JOHN CAPGRAVE'S FIRST ENGLISH COMPOSITION,
"THE LIFE OF ST. NORBERT"

By JANE C. FREDEMAN, B.A., Ph.D.
SENIOR EDITOR, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS

JOHN Capgrave (1393-1464) was born seven years before Chaucer died. He was a contemporary of Bokenham, Hoccleve, Lydgate, Pecock, and many of the Scottish Chaucerians, and before his death both Malory and Caxton, the two most important of late fifteenth-century writers, had been launched on their respective literary careers. In his own lifetime he was regarded as a highly learned man with considerable influence, but he is assigned no more than a minor entry in the annals of fifteenth-century literature, even though his writings in English exceed in bulk and in variety those of Bokenham and Hoccleve. In the general derogation and dismissal of fifteenth-century literature that has dominated scholarship, Capgrave has not been so much condemned as ignored, and his works have received little more than editorial—and that scarcely accurate—attention.

I

Though interest in publishing Capgrave's Life of St. Norbert was expressed by F. J. Furnivall as long ago as 1892, while the manuscript was still in the Phillipps collection, the text has yet to appear. As a consequence, the rime royal poem of 4109 lines is little known. Yet this earliest of his seven extant compositions in English is important both for its contents and for what it reveals about the history of its author.

At the time he undertook his translation, Capgrave had been

1 Internal references are to: John Capgrave, The Life of St. Norbert, ed. W. H. Clawson, unpublished, in the Huntington Library (HM55). Line numbers are taken from Clawson's unpublished transcript, the manuscript of which is in the University of Toronto Library. And Vita S. Norberti, P.L., clxx (Paris, 1894), cols. 1258-344. References to Capgrave are by line number, to the Vita by column number. A new edition being prepared by Cyril S. Smetana is not yet available. Father Smetana has already published a study of the dialect of The Life of St. Norbert in conjunction with E. Colledge in Medieval Studies, xxxix (1972), 422-34.
a member of his order for thirty years; if not already, he was soon to be prior of his home convent and within thirteen years of becoming prior, provincial. He was also the author of a number of scholarly works. The initial problem posed by The Life of St. Norbert is that of explaining Capgrave’s seemingly sudden shifting from the composition of Latin scriptural exegeses, scholastic treatises, and other theological works to English vernacular poetry at the age of forty-seven. Piously willing to accept the task imposed by his friend John Wygenhale, he nowhere evinces a natural inclination for translation or for the popularization of seldom-read texts. To understand this apparent change in subject, form, and language, it is necessary to review his previous literary career and his relationship with the men to whom he dedicated his works. ¹

Between 1427, when he probably completed his term as regent at Cambridge, and 1440, the date he gives for the

¹ Although certain documents are missing, Capgrave’s progression from lector to magister has been unnecessarily confused by recent biographers. The dates in the registers of the Augustinian priors-general clearly accord with modern usage, and in a document of 8 April 1421 Capgrave was appointed lector and exempted from the required lectures on the Sentences, presumably because he had already been a cursor for three years. Apparently there was no place immediately available, for he was still in London when Henry VI was born (6 December 1421), and a second letter of appointment, this one specifically to Cambridge, appears in the registers for 13 April 1422. The appointment is in the standard form, assuming that the candidate will not be presented for the bachelor’s degree for four years and then proceed to his magisterium. However, not only must Capgrave’s earlier exemption from the Sentences have been honoured, but his additional year in London must also have been construed as his year on the Bible, for he entered the year of opponency immediately and was promoted to the baccalaureate on 20 March 1423.

Since each order of friars was permitted only one promotion to the magisterium every two years, the Austins restricted the number preparing for the degree at each university to four. Unfortunately, a definitive chronology or catalogue of the Austin magisters at Cambridge is not possible. Geoffrey Schale incepted in 1421; but whether or not the Thomas Lassell who was directed in 1420 to qualify for the degree ever did so, is uncertain, for there are no further references to him. If he in fact took the degree, it was probably in 1423; if he did not, there is one other possibility for that year—the poet Osbern Bokenham. He was made a baccalarius the day after Capgrave and the words incorporari possit in the document may have meant he was to incept directly. In either case, Capgrave was probably presented for the degree in 1425, and then would have spent the required two years as regent before being replaced by the new Austin magister in 1427.
completion of *The Life of St. Norbert*, the only records of Capgrave's activities are contained in his Latin commentaries on the Books of Kings, Genesis, and Exodus which bear dedications to John Lowe, Bishop of St. Asaph, and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and in the now lost *Concordia*, dedicated to John Watford, abbot of the canons regular at Northampton. From the sole evidence of these dedications, Capgrave has been regarded as a patronized writer, but it must be emphasized that he was neither as fashionable as Lydgate nor did he enjoy a coterie fame comparable to that of his fellow friar Bokenham. His "patrons" may well have paid for the elaborate dedication copies of the manuscripts, since books produced in the convent *scriptorium*, as his were, were not by the rules of the order allowed to be alienated unless sold by special permission.

Lowe, to whom Capgrave dedicated at least two books of his commentary on Kings, and possibly all four, became a resident of the London convent in 1420, two years before Capgrave left it for Cambridge. During the following decade he rose to prominence in the heresy trial of John Taylour and went on to become prior-provincial (1427-33), Bishop of St. Asaph (1433), and Bishop of Rochester (1444). Little is known of his period in Wales, but he was certainly not permanently in residence there, and Capgrave probably met him at the regular meetings of the English province. At all events, two copies of the manuscripts of Capgrave's commentaries on Kings II and IV were preserved at Cambridge and at Walsingham at least as late as the sixteenth century, when they were seen and their dedications to Lowe recorded by Leland.1 The other lost manuscripts, the commentaries on Kings I and III, were among the volumes given to the library at Oxford by Duke Humphrey in 1444, and on that basis alone it has frequently been assumed that they were dedicated to him.2 However, since Lowe was the king's confessor during Gloucester's guardianship, and since it was at least partially through Humphrey's intercession that Lowe

obtained his bishopric, he may well have forwarded Capgrave's work to the duke, commending his exegetical skill.

Whatever the transmission of these manuscripts, Capgrave clearly knew they were in the duke's possession and assumed that their contents were familiar to him when he wrote the dedication to his Genesis commentary, for when he explains his method in the present work he refers to them "sicut in libris regum vires prolum triplex inveniatur." From the colophon it is known that Capgrave composed the manuscript between 11 October 1437 and 21 September 1438, and a note by Duke Humphrey affirms that Capgrave personally presented it to him on 1 January 1439 at Woodstock.¹

This is the only evidence that Capgrave ever met Gloucester; the claims of his biographers since the seventeenth century notwithstanding, it is improbable that he was his confessor.² In the dedication to Genesis, Capgrave makes it clear that he had no dedicatee in mind when he undertook his exegesis and does not suggest any personal relationship with the duke. Instead, he enumerates three considerations which prompted his choice of Humphrey. He pays tribute to him for taking an interest in theology at a time when even clerics were seeking worldly rewards; he recalls that an earlier Duke of Gloucester was a founder of the Augustinian order in England; and, finally, he points to the present duke as their guardian against "poisonous tongues". This last item seems to be a reference to Humphrey's intervention at Oxford in 1438, when he threatened to withdraw his support after an Austin friar, and later the whole convent, had been suspended; it may be, therefore, an indirect expression


² The accretions, from Leland's simple statement that Humphrey "toties literatissimi Capogrevi prudentissimo consilio utebatur" to Tomas de Herrera's "Fuit a sacris confessionibus Humfrido Duci Glocestriae, Henrici V Anglorum regis fratri", may most conveniently be examined in de Meijer, 119-28. De Meijer himself calls Capgrave Gloucester's confessor, but Peter Lucas, on grounds similar to my own, also denies the possibility ("John Capgrave, O.S.A. (1393-1464), Scribe and 'Publisher'", Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society, v, pt. i (1969), 31).
of gratitude from Capgrave and his order. That it was well received is confirmed by Capgrave's commencement of the Exodus commentary, also dedicated to the duke, shortly after.¹

Although there is no documentary evidence of Capgrave's whereabouts in these years, and his most recent biographer thinks "it is possible that Capgrave returned to his native friary, dedicating himself to historical studies and theological commentaries",² his meeting with Gloucester and the circumstances surrounding the production of one other work in this period suggest an alternative hypothesis. It was common for those who had finished their studies to be appointed to lecture at one of the other convents in the province, superintending the biblical studies of the young friars. In 1427, when Capgrave completed his term as regent, the convent at Northampton was so short of brothers that the prior-general empowered the superior of the house to "receive and keep four brethren from each English limit and six brethren from each ultra-marine province".³ Capgrave's trip to Woodstock is more easily explained coming from Northampton than Lynn, especially in winter. Stronger evidence for his assignment to Northampton is his otherwise unexplained acquaintance with the abbot of the abbey of St. James there, John Watford, to whom he addressed his Concordia, a work intended to reconcile the differences between the Austin friars and the Augustinian canons regular.

This treatise is now lost, but Capgrave refers to it in two of his English prose writings, The Solace of Pilgrims and A Treatise of the Orders under the Rule of St. Augustine, an English abridgement written in 1451 of a Latin sermon he delivered at Cambridge in 1422. In all likelihood the Concordia is identical with the work elsewhere referred to as De Augustino et suis Sequacibus, which found its way into Bale's possession from the library of Thomas Key, along with another of Capgrave's lost works Manipulus Doctrinae Christianae. From the précis

¹ de Meijer, Pt. iii, 539.
² de Meijer, Pt. i, Augustiniana, v (1955), 411.
Capgrave provides of its contents in *The Solace of Pilgrims*, it is clear that the work was a part of the long literary dispute over the priority of the Augustinian orders. In keeping with his avowed desire for "concord", Capgrave would have avoided the polemical tone in his treatise, although his conclusion there as elsewhere was doubtless that "heremites of this ordre be the very childyrn of seynt Austyn".¹

What evidence there is does not suggest that any of these five works was written on request. Probably Capgrave worked on them systematically in the hours he had free from his teaching and canonical duties. The importance of the recipients probably reflects his growing reputation for learning, but, above all, his subjects reveal his scholarly interest in selecting and organizing the fruits of his research into the scriptures and the history of his order.

Against this background his willingness to undertake an English translation of *The Life of St. Norbert* is perfectly explicable. In the *Treatise*, and probably in the *Concordia* as well, Capgrave discussed the Premonstratensians and their founder as adherents to the Augustinian rule. Thus, the subject was compatible with his interests, and he entered upon it very shortly after the completion of his Exodus commentary. Although it cannot be proved that he returned to Lynn until 1446, the production of this work would seem to place him there by August 1440.

II

The genesis of Capgrave’s *Life* of St. Norbert is specified early in the *Prologue*:

... I haue myn entent  
So I plese him pat 5aue me comaundment  
To make pis werk....  

(lines 13-15)

At this point his patron is unnamed and referred to only as "my goodly fader", but in the envoy to the *Life* Capgrave expressly identifies him:

Sey you were made to be abbot of Derham;
The abbot’s name was called at that tyde
The good Ion Wygnale... (lines 4095-102)

In the Prologue also, amid compliments to the white canons as fellow adherents of the Augustinian rule and assertions that he had long since placed himself under Norbert’s protection, Capgrave suggests that his poem is in part payment for hospitality granted to him and other friars at the Premonstratensian abbey at West Dereham:

I write to you with ful pur entent;
Thankyng sou er of sour hertly chere,
Whech se make us whan we ar oute sent; (lines 58-60)

Besides this internal evidence, there are external facts to support conjectures about the circumstances under which the poem was written. Firstly, although priests were expected to have a working acquaintance with Latin, the Premonstratensians were never known as a learned order; for this reason a vernacular life of their founder would be a prized accession. Secondly, the population of the monastery at West Dereham was always small, and a priest with the time and skill to make the translation was unlikely to be found there. But, thirdly, the canons were not restricted to their own group. They had considerable property and were celebrated for their hospitality. The monastery at West Dereham was well endowed, and among their many visitors must have been friars from Capgrave’s convent at Lynn, for the two towns are separated by only ten miles. Despite the fact that episcopal records for Norwich are scanty during this period, it can reasonably be assumed that members of the house at Lynn were licensed to preach and it is surely to their excursions that Capgrave refers when he says “whan we ar oute sent”.

More convincing, perhaps, is the final piece of external evidence, which relates to Capgrave himself. When he returned to Lynn, he came not just as a learned man to whom Wygenhale

2 Ibid. p. 307.
might reasonably turn for this translation or for other theological works, but probably as an old acquaintance. There is no record of Wygenhale's date of birth, but the two men must have been contemporaries. They were at Cambridge at the same time; Capgrave received his doctorate in theology and Wygenhale his license or bachelor's degree in canon law in 1425; and the Augustinian convent in Cambridge faced the Premonstratensian priory. There can be little doubt that the two young men from Norfolk would have met and continued to hear of each other as they pursued their respective successful careers. Whether Capgrave volunteered for this translation, and why he chose poetry as his vehicle are unanswerable questions; but it is certain that his motives were friendly and that his desire to honour the saint was sincere.

The precise manuscript Capgrave had to "sewe and translate" is not known but it derives ultimately from the standard (B) *Vita* composed between 1155 and 1164 rather than the shorter (A) version. Most of the extant copies of the Latin life are of the longer version; and, like Capgrave's *Life of St. Norbert*, they usually contain as an appendix a contemporary abridgment of *Vita B* with a few unparalleled additions made by a brother of the Cappenburg house. Capgrave's *Life* does not report any events that are found only in A, includes many details which are unique to B, and still recognizes the Cappenburg source of the second recension:


2 The late nineteenth-century controversy over the priority of the two early versions has not yet been resolved. Roger Wilmans edited as *Vita A* a life which he discovered, and believed to be earlier, in *Monumenta Historia Germanica: Scriptores*, xii (Hanover, 1856), 670-703. His dating was challenged by Godefroid Madelaine in his *Histoire de Saint Norbert* (Lille, 1886), pp. 17-19. The latter clearly establishes (p. 18) that the standard *Life* (B) is of French origin, A of German. However, the single linguistic example that he cites for B's ultimate priority is scarcely sufficient proof, and his whole argument is so dogmatic as to cause doubts.

3 The three lists which follow clarify Capgrave's precise relationship to *Vita A* and *B*. While he selects freely from B (as the third list indicates), he follows B both in the details omitted from A (list 2) and in the addition of details which do not appear in A at all (list 1).
(1) Details which appear in Capgrave and B but not in A; Troye as an alternate name for Xanten (line 93); the detail that Evermode kneeled in Norbert's footsteps when he finished preaching (lines 786-9); the name of Norbert's second disciple (line 811); that the third disciple was Hugh of Fosse (lines 813-14); that Norbert arrived with his disciples at Prémontré in Passion Week (line 822); the generalizing statement that the devil awaits his chance (lines 988-91); Norbert's direct speech (line 1045) and the explanation that he understood the devil's tricks (lines 1086-9); the explanation that a monk was standing in the crowd (lines 1095-8); the degree to which Norbert's speech ravished his disciples (lines 1235-9); the discussion of modification of the rules (lines 1443-54); the conclusion to section XV (chapter 25) that Norbert taught by example (lines 1527-33); the moral to the story of the young novice's theft (lines 1599-1602); the generalized discussion of the doubts of many concerning the success of the order (lines 1629-58); Norbert's address to the brothers on Satan's inevitable future assaults (lines 1699-1710); Norbert's designation of deputies while he is absent preaching (lines 1800-16); Norbert's consultation concerning the brother who wishes to expound biblical prophecies (lines 1921-9); the speech of those who wished to hear and the indirect speech of those who refused to hear the second expounder (lines 1966-74); introductory statement to section XX (chapter 30) (lines 1966-98); the fact that a boy holds the cross during the exorcism (lines 2119-20); the image of the order growing as the fruit of a tree (lines 2351-4); Norbert's ordination of an abbot at Viviers (lines 2362-3); the fact that the devil was following Norbert (line 2368); additional details in the seizure (lines 2380-455); Norbert's direct speech to the brothers about impure water (lines 2474-6); the three supernatural events concerning the wolf (lines 2514-639); the brother catching a tree as he pursues the devil (line 2694); the transition from the trials of the brothers to Norbert (lines 2717-19); the fact that Norbert was involved with negotiations for Duke Theobald when he happened to be in Spires and the arrangements he had made with his brothers (lines 2787-846); that Alberon indicated Norbert should be chosen as archbishop (lines 2868-70); the explanation of the names of the Slavs and Saxons (lines 2913-20); the comparison to Leah and Rachel (lines 2926-7); the fact that Norbert's original intention had been to minister to the heathen (lines 2927-8); the doorkeeper's speech and the response of the people (lines 2963-5); the dialogue between Norbert and officials on the wasting of church revenue (lines 3008-24); additional details in the reports of his attempts to restore the church's possessions (lines 3037-100) and of his difficulties in establishing his canons in the church of Our Lady (lines 3101-44); the details concerning the Anti-pope's possession of Rome by the power of his kindred (lines 3542-56); post mortem visions (lines 3711-826).

(2) Details omitted by Capgrave and B from the account in A: Norbert's speech to the pope (Wilmans, p. 678, lines 30-38); chapter 11 (p. 681). Not the same as B's chapter 11, this sequence concerns a barren woman and a holy child born to her after Norbert's prayers; the speech of the prior (p. 686, lines 25, 30); an appearance by the devil (p. 687, lines 21-36); the date 1125 (p. 693, line 22); the cardinal's name (p. 694, line 4) and his speech (lines 17-24).

(3) Capgrave's omissions from B: the Prologue; chapters 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 23, 32, 33, 34, 49, half of 50; numerous shorter passages.
One piece of internal evidence strongly suggests that Capgrave was working from an already shortened revision and not from the entire *Vita B*. When he treats of Norbert's part in Theobald's marriage negotiations, Capgrave can only suppose that the count's fiancée was "longing to Germayn, wher Norbert came fro" (line 2798). Had he seen chapter 34 of the *Vita*, he would have remembered that the girl was the daughter of Englebert of Ratisbon.

There are many such short omissions and reductions of detail in Capgrave's version, but there are also larger ones. Thirteen of the fifty-four chapters of *Vita B* are entirely absent. Some, such as chapter 5, which deals with the reasons holy men endure evil, do not further the narrative; others, such as chapters 23 and 32, deal with Norbert's contemporary benefactors, the Countess of Namur and Godfrey of Cappenberg, and may have been regarded as of local or specialized interest. It is more difficult to see why the chapters dealing with Hugh of Fosse (13-15), Norbert's successor, were left out of a life directed towards members of the order or why the further evidence of Norbert's miraculous powers contained in his vision of one of the 11,000 virgins and the discovery of her body and St. Gereon's is not included.

Making it more likely that Capgrave's Latin source did not include these passages is the evidence which demonstrates that it was written during the Great Schism (1378-1417), less than a quarter-century before Capgrave undertook his translation. This fact makes it of much later composition than any of the extant manuscripts, for they are all of the twelfth or early thirteenth century; and it makes more probable the suggestion that the passage of time accounted for the excision of matters no longer of general interest. The evidence of the reviser's hand (if he was more than a copyist) is contained in the following lines:

These wordis folowand ar drawyn ful schorthy
Owt of a book þat lith at Capenbregense.
Her founderis lif is wrytin þer seriously;
But þei hem-selue þus in schorter sentense
Brigged it thus on-to the complacense
Of her breþerin.

(lines 3851-6)
Drawing a comparison between the schism Norbert helped heal and the one during which he lived, the writer clearly dates his work.

Unfortunately, though there are three references which point to an English composer, they are too vague to help in deciding whether the abridgement was made by the author of this intermediary source or by Capgrave himself. It is likely that any Englishman would have omitted the twice-repeated detail that the faithless novice was an "Anglicus"; and either of them might have added the observation that asses are unknown in "his cuntre". The last reference, to the fact that a specific water-jug is cleaner than any "hens to Kent", is probably Capgrave's own, but since it seems to be inserted only for purposes of rhyme, its value as evidence is slight. With the manuscript lost and no other contemporary references in the poem, it is futile to speculate how extensive may have been Capgrave's revisions. In the particular instance cited above, lines 3550-52 would appear to be Capgrave's, for they constitute a familiar poetic topos to allege fidelity to the source. On other occasions, where specific references are made to "our langage", or where concrete explanations of figures of speech occur, Capgrave almost certainly intrudes. But, given this break in the manuscript transmission, it is not possible to consider changes as necessarily examples of the author's style; they can only be treated as part of the overall texture of the poem.

The portrait of the saint contained in Capgrave's Latin Vita source and in his poetic Life does not reveal in full the character of the man. In large measure the lack of balance is the result of the aims and conventions of the genre itself. The saint's life seldom provides any detailed rationale for the deeds of the person commemorated; little internal motivation is provided,
apart from the passionate love of God, and the words and acts reported are used chiefly to emphasize the virtues of the saint and to exhort the reader. The skeletal biography presented in the Vita is, of course, based on fact. The historical Norbert did found a religious order, restore peace among various warring feudal factions by admonishing them in Christ’s name, defeat a heresy, repair the many inroads made upon the possessions of his archdiocese, and play an important role in ending the schism. Moreover, he was sincerely devout, and his biographer, writing a memorial for his followers, had every reason to stress his humility, patience, and courage in the face of physical and verbal attacks. But it was not part of his concern to describe Norbert’s high birth or early years, during which he took more interest in the courtly life than in his religious duties at Xanten.

In certain respects, Capgrave’s Life of St. Norbert is even less objective than the Latin Vita. By large omissions Capgrave reduces the Vita’s picture of Norbert’s compelling impression on individuals as opposed to faceless groups, and thereby he diminishes to a certain extent the strength of personality inherent in the Latin version. He also discards vital episodes in the saint’s life. The story of Godfrey of Cappenburg’s family relations, for example, is not pleasant, but it does indicate Norbert’s appeal, as do the reports of his influence on Hugh of Fosse, Count Theobald, and the Countess of Namur. Capgrave omits not only the violent attack on Norbert by the citizens of Magdeburg and his flight, which might suggest widespread resentment of the bishop, but also the general accounts of the enthusiastic reception he received everywhere, his meeting with Pope Gelasius, his defeat of Tanchelin’s heresy, his settlement of the civil disorders at Fosse, and his trip to Rome to have his order confirmed in 1125/6, together with the secular activities associated with it.

Capgrave’s work, however, found its audience not among men still mindful of the names and events but among the saint’s disciples 300 years after his death, in England, a country Norbert had never visited. This audience was less interested in Norbert’s tribulations than in his glories; and continental French and Saxon nobility had not sponsored the foundations
in England. Naturally enough, then, the supernatural element, the universal and generalizing features of the saint’s life, took on larger proportions. Since Norbert’s life was filled with confrontations by demons, reported as fact rather than as evidence of psychological struggles, the result of the attrition of historical content is an emphasis on the repeated and to some extent repetitious defeat of the forces of evil by a saintly man.

Like Capgrave’s other saints’ lives, The Life of St. Norbert follows the tradition of the long Latin lives giving the saint’s whole history (i.e. the Antonian) rather than the native model which concentrates on a few critical moments. Although Capgrave denies that he is following any order in presenting the miracles of Norbert’s life, the work is clearly organized along chronological lines, but with only two dates explicitly mentioned—Norbert’s conversion in 1115 and death in 1134.¹ The first six sections of the poem (lines 1-539) are concerned with his birth, conversion, and early preaching activities; sections nine and ten (lines 659-833) provide the background for his choice of Prémontré as the site for his abbey and the coming of his first adherents; the description of the setting of the abbey and the construction of the church occupy sections seventeen and eighteen (lines 1604-1799); his elevation to the archbishopric, his installation, his activities to recover the church’s lands and to establish his canons in the church of Our Lady are the subject of sections twenty-seven to twenty-nine (lines 2780-3143); his provision of new abbots for the Premonstratensian monasteries is dealt with in section thirty-two (lines 3326-465); and his role in the schism, his illness, death, and burial are treated in sections thirty-four and thirty-five (lines 3529-710). In the remaining sections, the focus is either on Norbert’s personal behaviour and governance of his order or on the miraculous events connected with him and his followers.

This basic division does not, however, assume any change of tone. All the major episodes of his career are attended by some sign proving Norbert’s special status or at least by some circumstance which allows the narrator to add instructive

¹ The Latin also includes a reference to the year 1118 (col. 1256).
commentary. His mother, for example, is informed of his future preferment by a "heuenely vision":

"Be mery & glad, woman, & not a-frayde;
"ffor he pat is now in þi wombe conceyuyd
A hercbisschop schal be."

(lines 105-7)

His conversion follows a call from God (lines 148-61) and a massive thunderbolt which digs a man-size pit in the ground (lines 163-8); and the building site for the church at Prémontré is shown to one of the brothers by a vision of Christ on the cross (lines 1667-86). Similarly, the chance that takes Norbert to Spires where he is chosen as archbishop is seen as an instance of the strange workings of God's will (lines 2784-6). When the porter at the gate of the archbishop's palace fails to recognize Norbert in his threadbare garments as the new lord, there is an opportunity for Norbert to demonstrate his humility and for the narrator both to praise the saint and to exhort his readers:

"Thin eyne be mor cler, I telle the rit now,
"That callest me a begger, þan her eyne were
That chose me to worchep or to degree.
Hide not thi-selue ne fle not for fere.
Trost me sikerly þou hast thank of me,
So art þou worthi, þou flaterist not, parde!"
O noble meknesse, þat hast mad þi nest
In Norbertis herte and þer hast þi rest!

Euyr art þou stabil in þat same place
And euyr wilt þou dwelle to his lyuys ende!
Thus was this man stuffid al with grace,
Thus be-gan he in his exaltaciou to bende
His lyf al to mekeness. Crist mot us sende
Euyr swech condiciones to rest in our breest
Whech wer I-founde in this noble preest.

(lines 2975-89)

The same motives of instruction, exhortation, and confirmation of Norbert's saintly powers inform the sections dealing with his miracles and his characteristic demeanour. Capgrave certainly regarded the marvellous events as factual, but biographical accuracy was not his chief aim. Throughout the
poem, he makes brief statements accounting for the inclusion of certain episodes. When some of Norbert's brethren disparage him with complaints about the rule, Capgrave says:

And for ye mannes name was pus defamed
God ordeyned a remedy to rere it a-geyn;
With whech mene he was mor I-named
Than euer he was be-for, for as clerkys seyn,
The deuele, whech is euyr mor in peyn,
Exalteth seyntes with his temptacioun
With whech yat he supposed to brynge al a-down.
(lines 1023-9)

And there are many more occasions when he interrupts his narrative to praise God for his concern for men or to pray that Norbert's example may serve as a guide. Some are lengthy, like the general prayer to Christ for direction and salvation in the Prologue, which is almost an invocation (lines 64-70), or the conclusion to the first recension (lines 3834-50). Others specifically commend one of the saint's attributes. Thus Norbert's humility calls forth the "O noble meknesse" passage already quoted. Most of the shorter examples, however, have the tone of a refrain or of a perfunctory response, pious and platitudinous interpolations with little vitality, such as:

God be euyr †ankid in his seyntis alle
And on her helpyng mote we calle.
(lines 2456-7)

Beyond these, Capgrave digresses to explain what he considers the significance of a given event, in the following example providing a moral for the name of the Prémontré and stating the suitability of its location:

fful rithfully is ye name called Premonstrate,
ffor Premonstrate in our langage he soundit3 pus—
A place schewid befor, whch was desolate,
And aftir schuld be inhabit wit3 folk vertuous.
It was schewid be name, †an now is it plenteuous
Of schewyng in dede, as we se at y3e.
Euyr be it soo thorw Goddis mercy3e !

1 Other examples are found in lines 195-6, 652-8, 1209, 2181-4, 2338, 2642-3, 2987-9, 3499-500, 3901.
Rith as ye verytees whiche are in owr feith
Wer schewid be figuris in ye elde Testament,
Rith so pis ordre whiche Norbert forth leith,
fful of religion, fful of holy entent,
Took in pis place a very fundament.
As in a figure schewyd mystily,
Amongis busschis & breris hid ful pryuyly.

(lines 757-70)

He also employs biblical parallels and gives characteristic explanations of terms his author has used. The temptations, misfortunes, and slanders which befall Norbert and his brethren are justified as God’s will. One such example follows the disappearance of a novice with money belonging to the order (lines 1601-3). Elsewhere Capgrave makes general statements revealing that miracles are meant both to glorify the saint (line 294) and to give concrete demonstrations of the faith to the unlearned.1 Few of these explanations are found in the Vita, and they are one of the principal marks of Capgrave’s style. Again and again the literal-minded exegete clarifying his materials for a less learned audience is seen condensing and expanding his source.

The Life of St. Norbert also contains examples of less relevant excursions in which Capgrave outlines various possible interpretations but refuses to force a single resolution. Lines 1475-1512, for example, are occupied with a discussion of the habit ordained for the white canons by Norbert. The Vita says only:

Laneis ad carnem, laneis ad laborem uti, et absque uilla tinctura praecepit; licet asperrimo cilicio assidue vestiretur. In sanctuario vero, et ubi divina sacramenta tractanda fuerant, vel celebranda, propter munditiam et multimodam honestatem, lineis uti voluit, et omni tempore utenda dispositum.

(col. 1294)

Capgrave first confirms the wearing of the wool for labour with a bull of Innocent (lines 1479-84); he then states the problem:

1 He sees the incorruptibility of the saint’s body as proof of bodily resurrection (lines 3669-75), for example. Among other explanations of the significance of events, the following lines may be cited: 643-4, 1883-90, 2372-3, 2775-9, 2848-9, 3174-6, 3260-3, 3961-9.
Next, he translates the Latin in two prolix stanzas (lines 1492-1505); and, finally, he declares:

If men wil algate of here deuocyoun
Were lynend alwey; I wil it not dispraue;
Lete euery man aftir his discrecioun
His obseruances in his monastery haue.
But I wold I, ye vynte for to saue,
That all schuld go lich, to kepe honeste,
Euene as alle cleyme of o religiouyn to be.

Thus, he makes a claim for uniformity and gives an opinion, but he will not presume to set a rule. An elaboration of this kind is clearly directed at Capgrave's immediate audience, for it involves a contemporary dispute.  

Another passage which exemplifies Capgrave's concern for questions which may arise in his readers' minds, even though he cannot answer them, occurs at the end of the passage dealing with two brothers who were deluded by the devil into believing they had powers to interpret prophetic scriptures. The final statement in the Latin is that the brothers quarrelled. Aware that this climax is unsatisfactory, Capgrave points out that he is not omitting anything wilfully:

Wheythir Jrei wer mad at on aftir pis tyme
Mi book tellet not; withouten doute;
Ne I my-selue list not for to ryme
Neythir of her vertues ne of her cryme,
But-if I fond therfor sum auctoryte.
Me Finkith reson pat it so schuld be.

1 A theological question concerning the treatment of unclean objects which fall upon the altar is at the core of the third example (lines 281-97).
This passage offers an interesting sidelight on the whole principle of veracity in the saint's life. Since he elsewhere creates *ex nihilo* speeches for saint and demon alike, Capgrave certainly did not always demand authority. The difference is that such speeches are written with a view to the black or white character of the subject and are therefore "ethically" true. Were he to make a statement of resolution at this point, however, he might falsely praise or blame.

Since for Capgrave the narrative continuity is always subordinated to the didactic purpose of retelling the life of the saint in the first place, his digressions follow a fairly consistent pattern. And his preoccupation with the lessons of the life rather than with the man also explains his excisions and departures from his source. That he was at least to some degree aware of the critical problem is suggested by his candid admission that he has been selective,

Alle pese þyngis þat we haue teld in ȝour audien
Are but a fewe of many that he dede

(lines 659-60)

and by his denial that any significance attaches to the chronological ordering of events in the saint's life:

... now wil we turne
To telle ȝou treuly his occupacyon,
Noutʒ only his, but also we schul returne
Alle þe condicioun of hem þat þer soijorne,
So as her actes rith wer do indede,
ffolowyng non ordr, for it is no nede.

(lines 1794-9)

Throughout, Capgrave is shaping subtly the materials of his source to produce a calculated effect. Digressions, exclusions, selection, shading of emphasis—all reinforce the basic assumptions that underlie his handling of the genre. Like other saints' lives, the *St. Norbert* is intentionally didactic. Directed outwards, with the audience and the impact always in mind, it exemplifies both those qualities native to the form and the particular adaptations of its author. How these are conveyed, and their success, depends on the poetic and stylistic techniques that now remain to be examined.
III

By any definition of poetry Capgrave's writing would be found wanting; but such a comparison puts too negatively and too uncompromisingly the limitations of his verse without sufficient regard for those positive qualities which it does contain. That he was more comfortable in prose than poetry is immediately apparent from even a superficial reading of his four saints' lives; but that he should have tested his vernacular ability in both media is in itself an important fact about him as a writer. Why he chose to write in verse cannot, as already pointed out, really be adduced, but that he did so makes possible areas of comparison—of style, language (syntax, and diction)—that otherwise could not be seen.

It is fair to state that Capgrave was not by instinct poetically inclined. He was, clearly, familiar with the conventions of his time as regards language, metre, and stanza form, and competent to reproduce them, but he does not advance the art in any significant way; indeed, it can be argued whether in fact he ever managed to transcend the level of poetic exposition. Without exaggerating his achievement, it is no small accomplishment to turn Latin prose into English rime royal while at the same time maintaining a considerable fidelity to the original text. Capgrave makes syntactical inversions required by the rhyme and employs tags which are relatively unobtrusive to fill out lines metrically; but there is little evidence that he sensed the evocative possibilities inherent in patterns of sound and imagery. For example, the alliteration that occurs is most frequent in the kind of doublets that are characteristic of English, ones such as "rend... and race" and "derk and dym". End rhymes seem more often chosen for convenience than for precision of meaning; and while his rhythm is not monotonously regular, it is not patterned or varied to arrest the reader's attention at crucial moments, and it is not always even particularly harmonious.

In fact, his use of metre shows that Capgrave is a figure of transition in poetic as well as in prose composition. Many of the verses may be scanned as iambic pentameter, the line already
made popular by Chaucer and soon to be standard. But examination suggests that the influence of the older native metre with its four strong stresses and a varying number of unaccented syllables was still great. When syllable counting is replaced by a regard for the syntactically, etymologically and rhetorically emphasized words in a stanza, like the following where the number of syllables varies from eight to twelve, his tendency towards a four-stress line is readily apparent:

Swech maner sou3 he in poo dayes.  
To lerne lettirur, to lerne eke prudens.  
To dyuers men made he dyuers asayes.  
To vse vertu and to voyde necligens  
Was 5oue al his bysi, studious eloquens.  
This was his lyf all these thre 3er,  
Saue sumtyme in preching pé puple wold he ler.  

(lines 309-15)

The following passage illustrates amply the essentially prosaic nature of *The Life of St. Norbert*:

In this same cherch, of chanones seculer  
Was 3an a college of twenty persones & no moo.  
Thei kept her obseruaunce in cloyster & in qwere  
Mech pé bettir 3at he cam too and froo  
So often as he ded. But he desired 3oo,  
Be-cause it was ny him, his breperin schuld be 3er.  
He seide he him-self wold al pé costes ber  
Both to the Pope and eke on-to pé kyng.  
He profered hem eke a better place 3an 3at.  
This peticioun was not to her lykyng ;  
ffor pé chanonis of pé gret cherch seid him ful plat  
Ther schuld no man wit3 hood ne wit3 hat  
Take a-wey fro hem here possession  
ffor if he dede he schuld haue pé malyson  
Of Iesu Criste and owre fader the Pope,  
whiche had confermed it be many a bulle.  
Thus was our Norbert frustrate of his hope.  
But 3et at the last his hert gan he up pulle  
And took vp-on him auctorite at pé fulle,  
That sith he was hed and souereyn of hem alle,  
Nedys to his entent péy must bowe and falle  
Rather 3an he to hem, péis was the ende.  

(lines 3109-30)
While the two expressions, "& no moo" (line 3110) and "too and froo" (line 3111) are the only tags used, and only three lines (3109-10, 3129) and one phrase ("up pulle", line 3126) are noticeably inverted in syntax, there are in this passage no images and the rhymes are commonplace and bear little stress. Moreover, the highly varied metre of the passage does not serve an artistic purpose. Most of the lines may be scanned as iambic pentameter if the free use of anacrusis in Middle English verse is used to account for the extra syllables. But the last three lines of the first stanza are more satisfactorily seen as hexameters, and many lines, even such decasyllabic ones as:

Of Iesu Criste and owre fader the Pope
which had confermed it be many a bulle,

really have only four stresses.

It is in his dramatization of the incidents rather than in his poetic style that Capgrave's literary skill is most apparent. A structure with little necessary connection between the events is common in medieval narratives, and the Latin *Vita S. Norberti* is itself episodic. By his greater awareness of causal relationships and by the subordination of lesser elements, Capgrave improves on the logic of the divisions and the transitions. On three occasions he draws together previously separated events. Thus, he groups Norbert's attendance at the council of Reims, where he was commended to Bishop Bartholomew, with the later events in Laon; and he combines Theobald's request for Norbert to intervene in his marriage arrangements with the result that his journey causes Norbert to be in Spires when the new archbishop is chosen. In the third case, the grouping together of the three miracles concerning the wolf, Capgrave seems to have been guided simply by their logical relation.

In two cases in which he allocates a particular event to a different section, he improves both the logic and the overall dramatic effect. Thus, he ends his second section with Norbert's conversion and relegates the stay at Sigeberg to section three, along with the other details of Norbert's period of penance and study. And, later, he dissociates the story of the faithless novice from the description of the desolate ground at Prémontré.
and puts it where it belongs, with the vision showing the site where the church should be located.

With few exceptions, the Latin sections begin with an expression that conveys the passage of time. Generally, however, the author limits himself to the conventional forms—"fuit", "itaque", "deinde", "cumque", "eo tempore", "post", or "igitur"—frequently modified to a degree by an ablative absolute. In Capgrave's *Life*, many episodes open with a summary of the matter they contain or with some connective linking them with a previous passage. The summary may remove the possibility of suspense by pre-stating the outcome of the narrative, as it does in lines 246-51, or, it may more generally denote the importance of the section. The first lines of section three, for example, show that Capgrave saw Norbert's conversion, the subject of the previous section, as a climactic event and that he wished to isolate it dramatically from the period of religious training which ensued:

Now riseth he up, a-stoyned and a-drad.
He fleth þe pres þe besinesse he had er.
Ther he was wone to singe & be ful glad
Now ar his corage, his wordes, & his cher
Turned on-to sadnesse. A redy, a good skoler,
To holy ordres he hastith now in al wise ;
His stody is now to lerne dyuyne seruyse.

(lines 176-82)

When he connects one episode with a preceding one, Capgrave usually relies on common transitionals, such as "thus", though sometimes he achieves a new coherence with his links. For example, although he has falsified history by telescoping the council of Friexlar and Norbert's meeting with Gelasius at Saint-Giles, he manages both to remind the readers that Norbert had obtained a general license to preach and to prepare them for the following four stanzas which effectively summarize Norbert's evangelical travels:

1 The exceptions are chapters 5, 25, 28, 33, 36, 39, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 52, 54; three of them (25, 45, 52) begin with erat and two others (46, 47) with other past tense verbs suggesting a time division; three more (5, 33, 36) are omitted in Capgrave's poem; and two (41, 54) begin with generalizing statements.
More interesting, however, are the ways in which, having increased both the length of the scenes he retains and the episodic nature of the *St. Norbert* by introductions setting off the parts, by moral applications of the events, and by explanations of terms and references, Capgrave still renders his action more dramatically effective than that in his source. Nearly every episode contains examples of his chief methods: increased use of direct speech, colloquialisms in the idiom, homely imagery, and more detailed description of the actions of characters. Before two scenes are examined more thoroughly, a few brief illustrations will suffice to clarify his use of these techniques.

Sometimes he simply lengthens the direct speech given in his Latin source. Thus, when one of the feuding lords at Gemlacum agrees to Norbert's petition for peace, Capgrave replaces the Latin

Fiat quod vis; non est aliqua certae rationis oppositio, quam possit aliquis objicere, tuae contradicendo vel obsistendo petitioni

(col. 1281)

with

"God thank sou, ser, for that ye list to lere
"Swech as I am both loue and charyte.
I wil obey on-to 3ou in all maner wyse;
Rith as 3e wil, rit3 so schal it be.
I am a-ferd of 3at hye iustysye
That whan he sittith in his grete assyse
He wil elles dampne me but I do sum good."

(lines 588-94)

In this instance he does not employ a particularly colloquial idiom, but, turning away from the academic appeal to reason,
draws on the preacher's threat of eternal damnation. In addition, of course, in the first four lines he creates a different impression of Norbert's personal effect by emphasizing "loue and charyte".

Elsewhere, Capgrave either invents whole speeches or elaborates them from indirect statements in the Latin. For example, according to the *Vita*, after he was told of the vision concerning the location of the church, Norbert "gratias egit Domino Deo" (col. 1297). From this hint, Capgrave supplies a seven-line prayer (lines 1690-6). The introduction of colloquial phrases also serves to alter the tone of the work. He makes a character like the faithless novice more realistic by having him assure Norbert that "we lese not in this house a heryng-cobbe" (line 1582) on the night before he commits the robbery. Occasionally, the interjection is personal. Referring to one of the many times when Norbert was undeservedly slandered, Capgrave cannot refrain from an outburst which has a fine, impatient ring:

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And eke for pe slaundir whch was be-falle
Of pe euele tungs whch can neuer but knok
And clater in euele tyme—wold God pei had a lok
To schet with her tung—
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(lines 1648-51, italics added)

Such changes and additions as these are frequent in the *St. Norbert*, and they give a more forceful tone to the English version. Some of the images also contribute to this effect by their more concrete and homely nature. When Norbert declares his choice of the white habit, for example, Capgrave's approval of his argument is indicated by the introductory line, "Thus wits his malle pe nayle-hed he hit" (line 1363). To describe the movement of a demon, Capgrave uses a simile picturing a fluff-ball blown by the wind:

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Euene as pe wynde lifteth up a wullock
ffor very lithnesse, rith soo pese spiritis flye
ffro place to place, and pay ful hastilye.
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(lines 2189-91)

The juxtaposition of evil and harmless elements is by no means
ironic; rather, it reflects a conception of them as co-existing aspects of man’s world.

Capgrave could also use a brief image to render a scene concrete or to vivify otherwise unrealized characters. When Norbert first enters Magdeburg as bishop, he is pictured as “walled/All with men” (lines 2938-9); and the indirectly reported speech of his adversaries is given a proverbial tone with

The othir part seid he had leyd his ore
sferther in the watyr fann he myth rowe.
(lines 3043-4)

Additional descriptions of physical action appear everywhere. When the possessed man is brought into Norbert’s presence at Traiect, for example, the crowd is given a dynamic role. From the brief Latin phrase, “cum magno suffragio plebis circum-stantis” (col. 1303), Capgrave makes a tableau wherein the people first kneel praying to Norbert to help the bailiff (lines 2208-12) and then form separate groups on either side to watch the conflict (lines 2213-17). Sometimes, so many new details appear that the episode could be pantomimed. For the Latin author the importance of the devil’s appearance to the labourer at Viviers is to show the efficacy of the invocation of the saint’s name. In Capgrave, on the other hand, it becomes a vivid realization of the powerful effect of apparitions. In this case he removes all the dialogue. He depicts the man sweating in the field (lines 2381-5), running to the well (line 2386), looking into it (line 2390), starting away in terror (line 2393), meeting the devil (lines 2394-5), swooning (line 2399), tearing his clothes as he is possessed (line 2401), and being seized by other men (line 2404)—all previous to any mention of the saint.

These same techniques obviously coalesce and function together in some of the more extended episodes. New, direct speeches frequently include colloquialisms and homely images, and movement is often indicated during the scenes in which the speeches are made. Perhaps the most singular example of the combination, which most clearly reveals the total effect of Capgrave’s changes, is the possession and exorcism recorded in section twenty (lines 1996-2184). During one of Norbert’s
absences, one of the brothers is seized by the devil and afterwards bound by his fellows. The devil cries out against the prior who comes to conjure him; but he is forced to admit his identity, and, indeed, he testifies to Christ's lordship when he sees the crucifix. One of the young brethren volunteers to lead the possessed man to the holy-water single-handedly; and in short order the devil appears on the man's tongue in the form of a lettuce seed, makes one more effort to pervert the brothers, and finally disappears.

The account is dramatic enough in the Latin; much of it is in direct speech and the references to such apparatus as would be required for a stage performance—including the crucifix and the font—are already clear. What Capgrave does is, in the first place, lengthen the speeches, both by repetition and extension, so that the prior and the devil become more developed adversaries, and alter the tone of the devil's speeches so that he becomes cruder. Then he introduces additions which make the secondary characters more visible and their actions on the stage more effective.

In the Latin version of the devil's first speech

Modo intrabit ad me, modo intrabit ad me; modo venit, modo venit magister ille cum clavata tunica sua: maledicatur ipsi; firmate ostium firmiter, firmate quam celerrime,

(col. 1301)

the repetition creates a sense of anxiety and impending conflict. However, while Capgrave retains the essential outlines, he depicts a more obvious copy of the ranting devil of the medieval stage:

"Now schal he come, pe cursed prest & proude,
He schal now entre, and sor on me croude,
This daffid fool, with his barred cote!
Cursed be he, and hanged be pe thorte!

" Spere pe dor, men, & barr it sor & fast."

(lines 2013-17)

In adding the devil's vain threats to bar the prior's way with a tree (lines 2019-22), Capgrave increases the interval before the
prior's first words and so makes his lack of hesitation more forceful. In the next speech, Capgrave has the devil address the prior as "dotard balled schrewe" (line 2035) and replaces the list of titles ("magister", "tutor", "doctor") with the generalized slur, "man yat werith hood or hat" (line 2033). In his remaining speeches there are no further examples of this particular line of offence. But as the devil reveals himself as especially spiteful against Norbert and his followers and defiant in his attempts, despite his powerlessness, Capgrave's expansions increase the sense that his efforts are hopeless. The devil is made to stress his own evil and misery by repetition and to remind the audience of his previous defeat:

"... Ey me! Ey my! What schal I do? I must now tell my name. I am yat deuele, I am rith yat same

" Whech dwell sumtyme in yat fayr song mayde
At Nyuygelle, whech mayde po was browt
Be-for soun Norbert, where he his charmes sayde.
He lessed my power and set me al at nowt.
If I had power it schuld ful der be bowt.
Cursed be yat our yat soun Norbert was bore,
He and hise, pei contrary me euyrmore."
(lines 2063-72)

In the *Vita*, he says only:

Ei mi, ei mi, quid agam? Ego sum . . . ille . . . qui fui in puella Nivigellae coram Norberto magistro tuo, albo cane. Maledicatur hora qua unquam natus fuit.
(col. 1302)

Much of the expansion in Capgrave's first few lines (2063-7) is only by repetition and by the addition of adjectives; but in the remainder, the devil reiterates the events at Nivelles (lines 2068-9), wishes he had the power to revenge himself (line 2070), and includes Norbert's followers among his adversaries (line 2072).

In the case of the prior the expansions involve expressions of his complete trust in Christ and his acceptance of God's will. So, there is nothing in his long speech conjuring the devil (line 2045-61) which is not implicit in the Latin (cols. 1301-2).
The distinction is always between good and evil, but because he emphasizes Christ's sacrifice and his love, the prior is a somewhat more humanized figure in Capgrave than his counterpart in the Latin source.

The presence of the other members is realized mainly by two additions which give the convent as a whole an active role. The first is a speech (lines 2079-88) in which they all take part in the decision to pray, fast, and undergo corporal punishment to speed the cure of their brother, rather than merely to accept the command of the prior. Later, by expanding “aquam in vase ad hoc habili benedicunt, et cum processione eunt ubi erat demon...” (col. 1302) to

And to pe hous a-non streith pei 3ede.
They made haliwater with grete deuocyoun,
A vessel ful, ordeyned for that cause.
All pe couent went on processioun,
Syngyng and seying many a holy clause.
Whan pei cam pedir...

(lines 2093-8)

Capgrave provides a participating audience for the final action. Thus, on stage for the dénouement, along with the possessed brother, the demon, and the prior is the rest of the convent, and to them Capgrave adds a young boy holding the cross. Finally, the part allocated to the young canon who leads the victim to the font is increased. After the prior dramatically pauses to consider his request, a stanza is inserted to focus greater attention on his moment. In place of the abrupt “ille solus tenuit et usque ad aquam benedictam adduxit....” (col. 1302) Capgrave elaborates:

No man halpe him with hand ne wit3 tonge,
But brout3 him a-lone lich a childe
Pat is led wit3 norce whil he is ful 5unge.
This man, pat was be-for-tyme so wilde,
Now is he made in maner meke and milde.
The deuele qwook in pis mannes presens,
Whiche was so hardy to fulfile obedience.

(lines 2143-9)

Another and much briefer example of Capgrave's ability to
dramatize an event is found in section thirty-one (lines 3263-325). His account derives from the following passage in the Latin:

Non cessabat aemula iniquitas in occulto, in manifesto mansuetam simulans aequitatem, et tanto gravius et nequius, quanto magis a domesticis fiebat et familiaribus. Familiaritas vere dicenda est; quia cum quodam noctis tempore, ad celebranda cum clericis suis Matutinarum solemnia, more solito surrexisset, adverterat clericus quidam de domesticis, et retro ad ostium se in insidiis posuerat, iniquitate plenus et crudeli malitia; utpote armatus competentibus armis, quibus innocentem caute et in dolo ferire posset et interficere. Egressisque capellanis qui praecedebant, sicut mos est in terra (praecedunt enim dominos suos capellani) ille de insidiis prosilens, novissimum putans episcopum, unum ex clericis media veste conscissa percussit. Cumque ille exclamaret et diceret: "Quis est que me laedit?" ille, sonitu vocis, non esse ipsum quern quaerabat agnoscens: "Putavi, inquit, hunc novissimum esse, quem morti tradere disponebam." Praecesserat enim episcopus mistim inter alios, eundem eventum, quasi futurorum praescius, timens. At ille concito curso in fugam versus est, et cum ali ad capiendum illum insequentur: "Sinite, ait vir Dei, fugere eum, nec malum pro malo reddatus; fecit quippe quantum potuit, et quantum ei Deus permisit: nondum enim venit hora mea. Sed qui miserunt eum, non dormient nec quiescent; donec opprobriis suis satientur, et me vel morti tradant, vel, si divinum sit opus quod agitur de me, manifeste probatum reddant.

After a two-stanza introduction (lines 3263-76) stating that Norbert’s good example was despised by certain malicious individuals, Capgrave establishes the scene of this particular episode—Norbert’s habitual solemn attendance at the chapel (lines 3277-80). Then he gives the unknown clericus a motive; failing to observe the rule strictly, he has been frequently reprimanded by Norbert (lines 3281-7). Next, Capgrave inserts a speech made by some of the would-be killer’s relatives, so that when the actual crisis occurs, no explanation is necessary:

"This sory bisschop," pei seid, "pat is so lene, Schal neuer be in pees, but grucchin all his lyf. Go forth, you man, take in pin hand a knyf. "Wayte vp-on him whan he to mateyns goth; Take and serue him, pan schul we be in pees. He is euyr chidyng, euyr angry and wrooth." (lines 3288-93)

Finally, the tableau is presented: the clerk lying in wait (lines 3294-6), the procession passing by (line 3298) while the villain
waits for the last man (lines 3202-3), Norbert by chance walking in the middle (line 3305), and the falling of the blow (lines 3309-10). Then Capgrave adds a speech by the wounded brother to stop the action at the crisis point:

"What art you?" he seid, "in vertu of God a-boue, That smytest me soo, and I greue pe nowt. This maner brothirhod is not groundid in loue."

(lines 3312-14)

At the conclusion, he alters the words of the villain to include a more natural expression of surprise:

"O!" seyde pis theef, "al mys haue I wrowt! That ilk man whech pät I haue sowt He is skaped and goo or pät I wist!"

(lines 3315-17)

Both of these extended scenes clarify Capgrave's relationship to his material. As a scholar-poet, he maintains a fidelity to his sources without that slavish commitment of the copyist which would stifle any re-creation of their contents. Although he is working with characters who are conventional and stereotyped and who permit him little opportunity for shading or individuation, he manages by a careful manipulation of the scene and setting to give them a dimension through dramatization which they do not have in the Latin original. It is this sense of dramatic balance that distinguishes Capgrave as a writer. That quality more than any other compensates for deficiencies in his poetic and narrative art and gives to his work a stamp of originality.