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A Flouryngge Aege: Tracing the Sacred and Secular in the Book of St. Albans

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A Flouryng Aeg: Tracing the Sacred and Secular in the Book of St. Albans

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

by

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Abstract

With the introduction of the printing press to England around the mid-fifteenth century, English authors were not only writing under the lingering influence of Chaucer and the conventions of established medieval genres, but now had to confront the implications for reading and readership that printing brought with it along with the already turbulent political climate of the fifteenth century. Though this cultural shift was arguably a gradual one, with the earliest printers taking special care to remain faithful to the manuscripts they were copying, and conventional scribes likewise being commissioned to make copies of printed works, there were nevertheless radical innovations in text production and formatting being experimented with well before 1500 (Eisenstein 51-52). It was into this literary scene that *The Book of St. Albans* was published, a collection of treatises on hawking, hunting, and “other dyuers playsaunt materes belongynge unto noblesse” traditionally attributed to the Prioress Julyans Barnes (Barnes, rev. d viij). In spite of the book’s contemporary popularity, scholarship on the text has conventionally been limited to exploring the authenticity of the book’s authorship or relaying what the text reveals about the practicalities of late medieval sport. There has been a noticeable lack of analyses which read the collection as a cohesive literary text, which will be my endeavor throughout this project. Through this literary analysis, I hope to break free of the common trappings of previous scholarship and to showcase that *The Book of St. Albans* is a fascinating piece of secular literature in its own right which exemplifies the shifting consciousness of fifteenth century English society.

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INTRODUCTION

The Book of St. Albans is of perennial interest to those seeking to examine the literary works of medieval women, being not nearly as canonized as the contributions of Marie de France or Christine de Pizan but nevertheless periodically returning to the attention of medieval scholars along with renewed debate over the identity of the book's author. The book was originally published in 1486 and was the first English work to use color printing (Hardie 5). This first edition contained three treatises on hawking, hunting, and heraldry. In 1496, the book's second edition was published with the addition of a "Treatyse of Fysshyng wyth an Angle." The conventional story surrounding the book's authorship attributes the work to Julyans Barnes, often modernized as Juliana Berners by scholars and printed as "Bernes" in the book's second publication. Julyans was the daughter of Sir James Berners and the sister of Baron Richard Berners and held the title of Prioress at Sopwell Priory in Hertfordshire. However, the only extant evidence to validate this story is this line which occurs towards the end of the treatise on hunting: "Explicit Dam Julyans Barnes in her boke of hunting" (Julyans Barnes, *The Book of St. Albans* rev. e ij., ed. Haslewood). The rest of the story comes to us from a manuscript note in a copy from the collection of William Burton, which may have been made as early as 1612: "This Booke was made by the Lady Julian Berners, daughter of Sr. James Berners, of Berners-Roding, in Essex, Knight, and Sister to Richard Lord Berners. She was lady prioress of Sopwell, a Nunnery neere St. Albans, in which Abby of St. Albans this was first printed, 1486. She was living 1460" (Haslewood 7). Any further historical records on the life or other works of Barnes are either lost or never existed.

The common consensus which scholars seem to have reached is that most of the treatises are translations of pre-existing French works, with the book of hunting probably containing most

of Julyan's original input, since it is the only one to comment that this is "her boke of hunting" and, being composed in rhyme, it is stylistically unique. This is not to say that Barnes' own voice is absent from her translations. On the contrary, she will often pause to speak directly to the audience towards the beginning and end of each treatise to justify its placement in the volume or to explain a certain decision which she made in her presentation. For example, at the end of the "Treatyse of fysshynge wyth an Angle," she justifies the work's inclusion in the larger volume by stating:

this present treatyse sholde not come to the hondys of eche ydle persone whyche wolde desire it yf it were enpryntyd alone by itself & put in a lytyll plaunflet therefore I have compyld it in a greter volume of dyverse bokys concernynge to gentyll & noble men, to the entent that the forsayd ydle persones whyche sholde have but lytyll mesure in the sayd dysporte of fysshynge sholde not by this meane utterly dystroye it (Barnes, i iiii).

This desire to keep certain knowledge contained within the upper tiers of society reiterates a very common theme which is present throughout the *Boke of St. Albans*, which is Barnes' desire to speak directly to and solely to "gentylmen and honeste persones". It is interesting, then, when one compares the text's courtly, secular nature to the religious station of the woman who, regardless of what amount of the text we may comfortably assign complete credit to, was nevertheless the one to compile and translate these works and to introduce them to the English-speaking world.

I am certainly not the first to observe this apparent disconnect between work and author. Thomas Warton wrote in the second volume of *The History of English Poetry* that "For an abbess disposed to turn author, we might more reasonably have expected a manual of meditations for the closet, or select rules for making salves, or distilling strong waters. But the diversions of the field were not thought inconsistent with the character of a religious lady of this eminent rank" (172). Warton goes on to state that "The barbarism of the times strongly appears

in the indelicate expressions which she often uses; and which are equally incompatible with her sex and profession” (172).

This unease which male scholars felt at the idea of Barnes, a female religious figure participating in what they viewed as manly pastimes and speaking of these pastimes in blunt, practical terms, would extend well beyond the 18th century. Even as Alexander Dyce quotes the above passages by Warton in his 1827 publication *Specimens of British Poetesses*, he takes care to make a side-note stating, “That she followed the chase is by no means certain” (1). Even the nineteenth century’s most staunch supporter of Barnes’ authorship, Joseph Haslewood, describes in the foreword to his facsimile of *The Book of St. Albans* the duties assigned to a prioress of Sopwell in detail before concluding that “Under such restrictions it is impossible to believe that the staid prioress could, while in the exercise of such an important station, devote her time, without impeachment, to the diversions of the field” (15-16). He then states that the supposition that Barnes was not the sole author of every treatise, a relatively new theory at the time, actually works to her advantage, “by freeing her character from the weight of censure, by which it has long been shadowed, and giving it a fairer claim to be considered as feminine” (17). The less involvement that Julyans Barnes is assumed to have actually had in both physically engaging with these field sports and with acquiring knowledge of them, the more comfortable she became as a historical figure to the men discussing her.

It is easy to see the shortcomings of such arguments, especially after subsequent generations of medievalists have discovered various references in artistic and literary works to noble women participating in the courtly world of the hunt. Richard Almond provides a succinct summary of our current knowledge on this topic in his 2011 book *Medieval Hunting*, stating that “The real amount of active involvement of women in hunting is unknown and probably

impossible to quantify” but that “What appears clear is that there were gender-specific roles and rituals associated with the noble hunt” (24). Women participating in falconry is particularly common in illustrations of the time, and hawking was considered an essential part of a young noblewoman’s education. Almond references two French poems dating from the thirteenth century, authored by Robert de Blois and Jacques d’Amiens, which “specify that hawking, together with chess, telling stories, being witty and playing musical instruments, was part of ‘the notion of polished manners required of society ladies’” (24).

It would not have occurred to Barnes’ original audience, then, that there was anything peculiar or unfeminine about a woman of noble birth having extensive knowledge of hunting or hawking. However, these arguments do raise a compelling question about the relationship between the very courtly, secular nature of the text and the religious position of its author. *The Book of St. Albans* would likely exhibit to a fifteenth century reader less of a transgression of boundaries between gender, but a transgression between the boundaries of the divine and the worldly. In this regard, this text would hardly be unique in the shifting landscape of fifteenth century English literature. It is appropriate, then, for one to analyze this collection of treatises in the same manner which one would analyze a Lydgate poem or any other such contribution to the English literary canon.

Therefore, I will first highlight the ways in which *The Book of St. Albans* differs from the works of Barnes’ predecessors and contemporaries from within the church. Though members of the clergy throughout the Middle Ages were not as limited in their scope of literary culture as one may assume, there is nevertheless a noticeable difference in the dynamics between sacred and secular within Barnes’ writing when compared to her peers. Then, although I do not wish to follow the example of medievalists preoccupied with Julyans Barnes’ gender, it will be necessary

to also examine the roles that gender plays throughout the text, as doing so provides not only the potential to come to a better understanding of Barnes herself, but also of the social atmosphere and popular consciousness of the text's historical context. This context will be further investigated in the third chapter, in which the social and political climate of the fifteenth century will be examined as it pertains to how *The Book of St. Albans* was influenced by and likely would have exerted influence on its original audience.

These discussions will then culminate into what I hope to be the clearest conclusion, that *The Book of St. Albans* is not just noteworthy as an odd curiosity due to its ongoing authorship debate or its documentation of the fifteenth century's material culture, but is worthy of literary analysis in its own right due to its place in the rapidly changing climate of English literature following the introduction of print culture and in the development of the European conception of sacred versus secular as well as England's changing conception of itself as a society.

CHAPTER 1: BARNES' PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES

In Barnes' introduction to the "Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle," we are told of Solomon's parable that "a good spyryte makyth a flourynge aege." Barnes makes the connection that "good dysportes & honest gamys in whom a man Joyeth without any repentance after" may then fulfill this parable, providing the audience with what is basically the thesis of the entirety of *The Book of St. Albans*, as she specifically lists hunting, hawking, fishing, and fowling as examples (rev. g iij). Of these, Barnes states that she considers fishing to be superior because it doesn't entail as many of the stresses or hardships found in the other sports, providing the reader

with short, almost humorous descriptions of the potential woes of each of these activities as evidence.

The benefits of fishing as described by Barnes are spoken of as an aid to the individual's physical health in addition to their spiritual well-being. Combining both the language of religion and of medicine, Barnes quotes the *Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*, "Si tibi deficiant medici, medici tibi fiant/ Haec tria: mens laeta, requies, moderata diaeta," and provides an English translation to her reader: "Yf a man lacke leche or medicine he shall make thre thynges his leche & medicine: and he shall need never no moo. The fyrste of theym is a mery thought. The seconde is labour not outraged. The third is dyte mesurable" (g iij). Of course, this conflation of religion and medicine is not unique, as these two fields were thoroughly entwined throughout the Middle Ages. However, if we compare this passage to Hildegard von Bingen's *Physica*, a text predating the *Book of St. Albans* by about three hundred years but similarly coming from the pen of a Benedictine nun, some key differences come into focus.

The *Physica* states that "With Earth was the human being created. All the elements served mankind and, sensing that man was alive, they busied themselves in aiding his life in every way" (Bingen 1). However, Hildegard von Bingen is quick to make it clear to the reader that nature is not omnibenevolent, writing that "Through the beneficial herbs, the earth brings forth the range of mankind's spiritual powers and distinguishes between them; through the harmful herbs, it manifests harmful and diabolic behavior" (1). As she proceeds to list different herbs and minerals which were popular in the medicinal practices of the time, Hildegard von Bingen relates whether the ingredient in question is hot or cold according to humoral theory in addition to its practical uses. Though she does attribute illness to evil spirits, she also describes "herbs which have in them the foam, as it were, of the elements" and adds that "the devil loves

these and mingles himself with them,” implying that the destructive qualities of these herbs exist as a natural, inherent component of the plants and that the devil, rather than creating their evil qualities, is attracted by their evil qualities (1).

When one looks at the medicinal herbs which Juliana Barnes references in the *Book of St. Albans*, though, there is no such nod to humourism or to the spiritual aspects of the plants. In her treatise on hawking, Barnes provides particularly extensive and in-depth remedies for a wide variety of maladies which a hawk might suffer from. These instructions are given in a very blunt, pragmatic fashion, speaking to the reader in the second person. For example, when describing a treatment for Podagra, Barnes writes, “When youre hawkes fete be swollyn she hath the podagra then take fresh may butter and as moch of Oyll of olyf and of alyn, and chause it Wele to gedre at the fier and make ther: of anoyntment. and anoynt the fete iiii days, and set hir in the sonne, and yeve hir flesh of a cat” (c iiiii). She goes on to suggest an additional, similar course of action (another anointment with slightly different components and setting the hawk on a cold stone rather than out in the sun) should this one fail, ending the section with the simple assertion, “and she shalt be healt”. Her list of remedies includes not only which medicines to provide the hawk but also treatments such as blood-letting and methods by which to improve the animal’s general well-being and quality of life. These methods include fundamental animal care such as keeping one’s bird in a warm, dry environment with regular baths and clean, fresh food. She even acknowledges the practical concern of cost when she instructs the reader to “ever more gyve her good hote meetys. For it is better to a man to fede his hawke while she is tender wyth hote meetys: to make her good wyth some cost: than to fede her with evyll meetys to make her unthrifty wyth lytyll coste” (a ij).

Hildegard von Bingen herself inherited her characterization of medicinal herbs through the literature and practical application of a medical tradition established by Benedict of Nursia, who “listed care of the sick as one of the instruments of good works” (Throop). Following this example, centuries of monks and nuns would sustain an approach to medicine which combined both knowledge and cultivation of herbs and spiritual health. Hildegard von Bingen, in her biography of Saint Disibod, describes the saint as possessing all of the qualities of a good herbalist “who plants in his garden spices and aromatic plants, and always endeavors that his garden be green and not dry [...] many sick and weak people were brought to him, whom the Holy Spirit, through his merits, quickly healed” (Throop). Here, the recovery of Saint Disibod’s patients is attributed mainly to the moral character and spiritual merits of the healer rather than the tools of healing. Though his garden of medicinal herbs is mentioned, it is done so more to illustrate Saint Disibod’s adherence to the responsibilities of a healer and by extension his adherence to God than it is to describe the natural properties of the herbs themselves.

In contrast to this, Julyans Barnes’ depiction of nature is one of an idyllic, benevolent force with health benefits which exist within the natural world itself and which do not require a holy figure as an intermediary. When speaking of a hypothetical fisherman, Barnes sets the scene thusly: “a sweet ayre of the swete savoure of the meede floures: that makyth hym hungry. He hereth the melodyous armony of fowles” (g iij). This peaceful nature scene is positioned as an escape from the demands of high society, which Barnes establishes by concluding this description with “whyche me semyth better than alle the noyse of honndyes: the blastes of hornys and the scrye of foulis that hunters: fawkeners & foulers can make” (g iij). There is a duality established between the natural world and the world of the human court, with the former presented as purer and more attractive than the latter. This differs not only from the schemes of

nature as described in Hildegard von Bingen's *Physica*, but from the well-established literary convention in which fifteenth century writers would equate the machinations of court with the idealistic beauties of nature, the most famous example contemporary to Barnes being *The Floure and the Leafe*, an anonymously authored allegorical dream-vision. In this vision, the mysterious courtly revelers that the dreamer encounters align themselves with symbols taken from nature, dividing themselves into the court of the flower and the court of the leaf, and nature acts upon the company in order to reveal the moral significance of their choices in the form of a storm. Those who aligned themselves with the leaf, representing constant love, are provided with better shelter than those who aligned themselves with the flower, representing shallow, fickle love. Nature's most important role in the poem is to reflect the emotions and values of the human revelers and to reinforce ideals of courtly romance. In comparison to such works, Barnes' depiction of Nature is further separated from such human drama and her language seems almost critical of the rituals of high society.

However, I do not wish to paint a portrait of Barnes as cynical towards chivalric customs, as she explicitly invokes the divine right of kings in her "liber armorum" and provides her most spirited defense of knighthood within this same treatise. The treatise begins with a genealogy starting with Adam and listing several biblical figures leading to the sons of Noah. The justification which Barnes gives the audience for providing this chronology, however much it incorporates the language of the theological, is planted firmly in the realm of worldly politics. "A bonde man or a churle woll saye all we ben comen of Adam," she writes, "Soo Lucyfer wyth his company maye saye all we ben comen of heven. Adam the begynnyng of mankynde was as a stocke unsprayed & unfloris shyd. & in the braunches is knowledge whiche is rotyn & whiche is grene" (e vj). This chronology is thus meant to illustrate when and how human society became

divided and unequal, serving as a prelude to the chivalrous subject of the treatise proper. It is also meant to justify this social inequality, apparently in response to arguments which Barnes encountered around the time of the treatise's compilation.

The lingering presence of religiosity throughout the “*liber armorum*” following this introduction manifests itself in the typical language of chivalry, such as when Barnes lists the four “*temporall vertues*” and the four “*ghostly vertues*” of knighthood (the last of the ghostly virtues being “*he shall holde wyth the sacrefyce of the grete god of heven*”.) and in the designation of a man of the church as a “*gentyلمان spyrytuall*” (rev. f ij). Barnes details this spiritual knighthood in her section on the four “*dyverse manere of gentylmen*,” grouping it together with knighthood attained through blood and knighthood attained through merit. According to her description, this spiritual peerage is distinct from that of the secular court but does not supersede it. She illustrates this by pointing out that if a nobleman's son were to enter the priesthood, then “*he is a gentilman bothe spiritual & temporal*” (rev. f ij).

However, this line between nobility by blood and by spirit soon becomes blurred as the passage progresses. Barnes asserts that Jesus Christ “*was a gentyلمان of hys moder be halve*,” yet does not clarify whether this is a claim of earthly lineage or if this is a claim that spiritual nobility can be inherited as well. She then mentions the apostles, who she lists as “*Jews & of gentylmen come bi the right lyne of that worthy conqueror Judas Machabeus*,” yet she describes their descendants as having fallen into poverty over time and losing the label of gentlemen (e vj). This concession of the fluid nature of class seems almost antithetical to the authoritarian tone with which Barnes has designated the upper and lower classes as justly separated since biblical times (though this section does gain additional weight when one considers the circumstances surrounding Barnes' own family, which will be discussed later.) In addition to this, we see yet

another crack in the wall between secular and spiritual lineage in the invocation of the lineage of the Jewish people as both one of faith and one of birthright.

The peculiarity of the relationship between the secular and the spiritual within the *Book of St. Albans* may be more clearly appreciated when compared to contemporary texts which were similarly written by or for religious women. C. Annette Grisé provides a comprehensive summary of such texts in “Proliferation and Purification: The Use of Books for Nuns after Arundel.” Grisé writes “The mid-fifteenth century tradition disseminated the ideas established in the earlier part of the century, as vernacular spiritual treatises circulated among monasteries and pious households. In the treatises of this period we find a particular emphasis on the clean soul and the related notion of the prayer of the clean heart” (509).

An example of this trend may be found in the *Disce mori*, a fifteenth century compilation of instructional religious texts addressed to a “Suster dame Alice” by an anonymous writer. Lee W. Patterson describes the general layout of this text in his 1979 article *Ambiguity and Interpretation: A Fifteenth-Century Reading of Troilus and Criseyde*, writing “The *Disce mori* is divided into five parts and a concluding ‘exhortation to the persone that hit was written to.’ The standard catechetical material is disposed throughout these five parts but, with the exception of the accounts of the sins (Part II), is presented with an emphasis upon its appropriateness to the religious life” (299). The contents of the concluding exhortation are the most relevant to the discussion central to Patterson’s article and so is the section most thoroughly explored by him, thus why it is the section that will be at the center of our comparison.

The anonymous compiler addresses the sister presumably receiving the manuscript as “my best-beloved Suster dame Alice, / Whiche that for Jesus’ love have hool forsake / The world, the flesshe, and the fende’s malice” (L, fol. Lr). The war between spiritual love and

worldly pleasures is likewise the focus of the exhortation, with particular emphasis placed on how sinful love of the flesh disguises itself in the language of romance. To make this point, the author incorporates several literary references, including a quote from Ovid, a French proverb, and a reference to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. The author also employs the metaphor of the seven tokens of fleshly love, a motif which Patterson identifies as having originated in "a mid-thirteenth-century handbook for nuns by David of Augsburg, *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione*, also known as the *Formula novitioru*" (299). David of Augsburg's text had apparently received something of a revival in the fifteenth century, as there exist three other Middle English translations from this time period (Patterson 300). This text thus provides us with a glimpse into the intertextuality of fifteenth century religious literature as well as the concerns which were at the forefront of religious writers' minds.

Contrasting this text with *The Book of St. Albans*, the aforementioned intertextuality of the *Disce mori* demonstrates the ease with which the religious writing of Barnes' time could borrow from both sacred and secular genres, even if a text's stated goal is to dissuade the reader from worldly matters. Taking this into consideration, Thomas Warton's previously quoted assertion that the "indelicate expressions" employed by Barnes "are equally incompatible with her sex and profession" is revealed to be even further from the perceptions of her original audience and contemporaries, as it was entirely possible for a religious subject matter to be conveyed through the language and conventions of secular literature. However, although it is possible that Barnes was influenced by religious tracts such as the *Disce mori*, there is a significant difference in how the two texts approach the worldly pursuits which they describe.

In the *Disce mori*, the most common element binding the seven tokens of fleshly love is the emotional toll that love takes upon the involved parties and how these emotions distract the

lovers from dedicating their thoughts and prayers to God. Of the fifth token of fleshly love, the sending of tokens, letters, and gifts between lovers, the narrator says that these trinkets “be worshipped, kissed, used and kept as reliques” betraying the underlying theme of these hypothetical lovers allowing the object of their affections to replace God as a new idol. With this underlying logic in mind, one may look to the *Disce mori* as containing a perfect example of the “clean heart” rhetoric of which C. Annette Grisé spoke.

The Book of St. Albans, however, contains no such rhetoric. Though one of the prescribed health benefits of fishing is the spiritual contemplation which one achieves when one removes oneself from society and solitarily absorbs the beauty of nature, Barnes never frames this as a pursuit which should come at the expense of secular concerns. Instead, the two are thoroughly intertwined. Of the overall benefits which the sport of fishing brings, Barnes writes “for it shall cause hym to be holy, and to the heele of his body, for it shall cause hym to be hole. Also to the encrease of his goodys, for it shall make hym ryche” (h j).

Not only does Barnes’ hypothetical fisherman benefit from his contemplative surroundings on an individual level, but these gifts are presented as being destined to spread on a macrocosmic scale in accordance with the parable that “a good spyryte makyth a flourynge aege,” a sentiment which Barnes claims is attested to by both the parable of Solomon and by “the sayd doctrine of physyk” (referencing her earlier quotation of the *Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*.) This coupling of the spiritual with the temporal is found once again when Barnes references “the olde englysshe proverb” that “who soo woll ryse erly shall be holy helthy & sely” (h j).

It seems that whenever Barnes explicitly invokes religious subject matter, she does so in a way which resists the contemporary trends in sacred literature aimed at or authored by women

of the church and instead relies heavily upon her own interpretation of well-established medieval tropes. As a point of comparison, let us consider the works of one particular fifteenth century male author for whom gender was not a constraining factor affecting his literary career, but his religious station was. John Lydgate is a particularly good example for our purposes due to the extent to which he experimented with genre throughout his career, preceding and probably influencing Barnes yet demonstrating noticeable differences in how the two approach the secular conventions which they seek to emulate.

Himself a Benedictine monk, Lydgate is primarily remembered today for his longer works which brought Romance epics, such as Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* and the *Roman de Thebes*, out of their primary placement in the realm of Latin and French prose and into the English-speaking world and for his short works which sought to emulate Chaucer in almost every secular genre which Chaucer himself explored. This legacy has secured him a place among the likes of Chaucer and Capgrave as a "man of letters" (Drabble 616). In fact, Lydgate resigned from his office soon after being made prior of Hatfield Broad Oak in 1423 in order to focus on his travels and his writing, demonstrating a fascinating instance of how ambiguous the lines between sacred and secular authority could become for certain men of the church within this time period.

Lydgate's *The Temple of Glas* further demonstrates this apparent disconnect between text and author, as many medievalists have observed and analyzed throughout the years. Among them is J. Allan Mitchell, editor of the 2007 publication of the poem, who comments that "indeed, the poem is an example of secular court verse in which he indulged without the scruples one might assume (however anachronistically) in a medieval cleric". As Mitchell then explains, Lydgate experimented with several different genres, *The Temple of Glas* being among his forays

into courtly love literature. The poem is framed as a dream vision and describes a series of troubled lovers who make complaints to the court of Venus, ending with the dreamer waking and being grief-stricken at the vision's absence.

Lydgate's choice to follow the convention of embodying love with the pagan goddess rather than an allegorized Love (as in the *Roman de la Rose*) further reinforces the poem's distance from sacred literature. Even more curiously, the narrator dedicates the poem to "my lady," leaving the reader to speculate on the identity of this mysterious lady and leaving open the possibility of the text being part of an attempt to woo this imagined lady, despite the status of the author. Additionally, there is a tradition of critics who interpret the moment in the poem in which a group of female complainants mourn that they were committed to a convent at a young age and were thus denied the chance to pursue love as a "belated *cri de coeur* for what [Lydgate] has missed" since Lydgate himself was a young boy when he joined the order at Bury (Pearsall 104).

Although *The Book of St. Albans* contains no references to love, courtly or otherwise, one can nevertheless see a stark contrast between the ways in which these two fifteenth century writers from the church approach their secular subject matter and their layperson audience. Lydgate envelops his work almost entirely in the conventions of romance literature, allowing him to circumvent the question of religion by rendering it irrelevant to the text at large except in standalone instances such as the nun complainants. *The Book of St. Albans*, in contrast to this, does not limit itself to following the conventions of one genre and so allows itself more freedom in how it incorporates religiosity into its subject matter. The treatise on hunting begins with a call upon the reader to "take hede how Trystam doo you tell", a gesture which invokes the language of secular romance, yet the treatise on fishing begins with the aforementioned claim that the sports contained in the volume may fulfill Solomon's parable that "a good spyryte makyth a

flourynges auge”. The “*liber armorum*” provides details of chivalric pageantry, but only after establishing its chivalric interpretation of the genealogy of Christ.

However, this intertextuality by itself is by no means unique to Barnes. As Marcelle Thiébaux observes in her introduction to Barnes within *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology*, a combination of references to both religious and chivalric figures was typical of earlier hunting manuals, but such texts lack the pragmatism and precision found throughout *The Book of St. Albans*. “Connections to ‘hunting’ saints such as Eustace, Hubert, and Giles might be included,” Thiébaux writes, referencing earlier handbooks, “as well as anecdotes about Godfrey of Bouillon, Perceval, and Charlemagne” (479). Barnes, on the other hand, demonstrates through her practical and in-depth instructions that she is primarily concerned with the applicability of her words to the instruction of her reader. As previous quotes from her treatise on hawking demonstrate, she was not only concerned with instructions on how to perform the activity themselves, but also with mundane aspects of the sport such as the price of food for a hawk and the daily upkeep of a healthy animal. Her approach demonstrates that, like Lydgate, she was a writer who was keenly aware of the literary culture of the 15th century but that she was more willing than Lydgate to sacrifice conventions of the past for the practical benefit of her audience.

CHAPTER 2: THE ROLE OF GENDER IN *THE BOOK OF ST. ALBANS*

If we are to discuss what accommodations Barnes may have made for her audience, though, we must first try to establish who Barnes’ anticipated audience is. If we base our analysis on the audience most frequently spoken to by the text itself, then the presumed audience is not only secular, but predominately consisting of upper-class men. As previously mentioned, she

addresses her compilation to “gentylnen and honeste persones” and often describes the symbols which are detailed in the “Blasyng of armes” as being part of a predominantly male domain of knowledge with language like “There is a nother manere of sygne in armys by diverse noble men borne” and “There ben certen noble men whyche beere armys heeded as here it apereth” (a j). This exclusion of women as active participants in chivalric pageantry it is at odds with the historical reality which Herbert Norris catalogues in his 1927 book *Medieval Costume and Fashion*. In this, Norris details the pervasive trend throughout the high and late Middle Ages of noblewomen incorporating armorial designs into their costumes when attending tournaments and other public festivities. “The women of France were the first to adopt the fashion of displaying armorial bearings upon their garments,” Norris writes, “The earliest illustration extant is to be found in a French MS dating about 1285, and shows a lady, the wife of Sir Joifrois d’Aspremont and daughter of Sir Nicolas de Kievraing, in the dress she probably wore at the Tournai de Chauvency which took place that year” (Norris 328).

The treatise also fails to mention the historical reality that women were permitted in several different circumstances, such as in the absence of any sons or while the daughters remained unmarried within their father’s lifetime, to bear and inherit their family’s coat of arms and that a family’s coat of arms would often be halved or quartered to incorporate the patterns of both the maternal and paternal line (Norris 315-316). However, there is a short passage within Barnes’ “liber armorum” which explains that a son may wear his mother’s coat of arms if “a gentylwoman” is “weddyd to a man havynge no cotearmure” (g j).

Likewise, the treatise on fishing also appears to speak almost exclusively to a male audience, describing the physical and spiritual benefits which fishing brings to “a man” in the opening reference to Solomon and charging the reader not to violate fishing taboos such as

overfishing or fishing on another man's property "in the name of alle noble men." However, as with most of the treatises in the *Book of St. Albans*, the reader is often addressed by the second person "ye" and Barnes' usage of the pronoun "he" could simply be due to the Middle English tendency to refer to gender-neutral subjects with the "he" pronoun.

After all, while describing the major types of fish which one might expect to catch and how best to catch them, Barnes repeatedly refers to the fish as "he." For example, when introducing the pike, she writes: "The pyke is a good fysshe: but for he devouryth so many as well of his owne kynde as of other: I love hym the lesse" (rev. I ij). There is also a line from the *Boke of Huntyng* in which Barnes is describing hares which reads "And whan he is female and kyndlyth hym within", indicating that the gender of pronouns she chooses to employ does not necessarily always line up with her envisioned subject (d ij). This is complicated, though, by the usage of feminine pronouns to refer to hawks in the treatise on hawking. For example, when warning the reader of the risk that even a well-trained hawk may not return to its handler, Barnes writes "for though she be wel reclaimed it may happe that she woll soore soo hyghe in to the ayre that ye shall neyther se nor fynde her" (rev. a j). This feminization of hawks persists throughout the text, though there is one outlying passage which instructs the reader to "kepe hym well from colde: and from hurtyng of his bonys." However, this soon transitions back to feminine pronouns after employing masculine, then gender neutral, then feminine within two sentences: "And ever more gyve hym clene meete & hote, and a lytyll & often. And chaunge often theyr meete: but loke it be hote And kytte her meete in to smalle morcellys" (a ij).

One may posit that these inconsistencies could be due to the original usage of pronouns within the French manuscripts which Barnes is probably translating from. I concede that obtaining a full picture of the subtleties of Barnes' translations is impossible without access to

her sources, but Julyans Barnes so often injects her own thoughts throughout each text that it seems doubtful that preserving the grammatical tendencies of the original author was among her priorities. To find further support for this, one may look to a very similar, earlier work on hunting by “‘Mayster John Gyffard and Willm Twety,’ who were in attendance on King Edward the IId” (Haslewood 51). The various similarities between the two texts have led some to postulate that this was the work which Barnes adapted into her own *Boke of Huntyng*.

Haslewood held that the two were both derivatives of an even earlier work, but dedicates more time in his 1810 introduction to the *Boke of Huntyng* describing the differences between the two rather than their similarities. “The variations are numerous,” Haslewood writes, “the one being in prose, and the other in verse: in one section of the manuscript occurs an useful description of the art ‘to blow,’ a matter of instruction necessary with the followers of the diversion, yet unnoticed by our authoress, while many other branches of the science described by ‘our dame’ are not to be found in the manuscript” (51-52). Whether Barnes created a versification of the Gyffard and Twety text or both works are “grafts derived from the same stock,” as Haslewood says, these differences demonstrate the agency which Barnes allowed her own voice to have within her translations and adaptations.

Regardless of the intentionality behind Barnes’ usage of gendered pronouns, though, she tends to only make the gender of her human subjects clear when referring to noble men. However, noble women are clearly discussed in the “*Treatyse on Hawking*”. This treatise provides a large, comprehensive list of which birds are appropriate for which person based on the individual’s gender and class. The list contains designations for an emperor, a king, a prince, a duke, an earl, a baron, a knight, a squire, a “lady,” and a “yonge man.” We are then told that “there ben mo kyndes of hawkes,” grouping together, as one final item, hawks for a “yoman,” “a

poore man,” a “preest” and “an holy water clerke” (rev. c v). Only a few of these designations are accompanied by an explanation. The three birds reserved for an emperor, the eagle, the “Bawtere”, and the “Melowne,” are apparently done so because of their ability to hunt large game, such as a crane, a fawn, or an elk. We are also told that a Hobby hawk is the appropriate choice for a young man because they are “hawkes of the toure” who “ben both illuryd to be callyd and reclaymyd.” The underlying idea in this case seems to be to start a younger falconer with a smaller, more easily handled bird.

However, there is no explicit explanation, either practical or symbolic, given within the text as to why the “Merlyon” is “for a lady.” Though the general trend within this list seems to be that the size of the bird decreases whenever the status of its handler decreases (assuming that the current averages for these species are consistent with the average weights and sizes of their ancestors in the fifteenth century,) the Merlon hawk seems to be the exception to this rule, as it is larger than a sparrowhawk, “an hawke for a preest,” yet smaller than a goshawk, which is “for a yoman.” Considering the Merlon’s historical usage as a catcher of small prey, the underlying logic may be that smaller game implies less bloodshed and less chance of injury. This would be consistent with Almond’s theory that hawking was seen as more appropriate for noblewomen than other field sports due to it “lacking the fast pace and bloodier aspects of hunting but involving the aristocratic skills of horsemanship and the pursuit of game” (24).

Regardless of these gendered designations, though, it seems that Barnes, though not as gender non-conforming as the romanticized vision of her as “another Diana” which Haslewood scoffs at in his introduction, was nevertheless attempting to assert authority within a male-dominated literary genre. It is possible, then, that the maternal voice employed by the narrator throughout the “Boke of Huntynge” is meant to counterbalance this. The narrator addresses the

reader as “my chylde” at various times throughout the poem and there exists a separate manuscript which contains only the treatise on hunting without a prose introduction, unlike the version presented in *The Book of St. Albans*, which begins with the lines:

Mi dere sones where ye fare be frith or by fell
 Take good hede in his tyme. How tristrem wol tell
 How many maner bestes of venery there were
 Listenes now to oure dame, and ye shullen here (Haslewood 49).

The verses printed in the *Book of St. Albans* similarly instruct the readers to “take hede how Trystam doo you tell” and to “Lysten to your dame”. The opening lines of the previously mentioned Gyffard and Twety manuscript do not contain any such evocation of a feminine authority figure (Haslewood 52). However, this command to the audience also calls upon “Tristrem,” a masculine chivalric ideal. Later, the poem shifts back and forth between a maternal voice speaking directly to the audience and a dialogue between a young student and his master, who answers the students’ various questions about hunting and animal behavior. This shift happens suddenly and with little to no transition, adding a layer of ambiguity to the identity of the speaker and to the role of the reader in this exchange of information. The audience is thus confronted with appeals to both masculine and feminine authority and to both the reader as active participant and as passive onlooker.

In order to begin to approach what Barnes’ intentions behind this narrative choice were, it’s pertinent to consider the genre of the courtesy manual which these passages both borrow and deviate from. George Shuffelton provides a comprehensive introduction to this genre in his preface to “How the Wise Man Taught His Son,” which is a definitive example of such a text. The text presents itself as a dialogue between father and son in which the son is instructed on how to conduct himself in daily life in order to be a man of good character. This includes a broad range of topics from how one speaks and acts in public to how to be a good husband and a pious

layman. The contemporary “How the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter,” takes a similar approach, framing itself as instructions given to a young woman from her mother. Barbara Hanawalt has theorized that the rise in the popularity of such texts mirrored the rise of urbanization in early fifteenth century England and that these texts targeted young people “partly because the demo-graphics of the period made young people a scarce resource; both the urban and rural economies depended on well-governed youth” (Shuffelton).

In its formatting, then, the “Boke of Huntyng” seems heavily influenced by such manuals, as it similarly presents itself as the words being shared to a youth by an experienced elder. However, as previously mentioned, the ambiguity of the exact nature of the treatise’s speaker causes the text to break away from the heavily gendered way in which information is presented in both “How the Wise Man Taught His Son” and “How the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter”. Whether intentional on Barnes’ part or not, this opens the knowledge presented in the treatise to a broader audience than just “gentyll and noble men,” or, at the very least, creates a text peopled with a broader range of gendered voices than was typical of hunting manuals or courtesy texts.

CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *THE BOOK OF ST. ALBANS*

To gain a more complete picture of Julyans Barnes as an author, and consequently *The Book of St. Albans* itself, let us consider not just her literary influences but the events surrounding her life and how they may have shaped her writing. Haslewood relates that Julyans’ father “fell a victim to the turbulence of party, and was beheaded in 1388, as one of the evil counsellors of his imbecile master, Richard II (...) though the family was not restored in blood

until the general act of parliament passed in the twenty-first year of the same reign” (7-8). In spite of this shifting of fortune for the Berners family, it appears that they never lost their standing in court as Sir Berners’ widow took Sir Roger Clarendon, a knight and son of Edward Prince of Wales, as her second husband and it was after this marriage that the oldest son Richard received the title of Baron (8).

Returning to the discussion of knighthood and inheritance in the “*liber armorum*” referenced earlier, Barnes’ description of the gradual loss of nobility among the apostles’ descendants does take on a somewhat different meaning when one considers that it was penned by a historical person whose family had experienced the shifting nature of status and public opinion firsthand. After all, when describing the apostles’ descendants, she writes “by successyon of tyme the kindred fell to poverttee after the destruccon of Judas Machabeus,” placing the onus for this fall from grace on the removal of an individual from power, much like the turmoil her and many other families underwent following the deposition of Richard II. Additionally, she goes on to say, “And then they fell to labours: & were callyd no gentylnen,” emphasizing public opinion as the final determining factor which removed these lines from their previous standing.

Beyond its tumultuous conclusion, there were many other aspects of the reign of Richard II which would continue to influence the politics of England well into the fifteenth century, not the least of which because of the changing legal consciousness brought about by the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. Anthony Musson dedicates his 2001 book *Medieval Law in Context: The Growth of Legal Consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants’ Revolt* to investigating the cultural psychology surrounding the legal systems of twelfth-to-thirteenth century England, and I

believe that his evaluation of the revolt in 1381 on the psyche of the English people at large is particularly pertinent to the treatment of class within *The Book of St. Albans*. Musson writes:

The nature of law, its persona and authority, was conveyed not only through its force as custom [...] but also through its intangible images and mysterious practices which could have an equally arresting effect on those caught up in its web. Consequently law meant something (positive and negative) to all persons: it did not simply symbolise oppression for the poor, but carried for them [...] opportunity for remedial action in various everyday situations and even freedom from serfdom (254).

When one takes this context into account, the justification of class which Barnes provides in the “*liber aromorum*” takes on a reactionary tone, especially when she provides her retort against the argument that “all we ben comen of Adam,” which she credits as being specifically the type of argument which would be made by a “bonde man or churl.” In the biblical narrative which follows this, Barnes argues that, because Adam and Eve had no parents of their own (meaning they were exempt from the class system) and in their children “were founde both gentylnn and churle,” the universal heritage which the lower class were claiming to share with the nobility would therefore not be sufficient evidence to support equality. She credits Cain as being the first “churle” and claims that he earned this status through the slaying of Abel, not that he was born with it. Once again, even though the supposed goal of her narrative is to justify the existing divide between the upper and lower classes, she betrays that these distinctions are nevertheless fluid and often ambiguous.

This fluidity comes up once again within the following paragraph, in which Noah divides the world between his three sons. Barnes’ descriptions of which corners of the world were assigned to which son differ greatly from the designations typically given in medieval “Isidorean” or “T-O” Maps, which associate Shem with Asia, Japheth with Europe, and Ham with Africa (114). In contrast, Shem is described as inheriting Africa, which she calls “the countree of temperaunce,” Japheth as inheriting Asia, “the countree of gentrymen,” and Ham as

inheriting Europe, “the countree of churles” (e vj). The iconographic significance which is typically given to Asia in the medieval “T-O Map” aligns with Barnes’ designation of Asia as a place of nobility, or at least of divine importance, as the largest and uppermost section of such maps is uniformly reserved for Asia. As Barnes herself explains to her audience, this high status is due to the biblical events and figures set within the boundaries of what medieval thinkers classified as “Asia.” Barnes takes this religious inheritance and translates it to the inheritance of a noble title, using the language of chivalry to draw a genealogical line from Jafeth to Jesus in order to establish Jesus as having belonged to an upper-class bloodline: “that gentyll Jhesus was born very god & man after his manhede kynge of the londe of Jude & of Jewes gentylman by his moder Mary prynce of Cote armure” (f).

Less typical than this characterization of Asia as a land of religious import is Barnes’ characterization of Africa in relation to Europe. Below Asia, medieval “T-O” maps typically depict Europe and Africa as occupying an equal amount of space at the bottom of the page, Europe on the lower left and Africa on the lower right. Continuing our earlier interpretation of this imagery as reflecting the iconographic significance of each region, this implies an equal amount of divine importance attributed to both Europe and Africa. Barnes, in contrast to this, conveys a categorization of the world in which Asia and Africa are both morally superior to Europe. In the speech which Barnes depicts Noah delivering to his sons, Noah commands Shem to “multyplye Abellys blood that so wickydly was slayn” by populating Africa and describes Jafeth’s inheritance of Asia as a blessing “in stede of Seth Adams sone,” saying “as welthe & grace shall be: there thyn habitacion shall be,” but these are both preceded by him speaking of Ham’s inheritance of Europe as a curse brought about by Ham’s wickedness:

Now to the I geve my curse wyckyd for ever. I gyve to Northe parte of the worlde to draw thyn Inhabytacion, for there shall it be: where sorowe and care colde & myscheyf as

a churle thou shalt have in the thyrd part of the worlde: Whiche shall be callyd Europa. That is to say the countree of churles (e vj).

As Benjamin Braude concisely unpacks in his 1997 article *The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, the story of Ham was not yet linked to racist propaganda in the literature of medieval Europe. Illustrations of medieval texts on the sons of Noah typically depicted him and all of his offspring as white, the earliest depiction of a descendent of Ham as a black sub-Saharan African which Braude was able to find coming from the 1493 printing of *Das Buch der Croniken und Geschichte*, in which only one of Ham's descendants, Dedan, is given stereotypically black features (122-123).

I believe that Barnes' placement of Africa along with Asia as a place of spiritual importance is due to two historical developments which were shifting the typical narrative of the Isidorean map, one being the political turmoil plaguing England and Europe at large and the other being the shift in Europe's perspective of Africa due to an increase in communication with African nations. Ethiopia established contact with Europe through diplomatic envoys who reached Venice in 1402 and maintained these relations for decades afterwards, promoting the image in the medieval European mind of the Christian African as a counterpoint to the pre-existing image of the foreign Saracen. As Braude explains following his own summary of these exchanges, "Italians had every reason to know that Ethiopians were different from themselves, but such a vulgar and superficial corporeal conceptualization of ancestry and relationships could be overwhelmed by the more profound affinity of faith" (126-127). With the Wars of the Roses still plaguing England at the time of *The Book of St. Albans* publication as well as the gradual decline of feudalism throughout fifteenth century Europe, Barnes' classification as Europe as "the countree of churls" takes on a particular resonance as she compares her own country to a

part of the world which, to many fifteenth century Europeans, seemed to embody Christian virtues despite being far from the papacy's central authority.

With these historical factors in mind, it is even clearer to see that Barnes' inclusion of Christ's genealogy, focusing primarily on the three sons of Noah, is driven first and foremost by her desire to address anxieties and questions originating in the secular world of the fifteenth century rather than a desire to provide any particular insight in theological matters. Indeed, the moral virtue that characters such as Seth and Jafeth are described as holding align more neatly with chivalric ideals than with traditional attributes of piety.

That being said, there have been scholars such as Marcelle Thiébaux who interpret Barnes' readership as having actually been members of the rising middle class and not the aristocratic readers Barnes claims to be speaking to within the text itself. Thiébaux writes in her summary of the book of hunting, "Julians' little treatise might have engaged the interests of upwardly striving families like the Pastons" and further suggests that Barnes was aware of this aspect of her readership and wrote according to their tastes as well as the tastes of the aristocracy, "intending her instructions presumably for the landed gentry and middle classes whose fortunes were rising and who were inheriting the tastes of the nobles as they were acquiring their castles and titles" (478-479). Though this interpretation assumes an intentionality on Barnes' part that I do not believe to be evident within the text itself, it does allow one to have a more nuanced understanding of who *The Book of St. Albans* actual audience may have been.

As previously mentioned, Barnes gestures towards her expected readership in her treatise on fishing when she states that "this present treatyse sholde not come to the hondys of eche ydle persone whyche wolde desire it yf it were enpryntyd alone by itself & put in a lytyll plaunflet" (I iiij). By placing the treatise in the formatting of a book and grouping the treatise in with the

favorite leisure activities of the upper class, Barnes claims to hope to maintain an upper-class audience. However, the fact that Barnes voices this concern betrays her realization that her work may end up in the hands of a lower-class reader regardless, and the very inclusion of fishing as a sport may indicate that the class distinctions within her audience may not have been as clearly defined as her introduction suggests.

In spite of her high praise of the "disport" of fishing, Almond explains in *Medieval Hunting* that fishing was not held in high regard by upper class fifteenth century society when compared to the very sports which Barnes compares it favorably to in her treatise. According to Almond, "real gentlemen regarded fishing as a 'tame pursuit' lacking the dangers of hunting," an attitude which was further informed by the relative low cost and ease of access to fishing tools when compared to the tools of hawking or hunting (13). Almond interprets this as contributing to the general doubt cast upon Barnes' authorship, though he does not discuss his reasoning in depth. Presumably, his conclusion draws upon the assumption that Barnes, coming from an upper-class background, would be less likely to have an interest in the more vulgar, popular sports of the time.

However, if one approaches the text with a more complex understanding of who Barnes' audience may have been, two possible justifications for the treatise's inclusion arise. Firstly, if the readers of *The Book of St. Albans* truly were as high-born as much of Barnes' language indicates, then her spirited defense of the sport in the treatise's introduction is made all the more necessary. This presumed upper-class audience would need sufficient evidence that such a pursuit is worthy of their time before they could proceed to read the rest of the treatise. Part of Barnes' defense also rests upon separating fly-fishing from other methods of fishing more common among the peasantry, "for all other manere of fysshing is also laborious and grevous:

often makynge folks ful wete & colde, whyche many tymes hath be seen cause of grete Infirmytees” (rev. g iij).

On the other hand, if this text is simultaneously being aimed at a rising bourgeoisie, as Thiébaux suggests, then these attempts to raise fly-fishing to the status of a noble leisure activity could be an accommodation on Barnes’ part of the changing composition of book readership. John McDonald, who discusses Barnes’ contribution to the image of the sport within his highly acclaimed 1967 book *The Origins of Angling*, argues that the image of the fisherman presented by Barnes is a transgression of the traditional categories of feudal society and presents “something fairly new, a plain gentleman” (5).

McDonald makes the observation that medieval authors who wrote on the subject of hunting “had not troubled to mention fishing even negatively” and that, thanks to the publication of the *Treatise on Fishing*, “Sport fishing was thus introduced to a reading audience in the early fifteenth century on a cheerful, nonheroic note, which since then has been characteristic of the sport” (4). He contrasts this with the heroism embedded in the language of the medieval hunt and concludes that the pastoral depiction of the solitary fisherman provided by Barnes is the result of a larger shift within European culture towards the end of the medieval period: “Other moods were rising in the fading Middle Ages, among them a feeling for individual, private serenities to be sought in nature” (McDonald 5).

CONCLUSION

All of this brings us back to our original task of pinpointing where we may place *The Book of St. Albans* in the development of secular literature in the English-speaking world. On its surface,

the text seems preoccupied with upholding feudal authority at the expense of the religious overtones which one may expect from the identity of the author. Indeed, as I hope to have demonstrated in the passages above, religion seems to only be invoked when it is useful for achieving some other ideological goal, such as the validation of noble lineages or a justification for Barnes' creative choices. However, as one can see in the writings of Barnes' male contemporaries and predecessors, the line between the sacred and the secular had already become more ambiguous by the fifteenth century.

In a way, then, previous medieval scholars were correct in their assessment of Barnes' contributions as being unusual for her gender and station, even if not in the way which they had originally assumed that it was unusual. It was not at all unheard of for courtly women to participate in and contribute to the culture surrounding hawking, hunting, and heraldry, but the literary genres associated with these activities appear to have nevertheless been male-dominated and the particular way in which Barnes uses her treatises as vessels for political and social commentary distinguishes her from other female writers of the church. The text is overall dedicated to imparting practical advice and, when it does wander into ideological discussions, is primarily concerned with secular matters affecting the upper and middle classes of fifteenth century England.

However, it may be erroneous to even speak of these two matters as being separate from each other, since the concerns of the sacred and the secular are so thoroughly entwined throughout the text. Instead, it may be more accurate to say that *The Book of St. Albans* is a text which draws on a wealth of sources and literary influences, from biblical to classical to chivalrous, in a way which encapsulates the conflicts and conversations of the historical moment which produced it. At the very least, I believe that this text, as well as Julyans Barnes herself, deserves more attention and further study from those who research this period.

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