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Narrative and Knowledge Transmission
in Anglo-Saxon and Post-Conquest Literature

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(Abstract)

This thesis examines transformations in narrative across the Norman Conquest of England, from early Anglo-Saxon literature, to the writing of the late twelfth century. Orality and literacy have been widely studied for many years as actual contexts for the recording and delivery of poetry. However, an explicit dichotomy existed in the Middle Ages between orality and literacy as competing and sometimes incompatible modes of knowledge transmission, and so it is medieval attitudes to these modes of knowledge transmission which are the focus for this thesis.

Over the course of the twentieth century, repeated attempts were made to argue for the unity, or for the distinctiveness, of post-Conquest literature. It is argued in this thesis that post-Conquest literature is distinctive, and that the changes which occurred across the period studied are changes in attitudes to knowledge transmission. In literature, it is through narrative techniques that these changes can be discerned. Whilst there is continuity in the range of techniques used by Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest writers, the preoccupation with these techniques increases as the twelfth century progresses. The matter of narration itself, and the processes by which knowledge is transmitted, gradually become principal considerations for authors.

To the memory of my Grandfather

BRIAN WYNNE OAKLEY

for whom reason and the mind were always enough
and who almost lived to read this.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in footnotes and the bibliography:

ANS	*Anglo-Norman Studies*
ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
BBIAS	*Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*
ELH	*English Literary History*
ELN	*English Language Notes*
ES	*English Studies*
FMLS	*Forum for Modern Language Studies*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JMH	*Journal of Medieval History*
JMRS	*Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*
MLN	*Modern Language Notes*
MP	*Modern Philology*
NM	*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America*
PQ	*Philological Quarterly*
RES	*Review of English Studies*
SN	*Studia Neophilologica*
SP	*Studies in Philology*

Introduction

This thesis examines transformations in narrative across the Norman Conquest of England, from early Anglo-Saxon literature, to the writing of the late twelfth century. For many years, the scholarly consensus held that a literate Norman culture supplanted the oral Anglo-Saxon culture shortly after the Conquest, and that this was responsible for any changes that occurred. This is no longer considered to be the case. But largely because it is a preoccupation of the writers of the period as well as scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it is nevertheless in terms of literacy and orality that narrative in the period can be usefully studied.

Intellectual Background: The Orality/Literacy Debate

The scholarly view of medieval orality, and its presumed opposite literacy, is long, ongoing, and well-documented. The debate itself revolves around orality and literacy as actual phenomena related to the way in which texts were composed, shared, and received by audience or reader. Though this thesis is not preoccupied with the ways in which this occurred, or indeed with how they are now perceived to have occurred, it is important that this debate is summarized. The thesis will attempt to describe the attitude and perception of orality and literacy *at the time* the works were composed, based on the way in which authors handle oral and literate techniques in their writing. This thesis will also argue for a difference between the literature of the Anglo-Saxons and the literature of the twelfth century, but it will do so in a way which adopts some

of the terminology and approaches of previous arguments, whilst challenging much of what has previously been asserted in this area.

Views at the end of the nineteenth century were conditioned by a general sense of nationalism, and a resentment of the idea of invasion; that the Anglo-Saxons had once been invaders themselves seems to have been ignored. E. A. Freeman, in *The History of the Norman Conquest*, describes the effect of the conquest upon language:

> French for a time supplanted English as the speech of courtly intercourse, of the lighter forms of literature, and of such official documents as were written in Latin. The evil in this respect was temporary; in another respect it has been lasting, and we suffer under it to this day... For our purpose we may look on the tongue of England, as it stood at the coming of William, as forming one tongue, one variety of Teutonic speech, now brought face to face with the Romance enemy.[1]

Freeman's account is as philologically insensitive as it is racially polemic; it is, nevertheless, illustrative of the widespread perception of the coming of the Normans as something at best injurious, and at worst wholly supplanting, of the 'native' English culture.

With some modifications, this was also a view held by students of literature in the same period. The surviving Anglo-Saxon written literature was taken to be an accidental record of what was in fact an almost exclusively spoken form, a culture to which writing was available, but for which speech was preferred above all. The very earliest criticism of *Beowulf* attests to this view, and the history of the criticism of Anglo-Saxon literature is the history of the debate which leads to the present project. Grímur Jonsson Thorkelín, the first editor of the poem, expressed the view that the

[1] E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest*, v (Oxford: OUP, 1876), 507-13.

extant poem was descended from an oral original composed at the time of the events described in the work, and to which a reference is made towards the end of the work, during the obsequies for Beowulf himself. The poem we read, he argued, is a substantially later but otherwise largely unaltered version of an oral original composed to celebrate the life of the hero and mourn his death:[2]

> Þa ymbe hlæw riodan hildediore,
> æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,
> woldon care cwiðan ond cyning mænan,
> wordgyd wrecan, ond ymb wer sprecan;
> eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc
> duguðum demdon.
>
> [Then the brave soldiers, princes' sons,
> rode around the burial mound, twelve in all.
> They wanted to utter their grief,
> to lament the king, to tell aloud his story,
> and to talk about the man. They praised his heroism
> and his valorous accomplishments;
> in seemly ways they glorified him].[3]

This view of the poem was short-lived. Thorkelín's edition of the poem was completed in 1815. By the 1820s, a number of other theories had emerged which superseded Thorkelín's, mostly by virtue of the fact that they did not suffer from the flaw in the earlier theory, namely, that the poem makes reference to real historical events which occurred substantially after Thorkelín's suggested date for the composition. Certain elements of his interpretation persisted, however. Among these were the assumption that although the poem was not an entirely factual account, it was nevertheless

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[2] Robert E. Bjork and Anita Obermeier, 'Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences', in Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, (eds.), *A Beowulf Handbook* (Exeter: UEP, 1998), 13-34 at 14.
[3] The edition used here is *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk et al., 4th edn. (Toronto: UTP, 2008), lines 3169-74. The translations of *Beowulf* are throughout derived from *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. and ed. S. A. J. Bradley (London: J. M. Dent, 1982).

historically-rooted. Upon this premise, the notion of the oral origin of the poem was sustained, and along with it, the theory that written remains somehow preserve a lost oral culture.

Impressed by the references to the skilful oral poets in *Beowulf* and other descriptions of oral poetic rendition which occur widely in the written poetic record of the Anglo-Saxons, many subsequent theorists came to think of the culture of the Anglo-Saxons as an oral one in which writing was a rare and unfortunate destructive modernisation. Phrases like 'Primal Orality' were coined to accommodate this idea, and they reflect the ideological view of the Anglo-Saxon state of orality as essentially pre-lapsarian. These views were inevitably supported by the immanent impossibility of any corroborating oral records surviving outside of the accounts in *Beowulf* and similar works, and by the relative paucity of surviving written records from the Anglo-Saxon era, both of which were made to serve as proofs of the reality of the oral theory of Anglo-Saxon culture.

This theory was subsequently improved by the addition of empirical evidence, in contemporary studies by cultural anthropologists. In the 1930s, Milman Parry conducted research into South Slavic oral-poetics with a perspective which was both cultural-anthropological and literary, in the interests of understanding the processes which led to the composition of the classical epic form – a form he considered, *post hoc*, to be rooted in a purely oral system of composition.[4] This led to his creation of the so-called 'oral formulaic' theory, in which certain aspects of a poet's technique are attributed to the historical roots of the poem in orality. These are predominantly

[4] Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971). Parry refers to the epic form as 'Homeric Verse' although he is eclectic, including much Greek and South Slavic poetry from antiquity up to the time of his study.

mnemonic techniques which would enable a poet or minstrel to recall and recite a poem of considerable length - say, *Beowulf* or even the *Iliad* - and for that poem to then be readily transmitted, with free interchange of these mnemonic formulae, from generation to generation of performers. Using this theory, Parry analysed a variety of extant texts, which he described as 'Homeric' on the basis that they contained these formulae. The argument is somewhat circular. The features which he considers to be oral-associated are located in the work of modern oral poets and written versions of ancient texts, analysed, and found to be those which demonstrate the orality of the texts he examines. His work is, however, supported by near-exhaustive empirical evidence gleaned from the study of *guslars* – Slavic bards - whose system of composition and transmission Parry was convinced must echo that of the time of the composition of the Homeric epics. His work contrasts with the tendency of previous scholars (such as Thorkelín) to make general remarks about orality with little basis in research. Parry remarks in his foreword, 'it is not enough to know that the style of Homer is more or less traditional; we must know which words are traditional, which expressions'.[5]

Albert Lord followed Parry's work, and the collected volume of his research became the seminal work on oral theory in the two decades which followed its publication.[6] The scholarly goal of Lord's work, and that of his precursor Parry, was to resist the conservative attitude encouraged particularly by scholars of Latin which

[5] Parry, *Homeric Verse*, 1.
[6] Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd edn. (1960; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). That it was Lord's book rather than Parry's research which became the standard text is explained by the fact that Parry's work consisted of a vast quantity of comparatively unorganised interdisciplinary research, and the first few pages of a book to be called *The Singer of Tales*. Parry died before making significant progress, and his papers and notes were not published in a coherent form until the editing work of his son led to the publication of *The Making of Homeric Verse* in 1971. Lord's book is heavily reliant on Parry's research and methodology.

prioritized the importance of the written – and later the printed – word. *The Singer of Tales* was to be a revisionist examination of the notion of tradition itself:

> We ought to take a fresh look at tradition, considered not as the inert acceptance of a fossilized corpus of themes and conventions, but as an organic habit of re-creating what has been received and is handed on.[7]

Lord's descriptions of the primarily oral world of ancient Europe reflect the view he shared with Parry, of orality as pre-lapsarian. He comments on the introduction of writing to oral cultures with a paean to the skill of oral poets: 'the art of the narrative song was perfected, and I use the word advisedly, long before the advent of writing'.[8] The contrast with his figuring of the literate cultures which supplanted orality is marked: 'one cannot lead Proteus captive; to bind him is to destroy him'.[9]

In a 1953 paper, Francis Magoun had introduced the idea of studying Anglo-Saxon poetry as oral-formulaic, using much the same definition of oral formula that Parry had used when discussing classical poetry.[10] This was applied by Magoun and many others in the later 1950s to various specific examples of what were perceived to be oral formulas in Old English poetry.[11] Hitherto, however, the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory had discussed only classical epic, and its supposed descendants in modern Balkan culture. In *The Singer of Tales*, Lord's final chapter briefly discusses the application of the oral formulaic theory to what he calls 'medieval epic', among which

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[7] Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, xiv.
[8] Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 124.
[9] Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 124.
[10] Francis P. Magoun, 'Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum* 28 (1953), 446-467.
[11] For example, Francis P. Magoun, 'The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Bulletin de la Société Néo-Philologique de Helsinki* 56 (1955), 81-90; subsequently Adrien Bonjour, '*Beowulf* and the Beasts of Battle', *PMLA* 72 (1957), 563-73; also Stanley B. Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 200-206.

he cites *Beowulf*, beginning with the statement that 'the formulaic character of the Old English *Beowulf* has been proved beyond a doubt' and that 'analysis of *Beowulf* indicates oral composition'.[12] Certainly, there are similarities between *Beowulf* and the works which are the main focus of Parry's and Lord's researches. But the implications of branding *Beowulf* and much of the rest of Old English poetry as oral, along with its known or partly known historical context, were far reaching, and ultimately misleading. The brief and comparatively speculative chapter of Lord's book had disproportionate consequences for the study of Old English literature at large, primarily by reinforcing the essentially uninformed conclusions of nineteenth-century scholarship. Although Lord offers the possibility that *Beowulf* may be what he calls a 'transitional text', he does not explore this idea, and proceeds to discuss the relevant oral formulae which assist his view of the poem's composition, and the ways in which the oral formulaic theory assists in an argument for the unity of the poem.[13] Lord remains, throughout, not just a proponent of the view that *Beowulf* was originally an oral poem, embedded in an oral culture, but that the normative value subsequently placed upon literature is disastrous and misguided:

> When we look at oral poetry and observe in it something that looks like these new forms and complexities, we may be deluded. Enamoured of the meretricious virtues of art, we may fail to understand the real meaning of a traditional poem. That meaning cannot be brought to light by elaborate schematization, unless that schematization be based on the elements of oral tradition.[14]

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[12] Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 198, 200. The chapter is something of an afterthought, entitled 'Some notes on Medieval Epic'.
[13] This was a related, but essentially different debate which surrounded, and still surrounds *Beowulf*, but which has little to offer in the present discussion.
[14] Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 221.

Despite the near-century which had passed since the writing of Freeman's *History*, an emotional attachment to the presumed culture of the Anglo-Saxons remained a prominent force in the study of the period.

These debates are old, but they can be enlightening. Their failings, almost universally, are in presupposing that the adherence to oral or literate methods by authors was an unconscious decision, taken without awareness of the effects and potential of such a decision; additionally, the debates up until the late 1970s assume that the written literature reflects in its orality or literacy the actual state of the culture at the time. However, the terminology used is undeniably appropriate: a major dichotomy in literature was the distinction between oral and literate modes of transmission, and it was a dichotomy which was at times conspicuously acknowledged by medieval authors. The critics of the last thirty years have, broadly speaking, remedied the failings of the earlier scholars, although in the process have partially demonized some valuable ideas.

In the decade or so leading up to the publication of *The Singer of Tales*, and in the years which followed it, the matter of Anglo-Saxon orality was debated: Lord's views were not universally accepted. Some noted that there were already existing challenges which had not been answered by the work of Parry and Lord.[15] Others argued that there was strong evidence of literate influence on many works of Old English poetry that could not have emerged from a society in which orality received such privilege.[16] In a widely cited article, Larry Benson[17] strongly resisted the

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[15] J. R. Hulbert, 'The Genesis of *Beowulf*: a Caveat', *PMLA* 66 (1951), 1168-76. Hulbert refers to the work of R. W. Chambers in *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem* (Cambridge: CUP, 1921) among others, where Chambers had argued that '*Beowulf* is not the result of an accretion of lays accomplished impersonally or by a series of compilers is the product of a single author' (1169).
[16] E. G. Stanley, 'Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Penitent's Prayer*', *Anglia* 73 (1956), 413-66.

implications of the 'discovery' of the formulaic character of Old English poetry. 'To prove that an Old English poem is formulaic', he says, 'is only to prove that it is an Old English poem'.[18] He argues that much of Old English poetry exhibits characteristics which suggest 'the leisure and forethought that literary composition allows'.[19] There was also a parallel debate concerning the scope of the definition of 'formula'.[20] This debate is still ongoing. But the arguments of dissenters were eclipsed by the publication of the collected papers of Parry in 1971, upon which Lord had based his ideas, and so it was not until the publication in 1979 of Michael Clanchy's book *From Memory to Written Record*, and the increasing success it enjoyed through the 1980s, that an alternative approach was widely undertaken. Clanchy's book differed in some important respects from previous writing on the subject, despite espousing approximately the same view that the culture of the Anglo-Saxons was orality-dominated, and that of the people of post-Conquest England overwhelmingly privileged the written word over orality. But Clanchy's major contribution was to note that whilst literacy did rise in post-Conquest England, orality as a cultural-administrative tool was not replaced entirely, and indeed remained preferable in certain contexts. In the legal process, for example, 'the forms which had been suited to a purely oral procedure were preserved and ossified when documents were introduced'. This extended not just to the practice of summoning to which he refers, but to court procedure as well, where 'the

[17] Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, 'Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II', *Oral Tradition* 3 (1988), 138-90, refers to Benson's work as 'a turning point in the controversy' (151).
[18] Larry D. Benson, 'The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry', *PMLA* 81 (1966), 334-41 at 336.
[19] Benson, 'The Literary Character', 336.
[20] Though in Magoun, 'Oral Formulaic Character', the definition used by Milman Parry had been adopted, Robert Payson Creed, 'The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem', *ELH* 26 (1959), 445-54, considers the formula to have a function which is metrical, or at least prosodic, rather than mnemonic. Although Creed himself did not dichotomise these criteria with orality, the argument opened the possibility that formula were as much a characteristic of written poetry as of orality.

assumption was that where possible a litigant must speak on his own behalf in court, because only words from his own mouth were authentic'.[21] The attitude to authenticity which this custom implies will recur in this thesis, as a strong signal of orality. The overall impression from Clanchy's work, then, is that the cultural disjunction between pre- and post-Conquest England, at least from the perspective of orality, is not a clear one.

The softening of previous assessments is also carried into his remarks on literacy. Clanchy expresses concerns about privileging literacy over orality. Like Lord, he wished to make it clear that literacy should not be regarded as the evolutionary goal of civilization: 'literacy itself is primarily a technology... and is not a civilizing force in itself'.[22] Rather, he argues that 'it is language itself which forms mentalities, not literacy'.[23] By making this acknowledgement explicitly, the emotional connection with orality and with Anglo-Saxon culture is averted.

A further difference is that Clanchy's principal focus is on documentary sources. The connection between literacy in an abstract sense, documents of national administration, and literature like *Beowulf* is far from straightforward. The focus of the book, therefore, also enlarges the debate to incorporate a wider sense of the uses of orality. Literacy as a practice rose slightly throughout the twelfth century, according to the surviving evidence. The rise is so moderate in its material traces that Clanchy proposes the theory that the surviving literate witness to the period is not representative

[21] Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 2nd edn. (1979; Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 272-3.
[22] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edn., 7.
[23] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edn., 9.

of the true scale of literacy.[24] Other measures, such as the rise in the number of extant letters during the reigns of each of the Norman monarchs, correlated with the number of extant letters from the papacy, shows a substantial growth in the use of literate message-making in the twelfth century.[25] But records of the quantity of sealing wax used by the royal chancery increased tenfold over first half of the thirteenth century – a far more substantial increase than any in the twelfth century – suggesting that the rise in literacy had little to do with the Norman Conquest and its immediate aftermath.[26] The change in literate habits prompted by the Conquest as an event in history, and the gradual increase of literate practices over the next two centuries is smoother and slower than the cataclysmic transition implied by the ideological remarks of earlier scholars.

In a recent article which presaged the publication of a third edition of *From Memory to Written Record* published in August 2012,[27] Clanchy recants even the mollified view of the changes of his earlier publications:

> It is only in the last 30 years [since the first edition] that the administrative achievements of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom – from King Alfred onwards – have come to be appreciated in all their variety.[28]

He suggests that the apparently prominently literate culture of the Normans was developed in the course of their improvisation of an Anglo-Norman government, and that 'in the enormous undertaking of putting together evidence for the Domesday

[24] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edn., 55.
[25] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edn., 60.
[26] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edn., 59.
[27] This despite Wiley-Blackwell's somewhat paradoxical publication date of 2013, printed in the frontmatter.
[28] M. T. Clanchy, 'The Norman Conquest and Anglo-Saxon Literacy', *Past and Future* 3 (2008), 6-7 at 7.

Book, the Normans found their own passage from memory to written record'.[29] The evidence which persuaded Clanchy was part of a substantial collective effort of research, carried out by a number of scholars.

One of the first steps in this process of revision was the more rigorous – and consequently less sharply distinct – defining of the notions of orality and literacy. Franz Bäuml, building on the ideas of Malcolm Parkes, [30] recognised three sorts of literacy, each representing a different departure from orality. Professional literacy was that of a scholar, a monk or a scribe, whose business was the work of copying of composing in writing, and was consequently the 'most literate' form. Cultivated literacy was next in the scale – those reading or writing for recreation, which still required a high level of literacy, although the ability to read often did not correspond with the ability to write. Finally, pragmatic literacy was the literacy of those who needed reading and perhaps writing for their work, but as a tool rather than as an end in itself.[31] In the process of forming this threefold definition of literacy, Parkes and Bäuml removed many of the apparent conflicts between the two poetic cultures. Bäuml was also instrumental in first dichotomising orality and illiteracy. He notes that 'ready access to the written word is not to be equated with an ability to read and write'.[32] On the other hand, simply because a poet does not write does not mean that they inherit an unalloyed oral tradition:

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[29] Clanchy, 'The Norman Conquest', 7.
[30] Franz H. Bäuml, 'Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 237-65.Malcolm Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby, (eds.), *The Medieval World* (London: Aldus, 1973), 555-77.
[31] Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', 555.
[32] Bäuml, 'Varieties and Consequences', 243.

> *Illiterati* are not unacquainted with the content of the Bible and of written vernacular narrative; they are, however, functionally dependent on orally transmitted directives for the conduct of their lives. But this must be distinguished from the oral tradition as it functioned in preliterate society.[33]

Significantly, this defies the description of Anglo-Saxon culture as oral: it is not in dispute that, from a point early in their history, Anglo-Saxon communities in Britain had access to the Bible as a written text, even if most individuals could not read it. The culture as a whole was literate, and had a considerable written literary output, even if many members of society were individually unable to read or write. Research has since revealed that there was widespread pragmatic literacy in both Old English and Latin.[34]

Bäuml's argument did more than simply quibble over terminology. The designation of a culture as 'oral' had never been made with an ignorance that written literature did exist in the period, but it argued that writing was unnecessary, rare, and unpopular. By reconciling the inability of an individual to write sufficiently to have contributed to the written record of the civilisation, with the possibility that such an individual may well have possessed cultivated literacy amply sufficient to read a text, or

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[33] Bäuml, 'Varieties and Consequences', 247.

[34] N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: OUP, 1957), xv *et passim*, details a large number of administrative documents written in the Anglo-Saxon period. A list of such documents is conveniently listed under 'Records' in the index. Patrick Wormald, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits', *ASE* 17 (1988), 247-81 provides a catalogue of evidence for Anglo-Saxon administrative literacy in a specifically legal context, though the outcome of lawsuits is, at this early stage, rarely recorded, suggesting that the reliance on literacy in law was not absolute. Susan Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word', in Rosamund McKitterick, (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 36-62 summarises the use of writing in Anglo-Saxon society, in both Latin and the vernacular. Seth Lerer goes further. In *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Lincoln NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), argues that Asser's *Life of Alfred* 'makes a case for the *centrality of literacy* to the full understanding of the social and political life, and at the same time offers a presentation of the biographer himself as a reliable, literate narrator' (62; my emphasis). A general view of the development and changes in administrative practice from late Anglo-Saxon era onwards is provided by Nicholas Perkins, 'Writing, Authority, and Bureaucracy', in Elaine Treharne, (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 68-89.

that it could socially have been read aloud, Bäuml opened the debate to the possibility that cultural literacy may have left few traces, regardless of its proliferation.

In the same year as Bäuml's paper, the debate returned to poetry in Jeff Opland's book, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry*. Opland, like Parry, undertook research in what he believed to be an oral society analogous to Anglo-Saxon England.[35] Unlike Parry and Lord, however, he is less insistent on the generalisations he makes between the modern (Xhosa) culture and the culture of Anglo-Saxon England:

> If we remain aware that what we are studying in the two cultures is only an analogous phenomenon, then it is not necessary that the cultures be either similar or contemporaneous.[36]

He is more generous to the idea of poetic individuality[37] in the period:

> One may assume that the author wrote what he wrote by the conscious exercise of his creative powers rather than by the passive acquiescence to a binding tradition that presented to him all the materials in his composition; that he was, in other words, more poet than transmitter or collator.[38]

This 'soft-orality' argument circumvents the emphasis placed on oral composition as an actual fact, and the rough supplanting of this technique with literacy, as Parry and Lord had argued. It allows texts to be different but to bear similarities to one another, and it does not attribute the whole of a text to the functional necessity of transmitting it orally.

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[35] This later became his primary object of study, and his findings are published in Jeff Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects of a Black South African Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983).
[36] Jeff Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1980)
[37] The term is borrowed from Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry 1000-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).
[38] Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry*, 192.

The 1980s also saw the publication of Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy*. This was a work of cultural anthropology and pyscholinguistics, rather than a study of literature, but it made a valuable and lasting contribution to the revisionism of the literacy-orality debate which was already in progress in other disciplines. Ong demonstrates that there is a continuum between 'primary orality' in which writing is absolutely unknown, and literacy as its absolute (theoretical) opposite. Jack Goody has also made an interdisciplinary contribution to the matter of literacy, and his observations are extremely useful to the study of orality and literacy in a literary context. Goody emphasises the literate nature of the historical societies which are typically studied, based on the fact that, by definition, only written records survive. As a consequence, his view is that whilst orality may have been present in those societies, it is fallacious to consider them comparable with societies in a state of primary orality. Instead, he argues that:

> The very existence of writing leads to the creation of verse forms which would be inconceivable in a purely oral culture... yet once learnt, such a verse form may appear as part of the 'oral tradition' or at least of oral manipulation, in a literate culture.[39]

Many of the aspects of poetry which the oral-formulaic theory relies upon as being typically oral – metrical versification, for example – are considered by Goody to be part of this process.[40]

It is the idea that the modern reader mistakes literacy for orality, which provides the basis for Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe's book *Visible Song*. But O'Brien O'Keefe's

[39] Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 106.
[40] Clanchy gives a Clanchy-centric account of the debate in the 1980s in the postscript to *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 3rd edn. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 341.

suggestion is not simply that we mistake literacy for orality as a consequence of critical incompetence, but rather that the reader or listener of texts bearing certain features which we call oral are likely to do so, because these techniques are literary conventions for implying or mimicking orality, without ever being part of a genuinely oral tradition. Alternatively, they may be habits of writing associated with the use of the vernacular, which was much more widespread as a spoken language than Latin. Differences between the applications of the two languages are especially apparent in texts which exist in both, a rare example of which is Cædmon's hymn. Latin manuscripts exhibit approximately those characteristics we would expect in a modern printed edition of the poem – clear line and strophe demarcation, titles, thorough rubrication; Old English versions, by contrast, tend not to have such visually aesthetic rigour in their copying conventions. O'Brien O'Keefe also shows that these distinctions fade as the period progresses. This, she claims, is 'palpable evidence' of a progressive transition between 'the formula-defined process which is an oral poem and the graph-bound object which is a text',[41] but also as evidence of 'reading activity which is formula dependent'.[42]

Beyond this, Andy Orchard has noted the use of formula-like habits in the work of Anglo-Latin poet Aldhelm. The prosodic choices made by Aldhelm in his composition seem calculated to reduce the freedom of his verse – to make his verse more formulaic. Orchard supports this claim with rigorous statistical analysis of the metrical location of certain words.[43] This, in fact, had been noted by Michael Lapidge fifteen years before, who said that Aldhelm 'tended toward the monotonous in his

[41] Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 40.
[42] O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song*, 41.
[43] Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 98: Noting as an example the location of the word 'Deus' across all of Aldhelm's work, he observes '91.66% appear before a vowel, diphthong, or "h", scanned as a pyrrhic and restricted to a single position in the first foot of the line'.

metrical practice',[44] and concluded 'I cannot see any profound difference between the formula in Old English poetry and in the Latin poetry of Aldhelm'.[45] Orchard also records Aldhelm's use of lexical formulas, particularly in alliterating cadences.[46] These are typically selectively borrowed from classical or Christian sources. But while Lapidge's remarks served to reclassify Anglo-Latin as influenced by the same oral features as contemporaneous vernacular poetry, Orchard's remarks suggest that the metrical and lexical aspects that had been used to brand vernacular poetry as oral in its origin were in fact present in Anglo-Latin poetry as well. Since the wealth of references to classical and patristic literature in Anglo-Latin poetry confirm that there was no oral origin, this casts heavy doubt on the oral origin of vernacular poetry as well.

This research suggests that classifying Old English poetry as oral because of presumed *actual* origins in spoken recitation from memory is untenable. The scholars of the 1990s went further to reinforce this view. The notion of 'fictive orality' was given weight first by Janet Coleman,[47] who coined the term, and later by Dennis H. Green, who refined its usage.[48] This suggested that where oral features existed, they may be the product of deliberate attempts to create a style of verse which was subsequently mistaken as having inherited those features. In this thesis, it will be assumed that the written poetry that has survived from the Anglo-Saxon era was a literate production, and the matter of its actual origin left undebated. Any aspects of the poetry which suggest orality will be attributed to the conscious efforts of writers – whether original or

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[44] Michael Lapidge, 'Aldhelm's Latin Poetry and Old English Verse', *Comparative Literature* 31 (1979), 209-31 at 215.
[45] Lapidge, 'Alhelm's Latin Poetry', 229.
[46] Orchard picks out 'labra labellis' as an example.
[47] Janet Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).
[48] Dennis H. Green, 'Fictive Orality: A Restriction on the use of the Concept', in Mark Chinca et al., (eds.), *Blütezeit: Festschrift für L. Peter Johnson* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 161-74.

borrowed from an existing written tradition – rather than the passive inheritance of oral stylistic traits.

In the third edition of *From Memory to Written Record*, Clanchy recasts the pre-Conquest situation as one of diverse vernacular and some Latin literacy, which rapidly declined in the last decades of the eleventh century, and was subsequently 'forgotten' over the course of the twelfth. Authors, he suggests, may have been 'so concerned with producing [records] that were up to date and useful to practitioners' that the rapidly obsolescent records of the Anglo-Saxons were accidentally or deliberately omitted.[49] The most significant change in the predominant scholarly view of the period is that the lack of extant Anglo-Saxon literate documentation, coupled with the lack of Anglo-Norman statements referring to their predecessors' literacy, is no longer taken as evidence of a lack of literacy. Rather, when the literacy of the twelfth century is considered, it should be regarded as a period 'when the use of writing became irreversibly established for government business and titles of property':[50] a period of the growth in the trust which literacy inspired, and consequently, a period of examination of orality and literacy as competing modes. Such a period could only have emerged from an already extant literate culture.

Clanchy is not in agreement with all literary scholars, however. The most significant recent opposition comes from Elaine Treharne, who argues that approaches such as Clanchy's are unreasonably exclusive in what they deem to be examples of

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[49] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (3rd edn.), 29. This view is similar to that of Bruce O'Brien, who argues that omitting mention of Anglo-Saxon written lawcodes in twelfth century treatises serves a doubly useful end, since it 'preserves the vast ambiguity of an oral law for the future use of the monarch, and at the same time effaces the written texts which had preceded his treatise', 'The Becket Conflict and the Invention of the Myth of *Lex Non Scripta*', in J. A. Bush and A. Wijffels, (eds.), *Learning the Law: Teaching and the Transmission of Law in England* (London: Hambledon, 1999), 1-16 at 13.
[50] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (3rd edn.), 44.

literacy in English, and this confuses the impression of literary production and linguistic distribution in post-Conquest England. Whilst she acknowledges 'a decline in the official production and use of English', and 'something of a reduction in the range of material written in the vernacular', she is nevertheless exasperated by what she sees as a tendentious programme of proscription which results in the ignoring of any potentially contradictory examples of vernacular literature:

> How is it that in order to be counted, the hundreds of works composed in English from 1060-1220 must be something other – more 'literary', more 'original' – than they already are?[51]

The English language certainly continued to be written, whether or not it was put to use in work that could be called 'literature'. Meanwhile, post-Conquest culture was inherently multilingual in ways which stimulated rapid development;[52] it was partly as a consequence of the flurry of translating and copying activity necessitated by Conquest that the literature of twelfth century is so vast and inventive. The French and Latin writings of post-Conquest England are deeply indebted to the Anglo-Saxon past, as Laura Ashe has argued; it was an environment in which Anglo-Saxon history and

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[51] Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 123-4. Additionally, building on the detailed records of marginalia, book exchange and movements compiled by Richard Gameson, in *The Manuscripts of Early Norman England (c. 1066-1130)*, British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monograph (Oxford: OUP, 1999), Mark Faulkner has analyzed the use of pre-Conquest books by scholars of the early Anglo-Norman realm, in *The Uses of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts c. 1066-1200*, D.Phil. Thesis, Humanities (Oxford, 2008).

[52] Bruce O'Brien, *Reversing Babel: Translation among the English During an Age of Conquests, c. 800 to c. 1200* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), in a book which discusses translation practices in sociological terms, represents the chaotic linguistic situation in England following the Norman Conquest: 'There would have been bilingualism, trilingualism, and so on, where some were able to use two or more languages. There may also have been dual lingualism, where speakers of different languages successfully use their own language to communicate to one another... In [London], in the year 1150, a visitor might hear English mostly, but depending on where he walked, Rouenaise French, Baltic German, and Flemish... Danish and other Scandinavian dialects... and perhaps Genoese and Spanish. The visitor could by chance hear Breton, Welsh and even Irish and Scottish Gaelic, Hebrew and... possibly even Arabic' (34-5).

culture could be adopted by the invaders and enthusiastically expressed in their own language.[53] The conquest was a 'deep trauma', the action of which inevitably left scarce traces of the written culture of the Anglo-Saxons, but which, in combination with 'robust'[54] pre-Conquest English identity, resulted in 'the products of a remarkable period of English literary history, when romance was invented and historical narrative fired into energetic life'.[55] It is a combination of these views that form the approach of this thesis: a strong continuity of techniques across the conquest, taking into account the scale and significance of the Anglo-Saxon contribution to literature, whilst acknowledging that following the conquest – at least as a point in time – the epistemological attitudes of twelfth-century authors were profoundly different.

The Argument

This thesis will demonstrate that despite the research which demonstrates little change in actual uses of orality and literacy across the Conquest, the literature of the post-Conquest era is different. The differences, however, are not necessarily in actual orality and literacy, but rather in the attitudes of writers in the period. The differences between the two modes were acknowledged by Anglo-Saxon writers, but their powers and limitations were explored and tested by post-Conquest writers to the point of preoccupation. This thesis will argue that the orality-literacy debate is a major intellectual context to literature of the twelfth century, and is responsible in part for the richness and diversity of the literature of that period.

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[53] Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 20.
[54] Ashe, *Fiction and History*, 4-5.
[55] Ashe, *Fiction and History*, 209.

Approach

Throughout, texts are chosen from before and after the Conquest, in which the similarity of the techniques used demonstrates the technical continuity between Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest literature. Of interest are those techniques used in Anglo-Saxon literature which are subsequently adopted by the authors of post-Conquest literature, and the ways in which these techniques are modified over the course of the twelfth century. Close textual analysis of these techniques will illustrate the ways in which literature changes throughout the period. It would not be sufficient to say that these are simply differences which emerge over time, from the centuries that pass between the earliest text studied here (the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Bede) to the latest (probably the *Espurgatoire* of Marie de France). These differences, it is argued, are subtle but fundamental, and go to the heart of the presentation and organisation of the transmission of knowledge.

Despite departing from the orality-literacy debate as it existed from the 1960s to the 90s, orality and literacy will be a constant reference point in this thesis. For while the debate historically focuses on the ways in which the culture and society of Britain underwent a transition from orality to literacy, the examination here is into the ways in which orality and literacy were perceived and manipulated by authors from the period: authors demonstrably aware, to a greater or lesser extent, of the features and capabilities of each as a mode of knowledge transmission. It is evident from literature right across the period under consideration that orality and literacy were considered to be fundamentally at odds, but equally indivisible from one another, as systems employing

language with varying levels of efficacy. A strong theoretical understanding of the properties, powers, and limitations of both modes appears to be present in both the literature of the Anglo-Saxons and in the post-Conquest period, and later writers seem to have approached the matter extremely earnestly, making clear attempts to reconcile the limitations of orality and literacy as far as possible within the inevitably literate medium under scrutiny.

Since a number of works are studied, some of which are long, the analysis in this thesis will be confined to four features, wherever they are found, or where their absence produces a marked contrast with other literature:

- Consciousness of the effects upon a reader of oral or literate techniques.
- Engagement with perceived changes in the use of orality or literacy in general culture.
- Appreciation of the limitations of oral and literate techniques.
- Awareness of the immediate literate context of the written text, and its possible oral uses.

This thesis will argue that while post-Conquest literature is similar in its use of narrative modes to the literature of Anglo-Saxon England, these four features are markedly more prevalent in the literature of the late twelfth century, and that it is in the course of the twelfth century that they increase in prevalence.

Defining Orality and Literacy

The definitions of orality and literacy used in this thesis are widespread, but it is nevertheless useful to outline them, since the terms have a possible ambiguity. They will be used exclusively to refer to techniques available to authors of written literature, and available evenly across the period studied.

In this thesis, the term *orality* will be used to refer to certain specific technical or thematic features of a written text; they do not necessarily imply an actual context. These features are:

- External context-dependence, such as a listening audience, or references to visible gestures by the speaker which are invisible to a reader.
- Implication of minimal geographical and no temporal interval between transmission and receipt of knowledge.
- Heavy dependence on first-person grammar in the narrative voice.
- Close focalization of characters where second-person grammar is used.
- Implication of first-hand experience in the narrative voice.
- References to a short time-frame, which will usually be less than the length of a human life.
- The reliance upon these features for the conferring of veracity.

It is important to distance this definition of orality from those things which may be vestiges of actual oral poetry, such as rhyming, rhythm, formulaic repetition and so forth.[56]

Literacy, by contrast, will generally oppose these conditions, favouring:

- Internal context-dependence, in which the characteristics of the text itself take precedence.
- Implication of a substantial geographical and temporal gap, or reference to posterity.
- Detached, typically third-person grammar in the narrative voice.
- Scattered focalization.
- The reliance on these features for conferring veracity.[57]

Like the literary form of orality defined above, literacy in this sense is only reflective of an author's own awareness of the feel of literate knowledge transmission. Both modes are constantly available to authors to explore as they choose, making use of characteristics which they themselves determine.

A major axis of the argument, resisting the model of Anglo-Saxon orality progressing into Anglo-Norman literacy, is that the use of these modes is discretionary. The extent to which an author chooses to combine and manipulate them is a measure

[56] The argument by which these features are supposed oral is, in Anglo-Saxon literature at least, somewhat circular. Texts believed to be oral-derived contain such 'oral' features, and it is by this that they confirm themselves to be oral-derived.

[57] These widely used appraisals of oral and literate techniques are summarised in the paper by Brita Warvik, '"When you Read or Hear this Story": Issues of Orality and Literacy in Old English Texts', in Risto Hiltunen and Janne Skarfari, (eds.), *Discourse Perspectives in English* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2003), 13-57.

not of the two modes' availability, but of that author's preoccupation with knowledge transmission as an abstract notion.

Defining Narrative and Knowledge Transmission

Orality and literacy are the focus of this thesis because they are modes with which writers of both Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest England engaged, and with which the writers of the twelfth century were especially preoccupied, in considering a much larger attribute or preoccupation of literature: namely knowledge transmission in general. These modes of knowledge transmission use words, written words, and therefore appear in the study of literature. Knowledge could also be transmitted by pictorial images, possibly by musical sounds, by flags, hand signals and so on – and it is not necessary that these modes are translatable into words, although they often are. These are not modes of knowledge transmission which receive treatment in this thesis, but it is important to be aware that knowledge transmission in writing is potentially part of a much larger field of study.

The vehicle of written knowledge transmission is narrative. Narrative has been variously defined, for a variety of reasons.[58] It has been said to include a temporal dimension,[59] character-relatedness,[60] and a logical or causal dimension;[61] various

[58] Some definitions add further complexity to their general definitions of narrative. Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg, in *The Nature of Narrative*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: OUP, 2006), in particular make the assertion that 'by definition narrative art requires a story and a storyteller', and add that 'the narrative situation is ineluctably ironical' (240).

[59] Paul Ricoeur's narratological tract *Time and Narrative*, trans. Katherine Blamey and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: UCP, 1984), places action at the forefront of narrative theory, but it is the temporal relationship of actions which is what shapes them as narrative: 'Between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity' (i. 56). Gerald Prince is also privileges time, saying

attempts have been made to define it functionally.[62] There is much to recommend these definitions. They are, however, too complicated to be unified, and at times contradictory, and so the definition of narrative in this thesis shall be one which retains properties common to all definitions of narrative:

> Narrative is the process of the control and release of information.

This is a general definition, and there are certain additions which are incidental to most literature, but perhaps not necessary. The creator of narrative in literature is ultimately the author, but it is proper to separate the author from the process of narration. Narrative is carried out in the text by an artificial agent called the narrator. As there may be several narrators within any text, and most if not all will not be representative of the author, it is from the narrator that narrative is said to emerge. The overall structure and strategy of narrative is always attributable to the author, but the process of narration itself is said to be carried out by a narrator.

In this definition of narrative, which is even more generally conceivable as a sort of epistemological transfer, or the resolution of an imbalance in knowledge, information is considered to be any piece of knowledge whatsoever. It can therefore be said to include traditional narrative processes, like the telling of a story, as well as simply the

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'[where] we are unable to establish any kind of chronology, we are no longer in the presence of a narrative', *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 65.

[60] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), discusses the notion of diegetic levels, implying the significance of narrators and their relationship to the narrated story (e.g. 228). Similarly Irene de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987) is a perspective-based view of narrative.

[61] John Woods, *The Logic of Fiction* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974)

[62] For example, Lubomir Dolozel, in 'Truth and Authenticity in Narrative', *Poetics Today* 1/3 (1980), 7-25 at 11 etc., outlines a theory of narrative that it carries 'authentication-authority'.

answering of a question or the indication of the passage of time or the name of a speaker. It is not a contention of this thesis that this is a complete definition of narrative, but simply that the word may be used as a term of convenience in this extremely general way, without violating any of the specifications with which the word is normally, but nevertheless diversely, imbued.

Some of the special uses to which narrative is applied in literature are very widespread in the works examined in this thesis, and so deserve definition here. *Verification*, *justification* and *authentication* are processes which contribute to the ability of narrative to transmit knowledge. *Scepticism* is at odds with the transmission of knowledge, and especially to continued transmission of knowledge: a sceptical receiver of an account is unlikely to repeat the account using techniques of verification, justification or authentication. These terms are used within this thesis in particular ways, despite their occasionally overlapping meanings in casual use. To avoid ambiguity, their special definitions are summarised here.

Verification is the process of demonstrating that a claim made in narrative is true. This is complicated for the authors of apparently fictional works, since the notion of truth within fiction is obviously problematic. Nevertheless, workable logical schemata have been established in which fictional claims for truth can be compared not with external or universal truth, but with competing claims for truth within the same fictional framework.[63] Within this thesis, assertions about verification within fictional texts will be made with such logical schemata in mind.

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[63] The axiom of choice determines that all statements must satisfy the condition $A \vee \neg A$ ("A or not A"), the consequence of which is that a sentence must be either true or false (see the entry on 'Axiom of Choice' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online ⟨http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/axiom-choice/⟩, accessed 24/02/2010). Frege, in 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', added the proviso that some sentences were

Justification is the process by which a narrator accounts for the possession of knowledge which has just been or is about to be transmitted. Whilst verification has an ontological aspect, justification is purely epistemological, although it can supplement verification. If an account is justified by the claim that the narrator heard it from an eyewitness, for example, then this justification claim serves as verification as well, by suggesting that the account has not been altered or corrupted by (possibly accidental) successive retellers, and by implying that an eyewitness is less likely to be mistaken. It encompasses arguments of provenance and chains of provenance, in which a narrator may explain the history or part of the history of the account he has delivered.

Authentication is a special case of justification. Authentication is the combination of a justification and a claim for the status of the provenance. Through the status claim, the justification acquires elements of verification. In the works discussed in this thesis, authentication is almost always used in reference to men of religious rank. The argument is that such men are less likely to wilfully mislead, and less likely to be mistaken. Such claims for authentication are predicated on the status enjoyed by high-status clerics in patristic writings, and ultimately upon the claim made by St. Augustine that such men are endowed with *visio spiritualis* which enables them to make better judgements about the truth and accuracy of an account.

There are texts examined in this thesis in which the techniques of verification, justification, and authentication are deliberately misused, with the functional outcome

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not strictly true, but nevertheless carried 'sinn' ['sense']. A third category of sentence, neither true nor false and termed 'performative' was further investigated by J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (London: OUP, 1962). The question was raised in connection with narrative works by Felix Martinez Bonati, 'Die Logische Struktur der Dichtung', *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Lituraturwissenschaft und Geistsgesichte* 47 (1973), 185-200, and Woods, *The Logic of Fiction*, both of whom developed systems in which sentences pertaining to literary works could be determinably true or false given certain conditions.

of undermining the processes themselves. This does not necessarily complicate the structure of any of the processes themselves.

Knowledge is the transferable content of discourse of any kind. If narrative is the control and release of information, knowledge is that aspect of information which remains unaltered by retelling. *Knowledge Transmission* is the general term for the for the active transfer of knowledge within a text, or from a text to a reader.

Structure of this Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. Each chapter treats a different narrative technique, which appears in subtly different forms in literature from both before and after the Norman Conquest. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with modes of narration that interact with belief or trust in a reader, even if it is a temporary sort of belief associated with fiction, and demonstrate that although the techniques used are similar on either side of the conquest, the way in which an author adheres to ideas of knowledge transmission affects whether or not trust is inspired in a reader, and therefore whether or not a narrator is successful. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on narrative techniques in which the prevailing mode is either strongly oral, as in chapter 3, or strongly literate, as in chapter 4. In the texts in these chapters, belief and trust are only marginally important: more significant is the way in which the narrative reaches the reader. In some texts, this process is straightforward: a narrative is told in a way which is immediately accessible to a reader. In others, the techniques of the author make this process convoluted, requiring the reader to deduce information, or observe the process of narration as an external party. The change which these chapters demonstrate is that where such narrative techniques

are used, the process of knowledge transmission is increasingly examined by the text. It becomes not only a process necessary for the functioning of the text, but rather develops as an object of curiosity.

The first chapter is about the ways in which authors choose to convey narratives to readers, by combining the functions of the main narrator with the function of narrating characters within the narrative. It begins by analysing the 'behaviour' of the main narrator of *Beowulf*, and comparing this with the behaviour of the Anglo-Saxon cultural figure of the 'scop' or hall minstrel. It then procedes to a comparison of these techniques with the episode close to the opening of Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, known as the Haveloc episode, and observes that these differences are attributable to the comparative 'bookishness' of Gaimar's work, as expressed in his epilogue. The chapter ends with an examination of Chretien de Troyes' poem *Yvain*. Chrétien, whilst situating the events of the narrative, and the internal narrators, squarely within an oral civilisation, places his main narrator and himself outside this world, and separate from it. In this way, and using other techniques related to it, he undermines the justifying and verifying power of his narrative: the reader is actively encouraged to distrust and to question what they read.

Chapter 2 is about methods for justification and verification in extreme cases where the narrative is undermined or potentially distrusted from the outset, usually because it is a narrative of unique epistemology. The paradigm form of this type of narrative is the dream-vision or otherworld journey. The chapter begins with a discussion of the account of the 'Vision of Fursey' episode in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This vision

uses authority and an oral source to justify the account, and physical and transcendental 'evidence' to verify it, but does not acknowledge the fact of its own literacy, and the consequent fact that it is only as reliable as any literate account. Orderic Vitalis' *Historia Ælcclesiastica*, in a similar episode, does account for the process of conversion into a written account, but does not account for the fact that this alters the nature of the evidence that the narrator brings to bear. Increasingly preoccupied with its own material existence is the *Life* of Christina of Markyate, and the chapter concludes with Marie de France's *Espurgatoire de Seint Patriz*, a text so concerned about the transformation from real literate, oral, and physical evidence into a purely written account that it seeks to challenge itself, inviting the reader to assess the evidence and the literate representation of it separately.

The third chapter is about situations in which the transfer of information is produced by dialogue within a text. This is different from the internal narratives examined in chapter 1, since the primary purpose of dialogue *for the character* need not necessarily be the process of narration. The chapter begins by characterising the style of dialogue in the Old English *Solomon and Saturn* dialogues as primarily didactic: the information transferred between the characters is identical to the information transferred to the reader. There then follows brief discussion of a small but diverse range of other Old English texts which, whilst generically diverse, nevertheless exhibit the same structural property of having the external reader and internal listeners in identical epistemological positions. The chapter goes on to examine how the Old English version of the legend of the *Seven Sleepers* and the early Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn* modify this structure somewhat, whilst maintaining its overall form. The last part of the chapter is

an examination of Béroul's *Tristan*, in which several parts of the dialogue within the text manifestly convey three distinct epistemologies: that of the participants in the dialogue, that of other listeners within the text, and that of the reader.

The fourth chapter discusses materiality, a literate mode of narration, in which texts have an internal narrative which exists as a material entity – a written text of some sort. It begins by examining the Old English riddles, mostly from the Exeter Book, and then *The Husband's Message*. Whilst interest in literate materiality is clearly present in the work of Anglo-Saxon authors, it is evident that writing was seen primarily as a substitute for speech. The second half of the chapter looks at the same narrative mode in the *Lais* of Marie de France. Here, whilst writing still functions to overcome the limitations of speech, it is presented as important for other reasons, and powerful by the very fact of its writtenness, deriving as much from its own particular literate context as speech does from its immediate oral context.

Finally, in the conclusion, I discuss the findings and limitations of the research that led to this thesis and the arguments within it, and suggest a future for research in this area.

I

The Hero's Declaration

This chapter is about the ways in which knowledge in a text is transferred to the reader by a narrative, and how the narrator of a particular account interacts with the narrator of the work as a whole. This incorporates ideas of narrative justification, some basic solutions to the problem of narrative verification, and examines the effect these have on the reader's interpretation.

'Sigemund and Heremod' and the 'Scyldings Prologue': Staged Orality in Beowulf

Beowulf is a written text which seeks constantly to emphasise its disguise of orality. This staging allows the author to employ oral narrative techniques in order to provide justification and verification for his story. Throughout the work, there are constructed situations in which characters are close to one another, tell stories of their own recent experiences, and (in a limited way) interact with their audience. These fulfil the conditions of close geographical proximity, first-hand narration in the first person, and oral context-dependence which are always the marks of orality in narrative.

While the poem is a record of the heroic deeds of a fictional character, Beowulf, it also records a particular means of storytelling, both internally and in its outer structure, and a culture in which this was the sole means by which knowledge was transmitted. This is just as much a construct as the hero himself, and it too receives significant treatment from the poet.[1]

[1] For the first hundred or so years of *Beowulf* scholarship, the question of the poem's origin became mixed up with the question of the world which it portrays. An early reference to the manuscript is found in Humfrey Wanley's 1705 catalogue. The first substantial work on the poem began after the publication of Thorkelín's 1815 edition, *De Danorum rebus gestis secul. iii et iv, poëma danicum dialecto anglosaxonica* (Copenhagen: Havinæ, 1815). The idea of oral origin entered British (as distinct from Danish) criticism of the poem in H. Munro Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 1912): 'I am not aware that any serious argument has been put forward to show that

The first part of the poem, up to the departure of Beowulf from Hrothgar's court (1887),[2] has a density of words which refer to an oral poetic culture: 'scop' [an oral poet] occurs four times in the first thousand or so lines, as does the word 'sang' ['song'] which also occurs once in the second half; the simplex 'heal' ['hall'], associated with community gatherings in which oral recitation is represented as having taken place, occurs alone or in compounds twenty-three times. Given that the setting of the drama is a mead-hall, this is not altogether remarkable, but the fact that the compounds in which 'heal' appears often evoke the heroic culture to which the mead-hall belongs without its being strictly germane illustrates a preoccupation, an insistence, on a particular cultural representation. The word 'gifhealle' ['gifting hall'] (837) is used at a time when gifts are not being issued; the effect is to remind the audience of heroic culture and its trappings. It has also been argued that 'þyle' is a word referring to an oral poet: it certainly belongs the structure of the heroic court.[3] To an extent, 'beot' and 'gilp' also connote the heroic oral culture: they refer to formal boasts or statements of intent made by heroes at feasts, which were also the supposed setting for oral poetic performances.[4]

Beyond mere connotation, the process of oral storytelling is actually represented within the story, recreating in miniature the illusion which the work as a whole seeks to present. On the return from following the tracks of Grendel, a *scop* tells a story:

Beowulf was a literary production' (73); he also uses the phrase 'chimæra' to describe the notion of a literary *Beowulf* (75). The oral theory is enduringly supported by the work of Parry and Lord in the 30s, 40s and 50s, and introduced to Old English poetry by Francis P. Magoun in 'Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *Speculum* 28 (1953), 446-67. The dichotomy between oral content and necessarily literate context is summarised by Jack Goody in *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987): 'The [heroic-epic] genre was less typical of oral cultures than of early literate ones... the structure is not inconsistent with literary influence' (108).

[2] The edition of *Beowulf* used in this project is *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk et al. (Toronto, UTP: 2008).

[3] Norman E. Eliason, 'Þyle and Scop in Beowulf', *Speculum* 38 (1963), 267-84 at 268. It seems that the word has a more general sense of 'spokesman' or 'steward'. Ida Hollowell, in 'Unferð the Þyle in *Beowulf*', *SP* 73 (1976), 239-65 at 253, suggests a comparison with the term 'clerk'.

[4] Barbara Nolan and Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Beotword, Gilpcwidas and the Gilphlæden Scop of *Beowulf*', *JEGP* 79 (1980), 499-516 at 504. Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), reckons approximately 38% of the poem consists of around forty such formal speech acts (203).

Hwilum cyninges þegn,
guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig
se ðe eal fela ealdgesegena
worn gemunde, word oþer fand
soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
wordum wrixlan.

[From time to time a thane of the king,
a man fraught with exultant words,
his mind full of songs, and who had in memory
a great multitude of tales of antiquity –
one word would conjoin with another,
accurately linked – this man cleverly set about
reconstructing Beowulf's exploit,
successfully recited a skilful narrative,
achieving variety with his words]
(867-74).[5]

The *scop* then proceeds with a song about Sigemund and Heremod, which is introduced in this way:

welhwylc gecwæð
þæt he fram Sigemundes secgan hyrde
ellendædum, uncuþes fela,
Wælsinges gewin, wide siðas,
þara þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston
fæhðe ond fyrena, buton Fitela mid hine...

[Almost everything
that he had heard said about Sigemund he told;
about his deeds of courage, and much that was unfamiliar,

[5] The reading of these lines, esp. 870 b., has been seized on by many editors including Friedrich Klaeber and more recently George Jack, and translators, most recently Seamus Heaney, as giving evidence of the practice of improvising songs; if this is so, then the passage is unique in its description across all Old English and Germanic literature, explains Norman E. Eliason in 'The "Improvised Lay" in *Beowulf*', *Philological Quarterly* 31 (1952), 171-9 at 171. However, 'oþer', 'word...fand' and 'styrian' suggests not new composition, but simply the glorification of Beowulf *by recalling* a traditional tale. Of the approximately 1100 usages of the word 'oþer' in the Dictionary of the Old English Corpus, none take the meaning 'new' (*Beowulf* would be unique). The above reading is supported by the present editors, Fulk, Bjork and Niles in the commentary to l. 870 b. though it was initially unpopular, as can be seen from Robert Payson Creed, 'The Singer Looks at his Sources', *Comparative Literature* 14 (1962), 44-52, who describes Eliason's reading as 'puzzling' (46 n.).

> the struggle of this son of Wæls – the wide wanderings
> the feuds and the crimes – of which the children of men
> were not entirely aware, except Fitela who was with him]
> (874-9).

The technique of the *scop* is minutely described: the process first of memory in recalling the story, and then the story itself in the process of delivery; this is replicated in each of the *scop* passages of the poem. Upon Beowulf's return to the court, he is glorified by Hrothgar, and then gives his own account of battle. It is a restoration of the peaceful state of Heorot before Grendel's arrival, when 'þær was hearpan sweg, swutol sang scopes' [there was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the *scops*] (89-90). The practices of the *scop*, and the existence of a culture of transmitting knowledge orally are clearly of great thematic significance to the poet, regardless of the extent to which it reflects actual Anglo-Saxon or Danish culture. Beowulf's accounts of his deeds, discussed below, also belong to this preoccupied engagement with oral knowledge transmission.

Aside from the grammatical ambiguity, involved with whether the word 'gecwæð' demarcates reported speech or direct speech,[6] the identity of the speaker during the *scop* episode is a curiosity. This emerges from its resemblance to the voice of the 'Scyldings Prologue', the main narrator who opens the poem. There is something unmistakeably similar about the way in which practice of recounting events progresses. This is the voice of the main narrator, in the 'Prologue' to the work:

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[6] Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire* (New York: New York U P, 1989), 45. Vitz asserts that, where no typographical conventions enable the differentiation of speakers, the 'verb of saying' is the principle device used to make this indication. Bruce Mitchell has more precisely concerned himself with the modern punctuation added to Old English, in 'The Dangers of Disguise: Old English Texts in Modern Punctuation', *RES* 31 (1980), 385-413. He argues that 'the punctuation of Old English is prescriptive' (398), and that to the Anglo-Saxon authors, 'grammatical [considerations] are secondary to rhetorical' (393). Eliason in 'The Improvised Lay', comments that 'such shifts may be objectionable from the point of view of the modern editor faced with the task of punctuating the text, but I am not so sure that the poet's audience or readers found them quite so disturbing' (177).

Þa wæs Hroðgare heresped gyfen,
wiges weorðmynd, þæt him his winemagas
georne hyrdon, oðð þæt seo geogoð geoweox
magodriht micel.

[To Hrothgar next, military success was granted,
and esteem of his worth in war, so that his friends and kinsmen
readily obeyed him, until his troop of young men grew into
a great retinue of warriors]

(64-7).

Directly comparable in synopsis and brevity is the speaker in the Sigemund-Heremod digression:

Sigemunde gesprong,
æfter deaðdæge, dom unlytel,
syþðan wiges heard wyrm acwealde,
hordes hyrde.

[About Sigemund sprang
great repute following his death,
after he, hardy in the fray, killed the reptile guardian
of a treasure-hoard]

(884-7).

In their subject matter, naturally, they coincide somewhat, since *Beowulf* is a poem about the great deeds of great heroes, and so is the story of Sigemund and Heremod. But there is a more subtle similarity in the way that in each case, a simple causal connection is drawn between the fame and success of the hero, and his martial exploits. In both, the 'sentence' is of almost the same length, and is unusually brief in a poem in which the sentences (as far as we are able to interpret them) often run on far longer than the four lines we see here. It is as though a routine method for discussing the fame of a hero has been used in each case. It appears as though the same voice is speaking.

This passage has inspired a considerable scholarly output,[7] some of which deals with the content in a thematic or historical way, or considers its relationship to its sources. But the passage is of narrative-theoretical significance, since it indicates a conceptual closeness between the voice of the main narrator and the voice of the *scop*.[8] It has been suggested that it is the use of formulas which efface the identity of the speaker, blurring narrator with character.[9] Certainly, the poet does use recognisable and repeated phrases, and the manner in which the stories are told is 'formulaic'. But if any creativity at all is to be ascribed to the *Beowulf* poet, then the reader must acknowledge a choice has been made among available formulas. The oral poets within the story use the same methods – their choice of formulas are one – as the main narrator. The poem has an overall epistemological architecture which seeks to represent orality in the world of Beowulf and the Danes, and to create the illusion of orality in the poem *Beowulf*. The moment at which the main narrator and the voice of the *Scop* seamlessly meet serves this architecture extremely well.

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[7] Early examination connected the passages with the tribe of the Wælsings; these investigations are summarized by Julius Goebel, 'On the Original Form of the Legend of Sigfrid', *PMLA* 12 (1897), 461-74. The orality of the scop passages are discussed by Harrison, 'Old Teutonic Life'. Alexander Green considers each of the scop passages beside the story of Hildeburh and Hengest as a justification for his argument that *Beowulf* is Danish in origin, in 'The Opening of the Episode of Finn in *Beowulf*', *PMLA* 31 (1916), 759-97. Harry Morgan Ayers also compares the Hengest story with the Sigemund passage, to justify its position within the narrative of *Beowulf*, in 'The Tragedy of Hengest in *Beowulf*', *JEGP* 16 (1917), 282-95. In Barbara Nolan and Morton W. Bloomfield, '"Beotword," "Gilpcwidas," and the "Gilphlæden" Scop of *Beowulf*', *JEGP* 79 (1980), 499-516, the social function of the various oral content of the poem is examined, with particular emphasis on the role of the Sigemund scop. John Miles Foley follows the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in discussing the work of the Sigemund *scop* in connection with modern Serbian analogues, in 'Narrativity in *Beowulf*, the *Odyssey* and the Serbo-Croatian "Return Song"', Zoran Konstantinovic et al., (eds.), *Classical Models in Literature*, i (Innsbruck: VIU, 1981), 295-301.

[8] Eliason was one of the earliest critics to discuss the narrative complications of the passage, in 'The Improvised Lay'. The contrasting presentations of Geats and Danes are examined with reference to the celebratory Sigemund rendition by Kemp Malone in, 'Coming Back from the Mere', *PMLA* 69 (1954), 1292-9. Malone says, 'we must wonder with Klaeber whether by this time the poet had not simply forgotten his creature the scop' (1295). Subsequently Gerald Richman has suggested that the narrative complications of the moment of transition between one voice and another, poet and *scop*, are 'intentional and artful', in 'Poet and Scop in *Beowulf*', *In Geardagum* 21 (2000), 61-91 at 68.

[9] Stanley B. Greenfield, 'The Authenticating Voice in *Beowulf*', *ASE* 40 (1976), 51-62 at 53 says that it is the 'heavy use of formulas... [which] has the effect of depersonalizing the "I"'.

In the opening lines of the poem, the narrator uses techniques which suggest orality strongly enough that their effect is to disguise their materially literate reality. These techniques tendentiously suggest to an audience – reading or listening – that the main narrator of the poem is a *scop*, an oral relic of the age he is describing. The first line of the poem encapsulates the most obvious of these techniques. Words like 'hwæt' suggest an audience setting, and the use of 'we' reinforces it, by seeming to elide the temporal and geographical separation introduced between a reader and a writer when orality gives way to literacy. Throughout the 'Scyldings Prologue', the narration continues to be *scop*-like. The descriptions of the Scyldings are comparable to the later *scop*'s introduction of Sigemund, in the way they structure the life-summaries that they deliver. It is not necessarily the case that *scops* actually narrated in this way, of course, but the author has evidently selected words which indicate orality, evoking, we presume, real or conventionally understood oral-narrative behaviour. The author not only created his narrator as an oral transmitter of the poem, but had in mind specifically the *scop*-style narration which we see in the Sigemund and Heremod episode.

This interpretation of the main narrator as 'oral-seeming' is supported by comparison with other poetic *scops* of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The stylized vignettes in the prologue to *Beowulf* are recognizable in the Exeter Book poem, *Widsiþ*, in which the narrator is explicitly figured as a *scop* – possibly some sort of *scop* archetype – from the outset:

> Widsiþ maþolade, wordhord onleac,
> se þe monna mæst mægþa ofer eorþan,
> folca geondferde; oft he on flette geþah
> mynelicne maþþum
> ...
> Ongan þa worn sprecan.
>
> [Widsith spoke forth, unlocked the treasury of his words,
> he who had travelled through most of the peoples, nations
> and tribes of the earth; many a time on the floor of the hall

he had received some commemorative treasure.
...
He then began to say a great many things]
(1-9).[10]

Widsith goes on to tell of Hrothwulf and Hrothgar, using a structure for his description which is conspicuously similar to that of the main narrator in the 'Scyldings Prologue'.

Hroþwulf ond Hroðgar heoldon lengest
sibbe ætsomne suhtorfædran,
siþþan hy forwræcon wicinga cynn
ond Ingeldes ord forbigdan,
forheowan æt Heorote Heaðobeardna þrym.

[Hrothwulf and Hrothgar kept peace for a very long while
together, as uncle and nephew,
after they had driven off the Viking people
and humiliated Ingeld's vanguard,
cut down at Heorot the troop of Heathobards]
(45-9).

Deor, also from the Exeter Book, presents a *scop* who identifies himself clearly in the closing lines, saying 'ic hwile wæs Heodeninga scop' ['I was once the *scop* of the Heodenings'] (35).[11] Almost every 'stanza' of *Deor* demonstrates the characteristics that denote the *scop* and the main narrator of *Beowulf*:

Beadohilde ne wæs hyre broþra deaþ
on sefan swa sar swa hyre sylfre þing,
þæt heo gearolice ongieten hæfde
þæt heo eacen wæs.

[To Beadohild her brothers' death was not
so sore upon her as her own situation,
in that she had clearly realised that she was pregnant]

[10] The edition of *Widsið* used here is that found in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, ed. Bernard J. Muir, i (Exeter: EUP, 1994), 241-6. The translation is derived from Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*.
[11] The edition of *Deor* used here is that found in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, ed. Bernard J. Muir, i (Exeter: EUP, 1994) 283-5.

(8-11).

And elsewhere in *Beowulf*, *scops* use the same technique for introducing and describing their heroes. When a *scop* tells the story of Hildeburh and Hengest,[12] the synopsis is the same:

> Ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte
> Eotena treowe; unsynnum wearð
> beloren leofum æt þam lindplegan
> bearnum ond broðrum.
>
> [Neither did Hildeburh have cause to commend
> the good faith of the Jutes: for no fault of hers,
> she was bereft of those she loved in that armed contest,
> sons and brothers]
>
> (1071-4).

This later *scop*, is not syntactically ambiguous like the one following Beowulf's first expedition. But the effect is identical: the nature of the discourse associates the activity of the main narrator inescapably with the activity of *scops* within the poem. The voices are barely distinguishable because there is only one conventionally-accepted means of projecting this special kind of oral transmission in literature. Paull Baum has remarked that attempts to mimic scop style are unconvincing and 'will not have deceived his audience or us'.[13] But this is to miss the point in which the poet is a mimic. What happens in *Beowulf* is the echoing of a culturally accepted representation of the *scop*'s craft. These diverse examples demonstrate the widespread stylistic fixity of this convention: as far as the literature is concerned, this is the narrative behaviour of a *scop*.

The use of formulas alone does not suggest orality. The debate surrounding the oral formulaic theory and the relationship of formulas to oral performance has been discussed in the

[12] This is sometimes also referred to as 'The Finn Episode'.
[13] Paull Baum, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', *PQ* 39 (1960), 389-99 at 395.

introduction. There has also been debate as to how these formulas originate, especially in the case of *Beowulf*, a poem which may well have had an oral origin. It is possible that they emerged from the actual techniques of *scop*s but their ubiquity in Old English written literature suggests that their evolution into conventional devices in literature occurred long before *Beowulf* was written down, and were subsequently used as a sort of 'illusion' to persuade a reader of the orality of the work. But an alternative suggestion is that literate poets used 'oral habits', by which the use of the vernacular, once it ceased to be a language of orality, grew over the course of several hundred years to include characteristics which have subsequently been analysed as evidence of oral influence.[14] Another suggestion is that the very use of formula, distinct from the implications of orality which they have carried for critics since the 1930s, had an aesthetic value for the Anglo-Saxons unassociated with the origins of formulaic practice.[15]

Carol Braun Pasternack has approached the poem from a post-structuralist point of view, and considers the use of formulas to be part of an intertextual process which affects both the author and the reader. After the concept of intertextuality developed by theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Pasternack refers to the formulas as a 'mosaic' of 'traditional expressions that allude to any number of other texts and validate the text's meaning'.[16] Under such circumstances, the use of these formulas alluding to the oral culture of the society should be seen not as reflecting the culture but as creating the culture, both for modern readers and for

[14] Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 21. She demonstrates that other non-linguistic 'habits' were correlated with the use of the vernacular, but which do not occur in comparable Anglo-Latin manuscripts of the same period.
[15] Elizabeth M. Tyler, *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: York University Press, 2006). Tyler refers to 'an aesthetics marked by its preference – drive, even – for the familiar and by a capacity to make the new quickly familiar'. She adds, however, that familiar features did not correspond to a lack of poetic individuality: 'the interaction of these features could also make the familiar startlingly new' (157).
[16] Carol Braun Pasternack, 'Post-Structuralist Theories: the Subject and the Text', in Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, (ed.), *Reading Old English Texts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 170-91 at 176.

the Anglo-Saxons themselves.[17] It would therefore be reductive to suggest that simply by the use of formulas, the *Beowulf* narrator is mimicking orality without an understanding that the culture being mimicked may well have originated with the poetry from which we come to know it. Nevertheless it is evident from the specific formulas chosen by the poet that there was a tendentious programme to imprint at least this culturally created orality onto the narrator, and this is borne out by the play of similar formulas within *Beowulf* itself, and by the comparison with other works.

The scop passages serve the overall illusion of orality which is implied in the vocabulary and style of the opening of the poem. They provide, within the poem, a paradigm which allows direct comparison between the main narrator and a the traditional figure of the oral storyteller. This figure has the benefit of being seen in his true environment: in the mead hall, or on horseback celebrating a heroic victory. These are the artefacts of the valorized[18] civilization of the Scyldings that the main narrator lacks in the immediate written context of the poem. Comparison with this internal figure grants him the artefacts he lacks, by associating him closely with the world of 'geardagas'. As far as we can characterize the main narrator, he is structurally, and functionally, an oral poet.

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[17] Pasternack, 'Post-Structuralist Theories', 170: 'Look at the texts not as direct representations of culture, but as participants in the construction of meaning for Anglo-Saxon culture and society, and thereby in the construction of culture and society themselves'.

[18] Though this is a term which applies to anything which is made valuable or held up as an example to be valued, it also has a specific narratological sense which is also appropriate here. M. M. Bakhtin, in his essay 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258 at 91, discusses the valorised past of 'adventure-time' in Greek novels. His remarks describe accurately the time scheme in *Beowulf*: 'This empty time leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing. This is an extratemporal hiatus that appears between two moments of a real time sequence'. This is a time which is unreachably distant from the present of the narrator, beyond history.

The Narrator and the External Audience

While the transmission of knowledge from character to character *within* the story is demonstrably oral in its correspondence to those recognisable features of close geographic and temporal proximity, first-person experience and external context dependence, this is also true to a similar extent of the transmission of knowledge from the main narrator to the reading audience. The behaviour of the main narrator seeks to preserve the sense of a story being told by a single individual, to a listening audience, although the distance between the written text of the Nowell Codex and an oral text of which these features were genuine aspects is unknowably great.

The *Beowulf*-narrator has a definite voice,[19] as opposed to a mere textual presence, maintaining on parchment the *scop* illusion. But in addition to being strongly identifiable with the *culture* of the world of Beowulf, his narrative voice is situated in the present time of the reader: this is a consequence of the authorial choice to mimic orality. Oral transmission is a method of immediacy and presence. This immediacy is just as artificial as the culture constructed around the narrator, it emerges from the same source. His status is contradictory, in that he must simultaneously be a part of the oral culture he describes, and be a part of the time of his audience. The result is a narrator who serves to draw his real audience into his oral world, whilst occasionally holding the era of *Beowulf* at a temporal arm's length.

The association with the external audience is achieved early in the poem, by using the word 'we'; temporal cues like the phrase 'geardagum' ['in days of yore'] (1) help to distance the

[19] A. C. Spearing has observed that this does not amount to characterisation in the way that, say, Clarissa is a character, or even the extent to which the grieving Dr. Watson, uninvolved, narrates the 'Final Problem' of Sherlock Holmes. A. C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 17-18 *et passim*. Other narrative voices account for about forty-four percent of the narrative volume of the work, although none individually comes close to the total volume of the main narrator. It is for this reason that this narrator will sometimes be referred to as the 'main narrator' where confusion may otherwise arise.

time of the story from the time in which it is supposed to be told.[20] Similarly, the phrase 'we… gefrunon' ['we have heard'] creates some sort of temporal gap, of an indefinite length, between the time of the events of the story and the time of its telling. The narrator's voice is posited elsewhere throughout the work by fleeting autodeictic references like 'ne hyrde ic' ['I never heard'] (38) which serve to reassert the presence of a narrating voice and provide a definable location for it; this location is always in the present of the reader or audience. From this artificial proximity to the readers, rather than to the characters or witnesses to the action, the main narrative voice is able to establish a certain authority. But as a product of its situation with the reader rather than with the characters, this voice does not, on its own, produce any form of external support for the truth claims of the narrative.

This narrator has a sort of charismatic power over the audience. This power derives from the ability of the narrating voice to control the release of knowledge. The narrator reduces the amount of knowledge which could be apprehended by the reader without his intervention. The combat sequences in particular, as narrative turning points, demonstrate the narrator's imposition of limitations upon the audience's knowledge. The combats themselves are very finely balanced; the outcome cannot therefore be deduced from the preamble. Beowulf has 'þritiges manna mægencræft in his mundgripe' ['the strength of thirty men in his grip'] (379-80), which is certainly an advantage in normal combat, but we already know that Grendel

[20] Here, the term 'audience' does not in itself imply a live, listening audience, and nor should the fact of the writtenness of BL Cotton Vitellius A.xv, the sole manuscript witness to *Beowulf*, be taken as evidence that the work was only ever read in private. Some mixture of the two is possible, and indeed the unknowably long history of the poem may have involved many methods of delivery or reception. Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: OUP, 1951), is a significant early attempt to resolve questions relating to the audience of the work. More recently, the early history of *Beowulf* and its audience has been considered in Robert Payson Creed, 'How the *Beowulf* Poet Composed his Poem', *Oral Tradition* 18 (2003), 214-5. Creed's argument is derived from the oral models of composition within the work. The suggestion of transition from a situation of oral composition and delivery to written work is taken up in Graham D. Caie, '"Ealdgesegena Word": What the Old English *Beowulf* Tells us about Oral Forms', in Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, (eds.), *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008), 109-20. However, the audience of *Beowulf* is a substantial topic for which there is insufficient space, and so the assumed premise here is that is had either and listening or a reading audience or both at some point in its history.

had 'genam þritig þegna' (122-3) in one swipe. As adversaries, Grendel and Beowulf are thus precisely, numerically matched.[21] The temperament of Beowulf ensures that this match is not unbalanced by the used of weapons: confident of his chances in the fight with Grendel, Beowulf declares a sword to be superfluous:

> No ic me an herewæsmum hnagran talige
> guþgeweorca þonne Grendel hine;
> forþan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle.
>
> [I do not reckon myself inferior in my prowess
> in physical feats of combat any more than Grendel does himself;
> accordingly, I do not want to kill him by means of the sword]
> (677-9).

Grendel's mother is an even more fearsome adversary. In preparation for this second fight, Beowulf is more cautious: we are told in detail how 'gyrede hine Beowulf eorlgewædum' ['Beowulf decked himself in warrior's trappings'] (1441-2) including his 'herebyrne' ['mail shirt'] (1443), his 'hwita helm' ['shining helmet'] (1448) and the sword, Hrunting (1457). The outcome of both fights, despite Beowulf's great physical prowess, is by no means certain, and the fact that the story is initially told by a retrospective narrator in the time of the reader delays the inevitable release of knowledge instigated by the mere survival of the hero.

In the lead up to the denouement of the major battle scenes, the narrator asserts this control by releasing a small amount of the knowledge of the forthcoming action to the reader, outside of its rightful place in the chronological sequence of the narrative. By explaining that 'feond heora ðurh anes creæft, ealle ofercomon' ['by the strength of one man they might all overcome their enemy] (699), or for Grendel, 'Ne wæs þæt wyrd þa gen, þæt he ma moste manna cynnes ðicgean ofer þa niht' ['it was no longer to be his fate beyond that night to be

[21] In initial telling, the vast numerical measures of the strength of the adversaries seems hyperbolic. It is only when they are shown to be identically matched that their mutual formidable status is truly understood.

allowed to devour any more of humankind'] (734-6), the poet has revealed that Grendel will be defeated. This is not enough to remove the jeopardy from the battle, but just enough to adumbrate its outcome.[22] Later in the story, Beowulf participates in a fight in which he perishes at the moment of victory. This result is not ruled out by the little knowledge which the narrator releases. We know that the 'kyningwuldor' ['king of glory'] (665) supports Beowulf's campaign to a degree, but this is hardly surprising, considering that Beowulf's opponent has already been described as 'wiht unhælo'['unholy creature'] (120), and with a number of similar epithets. God still has a judgement to pass, 'þær gelyfan sceal dryhtnes dome se þe hine deaþ nimeþ' ['he that death takes must trust that it is God's judgement upon him'] (440-1). In the second fight, the poet observes of the hero, 'na ymb his lif cearan' ['he does not care about his life'] (1536) – glory does not necessarily mean survival: 'swa sceal man don, þonne he æt guþe þenceþ longsumme lof' ['so must a man do, who thinks to gain enduring fame from a fight] (1534-6). It is only just before the last blow of the battle that the narrator finally relaxes his control, and admits 'God geweold wigsigor' ['God decided the victor of the fight'] (1553-4).

The impending death of Beowulf is more explicitly presented in the second part of the poem, before his final fight with the dragon. It first emerges as a premonition in Beowulf's mind, but is then referred to by the narrator:

> Gesæt þa on næsse niðheard cyning
> þenden hælo abead heorðgeneatum,

[22] It has been severally argued that this dissolves any suspense in the poem, but the poet has been defended against this 'charge' in a number of ways. Robert M. Lumiansky, in 'The Dramatic Audience in *Beowulf*', *JEGP* 51 (1952), 545-50, describes the presence of what he refers to as the 'dramatic audience', a device which enables suspense to function internally for 'terror-stricken Danes and bewildered Geats' (545); he asserts that this device is inserted 'with the conscious purpose of hieghtening suspense and sustaining interest' (551). This is discussed by Adrien Bonjour in 'The Use of Anticipation in *Beowulf*', *RES* 16 (1940), 290-9, repr. in *Twelve Beowulf Papers*, 11-28. Bonjour argues that the device of revealing the outcome of a fight demonstrates the role of fate. In 'Suspense and Foreknowledge in *Beowulf*', *College English* 15 (1953-4), 379-83, Charles Moorman cites the variety of perspective in the fights as a device to sustain interest, and argues that 'the very nature of the epic demands an ordered cosmos and a purposeful deity and, in demonstration of these, foreshadowing statements' (381).

goldwine Geata. Him wæs geomor sefa,
wæfre ond wælfus, wyrd ungemete neah,
se ðone gomelan gretan sceolde,
secean sawle hord, sundur gedælan
lif wiþ lice; no þon lange wæs
feorh æþelinges flæsce bewunden.

[The king, a hardy man in conflict, seated himself on the headland
while he, generous friend and lord of the Geats,
bade farewell to his household companions. His spirit was melancholy
restless, prepared for death, and that fate was immeasurably close
which was to come upon the old man, seek the treasure-store of his soul
and part asunder life from body; not for long after that
was the prince's life clothed in flesh]
(2417-24).

Here too, the main narrator asserts his control over the release of knowledge. Beowulf, he tells us, faces death, perhaps even certain death. But in the fights involving Grendel and his Mother, their deaths were foretold, and Beowulf's survival was not. In the fight against the dragon, this imbalance persists: the fate of the dragon is not told. Throughout the fight, the dragon is a strong contender for ultimate victory, and only Beowulf is recognised as doomed:

Scyld wel gebearg
life on lice læssan hwile
mærum þeodne þonne his myne sohte,
ðær he þy fyrste forman dogore
wealdan moste swa him wyrd ne gescraf
hreð æt hilde.

[His shield adequately protected
the famous prince in life and limb a shorter time
than his purpose required at that moment,
when for the first time he had to fight on
without fate having ordained for him
the victory in battle]
(2573-5).

And yet despite what the narrator has allowed his audience to know, the outcome is still unexpected; in reading of the death of the dragon, we realize that throughout the account, our knowledge has been limited as well as enlarged by the narrator.

This process of controlling and releasing knowledge becomes, in moments of great narrative jeopardy, a play of suspense. But owing to the cultural context in which *Beowulf* was written, there is also an appreciable role played by fate, even if this is the fate constructed for *Beowulf* by the author. Fate was broadly believed to play a role in human affairs, and in Christian England, to operate alongside other noumenal factors like God's providence. This much can be inferred from two remarks in the series of statements in London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.i known as *Maxims II*, and which neatly summarise this dichotomisation of suspense and fate in *Beowulf*:

> Wearh [sceal] hangian
> fægere ongildan þæt he ær facen dyde
> manna cynne
> ...
> Is seo forðgesceaft
> digol and dyrne; Drihten ana wat,
> nergende fæder.
>
> [The criminal must hang and fairly pay the recompense because he has previously committed a crime against mankind... The shape of the future is obscure and unknowable: the Lord alone knows it, the redeeming Father]
>
> (55-63).[23]

The 'voice' of the *Maxims* inhabits a deterministic world, albeit an unknowable and mysterious one, in which unspoken local variations in detail are ignored, and events obey typological norms. In *Beowulf*, the narrative style depends upon the overall certainties of fate combined

[23] The edition of the 'Cotton Gnomic Verses' used here is that found in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (London: Routledge, 1942).

with the uncertainties of the narrative in this particular case: and this functions whether or not the inevitable mortality of an old Beowulf, a hero near the end of his story, is acknowledged by the reader. It is the narrator's simultaneous nearness and distance from his account which permits the management of these two elements, since it is only from distance that the end of the story can be known.

Fate is a troublesome element for narrative to encompass or acknowledge. It has a tendency to usurp control from the narrator, because the audience carry external preconceptions about the working of fate into their ongoing understanding of a story. But the main narrator of *Beowulf* controls the effect of fate doubly: firstly by delaying the introduction of character narratives which justify his own knowledge of the story, but most substantially by asserting his own control over the story before the moment at which fate would intervene. This narrative behaviour is a preserve of the oral narrator, whose role is as much to control the transmission of knowledge as to transmit it; the oral narrator of *Beowulf* directs a variety of narrating influences, one of which is the sense of the fate of the characters which is engendered by cultural clues to the reader. By creating a narrator with a multifaceted involvement in the narrative process, the author has created a narrating figure with a strong influence over the reader's interpretation of the text.

The main narrator's use of prolepsis and prescience significantly empowers his voice in the transmission of knowledge. It also asserts the distinction between the apparently oral narrator and his apparently oral sources. And it helps to avoid marring the distinction between the voices of eyewitnesses and subsequent report. The main narrator's voice is connected with the high past of his supposed ancestors by the use of many techniques which resemble those of the oral poets portrayed within the work. But it is connected only with the artificer of that time, not with the action he relates. But it lacks the close presence of evidence which is

associate with first-hand orally transmitted knowledge. The narrator has no first-hand experience: his epistemology must be supported by other sources. This presence of evidence is provided in the story by the introduction of a number of other sources, who add their voices and their experience to the main narrator's controlling and directing role.

Internal Narration: Character Accounts in *Beowulf*

A first-hand account enhances the immediacy common to all oral narration, by removing the number of steps between phenomenological events, and the audience's reception of an account. In order to attain this immediacy, the author has supplied not just the main narrator, but also 'evidentiary' accounts that come from the characters themselves. By implication, a first-hand oral account is less prone to the error and embellishment that can potentially occur as a result of repeated transmission from person to person. When the narrator cedes the business of narration to a character, they thereby increase the credibility of the account. The disadvantages of distance and time which are suffered by the main narrator, and shared to an extent by any narrator who cannot claim first-hand experience, are thus averted by recourse to a number of different narrative voices from within the story, who have some (usually) experience of the events they are relating.[24]

In general, these characters reiterate what has been said by the main narrator, occasionally adding a little detail. But this, too, contributes to the narrative structure of the work, beyond simply attenuating the process of its telling. Because, on several occasions,

[24] W. P. Ker briefly considers these passages *Beowulf* in his book *Epic and Romance* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 182-202. He explains that 'the repetition of the story, in shorter form, and in the mouth of the hero himself gives strength and body to a theme that was in danger of appearing trivial and fantastic' (199). It is also discussed by Adrien Bonjour, in 'The Technique of Parallel Descriptions in Beowulf', *RES* NS. 2 (1951), 1-10, repr. in *Twelve Beowulf Papers*, 51-62.

Beowulf fights alone or nearly alone, the account of these sections which requires support. Each of Beowulf's major fights, therefore, is narrated first by the main narrator, and subsequently enjoys a second narration by a character. We hear the story at a time when – at most – one surviving eyewitness could possibly know the details. In the constructed oral world of *Beowulf*, the epistemological process needs to be accounted for. By allowing the eyewitness to speak out directly from the text, the author is able to maintain the illusion of oral transmission directly from the originator of the account, even in a written text, and to provide the support which the main narrator needs.[25]

Beowulf's account of his own battle, his recitation of his own unique epistemology, cannot possess the same control over the transmission of knowledge that the main narrator has, since by his very presence, Beowulf indicates his survival and victory.[26] It is equally true that any narration internal to the story in some way reveals knowledge that reduces the control of a main or authorial narrator. This lapse of control is mitigated by the prior telling of the story by a retrospective narrator. But ultimately, the provenance of the main narrator's account becomes important, especially in the carefully constructed oral world of *Beowulf*. The later accounts of Beowulf and Wiglaf serve as a device to account for the narrator's possession of knowledge, a sort of *apologia* for the narrative. The only possible source of the epistemologically unique details which the narrator has transmitted to the reader are the surviving witnesses to the

[25] It should be noted that some explanations for the parallel character accounts in *Beowulf* suggest additional functions. Joseph L. Baird, in 'Unferth the Þyle', *Medium Ævum* 39 (1970), 1-12, suggests that there is a contrast between the two accounts – with those of the narrator evidencing Christianity, while those of Beowulf have a distinctly pagan character. Robin Waugh also mentions the passage in 'Competitive Narrators in the Homecoming Scene in *Beowulf*', *Journal of Narrative Technique* 25/2 (1995), 202-22, suggesting that 'many poets double as warriors and bardic status increases their competitive power' (205). Neither of these, however, acknowledges or accounts for the very close similarity of the accounts, both of which are explained by considering character accounts as epistemological devices.

[26] Indeed, the theorist J. Hillis Miller, in 'The Problematic of Ending in Narrative', *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 33 (1978), 3-7, observes that 'No narrative can show either its beginning or its ending. It always begins and ends still *in medias res*, presupposing as a future anterior some part of itself outside itself' (4).

events recounted. The narrator can only tell the reader what happened in the haunted mere if there was at least one first hand account from Beowulf himself.

On beginning his account to Hygelac after his return from the kingdom of Hrothgar Beowulf says, 'þæt is undyrne, drihten Hygelac' (2000). 'Undyrne' is often translated as 'manifest', but literally means 'unconcealed'[27]. This word is revealing about the perception of accounts and testimony: Beowulf's testimony undoes the state of concealment. Beowulf's deeds are at first 'dyrne' because he has carried them in his mind, but he has then revealed them, first to Hrothgar, and he is about to transmit them again. By this mechanism, his unique epistemology has become shared; knowledge has been transmitted and 'released' to audiences. It is this process of original transmission which justifies the main narrator's possession of knowledge. Each time such a speech appears in the poem, the poet is clear about the nature of the transmission: 'Beowulf maþelode' (957, 1651, 2000 et al.), or 'Wiglaf maþelode' (2862, 3076). Elsewhere, the word is used by Hrothgar after the attack of Grendel's mother (1321), and in various other places by Hrothgar, Wealtheow, Unferth, Wulfgar and the Coast Guard, all of whom make formal, sustained speeches. 'Maþelian' refers solely to a formal speech act of considerable importance, to the purposeful oral transmission of testimony.[28] The verb selection emphasises both the orality of the transmission and the significance of the act of transmission. In *Beowulf*, the word is not used for the informal, entertaining speech acts of the *scops*.

In the first of his speeches, Beowulf is proleptic, but does not control his ellipsis in the way that the main narrator does in his account of the same incident. Beowulf makes the outcome of the fight obvious, not only by telling the story himself, but by saying,

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[27] Bradley translates it as 'no secret'.

[28] *Dictionary of the Old English Corpus*, online ⟨tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus⟩, accessed 21 Aug 2012, 'maðelian'. Orchard, *A Critical Companion*, 215, observes additionally that 'Beowulf's speeches are marked by an authority and an assurance that sets him apart from the other figures in the poem... this effect stems from his frequent use of gnomic or proverbial statements which lend his utterances a sense of conviction, if not truth'.

We þæt ellenweorc estum miclum,
feohtan fremedon, frecne geneðdon
eafoð uncuþes. Uþe ic swiþor,
þæt ðu hine selfne geseon moste,
feond on frætewum fylwerigne.

['With great feelings of goodwill we carried through the contest,
that act of courage, and risked
the dangerous strength of the unknown. I should rather have wished
that you could have seen the enemy himself
in his trappings, exhausted and dying]
(958-62).

Beowulf has triumphed but the monster has escaped – the five lines with which Beowulf opens his speech are a laconic encapsulation of the whole fight. They contrast starkly with the subtle control and release of information accomplished by the main narrator. His purpose as a narrating character is to convey knowledge to the assembled Danes; his purpose as narrator in the structure of the text is even more perfunctory – to account for the narrative of the main narrator and to verify its contents. This remains true in his later account of the entire expedition to Hygelac:

Þæt is undyrne, dryhten Higelac,
mæru gemeting monegum fira,
hwilc orleghwil uncer Grendles
wearð on ðam wange, þær he worna fela
Sige-Scyldingum sorge gefremede,
yrmðe to aldre; ic ðæt eall gewræc
swa begylpan ne þearf Grendeles maga
ænig ofer eorðan uhthlem þone,
se ðe lengest leofað laðan cynnes
fære bifongen.

[It is no secret, Lord Hygelac,
but an encounter famed among many men,
what an occasion of conflict it was between Grendel and me
upon that site where he wreaked
very many sorrows and no end of misery
upon the conqueror-Scyldings. All that I avenged,

so that none of Grendel's kindred on earth nor
that one of the loathsome family that shall live the longest,
entrammeled in evil, will have grounds to brag
about that clash in the half-light]
(2002-7).

A combination of the identity of the narrator – the living Beowulf – and the brief summary of action, once more results in the total release of narrative information in the first few lines of the speech: control of knowledge does not seem to be within Beowulf's capacity as a narrator.

At the end of the story, Beowulf is necessarily unable to give the verification to narrator's account of the final battle that he had provided for his earlier battles. Instead, this is left to the only surviving eyewitness, Wiglaf the thane. When Wiglaf speaks, after the return of the cowardly Geats, the process of narration is slightly different. He begins with a rebuke, and only after this does he summarize the fight:

'Ic him lifwraðe lytle meahte
ætgifan æt guðe, ond ongan swa þeah
ofer min gemet mæges helpan;
symle wæs þy sæmra þonne ic sweorde drep
ferhðgeniðlan, fyr unswiðor
weoll of gewitte'.

['I was barely capable of rendering him aid for his survival
in the struggle and even so I set about
helping my kinsman beyond my capacity.
Once I had stabbed the life-menacing enemy with my sword
he grew steadily feebler and the fire billowed less fiercely
from his head.']
(2877-82).

Further details follow, of how Wiglaf brought treasure from the hoard out to Beowulf, but these are separated from Wiglaf's rebuke by a lengthy account, by the main narrator, of Hygelac's ill-fated Frisian raid. This serves to add to the tragedy of the fall of Beowulf by

magnifying him; simultaneously, the centre of attention is now Wiglaf, and this places the story back in the context of the succession of history with which it began. In other parallel descriptions, the entire fight account consists of one unbroken speech. Even in Beowulf's account to Hygelac, which contains the 'Ingeld digression', Beowulf's voice remains throughout. But although it serves a greater literary function, concerned with the generic types of elegy and tragedy, Wiglaf's account of Beowulf's last battle serves the same ultimate purpose: it makes the details of the fight 'undyrne' to other characters in the poem. One of the first acts of the new leader Wiglaf is concerned with this very process: 'Heht ðа þæt heaðoweorc to hagan biodan up ofer ecgclif' ['Then he commanded the outcome of the fight to be reported to the encampment high up on the sea-cliff'] (2892-3). Thus Wiglaf fulfils his narrative function of accounting for the widely held knowledge that would otherwise belong to him alone, in the process closing the internal circle by which the narrator's authority is claimed.

Throughout the story, character accounts bolster the version of the story told by the main narrator, stabilizing it with an epistemological architecture which would otherwise be a stark omission in the oral world of face-to-face, immediate transmission of knowledge which has been established by the author.

Conflicting accounts: the Breca Episode

There is one exception to the stabilizing architecture of the character accounts. Such an architecture can only function if there exists a consensus between the main narrator and the character upon whose experience the main narrator has supposedly based his version. This is not the case in the Breca episode: it is unique among the character-narrated episodes, and serves not to support the main narrator, but to establish the reputation of Beowulf, who later

goes on to become the main narrator's most important corroborator. Whilst it too is told twice, both versions originate from direct speech within the text – it does not receive treatment by the main narrator. It is this absence of the main narrator which gives the Breca episode its narrative instability. The narrative is epistemologically distanced from the main narrator: he is not party to either version of the story, and privileges neither explicitly.

Unferth, a member of Hrothgar's court, after a derisive introduction, is the first to give his account of a contest[29] between Beowulf and a man named Breca:

> Ne inc ænig mon,
> ne leof ne laðˇ, belean mihte
> sorhfullne siðˇ, ðˇa git on sund reon.
> Þær git eagorstream earmum þehton,
> mæton merestræta, mundum brugdon,
> glidon ofer garsecg; geofon yþum weol,
> wintrys wylmum. Git on wæteres æht
> seofonniht swuncom; he þe æt sunde oferflat,
> hæfde mare mægen.
>
> [No one,
> friend nor foe, could dissuade you
> from that adventure fraught with anxiety as you swam out to sea.
> There you covered the flowing tide with your strokes,
> you spanned the seaways, you hauled yourselves along with your hands,
> and vanished across the icy ocean. The deep was surging with waves,
> with the turbulence of winter]
>
> (510-18).

[29] In opposition to the balance of critical opinion, the episode is regarded here as a rowing contest, in which 'reon' is translated as 'row' rather than 'swim'. This reading has some significant defenders. Karl P. Wentersdorf in 'Beowulf's Adventure with Breca', *SP* 72 (1975), 140-66, following a suggestion in Fred C. Robinson's essay, 'Elements of the Marvellous in the Characterization of Beowulf', in Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving, Jr., (eds.), *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope* (Toronto: UTP, 1974), 119-37, and most recently William Nelles, 'Beowulf's 'Sorhfullne Siðˇ' with Breca', *Neophilologus* 83 (1999), 299-312. Robinson premises his argument on the fact that according to the reading 'swam', Beowulf's feat would be marvellous – inhuman – and that this would render the story uninteresting, since it would then represent the subsequent battles with the Grendelkin and the dragon as battles between two non-human species. The initial decision, to read 'reon' as a metaphor for swimming, which appears to originate with the gloss in Klaeber's edition, 'reon ROW (ie. swim)', and is replicated in virtually every other edition, with no comparable metaphor either in Beowulf or in any other poem, seems very far-fetched. The 'swim' reading depends on an extension to other metaphors for 'þehton', 'mæton' and 'brugdon'., and a prosaic rather than poetic reading of the word 'sund', which would be unusual for the context.

He goes on to insinuate that because it was Breca who returned to shore first, it was he who showed the greater strength and should be considered the victor in the contest, and that as a further token of Beowulf's weakness, he could not expect success against Grendel.

Beowulf's account is very much more detailed, and focuses on the reasons for his 'failure' to win the contest. Indeed, in comparison with what follows, the feat of rowing for seven days and nights pales. Beowulf introduces details of epistemological uniqueness to his account – unique because unlike the earlier part of the contest, in which Breca and Beowulf were closely matched, and remained together, a fact reflected by Unferth's use of the dual, Beowulf was now alone at the bottom of the sea. Beowulf confirms his similarity to Breca, and the closeness of the contest, mimicking Unferth's grammatical dual (539, 40) but then explains that they were separated by the sea (548). He tells of a mighty struggle with a 'meredeor' ['sea beast'] and other 'laðgeteonan' ['loathsome spoilers'] (558-9), which he slays, and swims to shore. This is a complete reversal of the outcome of the contest: what had appeared to be a humiliating defeat suddenly looks like a victory – not the same as Breca's supposed win, but altogether more impressive.

Having heard both versions of the story, we are left without any structural markers, such as the mediating voice of the main narrator, which would help us to decide between the versions.[30] The reader is forced to make a judgement between the accounts on their own merits. Both are oral accounts, one from a unique eyewitness with no corroboration; the other comes as hearsay, presumably via someone other than Beowulf, and is potentially less reliable, though it could be presumed to be free of Beowulf's inevitable self-bias. Ultimately, we can only assess the two accounts based on our opinions of the characters concerned. We know very

[30] Geoffrey Hughes, 'Beowulf, Unferth, and Hrunting: An Interpretation', *ES* 58 (1977), 385-95 at 386, considers that the episode is a case of 'only Beowulf's word against [Unferth's]'. Fred C. Robinson, 'Elements of the Marvellous', 126, says the account lacks 'the direct authority of the poet's own voice'.

little about Beowulf, and indeed our opinion of him is built up from accounts like these. Unferth, on the other hand, strikes us as extremely unlikeable.[31] He is introduced as being envious of Beowulf's accomplishments, appears to resent his boasts, and sullenly casts Beowulf as vainglorious. He says of the hero:

> 'He ne uþe þæt ænig oðer man
> æfre mærða þon ma middangeardes
> gehedde under heofenum þonne he sylfa'.
>
> ['He did not allow that any other man
> on earth might ever gain more glories
> beneath the heavens than he himself']
>
> (503-5).

After Beowulf's version has been heard, we are given the distinct impression that the contest of the accounts has been won by Beowulf; Hrothgar at the very least has found in his favour:

> Þa wæs on salum sinces brytta,
> gamolfeax on guðrof; geoce gelyfde
> brego Beorht-Dena; gehyrde on Beowulfe
> folces hyrde fæstrædne geþoht.
>
> [By now the distributor of treasure,
> white-haired with age and renowned in warfare,

[31] M. F. Vaughan, 'A Reconsideration of "Unferð"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 77 (1976), 32-48, suggests that our reading of Unferth's character is based wholly on assumptions drawn from a piece of specious early 20th century onomastics. 'Unferð' is conceivably a compound, 'un'-'ferð', meaning either 'un-peace', taking 'ferð' as a form of 'frið', as suggested by Morton W. Bloomfield, in '*Beowulf* and Christian Allegory', *Traditio* 7 (1949-50), 410-15, or 'un-intelligent', taking 'ferð' to mean 'mind', as suggested by Fred C. Robinson, in 'Personal Names in Medieval Narrative and the Name of Unferth in *Beowulf*', in H. Creed, (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams* (Birmingham AL: Birmingham-Southern College Press, 1970), 43-8. Both were based on an original suggestion made in Axel Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. Lee M. Hallender (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1919), 49. These readings would mean that Unferth alone in the poem has a name with obvious allegorical significance (with the possible exception of Thryth/Modthryth), but this does not necessarily invalidate the argument. Vaughan, in 'A Reconsideration', also points out that the 'Unferð' itself is a corruption of 'Hunferð', which would have no such connotation. Ida Hollowell, 'Unferth the Þyle' agrees that Unferth is disgruntled and sullen, but justifies his behaviour on the grounds of his duty as Þyle to Hrothgar – a title which has yet to be definitively identified. Another suggestion appears in William Sayers, 'Cei, Unferth, and Access to the Throne', *ES* 90 (2009), 127-41. Sayers suggests that the disgruntled and sardonic courtier is a stock character which progresses to become Cei (Kay) the Seneschal to King Arthur, in later medieval romance; he would have been recognised as such.

> was in a state of rejoicing;
> the lord of the glorious Danes put his trust in this help
> as he, shepherd of the people listened
> to the resolute sense of purpose informing Beowulf]
> (607-10).

So it is by a referred, indirect process, tempered by their own judgement, that the reader comes to trust Beowulf, and deems him to be the victor of the rowing contest.

Without the verification of a corroborating account, or the justification of providing the epistemological provenance for the account of the main narrator, this is the only way in which the reader can make this assessment. The audience is left with the impression that they have judged for themselves that Beowulf is worthy, although of course an act of narratorial management guided this decision. It is this unilateral decision, early in the work, which gives Beowulf – and by extension his follower Wiglaf – the authority to justify the main narrator's account without corroboration, in situations in which they are witnesses to events of unique epistemology. We later learn that Beowulf has the favour of God, and indeed is a brave, truthful, and powerful man. Initially, though, it is only the audience's own judgement, leading to verification, that structurally grants Beowulf the authority to narrate his own activities. The many-voiced narrative structure of *Beowulf* derives from the double decision of the author to associate the main narrator culturally with the events of his story, whilst temporally connecting him to the time of his audience. In so doing, the main narrator forfeits the tangible authority which comes from material evidence, from records; and in addition, rejects the excuse of distance and time which are implicit in literate transmission.

The process of knowledge transmission throughout is oral: the staging of the events, and of the text itself; the means of transmission within the text; the transmission of the story to the reader – the entire structure is based on individual testimony, delivered in an immediate

way. With nothing else to support the story or the accounts from which it is composed, author and reader alike are reliant on the effectiveness of this means of transmission. The author does not question the limitations or undermine the potential of oral knowledge transmission.

Literate Poetry: The Scattered Narrative Gaze in Gaimar's 'Haveloc' Episode

Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* was written substantially later than *Beowulf*, in the first half of the twelfth century.[32] In many ways, nevertheless, it is a complement to the Anglo-Saxon poem, dealing with putatively factual material in an historical way. The extant portion of Gaimar's history runs to over 6000 lines, and has its own short prologue which refers to the 'livre devant' ['previous volume'] (1).[33] It is at this point in his history that Gaimar begins to use the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as his primary source for historical information, and leaves (we presume),[34] Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The *Estoire* is therefore scarcely fragmentary. But as a necessary consequence of the scope of the work, individual episodes are much shorter than the account of Beowulf.

[32] We can be reasonably precise in the dating of the *Estoire*, although it is not without its controversy. Alexander Bell, in his edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), dates the initial composition to 1135-40, from internal references to a period of peace in Stephen's otherwise wartorn reign (li-lii). Ian Short, in the latest edition of the work is more precise, and from further internal analysis, dates the work to 14 months in 1136-7. Paul Dalton, however, in 'The Date of Geffrei Gaimar's Estoire des Engleis, the Connections of his Patrons, and the Politics of Stephen's Reign', *Chaucer Review* 42 (2007), 23-47, argues a later dating, of, 1140-50 (although acknowledges that work may have taken place on the text as it is now extant from as early as 1135 and as late as 1159, arguing that 'it is important to note the possibility that Gaimar revised his text' (31).

[33] The edition of the *Estoire des Engleis* used here is Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis: History of the English*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford: OUP, 2009). Short is convinced that these opening lines 'represent the handiwork of a scribe rather than the author', but that they refer to the division of the work into two volumes (1-4 n.). It therefore seems reasonable to suppose, given what follows, that they represent thematically some previous introduction, even if there exist technical differences. The *Estoire* exists in all four surviving manuscripts as a companion-piece to Wace's *Roman de Brut*, and in this way fulfills Gaimar's historical project to cover the whole of the time from the fall of Troy almost until the present day of the author.

[34] Although Gaimar pointedly does not cite Geoffrey as a source, probably for reasons of competition.

The *Estoire* stages literacy to a similar extent to the staging of orality in *Beowulf*. This is more than a comment on the obvious material fact of its literacy, a fact which is necessarily shared by all written texts. In the *Estoire*, those features which are recognisably indicative of a literate attitude to knowledge transmission are apparent. The timescale of the work is much larger than that of *Beowulf*, a fact which clearly facilitates the telling of history and is therefore closely connected with the genre of the work. External to the text, there is the suggestion of posterity in the writing, implying the potential to bridge a temporal gap between composition and reading. The work is also dependent on the facts of its literacy, and Gaimar demonstrates awareness of the nature of the complete work as a bookish, written piece. Its particular contrast with *Beowulf*, however, is in its independence from any individual narrative voice. The focalization is scattered, rather than favouring one individual at a time, and indicates an epistemological structure in which the knowledge contained in the work is not the product of first-hand testimony, but that of an observer, perhaps much later than the time of the events, working with existing accounts. These are literate methods.

Even in the way it anthologizes history, the *Estoire* is a literate work. This was a characteristic implicit in the initial vision for the work: it was created with the specific purpose of recording history in an organized, bounded way. Gaimar's retrospective overview of the naming of Anglo-Saxon, which continues for some considerable time, has the feel of the long naming books of the Bible, and as a consequence, demonstrates Gaimar's presentation of this history as something complete:

> Beldeg fu del linage Wodnez,
> de ki Hors e Henges fu nez;
> de lur linage furent nez
> icels ki furent apelez
> lé Westsexiens e Suthsexiens,
> Estsexiens e Midelsexiens

...
nez del païs ki Ange ad nun,
Engleis tuz les apela hom.

[Beldeg was from the lineage of Woden,
from which Horsa and Hengest were born;
From this lineage came the people
who were afterwards called
the West Saxons and South Saxons,
East Saxons and Middle Saxons
...
those born in the country called Angle
were all called the English]
(841-54).

Gaimar's vision is a literate one, and it contrasts with the vision of *Beowulf*. The acknowledgment of a pre-history and of a future to the events of the narrative indicating that the Old English poem is set *at a particular time* within a grand historical framework, however fictional or separate from real historical time that framework may be. It operates on the scale of the lives of individuals. As a result the whole of the matter of the work is feasibly within the scope of the recollection of eyewitnesses, and is therefore conceptually oral. The undertaking of the *Beowulf* narrator is to tell a story which could conceivably derive from such an oral account, or multiple accounts gathered coherently. No such sense of setting exists in the *Estoire* as a whole (although there are local instances of it), or indeed with any history. The scale of the project demands not a single witness *telling* what he has seen, but a writer recording from sources of various kinds.[35]

The epilogue talks about the text in its entirety as a literate undertaking, planned and executed by an author, as though the construction of the text in some way reflects a definable pattern in history itself:

[35] It is true that *Beowulf* and the *Estoire des Engleis* are typical considered different primarily because of their genre. However, the historical ambition of the writer in each case plays a major role in creating that genre.

Treske ci dit Gaimar de Troie:
il començat la u Jasun
ala conquere la tuisun
si l'ad defiué ci endreit.

[This narrative of Gaimar goes right from Troy
He began at the point when Jason
went to seek the fleece,
and he has at this precise time concluded it].
(6528-31).

The work ends, in fact, with the demise of the Conqueror's son, William Rufus, around forty years before the *Estoire* was written. The reference to completing the history, 'si l'ad defiué ci endreit', a reflexive reference to the moment in the book at which this occurs, illustrates the entrenchment of literacy in Gaimar's writing of history. The alternative, far shorter epilogue preserved in the Lincoln and Durham manuscripts is a more conventional *explicit* to the text, and contains two similar phrases about the ending of the history: 'Ci vuil finir m'estoire' ['I wish to finish my history here'] (1) and 'l'Estoire des Engleis ci finist' ['the History of the English finishes here'] (7).[36] This claim to the scope of the work is a remark which stages literacy in the work, bringing to the fore the artificial nature of such a project. History is represented by this scheme as a bounded whole, as something which is achievably the contents of a book, even before work on the book has begun by writer or reader. It is a literate way of examining history: it re-imagines an open-ended continuum within the endboards of an actual codex. So although the early part of the *Estoire* no longer survives (tentatively known as

[36] Alexander Bell, in his edition, and Ian Short, are undecided about the authority of the shorter epilogue; it contains less detail and is only 22 lines long compared with the 98 lines of the longer epilogue. Nevertheless, it is also written in the first person as though by the author, and survives in two of the four manuscript witnesses to the work. Both versions, therefore, are printed it as an appendix in both Bell's and Short's editions. The references here refer to the line number within that appendix.

the *Estoire des Bretuns*), the project from its inception was a profoundly bookish one, and the way it is described in the epilogue foregrounds its literate status.

It is therefore perhaps surprising that the early part of the work does not differ enormously from the opening of *Beowulf* in the way that the narrator recalls history. The extant opening, which is almost certainly not authorial, even uses the oral formula of the *Beowulf* narrator, 'avez oï' ['you have heard'] (3) – nearly identical to the 'we... gefrunon' ['we have heard'] of the opening lines of *Beowulf*. Gaimar refers here to a previous (lost) written volume. The verb 'oir' therefore has a additional metaphorical sense which hearing verbs do not convey in *Beowulf*, but its striking similarity to the formula as it is used in *Beowulf* makes it likely that the *Estoire*'s readers would understand it in the same way as those of *Beowulf*: a valorized recollection of the irretrievable British past, just as the *Beowulf* narrator recalls his Danish ancestors:

> Avez oi...
> Costentin tint aprés Artur tenement,
> e com Iwein refu feit reis
> de Muref e de Lōeneis.
> Mes de ço veit mult malement:
> mort sunt tut lur meilliur parent.
>
> [You have heard...
> Constantine ruled over this realm
> and how Yvain was made king
> of Moray and Lothian.
> But of this came great evil:
> all the best of their family were killed]
> (3-8).

The narrator at the outset is providing an account of a lineage of a great royal house, and one of the Danish founders of a great English city. Like the narrator of *Beowulf*, Gaimar swiftly moves onto the handling of what might be termed mythological history, by recounting the

story of Haveloc,[37] and the subtle hints of orality persist in occasional formulae. Once again, a form of 'oir' is used, 'Oiez ke fit cel felons reis' ['Just hear what this villainous king did'] (98), and as in *Beowulf*, it lends fictive orality to the story. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the story of Haveloc as it appears in Gaimar's *Estoire* is a redaction of a poem which circulated orally, from which it may have inherited these formulae.[38] Whether or not this is the case, and the doubt equally well applies to *Beowulf*, this part of the poem is certainly like *Beowulf* – a putatively Danish or Anglo-Saxon story about a youth growing into wisdom and great power. The events belong to the same oral world as the *Beowulf* narrator and his characters, and the style of delivery echoes that similarity. These do not appear to be the characteristics of a distinctly literate work.

However, the narrator of the *Estoire*, even at his most oral, as in the story of Haveloc, remains distant from his subject: he remains a literate narrator. Whilst a very oral text, like *Beowulf*, places the narration close to the events by using lengthy character testimony from the actual time and place of the events that they report, the *Estoire* separates and estranges. This is achieved by having a far more scattered narrative gaze, which, whilst opinionated, moves rapidly from one character to another with complete omniscience. In the space of less than fifty lines, 55-97, the subject is variously Edelsi and Adelbriht, each individually, Orwain (Edelsi's sister),

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[37] Richard J. Moll recently repeated Thorlac Turville-Petre's view that the Haveloc episode, 'though wholly fictional, was unhesitatingly accepted as a history until the early 14th century', in '"N'est pas Autentik, Mais Apocrophum": Haveloks and their Reception in Medieval England', *SP* 105 (2008), 165-206 at 166.

[38] Scott Kleinnman, 'The Legend of Havelok the Dane and the Historiography of East Anglia', *SP* 100 (2003), 245-77, says that 'Gaimar's source appears to be oral, suggesting that in all likelihood he created his Havelok episode by combining both oral and written traditions (252). In response to a view held at time of the publication of his edition that the Haveloc story derived from an earlier Anglo-Norman poem, Bell says that 'the ultimate origin of the Haveloc story hardly concerns us here', but seems to imply that it was part of a 'compilation' of information relating to a Danish claim to the English throne, some of which was certainly literate (the *ASC* predominantly) and some of which may have been orally transmitted semi-mythical history (lviii). These arguments echo views expressed in his article 'Gaimar's Early "Danish" Kings', *PMLA* 65 (1950), 601-40. Moll, '"N'est pas Autentik"', concludes that the Lincolnshire bias present in the work suggests that the story may have emerged from local folk history of what was previously the Danelaw (167). It is perhaps this that accounts for the lack of any known written precedent for the Haveloc story in any form.

Argentille (her daughter), Adelbriht again, Edelsi again, Orwain and Argentille, Orwain, and then Argentille again. Simply from practical point of view, this is necessarily a literary technique: keeping track of that many conflicting subjects, where, for metrical and other reasons, the pronouns are often omitted, is enormously trying. The process of understanding the story therefore demands the presence (or at least the existence) of a book, to an extent which a more linear succession of characters would not. The difficulty of following the story is acknowledged by the narrator only once in the passage, 'Orewain e Argentille – ço fut la raïne e sa fille' ['Orwain and Argentille – that is, the queen and her daughter'] (83-4). Oddly, this is one of the few times when there isn't the slightest ambiguity.

This shifting focus occurs equally prominently in the use of direct speech in the account. 'Haveloc' has no sustained speeches to compare with the 'mæðel' throughout *Beowulf*. Though there is a large amount of speech in Gaimar's 'Haveloc' episode, it is predominantly dialogic. At one stage, an exchange takes place between Haveloc and Argentille:

> 'Sire', fet ele, 'vus ardez!
> Esveillez vus, si vus volez!
> De voste buche une flambe ist;
> jo ne sai unkes ki l'i mist'.
> Tant l'enbransça e trest vers sei
> k'il s'esveilla e dist: 'Purquei
> m'avez eveillé, bele amie?
>
> ['My lord', she says, 'you burn!
> Wake up, if you please!
> A flame is coming from your mouth;
> I do not know who put it there'.
> She embraced him and pulled him toward her
> and he eventually awoke and said: 'Why
> have you woken me, fair love?']
>
> (251-8).

This exchange transfers the narrative gaze from Argentille to Haveloc; he does not know about her dream, even though the narrator has just told us. Apart from one speech of 24 lines which follows this exchange, in which Haveloc interprets the dream, the business of speaking is handed back and forth between the characters, always directed by the narrator using short cues such as 'dist il' and 'fet ele', which make no specific reference to the formality of the speech acts. It is conversational, where the speech in *Beowulf* is sustained and formal: speech does not have the same status in the Haveloc account.

Much of the *Estoire des Engleis* is not worthy of direct comparison with *Beowulf*, particularly in terms of its approach to literate knowledge transmission. It is expected, for example, that a redaction of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which makes up a large portion of the *Estoire*, would reflect the very literate nature of such a record. The purpose of recording history in this way is to avoid the fragility and ephemerality of memory and oral transmission. But the Haveloc episode is comparable. It has the feel of an oral traditional poem, and it has shades of the heroic tradition. Whether or not this impression of its origins is correct, it nevertheless bears strong similarities to *Beowulf*. Yet Gaimar's approach to the process of narration depends to a great extent upon the material reality of literate communication, upon the actual presence of a book. This is something upon which the *Beowulf* poet does not insist. Gaimar's narrator belongs absolutely to the present day of the text, to the world in which the subjects of his work are already history, and in which the text already exists as a literary entity in the present: the literacy of the work is not only a fact of its material existence, but as much a staged fact within the work as the orality of *Beowulf*.

The remark in the epilogue, 'si l'ad definé ci endreit', which concerns the completion of the history and the perspective of the historian over the whole sweep of its coverage, positions the narrator solidly in the present of the reader and the book. The narrator is, it seems, as

distant from the recent events he describes as he is from the time of Jason and the Golden Fleece. He first says he intends to bring his story up-to-date, making reference to existing treatments of the life of King Henry I, who reigned between the end of his narrative and its composition:

> Ore dit Gaimar, s'il ad guarant,
> del rei Henri dirrat avant,
> ke s'il en volt un poi parler
> e de sa vie translater,
> tels mil choses en purrad dire
> ke unkes Davit ne fist escrivre,
> ne la raïne de Luvain
> n'en tint le livrë en sa main.
>
> [Now Gaimar declares that if he has a patron
> He will go on to speak of King Henry,
> For if he is willing to say a little,
> and to translate his life,
> he will be able to recount thousands of things
> that David never had written down,
> nor the queen of Louvain,
> ever hold such a book in her hand]
> (6483-90)

He then decides against it, with a remark which seems to be a further dig at the historical skills of the same poet David:

> Ore mand Davit ke, si li pleist,
> avant die si pas nel leist,
> car s'il en volt avant trover,
> son livre en pot mult amender.
>
> [I now call upon David, who, if he wishes,
> to continue his narrative and not leave it,
> for, if he were willing to compose a sequel,
> his book could be greatly improved]
> (6519-23).

But beyond being authorial in-jokes, these references – to the process of making history books, rather than to the events themselves – draw our attention away from the history and defamiliarize the activity of the narrator. It highlights the processes of research and writing, and invites us to compare the material book we have before us with others. In so doing, it associates this authorial narrator with his own craft, and not with the world of the past, even though it is likely that at least for the final passages of the book, the author was actually part of that history. There is no disguise here, as there is in *Beowulf*: the book is an explicit presence in the text.

It is also in the epilogue that Gaimar makes his justification of the narrative, and it is this justification, rather than anything approaching evidence, which provides verification for his narrative. The extent to which oral history served as a source for Gaimar is uncertain. But in his epilogue, it has no place. He names among his sources only books:

> Il purchaça mainz esamplaire,
> livres engleis e par gramaire
> e en romanz e en latin,
> ainz k'en peüst traire al la fin.
>
> [He obtained a large number of copies
> of books in English, by scholarship,
> and books in the vernacular and in Latin
> until he could bring his work to a conclusion]
> (6441-4)

Along with (or perhaps amongst) these, he lists four specific volumes which were provided for him by his patron, 'le livre Walter Espac' ['Walter Epec's book'] (6448), 'le bon livre dë Oxeford' ['the good book of Oxford'] (6464), 'l'estorie de Wincestre' ['the Winchester history'] (6467) and 'de Wassingburc un livre engleis' ['from Washingborough, a book in English']. Various attempts have been made to identify these books with specific extant volumes, with

some success;[39] listing them in this way belies the detail with which Gaimar explains their provenance, which takes him around forty lines. Whilst this description is useful from a cultural-historical perspective,[40] it is an incidental consequence of their inclusion. Functionally, they provide a support for the narrative which is analogous to the character narratives of *Beowulf*: they are the literate equivalent of oral testimony.

The reference to the 'bon livre dë Oxeford' is a particularly brazen form of this support. It is convincingly argued[41] that this refers to the same book which Gaimar's near contemporary Geoffrey of Monmouth cites in the prologue to his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. There, it is a called a 'librum vetustissimus' ['a book of great age'], lent to Geoffrey by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford – Gaimar's 'arcediaen' (6465). But it is also believed that this book never actually existed, and that Geoffrey fabricated the idea of an additional source to give greater credence to his work.[42] Whether or not the book ever actually existed, it is significant that Gaimar chooses to refer to it specifically among his sources, in precisely the same way that Geoffrey does. Along with possibly being another shared joke among the group of historians working in the 1130s and 40s, it demonstrates the dependence of Gaimar's literate narrative upon strong literate provenance. It was not enough for Gaimar to have read Geoffrey's work, written at approximately the same time or slightly earlier. For a strong claim in support of a narrative,

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[39] Elizabeth Freeman, 'Geffrei Gaimar, Vernacular Historiography, and the Assertion of Authority', *SP* 93 (1996), 188-206, contains a summary of the scholarship connected with identifying these books. The Winchester and Washingborough books are presumed to be manuscripts of the *ASC*, which is used heavily in Gaimar's history up until the reign of Edgar the Peaceable. The book of Walter Espec is was a prominent figure in Henry I's judicial system, although the book is not specifically identified.

[40] Ian Short argues that the passage 'points to the existence of a circle of individuals not only with a high level of historical awareness, but able and willing also to provide patronage and to encourage innovation', 'Gaimar's Epilogue and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Liber Vetustissimus*', *Speculum* 69 (1994), 323-43 at 323.

[41] Among others, Short, 'Gaimar's Epilogue', *passim*.

[42] David R. Howlett notes that 'this fraud survives in over 200 manuscripts including fifty from the twelfth century', in 'The Literary Context of Geoffrey of Monmouth: an Essay on the Fabrication of Sources', *Arthuriana* 5/3 (1995), 25-69 at 26. The argument emerges from the lack of any appearance of this history in any literature before the time that Geoffrey was writing.

Gaimar needed a literate account that had been around for far longer.[43] This manifests itself elsewhere in Gaimar's work, where he refers to his source (at this point, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) as 'la veire geste' or 'la viele geste' (823; 2523 and elsewhere). Age is equivalent to veracity in conferring literate verification.

Gaimar is unusually extreme in his absolute dependence on literate modes of narrative justification, and it might be imagined that this derives from some essential conception of history writing in the twelfth century. But another example demonstrates that this was a matter of conscious choice for Gaimar. In the *Roman de Rou*, Wace exploits written records, certainly, but relies on eyewitness testimony alongside it, even for events quite distant from the time of writing.[44] In the account of the lead up to the Battle of Hastings, Wace recalls his father's account of the fleet:

> Jo oï dire mon pere
> – bien m'en sovient, mais vaslet ere –
> que set cenz nes, quatre meins, furent
> quant de Saint Valeri s'esmurent,
> que nes, que batels, que esqueis
> a porter armes e herneis;
> e jo ai en escrit trové
> – ne sai dire s'est verité –
> que il i out trei mile nes,
> qui portoent veiles e tres.
>
> [I heard my father say
> – I remember it well though I was only a lad –
> there were seven hundred ships, less four,
> when they set off from Saint Valéry,
> either ships, or boats, or skiffs,
> carrying weapons or equipment;

[43] Elizabeth Freeman, 'Geffrei Gaimar', considers that this may be premised on angst about the perception of historical writing in the vernacular. Freeman calls the Anglo-Norman language 'a language of unproven written authority' (189).

[44] This was observed by Elisabeth van Houts in two papers, 'Wace as historian', in K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (ed.) *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: The prosopography of Britain and France from the tenth to the twelfth century*, (Woodbridge, 1997), 103–32, and 'The Memory of 1066 in Oral and Written Traditions', *ANS* 19 (1996), 167-79, esp. 170.

and I have found in writing
– I do not know if it is true –
that there were three thousand ships
under sail]
(III. 6423-32).[45]

Though it is not clear that his father was necessarily the man who witnessed the fleet himself, the fact that Wace acknowledges his testimony, rather than attributing this detail to a book is telling. At the time of the writing, the battle in question was nearly a century before – outside of the scope of living memory, and yet Wace admits oral testimony regarding it. This clearly has an equal status to the written account which he cites in the same passage: one, he considers, is a supplement for the other. Elsewhere, the alternative reliance on oral testimony is less explicit, but is represented instead in the peculiarly close relationship between the narrator and the action. Later in the account, there are details which are focalized from the point of view of individuals present at the battle. This close focalization and the implication of first person experience are oral techniques: they imply transmission from person to person, they are direct, and they are proximal. Wace refers to the noise of battle: 'La oissïez noises e criz e de lances grant croisseïez' ['There you would have heard the commotion and shouting, and a great crunching of lances'] (III. 8559-60). Shortly afterwards, his focalization is through the eyes of William Patrick of La Lande:

A la Lande l'aveit veü
e Heraut out iloc geü,
e par la Lande fu passez
quant il ful al duc amenez.

[He had seen him at La Lande:
Harold had stayed there
and passed through La Lande

[45] The edition used here is Wace, *The Roman de Rou*, ed. Anthony J. Holden, trans. Glyn S. Burgess (St. Helier: Société Jersiaise, 2002).

when he was brought see the duke]
(III. 8589-92).

The scattered perspectives show an author taking advantage of the overall distance of a literate narrator to manage and shift between different perspectives, whilst simultaneously engaging with an oral mode of transmission. In this alternative mode, in which the narrator is more closely embedded in the events of his story, distance from the narrator confers lack of authority. It is the polar opposite of the literate mode, in which an old book, especially a very old one, carries great authority as a source of narrative justification. By using both modes simultaneously, Wace exploits the benefits of both in situations where Gaimar is resolutely committed to literacy.

By ending his own history at least thirty-five years before the present, Gaimar provides artificial closure for the ongoing drama of the 'Engleis', while promoting in the process his own literate agenda. For although he admits that the passage of time and events continues, his epilogue is a document which provides the boundaries for his history, one which defines the limit of his *Estoire* to be a time which is already historical.[46] This literate preoccupation is most prominent in Gaimar's epilogue, in which the actual process of production is under his particular scrutiny. But the immanent literary character of Gaimar's poem also affects the narrative mode throughout the story. Though *Beowulf* is a written text, it rejects literacy in favour of the use of oral techniques throughout. The *Estoire*, by contrast, embraces literacy to

[46] Some considerable effort has been made to determine whether or not 'Estoire' was considered to be a genre, and whether, as a consequence, its structural features can be attributed to the strictures of this genre. However, as Peter Damian-Grint has noted, in '*Estoire* as Word and Genre: Meaning and Literary Usage in the Twelfth Century', *Medium Ævum* 66 (1997), 189-206, although there does seem to be a lexical resonance with a the formal 'historia' genre of antiquity, the Anglo-Norman term 'estoire' which derives from it was not concerned so much with genre as with semantic implications of 'truthfulness and authority' (198). Damian-Grint notes that it is widely used alongside forms of the word 'veire' ['true'], and inherits an associated veracity from this conventional usage (194).

the extreme. Both works, however, place ultimate authority their chosen modes of knowledge transmission. They are not poems which invite the criticism of these modes.

Yvain: The Oral World of King Arthur's Court

In Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* there is, once again, much to be compared with *Beowulf*, and yet the text as a whole represents a method of narration which exists in between the oral extreme of *Beowulf* and the literate extreme of Gaimar's *Estoire*. Chrétien is neither exclusively oral nor exclusively literate, and uses techniques associated with both. Unlike Gaimar and the *Beowulf*-poet, Chrétien also exploits the potentials of his methods, and is highly critical of their limitations.

Like the *Beowulf* narrator, the narrator at the opening of *Yvain* presents a civilisation in a state of primary orality.[47] Indeed, many of the techniques he uses are identical to those of the *Beowulf* narrator. The world he describes is in a valorized past, and is one of oral storytelling, the 'geardagas' of the opening of *Beowulf*:

> Artus, li buens rois de Bretaigne
> La cui proesce os ansaigne,
> Que nos soiiens preu et cortois,
> Tint cort si riche come rois
> A cele feste qui tant coste,
> Qu'an doit clamer la pantecoste
> ...
> Aprés mangier parmi cez sales
> Li chevalier s'atropelerent

[47] Helaine Newstead suggests that this may reflect contemporary conditions, remarking that 'we may better understand what the medieval audience perceived in the text if we recall that it *listened*', in 'Narrative Technique in Chrétien's *Yvain*', *Romance Philology* 30 (1977), 431-41 at 432, emphasis original. There have also been attempts to find an oral origin for the tale of *Yvain*, most notably Claude Luttrell's essay 'From Traditional Tale to Arthurian Romance: *Le Chevalier au Lion*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 22 (1978), 36-57, in which he finds *Yvain* to be based on a type-400 folktale, 'The Man in Search of His Lost Wife', but also in Raymond Cormier, '*Cu Chulainn* and *Yvain*: the Love Hero in Early Irish and Old French Literature', *SP* 68 (1971), 10-25.

La, ou dames les apelerent
Ou dameiseles ou puceles.
Li un recontoient noveles,
Li autre parloient d'amors,
Des angoisses et des dolors
Et des granz biens qu'an ont sovant
Li deciple de son covant,
Qui lors estoit riches et buens.

[Arthur, the good king of Britain,
Whose prowess teaches us
To be brave and courteous,
Held court with the riches of a king,
At that feast of great cost
That is called Pentecost.
...
After eating, in the halls,
The knights would gather there,
At the invitation of ladies
Or damsels or maidens
They recounted past adventures,
Others spoke of love,
Of the anguishes and sorrows
And of the great blessings often enjoyed
by the disciples of its order,
Which was then rich and flourishing]
(1-17).[48]

The similarities are clearly apparent: Arthur, like Scyld Scefing, is a legendary king. As a location, 'Bretaigne' is similar to the land of the Spear-Danes; it is a sort of ancestral, valorized homeland. Even the description of the riches which Arthur lavished upon his subjects is reminiscent of the generosity of the Scyldings. Chrétien's 'proesce' is almost synonymous with the 'þrym' of the opening lines of *Beowulf*. In many ways, Chrétien has set the opening of his romance in an Arthurian Heorot. What follows, though, indicates the relationship between the reader and the era in which the story is set, and it is a relationship different from that constructed in the opening lines of the Anglo-Saxon poem, and also different from Gaimar's

[48] The edition of *Yvain* used here is Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain (le Chevalier au Lion)*, ed. T. B. W. Reid (Manchester: MUP, 1948).

Estoire. For in *Beowulf*, the narrator makes reference to tales that 'we... gefrunon' ['we have heard']. The narrator and listener are grouped together as participants in an oral activity, and are therefore simultaneously grouped with the primally oral denizens of fifth-century Denmark. In *Yvain*, there is no oral collaboration with the audience, and the tales are told only by the knights after dinner, as part of the culture being described in these valorized, legendary, historical terms. The narrator then laments the passing of this era:

> Mes ore i a mout po des suens;
> Que a bien pres l'ont tuit leissiee,
> S'an est amors mout abeissiee;
> ...
> Ore est amors tornee a fable
> Por ce que cil, qui rien n'an santent,
> Dïent qu'ilm aimment, mes il mantent,
> Et cil fable et mançonge an font,
> Qui s'an vantent et droit n'i ont.
>
> [But now there are few who serve love
> Almost all have deserted it,
> And love is greatly abased.
> ...
> Now love is turned into a trifle
> For those who know nothing about it
> claim that that they love, but they lie,
> And they mock and boast about it
> Those who lie and have no right to do so]
> (18-28).

The emphatic double use of 'ore' marks the separation from the 'then' of the past particularly in the presence of the apposing conjunction 'mes', and makes explicit the change in grammatical tense from the preterite of the time when Arthur 'tint cort'. This distances the narrator from the era of orality that he has created around the court of King Arthur. The *Beowulf* narrator is constantly identifiable with a speaker who is part of the staging of an oral culture. The *scops* of the story speak like the narrator, and it is possible to place the narrator in a similar (imagined)

setting. The narrator of *Yvain* is not disguised as a narrator from the valorized culture he describes. Though he makes occasional use of 'oral' formulas like the use of the verb 'oir', the models with which he could be compared in the text are knights, not storytellers, and the reader is left, as we shall see, with the impression that the disguise is operating in reverse: narrating characters within the text attempt to model themselves on their author.

Indeed, this is a distinction which runs right through Chrétien's oeuvre, usually more explicitly stating the textuality of the works. In all the other romances, Chrétien is mentioned by name in a prologue to the romance. This is an inherently literate technique, since it confiscates the power of narrative from the speaking presence in the text and returns it to an actual author. In so doing, it implies a spatial and temporal divide bridged by writing: Chrétien is not present to the reader, and yet it is, nevertheless, 'Chrestiens [qui] comence son conte' ['Chrétien begins his tale'] (*Cligés*, 45), or 'comance Crestïens son livre' ['Chrétien begins his book] (*Lancelot*, 25), or, in an extended metaphor, 'Chretiiens seme et fet semance D'un romance' ['Chrétien sows and casts the seeds of romance'] (*Perceval*, 7-8) that we are about to read. There is no staging, no illusion of an oral origin for the narrative maintained up to the level of the main narrator, as there is in *Beowulf*. We are consequently more aware of our immediate surroundings: we are reminded that we are reading a book, or hearing one read.

Chrétien is named in *Yvain*, but in the closing lines:

> Del Chevalier au Lion fine
> Chrestiens son romanz einsi;
> Qu'onques plus conter n'an oï,
> Ne ja plus n'an orroiz conter,
> S'an n'i viaut mançonge ajoster.
>
> [Chretien's romance of
> The Knight of the Lion ends thus;
> None shall hear tell of any more about it,
> I have not heard tell of any more,

Unless someone adds lies to it]
(6814-18).

This closes *Yvain* using the same narrative structure which opened the other romances, emphasising the bookishness of the work. By delaying this technique, its effect is consequently reduced: leaving it to the end means that the entire work can be read without this explicit written textuality being fully apprehended. The main narrator whose voice opens the poem plunges into the story without a preamble referencing the textuality of the work.[49] The absence of a true prologue means that the separation between the oral construct of Arthur's court and the literate reality of the romance on the page is more subtle. The separation which takes place in the opening of *Yvain* is thus not quite that of Chrétien's other romances. The orality of the world of King Arthur is stated, and the romance that we are reading is distanced from it. But Chrétien stops short, until the end of the poem, of offering as a reason for this distance the obvious material textuality of the work. It is necessary, because of the lengthy oral account which follows, that a partial illusion of oral witness testimony from within the text is maintained, even if the audience of that testimony is not the reader of the text.

In separating himself from the oral court of King Arthur, the narrator is also separating his readers from that culture. In addition to the descriptions of the location, which may differ to an unknowable degree from the location of the reader and thus distance them in one way, the audience of any oral narrative within the text also differs: they are the knights and ladies of

[49] Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'On the Prologue of Chrétien's *Yvain*: Opening Functions of Keu's Quarrels', *PQ* 64 (1985), 391-8, does not consider the prologue to be absent from *Yvain*. The only matter of dispute for her is how long it lasts, whether it is 'contained within the first 41 verses' (391) or whether it 'extends all the way to the end of Calogrenant's tale [at line 582]' (392). Barbara N. Sargent-Baur considers the absence of a prologue in *Yvain* to indicate a stronger connection between *Yvain* and *Lacelot* than is usually thought. Since *Yvain* can be said to fill narrative lacunae in the *Lancelot* story, by accounting for the absence of Arthur and Gawain at certain key points in *Lancelot*, and by including a reference to the kidnapping of the queen, the prologue to *Lancelot* effectively serves for both poems. She does not, however, claim that the poems were once joined, but that they were designed 'sequentially, to be read aloud in instalments' (386), in The Missing Prologue of Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion*', *French Studies* 41 (1987), 385-94.

Arthur's court. The characters in *Beowulf* hear the accounts of the characters too: knowledge is transferred within the story, but because no attempt is made by the author – via his narrator – to separate the reading audience outside the text from the listening audience inside it, the knowledge is transferred also to the reader, in the same way, and with the same implied content.

In *Yvain*, however, this process which we have seen elsewhere is not the only means by which we experience oral knowledge transmission. The use of stories heard inside and outside a text is a comparatively pedestrian means of presenting the oral transmission, and one which does not trenchantly examine or criticize it as an epistemological structure. *Yvain* is a poem, however, which tends towards narrative scepticism, a stance which depends upon the criticism of accounts, and an undermining of their reliability. This is opposite to the emphasis on verification seen in *Beowulf*, for example. The way Chrétien deals with knowledge transmission elsewhere in the work provides an insight into this scepticism.

Reader Response and Character Response in *Yvain*

Chrétien exercises his scepticism by engineering a difference between the response of the characters within the poem and the response of the reader of *Yvain*. This amounts to an exploitation of two modes of knowledge transmission – the immediacy of the oral transmission between characters, and the delayed transmission to the reader, allowing for critical analysis. The oral world that Chrétien presents is peopled by storytellers; this is an assertion made in the opening lines of the poem. The first real story that we encounter in the work is told not by the main narrator, but by one of Arthur's knights, Calogrenant. He is surrounded by a group of knights to whom he tells begins to tell his tale, and he is then interrupted by the queen, who

insists that he continue. Although more than thirty lines elapse following the queen's insistence before he actually starts his story, Calogrenant has taken over the process of narration. Chrétien's main narrator is a barely perceived frame. Like the 'oral' narrator of *Beowulf*, Calogrenant uses stock formulae, presumably typical of a storyteller:

> ore antandez!
> ...
> Cuer et oroilles me randez!
> ...
> Cuer et oroilles me doit randre;
> Car ne vuel pas parler de songe
> Ne de fable ne de mançonge,
> Don maint autre vos ont servi.
>
> [listen now!
> ...
> Lend me your hearts and your ears!
> ...
> Lend me your hearts and your ears,
> For I do not wish to speak of a dream,
> Or a fable or a lie
> Which many others have served you].
> (149-73)

In *Beowulf*, the shared use of oral formulae by the characters serves to elide the distinction between the main narrator and internal characters. Here, by their difference from the techniques of the main narrator, the formulae demarcate Calogrenant's narrative, and characterize his voice.

The response to Calogrenant's story is bifurcated between the response of the immediate, oral audience, and that of the reader, whose response is distant and not associated with the oral nature of the account. Readers experience the words of the knight separately from the audience within the poem, in addition to reading of the response of the characters within

the poem.[50] Our response is not like the way we respond to character narratives *Beowulf*, where – with the exception of the Breca Episode – we believe what we hear from the characters, and the author goes to considerable lengths to ensure that we do.[51] By contrast, the affective power of the characters in *Yvain* is resisted by a critical reading. Meanwhile, the characters who hear Calogrenant's story are swayed by what they hear, and their actions in the story are conditioned by the way in which they respond to the tales they are told.

By engineering a distance between the reader and the characters – by emphasizing, in effect, the distance of the reader from the narrative – Chrétien demonstrates the power of oral knowledge transmission. As readers, distinct from Calogrenant's audience, we are not part of this connection between oral narrator and listener. Orality requires proximity, and it is context-dependent, but it has strong returns: the oral narratives in *Yvain* have the power to compel action. Calogrenant's delivery of his story is more consequential than the narratives of the *scops*, or even the accounts of Beowulf himself.[52] Calogrenant's story is a confessional narrative.[53] The necessarily shared nature of a confession means that it is heavily dependent upon context, and when delivered orally, this context is highly variable. Calogrenant experiences great shame as a consequence of having spoken his confession in front of such renowned knights, and even reprimands himself for having done so:

'Si vos ai conté come fos

[50] Roberta L. Krueger, 'Reading the *Yvain/Charette*: Chrétien's Inscribed Audiences at Nouaz and Pesme Aventure', FMLS 19 (1983), 172-87, refers to the audience at the court of Arthur as one of the 'inscribed audiences' of Yvain.
[51] The relationship between the internal and external audience's response to dialogue is discussed in chapter 3.
[52] The extent to which this is true can be discerned from the criticism of *Beowulf*. A number of the character narratives in *Beowulf* are widely referred to as 'digressions'. Character narratives in *Yvain* are definitely not.
[53] Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, i, trans. Robert Hurley, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), discusses confession, dichotomising those narratives which are 'a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or marvellous narration of 'trials' of bravery or sainthood' with those which are 'ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the very depths of onesself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of confession holds out like a shimmering mirage' (59). He declares that in Western civilisation, confession is the 'most highly valued techniques for producing truth' (58).

Ce qu'onques mes conter ne vos'.

['Now I have told you like a fool
That which previously I never wished to tell']
(579-80).

The story elicits a further speech act from Yvain, who promises,

'Se je puis et il me loist,
J'irai vostre honte vangier'

['If I may and it is allowed,
I will go to avenge your shame']
(588-9).

Yvain subsequently sets out secretly, ostensibly to avenge his kinsman; the future path of the narrative is set by the circumstances in which Calogrenant chooses to tell his tale. In fact, Yvain seeks to do no such thing, rather hoping to advance his own reputation; this is one of many instances in which intention and outcome, or the internal understanding of an action, and the critical reader's understanding, are seen to differ.

Calogrenant's story, were it told in the third person by an external narrator, would serve perfectly well as a romance in its own right. But if this were the case, there would be no framework for the avenging of the shame by Yvain. It is a narrative necessity that the story is told by Calogrenant, orally, to assembled knights, in order to provoke the response it does. The course of the story is determined by the fact that it provokes activity.[54] However, Chrétien stages two dramas in the early part of the poem, allowing the Calogrenant episode to serve a

[54] Compare this with, say, Beowulf's account of his own adventure. It could be argued that the internal consequence of his story was the giving of rewards. But the rewards Beowulf is given are compensation for his heroism, not for the telling of his story. Yvain, by contrast, is avenging Calogrenant's shame (or so he says), which is a direct consequence of his having told the story, not of having been a participant in the events. The causal relationship between the various narrative elements of *Yvain* are explored at length by Zara P. Zaddy in a chapter entitled 'The Structure of *Yvain*' in her book *Chretien Studies: Problems of Form and Meaning in Erec, Yvain, Cliges and the Charette* (Glasgow: UGP, 1973), 87-106.

dual function, both as an adventure story, in which Calogrenant is assailed beside a magical fountain, to return shamed by his failure in battle; and as the story of the expression of that shame, a story about an oral speech act and its internal consequences, contrasted with its external interpretation. The details of the adventure and the details of Calogrenant's testimony are of equal importance. And just as it was a dramatic necessity that Calogrenant told his own story for the internal consequences to occur, it is equally necessary that the account comes to us indirectly, in a literate way. Our critical interest in the testimony is only possible with the backdrop of a main narrator who focuses upon the process of storytelling. As a consequence, we are able to appraise the source of that narrative within the framework of Chrétien's perception of Arthur's court.

The literate, critical response of the reader is to the text as a whole, examining the *process* of oral transmission as well as its content, as well as its consequences more widely. It depends on the time that the reading process enables, and the possibility to re-read afforded by the literate context of such a work. Additionally, *Yvain* is a very self-conscious romance, which commentates on the nature of the genre at the same time as undeniably being a part of it. It seems that this introspection even permeates to the level of the participants within the work. Calogrenant's showy oral formulae are an artefact of storytelling which does not belong in ordinary conversation. What is more, Calogrenant's entire adventure seems to begin with the idea in his mind of seeking a formulaic adventure, whose structure could only have been derived from the literary genre of the romance:[55]

> 'Il avint, pres a de set anz,
> Que je seus come païssanz

[55] Paul Vincent Rockwell, 'Writing the Fountain: the Specificity of Resemblance in Arthurian Romance', *BBIAS* 42 (1990), 267-82, observes that 'Calogrenant searches as if he were in some way familiar with the generic *avanture* before encountering specific examples of it' (268).

Aloie querant avantures,
Armez de totes armeüres
Si come chevaliers doit estre'.

['It happened, almost seven years ago,
That I was, like a peasant,
Riding along seeking adventures,
Armed in full armour,
As a knight should be']
(175-9).

There is an element of 'self-fashioning' in Calogrenant's persona. His manner seems flamboyant and excessive, a pastiche of courtesy rather than an unselfconscious demeanour. This is noted by Kay at the moment when Calogrenant alone leaps to his feet having noticed Guinevere approaching:[56]

'Certes, mout m'est bel, que vos
Estes li plus cortois de nos;
Et bien sai, que vos le cuidiez,
Tant estes vos de san vuidiez'.

['Certainly, I am delighted that you
Are the most courteous of us,
And it is obvious that you think so,
So empty of sense you are']
(73-6).

Calogrenant is undaunted by this brusque reprimand, and proceeds verbosely to resist the insistence of the gathering that he proceed with his story, on the grounds that the shame is too great:

'Certes, dame! Ce m'est mout grief,
Que vos me comandez a feire;

[56] K. S. Whetter, 'Reassessing Kay and the Romance Seneschal', *BBIAS* 51 (1999), 343-63, regards Kay's surliness as an attempt to provoke his fellow knights into acts of genuine chivalry, and to wake them from the indolence and mock courtesy into which they have sunk. If this were so, then it would be a further instance of internal romance self-consciousness.

Ainz me leissassse un des iauz treire,
Se correcier ne vos dotasse,
Que hui mes nule rien contasse;
Mes je ferai ce qu'il vos siet,
Comant que il onques me griet'.

['Indeed, my lady! To me it is grievous
To do that which you command;
Were it not for fear of your anger,
I would sooner let one of my eyes be put out,
Than tell them another thing today,
But I will do what pleases you,
Though it causes me pain]
(142-8).

Even with the excuse of shame, this seems gushing, especially since we know that he had 'comancié un conte' ['begun a tale'] (59) before the queen approached.[57] In front of the queen, Calogrenant's theatre is intensified: the chivalrous ideal of competing for the sake of a lady who will not return his devotion is suddenly added to the drama.

Far from being a straightforward story of an adventure at Arthur's court, the reader experiences a representation of a world in which the drama of a romance is played out, simultaneously with the self-aware examination and self-conscious adoption of the culture which defines it. In the rest of the poem, during the details of Yvain's exploits by the main narrator, this paradox persists. In the castle of *Pesme Aventure*, Yvain enters an orchard where he finds a family group:

Apoiié voit dessor son cote
Un prodome, qui se gisoit
Sor un drap de soie, et lisoit
Une pucele devant lui
An un romanz, ne sai de cui.

[57] Peter S. Noble notes that 'The description of the giant herdsman (288-326) is one of the very rare descriptions in the poem and fairly clearly a parody of the description of the *cortois* heroine', in 'Irony in *Le Chevalier au Lion*', *BBIAS* 30 (1978), 196-208 at 200. Since Calogrenant does not observe the same conventions when describing an *actual* maiden, Noble's remark should be regarded critically.

Et por le romanz escouter
S'i estoit venue acoter
Une dame, et c'estoit sa mere,
Et li prodon estoit ses pere.

[He saw there, reclining, propped on his elbow
A worthy man who lay
on a silk cloth, and
A maiden reading to him from
A romance, (I do not know by whom),[58]
And to listen to the romance
There was also there beside her
A woman, and that was her mother,
And the worthy man was her father]

(5362-70).

Critical views of this passage are variations on David Matthew's opinion that it is 'a rather arch self-reference'.[59] But it is a less salient moment than this view assumes. The scene with the book is an instance of Chrétien's persistent programme of undermining the world he has created. It is both the world upon which the genre of the romance is based, and also a world in which the genre of the romance is prevalent: the 'romanz' that the girl is reading is, we presume, a fiction. The inescapable consequence is to remind the reader of their present activity: a moment of context-consciousness at the level of the literate activity of the reader.

The magic fountain which is at the centre of the action in the first half of the poem is itself a sly strategy within the same programme. Wace tells us of how he investigated the truth of a story he has heard about an enchanted fountain in the forest of Broceliande, and berates himself for ever having expected it to be real:

[58] This could also be translated 'about what I do not know'.
[59] Matthews, 'Reading the Woman Reading': 'As the text is a *romanz*, the book functions as a rather arch self-reference on Chrétien's part, who draws attention through it to the nascent genre in which he himself is working... The depiction of the reading act is a generically self-conscious moment; when the romance frames with itself a romance, the frames and borders of romance become visible' (118).

[en] Brecheliant
donc Breton vont sovent fablant...
la fontaine de Berenton
sort d'une part lez le perron;
aler i solent veneor
a Berenton par grant chalor,
e a lor cors l'eve espuisier
e le perron desus moillier;
por ço soleient pluie aveir.
...
La alai jo merveilles querre,
vi la forest e vi la terre,
merveilles quis, mes nes trovai,
fol m'en revinc, fol i alai;
fol i alai, fol m'en revinc
folie quis, por fol me tinc.

[[in] Brocéliande,
about which the Bretons often tell stories...
the fountain of Barenton
emerges beside the stone slab.
Hunters used to come
to Barenton during the great heat
and scoop out water with their horns and
moisten the top of the stone; in that way
they used to get rain.
...
I went there in search of marvels;
I saw the forest and saw the land
and looked for marvels but found none.
I came back as a fool and went as a fool.
I went as a fool and came back as a fool.
I sought foolishness and considered myself
a fool]
(6373-98).

Chrétien even seems to echo the words of Wace's narrator in Calogrenant's humiliated self-berating, 'Einsi alai, einsi reving, Au reveneir por fol me ting' ['I went thus, and returned thus; upon returning I thought myself a fool'] (577-8). But in Chrétien's poem, the fountain is a 'fact' established as firmly as the existence of Arthur himself – whatever else about Calogrenant's account the reader may doubt, other characters do see the fountain, and the action of the poem

does take place there on a number of occasions. The intertextual reference in Chrétien's poem draws attention to the presence of a surrounding textual, literate tradition outside of the poem: it makes us notice that we are reading. Furthermore, we can not ignore the fact that whatever the Bretons say, the fountain exists only on the pages of books. We are reminded of Gaimar's explicit and confessed dependence on written sources in this moment of literate allusion. Furthermore, Chrétien makes a reference to a text which empirically disproves his own story, and this challenges to the readers to doubt everything that they read, to be more critical, literate observers, and less like the oral receivers within the work.

As a result of these strategies, the fictionality of the work is a constant presence, along with the necessary corollary of its artificer. The reader is unable to suspend their consciousness of this uncomfortable fact because Chrétien never allows it to lie dormant for long. This systematic undermining of the narrative begins early in the work. It establishes from the outset an implicit difference of interests between the narrator and the reader, one which continually focuses attention on the external figure of the author. Chrétien's introduction to the romance, by defining itself sharply against the culture it describes, invites the reader to compare his panegyric to the lost days of the Arthurian heyday with the story which follows, supposedly set in this same era and yet one which seems to conflict with the author's previously stated opinions.[60]

[60] These features of the poem's narrative structure are usually treated as instances of Chrétien's irony. For example, Noble, 'Irony', says 'anyone who could read the romance for him or herself would be able to compare the stated intention with the actual behaviour of the characters concerned and would surely wonder whether the whole prologue was not to be seen as ironical' (198). Robert Hanning, 'Love and Power in Twelfth Century Literature with Special Reference to Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France', in Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector, (eds.), *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex and Marriage in the Medieval World* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 87-103, observes that 'the overall intent and outlook of *Yvain* are by no means clear to me – its male and female protagonists have many problematic aspects, and Chrétien frequently submits them to considerable irony' (90).

Calogrenant's theatrical courtesy must be seen in the context of the main narrator's introduction to the romance. For although the description of the culture of Arthur's court seems sincere enough, Chrétien's undermining of the conventions of romance, and indeed the process of narration itself, means that the reader is alerted to the disparity between what is told by the narrator, and what is shown by the narrative. Despite assuming the role of narrator, Calogrenant remains a character within the story. His story is not duplicated by the main narrator, and so his words do not carry the authority that such an endorsement would grant. Whilst we listen to the narrator of *Beowulf* in earnest, and are persuaded, gradually, by numerous strategies of authentication and justification to believe what he tells us, we read what Calogrenant tells the assembled knights and interpret it critically. Chrétien's bifurcated narrative strategy is established to inspire doubt, rather than faith, in what the reader is told. It dissuades us from accepting the word of any of the characters, and leads us to expect irony from the main narrator.

Chrétien's invitation to doubt, inspired by the narrative structure, is supported in the content of the story. Calogrenant, it has been observed,[61] is established early in the story as a character, who, if not straightforwardly lying, is certainly shaping the appearance of events in his favour. The storm which assails him at the fountain in the forest of Broceliande is, of course, spectacularly ferocious:

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[61] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1946; Princeton: PUP, 2003), talks about 'the relation of the courtly ideal to reality' in Calogrenant's narrative (139). More recently, Evelyn Mullally has argued that the purpose of Chrétien's narratorial 'disappearance' during the Calogrenant narrative is to inspire the critical faculties of the reader, in *The Artist at Work: Narrative Technique in Chrétien de Troyes* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1998): 'It is impossible to reconcile what Chrétien tells us with what he shows us... the prologue of [Calogrenant's] tale is a string of contradictions' (210). Karl Uitti demonstrates the ways in which Chrétien sets up his character for a fall, undermining his narrative before it has begun, in 'Narrative and Commentary: Chrétien's Devious Narrator in *Yvain*', *Romance Philology* 33 (1979), 160-7. A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), discusses Chrétien's narrative strategy in *Yvain* more generally, illustrating the undermining effects of the 'narrative gaze', in which the events recorded appear to derive not from the main narrator but from individual characters.

'Tant fu li tans pesmes et forz,
Que çant foiz cuidai estre morz
Des foudres, qu'antor moi cheoint,
Et des arbres, qui depeçoient'.

['So dire and forceful was the storm
that a hundred times I feared that I would be killed
by the lighting that struck around me
And by the trees that were split']
(445-8).

He is rescued not by the natural process of the storm subsiding, but by what he claims is divine influence: 'quant De ne plot, vanter n'oserat' ['they dare not blow against God's will'] (453-4). The disadvantages which led to his subsequent failure against the knight, he tells his listeners, were not within his control:

'Li chevaliers ot cheval buen
Et lance roide, et fu sanz dote
Plus granz de me la teste tote'.

['The knight had a good horse
And a stiff lance, and was, without doubt,
Taller than me by a full head']
(520-3).

And following his defeat,

'Li chevalier siure n'osai,
Que folie feire dotasse;
...
A la fin volantez me vint,
Qu'a mon oste covant tandroie
Et que par lui m'an revandroie.

['I dared not follow the knight,
For fear of doing something crazy;
...
In the end I made the decision
that I would keep my promise to my host

And that I would return to him']
(550-6).

It is not cowardice, then, that keeps Calogrenant from inflicting a defeat on the knight. Rather, it is restraint and a courteous concern for his chivalrous vow. His motives were entirely chivalrous; the defeat was not his fault; he is the model of knighthood evoked in Chrétien's introduction.

Or so he says. Without the dialectic effect of an Unferth,[62] or the presence of a corroborating witness or authoritative main narrator, we have only Calogrenant's own, deeply personal, unique epistemology of events, followed by his own unsupported narrative redaction of them. It is totally undermined by the fundamental limitations of oral knowledge transmission: that it is a narrative of unique experience, and that it is dependent upon its speaker alone for verification. As a narrator, Calogrenant is thus structurally threatened from the outset; his account is ironized by the nature of its presentation. Likewise, Yvain, while apparently well-meaning, has no genuine interest in avenging his cousin, seems pathologically incapable of keeping his promise to Laudine, and spends the latter part of the poem atoning for this failure. Lunete, equally well-meaning, uses the power of speech to entrap her mistress into first marrying, and later forgiving Yvain. This is a poem which constantly apposes the contradiction between spoken utterance, and actual event.[63]

[62] A connection has been made between the role of Kay and the role of Unferth in Sayers, 'Cei, Unferth'.
[63] Lee Patterson argues the opposite of *Yvain*: 'It is... ethical verification that Chrétien's romance [*Yvain*] seeks to define: words, whether they be narratives or oaths, fables or personal accounts, are true not because they correspond to the historical world but because they impose an imperative upon the man who speaks. Language is made true, in short, by the ethos of chivalry', in *Negotiating the Past* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 208-9.

Conclusion: Inspiring Trust and Inspiring Scepticism

Chrétien separates his narrator from his subject, thus enabling the dramatization of orality, alongside literate reading. The *Beowulf* poet, meanwhile, rejects the literate context of the work, and chooses instead to couch it within the oral culture which it describes. In *Beowulf*, it is essential for the continuation of the story that character narrators are assessed and in general found to be speaking the truth: essential because in this, they support the narrating activity of the main narrator of the work. In contrast to the *Beowulf* poet, and to Gaimar, whose adherence to trust in his literate sources is just as strong, Chrétien seems rather to own and embrace the work's literacy, whilst maintaining distance between the narrating presences internal to the text, and the material facture of the work. His poem systematically challenges the claims of all its narrators by presenting a narrative which constantly seems to contradict their stance and assertions. As a result, *Yvain* defies narrative justification and narrative verification – the very functions which the character narratives in *Beowulf* seem designed to provide.

The authors of both *Beowulf* and *Yvain* have started from a similar premise. Both evoke a world which exists predominantly in a state of apparently primal orality; they both have a main narrator who is sidelined for internal character narratives; character narratives in both poems transmit knowledge of unique epistemology to the characters within the story. But in the choice and application of techniques, Chrétien chooses to foreground this process of narration in a way which the *Beowulf* poet does not. *Beowulf* leaves us trusting narration, and *Yvain* drives us constantly to doubt what we are told. *Beowulf* dramatizes the actions of the hero first and foremost, and author only as conduit, effaced as far as possible, or made a part of what is narrated: the narrator, after all, is represented as a *scop*. *Yvain* dramatizes the notion of trust,

and, above all, the artistry of the author. This is a feature of the literature of the twelfth century which we will see repeatedly throughout this thesis: a promoting of the process of narration, and a revaluing of epistemological processes, but frequently carried out using techniques which were already ubiquitous in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons.

2

The Miraculous Dimension: Narrating Unique Experience

This chapter is about persuading audiences to believe a story, or to trust a narrator. Exactly how much we are supposed to believe the texts we have so far examined is not knowable, but nor is it significant in the strictest terms; it is possible to experience the significance of the story of *Beowulf* whether or not the text is deemed to be a fiction. This is not true of all narratives. The religious stories in this chapter are all of a type which demand faith. They must persuade the reader that they have real truths to impart, or they fall short of their manifest role in the culture of the middle ages: namely to inspire and strengthen faith. The route to this persuasion is arguing for the intervention of celestial forces.

In the narrative of a dream or vision, the only witness is almost always the dreamer or visionary. There is consequently only one piece of testimony upon which to base an account, and this testimony is therefore unverifiable by recourse to other witnesses. Narratives of dreams and visions can therefore be said to have 'unique epistemology': there is one route to knowledge of a dream, and one person who can be said to have that knowledge. No matter what the content, they carry with them inherent structural problems which undermine belief and trust in their narrator. These problems are compounded by the fact that the material of the visions is not necessarily orthodox in a religious sense: even within the miraculous parameters of divine experience, visions are frequently aberrant.[1] Nevertheless, these immanently incredible

[1] Barbara Newman, 'What did it Mean to say "I Saw"?: The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture', *Speculum* 80 (2005), 1-43, supports this, observing 'The medieval view [of the vision] rests on a strongly supernaturalist account of "I saw" – not "I dreamed", "I imagined", or "I visualized", but "there appeared to me". Implicitly, at least, this all-or-nothing approach contradicts the

narratives are made to be believed, and belief in them is a purposeful institution designed to lead to greater faith. Authors developed a small number of techniques which are used throughout the middle ages, and exploited them in diverse ways in order to verify or argue for the accounts in their narratives.

Explicit Research and Verification in Bede's Account of Fursey

In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede goes to considerable lengths to ensure the inclusion of both literate and oral testimony. This is demonstrated by his stated preoccupation with the rigour of his research, both in his preface and in individual episodes of the history. It is also explicit that his purpose in this programme of rigorous research is one of justification – accounting for the provenance of the accounts – and verification, by which they are demonstrated to be reliably true.

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is a record not just of the spiritual epiphany of the English people as a whole, but also of the individual lives and experiences which led to the conversion. Indeed, it is the progression of these individual lives which lends the historical narrative its didactic force: lives serve as lessons and examples for the readers of the work as well as contributing to the narrative. Since the scope of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is very large, and the source of his information is not uniform, part of his narrative strategy for the justification and verification of these narratives is a thorough description of his research. So before moving to Bede's account of Fursey, it is worth examining his remarks in the prologue to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, where he takes great

devotional and contemplative manuals that taught the way to visionary experience. Yet for a number of reasons it carried general conviction' (4-5).

pains to ensure that his readers understand the research practices by which his history was composed:[2]

> Vt autem in his, quae scripsi, uel tibi, uel ceteris auditoribus siue lectoribus huius historiae occasionem dubitandi subtraham, quibus haec maxime auctoribus didicerim, breuiter intimare curabo.
>
> Auctor ante omnes... Albinus abba reuerentissimus, uir per omnia doctissimus, extitit; uel monimentis litterarum uel seniorum traditione cognouerat, et ea mihi de his quae memoria digna uidebantur... siue litteris mandata... uiua uoce referenda, transmisit
>
> [In order to avoid any doubts in the mind of yourself, or of any who may listen to or read this history, as to the accuracy of what I have written, allow me briefly to state the authorities upon whom I chiefly depend.
>
> My principal authority... has been the most revered abbot Albinus, a man of universal learning...He carefully ascertained from written records or from the traditions of old men, and transmitted to me whatever seemed worth remembering, either in writing or by word of mouth] (2).[3]

Bede goes on to explain that much of the research on Pope Gregory, to whose life a large section of the work is devoted, was conducted in the archives of the Vatican Library by another, Nothelm, 'sive literis mandata sive ipsius Nothelmi viva voce referenda, transmisit' ['to be transmitted either in writing, or by mouth and the relation

2 Danuta R. Shanzer considers the style to indicated author's historical ambitions as well as the content, and suggests that Rufinus and Orosius were possibly the historians whose style most influenced the style of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in 'Bede's Style: a Neglected Historiographical Model for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*?' in Charles D. Hall et al., (eds.), *Source of Wisdom* (Toronto: UTP, 2007), 329-52. Meanwhile, Henry Mayr-Harting maintains that Bede's style is predominantly patristic, and that his seemingly modern research practices were a consequence of his lack of connection with the world and its culture immediately outside his own monastery: 'Bede's real world, I persist in thinking, was the world of books', 'Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian', in *Religion and Society in the Medieval West, 600-1200* (Farnham: Ashgate-Variorum, 2010), 367-74 at 370.

3 The edition used here is *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). The translation is derived from the facing translation in the same volume.

of the said Nothelm'] (Preface, 4). Bede then gives an account of his own gathering of information:

> Ex priorum maxime scriptis hinc inde collectis ea quae promeremus didicimus... Porro in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum, quae fuerint gesta ecclesiastica partim ex scriptis uel traditione priorum, partim reuerentissimi abbatis Esi relatione conperimus... Non uno quolibet auctore sed fideli innumerorum testium, qui haec scire uel meminisse poterant, adsertione cognoui, exceptis his, quae per me ipsum nosse poteram... Quod uera lex historiae est, simpliciter ea quae fama uulgante collegimus, ad instructionem posteritatis litteris mandare studuimus.
>
> [I have drawn extensively on the works of earlier writers gathered from various sources... I have traced the progress of the Church in the province of the East Angles, partly from writings or old traditions, and partly from the account given by the most revered abbot Esi... I am not dependent on any one author, but on countless faithful witnesses who either know or remember the facts, apart from what I know myself... As the true law of history requires, I have simply sought to commit to writing whatever I could ascertain from common report for the instruction of posterity]
>
> (4-6).

This is a description of research practices which seem strikingly modern in their rigour. The range of sources includes both oral accounts and documentary evidence, ranging widely across Europe and taking account of epistolary evidence, monastic records and anecdote. The detail of the passage, which lasts for several paragraphs, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the integrity of the sources used, and the integrity with which they were assembled by the author. Appearing in the preface, this sets a scholarly tone. Bede's programme of research is balanced across a range of different sources, both oral and written, that ought to offset the potential inaccuracies of any single part of his material – to the extent, in fact, that the author must be blameless for them:

> Lectoremque suppliciter obsecro, ut siqua in his quae scripsimus aliter quam se veritas habet posita repererit, non hoc nobis inputet.
>
> [And I humbly beseech the reader, that if he shall find anything set down otherwise than truth in this that I have written, he will not impute it unto us]
>
> (6).

Indeed, Bede's approach to oral and written sources corresponds to the current understanding of the manner of record-keeping in the Anglo-Saxon period: written records in combination with literate methods, with particular privilege granted to neither, and with each providing support for the other. Michael Clanchy records the example of 'The Ely Farming Memoranda', a series of eighth-century Anglo-Saxon documents detailing stock prices, sales and inventories, recently discovered serving as quire guards and paste-downs in later medieval manuscripts. Owing to the lack of universal literacy across farm workers at the time, these would have existed as a supplement rather than a necessary document.[4] And Bede himself records in Book II of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* how the law was recorded in writing as early as the time of Pope Gregory.[5] Yet legal processes also required oral witnesses and testimony. It seems likely that the idea of combining oral and written sources was considered normal, and furthermore that neither was considered to be more reliable.

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[4] Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (3rd edn.; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 32.

[5] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Discussing the reign of Æthelberht, Bede tells us 'Qui inter cetera bona quae genti suae consulendo conferebat, etiam decreta illi iudiciorum iuxta exempla Romanorum cum consilio sapientium constituit; quae conscripta Anglorum sermone hactenus habentur et obseruantur ab ea' ['Among other benefits which he conferred upon the race under his care, he established with the advice of his counsellors a code of laws after the Roman manner; these are written in English and are still kept and observed by the people'] (150).

The work which follows the preface, as a consequence, is already supported by the process by which it was composed. Although no actual evidence has yet been supplied, the impression of thoroughness in documentary research, and particularly of the reputation of the people called upon as oral sources, implicitly lends credence to the narrator. He mentions six priests and abbots from whom he has received accounts, as well as the brothers of Lastingham Monastery. Their high ecclesiastical standing places them beyond suspicion. Whilst almost everything which follows freely admits to being a redaction, the heavy emphasis on research has diverted the burden of proof from the narrator to the original source. The preface provides support for an account by supporting the provenance of the account.

In the preface, then, there are three sources of narrative justification: direct oral transmission of accounts, second-hand transmission by word of mouth (such as the 'viva voce' account of Nothelm), and documentary evidence, which may be received at first or second hand, but which counts as literate transmission when it comes directly to Bede, since in this condition, it does not rely on intermediate transmission. The preface also outlines two simple systems of verification. The first is diversity of sources, by which testimony to an account can be strengthened by recourse to multiple witnesses. Although Bede does not directly suggest that multiple witnesses are used for any of his accounts at this stage, it later emerges that confirmatory accounts are used to strengthen the verification for some of the stories in his work – bystanders supporting the testimony of an experience, or an oral account in support of a written one. Secondly, status is used as a verifying technique. There is no logical strength in this technique, but it nevertheless carries weight for the faithful. The presumption is that men of God do not lie, and further, that higher men of God are less likely to be

mistaken. These are the techniques which are used throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in a variety of combinations, but which always place the burden of proof on the source, rather than the narrator himself.

Bede's apparently unimpeachable process of research – his adherence to what he calls the 'uera lex historiae' ['true law of history'][6] – refers to the *Historia Ecclesiatica* at large. Much of the work simply collates narratives which are already a matter of record. The coming of the Saxons, and indeed the conversion itself, on a large enough scale, is a fact which is plain and well enough attested that it does not require explicit local reference to provenance, or particular verification. But due to the extremity of the phenomenology of otherworld visions, and because of their usually unique epistemology, accounts like the vision of Fursey prove more problematic than the prosaic succession of kings and battles. In otherworldly cases, Bede is not content to rely on his general prefatory remarks on provenance. Otherworldly visions he delivers with their own citations. The purpose is to mitigate the problems of doubt, distrust of the unorthodox, and inherent weakness of an unsupported account, all of which are inherent consequences of the uniqueness of dream vision epistemology. Providing justification and verification offers a sort of epistemological palliative, more directly transferring the responsibility for the narrative away from the narrator and toward the source.

The simplest such citation is the reference to the *auctor*: this is a claim for a literate, documentary source for the narrative. Bede tells us that his version of the

[6] Roger Ray, 'Bede's Vera Lex Historiae', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 1-21, discusses the implications of this phrase and connects Bede's historical practice with theoretical ideas of historiography surviving from classical and late antique scholars. However, Bede's own description of his practices is so explicit as to render any connection with an analogue slightly superfluous. There is no doubt that in using the phrase, although it may be a conventional one, Bede is primarily referring to the immediately preceding passage detailing the provenance of his work.

Fursey story is premised on a 'libellus de uita eius' ['book about his life'] (270), to which Bede draws the attention of his readers three times during this comparatively short account. This method is clearly important for Bede because of the historical nature of his work, adding to the emphasis already placed on research and provenance in the preface. But it serves an additional purpose here. It is not only a disavowal of responsibility: it also appears to be an act of modesty, implying that although Bede is merely a humble gatherer of anecdotal information, and his narrator by itself may therefore be unreliable in an account of this type, this account *is* reliable because it has been used elsewhere by a (presumably) more elevated writer. This modest deferral places the burden of accuracy and proof onto his source, certainly, but it also magnifies that source. Bede has already shown his readers just how rigorous he has been, and we are bound to wonder how much more impressive must be a source that even Bede will trust. By mentioning the book, Bede improves the integrity of his own account, but his *auctor* has been mentioned twice before Bede makes any attempt to claim a strong provenance for the 'little book' which is his source. The argument of authority that is represented by the book from which he derived his source consequently appears to us as a verification completely separate from the more rigorous account of provenance which follows. Thus Bede's literate claim for verification and justification has a twofold impact.

Given his substantial stated interest in accountable research, it is unsurprising to find a thorough account of the provenance of the potentially incredible story of Fursey. Bede provides for his readers an account of the steps between the oral testimony of Fursey and the present literate account. This creates the illusion that Bede's text is in some way more oral than it is – as though it more closely resembles spoken testimony.

The implicit argument is that the various processes of redaction that must necessarily have occurred in the transmission of the text can be eliminated, leaving the reader with the actual testimony of Fursey. Since each step Bede mentions seems to be reliable individually, the disruption to the testimony, we reason, must be minimal.

> Superest adhuc frater quidam senior monasterii nostri, qui narrare solet dixisse sibi quendam multum ueracem ac religiosum hominem, quod ipsum Furseum uiderit in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum, illasque uisiones ex ipsius ore audierit.
>
> [There remains an old brother of our monastery who testifies that he once knew a truthful and devout man who had met Fursey in the province of the East Angles, and heard of these visions from his own mouth]
>
> (274).

This places the reader at the fourth degree of separation from Fursey himself, and Bede chooses to omit his own part in the transmission of the account at this stage, reducing the apparent separation to just three degrees: Bede's implication is that his narration is perfect, and that we read the account just as Bede heard it from the 'frater senior'. That is a very powerful thought. This technique – particularly the omission of Bede himself from the chain of provenance – strengthens our trust in our narrator. The misdirection from the present text toward the notion of the original account disguises Bede's part in the process, which, although not necessarily untrustworthy, would add another layer of potential corruption to the testimony.

In addition to being a justification of the narrative by recourse to the orality of the testimony, it is also an argument premised on status. As in his preface, Bede is dependent here on the religious character of the person providing the testimony. Brethren of Bede's monastery are trusted by Bede, and the old brothers more than the

young, we presume.[7] The one who told it to that brother was 'ueracem ac religiosum' ['truthful and devout'], and in any case, Fursey only tells his story to the very penitent – not to sinners and not to gossips. This kind of argument does not affect our view of the process of transmission. Instead, it strengthens our opinion of the local source of the narrative, asserting that the story is more likely to be true, rather than more likely to be transmitted accurately. Other than this status argument, all the techniques of justification and verification examined so far are ultimately arguments for the quality of the research, rather than for the reliability of the story in the first place. They supplement, but do not supersede the support already provided by the preface to the overall work. Even if we believe that the chain of provenance and the authority which Bede creates for his version of the story are as reliable as the narrator tells us, without any other evidence, we would ultimately be forced to take on trust the final step in the argument, that Fursey himself is trustworthy. We need something other than impeccable research to believe the integrity of the original account, and this needs to be more than the intuitive feel of reliability that comes with knowing the origin of an account, or even knowing that the originator of the account is trustworthy. Certainly, this assurance comes partly from faith; a faithful reader knows that Fursey is a holy man, and that holy men do not lie. But faith does not rule out lying entirely, or being mistaken – indeed, an aspect of spiritual insight is being able to separate the fallible visionary or the fictitious account from the genuinely divine. St. Augustine believed that although a religious vision could appear to anyone, the mixture of visio intellectualis and visio spiritualis found in ordained clergy was needed to recognise and

[7] Michael Clanchy observes that the old were often considered the last word in evidence: 'If the event were too far in the past... the oldest and wisest were asked what they could remember about it', in *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 295.

interpret such a dream, and so it is more likely that such a vision would go unnoticed in a layperson. These theories are outlined in his commentary, De Genesi ad Litteram.[8] There is also evidence that the number of visions with content considered to be divine or miraculous was actively restricted.[9] The These theoretical considerations aside, there were many practical reasons for disbelief in miraculous visions; Macrobius and Calcidius, along with Aristotle and the church fathers St. Augustine and Gregory the Great observe that seemingly holy visions could be merely insomnia brought on by stress or bad diet.[10] What is more, the scriptures themselves warn that Satan may appear to the faithful as an 'angel of light'.[11] Beyond verification, Bede therefore offers something that we could call evidence, or even proof.

Purgatorial Fire and Real Burns in the Account of Fursey

Bede's 'proof' – an extreme case of verification – comes in the form of tangible, material evidence which exists in parallel to the original account, and is ultimately part of an account at a later stage in the chain of provenance. The vision of Fursey is ordinarily

[8] Stephen Justice has discussed the problematics of this issue in his essay, 'Did the Middle Ages Believe in their Miracles?', *Representations* 103 (2008), 1-29. He formulates belief in miracles as 'a thing mobile and multiple: shifting, partial and unregularizable in its components, reliant upon hypothesis and metaphor, sustained by imaginative habits and improvisations, bracing itself against the mind's revanche, but also provoking it' (13). He postulates that 'the miracle stories and saints' lives suggest the possibility that a deeper scepticism, tacit and persuasive and so diffuse as to elude useful formulation or response, may have attached itself routinely to other and still larger matters like the reality of God' (21).
[9] The strenuous process of verification demonstrates 'a genuine effort to reduce the number of credible, proven miracles to a minimum', argues Michael Goodich in 'Reason or Revelation?: The Criteria for Proof and Credibility of Miracles in Canonization Processes', in Gabor Klaniczay, *Procés de Canonisation au Moyen Age* (Rome: Ecole Franċaise de Rome, 2004), 182-97 at 184. And R. W. Southern, *in Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, ii (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), asserts that 'nobody thought that it was sufficient to clarify doctrine, to organize the results in a systematic way, and then to leave these results to be accepted and given practical expression by the exercise of individual choice. Truth had to be authoritative in practice as well as in theory' (237).
[10] A. Peden, 'Macrobius and Medieval Dream Literature', Medium Ævum 54 (1985), 59-73 at 61.
[11] 2 Cor 11:14.

categorised as an 'Otherworld Vision', or an 'Otherworld Journey' because the content is not a symbolic representation of *post mortem* experience, or a miracle on Earth, but an actual presentation of a different world.[12] The centrepiece of the account has an epistemology unique to the visionary, which therefore demands an argument for the otherworld: no normal techniques of justification or verification offer any logical support for the narrative of Fursey's vision. Whilst the arguments about provenance and authority are potentially applicable to many types of account, the types of *evidence* which Bede offers in his Fursey account are especially powerful tools in otherworld visions of unique epistemology.

Fursey was a Celtic monk who fell into a catatonic sleep and was borne by an angel into the otherworld, where he saw something which was certainly a young concept in the theology of the time: a place in which souls are tormented, 'quasi... vallem tenebrosam subtus se in imo positam' ['as it were, a dark valley lying underneath him at the bottom'] (272). In the course of his dream, he sees many souls being tormented as he hovers above the scene with an angel, and the experience seems to be purely visual: he is the witness to various otherworlds without actually being present. The narrator describes the Purgatory as though it were an icon or other piece of static religious imagery, in which Fursey is merely an observer. All that is required of the

[12] Purgatory, in a modern recognizable form, may have its origins in the seventh century with early accounts of the vision of Fursey. The two earliest extant accounts of his adventures in Purgatory are an Anglo-Latin *Vita Fursei* and Bede's account of Fursey in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The argument that Purgatory originates in the story of Fursey is hard to entirely prove, but a convincing attempt is made by Marilyn Dunn, 'Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey and the origins of Purgatory,' *Peritia* 14 (2000), 238-54 at 239. The subject is discussed in great depth in the seminal work of Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), and in a literary context by D. D. R. Owen, in *The Vision of Hell* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1955). More recently, Sarah Foot has argued that the apparent 12th century origin of Purgatory (as the term is understood today) is due to the lack of a 'clear notion of the shape or organisation of the space' of Purgatory in the theology of preceding centuries, in 'Anglo-Saxon "Purgatory"', *Studies in Church History* 45 (2009), 87-96 at 94.

narrator at this point is that the details of the vision are accurately and completely related; there is little palpable verification for the dream, since the narrator is not identifiably reliable.

But then, in a moment of peculiar drama in the otherwise tableau-like description of the otherworld, Fursey is burned by the purgatorial fire:

> Cumque praefato igni maximo adpropiarent, diuisit quidem angelus, sicut prius, ignem flammae. Sed uir Dei ubi ad patefactam usque inter flammas ianuam peruenit arripientes inmundi spiritus unum de eis, quos in ignibus torrebant, iactauerunt in eum, et contingentes humerum maxillamque eius incenderunt.
>
> [As he approached the conflagration, the angel as before parted the flames. But when the man of God came to the passage opened up in the midst of the fire, the evil spirits seized one of those who were burning in the flames, hurled him at Fursey, hitting him and scorching his shoulder and jaw]
>
> (272-4).

Fursey is told by the angel guiding him that he has been punished for accepting gifts from a sinner. This transforms the nature of the account, since it situates the dreamer more closely within the description. It seems less like a visionary account, and more like the account of a phenomenological adventure. The separation between the vision and the visionary is elided in this one instant, and Fursey has moved from being an observer looking at an icon, to a character in a real-life, present Purgatory.

This is compounded by the state of Fursey after his vision – the events of the Purgatory are reflected in his bodily condition:

> Qui postmodum in corpore restitutus, omni uitae suae tempore signum incendii, quod in anima pertulit, uisibile cunctis in humero maxillaque portauit, mirumque in

> modum, quid anima in occulto passa sit, caro palam praemonstrabat.
>
> [When Fursey had been restored to his body, he bore for the rest of his life the marks of the burns which he had suffered while a disembodied spirit. They were visible to all on his shoulder and his jaw. It is marvellous to think that what he suffered secretly as a disembodied spirit showed openly upon his flesh]
>
> (274).

The narrative voice at this point suddenly has an additional role. It transmits not just a description of the events of the vision, but an account of the proof. The scars Fursey bears are supporting testimony for the account of the otherworld; all the narrator must now do is convince his audience of the truth of the wounds. Since wounds are visible, tangible, non-miraculous and can be verified by many witnesses, they lend a physical credence to what was otherwise a story with no possibility of corroboration. This change in the direction of the narrative, from a man who saw Purgatory with his spiritual sight, to a man who saw Purgatory and was burnt by it in his physical body, is a step which enables a different form of evidence to be brought to bear on the account of this Purgatory.

But the theological implications of bodily injuries inflicted on the visionary soul are substantial, and rely on awkward mixes of body-soul separation theories derived from Aristotle and Avicenna, in separate works both known as *De Anima*, via the Church Fathers, well beyond Bede and right into the later medieval intellections of Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, and eventually in Thomas Aquinas' long inquiry, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*. The debate surrounded the extent to which the soul could be considered a physical entity; the Fursey account seems to suggest that it could suffer bodily wounds in a way which was at least analogous to the wounding of a body.

Yet the fires of Hell, which St. Augustine was one of the first to warn about, were supposedly figurative, punishing the soul in a spiritual way which the living individual could not imagine; fire, with its capacity to char flesh, was a mere corporeal metaphor for an otherwise transcendental experience. The dream or vision, without its dependence on waking schemes of reality and perception, and its ability to explicate symbols in a sort of phenomenological laboratory, is the perfect place in which to situate something as theologically complicated as 'seeing' – or tormenting – a soul. But the fact that his living body was also burned and remained scarred shows that the purgatorial fire was also literal fire in the sense that we understand it in the waking world. Fursey was burnt as a living, real punishment, in a vision which was otherwise metaphorical or symbolic. It is undeniably easier to present physical, widely verifiable, bodily wounds as evidence for the otherworldly experience; the theological implications are insignificant compared with the pressure to provide this kind of evidence.

It is possible that this pressure for evidence stems from a tendentious authorial desire for readers to 'see' wounds in the text. There is a clear didactic purpose to the notion of being *actually* burned, connected with the fact that a burn to the flesh is more comprehensible to a lay reader than a torment to the soul. In everyday life, wounds (particularly burns) have the symbolically charged property of leaving permanent scars, which physically bear witness to the experiences which caused them. The branding of criminals takes advantage of this property and exploits the symbolic freight of the wound, for while a criminal may lie about his past, the permanence of scars is inescapable. As a form of physical evidence of Fursey's experience, then, burn scars have a secular analogue which makes them extremely appealing as a didactic tool, and therefore indispensable despite the theological complications which they confer.

As a tool for verification, the tangible evidence of burn scars falls between oral and literate knowledge transmission. It preserves evidence of the account for longer than the tale of the account lasts – and it provides something which can be used as a form of verification separate from the account. These are literate qualities. But since the scars remain on the victim, they must always be seen in the immediate presence of the victim. Like the relics of a saint, the narrative impact of the scars is effective only in their immediate presence. This is an oral characteristic. Subsequently, the evidence of the scars can be retold by someone who saw them, but this itself is subject to the constraints of any oral-type account. Scars are do not have unique epistemology, but this is their only improvement as a form of evidence upon the original oral account of the otherworld vision. In order for their value as evidence to differ from that of a normal oral account, each receiver of the evidence must travel to see them. The value of scars as evidence, therefore, is in displacing the visionary act from the otherworld to this world.

Transcendental Changes: Other External Evidence

As with his research, however, Bede uses an additional form of evidence which is free from some of the orality-related problems of physical evidence like scars. It is a widely used form of evidence, and it is subtler. It typically takes the form of a demonstration that the people who saw the miraculous awakening of a catatonic sinner, or saw the corroborating wounds on his body, had their faith strengthened; sometimes accounts even include conversions of previously non-Christian onlookers. It is therefore at a remove from the evidence of the wounds themselves, and unlike the visual experience of

the wounds, or the feel of the scar tissue that they leave, it is insensible to an observer. Unlike physical mutilation, a transformation to the soul of the visionary requires a complex assessment by the reader. It is harder to see a soul, and so it is harder to make judgments about it. The bodily mutilation, which in the case of Bede's account of Fursey represents the scourging of the soul, is not present. There is no de-spiritualised representation, and as a consequence the transformation of the soul can only be seen outwardly in the actions of the visionary. But once these judgments are made, the evidence is employed in the same way: the transcendental changes are taken as evidence (often amounting to proof) that the soul itself has been scourged or altered by the vision, and this transcendental evidence is taken as verifying evidence for the vision of the otherworld.

Transcendental changes are more complicated because they are rooted in metaphor. The 'dialogues' of the Soul and Body, found in the Exeter and Vercelli books, explore this metaphor. The soul, after the death of a sinner, returns to the corpse to argue that post-mortem bodily corruption is a reflection of the conduct of the body during life, and the sins which the mortal body inflicted on the immortal soul. The punishments visited on the body after the soul has been separated from it reflect both the sins of the living man and the torments suffered by the soul after death:

> Gifer hatte se wyrm, þam þe gefleas beoð
> nædle scearpran. Se geneþeð to
> ærest ealra on þam eorðscræfe;
> he þa tungan totyhð ond þa toþas þurhsmyhð,
> ond þa eagan þurhiteð ufon on þæt heafod
> ond to ætwelan oþrum gerymeð,
> wyrmum to wiste.
>
> [The worm is called gluttony, he whose jaws are
> needle sharp. He ventures

> the first of all into the earthgrave:
> he tears the tongue apart and crawls among the teeth
> and then eats through the eyes and down to the head,
> and bores his way to further plenty,
> a worm to the feast]
> (111-17).[13]

But neither the gluttony of the living man or the torture of his corpse *are* the torments of the soul. They are merely literal realisations of something transcendental which can only be expressed through extended metaphor. As in most Old English poetry, the use of metaphor is playful, and allows the burrowing of gluttony to match the burrowing of the worm throughout the poem: 'wyrmum to wiste' is both the worm which feasts on the corpse or the worm gluttony which infests the mind and leads the sinner to feast during his lifetime. But it is inescapable that the actual punishment is visited upon the soul: for the poet, the corpse is merely a 'lichoman þe heo ær longe wæg' ['body that he carried long before'] (11), earthly clothing. Indeed, a constant reference point in the poetry of the Exeter Book that the body is 'læne' ['loaned, transient'], in contrast to the permanence of the soul.

Metaphor, and from it, transcendental change, is the only form of transformation which occurs in the Old English vision poem known as *The Dream of the Rood*. Transcendental evidence, therefore, is the only verification offered by the poet. This work bears few generic similarities to the vision of Fursey; it is a narrative of a different sort, in which the overall message of Boethian conciliation and spiritual uplift which emerge from the events are more significant than belief in the actual events

[13] The edition used here is 'Soul and Body II' in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* ed. Bernard J. Muir, i (Exeter: UEP, 1994).

of the narrative.[14] Despite this, its structure, in which the progress of one narrative of transcendental change in the dreamer provides support for the other narrative of the vision itself, makes the poem worthy of a brief digression. Much of what occurs in the work is transcendental in its nature. Even the physical descriptions of the dreamer are metaphorical, descriptions of a divine or otherworldly view of the soul. They are effable manifestations of ineffable characteristics which do not transfer onto the living body as the wounds of Fursey transfer. The visionary's self-description as 'synnum fah' ['stained with sin'] (13) is almost certainly a visual description of an invisible soul.

The vigil of the dreamer in *The Dream of the Rood*, his nocturnal wakefulness, whilst nevertheless saying that 'ic gemætte to midre niht/ syþan reordberend restewundeon' ['I dreamed at midnight/ while the speechbearers were at rest'] (2-3)[15] is paradoxical unless it refers to *visio spiritualis* – that inner sight of a religious visionary. His vigilance cannot be wakefulness in real terms, since the vision is said to be a 'swefn' and the verb 'gemætan', both used universally of dreams in the simple sense of sleeping,[16] which definitively proscribes a simple sense of the vigilance which the dreamer implicitly ascribes to himself by comparison with 'reordberend'. This reading is supported scripturally. The vigilant faithful, at night, surrounded by silence and therefore able to receive revelations, reflects the warning of Paul to the Thessalonians, that 'the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night'.[17] The dreamer, then, is

[14] Such dream visions evolve in later medieval literature into 'philosophical visions', in which the narrative is clearly fictionalized, but that nevertheless impart a significant intellectual truth to the reader.
[15] The edition used here is 'Dream of the Rood' in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. George Krapp (London: Routledge, 1932).
[16] *The Dictionary of the Old English Corpus*, online ⟨tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus⟩, accessed 23 Aug 2012.
[17] 1 Thess 5:2. 2 Peter 3:10 also warns that 'the day of the Lord shall come as a thief', although many versions (including the King James) interpolated 'in the night' to Peter's letter. Believers are also warned about the approach of death in similar terms, 'Watch ye therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour',

in a state of transcendental wakefulness, vigilant only to God. Similarly, in the Song of Solomon, the idea appears as 'I sleep, and my heart watcheth'.[18]It is when the cross takes its metaphorical form of the 'syllica sigebeam' ['wondrous victory-tree'] that the soul of the dreamer is described in this way; the whole of the physical description of the dreamer in the first part of the poem is in this metaphorical, transcendental frame. Even in the tentative narrative scepticism of the verb construction at the start of the vision, there is the sense of metaphora: 'þuht me þæt ic gesæwe' ['it seemed to me that I saw'] (4). The poet uses the verb 'þyncan', which implicitly qualifies the strong sense of the active verb 'ic gesæwe'. The faculty with which the dreamer experiences the cross only *seems* like sight.

The evidence of this vision must be subtle, since all of these metaphors cannot result in straightforward, literal physical evidence on the body of the dreamer. The engagement between dreamer and dream in the *Rood* is like that between Fursey and Purgatory in the early part of his dream. The description is iconographic; the dreamer remains separate from it. In the account of Fursey, the dream does eventually interact with the dreamer, burning him on the face. But the dreamer's participation in his own vision is very passive. Any interaction is spiritual rather than physical. Consequently no physical scourging can occur – only a profound spiritual change takes place. When the dreamer 'wakes', his mental state is greatly altered:

> Is me nu lifes hyht
> þæt ic þone sigebeam secan mote
> ana oftor þonne ealra men,
> well weorþian.

Matt 25:13. The thematic trope of lack of vigilance for the apocalypse is explored by Ananya Jahanara Kabir, Paradise, *Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 110-24.
[18] Songs 5:2

[It is now my life's wish
that I might see the victory tree
more often than all men
and honour it well]
(126-9).

The use of the temporal marker 'nu' demonstrates the change that has occurred, and the narrator is now a man of hope:

Ic wene me
daga gehwylce hwænne me Dryhtnes rod,
þe ic her on eorðan ær sceawode,
on þysson lænan life gefetige,
and me þonne gebringe þær is blis mycel,
dream on heofonum.

['I long
for a day when the Lord's cross
that I saw I was shown here on earth before,
shall fetch me forth from this loaned life,
and bring me thence to where there is great bliss,
joys in heaven]
(135-40).

The change in the dreamer is significant, from the weeping and fear of the opening, in which the dreamer was, although vigilant, also apparently sinful, to the exuberant joy of the poem's end. The newly millenarian outlook, welcoming the second coming, and looking forward to the onset of death as the beginning of eternal joy is, in theological terms, at least as significant as the wounds on the body of Fursey, and represents just as much of a scourging of the soul. But the connection between the dream and the transformation is much more subtle – burning a man's face is a more straightforward purgatorial act than showing him a vision. Whilst there is no suggestion in *The Dream of the Rood* that the vision actually *does* anything to the dreamer, as there is in other

dreams, there is, nevertheless, highly personal affect: the seer before the dream and the seer after are undeniably altered. It is this undeniable alteration which supports the narrative of the dream, providing evidence that the sequence of facts is truthful, even if the purpose of the poem is not necessarily to make the reader believe that a real dreamer had such a vision.

The transcendental changes in Fursey are of a similar kind, but crucially, they have more widespread consequences. He is moved to greater acts of holiness, and is revered by the congregations that he inspires: unlike the scars, the inspired people from his congregations can be disseminated, and this transmits the affect, if not the specific knowledge, of his experiences in the otherworld. Furthermore, his transcendental alteration leads to the construction of a permanent monument. In the brief introduction to the story offered by Bede, it is said that after his vision, Fursey 'curauit monasterii construare' ['oversaw the building of a monastery'], and that

> Multos et exemplo uirtutis et incitamento sermonis, uel incredulos ad christum conuertit uel iam credentes amplius in fide atque amore christi confirmauit.
>
> [He converted many, both by the example of his virtues and the persuasiveness of his teaching, turning unbelievers to Christ, and confirming believers in His faith and love]
>
> (268).

Transcendental evidence does not seem as direct as its physical counterparts, since whilst burn scars are definitively the result of burning, and therefore leave us wondering only at the nature of the fire that caused them, spiritual growth is outwardly recognisable as behavioural changes. Both the cause and the connection between cause and effect are less straightforward. Later, however, the relationship between the physical

and transcendental evidence is made manifest. After the narrative of the vision has been told, the account records that 'curabat autem omnibus opus uirtutum et exemplis ostendere, et praedicare sermonibus' ['he took care to set an example of virtue to others in all his work and his teaching']. This evidence is compounded by further evidence of his experience:

> Quia tempus hiemis fuerit acerrimum et glacie constrictum, cum sedens in tenui ueste uir ita inter dicendum, propter magnitudinem memorati timoris uel suauitatis, quasi in mediae aestatis caumate sudauerit.
>
> [Although it was during a time of severe winter weather and hard frost and though Fursey sat wearing only a thin garment, he sweated profusely as though it had been summer, either because of the terror or else the joy which his recollections aroused]
>
> (274).

The evidence is intangible, and as a consequence, more elaborate, but its structure and function are more effective for the transmission of knowledge. It serves as an external, verifiable witness to the events of the account, and one which has the characteristics of literate transmission: it covers space and time, and it does not depend on the immediacy of oral transmission. This last quotation connects the evidence with the account very straightforwardly: sweating because of the recollection of the experience. This is so similar to the physical evidence of the scars that the close resemblance of transcendental and physical signs is obvious. The argument is that no man who has not seen the terrors of hell or the consolations of heaven could possibly be warm on a winter's day, just as no man who has not been burned could possibly bear the scars.

But the narrator, like a puzzled onlooker, struggles to interpret this sign. This is because of the nature of transcendental evidence. The relationship between wounds

sustained in a vision and wounds realised in life is a crude one, but the relationship between wounds to the soul and a vocation to build a monastery is rather more subtle. It requires a subtler wit to realise that the outward signs of changes in a man's soul may not just be marks on his body corresponding with incidents which wounded his soul, but may in some other fashion alter him. But despite this difficultly of interpretation, transcendental changes in Fursey have the potential to serve the account in a further way that Fursey's wounds do not. Readers of the account may have their faith strengthened by the lesson of Fursey; they may be inspired to acts of devotion comparable to Fursey's monastery building. Whilst the scars make good symbolic sense to the very broadest readership, the transcendental changes are more readily replicable in those same readers. Acts of holiness and devotion reflect not on the people who perform them, but on the account and by extension on the subject of the account which inspired the acts, and so there is always the possibility of further transcendental evidence emerging from the account itself. By inspiring faith, it is shown to be worthy of belief.

The account ends with another piece of external evidence which is neither the physical evidence of the scarring nor the transcendental evidence of a physical change, but a mixture of the tangible and the spiritual. It takes the form of a posthumous miracle, a type of incident which is nevertheless ubiquitous in saints' lives:[19]

> Quod dum, post dies XXVII esset factum, et corpus ipsum
> de porticu ablatum prope altare esset recondendum
> inuentum est ita inlesum, ac si eadem hora de hac luce

[19] The miracle of incorruption as a general hagiographical trope in Anglo-Saxon is briefly treated by Antonia Gransden in 'The Alleged Incorruption of the Body of St. Edmund, King and Martyr', *Antiquaries' Journal* 74 (1994), 135-68 at 135-9, and indeed it is possible that all such accounts are derivative, although the origin of the trope is not known.

> fuisset egressus. Sed et post annos quatuor constructa domuncula cultiore receptui corporis eiusdem ad orientem altaris, adhuc sine macula corruptionis inuentum, ibidem digno cum honore translatum est.
>
> [When, after twenty-seven days had passed, the body was taken from the porch to be buried near the altar, it was found to be as free from decay as on the day of his death. Four years later a more suitable chapel was built for his resting-place to the east of the altar, and his body, still without spot, was transferred to it with great honour] (276).

The miracle of incorruption is a form of physical evidence, and Bede proceeds immediately to an interpretation of the miracle, explaining that the incorruption of the body represents a pure, 'great' soul:

> Haec et de corporis eius incorruptione breuiter attigimus, ut quanta esset uiri sublimitas, legentibus notius existeret.
>
> [I have briefly touched upon these events and the incorruption of his body so that those who read it may understand more clearly how great a man he was] (276).

Causally, the connection is even more convoluted than the earlier forms of transcendental evidence. Burns cause scars, experiences change people – divine ones extremely so – but miracles are direct divine intervention apparently *because* of the earlier changes; as support for the account, therefore, the incorruption of Fursey's body is a greater challenge to the reader.

It is not evidence for the otherworld vision of earlier in the account, and nor does Bede explicitly claim it supports the earlier account in any way; nevertheless it serves the purpose of creating around Fursey the impression of a man of holiness, to whom miraculous visions might well occur. It also offers theological support to the

Purgatory episode. Unlike an ordinary sinner, whose body begins to decay after death and whose soul must spend time atoning for the sins committed during life, Fursey has already undergone this punishment; he has already been purged for his one sin of accepting clothes from a sinner. Internally then, it provides support for account of the vision, and for the view that Fursey died free from sin. And like the wounds and the transcendental evidence of the vision, it is externally verifiable, to the extent that the chain of events containing Fursey's death and subsequent incorruption can be seen and touched by multiple external witnesses. The discovery of this miracle was overseen by the chamberlain to Clovis II, identified by Bede as 'Ercunualdus patricius' ['noble Earconwald'] (276). The high-status associate of a Gallic royal is a powerful and trustworthy source; this lends further support to Bede's prefatory remarks about his research practices, and seems to comply very strongly with principle of the 'vera lex historiae'.[20]

This, though, like all the evidence Bede offers, is dependent on the fact that the account is not what it claims to be. Oral accounts age and eventually vanish; the scars of Fursey are only impressive while they can still be seen; neither is the case with a written account. The process by which the narrator transmits the knowledge of the account to the reader is the process of creating a series of illusions which distract us from the presence of the text or its author. Bede creates the illusion of orality by drawing the reader closer to the origin of the account; equally, the external physical evidence and its transcendental counterpart are also illusory. We no more see the

[20] The inherent circularity of the process by which miracles occur to holy men in order to preserve and promote their reputation of holiness is explored by Sofia Boesch-Gajano, in 'The Use and Abuse of Miracles in Early Medieval Culture', in Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein, (eds.), *Debating the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 330-9. She observes that 'hagiographical narratives at times allow us to discern a relationship between miracles and holiness that is not defined in linear fashion, but always intertwined and at times even reversed' (335).

evidence of Fursey's scars than we hear the testimony of Fursey, or the intermediate witnesses to the account, or the proselytizing of his congregations. But by separating the scars from the account, suggesting that they are a form of witness to the account which does not depend on oral testimony, and which is therefore not subject to the failings and corruption of oral testimony, we are, willingly perhaps, taken in. We accept, to an extent, that wounds which many people claim to have seen are justly considered evidence of the account which only one person is able to give. Similarly, the accounts of the transcendental evidence have reached us through others – others who did not see them, and so they too are reduced to the level of testimony. And in reality, the account of the miracle is subject to the same nexus of belief and doubt as any other part of the text because, despite the way it is presented as additional external evidence, it remains, in fact, part of the text. It attests to physical and transcendental evidence, but is, like the account, the wounds, and the spiritual changes in Fursey, just writing on parchment.

By creating a written account, Bede is normalising all the testimony about the otherworld into a literate form, and he does so tacitly. The advantages of oral transmission – the potential authenticity, the immediacy – are lost, but not acknowledged to have been lost. Furthermore, his efforts to differentiate between the various forms of evidence militate against his literate references to an *auctor*. Elsewhere, in a similar episode in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede's technique of narrative justification is similar but the elision of the distinction between the original form of the testimony and what we as readers received is even more pronounced. It is the story of how an ailing sinner, Dryhthelm, died and then returned to life to tell a story of a

vision of the Otherworld. The details are almost identical to those in the 'Vision of Fursey' episode:

> Qui infirmitate corporis tactus, et hac crescente per dies ad extrema perductus, primo tempore noctis defunctus est, sed diluculo reuiuescens ac repente residens, omnes qui corpori flentes adsederant timore inmenso perculsos in fugam conuertit; uxor tantum, quae amplius amabat, quamuis multum tremens et pauida remansit.
>
> [He was stricken down by an illness which grew worse from day to day until he reached his end and died in the early hours of the night. But at dawn he came to life again and suddenly sat up, so that all who were sitting mourning round his corpse were struck by terror beyond measure and fled, except his wife, who loved him dearly and remained with him, though trembling with fear]
>
> (488).

However, when Bede begins his account of the vision, where the details have epistemological uniqueness, and could be known at first-hand only to Dryhthelm, he dispenses with his own third person account: 'Narrabat autem hoc modo quod uiderat' ['He described what he had seen in this way']. There is then a transitional sentence in which the narrative moves into the direct speech of Dryhthelm: '"Lucidus" inquiens "aspectu et clarus erat indumento, qui me ducebat."' ['saying, "I was guided by a man of shining countenance and wearing bright robes"']. In the following sentence, there is no 'verb of saying': the narrative is entirely Dryhthelm's, 'Incedebamus autem tacentes' ['We proceeded whilst in silence'] (488) and the subject of the sentence is the plural first person, now denoting Dryhthelm and his angelic guide.

After the story, Bede provides the chain of provenance. He tells us that Dryhthelm told Hæmgisl, after 'repetitia interrogatione', the full account of what happened – how this version of the account may have differed from the version we have

just read, we are not told. But we can be certain that the account as it is represented differs at the very least by being oral, whereas ours is well-disguised writing. Bede is somewhat elliptical about the particulars between Hæmgisl and the written form in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: 'per cuius relationem ad nostram quoque agnitionem peruenere, quae de his pauca perstrinximus' ['it is through his account that these particulars which we have briefly described came to our knowledge'] (496). The clause 'ad nostram agnitionem peruenere' avoids specificity, possibly for the simple reason that Bede was uncertain of his source. Whilst the story was transmitted to Hæmgisl directly by Dryhthelm, there is no accounting for the chain of provenance from then on – whether Hæmgisl told Bede directly, whether there were intermediaries, or whether a written account was involved. Bede seems to place the dream of Dryhthelm some time between 710 and 720, and worked on the *History* throughout the 720s; there is certainly time for a considerable chain of provenance to have developed.[21] Instead of providing details, then, Bede once more chooses to access an oral epistemological system; this restores our trust in the narrative, but it remains an artefact – orality created internally in literature.

Oral accounts are still represented as oral, but are in fact made literate by Bede's process of research and recording. The wounds of Fursey are made slightly less physical, because while their physicality is still what is important about them in the account of Fursey, they too are now made literate: as readers we do not see them, and cannot feel them. To an extent, this is a necessary feature of recording any event. But Bede does so in a very discreet way, drawing little attention to the category shift from physical or oral

[21] These have been called 'problems of narrative transparency', by Andrew Rabin, 'Bede, Dryhthelm, and the Witness to the Other World: Testimony and Conversion in the Historia Ecclesiastica,' *MP* 106 (2009), 376-98 at 376.

report to written record. He was either unconscious of this shift, or did not consider it important; in either case, the reader's attention is not drawn to this material necessity of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In essence, there is nothing to privilege an oral account over a written one, and this view is supported by Bede's discerning use of both in combination. But their combined mutually supporting effect is dependent on the original nature of the account. Bede transforms everything to literacy, without acknowledgement, and in the process, loses the supportive framework of his wide range of sources. All the evidence which Bede provides is, ultimately, the literate testimony of his own narrative, and not of his sources.

Physical Evidence in Orderic's Walchelin

Orderic Vitalis, writing several hundred years later in his *Historia Ælcclesiastica*,[22] replicates the miraculous phenomenology of the Fursey account in the story of the priest Walchelin. It is an experience in this world, rather than the otherworld, but the events are miraculous, and crucially are seen by Walchelin alone: they have unique epistemology. Like Bede, Orderic provides similar 'evidence' for the account. But he differs in briefly acknowledging the evidence gathering process, and the need for evidence. Though he still tacitly normalizes his account toward supplying his own literate testimony, his approach to evidence does suggest a greater awareness – or interest – in the epistemological process of retelling the story.

Orderic does not mention that there are any steps between the origin of the account and the story we are reading; indeed, he is emphatic that while the first person

[22] The work was completed not later than 1140.

to hear the account was not himself, 'haec quae scripto tradidi... ab ore ipsius audiui' ['that which I have written here I heard from his own lips'] (248). Orderic has therefore little to do in the business of convincing us of the reliablility of the text. Assuming first that we are to believe in the vision itself, Orderic's account is as authentic as it could be, providing we trust that his story of a discussion with the priest. There are no steps in the provenance at which error unknown to Orderic could enter the account. He does, however, use means similar to Bede's for verifying the account of the vision.

Walchelin is walking home one night when his way is blocked by a procession of the revenant dead. At first, like Fursey's, this vision is tableau-like, and indeed, the seer is barred from taking part in the vision, by a youth of 'verum enormis staturae' ['truly enormous stature'], who tells him 'sta nec progrediaris ultra' ['stay and go no futher'] (238). But later, the youth joins the procession of the dead and Walchelin is at last allowed to actively participate in the vision himself. He has a conversation with a sinful knight who is revealed to be his own brother, and who suffers the symbolic torment of having to bear stinking, burning weapons for eternity, or until he and his fellow sufferers are redeemed by the prayers of the living. Clearly symbolic, a sort of ironic synecdoche for a life of sin, burning swords are more easily realised conceptually than burning souls, but like the burning of the souls of Fursey's vision, the exact relationship between the living torment and the experience of having one's soul tormented is complicated. The need for secularisation, for physical, tangible evidence or something which will rationalise the vision in conventional phenomenology, is identified extremely explicitly in the voice of the seer:

> 'Nunc uero manes mortuorum ueraciter uideo sed nemo michi credet cum uisa retulero, nisi certum specimen terrigenis exhibuero'.
>
> ['Now I do indeed see the shades of the dead with my own eyes, but no-one will believe me when I describe my vision unless I can show some sure token to living men']
>
> (242).

This insistence on the absolute need for proof is extremely unusual. In the texts examined earlier in this thesis, for example, proof was never insisted upon, despite always being available in at least some form of testimony. It does more to seed the possibility of doubt than its omission – or even the omission of proof altogether – would have done, by consciously identifying the unverifiability of the story being told. The reader's attention is drawn by the character's incredulity to the incredible nature of the account.

But it also interpolates the idea of proof into the narrative, thus reducing the division which is very strongly felt in Bede's account of Fursey, between the account told by Fursey and the various proofs, which are external to that account, whether physical, transcendental, or textual. Although the thoughts of the priest Walchelin surely reach us through the frame of the main narrator, they do so by direct speech: by adding an additional voice to the narrative, it is as though the main narrator has been joined in his account by a corroborating witness. Walchelin is just as sceptical as the first person to hear the account (Orderic himself), and presumably, just as sceptical as the reader. And because scepticism is a more reasoned position than blind acceptance when dealing with such tricky material as a vision of the revenant dead, Walchelin seems reasonable to the reader. Ultimately, acknowledging the limitations of the account alone, within the account itself, gives credibility to the teller.

Walchelin determines to catch a riderless horse from the procession of ghosts to use as physical evidence of his vision – intending, presumably, to show it to anyone who questions his story. In so doing, ironically, he is mimicking the behaviour of the itinerant knights that he now sees punished. But he is prevented from doing so by knights in the procession, who berate him for trying to steal their property – they are, after all, being punished for a similarly loose adherence to moral codes. This first attempt to acquire evidence is therefore a failure. But the account later tells of how Walchelin is seized by one of the host:

> Mox ille furibundus manum extendit et presbiterum per fauces apprehendit, secumque per terram trahens minare cepit. Captiuus autem manum qua tenebatur ardentum uelut ignem persensit.
>
> [The knight in a terrible rage then put out his hand and seized the priest by the throat, dragging him along the ground and threatening him. His victim felt the hand that held him burning like fire]
>
> (246).

The burning of the hand actually scars Walchelin's flesh. After the vision, the priest falls ill for a week, and when he awakes, he recounts the story to the narrator. It is during the account of the telling that the narrator introduces the evidence of the wounds, saying 'faciem eius horrendi militis tactu lesam perspexi' ['I saw the scar on his face caused by the touch of the terrible knight'] (249). The narrator, then, has seen the scars on Walchelin's body, and so considers this to be a form of corroboration for the account. The wounds are used for evidence in the same way as in the account of Fursey. They are not part of the unique testimony of the actual visionary, but belong instead to the testimony of an intermediary, in this case the narrator of the account

who is figured as Orderic himself. Although we are told that Walchelin considered the need for physical evidence during the vision, it is a necessary aspect of this kind of evidence that the claims made for it are always external to the account. This way, they appear to provide a second witness, and potentially many more. Actual, tangible wounds are potentially infinitely verifiable: this is their value as evidence. Furthermore, wounds have an aesthetic value which the theft of a ghostly horse would not have. No-one would willingly submit to permanent scarring; they are therefore a piece of evidence to which Walchelin was not party. They are not just physical evidence, they have the value of an independent witness.

Once again, though, this all distracts from the fact that the only piece of evidence the reader really has is the text. Like Bede, Orderic Vitalis performs this distraction tacitly, making very little reference to the textuality of the account when it would be significant to do so. It is implied that the testimony reaches us as oral testimony would, and that it is from the values of immediacy and direct transmission particular to oral testimony that it draws its verifying strength. But the normalization to literacy impacts on that testimony: once again, Orderic tells us a story using a medium specifically designed to mitigate the need for immediacy, but without acknowledgement of this structural transformation.

Committee Testimony: *Christina of Markyate*

A different approach to the supplying of testimony and evidence is taken in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, upon which work ceased in the early 1140s. This is the dependence upon a range of sources for each piece of testimony. At times, this enables

the author to subvert the restrictions placed on an account by its unique epistemology. In collating the testimony upon which an account is dependent, the author acknowledges the managing role of the literate author, and therefore accomplishes the task of verification in a way which is more self-conscious of the transformations through which the evidence must pass in order to become part of a written account such as the *Life*. The narrative perspective of the *Life of Christina* is twofold. The narrator throughout purports to be the anonymous monk of St. Albans to whom Christina is supposed to have told her story. The version which survives is found at the end of the somewhat fire-damaged British Library MS Cotton Tiberius E.i; although this version seems to be incomplete, in that it finishes mid sentence, it appears from the external evidence of a late fourteenth century redaction of Matthew Paris' *Gesta Abbatum* that 'we have nearly all the text... that there ever was'.[23] Due to the abruptness with which the account breaks off, the claim for the accuracy of the account, at least, is substantially stronger than that which Bede makes for any of his Saint's Lives. It is not a version told to someone, however faithful and reliable, who then told the author. It seems that the author is the person to whom the account was told, and whose personal circumstances prevented him finishing the account. By being the narrative of what appears to be a single voice, and a retelling of one other single voice, the tacit claim is that there is no intervention between the subject of the 'biography' and the author who penned it. Allowing, of course, for the usual complications introduced by the process of

[23] Rachel M. Koopmans, 'The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's Vita', Journal of Ecclesiastical History 51 (2000), 663-97 at 665. Koopmans suggests that the work was never finished. It was composed whilst Christina was alive, probably for Geoffrey de Gorron, and seems to have abruptly terminated at around the time of Geoffrey's death. Henry Mayr-Harting's seminal paper 'Functions of a Twelfth Century Recluse', History 60 (1975), 337-352, seems to suggest that there was a considerable suspicion of the English hermits who peopled the land surrounding what were by this time predominantly Norman religious institutions; it seems likely that without Geoffrey's immediate supervision and patronage, the work was abandoned.

copying – which are shared by all pre-printed texts – the argument for the reliability of the account at least is a relatively secure one.

The style of the narration during the first part of the *Life* seems to support this view. The perspective is that of Christina herself, and though the account is not told in the first person, the third-person narrative is closely focalized in this first part of the work, often containing incidents of unique epistemology. The effect is to transform the narrator from an onlooker into a sort of surrogate voice for Christina. All of the particulars of a first-person account are fulfilled without the grammar usually associated with an account of this kind.

In this part of the text, we see arguments for the otherworld that we recognise from elsewhere – transcendental arguments in which the state of mind of Christina is altered by spiritual consolation, physical proof where material evidence supplies the argument. The density of miracles in the life is quite exceptional, even for a work on this kind of subject;[24] the first vision appears to Christina just after she has been driven from the house by her father, and her mother has decided to find anyone she can to deflower Christina. In the argument for the validity of the vision, we find both physical and transcendental evidence. During the vision, Christina finds herself crying, and explains to the 'quandam similem imperatrici' ['one like an empress'] whom we presume

[24] Christopher Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate' in Derek Baker (ed.), Medieval Women (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 185-204 at 198, reckons that there are 42 accounts of miracles or visions in the work, of which one is a reference to multiple visions, and adds that in the original MS, this would amount to one miraculous incident for every side of parchment. Newman, 'What did it Mean to Say "I Saw"', observes that these miracles are of a very mixed nature, with 'virtually interchangeable use of dreams, prayer trances, and waking visions' (20). This is probably due to the time of writing – and strengthens the verifying power of each individual miracle: the *Life*, having been supposedly written partly during or just after the death of Christina could still call upon the memory of many living witnesses. The density and variety of miracles, while possibly unorthodox or uncanonical and therefore not a qualitative improvement on the few stories typically found in a saint's life, nevertheless has the consequence of supplying the *Life* with a large volume of testimony.

to be the virgin Mary, 'non est similis mei in sorte dolencium. Unde nec die nec nocte a fletu et singultu meo temperare possum' ['there is not one like me in the sorrow of my lot. Hence, neither day nor night can I temper my weeping and sobbing'] (24).[25] Like the wounds inflicted on Fursey, Christina finds:

> Post hec visa evigilavit et cervical suum multis lacrimis maduisse reperit ut sicut verum flere fuit quod sompniasse putabat ita de reliquorum eventu non ambigeret que per idem somnium viderat.
>
> [After this vision she awoke and found that her pillow was wet with many tears, and so she was convinced that since the tears she dreamed she had shed were real, so were the rest of the things which she had dreamed]
>
> (25).

The evidence of the tears is ambiguous. It certainly needs the strength of the explication: since it is possible to cry in one's sleep without such a concrete cause as a divine visitation, the 'unde' ['hence'] of the argument is central to the evidence. That moment of argument is a syllogism supported only by faith. But it is also bolstered by the transcendental proof which comes with it. The vision is introduced as an offer of consolation from Christ himself, 'inter has angustias volens Christus suam fidelem sponsam confortare per suam virginem matrem confortavit' ['amidst these anguishes, Christ, wishing to comfort His faithful bride,[26] gave consolation through his virgin mother'] (24). During the vision, Christina receives this promised consolation: 'ne

[25] This and subsequent references to paragraph numbers in The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse ed. C. H. Talbot (Oxford: OUP, 1959).

[26] This translates the phrase 'sponsore Christi', which is not uncontroversial. There is a thorough discussion of the sense of the phrase in Thomas Head, 'The Marriages of Christina of Markyate', *Viator* 21 (1990), 75-101. C. Stephen Jaeger, in 'The Loves of Christina of Markyate', Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, (eds.), *Christina of Markyate Priory: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 99-115, discusses various aspects of Christina's relationships with other people and with Christ.

timeas: vade modo quoniam ego de manibus eorum eripiam te et educam clara luce diei' ['fear not: go now, since I will deliver you from their hands and bring you into the bright light of day'] – and the visionary Christina is changed by it, since we are told next that 'recedebat igitur ut sibi videbatur leta' ['she departed gladly then, as it seemed to her'] (24). The words of the vision respond to the prayer of Psalm 30, in which an afflicted man prays for deliverance from 'them that regard vanities', 'libera me de manu inimicorum meorum et persequentium me' ['deliver me out of the hands of my enemies and from them that persecute me'].[27] This assists the 'evidence' for the vision by tying the miraculous intervention to scripture; the answered prayer of Christina has a orthodox precedent. And like the tears, the feeling of spiritual illumination is also carried into her waking life, and, it seems, in an enduring way: 'itaque videris eam totam repente mutatam. Magnitudinem leticie quam conceperat ex spe liberacionis sue vultus propalabat hilaritas' ['from that moment you could see she was completely changed, and the great joy which filled her at the thought of her freedom was displayed for all to see in the cheerfulness of her countenance'] (25).

This vision is obviously one of unique epistemology. The tears and the feeling of uplift are translated from the dream into waking life, and so these are in a sense externally verifiable. Burthred, Christina's would-be husband, is also in the dream: 'Burhredus iacebat prostratus super pavimentum' ['Burthred was prostrated there on the pavement']. He even interacts with Christina, 'persecutus oculis horribiliter ingemescebat et proprium caput pavimento repetitis ictibus hostiliter infligebat' ['he followed her with eyes, groaning horribly, and repeatedly struck his own head savagely on the pavement']. His presence in the dream, though, is not mirrored in his

[27] Ps. 30:16

experience.[28] It is merely a sort of symbolic representation of the damaging nature of their proposed relationship. The only witness to the actual events of the vision – as opposed to the physical evidence – is the dreamer, and it is her account which therefore must be the one we read.

While the grammatical nature of the narrative voice does not change over the course of the work, the perspective undergoes a subtle shift, from being entirely a retelling of the unique perspective of Christina, to having a more catholic focalisation, in which the unique perspective of any character who may have a contribution is included under the same narrative voice. This shift is comparable to the shift in Bede's account of Fursey, which occurs when Bede begins to tell of the miracle of Fursey's incorruption. The change there is necessary, since Fursey's post-mortem perspective is unobtainable. But in the latter part of the *Life of Christina* the perspectives, and thence the epistemologies, of both Christina and those who interact with her are introduced to the story. And unlike the case of Bede's account, these are multiple unique epistemologies, rather than one unique and one universal or verifiable epistemology. The narrator ceases to be the private surrogate of Christina's first-hand account, and becomes instead a medium for a variety of first-hand sources.

An instructive example comes from one of the later visions described in the work. It is not so much a vision of Christina, as an affirmation of her visionary nature; the vision itself appears to Geoffrey, the Abbot of St. Albans.

> Una vero nocte vidit floridam se pre manibus herbam tenere cuius succus repellendis admodum valeret langoribus. Quam si forcius premeret minus eliceret de succo, si vero dulcius et modestius, votum exequeretur compressor.

[28] This is not true of later visions in the *Life*, as we shall see.

> [One night, in truth, he saw himself holding a flowering herb in his hands, the juice of which was very efficacious for driving away maladies. If he squeezed it strongly, little juice came out, but if gently and quietly he would get what he wanted]
>
> (66).

The vision is focalised entirely through Geoffrey – it even uses the verb 'videre', an admission that the testimony of Geoffrey's unique epistemology is being evoked. There is no indication as to the route by which the knowledge reaches the author, but the nature of the knowledge is definitively unique to the visionary. Discussing the dream with another 'vir religiosus' the next morning, Geoffrey interprets the dream. This process of exercising his *visio intellectualis* demonstrates the validity of the dream; it is a form of transcendental proof. The physical proof comes from Christina, when, to the amazement of onlookers, she says before being told anything about the vision, 'hec inquid herba non est quam hac nocte in visione vidisti?' ['"this is the herb, is it not, that you saw in your vision last night?"'] and then 'ostendit et herbam' ['and she showed him the herb'] (66). This is evidence of Geoffrey's dream, but it is premised not solely on the physical, verifiable, waking world, but also on Christina's unique epistemology. She only is able to perform her showy trick of divine inspiration 'hoc enim sibi vocis delapse revelacione didicerat' ['for she had been told this by a voice which came to her in a revelation'] (66). This epistemology is unique to Christina: the revelation is a private affair between her and God; it provides the catalyst for verifiable physical evidence of another piece of unique epistemology. This 'committee' of unique epistemologies forms the structure of many of the visions in the latter part of the *Life*.

Another incident uses this same means of argument without the use of external physical evidence. Nevertheless, the structure re mains largely the same.

> Cogitavit forte nescio quid una puellarum illius occulte facere quod ancilla Dei, sedens in alia domo mediis parietibus vidit et prohibuit eam dicens: 'Ne facias, ne facias'. Cui puella, 'Quid domina?' Et illa 'Hoc quod cogitasti nunc'. 'Nichil inquid cogitavi quod prohibeatur fieri'. Tunc vocavit eam ad se et dixit ei in aure quid hoc erat quod illam in corde gerere viderat quo audito puella perfusa genas rubore verecundie perhibuit testimonium veritati obsecrans et obtestans illam ut pro sui reverencia nequaquam id palam faceret eo quod propalati pudorem ferre nequiret.
>
> [One of her maidens was thinking of I do not know what, secretly: and the handmaid of God, seated in another house, saw it through the walls and forbade her, saying, 'Do not do it, do not do it'. The girl said 'What, mistress?' And she said 'That which you were going to do now'. 'But I was not thinking of anything that is forbidden', she said. Then Christina called her to her and whispered in her ear what she had seen her thinking in her heart. On hearing it the girl blushed with shame, and proved that she spoke true. Then she besought and implored Christina for the sake of her good name not to tell anyone, because she would never be able to bear the shame of it if it were revealed]
>
> (82).

The unique epistemologies are different, but closely connected. The girl herself has a thought. Christina – and only Christina, since the even the narrator professes ignorance – experiences the thought through some sort of external sight, although it is clearly a spiritually gifted sight. In blushing, the maiden confirms that Christina's vision is accurate: this is the physical proof. Once more then, there are two unique epistemologies which combine to become a proof of the visionary nature of Christina.

This episode also represents a breach in the essential barrier of unique epistemology. Christina's apparently irresistible power spiritually to intrude into the

private lives of her neighbours is astonishing from a practical point of view, but perhaps more so from a narrative point of view. The incidents into which she makes her intrusions are of a sinful nature. The purpose they serve for Christina – and ultimately for God, we presume – is firstly that of ensuring for the wrongdoers in question nothing, not even thought, can be assumed private: Christina's spiritual sight serves as a deterrent against future sin, since no-one in her circle of acquaintance can be sure her power will not be used against them again. By extension, the possibility that a nearby saint may also be watching serves to strengthen the resolve of a wavering reader. But the breach of uniqueness in epistemology also provokes the process of narrative. That is to say that these sinful episodes would not be part of Christina's story were it not for her omniscience. The humiliation of the sinner, and gentle figurative flagellation which accompanies it, is incidental in narrative terms to the much more significant fact that the committee method of narration is necessarily the only means by which this story can be told. It is not just a technique which the author adopts optionally; rather, it is one which fundamentally enables the story.

Whilst unique testimony is vestigially an oral characteristic, combining it to form such a committee within one work transforms it. In the first place, to be combined like this, the testimonies have first been appropriated by the authorial voice of the narrator. The narrator is scrupulous to demonstrate the ways in which proof and testimony support one another in a way which is not possible with just the voice of the visionary; this much is true of Bede's narrator in his version of the vision of Fursey. But additionally, the narrator of Christina's *Life* exploits the illusion that multiple unique testimonies appear to form a consensus. The evidence of one piece of oral-type testimony is used in support of another, sometimes with a piece of circumstantial

physical evidence in support, not just on the microscopic scale of accounts of individual visions, but across the macroscopic scale of the whole work. By its structure throughout the *Life*, the narrative voice serves to compare the unique testimony of others with the unique testimony of Christina, and in this global way argue for the otherworldliness of her visions. Validity is granted to what might otherwise be a sycophantic and repetitive extolling of Christina's successes by the presence of other equally unverifiable sources.

In the structure of the narrative, particularly in the later part, the author of the *Life* has largely circumvented the difficulties of evidence; the 'burden of proof' on an account of non-unique epistemology is not nearly so strong. This could even be considered a miniature realisation of the functioning of faith itself. A series of many accounts, saints' lives and visionary stories like the *Life of Christina* and the account of Fursey, assemble themselves into an incoherent, but nevertheless agreeing committee of testimony in support of a much larger proposition. Deliberately or not, it is evidence leading to faith which provides the overall paradigm for the structure of narration in the *Life*. It is somewhat less didactic than Bede's method. The reader must assess the range of sources collated by the author, joining corresponding pieces of testimony to create a coherent chronology and system of knowledge transmission. This role is assumed by Bede's narrator. Also present in the *Life* is the method of drawing the reader's attention to the evidence: there are characters in the *Life* who have their scepticism dissolved or their credulity reinforced by timely production of some irrefutable piece of evidence. But no attempt is made to cast this evidence as anything other than testimony. The illusion that we are hearing oral testimony, or seeing physical evidence, is allowed to persist.

Overt Transmission of Literate Evidence: Marie de France

In the *Espurgatoire de Seint Patriz*, Marie de France fully embraces the oral to literate transformation process: she acknowledges, to a greater degree than any of the other writers examined in this chapter, the limitations of her account, and the effect upon the testimony of its transformations. Her work translates and partially adapts the Anglo-Latin *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, putatively by Henry de Sautrey.[29] In so doing, Marie makes various references to her source, and to herself. In her preface she makes some attempt to explain her process of composition, and the textuality of her work is manifested several times. Marie's poem and its source the *Tractatus* differ somewhat in the details of the early history of the Purgatory, but in the major aspects of their plots, the two poems are very similar.[30] Marie's version, however, introduces a debate over the textual validity of her story, and in so doing, she also adds a certain amount of material whose sole purpose is to argue for the account of the otherworld.

As an example of the changes of literature which occurred between the writing of Bede and the end of the twelfth century, the work of Marie de France must, of course, be regarded as only one writer amid a burgeoning culture. She is, however, outspokenly connected to the tradition of writing, and to other writers working in the period. She is concerned with the role of the writer, and is self-conscious about her own effect on the tradition, an aspect of her work which is discussed below. Furthermore, this thesis contains many examples of writers in the same period, who

[29] He is referred to in the text merely as 'H de Sautrey'.
[30] For discussion of the political implications of Marie's adjustments to the Tractatus, see Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 194-204; and of the translation in general, Bonnie H. Leonard, 'The Inscription of a New Audience: Marie de France's Espugatoire de Seint Patriz', *Romance Languages International* 3 (1993), 57-62.

were making the same self-conscious observations in many different ways. Although Marie's response to the intellectual context of the twelfth century is unique, she is representative of a generally increased sensitivity to knowledge transmission as a matter of debate.

The story of Marie's *Espurgatoire* is similar to those accounts of the otherworld found in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, with the subtle difference that the events occur while the protagonist is apparently awake, in a place that can be reached by any who are daring (and pious) enough. A knight, Owen, desirous of purging himself of his worldly sins, travels to what is now called Station Island in Lough Derg, where there is a portal to the Otherworld. There, he enters Purgatory and eventually emerges, chastened, to live a holier life. Like the story of Walchelin, the work dispenses with the notion of a vision: there is no sense that any of what Owen sees is a metaphor, or that the way in which his body is punished is a representation of some kind of punishment being wrought upon his soul. Indeed, the text is quite emphatic. A monk named Gilbert, who takes Owen as a servant after he has been to Purgatory, is particularly insistent on this point, ensuring that contemporary doubters and, as a consequence of the text's literary nature, future readers, are in no doubt that the Purgatory of St. Patrick scourges the living body, and that through this suffering, the soul is purged.

Un en i out ki ço oï,
duta qu'il ne fust mie issi.
Gileberz en respondi tant,
qu'il n'erent mie bien creant
ki diënt qu'espirituelment,
quant il entrent en la maisun
u a de Deu purgaciün,
les granz peines e les tormenz
ki sunt establi la dedenz.
Li chevaliers tut ço desdit,

ki tut corporelment le vit;
en char e en os les tormenz
sufri, quant il fu la dedenz.

[Yet there was one man who hearing him, doubted
That the knight had ever been in Purgatory.
Gilbert answered him, saying
That those people were not at all firm believers
Who said that
When people entered the house
Of God's purgation
They saw spiritually rather than corporeally
The great pains and torments
Which were established there.
The knight totally denied that view.
He saw things corporeally,
And suffered torments in his flesh and bones
When he was in Purgatory]
(2001-14).

It is noteworthy that this challenge to the physical evidence is recorded by the author.[31] The question of whether the wounds – and indeed the experience – were corporeal is evidently a potential sticking point in arguing for the otherworld. Furthermore, in the literary context in which the *Tractatus* and Marie's *Espurgatoire* were composed,[32] stories of knights' questing and returning wounded – often in magical circumstances – were commonplace, and there is clearly a generic conflict at play. On the one hand, this is precisely a story with the plot structure of a romance, about a knight departing for an unknown and semi-mythological land,[33] who returns changed by his experiences. It differs, here, from the vision of Fursey and the *Dream of the Rood* in that the visionary is apparently in a wakeful state; there is a bodily movement associated with involvement

[31] This is recorded in the original of H. de Saltrey, as well as being versified by Marie.
[32] *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, ed. Robert Easting, (Oxford: OUP, 1991), lxxxiv, offers a date of c. 1180-4 for the composition of the Tractatus; Marie's version was composed shortly after, during the 1190s, and probably close to 1190, according to *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, ed. and trans. Michael J. Curley (Binghampton NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 11.
[33] Purgatory was still not a matter of orthodoxy at this stage.

in the action of the dream, a fact which undeniably makes the piece more romance-like, and this is accentuated by the translation to the vernacular by Marie. On the other hand, it is a story with a serious message to impart: that a man must be purged of his sins before he can live a holy life, and that a terrible fate awaits those who ignore this message. But acknowledging to this problematic aspect – a thoroughly literate conflict borne out of intertextual reading – serves to distinguish the work from fiction, as a serious piece whose evidence must be considered thoroughly. This is accomplished merely by paying conscious attention: the theology remains a matter for debate, since while we may be told that Owen was wounded corporeally, this does not really settle the matter of whether the bodily wounding represents spiritual scourging or whether it substitutes for it.

We do not hear precisely how Owen was marked after his visit to Purgatory, but it is essential for the narrator's argument that as readers we understand that these are not psychological or spiritual scars but actual, factual, physical ones. The narrator tells of another monk who had been into the Purgatory, and who, once again, suffered permanent outward physical injury.

Tut flaelé e debatu
desqu'a la mort e navré fu.
Plaies out parfundes e granz,
par tut le cors aparissanz.
...
Tel plaie i out ki fu roünde
e desmesuree e parfunde,
e me dist qu'a sun plus lung deit
la parfundesce n'ateindreit.

[They had whipped and beaten him
And wounded him to the point of death.
His wounds were wide and deep,
And covered his entire body.

....
There was one that was round,
Wide, and deep,
Deeper, he told me, than
His longest finger]
(2035-48).

This last passage naturally recalls the episode of Doubting Thomas from the gospel of John.[34] But crucially, as in every case where physical evidence is offered in support of an account, we do not really have the luxury that Thomas had. We cannot actually make that probing, investigative motion with our own hands, and so we are trusting, as we are always forced to with a written account, the words of the narrator who describes the wounds for us. In the works investigated above, this necessary category shift from physical evidence – which behaves in an oral way, dependent as it is upon the immediate presence of the witness – to literate written evidence, from trusting at first hand to trusting the narrator, is left unmentioned at the time it occurs. But Marie treats the matter differently. Immediately after employing the physical evidence of the wounded monk, Marie reminds us that this category shift has occurred:

Gilberz conta icel fait
a l'autor, ki nus a retrait,
si cum Oweins li out conté
e li moignes dunt j'ai parlé,
ço que jo vus ai ici dit
e tut mustré par mun escrit.

[Gilbert told this matter
to our author, who reported to us,
just as Owen told him
and the monks of whom I have spoken,
That I have told you here,
And shown thoroughly in my writing]

[34] John 20:27. Christ says to Thomas Didymus, 'Put in thy finger hither, and see my hands; and bring hither thy hand and put it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing'.

(2057-62).

The process Marie describes closely resembles the accounts of his research that Bede is careful to include throughout his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and serves a similar function, placing a finite number of steps between the version we have just read and the originator of the account. While Marie never suggests that the record of pilgrims to Purgatory and their accounts is her authority, preferring instead to make reference to the *Tractatus*, she nevertheless accounts for the provenance of what we now read. It differs from Bede's claim, though, in a significant respect. When Bede makes the claim about the provenance of the text, he omits his own place in it; he does not remind us that all we really have is the written account. Marie, on the other hand, draws attention to her 'escrit', and does so, furthermore, only very shortly after we have also been offered physical evidence as well. Marie's prosody in this passage supports her overall thesis of literary-textual construction: the start of the first two lines connect Gilbert and 'l'autor', H. de Saltrey, and the subsequent rhyming couplet 'conté ffl parlé' refer to oral acts, along with 'dit', which is finally rhymed with 'escrit' in the final line of the passage. The narrative method joins with explicit craft, rather than omission, the characteristically oral evidence and the inescapably literate textual validation, and in so doing, represents far more rigorously the actual situation of delivering evidence through a written text in a literate way.

This is a technique which Marie carries into the coda of the work, a section which is original to her version of the story. In this section, she records a sort of interview which she claims to have held with an abbot, and then separately with a bishop and his chaplain. In recording these stories, she is adding further testimony,

defending not just the account of the knight Owen, but also the reputation of the place, St. Patrick's Purgatory, which had, by Marie's time, enjoyed nearly a six hundred year history in which to accrue miraculous happenings. These witness statements which appear late in the work stand alongside, we presume, many of the other accounts of the place. Early in The *Tractatus*, and in Marie's version, the authors explain that after emerging from the Purgatory, pilgrims were given the chance to tell their story, and 'ço qu'il voldrent cunter e dire,/ fist seinz Patriz iluek escrire' ['That which they wished to recount and tell/ Saint Patrick had written down on there'] (361-2). Later, this process is mentioned once again:

> Plusurs genz el tens seint Patriz
> e en altres tens altresi,
> issi cum nus avuns oï,
> dedenz l'espurgatoire entrerent
> e puis aprés s'en returnent,
> ...
> Cil ki revindrent tut cunterent
> e li chanoigne l'embreverent,
> pur edifiër altre gent
> e qu'il n'en dutassent niënt.
>
> [Several people in the time of St. Patrick
> and in other times as well,
> just as we have heard,
> entered into the Purgatory,
> and afterwards returned.
> ...
> Those who returned recounted all they had seen,
> and the canons took it all down
> To edify other people,
> And to leave no doubts about Purgatory]
> (422-32).

Whilst no time is spent attempting to summarise the contents of these accounts, the mere mentioning of the process of recording the oral narratives in a literate way

establishes the category shift from oral to literate before we even reach the vestigially oral first person narratives of the coda section. When we reach those, we are reminded frequently of the structure of the provenance. Having first explained the Gilbert – H. de Sautrey – Marie sequence, in which she makes specific reference to the practice of writing, she then proceeds to other witnesses:

> Puis parlai jo a dous abez
> d'Irlande erent, bons ordenez,
> si lur demandai de cel estre
> se ço poeit veritez estre.
> Li uns afirma que veirs fu
> de l'Espurgatoire e seü
> que plusures humes i entrerent,
> ki unkes puis n'en retornerent.
>
> [Thereafter, I myself spoke to two abbots,
> Good, ordained men, from Ireland,
> and asked them if these events
> could be true.
> One of them pronounced true
> All that has been said about Purgatory,
> And commented that he knew several men
> Who went there but who never returned]
> (2063-70).

It does not, in fact, verify the account, but asks merely if 'ço poeit veritez estre' ['it *could* be true']. The claim retains a certain scepticism as to the account itself; it forces the reader to regard the evidence critically, and with good cause. Evidence premised on the testimony of men 'ki n'en retornerent' is poor evidence indeed. The accounts which follow bear the same oblique relationship to the story of Owen. They are about the place, or places nearby, but they cannot actually directly support the Owen story. They are offered merely as evidence for consideration. Morphologically, this is comparable to the incorruption story at the end of the Fursey vision; indeed, it is the only part of the

Fursey account at which Bede connects the evidence with his intervention in the chain of provenance, saying 'haec et de corporis eius incorruptione breuiter attigimus ut quanta esset uiri sublimitas legentibus notius existeret' ['I have here briefly touched upon these events and the incorruption of his body so that the reader may more clearly understand how great a man he was'] (168). But 'attingere' ['to touch upon'] is not as clearly an indication of the work of the author as 'mustrer par escrit', which is what Marie claims to have done.

In discussing the interview with Bishop Florentien, the act of writing is not as prevalent. An interview is an oral process which specifically serves to engineer the immediacy of testimony at first hand, and a context in which the testimony elicited is dependent upon the context of questioning and response. The transformative effect of Marie's composition in verse is potentially most damaging in such a carefully constructed oral situation. But we are nevertheless delicately reminded of Marie's involvement with the process of evidence-gathering, in a way we are not after the preface to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Marie begins: 'en cel an meïsmes trovai/ un eveske, a qui jo parlai' ['in this same year, I encountered a bishop to whom I spoke'] (2071-2). The bishop's response to Marie's questioning confirms the story of Owen.

> Il me dist, certeinement
> que c'esteit veirs, e dist coment:
> que plusur i entrerent ja,
> dunt unkes nuls n'en repaira;
> tels i out ki ariere vindrent
> e ki les tormenz i sustindrent.
>
> [He said to me, certainly,
> that it was true, and he said this:
> that many entered there
> but almost none came back;
> some did return, though,

who had survived the torments]
(2081-6)

Marie once more draws attention to her work as author by referring to herself again, 'il me dist' ['he said to me'].

When the bishop has finished his story, the reader is reminded of the interview situation by the interruption of the voice of a third person present – the chaplain to the bishop:

Quant li eveskes ne dist plus,
uns suens chapeleins leva sus
e dist: 'Sire, jo contereie,
se vostre congié en aveie
sel seint hume ço que jo vi
e ço que jo de lui oï'.

['When the bishop spoke no more,
one of his chaplains stood up
and said, 'Sire, I would tell,
if I have your permission,
what I have seen about that saintly man
and what I had heard']
(2117-2122).

The chaplain's story, like the bishop's, is evidence in support of the general possibility or plausibility of the story of Owen. Once he has finished his first story, he interrupts the narrative once more, and again this recalls the reader to the presence of the audience within the text – to Marie listening. The work ends with Marie drawing attention once more to her role not just as listener and researcher, but also as writer:

Jo, Marie, ai mis, en memoire,
le livre de l'Espurgatoire
en Romanz, qu'il seit entendables
a laie gent e covenables.

['I, Marie, have put, as a record,
the book of Purgatory
into the vernacular, that it may be understandable
by layfolk and suited to them]
(2297-300).

This finalises the category shift from oral evidence into literary form, and with it, the physical evidence which accompanies some of the oral testimony. This is not something which is absent from any literate document involving testimony and evidence, but Marie makes her reader aware of this process. She does not attempt to preserve the illusion of oral or physical evidence.

Marie's purposeful exposure of her involvement in composition is a technique which she uses widely. Its appearance in the *Lais* is dealt with in chapter 4 of this thesis, in connection with an assertion about the literary nature of her own works. A similar 'exposure' technique is also found in the prologue to the *Fables*. The material of the *Fables* is more explicitly fictional: they are evidently intended to convey truth just as the accounts of otherworld visions are intended to convey truth, but there is no suggestion that the events of could occur, as there is with otherworld visions. The exposure which Marie gives to her role in production is not, therefore, part of a system of evidence, as much as one purely of provenance. In other respects, however, it is very similar. Marie simultaneously expresses and then undermines the chain of provenance by which the *Fables* came from Aesop to the book in which we read them. As with Marie's subtle scepticism in the *Espurgatoire*, it is Marie's discomfort with the idea of transmission, rather than, say, Bede's earnest trust in his sources, which undermines the provenance:

A mei, ki la rime en dei faire,

n'avenist niënt a retraire
plusurs paroles ki i sunt;
mes nepuruec cil m'en sumunt,
ki flurs est de chevalerie,
d'enseignement, de curteisie;
e quant tels huem m'en a requise,
ne vueil laissier en nule guise
que n'i mete travail e peine,
ki que m'en tienge pur vileine;
mult dei faire pur sa preiere.

[To me, that has put it into verse,
it was not at all tasteful to repeat
much of the discourse that is here;
but nevertheless the one commissioned me,
who is the flower of chivalry,
of learning, of courtliness;
and when such a man has commanded me,
I do not wish to neglect
working and taking pains,
no matter who may take me for a peasant;
I must do my best on account of his request]
(26-37).

All of this speaks not necessarily to distrust of the source, but to a process of selection, alteration for the purposes of versification, and quite possibly silent redaction. 'Chevalerie', 'enseignement' and 'cuteisie' are not in themselves reasons for trusting an account. By including them after a statement of her reluctance, Marie foregrounds the *ad hominem* authentication that Bede had used contentedly as a source not of comforting certainty. Here though, the same authority seems to be a source of coercion, something which can only weaken the provenance of the work. If the writer of the text as we read it is uncertain or reluctant, but is able to defer the responsibility for its error onto another person, we trust the writer but distrust the work. It is method close to that used by Bede, but for opposite effect.

Like the scepticism of Marie's voice in the *Espurgatoire*, the effect of Marie's intrusion into the chain of provenance is to make the reader question. Bede – or his surrogate narrator – sat in judgment upon the evidence which he himself provided. As the various forms of support and justification accumulate, our trust is increasingly strengthened, but we are not in a position to assess the merits of the evidence entirely as we experience them: Bede judges them suitable in oral form, whereas the reader experiences only a literate *account* of this testimony. Although the reader is not excluded, assessment of the evidence is a property internal to the text. The narrator continually provides his own assessment alongside his evidence. Marie, however, engenders this judging behaviour in the reader. She is silent, and sometimes even sceptical, about the quality and trustworthiness of her evidence, and she does not garnish it by tacitly disguising it as something it is not. Where judgments are made about the evidence – such as that made by Bishop Florentien – Marie makes herself manifest to ensure that the reader is aware that the Bishop's commendation does not emerge unmediated from the author. The reader is therefore the only participant in the narrative placed to make judgments upon the evidence, and to assess the accounts, whether oral or literate, on their merits, whilst being made fully aware that they have been transformed.

Conclusion: Faith, Truth and Scepticism

Discussing visions or accounts with miraculous content inevitably involves discussing the notion of faith; faith demands the suspension of some of the scepticism which may be present in the faithless reader, or the reader of a non-religious account. There are a

profusion of medieval visionary texts, and texts of otherworld adventures, requiring similar levels of verification from an author. They could be said to form a genre of their own, and this inevitably brings to an individual text an intertextual understanding derived from other members of the genre. Collectively, visionary accounts support one another: they show that visionary experiences are possible, and though each may be unorthodox in its details, the process itself is well-attested. Despite this, it seems that the systems of proof are ubiquitous. Whether or not it is needed, the testimony of witnesses, and corroborating accounts of other kinds are invariably included.

This is perhaps because trenchant examination is also a component of faith, and so the doubt which the reader in the Middle Ages may well have experienced must be satisfiable by the narrative strategy of the author of any account, whether miraculous or not. The later works examined above challenge their evidence simultaneously with providing it, by conspicuously inviting this penetrating analysis from the reader. This is not just a matter of examining the testimony on the basis of its content. It is also awareness of the form of the testimony and how it has evolved during the chain of provenance that led to the final version. It is consciousness – expressed consciousness – of the impact of that form upon the content of the testimony, and upon its effect on the reader. This invitation to criticize and analyse was being extended at the same period in history to other areas of culture. The centralisation of the processes of canonization and the standardisation or formalisation of the criteria for sainthood were changes which occurred during the twelfth century.[35] Both evince a more critical

[35] Benedicta Ward, in *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), observes that 'once it became necessary for papal recognition to be granted in the canonization of a saint, it also became necessary for a series of requirements to be established' (185). Whilst this is apparent, it is presumably also true that the pressure for papal control over canonisation

approach to matters of belief, and although they do not strictly suggest greater scepticism, they definitely mark an increased interest in the process of knowledge gathering and the structure of evidence. This could also be connected – although more tenuously – to the general concern for documentation which emerged as a consequence first of the Norman Conquest and then of 'The Anarchy' of 1135-53.[36] The twelfth century was a time when the preoccupation with evidence, and with the source of knowledge – the preoccupation with epistemology – was heightened, whether because it was more pragmatically important or for some less identifiable reason. But the nature of the evidence does not vastly differ.

In the literature, then, what emerges is not an entirely new sensibility of evidence provision. Research into the origins of stories is something which was clearly important for Bede, and the process of transmitting the knowledge contained in an account along with the story of its provenance evidently dates back to at least that time. Nor, it seems, did the writers of the twelfth century devise any new strategies for providing evidence or move from privileging one kind of evidence over another as the progenitors of the orality-literacy debate would have it. Descriptions of oral, literate, and variously material evidence are features present in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons with a profusion and diversity similar to their occurrence in the writing of the twelfth century. What emerges is a dissatisfaction with the means of transmission. The writers of the twelfth century acknowledge, more than their forebears, the material necessity of literacy itself. If words are to be recorded in a literate way, then they lose

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was a response to a culture which was adapting more generally to a self-conscious approach to methods of knowledge gathering.

[36] RaGena de Aragon, 'The Growth of Secure Inheritance in Anglo-Norman England', *JMH* 8 (1982), 381-91, gives a detailed sense of the 'Gordian Knot' of competing claims, and the unravelling that was left to Henry II (387).

the advantages of their orality, and take on all the potential disadvantages of literacy. From this emerges the implication, acknowledged in various ways, that the strength or weakness of evidence in narrative, and the power it has to inspire belief, is entirely confined to the work of the author; it is a consequence of the act of narration.

3

Dialogue: Listening and Learning

This chapter examines dialogue, and in particular, the ways in which it interacts with or supplants narration. Direct speech is a common feature of texts from right across the period studied in this project. Simply put, it is a grammatical means of representing speech; at times it differs only typographically from a narrative voice. Dialogue, though, as the term will be used here, refers to the places in which multiple voices, represented using direct speech, play alongside one another, interact, ask and answer questions, make offers which are accepted or refused, control and release information. Beyond simply transferring information between characters, dialogue can be used to place events in time sequence, or to cause a sequence of events to occur: this is dialogue-led narration; it differs from the simple reporting of events or expressing of facts. Under scrutiny are the various ways in which the structure of dialogue is used by writers to manipulate the transfer of knowledge, whether between characters, or from text to reader.

The Basic Dialogue Paradigm: Didactic Dialogue

Though the authors of didactic dialogues have very specific concerns, didactic dialogue represents the form of the dialogue in a simple way, and can therefore be useful to illustrate the process and function of many features which are common to all dialogue. Broadly, these are the features of dialogue which associate it with oral knowledge transmission: the close presence of two speakers, the immediacy of question and

response, the reliance on the personal knowledge and sometimes the first-hand experience of the interlocutors to provide these responses.

The Old English works known as the *Solomon and Saturn* group are formed around a dialogue, a structure which is characteristically oral.[1] This is demonstrated by the inseparable form and content – both by how dialogue is constructed and by the mere fact that it is dialogue. Dialogue grammatically depends on direct speech, in which the reader experiences the speech of a character without interference from any intermediate narrative voices, although there is the occasional intervention of an external speaker to 'manage' the order and introduction of each speaker. In the *Solomon and Saturn* group, and in all substantially dialogue-narrated passages, this manager is an artifice of the act of recording dialogue rather than a necessary factor in structuring the work. Drama, for example, requires some indication of who is speaking in the process of recording, but the status of their speech – phrases such as 'he answered', 'he exclaimed' – is usually absent. The only time sequence indicator is the inherent spatio-temporal

[1] The 'group' consists of the two or possibly three works involving a dialogue between Solomon and Saturn found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 422, known as *Solomon and Saturn I* (in references hereafter *SSI*), The *Prose Solomon and Saturn Pater Noster Dialogue* (hereafter *PSSPND*) and *Solomon and Saturn II* (hereafter *SSII*). Another text, known as the *Prose Solomon and Saturn Dialogue*, appears in London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A xv; this, however, appears to be related only in the names of the protagonists, rather than stylistically or in its content. The works I shall examine are those from the Corpus Christi manuscript. Due to textual complications, involving scribal ambiguities and damage to the MS, the divisions between the poems are not clear. Thomas D. Hill, in 'The Devil's Forms and the *Pater Noster*'s Powers: *The Prose Solomon and Saturn Pater Noster Dialogue* and the Motif of the Transformational Combat', *SP* 85 (1988), 164-75, asserts that 'we are dealing with [3] wholly distinct literary texts which really have little in common with each other' (164). More recently, Patrick P. O'Neill, 'On the Date, Provenance and Relationship of the *Solomon and Saturn Dialogues*', *ASE* 26 (1997), 139-68, argues that it is only the ambiguities which led to that conclusion, and a two-text situation is more likely, with *PSSPND* belonging to the end of *SSI*, and *SSII* existing as a separate poem. The edition used here is *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. and trans. Daniel Anlezark (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009); the translations are derived from those printed in this edition. Although Anlezark prints redactions of both versions of *SSI*, found respectively in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41 and 422, it is the CCCC 422 version, being broadly the more complete version, from which I will draw most of my quotations.

suggestion of the way in which words are laid out on a page.[2] Narration through dialogue depends heavily, and sometimes exclusively upon the knowledge of autonomous voices within a text – voices that exist independent of a co-ordinating main narrator. In this respect, then, the dialogue-narrated work is the quintessential oral text.

The voices of characters can be referred to as narrative voices with the same confidence with which we refer to the equally constructed 'narrator' as having a narrative voice: they too transmit knowledge to one another, and to the reader.[3] In a work such as the *Solomon and Saturn* group, it is the characters who are the vastly dominant narrative force. The voice of the main narrator is solely responsible for the subject-verb couplings 'Salomon cwæð' and 'Saturnus cwæð', along with narratorial opening lines of the second verse dialogue (*Solomon and Saturn II*), which echo the famous formulaic opening to the prologue of *Beowulf*:

> Hwæt! Ic flitan gefrægn on fyrndagum
> modgleawe men, middangeardes ræswum,
> gewesan ymbe hira wisdom.
>
> [Listen! I have heard of a dispute in ancient days
> between sagacious men, mentors of middle
> earth, debating about their wisdom]

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[2] Ann Banfield leads the modern work in this area, with her book *Unspeakable Sentences* (Boston: Routledge, 1982). She argues that direct speech in English fundamentally requires certain tense and references provisions. Sophie Marnette, 'Indirect Discourse in a Diachronic and Pangeneric Corpus of French: Forms and Strategies', *FMLS* 39 (2003), 414-25, has subsequently demonstrated empirically from a wide range of texts that the major rules governing the narrative processes of direct and indirect speech are invariant across time, genre and language.

[3] It is important to recognise, however, as A. C. Spearing argues with specific reference to medieval texts, that considering narrators as characters may be erroneous, since there is not necessarily a substantial 'background' or 'context' to a narrator, in *Textual Subjectivity* (Oxford: OUP, 2005). Spearing's work was anticipated by Roland Barthes, who tells us that 'Narrators and characters, at least from our perspective, are essentially 'paper beings'; 'the (material) author of a narrative is in no way to be confused with the narrator of that narrative', 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Harper Collins, 1977), 79-124 at 111.

(1-3).[4]

But it is a singularly dull narrative that emerges from reading only the narrator's voice. Dialogue-narrated works, though, or parts of works which are dialogue narrated, have more content than the pedestrian 'Solomon said'/ 'Saturn said' narrative would suggest. Meanwhile, knowledge is controlled and released at the arbitration of the speakers: they are the narrators.

The characters in the dialogue are highly stylized, but the selection is not entirely arbitrary. The characters chosen are defined not so much by their identity, but by the type of knowledge they possess. Solomon is widely recognized as a figure of wisdom, from his time as king of the Israelites, although in the middle ages, his representation was often hybridized: he came to be a champion of Christian wisdom and was occasionally depicted in judgement in scenes of a Christian nature, despite his origins as an Old Testament king.[5] His knowledge is cerebral, and logically obtained, and his status as a biblical figure means that his knowledge and analysis of theology and the Bible is his principal attribute. Saturn is a stranger choice: his identification as a pagan deity who is therefore ignorant of Christian wisdom makes him a plausible choice for an interlocutor, but the authors of the *Solomon and Saturn* group invest him with additional aspects of exotic knowledge which enhance his otherness, as though his inherent difference to Solomon were not sufficient. The openings of both *Solomon and*

[4] In *SSI* the 'prologue' is delivered in the first person, a description of Saturn, by himself: it does not have the feel of a general introduction characteristic of the prologue of *SSII*. It does, however, have the subject-verb groups of the other dialogues in the voice of the 'main narrator'.
[5] P. A. Torijano, *Solomon, the Esoteric King* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). In his introduction to his edition of the dialogues, Anlezark notes that the connection with the Jewish tradition had long since disappeared (12).

Saturn poetic dialogues digress on Saturn's wide travelling and attempts to acquire knowledge:

> Hwæt! Ic iglanda eallra hæbbe
> boca onbyrged þurh gebregdstafas,
> larcræftas onlocen Libia and Greca,
> swylce eac istoriam Indea rices.
>
> [*Hwæt!* I have tasted the books of all
> the overseas lands, through the woven letters,
> I have unlocked the sciences of the Libyans and the Greeks,
> and likewise also the history of the Indian kingdoms]
> (*SSI* 1-4)

> Saturnus sumra hæfde
> bald breosttoga, boca cæga,
> leornenga locan. Land eall geondhwearf,
> Indeamere, East Corsias,
> Persea rice, Palestinion,
> Niniuen ceastre, ond Norð Predan,
> Meda maððumselas, Marculfes eard,
> Saulus rice...
>
> [Saturn, bold commander,
> had the key to certain books,
> in which learning was locked.
> He wandered all throughout the lands
> of India, East Cossias, the Kingdom of the Persians,
> Palestine, the city of Nineveh, and the North Parthians,
> the treasure-halls of the Medes, the land of Marculf,
> the Kingdom of Saul...]
> (*SSII* 5-12)

Neither dialogue presents Saturn as a straightforwardly ignorant pagan. Indeed, his learning and his desire for learning are diverse and thorough. Both dialogues make reference to the use of books, and use the metaphor of unlocking 'larcræft' 'leorneng', from those books. The litany of exotic locations serves partly to demonstrate the diversity and geographical scope of his learning, but also to imply a misguided scholar,

searching among literate but unchristian peoples for wisdom.[6] From all the books he has read, there is apparently something which Saturn has been unable to learn, because for all his learning, he still has much to learn from Solomon. The manner of the 'research' he is about to undertake is different. In contrast to the literate book-learning which has left him deficient in wisdom, the dialogue is an oral process, learning directly from the holder of wisdom. In Saturn's case, he will enter a dialogue with the arch-wise Solomon. The dialogues are poems which enable the reader to follow an argument in which one character learns from another. But they are also poems *about* oral learning, and which provide for the reader a source of wisdom in which the manner of transmission is, in principle, oral rather than literate. These are not poems which place emphasis on the booklearning of Saturn, but rather on the Socratic process by which he acquires wisdom from Solomon.

Despite all that Saturn knows, that there is a clear gradient of information from Solomon to Saturn. Throughout most of the dialogues, Saturn is learning from Solomon. This is apparent in *Solomon and Saturn I*. The dialogue here has a structure which mainly consists of so-called 'x-questions', in which the question posed demands an open answer from within a freely chosen category, and one in which the domain of the answer is not precisely predictable.[7] Saturn's questions are not brief, and Solomon's answers are typically expansive:

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[6] Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'The Geographic List of *Solomon and Saturn II*', *ASE* 20 (1991), 133-41, argues that the extent of his travelling is dependent on 'less exotic geographic knowledge than was once thought' (124), and that it belongs to a variant form of a conventional list comparable with that in *Widsiþ* and other Old English poems: Saturn is represented more as a western traveller than an eastern mystic.
[7] Udo Fries, 'Question and Answer Sequences in Old English', in Dieter Kastovsky, (ed.), *Historical English Syntax* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991) 189-201 at 195. The term 'x-question' is directly derived from Bruce Mitchell's *Old English Syntax* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), which Fries criticises for its lack of attention to the syntax of answers, although the terminology is not originally Mitchell's. Fries also briefly describes the other type of question, termed the 'nexus question', in which a closed answer is delivered

Saturnus cwæð:
Ac hwa mæg eaðost ealra gesceafta
ða halgan duru heofona rices
torhte ontynan on getælrime?
Salomon cwæð:
Ðæt gepalmtwigede Pater Noster
heofonas ontyneð, halige geblissað,
Metod gemiltsað, morðor gefylleð,
adwæsceð deofles fyr, dryhtnes onæleð.

[Saturn said:
And who may most easily of all creations
open the holy gates of the Kingdom of Heaven
in numerical order?
Solomon said:
The palm-twigged Pater Noster
opens the heavens, blesses the holy,
Provokes mercy from the Lord, fells great wrongdoing,
quenches the devil's fire, kindles the Lord's]
(*SSI* 36-44).

The character of the knowledge which Saturn elicits and which Solomon imparts is reminiscent of folklore.[8] Though the references to the Pater Noster which is the principal subject of much of these works make them technically Christian, Saturn is asking for a charm which will open gates. That the gates are the 'halgan duru heofona rices' is almost incidental. When Solomon describes the Pater Noster as 'gepalmtwigede', he is describing a prayer as though it were a physical amulet with a wide range of potency. The words of the Pater Noster bear little relation to the capacities with which Solomon imbues it.

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from a pre-determined category. In this group are questions which demand 'yes/no' answers, and the sub-group of disjunctive questions, demanding an answer of the form 'black/white/neither' (193). This type of question is rare in the Solomon and Saturn group, but form a significant portion of dialogues such as Ælfric's *Colloquy*.

[8] Kathryn Powell, in 'Orientalist Fantasy in the Poetic Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn', *ASE* 34 (2005), 117-43, argues that the nature of the knowledge imparted in the work is 'dependent on the foil of the East', conditioned by Saturn's status as an exotic character (120).

After the Pater Noster poem, which describes the 'behaviour' of the runic letters which make up the prayer[9] in similarly folkloric terms, the *Prose Pater Noster Dialogue* resumes the pattern of question and answer with which the work begins. After this section of the dialogue, the knowledge gradient is someone levelled, as Solomon and Saturn begin to trade melancholy poetic wisdom:

> SATVRNVS CVÆÐ:
> Nieht bið wedera ðiestrost, ned biðwyrda heardost,
> sorg bið swarost byrðen, slæp deaðe gelicost.
> SALOMON CVÆÐ
> Lytle hwile leaf beoð grene
> ðonne hie eft fealewiað, feallað on eorðan,
> ond forweorniað, weorðað to duste.
> ...
>
> [Saturn said:
> Night is the darkest weather, need the harshest of fates,
> Sorrow is the sorest burden, sleep is most like death.
> Solomon said:
> For a short while, the leaves are green,
> Then they fallow, and fall to earth
> and rot, and turn to dust].
>
> (*SSII* 134-8)

In this part of the second dialogue, the form is conspicuously serving as a vehicle for the pronouncements, and there is nothing characteristic about the utterances of either participant. The melancholic tone of Saturn's wisdom about night, need, sorrow and sleep is matched by Solomon's remarks on the ephemerality of life. The answers which are not reasoned, but are rather a sort of 'received lore'. Whether or not they have a genuine traditional origin is not known, and nor does it matter. Like the dialogue which deals with the Pater Noster, the solemnity of the gnomic statements suggests

[9] The Pater Noster poem is briefly discussed in Chapter 4.

sage wisdom, and the fact that we are hearing them from timeless characters further impresses this.

The content of the dialogues are important in explaining the form, and in particular, for understanding how the form was perceived. Solomon and Saturn do not impart straightforward theology or Bible learning. Indeed, Saturn's knowledge of books is not probed at all. When God's Word is mentioned by Solomon, it is objectified, like the Pater Noster, like a reliquary or amulet, 'gimmum astæned | hafað sylfren leaf' ['gem studded, it has silver pages'] (63-4), rather than being investigated. Solomon transmits a very particular kind of knowledge, which is a sort of knowledge already associated with oral tradition. Folklore is connected with wise people (such as Solomon) imparting their wisdom directly; the words derive value from the person who speaks them. The authors of the dialogues have used the oral form of the dialogue to transmit knowledge already well-suited to an oral form from one character to another. The book learning of Saturn, and the specifics of the Bible seem to have been consciously avoided.

The dialogue form has been used in order to maintain the oral nature of this knowledge. A straightforward catalogue of wisdom, without the artifice of two characters talking is not unthinkable.[10] But the form in which this knowledge is transmitted preserves its characteristics, not for Saturn, who is a construct within the 'story', but surely for the reader. The dialogue, then, was perceived to be useful for establishing a narrative structure in which a speaker could direct oral knowledge to an interlocutor, and in which the reader could 'overhear' this dialogue and derive the benefit of hearing it from its important speaker: this is why it is a useful didactic mode. In this mode, the reader is a silent interlocutor. The internal epistemology of the

[10] The poems known as the *Maxims*, for example.

dialogue is replicated externally; the oral wisdom given weight by sage Solomon or exotic Saturn is imparted to the reader as much as to either participant. The gradient of knowledge between Solomon and Saturn is representative of the gradient of knowledge which exists between text and reader – and the knowledge which the text transmits to its audience is the same as the knowledge which passes from Solomon to Saturn.

Didactic Dialogue: A Structural Paradigm for Old English Dialogue

The *Solomon and Saturn* group is clearly didactic, and evidently intended to be so by its authors; this would seem to make the pieces special cases of dialogue-led narration, in a literature which contains a large number of examples of less purposefully didactic material. Although didactic dialogue influenced by the Socratic model[11] is evidently a special case of dialogue for tendentious reasons, it has an epistemological pattern similar to that in other examples of dialogue from the Old English corpus, and therefore serves as an instructive paradigm for examining a wider range of dialogues. This section is a necessarily brief examination of dialogue in a range of Old English texts.

The *Solomon and Saturn* group is immediately comparable with other 'pure' dialogues, such as Ælfric's Anglo-Latin *Colloquy* upon the occupations. Whilst it is possible that this dialogue was actually read in full in a classroom situation, it is 'more

[11] The dialogues were probably not written in direct relation to the tradition of the Socratic dialogues of Plato, but rather with the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great in mind. Unusually, but not uniquely, Daniel Anlezark also recognises the influence of the *Aeneid* on the work, in 'Poisoned Places: the Avernian Tradition in Old English Poetry', *ASE* 36 (2007), 103-26. Thomas D. Hill suggests a different influence, arguing that some of the imagery, although not the form of the work, emerge from Old Norse traditions, 'Tormenting the Devil with Boiling Drops: an Apotropaic Motif in the Old English *Solomon and Saturn* and Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *JEGP* 92 (1993), 157-66. John P. Hermann, 'The Pater Noster Battle Sequence in *Solomon and Saturn* and the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius', *NM* 77 (1976), 206-10, suggests similarities with the work of Prudentius and also, more plausibly, the anonymous *Contradictio Salomonis*, both of which were known in Britain contemporary to the composition of the dialogues.

likely a model for teachers to imitate', than an actual 'textbook'.[12] This corresponds, to a degree, with Hans Sauer's view that dialogues were used as a method to 'exercise the dialogue-partner's wit', as a pedagogical tool.[13] But their didactic nature is a generic aspect, rather than a narratological one. That the participants in Ælfric's work learn Latin rather than Anglo-Saxon socioeconomics is not at stake: as readers of the dialogue, the knowledge which is transferred to the interlocutor regarding the professions of ploughman, merchant and so on is precisely the same as the knowledge which is transferred to its reader by the text itself – as distinct from its circumstances.[14] Certainly these dialogues have a valorising function, establishing traditions of knowledge in a way which became literate in the encyclopœdias of the later middle ages. However, the use of dialogue as a means of transmitting this knowledge is identical. The purpose or function of a text does not affect the process of knowledge transmission, and it is the narratological structure of didactic dialogues which connects the dialogue in the *Solomon and Saturn* group with dialogue-led narration and dialogue in the Anglo-Saxon period more generally.

The didactic dialogue involves two or more (usually two) narrative voices. The owner of one voice is the addressee of the other: all dialogue has an audience internal to the text, since at least the second participant in the dialogue must hear what their

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[12] Joyce Hill, 'Learning Latin in Anglo-Saxon England: Traditions, Texts and Techniques', in Sarah Rees James, (ed.), *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 7-29 at 27.

[13] Hans Sauer, 'A Didactic Dialogue in Old and Middle English Versions: The *Prose Solomon and Saturn* and the *Master of Oxford's Catechism*', in Patrizia Lendinara and Loredana Lazzari (eds.), *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the Light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 363-98 at 363.

[14] It is important to stress the distinction between what the readers of Ælfric's dialogue learn in a pedagogical sense, and what they learn in a narrative sense. The language-learning aspect of the text is prominent because the content is so banal, but the ability of a reader to learn words – learn language – from any text is the same. What distinguishes Ælfric's dialogue in a narrative sense is that, like the *Solomon and Saturn* group, the very conspicuous transfer of information features in content of the text.

partner is saying. This is in addition to the reader, which is an audience shared by every text. In a didactic setting, the concern is for one, usually inferior interlocutor to receive information from his companion, and in such cases, the external audience – the reader – receives the same information and treats it in a similar way. Saturn's pagan ignorance makes him less informed than all but the least educated reader conceivable for such a text. Nevertheless, in this narrative structure, the difference between the knowledge which the reader brings with them to the dialogue, and the knowledge held by Saturn is not acted upon. It would not have a practical effect upon the reading experience if the text if the reader were, as Saturn seems to be, at the very bottom of the knowledge gradient. It is a work in which the addressee and the reader are at any time interchangeable without affecting the epistemological structure of the text. As we will see, this is a basic epistemological pattern not just of the conspicuously didactic *Solomon and Saturn*, but which is common in many dialogue narrated passages in Old English literature. These passages are not necessarily didactic generically, but follow the same narratological structure.

Much of the knowledge received by the reader in the poem known as *Christ and Satan*[15] is ascertained through direct speech; indeed, after a long passage in which Satan laments the condition of the rebel angels after the fall, the main narrator admits as much: 'Swa se werega gast wordum sæde,/ his earfoðo ealle ætsomne' ['So the cursed spirit spoke with words, summarising all his misery'] (125-6). This, though, is not really dialogue, but rather straightforward character narration: Satan is simply telling the whole story and describing hell on behalf of the main narrator. Dialogue requires

[15] The original is found uniquely in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Junius 11. The edition used here is from *The Junius Manuscript* ed. George Krapp (London: Routledge, 1931), 135-58.

exchange, or at least action caused by direct speech, especially if dialogue as a fact of structure is to lead the narrative. Later, in a section which dramatises the fasting of Christ in the wilderness and his temptation by Satan, there is what seems to be a passage of dialogue which could form a sort of interplay between the two agonists of the work. But although the manuscript has no physical gap, there is clearly a substantial lacuna in the sense of the work: almost certainly a number of lines are omitted, possibly because of eyeskip during copying, or because the scribe was referring to a damaged or incomplete exemplum.[16] What remains is a nexus question, of a rhetorical type, certainly, but nevertheless a question which could well have initiated dialogue: 'Wendest þu, awygrda, þæt awriten nære [...]' ['Did you think, cursed one, that it was not written [...]'] (674).[17]

What survives of the passage allows confident speculation about what is lost. The gospel story which is the basis of the poem at this point is well known,[18] and is in its original form an excellent example of dialogue-led narration. The poem dramatises the temptations of Christ, although the temptation to jump from the top of the temple is missing. The remark which prompts the question from Christ is a piece of interpolated direct speech which does not appear in the biblical original, 'gif þu saw micle mihte hæbbe' ['if you have so much might'] (672). Strangely, the lines preceding it, which are in the voice of Satan in the original, are reported in the poem: 'Brohte him to bearme brade stanas,/ bæd him for hungre hlafas wyrcan' ['[Satan] brought him

[16] Krapp does not offer either speculation in his notes, explaining only that 'Syntax and meaning indicate a considerable loss in the MS. here which none of the edd. have ventured to supply. Clubb supposes a loss in the MS. also after dreamas, l. 678' (676 n., p. 246).
[17] Krapp includes the succeeding line, 'nymþe me ænne' ['except me alone'] as part of the 'pre-lacuna' sentence. I cannot see how a meaningful sentence would progress if this were the case. It is possible that this half-line is an allusion to Christ's quoting of Deut 8:3 in Matt 4:4 and Luke 4:4, 'not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God'.
[18] Matt 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13.

to hold large stones, and bade him, because of his hunger, to make them into loaves'] (670-1). The interpolated line of direct speech makes the purpose of the tempting more obvious, and establishes the fact that Christ and Satan are involved in a spoken dialogue, but beyond this it does not affect the story.

After the lacuna, the temptation of power and glory is dramatised:

> 'Loca nu ful wide ofer londbuende.
> Ic þe geselle on þines seolfes dom
> folc and foldan. Foh hider to me
> burh and breotone bold to gewealde,
> rodora rices, gif þu seo riht cyning
> engla and monna, swa ðu ær myntest'.
> Þa him andswarode ece drihten:
> 'Gewit þu, awyrgda, in þæt witescræf,
> Satanus seolf; þe is susl weotod
> gearo togegnes, nalles godes rice...'.
>
> ['Look out now full widely over the people of the earth.
> I will give you for your own dominion
> the people and the land. Accept here from me
> the city and the wide lands to rule
> of the kingdom of heaven, if you are the just king
> of angels and men, as you have thought before'.
> Then the eternal Lord answered him:
> 'Get you gone, accursed one, to that place of punishment,
> Satan; certain torment awaits you,
> not the kingdom of God...']
>
> (683-92).

Christ's reply (of which the above quotation is an excerpt) is a little more inflammatory than his reply in the bible, but it is substantially the same in its content. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the section, when it was complete, was a retelling of the temptations of Christ with minor modifications.

It does not immediately resemble the dialogue of the *Solomon and Saturn* group, but this stems primarily from generic differences. There is more of a 'plot' to the

temptation of Christ: the dialogue, therefore, leads events external to itself, which is not true of *Solomon and Saturn*. The question/answer structure of *Solomon and Saturn* is modified in *Christ and Satan* because the dialogue here is 'performative':[19] offers, followed by acceptance or refusal, map onto potential actions outside of speech. But the answers that Christ gives satisfy the reader as well as Satan. Our status as readers is no different from our status in the *Solomon and Saturn* group: we could still be silent listeners present at the scene, since the epistemological gradient still flows to us from the speaker at any one time. Indeed, a dramatic possibility that occurs to us as modern readers but is not realised by the author here is the use of deception: Satan is treacherous, so we are told, and yet here, he makes offers and temptations, but whether they are deceptive or not is never manifest. This may be due to the absence of a suitable model for Satan in the Bible. *Christ and Satan* is more dramatic than the *Solomon and Saturn* group, but this emerges from its plot rather than its narrative structure. Crucially, the reader does not require knowledge beyond that transmitted in the dialogue in order meaningfully to interpret the words of the speaker.

The next example, *Beowulf*, contains a large amount of direct speech, but this is not generally what could be called dialogue. The presence of two or more speakers internal to the text, one of whom assumes the role of listener while the other speaks, is frequently rendered unnecessary, since the speeches which follow are so long and so divorced from the questions or requests which prompted them that they are more properly examples of the narrating function being transferred to another voice.

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[19] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: OUP, 1955), 6 *et passim*. Austin coins the term 'performative' as a noun referring to words or phrases which serve a purpose beyond communication. Among these he includes verbal contracts like marriage vows (9). Satan's tempting offers and Christ's refusals are also examples of performatives.

However, there are a few places where examining the transition from one speaker to another reveals the nature of dialogue as it was used by the author. Early in the work, before Beowulf has even fought, Unferth questions Beowulf's credentials,[20] asking about a rowing competition in which his adversary defeated him. Unferth asks a nexus question, of the type which demands a 'yes/no' response,

> Eart þu se Beowulf se þe wiþ Brecan wunne
> on sidne sæ, ymb sund flite?
>
> [Are you the Beowulf, the one that with struggled with Breca
> on the wide sea, competed on the sea?]
> (506-7).[21]

He elaborates to give details in which Beowulf lost the race or acted dishonourably. It is important to consider for whom this question was asked. Unferth clearly wishes to discredit Beowulf among the Danes, and perhaps to undermine him among his own men. As far as he is concerned, Unferth is already confident in his version of the story, and hopes the answer will be a (modified) yes, which would humiliate Beowulf and bring credit and attention to himself. The audience of the dialogue is the assembly in the hall: they are presumably 'all ears' to hear Beowulf defend himself against this charge. Unlike the *Solomon and Saturn* group, there are more characters in the vicinity of the dialogue than the dialogue partners, but this, once again, is connected with the genre of the work rather than its narrative structure. As in *Solomon and Saturn*, though, the assembled Geats and Danes who are Beowulf's audience hear and learn the same as the text's readers and hearers from the ensuing account given by the hero. We

[20] *Beowulf* is discussed, in the context of its long, formal, narrative speeches, in Chapter 1, and the Unferth (Breca) episode is also treated there.
[21] The edition used here is *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk et al., 4th edn. (Toronto: UTP, 2008).

and they learn that yes, he is that Beowulf to whom Unferth refers, but, in an extension to the standard nexus answer, we learn that the circumstances were rather different from those suggested by Unferth.

The nexus question which Unferth asks is rejected, in favour of an x-question the terms of which have unilaterally been decided by Beowulf. From Beowulf's point of view, this technique makes good sense. Changing the rules of the engagement to suit his strengths enables him to win the verbal contest, where meekly submitting to Unferth's tactics, and acknowledging Unferth's point of view would have caused him to lose, and lose face. But for the progress of the story, and therefore for the author whose aim is to present a certain view of Beowulf not just to the characters listening in Heorot, but also to the reader, Beowulf's technique serves an additional purpose concerned with the transmission of knowledge. Question and answer sequences are a very efficient means of transmitting evidence to an audience, and among the varieties of question, it is the x-question with its potentially open and expansive answer which is most effective at supplying information. It is by translating Unferth's question into an x-question that the requirements of efficient knowledge transmission are best served, and this also accounts for the length of most of the passages of direct speech in *Beowulf*: that way, more information can be transferred, more efficiently.

The instance of dialogue between Unferth and Beowulf demonstrates the latent presence of an alternative to the didactic mode of dialogue. Unferth's initial question, 'eart þu se Beowulf...', temporarily opens a nexus of two possibilities, one of which is

true, and the other false; in so doing, it does not consummately serve a didactic end.[22] Merely by offering a possibility other than the truth, Unferth has created a situation of doubt, in which the critical faculties of his audience and his readers are exercised.[23] Since the reader is placed in a position to receive knowledge differently from the internal audience, the didactic epistemological structure is destabilized. The internal audience *could* be misled by Unferth; the reader would have to maintain their own knowledge of Beowulf's character and credentials from some other source, such as the main narrator. But the creation of this mode, however, does not last for long. The nexus of possibilities is rapidly destroyed by Beowulf's response, and his status within the story effectively renders the exchange a didactic one, albeit one requiring greater judgement on the part of the reader. Unferth's question is one which puts *Beowulf* in an impossible position. His answer can only respond to a nexus question in the affirmative or the negative, and is structurally not permitted to protest the premise of the question – that there is such a man, Beowulf, according to the terms Unferth suggests.[24] What Beowulf does is to attempt to redefine his role in the dialogue as the party proposing the premises, and in order to do so, his answer does not respond to the question. This dialogue, therefore, whilst still didactic, has manipulated the didactic form, since it is only by Beowulf's refusal to answer the question asked by Unferth that the reader is able to learn anything about Beowulf's past.

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[22] This is supported in the etymology of the word 'heresy': the word enters modern European languages from the ancient Greek word 'αἵρεσις', 'choosing'. Heresy – choice – conflicts with the didactic aims of organised or orthodox (etymologically 'correct in opinion') religion.

[23] A different consequence of the instability of the narrative during the Beowulf-Unferth dialogue is discussed is Chapter 1.

[24] This is referred to as the paradox of definite descriptions, discussed widely by Bertrand Russell, and characterised by statements like 'The present king of France is bald', and outlined in his paper, 'On Denoting'.

Andreas shows a similar attitude to dialogue epistemology. Andreas is ordered by God, 'feran ond frið lædan' ['to travel, and spread peace'] (174). Andreas is nonplussed, and asks,

> Hu mæg ic, dryhten min, ofer deop gelad
> fore gefremman on feorne weg
> swa hrædlice, heofona scyppend,
> wuldres waldend, swa ðu worde becwist?
>
> [How can I, my Lord, over the deep
> make a journey in distant parts
> this promptly, creator of the heavens,
> wielder of glory, as you have ordered with words?]
> (190-93).[25]

The reply made to him by God is a useful reply to the audience as well as to Andreas himself – for although, given the hagiographical nature of the text, we could as an audience anticipate the response God would give, we do not *know* how God intends Andreas to accomplish the task. The answer begins as a straightforward assertion of God's power, 'nis þæt uneaðe eallwealdan Gode/ to gefremmanne on foldwege' ['it is not difficult for the all-powerful God to journey over the earth'] (205-6): the response from God never really answers the question, but it serves the same purpose as a simple response, and significantly, it serves the same purpose for us as it does for Andreas. The potential jeopardy of such a journey is alleviated, and God leaves Andreas with the performative blessing, 'hafa bletsunge... mine þær ðu fere' ['have my blessing where you travel'] (223-5) – which serves to reassure the reader in much the same way it reassures Andreas.

[25] The edition used here is *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. Kenneth R. Brooks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961).

Later in *Andreas*, however, the dialogue situation is complicated. A disguised God and his crew of angels pilot the ship which is to take Andreas to Mermedonia. Much of the day's sailing is spent in God's dialogue with Andreas. This episode is reminiscent of the visit by God and his angel to Abraham in the book of Genesis. In the biblical episode, however, there is no sense of a deception in the disguise:

> Cumque elevasset oculos apparuerunt ei tres viri stantes propter eum quos cum vidisset cucurrit in occursum eorum de ostio tabernaculi et adoravit in terra.
>
> Et dixit Domine si inveni gratiam in oculis tuis ne transeas servum tuum.
>
> [When he had lifted up his eyes, there appeared to him three men standing near him: and as soon as he saw them he ran to meet them from the door of his tent, and adored down to the ground.
>
> And he said: Lord, if I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away from thy servant].[26]

The God of *Andreas* is disguised so as to be apparently unrecognisable to the apostle, more like the visitation of Christ to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

> Et ecce duo ex illis ibant ipsa die in castellum quod erat in spatio stadiorum sexaginta ab Hierusalem nomine Emmaus. Et ipsi loquebantur ad invicem de his omnibus quae acciderant. Et factum est dum fabularentur et secum quaererent et ipse Iesus adpropinquans ibat cum illis. Oculi autem illorum tenebantur ne eum agnoscerent.
>
> [And behold, two of them went, the same day, to a town which was sixty furlongs from Jerusalem, named Emmaus. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that while they talked and reasoned with themselves, Jesus himself also drawing near, went with them. But their eyes were held, that they should not know him].[27]

[26] Gen 18:2-3.
[27] Luke 24:13-16

The introduction of God and his angels in the poem is like the episode in Genesis:

> He ðær lidweardas,
> þrymlice þry þegnas mette,
> modiglice menn, on merebate
> sittan siðfrome, swylce hie ofer sæ comon;
> þæt wæs drihten sylf, dugeða wealdend,
> ece ælmihtig, mid his englum twam.
>
> [There on the ship he saw crewmen,
> three splendid thanes, valiant men,
> sitting voyage-ready, as though they had come across the sea;
> it was God himself, ruler of the hosts,
> eternal almighty, with his two angels]
> (244-9).

But instead of the instant recognition of Abraham, we are told that when God speaks to Andreas, he remains incognito, as in Luke:

> Him onswarode ælmihti God,
> swa þæt ne wiste, se ðe þæs wordes bad,
> hwæt se manna wæs meðelhegendra,
> þe he þær on waroðe wið þingode.
>
> [Almighty God answered him
> so that he that awaited the answer did not know
> what the man was among men
> that he conversed with there on the shore]
> (260-3).

God's aim, it is clear, is to test the faith and resolution of his follower. This he achieves by talking with Andreas as though he were someone other than he is. His deception, though, seems to rely on only one questionable remark, 'we of Marmedonia mægðe syndon/ feorran geferede' ['we have journeyed from the province of Mermedonia, travelled far'] (264-5). This is not a patent falsehood; we know he has been in

Mermedonia, and that he was in some sense manifest there, rather than conversing remotely through the prayers of Matheus, since at the end of his visitation,

> Gewat him þa se halga helm ælwihta,
> engla scyppend, to þam uplican
> eðelrice.
>
> [The holy protector of all creatures then departed,
> creator of the angels, to the kingdom on high]
> (118-20).

Whether or not it complies strictly with orthodox theology, God's simple departure serves to illustrate the straightforward nature of his presence, and indicates that his words to Andreas are misleading only in that they imply humanity when coupled with his human form; they do not distort the truth.

What follows in *Andreas* is not unlike the kind of dialogue which characterizes sapiential work; the complication of God's concealed identity becomes so innocuous as a phenomenon as to warrant the constant reminders of the external narrator, who identifies him variously as 'æðelinga helm' ['protector of princes'] (277 etc), 'engla þeoden' ['lord of angels'] (290 etc.), alongside markers which remind us He is on board a ship 'beorna breogo, þær he on bolcan sæt' ['lord of men, there, seated on the gunnel'] (305). Their conversation largely concerns anecdotes of the life of Christ, and in narrative terms, it differs little from the toing and froing of Solomon and Saturn: our foreknowledge of the bible aside, the apparent gradient of information from Andreas to the mariner is similar to that between Andreas and the reader. The fact that the mariner is God, and therefore knows all of what Andreas is telling him is only a minor adjustment to the structure of the narrative.

Andreas is different from the *Solomon and Saturn* poems. Generic differences between the two emerge from conspicuously different literary functions: a formal, unalloyed, didactic function is fulfilled by the dialogue group. Furthermore, the knowledge gradient in the 'disguised God' section is also more complex. The audience knows more than Andreas, bringing to the dialogue on the ship knowledge from outside Andreas' personal story, which he has no means of gaining from the dialogue itself. But the work is also palpably homiletic – perhaps less so than other Old English religious works, but spiritually edifying nevertheless. The scene in which Andreas responds to the challenges to his faith which God places in his way clearly serves as a lesson for the reader. Andreas' answers, and his unswerving faith, are literally textbook examples in dealing with such challenges. God is testing Andreas, and of course the reader is not in the same position of judgement: Andreas' status as a luminary was, we presume, sufficiently widespread for the name if not the story of St. Andrew to be familiar to the readers before beginning the poem. But God's immediate objectives are the same as the reader's: both wish to know how Andreas will participate in the dialogue, and it is the precise content of his speech that is of interest. The dialectic with which God and Andreas interact serves as a general example in dialectic, just as the Socratic-type dialogue serves to teach more than just its immediate content. This, though, is unconnected with the work in question: all literature in which dialogue features could potentially provide this lesson. But in a manner which is just as pronounced as in the *Solomon and Saturn* group, the knowledge transfer from one interlocutor to another mirrors the knowledge transfer from text to reader. The dialogue's lesson here can be ascertained from Andreas' answers.

Like the Unferth episode in *Beowulf*, Andreas' exchange with God latently contains the germs of a non-didactic mode of dialogue, but this mode does not flourish. Where dialogue exists in these texts, it serves a purpose which is more elaborate than the didactic transfer of knowledge in the *Solomon and Saturn* group. It serves to drive actions within the timescale of the narrative, since characters act upon what they newly know, and in this way, it grants a sort of realism to a text, effacing the main narrator temporarily and bringing the reader into the work.[28] But in these texts, these additional purposes – even where they are the primary purpose of dialogue – do not alter the epistemological system. Ultimately, one channel of knowledge transmission is resolutely followed to the absolute exclusion of all others. The incident on the ship is a moment at which the potential of dialogue is raised; it is only a short episode in the work, and the work itself is part of only a very little surviving literature.

It is difficult to make any claims as to the position of such an episode within an unknowable lost literature and a potentially unrepresentative surviving corpus. Nevertheless, it is a point of significance that the narrative structure bears many similarities to that between Beowulf and Unferth, Solomon and Saturn. These examples serve as illustrations that the didactic mode as it is called in this chapter is a widespread mode of dialogue in Old English literature, and one which is not substantially affected by differences in genre or period. The way in which these dialogues – after experimenting with and rejecting the possibility of presenting an untrue account – transmit knowledge to the reader as though they were participants:

[28] Ruth Waterhouse has observed and discussed this application of dialogue, in 'Ælfric's use of Discourse in Some Saints' Lives', *ASE* 5 (1976), 85-103. She notes that 'in general the character who is given direct speech is more dramatically effective, more 'real', than the one who is represented through indirect speech' (85).

the reader does not obtain knowledge other than that which is transmitted. The narrative function of dialogue in these texts – its role in the telling of the story – is like that of a main narrator.

The Informed Reader and the Deceived Character

A development in complexity from the basic didactic dialogue paradigm occurs when the knowledge gradient between participants in a dialogue begins to differ from that between the characters and the reader. The first increment in this deception comes from just one party present in a scene of dialogue knows less (or more) than others, whilst the reader knows what is not known to the less informed party. Knowledge transmitted to level this gradient among the characters does not, therefore, have the same effect on a reader. This development enables writers to dramatize not just the knowledge that is transmitted, but the process by which it is gained, while the reader remains at a remove from that process. In this development, the reader is still a listener to the dialogue: the dialogue still occurs, as it were, for the 'benefit' of the reader, except that the reader is better informed than one party in the dialogue.

In *Andreas*, whilst the hero may not be as enlightened as the reader about the identity of the captain who conveys him to Mermedonia, his lack of knowledge is not functional. It does not affect his behaviour, and indeed the display of constancy that the scene delivers is the major contribution that it makes to the plot, so while Andreas may be mistaken, he is not misled. Elsewhere, deception serves a stronger narrative function, and can disrupt the twin knowledge gradient from speaker to interlocutor and speaker to reader. This is the situation in the Old English *Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, a free

and elaborated translation of a Latin prose text usually called the *Passio Septem Dormientium*.

The Latin version was derived from a tale which was widely popular in Europe from around the beginning of the seventh century. There are many version of the *Seven Sleepers* legend, but the existence of an Old English version indicates two things. Firstly, it demonstrates that the legend was known in England at the end of the Anglo-Saxon era. It is not possible to say how well-known, and the usual caveats that apply to all Old English literature must be applied to the *Seven Sleepers* as well: we do not know how representative any text can be in the context of a literature which has survived in a fragmentary form by the action of arbitrary choices and random fortune. If the number of surviving versions is a guide, however, the implication is that the tale was popular. The existence of the Old English version also indicates that the narrative techniques and devices present in the story as a whole were current, and available to writers. Beyond simply copying a Latin original, the translator has become involved in the process of the creation of the text of a vernacular version, and indeed made some minor adjustments. But it is also important to be aware that the Old English version is very similar to its Latin source, and therefore the narrative methods within it are not, broadly speaking, attributable to the Anglo-Saxon translator, but to an earlier author. The text is useful because it provides an account of methods of which the Anglo-Saxons must have been aware, and attitudes to dialogue of which they were conscious, but should not be considered representative of innovations purposefully made for the Old English version itself.

The author manifests the plot of the work – which is one of confusion and misunderstanding – through dialogue-led narrative. This is effectively achieved by pre-

emptively supplying the reader with knowledge which has not yet reached any of the characters in the story. In order for the reader to *know* that what they are seeing is misunderstanding rather than cruelty, this pre-emption by the narrator is necessary. It occurs on the morning that the sleepers awake after more than two centuries of sleep. The narrator is anxious to impart both the true and the misapprehended case of affairs, before the narration of the story can continue:

> Ða gelamp it þæt God wolde þæt seo halige geferræden aweht beon sceolde, þe on ðam scræfe tile hwile gereste hæfdon. And he... sylf synderlice mid his agenre dæde þas seofon halgan þe on ðam scræfe slepon he hi awehte ða of ðam slæpe... And ealle hi leton swilce hi on æfen slepon and sona ðæs on morgen of ðam slæpe awacedon; and þæt ilce geþanc and seo sylfe carfylnyss þe heom amang þam nihtslæpe wæs on heorra heortan, eall þa hi awacadon hi þæt sylfe geþohto, and hi nan oþer nyston buton þæt Decius se casere hete heora gecepan
>
> [Then it happened that God wished the saints to be woken, after they had slept in the cave for a suitable time. And by his own deed, he miraculously awakened from sleep the seven saints that slept in the cave. And they all supposed that they had gone to sleep in the evening and in the morning awakened from the sleep, and the same thought and the same anxieties which had troubled their sleep were in their hearts: each, when he awoke thought to himself, and knew nothing other than that Decius Cæsar had ordered their capture]
>
> (45-6).[29]

After awaking, one of the sleepers, Malchus, is sent into town to buy food. It is through his speech that his confusion is manifest. He is arrested for coining because the money he carries is unknown to the present time, and taken before the bishop. In his speech, he makes reference to Decius Cæsar, and it is this which marks him as a man from another age:

[29] The edition used here is *The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers* ed. Hugh Magennis (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994).

> 'La, leof, ic bidde eow þæt ælmyssan þæt ic mote anes þinges axian, and ic eow sona eall will cyðan hwæt ic þence on minum geþance: þæs ic wolde, leof, axian, gif ge me secgan woldon, hwær Decius se casere sy, se þe her wæs on þissere byrig?'
> Ða andwyrde se bisceop him Marinus and cwæð to Malche, 'Min leofe cild, nis nu todæg se casere on eorðan lifigende þe Decius sy genemned. Se casere þe ðu embe axast he wæs gefyrn worulde, and swiðe fela geara synd nu agane syððan he gewat of þyssan life'.
>
> ['Sir! I beg of you the charity that I may ask one thing, and I will soon let you know all that you wish of what I think in my mind: this I would ask, sir: would tell me where Decius Cæsar is, he that was here in this city?'
> Then the Bishop Marinus answered him, and said to Malchus, 'My beloved child, there is now today no cæsar on earth living that is named Decius. The cæsar you ask about was formerly of this world, and a great many years have now gone by since he departed this life']
>
> (54).

The sleeper Malchus' knowledge is reconciled with the truth through this dialogue, but ours is not. We already knew the truth, and so the drama we see unfolding is the drama of knowledge being transferred, within the story, from one character to another. We as readers cannot listen to the dialogue as the internal listeners listen, because of the position of epistemological supremacy in which we have already been placed. The function of the dialogue here is not directly informative. The truth value of the information which it imparts is challenged by the events in the story.

The dialogue that has been examined so far in this chapter is from Anglo-Saxon England, and for the most part, with more or less complexity and variation, it follows the basic paradigm of the didactic dialogue, like that found in *Solomon and Saturn*. The exception has been the dialogue passage from the *Seven Sleepers*. This work differs because of the way in which the author allows deception to function: dialogue ceases to be something which serves the characters just as much as it serves the reader, and becomes an element in the dramatic progress of the plot. The deception

(which here is actually a mistaking) is straightforward. Nevertheless, because the characters' actions are influenced by the mistake they have made, and because the reader realises the jeopardy of this mistake before the characters even become aware of it, the nature of the dialogue in the *Seven Sleepers* is fundamentally different from the dialogue in the works examined previously. The gradient of knowledge between speaker and reader is distinct from that between speaker and interlocutor. The *Seven Sleepers* example demonstrates that this model of dialogue-led narration, in which the reader and listener are no longer interchangeable, was available to Anglo-Saxon writers at the time. By providing a separation between the 'listening' activity of the reader and the listening activity of the characters, it offers considerable dramatic possibilities.

Dramatic Deception in the *Romance of Horn*

The mistake of the seven sleepers in the eponymous story demonstrates that there existed in the minds of writers in Anglo-Saxon England the possibility of manipulating a basic paradigm of dialogue in order to use the process of knowledge transmission as a dramatic process. In the *Romance of Horn*,[30] which seems to have been written in the late 1160s or 1170s, the deception is voluntarily created by a character within the story, and through the dialogue of the work, interferes with the process of knowledge transmission. This represents a further complexity: a character willingly misleading others is an example of an author creating a *character* who is concerned with the possibilities of manipulating the process of knowledge transmission. The romances that begin to flourish in the twelfth century are stories of deception and mistaken identity,

[30] The edition used here is *The Romance of Horn*, ed. Mildred K. Pope, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955).

to which deceptive dialogue, and consequent discrepant epistemology, are well-suited narrative techniques.

We know there must be an additional, dramatic purpose to the dialogue of the *Seven Sleepers* because it supplies us with information we have already been given by the main narrator earlier in the text: this is also true of *Horn*. Our epistemology in *Horn* is often not dependent on the dialogue, since in almost all cases the narrator has already thoroughly informed his readers of the situation. The description of Horn, as 'melz senez,/ Plus hardi de parler e li mielz doctrinez' ['the cleverest, the boldest in speech and the best schooled'] (32-3), who 'passa tuz de tutes beautez ['surpassed them all in all beauties'] (36) and 'Li plus jofnes d'aus iert e iert plus sené,/ Plus hardi iert de tuz e meuz enparenté' ['the youngest of them and the most intelligent, the boldest of them all and the most nobly born'] (163-163a), is almost replicated in Herland's description of him, 'Li plus jofnes de tuz en est li plus senez… pur taunt est, çoe m'est vis, tut li meuz enparlez/ E si est li plus genz e li meuz figurez' ['the youngest of them all is the wisest...he is, I think, the readiest of speech, the noblest and the handsomest'] (230-1). Dialogue is used not just for the transmission of knowledge, as it is in the Solomon and Saturn group, but as a tool for verification, as in the character-narrated passages in *Beowulf*. Here, though, the *Horn* poet Thomas, is using the technique to demonstrate that his view of the child Horn is widely held and attested. It is not a tool for verification: Thomas is not using this to demonstrate the truth of his claim. It is rather a form of justification, demonstrating the provenance of the information is internal to the story, rather than a narratorial interpolation. It strengthens the position of the narrator: Thomas can make the claims he does about Horn because, as he shows, his characters agree with him.

There is also a section of the text in which the relationship between the main narrator and the dialogue-narration is disrupted. As part of his plan to regain his kingdom, Horn decides to travel incognito under the name of Gudmod. Thomas, apparently aware that this deliberate deception on the part of the protagonist could be confusing, leads us through the name change process:

> Ki Gudmod des or mes sera il apelé:
> Pur çoe turna sun num, dunt ainz esteit nomé,
> Qu'il ne feust koneü en estrange regné,
> Desque pruesce oust fait dunt doust estre preisié.
>
> [He will now be called Gudmod,
> He changed his name from what it once was
> So that he would not be known in a foreign kingdom
> Until he had done deeds that merited praise]
> (2160-3).

This occurs in laisse 104. Over the next few laisses, the main narrator uses the name Horn, and Horn himself gradually develops the deception, saying 'Gudmod fui apelez a mun baptesmement' ['I was called Gudmod at my baptism'] (2266) in direct contradiction of the real case of affairs. But by laisse 110, it is as though the narrator has entered into the deception along with Horn. The narrator only rarely uses the name 'Horn' at all, and narrates from the point of view of a deceived observer, as though the events are occurring around a man really named Gudmod. This first happens with 'Egfer meine Gudmod a la mesun Malgis' ['Egfer led Gudmod to the house of Malgis'] (2284) and then 'Gudmod est desarmé' ['Gudmod disarmed'] (2288) and so on. The relationship between dialogue and narration becomes most problematic in laisse 113:

> A itant fu Gudmod devant eus apelé.
> Quant vint devant le rei mult bel l'a salué,
> E li reis fud corteis, bel li ad demaundé

Ki il est? dunt il vient? quels est sis parenté?
En apres demanda cum il iert apelé,
E il respundi, mes neënt tut verté,
Kar il veut ke sun nun seit ilokes celé
Dunt il iert coneü en meint divers regné.
'Reis, çoe ke demaundez, ne vus uert pas vééd,
Parmi tut çoe ke sui de povre parenté'.

[Then they called Gudmod before them.
When he came before the king, he saluted him graciously
And the king was courteous, and graciously asked
Who is he? from where does he come? who are his parents?
Afterwards he [Gudreche] asked him what he was called,
And he replied, but not entirely truthfully,
Because he wanted to conceal how he was known in many
kingdoms. 'King, that which you demand, will not be refused you,
Though I am of poor parentage]
(2330-2339).

The disruption here is that the main narrator introduces the laisse with 'Gudmod' – who remains the grammatical subject throughout most of the quotation above; and to this extent, the narrator entirely embraces the deception. But this is betrayed somewhat by 'mes neënt tut verté'. Whilst the narrator is on the one hand prepared to allow his signposting of the character to mislead, he is not prepared for the risk that 'Gudmod' may deceive the reader in speech. What Gudmod goes on to say, particularly about his parentage, is patently false to the reader; Horn also deceives in saying he will not deceive, and this verbal trick is also eschewed by the narrator. This places the burden of deceit back upon the speaker.

In order meaningfully to interpret the dialogue in this section of the poem, the reader must be apprised of the fact that in his dialogue – in the way he responds to questions – the persona Gudmod conceals the truth about Horn. The fact that the main narrator introduces him as Gudmod warns the reader that this persona is in play. The narrator's later attempts deflect the effects of the deception away from the reader:

we are not like the readers of the preceding examples of dialogue. We cannot sit beside Gudreche and passively learn what he learns, since knowledge transmitted by Gudmod does not lead us to the truth. Thomas, the poet, explores a crucial distinction in the way he has established narrative voice against dialogue-led narration: his main narrative voice must retain the trust of the reader in the veracity of the knowledge it imparts: this is how the reader becomes informed. The speaking character, by contrast, has no such obligation. And it is not just the nature of the character's deception, the difference between the 'accounts' offered by the main narrator and the deceptive character, which is relevant to the reader's understanding. The basis for the deception is also a matter of importance. The manipulation of the knowledge transmission process itself becomes a significant feature of the work, and it is this manipulation which is imparted to the reader.

Dialogue with Discrepant Epistemology: Deception in the Bible and the Old English *Genesis* Poem

It is evident from examining *Horn* that the knowledge transmission process, and the way it operates in dialogue, had become interesting to authors in the twelfth century. The Old English *Genesis* poem demonstrates that the epistemological structures related to deception in a text were well understood by Anglo-Saxon authors as well. In the *Genesis* poem, however, the authorial decision was to simplify, rather than complicate, an existing paradigm of deception.

While, in the parascriptural poem *Christ and Satan*, discussed earlier, the character of the devil Satan is surprisingly forthright – a tempter, but arguably not a liar

– the devil-serpent who tempts Adam and Eve in the Vercelli poem *Genesis* speaks in uncomplicated falsehoods. This is made clear by the external narrator, who lays bare the facts before the serpent can begin to speak, in lines 460-90. Then we are clearly told that the words of the serpent which follows are to be distrusted by the reader:

> Ongon hine þa frinan forman worde
> se laða mid ligenum.
>
> [Then the loathsome one
> began in his first words to question him with lies]
> (495-6).

Between them, the serpent's lies and the narrator's truths enact a manipulation of the original account of Genesis in a number of ways. Firstly, the external narrator explains that the trees in the centre of Eden are respectively the trees of life and of death; in the biblical account, one is life, the other is the tree of knowledge of good and evil, although this also carries with it the threat of death.[31] Both the biblical and the poetic serpent conceal the mortality which will also come from the fruit of the tree. Knowledge is something which the serpent offers in the poem, although the poet makes clear that this is not something which the fruit of the tree has the power to provide. Between them, then, the external narrator and the serpent in his dialogue with Adam and Eve fashion a liar more consummate than his biblical forebear. The serpent of the Book of Genesis is a tempter – at worst a concealer of fact – but the serpent of the poem says things which the external reader knows to be untrue.

This in itself is not sufficient to affect the narrative situation: the transmission of knowledge is not inhibited by discrimination between truth and falsehood. What

[31] Gen 2:9, 16-17.

makes the dialogue between the serpent and Adam or Eve different is the constant tension between the voice of the external narrator, who supplies one account, and the voice of the serpent, who supplies another. We have a choice as to which leads us to the truth, and although for the good Christian reader who has even the most basic knowledge of the Bible, the right choice is an obvious one, it is not so for Eve. Indeed, there is a measure of sympathy in the narrator's tone as he apologises for Eve's actions:

> Heo dyde hit þeah þurh holdne hyge,
> nyste þæt þær hearma swa fela,
> fyrenearfeðða, fylgean sceolde
> monna cynne, þæs heo on mod genam
> þæt heo þæs laðan bodan larum hyrde,
> ac wende þæt heo hyldo heofoncyninges
> worhte mid wordum...
>
> [She did it, though, through loyal intent.
> She did not know there would follow
> many harms, great torments
> for mankind, since she took to heart
> that which she had heard from the loathsome messenger;
> rather, she believed that she was gaining the favour of
> heaven's king with her words]
>
> (708-13).

So, inevitably, Adam is persuaded by Eve's entreaties, just as Eve was persuaded by the serpent's words. This is an old story, and the mechanism by which the main narrator and the serpent's version differ is scarcely the work of the poet; the way in which they differ, though, is. The external, 'true' voice has explained the precise provenance of the devil in serpent's form; the serpent gives a different account of himself entirely:

> Langaðð þe awuht,
> Adame, up to gode? Ic eom on His ærende hider
> feorran gefered, ne þæt nu fyrn ne wæs
> þæt ic wiðð Hine sylfne sæt.

> [Do you long for anything
> from God above, Adam? I have travelled here
> from far away on His errand. It was not long
> since I sat beside His very self]
> (496-9).

This is something which the Biblical version does not include, and it inspires in the reader a distrust not just in the content of a speaker's discourse, but in the provenance – as it were, the character – of that speaker. While his account of his origins is just another part of the 'ligen' against which we have already been warned, and against which our knowledge has already been assured, it is precisely because the first part of the claim is untrue that what follows must be so expressly distrusted. After all, there is nothing in the serpent's words which marks them as analytically false. Later in the same book of the Bible, God castigates Cain for killing his brother, and then exhorts Abraham to kill his son, who willingly complies. So Adam's initial distrust and refusal – another figment of a later storyteller – is not necessarily laudable.

The bible story has a more complex epistemological structure than its Old English redaction. The original story shows Eve being deceived, and Adam being misled, but does not rely on the lies of the serpent in the Old English *Genesis* poem. Narratologically, the serpent of the bible depends on an artificial but irreconcilable local barrier to the transmission of knowledge: the innocence of Adam and Eve means that they cannot know good and evil, since they have not eaten from the tree that would provide it. Lack of knowledge of good and evil is not something which inhibits the reader of the bible story: we are postlapsarian, and more pragmatically, educated to a level which allows us to know at least the meaning of the *name* of a tree called 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil', even if godlike knowledge of the entities themselves is

not something a reader would necessarily claim. The gradient of knowledge from God to Adam, and then from the serpent to Eve, is therefore different from the gradient of knowledge from any of the speakers in the text to the reader. The device of the tree, which enforces an exotic epistemological gradient for the characters, ensures this difference.

The Bible story has a further complexity. Whether or not he intends it, God deceives by omission to a comparable extent as the serpent: the definitive ignorance of Adam, and by extension Eve, means that misunderstanding is almost inevitable. He tells Adam, 'De ligno scientiae boni et mali ne comedas in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo morte morieris' ['Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death'].[32] It would take theologians to refine the understanding of God's use of the term 'die the death' – spiritual death and the connection between sin and life everlasting were later ideas. So when the serpent tells Eve that she will achieve godlike knowledge, the only difference is in the motivation of the speaker, not in the truthfulness. The reader is able to assess the claims of both God and the serpent more trenchantly than Adam or Eve because the reader is not interchangeable with those characters.

The Old English poem adapts the properties of the forbidden fruit from conferring knowledge and mortality to just conferring mortality. The tree in the *Genesis* poem therefore no longer serves to enforce and epistemological gradient within the text. It is only by lying, therefore, that the characters within the text can be misled. The reason for this adaptation is probably didactic: the complexity and deception which is present in the dialogue of the *Seven Sleepers* and *Horn* is at odds with the ends of

[32] Gen 2:17

didactic dialogue. A vernacular verse adaptation of the Vulgate Genesis of St. Jerome is aiming for simplicity. The dialogue in the bible story is not just complex by comparison, but continues to challenge the reader's judgment, driving the processes of analysis and criticism. The type of complexity in the biblical Genesis, in which the transmission of knowledge is staged as restricted by an artificial epistemological impediment, and the truth itself is disrupted by its sources, conflicts with the tendentious simplicity of the Old English adaptation. The Old English *Genesis* demonstrates sufficient sophistication to analyse and reject a complex model of deception through dialogue. But the creative possibilities it offers are desirable to some authors. It is the potential of dialogue to deceive, and for dialogue independent of an external narrator to be seen to deceive, resulting in the further disruption of the relationship of narrator, speaker and reader, that is exploited in Béroul's *Tristan*.

Deception in Béroul's *Tristan*

Béroul's *Tristan* employs a further development in the complexity of dialogue. His characters are deliberately deceptive, occasionally with both parties in a dialogue speaking untruths. In addition, this dialogue no longer takes place with the reader as a silent 'listener' – the reader must remain outside such a dialogue in order to remain undeceived. Instead, these very deceptive dialogues are overheard by a character *within* the text. What emerges in Béroul, therefore, is a complete dramatization of the oral process of dialogue, complete with its immediate context dependence, the fragility of the reliance upon first-hand testimony, and the potential for corruption in the speaker to lead to mistakes, deception and misconstruction in the listener.

Discrepant epistemology is the identifying feature of what is known as 'dramatic irony'. This term has long since lost its direct association with drama, and now applies to situations of discrepant epistemology in all genres, and describes a range of narrative structures. It refers to the state in which the knowledge of one or more of the characters differs from that of the audience; in almost all cases the knowledge of the characters is inferior to that of the audience. In his work *Irony and the Medieval Romance*, Dennis Green observed that according to this definition of dramatic irony, 'almost any treatment [of the *Tristan* story] by its choice of subject matter, could hardly avoid taking over thematic examples of this kind of irony'.[33] The *Tristan* legend is a story about deception of various kinds, many of the deceptions belonging to the stock comedy of fabliau.[34] There is a bed trick (although this does not appear in the fragmentary remains of Béroul's version), a tricked oath (in Béroul), a tricked ordeal (in most other versions),[35] and the overall topos of deception inherent in the cuckold-amorous couple triangle which is a commonplace of fabliaux. These are all plot situations sustained by a discrepancy in knowledge which leads to dramatic irony. Béroul's version, although more accomplished than many of the versions in which the

[33] Dennis Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979). The *Tristan* legend has also been considered a tale of dramatic irony by Laura Doyle Gates, in 'Precisions on the use of Irony in Béroul's *Tristan*', *Tristania* 14 (1993), 15-29, where she refers to the legend as 'this old tale, all of whose versions have a very evident ironic structure' (15). Norris J. Lacy complicates the perception of dramatic irony, saying 'it is no longer a matter of the pleasure we may take from our privileged position... instead, the ironic distance resituates itself between us and the entire textual ethos', in 'Where the Truth Lies: Fact and Belief in Béroul's *Tristan*', *Romance Philology* 52/2 (1998-9), 1-10 at 8.

[34] Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, 'Between Fabliau and Romance: Love and Rivalry in Béroul's *Tristan*', *Romania* 105 (1984), 292-311, says that the *Tristan* tradition, including Béroul's version 'has one foot in the fabliau world' (310).

[35] Sally L. Burch, 'Leprosy and Law in Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', *Viator* 38 (2007), 141-54, argues that the version of Béroul contains *both* a tricked oath and a tricked ordeal: the tricked oath stemming from Yseut's cunning in ignoring the usual terms of the excupatory oath (3233 ff). The ordeal comes in the form of trial by leprosy, since 'only the very purest would dare to attempt' to ride on a leper without contracting the disease, and since Yseut undertook this voluntarily, she must surely be pure (149): Tristan, diguised as a leper, does not carry the risk of contagion.

Tristan story has been shaped, still employs the same basic plot, and is subject to the same immanent dramatic irony which pervades it. Though the work as a whole contains many other examples of deception, and truth-manipulation in other ways belonging to the tradition of the 'Tristan and Iseut' legend, this section will focus on Béroul's application of dialogue. It is through his virtuosic handling of dialogue, and the manipulation of the process of knowledge transmission he dramatizes, that Béroul makes his own contribution to the tradition.

The two passages of dialogue take place in very similar situations,[36] and indeed the purpose of the dialogue is similar in each. In the first, King Marc listens from a tree as the two lovers meet in the garden below, and discuss the accusations against them. Marc later discusses what he heard with Yseut. In the second, Tristan and Yseut are overheard from behind a curtain in a bedchamber by Godoïne, one of the three 'felon' accusers of the couple. In both instances, as readers we are placed in a position of triple epistemology. We must, in order to understand the scene, apprehend the limited knowledge of the eavesdropper, and simultaneously have the knowledge of Yseut, knowing that she is overlooked, attempting to convey this to Tristan, who does *not* know, without conveying what she knows to the eavesdropper.

This complexity is not new to literature, and indeed, it has been shown how the Anglo-Saxon author of *Andreas* experimented with this narrative structure. We, along with Andreas, hear God's voice, and in this respect, the dialogue of *Andreas* is

[36] This has been noted by Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, in 'Accidental Symmetry: The First and Last Episodes of Béroul's *Roman de Tristan*', *Neophilologus* 88 (2004), 335-51, who points out the common features of 'action and dialogue before a hidden audience' (343) and the 'close collaboration, even wordless communication between the lovers' (337) and a scene which is 'spun out with confusing signs and ambiguous speech' (339). Geoffrey N. Bromiley argues that this 'symmetry' of narrative ideas is deliberate, 'dilligent' repetition, and cites several other examples, in 'The Making of Béroul's Tristan: The Role of Repetition', *Medium Ævum* 54 (1985), 47-58.

very straightforward. But Andreas does not know it is God to whom he is listening: there is, therefore, a very measurable difference between the knowledge of the reader and the knowledge of the character. But rather than probe the implications of this difference, the author makes the very lack of difference in Andreas' response a matter of narrative significance. In the dialogue-led passages in Béroul's *Tristan*, the knowledge transmitted through the dialogue from speaker to addressee (and, differently again, to listener) does not necessarily correspond to the knowledge transmitted to the reader by the text itself, and the difference in knowledge between the reader and the characters is profoundly significant. Although this sometimes overlaps with Green's definition of dramatic irony in the work, discrepant epistemology in the two dialogue-led situations is not created solely by the plot in either of these situations: it concerns the system of knowledge *transmission*, in addition to knowledge itself.

In the latter scene of the fragment, the epistemological situation is clearest. As in the case of *Horn*, there must surely be a function of the dialogue other than transmitting knowledge to the reader because we are apprised of the details by the main narrator, who talks directly to the reader-audience using the imperative 'oiez', in advance of the drama of the situation itself:

> Or oiez con li avint:
> Goudoïne fu acoruz
> Et fu ainz que Tristan venuz.
> La cortine ot dedenz percie;
> Vit la chanbre, qui fu jonchie,
> Tot vit quant que dedenz avoit
> ...
> Le fel qui fu a la paroi
> Garda, si vit Tristan entrer,
> Qui tint un arc d'aubor anter,
> En sa main tint ses deus seetes,
> En l'autre deus treces longuetes;

Sa chape osta, pert ses genz cors.
Iseut, la bele o les crins sors,
Contre lui lieve, sil salue.
Par sa fenestre vit la nue
De la teste de Godoïne.
De grant savoir fu la roïne,
D'ire tresue sa persone.

[Now hear what happened to him:
Godoïne had hurried
to the same place and had arrived before Tristan.
He had pushed aside the curtain and could see
the bedroom carpeted with rushes
and everything inside;
...
The villain at the wall
saw Tristan enter,
holding a bow of tough laburnum wood,
with two arrows in one hand,
and in the other some long tresses.
He took off his cloak; revealing his noble body.
The lovely, fair-haired Yseut
rose to greet him.
At her window she saw
the shadow of Godoïne's head.
The queen was very perceptive;
Anguish made her body run with sweat]
(4410-31).[37]

The dialogue that follows, then, does not serve the purpose of transmitting this knowledge from characters to reader or audience, since we already know it, but rather illustrates, even dramatises, the control and release of knowledge between the characters. It tells us nothing we did not already know, and yet the narrative is still led by the dialogue, because our interest in the dialogue is still paramount. Indeed, the unfolding of the actions is clearly of secondary importance in the building of tension in the scene, since the main narrator resolves any concerns as to the fate of the Godoïne a

[37] The edition used here is Béroul, *The Romance of Tristan*, ed. A. Ewert (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939). The translation is derived from Béroul, *The Romance of Tristan*, trans. Allan S. Fedrick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

few lines later: 'Cil, qui Dex doinst anor conquerre,/ L'engardera de l'eschaper' ['He to whom God granted honour/ would make sure against his [Godoïne's] escape'] (4450-1). Understanding the epistemology in Béroul's dialogue-led passages requires the reader to discern what each of the characters knows (or believes they know), and how this differs from the (fictional) fact. Initially, Godoïne 'knows' that Tristan and Yseut have continued to meet secretly following Yseut's exculpation, and that he has managed to secrete himself successfully – and this is verified for him by the fact that the meeting goes ahead, and Yseut does not panic and dismiss Tristan. We presume that this situation does not change throughout the scene, since he is sufficiently at ease to watch Tristan demonstrate the use of a bow, before he is killed when Tristan shoots an arrow through his eye. Yseut knows everything: about as much as the omniscient narrator of the work as a whole. She knows everything that Godoïne knows, and can adequately presume what he thinks he knows. She knows, also, that initially Tristan is ignorant of Godoïne's presence. Tristan initially thinks that the pair are meeting unobserved, but gradually enlarges that knowledge to encompass much of what Yseut knows, to the extent of apprehending her plan to shoot Godoïne. As readers, like Yseut, we begin with an exhaustive knowledge of the situation – although we cannot tell what will happen next.

The drama in this scene emerges very prominently from the characters' control and release of information. Yseut's first question, 'Sire, ge q'en puis?' ['My lord, what am I to do?'] (4438) is a reponse to the situation she knows she is in, but it does not transfer knowledge of that situation to the audience; nor does it alert either Godoïne or Tristan. She then begins the elaborate task of leading Tristan to her level of knowledge

in the process of asking him to show her how to use the bow. Tristan gradually becomes suspicious, although Béroul does not tell us how:

> Tristan l'estent, si s'apensa,
> Oiez! en son penser tensa;
> Prent s'entente, si tendi l'arc.
>
> [Tristan stood and thought to himself
> Hear! he struggled in thought,
> Grasped her meaning, and bent the bow]
> (4441-3).

But whatever alerts Tristan is so subtle or so personal to him and Yseut that Godoïne is not put on guard. This is the first of two steps in the gradual reconciliation of the knowledge discrepancy between Tristan and Yseut. The second step comes in her apparently cautionary advice on nocking the arrow,

> 'Amis, une seete encorde,
> Garde du fil qu'il ne retorde:
> Je voi tel chose dont moi poise.'
>
> [Love, nock an arrow,
> Take care that the string is not twisted
> I see something which disturbs me]
> (4453-5).

It is conceivable that the two verbs 'bender' and 'retordre', respectively 'to bend' and 'to twist', may be the words which alert Tristan, but it seems more likely that the archery flirting is merely to prepare Tristan for combat and the other two remarks, 'Sire ge q'en puis' and 'je voi tel chose dont moi poise' mean more to Tristan than they do to Godoïne. After all, Tristan does not need advice from Yseut on preparing his bow. They are evidence of that discrepancy in knowledge which forms the fabric of the scene, but unlike the scene itself, they belong exclusively to Béroul's telling of the story.

The last ironic remark is Tristan's. Facing the window, and finally on the same epistemological plane as Yseut, he declares 'Un des trois feus de Cornoualle/ Voi... par la defors' ['I see one of the three villains of Cornwall, outside there] (4466-7). It is not clear to Godoïne what is meant by this, but he remains safe as far as he can tell, since he is most certainly not outside the window. Tristan's words, however, let Yseut know that he has seen Godoïne and is ready. The entire process of knowledge transmission from Yseut to Tristan has occurred without being duplicated from Yseut to the reader, and, crucially for the drama, to Godoïne. But as readers, we see the whole process unfold.

Béroul engages with dialogue as an oral means of knowledge transmission. While this has nothing to do with the oral transmission of the text itself, what is evident is the significance of what dialogue allows the speakers to do which is not allowed by dialogue in its written form. Neither Tristan nor Yseult is heard by Godoïne to rectify their epistemological discrepancy: that would immediately rectify the discrepancy between Yseult and Godoïne as well, and that would be disastrous. But the discrepancy is nevertheless rectified by other markers which are not visible to Godoïne but which are an integral part of conversation – and emerge from the immediacy, the proximity, of transmitter and receiver in the case of oral knowledge transmission. Béroul is not a 'realist' writer, but he takes advantage of the realistic oral-contextual possibilities of a dialogue, possibilities which belong to speech and distinguish it from writing. We are informed by the narrator of Tristan and Yseut's unspoken communication. The knowledge transmission in this scene takes place using clues between Tristan and Yseut. These are clues which are not expressible in literate communication, precisely because of those things which define it: distance in space and

time, the necessity of clear interpretation by a reader.[38] Oral communication, by contrast, enables speakers subtleties of tone, expression, and body language which are unique to orality.[39] The drama – the excitement of this episode – is premised on this potential of orality.

The opening scene of the fragment, the tryst beneath the pine tree, depends more heavily on dialogue, and adds a level of complication to the basic epistemological structure of the scene in the chamber. But for the reader, the processes of reading and understanding are the same. The reader must first ascertain the comparative epistemological status of the various narrators. Once again, it is Yseut who knows the most: she knows that Marc is in the tree above them, because she has seen his reflection in the water of the fountain; she knows that Marc suspects the truth, and further knows that initially, Tristan is unaware of the situation. Marc 'knows' that Tristan and Yseut must be meeting for some adulterous purpose, because he has been informed by the astrologer-dwarf Frocin that the two lovers are to meet. And Tristan at first does not know the situation at all, but rapidly apprehends, since he is able to play the same deceptive word-games that Yseut plays during their conversation. The knowledge of the last two is our inference; Béroul's fragment begins during this scene, with the phrase 'que nul senblant de rien en face' ['that she should show nothing with

[38] The next chapter discusses the comparable 'clues' and contextual meaning transmitted in literate communication.

[39] Linguist Deborah Tannen reminds us that in oral communication, 'the meaning is the context' – the surroundings, gestures, tone of voice, can all be called to use as part of that communication, in 'Introduction', in Deborah Tannen, (ed.), *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* (Norwood NJ: Ablex, 1982), 1-15 at 3. This recalls the close analogue of orally performed literature, which are summarised neatly by Brita Warvik in '"When you read or hear this story read": Issues of Orality and Literacy in Old English Texts', in Risto Hiltunen and Janne Skarfari, (eds.) *Discourse Perspectives on English* (Amsterdam: Benjamin, 2003), 13-57, among which she includes 'context-bound, situation dependent' and 'close to the human life world, situational' (22). Erich Auerbach *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1946; Princeton: PUP, 2003), 3-23, makes a similar observation in his comparison of the biblical episode of Abraham and Issaac with Odysseus's homecoming.

her face'] (2). Bédier's reconstruction of the poem, which he bases on early germanic versions of the work, has Tristan noticing Marc's reflection early in the scene, as he approaches Yseut. However, symmetry with the last scene of the fragment, although 'accidental',[40] would suggest that it is during Yseut's first passage of speech that Tristan realizes what is happening. Whilst symmetry itself is no argument for this, the fact that the scenes are in other respects very similar – the meeting, the overheard conversation, the tell-tale reflection, the word-games – lends credence to an epistemological hierarchy in which Tristan gradually gathers that he is being overheard. In any case, Tristan seems to know by the time he says anything, because his response to Yseut's lengthy speech is a denial:

> 'Si home li ont fait acroire
> De nos tel chose qui n'est voire'.
>
> ['His men have made him believe
> Things about us that are not true']
> (83-4).

He would have no reason to make this denial to Yseut on her own. Furthermore, we are told a few lines later by the main narrator that he is fully cognisant of the situation:

> Qant out oï parler sa drue,
> Sout que s'estoit aperceüe.
>
> [When he heard his love speaking
> He knew that she had seen [Marc] standing]
> (97-8).

His denial privileges the oral approach to knowledge acquisition: testimony must derive directly from an eyewitness, but given these circumstances, there is no recourse but to

[40] See Sargent-Baur, 'Accidental Symmetry'.

believe the testimony. It is on this oral foundation that the scene develops in a more complex way than the chamber scene. In the chamber scene, Yseut apprises Tristan of the facts of the situation, without altering the epistemological status of the eavesdropper. Here, however, relying on the credulous character of King Marc, the pair conspire not just to escape without revealing their guilt, but actively to change what Marc knows. Their success in this additional plan is revealed severally, firstly in Marc's internal dialogue:

> 'Las!', fait li rois, 'or ai veü
> Que li nains m'a trop deceü'
>
> ['Alas!', said the king, 'now I have seen
> That the dwarf greatly deceived me']
>
> (265-6).

Then later as he leaves the tree,

> Li rois de l'arbre est devalez;
> En son cuer dit or croit sa feme
> Et mescroit les barons du reigne,
> Que li faisoient chose acroire
> Que il set bien que n'est pas voire
> Et qu'il a prové a mençonge.
> ...
> 'Or puis je bien enfin savoir'.
>
> [The king descended from the tree
> Saying in his mind that he now would believe his wife
> And disbelieve the barons of the court,
> Who had made him believe things
> Which he knew were not true
> And which he had proved were false
> ...
> 'Now I can finally know well']
>
> (286-98).

Finally, when Marc comes to Yseut to confess to eavesdropping, and to apologise for ever having suspected her infidelity, the narrator confirms for the readers his new 'knowledge'.

> Li rois sout bien qu'el ot voir dit
> Les paroles totes oït.
>
> [The king knew well that she spoke the truth:
> He had heard the whole conversation]
> (459-60).

Like the meeting in the chamber, the tryst in the arbour dialogue transfers knowledge between the characters, without transferring the same knowledge to the reader. But in the arbour, the situation is more complex. It is reasonable to suppose that in a non-fragmentary copy of Béroul's poem, we would already have received at least some briefing as to the circumstances leading up to the conversation. In narrative terms, therefore, the function of the dialogue beneath the pine tree is not to brief the reader but is, like the dialogue in the chamber, a drama of control and release of knowledge through dialogue. The conversation beneath the pine tree transfers entirely different knowledge to King Marc, and does not teach us, as readers, anything.

It has been observed that King Marc is unusually credulous.[41] This is certainly how Béroul portrays him. He variously believes the barons, the dwarf, the lovers, the seeming innocuousness of their forest hideout and then finally the tricked oath. But Béroul is particular about the kind of things he believes, and the extent to which he believes them. He is extremely susceptible to word-of-mouth testimony, and the words Béroul uses to describe his changed mental state with respect to the facts is very telling.

[41] For example, in Diana B. Tyson, 'Some Thoughts on the Character of King Mark in Béroul's *Tristan*', *Annuale Medievale* 20 (1981), 67-75.

Following the tryst beneath the pine tree, forms of the phrase 'bien savoire' are repeated (298 and 459): the king 'knows' what he has heard is the truth. It is hard for us to conceive of 'knowing' as the total apprehension of an untrue case of affairs. But it is not just our modern understanding which is challenged by Béroul's choice of epistemological vocabulary at this point. The two scenes from *Tristan*, but especially the scene in the arbour, illustrate an essential limitation in the power of oral testimony. It can be believed, or it can be disbelieved, but if a person can testify, then a person can also deceive, and the judge of such testimony is faced with the same choice between belief and disbelief, with no power to decide whether or not the testimony is deceptive.

The framework of the judicial oath, by which the everlasting soul of the swearer is faced with torment, is designed to prevent deception.[42] Because of this potential guarantee of legitimacy which it grants to dialogue, Béroul also brings the oath into question. The oath at the Mal Pas is twisted by Yseut so that although she does not lie, neither does she tell the truth. And earlier in the text, when Tristan is captured by Marc's men, he submits quietly, believing he will be entitled to trial by battle. Tristan, we are told, knows none would dare take him on in such a trial, and so he would go free. For Béroul, then, the trial is of no use. We know Tristan is guilty according to the terms of the law, and yet we are told that according to the legal terms of the trial, he would be 'proved' innocent.

> En deu tant fort se fiot
> Que bien savoit et bien quidoit,
> S'a escondit peüst venir,

[42] Ernest C. York, 'Isolt's Ordeal: English Legal Customs in the Medieval Tristan Legend', *SP* 68 (1971), 1-9, argues that this may not always have been the entire purpose, and suggests that 'there may have been concerns other than the determination of truth' (3), such as the 'merciful' punishment of a guilty party.

Nus n'en osast armes saisir
encontre lui, lever ne prendre;
Bien se quidoit par chanp defendre.

[In God he held such strong faith,
that he knew and well believed
That if he came to defend himself,

None would dare to seize, lift up or
Take arms against him,
So well he believed he could defend himself in the field].
(813-18)

Later, another reference is made to the certainty of Tristan's success in a bilateral judicial ordeal:

Tristan s'offri a esligier
Et la roïne a deraisnier,
Devant le roi, du loiauté;
Ne vout armes saisir ne prendre.

[Tristan offered to clear himself
and to defend the queen
before the king, against the accusation of disloyalty;
none was bold enough to seize or take up arms].
(3419-23)

Like Yseut's tricked oath, Tristan's trial by battle (although it never takes place) would be a miscarriage of justice, regardless of whether we support Tristan as a hero.

But Béroul is not part of an intellectual movement bringing *Judicium Dei* under scrutiny – or if he was, *Tristan* was not his soapbox. In the first place, his representations are not like those of sceptics of the period.[43] 'Open cynicism'[44] is not

[43] There was an intellectual movement in this direction when Béroul was writing, in the middle of the 12th century. Pope Alexander II and later Abelard, Peter the Chanter, Peter the Lombard, and their pupil

what we see in this scene: after all, the public love what they see, and the king is convinced. Béroul does not argue that ordeal can convict the guilty just as frequently as the innocent, as Peter the Chanter, a contemporaneous sceptic argued;[45] rather, the *Judicium Dei* fails to convict two people whom we as readers and Béroul as a storyteller have an interest in preserving. What we see in *Tristan* is the *Judicium Dei* being flouted along with other oral methods of determining truth. Certainly, God is not tricked by the tricked oath, but neither does he intervene; Tristan would win in battle in spite of his guilt, but this tells us more about his skill in battle, which is well attested in the Tristan tradition, than it does about the mechanics of bilateral ordeal.[46] Béroul makes a far more sweeping attack, which shows that no matter how trustworthy the speaker, the context-bound nature of oral testimony means that it is always subject to abuse. This is the preoccupation which unites the deception of the garden, the Mal Pas, and the chamber. Béroul presents a traditional legal process, designed to show beyond question

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Pope Innocent III argued that the system violates the pronouncement of Jesus in Matthew 4:7, channelling Deuteronomy 6:16, 'thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God', says R. C. van Caenegem, *The Birth of the English Common Law* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 68.; John Baldwin, initially in 'The Intellectual Preparation for the Canon of 1218 against Ordeals', *Speculum* 36 (1961), 613-36, and again in 'The Crisis of the Ordeal', notes that oaths were already under threat: 'during the four decades preceding the fourth Lateran Council, writers of romance had joined their voices to the canonists, theologians and popes in protest against the immorality and chicanery of the ordeal' (342).

[44] Richard W. Ireland, 'First Catch your Toad: Medieval Attitudes to Ordeal and Battle', *Cambrian Law Review* 11 (1980), 50-61, attests that throughout the twelfth century 'ordeal and battle were viewed with considerable distrust and occasionally with open cynicism' (50).

[45] Peter the Chanter, *Verbum Abbreviatum*, *PL* 205, cols. 226-8, tells of a man tried by ordeal and executed for the murder of his companion on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Shortly after the execution, the companion turned up, thereby making a mockery of the whole business.

[46] *La Mort de Roi Artu*, which was written around sixty years after Béroul's poem, after the papal convention and the law of Henry III outlawing the practice, challenges the judicial oath much explicitly as the author of ruin. In episode after episode, Lancelot, similar in many ways to Tristan, is undefeated in judicial combat, despite the known guilt of both Lancelot and Guinevere. There is no framework within the chivalry of the work by which judicial combat can be refused, and so it is the downfall of the very framework of the Arthurian society when Arthur finally decides against irrational proof, and moves to execute his wife. What is known conflicts with the outcome of an apparently reliable judicial system. It is the crisis of one epistemological system with another. This conspicuous attack on irrational proof is not what drives the narrative of Béroul's *Tristan*.

that the accused is either guilty or innocent, and then shows it to be (literally) farcical.[47] It is not a grand gesture against irrational proof, but a demonstration that law, necessarily supported by testimony, is therefore open to all the failings of oral knowledge transmission, among which are deception and trickery, but also innocent misconstruction and confusion.

What Béroul presents in the text as a whole, then, is a critique of oral knowledge transmission; he refutes the possibility that any means of oral transmission can ever lead to unequivocal truth. If Béroul's critique of orality and the attack on *Judicium Dei* can be linked at all, it is by saying that they belong to a wider cultural idea which questioned the nature of epistemology as a whole around the time of the writing of *Tristan*.[48] Dialogue, for the speakers, can be an extremely powerful tool, to deceive or change the course of their destiny. For listeners, it can be manipulating. For the purposes of authentication and validation, on the other hand, Béroul provides little solution. As readers, we are required to judge all these aspects of the text, listening in judgement to the dialogue remotely, rather than to what is said.

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[47] The fabliaux which often take romance as source material, and the increasingly bawdy lesser romances of the early middle English period frequently rely on bed tricks and tricked oaths of this kind for their humour.

[48] Peter Godman, *Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), discusses the rise of confession as a sacrament, parallel to the rise in scepticism as to its veracity. He notes and summarises an argument which was raised by Heloïse in a letter to Abelard, 'Pure of heart and of flesh yet impure of mind, Heloïse raises, with an acuteness unmatched by any author of her generation, the problem of verifiability. How can we, how could her contemporaries tell whether Heloïse means what she says?' (13).

Conclusion: Dialogue as Telling and Dialogue as Showing

Wayne Booth begins his theoretical work *The Rhetoric of Fiction* with a dichotomisation of the processes of 'showing' and 'telling' in narration. His work ultimately demonstrates that broadly speaking, this dichotomisation is a false one, which, while it may be a feature of authorial technique, is not fully experienced by the reader: 'everything he shows will serve to tell; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one'.[49] There is a parallel in the examination of dialogue. For what we see in many Old English texts is dialogue 'telling': the knowledge gradient toward the reader as well as between characters means that we are never fully allowed to withdraw from participation in the dialogue. Of course the characters must serve as our spokespeople in order to progress the dialogue, but we are effectively silent listeners to what is said. But in *Horn* and more so in *Tristan*, we are watching from a distance the entire process of knowledge transmission, without being involved in it: we are can no longer be listeners inside the text. Our non-participation – authorially-sanctioned non-participation – in the transmission of knowledge recalls the author's apparent lack of involvement in 'showing' narration. We are 'shown' knowledge changing hands, without being 'told' what to know.

Like the principles of 'showing' and 'telling' in narration at large, though, the divisions between the didactic and non-didactic varieties of dialogue are less definite than such a category distinction implies. The reader is briefed by the author in both cases: it is simply a distinction between when the author chooses to move from narrator-led narration to dialogue-led narration, and what is the functional outcome of

[49] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd edn. (1958; Chicago: UCP, 1983), 20.

that choice. We have always to be told at least once, in order to make any kind of rational appraisal, what is (fictional) truth, and what is falsehood. In *Beowulf*, as in the didactic dialogues of *Solomon and Saturn*, this briefing in truth is the manner of narration: belief in the narrator, as we have seen elsewhere in this project, is a mainstay of the author's technique, and the dialogue-led passages of narration are no exception. The possibility of complicating the relationship between truth and narration occurs to the author: Unferth disputes apparent truths, but Beowulf's riposte indicates an authorial decision to close-off this possibility. In the *Romance of Horn*, there is a discrepancy between what is said by the characters and received by the reader. But this discrepancy is softened: the constant guidance of the main narrator places the epistemological structure of *Horn* in between didactic and non-didactic narrative. It is at times certainly difficult to make a clear distinction.

But far removed from the trustworthy narration of *Beowulf* is the conflict between deceptive dialogue and truth in Béroul's *Tristan*. This discrepancy makes the dialogue of *Tristan* a dramatic opportunity. By removing the reader from the epistemological structure of the dialogue, Béroul makes it necessary that we are not the oral recipients of the speaker's words, but merely judges, able to reconstruct the dialogues imaginatively, but essentially divorced from them as representations of oral testimony. We are forced to keep in mind not just the immediacy and context of, say, Yseut's bedchamber or the moonlit arbour as we read the dialogue, but the whole bank of facts which has been gifted to us by the structure of a literate text. The dialogue in *Tristan* refers obliquely to the knowledge of the characters: this is different from the straightforward didactic method. The reader of Béroul acquires knowledge from the whole dialogue, rather than sitting, as it were, next to Saturn and learning from

Solomon. The drama does not come from the knowledge itself, but rather the control and release of knowledge which Béroul stages. *Tristan* evinces a preoccupation with these processes of knowledge transmission and demonstrates the powers and limitations of the essentially oral mode of dialogue. In the scene in which King Marc is deceived as he listens from a pine tree, we are implicitly warned by Béroul of the perils of listening to and believing what is said:

> 'Porqoi cro je si fort outrage?
> Ce poise moi, si m'en repent;
> Molt est fous qui croit tote gent'.
>
> ['Why did I believe such a strong outrage?
> That grieves me, and I repent of it;
> Great is the fool who believes everyone]
> (306-8).

It is clearly not obvious to Marc that in believing first one, then another witness, he is just such a fool; as readers, we are not fooled. We *know* the truth, to the extant that we can judge various testimony against a framework of (fictional) fact, and by *not* listening to any of the speakers in the various dialogue situations, we are best placed to retain that high epistemological status.

The differences illustrated by the examples in this chapter demonstrate a difference in intellectual priorities. *Beowulf* indicates a clear prioritisation of truth in narrative: the idea to subvert this truth is latent, but remains unexplored. Likewise, whilst there is an evident deception in the dialogue of *Andreas*, the dialogue as a whole remains formally didactic. The *Romance of Horn* uses the possibilities of doubt and untruth, but it is only in the near-contemporary *Tristan* that unsettling of narrative truth is fully practised. Dialogue itself ceases to be a tool of the narrator, and becomes

the object. In cases where the reader is informed but the character deceived, this is an emergent technique. What the dialogue does in these cases is to create a determinably true or false account of events or facts, but as readers, we do not have to make that determination. There exists a moderating force in an additional narrative voice. But in *Tristan*, we are no longer assisted in this way. And so as readers we are forced to assess the oral mode of dialogue as a tool for transmitting knowledge, rather than tacitly trusting it as such and using it to understand the story. In this enforced incisiveness, Béroul constructs an entirely different relationship between text and reader.

4

Materiality: Reading and Learning

This chapter deals with texts in which literacy is not just a mode of transmission, but a focus of an author's attention. The texts examined in this chapter mainly feature a material object which has been written upon. As the chapter progresses, the relationship between the content of the texts and their own narrative structure becomes more complicated, until, in the work of Marie de France, the text itself is inseparable from the material object which is its subject.

Old English Riddles and Materiality

The genre of the Old English riddles is one which is particularly suited to the exploration of materiality. They serve as an important document regarding Anglo-Saxon perceptions of literacy as a mode of transmission, and demonstrate for the most part, it was regarded as a substitute for speech, rather than as a tool in its own right, with its own potential and its own limitations.

The riddles are often narrated by an object which, to the extent that the work is representational, is the whole of the work.[1] They are an exaggeration of the process which occurs in all narrative. Narration, as it has been catholically defined for the purposes of this thesis, is the control and release of information, the transmission of

[1] Of the riddles of the Exeter Book, of which there are around 90 (the precise number is disputed because of ambiguities in the boundaries of some of the riddles) approximately half fall into the category of non-human speaker. The remainder have the disembodied voice of an external observer. These are themselves divisible into two categories: those which use a first person construction, usually beginning with a variant of 'Ic geseah' ['I saw'] or 'Ic wat' ['I know'], of which there are about 30, and those which have no first person pronouns, of which there are about 14.

knowledge subject to arbitrary constraints. The solution to any riddle is a single piece of information which it is the function of the riddle to conceal, and the process of reading is the process of discovering this solution. But it is essential that a riddle does not conceal its solution too well: in concealing, it must leave clues. These competing constraints on the transmission of knowledge in riddles is what defines them narratologically.[2] The clues which the riddle contains are a series of behaviours or appearances which are both like the solution and unlike it; usually, they mislead by resembling something other than the solution. A riddle is therefore a vignette of controlled knowledge transmission: the author – or at least the narrating voice in the riddle – withholds enough information to make the poem enigmatic, but releases enough to make it soluble.

Necessary to the execution of the word-play and other strategies which characterise the riddles is the trenchant examination of the object that will be their solution. A typical example is the onion riddle, number 25, from the Exeter Book:

> Ic eom wunderlicu wiht, wifum on hyhte,
> neahbuendum nyt; nængum sceþþe
> burgsittendra, nymþe bonan anum.
> Staþol min is stepheah, stonde ic on bedde,
> neoþan ruh nathwær. Neþeð hwilum
> ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor,
> modwlonc meowle, þæt heo on mec gripeð,
> ræseð mec on reodne, reafað min heafod,
> fegeð mec on fæsten. Feleþ sona
> mines gemotes, seo þe me nearwað,
> wif wundenlocc. Wæt bið þæt eage.

[2] Wim Tigges has codified the process by which riddles create 'anomalies and shifts within and between areas of phenomena ranging from the merely existential to the metalinguistic', in 'Signs and Solutions: A Semiotic Approach to the Exeter Book Riddles', in Erik Kooper, (ed.), *This Noble Craft* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 59-82 at 63. It could be added that speech of the non-human objects themselves is an overriding example of such an anomaly, which, while it does not serve to disguise the identity of the subject, forms part of the essential play of the riddle.

> [I am a wondrous creature, a delight to women,
> useful to those nearby; I harm no
> householder, except he that wounds me.
> My stalk is tall, I stand in the bed,
> quite hairy underneath. Sometimes,
> a comely girl, a peasant's daughter,
> ventures the courage to clasp me,
> rushes my redness, seizes my head,
> holds me in a tight place. Very soon,
>
> she that holds me will feel the effect of her encounter with me,
> curly haired woman. Wet will be her eye].[3]

The prevailing technique in the poem is prosopopoeia. It lasts throughout the riddle, in which human characteristics are tacitly ascribed to something non-human. 'Wiht' is a sufficiently ambiguous word, referring equally to humans and creatures more generally, and this ambivalence is essential to ensure that while the speaker may mislead, he does not tell untruths: the symbolic language established in the riddle must be consistent with the reader's external language of signifiers. The misdirection is especially effective in this riddle because of the coherence with which the riddle leads the reader to a misapprehension. This erroneous conclusion is much less mysterious, and benefits by being a usual subject of euphemism and circumlocution. The 'natural' language of unspoken taboo in the riddle is itself riddlic. The metaphorical usage of 'staþol', 'heafod', 'fæsten' is successful because it refers almost directly to a false answer, when actually being perfectly plausible metaphors for an alternative. We finally accept that when a creature describes itself in somewhat racy terms as being red, standing tall in bed, and being hairy underneath, this is being offered as the entirely innocent self-

[3] The edition of the riddles used here is *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, i, ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: UEP, 1994), Riddle 25. Numbering follows the convention established by George Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie in their edition, *The Exeter Book* (London: Routledge, 1936). The translations are derived from *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. and ed. S. A. J. Bradley (London: Everyman, 1982).

perception of an onion, although the author of the riddle does not share this purity. It is only our initial failure to understand this which creates, first, the enigma, and then the solution, and in the process of realisation, finally the humour.

In Exeter Book riddle 47, however, the solution is more closely engaged with the clues which conceal and supply it. This represents a different sort of challenge to the reader, and provides an impression of the Anglo-Saxon perception of literacy. The riddle begins 'Moððe word fræt', and is most frequently solved as the 'moth' of its opening line. It is not entirely unique for a riddle to reveal its solution explicitly, and indeed, in the Latin collections of 'aenigmata' which predate those of the Exeter Book, the solution to each riddle was included as its title.[4] Many critics have observed that the practice of seeking the solution to riddles does not necessarily serve the most effective purpose of the author, whose aim may well have been to elucidate the nature of objects, the enigmatic quality being a later playful addition.[5] As an investigative mode, then, the 'game' of a riddle lies not so much in seeking the solution, as in understanding why the seemingly paradoxical clues can be linked by their solution. The openness of the 'Moððe word fræt' riddle, even with this is view, seems self-defeating. We expect riddles to deceive to some extent, or at least to intrigue by complicating our understanding of the nature of the subject. Yet eating words is exactly what a

[4] While Rafal Boryslawski is unequivocal in asserting that 'the Old English riddles are without a shadow of a doubt rooted in the Anglo-Latin tradition', in *The Old English Riddles and the Riddlic Elements of Old English Poetry* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 174, Dieter Bitterli in *Say What I am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: UTP, 2009), proposes a more complex relationship between the Old English riddles and their Anglo-Latin precursors.

[5] For example, Matthew Marino, in 'The Literariness of the Exeter Book Riddles', *NM* 79 (1978), 258-65 at 261 argues that 'after these riddles have been solved, they become most interesting'; Jonathan Wilcox tells us that 'the pleasure of the riddles lies more in attending to their multiplicity than in their resolution', 'Tell me What I am: The Old English Riddles', in Derek Johnson and Elaine Treharne, (eds.), *Interpreting Old and Middle Enlgish Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 46-59 at 57; John D. Niles, in 'Exeter Book Riddle 74 and the Play of the Text', *ASE* 24 (1998), 169-207, asserts that the pleasure comes after the solution: 'we can then savour our insight and work out its implications, attentive to the nuances of every phrase...sometimes astounded' (181).

bookworm does. The riddle violates the reader's desire for enigma, therefore, by not appearing to conceal anything. But whilst the riddle does describe the nature of the bookworm, there is good reason for suggesting an alternative solution, hinged not on the nature of an object, but on the paradoxical nature of its activity. The subject of the riddle's investigation is not the unmysterious 'moððe', but rather the 'word' which he eats. No distinction between a written and a spoken word exists in the Old English language, as there is no distinction in modern English, and though it seems that the vastly prevalent usage of 'word' in Old English is in reference to the spoken word,[6] there is a sense that 'word' means one thing, whether it is spoken or written. The paradox or enigma of the riddle, therefore, emerges from the fact that this moth is eating – and is able to eat – something transient and ethereal, something which cannot even be touched, far less eaten. At the heart of the riddle is a 'metaphor' of eating spoken words, realised through the possibility of recording words in writing. In this way, the riddle draws attention to the writtenness of the word; the moth can only eat the words because they are the not the vanishing intangible words to which 'word' normally refers.[7] No such creature exists that can actually eat the spoken word: it is like the unspoken taboo of the onion riddle, different only because it is impossible, rather than obscene.

[6] The *Dictionary of the Old English Corpus* online, ⟨tapor.library.utoronto.ca/cgi-bin/doecorpus⟩, accessed 21 Aug 2012. The most prolific occurrence of 'Word' is for The Word of the book of John which is both the Word of God and later the Word made Flesh. The idea of materialising the spoken word is therefore something which was received in the religion of the Anglo-Saxons. It is plausible, therefore, to argue for 'the word made flesh' (if we accept flesh as a metaphor for material existence) as a possible solution. This would also account for the judgmental argument of the latter part of the riddle.

[7] The notion of eating spoken words probably derives from Jer 15:16, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was to me a joy and gladness of my heart: for thy name is called upon me, O Lord God of hosts'.

Consumption of ink and paper is alluded to by the simplicity of the expression with which the moth is said to eat words. It makes fun of the essential difference between the written and the spoken word. The play of the riddle emerges not from oddness of an animal but from probing this distinction. This challenges the reader to examine the nature of words in books – books such as the one in which the riddle is written – just as other riddles force the consideration of the nature of animal behaviour or characteristics. Written words are edible, and insect damage to manuscripts was certainly a hazard, but in other respects, they are permanent and immutable compared with their spoken counterparts. They can be read aloud and be heard, but can also be seen, and can be seen repeatedly, potentially endlessly; they preserve information across time and space. This is one of the principle aspects of literate knowledge transmission, and Derrida summarises it as not just an aspect but *the* purpose of writing:

> The sign comes into being at the same time as imagination and memory, the moment it is necessitated by the absence of the object from present perception.[8]

Riddle 47 is a playful expression of this thought that evokes the necessary immediacy of speech; the edibility of the words in the present expresses the bridging function performed by the literateness of the written word.

The riddle also pushes the process of literate interpretation – the business of a reader – to the fore.[9] There is a coherent trope of literate reading and interpretation as

[8] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context,' *Limited INC*., trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Melman (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1-21 at 6.

[9] Ananya Jahanara Kabir, 'Anglo-Saxon Textual Attitudes', in A. J. Minnis and Ian Johnson, (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: II. The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 310-23. Kabir suggests that this impression of orality was something of which the Anglo-Saxons were aware. The perception of a 'mythopoeticized' past as inherently oral was is not just a modern observation (311). The bookworm, intellectually primitive, has a 'destructive encounter with textuality', in a device which

a productive act, and certainly one in which the illiterate, vandalising bookworm cannot participate. In Bede's account of the cowherd-turned-poet Cædmon,[10] the eating of the bookworm in the riddle is paralleled closely, but with an important distinction. Cædmon's activity is 'ruminatio' ['rumination'], like the digestion of a cow. While the bookworm eats in a purely destructive way, the cow regurgitates the grass, and is also a source of milk, food, and parchment upon which words can be written: it is a powerful metaphor for the precise opposite of the bookworm's destruction. Unlike the bookworm, who consumes literature but does not 'ruminate', Cædmon, after a time, would return with a versified version of the scripture which had been dealt him. Though he was himself almost certainly illiterate, there is no doubt from the account that it is divine *literate* material which he converts to verse.

The ideas which structure the 'moððe fræt word' riddle are recurrent. In Exeter Book riddle 60, the solution appears to be a pen, or possibly an actual rune-bearing object of some sort.[11] Not unlike the riddle of the word-eating moth, this author also makes the permanence of writing his point of significance. There is also a dichotomisation of the silence of writing with the noise of speech:

Lyt ic wende
þæt ic ær oþþe sið æfre sceolde
ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan,
wordum wrixlan.
...
Eorles ingeþonc ond seo swiþre hond,
þingum geþydan, þæt ic wiþ þe sceolde
for unc anum twam ærendspræce

foregrounds 'the productive, literate hermeneutic activities of the reader' (314). This, though, indicates an interest in the technology of writing as the work of a civilized Christian society, without necessarily demonstrating an engagement with the theoretical properties of literacy.

[10] *Historia Ecclesiastica* Bk. IV.24.

[11] The riddle has been convincingly solved as both; the solution, however, is not as significant as the remarks which the riddle makes in either case about the process of literate creation.

abeodan bealdlice, swa hi beorna ma
uncre wordcwidas widdor ne mænden.

[Little I imagined
that early or late I should ever
speak, mouthless, across the meadbench
and communicate words.
...
An earl's ingenuity and his right hand
contrived a thing, that I with him,
us two alone could boldly speak of adventures,
so that no men except us two
could spread our words more widely].

In this riddle, words on the page are both like speech and unlike speech; they are silent and yet they 'speak' to a reader. And the author in this case also notes that the ownership which is possible in writing cannot be maintained in a chain comprised of oral transmitters. The dual person of the last line indicates a personal, private sort of relationship; as it were, a club of two. Unlike speech, the writer and his pen (or his writing, depending on how the riddle is solved) do not need any additional intervention to disseminate the tale of adventures. Writing is directly received by the reader from the hand of the writer, no matter how long after writing, or how distant from the place of composition. To be spread in that way, speech would require transmission by word of mouth from person to person: the club of two would necessarily have to be widened to encompass later speakers dependent upon memory and retelling. But throughout the riddle, oral communication is the signifier for writing: 'sprecan' is the chosen verb for the activity of the written word. It is through the confusion of oral and literate knowledge transmission that the riddler conceals the solution, and so it is by the consideration of the distinction between the two that the reader is able to solve the riddle.

The fascination with the process of creation and the properties of writing apparent in the pen riddle are even more focussed in Aldhelm's Anglo-Latin riddle which he titles 'De Elemento, uel Abecedario' ['On the Elements, or the Alphabet']. Aldhelm has a similar curiosity over the ability of words to be both tangible and ephemeral, silent and yet like speech:

> Nos denae et septem genitae sine uoce sorores.
> Sex alias nothas non dicimus adnumerandas;
> Nascimur ex ferro rursus ferro moribundae.
> Nec non et uolucris penna uolitantis ad aethram;
> Terni nos fratres incerta matre crearunt;
> Qui cupit instanter sitiens audire docentes.
> Tum cito prompta damus rogitanti uerba silenter.
>
> [We are seventeen sisters born without a voice;
> Six other counterfeits are not counted among us.
> We are born from iron and die by iron;
> Likewise, with the feather of a high-flying bird,
> Three brothers created us from an unknown mother.
> To one who thirsts for knowledge and wishes to hear
> We quickly and silently give our ready words].[12]

Aldhelm's focus is once again the difference between sounds or spoken words, and the alphabet or writing. The 'denae et septem sorores' are curious not just for their silence, but because their function is transmitting knowledge, and as a consequence they must have a voice. Very prominent in this riddle is the writtenness of the work – more so, perhaps, than the moth riddle, because of the first person grammar: the speaker *is* the writing, describing itself. Once the riddle has been solved, or ascertained from the title in this case, the words refer not just to the alphabet which is the general solution to the riddle, but to the actual letters of the riddle itself. It is impossible to read Aldhelm's

[12] Aldhelm, 'Riddle 29: De Elemento', ed. Nancy Porter Stork, in *Through a Gloss Darkly: Aldhelm's Riddles in the British Library MS Royal 12.C.xxiii* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990).

riddle without acknowledging the fact that it is composed of its own solution. The self-reflection is a tight circle: writing, constructing metaphor which suggests speech but signifies writing itself. But the riddle also indicates that writing itself fulfils this function: writing is a system capable of replacing speech, but which remains inescapably written.

But the manipulation of the boundaries of writing and speech cannot merely have been an exotic game evolved specifically for use in riddles. The riddles exploit the arcane phenomenology of things, but remain essays in knowledge transmission, not in confounding a reader. They balance the competing roles of the narrator, the control and release of information, and manage almost universally to transmit their core of knowledge – the solution – without directly violating their functional 'responsibility' of maintaining an enigma. The enigma is finally resolved in the mind of the reader, not in the work of the writer. This is altogether peculiar, since it is manifestly true of the riddles, in a way which is not true of all literature, that the writer must have an interrogable knowledge of the solution. It must be possible, were it to be practical, to ask the writer at any stage in the composition of a riddle to reveal the solution.

This knowledge in the writer is what makes the construction of the enigma possible in the first place. In the case of the approximate half of Exeter Book riddles in which the speaker is not human, the use of prosopopoeia is the most prominent of the author's decisions which must be understood by the reader at the outset. Speech is derived from the characteristics of objects, as though the objects were able to describe themselves, or as though a uniting consciousness which possessed those characteristics could speak about them. Everything the narrator says is an aspect of the object which will be the solution, and not an aspect of a human speaker: failing to apprehend this

would make the riddle insoluble. This is at one remove from the author who writes in the first person from the point of view of a human. A human author has a fairly strong sense of the human experiential domain; he has no sense of the experiences of an onion or a pen. Thus human experience must be used metaphorically. An onion with a head, or a pen that can speak are not just isolated metaphors; they must be part of a programmatic, widely-used cultural metaphor, by which written words become the utterances of something non-human.[13] In fact, this shared cultural understanding must tend to the writing of riddles and riddlic poetry, since within such a culture, literacy – writing on parchment – suggests the unnatural speech of an object, rather than a mode of transmission in its own right.

At every stage, the author of the riddle must encode representation using only shared metaphors. Prosopoeia is widely used; other aspects are more specific to the individual riddles. Thus, for an onion, the author subscribes to the cultural metaphors surrounding phallic imagery; for a pen or an alphabet, human speech is used. These cultural references mislead: an onion is not a phallus, and a pen does not speak. But within them, there must also lie the clues to solving the riddle. This is the only way in which a riddle can be solved, unless the author is fully and explicitly to reveal the solution, because there must be some chance that the reader is able to interpret the metaphor correctly. Just as a reader must be capable of interpreting the alphabet in which a scribe writes, the metaphors chosen by the author must not be so abstruse that the reader cannot recognise the relationship between what is written and what is meant. There must be some pre-existing structure within which an onion is understood to

[13] Marie Nelson, 'The Paradox of Silent Speech in the Exeter Book Riddles', *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), 609-15 calls 'paradoxical' the understanding required to recognise that the speaking object of the riddle manifests itself with the quality of speech which it does not possess in actuality.

have a head, or the relationship between a pen and its owner is understood to be one of loyalty. It is not sufficient to say that the metaphors are strong enough on their own: it is only their participation in the tissue of metaphors which makes up the riddle, that enables them to serve their dual function of obscuring and elucidating. It is therefore almost certain that although the riddles are brief and scarce, their portrayal of writing and of the perception of writing was widely held. For the Anglo-Saxons, words were essentially connected with the immediacy of oral knowledge transmission – of spoken communication. For whilst the riddles of the Exeter Book and Aldhelm acknowledge writing and its advantages, they are solvable only because the clues point to speech, a metaphor that must necessarily have existed in advance.

The necessity of shared cultural understanding is illustrated by the long-confounding case of Riddle 74. Solutions had awkwardly hovered around some sort of wooden object, perhaps a ship, or perhaps 'the life of wood itself from tree to ship', with S. A. J. Bradley adding 'cuttlefish', 'swan' and 'siren' to the list of possibilities. It was not until 1997, when Daniel O'Donoghue suggested 'barnacle goose' that anything like a consensus was reached. His solution was based on the oddities of Anglo-Saxon views on the life cycle of the goose, which hatches far to the north, well inside the artic circle, and whose early life was therefore a mystery. Without the knowledge of that culture, none of the metaphors in the riddle make sense, and cannot therefore lead the reader to a comfortable solution. Riddlic metaphors, therefore, are widespread and well-known, rather than inventive, although their combination engineers confusion and puzzlement. The riddles demonstrate a pan-cultural appreciation of literacy primarily as a substitute for orality. And just as a shield seen as a thane or an onion as a phallus are riddlic metaphors, writing is riddlic metaphor for speech.

Writing and the Materiality of Runes

Writing was perceived to be a powerful tool that enabled man to overcome the limitations of speech, and to bridge time and space: these are certainly aspects of literate communication.[14] The riddles provided an abstract phenomenology in which writing could be subjected to examination, but it remains, in the riddles, an abstract object. The Anglo-Saxon use of runes is a practical technique which further probes this, by providing a situation in which writing itself was foregrounded in texts in which it was not directly under scrutiny. The alphabet of almost all writing for the Anglo-Saxons was the Roman alphabet that had been received more or less with the arrival of Christianity in mainland Britain. However, there also existed, vestigially, the old Scandinavian fuðorc, a runic alphabet which, by the time the Exeter Book riddles were written down, seems to have been used almost exclusively for monumental inscriptions or signatures.[15] It has recently been convincingly argued that writing in runes was modish in the tenth century, representing an interest in their decorative rather than informative character.[16] Writing – not literature but letters themselves – is in this case

[14] This is not to say that the Anglo-Saxons had an 'oral culture', but simply that this is the way in which words themselves were perceived.

[15] A long held critical view that runes were believed to hold magical powers was convincingly dismissed by R. I. Page, in *Runes and Runic Inscriptions* ed. David Parsons (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995). Page argues that, in the Exeter Book, 'it seems that runes were known as an alternative script, and there was no thought that they were connected with magic' (124-5), whilst elsewhere there are 'only a handful of Old English runic inscriptions [that] can be cited as possible evidence for the existence of rune-magic in this country' (119). Monumental association can clearly be explained by the fact that it is simply easier to chisel a rune than a rounded, insular minuscule roman letter. Nancy L. Wicker's chapter, 'Bracteate inscriptions through the looking glass: a microscopic view of manufacturing techniques', in Marie Stoklund et al., (eds.), *Runes and Their Secrets* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006) 415-36. demonstrates the simplicity of creating carved runic lettering.

[16] Patrick Conner, 'The Ruthwell Monument Runic Poem in a Tenth Century Context', *RES* 238 (2008), 25-51 argues for a date substantially later than is normally ascribed to the carvings on the

an artistic creation, as distinct from a tool strictly associated with the transmission of knowledge, and this indicates a consciousness of another difference between speech and writing. As an ancestral alphabet, runes convey a sense of permanence and history, and when, later in the period, they are used alongside Roman letters, this sense of permanence is joined by a sense of mystification: to a scholar versed in reading the Roman alphabet, the transition to the barely comparable fuðorc requires attention.

In a few poems, runes are treated with peculiar veneration, and apparently magical characteristics are ascribed to them. The *Solomon and Saturn* dialogues, discussed at length elsewhere in this thesis, contain a passage in which most of the runes which comprise the Pater Noster are discussed for their individual qualities as weapons against Satan, each with magical powers. But this is more to do with their participation in the larger whole of the Lord's Prayer than the belief that runes or letters of any kind actually possess those powers on their own. The discussion of the magic powers of runes does distract from something more manifest about the use of runes, which is that they appear to be used to represent writing at times when this in itself is important, for reasons beyond the simple function of preserving or transferring knowledge. The use of runes makes writing more 'opaque': the reader is suddenly made to see both the medium and the knowledge imparted through it. Runes make their most significant contribution by being 'other' than the roman letters which surround

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Ruthwell Cross, suggesting that there is even a strong possibility that the runic panels post-date the rest of the carving. This would put the cross later than the majority of Anglo-Saxon runic inscription, suggesting a revival in interest, and one which must have been primarily aesthetic given the centuries-long lapse in rune usage. Elizabeth Okasha, 'Anglo-Saxon Inscribed Rings', *Leeds Studies in English* 34 (2003), 29-45, further suggests a 10th century fashion for runic inscription, as some of the runic inscriptions she studies are nonsense, favoured presumably for their decorative capacity.

them in the manuscripts in which they appear.[17] Whilst there is nothing about either runic writing or the roman alphabet *per se* which imparts a sense of writtenness, combining the two alphabets draws attention to both: it is an act of defamiliarisation that leaves the reader aware of the act of reading. There are riddles in which the solution is concealed in runes, written backwards,[18] abbreviated,[19] or in anagram.[20] Cynewulf, in four of his works, 'signs' his name acrostically using runes.[21] This, rather like the pen (or writing) riddle, shows a certain transmissible authority which is only possible in writing; this is a specifically literate trick. Reading the poem aloud, this signature may be understandable, and may perhaps even suggest the name of the author to the listener. But only when the page is in front of the reader is the effect of the difference between runic and roman lettering apparent, and so only then is the implied significance of the runes an effective tool.

A text containing runes is not fundamentally richer in its potential to carry sense, but it is no longer merely transmitting knowledge. It has an additional significance which emerges from being a language-bearing object, a literate artefact. The author's decision to use runes is the selection of a medium of strictly literate transmission that imbued his work with significance, permanence, reverence, and a sense of history. The runes, by being unfamiliar, also require an act of decoding, drawing further attention to the relationship between spoken words and writing. Since it is necessary that the reader also infer this from the runes, it demonstrates the

[17] On this point, I am in accord with Conner, who asserts that 'a consideration of a runic text needs to begin with the facts we can adduce from the engraver's decision to encode and/or inscribe the text in runes rather than in roman letters'. 'The Ruthwell Monument Runic Poem', 34.
[18] Riddles 23; 75.
[19] Riddle 64.
[20] Riddle 42.
[21] These are *Julia*, *Elene*, *Christ II*, and *The Fates of the Apostles*.

widespread perception of the power of the written word beyond the power of spoken utterance. Writing, certainly, can substitute for speech, but it also has greater potential for transmission. It can be passed not just from person to person, but across space and over time as well. But writing remains, in these subtle word games, a descendant relation of speech. All of its powers are inherited from powers possessed by speech, and being written merely adapts them. These works do not investigate writing as an independent system, and do not explore its powers or limitations.

The Husband's Message

The Exeter Book poem known as *The Husband's Message* develops the abstract examination of the riddles. Though it too looks at writing in an abstract way, and uses runes for some purpose beyond their function as a form of lettering, it does so by putting literate communication 'to work', showing a message fulfilling the role of transmitting knowledge.

The poem has been extensively compared with the riddles which surround it in the manuscript.[22] It uses two widespread riddlic tropes. The voice of the 'speaker' in the riddle is generally agreed to be that of a non-human object, and this use of prosopopoeia is clearly riddle-like, especially since this voice is used primarily to describe

[22] For example William C. Johnson Jr., *The Ruin* as Body-City Riddle', *PQ* 59 (1980), 397-411 at 399; Daniel Tiffany, 'Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism and Poetic Obscurity', *Critical Enquiry* 28 (2001-2), 72-98 at 72; Boryslawski, *The Old English Riddles,* suggests that 'The riddle-like is an attribute which, much as it forces the audience of riddles themselves to concentrate on the search for meaning, imposes a similar search in the audience of other, seemingly non-riddlic texts' (174) and discusses the poem more specifically at 177.

itself and its purpose.[23] Furthermore, the self-description uses the kenning 'treocyn' ['tree-kin'] (2),[24] a technique which adds to the riddlic feel of the work, although kennings are ubiquitous in Old English poetry. The master-thane relationship, in which objects in riddles frequently connect themselves with their human creators or users is also employed in the poem, and for a similar purpose. The object at the centre of the work talks about 'mines frean modlufun' ['my lord's heartfelt love'] (10) and refers to instructions given by a master-figure:

> þec þonne biddan het se þisne beam agrof,
> þæt þu sinchroden sylf gemunde
> on gewitlocan wordbeotunga,
> þe git on ærdagum oft gespræcon
> ...
> heht nu sylfa þe
> lustum læram, þæt þu lagu drefde,
> siþþan þugehyrde on hliþes oran
> galan geomorne geac on bearwe.
>
> [He that carved this beam bid me to tell you,
> jewel-laden one, that you recall to mind the oaths
> that you two often spoke in days gone by
> ...
> He has now bidden me happily inform you
> that you should ply the waves
> just as soon as you have heard from the clifftop
> the mournful cuckoo calling in the grove]
> (13-23).

Additionally, the runes at the end of the poem appear to be a coded message of some kind. They have yet to be successfully deciphered, but critics have suggested that they

[23] Christine Fell, 'Runes and Riddles in Anglo-Saxon England', in Carole Hough and Kathryn A. Lowe, (eds.), *'Lastworda Betst'* (Donington: Shaun Tyas – Paul Watkins, 2002), 264-77 at 76, warns us not to automatically associate prosopopoeia with riddles, arguing that we 'underestimate the extent to which prosopopoeia was for the Anglo-Saxons a way of thinking'.

[24] The edition of *The Husband's Message* used here is that found in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, i, ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: UEP, 1994). The translation is derived from *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. and trans. S. A. J. Bradley (London: Everyman, 1982).

may contain some sort of 'solution' to the work, as the runes of Exeter Book riddles 24, 42 and 64 cryptically reveal the solutions within the text of the work. The simple presence of the runes contributes a feeling of mystery to the poem.[25] Though the poem is not a true riddle, and the tropes listed are more likely to be examples of generic overlap between the two forms, there is one aspect of the comparison which is useful. *The Husband's Message* is a poem which self-consciously considers the properties of things. It is a poem about writing itself, and similar to the self-reflexive riddles of the alphabet and the pen, it invites consideration of the writing which it involves. Like the riddles, the technique chosen for this searching examination is a self-description: a discussion of the properties of an object from the point of view of that object.

The speaker of the poem is some kind of carved wooden object. The exact nature of this object is not unanimously agreed upon, but it is clear that from the object, a message can be read. In line 13, the grammar of the poem appears to belie this interpretation, by using grammar of both the third and first person when referring to the object upon which the message has been carved. However, the Brussels Cross, and engraved silver reliquary, is inscribed with verses containing a similar grammatical mix. The inscription is in two parts, one of which is the self-identifying part, in two lines of alliterative verse:

'Rod is min nama. Geo ic ricne cyning

[25] John D. Niles has argued, in 'The Trick of the Runes in *The Husband's Message*', *ASE* 32 (2003), 189-223, that 'To runify a text [as in the last lines of *The Husband's Message*] is to heighten the cryptic or arcane appearance of that text' (194) and that 'Runification can be regarded as a literary ploy, a special type of defamiliarization that appeals to writers who wish to cast a cloak of real or apparent mystery over their text' (196). Lois Bragg demystifies this idea somewhat by drawing attention to a living phonetic tradition of runes used in epigraphs, contrasted with the runes in manuscripts, which use a different system, and which are planted for riddlic effect, in 'Runes and Readers: In and Around *The Husband's Message*', *SN* 71, (1999), 34-50 at 36.

> Bær byfigynde blode bestemed'
>
> ['Cross' is my name. Once, trembling and
> blood soaked, I bore a mighty king'].[26]

The other part of the inscription is a dedication which does not sustain the voice of the remainder, by referring in the third person to the cross:

> 'Þas rod het Æþmær wyrican and Aðelwold hys beroþo[r]
> Criste to lofe for Ælfrices saule hyra beroþor'
>
> ['This cross was ordered to be made by Æthmær and
> Athelwold his brother for the love of Christ for the soul
> of Ælfric their brother'].

The Brussels Cross is a speaking object in a much more literal way than the disembodied voice in *The Husband's Message*: in addition to its being cross-shaped, it would have almost certainly contained a relic of the True Cross, a synecdoche for the whole cross, and would therefore have suggested the idea of the Cross of Christ describing its own role in the Passion. It seems, in view of this, that the third-person grammar of line 13 is in fact no barrier to the widely-held interpretation of the poem as a speaking object.

But the grammar of line 13 is not the only challenge posed by interpreting *The Husband's Message*. Even once it is established that the voice is that of a piece of carved wood, there remain two possible readings of the poem. In the first, simpler reading, the

[26] The Brussels Cross, now held in the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula in Brussels, like *The Husband's Message*, has elements which could certainly be described as riddlic. The first half line is connotative of a hypothetical solution to riddles which end 'saga hwæt ic hatte' ['say what I am called'] - indeed, an early although not widely adopted solution to Exeter Book riddle 55 is an ornamental cross. In addition, the impression of a 'wiht' soaked with blood and trembling without the initial identifying statement would mislead in a characteristically riddlic way. The text of the Brussels Cross appears in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliot van Kirk Dobbie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

poem which we call *The Husband's Message* is identical to a supposed message written on a piece of wood. Every word in the poem is carved by the sender, and read by the receiver, in a literal sense. The poem, in this reading, is the written contents of a message. Its failing as a reading is the limitation imposed by the persistent inability of a convincing decoding of the runes. If the entire poem is a message, then the meaning of the sequence of runes is surely significant. The early part of the poem is explicit in its meaning, but in the latter part, there was something worth concealing, and which, presumably, at least some of the poem's Anglo-Saxon readership must have understood. Like the clues to the riddles, this code must, in a simple reading, belong to some shared cultural recognition which would have allowed the poem to be read with understanding.

The alternative reading is more complex, but it does not, or does not necessarily suffer from the lack of understanding surrounding the hitherto cryptic runic section. This second interpretation postulates that the inscription on the wood was limited to the runes in the concluding passage. The message is a code which would be understood by the supposed recipient of the message, and consists only of the runic characters for 'S', 'R', 'EA', 'W' and 'M'. The remainder of the poem is an exposition of the poem's meaning – that which is intended by the sender and apprehended by the reader. The poem suggests that those runes and their implied meaning suggest 'modlufan mines frean' ['my lord's heartfelt love'] (9) and recollect the 'oft gesprǽcon wordbetunga' ['oft-spoken oaths'] (15-16), and the 'fædan goldes' ['burnished gold'] (34) and the 'fægre foldan' ['lovely land'] belonging to the sender. In addition, in a riddlic way, the poem is also a discourse on the purpose of written messages generally. The poem is a sort of paean to the power of written messages – literate knowledge transmission – which serve

to aid the memory over time, and cover great distances without being misconstrued. The simpler reading of the poem contains a written message which is simply shown to us, and which we read, albeit with incomplete understanding, just as its fictional recipient would have done. The more complex reading allows us a full understanding of the message, since the interpretation of the runic passage is apparently internal to the poem. We do not understand the stages by which the runes imply the meaning in the first part of the poem,[27] but perhaps we do not need to. The poem shows that the message's sender and recipient share understanding in advance, and that the message is able to efficiently convey meaning across great distances between the two.

A 'ruling' in favour of either reading cannot be made too heavily, and the reason for this is an important detail of the poem's narrative structure. The text of the poem is not imbedded in a story, and so we do not see the message 'at work'. We do not know the reasoning behind the carving – what ever that carving in fact was – and we do not see the reader go through the process of decoding it. As a result we have no model on which to base our interpretation: a full discussion of the poem that would enable us to decide upon one or other interpretation is absent. The understanding of the attitude to literate transmission which the poem gives is not insignificant: it is evident even from our limited comprehension that the poet is aware of the ability of literacy to supplement orality, similar to the attitude displayed in the riddles. And in the more complex reading of the poem, it seems that the poet also perceives some value in written communication beyond an oral message: some aspect of the message's materiality which expands upon the literal meaning of the words it contains. But the fact that the poem is

[27] Niles, 'The Trick of the Runes', offers a solution to the opacity of the closing lines, but his denial of the suggestion that his 'manner of reading' involves 'some cheating' is not entirely convincing (213).

not imbedded in a story has a further consequence. If we are to take the poem as an examination of literate transmission – messages – in any way at all, then we must see it performing the functions we ascribe to it. As it is, we postulate that it could stimulate the memory of the reader, or transmit whatever cryptic message it was carved in order to transmit. We postulate, in fact, the entire fictional context of the work: sender, receiver, pre-history. Like the oral communication in Béroul's *Tristan*, the immediate context of the message in its original state has immense importance to the recipient. In isolation, as the message exists in *The Husband's Message*, that context is irretrievable. The investigation of the literate mode is left incomplete by the poet, because we see the only the message, confined to communicating its written content. A more complete description of the properties of a material text must come from studying its functioning as a literate, material object: the full process of literate knowledge transmission.

Messages in Marie de France: *Chevrefoil* and *Laüstic*

Though Anglo-Saxon poets were evidently interested in writing, whether or not they considered it the distinct tool of literate transmission, their work suggests that it must constantly be defined in relation to orality. *The Husband's Message* does so with the use of an object upon which a message has been written. In the *Lais* of twelfth-century poet Marie de France, however, literacy is explored as a mode of knowledge entirely in its own right.

A number of the *Lais* contain a material object which bears writing, one of which, *Chevrefoil*, has strong resemblances to *The Husband's Message*. But where Anglo-Saxon poets associate writing strongly with speech, the appraisal of writing as a

system distinct from speech, rather than a substitute, is something which Marie de France appears to take extremely seriously. This is evident from the prologue to her *Lais*:

> Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie,
> Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,
> que pur remembrance les firent
> des aventures qu'il oïrent
> cil ki primes les comencierent
> e ki les enveierent.
> Plusurs en ai oïz conter,
> nes vueil laissier ne oubliër.
> Rime en ai e fait ditié
> soventes feiz en ai veillié.
>
> [I thought of lays that I have heard,
> I did not doubt, I knew well,
> that they were composed to make remembrance
> of adventures they had heard
> by the ones who first began them
> and circulated them.
> I have heard a number of them told,
> and do not want to neglect or forget them.
> I have made them into verse, made poems from them,
> working late into the night]
>
> (33-42).[28]

Marie argues that her work beneficially supplants oral transmission, fraught with the risk of neglect and forgetfulness, with permanent, implastic written verse, not by metaphorically mimicking the behaviours of orality, but by doing what orality cannot.[29] For while the written work may be corrupted by successive copyings, and in this way be

[28] The edition used here is *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Karl Warnke (Paris: Librarie Général Francaise, 1990), *Prologue*, lines 33-42. The translation is derived from *The Lais of Marie de France* trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin, 1986).

[29] Leslie Abend Callahan finds a similar theme in Marie's work, and has traced the theme of memorials and memory through the *Lais* and argues that the representation of memorial structures like tombs is a coherent metaphor for the commemorative function of writing down Breton lays. "'En Remembrance e en Memoire": Grief, Memory and Memorialization in the *Lais* of Marie de France', *Romance Notes* 40 (1999-2000), 259-70. This view is supported by June Hall McCash, "'Ensemble Poënt Bien Durer": Time and Timelessness in the *Chevrefoil of Marie de France*', *Arthuriana* 9.4 (1999), 32-44.

mutable, the transmission of a written text is never as transient as speech. In her provenance claims throughout the *Lais*, emphasis falls on converting a heard account into writing, or translating a written account from an apparently fragile, predominantly oral culture like ancient British or Breton, with the implication resonating from the prologue that oral transmission is obsolete or unreliable. This seems like a paradox. On the one hand, Marie claims that the *Lais* come to her primarily from oral renditions of old stories, if not directly, then at some stage in their provenance. Opposing this, she argues that the oral mode of transmission is prone to the twin perils of 'laissier' and 'oubliër' and that without her input, the *Lais* may well be lost to the future. Though her account of the *Lais* as pre-existing oral poems may be fictitious, Marie nevertheless represents her literate activity as the intervention necessary to safeguard the future transmission of the stories. Though she does not directly represent oral transmission as an unreliable system, it is weakened by its not leaving a physical trace.[30] Defined against the comparative permanence of literacy, orality is fragile.

The prologue serves as an apologia for the vernacular in which the poems are written, as opposed to their (possibly imagined) original language, or the more venerated Latin which was less widely understood among her stated readership, but it also serves as a manifesto for the work of transcribing from oral to literate record the stories the works contain: the prologue designates Marie's *Lais* as the moment of that transformation, and the record as it will remain into the future.[31] It is by no means

[30] This idea was common during Marie's life; in the *Roman de Rou*, Wace observes that fame is short-lived, 'si par clerc nen est mis en livre;/ ne poet par el durer ne vivre' ['unless it is put down by a cleric in a book; it cannot survive or live on otherwise'], *The Roman de Rou* ed. Anthony Holden, trans. Glyn S. Burgess (St. Helier: Société Jersiaise, 2002), III.141-2.

[31] For a discussion of the use of authority as a formulaic introduction in Marie's work, see Jeanette Beer, *Narrative Conventions of Truth in the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1981), esp. Chapter 3. The way in which Marie introduces her sources here, though, does not serve a general convention for truth, but

certain that any of what Marie says in her prologue with regard to the provenance of the stories is true;[32] equally, the individual accounts of provenance within each lay are doubtful, often claiming testimony dating from the events recorded. Nevertheless, the very fact that these claims are made indicates a preoccupation less with precision in the events of the story, than with the means by which we come to know them.

Marie's poem *Chevrefoil* was written in the late twelfth century in a tradition connected with courtly romance; it is, nevertheless, clearly comparable with *The Husband's Message* in its subject matter. *Chevrefoil* deals with a meeting in a forest between Tristan and Iseut; indeed, the poem is notable in making scant reference to the remainder of the story, which was already established in literary tradition at the time of the poem's composition. Central to the work is a lover's message, and in this case many of the difficulties of interpreting *The Husband's Message* are not present. In *Chevrefoil*, there is no doubt that the message is written on a stick, no doubt that there are lovers, and there is no doubt about the nature of their relationship; they are constructs which are strictly internal to the work, present without the need for extrapolation. The written message central to the text is a transaction whose sole participants are Tristan and Queen Iseut. The work is therefore conceptually divorced from oral knowledge transmission, since for the reader, the written text no longer serves as a substitute or supplement for speech. Any conceptual association between author and sender is entirely removed; equally, the receiver of the message is very definitely Iseut, and not the reader of the text.

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rather a different purpose connected with her own project of textualisation. The originality of Marie's technique – and the 'misprisioning' of her sources – is at the heart of Dolores Frese's essay attesting to the long term influence of Marie's *Yonec*, 'Marie de France and the "surplus of sense": a Modest Proposal Concerning the *Lais*', in John Miles Foley (ed.), *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir* (New York: Garland, 1992), 216-33.

[32] Marie's preoccupation with her own role in transmission is treated briefly in Chapter 2.

This narrative structure demands a complex of voices, and Marie achieves this complex by the employment of ambiguity in the identity of the speaker. Marie constructs three stages of composition, and then introduces them to her text. Of her source, she says:

> Plusur le m'unt cunté e dit
> e jeo l'ai trové en escrit.
>
> [Many have recounted and told it to me,
> and I have also found it in writing]
> (5-6).

At her conclusion, she once more makes reference to her source, this time attributing it not to some nameless storytellers, but claiming instead that it originated from Tristan himself:

> Pur les paroles remembrer,
> Tristram, ki bien saveit harper,
> En aveit fet un nuvel lai.
>
> [In order to remember the conversations
> Tristan, who knew well how to play the harp,
> Composed a new lay]
> (111-3).

Tristan, taken by the joy he experienced with Iseut that day, chose to record it in a poem: Marie portrays him converting his real experiences into verse 'pur les paroles remembrer' ['in order to remember their conversations'] (111), in a way which Marie subsequently claims to transform into the literate text that we read. This step in the production of the poem is an important one. It need not have occurred, even within the probably fictional provenance of the *Lais* in general: Marie is often content to refer to

the Breton poets in general. The fact that Marie includes it illustrates her preoccupation with the process of converting an oral object – Tristan's testimony, and then, presumably, Tristan's poem which he delivers in a characteristically oral way with a harp (112) – into a literate object, made material by being written down. The lay we read only bears witness to this process because of Tristan's position both within the story, and external to it, as its first recorder. In addition to the composition by Tristan, and the subsequent 'plusur' rewritings and retellings, Marie explicitly inserts herself as the third stage in the provenance of the work.

Chevrefoil, by a considerable margin the shortest of Marie's *Lais*, has received disproportionate attention from critics because of a particular section of thirty-five lines.[33] In this part of the poem, the hero Tristan prepares a piece of hazel and carves something on it. It is this piece of carved hazel which Tristan uses to transmit a message to Iseut. This much is clearly stated:

> Une coldre trencha par mi,
> tute quarree la fendi.
> Quant il a paré le bastun,
> de sun cultel escrit sun nun.
> Se la reïne s'aparceit,
> ki mult grant guarde s'en perneit,
> de sun ami bien conuistra
> le bastun quant el le verra.
>
> [He cut a hazel branch through the middle,
> and squared it.
> When he had pared the stick,
> he wrote his name on it with his knife.
> If the queen saw it,
> who would be very carefully looking out,
> she would know that it was the stick
> of her beloved, when she saw it]

[33] Keith Busby summarises the debate in "'Ce fu la summe de l'ecrit" (*Chevrefoil* 61) again', *PQ* 74 (1995), 1-15 at 1-8.

(51-8).[34]

Attention has focussed on the practicalities of inscribing anything but the briefest of messages: if Tristan was writing on the face of a split switch, he would only barely be able to write his name. As with *The Husband's Message,* there is no certainty offered by Marie's verses about the exact contents of the message. There then follows the phrase 'Ceo fu la sume de l'escrit' ['This was the whole of the inscription'] (61). The pronoun 'ceo' in could refer either retrospectively to Tristan's name, or prospectively to the lengthy description of the relationship which follows a few lines later:

> D'els dous fu il tut altresi
> cume del chievrefueil esteit
> ki a la coldre se perneit:
> quant il s'i est laciez e pris
> e tut entur le fust s'est mis,
> ensemble poënt bien durer;
> mes ki puis le vuelt desevrer,
> la coldre muert hastivement
> e li chievrefueilz ensement.
> 'Bele amie si est de nus:
> ne vus senz mei ne jeo senz vus!'
>
> [The two of them were
> like the honeysuckle is
> and like the hazel branch it grips
> when it is attached and wound
> right around the other.
> Together the two survive well,
> but if the two are dissevered,
> the hazel quickly dies,
> and the honeysuckle too.
> 'Beautiful love, it is thus with us:
> Neither you without me, nor I without you']

[34] Questions have been raised about exactly how the piece of wood has been carved or cut: these emerge primarily from the feeling that although the passage about preparing the wood is ambiguous to us, it would probably have been clear to Marie's audience. One such critic is Thomas L. Reed, Jr., 'Glossing the Hazel: Authority, Intention and Interpretation in Marie de France's Tristan, "Chievrefoil"', *Exemplaria* 7 (1995), 99-143. Reed argues for an even greater significance of the use of hazel as a medium for the inscription, citing classical mythology and other medieval Tristan sources.

(68-78).

This could well be the contents of a lover's message, although the voice is that of a narrator reporting contents. There is good reason for supposing that Tristan would be writing a message to his lover at this point in the poem. The last two lines are clearly in the voice of Tristan, and there is nothing at this stage to definitively suggest that this entire quotation was not approximately what he wrote. But it seems like a lot of material to be carved hurriedly, and read just as swiftly by Iseut, probably from a distance, and perhaps more importantly, so much writing could scarcely fit onto the face of a split switch.

The nature of the description of the love between the pair suggests that had Tristan written just his name, the rest would have been implicit. Had he written, say, just the last couplet, the rest would, again, have been implicit. Had the stick been left bare, it too would have had substantial implications for Iseut. After all, Tristan chose a switch from the tree around which honeysuckle was traditionally known to grow in English woodland, and it is from the image of the honeysuckle wrapped around the hazel that Tristan – and Marie – derived the title of the lay.[35] The selection of writing surface is as significant as anything written on it, since the central image of the poem is

[35] There is some dispute about the extent to which the minutiae of natural phenomena like the habitat of the honeysuckle would have been known to Marie. William Sayers claims that 'all of this would have been well known to Marie', in 'Marie de France's *Chevrefoil*, Hazel Rods and Ogam Letters *Coll* and *Uillenn*', *Arthuriana* 14/2 (2004), 3-16 at 5. June Hall McCash, in 'The Swan and the Nightingale: Natural Unity in a Hostile World in the *Lais* of Marie de France', *French Studies* 49 (1995), 385-96, notes that whilst at times Marie's use of natural phenomena is purely for its figurative merit, 'Marie's animals will not fit conveniently into any single niche' (385); she cites supernatural animals, symbolic animals and realistic or mimetic animals from across the *Lais* in support of this. Ann Tukey Harrison, on the other hand, is adamant that Marie was relatively ignorant of the natural world: 'Marie does not write from direct observation. She transmits the lore of others with no apparent concern for truth or accuracy', 'Marie de France as Naturalist', *Romance Notes* 21 (1980-1), 248-53 at 253.

of two symbiotic beings wholly dependent on one another: the hazel and the 'chevrefoil' wound round it is a perfect symbol for the lovers themselves.

It seems unlikely that there is a straightforward answer to the question of what was written on the stick. As it stands, the word 'ceo' leaves a glaring ambiguity, and in a collection of poems which thrives on comparable ambiguities, it is surely without resolving 'ceo' to mean 'this preceding' or 'this succeeding' that the text should be treated. The involvement of the narrator, reporting, or describing the relationship in such intimate terms at this moment in the text raises ambiguities over the focalization of the narrator. So when the distinction between the source of the lay and the lay itself is raised in the closing lines of the work, there is already a weight of uncertainty, but one which suggests Tristan's agency in the composition of Marie's work. This seems purposeful: hardly passive ambiguity resulting from slipshod wordcraft. What is left, then, is a blurring of the distinction between the voice of Tristan and the voice of the narrator, accompanied by a blurring of the distinction between the content and the meaning of the message. It is impossible to separate narrator from message and content from meaning precisely because of the structural co-dependence of Marie's literate narrating objects and her process of narration.

The ambiguity of voice in *Chevrefoil* serves to emphasize the fact that a message carries meaning disproportionate to the scale of the signifier itself: written messages are not the only aspect of a material object that can transmit knowledge. Physical messages, distinct from their oral counterparts, have a communicative power associated with their material being, their mere existence. Tristan's addressee – Iseut – reads the longest possible message from anything he wrote, regardless of how hard the external reader may find the interpretative process: it is not there for us to read at all. The importance

placed on this isolated, internal literacy is emphasised by Marie towards the end of the poem, with the account of the lay's supposed composition. In examining *The Husband's Message*, certain extrapolations were tested against the work, and it was these, rather than anything internal to the text, that enabled the reader to interpret the poem. But in *Chevrefoil*, no such extrapolation is necessary. Marie purposefully devotes a large proportion of the work to discussing its (fictionalised) provenance, and to describing the means by which Tristan prepared his message. The effect of this is to heighten the reader's awareness of the literate text, but it also serves to draw attention to the moment at which the literate recording process is used. The moment of composition – the actual moment at which Tristan engraved the wood – is present within the text, and although it is not clear to us what he wrote or how it should be understood, the moment of reading is also there in the text. In effect, we see a written message at work, transmitting knowledge from its sender Tristan, across time and space, to its reader Iseut.

For the external reader, there is a different, entirely external epistemological system. The text at large is connected to the Tristan tradition, and the intertextual relationship between others and this, extremely truncated, non-tragic, story is made remarkable by the inevitable foreboding of the tradition. It is the names Tristan and Iseut which place the work in the surrounding tradition, along with only a few brief references: the poem is therefore imbued with a sense of the naivety of the characters, and a sense of fate, neither of which can be present in the internal epistemology of the characters. Tristan chose to write his story about the events of that one happy day: externally, Marie chose to tell a story about an affair in its infancy, well aware that she has only told half a story. Marie's choice extends beyond *Chevrefoil*: the lovers

themselves become icons for other lovers and other affairs, and contribute to an overall literate tradition which unites the *Lais*. This is the epistemological interplay between the reader and the actual author of the work. Like the message left by Tristan, the intertextual freight of the work enables it to narrate beyond its own scale: *Chevrefoil* is a sort of synecdoche for the whole of the Tristan legend. The operation of this aspect of the message, though, does not affect the way the characters interpret it. Unlike the characters of Chrétien, who have a sort of awareness of themselves within a romance tradition,[36] Marie's characters interpret the written messages within the story in a way which is entirely isolated from the reader's perspective.

The plot of another of Marie's *Lais*, *Laüstic*, also deals with a jeopardy which leads to the sending of a message. Two lovers, separated by circumstances, are in the habit of gazing at one another from their respective windows all night. When asked why she leaves her bed to stand at the window, the lady says that she goes to listen to a nightingale which can be heard singing all night. Incensed, her husband traps and kills the bird, and throws the body at his wife, staining her breast with blood. Mocking her, he says that she will no longer be kept awake by it, thereby removing her excuse for standing all night by the window. The lady contrives at this point to send a message to her lover, lest 'il quidera que jeo me feigne' ['he think that I am fickle'] (131). Taking the dead bird, she wraps it in samite, 'a or brusdé e tut escrit' ['embroidered with gold and inscribed all over'] (136). This she sends to her lover, by means of a servant. The servant also carries an oral message:

> De sa dame il dist saluz,
> tut sun message li cunta

[36] This is discussed in Chapter 1.

e l'aüstic li presenta.

[From his lady he gave greeting,
recited his whole message
and presented the nightingale]
(142-4).

The knight who receives the nightingale ascribes enormous significance to it: the delivery is grim for the knight in a way which exceeds the reader's understanding of the poem as a tragic story: for him, it is imbued with a significance which belongs within the story. Like the hazel switch in *Chevrefoil*, it is the material component of this message which has the greatest importance – the reality of the message itself, rather than its content. He places the samite-wrapped nightingale in a golden casket and carries it everywhere with him.

As with *Chevrefoil*, the significance of the nightingale-message for the reader comes from outside. The lay has strong shades of Ovid's tale of Philomela.[37] In that story, Philomela is raped and then has her tongue cut out, so that the only way she has to accuse her rapist is by embroidering the story into a tapestry: the possibility of oral transmission is literally removed.[38] The account of the rape emerges solely from a tapestry, which Philomela embroiders: a material message. The gods take pity, and Philomela is eventually turned into a nightingale. Unlike Philomela, the lady in *Laüstic* is able to send an oral message, but only through an intermediary, and it is clearly the

[37] *Metamorphoses* Bk. VI.
[38] This story was well-known in the twelfth century; there was a version in Old French and indeed, Chrétien de Troyes own translation of the story of Philomela was also in circulation at the time, probably along with three other adaptations of stories from the *Metamorphoses*. June Hall McCash looks at the influence of the Philomela and Procne legend, in 'Philomena's Window: Issues of Intertextuality and Influence in Works of Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes', in Keith Busby et al., (eds.), *De Sens Rassis: Essays in Honour of Rupert T. Pickens* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 415-30. SunHe Kim Gertz compares Ovid's aesthetics in the *Ars Amatoria* with those of Marie in the *Lais*, in 'Echoes and Reflections of Enigmatic Beauty in Ovid and Marie de France', *Speculum* 73 (1998), 372-96.

material message which carries the greater burden. With the permanence that is a familiar characteristic of a written message, the bird and its embroidered shroud are carried around forever by the lover who receives them, encased in gold, which alchemically symbolizes permanence, whereas the oral message is necessarily fleeting. The act of sending an embroidered piece of samite, once the simple act of standing at the window has been prohibited, is analogous to the classical tale. This is a textual tradition which is established outside the text, and exploited by Marie. As readers, we interpret and use this tradition in our understanding of the text.

However, the nightingale is also interpreted, differently, by the characters within the text, in a manner unavailable to the reader. The characters take the ideas already associated with the nightingale and add to them the specific meanings of their own circumstances. In choosing to deceive her husband by saying she was listening to a nightingale, the lady chose a transparent excuse which, carelessly perhaps, conveyed a message to her husband. The general association of the nightingale with lovers' vigils becomes her own vigil. He interprets 'nightingale' as 'lovers' vigil', and jealously kills the bird, asserting his own power over his wife by the appropriation of her symbolic vocabulary and killing, he hopes, the love which it signified. When the lady sends the nightingale in its embroidered shroud to her lover, it is imbued with the general tradition of nightingales and the specific meaning of the message which accompanies it. The lover, it seems, is equally gifted in the interpretation of the story; he devotes himself to the corpse of the bird that has become the one remaining indication of his relationship with the lady. The dead nightingale is not simply 'lost love' but *his* lost love. More than the message of the servant, and more than the story on the

embroidered samite would alone have done, the material presence of the nightingale itself bears the symbolic significance for the three members of the love triangle.

In both of these lays, the object at the centre conveys a message out of proportion to the scale of the object itself. This is the power of the material context of the message, and is unique to literacy as a means of knowledge transmission. And unlike *The Husband's Message*, both *Chevrefoil* and to a lesser extent *Laüstic* show the entire process of literacy: composition, despatch, and reception, followed by interpretation. This process is the dramatic centre of each work.

Titles and the *Lais* as Literate Objects: *Laüstic*, *Chevrefoil* and *Le Chaitivel*

Marie represents literate transmission on an additional level. Her titles serve a bridging function between the literate activity within the story and the literate process by which a reader receives a text. They serve to identify an object of significance within the text, and thereby to objectify the whole text, and draw attention to her own literate practice in composition and preservation.

Laüstic is a poem which treats, among other things, the death of a nightingale, and 'Laüstic' is a word for 'nightingale'. It is also a word which refers to the process of transmission within the poem: it refers to the narrative, and to the message which is created by the lady and which moves from her to her lover. In this sense, the nightingale *is* the narrative. And because it is necessary, or at least important, that the reader in some way understands its significance, Marie 'allows' the poem to carry the title which she claims it had at its inception with the Breton people who supposedly wrote it: 'un lai en firent li Bretun | e Laüstic l'apelë hum' ['the Bretons wrote a lay

about it, and called it 'Laüstic'] (159-60). The word 'laüstic' provides the framework within which the poem is to be understood. When we read 'moððe word fræt', we are not sure exactly where the solution to the riddle, and therefore the vehicle of knowledge transmission, of the poem resides. But we are in no doubt in *Laüstic*. The name of the lay connects an internally referenced source with the title Marie gives to her own poem. She begins:

> Une aventure vus dirai,
> dunt li Bretun firent un lai.
> L'Aüstic a nun, ceo m'est vis,
> si l'apelent an lur païs.
>
> [An adventure I will tell you,
> which the Bretons made into a lay.
> It is named 'Laüstic', so I believe:
> Thus it is called in their land]
> (1-4).

In the narrative 'frame' at the end, the subject of the lay's composition is raised once more. Here, Marie gives the strong sense of *post hoc* composition:

> Cele aventure fu cuntee,
> ne pot estre lunges celee.
> Un lai en firent li Bretun
> e l'Aüstic l'apelë hum.
>
> [This adventure was told,
> and could not be concealed for long.
> The Bretons made a lay from it
> and they called it Laüstic]
> (157-60).

The suggestion is that the story which we have been told was circulated anecdotally for a while, and it was this story which was subsequently made into a lay. The title leads us to regard the lay as an object which emerged already formed from its early history. It is

a device which signifies the symbolic code of the poem, assists its function, and allows the reader at least some fleeting connection with this aspect of the work. Without the space which Marie devotes to the title of the work, it would be recognised as denoting only the work itself; her emphasis means that the title can be used as part of the strategy of literate narration.

This emphasis also occurs in *Chevrefoil*. Marie twice quotes the name that Tristan is supposed to have given his own versification of the story, '"Gotelef" l'apelent Engleis,/ "Chievrefueil" le nument Franceis' ['"Goatleaf" the English name, "Chevrefoil" the French name'] (115-16). An appeal to this title is also made in the opening lines to the 'lai qu'um nume Chievrefueil' ['the lai that has the name Chevrefoil'] (3). The word 'chievrefueil' consequently comes to denote something different at each stage in the provenance of the story. It is the 'name' of an idea in the story, in the experiential world of Tristan himself, the name of the plant which is known to bind tightly round hazel twigs, and supposed to depend upon them for sustenance. It is also simultaneously the name of Tristan's song and Marie's lay. This foregrounds the literate object within the text: the poem of Marie is named for the song composed by Tristan, and the stick which he inscribed. The reader is urged, by this triple sense, to consider the chain of provenance, and thence the construction of the extant, material, literate account of the events written by Marie.

The same strategy is also used in *Le Chaitivel*. Here once more, we find a threefold chain of provenance, and the poem as we read it could be the work of a

character, or the work of a later author.[39] Four knights compete for the favour of a lady, leaving one, crippled survivor. After this drama, the lady speaks to the remaining knight.

> 'Pur ceo que tant vus ai amez,
> vueil que mis doels seit remembrez.
> De vus quatre ferai un lai
> e Quatre Doels le numerai'.
>
> ['Because of the love that I have for you all,
> I wish that my grief is remembered.
> Of the four of you I shall compose a lay
> and call it The Four Sorrows']
> (201-4).

The knight disapproves of the title for the lay, and elaborately insists that it should instead be called 'Le Chaitivel' ['The Unhappy One'] because of the four, he is the only one who still suffers.[40] This is the first internal reference to the composition of the lay. However, the work is framed by two interjections in the voice of the author. The lay begins:

> Talenz me prist de remembrer
> un lai dunt jo oï parler.
> L'aventure vus en dirai
> e la cité vus numerai
> u il fu nez, e cum ot nun.
> 'Le Chaitivel' l'apelë hum,
> e si i a plusurs de cels
> ki l'apelent 'Les Quatre Doels'.
>
> [It pleases me greatly to recall

[39] SunHee Kim Gertz, 'Marie de France's *Le Chaitivel*: the Art of Poetry and the Art of Reading', *NM* 91 (1990), 369-77, considers this to belong to a 'metapoetic dimension' in *Le Chaitivel* (369). Marie, Gertz claims, is concerned to demonstrate the poet's skill in reading as well as writing.

[40] The emphasis upon titling and naming is prominent in the *Lais*, but has only been treated in the most general terms, for example, Douglas Kelly, 'Titles, Openings, and Adventures in Marie de France's Lays', in Danielle Buchinger (ed.), *Europäische Literaturen im Mittelalter* (Greifswald: Reineke Verlag, 1994), 231-9.

a lay which I heard spoken.
The adventure I will tell you
and name the city
in which it was born, and what its name is.
'The Unhappy One' it is normally called,
and there are others
who call it 'The Four Sorrows']
(1-8).

This discussion of the title does not acquire relevance until later in the work, when the knight insists on the use of just one of the titles that we have been offered by Marie, saying, 'Ki 'Quatre Doels' le numera,/ sun propre nun li changera' ['He that calls it 'The Four Sorrows' has deviated from its true name'] (237-8). The matter of the title is once more emphasised in the last lines, again in the authorial voice:

Issi fu li lais comenciez
e puis parfaiz e anunciez.
Icil kil porterent avant,
'Quatre Doels' l'apelent alquant.
Chescuns des nuns bien i afiert,
kar la matire le requiert;
'Le Chaitivel' a nun en us.
Ici finist, il n'i a plus:
plus n'en oï ne plus n'en sai
ne plus ne vus en cunterai.

[Thus the composition of the lay was begun
and later completed and performed.
Some of those who carry it around
call it 'The Four Sorrows'.
Each of the names is appropriate
and is borne out by the subject matter;
Its customary name is 'The Unhappy One'
Here it ends, there is no more:
I have heard no more, and I know no more
nor will I recount more to you]
(231-40).

The insistence on the title in *Le Chaitivel* establishes the paramount importance of a signifier, 'Le Chaitivel', whose referent in the first place was the knight who is the subject of the work. Once the lay is written, however, 'Le Chaitivel' begins to refer to the lay as well, whether or not the original lay came into existence in the way we are told. When Marie takes the next step, and transmits her knowledge of the lay to us, a third level of signification is added – 'Le Chaitivel' now also refers to the poem of Marie de France. When the poem ends, it seems to us that it is the very lay 'Le Chaitivel', written by the female at the centre of the story (although not so titled), that we have been reading. The sense of the text being under construction as we read it is strengthened by the fact that the surviving knight insists that its name is changed, from 'Quatre Doels' to 'Le Chaitivel'. This entirely changes the emphasis of the text, from one in which the maiden is the victim of the sorrow, to one in which the suffering of the surviving, maimed knight is foregrounded. As a consequence of Marie's discussion of the title at such length, and the unusually detailed account of the composition, the process of creation again takes a pre-eminent position in the work.

In *Le Chaitivel*, the preoccupation with naming has a particular effect upon the way in which the reader forms an understanding of the story. This reader's interpretation is distinct from the one that has just been performed by the characters. The lady, for example, sees herself initially as the foremost grieving victim of the whole affair, who, having had four eligible suitors and nothing to choose between them, now has only one, who is invalid as a lover as a result of the wounds he received in the course of events. The survivor, though, firmly but courteously choosing to misunderstand the title given to the lay that the lady has just composed, renames it in a way which demonstrates his own interpretation of the events. Due to the lady's

indecision, three men are now dead, and he himself is unable to enjoy the fruits of his struggle. Of the four who have suffered, and pointedly excluding the lady, he is therefore the remaining 'sorrowful one'. The lay is first composed by the lady, and then subsequently interpreted, first by the lady and then by the surviving knight, before the reader has approached the text. The meaning, as a consequence of the naming, is no longer confined to the lady's design: it has been adapted beyond the proportions which were established for it by the staged author.

Marie's interest in using its title to manipulate the symbolic language of the text is demonstrated by her inclusion of the debate: it is not simply the meaning that is important, so much as the adaptability of the subject matter, based solely on the way it is named. Even if the debate between the lady and the knight is in some way original to the work, it remains an addendum largely irrelevant to the plot, and one which must therefore be tendentiously included. The 'correct' title is a matter which Marie leaves to the reader. It remains a matter of uncertainty after the poem is read in its entirety, and therefore a point of emphatic discomfort in interpretation. Any title, though, is an artifice of the creation of a complete, bounded, more or less immutable text. Titles denote the object of the lay, and although the suggestion that Marie repeatedly makes is that the titles belong to orally composed lays, it is an inescapable fact that they now belong to Marie's written verse. Her insistence on titling serves to promote the text and its creation, rather than its contents, to the fore.

As a narrative strategy, titling has several outcomes. The riddles of the Anglo-Saxons appear without titles in the Exeter Book; although this is not the case with all Anglo-Saxon riddles, it alters the nature of an enigmatic poem if the title is absent, even if the title is not explicit in revealing the solution. It is one more clue which the

originator (or author or scribe) chooses to omit, and which, as a consequence, is unable to contribute to our reading. The literate, narrative-carrying object is as important in the *Lais* as in a riddle. Indeed, the reason the riddles function enigmatically is because the title, which would at least partially denote the speaking object, is absent.

The titles of the *Lais* are artificially external for modern readers, like the titles given by modern editors to Old English poetry, printed in bold type at the start. But unlike the titles of the riddles of the Exeter Book, they are also original to the poem, chosen by Marie. They appear in a sort of *incipit* by the author, and often at the end of the lay as well. They therefore have an internality to the work, which sets them at once separate as an artifice of composition and yet nevertheless welded into the work as an aspect of the poem's facture. Such titling is very unusual in Old English literature; its prominence in the *Lais* indicates the special significance of the material objects these titles denote, and the importance which Marie ascribes to the apprehension of that significance by the reader. Furthermore, unlike the titles usually given to riddles by editors, or which survive with Anglo-Latin riddles, the titles which Marie gives to her *Lais* contribute to the process of knowledge transmission in the poem: they do not 'solve' the interpretative problems of the work, so much as direct the reader to the epistemological structure at the core, and apotheosize the object which carries it. As the principal component of Marie's introductions and closing remarks, titling exists both within and external to the stories she tells. Titling therefore represents the moment at which the reader's and character's interpretative processes coincide.

Conclusion – Material Literacy in its Context

The literate narrative mode was treated with interest by the Anglo-Saxon authors of the riddles and related poetry. The genre is dependent for its success on a widespread cultural understanding of the idea which inspires the riddle, whether that is the phallic suggestions of an onion's appearance and life-cycle, or the connection between speech and writing. This suggests that curiosity about literate knowledge transmission was not peculiar to the writers of literature, but was also present in the audience or reader. The fact that the same interest appears in the post-Conquest work of Marie de France resists the idea of a simple difference, and supports recent work in the field which seeks to soften the impression of the Anglo-Saxons as an oral people, and the Anglo-Normans as the introducers of a new literate culture.

Marie, however, probes the mode further. The portrayal of characters internal to the texts reading literate documents enables the examination of literate knowledge transmission from a distance, as it were. The reader experiences not just an examination of the mode in its entirety, but of the process of composition, and its reception. Writing and reading are the active occurrence of transmission and reception. What she demonstrates of literacy in its context, much as the post-Conquest writers of the previous chapter demonstrated of orality in its context, is the ability for a message to transmit knowledge out of proportion to its scale. Just as spoken utterance draws on its temporary, context-dependent surroundings to shape and enhance its meaning, so the written messages in the *Lais* derive their meaning from the fact of their being written, from the permanent materiality of their existence.

Conclusion

Findings

Chapter 1

In this chapter *Beowulf* and Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* were examined alongside Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Yvain*. *Beowulf* is a poem which espouses a culture of orality; this has little to do with its actual origins, but rather to do with the way in which it presents the culture of the ancestral Geats and Danes. The poem uses exclusively oral methods of knowledge transmission: the testimony from which the story derives is transmitted by a main narrator whose discourse is disguised as that of an oral storyteller, and the story he tells is based on accounts told by the characters themselves, in long speeches, to audiences in oral settings, such as the mead hall of Heorot. Immediacy, first hand testimony, and the importance of audience context - the markers of orality - are clearly in evidence in *Beowulf*. This decision to use exclusively oral methods of knowledge transmission means that the overwhelming rhetoric from the main narrator is one of trustworthiness, of both narrator and (almost all of the) characters. The characters tell stories, and the narrator's narrative is based on those stories; each corroborates the other. Similarly, the reader must believe what the characters say if their accounts are to support the narrator's version. It is a work which requires the reader to trust orality, without considering the limitations which always attend oral knowledge transmission: lack of genuine, independent corroboration; the

individual and possibly unreliable motivations of the speaker; and reliance upon fallible memory, not to mention the presumption of good faith.

Gaimar's *Estoire*, by contrast, uses literate methods to form its own truth-claims. The structure of the work as a whole, as well as the provenance of the accounts from which it is compiled, are typically literate. The narrative gaze is scattered, and does not rely on uncorroborated first-hand testimony. The constructed audience of the work is a reading one, where the audience of *Beowulf* were staged as listeners. The literate characteristics of a large time-frame, detached narration, and dependence on the context of the work, rather than its audience, are all present. Like the adherence of the *Beowulf* poet to orality, however, Gaimar's adherence to literate methods is so absolute that the author is dependent upon the trust of the reader in these methods of knowledge transmission. Like orality, these literate methods have their limitations: challenges to authenticity; the lack of an immediate witness; and the possibility of misconstruction by an audience distant in time or space from the originator of the text.

In *Yvain*, Chrétien uses both these modes. Like the author of *Beowulf*, he stages the events of his work in a valorized past, in which orality is privileged and current as a mode of knowledge transmission. The first episode of the romance is an oral account told to an audience, like the accounts in *Beowulf*, and Chrétien has evidently constructed the manner of the speaker to resemble the mien of an oral storyteller. However, Chrétien himself narrates in a detached way, with a diffuse narrative gaze, able to perceive the world through the eyes of many of the characters in short sections: not unlike the narrator in Gaimar's *Estoire*. This is an overtly literate trait. Equally, although the setting of *Yvain* is described as an oral world at the opening of the poem, it seems to be peopled by avid readers of romance, and indeed the knight Calogrenant

seems to respond to a existing written romance tradition in the way in which he reports his behaviour. Ideals such as chivalry, honour, and shame are built into his telling of his own story, as well as the general plot structure of a knight wandering in search of adventure. But this juxtaposition of the oral with the literate is made to undermine the transmission of knowledge. Chrétien's studiedly literate distance from the narrative, and consequent lack of connection to the testimonies which led to its creation, is coupled with the sense that the characters telling stories within the created oral world are doing so for reasons other than conveying truth. This was not the case in *Beowulf* or the *Estoire*. *Yvain* presses the reader to scrutinize the transmission process, alongside receiving knowledge from it, and this newly-encouraged self-consciousness is problematic for any truth-claim. Through his narrative structure, therefore, Chrétien has created a further jeopardy in his text, one which stems from the modes of knowledge transmission it contains.

Chapter 2

Here, two visionary episodes from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* were examined alongside three texts from the twelfth century: an episode from Orderic Vitalis' *Historia Æcclesiastica*, the *Life of Christina of Markyate*, and Marie de France's *Espurgatoire de Seint Patriz*. In order to provide support for the occasionally unorthodox content of his stories, Bede explains his use of a variety of sources and witnesses, both written and spoken, as well as the physical 'evidence' of scarring and post-mortem incorruption. These various systems of verification and justification function both orally - relying on immediacy, first-person narration, and the context of the telling - as well as in a literate way, depending on the existing written accounts, transmission across a distance, and

widely verifiable evidence. However, Bede's work in itself serves as witness to the events, and in doing so, normalizes all the testimony which could support them, into a literate account. The valuable benefits accrued from a variety of testimony, presumed to be mutually corroborative, are therefore lost. Yet the limitations of the literate mode, which thus becomes Bede's only means of transmission, remain unexplored.

Orderic Vitalis is similar to Bede in this regard. Though his narrator discusses the implications of providing evidence explicity, he does not openly take account of the transference of evidence from its original form into his written, secondhand testimony. His text thus represents a different level of interest in evidence, certainly, but one in which consciousness of the importance of the form of the evidence - oral or literate - does not appear to exist.

In contrast, the narrative structure of the *Life of Christina of Markyate* explores a possible solution to the problem of converting oral knowledge transmission into a literate form. Though no attempt is made to reconcile the weaknesses of presenting oral testimony in a written way, the narrator of the *Life* simply presents a collection of testimony which creates an account only when combined. This distance from the narration process reduces the impact of converting oral testimony into a literate account, but does not remove the problem entirely, and the author does not acknowledge that this transformation has taken place.

Marie de France presents a story very similar to those found in Bede, but her approach to her sources is one of subtle scepticism. This scepticism extends to the nature of the testimony: Marie, unlike the other writers in this chapter, examines not just the content of the testimony, but its nature. The reader is made aware that the text being read belongs to the world of literate knowledge transmission, while the

testimony is predominantly of an oral type, and the entire work is derived in large part from an earlier written work under the operation of translation. Marie is engaged not just with the story, or even with the evidence to support her claims; rather she seeks to challenge her readers, by implying weaknesses in the chain of provenance and the form of the testimony which she presents. This challenge may well serve the same ends as the efforts at verification and justification, but it does so in a way which is acutely conscious of its own methodology - its systems of knowledge transmission - and in a manner which seeks to raise this same consciousness in the reader.

Chapter 3

This chapter examined dialogue as an oral means of knowledge transmission, using the Old English dialogues of the *Solomon and Saturn* group as a paradigm for a particular kind of dialogue which is widespread in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons. The Old English version of the legend of the Seven Sleepers was compared with the *Romance of Horn*, and the chapter ended with an investigation of Béroul's *Tristan*. The *Solomon and Saturn* group provides a simple model of a structure, in which one party in a dialogue asks questions and the other replies with informative answers, or the parties in a dialogue simply 'trade' knowledge. In these texts, there is a knowledge gradient between the two participants: transmission typically occurs in one direction. This is replicated in the way in which the reading audience receives knowledge from the text. Knowledge is transmitted from one character to another, and the same knowledge is transmitted to the reader, as though we participated in the dialogue as silent listeners. Though there are significant generic differences, this type of dialogue - with a characteristic knowledge gradient between characters and toward the reader - can also

be found in *Christ and Satan*, *Beowulf*, and *Andreas*, although these texts undeniably make a more dramatic use of the structure.

The didactic paradigm of dialogue represented by the *Solomon and Saturn* group was not the only use of dialogue made by the Anglo-Saxons. The Old English version of the Seven Sleepers shows that writers had other models available. In this work, the reader possesses knowledge held by neither party in the dialogue; this means that the gradient of knowledge from the text to the reader is different from the gradient of knowledge occurring within the dialogue. A similar structure of deception can be found in an early example of the romance genre, the *Romance of Horn*. Here, though, the reader and one party in the dialogue possess a greater knowledge than the other party, and the character - in this case Horn himself - actively works to deceive the other characters in the story. Such a model was also available to the Anglo-Saxons, in the story of the tempting of Eve in *Genesis*. However, the Old English vernacular treatment of that story works to reduce, rather than to explore, the complexity offered by a deceptive character. Nevertheless, it is evident from these examinations that there is considerable similarity between the use of dialogue in early romance and that in Anglo-Saxon texts.

Béroul's use of dialogue takes the matter a stage further, fully exploring those aspects of the structure which make it an oral form: its immediacy, and its audience-dependence; and its limitations, in its dependence upon personal testimony, and attendant difficulty of corroboration. The dialogues in *Tristan* are structured such that the knowledge transmitted within the dialogue is unconnected with the knowledge received by the reader. Tristan and Iseut speak deceptively to one another, while both know that the other is speaking deceptively, so that an eavesdropping party will be

deceived. Meanwhile, they are able to convey knowledge to one another that the overhearing party will not receive. This is an entirely different structure from the straightforward didactic dialogue of the *Solomon and Saturn* group, but it is also very much more complex than the structure of discrepant epistemology in *Horn*, or the *Seven Sleepers*. In Béroul's work, the function of the dialogue is so elaborate that it is dialogue as a form, and its oral characteristics, that have become a major dramatic focus of the work.

Chapter 4

Where chapter 3 examined dialogue, and its characteristics as an oral mode, chapter 4 handles the exploration and exploitation of the characteristics of literacy, in a mode called materiality. The Old English riddles of the Exeter Book were discussed as essays in materiality, and these were compared with *The Husband's Message*. These are then compared with the use of the same mode in Marie de France's *Lais*. Some of the riddles are self-conscious or self-referential descriptions of writing, vignettes which allowed authors to examine the nature of writing, and the potential of physical texts. They are expressive about perceptions of writing as a tool, and literacy as a means of knowledge transmission. The impression of the attitude to writing at the time of their composition seems to suggest that writing was always seen as a direct substitute for speech, a device that allowed writing to function as speech at a remove. Though there is no suggestion that speech was privileged in the way that early arguments the orality-literacy debate would have it, there is also no engagement in the riddles with the potential of physical writing as a mode of knowledge transmission in its own right, independent of speech.

The Husband's Message appears to show writing being used. It is a poem which is, or which contains, the words of a message inscribed on a piece of wood. The message describes itself, and its purpose, and claims to have been transmitted from one person to another through considerable jeopardy. In this way, it is like the riddles an extended description of writing, but this time a practical demonstration of writing in process. There are numerous unanswered questions about the poem: some of these relate to the content, while others relate to the staged context. The reader is left with the feeling that there is some irretrievable matter which would supplement meaning in the poem. Without a full knowledge of this staged context, which we do not have because the poem simply contains the message in isolation, we cannot see the message functioning as a tool for knowledge transmission. It merely serves as an enigmatic extension of a spoken message. It therefore exists as only a limited exploration of the mode of materiality.

Two of Marie's *Lais*, *Chevrefoil* and *Laüstic*, and to a lesser extent *Le Chaitivel*, explore this idea further, by placing the poems' messages in their functioning context. We see messages composed, sent, received and interpreted, and therefore see the whole process of literate knowledge transmission. The characters respond to cues from the material object that constitutes the message, demonstrating a function of literacy beyond its role as a substitute for orality. The messages in these poems transmit meaning out of proportion to the scale of the actual words of the message they convey, and this is due to their material existence: the fact that they have a physical presence absent in oral communication. They are messages which exploit literacy as an independent means of knowledge transmission, in what is clearly a preoccupation for Marie de France. The poems not only contain messages which function more

powerfully because of their own literacy: the works themselves are bound up with literate knowledge transmission. Marie discusses her role as a converter of oral stories into written *lais*, and uses titles for the works which emerge from the works themselves, associating the literacy within the stories with the material text before the reader. Marie's representation of the functioning of literacy is a vastly more complex example of the self-referential use of writing explored in the riddles. However, Marie also considers literacy in its own right: not as a substitute for orality, but a distinct mode of knowledge transmission.

Overall

The findings of each chapter are diverse but coherent: though the Anglo-Saxons were obviously aware of orality and literacy as methods of knowledge transmission, and used both without prejudice, the interest of authors in these methods of knowledge transmission, as objects of intellectual examination in their own right, was greatly heightened in the literature of the twelfth century. There are twelfth century texts in all these chapters which show little or none of the interest in knowledge transmission shown in other works of the period. Nevertheless, those that do show such an interest represent a distinct and important intellectual challenge to the reader, and it seems that they are concentrated in the twelfth century. In chapter 1, it was shown that Chrétien was a critical examiner of both modes, to the extent of undermining his own narrative. This illustrates that knowledge transmission itself had overtaken the effective narration of a story in Chrétien's work. In the *Espurgatoire de Seint Patriz*, examined at the end of chapter 2, it was evident that Marie's presentation of the story was tempered by the way in which she represented her sources. The mode of transmission and the history of

the knowledge were as important as the content. Chapters 3 and 4 both demonstrated how twelfth-century writers had adapted existing forms - forms used by Anglo-Saxon authors - into elaborate explorations which focused attention on themselves. Through this, dialogue itself, and the uses to which it can be put, is the major dramatic feature of Béroul's *Tristan*, and material, physical messages are at the centre of three of Marie's *Lais*, while the process and physicality of written texts pervade much of her work.

Scope and Limitations

This thesis covers a diversity of texts across a long period of time. This is both a weakness and an advantage. In such circumstances, an argument relating to any one of the texts falls between a narrow point about that one text and a universal one relating to all texts of that kind. I have attempted to use the broadness of my research to illustrate trends, to which there are of course exceptions. I have also used texts as paradigms, to which, of course, all texts cannot be fitted. These are problems attendant upon any selection of texts, and no complete survey of the period's literature will ever be possible. Ultimately, in researching into texts for this thesis, I have chosen those texts which make a significant contribution to questions relating to narrative and knowledge transmission, limiting myself to those for which I could reasonably make space. Many texts I rejected because they explore other areas of thought, and investigating them with regard to narrative would not be a profitable exercise. Some I rejected because closely comparable texts provided clearer illustrations of the trends in literature that I wished to point out.

Beowulf is so central to the modern understanding of Old English literature, regardless of how well it represents the actual literature of the Anglo-Saxons as it existed at the time, that its exclusion was unthinkable. Similarly, Chrétien's *Yvain*, though written by an author from Champagne, probably in northern France, was so influential to English literature at the time, so widely copied in England, and so defining for the genre in which it is classified, that its exclusion, too, was unthinkable. A thesis comparing the narrative techniques of those two texts alone would be a worthy effort of scholarship, but this would, I feel, be too narrow a discussion. Many of the comparisons and contrasts which apply to those texts, and which I have discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis, apply more widely, and have more significant implications than a discussion of just two texts can hope to convey. The result is a comparison of many, but by no means all of the texts which are germane to the discussion, and an impression, but by no means a complete picture, of narrative techniques and their connection to ideas of knowledge transmission in the period.

The diversity of texts provides a view of literature in the period which is not restricted by concerns of genre, language, or - to an extent - date. Many of the differences between the writing of the Anglo-Saxon era and the twelfth century appear to be due to developments in genre, yet the theoretical developments themselves appear to persist across genre boundaries, regardless of how they are defined. This enables a fuller, albeit more complicated, description of the trend toward sensitivity to knowledge transmission. I am hopeful that this can be considered an advantage of the scope of the thesis.

Significance and Future Research

This thesis places the orality and literacy debate into the hands of medieval authors. It demonstrates that while twentieth-century critics have gradually dissolved their inherited, Victorian preconceptions about aspects of orality and literacy, and replaced them with a neutral view in which both societies favoured both modes approximately equally, the debate was also a current one in the twelfth century. It was in literature that this debate found its voice. Future work in this area should consider adding 'knowledge transmission' to the list of intellectual questions which contextualise twelfth-century literature. The post-Conquest period's engagement with knowledge transmission through narrative is a stage in the history of thought which motivated significant authorial decisions, and may be part of a larger shift in consciousness which encompassed religion, politics and the law.

The thesis, however, also compares this period of debate with one in which orality and literacy do not appear in themselves to have been significant concerns for writers. Anglo-Saxon authors were clearly able to manipulate both oral and literate modes of knowledge transmission, and put them to work in a wide variety of circumstances, but they do not show much inclination to explore or challenge the modes themselves. This raises questions about exactly what changed before and during the twelfth century in the culture of English writing, that led authors to be preoccupied with the nature of knowledge transmission. It may be a cultural biproduct of some of the many changes that occurred with the Norman invasion. The introduction of a third language, and the flurry of translation activity that attended it, would raise questions about the reliability of translations and the identity of original authors, and thence lead

to questions about provenance. And it is certainly true that a similar expansion of literary activity took place in Sicily during the Norman occupation in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, where Norman French was used alongside Greek, Arabic, and sometimes Latin. Yet there is literature from other areas of Northern Europe which displays similar traits to those observed in this thesis in Anglo-Norman literature. The *Iwein* of Hartmann von Aue, written in the very early thirteenth century, for example, contains a passage which undermines narrator and narrative, along with provenance, and thoroughly challenges the reader's assumptions about verification even within the framework of fiction:

> Ich machte des strites vil
> mit worten, man daz ichnn wil,
> als ich in bescheide.
> si waren da beide,
> und ouch niemen me
> der mir der rede geste.
>
> [I could invent many words about the fight
> but for the following reason
> I do not want to do this:
> there they were, just the two of them alone
> and nobody else was around
> who could tell me what happened].[1]

Hartmann notes his own involvement in writing the text - this is a literary characteristic - and points out the failings of the essentially oral testimony upon which he would be forced to rely: there are no corroborating witnesses, and one man won the fight at the expense of the other's life. The reader is left wondering just where the story could have come from; this leads directly to the kinds of questions which appear to have

[1] Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein* ed. Thomas Cramer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), lines 1029-34. The translation is my own.

preoccupied authors in Anglo-Norman England. Historians who use their own eye-witness accounts in their work – Jordan Fantosme is one example – in England and elsewhere, included excuses like these in their histories to emphasise the reliability of the material to which they had borne witness. By contrast to the missing history where they had not, their own testimony was starkly believable. Including such a claim in a conspicuously fictional story makes the supposedly trustworthy narrator seem disingenuous. And Hartmann was of course influenced by authors like the arch-ironist Chrétien de Troyes, and this may well account for the presence of similar characteristics in his work, but it does not explain the decision to include such a prominent declaration of the problem.

A fertile area for future work would be research into the causes of the heightened sensitivity to knowledge transmission found in these Anglo-Norman texts. This may involve widening the geographical scope, to include contemporary writing from other parts of Europe. It may also involve research into other literate communities in comparable situations - a multilingual society in the century or so following invasion or subjugation; a young nation torn by civil war; a national administration seeking to codify traditional and diverse law codes and record-keeping practices. This research would help us to understand the ways in which literature responds to such events, and ascertain whether the literary activity of post-Conquest England was a response to turbulence which is widely replicated elsewhere and at other times, or whether the case of Norman England is unique.

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