Jaunts, Jottings, and Jetsam in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts

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A pageant of curiosities and dynamic images inhabits the margins of manuscripts, sometimes ornamenting, sometimes competing, sometimes commenting on the text they surround. They are a commonplace of codicological study, even more so since the publication of Lilian Randall's *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* in 1966 and of Michael Camille's *Image on the Edge* in 1992, which has done much to bring us to understand and interpret this panoply in ink and paint.[1] The images these writers treat, of course, are late, and it is the more rich and entertaining margins that command the attention, such as the copulating figures in the top margin of a book of hours (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 754, f. 65v),[2] or the Christ-like figure showing forth his buttocks to a spear-wielding, monkey-like creature mounted on an ostrich in the Rutland Psalter (London, British Library, Additional 62,925, ff. 66v-67r).[3] The margins of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts seem, by comparison, rather barren fields. There are certainly some notable exceptions, such as the illustrations in the Bury St Edmunds Psalter (Rome, Vatican Library, MS Reg. lat. 12),[4] or perhaps those in the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, ff. 78r, 87v, 123r).[5] But in truth, such examples are few in number and rather sober occasions in any case, lacking the spirited, immensely entertaining, and often surprising creations that fill the margins of later manuscripts. But if the Anglo-Saxons possessed vastly different conceptions of space, margins, and response to text than later generations, we nevertheless often find in their manuscripts a quiet, typically hidden or overlooked world of text and image entered into manuscripts by Anglo-Saxon and later users of these codices.

In British Library, MS Egerton 1993, a collection of Middle English saints' lives, a late hand has entered in ink a memorable drawing that proudly displays its own

rubric: "this is man" (fig. 1). Precisely what manner of beast man was occupied the attention of a number of doodlers who laid hands on Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. In London, British Library, MS Harley 863, a psalter of the third quarter of the eleventh century, a crowned man-beast (fig. 2) appears in red in the margins of Psalm 77.50. The Blickling Psalter, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, likewise contains various representations, some incised in drypoint, others done in ink. The psalter, in fact, includes some twenty-seven images in its margins. Some appear as elegant and suggestive in their simplicity (figs. 3-5), offering Picasso-esque representations of the human form, while others are more comic in aspect, such as the head of a cleric (fig. 6), or a melon-headed figure with bulbous eyes (fig. 7). Still others are more somber creations (fig. 8, ink) that have real artistic quality and command attention. In contrast, we find barnyard animals lurking within the margins as well (fig. 9). None of these illustrations has any relation to the text whose margins it occupies.

The glossaries in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 2685 retain their medieval binding, now held in place by a single thong and a few threads. And while its texts might have held little interest for at least one reader, its darkened and soiled cover offered itself as a canvas to the imagination, containing one partial and three full representations in ink of heads (fig. 10) in a later hand. Margins, and even book covers, provided clean palettes for figures, doodles, attempts at design work, and the like. In Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 8092, containing Sedulius' *Carmen Paschale*, a small head appears on the margin of f. 84r singing a tune whose music will never be heard (fig. 11a); in Bibliothèque Nationale MSS lat. 10575, the so-called Egbert Pontifical, and lat. 7585, containing Isidore's *Etymologiae*, we find typical and commonplace examples of design-work, in ink and drypoint, as also in MS lat. 9530 which contains Jerome on the Pauline epistles; London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A. i (the Vespasian Psalter); and London, British Library, MSS Royal 5 E. xi and 5 F. iii, both containing Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate* (figs. 11b-h). In the Blickling Psalter, in the bottom margin of f. 82r, appear scratches in a large, sprawling hand, easily passed over, but which appropriately spell in runes the word "psalter" (as *?saltrie*). Such doodles bring us into the world of modest play, of readers and scribes seeking distraction and succumbing to the urge to interrupt the silence of blank space; and now, as then, they offer the observant reader some respite from the labours of the text, although one cannot assume in all instances that the texts themselves were read.

At times, of course, more than simple play is intended. In the Eadwine Psalter, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1, drypoint sketches provide vital clues as to

the design and layout of a number of illustrations. At f. 66r, for example, a central figure standing on a mound is flanked by two groups of figures. The background is blank. Originally, however, two large mounds (here stylised mountains) were planned as backdrops to the groups of figures; the central mound may not have been part of the original design, for a drypoint wavy line indicates that the terrain was to be flat. At f. 53r, to the right of the frame a mountain appears surmounted by a tree. As the drypoint sketch indicates, originally the design on the right was to mirror that on the left; that is, the mountain was to be smaller, rising up to the right of the assembled group, and the tree to be the same size as that on the left: all this is visible in James' facsimile.[6] At f. 234v appears a figure to the right with an axe raised above his head and poised to strike; above him is a spear. The drypoint design indicates that originally the axe was to be raised higher and the spear to be further down and to the left, faintly visible in James' facsimile. It may be that here the artist wished the space between the two objects to be wider, and so did not follow the original layout. At f. 134r, the speaker to the left of the frame was originally portrayed as a horned Moses, although the horns were eliminated, a change which is also visible in James' facsimile.

The Paris Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 8846), a magnificent, although incomplete, copy of the Eadwine Psalter dated to the 1170's or 80's, likewise shows drypoint markings that bear on the design of the illustrations. The psalter's numerous illustrations have been much discussed, with the most recent detailed study published by C. R. Dodwell in 1990.[7] No mention is made there—nor have I found mention anywhere else—that in the bottom right margin of f. 72v, below the right-hand gloss column to the Gallicanum version of the psalms and extending below the columns containing the Hebraicum and Romanum versions there appears a drypoint drawing incised with a blunt point (fig. 12). The drawing shows a hart vaulting upward and to the left, while to the right there stands a figure with its right arm raised. However, the illustration accompanies Psalm 40, which makes no mention of the hart. The reference is found, in fact, at the beginning of the next psalm: *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus* "As the hart longs for the fountain of water, so my soul longs for you, O God," (v. 2). The scene is illustrated by the artist on f. 73v, although there are differences. In the full illustration, we see the hart being pursued by a dog charging from behind a tree, while to the right in another frame stand three figures. In the frame above this in the Paris Psalter stands a group of figures, one with a hand raised to chest-high position. But in the comparable illustration in the Eadwine Psalter we find above and to the right of the vaulting hart a figure to the left side of the group with an arm raised and outstretched from the

body.[8] It seems possible here that the artist of the drypoint sketch in the Paris Psalter was directly influenced by the design of the scene in the Eadwine Psalter.

The Paris Psalter also contains a more interesting mystery. Throughout the psalter, for example on ff. 95r, 111r, 125r, 133r, 137v, 148r, 149r, 151v, 157r, and elsewhere, there appears what initially can mistakenly be taken as offset from illustrations. But upon closer examination, this is not the case at all. On these folia we find in an exceedingly faint burgundy ink (like a stain or offset) the diamond patterning seen in the background of a number of the illustrations, and placed variously on the leaves in the margins or between columns. While the patterning is regular, the shape of the design is not, and it appears in some places that space was left for a figure, but none was ever entered in any of these cases. At times, the design is accompanied by letters and words, occasionally written backwards. At f. 137v the word (or name?) "MEDDICE" is written twice, while at ff. 148r and 149r, only "EDICE" appears. And to the left of the more pronounced of these designs on f. 151v, we find the letters "DNO" and below that an "E" with a macron—all written backwards—and below that a "B" and what seems to be a " Y." Additional letters and a cryptic sign appear elsewhere on the leaf. At ff. 155v and 160r the letters " ENE" are written in the bottom margins. At f. 95r the patterning appears without accompanying letters. I wonder if these additions bear any relation to the patches with monograms that are found as later additions (but before the Old English gloss was entered) in the Vespasian Psalter at, for example, ff. 18v, 19rv, 91r, and 128rv, although here the patches were used to repair holes and then decorated as elaborate monograms bearing personal names or names of saints: they remain, however, undeciphered. Could the additions to the Paris Psalter carry some indication of personal names?

In addition to drypoint and ink illustrations, it is a rare manuscript that does not contain some stray lines or comment, some jotting that travels as part of the codex's history and use. Commonplace among such comments are the *probationes pennae* that are found in various manuscripts.[9] The *probatio pennae* is not simply a few trial letters scrawled onto a leaf to test a pen's nib: one would expect that trials of this sort would be done on some piece of scrap vellum in advance of writing on what would be a finished leaf. Rather, the *probationes pennae* developed into a minor literary form. Sometimes, as in London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D. vi, the *probatio* simply takes the form of writing the words *probatio penn(a)e* (we find the same, for instance, in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 7586, where *prob* appears in the right margin of f. 37r and *probatio penne* in the upper left margin of f. 40v). In other

instances, they include verses or additional prose. In London, British Library, MS Harley 3013, for example, a copy of Aldhelm's prose *De laude virginitatis*, at the end of the text on f. 96r is written:

> Tres digiti scribunt. totum corpusque laborat.
> Scribere qui nescit. nullum putet esse laborem.
> Dum digiti scribunt uix cetera membra quiescunt.

The first two lines are also found in London, British Library, MS Royal 6 A. vi, again a copy of Aldhelm. In the incomplete copy of Isidore's *Etymologiae* in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 7586, at f. 35v, we find the lines: *probatio penna / uides me causum / dixit penna ad / magistrum*. Our whetted appetite is somewhat appeased when at f. 39r we read: *dixit penna / ad magistrum / uides me causa / sum [recte causum] et in sum[m]o capite incisa sum / suauiter me per me / et fortiter me / tene et omnia bona feceris eleme*. These are stylised additions, not pen-trials at all, giving us, in small measure, a sense of interaction between text and margin, writer and reader, and with some mild sophistication as well. Compare this with f. 31r, where in chapter 5, *De vermibus*, the scribe writes: "ba be bi bu, fa fe fi fo fu, ga ge gi go gu."

Scribes and readers occasionally comment on the texts before them. In his description of London, British Library, MS Tiberius B. v, part 1, N. R. Ker notes that on f. 19r appear the words *god me helpe*.[10] Lacking context, the addition remains undistinguished. However, the text which the words accompany is a computistical text that treats of embolismic days:

> In primo igitur anno embolismi hoc est in ogdoadae .iii. sunt epacte .xxii. et ideo est luna in kalendis septembris et octobris .xxviii. in kalendis novembris et decembris .xxix. Ipsa autem luna quae est .xxix. in kalendis decembris extinguitur illic sua luna est. Illa uero luna que in .iiii. nonis decembris incipit et terminatur .xxxii. kalendis ianuarius embolismi est.[11]

The calculation of embolisms, epacts, concurrents, and the like is highly specialised and complex, and one can easily imagine the words *god me helpe* to be an expression of a reader's exasperation with the text before him. In Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 85 occurs an Old English homily for the third Sunday in Lent at ff. 40v-61v. At one point the text speaks of the apportioning of good to those who hold themselves in cleanliness: *7 ðær gode dælan ðam ðe hyre hadas mid clænnesse 'ge'healdað*, f. 44v. A later hand has entered into the top margin *decid[it] omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus*

amor<i>; and where the text continues *7 godes lof mid riht began willað* "and God's love rightly will cultivate," the same hand has written in the left margin: *s[cilicet] p[ro] (?) amor uincit omnia et nos cedamus amor<i>*.[12] Such comments are neither insightful nor revealing, but they should not be so quickly passed over or dismissed either. These additions, like the ink and drypoint drawings that occupy the margins of numerous manuscripts, ultimately become components of textual culture and offer a record of the activity of users and readers and perhaps of anonymous owners.

A final item I would like to mention requires that I equivocate on the meaning of the term "margin." In his *Catalogue,* Ker details the Old English items in the Sherborne Pontifical (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 943), noting that ff. 163-170 form, as he says, "a quire of smaller format ruled for nineteen long lines" whereas the main text is ruled for twenty-five. The contents of this quire are briefly as follows: on f. 163r is written a Latin text of twenty-seven lines beginning *Tempus quod inter homines mortem et ultimam resurrectionem*; on f. 163v are rules of confraternity in Old English (*Ðis is þara gerædnessa sum biscopas geræd habbað*) followed by parts of a *Missa pro defunctis (A[ntiphona] Intret oratio mea. c[ollectio]. Deus qui caritatis. Epistola. In diebus illis*). Ff. 164r-170r/1 contain an Old English homily (*Vs is on þysum dæge to wurðigenne þyses temples symelnyss*), followed by additions in Latin in two hands: *dom[us] cunctaque congregatio cunctis sanctae aecclesiae*; *Annuente atque fauente melliflua dei*; and *Domo pape cunctisque generaliter.* Finally, f. 170v contains two formulary penitential letters (*Alleluia sacer christi miles adelwoldus*), followed by a writ in Old English (+ *Æþelric bisceop gret æþelmær*) that has been stained by a reagent but that is still legible except in a few places. Ff. 163-170 form a quire of 8, of which the central feature is the aforementioned homily. The other items are later accretions; when we strip away these items from the "margins" of the quire, we find the following: an originally blank cover (f. 163), followed by the Old English homily on the dedication of a church (ff. 164r-170r/1) and, with the exception of the single concluding line of the homily, a blank final cover (f. 170). Significantly, ff. 163r and 170v are notably darker than the other folia, which clearly indicates that the leaves served as outer covers of a booklet. Patrick Conner notes the disposition of the leaves, but he stops short of stating the straightforward conclusion: this quire and its homily traveled as a separate booklet, with the outer leaves forming the cover.[13] It is possible that Conner left off the observation, since he wants to suggest similarities between the script here and that of the main text, although he is careful to say that "we should not push such similarities too far" (Conner 92). He also states that if the main hand of the manuscript was written at Exeter, "it is reasonable to assume that these homilies were added before the

manuscript left Exeter," although he notes that "there is no proof of that" (Conner 92). Here is not the place to discuss these possibilities; and what role the recognition of the quire as comprising a booklet plays here may not assist in any argument. The point to be made here is a simple and illustrative one: in stripping away the accretions from the "margins" of the quire, one can recover something of its original composition and state.

The margins of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, although far less dynamic and lacking the interplay that we find in later manuscripts, especially French and Flemish, nevertheless offer access to a world of some activity, both by Anglo-Saxon and later users of these manuscripts. We will never understand in nearly all cases why a head is tossed into the margins here, a chicken there, or what impelled these users to leave their anonymous marks. On the one hand, we can account for the general bareness of Anglo-Saxon margins as linked to ways of reading coupled with a different notion of the use of text, where the layout of the page generally was not necessarily part of the function of reading. Text and *meditatio* remained central. But by the twelfth century, the idea of the codex as a written artifact with articulated visual cues and layout extended the notion of document into marginal space: there are many texts in which the distinction between main text and commentary, for example, is blurred. On the other hand, with the ascendancy of the Norman rulers, interest in the earlier manuscripts naturally waned. Still, as the many late examples of "doodling" here attest, people were nevertheless poking their noses and their pens into the manuscripts. We may never understand the reasons, we may never even understand whether or not in the majority of cases they even read the text before them, but the examples nevertheless bear witness to playful activity and creative urges at work. As we collect more of these jaunts and jottings—and we should begin to keep a record of them—we may come, if not to understand, at least to take quiet pleasure in the neglected and, most often, hidden world occupying the margins of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.

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Notes

1 Lilian M.C. Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1966); Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992); also M.W. Evans, *Medieval Drawings* (London: Hamlyn Publishing, 1969).

2 Camille 24.

3 Camille 21-2.

4 See Robert Mark Harris, "The Marginal Drawings of the Bury St. Edmunds Psalter (Rome, Vatican Library MS Reg. lat. 12)" Ph.D. Princeton University, 1960.

5 The drawings are reproduced in Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993), plates XVI-XIX.

6 M.R. James, *The Canterbury Psalter* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co Ltd for Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, 1935). Now see also *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image, and Monastic Culture in Twelfth-Century Canterbury* eds Margaret Gibson, T.A. Heslop, Richard W. Pfaff (London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992).

7 "The Final Copy of the Utrecht Psalter and Its Relationship with the Utrecht and Eadwine Psalter (Paris, B.N. lat. 8846, ca. 1170-1190)," *Scriptorium* 44 (1990): 21-53 + plates. Dodwell's name is attached as the author of the article, although it must be noted that Timothy Graham did much of the research.

8 For the Eadwine Psalter see James' facsimile (note 6 above), f. 73v.

9 Bernhard Bischoff wrote the only study of the *probationes pennae* that I am aware of: "Elementarunterricht und *Probationes Pennae* in der ersten Hälfte des Mittelalters," in *Mittelalterliche Studien. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte* vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1966), pp. 74-87.

10 In N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (1957; rep. with supplement Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

11 Printed in PL 90: 822.

12 Joseph McGowan points out the source of this: Virgil, *Eclogues* X.69.

12 *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, p. 92. See also P.R. Robinson, "Self-Contained Units in Composite Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Period," *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978): 231-8; rep. *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: Basic Readings,* ed. Mary P. Richards, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England 2 (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. 25-35.
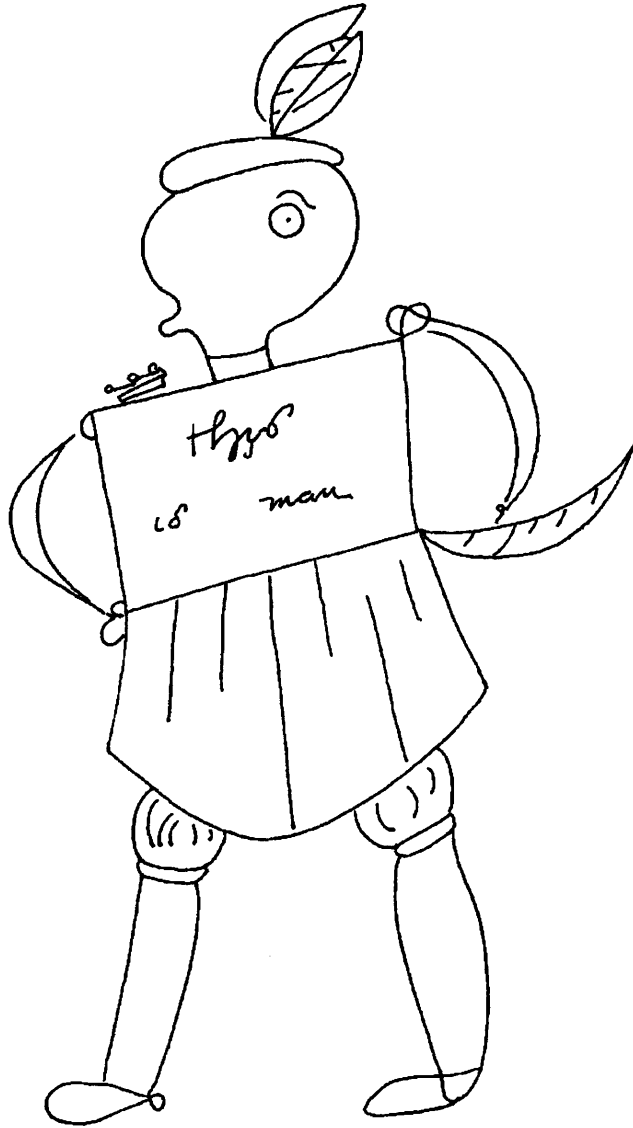
Marginal Drawings (traced, not to scale)

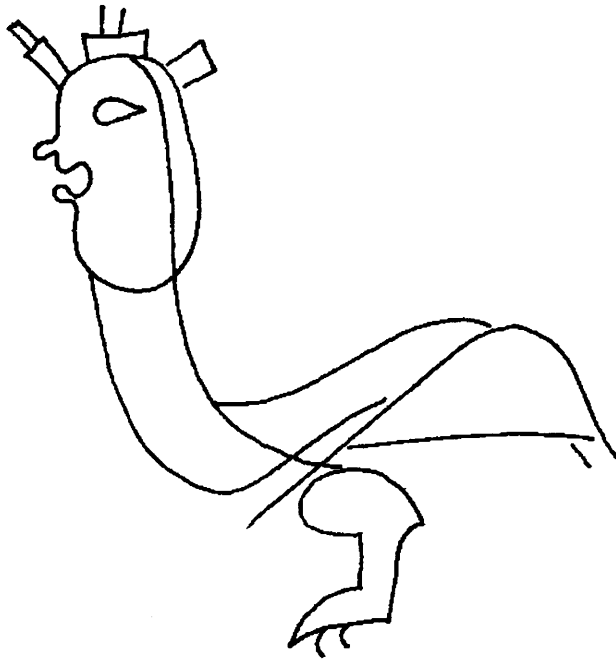Figure 1 London, British Library, MS Egerton 1993 f. 107r

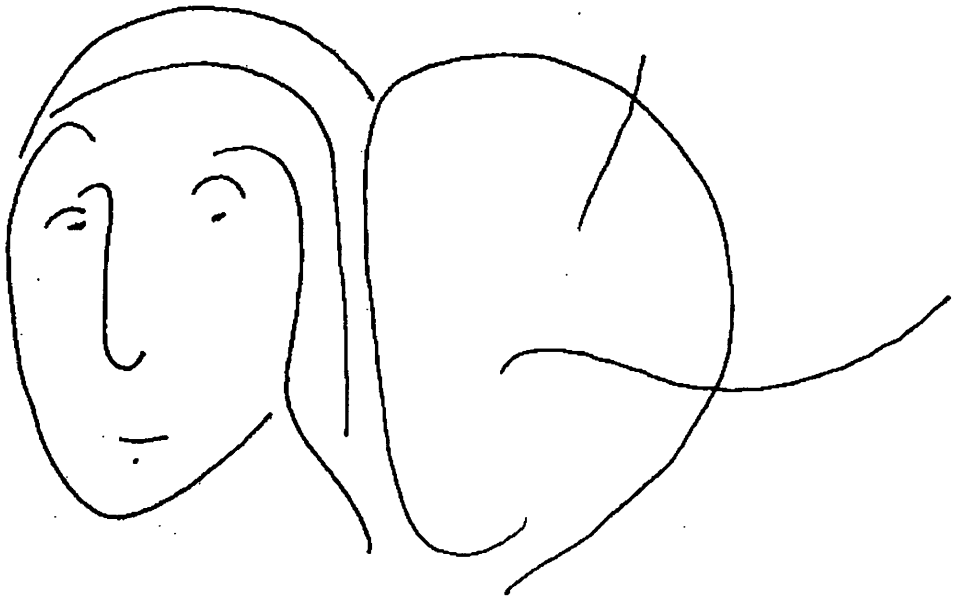Figure 2 London, British Library, MS Harley 863, f. 34r

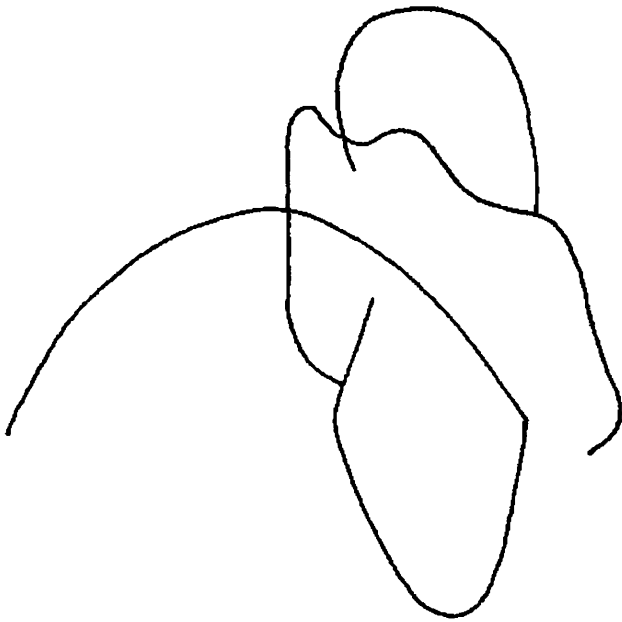Figure 3 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 60v

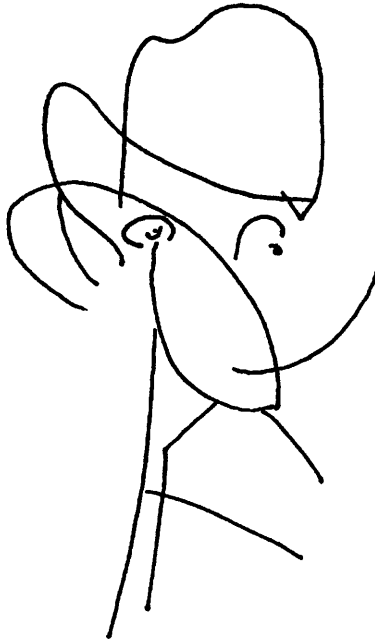Figure 4 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 41r

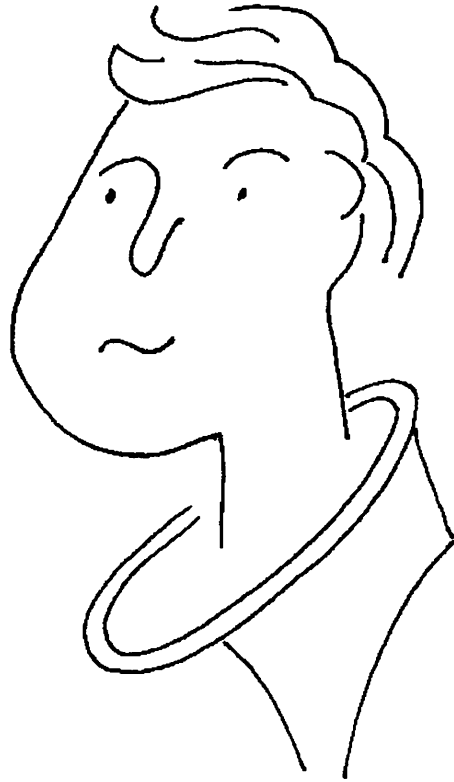Figure 5 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 40v

Figure 6 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 78v
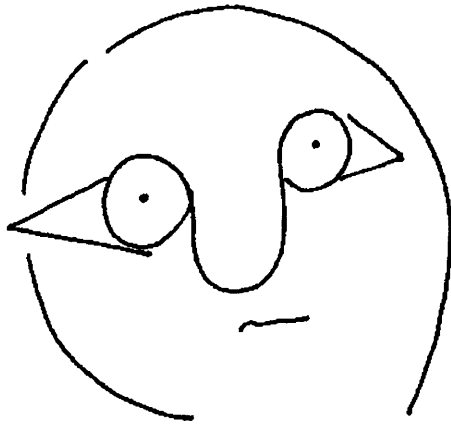
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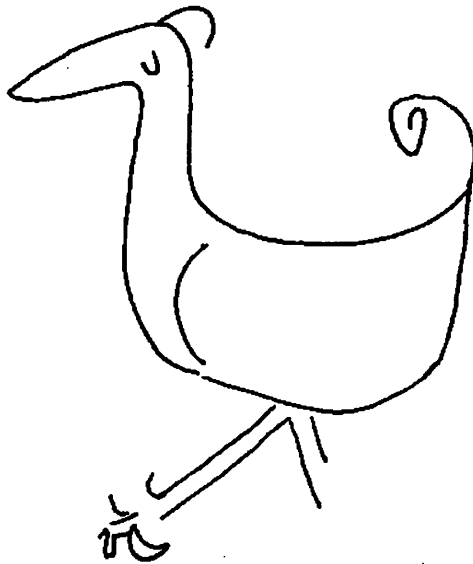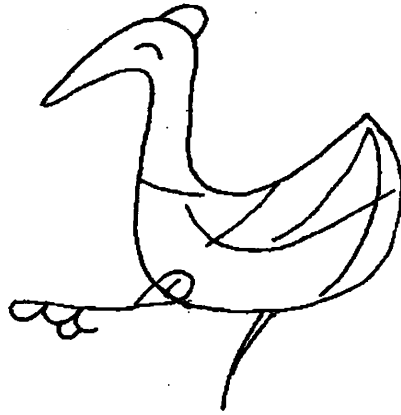Figure 8 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 40r

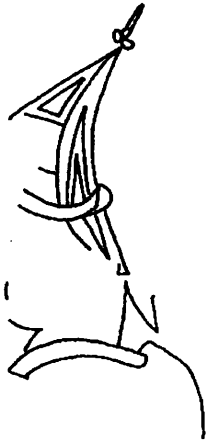Figure 9 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 85r

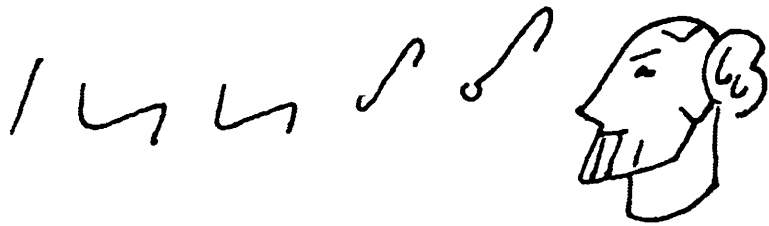Figure 10 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 2685, outside front cover

Figure 11a Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 8092, f. 84r

Figure 11b Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 10575, f. 1r
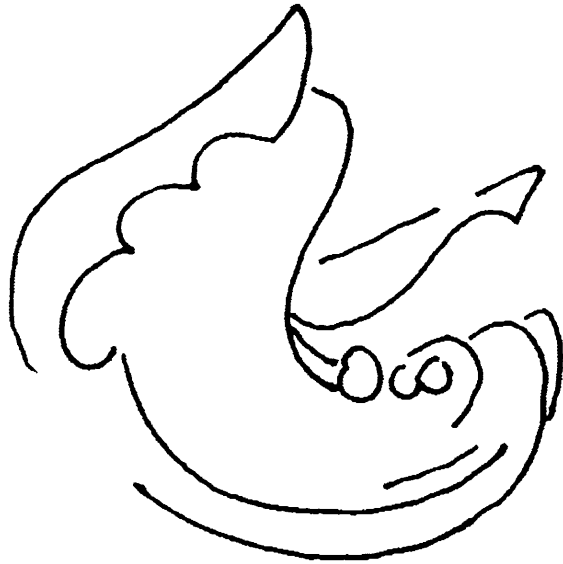
Figure 11c Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 7585, f. 53r

Figure 11d Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 9530, f. 165r

Figure 11e London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A i, f. 61r

Figure 11f London, British Library, MS Royal 5 E. xi., f. 82r

Figure 11g London, British Library, MS Royal 5 F. iii., f. 32v

Figure 11h Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 7585, f. 174v

Figure 12 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 8846, f. 72v

Figure 1 London, British Library, MS Egerton 1993 f. 107r

Figure 2 London, British Library, MS Harley 863, f. 34r

Figure 3 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 60v

Figure 4 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 41r

Figure 5 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 40v

Figure 6 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 78v

Figure 7 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 51r

Figure 8 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 40r

Figure 9 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 776, f. 85r

Figure 10 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 2685, outside front cover

Figure 11a Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 8092, f. 84r

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Figure 11d Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 9530, f. 165r

Figure 11e London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian A i, f. 61r

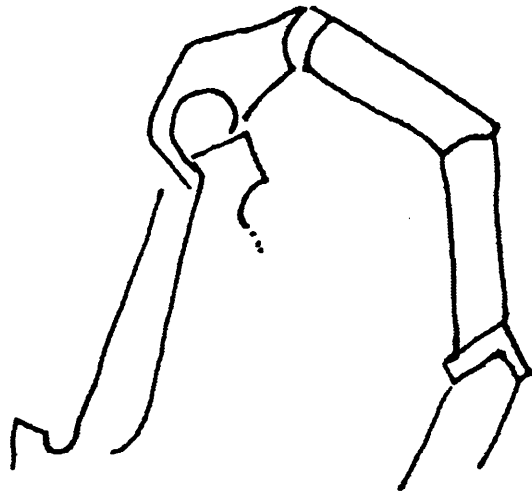Figure 11f London, British Library, MS Royal 5 E. xi., f. 82r

Figure 11g London, British Library, MS Royal 5 F. iii., f. 32v
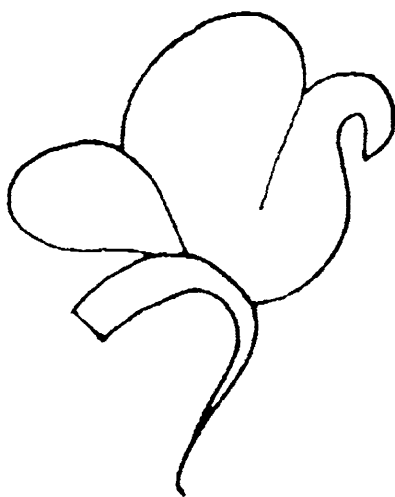
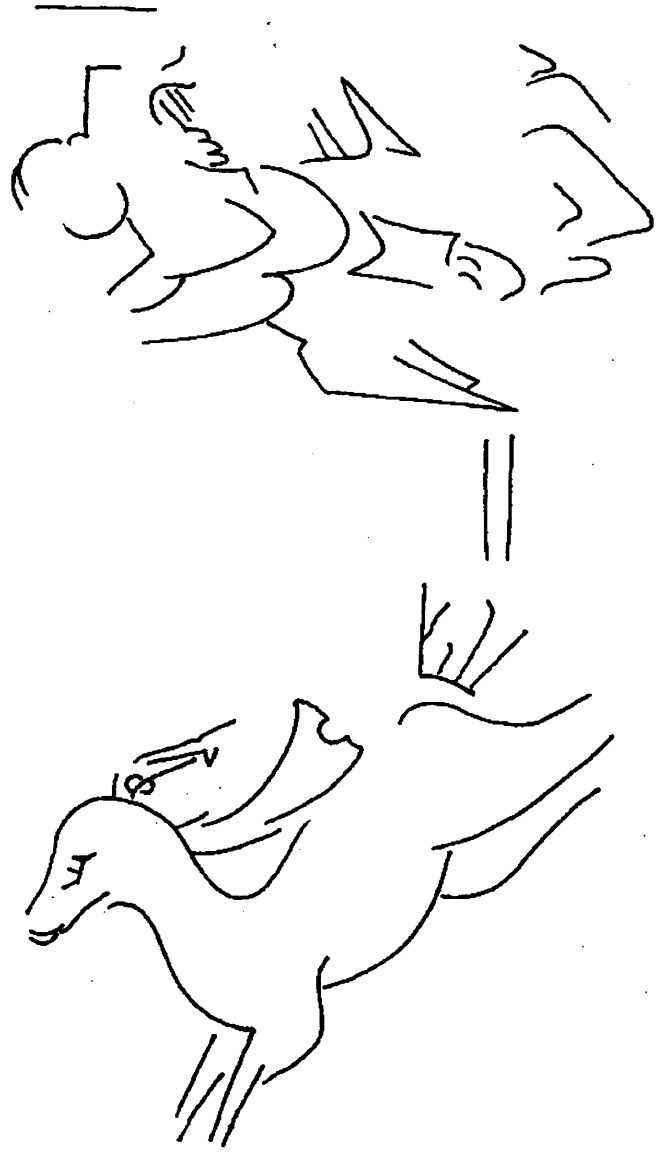Figure 11h Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 7585, f. 174v

Figure 12 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 8846, f. 72v