

A NEW MEDIEVAL CAROL TEXT?

On the back of one of the Halesowen Court Rolls in the Hagley Hall collection in Birmingham City Archives (no. 346333, 11 June to 30 July 1354) there are some pieces of Middle English verse. The document is in a poor state and the writing is very difficult to decipher; many words, particularly Latin ones, can only be tentatively read. With the help of Michael J. Preston, *A Concordance to the Middle English Shorter Poems* (Leeds, 1975, 2 vols) I have identified one piece as being a version of no. 179 in R. L. Greene, *The Early English Carols* (Oxford, 1977). The remainder I have been unable to identify, but it is clearly a carol about the Annunciation, and like Greene's no. 179, has some Latin words alternating with the Middle English. The first line may be a heading (or a refrain?) rather than part of the poem; lines 2, 6, 7 and 8 are paralleled in Greene's no. 237 A (1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 5.2). In line 2, 'cler' (if it is the correct reading) may be intended as a correction of 'bryght'. I am greatly indebted to Fiona Tait, Rachel McGregor and Chris Peers of Birmingham City Archives for their help in making the following transcription, which is here printed with their permission.

- a child of mighte [pat be] þer myght / þ^t is goddes son of myght
Gabriell and Aengell bryght [cler]
- 3 Fro god was sent a messynger þer Caram aurem Uirginis
he fond hyr hin chambyr ner
hys message þer he gan begyn Cum verbis suauibus his
- 6 hail blessid mary full of grace
God is w^t þe in ych place / ut fias salus hominis
So sche conseyved þe holy gost
- 9 and bare a chyld of mightes most diuini plena luminis

In no. 179, the following variants from Greene's text can be read (references to stanza and line no.; Greene's text in brackets):

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|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1.1 Bilassid be þe byrith | (Worshyp be the birth) |
| 1.3 burgh | (boure) |
| 2.1 For our syn | (For thorwe oure synnes) |
| 2.3 He schall hus saue | (But nowe shal vs saue) |
| 3.1 hu myghty | (Almyghty) |
| 3.3 þat he suld lyght in þe w ^t grace | (That vpon the shal lyght his grace) |
| 4.1 maydyn | (maide) |
| 4.3 betuyx | (Bytwene) |
| 6.1 w ^t myrth and al solempnite | (With merthe and alle solempnite) |
| 6.3 birt of bale | (berde of ble) |

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