

Diablo Valley College

Title

The Vision of Tundale: A Scare Tactic

Thesis

The Vision of Tundale Reinforced the Idea of Leading a Virtuous Life.

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The Vision of Tundale was one of the greatest works of vision literature of the twelfth century. It was written by an Irish Monk in 1149 and became the second book in the bible to be translated into Old Norse. It has been translated a whopping 250 times into many different languages. The Vision of Tundale is not known to be real or fake, no one knows if this experience happened or if it was all made up. During this time Christianity, Judaism, and Islam were the main religious beliefs. In Europe, the main religious belief was that of Christianity. The vision of Tundale seemed to grow in popularity as it was very vivid and had many monsters and demons described in the purgatory/hell part of the story. This gave people a glimpse into what the hell could look like. As this came before Dante's work it seems to be one of the popular purgatory, hell, and heaven concepts besides Dante's of course. As I read the Vision of Tundale translated into English I realized that many 21st-century ideas have come from this type of work. Such as the Ebenezer Scrooge idea. How he is an ungrateful man not willing to share a penny to the poor, or even movies like Liar Liar where the main character, Jim Carrey, lies to everyone and at the end of the movie we see him as a changed man. I find it interesting how these ideas have developed over the years from possibly the best literature known to man. The Vision of Tundale is actually a quite short story. It follows the life of a young man known as Tundale. As quoted in the story, "As it is written, to a wealthy man whose name was Tundale. He was a notorious fellow, well-endowed with goods but bereft of all goodness! Treacherous, envious, proud and angry, he was quick to seize the wealth of others but slow to do any service to God. His favourite pastimes were fornication and stuffing himself with food and drink! Mercy was not in his vocabulary. He loved neither God nor the Holy Church, had a heart that felt no pity and gave nothing away in charity. He harboured all sorts of criminals in his retinue and loved nothing better than to gossip and to stitch people up. He loved fighting and conflict. He was the worst of

all men”(Eleusinian). In this snippet of the story we get to understand first hand just exactly who this Tundale fellow is. He is a man of no good. One who steals from others in a cruel way. He steals back from them his loans and charges extra on top of that. He is gluttonous which we have heard in other beliefs will lead you to Hell! He also lies and does not care about God. He does not confess his sins to the priest. To be quite honest his life sounds much like most of ours. We as Americans eat a lot, most of the time do not go to church every Sunday, and lie a lot more than we should. Tundale is a perfect example of how most of us are but don't want to admit it. This could also explain why this vision literature was so popular as it had a relatable character in the foreground. The story goes on to explain more and more on how he is a terrible man with no remorse. As we move on with the story we come upon the first major part of the story and that is how he gets to purgatory. It seems as though as he was eating dinner he suddenly did not feel so well and fell down and died right at the dinner table. They don't really explain why this had happened but they leave his body on the ground in hopes of him waking up or coming back to life. The story explains it as, “But when they were at the table, Tundale suddenly began to feel very unwell. After eating only a mouthful of food, his arm became paralysed. He cried out and looked as though he had seen a vision of Death. 'Dear Lady,' he called to the mistress of the house, 'for mercy, fetch me my weapons and help me to your door, for I think that my end is near. I feel my strength ebbing. I sense that I am nigh to death. I am certain of it! Oh Jesus Christ! Have mercy upon me!' And Tundale made an effort to rise from the table, but instead, he collapsed to the floor”(Eleusinian). After he collapses we move into the next part of the story where he wakes up in the beginning of purgatory immediately being sought out by things called “fiends”. Fiends are apparently the word used for demons as we get further into the story I come to realize this to be true. These fiends are wicked and only stopped by the gracious power of an

angel. Not just any angel but apparently it is Tundales guardian angel that always watches over him. The angel shoos away these demons and tells him about this journey they must go on. The first part of the story is all about purgatory and all of the suffering that goes on there, the second part is about hell and the horrible suffering that goes on there, finally the last part of the story is about heaven and the different levels of heaven there is and how wonderful it is. There are many reasons for suffering in purgatory and hell such as sex with married women or vice versa, murdering, lying, thieves, religious people who broke their vows, and many other types of sins. We hear Tundales sins at the beginning of the book, “ The fiends crowded around Tundale and shouted: 'You wretched, sinful creature, there is a place in hell reserved for you, for you are one of us now! You are a daughter of Death. Eternal fire shall befriend you. Darkness shall be your companion and light shall be your enemy. You have lied and deceived. You love conflict, as we all do. You have had sex with married women! Every vice imaginable is ingrained into your character! You could have mended your ways while you lived but you chose not to. And where is all your wealth now? Where is your gold and your treasure? What good can it do you now? All the wealth on Earth, and all the prayers that may be said for your soul, all the Matins and Masses, cannot save you now from the pain of hell and eternal damnation! You concealed your sins from the Church and confessed nothing. Therefore you must come with us! Your life has shown you to be one of us, you villain! Come with us then, to eternal damnation!'(Eleusinian.) The angel takes Tundale on a journey of purgatory and hell where many punishments are seen. Some punishments are as horrible as a beast eating you alive, burning in the stomach, being defecated out, and then rats and snakes eating you inside and out, finally the process is repeated over and over again. There are a lot of punishments in this book that are punishments that seem to be repeated over and over again to people, really signifying that you do not want to go to this place

of horror. As I read this piece of vision literature, I myself became sick with the idea of many of the punishments going on in the purgatory and hell that this Irish monk had written about. One part of the book that really stood out to me was a part where a certain sin is punished of thieves, "It is for those who have robbed and taken men's property," the angel replied, "be they common men or learned scholars, and those who have stolen from the Holy Church. But some have more torment and some less, depending upon the gravity of their sins. Some have not balked at burning down a church! Others are fickle and disloyal. Some rob from churches, which is termed sacrilege. Those who have committed crimes within a church or desecrated a place of sanctuary, all these shall receive their punishment here. The man on the bridge you can see carrying the sheaves of corn and crying out in distress, he stole the corn from Holy Church, for they were taxes he owed and did not pay. You see how much they cost him now!" (Eleusinian.) We know that Tundale has committed much worse crimes than this and even then the punishment for a thief seems unbearable. As we go further and further into purgatory on the way to hell we see punishments getting more and more painful and repeated over and over again to make us really understand that if you do these sins and not live a virtuous life you will be condemned to these same types of punishments. Reading this story I realize that this is the repeating theme in the literature. This idea of being virtuous or living a virtuous life will get you out of having to endure such distress and torture. In the story you realize that even the Devil himself (Satan) is not having the best time either. A quote from the story that best represents this is from the middle of the story, "Satan was bound in iron chains surrounded by molten brass. The souls that he caught in his long fingers he tore to pieces as he brought them to his mouth as a man would a handful of grapes. When he had crushed them and digested them he expelled them back into the fire; and yet, they revived and were put to renewed torture! Tundale saw and heard how Satan cried out in

anguish at his binding and constraint and with each tormented exhalation a thousand souls were breathed back out into the fire. Soon they were scattered all around him, but this torture was still insufficient, and when he breathed in again all the scattered souls were swallowed down again, along with the fumes of pitch and sulphur.”(Eleusinian.) It is so terrifying that Satan breathes and excretes souls nonstop but is also in an anguish on top of that. After the last part of this section, Tundale sees purgatory, hell, even the devil himself, he is very shocked and scared that he might end up here himself if he does not change his ways. As most people are scared of their fate as we do not know what to expect, Tundale is scared because he knows exactly what to expect and has gotten a taste of almost every punishment in hell. At this point in the story most readers would understand now that you do not want to end up in this horrible stench of a place. Now as I kept reading I found out the graces of Heaven. They explain Heaven in such a way that it seems like the entire opposite version of hell. No suffering, no pain, just peace and happiness. However as you come to understand this place can only be achieved after most go to purgatory or relive a little bit of suffering. Unless of course you are a virgin priest who has dedicated his life to god. We hear this at the end of the story told by the angel, “None may dwell here,' replied the angel, 'except for those who have practiced holy celibacy and kept their bodies clean and lived as virgins and for the love of God Almighty have wholly forsaken the world and given themselves to God with all their mind and all their will.” (Eleusinian.) In this story only the best of the best can sit with God in the most wonderful part of heaven. However there are still parts of heaven that you can go to if you have lived a virtuous life. It seems as though people who respect their marriages and do not commit adultery, are followers and love god, and support the poor end up in heaven. To me it sounds like you need to go to church a lot, get married and respect that marriage, and help others in need. I understand that this might sound like a lot to do in the 21st

century and quite a harrowing task to some but back in the twelfth century religion was big and paying your penances for wrongdoing was even bigger. In the end of the story Tundale gets resurrected back into his body and ends up turning his life around and paying for his sins on earth, living a virtuous life, and helping the poor and needy. He ends up in Heaven after he actually dies and spends eternity in happiness. In the story Heaven is painted out to be a wonderful place, “Soon, as before, they found themselves, somehow, on the other side of this wall, and Tundale found pleasure in looking at the most beautiful place he had ever seen. It was more beautiful than any earthly man can describe. There were golden thrones set with precious stones and draped in silk and cloth-of-gold. Holy men and women sat upon them in fine regalia. There were rich ornaments everywhere and the great brightness of the face of God illuminated them. It was brighter than the sun. Rays of light played upon the crowns of holy men and women like threads of gold wire and the crowns themselves were so encrusted with precious jewels that the men and women looked like kings and emperors, finer than kings and emperors!”

(Eleusinian.) They highlight the fact that the heavens are only for the virtuous and only for the ones that truly deserve everlasting happiness. They engrain this idea of virtue throughout the whole story. So this story had quite a happy ending for the majority of it being about suffering and sadness. In the Vision of Tundale we hear a story about a man who gets shown the horrors of a possible afterlife he could have. He gets taught to love God and lead a more virtuous life, which in turn lets him have a happy afterlife. This story with no doubt is a story about why you should live a virtuous life. Through tactics the author uses such as the intense vivid scenery and demons in the afterlife. The various punishments you can receive in purgatory and hell, the eternal damnation and suffering you will face if you are condemned to hell. It has definitely been used as a scare tactic to instill discipline and devotion to God in those who read it. Don't get me

wrong it is a wonderful piece of literature and does a great job at providing a lesson to be learned through Tundale. The Vision of Tundale is the most classic original version of boy who cried wolf we could get. It warns the reader of what could happen if you do not lead a good life on earth. And was a great influence on what other ideas of hell could form in the future.



Bibliography

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