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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	<i>Arkiv für nordisk Filologie</i>
ASC	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
ASSAH	<i>Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BHL	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina
B-T	J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, <i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i> , with supplements (Oxford, 1972)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout)
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
EPNS	English Place-Name Society
ES	<i>English Studies</i>
FS	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit
LALME	A. McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and M. Benskin, <i>A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaval English</i> , 4 vols. (Aberdeen, 1986)
MÆ	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
Auct. antiq.	Auctores antiquissimi
SS rer. Germ.	Scriptores rerum Germanicarum
SS rer. Merov.	Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989)
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1841-64)
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
SS†	<i>Scandinavian Studies</i>

## PREFACE

This publication is the outcome of an initiative taken in 1999 by members of the post-graduate community in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic. That they have brought their venture so successfully to fruition is testimony not only to their commitment and enthusiasm, but no less importantly to the professionalism which they have displayed at every stage of the process. The Department is proud indeed to be associated with the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, and wishes it every success in the future.

Professor Simon Keynes  
Head of the Department of ASNC  
University of Cambridge

#### COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The second Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic took place on Friday, 25 May 2001, in the Winstanley Lecture Theatre, Trinity College, Cambridge. Papers on the theme of 'Boundaries and Borders in the Early Middle Ages' were presented in four sessions:

##### Session I (*Chair: Jim Rose*)

Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Guthlac's Crossings'

##### Session II (*Chair: Chris Abram*)

Antje G. Frotscher, 'Old Norse Prose *sennur*: Testing the Boundaries of a Genre'

Andrew Rigby, 'Beyond Byzantium: Seeking Serkland in the *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*'

Slavica Ranković, 'Emerging from the *Horizon of Expectations*: the Evolutionary Quality of Icelandic Sagas and Serbian Epic Poetry'

##### Session III (*Chair: Aaron Kleist*)

Alaric Hall, 'Demarcating Old and Middle English: the Monophthongisation of OE <eo>'

Siân Duke, 'From Bede to Ari: Extending the Boundaries of Christendom'

##### Session IV (*Chair: Emily Thornbury*)

Rebecca Rushforth, 'Mind the Gap: Hagiography and History in Cotton Tiberius B. ii'

Dorota Pomorska, 'Across the Irish Sea: Irish Saints and the Peoples of Britain in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Hagiography'

Andrew Hadley, 'Bamburgh: a Border Polity in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries?'

The members of the colloquium committee for 2000–1 were:

Chris Abram and Jim Rose (Chairmen), Verity Allan (Secretary), P. J. Buchan, Clare Downham, Sara Pons-Sanz, Alison Powell, Andrew Rigby, Keeley Schell, Bee Smyth, Harriet Thomsett and Emily Thornbury.

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## Guthlac's Crossings

Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe  
University of Notre Dame

To mark a boundary is to imagine a crossing. As I hope to show, attending to the work of boundaries and their crossings in Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci* can yield information about how space and place are constructed in this text and how their construction functions. The *Vita Guthlaci* is itself located at the intersections of several discrete discourses – religious, social, political – not, if you will, occupying their borders, but functioning itself as a node at which these discourses intersect. At a very literal level, the *Vita Guthlaci* presents, invokes, constructs or transgresses boundaries of various sorts: of kingdoms (notably of the Mercians, themselves 'borderers'; of the East Angles; and of the aptly named Middle Angles arrayed in between), of the fens (appearing in Felix's account as uncanny, liminal, and simultaneously full and empty), and of Guthlac's cell (at crucial points subject to various demonic invasions). As a place, the Crowland of Felix's narrative is discrete territory, located in the between-lands of two larger kingdoms and geographically distinct as fenland. But Felix's Crowland is also a space of narrative action, where the folding together of different, even conflicting, discourses in the narrative of Guthlac's life produces both the place and the space of Felix's fenland saint.<sup>1</sup> Using this distinction will make it possible to assess the outcomes of Felix's mapping of 'desert' upon

<sup>1</sup> For an elaboration of the distinction of space and place see M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 117–18.

'fen' and identify the arenas of action produced by the geographies of Felix's account.

One must be cautious, however, to avoid construing the production of space and place in Anglo-Saxon England either as the simple negation of our own productions or as something innocently primitive. To this end, I should like to situate the problem by reference to some influential remarks Michel Foucault used to preface his analysis of contemporary heterotopias in 'Of Other Spaces':

In the Middle Ages there was a hierarchic ensemble of places: sacred places and profane places; protected places and open, exposed places; urban places and rural places (all these concern the real life of men). In cosmological theory, there were the supercelestial places, as opposed to the celestial, and the celestial place was in its turn opposed to the terrestrial place. There were places where things had been put because they had been violently displaced, and then on the contrary places where things found their natural ground and stability. It was this complete hierarchy, this opposition, this intersection of places that constituted what could very roughly be called medieval space: the space of emplacement.<sup>2</sup>

This space of 'emplacement' he contrasts with the 'extension' resulting from the Copernican revolution, and also with the modern

<sup>2</sup> M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. J. Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 22–7, at 22. At a later point in the essay, Foucault complicates his schema by conceding that 'in the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis' (p. 24). However, this extension of heterotopia to 'primitive' cultures is more apparent than real, since he severely limits the functioning of such spaces in his defining examples: 'adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.' This has been an influential essay, disseminated by E. W. Soja's agenda-setting book, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989), pp. 16–21.

'site', describable in terms of clusters of relations.<sup>3</sup> As always, to a medievalist reader, Foucault manages to be both stimulating and irritating. In his description of medieval space as 'the space of emplacement' he produces the medieval as the 'other' of the modern, flattening a thousand years into a cartoon of the High Middle Ages. In this cartoon, places have a comforting order and exist in tranquil binaries. This construct is in opposition to contemporary heterotopias 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.<sup>4</sup> In the remarks on the *Vita S. Guthlaci* that follow, I should like to trouble the illusory stability of the binaries of place that Foucault sets up in his little history. In examining the *vita* constructed by the discourses on which Felix draws, discourses we might individually label as 'religious', 'social' and 'political', I argue that Felix produces in Guthlac's retreat a space for the meeting of incompatibles. As a liminal space physically, religiously, socially and politically, his retreat is also imagined as a space of transformation which, in that process, is itself transformed into a recognizable place, the shrine of a saint. Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci* is first and foremost a discourse of contested territory fundamentally altered through acquisition, purgation, and habitation. To make this outcome possible, Felix must first infest the place in question so that Guthlac might purge it. To follow the trail of transgressions and transformations in the *vita*, we must begin where the *vita* leads: with its close interest in the social and political in a narrative representing a Mercian warrior saint to an East Anglian king.

Felix begins his life of Guthlac not with the saint himself but with his father and pedigree. Through Penwahl, and indeed Guthlac himself, Felix firmly imbricates his narrative in the geographic and

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

political struggles in Southumbria of the later seventh century. Penwahl, we learn, is a man 'de egregia stirpe Merciorum', living, nonetheless, in the area of the Middle Angles ('cuius mansio in Mediterraneorum Anglorum partibus ... constabat').<sup>5</sup> Penwahl is sufficiently distinguished to trace his ancestry back to Icel, stated here as the founder of the Mercian dynasty.<sup>6</sup> Icel was five generations before Penda, the pagan father of Æthelred (675–704), the Mercian king in whose reign Guthlac was born, passed his youth, and entered his anchoritic retreat. When Guthlac decides to withdraw from the world, he enters Repton, a double monastery closely associated with the Mercian dynasty<sup>7</sup> and presided over by abbess Ælfthryth. Headda, bishop of the Mercian see of Lichfield (691) and later of Leicester (709), ordains Guthlac and consecrates his church.<sup>8</sup> Guthlac is visited by Æthelbald, later king of Mercia, while in exile. But he also receives a lead-lined coffin and linen burial cloth from one Ecgburh, an abbess and daughter of Aldwulf, king of the East Angles.<sup>9</sup> It is likely that she would have been abbess of an East Anglian foundation.<sup>10</sup> And, of course, it is for Ælfwald, king of East Anglia (acc. 713, d.

<sup>5</sup> *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), ch. i, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> D. N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50 at 30–7.

<sup>7</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, ch. xx, p. 84. Repton was the burial place for Mercian kings, in proximity to Lichfield, the Mercian bishopric from 669. See B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), pp. 101 and 102.

<sup>8</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1971), pp. 49–50 and p. 50, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, p. 16, regards the mention of Aldwulf without an accompanying specification that he was king of the East Anglians (ch. xlvi) as evidence that the *vita* was written in East Anglia.

<sup>10</sup> See D. Whitelock, 'The Pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia', *ASE* 1 (1972), 1–22, at 15, n. 8.

749), that Felix writes his account of Guthlac, the Mercian warrior turned anchorite.

That Penwahl lived in the region of the Middle Angles intrigues as much as it informs, since the name refers, given the evidence of the Tribal Hidage, not to a kingdom but to an agglomeration of different Anglian peoples located in small kingdoms bordering Mercia proper and separating Mercia from East Anglia.<sup>11</sup> The pointed location of Penwahl's *mansio* in the narrative is a reminder of Mercia's ascendancy and its designs on the area. Both Mercia and East Anglia were clearly interested in the Middle Angles. As the Mercians continued their expansion in the mid-seventh century, Penda installed his son Peada as overlord of the Middle Angles (653–655), subordinate to himself.<sup>12</sup> Penda's subsequent killing of the East Anglian king

<sup>11</sup> W. Davies, 'Middle Anglia and the Middle Angles', *Midland Hist.* 2 (1973), 18–20, at 20. On seventh-century Mercian policy toward the Middle Angles see D. N. Dumville, 'Essex, Middle Anglia, and the Expansion of Mercia in the South-East Midlands', in his *Britons and Anglo-Saxons in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1993), ch. 9, at pp. 13–20 (revised version of the essay of the same name in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. S. Bassett (London, 1989), pp. 123–40); see also Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, p. 106. The provenance of the Tribal Hidage is generally accepted to be Mercian, but the date of the composition remains controversial. For the range of opinion see A. R. Rumble, 'Appendix III: the Tribal Hidage: an Annotated Bibliography', section 3 in *The Defence of Wessex: the Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications*, ed. D. Hill and A. R. Rumble (Manchester, 1996), pp. 182–8. See D. N. Dumville, 'The Tribal Hidage: an Introduction to its Texts and their History', *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Bassett, pp. 225–30 and 286–7. Dumville dates the Tribal Hidage to between c. 635 and c. 680 ('Essex, Middle Anglia', p. 17); Davies dates the Tribal Hidage to 670–690 in W. Davies and H. Vierck, 'The Contexts of Tribal Hidage: Social Aggregates and Settlement Patterns', *FS* 8 (1974), 223–93, at 227.

<sup>12</sup> See Dumville, 'Essex, Middle Anglia', ch. 9, pp. 16–17; and further D. N. Dumville, 'The Terminology of Overkingship in Early Anglo-Saxon England',



Anna (ASC 654), would initiate the reduction of the East Anglian kings to dependents of Mercia for almost a century and a half.<sup>13</sup> However, the short-lived marriage between Tondberht, a prince of the (Middle Anglian) South Gyrwas and the East Anglian princess, St Æthelthryth (c. 652) suggests a related, perhaps defensive, political interest, given Penda's record of aggression.<sup>14</sup> Beside the peoples constituting the Middle Angles, a very different kind of buffer separated Mercia and East Anglia: around a million acres of fen and saltmarsh extending into the modern counties of Cambridge, Lincoln, Norfolk and Suffolk.<sup>15</sup> The complex topography of the fens, including peat land and silt land, salt and fresh water flooding, and increasing watertables<sup>16</sup> made the fens a difficult geographic frontier, and in the early seventh century they protected East Anglia from absorption by a territorially aggressive Mercia.<sup>17</sup> In the eighth century,

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*The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Hines (San Marino, CA, 1997), pp. 345–73, at 358: 'I should prefer to describe Peada's kingdom as an intermediate overkingdom or mesne kingdom'.

<sup>13</sup> See F. M. Stenton, *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970), pp. 394–402 at 401.

<sup>14</sup> *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), IV. xix, p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> P. P. Hayes, 'Roman to Saxon in the South Lincolnshire Fens', *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 321–6 (with reference to figs. at 318–19) at 325, suggests from evidence of early and middle Saxon pottery that the Spaldas, a Middle Anglian people, acted as a buffer between Mercia and East Anglia. See P. Courtney, 'The Early Saxon Fenland: a Reconsideration', *ASSAH*, BAR Brit. Ser. 92 (1981), 91–102, fig. 6.1 at 92. For a physical description of the Crowland area see P. P. Hayes and T. W. Lane, *The Fenland Project Number 5: Lincolnshire Survey, the South-West Fens*, East Anglian Archaeology Report no. 55 (1992), 192 and 203. See also D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998), p. 170.

<sup>16</sup> Hooke, *Landscape*, p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> H. C. Darby regarded the fenland as a frontier in economic, military and

however cooperatively subordinate East Anglian kings might have been, they must have looked both nervously and hopefully to the fens as a buffer with their Mercian overlords.

However inhospitable, the fens were not immune to settlement. There is evidence of Roman colonization on the silts, its retraction in the later second century after flooding, and possible rebuilding in the fourth century, but the archaeological record of settlement is difficult and complicated by silting.<sup>18</sup> The evidence of settlement in the early Anglo-Saxon period is thus ambiguous in the extreme. Felix's famous description of Guthlac's fen as 'in mediterraneis Britanniae partibus immensae magnitudinis aterrima palus, quae, a Grontae fluminis ripis incipiens, haud procul a castello quem dicunt nomine Gronte, nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus, ab austro in aquilonem mare tenus longissimo tractu protenditur',<sup>19</sup> frequently cited in discussions of the Lincolnshire fens in the Early Middle Ages, has its own rhetorical agenda, as will be clear below, but preferable evidence for inferring patterns of settlement has been place names, particularly those of the Tribal Hidage, and archaeological remains.<sup>20</sup> What is not ambiguous,

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psychological dimensions. See his 'The Fenland Frontier in Anglo-Saxon England', *Antiquity* 8 (1934), 185–201, at 192.

<sup>18</sup> Courtney, 'Early Saxon Fenland', p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, ch. xxiv, pp. 86–7. 'In the midland district of Britain a most dismal fen of immense size, which begins at the banks of the river Granta not far from the camp which is called Cambridge, and stretches from the south as far north as the sea. It is a very long tract, now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams'. I cite Colgrave's translation of the *vita* throughout.

<sup>20</sup> Cyril Hart, 'The Tribal Hidage', *TRHS* 5th ser. 21 (1971), 133–57, at 134, would locate six named tribes within the fens. For an argument about the

however, is the inhospitable nature of the peat fens, that area that Guthlac chose for his anchoritic retreat. His embrace of such territory is the first point of contact with Felix's eremitic exemplars.

The parallels between Guthlac's *vita* and that of Antony, in particular, are well known, and I do not wish to rehearse them.<sup>21</sup> However, it is necessary to look at a few particulars to situate the argument about space and place I should like to make. Movements across several sites punctuate Antony's progress in ascetic practice. At the beginning of his ascetic career Antony moves away from his home to the outskirts of the next village to learn from a holy man.<sup>22</sup> He next withdraws to tombs located not far from his village, at which time the man who brings him bread locks him in the tomb from without.<sup>23</sup> Around age thirty-five, he removes to the desert fortification, where he would spend twenty years, at Pispir, the 'Outer'

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locations of peoples in the fens and fen-margins, see Courtney, 'Early Saxon Fenland', pp. 96–98. See P. Hayes, 'The Fenland Project: the Northern Area', *Looking at the Land*, ed. M. Parker Pearson and R. T. Schadla-Hall (Leicester, 1994), pp. 24–7, at 26, summarizing new archaeological evidence for early Anglo-Saxon sites in the Lincolnshire Fens. On the enigmatic nature of the picture see P. P. Hayes and T. W. Lane, *Fenland Project Number 5*, p. 203: 'To the archaeologist, Crowland peninsula is the equivalent of receiving a present without being able to remove the wrapping paper.'

<sup>21</sup> BHL 3723. For the sources of the *vita* see now R. C. Love, 'The Sources of Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci* (L.E.2.1)', 1997, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed May, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> Evagrius, *Vita beati Antonii abbatis auctore sancto Athanasio*, PL 73, col. 128B, ch. iii (BHL 609). There is no modern critical edition of Evagrius' Latin translation of Athanasius' Greek life. For the tradition of translations from the Greek life and the Latin texts printed in the *Patrologia Graeca* and *Patrologia Latina* see *Athanasie d'Alexandrie Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Sources chrétiennes* 400 (Paris, 1994), 97–8.

<sup>23</sup> PL 73, col. 131C, ch. vii.

Mountain, east of the Nile, today El Maimûn.<sup>24</sup> He ultimately moves to the 'Inner' Mountain in the eastern Arabian desert in the Wadi Araba, around thirty kilometres from the Red Sea.<sup>25</sup> The trajectory of the saint's ascetic life thus moves progressively from the 'world' outward from home and native village to the most remote and emptiest part of Egypt, though broken by visits to the 'world'.<sup>26</sup> It is clear from the *vita* that Antony is tempted in manifold ways – while living outside the village he triumphs over demonically instigated sexual temptation, and in moving to the desert he continues to battle demons, remarkable for their ubiquity: 'ingens eorum turba istum pervolat aerem, non procul a nobis hostium caterva discurrit'.<sup>27</sup> This last point is an important one, and one that has significant bearing on Felix's deployment of his source. In Felix's narrative, the demons become a discrete phenomenon of place.

By contrast with the Life of Antony, in the *Vita Guthlaci*, despite their obvious attraction, the demons received no attention at all in the first twenty-four chapters of his Life, and are not mentioned until the moment that Guthlac sees Crowland. Only then do the demons come into the picture: 'nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* col. 133C, chs. xi and xiii.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* col. 148C, ch. xxiv. See Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine*, p. 44, and for a convenient summary see his entry 'Antonios', *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 1 (Freiburg, 1993), cols. 786–8, at 786.

<sup>26</sup> His anchoritic life is interrupted by two stays in Alexandria, the first to comfort the martyrs during the persecution by Maximian (PL 73, col. 447, ch. xxiii), the second to combat the Arian heresy (cols. 456–7, ch. xli).

<sup>27</sup> PL 73, col. 137B, ch. xv. 'A vast throng of them fly through the air; a troop of enemies move about not far from us'. For the demonology on which the Evagrian translation draws see Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine*, pp. 54–6. See also J. Daniélou, 'Les Démons de l'Air dans la "Vie d'Antoine"', *Antonius Magnus Eremita 356–1956: Studia ad Antiquum Monachismum Spectantia*, ed. B. Steidle, *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (Rome, 1956), 136–47, esp. 142–3.



habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum, in qua vir Dei Guthlac, contempto hoste, caelesti auxilio adiutus, inter umbrosa solitudinis nemora solus habitare coepit'.<sup>28</sup> The demons only act in the narrative in chapters xxix–xxxvi, the most crucial of the *vita*, and in these chapters the demonic obsession of Guthlac takes the form of transgression of boundaries in a series of contestations for possession of Crowland. Guthlac's saintly combat on the island he never leaves opens a space of transformation in which he increases in virtue and the island itself is purged.

The place of Guthlac's retreat is an island 'in abditis remotioris heremi partibus', and Felix's precedents are multiple and different.<sup>29</sup> The Life of Antony, of course, is a larger guide, but islands were a favourite place of retreat for Irish hermits, 'wanderer[s] in the desert of the ocean'.<sup>30</sup> Felix borrows directly from Bede's prose life of Cuthbert, itself calling on the Anonymous life. While Farne offers the immediate model for Felix's description of Guthlac's retreat, insofar as it is an island, neither the Anonymous nor Bede apply 'desert' to Cuthbert's retreat on Farne: *heremi* is used by Bede in the verse life, when describing Cuthbert's faithfulness to monastic ideals while in his episcopacy, but he does not use it in the prose *vita* as a descriptor of Farne.<sup>31</sup> Cuthbert's withdrawal to Farne is called by the

<sup>28</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, pp. 88–9. 'No settler had been able to dwell alone in this place before Guthlac the servant of Christ, on account of the phantoms of demons which haunted it. Here Guthlac, the man of God, despising the enemy, began by divine aid to dwell alone among the shady groves of this solitude.'

<sup>29</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, ch. xxv, pp. 88–9. 'in the more remote and hidden parts of that desert'.

<sup>30</sup> See A. D. S. MacDonald, 'Aspects of the Monastery and Monastic Life in Adomnan's Life of Columba', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 271–302, at 299.

<sup>31</sup> *Bedas metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti*, ed. W. Jaager, Palaestra 198 (Leipzig, 1935), 100, ch. xxii, 'Quomodo in episcopatu monasticam non reliquerit vitam', 'How

Anonymous simply 'solitariam uitam', and Bede's account of Cuthbert's life on Farne is not especially interested in the attacks of demons, dismissing them in a single sentence.<sup>32</sup> Instead Cuthbert's spiritual activity immediately (if figurately) fills the island by populating Farne with a 'city'.<sup>33</sup>

My point in drawing out these distinctions is to look at the way in which Felix, despite his clear use of the life of Cuthbert, uses the Evagrian life of Antony to produce a very different kind of retreat for Guthlac: if Cuthbert provides the English exemplar for an island as anchoritic retreat, Felix makes the inland fen island a desert. In so doing, I argue, Felix uses the discourse of the desert fathers to produce the Crowland fen as a particular space of incompatibles: it is at once contiguous territory and clearly marked as apart. Whatever the modern questions about the extent of habitation or use of the fens, they are, in Felix's account, empty. They are known and unknown. A boundary between two kingdoms, they become, through Felix's narrative, infested by demons and territory in question.

When Guthlac sets out for the desert, or, perhaps we should say more precisely, when Guthlac looks to find a 'desert', he sets out in a direction quite different from that of his spiritual predecessors. We

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he did not abandon the monastic life in his episcopacy': 'neque enim vel tegmina sueta/ Arida vel heremi mutari fercula curat', 'he did not care to change his accustomed garb or the dry food of the desert'. For an outline of the life see C. Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary', *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200*, ed. G. Bonner, D. Rollason and C. Stancliffe (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 21–44, at 29–36.

<sup>32</sup> *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: a Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), ch. xvii, p. 214. Cuthbert briefly alludes to his own temptations later, at ch. xxii. Similarly the Anonymous Life, III. i, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. Colgrave, p. 216, 'condidit ciuitatem suo aptam imperio et domos in hac aeque ciuitati congruas erexit'.

have seen that Antony's trajectory is determinately outward, from village, to outskirts, to tomb, to desert to deep desert. Cuthbert moves from Melrose to semi-island (Lindisfarne) to island surrounded by the sea (Farne). To move to a solitary place (*solitudinem*), Guthlac turns inland. As he had crossed from Mercia into Welsh territory as aggressor and either hostage or exile, in his spiritual withdrawal he moves out of Mercia again, but this time to the east across a different border. For him, the place of solitude, of spiritual testing, the contested grounds of the uncivilized (*inculta*), is in the heart of the country. From Repton he moves east and somewhat south to Crowland in the midst of a 'dismal fen' (*aterrima palus*) described as beginning on the banks of the Granta and stretching from south to north up to the sea. It is liminal territory with inland bodies of water and vast stretches of marsh. To penetrate the fens in Felix's account is to cross a clear boundary from the known to *inculta loca*, 'wild places'. Among the wild places in the desert he seeks ('*plurima ipsius spatiosi heremi inculta*'), one Tatwine tells him of a site more remote than the others. (To make the point, Felix uses *inculta* three times in chapters xxiv–xxv.) In moving further into the midland, Guthlac withdraws nonetheless to an island in the hidden parts of the more remote desert ('*insulam in abditis remotioris heremi partibus*', chapter xxv). Having crossed a boundary in leaving the settled for the *inculta*, Guthlac chooses a retreat with natural boundaries: the place of his enclosure is bounded by water. And in that island, he finds a barrow for his cell.

Guthlac's retreat iterates the spiritual gestures of his eremitic predecessors – and that is precisely the point.<sup>34</sup> Like Cuthbert he has

<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica*, III.xix), following the *Vita Fursei*, reports the pleasant location of the monastery that Fursey, the Irish bishop, establishes after 630 in the land of the East Angles: 'Erat autem monasterium siluarum et maris uicinitate amoenum, constructum in castro quodam quod lingua Anglorum Cnobheresburg, id est Vrbs Cnobheri, uocatur', *Bede's*

an island (though inland), like Antony and others, he inhabits a grave, covering a presumably dry cistern, like Athanasius in the desert.<sup>35</sup> By producing Crowland as a desert, Felix can reproduce the spiritual battles of his saint as battles for territory populated by demons. Before Guthlac, Crowland was not simply uninhabited, but uninhabitable 'propter incognita heremi monstra et diversarum formarum terrores' and 'propter uidelicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum'.<sup>36</sup> Guthlac's habitation requires a displacing and conquest of its demonic possessors. And so, his first act upon arriving on the island is, in fact, a formal act of possession: he moves around the island, searching out every part. When he has done so, he returns to Repton for ninety days. His next act, upon his return to Crowland where he would remain for the rest of his life, is to appropriate the barrow on the island for his cell.

*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 270. 'And a pleasant monastery, near the woods and the sea, was built in the town which in English is called Cnobheresburg, that is, Cnobhere's City.' See also B. Krusch, *Vita Fursei*, MGH SS rer. Merov. 4 (Leipzig, 1902), 437.

<sup>35</sup> R. Ehwald, *Aldelmi opera omnia*, MGH Auct. antiq. 15 (Berlin, 1919), p. 274, prose *De uirginitate*, ch. xxxii, lines 4–7 (on Athanasius): 'Verumtamen aemulorum uesaniae cedens, qui contra uirum Dei zelantes rancida uivoris inuidia torquebantur, profugus longe proficiscens exulat adeo, ut sex annorum intercapidine in arida cisternae latebra delitescens nequaquam limpido solis radio potiretur', 'Nonetheless, yielding to the madness of those jealous men who zealous against the man of God were tortured by the rancid envy of ill-will, banished a long way off, setting out he lives in exile to this degree, that for an interval of six years, concealing himself in the dry hiding place of a cistern, he never received the bright ray of the sun'.

<sup>36</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, pp. 88–9. 'on account of the unknown portents of the desert and its terrors of various shapes', and 'on account of the phantoms of demons which haunted it'. The second phrase borrows directly from Bede's prose life of Cuthbert, ch. xvii.

Both the island and the cell are places of contest between Guthlac and Crowland's demon inhabitants. Felix disposes swiftly of what might seem to us Guthlac's most serious temptation: the temptation to despair is figured as a poisoned arrow shot into Guthlac's mind and piercing the most intimate boundary of all, that between inside and out. His next temptation is also quickly disposed of: the demons try to trick him into destroying his body by excessive fasting. When neither of these works, the arena is changed to Guthlac's habitation itself. In a horror of obsession, the walls of Guthlac's cell become porous and a host of demons pour in:

Subeuntibus enim ab undique illis porta patebat; nam per criptas et cratulas intransibiles non iuncturae valvarum, non foramina cratium illis ingressum negabant; sed caelo terraque erumpentes, spatium totius aeris fuscis nubibus tegebant.<sup>37</sup>

The demons are monstrosities of hideous shape who drag Guthlac away from his cell through the waters and brambles of the fen. From there, they drag him up through the skies until they dangle him before the jaws of hell itself. Only the appearance of St Bartholomew saves Guthlac from being thrust in. And by heavenly command he is returned to his cell, victorious. His victory is underscored by two cowering demons, who weep that his power has vanquished them, and that they may neither touch or approach him ('non enim te tangere aut propinquare audemus', chapter xxxiii). Immediately following this remarkable scene of temptation is his encounter with the British demons.

<sup>37</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, pp. 102–3. 'The door was open to them as they approached from every quarter; as they entered through floor-holes and crannies, neither the joints of the doorways nor the openings in the wattle-work denied them entry, but bursting forth from the earth and sky, they covered the whole space beneath the heavens with their dusky clouds.'

To this point I have simply asserted the folding together of social, political, and religious discourses in Felix's narrative. The passage that does so spectacularly, and, in fact, demonstrates the dense inter-penetration of these discourses throughout the *vita* is the famous chapter (xxxiv) about Guthlac and the Britons. Felix tells us that this event took place in the reign of the Mercian king Coenred (acc. 704, retired to Rome and d. 709). It is a passage that has been taken by some as testimony to a Welsh incursion along the western border of Mercia,<sup>38</sup> or as evidence of the survival of Britons in the fens after the period of the invasions. Neither inference is safe.

There is nothing in the *Vita Antonii* precisely like the encounter with the demons in chapter xxxiv, but the point of contact between the two works is suggestive: In Evagrius's translation, chapter xii, Antony is visited by some acquaintances who are constrained to remain outside Antony's cell, a deserted fort, whose entrance he has blocked up. While they are waiting, they hear riotous noise, shrieking and wailing coming from inside, and voices crying: 'Quid te nostris ingeris habitaculis? Quid tibi et deserto? Abscede a finibus alienis, non potes hic habitare, non nostras insidias sustinere'.<sup>39</sup> Antony's visitors are appalled, thinking that Antony's sealed fort/cell had been invaded by men using ladders. But when they look into the fort through a hole in the wall they see nothing and realize that he was struggling with demons. And Antony, continuing his battle, sings the first two verses of Psalm LXVII: 'Exsurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici eius et fugiant qui oderunt eum a facie eius'.<sup>40</sup> Such contests

<sup>38</sup> Notably, D. Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1951), p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> PL 73, col. 133D. 'Why do you intrude yourself in our dwellings? What do you have to do with the desert? Go away from these lands that are not yours, you cannot live here, you can't withstand our snares.'

<sup>40</sup> 'Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered: and let them that hate him flee from before his face. As smoke vanisheth, so let them vanish away: as wax

continued, and Antony's visitors, time and again heard him sing these verses and Psalm CXVII.10.<sup>41</sup>

'As smoke vanishes' is a multiply-used tag in Felix's Life (as in the Life of Antony), but there are further resonances of this particular psalm in the *Vita Guthlaci* and crucial narrative differences where the dispelling of demons is the confirmation of territory. The chapter heading highlights the centrality of the psalm: 'Quomodo fantasticas turbas satellitum cantato primo versu sexagesimi septimi psalmi fugavit'; it is the means by which he dispels the demons.<sup>42</sup> Unlike in the *Vita Antonii*, in the *Vita Guthlaci* the singing of Psalm LXVII.1 at cockcrow (*gallicinali tempore*) routs the demons definitively.

The singing of this particular psalm is significantly overdetermined in the narrative, and while broadly derived from the *Vita Antonii*, the function of Psalm LXVII here invites further investigation. Felix makes clear that Guthlac performed the divine office in his retreat,<sup>43</sup> but the particulars of his monastic observance (or of

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meltdeth before the fire, so let the sinners perish at the presence of God.' These and all subsequent citations of the Vulgate in English are from the Douay-Rheims translation.

<sup>41</sup> 'Omnes gentes circumierunt me et in Domini quia ultus sum in eos.' 'All nations compassed me about; and in the name of the Lord I have been revenged on them.'

<sup>42</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, pp. 108–9. 'How by singing the first verse of the 67th psalm he put to flight the phantasmal bands of the devil's train.'

<sup>43</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, chs. xxii and xxiii (on his learning the psalms and Office); ch. xxvii, p. 90, '...sagittas psalmodiae ... arripuit'; ch. xxix, p. 94, 'cum quodam die adsueta consuetudine psalmis canticisque incumberet'; ch. xxxi, p. 100, 'cum vir beatae memoriae Guthlac adsueto more vigil inintermissis orationibus cuiusdam noctis intempesto tempore perstaret'; ch. xxxiii, p. 108, 'dein cum solito more matutinas laudes Domino Iesu inpenderet'. P. J. Lucas argues liturgical influence on the account of Guthlac's death in 'Easter, the Death of St Guthlac and the Liturgy for Holy Saturday in Felix's *Vita* and the Old English *Guthlac B*,' *MÆ* 61 (1992), 1–16.

that followed at Repton during his training) are not clear. At a minimum, Guthlac would have recited the full run of psalms weekly,<sup>44</sup> though it is likely that Felix imagined him to be more strenuous in his observation. Columbanus' roughly contemporaneous *Regula monachorum*, for example, specified a crushing recitation of psalmody in the night office in the winter.<sup>45</sup> Guthlac's recourse to this psalm at around cockcrow (*gallicinali tempore*) hints at an association with the night office. Intriguingly, in a performance of the divine office, following directions for the distribution of psalms in the *Regula Benedicti*, chapter xviii, Psalm LXVII would appear to have been recited at vigils on ferial Wednesdays, but any such connection with the *Vita Guthlaci* must remain in the realm of speculation.<sup>46</sup> There is, finally, no way of knowing the form of office Felix imagined for Guthlac more particular than *psalmodia currens*.<sup>47</sup> The celebration of the divine office, with its punctual observation of the hours for prayer, underlines a temporal along with the spatial contestation of Guthlac's retreat: time itself is transformed on the island in the measured performance of the office.

<sup>44</sup> What the *Regula Benedicti* (ch. xviii) considered a minimum, though it is impossible to know what sort of rule Guthlac might have followed. See *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, ed. A. de Vogüé and J. Neufville, 6 vols., Sources chrétiennes 181–6 (Paris, 1971–2), II, 534.

<sup>45</sup> *Sancti Columbani opera*, ed. G. S. M. Walker, Scriptorum Latini Hiberniae 11 (Dublin, 1957, repr. 1970), pp. 122–43, ch. vii, pp. 128–30, at 30: '...ita ut totum psalterii inter duas supradictas noctes numerum cantent'.

<sup>46</sup> See R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville, MN, 1986), pp. 136–7.

<sup>47</sup> See J. Dyer, 'Observations on the Divine Office in the Rule of the Master', *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies, Regional Developments, Hagiography*, ed. M. E. Fassler and R. A. Baltzer (Oxford, 2000), pp. 74–98, at 76. Dyer offers a useful summary of early medieval monastic rules in the West at p. 75, table 4.1.

Psalm LXVII is a triumphant and martial psalm in which God as a mighty warrior king protects his own.<sup>48</sup> In it God claims his territory, for example, at verse 17: 'mons in quo beneplacitum est Deo habitare in eo etenim Dominus habitabit usque in finem', 'a mountain in which God is well pleased to dwell: for there the Lord shall dwell unto the end'. And God frees the captives of the devil ('ascendisti in altum cepisti captivitatem', verse 19) and rewards his faithful after leading them through the desert (verse 10): 'pluviam voluntariam segregabis Deus hereditati tuae et infirmata est tu vero perfecisti eam', 'thou shalt set aside for thy inheritance a free rain, O God: and it was weakened, but thou hast made it perfect'. The oscillation between themes of inheritance and contested territory structuring Guthlac's *vita* is nicely recapitulated in the text history of the Latin version of Psalm LXVII.14. It is most likely that Felix knew the psalms in the version circulating in the Roman psalter, although Colgrave notes instances of Old Latin scriptural readings in the text.<sup>49</sup> The relevant portion of the verse in the Roman psalter reads 'si dormiatis inter medios cleros pinnae columbae deargentatae'.<sup>50</sup> However, rare though it was in the early Middle Ages, the version *inxta Hebraeos* makes a notable appearance in Anglo-Saxon England in the text for the Psalms in the Wearmouth-Jarrow Codex Amiatinus.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See M. Dahood, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Garden City, NY, 1966–70), II, 133.

<sup>49</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, p. 57.

<sup>50</sup> 'If you sleep among the midst of lots, you shall be as the wings of a dove covered with silver'. See *Le psautier romain et les autres anciens psautiers latins*, ed. R. Weber, *Collectanea Biblica Latina* 10 (Rome, 1953), p. 150; and on the Roman psalter in Anglo-Saxon England see H. Schneider, *Die Altlateinischen Biblischen Cantica*, *Texte und Arbeiten* 29–30 (Beuron, 1938), 49. For an excellent discussion of the evidence for the different versions of the psalms in Anglo-Saxon England see now R. Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE 15 (Cambridge, 1995), 10, 69–70, and in early Southumbria, 75.

<sup>51</sup> Marsden, *Text of the Old Testament*, pp. 27 and 141–2.

In this version, Jerome revised 'si dormiatis inter medios cleros' to 'si dormieritis inter medios terminos' after grappling with the equally obscure Hebrew, suggesting the danger of sleeping on the boundaries of one's enemies.<sup>52</sup> While the Romanum version was generally read allegorically, with reference to the two testaments of the Christian bible, literally *cleros* was taken as referring to property inherited by lot.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the two senses of inheritance and of danger appear in several Old English psalter glosses, if perhaps by inadvertance. While a standard gloss for *cleros* in Old English is *hlyt*,<sup>54</sup> the gloss *ðreatas*, that is, 'hosts', appears in the Vespasian psalter and others on the model: 'gif he slepað betwih midde ðreatas'.<sup>55</sup> This

<sup>52</sup> After two translations from the Septuagint, around 400 Jerome translated the psalms again from the Hebrew. For the text see *Sancti Hieronymi Psalterium inxta Hebraeos*, ed. H. de Sainte-Marie, *Collectanea Biblica Latina* 11 (Rome, 1954), 93–6 (numbered '68'). For a convenient facing-page edition see *Biblia Sacra inxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. R. Weber *et al.*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1994). The Old Latin version has 'si dormiatis in medio sortium'. For a discussion of the ambiguity of the Hebrew and contemporary commentary see Dahood, *Psalms*, II, 141–2.

<sup>53</sup> *Augustini enarrationes in psalmos*, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, 3 vols., CCSL 38–40 (Turnhout, 1966), II, 882.35–883.17.

<sup>54</sup> See *The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang together with the Latin Original*, ed. A. S. Napier, EETS o.s. 150 (London, 1916), 75, lines 27–9: 'Cleros an Crecisc getacnað hlyt an Englisc, þanon eac yrfewardnys an Crecisc cleronomia hatte, 7 se yrfeward hatte cleronomus.'

<sup>55</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. i (*The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, MI, 1965), p. 61). This gloss also appears in Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 1. 23 (*Der Cambridger Psalter*, ed. K. Wildhagen, *Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa* 7 (Hamburg, 1910), 160) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 27 (*Der altenglische Junius-Psalter: die Interlinear-Glosse der Handschrift Junius 27 der Bodleiana zu Oxford*, ed. E. Brenner, *Anglistische Forschungen* 23 (Heidelberg, 1908), 85); the gloss in London, BL, Arundel 60 ('Gif ge slapaþ betweoh midde gehlitan þreatas') offers a compromise (*Der altenglische Arundel-*

peculiar gloss replaces the safety of the inheritance in the Vulgate with the danger of sleeping amidst the hosts.<sup>56</sup> The incompatible readings layered in the difficult verse 14, crossing inheritance with danger, epitomize the dialectic of promise and struggle that forms Guthlac's life. It is precisely such an understanding that underlies Felix's description of Guthlac's contestation of the island, a 'locum, quasi ad paternae hereditatis habitaculum', chapter xxvi.

Guthlac's recitation of the first verse of this psalm (and its salubrious effect in chasing the demons), triggers the associations of the rest of the psalm with its triumphant possession of inheritance in the Lord and assurance of safety in danger.<sup>57</sup> It is an apt psalm for

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*Psalter: eine Interlinearversion in der Handschrift Arundel 60 des Britischen Museums*, ed. G. Oess, *Anglistische Forschungen* 30 (Heidelberg, 1910), 114). The gloss in Vespasian A. i cannot antedate 800. On the dating, provenance and dialect of the Vespasian Psalter and its relation to Junius 27, see now M. Gretsche, 'The Junius Psalter Gloss: its Historical and Cultural Context', *ASE* 29 (2000), 85–121, at 104–5. F. Wenisch, *Spezifisch anglisches Wortgut in den nordhumbriischen Interlinearglossierungen des Lukasevangeliums* (Heidelberg, 1979), p. 326, identifies *ðreat* as an specifically Anglian word.

<sup>56</sup> *ðreatas* might appear to point to the danger implied in the reading *inusta Hebreos*, except that the standard Old English gloss for *terminus* is *gemære*. At p. 263 in *The Vespasian Psalter*, Kuhn questions if *ðreatas* is a misreading, querying 'choros?' However, the text of Psalm LXVII.14 in the Vespasian Psalter clearly reads 'cleros'. The Old English word may also gloss *cohors*. See *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, ed. J. Zupitza (Berlin, 1880), p. 64, lines 11–13: 'hæc choors ðes ðreat, þæt is, lytel werod, huius choortis; hæc sors þis hlot oððe hlyt.'

<sup>57</sup> Jerome (*Tractatus S. Hieronymi presbyteri in librum Psalmorum*, ed. G. Morin, CCSL 78 pt. 2 (Turnhout, 1958), 40, lines 1–6) explains the particular reference of Psalm LXVII.1 to Christ's triumph over the devil through his resurrection and the general applicability of the line 'quando in tribulatione sumus et angustia'. For a division of this lengthy psalm into six parts and their significance, see *Magni Aurelii Cassiodori expositio psalmorum*, ed. M. Adriaen, 2 vols., CCSL 97–8 (Turnhout, 1958), I, 585. On 'cleros', inheritance, and the two

contention over territory, and in the ethnic politics of this contest with demons, we see the folding over of political and religious discourses in Felix's discourse of place. This assault of the demons against Guthlac, guardian of the island, is not merely parallel with the depredations of the Welsh against the western border of Mercia – in an analogous folding of the narrative, the demons *are* Britons (or is it that the Britons are demons?). Asleep in his cell, Guthlac is protected by two sets of boundaries, previously established: the bounds of his island are protected by water, and Guthlac himself is protected by his little cell. Around cockcrow, after a protracted vigil, Guthlac awakens from a light sleep to the noise of a great crowd. He leaves the cell and recognizes the sound as British speech owing, Felix says, to his having spent time among them as an exile ('inter illos exulabat'). As the Britons transgress these boundaries, Guthlac sees them first approaching through the marshes ('per palustria tectis subvenire certantes'), then burning his buildings, and finally lifting him on their spears. At this point, Guthlac recognizes the Britons as demons, and disperses them with Psalm LXVII.

While it is perfectly clear from both the chapter heading and the conclusion of this chapter that Guthlac's persecutors here are demons, not men, they are presented throughout the narrative as a real, encroaching army, closing in through the swamp, burning and killing. (It is hard here not to recall the earlier description of Guthlac in chapter xviii, who after nine years of similar *vastationes* successfully pacified his enemies.) We must ask what is achieved by this identification. In the merging of Britons and demons, Felix produces a node in which religious and political discourses, the material and the spiritual, are folded into one. This identification in chapter xxxiv

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testaments, see *Sancti Aurelii Augustini enarrationes in psalmos*, ed. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipoint, 3 vols., CCSL 38–40 (Turnhout, 1966), II, 881–2.



reveals the clear sense of boundary and transgression that for Felix marks the contestation of territory in the *vita*. As a border land, the fen is an uneasy place of meetings. It is both empty of people (to accommodate Guthlac's retreat) and full (first with phantom dangers; later with cautious visitors, the desperate sick and an anxious exile). Chapter xxxiv shows us the anxiety of the border. The chapter is a drama played out on the stage of Guthlac's island, though pointing clearly enough to the *Mierce*, the people of the border, a kingdom interested in expansion and interested, just as clearly, in protecting its western flank. The Britons are portrayed as the implacable enemies (*infesti hostes*) of the Saxon race, and the demons' art, in obsessing Guthlac, imitates life.

Unlike the previous attack, where the demons bring Guthlac across the border between earth and sky, earth and hell, to the very mouth of hell, this struggle takes place on the island. Unless we are to accuse Felix of a singular ineptitude in his arrangement (and the larger organization of his chapters argues against this), the placing of the visit of the Britons after the visit to hell is not bathos. This chapter is, rather, the culmination of the contests for the island. The next two scenes of obsession have to do with Beccel's attempted murder and the reprise of an Antonian scene (*Vita Antonii*, chapter viii) with demons appearing as various phantom beasts invading his house. Significantly, Beccel was tempted by the promise of Guthlac's 'place' ('si ipsum interimere potuisset, locum ipsius postea ... habiturus foret', chapter xxxv). But both these scenes show an already broken devil: chapter xxxv has the devil approach Beccel 'vires suas fractas conperiens', and Felix contrasts Guthlac's easy defeat of the devil's illusions in chapter xxxvi with the earlier 'veras apertasque diabolicas insidias' that the saint faces and overcomes. At this point the demonic obsessions cease. As an illustration of Guthlac's spiritual achievement in the conquest of his territory, in the following four

chapters Felix has the saint demonstrate his command over the natural world: parchment leaves are marvelously balanced on a reed; birds and fish come at his call; swallows would not presume to nest without Guthlac's permission and each year ask for a sign where to dwell; jackdaws return the gloves at Guthlac's command. From chapter xli on, Guthlac is shown as a healer, notably of the possessed: a demoniac is brought to Crowland and cleansed; in chapter xlii a *gesith* possessed by a spirit is brought to Crowland and healed; chapters xliii and xliv are two visions of the secret journeys of visitors. In chapter xlv Crowland is transformed into a famous site of pilgrimage by Guthlac's fame. There are prophecies to Headda and Wigfrith (chapter xlvi), Abbess Edgburh (chapter xlix) and the future king Æthelbald. Ultimately, upon his translation in the year following his death, he is interred in a splendid monument (chapter li).

Guthlac's multiple relationships to the territory he contests are manifest in his very name but must be teased out of the linguistic sleight of hand in Felix's explication of *Guð-lac* as *belli munus*. Some of the ambiguity of the Old English – 'play, battle, sacrifice, gift, service, medicine' – is approximated by the semantic range of the Latin: 'service, office, duty, work, gift'. But Felix narrows the referent of his saint's name by disambiguating the relationship of the Old English compound's elements with a specifying genitive. No longer 'war play', or 'war sacrifice', or 'war service', or 'war gift', his name signifies to Felix 'reward of war', 'quia ille cum vitiis bellando munera aeternae beatitudinis ... percepisset'.<sup>58</sup> Although by specifying that the battle is against vices and the reward is heavenly Felix means to point away from earthly things, Guthlac's *lac*, his service, has particular effects on earth. From an island where no one could stay, Crowland becomes a

<sup>58</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, ch. x, p. 78. 'because by warring against the vices he was to receive the reward of eternal bliss'.

place of healing (where the saint is the medicine of war) in its role as shrine of a saint (where the saint as healer is the gift of war). Whether or not Æthelbald assisted in the foundation of Crowland Abbey, he is credited with embellishing Guthlac's shrine after translation. And although Felix refers to Crowland as a continuing hermitage (Cissa succeeded Guthlac as anchorite, chapter xlvi), it would appear that he was interested in a further transformation. In describing Guthlac's retreat as a place of pilgrimage ('multi diversorum ordinum gradus, abbates, fratres, comites, divites, vexati, pauperes, non solum de proximis Merciorum finibus, verum etiam de remotis Britanniae partibus, fama nimirum virtutum eius acciti, confluebant'),<sup>59</sup> he reproduces the particular geographic references from Bede's prose *Vita Cuthberti*: 'ueniebant ... non solum de proximis Lindisfarnensium finibus, sed etiam de remotioribus Britanniae partibus fama nimirum uirtutum eius acciti'.<sup>60</sup> In reproducing Crowland as Farne through this citation he attempts to move beyond Bede's achievement by credentialling the island itself as a shrine.<sup>61</sup>

What I have been charting in this examination is Felix's production of the space of the fens. Felix's account of the *vita* produces Guthlac's fen island as a space where incompatibles meet,

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* ch. xlv, p. 138–9. 'many people of various ranks crowded to see Guthlac the man of God – abbots, brethren, *gesithas*, rich men, the afflicted and the poor – not only from the neighbouring land of the Mercians, but also even from the remote parts of Britain'.

<sup>60</sup> *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. Colgrave, ch. xxii, p. 228–9. 'Many came ... not only from the neighbourhood of Lindisfarne but also from the remoter parts of Britain, having been attracted by the report of his miracles'.

<sup>61</sup> On the cult of Cuthbert at Lindisfarne and the early eighth-century distribution of fragments of Cuthbert's Farne oratory as relics, see A. Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community*, ed. Bonner *et al.*, pp. 103–22, at 106.

where spiritual conflicts reproduce the territorial disputes of the Mercians themselves. By this I do not mean that Guthlac's spiritual combats are some sort of allegory of Mercian expansion. What I suggest, however, is that Felix's particular deformations of the discourse of the desert produces the fen as a theatre of political anxiety, as a place to stage the meeting of unimaginable difference, and to produce the result in the comforting choreography of Christian triumphalism. Herein is the central importance of the mapping of demon on Briton, the taking up (apparently independently) of the emotional trope of anti-British propaganda so central in the *Historia ecclesiastica*.<sup>62</sup> In this is the payoff of Felix's production of fen as desert: Felix produces the liminal area of the fens as a spiritual territory. In the claiming, purgation, and transformation of his fen retreat, the Mercian saint Guthlac undertakes a territorial action in which both Æthelbald of the Mercians and Ælfwald of the East Angles can take shared interest.

In Guthlac's spiritual triumph – over himself, over his island – spiritual and worldly transformation are one. His reply to Wilfrid, 'Nonne legisti, quia, qui Deo puro spiritu copulatur, omnia sibi in Deo coniunguntur?', figures just such a joining of the religious, social, and political discourses this paper has traced.<sup>63</sup> For his narrative of Crowland, Felix's most important borrowing from the life of Antony is a desert understood as a space of transformation. And while Felix's Crowland is not identical with the contemporary heterotopias Foucault analyzed, neither is it the tidy medieval 'place' envisioned in

<sup>62</sup> See especially *Historia ecclesiastica* V. xxiii and II. ii, II. xx, but also I. xxii and V. xxii, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 560, 140–2, 204, 68 and 554.

<sup>63</sup> *Life of St Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, ch. xxxix, pp. 122–3. 'Have you not read how if a man is joined to God in purity of spirit, all things are united to him in God?'

Foucault's historical schema. At the height of Guthlac's spiritual combats, Crowland was a space of incompatibles, and through Guthlac's efforts and merits, that place of transformation was itself transformed. And yet its crucial liminal character survived Guthlac's death as a double trace – in Cissa's succession as anchorite on the island and in the island's development as a site of healing. In making Crowland Guthlac's desert, Felix produces in his dismal fen a single real place of transformation that is at the same time a site for the crossing of incompatibles.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> I should like to thank Debbie Banham, David Dumville, Catherine Hills, Michael Lapidge, and Paul E. Szarmach for help with particular points in the argument of the essay. I am grateful to Audrey Meaney for making available to me in advance her essay 'Felix's Life of St Guthlac: Hagiography and/or Truth,' *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 90 (2001), in press.

From Bede to Ari:  
Extending the Boundaries of Christendom

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The theme of conversion lies at the heart of much of European historical writing in the Middle Ages. National and ecclesiastical histories like Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* record the coming of Christ by means of the gospel to the barbarian peoples lying outside the Roman Empire. Likewise, accounts of missions in the years running up to the Millennium focus with some urgency on bringing the remaining pagan northern European countries within the bounds of Christendom.<sup>1</sup> Converted in the year 1000 (or, more probably, 999), Iceland was one of the later countries to enter the fold;<sup>2</sup> and when the Icelanders began to write their own history, over one hundred years later, their conversion to Christianity took a prominent place. Although the written accounts appear to be based

<sup>1</sup> On the historical process of conversion in the Middle Ages, see R. Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: from Paganism to Christianity 371–1386 AD* (London, 1997). Two works which explore the literary context for medieval accounts of conversion are: K. F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville, VA, 1992), and *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Muldoon (Gainesville, FL, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> On the probable date of Iceland's conversion to Christianity, see Ólafía Einarsdóttir, *Studier i kronologisk metode i tidlig islandsk historieskrivning*, *Bibliotheca historica Lundensis* 13 (Stockholm, 1964), 72–81 and 117–26.

primarily on Icelandic oral tradition, they also draw on European conversion narratives like those of Bede, both as literary models and for source-material: accounts of conversion tend by their very nature to be highly stylized, and the Icelandic ones are no exception. What I want to explore in this paper is the relative importance of, and possible overlap between, oral tradition and European influence in the work of the first Icelandic known to have written about his country's conversion to Christianity: Ari Þorgilsson *inn fróði* 'the Wise'.

Ari's account of the conversion can be found in the younger version of his *Íslendingabók* 'The book of the Icelanders', which he wrote c. 1122–33 at the request of the Icelandic bishops Þorlákr and Ketill. The book begins with an account of Iceland's settlement, the beginning of which Ari dates to the murder by Vikings of the English king, Saint Edmund, in 870 (chapters 1–2). It goes on to describe the bringing of laws to Iceland by Úlfljótr, the establishment of the General Assembly (known as the Althing), the changes to the Icelandic calendar, which was out by about one day a year, and the division of the country into quarters for the purposes of jurisdiction (chapters 2–5). There is a chapter on the discovery of Greenland by Eiríkr *inn rauði* 'the Red' (chapter 6) and then, at the centre of the work, a long account of the country's conversion to Christianity (chapter 7), taking up about one fifth of the whole. Following the conversion, Ari gives the names of the foreign bishops who came to Iceland and then relates in some detail the lives of the first two native Icelandic bishops, Ísleifr and Gizurr (chapters 8–10).

According to Ari, Christianity came to Iceland from Norway, through the agency of the Norwegian king, Óláfr Tryggvason (reigned 995–999/1000). Óláfr sent a German priest called Þangbrandr to Iceland to convert the country, but Þangbrandr returned unsuccessful, having killed two or three men who had slandered him. Nevertheless, he did manage to convert a handful of

leading Icelanders before leaving, three of whom are named as Hallr of Síða, Gizurr *inn hvíti* 'the White', and Hjalti Skeggjason. Óláfr was furious at the poor welcome his messenger had received and threatened to kill or maim all the Icelanders in Norway, but Gizurr and Hjalti, who had travelled to Norway that summer, persuaded him to let them attempt to convert the country themselves. The following summer, they returned to Iceland, were joined by their relatives and friends and, after narrowly avoiding battle with their heathen adversaries, proceeded to preach the faith at the Althing. The result was a wholesale division of the Icelandic chieftains: both heathens and Christians named witnesses and declared themselves *ýr logum* 'out of law' with the other party.<sup>3</sup> This was a serious state of affairs for a republic in which the law was supreme and which had no executive power to enforce order: it was equivalent to anarchy. The Christians asked Hallr of Síða to proclaim the Christian law for them, but in an apparently perverse move, he persuaded the heathen law-speaker, Þorgeirr, to do this instead. For the rest of that day and all that night, Þorgeirr lay with a cloak over his head. The next morning, he got up and summoned the assembly to the Law-Rock. He made a carefully reasoned speech, advocating compromise between heathens and Christians, and both parties agreed to abide by the law he chose to proclaim. Þorgeirr then announced that all Icelanders were to become Christians and to be baptised, but that the old law should stand with regard to the exposure of children and the eating of horse meat.<sup>4</sup> People were allowed to sacrifice in private, if they wished, but would

<sup>3</sup> *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, ÍF 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), 16.

<sup>4</sup> These are usually explained as economic measures designed to safeguard against famine given the harsh living conditions in Iceland; see, for example, Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1956–58), I, 164–5 and Sigurður Línadal, 'Upphaf kristni og kirkju', *Saga Íslands*, ed. Sigurður Línadal, 5 vols. (Reykjavík, 1974–90), I, 227–88, at 247.

be sentenced to three years' exile if witnesses could be produced. In this way, without bloodshed and (perhaps more surprisingly) without any later periods of apostasy, Iceland became a Christian country.

Traditionally, Ari's account of Iceland's conversion has been seen as reliable to a degree unusual for a subject so ideologically weighted. There are a number of reasons for this faith in its authenticity. Firstly, and in purely pragmatic terms, it has the merit of being the only early account we have of these events: there are no contemporary sources, and all later Icelandic conversion narratives are to some extent derivative. If we discount Ari, we are left with very little else to go on. Secondly, Ari himself repeatedly emphasizes the care with which he has gathered information from oral sources, and the excellent credentials of his informants. Towards the beginning of his chapter on the conversion, he tells us that his foster-father, Teitr, was informed about the date of Gizurr and Hjalti's arrival in Iceland by a man *es sjalfr vas þar* 'who was there himself', and at the end he confirms that Teitr was his main source of information on the conversion.<sup>5</sup> As the grandson of the same Gizurr the White who played a leading role in events, Teitr would presumably have learned about these either first-hand from Gizurr or second-hand from his father, Ísleifr, who became the first bishop of Skálholt. Ari himself was descended from Hallr of Síða, whose negotiations with Þorgeirr led to the peaceful outcome of the crisis, and another of his informants was Hallr Þórarinnsson, who was born in 995 and lived to the age of ninety-four: Ari tells us that he remembered having been baptised by Þangbrandr when he was three years old.<sup>6</sup> Ari's one female informant, Þuríðr, was the daughter of Snorri *gøði* 'the Priest-chieftain', who, according to *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Kristni saga*, was

<sup>5</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, pp. 15 and 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

influential in encouraging the acceptance of Christianity among Icelanders from the west of the country.<sup>7</sup> Although we may wish to take into account a certain amount of bias in favour of Ari's foster-family and relatives, there is nevertheless an undeniably strong link between his written account of the conversion and those who were present at the events themselves.

Then there is the air of caution, precision and verisimilitude which is a hallmark of Ari's work: the apparent 'authorial humility' which results in his telling us only that which he can ascertain to be true. This is a principle which he enunciates most clearly in the prologue to the younger *Íslendingabók* when describing how he revised the older (lost) version: 'Jókk því es mér varð síðan kunnara ok nú es gerr sagt á þessi en á þeiri. En hvatki es missagt es í frœðum þessum, þá es skylt at hafa þat heldr, es sannara reynisk'.<sup>8</sup> The limitations of Ari's knowledge are clearly signalled within the account of the conversion by his careful recording of those details about which he is uncertain: he states, for example, that Þangbrandr stayed in Iceland for either one year or two, and that he killed either two or three men. He is meticulous in his citation of chronological and geographical details, even to the point of giving the exact week of the summer in which Gizurr and Hjalti arrived in Iceland, and in noting the places at which they stopped on their way to the Althing. He ends the chapter by dating the conversion in relation to formative events in Norway and western Europe, and ultimately from the birth of Christ and thus

<sup>7</sup> *Kristnisaga, Þátr Þorvalds ens víðforla, Þátr Ísleifs biskups Gizurarsonar, Hungrvaka*, ed. B. Kahle, *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 11 (Halle, 1905), 42; *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ó. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *ÍF* 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), 136.

<sup>8</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, p. 1. 'I added that which later became better known to me and which is now more fully told in this book than in the other. And whatever is stated incorrectly in this history, one is duty-bound to prefer that which is proved to be more true'.

from the origins of the Christian world.<sup>9</sup> Ari's apparently objective style and the absence of miracles, evaluative comment, and religious rhetoric in his work have all appeared to modern scholars to confirm its unique trustworthiness. Finally, the perceived unconventionality of his account of the conversion, in particular the role of the law-speaker Þorgeirr, has reinforced faith in the belief that it reflects what actually happened. These factors among others have led scholars like Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, Dag Strömbäck and Peter Foote to classify *Íslendingabók* as the only reliable source on Iceland's conversion to Christianity, a faithful record of a well-preserved Icelandic oral tradition.<sup>10</sup> This position has been advocated most strongly by Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson in the first edition of *Under the Cloak* and is reasserted in the second, extended, edition:

Ari wished to preserve the truth and everything suggests that he obtained the most reliable information available to him... *Íslendingabók* is a unique source on the acceptance of Christianity in Iceland and must form the basis of all research into the Conversion. Only when a satisfactory explanation has been found of every item in Ari's account can we look at other sources or put forward suggestions where the sources fail.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, pp. 17–18.

<sup>10</sup> D. Strömbäck, *The Conversion of Iceland: a Survey*, trans. P. G. Foote, Viking Soc. for Northern Research, Text Ser. 6 (London, 1975), 18–21; P. G. Foote, 'On the Conversion of the Icelanders', in his *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies*, ed. M. Barnes, H. Bekker-Nielsen and G. W. Weber, The Viking Collection, Stud. in Northern Civilization 2 (Odense, 1984), 56–64, at 59–61, and his 'Conversion', *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. P. Pulsiano and K. Wolf (New York, 1993), pp. 106–8, at 107; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, *Under the Cloak: a Pagan Ritual Turning Point in the Conversion of Iceland*, ed. Jakob S. Jónsson, appendix trans. T. Gunnell, 2nd extended ed. (Reykjavík, 1999), pp. 55–7 and 178–83.

<sup>11</sup> Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, *Under the Cloak*, pp. 55 and 57.

Attempts have also been made, however, to place Ari's *Íslendingabók* within a European setting, to suggest European models for it, and to question its status as unbiased, secular history. This alternative approach derives from the growing realization in the course of the last century that, far from being an isolated repository of oral traditions going back to pagan times, Iceland formed, upon conversion, close links with Christian Europe: leading Icelanders studied abroad in Germany, France and England, and schools were soon set up in Iceland along continental models.<sup>12</sup> Ari himself refers in the first chapter of *Íslendingabók* to a saga of St Edmund (presumably a Latin saint's life), and it is generally agreed that he may also have known Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*.<sup>13</sup> Bede in particular ranks high as a possible model for Ari's written history of the Icelanders. Björn

<sup>12</sup> Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, I, 173–92; Sigurður Línal, 'Upphaf kristni og kirkju', pp. 254–67. On the role played by the English church in the conversion of Norway and Iceland, see in particular A. Taranger, *Den angelsaksiske kirkes indflydelse paa den norske* (Kristiania, 1890); H. G. Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard Stud. in Comparative Lit. 6 (Cambridge, MA, 1921), 85–113; F. Birkeli, 'The Earliest Missionary Activities from England to Norway', *Nottingham Med. Stud.* 15 (1971), 27–37, and his *Hva vet vi om kristningen av Norge?* (Oslo, 1982), esp. pp. 24–9 and 80–1; L. Abrams, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia', *ASE* 24 (1995), 213–49.

<sup>13</sup> S. Ellehøj, *Studier over den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 26 (Copenhagen, 1965), 66–8 and 76–8; *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, pp. xxiv–xxvi; A. E. Christensen, 'Om kronologien i Aris *Íslendingabók* og dens laan fra Adam af Bremen', *Nordiske Studier: Festskrift til Chr. Westergård-Nielsen på 65-årsdagen den 24. november 1975*, ed. J. Brøndum-Nielsen, P. Skautrup and A. Karker (Copenhagen, 1975), pp. 23–34; B. Benedikz, 'Bede in the Uttermost North', *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. G. Bonner (London, 1976), pp. 334–43, at 334–5; E. Mundal, '*Íslendingabók* vurdert som bispestolskrønike', *Alvíssmál* 3 (1994), 63–72.



Sigfússon has suggested, for example, that the prologue to *Íslendingabók*, with its emphasis on precision and accuracy, may be based on the prologue to Bede's *Vita S. Cuthberti*, and Ari's insistence on tracing the oral transmission of the material he presents has been compared to the similar practice found in Bede's work.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the length and central position of the conversion narrative in Ari's *Íslendingabók* may reflect the thematic centrality of conversion in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. Ari refers directly at the end of *Íslendingabók* to Gregory the Great's conversion of the English.<sup>15</sup>

That *Íslendingabók* has an ecclesiastical bias cannot be doubted, whether or not one chooses to read it primarily as a history of the Icelandic church. Ari describes Iceland before the arrival of the settlers as a fertile land, covered by woods and populated by Irish monks, who depart rapidly when the Norwegians arrive, leaving behind them various ecclesiastical objects. He may be influenced here by Bede's representation of England in his *Historia ecclesiastica* as a 'promised land' for the Anglo-Saxons;<sup>16</sup> and certainly the presence of Christians on the otherwise uninhabited Iceland sets it apart as *terra christiana*, consecrated by the sacred objects which remain there.<sup>17</sup> In the chapter which follows, Ari goes on to name the four 'arch'-settlers

<sup>14</sup> Björn Sigfússon, *Um Íslendingabók* (Reykjavík, 1944), pp. 77–80; *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, p. xxii; *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: a Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 142–7.

<sup>15</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* I. xv, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 48–51. On Bede's contribution to the Anglo-Saxon myth of migration, see N. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, CT, 1989), pp. 49–71, esp. 59.

<sup>17</sup> J. Lindow, 'Íslendingabók and Myth', *SS* 69 (1997), 454–64, at 456; M. Clunies Ross, 'Textual Territory: the Regional and Genealogical Dynamic of Medieval Icelandic Literary Production', *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997), 9–30, at 21–2.

of Iceland: Hrollaugr in the east, Ketilbjörn in the south, Auðr in the west and Helgi in the north. These turn out to be the ancestors of the first five Icelandic bishops: Ísleifr, Gizurr and Þorlákur at Skálholt, and Jón and Ketill at Hólar. Úlfjótr, who brings the law from Norway to Iceland for the first time, has been compared to the archetypal law-giver, Moses;<sup>18</sup> while the chapter on the calendar is of obvious interest to the medieval church, for which chronological matters, such as the correct date of Easter, were of extreme importance. Finally, the account of the discovery of Greenland, the relevance of which has sometimes been queried, may have been included because Greenland was at the time under the jurisdiction of the Icelandic bishops; that is, at least, the impression we get from the context in which it is mentioned by Adam of Bremen.<sup>19</sup> It begins to look as if the narrow focus of Ari's work might have less to do with 'authorial humility' and more to do with 'authorial selectivity'.<sup>20</sup>

Even the unconventionality of Ari's account of the conversion has been questioned. Joaquín Martínez Pizarro has pointed out that, although *Íslendingabók* is unusual in its legal emphasis, Þorgeirr's decision that the Icelanders should convert reflects the role of kings in European accounts of conversion, where one man decides on behalf of his people either for or against Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has suggested rather unconvincingly that Ari drew on

<sup>18</sup> Sigurður Línal, 'Sendiför Úlfjóts: ásamt nokkrum athugasemdum um landnám Ingólfs Arnarsonar', *Skírnir* 143 (1969), 5–26, at 21–3.

<sup>19</sup> See Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* IV.xxxvi, xxxvii, ed. B. Schmeidler, MGH SS rer. Germ., 3rd ed. (Hannover, 1917), pp. 271–4; Mundal, 'Íslendingabók vurdert som bispestolskrønike', p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> The expressions those of Lindow, 'Íslendingabók and Myth', p. 460.

<sup>21</sup> J. Martínez Pizarro, 'Conversion Narratives: Form and Utility', *The Sixth International Saga Conference, 28.7.–2.8. 1985: Workshop Papers*, [no ed.] (Copenhagen, 1985), pp. 813–32, at 822–3.

medieval penitentials in his formulation of the Christian law proclaimed by Þorgeirr,<sup>22</sup> while Gerd Wolfgang Weber argues that, read against the background of medieval theories of conversion, there is 'nothing astonishing' about Ari's narrative. He claims that Þorgeirr's political common sense represents man's God-given *ratio*, and that the Icelanders' independent decision to convert illustrates a missionary topos found in many European texts: that the validity of conversion depends upon the voluntary acceptance of Christianity on the part of the neophyte.<sup>23</sup> Instead of seeing Ari's work as unique in its secular emphasis, this group of scholars stresses that Ari, like other European authors, wrote primarily in the service of the church. Just as Bede wrote the salvation history of the Anglo-Saxons, so Ari is seen to be writing the salvation history of the Icelanders, providing good examples for posterity and annexing the role of the Israelites in the Old Testament for the heathen Icelanders.<sup>24</sup> This viewpoint has been summed up by Sverrir Tómasson in an attack on the position taken by Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson: 'Ari er prestlærður maður og hann ritar bókina að hætti sinnar stéttar. Íslendingabók er þjóðarsaga skrifuð að hætti helgisagnaritara, samin eftir ákveðnum forskriftum'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, 'Um kristnitökufrásögn Ara prests Þorgilssonar', *Skírnir* 153 (1979), 167–74.

<sup>23</sup> G. W. Weber, 'Intellegere Historiam: Typological Perspectives of Nordic Prehistory (in Snorri, Saxo, Widukind and Others)', *Tradition og historieskrivning: Kilderne til Nordens ældste historie*, ed. K. Hastrup and P. M. Sørensen, *Acta Jutlandica* LXIII:2, Humanistisk Serie 61 (Århus, 1987), 95–141, at 115–23.

<sup>24</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum. Rannsókn bókmenntahefðar*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 33 (Reykjavík, 1988), 282–3.

<sup>25</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, 'Helgisögur, mælskufræði og forn frásagnarlist', *Skírnir* 157 (1984), 130–62, at 138: 'Ari was educated as a priest, and he writes the book in the style used by his class. *Íslendingabók* is a national history written in the style used by authors of religious histories and composed according to prescribed

At this point, it is worth pausing to ask how far Ari's aims and methods really do correspond to those of the medieval European historians with whom he has been compared, and in particular with those of Bede. Choice of language is an obvious difference between the two, but it also implies a different audience: whereas Bede writes in Latin, the language of the church, and was accessible throughout western Europe, Ari writes in the vernacular, for a predominantly Icelandic (possibly also a Norwegian) audience. We may wish to infer from this that he was interested neither in a European readership nor in making the close connection between his own church and that of Rome, which was so important for Bede.<sup>26</sup> As far as transmission of information is concerned, Bede refers to eyewitnesses and informants most frequently in his accounts of miracles, not so much as accurate observers of fact, but as religious men capable of understanding the true significance of events.<sup>27</sup> Ari, on the other hand, sees himself as standing in a tradition of *spakir menn* 'wise men', whose wisdom is specifically geared towards legal and genealogical knowledge (*fræði*).<sup>28</sup> It is often noted that Bede is deeply concerned with the spiritual health of the English people, and that he sees the history of the Anglo-Saxons as beginning with the conversion, which thus forms the basis of their identity as one people; in as much as his *Historia ecclesiastica* presents a 'pattern of redemption', it could be described as

conventions'.

<sup>26</sup> L. W. Barnard, 'Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians', *Famulus Christi*, pp. 106–24, at pp. 106 and 117–18. On the importance of papal authority and Roman order to Bede, see H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (London, 1991), pp. 42–3.

<sup>27</sup> B. Ward, 'Miracles and History: a Reconsideration of the Miracle Stories used by Bede', *Famulus Christi*, pp. 70–6, at 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, pp. 4, 9 and 22–23.

a kind of 'historical theology'.<sup>29</sup> For Ari, however, some of the most important moments in Icelandic history predate the conversion (for example the establishment of the Althing) and should not simply be dismissed as prerequisites for the later Christian events. His account focuses primarily on the wise men, both pagans and Christians, who throughout the history of Iceland are described as making legal and constitutional decisions and imposing order on virgin territory. The only change after the conversion is the participation of the bishops in affairs of state alongside the law-speakers and countrymen,<sup>30</sup> and that in itself is not so great a change when one considers that the bishops themselves came from the leading families in Iceland rather than from outside the system.

If the church is at the centre of Bede's history, it is the Althing which is at the centre of Ari's and this makes it less an ecclesiastical history than a history of the Icelandic constitution. It is speeches at the Althing which lead to the alterations to the Icelandic calendar and the division of the country into quarters, and both occasions provide significant parallels with Iceland's later conversion. In the first case, a man called Þorsteinn *surtr* 'the Black' has a dream immediately before the Althing in which he foresees the success of his suggested amendment to the law. The numinous quality of this could be compared to Þorgeirr's mysterious act in lying under his cloak for twenty-four hours before making a decision about the adoption of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> The second occasion is instigated by a failure on the

<sup>29</sup> See in particular P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129; B. Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (London, 1990), pp. 111–14 and 129–30.

<sup>30</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, pp. 20–4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 9–11 and 16. See Weber, 'Intellegere Historiam', pp. 119–20.

part of the Icelandic law to resolve the feud sparked off by the burning of Þorkell Blund-Ketilsson: there is fighting both at a regional assembly and at the Althing, and this is precisely the risk narrowly avoided just before the conversion. In a speech which at moments echoes the later one made by Þorgeirr, Ari's ancestor, Þórðr *gellir* 'the Shrieking', presents the urgent need for constitutional reform: 'Þá talði Þórðr gellir tólu umb at lögbergi, hvé illa mǫnnum gegndi at fara í ókunn þing at sækja of víg eða harma sína, ok talði, hvat hǫnum varð fyrir, áðr hann mætti því máli til laga koma, ok kvað ýmissa vandræði mǫndu verða, ef eigi réðisk bætr á'.<sup>32</sup> Although one may wish to read these events as prefiguring the conversion, it makes more sense to see the conversion itself as conforming to a pattern which Ari has set up from the very beginning of his work: a pattern of consensual government and resolution through arbitration, which is essentially secular and not religious in nature.

For despite Weber's assertion of Ari's conventionality, what stands out when his work is compared with European texts on conversion is the almost complete absence of religious considerations: there is no evangelistic address to the Icelanders, no miracles, not even any mention of baptism, except as part of the new legal requirements. While Þorgeirr's role does have something in common with Bede's accounts of royal conversion (his time of private meditation, for example),<sup>33</sup> for Ari, it is not the individual convert who is

<sup>32</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, p. 12. 'Then Þórðr gellir made a speech at the Law-Rock, about how ill it befitted people to go to an unknown assembly to prosecute for killings or injuries, and told what had happened to him, before he could bring the case to law, and said that various difficulties would arise, if it were not amended'.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Bede's account of Edwin's conversion in *Historia ecclesiastica* II.xii, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 174–83. On the blend of private and public concerns typical of royal conversion, see Martínez Pizarro, 'Conversion

important, but the strength and inviolability of the Icelandic law and constitution. It is the Icelandic law which allows for such a peaceful conversion, and it is as part of the law that Christianity is eventually adopted in Iceland. Þorgeirr's final address to the Icelanders emphasizes the interconnectedness of the law and the peace and, as Jenny Jochens has pointed out, 'encapsulates the classical Icelandic way of solving conflicts without resorting to arms'.<sup>34</sup> It is worth quoting in full:

En þá hóf hann tölur sína upp, es menn kvómu þar, ok sagði, at hónum þótti þá komit hag manna í ónýtt efni, ef menn skyldi eigi hafa allir lög ein á landi hér, ok talði fyrir monnum á marga vega, at þat skyldi eigi láta verða, ok sagði, at þat mundi at því ósætti verða, es vísa ván vas, at þær barsmiðir gærðisk á miðli manna, es landit eyddisk af. Hann sagði frá því, at konungar yr Norvegi ok yr Danmörku hǫfðu haft ófrið ok orrostur á miðli sín langa tíð, til þess unz landsmenn gærðu frið á miðli þeira, þótt þeir vildi eigi. En þat ráð gærðisk svá, at af stundu sendusk þeir gersemar á miðli, enda helt friðr sá, meðan þeir lifðu. 'En nú þykkir mér þat ráð', kvað hann, 'at vér látim ok eigi þá ráða, es mest vilja í gegn gangask, ok miðlum svá mál á miðli þeira, at hváirtveggju hafi nakkvat síns máls, ok hǫfum allir ein lög ok einn sið. Þat mon verða satt, es vér slítum í sundr lög, at vér monum slíta ok friðinn'.<sup>35</sup>

Narratives: Form and Utility', pp. 815–16.

<sup>34</sup> J. Jochens, 'Late and Peaceful: Iceland's Conversion through Arbitration in 1000', *Speculum* 74 (1999), 621–55, at 649.

<sup>35</sup> *Íslendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, p. 17. 'And then he began his speech, when people had arrived there, and said that he thought people's affairs had come to a sore pass, if they were not all to have one law in this land, and tried to persuade people in many ways that it should not be allowed to happen, and said that it was certainly to be expected that conflict would arise with the result that there would be battles between people through which the land would be laid waste. He said that the kings of Norway and Denmark had for a long time had conflict and battles between them, until the countrymen made peace between them, even though they did not wish it. And that advice turned out in

One only needs to compare this with the speech made by another pagan priest, Coifi, in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* for its extraordinary secularity to become apparent.<sup>36</sup> Neither heathenism nor heathens are stigmatised by Þorgeirr, rather it is those who are unwilling to compromise, presumably on both sides, who are of most danger to the state. The problem posed is political (how to preserve the community of laws) rather than religious. Above all, the contrast between the foolishness of the kings and the sagacity of the countrymen highlights the unique position in which the Icelanders, as a people not ruled by a king, find themselves: it illustrates 'the benefits of governance without a king' which are endangered both by the impending division of the Icelandic state and by the threat of Norwegian intervention.<sup>37</sup> The success of Þorgeirr's persuasion and the willingness on the part of the heathens to accept his arbitration is a triumph for the Icelandic constitution, not for the church.

Ultimately, despite the European influence which may be discerned in *Íslendingabók*, it is its difference from Bede and European narratives of conversion which proves compelling. But this is a difference which is perhaps to be found less in Ari's reliable reporting of objective fact and more in Iceland's unique situation in the Middle Ages: the creation by Icelanders of a significantly different society, requiring new literary forms as legitimation. Ari's work represents in many ways the beginnings of the Icelandic 'recreation' of the past

such a way that they were soon sending gifts to each other, and moreover that peace lasted for as long as they lived. "And now it seems to me advisable," he said, "that we also do not let those who most wish to oppose one another have their way, and that we arbitrate between them, so that each side has something of what it wants, and we all have one law and one peace. It will prove true, if we divide the law, that we will also divide the peace."'

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* II. xiii, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 182–7.

<sup>37</sup> Jochens, 'Late and Peaceful', p. 651.

which culminated in the literary achievement of the family sagas: it constructs for the Icelanders a shared history which serves not simply to integrate them into Christian Europe, but to define the boundaries of Icelandic ethnic identity.<sup>38</sup> Ari depicts a society created by a community of settlers, through collective social action, a society which the peaceful character of Iceland's conversion, decided by Icelanders at their national assembly, both affirms and vindicates. It is, as Kurt Schier has said, 'the awareness of standing at a beginning, of having created something entirely new'<sup>39</sup> that inspires and informs Ari's book of the Icelanders.

<sup>38</sup> On the role of *Íslendingabók* in forming a distinctly Icelandic identity, see K. Hastrup, *Island of Anthropology: Studies in Past and Present Iceland*, The Viking Collection, Stud. in Northern Civilization 5 (Odense, 1990), 75–9 and 88.

<sup>39</sup> K. Schier, 'Iceland and the Rise of Literature in 'terra nova': Some Comparative Reflections', *Gripla* 1 (1975), 168–81, at 180.

Old Norse Prose *sennur* :  
Testing the Boundaries of a Genre

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Old Icelandic possesses a number of terms for formalised, poeticised or in general 'literatised' utterances of invective, strife or competition. The two foremost of these are *senna* and *mannjafnaðr*, both of which refer to the dialogic forms of these utterances: the genre of the verbal duel, or flyting.<sup>1</sup> A *mannjafnaðr* is a comparison of men, a practice which seems to have its origins in juridical procedure – the term is used in sagas when after a feud with a number of killings the values of the slain men are compared and equalled out to avoid useless payments and counterpayments of compensation money.<sup>2</sup>

In its literary form, the *mannjafnaðr* is a kind of comparative game – the sagas describe it as a traditional pastime at social gatherings, often at feasts and in conjunction with a great deal of ale-drinking,

<sup>1</sup> Although the term 'flyting' of course originally denotes the Scottish verse quarrels of the early 16th century, it has been in use for Old Norse verbal duels since the 1920s – cf. B. S. Philpotts, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* (Cambridge 1920), pp. 156–9. For a more recent advocacy of the use of 'flyting' instead of the native terms for Old Norse verbal duels, see C. J. Clover, 'The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 444–468, at 445.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example *Heiðarvíga saga*, in *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, ÍF 3 (Reykjavík, 1938), 315–16 and *Grænlandinga þáttur*, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthias Þórðarson, ÍF 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), 290.

where men list achievements of their own or of a chosen champion to determine who might be the better man.<sup>3</sup> As for the *senna*, a simple and useful initial definition is that of Joaquín Martínez Pizarro in his 1976 Harvard dissertation: 'a scene in a narrative, oral or written, in which two or more persons exchange personal insults'.<sup>4</sup> The question whether *senna* and *mannjafnaðr* are a) two different genres of literary insult, b) two distinctly different manifestations of the same genre, or c) practically indistinguishable forms of verbal duels and best combined under the heading of the English term 'flyting' is an issue much debated by the critics.<sup>5</sup>

To his simple definition of the *senna* as a scene in which personal insults are exchanged, Martínez Pizarro adds a caveat when he writes that 'this use of the word is arbitrary and hardly supported by much evidence from Old Norse usage'<sup>6</sup> – which is certainly true. Although

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for example *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ó. Sveinsson and Matthias Þórðarson, pp. 98–9, or *Flóamanna saga*, in *Harðar saga*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, ÍF 13 (Reykjavík, 1991), 304–5. See also King Eysteinn's words in *Magnússona saga*, in *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ÍF 26–28 (Reykjavík, 1941–51) III, 259: 'Sá ǫlsiðr hefir opt verit, at menn taka sér jafnaðar-menn' ('It has often been custom at the ale-drinking, that men took a partner for a comparison'). Two standard studies on the literary, poetic *mannjafnaðr* are M. Bax and T. Padmos, 'Two Types of Verbal Dueling in Old Icelandic: the Interactional Structure of the Senna and the Mannjafnaðr in Hárbarðsljóð', *JSt* 55 (1983), 149–84, and L. Lönnroth, 'The Double Scene of Arrow-Odd's Drinking Contest', in *Medieval Narrative: a Symposium*, ed. H. Bekker-Nielsen, P. Foote et al. (Odense, 1979), pp. 94–119.

<sup>4</sup> J. Martínez Pizarro, 'Studies in the Function and Context of the Senna in Early Germanic Narrative' (unpubl. PhD diss., Harvard Univ., 1976), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, in support of choice b), the quite specialised, comparative *mannjafnaðr* is treated as distinct from the more open form of the *senna*, which is the primary concern in this discussion. Both the terms 'flyting' and 'verbal duel' are employed here to refer to the genre to which these two forms belong.

<sup>6</sup> Martínez Pizarro, 'Studies', p. 1.

its use as a literary term is supported by the title of the Eddic poem *Lokasenna*, in which, indeed, a number of people exchange personal insults, the term *senna* is also used in the sagas and the *Edda* in its meaning of simply 'quarrel' or 'argument'.<sup>7</sup>

This conventional usage begs the question of what criteria an exchange of insults in a narrative has to fulfil to warrant the designation '*senna* as a literary category'. Martínez Pizarro's definition already contains two. One, a *senna* is an exchange of insults, which means that two or more persons have to be involved in the scene – the *senna* is a form of dialogue. Two, the insults which are exchanged are of a personal nature. The opponents do not quarrel about or debate any outside issues – the topic under dispute is the participants themselves. Joseph Harris, whose 1979 article on the *senna* is still one of the most insightful on the topic, adds a third defining criterion: 'The *senna*', he writes, '...is a stylized battle of words'.<sup>8</sup> It is stylisation, or more general formalisation which turns insults into an art form, and a quarrel into a literary genre. As a criterion for a *senna*, this question of formalisation comes up in a number of studies on Old Norse verbal duels. In his article on the drinking-competition and *mannjafnaðr* in *Orvar-Odds saga*, Lars Lönnroth speaks of the *senna* as 'a competitive exchange of boasts and insults', and of the *mannjafnaðr* as 'a somewhat more formalized version of the same sport'.<sup>9</sup> Martínez

<sup>7</sup> The verb *senna* is used in this plain sense in, e.g., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ó. Sveinsson, ÍF 12 (Reykjavík, 1954), 91. The noun, however, is found almost exclusively in poetic use: on its own in *Guðrúnarhvot* 1, 1, but chiefly in kennings for 'battle', cf. the verses quoted in *Háttatal*, ed. A. Faulkes (Oxford, 1991), pp. 6–7, (v. 6); *Hallfreðar saga*, in *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ÍF 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), 190–1 (v. 27), or *Kormáks saga*, *ibid.*, p. 241 (v. 29).

<sup>8</sup> J. Harris, 'The Senna: from Description to Literary Theory', *Michigan Germanic Stud.* 5 (1979), 65–74, at 66.

<sup>9</sup> Lönnroth, 'Double Scene', p. 97.



Pizarro certainly thinks that this formalisation is what distinguishes the altercations which are only described with the verb *senna* in the sagas from the examples of the literary genre:

The word *senna* ... may be used for an actual quarrel taking place spontaneously and consisting of actions that could not be formalized or ordered in real life, while the literary application of the category *senna* involves a definite stylization of the exchange into a pattern of Germanic narrative.<sup>10</sup>

The form which this stylisation or formalisation takes is generally held to be that of poetry, and indeed Norse literature seems to have a marked tendency to conduct *sennur* in verse rather than prose: by far the best-known examples of *sennur* are the Eddic poems *Lokasenna* and *Hárbarðsljóð*; the verbal duels in the *fornaldarsögur* and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* are all verse flytings, set off from the main prose text of the saga or the *Gesta*; and many of those in the *Íslendingasögur* are in a prosimetric form, exchanges of *níðvísur*, 'insult-verses', in a frame of prose narrative. Martínez Pizarro talks of a 'tradition of "mixed forms"' and even claims that 'almost every specimen we find is, in fact, presented as verse in a frame of prose'<sup>11</sup> – and, looking at the passages popularly considered to be *sennur*, that sounds as if it might just be true.

The question, then, is whether an all-prose exchange of personal insults can be legitimately called a *senna* and treated as such if it lacks this stylisation into poetry. In theory the definitions of the *senna* quoted so far – 'a scene ... in which two or more persons exchange personal insults'; a 'competitive exchange of boasts and insults'; and even a 'stylized battle of words' – all leave ample room to include both verse and prose examples. In the corpus of Old Norse verbal duels, of which we can get an idea by conflating the lists drawn up by

<sup>10</sup> Martínez Pizarro, 'Studies', pp. 9–10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

the critics of the genre, a few of the latter can indeed be found. Carol Clover has a list of forty examples of Norse flytings on which she bases her observations in her article on 'The Germanic Context of the Unferþ-episode', Joseph Harris has compiled a list in his article on the Eddic Helgi-lays, and there are also the entries in the categories 'wit combat' and 'contest in scolding as introduction to battle' in Inger Boberg's *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the flytings in the *Edda*, Saxo and the *fornaldarsögur*, there are three examples from the Icelandic Family sagas which are mentioned by Clover as well as Harris and Boberg: the exchange of Hallgerðr and Bergþóra in chapter 35 of *Njáls saga*, *Olkoфра þáttr*, and chapter ten of *Bandamanna saga*. Boberg and Clover furthermore mention the *mannjafnaðr konunga* in the twenty-first chapter of *Magnússona saga*, and Clover adds passages from *Egils saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Bjarnar saga Híttdalakappa*.

This already seems like a respectable list of Norse prose flytings, but the numbers soon dwindle at a closer look: while the three heroes of the *skáldasögur*, Egill, Gunnlaugr and Björn, conduct their *sennur* as exchanges of verses, the passages in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Magnússona saga* are specifically *mannjafnaðir*, and are designated as such in the text. The exchange of the two women in *Njáls saga* has a similar comparative element which links it to the *mannjafnaðr* – in a not too serious aside Martínez Pizarro talks of the comparable 'quarrel of the queens' in the *Nibelungenlied* as 'a *kvennjafnaðr*'.<sup>13</sup> The two remaining

<sup>12</sup> Clover, 'Germanic Context', pp. 446–7, n. 9; J. Harris, 'Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry: the Evidence of Parallel Passages in the Helgi Poems for Questions of Composition and Performance', *Edda: a Collection of Essays*, ed. R. J. Glendinning and H. Bessason (Winnipeg, 1983), pp. 210–242, at 236–7, n. 22; I. M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagana 27 (Copenhagen, 1966), 153, H507 and H507.5.

<sup>13</sup> Martínez Pizarro, 'Studies', p. 3.

examples are exceptional in that here one person holds their own in a *senna* against a number of antagonists, not just a single opponent – a circumstance which makes Harris comment that ‘*Bandamanna saga* and *Olkofra þátrr* ... presuppose a model like *Lokasenna*’.<sup>14</sup> The formulaic *Þa sitr þú, Stryrnir/ Þórarinn/ Hermundr* etc., which Ófeigr uses in *Bandamanna saga* to greet his opponents as he addresses them in turn, and the likewise formulaic *ok kys ek þik frá*, with which he dismisses six of them as not fit for the role of arbitrator, is certainly reminiscent of Loki’s repeated *Þegi þú* to his sixteen divine opponents in *Lokasenna*. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen draws parallels between the *þátrr* and the Eddic lay in his discussion of the concept of *nið* in *Olkofra þátrr*, when he playfully calls the verbal exchange of Broddi with the chieftains ‘the *Broddasenna*’.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, then, pure prose examples of Old Norse *sennur* are rare: an overwhelming majority of the fifty or so passages meeting the basic criteria which can be found in the family sagas include verse at some point or another, even if it is only a short two or four-line poem. Still, although they are rare, they are not nonexistent.

A short survey of some of these pure prose *sennur* is probably best begun with a passage which exists in both a prose and a verse version, a circumstance which makes it possible to observe firsthand the transformation of stylised verse *senna* into ‘mere’ prose: the conversion of the flyting between Sigurðr and the dragon Fáfnir in the Eddic *Fáfnismál* into chapter 18 of *Völsunga saga*.<sup>16</sup> Although the compiler of *Völsunga saga* does not hesitate to include Eddic stanzas

<sup>14</sup> Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, p. 237, n. 22.

<sup>15</sup> P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, transl. J. Turville-Petre (Odense, 1983), p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Fáfnismál* is actually not found on any of the lists of Norse *sennur* mentioned above. For a reading of the lay as a *senna* see J. Quinn, ‘Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems: the Discourses of *Fáfnismál*’, *ANF* 167 (1992), 100–130.

for example from *Reginismál* and *Sigrdrifomál* in the chapters dependent on these lays, in the whole dragon-slaying episode not a single one of the forty-four stanzas of *Fáfnismál* is quoted in full, though lines are almost-quoted throughout. Repetitions in the lay are generally avoided in the prose, as that of the verb *hvetja* in stanzas 5 and 6, where the saga uses *eggja* in the first instance:

Hverr þic hvatti, hvi hvetiaz lézt,  
míno fiqrvi at fara? (*Fáfnismál* 5, 1–3)

Hugr mic hvatti, hendr mér fulltýðo  
oc minn inn hvassi hiorr; (*Fáfnismál* 6, 1–3)<sup>17</sup>

Fáfnir svarar: “Hverr eggjaði þik þessa verks, eða hví letzu at eggjask?” ... Sigurðr svarar: “Til þessa hvatti mik inn harði hugr...”<sup>18</sup>

The saga also omits the poetic *segðu mér*-formula in *Fáfnismál* 12 and 14, well-known from the *sennur* in *Vafðrúðnismál* and *Alvíssmál*:

Segðu mér, Fáfnir, allz þic fróðan qveða  
oc vel mart vita: (*Fáfnismál* 12, 1–3 and 14, 1–3)

More examples are the substitution of the poetic construction ‘*Ræð ek þér nú, Sigurðr, enn þú ráð nemir*’ (*Fáfnismál* 20, 1–2), as it appears in the *Loddfáfnir*-stanzas of *Hávamál*, with the simpler phrase ‘*þat ræð ek þér*’.<sup>19</sup> There are also the omissions of *veiztu* in the third stanza, a formula used repeatedly in *Lokasenna* (*Fáfnismál* 3, 1; cf. *Lokasenna* 4, 23, 27, 43 and 51) and *sveinn oc sveinn* in the first line of *Fáfnismál*, maybe reminiscent of the *sveinn sveina* which opens the dialogue in *Hárbarðsljóð*. In short, the compiler of *Völsunga saga* has not only eliminated the formulae and repetitions which are characteristic of

<sup>17</sup> Quotations from the *Poetic Edda* are from *Edda: die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandter Denkmäler*, ed. G. Neckel, 5th ed. rev. H. Kuhn, 2 vols, (Heidelberg, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> *The Saga of the Völsungs*, ed. and transl. R.G. Finch (London, 1965), p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

Eddic poetry, but also seems to be deliberately avoiding any phrasings which are reminiscent of the *sennur* in the Eddic collection.

However, there are larger, structural elements which the compiler has retained quite faithfully, like the initial, problematic identification and the exchange of questions and answers with its fair share of threats, boasts and unfavourable personal remarks. Based on the examples of mostly poetic *sennur*, Joseph Harris identifies three structural elements or phases in which the battle of words takes place:

It is possible also to extract a standard structural framework for the *senna*: there is a *Preliminary*, comprising an Identification and Characterization, and then a *Central Exchange*, consisting of either Accusation and Denial, Threat and Counterthreat, or Challenge and Reply or a combination; these structural elements are realized through a more or less regular alternation of speakers... A *conclusion* may be supplied by the intervention of a third person...<sup>20</sup>

After he has extracted this schema from, as he says, 'a dozen Old Norse poetic examples', Harris quickly adds 'the familiar ... disclaimer that such a pattern is likely to seem only approximate when confronted with a particular realization'.<sup>21</sup> For the *senna* in saga narrative, whether it is conducted purely in prose or in a prosimetric form, the detailed structure of regularly alternated speech and reply is certainly not so tenable, although the rough outline of *Preliminary*, *Central Exchange* and possible *Conclusion* works well. For example, *níðvísur* with their accusations are not necessarily followed by a matching stanza in reply, especially if the adversary of the poet is not a *skáld* as well. Threats and insults sometimes produce counterthreats and counterinsults, but there are numerous passages in which either or both are answered not in speech, but in typical Viking fashion with

<sup>20</sup> Harris, 'The *senna*', p. 66 (my italics).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66.

the blow of an axe, sword or fist. Speakers do alternate, but rather less than more regularly – a line of nondescript prose may be all the answer that is given in reply to two or three insulting verses. Identification is still a feature in saga flytings, especially if the encounters include strangers or heroes in disguise, but in meetings of old enemies during feuds they are superfluous and therefore often completely absent.

However, when Lars Lönnroth speaks of the *mannjafnaðr* as 'a somewhat more formalized version' of 'the competitive exchange of boasts and insults' that is a *senna*, the formalisation he speaks of is not one of content or structure, but of context. It is the setting of the *mannjafnaðr* in a hall, during a feast, often as a response to a challenge, which in the first place formalises examples like the twenty-first chapter of *Magnússona saga* or the drinking-contest in *Orvar-Odds saga*. Martínez Pizarro concurs with this view when he remarks that the otherwise international type-scene of the verbal duel 'is stylized [in Germanic literature] in a specific way: it occurs in a few standard settings only'.<sup>22</sup> Two of these standard settings for Germanic verbal duels are identified by Carol Clover in her article on Germanic flyting:

one outdoors, over ... 'the sundering flood' (a body of water separating the contenders), the other indoors in the hall, – at drinking, often at court (or, in Iceland, at the *Álþing*).<sup>23</sup>

The hall setting is of course primarily the environment in which the *mannjafnaðr*-variant of the verbal duel takes place – though, as *Lokasenna* shows, there are certainly exceptions – but there are a number of prose examples with the same or a similar 'watery' setting as such prime poetic *sennur* as the *Hárbarðsljóð* and the verbal duels in the Eddic Helgi-lays. *Ogmundar þáttur dytts*, for example, contains such a

<sup>22</sup> Martínez Pizarro, 'Studies', pp. 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> Clover, 'Germanic Context', p. 447.

scene in a ship-to-ship dispute. Qgmundr, a relative of Víga-Glúmr, has accidentally sunk a longship belonging to a man called Hallvarðr, and when Hallvarðr takes a rowing-boat and approaches Qgmundr's ship to ask for compensation, a quarrel ensues, which ends in a fight. The structure of the scene certainly fits the standard framework of the *senna* as laid down by Harris: it begins with an Identification, as Hallvarðr calls over the water to enquire after Qgmundr's name, and it has a Central Exchange of five single sentences, spoken by the two men in turn:

Þá mælti Hallvarðr: "Vér félagr eigum við yðr stórsakar ok erum nú til þess hér komnir at vita, ef þér vilið bjóða fyrir yðr nokkurar scemiligar bætr." Qgmundr svarar: "Eigi mun yðr bóta synjat, ef eigi er frekliga til mælt." Hallvarðr mælti: "Þeir menn eigu hér í hlut, at eigi vilja smáhluti þiggja fyrir stórar svívirðingar." Qgmundr mælti: "Þá viljum vér varna bóta, ef stórliga er látit í mót." "Ek ætla þat ok líkast," segir Hallvarðr, "at biðja yðr ekki þess, er þér ættið at bjóða."<sup>24</sup>

Although the encounter is initially a negotiation for compensation money, the two opponents soon turn to personal remarks, and the exchange thus fulfils the two criteria for a *senna* postulated in Martínez Pizarro's definition.

A second example is chapter four of *Grettis saga*, in which Qnundr *tréfótr* and Þrándr ambush the viking ships of Vígbjóðr and Vestmar. This passage actually contains some verse, a two-line stanza

<sup>24</sup> *Qgmundar þáttir dytis*, in *Eyfirringa sögur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, ÍF 9 (Reykjavík, 1956), 105–6. "Then Hallvarðr said: "My companions and I have a serious charge against you, and have now come here to know whether you will offer honourable compensation." Qgmundr said: "You will not be denied compensation, if what you ask is not greedy." Hallvarðr said: "Those men who have a part in this will not accept a small portion for such a great injury." Qgmundr said: "We will refrain from paying at all, if the other side behaves arrogantly." "I think it likely", said Hallvarðr, "that we will by no means beg you for what you ought to offer."'

with a joke on Qnundr's name with which the vikings react to the preceding Identification:

Víkingar lögðu at alldjarfliga, ok þóttu hinir komnir í stilli. Vígbjóðr spurði, hverir þessir væri, at þar váru svá kvíáðir. Þrándr segir, at hann var bróðir Eyvindar austmanns, – "ok síðan er hér félagi minn, Qnundr tréfótr." Þá hlógu víkingar ok mæltu þetta:

Troll hafi Tréfót allan,  
trollin steypi þeim öllum.

"Ok er oss þat fásét, at þeir menn fari til orrostu, er ekki megu sér." Qnundr kvað þat eigi vita mega, fyrr en reynt væri. Eftir þat lögðu þeir saman skipin; tókst þar mikill bardagi...<sup>25</sup>

The exchange again has the familiar structure, with the Identification of the Preliminary followed by a Central Exchange – the vikings' Challenge finds its Reply in Qnundr's indirect speech.

The most interesting of these ship-to-ship settings – especially in view of the question discussed here – is the flyting in the *riddarasaga Sigurðar saga þogla*, which has lines and lines of alliterating insults much in the style of the famous Middle Scots flytings:

enn fyrir þui at Wil(hialmur) vilde eigi verda fyrir orða ákasti vikinsins þuiat hann hafði mart heyrð enn visse eigi nema nockur jllzcu kraptur fylgde ordum hans. og þui uard hann ath bragde skiotare og m(ælti) til hans "Huer er sá j lyptigunne stendr enn hamingjutome folr og feigligur suartur og suipillr liotur og leidiligur boluadur og bannsettur fáuis og fagnadarlaus ... þuiat yfirbragd þitt birtit at þu ert galldrafullr

<sup>25</sup> *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonnar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, ÍF 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), 11. "The vikings advanced very boldly and thought that the ships had gone into the trap. Vígbjóðr asked who those men were who were penned in. Þrándr said that he was the brother of Eyvindr the Norwegian, "and this here is my companion, Qnundr Tréfótr." Then the vikings laughed and said: "May the trolls have Tréfótr whole,/ may the trolls throw them all down.' And we don't often see men go into battle who can't stand up for themselves." Qnundr said that that could not be known until it was put to the test. After that they laid the ships alongside, and a great battle ensued'.

og giptulaus. vammafullr og útstola dáðlaus og drottinssuikare klekiafullr og kynndugur.”<sup>26</sup>

The passage contains not only a stylisation of language almost to the point of poetry, but also the now familiar structural elements of a *senna*: Vilhjálmr’s first question can be seen as an Identification with a rather extensive Characterisation, and the remainder of the speech could be classified as either Accusation, Threat, or Challenge. Vilhjálmr’s long diatribe is answered with a single speech by his opponent before the actual fight breaks out, and the viking’s reply, though it is neither as long nor as packed with colourful insults, contains his Denial, Counterthreats, and a Challenge in return.

But hall-settings and ‘sundering floods’ by no means cover all the situations in which *sennur* occur in the sagas. A situation in which verse or prosimetric *sennur* regularly take place are the verse-wars between rival poets, as in *Kormáks saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, or *Bjarnar saga híttdalokappa*. Apart from that, there are at least two more settings in which prose *sennur* can be found over and over again: one is a kind of ‘interview’ situation, in which a travelling hero is questioned as to his lineage and intentions by a person of authority or power; the other the tense moments just before a formal duel – or in a situation where it is clear that a fight is about to break out.

<sup>26</sup> *Sigurðar saga þögla*, in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, ed. A. Loth, 5 vols., Editiones Arnarnagænar Ser. B, 20–4 (Copenhagen, 1962–5) II, 93–259, at 108–9. ‘And because Vilhjálmr did not want to stand before the taunting words of the viking because he had heard many things and knew nothing except that some evil power accompanied his (the viking’s) words. And therefore he reacted quickly and said to him: “Who is it that luckless one who stands on the poop-deck, foolish and doomed to die, black and ill-looking, ugly and loathsome, accursed and under ban, stupid (little-wise) and wretched (joyless)... Because your appearance makes it clear that you are full of viciousness and without luck, full of blemishes and insane, powerless and a traitor to your lord, shameful and guileful.”’

A good example of one of these ‘interviews’ is the first meeting of the hero with Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson in chapter six of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*. In general, if the answers given by the travelling hero satisfy the questioner, ensuing relations are friendly. In this case, they are not. The jarl questions Gunnlaugr not only about his family and age, but also about a boil on Gunnlaugr’s foot – a question which the hero resents, and his cocky answer seems to likewise displease one of Eiríkr’s retainers:

Jarl mælti: “Hvat er fæti þínum, Íslendingr?” “Sullr er á, herra,” sagði hann. “Ok gekk þú þó ekki haltr?” Gunnlaug svarar: “Eigi skal haltr ganga, meðan báðir fætr eru jafnlangir.” Þá mælti hirðmaðr jarls, er Þórir hét: “Þessi rembisk mikit, Íslendingrinn, ok væri vel, at vér freistaðim hans nokkut.”<sup>27</sup>

Gunnlaugr’s continued cockiness bodes ill for the outcome of this interview, and after an imprudent remark about the circumstances of Jarl Hákon’s death it is indeed only the interference of Gunnlaugr’s foster-brother Skúli which gets him out of the situation alive:

Gunnlaugr mælti ok heldr lágt: “Bið mér engra forbœna.” segir hann, “en bið þér heldr.” Jarl mælti: “Hvat sagðir þú nú, Íslendingr?” Gunnlaug svarar: “Svá, sem mér þótti vera eiga, at þú bæðir mér engra forbœna, en bæðir sjálfum þér hallkvæmi bæna.” “Hverra þá?” segir jarl. “At þú fengir eigi þvílíkan dauðdaga sem Hákon jarl, faðir þinn.” Jarl setti svá rauðan sem blóð, ok bað taka fól þetta skjótt. Þá gekk Skúli fyrir jarl ok mælti: “Gerð fyrir mín orð, herra, ok gefið mannum grið, ok færi hann á brott sem skjótast.” Jarl mælti: “Verði

<sup>27</sup> *Gunnlaugs saga*, in *Borgfirðinga sagur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, p. 69. ‘The jarl said: “What is wrong with your foot, Icelander?” “There is a boil on it, lord,” he said. “And yet you did not limp?” Gunnlaugr said, “One should not limp as long as both legs are the same length.” Then one of the jarl’s retainers, who was called Þórir, said: “This Icelander is quite arrogant, and it would be good if we did test him some.”’

hann á brottu sem skjótast, ef hann vill griðin hafa, ok komi aldri í mitt ríki síðan.”<sup>28</sup>

Again, this scene is not a pure prose *senna*, but contains a four-line poem Gunnlaugr makes about Þórir, who interferes in the exchange between Eiríkr jarl and Gunnlaugr. In a similar move Skúli enters into the exchange near the end of the quarrel, where his intervention provides a Conclusion to the *senna* exactly in the way Joseph Harris described it.

*Finnboga saga ramma* contains a whole chain of these interviews, as the hero encounters the farmer Barðr, the evil Álfr, and Álfr’s wife Ingibjörg in chapters 10, 12 and 14 of the saga respectively. All of them ask about Finnbogi’s father by name, and the two latter interviewers also about the bear Finnbogi killed in Hálogaland. Both Barðr and Álfr ask about his age, and in reply to his answer make a remark about how big and strong he is for a seventeen-year-old. The encounters, this following one with Álfr in particular, are actually quite hostile, since, like Gunnlaugr, Finnbogi resents the questioner’s more personal remarks and answers sharply:

Þar var einn dag, at Finnbogi gekk fram á björgin. Hann sá, at einn maðr reiri sunnan með landi á skútu mikill... Finnbogi spurði, hvat hann hétí. Hann gaf upp róðrinn ok sagði honum, at hann hétí Álfr ok kallaðr aftrkemba... Finnbogi sagði til sín ok fǫður sins. Álfr segir:

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 69–70. ‘Gunnlaugr said, keeping his voice low: “Do not wish evil for me, but rather pray for yourself?” The jarl said: “What did you just say, Icelander?” Gunnlaugr said: “I said what seemed right to me, that you should not wish me evil, but rather pray for yourself.” “For what?” said the jarl. “That you do not suffer such a death-day as Jarl Hákon, your father.” The jarl became as red as blood, and commanded [his men] to arrest the fool quickly. Then Skúli stepped in front of the jarl and said: “Act according to my word, lord, and give this man peace, and let him depart as fast as possible.” The jarl said: “Let him go as fast as possible, if he wants peace, and never come into my kingdom again.”’

“Hefir þú drepit skógarbjörninn þeira Háleygjanna?” Hann kvað þat satt. Álfr frétti: “Hversu fórtu at því?” Finnbogi segir: “Engu skiptir þik þat, því at eigi muntu svá drepa.” Álfr mælti: “Hverr Ásbjörn er faðir þinn?” Finnbogi segir: “Hann er Gunnbjarnarson, norrænn maðr at kyni.” Álfr spurði, hvárt hann væri dettiáss kallaðr. Finnbogi kvað þat satt vera. “Þá er eigi kynligt, þótt þú látir digrbarkaliga, eða hversu gamall maðr ertu?” Finnbogi segir: “Ek em seyjtján vetra.” Álfr mælti: “Vertu eigi annara seyjtján vetra jafnmikill ok sterkr sem þú ert.” Finnbogi segir: “Þat er sem verðr til þó, enda muntu dauðr áðr...”<sup>29</sup>

Despite Finnbogi’s arrogant and quite insulting tone, all three interviews result in friendly relations, at least up to a point: though Álfr readily takes Finnbogi with him in his boat, he harbours a grudge and tries to kill Finnbogi later on.

The last of the settings mentioned above concerns *sennur* which take place between the two opponents in a formal duel, just before the fight is about to begin. There is a relatively short passage before one of the duels between Kormákr and Bersi in chapter ten of *Kormáks saga*, in which Bersi uses the differentiation between a

<sup>29</sup> *Finnboga saga ramma*, in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, ÍF 14 (Reykjavík, 1959), pp. 276–7. ‘One day, Finnbogi went out onto the cliffs. He saw a man row from the south along the shore in a large boat... Finnbogi asked what his name was. He stopped rowing and told him that he was called Álfr aftrkemba... Finnbogi gave his name and that of his father. Álfr said: “Did you kill the wood-bear of the Hálogalanders?” He said that that was true. Álfr asked: “How did you do that?” Finnbogi said: “That does not concern you, because you will not kill anything in that manner.” Álfr said: “Which Ásbjörn is your father?” Finnbogi said: “He is the son of Gunnbjörn, from a Norwegian family.” Álfr asked whether he was called *dettiáss*. Finnbogi said that that was true. “Then it is not strange that you behave arrogantly; and how old a man are you?” Finnbogi said: “I am seventeen.” Álfr said: “You should not grow as big and strong again in the next seventeen years as you are now.” Finnbogi said: “That will be as it may, but you will be dead before that.”’



*hólmanga*, the formal duel governed by complicated laws, and *einvígi*, the more informal single combat, to insult Kormákr:

Nú er tekinn feldr ok breiddr undir fætr þeim. Bersi mælti: “Þú, Kormákr, skoraðir á mik til hólmöngu, en þar í mót býð ek þér einvígi; þú ert maðr ungr ok lítt reyndr, en á hólmöngu er vandhæfi, en alls ekki á einvígi.” Kormákr mælti: “Ekki muntu betr berjask einvígi; vil ek til þessa hætta ok í öllu til jafns halda við þík.” “Þú ræðr nú,” segir Bersi.<sup>30</sup>

The passage shows hardly any of the structural elements found in the *sennur* above: there is no preliminary Identification, since the two opponents have known each other for some time, and with just one speech and its reply, the Central Exchange is very short. The insults of inexperience and ineptitude are implied rather than explicit, and Bersi’s *Þú ræðr nú* is neither a Counterthreat nor even a proper Reply to Kormákr’s challenging or possibly threatening prediction of the outcome of the fight.

Chapter 4 of *Víga-Glúms saga* has a similar, slightly more elaborate example in the meeting between Eyjólfur and the berserk he is about to fight. The exchange has something which comes close to an Identification in the berserk’s insulting description of Eyjólfur as a *brunki*, a ‘brute’; the berserk himself, however, remains nameless:

...gengr á hólmi síðan. Berserkrinn mælti: “Skal sjá við mik berjask hrunkinn?” Eyjólfur mælti: “Er eigi þat, at þér ægi við mik at berjask? Kann þat vera, at þér sé eigi vel farit, er þú æðrask mikinn mann, en gambrar yfir litlum.” “Ekki er mér þat eignat,” segir hann, “en

<sup>30</sup> *Kormáks saga*, in *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ó. Sveinsson, pp. 236–7. ‘Now a cloak was taken and spread out under their feet. Bersi said: “You, Kormákr, have challenged me to a duel, and in return I offer you single combat; you are a young man and have hardly proved yourself, and there is difficulty in a duel, but none at all in a single combat.” Kormákr said: “You will not fight better in a single combat; I want to risk this and hold myself equal to you in all things.” “Well, it’s up to you,” said Bersi.’

löginnun ek þér segja upp um hólmöngu; þrimr mörkum skal mik leysa af hólmi, ef ek verð sárr.” Eyjólfur svarar: “Óskylt ætla ek vera at halda löngum við þik, er þú dæmir sjálf, hvers þú ert verðr, fyrir því at á váru landi myndi slíkt þykkja þrælsjöld, er þú gerir um sjálfan þík.” Eyjólfur átti fyrir at höggva ok hjó þat in fyrsta, at sverðit kom á skjaldarsporðinn, ok gekk af sporðrinn ok fótrinn af berserknum.<sup>31</sup>

Eyjólfur’s Accusation, using the standard insult of cowardice and boastfulness, evokes a prime example of a Denial from the berserk, who then in his next move uses the same slightly condescending implication that the hero is too young and inexperienced to be familiar with the *hólmöngulög* which Bersi employed in *Kormáks saga*. Still, like Álfur in *Finnboga saga ramma*, the berserk remains curiously untouched by the hero’s insults when he rather matter-of-factly returns to the situation at hand instead of replying with counterinsults.

In chapter 9 of *Þórðar saga breðu* there is a *senna* in a situation which was mentioned earlier, a meeting between two feuding enemies, Þórður and Özurr. Although this is not a formal duelling situation, it is clear that a fight is going to follow – Özurr has ambushed Þórður with a group of men in order to try to kill him:

<sup>31</sup> *Víga-Glúms saga*, in *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson, pp. 12–13. ‘Then he went to the duelling place. The berserk said: “Shall that big man fight with me?” Eyjólfur said: “Is it not so, that you are afraid to fight me? It may be that you have not behaved well, if you are afraid of a big man, but boast over a little one.” “That is not the case for me,” he said, “and now I have to explain the laws of the duel to you; three marks will release me from the duel if I am wounded.” Eyjólfur said: “I think it’s not my duty to keep the laws with you, if you decide yourself what you are worth, because in my country that price which you consider yourself worth would be thought to be the price for a slave.” Eyjólfur had the first blow, and struck thus, that the sword hit the lower end of the shield and the end came off and also the foot of the berserk.’

Þá mælti Þórðr við Özur: “Eigi ertu enn horfinn í fyrirsátunum við mik; þætti mér sem þér mundi minissamr fundr okkarr; muntu nú eigi fara betrum förum en næst, áðr vit skiljum.” Özur svaraði: “Þat sagða ek þér, at ek skylda þér aldri trúr, ef ek lifnaða; ok þat skal ek efna. Sækjum nú at honum ok njótum nú liðsmunar.” Þórðr segir: “Eigi er ek enn uppgfeinn; þykir mér ekki víst, hvat þér munduð á vinna, þó at ek væri einn, en nú hálfu síðr er þessir menn fylgja mér.” Síðan rann Þórðr fram at Özuri ok lagði spjótinu í gegnum þann mann, sem fremstur stóð. Þórðr mælti: “Féll þar nú einn, ok er eigi öðrum at firr.”<sup>32</sup>

Like Kormákr and Bersi, the two men know each other well. They have actually had a number of similar encounters in the course of the saga, so that the Identification – which seems to be a standard feature in the *sennur* over water – is not necessary and therefore omitted. The exchange between the adversaries, however, includes some classic flyting features such as references to past events in the two men’s boasts and insults, and predictions about the future in their threats and vows.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Þórðar saga breðu*, in *Kjalnesinga saga*, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson, pp. 205–6. “Then Þórðr said to Özur: “You still have not given up ambushing me. I thought that you would be mindful of our last meeting. You will not fare now any better than in the last meeting before we part.” Özur said: “I told you that I should never trust you if I lived and I shall fulfil what I said. Let us now attack him and make the most of the difference in numbers.” Þórðr said: “I still have not given up. It seems to me not certain that you would have to win even if I were on my own, and now much less likely since these men follow me.” Then Þórðr ran towards Özur and drove his spear through the man who was standing right at the front. Þórðr said: “Now one has fallen and others are not far behind.”’

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Clover, ‘Germanic Context’, at p. 452: ‘The structure of the flyting is conditioned by the terms of debate and has as a standard sequence a Claim, Defense, and Counterclaim. The Claim and Counterclaim consist of insults and boasts (past) and threats, vows and curses (future).’

The question that stood at the beginning of this paper was whether prose verbal duels could reasonably be counted as belonging to the genre *senna* – if they indeed fulfilled the criteria which are generally understood to determine an inclusion into the genre, specifically those of stylisation and formalisation, which seem to be important requirements for a quarrel to be regarded as a *senna*.

A simple, uncomplicated definition of genre might be as ‘[a set] of conventions which help to determine what a writer writes and which enable a reader to orientate her- or himself in relation to a text, and so establish the kind of meaning which may be expected from it.’<sup>34</sup> Understood like this, genre markers are basically a help for the reader to understand a given situation or scene in a narrative, and thus what is important is to provide, in a genre’s set of conventions, easy means of recognition; clues for the reader to pick up on early enough to adjust their expectations on the text and prepare themselves mentally for what is to follow. Both the verbal duels in verse which are universally recognised and accepted as belonging to the genre *senna*, and the prose passages discussed above as belonging to the same genre, do that through formalisation, and this formalisation is a combination of content (the verbal repetition, the structure, the personal dimension of the insults) and, more importantly, context. Even before such features of content as the identification of the opponents, the structure of speech and counterspeech or the nature of the insults has registered in the reader’s mind, the narrative has prepared the scene with the introduction of one of a handful of settings which are characteristic for the genre, and in which a following verbal exchange is rather more likely to be a *senna* than not.

<sup>34</sup> C. L. Phelpstead, ‘Dialogues on Sainthood: a Bakhtinian Reading of Saints’ Lives in the Icelandic Kings’ Sagas’ (unpubl. DPhil diss., Univ. of Oxford 1998), p. 56.

Old MacDonald had a *fjrm, eo, eo, y*:  
Two Marginal Developments of <eo>  
in Old and Middle English

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It is widely accepted that the Old English diphthong /e(:)o/ generally monophthongised, around the eleventh century, to the central rounded /ø(:)/.<sup>1</sup> In much of England, /ø(:)/ soon unrounded to /e(:)/, but in the dialects of the south-west and west Midlands, which had a greater predilection for rounded vowels, the /ø(:)/ reflex of /e(:)o/ was retained. Since the development /e(:)o/ > /ø(:)/ took place after /ø(:)/ < i-mutation had been unrounded, it had no effect on the phonemic system of Old English: the change led to no collapse or creation of phonemic distinctions. Accordingly, <eo> remained as useful a graph for /ø(:)/ as for /e(:)o/, and it was used to represent that sound into the fourteenth century (as in the thirteenth

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. M. Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English, Vol. 1: Phonology* (Oxford, 1992), §§5.210–11; R. Lass, 'Phonology and Morphology', *The Cambridge History of the English Language Vol. 2: 1066–1476*, ed. N. Blake (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 23–155, at 42–3. The Old English 'long' diphthongs were of course of the length usual in diphthongs, that is, in systematic terms, the same length as a long vowel. As Hogg emphasises, these would best be thought of as 'normal' diphthongs and signified by /eo/, and short diphthongs distinguished by a breve. For convenience however, I follow the common convention of marking normal diphthongs long (/e:o/) and leaving short ones unmarked. For the other languages cited, where there was no distinction of length between diphthongs, all are left unmarked, despite the fact that, for example, Old Welsh /au/ would correspond in length to Old English /æ:a/.

century AB language). The dating of the monophthongisation of /e(:)o/, therefore, relies on the appearance, largely in the eleventh century, of <e> spellings, attesting to a phonemic shift caused by unrounding. Thus, although the eleventh century is usually given as the time of the monophthongisation, it could in fact date from any time after the loss of /ø(:)/ < i-mutation.<sup>2</sup>

Monophthongisation could, however, be affected by phonological context, or proceed differently for more obscure reasons. Thus in late West Saxon, /eo/ regularly became /u/ between /w/ and /r/.<sup>3</sup> Another variant development is suggested by some less well observed south-western and west Midland Middle English forms, which show the spelling <u>, widely used in Middle English to represent /y(:)/, for etymological /e(:)o/. Mary S. Serjeantson found them in quantity in Hampshire, Dorset, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, with a scattering of forms in adjacent counties and Lancashire – a distribution more or less identical with the area in which rounded vowels survived into the fourteenth century – and suggested that /e(:)o/ 'seems to have been rounded and monophthongised to [ø], and perhaps subsequently raised to [y]'.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Serjeantson, while listing all instances of <u> for etymological /e(:)o/ in various texts for each county, did not analyse these data further: the phonological significance of <u> in a given text, which cannot be assumed for Middle English without considering a text's whole graphemic system, the possibility of patterns in phonological contexts for <u> forms, and relative proportions of different spellings for identical etymons therefore went largely unconsidered.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.214.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, §§5.183–5.

<sup>4</sup> M. S. Serjeantson, 'The Dialectal Distribution of Certain Phonological Features in Middle English: Section II', *ES* 4 (1922), 191–8, at 194–8.

This shortcoming was exacerbated by the fact that earlier commentators had tended to see <u> for late West Saxon <eo> to represent a wholesale sound change, particularly Wyld, who claimed that 'in the extreme S.W. and perhaps further Nth' [ø(:)] < /e(:)o/ was 'gradually raised' to [y(:)] and was 'thus levelled with Fr. [y] and with the same sound, when it survived, from O.E.' Wyld cited *Laȝamon's* rhyme *neode* 'need', rhyming with *hude* 'hide', and the *South English Legendary's* *duyre* 'dear', rhyming with *buyre* 'hire', without considering the more obvious explanation of i-mutation variants in <y> < <ie> in late West Saxon.<sup>5</sup> Luick justly opposed Wyld's interpretation, as have, implicitly, almost all commentators since.<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, <u> reflexes of conventional <eo> have since rarely been differentiated from spellings such as <eo, oe, eu, ue, uy>, as indeed they were not by Wyld, being taken together with them to imply /ø(:)/.<sup>7</sup>

A more detailed consideration of the evidence, however, suggests that Serjeantson's <u> forms did indeed represent /y(:)/, rather than

<sup>5</sup> H. C. Wyld, *A Short History of English*, 3rd ed. (London, 1927), §168c; cf. H. Sweet, *A History of English Sounds from the Earliest Period: with Full Word-Lists* (Oxford, 1888), §§657, 682.

<sup>6</sup> K. Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1914–40), §357, Anm. 3.

<sup>7</sup> S. Moore, S. B. Meech and H. Whitehall, 'Middle English Dialect Characteristics and Dialect Boundaries', *Essays and Studies in Eng. and Comparative Lit.* 13 (1935), 1–60, at 12–13; J. Fisiak, *A Short Grammar of Middle English Part One: Graphemics, Phonemics and Morphemics* (London, 1968), pp. 18, 20; K. Ek, *The Development of OE y and eo in South-Eastern Middle English*, *Lund Studies in Eng.* 42 (Lund, 1972), 12; R. Jordan, *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology*, trans. and rev. E. J. Crook (The Hague, 1974), §§65–6, 84–5; G. Kristensson, 'OE eo in the West Midlands in Late Middle English', *Historical and Editorial Studies in Medieval and Early Modern English for Johan Gerritsen*, ed. M. Arn, H. Wirtjes, and H. Janssen (Groningen, 1985), pp. 97–111, at 108–9; but n.b. A. J. Bliss, 'The OE Long Diphthongs *ĒO* and *ĒA*', *Eng. and Germanic Studies* 3 (1949–50), 82–7, at 84–5; Lass, 'Phonology', p. 55.

chance scribal variation for /ø(:)/, though this need not be true of the other spellings mentioned. That this should be so is suggested by the consistent use of <u> for etymological /y(:), u/ in stressed vowels in, for example, AB language, where the graph contrasts with <ou> for /u:/ and <eo> for /ø(:)/.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in view of Gillis Kristensson's statement regarding place-name evidence for the reflexes of OE /e(:)o/, that 'in the whole area examined the reflex of OE /y(:)/ remained, spelt <u>', his assumption that <u> should represent /ø(:)/ when derived from /e(:)o/ is rather counter-intuitive.<sup>9</sup> Particularly in view of the critical heritage, however, the a priori likelihood that our evidence attests to a development of /e(:)o/ > /y(:)/ requires further consideration, by two sorts of approaches. (1) We may seek circumstantial evidence for such a development in consistent phonological contexts, the plausibility of these being bolstered if they provoke similar processes elsewhere in linguistic change, ideally in the dialect(s) in question. (2) We may seek objective correlatives, that is correlating evidence of differing sorts for the change. The most important is that of correlating evidence from differing orthographic systems, most obviously pre-Conquest orthography showing <y> for etymological /e(:)o/. The chance occurrence of such spellings in similar contexts to the Middle English <u> spellings would be extremely unlikely: a correlation should reflect a genuine phonological phenomenon.

We may begin to pursue these forms of evidence by considering two manuscripts of the *South English Legendary*, London, BL Harley 2277 and Hand A of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 145, both from the first quarter of the fourteenth century, located in the

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne, *De Lijflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iuliane*, EETS 248 (Oxford, 1961), pp. 173–5.

<sup>9</sup> Kristensson, 'OE eo', p. 109.

*Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* to Berkshire and Somerset respectively; the original Legendary must have been produced in this area.<sup>10</sup> These texts use much the same orthography as AB language, with the only relevant difference being occasional <uy> for /y:/. We may be fully confident of the phonological value of the graph <u> when used of stressed long vowels here, and reasonably confident when it is used of short vowels. As in Serjeantson's material, a small number of instances show the variant form <u> for reflexes of conventional <eo>, and in view of the otherwise consistent orthographic system, these must represent /y(:)/ reflexes. Given the infrequency of the relevant forms, and the absence of an electronic text, for this initial survey, relevant forms were sought in the glossary to Harley 2277 and Corpus 145 by Charlotte d'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, which while not being complete, aims to record 'primarily the more unusual words and the more unusual meanings of common words... But occasionally familiar words ... are included when the variety of their forms is of interest'.<sup>11</sup> The glossary, then, should have noted most irregular <u> forms. It is unfortunate, however, that comparison of this edition with, for example, Wright's text from the life of St Michael shows that the EETS text, while purporting to be edited from Corpus 145 and Harley 2277, was in fact based on Corpus 145, with variants from Harley 2277 being recorded only when they affected word order and lexeme: spelling variants are not

<sup>10</sup> *LALME*, III, 11–12 (LP 6810) and III, 441 (LP 5130), respectively. For Corpus 145 Hand B, see III, 158 (LP 5560, Hants.); cf. M. Laing, *Catalogue of Sources for a Linguistic Atlas of Early Medieval English* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 95–6, 21–2.

<sup>11</sup> C. d'Evelyn and A. J. Mill, *The South English Legendary: Edited from Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 145 and British Museum MS. Harley 2277 with Variants from Bodley MS. Ashmole 43 and British Museum MS. Cotton Julius D. IX*, 3 vols., EETS 235, 236, 244 (London, 1956–9) III, 40.

noted.<sup>12</sup> Wright's text, for example, shows *urthe* to have been standard for Corpus 145 *eorpe*, with an instance of *durk* for *derk* besides. Fuller consideration of Harley 2277 would doubtless be rewarding in this connection, therefore; but for now, the material of Corpus 145 adverted to in the EETS edition's glossary will suffice (see Table 1).

Reference <sup>13</sup>	Etymon	Attested form
II, 504, l. 360; II, 472, l. 263; II, 511, l. 598	eorþ	urth-, vrth-
II, 504, l. 357; II, 538, l. 170	deorc	durc, durk
II, 496, l. 116	liornian	lurny
I, 259, l. 365; II, 692, l. 70	sīoþ; sīon < sīon	suchþ; suk
II, 471, l. 236; II, 578, l. 193	fiorða	furde
I, 132, l. 114	dīor	dure
I, 67, l. 144	dīope	dupe
cf. <i>LALME</i> III, 12; III, 441	hēold (but cf. eWS hīold) < healdan	huld

Table 1: Middle English instances of <u> for conventional <eo>

Serjeantson's suggestion, then, that our Middle English evidence sometimes indicates /y(:)/ as a reflex of /e(:)o/ is independently witnessed by a literary text. Moreover, the <u> forms occur in clear phonological contexts: they derive from /eor/ and /i(:)o/. Strikingly, we seem also to find a back-spelling, with <eo> for conventional <u>, in line 175 of the life of St Blaise, where we have *beorne* < *hyrne*; the form is confirmed by its rhyme in line 176, *turne* < Old English *tyrne* (subjunctive of *turnian*). There must, then, have been some confusion between the sounds represented by <eo> and <u>. Harley 2277

<sup>12</sup> T. Wright, *Popular Treatises on Science Written During the Middle Ages* (London, 1841), pp. 132–40; cf. d'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary*, II, 414–28.

<sup>13</sup> To d'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary*.

and Corpus 145, then, meet desiderata (1) and (2) above. But they still leave uncertainty, particularly with regard to the short vowels, where <u> might represent /y/ or /u/. It is necessary, therefore, to seek further evidence.

Old English material offers a number of forms with the spelling <y> for conventional <eo>, listed in the appendix; in pre-Conquest orthography, <y> consistently represented the high front rounded vowel /y(:)/.<sup>14</sup> The basis of my dataset was established by searching the *Dictionary of Old English* online corpus for word-roots showing <y> for conventional <eo>.<sup>15</sup> The roots were drawn from two corpora. The first was A. H. Smith's *English Place-Name Elements*, since the Old English charter bounds were deemed a particularly useful source, given the comparatively great possibility of localising and dating the material extracted therefrom.<sup>16</sup> The second source was Duncan Macrae-Gibson's list of word-roots occurring in the Old English poetic corpus.<sup>17</sup> This digital list of roots was selected principally

<sup>14</sup> Hogg, *Phonology*, p. 15; Hogg also argues (§§5.164, 5.170–5) that in late West Saxon, <y> represented a lax [Y(:)] (/y(:)/), but also a lax and unrounded [I(:)], for which argument cf. P. Gradon, 'Studies in Late West-Saxon Labialization and Delabialization', in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London, 1962), pp. 63–76. If so, however, we must nonetheless consider [I(:)] to have collapsed phonemically and perhaps phonetically with /y(:)/ by the twelfth century, if not by the late West Saxon period, since after the Norman Conquest, <u> was used for late West Saxon <y> in stressed syllables regardless of whether they originated in early West Saxon <ie> (which Hogg reads as [I(:)]) or <y>. Cf. Corpus 145 *hūre* < *hýran* < *hieran*; *hurd* < *hyrd* < *hierd*.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/>, accessed 5 November 2001; cf. R. L. Venezky, *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English* (Newark, DE, 1980–3).

<sup>16</sup> A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols., EPNS 25 (Cambridge, 1956).

<sup>17</sup> <ftp://ftp.csd.abdn.ac.uk/pub/dmg/ASPR.roots/>, accessed 5 Nov. 2001; cf. J. F. Madden and F. P. Magoun, *A Grouped Frequency Word-List of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (Harvard, 1966).

because <eo> roots could be found in it swiftly, and although its inclusion of poetic vocabulary was a drawback, it provided a generous selection of common words, enabling the effective searching of the whole online corpus. Positive results were collated with printed editions, with no discrepancies being discovered.

Where the substitution of <y> for <eo> produced the same form as a different word (e.g. *eorþ* 'earth' ~ *yrð* 'ploughing'), the search was first narrowed to include only the charter corpus, and abandoned altogether if the number of instances was still too great for each to be checked. Forms were also discovered, naturally, by chance encounter in other contexts, and included accordingly. The list, then, cannot claim completeness, particularly since the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus of Old English* does not contain numismatic evidence, and unfortunately, the search method does not reveal back-spellings; but the search should represent a substantial proportion of the material showing <y> for <eo>. Texts are referred to in the appendix by manuscript and, where applicable, Sawyer number.<sup>18</sup> Charters' dates and locations are derived from *The Electronic Sawyer*; cartularies' from Davis; and those of other texts, unless otherwise stated, from Ker.<sup>19</sup> Etymons are extrapolated from Holthausen and Bosworth-Toller.<sup>20</sup>

Forms which could be explained by other processes (e.g. *syfon* for *seofon*) were of course omitted from the list.<sup>21</sup> Particularly worthy of note among these excluded forms is *hyrg* for *beorg*, since von Feilitzen, followed by Campbell, noted *Intebyrgan* (Inkberrow, Worcestershire) in

<sup>18</sup> P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (London, 1968), collated with <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/sdk13/chartwww/eSawyer.99/eSawyer2.html>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; G. R. C. Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain* (London, 1958); N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957).

<sup>20</sup> F. Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1934); B–T.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), §299d; OED s.v. *birch*.

a similar context.<sup>22</sup> This form can be explained by well-attested confusion between *beorg* 'hill, mound', *burg* (dative singular and nominative and accusative plural *byrig*) '(fortified) dwelling', and perhaps *beorg* 'defence'.<sup>23</sup> Confusion between words so similar in sound and sense is unsurprising and need not reflect a sound change (compare Modern English confusion between *bought* and *brought*). Thus we see clearly analogical confusion in S771: 'Danon on lythlan eorþbeorg of þære byrig'. The sound change proposed might of course have promoted analogy, but *byrg* for *beorg* cannot demonstrate the change itself. Likewise, the forms *byrht* and *byrn* for *beorht* and *beorn* in personal names were dealt with separately (see below, pp. 82–3).

Before analysis of the collected forms can proceed, the evidence requires some discussion. S1547 (Exeter DC, 2530) is particularly noteworthy, since here we can be unusually confident that the document and its language are precisely localisable. The manuscript is one of the two surviving unattached single sheet Old English boundary clauses (the other is S255, MS 2, reportedly to be S1548B in Susan Kelly's revised edition).<sup>24</sup> Such documents seem most likely to have been those on which boundary clauses were originally recorded *in situ* in order to communicate the details of the bounds to the scriptorium where a single-sheet charter would be drawn up.<sup>25</sup> Here, then, *dyra* is probably a first-hand witness to Devonshire dialect, a point particularly significant in this instance, since in more northerly areas, a form *dyr* might be ascribed to influence from Old Norse *\*diur* (compare Old Icelandic *dýr*). Since S1547 corresponds to no surviving

<sup>22</sup> O. von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Names of Domesday Book*, *Nomina Germanica* 3 (Uppsala, 1937), pp. 61–2; cf. Campbell, *Grammar*, §304, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> See *Exodus*, ed. P. J. Lucas, (London, 1977), p. 87, for examples.

<sup>24</sup> K. A. Lowe, 'The Development of the Anglo-Saxon Boundary Clause', *Nomina* 21 (1998), 63–100, at 65.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.* p. 65.

charter, however, we cannot date it precisely.

For the rest, however, we must consider difficulties with sources, principally concern regarding the evidential value of the twelfth-century manuscripts of Old English texts which provide so many of the forms listed – the cartularies of Winchester and Worcester (generally known as the *Codex Wintoniensis* [CW] and *Hemming's Cartulary* [HC]), and the Winteneay version of the Old English *Benedictine Rule* [WR]. CW seems to date from the episcopate of Henry of Blois (1130–50),<sup>26</sup> while the material in HC may be dated paleographically to s. xi<sup>1</sup> and s. xi<sup>2</sup>, and WR to s. xii<sup>1</sup>. CW, and early medieval charters generally, seem to have been copied *literatim*, with little deliberate altering of forms, although copyists of other sorts of texts may have felt freer when copying.<sup>27</sup> But in each of our manuscripts, post-Conquest copyists have evidently altered some spellings (e.g. HC s. xi<sup>2</sup> *rudmerlega*, CW *urlæ*, WR *ysun*), and as well as possibly providing linguistic evidence in itself, this affects our understanding of spellings which may be accurate copies of Old English forms (e.g. HC s. xi<sup>1</sup> *rydemæreleage*, CW *yrle*, WR *HEARDHYRTNESSE*). Could a form like *yrle* be a post-Conquest alteration from an exemplar's regular form *\*eorle*? This would suggest /e(:)o/ > /i(:)/, not /y(:)/. However, this development would be even more surprising than /e(:)o/ > /y(:)/; such

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. R. Rumble, 'The Purposes of the Codex Wintoniensis', *Proc. of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies IV, 1981*, ed. R. A. Brown (Woodbridge, 1982), pp. 153–66, at 157, and *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> K. Lowe, '“As Fre as Thowt”?: Some Medieval Copies and Translations of Old English Wills', *Eng. Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* 4 (1993), 1–23; M. Laing, 'Anchor Texts and Literary Manuscripts in Early Middle English', *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts: Essays Celebrating the Publication of 'A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English'*, ed. Felicity Riddy (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 27–52, at 37–42; cf. P. R. Kitson, 'The Nature of Old English Dialect Distributions, Mainly as Exhibited through Charter Boundaries', *Medieval Dialectology*, ed. J. Fisiak (Berlin, 1995), pp. 43–135, at 48–50.



evidence as we have for such a change would in any case be most easily explained as unrounding of /y(:)/ < /e(:)o/.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the reading would sit ill with the appearance of post-Conquest <u> forms in the same contexts, in the same manuscripts. As in the *South English Legendary* material, these forms are problematic, and in early Middle English might represent /u:/ as well as /u, y(:)/. Meanwhile, if the <u> form derives from the exemplar, it would certainly suggest an Old English development of /e(:)o/ > /u(:)/. A close study of the WR leaves no doubt that <u> could represent /y(:)/ (e.g. 25.22–3 *hura uldran*),<sup>29</sup> but there are no instances of <ou> for /u(:)/ to suggest that an updating scribe would not have used <u> for /u(:)/ also. There are also some instances of <u> for conventional <eo> in Old English (though a search of the *Old English Corpus* based on Macrae-Gibson's list for examples of <u> for <eo> has produced far fewer examples than of <y> for <eo>).<sup>30</sup> However, it is clearly most efficient to argue that <y, u> for conventional Old English <eo> are different periods' spellings of /y(:)/ – otherwise we would have to argue the development of /e(:)o/ to two of /i(:), y(:), u(:)/, rather than only to

<sup>28</sup> Cf. von Feilitzen, *Pre-Conquest Names*, §34.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Gretsche, 'Die Wintenei-Version der Benediktinerregel', *Anglia* 96 (1978), 310–48, at 343.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.07–9, and note also *laruw* (Bede 5 B9.6.7, 9.410.19), *snfon* (ByrM 1 (Baker/Lapidge) B20.20.1, 1.2.123; ChrodR 1, B10.4.1, 83.3; Mt (WSCp) B8.4.3.1, 22.28, PsGIC (Wildhagen) C7.1, 11.7, 78.12; S1547, B15.8.589), *pwurh* (PsGIC (Wildhagen) C7.1, 77.8), *hura* (RegCGI (Kornexl) C27, 11.179), *eabtuþan* (RegCGI (Kornexl) C27, 32.731), *cnuwa* (leg. *cnuwa*, BenRGI C4, 50.85.17), *þud* (HomS 15 (Belf 6) B3.2.15, 130), *pwurh* (GD 1 (H) B9.5.8.2, 10.76.9), *betwun-* (ChrodR 1 B10.4.1, 54.21, 80.10; LS 21 (AssumptTristr) B3.3.21, 77; Nic (D) B8.5.3.2, 17). Citations according to A. diP. Healey, *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English: the List of Texts and Index of Editions* (Toronto, 1980). Note that PsGIC (Wildhagen) C7.1 and S1547, B15.8.589 also record <y> forms – respectively, *cnynn* (leg. *cnynn*) and *dyra snæd*.

/y(:)/. The spelling <y> for conventional <eo>, then, may be taken with confidence to represent pre-Conquest orthography, <u> to represent post-Conquest.

The presence of <u> for conventional <eo> in a post-Conquest manuscript is still not wholly straightforward. Though most obviously representing the intrusion of post-Conquest phonology via post-Conquest orthography into the copying, the spelling might conceivably be a transliteration of a form in pre-Conquest orthography (\*<y>) by a scribe who understood the phonological values of the former spelling system, and altered a form so as to preserve its phonological value in the new spelling system. The former prospect seems more likely, and is the safer assumption. Thus the second, post-Conquest, example from HC suggests <u> forms to show linguistic as well as orthographic updating. Here we have two apparently independent copies of the the same boundary clause,<sup>31</sup> the earlier giving *rydemæreleage*, the latter *rudmerleage*. Although the <u> of *rud-* could be an updated transliteration of the <y> in *ryd-*, if that form is original, the rest of the word shows linguistic as well as orthographic updating. Since Redmarley was local to the scribes of HC we may assume that the later scribe knew the name, and accordingly wrote down the form of the name which he was accustomed to use. This situation is less clear for forms such as CW's *dupan*, which preserves the Old English inflection, but it is safest to assume it.

The time and place for which 'exemplar forms' are evidence can be assumed reasonably comfortably for charters, since the form is likeliest either to derive from the area of the charter's bounds or from the area of the principal house of the charter's beneficiary. Kitson has

<sup>31</sup> N. R. Ker, 'Hemming's Cartulary', *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin and R. W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), pp. 49–75, at 51, 68.

argued that locally written boundary clauses were usually copied *literatim* into single-sheet charters, and thence into cartularies, with original dialect forms intact,<sup>32</sup> and with due caution we may ascribe <y> forms to the area of the charter's bounds in the case of genuine charters (otherwise, once more with caution, to the area of the principal house of the beneficiary). The provenance of the exemplar of WR is harder to judge, but Gretsich found that WR's closest textual affiliations were to London, BL Cotton Titus A. iv, whose likeliest provenance is Winchester.<sup>33</sup> We may cautiously assume, therefore, that WR's exemplar was likewise a Hampshire text, though its date is unknown.

Problems of origin and transmission also beset the form *Byferes stane* (Beverstone in Gloucestershire, very close to Malmesbury) in the E-text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but these can be resolved sufficiently for present purposes. It is not known where the E-recension of the Chronicle was being kept in 1051, but it is believed at least to represent a contemporary and independent record at this time, so if the form is original, it is precisely dated.<sup>34</sup> The fact that the annal locates events at *Byferes stan* without referring to a wider geographical context (recension D, by contrast, places events at *Gleawcester* instead)<sup>35</sup> implies that the annalist, and whatever audience he may have been writing for, knew Gloucestershire well. E seems to have been known in Worcester and Malmesbury in the thirteenth

<sup>32</sup> Kitson, 'Dialect Distributions', pp. 48–50.

<sup>33</sup> 'Die Winteny-Version', pp. 323–8; cf. M. Gretsich, *Die Regula Sancti Benedicti in England und ihre altenglische Übersetzung*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie 2 (Munich, 1973), 37.

<sup>34</sup> *The Peterborough Chronicle (the Bodleian Manuscript Laud Misc. 636)*, ed. D. Whitelock, EEMF 4 (Copenhagen, 1954), 31–2.

<sup>35</sup> *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1892–9) I, 175.

century, and was often in contact with a text known to D, D almost certainly being kept at Worcester.<sup>36</sup> We may localise the form of *Byferes stan* with confidence, therefore, to the area of the southern Welsh marches – if not, speculatively, to Gloucestershire, and accordingly its scholastic centre Malmesbury.

The two forms of apparent south-eastern provenance must also be noted. This provenance is interesting, but not problematic, since despite general and early unrounding of /y(:)/ in the south-east, a scattering of <u> reflexes of late West Saxon /y(:)/ is still apparent in the late medieval evidence for that region.<sup>37</sup> But each text is slightly complicated: London, BL Stowe Ch. 40, offering *Ljfwine*, is a forgery, though this does not invalidate it as linguistic evidence for the likely time of the text's composition, around the first quarter of the eleventh century; and since the beneficiary and bounds of the charter were in Kent, a Kentish provenance is fairly assured. Here, <y> might be an inverted spelling for /e:/ < /e:o/,<sup>38</sup> but as the Kentish form should have been *Liof*, this seems unlikely. The glosses in Yale University MS 401, with *yroda*, are located on the basis of south-eastern dialect features.<sup>39</sup> These use <yo> for Kentish <io>, so *yroda* might simply be a scribal error omitting the *o*.

Lastly, we must note some difficulties in determining the etonyms of place-names, and with the evidence of names in general. Place-names comprise the main part of the corpus of <y> forms, which is why the corroborating evidence of literary sources is particularly important. As Cecily Clark observed,

semantic divorce from common vocabulary lays name-material especially open to phonological change, in so far as shifts and

<sup>36</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. and trans. M. J. Swanton (London, 1996), p. xxv.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *LALME*, I, dot maps 17, 19, 23 and 1059.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.194.

<sup>39</sup> *Old English Glosses, Chiefly Unpublished*, ed. A.S. Napier (Oxford, 1900), p. xxxii.

reductions may be unrestrained by analogies with related lexical items and may at times be warped by random associations with unrelated but like-sounding ones. As a source of phonological evidence, name-material must therefore be treated with reserve.<sup>40</sup>

Fortunately, these difficulties should not generally impinge on the value of the charter evidence collected, since almost all the names there are transparent descriptive formations, even if some are also toponyms. *Dyra snæd* ('Wild animals' area), for example, seems unlikely to have been affected phonologically in ways in which other lexical categories would not, though the less transparent *Wryng* < *wriō-ing* might have been. On the other hand, it may be that names were less constrained by the orthographic conventions of the *Schriftsprache* than other words. Occasionally the etymology of a place-name is unclear – thus, although *rydmædwan* is included in the appendix, the first element might be < *ryd* 'clearing'. Smith considered the element more likely to derive from *hrēod* 'reed', however, perhaps because the place was by water.<sup>41</sup> But on the whole, etymons are clear and pose few difficulties. From these analyses, we may tentatively produce a list of pre-Conquest instances of <y> for conventional <eo> (see Table 2).

The distributions in Table 2 match those of Harley 2277/ Corpus 145. Five etymons have short vowels, and four of these show <y> before /-r/ (*yrī*, *hyrt*, *gedyrf*, *deorc*). Naturally enough, these also precede /-rC/, but it is hard to see any significance in this fact given the varied character of the second consonants. Of the eight long vowels, three

<sup>40</sup> C. Clark, 'Onomastics', *The Cambridge History of the English Language Vol. 1: the Beginnings to 1066*, ed. R. M. Hogg (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 452–89, at 485–6; cf. C. Clark, 'Onomastics', *The Cambridge History of the English Language Vol. 2*, ed. Blake, pp. 542–606, at 592–5; K. Cameron, *English Place-Names*, 2nd ed. (Trowbridge, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Place-Name Elements*, II, 82.

County	Etymon	Attested root
Worcestershire	hrīod	ryd (× 2)
Gloucestershire	biofor	byfer
	cnīow	cnyw
Wiltshire	dīor	dyr (× 2)
Somerset	wriō	wryng
Devonshire	dīor	dyr
Hampshire	eorl	yrī
	heorte	hyrt
	gedeorf	gedyrf
	*crēowel	crywel
	drīorig	dryri
South-East	liof	lyf
	ēorod < eoh-rād	yrod
Unlocated	deorc	dyrc
	drīorig	dryri

Table 2: Pre-Conquest instances of <y> for conventional <eo>

County	Etymon	Attested form
Wiltshire	hrīod	hrud
Hampshire	eorl	urlæ
	heorte	hurt
	dīop	dup
	dīofol	dufel
	bīoþ	bup
	liōht	luht
	prīost	prust
	gesēon	ysun

Table 3: Pre-Conquest instances of <u> for conventional <eo>

show <y> before /-r/ (though never before /-rC/; *dȳr*, *dryri*, *yrod*), though four follow /r-/ (*ryd*, *wryng*, *crywel* and *dryri*), but more striking here is that six out of eight etymons show /i:ɔ/ rather than /e:ɔ/. The <u> forms recorded in WR and CW once more repeat these distributions (see Table 3). Here, each of the short vowels precedes /r/, and all but one of the long vowels derive from /i:ɔ/.

The possibilities for explaining these developments are manifold, but the trends in context and etymology presented here inevitably guide us towards two strands of interpretation. Whatever the case, we may note that the roundedness of a monophthong from /e:ɔ/ can be explained without reference to external influence, due to the rounded second element of the diphthong, which alone was sufficient to produce the roundedness of /ø(:)/. In the Old English evidence, and the later material of Hampshire and Harley 2277/ Corpus 145, long diphthongs show /y:/ reflexes with no consistent synchronic phonological context; but they do derive almost invariably from what in early West Saxon would have been written as <io>.<sup>42</sup> So striking a context cannot be ignored. The significance of <io> is not entirely clear: the Old English high diphthong must originally have been /i(:)u/, and it is possible that <io> represented that, which would conform with the principal of 'diphthong height harmony' present in /e(:)ɔ, æ(:)a/ (cf. Lass, 'There is no doubt that this [sc. <io>] must be

<sup>42</sup> This seems also to be true of the west Midlands, north of the West Saxon dialect area, to judge from the <u> forms found by G. Kristensson, *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290–1350: the West Midland Counties*, Pub. of the New Soc. of Letters at Lund 78 (Lund, 1987), 112–18, 123–6, 151–7; distribution maps 11 and 13, pp. 244 and 245 (cf. Kristensson, 'OE *eo*'). These show eight different words, most of which, etymologically, had long diphthongs: *de Gruthurst* < *grīot*, *Stur* < *stīor* (Worcestershire); *de Durhurst* < *dior*, *Prust* < *priost* (Gloucestershire); *Bruwest* < *brīowan*, *Prust* (Oxfordshire); (*de*) *Crulefeld*, *de Cruleye* < \**crēowel* (Warwickshire). All show etymological /i:ɔ/ except the *Crul*- forms.

/iu/').<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, <io> may represent /i(:)ɔ/, with a lowered second element, which would be consistent with the spelling (cf. Hogg, 'it is certainly the case that the second element of all these diphthongs [sc. /e(:)ɔ, i(:)ɔ/] had already lowered lowered [sic] to /o/').<sup>44</sup> Fortunately, either form would plausibly yield /y(:)/ upon monophthongisation, so we need not decide between these alternative certainties; Bliss's reading [i:ɔ], whatever its phonemic status, would also be an important possibility.<sup>45</sup> For convenience, I read /i(:)ɔ/.

After /i(:)ɔ/ and /e(:)ɔ/ merged, the late West Saxon *Schriftsprache* of course used the digraph <eo> rather than <io>. This suggests that the phonetic process behind the merger was the falling of /i(:)ɔ/, at least in the dialect on which the *Schriftsprache* was based, although the preference for <eo> might simply reflect the greater frequency of /e(:)ɔ/ in the language,<sup>46</sup> leading to the promotion of the more common digraph. However, /i(:)ɔ/ > /e(:)ɔ/ is also suggested by the fact that the reflex of the diphthong in Middle English was almost always of mid articulation.<sup>47</sup> It is evident, however, that the late West Saxon *Schriftsprache* was not representative of the whole of the southwest, nor even, despite the common coinage 'Winchester usage', based on Winchester's dialect.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, Veronica Smart, while ruling out the form <LIOF-> for conventional *leof* as representative of many moneyers' dialects due to centralised die production, nonetheless found that 'Cnut's first type workshops in Chichester,

<sup>43</sup> R. Lass, *Old English: a Historical Linguistic Companion* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 50–1 for diphthong height harmony; p. 68 for quotation.

<sup>44</sup> Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.155.

<sup>45</sup> Bliss, 'Long Diphthongs'.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.155; d'Ardenne 192–3.

<sup>48</sup> Kitson, 'Dialect Distributions', p. 45 and nn. 19–21, with refs.

Lewes and Winchester also produced a few dies with this variant [ʃc. <LIOF->], suggesting that as far west as Winchester *Liof* represented an acceptable spelling of this element' in the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>49</sup>

The <LIOF-> spellings might be taken to reflect influence from the differing process of diphthongal merging in the south-east, where /e:o, i:o/ became <io> and /eo, io/ became <eo>. This evidence in part led Bliss to argue that /e:o/ rose to [i:o], and subsequently coalesced with /i:o/.<sup>50</sup> The argument certainly helped him to explain the Middle English development of Old English /e:ow/ > Middle English /iu/, rather than to /eu/ or /eu/, but in view of the data presented above, it cannot be accepted straightforwardly for the south-west. Only *yroda* and *crywelæ* seem to derive from /e:o/; and *yroda*, if it does show /y:/, would plausibly show the Kentish raising of /e:o/. The origins of \**crēowel* are unclear, and its value seems uncertain. On the basis of Old Frisian *crawil*, proto-Old English \**crawil* should have become \**crewel* by i-mutation, and *creowel* by the vocalisation of /-w-/ , with the lengthening of /e/ seen in \**cnew* > *cnēo(w)*.<sup>51</sup> However, a high vowel origin, and etymological long vowel, is hinted at by Old English *crīm*, 'a bend'. There is not space here to pursue this problem fully; we may simply note for present purposes that there is little sign of confusion between /e:o/ and /i:o/ derivations in the <y, u> forms. This surely implies that the <y, u> forms here show the monophthongisation of /i:o/ to /y:/, just as /e:o/ monophthongised to /ø:/, a necessary corollary being that at

<sup>49</sup> V. Smart, 'Die-Cutting and Diatopic Variation: the Variant <LIOF-> on Late Anglo-Saxon Coins', *Evidence for Old English: Material and Theoretical Bases for Reconstruction*, ed. F. Colman, Edinburgh Studies in the Eng. Language 2 (Edinburgh, 1992), 169–77, at 176.

<sup>50</sup> Bliss, 'Long Diphthongs', pp. 82–4.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Hogg, *Phonology*, §3.19; contra Smith, *Place-Name Elements*, I, 112.

the time of monophthongisation, /i:o/ and /e:o/ were still distinct.

According to standard accounts of Old English, /i:o/ and /e:o/ were merging in the south west at the time of the earliest West Saxon texts, around the end of the ninth century. However, if this were the case in the types of speech producing /y:/ reflexes, we would expect to see <y> for /i:o/ much earlier than we do. Instead, we must accept the implications of Smart's numismatic record, that /i:o/ was a variant in some dialects or registers of south-western speech into the eleventh century, and hypothesise moreover that these instances of /i:o/ were not due to a process like that in the south-east, of the wholesale raising of long mid diphthongs, but to conservative phonology. It would cause no great difficulty to scribes to transcribe the two phonemes /i:o, e:o/ with one graph <eo> (much as they transcribed the two phonemes /e:o, eo/ with one graph), but to write <eo> for /y:/ when that sound was normally represented by a different graph would be very counter-intuitive. Thus <io> disappeared from the written record even in dialects where /i:o/ survived, while a reflex /y:/ produced by the monophthongisation of /i:o/ sporadically appeared.

The other context for <y> forms is of course /eor/; these forms rarely derive from /io/ (infrequency of /io/ in Old English may account for its dearth in the dataset: but note Corpus 145 *lurny*). The shortness of the vowel corresponds with the fact that in Old English (and generally) short vowels were more prone to being affected by their contexts than were long vowels (as in i-mutation and breaking); but the context itself is problematic. As Hogg wrote when arguing that <y> represented the lax [ɪ(:)] in words like *rybt*, 'It is difficult to suppose that a preceding /r/ could have had the effect of rounding which we may assume for preceding /w/, for where /r/ has any phonological effect in OE it is usually one of retraction and/or

lowering.<sup>52</sup> Such a tendency may be observed in, for example, modern Spanish, where the openness of the trill /r/ tends to cause lowering of adjacent vowels.<sup>53</sup> Hogg's statement might be questioned, insofar as /r/ does not seem particularly associated with lowering; indeed, the context /weor/ regularly developed to /wur/ in West Saxon, where /r/ is a necessary component in raising. Likewise, breaking in the context /-rC/ (amongst others) originally involved the introduction of the high rounded /u/. In any case, even if the paradox implied by Hogg's claim is real, it is of a sort well known in Old English phonology. It is reminiscent, for example, of the disjunction between breaking and Anglian smoothing. In Anglian smoothing, /r, l/ + velar caused monophthongisation where at an earlier period the very same context caused breaking. This difficulty is probably to be explained by changes in the quality of velars, but it is interesting that /r/ is involved. The quality of /r/ may have changed also after the time of breaking; a close palatal /r/, for example, is perfectly conceivable, and can be heard in some dialects of Edinburgh. The late West Saxon development of *sel-* > *syl-* (thus *syf*, *syllan*, *syllic* < *seldlic*) is also relevant. Campbell assumed that this was a change related to palatal diphthongisation (*self* > *sielf* > *syf*),<sup>54</sup> and this is reasonable enough; but even if we read <y> here, with Hogg, as [I(:)],<sup>55</sup> we must still reckon with a raising of /e/ in a context otherwise associated with breaking (/ -IC/), the product of which Middle English orthography seems to show to have merged with /y/ (cf. n. 2 above).

Relevant also are the early and frequent forms *byrht*/*bryht* and *byrn*/*bryn* for etymological *beorht* and *beorn* in personal names, first appearing at the start of the tenth century. 'In the course of the 10<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>52</sup> Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.170.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. T. Navarro Tomás, *Manual de la Pronunciación Española* (Madrid, 1918), §53.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §325.

<sup>55</sup> Hogg, *Phonology*, §§5.164–5, 170.

this variant gains ground rapidly and tends to supersede *Beorht*.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, these words were excluded as a special case from the general search for <y> for conventional <eo>. The spellings might in theory be ascribed to palatal umlaut of metathesised *breoht* (*breoht* > *\*brieht* > *bryht*), or palatal umlaut acting through the /r/ of *beorht*, but this prospect has never been favoured. Campbell went so far to avoid it as to suppose a 'special development' of *beor-* to *byr-* in names.<sup>57</sup> In view of the evidence discussed, it seems more likely that these forms represent the earliest evidence for the proposed change /eor/ > /yr/. As noted above, it is not surprising to find an innovation attested earliest and most fully among personal names. Perhaps the change began in the context /beor/, or /Leor/, progressing in time, if sporadically, to /eor/ (cf. *dyrce*, c. 1000).

These explanations suggest two distinct sound changes, though their forces may at times have overlapped. Thus, *byferes*, with a short vowel, lacks an /-r/ context, but does derive from /io/; given the rarity of /io/ in Old English, it might be taken as sufficient evidence for the maintenance of /io/ as well as /i:o/ in some forms of speech, likewise monophthongising to /y/. Conversely, one might also perceive a tendency for /y:/ to appear in the context of /r/: of the thirteen relevant lexemes in Tables 2 and 3, seven show /r/ contexts; all of the six west Midland forms in note 4 do so. None of those are breaking contexts, which implies that the bias towards /r/ forms is due to something other than the causal relationship of /-rC/ with diphthongisation. This perhaps suggests that /i:o/ was less likely to fall to /e:o/ in the context of /r/, though one would not wish to press the idea. We may guess that the change /beor-/ > /byr-/ was underway before /i:o/ > /y:/. This is suggested by the late ninth

<sup>56</sup> von Feilitzen, *Pre-Conquest Names*, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, *Grammar*, §304, n.1; cf. von Feilitzen, *Pre-Conquest Names*, p. 62.

century occurrence of /byr-/ forms in personal names (where, for example, we see no instance of *Lyf*- for *Liof*-), whereas /i:ɔ/ > /y:/ is first securely attested in 960 (S684). Unfortunately, only one Old English text, WR, attests to both changes at once; here, the forms *hyrt* and *gedyrfe* attest to /eor/ > /yr/, and *dryri* to /i:ɔ/ > /y:/ before the end of Old English orthography, but no more can be said of them.

Serjeantson was right, then, to interpret Middle English <u> spellings as /y(:)/ reflexes of conventional Old English <eo>, though her idea that it might represent a raising of /ø(:)/ seems unlikely: we may perceive instead the two developments /eor/ > /yr/ and /i:ɔ/ > /y:/. Perhaps a stage /ø/ was present in /eor/ > /yr/, but that development seems to have begun some time before we would expect to find /eo/ > /ø/, by the end of the ninth century. It seems clear that /i:ɔ/ survived much longer in the south west than the literary record would suggest, and was being monophthongised to /y:/, if only sporadically, by the mid-tenth century. The patchy occurrence of these forms in the textual record cannot be attributed to variation across space: the material of the Vespasian Psalter and its descendants in AB language show no hint of them, but HC shows /i:ɔ/ > /y:/ in the same area in the eleventh, if not the tenth, century. We must reckon, surely, on register of speech suppressed in the textual record by a more prestigious variety, more innovative in respect of the loss of high diphthongs, but less so regarding /eor/ > /yr/; in Hampshire, this alternative register seems to have been sufficiently acceptable to receive reasonably extensive representation in the textual record. The reflexes of both these developments remained in Middle English until the loss of rounded vowels themselves.<sup>58</sup>

This much having been established, further research might examine other issues and material which have not been addressed

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Serjeantson, 'Dialectal Distribution', p. 194.

here. The corpus of Old English coin inscriptions might shed further light on the sound changes, and those developments might equally elucidate some linguistic issues in the coin corpus. At the other end of the development's attested history, further examination of the Middle English evidence would also be productive. We might determine more precisely than did Serjeantson the extent of each sound change, both in the lexicon and in space. For example, Serjeantson found *-true*, *Hurt-* and *Dup(e)-* in Lancashire, but no <u> forms to the south in Cheshire or north Shropshire, a gap in the distribution map which LALME dot map 738 (*urth*, *vrth*) partly rectifies, as do the forms *burne* and *rudde* in London, BL Cotton Nero A. x, whose language is from Cheshire.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, *Hurthull*, recorded in Derbyshire in 1272, suggests more easterly extremes for the developments.<sup>60</sup> However, these additional forms suggest only /eor/ > /yr/ this far north, despite the late attestation of the distinction between <io> and <eo> in Northumbria,<sup>61</sup> and the extent to which the two developments for which I argue overlapped in space, and how far they may have been related to each other, or to other developments with similar Old and Middle English distributions, such as <ie> > <y>, would be worth pursuing.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> LALME, III, 37 (LP 26).

<sup>60</sup> K. Cameron, *The Place-Names of Derbyshire*, 3 vols., EPNS 27 (Cambridge, 1959), I, 108.

<sup>61</sup> Hogg, *Phonology*, §5.159.

<sup>62</sup> I owe thanks to several for their helpful comments and other assistances regarding this paper: those who asked questions and made comments at the conference; Simon Horobin, Katie Lowe, Paul Bibire, Jon Coe, Meg Laing and Beth Fox.



## Appendix

<i>Manuscript and reference</i>	<i>Date</i>
Marquess of Bath, Longleat, 39. S371.	MS s. xiv Charter 904 (suspect)
Exeter, D.C., 2522. S684.	MS s. x <sup>med</sup> Charter 960
BL Harley 436. S766.	MS s. xiv Charter 968
Harley Glossary, BL Harley 3376. <sup>A</sup>	s. x/xi
BL Cotton Tib. A. xiii. S55.	MS s. xi <sup>1</sup> Charter 757
BL Cotton Tib. A. xiii, fo. 83. S1338. fo. 159. S1338.	MS s. xi <sup>1</sup> Charter 978 MS s. xi <sup>2</sup> Charter 978
Exeter, D.C., 2530. S1547.	?s. xi <sup>1</sup>
Aldhelm Fragments, Yale University, MS 401. <sup>B</sup>	MS s. x <sup>2</sup> Glosses s. xi
BL Stowe Ch. 40. S981.	MS ?s. xi <sup>1</sup> Charter undated (suspect)
Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Misc. 636. <sup>C</sup>	MS s. xii <sup>1</sup> Annal 1048 ( <i>recte</i> 1051)
Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.1.23. <sup>D</sup>	s. xi <sup>med</sup>
BL Cotton Ch. viii. 11. S540	MS s. xi <sup>2</sup> Charter 948 (probably forged)

<i>Place</i>	<i>Attested form, etymon, and MnE reflex or equivalent</i>
MS Glastonbury, Somerset. Bounds Somerset.	<b>wryng</b> < wrio, 'twisting'
Bounds Cornwall.	<b>hryd worwig</b> < hriod, 'reed'
Beneficiaries Wilton Abbey, Wilts. Bounds Wilts.	<b>Dyre broc</b> < dior, 'deer'
'Probably from the west of England'. <sup>E</sup>	<b>dyrc</b> < deorc, 'dark'
Bounds Warwicks.	<b>rydmædwan</b> < hriod, 'reed'
MS and bounds Worcester. MS and bounds Worcester.	<b>Rydemæreleage</b> < hriod-, 'reed' <b>Rudmerlega</b> < hriod-, 'reed'
Bounds Devon.	<b>dyra snæd</b> < dior, 'deer'
South Eastern (dialect).	<b>yroda</b> < eored, 'troop'
Beneficiary Christ Church, Canterbury. Bounds Kent.	<b>Lyfwine</b> < liof-, 'love'
MS Peterborough; annal refers to Beverstone, Gloucs.	<b>Byferes stane</b> < biofor, 'beaver'
'Perhaps from Winchcombe' (Gloucs.). <sup>F</sup>	<b>cnywv</b> [ <i>leg. cnyw</i> ] < cniow, 'knee'
Beneficiary church of SS Peter and Paul, Winchester. Bounds Wilts.	<b>dyre broc</b> < dior, 'deer'

<i>Manuscript and Reference</i>	<i>Date</i>
BL Add. 15350 (Codex Wintoniensis). S229, 275, 393, 540 (5 boundary clauses/ charters on consecutive folios). S378.	MS ?1130 × 1150 All spurious or dubious claiming to be s. vii to 948. Charter 909 (suspect)
S585.	Charter 956
S820.	Charter 973 × 974
S970.	Charter 1033
S1009.	Charter 1045
BL Cotton Claudius D. iii (Wintency Benedictine Rule). 27.2, 69.7; 3.6, 7.2, 7.5, 17.34, 25.5; 5.21, 23.23, 41.20, 77.15, 131.34. 79.14  19.29  7.5  13.14, 21.1  9.12  127.7  5.12	s. xii <sup>1</sup> . <sup>G</sup>
Brussels, 8558–63, f. 80 <sup>r</sup> . <sup>H</sup>	MS ?s. viii Gloss unknown

<i>Place</i>	<i>Attested form, etymon, and MnE reflex or equivalent</i>
MS Winchester Bounds Wilts. Bounds Hants.  Bounds Wilts.  Bounds Hants.  Bounds Hants.  Bounds Hants.	<b>dyre broc</b> < dior, 'deer' <b>ullan crywelæ</b> < *crēowel, 'fork in road or river' <b>hrud wylle</b> < hrīod, 'reed' <b>dupan furh</b> < diop, 'deep' <b>Godwine urlæ</b> < eorl, 'earl' <b>Godwine yrle</b> < eorl, 'earl'
Wintency, Hants. Exemplar closely related to BL Cotton Titus A. iv, possibly from Winchester. <sup>I</sup>	<b>(-)hyrt(-); (-)hurt(-); (-)hert(-)</b> < heorte, 'heart'  <b>gedyrfe</b> < gedeorf, 'labour' <b>dryri</b> < drīorig, 'dreary' <b>dufel</b> < diofol, 'devil' <b>bup</b> < biop, 'are' <b>leafluht</b> < lioht, 'light, not heavy' <b>mæsseprustes</b> < Lat. presbyter; cf. early West Saxon -prīost, 'priest' <b>ysun</b> < gesēon 'see'
Unknown	<b>dryrinese</b> < drīorig 'dreary'

Notes to Appendix

<sup>A</sup> *The Harley Latin–Old English Glossary: Edited from British Museum Harley 3376*, ed. R. T. Oliphant (The Hague, 1966), p. 153.

<sup>B</sup> Napier, p. 175.

<sup>C</sup> Plummer, *Saxon Chronicles*, I, 174.

<sup>D</sup> *Der Cambridger Psalter*, ed. K. Wildhagen, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 7 (Darmstadt, 1910), p. 285.

<sup>E</sup> Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 313.

<sup>F</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>G</sup> *Ibid.* p. xix.

<sup>H</sup> O. B. Schlutter, 'Anglo-Saxonica', *Anglia* 32 (1909), 503–15, at 513.

<sup>I</sup> Gretsche, 'Winteneý-Version', pp. 323–8.

<sup>J</sup> Cf. H. Sweet, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 2 vols., EETS 45 (London, 1871–2) I, 7; Plummer, *Saxon Chronicles*, I, 34.

Emerging from the 'Horizon of Expectations':  
the Evolutionary Quality of the Sagas  
of Icelanders and Serbian Epic Poetry

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And when they had fought for a very long time, Bjarni said to Thorstein, 'I'm thirsty now, for I am less used to hard work than you are.' 'Then go to the brook,' said Thorstein, 'and drink.' ... 'A lot is going wrong for me today,' said Bjarni; 'Now my shoelace has come untied.' ... Then Bjarni chopped Thorstein's entire shield away from him, and Thorstein chopped Bjarni's away from him. 'Now you're swinging,' said Bjarni. Thorstein answered, 'You did not deal a lighter blow.' Bjarni said, 'The same weapon you had earlier today is biting harder for you now.' Thorstein said, 'I would save myself from a mishap if I could and I fight in fear of you. I am still willing to submit entirely to your judgement.'<sup>1</sup>

Bogdan stood at the vineyard's edge:  
When he took in Marko's black eyes,  
the warlike glare in them,  
Bogdan's legs froze underneath him.  
Marko is looking at Bogdan the Fierce,  
Bogdan is looking at Kraljević Marko.  
None dares make a move on the other;  
A long while later, spoke Bogdan the Fierce:  
'Come, Marko, let's make up:  
Release my twelve retainers,  
and I'll let Relja and Miloš go.'

<sup>1</sup> A. Maxwell, 'The Tale of Thorstein Staff-struck', in *The Sagas of Icelanders: a Selection*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (London, 2000), pp. 677–84, at 681–2.

Marko could hardly wait to hear this...  
They sat and started drinking red wine.<sup>2</sup>

Remote as it may be, there still exists a possibility that a Varangian guard<sup>3</sup> met or even befriended his equivalent among Serbian emissaries to Constantinople. His new friend might have been a gifted guslar,<sup>4</sup> and he could have heard him perform at the court; while the Varangian himself might have been an engaging narrator and let the Serb have the taste of the Icelandic storytelling. We have to assume of course that they somehow understood each other sufficiently to appreciate the exchange. Beyond this highly hypothetical situation, it is hardly conceivable that the two peoples ever heard of each other during the Middle Ages, and that they engaged in a direct cultural exchange would require some serious stretching of imagination. Yet *Íslendingasögur* (sagas of Icelanders) and *srpske junačke narodne pesme* (heroic folk songs of Serbia) display some intriguing similarities in terms of their historical, ethical and poetic concerns.

The fact alone that some shared features exist between Icelandic sagas and Serbian epic poems may come as no great surprise despite their unrelatedness, especially after the scholarly work of comparatists such as Zhirmunsky<sup>5</sup> who established similarities among medieval

<sup>2</sup> Marko Kraljević and Bogdan the Fierce, in *Srpske Narodne Pesme*, ed. V. S. Karadžić, (Belgrade, 1976) II, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Varangian guards were a prestigious order of mercenaries employed by Byzantine emperors primarily consisting of Scandinavians – Icelanders among them.

<sup>4</sup> A guslar was a bard who would perform an epic song using a special one-stringed instrument called a 'gusle'. Today, guslari are the people who play gusle and sing an epic song that they learnt by heart. Unlike the former, they do not create, they reproduce. For more on guslari, see A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> V. M. Zhirmunsky, 'On the Study of Comparative Literature', *Oxford Slavonic*

heroic literatures far beyond a narrow Indo-European context, pointing to the parallelism in the stages of social development as the key to the parallelisms in literatures. If Turkic and Mongolian epics have so much in common with Russian epic lays and with famous European medieval epics such as *Beowulf*, *The Song of Roland* and the *Nibelungenlied*, why is it surprising if two 'small' European literatures do too? For all their apparent unrelatedness to each other, they are likely to have shared mutual influences. The parallels between, for example, the *Nibelungenlied* and the sagas are much more obvious, both being of Germanic origin, sharing a tradition, sometimes even subject matter. In turn, Zhirmunsky refers to Vaillant as someone who had made a plausible case for tracing the origins of Serbian epics to French *chansons de geste*. As a result, a vast body of scholarly work dealing with parallelisms between the sagas or Serbian epic poems and the great European epics has been produced. But, no research that would look at the sagas and the Serbian epics has been conducted as yet. Instead, without an apparent awareness of their respective fields, both Icelandic and South-Slav academic communities draw attention to certain 'unique' qualities of the sagas of Icelanders or Serbian epic poetry. Hence, we have Peter Foote pointing to the sagas' 'unique blend of pagan inheritance and Christian acquisition',<sup>6</sup> and at the same time Svetozar Koljević noting that it is 'the different social and spiritual settings of pagan and Christian, feudal and village life' that 'gives the Serbo-Croat oral epic material its unique interest'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, while Jane Smiley states that '[t]ypical saga style bespeaks an agricultural world'<sup>8</sup> and Robert

*Papers* 13 (1967), 1–13.

<sup>6</sup> P. Foote, 'An Essay on the Saga of Gisli and Its Icelandic Background', in G. Johnston, *The Saga of Gisli* (London, 1963), pp. 93–134, at 99.

<sup>7</sup> S. Koljević, *The Epic in the Making* (Oxford, 1980), p. vii.

<sup>8</sup> J. Smiley, 'Preface', *Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, pp. ix–xiv, at xi.

Kellogg perceives the sagas as 'a narrative art which aspires to counterfeit reality',<sup>9</sup> Mary Coote insists that 'the involvement of heroic songs with daily life gives them air of realism and historicity that distinguishes the Serbocroatian heroic songs from other traditions'.<sup>10</sup> Both Theodore Andersson<sup>11</sup> and Jovan Brkić<sup>12</sup> in their own ways describe the changes that heroic ideal underwent in the sagas of Icelanders and Serbian epic poems in terms of democratisation of honour.

Unique qualities?

It is at this deeper level that the most intriguing similarities between the sagas of Icelanders and Serbian epic poems are to be found. These similarities go beyond shared motifs, themes and basic plots (possibly ascribable to common influences); they concern the sagas' and the epic poems' treatment of the subject matter, the shared underlying creative currents, principal ideologies and relatively analogous socio-political circumstances that had made heroic literature acutely relevant to the two cultures for a prolonged period of time, long after what is known as the 'Heroic Age' had passed for the rest of the Europe. In particular, comparison of the epic songs' and the sagas' characters reveals a significant evolutionary trend, not present in earlier medieval epics such as *Beowulf*, *The Song of Roland* or the *Nibelungenlied*. In essence, this trend reflects increasing appreciation of the multifaceted nature of social and historical

<sup>9</sup> R. Kellogg, 'Introduction', *Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson, pp. xv–liv, at xxix.

<sup>10</sup> M. Coote, 'Serbocroatian Heroic Songs', *Heroic Epic and Saga: an Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics*, ed. F. J. Oinas (Bloomington, IN, 1978), pp. 257–85, at 261.

<sup>11</sup> T. M. Andersson, 'The Displacement of the Heroic Ideal in the Family Sagas', *Speculum* 45 (1970), 575–93.

<sup>12</sup> J. Brkić, *Moral Concepts in Traditional Serbian Epic Poetry* (The Hague, 1961).

realities. A comparative treatment of the sagas and the Serbian epics could yet prove a fertile ground.

There is a scene in *Thorstein Staff-struck* in which the hero and Bjarni of Hof have a most unlikely duel. After being endlessly egged on by his valiant old father, Thorstein kills Thord, the man who had given him the shameful nickname. Bjarni, with whom the responsibility to avenge his horse-carl (Thord) rests, is not too easily moved into action. He successfully resists the provocations of his two scoundrel servants, but it is his wife's nagging that he cannot ignore, and he finally sets off to meet Thorstein. What complicates this situation further is the fact that the two men respect and fear each other. Bjarni is too old to fight duels, and Thorstein is unwilling to draw the wrath of Bjarni's many powerful relatives, all for the sake of an overbearing troublemaker whom nobody liked anyway. The heroes find themselves trapped between the rigidity of the inherited heroic code that commands vengeance regardless of the absurdity of the situation, and their loyalty and reverence for this same code. The result is the humorous scene of the duel in which the fighting is frequently stopped in order for Bjarni to tie his shoe-thong, or tend to his blunt sword and so on, until the two finally agree that, as a form of an atonement, Thorstein had better take Thord's place in Bjarni's household. And the matter is settled.

There is a similar scene in the Serbian epic poem *Marko Kraljević and Bogdan the Fierce*. Marko advises his blood-brothers not to ride through the vineyards of Bogdan the Fierce, but they reproach him, in the manner of the heroic code, saying that it is better to die than retreat. When infuriated Bogdan arrives with his twelve retainers, Marko gives his two blood-brothers a choice: either they could take on Bogdan alone, or they could attack his twelve men. Forgetting their former boasting, the two of them, rather unheroically, decide to fight Bogdan alone, but he proves to be a tougher choice. He captures

them as easily as Marko does the twelve retainers. But now, after the dynamic action in which both heroes show themselves worthy and skilled warriors, Marko and Bogdan are finally left alone, looking at each other. Their whole duel is of a psychological nature, happening through their glances: 'Marko is looking at Bogdan the Fierce,/ Bogdan is looking at Kraljević Marko,/ None dares make a move on the other.'<sup>13</sup> It is only after a while, realising that nobody is winning this staring contest, that they decide to exchange the captives and have some wine.

These two scenes well encapture the change in the portrayal of a hero in Icelandic sagas and Serbian epic poems, from the warrior ideal of the uncompromising assertion of one's prestige, to a more flexible and pragmatic, more unpredictable and complex, more democratic, or popular ideal. Heroes such as Beowulf, Roland, Grettir the Strong and Marko Kraljević all seem to occupy the same context of medieval epic literature, yet the differences in crafting the former two and the latter two characters are profound. Although all of them share some basic features (super-human strength, courage and pride), Beowulf and Roland are markedly more deterministic, single-minded, unbending and, therefore, more one-dimensional. I do not wish to suggest that the authors of *Beowulf* or *The Song of Roland* used a strictly black-and-white palette while creating their characters. Beowulf and Roland are, of course, heroes *par excellence*, but they are not conceived as flawless. During his eulogy upon Beowulf's slaying of Grendel's mother, King Hrothgar finds it necessary to warn the young Geat about the dangers of pride and hunger for power. Similarly, Roland's arrogance and haughtiness are bitterly reprimanded by his ever-faithful Oliver. Close as he may be to the gods, a hero is

<sup>13</sup> *Marko Kraljević and Bogdan the Fierce*, in *Srpske Narodne Pesme*, ed. Karadžić, I, 163.

still human: he is vulnerable and faulty. This is recognised by the creators of *Beowulf* and *The Song of Roland*.

We could hardly though imagine Beowulf (or Roland) sitting in a tavern, drinking wine with his horse, and (at least for a while) patiently receiving his enemy's blows, laughing them off with the words: 'Stop disturbing the fleas in my fur!';<sup>14</sup> or in a slapstick erotic situation in which a maid stares at his unimpressive loins, wondering jocundly at the disproportion of what she sees and the greatness of the hero.<sup>15</sup> These scenes do not befit *Beowulf*. They are not that frequent in the sagas and the Serbian epics either, but for all their extremity, they do nothing to belittle the kind of heroism that Marko Kraljević and Grettir the Strong stand for. Not for a moment does the audience doubt that Marko will have the head of Filip the Hungarian by the end of the poem, and Grettir's narrator is unnecessarily cautious when he ends the episode with the servant girl by immediately swerving the attention of the audience and stressing (the insistence itself having almost a comical effect) that 'when it became known that Grettir had swum four miles, everyone thought his valour was outstanding both on land and on sea'.<sup>16</sup> These excursions into areas beyond the narrow context of the traditional heroism produce fuller, more palpable personalities with features that do not always harmoniously complement each other, but rather clash or are left without final definition.

Marko and Grettir match Beowulf's prowess but have more apparent flaws (Marko's violent rashness, the stain of his vassal bondage; Grettir's arrogance and cruel disposition). At the same time, Marko and Grettir possess some nobler qualities than Beowulf.

<sup>14</sup> *Marko Kraljević and Filip the Hungarian*, in *Srpske Narodne Pesme*, ed. Karadžić, II, 255.

<sup>15</sup> D. Fox and Hermann Pálsson, *Grettir's Saga* (Toronto, 1974), pp. 154–5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155.

Despite his unmatched strength, Grettir is a relatively moderate man who knows his limitations. He can fight up to four people at one time: not more if there is a choice, he says. In terms of heroic literature, where single-handed heroes kill enemies in their hundreds, this estimate is more than modest. Beowulf's mission in Denmark can be perceived as that of mercy mainly in terms of the convenient circumstance. His main motive is to prove his own worth ('inspired again by the thought of glory')<sup>17</sup> and to firmly establish himself as a hero, a prince and a leader. Marko, on the other hand, rarely fights to test and display his strength in pursuit of personal prosperity. He is the champion of the weak and helpless, and can easily be moved to tears by the suffering of another, be it a human or an animal. Finally, evident from the above scenes, both Marko and Grettir are given a sense of humour and wit: a quality that heroes of the earlier epics rarely possess, and when they do, as is the case with Archbishop Turpin in *Roland*, it is usually directed at the expense of the enemy ('The news for you is, you are dead').<sup>18</sup> What distinguishes Grettir and Marko is the fact that they are capable of being the butt of the joke too. Although in many ways Grettir and Marko fall short of the kind of nobility and heroic determinism we encounter in the earlier medieval epic models, at the same time, they are graced with some unparalleled characteristics: they are aware of their limitations and they do not take themselves too seriously; their integrity is not threatened by an occasional joke at their expense; and for all their hasty temper, they are capable of exquisite gentility and are able to appreciate virtues in others, friends and foes alike.

The saga authors and the epic singers create less deterministic, more complex and multilayered characters than their predecessors.

<sup>17</sup> S. Heaney, *Beowulf* (London, 1999), p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> C. H. Sisson, *The Song of Roland* (Manchester, 1983), p. 52.

The reason for this may be sought in the fact that the socio-political circumstances (the Turkish invasion and subjugation of Serbia, and Iceland's subordination to Norway) had produced fertile soil for the continuation of the relevance of the heroic literature. The extraordinary changes that kept transforming Western Europe during this span of time have not been experienced by the Serbs. Serbia's position as a vassal state and later a part of the extremely conservative Ottoman Empire for nearly five centuries, meant that a Serb 'from the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century did not differ much from his ancient ancestors'.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Denton Fox and Hermann Pálsson note that 'life in the eleventh-century Iceland was in many ways very similar to life in fourteenth-century, or even eighteenth-century, Iceland'.<sup>20</sup> This, however, does not mean that the cultural development of these two peoples remained stationary or repetitious. It is precisely because of such historical circumstances, precisely because the two peoples facing the threat of cultural assimilation attempted to draw safe boundaries around their identities, that the heroic genre thrived and developed there longer than elsewhere in Europe.

Although both cultures did follow the European literary fashions of the day, epic was still the dominant form of literary expression. Chivalric, courtly literature, romance, fabliaux were translated and adapted, they also influenced some of the sagas (*Gunnlaug's saga*, for example, or the end of *Grettir's saga*) and the poems that Vuk Karadžić<sup>21</sup> had difficulty classifying (such as *Death of Omer and Merima*

<sup>19</sup> V. Đuric, 'Srpskohrvatska Narodna Epika', *Antologija Narodnih Junačkih Pesama*, ed. V. Đuric, 13th ed. (Belgrade, 1990), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> D. Fox and Hermann Pálsson, 'A Note on the Social and Legal Background of the Saga', in their *Grettir's Saga*, pp. 193–5 at 193.

<sup>21</sup> Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) was the nineteenth-century reformer of the Serbian language. The discrepancy between the official written language



or *Death of Ive and Jelina*). The original Icelandic romances<sup>22</sup> were created too, but started enjoying a remarkable popularity in Iceland as late as the fifteenth century, after the ripple effect of the turbulent Sturlung Age had relatively calmed, and the society restructured itself under Norwegian rule. Up till then the heroic genre had persisted for more than two centuries longer than in other European countries and developed its autochthonous character.

As far as the Serbian medieval literature is concerned, after the fall of the last ruling dynasty (Branković) in 1458, there were no courts left to appreciate and nurture courtly literature. With the complete subjection of Serbia, once lively monastic culture, culture that had developed its distinct style of hagiographical writing, was left to scrape its existence from the good will of the impoverished peasantry. The struggle with the subjugator and the threat of cultural assimilation have brought the heroic literature to the fore.<sup>23</sup> As this state of affairs persisted for nearly five centuries, the genre had to reinvent itself, it moved away from the models inherited from the Heroic Age.

Describing the specificity of *Nibelungenlied*'s twofold structure, Hatto notes that its poet was 'standing at the hinge of old and new',<sup>24</sup>

(‘Slavenoserbski’) that only a minority of people could use and the one that everyone spoke was great, and it was this self-taught scholar who won the battle for the people’s language and the phonetic principle: ‘write as you speak, read as it is written’. He was the first to systematically collect Serbian folk literature. Goethe and the brothers Grimm admired his work. Goethe had even learned the language to enjoy the literature in the original and to translate it, while the Grimms gave Vuk some advice concerning the way of collecting and editing the material.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London, 1934).

<sup>23</sup> See S. Koljević, *The Epic in the Making* (Oxford, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> A. T. Hatto, ‘An Introduction to a Second Reading’, in his *Nibelungenlied* (London, 1969), p. 347.

trying to adapt the old, crude (from the chivalric perspective) heroic material to suit the tastes of the twelfth-century audience. However, like oil and water, the heroic and romance mixture is never completely harmonised and the whole epic resonates in two distinct voices. Saga authors and Serbian bards also found themselves ‘standing at the hinge of old and new’, but ‘the new’ was of an evolutionary rather than revolutionary character: the change did not come from the outside but rather, it happened within the heroic genre. A transgression against the established *horizon of expectations* occurred. In terms of ideology, this evolutionary trend manifests itself through re-evaluation of basic concepts such as ‘heroic code’ and honour, and in terms of poetics, through spicing the traditionally ‘high’ epic genre (in Aristotelian terms) with the ‘low’ genres of comedy and satire. As we have glimpsed in the example of Marko and Grettir, this results in a more layered, rather than deterministic, representation of the characters and the world around them.

In comparison with earlier heroic literature, Icelandic sagas and Serbian epic poetry are hugely democratised genres. They appealed to audiences across the societies’ layers, the borders between these layers not too sharp themselves.<sup>25</sup> This situation allows for the realism of everyday life to creep in. As much as heroes need to stay heroes, models of physical strength and moral integrity, they are only partially idealised and also had to resemble the peasant audience in order to be identifiable with and hence relevant. Icelandic heroes such as Egil, Gunnar, and Gisli could all be seen engaging in manual labour, cultivating their farms. Celebrated Serbian outlaws are ex-peasants who often relate stories of hard toil before they were forced to

<sup>25</sup> See P. Meulengracht Sørensen, *Saga and Society: an Introduction to Old Norse Literature* (Odense, 1993); also Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age* (Reykjavík, 1998).

outlawry by Turkish oppression. Although the values of the age gone by were perpetuated in principle, at the same time the crucial concepts such as honour and heroic code have broadened and underwent thorough revisions. These changes sprout from within the society that is described, the critique of the rigidity in the inherited code does not come from the 'outside', as a result of the authorial superior perspective, or, as Andersson perceives these changes, they are not so much a product of the replacement of a pagan ideal with a Christian ideal as 'the replacement of a warrior ideal with a social ideal'.<sup>26</sup> Icelandic sagas differentiate between plain pride and the maintenance of personal/ family integrity, both belonging to different ends of the term's spectrum of meaning. Consequently, temperance and moderation are the characteristics of a hero preferred to uncompromising self-assertion, showmanship of prowess and blind thirst for revenge as the only way of re-establishing one's stained honour. Jovan Brkić notes that Serbian 'patriarchal society inherited ideas about personal honour and dignity from the feudal society, but it struck off all class distinctions connected with them'.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the fact of vassalage created a new dimension to the concept, as the maintenance of one's honour from the position of a subject had to be fundamentally different from the maintenance of one's honour from the position of power. In both Icelandic sagas and Serbian epic poetry, the concept of honour is not a monolithic structure, but rather a complex, with a great variety of shades.

Not only do we encounter a range of honourable behaviour across the saga literature and the epic songs of Serbia, but sometimes this range tends to reside within one character, adding to his tangibility. If, while in Norway, Hrut (*Njal's saga*) behaves like a gallant

<sup>26</sup> Andersson, 'Displacement', p. 592.

<sup>27</sup> Brkić, *Moral Concepts*, p. 106.

courtier and in his dealings with pestering Vikings he somewhat resembles the hero of the 'olden' times, once back in Iceland he succumbs to Gunnar's challenge about Unn's dowry without a fight. He is a hero, but also a tired aging man who does not stand a chance. Similarly, the first thing that strikes us about the character of Miloš Obilić of the Kosovo cycle is how perfectly he adheres to the old heroic ideal. A faithful retainer slandered before his lord, he vows to kill the Turkish sultan and fulfilling the task he sacrifices his own life. However, this stainless portrayal is, if not slightly compromised, then rendered more complex by another poem of the same cycle – *Kosančić Ivan's Spying of the Turks*. There, Miloš displays some doubt in the very lord he is making the ultimate sacrifice for: he decides to present a false report to him about Turkish forces in fear that the genuine one would affect the morale of the army and his master. Not even these heroes that in the sagas and Serbian epics come closest to the old heroic ideals are given the option for morally simple choices.

Although honour is often more valued than life in the sagas and Serbian epic poems, heroes that choose life at the expense of honour (such as Hrafnkel or Viga-Grum) are not always seen in a negative light. On the contrary. Down-to-earth peasant pragmatism enters what was once the realm of idealism. Fanaticism in preserving one's honour leads to endless feud-chains that leave the greatest of men dead and families devastated. The fact that worthy men who would rather be friends than foes (Gunnar and Gizur the White; *Njal* and *Flosi*) find themselves on the opposite sides of a feud into which they have been dragged by lesser men, is often seen as tragic. Sometimes one can truly respect the code only by breaking it. A great chieftain, Hall of Sida (*Njal's saga*) chooses to leave his son unavenged, ultimately neglecting his obligations to the code of honour. The act is, however, recognised as one of sacrifice for the sake of the greater good – peace rather than cowardice, and this is valued by the saga.

As important an avenger figure as Marko Kraljević is, he is still allowed to get scared and avoid conflict where possible, even to be bought off by the Turkish sultan with a bag of money for drink. It is, nevertheless, his human failures and imperfections as much as his astonishing strength and courage that make him the most popular of Serbian heroes. New times call for new measures: a hero needs to have the sense to keep his head on his shoulders at the expense of pride so that, when in a position, he can save more lives and rectify more injustices. Survival in the vassalage has to include a degree of compromise and diplomacy, be it as crude and unskilled as Marko's. The fact had to be recognised by a good singer and appreciated by his audience.

As much as the sagas, and especially the Serbian epic songs, consist of dreaming about the glorious past, peoples seeking and projecting a desired identity onto the one in the present that is in crisis, they are far from escapist or indulgent. The impulses to explain and cope with the forces that shape the actuality are evident too. Íslendingasögur perceive the age of settlement as a Golden Age of successful self-rule when there was plenty of land and natural resources for everybody; even the climate itself was mild and friendly. At the same time the narratives are centred around feuding, and although the plots are gripping and the heroes splendid and engaging, devastating effects of blood begetting blood are recognised: the revenge culture is never glorified. Serbian epics on the other hand, are centred around the Kosovo tragedy<sup>28</sup> and its aftermath, as well as the

<sup>28</sup> The Battle of Kosovo took place on St Vitus' Day – on 15 or, according to the Julian (Orthodox) calendar, on 28 June 1389. By medieval standards, the battle involved a great number of people – around 100,000. Both Turkish and Serbian sources exaggerate the odds, but according to new sources (Durham, 1989), it seems reasonable to believe that there were about 60,000 Turks and 40,000 Serbian allied forces. The battle was devastating for both sides and both

events preceding the battle that had (in terms of pseudo-history and history to a degree) cost Serbia its independence. There is a vision in the epic poems of a strong Serbian empire, studded with majestic castles and magnificent monastic edifices, but at the same time it is recognised that 'there is something rotten' amidst all that splendour: the ultimately self-destructive struggle for power and greed of the feudal lords that 'among themselves they want to start a war,/ kill each other there with their golden knives'.<sup>29</sup> These apparently paradoxical attitudes towards the events of the past pervade the atmosphere of both the Icelandic sagas and Serbian epic poems, but this split consciousness accommodates two pressing needs that the two peoples must have felt simultaneously: a need to hope for the better and the need to cope with the unsettling present. A hope for the brighter future is being legitimised by the glorious past while, at the same time, that very past is being made accountable for the turbulent present. It is impossible to view realism and objectivity of the sagas and the Serbian epics in positivist terms of historical verisimilitude. However, viewed from a more holistic perspective, these two terms become acutely applicable to the two literatures. They account for the sagas' and Serbian epics' authenticity in translating the memories of significant historical events into fiction.

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the commander of Serbian armies, Prince Lazar, and the Turkish Sultan, Murad I, were slain. The Turks were victorious (though the victory was Pyrrhic) and Serbia became a vassal state. Koljević (*Epic*, pp. 154 -55), notes that 'for several decades Serbia was to undergo the agonies of recuperation in vassalage, the agonies of faction, treacheries and defeats that would turn it before long into largely depopulated and illiterate land. There was no human drama or historical impetus lacking for the Battle of Kosovo to be seen as the Doomsday of national grandeur and prosperity.'

<sup>29</sup> *Uroš and the Mrhjavčevićs*, in M. Holton and V. D. Mihailovich, *Songs of the Serbian People* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1997), p. 71.

Contrasting aspects of life, its everyday and its capacity for the momentous, its dialectics of the tragic and the comic, the aristocratic and the democratic, all merge in the sagas of Icelanders and Serbian epic poetry. This as a result yields a more complex, more intricate representation of reality. The humour and irony in which the two literatures abound support rather than undermine this complexity in so much as these qualities (rare in earlier medieval epics) presuppose a critical view of the subject. Observed from this perspective, sagas of Icelanders and Serbian epic poems emerge from the mighty shadow of their predecessors and stop being two obscure European literatures frozen in time, obstinately persisting with the heroic yarn when everybody else got bored with it. Rather, they are two literatures that pushed the boundaries of heroic narrative, made the next step, evolved.