is fighting the dragon part with a bident. It is possible that this represents self-conflict of morality and the fight within oneself to resist the temptation of sin. The image is capable of evoking fear because there is an implication that evil can become a part of a person, even overcome them, if they do not fight it.



Figure 8. A human/dragon hybrid, *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 171.



Figure 9. Dragon and a grotesque. *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 56v.

Figure 9 is another example of a dragon illustration. This image is in *The Luttrell Psalter* and shows a menacing looking dragon frightening a hybrid figure.

The borders of the psalters contain many examples of monsters, or grotesques. Monstrous images force the reader to question what it is to be human. Edwards and Graulund write,

Such figures foreground the limits of the human body, policing the margins of classification, but they also engender fear, rather than stability, through frightening depictions of what happens when the boundaries of classifications give way to monstrous hybrid figures.<sup>35</sup>

Often defining boundaries, monsters were used to express distinction between morality and sin. This was also true of conformity and nonconformity. People of the Middle Ages were concerned with the hierarchy that defined their position in society. Therefore, they were highly sensitive to disorder.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it is probable that the monstrous images in the psalters often evoked fear in the reader. According to Edwards and Graulund, ‘The grotesque can, at times, lead to anxious indeterminacy, but where the emphasis is on anxiety as much as it is on creativity.’<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, *Grotesque*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Camille, *Image on the Edge*, p.15.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards and Graulund, *Grotesque*, p. 4.



Figure 10. Grotesque. *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 27r.

Figure 10 is a particularly frightening example of a grotesque with its distorted form, apes head and demonic face on its back. It feeds into the medieval sensitivity to disorder. Thus, evoking fear. Edwards and Graulund state that, ‘the grotesque offers a creative force in conceptualizing the indeterminate that is produced by distortion and reflecting on the significance of that uncertainty that is thereby produced.’<sup>38</sup> Illustrations of monsters in psalters evoked fear in the reader because they served as a reminder of morality and sin, and of the fragility of life and the inevitability of death. They fed into the pre-existing Christian fears of death and the afterlife, especially the fear of spending eternity in hell.

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<sup>38</sup> Edwards and Graulund, *Grotesque*, p. 3.

## Chapter 2.

### Hope.

In psychology, hope is conducive to improvement and growth: ‘Hope is not just a feel-good emotion, but a dynamic cognitive motivational system.’<sup>39</sup> Hope can be seen as the ability to walk a desired path and provides the motivation to remain on this path. Hope Theory was developed by American psychologist Charles Snyder in the 1980s. The theory can be subdivided into four categories:

1. **Goals** of which there are two types. The first type reflects positive goals. The second, ‘a forestalling of a negative goal outcome.’<sup>40</sup> Goals provide direction and are ‘the targets of mental action sequences.’<sup>41</sup> They are the anchors of hope theory.
2. **Pathway Thoughts** refer to the routes taken by an individual to achieve their goals and their perceived ability to produce the required routes.
3. **Agency Thoughts** refers to the motivation required to follow the routes towards our goals.
4. **Barriers** block the attainment of our goals. In the event of a barrier, there is a choice to give up or use pathway thoughts to create new routes.

Hope theory can be applied to the religious hope of the Middle Ages. Firstly, the positive goal for Christian individuals was presumably to spend an eternity in heaven, which was considered the goal for the pious. Secondly, the routes to get there involve living a life free from sin, prayer, devotion to God, acts of charity and preparing for a ‘good’ death. Thirdly, motivation can be gained through reading and learning from personal devotion texts, such as the psalter. Lastly, the

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<sup>39</sup> Scott Barry Kaufman, *The Will and Ways of Hope* (2011), <[The Will and Ways of Hope | Psychology Today](#)> [accessed 20/09/21].

<sup>40</sup> C. R. Snyder, ‘Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind’. *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol.13, No. 4 (2002), pp249-275 (p. 250). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1448867> [accessed 30/09/2021].

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

barrier that stands in the way of achieving the goal of entering paradise is giving into sin. However, new pathway thoughts can be created through confession and atonement for these sins.

As well as there being spiritual fear in the Middle Ages, there was also spiritual hope. There are many references to hope in the bible. The underlying message being that as much as God should be feared, He also provides hope to the faithful: ‘The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love’ (Psalm 147:11).

The pages of the psalters contain various images of people or saints fighting dragons, demons, or the devil. It is possible that the artists included these illustrations to evoke the emotion of hope in the reader and encourage them to fight sin and overcome evil. As previously mentioned, the dragon was likened to the devil and there are instances in legend, in folklore, and in the Bible where saints and men fought and defeated a dragon. The neighbours of the commissioner of *The Luttrell Psalter*, Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, also had a psalter lavishly decorated by the same artists used by Sir Geoffrey. The Bardolph family’s ancestor is said to have slew a dragon during the time of Henry I,

Ther reigned at a toune called Wormesgay a dragon in a lane in the field that venomed men and bestes with his air; sir Hugh upon a wedding day did fyght with his dragon, and slew hym, and toke his heade, and bayre it to the kynde, and gave it hym, and the kyng for slaying of the dragon put to his name this word dolfe and did call him afterwards Bardolfe ; for it was before sir Hugh Barde, and also the king gave him in his armes then a dragon in sygne.<sup>42</sup>

The appropriation of folklore, such as slaying dragons, was used as a tool by those of high status to support their superiority. It feeds into the importance the heroic during the Middle Ages. Courage and heroism were the ideal, whereas cowardice was deemed shameful. Heroic literature was extremely popular during the

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<sup>42</sup> George Santayana, ‘The British Character’, *Soliloquies in England*, (London, 1922), p. 30.

medieval period; From Germanic tales of heroic deeds, such as *Beowulf*, epic poems such as *Chanson de Geste*, to the stories of king Arthur and his heroism. There are many examples of heroic literature that include battles with monsters, including dragons. *Beowulf* is one example in which the protagonist fights three monsters during his heroic life, the dragon being the last. Although, Beowulf is unable to defeat the dragon himself, the dragon is defeated in a show of courage from his kinsman, Wiglaf. He spoke,

‘Beloved Beowulf, carry through all well, for long ago in the days of your youth you declared that you would never allow your reputation to decline for as long as you lived. Now, resolute prince, renowned for deeds, you must defend your life with all your might; I will aid you!’ (Lines 2663-68)<sup>43</sup>

The courage shown in tales such as these can provide hope because they are tales of overcoming adversity. Christianity uses aspects of folklore in much the same way, to provide hope by showing the faithful that by putting their trust in God, goodness will prevail over evil. The heroes in Christianity are often the Saints.

*The Luttrell Psalter* contains an illustration of Saint George slaying a dragon (figure 11). The image shows St. George holding a shield emblazoned with a red cross, sword raised and standing on a dragon. According to legend, a dragon plagued the city of Silene in Libya, killing and terrifying the people of the city. The people of the city got so desperate that they threatened to burn the king’s house if he did not sacrifice his daughter to the dragon. With great sadness the king agreed after 8 days had passed and his daughter was led to where the dragon was. Saint George was passing by and stopped to help the lady, in the name of Jesus Christ. Jacobus de Voragine writes,

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Swanton, trans., *Beowulf*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 161.



Figure 11. St. George and the dragon. *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 46v

S. George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground.<sup>44</sup>

This tale epitomises good over evil and gives hope to Christians that it is possible to conquer any evil they encounter in their everyday lives, resist the devil, and avoid sinning.

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<sup>44</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*, Trans. by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, (Temple Classics, 1900 (Reprinted 1922, 1931)) [Internet History Sourcebooks \(fordham.edu\)](http://www.fordham.edu/~Internet/History/Sourcebooks/fordham.edu) [accessed 19/09/2021].



Figure 12. Four Saints' slaying demons. *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 101r.

Saint Michael appears in an illustration later in *The Luttrell Psalter* (figure 12). Saint Michael is depicted with three other saints slaying demons. According to legend,

In the time of the Antichrist Michael will rise up and stand forth as defender and prorektor of the elect. He it was that fought with the dragon and his angels and expelled them from heaven, winning great victory ... At the sound of the voice of the archangel Michael the dead will rise, and he is the one who will present the cross, the nails, the spear and the crown of thorns at the Day of Judgement.<sup>45</sup>

In Revelation, the ultimate battle between Good and Evil unfolds. One of the most dramatic scenes is the battle between St. Michael, assisted by an army of angels, and the devil,

And now war broke out in heaven when Michael with his angels attacked the dragon. The dragon fought back with his angels, but they were defeated and driven out of heaven. The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had led all the

<sup>45</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, Vol. 2, Trans. by William Granger Ryan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 201.

world astray, was hurled down to the earth and his angels were hurled down with him. (Revelation 12: 7-9)

Saints were revered and provided a positive example to Christians. Their popularity is evident in the many texts written about their lives, and the abundance of medieval art that contain their image. By depicting them fighting demons, it sends a message that evil is to be overcome which, in turn, evokes hope that it is possible to triumph over evil.

Saints were not the only figures depicted fighting dragons, demons, and Satan. *The Gorleston Psalter* contains an illustration of a knight-foliate hybrid slaying a dragon (figure 13) and *The Luttrell Psalter* contains an illustration of an archer aiming his bow and arrow at a dragon (figure 14).



Figure 13. Knight slaying a dragon. *The Gorleston Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 49622, f. 21r.



Figure 14. Archer aiming at a dragon. *The Luttrell Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 42130, f. 13v.

Both illustrations evoke hope by feeding into heroic traditions. They capture the importance of courage, as well as spreading the Christian message of the importance of good overcoming evil. The dragon signifies evil, and the courageous knight and archer signify the good. By vanquishing the dragons, they evoke hope because they signify that it is possible for good to triumph.

Figure 15 is a depiction of the saintly Bishop Dunstan, who was also a skilled blacksmith. The image shows Bishop Dunstan pinching the nose of the devil with a pair of tongs. The face of the devil was believed to be intentionally smudged at a later date. The legend of Bishop Dunstan's encounter with the devil appears in a poem by Edward G. Flight,

A tale, I know, has gone about  
That Dunstan twinged him by the snout  
With pincers hotly glowing;  
Levying, by *fieri facias* tweak  
A diabolic screech and squeak

No tender mercy showing.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 15. Sainly Bishop Dunstan pinches the nose of the devil with a pair of tongs. *The Macclesfield Psalter*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 1-2005, f. 140r.

According to the poem, the legend was untrue, and the truth was that the bishop affixed a horseshoe to the hoof of Satan,

His tail's short, quick, convulsive coils  
Told of more pain than all Job's boils  
When Satan brought, with subtle toils  
Job's patience to the scratch  
For sympathetic tortures spread  
From hoof to tail, from tail to head:  
All did the anguish catch.<sup>47</sup>

According to the poem, Bishop Dunstan gave the devil a taste of his own medicine. Satan experienced the pain and torture that he inflicts on the souls in hell. Whether the illustration of Bishop Dunstan is portraying the truth, or not, the image is still capable of evoking hope in the viewer because it shows the bishop overpowering the devil.

<sup>46</sup> Edward G. Flight, *The True Legend of St. Dunstan and the Devil*, (eBook #13978). [The Project Gutenberg eBook of The True Legend of St. Dunstan and the Devil, by Edward G. Flight](#) [accessed 30/09/2021].

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

As alluded to in chapter 1, the deathbed scene (figure 1) evokes hope as well as fear. By including an illustration of Jesus looking on, the reader is reminded that that their soul can be saved through confession, repentance, and prayer. Thus, giving them hope.

Hope is a very powerful emotion that can pull an individual through the darkest of times and helping them overcome any obstacles that stand in their way. For the faithful, spiritual hope can be seen as a beacon, guiding them through their earthly life because they have the hope that if they follow the word of God, they will be rewarded with eternity in paradise.

## Chapter 3.

### Joy and Amusement.

Joy is a universal emotion, yet the way of expressing it is shaped by content and culture. As Darrin McMahon states, ‘joy is taught and joy is learned as part of the emotionology of all societies.’<sup>48</sup> Joy is an emotion that comprises feelings of happiness, harmony, and contentment. It is thought that joy connects an individual to their values and core identity. Furthermore, ‘joy often implies self-recovery and return, completion, and the longing for recurrence.’<sup>49</sup> There are conceptions of joy in the Christian tradition with virtue, beauty and joy all being words that have been used in the discussion of the soul. McMahon writes,

The main words for joy in the New Testament- chara (joy) and chairó (to rejoice)- occur 133 times, giving credence to the claim by one theologian that ‘the Gospel as such a message that centred on joy.’<sup>50</sup>

However, despite the message of ‘rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven’ (Matthew 5:12), Christian thought was often sceptical. One tendency of the Christian religion was less accommodating of earthly joys because the thought was that they were a gateway to sin. Therefore, it is possible that for this reason, the humorous illustrations in the psalters were often not only for entertainment but convey a message too. Primarily, reflecting the conflict between body and soul. Furthermore, it is possible that the artists believed that the pages of the psalter were a safe space in which to express themselves in a way subversive against cultural norms.

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<sup>48</sup>Darrin M. McMahon, ‘Finding Joy in the History of Emotions’, *Doing Emotions History*, edited by Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2014). pp. 103–19 (p. 110). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt3fh5m1.8> [accessed 30/09/2021].

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> McMahon, ‘Finding Joy’, p. 111.

The psalters examined in this study contain a variety of humorous illustrations of animals and monsters that would possibly have provided plenty of amusement to the medieval reader and contrasted the serious text. Scholars have been unable to give a full and comprehensive explanation for these images thus far. One reason that has been suggested is *horror vacui* (or fear of empty space). Another is that they contained no meaning and were purely decorative. Sydney Cockerell, who wrote a book about the *Gorleston Psalter*, described the illustrations as ‘virile, if somewhat irresponsible in design.’<sup>51</sup> This opinion may have arisen from the fascination the artists appeared to have with bottoms.



Figure 16. Detail of a marginal scene of a grotesque hybrid examining another's hindquarters, *The Gorleston Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 49622, f. 104r.

<sup>51</sup> Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, *The Gorleston Psalter, a Manuscript of the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century in the Library of C. W. Dyson Perrins*, (London: Chiswick Press, 1907), p.16.



Figure 17. A centaur shooting an arrow into a monkey's hindquarters. *The Gorleston Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 49622, f. 66r.



Figure 18. detail of a miniature of a man on horseback encountering a monkey displaying its hindquarters. *The Gorleston Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 49622, f. 102v.

The illustrations in figure's 16, 17 and 18 all direct particular attention to the hindquarters of the creatures. Figure 16 shows two hybrid creatures, one is closely examining the hindquarters of the other. Figure 17 shows a centaur shooting an arrow into the hindquarters of a monkey, and figure 18 shows a monkey exposing his hindquarters to a man on horseback. It is possible that the medieval viewer would have been amused by these illustrations. However, it is also possible that the joy evoked would have been brief. Such crude hybrids belong to the world of the body yet are placed next to texts that concern the spirit. Alixe Bovey writes,

The farting, naked and lecherous monsters that swarm in manuscript margins make ordinary human desires laughable. Medieval viewers might have laughed at grotesques, but far from promoting the kind of sexualised and corporal monstrosity they portray, these marginal images might well have served to condemn it to ridicule.<sup>52</sup>

These crude illustrations appear to amuse, yet also function as anti- examples of what not to do.

The psalters also contain several illustrations where the lines between animals and humans are blurred. Known as the *monde reversé* – or upside- down world- the usual rules are turned on its head. Animals are often portrayed performing unexpected tasks such as playing instruments (figures 19 and 20).

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<sup>52</sup> Bovey, *Monsters & Grotesques*, p. 45.



Figure 19. A monkey playing a wind instrument. *The Gorleston Psalter*, British Library, London, Add MS 49622, f. 43v.



Figure 20. A rabbit and a dog playing an organ. *The Macclesfield Psalter*, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 1-2005, f. 15r.

Figures 19 and 20 show animals playing instruments. In the upside-down world of the psalter, the impossible becomes the norm. They are whimsical and amusing which would have possibly evoked joy in the viewer. However, they may have

caused unease because they are the reverse of the world, they believed God created. This may have been the intention of the artists to remind the viewer that true and lasting joy can only come from God.

## Conclusion.

The marginal illustrations of animal and monsters in *The Luttrell Psalter*, *The Gorleston Psalter* and *The Macclesfield Psalter* can evoke a variety of emotions. The emotions evoked are heavily influenced by the Christian ideals that the psalters teach. The use of illustrations that evoke emotions enforce the message of the text which in the case of the psalter, is the word of God. The repeating of motifs in various manuscripts and depicting scenes that were familiar because, for example, they were passed down from the classical era help to ensure that the word of God is accessible and understood by many. Illustrations of monsters evoke emotion because they often represent physical and spiritual dangers. Fear evoked by the illustrations, especially, aided the functionality of the psalter as a spiritual and teaching aid because fear is such a powerful emotion to exploit when spreading a message. Similarly, hope is a powerful emotion that can be used as an implement to guide the faithful on the path to salvation. The illustrations can be powerful reminders of the sensitivity to morality and sin that were felt by medieval Christians and the importance the Christian faith placed on living a life that was free from sin.

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