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The *Heliand*'s Massacre of the Innocents: Was the *Heliand* Written by a Woman?

The Old Saxon epic poem, the *Heliand*, was composed c. 850 CE at the Benedictine Abbey of Fulda in Saxony. The *Heliand* is a gospel harmony detailing the life of Christ, in which the narrative was adapted for a Saxon audience to include elements of their history and culture (Murphy 2004, 263). Because the poem is so intimately tied to Saxon life, it is unsurprising that it contains graphic violence of soldiers murdering innocents, as a reference to the brutal Frankish conquest of Saxony in the eighth and ninth centuries, which decimated their territory and resulted in mass death. The violence of war is especially present in the depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents from the Gospel of Matthew. As opposed to the Vulgate Bible, the *Heliand*'s emotional and maternally-driven rendition of the Massacre differs sharply from the original brief and dispassionate telling. The focus on the pain of mothers prompts the question—why did the author decide to alter the gospel to appeal to Saxon mothers? A possible answer is that the author is a woman. Through an analysis of the *Heliand* within the framework of the roles of women as mothers and keepers of memories, the context of the Saxon Wars, and a comparison to other versions of the gospel and literature by women from this time, one can observe the potentiality of female authorship. This possibility demands a reexamination of the historical record regarding Saxon women, and prompts further questions regarding their agency and influence in both the religious and secular worlds.

The Massacre of the Innocents is described in “Song 9” of the *Heliand*, and is twenty-eight lines long. The story concerns King Herod of Judea ordering all of the boys of Bethlehem under the age of two to be murdered after the Magi warn him that the promised Messiah was born. The author writes:

Never before or since has there been a more tragic departure for young persons, a more miserable death. The women were crying, the many mothers who saw their infants killed. Nor were they able to help them. Even if she held her own boy, little and loveable, tightly in her arms, the child still had to give up its life in front of the mother. They saw nothing evil, they saw nothing wrong, the ones who carried out this outrageous crime. With the weapon's edge, they did an enormous work of evil, cutting down many a man in his infancy. The mothers were weeping over the violent deaths of their young children. Sorrow was in Bethlehem, the loudest of lamentations, even if you cut their hearts in two with a sword, nothing more painful could ever happen to them in this world, the many women, the brides of Bethlehem. They saw their children in front of them, men in their childhood, violently killed, lying in blood on their laps. (Murphy 1992, 28)

The misery of the mothers who are forced to watch as cruel soldiers murder their children is the focus of this passage. They are the protagonists, rather than the infants, soldiers, or Herod.

Contrastingly, the original bible passage and the gospel harmony *Diatessaron* by Assyrian theologian and writer Tatian are short and unemotional (Harrison 2017, 204). In the Vulgate Bible, Matthew 2:16 states:

Then Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry and sending killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. (Swift and Kinney 2010, 9)

The graphic and lamentational nature of the *Heliand*'s "Song 9" is clear through a comparison to the original passage on which it is based. "Song 9" also relays more of the mothers' point of view, as the poem describes introspective details of their mental state—love for their children, and intense pain and grief. That is not to say that similar themes of death and loss are entirely absent in the bible, as Matthew 2:18 describes Rachel's Cry for her Children: "[a] voice in Ramah was heard, lamentation and great mourning: Rachel bewailing her children and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Swift and Kinney 2010, 9). While Rachel is not the infants' actual mother, her grief and wailing evoke a similar tone to the *Heliand*. Additionally, just as the *Heliand* is referencing the collective trauma of Frankish conquest, the gospel of Matthew is appealing to a collective memory of the descendants of the Israelites—the attempted massacre of

infants by Pharaoh in Exodus 1:15-22 (Park 2013, 480). However, the *Heliand*'s version of the narrative is long and gratuitous, and lingers on the anguish of mothers, which has no biblical parallel. The *Heliand* differs from its other influences as well.

Tatian's gospel harmony, the *Diatessaron*, was written c. 160-175 CE in Assyria. A copy of his writing was kept at Fulda, and thus the author of the *Heliand* had access to it. His version of the Massacre of the Innocents is:

Then Herod, seeing that he had been deceived by the Magi, was extremely angry and, sending, he killed all the boys, who were in Bethlehem and in all its territory, from the age of two years and under, according to the time that he had found out from the Magi. (Harrison 2017, 207)

This is almost an exact copy of the passage in the bible. The author of the *Heliand* was drawing from the Vulgate Bible and almost certainly also the *Diatessaron*, and a comparison illuminates the uniqueness of "Song 9." The fact that the *Heliand*'s emotional and maternally-driven account diverges from its source material begs the question—if not other biblical texts or gospel harmonies, what was the author drawing on? One potential answer is the collective memory of the Frankish conquest of Saxony, in which Frankish soldiers murdered countless Saxons.

Information regarding the Saxon Wars is limited, and there is a lack of Saxon perspectives, but through Frankish documents one can attempt to ascertain the historical narrative. One source is the *Royal Frankish Annals*, which provides a recounting of Carolingian history from 741-829 CE, the period when the Saxon Wars took place. The commissioner and exact purpose of the *Annals* is unknown, but it was likely sponsored by Charlemagne's government (Rogers and Scholz 1970, 3). One of the earliest mentions of the Saxons is in 758, which states that, "King Pepin went into Saxony and took the strongholds of the Saxons at Sythen by storm. And he inflicted bloody defeats on the Saxon people" (ibid., 42). Perhaps the

most violent episode in the Frankish conquest of Saxony is the blood-bath at Verden in 783, where allegedly 4,500 Saxons were hanged after the rebellion led by Saxon leader Windukind (Mayr-Harting 1996, 1116). The *Annals* corroborate the mass-murder: “An immense number of Saxons were slain at this place so that only a few escaped by flight... There another battle was fought, and the number of Saxons killed was no less than before” (Rogers and Scholz 1970, 61). While these passages confirm the brutality of the Saxon Wars, they tell of the deaths of soldiers, not that of children as in the Massacre of the Innocents.

Because there is so little written about the wars, it is difficult to determine what the death toll was, and who the victims were. However, the *Annals* describe the destruction of Saxon settlements and non-soldiers, so it can be inferred that the murder extended beyond formal armies. In 784, the year following Windukind’s rebellion, the author of the *Annals* writes that “the Lord King Charles... entered Saxony and went here and there devastating the countryside until he reached Hockeleve” (Rogers and Scholz 1970, 61). The phrase “devastating the countryside” does not inform whether or not the Frankish armies murdered children as in the Massacre of the Innocents, but it demonstrates that Saxon civilians, including mothers, were familiar with Frankish brutality, and would relate to a story of soldiers murdering children. In addition to the historical context of violence and massacre against the Saxons, the histories of women must be analyzed.

To place the *Heliand* within a larger context of women’s history, one must first examine their lives and roles during the time when the *Heliand* was written. Motherhood and fertility were highly valued and associated with virtue, demonstrated by legal codes, ecclesiastical writing, and the Carolingian and Saxon cultures. A majority of the historical evidence regarding women at this time concerns Carolingians. But during the conquest, the Saxons adopted

Carolingian government structures, religious practices, and material culture, so the close association between the two peoples allows for cautious generalizations (Hines 2003, 307-308).

The Frankish *Salic Laws* compiled by King Clovis c. 500 dedicate several laws to policing the murder of women:

If somebody kills a free woman after she has begun to have children, let the offender be judged liable for 24,000 denarii, which amounts to 600 solidi. Should the woman be past the age of child-bearing age, let the offender be judged liable for 8000 denarii, which amounts to 200 solidi. (Murray 2000, 535)

The ramifications for murdering a woman that is capable of giving birth demands a fine that is three times larger than the cost of murdering a post-menopausal woman. The implication in the *Salic Laws* is that women who can give birth hold significantly greater societal value, thus demonstrating how central children were to Frankish women's lives. Religious texts also illuminate the emphasis on fertility.

Hrabanus Maurus, the Abbot of Fulda from the 820s-840s CE, wrote about the importance of motherhood. Maurus was concerned with the relationships between motherhood and marriage and motherhood and religion, as seen in his comment: "Man and wife, soul and flesh, the work of begetting a son done by both, as in Exodus: Let him serve you [God] with his wife and sons" (Garver 2012, 219). In the context of this statement, the massacre of boys would be especially heinous, as giving birth to sons is how women serve God and their husbands. As the Abbot of Fulda his teachings, if not the man himself, would have been a source of influence for the author of the *Heliand*.

Maternity and fertility were tied directly to morality, so for Saxon women, losing children during the Saxon Wars would have been one of the gravest events imaginable, as with mothers of any culture. Motherhood was also not exclusive to actual mothers, as nuns also performed mothering. For example, Rudolf of Fulda described Saint Leoba in his *Life of Saint*

Leoba—who was aiding Saint Boniface in the conversion of the Saxons—as giving birth to a new generation of Christians (Rhodes 2012, 64). Literacy at this time was largely restricted to the aristocracy and church, so the author may have been a nun or abbess (Schaus 2006, 402). And because childless women in the church were also connected to motherhood, if the author was a nun, she could still sympathize with mothers. The horrifying nature of the *Heliand*'s Massacre of the Innocents is therefore consistent with the societal importance of children and motherhood.

Beyond the externally imposed valuing of fertility demonstrated by legal codes and religious teachings, women in the world of the *Heliand* were the keepers of memories and stories in their families. Women, both religious and secular, were the centers of kinship networks (Garver 2009, 69). Because of this role, they remembered, recorded, and passed down memories, especially with regard to death. If the *Heliand* was written by a woman, then the Massacre of the Innocents could have been her attempt to preserve the collective memory of mothers' trauma during the brutal Frankish conquest.

Aristocratic Carolingian women memorialized their dead family members in written form by writing letters or books concerning them, and venerated them through liturgy (ibid., 69). Carolingian women wrote records of their dead family members in “libri memoriales,” in which the names were written in groups based on family, friendship, or other intra-community bonds (ibid., 74). In addition to secular women, nuns and abbesses maintained close relationships with their families. Fulda, where the *Heliand* was written, was a male religious community founded by Saint Boniface in 744 CE. But its sphere of influence extended beyond the men who inhabited it, as religious women in Saint Boniface's circle, as well as secular aristocratic Carolingian and Saxon women, attached themselves to the monastery through donations, friendship, or family

ties (ibid., 102-103). At Fulda, many women assisting Saint Boniface in his conversion of the Saxons wrote about concerns over absence from their family. For example, Saint Leoba, an Anglo-Saxon nun, wrote a letter to Saint Boniface with information about her deceased parents, and asked him to pray for their souls (ibid., 103). Despite her separation from her family, who remained in Anglo-Saxon England, Saint Leoba tasked herself with memorializing her parents.

Women recording and sharing family memories, and especially venerating dead family members, demonstrates the regularity with which Carolingian, and later Saxon women, controlled kinship and mourning. If written by a woman, these precedents place the *Heliand* within a larger tradition of women recording tragic family and community history. The unprecedentedly graphic Massacre of the Innocents in the *Heliand* could be the preservation of the collective memory of the Saxon Wars. And, in addition to historical context and evidence concerning the Frankish conquest of Saxony and women's roles in Carolingian and Saxon societies, "Song 9" mirrors writings that are confirmed to have been written by women.

Female writers were present in the Frankish and Saxon societies, so the *Heliand* being written by a woman is feasible from a practical standpoint. Carolingian nuns were well-versed in Latin grammar, and both copied existing works and wrote original texts (Garver 2009, 15). The *Heliand* was written in Old Saxon, but the commonality of literacy in Latin among religious and aristocratic women suggests that some were likely able to write in Old Saxon. Oral storytelling was also a large part of women's lives, especially with regards to the family histories and collective memories discussed previously (ibid., 15). They were also not confined by genre, and wrote hagiography, drama, fables, and historiography (McLeod and Wilson 2007, 335). These stories tended to feature heroines, center women in their narratives, and characterize them as admirable, especially in relation to men (ibid., 336). Likewise, in the *Heliand*, the mothers are

the focal point, and they are contrasted by the cruel and violent male soldiers. The presence of literature written by women and their participation in oral performance allows for the potentiality of female authorship of the *Heliand*. In terms of content, the theme of mothers mourning the loss of their children and their powerlessness in being unable to prevent it was a common theme in literature written by women. Therefore, the *Heliand* is in line with other works by women of the time, including Dhuoda's *Liber Manualis* and Hrosvitha von Gandersheim's *Sapientia*.

Dhuoda, born c. 803 CE, was a member of the Carolingian aristocracy, and was married to Bernard of Septimania, a cousin of Charlemagne. They had two sons: William, born c. 826, and an infant born c. 841, whom she did not name, but was later Christened Bernard (Claussen 1996, 786). Dhuoda was powerless when her husband stole their children to give to King Charles the Bald as a tribute shortly after their youngest son was born. In response, she wrote *Liber Manualis* for her older son William to teach him life lessons and lament her loss (Dronke 1984, 38). Her sorrow is evident in the introduction to her book when she writes:

Knowing that most women in the world have the joy of living with their children, and seeing that I, Dhuoda, am withheld from you my son William, and am far away—as one anxious because of this, and full of longing to be useful, I am sending you this little work of mine, copied for you to read, a work that's formative in a mirror-like way. I'd be happy if, since I am not physically present, the presence of this little book call to your mind, as you read it, what you should do for my sake. (ibid., 40)

She states in the introduction that a mother's loss of her children is one of the most tragic occurrences in existence, and her pain and powerlessness is clear in her word choice, including describing herself as “anxious” and “longing to be useful,” and asserting the lack of “joy” as a result of living without her sons. Dhuoda's sense of powerlessness is echoed in “Song 9,” when the author writes that the mothers “[n]or were they able to help them,” and that “[t]hey saw their

children in front of them, men in their childhood, violently killed, lying in blood on their laps” (Murphy 1992, 28).

Another similarity between *Liber Manualis* and “Song 9” is that the mothers and their pain are centered, and they are the protagonists, rather than those who stole their children, or the children themselves. Later in the book, Dhuoda writes that she was “...neglecting myself, as if forgetting myself, in the sweetness of my excessive love for you and in the longing for your beautiful presence...” (Dronke 1984, 52). Her suffering and love for her child is foremost, similarly to the mothers in the *Heliand*. Dhuoda was a member of the Carolingian aristocracy rather than a Saxon civilian, and her sons were stolen but alive, rather than murdered. However, her lamentation and that her response to the loss of her sons demonstrates the centrality of mothers’ pain. And, the fact that *Liber Manualis* and the *Heliand* were written by contemporaries reveals the importance of this theme at the time when they were written.

There is also evidence that Saxon women were preoccupied with the murder of children, as observed in the writing of Hrosvitha von Gandersheim. Hrosvitha was an Ottonian nun and playwright born c. 935 CE, roughly a century after the *Heliand* and *Liber Manualis* were written. One of her allegories, *Sapientia*, relays the story of a mother and her three daughters, who are tortured in an attempt to force them to forsake Christianity (Richmond 2003, 133-134). *Sapientia*, the mother, watches Hadrian and Antiochus brutally and graphically torture and murder her daughters Faith, Charity, and Hope through whipping, burning, mutilating, and cutting apart their bodies (Marshall and St. John 1923, 144-153). *Sapientia*’s mourning is evident after the torture, as demonstrated when she wishes her daughters goodbye: “Farewell, beloved child, farewell; and when you are united to Christ in heaven give a thought to the mother who gave you life even when the years had exhausted her strength” (ibid., 154-155). Later, in the final

monologue, Sapientia is experiencing such extreme grief that she wishes to die: “I have sacrificed the children I bore. Oh, in Thy goodness do not delay the fulfilment of Thy promise, but free me swiftly from the bonds of this flesh that I may see my children and rejoice with them” (ibid., 157). Just as the author of the *Heliand* wrote that “[t]he mothers were weeping over the violent deaths of their young children” (Murphy 1992, 28), Hrosvitha wrote of Sapientia’s pain in a similarly gruesome manner.

The tone is different from the *Heliand* and *Liber Manualis*, as Hrosvitha was telling a story of martyrdom in order to urge the audience not to abandon their faith, and was expressing the virtue of those who suffer for Christ. However, the play concludes with Sapientia dying of grief, thus depicting the pain associated with the death of one’s children (Richmond 2003, 134-135). Therefore, although the powerlessness and misery are less evident in *Sapientia*, violence against or loss of children in front of their mothers and the mothers’ resulting lamentation is present in all three works. If the *Heliand* was written by a woman, these examples, which are few of many, place the Saxon poem within the tradition of literature about mothers mourning the loss or death of their children.

In addition to literary similarities, the three compositions reflect traditions and roles of women in the Frankish and Saxon cultures. As discussed previously, women were the keepers of familial and collective memory, which was notably common in memorialization and veneration of the dead. Dhuoda was writing to her son so that he had a piece of his mother with him, seen in her hope that despite her absence, through *Liber Manualis*, William would be able to feel the comfort of her presence (Dronke 1984, 40). Sapientia was not a real woman, but Hrosvitha had her pray for her children in a manner that resembles Saint Leoba’s request that Saint Boniface pray for her deceased parents (Garver 2009, 103). If the Massacre of Innocents in the *Heliand* is

the author's way of preserving the Saxon collective memory of the Frankish conquest and mass-murder that ensued, then the poem positions itself within both the conventions of women's literature, and Carolingian and Saxon societal norms and roles of women.

While there is extensive evidence that the *Heliand* could have been written by a woman, it is possible that a man could call upon Saxon trauma and motherhood. Otfrid von Weißenburg's gospel harmony known as the *Evangelienbuch*, written in Fulda c. 863-870 CE, portrays the Massacre of the Innocents similarly to the *Heliand*. Otfrid would have likely had access to the *Heliand*, as it was written in the same place but a few decades prior, so the commonalities may be a result of the *Heliand*'s influence. Nevertheless, the fact that a man wrote an emotional and graphic Massacre of the Innocents shows that not only women would choose to write this narrative. Otfrid's portrayal reads:

But when Herod the king noticed that he had been betrayed by them [i.e. the magi], he was quickly inflamed with great rage. He sent many men arrayed in arm and, encountering no resistance, they inflicted great slaughter. They began to kill the children who could not even speak, and precisely those who had recently been born had to perish this way, up to the age of two... The mothers cried, tears flowed, and their crying rose all the way up to heaven. They bared their breasts and tore their hair; there is no one who ever witnesses such grief. (Putter 2016, 363-364)

The actions and emotions of the mothers, and the overall tone of the passage, mirrors that of the *Heliand*. In the *Heliand*, the author writes that the mothers wept over the murder of their children, and that there is no greater pain (Murphy 1992, 28) Otfrid's final phrase regarding the mothers' grief and tears reaching all the way to heaven evokes an identical tone, in which sorrow, weeping, and grief are centered (Putter 2016, 364). While the similarities between the two passages are strikingly similar, however, there are equally striking differences.

"Song 9" is nearly twice as long as the *Evangelienbuch*'s Massacre of the Innocents, the mothers are present in a larger portion of the narrative, and the violence is gorier. Otfrid

describes the murders through the actions of the soldiers as they slaughtered the innocent children (ibid., 363). Contrastingly, “Song 9” describes the mothers as the primary actors, as they watched the murder and held the bloody corpses of their children (Murphy 1992, 28). They possess more agency than the mothers in the *Evangelienbuch*, who are presented solely in terms of their reactions to the soldiers. If the *Heliand*’s author was a woman, this difference in the mothers’ active participation in the narrative can be explained through the tendency of female authors to depict women as protagonists and heroines.

The pain of the mothers is also written more explicitly in “Song 9,” as observed when the author compares their pain to a sword slicing their hearts in two (Murphy 1992, 28). The author provides a more introspective, personal reaction to the murders than Otfrid, which suggests that the *Heliand*’s author was more familiar with this pain. The graphic violence in “Song 9” contains blood and gore, a reference to wartime casualties, more so than the *Evangelienbuch*. A possible explanation for this difference is that both the author of the *Heliand* and Otfrid are Saxons, who could call upon a shared memory of the trauma of Frankish conquest; but because the *Heliand* was written earlier, the bloodshed was a more recent memory. The literary characteristics in which the authors of the *Heliand* and *Evangelienbuch* differ demonstrate that although they are similar, “Song 9” is more maternally-driven. Aside from the *Evangelienbuch* complicating the argument that the *Heliand* was written by a woman, there is more direct evidence against female authorship.

In 1562, Matthew Flacius Illyricus printed a Latin translation of the *Heliand* that included a *Praefatio* that describes an attempt by a Saxon man to translate the entire Bible into “Germanicam linguam” under the orders of Ludouicus piissimus Augustus (the most pious emperor Louis), who could be either the Carolingian king Louis the Pious (r. 813-840 CE) or

Louis the German (r. 843-876 CE) (Pelle 2010, 64-65). The *Praefatio* states of the author that the man chosen for the task of versifying and translating the scriptures was a Saxon “who was considered a poet of renown among his own people,” thus gendering the author (ibid., 65). This evidence, however, is dubious because this *Praefatio*, while written contemporaneously to the *Heliand*, was not attributed to this supposed male author until M. Flacius Illyricus printed the poem. It also claims that the author was to transcribe the entire Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, whereas the *Heliand* detailed exclusively the life of Christ. Therefore, the *Praefatio* could be referring to an entirely different document and author. While the *Praefatio* might provide information about the author, because its link to the *Heliand* is questionable, it does not eliminate the possibility that the author was a woman. And, regardless, analyzing the question—was the *Heliand* was written by a woman?—calls for a reexamination of the historical record regarding Saxon and Carolingian women.

The Frankish conquest of Saxony in the eighth and ninth centuries consisted of bloody wars that resulted in mass-death of the Saxons, as seen in the *Royal Frankish Annals*. In its rendition of the Massacre of the Innocents, the *Heliand* is potentially responding to the violence through invoking a collective memory of the war inflicted on both Saxon soldiers and civilians in the countryside. Additionally, while the author is unknown, there is cultural and textual evidence that the author may have been a woman. Carolingian, and later Saxon women as a result of the widespread assimilation of Saxons into Frankish culture, were responsible for recording family memories, especially with regard to venerating and memorializing the dead.

Its unprecedentedly emotional depiction of the Massacre differs from the brief and dispassionate telling in the Vulgate Bible and Tatian’s *Diatessaron*. Even Otfrid von Weissenburg’s *Evangelienbuch*, whose Massacre of the Innocents is similar to the *Heliand*’s,

does not allow the mothers to be active agents, and includes less of their introspection and mental state. Further, the emphasis on the suffering of mothers who lost their children is present in the writings of other female authors from the *Heliand* era, including Dhuoda and Hrosvitha. While the author of the *Heliand* will likely never be confirmed, analyzing the historical narrative surrounding the gospel harmony and epic poem suggests that they may have been a woman. The next step in research is a search for other possible contextual influences on the *Heliand* beyond the Saxon wars, which may reframe the Massacre of the Innocents. Next, an examination of the other gospel commentaries that were available at Fulda's extensive library, like that of Hrabanus Maurus, and a comparison to the *Heliand* to locate similarities and differences. Further, a search for other texts possibly written by women must be performed. This suggestion that the *Heliand* was written by a woman thus demands a reexamination of scholarship on Medieval literature, as well as the roles of Saxon women within the religious and secular spheres.

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**Research Narrative for “The *Heliand*’s Massacre of the Innocents: Was the *Heliand*
Written by a Woman?”**

This research paper—an argument that the ninth century Saxon gospel harmony and epic poem the *Heliand* was written by a woman—was inspired by a conversation that I had with Professor Nicole Marafioti of the history department, when she commented that the *Heliand*’s depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents was unprecedentedly focused on the suffering of the mothers from their point of view. After a preliminary search through academic literature, I realized that studies concerning women in the *Heliand* was limited, and the argument that the author was a woman had never been made. Because the field of Medieval and Renaissance studies is traditionally male-dominated, I decided to challenge that misogynistic narrative. However, because mine was a novel argument, it required me to perform extensive primary and secondary source research.

First, I analyzed the *Heliand*’s telling of the Massacre of the Innocents, the center of my argument, and recorded all details that I believed were maternally-focused. Next, in order to prove that the *Heliand* was unprecedentedly maternally-focused, I consulted other tellings of the Massacre of the Innocents from the period. With the help of librarian Professor Micheal Hughes and Professor Marafioti, I located several other manuscripts and translations of gospel harmonies similar to the *Heliand*, including the original passage in the Vulgate bible, the second century *Diatessaron*, and ninth century *Evangelienbuch*. Through an analysis of these versions of the gospel that covered the same material and were written for a similar purpose as the *Heliand*, I was able prove its uniqueness. And as a result of the maternally-centered narrative of the *Heliand*, I hypothesized that the author was a woman.

After the religious sources, I consulted literature written by women from the ninth and tenth centuries in order to observe the ways in which they wrote about themselves and women at large. This included a ninth century book by Frankish noble Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, and a *Sapientia*, a play written by Hrosvitha von Gandersheim, a tenth century Ottonian nun. This research increased confidence in my argument, as the book and play contained similar themes of maternal grief and loss that were written similarly to the *Heliand*'s Massacre of the Innocents. My final primary source research consisted of writings on history or current events from the time around which the *Heliand* was written, especially concerning the Frankish conquest of Saxony. I located the *Royal Frankish Annals*, a well-chronicled history of the Saxon wars written by a noble Frankish author. The *Annals* provided information on the conditions under which the author of the *Heliand* was writing, and offered potential insight into their (her?) motivations. The violence and trauma of the Frankish conquest of Saxony mirrors the violence and mass-death in the Massacre of the Innocents, and so I concluded that it perhaps influenced the maternally-centered *Heliand*. This comprehensive list of primary sources allowed me to both use comparisons to other versions of the Massacre of the Innocents, literature written by women, and historical context to evidence my claim that the *Heliand* was written by a woman.

After I compiled my primary sources, I began my search for secondary literature beyond my preliminary search that revealed the lack of writing about the *Heliand* and female authorship. As per the recommendation of Professor Hughes, I first utilized two Medieval-specific databases: "Medieval and Early Modern Bibliographies" and "Iter: Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance." I searched for academic essays concerning the historical context of the *Heliand*, how the Massacre of the Innocents was perceived in the middle ages—especially with regards to infanticide and mass-death caused by war, information on the lives and roles of

women in the ninth century Saxon and Frankish cultures, and literature confirmed to have been written by women. After using the Medieval databases that were most suited to my research, I searched through broader databases, including journals dedicated to history and Medieval studies, and finally JSTOR. Additionally, I received recommendations for secondary literature from Professor Marafioti and a classmate who was also researching the *Heliand*, Juan Kamel. The final stage of my secondary source research was to locate the sections of Coates Library that contained books about Medieval women and Medieval biblical literature, and I briefly parsed through all books in the collection to ensure that I had as much material as possible. By the time that I completed the primary source and secondary literature research, I had gathered adequate evidence to begin the compilation and writing processes.

This essay where I argue that the *Heliand* was written by a woman was the most rigorous project that I have undertaken at Trinity University, as it involved extensive primary source research. Additionally, since it is a novel argument, there is no secondary literature directly about the subject. While there is always more research to be done on my topic—especially concerning alternate motivations of the author beyond recounting the trauma of the Frankish conquest of Saxony—I believe that my work proves that there is a demand for scholars of Medieval studies to reexamine the roles of women in history, literature, art, and all other disciplines.