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To cite this article: Harriet Claire Strahl (2025) ‘Compassion Alone Moved Me to Tell This Story’: Orderic Vitalis on the Wreck of the White Ship, *Journal of Medieval History*, 51:1, 55-80, DOI: [10.1080/03044181.2024.2436042](https://doi.org/10.1080/03044181.2024.2436042)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03044181.2024.2436042>



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Published online: 18 Dec 2024.



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‘Compassion Alone Moved Me to Tell This Story’: Orderic Vitalis on the Wreck of the White Ship

Harriet Claire Strahl 

History Department, Durham University, Durham, UK

ABSTRACT

The eight complete contemporary accounts of the 1120 wreck of the White Ship offer a unique opportunity to study emotions, remembrance and the writing of recent history in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman society. This essay analyses and compares Orderic Vitalis’ long, detailed and affective text with other accounts of the wreck and its aftermath at the royal court of Henry I to identify grief and commemoration for victims in a national and local context. It reveals Orderic’s unique, local viewpoint on this nationally significant disaster. All narrative elements in his account reflect upon the theme of duty, prompting readers to commemorate the local victims connected to Orderic’s monastic community. The account itself was an act of duty for Orderic, revealing how he conceived of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* as a commemorative communal history, and how he saw his role as a monk within both the monastic and wider community.



ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 May 2023
Accepted 28 April 2024

KEYWORDS

Duty; history writing; Henry I; grief; local community; commemoration; Anglo-Norman society; remembrance

The wreck of the White Ship on a rock off Barfleur on 25 November 1120, while Henry I and his court were crossing from Normandy to England, killed Henry I’s heir, William Adelin, two of his illegitimate siblings, the earl and countess of Chester, numerous noble heirs as well as promising knights and courtiers and around fifty sailors.¹ At nearly two thousand

CONTACT Harriet Claire Strahl  harriet.c.strahl@durham.ac.uk  History Department, Durham University, 43 North Bailey, Durham DH1 3EX, UK

¹ Abbreviations: *OV*: Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols., trans. and ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969–1980). *OV* is cited without volume number unless other than vol. 6; *Le Prévost*: Orderic Vitalis, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae Libri Tredecim*, vol. 5, ed. Auguste Le Prévost (Paris: Julius Renouard et Socii, 1855); *Regesta II*: Charles Johnson and H.A. Cronne, eds., *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum vol. II: Regesta Henrici Primi, 1100–1135* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956). The only works with the White Ship as their subject are a source collection, a popular history book, a brief overview of the disaster and an article making the implausible case that the wreck was a mass murder: Caroline White, ‘The Wreck of the White Ship in 1120, as Recorded by Historians of the Twelfth Century’, in *The Cambridge Anthology of British Medieval Latin, Volume 2: 1066–1300*, ed. Caroline White, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 111–33; Charles Spencer, *The White Ship: Conquest, Anarchy and the Wrecking of Henry I’s Dream* (London: William Collins, 2020); Tony Brett-Jones, ‘The White Ship Disaster’, *The Historian* 64 (1999): 23–6; Victoria Chandler, ‘The Wreck of the White Ship: A Mass Murder Revealed?’, in *The Final Argument: The Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald J. Kagay and L.J. Andrew Villalon (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1998), 179–94. A summary of the event and its victims is given by W. Farrer, ‘An Outline Itinerary of King Henry the First (Continued)’, *The English Historical Review* 34, no. 136 (1919): 513–14. William Adelin’s death is mentioned in innumerable works as a pivotal moment in Anglo-Norman history. Discussions of individual

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words, Orderic Vitalis' account in Book 12 of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written in or after 1136, is the most comprehensive of the eight complete contemporary accounts of the wreck.²

An English monk at the Norman abbey of Saint-Évroult, Orderic Vitalis (1075 – c.1142) is best known for his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a monumental work written over multiple decades until the end of his life covering his abbey's history and Norman history up until his own time, with other historical excursions.³ Comparing his text with the other accounts of the wreck reveals how Orderic's and his monastic community's background, aims and emotions shaped his text. While it includes stylistic, linguistic and narrative features present in other accounts, it stands out for its length, detail, extensive victim list and heightened rhetoric.⁴ A comparison offers insight into the expression of emotions, community interests and the practice of remembrance in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman society. It complements broad overviews of medieval emotions and the studies on individual emotions or the social rules governing emotional expression by focussing on the interplay between heightened rhetoric, narrated emotion and communal considerations such as commemoration.⁵ Research on monastic-lay relations is based largely on evidence from charters, ritual transactions and

victims, bereaved relatives, or the fortunes of individual lordships feature in studies of families and groups as well as biographies of relatives: J.O. Prestwich, 'The Military Household of the Norman Kings', *The English Historical Review* 96, no. 378 (1981): 1–35; Kathleen Thompson, 'Family Tradition and the Crusading Impulse: The Rotrou Counts of the Perche', *Medieval Prosopography* 19 (1998): 1–33 (11); Kathleen Thompson, 'The Lords of Laigle', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 18 (1996): 177–99 (183); C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 317–20; Kimberley LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord (c.1067–1137)* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 389–90; Edmund King, *King Stephen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 17–18. A few victims have entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: Judith Green, 'Geoffrey Ridel (d.1120)', *ODNB* 2008; J.F.A. Mason, 'William [William Aetheling, William Adelinus, William Adelingus]', *ODNB* 2004.

² OV, 294–307.

³ For information on Orderic, see Marjorie Chibnall's introductions in all six volumes of her edition, particularly vol. 1 (1980); see also Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Charles Rozier, Daniel Roach, Giles Gasper, and Elisabeth van Houts, eds., *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2016).

⁴ Seven other complete accounts written in Normandy and England within 30 years of the event were consulted: Dorothy Whitelock, David Douglas, and Susie Tucker, trans. and eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), 187; Eadmer of Canterbury, *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia: Et, opuscula duo de vita Anselmi et quibusdam miraculis ejus*, ed. Martin Rule (London: Longman & Co., 1884), 288–90; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum = The History of the English People*, trans. and ed. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 466–8, 592–4; Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York, 1066–1127*, trans. and ed. Charles Johnson, Martin Brett, Christopher Brooke and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 164; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Patrick McGurk (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 146–8; Symeon of Durham, 'Historiae de Regibus Continuatio', in *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera at Collectanea*, vol. 1, ed. Hodgson Hinde (Durham: Andrews & Co., 1868), 78–131 (113); William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum = The History of the English Kings*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Roger A.B. Mynors, Rodney M. Thomson and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 758–62. Wace's account in *The History of the Norman People: Wace's Roman de Rou*, trans. and ed. Glyn Burgess (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 205–7, while useful Wace's account, while useful for comparison in some instances, was written at least forty years after the wreck and is not judged to be contemporary.

⁵ For overviews and theory of the history of medieval emotions see Jan Plamper, *History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Damian Bouquet and Piroška Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities: A History of Emotions in the Middle Ages*, trans. Robert Shaw (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and the contributors to *Early Medieval Europe* 10, no. 2 (2001). For individual emotions or emotions in specific contexts see the contributors to Barbara Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Moshe Barasch, 'Despair in the Medieval Imagination', *Social Research* 66, no. 2 (1999): 565–76. Orderic Vitalis and his writings have previously been subjects of emotion history: Emily Albu, 'Worldly Woe and Heavenly Joy: The Tone of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in Rozier, et al., *Orderic Vitalis*, 217–46; Richard Barton, 'Emotions and Power in Orderic Vitalis', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 33 (2011): 41–60; Elisabeth Van Houts, 'Orderic and His Father, Odelarius', in Rozier, et al. *Orderic Vitalis*, 17–36.

administrative and archival documents.⁶ While history writing is used as a source of information, this article suggests that the practice of history writing was also an active part of this relationship. Focussing on community considerations, this article corroborates Leah Shopkow's conclusions from her wide-ranging study of Norman writers about how history writing could be an expression of institutional identity.⁷ Rather than isolating individual emotions, the reaction to the wreck as recorded in the contemporary literature illustrates the dynamic affective landscape of different emotional expectations, representations and expressions interacting in elite Anglo-Norman culture.

Orderic's account starts with the royal court preparing to cross the Channel at Barfleur. Henry I entrusts his sons to the captain of the White Ship. Late that night, long after the king has sailed, the ship, carrying hundreds of drunk young men and women, is wrecked on a rock and the people on board plunge into the sea. Following the death of the heir, William Adelin, the captain, Thomas FitzStephen, lets himself drown, while the sole survivor, a butcher named Berold, is rescued in the morning. Initially, the courtiers hide the news from Henry. When they finally send a child to tell him, Henry falls to the ground lamenting and is led into his private chambers. At this point, Orderic inserted a poem on the disaster, before listing the victims and describing the aftermath of families searching for bodies but recovering very few.⁸

The account allows us to study grief and other emotions expected, represented and expressed, and the practice of remembrance and commemoration by individuals and communities, including Henry I, Orderic and his monastic community at Saint-Évroult. This article does not make any claims about the actual feelings of Orderic, Henry or others, or about what actually happened during and shortly after the disaster; rather, it studies the use of heightened rhetoric and tone, emotive words and dramatic narrative features. Close reading and comparison with other accounts enable us to explore why Orderic may have made certain editorial decisions, such as lingering on the king's grief and naming only some of the approximately three hundred victims. The essay analyses who was named and in what order to study public grief and commemoration in literate Anglo-Norman society and reveals that Orderic's *pietas*, the reason he gave for his exceptional account, connoted both compassion and compulsion to duty. The theme of duty runs through the account: Orderic's victim list displays a notable local bias and includes many benefactors and neighbours of his abbey missing from other writers' lists. Orderic linked the disaster to his community and used heightened rhetoric to express emotions on its behalf. His abbey's interests and the theme of duty are undercurrents, too, in his description of Henry grieving and behaving according to his dual roles of king and father. His idea of *pietas* in his account of the wreck reveals Orderic's conception of his role within his wider monastic and local community of

⁶ Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050-1150* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); the contributors to Emilia Jamrozak and Janet Burton, eds., *Religious and Laity in Western Europe 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval French Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁷ Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 4, 184, 195, 253.

⁸ The poem is described as by 'one distinguished versifier'. It is not attributed to anyone, nor has it been subsequently identified. Whether Orderic wrote it or not, he certainly found it relevant and included it. For the purposes of this article, it is treated as Orderic's own. All translations are from Marjorie Chibnall's edition unless stated otherwise.

neighbours and benefactors. The account itself was an act of duty with the purpose of ensuring the future commemoration of the victims connected to Saint-Évroult.

Commemoration

Orderic's victim list was commemorative, as were those of some of the other writers, though his list in particular was in a format suited more to liturgical remembrance, and his *Historia* was an extension of his duties as a monk of Saint-Évroult. Many of the victims Orderic named were neighbours or benefactors of the abbey, who would have been included in its liturgical remembrance. This contrasts with the lists of six other writers without a local focus.⁹ Remembrance of the victims became increasingly urgent over time as their contemporaries aged and died, however, all of the writers were selective in whom they commemorated. Orderic was unusual in paying attention to female and lower-ranking victims, perhaps because his commemorative focus was shaped by his duty to his monastic community. Orderic's accounting of the victims is the longest, distinguishing sixteen individuals in a list and another nine in the narrative, totalling 25. Of these, one, William of Pirou, was included in error, as he witnessed charters after 1120.¹⁰ Orderic identified another individual, Engenulf of Laigle, as a victim earlier in the *Historia*, but did not mention him in the account of the wreck.¹¹ Orderic also included groups of unnamed persons such as eighteen women of high rank, castellans of Mortain and fifty rowers. Eadmer of Canterbury's and Hugh the Chanter's lists consisted only of William Adelin and generic groups such as 'nobles', 'women', 'sailors' or 'boys'. The other four writers listed a core group of the four to six most famous victims, as well as generic groups;¹² that core group consisted of William Adelin, his illegitimate brother Richard of Lincoln, their illegitimate sister Matilda countess of Perche, as well as Richard earl of Chester, his wife Matilda countess of Chester and his illegitimate half-brother Othuer FitzCount. Apart from them, there were only three names shared between two or three lists.¹³ Orderic omits two victims known from another of the sources, John of Worcester's chronicle.¹⁴

The victims were very much in need of prayers and commemoration. Orderic emphasised their sudden death, precluding the last rites, penance and absolution, thereby putting the victims in peril of their souls, particularly as they had just offended God by chasing away the priests who had come to bless the ship.¹⁵ As a result, Orderic

⁹ 'List' refers both to paragraphs listing victims and any mentions of victims throughout the narratives. Including Orderic, seven writers included victim lists in their accounts, provided in the appendix. These are OV, 304; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 187; Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, 288; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 466; John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 148; Symeon of Durham, *Opera*, 113; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 760.

¹⁰ *Regesta II*, no. 1243. This charter was certainly from 1121, as it is also witnessed by Ranulf earl of Chester, Richard's successor.

¹¹ OV, 4: 50. In contrast, he did mention Engenulf's brother, Geoffrey, in the account.

¹² Orderic (25 individuals and groups), Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (4 individuals and groups), Henry of Huntingdon (5 individuals and groups), John of Worcester (9 individuals and groups), Symeon of Durham (9 individuals and groups), William of Malmesbury (6 individuals and groups).

¹³ Geoffrey Ridel: Orderic, John of Worcester, Symeon of Durham; William Bigod and Robert Mauduit: Orderic and Symeon of Durham.

¹⁴ Geoffrey archdeacon of Hereford and Walter de Everci.

¹⁵ OV, 298. Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1997), 29, 66.

noted doubts about their salvation.¹⁶ The lack of burials in holy ground was also a concern to families, who expended time and money searching for bodies, while Orderic and other writers emphasised the horror of bodies lost at sea, picturing them disintegrating, naked, unrecognisable and eaten by sea monsters or fish.¹⁷ Many young victims, like the Laigle brothers, had no descendants with an interest in commemorating them and did not hold their own lands, missing out on commemoration by their successors.¹⁸ Given their youth and lack of descendants and wealth, many victims would have received little commemorative attention.¹⁹ Orderic referred to their reversal of fortune: In life, William and his friends were amongst the most powerful people in Northern Europe. In death, they relied on divine mercy.²⁰

Prayers, masses and clerical or monastic commemoration could influence divine mercy. Orderic revealed his belief in purgatory and the benefit of prayers after death in a long chapter describing a priest's vision of Hellequin's Hunt, in which dead people recounted the tortures they suffered and how the priest and their families could help them.²¹ Orderic made the commemorative intention of his White Ship account and list clear in one sentence: 'Compassion alone moved me to tell this story, and diligence impels me to write a true record of these events for future ages; for the black deep swallowed none of my kindred, for none need I weep by reason of blood, but only from compassion'.²² By inscribing the victims' names, he enabled his readers, present and future, to pray for them individually, and ensured that they were not completely lost to history when other structures of remembrance failed. He revealed his commemorative purpose in naming people in the *Historia* when he did the opposite and made a point of not recording the names, for example, of slanderous monks, ensuring that they would not be remembered.²³ Apart from Orderic's *pietas*, only Henry of Huntingdon explicitly announced his commemorative intention by including a poem about the disaster. He explained elsewhere that he used verse to immortalise people.²⁴ In the letter *De Contemptu Mundi*, Henry also referred to commemorative naming: 'This letter is a witness to the names of the most powerful and of all those most worthy of remembrance, yet there may be no one, or scarcely anyone, to read it'.²⁵ It did not necessarily have to be read, as the act of writing down names, which had

¹⁶ OV, 304: 'Damnatio threatens all those lost in deep waters'. / 'Inter aquas istis instat damnatio tristis'. 'But human minds cannot know, to their grievous sorrow; If eternal rest comes to those whom the sea waves cover'. / 'Hinc dolor est ingens humana quod inscia fit mens; An requires sit eis quos quatit uda Thetis'. The reference to Thetis, an ancient Greek goddess of water, not in the translation, is from Orderic's poem and purely poetical.

¹⁷ Families searching for bodies: OV, 306; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 762. Horrific descriptions: OV, 302, 304, 306; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 594, 606; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 762.

¹⁸ Nicholas Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps: The Crusades and Family Memory in the High Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 27. Paul shows how family chronicles emphasised direct succession lines. Uncles and aunts were commemorated less and for fewer generations. Victims *en route* to receiving their inheritances: OV, 304.

¹⁹ This does not apply to all victims. Matilda countess of Perche and Geoffrey Ridel held lands and had children. Differences between clerics and lay people are not discussed here, as most known victims were lay.

²⁰ OV, 302.

²¹ OV, 4: 236–50, especially 240 and 248.

²² OV, 304: 'Sola pietas me compulit ista narrare, diligentiaque stimulator haec sequenti euo certis apicibus allegare, quoniam tetra uorago neminem absoruit de mea consanguinitate, cui lacrimas affectu sanguinis eddundam nisi ex sola pietate'.

²³ OV, 2: 52.

²⁴ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 309.

²⁵ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 614: 'Testis est hec epistola quam pro nominibus potentissimorum et omnium assurrectione dignissimorum nemo tamen, uel uix aliquis, potest perlegere'.

Table 1. Number of individual victims (excluding groups) in accounts over time.^a

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (1121)	William of Malmesbury (1125)	Eadmer of Canterbury (before 1126)	Hugh the Chanter (in or before 1128)	John of Worcester (before 1128)	Symeon of Durham (before 1128)	Henry of Huntingdon (1130/1131)	Orderic Vitalis (after 1135)
4 victims	6 victims	1 victim	1 victim	9 victims	9 victims	5 victims	24 victims

^aSources for the dating of the accounts: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 187, n. 8; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings: General Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, R. M. Thomson and R. Winterbottom, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xviii; Eadmer died in or after 1126: J. C. Rubenstein, 'Eadmer [Edmer] of Canterbury (b. c. 1060, d. in or after 1126)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004; Hugh the Chanter, *History*, xvii; The latest date for John of Worcester's entry is determined by Symeon of Durham's death c. 1128. As Symeon used John's text, it must have been written earlier. Bernard Meehan, 'Symeon of Durham (fl. c. 1090–c. 1128)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, lxxvii–lxxii. For Henry of Huntingdon, only the account in book 7 is relevant here and not *De Contemptu Mundi* (post 1135), as it does not add any new victims.

a long Christian tradition, had a symbolic significance in itself.²⁶ As Shopkow argues, turning communal memory into a commemorative object made the memory independent of anyone actually remembering.²⁷ It ensured that the potential for commemoration and prayers, and for salvation, always remained.

While no other writer apart from Henry and Orderic made his commemorative intention explicit, we can nevertheless compare naming patterns in their lists to see that the later lists were more likely to be commemorative and had more commemorative potential than the earlier lists. The earlier lists included fewer individuals and more groups. While groups could be prayed for, the individuals in them could only be commemorated anonymously. Although eight accounts are not a large sample size, the table above (Table 1) tentatively suggests that the number of individuals mentioned increased in the later accounts. William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon appear to be exceptions. Even though Henry was explicitly commemorative, it may be that he did not find the other victims worth commemorating, though he certainly knew who they were, having spent time at court himself.

John of Worcester and Symeon of Durham used Eadmer's account as a source. Their efforts to improve Eadmer's list show the importance they attached to naming and make it likely that they, too, had a commemorative purpose in writing about the disaster. Eadmer's list consisted of groups such as 'nobles' and 'women'. John added eight individuals identified by name or rank. Symeon used John's list and added another person and the group of fifty rowers, as well as switching John's order. This signals that they thought that the individual victims and the order in which they were mentioned were important. If we conclude that Orderic and Henry definitely, and John and Symeon likely, had a commemorative purpose, this suggests that the commemorative need increased with time.

The victims' parents, spouses and siblings made efforts to ensure that the memory of their drowned relatives did not die with them. Henry I promptly founded Reading Abbey in 1121, possibly as a pseudo-resting place for William, as Hollister speculates; William's sister, the Empress Matilda, and his uncle, King David of Scotland, were both

²⁶ Shopkow, *History and Community*, 184; Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 372–3.

²⁷ Shopkow, *History and Community*, 195.

benefactors.²⁸ In fact, Henry exchanged a manor for land at Reading with the monks of Battle Abbey just a couple of days after the loss of the White Ship, with the charter arranged at Portsmouth before Henry moved to Brampton for Christmas 1120.²⁹ Immediately after the loss, it seems that arranging appropriate commemoration for William was at the forefront of Henry's mind. Henry started to include William's soul next to those of his parents and wife, Matilda, in his charitable grants and confirmations from 1121 until the end of his life.³⁰ Sometime before 1129, Ranulf earl of Chester included the soul of his predecessor Richard in a confirmation of a grant which Richard had first made.³¹ The next evidence for commemorative activity comes from around 1140, when Rotrou count of Perche made a benefaction to Saint-Denis of Nogent-le-Rotrou for the soul of his wife, Matilda, and Geva, Geoffrey Ridel's widow, founded Canwell Priory for her husband's soul.³² There is probably more evidence for commemoration of individual victims, but it lies outside of the scope of this article. These activities tally with the increasing commemorative intention in narratives to indicate renewed anxiety and commemorative intentions among aging families and friends.

Family members may have approached their affiliated churches to continue the commemoration of their relatives after their own deaths. If the victims of the wreck were themselves benefactors, the churches and monasteries may have made provisions without further prompting. Intercession through prayers, hymns and abstinence for monks' relatives and benefactors, whose names were solemnly recorded in necrologies and commemoration books, was an integral aspect of monastic life.³³ Multifaceted relationships between monks and lay benefactors involving oblates, donations and gifts and secular and spiritual services amongst others have been studied by many historians including Stephen White, Constance Brittain Bouchard and Megan McLaughlin, who come to similar conclusions about the close relationships between monks and their benefactors.³⁴ At Saint-Évroult, Orderic described an elaborate anniversary ceremony held every June to commemorate the parents, brothers and sisters of the monks, whose names were inscribed on a roll under that of their monastic kinsman.³⁵ Charters recording gifts from benefactors state that they were given in return for masses, prayers and fraternity of the abbey, sometimes compelling monks to pray for them as they would for a fellow monk.³⁶ Orderic was keenly aware of the close connection between his abbey and its neighbours and benefactors. He paid attention to the deeds of benefactors throughout his *Historia*, even diverging from his narrative to set

²⁸ *Regesta II*, no. 1427; Hollister, *Henry I*, 337, 487–8.

²⁹ *Regesta II*, no. 1238.

³⁰ *Regesta II*, nos. 1249, 1260, 1301, 1312, 1401, 1507–1509, 1580–1581, 1618, 1748, 1827.

³¹ Geoffrey Barraclough, ed., *Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester, c. 1071–1237* (Gloucester, UK: Alan Sutton for the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1988), 19, no. 10, see also 26, no. 14.

³² Thompson, 'Affairs of State: The Illegitimate Children of Henry I', *Journal of Medieval History* 29, no. 2 (2003): 129–51 (147); G. Baugh, W. Cowie, J. Dickinson, et al., 'Houses of Benedictine Monks: The Priory of Canwell', in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 3*, ed. M.W. Greenslade and R.B. Pugh (London: Victoria County History, 1970), 213–16 (213).

³³ *OV*, 3: 210; Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 67–8; White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts*, 26.

³⁴ White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts*; Jamrozik and Burton, eds., *Religious and Laity in Western Europe*; Bouchard, *Sword, Miter and Cloister*; McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*.

³⁵ *OV*, 2: 114.

³⁶ *OV*, 3: 118; *Le Prévost*, 184–6 nos. III, V, VI, VIII, 191 no. XXXVII, 194 no. XLVII. For an overview of monastic fraternities and select sources, see Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld, 'Looking for Common Ground: From Monastic Fraternitas to Lay Confraternity in the Southern Low Countries in the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries', in Jamrozik and Burton, *Religious and Laity in Western Europe*, 287–314.

out the families, lives and careers of benefactors, to record their names and to commemorate them, sometimes with a poem.³⁷ Orderic considered his writing part of his monastic intercessory duties for his abbey's benefactors: 'But I ask my readers not to be impatient if, mindful of the benefits received, I commemorate our benefactors'.³⁸ He explained that he wrote their names and deeds down for future monks to commemorate those people by whose gifts they were supported, and asked readers to pray for individual benefactors: 'Reader, in Christian duty, think to help him, pray humbly that he may find room in heaven'.³⁹ Noteworthy here is his reference to duty. In the general prologue to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Orderic claimed to confine his subject matter to his 'monastic duty'.⁴⁰ It is in this context that we should view Orderic's account of the disaster and his commemorative victim list.

Writers made editorial choices when they compiled victim lists, curating which people to name and in which order. Judith Butler's method of analysing newspaper obituaries to study which people were publicly 'grievable' can be usefully applied to the twelfth-century counterpart of newspaper obituaries: monastic histories.⁴¹ While other writers spoke to a wider public and commemorated the most famous victims, Orderic's selection shows that despite compiling the most extensive list, his public sphere was predominantly local. Of the 24 individuals in Orderic's account, not counting William of Pirou or Engenulf of Laigle, mentioned elsewhere, nine had strong connections to the abbey. Four were indirectly connected or probably had links. For ten victims, no connection is known, although it is likely that some of them were benefactors.⁴² Finally, the captain, Thomas FitzStephen, was probably solely named for narrative purposes. Three of the four victims with indirect connections were William Adelin, Richard of Lincoln and Matilda countess of Perche, who were the children of a benefactor – Henry I, who gave and confirmed gifts to Saint-Évroult.⁴³ Matilda may have also been linked to the abbey through her husband, Rotrou count of Perche, who was related to benefactor and founder families of the abbey and may have been a benefactor himself.⁴⁴ The fourth, the knight Gilbert of Exmes, was likely a benefactor as a neighbouring lord to Saint-Évroult. However, no evidence of this survives. Nine victims had strong and provable links to the abbey. Richard earl of Chester, his wife, Matilda, and his half-brother Othuer had multiple connections to Saint-Évroult, as Richard was a benefactor, following in the footsteps of his father Hugh. Members of Earl Hugh's household became monks at Saint-Évroult, including a half-brother of Richard and

³⁷ OV, 2: 22–32, 3: 132–4, 256–8, 4: 50, 136–46, 230, 338.

³⁸ OV, 3: 260. 'Inde michi queso non indignantur lectores, si beneficii accepti memor recolo nostros benefactores'.

³⁹ OV, 4: 144: 'Ergo pie lector eius adesto memor; Hunc ut in etherea locet arce; roga prece digna'.

⁴⁰ OV, 1: 130. 'monachilem obseruantiam'.

⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004), xx. For a similar method of comparing lists of the dead at Agincourt see Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, 379.

⁴² The 10 with unclear connections to St Évroult are Thierry, kinsman of the German emperor, William Bigod, Geoffrey Ridel, Robert Mauduit, Gisulf the scribe, and the son, brother, and three nephews of Roger bishop of Coutances. William Bigod witnessed Henry I's 1113 charter confirming gifts to Saint-Évroult (*Regesta II*, no. 1019). Orderic copied the epitaph of Roger Bigod, William's father, buried at Thetford, which may suggest a link between Saint-Évroult and the Bigod family (OV, 146). Geoffrey Ridel, the royal justice, could have been indirectly connected to Saint-Évroult through his wife Geva, an illegitimate daughter of Hugh earl of Chester (Judith Green, 'Geoffrey Ridel (d.1120)', *ODNB* 2008).

⁴³ *Regesta II*, no. 1019.

⁴⁴ Thompson, 'Family Tradition and the Crusading Impulse', 11; Thompson, 'The Lords of Laigle', 177–99 (183); OV, 196, 250.

Othuer.⁴⁵ Ivo II and William Grandmesnil and Geoffrey and Engenulf of Laigle were descendants of the founders of Saint-Évroutl and their families continued to supply monks and gifts to the abbey.⁴⁶ Geoffrey and Engenulf may have been baptised at Saint-Évroutl as godsons of the monks, like their older brother Richer, who was not on the ship.⁴⁷ As a small child, their cousin and the Grandmesnills' cousin William of Rhuddlan confirmed his father's gifts after Robert of Rhuddlan's death in the 1090s and entered into the fraternity.⁴⁸ His father lay buried at Saint-Évroutl.⁴⁹ William witnessed another transaction for the monks, two of whom were his uncles.⁵⁰ The father of Hugh of Moulins, William, was a benefactor who held the fraternity of the abbey and was buried there.⁵¹ Finally, Ralph the Red of Pont-Échanfray was a neighbour and benefactor.⁵² He and his brother came to the abbey to confirm their predecessors' gifts in return for admittance to the fraternity and the gift of a war horse.⁵³ Orderic also noted that he protected the abbey's lands during periods of unrest.⁵⁴ Orderic's list displayed a strong local bias not present in any of the other surviving lists. They are shorter and name only the nationally and internationally most famous victims. Only John of Worcester, who added the two names not mentioned by anyone else, Walter de Everci and Geoffrey archdeacon of Hereford, may have taken local interest into account, as Hereford is not far from Worcester.⁵⁵ Apart from Orderic and John, only Henry of Huntingdon displayed personal interest with comments about the promise shown by Richard of Lincoln, whom he knew and respected.

Despite the difference in length, comparing the lists using Judith Butler's method shows how Orderic's local considerations impacted his presentation of the victims. The lists differ in their treatment of gender, illegitimacy and rank.⁵⁶ Only Orderic mentioned the two high-ranking female victims by name, Matilda countess of Perche and Matilda countess of Chester, as both were connected to Saint-Évroutl. Through these connections, both women were part of Orderic's wider sense of community. No other writer even named 'the countess of Perche' and 'the countess of Chester'. Without names, there were no individual female deaths for readers to commemorate. William of Malmesbury made the countess of Perche responsible for the prince's death: when the prince, safe in a small boat, rows back for her, his boat is swamped and he

⁴⁵ Richard's gifts: *Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester*, 19–21, nos. X, XI. Earl Hugh's and his household's gifts: OV, 3: 240. Members of the household and Robert, Earl Hugh's illegitimate son, becoming monks at Saint-Évroutl: OV, 3: 118, 226, 236–8.

⁴⁶ Foundation of Saint-Évroutl: OV, 2: 12–14. Gifts by the families and fraternity membership: *Regesta II*, no. 1553; OV, 2: 82, 5: 266. Relative becoming a monk: OV, 2: 40. Overview of the Laigle family: Thompson, 'The Lords of Laigle'.

⁴⁷ OV, 460.

⁴⁸ *Le Prévost*, 187, no. XI. His father's gifts: OV, 3: 238, 4: 136–46.

⁴⁹ OV, 4: 136–46.

⁵⁰ *Le Prévost*, 192, no. XLI. For his monastic uncles: OV, 4: 136–46.

⁵¹ OV, 3: 132–4, 6: 394; *Regesta II*, no. 1594; Amanda J. Hingst, *The Written World: Past and Place in the Work of Orderic Vitalis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 1–2; Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 15, 25–7. For the career and inheritance of Hugh's father: Emily Zack Tabuteau, 'The Family of Moulins-la-Marche in the Eleventh Century', *Medieval Prosopography* 13, no. 1 (1992): 29–65.

⁵² Hingst, *The Written World*, 1–2; Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 15, 25–7.

⁵³ *Le Prévost*, 194, no. XLVII.

⁵⁴ OV, 220–2.

⁵⁵ As this article is primarily concerned with Orderic's account, researching local connections of other writers' lists lies beyond its scope.

⁵⁶ No consideration has been given to clerical, monastic or lay status of the victims, as most known victims were lay.

drowns.⁵⁷ Despite her prominent role in his narrative, William of Malmesbury, the only writer to tell this story, never named her as Matilda and only referred to her as ‘the countess of Perche’, possibly an act of *damnatio memoriae*.⁵⁸ Other writers had no clear reason for ignoring the women. They simply did not see them as grievable in the public sphere, although Orderic apparently considered them locally grievable. Thus, writers did not describe laypeople weeping for women. Orderic mentioned women weeping for their men, but not vice versa, and claimed that Henry ‘bewailed his sons and favoured knights and eminent barons’, but not his daughter.⁵⁹ Although Henry dedicated some donations to the souls of all his children, he never singled out his dead daughter, in contrast to the many donations he made for William’s soul.⁶⁰ Matilda’s husband, however, included her soul in his gift to Saint-Denis of Nogent-le-Rotrou. Stephen White speculates that the responsibility for commemorating women may have passed from their fathers to their husbands on marriage.⁶¹ While that could be the case, there is a difference between responsibility for commemoration and grief, and there is little evidence for public grief for women. Women may have been mourned in private, yet the writers did not even imagine Henry privately grieving for his daughter.

While White’s hypothesis could explain Henry’s lack of commemoration for Matilda, it does not explain his lack of benefactions for his illegitimate son Richard of Lincoln. In contrast, the writers did not distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate victims, nor did they imagine Henry differentiating. When Henry entrusts his sons to Thomas Fitz-Stephen, he says he loves both ‘as my own life’, and afterwards, he weeps for his ‘sons’ in the plural.⁶² Although three writers mentioned the illegitimacy of Matilda countess of Perche, Richard of Lincoln and Othuer, Earl Richard’s brother, no writer took it into account in the order of the victim lists.⁶³ Richard of Lincoln was always listed with his brother William, a notable difference to witness lists, where the king’s illegitimate sons were named after earls and counts.⁶⁴ Monastic writers would have been familiar with the correct procedure in charters, as they copied their monasteries’ official documents, and Orderic worked in the scriptorium.⁶⁵ They ordered the victims by family rather than by rank, which supports a commemorative intention. In contrast to public lay remembrance through donations, writers commemorated legitimate and illegitimate victims equally.

Peasants were not grievable to monastic, clerical and literate lay audiences. No writer mentioned members of the lower ranks on board, and their treatment of the lowborn survivor summarises their attitude. Orderic went into detail about Berold, the butcher, because he was an essential witness for his account, and Symeon of Durham seems to

⁵⁷ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 760.

⁵⁸ The only possible source for this story would have been Berold. Rather than speculating why Orderic, who was geographically closer to Berold and may have spoken with him or someone connected to him, or any of the other writers did not repeat this story, it seems more likely that William, who probably never met Berold, made it up.

⁵⁹ OV, 302: ‘filios et electos tirones precipuosque barones plangebat’.

⁶⁰ Thompson, ‘Affairs of State’, 137.

⁶¹ White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints*, 268 note 105 (for chapter 4, 109). White provides no evidence for this suggestion.

⁶² OV, 296, 302: ‘quos sicut me diligo’.

⁶³ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 592; Symeon of Durham, *Opera*, 113; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 760.

⁶⁴ *Regesta II*, nos. 1062, 1204, 1243, 1247–49, 1289. For an exception to this: no. 1245.

⁶⁵ *Regesta II*, no. 1019: 1113 charter of Henry I confirming gifts to Saint-Évroult, with his son Robert of Gloucester witnessing. Orderic would have certainly seen this charter and the order of witnesses.

have had an interest in peasants in general, as he made a point of adding Berold and the sailors to his list.⁶⁶ However, Eadmer of Canterbury and John of Worcester agreed that Berold, along with the other peasants on board, was ‘not worthy of being named’.⁶⁷ Most writers named only the victims readers throughout the realm would have heard of: these were the king’s children and the earl and countess of Chester with the earl’s brother. Orderic provided a dozen more names down to the rank of knight, showing that his intended audience was local to Saint-Évroult.

While information bias played a role in Orderic’s list, the local focus was nevertheless deliberate. Orderic’s witness Berold could probably not name everyone on board and the local bias in Orderic’s account was partly caused by limited information from local families. It could be argued that his inclusion of groups such as the eighteen high-ranking women and the castellans of Mortain may reveal his desire but inability to include victims from beyond his local sphere. He did not know who the unnamed women were, as the comment ‘it is said’ reveals.⁶⁸ If he relied on local sources of information and the noblewomen and the castellans of Mortain had no connection to the abbey, finding their names would have required more effort. In the fifteen to twenty years between the wreck and the time of writing, Orderic would conceivably have been able to do so, but significantly had not found out who these people were. The local focus was not exclusive, as not all of the listed victims were demonstrably connected to the abbey, and Orderic seems to have noted names where he knew them, foremost the famous, core group. He may have named others out of charity, but he did not prioritise compiling a comprehensive victim list, which suggests that the non-local victims were not as important to him as the local victims. Their families belonged to Orderic’s wider community, and these were the people he tried to please and towards whom he felt a duty. Other victims were not relevant to his purpose, which was *pietas*. *Pietas* is notoriously hard to define. It is translated by Chibnall variously as a pious or filial duty, filial affection, mercy and compassion. While some contexts exclude ‘duty’, the filial contexts especially imply a term denoting something that is owed. Orderic used the term mostly to describe a person’s religious conduct and less in secular contexts.⁶⁹ *Pietas* was associated with duty towards parents or gods especially in classical Latin, but there are also medieval examples of this.⁷⁰ If he had meant charity or duty on their own, more specific terms such as *caritas*, *compassio*, and *officium* would have served better. *Pietas* combined duty with the charitable love expected of monks. It was his duty to record the names and memories of benefactors when other means of commemoration failed. As members of his community, they could expect his love and charity, which were required of monks in the Benedictine Rule.⁷¹ The monks of Saint-Évroult, just like monks in other Benedictine houses, used terms such as *caritative* in their transactions relating to thoughtful gifts to benefactors, for example a book for a

⁶⁶ Symeon of Durham, *Opera*, 113.

⁶⁷ Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, 288; John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 146: ‘nec nomine digno’.

⁶⁸ OV, 304: ‘ut fertur’.

⁶⁹ Examples from vol. 6: pious duty: OV, 36, 146; filial duty or affection: OV, 140, 168, 384; mercy/compassion: OV, 278, 546; divine mercy: OV, 166, 302.

⁷⁰ LewisShort and *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ‘Pietas’, accessed through Logeion, <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/pietas>.

⁷¹ Terence G. Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), chapters 4 (79–102) and 72 (587–602).

benefactor intending to send his son to school or a war horse for the knight and victim of the wreck Ralph the Red.⁷² White observes that the relationship and solidarity between monks and benefactors were described with terms such as ‘friendship’ and ‘kinship’, and McLaughlin has argued that such close, familial associations and bonds were one of the prime motivators and intentions behind lay gifts to monasteries.⁷³ Some victims, including Richard earl of Chester, his brother Othuer and William of Rhuddlan, were related to monks at Saint-Évroult, but Orderic also used the same terms for unrelated benefactors and for spiritual kinship. He reproved Richer of Laigle, the monks’ godson, for failing to behave towards the monks in a friendly and familial manner.⁷⁴ Richer’s brothers Geoffrey and Engenulf of Laigle were probably also godsons to the monks, while William of Rhuddlan had been dealing with the monks since childhood.⁷⁵ The close monastic-benefactor relationship suggests that the monks would have genuinely grieved for people they had known all their lives. There is a strong case to be made that Saint-Évroult monks ought to feel and pray for their benefactors, and therefore that Orderic had a duty to the benefactor victims on the White Ship and his local focus was not accidental. Orderic’s *pietas* is a caring duty, a task both required and done out of charity. His account ensured that monks could pray for the local victims by name even after the deaths of all who knew them.

Orderic and His Contemporaries

While local information bias probably played a role in compiling his list, Orderic shaped his entire account around community interests. Orderic’s heightened rhetoric, and that of other writers, framed the wreck as a disaster with national consequences, however, Orderic’s affective terms and tone also highlighted a local perspective. At the same time, the disaster resonated with Orderic personally, and as a monk of Saint-Évroult, he would have grieved for the abbey’s associates, with whom the monks had close ties. Analysing Orderic’s narrative on these three levels reveals that the wreck of the White Ship remained upsetting to individuals, communities and the realm decades later.

Orderic’s account is striking due to its length and level of detail. Throughout, he noted the feelings of people involved, including grief, despair, anxiety and anguish, particularly when describing the royal court after the disaster, but also the king’s love for his sons and the ‘deep mourning and countless tears’ of the people in general.⁷⁶ He frequently used adjectives to emphasise the misfortune, calling the ship ‘ill-fated’ and referring to the ‘sad news’.⁷⁷ Orderic used rhetorical devices to shape the narrative, for example questions and direct speech at key moments, as well as interjections to highlight the tragedy, including ‘alas’ and ‘terrible to relate’.⁷⁸ These narratorial comments interpret the event for his readers as explicitly tragic. Together with the poem, which emphasised doubts about the victims’ salvation, they show how Orderic wanted his readers to see the event. He acknowledged his own personal involvement with the comment about

⁷² *Le Prévost*, 190 no. XXXII and XXXIII, 194, no. XLVII; White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints*, 47.

⁷³ White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints*, 27, 29–30, 39, 157; McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, 133–77.

⁷⁴ *OV*, 2: 86, 92, 6: 460.

⁷⁵ *Le Prévost*, 187, no. XI, 192 no. XLI.

⁷⁶ ‘multos luctus et innumerabiles lacrimas’.

⁷⁷ ‘infausta naue’ and ‘lugubris rumor’.

⁷⁸ ‘heu’ and ‘proh dolor’.

how he himself had not lost any relatives, but wrote about it from *pietas*, whether that is duty or compassion.

The same narratorial emotive terms and descriptions of characters' feelings turn up throughout the *Historia*, but the sheer concentration of these expressions and the detail and focus on characters' feelings is unique to the account of the White Ship. To a lesser extent, Orderic referred to 'mourning' and 'tears' and interjected 'terrible to relate' in passages describing the suffering of Normandy under the incapable Duke Robert Curthose or after the death of Henry I. Often, these descriptions are spoken by characters, such as Serlo bishop of Sées, who reproves Henry I for his inactivity in the face of Normandy's woes or Count Helias, who refuses to rebel against Henry for the sake of peace.⁷⁹ As such groupings of emotive terms usually appear as laments for the state of Normandy, this national context may be how Orderic intended the account of the White Ship to be read, since he mentioned the suffering of lands deprived of their rightful heirs by the disaster. This comment could also refer to a local situation: the deaths of Geoffrey and Engenulf of Laigle secured their brother Richer's inheritance, and Richer proceeded to attack the lands of his monastic neighbours and godfathers.⁸⁰ A national and local viewpoint are not mutually exclusive. Both apply.

The communal focus comes through in Orderic's description of other people's emotions. Just as the entire *Historia* was interspersed with anecdotes of local interest, so was the account of the wreck. Orderic recounted how Henry I 'above all mourned for Ralph the Red and Gilbert of Exmes, and frequently described their deeds of courage, weeping as he related them'.⁸¹ No other writer mentioned Ralph the Red of Pont-Échanfray, a crusader, champion knight and benefactor whose career features in Orderic's *Historia*.⁸² By describing Henry weeping for Ralph, Orderic signalled that Ralph was worthy of a king's tears. His inclusion in the account shows that Ralph was still very much remembered and grieved for, possibly both by the monks and by his family. Cloistered historians' work gathering oral evidence led to frequent interactions with locals and noble families, and texts including dynastic history might have been read to families to secure their continued patronage.⁸³ Even if families did not read or hear the text directly, the knowledge that a monk was writing a history that commemorated the deeds of their dead family member would have been a comfort. Orderic probably had contact with Ralph's family for information about his life and may have inserted the comment about Henry weeping for him in the expectation that it would please the family. This is not the only such example. Despite calling the nobles on board the White Ship sinful, Orderic took care to make exceptions, singling out and praising victims from local or connected families: Geoffrey of Laigle, founder's kin and from a benefactor family, survived the wreck long enough to have time for penance; Richard earl of Chester was 'a young man of great valour and notable kindness'; and the Grand-

⁷⁹ OV, 60–8, 94–6, 450–2, 478.

⁸⁰ OV, 460.

⁸¹ OV, 302: 'maximeque Radulfum et Gislebertum de Oximis lugebat et eorum strenuitates sepius iterando cum fletibus recitabat'.

⁸² Hollister, *Henry I*, 304; OV, 40, 70, 104, 220–2, 246; *Le Prévost*, 194, no. XLVII.

⁸³ David Bates, 'Lives, Identities and the Historians of the Normans', in *Lives, Identities and Histories in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. Julie Barrau and David Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 180–202 (183, 196); Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps*, 59.

mesnil brothers were ‘two handsome sons’.⁸⁴ While Orderic certainly did use emotion words and narratorial interjections in the context of Normandy’s suffering, at the same time, Henry I’s grief and the adjectives served to emphasise local losses.

Just as the witness lists of other writers only covered the nationally famous victims, so too, their use of heightened rhetoric was in the service of national or moral reasons and did not consider local interests. We might expect the affective tone of the accounts to correspond to commemorative purpose as discussed above, but this is not the case. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Hugh the Chanter and John of Worcester used a brisk and business-like tone without rhetorical flourishes or narratorial interjections, although Hugh the Chanter and John of Worcester did note the feelings of the bereaved king, and John of Worcester’s narrative is quite detailed. Most writers presented the wreck as a dramatic story, often calling attention to it being a judgement of God. Eadmer used it to stress the king’s humility in the face of great loss. He described the king’s and the people’s feelings and used direct speech by the king to emphasise the point. Symeon of Durham used foreshadowing, included many details and the feelings of the king and characterised the event as sad news. He also noted William’s status as heir, which sets the tragedy in a national context. William of Malmesbury’s, Henry of Huntingdon’s and Orderic’s narratives were the most elaborate and affective. William repeated the association of William Adelin with hope several times in his lengthy and detailed account and noted the love and devotion between Henry and his sons. He called the wreck a tragedy and a calamity for all England and made the narrative more dramatic by switching to the present tense just as the ship strikes the rock. Henry of Huntingdon covered the disaster twice, in his main narrative in book seven, written around 1130, and in the letter *De Contemptu Mundi*, written 1135. In the main narrative, he presented the episode as a moral story and memorialised it with a poem. There are very few affective terms. Instead, in accusing the passengers of sodomy, Henry chose to stress their sinfulness and God’s revenge on them, expressed in a rhetorically carefully crafted text. *De Contemptu Mundi* provided a markedly different perspective. The letter also referred to the judgement of God and the sins of the passengers, though these were now pride rather than sodomy. Henry included the feelings of the king and the prince and used rhetorical devices such as direct speech. In the letter, Henry stressed his personal involvement with phrases such as ‘we saw’ and mentioned his dislike of William Adelin. Most notably, in a long, touching sentence, he remembered how he had honoured and admired Richard of Lincoln and entertained high hopes for his future career. *De Contemptu Mundi*’s more affective and personally involved tone indicates that emotions around the White Ship heightened after 1135. The text’s later date suggests that Henry’s attitude towards the victims softened, and it is tantalising to link it to the death of Henry I and the ensuing chaos. As Henry never revised his narrative in book seven, but also placed *De Contemptu Mundi* into the *Historia*, he consciously presented different perspectives on the same event to his readers. Orderic’s, Henry’s and William’s narratives also all apportion blame for the event, which could be an expression of emotion, but may have also been connected to presenting an appropriate villain in their moral stories. William blamed Matilda countess of Perche for William Adelin’s death, as discussed above. Orderic blamed the captain, Thomas FitzStephen. In Orderic’s

⁸⁴ OV, 304: ‘iuuenis multa probitate et benignitate laudabilis’, and ‘duo elegantes filii’.

narrative, FitzStephen surfaces after the wreck and lets himself sink after hearing of the prince's death. This, for Orderic, was a suicide, as he described the captain as 'male desperans'.⁸⁵ In twelfth-century art and architecture, the personified *Desperatio* was always depicted in the act of self-destruction, and in literature, *desperatio* was connected to Judas Iscariot, who killed himself.⁸⁶ 'Male desperans' clearly signalled suicide. Writers of history often covered suicides in silence or used ambiguous expressions to describe it;⁸⁷ yet, instead of simply reporting the captain's death, Orderic was unusually explicit. His decision to report the story, whether he invented it or heard it from Berold, was an act of character assassination. By telling everyone that this man was a suicide, Orderic shamed and condemned FitzStephen to eternal opprobrium, tarnishing his memory and ensuring that he would receive no kind thoughts or prayers from the *Historia's* readers. Meanwhile, Henry of Huntingdon presented two versions, one in which he summarily condemned all passengers as sodomites and another in which he tempered the sin, calling it pride, and associated it only with William Adelin. For him, there had to have been a sin that was punished. The discrepancy between Henry's fondness for some of the victims and the mercilessness of his condemnatory account, with its graphic detail of bodies rotting in the sea, emphasises the extent to which the event shook his world-view. The difference between the two accounts and the late date of *De Contemptu Mundi* reveals that he was still thinking about the disaster in conflicting ways decades later.

1135 was a key year, as Henry I died without a direct male heir, plunging England and Normandy into civil war. Apart from Henry of Huntingdon, whose *De Contemptu Mundi* was edited after the king's death, Orderic is the only writer studied here who wrote his account of the wreck after its long-term consequences had become clear. Eadmer, Symeon of Durham, Hugh the Chanter, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury and Orderic noted William's status as heir, and of these, Eadmer, William of Malmesbury and Orderic referred to William Adelin's loss as the death of hope.⁸⁸ Orderic's loss of hope had a different meaning from William of Malmesbury's and Eadmer's, however. William Adelin's death had not immediately been a succession problem. There was little doubt in the 1120s that Henry, who remarried in 1121, could father another suitable male heir. Unease about the succession would have grown over time, as Henry aged and Adeliza of Louvain remained childless; another possible heir, Henry's nephew William Clito, died in 1128. William of Malmesbury and Eadmer wrote their accounts in 1125 and by 1126 respectively, before there was serious cause to worry. Although William of Malmesbury noted Henry I's impatience for a new heir, and Eadmer made a vague allusion to evil people and evil times as the consequence of the heir's death, their loss of hope should be seen in the loss of William Adelin's impeccable lineage.⁸⁹ Combining his father's Norman blood with the royal English blood of his mother, Matilda, William would have been the first 'English' king on the throne since

⁸⁵ OV, 298.

⁸⁶ Barasch, 'Despair', 568, 573.

⁸⁷ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: The Violent Against Themselves*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33, 35.

⁸⁸ OV, 302; Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, 290; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 594; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 758.

⁸⁹ For a discussion of William's and his legitimate sister Matilda's lineage, see Sara McDougall, *Royal Bastards: The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1230* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 125-7.

Edward the Confessor. William of Malmesbury mentioned a prophecy to that effect, which was well-known among contemporaries, as even the French abbot Suger knew it.⁹⁰ The prince's ancestry was important to the half-English William of Malmesbury and the fully English Eadmer. As William's mother predeceased him, no future son by Henry I would share this lineage. The two writers wrote too early to foresee the violent consequences following Henry I's death. Eadmer's comment about William Adelin as the hope against evil people and evil times may allude to the promise of peace which William had just secured by swearing allegiance for Normandy and through his alliance and marriage to Matilda of Anjou. Their loss of hope must be seen in a mainly ethnic dimension, while Orderic, who was also half English but lived in Normandy, took a Norman perspective and wrote in the context of the civil war and widespread suffering, as the above comparison with other instances of affective language in the *Historia* shows. Unrest reached Saint-Évroult in 1136, when the town was burnt by Angevin forces.⁹¹ Orderic wrote his account around this time and claimed that people still grieved for the White Ship, using the present-tense 'plangunt' and emphasising William's unfulfilled promise.⁹² This grief was not for William as a person, but for the consequences of his death, as Orderic made clear when he detailed the dire suffering of the people living in the lordships made vacant by the disaster.⁹³ To describe William as the hope of the people was not an exaggeration: he was promising and old enough for a smooth transition and had started taking part in political affairs. Private disasters in the royal family emotionally affected people throughout the realm because of the implications for the safety, peace and stability of the country. The wreck of the White Ship is a case in point. Before 1135, writers lamented the loss of William's promising and irreplaceable lineage. After 1135, Orderic grieved for the peace and stability that could have been.

The influence of Orderic's childhood trauma on aspects of his writing has been noted by several historians, and there are parallels between the White Ship disaster and Orderic's own life experience.⁹⁴ Perhaps the defining point in his life was being sent away from England to a Norman monastery at the age of ten. He reflected on this experience multiple times, using terms of grief and mourning.⁹⁵ As Orderic used the same biblical comparison of Jacob grieving for Joseph for his own experience of separation and in his account of Henry I grieving for William, one could argue that he saw his and his father's feelings as comparable to Henry's feelings after William's death.⁹⁶ As Orderic did not use this comparison elsewhere, its use here is significant. It reveals his intense empathy for Henry and explains his sympathetic treatment of the king in the narrative, discussed below, even as it suggests that he conflated these different situations of parent-

⁹⁰ Suger, *The Deeds of Louis the Fat*, trans. and ed. Richard Cusimano and John Moorhead (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 69.

⁹¹ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 40.

⁹² OV, 300, 302.

⁹³ OV, 304.

⁹⁴ Bates, 'Lives, Identities and the Historians of the Normans', 191; Albu, 'Worldly Woe and Heavenly Joy', 224; Van Houts, 'Orderic and His Father, Odelerius', 24–6.

⁹⁵ OV, 3: 146, 150–1, 5: 554; Van Houts, 'Orderic and His Father, Odelerius', 26.

⁹⁶ OV, 554. For interpretations of that comparison for Orderic's life, see Giles E. M. Gasper, 'Orderic Vitalis, Historical Writing and a Theology of Reckoning', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 247–59 (255); Thomas O'Donnell, 'Meanders, Loops, and Dead Ends: Literary Form and the Common Life in Orderic's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 298–323 (314–16).

child separations. Like the victims of the wreck, he was dead to his father and physically lost to his family. Neither Orderic nor the victims were ever reunited with their families. Personal poignancy may partly account for his uniquely long, detailed and affective narrative. It would not be unreasonable to posit that Orderic was understandably upset by an event that mirrored his own trauma in such a dramatic way.

Such expressions of feelings would have been encouraged by Orderic's duty to Saint-Évroult. He states that he himself did not lose any relatives in the wreck, but he certainly knew people who had. As a monk of Saint-Évroult, Orderic was required to express emotional reactions to the disaster. Monks were to direct their minds and emotions to serve God and the community in love and friendship, emotions required in the Benedictine Rule, though this did not mean that his expressed emotions were not real and felt.⁹⁷ As noted above, the monks had known many of the victims such as William of Rhuddlan and the Laigle brothers since childhood, and had been involved in transactions with them throughout their lives, such as setting up Ralph the Red as a knight with the gift of a horse. Although most of the victims were young, these examples show that the abbey had already invested in a considerable relationship with them; thus Saint-Évroult lost not only past and current benefactors, but the expectation of a long relationship and of future gifts and benefits from promising young men at the start of their careers. Orderic may have fulfilled his duty of feeling for the local victims by connecting the disaster to his personal experience of loss and using highly affective terms in the account of the wreck, focussing on the feelings of those involved and making frequent interjections to emphasise the tragedy. The wreck of the White Ship had national significance, but Orderic framed it as a local story.⁹⁸ Many writers reported the king's grief, yet Orderic used even this shared, nationally significant anecdote to introduce local concerns, showing Henry grieving for a benefactor of Saint-Évroult. Orderic's audience stretched just beyond the monastery walls – an audience Orderic expected would still care about the wreck decades later. Orderic's personal experience and empathy and community considerations came together decades later against the backdrop of civil war to shape a highly emotional, dutiful account which demonstrates that the White Ship was still a tragedy, and especially so after 1135, on an individual, communal and national level.

The King's Two Duties

As we have seen, many contemporary writers used heightened rhetoric and described the emotions of participants to draw moral lessons from the story, usually stressing the consequences of sin, warning readers about the victims' sudden reversal of fortune. They also showed the grieving king as an example of humility and pious acceptance of God's judgement. Orderic did so as well, although even here, he used benefactors of Saint-Évroult as positive examples.

Henry I visited Saint-Évroult in 1113 and on this occasion confirmed gifts and donations to the abbey.⁹⁹ Orderic probably witnessed the visit, which may have left a positive impression on him, shaping his sympathetic presentation of the king in the

⁹⁷ Bouquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, 84, 91; Kardong, *Benedict's Rule*, chapters 4 (79–102) and 72 (587–602).

⁹⁸ This does not mean it was an exclusively local story, it was also a nationally significant story, and Orderic highlighted both.

⁹⁹ *Regesta II*, no. 1019.

Historia. His view of Henry I was probably further elevated by nostalgia for the stability of Henry I's later years after the king's death in 1135 and the outbreak of civil war in 1136. In the account of the wreck, Orderic contrasted Henry's model behaviour with the bad behaviour of others, which served to exalt Henry's wisdom and set him up as a moral example. Henry is shown fulfilling his duties in the face of unprecedented loss. Orderic subtly foreshadows Henry's anger before thwarting his readers' expectations with a demonstration of Henry's virtue. During the wreck, the captain, Thomas FitzStephen, drowns himself rather than face 'furore[m] irati regis', the fury of an irate king; the courtiers in their turn keep the news from Henry and grieve in secret for fear of announcing it to the king. Eventually, they arrange for a child, whose innocence could temper Henry's reaction, to throw himself weeping at the king's feet in a gesture of humility. With FitzStephen's terror still in their mind, readers would likely have understood the courtiers' reluctance as fear of Henry's wrath. In this situation, anger would have been a sin. Writers sometimes distinguished between righteous and uncontrolled anger. *Ira*, as opposed to *furor*, could be rational, controlled, public and appropriate for a king to display, especially in a judicial context.¹⁰⁰ Orderic revealed this view of *ira* in the speech of Serlo bishop of Sées to Henry I, when the bishop demands that Henry 'be angry to some purpose' in response to the lawlessness in Normandy under Duke Robert.¹⁰¹ Anger with a purpose could be justified and virtuous. In Orderic's *Historia*, Henry displays *ira* even before he becomes king, during the suppression of an uprising in Rouen, in which he threw the chief rebel, a burgess named Conan, from a tower.¹⁰² Although Henry shakes with anger, Orderic emphasised in his account of the long journey to the top of the tower that the act is controlled, deliberate and premeditated. *Ira* served the exercise of justice, a royal duty, while *furor*, on the other hand, was uncontrolled and raging. When Orderic connects *furor* to the exercise of power, it is normally done as criticism.¹⁰³ Since everyone responsible for the wreck of the White Ship was dead, there was no justice to be achieved; Henry's anger would have been without a purpose and therefore *furor*. Orderic showed with his depiction of the captain's and the courtiers' fear that it was reported or at least plausible to Orderic that Henry was expected to fall below the ideal moral standards of a king.

There was no justice to be achieved, for in fact, the wreck of the White Ship was in itself an example of justice. It was to most contemporary writers an act of God.¹⁰⁴ Orderic invoked God's agency from the beginning, foreshadowing that 'in the morning those whom God allowed to do so landed in England'.¹⁰⁵ He recounted how the passengers of the White Ship disrespected God by chasing away the priests who

¹⁰⁰ Richard Barton, 'Emotions and Power in Orderic Vitalis', 41–60; Gerd Althoff, 'Ira Regis: Prolegomena to a History of Royal Anger', in *Anger's Past*, 59–74 (70); Stephen White, 'The Politics of Anger', in *Anger's Past*, 127–52 (137); Bouquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, 179.

¹⁰¹ OV, 62. 'utiliter irascere'.

¹⁰² OV, 4: 226.

¹⁰³ Barton, 'Emotions', 49–50. Orderic's distinction between *ira* and *furor* is not entirely consistent: OV 30: He described Robert of Béleme as a tyrannical, brutal and beast-like man throughout the *Historia*, yet when Robert is defeated, he displays *ira* and *dolor*, rather than *furor*, as we might expect, especially since he then goes on a killing and torturing spree and is compared to a wild dragon. *Ira*, as one of the seven deadly sins, did not always denote righteous anger, of course, and had different, conflicting connotations: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 'Ira', accessed through *Logeion*, <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/ira>.

¹⁰⁴ OV, 300; Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, 288; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 466; John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 148; Wace, *Roman de Rou*, 206; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 758.

¹⁰⁵ OV, 296: 'mane Angliam quibus a Deo concessum fuit amplexati sunt'.

had come to bless the ship. 'All too soon they were punished for their disrespect'.¹⁰⁶ In the case of Conan the rebel, his disrespect for his lords had occasioned Henry I's anger.¹⁰⁷ The similarity of their motivation suggests that Orderic perceived God's role and the king's role as parallel, if on a different scale. Just as Henry made an example of Conan, God, in Orderic's account, used the wreck to teach a lesson. God drowns all the irreverent nobles, except for Geoffrey of Laigle, who is spared along with the butcher, Berold. The two men cling to a spar, humbled and awaiting God's disposition. During the night, they are equals, and Geoffrey 'commend[s] his companion to God' before he himself freezes to death and Berold is rescued.¹⁰⁸ Geoffrey's penance may have saved his soul, and with his connection to Saint-Évroult, Orderic may have intended to comfort Geoffrey's bereaved friends and relatives and show Geoffrey in a better light to future monks and readers. However, the lesson was intended rather for those left behind. In an implicit reference to the wheel of fortune, the nobles disrespect God and only the poorest man on board, not implicated in the sin, survives. Having just seen the consequences of disrespecting God, the king would have been ill advised to question God's judgement with *furor*.

Orderic highlighted Henry's virtuous behaviour by showing how Henry, against all expectations, did not become angry. Upon hearing the news, Henry falls down and is led into his private quarters to lament and grieve.¹⁰⁹ The next time he appears in the narrative, he is listening to his councillors.¹¹⁰ Orderic's thwarting of any expectation of anger seems his attempt to solve a problem faced by other writers favourable to Henry. A good king shows no weakness, while a good father grieves for his children: seemingly incompatible roles. Other writers did not see Henry's reaction in a positive light. Hugh the Chanter mentioned Henry's *inmoderatus* grief, signalling loss of control (although he hastened to add that 'like a wise man' Henry consoled himself).¹¹¹ Eadmer omitted the initial loss of control, veiling the fall in silence, and described Henry comforting his people with courage and with a humble voice and gestures deferring to God's judgement. Eadmer used direct speech to emphasise Henry's pious prayer.¹¹² In his somewhat later account, Wace hostile to Henry, described him fainting and needing courtiers to sternly tell him to stop weeping like a woman, to get up and act with authority like a king. After that, he dines with the court, shows no sorrow and even flirts with ladies.¹¹³

However much Orderic tried to show it in a virtuous light, Henry's fall was not ideal kingly behaviour, as melancholic grief had passive associations.¹¹⁴ Weeping was a sign of humility and penance, however, and writers stressing Henry's humility may have

¹⁰⁶ OV, 296: 'Paulo post derisionis suae ultionem receperunt.' *Ultio* was often used in the sense of 'vengeance', which implies emotional involvement: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 'Ultio', accessed through *Logeion*, <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/ultio>. Chibnall herself translates *ultio* as 'vengeance' in the passage about Conan the Rouen rebel (OV, 4: 226). Other accounts support this reading, for example Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 466: 'Behold the glittering vengeance of God!' / 'Ecce coruscabilis Dei vindicta!'

¹⁰⁷ OV, 4: 224.

¹⁰⁸ OV, 300: 'socium [...] suum Deo commenda[t]'.
¹⁰⁹ OV, 300.

¹¹⁰ OV, 308.

¹¹¹ Hugh the Chanter, *History*, 164: 'grau[em] et inmoderat[um] dolore[m]', and 'sicut sapiens homo'. For a similar narrative, see Symeon of Durham, *Opera*, 113.

¹¹² Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, 288.

¹¹³ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, 207.

¹¹⁴ Barasch, 'Despair in the Medieval Imagination', 570.

intended this as a more positive interpretation of his behaviour.¹¹⁵ The positive religious association may have come to the monastic writers Hugh the Chanter, Eadmer and Orderic more readily than to Wace, whose account was entirely secular: Henry's grief was wholly inappropriate for a king, and neither Henry nor the courtiers spare any thought for humility or God. The difference came as much down to the authors as the audience: Eadmer, Hugh and Orderic wrote Latin monastic histories for fellow monks and clerics, Wace, writing long after Henry I's death, during the reign of Henry II, wrote a vernacular courtly poem for laypeople. Orderic knew that behaviour deemed acceptable and pious by monks could be and was construed as weak in noblemen. While recounting events in *Outremer*, for example, he described how the crusade leader Tancred, upon hearing of his fellow leader Bohemond's capture, did not submit to 'vain tears and laments' like a woman, but rather gathered an army to set right the situation.¹¹⁶ Both Wace and Orderic recognised a gendered association to weeping. Tancred has options to remedy the situation, while Henry does not and is impotent. Weeping made the king appear weak, whereas anger, however inappropriate in this situation as *furor*, would have allowed him to display extreme emotion while seeming to preserve his power.¹¹⁷ The courtiers' reaction to the faint speaks volumes: Henry is led away to compose himself. He must not grieve in public except in a subdued, controlled manner. In a separate example, also in 1120, Juhel lord of Mayenne recounted how he intended to kill a man in his court in anger, but was prevented by his wife and some clerics, who dragged him into his private chambers.¹¹⁸ This allowed lords unable to restrain their reactions to deal with their publicly inappropriate emotions. It was a way to save face. In both Juhel's and Henry's case, other people initiated this move, suggesting that the emotional lord in question was not expected to recognise his own overreaction. Orderic was aware of Henry's perceived weakness and impotence, but as a monk, unlike other writers, Orderic did not condemn Henry for his failure of restraint and even dwelled on Henry's lamenting. For him, Henry's strength as king came through in the absence of anger. He did not justify Henry's reaction by framing it as penance.¹¹⁹ Perhaps he envisaged an audience at least in part non-monastic, for example the benefactors and relatives. Instead, he defended Henry's reaction by comparing his grief to David's for Ammon and Absalom (II Samuel 13.31-13.39 and 18.33-19.4 Vulgate).¹²⁰ Like Henry, David falls to the ground after Ammon's death, and he weeps and laments after Absalom's death, even being criticised for it. Orderic invoked the biblical precedent to make Henry's reaction appropriate for a king. The story of David and Absalom was one of Orderic's favourite biblical comparisons for the rulers of his day and their relationships with sons and subordinates.¹²¹ David's precedent offered a solution to Orderic, and if the descriptions of Henry's fall or faint were in fact accurate,

¹¹⁵ OV, 2: 92, 320 for examples of weeping as penance.

¹¹⁶ OV, 5: 354: 'inanes lacrimas seu lamenta'.

¹¹⁷ Barton, 'Emotions', 57.

¹¹⁸ Richard Barton, "'Zealous Anger" and the Renegotiation of Aristocratic Relationships in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century France', in *Anger's Past*, 153-70 (153, 163).

¹¹⁹ Examples of penitential weeping by noblemen: OV, 2: 92, 320.

¹²⁰ OV, 300.

¹²¹ OV, 3: 93, 4: 8, 130. He had previously compared Henry with King David, meaning readers would have already been familiar with the association: OV, 60-66.

perhaps Henry himself, aware of his public status, may have modelled his behaviour on King David's.

The narrated contrast with Thomas FitzStephen served to further exalt Henry's virtues and mask his shortcomings. At the beginning of the White Ship account, Orderic linked Thomas FitzStephen's family to Henry's when FitzStephen reminds Henry that his father ferried Henry's father across the Channel in 1066. Henry affirms and continues this connection by entrusting the next generation, his sons, to him.¹²² FitzStephen resurfaces after the wreck and hears of William's death and his failure to ferry him across safely. Now, both Henry and FitzStephen are struck by disaster. Where Henry is expected to be angry, FitzStephen gives in to despair. *Furor* and despair are both strong and uncontrolled emotions, depicted as vices in art and contrasted with virtues such as patience. When the vices lose their battles against the virtues, they become mad and contorted and finally commit suicide.¹²³ Strong emotions such as fear, greed, sorrow and joy ate away at the human heart, led to darkness and ultimately proved destructive, Orderic warned.¹²⁴ Yet where FitzStephen gives in to despair and lets himself drown, Henry chooses patience over anger. FitzStephen refuses to face the worldly consequences of his actions, and by doing so, he invokes a harsher, spiritual consequence, damnation. He fears Henry more than he fears God. He has lost control of his emotions and expects Henry to do the same. His fear of 'furor[is] irati regis' combines both *ira*, justified anger against the incompetent captain, and the dangerous *furor*. Henry, on the other hand, faints and laments. While this could be construed as a weakness, Orderic emphasised that he did not succumb to raging, extreme emotion, which would lead to loss of control and ultimately self-destruction, as the comparison with Thomas FitzStephen illustrates. Orderic drew readers' attention to what Henry does not do. Apart from the initial shock, Henry remains in control, choosing virtue over vice. The account is a record of what, according to a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman monk, could have plausibly happened. Orderic saw the White Ship as a lesson in emotion management and explored and contrasted the options open to Henry. For this moral lesson, he kept his community in mind. The captain and the passengers represent examples of pride, fear and anguish, which led to death. Orderic's negative portrayal of the captain may have been a form of punishment for killing benefactors and relatives of the monks and for ultimately plunging the country into civil war. Henry, Berold and even Geoffrey of Laigle set examples of duty, restraint, humility and acceptance, which led to life. Henry and Geoffrey were benefactors, while Berold was important to Orderic as a witness. Orderic's idea of virtuous behaviour leaves room for Henry to grieve in measure. In fact, Henry is seen to publicly fulfil both duties, as a father and a king. The constraints and expectations of duty are central to Orderic's narrative. Henry is measured by his adherence to his duties in response to tragedy. Monks reading about Henry's exercise of duty may very well have reflected on their own duties.

¹²² OV, 296.

¹²³ Barasch, 'Despair in the Medieval Imagination', 573.

¹²⁴ OV, 4: 228.

Conclusion

Shopkow suggested that Orderic wrote Norman history and the history of Saint-Évroult within the larger context of Christian history, thereby minimising the Norman and local elements.¹²⁵ I hope to have shown instead that Orderic wrote on multiple levels at once, but the larger context did not diminish the local. The wreck of the White Ship was nationally significant and Orderic duly focussed on the grieving royal court. His victim list included both the well-known core group and local knights, and he used the larger, shared story of the king's reaction and the moral lesson in the tale to subtly include local elements. The emotions in Orderic's account, either expected, described or expressed, are connected to his sense of duty. His description of Henry I's and Thomas FitzStephen's public emotional reactions is an analysis of two men behaving according to their duty or failing to do so. Orderic fulfilled his own duty by expressing emotions on behalf of his affected monastic community and by commemorating the local victims. Bearing in mind that Orderic's intended readers were Saint-Évroult monks, we see that all other features of the narrative are subservient to the purpose of duty. By contrasting Henry's and FitzStephen's reactions, Orderic highlighted the theme of dutiful behaviour to his readers. His expression of emotions appropriate for a monk of Saint-Évroult was a model for his monastic readers to imitate. By painting an emotional picture of the wreck, Orderic acknowledged his community's pain and reinforced the *Historia* as a communal history. He repeatedly referred to composing memorable accounts of lay patrons' lives and deaths.¹²⁶ The heightened rhetoric and the minute details make the passage stand out, prompting readers to pay closer attention and feel sympathy. *Pietas* with its complex meaning would have reminded readers of their duty if they were Saint-Évroult monks or nudged them towards charitable compassion if they were not. The list of victims enabled future monastic readers to fulfil their duty and commemorate them by name. Orderic directed the entire account with all its narrative and stylistic features towards making the passage memorable and reflective on the theme of duty, so that future readers might pause in their reading and pray for the victims.

Analysing the accounts of the wreck of the White Ship allows us to see how the tragedy was perceived by writers without personal connections to the victims, and how it was remembered and commemorated in hard-hit communities like Orderic's abbey. Close reading and comparison offer a glimpse of how one monk conceived of and fulfilled his role within his community, and how he envisaged his text would work in this community in centuries to come. Orderic's account provides insight into how he felt or believed he ought to feel. Saint-Évroult and the realm suffered the consequences of William's death, and Orderic connected to the wreck on both a personal and communal level. Orderic's emotional expression and commemorative record would have been an attempt to genuinely feel for his benefactors. His duty was spiritual. Only showing the appropriate emotions wasn't enough, since 'men judge from outward appearances; God looks into the heart'.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Shopkow, *History and Community*, 109.

¹²⁶ OV, 2: 25, 104.

¹²⁷ OV, 4: 240. 'Homo enim uidet in facie; Deus autem in corde'. From 1. Samuel 16.7 (Vulgate Douay-Rheims).

Despite the efforts of relatives and writers, the victims of the White Ship were not remembered. Starting with Wace, many later histories reporting the disaster mentioned only William Adelin. The importance of the commemorative aspect of monastic history writing cannot be assessed by judging a work's contemporary success, attention and numbers of readers. The account and the *Historia* are valuable evidence of monks' relationships with benefactors outside of the formulaic donation charters and ritualistic gift exchanges and show a sense of community stretching far beyond the abbey walls. The *Historia* contextualises these exchanges and fills out the dry lists of names in commemorative rolls with life stories, detail and character, providing sketches of real, fleshed-out people for readers to care and pray for. Orderic's care to preserve the character and lives of benefactors supports McLaughlin's argument that a close, personal relationship was central to exchanges between benefactors and monks.¹²⁸ Orderic's efforts aimed to continue this relationship, to make the benefactors, for future generations of monks, more than just random names to be prayed for periodically. Orderic envisioned an important and invaluable role for monastic history in the liturgy and commemoration of his abbey. To what extent others shared his view remains to be seen. Orderic's *Historia* was not widely read in his time and for centuries afterwards but by recording the victims' names on parchment, Orderic ensured that the possibility of remembering always remained.¹²⁹ Orderic hoped that future generations of historians would make use of his text.¹³⁰ Thus, we still serve his purpose today in remembering Saint-Évroult's victims of the wreck of the White Ship.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr Emily Winkler and Dr Harriet Soper for supervising the research upon which this article is based, and to Prof. Giles Gasper and Prof. Len Scales for their helpful comments on various drafts of my manuscript. I also thank the two anonymous peer reviewers, whose detailed suggestions helped me improve this article significantly.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Harriet Claire Strahl  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6093-4327>

¹²⁸ McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, 133–77.

¹²⁹ Shopkow, *History and Community*, 195.

¹³⁰ *OV*, 2: 25, 104.

Appendix. Victim Lists¹³¹**Orderic Vitalis** (post 1136)¹³²*List*

'William and Richard, the king's sons'
 'Their sister Matilda, the wife of Rotrou count of Mortagne'
 'Richard, earl of Chester'
 'His wife Matilda, who was the sister of the palatine count, Theobald'
 'Richard's brother, Othuer, the son of Hugh earl of Chester and tutor and guardian of the king's son'
 'Young Thierry, the kinsman of Henry, emperor of the Germans'
 'Two handsome sons of Ivo of Grandmesnil'
 'William of Rhuddlan, their cousin'
 'William Bigod'
 'William of Pirou, the king's steward'¹³³
 'Geoffrey Ridel'
 'Hugh of Moulins'
 'Robert Mauduit'
 'Gisulf, the king's scribe'
 'Many others'

Mentioned in no particular order in the text

'18 women, [...] the daughters or sisters, nieces or wives of kings and counts'
 'Barons and chief nobles of Mortain'
 'Ralph the Red'
 'Gilbert of Exmes'
 William, chaplain of the king and son of Roger bishop of Coutances
 'His [Roger bishop of Coutances'] brother'
 'Three distinguished nephews' of Roger bishop of Coutances
 'Thomas FitzStephen'
 'Geoffrey, the son of Gilbert of Laigle'
 (Engenulf of Laigle – mentioned as a victim of the disaster elsewhere)¹³⁴
 'Fifty experienced rowers there, and high-spirited marine guards'

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (1121)¹³⁵

'The king's two sons, William and Richard'
 'Richard, earl of Chester'
 'Ottuel, his brother'
 'Very many of the king's court'
 'Stewards'
 'Chamberlains'
 'Cupbearers'
 'People of various offices'
 'A very immense number of excellent people'

Eadmer of Canterbury (before 1127)¹³⁶

'William, son of King Henry'
 'Many nobles'
 'Knights'

¹³¹ For the accounts, translations and contextual and linguistic notes, see White, 'The Wreck of the White Ship'.

¹³² OV, 294–306.

¹³³ Erroneous. See *Regesta II*, no. 1243 from 1121.

¹³⁴ OV, 4: 50.

¹³⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 187.

¹³⁶ Eadmer of Canterbury, *Historia Novorum*, 288. Own translation.

'Boys'
'Women'

Henry of Huntingdon (main account: c. 1130)¹³⁷
Main account

'Two of the king's sons, William and Richard'
'The king's daughter'
'His [the king's] niece'
'Many of the king's nobles'
'Stewards'
'Chamberlains'
'Butlers'
'Earl Richard of Chester'

Hugh the Chanter (1127/1128)¹³⁸

'The king and duke designate'
'All who were with him in his ship'
'Many friends [of the archbishop of York]'

John of Worcester (before 1128)¹³⁹

'His [the king's] son William'
'In the company of a large crowd of nobles'
'Knights'
'Young men'
'And women'
'His [William's] brother Richard'
'Richard, earl of Chester'
'His brother Othuer'
'Geoffrey Ridel'
'Walter de Everci'
'Geoffrey, archdeacon of Hereford'
'The countess of Perche, the king's daughter'
'The countess of Chester, the king's niece'
'Many others who are omitted for the sake of brevity'

Symeon of Durham (before 1128)¹⁴⁰

'The king's son'
'His illegitimate brother Richard'
'The king's daughter, wife of Rotrou'
'Richard earl of Chester'
'His wife the king's niece and Count Theobald's sister'
'Othuer, tutor of the king's son'
'Geoffrey Ridel'
'Robert Mauduit'
'William Bigod'
'Many other principal men'
'Not a few nobles'
'140 knights'
'50 sailors'
'Three naval guides'

¹³⁷ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, 466.

¹³⁸ Hugh the Chanter, *History*, 164.

¹³⁹ John of Worcester, *Chronicle*, 148.

¹⁴⁰ Symeon of Durham, *Opera*, 1: 113. Own translation.

William of Malmesbury (1125)¹⁴¹

'William'
'The king's other son Richard'
'Richard earl of Chester'
'His brother Otuel, the guardian and tutor of the king's son'
'The king's daughter the countess of Perche'
'His niece, Theobald's sister, the countess of Chester'
'Choiciest knights'
'Chaplains of the court'
'Nobles' sons, [...] candidates for knighthood'

¹⁴¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, 1: 758–62.