

G.B. Hoeler---Independent Study Excerpt

Creative Medieval License: Intertextual Satire in Richard of Devizes' *Chronicon*

Scholars today know Richard of Devizes' *Chronicon* as a short political satire discussing the tumultuous absence of Richard I while he journeyed to Jerusalem between September 1189 and October 1192. It only records three years worth of activity during the reign in its eight-two pages, although scholars still question whether or not this was the author's intention.

Historians who have written about this topic often mention and generally agree on two things: that this is a work of satire and that this piece is unusual in the context of when Richard of Devizes was writing. For example, Anthony Bale argued that Richard used the Jewish characters within his chronicle to expose the contemporary anti-Semitic views held by the public, and that he used the Jewish character to create a commentary about the national identity and about the monarchy. However, a separate read of the sources Richard uses reveals a different kind of satire: focusing its target not on the English public but on the royal family itself. Richard of Devizes' *Chronicon* uses outside sources to create a sociopolitical satire about the royal family and its advisors.

Richard wrote in this way to show how highly he disapproved of Richard I's decision to abandon England in pursuit of claiming Jerusalem. When Richard left England, the English throne was left to the care of power-hungry politicians and foolish clergymen who were unsuited to maintain the kingdom. Rather than saying this outright,

however, Richard hints at the purpose of his writing in two ways. First he uses the plot of the story to exploit every outright mistake made by the officials in England and by Richard abroad. Supplementing this plot are dozens of satirical remarks, the most potent of which are the intertextual references Richard makes to other works. By comparing the original texts with their brief appearances in the *Chronicon*, Richard of Devizes' purpose for the text becomes clear. The *Chronicon* is a literary example of how not to rule a kingdom, meant not only to highlight a period of Richard's rule, but to expose—if only to similarly educated readers—the ineptitude of Richard I and his advisors as leaders to England. By reading the intertextual passages from Richard of Devizes' text along with the original source, future readers of the *Chronicon* can more easily understand the purpose of his work and have a better grasp of how the Benedictine monastic community felt towards Richard I during the late twelfth century.

This paper will go close detail about certain passages Richard of Devizes uses, showing the juxtaposition between the original purposes of these quotes in the face of the failed crusade conducted by Richard I. The references are typically biblical, but are surrounded by quotes from classical texts including Statius's *Thebaid Cycle* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*. These explore a different kind of satire than the biblical passages, but they still require an intertextual understanding that the general public may not have benefited from at the time unless they experience a similar education to Richard of Devizes.

However, the most important aspect of this claim is not that there is satire but that the satire is intertextual, often only understood if the reader has at least some knowledge of the texts Richard refers to in his eight-two page text. Without the fore-knowledge of these sources, the audience would not be able to read this text for the satirical work that it is. It is only through previous readings and recollections of those sources that the true voice of this piece comes out.