

REPENTANCE AND RETRIBUTION: THE USE OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL IN OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXTS

J.-A. GEORGE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

I felt a bit awkward too so I went into the Sunday School Room. There was some Fuzzy Felt to make Bible Scenes with and I was just beginning to enjoy a rewrite of Daniel in the lions' den when Pastor Finch appeared. I put my hands into my pockets and looked at the lino.

'Little girl,' he began, then he caught sight of the Fuzzy Felt.

'What's that?'

'Daniel,' I answered.

'But that's not right,' he said, aghast. 'Don't you know that Daniel escaped? In your picture the lions are swallowing him.'

'I'm sorry,' I replied, putting on my best, blessed face. 'I wanted to do Jonah and the whale, but they don't do whales in Fuzzy Felt. I'm pretending those lions are whales.'

'You said it was Daniel.' He was suspicious.

'I got mixed up.'

(Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges are not the only fruit*)

Winterson's 'mixed up' twentieth-century rewriting of the book of Daniel is but one in a long line of interpretations based upon the Old Testament text, a text foregrounded in the medieval period in such works as the (anonymous) Old English poem *Daniel*, a selection of Ælfric's *Homilies*, portions of *The Canterbury Tales*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, *Cleanness*, the fourteenth-century alliterative *Susannah* and a wide body of medieval drama and lesser known poems in Middle English.

It is obvious from the above list (one which is by no means exhaustive) that the story of Daniel gained prominence and became a popular source for literature during the Middle Ages.¹ This was true not only in England but on the Continent as well. Fourteenth-century Italy produced, amongst others, three poems dealing with the Susannah episode, the *De Sancta Susanna*, *Tractatus metricus de Susanna* and *Rithmi Susanna*.² From northern

¹ References to, or full-scale reworkings of, the book of Daniel are also found in *Piers Plowman*, the metrical romance *Robert of Sicily* (c.1370), and the late fourteenth-century poem entitled *The bird with four feathers* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 596).

² See J.H. Mozley's 'Susannah and the Elders: three medieval poems', *Studi Medievali*, N.S., 3 (1930), 27-52.

Europe there is the Middle High German *Daniel* and an Icelandic version of the *Somniale Danielis*: the latter provides a good illustration of how Daniel's reputation for being the master of dream interpretation was consolidated in the Middle Ages. In French a number of 'major and representative works in several genres – *La chanson de Roland*, the *Romance of Horn*, and *La vie de Sainte Modwenn*' use the prophet's story as a salvation *exemplum*.³ Moreover, throughout the medieval period there are innumerable Latin writings such as hymns, biblical commentaries and the various *Somniale Danielis* texts which deal, in some shape or form, with the book of Daniel. The drama, largely from the twelfth century, yields such works as Hilarius' *Historia de Daniel representanda* and the anonymous *Ludus Danielis* from Beauvais, both composed in Latin verse.

Though the book of Daniel was decidedly popular with medieval authors, it was not put to any homogenous use. Writers such as Ælfric, Gower and the poet of *Cleanness* chose to draw upon the highlights of the first five books of their Old Testament source, concentrating primarily on Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and madness, the 'writing on the wall' passage and Belshazzar's feast. Chaucer, on the other hand, makes substantial use of the Susannah and the Elders episode, especially in *The Man of Law's Tale*.⁴ Whilst it is difficult to discern any unified literary approach to the book of Daniel in the Middle Ages, it is possible, nevertheless, to group some of the relevant material in terms of shared characteristics. With this in mind, the remainder of this study will be primarily devoted to a discussion of the Old English *Daniel* and the fourteenth-century alliterative *Susannah*; both texts attempt at least in part to explore the relationship between sin and repentance (or lack thereof).⁵

In the Old English *Daniel* Nebuchadnezzar summons the Chaldean commanders (*folctogan*, 527a) to him to ask the significance of a terrifying dream,⁶ and the poet here adds a

³ John Philip Coletta, 'Daniel in the lions' den: symbol of salvation and symbol of the Virgin Birth', unpublished paper, 6.

⁴ Susannah is mentioned by name in Custance's invocation to God, and it seems rather obvious that Chaucer is alerting his audience to the fact that he is recreating Susannah's story in his own tale of a chaste woman who refuses to commit adultery, is then wrongly accused and, at the eleventh hour, is saved by divine intervention.

⁵ All future references to these works and to the poems of the Junius Manuscript as a whole are taken from *The Junius manuscript*, ed. George Philip Krapp, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records [ASPR], 1 (New York and London, 1931) and *Susannah: an alliterative poem of the fourteenth-century*, ed. Alice Miskimin (London: Yale University Press, 1969). 'The emended text of *Susannah* incorporates the editor's conjectural emendations and choices among MS variants from all five versions of the poem' (Miskimin, 1). All translations from OE are my own.

⁶ This is Nebuchadnezzar's second dream, the dream of the tree. See Daniel 4:7–15.

comment not found in the Vulgate source: *nalles þy he wende þæt hie hit wiston/ ac he cunnode hu hie cweðan woldon* (ll.529–30): ‘not because he imagined that they would know it, but he was trying to discern what they would say’. Having posited a ‘riddle’ he knows his own men cannot decipher the king then calls in Daniel to remedy the situation. The prophet’s appearance on the scene attests to the failure of the *folctoga* (‘leader of the people’) and prompts the poet to extol Daniel’s virtues. The description which follows, like others relating to Daniel, is highly formulaic:

Ða wæs to ðam dome Daniel haten,
 godes spelboda. Him wæs gæst geseald,
 halig of heofonum, se his hyge trymede.
 On þam drihtenweard deopne wisse
 sefan sidne geþanc and snytro cræft,
 wisne wordcwide. Oft he wundor manig,
 metodes mihta, for men ætbær.

(ll.531–7)

Then was Daniel, God’s messenger, called to the judgement. From heaven a holy spirit was given to him which strengthened his soul. In him the Guardian-King was aware of a deep and expansive intensity of intellect, the power of insight and wise speech. Often, for the man’s benefit, he had explained many a marvel and the might of the Lord.

As the prophet delivers his *wisne wordcwide* (l.536a) he speaks *for men ætbær* (l.537b), thus creating a point of high drama in the poem. In this address to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians Daniel is, in effect, the poet addressing his own audience. The moral lesson concerning penitence and contrition is, therefore, meant for us all:

Gehyge þu, frea min, fæstlicne ræd.
 Syle ælmyssan, wes earmra hleo,
 þinga for ðeodne, ær ðam seo þrah cyme
 þæt he þec aworpe of woruldrice.
 Oft metod alæt monige ðeode
 wyrcan bote, þonne hie woldon sylfe,
 fyrene fæstan, ær him fær godes
 þurh egesan gryre aldre gesceode.

(ll.585–92)

Consider, my prince, my constant counsel. Give alms, be the refuge of the needy remnant, appeal to the Lord before the time comes when He will cast you out of your worldly-kingdom. Often the Lord permits many a people, bound fast in sin, to make amends – when they themselves have been desirous – before the dreadful terror of God’s wrath drains the life from them.

The nature of the speech cited above, homiletic in tone, suggests that it is possible to place the Old English *Daniel* within the context of early medieval penitential literature. One of the poem’s

main aims, after all, is to chart the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar from *se hæðena þeoden* (l.241a) to one who *bead metodes mihte* (ll.646b–7a). This progression is defined in five easy steps:

Wyrd wæs geworden, wundor gecyðed,
 swefn geseðed, susl awunnen,
 dom gedemed, swa ær Daniel cwæð,
 þæt se folctoga findan sceolde
 earfoðsiðas for his ofermedlan.
 (ll.652–6)

Fate was fulfilled, the enigma explained, the dream realized, the torment overcome, the judgement executed just as Daniel had prophesied; that the leader of the people should experience a difficult journey because of his pride.

Whilst there is no fixed definition of penitential literature,⁷ the Babylonian king experiences all of the identifiable stages in the penitential cycle: temptation, sin, repentance, confession, punishment, forgiveness, and then a rebirth. He is tempted and sins out of pride, and his punishment is exile and madness. Ultimately, however, Nebuchadnezzar (and by extension his people) is offered the chance of a new beginning, both politically and spiritually:

swa him ofer eorðan andsaca ne wæs
 gumena ænig oðþæt him god wolde
 þurh hryre hreddan hea rice.
 Siððan þær his aferan ead bryttedon,
 welan, wunden gold, in þære widan byrig,
 ealhstede eorla, unwaclice,
 heah hordmægen, þa hyra hlaford læg.
 (ll.668–74)

So that there was not any man on earth who strove against him until God willed, through death, to take away that exalted empire. Afterwards, when their loaf-lord lay dead, his successors nobly enjoyed prosperity, riches, wound gold and a sublime abundance of wealth there in the ample city, the haven of men.

Aside from the stages of the penitential cycle charted above, there is another factor to consider in relation to Nebuchadnezzar. Allen J. Frantzen points out that in the literature of penance the sinner often makes a public confession and, interestingly, this is exactly what the Babylonian king does in lines 645–51 of the Old English *Daniel*:

⁷ As Allen J. Frantzen concludes in his book *The literature of penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983): 'Without a certain battering of the text few [works] seem to fit any definition of penitential [literature]' (182).

Ne lengde þa leoda aldor
 witegena wordcwyde, ac he wide bead
 metodes mihte þær he meld ahte,
 siðfæt sægde sinum leodum,
 wide waðe þe he mid wilddeorum ateah,
 oðþæt him frean godes in gast becwom
 rædfæst sefa, ða he to roderum beseah.

The prince of the people did not then linger over the prophet's words but he preached widely of the Lord's might wherever he could make a proclamation. He told his people of his fated journey, the great wandering he had done with the wild beasts until, from the Lord God, a prudent understanding entered into his soul when he looked to the heavens.

Little explanation for these lines has been offered throughout the course of *Daniel*-criticism. Examined in the context of penitential literature, however, they take on a new and significant meaning.

Nebuchadnezzar's role must also be taken into consideration here, for exile is often the punishment deemed suitable for the sinner. Traditionally it is Daniel and the three youths who are seen as the exiles of the poem and have, for this reason, been compared to the three patriarchs (Noah, Abraham and Moses) of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11. This comparison, in turn, is often used to establish exile as a major theme throughout the first part of the codex. It is possible in addition, however, to say that this theme also links the sinners found within the poems of this manuscript. In *Genesis B*, for example, Satan is banished from his heavenly home (*Acwæð hine þa fram his hyldo and hine on helle wearp*, l.304: 'He banished him then from his favour and cast him down into Hell') and Adam's ultimate punishment in *Genesis A* is described in terms of *wræc* ('the misery of banishment'):

Du scealt oðerne eðel secean,
 wynleasran wic, and on wræc hweorfan
 nacod niedwædla, neorxnawanges
 dugeðum bedæled; þe is gedal witod
 lices and sawle.

(ll.927–31a)

You shall seek another homeland, a joyless habitat, and in exile wander as a naked indigent, bereft of the blessings of Paradise; for you is decreed the separation of body and soul.

Similarly, after the murder of Abel God declares to Cain:

Du þæs cwealmes scealt
 wite winnan and on wræc hweorfan,
 awyrged to widan aldre.

(ll.1013b–15a)

For this murder you shall suffer punishment and wander in exile, corrupted for all time.

In *Exodus*, good and bad alike are dispersed and suffer as a consequence. It is clear that exile is a preoccupation of the poem from its opening lines:

Hwæt! We feor and neah gefrigen habað
ofer middangeard Moyses domas,
wræclico wordriht, wera cneorissum,
(ll.1-3)

Listen! We have heard, far and near throughout middle-earth, exceptional people speak of the judgements and commandments of Moses to generations of men.

Like *Daniel*, the Old English hagiographical poems (the poems of the *sanctorale*) are allegories of conversion and salvation.⁸ *Juliana*, for example, insists upon Eleusius' conversion before she will even consider becoming his bride:

'Næfre ic þæs þeodnes þafian wille
mægrædenne, nemne he mæгна god
geornor bigonge þone he gen dyde,
lufige mid lacum þone þe leoht gescop,
heofon ond eorðan ond holma bigong,
eodera ymbhwyrft. Ne mæg he elles mec
bringan to bolde. He þa brydlufan
sceal to oþerre æhtgestealdum
idese secan; nafað he ænige her.'
(ll.108-16)⁹

'Never will I consent to marry this prince unless he more eagerly embraces than he has yet done the worship of God, demonstrating his love with offerings for Him who shaped light, heaven and earth, the course of the oceans and the circuit of the territories. Otherwise he may not else bring me to his abode. With his wealth he must seek a bride's love from some other woman. He shan't have any here'.

Eleusius, in his failure to convert, functions as a negative *exemplum* in *Juliana*. This is seen in a warning issued by the poet:

Ða se synscapa
to scipe sceohmod sceaþena þreate
Heliseus ehstream sohte,
leolc ofer laguflod longe hwile
on swonrade. Swylt ealle fornom
secga hloþe ond hine sylfne mid,
ærþon hy to lande geliden hæfdon,
þurh þearlic þrea.
(ll.671b-8a)

⁸ The phrase used by James W. Earl in 'The typological structure of *Andreas*', *Old English literature in context*, ed. John D. Niles (Cambridge and Totowa NJ: D.S. Brewer, 1980), 70.

⁹ All references to *Juliana* are taken from *The Exeter Book*, eds George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR, 3 (London: Routledge, 1936).

Then the sinful miscreant Eleusius, wanton-hearted, sought the ocean by ship with a band of warriors; for a long while they struggled over the waves along the swan-road. As a harsh punishment, death consumed them all – the crew of men and he himself with them – before they had managed to sail to land.

Turning to *Guthlac A*, the benefits of conversion are illustrated largely through the figure of Guthlac himself. We are told, for example, that he followed the path of sin in early life:

Hwæt we hyrdon oft þæt se halga wer
in þa ærestan ældu gelufade
frecnessa fela;

(ll.108–10a)¹⁰

Why, we have often heard that the holy man, in his earliest days, enjoyed many dangerous things.

The future saint eventually mends the error of his ways, however, through the help of God:

fyrst wæs swa þeana
in Godes dome hwonne Guðlace
on his ondgietan engel sealde
þæt him sweðraden synna lustas.

(ll.110b–13)

Yet the time when an angel would visit Guthlac in his conscience in order that he would forgo all sinful lusts was in the judgement of God.

In contrast to this highly individual experience, conversion in *Andreas* is carried out on a mass scale:

Ða se modiga het,
cyninges cræftiga, ciricean getimbran
gerwan Godes tempel, þær sio geogod aras
þurh fæder fulwiht ond se flod onsprang.

Ða gesamnodon secga þreate
weras geond þa winburg wide ond side,
eorlas anmode, ond hira idesa mid;
cwædon holdlice hyran woldon,
onfon fromlice fullwihtes bæð
dryhtne to willan, ond diofolgild,
ealde ealhstedas, anforhlætan.

Ða wæs mid þy folce fulwiht hæfen,
æðele mid eorlum, ond æ Godes
riht aræred, ræd on lande

mid þam ceasterwarum, cirice gehalgod

(ll.1632b–46)¹¹

¹⁰ All references to *Guthlac* are taken from *The Guthlac poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. Jane Roberts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

¹¹ *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. Kenneth R. Brooks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

Then the noble-minded man, the King's craftsmen, bid that they build a church, make ready God's temple, there where the young were raised up through the Father's baptism and the flood burst forth. Then men gathered together in groups of people from far and wide around the wine-town, men of one mind and their women with them. They professed that they would loyally obey, fearlessly receive the waters of baptism and renounce idol-worship and the old temples. Then in that nation, amongst that folk, baptism was established and God's law and rightful counsel was extolled in the land amongst the city-inhabitants, and the church was consecrated.

In terms of the way in which penance and conversion are achieved, *Elene*, of all the poems of the *sanctorale*, offers a special point of comparison to the Old English *Daniel* for Constantine's embracing of the faith, like Nebuchadnezzar's, is partly brought about by a dream. Constantine's dream is a multi-media event in two parts. The first is comprised of the address which the *wlitig wuldres boda* (l.77a) speaks; the second, delineated in a way which echoes the description of the heavenly messenger, is *wliti wuldres treo* (l.89a) as vision. This marks the beginning of Constantine's conversion to Christianity:

æt þam se leodfruma
fulwihte onfeng and þæt forð geheold
on his dagana tid dryhtne to willan:-
(ll.191b-3)¹²

Through them the prince of the people received baptism and adhered to it all the days of his life, as the Lord willed.

Constantine and Nebuchadnezzar are also comparable in that their dreams have a political as well as a spiritual significance and, as a result, the Roman Empire and Babylon are directly affected by the content of these visions.¹³ Furthermore, it is important to note that both of these leaders (once they have achieved salvation) conform to the behaviour expected of the penitent by becoming humble and obedient to God's law. This is in keeping with Mary Flowers Braswell's observation that

The reformed penitent is never an individual, but a type. His confession has stripped him of those particular sins which have made him unique, and he has espoused the cardinal virtue of humility. His is a passive good; the goal of the confessional has been met, and we find him interesting not for his future activities but for his past.¹⁴

¹² *Cynewulf's Elene*, ed. P.O.E. Gradon (Exeter: University Press, 1977).

¹³ 'The critics say that dreams concerning the welfare of the state are not to be considered significant unless military or civil officers dream them, or unless many plebeians have the same dream'. *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 91.

¹⁴ *The medieval sinner* (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), 13.

Even more apposite to the present discussion is Robert Emmett Finnegan's analysis of Nebuchadnezzar's tumultuous spiritual journey and awakening:

That this faith in the true God, once found, should be lost is serious, perhaps tragic; but not finally damning. For the poem demonstrates both man's curious incapacity to maintain faith with God, and God's loving compassion in always offering man, often despite himself, another opportunity for grace and salvation.¹⁵

This brief comparative analysis of the Old English *Daniel* and the poems of the *sanctorale* has perhaps uncovered some important points of commonality between these texts. As a final thought, then, it might prove useful to cite James W. Earl in the hope of instigating further discussion at some later date:

It is common for the hagiographer to point to the traditional nature of the saint's legend and the legend's non-historical (or non-literal) basis. This is because the saint's life is ultimately devotional rather than historical in our sense of the word. It is more concerned with the truths which underlie Christian history, which motivate it and can be derived from it, than with the particulars of actual historical events.¹⁶

The fourteenth-century alliterative *Susannah*, as its name suggests, takes its main story from the apocryphal thirteenth chapter of the book of Daniel,¹⁷ a chapter which seems to have captured the medieval mind in a particularly dramatic way. Like the other major episodes from the Old Testament book, *Susannah* was important largely because it could be put to a variety of didactic uses. Jerome, for example, interpreted the story as an important historical testimony to divine intervention insofar as Daniel, God's earthly emissary, saves *Susannah* from a great injustice. Jerome also saw a theological significance in the *Susannah* episode in that he read the false witness of the Elders as a prefiguration of that of Judas. As the Middle Ages progressed, other commentators and writers began to discern any number of moral lessons for women, youths, old men, judges and witnesses (to name but a small section of the potential audience) in the story. Chaucer, as has already been suggested, was convinced enough of the episode's creative potential to incorporate it into *The Man of Law's Tale*. Indeed, the poet framed much of the tale around this piece from the Apocrypha. As Alice Miskimin writes in her edition of the alliterative *Susannah*:

¹⁵ 'The Old English *Daniel* the king and his city', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 85 (1984), 211.

¹⁶ 'The typological structure of *Andreas*', 69.

¹⁷ The books of the Apocrypha are problematic and are seen by some commentators as deriving from an entirely separate tradition from the canonical books. We can best define the apocryphal *Daniel* material, therefore, as those stories contained in the Greek translation of *Daniel* which are not found in the original text. Jerome, in his Latin translation, retained the apocryphal books, and in this way they were handed down to medieval writers.

It was interpreted on many levels and in countless forms: as an authentic miracle, illustrating the reward of chastity, patience and faith; as an allegory of the blindness of man contrasted with the sacred innocence of the vision of a child; a lesson on the punishment of atheists (the judges turn from heaven to look on Susannah's beauty); as symbolic of the sufferings of the Church, or of the Christian soul in its dilemma of flesh and spirit.¹⁸

In light of my earlier discussion of Nebuchadnezzar's role as repentant sinner in the Old English *Daniel*, the following analysis of the alliterative *Susannah* will take into account its potential to be read, in Miskimin's words, as 'a lesson on the punishment of atheists'.

As with so many of the texts derived from the book of Daniel, *Susannah* (perhaps the only extant poem written by the elusive Huchown) deviates quite radically from its Old Testament source. This discrepancy is noticeable from the very opening of the poem where the reader is immediately placed in Joachim's garden, a setting indebted to a medieval, as opposed to a biblical, tradition. The garden, long descriptions of which are scattered throughout the poem,¹⁹ is an earthly paradise where flowers bloom abundantly (*The rose raggyd on [rote] richest in [rane]*, l.72), birds sing (*Ther briddis on blosmes brokkid wel loud*, l.79), and the weather is never inclement. The joy which Joachim and his wife Susannah experience in this prelapsarian environment is initially unbounded (*iewes wiþ Ioachym priuily gan play*, l.28) and an obvious attempt is made to identify Susannah with the garden: like the flowers she is *semely of hewe* (l.44) and is [*In*] *ryche robys arayde reed as þe rose* (l.212).²⁰

Joachim's garden, delineated as a place of earthly bliss, is seen to be rightfully enjoyed by God's chosen. Thus, the Elders' intrusion and their attempted violation of Susannah (and, by extension, the garden) takes on an even greater significance here than in the apocryphal source, where the setting plays no significant symbolic role. Frequently referred to as *domysmen* (the word is used six times in the poem), the Elders/Judges foreground the issues of judgment and the law even as they blatantly defy them. As the Elders approach the unsuspecting Susannah, for example, the poet

¹⁸ Miskimin, 199.

¹⁹ There are no allusions to the beauty of the garden in the Old Testament, nor is it even properly described in the source. All we are told is that *Erat Ioakim dives valde, erat ei pomarium vicinum domui suae* (Daniel 13:4). This being the case, it calls into question Miskimin's claim that '*Susannah* is a close verse paraphrase of the Latin prose version of the story in the Vulgate Bible, found in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Daniel' (17). Quotations from the Vulgate in the present paper are from *Biblia Vulgata*, eds Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado, Biblioteca de autores Cristianos (Madrid, 1982).

²⁰ The name *Susannah* (*sosannah*) means *lily* in Hebrew and, thus, identifies this figure even more closely with the garden. In keeping with this, she is described as *Lovely and lilye white [lele] of hynage* in line 16 of the alliterative poem.

writes: *Now are þese domesmen [derf] drawen to derne* (l.131). These words signal the most crucial moment in the poem, for it is here that its central concerns are made clear, concerns perhaps best articulated by a series of questions: how can innocence (embodied in Susannah) be protected? How can those who attempt to violate purity be punished and, correspondingly, how can God's law be carried out on earth, outside of the confines of the garden?²¹

If the construction of the Elders as 'unbelievers' is the main focus of the poem, their lust for Susannah is of importance principally because it is the most obvious manifestation of their spiritual decay:²²

Whan þes *perlous prestes* perceyvid her play
 Do þoght [þe] wrecches to [bewile] þat worþi in wone
 Her wittys [al wytherward] þei writhyn a way
 Ant turnyd from his teching þat [teeld is] in trone
 [Fro] sight of her soueraigne sobly to say
 Her hore hedis fro hevyn þei [hyd apone]
 [And] caught fro her covetyse [camyes] curs for ay
 For rightwis Iuggement recordid þei none
 They two
 [Iche] day by [þe] day
 In þe pomery þei play
 While þei myght susan [assay]
 To worchyn her woo.

(ll.53–65)

These *perlous prestes* (l.53) and *wrecches* (l.54), captivated by Susannah's beauty, lose sight of the symbolic heavenly bliss embodied in both Susannah and the garden and, consequently, turn away from God to pursue their own desires: *[Fro] sight of her soueraigne sobly to say* (l.57). In this regard, the greatest mistake they make lies in their failure to recognize that Susannah's beauty is ultimately a reflection of the *sotil and sage* (l.14) qualities she shares with Daniel. It is also important to remember that the connection

²¹ Of particular relevance here is J. Huizinga's comment in *The waning of the Middle Ages* (New York: Doubleday, 1954) that the medieval imagination was 'directed to the gravity of fault and the horrors of the chastisements. All moral conceptions are exaggerated, overcharged to excess, because they are always placed in direct connection with divine majesty. In every sin, even the least, the universe is concerned. No human soul can be fully conscious of the enormity of sin. All the saints and the just, the celestial spheres, the elements, the lower creatures and inanimate objects, cry for vengeance on the sinner' (217).

²² See 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5: 'Haec est enim voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra: ut abstineatis vos a fornicatione, ut sciat unusquisque vestrum vas suum possidere in sanctificatione, et honore non in passione desiderii, sicut et gentes, quae ignorant Deum'. Another example of the Elders' spiritually lawless behaviour is their giving of false witness, an act which allies them with Judas. Not only do they testify falsely against Susannah but they also lie to Daniel, telling him that they initially entered Joachim's garden *In prayer and penance [as] was our purpose* (210).

between physical beauty and inner spirituality has a long history. Augustine writes in *De civitate Dei*, for example, that:

Iam vero in ipso corpore, quamvis nobis sit cum beluis mortalitate commune multisque earum reperiatur infirmius, quanta Dei bonitas, quanta providentia tanti creatoris apparet. Nonne ita sunt in eo loca sensuum et cetera membra disposita speciesque ipsa ac figura et statura totius corporis ita modificata ut ad ministerium animae rationalis se indicet factum? ... Sunt vero quaedam ita posita in corpore ut tantummodo decorem habeant, non et usum . . . Transitura est quippe necessitas tempusque venturum quando sola invicem pulchritudine ad laudem referendum est conditoris, cui dicitur in psalmo: *confessionem et decorum induisti*.²³

Moreover, even in the body, which is something we have in common with the brute creation – which is in fact weaker than the bodies of any of the lower animals – even here what evidence we find of the goodness of God, of the providence of the mighty Creator! Are not the sense organs and the other parts of that body so arranged, and the form and shape and size of the whole body so designed as to show that it was created as the servant of the rational soul? . . . There are some details in the body which are there simply for aesthetic reasons, and for no practical purpose . . . For practical needs are, of course, transitory; and a time will come when we shall enjoy one another's beauty for itself alone, without any lust. And this above all is a motive for the praise of the Creator, to whom the psalm says, 'You have clothed yourself in praise and beauty'.²⁴

Inversely, a woman's beauty can be seen to signify evil, as in the following extract where, in a discussion of the prophet Jeremiah, the homilist digresses considerably to offer his opinion on the physical allure of women:

Alswa doð monie of þas wimmen heo smuried heom mid blanchet þet is þes deofles sape and claþed heom mid eoluwe claþe þet is þes deofles helfter. and seodðan heo lokied in þe scawere. þet is þes deofles hindene.²⁵

Thus far, I have merely alluded to Daniel's role in the alliterative *Susannah*. This is due, in part at least, to the fact that the prophet does not make an appearance until the final stages of the poem. Just before he is introduced (or perhaps 'raised up' is a more exact phrase) Susannah makes an urgent appeal to God to save her from an unjust fate:

Grete god of his *grace* of gyftes vngnede
 [Wip] help of þe holy herde hyr prayere
 He [dyrectid] his dome [on þis] derf dede
 To danyell þe prophete of dedys so dere
 Such 3yftys he him 3af in hys 3ong hede
 3ett [fayled hym of fourten ful of al] 3ere
 Not to layne
 Then cryed þat frely food

²³ St Augustine, *De civitate dei*, v (London: William Heinemann for The Loeb Classical Library, 1957–72), 330–4.

²⁴ *The City of God*, ed. David Knowles (New York: Penguin, 1980), 1073–4.

²⁵ *Old English homilies and homiletic treatises . . . from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries*, ed. Richard Morris (London, 1867–73; reprinted New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 83.

Why spylle ze [innocentes] blod
 All [þei stoteyd] & stode
 Thes ferlees to frayn
 (ll.276–86)²⁶

In keeping with most portraits of this prophet, Daniel is described as being intelligent, a possessor of the ever-important *dōm*,²⁷ and a performer of *dedys so dere* (l.279). The poet elaborates somewhat on the apocryphal account, however, by designating a specific age to Daniel, fourteen (l.281). In the Apocrypha, all we are told is that the prophet is *pueri iunioris*.

Despite all of his goodly and godly qualities, Daniel emerges as a harsher figure in *Susannah* and in the corresponding apocryphal material than he does in the other chapters of the Old Testament book (in particular the sections upon which the Old English *Daniel* is drawn). This is demonstrated in the language used by the boy prophet when he addresses the Elders:²⁸

Thow seyst þu segh sussanne synne in þy syght
 Tell me now trystily vndur what tree
 Man be the [mikel] god þat most ys of myght
 Vnder a syne sothly my self i [hir] se
 Now þu lyst in þy hed be heuen vpon hyght
 An angell wiþ a naked swerde þe nyzes full ne
 He hath braundest [his] bronde burnysshed full bryght
 To merk [þi myddil] in [melle in more þan in] thre
 No lees
 Thow [brak] goddes comaundement
 To sle such an innocent
 Wyth any fals iugement
 Vndewly on dees

(ll.313–25)

Susannah is a poem which explores the nature of justice²⁹ and it is not surprising, therefore, that Daniel becomes a merciless criminal prosecutor during his interrogation of the Elders. Divine law, of which the prophet is an agent, requires the punishment of these

²⁶ This corresponds to Vulgate 13:44–9: 'Exaudivit autem Dominus vocem eius. ⁴⁵Cumque duceretur ad mortem, suscitavit, Dominus spiritum sanctum pueri iunioris, cuius nomen Daniel; ⁴⁶et exclamavit voce magna: Mundus ego sum a sanguine huius. ⁴⁷Et conversus omnis populus ad eum, dixit: Quis est iste sermo quem tu locutus es? ⁴⁸Qui cum staret in medio eorum, ait: Sic fatui, filii Israel, non iudicantes, neque quod verum est cognoscentes, condemnastis filiam Israel? ⁴⁹Revertimini ad iudicium, quia falsum testimonium locuti sunt adversus eam'.

²⁷ *Dome* appears with some frequency in the poem: 190, 278, 349; *domes*, 37, 292, 310; *Domesman*, 326; *domysmen*, 32, 40, 131, 175, 236. The name *Daniel*, like *Susannah*, is significant and means 'God is judge' (*dōm* = judgement).

²⁸ Compare this with the gentle diplomacy Daniel exercises upon Nebuchadnezzar in 416–29 of the Old English poem. Cf. J.-Anne George, 'Daniel 416–29: an "identity crisis" resolved?', *Medium Ævum*, 60 (1991): 73–6.

²⁹ Much of the poem is concerned with the law, as the poet's initial description of Joachim indicates: *He was so lele of his lawe þer [lyved] non hym liche* (l.3).

sinners. In the end, the Elders are summarily dispatched whilst Daniel looks on, nonplussed:

Then þe folk of israell fellen vpon knees
 And [lovyd] our lord þat her þe lyf lent
 All gomes þat her gode wolde glades & gleees
 That þys prophete so pertly preued hys entente
 They trumped before þe *tratours* & *trayed* hem on trees
 Thorow out þe cyte [for soth] be comune assent
 [Who so] leueth [on our] lord þar hym [not] lees
 That þus his seruant con saue þat schuld [ha] be schent
 [Vnsete]
 Thys ferly be fell
 In þe dayes of danyell
 The [pistel witnessiþ it] well
 Of [þat] prophete

(ll.352–64)

The poem, in its cruel chastisement of the immoral Elders and its unequivocal characterization of the godly Susannah, displays characteristics of the saint's life, and it may well be that the text absorbed some of the more salient features of that genre. *Susannah's* hagiographical indebtedness is further reinforced by the quiet Christian tag which brings the poem to a close:

- P. *Here endith þe storye of Susanne and Danyell,*
 I. *Qui scripsit carmen sit benedictus, amen.*
- V. *Ihesus crist wiþ mylde steuene*
Graunt vs alle þe blisse of heuene amen
- A. *God graunt vs þi grace to play us pertly in þi place*
And feiþely þi feire face to se þat is swete amen
- explicit epistola susanne secundum daniele.*

The Old English *Daniel* and the alliterative *Susannah* help to illustrate the fact that during the Middle Ages the book of Daniel was largely used by western writers to illustrate some facet of Christian morality. It is interesting to note, however, that though the story of Susannah and the Elders continued to be reworked during the Renaissance, these later writers manipulated it to more secular ends. There is, to cite but one example, a sixteenth-century play, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* (c.1578), which conforms to this trend. The play,³⁰ especially its latter half,

³⁰ According to David Bevington in *Tudor drama and politics* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1968), 160, the play is an anonymous hybrid morality, though it has been argued in some quarters that it may be attributed to Thomas Garter. All references to *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* are taken from Thomas Garter, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* (London: 1578; Oxford: Malone Society Reprint, 1936).

concerns itself primarily with theories of jurisprudence. This immediately signals a major departure from the Vulgate source, as does the fact that in *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* the heroine's deliverance is not secured exclusively through divine intervention; and Daniel, though his initial entrance is seemingly effected by 'supernatural' means,³¹ acts only partly as God's prophet. At other times he emerges as a shrewd solicitor exercising his constitutional authority on Susannah's behalf. We see the Judge (*Iudex*) in the play, for example, being so impressed by Daniel's judicial skills that he invites the prophet to join him in the seat of judgement:

And synce that God by thee hath given,
a warning to us al,
Com sit with us in iudgement seate,
least we agayne should fall.

(ll.1077-8)

Thus, Daniel's earthly status is elevated to that of a judge. This is also, interestingly enough, the guise he adopts in another sixteenth-century play, *Nice wanton* (c. 1550). Here, the prophet's opening lines leave the audience in no doubt as to his function:

As a judge of the country, here am I come,
Sent by the King's Majesty, justice to do:
Chiefly to proceed in judgment of a felon:
I tarry for the verdict of the quest, ere I go.³²

David Bevington writes of Daniel's role in *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* that:

The authorial spokesman, Daniel, is a reforming moralist who places civil authority under the guidance of divine law, and who comes close to justifying some kind of human intervention in the name of that higher law . . . Daniel is concerned not merely with justice after this life but with the legal safeguards of this world.³³

It is clear, if one extends the above argument, that the play has a political bias. The genre from which it stems, that of the political morality, is, in part, devoted to an exploration of the nature of tyrants. In this respect, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* has much in common with other plays of the period such as *Cambyses*,

³¹ The stage direction (ll.1061-2) reads . . . and God rayseth the spirite of Danyell. Bevington suggests that this technically complicated direction may indicate that the play was never actually performed (*Tudor drama and politics*, 162).

³² *English moral interludes*, ed. Glynne Wickham (London: Dent, 1985), 155.

³³ *Tudor drama and politics*, 162.

Apius and Virginia and *Jocasta*.³⁴ The somewhat secularized portrait of Daniel offered in this play is also likely to have been influenced by the growing preoccupation with the law found in a great deal of Humanist writing. As Benjamin G. Kohl observes, Humanism arose 'in the cities of Padua, Bologna, Milan and Verona at the time of Dante, fostered by the nascent professional classes of the Italian city-states – lawyers, notaries, school-masters and merchants'.³⁵ In this respect, *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna* is very much a product of Humanist thought and perfectly illustrates how the book of Daniel was manipulated to reflect particular epochs and their own pressing concerns.

³⁴ In George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, Thomas Garter's *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna*, R.B.'s *Apius and Virginia*, and Preston's *Cambyses*, tyranny is identified not allegorically but by the king's or magistrate's lust and his cruelty and hypocrisy in trying to satisfy that lust and protect his position.

'... When he meets a woman, the morality tyrant usually attempts to rape her but is overcome by his own passion. Voluptas and Sensualitas, the wicked judges of *The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna*, are stricken by Cupid's arrows and flames, "the greatest scourge that may be given" (l.728). Each man's compulsion to "heale my secrete wo" (l.732) is almost instantly turned into rage against Susanna when she refuses their advances; as Sensualitas says to her, "we mean to have our will" (l.759). But Susanna's resistance ultimately defeats them': Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of tyrants: political thought and theater in the English Renaissance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 89–90.

³⁵ *Renaissance humanism, 1300–1500: a bibliography of materials in English* (London: Garland, 1985), xv.