> For more than 1600 years a Church has stood on the site of St. Albans Abbey, which was once recognised as the premier Abbey of England . . . . but the interest of St. Albans does not consist in its buildings alone. Time was, for instance, when the nation cared nothing for the education of the people, but here in St. Albans–at least from the time of Edward the Confessor–an educational ladder was in existence by means of which children of the humblest origin might rise, and some of them did rise, to the highest position in Church and State. . . . . Again, from a military point of view, St. Albans from prehistoric times down at least to the Wars of the Roses, seems always to have been considered a place of supreme importance. Examples can be found here of ancient British, Roman, and Mediaeval fortifications. There are recorded visits of almost every English Sovereign from William the Conqueror to Queen Elizabeth. A visit to St. Albans should do something to arouse renewed interest in the Church and State to which we are proud to belong. There are not many towns in the land whose records tell more about the story of the English people.
>
> —*The Alban Guide to the Cathedral and Abbey Church*, 1936

In this passage from a twentieth century guidebook, the abbey of St. Alban's is figured as a long-standing bastion of education that has persisted through and has been built up by various empires on English soil. Certainly, we can read the mention of the various sovereigns' visits to the Abbey as a pressuring appeal to tourists: "Hey, if Queen Elizabeth could make it to the abbey, shouldn't you?" But what interests me in this excerpt is the way in which Church, State, St. Alban's, and the people are all portioned out as either opposing or allied elements in the history of England. The populace is fully distinct from "the nation, [which] cared nothing for the education of the people," but St. Alban's has countered such national negligence by educating children even "of the humblest origin" and pushing them up the social ladder to "the highest position in Church and State." The guidebook looks to St. Alban's as the glue that has held the nation together—in both the past and the present. Such phrases as "For more than 1600 years a Church has stood" and "St. Alban's . . . seems always to have been considered a place of supreme importance" suggest a historical continuity in the material existence and public perception of the abbey itself. And in the present, a mere visit to the abbey will "arouse" the people's "renewed interest in the Church and State"; the abbey will consolidate all these disparate (and sometimes opposed) elements of England. Ultimately, the site "tell[s] more about the story of the English people"—both past and present—than any other locale.

But because the rhetoric of this passage serves to promote tourism rather than interrogate St. Alban's role as a national symbol, some interesting issues and tensions go unacknowledged. If the people have always perceived St. Alban's as unifying force in the nation, why do they need to "renew" their interest by visiting? Does this call for renewal suggest a discontinuity in St. Alban's history of representing the Church and State, or is this renewal a sort of performance, a reaffirmation of the site's continued importance for the people and nation? Does the move to assert the primacy of the region—"There are not many [other] towns in the land"—support or destabilize the notion of a larger Church and State unified by St. Alban's? And is the church important for its materiality—its physical existence—or for the textuality it has engendered, the "records" that tell "the story of the English people"?

A variety of texts from different periods have discussed and represented St. Alban's Abbey or St. Alban himself, and interestingly enough, these very issues—historical continuity, performance, regionalism, nationalism, textuality, materiality, etc.—tend to reoccur as pivotal sites of critical inquiry. Martyrologies and hagiographic texts, for example, often look to the abbey or its namesake to claim the constancy of the Christian Church and the nation on English soil, despite imperial threats to their perseverance. Thus, several hundred years before the 1936 tour guide, such texts as the *South English Legendary* (*SEL*), Lydgate's *Saint Albon and Saint Amphibalus*, and Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* present Alban as England's first Christian martyr, whose refusal to recant his faith in the face of persecutors results in his martyrdom. Alban thus becomes an exemplar of a devout Christian for the people who learn of his life.

But one of the primary questions in each of these texts is, which people is he an exemplar for? Individual practitioners of a Christian faith? A particular region of England? The entire nation of England? A universal, atemporal Christendom? Some sort of "true" Christendom?

Each of these texts negotiates different levels of inclusion regarding the people who are to imitate Alban, so Alban's representations are often multivalent and ambiguous. Critics approaching Foxe's martyrology are clearly aware of this fact. Thomas Betteridge comments on the constant tension in Foxe between a "universal, ahistorical act of martyrdom and the particular, historical record of persecution" (148). In "Elect Church or Elect Nation?," Glyn Parry notes the ambiguity in Foxe's approach to the martyrs of England: "He saw England, or at least the gathered flock of the faithful in England, in the context of the universal true church" (169). So, the question remains: do the people who read Alban within these texts constitute a nation, a gathered flock, a subset of universal Christians, or all or none of the above?

In this paper I will explore these questions by interrogating how people are represented as reading Alban or else are instructed to do so. In other words, I want to look to particular moments of two different sorts: (1) when the people are enacting a particular sort of reading of Alban's martyrdom within a text; and (2) when the author makes an explicit reference to read Alban in a certain way. Furthermore, as we saw in the guidebook above, one possible strategy for connecting the people to the nation and Christianity is to have them read the abbey itself—its material existence and its records. Hence, I will also consider the various representations of the abbey in the *SEL*, Lydgate's *Albon*, and Foxe's *Acts*. While these texts share a common concern—the affirmation of the continuity of a nation of Christians and a more universal Christian community despite imperial and pagan threats and persecution—they differ markedly in their strategic use and *non-use* of the people and the abbey to represent and construct such continuity.

**The Architecture of Alban, St. Alban's, and the *South English Legendary***

The possibility of a continuous Christianity appears as a point of debate not only in literary-critical analyses of Alban texts but also in architectural and archaeological studies of the town and abbey of St. Alban's. The essays in the recent collection *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology* make it clear that the archaeological evidence does not conclusively prove the existence of a single Christian church and community at St. Alban's for at least 1600 years, as the tour guide has suggested. In "The Origins of St Albans Abbey," Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjolbye-Biddle allow for the possibility of the eventual discovery of a "Christian site in continuous use since the 4th century A.D." and a "basilica built over Alban's grave at some date before the visit of Germanus in 429" (73). But there is no concrete evidence of this continuous Christian site as yet. Instead, what we find around the site of St. Albans is the progressive building and topographic expansion of different churches, chapels, the nave, etc. by Anglo-Saxon, Norman, and later British people, all above the site of a Romano-British cemetery from ca. 400 (45). Thus, the abbey is a sort-of conglomerate of the work of various cultures on the same site—a palimpsest with layers of the Christian work of various cultures on a possibly pagan-influenced (Breton) foundation.

Interestingly, questions of materiality and textuality emerge in these essayists' discussion of the use of evidence on the Alban site. In "Why *Verulamium*?," Rosalind Niblett looks for evidence of Christianity in the region of St. Albans (under the Roman name *Verulamium*) to explain the sharp decline in the Oysterfield/Folly Lane cult center nearby, which employed the pagan practices of local hero worship. She finds that there are no portable items with Christian

symbols to prove the existence of a Christian community here but notes that three buildings in the region shows signs of conversion from a temple to a church (6). Thus, the churches themselves become the material proof of Christian continuity and triumph over competing religious practice in the fifth to eighth centuries.[a] Martin Henig echoes this lack of Christian evidence at the site of Verulamium and contends that artifacts like a Christian signet ring have been discovered, but at a considerable distance from the region ("Religion and Art in St Alban's City" 26-7). He finds this lack of material evidence "embarrassing" due to the general "presumption of continuity on the site." Ultimately, he seems to locate this presumption of continuity in the reader-response to hagiographic texts, which we must approach as "a matter of faith and fine judgement." Perhaps not too surprisingly, these scholars of architecture and archaeology look to such material evidence as artifacts and the vestiges of physical structures to prove the idea of historical continuity. Hagiography is thus rendered as a textually constructed (and dismissable) representation of historical continuity, though one can argue that the architectural argument is also a constructed idea based on a belief in material, rather than verbal, evidence.

But how exactly does the *SEL*—a hagiographic collection of saints' lives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—construct continuity in the case of Alban's life? What sorts of textual strategies are employed to suggest continuity and what, exactly, is supposed to be continuous? As I mentioned at the outset, to approach such questions I will look to representations of the people and the abbey to emphasize the various possible levels of inclusion

[a] She also uses the evidence of Roman roads to prove that Verulamium was unlikely to have been infiltrated by Anglo-Saxon invaders, so that a Christian community, if it had existed, would have been protected.

for those who are to read and imitate Alban. But considering the opposition of architectural/material versus literary/textual set out by the essayists above, we should also contemplate the potential role of materiality in the textual representations of the people and the abbey.

In its first two lines, the Alban section of the *SEL* ties Albon immediately to England, fronting the nation before the martyrdom itself: "Seint Albon the holyman her of Engelonde / Imartred he was for Godes loue . . ." (1-2, p. 238). Reiterating Albon's function as a figure for both the nation and a larger Christianity, the poet even encapsulates the two into the rhyme of a couplet: "A Iustice that with hom was to Engelonde com / To martri alle Cristenemen and destruie Cristendom" (9-10). Thus, Christianity is harmonized, even equated, with the nation itself, a move that in some ways resembles the overt tying of English Church and State in the tourist info book from the 1930s. Of course, in the case of the *SEL* the integrity of Christianity and the nation is threatened by a Justice who speaks French; this man is represented as an invader into England whose first words are "Bel ami" (29). He would most likely be read in the Middle Ages as a Norman persecutor on English soil. On one hand, then, Englishness is defined in opposition to the Norman practice and culture of a medieval present (i.e., from a medieval audience's perspective). But Englishness is also defined against the "hethene" practice associated most ominously with the "luther prince[s]" Dioclisian and Maximian (3, 5-6). The text does not emphasize that these are Roman emperors from the past. This elision, coupled with the presence of a Norman Judge, blurs the line between past and present: while this portion of the narrative is in the past tense, the historical Roman figures are placed into the same time and place

as a daunting figure from the post-invasion present. Continuity here is thus established through a mixing of similar persecuting figures from different times into the same imagined time and space, rather than a clear portioning out and paralleling of past and present persecutions.

Nevertheless, while the poet suggests to medieval readers the link between Englishness and a larger Christianity against foreign invaders of different (but ultimately the same) sorts, he allows only a little space for the people represented in the text to enact a reading of Alban. A crowd of people witness Alban's miracles, including his splitting of the water and the appearance of a spring on dry rock. But the only attention given to their reading of his miracles is one man's giving up his sword to praise Alban and ask for God's mercy. As Alban is killed, the people fade out of the narrative. However, in the closing lines the poet brings the tale into the present tense to mention Alban's legacy: "there is nou a chirche arered" beside the town of Wincester, near the spot of Alban's death (l. 95). The reader is instructed to note the greatness of the Abbey and to ask Jesus and Saint Albon for a joy "that euere ssel ilaste"; but this dangling clause may also modify the Abbey itself, suggesting its own endurance. Much like the tourist piece, this text encourages the reader to interpret the persistence of Alban though his cathedral as a symbol of the endurance of an English and Christian nation.

Thus, at the poem's end the *SEL* Alban poet represents the continuity of Christianity on English soil in the material persistence of the Abbey itself rather than the physical presence of Alban's followers. This is of course a textual representation of materiality, but not a textuality divorced from material concerns as suggested by the architectural critics above. Hence, the poetics of the conclusion serve as a sort of textual-materiality—a more subtle reinforcement of

the continuity of the English nation via St. Alban's. As set up by the initial rhyming of "Engelonde com" and "Cristendom" at the poem's beginning, some of the final lines of the poem—which describe the everlasting abbey— rhyme the following: *understonde, fonde, Engelonde,* and *understonde*. By writing England into the rhyme scheme of the poem, which progresses continuously in couplets, the poet builds a poetic architecture that hints at England's role in a perpetually harmonious structure. Furthermore, each of these rhymes (and most throughout the poem) are native, Germanic words. This fact is particularly interesting since rhyming couplets were themselves a borrowing from Norman and Continental poetic practices.[b] It is as if the poet has nativized and nationalized this poetic form, writing out the Norman qualities to re-emphasize Alban as a symbol for the continuity of an English nation despite the conquest.

The poem thus exhibits a textual-materiality: by building Christianity and England into the poetic form, we can observe (as readers) and hear (as listeners) these as fundamental elements of an unvarying, overall structure.[c] While this structural continuity reinforces the perpetuity of the abbey, the English nation, and Christianity, we should also note that the people who read Alban in the *SEL* are primarily outside the text rather than represented within it. That is, it is mainly the text's audience who should take in the harmonious poetic effects and recognize the perpetuity of the Christian nation through the abbey of Alban. Nevertheless, when we move to Lydgate's *Alban*, we find that the representations of the people and the abbey, and

[b] Linguistically, Romance languages lended themselves towards end-rhymes while Germanic languages favored other sorts of rhyming, such as alliteration (front-rhymes).
[c] The overall structure could suggest the more universal harmony of a united Christendom under God, but it is difficult to reconcile this possibility with the very nativeness of the vocabulary of the end-rhymes.

even the conception of continuity, are markedly different.

**Performance and Continuity in Lydgate's *Albon***

Out of the three texts I will analyze in this paper, Lydgate provides the most elaborated version of Saint Albon's life. *Saint Albon and Saint Amphibalus* attempts to tie English national identity to the Christianization of peoples on the isles. Lydgate pushes this connection primarily through the character of Albon, who, after abandoning his allegiances to Roman deities, becomes the first Christian martyr on the island. Albon is portrayed as a mostly "stable" figure[d] geographically tied to the land and God; "al hol" he keeps "his ground and place" (2.1081) and remains "Groundid in God" (2.1725) when his faith is tested. Even in his miracles he is intimately linked to the English land itself, praying to God to cure the excesses of nature—flood or drought—and restore the land. Albon becomes an edifice for the endurance of Christianity since its arrival in Romanized Britain, and Lydgate more overtly addresses Albon's post-mortem edification as he succinctly describes King Offa's subsequent building of St. Alban's monastery (1.642+). But unlike the *SEL* poet, Lydgate foregrounds various peoples' response to Alban's martyrdom on English soil and contains the discussion of the abbey in a short passage. Since Lydgate emphasizes the people in this text, I will first analyze their role in establishing continuity and then move on to discuss the impact of the passage about Offa and the abbey.

In Lydgate's *Albon*, the critical feature of his construction of a continuous English Christianity is his narrative attempt to consolidate Britain's Roman/pagan past and national Christian present. Like the *SEL*, the audience is called upon to recognize this consolidation in

their reading of Alban's life and martyrdom. But instead of locating the people primarily in this audience, Lydgate incorporates numerous instances in which the people in the text observe and enact various readings of Albon's suffering, miracles, and martyrdom. This inclusion of the people adds another dimension to our study: how do the performative qualities of the people's reactions to and imitations of Alban help constitute a specific conception of *nationhood*?

To better understand the term *performative* and its connections to the idea of nationhood, we should consider the work of Homi Bhabha. In "DissemiNation", Bhabha distinguishes the *pedagogical* articulation of nationhood, which represents "the people as an a priori historical presence," from the *performative*, in which the people are constructed as repeating or iterating actions that may subvert, reauthorize, or supplement some concept of the nation (147). Whereas the pedagogical model would hold that historical continuity is the result of a necessary, sequential progression of events, the performative might hold that continuity is the set of all iterated cultural practices that people happen to enact because of social conditions and/or individual agency. Thus, the performative construction of nation allows a space for those who are marginalized to reconstruct the nation as a non-homogenizing, more porous entity.

If we try to examine the construction of nationhood in these terms in *Saint Albon and Saint Amphilbalus*, we discover that the text is somewhat conflicted about its pedagogical and performative approaches to the nation. Book 1 begins with a mostly uncritical look at the integrity of the Roman empire and the emperor's concern for the "common profit" of all its diverse lands. The emperor even develops a chivalric code, draws in representatives from the various regions, and sends them back out as steward-knights to protect the people and uphold

[d] The word *stable* appears often as a descriptor for Alban

good virtues and Roman law. Here Lydgate establishes continuity with the Roman/pagan past by establishing the models of good government and chivalric practice as Roman cultural practices that Christianity would adopt, extend, and improve upon by re-orienting them towards God. Alban is a key figure here, for even the pre-Christian Albon protected his people and practiced righteously. But his devotional orientation was askew, just waiting to be re-oriented in his eventual imitation of Amphibalus.

Following this unification of regional variation and totalization of the people of Roman the empire, Book 2 turns the focus away from any mention of regions towards the private conversion and religious practice of Albon in England. The text emphasizes the performativity of Albon's indoctrination: Amphibal is "rehersyng" the doctrine of the Trinity "to Albon," who in turn "rehersid in sentence . . . These words" but ultimately reperforms them as a personal repentance for his "mysdede" (2.710-7). This individuated reiteration of the Christian faith, coupled with the lack of reference to region or nation in this section of the book, advertises a private connection to a more universal Christian faith and practice. Here Albon is a sort of everyman—perhaps one of the people—and any reader could imitate his private actions by reiterating the words on the page. Even so, when Albon publicly martyred, Lydgate shifts the focus on the reader's imitation of Alban's private practice to the interest of people from all sorts of regions and cities in Britain. As they appear in undifferentiated throngs to watch his suffering, the people are again super-regionally totalized within the bounds of the nation.

The end of Book 2 provides contradictory representations of the people and Albon as either parts or the whole of the nation. On one hand, the people are "all of oo sentence, / And

with oo vois" in their disdain of the judge—they are absolutely homogenized though positioned against state authority (2.1980-1). On the other hand, in their initial reaction to the healing miracles of Albon there "was gret contraversie"; this lack of a general consensus among the people establishes a space for more differentiable voices or identities among them (1962). And curiously, when performing the Latin laud to Albon, "each partie" enacted it "for a syngular comendacioun / Of hym . . . / Stiward of *Bretonys*" (2026-2030). The word *syngular* nicely emphasizes the doubleness of this performance: to support Albon as a representative of the nation, each person performs a song with the same set of words, but each performance is a unique praise of the saint. These individuated reiterations of a standard laud bolster the conception of a nation of Bretonys through the figure of Albon—most clearly reinforced by the light that shoots from his hometown into the sky so that the people of "alle four parties strecchying of Bretyn" can see it (2010). But Lydgate undercuts this national totalization in the Book's final lines by reaffirming the centrality of Albon's home region: Albon is "to that cite supportour and patroun" (2046). In a sense, we can locate performativity in Lydgate himself, who reiterates Albon as a shifting center in different contexts—from a private practitioner of a universal Christianity, to a symbol of national unity, to the protector of a local district. The people, then, are reiterated as well—sometimes totalized, sometimes individuated, sometimes both totalized and individuated, but almost always directed towards or away from Albon as a center.

On one hand, we can read the sheer variety of formations of the people as various discontinuities in behavior and practice on English soil that are eventually brought to cohere by

Alban's martyrdom. But this more progressive, pedagogical reading is undercut by the possibility of singular practice, since Lydgate opens up some space for individual people to perform unique acts of worship and witness of Albon's legacy. Thus, continuity is established through people's individual imitations of Alban as an exemplar—available to the Bretons in the past (the people in the text) and to the audiences in the present and future (those readers and listeners outside the text).

Despite the primacy of the people in the construction of a continuous English and universal Christianity in this text, Lydgate makes mention of the "monastery" built by "Kyng Offa", who "bar the cost, of gret devocioun" (Book 1, ll. 642-665). This extremely brief story appears as a sudden digression in the middle of a discussion of Alban's chivalric prowess, presumably to support the idea that Alban's name was "worthi to be put in memorie" (631). But why invoke King Offa, a Mercian king from Old English times? In "Offa, Aelfric, and the Refoundation of St Albans," Julia Crick argues that there was a long-standing tradition in Bede and other texts which claimed that Offa had sponsored the building of St. Alban's. There were, for instance, several Offa-charters that supposedly bore his signature. Even though these are all likely forgeries, various authorities firmly believed in the story's veracity. But even more intriguing is the fact that these Offa-charters suggested that the monastery needed mediation by the king when it made various important decisions, such as choosing a new abbot. Post-conquest charters often stuck closely to the Benedictine Rule, which emphasized that such decisions were to be made by the community itself rather than an outside source. Consequently, some texts that wanted to support the autonomy of the monastery and the region would edit out this Offa tale as

apocryphal.

But why would Lydgate include this Offa story in such a late medieval text (in the fifteenth century and later)? Perhaps he invokes it to capitalize on the story's resonance as a tale that de-emphasizes the autonomy of the region/monastery and heightens its connections to larger structures—the English king and a larger Christendom. The text supports this idea, since Offa is described as "a notable gouernour" who was known "thorugh many regioun" (647-9).[e] Furthermore, Lydgate once again links two different cultures, the Romano-Breton and the Anglo-Saxon, but this time through the abbey itself. Thus, Alban's uniting of regions prefigures and perhaps predicts Offa's eventual supra-regional renown and his building of the abbey to symbolize Alban's continued importance for Christians everywhere and at every time, even for the Lydgate's contemporary audience. Nevertheless, the supposed persistence of the abbey was eventually undercut during the 1534 printing of this text. James Clark notes that "There was a growing perception in the community that the abbey's status as an exempt house of premier rank was under greater threat than ever before. Its share of royal patronage had diminished . . ." ("The St Albans Monks and the Cult of St Alban" 227). To help raise "the profile of the abbey as a centre of political and spiritual importance," the monks printed Lydgate's text (with some changes, such as a direct appeal to the monarchs) with their own abbey press (226-7). On the eve of the dissolution of the monasteries, the Offa passage may in fact have been read as an impassioned plea to the people of the community and the king himself to recognize the monastery's role in reaffirming the continuity and stability of Christianity in England. Or else it may have been read as a reluctant acceptance of the abbey's inevitable but unfortunate demise.

In this case, the monks may be disseminating Lydgate's life of Alban as a necessary substitute for the waning abbey itself—a textual representation of a continuous individual, regional, English, and universal Christianity that replaces the material symbol of these notions. The 1534 printing was thus a last-ditch effort by the monastery to use textuality to unite the people around Alban again, encouraging them to read and imitate his life, to reperform Alban's and the people's performances, each in a singular but ultimately universal way.

**Foxe and Alban: The Textuality of a Martyr**

Some interesting questions arise when we move from Lydgate to Foxe's Alban. We should keep in mind (at least) two important points about Foxe's work: (1) Foxe may have consulted Lydgate's version as a source for his own work; and (2) Foxe was staunchly Protestant and critical of many Catholic practices, including the belief in saints and miracles. Thus, if Lydgate inscribes the people primarily as readers of Alban's miracles, and if Foxe consciously omits the miracles from his discussions of the martyrs, what happens to the people in Foxe's text? Does the institution of St. Alban's come into Foxe as another way to read Alban, or is it, too, written out due to its monkishness? How then does Foxe use the Alban story to construct an idea of the continuity of a universal, true Christian church, especially if this church was primarily Catholic for numerous centuries?

Foxe overtly dismisses the miracles of Alban, such as his drying up of the river, "because they seeme more legend like then truth like" (115). Hence, with the omission of these miracles, the people–the witnesses of Alban's suffering and martyrdom–are written out of Foxe's account.

[e] The text does not specify if these regions are only internal to the English soil or else much wider in scope.

They are not even given an opportunity to enact a reading of Alban in a particularized or homogenized way. I write "omission" of the miracles, but ironically, by listing examples of what he will omit in an *occupatio*, Foxe ends up listing the miracles for his reader, though with minimal or no elaboration. Instead of representing the people's readings of the martyr, Foxe puts forth his own reading. He opens a space for the reader to interpret the miracles as he sees fit, but Foxe's reading will of course put pressure on such supposedly free reading: "because I see no great profit nor necessity in the relation thereof [the relevance of the miracles], I leave them to the free judgement of the reader, to thinke of them as cause shall move him" (115). This is an interesting moment of locating the people outside the story, admitting yet constraining their free will as readers of Alban. Unlike the implicit location of the people outside the *SEL*, this indirect address to the reader in the third person admits a certain flexibility in the individual reception of Alban as a textual entity. But at the same time, the rhetorical move reveals a certain uneasiness on Foxe's part in rewriting and challenging the story of a national saint.

In some ways the institution of St. Alban's is also written out of the tale. In this passage, Foxe mentions it only to question its library as a source for a supposedly native tale that he finds dubious. At the same time, though, he concludes this portion by reminding the reader that during Alban's time under the tenth persecution, "all christianitie almost in the whole Iland was destroyed, the churches subverted, all bookes of the scripture burned" (115). Unlike the *SEL*, he makes no mention here of the permanence of St. Albans despite such threats, perhaps because by this time the monasteries had been dissolved and St. Albans had been seized by the Crown. He does not offer the monastery as another way for the people to read Alban. An interesting

historical tidbit to note is that the Abbey Church was actually bought back from the Crown by the townspeople living near the Church in 1550 (Alban Guide 8). The people played a part in reclaiming the Church for their own region (as their Parish Church). Whether or not Foxe were aware of this fact, he chose not to represent the church as a figure of Alban's constancy for the people. Perhaps Foxe omits the abbey and the people's reclamation because of the possibility of his readers' over-attachment to St. Alban's architectural grandeur rather than God and scripture. Or more simply, he may prefer to invoke Alban as a text rather than as the material instantiation of the monastery to distinguish a true Christianity—in the example of Alban's martyrdom—from a false or misguided one—the monastery.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have detailed the absences, omissions, and pseudo-omissions of Foxe's Alban story. While some of these absences are acknowledged by Foxe himself, we see others only by comparison to the particular presences of the people and the monastery in previous Alban stories. But are the people totally absent from Foxe? Does he give any indication of how Alban the martyr is to be read by the people outside the story–the reader or reading public?

As I mentioned above, Foxe's Alban story is embedded in his discussion of the tenth persecution of the early Christian Church under the emperor Diocletian of the Roman empire. Unlike Lydgate's chivalrous, well-governed, yet pagan Roman empire, Foxe's is far more fragmented: there were "divers warres that rose in many prouinces" (100). We can certainly see here what Michael Pucci identifies as the 'Roman tyranny'–the parallel between the bad governing of popes and Roman emperors (36). But it is important to note that Foxe's Roman

empire is not corrupt at its core–before Diocletian tried to exterminate Christians and make his subjects worship him as a god, the empire was "quietly and moderately . . . governed" to the benefit of Christians everywhere (100). In the Church and the empire, it is particular individuals who corrupt the true system.

In Foxe, the people do appear, usually generically and anonymously, as various groups persecuted by Diocletian. Elders and bishops are tortured (100), soldiers lay down their weapons and die for their faith (101), and men, women, and children are burnt (102). Names for particular regions may be provided, but the people often appear only as *martyrs*. Thus, Foxe says the "persecution reached even unto the Britans" and that "all the Christians in Brittanny were utterly destroyed" (103). By making the people anonymous while naming the regions, Foxe tries to maintain the universality of Christian persecution across time and space while simultaneously specifying how widespread such persecution can become. And part of that universality seems to depend on its ability to span the experience of peoples across regional, national, and perhaps linguistic groupings.

But if such universality is key for Foxe, why suddenly omit the people when touching on the subject of Alban? For one, Foxe believes that the anonymous multitude of those persecuted is impossible to grasp cognitively because they are "in number infinite" (114). Instead of locating singularity in the people's act of imitating and reading a martyr, Foxe projects singularity onto Alban himself, perhaps as a way to help readers sediment one instance of the infinite universality of martyrdom. The readers "may and ought to looke upon" Alban's "examples" to discover and perhaps imitate his "singular constancy and fortitude" (114).

Moreover, Foxe locates Alban's singularity in his connections to the nation: he is "the first martyr that ever in England suffered death for the name of Christ" (114).

But in what way, specifically, does Foxe want Alban to be read? As a national hero? Probably, since he says, in Lydgatian fashion, that Alban was "armed with spiritual armour" (114). Should he be read as a universal model for individual Christian practice? Probably so, because he suggests the imitability of the Christian life when Alban "began to imitate the example of [Amphibalus's] faith and vertuous life" (114). The implication, of course, is that the reader can imitate Alban's method of imitation.

But Foxe also endorses a more subtle reading of Alban. This reading resists placing the martyr in either a purely ahistorical universality or an over-determined historical moment and instead pulls him into an active present. After the Judge challenges Alban, Alban's first speech-act is reported, indirect, buried in the past tense of already narrated history: "he [Alban] openly pronounced that he would not obay his commandment" (114). When the Judge then asks of Alban's kindred, the martyr actually speaks, though in past tense: "Alban *answered*, What is it that to you, . . .if you desire to heare the verity of my religion, I doe ye to wit that I am a Christian, and apply my self altogether to that calling" (115). But ultimately, while the Judge's utterances remain in the past tense, Alban's final one is cast in the present: "Alban *replyeth*: These sacrifices which yee offer unto Divels, can neither helpe them that offer the same, neither yet can they accomplish the desires and prayers of their suppliants: but rather shall they, whatsoever they be, that offer sacrifice to these idols, receive for their meed everlasting paines of Hell fire" (115). Foxe thus encourages his readers to pull Alban out of history and into their

present to emulate his pronouncements of faith. Furthermore, as Foxe narratively pushes Alban into direct speech and into the present tense, Alban's pronouncements grow stronger and more critical. The reader is thus compelled to imitate both Alban's pronouncement of his faith and his outright rejection of the idolatry of others.

For Foxe, then, the history of the continual persecutions of the often anonymous members of the true Christian church collapses into this singular, present moment of Alban's profession of his faith and martyrdom. Alban becomes an exemplar for all such persecutions, and Foxe puts pressure on the reader, who should be able to cognitively grasp this finite moment, to recognize his exemplarity and imitate it. But why does Foxe choose Alban in particular? As we have seen in the *SEL* and in Lydgate's text, Alban is a prime choice for representations of nationhood and Christianity. In reworking the Alban story, Foxe emphasizes that the continuity of the English nation may also collapse in this more universal moment of Alban's profession of Christianity. But another answer may lie in Alban's mere textuality—specifically the narratability of his speech-act. Many of the anonymous groups of martyrs had stories, per se, but for Alban Foxe could locate numerous sources with elaborate Alban narratives, including Bede and Lydgate. Foxe could thus edit and modify the narrative to his liking, giving utter primacy to Alban's speech-act. Alban's profession is a speech-act in the technical sense, since he enacts his Christianity by professing it. And ultimately, this speech-act is a performance that the reader can reperform and use to become a part of the larger continuity of a true Church that persists over time and space despite outside threats. For Foxe, it is such speech-acts—and *not* physical buildings like a monastery—that are the true *Acts* and *Monuments* of the Christian faith.

**Some Final Considerations: The Semantics of Alban**

Foxe's strategy of balancing the more generic, universal plight of martyrs with the retemporalized readings of more specific, singular martyrs is markedly different from Lydgate's representations of enacted religious practice as performance, or the *SEL*'s projection of the power of martyrdom onto a permanent physical structure in the present. Even so, each text constructs some notion of a persistent and continuous Christian church exemplified by the life and practice of Alban, or else the abbey church named for him. In a variety of ways, each text negotiates different levels of Alban's exemplarity for the people within a text or outside of it (i.e. the audience) who witness his martyrdom. Thus, at any point in these texts, Alban may become an exemplar for any non-trivial subset of the following: individual Christian practice, a particular region of England, a supra-regional Christianity and/or English nation, a specific Christianity from the past, a universal present Christianity, or even a universal, atemporal, continuous Christendom. It is also interesting that each of these texts, in order to emphasize some grouping of the above exemplarities, foregrounds a type of textuality as either an extension of or replacement of Alban's material existence as the abbey itself. Thus, the *SEL* parallels Alban's physical monument to the persistence of the nation in the architecture of the poem itself. The monks promote Lydgate's text as a substitute for a failing abbey, and Foxe rejects the abbey altogether and looks to Alban's narratability as a source for his singular example of a universal Christianity.

Furthermore, there is an interesting difference in Lydgate's and Foxe's choice of labels

for Alban. Lydgate refers to him as the *protomartyr* of England, but Foxe calls him the *ringleader* of martyrs. A preliminary study of the etymologies and semantics of these terms is suggestive and deserves further scrutiny. If we look in the Oxford English Dictionary, we find that both terms are essentially new coinages in their time periods. The first recorded use of *ringleader* with a positive connotation is in 1548 (and the negative is 1503), and in fact Lydgate himself provides the first recorded use of *protomartyr* in 1433. According to the OED, *protomartyr* suggests 'The first martyr; the earliest of any series of martyrs (for Christianity, or for any cause); spec. applied to St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr.' *Ringleader*, though, denotes 'In good or neutral sense: A leader or head; a chief authority'; this valence is an amelioration of the term's original sense, 'One who takes a leading place or part among a body or number of persons whose character or conduct is reprehensible; esp. a leader, a chief instigator or organizer, of a mutiny, tumult, etc.' And perhaps these terms seem fitting for their respective texts.

The word *protomartyr* is a direct borrowing from Latin, ultimately from Greek. It emerges from the linguistic process of prefixing, which in the late Middle English period commonly involved the attachment of borrowed prefixes to borrowed open-class words.[f] *Ringleader*, though, is thoroughly native/Germanic. It results from the native Germanic process of compounding already available lexical items, both of which (*ring* and *leader*) are native terms. Thus, Lydgate is far more open to incorporating the language of the Catholic church in his label for England's first martyr. Always suspicious of Catholicism, Foxe is far more comfortable

relying on native vocabulary from the vernacular to create a label for Alban. In terms of semantics, p*rotomartyr* conveys the sense of a linear progression of martyrs—there was a first martyr, and all others followed in his footsteps typologically, recapitulating his self-sacrifice (and ultimately Jesus's). In Lydgate, of course, this progression is both linear and reiterated/reperformed in singular acts of worship, sacrifice, and imitation of Saint Alban. But *ringleader* does not suggest such a linear progression of time. Instead, it suggests a particular moment of leadership in the Christian church, in which others are oriented in a continuous circle: Alban leads a ring of other martyrs. In a sense, the semantics of *ringleader* perform Foxe's version of continuity—the collapse of history in the moment of a singular martyr's profession of faith—which ultimately holds all Christians across space and time together in a cycle.

[f] Open-class words include nouns, verbs, and adjectives; new words (from borrowing or native word-formation processes) can enter into the language within these categories. Closed-class words include pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions; innovations/borrowings into these categories rarely occur.

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