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Extraterrestrials or Terrestrial Heretics? Being Green in the Middle Ages.

Rosamund M. Gammie and Adam Foxon.

Abstract:
In this paper we seek to propose a novel solution to the Green Children of Woolpit, a 12th century 'alien' mystery by approaching the 'otherworldly' through a terrestrial, theological lens. In focusing specifically on their otherworldliness, we suggest a congruence between the children's characteristics and the theological threat of early Catharism. When viewed Christologically, the Green Children mystery offers ample opportunity for exotheological discourse, focusing as it does on key Christian theological issues such as: Christ's humanity, the Incarnation, and what it means to be human in the Middle Ages.

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There is a peculiar omission in medieval literature which abounds with tales of the marvellous, faery, fantastical, and supernatural, and that is reference to the idea of extraterrestrial life on other worlds. Roman writers certainly marvelled at the idea: Lucian's *Vera historia* satirised the possibility, and the likes of Leucippus (*fl*. 480 BCE), Democritus († 361 BCE), Epicurus († 270 BCE), Lucretius († 55 BCE) and Plutarch († 120 CE) all discuss extraterrestrial life to differing degrees.[1] In a post-Copernican universe the idea of space travel and debate over extraterrestrials (ETs) received considerable attention: John Wilkins († 1672) wrote his popular *Discovery of a World in the Moone* in 1638, paving the way for the genre to truly flourish.[2] By the end of the 15th century terrestrial horizons had expanded; the trope of long journeys to strange places was, Kathleen Burt remarks, "highly suited" to the 14th and 15th centuries, helped along by travellers such as Marco Polo, Symon Semeonis, Christopher Columbus, Alvares Cabral, and Vasco de Gama.[3] Coupled with the interest in Aristotelian astronomy and the tentative steps towards a scientific method, it would seem that the High to Late Medieval period would offer opportune ground for fantastical literature relating to the cosmos. Yet this is apparently not the case. Despite countless tales of faeries and the monstrous, the otherworldly element of medieval literature is firmly terrestrial, or subterranean, but certainly not extraterrestrial. Compounding this seeming disinterest in ETs in medieval literature, bar the handful of references to the plurality of worlds discussed by scholastics, particularly in the wake of the Condemnations of 1277, is that modern ufology often looks back to the Middle Ages and to two stories in particular to find 'proof' and 'evidence' of 'alien beings.'[4]

The Green Children of Woolpit, a story recorded in two 12th century chronicles, has, since the late 16th century been associated with travellers from another planet.[5] Similarly, stories of ships sailing over the sky in Ireland, found in a number of different chronicles from the 8th to 13th centuries, has perhaps unsurprisingly also made its way into the historiography of ufology.[6] As Carl Kears and James Paz in their introduction to *Medieval Science Fiction* summarise, "the Green Children of Woolpit have sparked speculations about alien visitations in the Middle Ages. Sky ships recorded by Gervase of Tilbury and others have entered ufology."[7] In the original accounts of these stories, there is never a hint that the ships, or the Green Children, were extraterrestrial or had their origins in different planets or

earths; it speaks more to our own modern sensibilities that ufologists use them to justify their suspicions today. This apparent lack of ETs in medieval storytelling is conspicuous enough in itself: interplanetary fiction existed in the pre- and post-medieval literary imagination, so why was there a lacuna during the Middle Ages itself? Whilst this paper does not attempt to answer such a lofty question, by exploring the Green Children story through a theological, specifically Christological, lens it may be suggested that for writers of the High and Late Middle Ages, the real threat to Christendom came not from interplanetary travel but from pointedly terrestrial heresies, detailed in pointedly terrestrial terminologies. As such, the Green Children are not to be seen as malnourished Flemish children nor are they, as Jeffrey Cohen surmises, a metaphor of pre- and post-Conquest England, but rather, they are Cathars.[8] Catharism, a significant heretical movement of the 12th and 13th centuries, was deemed so dangerous so as to warrant not only a Crusade (1209-1229) but also from 1231 an Inquisition.[9] Their heterodox views included a rejection of the sacraments, a Manichean dualism, and, importantly, a rejection of Christ's humanity, and thus, His Incarnation.

Though it would be a tenuous stretch to define the Green Children story as proto-science fiction, this paper will argue that there is a wealth of exotheological and exobiological related discourse to be gleaned, when the story is viewed through a Christological lens. As David A. Wilkinson writes, *contra* Thomas O'Meara's assertion that science fiction has no value bar entertainment, we "disagree and see science fiction as fertile ground for theological engagement."[10] He continues that rather than searching for "parallels" in fantastical tales, they are far more useful landscapes to explore "big questions of hope, good and evil, transcendence and the nature of humanity."[11] The Green Children of Woolpit is one such landscape.

The story of the Green Children is reported by William of Newbury († 1198) as having happened during the reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154 and by Ralph of Coggeshall († c. 1227) as having happened during the reign of Stephen's successor, Henry II, 1154-1189.[12] There is no suggestion of extraterrestrial travel, or at least, not in the two original versions of the event described. Both William's and Ralph's descriptions are similar; a brother and sister emerge from the ground in East Anglia. Physically they look like humans but with one striking difference; they were the colour green, from head to toe. Neither can communicate verbally with the inhabitants who find them, [Ralph: *loquelam eorum nullus inelligere potuit*.] The brother and sister would not eat anything other than beans, though they had to be

shown how to eat them. According to both storytellers, the boy died not long after being discovered; the girl, however, "recovered her more-human like colour" [Ralph: *atque sanguineam habitudinem totius corporis paulatim recuperavit*], she is baptised, and she is married in Lynn. In William's account, both siblings are baptised. In Ralph's account of the story there is no overt discussion of religion, though there is a potential hint of the girl's knowledge of sin; Ralph writes that the siblings were "tormented by great hunger" [Ralph: *maxima famis....cruciarentur*] to which she "confessed" [Ralph: *confessa es*t]. With the fate of both children detailed, the story ends; the brother, having died, and the sister, married and serving the house of a knight, who had a reputation of being "wanton and rude" [Ralph: *lasciva et petulans*]. When asked about their native land both authors recount that the brother and sister lived in a "land" [Ralph: *regione*] of perpetual twilight, and in Ralph's version not only were all the "inhabitants" [Ralph: *habibantes*] the same green hue, but their air was of a different nature [Ralph: *aeris temperie*].

In William's account there are questions over religion, much more so than in Ralph's. When questioned about their place of origin the siblings reply that they "are from the land of St. Martin, who, in our native land is held in particular veneration" [William: *homines de terra Sancti Martini, qui scilicet in terra nativatis nostrae praecipuae venerationi habetur*.] When asked if they believed in Christ, the children reply that their "land is Christian" [William: *terram illam Christianam esse*] and that they did indeed have churches [William: *et ecclesias habere*]. Though they reply that their country is Christian, they also remark that the "sun does not rise [on us]; our land is not illuminated by its rays" [William: *"sed sol," inquiunt, "apud nostrates non oritur: cujus radiis terra nostra minime illustratur*"].[13] Mary Baine Campbell, in her thorough chapter on the legend of the two Green Children and its lasting impact in the science fiction tradition, briefly mentions the theological consequences of this story. She suggests that the theological problems arising from the Green Children are similar to those of medieval travel stories; as with the antipodes, the hemisphere, because of its temperature and climate, must be uninhabited, which may explain the strange twilight-like atmosphere of the Green Children's native lands.[14] However, the girl remarks the land *is* Christian, and that there *are* churches; they even venerate a certain St. Martin. As Campbell herself remarks, "if there are churches in St Martin's Land, how did the word of the Lord *reach* those green people? Where within reach of Christ's apostles lies a land without sun?"[15] Campbell concludes that the native land of these two children stands at the "interspace [*entre-deux*] of science and fiction," not an extraterrestrial land but a subterranean one, a

common location for the medieval supernatural and faery story.[16] Whilst both Ralph and William make it clear that the children are not extraterrestrial but are indeed subterranean (they both, after all "emerge" [Ralph: *de terra emergentibus*] from the wolf-pits) it is perhaps the description of the atmosphere and the unusual state of twilight (according to William, this light and dark is divided by the "largest river" [*amne largissimo*]) that has, for a plethora of early modern writers, aligned the story with interplanetary space travel.[17] As Campbell writes, "when the English writers of the seventeenth century returned to his [William's] text and Ralph's--[William] Camden, [Francis] Godwin, [Robert] Burton--they all associated the tale with planetary travel."[18] Campbell describes the children as "alien beings" and remarks that these types of characters and otherworldly tales "abounded" in romance, epic, poetry, and chronicles.[19] What makes the Green Children story so different, she remarks, is the inclusion of "direct quotation from the alien beings in questions about their experiences elsewhere, beyond the lands of 'our people."[20] As Campbell notes, the only direct quotations attributed to the children is to the sister when discussing the crepuscular atmosphere of St Martin's Land.[21] She suggests that it is for this reason why so many early modern science fiction writers are attracted to the story, writing that the specific quotation marks enclosing the girl's answer "predicates the potentially astronomical one was far more interesting than the question about religious confession."[22] However, if Campbell's own suggestion is to be taken, that the 'sun' refers to Christ, then the astronomical question is, in fact, Christological, and the perpetual twilight refers, quite literally, to a theological twilight-zone.

Campbell, closely analysing the construction of the question asked to the sister as to whether they had knowledge of Christ, persuasively suggests that the 'sun' is evidently metaphorical, "given the common trope of the risen Christ as not only son but *sun.*"[23] How, then, do we explain a *terra incognita* that is Christian, has churches, has residents who are knowledgeable of sin (given Ralph's account of the girl confessing to her constant hunger), but is one where Christ's light has not fully reached? Perhaps it is obvious; that they come from a land that declares itself Christian, is full of churches and ostensibly *looks* Christian. However, if it cannot bask in the light of Christ, then clearly, the inhabitants are doing something wrong; in rejecting Christ they are not true believers, and the land is only superficially Christian. This is reinforced by the phrasing of the questioning reported by William: the girl is asked directly if *she* "believed in Christ" [Wiliam: *in Christum credеretur*] followed by her vague reply that "the land is Christian" [William: *terram illam Christianum esse*] lacking any clarification on her own personal faith in Christ suggests that

whilst it may appear a functioning Christian land, these otherworldly inhabitants themselves *are not Christian;* the lack of sunlight signifying their rejection of Christ.

As Harold O.J. Brown explains, "what distinguished Catharism from traditional Christianity was its radical otherworldliness."[24] The children refuse all food other than broad beans (*vicia faba)*; an indication of the Cathars' maintenance of a vegan diet.[25] Though *faba* as fava/broad beans were not directly associated with sin, the genus *vicia* as *vetch* has Biblical allusions to sin that were popularised in the Middle Ages.[26] They reject certain sacraments, such as the Eucharist and Baptism, but they do accept confession (in the form of the *apparelhamentum*); when Ralph notes that the girl *confessed* to her hunger, he is consciously employing a weighted word. The children, William writes, have to be shown how to eat bread, a clear reference to the Eucharist and an implicit reference to the Christological issues inherent in such an act. We learn that the girl, though married, is "wanton and rude" William is perhaps hinting towards the supposed sexual proclivities of the Cathars. The girl, if Cathar, would not have been baptised; perhaps this is why William relates that the decision to baptise her (or, as in William's account, both brother and sister) was a "prudent" [*prudentibus*] one. That the questions over religion appear in William's account more so than Ralph's is also telling as William was well aware of the Cathar threat.[27] In an account of heretics elsewhere, in his *Historia* (2.13) William describes them as hiding in subterranean dens or foxholes and these Green Children emerge from an underground wolf-pit.[28] In his account of heretics entering England William describes how those who fall into their grasp are "saturated" [*imbuere*] with heresy; perhaps the Green Children had been so saturated as to turn green.[29] However, the most striking reference to their heretical constitution is found in the twilight that encapsulates Saint Martin's Land. As Cathars, in maintaining dualistic beliefs between good and evil, light and dark, it is no wonder that these children grew up in a crepuscular atmosphere, with different air and climate. As Malcolm Barber states, "the absolute dualists believed in the existence of two worlds;" what better way to depict this Manicheaist light/dark than two lands in constant twilight, the one of light (representing Christ and earth) visible across a large impassable river.[30]

Finally, and again, to the point of Christology, Cathars believed in neither the physical incarnation of Christ, nor of any kind of resurrection. This is crucial to the curious statement concerning a superficially Christian land but one where its inhabitants cannot answer to their faith in Christ. The sun does not rise in St. Martin's land because Christ was

not resurrected. When the girl replies that her land "is not illuminated by its rays" it is because there is no hope in the Incarnation. By aligning sun with son, William and Ralph are metaphorically acknowledging the Cathars' rejection of Christ's Incarnation, His humanity, and His relationship with humankind. This in turn raises questions about the humanity of the Green Children themselves.

That William identifies the land as being St. Martin's Land has led some scholars to propose places, such as St. Martin of Fornham, close by, as the original home for these children, a suggestion that has held sway.[31] Paul Harris suggests that the children were afflicted by "green sickness," a malnourishment also known as chlorosis, that turns the skin green.[32] The children were malnourished, Harris suggests, because they were Flemish refugees/orphans following the Battle of Fornham in 1173; Fornham St. Martin lying only a few miles north of Bury St. Edmunds where this story is situated.[33] If this is the case, William of Newburgh's dating is incorrect, for he situates this story in the reign of King Stephen (1135-54), not Henry II. There may be some truth to Harris's claim that the children were refugees; but we suggest they were not from the battle of Fornham but from Cathar expulsions in Northern France and/or the Low Countries. Peter Biller has shown that, prior to the well-known location of Languedoc as being a Cathar stronghold, Cathar's were originally located in Northern France; at least in the early decades of the twelfth century.[34] William himself observes this; in a story at 2.13 he describes the execution of certain Cathars in England in the 1160s, detailing their origins in Gascony but stating that they had been in England for quite some time prior.[35] The identification of heretics in Northern Europe, particularly northern France and Germany and the Low Countries prior to the turn of the thirteenth century has led Biller to suppose of the Cathars in William's later account, "that the heretics in England were refugees from over the Channel or the North Sea."[36] Perhaps this is the *amne largissimo* referred to by the Green girl.

Additionally, Biller notes that the early missionary Cathars were German - this may even account for the Green Children's inability to communicate with the inhabitants of Bury St. Edmunds. Our suggestion that these Green Children were perhaps Cathar refugees from Northern France is bolstered by the name of their supposed land - *terra Sancta Martini.* Perhaps William has identified with these Cathars St. Martin of Tours (d. 397). This association with St. Martin has been suggested by Jeffrey Cohen, who has uses it to argue

that William's use of the Green Children was to highlight the post-Conquest relationship between England and France, writing "the boy and girl of verdant hue arrive to tell a complicated story about gender, race, conversion, and the historical fragility of English identity."[37] For Cohen, St. Martin, a monastery in whose name was consecrated at Battle, Hastings, symbolised the "violent and permanent commingling of the Norman and English."[38] Other links include the link between Martinmas and the dead, aligning the children as having returned from the Underworld, but that the story takes place during the harvest, and thus late-summer, seems to counter this.[39]

Though Cohen identifies a French connection to the choice of St. Martin, it is for different reasons that we suggest. St. Martin has been described as a "conscientious objector," protesting as he did his military service; his appeal to Cathars immediately apparent.[40] Over 4,000 parish churches and 500 villages were dedicated to Saint Martin in France; and as David Farmer writes, "his cult spread rapidly" and his hagiography "became one of the most popular of the Middle Ages."[41] Saint Martin's involvement with the Priscillianists, a Gnostic sect of the 4th century, may too have accounted for his good standing with the Cathars of the 12th century.[42] Priscillian, condemned by the Church in 384, was accused of the capital offence of sorcery by Emperor Maximus (d. 388) in 386. Saint Martin intervened, suggesting that Priscillian be dealt with by the Church rather than the emperor. Notwithstanding, Prisicillian was executed. Following his execution, the Priscillian sect increased, particularly in Spain, and Farmer has described it as a "distant precursor of Catharism."[43] Cathars, a condemned, heretic sect persecuted by the authorities, may have felt an affinity toward such a Saint. William could have picked any number of reasons for naming this *terra incognita* St Martin's Land. Perhaps, the popularity of St. Martin in France, not just around Tours, (situated, it must be noted, in northern France), was enough to warn the reader of their geographical origin.[44] For Cohen, the Green Children are the other, but, he writes, "they were already Christian."[45] The difference identified in this paper between the questioning of a belief in Christ, and the girl's equivocal response that her land has churches, is not manifest in Cohen's interpretation of events; they were *not* Christian.

It is this suggestion that the children were Cathars that accounts for their Green appearance as an important identifier regarding their relationship with Christ. There have been several attempts at answering the reasoning behind their green hue; Harris's suggestion discussed above that they, as orphaned refugees, suffered from chlorosis, is one. Another

possibility is that their greenness is another signifier of their vegetarian, and thus Cathar diet. Nancy Partner famously wrote of the uselessness of "worrying over the suggestive details of these wonderfully pointless miracles."[46] Ignoring such details may be suitable for Partner's own aim, but when it comes to heresy, the Devil is quite literally in the detail. A much more convincing argument is made by Elizabeth Freeman who uses this story amongst others to identify the human and heretical body as a common metaphor for the Christian body more generally, and of how "bodily difference functions as a sign of social difference."[47] Cistercians, like Ralph, were known to be "go-betweens in Anglo-French relations."[48] This means that Ralph, like William, was well-attuned to the early threat of the continental Cathars. She also suggests that "heretical practices that one should condemn and the pious practices that one should praise were manifest most readily in the site of the human body."[49] As such, bodily integrity was based on spiritual and social integrity; thus Ralph "invokes heretics as examples of bad users of the body."[50] Freeman's articulation of the body-as-metaphor is powerful. Afterall, the Green girl *returns* to her sanguine nature once she has converted through certain specified sacraments (in William's account both the boy and the girl lose their green tinge). Whether or not the Green Children were actually green, it is clear that their greenness is indicative of a higher meaning; of the body-politic, and of heresy more specifically.

Given the Christological heresy posed by the Cathars, there is another possibility for the Green Children's tint, one that builds upon the heretical-body theory of Freeman's. For the Church, the brother and sister were not Christian because Cathars abandoned the sacraments because of their Christological interpretation of Christ, this disavowed Him of his humanity and physical Incarnation. Therefore, when asked if she believed in Christ specifically and directly there is a vague non-response from the girl; she does not answer the question directly, instead simply stating that there are churches. By throwing into question the very nature of Christ's humanity, Cathars, in tending towards monophysitism and doceticism, challenge the very nature of the hypostatic union. This union, that Christ is fully human and fully divine, is a central tenant of orthodox Catholicism. The implications are manifold, with many resting on man's relationship with Christ; after all, the humanity of Christ plays an important role in incarnational theology and theories of redemption. Perhaps, in an attempt to highlight the differences between Catharism and orthodox Catholicism, by physically and visually changing the very nature of the Green Children, both William and Ralph are hinting towards the very nature of their relationship, or rather, lack of relationship,

with Christ. This idea is reinforced with the fact that the sister does return to her sanguine, or more human, colouring, prior to, and in preparation for, the conferment of Baptism. This trope is not confined to the Green Children and Catharism; the Middle-English romance *The King of Tars* from the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century details a similar changing in colour of skin tone aligning with conversion and preparation for baptism.[51]

The question remains as to whether the Green Children are considered fully human, partially human, or not human at all. At first glance, it appears that their human-like appearance is to suggest that they are human, but simply a different colour, with an interesting diet, a lack of language, and, potentially, used to a slightly different climate (these last two distinctions being common descriptors for the air-sailors in a number of different versions, who often appear to be as if drowning in our own atmosphere, but are routinely described as *men*). Afterall, they are children, *pueri*, a word that can only be associated with human offspring. Ralph explains that they have "limbs similar to those of other humans" [Ralph: *que forma omnium membrorum caeteris hominibus similem habebant*] and William describes the girl as "not so different to our own women" [William: *et nec in modico a nostri generis feminis discrepante*]. There is no mention of animalistic qualities about them, they are not the furry, they don't have horns or walk around on all fours. However, if a Christological approach is taken, then their rejection of Christ is a rejection of the hypostasis, and a rejection of full humanity. Christ, as fully and human and fully divine, redeems *human* sin; it is the hypostatic nature that is so central in the unity between human beings and Christ himself. Because the Green Children, and presumably the rest of the population of St. Martin's land, have denied Christ his humanity, it perhaps suggests that they too are denied *their* humanity. Why, then, did the authors not invent marvellous and monstrous descriptions of the Green Children akin to those found in Mandeville's Travels, to really establish their non-humanness? Afterall, the only true oddity about them is their green colour.

We suggest they are described as being almost-human for a very pointed and deliberate purpose; to focus exclusively on their ungodliness. Dorothy Yamamoto has discussed the metaphoric 'wild-man' and the societal phobias that are symbolised by such a character; often encapsulating societal, political, familiar, gendered, or economic angst.[52] For Ralph and William, their concern is exclusively religious, and primarily concerned with the very nature of humanity itself. Just as vetch/*vicia* was frequently used to describe sin or heretics, it is because the danger lies in the *appearance* of vetch as a mimic weed; it is only

distinguishable from wheat when it is all but too late, and has ruined the entire crop.[53] Just as docestism's danger lies in the distinction of Christ having *appeared* human rather than actually *being* human, the danger of these Green Children is in their imitable appearance to other, proper, Christians. This distinction in the very nature of humanity and otherness is clarified when the recovery of their humanity is discussed. Both Ralph and William's account relate the order of the events in the same way; the children lose their green colour *prior* to baptism. As William writes, the Green Children "eventually changed their colour" [William: *Denique colorem proprium...paulatim mutantes*] and "became like us" [William: *et similes nobis effecti*]. Ralph's account falters only in that it is only the girl who has survived thus far. For both chroniclers the children must become more sanguine and thus more human-like before they are able to be baptised.

There is thus conflicting evidence as to whether or not these Green Children are indeed human, and this seems intentional. Their humanity is thrown into doubt because they, as Cathars, have thrown Christ's humanity into doubt. It is clear that their human-*like* qualities are implicitly dangerous, akin to the wheat-*like* qualities of vetch/*vicia.* The differences are intentionally subtle, yet deliberate. Their rejection of Christ and their lack of humanness are intertwined; until they recover their humanity, they cannot accept Christ, and cannot receive His redemptive and salvific potential. The lines between the Green Children and the children of orthodox Catholics are necessarily blurry, the very meaning of the story is to highlight Christological subtleties. We are invited to look beyond their physical appearance, which tells us little, to their actions; they are baptised, they know confession (according to Ralph, perhaps) there is a suggestion with the emphasis on bread that they accept the eucharist, the girl is married, and the boy dies (there is no mention of what kind of rites his death invites). They have, by the end of the story, partaken in numerous sacraments; they have lived a Christian life, and openly embraced the orthodox stance on Christ's nature in doing so. There is no question that by the *end* of the story, they are human. The answer to the question 'are they human?' lies in their *recovery* to their sanguine nature; they were originally human, before turning green due to the heretical constitution and their rejection of Christ. William does not use the term recovered, he simply says that they changed their colour, but Ralph uses *recuperare* to clearly indicate their return to their original human nature. If so, their descendancy from Adam is intact and it is beyond question that they were born human.

Conclusion.

In exploring the Green Children of Woolpit through a Christological lens we are able to ascertain certain elements of a popular story that have received little elaboration. It is clear that the story has elements of exotheology and exobiology; it is for similar reasons that the story has been so popularly received and circulated amongst ufologists, but has received little attention from theologians, having remained firmly in the realm of science fiction and folklore studies. In viewing the story as a religious commentary on the threat of Catharism we are able to reveal an illuminating discussion on the very nature and definition of humanity, through their rejection of Christ's hypostatic union and thus their own rejection of their own human nature. The Catholic Church's position today is one that would baptise martians, if they wished to be baptised.[54] Pope Francis clarified that he was indeed referring to actual aliens, describing them as "green, with long noses and big ears, like in children's drawings."[55] That the collective imagination for aliens is immediately evocative of green, human-like creatures is perhaps the most significant reason why modern ufologists frequently turn to the Green Children of Woolpit story.

To suggest that Ralph and William were invoking intergalactic travellers would be shamefully anachronistic, as it would be to define it as an early piece of science fiction. However, as a story intended to raise the "big questions" about the intricacies of human nature, the hypostatic nature of Christ, and the unity of relationship between Him and mankind through His Incarnation, the Green Children of Woolpit proves to be an excellent source. Whether the story took place during the reign of King Henry or Stephen, both were prior to the condemnations of 1277, one of which (34) allowed for the proposition of a plurality of worlds, the notion that God could, if he wanted to, create multiple worlds, inhabited or otherwise. The fallout from this condemnation can be found in the works of William of Ware, Nicholas Oresme, William of Vorilong, and Nicholas of Cusa, who all discuss the possibility of *life* on other worlds, not just the existence of other earths. Much of these discussions, as with modern exotheology, focuses on the possibility of multiple Incarnations.[56]

Implicit in these discussions are ones of hypostatic union, the necessity of the Incarnation, the relationship between Saviour and saved, and the cosmic Christological

significance of such discourse. In the Green Children of Woolpit story, we have these tentative discussions, discussed in a non-scholastic environment a century before the possibility of multiple earths would have even entered scholastic discourse. It is no wonder that the Green Children were not extraterrestrial; it was a theological impossibility for them to have been so. This is not to say that the problems faced by both ETs and terrestrial heretics were not dissimilar, then and now. As Wilkinson writes, "our identity as human beings is established in relationship, either by differentiation or by commonality. We want to find out about ETI [Extraterrestrial Intelligence] because we want to find out about ourselves."[57] William and Ralph both use the Green Children to metaphorically highlight the intricacies of the relationship between Christ and humanity, the human and the non-human, the human and the almost-human. Perhaps the story's popularity is due to what it tells us about humanity, rather than what it tells us of the alien.

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[1] Michael J. Crowe, "History of the ETI Debate," *Zygon* 32 no. 2 (1997): 147-162, at 148.

[2] Crowe, "ETI Debate." One of the first to compile these stories was Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Voyages to the Moon* (Macmillan Co., 1948); see also Steven J. Dick, "The Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate and its Relation to the Scientific Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41 no. 1 (1980): 3-27; Steven J. Dick, *Plurality of Worlds: Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); David Cressy, "Early Modern Space Travel and the English Man in the Moon," *The American Historical Review* 111 no. 4 (2006): 961-82.

[3] Kathleen Burt, "The Medieval Beginnings of Science Fiction," *Journal of the Georgia Philological Association* 8 (2019): 68-88 at 76-77.

[4] Condemnation 34 states "that the first cause could not make several worlds." Edward Grant, *A Source Book in Medieval Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 48. For more on the importance of Condemnation 34 and its medieval impact see Crowe, "ETI Debate," and Dick, *Plurality.* See for example Jacques Vallée, *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers* (S.I.: Regnery, 1969); Duncan Lunan, *Children from the Sky* (Glasgow, 2012); C.R. Hale, *The Ancient Alien Theory: Part One. An Introductory Study Guide of the Ancient Alien Theory* (ancientalienpedia, 2018). The stories are also included in a plethora of UFO related internet websites, blog posts, and forums, see for example the forum "Ancient and Medieval UFO," Unexplained Mysteries, 22 June 2019. Accessed 9 February 2022, https://www.unexplained-mysteries.com/forum/topic/328624-ancient-and-medieval-ufo/; Editors of Publications International, Ltd, "UFO History," How Stuff Works, 30 January 2008. Accessed 9th February 2022, https://science.howstuffworks.com/space/aliens-ufos/ufo-history2.htm; "Anchors Aweigh: Sky Ships and Storm Wizards," Mysterious Universe, 7 September 2011. Accessed 9 February 2022, https://mysteriousuniverse.org/2011/09/anchors-aweigh-sky-ships-and-storm-wizards/. See also Ryan Sprague and Micah Hanks, hosts, "Medieval UFOs: Mythologizing Aerial Phenomena," Somewhere in the Skies (podcast), 18 May 2020. Accessed 9 February 2022, https://play.acast.com/s/somewhere-in-the-skies/medievalufos-mythologizingaerialphenomena; S. Pats, "Medieval UFO Sightings," Medium, 5 December 2020. Accessed 9 February 2022, https://medium.com/lessons-from-history/medieval-ufo-sightings-925b20e8ba85.

[5] John Clark, "Small, Vulnerable ETs: The Green Children of Woolpit," *Science Fiction Studies* 33 no. 2 (2006): 209-29. Clark points to the Green Children story in William Camden's *Britannia* in 1586 that references not only the underworld passage the Children supposedly took, but that also references Lucian's *Vera Historia* in which a ship sails to the moon to find it inhabited (p. 211). From this point on it seems that the historiography of the origins of the Green Children is often accompanied with extraterrestrial speculation.

[6] The air-ships and air-sailors are an interesting phenomena, appearing in numerous medieval Annals from the 8th century. The sailors are nearly universally described as similar to humans; they look and move like human sailors, although they find it hard to breathe in air (as if they are drowning), and they speak an unknown language. See for example the 815 account by Agobard of Lyon, *De grandine et tonitruis* 2 ll.1-6, CCCM 52 ed. L. Van Acker (1981); the slightly later account in the *Historia Brittonum*, auct. Ant. 13 additio e cod.

Parisino 11108, 222. V. 128, ed. Theodor Mommsen (1898); the 11th century Irish account in the *Leabhan breathnach annso sis: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius,* appendix 1, 2.23, ed and trans. James Henthorn (Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society, 1848). In the 13th century there is the account of Gervase of Tilbuy in his *Otio Imperialia* 1.13, ed. and trans. S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 80-81, as well as a similar version in the Old Norse *The Kings Mirror (Speculum regale-Konungs skuggsa) translated from the old Norwegian,* trans. Lawrence Marcellus Larson (New York: New York American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1917), 116-17. For secondary reading on the pervasiveness of sky ships particularly in the Irish imagination see Miceal Ross, "Anchors in a Three-decker World," *Folklore* 109 (1998): 63-75 and Michael McCaughan, "Voyagers in the Vault of Heaven: The Phenomenon of Ships in the Sky in Medieval Ireland and Beyond," *Material History Review* 48 (1998): 170-80.

[7] Carl Kears and James Paz, "Medieval Science Fiction: An Impossible Fantasy?" in *Medieval Science Fiction* eds. Carl Kears and James Paz, 3-38, at 17.

[8] Jeffrey Cohen, "Green Children from Another World, or the Archipelago in England,' in *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages* ed. Jeffrey Cohen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 75-94; Paul Harris, "The Green Children of Woolpit: a 12th Century Mystery and its Possible Solution," in Stephen Moore, ed., *Fortean Studies* 4 (1998): 81-95. See the questions raised by Harris's suggestion in Clark, "Vulnerable ETs" for an excellent account of how the story has entered popular culture and folklore. Keagen Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2016), 6-7 declares Harris's conviction "convincing."

[9] Erwin Fahlbusch et al., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 368-69.

[10] David A. Wilkinson, "Why Should Theology take SETI Seriously?" *Theology and Science* 16 no. 4 (2018): 427-38, at 433.

[11] Wilkinson, "SETI," 433.

[12] William of Newbury (Guillelmus Neubrigensis), *Historia rerum Anglicarum* 1. 27 (pp. 82-84) ed. R. Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I.* Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores 82, vol. 1, (London: 1884-1885). Ralph of Coggeshall, *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum,* ed. Joseph Stevenson, Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores (London: Longman, 1875), 118-120. All translations are authors' own. For a thorough comparison and *précis* of the two texts, see Clark, "Vulnerable ETs."

[13] We have given quotation marks where the authors, Ralph or William, have indicated that this is the words of the two siblings themselves. This is one of the few direct quotations as reported in the accounts. We will discuss this significance more below.

[14] Mary Baine Campbell, "Those two green children which Nubrigensis speaks of in his time, that fell from heaven', or the Origins of Science of Fiction," in *Medieval Science Fiction* eds. Kears and Paz, 117-32 at 126.

[15] Campbell, "Two Green Children," 126.

[16] Ibid. Here this is also a discussion on the opinion of Dalche and the *entre-deux* of science and fiction.

[17] Ibid., 123.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 121.

[20] Ibid., 120.

[21] Ibid., 123.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies. Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Catholic Church* (Hendrikson, 2003), 254.

[25] It is more accurate to say they were pescatarian, as they did eat fish, but spurned meat, milk, and eggs; see Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 214. John Clark, "Martin and the Green Children," *Folklore* 117 no. 2 (2006): 207-14, at 209 discusses the *vicia faba* offered to the children as signifying the story occurred in August.

[26] See the Parable of the Tares, Matthew 13.24-43. The danger in poisonous *tares,* zizanium, darnel and vetch lies in their imitable appearance to wheat; they are almost indistinguishable until it is too late, by which point the whole crop of wheat is ruined. See J. R. C. Cousland, "Toxic Tares: The Poisonous Weeds (ζιζάνια) in Mathew's Parable of the Tares (Matthew 12.24-30, 36-43)," *New Testament Studies* 61 no. 3 (2015): 395-410, and Howard Thomas, Jayne Elisabeth Archer, and Richard Marggraff Turley, "Remembering Darnel, a Forgotten Plant of Literary, Religious, and Evolutionary Significance," *Journal of Ethnobiology* 36 no.1 (2016): 29-44 for their discussion on the translation of *tare* and *vicia.*

[27] See Peter Biller, "William of Newburgh and the Cathar Mission to England," *Studies in Church History* 12, subsidia, (1999): 11-30.

[28] *Historia rerum Anglicarum* 2.13 describes these Heretics (*Publicanos*) hiding in England as foxes (*vulpes*) who lurk in underground pits (*foveis delitescunt*).

[29] We discuss their green colour below

[30] Barber, *The Cathars,* 102.
[31] See n.8 above.
[32] Harris, "12th Century Mystery," 714-38.
[33] Brewer, *Wonder and Skepticism,* 7.
[34] Biller, "Cathar Mission," 24.
[35] Biller, "Cathar Mission," 18-19.
[36] Biller, "Cathar Mission," 28.
[37] Jeffrey Cohen, "Green Children from Another World, or the Archipelago in England,' in *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages* ed. Jeffrey Cohen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 75-94, at 84.
[38] Cohen, "Green Children," 86.
[39] Anne E. Witte, "St Martin: Seasonal and Legendary Aspects," *Medieavalia* 14 (1988): 63-74; Clark, "Martin," 208-9 discusses Witte's suggestion and counters the suggestion made by Martin W. Walsh on the links between the Green Children and the faery Underworld; Martin W. Walsh, "Medieval English Martinmesse: The Archaeology of a Forgotten Festival," *Folklore* 111 no. 2 (2000): 231-54.
[40] "Martin of Tours" in David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 350-52.
[41] Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints,* 351.
[42] The following account is taken from Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints,* 351.
[43] Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints,* 351.
[44] It is worth noting that a decade after William's death, a battle took place at a certain Saint-Martin-Lalande in southern France, in the heart of Cathar territory during an early skirmish of the Albigensian crusade between Simon de Montford and Raymond VI of Toulouse. See Catherine Léglu, Rebecca Rist and Claire Taylor, eds, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (London: Routledge, 2014), 140. It is not possible for William to be writing with knowledge of this battle in mind, but for Ralph, writing his history it is suggested between 1200-1220, the battle would have been all but contemporaneous; though only William names the land directly.
[45] Cohen, "Green Children," 88.
[46] Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 122.
[47] Elizabeth Freeman, "Wonders, Prodigies and Marvels: Unusual Bodies and the Fear of Heresies in Ralph of Coggeshall's *Chronicon Anglicanum," Journal of Medieval History* 26 no. 2 (2000): 127-43 (at 134). At 141 she writes "it was after all a common literary trope to employ the human body as a metaphor for the wider social community."
[48] Freeman, "Wonders," 139.
[49] Freeman, "Wonders," 139.
[50] Freeman, "Wonders," 141.
[51] See Cord J. Whitaker, "Black Metaphors in the King of Tars," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112 no. 2 (2013): 169-193. The protagonists in the *King of Tars* poem are a white Christian princess and a Black sultan; Whitaker discusses the metaphor of the change in skin colour through a lens of religion, race, and ethnicity. This differs in context to the Green Children of Woolpit which references a change in skin colour from green to sanguine.
[52] Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) at 144-68, at 147-48.
[53] See n. 26 above.
[54] Adam Withnall, "Pope Francis says he would baptise aliens: 'Who are we to close doors?" The Independent, 14 May 2015. Accessed 22 February 2022, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/pope-francis-says-he-would-baptise-aliens-9360632.html. See also Guy Consolmagno, SJ, and Paul Mueller, SJ, *Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial? And Other Questions From the Astronomers' In-Box at the Vatican Observatory* (New York: Random House, 2014). The answer to the question posed is "only if she asks!" (p. 440).
[55] Withnall, "Pope Francis."
[56] See for example Andrew Davison, "Christian Systematic Theology and Life Elsewhere in the Universe: A Study in Suitability," *Theology and Science* 16 no. 4 (2018): 447-461.
[57] Wilkinson, "SETI," 434.