

The Sayings of St Bernard

This poem supposedly represents the advice of the twelfth-century Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, though it almost certainly does not. *The Sayings of St Bernard* employs the *ubi sunt* (Latin for ‘where are they’) motif, which plays on nostalgia for the past. The poem survives in five manuscripts in addition to the Auchinleck manuscript, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS 19.2.1: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108 (c. 1275-1325); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86 (c. 1275-1300); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Additional E.6(a); London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 (c. 1310); and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley poet A.1 (late 14th or early 15th century).

The edition below is of the Auchinleck version, which is only a fragment of the full text, corresponding to lines 121-131 and 157-180 in the MS Laud Misc. 108. Although the Auchinleck scribe as indicate breaks between the stanzas with the paragraph mark, I have added modern line breaks. I have also added modern punctuation. Letters in brackets are reconstructed.

5	¶ Where ben men biforn ous were, þat houndes ladden & haukes bere & hadden feld & wode, þe riche leuedis in her bour þat werd gold in her tresour ¶ Wiþ her briȝt rode?	are; [who] before; us led; bore field; wood ladies; their; bower (bedroom) wore cheeks
10	þai eten & dronken & made hem glade, Wiþ joie was al her liif ylade; Men kneled hem bifore. þai beren hem wel swiþe heiȝe; Wiþ a tv[i]nkling of her eiȝe Her soules were forlore.	them life; led very; high (i.e. nobly) all lost
15	¶ Whare is þat hoppeing & þat song þe trayling & þe proude gong, þe haukes & þe houndes? Al þat wele is went oway; Her ioie is turned to wayleway, To manie hard stoundes.	hopping (i.e. dancing) trailing [of gowns] wealth; gone away joy; woe is me times
20	¶ Dreize her, man, ȝif þat þou wit; A litel pine men þe bit. Wiþdrawe þine aise oft: ȝif þe pine be vnrede, & þou þenke of þi misdede, It schal þe þink soft	suffer here; if know (i.e. are wise) pain; thee; bid ease/pleasure/comfort if; dreadful seem to you mild
25	¶ ȝif þat þe fende, þe foule þing, þurth wicked rede of fals egging Adoun þe haþ ycast, Vp & be gode champioun, Stond & falle no more adoun	through; advice down
30	For a litel blast.	because of a small blast [of wind]

	¶ Take þe rode to þi staf & þenk on him þat þeron 3af His liif þat was so lef. He it 3af for þe, þou 3eld it him;	rood (cross) gave dear [let] thou yield it to him
35	O3ain þi fo þi staf þou nim & wreke þe of þat þef.	against; [let] thou take avenge yourself on that thief
	¶ Jhesu Crist ous aboue, Þou grant ous, for þi moder, loue At our liues ende.	[may] thou grant; for the sake of
40	When we han ri3tes of þe prest & þe deþ be at our brest, þe soule mot to heuen wende. Amen	have [last] rights must; go