



THE LATIN VERSES OVER THE CELL DOORS OF  
LONDON CHARTERHOUSE.

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In his *History of the London Charterhouse*, Sir William St John Hope made public a large amount of information transcribed and translated from the cartulary of the house.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, this cartulary, now PRO, Land Review Miscellaneous Book 61, provided a list of the founders of the cells, to which Hope added biographical information. Our knowledge of the foundation of the cells was furthered by Dom David Knowles and W. F. Grimes, who, in their study of the charterhouse,<sup>2</sup> suggested dates for the foundation of each, from Walter de Manny's initial bequest of 1371 through the mid-fifteenth century. From these sources, we know that the London charterhouse had twice the normal number of choir monks, and thus of heremitic cells, as the usual Carthusian plan, which numbered a prior and twelve monks: the London community numbered twenty-five in all. The contemporary plan for the aqueduct to provide water to the cloister, which also survives,<sup>3</sup> provides confirmation, and shows how the cells were arranged: seven cells, designated 'A' through 'G', along the western wall; another seven cells, 'H'

The authors wish to thank Stephanie Russell and Greta Dinkova-Bruun for their helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Hope, *London Charterhouse*. The founders' list is in fact a list of the dates of endowment, since the provision of funds and the actual building would not have coincided exactly.

<sup>2</sup> Knowles and Grimes, *Charterhouse*.

<sup>3</sup> See particularly the discussion and illustration in Knowles and Grimes, *Charterhouse*, pp. 33-36.

through 'O', along the northern wall;<sup>4</sup> a third seven cells, 'P' through 'X',<sup>5</sup> along the eastern wall; and four cells, 'Y' and 'Z', plus two supernumerary cells, along the southern wall, next to the chapel.<sup>6</sup> In the list of donors of the cells in the cartulary, these two cells are both designated 'S'. According to C.M. Bourtrai's<sup>7</sup> the practice of identifying the individual cells with a letter of the alphabet was a tradition that dated back to the Desert Fathers of Egypt, and for Carthusians this system had the practical advantage of allowing a monk to leave notes communicating his need of food or supplies at his food hatch, or *guiche*, signed with this emblem of his heremitic identity.

It is particularly interesting that the cells of the cloister of London charterhouse are known to have been designated not merely by letters, but by verses beginning with those letters. These verses would probably have been painted above or on the door of each cell, or perhaps affixed to it in some way, with the initial letter of each verse corresponding to the letter of the alphabet above each door or door jamb.<sup>8</sup> London charterhouse was not alone in its literary expansion of these simple letter designations: Bourtrai describes the cells of La Grande Chartreuse in his day (but probably reflecting a tradition dating back at least to the fifteenth century) as bearing texts such as 'a quotation from the Bible, the Fathers, the *Imitation* [*of Christ*], the Carthusian liturgy, or even one of the profane authors.'<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger has recently described manuscript evidence for the decoration on the walls of the inner gallery of the cloister of Basel

<sup>4</sup> The letters 'I' and 'J' were not distinguished in the medieval alphabet.

<sup>5</sup> The letters 'U', 'V' and 'W' were not distinguished.

<sup>6</sup> That closest to the chapel would certainly have been the Sacristan's cell.

<sup>7</sup> [Bourtrai], *La Grande Chartreuse par un chartreux*, 8th edn (Paris: Arthaud, 1950), p. 191; see *The History of the Great Charterhouse*, trans. by E. Hassid (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934), p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> The most recent archaeological work suggests that the letters were probably painted on the door or jamb of each door, for in neither of the two door cases which survive is the letter carved into the stonework; Coppack and Aston, *Christ's Poor Men*, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> La Grande Chartreuse has been rebuilt a number of times: most notably in the period with which we are concerned, after the fire of 1473. In an appendix, he describes the difference in form between the portals of the oldest cells, which had an arched lintel, and those more recent, with a plain flat stone, dating from reconstructions done under Dom Le Masson in 1688. See *La Grande Chartreuse*, pp. 216–17. It should be noted that verses deriving from the *Imitation of Christ*, as Bourtrai describes them, could not have been written before the mid-fifteenth century.

charterhouse, which included both a series of alphabetical biblical verses on the cell doors, and of allegorical paintings on the wall beside each door.<sup>10</sup>

St John Hope's comment on the fact that the cell doors of London charterhouse were identified not only with the simple letters of the alphabet, but with an alphabetic set of verses, was that 'It would be interesting to discover what these verses were.'<sup>11</sup> Knowles and Grimes suggested that perhaps each letter was the initial of a short sentence from a psalm or other scriptural verse.<sup>12</sup> In fact, we know what these verses were: for in an article published in 1967, in which he presented a fifteenth-century English Carthusian *carta visitationis* surviving amongst the binding-sheets of BL, Sloane MS 2515, Dom Andrew Gray independently drew attention to an alphabetically ordered acrostic set of Latin stanzas on the transitory nature of human life that are found in varying versions in four English manuscripts, in two of which they are described as having been written over the doors of the cells of London charterhouse.<sup>13</sup> The first of these occurs in the puzzlingly allusive narrative of (apparently) his own conversion and entry into the charterhouse written by John Blacman at the head of the contents of the Sloane manuscript, a compilation of Latin writings on the *ars moriendi*. A second set of verses, which appear more accurately to reflect the physical layout of the London charterhouse, and bears the heading, 'Omnes isti versus scribuntur super diuersa hostia cellarum in Claustro Domus Carthusiensis London' ('These verses are all written over the diverse cell doors in the cloister of the London charterhouse'), occurs in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.53 [James 1157]. Two other versions of the verses, neither of which mentions London charterhouse, occur at the end of OBL, Bodley MS 131, a copy of *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* by the Mount Grace Carthusian Nicholas Love, and among the extra

<sup>10</sup> Hamburger, 'The Writing on the Wall: Inscriptions and Descriptions of Carthusian Crucifixions in a Fifteenth-Century Passion Miscellany', in *Tributes in Honour of James H. Marrow: Studies in Painting and Manuscript Illumination of the Late Middle Ages and Northern Renaissance*, ed. by J. Hamburger and A.-M. Bouché (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2006), pp. 231–52; see also 'De Cellis Carthusiae Basilienensis' in *Basler Chroniken*, ed. by W. Vischer and others, 11 vols (Leipzig: Hirtzel, 1872–1987), I, 496–98.

<sup>11</sup> Hope, *London Charterhouse*, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> Knowles and Grimes, *Charterhouse*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Gray, 'A Carthusian *Carta Visitationis* of the Fifteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 40 (1967), 91–101.

sheets bound in at the head of the second volume of the Muchelney Breviary, BL, Additional MS 43406.

The verses are of interest for a number of reasons. First, they can help us in defining the spirituality of English Carthusian monks during the late-medieval period. Seen every day by the monks in the charterhouse, the verses played an important part in the life of the community and in its devotional culture. In addition, they allow us to glimpse a world view shared not only by the inhabitants of the London charterhouse, but also by monks across the whole order. In this sense they provide unique insight into what can be called the Carthusian monastic imaginary: those common beliefs and practices that characterize the vocation and corporate identity of members of the order. The verses indicate how monks imagined their surroundings, especially the strict enclosure of their own existence ('the life of the cell'), and how they saw themselves in relation to the world outside the cloister.

The verses also furnish crucial evidence about the visual culture of the charterhouse. These poems would be one of the first things to greet the novice, laybrother, or even a visitor when entering the charterhouse.<sup>14</sup> As words on display, these texts functioned as images or 'spiritual pictures.' Like illuminated initials in a medieval manuscript, they used written language in a material, sensible form. The letters for each cell became poetic objects in themselves, endowed with symbolic significance sometimes epitomized in the opening word of the couplet, as in 'C' for 'Cella', 'G' for 'Gloria', 'K' for 'Kyrie', 'M' for 'Mors', and so on. This topical referencing system, like manuscript shelf-marks writ large, made the charterhouse a living library of texts and ideas. Thus, the verses represent a fascinating counterpoint between Carthusian visual culture and literary practice.

The visibility of the verses as written signs also demarcated the boundaries of the cell in a unique manner, contributing to the formation of the cell as a distinctively Carthusian space. Positioned at the threshold of the monk's earthly habitation, the verses established the limits of the precincts of the 'desert,' emphasizing the topographical boundaries that separated each cell from the rest

<sup>14</sup> On Carthusian legislation that discusses (and condemns) the presence of secular visitors, including women, in the English charterhouses, see Vincent Gillespie, *Carthusian Monks in Desert*, in Sargent, *De Cella in Seculum*, pp. 161–81 (pp. 170–71). Dom Maurice Chauncy's sixteenth-century narrative of life in the London charterhouse also describes seculars, who often withdrew from their cells in tears, saying, 'Truly God is in this place,' M. Chauncy, *The History of the Sufferings of Eighteen Carthusians in England* (London: SPCK, 1890), pp. 26–27.

of the charterhouse and from the outside world.<sup>15</sup> The verses also framed the sanctified institutional space of the cell as a devotional object in itself: a location for contemplation of the written word. As graphic signs, the verses mark the monk's domestic environment as a distinctly textual space — a place for reading.

For Carthusian monks, the cell was the focus for sacred reading and for the production of manuscript books, a form of ascetic practice and manual labour that was emphasized by the order from its inception. The copying of books was a sanctioned pastoral exercise whereby monks could silently 'preach with the hands,' while contributing to the spiritual welfare of others.<sup>16</sup> The order was responsible for a wide range of well-documented literary activity in the Middle Ages: they were active as authors, scribes, and translators, so it is particularly fitting that the entry to each cell was adorned with poetry, which probably would have been committed to memory. Indeed, the Latin term *cella*, or *cellula*, was linked throughout the period to the study of books through its association with memory storage and retrieval. Like the more common *thesaurus*, *cella* was a synonym for the memory.<sup>17</sup>

The alphabet as an ordering system also has richly detailed links to medieval mnemonic technique, and 'memory places' were often arranged alphabetically and placed in imagined architectural settings.<sup>18</sup> As a heuristic scheme tied to concrete physical locations, the verses would have been particularly well-suited to the medieval arts of memory.<sup>19</sup> In addition, although the verse for each cell could function as a self-contained unit, read together they form a complete alphabet poem (*abcedarium*), a widespread medieval literary tradition that was often associated with the *ars memorativa* and with elementary education.<sup>20</sup> The

<sup>15</sup> Megan Cassidy-Welch's remarks on the Cistercians can be applied here to the Carthusians: '[they] were not simply concerned with topographical separation, but also with imagined space [. . .] In this way, the cloister was both material and metaphorical, physically located and mentally imagined.' M. Welch, *Monastic Spaces and their Meanings: Thirteenth-century English Cistercian Monasteries*, Medieval Church Studies, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Carthusian Order*, p. 524.

<sup>17</sup> See M. J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 34–35.

<sup>18</sup> Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 29–30, 109, 125–26.

<sup>19</sup> Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 71–79, 122.

<sup>20</sup> On medieval alphabet poems, see Joseph Szövérfy, *Die Annalen der lateinischen Hymendichtung, ein Handbuch*, 2 vols (Berlin: Schmidt, 1964–65).

disciplinary, monitoring quality of the verses also bears out this link to pedagogy, since they sometimes seem aimed at spiritual beginners learning the basic tenets of monastic life. Many of the verses read like a shorthand primer on monastic life: 'Tempore surge cito, fugias noua, noxia plora, / Semper obedito, te discute qualibet hora; (Rise up quickly at the right time, flee novelties, deplore harmful things, / Obey always, examine yourself at every hour.)

The verses would have served to discipline or train the mind of the monk to think of specific devotional topics each and every time he walked to chapel to perform the divine office, or whenever he entered or left his cell. As the verse for cell 'N' puts it: 'Nunc lege, nunc ora, nunc cum fervore labora: / Sic erat hora brevis & labor ille levis'. (Now read, now pray, now work with fervour: / Thus the hour will be short and the labour light.)

The verses articulate a particular vision of monastic subjectivity that is sometimes dominated by stark polarities. As the verse for cell 'E' puts it: 'Est pax in cella; fortis exant iurgia bella: / Si pacem quæries hanc rarius egredieris'. (There is peace in the cell; outside there are quarrelsome wars: / If you seek peace you will leave it quite rarely.) The monk is to define himself in opposition to the world, which is clearly distinguished as a place of peril, spiritual danger, and carnal temptation: according to the verse for cell 'H', 'His dabitur vere dominium sine fine videre / Qui carnis misere cupiunt viciosa canere'. (To them will be given to truly see the Lord without end / Who desire to avoid the vice-laden misery of the flesh.)

The verses also highlight the 'psychologically exacting'<sup>21</sup> demands of life in the 'desert'. In addition to combating the frequently remarked uponedium of monastic life, the Carthusian monk faced other emotional strains and psychological challenges. E. Margaret Thompson recounts several examples of English Carthusian monks during the period, whose mental health suffered apparently as a result of the seclusion and exceptional austerity of this way of life.<sup>22</sup> It is not surprising that the verse for cell 'D' urges a specifically cognitive form of discipline: 'Dona Dei recolas; vaneſcant omnia vana; / Fortius ut valeas mentis perquirete sana; (Think on the gifts of God; let all vain things vanish; / In order that you may be stronger, seek healthy things of the mind.) The theme is echoed in the verse for cell 'P': 'Peruigili cura ſemper meditare futura; /

<sup>21</sup> Knowles and Grimes, *Charterhouse*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> See Thompson, *Carthusian Order*, pp. 276–98.

Tempora transibunt & gaudia vana peribunt. / With ever vigilant care, think  
 always on future things: / Times will pass and vain joys will perish.)

The most prominent theme in the verses as a whole is the inevitability of  
 death and, in contrast, the rich eschatological rewards promised by life in the  
 charterhouse. With great regularity the verses return to the theme of *memento*

*mori*. The poems for cells 'A' (the abbot's cell) and 'V' are typical in this respect:  
 the first reads, 'Ad regnum celi suspires mente fidel: / Non exalteris quamvis  
 multas dominaris, / Nec iam leteris, quia forsan cras morieris.' (Sigh for the  
 kingdom of heaven with a faithful mind: / Do not exalt yourself, though you  
 rule over many. / Nor even rejoice, for perhaps tomorrow you will die.) The

second, 'Vive Deo gratas, toti mundo tumulatus, / Crimine nudatus, semper  
 transpire paratus.' (Live grateful to God, entombed to the whole world, /  
 stripped of sin, always prepared to pass away.) The message suggests that the cell  
 is a kind of tomb in which one 'dies to the world' and prepares for the hour of  
 death. The Latin verb *tumulare* (to bury or entomb) is used again in the verse

for cell 'Y', reinforcing the impression that the cell is the place where the monk  
 is to perform these arts of dying: 'Ymmixta monache Christi seclusus amore: /  
 Intus palle Deo, totus tumulatus in eo.' (Mingle, lone monk, with the love of  
 Christ: / Sing psalms within to God, be totally entombed in Him.)<sup>23</sup>

Although the verses at the London charterhouse could have originated  
 elsewhere, either within the Carthusian order or generally from within the late-  
 medieval *memento mori* literature, there is no reason to exclude the possibility  
 that they were a native English Carthusian product. In any event, their origin is  
 likely to have been within the order, for the Carthusians are the order for whom  
 the following couplet makes the best sense: 'Cella Dei sedes in qua si tu bene re-  
 des: / Hinc cum discedes victor cum laude recedes.' (The cell is the seat of God  
 in which if you place yourself well / When you pass away from here, you will  
 leave as a victor with praise). The content of the verses is fully in keeping with  
 what has been called the 'literary character of the spirituality of the Carthusian

<sup>23</sup> The idea of the cell as a grave is treated more fully in M. V. Hennessy, 'The Remains  
 of the Royal Dead in an English Carthusian Manuscript, London, British Library, MS  
 Additional 37049', *Vivator*, 33 (2002), 310-54 (pp. 324-26). The particular impetus to  
 think on death in the verses would have had additional resonance for the inhabitants of  
 the London charterhouse, which was built on top of a burial ground for victims of the  
 plague. Sir Walter de Manny founded the monastery as an act of charity. See Hope,  
*London Charterhouse*, pp. 3-6.



order,<sup>24</sup> as well as with the order's preference for the Latin language, even in England, where their interest in vernacular devotional works, as evidenced in the manuscripts they copied, translated, and transmitted, is often emphasized. As the booklists recently published by A. I. Doyle demonstrate,<sup>25</sup> the literature of spirituality of the Carthusian order in England was, like that of their continental confreres, Latinate.

The literary tastes of the English Carthusians have been described by Roger Lovatt as conservative, academic, and orthodox:

Not only were they habituated to a European intellectual syllabus and inherently unsympathetic towards the vernacular, but the particular nature of English heresy actually rendered the vernacular an object of suspicion amongst a group with such traditional and orthodox sympathies.<sup>26</sup>

The verses identify the monks of the London charterhouse as part of this international textual community, but their real value lies not in any of their literary qualities, but in how they transmit Carthusian monastic culture. Fortunately we have a unique record of how the verses were valued and interpreted by one fifteenth-century reader and aspiring Carthusian novice: the primary version of these verses, as noted above, occurs in the conversion-narrative of John Blacman (d. 1485), who is best known to the world at large as the biographer of King Henry VI, for whom he may have served as confessor.<sup>27</sup> It is certain that Blacman was in close contact with Henry VI, moving within the king's immediate circle,<sup>28</sup> and to those interested in late-medieval and particularly Carthusian book ownership, he has been identified as the

<sup>24</sup> M. G. Sargent, 'The Transmission by the English Carthusians of some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), 225-40.

<sup>25</sup> See Doyle, *Libraries*.

<sup>26</sup> R. Lovatt, 'The Library of John Blacman and Contemporary Carthusian Spirituality,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 43 (1992), 195-230 (p. 225).

<sup>27</sup> See R. Lovatt, 'John Blacman: Biographer of Henry VI in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. by R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 418-44; R. Lovatt, 'A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited,' in *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, ed. by A. J. Pollard (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), pp. 172-97; R. Lovatt, 'The Library of John Blacman and Contemporary Carthusian Spirituality,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 43 (1992), 195-230; Henry the Sixth: *A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir*, ed. and trans. by M. R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919).

<sup>28</sup> Lovatt, 'A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes', p. 173.

benefactor who donated sixty-nine manuscript volumes to Witham charter-house.<sup>29</sup> Blacman was a fellow of Merton College, Oxford, from 1436 to 1443, then of Eton College until 1454; he was also warden of King's Hall, Cambridge, from 1452 to 1457, and dean of the college at Westbury upon Tyne, near Bristol, from 1456 to 1458. After an extraordinarily active life in academe and at court, Blacman retired to the cloister, trying his vocation at London Charterhouse in the late 1450s; apparently unsuccessful in his novitiate there, he moved on to Witham in Somerset as a *clericus redditus* about 1463, but apparently without ever making his profession. In this intermediate status, he would have lived more-or-less in a perpetual novitiate, but with the right to retain personal possessions and to leave the order at any time; he probably did so eventually, dying, presumably, outside the order in the mid-1480s.<sup>30</sup>

Sloane 2515 is a compilation of Latin writings on the *ars moriendi* written in Blacman's own hand, and at the head of the manuscript is his transcription of the verses and some autobiographical remarks upon them (see Appendix below). This commentary provides an interesting account of his actual state of mind upon entering the order. Although we do not know precisely how long after his resignation of the wardenship of King's Hall he entered London Charterhouse, it is tempting to hypothesize that the two events marked some great crisis in his personal or spiritual life. His introduction to the volume describes his conversion from the world and entry into the London Charterhouse as a highly personal reaction to the threat of mortality.<sup>31</sup> He begins with the words of Susanna from the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Daniel, when she is confronted by the lecherous Elders with the threat that if she does not yield to their desires, they will tell her husband that they have seen her bathing with another man. Blacman (who refers to himself as 'ruant B') uses her words, 'si hoc egro mors mihi est' ('If I do this, it will be the death of me), to describe his own death to the world: 'What is this 'this'? he asks; he comes to the door of the London Charterhouse and asks to be received into the community. He is assigned to cell 'M', in the middle of the side of the cloister

<sup>29</sup> Doyle, *Libraries*, pp. 630-51.

<sup>30</sup> See Lovatt, 'The Library of John Blacman' (p. 222): 'It is revealing that Blacman occupied the anomalous status of *clericus redditus*, a member of the order and yet not fully integrated into it.'

<sup>31</sup> Blacman's Introduction is also discussed in Lovatt, 'John Blacman: Biographer of Henry VI', p. 427 and *idem*, 'The Library of John Blacman' (p. 212).

opposite the entryway, and he gives the list of the verses over the cell doors. Following this, he repeats the verse over his own cell door as if it is a divination tool: *Mors iuvenes rapit atque senes, nulli miseretur; / Ergo quisque bonum dum tempus adest operetur*; (Death seizes young and old, takes pity on none; / Let everyone then do good while there is time.) He uses the couplet as a mirror in which to see his own mortal reflection. He then holds an anxious imagined dialogue with Death personified, the kind of literary product often found in monastic manuscripts. The entry culminates in his list of the edifying works on the 'Art of Dying' that the manuscript contains.

This autobiographical moment reveals how Blacman associates his new vocation with both a specifically textual and death-oriented set of practices. He attempts to acquire Carthusian monastic culture in a particularly condensed, immediate manner through the verse over his cell door, which comes alive in the image of Death. The passage shows the importance he attaches to the verses for the formation of his new monastic identity. His reply to Death: *Quando placet Christo me carcere soluat ab isto. Ut carnis morte celli partem michi porce*; (When it pleases Christ, let him release me from this prison, so that at the death of the body the gates of heaven lie open for me), shows what a good reader he is of his new surroundings — which is not surprising, given that he had probably put together by this time a considerable part of what Lovatt calls the most comprehensive private collection of devotional texts known to us from fifteenth-century England.<sup>32</sup>

Blacman's account of his intimate encounter with Carthusian spirituality focuses not only the familiar monastic theme of 'world-flight' or 'dying to the world,' but also on what W. Scott Blanchard calls, in a different context, a 'flight into the text'.<sup>33</sup> He sees his future life in specifically textual terms, defined on the one hand by the verses above his cell door with its *memento mort* message, and on the other by the devotional reading programme of the commonplace book for which he has compiled and prepared an introduction, and which he finds especially suitable to his new vocation. In both cases, Blacman conceives of Carthusian life as a life among texts. The charterhouse is the architectural version of his *ars moriendi* volume — a living library of *memento mori*. In this instance his self-analysis merges with the broader cultural matrix that closely

<sup>32</sup> Lovatt, 'The Library of John Blacman' (p. 213).

<sup>33</sup> W. S. Blanchard, 'Research and the Genealogy of Asceticism,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001), 401–23 (pp. 405–06).

aligned the Carthusian order with death and with texts — two themes made explicit by the verses over the cell doors.

The other manuscript contexts in which the verses appear have different kinds of claims to authenticity, including some concrete connections to the Carthusian order. The version of the verses in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.53, which bears the heading, 'Omnes isti versus scribuntur super diuersa hostia cellarum in Claustro Domus Cartusiensis London', is interesting in that it ends with two extra sets of verses with the initial 'S', which would correspond to the list of donors of the cells of the London charterhouse. Neither of the other two versions of verses mentions London charterhouse, although it is possible that in OBL, Bodley MS 131, the copy of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* made in York by John Morton in the mid-fifteenth century, was transmitted through Carthusian channels, since this manuscript is the only one of Love's *Mirror* to be copied in a notably Yorkshire dialect, and it is thus possible that the contents of the manuscript came directly from Mount Grace charterhouse. How a fragmentary version of the verses came to be copied into the end-leaves of the Muechelnay Breviary is rather more problematic, although it is to be noted that Blacman was a native of Bath and Wells diocese, was dean of the college at Westbury upon Tyne, just north of Bristol, immediately before his entry into London charterhouse, and eventually ended his Carthusian career at Witham in Somerset, whence he disappeared without a recorded *obit*. It is probable that he returned to life as a secular cleric before his death, and possible that the Muechelnay fragment of the verses is a relic of the final stage of his career.<sup>34</sup>

The sets of verses differ in a number of ways: the Blacman version (Walther, *Versanfänge* 432)<sup>35</sup> comprises the complete series of the alphabet, beginning with a three-line stanza for the letter 'A', fourteen two-line stanzas for 'B' through 'P', a three-line stanza for 'Q', eight two-line stanzas for the letters 'R' through 'Z' and the sign '+'. In the Blacman manuscript, the letter of each stanza is also provided in rubric in the left-hand margin, and to the right of each verse-bracket is 'cella prima', '2a', '3a' etc. through '23a' and '24a'. The final two verses have been cancelled, apparently by Blacman's hand. The version in the Trinity College,

<sup>34</sup> Not, that is, that Blacman ended his days at Muechelnay, but that whoever copied the verses into the Muechelnay breviary may have encountered them in the region.  
<sup>35</sup> H. Walther, *Carmina Mediae Aevi Posterioris Latina I: Initia Carminum ac Versuum Mediae Aevi Posterioris Latinarum [Versanfänge]* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

Cambridge manuscript (Walter, *Versanfänge* 2178) lacks the initial three-line stanza for the letter 'A', but adds two extra stanzas for the letter 'S' at the end — corresponding, in the latter detail, to the designation of the cells in the list of donors. The verses in the Bodley manuscript and the Muchelney brevariary have minor variations, but because they both begin with the same *incipit* as Blacman's version, they are indexed with it in Walter's *Versanfänge*, while the Trinity version is not. The copy in OBL, Bodley MS 131 interpolates the refrain 'Hec tibi vox celle proclamata incola celle' (Let the voice of the cell proclaim these things to you, inhabitant of the cell) after each set of stanzas; the version in the Muchelney brevariary lacks a number of stanzas, and there are gaps in the actual writing, not corresponding to where the missing lines should be. The four manuscripts agree randomly with each other in varying versions of some of the verses, so that it is impossible to say which more nearly represents the original.

The manuscripts are as follows:

(1) BL, Sloane MS 2515, fols 3–5. Paper, 21 cm x 14.50 cm. A collection of devotional writings compiled by John Blacman. The monastic verses occur among various preliminary materials on fols 1–5; the first of these items, a single sheet folded double (fols 1–2) comprising a *carmen visionis* from Hull charterhouse, was probably added to the collection in the mid-sixteenth century; this is followed by Blacman's autobiographical introduction to the volume — which includes the verses — which is given below. The identity of the scribe is confirmed by the inscription at the bottom of fol. 3: 'London, quod Jo. Blacman'.

(2) OBL, Bodley MS 131, fols 144<sup>v</sup>–145<sup>r</sup>.<sup>36</sup> Paper and parchment mixed, 21 cm x 15 cm. Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, copied by John Morton of York, around 1440,<sup>37</sup> with various other devotional contents. On fols 140<sup>v</sup>–144<sup>r</sup>, immediately preceding the verses with which we are concerned, is a copy of the Lydgate version of the 'Anonymous Chronicle of the Kings of England' (*IMEV*, 444), with a prose paragraph on 'De Tyell of

<sup>36</sup> *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, ed. by F. Madan, and others, 7 vols in 8 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895–1953, repr., with corrections Munich: Klaus, 1980), II:1, 1999.

<sup>37</sup> See Nicholas Love: *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition*, ed. by M. G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), pp. ix–xxd, 132–33.

France. Also bound in, at the beginning of the volume, are a pair of leaves from a Gradual; at the end of the volume are a recommendation of John Morton and his wife Juliana to the spiritual aid of the Austin friars, by William, prior provincial of the order, dated York, 1438 (fols 148-149), and a recommendation of Agnes Wyndhyll, John her son, and Robert to the Carmelite convent of Scarborough, (fol. 150). Carol Meale notes the possibility that John Morton may have been related to the armigerous book-owner of the same name whose will is dated York, 1431.<sup>38</sup>

(3) BL, Additional MS 43406 (The Muchelney Breviary, vol. 2), fol. 1<sup>v</sup>. Parchment, 24.10 cm x 17.50 cm. The two-volume Breviary itself, which belonged to the Benedictine Abbey of Sts Peter and Paul at Muchelney, Somerset, was produced in the late thirteenth century, but has nearly 180 additions (some interleaved) in more than thirty hands ranging from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> The second volume contains the Psalter, Canticles, Litany, the Office of the Dead and Sanctorale, with additions on nine leaves inserted at the beginning, and twelve at the end. The verses with which we are concerned are at the beginning of this volume, in a fifteenth-century hand. Their order suggests that they may have been recalled from memory, rather than copied, since they occur in two series, each in alphabetic order, but with gaps: 'C', 'G', 'I', 'M', 'Q', 'S', 'V', 'Z', 'H', 'K', 'L', 'O', 'P', 'R', 'T', 'X'. There are no verses for the letters 'A', 'B', 'N' or 'Y'; but four lines occur at the end that are not found in any of the other versions.

(4) Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.53 (James 1157), fols 25<sup>v</sup>-26<sup>r</sup>. Paper, 21 cm x 14.60 cm. A notebook with contents in English and Latin, some of which appear to be school texts (for example, the alphabetical Latin poem on fol. 2<sup>v</sup>-20<sup>v</sup>), dating from the late fifteenth century (a note on the birth of Prince Edward, son of Edward IV, 2 December 1470, fol. 29<sup>v</sup>) through the mid-sixteenth (a note of payment made in 32 Henry VIII: that is 1541, fol. 65<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>38</sup> C. M. Meale, 'Of sibis with grete deuotion I pougth what I mygt do plesyng to god: The Early Ownership and Readership of Love's Mirror, with Special Reference to its Female Audience', in *Nicholas Love at Walsden: Proceedings of the International Conference, 20-22 July, 1995*, ed. by S. Oguro, R. Beadle, and M. G. Sargent (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 19-46, at 26.  
<sup>39</sup> See *Muchelney Memoranda*, ed. by B. Schofield, Somerset Record Society, 42 (Frome: Somerset Record Society, 1927). The monastic verses are printed on pp. 55-56.

Other relevant items include a transcription of the verses written on the tomb of Richard II (fol. 45') and those written on the tomb of Symon Langham summyne Abbot of Westminster. In addition, the volume shares two items with another English Carthusian manuscript, BL, Additional MS 37049, the ABC of Aristotle (*IMEV*, 3793) and a popular lyric, 'O man unkynde' (fol. 69<sup>v</sup>; *IMEV*, 2504). The hand of the verses is cursive, of the late fifteenth century. The heading, 'Omnes isti versus' is written in the same hand at the top of the page, in red; a blank space, sufficient for a single line with appropriate spacing before and after, but not for a two- or three-line stanza, occurs between this heading and the poem itself. The final stanza of the poem occurs on fol. 26', followed by seventeen lines of accounts, cancelled.

*Appendix: John Blacman's Autobiographical Introduction to BL,  
Sloane MS 2515*

IHC

fol. 3<sup>r</sup> Si hoc egero, mors michi est [Daniel 13. 22], dicit B. truanus quispiam cum  
Susanna pia. Vetur ista legem pruaricare. Ambit & ipse transitoria vitare. Ista  
nolens mortem corporalem, promisit, Si hoc egero, mors michi est. Ille nolens  
mortem eternalem, sed amplexans temporalem, annuit Si hoc egero, mors michi  
est. Et quid est illud 'hoc'? Antra deserti Cartusialis prope Smithfeld aggregeditur  
ille B., patrem inibi pulsans pro monasterio sibi fratrumque societate tribuendis.  
Fratrum insuper caritate conclamantium paterna pietas comota, concedit  
postulata cohabitandi scilicet monachiam. Deinde honestas pudorisque claustra  
subintrans ac penetrans ille B., iussus delegit sibi de viginti quatuor alfabeti  
litteris depurata latinis, M. monasterium, quod medium consistit vertique  
extremitati ouans versiculi consortio innodari: 'Medium tenuere beat'  
Qui titubat si M. gramma sit ad mediam cellarum ipsarum, perconteritur singulas  
per ostia earum, habet enim prima in circuitu cella que est venerabilis patris  
nostri prioris, sic:

a. Ad regnum celli suspires mente fideli:  
cella prima. Non exalteris quamvis multis dominis,  
Nec iam leteris, quia forsan cras morieris.<sup>1</sup>

b. Bis duo sunt que mestificant {me} nocte dieque:<sup>2</sup>  
2<sup>o</sup> sic En moriar sed vbi vel quomodo nescio quando.<sup>3</sup>

c. Cella Dei sedes in qua si tu bene te des:  
3<sup>o</sup> sic Hinc cum discedes victor cum laude recedes.

<sup>1</sup> In the following notes, the Blacman manuscript (BL, Sloane MS 2515) is designated by the sigl S, the Trinity manuscript by the sigl T, the Muchelney breviary by M, and the Bodley manuscript by B. T lacks the verses for the letter 'A'.  
<sup>2</sup> Scrolled brackets thus — {} — in this transcript mark interlinear additions by the scribe.  
<sup>3</sup> M lacks the verses for the letters 'A' and 'B'. At this point, B adds a three-line stanza: Segnicem fugito; que sunt noctura caneto; / Pulses absque mora noctis cum venerit hora; / sis celer vt possis egris dare debita cun[ct]is.



d.	Dona Dei recolas; vaneant omnia vana; Fortius <sup>4</sup> ut valeas mentis perquirere sana. <sup>5</sup>	4 <sup>a</sup> cella
e	Est pax in cella; fortis extant iurgia bella: Si pacem queris hanc rartus egredieris.	5 <sup>a</sup> cella
f	Fallitur insipiens vite presentis amore; <sup>6</sup> Sed bene scit sapiens quantum sit plena dolore.	6
g	Gloria natorum, dilectio dulcis eorum, Cuncta relinquuntur nec postea inueniuntur. <sup>7</sup>	7 <sup>a</sup>
h	His dabitur vere {dominium} sine fine videre Qui carnis misere cupiunt viciosa canere. <sup>8</sup>	8 <sup>a</sup>
j	Illis iungentis quorum nunc facta sequentis: Elige sanctorum consortia non reproborum.	9 <sup>a</sup>
k	'Kyrie' dic Christo quociens avertis ab ipso: Obscero 'Parece {michi}', me quem fac paradisi.	10 <sup>a</sup>
l	Limus homo primus; sortem mutare nequimus. Unde superbum? Quid ego, quid tu nisi limus? <sup>9</sup>	11 <sup>a</sup>
m	Mors iuvenes rapit atque senes nulli miseretur; Ergo quisque bonum dum tempus adest operetur.	12 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>4</sup> T: Fortune.

<sup>5</sup> In place of the verses for the letter 'D', B has the following two stanzas: Hanc quicumque domum frater semel ingrederis / Tu de morte tua mediteris nam mortis / Quamuis sis fortis memorare tamen queso mortis / Contra vim mortis non est medicamen in ortis / Ergo tue domui dispone nec inde moreris. // Dampna fleo rerum set plus fleo dampna dierum / Quisque possit [pocet M] rebus succurrere nemo diebus. The latter of these stanzas also occur in M.

<sup>6</sup> Final '-e' corrected from '-is' in S.

<sup>7</sup> T has the following variant verses for the letter 'G': Gloria, fama scolis, laus, artes, cetera mundi / Vana nimis valeant: spes michi sola Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> The verses for the letter 'H' follow those for 'Z' in M.

<sup>9</sup> The verses for the letters 'K' and 'L' follow those for 'H' in M.

13 <sup>a</sup>	n	Nunc lege, nunc ora, nunc cum feruore labora: Sic erit hora breuis & labor ille leuis. <sup>10</sup>
14 <sup>a</sup>	o	O quam dirantur qui cethica regna hucrantur; Uiuunt iocundi qui spernunt gaudia mundi.
15 <sup>a</sup>	p	Peruigili cura semper meditare futura; Tempora transibunt & gaudia vana peribunt. <sup>11</sup>
16 <sup>a</sup>	q	Qui non assuescit virtutibus dum iuuenescit, A vicijs nescit discedere quando senescit. <sup>12</sup>
17 <sup>a</sup>	r	Regia magestis, omnis terrena potestas; Prosperitas rerum, series longinqua dierum; Transiet <sup>13</sup> absque mora mortis cum venerit hora. <sup>14</sup>
18 <sup>a</sup>	s	Sit tibi lex Dormini requies, caro victima, mundus Exilium, celum <sup>15</sup> patria, vita Deus. <sup>16</sup>
19 <sup>a</sup>	t	Tempore surge cito, fugias noua, noxia hora, Semper obedito, <sup>17</sup> te discute <sup>18</sup> qualibet hora. <sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The verses for the letter 'N' are lacking in B and M.

<sup>11</sup> The verses for the letters 'O' and 'P' follow those for 'I' in M. B and M have the following

variant verses for the letter 'P': Per nullam sortem poteris repellere [B: depellere] mortem /  
Fac bene dum viuis; post mortem uiuere si vis [the last three words missing in M].

<sup>12</sup> I has the following variant verses for the letter 'Q': Quid punctus, quid momentum,  
quid queritur instans; / Quin [magister, cancelled] magis eternum querita corda Jesum.

<sup>13</sup> T: Transies.

<sup>14</sup> The verses for the letter 'R' are displaced to follow those for 'P' in M.

<sup>15</sup> T: celum.

<sup>16</sup> B has the following variant verses for the letter 'S': Si vis saluari semper studeas imitari  
/ Vitam iustorum, fugiens exempla malorum, which echoes the verses for 'I'.

<sup>17</sup> M: obedito.

<sup>18</sup> M: distrahe.

<sup>19</sup> The verses for the letter 'T' follow those for 'R' in M.

v	20 <sup>o</sup>	Vine Deo gratus, toti mundo tumularus, Crimine nudatus, semper transire paratus.
x	21 <sup>a</sup>	Xristo deuotum studas te tradere totum. Qui vis saluari verus monachusque vocari. <sup>20</sup>
y	22 <sup>a</sup>	Ymixa <sup>21</sup> monache Christi seclusus amore; Inrus psalle Deo, totus tumularus in eo. <sup>22</sup>
z	23 <sup>a</sup>	Zelator motum vis scandere regna polorum; <sup>23</sup> Tempus tunc redime per luctum nocte dieque. <sup>24</sup>
+	24 <sup>a</sup>	{Dominum lauda}; <sup>25</sup> locundo tempore lauda Turbine fortune flabilliore Deum. <sup>26</sup>

fol. 4<sup>r</sup>

Ergo cum libeat trutano predicto in istis medium carpere cellam, opus ad 'M' litteram firmos componere gressus morti concessicam.<sup>27</sup> Nam patentes in habitabilis | illius fontibus sic se litere habenr, 'Mors iniunes rapit atque senes nulli miseretur / Ergo quisque bonum dum tempus adest operetur, vt supra. Ac deitrus responderetur morti sic aspiciant;

**Dicit Mors dialogus cum celliula:** 'Pulso quis hic?' 'Ego sum; quis tu?' 'Mors: Quid petis?' 'Ve intrem.' 'Expecta.' 'Quantum.' 'Donec me fecero promptum.

**Expectare volo sed te dimittere nolo.**

**Ergo festina dum vita manus peregrina.**

<sup>20</sup> The verses for the letter 'X' follow those for 'T' in M.

<sup>21</sup> Medial '-x-' corrected from '-3-' in S; B: 'Ympinga'.

<sup>22</sup> The verses for the letter 'Y' are lacking in M.

<sup>23</sup> T adds, then cancels, here: 'Tempore tunc redeme.

<sup>24</sup> B ends at this point, with the refrain 'Hec tibi vox celle proclamitat incola celle, Amen.

Venimus imposco presentu, dico venimus.

<sup>25</sup> For Dominum lauda, M has: Da Domino laudes.

<sup>26</sup> The verses for the letters 'Z' and '+' are cancelled in S; T lacks the verses for '+', but adds two more sets of verses for the letter 'S': Sola placent celebri conuita splendida regi; / Sola placent alto peccora casta Deo. // Sit tibi cella placent, pes tardus ad exteriora; Semper

vbique tacens, aude, lege, plange vel ora.

<sup>27</sup> There is a note at the bottom of the page: "cephas"; caput; idem cephalicum' quod est 'capitalem';

Quando placet Christo me carcerē soluat ab isto.  
 Ut carnis morte celli pateant michi porre.  
**Cur contristaris cum sis michi familiaris?**  
**Non parco caris vox testis sit popularis.**  
 Qui Deus est, & qui pius est, de virgine natus.  
 Te superabit, meque iuuabit pacificatus.  
 Terram tria regat, demon perita resumat.  
 Mundus res habeat. Spiritus alta petat.

Nunc, nunc sibi ipsi {rephlet} antedictus B. truanus cum Susanna pia quod  
 preassumptum est, 'Si hoc egero, mors michi est,' nam mors illi ultra serie  
 deputata est. Et  
 fol. 5<sup>r</sup> ve corporis cladem seu | mortem cum uenerit non abhorreat, imo sufficit  
 patienter, feruenter studeat, huius codicis posita subsequenter.  
 Ex quibus dulciter hauriet illud ueritatis parafraasticum<sup>28</sup> in delectationem  
 inefficentem. Atropos curat quod Lachesis perantea traxit. Quoniam cum  
 omni {oculis & auribus} fastidiose & immane complacens, mors & vita duello  
 confingant mirando. Vita uidelicet absque termino duratura, quam nisi contingo  
 nisi interueniente corporis morte nec accipio, prout ab uniuersitatis {conditore}  
 statuum est, si, pro quia, 'Si nunc hoc egero, mors michi est.' Ac postea de  
 dulcissimi saluatoris misericordia, sempiterna sua gloria in retributione eterna.  
 Amen.

[The Table of Contents of the manuscript follows]:

Ars moriendi.  
 Breuis tractatus de arte moriendi.  
 Scientia uilissima homini mortali que est scire mori.  
 Meditatio beati ieronimi.  
 De uita beati augustini magni parafraastes.  
 Speculum ualde Horribile beati ieronimi.  
 Ambrosius sanctus de bono Mortis.  
 Parafraastes beati gregorie lectionis iiii<sup>m</sup> apostoli.  
 De morte cuiusdam pape bona.

<sup>28</sup> At bottom of page: 'parafraastes': qui loquitur ad similem, non ad uerba; inde  
 'parafraasticum' addicione.